

RIDESAFE
RIDE SAFE

BOOK YOUR RIDE NOW

DOWNLOAD THE APP NOW

@ridesafe.app

2 Women's empowerment, upliftment in focus at Abolish 153 art exhibition



6 Business and Bollywood vote in India's election



9 Saudia Group in 'landmark' deal for 105 Airbus planes



14 Haikyuu!!: Comic heroes fuel Japan Olympic volleyball manga mania



Iran mourns Raisi's demise

Amir sends condolences • Interim president, foreign minister appointed

Amir attends PAAET graduation ceremony



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training graduation ceremony on May 20, 2024. — KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attended and patronized the graduation ceremony of top graduates of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training for the academic year 2022/2023. The event, attended by top dignitaries including HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah and Chief of Supreme Judicial Council and Court of Cassation Dr Adel Boursli, highlighted HH the Amir's vision for encouraging educated

and capable youth to ensure Kuwait's sustainable development.

Both Education Minister Dr Adel Al-Adwani and PAAET General Director Dr Hassan Mohammed Al-Fajam praised the institution's efforts in aligning with national development goals. Graduating student Wansah Abduljaleel expressed gratitude on behalf of her peers, emphasizing the role of education in Kuwait's future. — KUNA (See Page 3)

TEHRAN: Iranians on Monday mourned the death of President Ebrahim Raisi when his helicopter crashed into a fog-shrouded mountain, setting off a period of political uncertainty in the Islamic republic. Raisi, 63, his foreign minister and seven others died when the aircraft went down on Sunday in a remote area of northwestern Iran, where the wreckage was only found on Monday morning. The ultraconservative Raisi had been in office since 2021.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who wields ultimate power in Iran, declared five days of mourning and said Vice President Mohammad Mokhber, 68, would assume interim presidential duties until elections are held within 50 days. "The Iranian nation has lost a sincere and valuable servant," said 85-year-old Khamenei, whom Raisi had been expected to one day succeed by many observers.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable of condolences to Mokhber over the demise of Raisi and his accompanying delegation in a helicopter crash. HH the Amir also expressed similar sentiments to the families of the deceased, wishing them and the Iranian people patience and solace. HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of condolences to Mokhber, expressing his sincere condolences and deep sympathy to the families of the victims and the Iranian people.

Thousands of mourners massed in central Tehran's Valiasr Square to pay their respects to Raisi as well as



TEHRAN: A handout picture shows the empty seat of late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi during a cabinet meeting on May 20, 2024. — AFP (See Page 5)

to Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. Iran's onetime top nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri was appointed as acting foreign minister. Funeral rites were set to start Tuesday in Tabriz, East Azerbaijan province, for them and the other victims — three crew, two bodyguards, an imam and a provincial governor — before Raisi's body was to be taken to Tehran. Iran's military chief of staff Mohammad Bagheri ordered "a high-ranking committee to launch an investigation into the cause of the president's helicopter crash".

Continued on Page 6

Info ministry to launch news channel in July

KUWAIT: The ministry of information announced on Monday it would test-launch a news broadcasting channel in July as part of its new strategy to follow up on local, regional and international developments. After a meeting held by the Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, the Ministry's Spokesperson Dr Bader Al-Enezi told KUNA that the news channel to be launched will include news bulletins, summaries, cultural programs and talk shows around the clock.

"The channel's policy will be compatible with the foreign policy of Kuwait regarding foreign issues and will work to highlight the most important local events and achievements and present them as a news interface for the country," he said. "In light of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's latest speech, the channel will shed light on the government's achievements and work with the directives of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in cooperation with the media, institutes and ministries," he noted.

"The channel will use the latest technology in the fields of television broadcasting, photography, and directing in studios operating at the highest levels and by benefiting from the expertise and technical crews of the ministry of information," Enezi added. — KUNA

ICC seeks Gaza war crimes arrest warrant for Bibi

THE HAGUE: The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on Monday applied for arrest warrants against Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and top Hamas leaders on suspicion of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Prosecutor Karim Khan said he was seeking warrants against Netanyahu and Zionist Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for crimes including "starvation", "wilful killing", and "extermination and/or murder".

"We submit that the crimes against humanity charged were committed as part of a widespread and systematic

attack against the Palestinian civilian population pursuant to state policy. These crimes, in our assessment, continue to this day," said Khan in reference to Netanyahu and Gallant.

Charges were also laid against Hamas leaders including Yahya Sinwar, the head of the movement in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, the movement's political chief, and Mohammed Deif, who heads Hamas' armed wing. Hamas said it "strongly condemns" the ICC prosecutor's application for arrest warrants against its leaders, but said it supported the ICC's move against Netanyahu and Gallant. "The Hamas movement strongly condemns the attempts of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to equate the victim with the executioner by issuing arrest warrants against a number of Palestinian resistance leaders," the group said in a statement.

Continued on Page 6

Gold hits record as Iran shock boosts support

LONDON: The price of gold hit a record high Monday as the shock death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash boosted support for the precious metal seen as a haven investment. Copper also struck an all-time peak and silver jumped to the highest level in more than 11 years — with markets generally gaining from a brighter economic outlook. Gold had already hit a series of record highs this year.

Asian and European stock markets began the week higher, having recently

struck all-time peaks along with indices on Wall Street, where the Dow ended above 40,000 points for the first time on Friday. Wall Street opened flat with the Dow sliding back below 40,000 points. The metals are priced in the dollar, which has come under pressure recently from expectations that the US Federal Reserve will soon start to cut interest rates as inflation cools.

Gold struck a record \$2,450.07 an ounce Monday, while copper's all-time high stood at \$11,104 per ton. Raisi was confirmed dead on Monday after search and rescue teams found his crashed helicopter in a fog-shrouded western mountain region, sparking mourning in the Islamic republic. Foreign countries had been closely following the search at a time of high

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: An injured Palestinian boy stands next to the rubble of a family house that was hit overnight in Zionist bombardment in the Tal al-Sultan neighbourhood of Rafah in southern Gaza on May 20, 2024. — AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti jeweler Mohammad Fadhel displays a gold bar at his shop in downtown Kuwait City on May 20, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Women's empowerment, upliftment in focus at Abolish 153 art exhibition

Event at Boushahri Gallery part of efforts to raise awareness against domestic violence



Members of Abolish 153 and artists pose for a group photo.



Australian Ambassador Melissa Kelly



Boushahri Gallery hosts Abolish 153 art exhibition.



Canadian Ambassador Aliya Mawani visits the exhibition.



Sondus Al-Bader with her artwork.



Zainab Dashti with her work of art.



Nadia Ghafour with her painting.



Heba Al-Enezi with her painting.

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: In line with its mission, Abolish 153 held an art exhibition at Boushahri Gallery to showcase the work of artists expressing their perspectives through painting. The exhibition, held on Sunday, May 19, 2024, featured numerous artworks promoting women's empowerment and societal upliftment. Attendees included members of Abolish 153, ambassadors, artists and local community members.

During the exhibition, Kuwait Times interviewed Dr Alanoud Alsharekh, a member of Abolish 153. She expressed her delight with the exhibited artworks and highlighted the significant contributions of Kuwaiti artists. Dr Alsharekh stated: "This exhibition is part of our efforts to raise awareness against domes-

tic violence and to showcase the talents dedicated to this cause in Kuwait and the region."

Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait Aliya Mawani also spoke to Kuwait Times, expressing her pleasure at attending the exhibition again. She emphasized the importance of such events in raising awareness about women's issues, which are not limited to Kuwait but are prevalent globally. The ambassador stressed the need for community efforts to combat domestic violence and other forms of emotional and psychological abuse.

Mawani praised Abolish 153 for its crucial work and the exhibition's role in fostering a community of supporters through art. "I learn so much from events like this and it's wonderful to see artists tackling these themes. I am here to learn more about Kuwait

and the people's incredible efforts to address societal issues," she added.

Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Melissa Kelly shared her thoughts with Kuwait Times: "This exhibition is a fantastic initiative, bringing together beautiful art for a vital cause. Domestic violence is a global epidemic, including in Australia, and it demands our attention. Raising funds and awareness is essential, and I commend Abolish 153 for its efforts."

Participating artist Nadia Ghafour described her art to Kuwait Times, explaining that it depicts the unbalanced scales of justice for women. Her painting portrays women as flowers of life and men as flesh-eating plants, highlighting the law's neglect of domestic violence and other injustices against women. Artist Heba Al-Enezi shared that her vibrant por-

trait reflects her love for people and color. She joined the exhibition because she strongly believes in the cause and supports Abolish 153's efforts to stand against violence and for women's rights.

Dala Al-Zayed explained her contribution as a collection conveying women's dreams. Her painting features a coffee cup filled with coffee and song lyrics on a colorful background. The artwork is positive, colorful and feminine, celebrating women's dreams and aspirations. Samar Al-Mutawaa's painting focuses on women and motherhood, aiming to empower women in all their forms. It depicts three women with different appearances: One wearing an abaya, another modestly dressed, and the third revealingly. The artwork promotes acceptance and love for all women without judgment.



Artworks displayed at the exhibition. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Samar Al-Mutawaa with her painting.



Dalal Al-Zayed with her painting.

KISR inaugurates project to assist deaf patients

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) inaugurated on Monday a project to develop a sign language communication system in pharmacies in cooperation with the software development department at the institute and pharmacists at the Adan Specialized Health Center. This is aimed at improving the communication between pharmacists and deaf patients. The project is also aimed at developing a web application that allows pharmacists to convert drug instructions into explanatory videos in sign language, which contributes to improving the understanding of deaf patients

and ensures their adherence to the prescribed treatment, as well as providing more accurate and safe health care for deaf patients and enhancing their ability to receive and understand the pharmacological instructions correctly.

The application was presented and used practically in front of the audience, as the application was successfully installed on pharmacists' mobile devices in the main pharmacy at the Adan Specialized Center. There is a plan to develop an English-language version of the application, which will expand its use to a wider audience. A future survey will be conducted to collect the feedback of pharmacists and deaf patients on the effectiveness of the tool. This project is an important step towards achieving equal opportunities in healthcare by ensuring that health services are accessible and understandable to all, which promotes the integration of people with disabilities into society more effectively. The project illustrates the commitment of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research to developing assistive technologies to improve the lives of people with disabilities. — KUNA



Local

Amir patronizes, attends honoring ceremony for top PAAET graduates

Minister congratulates excelling graduates



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah waves at the attendees as he arrives to the ceremony. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a commemorative gift.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday patronized and attended the graduating ceremony for excelling Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) graduates for the academic year 2022-2023. Receiving HH the Amir were Minister of Education, Higher Education, and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Adwani, General Director of PAAET Dr Hassan Mohammed Al-Fajam, and top Authority officials.

The ceremony was also attended by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Sabah, the Chief of the Supreme Judicial Council and Court of Cassation Counselor Dr Adel Bouresli, top state officials, and families of graduates. The Minister of Education extended his deep thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Amir for sponsoring and attending the ceremony. In his speech addressing the audience during the ceremony on Monday, Minister Al-Adwani spoke of His Highness the Amir's vision of creating an individual with the awareness and capabilities to face challenges of the future.

The Minister highlighted His Highness the Amir's directives to invest in education and cultivate knowledge to ensure sustainable growth and comprehensive development for the country. These visions and directives drove the Authority, with both its educational and training sectors, to strive towards becoming a beacon of knowledge and aspire to boost productivity and competitiveness in the job market, supplying it with capable graduates and trainees to meet demand and address shortages.

Al-Adwani congratulated the excelling graduates, expressing his pride in their achievements and wishing them success, saying that this is but the beginning. The Minister of Education called the youth a never-ending source of wealth for the country to achieve all its hopes and ambitions. As for Dr. Al-Fajam, he warmly welcomed His Highness the Amir in his address at the ceremony. Al-Fajam said, addressing His Highness the Amir, "We welcome Your Highness as we celebrate your presence with special pride. It is a celebration of the soul and real joy's comeback to the hearts of the authority and all its personnel."

PAAET, since 2020, when the distressing coronavirus pandemic broke out, has been graduating excellent students without celebration in the absence of the "Kuwait's ruler and leader; thus, your presence, Your Highness... is a bright moment for the graduates," he said, applauding His Highness' keenness on partaking in the celebration with the graduates' parents. The authority has been shouldering great responsibilities and undertaking grand tasks to attain the goals of its establishment, including securing and developing the national labor force and meeting the country's development needs.

With the launch of the Kuwait development strategy, Neo Kuwait Vision 2035, PAAET has set participation in attaining it among its priorities. Its 2023-2038 strategy has been worked out to rise to the level of the Kuwait Vision in cooperation with the Arab Planning Institute and the Secretariat General of Planning and Development. PAAET's strategy, he has continued, envisages overhauling the national cadres' potentials, encouraging innovation and creativity scientifically and

professionally, said Al-Fajam, revealing that more than 20,000 citizens are enrolled in the authority per year.

The Authority sets up high-quality programs, with continuous communications with the public and private sectors, "to open new horizons for the graduates," Al-Fajam said. In addition to upgrading installations and building branches with international specifications, PAAET applies governance in the administration through digitization to ensure integrity, transparency, and combating corruption for preserving public funds and achieving high-quality performance.

The plan encompasses boosting the community's participation, depending on studies and research conducted by elite personnel, to find solutions to the plentiful problems and challenges facing state institutions. Al-Fajam indicated that the hard work resulted in earning certificates of excellence from international organizations for PAAET's faculties.

"Your Highness, your vision, sagacious administration, and pioneering plan aim at attaining full-scale development of the Kuwaiti citizens, where they adopt strong loyalty and belonging to the homeland based on a system of religious and ethical values and genuine traditions—an approach designed to maintain Kuwait as a minaret of civilization and sciences, present and effective at the Gulf, regional, and international quarters. Turning his address to the graduates, along with their families," Al-Fajam said, urging for maximum efforts for promoting and developing Kuwait. "Stick to the path of hard work and national unity; shun any causes of discord," he added, as he warmly re-wel-

comed His Highness the Amir and expressed deep appreciation for his presence at the graduation ceremony, held at PAAET's theater in the district of Shuwaikh.

For her part, Wansah Abduljaleel, a graduating student, delivered a speech on behalf of all peers and welcomed His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Minister of Education and Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Adwani, Head of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training Dr Hassan Al-Fajam, and the graduates' families.

She thanked His Highness the Amir for his trust and continuous motivation to serve Kuwait under his wise leadership. The youth are this country's future and its development; she added, "We learned that our ambitions and hopes should always be directed toward serving Kuwait, contributing to its progress, and maintaining its security and stability." On behalf of all graduates, Abduljaleel thanked the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training for their efforts in supporting Kuwait's progress.

She extended the graduates sincere appreciation to the teachers for teaching them and showing them valuable efforts, as well as the parents and families for supporting them throughout this journey. Abduljaleel concluded the speech by wishing His Highness the Amir good health and further progress and prosperity in Kuwait, and he thanked everyone who attended the ceremony. His Highness the Amir was then presented with a gift to commemorate the occasion. — KUNA



Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadi and US delegation pose for a group photo. - KUNA

Health Minister and US delegation discuss ties

KUWAIT: The Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadi, discussed ways of joint cooperation and exchange of experiences with the National Children's Hospital Foundation in Washington, DC, USA, as part of an effort to strengthen partnerships with international hospitals, universities, and medical centers. The Ministry said in a press release that Minister Al-Awadi discussed, during his reception of the American delegation, aspects of cooperation in the field of health education and the necessary arrangements to prepare a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the training of medical staff, nursing staff, pharmacists, and technicians.

This cooperation comes within the framework of keenness to strengthen global partnerships and

implement the Ministry's strategy by providing the best standards of health quality exchange experiences with international institutions and benefiting from successful experiences to support professional practices in the interests of patients.

The American delegation visited the National Bank of Kuwait children's hospital to learn about

the health services provided and its capabilities, and also visited the Thoracic Diseases Hospital to learn about the services provided in the field of pediatric cardiac surgery. The visiting American delegation included the foundation's president, Diana Marshall, vice president David Wessel, and executive director Soraya Angioli. — KUNA

DGCA Chief, ICAO Secretary General discuss cooperation

RIYADH: Head of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Sheikh Humoud Al-Sabah, discussed bilateral cooperation on Monday with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Secretary General Juan Carlos. In a statement to KUNA, Sheikh Humoud Al-Sabah said that the meeting took place in Riyadh on the sidelines of the third edition of the Future Aviation Forum 2024. During the meeting, both sides agreed on more cooperation between ICAO and Kuwait in the fields of safety, security, navigation, and strategic aerial transportation, he said. He added that both sides also agreed on cooperation in the field of training and qualifying national competencies to help develop the Kuwait Directorate General of Civil Aviation in the future. — KUNA

In my view

The legal culture

By Azzah Al-Ghamdi

local@kuwaittimes.com

In our current era, legal culture is considered one of the basics and necessities, especially with the multiplicity of tools that may lead to some people falling under the penalty of law due to ignorance of the law. Education today is keen to develop students' skills in various aspects of life, and curricula are drawn up to provide male and female students with different life skills during their studies before the university stage.

However, after students enter university or institutes, a legal culture course must be allocated to all students to be taught in their first academic year. This will provide them with experience and information about the penal code, enabling them to understand what is criminal and what is permissible. This way, we protect them from slipping into prohibitions under the excuse of ignorance of the law.

It must be pointed out that ignorance of the law is not a valid excuse. Once a person reaches the age of 18, their legal status changes from juvenile to adult, and they are subject to the penal code. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the ministry of higher education to provide these students in their first academic year with a legal culture course, similar to other cultural subjects such as the Arabic language and Arab Islamic civilization.

Today, not everyone possesses a legal culture, especially since most articles of the penal code are absent from the media. Only those who study law are aware of the penalties and punishments; others are not knowledgeable. They may commit acts they believe are permissible, only to find out they have committed crimes that could lead to imprisonment.

The situation in the past was different from our current era, as crimes were limited to specific cases. However, today, with the emergence and spread of social media, there is a vast array of laws and prohibitions, and young students may fall into these traps out of ignorance, leading to imprisonment, fines, and convictions. Therefore, it is necessary for curricula to keep pace with the current era. Not all curricula need to provide students with a general culture, but they must adapt to contemporary developments to protect members of society from many problems and obstacles.

Producing well-educated and cultured generations is a societal responsibility. Efforts must be made to bring today's youth to maturity and protect them from penalties and imprisonment due to their ignorance of the law. This would also benefit the judiciary, as case rates would decrease significantly. Many young people are currently tried and convicted because of their ignorance of the law.

Additionally, the media must focus on providing citizens with a legal culture in various aspects of life. It should educate members of society about their duties and rights in areas such as the penal code, personal status law, administrative law and social insurance law. These laws affect all members of society, ensuring that rights are not lost and that citizens can preserve their rights.

It is necessary to take care of the coming generations, as society can only develop on the shoulders of the younger generations, who are the backbone of the nation. The best investment is in human resources, as they contribute to the nation's renaissance and prosperity. Developed countries pay great attention to human resources, preparing their youth to build the future of their country. We can do the same to achieve prosperity for our country.

GCC affirms support for peace in Yemen

RIYADH: Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jasem Al-Budaiwi affirmed on Monday that GCC countries and international efforts support Yemen's plan for achieving peace and stability for the country and its people. In a statement, the GCC General Secretariat said Al-Budaiwi reviewed the Yemeni issue during the meeting with the United Nations (UN) Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The discussions focused on topics related to the GCC's position in supporting Yemen's legitimacy and ending the Yemeni crisis in order to reach a political solution according to the Gulf Initiative's terms and the UN Security Council's Resolution 2216. Al-Budaiwi reaffirmed the GCC's Supreme Council statement during its 44th session in Qatar in December 2023, which included full support for the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council's President, Dr. Rashad Al-Alimi, to achieve a stable and secure Yemen. — KUNA

Ministry of Awqaf recognizes Zain for contributions to community

Recognition highlights fruitful collaboration with Grand Mosque during Ramadan

KUWAIT: Zain was recently recognized by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Mosques and Cultural Affairs Divisions, to highlight the fruitful collaboration and strategic partnership between the company and the Grand Mosque of Kuwait during the Holy Month of Ramadan this year. The collaboration resulted in presenting several community programs aimed at serving worshippers and Mosque attendees throughout the Holy Month under the umbrella of the Zain Alshuhoor social campaign.

The recognition came during the special event held by the Ministry at its headquarters to celebrate success partners. In attendance were Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Dr Bader Al Mutairi, Zain Kuwait Corporate Relations Department Manager, Hamad Al Musaiibeh, along with Ministry officials and Zain's team. The step highlighted the recent successful partnership between Zain and the Grand Mosque, where many community programs and contributions were jointly presented under the umbrella of the annual Zain Alshuhoor Ramadan community campaign.

The initiatives included daily Iftar meals at the Mosque's Grand Hall, Zain's first Holy Quran Recitation Competition, hospitality and transportation services at the Mosque, and Eid breakfast meals during Eid Al Fitr prayers. This year, Zain's annual Iftar initiative to serve fasting individuals came back in its 17th year, this time in strategic partnership with the Grand Mosque of Kuwait and the Kuwait Food Bank. A total of 42,000 meals were served throughout the entire month.

Meals were served daily at the Grand Mosque's main tent, and the initiative was directly supervised and organized by Zain's team and Zain Alshuhoor volunteers to ensure the quality of all the meals delivered. Zain also hosted its first Holy Quran Recitation Competition in strategic partnership with the Grand Mosque. The contest aimed to encourage the community to pursue recitation of the Holy Quran and embody its values and offered prizes for the first three winners in each of the six categories.

It was supervised by a certified judges panel from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in collaboration with the Grand Mosque. In a step to engage its employees in its community programs and initiatives, Zain also held the fourth Holy Quran Recitation Competition for employees and their children. The competition was held at the Grand Mosque, and the first three winners in each of the six categories were awarded with cash prizes.



Zain's Iftar Hall at the Grand Mosque served fasting individuals daily during Ramadan.



Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Dr Bader Al Mutairi honors Al Musaiibeh with Ministry officials present.



Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jasem Al-Budaiwi takes a group photo with other officials during his visit to the GCC Joint Program Production Institution's headquarters in Kuwait. — KUNA photos



Budaiwi commends GCC JPPI's pivotal media role

KUWAIT: Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jasem Al-Budaiwi has hailed the GCC Joint Program Production Institution (JPPI) for its role in developing media production of the Arabian Gulf States. In statements during his visit to the Institution's headquarters in Kuwait Sunday, Al-Budaiwi also admired the institution's role in boosting the GCC media cooperation as well as its distinguished initiatives

and programs to strengthen the common cultural identity of the Arabian Gulf states.

He spoke highly about the institution's professional and innovative production that promotes the values and traditions of the Gulf societies and raise GCC peoples' awareness. Al-Budaiwi underlined the need for continuing cooperation for further success in the media domain to help materialize the GCC goal of achieving integration and unity among the Gulf countries.

GCC condolences Iran

In another development, the Gulf Cooperation Council expressed on Monday its deepest con-

dolences over the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and the accompanying delegation who were killed in a helicopter crash. A statement by the GCC revealed that Jasem Al-Budaiwi - Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) - extended his deepest condolences on the demise of President Ebrahim Raisi and his accompanying delegation following the tragic accident. The Secretary General also reaffirmed the solidarity of the GCC with the Government and people of Iran in these difficult circumstances, and extended his sincere condolences and deep sympathy to the families of the victims in this great calamity. — KUNA

Kuwait's First Deputy PM receives top US officials

KUWAIT: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah and US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy Daniel Shapiro discussed topics of common inter-

est and latest regional and global events. The Ministry of Defense lauded the distinguished friendly ties between Kuwait and the US. The meeting was attended by US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sahasara. — KUNA



NCCAL lauds Saudi cultural movement

RIYADH: The Secretary General for the arts sector of Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL), MUSAED AL-ZAMEL on Monday praised the development of the cultural movement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In a statement to KUNA, Al-Zamel revealed that he, along with a delegation from the NCCAL, visited the Diriyah Biennale at the invitation of Saudi Arabia's Minister of Culture, Prince Badr bin Farhan Al-Saud.

The delegation accompanying him included NCCAL's Director of the Communications and Media Department, the Acting Director of the Music and Heritage Department, Yousef Al-Jamaan, and the Communication Officer for the Arts Sector from the Fine Arts Department, Sarah Al-Khalaf. Al-Zamel appreciated Saudi Arabia's development in the culture, arts, and literature sectors, highlighting that Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are two sides of the same coin in serving the Gulf Cooperation Council and contributing to the success of every event.

He noted what he and the delegation saw, from the Diriyah Biennale to other cultural, historical, and artistic buildings, to the warm welcome. They also discussed with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of

Culture for International Cultural Relations, Fahd bin Abdulrahman Al-Kanaan other issues including developing cultural relations.

The Kuwaiti delegation visited the Saudi Museum of Contemporary Art and attended a tour of the historic Turaif neighborhood, which is famous for being an important historical and architectural district and was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2010. They visited the historic Salwa Palace located in the northeastern part of Turaif neighborhood, which was the headquarters of the princes and imams of the Al-Saud family, and the Royal Institute of Traditional Arts located in the Al-Murabba neighborhood. — KUNA



Damaged Gaza hospital reopens



TEHRAN: Iranians gather at Valiasr Square in central Tehran to mourn the death of President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and seven others in a helicopter crash the previous day, on May 20, 2024. — AFP

Iran's allies in 'Axis of Resistance' mourn Raisi

Leaders in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen voice solidarity with Iran over president's death

BEIRUT: Iran-backed members of the "Axis of Resistance" against the Zionist entity and its allies expressed their condolences Monday after Tehran confirmed President Ebrahim Raisi had died in a helicopter crash.

Palestinian militant group Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, Yemen's Houthis rebels, the Syrian government and Iraq-based armed groups all mourned the death of Raisi and eight others on Sunday.

Also, among those killed when the helicopter crashed into a remote mountain side in heavy fog was Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, known for his fierce anti-Zionist sentiment and skepticism of the West.

Hamas mourned Raisi as an "honorable supporter" and said it appreciated Raisi's "support for the Palestinian resistance and tireless efforts in solidarity" with Palestinians since the start of the Zionist war in Gaza.

Hamas also praised Raisi and Amir-Abdollahian's "intense political and diplomatic efforts to stop the Zionist aggression against our Palestinian people".

Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah group, which has traded deadly cross-border fire with the Zionist entity amid the war, praised

Raisi as "a strong supporter, and a staunch defender of our causes ... and a protector of the resistance movements". "Hezbollah in Lebanon extends its deepest condolences," the group said in a statement, adding that it had known Raisi "closely for a long time".

Mohammed Abdulsalam, a spokesperson for Yemen's Houthis rebels, said on X that Raisi's death was a loss "for the entire Islamic world and Palestine and Gaza". Palestinians were "in dire need of the presence of such a president who continued to defend" their right to freedom, said the group, which has launched attacks against targets with alleged Zionist links in support of Palestinians.

Syrian 'solidarity'

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad expressed solidarity with close ally Tehran, which has backed him during more than a decade of civil war. Assad "affirmed Syria's solidarity with the Islamic Republic of Iran and with the families of the late deceased and his comrades," the Syrian presidency said in a statement.

"We worked with the late President to ensure that strategic relations between Syria and Iran flourish always," the statement added. Syria and Lebanon an-

nounced three official days of mourning. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani declared Tuesday a day of mourning and said that "we stand in solidarity with the Iranian people". Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the highest Shiite Muslim religious authority in Iraq, offered his condolences to the Iranian people and government "and especially the grieving families for this painful tragedy".

Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces, or Hashed al-Shaabi, also expressed their sympathies, adding that Raisi had "always declared that Iraq and Iran are one people that cannot be separated".

The Hashed are an integral part of the official Iraqi security apparatus under the authority of the prime minister that also includes several pro-Iran armed factions.

Iraq's powerful pro-Iran group Kataeb Hezbollah extended their condolences to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Revolutionary Guards and people. "The great Iranian people, who have overcome severe challenges and crises ... stand united today in the face of this calamity," the group said.

Iraq's al-Nujaba armed group praised Raisi's role in "defending the Islamic nation's

causes, not only in the Islamic Republic but also for his support of the Iraqi people in the fight against the terrorist Daesh", using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State group, as well as his

support for Gaza. Raisi was "one of the greatest supporters of the resistance path, and with his passing, the Islamic resistance has lost one of its pillars," the group added. — AFP

International Monetary Fund

IMF-Middle East Center for Economics and Finance - Kuwait

Vacancy Announcement

Technical Assistance Officer (Macroeconomics)

Job Description

The IMF-Middle East Center for Economics and Finance (CEF) located in Kuwait is looking to hire a Capacity Development Advisor (Economist). The CEF is an office of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with a mission to strengthen the skills of officials from Arab League countries in economics, finance, and policy formulation, done mainly through the delivery of training courses and seminars. This is a full-time position with an initial appointment term of two-years (renewable) and carries a competitive salary and benefits package commensurate with the successful candidate's experience and qualifications. For non-residents of Kuwait, relocation and living allowances are provided.

Summary Description

We are seeking an experienced Capacity Development Advisor (Economist) to enhance our CEF-based economics and finance faculty. Primary tasks include teaching of selected courses delivered by the IMF, involvement in curriculum development, and conducting research in support of the CEF's training activities, and series of seminars and conferences.

Main Duties and Responsibilities:

•**Teaching:** Teach several advanced short courses in conjunction with the IMF and other international organizations. The audience will include public sector officials from Arab countries, especially officials from central banks, finance ministries and other government economic agencies.

•**Course Development:** Develop new courses on topics of relevance to the region, in collaboration with staff in IMF headquarters or other international organizations, as needed. Course development will include the preparation of pedagogical material such as lectures, and detailed quantitative case studies based on country experiences.

•**Outreach:** coordinate events (seminars, webinars, and conferences) on cutting edge economic issues of relevance to the region in collaboration with staff in IMF headquarters or other international organizations. The Capacity Development Advisor will also be expected to spearhead efforts to produce quarterly newsletters.

•**Research:** Conduct original research on economic issues of relevance to the CEF's training mission and cooperate with universities, research institutes, and think tanks in the region.

Qualifications:

Candidates should have strong analytical skills in macroeconomics or finance, at least five years of practical experience with analyzing economic issues especially in emerging and developing countries, as well as a substantial experience and interest in teaching. Experience in providing advanced training to public sector officials in applied macroeconomic policy issues, finance and econometrics would be highly desirable. Applicants should hold an advanced degree in economics or finance. Excellent teaching and communication skills and fluency in Arabic and English are essential.

Closing date of the application is June 11, 2024.

Interested applicants should visit www.imf.org/jobs for the full vacancy information and to apply to requisition # 24-R6743.



VARZAGHAN: Rescue team members recover the body of a victim from the crash site of a helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in northwestern Iran, on May 20, 2024. — AFP

Death in the fog: The grim search for Raisi's helicopter

TEHRAN: A thick blanket of fog shrouded Iran's remote western mountains during the helicopter crash that killed President Ebrahim Raisi, and for over 15 hours it kept the deadly carnage hidden.

Radio contact was lost on Sunday afternoon with the aircraft, but it took an all-night effort involving hundreds of search and rescue crew before the mangled wreckage was found shortly after the sun rose on Monday.

When the first teams finally reached the crash site on a steep and soggy slope covered in sparse mountain forest, the uncertainty about Raisi quickly lifted even if the heavy mist and drizzling rain did not. They found the twisted wreckage of the blue and white Bell 212 helicopter, surrounded by soot-covered debris strewn across the low scrub of the range in East Azerbaijan province.

There were no survivors among the nine people on board at the accident site, some three kilometers (two miles) northeast of the small village of Tavil. The victims were Raisi, the foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, a provincial governor and an imam, the aircraft's three crew and two bodyguards, officials said. Many of the remains were charred but they could be identified without DNA tests, an official told Tasnim news agency. After a night that had seen mass prayers at mosques across the majority Shiite Muslim country, state media reported that the aircraft had "hit the mountain and disintegrated" on impact, leaving "no signs of life".

The crash happened as Raisi and his entourage were on their way back from East Azerbaijan province after having inaugurated a dam project with the Azeri president. Rescue teams were immediately dispatched in a gargantuan effort involving personnel from the Red Crescent medical service, the army, police and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Countries including Turkey and Russia sent drones and rescuers to help the search operations, and the European Union activated its "rapid response mapping service" to help the search. Iranians had been captivated by the search, and images from the crash were shared on social media, including one that showed a victim in a white shirt lying amid the debris and dense foliage. Iranian media later published images of rescue workers carrying the bodies back on makeshift stretchers and in blankets through the inhospitable terrain, to long rows of ambulances parked on a nearby road. —AFP

Analysts: Raisi's death won't change Iran's foreign policy

PARIS: The death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash could lead to a period of political instability but is unlikely to change Iran's foreign policy or its role in the Middle East, analysts said on Monday.

The headline cleric was considered a favorite to succeed supreme leader Ali Khamenei, 85, who has ultimate authority in Iran, and Raisi's death will pose a challenge to the country's authorities in ensuring the stability of the political system. But analysts are betting on the continuity of the Islamic republic's foreign policy which is the domain of Ayatollah Khamenei and the secretive Supreme National Security Council. "A successor may emerge who is as conservative and loyal to the system as Raisi was," said Ali Vaez, an Iran specialist at the International Crisis Group. "On foreign policy, the supreme leader and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps will continue to dominate strategic decisions", he said on social media site X, anticipating "more continuity than change".

Farid Vahid, an Iran expert at the Fondation Jean-Jaures, said that "Raisi was absolutely in lockstep with the Guard Corps", which "has left a lot of room and freedom for the Guards in the region". With Raisi, "decision-making was very fluid because he was completely subservient to the leader", Vahid told AFP.

"The question for the Iranian conservatives is to find someone who will be elected ... and who will not cause them too many problems." Iran is scheduled to hold presidential elections within 50 days to replace Raisi, with vice president Mohammad Mokhber, 68, to assume interim duties. Raisi's death comes at a time tensions are soaring between the Islamic republic and the Zionist entity. Those tensions peaked in mid-April, when the Zionist entity allegedly bombed Iran's embassy complex in Syria, destroying the consulate building in the capital Damascus, killing at least seven officials. —AFP

International

Business and Bollywood vote in India's marathon election

Less red tape, less corporate tax rates help Modi win corporate titans' hearts: Expert



MUMBAI: Mukesh Ambani (center), chairman and managing director at Reliance Industries with his wife Nita Ambani (left) leave a polling booth after casting their ballots. — AFP photos



Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan (right) with daughter Suhana Khan (left) arrives to cast his ballot at a polling station in Mumbai on May 20, 2024.

MUMBAI: A parade of India's business and entertainment elite — many of them supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi — went to the polls Monday as the financial capital Mumbai voted in the latest round of the country's six-week election.

Modi, 73, is widely expected to win a third term when the election concludes early next month, thanks in large part to his aggressive championing of India's majority Hindu faith. "My vote is for the BJP and Modi," said Deepak Mahajan, 42, who works in banking. "There is no other choice if you care about the future of the economy and business. I have always voted this way."

Big conglomerates have bestowed upon Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) a campaign war chest that dwarfs its rivals, while Bollywood stars have backed its ideological commitment to more closely align the country's majority religion and its politics.

Latest data shows that the BJP was by far the single biggest beneficiary of electoral bonds, a contentious political donation tool since ruled illegal by India's top court.

Leading companies and wealthy businesspeople gave the party \$730 million, accounting for just under half of all donations made under the scheme in the past five years. Conglomerate owners support Modi's government because it caters to the needs of India's "existing oligarchic business elite," Deepanshu Mohan of OP Jindal Global University told AFP.

Lower corporate tax rates, less red tape and a reduction in "municipal regulatory corruption" have



Bollywood actor Aamir Khan and director Kiran Rao (left) display ink marked fingers after casting their votes at a polling station.

also helped Modi win the affection of corporate titans, he said. N Chandrasekaran, the chairman of Tata Sons, a sprawling Indian conglomerate with interests ranging from cars and software to salt and tea, cast his ballot at a polling station in an upper-class Mumbai neighborhood. "It's a great privilege to have the opportunity to vote," he told reporters.

Asia's richest man, Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani, also voted at the same polling station, accompanied by his wife, son, and a media scum, posing to show his ink-stained finger.

Anand Mahindra, chairman of the eponymous automaker, told news agency PTI after voting: "If you look at the world around us, there is so much uncertainty, there is such instability, there's terror, there's

war. "And we are in the middle of a stable democracy where we get a chance to vote peacefully, to decide what kind of government we want. It's a blessing."

Bollywood stars

Modi's cultivated image as a champion of the Hindu faith is the foundation of his enduring popularity, rather than an economy still characterized by widespread unemployment and income inequality.

This year he presided over the inauguration of a grand temple to the deity Ram, built on the grounds of a centuries-old mosque in Ayodhya razed by Hindu zealots in 1992. Construction of the temple fulfilled a longstanding demand of Hindu activists and was widely celebrated across the country with back-to-back television coverage and street parties.

The ceremony was attended by hundreds of eminent Indians including Ambani, whose family donated \$300,000 to the temple's trust. Also present were cricket star and Mumbai native Sachin Tendulkar along with actor Amitabh Bachchan — the single most famous product of Bollywood, as the financial hub's film industry is known.

Numerous screen stars have established themselves as vocal champions of Modi's administration since he was swept to office a decade ago. Former soap actor Smriti Irani is one of the government's most recognized ministers and beat India's most prominent opposition leader Rahul Gandhi in the contest for her current parliamentary seat in 2019.

Filmmakers have also produced several provoc-

ative and ideologically charged films to match the ruling party's sectarian messaging, which critics say deliberately maligns India's 200-million-plus Muslim minority.

Last year's "Kerala Story" was heavily promoted by the BJP but condemned elsewhere for falsely claiming thousands of Hindu women had been brainwashed by Muslims to join the Islamic State group. But some in Mumbai, like delivery driver Sunil Kirti voted for the opposition Congress party. "In the past year I am earning less, but prices of basic essentials... food and vegetables have gone up," said Kirti, 29. "Who is to blame for that?"

Heatwave returns

India's election is conducted in seven phases over six weeks to ease the immense logistical burden of staging the democratic exercise in the world's most populous country, with more than 968 million eligible voters.

The fifth round is taking place as parts of India endure their second heatwave in three weeks. Scientific research shows climate change is causing heatwaves to become longer, more frequent and more intense. Turnout is down several percentage points from the last national poll in 2019, with analysts blaming widespread expectations of a Modi victory as well as the heat. Temperatures reached 44 degrees Celsius (111 degrees Fahrenheit) in Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh, one of the states where tens of millions of people voted on Monday. — AFP

Spain demands Milei apologize for 'corrupt wife' remark

MADRID: Spain on Monday demanded a "public apology" from Argentina's President Javier Milei for calling Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's wife "corrupt" amid a deepening diplomatic crisis between the Hispanic allies. Spain's socialist government has already recalled its ambassador to Buenos Aires and the two leaders sparred over the comments made to a conference of far-right leaders in Madrid.

Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said he would summon the Argentine ambassador on Monday "to explain to him the gravity of the situation and I am going to demand again a public apology by Javier Milei." Albares said he would not exclude the possibility of

rupturing diplomatic ties with Argentina. "We clearly do not want to take these measures but if there is no public apology, we will do it," the minister said.

The Spanish prime minister accused Milei of not being "worthy" of the countries' "fraternal bonds", in his first comments on the row. "I am fully aware that the person who spoke yesterday did not do so in the name of the great Argentine people," he added, saying he had asked Milei for a "rectification" of his comments. The tub-thumping conservative Argentinian leader showed no regrets in his response on X, the former Twitter. "The lion is back and surfing on the waves of the socialist tears," he said. "Long live liberty".

Not sorry

"There is no apology to make," said Argentina's Interior Minister Guillermo Francos. "I think, on the contrary, it is for the Spanish government to make an apology for what has been said about Milei," he told the TN television channel. Milei caused outrage at a Madrid conference organized by Spain's far-right

Vox party. He lashed out at socialism and attacked Sanchez's wife, Begona Gomez, without naming her.

"The global elites don't realize how destructive it can be to implement the ideas of socialism," Milei said. "They don't know the type of society and country that can produce, the type of people clinging to power and the level of abuse that generates." He added: "When you have a corrupt wife, let's say, it gets dirty, and you take five days to think about it."

Sanchez recently considered resigning after Spanish prosecutors opened a preliminary corruption investigation against his wife, which was quickly closed. Within hours of Milei's attack, Spain recalled its ambassador and Albares slammed the visiting president's "insult". The European Union's foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell also condemned Milei's latest remarks.

Milei arrived in Spain on Friday and there was immediate diplomatic friction as no meetings with Sanchez or King Felipe VI were organized during his stay. During a speech on his first day, Milei denounced what he called "satanic" socialism.

ICC seeks Gaza war crimes arrest...

Continued from Page 1

The landmark request was greeted with outrage in the Zionist entity, with Netanyahu saying he "rejects with disgust" the application, while Foreign Minister Israel Katz slammed the application as "a historical disgrace that will be remembered forever." US President Joe Biden denounced the "outrageous" application, as Washington warned the move put truce talks at risk. Neither the United States nor the Zionist entity is a member of the ICC and both have rejected its jurisdiction. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken separately denounced the "shameful" application and warned it "could jeopardize" ongoing efforts for a ceasefire.

The ICC prosecutor in 2021 opened a probe into the

Zionist entity as well as Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups for possible war crimes in the Palestinian territories. Khan has said this investigation now "extends to the escalation of hostilities and violence since the attacks that took place on October 7, 2023".

ICC judges will now decide whether the application meets the threshold for the warrants to be formally issued — a process that could take some weeks or even months. "Today we once again underline that international law and the laws of armed conflict apply to all. No foot soldier, no commander, no civilian leader — no one — can act with impunity," said the prosecutor.

Legal experts have told AFP that Hamas and the Zionist entity could face war crimes charges over the conflict. Veteran war crimes prosecutor Reed Brody said the application was "a watershed event in the history of international justice." If granted, the warrant means that technically any of the 124 ICC member states would be obliged to arrest Netanyahu if he travelled there. — AFP

property sector. "Therefore, the recent gains in metals are partly due to a weaker dollar and increased chances of a Fed rate cut, plus optimism over China," said market analyst Fawad Razaqada at City Index and FOREX.com. "However, the majority of the gains have been driven by inflation-hedging demand and central bank purchases," he added.

Oil prices dipped after initially jumping on the Iran news. Investors are looking to the release Wednesday of minutes from the Federal Reserve's May policy decision, hoping for some insight into the thinking of decision-makers. The release comes after data last week showed US inflation easing in April, reviving hopes the central bank would cut interest rates twice this year. There are also a number of companies reporting earnings, with NVIDIA centerstage on Wednesday. — AFP

Gold hits record as Iran shock...

Continued from Page 1

regional tensions over the Gaza war raging between the Zionist entity and Hamas since Oct 7. "Gold and copper have hit record highs, (and) silver jumped to an 11-year high... after the death of Iran's president in a helicopter crash," noted Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Finalto trading group. "There is a clear geopolitical premium since October 7th," he said, adding that "expectations the Fed will cut rates soon is helping".

Analysts said market sentiment was boosted additionally by China's plan to support its struggling

Iran mourns Raisi's demise...

Continued from Page 1

State TV broke the news early Monday that "the servant of the Iranian nation, Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi, has achieved the highest level of martyrdom", showing pictures of him as a voice recited the Holy Quran. Flags soon flew at half-mast and a black banner was hoisted at a major Shiite shrine in city of Qom south of Tehran. Global allies Russia and China and regional powers voiced their condolences, as did NATO, while the UN Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Condolences also came from Palestinian group Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah and from Syria, all members of the so-called Axis of Resistance against the Zionist entity and its allies, amid high tensions over the Gaza war. The US offered condolences and said it saw no immediate security impact from Raisi's death. The State Department also said Iran had asked the US for assistance after the crash, adding it was unable to do so "for logistical reasons".

The price of gold hit a record high in the morning as the shock news boosted support for the precious metal seen as a haven investment. But analysts did not expect major changes, pointing out that ultimate power in Iran is held by the supreme leader and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps who work with a regional network of armed groups.

"It will be (the) status quo," Jason Brodsky, an expert at the Middle East Institute, told the BBC of Iran's relations with these groups. "The IRGC reports to the supreme leader and liaises with Hezbollah, the Houthis, Hamas and the militias across the

region. The modus operandi and the grand strategy of the Islamic republic will remain the same."

Iranian authorities first raised the alarm on Sunday afternoon when they lost contact with Raisi's helicopter as it returned from a border meeting with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev to inaugurate a dam. Only two of the convoy's three helicopters landed in Tabriz, setting off a massive search and rescue effort, with multiple foreign governments soon offering help.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi at first spoke of a "hard landing" and urged citizens to ignore hostile foreign media channels and get their information "only from state television". Guards, army and police personnel joined the search as Red Crescent teams trudged up a steep hillside in the rain while rows of emergency services vehicles waited nearby.

As the sun rose Monday, rescue crews said they had located the destroyed Bell 212 helicopter, with no survivors. State TV reported that the aircraft had "hit a mountain and disintegrated" on impact, and the Red Crescent soon confirmed that "the search operations have come to an end". Raisi had in 2021 succeeded the moderate Hassan Rouhani. In March 2023, regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia signed a surprise deal that restored diplomatic relations.

The Gaza war sent tensions soaring and a series of tit-for-tat escalations led to Tehran launching hundreds of missiles and rockets directly at the Zionist entity in April. In a speech hours before his death, Raisi emphasized Iran's support for the Palestinians, a centerpiece of its foreign policy since the 1979 Islamic revolution. "We believe that Palestine is the first issue of the Muslim world," said Raisi. Hamas hailed Raisi as an "honorable supporter", Hezbollah mourned "a protector of the resistance movements" and Yemen's Houthis declared his death a loss "for the entire Islamic world". — Agencies

International

Damaged Gaza hospital reopens

Nasser hospital back to seeing patients amid scarce resources, blocked aid

KHAN YUNIS: Lying bedridden in her room at the recently reopened Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis in Gaza, Alaa Abu Ahmed is relieved that she can finally restart her medical treatment. Displacement because of the Zionist invasion of the Palestinian territory interrupted Abu Ahmed's treatment for a chronic condition.

Over a week in February, the hospital was attacked when Khan Yunis was the focus of the Zionist military operation in Gaza and soldiers raided it, saying Hamas was holding Zionist hostages there.

Now hallways are filled with still-wrapped boxes of equipment, and some semblance of order is returning to the facility. While air strikes, bombardment and fighting continue to rock other areas of Gaza, in Nasser the beds have been straightened, the debris cleared and white coats bearing Doctors Without Borders (MSF) logos mix with the blue uniforms of local medics.

The international NGO has just resumed work at the hospital, the most important in the southern Gaza Strip. "Thank God MSF was able to start working again at Nasser Hospital and I returned for treatment," Abu Ahmed said.

"My condition has improved, but I did spend some time afraid that what happened at Al-Shifa hospital would repeat itself," she added of the territory's largest hospital, in Gaza City. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Al-Shifa has been reduced to an "empty shell" after a two-week Zionist siege ended there on April 1.

Just 13 out of 36 hospitals in the territory are "partially" functional, according to WHO, after unrelenting Zionist bombardment began in October.

When the Zionist entity withdrew its troops from Khan Yunis in early April, MSF returned to Nasser and resumed operations in mid-May, focusing on orthopedic surgery and the burns unit.

In one bed lay a girl with a burned face, in another a silent boy with a bandaged leg watched over by a relative. A girl wearing a red dress cried as a doctor examined her.

The repeated evacuation or closure of hospitals by Zionists "greatly handicap the delivery of medical care to the Palestinian population", said Aurelie Godard, who oversees MSF activities in Gaza. Now MSF is preparing to reopen the Nasser's maternity and neonatal intensive care units.

"Evacuating or reopening is difficult every time. Especially for the patients, because they have to know where to find us; they have to know what services and what care is available in what place," Godard said. "It's difficult for us, because obviously there's all the equipment, the medicines, the machines ... to transport, to repair sometimes," she added.

'Living in a desert'

WHO said Friday it had received no medical equipment in Gaza since May 6, the eve of the Zionist entity's offensive on Rafah city in Gaza's far south which led to the closure of the main aid entry points into the territory.

Since then almost no aid has made



KHAN YUNIS: People inspect the damage in a room following Zionist bombardment at Nasser hospital in this file photo taken in December 2023. — AFP

it into Gaza, the UN and NGOs say. The Zionist military cut off electricity to Gaza at the beginning of the war and international organizations fear a total depletion of fuel to run generators.

More and more people are leaving Rafah, where the UN says the entity's offen-

sive has forced around 800,000 people to flee, hoping to find refuge in Khan Yunis.

Near Nasser hospital, plastic containers are piled up at water distribution points. "People just appear to be alive on the outside," said Mohammed Baroud, who was displaced from Rafah to Khan Yunis. He

said "everything is destroyed" in the area around Nasser Hospital.

"Water is not available. We search for even a few drops of water," he said, adding that to get that they have to come a long way. "Water is very scarce," he said. "It's like living in a desert." — AFP

Uncertain future for thousands after deadly Brazil floods

PORTO ALEGRE, Brazil: Rafael Adriano Peres could hardly move as he lay on a mattress in a refuge center in Porto Alegre, after being hit by a car when historic floods swept southern Brazil this month. The 35-year-old suffered two broken ribs but couldn't return home from hospital as water had filled the property he shares with his wife.

"We don't know what tomorrow will bring. We have to start from scratch," said Peres, who worked in waste management in Porto Alegre which is now largely submerged after the Guaiba River burst its banks. Surrounded by a mountain of donated clothes and toys, almost 800 people were staying in this large hangar Sunday in the capital of Rio Grande do Sul. The state has been gripped by a climate catastrophe for almost three weeks which has killed more than 150 people and left around 100 missing.

'Only getting worse'

Some people plan to return to their homes once the high waters subside but others like 50-year-old Marcia Beatriz Leal, who has suffered three floods, have already given up that hope. "You fight to get it all back and then it's gone again," said Leal, who lived in a rented home in the flood-hit town of Estrela.



PORTO ALEGRE: People displaced by the floods are seen in a shelter in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul State, Brazil, on May 18, 2024. — AFP photos

She spoke to AFP with her seven-year-old son Pietro and her mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, sleeping next to her. Leal, who makes clothes for pets, said she felt better after crying at a talk in the shelter organized by the city council's mental health service.

She hopes to move to another area with her mother and son, hopefully sheltered from increasingly intense rains in the region that scientists say are linked to climate change and the El Nino weather pattern. "This is nature giving back to us what we do to it," Leal said.

Huddling in colorful blankets next to Leal, Peres agreed: "It's human beings who are destroying our

planet. It's only going to get worse." He worries other cities in Brazil could face similar flooding, pointing out his concerns in particular about deforestation in the Amazon.

'Life goes on'

Some 13,000 people have taken refuge in the 149 facilities in Porto Alegre, a city of 1.4 million inhabitants, according to local authorities. Those worst affected may face a lingering fear of floods returning, but most will overcome that feeling, said psychologist Marta Fadrique, who

leads the city's mental health service.

Problems can include anxiety, insomnia and paranoia, she told AFP outside the center, where clothes dry in the sun and children run around, seemingly oblivious to the tragedy. Venezuelan cleaner Habraham Elises Gil, 25, left his country six years ago due to its economic troubles and rebuilt his life in Porto Alegre with his wife and two children. He lost everything in the floods but is already thinking about starting over. "The children give us strength. Life goes on. As long as we are alive, everything has to go on," Gil said. — AFP



A man navigates a boat through a flooded street in front of the public market in downtown Porto Alegre on May 19, 2024.

South Africa's top court strikes Zuma from ballot

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's top court on Monday barred former president Jacob Zuma from running in general elections next week, but his upstart opposition party vowed to fight on to return the graft-tainted politician to office.

The ruling has stoked fears of violent unrest in the run-up to the poll, already the most competitive since the advent of democracy in 1994. But Zuma's party, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK), urged supporters to remain calm and go out and vote on May 29.

"This heavily flawed and conflicted judgement is not the end but rather a pivotal moment affirming that the MK Party is the right choice for the black poor and downtrodden," it said. The top court backed an electoral commission decision that Zuma's previous conviction for contempt of court prevents him from becoming an MP, ruling that the constitution bars anyone sentenced to more than 12 months in jail.

'Not eligible'

Zuma, who left office in 2018 dogged by corruption allegations, was convicted of contempt in 2021 and sentenced to 15 months. Rioting after his imprisonment left more than 350 people dead.

He eventually served less than three months in jail, but the court ruled that this was irrelevant as the constitution refers to the sentence imposed, not served. "Mr Zuma ... is accordingly not eligible to be a member of and not qualified to stand for election to the national assembly," Justice Leona Theron said, reading the judgement.

In a South African general election, the president is chosen by MPs from among their own ranks. If Zuma is not allowed to enter parliament he cannot become president, even if his newly formed party is able to muster enough seats to propose him.

The electoral commission said ballot papers would not be reprinted nine days from the vote and Zuma's photo would still appear next to his party's name. "Jacob Zuma is still the party leader, Jacob



JOHANNESBURG: Supporters of the uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) political party march and chant slogans outside South African Constitutional Court following the ruling that declares former president and uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) leader Jacob Zuma ineligible as a candidate in the upcoming South African general election. — AFP

Zuma is on the ballot paper of MK party and people are still going to vote Jacob Zuma in numbers," MK secretary general Sihle Ngubane told AFP.

A few dozen supporters of the firebrand ex-leader turned opposition challenger—some sporting the military fatigues often worn by MK members—chanted and danced as they left the court in Johannesburg after the hearing. "We are resolute," MK party member Lindiwe Mtshali, 39, told AFP, adding she was however "very disappointed" at the ruling.

MK has attempted to portray the decision as a desperate effort from its opponents to derail its electoral hopes. The party boasts it will secure a two-third majority in the National Assembly that would allow it to change the constitution and reinstate Zuma — but that seems highly unlikely.

Opinion polls suggest MK will not do well outside of Zuma's native KwaZulu-Natal province. An Ipsos survey last month estimated support at 8.4 percent nationwide. "The country is still in shackles," prisoner rights activist and Zuma supporter Golden Miles Bhudu declared, as he protested the verdict outside the court, his arms and legs bound by chains. "This judgement is irrational," he said.

Since leaving office, Zuma, who was president between 2009 and 2018, an era that for many South Africans has become synonymous with official corruption, has fought several legal battles.—AFP

Assange wins bid to appeal US extradition

LONDON: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on Monday won a bid to appeal against a UK court ruling that approved his extradition to the United States to face trial for breaking national security laws.

Two London High Court judges granted Assange permission to appeal, having previously asked Washington to provide "satisfactory assurances" about free speech protections at any US trial.

Those submissions were presented at a hearing on Monday, which the 52-year-old Australian did not attend. Assange is wanted by Washington for publishing hundreds of thousands of secret US documents from 2010 as head of the whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks.

Had he lost at Monday's hearing, Assange — who has become a figurehead for free speech campaigners — could have been swiftly extradited after a five-year legal battle. Instead, he will now face another court battle in his long-running legal saga, after the UK government approved his extradition in June 2022.

Assange's wife Stella said outside court that the ruling "marks a turning point" and that "we are relieved as a family that the court took the right decision. "Everyone can see what should be done here. Julian must be freed," she added.

Human rights monitor Amnesty International called the ruling "a rare piece of positive news for Julian Assange and all defenders of press freedom". "The USA's ongoing attempt to prosecute Assange puts media freedom at risk worldwide. It ridicules the USA's obligations under international law, and their stated commitment to freedom of expression," said Simon Crowther, legal adviser at Amnesty.

Cheers for Assange

In written submissions for the hearing, Edward Fitzgerald, representing Assange, accepted as "unambiguous" US government assurances that he would not face the death penalty. But he queried whether his client could rely on the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which covers freedom of speech and freedom of the press, at trial.

James Lewis, representing the US government, told the court Assange's conduct was "simply unprotected" by the First Amendment. It does not apply to anyone "in relation to publication of illegally obtained national de-



LONDON: Supporters of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, fly a banner featuring an image of Assange, as they protest in support of him on May 20, 2024. — AFP

fense information giving the names of innocent sources to their grave and imminent risk of harm", he submitted.

Dozens of Assange supporters gathered outside the Royal Courts of Justice in central London early Monday, many wearing T-shirts bearing Assange's face, and cheered as news of the decision filtered through. "This man's life is at stake," 83-year-old sculptor Jenny West told AFP. "He represents all other journalists, it's a pressing humanitarian situation," she added.

Case 'rigged'

Assange has been detained in the high-security Belmarsh prison in London since April 2019. He was arrested after spending seven years holed up in Ecuador's London embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he faced accusations of sexual assault that were eventually dropped.

US authorities want to put Assange on trial for divulging US military secrets about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is accused of publishing some 700,000 confidential documents relating to US military and diplomatic activities, starting in 2010.

The United States has accused Assange under the 1917 Espionage Act, which his supporters warn mean he could be sentenced to 175 years in prison. UK courts approved the extradition request after the United States vowed that Assange would not go to its most extreme prison, "ADX Florence", nor be subjected to the harsh regime known as "Special Administrative Measures". His supporters have criticized the legal proceedings he has faced.— AFP

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2024

Global economic trends could impact Kuwait real estate sector, says expert

Increased regulator scrutiny essential to ward off 'fraud and deceit'

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: The interconnectedness of global markets means that economic developments in major economies can have profound effects on Kuwait. Economic trends in major economies are likely to affect Kuwait's real estate market, particularly in terms of transaction volumes and market values. To better understand the impact of the global economic trends and the regulatory measures needed to ensure stability and prevent fraudulent activities in Kuwait's substantial real estate sector, Kuwait Times spoke to Ala'a Behbehani, a passionate real estate investor and the general manager of a renowned real estate company in Kuwait.



Ala'a Behbehani

Global economic impact

Behbehani explained: "Kuwait is a part of the world and is greatly affected by it. Since the United States is the dominant economic force globally, any disruption or impact there will, in one way or another, affect the entire world, including Kuwait. As you can see, the

American economy has been experiencing inflation and rising interest rates since the post-COVID period, and there are fears of entering a recession or depression in the worst-case scenario. This will reflect on the currencies of various countries and the amount of imported oil, and its effects will undoubtedly impact Kuwait due to its connection with these two important factors.

"According to economic indicators from America, Europe, and Asia, I can say that from now and for the next year, the Kuwaiti real estate market will experience either stagnation or a decline in the number of transactions and traded value. This is because we have reached a cap due to the gap between asking prices and the purchasing power available to citizens for buying residential properties today."



Economic trends in major economies are likely to affect Kuwait's real estate market, particularly in terms of transaction volumes and market values. - Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait's real estate market

Behbehani added: "We know that the annual trading volume of the residential real estate market in Kuwait ranges between KD 2-4 billion. It is a very large market, and many citizens prefer to trade in real estate or the stock market because these are the only two fields that do not require extensive experience and offer quick profits. Additionally, there is no need for a commercial license to engage in these activities.

However, this large market needs greater and stricter oversight from the Ministry of Commerce, especially regarding real estate offices and brokers, as we find thousands of brokers operating without offices or official licenses, increasing instances of real estate fraud."

Enhanced regulations

Behbehani concluded: "As a regulator and enforcer of legislative laws, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, the government must scrutinize and tight-

en the issuance of real estate and broker licenses and impose stricter penalties on intruders to prevent fraud and deceit. This will also help prevent money-laundering, which previously found an easy market. Additionally, we need a real estate authority that takes care of this large market, involving the Ministry of Commerce, the Municipality, and the Ministry of Justice. There is also a need to issue laws and tighten control over the market and establish modern mechanisms for buying and selling real estate," he pointed out.



Bold initiatives are proposed to accelerate diversification, boost productivity and competitiveness, and strengthen climate sustainability in Qatar.

IMF: Qatar economy resilient despite global headwinds

WASHINGTON: Qatar launched the Third National Development Strategy (NDS3) with bold initiatives, aiming at boosting non-hydrocarbon productivity, enabling private sector-driven growth, and enhancing climate sustainability. The strategy's emphasis is in line with past IMF advice and very much welcome, said a report issued by an International Monetary Fund team following its visit to Doha.

The team led by Ran Bi visited Doha during April 30-May 9, 2024 to gather facts on recent economic and financial sector developments, the outlook and the authorities' policy actions and plans.

"NDS3 provides a blueprint identifying the strategic priorities and reforms needed in the years ahead (2024-30). The strategy is based on a candid assessment of past progress and lessons, highlighting the need to shift from a costly government-funded growth model to a more dynamic private sector-led one, with the state becoming an enabler," Bi issued a statement at the end of the visit.

According to the statement, bold initiatives are proposed to accelerate diversification, boost productivity and competitiveness, and strengthen climate sustainability. This comprehensive and ambitious strategy is welcome, and its strategic emphasis is in line with past IMF advice.

"Qatar continues to demonstrate significant resilience against global uncertainty and geopolitical tensions. The conflict in Gaza has had no visible impact on Qatar, and the tension in the Red Sea had delayed Qatar's LNG export only temporarily due to re-routing. Qatar stands out as one of the few coun-

tries where the sovereign credit rating was upgraded by all three rating agencies over the past months. High frequency financial market indicators have confirmed Qatar's resilience," the statement said.

The post-World Cup growth normalization continued, with the 2023 real GDP growth estimated at 1.3 percent. Growth is likely to bottom out in the near term and gradually pick up to 1½ percent in 2024-25, with non-hydrocarbon output growth supported by public sector investment, spillovers from the ongoing LNG expansion project, and strong tourism. The medium-term outlook is more favorable, with average growth expected to reach around 4½ percent, on the back of significant LNG production expansion as the North Field East and South projects complete, as well as more buoyant non-hydrocarbon growth as the implementation of NDS3 starts to bear fruit.

The recently announced North Field West project will increase LNG production by another 20 percent by 2030, further improving the medium-term growth outlook. Headline inflation is expected to ease to 2½ percent in 2024 and gradually converge to 2 percent over the medium term. The external and fiscal accounts will likely remain in surpluses over the medium term, assuming elevated hydrocarbon prices and sustained fiscal prudence. Risks to the outlook are broadly balanced, it added.

"Monetary policy has been consistent with the currency peg to the US dollar. The Qatar Central Bank (QCB) has improved liquidity management through carefully calibrated T-bill issuance, contributing to greater monetary policy transmission. Supported by IMF technical assistance, the QCB is looking to further upgrade its liquidity management framework. Banks remain well-capitalized, liquid and profitable. The non-performing loans (NPLs) edged up to 3.8 percent in 2023Q2 (from 3.6 percent at end-2022) but they are well provisioned. The liquidity coverage and net stable funding ratios were high (at 174 percent and 140 percent, respectively, in 2024Q1).

CBK launches 4th session of 'cybersecurity program'

KUWAIT: The Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Institute of Banking Studies, Basil Al-Haroun, announced on Monday the launch of the fourth session of the Cybersecurity Leaders program, directed to Kuwaitis specialized in the field of information and network security. The Central Bank Governor said in a press statement that the program comes within the framework of the bank's strategy to develop national cadres and competencies in the banking sector and the national economy and build technical capabilities in the field of cybersecurity.

He added that the program's goal is to strengthen the financial sector's immunity against the risks of the rapid development of modern technologies used in the field of information systems in the banking sector, ensuring the adoption of the latest technologies while reducing their risks at the same time. He explained that the program comes within the "Kafa'a" initiative launched by the Central Bank in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and managed by the Institute of Banking Studies, stressing that the "Cybersecurity Leaders Program" is of a high level and provides Kuwaiti specialists with the opportunity to hone their skills and enhance their capabilities.

He added that the program contributes to establishing a generation of professional and technical leaders capable of developing appropriate programs to protect information systems in the banking and financial sector in Kuwait in accordance with the best practices used in the field of information security. He explained that the program comes as a continuation of the fruitful cooperation between the Central Bank, Kuwaiti banks, and the Institute of Banking Studies within an integrated set of initiatives that seek to develop and qualify national

cadres. He stated that the program will be implemented in cooperation with the SANS Cybersecurity Training Institute, one of the best cybersecurity training institutions in the world that specializes in training and providing accredited professional certificates in this field over a period of three months, in addition to a training workshop with the Bank for International Settlements.



Central Bank of Kuwait Governor Basil Al-Haroun.

Regarding the conditions for joining the program, Al-Haroun said that the basis for selecting applicants has been determined according to objective controls, and it is also required to pass the tests prescribed in this regard and personal interviews, explaining that those wishing to apply can view the details of the program and submit applications for admission, starting Monday, until Thursday, corresponding to next June 20 through the Kafaakw Initiative website (Kafaakw.org). - KUNA

Ship that destroyed Baltimore bridge being towed to port

BALTIMORE, US: The cargo ship that collided with a Baltimore bridge nearly two months ago, collapsing it and killing six highway workers, was refloated on Monday and was being towed back to port. Live television images of the operation showed a flotilla of tugboats pushing and towing the M/V Dali away from the remains of the shattered Francis Scott Key Bridge and towards a marine terminal. The Key Bridge Response Unified Command said the complex operation would take a total of some 21 hours and involve the Coast Guard, US Army Corps of Engineers, Maryland Department of the Environment and other agencies.

It said the Dali was refloated at high tide and began moving around 7am (1100 GMT). The Singapore-flagged ship has been blocking one of America's busiest ports since it lost power and plowed into a support column of the bridge on March 26, causing

it to collapse and killing six road workers. Moving the nearly 1,000-foot (300-meter) container vessel is a major step in reopening the key shipping channel. The accident shut down the port, though temporary channels have allowed some traffic in and out of Baltimore. Authorities have been working around the clock to clear the fallen bridge and reopen the waterway after it was rendered impassable due to the wreckage. Demolition experts last week used explosives to remove parts of the collapsed steel bridge trapping the Dali, which still has its 21-man crew onboard. Salvagers then drew out up to 1.25 million gallons (4.7 million liters) of water previously pumped into the Dali to stabilize it as ballast, before releasing its anchors and mooring lines.

The port is a key hub for the auto industry, handling almost 850,000 autos and light trucks last year - more than any other US port, according to state figures. In April the FBI launched a criminal probe into the incident, with agents boarding the Dali as part of the investigation. The National Transportation Safety Board, which is also investigating, said the ship had two electricity blackouts in the moments before the disaster. It also said the crew had been tested multiple times, before and after the disaster, for drugs and alcohol, and that none had been detected. - AFP

Saudia Group in 'landmark' deal for 105 Airbus planes

Three-day 'Future Aviation Forum' begins in Riyadh

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's Saudia Group will buy 105 Airbus planes, the company said on Monday, hailing it as the biggest aircraft deal in the country's history. Saudia airline will receive 54 A321neo aircraft, while budget offshoot flyadeal will acquire 12 A320neo and 39 A321neo planes, they said in a statement.



RIYADH: Saleh Eid, Vice President of Fleet Management & Agreements at Saudia Airlines speaks during an interview.



RIYADH: Steven Greenway, Chief Executive Officer of Flydeal airlines speaks during an interview.

The deal is valued at \$19 billion, according to a separate statement from the Future Aviation Forum, the conference in the Saudi capital Riyadh where the deal was announced.

The 2024 Future Aviation Forum themed boosting global aerial connectivity began in the Saudi capital on Monday with participation of Chair of Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Mubarak Al-Sabah.

"This landmark agreement encompasses 105 confirmed aircraft and marks a significant moment not only for the Saudi aviation industry but also for the wider MENA region," the Saudia statement said.

The purchase, described as "the largest aircraft deal in Saudi aviation history", marks a further investment by Saudi airlines more than a year after new carrier Riyadh Air was unveiled. Saudi authorities have also announced plans for a large new airport in the capital Riyadh capable of accommodating 120 million passengers a year.

Prior to the deal announced Monday, Saudia had a fleet of 144 aircraft while flyadeal had 32. Saleh Eid, vice president of fleet management and agreements at Saudia, told AFP that deliveries would start in 2026 and continue until 2032. Jeddah-based Saudia, also known as Saudi Arabian Airlines, dates to 1945 when it received its first jet, a gift from US president Franklin Roosevelt.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman sees aviation as a key component of his "Vision 2030" reform agenda to remake the petroleum-centered economy, aiming to more than triple annual traffic to 330 million passengers by the end of the decade. Vision 2030 "motivated our decision to secure this significant deal, which will create jobs, increase local content and contribute to the national economy," Saudia Group director general Ibrahim Al-Omar said in the statement.

Aviation contributed \$20 billion to the Saudi economy in 2023, according to a report published Monday by the Saudi General Authority for Civil Aviation. "Aviation supports 241,000 jobs, and a further estimated 717,000 jobs in the tourism sector," the report said.

Steven Greenway, chief executive of flyadeal, told AFP the aircraft order announced on Monday was "really a confirmation of how quickly the market is growing and our ambitions to support it". Currently flyadeal has a mix of 80 percent domestic flights and 20 percent international, but "that will change to 50-50 over the next couple of years where we start expanding internationally," Greenway said. Last year Saudia announced a deal to buy 39 Dreamliner planes from Boeing with options for 10 more.

Newcomer Riyadh Air had also announced an agreement to buy 39 Boeing Dreamliners, with options for 33 more jets. Despite ongoing problems at Boeing, which has reported a string of financial losses and has significantly slowed its delivery of new jets while it addresses quality control issues, Riyadh Air is still expected to start flying in the summer of 2025, chief



RIYADH: Saudis and foreign delegates attend the Future Aviation Forum in Riyadh on May 20, 2024. — AFP

commercial officer Vincent Coste told AFP.

Approximately 10 destinations will come online by the end of that year, Coste said, with more than 100 targeted by the end of the decade. "We'll pretty much open an average of two destinations every month, during five years, which has never been achieved before," he said. Saudi Arabia is also launching NEOM Airlines, to be based in the planned megacity.

The Saudis are moving into a crowded Gulf market. Dubai, in the neighboring United Arab Emirates, has Emirates, the Middle East's biggest airline, and the world's busiest airport for international passengers.

Qatar, another Gulf air hub, is expanding capacity at Hamad airport to 70 million people a year and increasing routes for Qatar Airways. But Greenway from flyadeal said he had no doubt Saudi Arabia's growth could continue. "The country has only just opened up over the past couple of years, so you're only just starting to see the tip of the iceberg in terms of the potential of the market," he said. "There's still a long way to go."

The inaugural session of the three-day forum was addressed by several aviation leaders, namely Saudi Transport Minister Saleh Al-Jaser, Chair of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Salvatore

Sciacchitano and Head of the Saudi General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) Abdulaziz Al-Duailej.

The latter addressed current developments in the aviation and transport industries in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Other lecturers were the Director General and Chief Executive Officer of the Airports Council International (ACI) Luis Felipe de Oliveira, Chief Executive Officer of Riyadh Air Tony Douglas and representatives of other global aviation stakeholders.

The forum has brought together more than 5,000 leaders and experts of the civil aviation industry from more than 120 countries and organizations as well as major entrepreneurs in the sector. The agenda addresses plans for facing prior challenges in global aviation and potential investment opportunities in Saudi Arabia, estimated on paper at \$100 billion. Moreover, the venue is expected to witness signing of more than 70 deals, worth \$12 billion. The forum, held in its third edition, is the first of other identical activities in the rest of the week. The kingdom will host later in the week the seventh meeting of civil aviation leaders in the Middle East, a meeting of a commission tasked with monitoring aviation safety in the Middle East and North Africa and sessions of bodies affiliated to the Arab Aviation Organization.— Agencies

NBK Academy welcomes 29th wave of trainees

KUWAIT: In line with its strategy to attract high-caliber national talent from Kuwaiti fresh university graduates and offer them suitable job opportunities, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) welcomed the 29th wave of newly-hired employees to its annual NBK Academy program especially designed for developing Kuwaiti fresh graduates.

The Opening ceremony was attended by Mohamed Al-Othman, CEO - Consumer and Digital Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait, Mohammad Al-Kharafi, COO - Head of Group Operations and Information Technology, Ahmed Bourisly, GM - Corporate Banking Group, along with a number of executive managers and officials from Talent Management Department.

The program will run for seven months, from May to November 2024, during which the trainees will receive intensive training on technological, behavioral and other skills that allow them to build a thriving career at NBK. It also covers various aspects of the

banking business including key banking principles, risk management, financial accounting, marketing, negotiation, as well as training on creativity, innovation and design thinking, increasing productivity. Following that, the trainees will receive intensified training on branch work mechanism for five weeks before having on-site training at NBK branches for one month.

At the final part of the program, the trainees will be familiarized with all NBK groups and departments through on-site visits to gain better understanding of the banking sector. The participants will also present new ideas to the heads of different departments through the "Innovation Challenge" program, which aims to stimulate trainees' creativity and introducing innovative solutions for the various training aspects covered in the Academy. NBK Academy boasts a long record of success for 16 years. The program was specially designed for Kuwaiti fresh university graduates who successfully meet the admission criteria. It also hosts internationally accredited trainers to enable employ-



Najla Al-Sager

ees acquire specialized banking skills.

Commenting on this, Najla Al-Sager, Head of Talent Management, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said, "At NBK, we always seek to offer suitable job opportunities for Kuwaiti fresh graduates by attracting, developing and upskilling them to become and paving their way to start a thriving career based on solid foundations, thus creating added value to the banking sector in the future." "The Academy reflects NBK's vision of fostering sustainable human capital as a key strategic objective and joint responsibility between the government's different entities and the private sector," she added.

"NBK Academy's objective is to prepare highly skilled young Kuwait banking leaders in all the banking disciplines. This resonates with our ambitious plans to build a sustainable future, continuous elevation of service levels, and achieving steady business growth and expansion both locally and regionally," she noted. NBK Academy is an award-winning program which has received 3 awards from prestigious organizations over the past three years. The Academy was launched in 2008 with the aim of paving the way for Kuwaiti fresh university graduates to join the banking sector. It provides the trainees with the best-in-class training programs developed in cooperation with leading international institutions and universities to meet the demands of the labor market.

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for three months with a rate of return at 4.375 percent.

GCC's 2024 growth hinges on non-oil sector activity: WB

WASHINGTON: The World Bank's new Middle East and North Africa Economic Update, entitled "Conflict and Debt in the Middle East and North Africa", shows that lackluster growth, rising indebtedness and heightened uncertainty due to the conflict in the Middle East are impacting economies across the region. According to the report, MENA economies are expected to return to low growth akin to the decade prior to the pandemic. MENA's gross domestic product (GDP) is forecast to rise to 2.7 percent in 2024, which is a tepid increase from 1.9 percent in 2023. As in 2023, oil importing and oil exporting countries are likely to grow at less disparate rates than 2022, when higher oil prices boosted growth in oil exporters.

For Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the 2024 growth uptick reflects expectations of robust non-oil sector activity and fading out of oil production cuts towards the end of the year. GDP growth in almost all oil importing countries is expected to decelerate. The report looks at the economic impact of the conflict in the Middle East on the region. Economic activity in Gaza has come to a near standstill. The GDP of the Gaza strip has dropped by 86 percent in last quarter of 2023. The West Bank has plunged into a recession, with simultaneous public and private sector crises. A recent World Bank report goes into further depth on damages to the Gaza Strip and catastrophic impacts on the people of Gaza.

The economic impact of the conflict on the rest of the region has remained relatively contained, but uncertainty has increased. For example, the shipping industry has coped with shocks to maritime transport by rerouting vessels away from the Red Sea, but any prolonged disruptions to routes through the Suez Canal could increase commodity prices regionally and globally. The report also looks at rising indebtedness in the MENA region. Between 2013 and 2019, the median debt-to-GDP ratio for MENA economies increased by more than 23 percentage points. The pandemic made things worse as declines in revenue, together with pandemic support spending, increased financing needs for many countries. This rising indebtedness is heavily concentrated in oil-importing economies, which now have a debt-to-GDP ratio 50 percent higher than the global average of emerging market and developing economies.—AFP



A group photo of the 29th wave of employees at the annual NBK Academy.

US inflation fight will take 'further time': Fed official

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve should keep interest rates at their current elevated levels for longer than previously expected due to disappointing recent inflation data, a senior bank official said Monday. The Fed has raised interest rates to a 23-year high and held them there as it looks to bring inflation down to its long-term target of two percent. But despite significant progress last year, the Fed's inflation fight has faced a

setback this year, with the rate at which consumer prices are rising accelerating again in the first quarter.

Speaking at a conference in the US state of Florida on Monday, Fed vice chair for supervision Michael Barr said the bank had made "tremendous progress" in bringing inflation down from its 2022 peak, while unemployment—the other leg of its dual mandate—had remained low.

"We are not yet all the way to our target of two percent," he said in prepared remarks, noting the "disappointing" recent inflation data. "These results did not provide me with the increased confidence that I was hoping to find to support easing monetary policy by reducing the federal funds rate," he said.

"This means that we will need to allow our restrictive policy some further time to continue to do its

work," added Barr, a permanent voting member of the Fed's rate-setting committee. Barr's remarks echo those of Fed chair Jerome Powell, who said earlier this month that the US central bank had to remain "patient and let restrictive policy do its work." Also speaking Monday, Fed vice chair Philip Jefferson—another permanent voting member of the Fed's rate-setting committee—said inflation was still coming down, "although nowhere near as quickly as I would have liked."

"In making judgments about the appropriate stance of policy rate over time, I will be carefully assessing the incoming data, the evolving outlook, and the balance of risks," he said in prepared remarks for a conference in New York. Fed policymakers are widely expected to leave rates unchanged when they meet to set interest rates again next month.—AFP

Business

Gulf Bank empowers its employees and promotes social responsibility

Bank the platinum sponsor of ICF Kuwait Chapter conference

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance and develop its employees, Gulf Bank concluded its platinum sponsorship of the International Coaching Federation (ICF) Kuwait Chapter's conference, held in celebration of Global Coaching Week. The event attracted numerous coaches, professionals, and corporate leaders.

During the conference, Salma Al-Hajjaj, General Manager of Human Resources at Gulf Bank, delivered a lecture on "Creating a Corporate Coaching Culture." She highlighted its role in employee development and its positive impact on the organization's performance. In this context, Al-Hajjaj stated, "Gulf Bank's sponsorship of this significant conference reflects our deep belief in the importance of training to enhance and prepare employees and national talents for advancement and leadership roles."

She emphasized that the bank's active participation in supporting the ICF Kuwait Chapter's efforts

aligns with their shared goals, which include promoting a culture of continuous learning, investing in personal development, and empowering talents and skills. She added, "As part of the bank's social responsibility and ongoing efforts to promote sustainability principles in the community, we are committed to supporting all initiatives that enhance personal development, and bring positive changes to individuals' lives: helping them achieve professional and practical growth."

Al-Hajjaj further emphasized, "In alignment with our unwavering dedication to supporting Kuwait's vision, Gulf Bank is wholeheartedly devoted to driving substantial progress in sustainability across environmental, social, and governance fronts. This dedication is demonstrated through carefully planned sustainability efforts carried out within and outside the bank."

It's worth noting that the International Coaching



Salma Al-Hajjaj
We support initiatives aimed at fostering the professional growth of individuals' talents and competencies, empowering them to take on leadership roles.

Federation (ICF) stands out as a top global training institution dedicated to advancing the profession through the establishment of best practices and standards. The ICF strongly advocates for the transformative potential of coaching, viewing it not

only as a tool for personal development, but also as a catalyst for promoting social responsibility within communities. 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.



Ryanair profit jumps on higher demand, fares

LONDON: Irish no-frills carrier Ryanair on Monday said group net profit jumped a third to 1.92 billion euros in its financial year as higher demand and fares offset ballooning fuel costs. Profit after tax climbed 34 percent to the equivalent of \$2.1 billion in the 12 months to the end of March for the airline that flies mostly across Europe, Ryanair said in an earnings statement.

The Dublin-based carrier added that demand rose nine percent to almost 184 million passengers. Revenue jumped a quarter to 13.4 billion euros. This helped offset a fuel bill up around a third to 5.1 billion euros. Ryanair forecast it could fly up to 200 million passengers in its current financial year, as the aviation sector continues to recover strongly after the world emerged from Covid lockdowns.

The target "will be heavily dependent upon avoiding adverse events", chief executive Michael O'Leary said in the statement. He added that the airline risked flights being affected by the Ukraine and Gaza wars, in addition to "extensive air traffic control disruptions or further Boeing delivery delays".

O'Leary, known for his outspoken comments, has been very critical of US plane-maker Boeing for delaying delivery of new jets, including to Ryanair, over safety issues. In January, a door blew out from the cabin of a Boeing 737 MAX 9 plane during an Alaska Airlines flight. The incident resulted in a few minor injuries. Following Monday's results update, Ryanair's share price edged up 0.1 percent to 18.36 euros in early Dublin trading.

O'Leary added that the airline planned to repurchase shares worth 700 million euros and that it would run its "largest ever summer schedule". The CEO said air fares could be cut in its current first quarter, ahead of the peak summer season, to attract passengers. "Consumers have been ringfencing budgets to satisfy their wanderlust, but there are now signs many more are starting to balk at higher prices," Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown, said Monday.

Airlines have benefitted from growing global travel after the COVID years despite air fares soaring due to inflation. Carriers have sought to recoup in the wake of heavy losses caused by the pandemic, which grounded planes worldwide. They have additionally needed to pay higher wages amid the highest global inflation in decades that sent the cost of jet fuel soaring. With demand rebounding, the aviation sector had been on a massive recruitment drive, having slashed thousands of jobs owing to lockdowns. — AFP

US plans to end leasing in largest coal-producing region

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden's government announced a plan to end coal leases in the Powder River Basin, the nation's largest coal-producing region, drawing condemnation from the mining sector and praise from environmentalists.

It comes as the world's second largest economy continues its shift away from coal, the most carbon-intensive fossil fuel, which has seen its output

Black farmers in Brazil changing views on coffee production

NOVA IGUACU, Brazil: Raphael Brandao beams with pride as he describes the high-end Brazilian coffee he produces with beans sourced exclusively from black farmers in a country where many still associate the product with slavery.

The 31-year-old buys his coffee beans solely from farms owned by Afro-descendants and says his goal is to "reverse this logic that black people" like himself "are mere laborers."

"In my own way, I am trying to make historical reparations," Brandao told AFP at his roastery in Nova Iguaçu, a poor suburb of Rio de Janeiro. Four years ago, he launched his brand Cafe di Preto.

By 2022 he sold 800 kilograms (about 1,700 pounds), the following year 1.4 tons. This year he hopes to increase that to more than two tons following a 20-percent sales increase in the first quarter alone.

The logo for Cafe di Preto is a raised black fist clutching a coffee branch, and the different flavor lines are each named after important black women of Brazilian history. Brazil was the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery, in 1888, and racial inequalities remain high in a country where more than half of people identify as "preto" (black) or mixed-race.

Through his endeavors, Brandao told AFP he wants to remind the world that Brazil became a leading coffee producer on the back of slaves from Africa, where coffee originates from. He is also seeking to "break the stigma that black people do not produce quality." "So my work also gives light to this," he said. "Today I have six coffees produced by black people, all of them... of great quality."

Many of his clients, he added, are looking for quality but also for a product that is "changing the world." Brandao is a leader in the so-called black business wave in Brazil that promotes commerce among people of African descent as a tool for social progress.

Crunch time looms for BHP's bid to buy Anglo American

SYDNEY: Mining behemoth BHP must overcome major hurdles to salvage its faltering pursuit of rival Anglo American, analysts said Monday as a midweek deadline over the seismic takeover bid approaches. UK-based Anglo American has already knocked back two attempts by the Australian giant, which has until 5.00pm London time (1600 GMT) on Wednesday to up its offer, walk away, or launch a hostile takeover at enormous risk.

Any deal between two of the world's largest resources companies would fundamentally reshape the sector, with far-reaching consequences for commodities markets and the global energy transition. The latest bid sits at US\$43 billion, which would rank as one of the largest mining deals ever seen.

MineLife analyst Gavin Wendt said Anglo American's disinterested board had kept the larger competitor at bay for now. "Firstly, the biggest challenge for BHP so far is Anglo's unwillingness to engage within the context of a very tight timeline," Wendt told AFP. "Anglo has already rejected two non-binding proposals from BHP, based on valuation and complexity." BHP claims to be the largest mining

company in the world with a market value of around US\$148 billion. Its desire to buy its longtime rival, which has a market value of about US\$36 billion, first came to light in late April. It is a high-stakes gambit from the company nicknamed the "Big Australian".

If BHP ends up walking away from the negotiating table on Wednesday, UK financial laws would prevent it from tabling another offer for at least six months, Wendt said.

A hostile takeover, seen as the least likely outcome, would preclude BHP from looking at Anglo American's books - and force it to swallow under-performing parts of the company it would rather cast off. "At this stage the path for BHP seems difficult in terms of negotiating with Anglo's board, which might mean it tries to generate interest directly with Anglo's biggest shareholders," Wendt said.

That is a pathway fraught with complicated geopolitical considerations. Anglo American is based in London, has lucrative projects across South America, and lists South Africa's Public Investment Corporation among its largest shareholders. BHP's interest is largely stoked by its hunger to se-



SANTO ANTONIO DO AMPARO, Brazil: Coffee producer Neide Peixoto (right) harvests coffee beans at the Santo Antonio farm in Santo Antonio do Amparo, Minas Gerais, Brazil on May 15, 2024. — AFP

At first, he had trouble finding black suppliers given that the overwhelming majority of coffee plantations in Brazil still belong to white families.

"My black suppliers are the first generation to produce on their own land, often only a few hectares," he said. And Brandao has more than once had to defend his chosen crusade.

"I am sometimes asked: 'What if it was the opposite, if roasteries owned by whites bought coffee from white farmers?' But isn't that what is happening already?"

About 500 kilometers (311 miles) from Nova Iguaçu is the 19-hectare (47-acre) coffee plantation of Neide Peixoto, one of Brandao's first suppliers. "I have been in contact with coffee since childhood. My parents worked in crops and I often accompanied

them," Peixoto, 49, told AFP on her farm in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais. Unlike her parents, she grows coffee on land that belongs to her own family, bought by her husband and brothers who are also former laborers.

"It means a lot to me to be a black producer of special coffee, because... we, black people have a very difficult and painful history," Peixoto said. Most of the farm's production is for export, but the beans reserved for Cafe di Preto have a special significance for Peixoto.

"It's exciting to know that the coffee I produce, which is coffee produced by black people, is also roasted by black people," she said. "I'm very happy to know that we are making this connection, from production here on the farm to the cup." — AFP



BHP's bid for Anglo American comes as it looks to secure a reliable copper supply. — AFP

cut carbon emissions in the United States." "For years, conservation groups have litigated to get to this point - arguing that the federal government cannot simply lease away our public lands to coal companies while ignoring the impacts to public health," he added.

Democratic incumbent Biden is facing a tough reelection against presumptive Republican nominee Donald Trump in November, with climate action seen as key to galvanizing youth and progressive voters. A victory for climate change skeptic Trump would all but assure a wholesale reversal of green policies, from unfreezing permits on new liquefied natural gas exports to reversing restrictions on drilling in the Alaskan Arctic. — AFP

Anglo American's South American copper holdings include four of the largest copper mines in the world. An electrical conductor used in wiring, the metal is seen as a bedrock of emerging clean energy industries. It is a crucial component in the manufacture of solar panels, electric vehicles and rechargeable batteries. "They are trying to grow their copper exposure because the future demand is expected to grow in coming years, and there are signs the global supply seems to be drying up in some places," said Moody's Ratings senior ana-

lyst Saranga Ranasinghe.

Saxo Bank head of commodity strategy Ole Hansen said it was easier to buy an existing copper mine, than to dig one from scratch. "Hence the reason why miners are more interested in growing through acquisitions and consolidation rather than through investments into new projects," he said. "The latest example being BHP Group's so far futile attempt to acquire Anglo American." BHP did not reply to a request for comment from AFP. Anglo American said: "UK laws restrict us from commenting ahead of the deadline." — AFP

test period, with a final order due later. It won't affect current coal leases in the region, which spans southeast Montana and northeast Wyoming. The statement noted the Powder River Basin coal industry has been in decline since 2008.

Still, Rich Nolan, president and CEO of the National Mining Association, called the plan "outrageous," adding it "damages American energy security and affordability and is a severe economic blow to mining states and communities."

But the move was celebrated by green groups. Earthjustice's Drew Caputo hailed it as "a monumental decision that will save lives, safeguard our environment, and significantly

cut carbon emissions in the United States." "For years, conservation groups have litigated to get to this point - arguing that the federal government cannot simply lease away our public lands to coal companies while ignoring the impacts to public health," he added.

Democratic incumbent Biden is facing a tough reelection against presumptive Republican nominee Donald Trump in November, with climate action seen as key to galvanizing youth and progressive voters. A victory for climate change skeptic Trump would all but assure a wholesale reversal of green policies, from unfreezing permits on new liquefied natural gas exports to reversing restrictions on drilling in the Alaskan Arctic. — AFP

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2024



Nelson Orepcanga, a student of Formacion Artistica Coro y Orquesta Urubicha, carves a piece of wood to make a violin in the town of Urubicha, Bolivia. — AFP photos



Hernan Yarita, a student of Formacion Artistica Coro y Orquesta Urubicha, carves a piece of wood while making a violin.



Hildeberto Oreyai plays the violin outside his house in the town of Urubicha, Bolivia.



Violin village: Artisanal hub in Bolivian Amazon

Nestled in the Bolivian Amazon, the small, majority-Indigenous town of Urubicha has become an unexpected hub of violin makers, also known as luthiers. Out of a population of some 8,000 people, most of whom are native Guarayos, some 40-50 work directly in the trade, local resident Waldo Papu tells

done with patience, so that it comes out well," he said in a mixture of Spanish and Guarayo, one of Bolivia's 37 official Indigenous languages. Each violin is made from cedar or mara - a local hardwood - and sells for the equivalent of about \$580.

Roots in tradition

A widower with five children and several grandchildren, Oreyai speaks little and has had hearing problems for a while. With his luthier's ear impaired, he tunes practically by heart. "I really like to play," he says, sitting outside his rustic workshop.

Unlike some others in the town, Oreyai has been unable to convince any descendants to take up the violin-making trade he first learned from his grandfather. Urubicha lies over 300 kilometers (200 miles) north of the departmental capital Santa Cruz. In the early 19th century, Franciscan missionaries arrived in the area of current-day Guarayo and noticed that the Indigenous peoples were skilled artisans and, above all, musically talented.

Anthropologists believe that may be rooted in the Guarayos' beliefs around death. For one's soul to reach the Great Ancestor it must sing and play the "tacuara" or bamboo flute, historian Juan Uranavi says.

The soul rides on a caiman to the ancestor, but if it does not know how to play the tacuara well, "because of some carelessness in his life," the caiman tips him over into the river to devour him, Uranavi told AFP. Taking advantage of their musical proclivities, the Franciscans used the violin as a tool to evangelize the local population. At first, the instruments could only be played in church, but later "the natives themselves learned from the



Hildeberto Oreyai works on a piece of wood to make a violin.



Hildeberto Oreyai plays the violin outside his house in the town of Urubicha, Bolivia.

AFP. "I have not seen a place where so many violins are made," he said.

Papu heads up the Urubicha Institute of Artistic Training, Choir and Orchestra - one of the most well-known baroque music schools in Bolivia with about 600 students. About 20 or so students are learning to make violins, carrying on the tradition practiced by elders such as Hildeberto Oreyai.

The master craftsman, 76, tells AFP he was led into the practice by his father.

He takes two weeks to make a classical four-stringed instrument. "You have to work with the instrument. It is



Hildeberto Oreyai works on a piece of wood to make a violin.



José Manuel Urarepia, teacher of the Instituto de Formacion Artistica Coro y Orquesta Urubicha, shows a finished violin.

missionaries" to make and play them, Papu said.

One student learning the violin-making trade is 38-year-old Hernan Yarita, who is soon to graduate as a luthier. He tells AFP he wants his violins to reach his

fellow villagers first. "There are children who do not have a violin and we have this vision of making them for ourselves, for our relatives," Yarita says. — AFP



Hernan Yarita, a student of Formacion Artistica Coro y Orquesta Urubicha, carves a piece of wood while making a violin.



Hernan Yarita, a student of Formacion Artistica Coro y Orquesta Urubicha, carves a piece of wood while making a violin.



Nelson Orepcanga, a student of Formacion Artistica Coro y Orquesta Urubicha, works on a piece of wood to make a violin.



José Manuel Urarepia, teacher of the Instituto de Formacion Artistica Coro y Orquesta Urubicha, explains how to make a violin.

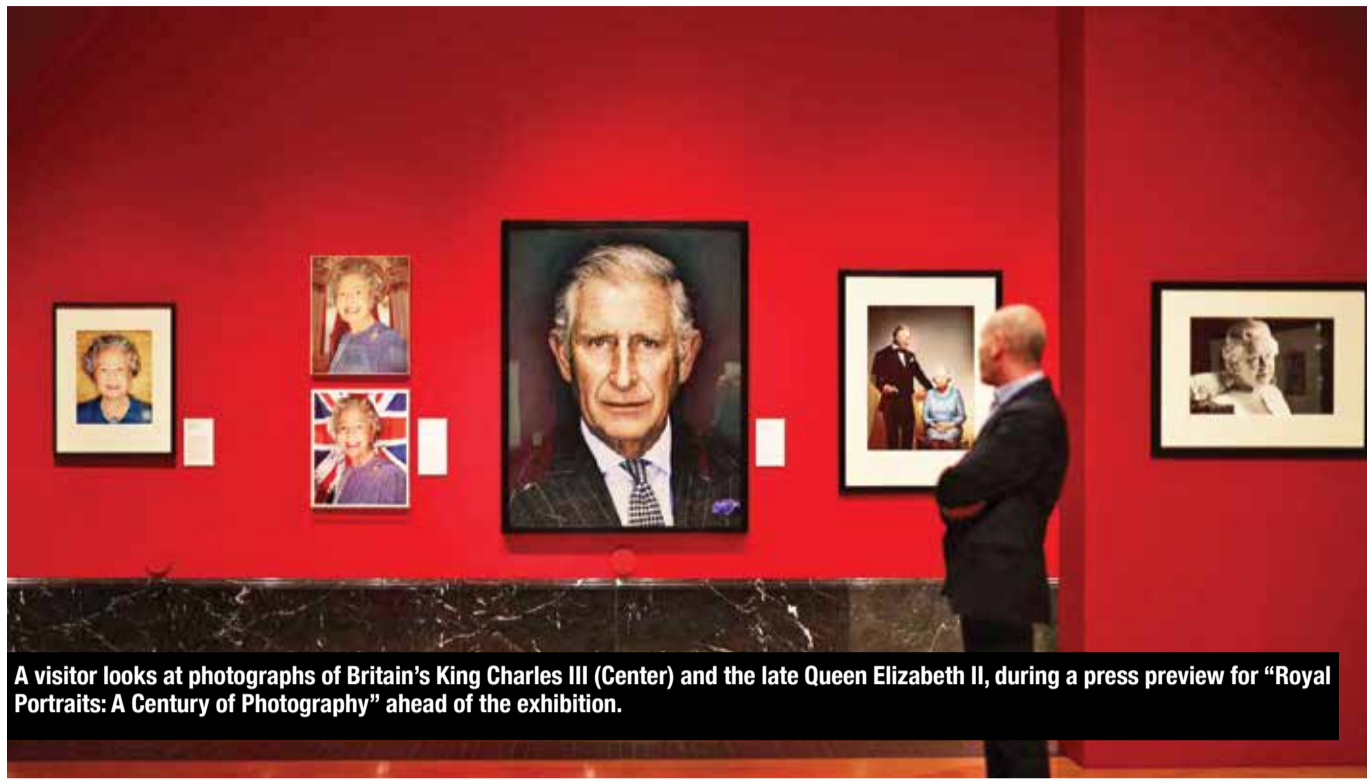


Hildeberto Oreyai works on a piece of wood to make a violin.

Lifestyle



A visitor reads the museum label of the photograph "King Charles III when the Prince of Wales" by British Photographer Nadav Kander.



A visitor looks at photographs of Britain's King Charles III (Center) and the late Queen Elizabeth II, during a press preview for "Royal Portraits: A Century of Photography" ahead of the exhibition.



A visitor looks at photographs of Britain's King Charles III and the late Queen Elizabeth II, during a press preview.

100 YEARS OF BRITISH ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHY GOES ON DISPLAY IN LONDON

A new exhibition opens this week tracing a century of British royal portrait photography, from the official coronation image of King Charles III to an intimate portrait of his late aunt Princess Margaret. "Royal Portraits: A Century of Photography" is the first exhibition in the newly reopened King's Gallery at Buckingham Palace, which was previously known as the Queen's Gallery.

Displaying 150 photos by 40 photographers, the exhibition brings together works by renowned photographers including Cecil Beaton, who captured the royal family across four decades. The photographs are all drawn from the Royal Collection -- one of the largest art collections in the world -- and includes portraits by Dorothy Wilding, Princess Margaret's husband Lord Snowdon, and Annie Leibovitz.

Century of change

Starting from the 1920s, the exhibit charts royal portraiture from its beginnings in black-and-white photography, to colourful, modern depictions in the 21st century.

The exhibition opens with a small but imposing blue room, with just two photos: one marking the engagement



A member of the media photographs the screenprint "Reigning Queens (Royal Edition) Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom" by American artist Andy Warhol.

of Prince Albert and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon -- the future King George VI and Queen Elizabeth -- in 1923.

The other is their grandson King Charles III's official coronation portrait in 2023. Taken 100 years apart, curator Alessandro Nasini said one was a private commission, while the other was distributed across the world in seconds.

One photo by Snowdon of four royal mothers with their newborn babies in 1964 is on public display for the first time. "Royal Portraits" also displays many iconic photos of the late Queen

Elizabeth II, who died in September 2022, including her coronation portrait by Cecil Beaton.

The black-and-white photo shows the queen in full regalia in the Green Drawing Room at Buckingham Palace, in front of a painted backdrop of Westminster Abbey.

On show too are Andy Warhol's 1985 screenprint based on Peter Grurgeon's original portrait of the Queen, and Jamie Reid's controversial 1977 cover picture for the Sex Pistols' punk single "God Save the Queen".

The song and cover were seen as an attack on the monarchy, and the song was banned by most radio stations at the time.

Modern age

Photography has been an important way for the British royal family to project a careful public image while also appearing accessible. According to curator Nasini, royal portrait photography can uniquely "maintain the historical role and function of a royal portrait while placing the royal family firmly in the modern age".

In the digital age, where images are shared globally in seconds and accessible by millions, royal photos



A visitor looks at the painting "Alexandria princess of Wales" by German painter and lithographer Franz Xaver Winterhalter.

may have lost some of their ability to control the perception of the royal family. But Nasini wants visitors to pay attention to the value of the original portraits and to "appreciate their materiality and beauty".

"It's so important to look closely at those prints and take your time, especially today when images are consumed so quickly through the smartphone", Nasini told AFP. Asked about his favourite shot in the collection, Nasini pointed to a 1968 portrait of the late Queen taken by Cecil Beaton. The photo shows Queen Elizabeth II wear-

ing a simple black cape, against a stark white backdrop.

He said it "shows the queen, perhaps more as a woman, as the person who came up behind the monarchy" -- and reminded him of a letter her mother, Queen Elizabeth, wrote to Beaton in 1963. "She writes, and I quote, 'I feel that as a family we must be deeply grateful to you for producing us as really quite nice and real people.'", he said. The exhibition opens on Friday and runs until October 6. --AFP

Forever fad: Rubik says his cube 'reminds us why we have hands'

The naysayers said the maddening multicoloured cube that Erno Rubik invented 50 years ago would not survive the 1980s. Yet millennials and Generation Z are as nuts about Rubik's Cube as their parents were, much to the amusement of its 79-year-old creator, who talked to AFP in a rare interview.

Rubik's Cube has remained one of the world's top-selling puzzle games, with more than 43 quintillion -- a quintillion being a billion trillion -- ways of solving it.

Even after "hundreds or thousands of years", you would still be finding ways to crack it, Rubik enthused. Despite the omnipresence of screens, "new genera-

tion Cube" first sold domestically in 1977 before hitting international shelves three years later. Rubik recalled his first fairytale-like trip from communist Hungary to the West, on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

'Retirement money'

Despite being publicity-shy, the inventor has amassed a collection of some 1,500 magazine covers featuring his cube over the years, which has become "a symbol of complexity" to illustrate anything from geopolitical problems to elections.

You either "like or hate it", he said, but you cannot ignore it. Rubik's Cube legacy lives on strongly in pop culture, having been featured in numerous TV series and Hollywood blockbusters.

It has also remained the centerpiece of puzzle-solving competitions. Masters of the cube frequently gather across the world, battling with their hands and feet -- sometimes while blindfolded, parachuting or doing headstands -- Rubik said.

The cube has a place in the permanent exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, and it has also inspired artists, including renowned French street artist Invader. An educational tool used everywhere from nursery schools to universities, the cube is also popular in retirement homes and helps people living with autism, including American speed-cubing star Max Park, who holds the world record of solving it in 3.13 seconds. Rubik said the emotional rewards the cube has brought him have been even better than the "retirement money" it has earned him. It feels nice to have done "something good for people", he said, adding that the cube has even made "marriages and much more..." --AFP



Hungarian inventor Erno Rubik holds a Rubik's Cube 3D puzzle in his hands.



Hungarian inventor Erno Rubik sits next to several Rubik's Cubes.

In a digital world "we are slowly forgetting that we have hands", Rubik said. But playing with the cube helps us tap back into something deeply primal about doing things with our hands, he said -- "our first tools", as he calls them.

"Speed cubing" and Rubik's Cube hacks are huge on social media, with youngsters regularly going viral while dancing, rapping and even playing the piano while solving the 3D puzzle.

Rubik said the "connection between the mind and hands" that the cube helps foster has been "a very important" factor in human development. "I think probably the cube reminds us we have hands... You are not just thinking, you are doing something. It's a piece of art you are emotionally involved with," Rubik added.

43 quintillion solutions

The unassuming Hungarian architecture professor never thought the prototype he devised would conquer the world -- and set him up for life. More than 500 million copies of the cult object have been sold -- not counting the myriad of counterfeits.

tions have developed the same strong relationship with the cube," Rubik told AFP at Budapest's Aquincum Institute of Technology, where he sometimes gives lectures. It was in the spring of 1974 that he created the first working prototype of a movable cube made of small wooden blocks and held together by a unique mechanism.

Like a 'wunderkind' in family

The five decades since have been "unbelievable", he said, comparing his relationship with the cube to having a "wunderkind" in the family. "You need to take a step back because of your 'child' and its fame.... (which) can be very tiring," he said.

In his book "Cubed", published in 2020, Rubik revealed that he had never intended to leave a mark on the world -- he was just driven by a love for building geometric models.

It took Rubik several prototypes and weeks of tinkering to figure out the ideal mechanism -- and a way to solve his puzzle -- before he could file a patent application in 1975. The colourful "Mag-



Singer and model Cassie Ventura (left) and Rap mogul P Diddy (aka Sean Combs) arrive for the traditional Clive Davis party on the eve of the 60th Annual Grammy Awards on January 28, 2018, in New York. --AFP

Sean 'Diddy' Combs apologizes after video shows him assaulting partner

Rapper Sean "Diddy" Combs apologized on Sunday after hotel surveillance video surfaced showing him physically assaulting his then-girlfriend Cassandra Ventura in 2016. Combs is the target of several civil lawsuits that characterize him as a violent sexual predator who used alcohol and drugs to subdue his victims, and his homes were raided this year by federal agents.

Disturbing footage published Friday shows Combs attacking Ventura -- a singer and model also known simply as Cassie -- corroborating allegations she made in a now-settled lawsuit late last year.

"My behavior on that video is inexcusable," Combs said in a video posted on Instagram, adding he was "disgusted" and "sought out professional help" after the incident including therapy and rehab.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "I'm committed to be a better man each and every day." The footage, which was published by CNN, shows the rap mogul hitting, dragging and kicking Ventura, who in her recent lawsuit said Combs subjected her to more than a decade of coercion by physical force and drugs, plus a 2018 rape.

In the video, Ventura leaves a hotel room after which Combs, appearing to wear only a towel, chases her before throwing her to the hallway floor and assaulting her. "The gut-wrenching video has only further confirmed the disturbing and predatory behavior of Mr. Combs," read a statement from her lawyer Douglas Wigdor.

Ventura sued Combs in federal court last fall in a bombshell suit that was settled out of court but succeeded by a string of similarly lurid sexual assault claims against the hip-hop star. --AFP

Paul McCartney becomes UK's first billionaire musician

Music icon Paul McCartney has become the UK's first billionaire musician, according to the Sunday Times Rich List published Friday, despite the country recording its largest fall in the billionaire count in the guide's 36-year history.

The 81-year-old's fortune was boosted by "strong touring, a valuable back catalogue and even a little help from Beyoncé", who covered the Beatles song "Blackbird", said the Rich List, considered the definitive guide of the UK's wealthy.

McCartney, whose net worth was estimated at £1.0 billion (\$1.26 billion), has bucked the trend, with the amount of billionaires in the UK falling from a peak of 177 in 2022 to 165 this year.

This is partly due to plans by the government to scrap the "non-dom tax status" from next year, the system whereby people do not pay UK tax on their overseas earnings. --AFP



In this image released on May 3, Sir Paul McCartney visits Paul McCartney Photographs 1963-64: Eyes of the Storm at Brooklyn Museum on April 29, 2024 in Brooklyn, New York. --AFP

Lifestyle



(From left) US actor Hayes Costner, US actress Jena Malone, US actress Georgia Macphail, British-US actress Sienna Miller, US actor Kevin Costner, British actress Ella Hunt, US actress Wase Chief, Australian actress Abbey Lee, US actress Isabelle Fuhrman and US actor Luke Wilson arrive for the screening of the film "Horizon: An American Saga" at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival. — AFP photos



US actor Kevin Costner is seen on a giant screen before the screening of the film "Horizon: An American Saga".

HOLLYWOOD ICONS COSTNER AND DEMI MOORE MAKE CANNES COMEBACK

Two Hollywood legends made their comeback at the Cannes Film Festival on Sunday, as Kevin Costner launched his sprawling self-funded Western and Demi Moore returned in a gore-filled body horror flick. The star-studded premieres arrived midway through the world's most famous movie festival, where "Emilia Perez" - a musical about a transgender drug lord, starring Selena Gomez - is currently the talk of the town.



Kevin Costner arrives for the screening of the film "Horizon: An American Saga".

Epic Western "Horizon, an American Saga" is a passion project for Costner, who told AFP he had started working on the screenplay in 1988. Despite having enormous success with Westerns, including the Oscar-winning "Dances with Wolves", "Open Range" and television's

"Yellowstone", he could not find a studio willing to fund his script.

"But I loved it and so I decided I would write four, which is very American of me - insane," said Costner, who bankrolled the project himself. The first film premiered at Cannes on Sunday in a special screening outside the main Palme d'Or competition. A second film has also been shot, and both will launch globally in theatres this summer.

"Horizon" follows multiple characters and storylines on the violent frontier, as Europeans establish settlements on Native American land.

Costner stars along with Sienna Miller and Sam Worthington. Critics were underwhelmed, with the Hollywood Reporter dubbing it a "clumsy slog."

Moore wows

Another veteran US star, Demi Moore, took centre stage in "The Substance", a horror film that tackles the immense pressures society places on women to maintain bodily perfection as they age. Moore starred in several hit movies in the 1990s, including "Ghost", "A Few Good Men", "Indecent Proposal" and "G.I. Jane".

This year's Cannes is a remarkable return to the red carpet, after years in which Moore has made headlines more for her marriages to Bruce Willis and Ashton Kutcher than her acting. The ultra-graphic film drew gasps and raucous ovations throughout its screening, and also fared much better in reviews.



(From left) US actor Dennis Quaid, US actress Margaret Qualley, Coralie Fargeat and US actress Demi Moore arrive for the screening of the film "The Substance".

Deadline called the movie "the year's smartest, goriest horror breakout", while Variety singled out Moore as "nothing short of fearless".

"The Substance", directed by Coralie Fargeat, is among 22 films competing for the Cannes festival's top prize, the Palme d'Or. Also on Sunday, Ben Whishaw drew rave reviews for his portrayal of a radical Soviet poet in "Limonov: The Ballad".

The Guardian said the British actor was "glorious" as a dissident writer who lived homeless in New York before returning to Russia and fronting a fascist

group. IndieWire hailed a "career-crowning" performance, which puts Whishaw among the favorites for the festival's acting prize.

Other high-profile entries that have played so far include Francis Ford Coppola's divisive epic "Megalopolis," Andrea Arnold's much-praised childhood saga "Bird" and Paul Schrader's widely panned "Oh, Canada".

Audiard's audience

The early frontrunner appears to be "Emilia Perez" from French auteur Jacques Audiard, who received a hero's

welcome from the world's media as he hosted a press conference Sunday, a day after its world premiere.

Karla Sofia Gascon, a Spanish trans woman, stars as a Mexican drug baron who longs to change gender and escape the narco life. "We're normal people who can have the careers they want," said Gascon.

Zoe Saldana plays a lawyer who must arrange the operation, which is kept secret from everyone including the narco boss's wife, portrayed by pop star-turned-actor Gomez.

The characters regularly break out into song, with lyrics tackling everything from plastic surgery to Mexico's struggles with corruption and warring drug gangs. Audiard said he had originally envisioned the film as an opera.

The "crumbling of democracy" in Mexico, a country he finds to be "schizophrenic", provided the perfect setting for "a tragedy", said the director.

Outside of the Palme d'Or competition, Cate Blanchett launched "Rumours", which follows a group of world leaders who meet for a G7 summit but end up getting lost in a forest, with debauchery ensuing.

"I think if you try to make sense of this movie, you'll feel like you're losing your mind," joked Blanchett. The Palme d'Or winner will be unveiled on Saturday, the festival's closing day. — AFP



(From left) US actress Selena Gomez, Venezuelan Actor Edgar Ramirez, French director Jacques Audiard and US actress Zoe Saldana arrive for the screening of the film "Emilia Perez".



(From left) US actor Dennis Quaid, French director Coralie Fargeat and US actress Demi Moore pose during a photocall for the film "The Substance".



Kevin Costner arrives for a press conference for the film "Horizon: An American Saga".

Cannes film follows Egypt feminists on brink of adulthood

Filmmakers Nada Riyadh and Ayman El Amir spent so much time following an all-girl theatre troupe in a remote Egyptian village that at one point someone tried to sell them a house.

"He thought we were always there so we might as well live there," Riyadh told AFP after the premiere of their documentary at the Cannes Film Festival.

"The Brink of Dreams" follows a group of teenage girls in rural southern Egypt over four years, between rehearsals, as they navigate the tough decisions that will determine their adulthood. Majda dreams of studying theatre in Cairo, Monika wants to become a famous singer and Haidi is being pursued by the hottest guy in the village.

In their feminist street performances, they boldly rail against the patriarchy, challenging members of the crowd on issues such as self-fulfilment and early marriage. But soon life takes over and the teenagers from Egypt's Coptic Christian minority find themselves confronted with these concepts for real.

The camera discreetly captures conversations in the family shop, between a father and daughter, or two lovers, as neighbors and animals go about their daily lives.

"In the beginning there was a lot of people always looking at the camera. Everybody was self-conscious," said Riyadh. But "once the trust had been built between them and us, we had that chance to blend in."

'Mind-blowing'

Riyadh said the documentary, which is screening in a sidebar section of the festival, was driven by her and co-director Amin discovering the troupe in 2017. The film "is intentionally feminist in every way but I think it was also dictated by what this inspiring group of women was already doing," she said.

It's "mind-blowing because they're demanding answers about very important things and opening a dialogue with everybody in their community."

Co-director Amin said the main chal-

lenge was editing down 100 hours of footage to tell this coming-of-age tale and convey a seldom seen side of Egypt. "Most mainstream films in Egypt tell stories about living in gated compounds and shopping in malls," Amin said.

"It's very rare to see stories that take place in the south outside of Cairo or Alexandria and see girls like those girls on screen." The documentary has a French distributor, but the filmmakers also hope to show the film widely in Egypt - including in the rural south.

Until then, six of the actors in the film got to attend the Cannes premiere, after a last-minute rush to get them their first passports and visas on time.

Monika, the aspiring singer, has two children now. But on the red carpet, the DJ played the catchy song that she made with a popular Egyptian producer called Molotof for the film's final credits. — AFP

Russia director at Cannes denounces Moscow theatre trial

Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov, competing for the Palme d'Or at Cannes, brandished a picture of two theatre artists who went on trial in Moscow on Monday. "They did absolutely nothing wrong, they just put on a show and they have already been in prison for a year," Serebrennikov told reporters at the film festival.

The arrest of director Yevgeniya Berkovich and writer Svetlana Petrichuk in May last year shook Russia's artistic community, already facing an increasingly repressive environment since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The women have been accused of justifying terrorism in their 2021 play about Russian women lured to marry Islamic State militants in Syria and tried for terrorism on their return. It was awarded two prestigious Golden Mask awards.

Serebrennikov, who has competed multiple times at the Cannes Film Festival, left Russia after the invasion. His new movie, "Limonov: The Bal-

lad" is an English-language portrayal of a radical Soviet poet starring British actor Ben Whishaw.

Serebrennikov told reporters in Cannes that Berkovich is one of his former students "and she is in prison for completely invented accusations".

"This is the real consequence of the law on foreign agentism," he added, referring to recent laws aimed at identifying Russian civil society groups that are financed from abroad. — AFP



Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov poses with a picture of two theatre artists who went on trial in Moscow during a photocall for the film "Limonov: The Ballad". — AFP

Sports

High-priced Cummins, Starc face off as IPL enters playoffs

Kolkata have been the team to beat with 20 points

AHMEDABAD: The two highest-priced players in the IPL—Australia teammates Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc will go head-to-head Tuesday for a place in the final as the cash-rich Twenty20 league enters the playoffs. Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper Cummins cost \$2.5 million at auction, a record which stood briefly until Kolkata Knight Riders then paid \$2.98 million for fast bowler Starc.

Former champions Hyderabad finished second after a four-wicket win over Punjab Kings on Sunday with Kolkata topping the table—setting up the clash at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad where the winners will reach Sunday's final.

The losers will get a second chance on Friday against either the third-placed Rajasthan Royals or Royal Challengers Bengaluru, who finished fourth. They play in an eliminator on Wednesday.

The final will be followed just six days later by the T20 World Cup in the West Indies and the United States. Cummins last year led Australia to the 50-over World Cup when they beat India in the final, also at Ahmedabad. "We've had a lot of fun and played some really great cricket," Cummins said of his side that twice broke the IPL scoring record this season, with innings of 277 and 287.

"It's satisfying and exciting" to be in the play-offs, he said. "A few of these guys haven't played in (IPL) finals before—I haven't played in finals before."

Into the groove

Kolkata have been the team to beat with 20 points from 14 matches and were the first of the 10 IPL teams to clinch a playoff place. They hit 272-7 against Delhi Capitals this season, the third highest innings in IPL history behind Hyderabad's two huge totals. Starc had a quiet start, but began to justify his price tag with match-winning figures of 3-38 against Lucknow Super Giants last month. He then took 4-33 against Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede Stadium earlier this month, getting into the groove ahead of the World Cup. He has taken 12 wickets in 12 matches but has been expensive, with an economy rate of more than 11 per over on the batting-friendly pitches that have dominated the 2024 season. Cummins has 15 wickets in 13 games but it is his captaincy that has stood out with his rotation of bowlers key in Hyderabad winning eight out of 14 matches.

His lower-order batting—Cummins scored an IPL fifty in 14 balls in 2022 for Kolkata—has also come in handy with a highest of 35 not out. Cummins has



HYDERABAD: Sunrisers Hyderabad's captain Pat Cummins (C) greets supporters after his team's win in the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Punjab Kings at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad. — AFP

fellow Australian Travis Head for company in Hyderabad. The attacking opener has scored 533 runs, with a century and four fifties, to stand third in the batting chart led by Bengaluru's Virat Kohli on 708.

Kohli and Bengaluru reached the playoffs after beating Chennai Super Kings in a dramatic final league match at the weekend to keep their hopes alive of a first IPL title.—AFP



LOUISVILLE: Xander Schauffele of the United States poses with the Wanamaker Trophy after winning the final round of the 2024 PGA Championship at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville. — AFP

Schauffele birdies final hole to capture PGA for first major win

LOUISVILLE: Xander Schauffele outdueled Bryson DeChambeau down the back nine on Sunday to win the PGA Championship, capturing his first major triumph with the lowest score in major history. Third-ranked Schauffele sank a tension-packed six-foot birdie putt on the par-5 18th hole at Valhalla for a one-stroke victory over DeChambeau to snap a two-year victory drought. "I was actually kind of emotional after the putt lipped in," said Schauffele. "It has been a while since I've won. I kept saying it all week. I just need to stay in my lane. And man, was it hard to stay in my lane today. But I tried all day to just keep focus on what I'm trying to do."

Schauffele, who had 12 prior top-10 major finishes without a victory, had not won an event since the 2022 Scottish Open, having had 19 top-10 PGA Tour finishes during his drought. But he matched the lowest round in major history with a nine-under 62 on Thursday and was equal to the challenge on Sunday.

The reigning Olympic champion fired a six-under par 65 and finished 72 holes on 21-under 263 to edge fellow American DeChambeau, the 2020 US Open champion. Schauffele broke the old 72-hole record low under-par winning score of 20-under, done four times, most recently by Australian Cameron Smith at the 2022 British Open. Victory was worth \$3.33 million to Schauffele from an \$18.5 million purse while DeChambeau took home \$1.998 million. "Proud of Xander for finally getting the job done," DeChambeau said. He's an amazing golfer and well deserved major champion now.

"On my side of the coin, disappointing. I played well. Shot 20-under par in a major championship. Proud of myself for the way I handled adversity. Definitely disappointing, but one that gives me a lot of momentum for the rest of the majors."

DeChambeau closed with a 64 while Norway's Victor Hovland, last year's PGA runner-up, was third on 266 after shooting a 66. Belgium's Thomas Detry fired a 66 to share fourth on 269 with Collin Morikawa, the 54-hole co-leader who made 16 pars in shooting 71. England's Justin Rose and Ireland's Shane Lowry shared sixth on 270.

DeChambeau rolled in a birdie putt from just beyond 10 feet at the par-5 18th hole, the ball barely dropping in, to match Schauffele for the lead at 20-under. Seconds later, Hovland missed his 10-foot birdie putt to doom his chances and ended up making a bogey.

Schauffele's tee shot at 18 was in the left rough on the edge of a fairway bunker. He calmly blasted his second shot 36 yards from the hole in the fairway short of the green and dropped his approach six feet from the hole. The ball made a slight roll on the edge as it fell in to give him a wire-to-wire triumph, counting shared leads. Not since 2005 Phil Mickelson at Baltusrol had a player birdied the 72nd hole to win the Wanamaker Trophy. "I just told myself this is my opportunity and just capture it," Schauffele said. He put past defeats in perspective with a text from his father—a steady drip breaks the rock. — AFP

Comic heroes fuel Japan Olympic volleyball mania

TOKYO: Men's volleyball is flying high in Japan with the national team ranked fourth globally ahead of the Paris Olympics and the sport's soaring popularity fuelled by a manga blockbuster.

"Haikyu!!," the tale of school teams featuring an inspirational comic-book hero determined to beat the odds and his diminutive stature, has sold 60 million copies since its 2012 inception. Turned into a hit anime series, now a new film "Haikyu!!: The Dumpster Battle" has taken 10 billion yen (\$65 million) at the Japanese box office and will release in North America this month.

Masahiro Yanagida, who captained the national team from 2018-2021, said he was "immensely grateful" that the exploits of the fictional team have helped trigger a boom in numbers hitting the courts.

"I have all volumes of the manga myself," he told AFP, recalling being "completely hooked" on its "pretty realistic" depictions of the sport. High-school volleyball club membership for boys jumped from 35,000 in 2012 to more than 50,000 this year, official records show.

Anime-like action

Among those inspired is Kaede Sakashita, 10, seeking to emulate "Haikyu!!" elite setter Atsumu Miya, and his low-lunge toss, in a Tokyo sports hall. "He's my role model," Sakashita, a member of Tokyo's Sugijichi junior volleyball club, told AFP. The "Haikyu!!" fandom goes beyond boys. For Nanami Fujiki, 22, the manga ignited her "love" for the sport. "I used to have no interest at all... I didn't even know the rules," she told AFP at a pop-up store selling "Haikyu!!" merchandise.

But now thanks to the series "I can enjoy the actual matches in a way I never did before." The current national team has a real-life echo of the comic in star players like Ran Takahashi, a wildly popular 22-year-old playing in Italy's top league.

Despite not being tall by volleyball standards, the 1.88 metre (6ft 2in) outside hitter stunned the world last

year with a pirouetting spike with his back to the net—just like a character in "Haikyu!!". "Thanks perhaps to 'Haikyu!!', I feel the visually entertaining plays of Japanese volleyball are riveting spectators worldwide more and more," Takahashi told AFP. "Some may say the quality of Japanese volleyball is approaching anime."

'Miracle in Munich'

Japan's glory days in volleyball date back more than half a century. The women's team, the "Oriental Witchess", famously defeated the Soviet Union to win gold at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, followed by the men's "Miracle in Munich" gold medal in 1972.

The women have since fared better since, winning bronze at the 2012 London Olympics, although they haven't qualified for Paris yet. The men meanwhile "stagnated for ages," Japan Volleyball Association spokesman Naohiro Kakitani told AFP. The turning point came with players such as Takahashi and Yuki Ishikawa, 28, foraying into Italy's top league, along with the team's transformation since the 2017 arrival of French coach Philippe Blain, Kakitani added.

Last year, Blain's squad finished third at the Volleyball Nations League, the first men's medal at a major international tournament in 46 years. "They're now on a whole different level that I wouldn't have dreamed of in our time," said Yanagida.

The sport still has challenges, however, with critics pointing to the poor profitability of Japan's top-level V.League. The league features many company-backed teams whose players don't rely on volleyball for a living and can therefore be less motivated, Yanagida said.

Breaking the mould is Yanagida's current club, Tokyo Great Bears. Donning pink uniforms, they are "actively shedding an aggressive, macho image" often associated with male athletes, to ensure "female fans wouldn't feel ignored," club president Takeshi Kubota told AFP.

This approach, combined with tie-ups with YouTube and musicians, helped Tokyo Great Bears lure the biggest crowds in the men's division for two straight years. "We wanted to prove volleyball can draw crowds," Kubota said. And it's a mindset that resonates with Takahashi, who willingly makes himself a volleyball poster boy by modelling and singing on YouTube. "I want to make volleyball a sport children can dream of," he said. — AFP



TOKYO: This picture taken on April 19, 2024 shows people visiting a pop-up store for the Japanese volleyball manga series "Haikyu!!" in Tokyo. — AFP

McLaughlin powers to Indy 500 pole in Penske front row

WASHINGTON: New Zealand's Scott McLaughlin produced a blistering qualifying session to grab pole position for next week's Indianapolis 500 in a Team Penske front row sweep. McLaughlin, last out in the "Fast Six" final qualifying, stormed to pole with an average four-lap speed of 234.220 miles per hour (376.94 Km/h) -- a record average speed in qualifying at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Teammates Will Power (234.220 mph) and defending champion Josef Newgarden (233.808 mph) will start second and third on the grid at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. It is just the second time in the history of

the race that a team has produced a front row sweep—Penske first achieved that feat in 1988.

It was the first time that McLaughlin has grabbed pole at Indianapolis but a record-extending 19th pole for Team Penske. "So much pride in being able to do it, this is the first step and very proud to do it for all these guys and girls on the team," said McLaughlin, who switched to IndyCar racing in 2020 after a successful career in the Supercars Championship.

"It's a lot of hard work, a lot of visualizing, mental game, trying to figure out what the best execution looks like," he added. American Newgarden will attempt to become the first driver to win back-to-back Indy 500's in 22 years and had mixed feelings with his third place.

"It's bittersweet. I mean, this is an amazing job by Team Penske, to have all three cars in the front row is a testament to the team," he said. "That is what Indianapolis rewards, the effort from every individual that we have in this group, it takes an entire year to get to this point, we don't find this over a week or two.

"So I'm thrilled for the team (but) I'm bummed. I

Kuwait's Al-Rajhi 5th in 400m final at Kobe Championships

TOKYO: Kuwait's national team player Faisal Al-Rajhi finished fifth in the men's 400 meters T54 final, at the Para Athletics World Championships, Monday. He clocked 46.78 seconds, while China's Hu Yang earned the gold medal in a Championship record of 44.98 seconds in the event at the Kobe Universiade Memorial Stadium, Western Japan.

On Saturday, Al-Rajhi, 25, secured the gold medal in 5,000-meter wheelchair race, making a remarkable achievement ahead of the upcoming Paralympic Games in Paris 2024. He is also set to compete in 1,500 meters and 800 meters races in the Kobe games.

In the nine-day championships through May 25, Kuwait has sent four athletes, Al-Rajhi, Dhari Buti in the men's shot put F37, Tokyo Paralympics bronze medalist Faisal Sorour in the men's shot put F63 and Malak Ali in the women's javelin throw F54. — KUNA

Paralympics should put disability back on global agenda: IPC

PARIS: The Paris Paralympics are expected to give the movement the biggest boost since the mould-breaking 2012 London Games — and organisers hope they will help to move the rights of disabled people to the top of the list of global priorities.

International Paralympic Committee (IPC) president Andrew Parsons believes the Games, which follow the Olympics and open in 100 days' time on August 28, "will have a big impact on how people with disability are perceived around the world".

"This is one of the key expectations we have around Paris 2024: we believe that we need people with disability to be put back on the global agenda," Parsons told AFP in an interview. He says disability has fallen behind issues such as gender identity in recent years.

"We do believe people with disability have been left behind. There is very little debate about persons with disability." The COVID pandemic exacerbated the situation. "In the pandemic, they were really affected. Some of the health systems, even in big nations, were put to the test and they have failed people with disability," Parsons said.

After the COVID-blighted 2020 Tokyo Paralympics and the 2022 Winter Paralympics in Beijing that largely played out in empty venues, Paris represents a return to normality — and crowds. "We'll have spectators back, and this is a huge difference from Tokyo and Beijing," Parsons, a Brazilian, said. "There is a Paris effect, to be close to iconic landmarks, to have five-a-side football at the Eiffel Tower or taekwondo at the Grand Palais. The images that people will see around the world will be fantastic." The IPC is confident the TV audience for Paris will surpass the 4.1 billion who watched the Tokyo Paralympics, helped by kinder times for viewers in Europe and the Americas.—AFP

wish the two car could have been up there but we are there, all three of us are, so it is a great day for Team Penske," he said. Alexander Rossi of Arrow McLaren will start fourth while Kyle Larson of Hendrick Motorsports, will be fifth on the grid.

Larson left the track by helicopter to head to North Carolina where he will drive in the NASCAR All Star Race later on Sunday. Next week Larson plans to compete at Indy and then NASCAR's Coca-Cola 600 in Charlotte on the same day.

Santino Ferrucci of A.J. Foyt Racing was sixth-fastest on Sunday. British driver Katherine Legge of Dale Coyne Racing and Sweden's Marcus Ericsson of Andretti, the 2022 winner both made it through in Last Chance Qualifying.

Graham Rahal of Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing also grabbed one of the three spots still available on Sunday on the last row of the grid, but 19-year-old rookie Nolan Siegel missed out after losing control after clipping the wall in his Dale Coyne Racing Honda on the final attempt of the session. — AFP

Sports

Brest secure CL qualification, PSG win without Mbappe

Mbappe expected to play his last game for PSG against Lyon

PARIS: Brest belied their status as one of the smallest clubs in France's top flight as they secured Champions League qualification for the first time in their history on Sunday, while Paris Saint-Germain completed their Ligue 1 campaign by beating Metz 2-0 without Kylian Mbappe.

Modest Brittany outfit Brest began the day in fourth place, behind Lille on goal difference, with the top three in Ligue 1 going straight into next season's expanded 36-team Champions League and the side in fourth entering in the preliminary rounds.

Brest duly did their bit by easing to a 3-0 victory away at Toulouse thanks to second-half goals by Mahdi Camara, Jordan Amavi and Kenny Lala. They then needed a favour in Lille, and got one as the home side conceded late to draw 2-2 with Nice.

Lille had trailed to an early Gaetan Laborde goal, but looked set to get the victory they required when Hakon Haraldsson and Benjamin Andre scored after the break to turn the game around. However, Jordan Lotomba's injury-time strike earned a point for Nice, who were already guaranteed to finish fifth and will be in the Europa League next season.

Lille, who reached the Champions League last 16 in 2022, will now have to come through two qualifying rounds to get into the league stage of Europe's elite club competition. Brest had never previously finished above eighth in the top flight and so will be playing in Europe for the very first time next season.

It is expected that Eric Roy's team will have to play home games in the Champions League at a neutral venue as their own Stade Francis-Le Ble does not meet UEFA requirements. "It is difficult to describe the emotion. Even as a player I never experienced emotions like it," said Roy, a former Marseille and Sunderland midfielder.

"It is why we love football. I had already congratulated the lads for being guaranteed a top-four place but there was one more stage to conquer. "We thoroughly deserve it after the season we have had." France captain Mbappe was left out of PSG's squad as the champions won away at struggling Metz.

Mbappe, who will leave PSG at the end of the campaign after seven years, had already missed his team's 2-1 victory at Nice in midweek due to a hamstring niggle. He did not travel with the team to Metz and was one of several first-team regulars who were rested by coach Luis Enrique, whose side had already wrapped up the title.

Ousmane Dembele, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Marquinhos and Vitinha also played no part but PSG still claimed the victory thanks to early goals by Carlos Soler and Lee Kang-in. Mbappe is still expected to play his last game for PSG in next week's French Cup final against Lyon, before a likely move to Real Madrid for next season.

Lyon qualify for Europe

Despite their defeat, Metz could still stay up. They end the season in the relegation play-off place, finishing above Lorient because they scored more away goals in meetings between the two clubs. Lorient's 5-0 win over Clermont meant they ended level with Metz on points and goal difference, but the Brittany club go straight down to Ligue 2 with Clermont, while Metz will get a second chance to survive in a play-off against a side from the second tier.

Elsewhere, Lyon completed an astonishing turnaround in their fortunes as Alexandre Lacazette's stoppage-time penalty secured a 2-1 win over Strasbourg that saw them snatch European qualification. Lyon had been rock bottom in early December and looked favourites for relegation, but their revival un-



TOULOUSE: Brest's French defender #03 Lilian Brassier (R) runs with the ball during the French L1 football match between Toulouse (TFC) and Stade Brestois 29 (Brest) at the Stadium TFC in Toulouse, south-western France. — AFP

der new coach Pierre Sage has been stunning.

They made it 15 wins in their last 20 league games with Lacazette getting the decisive goal after his opener had been cancelled out by Habib Diarra. Lyon finish sixth, pipping Lens after they squandered a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 with Montpellier. Sage's team are therefore certain to play in the

Europa League next season, before going into the French Cup final against PSG next weekend, while Lens finish seventh and will be in the Conference League. In other games, runners-up Monaco crushed Nantes 4-0, while Marseille missed out on a European place despite a 2-1 win at Le Havre, and Reims defeated Rennes 2-1. — AFP

Guardiola casts doubt over long term City future

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola cast doubt over his long-term future at Manchester City on Sunday after winning a historic fourth straight Premier League title, admitting it is difficult to find motivation after so much sustained success.

City's 3-1 victory against West Ham sealed a sixth top-flight title in seven seasons under the Catalan, who has taken the club to extraordinary new levels since he arrived in 2016. His tally is exceeded only by Alex Ferguson, who won 13 Premier League titles during his long reign at Manchester United.

In 2019 City became the first club to win the domestic treble of Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup in the same season and last year they emulated Manchester United's class of 1999 in winning the treble of Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League, which they lifted for the first time.

City are now the first side in English top-flight history to win four titles in a row—surpassing the achievements of the great Liverpool and Manchester United teams from previous eras. And next week they will attempt to become

the first English side to win back to back domestic doubles when they take on United at Wembley in the FA Cup final.

Former Barcelona and Bayern Munich manager Guardiola, 53, has a contract at the Etihad until the end of next season but his future after that is unclear. "The reality is I'm closer to leaving than to staying," Guardiola told Sky Sports. "It's eight years, will be nine.

"Right now my feeling is I want to stay next season. We talked with the club, we have time to talk next season because I have to see the players as well (to see) if they follow me, they follow us, for many reasons. I will stay and during the season we will talk when calm."

Asked at his post-match press conference whether he felt as though he had "completed English football" and what he felt was left to achieve, Guardiola shrugged his shoulders and said: "I had that feeling last season.

"When we won in Istanbul (in the Champions League final) I said, 'It's over, what am I doing here? It's over, there's nothing left.' "But I have a contract, I'm here and still enjoying. Some of the moments I'm a bit tired but



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola poses with the Premier League trophy after the presentation ceremony following the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and West Ham United at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. — AFP

some of the moments I love, and after I said 'OK, we are here'.

"We start winning games, playing good, different players, new players and I start to think about 'No one has done four in a row, why don't we try?' And now I feel 'It's done, so what next?' I don't know right now."

He added: "Next season, right now, I'm not able to know exact-

ly what will be the motivation to do it because it's difficult sometimes to find it when everything is done." Guardiola said for now he was enjoying basking in the glow of another Premier League triumph.

"When I moved here if someone had said I would win six leagues in seven seasons I would say you're insane—no way," he said. — AFP

Wirtz returns to help Leverkusen chase history

LEVERKUSEN: Bayer Leverkusen's chances in Wednesday's Europa League final clash with Atalanta in Dublin have been boosted by the return of star midfielder Florian Wirtz to full fitness. A crucial component of their maiden Bundesliga title bid, Wirtz has had to settle for a bit part role in recent weeks as coach Xabi Alonso, with games like this in mind, wrapped the 21-year-old in cotton wool.

With Wirtz forced to play through the pain of a muscle injury to his leg, Alonso has used the midfielder sparingly. Wirtz has not played a full 90 minutes since Leverkusen's Europa League quarter-final win over West Ham on April 11, nine games ago, but has still made an impact.

He came off the bench at half-time and scored a hat-trick as Leverkusen beat Werder Bremen 5-0 to secure the title in mid-April. In his next two league games, Wirtz laid on equalisers deep in stoppage time against Borussia Dortmund and Stuttgart which kept their unbeaten run alive.

'Mr 70 Percent'

Even with a team firing on all cylinders amid a 51-game unbeaten run in all competitions dating back to May 2023, Alonso knows Wirtz offers something unique. While the club now boasts a squad the envy of many in Europe, Wirtz remains the club's only true superstar.

Wirtz turned 21 in May and has 18 goals and 20 assists in all competitions this season. Born just 20 minutes away in the village of Pulheim, his performances have him earmarked for future Ballon d'Or honours, with some in the German media suggesting he may be an outside chance this year should Germany go far at the Euros.

The coach, who has repeatedly preached patience as Leverkusen have continued their rampage this season, has taken risks with Wirtz despite his injury. Alonso admitted he had tried to rest Wirtz in the second leg of Leverkusen's Europa League semi-final



LEVERKUSEN: (FILES) Bayer Leverkusen's Spanish head coach Xabi Alonso and his players celebrate with the Bundesliga trophy after the German first division Bundesliga football match between Bayer 04 Leverkusen and FC Augsburg in Leverkusen. — AFP

against Roma, but brought him off the bench with nine minutes remaining and Leverkusen trailing 2-0, level 2-2 on aggregate.

The hosts scored a minute later to take the lead in the tie and added a second in stoppage time to stretch their unbeaten streak to 49 games, breaking a 59-year-old European record in the process. "He couldn't run well, he was limping, but he wanted to help the team," Alonso said afterwards. "He's still a pretty good player when he's 70 percent fit," Alonso said. "But he still needs a bit more time." Wirtz missed the next two league games and returned on Saturday, with Alonso saying beforehand "he feels much better... (and) could play from the start."

'Laterkusen' chasing history

Coming into this season, the 1988 Europa League and the 1993 German Cup were the only titles Leverkusen had won in their 120-year history. Having

clinched the Bundesliga in mid-April, Leverkusen—who face second-division Kaiserslautern in the German Cup final on Saturday—are now two wins away from an unbeaten treble.

Without a trophy since the 1963 Coppa Italia, Atalanta will also be hoping for a drought-breaking victory—but face a side who do not seem to know when they are beaten. Even if Atalanta, who lost the Coppa Italia final to Juventus on Wednesday, manage to get a jump on their opponents, Leverkusen's record late in matches will keep Gian Piero Gasperini's side looking over their shoulder.

Leverkusen have scored 15 goals after the 90-minute mark this season, often snatching victory, or at least a draw, from the jaws of defeat. While luck, momentum and an insatiable home crowd have played a role, opponents have struggled to keep up with Leverkusen's relentless ball movement and have faded late. — AFP

S Korea to name caretaker coach

SEOUL: South Korea said Monday they will have another caretaker coach in charge when they look to seal their place in the next round of qualifying for football's 2026 World Cup. Kim Do-hoon, whose previous job ended after he appeared to headbutt an assistant from an opposing team, will take over for two games next month.

Son Heung-min's South Korea sacked Jurgen Klinsmann in February and have yet to find a permanent replacement. Under-23 coach Hwang Sun-hong took over for a 1-1 home draw with Thailand and the 3-0 win in the return fixture in Bangkok in March, leaving South Korea needing just a point from their two remaining games to guarantee progress in qualifying.

The Korea Football Association said that former international striker Kim will oversee matches away at Singapore on June 6 and home to China five days later. "It is possible negotiations for the appointment of the national head coach will not be finalised by the matches in June," the KFA said in a statement.

"To prepare for such a case, we have decided to appoint Kim Do-hoon as interim coach for the two matches." Kim coached Ulsan in the domestic K League from 2017 to 2020, taking them to the Asian Champions League crown. — AFP

Kane to face old club Spurs for first time in Seoul

SEOUL: England captain Harry Kane will face his old club Tottenham Hotspur and former strike partner Son Heung-min for the first time in August after Spurs announced a pre-season fixture against Bayern Munich in Seoul. Tottenham had already scheduled a match against Vissel Kobe in Japan on July 27 and have now added the clash with Bayern on August 3 at the Seoul World Cup Stadium. "We are delighted to announce that our men's first team will travel to South Korea as part of its pre-season tour of Asia this summer," said Tottenham in a statement on Monday.

It will be the Premier League club's fourth visit to South Korea where they enjoy massive popularity thanks to national hero Son. On their most recent trip in 2022, large crowds turned out just to watch Tottenham train, with Kane also highly popular.

Kane and Son combined for a Premier League-record 47 goals in eight seasons together at Spurs. "It is fantastic to have the opportunity to engage with our huge fan base in the country," said Tottenham executive director Donna-Maria Cullen. — AFP



MADRID: Bayern Munich's English forward #09 Harry Kane and teammates react to their defeat after the UEFA Champions League semi final second leg football match between Real Madrid CF and FC Bayern Munich at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

Timberwolves knock out defending champion Nuggets

Pacers shoot down Knicks to reach NBA Eastern Conference finals



COLORADO: Karl-Anthony Towns #32 of the Minnesota Timberwolves shoots the ball against Nikola Jokic #15 of the Denver Nuggets during the first half in Game Seven of the Western Conference Second Round Playoffs at Ball Arena in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: The Minnesota Timberwolves erased a 20-point deficit to stun Denver 98-90, knocking the defending NBA champions out of the playoffs Sunday as Indiana ousted the New York Knicks.

Karl-Anthony Towns scored 23 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, Jaden McDaniels added 23 points and Anthony Edwards hit his stride late as the Timberwolves became the first team to come back from a halftime deficit of more than 11 points to win a game seven. The Pacers connected on an NBA playoff record 67.1 percent of their shots - making 53 of their 79 attempts from the floor - in a 130-109 game seven triumph over the Knicks at Madison Square Garden.

Edwards, who has emerged as a star for the Timberwolves at 22, said poise was the key to Minnesota's latest unlikely victory over three-time NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic and the Nuggets.

Down by 15 at halftime, Minnesota trailed by 20 early in the third. But Denver went cold as Edwards found

his range and the Timberwolves cut the deficit to one point going into the fourth quarter. Edwards, who scored 12 of his 16 points in the second half, said coach Chris Finch told him at the break to "play quicker."

"If they're going to continue to trap you, you got to make the right play and trust your teammates," Edwards said. "We was just poised throughout the entire game. We just fought, fought."

"And KAT played spectacular tonight," Edwards added of Towns. "He carried us tonight." Minnesota had pulled within one point going into the fourth quarter and took the lead for good on Rudy Gobert's driving layup in the first minute of the final period.

Jokic scored 14 of his 34 points in the fourth quarter. He added 19 rebounds and seven assists and Jamal Murray scored 35 points but both said the Nuggets just missed too many shots.

"I felt like we got the shots we wanted and the opportunities were there," Murray said. The Timberwolves, who had rocked the Nuggets with two wins in Denver to open the series before dropping

three straight games, closed it out with a blowout game six win and their final comeback triumph.

"It's a special moment," Finch said. "This is a hell of a team with the best player on the planet. The series was wild, and this game was just a microcosm of the series."

Minnesota will play the Dallas Mavericks in the Western Conference finals while the Pacers booked an Eastern Conference finals showdown with the top-seeded Boston Celtics.

Tyrese Haliburton scored 26 points while Pascal Siakam and Andrew Nembhard added 20 apiece as six Pacers players scored in double figures.

Donte DiVincenzo made nine three-pointers on the way to 39 points for the Knicks. Jalen Brunson scored 17 and handed out nine assists before departing with a broken left hand at the start of the fourth quarter - a final injury blow for the ravaged Knicks.

The Pacers broke through for their first road win of the series with a breathtaking offensive display in the first half, when they made 29 of their 38 shots for

a 76.3 shooting percentage.

The Knicks cut a 15-point halftime deficit to six early in the third, but the Pacers had all the answers. "Just a great game overall, top to bottom for us," Haliburton said. "We hadn't won on the road all series - we just found a way."

The Knicks, chasing a first Eastern Conference finals berth since 2000, hurt their own cause with two costly turnovers on inbounds plays and the Pacers quickly pushed the lead back to 19 points.

The Knicks had hoped for a boost from forward OG Anunoby, who returned to the starting lineup after missing four games with a hamstring injury.

But Anunoby was clearly limited and departed in the first quarter as hurting teammate Josh Hart soldiered on despite an abdominal strain.

"Guys gave everything they had, and that's all you could ask," said Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau, who was without Julius Randle, Mitchell Robinson and Bojan Bogdanovic for the playoffs. "It was a battle all year and there was nothing left to give at the end." — AFP

Jackson wins season opener in Marrakesh with all eyes on Paris

MARRAKESH: Jamaica's two-time world champion Shericka Jackson sealed victory in the women's 200m at the Diamond League meet in Marrakesh on Sunday as she set her focus on this summer's Paris Olympics.

Jackson the fastest woman alive over the distance had twice delayed her return to her favored half-lap event this season. She clocked 22.82 seconds in lane six for the win. The Jamaican, the first athlete in world champs history to win medals in the 100, 200 and 400 metres - including the 4x100 and 4x400 metres relays - had to graft for her victory, however. She then grimaced as she watched the replay on the big screen. "I think it was a pretty good race for the first race of my season," Jackson insisted after what was her first appearance in track and field's elite one-day series this year. "The time is what it is. I tried to focus on my technique and execution. I think I did good."

"Next? I don't know. For me it is only the start of the season, I don't know about the next race. And it is too early to talk about the events I will do at the Paris Olympics," said Jackson, a six-time Olympic medallist including gold in the 4x100m relay at the Covid-delayed Tokyo Games in 2021.

With the Paris Games just 11 weeks away, Canada's An-

dre De Grasse, the reigning Olympic 200m champion, was edged at the line in the 100m by African champion Emmanuel Eseme of Cameroon. Eseme clocked 10.11sec into a headwind, De Grasse timing 10.19sec in second ahead of Briton Jeremiah Azu. Home favorite Soufiane El Bakkali, the Fez-born Olympic champion and reigning two-time world gold medallist, sealed victory in the men's 3,000m steeplechase in 8:09.40 ahead of Ethiopia's Getnet Wale.

El Bakkali wins on home soil

It was El Bakkali's third successive victory at Diamond League events in Morocco to bring the curtain down perfectly on the meet in Marrakesh. He timed his last 600 metres to perfection, passing Getnet and gritting his teeth through to the line for a victory that sent the crowd at the Grand Stadium wild. Ethiopian Lamecha Girma, who won steeplechase silvers in the last three global competitions when El Bakkali took gold, opted to avoid a showdown with the Moroccan and instead ran against a loaded field in the men's 1,500m. But there was a shock win in 3:32.86 for Moroccan-born Frenchman Azeddine Habz, only cleared to represent his adopted country in 2018, ahead of Britons George Mills and Elliot Giles, with Girma fourth.

Two 18-year-old women had earlier impressed, Angelina Topic winning the high jump in a Serbian national record of 1.98m, while Medina Eisa of Ethiopia sprinted to victory in the 5,000m in 12:34.16. In the field, Cuban Lazaro Martinez won the men's triple jump in a meeting record of 17.10m ahead of Portugal's Pedro Pichardo (16.92).

Lithuania's Mykolas Alekna, the new world record holder, was the only man to go past the 70-metre mark, by 70 centimetres, to win the men's discus, Australia's Common-



MARRAKESH: Jamaica's Shericka Jackson celebrates winning the women's 200m during the IAAF Diamond League competition at the Grand Stadium in Marrakesh. — AFP

wealth champion Matthew Denny in second (67/74). Belgium's Alexander Doom, winner of the world indoor title in Glasgow in February, claimed victory in the men's 400m in a personal best of 44.51sec, just three-hundredths ahead of Zambia's Muzala Samukonga.

"I'm supper happy for winning this race," said Doom. "I was not expecting to win it and achieve my PB. Especially, this is my first outdoor race this season as I just came out from injury." The 800m races went to Kenya's Emmanuel Wanyonyi in 1:43.84 and South Africa's Prudence Sekgodiso in a personal best of 1:57.26 in the women's race, the fastest in the world this year. — AFP



NEW JERSEY: Nelly Korda of the United States poses with the winner's trophy after winning the Mizuho Americas Open at Liberty National Golf Club in Jersey City, New Jersey. — AFP

Korda wins sixth LPGA title at Liberty National

NEW YORK: World number one Nelly Korda continued her remarkable year, clinching her sixth win on the LPGA Tour with victory at the Mizuho Americas Open at Liberty National on Sunday. Korda duelled with Australian Hannah Green throughout the final round in Jersey City but Green made bogey on the final hole. Korda's one-under round of 71 was enough for the one stroke victory. The 25-year-old American missed out on what would have been a record sixth straight title at the Founders Cup last week.

But despite a shaky front nine, where she made three bogeys and a birdie, Korda recovered with birdies on the 10th, 13th and 15th. It came down to the final hole with the leading pair level - Green found the left rough after pulling her tee shot while Korda safely found the fairway. Green's second shot ended in the rough by the greenside bunker and she then found the green but left herself a 15-foot putt. Korda's putt for birdie was just inches away, leaving Green to make her putt to force a playoff which the Australian was unable to do as she made bogey.

"Oh my gosh, six, I mean, I just can't even really gather myself now after that head-to-head that Hannah and I had pretty much all day," Korda said. "It wasn't my best stuff out there today but fought really hard on the back nine," she added. — AFP