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Kuwait calls on UN Assembly to recognize Palestine State

Zionist airstrikes kill more than a dozen • Hamas studying new truce proposal

Amir to partake in international forum in Saudi

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is scheduled to depart on Sunday, along with an official delegation to Saudi Arabia. His Highness the Amir will head Kuwait's delegation partaking in the international economic forum, themed "Global cooperation, growth, and energy for development." The forum is scheduled for April 28-29.

Kuwait Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said the participation of His Highness the Amir would mirror his keenness on partaking in summits, conventions, and international forums hosted by the Kingdom. In a statement to KUNA, the ambassador affirmed that His Highness the Amir's

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NEW YORK: Kuwait has urged the international community to recognize Palestine as a member of the United Nations, citing the UN General Assembly's Resolution 3236, which acknowledges Palestine's right to independence and full sovereignty. The renewed Kuwaiti stand was declared by the plenipotentiary minister and the deputy representative at the UN, Faisal Al-Enezi, while addressing an open ministerial session of the Security Council late on Friday, themed "The situation in the Middle East, namely the Palestinian cause."

Al-Enezi said the UNGA resolution has affirmed again that the rights of the Palestinian people cannot be compromised, particularly the right to self-determination without external intervention, in addition to the national rights for independence and sovereignty. The Zionist entity had been recognized as a member of the UN four years after establishing the

international organization. However, Palestine has been demanding its rights since five decades ago. Regrettably, the entity that occupied the Palestinian territories demands that the international community abstain from recognizing Palestine's membership, the Kuwaiti diplomat said.

In another development, Hamas said it was studying on Saturday the latest Zionist counterproposal regarding a potential ceasefire in Gaza, a day after media reports said a delegation from mediator Egypt arrived in Zionist entity in a bid to jump-start stalled negotiations. The signs of fresh truce talks came alongside at least three air strikes during the night in Rafah, southernmost Gaza, according to an AFP correspondent. Rafah is crowded with hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by nearly seven months of war between Zionists and the Islamist movement Hamas.

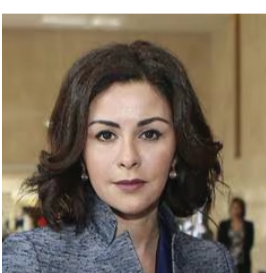
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GAZA: A man kisses the shrouded corpse of a child killed in overnight Zionist bombardment, in the front of the morgue of a hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on April 27, 2024. — AFP

'Palestine will be free'

KUWAIT: In a post on her social media platforms, Kuwait's ambassador to the United States Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah posted, "For all those who have reached out to inquire about the motives of the faculty members encamping in college campuses around the United States, I will answer you loud and clear: "They encamp for truth, justice, humanity, accountability, transparency, peace and justice for Palestinians. Because of their unrelenting efforts, Palestine will be sovereign and free."



Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah

Meanwhile, police in riot gear detained about 100 people as they cleared a pro-Palestinian encampment at a Boston university Saturday, the latest in a series of clashes on US campuses triggered by protests over Zionist war against Hamas. The action was taken after some protesters resorted to "virulent slurs", Northeastern University said in a statement on social media platform X.

The campus protests have posed a major challenge to university administrators across the country who are trying to balance commitments to free expression with complaints that the rallies have veered into anti-Semitism and hate speech. Police have carried out large-scale arrests at universities in recent days, at times using chemical irritants and tasers to disperse demonstrators. In its statement, Northeastern said campus police backed by local law enforcement moved in Saturday to clear "an unauthorized encampment" on the campus. "What began as a student demonstration two days ago was infiltrated by professional organizers with no affiliation to Northeastern," the school said. It added that detained individuals who produced a valid school ID have been released and will face disciplinary proceedings, not legal action. — Agencies (See Page 5)

Heatwave hits Indian voters

MATHURA: India's six-week-long election resumed with millions of people lining up outside polling stations in parts of the country hit by a scorching heatwave. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is widely expected to win a third term in the election, which concludes in early June. But turnout in the first round of voting last week dropped nearly four points to 66 percent from the previous election in 2019, with speculation in Indian media outlets that higher-than-average temperatures were to blame.

Modi took to social media shortly before polls opened to urge those voting to turn out in "record numbers" despite the heat. "A high voter turnout strengthens our democracy," he wrote on social media platform X. "Your vote is your voice!" The second round of the poll - conducted in phases to ease the immense logistical burden of staging an election in the world's most populous country - includes districts that have this week seen temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit). India's weather bureau said that severe heatwave conditions would continue in several states through the weekend. That includes parts of the eastern state of Bihar,

Ship hit by missiles off Yemen's coast

DUBAI: A ship was damaged when it was targeted twice with multiple missiles off Yemen's coast on Friday, in the latest attack on international shipping in the Red Sea to be claimed by Houthi rebels. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations security agency said the attack took place southwest of the Yemeni port of Mokha. In the first attack, the ship "experienced an explosion in close proximity to the vessel which was felt by the crew on board", UKMTO said on social media platform X. "The second attack on the vessel consisted of what is believed to be two missiles, which resulted in damage."

Hours earlier, the British maritime security firm Ambrey also reported an attack off the port of Mokha. "Three missiles were sighted" in that incident, Ambrey said. "A Panama-flagged tanker was the closest vessel to these. The tanker was formerly UK-owned (but)... the ownership changed in November 2023," according to Ambrey. Currently, it said, the vessel is registered in



MUMBAI: Indian election official demonstrates the use of the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) to citizens at an awareness camp in Mumbai. — AFP

where five districts are voting Friday and where temperatures more than 5.1C above the seasonal average were recorded this week. Karnataka state in the south and parts of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state and heartland of the Hindu faith, are also scheduled to vote while facing heatwave conditions. Voter turnout was "less than what we would normally expect", polling officer Shyam Sundar Bharti told AFP in Mathura, a city not far from the Taj Mahal where temperatures were expected to hit 41C (106F).

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Female TikTok star killed

BAGHDAD: A gunman on a motorbike shot dead a well-known Iraqi social media influencer known as Om Fahad outside her Baghdad home on Friday, Iraqi security officials told AFP. An unidentified attacker shot Om Fahad in her car in the Zayouna district, a security official said, requesting anonymity because he was not cleared to speak to the media. Another security source said the attacker appeared to have pretended to be making a food delivery. Om Fahad had become known for light-hearted TikTok videos of herself dancing to Iraqi music wearing tight-fitting clothes. In February 2023, a court sentenced her to six months in jail for sharing "videos containing indecent speech that undermines modesty and public morality". The Iraqi government launched a campaign last year to clean up social media content that it said breached Iraqi "morals and traditions". — AFP

Cocaine hid in hair braids

POINTE-À-PITRE: A woman who was carrying two kilos of cocaine in false hair braids has been jailed for 18 months in the French Caribbean territory of Guadeloupe, a regional customs official said. The 24-year-old woman from Guyana was caught at an airport in March, said Olivier Fouque, regional customs director. The cocaine was in "tubes hidden in false braids," the official said. The woman was jailed for 18 months and fined 30,000 euros, he added without giving more details. Fouque cited the woman as an example of new ways being used to get drugs into France's Caribbean islands after the introduction of tougher airport checks. Last year there were 47 cases of people being detained for carrying cocaine and other drugs in their stomachs, according to the official. This year, there have been "one or two", he added. France introduced tougher checks on flights in Guyana in 2022 and the tactic was extended to Guadeloupe and Martinique in March this year. — AFP



Local

Khaleejesque's Kilmitain workshop fosters creativity, innovation, cultural exchange

'Overcoming your negative voice'



Participants attend an interactive workshop.

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: Khaleejesque organized an interactive workshop themed "Overcoming your negative voice." The workshop is designed to help creatives manage their inner potential as participants learned how to identify their unique patterns of negative self-talk and acquire strategies to enhance resilience and self-confidence.

After pinpointing specific instances of self-doubt and negative beliefs, participants developed three types of proactive strategies. The strategies helped

them determine when to convert negative thinking into creative motivation and when to disregard the thoughts entirely. A key emphasis will be placed on distinguishing between rational and irrational thoughts and identifying which ones support or hinder creative pursuits. The practical tips that participants gained from the workshop are fundamental to creative thinking in general and can be applied to any project.

Nada Faris, a writer and certified coach for creatives, helps clients discover ways to express themselves authentically, become resilient to failure

and disappointments, and accomplish their creative goals. After the workshop, Faris said, "I felt amazing. It was a wonderful batch of participants. They had amazing teamwork. We set the ground rules for our community guidelines."

"My main goal is to demystify the negative voice. When creatives talk about resistance, it is usually in mythological terms, but I wanted to make the negative voice practical and specific to each individual and to give them practical tools to overcome it in their own process," she clarified. "The process was really amazing; people were shar-

ing and feeling comfortable with each other. People felt honest enough to talk about deep parts of themselves. This is rare in Kuwait, making it a unique and wonderful experience," she added.

Khaleejesque is a platform dedicated to empowering and showcasing creative industries in the Gulf region, with a special focus on Kuwait. Through events like Kilmitain, Khaleejesque aims to foster creativity, innovation, and cultural exchange, providing a space for artists, designers, and entrepreneurs to thrive and connect with a larger audience.



Nada Faris



Sheikha Dana Naser Al-Sabah with Enbat graduates, trainers and partners.



Sheikha Dana Naser Al-Sabah with KIPCO's Corporate Communications team.

KIPCO celebrates graduates of first Enbat program

KUWAIT: KIPCO – Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) – celebrated the graduation of the first class enrolled in the 'Enbat' program. Running for eight weeks from January to March, the KIPCO program offered new college graduates a space to foster skills that they may not have been exposed to during their education, and that employers feel are key competencies that new hires need to have.

The graduation was hosted by KIPCO's Group Chief Executive Officer, Sheikha Dana Naser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. The event celebrated the success of the Enbat graduates and their trainers, and also recognized the efforts of KIPCO's partners: en.v for designing the program's curriculum and Blue Hat for contributing to the modules; Sharaf Studio for creating the brand identity; and the American University of Kuwait (AUK) and the American United School (AUS) for hosting the training sessions.

Speaking at the event, Eman Al Awadhi, KIPCO's Group Senior Vice President – Corporate Communications and Investor Relations, said: "Enbat, to germinate, is a word that holds so much meaning to us here at KIPCO, where we believe that it is through helping our people grow that we, as an organization, can achieve success. And this extends to our community. This program embodies KIPCO's commitment to nurturing talent, fostering innovation and investing in the future leaders of our community. We created Enbat because we believe in empowering individuals to drive positive change in society. We believe in equipping our youth with the skills, knowledge and mindset needed to thrive in an ever-changing world."

Addressing the graduates, she added: "Today marks the culmination of your hard work, dedication and determination. As you embark on the next chapter of your journey, remember the lessons you have learnt, the friendships you have forged, and the experiences that have shaped you. Know that you carry within you the potential to make a difference, to lead with integrity, and to inspire others."

The Enbat program will be held on an annual basis, and the ceremony witnessed the launch of the 'Enbat Alumni Network', a platform that will enable the graduates, trainers and partners to stay connected, share experiences and continue the journey of growth and development. Reflecting on his experiences during the program, Abdulrahman Al Khaldi spoke on behalf of the graduates and said:

"Enbat has allowed us to sharpen essential skills such as empathy, critical thinking, and teamwork – vital tools for navigating today's complexities. The program provided us with a platform to cultivate our talents and foster inclusivity in society. Equipped with newfound confidence, we are ready to tackle the challenges ahead and make meaningful contributions in our future endeavors. Let's carry forward the lessons learnt, and the connections made."

The program was designed in collaboration with en.v which has worked on a number of successful programs, all of which focus on bringing together people representing different parts of the community and facilitate the process of building bridges, collaboration and connections.

Speaking on behalf of en.v, Noor Al Khateeb said: "When KIPCO approached en.v to design Enbat, we specifically looked at the gaps and challenges faced by young people as they enter the workplace. These skills, identified by many managers as essential for the success of new graduates in the workplace, which include thinking critically and creatively, communicating effectively with others, and self-regulating in order to engage in healthy interpersonal relationships and adapt to changing work demands."

She added: "Working to address these gaps, we specifically focused on building critical thinking, intercultural communication, leadership and design thinking skills. We encouraged participants to challenge assumptions, take risks and cultivate inquiry skills for creative problem-solving. Enbat sets graduates on a



Sheikha Dana Naser Al-Sabah



Eman Al Awadhi giving KIPCO's speech.



Abdulrahman Al Khaldi speaking on behalf of the graduates.



Noor Al Khateeb speaking on behalf of en.v

KRCS distributes aid in Armenia

ANKARA: A team from the Kuwait Red Crescent Society has begun distributing humanitarian aid to the needy in Armenia, team chief Khaled Al-Mutairi said on Saturday. In a telephone conversation with KUNA, Al-Mutairi said the KRCS team handed over food, blankets, heaters, and hygiene materials in various Armenian regions over five days. Up to 1,500 individuals are scheduled to take a share of the supplies, he said, reaffirming the KRCS' policy of reaching those in need throughout the globe. Kuwaiti society has already aided millions of people in need or distress worldwide.

Meanwhile, the State of Kuwait Ambassador to Armenia, Nawaf Al-Enezi, in a statement to KUNA after meeting the KRCS team,

affirmed that the State of Kuwait would continue performing its humanitarian duty to relieve the afflicted in all corners of the world. He lauded Kuwaiti society's response to offer humanitarian aid and place resources at their disposal to relieve people in need. — KUNA



Local

Zain and SACGC host workshop on digital innovation, entrepreneurship

Seminar for KU's College of Life Sciences students, under Innovation Nation initiative



The students with Zain and SACGC officials.

KUWAIT: Zain and Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) – a center of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), have jointly hosted a workshop for students from Kuwait University's College of Life Sciences, Department of Information Science. The insightful session covered the essentials of digital innovation and entrepreneurship.

This workshop came under the strategic partnership between Zain and SACGC, part of the Innovation Nation initiative that strives to foster

creativity, innovation, digital upskilling, and entrepreneurship in the community. The initiative strives to share private sector expertise with students and graduates from schools and universities across Kuwait and has contributed to empowering thousands of aspiring young people through tens of interactive programs.

The workshop was attended by students and faculty members from the College of Life Sciences. It featured essential topics like establishing startups, building effective teams, creating an

impactful brand, attracting potential investors, and developing strategies, services, and products. The session also gave the students exercises to make their own startups and pitch them to investors to achieve sustainable growth.

This step is a continuation of the fruitful collaboration between Zain and the Department of Information Science, College of Life Sciences. Last year, Zain hosted a special tour of its Subahiya datacenter for a group of graduate students from the department. The visit provided the students with

a firsthand understanding of Zain's cutting-edge infrastructure and its role in supporting Kuwait's digital transformation journey.

This initiative adds to the long list of programs co-presented by Zain and Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity under their joint vision to achieve a number of strategic pillars, like fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, upskilling young people, empowering startup owners, investing in youth's digital skills, and more.



Aron Yemane (left), Operation Manager at Capago, and French Ambassador Claire Le Flécher.



Aron Yemane, Operation Manager at Capago, explains the new visa sticker.

France remains 'top destinations' for Kuwaiti travelers

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The French Ambassador to Kuwait, Claire Le Flécher, stated that France remains one of the top destinations chosen by Kuwaiti travelers. "In 2023, the consular section received almost 42,000 visa applications. For the first 3 months of 2024, almost 8,000 applications have been received," she added. During the press conference on updating Schengen visa procedures, the French ambassador emphasized the enduring friendship between the two countries, citing the significant number of Kuwaitis opting for France as their holiday destination as a testament to



French Ambassador Claire Le Flécher speaks during the conference.

the vibrancy of bilateral economic and cultural ties.

The ambassador indicated that France will be hosting the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and during this upcoming tourist season, visa ap-

plications for France will see a sharp increase on a global scale. He advised people to apply earlier as waiting times will increase and to avoid any difficulty in the visa application process. She said, "A visa application can be submitted up to 6 months before the scheduled trip. The applicant must apply first on the France Visas website and then make an appointment on the website of our service provider, Capago."

"The applicant must take into account that around 6 weeks are needed to issue the visa, which is additional to the waiting time before the appointment, which can reach 3 weeks, depending on the period. The applicant should start the process at least nine weeks before the scheduled departure. The sooner, the better," she continued. Regarding visa fees, Aron Yemane, Operation Manager at Capago, said, "Standard visa fees include the Consulate fees, which cost 80 euros for a short-stay visa, and the Capago office service fees, which cost 24 euros, for a total of 104 euros." He revealed that the visa sticker will no longer have a signature but will have a stamp and a QR code.

Kuwait, UAE eye closer military, defensive ties

ABU DHABI: The Chief of Staff of the Kuwait Armed Forces, Lieut. Gen. Bandar Al-Muzain, and his UAE counterpart, Issa Al-Mazrouei, discussed the means of developing and enhancing relations between the two sister countries, mainly in the military and defense domains. Al-Muzain, accompanied by some senior officers, visited Abu Dhabi in response to an invitation from Al-Mazrouei, Kuwait's General Staff said in a statement. The two sides held a meeting in the presence of a number of senior officers and officials of the two countries, it added. — KUNA



Kuwait donates, supports UNRWA and Palestinians

NEW YORK: Kuwait has announced a voluntary contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) worth 30 million dollars, while renewing the international community's demand to recognize Palestine's membership in the United Nations. This was stated in the speech delivered by Kuwait's Minister Plenipotentiary Faisal Al-Enezi, its Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the ministerial meeting of the UN Security Council.

Al-Enezi said the contribution comes out of the moral and humanitarian responsibility of Kuwait to support UNRWA. He stressed the continuity of the operations of the Kuwaiti Air Relief Bridge in order to meet all the needs of the Palestinian people. He also touched on the decision of many countries to suspend their support for UNRWA following allegations made by the Zionist occupation that later proved invalid, which led to the reversal of those countries' decision to suspend their voluntary contribution to the agency.

UNRWA was subjected to a campaign that claimed that 12 of the agency's staff participated in Operation Al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, but a report by an independent UN Commission of Inquiry concluded that the Zionist occupation has not provided evidence to support its claims in this regard. On a related note,



The plenipotentiary minister and the deputy representative at the UN Faisal Al-Enezi

Al-Enezi renewed Kuwait's call on the international community to recognize Palestine's membership in the United Nations, citing General Assembly Resolution No. 3236, which recognizes that Palestine should be given full independence and sovereignty and recognized by the organization.

The resolution reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, in particular the right to self-determination without external interference, as well as the right to national independence and sovereignty. He added that the Zionist occupation "was recognized by the UN as a member four years after the establishment of this organization," while Palestine, five decades after the issuance of the resolution, still demands its right to be recognized by the UN as an independent state like the rest of the member states.

Al-Enezi expressed regret that the United States used its veto power against an Algerian draft resolu-



UNITED NATIONS: General view of the United Nations Security Council meeting on the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) at UN headquarters in New York. — AFP

tion recommending the admission of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations. In this regard, he stated that "Kuwait is Palestine, Palestine is Kuwait, Kuwait's membership in the United Nations is Palestine's membership, your concerns are our concerns, and your challenges are our challenges."

Kuwait's representative to the UN reiterated the need to comply with the three basic demands, namely, a ceasefire in Gaza, the payment of humanitarian and

relief assistance, the cessation of forced displacement, and the end to ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people. Last week, the UN Security Council failed to adopt an Algerian draft resolution recommending that the General Assembly accept Palestine as a full member of the United Nations. 12 of the 15 council members voted in favor of the resolution, while the United States opposed it and the United Kingdom and Switzerland abstained. — KUNA

Arabs' embrace of AI 'inevitable'

CAIRO: Arab Parliament President Adel Asoumi has affirmed that Arab states' embrace of artificial intelligence is inevitable and necessary to stay abreast of the global development in this sector. Addressing the sixth Arab Parliament conference, Al-Asoumi called for the employment of AI benefits in various life realms and daily life; however, he stressed that AI governance is one of the significant priorities that require pan-Arab strategies to apply the latest application in a manner that conforms with Arab values and morals.

Aware of the necessity to draw up legislation to regulate the latest technological innovation, the Arab Parliament enacted a joint Arab guidance law for artificial intelligence employment two months ago, he said. Moreover, it had prepared a document titled "An Arab vision for attaining safe employment of artificial intelligence," Al-Asoumi added, indicating that the paper had been debated by the conference preparatory committee and adopted by chairmen of the Arab parliaments and assemblies. The document includes recommendations and forecasts regarding the latest technological innovation, he said, noting that it would be submitted to the Arab leaders during their next summit. He touched on the Palestinian plight, noting the passiveness of the international community toward the Palestinian people's suffering and also calling for mechanisms of the international order to be revised.

Pan-Arab integration

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Al-Sudani said on Saturday that pan-Arab integration could pave the way to creating jobs and called for innovating new production methods and elevating labor skills. Al-Sudani, speaking during the inauguration of the 50th session of the Arab Labor Conference, said crises currently witnessed throughout the world negatively impact labor and production. He called for overhauling the performance of the labor institutions and the markets as well as creating "a qualitative relationship" between students' graduation and market needs.

Moreover, the Iraqi Prime Minister urged luring women into the work sector and tackling child labor. For his part, Qatari Labor Minister and President of the Arab Labor Organization Ali bin Saeed said the organization had made a lot of accomplishments this year and expressed hope that the conferees would recommend means to maintain workers' rights.

The organization's Director General, Fayez Al-Mutairi, called for upgrading labor skills, noting the immense impact of "the technology revolution" on the sector. The session agenda tackles issues related to the labor markets, the workforce in Arab countries, and the future of human resources in the shadow of the "technology revolution." Kuwait is represented by Ahmad Al-Enezi, the president of the Kuwait Labor Union. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Photo shows view of aquatics sports centre in Salmiya with the skyline of Kuwait City behind. — AFP

Kuwait teams gear up for World Robotics Competition in Dallas

KUWAIT: The Department of Computer Science (Kuwait University), in strategic partnership with the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity, one of the centers of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), and the mobile telecommunications company Zain Kuwait, announced the teams that will represent Kuwait in the World Robotics Competition in Dallas, Texas.

The announcement comes after the end of the Kuwait National Robotics Competition, which was held last March with the participation of 32 teams, including 170 students from 11 secondary schools, 13 middle schools, and 6 universities in both public and private institutions. This diverse participation highlighted the overall approach of the competition and its role in bringing together a wide range of young talents.

The competition was organized by 40 volun-

teers, a jury of eight judges from Kuwait University, Kuwait Technical College, and specialists from the private sector. The teams that qualified for the World Robotics Competition include: (undergraduate teams) Kuwait University, American University of the Middle East; (secondary school teams) Ibn Al Ameer School, Giftedness and Creativity Classes, International English School in Kuwait; (middle school teams) American Baccalaureate School.

This achievement represents an important step in strengthening Kuwait's position in the field of technological innovation and artificial intelligence at the international level. Through this participation, Kuwaiti teams will compete with more than 1,800 teams from all over the world and in different categories, providing students with a unique opportunity to exchange experiences and learn from diverse cultures. This experience contributes to developing students' practical and theoretical skills and enhancing their abilities to innovate, think critically, and work in teams.

Preparations are underway at Kuwait University, where students will undergo intensive training programs. This will be supervised by a group of experts and trainers in the Department of Computer Science. This program aims to refine students' skills and prepare them optimally for international competition. The participation of Kuwait's teams at these levels is not only an opportunity to showcase their talents and creativity but also a platform to enhance Kuwait's



Some of the participants are pictured in these photos.

position, as well as highlight its position as a center of innovation and excellence in the fields of science and technology.

"Through this international presence, we are working to open new horizons for our students, contributing to the development of their academic and career paths in the future," Dr. Noura Al-Jeri, a faculty member in the Department of Computer Science at Kuwait University and Chairperson of the Organizing Committee of the competition, said.

"As we prepare to participate in the International Robotics Competition in Dallas, I can only express my deep pride in the achievements of the teams in the Kuwait National Robotics Competition, and I am pleased to witness the development achieved in the field of robotics. We now have a new challenge and an exceptional opportunity to highlight the position of Kuwait on the global stage in the field of technology and innovation," she added, adding that participation in this international competition is not only an opportunity to showcase students' skills but also an important step towards achieving their vision to be a center of innovation. "We are grateful for our strategic partnership with the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity and Zain Kuwait, which have played a pivotal role in supporting our efforts and enabling our students to reach this advanced stage," she said.

GCC countries making headway in economic diversification

RIYADH: Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Jaseem Al-Budaiwi said the GCC economies, in keeping with the strategic vision approved by the GCC leaders, have made progress in alleviating reliance on oil revenues as a source of national income. "The achievements made over the past four decades in various sectors had positive impacts on the GCC people," a statement from the GCC Secretariat quoted him as saying.

Al-Budaiwi made the comments at a panel discussion hosted by the Asian Society Hong Kong Center (ASHK) under the theme of "Engaging with the Gulf States." He reviewed the numerous achievements made by the GCC

member countries as they strive to grow and diversify their economies and promote their status on the global economic map. The GCC states laid out plans and strategies for economic diversification and created partnerships to promote trade and investment, thus becoming major international actors.

They have struck free trade agreements with several friendly countries and global economic blocs with a view to opening new markets for their products, he pointed out. Al-Budaiwi commended as strategic the relationship between the GCC states and Hong Kong, saying that both sides share the desire to take this relationship to new heights in economics, trade, and investment. The ASHK is one of the 14 global centers of the New York-based Asia Society. It is an independent non-governmental educational organization established in 1990 by a group of Hong Kong community leaders led by Sir Quo-Wei Lee. — KUNA



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Calls for mosque demolition in India weigh on Muslim voters

Migrants eyeing Europe bide their time in Tunisia

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BOSTON, United States: Pro-Palestinian protesters stand in front of a police barricade after police raided an encampment at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, on April 27, 2024. -- AFP

Police detain 100 at Boston University as pro-Palestinian protests turn violent

Blinken says US campus protests part of 'democracy'

BOSTON: Police in riot gear detained about 100 people as they cleared a pro-Palestinian encampment at a Boston university Saturday, the latest in a series of clashes on US campuses triggered by protests over Zionist entity's war against Palestine. The action was taken after some protesters resorted to "virulent anti-Semitic slurs, including 'Kill the Jews,'" Northeastern University said in a statement on social media platform X.

The campus protests have posed a major challenge to university administrators across the country who are trying to balance commitments to free expression with complaints that the rallies have veered into anti-Semitism and hate speech. Police have carried out large-scale arrests at universities in recent days, at times using chemical irritants and tasers to disperse

demonstrators. In its statement, Northeastern said campus police backed by local law enforcement moved in Saturday to clear "an unauthorized encampment" on the campus. "What began as a student demonstration two days ago was infiltrated by professional organizers with no affiliation to Northeastern," the school said. It added that detained individuals who produced a valid school ID have been released and will face disciplinary proceedings, not legal action. "Those who refused to disclose their affiliation were arrested," the school said.

Tensions were also escalating Saturday at the University of Pennsylvania, where the college president ordered a campus encampment to be disbanded immediately after what he said were "credible reports of harassing and intimidating conduct."

Meanwhile, Columbia University in New York, where the protests originated, announced Friday that it would not be calling police back to campus after more than 100 people were arrested last week. "To bring back the NYPD at this time would be counterproductive, further inflaming what is happening on campus, and drawing thousands to our doorstep who would threaten our community," the leaders of the school said in a statement, referring to the New York Police Department.

The decision was made even as Columbia signaled it had barred from campus Khymani James, a leader of the campus protests who had said in a video in January that "Zionists don't deserve to live," and "Be grateful that I'm not just going out and murdering Zionists." "Chants, signs, taunts and social media posts from our own stu-

dents that mock and threaten to 'kill' Jewish people are totally unacceptable, and Columbia students who are involved in such incidents will be held accountable," the school said.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that campus protests sweeping the United States over the Middle East were part of democracy, but criticized the "silence" over the Palestinian militants Hamas. Speaking in Beijing following a day of meetings with high-ranking officials, Blinken said such protests were a "hallmark of our democracy". "Our citizens make known their views, their concerns, their anger, at any given time," Blinken said in China, which tightly controls protests. "I think that reflects the strength of the country," he said. -- AFP

20 Cambodian soldiers killed in explosion

PHNOM PENH: Twenty Cambodian soldiers have been killed in an ammunition explosion at an army base, Prime Minister Hun Manet said Saturday. The blast at around 2.45pm (0745 GMT) at the army base in Kampong Speu province to the west of the capital also wounded several soldiers, according to the PM, with the army saying that an entire truck of munitions had exploded. "I am deeply shocked to receive the news of the ammunition explosion incident," Hun Manet said in a statement on Facebook, expressing his "deepest condolences" to the families of those killed.

It was not immediately clear what had caused the explosion. Pictures on social media showed a destroyed one-storey building wreathed in smoke, with residents of a nearby village also sharing images online of broken windows. Other images showed what appeared to be civilians with cuts and gashes being treated in hospital.

Munitions accidents are not uncommon in Cambodia, which is awash with ammunition following decades of civil conflict—accidents that are exacerbated by frequently lax safety standards.

Cambodia's army said the incident was a "warehouse ammunition explosion", that had destroyed a truck fully loaded with weaponry. An office building as well as nearby barracks were destroyed, with 25 nearby homes also battered by the resulting explosion. In his statement, Hun Manet said he had ordered the defense minister and the commander-in-chief of Royal Cambodian Armed Forces to urgently arrange funerals for the soldiers who died. He also said that the families of those killed would receive roughly \$20,000 each, while injured soldiers would get \$5,000.—AFP



KAMPONG SPEU, Cambodia: A doctor treats a child injured in an explosion at the army base in Kampong Speu province on April 27, 2024. -- AFP



US President Joe Biden visits Zummo's Cafe with Scranton, Pennsylvania, Mayor Paige Cognetti before departing for Pittsburgh. -- AFP

An upbeat Biden ranges far as trial keeps Trump tied up

WASHINGTON: Meetings, interviews, fundraising events, official travel: Joe Biden tried this week to be everywhere at once while his rival Donald Trump was held up in court. It was a tactical campaign move by an 81-year-old president who faces mixed polls and nagging questions about his age. Since last Monday, Trump has been tied up in criminal court in connection with alleged hidden payments to a former porn star.

And for the next several weeks, the 77-year-old former Republican president, who's been indicted in several other cases, will see his campaign disrupted while he sits in the New York courtroom.

Biden's team jubilantly noted that last Wednesday, the only day Trump was not required to be in court, the real estate magnate played golf. "I haven't had a chance to watch the court proceedings," Biden chuckled on Thursday at a fundraiser at the home of actor Michael Douglas, "because I've been out campaigning."

On Tuesday, Biden flew to Florida to defend abortion rights. A day later, he presented himself to construction workers as a child of the middle class. On Thursday, Biden announced heavy federal investments in semiconductors. Trump "learned the best way to get rich is inherit it," said Biden, adding: "I guess that's how you look at the world from Mar-a-Lago," the former president's vast estate in Florida. On Friday, Biden again played up the contrast in a radio interview with host Howard Stern, a regular venue for Trump before he won the presidency in 2016. Stern and Trump often delved

into salacious terrain. But Friday's interview was neither abrasive nor off-color. Biden reviewed his life, the painful moments—the death of his first wife and their baby daughter, then the death of his eldest son from cancer—as well as the happy ones, such as meeting his current wife Jill. With the encouragement of a very supportive Stern, Biden took the opportunity to highlight his sense of family, his empathy and his resilience.

"We have a fundamentally different value set," Biden said of Trump. However, the week was not all roses for the Democrat. On Wednesday, a Bloomberg News/Morning Consult poll gave Trump the lead in several crucial states. On Thursday, he was hit by worse-than-expected economic statistics.

And questions about Biden's age resurfaced, thanks to a change in his routine. Until now, when Biden traveled by helicopter, he walked alone to Marine One on the White House lawn, and did the same on his return, with multiple cameras focused on him. Recently however, the president has been surrounded by advisors as he walks these few dozen yards. According to the Axios news outlet, some aides prefer moving in a group to draw attention away from Biden's gait, which has stiffened considerably. This is not the first such accommodation. Biden who has fallen several times in public, now prefers the shortest walkway to board his plane. He was also recently seen wearing thick-soled sneakers rather than dress shoes. The Democrat has a well-honed response to polls and age. On the subject of opinion polls, he constantly criticizes the press for ignoring those that are favorable to him, such as an NPR/Marist poll this week that puts him ahead of Trump in voting intentions nationwide. At Michael Douglas's home on Thursday, he recalled that the actor played Benjamin Franklin in a series. "I knew him really well. He was only a couple of years older than I was," he joked about the founding father of the United States, who died in 1790. -- AFP

Blinken due in Saudi for summit on global economy

RIYADH: Washington's top diplomat is among leaders expected at a Saudi-hosted economic summit set to begin on Sunday with a strong focus on the grinding war in Gaza, organizers said. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will be "coming in directly from his visits in China and on his way to Zionist entity," Borge Brende, president of the World Economic Forum (WEF), told a press conference on Saturday in Riyadh.

Other participants at the two-day WEF special meeting include Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and foreign ministers and prime ministers from across the Middle East and Europe.

These include foreign ministers from France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the EU and prime ministers from Qatar, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq, according to a WEF press release.

A total of 12 heads of state and government feature among the more than 1,000 participants, Brende said on Saturday. "There is some new momentum now in the talks around the hostages, and also for... a possible way out of the impasse we are faced with in Gaza," Brende said, without elaborating.

"There will be discussions, of course, on the ongoing humanitarian situation in Gaza" and "regional aspects also with Iran will be discussed" during what "has all the prospects for becoming a very consequential meeting." Zionist entity estimates that 129 hostages are still being held by Hamas in Gaza, including 34 the military says are dead. Zionist entity's retaliatory military campaign to destroy Hamas has killed at least 34,356 Palestinians, most of them women and children, according to the territory's health ministry. Hamas said it was studying on Saturday the latest Zionist entity counterproposal regarding a potential ceasefire in Gaza, a day after media reports said a delegation from mediator Egypt arrived in Zionist entity in a bid to jump-start stalled negotiations.

Saudi Arabia has never recognized Zionist entity but was considering doing so before the Oct 7 attack, and talks continue on a deal that would also see Riyadh and Washington bolster their security partnership. Saudi officials fear the war in Gaza and a potential regional conflagration could stymie the Gulf kingdom's ambitious Vision 2030 social and economic reform agenda, which is meant to lay the groundwork for an eventual post-oil future. -- AFP

International

Migrants eyeing Europe bide their time in Tunisia

Living in makeshift tents, thousands surviving on meager rations

EL AMRA, Tunisia: Thousands of sub-Saharan migrants have huddled in Tunisian olive groves for months, living in makeshift tents and surviving on meager rations while keeping their hopes alive of reaching Europe.

Around 20,000 are in isolated areas near the towns of El Amra and Jebeniana, some 30 and 40 kilometers (19 and 25 miles) north of the port city of Sfax, humanitarian sources say. Sfax is one of Tunisia's main departure points for irregular migration to Europe by boat, and was once a hub for sub-Saharan migrants.

After being forcibly removed from the city last autumn, migrants set up camp in neighboring towns as they awaited their chance to make the perilous crossing. One weary 17-year-old calling himself Ibrahim told AFP he had left Guinea more than a year ago, hoping to reach the other side of the Mediterranean "to provide for his sick mother and little brother" back home.

He said that after walking for three weeks from the border with Algeria, he arrived in El Amra in mid-winter, about three months ago. "It's really difficult here," he said, adding that he and other migrants feel trapped on the sidelines of society.

"Even shopping, we have to do it in secret. 'You can go out looking for work, but when it's time for your employer to pay you, they would call the police,'" he said. After President Kais Saied said in a speech last year that "hordes of illegal migrants" posed a demographic threat to Tunisia, anti-migrant violence broke out and hundreds of sub-Saharan Africans were kicked out of their jobs and homes.

Tens of thousands embarked from Sfax in 2023 because of its proximity to Italy, the closest European country. "We are only a few kilometers from Europe," said Ibrahim of Lampedusa island some 150 kilometers away. Near El Amra, in tents made of tarpaulins

and rods, groups of five—and at times even 10 -- share the same sleeping space. Men, women and children, mostly from Cameroon, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Sudan, congregate by language.

The women cook stew as men remove the feathers of inedible-looking yet indispensable bony chickens. The winter "was very cold, but we managed to survive thanks to the solidarity we have as African brothers", said Ibrahim.

"If someone has food and you don't, they give you some," he said. "We bought the tarpaulins with our money," which relatives managed to send them, "or by begging". Some 7,000 migrants received their first food aid in months from NGOs earlier in April, but they said this was not enough and called for more help from Europe, which has ramped up measures aiming to curb irregular migration.

According to Romdhane Ben Amor, spokesman of the Tunisian NGO FTDES, the North African country "is turning into a de facto detention centre because of border control agreements signed with the European Union". Hygiene is a pressing concern at the encampments.

"There have been many births and sicknesses," said Ibrahim. One humanitarian source told AFP there had been one migrant birth per day in recent weeks at a hospital in Jebeniana. Salima, 17, said she had no diapers for her four-month-old baby and had to use plastic bags instead. While awaiting the resumption of departures for Europe, delayed because of bad weather, Salima told AFP she was still determined to make the crossing.

Tunisian authorities raided several encampments recently, tearing down tents and kicking out some migrants, after locals allegedly reported thefts. Near Jebeniana, AFP journalists saw used tear gas canisters, bulldozers and destroyed tents—some of



DJEBENIANA, Tunisia: A migrant from Sub-Saharan Africa walks near tents at a camp in Jebeniana in Tunisia's Sfax governorate. — AFP

which were already being put back up. "We're very tired of the police," said 22-year-old Sokoto—also a pseudonym—who left Guinea three years ago and entered from Algeria last January. "Just yesterday, I was chased from shops" in the town of El Amra, he said. Mohamed Bekri, a resident of El Amra, said he often brings food and water to the migrants for "humanitarian" reasons. "There are

babies who are three and six months old," he said.

Despite the tensions and the dire situation the migrants find themselves in, none of those AFP interviewed said they wanted to return to their countries of origin. "The reverse gear is broken," said Sokoto. "I left to help my family and I suffered a lot to get here. 'I'm not going back to Guinea even if I have to swim across the sea' to Europe." — AFP

Paris students end Gaza war protests after street fight

PARIS: Students at one of France's most prestigious universities on Friday called off protests over the Gaza war after street scuffles between pro-Palestinian and pro-Zionist entity groups. Administrators at the Institute of Political Studies, or Sciences Po, university in Paris acted to douse mounting tensions at the Paris establishment as demonstrations spread across American universities over the impact of the Gaza war.

Pro-Palestinian students have staged several days of sit-ins and protests at the 150-year-old university. Some blocked entrances to the university and tents were set up at the central courtyard for a protest camp. Hundreds of students turned out Friday and police moved in when about 50 pro-Zionist entity demonstrators arrived shouting and scuffles started. With exams scheduled to start soon, the university said the pro-Palestinian students had agreed to call off their action in return for an "internal debate" about the university's ties to Zionist entity.

University authorities also agreed to drop all disciplinary proceedings against demonstrators, said a note sent to students and faculty by Jean Basseres, Sciences Po's administrator. Science Po has a joint degree program with New York's Columbia University and several French students are taking part in protests at one of the US institutions most radicalized by protests. — AFP

King Charles to resume some public duties

LONDON: British head of state King Charles III will make a limited return to public duties next week, after doctors said they were "very encouraged" by the progress of his treatment for cancer. His first engagement with Queen Camilla would be to a cancer treatment centre on Tuesday. The couple will also host Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako of Japan for a state visit in June.

The announcement follows a difficult spell for the royal family after both Charles, 75, and his 42-year-old daughter-in-law Catherine, Princess of Wales, revealed that they had cancer.

Catherine, the wife of heir to the throne Prince William, made the shock announcement that she was undergoing preventative chemotherapy just over a month ago in a video posted to social media.

Announcing Charles's limited return, a Buckingham Palace spokesperson said it was "too early to say" how much longer his treatment would continue. But they noted that his medical team were "very encouraged by the progress made so far and remain positive about the king's continued recovery".

"The pacing of the king's program will be carefully calibrated as his recovery continues, in close consultation with his medical team," the spokesperson added. The king and Queen Camilla will host the Japanese royal couple at Buckingham Palace in late June, the palace said, confirming reports in the Japanese media last month.

The Japanese royals both attended the state funeral of Charles's mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in September 2022, in their first overseas trip after the emperor's enthronement. They also attended the reception the king hosted at Buckingham Palace the evening before the funeral for heads of state and official overseas guests. An earlier state visit which had been planned for early 2020 had to be postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Neither Charles nor Catherine has disclosed the exact type of cancer they are suffering from. Charles was just 17 months into his reign when the palace announced in early February that he had cancer and would be pausing all public-facing engagements as he began treatment. He had been admitted for surgery for a benign prostate condition in January, which saw him spend several days in hospital.

The king has continued with behind-the-scenes work and holding some in-person meetings and increasingly attending official events. He made his most high-profile appearance over the Easter weekend, attending a Sunday church service at Windsor Castle, west of London.

"His Majesty is greatly encouraged to be resuming some public-facing duties and very grateful to his medical team for their continued care and expertise," the palace spokesperson said. Charles said in March that he would continue to serve "to the best of my ability", and he had been "deeply touched" by people's wishes for his health. Kate, as Catherine is widely known, has been receiving treatment for a cancer discovered following abdominal surgery that was announced in January. Having both Charles and Kate simultaneously fight serious illness has created an unprecedented crisis in modern times for the British monarchy, with a lack of senior royals available for public duties.



TOMINTOUL, United Kingdom: Britain's King Charles III reacts as he meets members of the public during a visit to the Discovery Centre and Auld School Close in Tomintoul, Scotland where he learnt about an energy efficient housing project in the area. — AFP

The family would previously have been able to rely on Prince Harry—the king's younger son—to help out, but he and his American wife Meghan quit the royal front line in 2020. They now live in California and have been largely estranged from the family following an acrimonious split.

The visit by Japan's royals will be the couple's second international goodwill visit abroad since the Emperor's enthronement. They visited Indonesia last year. Japanese media reports last month said the couple may visit the University of Oxford, where they both studied at different times.

The couple is also expected to have a luncheon with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his wife, Akshata Murty, according to the reports. — AFP

Kuwait calls on UN Assembly...

Continued from Page 1

Strikes in Rafah and elsewhere killed more than a dozen people overnight, hospital officials said. "Today, the Hamas movement received the official Zionist occupation response to the movement's position, which was delivered to the Egyptian and Qatari mediators on April 13," Khalil Al-Hayya, deputy head of Hamas' political arm in Gaza, said in a statement.

"The movement will study this proposal, and upon completion of its study, it will submit its response." Hamas has previously insisted on a permanent ceasefire, something rejected by Zionists. Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been unsuccessfully trying to seal a new truce deal in Gaza ever since a one-week halt to the fighting in November saw 80 hostages exchanged for 240 Palestinians held in Zionist prisons.

A delegation from Egypt arrived in Zionist entity on Friday hoping to revive the truce negotiations, Zionist and Egyptian media reported. There has been "noticeable progress in bringing the views of the Egyptian and Zionist delegations closer", said Al-Qahera News, which is linked to Egyptian state intelligence services. In early April Hamas had said it was studying a proposal, after talks in Cairo, and Al-Qahera reported progress. Days later, Zionists and Hamas accused each other of undermining negotiations.

Deaths every day

As talks drag on, dozens of people in Gaza die every day, according to figures from the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. Vowing to destroy Hamas, Zionist retaliatory offensive has killed at least 34,356 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry. The war is on the agenda for an international summit in Saudi Arabia.

The World Economic Forum special meeting, scheduled to begin in Riyadh on Sunday, will include a Gaza-focused session on Monday set to feature newly appointed Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Mustafa, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa

Madbouly and Sigrid Kaag, the United Nations aid coordinator for the Gaza Strip. Military on Saturday said its aircraft had hit more than 25 militant targets over the previous day. Zionists estimate that 129 hostages seized by militants on October 7 are still being held in Gaza, including 34 the military says are dead. Demonstrators have intensified protests for their government to reach a deal that would free the captives, accusing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of prolonging the war.

'We are tired'

Amid the destruction, a surgeon had hailed baby Sabreen Al-Ruh's survival as a miracle. She was the only member of her family left alive after her birth by caesarian section from her dying mother. Witnesses said a strike hit their home. But the baby's uncle, Rami Al-Sheikh, told AFP on Friday that her condition had worsened and hospital staff could not save her. Military offensive has turned vast swathes of Gaza into rubble, creating 37 million tons of debris that will take years to clear away, according to the UN Mine Action Service. It said unexploded ordnance would complicate that work.

On Friday the European Union said it was giving an extra \$73 million for food, water and other aid to Palestinians in Gaza "in light of the continued deterioration of the severe humanitarian crisis". The World Food Program has warned famine is "a real and dangerous threat". In the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis, where intense fighting raged in February, some residents said they preferred to return and live among the ruins. "We are tired after seven months of displacement and struggle in the camps. So we insisted on returning and staying in a tent over the rubble of our home," said Abdelqader Mohammed Qwaider.

Minister in car crash

The main aid agency in Gaza, the UN agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) has been under attack and lost some of its global funding since January when Zionists said several UNRWA employees were involved in the October 7 attack. The United Nations immediately fired the accused staffers and began an investigation. UN spokesman Stephane Dujarrig on Friday said one case has been closed "as no evidence was provided to support the allegations against the staff member". — Agencies

Amir to partake in international...

Continued from Page 1

participation in the forum would affirm Kuwait's role and its keenness to support all initiatives designed to enhance international cooperation to attain economic prosperity for the whole world.

Sheikh Sabah Nasser affirmed the significance of the forum, which would draw more than 1,000 participants, including heads of state and economic experts from various corners of the world, to study challenges facing the global economy and find solutions to economic issues. He stressed the necessity of coordinating global efforts to attain economic stability in the Middle East, which is currently witnessing conflicts. He lauded the Kingdom's great role and noticeable efforts in hosting international meetings, along with its approach to attaining peace, prosperity, and security for the region and the world.

As the global economy grapples with increasing challenges, specifically in the Middle East region, Saudi Arabia gears up to host the World Economic Forum

Heatwave hits Indian voters...

Continued from Page 1

"The heat is the reason," he said. Booths in Mathura saw a late flurry before they closed from voters who had spent the day trying to avoid venturing outdoors. "I waited for the sun to lower," Sajid Khan, 35, told AFP. "It was too hot to step out in the afternoon." Analysts have long expected Modi to triumph convincingly in this year's vote, an assessment outwardly shared by his ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Political analyst and Modi biographer Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay said that perceptions of the vote as a foregone conclusion may have dampened voter enthusiasm. "There is some disinterest among some BJP voters," he told AFP, "because when they hear the leadership say 'we will get 400 seats' they think, why slug it out in the heat?"

India's election commission said this week it had formed a task force to review the impact of heatwaves and humidity before each round of voting. The commis-

(WEF) on April 28–29 as part of efforts to address challenges and achieve economic stability. Saudi Shura Council member Fadel Alboenain told KUNA that this fuels international cooperation efforts and creates sustainable solutions. Alboenain affirmed Saudi Arabia's keenness on such initiatives to boost international efforts, joint work, and suitable solutions to arrive at global growth and prosperity.

This high and expansive participation allows the chance to handle a host of issues and developments, as it creates a joint platform for world countries. The WEF is a great opportunity to exchange experience and skills, discuss important geopolitical and economic issues to formulate a shared vision that aids economic reform and growth, and establish global cooperation.

On his part, the CEO of Saudi Arabia's Razeen Capital and analyst, Mohammad Al-Suwayed, affirmed in his remarks to KUNA the significance of the forum in establishing global economic stability and growth. These conventions handle important topics of policymaking and agreement, supporting regions still recovering from economic halts during the coronavirus pandemic, stated Al-Suwayed. Saudi Arabia hosting the forum is part of their responsibility in contributing to and seeking economic stability in the region and the world, he affirmed. — KUNA

sion said in a statement on Monday it had "no major concern" about the impact of hot temperatures on Friday's vote. But it added that it had been closely monitoring weather reports and would ensure "the comfort and well-being of voters along with polling personnel".

A wave of exceptionally hot weather has blasted South and Southeast Asia, prompting thousands of schools across the Philippines and Bangladesh to suspend in-person classes. The heat disrupted campaigning in India on Wednesday when roads minister Nitin Gadkari fainted at a rally for Modi's party in Maharashtra state. Footage of the speech showed Gadkari falling unconscious and being carried off the stage by handlers. He later blamed the incident on discomfort "due to the heat". Years of scientific research have found climate change is causing heatwaves to become longer, more frequent and more intense.

Friday will also see voting in the constituency of India's most prominent opposition leader - Rahul Gandhi of the once-dominant Congress party. The 53-year-old is fighting to retain his seat in the southern state of Kerala. "It is the duty of every citizen to become a soldier of the constitution, step out of their homes today and vote to protect democracy," he wrote on X. — AFP

International

Calls for mosque demolition in India weigh on Muslim voters

NDA govt accused of marginalizing India's 220-million-plus Muslim population

MATHURA, India: Muslim teacher Tasleem Qureshi's walk to the polls on Friday took her past the yellow barricades and police cordon guarding her local mosque - a looming flashpoint in India's religious divide. Her hometown Mathura is the site of the Shahi Idgah, an Islamic house of worship that the Hindu faithful believe was built over the birthplace of the deity Krishna.

Hindu activists want to "reclaim" the site in a campaign endorsed by members of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"The BJP keeps saying that the Shahi Idgah will cease to exist after the elections," Qureshi, 48, told AFP. "We will not let that happen and we will protect it with our lives," she said. Modi is widely expected to win a third term in office once India's six-week-long election concludes in June, in large part thanks to his championing of the country's majority faith.

Mathura is one of several locations across India's northern heartlands where activists have sought to replace centuries-old Islamic monuments with Hindu temples. In January, Modi presided over the inauguration of a grand temple to Ram, one of the most important deities in the Hindu pantheon.

It was built in the northern city of Ayodhya on the grounds of a centuries-old mosque razed by Hindu zealots decades earlier. Modi told an audience of thousands at a glitzy ceremony attended by Bollywood celebrities and cricket stars 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 cele-

brated across India, with extensive television coverage and street parties. Jubilant Hindu activists had proclaimed when the mosque was destroyed that more would follow, identifying the Shahi Idgah in Mathura as one of their future targets. Modi's opponents accuse his Hindu-nationalist government of marginalizing India's 220-million-plus Muslim population. He was accused last weekend of "blatantly targeting" the faith in a campaign speech in which he claimed his opponents had once pledged that Muslims had "first right over the nation's wealth".

Temples small and large line Mathura's narrow, pot-holed streets, teeming with young men offering guided tours for pilgrims. The street leading to the mosque has for decades been guarded by a stern, round-the-clock police detachment to prevent vandalism. A polling station nearby is testament to the close quarters in which the city's two main faiths live, with women in Muslim dress voting alongside saffron-clad Hindu priests. But with Hindus accounting for more than 80 percent of Mathura's population, its religious divide is a microcosm of the one across India at large.

Its parliamentary seat has been held by the BJP since Modi was first elected in 2014, represented by movie star Hema Malini, and the Ayodhya temple's inauguration has galvanized Hindu voters in the city who support the mosque's removal. Gokul Prasad, an electrician, told AFP that Modi's inauguration of the Ayodhya temple was the "single most important issue" of the election campaign.

"Since we live in Mathura so close to the Shahi



A general view shows the Shahi Idgah mosque (left) and the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple (right) in Mathura on April 26, 2024. — AFP

Idgah, we will obviously vote for Modi," the 50-year-old said. The fate of the Shahi Idgah has also mobilized the city's Muslim minority.

But several told AFP that they had lined up to vote on Friday only to find their names were missing on the electoral rolls. "They told me neither I nor my

husband can vote as our names are not there," said 55-year-old Rehana Qureshi - no relation to Tasleem - outside a polling booth.

"We have lived and voted here for generations," she added. "It seems that the only right we Muslims still have is also being taken away." — AFP

'Everyone sits out': Yangon parks offer heatwave relief

YANGON: As the sun sets on another scorching Yangon day, the hot and bothered descend on the Myanmar city's parks, the coolest place to spend an evening during yet another power blackout. A wave of exceptionally hot weather has blasted Southeast Asia this week, sending the mercury to 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit) and prompting thousands of schools to suspend in-person classes.

Even before the chaos and conflict unleashed by the military's 2021 coup, Myanmar's creaky and outdated electricity grid struggled to keep fans whirring and air conditioners humming during the hot season.

Now, infrastructure attacks and dwindling offshore gas reserves mean those who cannot afford expensive diesel generators must face at least eight hours daily at the mercy of the scorching heat.

For many in the city of some eight million, relief comes only at night and outdoors with the metropolis' parks offering natural shade and blissful breezes. "My parents can't stay inside their house in the afternoon," one Yangon resident told AFP, as she visited Inya lake late Friday. "They have to go outside and sit under the shade of trees."

The woman said her parents warn her about going outside in the weather, urging her to cover up, and added: "I feel this year is far hotter than last year." Mya Aye, 62, said she comes to the park every day when the power goes off at 5 pm. "The weather at home is so hot that neither the children nor the elderly can stay," she said. Across swathes of Myanmar's arid heartland day temperatures on Thursday



YANGON: People gather at a jetty during an electricity blackout in Yangon on April 26, 2024. — AFP

were 3-4 degrees Celsius higher than the April average, according to the country's weather monitor.

In Chauk in Magway region, the temperature reached a blazing 45.9 Celsius (114.6 Fahrenheit) on Wednesday, the office said. Back at the picturesque lake, one man told AFP he and his family had travelled from the northern part of the city as they could not remain at home because of the heat. "Even if we sit outside, the sun's rays are very hot and we can't sit anywhere," he said. "After 10:00 am in the morning, it's getting hotter and we can't stand it," he said, adding that older people were particularly impacted. "Elderly people are not going outside because of the

heat and they just stay inside. After the sun is gone, they come out," he explained.

The frequent power outages only made the situation worse, he said, with homes emptying each evening. "When there is a power blackout everyone sits out on the street until 9:00 or 10:00 pm," he said. Global temperatures hit record highs last year and the UN's World Meteorological Organization said Asia was warming at a particularly rapid pace, with the impact of heatwaves in the region becoming more severe. Scientific research has shown climate change is causing heatwaves to be longer, more frequent and more intense. — AFP

Taiwan detects 22 Chinese aircraft around island

TAIPEI: Taiwan's defense ministry said Saturday it had detected 22 Chinese warplanes and drones around the self-ruled island in a window of less than three hours. The sorties come less than a month before the May 20 inauguration of new Taiwan president Lai Ching-te, who China regards as a dangerous separatist.

"We detected activities from 22 PLA aircraft... since 9:30 am (0130 GMT)," it said in a statement released at 12:10 pm on Saturday. "12 aircraft crossed the median line and entered Taiwan's northern and central air defense identification zone," it said, adding that the warplanes and drones joined Chinese naval vessels in "joint combat patrol".

The median line bisects the Taiwan Strait, a narrow 180-kilometre (110-mile) waterway separating the island from mainland China. Beijing, which does not recognize the line, claims democratic Taiwan as part of its territory and has never renounced the use of force to bring the island under its control.

Under the administration of Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, tensions between Beijing and Taipei have ramped up, as she and her government reject China's claim to the island. Her deputy, Vice President Lai, won the island's January presidential election despite warnings from Beijing that he would cause "war and decline" for Taiwan. Saturday's show of military might comes as the United States and the Philippines are conducting joint military exercises, including near the potential flashpoints of the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. The joint drills involve a simulation of retaking enemy-occupied islands in areas facing Taiwan. Beijing claims the South China Sea almost in its entirety despite an international ruling that the claim has no legal basis, and recent clashes between Chinese and Philippine vessels have stoked fears of wider conflict. — AFP

Kenyan patients suffer as doctors' strike grinds on

KIAMBU, Kenya: Desperate to have her five-month-old daughter treated for a skin infection in Kenya, Celine Nyaga rode for an hour on the back of a motorcycle, cradling her baby in her arms. The 23-year-old businesswoman had spent all morning scouting public hospitals to find a pediatrician for her Audrey as a nationwide doctors' strike ran into a seventh week.

Kenya's healthcare system has long been overburdened and underfunded, but it has ground to a near halt after about 7,000 members of the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) walked off the job to demand better working terms.

"I am exhausted and am very worried," Nyaga told AFP as she arrived at Kiambu Level Five Hospital, north of the capital Nairobi. A vital safety net for poor Kenyans, the hospital was barely staying afloat with a weary skeleton crew caring for patients in the doctors' absence.

The usually packed hospital was virtually empty during a visit by AFP journalists, with a handful of patients sitting silently on wooden benches, too weak to chat. The number of patients had dropped to about 30 percent of the usual capacity, Kiambu county health minister Elias Maina told AFP as he visited the facility.

Many patients cannot afford treatment at relatively expensive private clinics and were sitting at home "not knowing what will happen next", Maina said. "Even those who will survive through these periods, they'll come back to us when their condition has worsened, so we'd be in a worse off position."

Others were making rounds of every public hospital within reach, determined to get help. A single mother of three, Faith Njeri had already visited the Kiambu facility twice in search of a diagnosis and treatment for her one-year-old daughter, who was suffering from chest problems.

But she had not had any luck, she said. "I didn't find any doctor there, so now I have to ask the pharmacy for some medicine or something," the 25-year-



KIAMBU, Kenya: Beds are spread inside the casualty room without patients, as Kenyan doctors continued with their strike to demand better pay and working conditions, disrupting health care at the country's 57 public hospitals, at the Kiambu referral hospital, in Kiambu county. — AFP

old hairdresser said, adding that she was "struggling" financially. "I feel bad, I feel worried. Right now, it's very cold, it's raining and her condition may worsen".

Talks between the striking doctors and the government broke down this week despite a court deadline to reach an agreement, with each side blaming the other. At the centre of the row is a standoff on the salaries of medical interns, who make up about 30 percent of doctors, according to KMPDU.

On Tuesday, the cabinet said "it is unsustainable" to pay the interns a monthly stipend of 206,000 Kenyan shillings (\$1,530) and instead offered \$530. The union has refused to cede ground on what it says is a "deal breaker". "Let the government issue their threats and do their worst, then they will come back and talk," KMPDU deputy secretary general Dennis Miskellah told AFP, referring to warnings that doctors would lose their jobs if they didn't call off the strike.

A prolonged strike could prove deadly, said county minister Maina. In 2017, doctors staged a 100-day nationwide strike and dozens of patients died from a lack of treatment during that walkout. "This is my biggest worry," Maina said. "You can't put a price on the life of a human being, and (if) you lose one life you will not recover it." Some people have already turned to alternative medicine, including uncertified herbalists and faith healers, because they cannot afford anything else. — AFP

News in Brief

Australians protest violence against women in main cities

SYDNEY: Hundreds of people protested in Australian cities on Saturday, demanding more be done to stop violence against women. At events in Sydney and Adelaide, demonstrators carried banners saying "no excuse for abuse" and asked the government to step in and prevent violence that has claimed dozens of lives already this year. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese backed the protests and vowed to march at further events planned for Sunday. — AFP

Finnish MP suspected of shooting firearm in public

HELSINKI: A Finnish far-right MP is suspected of shooting a firearm outside a Helsinki nightclub, the populist Finns Party secretary said. "One of our party's MPs was... implicated in an incident in Helsinki," Harri Vuorenpaa wrote on X, formerly Twitter, on Friday night. "The course of events is currently unclear. Police are investigating and we are waiting for further information," added Vuorenpaa. According to the Seiska newspaper, two members of parliament were on a night out in the capital on Friday when one fired a gun after leaving the Bar Ihku nightclub. — AFP

Mali court 'incompetent' to rule on political crackdown

DAKAR: Mali's constitutional court has declared itself "incompetent" to examine a case calling for the military junta's suspension of political party activity to be annulled. In a document seen by AFP on Saturday, the court also ruled "inadmissible" a request from associations for magistrates and prosecutors to find that Mali was in a legal and "institutional vacuum" and to set up a roadmap back to elections. Both court rulings were dated on Thursday. The West African nation has been ruled by juntas since back-to-back coups in 2020 and 2021, with the worsening security situation aggravated by armed jihadist and separatist groups. — AFP

13 Cubans given hefty prison terms over power cut protests

HAVANA: Thirteen Cubans received sentences of up to 15 years in jail for protesting prolonged power cuts on the island in 2022, a human rights group said Friday. The 10 men and three women had already been incarcerated for taking to the streets and demanding improved living conditions and an end to power outages - some lasting up to 18 hours - in the town of Nuevitas, 600 kilometers (370 miles) from Havana. On Friday, they were notified that their sentences would range from four to 15 years in prison for sedition, contempt, enemy propaganda and sabotage, among other charges, according to a list provided to AFP by Miami-based NGO Justicia 11J. — AFP

Scores of tornadoes lash central US plains states

WASHINGTON: Dozens of tornadoes struck the central United States on Friday, razing homes, knocking down power lines and injuring at least three people, authorities said. More than 70 tornadoes were recorded across the country by the National Weather Service (NWS), most of them around Omaha, a transportation hub in Nebraska. Images from storm chasers posted on social networks showed immense black twisters sweeping across the sky, turning over earth, dust and materials in their path. In the Omaha suburb of Elkhorn, the storms razed numerous homes, blew off roofs and stripped trees of leaves. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2024

NBK Wealth emerges as the largest local and regional wealth management group

AUM exceeds \$20bn • The new brand is a strategic step and milestone



Faisal Al-Hamad on the sidelines of a panel discussion during the announcement of the NBK Wealth brand.



Audience attending the event.

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held a press conference at its headquarters to unveil the NBK Wealth brand identity. During the event, Faisal Al-Hamad, Chief Executive Officer, NBK Wealth, presented the strategic vision behind the launch of the NBK Wealth brand, positioning it as the leading wealth management group in the local market and one of the largest in the region.

During the press conference, Al-Hamad emphasized that NBK Wealth, as a new brand, represents a strategic milestone, deriving its strength from the esteemed legacy of NBK Group, a leader in both the regional and global financial landscape.

Al-Hamad emphasized that NBK Wealth represents a significant advancement in distinguishing itself from competitors by offering distinctive services such as asset management, brokerage, lending, deposits, and a range of customized and innovative solutions tailored for high-net-worth individuals and institutional clients. This

initiative contributes to strengthening the Group's diversification endeavors.

He explained that NBK Wealth encompasses a comprehensive range of services and products, including, Watani Investment Company, Watani Wealth Management Company (Saudi Arabia), NBK Banque Privée (Suisse), along with National Bank of Kuwait (International) PLC and Watani Financial Brokerage Company (WFBC).

Al-Hamad also pointed out that by the end of 2023, NBK Wealth's Assets Under Management (AUM) exceeded \$20 billion.

"Our brand has strengthened its global footprint with an extensive network of comprehensive operations spanning 9 cities across 5 countries worldwide. Additionally, our valuable partnerships with JPMorgan Asset Management and Intervest further leverage multiple dimensions, including advisory services and the development of new investment solutions", Al-Hamad said.

"We do not offer pre-packaged solutions. We value the significance of com-



Faisal Al-Hamad

- Our aim is to become the partner of choice for our clients, establishing ourselves as the leading and trusted option in wealth management
- Our philosophy is centered on building long lasting partnerships and creating legacies that span generations for our clients
- We've established partnerships with JPMorgan Asset Management and Intervest to advance and improve investment solutions

prehending the unique requirements and financial objectives of each client to craft a tailored wealth management plan. Our core principle is to prioritize clients' needs and build long-lasting, strong relationships with them," Al-Hamad added. Al-Hamad also expressed NBK Wealth's commitment to becoming the premier partner for its clients, striving to be the leading and

trusted option in wealth management. This is achieved through delivering specialized, comprehensive solutions that generate additional value, foster positive outcomes, and establish a legacy spanning generations for our clients.

He emphasized that NBK Wealth firmly believes in its ability to assist clients in addressing these challenges through im-

plementing robust investment strategies, diversifying their financial portfolios, and offering investment guidance based on thorough analysis of prevailing economic conditions. When asked about NBK Wealth's plans for the future, Al-Hamad responded, "We recognize the perpetual flux of market dynamics and the ever-evolving nature of client needs. Hence, we emphasize the necessity of adaptability in response to these changes and the provision of innovative investment strategies that align with our clients' objectives". In his speech during the press conference, Al-Hamad highlighted the extensive expertise of NBK Wealth's team, stating, "We provide our clients with numerous unique advantages, ensuring them an unmatched experience. This encompasses personalized services customized to meet their specific needs and financial objectives, delivered by a dedicated team of over 125 investment professionals and traders, in addition to 75 relationship managers."



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Business



Najla Al-Eisa with the marketing team at Gulf Bank.



Najla Al-Eisa speaks during one of the sessions of the forum.

Gulf Bank's strategic sponsorship fuels creativity at 'Kilmitain' forum

Competition organized by Khaleesque attracts creative ideas from youth

KUWAIT: Continuing its commitment to supporting youth initiatives, Gulf Bank wrapped up its strategic sponsorship of the "Kilmitain" forum, organized by "Khaleesque", a lifestyle magazine dedicated to exploring the continuously evolving cultural, artistic and design scenes in the Arab region. The forum aimed to empower creative industries in Kuwait by bringing together numerous experts and innovators for a series of seminars and panel discussions, attracting over 700 attendees from various professional backgrounds.

While serving as a keynote speaker in a panel discussion at the forum, Najla Al-Eisa, the Chief Marketing Officer at Gulf Bank, stated, "Gulf Bank is committed to fostering the talents and innovations of the youth across diverse sectors. This commitment stems from our strategic emphasis on youth as a core pillar of our organization." She highlighted that participating in these events offers a distinctive platform for dialogue and the exchange of ideas among creative professionals – par-

Najla Al-Eisa: We are committed to inspiring and supporting the new generation of young creators and highlighting their innovations

ticularly in the marketing industry, where creativity and innovation are crucial for effectively communicating an institution's messages and objectives to its customers.

Al-Eisa stressed the bank's commitment to providing equal opportunities for everyone, from advertising agencies to individuals, to showcase their ideas. The bank prioritizes selecting ideas that are not only highly creative, but also align with its marketing goals; with an emphasis on modernity and innovation as key cri-

teria for selection. She noted that Gulf Bank aims to inspire and support the emerging generation of young creators, by highlighting their innovations and encouraging their development. The bank is dedicated to helping them overcome the challenges they encounter in implementing their innovative ideas and unleashing their creative potential. Al-Eisa also mentioned that Gulf Bank's successful marketing campaigns in recent years, promoting its unique products and services, are the outcome of various factors. Creative ideas have consistently taken the lead, aligning with the aspirations and needs of customers.

Additionally, during the forum, Gulf Bank introduced a competition designed to draw in the creative ideas of young people in the field of advertising. Winners of this competition will have the chance to collaborate closely with Gulf Bank through all phases of idea implementation, from inception to completion. This opportunity allows them to fully develop their ideas and break into

the advertising market through Gulf Bank, one of the most prominent financial institutions in Kuwait.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



BEIJING: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (right) talks with Yuxuan Zhou during a visit to Li-Pi record store in Beijing on April 26, 2024. — AFP

Xi tells Blinken US, China should be 'partners, not rivals'

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday told top US diplomat Antony Blinken that the world's biggest economies should be "partners, not rivals" as the two sides pressed for headway on a range of concerns. Blinken, in China for the second time in less than a year, pointed to improvements in the relationship but urged greater action from Beijing on areas including curbing support for Russia. Meeting Blinken in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, Xi said the two countries had "made some positive progress" since he met with US President Joe Biden in November.

"The two countries should be partners, not rivals," Xi said. But he issued a warning over what China considers US pressure to curb its economy, which has included a sweeping ban on semiconductor exports and efforts to wrest blockbuster app TikTok from its Chinese owners.

"We hope the US can also take a positive view of China's development," Xi said. "When this fundamental problem is solved," he said, "relations can truly stabilize, get better and move forward". Earlier China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned Blinken that US pressure could trigger a "downward spiral". Wang also warned that the question of self-ruled Taiwan was the "first red line" that must not be crossed in China-US relations.

Blinken described his talks with Wang at the Diaoyutai state guesthouse - which lasted more than five and a half hours - "extensive and constructive". He announced that the two countries will in the coming weeks hold their first formal talks on managing artificial intelligence, a rising area of concern as the technology progresses rapidly. But Blinken sounded a warning on China's support for Russia's "brutal war of aggression" in Ukraine, saying that Beijing - while stopping short of direct arms exports - has helped Russia ramp up production of rockets, drones and tanks. Russian President Vladimir Putin said this week he will visit China in May. "Russia

would struggle to sustain its assault on Ukraine without China's support," Blinken said, warning that the United States was ready to take action against Beijing if it does not take action itself. But he said China has been helpful in the past, including in discouraging nuclear weapons use by Russia, and said that Wang promised to stay in touch on the Middle East, a key priority for Washington.

Pointing to China's ties with Iran, whose shadow war with Zionist entity has come into the open, Blinken said: "I think the relationships that China has can be positive in trying to calm tensions, to prevent escalation, avoid the spread of the conflict." US officials and experts believe that Xi's foremost priority is to manage headwinds in the Chinese economy and that, at least in the short term, he is looking to avoid flare-ups with the West.

As he opened the meeting with Wang, Blinken said China and the US should manage the relationship "responsibly" and added: "I hope we make some progress on the issues our presidents agreed" on at the California summit. The two countries should be as "clear as possible about the areas where we have differences - at the very least to avoid misunderstandings, to avoid miscalculations", Blinken said. "That really is a shared responsibility that we have not only for our own people, but for people around the world, given the impact that our relationship has," he said.

Biden, who recently spoke by telephone with Xi, faces a tough re-election fight in November against his predecessor Donald Trump, who has cast China as an enemy and vowed a hard line.

The Biden administration has pointed to wins with China, with Blinken highlighting efforts by China to curb precursor chemicals to fentanyl, the painkiller behind an epidemic in the United States.

He said he urged China to carry out further prosecutions. But while open to cooperation, Biden has increased pressure on China beyond Trump in some areas. In the latest move, the US Congress, with Biden's support, voted to force the divestment of TikTok from Chinese company ByteDance or risk a ban in the United States. Blinken said, however, that TikTok did not come up in his talks. US officials allege security and privacy concerns over the app, which has taken off among US teenagers. ByteDance denies the allegations and has insisted it has no intention of selling. — AFP

Focus must be on cutting emissions, not ending oil: Al-Ghais

VIENNA: The pace at which global energy demand is growing means that alternatives cannot replace oil at the necessary scale, OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al-Ghais said, adding that rather than calling for an end to oil, the focus should be on reducing emissions. A recent report on oil demand by "The Economist" exemplifies a worrying trend of narratives that increasingly use terminology like - the end of oil - while simultaneously underplaying or omitting key details regarding current and future oil demand. Al-Ghais wrote in an article distributed Friday by the OPEC Secretariat. "Such assertions, despite all evidence to the contrary, are all the more dangerous given their potential to foster energy policies that stoke energy chaos. What if investments in supply fall as a result, but demand for oil keeps increasing, as we are seeing today?" he wondered. Although the main goal of the Paris Agreement on climate change is to reduce emissions - not to choose energy sources - it feels like this has been forgotten, replaced by rigid narratives to reduce demand for hydrocarbons without thinking through the effects on energy security, socioeconomic development, or reducing energy poverty, he elaborated.

These kinds of narratives forget that oil continues to be irreplaceable in fostering global prosperity and maintaining energy security. In this respect, Ed Conway, a writer, was not exaggerating in 'Material World' - one of The Economist's best books of 2023 - when stating that the Oil Age - delivered humankind from much of the drudgery of manual labor - lifted incomes around the world - helped us live longer - and provides the chemicals from which we make the fertilizers that keep half the planet alive, the OPEC chief pointed out.

He went to say "it is sometimes easy to forget just how critical oil is to our everyday lives, but without it we would not have gasoline, heating oil, jet fuel, syringes, soap, computers, car tires, contact lenses, artificial limbs, many types of medicine and much more. The fiberglass, resin and plastic needed to construct most wind turbines and the ethylene for solar panels would not exist either".

India's IndiGo to buy 30 A350 planes: Airbus

PARIS: Airbus said Thursday that Indian airline IndiGo had agreed to buy 30 A350 long-range jets as the carrier made its first-ever order for wide-body passenger planes. "Airbus confirms that IndiGo, India's largest airline, has agreed to place an order for 30 Airbus A350-900 aircraft," the European planemaker said in a statement, hailing "an exciting new chapter in our close partnership with IndiGo". The deal, to be signed in the coming days and worth \$9.5 billion at list prices, will also see the Indian low-cost carrier, the country's biggest by market share, place an option to buy 70 additional planes from the A350 family. Deliveries will start from 2027 as IndiGo positions itself as a significant player in the long-haul market.

IndiGo carried 100 million passengers last year, pri-

"The reality is that the end of oil is not in sight. Oil continues to make up almost a third of the global energy mix today and global oil demand continues to rise. Last year, we saw global demand growth of around 2.5mn b/d, and OPEC and many other forecasting agencies see significant growth in the coming years too," Al-Ghais said.

He suggested that oil demand could peak by 2030, or even drop by more than 25 percent over the same time-frame, as some narratives allude to, overlooks what all energy sources can actually deliver and on what timescale, especially as 2030 is less than six years away. OPEC research outlines how detrimental this could be for energy security when noting a staggering oil market deficit of over 16mn b/d between forecast rising global oil demand and supply by 2030 if investments into upstream activities stopped today.



OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al-Ghais.

"We do not believe that this makes for prudent energy-making policy," he noted. Many narratives also fail to mention that scores of initial proposals for ambitious net-zero policies are increasingly being opposed across the world, as people begin to understand the true cost of these policies and their corresponding capabilities, he stated. People want affordable, reliable energy and lower emissions. They want stability. The simple yet crucial fact also sometimes left out of these narratives is that the world needs much more energy, as all sources of energy will be needed simply to meet rising population growth and urbanization, he said. By 2030 alone, over half a billion more people are expected to move into cities across the world as the global economy continues to expand, he said, noting this is the equivalent of approximately 50 new cities the size of London. — KUNA

marily on domestic routes. The A350 planes, with ranges of up to 15,000 kilometers (9,300 miles), will allow it to further expand its network. "This is an exciting new chapter in our close partnership with IndiGo," said Benoit de Saint-Exupery, Airbus' executive vice president for commercial sales.

The order comes 10 months after Airbus and IndiGo agreed at last year's Paris Air Show on the largest civil aviation order ever for single-aisle aircraft, for 500 aircraft from the A320neo family. The list price for that mega deal topped \$55 billion but in reality carriers earn a significant discount. "The airline has revolutionized Indian domestic air travel with the A320neo family by making flying more accessible to more people. With the A350 selection, IndiGo is now embarking on further opening the world to India," de Saint-Exupery said. IndiGo's general director Pieter Elbers said in a statement the deal marked "the next phase of its transformation into one of the major players in global aviation". Overall, IndiGo has placed orders for almost 1,000 aircraft from the A320 family, Airbus's most successful aircraft and rival of the Boeing 737 MAX, which has endured multiple setbacks after a series of safety scares. — AFP

Business

Burgan Bank launches its Investment and Wealth Management Academy

Academy curated and delivered in collaboration with Fitch Learning

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced the launch of an exclusive Investment and Wealth Management Academy, in line with its dedicated human capital strategy. The academy is curated and delivered in collaboration with the world-renowned provider of learning and development solutions Fitch Learning of Fitch Group. The intensive three-week in-house program reinforces the Bank's commitment to advancing the professional calibers of Kuwait. It also confirms Burgan's unwavering efforts to equip its staff with the necessary up-to-date skills and knowledge required to provide its Private Banking and Wealth Management customers with top-notch service.



Fatma Ahmad

Following such achievement, Fatma Ahmad, Learning Acting Senior Manager at Burgan Bank said "On our mission to deliver an unparalleled customer experience and continue to lead with innovation, it is necessary to remain steadfast in our efforts to develop our employees' personal skills and expand their professional knowledge base." She added, "our latest collaboration with Fitch Learning is an extension of our existing employee development program, which is designed to cater to our staff's personal and business needs comprehensively and inclusively. By enrolling our most aspiring employees from across different departments in our latest Investment and Wealth Management program, we guarantee that all departments work in synergy to deliver a holistically impeccable service to our esteemed high-net-worth customers."

Fatma also highlighted the importance of fostering a culture of growth and development in the workplace to attract high-caliber talent who form the basis for Burgan Bank's consistent growth and market-leading success.



During the launch of Burgan Bank's exclusive Investment and Wealth Management Academy.

The new Investment and Wealth Management intensive program is set to be delivered into two batches of employees, whereby each batch consists of 15 employees from across the departments of private banking, corporate banking, retail banking, and operations. Throughout the three-week intensive program, participants will be offered exposure to modules on investment management, including portfolio construction, risk management, asset allocation, and financial analysis. The modules also incorporate a combination of interactive lectures, case studies, and practical exercises that guarantee high engage-

ment from participants.

Upon successful completion of the program, the participants will be eligible to register with the Capital Markets Authority (CMA). As the aim of the program is to develop our staff's investment knowledge with international standards providing them with the necessary tools to deliver the highest quality service to Burgan Bank's Investment and Wealth Management customers. Participants will also receive the International Introduction to Securities and Investment (IISI) certificate awarded by the Chartered Institute for Securities and Investment - London (CISI).

Burgan Bank remains to hold a leading position within the domestic banking sector marked as the employer of choice owing to its progressive human capital development programs, which guarantees consistent growth trajectory for all employees across the Bank's different departments and employment levels. In recognition of these outstanding efforts, Burgan Bank received the Great Place to Work certificate, as well as being listed as one of the Best Workplaces in Kuwait and Asia, and recognition among top best companies and workplaces in Asia 2023.

COP29 host says deal on climate aid essential

BERLIN: The world must agree this year on how to raise billions of dollars to help poorer countries adapt to global warming, the president of the UN climate talks said Thursday. Mukhtar Babayev of Azerbaijan offered little detail about how to broker this deal but said climate finance would be a "pillar" of the COP29 summit in the petro-state in November.

"We know that the world needs to increase the overall flow of climate finance by several multiples... At COP29, we need to agree a new climate financial goal," he told ministers and diplomats at the Petersberg Climate Dialogue in Berlin. Just a small fraction of the money needed to fund clean energy and build resilience to extreme weather in less developed countries is raised each year, eroding much-needed trust in climate negotiations.

The issue has dogged past COPs, with wealthier nations most responsible for planet-heating emissions criticized for not paying their fair share. An earlier promise to raise \$100 billion a year in climate finance was only likely met for the first time in 2022 - two years behind schedule, according to the OECD. But this is far from the estimated \$2.4 trillion annually that developing countries - excluding China - will need to meet their climate and development needs.

Babayev, a former executive of Azerbaijan's national oil giant SOCAR, acknowledged the issue had been one of the thorniest in climate negotiations and "there are strong and well-founded views on all sides". He assured they were listening to the concerns of all parties but stressed there was "no single initiative that will unlock climate finance and deliver the multiples we need".

But he did not outline a detailed timeline, financial



BERLIN: UAE's Special Envoy for Climate Change Sultan Ahmed Al-Jaber (left), Azerbaijan's Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources and COP29 President Mukhtar Babayev (second left), Azerbaijan's President Heydar Aliyev (center), German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (second right) and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (right) are seen at the beginning of the second and last day of the Petersberg Climate Dialogue (Petersberger Klimadialog) meeting in Berlin, Germany on April 26, 2024. — AFP

targets, or other concrete steps that might help overcome the long-running deadlock in the months before COP29. The push for a new pact on finance comes as nations are being urged to make deeper cuts to greenhouse gas emissions, with the world off track to meet the goals of the 2015 Paris agreement.

By early 2025, countries are to explain what steps they are taking in line with the agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level.

More money could allow for more ambitious climate action, and some developing nations want their pledges to be contingent on receiving financial aid. India has proposed that developed countries provide \$1 trillion in climate finance every year from 2025 - 10 times the current target.

But there is also a vigorous debate around who should pay, with some parties calling for China and

other major emerging economies to chip in. Under a UN climate treaty signed in 1992, only a small handful of high-income countries that dominated the global economy at the time were required to pay climate finance. China was not among them, but today it is not only far wealthier but also the world's largest polluter.

"The world has changed, obviously, since 1992," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Thursday. "This is why I strongly urge those who can to join our effort, and particularly the strongest polluters of today, particularly looking also at the G20," she said. Later she said that China, India and Saudi Arabia could be added to the list of donors. But this expansion "risks diluting the historical responsibilities of developed nations", said Harjeet Singh from the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative. — AFP

Italy summons Russia envoy over Ariston arm move

ROME: Italy on Saturday summoned Russia's ambassador after Moscow announced it was putting a subsidiary of Italian heating firm Ariston Thermo Group under the "temporary management" of state energy giant Gazprom.

"The government requests clarification on the matter of the nationalization of the Ariston Thermo Group," Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said on X, formerly Twitter.

He said he had asked the top official in Italy's Foreign Office to summon Russia's ambassador.

"(We are) working also with Brussels, in conjunction with Germany," after Bosch was also targeted, he said. In another post, Tajani said he had spoken with the top managers of Ariston, adding that Rome "stands alongside businesses, ready to protect them in all international markets".

The move was announced in a Russian decree published on Friday - although dated Thursday - and signed by President Vladimir Putin.

It transfers control over 100 percent of the shares in Ariston's Russian companies - Ariston Thermo Rus, owned by Ariston Holding NV and BSH Household Appliances, owned by BSH Hausgerate GmbH - to Gazprom Household Systems, a subsidiary of Gazprom. Since invading Ukraine, Moscow has taken the Russian subsidiaries of a number of Western companies - notably French yoghurt-maker Danone and Danish brewer Carlsberg - under what it calls "temporary management control". It cast the moves as a response to Western sanctions on Russian companies. Western officials and some of the companies have blasted Moscow's "nationalization" of private property. — AFP

Rating agencies doubt France's target to cut debt

PARIS: Two major ratings agencies left their assessment of France's huge debt pile unchanged Friday, but cast doubt on the government's debt reduction target. Moody's maintained France's sovereign rating at "Aa2" with a stable outlook. Fitch, which downgraded its rating for France last year, left it unchanged at "AA-" with a stable outlook.

France's public deficit widened to 5.5 percent of GDP in 2023, overshooting the government's 4.9 percent target. And with the debt stock equal to 110.6 percent of GDP, France has the third highest debt ratio in the European Union after Greece and Italy. The government has set a target of bringing debt below 3.0 percent of GDP by 2027. But both agencies cast doubts.

Moody's said it was "unlikely" that France will hit its deficit target of 2.9 percent in 2027. "Progress in sustainably reducing the budget deficit and government debt is limited," it said in a commentary.

The agency predicted that debt could reach "almost 115 percent of GDP by 2027". "France's interest burden will gradually rise and could double over the next decade if the debt level does not materially decline," it added.

Fitch said "it will be difficult to achieve this target as deficit narrowing measures remain largely unspecified, France has only met the 3 percent defi-



PARIS: This picture taken on January 17, 2012 in Paris shows a close-up of a page of the Ratings agency Fitch website. — AFP

cit criterion in four out of the last 20 years." French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said in a statement that the agencies' decisions should "encourage us to redouble our determination to restore our public finances and meet the objective" of getting debt below 3.0 percent in 2027.

"We will keep to our strategy based on growth and full employment, structural reforms and the reduction of public spending," he added. France lost its triple-A rating in 2012, though double-A still implies only a minimal chance of a default.

"France's ratings are supported by its wealthy and diversified economy with supportive demographic trends," Moody's said. "Structural reforms have started to address credit challenges such as high unemployment and weakening competitiveness." — AFP

US Fed's favored inflation measure accelerates

WASHINGTON: The US central bank's favored measure of inflation accelerated last month, according to government data published Friday, pushing back the chances of an interest rate cut this summer. The hotter print is likely to cement the view that inflation, while down sharply since 2022, remains a challenge, and could keep the Federal Reserve on pause as it seeks to battle rising prices.

It also complicates US president Joe Biden's reelection message as he seeks to convince still-skeptical consumers that the economy is heading in the right direction ahead of November's vote.

The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index rose at an annual rate of 2.7 percent in March, up 0.2 percentage points from a month earlier, the Commerce Department said in a statement.

This was above the median forecast of 2.6 percent in a survey of economists conducted by Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal. Much of the overall annual rise came from the services sector, which increased at an annual rate of 4.0 percent.

Among the more volatile items, energy prices rose by 2.6 percent from a year ago, while food prices were up 1.5 percent. "While inflation has fallen more than 60 percent from its peak, today's report reinforces the importance of our ongoing work to bring costs down," White House national economic

advisor Lael Brainard said in a statement.

On a monthly basis, PCE inflation rose by 0.3 percent, in line with the figure from February, the Commerce Department said. The closely watched "core" measure of inflation, which strips out food and energy costs, rose at an annual rate of 2.8 percent in March, unchanged from a month earlier.

The March data reaffirm the concern among economists that inflation is proving to be more stubborn than previously thought - complicating the Federal Reserve's fight to bring it down firmly to its long-term target of two percent through interest rate hikes. For much of last year, its policy appeared to be working: Inflation came down sharply, even as economic growth and the labor market continued to show signs of resilience. But three months of higher inflation data since the start of the year suggest that fight is not over yet.

"The recent data have clearly not given us greater confidence, and instead indicate that it's likely to take longer than expected to achieve that confidence," Fed Chair Jerome Powell told an event in Washington earlier this month.

As recently as December, futures traders were expecting interest rate cuts to come as early as March, according to data from CME Group. They now assign a probability of more than 60 percent that the first of the Fed's three expected cuts this year will arrive by mid-September. "At next week's May FOMC meeting, we think the Fed will take a wait-and-see approach to cuts while giving policy more time to work," Bank of America wrote in a note to clients on Friday, referring to the Fed's next rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee meeting next week. — AFP

SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2024

Pakistan horror zoo is reborn as rehab center



In this picture a wildlife ranger (left) takes care of a rescued leopard cub at the Margallah Wildlife rescue center, formerly a zoological park, in Islamabad. — AFP photos

Before it was forced to close over its "intolerable" treatment of animals, the Islamabad Zoo was home to neglected elephants and underfed lions pacing back and forth behind the bars of their enclosures. Now, four years later, it is a rehabilitation center for Pakistani wildlife, providing a refuge for motherless leopard cubs, tigers seized from owners who kept them as status symbols, and bears forced to dance - or fight - for the amusement of crowds. "The whole energy of the place has changed ever since the zoo was emptied... The care shows, look around." Rina Saeed, the head of Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB), told AFP.

The zoo found international notoriety in 2016, when the singer Cher launched a campaign to remove its shackled Asian elephant Kaavan, the last in the country and dubbed the world's loneliest elephant. But Kaavan's treatment wasn't an isolated incident - two lions died at the facility when zookeepers attempted to force them from their pen by setting fire to piles of hay. And over the years, hundreds of animals listed on the zoo's inventory simply vanished.

Pakistan's climate change ministry said it was "seriously concerned" about the "intolerable and inhumane" treatment of animals at the zoo in 2020 - the same year the courts ordered it shut and Kaavan was moved to Cambodia. Within months of its closure, a small rescue center began to take root at the facility, and now evidence of its past as a tourist attraction is fading - silence hangs over the empty, overgrown parking lot and the shabby ticket stand sits idle next to a swing set. "Now it is a proper rehabilitation center with over 50 animals," Saeed said, adding that the team had rescued more than 380 animals.

'Unrecognizable'

The IWMB team rescues animals from across the country, recently taking in two indigenous leopard cubs poached from their mother, bears once forced to fight dogs in underground competitions and monkeys made to dance for tips. Amir Khalil, a veterinarian who directs the global animal welfare organization Four Paws, recently made an emotional return to the zoo, saying it "now holds hope". Vets from the Austria-based NGO had come to the center to see after three black bears whose claws had been removed by their previous owners, treating

them in the shadow of an abandoned Ferris wheel in the zoo's former cafe - now a makeshift clinic.

"This place is unrecognizable," Khalil told AFP while inspecting one of the animals, an overweight former dancing bear called Anila. Anila was also suf-

fering from a nose infection from a ring pierced through her snout to help keep her under control. "We hope this place turns out to be a place for animals with a better future," Khalil said. Last year the IWMB seized a tiger cub with broken bones from a vet clinic in an upscale neighborhood in the capital, later relocating the animal to South Africa. Owning a wild cat is a symbol of wealth in Pakistan even though it is illegal in some parts of

the country. "We think animals are toys," said Ali Sakhawat, deputy director of research and planning at the IWMB. The animals brought to the center are not only physically injured but also mentally traumatized. "We keep them occupied to help them erase the memo-

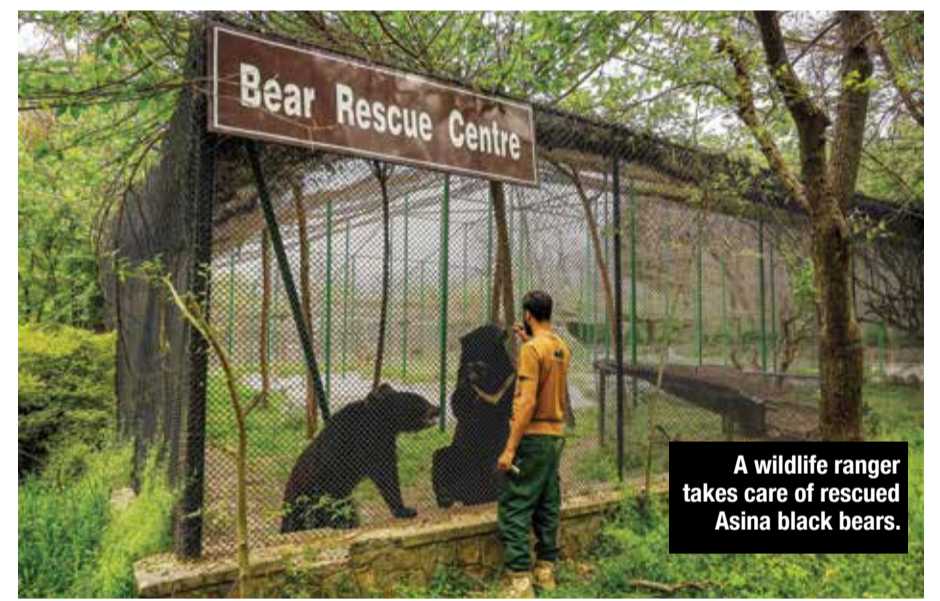
ry of the trauma inflicted by poachers," Aneis Hussan, a wildlife ranger, told AFP as he played with Daboo, one of the rescued black bears. "The bears you've observed here exhibit signs of joy - roaming freely, climbing trees - a stark contrast to the captivity that deprived them of happiness," Hussan added.

welfare - restricting bear baiting - was passed over 20 years ago by President Pervez Musharraf. "No one in the government listens, I have gotten old trying to make them understand how important this is," Safwan Ahmad, vice chairman of the non-profit Pakistan Wildlife Foundation, told AFP. IWMB wants to establish a permanent sanctuary at the site of the rehabilitation center, but the local authority that owns

the land intends to reopen the facility as a public zoo. "There is one (zoo) in almost every city worldwide," said Irfan Khan Niazi of the environmental department of the Capital Development Authority, which oversees planning and development in Islamabad.



A rescued monkey sits inside an enclosure at the Margallah Wildlife rescue center.



A wildlife ranger takes care of rescued Asina black bears.



Members of Four Paws International sit on a vehicle to transport a female bear 'Anila' for a surgery.



A wildlife ranger takes care of a rescued leopard cub.



A rescued leopard cub sits inside an enclosure.

fering from a nose infection from a ring pierced through her snout to help keep her under control. "We hope this place turns out to be a place for animals with a better future," Khalil said. Last year the IWMB seized a tiger cub with broken bones from a vet clinic in an upscale neighborhood in the capital, later relocating the animal to South Africa. Owning a wild cat is a symbol of wealth in Pakistan even though it is illegal in some parts of

Bumpy quest for survival
Wildlife authorities are pushing for

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"Just because rules were not followed once does not mean it would happen again", he added. "No matter how many zoos we make for kids, this won't teach them that animals are to be taken care of," said IWMB's Sakhawat. "Wild animals are to be kept in the wild, not cages", he added. — AFP



Rescued Asian black bears are pictured at an enclosure at the Margallah Wildlife rescue center.



A guide map is pictured.

PALESTINIAN FILM DIRECTOR AIMS FOR 'DIFFERENT IMAGE' OF GAZA

Palestinian director Rashid Masharawi wants to "export a different cinematic image of Gaza", now ravaged by war, as he presides over the jury at the eighth Aswan International Women Film Festival themed on "resistance cinema". Against the backdrop of the war in the Gaza Strip, the festival in southern Egypt decided to screen six Palestinian short films in the competition, which brings together filmmakers from across the region.

This was despite many voices in the Arab world calling for the suspension of all artistic and cultural activities in solidarity with Palestinians. Masharawi is known internationally for being the first Palestinian director to be in the official selection at the Cannes Film Festival when his film "Haifa" was included in 1996.

Born in the Gaza Strip to refugees from the port city of Jaffa, the director now lives in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. He said he "does not consider art and cinema as purely entertainment". "If film festivals do not play their role when major disasters occur, as with what is currently happening in Palestine, then why do they exist?" he asked.



Palestinian film director Rashid Masharawi poses for a photo at the eighth edition of the Aswan International Women Film Festival in Egypt's southern city of Aswan. — AFP

Among the six Palestinian films included at Aswan is the 14-minute documentary film "Threads of Silk" by director Walaa Saadah, who was killed last month in the war. The film looks at the meanings of the embroidery on the Palestinian "thawb" robe.

Another is the five-minute film "I am from Palestine" by the director

Iman al-Dhawahari, about a Palestinian-American girl in the United States who is shocked at school to see a map of the world without her country. The 16-minute documentary film "A Cut Off Future" from director Alia Aroghli discusses the daily experiences of 27 girls between the ages of 11 and 17 in the shadow of the Zionist occupation.

'Films from Distance Zero'

In his newest film, for which work is ongoing, Masharawi said he wanted to expose what he called "the lie of self-defence". "The occupation blew up the studio of an artist in Gaza with paintings and statues. Where is self-defence when one kills artists and intellectuals while calling them terrorists?" the 62-year-old told AFP.

The conflict in Gaza erupted with the unprecedented October 7 Hamas attack on the Zionist entity which resulted in the death of at least 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Zionist figures.

In retaliation, the Zionist launched a bombing campaign and ground offensive in Gaza aimed at destroying Hamas that

has killed at least 34,183 people, the majority women and children. Two months after the beginning of the war, Masharawi began a new project: a support fund for cinema in the besieged coastal strip. The initiative "Films from Distance Zero" supports Gazan filmmakers living "under the bombing or becoming refugees" to produce their films.

Female filmmakers are active in the project, about whom Masharawi said, "always in the most difficult moments, we find the Palestinian woman on the front line." Around 2.4 million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip, which has been under a blockade since Hamas came to power in 2007.

'Doomed to failure'

Theatres in Gaza closed at the end of the 1980s during the Palestinian uprising against the Zionist entity known as the First Intifada, but reopened after the creation of the Palestinian Authority in the 1990s. Hamas control changed all that, with the political Islamist movement considering film contrary to the values of Islam.

Nevertheless, last year an open-air

film festival took place, "taking into account the customs and traditions of the territory," a Hamas official said at the time. For Masharawi, now more than ever, it is necessary to support cinema and have "a different cinematic image of Gaza" reach the world to "make the truth prevail in the face of the lies of the occupation". At the heart of Masharawi's work is identity. "It is difficult for the Zionist entity to occupy our memories, our identities, our music, our history and our culture," he said.

The Zionist entity is wasting a lot of time on a project doomed to failure and which will kill many of us", he said, referring to the war in Gaza.

Masharawi said he thought the solidarity of the Arab public with the Palestinian people, "and I mean the people and not their leaderships," might come "from their powerlessness and the restrictions of their (government) systems." He added, "I used to dream that the Arab governments would be like their people, but I say it clearly: this has not happened, even after we have come to 200 days of war." — AFP

Louvre says Mona Lisa could get a room of her own

The Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci, the world's most famous portrait, could get a room of its own in the Louvre, the museum's president said on Saturday. Such a move would give visitors, many of whom visit the Louvre for the iconic painting alone, a better experience, Laurence des Cars told the France Inter broadcaster.

"It's always frustrating when you don't give visitors the best possible reception, and that is the case for the Mona Lisa," she said. "A better solution seems necessary to me today," she said, adding that the Louvre was in contact with the culture ministry about potential solutions.

The Louvre, the world's most popular museum, welcomed close to nine million visitors in 2023. Des Cars said 80 percent of them - 20,000 people per day -



braved the crowd to catch a glimpse of the Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile, often taking selfies in front of the painting.

The Mona Lisa currently hangs in the Louvre's Salle des Etats (State Room), the museum's biggest, in a protective glass case, but Da Vinci's masterwork is not alone there. It is accompanied by works by 16th-century Venetian masters, and across the room hangs the Louvre's biggest painting, The Wedding at Cana by Paolo Veronese. — AFP

Star K-pop producer causes online stir after lashing out at industry bosses

The creative director behind the girl band NewJeans has found online fame after a tearful, profanity-laced news conference in which she slammed some of K-pop's most powerful executives as "middle-aged jerks". HYBE, the South Korean agency behind K-pop sensation BTS, filed a legal complaint on Thursday against Min Hee-jin, the head of its powerhouse subsidiary label ADOR, for breach of trust in business.

That followed an announcement three days earlier that it had launched an audit of ADOR and demanded that Min resign. HYBE's share price fell close to 10 percent after the audit was announced and closed on Friday down 4.95 percent. Min, 44, hit back in a news conference on Thursday that drew empathy online from young working men and women who compared her story with their own experiences with unreasonable and jealous bosses who either took credit for their work or failed to acknowledge it fairly.

Others, however, said she had acted inappropriately and unprofessionally by occasionally lapsing into profanity.

She denied HYBE's accusations and claimed it was trying to dismiss her unfairly after she accused another of its subsidiaries, BELIFT LAB, of imitating NewJeans with a girl group of its own called ILLIT.

Min, speaking off the cuff and often breaking down in tears, candidly shared her frustrations for more than two hours. She referred to HYBE's leaders, including chairman Bang Si-hyuk, the man behind BTS, as "gaejeossi", which translates roughly to a "middle-aged or old male jerk". "I feel betrayed by HYBE... they used me until I was no longer of use to them," she said.

'Undermined'

The live-streamed event, during which even her lawyers appeared embarrassed, had millions of views and drew an explosive public response.

One parody YouTube video seen by 2.5 million viewers combined a



Members of South Korean K-pop group NewJeans.

clip of Min speaking passionately with hip-hop music. The t-shirt and baseball cap she was wearing sold out on several online platforms and many others said they had suffered similar experiences.

"Women who have truly worked (hard) and experienced being undermined by men, along with the dirty side of office politics, could never speak ill of Min Hee-jin," a South Korean woman said on social media platform X.

But Lee Moon-won, a culture critic who watched the news conference, said Min sidestepped the real allegations against her.

"No figure as influential as Min in the entertainment industry has ever used curse words during an official press conference, people have really never seen anything like it, so this obviously has attracted enormous attention," he told AFP.

'Incompetence and vulgarity'

Min, who joined the industry in the early 2000s, is widely regarded as one of the most successful producers in K-pop, having worked with stars such as Girls' Generation, EXO and SHINee.

NewJeans, a K-pop phenomenon that made its debut in 2022 and whose members are all under 20, is among HYBE's most successful K-pop groups along with BTS.

As one of few successful women producers in the industry, Min has been recognized for her arresting visual imagery on numerous K-pop hits, including Girls' Generation's "Gee" and EXO's "Growl". NewJeans has topped global charts, including the Billboard 200, and broke the Guinness World Record last year for "Fastest K-pop act to reach 1 billion streams on Spotify".

Min said HYBE chairman Bang never congratulated her on NewJeans' debut and that the parent company had given promotional priority to another of its K-pop groups, Le Sserafim. HYBE rejected Min's accusations and urged her again to resign and stop discussing NewJeans.

Some experts criticized both Min and HYBE over a scandal that has gripped much of South Korea. K-pop columnist Isak Choi said those involved showed "incompetence and vulgarity" by not hesitating to publicly display infighting". Just because Min criticized HYBE's leadership, "it doesn't mean she is free from the rotten issues of this industry", Choi wrote on X.

"She cannot become the underdog simply because she is fighting with the management, especially after having gained astronomical benefits from within it." — AFP



Auctioneer Michael Kovacek sells the Gustav Klimt painting "Portrait of Miss Lieser" for 30 million euros during the auction in Vienna. - AFP

Long-lost Klimt portrait auctioned off for 30 million euros

A painting by Gustav Klimt that reappeared after nearly a century sold for 30 million euros (\$32 million) on Wednesday, setting a record price for an Austrian auction despite questions surrounding its provenance. Hong Kong gallery HomeArt snapped up the "Bildnis Fraulein Lieser" ("Portrait of Miss Lieser"), which was commissioned by a wealthy Jewish industrialist's family and painted by the symbolist master Klimt in 1917 shortly before he died. The unfinished portrait of a dark-haired woman was likely last seen at a Viennese exhibition in 1925 until it reemerged this year when Viennese auction house im Kinsky announced its sale.

Im Kinsky had estimated the value at 30-50 million euros but said reports questioning the work's provenance discouraged buyers. "The numerous critical reports that were spread in recent weeks... were unsettling" for buyers, im Kinsky manager Ernst Ploil told reporters after the auction, adding he was "disappointed". Portraits by the Austrian great rarely come onto the open market. Last June, Klimt's "Dame mit Faecher" (Lady with a Fan) was sold in London for £74 million (\$94.3 million at the time), a European art auction record. Previously the highest price paid at auction in Austria was for a work by Flemish painter Frans Francken II, which fetched seven million euros in 2010.

Helene, Annie or Margarethe?

Ahead of the auction, Klimt's well-preserved painting had been put on show in Austria, Britain, Germany, Hong Kong and Switzerland. "No one expected that a painting of this importance, which had

disappeared for 100 years, would reappear," said im Kinsky expert Claudia Moerth-Gasser prior to the auction. Besides "Portrait of Miss Lieser", sketches by Klimt and works by his contemporaries such as Egon Schiele also went under the hammer. The unsigned painting shows a young woman adorned with a large cape richly decorated with flowers on a bright red background. The model, who visited Klimt's studio nine times for the portrait, is known to be from the Lieser family, a Jewish industrial dynasty.

She could be one of the two daughters, named Helene and Annie, of Henriette (Lilly) Lieser, an art patron. But the first catalogue dedicated to Klimt, dating from the 1960s, said it was Lieser's niece, Margarethe. Lilly Lieser remained in Vienna despite the Nazi takeover, was deported in 1942 and murdered in the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1943.

Before her death, Lieser is thought to have entrusted the painting to a member of her staff, Austrian daily Der Standard reported, based on correspondence in an Austrian museum. It then turned up in the possession of a Nazi trader, whose daughter inherited it and in turn left it to distant relatives after her death. Im Kinsky, which specializes in restitution procedures, insists it has found no evidence that the work was stolen or unlawfully seized. The back of the painting is "completely untouched" and has "no stamps, no stickers, nothing" which would indicate it was seized or left Austria, according to the auction house. Moreover, none of the Lieser descendants who survived the war claimed the painting. — AFP



Photos show hippos stuck in a dried up channel near the Nkaraga village in the Okavango Delta on the outskirts of Maun. — AFP

Herds of endangered hippos trapped in mud in drought-hit Botswana

Herds of endangered hippos stuck in the mud of dried-up ponds are in danger of dying in drought-struck Botswana, conservation authorities told AFP. Southern Africa has been affected by severe drought, caused by the El Nino weather phenomenon, which has threatened harvests and plunged millions into hunger. Several countries in the region have recently declared a state of national disaster. Near the vast wet-

lands of the Okavango Delta in northern Botswana, the dried-up Thamalakane River has forced herds of hippos to head for natural water reserves close to the tourist town of Maun.

"The river system dries up and animals are in a compromised situation," said Lesego Moseki, spokesperson for Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) in Botswana's capital Gaborone. Botswana is home to one of the world's largest populations of hippos living in the wild, estimated at between 2,000 and 4,000 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

"The riverine vegetation is poor and the hippo in Ngamiland (northwestern district) depends on the water flowing

through the Okavango Delta systems," Moseki added. They were still looking into the how many hippos had died in the pools, he said. Hippos have thick but sensitive skin, meaning they need to bathe regularly to avoid sunburn and usually live in humid areas.

Without water, they can become aggressive and approach villages. Local authorities are calling for hippos to be relocated to reserves to avoid conflict with humans. El Nino is a naturally occurring climate pattern typically associated with increased heat worldwide, leading to drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains elsewhere. — AFP

Lifestyle



Saudi model Romy Al-Qahtani poses for pictures during an interview with AFP at her home in Riyadh. — AFP photos



SAUDI COULD GET FIRST MISS UNIVERSE CONTESTANT THIS YEAR

Saudi Arabia could have its first Miss Universe contestant this year, organizers said this week, after a fashion model and influencer claimed she had been selected.

The Miss Universe Organization "is currently undergoing a rigorous vetting process qualifying a potential candidate to be awarded the Saudi Arabia franchise", Maria Jose Unda, the organization's coordinator of international relations, said in a statement to AFP.

"We'll have a decision on the National Director for Saudi Arabia very, very soon," she said, noting it was "possible" for Saudi Arabia to have a contestant in place before the next edition of the competition, scheduled for September in Mexico.

The statement came after Saudi model Romy Al-Qahtani created a

buzz online in late March when she posted to her hundreds of thousands of Instagram followers that she was "honoured" to represent Saudi Arabia at Miss Universe at the upcoming event.

The post included pictures of Qahtani, a 27-year-old native of Riyadh, in a sequined dress holding the green Saudi flag. Less than a week later, Miss Universe issued a statement referring to Qahtani's post as "false and misleading" and saying no selection process had been carried out in the Gulf kingdom.

'Negative comments'

Speaking at the Riyadh home she shares with her mother and three sisters, Qahtani maintained she was in "negotiations" about participation in Miss Universe but declined to provide

further details.

"I have been contacted from the Miss Universe committee to represent Saudi Arabia. Negotiations started but it was during the month of Ramadan and I wasn't able to respond," she told AFP in her first interview since her March Instagram post went viral.

"We are still negotiating, and hopefully it will result in a happy ending."

Maria Jose Unda, the Miss Universe official, said the procedure calls for a national director to hold a Miss Universe Saudi Arabia pageant to choose a delegate to send to Mexico.

"We ignore the reason why (Qahtani) announced her candidacy, but if she wants to participate in the Saudi Arabia pageant, she will have to go through the same selection process as every other candidate," she said.

Qahtani told AFP she had previously participated in various pageants in the Middle East and Europe and posed with several sashes she said she obtained at the competitions.

She described fielding a host of unexpected questions about Saudi Arabia during her bid to take the beauty pageant world by storm, including one from a fellow contestant in Europe who wanted to know if she kept barrels of crude oil stored in her house.

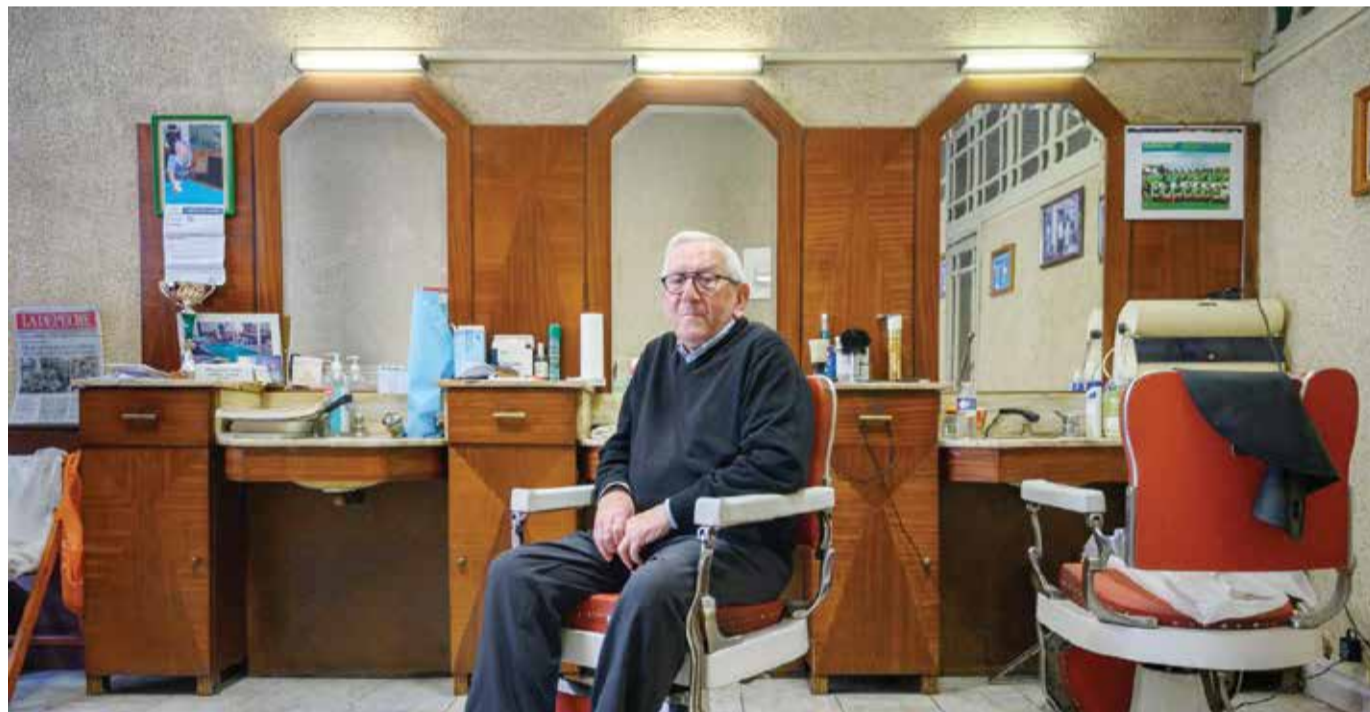
All the while she has tried to manage the potential backlash back home, including from more conservative Saudis who object to her clothing or her decision to pose on Instagram last year wrapped in the Saudi flag. "There were some negative comments about the way I dress and when I pictured myself with the flag wearing what people con-

sidered immodest clothing," she said.

She added, though, that she had no regrets. "Many sports supporters picture themselves with the flag the same way I did," she said. "In beauty pageants also, each girl carries her own country's flag, so I didn't mean anything offensive at all."

Fawzia Ayed, Romy's mother, told AFP that she hoped her daughter would persevere despite the criticism.

"I always tell her to carry on, and that she has come a long way for a Saudi girl. Before, (society) was closed and strict," she said. "Romy has encouraged a lot of girls. I see that many contact her and ask her how she has reached this level, and that they would like also to participate." — AFP



Hairdresser Roger Amilhastre, 90, poses for a photo in his hair salon, "Achille coiffure masculin".



Hairdresser Roger Amilhastre trims the moustache of Yves Desdoit at his hair salon.



Hairdresser Roger Amilhastre (center), 90, holds a pair of scissors in his salon.

French barber still trimming at 90

French barber Roger Amilhastre, 90, could have hung up his clippers decades ago but he said his passion for hair gives him a reason to get up in the morning. "I love this job, it's in my bones," he said, leaning on one of his cast-iron barber's chairs from the 1940s. "And despite my age, my hands still don't shake." Even with arthritis, he is on his feet from Tuesday to Saturday, tending to his customers' hair and beards in his shop in the small southern town of Saint-Girons in the foothills of the Pyrenees. "I would have liked to retire at 60, but my wife was sick and I needed to pay for the care home," he said, which cost more than 2,000 euros (\$2,150) a month.

Even after his wife died in January, he kept going to work to stave off the sad thoughts. "I'm not grumpy getting up" to go to work, he said. France's national hairdressers' union believes Amilhastre may be France's oldest active barber. "We have a few who continue late in life, but 90 years old is exceptional," union president Christophe Dore told AFP. "I'm not sure if he is France's oldest barber, but if not, he can't be far off," he added.

Decades of hairstyles

According to the national statistics institute INSEE, a little more than half a million people over 65 still work in France. In the southern region of Occitanie, where Amilhastre lives, only 1.65 percent of people older than 70 years old still work, including 190 79-year-olds. But statistics do not go beyond that age.

Many of Amilhastre's customers call him Achille, after his father who founded the barber's shop in 1932, giving it his name and then teaching his son the profession. The shop witnessed the German occupation of France during World War II. "During the war, German police came to find my father to groom a captain who had broken his leg," Amilhastre said.

German troops had taken over a large stately home in town called Beaugard. "We were scared because they used to say that anyone who went up to Beaugard never came back," he said.

"Luckily he did."

The 90-year-old said he remembered a "tough period" for businesses when he first picked up the scissors in



Hairdresser Roger Amilhastre points to an early photo of his father and himself posing in front of the "Achille coiffure" hair salon.

1947 a few years after the war ended.

But then the town rebounded, he said, with its men following a flurry of new hair trends from greased back quiffs in the 1950s to 1970s bowl cuts.

The barber's shop survived an economic downturn as local paper mills closed in the 1980s sparking mass layoffs, and supermarkets pushed small shops out of business. "People started looking for work further afield, so we had to adapt and stay open later in the evening," Amilhastre said.

'Friendship'

That same decade, the AIDS epidemic sent customers into a worried frenzy. "People were scared. They no longer asked to be shaved and when we did, we were petrified there'd be a cut, that someone would bleed and the virus would be passed on to the next customer," he said. Jean-Louis Surre, 67, runs the nearby cafe where Amilhastre once taught him to play billiards as a young boy.

Behind his bar, Surre said he still remembered his mother taking him across the road to see Amilhastre for a haircut every month as a child. "He'd pump up the chair to reach the mirror, use his clippers and then at the end perfume you with some cologne - you know, squeezing those little pumps," he said.

He is one of several old-timers to regularly drop by Achille's - even just to read the newspaper or have a chat. Inside the barber's, Jean Laffitte, a balding 84-year-old, said he no longer really needed a haircut. "With what little is left up there, these days I come out of friendship," he said. — AFP

Japan town to block Mount Fuji view from troublesome tourists

A huge black barrier to block Mount Fuji from view will be installed in a popular photo spot by Japanese authorities exasperated by crowds of badly behaved foreign tourists. Construction of the mesh net - 2.5 metres (8 feet) high and the length of a cricket pitch at 20 metres - will begin as early as next week, an official from Fujikawaguchiko town said Friday.

"It's regrettable we have to do this, because of some tourists who can't respect rules," leaving litter behind and ignoring traffic regulations, he told AFP. It is the latest direct action in Japan against overtourism after residents of Kyoto's geisha district banned visitors from small private alleys this year.

Record numbers of overseas tourists are travelling to the country, where monthly visitors exceeded three million in March for the first time ever. Mount Fuji, Japan's highest mountain, can be photographed from many spots in the resort town of Fujikawaguchiko. But this viewpoint is particularly popular because the majestic volcano appears behind a Lawson convenience store, which are ubiquitous in Japan.

Due to this visual juxtaposition, "a reputation has spread on social media that this spot is very Japanese, making it a popular photo location," said the town official who declined to be named. The mostly non-Japanese tourists are overcrowding a stretch of pavement next to the Lawson shop, he said.

After traffic signs and repeated warnings from security guards fell on deaf ears, the town in Yamanashi region decided on the huge screen as a last resort. The measure is also meant to protect a nearby dental clinic against the onslaught of tourists.

They sometimes park there without permission and have even been seen climbing on the roof of the clinic to get the perfect shot, the official said. The town wishes it hadn't come down to this, he said, adding that the current plan is for the screen to be maintained until the situation improves.

Tourism to Japan has been booming since pandemic-era border restrictions were lifted, and the government has been working hard to boost visitor numbers. But this has not been universally welcomed - including in Kyoto where locals have complained of snap-happy tourists harassing the city's immaculately dressed geisha.

And this summer, hikers using the most popular route to climb Mount Fuji will be charged \$13 each, with numbers capped to ease congestion. Other top destinations worldwide are also struggling with visitor numbers, and on Thursday Venice began charging day-trippers for entry to tackle mass tourism. — AFP



Hairdresser Roger Amilhastre cuts the hair of Yves Desdoit.



Hairdresser Roger Amilhastre (center), 90, prepares to cut the hair of Yves Desdoit at his hair salon, "Achille coiffure masculin", in the town of Saint-Girons, southwestern France. — AFP photos

Sports

'Ballistic' Bairstow stars as Punjab pull off record chase

Punjab registered only their third win from nine games and moved to eighth spot



KOLKATA: Punjab Kings' Jonny Bairstow plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Punjab Kings at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. — AFP

KOLKATA: Jonny Bairstow smashed a "ballistic" unbeaten century as Punjab Kings recorded the highest successful run chase in Twenty20 cricket with an eight-wicket thrashing of Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League on Friday.

The England star clobbered nine sixes and eight fours in his 48-ball 108 to help Punjab overhaul Kolkata's 261-6 with eight balls to spare in hot and humid conditions at the Eden Gardens. "We got off to a good start and that was key. They got off to a flier themselves so we knew we had to go ballistic in the powerplay," said Bairstow, named player of the match.

"When you've to chase 200-plus you've to take risks in the powerplay. Try and whack it as hard as possible," Shashank Singh also impressed with the bat, making 68 not out off 28 balls with eight sixes and two fours.

The previous highest run chase in T20 history was scripted by South Africa who overhauled 258-5 made by the West Indies in 2023. "Shashank has done it all season, a lovely guy and special player. To have someone like him coming in and do that is unbelievable," added Bairstow.

The match also saw the batsmen club 42 sixes – the most ever hit in a T20 game.

'Cricket turned to baseball'

"Cricket has turned to baseball hasn't it?" said Punjab captain Sam Curran. "Guys can hit balls for long periods of time, the coaches, training, the dew, dot balls become wide after reviews and you get the extra ball. Stats are going out of the window."

He added: "Really pleased for Jonny, he's been on tour for a long time and was eager to score. Shashank, he was promoted to number four, he's been our find of the season." Kolkata skipper Shreyas Iyer said his team will learn from the defeat. "Both teams played tremendously. You have to go back to the drawing board and see where you went wrong," said Iyer.

"Not defending hurts but it's a great lesson for the players." Punjab registered only their third win from nine games and moved to eighth spot in the 10-team competition. Kolkata, with five wins from eight games, remain in second place.

"From the dugout, I was watching the wicket. I felt the ball was coming on with good bounce," said Sha-

shank. "This match, the way Jonny batted was a huge positive. It was a great learning for me, we still have five more matches to go."

Opening the Punjab innings, Bairstow put on 93 runs with impact sub Prabhshimran Singh (54) and another 85 runs with South Africa's Rilee Rossouw (26). Prabhshimran was run out by a direct throw from Sunil Narine who also chipped in with the wicket of Rossouw in the 13th over.

Despite the two dismissals, Shashank continued to unleash big shots, making sure Punjab did not lose their nerve while chasing the big total. Earlier, Kolkata got off to a blistering start with Phil Salt and Narine sharing 138 runs off just 69 balls for the first wicket after being put in to bat.

Narine, dropped on 16, hammered four sixes and nine fours in his 32-ball 71 before holing out to Bairstow off leg spinner Rahul Chahar. England's Curran dismissed Salt who hit a 37-ball 75 studded with six sixes and six fours after being dropped twice by sloppy Punjab fielders. Venkatesh Iyer chipped in with a cameo 39-run knock as Kolkata posted the highest IPL total ever at the Eden Gardens. — AFP

Duplantis sails to victory in Suzhou, Simbine wins

SUZHOU: Sweden's Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis dominated the men's pole vault at the Suzhou Diamond League meeting on Saturday, going close to bettering his own world record set last week. The reigning Olympic champion, who cleared 6.24 metres in Xiamen for his eighth world record mark, wrapped up the win in Suzhou with a meet record of 6.00 metres. The bar was immediately raised to 6.25m, but it proved too much for the US-born Duplantis, who failed three times at the height, albeit going close on his final effort. "There's always a little bit of a crash after a huge performance like that, like I had last week, but I still felt good today, of course," Duplantis said.

"I knew I was going to have to push a little bit harder, it wasn't going to come as natural as last week because that's just kind of the nature of how it feels. "I felt a little bit flat today, but still really good. I just feel that conditions have to be perfect for me to jump a world record and I wasn't quite feeling it off the runway tonight," he said.

World 100m champion Sha'Carri Richardson suffered another upset in the women's 200m, with the American coming in third at 23.11 seconds behind Briton Daryll Neita's winning 22.62 and the USA's Anavia Battle's 22.99. "I came here praying and hoping for the win," said Neita after launching her season heading into the Paris Olympics.

"To come out here and win it, in a decent time, in such a strong field, I feel really confident going forward." South Africa's Akani Simbine won the men's 100



SUZHOU: (L-R) Jamaica's Hansle Parchment, USA's Daniel Roberts and Japan's Shunsuke Izumiya compete in the men's 110m hurdles during the IAAF Diamond League athletics meeting in Suzhou on April 27, 2024. — AFP

metres in 10.01sec ahead of American Christian Coleman. "I expected a better performance but I am fine with today's result which I achieved my SB today," said newly-crowned world indoor 60m champion Coleman, who won the blue riband event in Xiamen. "I am prepared for the Olympics Games. I'm going to keep training and improving in the upcoming months."

Simbine added: "With Coleman, you just need to know that he's going to come out, (you have to) just stick to the arranged plan, focus on your own race."

pounced. With three laps left Marquez hit a damp patch and slid off. He remounted to finish seventh. "I had a good start but then I saw Marquez was coming even though I was pushing a lot, a lot, a lot," said Martin.

'Did not matter'

"Marc overtook me because I made a mistake on corner seven. Then I tried to push him and he made a mistake." Acosta, who started on the fourth row on his GasGas, came through to take second. Martin went to 92 points in the standings, 29 clear of Acosta who took over second, four points ahead of Italian Enea Bastianini of Ducati who did not finish.

Spaniard Maverick Vinales, a double winner in Austin last time, is fourth after he too fell on his Aprilia. Acosta, who appeared surprised when told he was second overall, said it "did not matter". "We know we have the pace, but it was quite tough starting from 10th after the crash in qualifying," said the 19-year-old. "With the mixed conditions it was not easy. The wet patches were quite wet and it was easy to lose the rear tyre. It happened that I touched a wet patch and went wide."

Yamaha's Quartararo, who had started 23rd out of 25 riders, held off a late challenge from Spanish veteran Dani Pedrosa on a KTM to complete the podium. "Starting from P23 it was a great race," said Quartararo, world champion in 2021. "The track was really tricky. Of course, a lot of crashes in front but I managed to get the first podium of the year on the sprint." Martin said he hoped the track would be easier for Sunday's main race. "Tomorrow in dry conditions it will be a different story," he said. — AFP

Fred Kerley, the 2022 world champion and Olympic silver medalist, rounded out the podium in 10.11sec.

Nigeria's world record holder Tobi Amusan was disqualified from the women's 100m hurdles after a false start, with Olympic champion Jasmine Camacho-Quinn of Puerto Rico awarded first place in 12.63sec in a photo finish.

Ethiopia's Mekedes Alemeshete claimed victory in the women's 5,000m and took the world lead with a new personal best of 14:36.70. — AFP

Jorge Martin wins crash-filled sprint at Spain MotoGP

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA: Jorge Martin extended his lead in the MotoGP standings as he won the Spanish Grand Prix sprint in Jerez on Saturday after Marc Marquez crashed out while leading late in the race.

Teenager Pedro Acosta was runner up to take second in the championship race with former world champion Fabio Quartararo third as nine riders failed to finish. All three podium finishers described the track, dappled with damp after morning rain, as tricky. "A difficult race, the track conditions were super hard," said Martin in his on-track interview. Marquez, with his first pole since joining Ducati Gresini, and Martin started on the front row, but South African Brad Binder shot off from the second row to grab the lead on his KTM.

Spaniard Martin, on a Ducati-Pramac, overtook on lap two and pulled away from the chaotic battle behind him as riders kept tumbling. Two-time defending champion Francesco Bagnaia went down on lap three. Binder squeezed past on the inside, forcing the Italian into another bike. Bagnaia's Ducati went flying, out of the race and out of the points.

Martin built a comfortable lead but Marquez was the fastest bike on the course and closed in. Under pressure, Martin made a mistake on lap seven and Marquez



Brendan Steele

Steele takes charge in LIV Adelaide as champions loom

ADELAIDE: Three-time PGA Tour champion Brendan Steele seized a one shot lead Saturday to take into the final round at LIV Golf's Adelaide stop, but a slew of major winners are within striking distance. The American nailed nine birdies to one bogey in an eight-under-par 64 at the Grange Golf Club to edge clear of New Zealander Danny Lee, who carded a 67.

Mexico's Carlos Ortiz and Chile's Mito Pereira were a shot further back. "I was hitting it really well today," said Steele, who is 14-under after 36 holes and looking to better his best result on the Saudi-backed tour—third place in Tuscon last year.

"There's a lot of birdies out there and it's kind of going to be a race to 20-under I think," he added of the potential winning total. "For me personally, I just want to go and play as freely as I can. I've been doing that well over the last few days and if I can do it for one more day then I can have a good chance."

Once again, bumper crowds produced a carnival atmosphere at the fledgling circuit's most successful event and Steele said he thrived on it. "This crowd is incredible, it's so big, it's so supportive, which I find fantastic," he said. Steele heads into the final day with a stacked chasing pack, including two major winners three shots behind and four more within six of the lead. Among them is Australia's 2022 British Open champion Cameron Smith, who would like nothing more than to take out the title on home turf.

He was followed by big crowds and kept them happy with a blemish-free 65 to be three adrift alongside former Masters winner Patrick Reed. "It's starting to feel better, there were some changes there that needed to be made," he said of his work off the tee, which was a highlight of his round. — AFP

Olympic chief Bach backs doping body over Chinese tests

LAUSANNE: The head of the International Olympic Committee Thomas Bach has backed the World Anti-Doping Agency in a row over its handling of positive drug tests by 23 Chinese swimmers. "We have full confidence in WADA and the regulations and that WADA have followed their regulations," Bach told AFP in an exclusive interview Friday at the committee's headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland.

WADA has faced criticism since media reports last weekend revealed that the Chinese swimmers tested positive for heart drug trimetazidine (TMZ) - which can enhance performance - ahead of the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. The swimmers were not suspended or sanctioned after WADA accepted the explanation of Chinese authorities that the results were caused by food contamination at a hotel where they had stayed. The head of the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), Travis Tygart, has called the situation a "potential cover-up" with the positive tests never made public at the time. Bach stressed that WADA was run independently, despite being funded by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and he said he had learned of the positive tests via the media. The IOC was awaiting the results of a new investigation ordered by WADA on Thursday, but Bach said the Chinese swimmers could compete at the Paris Olympics this year if cleared. "If the procedures are followed, there is no reason for them not to be there," the 70-year-old former German fencer added.

'Iconic' Paris

The Paris Games are set to be important to "revive the Olympic spirit" after the last COVID-affected edition in Tokyo in 2021 saw sport play out in empty stadiums, Bach said. The hugely ambitious opening ceremony being planned by French organizers remains one of the biggest doubts, with infrastructure for the Games either already built or on track. Instead of a traditional parade through the athletics stadium on the first night, teams are set to sail down the Seine on a flotilla of river boats in front of up to 500,000 spectators. Worries about a terror attack have led to persistent speculation that the ceremony might need to be scrapped or scaled back dramatically.

"The very meticulous, very professional approach (from French authorities) gives us all the confidence that we can have this opening ceremony on the river Seine and that this opening ceremony will be iconic, will be unforgettable for the athletes, and everybody will be safe and secure," Bach said.

Recent grumbling from Paris residents and negative media reports were typical of the run-up to any Olympics, he said, and also a symptom of broader anxiety. "It's part of our zeitgeist because we are living in uncertain times. And there are people who are skeptical. Some are even scared. Some are worried about their future," the IOC president said.

Diplomatic tightrope

As with previous Olympics, international politics and diplomacy are set to intrude on the world's biggest sporting event. Bach reiterated his support for the IOC's policy of excluding Russia from the Paris Games over the "blatant violation" of the Olympic charter when it annexed Ukrainian sporting organizations. A small number of Russian athletes will be able to compete as neutrals in Paris, providing they have not declared public support for the invasion of Ukraine or are associated with the security forces. Any Russian athlete that expressed political views on the field of play, including the "Z" sign that has come to symbolize Russian President Vladimir Putin's war, could be excluded. "Immediately a disciplinary procedure would be opened and the necessary measures and or sanctions be taken," Bach said, adding: "This can go up to immediate exclusion from the Games." Addressing Zionist's military campaign in Gaza, he said between six and eight Palestinian athletes were expected to compete in Paris, with some set to be invited by the IOC even if they fail to qualify.

Bach dismissed any suggestion that the IOC had treated Russia differently over its invasion of Ukraine compared with Zionist entity and its war in Gaza. "The situation between Zionist entity and Palestine is completely different," he said. He said he had been even-handed in his public statements on Ukraine, the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 and the subsequent Zionist invasion of Gaza. — AFP



JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA: Ducati Spanish rider Jorge Martin celebrates after winning the Sprint race of the MotoGP Spanish Grand Prix at the Jerez racetrack in Jerez de la Frontera on April 27, 2024. — AFP

Sports

Guler stretches Madrid's vast Liga lead at Real Sociedad

Barcelona face Valencia on Monday in La Liga

SAN SEBASTIAN: Turkish teenager Arda Guler's strike helped Real Madrid close in on the Spanish title with a 1-0 win at Real Sociedad on Friday, moving 14 points clear at the top of La Liga. After last weekend's Clasico win over second place Barcelona it appears a formality for Madrid to take the title back from their arch-rivals, and Guler helped them move one step closer. The playmaker, 19, has endured an injury-hit season but on his first league start snatched a heavily rotated Madrid side a tight victory at the Reale Arena. Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti rested virtually his entire first choice team with Tuesday's Champions League semi-final visit to face Bayern Munich in mind.

Top scorer Jude Bellingham was on the bench after recovering from a stomach problem to earn a late addition to the squad list, alongside Vinicius Junior, Toni Kroos and various other stars. As a result Madrid conjured little in attack beyond Guler's goal, with the hosts, sixth, on top in driving San Sebastian rain.

"Arda scored a goal, Arda will be an important player for us in the future, there's no doubt he'll be here next year," Ancelotti told reporters, also praising his team's commitment despite the rotations. "It was quite clear that everyone thought we were coming here for a stroll, the only ones who didn't think so were the players," he continued.

"I am proud of the players because they had the desire and will to keep winning... I have to thank them because from that point of view, they were spectacular." Madrid goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga, on loan from Chelsea, pushed away a Takefusa Kubo effort as La Real continued to probe.

Ancelotti also gave defender Eder Militao his first

start after his long-term knee injury. The Brazilian looked uncertain but Real Sociedad could not capitalize, with Benat Turrientes firing narrowly over. Despite previously failing to generate openings of their own, Madrid took the lead in the 29th minute.

Aurelien Tchouameni swept the ball out to Dani Carvajal on the right, who stroked a low ball across the area. It was a perfectly placed pass by the Spain international - playing seemingly only as he is suspended for the visit to Munich - and Guler arrived in the right place at the right time to finish.

'Sleeping'

Kubo thought he had pulled Real Sociedad level against his former side before the break when he beat Militao and slotted home, but Ander Barrenetxea was penalised for a foul on Tchouameni in the build-up. "Barrene went to steal the ball and the only thing I can say is that the player who loses it was sleeping," Kubo told Movistar.

Arrizabalaga pushed a Turrientes effort wide in the second half and Ancelotti called on the cavalry for the final 25 minutes, sending Vinicius Junior and Fede Valverde into the fray. Another substitute, Antonio Rudiger, made a vital block on an attempted Oyarzabal dink to deflect the forward's effort behind for a corner.

Alex Remiro made a fine save to deny Eduardo Camavinga late on as the reinforced visitors took control in five minutes of added time to see out the win. The match was brought forward to Friday from Saturday at little more than a week's notice, to help Madrid prepare for their Champions League match at Bayern.



SAN SEBASTIAN: Real Madrid's Turkish midfielder #24 Arda Guler celebrates scoring his team's first goal during the Spanish league football match between Real Sociedad and Real Real Madrid CF at the Anoeta stadium in San Sebastian. — AFP

"It's a pity, whoever watched the game knew that we deserved to win," added Kubo. "It's a pity for the fans, because of the rain, the change of schedule... all that rubbish." Barcelona face Valencia on Monday in La Liga but the Catalans have

all but thrown in the towel in the title race. Madrid's performance was decidedly forgettable but they are eyeing a league and Champions League double for the fifth time in their history - and that would be something to remember. — AFP

Leicester promoted to Premier League as Leeds crash

LONDON: Leicester City were promoted to the Premier League on Friday after rivals Leeds United crashed to a shock 4-0 defeat at Queens Park Rangers. The result leaves Leicester top of the Championship with 94 points with two games to play while Leeds stay second on 90 but with just one match left.

Third-place Ipswich Town can pip Leeds to the second automatic promotion place as they currently have 89 points with three matches still to play. "It's not in our hands anymore (automatic promotion), we need to be honest," Leeds boss Daniel Farke told the BBC. "The race is not over, if Ipswich win the next two games then I will say congratulations but if they don't win them then we will have a lot to play for (against Southampton on the final day of the season). "As long as we have a chance, I'm far away from giving up."

Enzo Maresca's Foxes achieved promotion at the first time of asking having been relegated from the Premier League last season. Their final two games begin with a trip to Preston on Monday, before they round off the season with a home finale against Blackburn on May 4. Leeds will find themselves outside the top two if Ipswich beat Hull on Saturday or Coventry in their game in hand on Tuesday. Should Ipswich win both, they will be promoted while Leeds will have to enter the play-offs.

"Congratulations to QPR and congratulations to Leicester," added Farke. "In the first 20 minutes we didn't do the basics and QPR used this in an effective way to be 2-0 up." Leicester were shock Premier League champions in 2016 but were relegated with Leeds and Southampton last season.

The Foxes were cruising towards promotion back in February when they were 12 points clear at the



LONDON: Liverpool's Dutch defender #04 Virgil van Dijk (R) vies with West Ham United's English striker #20 Jarrod Bowen (C) during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Liverpool at the London Stadium, in London. — AFP

top and had a 14-point cushion to third spot. On Tuesday, they faced fellow promotion hopefuls Southampton after losing six of their previous 11 games. However, they demolished the Saints 5-0 thanks to a Issahaky Fatawu hat-trick and goals from Wilfred Ndidi and evergreen striker Jamie Vardy. That resounding victory put them on the brink of a Premier League return.

Joy at promotion will be tempered to a degree after they were charged in March by the Premier League for alleged breaches of profit and sustainability rules (PSR) relating to their last three years in the top flight.

If found guilty, Leicester could start life back in the top flight with a points deduction. Meanwhile, goals

from Ilias Chair, Lucas Andersen, Lyndon Dykes and Sam Field gave QPR their deserved victory over Leeds and guaranteed their survival in England's second-tier.

QPR were second from bottom of the Championship when Marti Cifuentes took over from Gareth Ainsworth in October. "It was a fantastic evening. We worked really hard to get this type of performance," said Cifuentes.

"All the way we have been showing resilience mentally. The whole club felt we were in a huge challenge but we were all together. "I'm very happy for the players, the fans and the club. It was a difficult task but we managed to get the great escape." — AFP

Liverpool reach agreement for new manager

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool reached an agreement with Feyenoord on Friday for Arne Slot to succeed Jurgen Klopp as manager, British media reported. The Press Association said that a compensation package for the 45-year-old, who had two years left on his contract, has now been agreed. The BBC claimed that the deal is worth up to £9.4 million (10.9 million euros). Slot had said Thursday that he was "confident" of landing the Anfield job. "I would like to go to Liverpool. Now I'm waiting to see whether the clubs reach an agreement. I'm very confident in that," he told reporters.

Slot moved to Feyenoord in 2021 after impressing in his first managerial role at AZ Alkmaar. He led the Dutch giants to the inaugural Europa Conference League final at the end of his first season, in which they narrowly lost 1-0 to Jose Mourinho's Roma.

Slot then delivered just a second league title in 24 years to De Kuip last season before penning a new three-year deal. Klopp will step down at the end of this season after a nine-year reign which brought the Champions League title in 2019 and Premier League trophy a year later. "I like the way his team plays football. If he is the one, I like that a lot. So good coach, good guy. Looking forward for the club, if he is the solution, if he is the man, I'm more than happy. "It's the best job in the world, best club in the world. Great job, great team, fantastic people. A really interesting job." Feyenoord are currently second in the Eredivisie table, with PSV Eindhoven nine points clear at the top. Failing to win the Dutch title would be a disappointment for Slot, mirroring Klopp's frustration at Liverpool's own faltering title bid. Liverpool are in third place in the Premier League, three points behind leaders Arsenal and two adrift of second-placed Manchester City. — AFP

Arteta wants Arsenal to 'raise the bar' in Spurs showdown

LONDON: Mikel Arteta has urged Arsenal to "raise the bar" as the Premier League leaders prepare for a defining moment in the title race against north London rivals Tottenham. Arteta's side make the short journey to Spurs on Sunday looking to keep title rivals Manchester City at bay with a vital victory.

The Gunners are one point clear of second-placed City, who have a game in hand, and will kick off at Nottingham Forest soon after the final whistle in north London. After a damaging home defeat against Aston Villa, Arteta's team have bounced back by winning at Wolves and crushing Chelsea 5-0 on Tuesday. But the Arsenal boss is well aware of the threat posed by fifth-placed Tottenham, who drew 2-2 at the Emirates Stadium in September, and he called on his players to find another gear this weekend. "Enjoy the moment, try to navigate things to a natural way. Tottenham are super-competitive at the moment. There is one thing to do in this situation, compete, compete, compete," Arteta told reporters on Friday.

"It's a really good sign because we know what we are going to have to do to win it and we have to raise the bar to match that." City responded to Arsenal's emphatic win against Chelsea by crushing Brighton 4-0 on Thursday.

Pep Guardiola's side will be crowned champions for an unprecedented fourth successive season if they win their last five games. But Arteta is not concerned about his former club's results, preferring to ensure his team are focused on their own performances.

"It's another game that they managed to win in a convincing way, something that we cannot control. Let's do what we have to do," he said. "You have to show it every season, every game and in this league that's extremely difficult to do."

"We are going to do everything we can to win it and if we do win it, we are going to try to win it again. If we don't, for sure we will try again." Arsenal are hoping to win the title for the first time in 20 years after blowing an eight-point lead to gift City the trophy last season.

Arsenal famously won the league twice at Tottenham's old White Hart Lane stadium, in 1971 and 2004. The Gunners cannot clinch silverware on enemy territory this time, but a victory would keep them in the title hunt while damaging Tottenham's hopes of qualifying for the Champions League via a top-four finish.

"You know what you can give to your people, which is a lot of joy and happiness if we manage to win the game," Arteta said. "Obviously when you have the chance to do that and that's in your hand, you really want to make the most of it to try and make it happen." — AFP



LONDON: Arsenal's Spanish manager Mikel Arteta gestures on the touchline during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Chelsea at the Emirates Stadium in London. — AFP

Team UAE prodigy Ayuso takes Tour de Romandie lead

ORON-LA-VILLE: American rider Brandon McNulty won the Tour de Romandie third stage individual time-trial on Friday as his UAE Emirates teammate Juan Ayuso took the overall lead. Ahead of Saturday's decisive Queen stage in the high mountains McNulty was fortunate to cover the 15.5km course before the rain arrived. "Yeah it's my first win here so I'm very happy, I had a good day and was lucky to go before the bad weather," said the American. Belgian rookie Thibau Nys the overnight leader finished way down the field

after his exertions Thursday in an all day escape took their toll. The yellow jersey was taken by the 21-year-old Spaniard Ayuso who appears perfectly suited to go on and win the Tour in the mountains as the UAE prodigy continues to emerge from the shadow of the team's top rider Tadej Pogacar.

Ilan Van Wilder is second at seven seconds and Alexandr Vlasov third at 10sec, with Carlos Rodriguez and Lenny Martinez rounding out the top five. Ayuso said at the start he was hoping to "take time back before Saturday" and he achieved that, taking all the time back and then some.

"I suffered, but I took some risks and I'm in a good position to defend the jersey now," he said after the stage. Another up-and-coming all-rounder Frenchman Martinez was 16th on the day but was delighted with his overall fifth at 23sec, and his prospects given his 52kg weight and the mountain stage ahead. — AFP



MARACON: UAE Team Emirates' US rider Brandon McNulty cycles on his way to win in the third stage of the Tour of Romandy UCI cycling World tour, a 15.5 km time trial starting and finishing in Oron, in Maracon, western Switzerland. — AFP

Liverpool Premier League title hopes suffer blow; Sheffield Utd relegated

Manchester United's push for Europe dented by Burnley



LONDON: Liverpool's English defender #78 Jarell Quansah (L) vies with West Ham United's Brazilian midfielder #10 Lucas Paqueta (R) during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Liverpool at the London Stadium, in London on April 27, 2024. — AFP

LONDON: Liverpool's fading Premier League title hopes were dealt a near-fatal blow on Saturday as West Ham rescued a draw against Jurgen Klopp's men while Sheffield United were relegated in ignominious fashion. Manchester United's push for Europe was dented by Burnley, who secured a 1-1 draw at Old Trafford, keeping alive their hopes of survival. Klopp's glittering reign at Anfield appears to be ending on a flat note after they dropped points for the fourth time in five league games at the London Stadium.

Just weeks ago Liverpool, who won the League Cup in February, were on course for a quadruple of trophies but that is now a distant memory after FA Cup and Europa League exits and a string of damaging league results.

Liverpool would have moved level on points with leaders Arsenal with a victory, at least temporarily, but they failed to make the most of their chances despite a stirring second-half fightback.

The Gunners are on 77 points, two clear of Liverpool with a game in hand, while defending cham-

pions City have 76 points with two games in hand on the Reds.

Jarrod Bowen put David Moyes' West Ham ahead shortly before half time but Liverpool looked a different side in the second period, taking the lead through Andy Robertson before an own goal from West Ham goalkeeper Alphonse Areola.

But West Ham levelled in the 77th minute when Bowen wriggled free down the right and lifted a cross towards Michail Antonio, who headed home. A downbeat Klopp, in the final weeks of his time at Anfield, said he did not want to talk about his side's title chances.

"I'm not in the mood to talk about that to be honest or look at that at all," he told TNT Sports. "We had to win here, we knew that, and we didn't, and now we have a little bit more time between now and the next game. We try to get the boys ready again and we will go again."

The German bemoaned his side's squandered chances, which have cost them dear in recent weeks.

"When we are 2-1 up we could control it, and still, as I said, in a lot of moments playing really well but the final situation we didn't take," he said. "That has been the story of the last four weeks."

Klopp attempted to play down a touchline spat with Mohamed Salah, who was left out of the starting line-up, but the Egypt forward fanned the flames. "There's going to be a fire today if I speak," he told reporters.

Pep Guardiola's City, who play relegation-threatened Nottingham Forest on Sunday, are hot favourites to secure an unprecedented fourth straight English top-flight title. Arsenal, who led the way for much of last season, are firmly in the hunt but face a tough away day at Tottenham, also on Sunday.

Sheffield Utd down

Newcastle's 5-1 win against bottom club Sheffield United strengthened their push for European football next season but sent Chris Wilder's team down to the Championship after just one season in the top flight.

Anel Ahmedhodzic gave the visitors an early lead at St James' Park but two goals from Alexander Isak either side of a Bruno Guimaraes header turned it around.

An own goal by Ben Osborn deepened the woe for Sheffield United and Callum Wilson smashed in a fifth. Newcastle remain in seventh place but are just one point behind Manchester United, who conceded a late penalty in a draw against Burnley.

Brazilian winger Antony scored his first Premier league goal of the season but Zeki Amdouni levelled from the spot in the 87th minute to leave the home side ruing missed chances.

Burnley are two points below Forest, who are just outside the relegation zone, and one point behind Luton. Hwang Hee-chan and Toti Gomes scored as Wolves deepened Luton's woes with a 2-1 win and Fulham drew 1-1 with Crystal Palace.

Everton host Brentford later on Saturday seeking their fourth win in five games while Aston Villa, chasing a Champions League spot, take on inconsistent Chelsea in the late kick-off. — AFP



ABU DHABI: The victorious Kuwait team. — KUNA

Kuwait Handball Federation praises silver medal win

ABU DHABI: Deputy Chairman of the Kuwait Handball Federation Shabib Al-Hajri commended the Kuwaiti youth team for their impressive performance in clinching the silver medal in the Gulf Youth Games in Abu Dhabi. Defeating the UAE national team in the final match, Kuwait secured the second spot on the podium, while the gold medal went to the Saudi team. Al-Hajri expressed full satisfaction with the overall performance of the Kuwaiti youth throughout the tournament, highlighting their second-place achievement. He emphasized that the team possesses young talents with the potential to guide the national team towards future achievements.

Al-Hajri stressed the team's participation in up-

coming tournaments like the Asian Cup and the World Cup, stating that participating will boost the Kuwaiti youth's abilities to excel and represent their country proudly. The Kuwaiti handball team clinched their fourth victory, defeating the UAE 33-20, and securing eight points to win the silver medal in the UAE-hosted handball competition.

Meanwhile, Kuwait on Saturday won 16 more medals in karate, swimming, table tennis, archery and electronic games in the First Gulf Youth Games, which kicked off in the UAE on April 16.

Kuwait's national karate team won 10 medals, including three gold, one silver and six bronze, while swimmers obtained three medals; one gold and two bronze. The country's table tennis squad clinched one silver medal, and its archery team won one bronze medal. In electronic games, Kuwait secured one bronze medal. Hosted by the UAE, the first Gulf Youth Games kicked off on April 16 and will conclude on May 2, 2024, with the participation of 3,500 male and female athletes competing in 24 disciplines, under the theme, "Our Gulf is One... Our youth are promising". — KUNA

Estanguet emotional as Olympic torch sets sail for France

PIRAEUS: The Olympic flame set sail on Saturday on its voyage to France on board the Belem, the Torch Relay reaching its climax at the revolutionary Paris Games opening ceremony along the river Seine on July 26.

"The feelings are so exceptional. It's such an emotion for me", Tony Estanguet, Paris Olympics chief organizer, told reporters before the departure of the ship from Piraeus. He hailed the "great coincidence" how the Belem was launched just weeks after the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896.

"These games mean a lot. It's been a centenary since the last time we organized the Olympic games in our country," he added. The 19th-century

three-masted boat set sail on a calm sea but under cloudy skies.

It was accompanied off the port of Piraeus by the trireme Olympias of the Greek Navy and 25 sailing boats while dozens of people watched behind railings for security reasons. "We came here so that the children understand that the Olympic ideal was born in Greece, I'm really moved," Giorgos Kontopoulos, who watched the ship starting its voyage with his two children, told AFP. On Sunday, the ship will pass from the Corinth Canal - a feat of 19th century engineering constructed with the contribution of French banks and engineers.

The Belem is set to reach Marseille - where a Greek colony was founded in around 600 BCE - on May 8. Over 1,000 vessels will accompany its approach to the harbour, local officials have said. French swimmer Florent Manaudou will be the first torch bearer in Marseille. His sister Laure was the second torch bearer in ancient Olympia, where the flame was lit on April 16. — AFP



PIRAEUS: French President of the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympics Organising Committee (Cojo) Tony Estanguet carries the Olympic flame as he poses with young "eclaireur" sailors on board French 19th-century three-masted barque Belem to begin the flame's journey to France at the Piraeus port, near Athens. — AFP