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2 NBK sponsors specialized training for Kuwaiti medical team heading to Gaza



7 Lightning, flooding kill 135 in Pakistan and Afghanistan



11 Australia's Great Barrier Reef hit by record bleaching



16 Al-Arabi beat Al-Kuwait to win Kuwait Futsal Cup



Iran shows military might as tensions with Zionists soar

Hezbollah targets Zionist army base, wounding 14 soldiers



TEHRAN: Iranian soldiers march past President Ebrahim Raisi during a military parade as part of a ceremony marking the country's annual army day on April 17, 2024. — AFP

TEHRAN: As regional tensions run high, Iran paraded drones, missiles and soldiers on Wednesday to show it is ready for any response from the Zionist entity after launching an unprecedented attack on its bitter enemy. The Islamic republic carried out its first-ever direct attack on the Zionist entity at the weekend in response to an April 1 air strike on its consulate in Damascus which has been widely blamed on the Zionist entity.

The operation dubbed Honest Promise "brought down the glory of the Zionist regime", President Ebrahim Raisi said at a military base on the outskirts of Tehran. "This operation showed that our armed forces are ready," he said in a speech addressed to the regular army and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Wednesday's parade saw the Iranian armed forces showcase a range of military equipment including drones and long-range ballistic missiles. Among them were multiple versions of the Ababil, Arash and Mo-hajer drones as well as the Dezful medium-range ballistic missile and S-300 air defence missile system.

Raisi on Wednesday reiterated warnings against "the slightest act of aggression" by the Zionist entity, saying it would lead to "a fierce and severe response". The Zionist entity has vowed to respond to the weekend attack, with military spokesman Rear Admiral Dan-

iel Hagari saying Iran would not get off "scot-free".

The Zionist army said most of the projectiles fired by Iran were shot down — with the help of the United States and other allies — and that the attack caused only minimal damage. Iran hailed the attack as "successful" and said it "achieved all its objectives" including inflicting damages to the air base and intelligence centre which it says was used by the Zionist entity to strike the Damascus consulate.

On Wednesday, Iran's air force commander Hamid Vahedi warned Iran's enemies against making a "strategic error". "We are 100 percent ready in all aerial fronts," he was quoted as saying by ISNA news agency. In his speech, Raisi also hit out at countries that had "sought to normalise relations" with the Zionist entity. "These countries are now humiliated in front of their own people which constitutes a strategic failure for the regime" of the Zionist entity, he said.

In 2020, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco normalised relations with the Zionist entity as part of the US-brokered Abraham Accords, vehemently criticised by the Palestinians. Egypt and Jordan signed peace accords with the Zionist entity in 1979 and 1994, respectively.

Continued on Page 6

Sahel denies app hacked

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: The official spokesman of the Sahel app Yousef Kadhem denied on Wednesday the application had been hacked, after users around Kuwait reported receiving notifications from the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha). Kadhem explained Nazaha has added a new service related to persons subject to the provisions of financial disclosure, after which notifications were sent to the app's entire userbase, which exceeds 1.7 million users. This affected the app's performance, slowed down the service and prevented access to some services, he noted.

Kadhem emphasized the importance of obtaining correct information from reliable sources and cautioned against spreading rumors or false information on various media and social platforms. The information and interior ministries have repeatedly stressed the importance of confirming news before publication to prevent the spread of misinformation in society. Misinformation or "post-truth" has detrimental effects on various domains such as the economy, health and foreign policy, with misinformation becoming pervasive in digital media environments. Kadhem affirmed that Nazaha included various data related to persons subject to financial disclosure provisions, including the date of the next financial disclosure and previously submitted financial disclosure statements.

Cybersecurity expert Muhammad Al-Rashidi reassured that Sahel is one of the most secure government applications despite experiencing temporary issues due to high usage. "It is not a matter of worry, as the most advanced applications in the world can also suffer from the same thing, due to high usage at the same time. People can access the application by simply giving it time and restarting the application," he explained. "Those whose application has crashed can delete and redownload the app," he added, assuring it will operate normally again.

UAE reels from flooding after record rainfall

DUBAI: Dubai's giant highways were clogged by flooding and its major airport was in chaos as the Middle East financial center remained gridlocked on Wednesday, a day after the heaviest rains on record. Tailbacks snaked along waterlogged, six-lane expressways after up to 259.5 mm of rain, the most since records began 75 years ago, fell on the desert United Arab Emirates on Tuesday.

At least one person was killed after a 70-year-old man was swept away in his car in Ras Al-Khaimah, one of the oil-rich country's seven emirates, police said. Power outages were reported around Dubai, which was dotted with flooded areas and submerged and abandoned cars. One road tunnel near the airport was completely flooded to a depth of several metres (yards).

As sunny skies returned on Wednesday, a day after torrential downpours and rolling black clouds, stories emerged of residents stuck in cars and offices overnight. "It was one of the most horrific situations I had ever experienced, because I knew that if my car broke down, it would sink and

Continued on Page 6



SHARJAH: A flooded street is seen following heavy rains on April 17, 2024. — AFP

Russian strikes on Ukraine city leave 17 dead

CHERNIGIV, Ukraine: Three Russian missiles crashed into Ukraine's historic city of Chernigiv on Wednesday, killing 17 people, as officials pleaded for more air defence systems from allies. Pools of blood gathered on the street at the scene of one strike, where rescuers searched for survivors in the rubble and carried away the wounded on stretchers, official images

showed. Buildings and cars across the centre of the northern city were destroyed in the strike.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, who has urged allies to send more missiles to thwart Russian aerial attacks, said Ukraine lacked the weapons it needed to intercept the three missiles that struck Chernigiv. He said he had spoken to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg about the strike and asked for "immediate steps" to bolster Ukraine's air defences.

Resident Olga Samoilenko told AFP how she ducked with her children into the corridor of their apartment building for protection when the first

Continued on Page 6



CHERNIGIV, Ukraine: Ukrainian rescuers clear the rubble of a destroyed building following a missile attack on April 17, 2024. - AFP

Telegram app hits 900m users, eyes 1bn mark

DUBAI: The encrypted messaging app Telegram has reached more than 900 million active users and should pass the one-billion mark within a year, its boss said in an interview published Wednesday. "Telegraph is spreading like a forest fire. Two-and-a-half million users sign up every day," said

Pavel Durov, the Russian who founded the company alongside his brother Nikolai, in a rare interview with controversial right-wing US talk show host Tucker Carlson.

People "love the independence. They also love the privacy, the freedom, (there are) a lot of reasons why somebody would switch to Telegram", Durov told Carlson. The encrypted messaging app, based in Dubai, has positioned itself as an alternative to US-owned platforms, which have been criticized for their commercial exploitation of users' personal data. Telegram has committed itself to never disclosing any information about its users.

Durov said he got the idea to launch an encrypt-

ed messaging app after coming under pressure from the Russian government when working at VK, a social network he created in his home country before selling it and leaving Russia in 2014. He said he then tried to settle in Berlin, London, Singapore and San Francisco before choosing Dubai, which he praised for its business environment and "neutrality".

"I think we're doing a great job with Telegram. 900 million users will probably cross a billion monthly active users within a year from now," he said. By basing itself in the United Arab Emirates, Telegram has been able to shield itself from moderation laws at a time when Western countries are pressuring large platforms to remove illegal content. — AFP



Local

NBK sponsors specialized training for Kuwait medical team heading to Gaza

UK-based charity, David Nott Foundation, in collaboration with KRCS organize training sessions



Isam Al-Sager receives an honorary shield from Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer.



Sheikha Al Bahar and Maha Al Borges are pictured during the event.

KUWAIT: Over a period of five days, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) sponsored and hosted specialized medical training courses conducted by UK-based charity David Nott Foundation, in collaboration with Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS). The courses involved the participation of 37 Kuwaiti doctors and trainees specializing in general surgery and anaesthesia. These medical professionals were trained to offer assistance in crisis situations resulting from wars and natural disasters. A selected group will be dispatched to the Gaza Strip to provide medical support to the injured Palestinian population.

At the conclusion of the training courses, Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group CEO of NBK, welcomed the medical personnel. Also present were Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub and representatives from UK-based David Knott Foundation Medical Director Dr Ammar Darwish and representatives from British Embassy Kuwait.

Strategic partnership

In his speech, Al-Sager extended a warm welcome to the attendees, conveying NBK's delight in partnering with Kuwait Red Crescent Society and David Nott Foundation. This collaboration underscores the bank's commitment to its strategic partnership with KRCS, aimed at bolstering humanitarian endeavors both within and beyond Kuwait's borders.

He elaborated on NBK's commitment to extending aid to the people in Gaza Strip, aiming to bolster their resilience in the wake of the Zionist aggression. The bank's sponsorship of the collaboration between KRCS and David Knott Foundation underscores this commitment. The partnership entails providing training for doctors operating in conflict and disaster zones. The bank hosted these specialized training courses for five days, from April 13 to 17, accommodating doctors and trainees from Kuwaiti medical professionals, specializing in general surgery and anaesthesia.

Surgical procedures

Al-Sager announced that a group of the trained local professionals will be dispatched to Gaza Strip, offering medical assistance to the injured individuals of the Palestinian community. They will conduct vital surgical procedures and administer treatments and medications to those impacted by the continuous Zionist airstrikes on Gaza Strip.

Pride and gratification

"We, at NBK, are deeply honored to extend our support to KRCS' initiative aimed at performing surgical procedures and delivering essential healthcare services to Gaza Strip. This project, led by specialized medical personnel from Kuwait, is projected to directly benefit approximately 20,000 individuals in Gaza. It addresses the urgent medical and therapeutic needs of the injured and affected, while also prioritizing the critical deficit in the healthcare infrastructure of Gaza Strip. Our collaboration with humanitarian organizations endeavors to prevent the imminent collapse of the healthcare system in Gaza," Al-Sager commented.

Familiar territory

Al-Sager highlighted that NBK's sponsorship of the collaboration between KRCS and David Knott Foundation isn't the bank's first initiative toward aiding the people of Gaza during their ongoing crisis. He noted that the bank had previously contributed US\$5 million in October 2023 to support relief efforts. Additionally, the bank donated mobile medical clinics, fully equipped with medical equipment and devices, through KRCS to support Gaza.

Al-Sager emphasized that the bank, in collaboration with KRCS, remains steadfast in its commitment to providing assistance to those in need, particularly the Palestinian population. This commitment stems from its dedication to humanitarian and social causes, aligning with Kuwait's policy of aiding nations requiring support and championing Arab and Islamic causes, notably the Palestinian cause. He highlighted that NBK's initiatives and backing for humanitarian and relief endeavors epitomize its commitment to social responsibility, a principle it diligently upholds not only within Kuwait but also across the Arab world.

Thanks and appreciation

In conclusion, Al-Sager expressed heartfelt gratitude to KRCS and David Knott Foundation for their dedicated efforts. He also expressed hope that their collaboration would successfully achieve its objectives of alleviating the such impacts on Gaza. He also voiced optimism that such initiatives would help prevent the collapse of the healthcare system in Gaza Strip and mitigate the effects of the humanitarian

Al-Sager:

- Our collaboration with KRCS aims to extend relief to those in need, with a particular focus on the Palestinian population
- Directly impacting 20,000 individuals in Gaza Strip through surgical interventions and medication provisions
- Our sponsorship of training sessions serves to strengthen humanitarian endeavors both within and beyond Kuwait's borders

Al-Sayer:

- The initiative spans a duration of six months and incorporates regular field visits to monitor its progress, along with monthly reports to track its performance
- Its primary objectives are to address the critical shortage within the medical sector and prevent the total collapse of the healthcare system in the region



Isam Al-Sager delivers his speech.

crisis faced by our brothers and sisters in Palestine.

Leading organization

Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer, expressed gratitude for NBK's sponsorship and hosting of the training courses organized by KRCS in collaboration with David Nott Foundation. He remarked, "This exemplifies what we have come to expect from a leading organization like NBK, in extending its generosity to execute humanitarian projects aimed at alleviating the suffering of those in need."

He highlighted that this collaboration is part of the strategic partnership between NBK and KRCS. Through this partnership, the bank extends support to numerous charitable and humanitarian initiatives both domestically and internationally. Moreover, Al-Sayer expressed his delight in the successful accomplishment of the training courses, fulfilling their intended objective of enhancing the skills of several Kuwaiti surgeons and anesthesiologists to deliver vital medical assistance in regions impacted by conflicts and natural disasters. He highlighted that a portion of these skilled professionals will be dispatched to Gaza Strip to provide

essential medical aid to the injured and wounded members of the Palestinian community.

Recipients and project initiatives

He indicated that the project to conduct surgical operations and provide medical treatments in Gaza Strip will directly benefit 20,000 individuals wounded by the Zionist airstrikes, with an indirect impact on all residents living in Gaza Strip. The project spans six months and entails several activities, including conducting a comprehensive field survey to accurately assess needs and identify recipients, with a focus on those most vulnerable to death or complications among the injured.

Other activities involve obtaining necessary permits, coordinating with relevant authorities, supplying medical personnel and equipment, conducting essential surgeries, and providing advanced training courses for the medical team by David Nott Foundation, facilitated in collaboration with NBK. Additionally, the project includes ongoing follow-up activities, field assessment, and media records to document its progress. Al-Sayer concluded his speech by emphasizing that KRCS stands as a national foundation committed to consistently of-

fering humanitarian and relief aid to those in need, demonstrating unwavering dedication to supporting afflicted and affected populations.

Specialized training

Meanwhile, Dr Ammar Darwish from David Nott Foundation expressed his satisfaction in collaborating with KRCS to provide specialized training to a cohort of Kuwaiti general surgeons and anesthesiologists. He extended gratitude to NBK for sponsoring and hosting these specialized training sessions.

Skill development

He emphasized that David Nott Charitable Foundation remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting and enhancing the skills of medical teams delivering urgent aid to the injured and affected individuals amidst the ongoing events in Gaza. He noted that since 2015, the foundation, specializing in training doctors operating in conflict zones and areas struck by natural disasters, has consistently provided training courses to national teams across various countries. These courses aim to elevate their abilities to deliver essential medical care in regions impacted by wars and calamities.



Kuwait medical professionals are seen during the conclusion of the training program.



A snapshot during the training program.

Local

Palestinian ambassador lauds Kuwait's unwavering support

KRCS' initiative reflects commitment to humanitarian efforts

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tabhoub praised the Kuwait Red Crescent Society for its unwavering support of the Palestinian people in Gaza throughout the Zionist aggression. He was speaking on the sidelines of a press conference held by KRCS and National Bank of Kuwait to announce the conclusion of a training course for doctors and anesthesiologists, aiming to prepare them to support Gaza's deteriorating medical sector.

"The aid and assistance extended by Kuwait, from the outset of the conflict until now, are a source of immense pride for the nation. The recent initiative by the Red Crescent to train Kuwaiti doctors to provide medical assistance in Gaza is particularly noteworthy, reflecting Kuwait's commitment to humanitarian efforts and solidarity with those in need," he said.

Meanwhile, a visiting delegation of British surgeons and anesthetists volunteering with the David Nott Foundation, a UK medical charity specializing in training doctors working in conflict and natural disaster zones, concluded the delivery of two 'Hostile Environment Surgical Training' courses to more than 30 Kuwaiti medics who are set to deploy to Gaza. These courses, hosted at NBK's headquarters, were facilitated and funded in partnership with the British Embassy of Kuwait and KRCS to equip participating Kuwaiti medics with vital trauma surgery and anesthesia skills that will help them save lives when they deploy to Gaza.

"This week's training is a great example of the UK and Kuwait's partnership in action. One of the core values we share is our commitment to humanitarian assistance, and I sincerely hope the specialist skills participating medics will have acquired can help them alleviate the dreadful suffering in Gaza. On be-



Some of the Kuwaiti doctors during the program.

half of the British Embassy, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, who have joined us to help fund and facilitate the David Nott Foundation's delivery of both courses, the National Bank of Kuwait for providing the venue, the Kuwaiti government for their support, and, of course, the British surgeons and anesthetists who so generously volunteered their time over the past week." British Chargé d'affaires to Kuwait Sunny Ahmed said.

"Recognized by the UN as a Humanitarian Center and embodying the values of charity and humanity, Kuwait is a natural partner for the David Nott Foundation. This week we have trained 22 surgeons and 10 anesthetists in partnership with the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society and the British Embassy Kuwait," Co-Founder of the David Nott Foundation Elly Nott said. "These medics have been trained in surgical skills essential for saving life and limb as they contribute to relief campaigns and humanitarian initia-



Group photo of doctors and officials during the press conference. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

tives in the region. There is sadly no end of need for their skills in the world at present and we look forward to further collaboration with our colleagues here in Kuwait for the benefit of those who suffer in conflict," he added.

Associate Professor of Surgery at Kuwait University Dr Mohammad Jamal emphasized to Kuwait Times the profound significance of the Palestinian cause to the Kuwaiti people, underscoring the importance of the training course in equipping surgeons to provide vital medical care in Gaza, where it aimed to diversify the expertise of surgeons, expanding their specialization to include obstetrics and gynecology, orthopedics, plastic surgery, burns and other critical areas essential for wartime medical care.

Reflecting on their experiences in Gaza, he highlighted that the danger faced by doctors in Gaza doesn't compare to the hardships endured by the Palestinian people. "Despite initial fear, upon witnessing the resilience of the people, we felt reas-



Kuwaiti doctors participate in the program.

sured and welcomed. Despite the ongoing war, we were honored by the hospitality we received, where they gave us thyme and dukkah," he said.

Kuwait tackles human trafficking, smuggling

MUSCAT: Kuwait Minister of Justice and Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Faisal Al-Ghareeb said Kuwait attaches great importance to combating human trafficking through laws and legislation that include deterrent penalties and protect victims' rights. This came in his speech Wednesday during the launch of the Middle East Forum to Combat Human Trafficking in its fifth session, organized by the Oman Capital Muscat. In its relentless efforts towards criminalizing all kinds of human trafficking, Kuwait issued Law No. 91 in 2013 regarding combating human trafficking and smuggling immigrants, Al-Ghareeb stated.



Minister of Justice and Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Faisal Al-Ghareeb

He explained that the Cabinet approved a decision to adopt the national strategy to prevent those crimes, which contains three main axes (prevention,

protection, and international cooperation) and the establishment of a permanent national committee concerned with implementing that strategy with representation from all relevant national authorities.

This government committee approved the national referral system in December 2019, added Al-Ghareeb, concluded partnerships with relevant international organizations, signed a declaration of intent with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime for the GCC region, and is working on developing this cooperation into a memorandum of understanding.

Al-Ghareeb stated that Kuwait established a shelter for female expatriate workers, where those who wish to reside there are received voluntarily through immediate entry without any requirements and by allocating accommodations and means of living. Kuwait is well aware of the importance of cooperation with other countries, especially those who issue reports regarding trafficking around the world, in order to combat it, Al-Ghareeb noted, pointing to

the importance of exchanging opinions to achieve the desired goals.

He offered his sincere condolences and sympathy to the Sultanate of Oman over the deaths and losses due to the heavy rains that have swept it these days, and he thanked the Sultanate for the warm reception and organizing the forum. He concluded by suggesting several recommendations, including the establishment of a technical working group to develop a map for implementing the recommendations to ensure achieving the desired goals of the forum.

He also recommended benefiting from the experiences of participating countries in the field of labor inspection procedures, control rules, follow-up of recruitment and employment companies, and coordination mechanisms between labor-hosting countries and source countries, as well as continuing to raise community awareness of the rights and duties of migrant workers and boost combating forced labor. — KUNA

Deputy FM chairs meeting of diplomatic, consular corps



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Wednesday chaired a meeting of the council of the diplomatic and consular corps. The meeting was held at the ministry's headquarters, with the participation of the assistant foreign minister and members of the council. They addressed issues set in the session agenda. — KUNA

Kuwait 'essential partner' to NATO

ROME: Kuwait's Ambassador to Italy, Nasser Al-Qahtani, underscored Wednesday the importance of strategic cooperation between Kuwait and NATO, as Kuwait is an essential partner in boosting regional stability and security in the Arabian Gulf region. Ambassador Al-Qahtani spoke to KUNA on the sidelines of an international conference marking 75 years since the establishment of the alliance.

The conference, held in Rome, was inaugurated by Italian President Sergio Mattarella. Inviting former Interior Minister and chief of national security Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah as a keynote speaker on security and peace at a time of global change reflects the significance of Kuwait's regional role, stated Al-Qahtani. Al-Qahtani also called it an opportunity for the exchange of perspectives on preserving global stability, especially during these tumultuous times.

Sheikh Thamer called for intensifying cooperation between the military alliance and the states of the Istanbul initiative to arrive at sought-after results. Kuwait joined the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative back in 2004 and, since then, has adopted an active role in facing regional and international challenges. Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali commends the role of Kuwait-NATO in cementing regional security.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's former interior minister, Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah, has lauded the fruitful strategic cooperation between the State of Kuwait and NATO for its impact on regional security and stability. Speaking at an international conference held in Rome to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the NATO foundation, Sheikh Thamer, also the former chief of Kuwait's National Security Apparatus, highlighted the development of Kuwait-NATO relations and cooperation over the past two decades.

As he co-chaired a special session on "Security in the Southern Neighborhood: The Gulf Region," alongside the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Secretary General of the Supreme Defense Council in Bahrain, Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa, Sheikh Thamer pointed out that Kuwait was the first country to join NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), which is a platform established by NATO to promote security cooperation on a bilateral basis between NATO and partner countries in the broader Middle East region, in June 2004.

He hailed the establishment of the ICI Regional Center in Kuwait in 2017 as the culmination of the cooperation between Kuwait and the Alliance. Sheikh Thamer shed light on the center's activities and contributions in dealing with emerging challenges. According to NATO, the NATO-ICI Regional Center in Kuwait acts as a hub for the enhancement of practical cooperation between NATO and its Gulf partners. It aims to improve



Kuwait's former Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah attends the international conference. — KUNA

common understanding of security challenges and, through increased interoperability and standardization, enable closer cooperation.

The hub promotes practical cooperation in various areas, including strategic analysis, civil preparedness, military-to-military cooperation, and public diplomacy. Sheikh Thamer underscored the importance of understanding the special nature and dimensions of regional security in the Middle East. He called for acting to confine weapons to states after the spread of weapons among nonstate actors and terrorist organizations in many countries.

He described NATO as the most important organization concerned with strategic and geopolitical security. Sheikh Thamer urged the alliance to increase and intensify mutual cooperation with the Istanbul Initiative coun-

tries to achieve the initiative's goals and maximize benefits for all members. On the sidelines of the conference, Sheikh Thamer held meetings with the Italian Minister of Defense, Guido Crosetto, the Deputy Secretary-General of NATO, Mircea Geoana, and several key participants. Kuwait's Ambassador to Italy, Nasser Al-Qahtani, attended the meetings.

The Italian Society for International Organization (SIOI), in collaboration with NATO's Public Diplomacy Division, organized the International Conference "NATO at 75: Shaping a New Transatlantic Agenda, Security, and Peace at a Time of Global Transformations," held on April 15-16 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty that established NATO on April 4, 1949, and to review the principal issues facing NATO today. — KUNA

News in Brief

KAC reschedules flights

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) rescheduled its flights to Dubai due to volatile weather, upon instructions of Dubai airport on not receiving flights. On its "X" account, the corporation said the move was taken for the safety of passengers, adding that flight No. 675KU heading to Kuwait was rescheduled, and its passengers are listed on flight No. 677KU. Flight No. 676KU coming from Dubai was rescheduled, and its passengers were listed on flight No. 674KU, it noted. The airline will communicate with the travelers through sms, it stated. — KUNA

PAHW signs contracts

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) has signed two contracts to construct public buildings in the new Al-Metlaa residential district worth KD 42.468 million (\$140 million). The authority said in a statement on Wednesday that the new buildings would be constructed with high-quality materials, affirming the keenness to secure all needs for the citizens while moving to their newly built houses in the region. The facilities will include nurseries, stores, two schools in addition to various other shops. Currently, the authority is executing several projects including a medical center, a supermarket, a police station, a municipal building, a postal office and others. Electric power has been connected to 109 buildings in the district, it said, indicating at the ongoing work to build all necessary facilities for the new residential district, one of the latest mega housing projects in Kuwait. Al-Metlaa, with some hilly sites, is located to the north of Kuwait City. — KUNA

Grocery store robbers arrested

KUWAIT: Criminal detectives identified two Egyptians involved in multiple grocery store robberies in Salmiya after reviewing security camera footage. Legal action is being taken against the two, who will be deported with no possibility of returning. Meanwhile, a 26-year-old domestic helper hanged herself at her employers' house in Qasr. Authorities are investigating the incident. — KUNA

KNG congratulates new PM

KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on assuming the office upon an Amiri decree. "It pleases us to send sincere congratulations on appointing you (Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah) as Prime Minister and tasking you with nominating the members of the new government," said a statement of the National Guard, quoting Sheikh Faisal Nawaf as saying.

Sheikh Faisal wished Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah every success in the new post to serve the dear

homeland and meet the aspirations and hopes of Kuwait's people. He also wished everlasting well-being to Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect Kuwait and maintain security, safety, stability, and progress for its people under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Chief of the National Guard has affirmed that the Guards' command spares no effort in securing sufficient equipment for the squad in coordination with military insti-

tutions in and outside Kuwait. The Guards said in a statement on Wednesday that Deputy Chief Sheikh Faisal was speaking during an inspection of the posts of the First Protection Brigade tasked with securing the US Embassy building, Al-Muqawaa Transmission Station, and the Second Protection Brigade for Subhan fuel depots. He has affirmed the necessity of applying the laws, staying vigilant, and treating the citizens and residents of the country well. Sheikh Faisal conveyed to the personnel the greetings of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah and good wishes for them. — KUNA

NCCAL participates in 4th session of Gulf Cinema Festival

RIYADH: The Kuwait National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) is participating in the Gulf Cinema Festival in its fourth session, held in Riyadh, with six short and long documentaries. The Kuwaiti participation comes within the framework of the efforts exerted to support the Kuwaiti talents in this field, said Head of Kuwaiti delegation to the festival, Musaed Al-Zamel.

In a statement to KUNA, Assistant Undersecretary for the Art Sector in the NCCAL, Al-Zamel, said that the Kuwaiti participation aims to enhance the artistic level of cinema makers in Kuwait and to increase their experience through dialogue and art seminars held during the festival. The NCCAL also affords both moral and material support for Kuwaiti works in such forums, Al-Zamel explained.

The festival began on Sunday and lasts for five days, amid the participation of 29 short and long narrative and documentary films competing for nine awards that cover categories related to filmmaking such as directing, photo shooting, music, and acting. It will also honor five significant cinematic characters from the GCC countries who brought regional cinema to international levels. The delegation included the names of Director Manager of Communication and Media Management Yousef Al-Jamaan, Mohammad Al-Khaldi for Foreign Culture, and Areej Al-Hamdan from the Communication and Media Sector, in addition to a number of famous Kuwaiti actors and directors. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait University holds a trial day to launch an electronic library for students with disabilities.



KU launches e-library for disabled students

KUWAIT: The Dean of Student Affairs, represented by the Social Welfare Department and the Department of People with Disabilities, held a trial day to establish an electronic library for students with disabilities in the Kuwait University Central Library in Sabah Al-Salem University City. The Social Welfare Department, in coordination with Kuwait University's students with disabilities, conducted a pilot demonstration of some devices for people with disabilities, where they experimented with the devices that facilitate their access to the books they need.

In this regard, the Director of the Social Welfare Department, Wael Al-Obaid, stated that the Social Welfare Department seeks to develop and upgrade the services provided to students with disabilities in order to keep pace with their academic requirements. "From this standpoint, the administration, in cooperation with the Sector of the Vice Chancellor for Planning, the E-Learning Center, and the Central Library of Kuwait University, prepared for the establishment of an electronic library for students with disabilities to enable them to access and view books, references, and periodicals and prepare reports and research," he added.

The Social Welfare Department, in cooperation with Al-Deera Company, which specializes in technological devices for people with disabilities, provided multiple and varied devices for students with disabilities to experiment, evaluate, and make observations.



KUWAIT: Chief of the General Staff of Kuwait Army Lieutenant General Bandar Al-Muzain discussed with Commander of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) General Michael Kurilla and his accompanying delegation, issues of common interest and ways to boost them. During the meeting, they discussed the latest regional and international developments, said Al-Muzain in a press statement on Wednesday. Several senior commanding officers in the army attended the meeting. — KUNA



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Manpower receives 137 job seekers

KUWAIT: As part of its efforts to create job opportunities, the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) in cooperation with the

Ministry of Health and the Public Authority for Youth, received job seekers at the Authority's main building in Riggaa. They were briefed on the available jobs, the programs and the nature of the work. 137 job seekers were interviewed. After passing the job interviews, the applicants will be trained for a period of five weeks.





France evicts hundreds of migrants ahead of Olympics

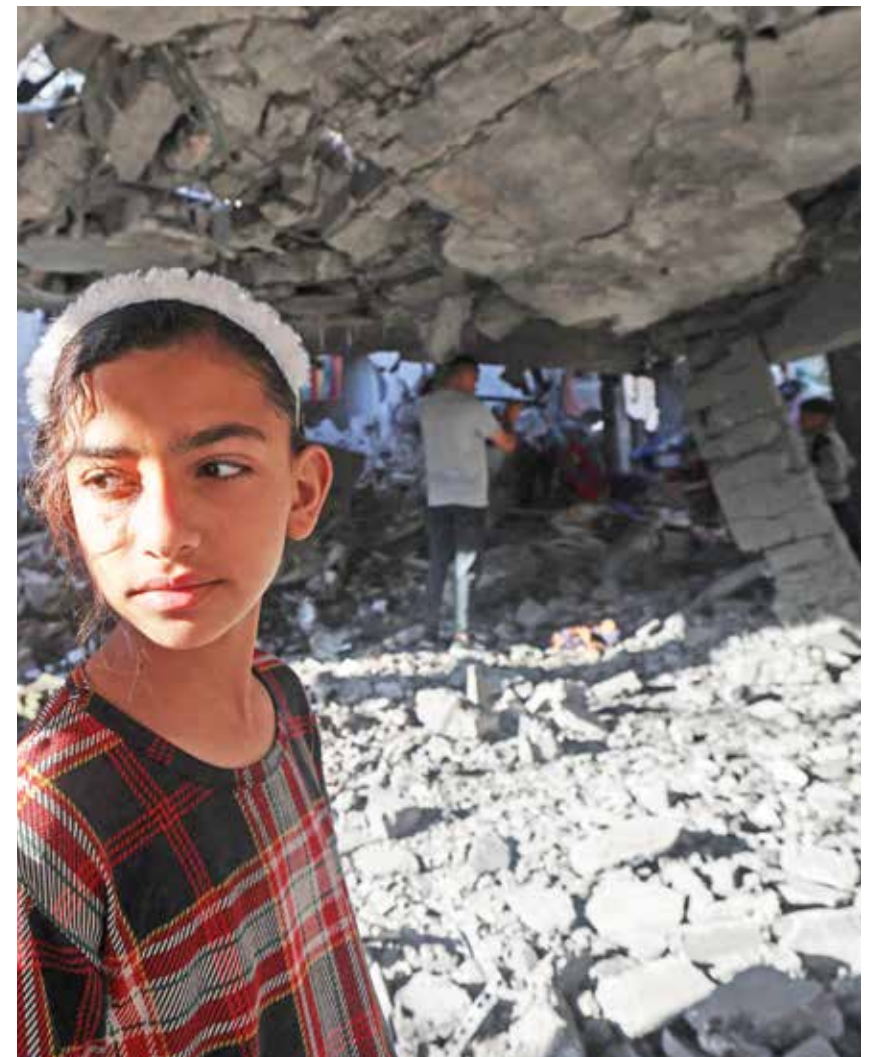
Biden blasts Trump on trip to childhood home

Page 6

Page 7



NUSEIRAT: A cloud of smoke erupts down the road from an explosion as a man drives an animal-drawn cart loaded with jerrycans in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip.— AFP photos



RAFAH: A Palestinian child checks a building destroyed by Zionist bombardment the previous night in Rafah the southern Gaza Strip on April 17, 2024.

Netanyahu challenges allies' advice

Zionist entity to 'make its own decisions' on Iran's response as it continues to pound

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday the Zionist entity will decide how to respond to Iran's unprecedented attack as world leaders called for restraint to avoid escalation.

The Zionist military has vowed to respond to Iran's missile and drone weekend attack, prompting a diplomatic flurry aiming to calm a region already on the edge due to the Zionist war in Gaza.

Washington and Brussels have pledged to ramp up sanctions against Iran, while British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock became the first Western envoys to visit the Zionist entity after the attack.

Netanyahu told the visiting ministers that the entity "will reserve the right to protect itself," his office said. The pair offered "all kinds of suggestions and advice" during a meeting, Netanyahu said. "However, I would also like to clarify: we will make our decisions ourselves."

For his part, Cameron said that "we're very anxious to avoid escalation and to say to our friends in (the Zionist entity): It's a time to think with head as well as heart." Baerbock emphasized that "the region must

not slide into a situation whose outcome is completely unpredictable." Tehran has vowed to hit back if the entity responds to the Saturday attack, which itself was launched in retaliation to a deadly strike on Iran's Damascus consulate building earlier this month.

US, EU to toughen sanctions

The Zionist entity's top ally the United States has made clear it won't join any attack on Iran, vowing instead to level more sanctions targeting Iran's missile and drone program, its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Iranian defense ministry.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Brussels was also working to expand sanctions against Iran, including its supply of drones and other weapons to Russia and to proxy groups around the Middle East. Germany's Baerbock said that Berlin and Paris were in favor of a European sanctions regime against Iranian drones to be extended to include "missile technologies in Iran's arsenal".

Cameron also urged the G7 to adopt new "coordinated sanctions against Iran," ahead of a meeting with counterparts from the Western-led grouping in Italy.

Deadly strikes in Gaza

The sharply heightened Zionist-Irani tensions have threatened to overshadow the Gaza war, even as deadly bombardment and combat raged on unabated in the besieged territory. Talks toward a truce and hostage release deal have stalled for now, said Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, a key mediator, despite months of effort also involving US and Egyptian officials.

The Zionist military said Wednesday its aircraft had "struck over 40 terror targets throughout the Gaza Strip" over the past day. When one strike hit the southernmost city of Rafah, where 1.5 million Palestinians are sheltering, Jamal Ramidan said she "woke up to the sounds of girls shouting 'mama, mama, mama.'" As she fled the carnage alongside children, they stumbled over "body parts and corpses scattered all over the place," Ramidan told AFP. Vast areas of Gaza have been devastated by more than six months of war, while its 2.4 million people have suffered under a Zionist siege that has blocked most water, food, medicines and other vital supplies. The Zionist entity's devastating offensive, which it claims is aimed at

destroying Hamas, has killed at least 33,899 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

'Above and beyond'

The Zionist entity has faced growing global opposition to the relentless fighting in Gaza, which the United Nations and aid agencies have warned has pushed the north of the territory to the brink of famine.

But Netanyahu rejected any claims about famine on Wednesday, saying the Zionist entity "is doing 'above and beyond' what is needed 'on the humanitarian issue,'" his office said. The UN said it would launch an appeal on Wednesday for \$2.8 billion to help Palestinians in Gaza and in the occupied West Bank.

The bloodiest ever Gaza war has also revived the push for Palestinian statehood as part of a two-state solution to the decades-long conflict. The UN Security Council was preparing to vote Thursday on an Algeria-drafted resolution for full United Nations membership for a Palestinian state, diplomatic sources said. However, the veto-wielding United States has repeatedly expressed opposition to the move. — AFP

US university pulls student's speech after Zionist protest

LOS ANGELES: A top US university has canceled its plans for a graduation speech by a Muslim student over what it says are safety concerns, after pro-Zionist groups criticized her selection. The decision by the University of Southern California is the latest controversy to roil American higher education since the Zionist war in Gaza.

Asna Tabassum, who has been attacked online for "antisemitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric," had been selected as class valedictorian. USC's valedictorian is chosen by college officials from among scores of applicants with high academic grades. They represent the graduating class and deliver a speech at graduation in front of up to 65,000 people.

But on Monday the university's provost, Andrew Guzman, announced the May 10 ceremony would go ahead without the speech. "Unfortunately, over the past several days, discussion relating to the selection of our valedictorian has taken on an alarming tenor," Guzman said in a statement.

"The intensity of feelings, fueled by both social media and the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, has grown to include many voices outside of USC and has escalated to the point of creating substantial risks relating to security."

Guzman's statement gave no specifics, but the Los Angeles Times quoted Erroll Southern, the university's associate senior vice president for safety and risk assurance, as saying the institution had received threats by email, phone and letter. Individuals "say they will come to the campus," he said.

Tabassum criticized the decision, which she said was the result of the university "succumbing to a campaign of hate meant to silence my voice." "Although this should have been a time of celebration for my family, friends, professors and classmates, anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian voices have subjected me to a campaign of racist hatred because of my uncompromising belief in human rights for all," she said in a statement. The Zionist offensive in Gaza has killed at least 33,843 people in the besieged territory, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.—AFP



GAZA: Palestinians line up to buy subsidized bread from a bakery in Gaza City on April 14, 2024. — AFP photos

Hundreds of Gazans queue for bread at reopened bakery

GAZA: Hundreds of Palestinians queued for bread at a reopened bakery in Gaza City, after fresh supplies arrived in a heavily blockaded area that has suffered months of deprivation. They waited for hours in the streets of Gaza's biggest city this week as the bakery turned out bags of subsidized bread after the World Food Program was able to resupply it.

Children stood patiently in line alongside young men and elderly people. "When (the Zionist entity) prevented us from getting flour, we started eating corn and barley, until it reached the point where we had to eat some animal feed," Wissam Dawad told AFP as he stood in the queue.

Firas Sukkar, also queuing, said, "I'm happy but I swear by God we are tired." "We have lost our sons, daughters, and wives. We have lost our entire lives," he said. "What more can I ask for?" he added. "My

only message is to stop the war." The Zionist entity has faced growing global opposition to its relentless invasion, which has reduced vast areas of territory to a wasteland of gutted buildings, bomb craters and rubble. The war and the siege have triggered a dire humanitarian crisis, with desperate shortages of food, water, medicines and fuel, helped only by sporadic aid deliveries.

The United Nations has warned that the Gaza war and siege have caused "the highest levels of catastrophic hunger in the world". Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to push ahead with the war despite the opposition.

'Not sufficient'

"Bakeries have been unable to operate for several months due to conflict and lack of access," the World Food Program said on Sunday, announcing it had "delivered fuel to a bakery in Gaza to start producing bread." "We need safe and sustained access to prevent famine," it warned in a post on social media network X, formerly known as Twitter.

Gaza resident Khaled Al-Ghoul told AFP he "waited for six hours to get a loaf of bread". "It's an extremely difficult struggle," he said. "It's unfair."

"The available quantities are obviously not sufficient," said Moataz Ajour, surrounded by workers packing the bread in a back room of the bakery. "We hope that people and the World Food Program will also support us, so that the quantities are enough, and we can continue our work." — AFP



A Palestinian worker arranges freshly baked flatbread at the newly reopened bakery.



International

Biden blasts Trump on trip to childhood home

US president bashes Trump's 'Mar-a-Lago' values, 'dictatorship' aspirations in key swing state

SCRANTON: Joe Biden made a campaign trip to his beloved birthplace Tuesday in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where he unleashed a blistering condemnation of Donald Trump as the tycoon languished in court. The 81-year-old US president even visited his childhood home in the former mining town as he contrasted his blue-collar roots with the election rival he branded a self-obsessed billionaire.

In a speech calling for the wealthy to pay more taxes, Biden said he "learned a lot here in Scranton." "I learned that money doesn't determine your worth." "People like Donald Trump learned very different lessons ... he learned that telling people 'you're fired' is something to laugh about," he added, referring to Trump's catchphrase on the reality TV show "The Apprentice."

Democrat Biden made no reference to Trump's historic hush money trial in New York, which is keeping the Republican off the campaign trail. But he repeatedly drew broader contrasts with Trump, saying November's vote was a battle between "Scranton values or Mar-a-Lago values," in a reference to Trump's luxury Florida mansion.

"Donald Trump looks at the world differently to you and me," a fired-up Biden said. "He wakes up in the morning in Mar-a-Lago thinking about himself, how he can help his billionaire friends gain power and control and force their extreme agenda on the rest of us."

The Scranton visit kicks off a three-day swing through Pennsylvania, a key swing state Biden narrowly carried in the 2020 election against Trump. Also known as the setting for the US version of hit TV comedy "The Office," Scranton has long been at the heart of the political mythology Biden has cultivated about his hardscrabble upbringing there.

During his visit he drove down an expressway named in his honor and visited his wood-paneled childhood house, where large crowds including school children were cheering. There were also some Palestinian flags flying, as protests continue against Biden's support of the Zionist entity's war in Gaza.

'Bloodbath'

Biden's campaign earlier released a social media ad featuring Scranton locals, including a cousin, bashing Trump as rich and selfish. His



SCRANTON: US President Joe Biden walks with children in front of his childhood home in Scranton, Pennsylvania, on April 16, 2024. — AFP

homecoming trip rides on recent momentum in polls that show him catching up with Trump, after months of trailing the Republican.

Biden meanwhile mocked Trump for his recent fundraising advantage over his rival, quipping that if stock in Trump's media group "drops any lower, he might do better under my tax plan than his." "On a more serious note, Biden angrily attacked Trump as a threat to democracy, returning to a theme Democrats hope will resonate with voters. "He says he'll be a dictator on day one, he promises a bloodbath if he loses, this guy denies January 6," added Biden referring to the 2021 attack on the Capitol by Trump

supporters after his election loss.

Biden however made no mention of the trial occupying Trump's time this week. The Republican himself angrily complained outside the Manhattan courtroom on Tuesday that he "should be right now in Pennsylvania and Florida — in many other states, North Carolina, Georgia — campaigning."

The White House said Biden would not be following the proceedings in New York. "His focus is on the American people," Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters traveling with the president aboard Air Force One.

Voters in Scranton said they were worried about a

range of issues ahead of November's election. Trump "is talking about eliminating taxes so I would lose my job," said Rose Williams, 41, a tax professional from Scranton. "When I go to vote, I'll be voting for Biden." But she added that she was concerned about issues such as poverty and also Biden's support for the Zionist entity's war on Hamas in Gaza.

"I just prefer Biden," added Debra Hodges, 66, who does volunteer work and moved to the town from New York City about 20 years ago. "His age is not a problem for me. I mean, we're all going to get older," she said, referring to another poll worry for Biden. — AFP

Deepfake tools warp India vote

BENGALURU, India: Death has not extinguished the decades-long rivalry between two Indian leaders: both have now seemingly risen from the grave, in digital form, to rally their supporters ahead of national elections. Political parties are harnessing powerful artificial intelligence tools to make deepfakes, reproducing famous faces and voices in ways that often appear authentic. Both the government and campaigners have warned that the spread of such tools is a dangerous and growing threat to the integrity of elections in India. With a marathon six-week general election starting on April 19, so-called "ghost appearances" — the use of dead leaders in videos — have become a popular mode of campaigning in the southern Tamil Nadu state.

Actress turned politician J. Jayalitha died in 2016, but she has been featured in a voice message deeply critical of the state's current governing party, once led by arch-rival M. Karunanidhi. "We have a corrupt and useless state government," her digi-

tal avatar says. "Stand by me ... we are for the people." Karunanidhi died in 2018 but has appeared in AI-generated videos — clad in his trademark black sunglasses — showering praise on his son M K Stalin, the state's current chief minister. Recycling "very charismatic" speakers offered a novel way to grab attention, said Senthil Nayagam, founder of Chennai-based firm Muonium, which made the AI video purporting to be Karunanidhi. Resurrecting dead leaders is also a cost-effective way of campaigning compared to traditional rallies, which are time-consuming to organize and expensive to stage for voters accustomed to a grand spectacle. "Bringing crowds is a difficult thing," Nayagam told AFP. "And how many times can you do a laser or drone show?"

'Very thin line'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been an eager early adopter of technology in election campaigning. In 2014, the year he swept to power, the party expanded Modi's campaign reach by using 3D projections of the leader to make him appear virtually at rallies. But harnessing technology that can clone a politician's voice, and create videos so seemingly real that voters struggle to decipher reality from fiction, has naturally sparked

concern. Ashwini Vaishnav, the communications minister, said in November that deepfakes were "a serious threat to democracy and social institutions".

AI creator Divyendra Jadoun said he had received a "huge surge" of requests for content from his company, The Indian Deepfaker. "There is a huge risk in this coming election, and I am pretty damn sure many people are using it for unethical activities", the 30-year-old said.

Jadoun's repertoire includes voice cloning, chatbots and mass dissemination of finished products through WhatsApp messaging, sharing content instantly with up to 400,000 people for 100,000 rupees (\$1,200). He insisted that he turned down offers that he disagreed with, but said it was a "very thin line" to determine whether or not a request for his services was unethical. "Sometimes even we get confused," he added.

Jadoun said the rapidly advancing technology was little understood by a "big part of the country", and AI products were taken by many to be true. "We only tend to fact-check videos which don't align with our preconceived notions," he warned.

'Threat to democracy'

Most AI-generated campaign material has

so far been used to lampoon rivals, especially through song. This week a leader of the BJP's youth wing posted an AI-generated video of Arvind Kejriwal, a leading opponent of Modi arrested last month in a graft probe.

It shows him sitting behind bars, strumming a guitar and singing a verse from a popular Bollywood song: "Forget me, for you have to live without me now." Elsewhere, digitally altered videos purport to show lawmaker Asaduddin Owaisi, one of India's most prominent Muslim politicians, singing devotional Hindu songs.

A caption alongside the video on Facebook jokes that "anything is possible" if Modi's party, known for its Hindu-nationalist politics and accused of discriminating against India's Muslim minority, wins again.

Joyjeet Pal, an expert in the role of technology in democracy from the University of Michigan, said that ridiculing a political opponent was a more effective campaigning tool than "calling them a thug or a crook".

Mocking opponents in political cartoons is a centuries-old tactic, but Pal warned that AI-generated images can easily be misinterpreted as real. "It is a threat to what we can and cannot believe," he said. "It is a threat to democracy as a whole." — AFP

Iran shows military might...

Continued from Page 1

Iran insists its attack on the Zionist entity was limited and carried out in "self-defence" following the strike on its consulate in the Syrian capital. It said it had informed the United States and given a 72-hour warning to neighbouring countries ahead of the attack.

Late Tuesday, the United States said it would soon impose fresh sanctions on Iran's missile and drone programme and that it expected its allies and partners to follow with parallel measures. British Foreign Secretary David Cameron has urged the G7 Wednesday to adopt new "coordinated sanctions" against Iran. Asked about fears of a wider regional conflict, Cameron called the situation "very concerning".

In Tehran, where daily activity proceeded as normal in the bustling city centre, some showed support for Iran in case of a possible Zionist response. "When it comes to defending our homeland, we are willing to go through anything," said 50-year-old lawyer Hossein. "Our country is currently facing economic sanctions and many people are struggling, but defending our country is stronger than any obstacle." Fershteh, a teacher, was also defiant. "We are not worried about war because we believe that if God wills it to be a war, I will survive."

Meanwhile, Lebanon's Hezbollah group said it attacked a Zionist army base near the border on Wednesday, with the latest in a series of tit-for-tat

strikes wounding 14 soldiers, according to the Zionist military. The Zionist entity and Hezbollah, an Iran-backed Hamas ally, have been exchanging near-daily cross-border fire since Oct 7.

But Wednesday's incident marked the third day in a row that Hezbollah strikes wounded people in the Zionist entity. Hours after the strike on Arab al-Aramshe, an Arab-majority village in the Zionist entity near the border, Zionist forces hit targets in eastern Lebanon, a Hezbollah source told AFP.

According to the source, the strike targeted a warehouse in Iaat, a residential area near Baalbek, and "lightly" wounded one man. The official National News Agency reported three drone strikes in the area, a Hezbollah stronghold far from the border with the Zionist entity. An AFP photographer said the warehouse that was hit stored vegetables and agricultural produce.

There was no immediate comment from the Zionist military, which earlier said 14 soldiers were wounded in the strike on the Zionist entity, including six seriously. Hezbollah said it launched "a combined attack with guided missiles and explosive drones on a new military reconnaissance command center in Arab al-Aramshe".

According to the Zionist army, "a number of launches from Lebanon were identified crossing into the area of Arab al-Aramshe," and Zionist forces struck the sources of the fire. Hezbollah said the attack came "in response to the enemy assassinating a number of resistance fighters in Ain Baal and Shehabiya" on Tuesday.

On Tuesday, the Zionist entity said its strikes in south Lebanon killed two local Hezbollah commanders and another operative, with the Iran-backed group saying three of its members were killed as it launched rockets in retaliation. — AFP

emergency services said 60 people — including three children — had been wounded. "Search and rescue operations are ongoing," their statement added.

Mayor Oleksandr Lomako said more than a dozen buildings had been damaged in the attack while other officials said dozens of vehicles, and medical and educational facilities were also damaged. A 25-year-old policewoman on sick leave was among those killed after suffering a severe shrapnel injury, the interior minister announced. AFP journalists at the scene saw a body being pulled from the rubble and an eight-storey hotel building gutted by the strike where municipal workers

UAE reels from flooding after...

Continued from Page 1

"I would drown with it," said one worker in his 30s, who did not want to give his name, after his 15-minute commute had turned into a 12-hour saga on flooded roads. "I was very afraid," he added.

Schools will remain closed in Dubai until next week, authorities said, underscoring the difficulty of the clean-up. One householder, also requesting anonymity, said he made a small detour on his way home on Tuesday to buy McDonald's for his children, only to get stuck in traffic and finally arrive — empty-handed — six hours later. "I can understand that the country can't deal with rain on this scale, but the lack of transparency and real-time information is disappointing," he said.

Passengers were warned not to come to Dubai airport, the world's busiest by international traffic, "unless absolutely necessary", an official said. "Flights continue to be delayed and diverted," a Dubai Airports spokesperson said, calling working conditions "very challenging". Dubai's flagship Emirates airline canceled all check-ins as staff and passengers struggled to arrive and leave, with access roads flooded and some metro services suspended.

At the airport, long taxi queues formed and pas-

were using a crane to clear debris.

Nearby apartments, a beauty salon and beer shop were among structures whose windows had been blown out by the attack. The Chernigiv region, which borders Belarus to the north, was partially occupied at the beginning of the Russian invasion but has been spared fighting for around two years since Russian forces retreated.

Zelensky blamed Russia for the attack but also said the West should do more to help defend Ukraine's skies. "This would not have happened if Ukraine had received sufficient air defence equipment and if the world's

sengers milled around, many growing increasingly frustrated as nearly every departure was repeatedly delayed. "They are completely lost, its complete chaos — no information, nothing," fumed one passenger, who did not want to be named, after a 12-hour wait.

Meanwhile, a large crowd gathered at a connections desk, clapping and whistling in protest at the lack of information. Scores of flights were also delayed, canceled and diverted during Tuesday's torrential rain. The storms hit the UAE and Bahrain overnight Monday and on Tuesday, after lashing Oman, where 18 people were killed including children.

Climatologist Friederike Otto, a specialist in assessing the role of climate change on extreme weather events, told AFP it was "highly likely" that global warming had worsened the storms. Maryam Al-Shehhi, senior weather forecaster at the Gulf state's National Center of Meteorology, denied a report that the UAE had carried out cloud seeding — spraying chemicals to increase rainfall. "We did not use cloud seeding because (the storm) was already strong," Shehhi told AFP.

"The desert needs more time than other land for water to seep in. The amount of rain that has fallen is too much for the land to absorb," she added.

Official media said it was the highest rainfall since records began in 1949, before the formation of the UAE in 1971. Schools will also remain closed until next week in Bahrain, which saw record one-day rainfall of 96.88 mm on Tuesday, beating the 67.9 mm witnessed in 1995. — AFP

Russian strikes on Ukraine city...

Continued from Page 1

missile exploded. "Our neighbours were already there. We started shouting for everyone to fall to the floor. They did. There were two more explosions. Then we ran to the parking lot," the 33-year-old said. The official death toll grew to 17 during the day, while

determination to resist Russian terror had been sufficient," he said. Echoing the comments, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba suggested in a social media post that Ukraine should enjoy the same cover from aerial attacks as the Zionist entity.

"In the Middle East, we saw what reliable protection of human lives from missiles looks like," he added, referring to the interception of Iran's drone and missile barrage on the Zionist entity on Saturday. Kuleba thanked Germany for agreeing to supply Ukraine with another Patriot air defence system and said he would appeal to other countries at a G7 meeting this week for more weapons. — AFP

International



VITRY-SUR-SEINE: French gendarmes stand guard next to migrants waiting with their belongings to be registered by associations members to get to another location. — AFP photos

France evicts hundreds of migrants ahead of Olympics

Young men, women with children forced to move outside Paris despite having put down roots



French gendarmes force an entrance door to ask migrants to leave and to register with associations' members to get to another location.

VITRY-SUR-SEINE, France: French authorities on Wednesday evicted hundreds of migrants from a squat in a southern suburb of Paris with just 100 days to go until the Olympics, encouraging them to board buses to other parts of France. Charities have accused the authorities of seeking to clear homeless people from the French capital to make it look better for the Games from July 26 to August 11.

The abandoned office building in Vitry-sur-Seine had been home to up to 450 migrants, most of them documented but awaiting social housing, according to non-governmental organizations who visited to help them. Several had left the building earlier in the week after authorities announced the upcoming eviction.

Clutching their belongings in bags, suitcases or trolleys, some 300 people who had remained left calmly on Wednesday morning under the eye of police in riot gear, looking worried about their next step. Most were young men, but several

women with children were also among the crowd. One by one, holding documents in plastic folders, they approached immigration officials sitting behind tables to explain their situation in broken French or stilted English.

Buses waited outside, ready to take them to the central city of Orleans or the southwestern city of Bordeaux. But many people said they did not want to leave the Paris region. "I want to stay here," said Abakar, a 29-year-old from Sudan who did not give his second name. He said he was in Paris to follow a logistics course and had been promised a job in a supermarket.

'Bordeaux is nice'

At one table, a woman official tried to convince another young man to try his luck in Bordeaux. "You know in France, there isn't just Paris. Bordeaux is nice, it's warmer than here," she said. But he too was attending training in the capital region, and so

she directed him to another table where a colleague was in charge of accommodation near Paris.

Merci Daniel, a mother from Sudan, said she had sent her children to stay in a nearby shelter because there was "too much violence" inside the squat. But she did not want to leave the area as she was scared she would no longer see them if she did. An official found her a room at a hotel outside Paris for several days.

Migrant and homeless charities have accused the authorities of seeking to remove the homeless from Paris and its outskirts before tourists arrive for the Olympics. "There are spaces in shelters near Paris, but clearly they want to move them away from the capital. Especially before the Olympics," said Paul Alauzy, a representative from medical charity Medecins du Monde (Doctors of the World). Some mayors in rural and small-town France have also become increasingly angry over the transfer of migrants from the capital to their communities. — AFP

Downpours kill 135 in Pakistan, Afghanistan

PESHAWAR/KABUL: At least 65 people have died in storm-related incidents including lightning in Pakistan, officials said, with rain so far in April falling at nearly twice the historical average rate. It has also been hammered by spring downpours. Around 70 people have been killed by heavy rains over the past five days, the government's disaster management department said Wednesday.

More than 2,600 houses in Afghanistan have been damaged or destroyed and 95,000 acres of farmland wiped away. Giving a smaller death toll last week, Disaster management spokesman Janan Sayeq said most fatalities at that point had been caused by roof collapses resulting from the deluges.

In Pakistani villages, downpours between Friday and Monday unleashed flash floods and caused houses to collapse, while lightning killed at least 28 people. The largest death toll was in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where 32 people have died, including 15 children, and more than 1,300 homes have been damaged. "All the casualties resulted from the collapse of walls and roofs," Anwar Khan, spokesman for the province's disaster management authority, told AFP on Wednesday.

Historic rainfall

Villagers whose homes were inundated with water were forced to seek refuge on higher ground, including on the shoulders of motorways, creating makeshift tents with plastic sheeting and bamboo sticks. "In April, we have observed highly unusual rainfall patterns," Zabeer Ahmad Babar, spokesperson for the Pakistan Meteorological Department, told AFP. "From April 1st to April 17th, we experienced precipitation levels exceeding the historical average by 99 percent," he added, citing data from the past 30 years as a comparison.

Most of the country experienced a pause in rain on Tuesday and Wednesday, but more downpours are predicted in the coming days. "Climate change is a



CHARSADDA, Pakistan: Residents waded through the flooded waters outside their homes following heavy rains on April 17, 2024.

major factor behind these unusual weather patterns and above normal rainfalls, but it's not just Pakistan which is affected, the whole region is experiencing changes in temperature patterns," Babar added.

Pakistan is increasingly vulnerable to unpredictable weather patterns, as well as often destructive monsoon rains that usually arrive in July. In the summer of 2022, a third of Pakistan was submerged by unprecedented monsoon rains that displaced millions of people and cost the country \$30 billion in damage and economic losses, according to a World Bank estimate.

In the latest rains, 21 people including farmers harvesting wheat were killed by lightning in Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, provincial authorities said. 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. People living in open, rural areas are at greater risk of being struck by lightning during thunderstorms. Schools in Balochistan province were ordered

shut on Monday and Tuesday, with some reopening on Wednesday, because of the downpours. At least four people were killed in road accidents linked to flooded roads in southern Sindh province.

Extreme weather

Afghanistan was parched by an unusually dry winter which desiccated the earth, exacerbating flash-flooding caused by spring downpours in most provinces. The United Nations last year warned that "Afghanistan is experiencing major swings in extreme weather conditions".

After four decades of war the country ranks among the nations least prepared to face extreme weather events, which scientists say are becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change. At least 25 people were killed in a landslide after massive snowfall in eastern Afghanistan in February, while around 60 were killed in a three-week spate of precipitation ending in March. — AFP

UK pediatricians urge lawmakers to ban smacking kids

LONDON: Pediatricians on Wednesday urged the UK government to follow devolved governments in Scotland and Wales and outlaw smacking children in England and Northern Ireland, arguing the move was "long overdue". One government minister insisted however that the existing laws were adequate. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) said in a new report that current law in England and Northern Ireland had created "grey areas" that sometimes provided a defense for physical punishment.

Wales made any type of corporal punishment — including smacking, hitting, slapping and shaking — illegal in March 2022, while Scotland introduced a similar ban in November 2020. However, the RCPCH argues a 2004 law for England and 2006 legislation for Northern Ireland covering this area needed amending to remove a possible "reasonable punishment" defense. Its report said that ahead of a general election expected later this year, all political parties should make "meaningful commitments on this important children's rights issue".

However, government minister Laura Trott insisted laws in England were clear and that any abuse of children is "completely unacceptable", in comments to Sky News Wednesday. "They are very clearly set out in the Children Act, but it is for parents to discipline their children," she added. But Andrew Rowland, a consultant pediatrician and RCPCH officer, criticized the situation in the two UK nations without recent changes. "The laws around physical punishment as they stand are unjust and dangerously vague," he argued. "They create a grey area in which some forms of physical punishment may be lawful, and some are not." Rowland added he was "regularly faced with situations where it is alleged that physical punishment has been used against a child" but that the "vague nature of the laws make it extremely challenging" to respond. — AFP

Germany arrests 10 for trafficking wealthy migrants

BERLIN: German investigators arrested 10 people in nationwide raids on Wednesday, over suspicions they were part of a network smuggling in wealthy migrants from China and the Arab world. Prosecutors identified the alleged ringleaders as a pair of lawyers, who charged "wealthy nationals of China and the Arab world" between 30,000 and 350,000 euros (\$32,000 and \$373,000) each to obtain permanent residence in Germany. The residence permits were issued by officials in four districts, including the western cities of Kerpen and Solingen, prosecutors said. Among the suspects detained is an official who allegedly received bribes from the network.

Police are investigating 38 suspected members of the smuggling gang, as well as 147 people believed to have been trafficked into the country. More than 1,000 police officers were mobilized in the search of 101 properties, including two legal practices and the district offices where residence permits were issued. German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said such "high pressure" was necessary against criminal gangs. — AFP



SPIN BOLDAK: Afghan people wait to cross a flooded area in Spin Boldak district of Kandahar province on April 13, 2024, after a flash flood following a heavy rainfall. — AFP photos

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2024

Why oil prices are muted despite Iranian attacks?

Sanctions reduce Iran's oil revenues, restrict trade



SYDNEY: Tugboats escort a crude oil tanker, Kara Sea, through Sydney Harbor. — AFP

LONDON: Oil prices have failed to soar even after major crude producer Iran attacked Zionist entity with drones and missiles, risking wider conflict in the crude-rich Middle East. On Tuesday, the world's main oil contracts were trading slightly higher. European benchmark, Brent North Sea crude, gained 0.1 percent to \$90.17 per barrel. WTI, the main US traded oil contract, won 0.3 percent to \$85.66 per barrel. They fell on Monday following the weekend attack.

Retaliation?

Fallout from Iran's actions were to an extent priced in by markets as warnings had been given prior to the attack, although the scale of retaliation remains unclear. "The attack, announced well in advance, resulted in minimal damage as Zionists and allied forces intercepted nearly all projectiles," noted Ole Hvalbye, analyst at SEB bank. From late on Saturday to early Sunday, Iran launched more than 300 drones, missiles and ballistic missiles at Zionist entity but caused just minor

damage, including at a military base in the country's south. "The market discounts a possible escalation of the crisis between Iran and Zionists," said Tamas Varga, analyst at PVM Energy. "It believes that any Zionists retaliation will be measured, partly due to US and international pressure to show restraint."

"Iran will also be careful not to exacerbate the situation as it will want to continue its crude oil exports," Varga told AFP. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has warned there could be further sanctions targeting Iran. It already faces crippling US sanctions since Washington's unilateral withdrawal in 2018 from a landmark deal that had promised sanctions relief in return for curbs on Iran's nuclear program. The sanctions sharply reduced Iran's oil revenues and further restricted trade, helping to harden the decades-old enmity with the United States and Zionist entity.

Supply disruption?

Iran still produces close to 3.2 million oil barrels

per day, according to the International Energy Agency, which last year put the country as the world's ninth largest crude producer. "Zionist entity may exert pressure on its ally, the US, to impose stricter sanctions on Iran," said Hvalbye. "The enforcement of such sanctions, particularly on Iranian oil exports, could result in a loss of anywhere between 0.5 million to 1.0 million barrels per day of oil supply."

That should still leave Iran's daily output above the roughly 1.9 million barrels of oil seen in mid-2020 - after then-US president Donald Trump pulled out of the nuclear agreement. Varga forecast that spare oil capacity within the OPEC cartel "should be sufficient to mitigate the impact of any supply disruption" caused by Iran. He said this would be the case as long as major oil producer Saudi Arabia was not drawn into the conflict, or that the Strait of Hormuz - a key sea passage for transporting crude - remained open. "For now, the market believes that further serious conflagration is avoidable," Varga added. — AFP

Global debt levels facing 'Great Election Year' risk

WASHINGTON: The path towards sustainable government debt levels around the world is under threat this year from the sheer number of elections taking place, the IMF said Wednesday in a new report. "History suggests, and empirical evidence confirms, that governments tend to spend more and or tax less in election year," Vitor Gaspar, the head of the International Monetary Fund's Fiscal Affairs told AFP, ahead of the publication of the Fiscal Monitor report.

He added that the situation this year is particularly complicated because, "the political discourse is dominated by references to fiscal expansion and calls for fiscal support or public spending - or both." The Fiscal Monitor report found that global public debt "edged up again" last year, reversing a couple of years of decline, due largely to a fall in revenues "as windfall revenues from inflation waned."

"Fiscal tightening is projected for 2024, but it is subject to considerable uncertainty," the IMF report continued. Much of this uncertainty, the IMF said, is down to the fact that 2024 is the "Great Election Year," when 88 economies or economic areas representing more than half of the world's population have held, or are due to hold, elections. "Clearly, given the stronger link between fiscal policy and politics, it is perfectly reasonable to think that political factors and political discourse will play an added role right now," Gaspar told AFP.

Medium-term concerns

The IMF predicts that current spending and taxation levels have put global public debt on track to rise from just over 93 percent of economic output last year to 99 percent by 2029. This trend is "driven by the world's two



WASHINGTON: (Left to right) International Monetary Fund (IMF) Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, IMF Research Department Deputy Director Petya Koeva Brooks and IMF Research Department Division Chief Daniel Leigh hold a press briefing as the IMF publishes its global economic forecasts at the IMF-World Bank Group spring meetings at IMF headquarters. — AFP

largest economies, China and the United States, where under current policies public debt is projected to continue increasing beyond historical highs," the IMF report said.

The US experienced "remarkably large fiscal slippages," last year, the IMF said, citing a steep decline in income tax revenues due to lower capital gains taxes and "delayed tax payment deadlines."

While the IMF expects the US fiscal deficit to remain stuck above six percent over the next five years, the country's strong economic position makes it a "very strong outlier in fiscal development around the world," Gaspar said. "The United States has ample fiscal space," he continued. "There are many measures that can be taken on the spending side and the revenue side." — AFP

Apple CEO meets Indonesia leader, talks investments

JAKARTA: Apple chief executive Tim Cook met Indonesia's president on Wednesday, as the tech giant explores ways to invest in Southeast Asia's biggest economy and diversify supply chains away from China. The visit comes as US President Joe Biden's administration seeks to boost other Asian trade partners' roles in the global tech supply chain to reduce American dependence on China. Cook travelled to Indonesia's presidential palace in Jakarta to meet Joko Widodo, the outgoing leader more popularly known as Jokowi, who has promoted a burgeoning tech sector.

"Indonesia is a very important market for us. We talked about the president's desire to see manufacturing in the country, and it's something that we will look at," he told reporters. "I think the investment ability in Indonesia is endless. We believe in the country," he



JAKARTA: This handout picture shows Indonesian President Joko Widodo (right) shaking hands with Apple CEO Tim Cook at the Merdeka Palace in Jakarta. — AFP

added. "It was a dialogue about how much potential there is in the country and our commitment to the country." The iPhone-maker announced Tuesday it will expand its developer academies in Indonesia to four with a new facility on the Hindu resort island of

Bali. Indonesia has a young, tech-savvy population with more than 100 million people under the age of 30, but Apple is dominated in the smartphone market by Google's Android, according to statistics.

Cook later met president-elect and current defense minister Prabowo Subianto, who will take the reins from Jokowi in October after his election win in February. The pair held talks that lasted more than an hour at the defense ministry in Jakarta, according to a ministry statement. They "discussed various matters, especially regarding collaboration between Apple and the Indonesian government", the statement said. It said Cook had sent a letter to Prabowo last month in which he wrote: "Looking to the future, I am confident that we will be able to open up more successful cooperation between Indonesia and Apple".

Minister of Communication and Informatics Budi Arie Setiadi last month said Cook's visit could involve talks on new Apple investments in Indonesia, including a smartphone factory. "There are all possibilities, we'll see what the approach is, because there are a lot of Apple users in Indonesia," he said, local media reported. Apple did not respond to an AFP request for comment about Cook's plans in Indonesia. — AFP

News in Brief

Emirati group eyes Naturgy

MADRID: Abu Dhabi-based energy holding Taqa said Wednesday it was in talks to buy the 41 percent stake in Naturgy, Spain's leading gas supplier, held by investment funds CVC and GIP. If Taqa acquires the stakes held by the two funds, it would need to launch a full takeover offer for Naturgy, it said in a statement sent to Spain's stock market regulator. At the same time Taqa said it was also talking to Naturgy's largest shareholder, Criteria Caixa "about a possible cooperation agreement relating to Naturgy," it added in the statement. Criteria Caixa, the investment holding company of Spanish bank La Caixa, holds a 26.7 percent stake in Naturgy. GIP and CVC each own about 21 percent of Naturgy, while infrastructure fund IFM owns about 15 percent. Taqa said it still had not yet reached "any agreement with Criteria Caixa, CVC or GIP". — AFP

S Africa inflation slows

JOHANNESBURG: Inflation in South Africa eased for the first time this year in March, dropping 0.3 percentage points to 5.3 percent, official data showed on Wednesday, ahead of general elections in May. Following a two-month upswing, the decrease helped keep the rate within the central bank's official target range, national statistics agency StatsSA said. "The rate has held its ground between 5 percent and 6 percent since September 2023," it said. After reaching a peak of 14 percent a year ago, the inflation rate for food and non-alcoholic beverages slowed to 5.1 percent in March from 6.1 percent in February. This was "the lowest annual increase since September 2020", StatsSA said. Up 6.3 percent, 6.0 percent and 5.9 percent respectively, education, health and housing were among the categories registering the highest annual price changes. The economy is among voters' main concerns as South Africans head to the poll on May 29 amid high unemployment, poverty and sluggish growth. — AFP

Volvo Group profit rises

STOCKHOLM: Swedish truck maker Volvo Group on Wednesday announced a 9.9 percent rise in net profit in the first quarter despite lower sales volumes thanks to higher prices. "Demand continued to normalize at good levels across many of the Volvo Group markets," chief executive Martin Lundstedt said in a statement that announced net profit of 14.1 billion krona (\$1.29 billion). Lundstedt said that after record demand in 2023, the company delivered 55,470 trucks in the first quarter this year, 10 percent down on the same period last year. Orders fell 19 percent to 48,701 trucks. But net profit for the quarter was up from 12.9 billion krona in the same period last year. Sales revenue was stable at 131.2 billion krona (\$12 billion). — AFP

Business

Canada budget woos young voters, asks rich to pay more

Inflation ticks higher to 2.9 percent

OTTAWA: The government of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday unveiled a federal budget that seeks to woo young voters while asking the wealthy to pay higher taxes. Trailing his main rival, conservative leader Pierre Poilievre, by more than 10 points, Trudeau must rally support from the millennials and Gen Z voters who propelled him to power in 2015 in order to win elections expected next year.

At the same time, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland has promised not to swell the nation's budget deficit while doling out tens of billions of dollars in additional social spending to help ease concerns about rising costs of living. Most of the new spending is directed at education, housing and jobs - all pressure points for young voters. "For too many younger Canadians, particularly millennials and Gen Z, it feels like their hard work isn't paying off," Freeland said in the budget document. "They're not getting the same deal their parents and grandparents did," she said, adding: "We must restore a fair chance for millennials and Gen Z."

New homes, rent subsidies

Specifically, millennials and so-called Zoomers could benefit from extended student grants and loans, rent subsidies, a boost to work placement and summer jobs programs, a new youth mental health fund, and help improving their coding skills. The Liberal government also pledged amid a housing crunch to build an additional 3.87 million new homes by 2031 "at a pace and scale not seen since after the Second World War," Freeland said.

To do this, Ottawa will open up public lands for housing, convert federal offices to apartments, tax vacant properties and scale up modular housing. New home prices fell slightly in March but not enough to offset a jump in mortgage interest costs that has sidelined many would-be first-time buyers. Inflation came down from a recent high to 2.9 percent in the month, but it is still too high to bring relief in interest rates set by the Bank of Canada.

Nevertheless, Canada is expecting a "soft landing" this year and will avoid a recession due to slightly improved growth despite relatively high interest rates weighing on the economy, the budget said. Economists surveyed by the government "expect the economy to avoid a recession," it said, forecasting growth of 0.7



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

percent this year and 1.9 percent in 2025 - compared to 0.5 percent and 2.2 percent forecast in a November economic statement.

To help offset the boost in social spending, the budget calls for increased capital gains taxes on the wealthiest Canadians. "Today, it is possible for a carpenter or a nurse to pay tax at a higher marginal rate than a multi-millionaire," Freeland told lawmakers. "That isn't fair." Small businesses meanwhile will gain a carbon tax rebate, and funds were made available for artificial intelligence research and startups.

Ahead of an expected catastrophic summer wildfire season, Ottawa is also doubling a volunteer firefighter tax credit. In the budget, funding was also earmarked for a national school food program, free contraceptives for women, enhancing Canada's spy agency capabilities to combat foreign interference, more foreign aid, and restoring roads to remote Indigenous communities damaged by climate change.

Freeland reported in the budget that the nation-

al debt will increase slightly to a new record high of Can\$1.3 trillion in fiscal 2024-2025. Canada's debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to fall to 41.9 percent. The deficit, meanwhile, is expected to come in a bit lower than originally expected to Can\$39.8 billion, and remain stable before starting to fall in 2026-2027.

Inflation ticks higher

Inflation in Canada rose to 2.9 percent in March led by higher gasoline prices, the government statistical agency said Tuesday. The 0.1 percentage point increase from 2.8 percent the previous month was largely expected after consumer inflation in the United States - Canada's neighbor and biggest trading partner - accelerated last week. Rising costs of living are proving to be the biggest obstacle to both Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and US President Joe Biden's re-election hopes.

Biden is facing Donald Trump in a tight race to a November ballot while Trudeau trails his main rival,

Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre, by more than 10 points in public opinion polls with an election looming in 2025. Trudeau's Liberal government is to unveil its 2024 budget later in the day with tens of billions of dollars in new spending aimed at helping to ease the impacts of rising prices - notably for homes - on Canadians. Political pundits have said interest rates and prices overall must come down in the coming 18 months if Trudeau is to have any chance of convincing voters to continue supporting his minority government.

According to Statistics Canada, year over year gasoline prices increased 4.5 percent in March, following an 0.8 percent rise in February. New home prices fell slightly in the month but not enough to offset a jump in mortgage interest costs. Rents were up too, along with air transportation, clothing and footwear, and passenger vehicle insurance premiums. Telephone and Internet services, as well as natural gas prices, meanwhile, fell.- AFP

32 million views for Gulf Bank commercials featuring Nabil Shuail

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has wrapped up its advertising campaign in collaboration with the renowned star, Nabil Shuail. The campaign, featuring three comedic commercials, accumulated approximately 32 million views across various social media platforms.

The third advertisement, centering on the semi-annual draw of the Al-Danah account featuring a prize of KD 1 million, accumulated approximately 11 million views in just two weeks during the holy month of Ramadan.

This campaign comprised four prize competitions, with each offering KD 1,000. It is noteworthy that the semi-annual draw for the Al-Danah account,

revealing the winner of the KD 1 million prize, is set for July 18, 2024, with representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Ernst & Young in attendance.

The second commercial, which celebrated Kuwait's National Day and featured the song "Free Kuwait"

wait" by artist Nabil Shuail, received around 13 million views in a short timeframe. It also highlighted the prepaid card adorned with Kuwait's flag, resonating deeply with citizens. Regarding the "Ya Shams" commercial, which concluded with Nabil Shuail stating, "Switch to Gulf Bank today and experience continuous benefits," featured participating stars expressing their enthusiasm and appreciation for the bank's digital advancements and the comprehensive features of its mobile application. This commercial amassed approximately 8 million views across different social media platforms.

Najla Al-Eisa, Deputy General Manager and Chief Marketing Officer of Gulf Bank, extended her appreciation to the esteemed star Nabil Shuail, the actors, the filming crew, and the director, for their substantial contributions towards accomplishing the social and promotional goals of the three commercials. Al-Eisa highlighted that the significant engagement on social media attained through the bank's promotional campaign underscores their success in reaching diverse segments within society. She also emphasized the level of customer satisfaction with the notable enhancements observed in the customer experience, especially through the bank's mobile application.

She also noted that Gulf Bank's digital transformation journey, which includes branch and ATM developments, customer service center updates, and enhancements to the interactive voice response system. These efforts align with the bank's 2025 strategy to reinforce its prominent role in Kuwait's banking industry, and deliver exceptional services and solutions to its customers.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti



Nabil Shuail

Bank of the Future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

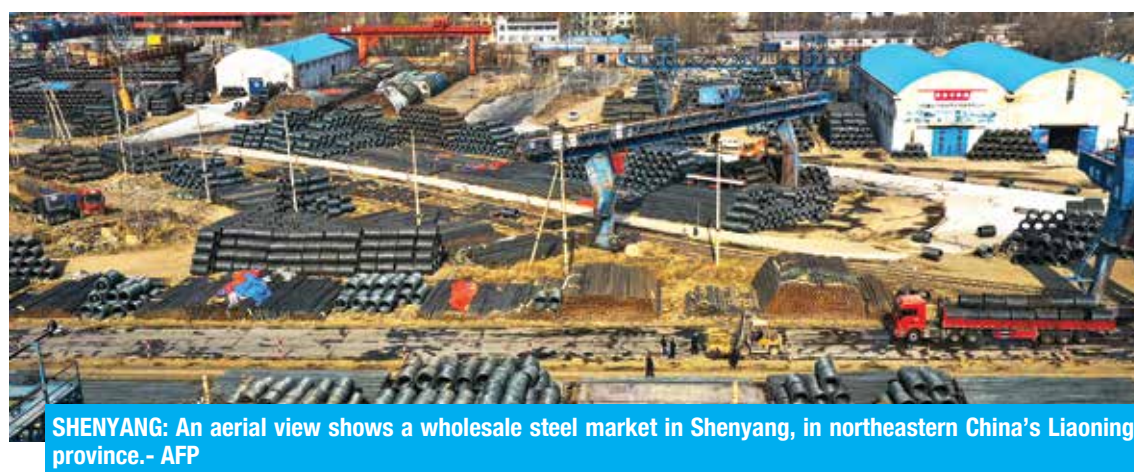
UK inflation slows less than expected

LONDON: Britain's annual inflation rate fell less than expected last month, according to official data Wednesday that could cloud the outlook for interest rate cuts and cause more pain for the government. The Consumer Prices Index dropped to 3.2 percent in March, the lowest level since September 2021, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said. Markets, however, had expected a rate of 3.1 percent in March.

Inflation rose 3.4 percent in the 12 months to February, the ONS added in a statement. "Inflation eased slightly in March to its lowest annual rate for two-and-a-half years," ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner said. "Once again, food prices were the main reason for the fall, with prices rising by less than we saw a year ago. "Similarly to last month, we saw a partial offset from rising fuel prices," he added in the ONS release.

Finance minister Jeremy Hunt described the latest drop as "welcome news". But inflation remains well above the Bank of England's two-percent target, as millions of Britons wait to see when it will start cutting interest rates to ease a cost-of-living crisis. Ruth Gregory, deputy chief UK economist at Capital Economics, said the smaller-than-expected fall "raises the risk that inflation will follow the trend in the US and soon stall."

"The chances of interest rates being cut for the first time in June are now a bit slimmer," she noted. Other analysts said a June cut remained a strong possibility. "Today's data are unlikely to move the needle for the Bank of England," said Yael Sellin, chief economist at KPMG UK. "The overall outlook for inflation remains broadly positive, however there are several risks which could cause a setback.—AFP



SHENYANG: An aerial view shows a wholesale steel market in Shenyang, in northeastern China's Liaoning province.- AFP

Cheap Chinese steel threatens jobs in Latin America

SANTIAGO: Latin American metal workers are clamoring for higher import tariffs as cheap Chinese steel floods the region, threatening hundreds of thousands of jobs linked to the industry. Last year, the region imported a record 10 million tons of Chinese steel - a 44 percent rise from the year before, according to data from the Latin American Steel Association (Alacero). Two decades ago, the figure was just 85,000 tons. "China is too present in Latin America," Alacero executive Alejandro Wagner told AFP. "No one is against trade between countries, but it must be fair trade," he added.

As the pressure increases, steel plant bosses and

workers in countries like Chile and Brazil - the top producer in the region and number nine in the world - are pressing governments for higher import tariffs. If they were to do so, they would follow Mexico and the United States, which have imposed additional tariffs of 25 percent on Chinese imports amid a surge of cheap exports as a result of Beijing subsidies and excess production.

Earlier this month, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen expressed concern about "substantial overinvestment and excess capacity" in sectors like steel and aluminum in China, which she said had "decimated industries across the world and in the United States." A dive in the Asian giant's construction sector has further added to an oversupply of steel for exportation. Data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2022 showed China leading global steel production with 54 percent, followed by India with 6.6 percent. Latin America's top producers - Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia - came in at a combined 3.1 percent.—AFP

Anemic France and Germany will slow euro-zone down

PARIS: The economies of France and Germany will grow by less than expected this year and next, weighing on the euro-zone's overall performance, the International Monetary Fund said Tuesday. In its latest World Economic Outlook report, the IMF slashed its forecasts for growth in the euro-zone's top two economies this year by 0.3 percentage points as high interest rates continue to weigh on the region. It now expects French growth to slow to 0.7 percent this year, from 0.9 percent in 2023. Meanwhile, the German economy should manage only a weak recovery of 0.2 percent, from the 0.3 percent contraction it suffered last year, as "persistently weak consumer sentiment" hobbles its performance, the IMF said.

Both countries will underperform the overall euro-zone, which is expected to see growth accelerate to 0.8 percent this year, from 0.4 percent in 2023. That is a drop of 0.1 points from the IMF's previous 2024 forecast made in January. "In the euro area, growth will pick up this year, but from very low levels, as the trailing effects of tight monetary policy and past energy costs, as well as planned fiscal consolidation, weigh on activity," the IMF said in its report. "Stronger household consumption, as the effects of the shock to energy prices subside and a fall in inflation supports growth in real income, is expected to drive the recovery," it added. It is the third consecutive downgrade by the IMF of its forecast for German growth, and the second for France. As of last October it saw France's growth picking up steam to 1.3 percent this year. Germany's lackluster economic performance has seen it once again labeled by analysts as the "Sick man of Europe", unheard of since the late 1990s when it was weighed down by the cost of unification.

Increasing competition from Chinese manufacturers, the transition to a green economy and the rise of energy costs following the Russian invasion of Ukraine all weighed heavily on the German economy, BNP Paribas economist Stephane Colliac told AFP. Inflation and high interest rates continue to weigh upon the French economy, as does Germany's weak recovery, he added. "The geopolitical context is not favorable to growth and confidence," a source in the French economy ministry said, pointing to attacks by Yemeni rebels on shipping through the Red Sea and the risk of the conflict in the Middle East spreading, as well as the continued fighting in Ukraine. The IMF's forecast for Germany is now in line with that of the German government. The French government lowered its 2024 growth forecast in January to 1.0 percent, but that is now seen as too optimistic. The French central bank sees 0.8 percent growth, the OECD 0.6 percent, and the European Commission 0.9 percent. The IMF sees the French and German economies continuing to underperform the overall euro-zone in 2025, which is seen as growing by 1.5 percent, a cut of 0.2 points from its previous forecast. It expects the French economy to pick up the pace to a 1.4 percent expansion, with German growth accelerating to 1.3 percent, a cut in 0.3 points for both.—AFP

Stocks mixed after selloff as Fed, Middle East dampen sentiment

Traders nervously awaiting Zionist entity's next move

HONG KONG: Asian markets were mixed Wednesday as Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell's indication that interest rates could stay higher for longer offset a rebound following the latest bout of Middle East-fueled selling. While traders are nervously awaiting Zionists' next move after Iran's missile and drone attack at the weekend, the lack of an immediate response has seen them focus on the US central bank's monetary policy plans. A string of hotter-than-expected data on inflation and jobs in the first three months has forced investors to whittle down their bets on how many interest rate cuts the Fed will make this year.

And Powell all but confirmed that borrowing costs will likely have to remain elevated longer than previously hoped. "The recent data have clearly not given us greater confidence and instead indicate that is likely to take longer than expected to achieve that confidence," he warned Tuesday in Washington. "Given the strength of the labor market and progress on inflation so far, it is appropriate to allow restrictive policy further time to work and let the data and the evolving outlook guide us."

The bank's most recent "dot plot" guidance for rates suggested it will cut three times this year, with June eyed for the first. Traders had priced in as many

as six cuts at the start of the year. But observers are now predicting just one or two at best - starting in July or September - with some even arguing that the next move could be a hike if inflation refuses to come back down to the Fed's two percent target. Powell's remarks chime with those of several officials at the Fed, who have urged caution on when to begin normalizing rates.

Richmond Fed chief Thomas Barkin said Tuesday that the recent run of indicators had not supported the idea of a soft landing for the economy, while Fed Vice Chair Philip Jefferson saw inflation coming down but rates remaining elevated for now owing to price pressures. The S&P 500 and Nasdaq both fell in New York, though the Dow eked out a gain. Asia was mixed, with Tokyo, Sydney, Seoul, Jakarta and Bangkok down but Shanghai, Singapore, Wellington, Taipei and Manila rising. Hong Kong was flat. London edged up in the morning, with data showing Britain's annual inflation rate fell less than expected last month. Paris and Frankfurt were also higher.

US Fed's credibility

"The hawkish tone from Powell didn't come as much of a surprise, considering the persistent inflationary challenges, the robust state of the US economy, and the

Fed's commitment to data-driven decision-making," said Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management. "Anything short of reaffirming the 'higher for longer' would likely have raised even more questions about the Fed's credibility." The dollar's recent rally stalled despite Powell's comments, though it remains elevated against its peers, including the yen, South Korean won and Indian rupee.

South Korea said Wednesday that its finance minister had met his Japanese counterpart to discuss the recent weakness of their currencies, agreeing to take "appropriate actions" to counter extreme volatility. Seoul issued a rare warning Tuesday, saying authorities were carefully monitoring currency movements as the won briefly touched a critical level of 1,400 per dollar for the first time in 17 months.

That came after officials in Tokyo said they were ready to intervene in forex markets to support the yen, which is sitting around a 34-year low. South Korean Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok and Japan's Shunichi Suzuki "shared serious concerns about the recent significant depreciation of the Japanese yen and the Korean won", Seoul's finance ministry said in a statement. Traders are keeping an eye on developments in the Middle East after Zionist army chief General Herzli Halevi warned that there would be a



RUICHANG: An employee works at a factory that produces charging stations for electric cars in Ruichang, in central China's Jiangxi province on April 17, 2024. — AFP

response to Iran's barrage on Saturday, fuelling worries of a region-wide conflict.

Tehran said the attack was in retaliation for a strike on the consular annex of its Damascus embassy that killed seven Revolutionary Guards, though it said: "The matter can be deemed concluded". While on edge for any further escalation,

trading floors are relatively calm Wednesday, with oil prices edging down despite the crises in the Middle East, Ukraine and OPEC output cuts. "Our base case is one where tensions remain contained (in the Middle East), avoiding a wider conflict that disrupts oil supply," said Han Zhong Liang of Standard Chartered. — AFP

ASML's profits down amid China chip spat

THE HAGUE: Dutch tech giant ASML, which supplies chip-making machines to the semiconductor industry, on Wednesday reported a drop in net profits and orders amid a high-tech trade spat between China and the West. Net profits came in at 1.2 billion euros (\$1.3 billion) in the first quarter, compared to 2.0 billion euros the firm reported in the fourth quarter of last year.

Bookings slumped to 3.6 billion euros, a sharp decline from the 9.2 billion euros reported in the fourth quarter. Company shares slumped more than six percent at the opening bell of the Amsterdam stock exchange, which was down 0.7 percent overall. ASML is one of the leading manufacturers of equipment to make state-of-the-art semiconductor chips, which power everything from mobile phones to cars.

But the semiconductor industry has become a geopolitical battleground as the West seeks to restrict China's access over fears the chips could be used for advanced weaponry. ASML announced this year that it had been blocked from exporting "a small number" of its advanced machines to China, amid reports of US pressure on the Dutch government. Chief executive Peter Wennink said the firm was still upbeat for the second half of 2024, which ASML has identified as a "transition" year before a stronger 2025.

"Our outlook for the full year 2024 is unchanged, with the second half of the year expected to be stronger than the first half, in line with the industry's continued recovery from the downturn," Wennink said in a statement. Overall sales in the first quarter came in at 5.3 billion euros, lower than the 7.2 billion euros from the fourth quarter but in the range the company had forecast. In its annual report published in January, the firm had forecast first-quarter sales of between 5.0 and 5.5 billion euros. For the second quarter, the firm said it expected total net sales between 5.7 billion and 6.2 billion.

'Operation Beethoven'

Chief Financial Officer Roger Dassen said investors should bear in mind that combined orders over the past two quarters amounted to 13 billion euros - "a pretty significant number." He said orders were "typically quite lumpy", meaning wide variations can occur from quarter to quarter. Despite the first quarter drop in sales, the percentage of sales to China actually rose - to 49 percent from 39 percent in the fourth quarter of last year.

ASML employs 42,000 people worldwide, more than half of whom are based at the firm's huge complex in Veldhoven, in the east of the Netherlands, with a significant proportion coming from abroad. That aspect of the business has hit the headlines in recent months with the surprise election win of far-right leader Geert Wilders, who wants to drastically crimp immigration. The firm has said that if it is unable to find the talent in the Netherlands, it could possibly be forced to look elsewhere, unnerving Dutch politicians.

Last month, the country unveiled "Operation Beethoven", a charm offensive worth 2.5 billion euros to keep global firms like ASML from moving abroad to attract talent. The semiconductor industry was at the heart of discussions between Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Chinese President Xi Jinping last month in Beijing. Xi declared that "no force can stop the pace of China's scientific and technological progress" while Rutte said that any measures taken were not aimed at one specific country. There are concerns Beijing may introduce its own export controls on gallium and germanium - two rare earth metals critical for the manufacture of semiconductors. — AFP

Women in tech, AI in focus as Web Summit opens in Rio

RIO DE JANEIRO: The future of artificial intelligence, technology to fight climate change and other glimpses at the cutting edge were in focus Tuesday as mega-tech conference Web Summit opened in Rio de Janeiro. Known as the "Davos for Geeks," the conference is holding its second edition in the Brazilian beach city, with more than 600 tech gurus, public personalities and other speakers joining entrepreneurs from more than 1,000 startups.

In a male-dominated industry, organizers said 45 percent of the startups represented this year were founded or are led by women, a record for Web Summit, which started in 2009. Dozens of women tech entrepreneurs from countries including Argentina, Brazil, Portugal and Uruguay took the stage to applause as organizers opened the three-day event.

"Discussions at this year's event focus on technology's role in addressing crucial global issues, such as AI, fintech, climate change and human rights," said conference director Artur Pereira. The gathering is "an opportunity for Web Summit to convene technology's leaders in Latin America's already dynamic



HUAIBEI: Employees work on aluminum products at a factory in Huaibei, in China's eastern Anhui province. — AFP

Biden pushes triple tariffs on Chinese steel, aluminum

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Wednesday urged a tripling of tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum, citing "unfair competition" as he seeks to win blue-collar votes in November's election. Biden's call comes as the US Trade Representative (USTR) announced it is launching a probe into China's trade practices in the shipbuilding, maritime and logistics sectors in response to a recent petition by five US unions. The president is preparing to address steelworkers in Pittsburgh on Wednesday, the second day of a three-day trip through the crucial swing state of Pennsylvania.

Both Biden and his election rival Donald Trump are competing for vital blue-collar voters, promising to revive American manufacturing. "Chinese policies and subsidies for their domestic steel and aluminum industries mean high-quality US products are undercut by artificially low-priced Chinese alternatives produced with higher emissions," the White House said in a statement. A senior US official told reporters that China accounts for about half of global steel production, while exporting the metal at a significantly lower cost than US steel prices.

As the USTR reviews tariffs imposed on China during Trump's administration, Biden urged it to triple an existing rate under Section 301 of the



RIO DE JANEIRO: A signboard of the Web Summit is seen at the Copacabana seafont in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP

and rapidly growing tech scene" and connect them with global players, he said. Launched in Dublin 15 years ago, Web Summit moved to Lisbon in 2016. The Latin American edition is held in parallel with the original, which still convenes each November.

Organizers plan to hold the Rio edition at least through 2028. AFP is a media partner of the event this year. The conference brings together startups

with giants like IBM, BYD, Salesforce, Huawei and JP Morgan. "Our mission is to transform Rio into the capital of innovation of Latin America," Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes said in his opening speech. "We believe that tech and innovation can act as key drivers of Rio's economy." Rio officials say the event will draw 40,000 people a day and inject some 33 million reais (\$6.4 million) into the economy. — AFP

Businesses shut down across Uganda; Union protests high taxes

KAMPALA: Businesses shut down in major towns and cities across Uganda on Wednesday in protest at high taxes and a newly enforced revenue collection system. The week-long action was launched by the Federation of Uganda Traders Association on Tuesday and has spread from the capital Kampala to many other parts of the country.

"We have called on all businesses in the country to close in protest until the government hears our voice," FUTA president John Kabanda told AFP. "We are pressing ahead with the strike and we are determined to close for even a month until the government acts on our demands." Shops and other businesses including butchers, bakers and eateries have shut their doors, protesting at high interest rates and taxes, with VAT at 18 percent, and a new levy on imported clothing.

The action was triggered by the government's enforcement of a tax regime known as EFRIS requiring that all receipts and invoices submitted to the revenue authority must be digital. Uganda's minister of state for finance, Haruna Kyeyune Kasolo, said the businesses were protesting because they did not understand the new system. "The striking traders must appreciate the new system because it is for the good of their businesses while enabling the country to collect taxes as opposed to (relying on) foreign funding," he told AFP.

But local traders voiced anger at the tax burden they are facing. "I joined the protest to save my business. We are tired of paying high taxes yet we have other high operational costs," said Bernard Musoke, a 48-year-old who runs a mixed retail shop in Kampala's main commercial district. "Should we continue to pay high taxes for the government officials and parliament to embezzle and live in luxury?" Sylvia Atwenda, a 31-year-old mother of three who trades in cosmetics and hair accessories, told AFP that people had set up businesses to support their families, not fund the government. "Instead of taking away all that we have, we appeal to the government to give us subsidies and support our businesses to grow and not kill them." — AFP

Trade Act. Currently, the average tariff on steel and aluminum under this section is 7.5 percent. The so-called Section 301 investigation was the primary tool the Trump administration used in the trade war with China to justify tariffs. The White House added on Wednesday that Biden is also directing officials to work with Mexico to prevent tariff evasion by China.

Meanwhile, the USTR investigation into shipbuilding and other sectors comes after a petition last month by unions including the United Steelworkers. They urged for action to address "unreasonable and discriminatory" policies and practices used by Beijing to dominate these industries.

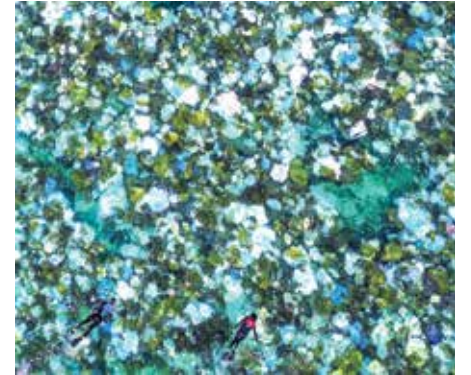
Biden won the backing last month of the United Steelworkers union and has opposed a bid by Japan's Nippon Steel to take over the Pittsburgh-based US Steel. The White House said on Wednesday that Biden would continue making clear that it is "vital" for US Steel to remain an American company that is domestically owned and operated.

Biden's National Economic Advisor Lael Brainard said the president understands American steel "built our nation" with steel mills helping to grow the US middle class in states like Pennsylvania and Ohio. While there is a need to invest in US manufacturing, she said officials also considered it necessary to "protect those investments and workers from unfair exports associated with China's industrial overcapacity." In a trip to China this month, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the United States "will not accept" a situation where underpriced Chinese goods flood the global market, battering industries elsewhere. — AFP

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2024



This photo shows bleached and dead coral around Lizard Island.



This aerial photo shows tourists snorkelling above bleached and dead coral around Lizard Island on the Great Barrier Reef, located 270 kilometres (167 miles) north of the city of Cairns. — AFP photos

Australia's Great Barrier Reef hit by record bleaching

Australia's spectacular Great Barrier Reef is experiencing the most widespread bleaching on record, with 73 percent of surveyed reefs damaged. Often dubbed the world's largest living structure, the Great Barrier Reef is a 2,300-kilometre (1,400-mile) long expanse, home to a stunning array of biodiversity including more than 600 types of coral and 1,625 fish species.

But aerial surveys conducted by scientists show about 730 out of more than 1,000 reefs spanning the Great Barrier Reef have bleached, government reef authorities said on Wednesday. For the first time, extreme bleaching - which is when more than 90 percent of coral cover has bleached - has occurred everywhere on the Great Barrier Reef.

"The cumulative impacts experienced across the reef this summer have been higher than previous summers," the federally funded Marine Park Authority said in a statement.

A separate government report into this summer's event said that up to 46 percent of reefs had experienced record heat stress, compared to 2016 when only 20 percent of reefs were exposed. This event is the fifth mass bleaching on the reef in the past eight years. Bleaching occurs when water temperatures rise and coral expel microscopic algae, known as zooxanthellae, to survive. If high temperatures persist, the coral can eventually turn white and die.

Richard Leck, WWF Australia head of oceans, told AFP the bleaching had impacted an "unprecedented

amount of the reef, particularly in areas which had previously escaped major bleaching events.

"This is the worst event the southern reef has experienced," he said. "This scary thing about this year's event is that it is more widespread than in 2016, but

he said. Experts have warned urgent action is needed to reduce the impacts of coral bleaching, including reducing global emissions and increased local restoration projects. Great Barrier Reef Foundation managing director Anna Marsden said the reef had "suffered its worst summer

rier Reef this month. Lizard Island, a small slice of tropical paradise off Australia's northeast tip that is usually teeming with vibrant coral life, resembled a watery graveyard.

Marine biologist Anne Hoggett, who has lived and worked on Lizard Island

or not," Hoggett told AFP. Australia has invested about Aus\$5 billion (\$3.2 billion) into improving water quality, reducing the effects of climate change, and protecting threatened species.

The country is one of the world's largest gas and coal exporters and has



This underwater photo shows fish swimming near bleached coral around Lizard Island.



Marine biologist Anne Hoggett inspecting and recording bleached and dead coral around Lizard Island.

we won't know for a few months what the mortality of corals looks like." The Reef Authority's chief scientist Roger Beeden said climate change posed the biggest threat to reefs globally.

"The Great Barrier Reef is an incredible ecosystem, and while it has shown its resilience time and time again, this summer has been particularly challenging,"

on record". "If we do not take immediate action to reduce global emissions and implement effective conservation measures, we risk losing these irreplaceable ecosystems forever."

Recovery in doubt

AFP journalists visited one of the worst-impacted areas of the Great Bar-

rier Reef for 33 years, said when she first arrived, coral bleaching only occurred every decade or so. Now, it is happening every year, she said, with about 80 percent of vulnerable Acropora corals on the island reef suffering bleaching this summer.

"We don't know yet if they've already sustained too much damage to recover

only recently set targets to become carbon neutral. Whether these efforts will be enough for the reef to keep its World Heritage Status will be examined by UNESCO later this year. — AFP



This underwater photo shows a green turtle swimming at Lizard Island on the Great Barrier Reef.



This photo shows a woman standing on a beach on Lizard Island.



This photo shows a storm approaching behind rocks on Lizard Island.



This aerial photo shows a boat anchored near coral around Lizard Island.



Photo shows bleached and dead coral around Lizard Island.



This aerial photo shows a coral atoll near Lizard Island on the Great Barrier Reef.



This underwater photo shows bleached and dead coral.

AYAHUASCA: PSYCHEDELIC BREW LANDING SHAMANS IN JAIL



An assistant of Colombian shaman Claudino Perez starts a yage or ayahuasca ceremony in La Mesa, Cundinamarca department, Colombia.—AFP photos



Peruvian shaman of the Amazon Shipibo-Konibo people Lauro Hinostrza performs a ritual before an interview with AFP in Mexico City.



Colombian shaman Claudino Perez serves yage or ayahuasca during a ceremony in La Mesa.



An assistant of Colombian shaman Claudino Perez (not in frame) takes part in a yage or ayahuasca ceremony.

Wearing a necklace of jaguar fangs and a green feather headdress, shaman Claudino Perez is back home in Colombia overseeing an ayahuasca ceremony after the mind-altering brew landed him in a Mexican jail. Perez, 63, is one of nine people, mainly from Indigenous communities in Colombia, Peru, and Brazil, to have been arrested in Mexico since 2022 for possession of ayahuasca - classed as an illicit substance in many countries. He spent two years awaiting trial on narcotics charges.

All nine have since been released, but their arrests have revived a debate over the ancient Amazonian concoction used by Indigenous people as a healing portal to the spirit world. In Mexico, "you are just another criminal... they classify us as traffickers," Perez told AFP on the sidelines of a traditional ceremony in La Mesa, 65 kilometers



Peruvian shaman of the Amazon Shipibo-Konibo people Lauro Hinostrza performs a ritual.



Peruvian shaman Jose Campos speaks next to Ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) plants - also known as, caapi, soul vine, or yage - during an interview in Yarinacocha, Pucallpa, Peru.



Colombian shaman Claudino Perez (right) leads a yage or ayahuasca ceremony in La Mesa.

(40 miles) from the capital Bogota. Perez, from the Uitoto people, was arrested in March 2022 at the Mexico City airport after drug enforcement agents found bottles of ayahuasca in his luggage. Prosecutors sought a 25-year prison term against him.

His case was dismissed after Colombian President Gustavo Petro, who has said he tried ayahuasca, sent a team of academics to Mexico to address the court about the ancient uses of ayahuasca.

Ritual, therapy, and trend

Ayahuasca is extracted from an Amazonian vine, *Banisteriopsis caapi*, and mixed with other leaves and ingredients before being consumed in shamanic rituals. It contains the hallucinogenic active ingredient dimethyltryptamine, or DMT, which is illegal in Mexico, the United States, Canada and some European countries. Mexico considers it "an especially serious problem for public health." Perez has travelled the world with ayahuasca to treat those seeking its healing benefits. He said he has been to Mexico dozens of times for this purpose.

Scientists are increasingly interested in the therapeutic uses of psychedelic drugs to treat addiction and mental health issues.

Ayahuasca has also become trendy amongst wellness-obsessed Westerners who flock to retreats in Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, as well as those hosted by so-called "neo-shamans" in Europe and the United States. Celebrities such as Susan Sarandon, Sting and Lindsay Lohan have openly talked about taking the brew. However, experts warn the concoction has its dangers, especially if mixed with other drugs, and can trigger psychotic episodes.

Julian Quintero of the NGO Accion Tecnica Social,



Peruvian shaman Jose Campos speaks next to Ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) plants - also known as, caapi, soul vine, or yage - during an interview in Yarinacocha, Pucallpa, Peru.



Peruvian shaman Jose Campos pours himself some prepared ayahuasca extract.



US' Sidney Bronson prepares to drink yage or ayahuasca during a ceremony with Colombian shaman Claudino Perez (not in frame) in La Mesa.



People take part in a yage or ayahuasca ceremony by Colombian shaman Claudino Perez (not in frame) in La Mesa.

which is against the war on drugs, said traditional ceremonies that include the use of ayahuasca are moving out of Indigenous ritual contexts given the "global trend of returning to spiritual experiences."

"There is a gray area that Latin American countries should regulate" including to determine "who has the power" to use ayahuasca and ensuring it is not aimed at "purely recreational commercial sale," he said.

'The crime is being Indigenous'

Among Colombia's Indigenous people, 84 percent of those older than 12 have used ayahuasca as a traditional medicine, according to official figures.

In Peru, authorities declared ayahuasca part of the natural cultural heritage in 2008.

But in September 2023, shaman Lauro Hinostrza of the Peruvian Amazon's Shipibo-Konibo tribe was arrested after he landed in Mexico City to attend an international congress on Indigenous medicine. The 71-year-old told AFP he did not understand why he ended up behind bars for six months. In "healing, the working tool is the plant, ayahuasca," he said. "They arrest us for being poor and for being healers... the crime is being Indigenous," said Hinostrza. Mexican authorities did not respond to AFP's requests for comment. — AFP

Lifestyle

Clark Kent lookalike turns accidental superhero in Brazil



Leonardo Muylaert poses for a picture.

Leonardo Muylaert was just another mild-mannered professional on vacation with his girlfriend when the 36-year-old Brazilian went viral on social media thanks to an unexpected superpower that has changed his life: his uncanny resemblance to Superman.

Muylaert - a strapping, bespectacled civil rights lawyer from Brasilia - was in line at the 2022 Comic-Con convention in Sao Paulo when a stranger surreptitiously shot a cell phone video of him, amazed at his resemblance to "Superman" film star Christopher Reeve.

"Am I seeing Clark Kent?" asked the star-struck comic book fan, in a clip that soon racked up thousands of views on TikTok - unbeknownst to Muylaert, who did not even have a social media account at the time. Weeks later, Muylaert learned through friends that he had become an online sensation, dubbed "The Brazilian Superman."

"It was funny and crazy to read that so many people think I look like Superman," he told AFP. That's when an idea took root in the back of his mind, he said: get a Superman suit and try the alter ego on for

size. He ordered an old-fashioned costume online, and started traveling around Brazil as Superman.

Muylaert visits hospitals, schools and charities, poses for pictures with commuters on random street corners, and generally tries to be what he calls a symbol of kindness and hope - all free of charge.

He put his new persona on social media and soon became an Internet star, his videos reposted by the likes of "Guardians of the Galaxy" filmmaker James Gunn, director of the upcoming "Superman" movie.

Every Clark needs a Lois

To make his magic happen, this Superman relies on his super-organized girlfriend, Helenise Santos, who handles his agenda, shoots videos for his social media accounts and constantly gets the question: are you Lois Lane?

On a recent trip to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopedics (INTO), a public hospital in Rio de Janeiro, Muylaert visited patients and posed for selfies with staff thrilled to see a 2.03-meter (nearly six-foot-seven-inch) superhero in the office.

"His presence puts a smile on everyone's face, not just patients but also the whole hospital staff. It gives everyone a break, and new energy to deal with our intense routine," said INTO research coordinator Rodrigo Cardoso. Muylaert, who studied in the United States on a basketball scholarship before finding his superhero calling, handed out presents to toddlers at the hospital and amiably shot videos for elderly patients' children and grandchildren.

The Brazilian Superman has an uncertain future. When not wearing his red and blue suit, he returns to his normal life as a lawyer specialized in civil



Leonardo Muylaert known as the Brazilian Superman, talks with a group of patients of the Association of Parents and Friends of Neurodivergent People (APAE-RIO) in the Tijuca neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP



Leonardo Muylaert poses during an interview with AFP at his office in Brasilia.



Leonardo Muylaert is seen crossing a street in the Tijuca neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



Leonardo Muylaert poses with a patient.



Leonardo Muylaert is seen doing a social media video with workers of the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopedics (INTO).



Leonardo Muylaert gets ready at his office before visiting a retirement home in Brasilia, Brazil.



Leonardo Muylaert takes a selfie with a group of ladies at the Association of Parents and Friends of Neurodivergent People (APAE-RIO).

rights who needs reading glasses to work. Muylaert says he is weighing how big a space in his life to give the superhero role.

"It fills a void in that sometimes very solitary office routine," he said at his law firm in Brasilia, sporting a suit and tie and looking remarkably like Clark Kent sitting at his desk at the Daily Planet.

"Sometimes amid all the long hours and paperwork, you forget how important human interaction is and the care and attention so many people need. Serving the community fills that void. And all the incredible feedback I've gotten from people on social media motivates me to keep going." — AFP



Leonardo Muylaert plays with children and workers at the Association of Parents and Friends of Neurodivergent People.

CLEAN GIRL AESTHETIC

Nailing 'the clean girl aesthetic': Understated elegance at your fingertips

In the meticulously curated world of 'the clean girl aesthetic', even the smallest details matter, extending to the realm of nail art. This trend, characterized by its minimalist approach to beauty, redefines nail style, favoring understated elegance over the ornate and elaborate. It's a reflection of a broader movement towards simplicity and natural beauty, where chic, polished nails become an extension of one's personal style.

The essence of 'the clean girl aesthetic' lies in its celebration of natural shapes and subtle hues. Nails are kept at a short to medium length, shaped softly to mirror the fingertips' natural contours. This choice not only aligns with the minimalist ethos but also exudes a sense of neatness and sophistication, proving that true elegance often lies in simplicity.

Color plays a crucial role in achieving the Clean Girl look, with a palette

dominated by muted tones. Nudes, pale pinks, and soft beiges are selected for their ability to enhance the nails' natural beauty without drawing undue attention. These shades offer a timeless elegance, creating a polished finish that complements any outfit or occasion.

For those seeking a touch of creativity within the minimalist framework, 'the clean girl aesthetic' accommodates subtle embellishments. A single thin stripe of metallic polish or a delicate dot can add interest without compromising the overall simplicity of the look. Similarly, a reimagined French manicure, featuring a thin, natural-looking tip, epitomizes the aesthetic's understated elegance.

This trend is more than just a style preference; it's a part of a larger movement towards minimalism and authenticity in beauty and fashion. It champions the idea that elegance is



rooted in simplicity, encouraging individuals to find beauty in the understated and to embrace their natural features with confidence and grace. As 'the clean girl aesthetic' continues to inspire, it reminds us that sometimes, the most profound statements are made with the subtlest of touches, even down to the tips of our fingers.

Join us at Dashe Beauty on this journey to discover the essence of the Clean Girl Aesthetic, a testament to the beauty of simplicity and the power of natural elegance. Get more inspiration by visiting our website <https://dashebeauty.com> or follow up on our beauty blog. — Dashe Beauty Kuwait

Sports

Buttler ton powers Rajasthan to record IPL chase of 224

Powell 'whispering in Narine's ears' for T20 W Cup return

NEW DELHI: Jos Buttler smashed an unbeaten 107 to trump Sunil Narine's first T20 century as Rajasthan Royals pulled off a joint record IPL chase against Kolkata Knight Riders off the final ball on Tuesday. Chasing 224 for victory, Rajasthan looked in trouble at 121-6 in the 13th over but Buttler moved through the gears in his 60-ball blitz to achieve the target with two wickets to spare at Kolkata's Eden Gardens. Rajasthan equalled their own record from 2020 when they chased down 224 against Kings XI Punjab in Sharjah.

Buttler, who came in as an impact substitute, reached his second ton of the season in 55 balls with a six off Varun Chakravarty at the start of the last over. Buttler, struggling with cramp, then played out three dot balls before a two and a single on the final delivery ensured Rajasthan held on to top spot in the table with six wins in seven matches. "Keep believing, that was the real key today," Buttler said.

"I was struggling a bit for rhythm. At times you feel frustrated or you are questioning yourself. I tell myself 'It's okay, keep going, you'll get your rhythm back and try to stay calm.'" He said, "There's been plenty of times throughout the IPL, you've seen crazy things happen. Guys like (M.S.) Dhoni and (Virat) Kohli, the way they stay till the end and keep believing and I tried to do the same."

England's Buttler, who hit nine fours and six sixes, moved ahead of Chris Gayle with seven IPL tons and is only behind Kohli's eight in the T20 tournament.

Narine heroics

Buttler built key partnerships including 50 runs with Riyan Parag (34), 57 with Rovman Powell (26)

and then an unbeaten 38-run stand with Avesh Khan (0 not out). Spinners Narine, Chakravarty and fast bowler Harshit Rana took two wickets each for KKR.

"Emotions were a roller-coaster, certainly didn't think we will get into this situation," said Kolkata captain Shreyas Iyer. "It's a funny game at the end of the day, he was striking the ball cleanly and timing them so well, have to take it on the chin and move on." Narine hammered 109 off 56 balls to guide Kolkata, who stay second in the 10-team standings, to 223-6. Narine put on 85 runs for the second wicket with Angkrish Raghuvanshi, who hit 30, and got together for a 51-run stand with Andre Russell.

Narine, playing his 504th T20 match, reached his ton from 49 balls with a six and a four off Yuzvendra Chahal for Kolkata's third hundred in the IPL as he jumped for joy.

He was finally bowled by a Trent Boult yorker before he returned to a standing ovation. Narine moved into the top three in the batting charts led by Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Kohli (361) with 276 runs. Rinku Singh finished off the innings on a high with his unbeaten nine-ball 20 including a four and two sixes.

Meanwhile, West Indies skipper Rovman Powell is trying to convince fellow IPL star Sunil Narine to come out of international retirement for their home T20 World Cup. All-rounder Narine smashed his first T20 century on Tuesday and took two wickets for Kolkata Knight Riders as they went down to Rajasthan Royals. The 35-year-old announced his international retirement in 2023, four years after he last played a T20 for the West Indies.

But with the World Cup in June hosted by the West Indies, together with the United States, Powell



KOLKATA: Rajasthan Royals' Jos Buttler celebrates after winning the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Rajasthan Royals at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. —AFP

hopes his countryman will have a change of heart.

"For the last 12 months I've been whispering in his ears, he's blocked out everyone," Powell, who plays for Rajasthan, said. Powell hopes that Kieron Pollard, Dwayne Bravo and Nicholas Pooran, fellow West Indians in the IPL, "can crack his code".

Pollard and Bravo are coaches while Pooran plays for Lucknow and is a key member of the West Indies team. Narine, usually a middle or lower-order left-handed batsman, was promoted to open the Kolkata innings this season.

He has responded with 276 runs including 109 off 56 deliveries at Eden Gardens stadium on Tuesday. Narine has also claimed seven wickets at an economy rate of 6.87 in a season where big scores have come in abundance. Narine said earlier this season that he would watch the World Cup "from home". But he gave a cryptic response when asked about his return to the West Indies team after his ton. "It is what it is—we'll have to see what the future holds," said Narine, who has played 51 T20 internationals stretching back to 2012. —AFP

China GP back after five years with contentious sprint

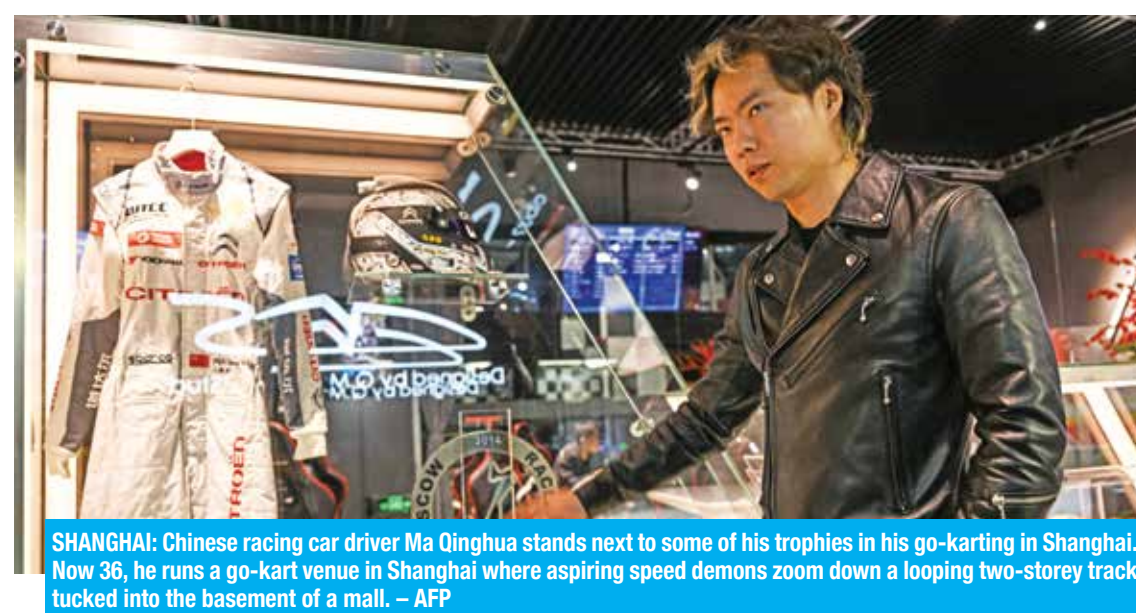
SHANGHAI: Formula One returns to China for the first time in five years this week with a packed programme including a Saturday sprint race, but not everyone is happy with the Shanghai schedule. Championship leader Max Verstappen and Ferrari's Carlos Sainz are among those who have expressed doubts about having limited practice on a resurfaced circuit that is unknown to the current specification of F1 cars. China's closed borders during the pandemic meant the Shanghai International Circuit has not hosted a grand prix since April 2019, when the race was won by Lewis Hamilton in a Mercedes one-two with Valtteri Bottas.

This weekend has just 60 minutes of free practice on Friday morning ahead of sprint qualifying, leaving drivers fearful about the lack of preparation. "I think it's not great," said Red Bull's three-time world champion Verstappen about F1's choice of China as the first of the season's six sprint venues.

"When you have been away from a track for quite a while you never know what you're going to experience," added Verstappen, who has never won in China. There will be at least one contented face in the paddock—Sauber's Zhou Guanyu will be driving in front of his own fans for the first time in Formula One.

Shanghai-born Zhou was a five-year-old spectator at the inaugural Chinese Grand Prix in 2004. "I couldn't be more excited to finally race on home soil in Shanghai," said Zhou, who drove an F2 car for Renault at the circuit in 2019 before stepping up to F1 in 2022.

"To be the first Chinese driver ever to compete in Formula 1 in China means a lot to me. It fills me with immense joy, pride and responsibility. "I have fulfilled my dream." The sprint weekend schedule has changed this season, with Shanghai's 19-lap sprint race on Saturday morning followed by main qualifying in its normal af-



SHANGHAI: Chinese racing car driver Ma Qinghua stands next to some of his trophies in his go-karting in Shanghai. Now 36, he runs a go-kart venue in Shanghai where aspiring speed demons zoom down a looping two-storey track tucked into the basement of a mall. —AFP

tern slot to determine the grid for Sunday's 56-lap grand prix. This generation of F1 cars run much lower to the tarmac than those that raced half a decade ago. Drivers can be penalised if planks protecting the floor of the car show excessive wear, caused by hitting unexpected track undulations—something that can also throw cars out of control.

'Going to be tough'

Verstappen has won three out of the four grands prix this season with Sainz taking the chequered flag in the other, in Melbourne. The Spaniard too has concerns about this weekend. "I think it's going to be a tough weekend for everyone. With how tricky one bump could make the car, I think it's not a good choice to choose to put the sprint after four or five years' absence," said Sainz.

"Maybe for people watching at home it's exciting, but for engineers and drivers, it's something that, in my opinion, we shouldn't take the risk and have a normal

weekend." Mercedes were previously the dominant force on the 5.451km Shanghai circuit, winning six times from 2012.

But the Silver Arrows have struggled again this season. Both failed to finish in Melbourne and in the last race, the Japanese GP, George Russell and Hamilton were seventh and ninth respectively. It was a Red Bull one-two at Suzuka and Mercedes were also well beaten by both Ferraris, with the McLaren of Lando Norris and Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso finishing ahead of Russell as well.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Sainz look the most likely to challenge the dominance of Verstappen and Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez. Leclerc said Ferrari's race pace was not the issue, it was qualifying they needed to improve. "We've had some difficulties putting the tyres in the right window on the out laps in qualifying," said the Monegasque. "So we really have to focus on that to make sure we can put it all together in China." —AFP

Nadal cool after triumphant return from injury

BARCELONA: Rafael Nadal said he had limited expectations at the Barcelona Open as he made a triumphant return from injury on Tuesday, beating Italy's Flavio Cobolli 6-2, 6-3. The 22-time Grand Slam champion had not played a competitive match since January but eased past the 62nd-ranked Cobolli in 85 minutes to reach the second round. The former world number one has seen his ranking slip to 644 after missing all of the 2023 season following the Australian Open. His comeback at the start of this year hit a stumbling block when he felt a hip injury flare up in Brisbane.

For Nadal, a 12-time winner in Barcelona, it was his first appearance on clay since he won the French Open almost two years ago, but the Spaniard was keen not to get ahead of himself. Stefanos Tsitsipas, last week's Monte Carlo Masters champion, said earlier this week he wouldn't be surprised to see Nadal reach the final on a court named after him.

"Today to say that I am favourite I think is stupidity. Tsitsipas knows that it's not the case," said Nadal, who turns 38 in June. "I understand what he says as respect for what I have done in this tournament. Everybody knows I am not favourite to win a tournament." "I didn't have the slightest idea if I was favourite today. I know tomorrow I will not be," added Nadal, who plays fourth seed Alex de Minaur on Wednesday for a place in the last 16. "But it doesn't matter, I will go out and play and it will be an experience against a top level player."

After a double fault to fall 30-0 behind Nadal found his rhythm, with Cobolli intimidated by the fervent support for the Spaniard on the court named after him. Nadal converted his third break point in the fourth game for a 3-1 lead, with Cobolli surviving four more to hold at 4-2 down.

The Spaniard broke again to claim the set in 43 minutes, clenching his fist in celebration. Cobolli handed



BARCELONA: Spain's Rafael Nadal returns the ball to Italy's Flavio Cobolli during the ATP Barcelona Open "Conde de Godo" tennis tournament singles match at the Real Club de Tennis in Barcelona. —AFP

Nadal a break for 2-0 in the second set with two more unforced errors but finally put some pressure on Nadal's serve in the third game to break back. However Nadal broke again for 3-1 after Cobolli's third double fault and served it out to triumph. "It was a good start—when you return you can't get rid of the doubts in one day, above all, on a physical level," Nadal told TVE.

"Within what it could be, it was a good first round. He made mistakes and I think I played the game that I had to play." Brandon Nakashima dumped a raging Andrey Rublev out in the first round with a 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) victory. The American, ranked 87th, ousted the world number eight, who made five double faults and only forced one break point in the match. Nakashima edged the first set by breaking the Russian in the ninth game for 5-4 and then surviving a break point before serving out. Rublev, second seed at the tournament, saved four second-set break points but tumbled to defeat in the tie-break after sending a backhand long. The Russian smashed his racket repeatedly on the ground before storming off. Carlos Alcaraz, champion in Barcelona in 2022 and 2023, withdrew on Sunday with a forearm injury. —AFP

McIlroy dismisses LIV report, pledges future to PGA Tour

LOS ANGELES: Rory McIlroy rubbished reports linking him with a move to LIV Golf on Tuesday, vowing to remain a PGA Tour player for the rest of his career. A report in Britain said McIlroy—a long-time critic of the upstart Saudi circuit—was poised to switch to LIV in a staggering deal worth \$850 million. But the four-time major winner from Northern Ireland swiftly debunked the rumors in an interview with NBC's Golf Central on Tuesday. "I honestly don't know how these things get started," McIlroy said. "I've never been offered a number from LIV, I've never contemplated going to LIV. Again, I think I've made it clear over the past two years that I don't think it's something for me."

LIV has signed a slew of golf's elite since its formation, with Spanish star Jon Rahm the last big name to make the switch last December in a move reported to be worth around \$500 million. McIlroy, who has been increasingly conciliatory towards LIV professionals in recent months amid ongoing negotiations with the PGA Tour over a merger, reiterated that he bore no ill will to golfers who have joined the circuit. "One of the things I think I've realized over the past two years is that people can make their own decisions on whatever they think is best for themselves," McIlroy said. "Who are we to judge them for that? But personally for me my future is here on the PGA Tour and it's never been any different."

"I'm here today and playing a PGA Tour next week and I'll play the PGA Tour for the rest of my career." McIlroy was speaking ahead of this week's RBC Heritage in South Carolina where he is among a star-studded field taking part following last week's Masters at Augusta. —AFP

Fire and fury: The Olympic torch relay

PARIS: The Olympic torch has been into space, deep underwater, the North Pole and even scaled Mount Everest. As the 2024 torch crosses Greece before heading for France, AFP looks back at some of the most dramatic moments of past relays.

Blasting jocks

One of the most memorable stunts involving the torch pageantry dates to 1956 ahead of the Melbourne Games when an Australian university student named Barry Larkin fooled crowds with a homemade torch topped by burning underpants.

Larkin managed to get his torch—a wooden chair leg crowned with a metal pudding container topped with the fiery underwear—up the stairs of Sydney's Town Hall and deliver it to city mayor Pat Hills, cheered on by tens of thousands of onlookers.

Runaway jaguar

A 17-year-old jaguar named Juma was paraded in chains for photos as the torch passed through the Amazon in northern Brazil ahead of the Rio Games in 2016. But Juma escaped its handlers and four tranquilliser darts failed to slow it down. After it threatened a vet, soldiers opened fire on the jaguar and shot dead the animal.

Cauldron drama

The climax of the relay—the lighting of the Olympic cauldron—has not always gone smoothly. In Seoul in 1988, dozens of doves released earlier in the opening ceremony alighted on the cauldron. When the flame was lit, several of the birds were incinerated, to the horror of watching spectators. In 1996 in Atlanta, viewers around the world held their breath as boxing superstar Muhammad Ali momentarily conquered his trembling due to Parkinson's disease to defiantly raise the Olympic flame and then slowly lower it to light the cauldron. In Barcelona in 1992, Paralympic archer Antonio Rebollo fired a burning arrow at the seven-storey high cauldron to light the flame. As it sailed over the cauldron, the gas from a jet inside ignited the flame. The charred arrow landed safely in a sandbox.

Heated protests

The torch relay has been the target of several protests, most notably during the run-up to Beijing 2008 as demonstrators took China to task over its Tibet policy. Protests started as soon as the flame was lit in ancient Olympia and dogged the relay throughout its journey to China, notably as it passed through London, Paris and San Francisco. In Japan, monks at an ancient Buddhist temple pulled out of hosting a torch ceremony because of the Chinese crackdown in Tibet. —AFP



OLYMPIA: Greek actress Mary Mina, playing the role of the High Priestess, lights the torch during the flame lighting ceremony for the Paris 2024 Olympics Games at the ancient temple of Hera on the Olympia archaeological site, birthplace of the ancient Olympics in southern Greece. —AFP

Sports

Burgan Bank sponsors Bristol Rovers Football Academy

Confirming its commitment to empowering Kuwaiti youth in sports

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced its sponsorship of the UK-based Bristol Rovers Football Academy in Kuwait; its latest bid to advance the sports culture in Kuwait and encourage youth to adopt a healthy lifestyle. This initiative comes as part of the Bank's expansive social responsibility program and its unwavering efforts to encourage aspiring athletic talents across all ages and sports.

"Football is a sport that is enjoyed by a huge fan base in Kuwait," Talal Al Ayar, Senior Officer – Corporate and CSR Communications at Burgan Bank, said. "However, it's time that we paved a path for our young, aspiring athletes to get more involved in their favorite sport and go from merely watching and cheering to playing on the field. In our ongoing mission to provide our community with the best, we are very proud to announce our partnership with the esteemed UK-based club, Bristol Rovers FC, which now operates a Kuwait-based football academy where our youth can get the guidance they need to excel in the competitive sport of football."



Abdulaziz Alroomi

Talal Al Ayar

"Many football fans, especially the younger ones, perceive the sport as a chance for stardom," Abdulaziz Alroomi, Head of Bristol Rovers Football Academy said. "But at Bristol Rovers Academy, we are well aware of the lasting impact that all sports, especially football, have on the development of our

players' characters – both on and off the field. Besides guiding and honing the academy members' athletic and technical performance, our coaches put a lot of emphasis on values such as perseverance, commitment, accountability, teamwork, and communication. This guarantees that all players mature not only as athletes but also as rounded, impactful members of their team and community. This has been our mission at Bristol Rovers FC for over 140 years and we are very proud to bring our passion for football and our commitment to inspiring the youth through sports to the wonderful people of Kuwait."

Founded in 1883, Bristol Rovers FC is a professional football club that competes in the English Football League's (EFL) League One and is majority-owned by Kuwait's Hussain Al-Saeed, who also currently assumes the responsibilities of the Club's Chairman. From Bristol to Kuwait, Al-Saeed planted the seed of this football legacy in his hometown by launching the Bristol Rovers

Football Academy in Sharq, Kuwait City, on January 2024, to inspire the Kuwaiti youth and allow the outstanding players to take part in football camps at the Club's Memorial Stadium in Bristol, or even officially compete on the UK-based Bristol Rovers team. Leading the football practice at the Academy are Head Coach Brandon Quantrill and Coach Bobby Black.

It serves to note the Burgan Bank remains one of the most dedicated contributors to the overall development of the sports sector in Kuwait, with multiple sponsorships including the 8th edition of Flare Festival, Kuwait's biggest fitness challenge, the final match of the Kuwait Crown Prince Cup, and "The Workout" Ramadan fitness experience. It also remains a primary sponsor of several national and international champions, including Tareq Al-Qallaf, the wheelchair-fencing Paralympic world champion, and Olympians Yaqoub Al-Youha, Mudhawi Al-Shammari, Ebrahim Al-Dhafaeri, Amal Al-Roumi, Abdulmohsen Al-Ali and Jude Tawfeeq.

Dortmund sink Atletico to reach Champions League semi-finals

DORTMUND: Borussia Dortmund fought back to beat Atletico Madrid 4-2 in their quarter-final second leg on Tuesday, securing a 5-4 aggregate victory and a first Champions League semi-final since 2013. Trailing 2-1 from the first leg, goals from Julian Brandt and Ian Maatsen had Dortmund 2-0 up at half-time.

Visiting coach Diego Simeone made three changes at half-time including bringing on Angel Correa and his energy told immediately, Mats Hummels conceding a poor own goal before the Argentine netted to put Atletico back ahead in the tie.

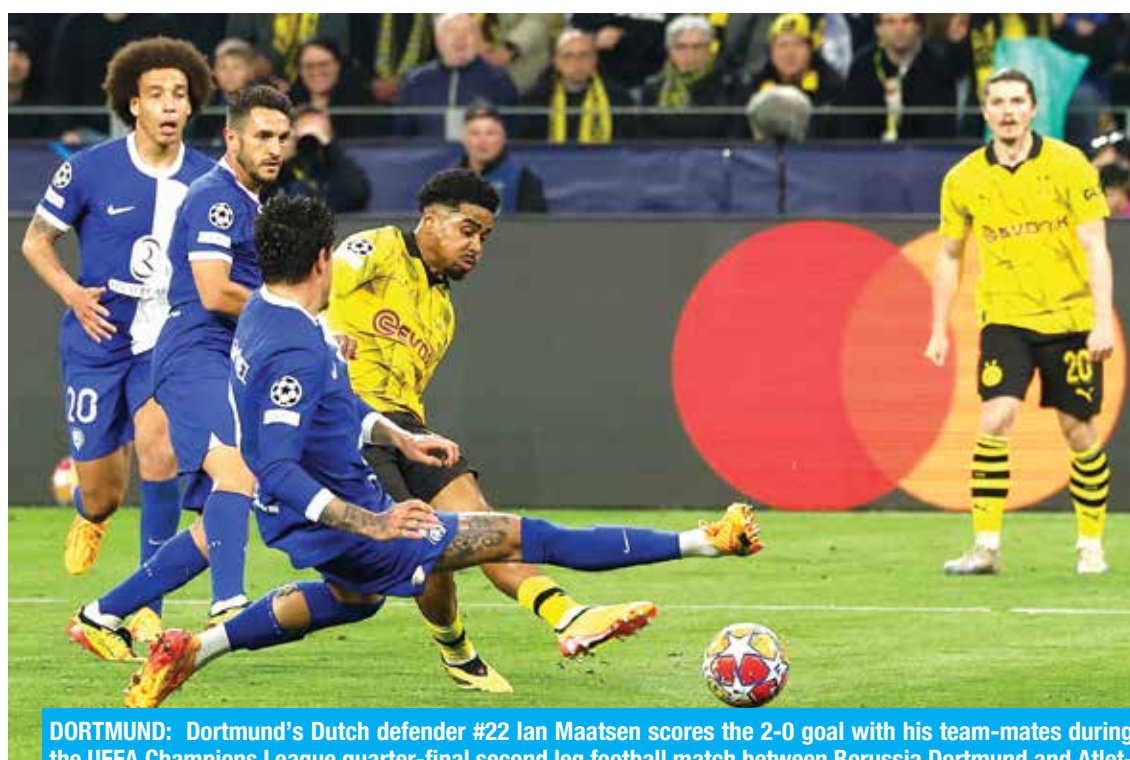
But those goals brought a sluggish Dortmund back to life, with Niclas Füllkrug and Marcel Sabitzer each scoring in a three-minute period to send the Bundesliga club through. "It was magical. I try not to go overboard in interviews, but it was really magical. The stadium was on fire today," Füllkrug told DAZN.

Former winners Dortmund, fifth in the German top flight and struggling to qualify for next season's Champions League, will next face Paris Saint-Germain for a place in the final at Wembley on June 1. "We did give them chances and goals in the 15 minutes after half-time, we have to improve that for sure, but our response to it was sensational," said Brandt.

Atletico were bidding to reach the last four for the first time in seven years, but fell at the quarter-final stage for the third time in five seasons. "It was tough," Atletico captain Koke told Movistar. "Their goals hurt a lot — the fact that they got them so quickly after each other. "We are angry because we wanted to get through. This is football and it can be cruel."

Dortmund's fast start

The home side should have been level in the tie after three minutes but Sabitzer took an extra touch with the goal beckoning, allowing Atletico to cover. Just moments later, Atletico had a major chance of their own, as Alvaro Morata raced through one-on-



DORTMUND: Dortmund's Dutch defender #22 Ian Maatsen scores the 2-0 goal with his team-mates during the UEFA Champions League quarter-final second leg football match between Borussia Dortmund and Atletico Madrid in Dortmund, western Germany. – AFP

one with the goalkeeper but chipped the ball well wide of the post.

Buoyed by an 80,000-strong home crowd trying to one-up last week's atmosphere in the Spanish capital, Dortmund pushed and prodded, with Karim Adiyemi shooting straight at Jan Oblak. Dortmund broke through on 34 minutes, Brandt collecting a Hummels chip and shooting on the turn, the ball bouncing through Oblak's hands.

The Germans were ahead in the tie just five minutes later, Maatsen threading in from an acute angle after he was given space to run in the Atletico box. With Simeone sensing his chances of qualifying for the semis for a fourth time as Atletico boss slipping away, he shuffled his deck at half-time, making three changes including hooking the ineffective Morata for Correa.



MANCHESTER: Real Madrid's English midfielder #5 Jude Bellingham reacts as he speaks during a press conference at the Etihad Stadium, in Manchester, in north-west England, on April 16, 2024, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League quarter-final second-leg football match against Manchester City. – AFP

changing room." Bellingham turned down the advances of City to join Madrid last year and enjoyed a dream start to his first season in Spain, scoring 17 times in his first 20 appearances.

However, he has struck just three times in his last 13 games for his club, while injury and suspension have also curbed his momentum. "I think it's definitely affected my rhythm," he said of an ankle injury suffered in February. "The one thing I had at the start of the season was I was playing every game consistently and felt like I was very clear what I was doing."

"The last couple of months, my roles changed slightly and you know, there's been little things that I've had to kind of tweak and it means that maybe I'm doing a bit more work for the team, which I absolutely don't mind doing, but maybe I lose that effectiveness on the pitch." Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti said City's threat was not causing him sleepless nights with the Italian keen to move on from last season's humbling. Two years ago Ancelotti got the better of Guardiola as Real edged a thrilling semi-final 6-5 on aggregate. "Nothing keeps me awake at night, apart from maybe eating too much," joked the Italian. "We only have to look to the future. We need to compete, fight and have confidence. "The game is level. Anything can happen and we have the confidence we can create problems." – AFP

Dortmund's wobbles suddenly returned, letting the visitors back into the tie. Hummels turned Mario Hermoso's header into his own net from an Atletico corner under little pressure and with goalkeeper Gregor Kobel waiting to save. Atletico smelt blood and could have levelled when Correa dragged the ball just wide.

The World Cup winner made up for his miss on 64 minutes when he lashed a loose ball inside the box in off the crossbar, putting Atletico in front on aggregate. The goal jolted Dortmund back into action and Edin Terzic's men scored twice in three minutes to re-take the overall lead.

Füllkrug headed in a Sabitzer cross and the Austrian midfielder then got a goal of his own, shooting through the Atletico defence and into the bottom corner from the edge of the box, grabbing Dortmund a famous victory. – AFP

Title breakthrough has Alonso's Leverkusen hungry for 'more'

LEVERKUSEN: Hours after sealing Bayer Leverkusen's maiden Bundesliga title win, coach Xabi Alonso told thousands of delirious fans "we want more". "We want more. We want the (German) Cup, we want Europa League," the 42-year-old said over the stadium PA to thousands of Leverkusen fans after his side's 43rd straight match without defeat. With a German Cup final meeting with second-division Kaiserslautern already booked for May 25, Leverkusen's next task is Thursday's trip to London to face West Ham in their Europa League quarter-final second leg.

Alonso's side hold a 2-0 lead after the first leg, meaning anything other than a stunning loss to David Moyes' men will keep their treble dreams alive. Sunday's 5-0 win over Werder Bremen not only broke Bayern Munich's 11-year stranglehold on the German top-flight title, it flushed Leverkusen's unwanted 'Neverkusen' tag for good. With two major titles in the club's history before Sunday, Alonso's side can more than double their tally by completing the treble. This season, Alonso has repeatedly said the club needed to be patient, even as the Bundesliga title grew more and more likely.

On Sunday, he pushed talk of Thursday's West Ham match away, saying: "Now is the moment to celebrate and enjoy it all." If overturning a 2-0 deficit seems like a mountain to climb for West Ham, the stats speak even less in their favour. Alonso's side have only failed to score once in 43 games this season and have laid on 123 goals at the other end. West Ham have only kept one clean sheet in their past 18 fixtures — although that did come against German opposition in their 5-0 drubbing of Freiburg in the last-16 second leg at the London Stadium.

Alonso's focus on the treble has been widely adopted by Leverkusen's squad, with several players reminding fans that the season was not over on Sunday night. Nigeria striker Victor Boniface, given a first start of 2024 after missing several months with a groin injury, echoed his coach's statements over the loudspeaker on Sunday. "We want to say, thank you for your support from the beginning of the season — and we still have two more finals to give you guys." – AFP

Klopp's Liverpool farewell at risk of fizzling out

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp was headed for a glorious send-off in his final season at Liverpool just a few weeks ago, but talk of a potential quadruple is now long forgotten as the Reds have come off the rails. Liverpool have a mountain to climb if they are to make the Europa League semi-finals on Thursday after losing the first leg of their last-eight tie at home to Atalanta 3-0.

Klopp's men were also dumped out the FA Cup by Manchester United last month as the Red Devils edged a thrilling tie 4-3 at Old Trafford. Liverpool failed to learn their lesson from that defeat as they were held 2-2 by United three weeks later and then stunned 1-0 at home by Crystal Palace in their last two Premier League games to fall two points behind Manchester City in the title race. AFP Sport looks at what has gone wrong to leave Klopp's fitting farewell at risk of fizzling out.

Slow starts

Liverpool's habit of fighting back from losing positions was lauded earlier in the campaign as a sign of the "mentality monsters" Klopp has created throughout his time at Anfield. They have amassed 27 points after falling behind in the Premier League alone this season, but saw their luck run out against Palace on Sunday after another slow start. In all competitions, Liverpool have conceded the opening goal 21 times this season. "It's been the story of the last few games and that's why we have been punished," said left-back Andy Robertson on his side's sluggish starts. "We are struggling to keep clean sheets right now."

Wasteful finishing

To compound a run of nine games without a clean sheet, Liverpool's forward line has also gone off the boil come the business end of the season. In their last six league games, the 19-time English champions have scored nine goals from a total of 149 shots, a conversion rate of six percent, which would be the worst in the Premier League over the course of a season.

Mohamed Salah has looked out of sorts since returning from a hamstring injury picked up at the Africa Cup of Nations. And Diogo Jota, often heralded as the most natural finisher at the club, has only just returned from a two-month injury layoff.

Luis Diaz, Darwin Nunez and Cody Gakpo have combined to score 45 goals this season but all remain inconsistent in front of goal. That trio have been labelled "scruffy" by former Manchester United captain Gary Neville in comparison to the Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane triumvirate that carried Liverpool to glory earlier in Klopp's reign. "I think the nature of the players, it will always be a little bit like that in terms of the numbers we are looking at because of the way they finish and the type of players that they are," said former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher.

Fatigue

The quest for the quadruple could now be coming back to haunt Klopp as Liverpool look to have run out of steam. They have already played 51 games this season and will have a minimum of seven more before the end of the campaign.

A number of academy graduates stepped up during an injury crisis in the early months of 2024 and helped ensure Klopp did at least secure some silverware in his final season by winning the League Cup in February.

Yet, just as they are getting major players back with Alisson Becker and Trent Alexander-Arnold returning along with Jota in the past week, those that have been relied on most during the winter months are fading. Klopp admitted after the Palace match that midfield duo Alexis Mac Allister and Wataru Endo are struggling due to the burden placed upon them.

"A couple of players had to play a lot and a couple of players always were interrupted — that's a bit the situation," said Klopp. "We just have to make sure that we don't think about where we are coming from — whether they are injured or whether they are not — and make sure we find a way to beat the specific opponent in front of us. It's always like this." – AFP

Bellingham 'used to' racist abuse in Spain

MANCHESTER: Jude Bellingham said he and his Real Madrid teammates have become accustomed to dealing with racist abuse at away grounds in Spain, but the England international does not believe the authorities will do enough to quell the problem.

A racist gesture was made towards France's Aurelien Tchouameni after he scored the only goal in a 1-0 win at Real Mallorca on Saturday. Brazilian star Vinicius Junior has been a repeated target of racial abuse and Bellingham said he and his teammates were "used to" have to deal with "horrible" treatment. "I think in the games where we go away in La Liga especially, you almost get so used to it," said Bellingham at a pre-match press conference ahead of Madrid's Champions League quarter-final, second leg away to Manchester City.

"I think it's a horrible way for a player to have to prepare for a game knowing that they're probably going to get racially abused. It's disgusting. It shouldn't happen. The people in power need to do more." Mallorca publicly condemned the gesture and said they are working with police to identify the culprit. Bellingham said he had not even been aware of the incident, racist abuse is so frequent.

"It's definitely a call out for the people who are in charge to take control," he added. "I doubt that will happen and it's going to be something that I imagine we will still have to just deal with going into games."

Madrid's revenge mission

Bellingham is back in his homeland as Madrid seek to exact revenge on Wednesday for their Champions League semi-final thrashing by holders City last season. The tie is finely poised after a thrilling 3-3 draw in the first leg last week.

Pep Guardiola's men won 4-0 at the Etihad when the sides met 11 months ago on their way to winning the Champions League for the first time. Bellingham shrugged off the suggestion that the 14-time European champions are big underdogs to progress.

"I think everyone has spoken a lot about them, you know, they're the treble winners, and rightly so. They're an amazing team," said the 20-year-old.

"I know that we are Real Madrid, we're a pretty good team ourselves, we've got brilliant players. Internally we trust in ourselves and the ability in the

PSG beat Barca to reach semis

Mbappe punishes 10-man Barcelona to keep Champions League dream alive



BARCELONA: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe scores his second goal and his team's fourth goal during the UEFA Champions League quarterfinal second leg against Barcelona at the Estadi Olimpic Lluis Companys on April 16, 2024. — AFP

BARCELONA: Kylian Mbappe struck twice as Paris Saint-Germain battled back to beat 10-man Barcelona 4-1 and book a place in the Champions League semifinals with a 6-4 aggregate triumph on Tuesday. Raphinha fired Barcelona ahead early on but Ronald Araujo's 29th-minute red card turned the tide in PSG's favor, despite the Spanish champions leading by two goals following a 3-2 quarterfinal first-leg win.

Ousmane Dembele and Vitinha leveled the tie for PSG and the deadly Mbappe hit a brace to put them into the final four for the first time since 2021, setting up another meeting with Borussia Dortmund, who they played twice in the group stage. "Hats off to Kylian, look at how he pressed, that's how you lead a team," said PSG coach Luis Enrique, noting the striker's all-round contribution. "When Kylian can give that we are much, much better."

The French champions have never won the trophy despite huge investment but demonstrated they have the attacking weapons in their squad to do so. "I dream of winning the Champions League with Paris, it's another step overcome against a great team," said Mbappe,

who has his sights set on this year's final. "We're going to try and go to Wembley."

Luis Enrique, who led Barca to the 2015 Champions League, said he believed his PSG team would turn things around despite never having managed to after a first-leg home defeat, and so it proved. "It looked bad but the team concentrated — whatever happened, we had to beat Barcelona," said Dembele, whistled heavily by fans of his former club.

Five-time winners Barcelona were dreaming of a first semifinal return since 2019 but Araujo's red card for pulling down the relentless Bradley Barcola undermined their grip on the tie. It became another in a series of European nightmares for the Catalans, who last won the trophy in 2015, with Xavi blaming the referee. "With 11 against 10 it's practically impossible," said the coach. "I think the red card is not necessary, it's unfair and needless."

The visitors started with determination and penned Barcelona back in their own territory, but it was the hosts who took the lead. Explosive 16-year-old starlet Lamine Yamal ripped past Nuno Mendes and crossed

to the near post where Raphinha turned home his third goal in the tie. The other PSG forwards found the net but it was Barcola who tilted the match in PSG's favor.

The winger teed up Mbappe but Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen denied him well, before Araujo was sent off for bringing him down. The Uruguayan centerback pulled Barcola back as he burst into the area, leaving Barca with 10 men. Dembele struck after 40 minutes from another Barcola cross, which raked across the area to the back post where he was arriving to fire into the roof of the net. Barcelona sacrificed Yamal for defender Inigo Martinez after Araujo's red card and it left them with few outlets in attack.

No escape

With PSG controlling the game Barcelona soon paid the price. Vitinha was given far too much space on the edge of the box and he drilled into the bottom corner to put PSG ahead on the night. Ilkay Gundogan hit the post at the other end for Barcelona before their coach Xavi was sent off for a show of dissent on the touchline. "Since I've been here we're not getting any refereeing

decisions, they've all been bad for us," added Xavi. "The refereeing was very strange."

Despite the finger-pointing the Catalans were losing their heads and Joao Cancelo clumsily fouled Dembele to hand PSG a penalty. Mbappe, who had been kept quiet in the first leg, hammered it into the top corner for his 40th goal across all competitions. The striker's future may lie in Spain, with Real Madrid aiming to sign him in the summer at the end of his contract, and he made no friends in Barcelona by hopping the advertising hoardings and running towards fans to celebrate.

Another member of Barcelona's backroom staff was dismissed after Gundogan had a penalty appeal waved away and it became clear the hosts had no response. Mbappe wrapped up the win in the 89th minute after a fine Ter Stegen double save, leaving Barcelona the victims of another bitterly disappointing night in Europe. "In Europe playing with 10 you know you are going to suffer," Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong told Movistar. "We tried and we fought to be in the semifinals, it's a tough blow because we were convinced we could get through." — AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwait and Malaysia fight for the puck during the World Championship Division IV ice hockey tournament at the Kuwait Winter Games Club on April 16, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait win opener of World Ice Hockey Championship

KUWAIT: Kuwait hammered Malaysia 15-1 in the opening match of the World Championship Division IV ice hockey championship on Tuesday. The game, hosted by Kuwait Winter Games Club, saw the Blue Team scoring five goals in the first set of the period, six in the second and four in the final. Malaysia's only goal was scored in the second period. In the other match, Mongolia beat Indonesia 9-3.

Speaking to reporters following the match, Kuwaiti player Mohammad Al-Duaij voiced hope that the great result of the game would give impetus to the team and enhance their self-confidence. The Kuwaiti team is now better prepared for the coming crucial match against Mongolia on Thursday, he said.

Duaij thanked Kuwait Winter Games Club and Kuwaiti fans for the great support to the team before and during the match, saying their support was the main cause of the victory. Earlier, Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Minister of State for Communications Affairs Dawood Maarafi, the sponsor of the event, announced the championship open, voicing best wishes to the participants. — KUNA

Al-Arabi win Kuwait Futsal Cup



KUWAIT: Al-Arabi FC team defeated Al-Kuwait 3-1 in the final of the 2023-2024 Futsal Cup on Tuesday. Mohammad Al-Mansouri, Marcio Moreira and Borja Torres scored for Al-Arabi, while Al-Kuwait's sole goal was scored by Abdul-Rahman Al-Mesbahi. — KUNA

