

RIDESAFE
RIDE SAFE
@ridesafe.app

BOOK YOUR RIDE NOW

DOWNLOAD THE APP NOW

2 Academy X on mission to cultivate young women tech entrepreneurs



5 Hindu nationalist Modi the favorite as India votes



10 In historic election, Volkswagen workers in US vote to unionize



16 Mongolia win ice hockey division IV championship, Kuwait finish second



Mideast tensions boiling over

Iran, Zionists pull back from brink • Zionists kill 9 family members in Gaza • Deadly blast at Iraq army base



GAZA: A Palestinian man holds the shrouded body of his child as a woman stands besides the bodies of her children, all killed in Zionist bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on April 20, 2024. — AFP

TEHRAN/GAZA: Iran has dismissed as akin to child's play the Zionist entity's reported retaliation for an unprecedented Iranian strike, as both sides on Saturday appeared to step back from wider conflict stemming from the war in Gaza. However, a deadly blast at an Iraqi military base emphasised the high tensions which persist in the region, as did more deadly Zionist strikes in Gaza and intensifying clashes in the West Bank.

Fears have soared this month that escalating tit-for-tat attacks between the Zionist entity and Iran could tip over into a broader war in the Middle East. The Zionist entity had warned it would hit back after Iran launched more than 300 missiles and drones a week ago in its first-ever direct attack on its archenemy's territory.

The Iran attack was itself in retaliation for a Zionist air strike that leveled the Iranian consulate in Damascus and killed seven Revolutionary Guards on April 1. The Zionist retaliation appeared to come on Friday, when Iranian media reported blasts in the central province of Isfahan. Fars news agency reported "three explosions" close to Qahjavarestan, near Isfahan airport and the 8th Shekari army airbase.

"What happened last night was no attack," Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told NBC

News. "It was the flight of two or three quadcopters, which are at the level of toys that our children use in Iran," he added. "As long as there is no new adventure on behalf of the (Zionist) regime against Iran's interests, we will have no response."

Zionist officials have made no public comment on what — according to a senior US congressional source who spoke to AFP — were retaliatory Zionist strikes against Iran. Sanam Vakil, director of the Middle East and North Africa program at Britain's Chatham House think tank, said the reported Zionist strike had been "calibrated to avoid damage and further Iranian aggression". Iranian political expert Hamid Gholamzadeh said the incident in Isfahan, while "insignificant", needs to be seen in the context of the "fight for balance of power" between the two countries. "The region is on fire and an all-out war can be ignited any moment," he said.

On Saturday, Gaza's Civil Defence agency said an overnight Zionist strike in Rafah killed nine members of a family including six children. Agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said the Zionist army had also hit several other areas of Rafah overnight, adding: "It has been a very hard night."

Continued on Page 6

Erdogan meets Haniyeh; Abbas to reassess US ties



ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meets Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of Hamas, at the Dolmabahce Presidential working office on April 20, 2024. — AFP

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged Palestinians to unite amid the Zionist entity's war in Gaza following hours-long talks with Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Istanbul on Saturday, his office said. Tensions in the region are running high as the Hamas-run Palestinian territory braces for a new Zionist offensive and a reported Zionist attack on Iran.

Erdogan called on Palestinians to unite following the talks at the Dolmabahce palace, on the banks of the Bosphorus strait, that Turkish media reports said lasted more than two and a half hours. "It is vital that Palestinians act with unity in this process. The strongest response to (the Zionist entity) and the path to victory lie in unity and integrity," Erdogan said according to a Turkish presidency statement. Hamas is a rival of the Fatah faction that rules the semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank.

Continued on Page 6

Zionists kill 10 Palestinians in West Bank raid

TULKAREM: The Zionist army said Saturday troops had killed 10 Palestinians in an ongoing raid around Nur Shams, a refugee camp in the north of the occupied West Bank. AFP journalists heard gunshots and saw houses hit by blasts as Zionist drones flew overhead and armored vehicles moved through the camp.

Since early last year, violence has flared in the West Bank, which the Zionist entity has occupied since 1967. It has escalated further since war broke out in Gaza on Oct 7. The Palestinian health ministry said it had confirmed 11 wounded in the Zionist raid, seven of them "wounded by live gunshots".

It said a paramedic shot while trying to get to the wounded was among them.

The health ministry said medics had been alerted to "a number of killed and injured" inside the camp, but said the army was "denying them access to tend to the wounded". An AFP journalist said paramedics had tried to enter the camp but had been refused access by the army. On Friday the health ministry said 16-year-old Qais Fathi Nasrallah was killed by Zionist troops in the nearby Tulkarem refugee camp.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said he died after being "shot in the head by (Zionist) live gunfire". It was unclear exactly when he died. A 30-year-old man, Salim Faisal Ghanem, was "killed (by Zionist troops)" on Friday in the Nur Shams camp, Wafa said. Residents contacted by AFP on Saturday said there was no electricity in the camp and food was running short, saying nobody was allowed to enter or leave. — AFP



AQRABA: Mourners pray over the bodies of two Palestinian men killed during a Zionist settler attack on this village in the Zionist-occupied West Bank during their funeral procession on April 20, 2024. — AFP

Lacking storm drains, Dubai floods persist

DUBAI: When record downpours sent water flooding into his Dubai home, Riaz Haq expected the levels to drop once it stopped raining. But instead of falling, the water kept rising higher. "We went to bed, the water was half-a-meter," the British lawyer said, recalling Tuesday's tempest that flooded homes, malls, offices and roads. "We woke up and it was one metre. My cars were submerged, water to our waist. Everything is ruined."

Haq, his wife and their dog spent more than two

days trapped on the upper floor of their two-storey home before they were finally rescued by a neighbour's boat on Thursday. The couple, who were only able to salvage some bread and snacks, did not eat for most of that time, surviving on a few bottles of water.

"Fridge, freezer, even my car was floating. Everything was floating," he told AFP. "I had a brand new car. It's all ruined. It's a natural disaster situation. No one was prepared for this level of carnage," he added. During their ordeal Haq, his wife and their neighbors — about 18 families in a suburban residential community — were too scared to wade out through the waist-high, smelly water, fearing electrocution.

Continued on Page 6



DUBAI: Men transport salvaged belongings in a canoe along a flooded street on April 19, 2024. — AFP

H5N1 strain of bird flu found in milk: WHO

GENEVA: The H5N1 bird flu virus strain has been detected in very high concentrations in raw milk from infected animals, the WHO said Friday, though how long the virus can survive

in milk is unknown. Avian influenza A(H5N1) first emerged in 1996 but since 2020, the number of outbreaks in birds has grown exponentially, alongside an increase in the number of infected mammals.

The strain has led to the deaths of tens of millions of poultry, with wild birds and land and marine mammals also infected. Cows and goats joined the list last month — a surprising development for experts because they

were not thought to be susceptible to this type of influenza. US authorities earlier this month said a person working on a dairy farm in Texas was recovering from bird flu after being exposed to cattle.

"The case in Texas is the first case of a human infected by avian influenza by a cow," said Wenqing Zhang, head of the global influenza program at the World Health Organization. "Bird-to-cow, cow-to-cow and cow-to-bird

transmission have also been registered during these current outbreaks, which suggest that the virus may have found other routes of transition than we previously understood," she told a media briefing in Geneva.

It was only the second case of a human testing positive for bird flu in the United States, and came after the virus sickened herds that were apparently exposed to wild birds.

Continued on Page 6



Local

Academy X on mission to cultivate young women tech entrepreneurs

An exceptional move to empower young women

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: In an exceptional move to empower young women for a brighter and more innovative future, CODED has introduced the Academy X program, which commenced its classes on Saturday. With a dedicated mission to equip 300 participants with essential entrepreneurial and tech skills crucial in today's workplace, the program aims to graduate its first batch at the end of the six-day course.

Open to youths aged 14 to 18 from all nationalities and skill levels, the initiative prepares girls to launch their own businesses and address the gender gap in entrepreneurship. "We want to see more women as entrepreneurs and CEOs," remarked Janna Al-Muqaisib, the program's lead, in an interview with Kuwait Times, highlighting the importance of challenging the perception of male dominance in founding positions.



Janna Al-Muqaisib

Notably, prior experience in business or technology is not required to join the program. "We welcome beginners and those with intermediate skills. We understand they may lack experience, and our aim is to provide them with the opportunity to learn something valuable and different," Muqaisib emphasized.

By guiding students in effectively utilizing AI to nurture their projects and ideas, the initiative encourages participants to streamline startup processes. Dalal Al-Jassem, an instructor at Academy X, highlighted the inevitable importance of digital thinking in today's world, noting the necessity of building apps or websites for selling and promoting products and services of any type.

In this context, the significance of AI tools in simplifying content creation and web designing by accessing readymade templates becomes evident. "Our aim is to teach the girls how to optimize their time by learning such tools, enabling them to focus on other critical aspects of their business," Jassem remarked.

Muqaisib further underscored the program's core objective in fulfilling the knowledge gap in this specific area, noting that schools and universities often lag behind in incorporating such technological advancements in their curricula. As



KUWAIT: Photos show participants at the Academy X program.— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



CODED strives to keep pace with trends and technology, this program serves as a catalyst for change. "Since we rely on these tools daily in the workplace, we realized it's crucial to integrate them into our curricula and teach them to students," Muqaisib added.

During her opening speech, she provided an overview of the six-day program, highlighting its

holistic learning approach. Participants will engage in a wide range of topics, including foundations of technology, entrepreneurship basics, interface design, project execution, communication, and presentation skills.

The learning journey will conclude with a celebratory event, where students will showcase their final projects and express their aspirations

for the future. Muqaisib wrapped up her remarks by acknowledging the invaluable support of strategic partners - Zain Group, Gulf Insurance Group, Agility, Talabat and Kuwait University, as well as M2R for their exclusive digital sponsorship and Kuwait Times and Kuwait News for their media sponsorship - without whom this initiative wouldn't have been possible.

Kuwait Economic Fund, ILO ink MoU

WASHINGTON: The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) has signed a memorandum of understanding for development cooperation with the International Labor Organization. The MoU was co-signed by KFAED's Acting Director General Walid Al-Bahar and ILO's Assistant Director-General for External and Corporate Relations, Laura Thompson, on the sidelines of the 2024 spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

KFAED said in a statement that the MoU aims at establishing a framework of technical cooperation and coordinating joint action in the realms of economic and social funding in developing countries, in addition to mutual coordination for expertise swaps. The MoU, with a five-year renewable mandate, focuses on cooperation in activities that meet the two sides' objectives in the developing countries where they have a presence.

It is also designed to swap economic, financial, and commercial information and employ resources in joint interest realms, the statement said, adding that the cooperation would cover statistics, policies, en-



WASHINGTON: KFAED's Acting Director General Walid Al-Bahar and ILO's Assistant Director-General for External and Corporate Relations Laura Thompson signs the memorandum of understanding. — KUNA

hancing potentials, youth economic empowerment, gender equality at work, and responding to crises, in addition to cooperation among states of the South.

The two sides will hold regular consultations, according to the memo, to coordinate operations in the targeted countries. — KUNA

the same period in 2023. Last February also saw increases in aircraft and passenger traffic by 23 percent and 13 percent, respectively, compared to the same period in 2023. KAC has followed a new policy of increasing direct operations on the lines that are experiencing significant growth by passengers, in addition to operating its flights to new airports and choosing economically viable destinations in the interest of the Blue Bird.

The current results are the best evidence of reaching "unprecedented and distinguished" levels of positive results and growing significantly and accelerating, which contributed significantly to achieving the goals of the comprehensive development policy set by the company recently, confirming its commitment to take a steady step towards improving the services provided to customers.

KAC pointed to its keenness to consolidate relations and enhance joint cooperation with the concerned authorities, foremost of which is the General Directorate of Civil Aviation, as this cooperation contributed to the development of the operational system and the convergence of views in reaching broader horizons of prosperity and progress for the benefit of all parties and Kuwait.



The company has recently announced a plan to launch new destinations for the coming summer season, including those connected to the cities of the Turkish Republic, such as Antalya, Trabzon, and Bodrum, in addition to the Egyptian city of Sharm El-Sheikh, Spanish Malaga, French Nice, and Sarajevo. Kuwait has increased the number of its flights to many destinations, such as London, Amsterdam, Munich, Vienna, and Geneva, to accommodate the growing demand for these European destinations and some other destinations in the summer, such as Dubai, Riyadh, and Manchester. — KUNA

KAC records high rates of operational activities

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Company (KAC) on Saturday announced the increase in the percentage of its operational activities in the movement of aircraft and passengers during the months of November and December 2023, January and February 2024. The company explained in a press release that aircraft traffic increased by 7 percent, while passenger traffic increased by 10 percent during last November compared to the same period in 2022, indicating that aircraft traffic increased last December by 12 percent, while passenger traffic increased by 9 percent compared to the same month in 2022.

During the past month of January, operational activities witnessed an increase of 25 percent in aircraft traffic and 21 percent in passenger traffic compared to

Kuwait chairs meeting of media excellence award committee

CAIRO: The Arab League General Secretariat announced Saturday that the Arab Media Excellence Award jury will hold a three-day meeting as of Monday, headed by Kuwait, with the participation of representatives of committee members. Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Media and Communication Sector of the League Ambassador Ahmed Khattabi said in a statement that the meeting comes within the framework of implementing the recommendations issued by the (18) regular session of the Executive Office of the Council of Arab Information Ministers, held in Libya on December 24, related to the item "Encouraging Quality" to enhance the capabilities of Arab media professionals.

He added that the slogan of the committee, "Communicating Crises, Disasters, and Risks," comes in line with the crises and disasters that the Arab region has recently witnessed, including the Zionist aggression on Gaza and the deteriorating humanitarian conditions it has left behind. He pointed out that the Technical Secretariat of the Council of Arab Information Ministers has so far received nearly 100 works in the various categories of the award, including television, radio, journalistic, and digital media works.

This award aims to highlight distinguished media models in the Arab world and support their appreciated efforts in the media field, especially their constructive contributions that concern the Arab nation. The jury includes representatives from Egypt, Bahrain, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, and Morocco. — KUNA

Local

Kuwait regrets Security Council's failure to approve Palestine's full membership

Palestine cause remains Kuwait's top priority

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed deep regret over the UN Security Council's (UNSC) failure to approve a full membership for Palestine in the council. In a statement on Friday, the ministry said that Kuwait renewed its call for the international community to exert further efforts to resolve the situation in Palestine and to protect the rights of Palestinians. Kuwait also applauded the efforts of Algeria, supported by the Arab group in the UN and other friendly countries, to back up Palestine's membership resolution.

The US' use of a veto at the UN Security Council not to recognize Palestine's state as a UN full member is a step back in efforts aiming to achieve fair and comprehensive peace in the Middle East region, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi said. In a news statement, Al-Budaiwi affirmed the GCC's unwavering and supportive stance on Palestinians' rights to self-determination and the establishment of their independent state based on June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

He called on the international community to work decisively and immediately to ensure the recognition of Palestine's state and enable Palestinians to get their main and legal rights in accordance with UN resolutions and international law. Al-Budaiwi said the UN Security Council should take serious and necessary steps to re-assess international mechanisms of peace in a way that ensures maintaining people's rights and international and regional security and stability. The GCC chief also urged all countries and international organizations to stand with justice, back efforts to restore rights, and build a better future for the region and the world's nations, according to the statement.

Top priority

Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Hamad Al-Merri said his country maintains special, deep-rooted relations with Palestine, affirming that the Palestine question is a top priority for the Kuwaiti leadership, government, and people. "Kuwait continues supporting the Palestinian people through funding socioeconomic development projects," he said in statements to KUNA after the closing ceremony of a training program on "building the capacity of Palestinian entrepreneurs."

The program was organized by the Arab Planning Institute (API) in collaboration with the Palestine



NEW YORK: The United Nations Security Council meets on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, at UN headquarters on April 18, 2024. (Inset) US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood votes against a resolution allowing Palestinian UN membership.— AFP photos

Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR) in Amman. "Kuwait spares no effort to advance the Palestine cause, which is a central issue for Kuwait and all Arab countries," Ambassador Al-Merri pointed out. On the just-ended training program, the Kuwaiti diplomat noted that his country spearheads the efforts to realize socio-economic development in the sisterly Arab countries and improve the lives of Arab citizens.

Appreciating the role of the API, Ambassador

Al-Merri said the Institute offers a variety of activities, including training courses, research, and consultancy, to promote sustainable development and human development in Arab countries. On a similar note, API Director General Dr. Abdullah Al-Shami said the training program aimed to help Palestinian entrepreneurs and cadres lead the development drive more effectively. "The program is one of the main activities of the API to empower Arab young entrepreneurs, particularly Palestinians," he added.

On his part, PECDAR Director-General Mohammad Abu-Awadh said the training program, the sixth of its kind, gathered 150 Palestinian trainees who will help advance the Palestinian labor market. "The API plays a vital role in backing development in the Arab world, particularly in Palestine," Abu-Awadh added. Founded in 1980 in Kuwait, the API is a non-profit organization dedicated to the cause of economic and social development in Arab countries through training, research, consultancy, expert-level meetings, and publications. — KUNA

Local brands must tread lightly amid growing attention

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: There has been a noticeable increase of interest in local brands in Kuwait and other GCC countries, which indicates that local brands have a prime opportunity to thrive and expand. To look more into the potential of local brands, Kuwait Times spoke to Altaf Almutairi, an entrepreneur and activist with expertise in the field of luxury brands management. Almutairi pursued her education in Luxury Brand Management at IFA Paris Fashion Academy and has founded and participated in numerous industry products in this domain.

Almutairi told Kuwait Times that a clear shift towards local brands has emerged in the Gulf region, prompting international brands to incorporate the region's cultural richness into their offerings. This presents a unique opportunity for local brands to establish themselves and thrive in the market.

However, achieving this requires local brands to adhere to key principles such as robust regulations, comprehensive support systems, and building trust among local clients, investors, and the government. When it comes to local fashion brands, support should encompass financial aid, guidance, legal assistance, and access to advanced facilities crucial for the fashion industry's growth and the country's economic development. The primary challenge for local brands lies not in expertise, but rather in the lack of essential infrastructure to undertake specialized projects in the fashion sector, said Almu-

tairi who is also the chairwoman of the Entrepreneurship Committee and secretary trustee of the International Relations Committee at the Kuwait Youth Assembly.

How to stand out

Almutairi explained that for a brand to excel and thrive, it must embody a definitive identity, vision, and unwavering conviction that propels its sustainability. It is crucial for brands to target their local markets and address the distinct requirements of their customers while upholding product quality that aligns with local standards. Failing to grasp and meet the expectations of local consumers can jeopardize a brand's success.

Local brands, however, sometimes gravitate towards a more global approach, overlooking their geographical uniqueness and rapid access to the Gulf market and local customers. This misstep must be avoided by local brands. They should instead concentrate on their specific geographical positioning. It is imperative for these brands to offer products tailored to the precise needs of their local market to ensure ongoing relevance and success.

Global expansion

Almutairi emphasized that it is crucial for a local brand to engage in observation and clearly define its goals. Evaluating the choice between regional and global expansion should be done carefully, considering whether it aligns with the brand's identity or could potentially dilute its essence.

criticism of the superpowers' failure to deter Zionist entity from the mass killing of Palestinians, particularly the Gazans. "The Western double standards illustrated amid the blatant aggression on Gaza must cease to exist," the Arab Parliament chief said, calling for reforms of the laws and covenants of the international organizations that "grant authority to Western powers that are no longer guided by the compass of ethics and humanity."

"We are meeting for the fourth time since last October, and our brothers in Palestine are still facing genocide for seven months, where the flagrant occupation entity has been proceeding with the ugliest crimes and the barbaric bombardment of the populated neighborhoods and towns in Gaza," he said. Al-Asoumi alluded in particular to the occupation's destructive bombardment of hospitals and infrastructural facilities, leading to the deaths of thousands of martyrs, mostly children and women, in the most horrific crime witnessed by the world in the modern age.

Although the United Nations Security Council issued, for the first time, a resolution urging for a cease-fire during



KUWAIT: This file photo shows bags decorated with elements from the Kuwaiti culture made by local designers. — KUNA

Not all local brands may be suited for international expansion. However, those with the necessary capabilities must be strategic and mindful in their approach. In today's digital age, there are numerous cost-effective opportunities for global expansion, thanks to technological advancements that enable wide consumer reach. Nevertheless, a key challenge lies in understanding and adapting to the diverse needs and preferences of a global audience when offering products or services. With the target market being vast and options limited, it is essential to provide

solutions that meet the demands of a varied audience.

Keep your brand authentic

Almutairi explained that local brands have made a concentrated effort to infuse the cultural essence of their regions into their products and services with sophistication and innovation. While this approach has been successfully executed by many, it is crucial that the cultural references do not eclipse the brand's unique identity. Brand owners need to understand how to effectively utilize this cultural inspiration

to showcase their expertise, meet customer needs, and create opportunities.

It is important to recognize that the industry is currently experiencing intense competition. These brands face the dual challenge of ongoing competition and the necessity to develop a compelling vision, while continuously enhancing their offerings to cultivate brand loyalty. Brands that fail to adapt may struggle to survive in this competitive landscape. Furthermore, customers are not easily swayed by new entrants and are more inclined to remain loyal to brands with a strong, established reputation in the market.

Local talent revered

Almutairi concluded by highlighting the Gulf's evolving interest in local talents, especially in the fashion world. She said the Gulf region's fashion industry has experienced a remarkable surge in recent years, fueled by a strong commitment to its advancement. Local designers have been supported through a variety of means, including annual competitions, industry associations, and representation at international fashion events. Furthermore, dedicated organizations within the sector offer guidance and support to emerging talents.

The region's active participation in key fashion forums underscores its dedication to fostering industry growth. Noteworthy among these efforts is Riyadh's inaugural Fashion Week, poised to revolutionize the Gulf designers' community by providing a platform for local talents to showcase their creations on a global stage. The industry's progress is further bolstered by the presence of seasoned professionals whose expertise has been instrumental in nurturing local talent and shaping the region's fashion landscape.

AP lambasts superpowers' indifference

CAIRO: President of the Arab Parliament (AP) Adel Al-Asoumi condemned on Saturday "the shameful and blatant stances" that have been taken by "many Western governments" toward the crimes and the terrorist acts undertaken by the flagrant Zionist occupation in Gaza. Al-Asoumi, addressing the third general session of the Arab Parliament's third legislative term, said, "The real bet is on the free peoples that can no longer tolerate this abhorrent international hypocrisy, and they should pressure their government so humanity and the voice of justice may prevail."

"This unprecedented subjugation of the international community to the criminal entity devoids the law of credibility and gives way to the law of force to prevail, with all its ramifications on the whole world community," he said in his sharp

the past fasting month of Ramadan, the occupation entity did not abide by it, abstained from showing respect for the fasting month's sanctity, and continued to perpetrate brutal massacres against civilians. Al-Asoumi condemned the failure of the UNSC two days ago to pass a resolution approving Palestine as a full UN member due to a US veto.

"This scene has bolstered the facts about the blind American bias in favor of the occupation entity," he said. He indicated widespread demands and calls by a lot of people throughout the world, as well as parliamentarians' appeals defending the rights of the Palestinian people vis-à-vis the crimes and massacres. He also hinted that this trend signaled "an unprecedented turning point" in the quest to support and fathom the legitimate Palestinian cause. Moreover, such a drastic change in global public opinion affirms the certain reality that attaining security and stability in the region and the world requires a comprehensive and just settlement for the Palestinian cause, and that is by establishing an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. — KUNA



Palestinian children pose for a picture on April 19, 2024, inside a building that was damaged during the Zionist bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, amid ongoing battles between the Zionist entity and the militant group Hamas. — AFP

Kuwait Youth Authority stresses importance of UN Youth Forum

NEW YORK: Kuwait's Youth Public Authority said that the UN Youth Forum 2024 was an important event – positively contributing to the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). Speaking to KUNA, Acting Director General of the Youth Public Authority Nasser Al-Sheikh told KUNA that Kuwait's participation in the event, held on April 16–18, reflected the state's interest in sharing the world's youth inspirations and concerns.

He indicated that the Kuwaiti delegation to the event took part in sideline meetings such as the regional meeting for Arab countries, which focused on supporting youth in the region through numerous strategies and plans of action. On the issues discussed during the forum, the Kuwaiti official indicated that environmental issues and the role of youth in bolstering sustainable development took center stage, in addition to other important matters.

He noted that the influence of AI on youth as well as preparations for the upcoming UN Future Summit in September were discussed during the course of the youth forum. Al-Sheikh thanked the Kuwaiti mission at the UN headquarters in New York for facilitating the Youth Public Authority's participation in the forum. The forum saw the participation of various officials, including UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, and organizations from across the globe. — KUNA



Acting Director General of the Youth Public Authority Nasser Al-Sheikh participates in the UN Youth Forum 2024. — KUNA

Burgan Bank continues its support for KACCH, BACCH for 23rd consecutive year

Part of its comprehensive social responsibility program



Kholoud Al-Feeli and Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah presenting the donation to Margaret Al-Sayer and Dr Tala Al Dabbous from KACCH and BACCH.

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced it continues annual support for the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH) and Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice (BACCH) for the 23rd consecutive year. The Bank's unwavering support for KACCH and BACCH has taken multiple forms over the decades, from annual donations to year-long volunteering that engages all Burgan staff. This comes as part of the Bank's committed and all-encompassing social responsibility program and its institutional mission to remain a leading contributor to the overall development of its community.

Commenting on Burgan's continues partnership with KACCH and BACCH, Mrs. Kholoud Al-Feeli, Deputy General Manager at Burgan Bank, said: "We are delighted and honored to continue our support for KACCH and BACCH, ensuring that they continue to excel at their mission for enhancing the quality of life for children in hospitals and supporting their families. On our mission to influence positive change across society, it is essential to maintain and expand our support network, which includes government bodies, civil society organizations, and other instigators of change."



Kholoud Al-Feeli

On her part, Mrs. Margaret Al-Sayer, Founding Director of KACCH & BACCH, said: "We extend our sincere gratitude to Burgan Bank for their continuous support over the past two decades. Their commitment to supporting our vital services for sick children and their families in hospitals, especially their support for the sustainability of 'Child

Life' programs in Kuwait, is commendable. We look forward to continuing this distinctive and fruitful relationship, which directly contributes to expanding and developing our charitable efforts in hospitals and at Bayt Abdullah, and to changing the healthcare experience for children in Kuwait. It is worth mentioning that we have provided 36,921 services to support children and their families by our Child Life Specialists and

Play Leaders in hospitals, in addition to 5,696 medical services at Bayt Abdullah."

From a single playroom in the Amiri Hospital in 1989, KACCH and BACCH now operate in eight public hospitals across Kuwait in addition to Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice, offering psychosocial support to children in hospitals and their families through their team of certified Child Life specialists and the fully equipped play areas that are designed to meet every child's needs. In addition to the specialized palliative care services provided to children who are suffering from life limiting or life-threatening conditions in Bayt Abdullah.

In the most recent years of their joint efforts, Burgan Bank organized numerous initiatives in collaboration with KACCH and BACCH, including the Ramadan Toy Drive, music instrument donations, and sponsoring a young palliative care patient's trip to attend the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 semi-final match. It serves to note that the Bank encourages its employees to volunteer in many of these initiatives, ensuring that the values of compassion, empathy, and giving are exercised thoroughly across the institution.

Oncoplastics and breast reconstruction seminar kicks off

KUWAIT: The Surgical Oncology Department at Kuwait Cancer Control Center (KCCC) will organize a practical scientific workshop for

oncoplastics and breast reconstruction, headed by Dr. Majida Abdulsamad Al-Saleh, who is an oncology surgery consultant and head of the

breast surgery and reconstruction unit at KCCC. The workshop will start on Sunday and will continue for five days.

Assistant Professor of Breast Oncology from Brazil, Dr. Fabricio Palermo Brenelli, and oncoplastic surgical oncologist Peter A Barry at the Royal Marsden Hospital in London will give

lectures during the workshop. The workshop will present 34 cases of partial or total removal of the breast and then carry out the constructive surgeries according to each case. It will create an opportunity to have such delicate procedures performed by world experts in Kuwait, saving them the trouble of traveling abroad.

Kuwait underlines importance of WBG meetings

WASHINGTON: Acting Director General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), Waleed Al-Bahar, said Friday that Kuwait, represented by KFAED, is eager to attend the annual meetings of the World Bank Group (WBG) to promote economic and social development cooperation. Speaking to KUNA, he said Kuwait, which has been in close relations with the WBG since 1960, supports the goals and operations of the WBG and IMF by regularly contributing to their development resources.

He added that he had already held meetings with government representatives, ministers of finance, planning, and international cooperation, and chiefs of development institutions on the sidelines of the two UN bodies' spring meetings that last until April 20. The meetings, he elaborated, focused on aspects of cooperation in the areas of promoting economic and social development worldwide amid mounting challenges developing countries are facing. He noted that he had also participated in the joint development meeting of the WBG and IMF, which defined their general trends and strategic trends.

The meeting looked into the WBG's development roadmap and regulations in the context of the fresh vision that was adopted by the two bodies' board of governors during their annual meetings in 2023, he said. Earlier in the day, the KFAED signed a memorandum of understanding for development cooperation with the International Labor Organization. The MoU was co-signed by KFAED's Acting Director General Waleed Al-Bahar and ILO's Assistant Director-General for External and Corporate Relations, Laura Thompson, on the sidelines of the 2024 spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

KFAED said in a statement that the MoU aims at establishing a framework of technical cooperation and coordinating joint action in the realms of economic and social funding in developing countries, in addition to mutual coordination for the sharing of expertise. The MoU, with a five-year renewable mandate, focuses on cooperation in activities that meet the two sides' objectives in developing countries.

Co-financing platform

Meanwhile, a coalition of 10 multilateral development banks (MDBs) launched a new co-financing platform that will enable them to channel



Waleed Al-Bahar

additional capital for development scale and impact. The Global Collaborative Co-Financing Platform will consist of the digital Co-Financing Portal, which will create a secure platform for registered co-financiers to share project pipelines," according to a statement released by the World Bank on Friday.

This tool, hosted at the World Bank, will increase efficiency and transparency and make it easier for MDBs to share information and identify opportunities for co-financing. The platform also includes the "Co-Financing Forum," which will provide a space for participants to discuss co-financing opportunities, best practices, and common issues and will support ongoing efforts to coordinate policies to reduce the burden on partner countries.

For countries, the new platform will reduce the administrative burden and transaction costs and enable better coordinated financing in line with their priorities, resulting in greater development impact. By leveraging partnerships and promoting transparency, the platform will enable MDBs, partner agencies, and client countries to address global challenges more effectively and efficiently. Strengthening partnerships is a key element of the World Bank Group's new playbook aimed at boosting impact.

Co-financing has been identified as an effective way to improve strategic alignment, crowd in concessional resources, promote efficiency, and strengthen coordination, the statement noted. MDBs that will be part of the new co-financing platform include: African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Council of Europe Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Investment Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, New Development Bank, and the World Bank Group.

The new financial instruments designed to boost lending capacity and enable the World Bank Group to take on more risk for shared global challenges have received a significant endorsement. A set of 11 countries announced commitments today for the Portfolio Guarantee Platform, hybrid capital mechanism, and new Livable Planet Fund totaling \$11 billion, according to the statement. The World Bank Group's unique leveraging capability enables the resources pledged to hybrid capital and the Portfolio Guarantee Platform to be multiplied six to eight times over 10 years. — KUNA



Scan & Subscribe
KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

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



Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220



Violent Zionist settler attacks terrorize villagers in West Bank

'Crisis not over' in Indonesia



HARIDWAR: Women stand in a queue to cast their votes at a polling station as voting starts in the first phase of India's general election in Haridwar, in the country's Uttarakhand state on April 19, 2024. — AFP photos



A sadhu or a Hindu holy man walks after casting his vote at a polling station.

India's Hindu faithful vote for 'civilizational glory'

Modi the favorite as millions begin casting their ballots

HARIDWAR: India began voting Friday in a six-week election with an all but assured victory for Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as a weakened opposition is pushed to the sidelines. A total of 968 million people are eligible to take part in the world's biggest vote — a staggering logistical exercise that critics say follows a concerted effort to delegitimize rivals.

A long and winding queue was patiently assembled outside a polling station in the Hindu holy city of Haridwar, even before the booths opened. Nestled between the Himalayan foothills and the banks of the Ganges river, the ancient city of Haridwar is ringed by temples and a key pilgrimage site for India's majority faith.

It is also a stronghold of support for Modi, whose Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has brought religion to the forefront of politics in defiance of the country's secular political constitution. "Modi had ensured our country as well as our faith is secure," 59-year-old Hindu ascetic Uday Bharti told AFP outside a polling station. "We have come here to make sure Modi keeps doing his good work."

Elderly Hindu ascetic Ram Bhakt, 96, braved searing heat Friday as he hobbled through the narrow laneways of the city. "I am voting for India's civilizational glory," said the wizened nonagenarian, clad in a simple saffron robe and resting his weight on a wooden walking stick, his wrinkled forehead smeared with vermilion and ash.

"Under Modi, our country has become what we sagely had always hoped for," he told AFP. Modi is widely

expected to resoundingly win this year's national elections in India, which began on Friday and continues in phases until June 1. His enduring popularity in India has been forged in large part by his appeal to the Hindu faithful. This year, he presided over the inauguration of a grand temple to Ram, one of the most important deities in the Hindu pantheon, built on the grounds of a centuries-old mosque razed by Hindu zealots.

At the glitzy ceremony attended by Bollywood celebrities and cricket stars, he told an audience of thousands that India was "creating the genesis of a new history". Construction of the temple fulfilled a long-standing demand of Hindu activists and was widely celebrated across India with back-to-back television coverage and street parties.

Shiv Shankar Giri, a young man serving in a Hindu monastic order in Haridwar, told AFP that he had cast his vote for "the one who had brought Ram". "We are all voting for the person who has made Hinduism strong," said the 28-year-old. "We are voting for Modi."

'Our faith is secure'

The growing alignment between India's politics and its majority faith has been cheered on around the country in the decade since Modi took office. But the rising tide of Hindu nationalist fervor has also left the country's 220 million-strong Muslim community and other minorities fearful. Uttarakhand state, home to Haridwar and the source of the Ganges, is consid-

ered a geographical cornerstone of Hinduism, and has smoldered with sectarian tensions. Hardline activist groups loosely affiliated with the BJP have issued calls for Muslims to be expelled from the state. In another part of Uttarakhand, several Muslims were killed in February after clashes with their Hindu neighbors, prompted by municipal authorities demolishing a mosque they said had been constructed illegally. For Mukesh Dubey, the priest of a small temple in Haridwar, the Modi government's championing of his faith was a distraction from more pressing issues facing India, with millions of young university graduates out of work. Sops to the faith amounted to nothing if "people do not have jobs and food to fill their stomachs," the 38-year-old told AFP.

Modi's party is nonetheless expected to coast to victory in Haridwar, where in the last election five years ago the BJP candidate won 250,000 more votes than his nearest rival. "Modi had ensured our country as well as our faith is secure," Uday Bharti, 59, told AFP outside a polling station. "We have come here to make sure Modi keeps doing his good work."

Voting on Friday was mostly without incident, but one polling station in conflict-hit Manipur was ransacked after unknown assailants let off gunfire outside. The far-flung state has fractured along ethnic lines after fighting broke out last year between the predominantly Hindu Meitei majority and the mainly Christian Kuki community, displacing thousands.—AFP

Russia quietly exits Karabakh, ceding its clout

BAKU: When Russian troops deployed to Nagorno-Karabakh four years ago, their task was clear: keep the peace between bitter foes Armenia and Azerbaijan and prevent another war in the volatile region. But as Azerbaijani forces swept through mountainous Karabakh last September and crushed Armenian separatist forces in a matter of hours, the Russian mission looked lost.

The Kremlin this week quietly confirmed that the peacekeepers were withdrawing, taking with them their weapons and hardware, as well as Russian clout from a region it long considered its own backyard. "We are witnessing a historic process — Russians are leaving for the first time in two centuries," independent Azerbaijani analyst Elhan Shahinoglu told AFP. Moscow ruled over the Caucasus region first during the Russian empire and then in the Soviet era. When war broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan after the USSR's collapse, Moscow sought to mediate. The Kremlin deployed almost 2,000 troops in 2020 as part of a ceasefire deal that halted six weeks of brutal fighting between the arch-foes over the Karabakh region.

The accord held until the lightning Azerbaijani offensive last September that ignited an exodus of more than 100,000 Armenians from Karabakh and deepened their frustration with Moscow.

Russia 'betrayed us'

"Along with the Russians leaving Karabakh, the last hope that the population will return home is gone," said Iveta Margaryan, a 53-year-old trained accountant on the streets of Armenia's capital. "The Russians have betrayed us," she added.

Observers of the Caucasus say Russia is too caught up with its invasion of Ukraine to retain its sway in the region. Azerbaijan has recently deepened ties with Turkey — a close military and political partner with shared cultural ties. And with the pullout from Karabakh, Moscow has further alienated Armenia.

Yerevan has criticised Moscow's perceived shortfalls, with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan busy forging closer ties with the West. In February, he froze Yerevan's participation in the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, a defense grouping of several ex-Soviet states.

Yerevan also joined the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Moscow's wishes — a move that obligates it to arrest Vladimir Putin should he visit Armenia. The European Union and United States are now leading efforts to broker a peace agreement between the Caucasus foes, with Moscow stuck playing second fiddle.

Moscow's unease over Armenia's rapprochement with the West has also become public. The foreign ministry this week demanded that Yerevan "disavow" reports it was deepening military ties with Western countries. France — home to a large Armenian diaspora — has also planted a flag in the region, intensifying its diplomatic backing for Yerevan and providing cutting-edge defensive radars and missiles. "Russia is out, the West is in," said Azerbaijani political scientist Eldar Namazov.

The Russian peacekeepers were meant to "project influence," said Gela Vasadze, senior fellow at the Georgian Strategic Analysis Centre. But their withdrawal has clearly illustrated the limits of Russia's power, he told AFP. "The myth that Russian boots never leave territories they had once stepped in is shattered."—AFP

India pushes Maoist rebel strongholds on road to democracy

DANTEWADA: A narrow winding road through an untamed forest has proven a blow to a decades-old Maoist rebellion that is one of India's longest and deadliest insurgencies. As the world's biggest democracy began a six-week election Friday, the people of one small village — newly connected by fresh tarmac to the outside world — cast their ballots for the first time.

"There was no government here during the last national vote, no polling booth, but only the rebels who warned against contact with the state," Tetam village chief Mahadev Markam told AFP.

Remote and wild Bastar district of Chhattisgarh state where Tetam lies is the center of the country's "Red Corridor", home to left-wing guerrillas sworn to battle the state. For years unable to penetrate rebel strongholds in the district, India instead urged Tetam's inhabitants to travel vast distances to vote in government-controlled areas.

With the Maoists threatening punishment for anyone who participated, very few people undertook a journey fraught with high risk — and no rewards. "Why vote? Why would anyone trek for hours across the forest, over the hills and the streams, and risk the wrath of the rebels? For what? What did the government ever do for us?" Markam asked.

This year it was different: Tetam was one of more than 100 villages in former rebel-held territories where a national vote was staged for the first time since independence from British rule in 1947.

'The state has arrived'

The Naxalite rebellion, as the Maoist movement is known, began in the 1960s as a revolt against the exploitation of marginalized rural Indians. More than 10,000 people have died in the insurgency, waged in the name of the poor and largely tribal communities where the rebels are based.

Heavy-handed campaigns against the guerrillas have often backfired in the past by bolstering hostility towards the government. But the Naxals also have a track record of abductions, forced recruitment, demands for protection money and summary executions that have struck fear into those living alongside the rebels in their heartland. At the peak of the insurgency, the Red Corridor was a vast swathe of territory controlled by rebels



DANTEWADA: Voters are greeted with flowers as they arrive to cast their ballot at a polling station during the first phase of voting for the India's general election on April 19, 2024. — AFP

that rejected the Indian state, operating their own parallel health clinics, schools and criminal justice system. "Earlier, the rebels used to ask the villagers if they'd seen any other government," a top interior ministry official in New Delhi told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the media. "We are your doctors, teachers, and judges," they said. And they were right. But not anymore. They negated the state. But the state has finally arrived."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has pumped billions to construct new roads and mobile towers in the region in the last few years. Along with reinvigorated counterinsurgency operations, the number of districts with an active Maoist presence has nearly halved to 45 since 2010, according to an official report last year.

"The government and security forces reaching these regions simultaneously is the antidote, and not just a singular focus on security," the interior ministry official said. "We are the two tracks of a train, and we have to run with each other to reach the destination."

'So much to see'

Around 80 Maoist rebels have been killed since

January, including a group of 29 killed in a government assault in a remote area of Chhattisgarh three days before India's election began. Home minister Amit Shah this week said the government was running a "focused campaign to root out" the insurgents, with 250 security garrisons established in the state since 2019.

One such garrison was established near Tetam in 2022 as a paved road was being laid to the village for the first time. Life in the village remains hardscrabble and reliant on foraging from the surrounding forests for survival, but evidence of a budding transformation is everywhere.

In the last 18 months, Tetam's inhabitants now have mobile connections, power from the national grid, a health clinic and a government ration shop. Long kept isolated as the insurgency raged around them, some of Tetam's 1,050 inhabitants have since ventured out of their home community for the first time.

Many have gone to visit the nearest small town of Dantewada — population around 20,000, according to local officials — for the first time. "The city was really wonderful," Tetam resident Deepak Markam, 27, told AFP. "There was so much to see there. I hope our village also develops to be like it." — AFP

International

'Crisis not over' in Indonesia

Volcano eruptions continue as thousands of locals evacuated

JAKARTA: The threat from an Indonesian volcano that has erupted more than half a dozen times this week is not over, the archipelago's top volcanology official told AFP, as the crater belched another ash tower on Saturday.

Mount Ruang, located in Indonesia's outermost region of North Sulawesi province, started erupting late Tuesday, prompting authorities to evacuate thousands on islands near the stratovolcano and closure of the nearest international airport.

The volcano erupted again before midnight Friday and again on Saturday afternoon, spewing an ash column 250 meters (820 feet) above its peak, the latest of a wave of volcanic activity, the volcanology agency said. That forced the country's volcanology agency to warn that major eruptions could still take place, despite the crater calming since it stirred a spectacular mix of lava, ash and lightning earlier in the week, raining down molten rocks on nearby villages.

"With volcanic earthquakes recorded, this crisis is not over yet," agency head Hendra Gunawan told AFP. "It indicates magmatic fluid supply is still moving from the depth to the surface. So it's not surprising if eruptions still occur."

The volcano, with a peak 725 meters above sea level, is currently the

only one of Indonesia's more than 100 volcanos at the highest alert level of a four-tiered system. Authorities have kept a six-kilometer (3.7-mile) exclusion zone around the volcano.

More than 6,000 residents of neighboring Tagulandang island, home to around 20,000 people, were evacuated outside the exclusion zone, a local official said Friday. Authorities previously estimated more than 11,000 people would need to be evacuated because of the volcanology agency's warning of volcanic rocks, hot clouds and lava flows.

Residents were advised to wear masks to avoid respiratory problems, the agency said in a statement. The stratovolcano's latest activity also prompted authorities to extend the closure of Sam Ratulangi international airport in the provincial capital of Manado, more than 100 kilometers away.

The airport, initially set to reopen Saturday, will remain closed until Sunday as volcanic ash from Mount Ruang was detected around it, Ambar Suryoko, head of the Manado region airport authority, said in a statement. Indonesia, a vast archipelago nation, experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire". — AFP



SITARO: Mount Ruang volcano erupts in Sitaro, North Sulawesi, on April 19, 2024. — AFP

AUKUS risking nuclear proliferation in Pacific: China FM

SYDNEY: China's foreign minister on Saturday accused Western powers in the AUKUS security pact of provoking division and risking nuclear proliferation in the South Pacific. On a weekend visit to strengthen Beijing's ties with Papua New Guinea, Foreign Minister Wang Yi lashed out at AUKUS, which provides for the United States and Britain to equip Australia with nuclear-powered but conventionally armed submarines.

The three-way AUKUS agreement "runs counter" to a South Pacific treaty banning nuclear weapons in the region, he told a news conference in Port Moresby. AUKUS also "raises serious nuclear proliferation risks", the Chinese foreign minister told reporters af-

ter meeting with his Papua New Guinea counterpart Justin Tkatchenko.

In recent years, Beijing has tried to chip away at US and Australian influence across the South Pacific, including in Papua New Guinea. The Pacific Islands, while small in population, are replete with natural resources and sit at a geostrategic crossroads that could prove strategically vital in any military dispute over Taiwan.

Australia is by far Papua New Guinea's largest donor, but Chinese firms have made solid inroads into markets in the impoverished but resource-rich nation. The Chinese foreign minister seized on a recent announcement by the AUKUS nations that they are considering cooperating with Japan on military technology. Under the AUKUS agreement, the partners plan to develop advanced warfighting capabilities such as artificial intelligence, undersea drones and hypersonic missiles.

"The recent attempts to draw more countries to join in such an initiative of stoking confrontation between blocs and provoking division are totally in-

consistent with the urgent needs of the island countries," the foreign minister said. Wang took a thinly veiled swipe at Australian and US relations with Solomon Islands, which held elections on Wednesday.

'Not the backyard'

The Solomons' incumbent prime minister, Manasseh Sogavare, has embraced China while his main challengers view Beijing's growing influence with a mix of skepticism and alarm. A new government has yet to be agreed among elected MPs. "We believe that the people of Solomon Islands have the wisdom and ability to determine the future of their country. Island nations belong to their people," Wang said.

"They are not the backyard of any big country," Wang said — an allusion to historic perceptions that Australia considered the South Pacific to be its backyard. State-backed Chinese news outlets have pushed reports that the United States might orchestrate riots to block Sogavare from returning to power.

US Ambassador to the Solomons Ann Marie Yas-



PORT MORESBY: China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi speaks during a press conference with Papua New Guinea's Foreign Minister Justin Tkatchenko in Port Moresby on April 20, 2024. — AFP

tischock has said such rumors are "blatantly misleading". Papua New Guinea's foreign minister welcomed the Chinese minister, saying they had "reached some understanding" in their talks. "PNG values China as an important bilateral partner," he said. — AFP

Mideast tensions boiling over...

Continued from Page 1

Five children aged one to seven and a 16-year-old girl were among the dead, along with two women and a man, according to the city's Al Najjar hospital. "Nine martyrs, including six children, were pulled out from the rubble after Zionist air forces struck a house of the Radwan family in Tal al-Sultan in Rafah," Bassal said in a statement.

Outside the hospital, an AFP journalist saw people grieving over small body bags. A woman stroked a dead boy's forehead as planes rumbled overhead. "People were sleeping peacefully," said neighbor Abu Mohammed Ziyadah. "As you can see, there were no militants, not even male adults, except for the head of the family. They were all women and children." The Zionist offensive has killed at least 34,049 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the latest toll from the health ministry in the territory.

While tensions rose after the attack on Iran's consulate, violence involving Iran-backed groups had already been surging across the Middle East since the outbreak of the Gaza war. Officials in Iraq said one person was killed and eight wounded in an explosion at a military base south of Baghdad housing a coalition of pro-Iranian armed groups. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The full details remain unclear hours after the blast hit the Kalsu military base in Babylon province south of Baghdad, where regular army, police and members of Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces, or Hashed al-Shaabi, are stationed. The Iraqi security forces' media unit said "an explosion and a fire" hit the Kalsu base in the early hours of Saturday, leaving one person dead and eight wounded.

Air defense command reported "no drones or combat aircraft in the airspace of Babylon province before or during the explosion", it added in a statement. Shortly after the explosion, the US military said its forces were not behind a reported strike in Iraq.

H5N1 strain of bird flu found...

Continued from Page 1

"Now we see multiple herds of cows affected in an increasing number of US states, which shows a further step of the virus spillover to mammals," Zhang said. "The virus has also been detected in milk from infected animals." Zhang said there was a "very high virus concentration in raw milk", but experts were still investigating exactly how long the virus is able to survive in milk.

The Texas health department has said the cattle infections do not present a concern for the commercial milk supply, as dairies are required to destroy milk from sick cows. Pasteurization also kills the virus. "It is important for people to ensure safe food practices, including consuming only pasteurized milk and milk products," said Zhang.

"The United States has not conducted air strikes in Iraq today," US Central Command (CENTCOM) posted on social media platform X, adding that reports that American forces had carried out a strike were "not true". When reached by AFP, the Zionist army said it "does not comment on information published in foreign media".

In a statement, Hashed al-Shaabi said an "explosion" had inflicted "material losses" and casualties, without giving a number. The group said investigators had been sent to the site. On Saturday morning, however, the Hashed issued another statement that referred to a meeting between its chief of staff and investigation committees "on the site that has been attacked". "We will retaliate against whoever is behind this aggression," Hashed commander Abu Alaa Al-Walalai wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "Those involved in this odious crime will pay the price."

An interior ministry official had initially reported an "aerial bombing" on the site. "The explosion hit equipment, weapons and vehicles," said the source. An Iraqi military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the subject, said the overnight explosion had occurred in "warehouses storing equipment".

The Zionist entity has faced growing global opposition over its military offensive in Gaza, which has reduced vast areas of the besieged Palestinian territory to rubble, while aid groups have warned the north is on the brink of famine. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is under pressure over the rising civilian toll, needs "further escalation and another war to distract the world attention" away from suffering in Gaza, Iranian analyst Gholamzadeh said.

The Zionist military said it struck dozens of militant targets over the past day, including the site in north Gaza from which a rocket was fired into the Zionist city of Sderot. Witnesses in the central Nuseirat refugee camp said the Zionist army told them to evacuate one home, then several were destroyed. "They instruct us to evacuate and return later, but where do we go back? To ruins?" asked resident Abu Ibrahim. "How long will this farce continue?" — Agencies

From 2003 to April 1 this year, the WHO said it had recorded 463 deaths from 889 human cases across 23 countries, putting the case fatality rate at 52 percent. Zhang noted that the human cases recorded in Europe and the United States in the past few years — since the virus surged — have been mild cases. So far, there is no evidence that A(H5N1) is spreading between humans.

And Zhang stressed that the A(H5N1) viruses identified in cows and in the human case in Texas showed no increased adaptation to mammals. As for potential vaccines, if required, Zhang said there were some in the pipeline. "Having candidate vaccine viruses ready allows us to be prepared to quickly produce vaccines for humans, if this becomes necessary," she said. "For this particular H5N1 virus detected in dairy cows, there are a couple of candidate vaccine viruses available." In the case of a pandemic, there are close to 20 influenza vaccines licensed for pandemic use and they could be tailored with the specific virus strain in circulation, she said. — AFP

Erdogan meets Haniyeh; Abbas...

Continued from Page 1

The Palestinian Authority will "reconsider" its relationship with the United States after Washington vetoed a Palestinian bid for full UN membership earlier this week, President Mahmoud Abbas said Saturday. "The Palestinian leadership will reconsider bilateral relations with the United States, in a way that ensures the protection of the interests of our people, our cause and our rights," Abbas told the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

Thursday's vote saw 12 countries on the UN Security Council back a resolution recommending full Palestinian membership and two — Britain and Switzerland — abstain. Only the United States, the Zionist entity's staunchest ally, voted against, using its veto to block the resolution. Abbas said the Palestinian leadership will "develop a new strategy to protect Palestinian national decisions independently and follow a Palestinian agenda rather than an American vision or regional agendas".

He said Palestinians would "not remain hostage to policies that have proven their failure and have been exposed to the entire world". And he said the stance of the US government had "generated unprecedented anger among the Palestinian people and the region's populations, potentially pushing the region towards further instability, chaos and terrorism".

As soaring tensions between Iran and the Zionist entity stoke fears of a wider regional war, Erdogan said recent events should not allow the Zionist entity to "gain ground and that it is important to act in a way that keeps attention on Gaza". With Qatar saying it will reassess its role as a mediator between

Hamas and the Zionist entity, Erdogan sent Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to Doha on Wednesday in a new sign that he wants a role.

"Even if only I, Tayyip Erdogan, remain, I will continue as long as God gives me my life, to defend the Palestinian struggle and to be the voice of the oppressed Palestinian people," the president said Wednesday when he announced Haniyeh's visit. Hamas has had an office in Turkey since 2011 when Turkey helped secure the agreement for the group to free Zionist soldier Gilad Shalit. Erdogan has maintained links with Haniyeh, who has been a frequent visitor.

Fidan was a past head of Turkish intelligence and the country provided information and passports to Hamas officials, including Haniyeh, according to Sinan Ciddi, a Turkey specialist at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington. This has never been confirmed by Turkish authorities, however.

If Qatar withdraws from mediation efforts, Turkey could seek to increase its mediation profile based on its Hamas links. Fidan on Saturday held talks with visiting Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, with both men emphasizing the need to deliver more humanitarian aid to devastated Gaza where the threat of famine looms. Turkey is one of Gaza's main humanitarian aid partners, sending 45,000 tonnes of supplies and medicine in the region.

But Erdogan can only expect a "very limited" role because of his outspoken condemnation of the Zionist entity and its actions in Gaza, according to Ciddi. Last year, the Turkish leader likened the tactics of Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to those of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler and called Zionist entity a "terrorist state" because of its offensive against Hamas. Ciddi said Erdogan would not be welcome in the Zionist entity and at most might be able to pass messages between Palestinian and Zionist negotiators. — AFP

Lacking storm drains, Dubai floods...

Continued from Page 1

The failure of water to drain away has proved a major obstacle to recovery efforts in the desert country, with persistent flooding blocking roads around Dubai days later. Impassable roads have affected basic services, with supermarkets unable to restock and many employees struggling to reach their workplaces. Dubai's airport, the world's busiest for international passengers, has suffered badly from staff shortages with flight cancellations and delays expected to continue into the weekend.

Karim Elgendy, associate director at the Buro Happold engineering consultancy, said drainage for stormwater had not been widely included in planning for the city, much of which is only a few years old. "Someone must have vetoed this because of the fact that it hardly rains. This conversation, I think, when it happened, was short," he told AFP. "Water is locked in. If you have a hard surface like the road or the airport, where will it go? The ground is too hard (to absorb water)," Elgendy added.

Without drainage for excess water, authorities rely on pumping trucks to suck it up with giant hoses and drive it away. Elgendy called this a

"stopgap" measure. But he said it was very difficult to install stormwater systems once infrastructure has been built. "Once a city is built in a certain way, retrofitting stormwater management is next to impossible," he said.

Four people died after the heaviest rainfall on record in the oil-rich UAE, including two Filipino women who suffocated inside their vehicle in Dubai's flooding. Climate change will make extreme weather events more common, Elgendy warned, saying the storm — which dumped up to two years' worth of rain on the Gulf country — was consistent with the effects of global warming. "What this particular incident highlights is that the historic calculus on (whether to install stormwater systems) has changed, because there is a cost," he said. "There's also a reputational cost. These scenes of the runways and airplanes taking off in water — I don't think that's consistent with Brand Dubai," he added, referring to widely shared footage of planes taxiing through standing water on Tuesday.

UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed has ordered at-risk families to be moved to safety and directed an urgent study of the country's infrastructure. While Haq is reassured by the support, uncertainty remains. "We don't know when we will be able to come back to normality," he said. "They are using tankers to remove the water. It will take days. But I'm sure the authorities will do everything they can to get us back to our homes." — AFP

International



AL-MUGHAYYIR: Toys are scattered amid charred objects inside a house in the aftermath of an attack by Zionist settlers in occupied West Bank village of Al-Mughayyir on April 17, 2024. — AFP photos



DUMA: People stand amid the damage caused by Zionist settlers storming the Palestinian village of Duma and setting buildings on fire.

Violent Zionist settler attacks terrorize villagers in West Bank

Zionist army protects attackers, locks up 70 Palestinians who tried to defend their community

AL-MUGHAYYIR: Sitting around a fire in the hills of the Zionist-occupied West Bank, Ibrahim Abu Alyah and some friends stood watch over his herd in the aftermath of a settler raid on their village. "We are here so that we can put away the sheep and tell people to protect their homes in case settlers come," Abu Alyah told AFP.

After 14-year-old Benjamin Achimeir went missing on April 12 in the nearby illegal settler outpost of Malachi Hashalom, dozens of Jewish settlers stormed his village of Al-Mughayyir, north of Ramallah. Armed with rifles and Molotov cocktails, they set houses ablaze, killed sheep, wounded 23 people and displaced 86, according to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA.

One Palestinian was also killed in the violence. Abu Alyah, a shepherd, lost "20 or 30 sheep" and the cash he made from selling milk products when his house was set alight. Al-Mughayyir mayor Amin Abu Alyah said the settlers, who were part of the search party for Achimeir, burnt "everything they found in front of them" including houses, a bulldozer and vehicles.

Several people tried to organize protection committees to defend themselves from raids, but were prevented from doing so, he said. "We currently have more than 70 prisoners inside (Zionist) prisons on

charges of joining protection committees or trying to form an organized body," he said.

Duma, struck twice

In the nearby village of Duma, north of Al-Mughayyir, old fears came true when hundreds of settlers came down through the surrounding fields on Saturday. That day, Achimeir's body was found bearing marks of a stabbing attack. People watched powerless as settlers rampaged through the village.

"Hundreds of settlers entered the village followed by more than 300 (Zionist) soldiers who stormed the village and declared it a closed military zone," Suleiman Dawabsha, head of Duma's village council, told AFP. The Zionist army has not specified details of the events concerning the killing of Achimeir. It also has not commented on Dawabsha's accusation of soldiers storming the village along with the settlers.

Mahmud Salawdeh, a 30-year-old iron worker whose house was torched, felt vulnerable when he realized the soldiers were not stopping the attack. "We feel helpless because we are unable to protect ourselves, and the settlers are protected by the army," he said. "I lost all my money and my future," he added from the ground floor of his charred house on the outskirts of Duma, near the fields the attackers came through.

At his feet, burnt furniture and shattered glass covered the floor, while walls black with soot served as a reminder of the firebombs thrown at the building. His workshop in the adjacent room was torched and charred remnants of old tools lay around, while a large wooden box where he had been raising 70 chicks was now empty.

The incident opened old wounds for Duma residents, who still remember the tragedy that struck another Dawabsha household. In 2015, their family home was set ablaze by a settler extremist, killing the parents and their toddler, and leaving only one surviving member, four-year-old Ahmed.

'We will never leave'

Duma residents, like many West Bank villagers, say they are protected neither by Palestinian security, which is only allowed to operate in 40 percent of the territory, nor by the Zionist entity, which controls the rest. Zionist soldiers do not always restrain settlers from attacking Palestinians, OCHA said.

In January, "in nearly half of all recorded incidents (of settler violence) after 7 October, (Zionist) forces were either accompanying or reported to be supporting the attackers," it said. OCHA recorded 774 instances of Zionist settler attacks against Palestinians since October 7, and said 37 communities had

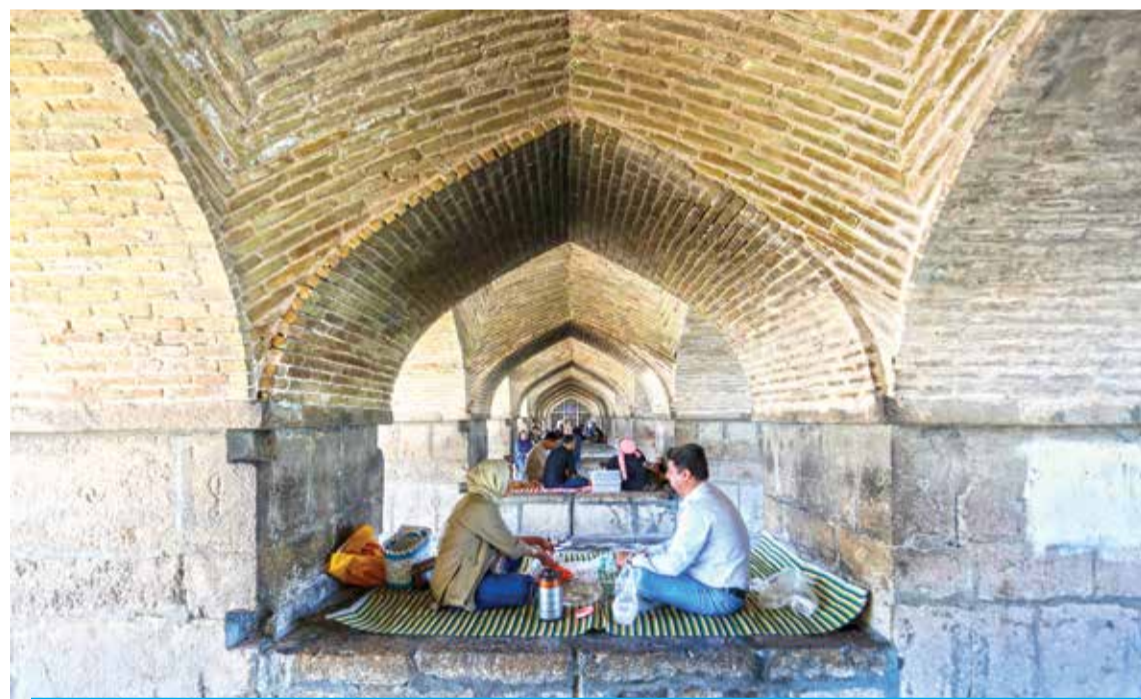
been affected by violence between April 9 and 15, "triple the number" of the preceding week.

Nine Zionists, including five in the Zionist forces, were killed in the West Bank over the same timeframe, OCHA said. At least 469 Palestinians have been killed by Zionist troops or settlers in the West Bank since the start of the Zionist war in Gaza, according to Palestinian official figures.

The West Bank, occupied by the Zionist entity since 1967, has seen a surge in violence since early last year, which has intensified since the Zionists launched their military campaign in Gaza after the Hamas attack.

Despite the hardships, "we will never leave", herder Abu Alyah told AFP. But the 29-year-old already had to move from his former herding grounds on the other side of Al-Mughayyir, closer to the settlement outpost, in September.

The weekend's attacks marked a peak in violence due to the sheer number of people who took part in them, but also reflects a wider trend in the West Bank, NGOs said. "It is clear that the escalation of violence in the West Bank has occurred in tandem with the crisis in Gaza," charity ActionAid said. On Wednesday evening, settlers were planting Zionist flags along the road that runs between Al-Mughayyir and Malachi Hashalom. — AFP



ISFAHAN: People gather for a picnic under the Si-o-Se Pol Bridge in this central Iranian city on April 19, 2024. — AFP

Iranians appear unfazed by Isfahan blasts

TEHRAN: Despite Friday's announcement of explosions in central Iran, many people appeared unfazed and planned rallies in the capital supporting last weekend's unprecedented Iranian attack on the Zionist entity still went ahead. "We're going to the park to play board games. Everything is just like before," Bahar, 24, an instructor who works with children, told AFP from Isfahan province where the early morning blasts were heard.

"It's just like a normal Friday morning," added Bahar, who said she only heard about the explosions from a friend living abroad. State media reported detonations were heard after "several" drones were "successfully shot down" by Iran's "anti-aircraft defense system". However, US media quoted officials there as saying the Zionist entity had carried out strikes in retaliation for Tehran's drone and missile barrage fired at the entity last weekend.

Iran's Tasnim news agency quoted "informed sources" as denying the explosions were an attack from abroad. Even President Ebrahim Raisi made no mention of the blasts when he gave a speech in Semnan province east of Tehran. Flights over Iran were briefly suspended following the explosions, but later resumed as scheduled.

'We are against war'

Friday's explosions took place almost a week after Iran launched its first-ever direct retaliatory attack

on the Zionist entity. Along with the United States and other allies, the entity intercepted most of the more than 300 missiles and drones which it said Iran had launched. Only minor damage was reported in the Zionist entity, and there were no fatalities.

Iran attacked in response to an April 1 strike in Damascus which levelled the five-storey consular annex of the Iranian embassy and killed seven Revolutionary Guards, two of them generals. Following its drone and missile barrage attack, Iran said it deemed the matter concluded and Raisi warned the Zionists against the "slightest action".

After Friday prayers, thousands of people rallied in Tehran to support the Islamic republic's retaliatory attack, chanting "Death to America" and "Death to (the Zionist entity)".

The demonstrations dispersed shortly after the prayers, and many people around the city then flocked to Tehran's parks to enjoy the spring weather while others went hiking in the mountains.

Some people did express concern about the prospect of an expanding conflict, however. "War is a destructive thing, it is troublesome for everyone," said Mohsen, a 60-year-old taxi driver in the capital. "The whole world wants peace and comfort."

Friday's explosions prompted world leaders to appeal for calm and de-escalation as Zionist-Iran tensions spiked against the backdrop of the Zionist war in Gaza. Ali, a 48-year-old construction worker, told AFP he was angered by the possibility of a Zionist strike on Iran. "(The Zionist entity) has no right to interfere in Iran," he said. "If (the Zionist entity) wants to attack our country, our goal is to defend it."

Retired firefighter Behrouz hoped for calm. "We are against war, one way or another," the 71-year-old said. "We are not happy with the killing of people, whether they are Iranians, (Zionists), or Gazans." — AFP

Thousands march for independence in Scotland

GLASGOW: Around 2,000 Scottish independence campaigners marched in Glasgow on Saturday in a show of support for the devolved UK country's flagging movement for self-rule ahead of a general election later this year. A series of setbacks, including a fraud scandal involving Scotland's former first minister Nicola Sturgeon, have left the independence movement at arguably its lowest ebb in recent memory. The march comes after Sturgeon's husband, Peter Murrell, was charged on Thursday for the embezzlement of £600,000 in donations meant for independence campaigning.

Murrell, the 59-year-old former chief executive of the ruling pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP), was charged more than a year after he was first arrested. Sturgeon, who resigned as the devolved UK administration's first minister and SNP leader in February 2023, was arrested in June last year, but released without charge. On Friday, she described her husband's situation as "incredibly difficult," with current First Minister Humza Yousaf calling it a "really serious matter indeed".

Independence figurehead

Sturgeon had established herself as one of the figureheads of the independence movement alongside then Scottish first minister Alex Salmond ahead of an independence referendum in 2014. Scotland voted against independence, with 55 percent of electors choosing "No", but Sturgeon, 53, put the matter back on the table in 2016 after the UK voted to leave the European Union. She argued Scotland was being forced out of the bloc against its will as Scots had voted overwhelmingly to remain in Europe. Sturgeon's self-assured leadership and excellent communication

skills during the COVID-19 pandemic — in contrast to the perceived chaos under former prime minister Boris Johnson's Westminster government — saw support for Scottish independence climb above 50 percent in 2021.

After being refused another referendum by successive prime ministers, Sturgeon took the issue to the UK's top court. But in November 2022, judges ruled against the Scottish government, saying that the power to grant a referendum was a "reserved" matter for the UK government. For Westminster, the Supreme Court's ruling was the final word on another Scottish independence referendum. Sturgeon, who was accused of overplaying her hand, resigned soon after.

Support for independence has since fallen to between 41 and 43 percent, according to three opinion polls taken in April. For the marchers, however, the turmoil within the SNP has done little to dampen their resolve to win independence from the Westminster government. "I've been in favor of independence all my life," school support worker Jetta Becker, 62, told AFP. "I think we should have the right to run the country our way," Thomas MacArthur, a 60-year-old security guard, urged voters to back the SNP as it was the largest pro-independence party in the country. "Basically, we get a government we don't vote for," he said. "If we were to keep our own tax revenue, we could use that money to support our people."

Current SNP leader Yousaf has vowed to continue the push for independence at the UK general election, which is expected to be held in October or November. He says the SNP will claim "a mandate for independence negotiations" with the British government if it wins at least 29 of the 57 seats up for grabs in Scotland.

The party currently has 43 MPs but is expected to lose several to a resurgent Labour Party, which is tipped to form the next government. The SNP has a seven-point lead over Labour in voting intentions, according to the polling agency Ipsos, but that is down from 12 points a year ago. Yousaf has also vowed to rejoin the EU as fast as possible, but that won't happen anytime soon with independence not currently on the horizon. — AFP



GLASGOW: People wave Scottish flags and hold placards as they march in support of Scottish independence in Glasgow on April 20, 2024. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024

Meta releases beefed-up AI models

Meta AI 'now the most intelligent AI assistant that you can freely use'

SAN FRANCISCO: Meta has introduced an improved AI assistant built on new versions of its open-source Llama large language model. Meta AI is smarter and faster due to advances in the publicly available Llama 3, the tech titan said in a blog post. "The bottom line is we believe Meta AI is now the most intelligent AI assistant that you can freely use," Meta co-founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said in a video on Instagram.

Being open source means that developers outside of Meta are free to customize Llama 3 as they wish and the company may then incorporate those improvements and insights in an updated version. "We're excited about the potential that generative AI technology can have for people who use Meta products and for the broader ecosystem," Meta said.

"We also want to make sure we're developing and releasing this technology in a way that anticipates and works to reduce risk." That effort includes incorporating protections in the way Meta designs and releases Llama models and being cautious when it adds generative AI features to Facebook, In-

stagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger, according to Meta.

"We're also making Meta AI much easier to use across our apps. We built it into the search box right at the top of WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram messenger, so any time you have a question, you can just ask it right there," said Zuckerberg in the video. AI models, Meta's included, have been known to occasionally go off the rails, giving inaccurate or bizarre responses in episodes referred to as "hallucinations." Examples shared on social media included Meta AI claiming to have a child in the New York City school system during an online forum conversation.

Slow and steady

Meta AI has been consistently updated and improved since its initial release last year, according to the company. "Meta's slower approach to building its AI has put the company behind in terms of consumer awareness and usage, but it still has time to catch up," said Sonata Insights chief analyst Debra Aho Williamson. "Its social media apps represent

a massive user base that it can use to test AI experiences." By weaving AI into its family of apps, Meta will quickly get features powered by the technology to billions of people and benefit from seeing what users do with it.

Meta cited the example of refining the way its AI answers prompts regarding political or social issues to summarize relevant points about the topic instead of offering a single point of view.

Llama 3 has been tuned to better discern whether prompts are innocuous or out-of-bounds, according to Meta. "Large language models tend to overgeneralize, and we don't intend for it to refuse to answer prompts like 'How do I kill a computer program?' even though we don't want it to respond to prompts like 'How do I kill my neighbor?'," Meta explained.

Meta said it lets users know when they are interacting with AI on its platform and puts visible markers on photorealistic images that were in fact generated by AI. Beginning in May, Meta will start labeling video, audio, and images "Made with AI" when



TOKYO: This photo illustration shows a mobile phone displaying the Instagram account of the Imperial Household Agency of Japan. — AFP

it detects or is told content is generated by the technology. Llama 3, for now, is based in English but in the coming

months Meta will release more capable models able to converse in multiple languages, the company said. — AFP

AI's relentless rise gives journalists tough choices

PERUGIA: The rise of artificial intelligence has forced an increasing number of journalists to grapple with the ethical and editorial challenges posed by the rapidly expanding technology. AI's role in assisting newsrooms or transforming them completely was among the questions raised at the International Journalism Festival in the Italian city of Perugia that closes on Sunday.

What will happen to jobs?

AI tools imitating human intelligence are widely used in newsrooms around the world to transcribe sound files, summarize texts and translate. In early 2023, Germany's Axel Springer group announced it was cutting jobs at the Bild and Die Welt newspapers, saying AI could now "replace" some of its journalists. Generative AI - capable of producing text and images following a simple request in everyday language - has been opening new frontiers as well as raising concerns for a year and a half.

One issue is that voices and faces can now be cloned to produce a podcast or present news on television. Last year, Filipino website Rappler created a brand aimed at young audiences by converting its long articles into comics, graphics and even videos. Media professionals agree that their trade must now focus on tasks offering the greatest "added value". "You're the one who is doing the real stuff" and "the tools that we produce will be an assistant to you," Google News general manager Shailesh Prakash told the festival in Perugia.

All about the money

The costs of generative AI have plummeted since ChatGPT burst onto the scene in late 2022, with the tool designed by US start-up OpenAI now accessible to smaller newsrooms. Colombian investigative outlet Cuestion Publica has harnessed engineers to develop a tool that can delve into its archives and find relevant background information in the event of breaking news. But many media organizations are not making their own language models, which are at the core of AI interfaces, said University of Amsterdam professor Natali Helberger. They are needed for "safe and trustworthy technology", he stressed.

The disinformation threat

According to one estimate last year by Everypixel Journal, AI has created as many images in one year as photography in 150 years. That has raised serious questions about how news can be fished out of the tidal wave of content, including deepfakes. Media and tech organizations are teaming up to tackle the threat, notably through the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity, which seeks to set common standards. "The core of our job is news gathering, on-the-ground reporting," said Sophie Huet, recently appointed to become global news director for editorial innovation and artificial intelligence at Agence France-Presse. "We'll rely for a while on human reporters," she added, although that might be with the help of artificial intelligence.

From Wild West to regulation

Media rights watchdog Reporters Without Borders, which has expanded its media rights brief to defending trustworthy news, launched the Paris Charter on AI and journalism late last year. "One of the things I really liked about the Paris Charter was the emphasis on transparency," said Anya Schiffrin, a lecturer on global media, innovation and human rights at Columbia University in the United States. "To what extent will publishers have to disclose when they are using generative AI?" Olle Zachrisson, head of AI and news strategy at public broadcaster Swedish Radio, said there was "a serious debate going on: should you mark out AI content or should people trust your brand?"

Regulation remains in its infancy in the face of a constantly evolving technology. In March, the European Parliament adopted a framework law aiming to regulate AI models without holding back innovation, while guidelines and charters are increasingly common in newsrooms. AI editorial guidelines are updated every three months at India's Quintillion Media, said its boss Ritu Kapur. — AFP

AI a 'fundamental change in the news ecosystem': Expert

PERUGIA: Artificial intelligence is shaking up journalism and in the short term will cause "a fundamental change in the news ecosystem", media expert David Caswell told AFP. A former employee at Yahoo! and BBC News Labs, the British broadcaster's innovation wing, Caswell spoke as industry leaders gathered in the Italian city of Perugia to discuss the biggest questions facing their trade.

How do you see the journalism of the future?

"We don't know. But what we are trying to do is to understand all of the possibilities or as many of the possibilities as we can. But I think there are some things that are becoming clearer: one is the fact that more media will probably be created and originated and sourced by machines. So machines will do more gathering in a lot of journalism, will do more of the producing, the audio, the video and the text, and will create the kind of experiences of consumption that consumers have.

That is a very fundamental change in the information ecosystem in general, and the news ecosystem in particular. This is structurally different than the one that we're in now. We don't know how long it's going to take - it may be two, four, seven years. I think it's going to be faster because there is very little friction. People don't need news devices, new hardware, they don't need a lot of money as producers, they don't need technical expertise. All those things that were barriers in the previous generation of AI are no longer barriers, thanks to generative AI."

What are the latest developments underway in newsrooms?

"One class of development is in new tools that enables AI workflow, for example JP Politikens in Denmark focused on making their existing products and activities more efficient. But it is also a basis for transitioning their products, their workforce, the activities into this new AI world.

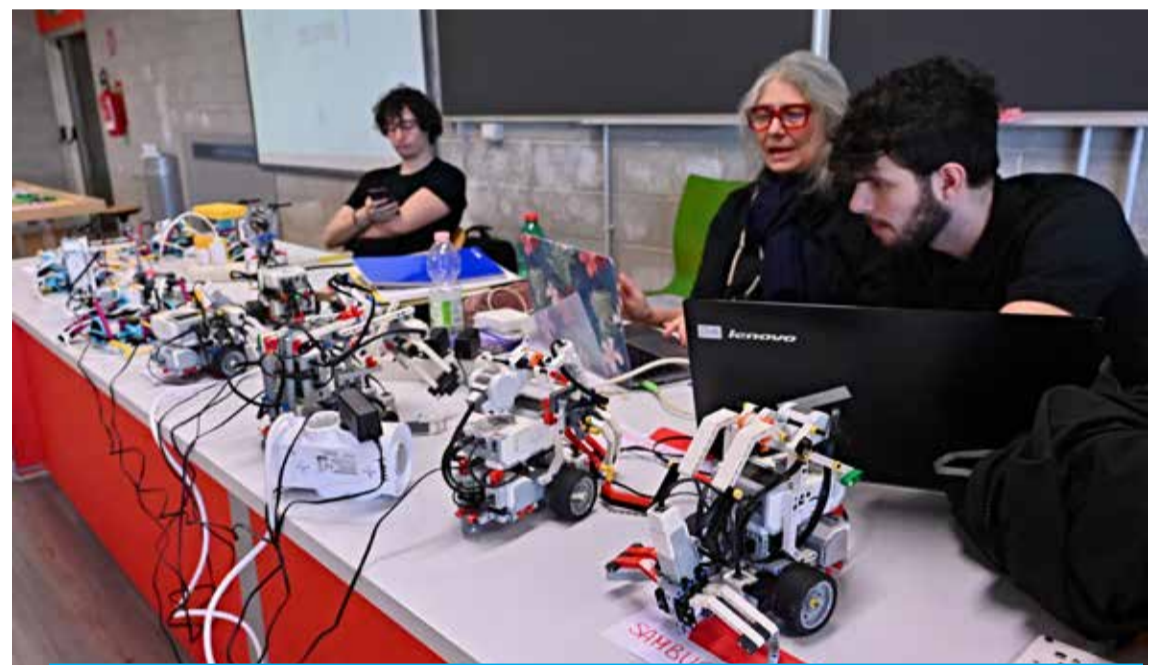
There is a tool that Google has built - the code name is 'Genesis' - that they are testing with publishers. Some publishers are building their own. There will be platform versions of these tools. These are tools, you bring your news gathering on the left side: your PDF, transcripts, audios, videos.. roughly. It helps you do things like analysis, summaries, turn into scripts, audios. They're orchestrated by the tool.

What the journalist is doing is coordinating the tool, verifying the content all the way through to the

Harvesting data: Latin American AI startups transform farming

RIO DE JANEIRO: For centuries, farmers used almanacs to try to understand and predict weather patterns. Now, a new crop of Latin American startups is helping do that with artificial intelligence, promising a farming revolution in agricultural giants like Brazil, the world's biggest exporter of soybeans, corn and beef. Aline Oliveira Pezente, a 39-year-old entrepreneur from the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, was working at agriculture company Louis Dreyfus Commodities when she noticed a problem in how the farming industry operates in Brazil.

Producers need huge amounts of credit up-front to buy inputs like seed and fertilizer, she says. But lenders are wary given how difficult it is to size up the myriad risks, from the natural - droughts, floods, crop disease, erosion - to the financial - bankruptcy, price crashes and more. In 2018, Aline and her husband Fabricio launched a startup called Traive that collects massive amounts of agriculture-related data, then analyzes it with AI, breaking down the capital risk for lenders and giving farmers easier access to credit.



ROME: A professor (center) along with students test mechanical robots during the RomeCup 2024 focusing on 'Artificial Intelligence and Robotics for the challenge of holistic sustainability', an event dedicated to the frontiers of technological development, at the University of Tor Vergata, in Rome. — AFP

end, and editing. The job becomes using the tool, like an editorial manager of this AI tool. It technically works. But that's a different thing than putting it in a newsroom in a large operation and use it day in day out, months in, months out. That's a big question: is it going to be enthusiastically adopted, to be used in a way that isn't very productive in the long run or will that enhance the productivity of newsroom dramatically?"

What is the cost?

"In the last decade it was very expensive. It was very difficult: You need the data, you had to build a data warehouse, have an enterprise deal with Amazon or Google cloud, you had to hire data scientists, to have a team of data engineers, it was a major investment. Only the BBC, the New York Times, this level of organizations could really afford it. That's not true with generative AI. You can run news workflow through interfaces that you pay 20 dollars a month. You don't need to be a coder. All you need is motivation, enthusiasm and curiosity.

There's lots of people in news organizations that would not have been involved in AI in the past because they did not have the technical background and now they can just use it. It's a much more open form of AI: both smaller newsrooms can do a lot with, and more junior individuals in more established newsrooms can do a lot with. I think it's a good thing, but it's also a disrupt-

ive thing. Often the internal politics in newsrooms are disrupted by that".

At what stage of AI are we at?

"AI has been around since the 1950s. But AI for practical purposes appeared with ChatGPT. It's going to be quite a while - years - before we really understand how to use them for valuable things. There are so many things that you can do with them. The risk to journalism is that other organizations, start-ups, tech companies will do things in news faster than the news world itself. Lots of start ups have no editorial component at all. They are swiping the content of news organizations, some are covering niches: they are monitoring press releases, social media channels, PDF from reports".

What are the risks?

"Journalism has not been doing well for the last 10 or 15 years, there hasn't really been a credible vision of the future for how this is going to play out just in the social media world. What AI does (is) it gives news organizations a chance to change that situation, to participate in a new ecosystem. It's good to be optimistic, getting engaged, exploring, having projects, experiments, maybe changing your mindset, that's positive. As Jelani Cobb, Dean of Columbia School of journalism, says: '+AI is un-ignorable force that journalism will have to organize itself around'. It's not going to adapt itself to journalism. — AFP



A worker tends to lettuce under artificial lights at the Pink Farms warehouse in Sao Paulo on August 28, 2020. — AFP photos



Aerial view of a soybean plantation at one of the plots of the Bom Jardim Lagoano farm in the municipality of Montividiu, Goias State, Brazil, taken on Jan 22, 2024

"Lenders used to each use their own (risk analysis) model. Imagine like a giant Excel file," Aline told AFP. "But it's very hard for humans, even those who are super knowledgeable of statistics and mathematics, to create equations that capture the nuances of all the variables. "They were taking three months to do something that we can do in five minutes with way better accuracy," said Aline, who has a master's degree specializing in AI and data analysis from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Seven years on, Traive's clients include agro-industry giants like Syngenta, fintech firms and Latin America's second-biggest bank, Banco do Brasil. More than

70,000 producers use its platform, which has facilitated nearly \$1 billion in financial operations, it says. Aline presented her work this week at the Rio de Janeiro edition of Web Summit, the massive tech gathering dubbed "Davos for Geeks."

Speaking alongside her on a panel called "Harvesting Data: The Next Agricultural Revolution," fellow entrepreneur Alejandro Mieses explained how AI has the potential to reshape farming. Worldwide, farmers are increasingly turning to AI to boost yields and returns, with applications like self-driving tractors, drones that track crop health and smart cameras that recognize weeds for herbicide treatment. — AFP

Business

Apple drops WhatsApp and Threads from China App Store on govt order

Cyberspace Administration of China orders removal of apps

BEIJING: Apple has removed Meta's WhatsApp and Threads from its App Store in China on orders from the country's internet regulator, US media reported Friday. Mainland China has some of the world's most extensive internet censorship, with web users unable to access everything from Google to many foreign apps without workarounds such as a virtual private network (VPN). "We are obligated to follow the laws in the countries where we operate, even when we disagree," Apple said in a statement, according to Bloomberg.

The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) ordered the removal of these apps from the China storefront based on their national security concerns," it added, referring to China's internet regulator. "These apps remain available for download on all other storefronts where they appear." A Meta spokesperson referred AFP to Apple, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The App Store did not display any search results for WhatsApp or Threads when tested by AFP in China. Encrypted messaging apps Telegram and Signal were also not available, with Bloomberg reporting, citing consultants, that they had been removed. AFP has reached out to Signal and Telegram for comment. The CAC and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology—another top Chinese regulatory body—did not immediately respond.

China is a key market for Apple, which last

year topped the country's smartphone market for the first time. But thorny issues of censorship and national security have long hounded the US tech giant's operations in China, as well as Beijing and Washington's fierce battle for technological supremacy. In January, China said it had cracked Apple's encrypted AirDrop file transfer service, which had once given protesters a vital channel for sharing information during the 2019 pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong.

State-backed experts said they had devised a way to reveal an iPhone's encrypted device log, allowing them to then identify an AirDrop user's phone number and email accounts. Many platforms that are popular in much of the world—including Google, Facebook, X, WhatsApp and TikTok—are blocked in mainland China. But savvy Chinese iPhone users have still been able to download banned apps and use them through a VPN to dodge restrictions.

Removing WhatsApp and Threads from the Chinese App Store will greatly complicate the ability of new iPhone users to access the apps. Their removal came a day before a scheduled vote in the US House of Representatives on a bill that includes provisions to force TikTok to sever all links with its Chinese parent ByteDance over national security concerns. Beijing has frequently lashed out against US restrictions on Chinese tech, claiming they are a pretext to contain the country's economic rise. — AFP



SHENYANG: This photo shows a poster for the new iPhone 15 at an Apple store in Shenyang, in China's northeastern Liaoning province. — AFP

Chinese auto sector steps up Europe push with Spain plant

MADRID: Chinese carmaker Chery signed a deal Friday to produce mainly electric vehicles in Spain, as Beijing's auto sector pushes ahead with plans to expand into Europe despite growing competition concerns. It is the second Chinese carmaker to set up in Europe after China's top electric carmaker BYD said in December it would build a factory in Hungary. Chery's move into Spain comes as the European Union is investigating whether Chinese electric vehicle makers benefit from unfair government subsidies.

The Chinese firm and its Spanish partner Ebro-EV Motors signed a joint venture agreement on Friday to assemble cars at a factory that Japanese carmaker Nissan shut down in December 2021 and that once employed nearly 3,000 people. Chery, which is known for its cheap cars, is the junior partner in the venture.

The two firms said they expect to create 1,250 jobs and produce around 150,000 vehicles a year by 2029 at the site, a figure which could rise further. Under the agreement sealed Friday in the presence of Spanish Prime minister Pedro Sanchez, Chery will start to assemble the internal combustion engine and electric versions of its Omoda model in the coming months, using the plant's existing infrastructure. This production will be supplemented from the fourth quarter of 2024 by electric SUVs marketed under the Ebro brand.

This project "will result in the creation of wealth and, above all, in the creation and maintenance of jobs," Sanchez said, adding it is "a symbol of the process of reindustrialization" under way "throughout Spain". Founded in 1997, Chery is a state-owned company which says it sold 1.9 million cars in 2023. It rose to popularity in China about 15 years ago with its small petrol-fuelled city cars aimed at the local market. It has since moved into the electric vehicle (EV) market although it is not one of China's best-known players, even if it claims to be its biggest vehicle exporter.



BEIJING: Guests check out the concept cars from Chinese carmaker Chery on display at the Auto China 2012 exhibition in Beijing. — AFP

'Artificially low' prices

Spain is Europe's second-largest car producing nation after Germany. Last year 1.87 million were assembled in Spain, according to the European Automobile Manufacturers Association. Chery's move into Spain comes as tensions soar between Beijing and Brussels, with the EU stepping up actions to defend European industry against growing threats from China and the United States. Brussels in September opened a probe into the subsidies China grants its electric vehicle sector, accusing Beijing of distorting competition.

The European Commission argues these subsidies make it possible for Chinese firms to offer "artificially low" prices. It could respond by slapping punitive customs duties in Chinese vehicles, at the risk of triggering a trade war with Beijing. Experts said setting up factories on European soil would

enable Chinese groups to circumvent any customs duties that Brussels may impose on car imports, and to better integrate into the continental market. China is the biggest electric vehicle market in the world. Of all new electric vehicles sold globally in December last year, 69 percent were in China, according to the research firm Rystad Energy.

The dynamic Chinese electric vehicle market has in recent years seen the emergence of dozens of local brands such as BYD, Zeeker, XPeng and Great Wall which are now competing with Tesla from the United States and other foreign manufacturers. Several of these companies are now trying to strengthen their presence in Europe, where some already have sales outlets and research and development centers. They complain they face unjustified obstacles, which they allege have been imposed at the request of the incumbent European manufacturers. — AFP

IMF calls on EU to deepen single market integration

WASHINGTON: Deeper integration of the European Union's internal market could prove crucial for boosting lagging economic growth and productivity levels in the 27-member trading bloc, a senior IMF official told AFP Friday. "We estimated, actually, what you could do just by reform of that single market and integration - and the numbers are startlingly high," International Monetary Fund European director Alfred Kammer said in an interview in Washington.

The IMF expects European growth to pick up slightly this year to 1.6 percent, increasing to 2.0 percent next year, according to a regional economic outlook published Friday. But with European average per capita income levels - in purchasing-power-parity terms - still roughly one third lower than in the United States, Europe must do more to boost flagging productivity and growth levels, Kammer said.

The IMF estimates that cutting internal barriers within the EU's single market by 10 percent would lead to a seven percent rise in growth inside the EU. "It requires leadership, and it requires to explain to the populations what the benefits are of that single market and of the European Union," Kammer said. "Brussels is the scapegoat and is being blamed for many things," he added. "That narrative needs to change."

Beyond deepening regional integration, the IMF report suggested other ways to boost flagging productivity levels, including by increasing digitalization and enacting structural reforms. "You can do a lot in Europe in order to catch up in this productivity gap," Kammer said. "What is not good enough is when you're looking at current productivity growth rates in Europe," he added. "That will not help you converge."

Inflation on track

The IMF report said European countries were on track for a so-called "soft landing," when countries successfully bring down inflation without causing a surge in unemployment or killing off economic growth. Although inflation in some European countries remains elevated, among advanced economies it is expected to continue falling from recent highs to 2.4 percent this year and 2.1 percent in 2025, according to the IMF. "We are seeing a recovery, while we have had substantial disinflation," Kammer said. "That's not the usual landing you have after monetary policy tightening." "So this recession has been avoided," he continued. "And that is a big, big achievement."

However, the work is far from done, Kammer said, and there are a number of "crosswinds" which could cause a reacceleration in inflation. "If oil prices are higher, again that would increase inflation in Europe," Kammer said. "Everything has been relatively small in terms of impact what happened on the oil markets recently," he continued, adding: "it's not having much of an impact." "The bottom line is that we need to stay data dependent meeting by meeting, and that policy loosening may have to be adjusted from what we have right now in the baseline," he said.

Rising spending pressures

The IMF report recommends that Europe's advanced economies with high debt levels should "frontload fiscal consolidation" - including by raising some taxes - to rebuild fiscal buffers depleted by government spending during the pandemic. "This is part of the fiscal consolidation to create buffers to be ready for the next shock," Kammer said. "But we also are very clear that the spending pressures are going to rise in the medium term," he added. Kammer said the IMF estimates Europe's advanced economies will face a rise in spending pressures of 5.5 percent of GDP, on average, by 2050. "That's climate, that's defense, that's pension payments, that's interest payments," Kammer said. "So if you want to deal with those, you need to create room in the budget," he added. — AFP

Guatemala activists demand closure of gold mine

METAPAN: Waving banners and shouting "no to mining," environmental activists gathered in small boats on a lake between El Salvador and Guatemala on Friday calling for the closure of a Canadian-owned gold mine. Residents fear that the Cerro Blanco site, which has been granted permission by Guatemala to convert from an underground to open-pit mine, will contaminate Lake Guija.

"All these extraction projects do is sell out our environment and our future," said Claudia Rodriguez, a 41-year-old member of an association of women environment defenders. "The goal is for Cerro Blanco to close, even if we have to give our lives for it," she said. The previous Guatemalan government in January gave approval to Canadian owner Bluestone Resources to turn Cerro Blanco into an open-pit mine, just days before right-wing president Alejandro Giammattei left office.

The government of El Salvador expressed "serious concern" about the move. On Thursday, Guatemala's new government said it was seeking to reverse the decision due to what it called "anomalies." Opponents say the site poses a serious threat to the environment. "The use of chemicals in mineral extraction is greatly damaging our natural resources and the Cerro Blanco mine is no exception," Salvadoran environmental campaigner Ricardo Navarro said. "The use of chemicals in that mine will harm not only El Salvador, but also Guatemala and Honduras," he told AFP.

Chemicals harmful to humans, animals and plants would pollute the Lempa river that flows through the three countries, Navarro said. Lake Guija feeds a tributary of the Lempa River, which starts in Guatemala, crosses part of Honduras and then enters El Salvador, where it is an important source of drinking water for the capital San Salvador. Videlina Morales, a 56-year-old anti-mining activist, said she feared for the future of the lake, which local fishermen rely on to earn a living. "We demand the closure of the Cerro Blanco mine out of respect for our natural resources," she said. — AFP



TOKYO: A customer shops for groceries at a supermarket in Tokyo. — AFP

Japanese inflation slips to 2.6%

TOKYO: Japanese inflation slowed to 2.6 percent in March, largely in line with market expectations, data showed Friday. The year-on-year rise in prices excluding volatile fresh food - against a market consensus of 2.7 percent - followed a 2.8 percent February increase, in part thanks to lower gas bills. Stripping out fresh food and energy, prices rose 2.9 percent, against market expectations of 3.0 percent, and edged down from 3.2 percent in February.

After years of deflation in the world's number four economy, the Bank of Japan (BoJ) has sought to generate rising prices with ultra-aggressive monetary stimulus policies. But last month, it hiked borrowing cost rates for the first time since 2007 and scrapped the world's last negative interest rate, in part due to meeting its two-percent inflation target. The BoJ will hold a meeting next week when it

will likely hike inflation forecasts.

But most economists expect the bank to keep interest rates unchanged for now. "If inflation continues to move in line with the BoJ's projections, further rate hikes may be on the cards this year," Capital Economics said. Other major central banks including the Federal Reserve in the United States have much higher interest rates.

But Japanese Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki said Friday that this was not the only factor in the yen's recent sharp fall to around a 34-year low against the dollar. "I don't believe that the rate difference alone is setting the current level," Bloomberg News quoted Suzuki as saying in Washington. This week, Suzuki and his South Korean counterpart issued a joint statement expressing "serious concerns" about the recent weakness of their currencies and agreed to take "appropriate actions" if needed. Japan's government last intervened in markets to support the yen in October 2022, when it spent 6.3 trillion yen (around \$40 billion today) on forex intervention operations. — AFP

Business

NBK announces the first winner of Al Jawhara grand prize draw worth KD 1 million for 2024

Engaging features various entertainment activities, shows and competitions

KUWAIT: Amidst festive atmospheres and remarkable audience, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held a special event on Friday at the 360 Mall, which extended for more than 3 hours and featured a variety of highly engaging activities, marking the announcement of the first draws of Al Jawhara and Al Jawhara Junior grand prizes for 2024.

The event was attended by a number of NBK executive leaders and officials where the draw, which was conducted in the presence and oversight of a representative of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as a representative of Deloitte, revealed Al Jawhara Account holder Abdullahif Saad Abdullahif Al Dosaryas the lucky winner of the KD 1 million prize, making him the first millionaire in Al Jawhara Account for this year. In addition, Al Jawhara Junior Account holder Fatima Mohammed Abdulwahab Al Zalalah was announced as the winner of the grand prize worth KD 10,000. The grand prize draws for both Al Jawhara and Al Jawhara Junior Accounts is conducted 3 times a year.

The event of announcing the winners featured many engaging entertainment activities and games for children and adults, in addition to the Gergasha comedy show for children. It also included a number of competitions and draws on valuable prizes for the audience, including complimentary one night stay at the Waldorf with spa & restaurant vouchers, in addition to McLaren driving experience for a full weekend, and a free yacht trip for 6 hours to enjoy wonderful moments with friends and family. The event also hosted many booths showcasing NBK's premium offerings for Private and Privilege Banking Customers.

Savings culture and financial inclusion

Commenting on this occasion, Mohammed Al-Othman, CEO-Consumer and Digital Banking at National Bank of Kuwait said, "Today, we are pleased to celebrate the announcement of the first millionaire in Al Jawhara grand prize draws for this year, as well

as the winner of Al Jawhara Junior grand prize. These prizes come within our customer rewarding strategy, while Al Jawhara Account serves as a key tool for promoting a culture of savings and financial inclusion."

"NBK always seeks to deliver a top-notch banking experience for its customers, integrating the best products and services with a package of exclusive, unmatched benefits and rewards. To this end, the bank has increased the total amount of the Al Jawhara Account prizes to KD 5 million starting this year," he added. "Seeking to elevate the benefits and rewards provided to Al Jawhara Account holders, NBK always strives to introduce valuable offerings including Al Jawhara Junior Draws for Al Jawhara Account holders below the age of 21 with 7 winners of monthly draws (KD 1,000 for 3 winners and KD 500 for 4 winners) in addition to 1 winner of KD10,000 prize with each grand prize draw," he mentioned.

"Furthermore, NBK provides the new exclusive Al Jawhara Saver Account, offering customers a bonus interest rate up to 1.5% for the first year, in addition to the chance to enter the monthly and grand draws if savings reach KD5,000 and above. The bank is also offering customers who have been banking with it for more than 2 years double chances in case they were not eligible to earn the existing double chances," he explained. NBK has already increased Al Jawhara prizes by more than the double in early 2023, making it the biggest in Kuwait, with KD 20,000 prize weekly, KD 125,000 monthly, and grand prizes worth KD 1,000,000 each, three times a year.



Mohammed Al-Othman



Tesla to recall Cybertruck; Musk delays India trip

NEW YORK: Tesla is recalling 3,878 Cybertruck vehicles because of a defect that can cause unintentional vehicle acceleration, increasing crash risk, according to a US notice posted this week. Tesla notified the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration on April 17 of the condition in which the accelerator pedal may become trapped on the Cybertruck, Elon Musk's futuristic take on the American pickup truck.

If the accelerator pedal becomes trapped, "the performance and operation of the pedal will be affected, which may increase the risk of a collision," Tesla said in the notice. Tesla said it was not aware of any collisions or injuries related to the condition. The company will replace or rework the accelerator to address the issue, the company said. Musk has championed the Cybertruck, declaring at a launch event last November that "Finally, the future will look like the future!"

But the vehicle's use of large flat plates of unbent stainless steel poses challenges in manufacturing. Musk has said it will take time to ramp up production, targeting 2025 as the year when output will reach 250,000 a year. Earlier this week, Tesla announced it would lay off more than 10 percent of its global workforce as it contends with rising competition among electric vehicle producers and slowing demand growth in some markets.

'Tesla obligations'

Meanwhile, Tech billionaire Elon Musk announced Saturday he was postponing his visit to India, during which the Tesla boss was meant to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discuss big investment plans. The news came a day after Musk's electric car company announced the recall of nearly 4,000 Cybertruck vehicles owing to an acceleration pedal defect that increased crash risks. "Unfortunately, very



AUSTIN: The Tesla logo is displayed at a Tesla dealership in Austin, Texas. — AFP

heavy Tesla obligations require that the visit to India be delayed, but I do very much look forward to visiting later this year," he said in a post on his social media platform X. Media reports had suggested the trip would begin as soon as Sunday and last two days, during which Musk would meet with Modi and aerospace companies.

Tesla was reported to be scouting factory locations in India after the government last month cut import taxes on electric vehicles for global automakers that committed to invest \$500 million and to start local production within three years. The policy also allows companies to import up to 8,000 electric vehicles priced at \$35,000 or higher every year with greatly reduced import duties. Indian media reported

that Tesla might first import cars from its Berlin factory until it makes a final decision on where to set up a production line. Experts say it's unlikely the Indian market will be an immediate shot in the arm for the company, mostly due to the high price tag of its cars.

Tesla's cheapest model now is the Model 3 sedan, which retails for around \$39,000 in the United States. Musk's present business interest in India is limited to X, formerly known as Twitter. He has faced questions from free speech activists over his social media platform reportedly caving in to the Indian government's demands to take down critical posts. Musk, who has described himself as a Modi fan, last visited India in 2007, calling the country "amazing" and saying that the Taj Mahal "truly is a wonder of the world". — AFP

'Halving' of reward for bitcoin miners

NEW YORK: The bitcoin market on Friday engineered the "halving" of the reward for operating the cryptocurrency, a much-anticipated step designed to limit production and boost the digital money. "The 4th #Bitcoin halving is complete!" announced cryptocurrency exchange Binance on X, the former Twitter. "The countdown has been reset - see you in 2028." Bitcoin is created as a reward when computers solve complex puzzles to decide which miner wins the privilege to validate the block - and receive the reward in bitcoins. However, since the digital currency's launch in 2009, the reward has been halved for every 210,000 blocks in a process called halving.

With one block validated roughly every ten minutes, this critical industry event occurs just under every four years. The reward, which was fixed since May 2020 at 6.25 bitcoins per new block, has now fallen to 3.125 bitcoins. Bitcoin was conceived in 2008 by a person or group writing under the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto. The halving process slows the rate at which new bitcoins are created,

thereby restricting supply. The reward amount has been trimmed over time, via halving, to implement Nakamoto's overall global limit of 21 million bitcoins. But this ceiling is due to be reached by 2040.

Controlling supply

"The primary purpose of halving is to control bitcoin's supply," City Index analyst Matthew Weller said in a research note ahead of the event. "By slowing the rate at which new bitcoins are created, halving helps to maintain scarcity and potentially increase the cryptocurrency's value, assuming demand remains steady or increases," he added. The price of bitcoin has blazed a record-breaking trail on the prospect of reduced supplies, as well as big moves toward greater trading accessibility.

Bitcoin has rocketed by 50 percent in value since the start of the year, climaxing last month at a record \$73,797. Prices have fallen in recent days. "This is the first time that bitcoin beat the previous historical record before the halving has even taken place," said eToro analyst Simon Peters, noting there had been a pullback in recent days. Commercial bitcoin mining companies operate thousands of computers in huge hangers or warehouses, consuming large amounts of electricity at a vast cost. Halving therefore represents a major survival test for such



HONG KONG: People wait in a queue at a cryptocurrency exchange in Hong Kong. — AFP

companies because it slashes their main income source.

Reduced margins

Faced with the prospect of reduced margins, bitcoin players have invested heavily in cutting-edge new computers, in tandem with an efficiency drive which in particular seeks to slash energy costs. In addition, some mining companies will have to "turn off some of their machines to cut costs, which equates to fewer bitcoins being cre-

ated," said Manuel Valente, founder of crypto asset investment group Coinhouse. "And if the price of bitcoin goes down, their profitability decreases" further, he told AFP. Halving therefore exposes the weakest bitcoin mining firms, and could potentially spark a fresh wave of sector consolidation in a survival of the fittest, commentators say. At around 0030 GMT, after the halving had taken place, the price of bitcoin was up 0.7 percent at \$63,467.46. — AFP

Advanced economies pledge \$11bn to boost World Bank lending

WASHINGTON: A group of advanced economies have pledged \$11 billion in new funding commitments to boost the World Bank's lending capacity by up to \$70 billion over a decade, the development lender announced Friday. The 11 countries—including the United States, Germany and Japan—committed the funds to three lending instruments designed to increase capacity and allow the World Bank to take on "more risk for shared global challenges," the bank said in a statement. By leveraging the resources pledged, the bank should be able to provide up to \$70 billion in new lending over a 10-year period.

"We worked hard to develop these new financial instruments that boost our lending capacity, multiply donor funds, and ultimately allow us to improve the lives of more people," World Bank president Ajay Banga said in a statement. He added that the new commitments were "both an endorsement of the progress we have made to reform the bank, and a sign of their shared commitment to development globally." The bank has previously estimated that developing countries will need an average of \$2.4 trillion each year between now and 2030 in order to address the "global challenges of climate change, conflict, and pandemics." — AFP

In historic election, Volkswagen workers vote to unionize

NEW YORK: Volkswagen workers in Tennessee voted decisively to become a union shop, according to election results released Friday, marking the first victory for organized labor at a foreign-owned auto plant in the American South. With a solid 73 percent supporting, employees in the Chattanooga plant voted for representation by the United Auto Workers at the 13-year-old factory, according to results released by VW, a triumphant outcome for organized labor in a region in which it has long failed to make major gains.

"Volkswagen workers just made history!" said a UAW post on X, the former Twitter. VW, which adopted a neutral position in public communications, said in a press release that the election "was administered through a democratic, secret ballot vote overseen by the National Labor Relations Board." "Volkswagen thanks its Chattanooga workers for voting in this election," the company added. Parties have five days to file objections, said the NLRB, adding, "the employer must now begin bargaining in good faith with the union."

The vote marks the latest big win for Shawn Fain, who was sworn in as UAW president in March 2023 and subsequently won significant salary hikes for members following last fall's "Stand Up Strike" at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis. In November 2023, Fain announced an ambitious organizing campaign aimed at unionizing 13 companies with nearly 150,000 workers, with the majority of venues in southern US states like Tennessee. Chattanooga was the first plant to qualify for an election. The next vote will take place at a Mercedes-Benz factory in Vance, Alabama from May 13-17, the NLRB announced earlier this week. The win in Chattanooga lends further momentum to UAW efforts in Alabama and beyond. A UAW press release also cited a Toyota plant in Missouri and a Hyundai factory in Alabama as places with active campaigns. — AFP

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024

Taylor Swift, tortured poet, exorcises demons with new double album

Taylor Swift's hotly anticipated "The Tortured Poets Department" is here along with a surprise second album — 31 tracks released Friday in which the megawatt star purges her inner turmoil while scorching former lovers. The first album was released as scheduled at midnight (0400 GMT) but two hours later, an additional 15 tracks appeared — giving legions of Swifties plenty to chew on.



Taylor Swift

By Friday evening, Spotify declared the album its most-streamed in a single day, with Swift also becoming the most-streamed artist in a single day. The 34-year-old billionaire is one of music's most shrewd users of social media, employing her massive online presence as well as her songwriting to create a sense of intimacy with fans through so-called "Easter eggs" and hidden messages.

"I'd written so much tortured poetry in the past 2 years and wanted to share it all with you, so here's the second installment of TTPD: The Anthology. 15 extra songs. And now the story isn't mine anymore... it's all yours," she posted in revealing the extra music.

Swift's album comes on the heels of a remarkably successful and busy year for the artist, whose "Midnights" won her a record-setting fourth Album of the Year Grammy.

She put on the first tour to break the \$1 billion mark and is on track to make a second billion by the time it's over.



This photograph taken in Paris on April 19, 2024 shows a smartphone displaying the US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift's new album "The Tortured Poets Department" on Spotify.

Swift also released two re-recordings of her earlier albums to resounding success, and broke box office records with an Eras Tour film. But she also ended a six-year relationship with the British actor Joe Alwyn, after which she was linked to — and dramatically de-linked from — front man Matty Healy of the 1975. Now she's dating NFL star Travis Kelce, whose Kansas City Chiefs just won the Super Bowl. And all of the drama is immortalized in song.

'Sensational and sorrowful'

When she announced "TTPD," Swift said it would be "an anthology of new works that reflect events, opinions and sentiments from a fleeting and fatalistic moment in time — one that was both sensational and sorrowful in equal measure." "This period of the author's life is now over, the chapter closed and boarded up."

Tying together the roots of 2020's "Folklore" with the heavier synths of her more pop-oriented work, Swift spills the tea on both Alwyn and Healy. "So Long, London" offers a painful postscript to the breezy "London Boy" off her 2019 album "Lover". "I stopped trying to make him laugh / Stopped trying to drill the safe," she sings in the former track, bidding farewell to her one-time home with Alwyn. Alwyn and fellow actor Paul Mescal revealed in 2022 that they had a group chat entitled "The Tortured Man Club", and some think the album title refers to that. While her cuts against Healy are sharp — "And I don't even want you back / I just want to know / If rusting my sparkling summer was the goal," she sings on "The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived" — she portrays herself as a similarly messy character.

For the LA Times pop music critic, Swift's confessional style is raw and refreshing. "In a time of stan culture run amok, it's thrilling to hear a superstar address her followers this way," the critic wrote in a review. "Swift isn't seeking betterment in these songs about emotional trauma and its aftermath; if anything, she's taking a perverse satisfaction in her unwillingness to learn someone else's lessons."

Florence + The Machine makes



Taylor Swift fans gather outside a building where a mural featuring a large QR code was being painted to promote Swift's latest album, "The Tortured Poets Department", on April 17, 2024 in Chicago.—AFP photos

a cameo on the album, as does Post Malone on the opening single "Fortnight"—complete with forthcoming video. She also addresses her new highly publicized relationship with Kelce. In "The Alchemy," she describes the dopamine rush of new love, saying "Honestly, who are we to fight the alchemy?" "He just comes runnin' over to me."

'Tortured poetry'

Swift began writing songs professionally as a teenager, signing with Nashville's Big Machine Records as a country artist. After a highly publicized dispute with Big Machine executives regarding ownership of her first six albums, she made the risky decision to re-record those albums to own their rights. It worked, delighting ardent fans, bringing new Swifties into the

fold, and earning her renewed respect within the industry.

With "The Tortured Poets Department," she stands to make waves once more, although she'll face stiff competition next awards season from the likes of Beyoncé, who dropped her electric "Cowboy Carter" on March 29, and Billie Eilish, whose upcoming album is due May 17. "Tortured Poets" is Swift's ninth LP in five years — five original studio albums and four re-records — and with it, she will almost certainly, like all the others, strike chart-topping gold. "Once we have spoken our saddest story, we can be free of it," she wrote Friday on Instagram. "And then all that's left behind is the tortured poetry." — AFP



Martin Nolan, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Julien's Auctions, stands next to dresses once worn by Princess Diana at a media preview ahead of the auction titled "Princess Diana's Elegance & A Royal Collection" on display in Hong Kong on April 17, 2024.— AFP photos



Princess Diana's dresses on display in Hong Kong ahead of auction

Shoulder-padded, daffodil yellow and accented with gleaming gold buttons — a very of-its-time suit Princess Diana wore during her 1989 trip to Hong Kong is now among six outfits on display in the former British colony. The collection of dresses, shoes and handbags — some of which are familiar fashion moments from the Princess of Wales — is part of a 12-day exhibit at a Hong Kong mall which launched Thursday. They will then be on display in Ireland at another exhibit before going on auction on June 27.

"She made a fashion statement every time she got dressed and went out the door," Martin Nolan, executive director of California-based Julien's

Auctions, told AFP. The yellow suit, designed by Catherine Walker, is estimated to fetch up to \$50,000 — a fraction of the \$400,000 that a midnight blue star-embellished tulle gown is expected to bring at the auction block.

Diana had worn the showstopping number designed by Murray Arbeid to the 1986 "Phantom of the Opera" premiere in London's West End. Visitors milled about the small, pop-up space on Thursday, pausing every once in a while to take a closer read of an outfit's history. Remembering Diana's visit in 1989, an elderly shopper surnamed Fung said the streets of Hong Kong were crowded with people hoping to catch a glimpse of the glamorous royal.

The 65-year-old added that the city's affection for her went beyond the usual fanfare for other British royals. "Diana was charismatic, caring and devoted to charity. That's why a lot of Hong Kongers respected her," Fung said. Other notable items included a Victor Edelstein-designed silk and lace evening dress, as well as a pink floral Catherine Walker dress, which Diana wore in 1991 when she kept bedside vigil beside close friend Adrian Ward-Jackson.

The pieces are all "tangible assets and great conversation pieces", said Nolan, given that people still find Diana relatable more than two decades after she died in a tragic car crash. "People are still in love with Diana as if she was

with us today, and that's the amazing thing about it," he said. Last year, Julien's Auctions sold one of Diana's evening dresses for \$1.14 million, breaking records and showing that collectors' interest remained undimmed.

Even for the younger generation, Diana looms large in pop culture, said Kathleen, a digital marketer in her 20s, who reckons that might be in part due to Netflix's hit series "The Crown". And her style might be coming back in vogue, she told AFP. "It ties together fashion and history," Kathleen, who only gave her first name, said of the exhibit. "It's different from just seeing photos." — AFP



Photos show outfits, shoes and accessories once worn by Princess Diana.



Lifestyle



Designer Luis Fernandez poses for pictures with customer Virginia Cuaresma wearing a flamenco dress at his workshop in Seville on April 8, 2024. - AFP photos



Designers Luis Fernandez and Manuel Jurado adjust a flamenco dress as customer Virginia Cuaresma tries it on.

FLAMENCO DRESS: ANDALUSIAN CLASSIC EVOLVING WITH FASHION

Luis Fernandez's workshop in Seville's Old City is buzzing with customers who have come to try on his dazzling array of flamenco dresses, their vibrant fabrics replete with voluptuous ruffles and polka dots. Flamenco fashion hits its annual peak in springtime when towns and cities across Spain's southern Andalusia region hold their annual week-long ferias, when everyone puts on their finery to go out and eat, drink and dance into the small hours.

One customer is Virginia Cuaresma. Under the watchful eye of the designer, she tries on a traditional midnight blue gown, ruffles adorning the skirt and the sleeves. Then she tries one in aquamarine, twinned with an embroidered fringed shawl in the same colour. Then a more modern styled red dress, which leaves a lot of skin on show.

"Right now, everything is in chaos, we're up to our eyes... these are the last few fittings" before the clients return to collect their gowns "and enjoy the feria," Fernandez told AFP, referring to this southern city's prestigious fair which attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors and this year ran from April 14 to 20. The most traditional design, which dates back more than 100 years, is a floor-length

dress which is closely fitted to the thigh, fishtailing out in a ruffled skirt and matching ruffles on the sleeves.

To complement the dress, women accessories, wearing a fringed shawl round the shoulders, earrings and bracelets, their hair pulled up in a bun and pinned with a comb with a single flower in an ensemble that has become the image of Andalusia and even used abroad as a symbol of Spain. "The flamenco dress brings out what's most beautiful in a woman," explains Fernandez, pointing to the wide neckline and "hourglass silhouette" which highlights the contrast between the narrow waist and the hips and bust, in a style that's "very flattering" and makes the wearer look "beautiful".

"When I chose a dress to go to the feria, I look for something that will enhance my female figure," says Cuaresma, a 34-year-old geographer with a dark complexion and long dark hair. For her, dressing up for the feria is a way of "carrying on Andalusian traditions" and connecting with her late grandmother Virginia, who used to sew flamenco dresses when she was a child.

A style evolution

A Seville native who grew up loving the fair, Fernandez started working as a designer in 2012 alongside fellow couturier Manuel Jurado, and from the start he knew he wanted to make flamenco dresses. For him, it is a unique regional costume "that evolves with fashion and the only one which incorporates new trends," he says with pride.



Designer Luis Fernandez works on a flamenco dress at his workshop.

The garment has its roots in so-called "majo" costumes "worn by working class people" in Spain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and often captured in the paintings of Spanish master Goya, explained anthropologist Rosa Maria Martinez Moreno, who wrote a book called "El Traje de Flamenco" ("The Flamenco Dress").

With the start of the Seville fairs in the middle of the 19th century, the style began to be adopted by the wealthy classes at a time when there was a pushback against all things French, including its aristocratic fashions. Thrown into the mix was the dress of the gypsy women who sold doughnuts at the fair and who wore dresses and skirts adorned with ruffles.

By the 20th century, the flamenco dress had evolved into its current form and become popular, thanks largely to the growth of flamenco as an art form and the expansion of schools teaching this Andalusian dance form, which women often learn to perform at the fairs, Martinez Moreno said.

Image of Spain

During the 1960s, the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco set out to

"sell Spain as a tourist attraction" and to do so used "popular stereotypes" such as the flamenco dress which "began to be recognized as the image of Spanishness" abroad, she adds. In recent years Andalusian dress has inspired big-name designers such as Christian Dior, who in 2022 showcased a new collection in Seville's iconic Plaza de Espana.

Fernandez says the sector in Seville has become more professional with designers who follow "the trends from Paris and Milan", and who have since 1995 staged a yearly international flamenco fashion show in the city. An outfit from an atelier like the one Fernandez runs can range from several hundred euros to over one thousand.

But there are cheaper options today in an era where fashion has become more accessible. That is a relief for women like Cuaresma, who says she usually buys "at least" one flamenco dress each year because for the fair, or at least the opening day, "we don't like to repeat" the same outfit worn in previous years. - AFP

Giving a second life to fashion's deadstocks

At the Nona Source showroom in northern Paris, designers pick through luxurious textiles with ornate names: curly alpaca, geometrical macrame guipure, silk diamond cloque Jacquard. What makes them really exotic, however, is that they all come from "deadstocks" — the leftovers designers discard when they have finished with a roll of fabric.

Until recently, it was common for deadstocks — like unsold clothes — to be burned or buried. At best, they gathered dust in storerooms. Ever-conscious of its image, luxury giant LVMH set up Nona Source three years ago, selling deadstocks at a sizeable discount to up-and-coming designers. "I realized there were what we call 'sleeping beauties' in the depots, magnificent fabrics that were lying there for years after collections were made," said co-founder Romain Brabo.

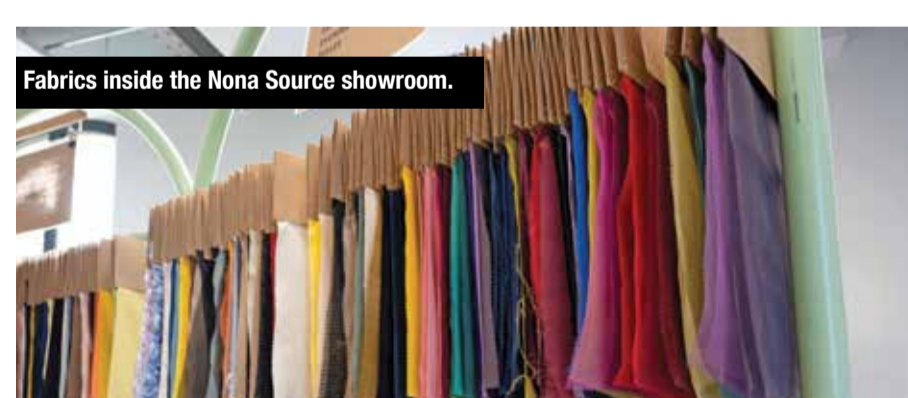
Last year, it sold some 280 km of fabric, enough for roughly 140,000 items of clothing. Among the regular customers is Arturo Obegero, a 30-year-old Spanish designer who uses only up-cycled and recycled materials. Despite working out of a small space in his house, he has scored some big-name orders including a sheer corset dress for Beyonce on her Renaissance tour — a sign of his skill and the increasing attraction of climate-conscious design. "I come from a family of surfers,

of fishermen. When you come from a small town, you're connected to nature, you learn to respect it," said Obegero. He says Nona Source has allowed him to work in the big leagues. "People are more conscious about which products they purchase... but it can be complicated to offer something really sustainable at an affordable price."

Evolving beauty

As pressure mounts on the fashion industry to manage its mountains of waste and massive ecological impact, initiatives like Nona Source are multiplying. Luxury behemoths like LVMH can afford to make an effort — and also understand the marketing value. It has ambitious aims such as shifting transport from planes to boats, training suppliers in better water-management, and investing in tech-driven new textiles like vegan leather (it says it tested 300 such innovations last year).

But Helene Valade, LVMH's head of sustainability, says the company's



Fabrics inside the Nona Source showroom.

main role is to "evolve" people's understanding of beauty. "That's really our power. Ten years ago when we wore something recycled, people found it ugly. That's no longer the case," she told AFP. "Beauty is no longer something that is completely smooth, perfect, straight... It's also what designers can do with recycled fabrics."

Some are sceptical. "Until they get PVC plastic out of their supply chain, especially at Louis Vuitton, LVMH

will never be a green company," said Dana Thomas, author of "Fashionopolis" about the industry's climate impact. Louis Vuitton, the world's biggest-selling luxury brand, makes most of its money from its monogrammed bags, which are made from PVC-coated canvas.

'Major change'

Thomas welcomes ideas like Nona Source, but finds it frustrating. "It's

a sensible idea. So why weren't they already doing this 20 years ago?" she said. "Fashion is so behind compared to, say, the automobile industry. You can now buy an electric truck, but bags are still made from plastic?" She says a new generation of fashion executives are finally paying attention, and Nona Source is seeing the impact as an increasing amount of the deadstock it receives is already made from recycled textiles. "We are seeing a real major change," said Brabo.

As he spoke to AFP, he walked Charles de Villemorin, the 27-year-old prodigy who was creative director for Rochas and runs his own Paris label. "I come here for inspiration. I like to be surprised," said De Villemorin. "I find it wonderful that they give new life to these materials, that they are not thrown away or destroyed... It's very important." - AFP



Spanish designer Arturo Obegero poses in the Nona Source showroom.



Co-founder of Nona Source Romain Brabo poses in the Nona Source showroom reselling materials from the LVMH Group's Fashion and Leather Goods companies in Paris on March 14, 2024. - AFP photos

'ANCIENT ROMAN' SOLAR ROOF TILES POWER POMPEII VILLA



An aerial view shows the 'Villa of Mysteries' which has been partly retiled with solar panels, on April 15, 2024 in Pompeii. — AFP photos

Pompeii is shining a light on mysterious rites of ancient Rome thanks to terracotta-style solar roof tiles installed on one of its most famous villas. The traditional-looking tiles have solar photovoltaic cells inside, allowing the UNESCO World Heritage Site to preserve its aesthetics while generating clean energy to illuminate its frescoes. And though the project is in its early stages, experts say the tiles could one day help historic city centers across Italy turn green.



Alberto Bruni, project manager for solar roof tiles at the Pompeii Archaeological Park.

The tiles look "exactly the same as the ancient (Roman) ones", found in archaeological sites and cities across the Mediterranean, Pompeii director Gabriel Zuchtriegel told AFP. But while "Pompeii is a unique site due to its vast size and complexity ... I hope this will not be a unique project," said Zuchtriegel, who wants the site near Naples to be a "re-

al-life lab for sustainability".

The scheme weds emerging technologies with an extraordinary mural unearthed in 1909 under deep layers of volcanic ash at the Villa of the Mysteries, which was buried along with the rest of the city when Vesuvius erupted nearly 2,000 years ago. The mural depicts female devotees of Dionysus — the deity of wine and revelry — engaged in mysterious rites. They have intrigued scholars for decades, with some historians suggesting they are evidence that the



Gabriel Zuchtriegel, director of the Pompeii Archaeological Park.

lady of the villa was a priestess whose slaves took part in cult rituals.

Terracotta varnishes

The fresco, which covers three walls and is one of the best preserved in Pompeii, is illuminated by special LED lights designed to bring the deep red, purple and gold images to life, while not dam-

aging the painted surfaces. The lights are powered by electricity generated by the solar panels, which were installed in October. Ahlux, the Italian company behind the lights, patented the system in 2022 and produces both curved and flat panels varnished in terracotta tones.

The solar panels on the villa's roof are flat and lie between traditional ceramic curved tiles. They cover 70 sq m of roof, produce a maximum of 13 kilowatt-hours and are linked to an ecologically-friendly sodium battery, according to project manager Alberto Bruni. Pompeii, which gets over 15 hours sunlight a day in peak summer, intends to extend their use to other villas in the archaeological site, he said.

Augusto Grillo, the founder of Ahlux, said the tiles are about five percent less efficient than a traditional solar panel. "This nominal loss is compensated however by the fact that our panels heat up less in summer," while traditional ones are covered by glass, and can lose efficiency on very hot days, he said. "The performance ends up being very similar," he said.

Red-tiled cities

Various institutions have expressed interest in the tiles, from Rome's MAXXI modern art museum to the 17th century Pinoteca Ambrosiana museum in Milan, Grillo said. "The problem is finding the funds," he said, adding that many of Italy's famous historic buildings are public or owned by Catholic institutions. The cost is a bit more than the price of a new roof and traditional panels put together



Tourists visit the 'Villa of Mysteries' lit by green energy.

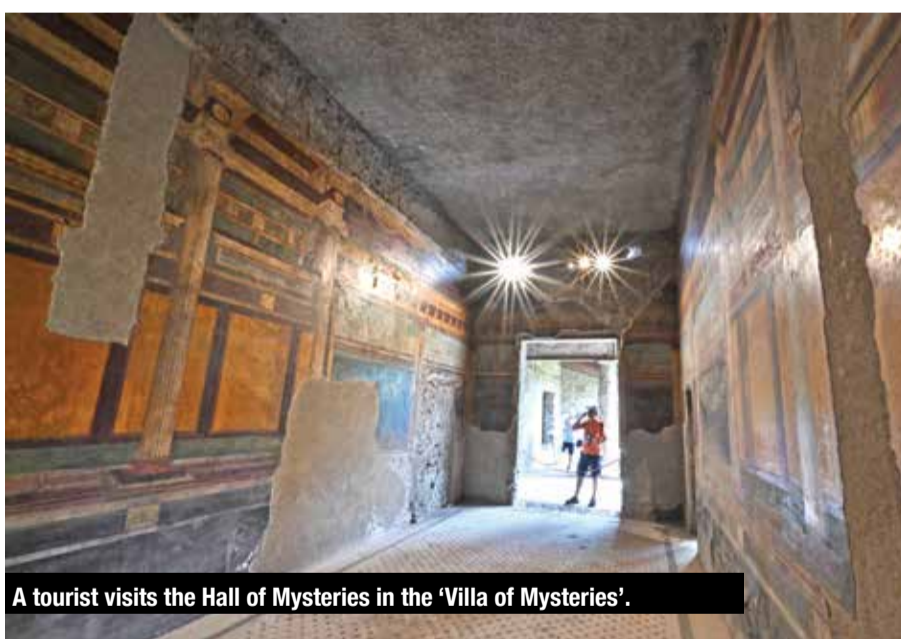
— though the solar tiles, which last between 20 to 25 years, serve double duty, because they function as a roof too, Grillo said.

Project manager Bruni said the cost of the panels "is coming down", meaning they may be able to play a part in the wider ecological transition. Italy is under pressure to make red-roofed cities such as Florence or Bologna greener as part of efforts to combat climate change.

The European Union aims to reduce carbon emissions by 55 percent compared with 1990 levels by 2030, and will have to upgrade existing buildings to do so. That is a mammoth challenge for Italy, where some 60 percent of buildings

are in the worst two energy categories, compared to 17 percent in France and six percent in Germany, according to Italian Constructors' Association ANCE.

"There needs to be some national and perhaps European co-investment to make sure that the very, very ambitious timelines have a chance of being respected," Angelica Donati, president of the youth constructors' association ANCE Giovani, told AFP. "We have the most beautiful cities in the world, which means we need much more thoughtful interventions, and quickly. There's a lot to be done". — AFP



A tourist visits the Hall of Mysteries in the 'Villa of Mysteries'.



Innovative solar panels on the roof of the 'Villa of Mysteries'.



Photography is 'mirror on society': Sebastiao Salgado

He might be 80 but Sebastiao Salgado, the Brazilian photojournalist who has spent five decades chronicling the world around us, is not ready to hang up his camera yet. Salgado, known in particular for his work in the Amazon, insists there is still a need to "raise awareness" about the deforestation of the planet. "Photography is the mirror on society," he said in an interview with AFP to mark the start of a London retrospective of his 50-year-career.

Despite his advancing years, Salgado is still working and insists on what he sees as a need to "make people aware that together we can do things different-

ly". That way, he says, "we will be able to save this great forest on which we depend for biodiversity and also this great cultural reserve that are the indigenous tribes living in the Amazon".

In 1998, with his wife Lelia, he created the Instituto Terra for the reforestation of the Brazilian Amazon and the planet in general. The self-taught photographer has won numerous international awards for his portrayal of society across the world, most recently turning his focus on the peoples of the Amazon rainforest basin. "We have lost 18.2 percent of the Amazon. But it is not just the Brazilians or other countries in the region who destroyed it, it is our consumer society, because of a terrible need for consumption, for profit", he said.

'Second tragedy'

Deforestation of the planet, however, is far from being his only concern. Water shortage, he says, is a "second tragedy,



Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Salgado speaks during an interview with AFP at Somerset House in London on April 18, 2024. - AFP

just as important as global warming". The exhibition, which runs until May 6 at the city's Somerset House, features 50 of his photographs. "It's a selection. One can't present 50 years of career in

50 photos. (But) each one represents a moment in my life which was very important," he said.

The show comes a month after Salgado was announced as the Out-

standing Contribution to Photography recipient in the prestigious Sony World Photography Awards 2024. "It's the reward for a lifetime's work," he said, with obvious gratitude. "A photographer has the privilege of being where things happen". "People tell me I'm an artist but I tell them no, I'm a photographer and it's a great privilege to be one. I've been an emissary of the society of which I am part."

As he starts his ninth decade, Salgado has no plans to retire and says he doesn't waste time thinking about his legacy. "I have 50 years of career behind me and I am 80 years old. I am closer to death than to anything else. (...) But I continue to photograph, I continue to work. "I have no concerns or pretensions about how I will be remembered. Photos are my life, nothing else." — AFP

Sports

Rahul shines as Lucknow beat Chennai by eight wickets in IPL

Pollard, David fined for illegal TV review help in IPL game



LUCKNOW: Lucknow Super Giants' captain KL Rahul plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Lucknow Super Giants and Chennai Super Kings at the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow. — AFP

LUCKNOW: KL Rahul's solid 82 runs off 53 balls helped Lucknow Super Giants comfortably beat Chennai Super Kings by eight wickets in the IPL on Friday. Rahul's time at the crease, which saw him smash nine fours and three sixes, played a key role in pushing Lucknow past Chennai's 176-6 with six balls to spare.

"I felt that if we bat well, we could chase it down... when your partnership goes on, you can take a few more chances. Glad that it happened," said Rahul.

Chennai got off to a slightly jittery start after being invited to bat first, losing Racin Ravindra (zero) and skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad (17) in the first five overs. Ajinkya Rahane looked to steady the side, with the help of Ravindra Jadeja, but fell in the ninth over after racking up a respectable 36 runs off 24 balls.

Lucknow's clinical bowling restricted Chennai in the middle overs, with Shivam Dube (three) not being able to pop off. But Jadeja soldiered on for the rest of

the game, getting his half-century in the seventeenth over. Reliable warhorse M.S. Dhoni, who smacked 28 runs off 9 balls, helped Chennai turn up the heat in the last three overs and pushed the team to 176-6.

Lucknow opens Quinton de Kock and KL Rahul set up the chase with a superb 134-run partnership, before de Kock, who hit five fours in his 43-ball 54, fell in the fifteenth over.

Rahul went onto smash an incredible 82 runs off 53 balls before being dismissed in the eighteenth over. A final push by Nicholas Pooran (23) helped seal the victory for Lucknow.

"We lost wickets regularly and were 10-15 short," said Gaikwad. "Good to play them again soon, will come back with homework done."

Mumbai Indians batsman Tim David and batting coach Kieron Pollard were fined Saturday for asking a teammate to seek a TV review in contravention of rules during an Indian Premier League match.

A video of the team dugout showed David and Pollard gesturing towards batsman Suryakumar Yadav and urging him to take a review for a wide ball during a game against Punjab Kings in Mullanpur on Thursday.

David and Pollard were found to have committed a Level 1 offence under the IPL's Code of Conduct, which says a player is not allowed to "seek assistance from any person off the field of play in order to decide whether to request a referral to the TV Umpire".

"David and Pollard were each fined 20 percent of their respective match fees. Both admitted to the offence and accepted the Match Referee's sanction," the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said in a press release.

Five-time champions Mumbai Indians, who pulled off a narrow win by nine runs in Thursday's match, are currently placed seventh in the 10-team competition. — AFP

Chinese swimmers fail doping tests ahead of Olympics

NEW YORK: Twenty-three Chinese swimmers tested positive for a banned substance ahead of the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 but were allowed to compete after world governing bodies secretly accepted China's findings that they had ingested it unknowingly. The New York Times said Saturday.

The athletes included nearly half of the swimming team that China sent to Japan, with several going on to win medals, including gold, according to the report. Many are expected to be in contention again at the Paris Olympics this summer.

The newspaper reported that they tested positive for a prescription heart drug that can enhance performance at a domestic meet in late 2020 and the first days of 2021. But it was determined by Chinese anti-doping authorities that they ingested the substance unwittingly from tainted food and no action against them was warranted.

The Times cited a review of confidential documents and emails, including a report compiled by the Chinese anti-doping agency and submitted to its global counterpart WADA. It said WADA and swimming's governing body World Aquatics, which at the time was known as FINA, decided not to act due to "a lack of any credible evidence" to challenge China's version of events.

WADA was not immediately available for com-

ment to AFP but told the Times it opted against pursuing the matter further after "consulting scientists and external legal counsel". "Ultimately, we concluded that there was no concrete basis to challenge the asserted contamination," said WADA's senior director of science and medicine Olivier Rabin.

World Aquatics confirmed to the Times the cases had been reviewed by a doping control board and were subjected to independent expert scrutiny. "World Aquatics is confident that these AAFs (adverse analytical findings) were handled diligently and professionally, and in accordance with all applicable anti-doping regulations, including the World Anti-Doping Code," it said.

But the United States Anti-Doping Agency said the swimmers should have been suspended and publicly identified, calling WADA's lack of action "a devastating stab in the back of clean athletes". The organisation's chief executive Travis T. Tygart claimed he had provided WADA with allegations of doping in Chinese swimming multiple times since 2020.

China's anti-doping authority was not immediately available for comment. There was no immediate reply from China's swimming association when contacted for comment. Chinese swimming has a chequered doping history, with a rash of cases throughout the 1990s. Seven Chinese swimmers tested positive for steroids at the 1994 Asian Games in Hiroshima.

In 1998, swimmer Yuan Yuan was banned after Australian customs officers discovered a large stash of human growth hormone in her bags at the World Championships in Perth. More recently, three-time Olympic champion Sun Yang was banned for doping, ruling him out of the Tokyo Olympics. — AFP



GOLD COAST: Kaylee McKeown reacts after competing in the women's 50m backstroke final during the Australian Open Swimming Championships at the Gold Coast Aquatic Centre. — AFP

Mollie O'Callaghan upstages Olympic champion Titmus

GOLD COAST: World record holder Mollie O'Callaghan upstaged Olympic champion Ariarne Titmus in the year's fastest 200m freestyle Saturday, while Kaylee McKeown narrowly missed her own 200m backstroke world best.

Kyle Chalmers was also in blistering form at the Australian championships, swimming a lightning 100m free to lay down a marker ahead of the Olympics. O'Callaghan hit the wall on the Gold Coast in an eye-popping 1min 53.57sec, with an explosive last 50 pulling her away from Titmus, who touched second in 1:55.38.

"I'm always striving to go fast," said O'Callaghan, who also won the 100m title. "The 200 is a difficult event to work out and this was the last time to get it worked out before trials." Australia's Olympic trials are at Brisbane in June, with the 20-year-old potentially targeting six gold medals in Paris this summer.

All-conquering backstroke star McKeown will also be in the hunt for multiple Olympic titles. She clocked the fastest 200m backstroke of the year ahead of American arch-rival Regan Smith by powering home in 2:03.84 to miss her world record by just seven-tenths of a second.

"I just wanted to go out hard and try and hang on," said McKeown, who was under world record pace at the halfway mark. "I definitely felt it in the last 35 metres." McKeown also won the 50m backstroke, but skipped the 100m to focus on the 200m and 400m medley where she set among the fastest times ever.

The 22-year-old confirmed she will swim the 200 medley at the Olympic trials, along with the backstroke events, but not the 400 medley. Chalmers, the 2016 Olympic champion who took silver in Tokyo behind American arch-rival Caeleb Dressel, blitzed to a 47.63 victory ahead of William Yang (48.20).

Since the last Olympics, China's Pan Zhanle has burst on the scene to challenge the old guard, setting a new world record of 46.80 this year. He is in the only man faster than Chalmers this year. "I really wanted to go under 48, so really, really happy with that," said Chalmers.

"I love racing, no matter where it is, when it is, I love getting myself up for a race. That's what keeps me motivated." In other races, Japan veteran Daiya Seto took out the 400m medley in 4:10.44, comfortably beating reigning world champion Lewis Claret of New Zealand.

Both men were swimming on invitations, with Seto scoring revenge after Claret beat him in third at the February world titles in Doha. Australia's most decorated Olympian Emma McKeon won the women's 100m butterfly in 56.58 ahead of Brianna Throssell (56.77). — AFP

Korda one off the lead at PGA's Chevron

MIAMI: Thailand's Athaya Thitikul and South Korea's Im Jinhee share the second round lead at the PGA's Chevron Championship, the first women's major of the season, but record-hunting American Nelly Korda sits just one shot behind.

Korda is looking to become the first woman to win five consecutive tournament wins and she left the course on top of the leaderboard after carding a three-under round of 69 at Carlton Woods, in The Woodlands, Texas.

But late in the day, Im and Thitikul both finished strongly to grab the top spot heading into the weekend. Korda had a nightmare start making a double bogey on the opening par-four hole where it took her two shots to get out of a fairway bunker after a poor tee shot. But she bounced back immediately, draining a birdie putt on the second and then claiming another on the par-five fourth.

She ended her round with a three under-par 69 with her resilience ensuring she is in contention for what would be a remarkable fifth straight win. "Kind of all over the place on the front nine, but pretty clean scorecard on the back with two birdies," she said, noting that the early double hadn't knocked her off her game.

"I actually didn't feel bad at all. Sometimes when you start to make mistakes you just don't really feel confident or you don't feel that great. "But I just told myself that it's the first hole of the tournament today. Even though I may have made a double, I wanted to save a bogey. There is still so much golf to be played and there is still a good bit of gettable par-5s, that's usually what I think about, just the opportunities that I have ahead," she said.

But Im and Thitikul offered the prospect of a real battle for the title. The 21-year-old Thitikul left the course in upbeat mood after making birdie on the par-5 18th to complete a 5-under round of 67. The Thai star, who has two wins on the LPGA and four on the Ladies' European Tour, is playing in her first tournament of the year after suffering a left thumb injury.

With her expectations low, Thitikul said she was playing without any real pressure. "I'm feeling kind of free. Just a little bit of excitement of starting like my first week of the season here in a major. But other than that, not really any pressure at all," she said.

LPGA rookie Im, who enjoyed four wins on the Korean tour last year, posted a bogey-free 67 and led the field in putting. There were emotional scenes at the last hole when Ryu So-yeon of South Korea said her final farewell to the tour amid hugs from her fellow players.

The 33-year-old, who missed the cut, is retiring after an illustrious career which saw her win two majors and six LPGA titles in total, including the Chevron in 2017. "I'm very numb now. I just cannot believe this is real. Nobody pushed me to retire. That was my decision. Still I just cannot believe this is real," she said.

"But this is it. This is a time I need to give myself enough credit and this is the time I need to be proud of myself, and then this is the time I start to send all the loves and thank you notes to all the people," she said. — AFP

Nigerian breaks record for longest chess marathon

NEW YORK: Nigerian Tunde Onakoya has broken the world record for the longest chess marathon after playing unbeaten for more than 58 hours in New York City's Times Square to raise money for underprivileged children.

Onakoya, 29, embarked on his marathon session on Wednesday, and was visibly emotional when he finally surpassed the 58-hour mark on Friday night in front of an enthusiastic crowd. "I can't process a lot of the emotions I feel right now. I don't have the right words for them. But I know we did something truly remarkable," he told AFP.

"(At) 3 am last night, that was the moment I was



ROUBAIX: Deceuninck team's Dutch rider Mathieu Van Der Poel celebrates as he cycles past the finish line to win the 121st edition of the Paris-Roubaix one-day classic cycling race, 260km between Compiègne and Roubaix. — AFP

Pogacar aims to halt Poel's bid to emulate record

LIEGE: Tadej Pogacar stands in the way of Mathieu van der Poel's bid to become the first man in almost half a century to win three of the big five one-day races in one season at Liege-Bastogne-Liege on Sunday.

Over the 259km, through the winding Ardennes forest lanes, Pogacar will be shadowed by the world champion van der Poel, lauded as the greatest classic rider of his generation since winning the ultra tough Tour of Flanders and Paris-Roubaix cobbled classics.

Should Van der Poel win Sunday's final spring classic he would be the first man to capture three of the 'big five' monuments in a single season since legendary rider Eddy Merckx in 1975. "Facing Mathieu is going to be a great fight," Pogacar said Friday.

"Even if I probably climb better than him, I feel he's capable of winning." Van der Poel is fully aware of this, but has constantly found ways of exploiting the quirk of any race. "I'm realistic enough to know that I would have difficulty keeping up with Remco (Evenepoel) and Tadej if they are at their best. They climb better," said the Dutchman at the recent Paris-Roubaix race.

For Pogacar the race also launches him on his ambitious quest for a Giro d'Italia-Tour de France double and allows him to lay to rest the ghost of a fall in which he broke his wrist last season. Champion Evenepoel, former winner Primož Roglic and Tour de France champion Jonas Vingegaard, all real threats, are injured.

"I wish them all a speedy recovery," said 25-year-old Pogacar. "I have learned from personal experience that coming back after an accident takes a long time. Your body doesn't recover as quickly as your head."

'Impatient to race

Liege-Bastogne-Liege is dotted with several steep climbs, one of them 12km from the finish in Liege after the riders swoop down into the town from the industrial neighbourhood above local football club Standard Liege's stadium where a breathless dash usually ensues.

Untouchable on the cobbled Monuments, Van der Poel spent the week warm in Spain, where he lives, to train and escape media attention. Pogacar arrives with a very different dynamic. Focused on the Giro in May, he has not raced since his triumph at the Tour of Catalonia on March 24.

"I spent time at altitude to prepare for the Giro. My form is good and I am impatient to race again," he said. He too cycled in the sun, sharing photos of his training outings under the blue sky of the Italian Riviera while a deluge of sleet fell on his colleagues competing at the Fleche Wallonne. — AFP

ready to just give it all up... but Nigerians traveled from all over the world. And they were with me overnight," he continued. "We were singing together and they were dancing together and I couldn't just give up on them."

The previous record had been 56 hours of play. Onakoya is well known in Nigeria, where he launched the Chess in Slums project in 2018 in Ikorodu, on the outskirts of Lagos. The organization offers often-marginalized young people, many of whom are not in school and work to help their families, a space to learn to play chess.

Nigerian President Bola Tinubu congratulated Onakoya in a statement for "setting a new world chess record and sounding the gong of Nigeria's resilience, self-belief, and ingenuity." Onakoya, he added, had "shown a streak customary among Nigeria's youth population, the audacity to make good change happen... even from corners of disadvantage." By beating the world record, Onakoya hopes to raise \$1 million to help underprivileged children in Africa. — AFP

Sports

Off-form Juventus fight back to draw at Cagliari

Juventus guaranteed a place in next year's tournament

MILAN: Juventus came back from two goals down at half-time to claw themselves to a 2-2 draw at Cagliari, who took another step towards Serie A safety on Friday. Trailing at the break to penalties from Gianluca Gaetano and Yerry Mina, Juventus salvaged a point as Dusan Vlahovic whipped in a perfect 62nd-minute free-kick before Alberto Dossena's unfortunate own goal three minutes from time. The draw is another of a number of disappointing recent results for Massimiliano Allegri's side whose season is petering out towards a drab ending after for a time promising a league title race. But two wins in 12 matches have left third-placed Juve 19 points behind league leaders Inter Milan, who can secure the Scudetto by beating local rivals AC Milan on Monday night.

"We gave away every ball we could... but in the second half the boys did better," said Allegri. "At the end of the season we need to sit down and assess things, from there we'll kick on. The most important thing right now is securing Champions League football."

Confirmation of Serie A's fifth spot in next season's Champions League means Juve are effectively guaranteed a place in next year's tournament. With five matches remaining in their campaign Juve are 12 points above sixth-placed Lazio who

are three points from the Champions League places thanks to want-away star Luis Alberto shooting them to a 1-0 win at Genoa.

Dossena diverting Kenan Yildiz's cross into his own net means Cagliari stay 14th, five points above the relegation zone. One defeat in their last nine games and a series of hugely impressive performances have lifted Cagliari away from danger after being second-from-bottom in mid-February.

"We need to stay united and we'll stay in Serie A. The fans deserve and I hope they are proud of us because the boys gave absolutely everything," said coach Claudio Ranieri. Luis Alberto swept home the decisive goal in the 57th minute, only a few days after saying that he wanted to rescind his contract and he didn't "want another euro" from Lazio.

The 31-year-old signed a contract extension until 2027 with Lazio just last summer. Luis Alberto pushed Lazio to within sight of local rivals Roma, who host Bologna on Monday evening and sit in the fifth and the final Champions League spot.

Roma also have the final 18 minutes of their interrupted fixture at Udinese to play on April 25, a match which was locked at 1-1 when Evan Ndicka's on-pitch collapse caused play to be suspended. — AFP



TURIN: (FILES) Fiorentina's Brazilian defender #02 Dodo fights for the ball with Juventus Turkish forward #15 Kenan Yildiz during the Italian Serie A football match between Juventus and Fiorentina, at The Allianz Stadium, in Turin. — AFP

Kuwait maintain lead in GCC games

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti national football team defeated Oman's 1-0 in their second encounter in the First Youth GCC Games, maintaining a six-point lead. The sole goal was scored by Fawaz Al-Dawood at minute 65 of the game. The Omani team stand at the second position with three points followed by the UAE hosts who have similar number of points but less number of goals. The Blue team had defeated Bahrain 1-0 in their first encounter.



The victorious Kuwait team.

Vonn hails use of AI to protect athletes from online hate

LONDON: US skiing great Lindsey Vonn has welcomed plans to use artificial intelligence to shield Olympic athletes from vicious online hate, recounting how she was "wildly harassed" before the 2018 Winter Games. AI will be used at the 2024 Paris Olympics and the Paralympics to protect competitors from abuse.

The retired Vonn, speaking to AFP at the International Olympic Committee's AI Agenda launch at London's Olympic Park on Friday, recounted her painful experiences when she was competing. "Social media can be a very positive experience but unfortunately I've experienced the other side of it, specifically before the 2018 Olympics in Pyeongchang," she said. "I was wildly harassed, and people were sending me death threats and that was really hard for me. "You have enough, as an athlete trying to perform at the Olympics, than to deal with people that you know want you to ski off a cliff. "So the fact that AI will be able to in real time take these comments down and not only that but be able to help them prosecute people, that is huge because that will, I think, change the dynamics of social media." Vonn, 39, who won Olympic women's downhill gold at the 2010 Games in Vancouver, said she wished she had had access to the technology that will be used in Paris. "It would have saved me a lot of anxiety and emotional trauma," she told the conference in London. "It's part of being in the public eye and of course we have to deal with that but if there's a way to minimise that type of hate speech, that's wildly beneficial to the athletes."

Kirsty Burrows, head of the IOC's Safe Sport Unit, said she was anticipating around half a billion social media posts in Paris. "We know that social media and sport are inextricably linked and they present such fantastic opportunities for engagement but unfortunately we also know in this digital age that online violence is something that is pervasive and it's also inescapable," she said. Burrows said the IOC was working with a technology provider to use AI to "create and foster digitally safe environments" in Paris.—AFP



Kuwait National Girls Rhythmic Gymnastics team along with their coach.

Kuwait girls gymnastics team in Georgia

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Girls Rhythmic Gymnastics team is participating in the Keti Cup International Championship in Georgia with 300 players from Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Qatar, Iraq, UAE, Kuwait and host country Georgia.

Kuwait's team left for Tbilisi on Saturday and includes players Liyan Behbehani, Sarah Al-Bannai, Amina Al-Kandari, Nabila Al-Kharafi, Raya Al-Qassar, Talia Behbehani, Aljazi Al-Haroun and their coaches.

Today's Matches

ENGLISH FA CUP

Coventry City v Manchester United 17:30
beIN Sports HD 2

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

FC Everton v Nottingham Forest 15:30

beIN Sports HD 1
beIN Sports HD 2

Crystal Palace v West Ham United 17:00

beIN Sports HD 8

Aston Villa v AFC Bournemouth 17:00

beIN Sports

FC Fulham v Liverpool 18:30

beIN Sports HD 1

SPANISH LEAGUE

Getafe CF v Real Sociedad 15:00

beIN Sports HD 3

UD Almeria v Villarreal CF 17:15

beIN Sports HD 3

Deportivo Alaves v Atletico de Madrid 19:30

beIN Sports HD 3

Real Madrid CF v FC Barcelona 22:00

beIN Sports HD 1

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE SERIE A

US Sassuolo Calcio v US Lecce 13:30

beIN Sports

Torino FC v Frosinone Calcio 16:00

beIN Sports

Salernitana v ACF Fiorentina 19:00

beIN Sports

AC Monza v Atalanta BC 21:45

beIN Sports

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

SV Werder Bremen v VfB Stuttgart 16:30

beIN Sports HD 5

Dortmund v Bayer 04 Leverkusen 18:30

beIN Sports HD 5

SC Freiburg v FSV Mainz 05 20:30

beIN Sports HD 5

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, Mohammed Irshad Mohammed Ramzan Kureshi Holder of Indian Passport No. M2286361 & Aadhar No. 9117 0717 4008, having permanent address, Room no 403/C MK NAGAR 48/A-B-C Navpada Bandra East Mumbai -400051 Maharashtra India, residing in Kuwait at hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as : Given name : Irshad Ramzan and Surname : Qureshi.
(#5195) 19/04/2024

I, Waseem Shaik, Holder of Indian Passport No. V7777213 having permanent address 20-1235-3, Municipal Quarters Meeramohiddin Darga Kotam, Potti Sriramulu Nellore, Pin: 524001, Andhra Pradesh, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as : given name Mohammed Waseem and surname Shaik.
(#5196) 19/04/2024

I, Sukhpreet Singh Brar, holder of Indian Passport No. T4011071 having permanent address Vill Rataul Rohi Po Sodhiwala The Zira, Ferozepur, Pin: 142050, Punjab, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: given name Sukhpreet Singh.
(#5196) 19/04/2024

Ambasciata d'Italia in Kuwait

Avviso di assunzione di impiegato a contratto

Avviso di assunzione di n° (1) impiegato a contratto da adibire ai servizi di collaboratore amministrativo nel settore commerciale dell'Ambasciata d'Italia in Kuwait. Necessaria la conoscenza delle lingue italiana e araba e la residenza in Kuwait da almeno due anni. Tutte le informazioni riguardanti i requisiti richiesti e il processo di selezione sono disponibili al seguente link: https://ambalkuwait.esteri.it/it/news/dall_ambasciata/04/2024/avviso-assunzione-1-impiegato-a-a-contratto-a-tempo-indeterminato/. Il termine per la presentazione delle domande è fissato per il 2024/05/20 alle 23:59

Embassy of Italy in Kuwait

Job Vacancy

Recruitment announcement of (1) employee as administrative collaborator in the commercial section of the Embassy of Italy in Kuwait. Mandatory requirements are proficiency in Italian and Arabic languages as well as permanent residency status in Kuwait for at least the last two years. All information concerning the requirements and the selection process is available at the following link: https://ambalkuwait.esteri.it/it/news/dall_ambasciata/04/2024/avviso-assunzione-1-impiegato-a-a-contratto-a-tempo-indeterminato/. The deadline for the submission of the applications is set for 2024/05/20 at 23:59

السفارة الإيطالية في الكويت وظيفة شاغرة

إعلان توظيف عدد (1) موظف يعقد للعمل كمعاون إداري في القسم التجاري بالسفارة الإيطالية في الكويت. المتطلبات الإلزامية هي إتقان اللغتين الإيطالية والعربية والإقامة الدائمة في الكويت خلال العامين الماضيين على الأقل. جميع التفاصيل المتعلقة بشروط التقديم وإجراءات الاختيار متاحة على الرابط التالي: https://ambalkuwait.esteri.it/it/news/dall_ambasciata/04/2024/avviso-assunzione-1-impiegato-a-a-contratto-a-tempo-indeterminato/.

الموعد المحدد لتقديم الطلبات أقصاه بتاريخ 2024/05/20 الساعة 23:59



For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSAL hotline 128

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

Mongolia defeat Malaysia in World Cup Ice Hockey Championship Division IV

Kuwait beat Indonesia to clinch second spot



KUWAIT: Ice hockey team of Mongolia celebrate after winning the Ice Hockey World Championship Division IV tournament at the Kuwait winter games club in Kuwait. — Photos by Yasser Al Zayyat



Kuwait national ice hockey team with the trophy.

By Abdellatif Sharaa & KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait national ice hockey team ended in second place of the World Cup Ice Hockey Championship Division IV, concluded on Friday with a match between Kuwait and Indonesia, that was won by Kuwait with the score of 8-7, leaving Indonesia in third place, meanwhile Mongolia became champions by defeating Malaysia 14-2 elevating them to Division III.

The match was very competitive and highly exciting during all its three periods with unprecedented support by fans of both teams, as they both exchanged leads before the decider and winning goal by Kuwait. Kuwait collected (6) points from two wins and one loss to the champions Mongolia. Indonesia remained with (3) points out of one win and two losses.

Meanwhile Mongolia won the championship by three consecutive easy wins, the last against Malaysia (14-2), giving it the full mark of 9 points, while Malaysia could not collect any point after three losses. Chairman of the organizing committee, told journalists, that hosting this championship placed Kuwait Ice Hockey sport at the International path both



Kuwait ice hockey team celebrate with officials

technically and organizationally, and considered Kuwait winning of second place and advancement in its international ranking, as the team ended in third place in the previous championship, and the ambition is to win the title of the next championship.

Chairman of Kuwait Winter Games

Club Fuhaid Al-Ajmi lauded the performance of players in all matches, and appreciated the patronage of Minister for National Assembly, Youth and Communications Affairs Dawood Maarafi of the Championship, and lauded the support of the Olympic Committee and Public Authority for Sport, which made the or-

ganization work easier and gained the IIHF satisfaction.

He said the championship's success was the result of the board of director's efforts, and thanked Kuwait fans who supported the team in all its matches. Meanwhile, representative of the IIHF supervising the championship said the

Kuwait organizing committee gave an example for the organization aspect. He said the championship was at outstanding levels. He said the IIHF will work on increasing the number of participating teams at this division to become 6 or 8 in the coming championships, which gives the teams additional international experience.



KUWAIT: (From left) Kuwait Winter Sports Club Secretary Mishal Fulaiteh, Kuwait and Mongolian players with the trophy, IIHF representative Franz Reindl and Indonesian Ambassador to Kuwait Lena Maryana.

Swiatek's perfect 10 in Stuttgart as Gauff, Sabalenka crash out

STUTTGART: World number one and defending champion Iga Swiatek took her Stuttgart winning streak to 10 matches on Friday with a straight sets quarter-final victory over Emma Raducanu while title rivals Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff suffered shock defeats.

Top seed Swiatek, the 2022 and 2023 champion at the German clay-court tournament, saw off former US Open champion Raducanu 7-6 (7/2), 6-3. Reigning Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova beat world number two and three-time Stuttgart runner-up Sabalenka 3-6, 6-3, 7-5.

US Open champion Gauff, the world number three, fell 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) to Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk. The 22-year-old Swiatek needed just over two hours to defeat Raducanu who was playing in her first quarter-final since 2022.

"She started playing at the beginning pretty loose, like she had nothing to lose, and I totally get that. Sometimes it is like that," said Swiatek. "But I knew I was kind of questioning if she's going to be able to keep the same intensity throughout the whole match. It wasn't about service games or return games. I was just waiting for my chances to break back and I was sure that I'm going to get them."

Despite her loss, there were encouraging signs of a return to form for Raducanu. Her two wins for Britain in the Billie Jean King Cup win against France last weekend followed by two victories in Stuttgart mark the first time she has won four matches in a row since her 2021 US Open title triumph.

The former world number 10 came into Stuttgart ranked at 303. Twelve months ago, Stuttgart proved to be her final event of 2023 before undergoing surgery on both wrists and her ankle.

Kostyuk fightback

Swiatek will face fourth-seeded Elena Rybaki-



STUTTGART: Poland's Iga Swiatek returns the ball to Britain's Emma Raducanu (not in picture) during the Women's Tennis Grand Prix WTA tournament quarter final match in Stuttgart, south-western Germany. — AFP

na, who defeated Jasmine Paolini 6-3, 5-7, 6-3, for a place in the final. Vondrousova reached her first semi-final since clinching the Wimbledon title last July when she stunned Sabalenka.

The sixth-seeded Czech celebrated her first win over Sabalenka in six years after losing four in a row between 2018 and 2023. Australian Open champion Sabalenka had been attempting to make the Stuttgart final for a fourth successive year.

The powerful Belarusian crunched 35 winners to Vondrousova's 17, but committed 48 unforced errors compared to 19. Vondrousova crucially converted seven of eight break points while Sabalenka only capitalised six times from 15 opportunities.

Vondrousova will face Kostyuk for a place in Sunday's final after the 27th-ranked Ukrainian avenged her Australian Open quarter-final loss to Gauff. The 21-year-old Kostyuk had needed over three hours to defeat Laura Siegemund in the first round before saving five match points to get past Zheng Qinwen in the last 16. — AFP

Verstappen wins Chinese Grand Prix sprint race

SHANGHAI: Max Verstappen continued his dominant start to the season in emphatic style Saturday by romping to sprint victory then claiming pole position for the Chinese Grand Prix—an "incredible" 100th for his Red Bull team.

It was an ominous display from Verstappen, who looks on course to win a fourth grand prix out of five on Sunday as he marches towards a fourth consecutive world title. The Red Bull driver was 0.322 seconds clear of Sergio Perez as Red Bull locked up the front row, with Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso third on Formula One's return to China after five years away.

Verstappen clocked a fastest lap of 1min 33.660sec to record the team milestone and his first pole at the Shanghai International Circuit. "Before I jumped in the car (Red Bull chief Christian) Horner told me if you get pole today it could be number 100 for the team, so I was like, 'OK, that's nice, I'll give it a good go'," Verstappen said.

"Of course that's an incredible achievement for the whole team," Verstappen won the 19-lap sprint in the morning by a huge 13 seconds from Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes as the Dutchman laid down a marker for Sunday's 56-lap race.

"The car worked even better in qualifying," said Verstappen. "That final lap felt pretty decent and very happy to drive here in the dry, it was a lot of fun. 'If the car is even half as good tomorrow as it was in the sprint we will be all right.'"

Lando Norris will start on the second row in his McLaren alongside Alonso for the first grand prix to be held in China since 2019 because of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Oscar Piastri was fifth fastest in the second McLaren ahead of the Ferrari pair of Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz, with George Russell's Mercedes eighth.

Perez was relieved to be on the front row. "Very intense, I nearly got knocked out in Q1," said the Mexican. "In the final run the track was getting quite a bit better and I managed to put a good lap together."

Leclerc said he hoped Ferrari could be stronger on Sunday. "We compromised our qualifying by prioritising the race tomorrow and struggled slightly more than we expected," said Leclerc. "Our race pace is strong and it will be a long one, with tyre degradation playing a big role here."

Joy to despair

Earlier, Verstappen blasted from fourth on the sprint grid to an easy victory that increased his championship lead over Perez to 25 points. But Hamilton's joy at coming second turned to despair in Q1 when the Englishman locked up, relegating him to 18th.

It was the first time since the 2022 Saudi Grand Prix that the seven-time world champion had been knocked out so early. "I made massive changes into qualifying," said Hamilton who won the last Chinese Grand Prix in 2019.

"It is what it is. We can still have some fun even if we are starting from P18." Sainz is the only driver apart from Verstappen to win a grand prix in 2024 and he survived a huge scare in Q2. The Spaniard ran wide at the final bend and span across the start-finish straight to lose his nose cone in the barriers.

It brought out the red flags but Sainz was able to limp back to the pits and make it to the top 10 shootout. "I had a big moment there, touching the gravel," Sainz said. "From then on, a tough quali. I just don't think we have been very quick this weekend. It's a difficult track for us."

Huge crowds turned out to see Shanghai native Zhou Guanyu, China's first Formula One driver, on the first Chinese Grand Prix weekend since 2019. The fans had plenty to cheer Friday when Zhou propelled his Sauber into the top 10 in a wet sprint qualifying but he narrowly missed out on scoring a sprint point by finishing ninth. Zhou failed to make it out of Q1, to groans from the packed grandstands, and will start 16th on the grid. — AFP