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3 Amir receives UAE Balloon team, GCC Balloon to soar



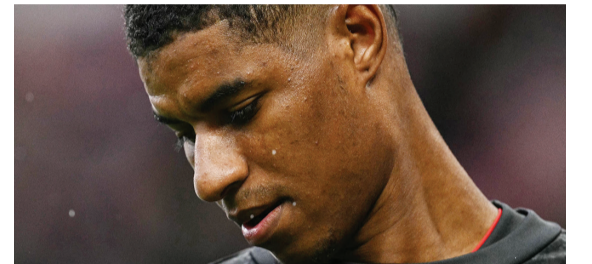
7 9 child workers die in Egypt as bus plunges into the Nile



8 Volvo Cars Kuwait launches the new fully electric EX30



15 Man Utd's Rashford left out of England's Euro 2024 squad



Nationality law petition rejected

Court to review Chamber law, tosses poll challenges • Citizenship probe panel meets

Qadsia beat Salmiya to lift record 17th Amir Cup



KUWAIT: (Left) HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah presents the Amir Cup to Qadsia Sporting Club players after they beat Al-Salmiya Sporting Club at Jaber International Stadium on May 21, 2024. (Right) Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi greets HH the Amir and presented him a memorial sword. (See Page 16)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The constitutional court on Tuesday rejected a petition challenging the rights of children of naturalized Kuwaitis to run in parliamentary polls. The petition had argued that a law issued in 1994 allowing children of naturalized citizens to contest elections breached the constitution and should be canceled. Under Kuwaiti law, naturalized citizens have no right to contest parliamentary polls for life, but their children are considered Kuwaitis by birth and accordingly are allowed to contest National Assembly elections.

Kuwaiti citizenship is divided into several categories based on the way citizens had obtained their nationality. Kuwaitis, who or their ancestors had been in Kuwait before 1920, are considered native Kuwaitis or first-degree citizens and have unrestricted right to vote and run for public office. The petition demanded that contesting parliamentary polls should be restricted to first-degree citizens and that children of naturalized Kuwaitis must be banned from running in elections.

The court rejected the motion, saying that those who submitted the petition failed to explain the damage, if any, to national interests if children of naturalized Kuwaitis are allowed to contest polls. Rulings by the constitutional court are final and cannot be challenged. The constitutional court also decided on Tuesday to throw out all challenges related to the April 4 parliamentary polls.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

King Salman's health reassuring

RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Tuesday offered reassuring words about the health of King Salman, who has a lung infection, state media said. Prince Mohammed "reassures everyone about the health of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques", the official Saudi Press Agency said. Prince Mohammed also voiced "gratitude to everyone who inquired about King Salman's health" and prayed for his "speedy recovery". — AFP

Syrian first lady has leukemia

BEIRUT: Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's British-born wife Asma, who recovered from breast cancer in 2019, has been diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia, an aggressive cancer of the white blood cells involved in battling infection, the president's office said on Tuesday. It added she will undergo a "specialized treatment protocol" that requires social distancing to avoid infection and will "temporarily withdraw from all direct engagements". — AFP

Amal Clooney helped ICC

WASHINGTON: Amal Clooney helped the International Criminal Court weigh evidence that led to the decision to seek arrest warrants for top Zionist and Hamas leaders, the human rights lawyer said Monday. The high-profile British-Lebanese barrister said she was asked by prosecutor Karim Khan to join an expert panel to "evaluate evidence of suspected war crimes and crimes against humanity in (the Zionist entity) and Gaza." — AFP (See Page 5)

Officials offer condolences on Raisi's demise

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Following the tragic helicopter crash in northwest Iran that claimed the lives of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian and others, the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Kuwait opened a three-day condolence book to honor their memory.

Senior Kuwaiti officials, including Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammed Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, on behalf of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya,



KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammed Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah (left) and Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya (right) write in the book of condolences at the Iranian Embassy on May 21, 2024 following the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

offered deep condolences, expressing sorrow and praying for peace and solace for the bereaved families and the Iranian nation.

Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Toutouchi expressed grat-

itude for the support from Kuwaiti leaders. He highlighted that under the late President Raisi's leadership, Iran strengthened its international relations, especially with Arab nations like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. He expressed pride in Raisi's legacy, noting his staunch support for Palestine and Gaza against the Zionist entity, and emphasized that his martyrdom is a significant loss for the Iranian people and the nation. (See Pages 3 & 5)

Kuwait-US JMC meets in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Chief of the Kuwait Army General Staff Lt Gen Bandar Al-Muzain and US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Daniel Shapiro chaired the Joint Military Committee (JMC) meeting held in Kuwait Monday and Tuesday. The Kuwait Army said in a press statement the meeting included holding a number of workshops for the participating teams from both sides, in

which joint defense cooperation was reviewed and several related issues and topics discussed.

It added that signing ceremonies were held for multiple agreements between both sides to enhance strategic, defensive and military joint interests, and boost cooperation between the two friendly countries. It also mentioned that Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US Sheikhha Alzain Nasser Al-Sabah and her counterpart Karen Sasahara and many other military officials from both sides participated in the signing ceremonies. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Senior Kuwaiti and US officials pose for a photo during the Joint Military Committee (JMC) meeting. — KUNA

Zionists kill 7 in West Bank amid Gaza massacres

GAZA/JENIN: Zionist forces battled Hamas in Gaza on Tuesday after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu angrily dismissed a bid for an international ar-

rest warrant against him on charges of war crimes in the Palestinian territory. The Zionist military reported ground combat and air strikes on 70 targets in Gaza in 24 hours, while its forces were also engaged in deadly clashes in the other major Palestinian territory, the occupied West Bank.

At least seven Palestinians were killed and 19 wounded in the northern city of Jenin, the Ramallah-based health minist-

ry said. Palestinian official news agency Wafa said a hospital surgeon, Usaed Jabareen from the Jenin government hospital, a schoolteacher and a student were among those killed in Jenin, a stronghold of Palestinian groups.

An AFP journalist saw four bodies at Jenin's Khalil Suleiman hospital morgue. The Palestinian ministry said the wounded included two who were in a critical condition. Amer Manasra, a 25-year-old

freelance journalist, told AFP he had been wounded by Zionist forces during the raid. "I was hit in the back of my leg by a stray bullet fired by (Zionist) forces," he said from a hospital bed, adding the incident had taken place near the entrance to the camp.

Following the raid, all schools in Jenin and the camp were evacuated, Wafa said. In the afternoon, the streets near

Continued on Page 6



Local

Minister inaugurates physiotherapy, rehabilitation building in Al-Adan

A qualitative leap in Kuwait's health services



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi inaugurates the physiotherapy and rehabilitation building at the Al-Adan Hospital. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: The Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi confirmed on Tuesday that the new building for physiotherapy and rehabilitation at the Al-Adan Hospital is a qualitative leap in the health services provided in accordance with the latest international protocols. This came in a statement made by Minister Al-Awadhi to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) after the inauguration of the building, which comes within the Ministry's plan to open nine major projects at Al-Adan Hospital.

Al-Awadhi explained that the new building consists of five floors, including three departments for men, women, and children, adding that each department includes a physiotherapy and rehabilitation center and a hydrotherapy center, in addition to specialized clinics, both for occupational therapy and for people with special needs. There will be 123 therapists, training halls, and research halls. The building is part of the nine new buildings of Adan Hospital, including surgery, maternity, and a children's center, a building with more than 28 operating

rooms and three parking lots.

These buildings will be opened successively in the next few weeks. The ministry is working within a clear work plan with performance indicators and precise dates, as many buildings have been re-scheduled to open during the 100-day plan according to the instructions and decisions of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. For his part, Assistant Undersecretary for Engineering and Projects Affairs at the Ministry, Ibrahim Al-Naham, said in a similar statement that the new building is the largest physiotherapy center, as it is located on an area of 6,000 square meters and consists of a basement, ground, and three floors designed with the latest standards.

The official spokesman of the Ministry, Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad, said that the new Al-Adan Hospital project is being carried out under the supervision and implementation of the Ministry, specifically the engineering affairs and projects sector. Al-Sanad pointed out that the project



includes nine buildings, namely the maternity building, which contains 637 beds, 21 operating rooms, 16 facilities, technical departments, a building for general and specialized surgery, a building for physiotherapy and rehabilitation, a building for the administration, and parking lots.

For his part, the head of the physiotherapy department at Al-Adan Hospital, Dr Ali Al-Muhanna, said that the opening of this building is a big step towards improving the quality of health care provided in Kuwait, as it contributes significantly to raising the level of health services

and providing the necessary support to patients. Al-Muhanna explained that the building provides occupational therapy, speech therapy, and other services in order to facilitate the patient's ability to obtain various rehabilitation services that he needs in one place. — KUNA

UNHCR workshop discusses digital marketing, strategies

KUWAIT: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) organized a workshop on Tuesday entitled 'Digital Marketing in the Service of Humanitarian Issues: Strategies for Successful Campaigns' at the United Nations House in Kuwait in cooperation with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In a speech during the opening of the workshop, the acting UNHCR representative to the country, Amal El-Beidh, said that the UNHCR seeks, through its activities, to communicate with all segments of society in order to develop humanitarian work and enhance the spirit of joint cooperation with its partners in Kuwait through capacity-building and open discussion in light of the continuous rise in the numbers of people displaced and the increasing emergency situations in several regions around the world.

The workshop aims to enhance the exchange of skills and experiences between the parties and partners involved in humanitarian work and to support the displaced, stressing the need to enhance the dissemination of their humanitarian work through various means. The head of private sector partnerships at UNHCR for the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey, Nader Al-Naqib, said in a similar speech that digital tools have a great role in highlighting humanitarian issues, as technology is used in fundraising to meet the humanitarian needs of refugees, which proves to be an essential tool for collective efforts to support the most vulnerable groups.

Al-Naqib added that the workshop works to bring together leading institutions in Kuwait and enhance the environment of skills exchange and cooperation to enhance the capabilities to serve humanity more effectively while ensuring that each contribution has a significant impact. The workshop concluded with a session on future strategies for using digital marketing tools in the development of humanitarian projects. — KUNA



Foreign Minister visits Diplomatic Institute

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya visited the Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute of Kuwait on Tuesday to review the progress of the promotion course of the batch of diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to check the training programs and academic courses provided to the officials. During his meeting with the participants, the minister underlined the importance of commitment and hard work. He stressed the need for them to keep abreast of the changes in current political events in the region. The minister wishes them success. He also met with the batch of new applicants at the Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute of Kuwait. — KUNA

the primary beneficiaries of the aid are the central Asian nation's most destitute.

The initiatives, held in collaboration with a Tajikistan-based charity, are part of efforts by Kuwait to come to the aid of people languishing in penury, the official underlined, highlighting the educational projects as among the most significant ones that are aimed at providing sound and quality education around the world.

These projects have now become a reality for the people of Tajikistan, according to IICO senior donor Jarah Al-Zaid, who says the projects will provide a "decent living" to impoverished Tajiks, subsequently giving them a sense of security. Such gracious acts have garnered large-scale appreciation for the diverse aid, he added, emphasizing that similar endeavors are needed to bring societies, no matter how diverse, together in a bid to enhance and promote humanitarian principles. — KUNA

Kuwait-based charity launches aid projects in Tajikistan

KUWAIT: The Kuwait-based International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) inaugurated a number of humanitarian projects in Tajikistan on Tuesday with the aim of keeping development steady in countries mired in poverty. The project is funded by a national minority affairs body. The projects run the gamut from medical aid to educational assistance. Kuwait Public Authority for Minority Affairs Bashayer Al-Aidan said amid a ceremony to unveil these endeavors, pointing out that



Kuwait-based International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) delegation participates in the opening of humanitarian projects in Tajikistan. — KUNA

Kuwait presents proposals to GCC undersecretaries

DOHA: Kuwait participated in the 71st meeting of the committee of undersecretaries of the ministries of finance of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Monday with a delegation headed by Undersecretary of the Ministry of Finance Aseel Al-Munaiifi. The Kuwait Ministry of Finance said in a statement that Al-Munaiifi sent several proposals and recommendations to be submitted to the meeting of the Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee, and they were unanimously supported by member states.

The Ministry added that one of the most important suggestions and recommendations made by the Kuwait delegation is to comply with the Ministerial Council's decision regarding the continuity of the work of the board of directors of the Customs Union Authority on a temporary basis until the approval, in principle, of the draft budget of the Customs Union body and its referral to the Standing Committee on Financial and Administrative Affairs for consideration and then adoption.

Among the proposals and recommendations is also "the importance of the participation of the Ministry of Finance in the joint meetings between the Industrial Development Committee and the Customs Union Authority to discuss the treatment of factory products located in free zones. The agenda of the meeting included many economic topics through which the member states seek to achieve the desired economic integration in accordance with the directives of the Supreme Council, foremost among which are the results of the meeting of the committee of central bankers of the GCC countries and the memorandum of the General Secretariat on completing the remaining steps for the establishment of the Customs Union. — KUNA



Arab Planning Institute launches the second phase of "the national program for disseminating the culture of leading businesses" in the northern city of Tripoli. — KUNA

API launches businesses program in Lebanese city

BEIRUT: The Kuwait-headquartered Arab Planning Institute (API) has launched the second phase of "the national program for disseminating the culture of leading businesses" in the northern city of Tripoli for backing up human resources. Karim Darwish, the head of the API administrative apparatus, said in remarks to KUNA on Tuesday that the activity was opened with the training course, "Your small ven-

ture from a notion to operation and development," involving 53 participants who represented 42 foundations, societies, and colleges.

The program's first stage was launched in January during a visit by API Director-General Dr Abdullah Al-Shami to Beirut. Moreover, Darwish indicated that the program aims at encouraging the youth to launch private businesses, start-ups, and medium projects. It also boosts competition and innovation among youngsters. Toufic Dabbousi, the Chair of Tripoli and Lebanese Chamber, in a statement at start of the training course, lauded the institute for encouraging initiatives and enterprises. His remarks were echoed by Abdulrazzaq Al-Qarhani, the chair of "Dar Al-Ilm and Ulemaa," who noted that such activities contribute to re-developing Lebanon. — KUNA

Amir receives UAE Balloon team



A group photo of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the UAE Balloon team.



His Highness the Amir receives the UAE Balloon team at Bayan Palace.



His Highness the Amir and UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday the UAE Balloon team at Bayan Palace on the occasion of their visit to the country. The UAE Balloon team's leader, Captain Pilot Abdulaziz Naser Al-Mansouri, said that he was honored to meet His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, revealing that during the meeting, they touched on the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's Balloon, which garnered several achievements in international participation.

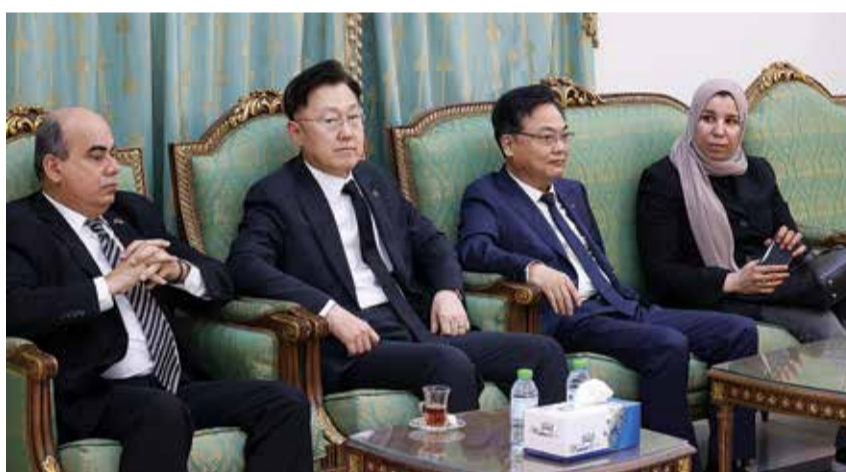
"His Highness the Amir instructed us to take good care of our human resources in the GCC and to keep a strong connection between its peoples. During the meeting, we inaugurated the balloon of the GCC that will soar at the 45th GCC Summit to be held in Kuwait in December, in addition to the GCC Cup," he noted. "His Highness the Amir commended that the GCC Balloon should fly over all six countries of the GCC to represent our unity and firm relationship as one nation," he added. — KUNA



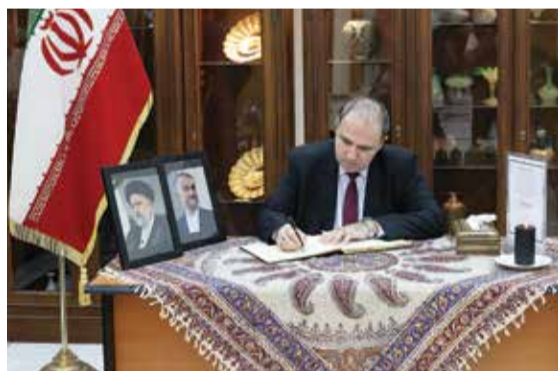
Abdulaziz Al-Mansouri



Ambassadors gathered at the event.



Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianwei and Iranian Ambassador Mohammad Toutouchi.



Azerbaijan Ambassador Emil Karimov writes in the book of condolence.



Iranian ambassador receives Omani ambassador.



South African Ambassador Dr Manelisi Genge

Iran Embassy opens condolence register

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has opened a three-day condolence book on Tuesday to honor the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian, and other members of their delegation who tragically lost their lives in a helicopter crash in northwest Iran.

Kuwaiti Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, offered his deep condolences on the death of the Iranian president and foreign minister on behalf of His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He wished for God to envelop them with His vast mercy. He added, "we pray for our dear neighboring country to overcome this painful incident and to always remain blessed with peace and stability."

Expressing his deep sorrow upon receiving the tragic news, Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya extended sincere condolences to the Islamic Republic of Iran, its leadership, government, and citizens, as well as to the bereaved families and the entire Iranian community. In addition to praying for God to shower them with His vast mercy, he said, "May they find solace in the love of their dear ones and may their departed souls find eternal peace."

Kuwait's former Foreign Affairs Minister, Dr Ahmed Nasser Al-Sabah, echoed these sentiments, beseeching the Almighty to grant comfort and patience to the grieving families. The Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait, Mohammad Toutouchi, extended his condolences to the Iranian nation and people over the loss of President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Dr Amirhossein Abdollahian, and other officials who were martyred in the line of duty.

He expressed gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah for their condolences and support. Regarding future arrangements, he referred to

an announcement by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, indicating that Mohammad Mokhber, the Vice President, would assume the role of interim president following the death of President Ebrahim Raisi.

Additionally, he noted that according to the Iranian Constitution, a council comprising the heads of the judiciary and legislature, along with Mohammad Mokhber, would be established to facilitate presidential elections within fifty days. Meanwhile, Ali Bagheri Kani will temporarily oversee the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs until the new government assumes office.

Toutouchi stated that the government of the late president witnessed a strengthening of relations with countries around the world, particularly mentioning Arab nations such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Holding pride in the late president's legacy, he added, "as you all know, the martyred president was a staunch defender and supporter of Palestine and the people of Gaza against the usurping Zionist entity. His martyrdom is a great loss for the Iranian people and for the peaceful and glorious nation."

The occasion was marked by the attendance of distinguished representatives from various Gulf countries. Ambassadors from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman joined at the embassy to extend their heartfelt condolences. They expressed their deep sorrow and solidarity with the Iranian people, offering prayers for the deceased souls to rest in peace.

Azerbaijan's Ambassador to Kuwait, Emil Karimov, emphasized that Azerbaijan stands in solidarity with the grieving families and communities, and he prayed for God to bestow patience and strength upon them during this challenging time. He remarked, "On this day of mourning, we pray for mercy for those who have passed. May their souls find peace and their memories be honored."

Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait, Zhang Jianwei, expressed deep condolences on behalf of the Chinese people, emphasizing the profound loss felt by both the Iranian and Chinese nations. He remarked, "The Chinese people have lost a cherished friend," highlighting the significance of the friendship between the two countries. Ambassador Zhang reiterated China's commitment to strengthening the comprehensive strategic partnership with Iran, affirming the belief that their relationship will continue to flourish and grow stronger in the face of this tragic loss.

South African Ambassador to Kuwait, Dr Manelisi Genge, extended heartfelt sympathy to the families of the deceased, expressing wishes for their swift recovery from the shock of the tragic news. He also conveyed hopes for Iran to find peace and strength in coping with this deeply saddening event. The Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait, Tuba Nur Sonmez conveyed deep sorrow over President Raisi's death. She announced her country's declaration of one day of national mourning to honor the memory of the late President, reflecting the profound impact of his loss on both nations.

Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, Dr Adarsh Swaika, expressed his deepest condolences on the tragic and untimely demise of the Iranian President and Foreign Minister. He emphasized India's solidarity with Iran, pledging full support during this difficult time. Dr Swaika also announced that India would declare a one day of state mourning as a mark of respect for the departed leader.

More ambassadors from various countries also attended to express their condolences in the book, including Armenia, Sudan, Thailand, Iraq, India, Peru, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, Sweden and Tajikistan. This international solidarity highlighted the interconnectedness of nations and their collective mourning for the tragic loss of the Iranian President and Foreign Minister.

Ministry underlines importance of GCC media cooperation

DOHA: Kuwait's Ministry of Information Undersecretary, Dr. Nasser Muhaisen, stressed on Tuesday the importance of strengthening and developing media cooperation between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. This came in Muhaisen's statement to KUNA after Kuwait's participation in the GCC Undersecretaries of Information Ministries' preparatory meeting of the 27th GCC Ministers of Information meeting, which is scheduled for Thursday in Doha.

He added that the meeting discussed various topics of common interest, including setting a media plan to spread awareness and preserve the Gulf identity, as well as introducing artificial intelligence and digitalization. Muhaisen stressed the importance of exchanging information and experiences for the development of the media sector in the GCC countries, adding that Kuwait is welcome to host the upcoming meeting. — KUNA



Dr Nasser Muhaisen



Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) signed a cooperation agreement with the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS). — KUNA

KRCS, PRCS sign cooperation deal

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) signed a cooperation agreement with the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) on Tuesday to enhance relief collaboration and support humanitarian efforts. The agreement was signed by KRCS Chairman Dr Hial Al-Sayer, representing the Kuwaiti side, and PRCS Chairman Sardar Shahid, representing Pakistan's side.

Speaking to KUNA, Shahid stated after the signing that the agreement aims to support and continue joint cooperation and increase efforts in humanitarian work between both sides, mentioning that after the signing, he met with his Kuwaiti counterpart to discuss various topics, including the services provided by KRCS in Pakistan, commending Kuwait's humanitarian efforts.

He emphasized his commitment to strengthening relations with KRCS to ensure continued support for ongoing recovery programs benefiting families affected by floods in Pakistan, reviewing the humanitarian aspects the society is concerned with locally and internationally, and pointing out their relief efforts in many affected areas worldwide. — KUNA

Saudi tries to boost tourism in Gulf

RIYADH: Saudi tourism minister Ahmed Al-Khatib confirmed on Monday that the Kingdom is leading major efforts to improve local tourism with Gulf countries through various initiatives, including the unified visa for the Gulf region, in which travelers are allowed to enjoy 30 days in the Gulf countries. During his participation in the ministerial speech entitled "Enhancing tourism activities by exploring new destinations and exchanging cultures in the present and future" at the aviation 2024 conference, Al-Khatib said that the tourism and aviation sectors have become more powerful than ever in history.

He added that during the past year, the Kingdom has surpassed the levels of tourism after the Corona pandemic to reach a growth level of 122 percent, explaining that this continuous growth in the sector contributed to the revision of the goals. He pointed out that one of the goals achieved was to welcome about 100 million visitors last year, as this figure was reached seven years earlier than planned.

Meanwhile, work is underway to raise the target to welcome up to 150 million visitors by 2030, including more than 70 million international tourists. He explained that the noticeable increase in demand in the Kingdom and the Gulf requires additional airlines and that the Civil Aviation Authority, coordinators, travel agencies, investors, airports, airlines, the tourist experience program, and tour operators are all working towards achieving a sustainable integrated system.

He stressed that the sector is ready to be a powerful engine for the economy by contributing about 10 percent to the GDP and achieving 6.1 million jobs, with plans to double the number of expatriates. "We are working together to improve the capabilities and communication through air navigation lines to meet the growing demand for tourism, as the Ministry of Tourism established the Air Link program in 2021, and over the past two years, 28 air lines connecting Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam to new destinations have been opened," he added.

These air routes not only provide new travel options but also provide opportunities to improve bilateral relations, find partnerships for business activities, facilitate dialogue between leaders and citizens, and bring inspiration for cultural exchange. Minister Al-Khatib concluded, "We are looking forward to the Kingdom, and tourism in it is based on cooperation with these integrated systems of air routes and air connectivity as the main center, and I am convinced that the kingdom will set better and stronger targets to continue to achieve innovation in all areas." — KUNA

NBK pledges KD8m to boost Sharq area with new park and parking facility



Engineer Saud Al-Dabbous and Mohammed Al-Farhan, CEO of Al-Shaab National Real Estate Company take a group photo with officials from the Bank, Al-Shaab company and the Municipality.

KUWAIT: In a significant push towards sustainable urban development, the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has committed KD 8 million to a transformative project in the Sharq Area, in collaboration with Kuwait Municipality and Al-Shaab National Real Estate Company. This initiative will see the creation of a public recreational park and a multistory parking garage, aiming to enhance the urban landscape and address infrastructural needs.

The ceremonial signing took place at the headquarters of Kuwait Municipality, witnessed by Dr Noura Al-Mashaan, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs; Isam Al-Sager, Vice-Chairman and Group CEO of NBK; and Eng Saud Al-Dabbous, Director General of Kuwait Municipality. Representatives from the bank, Al-Shaab National Real Estate Company, and the Municipality were also present.

Spanning over 12,000 sqm, the new development will incorporate lush green spaces, a mix of soft and hard landscaping, and areas for public recreation. The accompanying parking facility is set to provide over 1,000 parking bays, significantly mitigating the persistent parking shortages and traffic congestion within the bustling Sharq business district. This project aligns with the Kuwait National Development Plan (KNDP) and supports the objectives of Kuwait Vision 2035 to establish Kuwait as a leading financial and commercial hub. It also responds to a recent call by Kuwait Municipality for private sector engagement in beautifying and



Minister of Public Works, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Dr Noura Al-Mashaan and Deputy Chairman and CEO of National Bank of Kuwait Isam Al-Sager during the signing of the agreement.

improving Kuwait City's infrastructure.

Benefits and impact

Scheduled for completion in approximately two and a half years, the project aims to deliver multiple benefits: **Easing Parking Shortages:** Alleviating the acute lack of parking spaces in Kuwait City, as highlighted in recent traffic studies and the Structural Plan which considers the region's ongoing and future urban developments.

Reducing Traffic Congestion: Building on solutions from a comprehensive traffic study conducted by a consortium of private companies, under the oversight

of the Public Authority for Roads & Transportation.

Enhancing Public Spaces: The introduction of substantial greenery and landscaped areas will upgrade public services and pedestrian pathways, significantly enhancing the quality of urban life.

On this occasion, Al-Sager remarked, "This initiative reiterates NBK's commitment to fostering sustainable development within the Kuwaiti economy and actively supporting the State's developmental ambitions." He further noted, "The development of a public park aligns with the State's climate action goals and our bank's mission to foster environmental, social, and economic welfare, in keeping with Kuwait's pledge towards achieving carbon neutrality." "Moreover, constructing a well-equipped parking garage will address some of the critical traffic and parking challenges faced in Kuwait City," he added.

Al-Sager also highlighted that environmental protection remains a pivotal element of NBK's sustainability strategy, which integrates ESG standards across all operations to enhance value for all stakeholders. In 2023 alone, NBK's social responsibility efforts exceeded KD 28 million, including significant investments like the KD 3 million donation towards the development and beautification of the Shuwaikh waterfront, which spans 1.7 km. This initiative is expected to set a benchmark for private-public partnerships in urban development, reflecting a shared commitment to enhancing Kuwait's global standing and livability.

Exhibition showcases beautiful reflection of plastic arts, paintings

KUWAIT: An elite group of artists active in the field of art and paintings presented beautiful plastic paintings that they used to decorate the corridors of the art hall in the suburb of Abdullah Al-Salem. The group organized the first exhibition of the art group "Studio 27". The visions and experiences of the artists were stated during the exhibition, which was inaugurated under the auspices of the National Council for Culture, Arts,



and Letters (NCCAL) and lasted for five days.

The event reflected the artists' potential in the fields of plastic arts. Following the opening of the exhibition, the participants expressed their views through their paintings in a distinctive formative style, stressing the support of national culture in the field of the arts. In turn, the organizer of the exhibition, the head of the art group "Studio 27", Dr Nasser Al-Rifai, said the group consists of women artists.

The NCCAL organizes an exhibition "Studio 27" to convey a humanitarian message between Kuwaiti pioneers of plastic art and professionals who strive to enrich the artistic culture integrated with humanity. Such exhibitions come as a tribute to the artists for their creative gifts and hard work in plastic art.

The NCCAL aspires for excellence and cultural diversity in order to continue and develop it through communication with other parties, both locally and abroad. The Council also seeks cultural exchange within the policies adopted by the general secretariat of the NCCAL since its establishment in 1973. — KUNA



Dr Nasser Al-Rifai



Luluwa Al-Rakhees showcases her paintings.



Committee rejects bids to liquidate Palestinian cause

CAIRO: The Arab Parliament's Palestine Committee on Tuesday declared anew utter rejection of any bid to liquidate the Palestinian cause, systematic coercive displacement of the Palestinian people and any scenario to replay Al-Nakba. The Palestinian Nakba has been recurring since the October 7 events (2023) in an uglier and much more horrific manner, said the commission in a statement, released after a meeting.

It alluded to the Zionist occupation's daily massacres and genocides claiming lives of thousands of Palestinians, mostly women and children. The Arab Parliament will continue its international and regional efforts in support of the cause until the Palestinian people attain their legitimate rights and establish their independent state with the June 4,

1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital.

It affirmed necessity that Palestine as an independent state be accepted as a member in the United Nations, with full sovereignty and ensure reclaiming all the legitimate rights for the Palestinian people namely their right to return to their homeland and determine their destiny. International stakeholders are ought to shoulder their responsibilities to restore peace, security and stability to the Middle East, the statement said, warning that this objective could not be attained without resolving the Palestinian cause, achieving justice and granting freedom to the Palestinian people.

It supported a recent call by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to hold an international conference and take irreversible steps for establishing the Palestinian state according to the 2002 Arab peace initiative and resolutions of the international legitimacy. The commission, in the end of the session, adopted a resolution regarding the situation in Palestine for submission to the broad session of the Arab Parliament, due at the Arab League headquarters on Saturday. — KUNA



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TABRIZ: This handout picture provided by the Iranian president's office shows mourners gathering around the coffin during a funeral procession on May 21, 2024 for late president Ebrahim Raisi and seven others killed with him in a helicopter crash two days ago. — AFP

Iranians mourn 'martyr' Raisi

Funeral ceremonies for Iran's president to continue until his burial Thursday evening

TEHRAN: Tens of thousands mourned Iran's president Ebrahim Raisi on Tuesday after his death in a helicopter crash, amid political uncertainty ahead of an election for his successor next month. Raisi and seven members of his entourage including foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian were killed when their aircraft came down on a fog-shrouded mountainside in northern Iran on Sunday.

Waving Iranian flags and portraits of the late president, mourners marched in the northwestern city of Tabriz, where Raisi's helicopter had been headed when it crashed.

Black-clad mourners beat their chests as they walked behind a lorry carrying the coffins of Raisi and those who died with him. "We, the members of the government, who had the honor to serve this beloved president, the hardworking president, pledge to our dear people and leader to follow the path of these martyrs," Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said in a speech.

From Tabriz, Raisi's body was taken to the Shiite clerical center of Qom later Tuesday before being moved to Tehran, where huge banners hailing him as "the martyr of service" have appeared around the city. In Qom, the procession moved toward the city's

main shrine of Massoumeh as mourners waved the Shiite red flag and the yellow flag of the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah group. The official IRNA news agency said the funerals in Iran were attended by "hundreds of thousands" of people.

Contact with Raisi's helicopter was lost in bad weather on the return flight to Tabriz after the inauguration of a joint dam project on Iran's border with Azerbaijan, in a ceremony with his Azeri counterpart Ilham Aliyev. A huge search and rescue operation was launched, and state television announced his death early on Monday.

National mourning

Over pictures of Raisi and as a voice recited Quranic verses, the broadcaster said "the servant of the Iranian nation, Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi, has achieved the highest level of martyrdom". As well as the president and foreign minister, provincial officials, members of Raisi's security team and the helicopter crew all died in the crash.

Armed forces chief of staff Mohammad Bagheri ordered an investigation into the crash as Iranians nationwide mourned Raisi and his entourage. Tens of thousands of people gathered in the capital's Val-

iasr Square on Monday. Iran's highest security body, the Supreme National Security Council, said the "vast presence" of mourners at the funeral "guaranteed the stability and national security of the Islamic republic". On Tuesday, the Assembly of Experts, a key clerical body in charge of selecting or dismissing Iran's supreme leader, held its first session since being elected in March, with the seat reserved for Raisi carrying his portrait. Raisi, who was widely expected to succeed current supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had been a member of the body since 2006. Khamenei wields ultimate authority in Iran, and has declared five days of national mourning.

He has assigned Vice President Mohammad Mokhber, 68, as caretaker president until the June 28 election for Raisi's successor. Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri, who was Amir-Abdollahian's deputy, has been named acting foreign minister.

Home town funeral

A ceremony for the crash victims was held in Tehran Tuesday ahead of processions in the capital on Wednesday morning before Khamenei leads prayers at a farewell ceremony. Countries including Turkey and Russia have announced they will send represen-

tatives to the funeral. Raisi's body will be flown from Tehran to his home city of Mashhad in the northeast, where he will be buried on Thursday evening after funeral rites at the Imam Reza shrine.

Raisi, 63, was elected president in 2021. The ultra-conservative's time in office saw mass protests, a deepening economic crisis and unprecedented armed exchanges with arch-enemy (the Zionist entity). Raisi succeeded the moderate Hassan Rouhani at a time when the economy was battered by US sanctions imposed over Iran's nuclear activities.

Messages of condolence flooded in from Iran's allies around the region, including Syria, Palestinian militant group Hamas and Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, both of which are backed by Tehran.

In a speech just hours before his death, Raisi underlined Iran's support for the Palestinians, a centerpiece of its foreign policy since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Palestinian flags have flown alongside Iranian flags at ceremonies held for the late president. Tribute was also paid to Raisi by a China-led regional bloc on Tuesday. Envoys from Russia, China, India and Pakistan were among those who stood for a minute's silence at a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Astana, Kazakhstan. — AFP



NEW YORK: In this file photo, Amal Clooney attends a United Nations informal gathering of Security Council members, on April 27, 2022. — AFP

Amal Clooney helped ICC weigh war crime evidence

WASHINGTON: Amal Clooney helped the International Criminal Court weigh evidence that led to the decision to seek arrest warrants for top Zionist and Hamas leaders, the human rights lawyer said Monday. The high-profile British-Lebanese barrister posted a statement on the website of the Clooney Foundation for Justice, which she founded with her husband, American actor George Clooney.

Both she and the foundation had previously been criticized on social media for not speaking out over the civilian death toll in Gaza. Clooney said she was asked by prosecutor Karim Khan to join an expert panel to "evaluate evidence of suspected war crimes and crimes against humanity in (the Zionist entity) and Gaza."

The statement came the same day Khan said he was seeking arrest warrants against Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, as well as top Hamas leaders. "Despite our diverse personal backgrounds, our legal findings are unanimous," Clooney said, adding there were "reasonable grounds to believe" that Hamas' Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh engaged in "hostage-taking, murder and crimes of sexual violence." With Netanyahu and Gallant, meanwhile, there are "reasonable grounds to believe" the two have engaged in "starvation as a method of warfare, murder, persecution and extermination." Khan thanked Clooney in his statement announcing the decision to seek the arrest warrants.—AFP

Zionist entity shuts down AP live video feed of Gaza

JERUSALEM: The Zionist entity said it had shut down an Associated Press live video feed of war-torn Gaza on Tuesday, sparking a protest from the US news agency and concern from the White House. The entity's communications ministry accused the AP of breaching a new ban on providing rolling footage of Gaza to Qatar-based satellite channel Al Jazeera.

It said its inspectors moved in and "confiscated the equipment" on orders approved by the government "in accordance with the law". The AP said Zionist officials had seized its camera and broadcasting equipment at a location in the Zionist town of Sderot that overlooks the northern Gaza Strip.

"The Associated Press decries in the strongest terms the actions of the (Zionist) government to shut down our longstanding live feed," the AP said in a statement. It blamed "an abusive use" of the entity's new foreign broadcaster law.

"We urge the (Zionist) authorities to return our equipment and enable us to reinstate our live feed immediately so we can continue to provide this important visual journalism to thousands of media outlets around the world," the agency said. AP, in its own news report, said Al Jazeera was among thousands of clients that receive live video feeds from the agency.

Zionist opposition leader Yair Lapid reacted to the decision on X, saying the government "went crazy". "This is not Al Jazeera, this is an American media outlet that has won 53 Pulitzer Prizes," he wrote.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on President Joe Biden's plane that "obviously this is concerning and we want to look into it". The Qatar-based station was taken off air in the Zionist entity earlier this month after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government voted to shut it down over its coverage of the Gaza war. Al Jazeera's Jerusalem offices were shuttered, its equipment confiscated and its team's accreditations pulled.

Camera, equipment seized

The AP said that officials from the communications ministry had arrived at the AP location in Sderot on Tuesday afternoon and seized the equipment. It said the officials had handed the AP a piece of paper,



NUSEIRAT: A woman salvages items from a waste dump expanding along a tent displacement camp west of Nuseirat in the Gaza Strip on May 21, 2024. — AFP

signed by Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi, alleging it was violating the country's new foreign broadcast law. The ministry confirmed the incident in a statement. It said the US news agency regularly took images of Gaza from the balcony of a house in Sderot, "including focusing on the activities of IDF (army) soldiers and their location".

"Even though the inspectors of the Ministry of Communications warned them that they were breaking the law and that they should cut off Al Jazeera from receiving their content and not transfer a broadcast to Al Jazeera, they continued to do so," it said.

"The inspectors of the Ministry of Communications operated in Sderot, as they operated last week in Nazareth, according to the orders approved by the government in accordance with the law, and confiscated the equipment."

Last week, Zionist officials confiscated broadcasting equipment from Al Jazeera's studio in the Arab city of Nazareth in the Zionist entity's north. AP said it had been broadcasting a general view of northern Gaza before its equipment was seized, and that the

live feed has generally shown smoke rising over the Palestinian territory.

"The AP complies with the (Zionist entity)'s military censorship rules, which prohibit broadcasts of details like troops movements that could endanger soldiers," the agency added.

The Foreign Press Association in the entity, said it was "alarmed" by the confiscation of AP's equipment. "(The Zionist entity)'s move today is a slippery slope," it said in a statement, warning it could lead to the blocking of other international news agencies' Gaza coverage.

It denounced the Zionist entity's "dismal" record on press freedom during the Gaza war. In the 2024 press freedom index published by media watchdog Reporters Without Borders, the Zionist entity ranked 101st out of 180 countries.

The Zionist entity's seven-month offensive in Gaza has killed at least 35,647 people, mostly civilians, according to the territory's health ministry. The entity claims it's in response to an attack by Hamas, which left 1,170 people dead, also mostly civilians. — AFP

International

Ukraine pushes allies for direct involvement in war

If allies don't shoot down missiles themselves, they should provide Kyiv with means to do it: FM

KYIV: Ukraine said Tuesday that its allies could shoot down Russian missiles from their own territory, an apparent appeal stemming from the war-torn country's critical lack of air defense systems. The comments from Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba came during a press conference with his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock, who warned that delaying aid to Ukraine also put Western countries' security at risk.

Kyiv has urged the West to bolster its air defense systems in the wake of new Russian strikes that have crippled energy facilities, and a ground offensive that saw Kyiv cede several border villages in the northeast. "There is no legal, security or moral argument that stands in the way of our partners shooting down Russian missiles over the territory of Ukraine from their territory," Kuleba said.

"If you don't want to do it, then just provide us with all the means necessary for this. We will deploy them on the territory of Ukraine and intercept these missiles ourselves," he said. The visit from Baerbock, who voiced concern on her arrival about the worsening situation on the front lines for Ukraine, began just after more than two dozen Russian drones targeted Ukraine overnight.

Speaking with Kuleba, she acknowledged the importance of providing air defense systems to Ukraine and said delays in providing military support to Ukraine harmed the West's security. "It is clear that every hesitation and every delay in supporting Ukraine costs the lives of innocent people. And every hesitation in supporting Ukraine also jeopardizes our own security," she said.

Ukraine 'will win'

Arriving to Kyiv by train for her eighth visit to Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022, Baerbock had acknowledged the situation on the

front had "dramatically deteriorated", citing Russian air attacks and its major ground offensive in the Kharkiv region. But she also voiced confidence that Ukrainian forces would achieve their goals and that the West would keep delivering aid. "Our support is based on the deep conviction that Ukraine will win this war," Baerbock said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who also met with Baerbock, warned last week that the Russian offensive launched this month in the Kharkiv region might be only a "first wave", and that Russian troops could be aiming for the city of Kharkiv, the second largest in Ukraine.

The Russian official appointed by Moscow as governor of the Kharkiv region said Tuesday that his country's forces were now in control of nearly half of Vovchansk. The town near the Russian border had around 17,000 residents before the war and is now the epicenter of fighting.

Drone barrage

"Our guys control about 40 percent of the city. They have cut deep into the defense and knocked out the enemy as far as they could," said the official, Vitaly Ganchev. "The northern part of the city has already been completely liberated," he told Russian state television. A Ukrainian military spokesman told state media that fighting in the border territories "remains difficult and is changing dynamically". But he also said the number of bouts with Russian forces had decreased.

In a rebuke to Baerbock, the Kremlin said that even if supplies of Western weapons to Ukraine picked up, more deliveries would not change Russia's dominant position on the battlefield. "It will still not allow the Ukrainian armed forces to somehow change the dynamics on the fronts," spokesman



KHARKIV: Firefighters clear debris from private houses in the suburbs of Kharkiv destroyed by the attack of Russian drones, on May 21, 2024. — AFP

Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Zelensky has repeatedly called on Ukraine's allies to provide at least seven more air defense systems, including at least two to protect the Kharkiv region. Just before Baerbock arrived, the Ukrainian air force said it had intercepted 28 of 29 Iranian-designed attack drones launched by Russian forces overnight. The unmanned aerial vehicles were downed over

southern and eastern regions of Ukraine.

The head of the Kharkiv region said a 53-year-old man was wounded by Russian rocket fire that targeted a transport infrastructure facility. Systematic Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy grid have crippled the sector, and officials in the capital announced rolling power cuts throughout the day on Tuesday to reduce the demand on the network. — AFP

Russian hypersonic scientist jailed for 14 years for treason

MOSCOW: A Russian court on Tuesday jailed a 77-year-old scientist for 14 years on treason charges after he was accused of sharing top secret data related to Russia's hypersonic missile program with Germany.

Several prominent Russian scientists involved with research into hypersonics have been arrested and imprisoned in recent years, accused of sharing state secrets with foreign countries. A court in Saint Petersburg found physicist Anatoly Maslov "guilty of treason ... and imposed a sentence of 14 years in prison," the press service for the city's courts said in a post on social media.

The case was heard in closed session as it was classified "top secret", the court added. But Russian media outlets reported that Maslov was accused of passing classified data related to Russia's hypersonic missile program to German intelligence.

Maslov denied the charges in a court hearing before sentencing last week. "He said he had done nothing wrong or illegal. He has devoted his life to his family and domestic science ... he did not transfer the alleged information and it doesn't constitute a state secret," the state-run TASS news agency quoted his lawyer as saying.

Maslov, who was arrested in June 2022, specialized in research in hypersonics — a theoretical field with important applications for Russia's advanced missile program. He was the chief researcher at the Institute of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics, part of the Siberian branch of Russia's Academy of Sciences. — AFP

German 'prince' at center of coup plot denies charges

FRANKFURT: The self-styled prince at the heart of an alleged conspiracy-fueled plot to attack Germany's parliament and topple the government rejected the accusations made against him as his trial opened Tuesday. In all, six men and three women accused of belonging to or supporting the group face trial in Frankfurt in one of the biggest cases heard by German courts in decades.

Prosecutors accuse the group, which includes a former politician and ex-army officers, of preparing a "treasonous undertaking" to storm the Bundestag and take MP's hostage. The defendants filed into the purpose-built, high-security court in the western German city ahead of the proceeding.

One woman, wearing a hooded jacket, hid her face from journalists' cameras with a file, while the alleged ringleader, Prince Heinrich XIII Reuss, looked relaxed as he entered the room. Reuss, a minor aristocrat and businessman, was in line to become the provisional head of state after the current government was overthrown, according to prosecutors. Reuss's lawyer Roman von Alvensleben told journalists outside the courtroom his client was "no ringleader, and not a member of a terrorist organization" as suggested by prosecutors.

The sensational plan, uncovered by authorities at the end of 2022, is the most high-profile example of a growing threat of violence from the political fringes in Germany. The alleged plotters are said to have taken inspiration from "conspiracy myths", including the glob-



FRANKFURT: Defendant Prince Heinrich XIII Reuss (center), a minor aristocrat and businessman, arrives between his lawyers in the courtroom for the trial against him. — AFP

al QAnon movement, and drawn up "lists of enemies". They also belonged to the German Reichsbuerger (Citizens of the Reich), a political movement of extremists and gun enthusiasts who reject the legitimacy of the modern German republic.

'Deep state'

According to prosecutors, the plotters believed Germany was run by a hidden "deep state" and were waiting for a signal from an international "Alliance" of governments to launch their coup. The proceedings in the highly complex case, in which a total of 26 people face trial, are being held across three different courts.

Nine members of the group's "military arm" went on trial in Stuttgart at the end of April. A third set of proceedings is scheduled to begin in Munich in June.

Among those in the Frankfurt dock next to Reuss are former soldiers Ruediger von Pescatore, Maximilian Eder and Peter Woerner, who are said to have founded

the coup plotters' group in July 2021. The defendants also include several members of a "council" that prosecutors say was to replace the government after the coup, in particular a judge and former far-right MP Birgit Malsack-Winkemann.

Malsack-Winkemann, a former jurist and ex-member of parliament for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, is said to have been lined up for the justice portfolio. Investigators believe the 59-year-old had passed on inside knowledge of the German parliament to help the group plan an armed attack on the Bundestag building. Michael Fritsch, a former policeman from Hanover, was allegedly in line to take over the interior ministry.

Russian contacts

The ninth defendant is Reuss's partner, a Russian citizen identified as Vitalia B. She is accused of "abetting" the alleged putsch plan and putting Reuss in touch with a contact at the Russian consulate in Leipzig.

Reuss and the other alleged ringleader of the group, von Pescatore, also sought a meeting with Russian officials in the Slovakian capital Bratislava in February 2022, prosecutors said. Reuss was allegedly tasked with negotiating an accord with Russia in the event the coup succeeded. "How the Russian Federation responded, has not yet been clarified," prosecutors said.

Investigators are still working to unravel the reach of the group. According to prosecutors, at least 136 people had signed "non-disclosure agreements" with the group. The threat from the far right has become the biggest extremist menace to Germany, according to officials. In April, police charged a new suspect in relation to a separate coup plan, in which five others have already been indicted. The plotters, frustrated with Covid pandemic-era restrictions, planned to kidnap the German health minister, according to investigators. — AFP

Zionists kill 7 in West Bank amid...

Continued from Page 1

the camp were deserted, except for Zionist bulldozers moving debris. The road between the hospital and the camp had been stripped of its asphalt by Zionist troops who said they were looking for concealed bombs. Drones buzzed overhead and sporadic gunfire rang out.

Crowds of mourners including schoolchildren gathered for the funeral of teacher Allam Jaradat. Jaradat's body, wrapped in the green flag of Hamas, was kept at a mosque where mourners offered prayers. "The new massacre in Jenin... is conclusive evidence of the criminal mentality that rules the occupying state and its ideological belief in killing our people," Hamas said in a statement.

The office of Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas condemned Tuesday's raid in a statement on Wafa, saying the Zionist entity was "killing innocent people, doctors, and destroying the infrastructure of Palestinian hospitals, cities and villages".

"We are running out of words to describe what is happening in Gaza," Edem Wosornu of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs told a Security Council meeting on Monday. "We have described it as a catastrophe, a nightmare, as hell on earth. It is all of these, and worse," she said of conditions in the besieged territory of 2.4 million people. Wosornu said "1.1 million people face catastrophic levels of hunger and Gaza remains on the brink of famine" while three quarters of its people had been forcibly displaced, some up to five times.

The Zionist entity on Tuesday shut down US news agency the Associated Press' live feed from war-torn Gaza, two weeks after it ordered the closure of Al Jazeera. The AP said Zionist authorities accused the news agency of violating its ban on Al Jazeera, which was targeted based on a new Zionist law governing foreign broadcasters. The news agency decried the decision "in the strongest terms", while the White House described the Zionist entity's decision to shut AP's feed as "concerning".

The Zionist offensive has killed at least 35,647 people in Gaza, mostly women and children. Recent fighting



People tend to a Palestinian youth injured in Zionist bombardment in the Al-Daraj neighbourhood of Gaza City on May 21, 2024. — AFP photos



Students surround the body of their schoolteacher Allam Jaradat during his funeral at a mosque in Silat al-Harithiyah, east of Jenin in the occupied West Bank, after he was killed in a Zionist army raid on May 21, 2024.

has raged around the far southern city of Rafah, the last area to face a ground invasion — but fierce combat has also been reported again in the northern Jabalia area where Hamas forces have regrouped.

The World Health Organization said Jabalia's Al-Awda Hospital had been "under siege" for two days, trap-

ping 170 patients and staff who had reported sniper fire and a rocket hit. The Zionist entity launched its ground assault on parts of Rafah early this month, defying international opposition including from top ally the United States, which feared for the more than one million civilians trapped there. — AFP

Nationality law petition rejected...

Continued from Page 1

because the National Assembly has been dissolved and the petitions have become meaningless.

In another ruling, the constitutional court accepted to look into a petition submitted by Chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Sager demanding that a law issued by the National Assembly about the chamber should be declared unconstitutional. The law scrapped the special status accorded to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry since it was established over seven decades ago and treated it as a department under the ministry of commerce and industry. The court will begin looking into the case on July 10.

Meanwhile, First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, Minister of Interior, and Chairman of the Supreme Committee for Investigating Kuwaiti Citizenship Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah chaired a meeting of the committee, attended by the Head of the Central Agency for Remediating the Status of Illegal Residents Saleh Al-Fadalah, Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah, Chief of the General Staff of the Army Lt Gen Bandar Al-Muzain, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lt Gen Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah and other committee members.

Sheikh Fahad expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the work and efforts made by the committee, stressing this translates the contents of the noble speech of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in maintaining national identity and the unity of society. During the meeting, the committee discussed the items on the agenda, reviewed the committee's efforts and examined several new issues, making decisions accordingly.

International

Small island states win 'historic' climate case

Polluting countries have obligation to mitigate effect of emissions on oceans: UN court

BERLIN: The UN maritime court on Tuesday ruled in favor of nine small island states that brought a case to seek increased protection of the world's oceans from catastrophic climate change. Finding that carbon emissions can be considered a sea pollutant, the court said countries had an obligation to take measures to mitigate their effects on oceans. The countries that brought the case called the court decision "historic", and experts said it could be influential in shaping the scope of future climate litigation involving greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. "Anthropogenic GHG emissions into the atmosphere constitute pollution of the marine environment" under the international UNCLOS treaty, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) ruled in an expert opinion.

Polluting countries therefore have "the specific obligation to take all measures necessary to ensure that ... emissions under their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage by pollution to other states and their environment", the court said. The case was brought in September by nine small countries disproportionately affected by climate change, including Antigua and Barbuda, Vanuatu and Tuvalu. They asked the Hamburg-based court to issue an opinion on whether carbon dioxide emissions absorbed by the oceans could be considered pollution, and if so, what obligations countries had to address the problem.

The UNCLOS treaty binds countries to prevent pollution of the oceans, defining pollution as the introduction of "substances or energy into the marine environment" that harms marine life.

But it does not spell out carbon emissions as a specific pollutant, which the plaintiffs had argued should qualify.



HAMBURG: (From left) Arnold Loughman, Attorney General of Vanuatu, Kausea Natano, Prime Minister of Tuvalu, and Gaston Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda pose for a picture during a hearing at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) on September 11, 2023. — AFP

'Fighting for survival'

The court's opinion is advisory and non-binding but will influence how the UN treaty is interpreted around the world. "This is the first-ever decision by an international tribunal on climate change and the oceans and clarifies the legally binding obligations of 169 countries that are party to the (UNCLOS treaty)," the nine plaintiff countries said in a statement.

The prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Gaston Browne, said small island nations were "fighting for their survival". "Some will become

uninhabitable in the near future because of the failure to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. We demand that the major polluters respect international law, and stop the catastrophic harm against us before it is too late," he said.

The other island nations joining the ITLOS case were the Bahamas, Niue, Palau, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, and St Vincent and the Grenadines. The case is seen as the first major international climate justice case involving the world's oceans, and experts say it could have far-reaching implications for countries' fu-

ture climate change obligations. The Center for International Environmental Law said the case was "particularly significant" because it was the first of three key international court advisory opinions on climate change. "For the first time, an international court has recognized that the fates of two global commons—the oceans and the atmosphere—are intertwined and imperiled by the climate crisis," said CIEL attorney Joie Chowdhury. The other climate case rulings, by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), are due to be given in the coming months.

Rising temperatures

Mandi Mudarikwa, Amnesty International's head of strategic litigation, said the ruling was "likely to inform future climate justice cases in national, regional and international courts". Tom Mitchell, executive director at the International Institute for Environment and Development, told AFP the tribunal's opinion "is an important marker on the legal responsibility for the effects of climate change, which will doubtless be influential in shaping the scope and direction of future climate litigation". Ocean ecosystems create half the oxygen humans breathe and limit global warming by absorbing much of the carbon dioxide emitted by human activities. But increasing emissions can warm and acidify seawaters, harming marine life and ecosystems.

Rising global sea temperatures are also accelerating the melting of polar ice caps and increasing sea levels, posing an existential threat for small island nations. Global sea surface temperatures hit a monthly record in April for the 13th month in a row, according to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service. — AFP

EU financing dumping of black migrants in Sahara: Media report

BRUSSELS: The European Union admitted on Tuesday to a "difficult situation" after a journalism consortium said Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania were dumping migrants in the desert, using the bloc's funds. The wide-ranging investigation by LightHouse Reports with outlets including Le Monde and The Washington Post paints the EU as complicit in a "system of mass displacement" and serious rights abuses. "Europe supports, finances and is directly involved in clandestine operations in North African countries to dump tens of thousands of black people in the desert or remote areas each year to prevent them from coming to the EU," a report said.

Such operations, it said, were "run thanks to money, vehicles, equipment, intelligence and security forces provided by the EU and European countries". "This is a difficult situation. It's a fast-moving situation, and we will continue to work on it," European Commission spokesman Eric Mamer told reporters when questioned about the investigation. The report said refugees and migrants in Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia were being "apprehended based on the color of their skin, loaded onto buses and driven to the middle of nowhere, often arid desert areas", without water or food.

Others reportedly were taken to border areas where they were allegedly "sold by the authorities to human traffickers and gangs who torture them for ransom". The 27-nation EU has struck deals with the three named countries with explicit financing to boost stopping irregular migration to Europe. Brussels has given 150 million euros (\$160 million) to Tunisia under a recent accord, with more promised. It has also allocated 210 million euros to Mauritania and 624 million euros to Morocco under the cooperation agreements.

Racially motivated

The EU's efforts to have African countries stem migration flows across the Mediterranean Sea go hand in hand with a newly agreed overhaul of the bloc's asylum rules. These will make EU borders tighter and speed up the deportation of unsuccessful asylum seekers. The Lighthouse Reports said it interviewed more than 50 black migrants — all of them from sub-Saharan Africa and West Africa — who had been expelled from the three North African countries. Their testimony, including videos and photos, "helped us to recognize the systematic and racially motivated nature of the practices," along with the consortium's own evidence gathering, it said. It cited unnamed European officials as denying that EU funds were being used to violate migrants' rights. But it said two EU sources acknowledged it was "impossible" to fully account for how the funding from Brussels was being used.

The European Commission — the EU's executive arm — did not respond explicitly to the report's allegations. Commission spokeswoman, Ana Pisonero, said: "Sometimes the situation is challenging in our partner countries ... (but they) remain sovereign states and they continue to be in control of their national forces." She said the EU monitored programs it provided funding for, and noted pledges from partner countries to uphold international law and human rights. Tunisia has said that, in the first four months of this year, it intercepted 21,545 migrants on shore or at sea, preventing them from crossing the Mediterranean to Europe. That compared with 17,576 in the same period a year earlier. Tunisian President Saïed has vowed his country will not become "a country of transit or settlement" for migrants from other African countries. In early May, the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights non-governmental organization said authorities had expelled hundreds of sub-Saharan asylum-seekers, migrants and refugees from encampments in the capital Tunis. — AFP

Schools shut as temperatures soar in India

NEW DELHI: Indian authorities in the capital have ordered schools shut early for the summer holiday, after temperatures hit 47.4 degrees Celsius (117 degrees Fahrenheit) with Delhi gripped by a "severe heatwave". Delhi city officials asked schools to shut with "immediate effect" due to the blistering heat, according to a government order quoted by the Hindustan Times Tuesday, cutting short the term by a few days.

India's weather bureau has warned of "severe heatwave conditions" this week, with the mercury reaching the sizzling peak of 47.4 degrees Celsius in Delhi's Najafgarh suburb on Monday, the hottest temperature countrywide. Authorities in other states — including Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan — have also ordered schools close, Indian Today reported. India is no stranger to searing summer temperatures. But years of scientific research have found climate change is causing heatwaves to become longer, more frequent and more intense.

The Indian Meteorological Department warned of the impact of the heat on the health especially for infants, the elderly and those with chronic diseases. In May 2022, parts of Delhi hit 49.2 degrees Celsius (120.5 Fahrenheit), Indian media reported at the time.

The next round of voting in India's six-week-long



NEW DELHI: People use clothes and umbrella to shield themselves from sun during a hot summer day in New Delhi on May 21, 2024. — AFP

election takes place on Saturday, including in Delhi. Turnout in voting has dipped, with analysts suggesting the hotter-than-average weather is a factor — as well as the widespread expectation that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will easily win a third term.

India's election commission has formed a task force to review the impact of heatwaves and humidity be-

fore each round of voting. At the same time, India's southern states including Tamil Nadu and Kerala have been lashed by heavy rains over the past few days.

Severe storms also hit parts of the country last week, including in the financial capital Mumbai, where strong winds flattened a giant billboard that killed 16 people and left dozens more trapped. — AFP



BANGKOK: This frame grab from a video taken and released on May 21, 2024 shows a plane taking off as medical staff gather near ambulances at the fire station at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok. — AFP

One dead, 71 injured as London-Singapore flight hits turbulence

BANGKOK: One person died and more than 70 were injured Tuesday when a Singapore Airlines flight from London hit severe turbulence and was forced to make an emergency landing in Bangkok. Flight tracking data suggested the plane dropped more than 1,800 meters (6,000 feet) in just five minutes, causing multiple head injuries to those on board.

It is the latest drama involving a Boeing plane, after a fuselage panel blew out of an Alaska Airlines 737 MAX in January as well as two fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019. Singapore Airlines said flight SQ321 took off from London's Heathrow airport and "encountered sudden extreme turbulence" at 11,300 meters (37,000 feet) over Myanmar's Irrawaddy Basin.

"We can confirm that there are injuries and one fatality on board the Boeing 777-300ER. There were a total of 211 passengers and 18 crew on board," the airline said in a statement. Kittipong Kittikachorn, the director of Suvarnabhumi Airport, said the passenger who died was a 73-year-old British man. Most of the injuries were caused by blows to the head, Kittipong said.

Bangkok's Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital said a total of 71 people had been sent for treatment, six of them severely injured. "We deeply apologize for the traumatic experience that our passengers and crew members suffered on this flight. We are providing all necessary assistance during this difficult time," Singapore Airlines said. Of the passengers, 56 were Australians, 47 British and 41 Singaporeans, the airline said. The incident came as parts of Thailand were buffeted by thunderstorms as the country's annual rainy season gets underway. "At 3:35 pm the airport received a distress call from the Singapore Airlines flight saying there were passengers on board injured by turbulence, and requesting an emergency landing," Suvarnabhumi Airport said in a statement.

"The plane landed at the airport and the medical team was sent to treat all the injured." Emergency vehicles raced onto the tarmac at the Thai capital's main airport with lights flashing and sirens blaring after Singapore-bound Boeing 777 touched down at 3:45 pm (0845 GMT).

Singapore's transport ministry said it would send investigators to Bangkok, while the city-state's President Tharman Shanmugaratnam said "we must hope and pray" for the injured to recover. Boeing said it was "ready to support" Singapore Airlines. "We extend our deepest condolences to the family who lost a loved one, and our thoughts are with the passengers and crew," Boeing said on social media platform X. — AFP

9 child workers die in Egypt after bus plunges into Nile

CAIRO: At least 10 female farm workers, nine of them children, died in Egypt on Tuesday when a minibus plunged off a river ferry and into the Nile northwest of Cairo, the health ministry said. "The toll is at 10 and could rise," ministry spokesman Hossam Abdelghaffar told AFP. Reporting the accident, the state's flagship Al-Ahram newspaper said the driver, who had released the handbrake, was arrested while trying to flee. He had "a verbal argument" with one of the passengers before getting out of the bus, the paper said.

Two of the victims — all of whom worked on an "export-oriented fruit farm" — were 13 years old, according to a list published by Al-Ahram. The rest were 16 and younger, except for one victim who was identified as a 40-year-old woman. The vehicle sank at the village of Abu Ghalib, some 50 kilometers (31 miles) northwest of the capital. Villagers used small wooden boats to row out and help search-and-rescue workers look for survivors, as relatives waited anxiously on the banks of the narrow stretch of the Nile. A crane was finally able to lift the minibus from the water, after rescuers and locals had swum out to extract victims from the windows of the submerged vehicle. — AFP



ABU GHALIB: Rescuers work to pull a sunken minibus from a canal of the Nile River near Abu Ghalib village in Egypt's Giza governorate on May 21, 2024. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 2024



A group photo of the Volvo team. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



The fully electric Volvo EX30.

Volvo Cars Kuwait proudly announces launch of the new fully electric EX30

EX30 produces zero tailpipe emissions and minimizes its carbon footprint throughout its lifecycle

By Ghadeer Ghoulm

KUWAIT: Volvo Cars Kuwait has officially launched the new, fully electric Volvo EX30 at a press event held at Volvo Studio on Tuesday. The EX30 is now available for sale, booking and test drives at the Volvo Showroom and Volvo Studio retail spaces. The EX30 has already garnered significant recognition, including the prestigious 2024 World Urban Car title at the New York International Auto Show. It was also ranked among the top three cars globally from a pool of 38 nominees. Since its launch last summer, the EX30 has won several major awards, such as "The Sun Car of the Year" and "Small SUV/Crossover of the Year" from the Sunday Times, and "Eco Warrior of the Year" from Top Gear magazine.

Sustainability and performance

The EX30 is Volvo's smallest and most environmentally conscious SUV to date. It boasts a total carbon footprint of just 23 tons per 200,000 km, which is approximately 60 percent less than the petrol-powered XC40 ICE. Built on a purpose-designed electric car platform, the EX30 not only produces zero tailpipe emissions but also minimizes its carbon footprint throughout its lifecycle.

Mishal Al-Safran, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors at Volvo, expressed pride to Kuwait Times in the EX30, highlighting its environmental friendliness, powerful performance, and use of 30 percent recycled materials. The EX30 is available for test drives

at the Volvo showroom in Rai and the Volvo Studio in AlKhaleejia Tower. The EX30 has rapidly become popular with customers worldwide and is projected to be one of Volvo's best-selling models this year. Achraf Tamim, General Manager at BNK Automotive, emphasized the car's appeal, stating: "With its sustainability, power, and minimalistic features, we expect high demand from electric car enthusiasts and a youthful customer base."

Powertrain options

Buyers of the EX30 can choose from three electric powertrains:

- Single Motor with 200kW (272hp) and a 51kWh battery
- Single Motor Extended Range with a 69kWh battery
- Twin Motor Performance model with 315kW (428hp) and a 69kWh battery

To enhance the customer experience, Volvo Cars offers a complimentary car charger installation at the customer's preferred location, be it home, office or chalet. Prospective buyers are encouraged to visit Volvo retail spaces for an unforgettable EX30 test drive experience.



A visitor checks out the interior of the newly-unveiled, fully electric Volvo EX30.

Founded in 1927, Volvo Cars is a globally recognized brand with sales in over 100 countries. Listed on the Nasdaq Stockholm exchange under the ticker "VOLCAR B", Volvo aims to provide customers with personal, sustainable, and safe mobility. The company is committed to becoming fully electric by 2030 and achieving climate neutrality by 2040. As of December 2021, Volvo Cars employs around 41,000 people, with

its headquarters and primary functions in Gothenburg, Sweden, and production plants in several countries, including Belgium, the US, and China.

BNK Automotive

BNK Automotive, the exclusive distributor of Volvo Cars in Kuwait, is owned by Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi and is part of BNK Holding KSCC.



SEOUL: This handout photo taken on May 21, 2024 and released by the South Korean Presidential Office via Yonhap shows South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol (center) attending the virtual AI Seoul Summit hosted jointly by South Korea and Britain, in Seoul. — AFP

16 top AI firms make new safety commitments

SEOUL: More than a dozen of the world's leading artificial intelligence firms made fresh safety commitments at a global summit in Seoul on Tuesday, the British government said in a statement. The agreement with 16 tech firms - which include ChatGPT-maker OpenAI, Google DeepMind and Anthropic - builds on the consensus reached at the inaugural global AI safety summit at Bletchley Park in Britain last year.

"These commitments ensure the world's leading AI companies will provide transparency and accountability on their plans to develop safe AI," UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said in a statement released by Britain's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. Under the agreement, the AI firms that have not already shared how they assess the risks of their technology will publish those frameworks, according to the statement.

These will include what risks are "deemed intoler-

able" and what the firms will do to ensure that these thresholds are not crossed. "In the most extreme circumstances, the companies have also committed to 'not develop or deploy a model or system at all' if mitigations cannot keep risks below the thresholds," the statement added. The definition of these thresholds will be decided ahead of the next AI summit, due to be hosted by France in 2025.

The firms that have agreed on the safety rules also include US tech titans Microsoft, Amazon, IBM and Instagram parent Meta; France's Mistral AI; and Zhipu.ai from China. In his opening remarks, South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol flagged "growing concerns over potential risks and negative impacts of AI, including fake news through deepfake and the digital divide."

"Since the digital space is hyper-connected and transcends national borders, we need digital norms at the global level," he added.

The stratospheric success of ChatGPT soon after its 2022 release sparked a gold rush in generative AI, with tech firms around the world pouring billions of dollars into developing their own models. Generative AI models can generate text, photos, audio and even video from simple prompts, and its proponents have heralded them as a breakthrough that will improve

lives and businesses around the world. But critics, rights activists and governments have warned that they can be misused in a wide variety of situations, including the manipulation of voters through fake news stories or so-called "deepfake" pictures and videos of politicians.

Many have called for international standards to govern the development and use of AI, and have called for action at summits such as the two-day gathering in Seoul this week. In addition to safety, the Seoul summit will discuss how governments can help spur innovation, including into AI research at universities.

Participants will also consider ways to ensure the technology is open to all and can aid in tackling issues such as climate change and poverty. The Seoul summit comes days after OpenAI confirmed that it had disbanded a team devoted to mitigating the long-term dangers of advanced AI.

"The field of AI safety is quickly evolving and we are particularly glad to endorse the commitments' emphasis on refining approaches alongside the science," Anna Makanju, OpenAI's vice president of global affairs, said in the statement announcing the new commitments on Tuesday. The two-day summit will be partly virtual, with a mix of closed-door sessions and some open to the public in Seoul. — AFP

EU states give final backing to AI rules

BRUSSELS: EU states on Tuesday gave their final backing to landmark rules on artificial intelligence that will govern powerful systems like OpenAI's ChatGPT. The European Parliament had already approved the law in March and it will now enter into force after being published in the official EU journal in the coming days. The European Union says the law will protect citizens from AI's dangers while harnessing the technology's potential in Europe.

First proposed in 2021, the rules took on greater urgency after ChatGPT arrived in 2022, showing generative AI's human-like ability to produce eloquent text within seconds.

Other examples of generative AI include Dall-E and Midjourney, which can produce images in nearly any style with a simple input in everyday language. The law known as the "AI Act" takes a risk-based approach: if a system is high-risk, a company has a tougher set of obligations to fulfill to protect citizens' rights. There are strict bans on using AI for predictive policing and systems that use biometric information to infer an individual's race, religion or sexual orientation.

Companies will have to comply by 2026 but rules covering AI models like ChatGPT will apply 12 months after the law becomes official. "With the AI act, Europe emphasizes the importance of trust, transparency and accountability when dealing with new technologies while at the same time ensuring this fast-changing technology can flourish and boost European innovation," said Mathieu Michel, Belgian secretary of state for digitization. — AFP



Business

Boursa Kuwait showcases investment opportunities in Kuwait capital market

Twelfth Corporate Day held in collaboration with Jefferies Financial Group

LONDON: In its continuous quest to showcase the Kuwaiti capital market and its standout listed companies as well as ignite investor interest in the unique opportunities it presents, Boursa Kuwait organized its twelfth Corporate Day in London in collaboration with Jefferies Financial Group, a world-renowned global investment banking and capital markets institution on May 20, 2024.

The prominent event brought together six companies listed on the exchange with globally recognized asset management firms, investment banks, sovereign wealth funds, pension funds and other financial entities. Institutional investors were given an opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge about "Premier" Market entities, including Boursa Kuwait, the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), Gulf Bank, Mabaneq, Jazeera Airways and HumanSoft, and through 36 meetings where the Kuwaiti companies presented their latest performance figures, ESG metrics business strategies, and outlook to financial analysts from these global institutions.

Speaking on behalf of the exchange, Boursa Kuwait's Head of Markets Sector Noura Al-Abdulkareem said, "Boursa Kuwait is committed to showcasing the investment opportunities in the Kuwaiti capital market and its standout listed companies that attract the interest of investors from around the world through its series of Corporate Days that are organized with world-renowned financial entities in the international capitals of finance. Access to long-term global capital is essential to the Kuwaiti capital market's sustainable growth and we will continue to explore opportunities that will provide transparency, enhance market liquidity and attract a greater range of investors to our marketplace."

During its meetings with prospective investors,



Boursa Kuwait's Head of Markets Sector
Noura Al-Abdulkareem



Boursa Kuwait's Chief Financial Officer
Naim Azad Din

Boursa Kuwait showcased its first-quarter performance as well as the underlying numbers of the Kuwaiti capital market, which saw tremendous growth in trading volume, jumping 68.65 percent from 8.52 billion shares to 14.36 billion shares. Additionally, traded value increased by 34.21 percent from KD 2.64 billion to KD 3.54 billion, while average daily traded value (ADTV) increased by the same percentage from KD 43.26 million in 2023 to KD 58.06 million. Furthermore, institutional investors made up 62 percent of the capital market in the first quarter of 2024 while international investors made up 15 percent, a testament to Boursa Kuwait's continuous efforts to develop the Kuwaiti capital market and promote it to investors worldwide.

Boursa Kuwait's Chief Financial Officer Naim Azad Din said, "Corporate Days are an integral part of Boursa Kuwait's strategy, as they give the exchange, which has been self-listed on the "Premier" Market since 2020, a chance to showcase its financial

and operational performance and highlight our initiatives in the field of ESG implementation and reporting. These events also give Boursa Kuwait a chance to tell its story to the international investment community as a leader in the region as well as a pioneer in the privatization efforts of the State of Kuwait and a successful tale in the privatization of stock exchanges in the Middle East."

"Boursa Kuwait's participation comes as part of the company's commitment to implementing the best-in-class standards and practices in the field of investor relations, as IR plays a pivotal role in developing business strategies and enabling investors access to vital financial and non-financial information that helps them make sound investment decisions and gives them insights into future outlooks and opportunities. We are grateful to Jefferies Financial Group for giving us this opportunity to tell our story and we look forward to more collaborations in the future," said Azad Din.

The 12th Corporate Day marks the third collaboration between the Kuwaiti stock exchange and Jefferies Financial Group, and the first in 2024. In 2023, the two financial institutions partnered twice, once on a London Roadshow with the Kuwait Clearing Company that contributed to the implementation of several developmental projects to ease investor access and another time on a Corporate Day held in Dubai that saw the participation of 13 listed companies.

Boursa Kuwait has been a key driver in the development of the Kuwaiti capital market and the diversification of the national economy, in line with the goals of the "New Kuwait" vision. Since its inception, the company has worked diligently to create a thriving capital market that attracts local and

Six companies listed in the "Premier" Market met with world-renowned investment institutions at the exchange's 12th Corporate Day in London

foreign investors through a broad spectrum of new products and services, infrastructure upgrades, and market reform initiatives, as part of its multi-phase market development plans.

Boursa Kuwait was fully privatized in 2019, the first government entity in the country to successfully undergo the process, bringing about greater levels of efficiency. It has also been self-listed since September 2020 and has made great strides in sustaining its operations and business continuity in the face of uncertainties and challenges. The company has rolled out numerous market reforms and new initiatives as part of its comprehensive multi-phase market development (MID) plans and showcases some of the standout listed companies and the investment opportunities that reside in the Kuwaiti capital market through its series of Roadshows and Corporate Days, putting these companies in touch with some of the world's leading investment firms and financial institutions and highlighting their financial health and business strategies and outlooks, to help investors gain an in-depth understanding of the benefits and opportunities of investing in Kuwaiti companies.

India inspects spice firms after foreign bans

MUMBAI: India's government spice board has launched factory inspections of two top companies in the wake of foreign bans following accusations some products were tainted with pesticides, media reports said Tuesday.

India is a key spice producer making up some 12 percent of global exports, totaling \$4.25 billion last year, according to the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI). The Spices Board of India launched checks at processing plants of popular producers MDH and Everest - together making up more than a quarter of India's market - to ensure that they meet global standards, the Economic Times reported.

Both companies deny their spices pose a health risk, and MDH last month said the claims were "untrue and lack any substantiating evidence". Last week Nepal became the latest jurisdiction to impose bans on the import and sale of some spice products by the two brands, following restrictions imposed by both Hong Kong and Singapore.

Restrictions were slapped on after tests detected the presence of ethylene oxide, according to media reports. Besides its use as a pesticide, ethylene oxide is used as a sterilizing agent in spices to prevent illnesses caused by salmonella and E.coli bacteria.

Regular exposure to the colorless and odorless compound increases the "risk of cancers of the white blood cells", according to the US Environmental Protection Agency. There was no immediate response from the Spices Board, and the media reports did not specify exactly when the factory checks began. But the reported checks come after the board earlier this month ordered exporters to "test raw materials, processing aids, packaging materials and finished goods" for ethylene oxide contamination.

It urged producers to avoid use of ethylene oxide for sterilization and switch to "alternate methods" including steam. Major importers including Australia, Britain and the United States have also demanded additional information or are considering extra quality control measures, Indian media have reported. Earlier this month, the GTRI research body warned that should key importer China follow suit, Indian spice exports "could see a dramatic downturn". - AFP

Eurostar seeks to reassure over new post-Brexit checks

LONDON: Eurostar, whose trains connect London with mainland Europe, on Tuesday played down fears that passengers could face long delays once post-Brexit scanning checks finally begin this year. The automated system, mostly paid for by Eurostar at a cost of 10 million euros (\$11 million), is set to enter operation in early October following long delays in the wake of Britain's departure from the European Union. It will record a non-EU national's details and biometric data along with their date of entry and exit, keeping track of overstays and refused entries. Passports will still be stamped under the existing system. London mayor Sadiq Khan recently warned that the new arrangement would cause "chaos".

HS1 - which operates high-speed rail tracks between London and the Channel Tunnel that connects England with France - had also expressed concern about potential massive queues.

But at a London press conference with Eurostar on Tuesday, HS1 said major investment had helped to



TOKYO: People walk along an underground concourse leading to the subway in Tokyo. - AFP

Stock markets waver as traders look for impetus

LONDON: European stock markets fell while Wall Street indices were little changed Tuesday as traders awaited more signs on the direction of interest rates and an earnings update from US tech giant Nvidia. In some markets, profit-takers appear to have stepped in to take advantage of strong gains in recent sessions.

"It looks as if investors are choosing to take some money off the table now," said David Morrison, senior analyst at Trade Nation. "There was little to influence market direction following all the excitement from last week's ever-so-slightly positive, although just-as-expected" US consumer inflation data, he said. Stock markets hit fresh record highs last week after figures showed US inflation slowed to 3.4 percent in April, raising hopes that the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates in the coming months. But all major European markets were lower on Tuesday, while in New York the Dow and the broader S&P 500 were basically unchanged while the Nasdaq was down slightly.

"One can see that there isn't a lot of conviction" in the market, said Patrick O'Hare, an analyst at Briefing.com. There's an "expectation of consolidation activity given the run the major indices have enjoyed since their mid-April lows." Eyes are on the release later in

the day of minutes from the Federal Reserve's May policy decision for clues on the outlook for cuts to US interest rates.

Recent US data has been mixed and a number of Fed decision-makers have warned they are not willing to call for a reduction until they are convinced higher borrowing costs are doing their job and that inflation is truly under control. Wall Street shares are also being held back by JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon's announcement Monday that the bank is not expecting to buy back a lot of stock, O'Hare said.

On Wednesday, investors will closely watch earnings results from US chip-maker and stock market star Nvidia, whose high-end processors are key for artificial intelligence companies. "For the market to keep momentum this week, it may come down to just one stock - Nvidia," Freedom Capital Markets' Jay Woods said. "It sure feels like the hype for this earnings event will be the talk of trading desks and financial media all week." Chinese property firms, which soared Friday on news of new government support measures, sank in Hong Kong, which led other Asian markets lower.

China's announcement Tuesday that local governments took in the least amount of revenue for land sales in eight years underscored the difficult path to bring China's property sector back to health. Copper, a key gauge of the state of the economy owing to its widespread use, hit a record above \$11,400 Monday, while gold fell back marginally from its own peak touched on the same day. Silver was around an 11-year high. Oil prices fell and the dollar was little changed. - AFP



alleviate such worries. HS1 and Eurostar have "put a lot of money and time and effort into understanding what this actually means for the passenger journey and trying to curate it and make it as seamless and pleasurable as we possibly can," said Richard Thorp, engineering director at HS1.

Eurostar said it would continue to recommend that passengers arrive at its London terminal, St Pancras International, between an hour and 90 minutes

before departure, adding that it plans to increase staff numbers to help with the new system. Britain formally left the EU in early 2020 following the 2016 Brexit referendum, with its citizens losing the right to freedom of movement in the bloc.

Almost 19 million people last year used the Eurostar - which connects Britain with Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands - as traveler numbers returned to their pre-pandemic levels. - AFP

Kuwait's money supply grew by 0.7% in April: CBK

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait announced on Tuesday that the broad money supply (M2) increased by 0.7 percent in April on a monthly basis to reach KD 40.1 billion (about \$130.6 billion). The bank's Economic Research department said in statistical tables issued to KUNA that private sector deposits in local banks in dinars rose last April by 0.8 percent to reach KD 36.5 billion (about \$119.1 billion). The department added that private sector deposits in foreign currencies rose by 0.9 percent to reach KD 1.9 billion (about \$6.1 billion), while the total balances of local banks' demands on the Central Bank in dinars, represented by Central Bank bonds, stabilized at \$3.3 billion (about \$11 billion). It explained that the total assets of local banks increased slightly by 0.2 percent last April to KD 87.8 billion (about \$286 billion), while the net foreign assets of local banks decreased by 7 percent to KD 12.7 billion (about \$41.4 billion).

It stated that term deposits with the Central Bank decreased last April by 22.5 percent to KD 930 million (about \$3 billion), while the balances of cash credit facilities loans increased by 0.6 percent to KD 54.8 billion (about \$178.5 billion). The department indicated in its tables that the average interest rates on treasury bonds with a maturity of one year stabilized last April at 4.625 percent, while financing Kuwaiti imports increased by 1.1 percent to KD 639 million (about \$2.08 billion), while the average exchange rate of the US dollar rose against the dinar by 0.2 percent to 307.7 fils.

In its narrow sense, the money supply means the volume of current transactions and includes paper and coin currencies that people circulate in their daily dealings and money deposited in banks in the form of current accounts or demand deposits. The money supply in its broad sense includes, in addition to current money, term deposit accounts and savings accounts. - KUNA

Peru to become 2nd country to exit IMF program

WASHINGTON: Peru will become only the second nation to exit an IMF support program later this month, the Washington-based lender said Tuesday, citing the country's "strong economic fundamentals." The South American country will exit the Flexible Credit Line (FCL) when it expires on Sunday, the International Monetary Fund said in a statement - making it the first country to do so since Poland became the first to exit the program in 2017.

The International Monetary Fund set up the FCL in 2009 to provide financial support to emerging economies with strong macroeconomic fundamentals, helping them meet balance of payment needs during times of crisis and boosting market confidence. Peru entered the IMF's FCL program at the start of COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020, opening up an emergency credit line - which it never used - of around \$10 billion that was later reduced by half. "The IMF's Executive Board commended the authorities for very strong economic fundamentals and institutional policy frameworks, a sustained track record of implementing very strong macroeconomic policies despite political turmoil," the IMF said in a statement. In an updated economic forecast, the Fund said it now expects Peru's economy to rebound from last year's twin challenges of "climate-related shocks and social turmoil" and to grow by 2.5 percent this year. This growth will be "supported by a strong recovery in agriculture and fishing, continued momentum in mining, and a looser monetary policy stance," it continued, adding that inflation is also expected to ease. - AFP

Business

Microsoft unveils 'AI-ready' PCs

Tech giant estimates over 50 million 'AI PCs' will be sold over next 12 months



REDMOND: Microsoft Corporate Vice President, Surface devices Brett Ostrum speaks during the Microsoft May 20 briefing event at Microsoft in Redmond, Washington. — AFP photos



REDMOND, US: Attendees take a look at the new Microsoft Surface devices following the Microsoft briefing event in Redmond, Washington on May 20, 2024.

REDMOND, US: Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella unveiled a new category of PC on Monday that features generative artificial intelligence tools built directly into Windows, the company's world leading operating system. The tech giant estimates that more than 50 million "AI PCs" will be sold over the next 12 months, given the appetite for devices powered by ChatGPT-style technology.

"We are introducing an entirely new class of Windows PCs engineered to unleash the power" of on-device AI, Nadella said at a launch event in Redmond, Washington.

"We call this new category 'Copilot Plus'...the fastest, most AI-ready Windows PCs ever built," he added. Of all the tech giants, Microsoft has pushed the most aggressively to infuse the powers

of generative AI into its products, often leaving rival Google to play catch-up.

ChatGPT-style AI, which is called Copilot at Microsoft, is available across the company's products, including Teams, Outlook and its Windows operating system. Microsoft even tried, so far unsuccessfully, to rejuvenate Bing, its poor-performing online search engine, with generative AI powers. "These improvements provide the most compelling reason to upgrade your PC in a long time," said Microsoft Vice President Yusuf Mehdi. Microsoft said Copilot Plus PCs, built with powerful AI-ready chips, are 58 percent faster than the M3 MacBook Air. Companies like Lenovo, Dell, Acer and HP said they would also release PCs that run on Microsoft's new Copilot Plus software.

Microsoft said that the AI features will take place on the device, so you won't have to wait for data to get sent to and from remote data-centers or pay for a subscription. AI offerings will include live translation, image generation and a state-of-the-art ability to interact with your computer through chats and simple prompts instead of clicking on files or drop-down menus.

Microsoft's pivot to AI has been celebrated by Wall Street, and the company is now the world's biggest company by market capitalization, after dethroning Apple. Microsoft is OpenAI's main investor and has injected some \$13 billion in the form of cloud computing credits that fulfill the ChatGPT-maker's huge needs for computing.

In return, Microsoft depends on

OpenAI's models - such as GPT-4 for text or Dall-E for images - to feed AI to its products. Nadella's announcement on AI comes on the heels of those made by Google and ChatGPT-maker OpenAI last week. They showcased updates to their chatbots, with even more human-like interactions and new abilities to understand their surroundings via video. Google also announced it was adding AI answers to its world-leading search engine, despite fears it may eat into its advertising revenues or starve web sites of traffic.

Analysts believe that the hunger for AI products is helping buoy Microsoft and Google's cloud computing businesses, with clients ready to pay a premium to adopt ChatGPT-like capabilities. In a note to clients, Wedbush

Securities analyst Dan Ives said that AI will add \$25 billion-\$30 billion to Microsoft's sales by 2025. "The spending on AI is unprecedented across the tech world and this is just the first phase of the AI Revolution playing out," Ives said. Microsoft's injection of AI into PC's came just ahead of an Apple event next month that is widely expected to see ChatGPT's abilities feature in a new iPhone. Media reports also suggest that Apple could announce a partnership between Apple and OpenAI.

The tech giants are racing the products out the door despite worries that generative AI poses a threat to society. Authorities, including in the US, are drawing up ways to more closely track the developments in AI, and potentially put limits on its deployment. — AFP



IMF cautions on timing of UK rate cut

LONDON: The International Monetary Fund on Tuesday said the Bank of England should be mindful over when to start cutting interest rates or risk harming an economy recently out of recession. The warning came as the IMF ramped up its UK economic growth forecast but warned over "difficult" fiscal choices to stabilize debt, as beleaguered Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservatives trail the main opposition Labour party in opinion polls before a general election this year.

The BoE this month signaled a summer rate cut, after holding borrowing costs at a 16-year peak of 5.25 percent to further dampen price rises. "As monetary policy reaches an inflection point, the timing and pace of rate cuts must carefully balance the risks of premature and delayed easing," the IMF cautioned in its latest outlook document.

Premature easing could risk further stoking inflation - but delayed easing could "stall or even reverse" economic recovery, the IMF said. The BoE began a series of rate hikes in late 2021 to combat inflation, which rose after countries emerged from COVID lockdowns and accelerated following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

UK inflation peaked at 11.1 percent in late 2022 and has decelerated since then, reaching 3.2 percent in March. April data is due on Wednesday. It remains above the BoE target of two percent.

Britain's gross domestic product is forecast to grow 0.7 percent this year, the IMF predicted, faster than the 0.5 percent it predicted in April. It is then anticipated to expand by a solid 1.5 percent in 2025, according to the Fund.

"The UK economy is approaching a soft landing, with a recovery in growth expected in 2024, strengthening in 2025," the IMF added. Recent data showed the economy emerged from a short-lived recession with better-than-expected 0.6-percent growth in the first quarter.

That came after Britain's economy shrank slightly for two quarters in a row in the second half of 2023, meeting the technical definition of a recession.

British finance minister Jeremy Hunt welcomed the IMF update, noting that "independent international economists agree that the UK economy has turned a corner". "The IMF have upgraded our growth for this year and forecast we will grow faster than any other large European country over the next six years - so it is time to shake off some of the unjustified pessimism about our prospects," added Chancellor of the Exchequer Hunt. The institution did, however, sound a warning over Britain's longer-term growth outlook. Those prospects "remain subdued due to weak labor productivity and somewhat higher-than-expected inactivity levels due to long term illness, only partly offset by higher migration numbers". — AFP

Yellen says G7 to discuss Chinese overproduction

FRANKFURT: United States Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Tuesday that concerns about Chinese overproduction of key green technologies would be a key topic at a forthcoming meeting of G7 finance ministers. Chinese production in areas such as electric vehicles, batteries and solar panels "significantly exceeds global demand", Yellen said in a speech in Frankfurt.

The excess capacity "poses a threat to the development of clean energy industries around the world", Yellen said. The subject "will be a focus at the G7 meetings in Italy later this week", she added.

Finance ministers from the Group of Seven industrialized nations are due to meet in Stresa, Italy, from Thursday. Washington is concerned that Chinese government support is leading to more production capacity than global markets can absorb, driving cheap exports and stifling growth elsewhere.

Yellen said her concerns had been "communicated directly to my Chinese counterparts", during a visit to the country last month. The treasury secretary and US President Joe Biden would take action to protect workers and companies from "being undercut by unfair Chinese economic competition", Yellen said. "We want to see healthy green technology sectors, from innovative start-ups to green manufacturing factories in the United States, Europe and around the world, not just in China," she said.

The United States earlier this month sharply raised tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles and other key technologies over capacity concerns. Meanwhile the European Commission, which participates in G7 summits alongside EU member states France, Germany and Italy, has opened a series of probes into Chinese green tech subsidies. Beijing has reacted angrily to the US and European Union actions, warning that the move risk souring economic cooperation with China.

Apple appeals huge EU fine for music streaming curbs

BRUSSELS: Apple is challenging a 1.8 billion-euro (\$1.9-billion) fine by the European Union for thwarting access to information about cheaper music streaming services, an EU court said Tuesday. The iPhone maker filed an appeal with the EU's General Court in Luxembourg on May 16, the court told AFP.

The European Commission, the EU's powerful competition regulator, hit Apple with the fine in March in a long-running saga dating back to a 2020 investigation launched after a complaint by Swedish streaming giant Spotify.

It was the first ever antitrust fine against Apple by Brussels. The commission said Apple prevented app developers from informing iOS operating system users about cheaper music subscription services available outside the App Store. Apple had said at



WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (left) and Trade Representative Katherine Tai await US President Joe Biden's speech about his agenda on investments and jobs in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

Russian assets

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WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 2024



People travel on the new version of a modern battery-powered electric iconic red and white tram.



A tram driver looks ahead on a modern battery-powered electric iconic red and white tram.



Director of electric transport of Istanbul Ali Tugrul Kucukalioglu poses out of the window.



The new version of a modern battery-powered electric iconic red and white tram is seen through the window of the old version of a tram powered by traditional overhead power lines (REAR) in Taksim Istiklal Street, in Istanbul.

ISTANBUL'S CENTURY-OLD STREETCAR GETS A MAKEOVER

Istanbul's emblematic red and white trams, built over 100 years ago and loved by both locals and tourists, are about to give way to a more modern streetcar. The tramway has become a symbol of Istanbul's most popular shopping street, Istiklal Avenue, which runs for 1.4 kilometres (0.9 miles) on the European side of the city.

Put into service in 1914, the original streetcars have undergone regular touch-ups, without ever betraying their historical look. The new battery-powered trams, from their wooden floor to their reversible seats, stay faithful to the look of their predecessors.

Two cameras on either side of the vehicles replace the old rear-view mirrors, giving drivers better visibility and enabling them to drive seated.

"It's a very good thing that they are modernising the tram. The new one hasn't changed the nostalgic aspect of the old one," said local Gonul Murtekin, who travels with her grandson.

Nostalgia and energy-saving

Istanbul's mayoral office says it plans to retire all the old trams and put them in a transport museum which is still in the planning stage. In the meantime, the newest streetcar will be co-habiting with its century-old ances-



This photograph shows a tram powered by traditional overhead power lines (left) and a modern battery-powered electric tram (right) wait at the stop in Istiklal Street, in Istanbul.—AFP photos

tors while it undergoes testing.

The city authorities hope to dismantle the overhead power lines on Istiklal Avenue within a year. Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu has committed to reduce energy consumption. "With the battery system, we save a lot of energy," said Ali Tugrul Kucukalioglu, Istanbul's director

of electric transport.

He pointed out that a tram can "run for two days on a single battery". The batteries will enable the city to get rid of the trams' overhead power lines.

"During national holidays, the tram had difficulty running because of the flags hanging from the lines," said

Kucukalioglu.

More importantly, the streetcar has been stripped of its external sidebars, which passengers would cling on as it travelled up and down Istiklal Avenue. "It was a risk for them and for our drivers," Kucukalioglu said.

Clinging to the tram

Yusuf Deniz, a young roast chestnut seller, recalled seeing tourists fall off the streetcar and hurt themselves.

"When tourists want to hold onto the tram, they do not manage like the Turks do," he said. "So the new tram is better." Until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 1920s, Istiklal Avenue, or the Grand Avenue of Pera as it was known then, was the heart of the city's cosmopolitan quarter.

The street remains popular for tourists who choose to travel to Taksim Square on the century-old trams.

Not all locals, however, feel the same about the new streetcars. Ahmet Huseyin, 16, is sad that he can no longer make the journey clinging to the side of the tram and getting some fresh air. "It ruins the traditional side of Taksim as it used to be," he said.—AFP

Sick of tourists, Japan town blocks view of Mt Fuji

A Japanese town mounted a large mesh barrier at a popular viewing spot for Mount Fuji on Tuesday, in an attempt to deter photo-taking by an ever-growing number of tourists. Japan's most famous sight can be seen for miles around, but Fujikawaguchiko locals are fed up with streams of mostly foreign visitors littering, trespassing and breaking traffic rules in their hunt for a photo to share on social media.

Parking illegally and ignoring a smoking ban, they would cram a pavement to shoot the snow-capped mountain, which soars photogenically into the sky from behind a convenience store, residents said. Workers began putting the black netting measuring 2.5 by 20 metres (eight by 65 feet) in place on Tuesday, and by late morning they were already done, an AFP reporter at the scene said.

"I hope that the net will prevent dangerous activities," resident Michie Motomochi, 41, who runs a traditional Japanese sweet shop, told AFP.

"I think it's disappointing that they



A worker installs a barrier to block the sight of Japan's Mount Fuji emerging from behind a convenience store to deter badly behaved tourists.

are putting it up. It's obviously an iconic shot," said Christina Roys, 36, a tourist from New Zealand. "But it's completely understandable. We were here last night, managing to get the last shot before they were putting up the wall, and there were so many people," she said.



A worker installs a barrier to block the sight of Japan's Mount Fuji emerging from behind a convenience store to deter badly behaved tourists.

"It's quite dangerous because of the traffic coming through. There are other spots where you can get the shot of the mountain."

Online bookings

Record numbers of overseas tourists are coming to Japan, where monthly visitors exceeded three million for the first time in March and then again in April. But as in other tourist hotspots, such as Venice -- which recently launched a trial of entry fees for day visitors -- the influx has not been universally welcomed.

In Japan's ancient capital of Kyoto, locals have complained of tourists harassing the city's famed geisha. And hikers using the most popular route to climb Mount Fuji this summer will be charged 2,000 yen (\$13) each, with entries capped at 4,000 to ease congestion.

A new online booking system for the mountain's Yoshida trail opened on Monday to guarantee hikers entry through a new gate, although 1,000 places a day will be kept for day-of entries. Mount Fuji

is covered in snow most of the year, but during the July-September hiking season, more than 220,000 visitors trudge up its steep, rocky slopes.

Many climb through the night to see the sunrise, and some attempt to reach the 3,776-metre (12,388-foot) summit without breaks, becoming sick or injured as a result. Regional officials have raised safety and environmental concerns linked to overcrowding on the active volcano, a symbol of Japan and a once-peaceful pilgrimage site.

Residents near other popular photo spots in the region, including the so-called Fuji Dream Bridge, have also reportedly complained about overtourism in recent weeks. One tour operator that offers day trips from Tokyo to the Mount Fuji area told AFP they are taking visitors to another Lawson store nearby where a similar view can be seen, but there are fewer nearby residents.—AFP



A person takes pictures of Mount Fuji from across the street of a convenience store, hours before the installation of a barrier to block the sight of Japan's Mount Fuji to deter badly behaved tourists, in the town of Fujikawaguchiko, Yamanashi prefecture.—AFP photos



Vice-President of Events and Exhibitions at Studio Ghibli, Kenichi Yoda, waves next to Japanese director Goro Miyazaki as he holds the Honorary Palme d'Or.—AFP

Japan's Studio Ghibli receives honorary Palme d'Or in Cannes

Legendary Japanese animators Studio Ghibli on Monday became the first collective to receive an honorary Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. The Oscar-winning studio, founded 40 years ago, is beloved worldwide for masterpieces like "My Neighbor Totoro", "Spirited Away" and "Howl's Moving Castle".

Ghibli co-founder Hayao Miyazaki, 83, did not attend the French festival, but his son Goro Miyazaki received the award, which is typically bestowed on individuals.

"I would like to thank all the fans worldwide," he said on stage after receiving the honour, before attendees were treated to four short films from the wildly imaginative collective.

Among them was 2002's "Mei and the Baby Cat Bus," billed as a "mini-sequel" to Hayao Miyazaki's 1989 classic "My Neighbor Totoro". In "Mr. Dough and the Egg Princess", a giant gloop of dough helps a tiny egg in a pink dress escape a ravenous witch. "House Hunting" and "Boro the Caterpillar" -- the second starring a tiny grub munching on leaves -- featured amusing human voiceovers for everything from a friendly river monster to squeaky bicycles.—AFP

Lifestyle



CHILD MASCOTS AND BUN TOWERS: HONG KONG KEEPS ISLAND TRADITIONS ALIVE

Supporting costumes ranging from Cinderella dresses to Dragon Ball Z outfits, children were hoisted onto metal poles as unofficial mascots of a boisterous parade as Hong Kong celebrated its annual bun festival. Thousands of visitors flocked to Hong Kong's outlying island of Cheung Chau to watch the "Piu Sik" or floating colors parade, which used to be performed with statues of deities before costumed youngsters replaced them.

The elaborately dressed young children were raised above the crowds for the iconic spectacle on the island, which is steeped in cultural traditions and a popular tourist destination. Temperatures soared to 29 degrees Celsius (84 degrees Fahrenheit) during the parade. "Last year I was a firefighter... I've always wanted to be a cop," said Wu, 9, who was dressed as a police officer - complete with sunglasses and a baton. "It's cool."

Legend has it that in the 1800s, Cheung Chau's fisherfolk drove away pirates and the plague by parading a statue of Taoist sea deity Pak Tai, inspiring today's five-day bun festival.



A popular local bakery saw long queues of festivalgoers eager to sample the island's favourite sweet buns, which are stamped with the Chinese character for "peace and safety".

"We've always had a queue for our 'ping on' buns," said second-generation store owner Martin Kwok, adding that the store made more than 60,000 buns daily in the preceding week.

Kwok said he quit a high-paying finance job to carry the torch at the family business, over his father's objections.

"I really want to maintain the tradition of making buns and to keep the spirit of the bun festival alive," Kwok told AFP. In a nearby playground, a 14-metre-high (45-foot-high) tower covered with imitation steamed buns loomed over the crowd, the site of a midnight contest



where 12 athletes will speed-climb their way to the top.

Janet Kung, a former winner who is competing again this year, said the bun scrambling competition has a "sense of grandeur" given its long tradition and live audience. "The biggest challenge for bun scrambling is how to get over the pressure from the crowd, as well as from my own expectations," said the 30-year-old,

who works as a nurse. A retiree in her 50s surnamed Chan said she appreciated the bun festival's cultural legacy as well as the charms of Cheung Chau, a contrast to the hectic pace of city life. "It's the ambience of old Hong Kong, the alleys and the small shops... I think this was how my father and mother lived." — AFP



Performers participate in the "Piu Sik" parade on the island of Cheung Chau during its annual Bun festival in Hong Kong. — AFP photos

Dramas elevate Iran cinema but it's comedy that sells

Social dramas have made Iranian films and their directors renowned at international festivals such as Cannes, but at home it's comedy that sells and has long been the favored genre. There are around 750 screens in the Islamic republic, and going to the movies is a preferred leisure activity for people seeking distraction from often difficult daily lives.

An Iranian film may be in competition at this year's Cannes, but it was comedy that monopolized the top six box office places in the Iranian year 2023-2024 that ended in March. During those 12 months, 28 million cinema tickets were sold in Iran.

"These films offer a simple plot and structure that make them accessible to everyone," movie critic Houshang Golmakani told AFP. It's a generic formula that works well and generally has stereotypical characters - pretty women, young people wanting a better life, a "Don Juan" and clumsy pious men.

"We need to laugh because the social-economic situation is difficult," said 47-year-old trader Milad, speaking outside a cinema in the capital Tehran.

"I go to the movies and can forget all my troubles for a few hours." Elaheh Kargar, a 24-year-old nurse, said she "naturally chooses a comedy" so she can "have a good time" at the cinema. Take one of the big successes of the past few months, the comedy "Hotel".

Mix-ups

This film tells the tale, replete with misunderstandings and mix-ups, of a man who hides his fiancée from his former wife so he can borrow money from his ex's aunt. It was filmed on the island of Kish, where Iranians like to recharge their batteries in a relaxed setting inspired by Dubai just a 12-hour ferry ride across the Gulf.

"Hotel" was seen by 6.2 million people, but even it was overtaken by "Fossil" which, at 7.5 million, became one of the top-viewed movies in the history of Iranian cinema. "Fossil" chronicles the adventures of a group of musicians before and after the Islamic revolution of 1979, after which pop music was banned for more than two decades.

It plays on nostalgia for the golden age of popular music by covering hits sung by actors resembling Iranian stars of the 1950s to 1980s, many of whom went into exile in the United States. "When we screened 'Fossil' the house was always full," said one employee at a Tehran cinema who asked not to be identified.



Iranians walk past a movie theatre in Tehran.

"This film revived cinema, which had been in recession because of COVID. If we screened it again now, the house would still be full." "Fossil" was not a hit with Iran's ultra-conservatives and did not make them laugh. Kayhan newspaper raged that it promoted Shah-era culture, "promiscuity" and "Westernisation", and urged officials to "block the cultural influence of enemies" on younger generations.

Many Iranian comedies use satire to

criticize the inflexibility of the country's rulers towards young people.

"Dynamite" recounts the setbacks of two Shiite seminarians who move into a flat and become neighbors with a cannabis dealer and two young female Instagram influencers.

Sanctions

The directors obey the restrictions imposed by the Islamic republic: women should wear hijab head scarves, men and women must not touch each other and alcohol cannot be shown.

But that does not prevent them from mocking official cultural values such as "protecting the family at all costs", said Golmakani, adding that such movies "end without really harming these values". The authorities tolerate comedies because "they respond to the needs of the population", the critic added.

Iran's cinema-going public has few choices because of the low number of foreign productions, particularly Hollywood movies, shown locally. The country is also subject to international sanctions

and has no diplomatic relations with the United States.

People can also see serious works by, among others, Asghar Farhadi, Oscar-winning director of "A Separation", and Saeed Roustaei who made "Law of Tehran". But three 2022 films that drew international acclaim - "Leila's Brothers", "World War III" and "Beyond the Wall" - were not allowed to be screened, meaning enthusiasts had to download them.

The Iranian film in competition at Cannes this year, "The Seed of the Sacred Fig" by Mohammad Rasoulof, will not be shown at home as its director fled abroad after being sentenced to five years in jail.

Golmakani believes that the success of comedies pushes producers to favor the box office to the detriment of social dramas, which are "increasingly marginalized" at a "time when costs are increasing". "The excessive production of comedies affects the overall quality of Iranian cinema," he said. — AFP



Iranians walk past a movie theatre in Tehran. — AFP photos

Lifestyle

Explosive Trump biopic hits Cannes Film Festival

Rape, baldness and betrayal: an explosive new biopic of Donald Trump shown at Cannes on Monday paints an unflinching but nuanced portrait of the former US president, even as he runs again for the White House. "The Apprentice" traces Trump's origin story as an ambitious young property developer in 1970s and 1980s New York.



Iranian director Ali Abbasi uses a camera as he poses during a photocall for the film "The Apprentice".

Sebastian Stan, best known from Marvel superhero films, stars as Trump, while Jeremy Strong of "Succession" fame plays his ruthless mentor and attorney Roy Cohn -- and both received glowing reviews from Cannes critics.

Initially presenting an almost sympathetic portrayal of a headstrong but naive social climber, the film charts

Trump's decency being eroded as he learns the dark arts of dealmaking and tastes power. Its premiere at the French film festival Monday came while Trump is on trial in Manhattan for a tawdry scandal involving a porn star.

The movie begins with a disclaimer that many of its events are fictionalised, and director Ali Abbasi puts that licence to full use, imagining brutal events taking place behind closed doors.

In one harrowing scene, Trump is seen raping his first wife Ivana. During divorce proceedings, Ivana once accused Trump of raping her, though she later rescinded the allegation. She died in 2022. The movie appears to have already infuriated Trump's team.

His campaign communications director Steven Cheung said a lawsuit would be filed "to address the blatantly false assertions from these pretend filmmakers".

"This garbage is pure fiction which sensationalises lies that have been long debunked," added Cheung in a statement to AFP. Speaking to Vanity Fair before the premier, Abbasi had said the aim was "to do a punk rock version of a historical movie... [not] get too anal about details and what's right and what's wrong".

'Attack, attack, attack'

Iranian-born director Abbasi is a Cannes regular. His serial killer fable "Holy Spider" played in competition two years ago. "The Apprentice" be-



(From left) British producer Julianne Forde, US executive producer Amy Baer, US actor Martin Donovan, US writer Gabriel Sherman, Bulgarian actress Maria Bakalova, Iranian director Ali Abbasi, Romanian-US actor Sebastian Stan, French producer Louis Tisne, US producer Jacob Jarek, Israeli producer Daniel Bekeran and Irish producer Ruth Treacy pose during a photocall for the film "The Apprentice" at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.—AFP photos

gins with a young Trump, obsessed with joining the city's elite and dreaming of his own luxury hotel, even as he spends his days personally collecting rent from his father's tenants.

His life is transformed by an encounter with Cohn, whose harshly nihilistic lessons such as "admit nothing, deny everything" and "attack, attack, attack" will become Trump's manifesto in later life. Cohn made his name as a fearsome lawyer by hunting Communists for Senator Joseph McCarthy,

and sending Soviet spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg to the electric chair.

Far from a simple hatchet job, The Times of London even argued it would "make you feel sympathy for Trump", while Variety said it was "sharp and scathing, but it avoids cheap shots".

The screenplay was written by Gabriel Sherman, a journalist who covered real estate for the New York Observer in the 2000s and regularly spoke with Trump. The film is one of 22 in competition for the festival's top prize, the

Palme d'Or. A jury headed by "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig will unveil its winner on Saturday.

Asked whether it was possible for an American woman to be objective in judging a film about Trump, Gerwig said she would come to the movie with "an open mind and an open heart, and willing to be surprised".—AFP

Nigerian women's rights pioneer celebrated in new biopic

Generations of schoolchildren have grown up being taught that Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was the first woman to drive a car in Nigeria. But the director of a new film about the pioneering women's rights activist told AFP that the anecdote offered a very limited view of Ransome-Kuti's achievements.

"She is so much more," said Bolanle Austen-Peters, whose acclaimed biopic "Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti" comes to Nigerian cinemas on Friday. The film's opening sequence sets the tone for her extraordinary life. It begins in 1977, with soldiers hurling an elderly Ransome-Kuti from a window during a military raid at the home of her son, the legendary protest musician and "King of Afrobeat" Fela Kuti.

Ransome-Kuti would later die from her injuries, aged 77, after a lifetime at the forefront of fighting for rights and shaping Nigeria's history. The film zooms in on a formative episode in the 1940s

when Ransome-Kuti led women at a market in Abeokuta city north of Lagos in protest against heavy taxes demanded by a traditional king and the British colonial authorities.

"In the age where there was no social media, she rallied over 10,000 women from different parts of Western Nigeria," Austen-Peters said. "Traditional rulers were very powerful, and she confronted them. And then, she also confronted colonial governments," she added.

The taxes in Abeokuta were used to enrich the traditional king but also to replenish the coffers of the British colonisers after World War II. "She realised they were just milking us," Austen-Peters said. Ransome-Kuti managed to bring together different social classes under the Abeokuta Women's Union, Austen-Peters went on.

She said that shooting a powerful scene where 600 actresses storm the king's palace under a blazing sun had

left her in tears for the first time on a film set. The film concludes in 1955, the year Ransome-Kuti's husband and unwavering supporter Israel Oludotun Ransome-Kuti died.

It does not cover the whole scope of her career, which included campaigning for women's voting rights, education for the less wealthy and Nigeria's independence from Britain -- and drew the wrath of the Nigerian government and Western allies over contacts with China and the USSR at the height of the Cold War.

Austen-Peters hopes her film will help young women take inspiration from the life of the feminist and anti-colonialist activist. "We can't underestimate the power of narratives and narration," she told AFP. "Young women who see this will begin to challenge the status quo. It should inspire us to want to make a change," she said.—AFP



Nigerian filmmaker Bolanle Austen-Peters stands next to the poster of the film Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti in Lagos.



Nigerian movie maker Bolanle Austen-Peters (center) poses for a photo at Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti movie's premiere in Lagos.—AFP photos

OpenAI apologizes to Johansson over AI voice similarity

OpenAI chief Sam Altman publicly apologized Tuesday to Scarlett Johansson after the movie star said she was "shocked" by a new synthetic voice released by the ChatGPT-maker that sounds "eerily similar" to her.



US actress Scarlett Johansson arrives for the premiere of "Asteroid City" at Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City on June 13, 2023.—AFP

At issue is "Sky," one of several voices OpenAI unveiled last week with the release of its higher-performing and even more humanlike GPT-4o artificial intelligence technology. In a demo, Sky was at times flirtatious and funny, capable of seamlessly jumping from one topic to the next, unlike most existing chatbots.

The technology -- and sound of the voice -- quickly drew similarities to the

Johansson-voiced AI character in the 2013 film "Her." Altman has previously pointed to the Spike Jonze-directed movie -- a cautionary tale about the future in which a man falls in love with an AI chatbot -- as inspiration for where he would like AI interactions to go.

He furthered speculation last week with a single-word post on X, formerly Twitter, saying "her." Johansson on Monday expressed outrage at the new voice, saying in a statement she was "shocked, angered, and in disbelief that Mr Altman would pursue a voice that sounded so eerily similar to mine that my closest friends and news outlets couldn't tell the difference."

She said Altman had offered in September to hire her to work with OpenAI to create a synthetic voice, saying it might provide people comfort engaging with AI.

OpenAI said Monday on X that it was working to "pause" Sky, with a company blogpost explaining that "Sky's voice is not an imitation of Scarlett Johansson but belongs to a different professional actress using her own natural speaking voice." In a statement shared Tuesday with AFP, Altman said the company "cast the voice actor behind Sky's voice before any outreach to Ms. Johansson."

"Out of respect for Ms. Johansson, we have paused using Sky's voice in our products. We are sorry to Ms Johansson that we didn't communicate better." The company, in its blogpost, explained that it worked with professional voice actors on synthetic voices it named Breeze, Cove, Ember, Juniper and Sky.—AFP

Muted on world stage, Taiwan speaks up at Cannes

A slew of Taiwanese movies at the Cannes Film Festival offer the island an increasingly rare chance to tell its stories on the global stage. These days few countries even have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan, a self-ruled island that is claimed by Beijing.

Introducing his neo-noir thriller "Locust" at the world-famous festival, artist and director KEFF said he was "not interested in debating whether or not Taiwan should be a country." "But we've gotten to a point where to even reflect the reality of Taiwan is to be provocative. And I don't agree with that," he told AFP.

"Locust" centres on Zhong-Han, a restaurant worker who runs with a violent gang by night, and is mute -- a striking metaphor for his home island.

"Zhong-Han represents a generation that is unable to speak for itself, but also a place, Taiwan, that is unable to speak for itself," the director said. Actor Liu Wei-chen was forbidden to speak for weeks before shooting began, to prepare for the role. Meanwhile "Mongrel," which premiered Monday, explores the lives of undocumented workers, including a caregiver living in the mountains of Taiwan.—AFP



(From left) Chinese director Jia Zhang-ke, Chinese actress Zhao Tao, Chinese cinematographer Yu Lik Wai, Japanese producer Shozo Ichiyama and producer Liang Jiayan attend a press conference for the film "Feng Liu Yi Dai" (Caught By the Tides) during the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.—AFP photos

Chinese director Jia mines leftover footage for top Cannes film

Veteran director Jia Zhang-Ke has boldly repurposed the leftover material he has amassed across his entire career to create a brand new film. Jia's "Caught By The Tides" is a decades-spanning love story that is in competition for the Cannes Film Festival's illustrious Palme d'Or.

It is a meditative reflection on cinema, the passage of time, and the profound changes that China has experienced over the past 25 years.

Jia, 53, told AFP the decision to make his unorthodox film was prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which made filming in China difficult.

He decided to revisit footage shot over the past few decades, some of which was originally filmed without any specific purpose as Jia and his crew experimented with diverse techniques.

"While editing, I suddenly realised that I would have to consider all the footage I had shot over the past 20 years as potential material," he said.

"That's how this film was ultimately formed." Roughly 10 scenes in the film have actually appeared in his previous films. But, he insists, "for me, it's a new story, a new understanding of the world and a process of recreating a new character, Qiao Qiao."

The movie begins in the early 2000s in the grim and impoverished surrounds of northern Chinese city Datong, where Qiao Qiao (Zhao Tao) and Guao Bin (Li Zhubin) meet and fall in love.

Guao Bin decides to try his luck in another part of the rapidly industrialising country. Qiao Qiao initially waits, before leaving in pursuit of him. The film hops forward, many years at a time.

'Before and after'

Qiao Qiao is played by Jia's wife, Zhao Tao, who has starred in many of his films. Due to the unusual filmmaking method Zhao, along with other returning actors, ages by 20-odd years in real life as the narrative progresses.

A final section, set in contemporary China, was shot during the pandemic.

"I was a little restless," Zhao told AFP. "What worried me was not the present, but my past performances. I didn't remember how I had done it."

"But when I saw my previous clips in the editing room I realised that my worries could be dispelled. From my beginnings I was always lucky enough to put the character in the foreground."

Part of the film uses footage initially shot against the backdrop of the construction of the Three Gorges Dam.

That vast project, which displaced more than a million people, is a subject that has long fascinated Jia, epitomising China's warp-speed transformation in the early 21st century.

It was also the subject of his 2006 "Still Life," which launched Jia to greater international acclaim by winning the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, and "Ash is Purest White". For Jia, the completion of the film marks the end of that chapter of his career.

"On the one hand, this film represents a retrospective and a reconstruction of my past," he said. "At the same time, I think it is an inevitable turn for everyone. I have the impression that the world has been divided into a before and after the 2000s."—AFP



Chinese director Jia Zhang-ke poses during a photocall for the film "Feng Liu Yi Dai" (Caught By the Tides).

Sports

Japan still wrestles with legacy of graft-stained Games in Paris warning

'Japanese love Olympics' and had high hopes for Tokyo Games

TOKYO: Japan is still grappling with the fallout of the graft-stained and pandemic-delayed Tokyo 2020 Olympics, serving as a warning to Paris ahead of the Games this summer in the French capital.

Cost over-runs, corruption and COVID all tarnished the Japanese public's memory of the Tokyo Olympics, which were held largely behind closed doors in 2021, a year later than planned.

Japan consequently dropped the idea of hosting the Winter Olympics in the northern city of Sapporo because of a lack of public support. Kaori Yamaguchi, who served on the Japanese Olympic Committee's executive board for 10 years, told AFP that "Japanese people love the Olympics" and had high hopes for the Tokyo Games.

But Yamaguchi, who stepped down from the board just before the Olympics, said the gap between expectations and reality left people "wondering who the event was for".

"People felt positive watching the athletes compete (mostly on television) but they had a negative impression of the organization and management of the event," said Yamaguchi, who won judo bronze at the 1988 Seoul Games. "It felt like there was a wall that just bounced everything back - whatever people said got ignored or didn't get through."

Doomed Winter Games bid

The final price tag for the Tokyo Olympics came in at almost \$13 billion, about double the original estimate. Public opinion was split in the months leading up to the Games, with many Japanese arguing that they should be cancelled because of the pandemic.

Much of their anger was directed towards organizers who they felt were out of touch, a feeling that deepened when committee president Yoshiro Mori was forced to step down after making sexist comments.

The Games went off without major incident but will be remembered as one of the strangest in Olympic history because of anti-virus measures that included fans being barred from all but a handful of venues.

A corruption scandal that emerged once the Games were over brought more negative headlines. A series of trials have so far found 10 people guilty of paying bribes in connection with the event.

"Even if the pandemic hadn't happened, the dishonesty, the inappropriate statements from the people at the top and the cost would all still have happened," said Hirokazu Arai, a professor specializing in sports psychology.

The battering that the image of the Olympics took in Japan proved fatal for Sapporo's Winter Games bid, which was initially pushed back from 2030 to 2034, then dropped in December altogether.

A panel investigating the doomed bid found that officials had not done a good enough job of explaining costs and the benefits of hosting the Olympics to local people. The central city of Nagoya will host the 2026 Asian Games, although that decision was taken in 2016.

'Positive things'

Yamaguchi says it will be "quite a while" before Japan will have enough public support to make another Olympic bid. "The modern Olympics have a history of over 100 years, but if you can't explain what the point in having them is, people will think that they're just another event that costs money," she said.

Without the responsibility of hosting, Yamaguchi says the Japanese public will enjoy watching the Paris Games on television. But Arai believes there is now "less interest" in the Olympics in Japan, just over two months away from the opening ceremony in the French capital.

"The Paris Olympics are following on from the To-



PAU: French slalom canoeist Anne-Lise Bardet (L) holds the Olympic flame while heading down the white-water venue as part of the Olympic torch relays, in Pau, southwestern France, on May 20, 2024, ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games. - AFP

kyo Olympics, and in that case there would usually be a lot of news about it," he said. "I don't feel like that's the case."

Yamaguchi believes the Tokyo Olympics held up a mirror to Japanese society and allowed it to see the good and bad things about itself.

She is hopeful that the positive legacy of the Games may become clear "in 10 or 20 years' time",

when the current generation of children grows up.

"The organizing committee started with a theme of inclusion and diversity and Paralympians visited a lot of schools and so on - there was a lot of unglamorous work that people didn't see," she said. "There were negative things, but there were also positive things, and they planted seeds that could blossom in the future." — AFP

News in Brief

Germany's Kroos to retire

MADRID: Real Madrid's German international midfielder Tony Kroos announced on Tuesday he will retire from all football after Euro 2024. "My career as an active footballer will end this summer after the Euro championship," 34-year-old Kroos, who won the 2014 World Cup with Germany, said on Instagram. Before the European Championship, Kroos has a chance to win the Champions League with Real for a fifth time when they face Borussia Dortmund at Wembley on June 1. He also won the Champions League with Bayern Munich before joining the Spanish giants. Kroos joined Real in 2014 and quickly formed a formidable midfield partnership with Luka Modric. In a statement on their website, Real said Kroos "will go down in Real Madrid history as one of our club and international football's greatest legends". Kroos has also won the Liga title four times. — AFP

Wrestling boss pleads not guilty

NEW DELHI: India's scandal-hit ex-wrestling federation chief pleaded not guilty to sexual harassment of female athletes as his trial opened Tuesday. Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a lawmaker from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party, denied he had groped female athletes and demanded sexual favors from them. "When I have not committed any mistake, why will I admit it?" Singh told the court in the capital Delhi on Tuesday, NDTV news network reported. Singh, 67, was charged last June with sexually harassing and stalking women wrestlers. Many of India's top wrestlers had led a noisy sit-in protest demanding his ouster after the allegations came to light last January. The weeks-long demonstration by India's top wrestlers, including world champion medalist Vinesh Phogat and Olympic bronze medalist Sakshi Malik, attracted widespread attention. Wrestling is hugely popular in rural northern India and images of star athletes being detained as they tried to march to parliament in May went viral on social media. — AFP

Schnellinger dies at 85

BRELIN: Karl-Heinz Schnellinger, a World Cup finalist with West Germany at the 1966 World Cup, died on Tuesday at the age of 85, his daughter confirmed to AFP subsidiary SID on Tuesday. Schnellinger, a defender, played in four World Cups with West Germany from 1958 to 1970 and was on the losing side when England lifted the trophy at Wembley in 1966. He played 47 times for West Germany. His one goal in national colors came in the 1970 World Cup semi-final against Italy, where he scored the equalizer which sent the match to extra time before Italy triumphed. At club level, Schnellinger won the German top-flight title with Cologne in 1962 and was named German Footballer of the Year before becoming one of the first players to move abroad, spending the majority of his career in Italy. After one year at FC Mantua and another year at Roma, Schnellinger spent nine seasons at AC Milan. With the Rossoneri he won four Italian Cups and a league title. After retiring, Schnellinger lived in Italy and died in a hospital in Milan. — AFP

USADA blasts WADA's Banka over 'hit job' on US athletes

LOS ANGELES: The US Anti-Doping Agency on Monday accused World Anti-Doping Agency president Witold Banka of smearing US athletes in a bid to divert attention from WADA's handling of the case of 23 Chinese swimmers who tested positive before the Tokyo Olympics.

In a statement released on Monday, USADA responded to comments made by Banka during an extraordinary virtual meeting of WADA's Foundation Board on Friday. The US agency said Banka had distorted facts "to deflect from the real concerns the world has about how WADA allowed China to sweep 23 positive tests under the carpet."

WADA came under fire in April after it was revealed that the Chinese swimmers tested positive for trimetazidine - which can enhance performance - ahead of the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. The swimmers were not suspended or sanctioned after WADA accepted the explanation of Chinese authorities that

the positive tests for the prescription heart drug were caused by food contamination at a hotel where they had stayed.

USADA chief Travis Tygart has called the situation a "potential cover-up". On Friday, Banka cited three US doping cases that resulted from environmental contamination, as the Chinese swimmers' cases have also been ruled. But USADA noted on Monday that the three US contamination cases were made public and resulted in violations and disqualifications for the named athletes. Banka also pointed to "inconsistent rule implementation in the US" and claimed that 90 percent of American athletes - in professional leagues and college sport - do not compete under the world anti-doping code.

USADA said that remark was "a particularly manipulative comment in an effort to indicate that 90 percent of US athletes are dirty and only 10 percent are clean." USADA noted leagues such as the NFL, NBA and Major League Baseball have their own anti-doping systems, and that it was "incredibly reckless for the President of WADA to suggest these sports do not have robust and effective programs and that their athletes are not clean."

"Simply put, these comments are harmful and an insult to all athletes in these leagues and to the leagues themselves," USADA said, noting that col-



World Anti-Doping Agency headquarters.

lege athletes become subject to WADA rules when they take part in competitions sanctioned by international governing bodies.

"There is nothing more classic in a cover-up than diversion and smoke and mirrors," USADA said. "The second most classic response to a cover-up is to attack the messenger, which is the current situation as Banka and surrogates plumb the depths of misinformation and half-truths to make personal attacks, even stooping so low as to attempt a hit job on all US athletes." — AFP

Hazardous weather sparks chaos at Giro 16th stage

LIVIGNO: The Giro d'Italia's 16th stage was twice shortened due to hazardous weather conditions, including heavy snowfall, on Tuesday after a rider rebellion against organizers who pushed for a full day's racing.

Riders were supposed to begin the 202-kilometre mountain stage between Livigno and Santa Cristina Val Gardena at 11:20am (0920 GMT) but plans were changed after hours of discussion, confusion and anger within the peloton.

Giro organizers RCS eventually announced that the stage would get underway in Laas, 118.4km from the finish line, at 2:25pm (1225 GMT). That was second change of the day. Shortly before noon in Italy RCS had said that riders were supposed to start a parade around snow-covered Livigno at 11:50 am (0950 GMT) before heading to Prati allo Stelvio, 121km from the finish, where the stage proper would get underway at around 2:00 pm (1200 GMT).

But there was no one at the start line and RCS' insistence on a start in Livigno, where local authorities had paid to have a Giro stage start in the ski resort, drew a livid reaction from Ben O'Connor, who called the Giro "one of the worst organized races".

"This would never happen in 99 percent of other situations," Australian O'Connor, who is fourth in the general classification, told Eurosport. "It's just a

Fraser-McGurk, Short added to Australia T20 World Cup squad

SYDNEY: Rising talent Jake Fraser-McGurk and fellow batsman Matt Short were added to Australia's Twenty20 World Cup squad as travelling reserves Tuesday. Fraser-McGurk has been in rampant form for Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League while the versatile Short, who can also bowl off-spin, was a standout in Australia's recent Big Bash League.

Both were close to being included in the initial 15-man squad, but missed out due to the strength of Australia's top order, led by David Warner, Travis



MANERBA DEL GARDA: Team DSM's French rider Romain Bardet climbs the last kilometer of the 15th stage of the 107th Giro d'Italia cycling race, 222km between Manerba del Garda and il Mottolino. - AFP

shame that it is 2024 and you have dinosaurs who really don't see the human side of things."

French climber Valentin Paret-Peintre said that the peloton would only ride the full stage if RCS's race chiefs "drive it in a convertible", while two-time world champion Julian Alaphilippe joked that he

would spend the day "making snowmen".

On Monday, RCS had put in place the second of three potential protocols for stage 16, which had already lost the iconic Stelvio pass due to the risk of avalanche and had been threatened for days by dangerous weather. — AFP

Head and Mitchell Marsh. "Matt and Jake made compelling cases for initial selection with their respective performances for Australia last summer and, in Jake's case, more recently in the IPL," said chief selector George Bailey.

"As the tournament proceeds, the short turnaround between fixtures makes it challenging to get players in at short notice in the event of injury. "Matt provides the squad with an all-round skill set option, while Jake provides further batting cover."

The Twenty20 World Cup will be played in the United States and West Indies from June 2. Australia squad: Mitchell Marsh (capt), Ashton Agar, Pat Cummins, Tim David, Nathan Ellis, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Glenn Maxwell, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Matthew Wade, David Warner, Adam Zampa. Travelling reserves: Jake Fraser-McGurk, Matt Short. — AFP



Jake Fraser-McGurk

Sports

Man Utd's Rashford left out of England's Euro 2024 squad

England face Bosnia and Herzegovina on June 3 and Iceland four days later

BURTON UPON TRENT: Marcus Rashford paid for his poor season as the Manchester United forward was left out of England boss Gareth Southgate's provisional 33-man squad for Euro 2024 on Tuesday. Former Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson and Chelsea skipper Reece James were among the other big names to miss out on the squad, that must be trimmed to a maximum of 26 before the tournament in Germany begins.

Crystal Palace's Adam Wharton is rewarded for the Eagles' brilliant end to the Premier League season with his first-ever call up. Everton's Jarrad Branthwaite and Liverpool duo Jarell Quansah and Curtis Jones are the other uncapped players selected with Southgate short on defensive options.

England face Bosnia and Herzegovina on June 3 and Iceland four days later before jetting off for Germany, where they are one of the favourites to win the tournament. The wealth of options available to Southgate in attacking areas means Rashford misses out on a major international tournament for the first time since the 2014 World Cup.

Rashford has scored just eight times in 42 appearances for his club this season and only recently returned from injury. "These are difficult calls. With Marcus I just feel other players in that area have had better seasons. It's as simple as that," said Southgate.

In a social media post, Rashford said: "Wishing Gareth and the boys all the best." Henderson's injury-hit move to Ajax in January after a short spell in Saudi Arabia has not done enough to earn the 33-year-old a place.

"Henderson's given himself every chance. The determining factor was the injury he picked up in the last (international) camp," added Southgate. "He missed five weeks and wasn't able to get back up to

the level of intensity. It was a difficult decision."

The same goes for Jadon Sancho despite his renaissance on his return to Champions League finalists Borussia Dortmund on loan from United. Raheem Sterling and Kalvin Phillips were also overlooked despite shining for Southgate in the past at major tournaments.

Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham, Phil Foden, who fired Manchester City to the Premier League title on Sunday, and Arsenal winger Bukayo Saka are included as part of a fearsome collection of creative talent to supply England's all-time top goalscorer Harry Kane.

England's men begin their quest to win a major tournament for the first time in 58 years against Serbia on June 16 before facing Denmark and Slovenia in Group C. The Three Lions have come agonisingly close to glory under Southgate before, losing the Euro 2020 final on penalties to Italy.

England also reached the 2018 World Cup semi-finals and last eight of the 2022 World Cup. "Are we one of those teams who can win? Of course," said Southgate. "I'd be an idiot if I said no, but if I said yes, that doesn't mean there's not a lot of work ahead of us. "They know what is possible, they know what they've won at club level and what that's taken. You can see cup football, you have to navigate game-by-game."

Squad

Goalkeepers: Jordan Pickford (Everton), Aaron Ramsdale (Arsenal), Dean Henderson (Crystal Palace), James Trafford (Burnley).

Defenders: Kyle Walker, John Stones (both Manchester City), Luke Shaw, Harry Maguire (both Manchester United), Jarrad Branthwaite (Everton), Jarell



BURTON UPON TRENT: England's manager Gareth Southgate speaks during a press briefing at St George's Park in Burton-on-Trent, central England, on May 21, 2024 for the announcement of England's squad for the forthcoming UEFA EURO 2024 football tournament. — AFP

Quansah, Joe Gomez (both Liverpool), Marc Guehi (Crystal Palace), Kieran Trippier (Newcastle), Ezri Konsa (Aston Villa), Lewis Dunk (Brighton).

Midfielders: Declan Rice (Arsenal), Kobbie Mainoo (Manchester United), Adam Wharton (Crystal Palace), Conor Gallagher (Chelsea), Trent Alexander-Arnold, Curtis Jones (both Liverpool)

Forwards: Harry Kane (Bayern Munich/GER), Ollie Watkins (Aston Villa), Ivan Toney (Brentford), Jarrod Bowen (West Ham), Bukayo Saka (Arsenal), Anthony Gordon (Newcastle), Cole Palmer (Chelsea), James Maddison (Tottenham), Jude Bellingham (Real Madrid/ESP), Phil Foden, Jack Grealish (both Manchester City), Eberechi Eze (Crystal Palace). — AFP

Gasperini stands in way of Alonso's rise in Europa final

DUBLIN: Bayer Leverkusen's Xabi Alonso can confirm his status as the rising star of coaching in Wednesday's Europa League final, but he will come up against a wily old fox in Atalanta's Gian Piero Gasperini. Alonso has rebuffed advances from former clubs Liverpool and Bayern Munich to remain in charge of Leverkusen after leading the club to their first ever Bundesliga title with an unprecedented unbeaten season.

The German champions have not lost in 51 games across all competitions and could wrap up a remarkable treble in two finals this week. Leverkusen are huge favourites to see off second-tier Kaiserslautern in the German Cup final on Saturday.

But they face a much trickier task in Dublin against an Atalanta side who could also achieve the greatest ever season in their history.

A provincial club from Bergamo, Atalanta have traditionally lived in the shadow of the nearby giants AC and Inter Milan. However, they are enjoying a golden age under Gasperini and will play in the Champions League next season for the fourth time in five years.

Yet, they have consistently missed out on a trophy to mark an era of punching above their weight.

Atalanta have not lifted silverware for 61 years having lost three Coppa Italia finals in the last six seasons, most recently to Juventus less than a week ago. "Is it the highest point of my career? Yes, in terms of accomplishment and prestige, absolutely," Gasperini told UEFA.com on reaching the club's first ever European final.

"I don't think winning a cup is necessarily always part of the parameters by which success is judged. Everyone has their own goals. When you manage to exceed them by far, as has happened at Atalanta, you still have to be very satisfied.



ROME: Atalanta's Italian coach Gian Piero Gasperini and Atalanta's players look dejected at the end of the Italian Cup Final between Atalanta and Juventus at the Olympic stadium in Rome. — AFP

"If we also manage to add a cup, of course, we'll be even more satisfied." The 61-year-old said Atalanta's "world has changed" since he took over eight years ago.

Back then just surviving in Serie A was a success. Now continental football may be commonplace, but they have enjoyed two of their finest ever nights in knocking out European giants Liverpool and Marseille on the road to Dublin.

'Golden letters'

Gasperini's willingness to take risks with an attacking brand of football and nurturing young talent has earned the admiration of Alonso.

"He has a clear plan and built up a team with strong mentality and high quality," said the Span-

na na na. "You welcome the new manager like you welcomed me," he said. "You go all-in from the first day. And you keep believing and you push the team."

Feyenoord success

Slot, linked with a move to Tottenham last year, became Feyenoord boss in 2021 after impressing in his first managerial role at AZ Alkmaar. He led the Dutch giants to the inaugural Europa Conference League final at the end of his first season, which they lost 1-0 to Jose Mourinho's Roma.

Slot then delivered just a second league title in 24 years to De Kuip last season before penning a new three-year deal. Feyenoord have enjoyed a strong season, winning the Dutch Cup and coming second to an all-conquering PSV Eindhoven side in the league.

Under Slot, Feyenoord have delighted the fans at De Kuip with an attacking brand of football and Slot has won praise from Klopp himself. "I like the way his team plays football. If he is the one, I like that he wants it," Klopp said last month.

"It's the best job in the world, best club in the world. Great job, great team, fantastic people. A really interesting job." Liverpool captain and fellow Dutchman Virgil van Dijk has hailed Slot's attacking mindset, saying it would suit the philosophy at Anfield.

Speaking about the future under the new boss, Van Dijk said: "It is all about sticking together and giving him the chance of showing what he is capable of with the other guys who will come in.

"He probably knows already but everyone knows our expectations are always huge and it is about managing that in the right way and getting the maximum out of all of our players." Slot has huge shoes to fill at Anfield after Klopp restored Liverpool to

the elite of English and European football during his nine-year reign.

Under his leadership Liverpool won a sixth Champions League crown and a 19th league title, as well as a clutch of other trophies. Initially, Bayer Leverkusen boss and former Liverpool midfielder Xabi Alonso was the favourite to succeed Klopp at Anfield.

However, Alonso committed to staying at Leverkusen as he led them to a first-ever Bundesliga title. Liverpool finished third in the Premier League, qualifying for next season's Champions League, and won the League Cup in Klopp's final season. — AFP



Arne Slot

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Juventus score three late goals to salvage draw at Bologna

ROME: In a match that might have been a test of Thiago Motta's credentials to take over Juventus, his Bologna team made a blazing start but collapsed at the end and drew 3-3 with the Turin Giants on Monday.

Former Italy midfielder Motta's contract with Bologna, where the 41-year-old has been since 2022, expires at the end of the season. His team have been a revelation this season and are already qualified for next season's Champions League.

Monday's draw preserved third place, ahead of Juventus on tiebreak. Juventus playing their first match since Massimiliano Allegri was fired following a spectacular tantrum as his team won the Italian Cup last week, started in a daze.

After two minutes, Riccardo Calafiori side-footed into the roof of net as the ball dropped to him in space following a corner. On 11 minutes, Argentinian Santiago Castro, a 19-year-old making his first Serie A start, headed in at the near post. The only challenge he had to survive was from teenage team-mate Kacper Urbanski, also eager to nod in from close range.

With Juventus seemingly uninterested in running or tackling, unmarked Jens Odgaard then smashed home a 13th-rebound but was deemed offside. Juventus showed more bite after their half-time encounter with interim coach Paolo Montero, the former Uruguay defender who had been managing the club's Under-19 team.

With the visitors pressing, Castro pinched the ball in midfield in the 53rd minute and launched a Bologna counter-attack. It finished with centre back Calafiori running in alone on goal and chipping Wojciech Szczesny. After both coaches made five changes, Bologna imploded in five chaotic minutes. Federico Chiesa pounced on an error by Jhon Lucumi to pull a goal back for Juventus after 76 minutes. Motta had taken off both goalscorers. — AFP

Slot admits he could not resist lure of club

LONDON: Arne Slot said the chance to work at one of the world's biggest clubs was "difficult to ignore" after Liverpool confirmed on Monday that the Feyenoord coach would be their new manager. Just 24 hours after Jurgen Klopp's emotional farewell at Anfield, the Premier League club said in a statement that the Dutchman would take up the position of head coach on June 1, subject to a work permit.

The club did not specify the length of Slot's contract but it was widely reported in the British press that he had signed a three-year deal. The new manager's arrival was an open secret, with Liverpool reportedly agreeing a compensation deal worth up to £9.4 million (\$12 million) with Feyenoord.

Slot, 45, confirmed Anfield was his next destination at his final pre-match press conference at the Eredivisie club on Friday. "It is certainly not an easy decision to close the door behind you at a club where you have experienced so many wonderful moments and worked successfully with so many wonderful people," he told Feyenoord's website on Monday.

"But as a sportsman, an opportunity to become a head coach in the Premier League, at one of the biggest clubs in the world, is difficult to ignore." Klopp, 56, announced in January that the 2023/24 season would be his last at Anfield, and took charge of his final game on Sunday, a 2-0 win against Wolves.

In his farewell speech to the crowd, the German urged fans to throw their full support behind his successor, leading them in a chant of "Arne Slot, na na

WTA signs 'multi-year partnership' with Saudi investment fund

NEW YORK: The women's tennis tour (WTA) on Monday announced "a multi-year partnership" with the Saudi Arabian sovereign wealth fund (PIF), emulating a deal made by the men's tour (ATP) in February.

The WTA said in a statement that it shared with PIF an "ambition to grow women's professional tennis and inspire more women and girls around the world to take up the game." "We look forward to sharing the journey of our talented players across the season, as we continue to grow the sport, creating more fans of tennis and inspiring more young people to take up the game," said Marina Storti, CEO of WTA Ventures, in the joint statement.

PIF will become the "first-ever naming partner of the WTA Rankings". "Through our partnership with WTA, PIF will continue to be a catalyst for the growth of women's sport," said Mohamed Alsayyad of PIF in the statement. "This partnership aligns with our ambition to elevate the game and bring positive growth to the sport around the world."

The partnership between the WTA and PIF follows the recent announcement that the season-ending WTA Finals, featuring the eight top singles players and doubles pairings, will be held in Riyadh for the next three years, starting this year. Much like its forays into golf and football, the Saudi tennis push has met some resistance, with legends Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert denouncing Riyadh's record on women's rights in an op-ed published by The Washington Post in January. — AFP

Qadsia crowned Amir Cup champions

17th Amir's Cup win for Qadsia Sports Club



KUWAIT: The victorious Qadsia Sports Club players with the Amir's Cup.

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Qadsia Sports Club claimed their 17th Amir's Cup title, surpassing Al-Arabi Sports Club and Kuwait Sports Club, by defeating Al-Salmiya 1-0 on Tuesday. The Amir's Cup final, held at Jaber International Stadium, began at a slow pace. Salmiya controlled the first 20 minutes as Qadsia

adopted a conservative and cautious strategy, keeping their defense in place and allowing Salmiya to operate within Qadsia's third of the field.

Midway through the first half, Qadsia began to advance and created a few chances, but the match remained goalless at halftime. The second half continued with Qadsia on the attack, making the game more exciting and intense. Defenders on

both sides had to be more aggressive to protect their goals.

In the 70th minute, Salmiya's Issaka Abudu Dirra received a second yellow card and was sent off. Despite being down a player, Salmiya almost scored shortly after the game resumed. In the 83rd minute, Qadsia's Rashid Al-Dousari was also shown a red card.

Both teams continued to exchange attacks, but Qadsia broke the deadlock two minutes before the end of regulation. Qadsia's forward Ibrahim Tandia scored from close range after Salmiya's keeper deflected the ball towards Alex Lima, who capitalized on the opportunity. Salmiya had a golden chance to equalize, but Qadsia's goalkeeper made a brilliant save, securing the title for his team.

Pochettino leaves Chelsea after just one season in charge

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino has left Chelsea after just one season in charge by mutual consent, the English club announced on Tuesday. The Blues finished sixth in the Premier League thanks to a fine run towards the end of the season but missed out on Champions League qualification and a trophy.

"Chelsea FC can confirm that the club and Mauricio Pochettino have mutually agreed to part ways," Chelsea said in a statement. In just two years under the ownership of an American consortium fronted by LA Dodgers co-owner Todd Boehly and private equity group Clearlake Capital, Chelsea have spent over £1 billion (\$1.3 billion) on new players.

The vast majority of that outlay was spent on rising stars and Pochettino pointed to a lack of experience and a lengthy injury list for failing to achieve consistent results. Chelsea lost the League Cup final 1-0 to Liverpool after extra-time and pushed Manchester City all the way before losing in the FA Cup semi-finals by the same score. But there had been signs that Pochettino's project was coming together in a run of five consecutive wins to end the season that ensured Chelsea will be in Europe next season. They will qualify for the Euro-



Mauricio Pochettino

pa League if Manchester United lose to City in the FA Cup final and the Conference League if the Red Devils shock the English champions.

"Thank you to the Chelsea ownership group and sporting directors for the opportunity to be part of this football club's history," said Pochettino. "The club is now well positioned to keep moving forward in the Premier League and Europe in the years to come."

Chelsea sporting directors Laurence Stewart and Paul Winstanley said: "On behalf of everyone at Chelsea, we would like to express our gratitude to Mauricio for his service this season. "He will be welcome back to Stamford Bridge any time and we wish him all the very best in his future coaching career." — AFP

fans had been relishing what could perhaps have been the last match between members of the Big Four who have dominated men's tennis this century: Djokovic, Murray, Rafael Nadal and the now-retired Roger Federer.

Instead, Hanfmann will now face world number one Djokovic in the second round on Wednesday. Now number 75 in the world, Murray, aged 37 and playing with a metal hip, has said he is unlikely to carry on playing competitive tennis beyond the next few months, while Nadal, also plagued by injuries, is likewise facing the end of his career and is unsure if he will make a farewell appearance at next week's French Open. — AFP

NBA's young stars set to battle in conference finals

LOS ANGELES: The NBA conference finals starting Tuesday will showcase a new generation of stars as the Boston Celtics take on Indiana in the East and Dallas clash with Minnesota in the West for a place in the NBA Finals.

Boston's 26-year-old Jayson Tatum and 27-year-old Jaylen Brown are already experienced hands after the Celtics reached the conference finals in each of the past two seasons. They made it to the championship series in 2022 but fell to the Golden State Warriors then were stunned by eighth-seeded Miami in the conference finals last year.

In the Pacers they'll face a high-octane offense led by 24-year-old Tyrese Haliburton while in the West 25-year-old Luka Doncic will lead the Mavericks against 22-year-old Anthony Edwards and the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Kyrie Irving, traded to the Mavericks in February 2023, has seen close-up what Doncic and the rest of the league's rising stars bring to the table. "They have no fear," Irving said after the Mavericks polished off a six-game victory over the top-seeded Oklahoma City in the conference semi-finals.

"They want to kill our records. They want to kill us every time they get on the court," said Irving, an eight-time All-Star who won a title with Cleveland in 2016. "That was the first thing I noticed about Luka, that he just had no fear going against the best in the world," Irving said. "He always walks around like he's the best player in the world. I think that's the confidence of a champion. That's where it starts."

LeBron James is still a force at 39 but his Lakers were swept by Denver in the first round of the playoffs. The Timberwolves swept Kevin Durant and the Phoenix Suns out of the first round when the Pacers took care of Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks.

Stephen Curry's Golden State Warriors didn't make it out of the play-in and three-time Most Valu-

able Player Nikola Jokic and the defending champion Nuggets were subdued in seven games in the West semis by Minnesota.

Edwards, averaging 28.9 points, 6.2 rebounds and 5.9 assists in the playoffs, showed his maturity in game seven, when he shook off a poor shooting night to dig in on the defensive end and help author one of the greatest game-seven comeback wins in NBA history.

"I'm not one-dimensional," declared Edwards, whose stellar season has seen him tabbed for the US Olympic team. But Irving thinks Doncic has the edge in maturity. The Slovenian star is in the playoffs for the fourth time, his longest prior run a trip to the conference finals in 2022. Irving says Doncic is set to shine with a new supporting cast around him—not least himself.

'A lot of battles'

The Mavs, seeking to add to the lone NBA title they won in 2011, host the Timberwolves in game one on Wednesday. The Celtics, who share the record for most NBA titles at 17, host the Pacers in game one on Tuesday, with Brown and Tatum aiming to become the latest to lead Boston to the crown.

"We've just been in a lot of battles together," Tatum said of his partnership with Brown. "Seven years as teammates. He's been in the conference finals six times, this is my fifth time." (We're) really getting to a stage where we understand what we can do individually. We know how gifted we are offensively, but each night just kind of presents different challenges ... both of us are capable on the basketball court to do literally everything."

The Pacers' Haliburton is in unfamiliar territory, but he can rely on the experience of Pascal Siakam, an NBA champion with Toronto who was acquired from the Raptors in January. After surprising in the regular season—and earning national attention with their run to the final of the new in-season tournament—the Pacers are out to prove they can flout conventional wisdom and use their up-tempo offense to carry them all the way.

"Well, we're the uninvited guest," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said of sixth-seeded Indiana's arrival in the conference finals. "So here we are, OK." — AFP

Andy Murray comeback ends in Geneva defeat

GENEVA: The dream of one more match between Andy Murray and Novak Djokovic evaporated Tuesday as Murray tumbled out of the Geneva Open on his comeback from an ankle injury. Wild card Murray was 7-5, 4-1 down to Yannick Hanfmann when a thunderstorm lashed the Parc des Eaux-Vives grounds on Monday.

They resumed on Tuesday, with the German world number 85 taking little more than 10 minutes to win the second set 6-2. Ever since Friday's draw, tennis