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4 Young Kuwaiti pianist Rawan Behbehani shines in Geneva



5 18 Chinese among 22 dead in South Korea battery plant fire



8 India buys record sunoil as Ukraine, Russia cuts prices



15 Germany survive Euro 2024 scare as Hungary win marred by injury



Kuwait lifts visa ban on Filipinos

Philippine envoy welcomes deal • Joint committee to address labor issues

By B Izzak & Passant Hisham

Crown Prince receives citizens at Al-Sabah Family Diwan



KUWAIT: In a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received citizens at the Al-Sabah Family Diwan at Bayan Palace on Monday. The reception reflected the one-family spirit in the Kuwaiti society that has been renowned for fraternal coherence and communication between the leadership and people. (See Page 3)

KUWAIT: Kuwait announced on Monday that it has lifted a ban on issuing all types of visas to Filipinos and also allowed the recruitment of domestic helpers with work experience, officially ending a row between the two countries, an official statement said. The agreement came during a meeting held Sunday between Kuwait's Deputy Premier, Defense and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah and visiting Philippine Deputy Minister of Migrant Labor Bernard Olalia.

The interior ministry statement said that it was agreed to lift the ban imposed by Kuwait and allow the issuance of all entry and work visas for Filipino nationals, in addition to allowing the recruitment of Filipino domestic workers with overseas work experience. "The two sides agreed to establish a joint technical working committee consisting of competent authorities from the two countries to meet periodically to address employment-related issues and other concerns that may arise in the future," the interior ministry statement said.

The two sides also reiterated their commitment to the domestic workers' employment agreement signed between the two countries in 2018 which granted more protection to Filipino domestic workers, following a similar row that began with

Continued on Page 6

NEWS IN BRIEF

Bashar Abdullah new PAS chief

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Youth Affairs Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah has appointed former Kuwait football international Bashar Abdullah as the new Director General of the Public Authority for Sport. Abdullah was part of Kuwait's prolific national team in the 1990s that won the Gulf Cup in 1996 and 1998.



Bashar Abdullah

Iran, Bahrain seek to restore ties

TEHRAN: Iran and Bahrain have agreed to start talks about the release of Iranian funds frozen in Bahrain and resuming diplomatic ties. This came in a meeting that brought together Bahrain's minister of foreign affairs Abdullatif Al-Zayani and Iran's acting foreign minister Ali Bagheri on the sidelines of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue summit in Tehran. — Agencies

Dubai to build \$8bn drain system

DUBAI: Dubai on Monday announced an \$8 billion plan for a stormwater runoff system, two months after widespread flooding brought the city to a standstill. The rainwater drainage network is set to be completed by 2033, with construction to start immediately. "It will cover all areas of Dubai and will absorb more than 20 million cubic meters of water per day," Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum said. — AFP

Fines, evictions and garbage piles amid strict inspections

By Zainab Al-Mashoor

KUWAIT: Following the tragic fire in Mangaf that resulted in 50 deaths, Kuwait Municipality has enforced strict regulations against storing furniture, rubble and other materials in front of apartments, on staircases and in basements. Property owners who violate these rules face hefty fines. Inspections across Kuwait have led to sudden demands for tenants to clear their belongings, leading building janitors to dispose of items quickly and

creating piles of garbage on the streets.

Glass panes and doors under many buildings have also been removed to facilitate the evacuation of residents in the event of a fire. Tenants living in unauthorized studios across Kuwait have faced eviction without notice, resulting in increased rent and loss of belongings. Many tenants had to clear their belongings from outside their flats and from stairwells overnight to avoid fines, while janitors spoke about strict inspections and fines for minor infractions like shoe racks.

Some tenants expressed frustration over having to store items indoors, leading to cramped living conditions, while municipal cleaning workers said their workload has increased due to the high volume of discarded items. Residents shared their experiences and concerns with Kuwait Times about the significant disruption and financial strain they face due to these new regulations. (See Page 2)



KUWAIT: Mounds of discarded furniture and household items dumped by a roadside.

1,301 deaths during hajj, mostly among unregistered pilgrims

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia said Sunday that more than 1,300 faithful died during the hajj pilgrimage which took place during intense heat, and that most of the deceased did not have official permits. "Regrettably, the number of mortalities reached 1,301, with 83 percent being unauthorized to perform hajj and having walked long distances under direct sunlight, without adequate shelter or comfort," the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

An AFP tally showed the dead came from more than 10 countries stretching from the United States to Indonesia, and some governments are continuing to update their totals. Arab diplomats told AFP last week that Egyptians accounted for 658 deaths — 630 of them unregistered pilgrims. The diplomats said the cause of death in most cases was heat-related. Temperatures in Makkah this year climbed as high as 51.8 degrees Celsius, according to Saudi Arabia's national meteorological center.

On Friday, a senior Saudi official gave AFP a partial toll of 577 deaths for the two busiest days of hajj: June 15, when pilgrims gathered for hours of prayers in the blazing sun on Mount Arafat, and June 16, when they participated in the "stoning of the devil" ritual in Mina. The official said: "The state did not fail, but there was a misjudgment on the part of people who did not appreciate the risks."

Saudi Health Minister Fahd Al-Jalajel on Sunday described management of the hajj this year as "suc-



MAKKAH: Medical personnel evacuate a pilgrim affected by the scorching heat at the base of Mount Arafat during the annual hajj pilgrimage on June 15, 2024. — AFP

cessful", SPA reported. He said the health system "provided more than 465,000 specialized treatment services, including 141,000 services to those who didn't obtain official authorization to perform hajj," according to SPA, which summarized an interview he gave to the state-affiliated Al-Ekhabriya channel.

Jalajel did not specify how many deaths Saudi officials attributed to heat. "The health system addressed numerous cases of heat stress this year, with some individuals still under care," SPA reported. "Among the deceased were several elderly and chronically ill individuals."

Continued on Page 6

Relatives of Mangaf victims arrive in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Relatives from India visit a person injured in the Mangaf fire.

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Relatives of residents injured in the Mangaf fire tragedy have arrived in Kuwait from India to visit their loved ones. The blaze on June 12 killed 50 people, including 46 Indians. Currently, six Indian and one Filipino worker remain hospitalized, with three in intensive care. A victim from India's Bihar state was identified through DNA tests, and his body was repatriated with the help of his brother on Monday.

NBTC, the victims' employer, facilitated the arrival of the injured workers' relatives by providing visit visas, flight tickets, accommodation and other support. Five relatives arrived on Sunday, with four more expected by Wednesday. The company also announced financial assistance of 800,000 Indian rupees for the families of those who died and 25,000 rupees for funerals. (See Page 3)



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Inspection campaign triggers chaos after deadly fire incident

Municipality issues stern warning over violations

In my view

Worst country for expatriates, best country for peace



Nejouad Al-Yagout

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Many Kuwaitis must be rejoicing at the latest finding of the Global Peace Index, where Kuwait was listed as the most peaceful nation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Obviously, this accolade is worth mentioning and posting about. Kuwait has a reputation for security and safety. Also, our government is neither expansionist nor has it ever been a colonial power. To say we are happy that Kuwait does not actively encroach upon the land of other nations, and is a relatively safe country, is an understatement. However, and this is a big however: What is peace without happiness?

Isn't happiness also an essential factor in the lives of the people who inhabit Kuwait? Doesn't happiness give us a state of peace? Many Kuwaitis are happy because we live lives of ease, we are citizens of a welfare state, our government provides us with many amenities and services. We have free education, free healthcare, and among the most beneficial pension systems. But does material comfort bring happiness or is it superficial happiness? And, if we nod and say it does bring us joy, let us not forget that we are a minority in our country. What about the expatriates that live in Kuwait? Are they happy?

Let's look at reports. According to the Middle East Monitor, by August of 2023, Kuwait had deported 108 expatriates a day, totaling more than 25,000 expatriates from the beginning of the year! Some locals argue that the reason was because there are many illegal residents, but who allowed these residents in? Why are smugglers and human traffickers still getting away with their crimes?

And why are some locals treating illegal residents as criminals when many of them spent a fortune on coming to Kuwait under the false pretext of being a paid employee only to discover that their presence is against the law? Why is it okay to denigrate foreigners when we have so many issues we need to address as locals? Where is our compassion?

Once more, let's look at reports. Domestic workers are employed by an antiquated kafala system in which they are legally dependent on their employers. This legal (or hopefully, soon to be illegal) dependence also creates an underlying master-slave aura in which adult workers need permission to go out, are usually given one day off a week, if they are lucky, have their passports taken away so they don't run away, even when they may be running away from abuse or trauma.

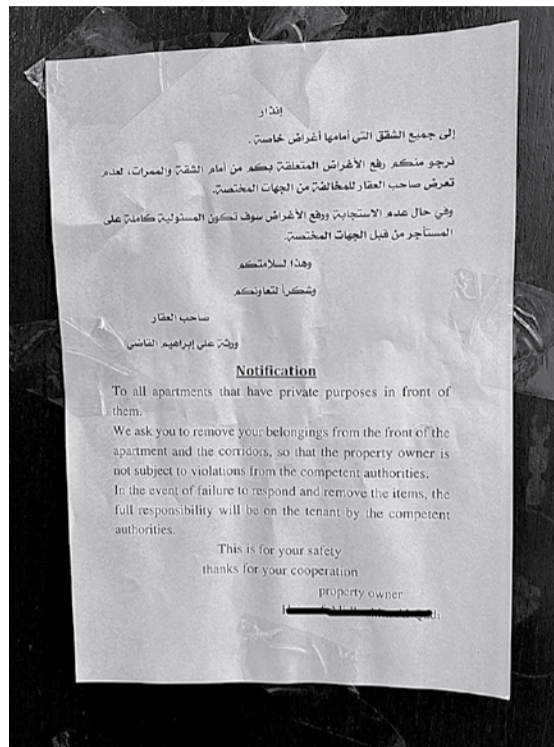
There are domestic workers who have been assaulted, whose phones have been taken away from them, and who are not allowed to eat the same food as their employers. These may be extreme cases, but shouldn't such factors be taken into consideration when we refer to a country as the most peaceful country in a region? Why are employers only held into account when a murder takes place? Why do we have to wait until a tragedy occurs to put laws into practice? Yes, there may be security in the streets, in terms of less crime rates in comparison to other nations, but what about humanitarian crimes within our homes?

Where does peace factor in when we speak of construction workers and street cleaners who work in the heat even when the law prohibits it? Where does peace factor in when we feel superior to others because we have oil? Even expatriates in high positions have an underlying fear that one day their job will be replaced by a Kuwaiti, regardless of whether he is more or less qualified.

Again, let's look at reports and ascertain whether expatriates are happy. In an International ranking of 2023, Kuwait was rated the worst country for expats among a total of 53 countries. The year before, in 2022, Kuwait was also the worst country for expatriates. In an oil-rich state where few locals emigrate to other countries, many expatriates, especially from certain countries, are suffering harsh treatment and lack of dignity.

Instead of addressing such an important issue in a country where foreigners outnumber locals (70 percent expats and 30 percent locals), one would think it is imperative to create laws that protect expatriates and ensure they are implemented rather than created to appease human rights organizations and enhance our reputation abroad.

Our reputation can never be enhanced by topping the MENA Global Peace Index. True peace arises when there is a sense of community in a nation. In Kuwait, unfortunately, there is a great divide between expatriates and locals. And when this divide is bridged, we can become one of the best countries for expatriates and truly rejoice and celebrate.



By Zainab Al-Mashoor

KUWAIT: Following the tragic fire incident in Mangaf that resulted in the death of 50 residents, Kuwait Municipality has issued a stern warning against storing leftover furniture, rubble, or any other materials in front of real estate apartment, staircases and basements. Property owners who violate this will face penalties and financial fines as per Municipal law. Inspections across various districts in Kuwait have compelled residents to remove their belongings, with no prior notice given for visits.

As building owners order residents to clear out their properties, building guards are rapidly disposing of items, resulting in piles of garbage littering the streets. Kuwait Times interviewed building guards, residents, and cleaning workers to understand the impact of these measures. Shihabuldeen, a labor worker with Kuwait Municipality, explained: "We come twice a day, starting at 4 am to 8 am, and again in the evening. We roam around the district, collecting solid materials and furniture to take to the Municipality in Kabd, the

Municipality's solid waste management project. Since the fire, the workload has increased significantly, as we haven't seen this many items disposed of in years."

Jacqueline Mercado, a resident in Salmiya, recounted her experience: "Last Wednesday, I came home late from work and was forced to evacuate my studio, where I had lived for the past four years, without prior notice or even a three-day grace period to pack. I paid KD160 for my rent and was moved to another flat with a rent of KD350, which I couldn't afford. The building owner suggested I share the apartment with another neighbor in the same situation. Now, I'm in chaos, living with a stranger and trying to unpack my belongings, many of which were lost or damaged."

This happened to about ten studios in my neighborhood, as they were rented unregistered which we didn't even know. In old Salmiya Souq, many unregistered basement shops were demolished as well." She added, Tom, a resident in Farwaniya, shares: "The day after the fire, my haris knocked on my door at 1 am, asking us to

remove all our belongings from in front of the apartment and the warehouse. It took almost six hours to clear everything. The next morning, the municipality came for a checkup, but luckily our building didn't receive a fine."

However, the dustbin outside became a hill of discarded items. The area is cleaner now, but I worry that rents might increase as building owners try to recoup their losses of not being able to rent the basement or warehouse." Abu Mustafa, a gatekeeper in Khaitan, said: "On the night of the fire, firefighters conducted a sudden inspection, and we received a warning letter from the municipality to remove all belongings. I heard from a friend in Farwaniya that they were fined even for a shoe rack, so we asked residents to remove them too."

Lamia Shalabi, a resident in Hawally, commented: "We were asked to remove our bicycle from the staircase, and the building owner posted a warning letter on our doors to remove shoe racks after hearing about a KD500 fine imposed on a building in Khaitan. It's disturbing to have to put the shoe rack inside my al-

ready cramped apartment, and I had to get rid of some shoes and belongings to make space." Moatasem Samara, another resident in Hawally, supported the decision: "A clean environment is essential, but does it really help? We had to throw out many necessary items but also take in some necessary items making it congested and more dangerous due to lack of space inside the apartments."

And given the shoe rack that were enforced indoors is suffocating. Even in mosques, shoes are not kept inside; how can we live, pray, and eat with shoes around us?" Nermeen Saab, a resident in Khaitan, noted: "Our building received a warning letter to remove our building's glass door because it wasn't safe for emergency evacuations. The door only allowed one person to pass at a time, so they took it off on the same day to avoid penalties. Sharukh came home to find his kids' bicycles and the furniture at the staircase thrown away. It was upsetting to have them discarded without permission, but it was also a relief as he didn't know what to do with the furniture."



Municipality workers collect garbage as building owners order residents dispose unused properties, resulting in piles of garbage littering the streets of Kuwait.



FM calls for an end to Gaza massacres and violations

TEHRAN: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya has underlined the necessity of putting an end to the occupation's massacres and violations in Palestine and welcomed the Security Council's approval of a ceasefire resolution stipulating the withdrawal of occupation forces, allowing for repatriation of Palestinians, and guaranteeing the flow of aid.

Al-Yahya made these remarks at the 19th Asia Cooperation Dialogue ministerial council in Iran, affirming Kuwait's intent on boosting joint work and cooperation between member states, especially as Kuwait hosted the first ACD meeting and is home to its headquarters. The Foreign Minister commended all efforts supporting the Palestinian cause, arriving at just permanent peace, and achieving the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. Concluding his statement, Minister Al-Yahya called on member states to actively strengthen partnership

Kuwait Airways adjusts ticket prices to suit travelers

KUWAIT: The results of the travel ticket price processing committee formed by the Board of Directors of Kuwait Airways Company recently began to reap the fruits of its work, which appeared clearly on the ground through the positive results it achieved that led to reaching the desired goals in treating the previously applicable prices. The decision of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Airways to form this committee came in implementation of the directives of the political leadership to harness all capabilities to serve our valued citizens and customers and give them broader options and opportunities to suit their aspirations.

In this regard, the Chairman of the Board of Directors, Captain Abdul Mohsen Salem Al-Faqaan, said that the signs of the committee's work began to be reflected on the ground by the company's executive management, as the travel ticket price processing committee accomplished what was required of it in a short period of time, which included many research procedures and examination of defects in Pricing processes and developing solutions that are in line with the company's available capabilities.

Through it, it achieved positive results in line with market data, whether regionally or globally, indicating that the committee worked on developing several recommendations, the most important of which is changing the pricing policy and providing competitive prices in addition to providing different offers over several periods and ensuring that prices are

and cooperation and turn this dialogue into a regional organization.

Iran's acting president, Mohammad Mokhber, called on Asian countries on Monday to create a coherent network of cooperation to secure the stability of Iran and enhance the international economy. This came during his speech, which was read out by Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani in the 19th ministerial meeting of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), held in Tehran.

Mokhber expressed the hope that this meeting could help enhance solidarity among the Asian nations in line with observing Asian values, creating a coherent network of constructive cooperation, and strengthening friendly ties on this continent. Asia could be an impetus in the formation of an international convergence, he pointed out. The Iranian official slammed the atrocities committed by the Zionist regime in the genocidal war in the Gaza Strip.

Mokhber condemned the international community's indifference in dealing with the Zionist crimes in the enclave over the past eight months. "We consider Palestine an integral part of the Islamic world and stand with all our might to support Palestinians," he underscored. Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya is participating in the 19th minister-

available to the public, and finally changing the policy. Travel agent ticket prices, through gradual stages in the re-pricing process to ensure the correct and balanced workflow.

Al-Faqaan stated that Kuwait Airways, through the committee, has been constantly restructuring the pricing and revenue management sector of the Networks and Lines Department and developing a dynamic, variable and advanced pricing policy by selecting national competencies and cadres with experience in the national carrier and providing them with opportunities to develop a strategic plan in line with Market requirements. He added, "Kuwait Airways has recently focused on developing reservations, pricing, and network planning systems in line with the latest systems in the world of aviation and the commercial air transport sector."

Al-Faqaan added, saying: "Kuwait Airways is keen to offer tickets in a way that suits the competitive market and according to the market share, with its full commitment to aviation regulations and procedures, especially in light of the tangible support that Kuwait Airways is witnessing from the General Administration of Civil Aviation, which has had a positive impact on Cooperation at various levels."

Al-Faqaan pointed out that the prices of travel tickets in general vary from one season to another and based on the concepts of supply and demand, indicating that the company was keen to achieve balance in the sales process by reaching profitability



TEHRAN: Foreign Minister Abdullah Yahya holds talks with Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Dr Ali Bagheri on Monday on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue, which is being held in the Iranian capital Tehran. — KUNA

al meeting of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) with another 30 delegations from different countries. The Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) was inaugurated in June 2002 in Cha-Am, Thailand, where 18 Asian Foreign Ministers met together for the first time. The ACD is a continent-wide forum, the first of its kind in Asia. — KUNA



and ensuring the continued preservation and satisfaction of valued customers, especially since Kuwait Airways is considered a category of companies.

The airline is characterized by its luxury character due to the distinguished and exceptional services it provides to valued customers, in addition to its seat space, as well as its being the national carrier of the State of Kuwait, which makes the responsibility greater in providing the best services and keeping up with developments in the world of aviation. Including providing the best prices, whether by offering discounted prices or presenting offers on an ongoing basis through Kuwait Airways Holidays office, which offers distinct travel packages with the aim of ensuring access to the various segments of travelers on board Kuwait Airways.

It is worth noting that Kuwait Airways recently launched its new prices in addition to offers for travelers through its participation in one of the exhibitions specialized in tourism and travel, where the company achieved remarkable success through the arrival of a large number of exhibition visitors and benefiting from the offers presented by the Kuwait Airways Holidays Office, especially the launch of its latest campaign by offering... Price offers on various distinguished summer destinations.



Captain Abdul Mohsen Salem Al-Faqaan

Kuwait's IICO assists Palestinians in West Bank during Eid

RAMALLAH: The Solidarity Association for Social and Cultural Development's (Tadamon) President, Alaa Maqboul, said that the association began distributing Eid Al-Adha sacrificial meat in the West Bank in cooperation with Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO). The President told KUNA that the project was executed under the slogan 'Your sacrifice is a ritual and feeding', and the meat was distributed to the families of orphans registered with it.

Many families, who have lost a breadwinner and keep facing great difficulties, have benefited from the project. He stated that a committee was formed to supervise the work in the field of sacrifices in Nablus Governorate and to ensure the distribution of sacrifices to the largest possible number of beneficiaries. The association's administration expressed their gratitude for implementing such projects due to their importance and their great role in supporting charitable work and helping needy families.

Meanwhile, over 50 Palestinians were killed and 121 others injured in three massacres committed by the occupation forces, health authorities in the Gaza Strip announced. The death toll from the occupation's assault on Gaza has reached 37,598 with 86,032 injured since October 7th, they reported in a press statement. Several victims are still under rubble and on the streets, with emergency and civil defense teams unable to reach them, the health authorities explained.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights and Civil Society Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) condemned the ongoing crimes committed by the occupation in Gaza, including targeting unarmed civilians, women, and children, and destroying civilian infrastructure, which is a blatant violation of human rights. In a press statement on Monday, the department called for immediate and decisive international action to stop the aggression, genocide, and military escalation, demanding that perpetrators of these crimes be referred to international courts for accountability.

The Human Rights Department urged countries to document the occupation's crimes against Palestinians in preparation for prosecuting the occupation leaders, calling on member states of the international community to acknowledge and record these crimes, including those against humanity and severe human rights violations, to ensure fair and just prosecution in international courts. — KUNA

NBK grants Joud's wish to be an architect and decor professional

Part of bank's 'I Dream to Be' initiative for children with cancer



KUWAIT: NBK's contributions are not limited to financial support, but also include addressing children's psychological and moral needs. Seeing children recover and the joy on their parents' faces encourages us to do our utmost efforts to give more. National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always seeks to bring a smile to the faces of children with cancer, by supporting them and realizing their dreams through its 'I Dream to Be' initiative, which has been ongoing for 12 years.

In this context, the bank granted the wish of Joud Al-Merai, a 12-year-old girl, who is undergoing treatment at NBK Children's Hospital, to become an architect and décor professional, as she has a sense of creativity and is fond of design since an early age. To this end, NBK's team took Joud on a tour at KAYAN Architects, in coordination with the company's owner, Bashar Al-Salem, for designing sketches, interacting, and teaching her some tips and techniques.

Following that, NBK's team accompanied Joud to Hassan Abul's Showroom where she picked and designed a whole space including carpets,

sofas, curtains, chairs and lamps. She also got the chance to design her dream home with architects on the computer as she picked several materials to be used in it. The 'I Dream to Be' initiative aligns with NBK's commitment to deliver its social responsibility through unwavering contributions bolstering its position as the leading bank in social responsibility in Kuwait, especially in children's healthcare.

On this occasion, Joanne Al-Abdul Jaleel, NBK Public Relations Manager at National Bank of Kuwait said, "At NBK, we take pride in the 'I Dream to Be' initiative, which has fulfilled the dreams of many children and given them hope, and every time we fulfill a child's dream, we feel proud of this initiative that brings a smile to the faces of children and their families." "NBK's social contribution is not limited to financial support, but also addressing children's psychological and moral needs to help them through these difficult times, as the bank makes its utmost endeavors to grant children's wishes, bring joy to their hearts, enhance their vision for the future, and give them happiness and hope for a bright

tomorrow, she noted.

"NBK serves as a role model in delivering social responsibility through constant contributions on all levels, especially healthcare services, and the activities and initiatives to develop the healthcare system in NBK Children's Hospital," she emphasized. "Seeing children recover and the joy on the faces of their families encourages us to do our utmost endeavors to further advance the 'I Dream to Be' initiative. NBK also continues to support the hospital by developing all units and providing comprehensive care that transcends treatment services by organizing a variety of entertainment activities that bring joy and happiness to children and their families," she mentioned.

NBK stands out with a rich record of various pioneering humanitarian and social initiatives, showing unwavering dedication to extending all sorts of support to children. Additionally, it continuously organizes many visits to childcare institutions to foster a culture of community service and raise awareness of social responsibility, underscoring a deeply-rooted approach which it always seeks to promote.

Young Kuwaiti pianist captivates audiences in Geneva

VIENNA: Young Kuwaiti pianist Rawan Behbehani captivated audiences at the Victoria Hall Theater in Geneva. Her appearance, the first of its kind, is a considerable feat, as the concert venue is known for hosting musical geniuses. Behbehani, a prodigy of classical music, appeared on stage for eight minutes, playing the second movement of Beethoven. The young pianist told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) of her overwhelming joy at representing Geneva's Conservatoire alongside her peers, as the institute is the oldest in Switzerland and one of the oldest in Europe.

Behbehani answered a question on the musical pieces that have influenced her, saying that she has been moved by the work of Mozart, Beethoven, Haydn, and other classical music geniuses. She spoke to KUNA about her recent visit to Mozart's home-turned-museum, where she also attended a concert, and voiced her hope for a chance to play at Vienna or Salzburg's opera houses. Rawan discovered her passion for classical music at the ripe age of six, and despite her youthful career, she has already been awarded 13 international prizes.

She performed with an orchestra four times, including a performance in Kuwait with Prague's philharmonic orchestra at the age of 10, a performance in Geneva at 12, and on Omani women's day at the local opera house in 2022. Upon realizing her talents, Rawan's family made sure to create the proper environment to nurture her gift. — KUNA



Kuwaiti pianist Rawan Behbehani



Young Kuwaiti pianist Rawan Behbehani captivates audiences at the Victoria Hall Theater in Geneva. — KUNA photos



Rawan Behbehani at the Victoria Hall Theater in Geneva.



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Gaza war shatters Palestinian pupils' dreams

Shock in Indian district where 56 died from tainted alcohol

Page 6

Page 7

Zionist strike kills Gaza emergency chief

Medics aim to screen thousands of Gaza children for malnutrition



GAZA: A man mourns by the body of a Palestinian doctor Hani Al-Jaafarawi, Gaza's ambulance and emergency teams chief, during his funeral at Al-Ahli Arab hospital on June 24, 2024. — AFP



DEIR AL-BALAH: Jana Ayad, a malnourished Palestinian girl, lies on a bed as her mother sits next to her at the International Medical Corps field hospital. — Reuters

CAIRO: Two Zionist air strikes targeting aid supplies killed at least 11 Palestinians in Gaza on Monday, medics said, as Zionist tanks pushed deeper into Rafah in the south and fought their way back into areas in the north they had already subdued months ago.

One strike at a food distribution center in Gaza City, near the Shati historic refugee camp, killed three people. Another, near Bani Suhaila town in the southern Gaza Strip, killed at least eight, including guards who accompany aid trucks, the medics said. There was no immediate comment from the Zionist entity, which denies attacking aid efforts and accuses militants of causing harm to civilians by operating among them.

Overnight, a Zionist air strike at a medical clinic in Gaza City killed the director of Gaza's Ambulance and Emergency Department, the enclave's health ministry said. The Zionist military said that strike had killed a senior Hamas armed commander.

The health ministry said the killing of Hani Al-Jaafarawi brought the number of medical staff killed by Zionist fire since Oct 7 to 500. At least 300 others have so far been targeted. In a statement, the Zionist military said the strike targeted Mohammad Salah, who it said was responsible for developing Hamas weaponry.

Screening for malnutrition

More than eight months into the fighting, international mediation backed by the United States has so far

failed to bring a ceasefire agreement. Hamas says any agreement must bring an end to the war, while the entity says it will agree only temporary pauses in fighting until Hamas is eradicated.

In Rafah, near the border with Egypt, Zionist forces which took control of the eastern, southern, and central parts of the city pursued their raid into the western and northern areas, said residents, describing heavy fighting. On Sunday, residents had said Zionist tanks had advanced to the edge of the Mawasi displaced persons' camp in the northwest of Rafah, forcing many families to leave northward to Khan Yunis and to Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza, the only city in the enclave where tanks have not yet invaded.

"The situation in Tel Al-Sultan, in western Rafah, remains very dangerous. Drones and (Zionist) snipers are hunting people who try to check on their houses, and tanks continue to take over areas overseeing Al-Mawasi further west," Bassam, a resident of Rafah, told Reuters via a chat app. The Zionist military said forces continued "intelligence-based targeted operations" in Rafah, locating weapons and rocket launchers and killing militants "who posed threats to them."

In the north of the enclave, where the Zionist entity had said its forces completed operations months ago, residents said tanks had pushed back into Gaza City's Zeitoun suburb and were pounding several areas there. In Deir Al-Balah, now the last refuge for many thou-

sands of Gazans following the assault on Rafah, medics at a clinic said they were working to step up screening of young children for severe malnutrition. "With the displacement, communities are settling in new locations that do not have access to clean water, or there is not adequate access to food," said Muamar Said, a doctor with aid group International Medical Corps. "We fear there are more cases being missed."

The group and partners are planning to reach more than 200,000 under five-years-old as part of a campaign over coming months. Over the weekend, families were already coming into the clinic. Five-year-old Jana Ayad had weighed just 9 kilograms when she arrived, suffering from diarrhea and vomiting, Nutrition Officer Raghda Ibrahim Qeshta told Reuters as she carefully held the child. "My daughter was dying in front of me," said Nasma Ayad as she sat next to the bed. "I didn't know what to do." Jana had started putting on some weight after treatment, medics said, but she was still painfully thin with her ribs showing as she lay listlessly in her bunny pajamas. A group of UN-led aid agencies estimates that around 7 percent of Gazan children may be acutely malnourished, compared with 0.8 percent before the war.

Intense fighting to end soon

The Zionist entity began a ground and air campaign in Gaza after Hamas-led militants attacked

the south of the Zionist entity on Oct 7, killing around 1,200 people and seizing more than 250 hostages, according to Zionist tallies. The Zionist offensive has killed almost 37,600 people, according to Palestinian health authorities, and has left Gaza in ruins.

Netanyahu said the phase of intense fighting against Hamas would end "very soon". In an interview with the Zionist channel 14, he said forces based in Gaza would be freed to move to the north, where the entity has warned of a potential full-blown war against Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, which has struck the border region in what it says is solidarity with the Palestinians. "After the intense phase is finished, we will have the possibility to move part of the forces north. And we will do this," Netanyahu said.

The interview was Netanyahu's first since the start of the war in a television format. He said he would support only a temporary ceasefire, before troops would return to fighting. Hamas said this was evidence that he was reneging on a truce offer touted by the White House and backed by the United Nations. The remarks showed that Netanyahu was using ceasefire negotiations only as a stalling tactic while combat continues, Ezzat El-Reshiq, a senior Hamas political official who lives in exile, said in a statement. — Reuters

Foreign diplomats tour Beirut airport after weapons claims

BEIRUT: Senior Lebanese officials on Monday defended procedures at Beirut airport during a tour for journalists and diplomats, a day after a British daily alleged Hezbollah was storing weapons at the facility.

The accusations came during escalating exchanges of fire and bellicose rhetoric between Lebanon's Hezbollah movement and Zionist forces, which have engaged in near-daily fire since war in Gaza began.

On Sunday, British daily The Telegraph reported that Hezbollah was storing missiles and rockets at Beirut airport, where "whistleblowers" had reported the arrival of "unusually big boxes" from Iran. Hezbollah has not made any official comment. "The airport adheres to international standards," said Transport Minister Ali Hamieh, who led the visit together with Lebanon's ministers for foreign affairs, tourism and information.

Representatives from foreign missions including Egypt, Germany and the European Union delegation joined the tour of the airport's warehouse facilities. Hamieh on Sunday held a press conference to reject The Telegraph report as false and "to say that there are no weapons entering or leaving Beirut." He invited ambassadors and reporters for the tour.

India's Modi calls for 'consensus' as parliament opens

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to an emboldened opposition for "consensus" Monday, as parliament opened following an election setback that forced him into a coalition government for the first time in a decade. Expected in the first session, which will run until July 3, is a preview of Modi's plans for his third term and the likely formal appointment of Rahul Gandhi as leader of the opposition — a post vacant since 2014.

Modi's first two terms in office followed landslide wins for his right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), allowing his government to drive laws through parliament with only cursory debate. But now analysts expect the 73-year-old Modi to moderate his Hin-

du-nationalist agenda to assuage his coalition partners, focusing more on infrastructure, social welfare and economic reforms.

"To run the country, a consensus is of utmost importance", Modi said in a speech shortly before entering parliament, calling on the opposition to play a constructive role. "People expect their representatives to debate and discuss issues which are important to the country ... they don't expect disturbances or hindrances in the parliamentary proceedings," he said. "People want substance, not slogans."

'Lies'

The Zionist entity has for years accused Hezbollah of keeping weapons in installations throughout Lebanon, including near Beirut airport, an accusation Hezbollah has denied. The Zionist entity bombed Beirut airport when it last went to war with Hezbollah in 2006.

The airport's manager, Fadi El-Hassan, said all aircrafts arriving at the facility, including Iranian planes, "are subject to the same customs procedures". Egyptian ambassador Alaa Moussa said that while diplomats were not responsible for inspecting the airport for prohibited items, "our presence (at the tour) is a message of support" to Lebanon and "a message to all parties that what is needed ... is calm".

Housewife Rola Qassem, aged around 50, who had just arrived from Ivory Coast to spend summer in south Lebanon with her family, said she didn't believe the reports of weapons being stored at the airport. "It's all lies so that people are afraid to go to Lebanon, to stop tourism," she told AFP. — AFP

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Modi led lawmakers in taking the oath — as his cheering supporters thumped their desks in support, and opposition members waved the constitution in protest. He said he was "proud to serve" India.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Kiren Rijju on Monday called for a "peaceful and productive" session, but Indian media said they expected lively debate with a far stronger opposition. "All set to spar," one headline in the Hindustan Times read Monday. "Resurgent opposition set to push government," said the Indian Express front page. — AFP



HWASEONG: Firefighters take a break as rescue work continues following a deadly fire at a lithium battery factory owned by South Korean battery maker Aricell on June 24, 2024. — Reuters

Blaze at S Korea lithium battery plant kills 22

HWASEONG: A lithium battery factory in South Korea was set on fire after multiple batteries exploded on Monday, killing 22 workers, most of them Chinese nationals, fire officials said. The fire and a series of explosions ripped through the factory run by primary battery manufacturer Aricell in Hwaseong, an industrial cluster southwest of the capital Seoul.

The victims likely succumbed to extremely toxic gas within seconds of the blaze getting out of control, the officials said. It was unclear what caused the explosions, and the fire was largely extinguished in about six hours. Eighteen Chinese workers, two South Koreans and one Laotian were among the dead. The nationality of the other deceased worker

was yet to be confirmed. Kim Jin-young, an official at the Hwaseong fire service, told reporters, citing information from company officials. The blaze was first reported at 10:31 am (0131 GMT) after a series of battery cells exploded inside a warehouse of 35,000 batteries, Kim said.

A Reuters journalist saw firefighters moving up to six bodies out of the factory. Due to the intensity of the blaze, rescuers were finding it difficult to identify the dead, Kim said. Two people were being treated for major burns, officials at the scene said. Live TV footage showed firefighters spraying the damaged steel and concrete building. Parts of the upper level had collapsed, and large chunks of the building looked like they had been blown out into the street by explosions.

Aerial footage showed massive white smoke clouds billowing from the structure and explosions rolling through the building. Gyeonggi province fire official Cho Sun-ho said most of the foreign workers killed were temporary hires, likely unfamiliar with the structure of the building. Smoke and the fire blaze spread within 15 seconds and the victims likely succumbed after taking one or two breaths, he said. — Reuters

International

Shock in Indian district where 56 died from tainted alcohol

Political rivals trade blame for one of worst alcohol poisonings in recent years



KALLAKURICHI: Members of All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party protest against toxic alcohol that led to the death of 56 people on June 24, 2024. (Right) Relatives mourn near the deceased who consumed toxic alcohol. — AFP photos

KALLAKURICHI, India: Plumes of smoke from funeral pyres darkened the sky Monday over the Indian town at the epicenter of a poisoning by a batch of illegal alcohol that has killed 56 and hospitalized more than 100. Wailing relatives mourned the dead, draping flower wreaths on coffins as the community gathered in shock in Kallakurichi district in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

Indian police said Monday the death toll from the toxic batch had risen to 56, with 117 people in hospital recovering, several in serious condition. Others have been blinded after drinking the locally made "arrack" last week, which was laced with methanol.

Kokila, aged 16, lost both her parents to the toxic brew. She is determined to make them proud. "My father wanted me to be an engineer," Kokila said, who uses only one name. "That is why I will study and become one." Hundreds of people die every year in India from cheap alcohol made in backstreet distilleries, but last week's poisoning is one of the worst in recent years. To increase its potency, the liquor is often spiked with methanol, which can cause blindness, liver damage and death.

Top district police official Rajat Chaturvedi told AFP that "56 people have died so far and around 117 people are currently under medical treatment". Po-



litical rivals in the state have blamed each other for the deaths, and the site of the tragedy on Monday witnessed a protest by local opposition politicians.

Poor laborers in Kallakurichi district regularly bought the liquor in plastic bags costing 60 rupees (\$0.70), which they would drink before work. This batch, however, was devastating. Some people went blind, while others collapsed in the street and died before they could make it to hospital.

Murugan said he had tried to get his father, 55-year-old Vijayan, to give up drinking alcohol. Vijayan also died after drinking the tainted batch. Murugan said government compensation payments

would not make up for the loss. "Despite repeated requests, he continued to consume liquor in the evening after work," he said. "The government has given us money, but I can't get my father back."

Tamil Nadu is not a dry state, but liquor traded on the black market comes at a lower price than alcohol sold legally. Selling and consuming liquor is prohibited in several other parts of India, further driving the thriving black market for potent and sometimes lethal moonshine. Last year, poisonous alcohol killed at least 27 people in one sitting in the eastern Indian state of Bihar, while in 2022, at least 42 people died in Gujarat. — AFP

Death toll rises to 20 after gunmen attack Dagestan

MOSCOW: The death toll from a series of brazen attacks on churches and synagogues in Russia's mainly Muslim region of Dagestan rose to 20 on Monday after gunmen went on the rampage in coordinated attacks in two of the republic's most important cities.

Gunmen with automatic weapons burst into an Orthodox church and a synagogue in the ancient city of Derbent on Sunday evening, setting fire to an icon at the church and killing a 66-year-old Orthodox priest, Nikolai Kotelnikov.

In the city of Makhachkala, about 125 km (75 miles) north on the Caspian Sea shore, attackers shot at a traffic police post and attacked a church. Gun battles erupted around the Assumption Cathedral in Makhachkala and heavy automatic gunfire rang out late into the night. Footage showed residents running for cover as plumes of smoke rose above the city.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Russia's investigative committee said 15 policemen and four civilians were killed. According to Dagestan's healthcare ministry, 46 more people were wounded. At least five attackers were killed, some were shown by local media shot dead on a pavement.

"This is a day of tragedy for Dagestan and the whole country," said Sergei Melikov, the head of the Dagestan region, who on Monday visited the synagogue and church that were attacked in Derbent. He said that foreign forces had been involved in preparing the attack, but gave no details. "This is an

attempt to cleave apart our unity." "We must understand that war comes to our homes too. We felt it but today we face it," he said, adding that authorities were hunting for " sleeper cells " that had trained the attackers with assistance from abroad. He said later on Monday the perpetrators were from Dagestan, Russian state news agencies reported.

Dagestan announced three days of mourning. Photos of the dead policemen were lined up on the street by red carnations. President Vladimir Putin, who has long accused the West of trying to stoke separatism in the Caucasus, sent his condolences to those who lost loved ones. Dagestan is a mainly Muslim republic of Russia's North Caucasus, a patchwork of ethnic groups, languages and regions that live in the shadow of the Caucasus mountains between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea.

The attack on Christian and Jewish places of worship stoked fears Russia may be facing a renewed militant Islamist threat just three months after a deadly attack in Moscow. In the Moscow attack, 145 people were killed at the Crocus concert hall, an attack claimed by Islamic State.

In October, after the war in Gaza broke out, rioters waving Palestinian flags broke down glass doors and rampaged through Makhachkala airport to look for Jewish passengers on a flight arriving from Tel Aviv. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the attack and conveyed his condolences, a spokesperson said.

Derbent, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth, is home to an ancient Jewish community and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Russian investigators said it was a "terrorist" attack but did not give details of the attackers.

Russia's state media cited law enforcement as saying two sons of Magomed Omarov, the head of



DERBENT: Dagestan region governor Sergei Melikov visits an Orthodox church, which was attacked by gunmen a day before, in this handout picture. — AFP

central Dagestan's Sergokala district, were among the attackers in Dagestan. They were killed and their father was detained, state media said. June 24 to 26 have been declared days of mourning in Dagestan, Melikov said, with flags lowered to half-mast and all entertainment events cancelled.

The Russian empire expanded into the Caucasus in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, but an insurgency after the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union led to two wars. In August 1999, Chechen fighter Sham-

il Basayev led fighters into Dagestan in a bid to aid Dagestani Wahhabist fundamentalists, triggering a major bombing campaign by the Russian military ahead of the Second Chechen War.

Asked whether Moscow feared a possible return of such violence, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "No. Now there is a different Russia. Society is consolidated and such terrorist manifestations are not supported by society in Russia or in Dagestan." — Agencies

1,301 deaths during hajj, mostly among...

Continued from Page 1

The hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam that all Muslims with the means must complete at least once in their lives. Saudi officials have said 1.8 million pilgrims took part this year, a similar number to last year, and that 1.6 million came from abroad. For the past several years the mainly outdoor rituals have fallen during the sweltering Saudi summer.

The timing of the hajj moves forward about 11 days each year in the Gregorian calendar, meaning that next year it will take place earlier in June, potentially in cooler conditions. A 2019 study by the journal Geophysical Research Letters said because of climate change, heat stress for hajj pilgrims will exceed the "extreme danger threshold" from 2047 to 2052 and 2079 to 2086, "with increasing frequency and intensity as the century progresses".

Hajj permits are allocated to countries on a quota

system and distributed to individuals by lottery. Even for those who can obtain them, the steep costs spur many to attempt the hajj without a permit, though they risk arrest and deportation if caught. Saudi authorities said before the hajj that they had cleared hundreds of thousands of unregistered pilgrims from Makkah.

The Saudi official who spoke to AFP on Friday said around 400,000 unregistered pilgrims took part, and that "almost all of them (were) from one nationality", an apparent reference to Egypt. On Saturday, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly ordered 16 tourism companies stripped of their licenses and referred their managers to the public prosecutor over illegal pilgrimages to Makkah, Egypt's cabinet said.

It said the rise in the number of deaths of unregistered Egyptian pilgrims stemmed from some companies which "organized the hajj programs using a personal visit visa, which prevents its holders from entering Makkah" via official channels. Unregistered pilgrims in many cases did not have access to amenities meant to make the pilgrimage more bearable, including air-conditioned tents. Unregistered Egyptian pilgrims told AFP last week that in some cases they struggled to access hospitals or hail ambulances for loved ones, some of whom ended up dying. — AFP

In 2020, the Philippines reimposed a ban on its citizens going to work in Kuwait after a Filipina was allegedly killed by her employer. In May last year, Kuwait imposed a total ban on the recruitment of workers from the Philippines and also banned the issuance of all types of visas to Filipinos following another row between the two countries over the murder of a Filipina housemaid.

In February last year, the Philippines imposed a ban on deploying first-time domestic workers to Kuwait in protest against the gruesome murder of 26-year-old Julebe Ranara after her body was found burnt in the desert. She was also found to be pregnant. Authorities arrested the then 17-year-old son of her employer, who was later sentenced to 16 years in jail because he was a minor.

When issuing the ban, Kuwaiti authorities insisted that the embassy of the Philippines breached its diplomatic status by interfering in domestic issues related to domestic workers. There are around 270,000 Filipinos in Kuwait, many of them working as domestic helpers.

Pushback urged against efforts to disband UNRWA

GENEVA: The head of the United Nations Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) on Monday called on partners to fight back against efforts by the Zionist entity to have the organization disbanded as it provides humanitarian assistance to Gaza and across the region. "(The Zionist entity) has long been critical of the agency's mandate. But it now seeks to end UNRWA's operations, dismissing the agency's status as a United Nations entity supported by an overwhelming majority of member states," UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said at a meeting of the agency's advisory commission in Geneva.

"If we do not push back, other UN entities and international organisations will be next, further undermining our multilateral system," Lazzarini said the agency was being subjected to a "concerted effort" to dismantle it, including through legislative initiatives threatening to evict the agency from its compound and labeling UNRWA as a terrorist organization.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has for years called for UNRWA to be dismantled, accusing it of anti-Zionist incitement. Last month, the Zionist parliament, the Knesset, passed the preliminary reading of a bill aimed at designating UNRWA as a terrorist organization. The Zionist diplomatic mission in Geneva dismissed Lazzarini's statement on Monday.

"Letting other UN entities and international organizations be used or controlled by terrorist organizations to the extent Hamas embedded itself in UNRWA will further undermine our multilateral system," it said in a statement. "This is the real threat to our ruled-based international order."

Lazzarini also said the agency, which has provided essential aid to Gazans throughout the Zionist entity's eight-month offensive, was "staggering



GAZA: Palestinians carry a victim outside the headquarters of UNRWA following a Zionist strike in Gaza City on June 23, 2024. — Reuters

under the weight of relentless attacks". "In Gaza, the agency has paid a terrible price: 193 UNRWA personnel have been killed," he said. "More than 180 installations have been damaged or destroyed, killing at least 500 people seeking United Nations protection...Our premises have been used for military purposes by (the Zionist entity), Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups."

Several countries halted their funding to UNRWA following accusations by the Zionist entity that some of the agency's staff were involved in the Oct 7 Hamas attack on the Zionist entity that triggered the Gaza war. Most donors have since resumed their funding. Lazzarini said that UNRWA still lacked the necessary resources to fulfill its mandate.

"The agency's ability to operate beyond August will depend on member states disbursing planned funds and providing new contributions to the core budget," he said. Established in 1949 following the first Arab-Zionist war, UNRWA provides services including schooling, primary healthcare and humanitarian aid in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. — Reuters

Kuwait lifts visa ban on Filipinos...

Continued from Page 1

the discovery of the remains of a murdered Filipina maid in her employers' freezer. Ambassador of the Philippines to Kuwait Ambassador Jose A Cabrera III told Kuwait Times the Philippine Embassy welcomes the lifting of the visa ban on Filipino citizens and the return of Filipino workers to Kuwait. "The embassy looks forward to the enhancement of the bilateral relationship between the two friendly countries with forthcoming meetings and discussions that will take up and address the outstanding labor issues and concerns to the satisfaction of both parties and to the mutual benefit of workers and employers," he added.

International

Gaza war shatters Palestinian pupils' dreams

Final exams cancelled • 75 percent of schools need full reconstruction after Zionist bombardment

KHAN YUNIS: Teenagers across the Gaza Strip should have been taking their final exams this month, a last hurdle before university and lifelong dreams, but the war in the Palestinian territory has crushed those hopes. According to the education ministry in the Gaza Strip, 85 percent of educational facilities in the territory are out of service because of the war. "I was eagerly awaiting the exams, but the war prevented that and destroyed that joy", said Baraa Al-Farra, an 18-year-old student displaced from Khan Yunis in southern Gaza.

"At first we were waiting in the hope that the war would end and we would catch up," he said. But "we don't know how long it will last or how many years it will deprive us of our educational lives."

The Education Cluster, a UN-backed organization, estimated in a report this month that more than 75 percent of Gaza's schools would need full reconstruction or major rehabilitation to reopen after nine months of Zionist bombardment. Many have been turned into shelters for Gaza's displaced and others have been damaged in Zionist strikes.

'Books not bombs'

Liliane Nihad, an 18-year-old displaced from Khan Yunis from Gaza City, in the territory's north, said she and her fellow students had "been waiting 12 years to take these exams and pass and feel happy and enter university ... but we have been deprived of all that by this damned war".

Nihad said she had been hoping to study English

and to get a doctorate, "but all of that has evaporated". Displaying their anger at the situation, dozens of students and teachers held a protest in Gaza City's Al-Rimal neighborhood on Saturday.

"We demand our right to take high school exams" and "We want books, not bombs" they chanted, while empty chairs were laid out to symbolize those students killed in the war. Farra said he wanted to get out of the territory to achieve his dreams. "I hope that the crossing will be opened so that I can travel in order to complete my education and not waste my years because I am young and want to achieve my ambitions." For now, he faces the harsh realities of life under siege. "I wish I could experience the fatigue of staying up late studying now and not the fatigue of queuing for sweet and salty water" in the territory where clean water is scarce, like many other essentials.

'Psychologically exhausted'

Pupils in the Zionist-occupied West Bank will take the exams, as will those Gazans who managed to escape to neighboring Egypt. Even for these pupils, however, the war has been hugely disruptive. "We are psychologically exhausted and not well prepared" said Muhammad Osama, a student from Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, after completing his religious studies exam in Cairo.

In the West Bank, Zionist settler violence has further escalated since the start of the Gaza war. According to the Palestinian official news agency Wafa, 20 high school students are among the hundreds of



GAZA: A Palestinian youth visits the grave of a relative killed in the Zionist war on Gaza, at a makeshift cemetery in the eastern Al-Tuffah neighborhood of Gaza City. — AFP

Palestinians killed there. Wafa reported that 89,000 students from Gaza and the West Bank had been expected to take high school exams this year.

Back in Gaza, however, there will be no exams at all. The UN, citing the Palestinian ministry of education, said about 39,000 high school students in Gaza are

unable to take their tests. Sulaf Mousa, an 18-year-old from Al-Shati Camp west of Gaza City who was hit by a deadly air strike on Saturday, said he had hoped to study medicine and become a doctor. "Now, we hope we will survive the war and not lose more than we have already lost," Mousa said. — AFP

Filming TikToks in tear gas: Kenya's Gen-Z protesters

NAIROBI: Growing up in a shanty town in Kenya's capital Nairobi, Sarah Njoroge saw her parents ban her older siblings from taking part in anti-government demonstrations, fearing the bloody crackdown that would follow. But the 21-year-old spent two days last week dodging clouds of tear gas and water cannon — smartphone in hand — instead of attending her psychology class. She is part of a mostly Gen-Z, social media-savvy crowd that has flooded streets across Kenya, bringing together thousands of youth from different social classes united in their opposition to proposed tax hikes. Many said they wanted to challenge the cliché that their generation is apolitical as they gear up for a national strike on Tuesday.

Some have already paid a huge price — with at least two deaths and dozens wounded, according to rights campaigners. A police watchdog said on Friday it was investigating allegations that a 29-year-old man was shot by officers in Nairobi after the demonstrations. "I did not need my mother's permission to come here," Njoroge told AFP, dressed in ripped jeans and black trainers, in an alleyway emblazoned with graffiti about corruption — a hot-button issue in the country. "Even so, her refusal would mean she is in bed with our oppressors."

The movement started on social media — as furious TikToks amassed thousands of views — and snowballed into protests in Nairobi, which then spread nationwide. "They instilled a lot of fear in our parents and we don't want to inherit that," 19-year-old international relations student Jeremy Mwangi told AFP. "We want to stand up for ourselves, we want to determine our future."

'Cool kids'

The government's initial dismissal of the movement as "clueless" protests by "cool kids" is now being put to the test, with President William Ruto saying on Sunday that he was ready for talks with the protesters. "I am very proud of our young people ... and I want to tell them we are going to engage them," Ruto said, hailing the demonstrations for being "peaceful". But protest organizer Hanifa Adan said Ruto needed to "respond publicly" to their demands calling for the hikes to be cancelled. "Presi-



NAIROBI: People react after police use water cannon to disperse protesters during a demonstration against Kenya's proposed finance bill 2024/2025 on June 20, 2024. — Reuters

dent Ruto can't claim to support us while his police brutalize peaceful protesters," she told AFP, adding that she was in hiding to avoid arrest.

Kenya has a long history of protest, with demonstrators facing arrests and police violence during their struggle for multi-party democracy in the 1980s and 1990s. But subsequent decades saw rallies characterized by paid crowds, with leaders keen to give the impression they could draw a spontaneous and adoring following.

'Raise hope, not tear gas'

Things look very different this time. Armed with smartphones, and often livestreaming their protests, the demonstrators have won fans online with their colorful, witty and occasionally explicit signs. "Raise hope, not tear gas," read one placard last week, with another declaring: "It's not tear gas, it's the fragrance of change." The government has made some concessions but vowed to push ahead with other tax increases. Despite angry calls for Ruto's resignation, the protests have remained largely peaceful — devoid of the vandalism and looting that became synonymous with previous political rallies. Demon-

strators have also trained their livestreams on police officers, who have a history of using sometimes lethal force against civilians.

'Ripe for revolution'

Kenya is one of the most dynamic economies in East Africa. Yet more than a third of its roughly 52 million people lives in poverty, according to government figures. Ruto said Sunday that the annual budget included measures to tackle youth unemployment and improve access to higher education. But promises may not be enough. "Kenya is ripe for a revolution," political analyst Macharia Githo wrote in the leading Daily Nation newspaper. He warned that the movement could "shake the foundations of a state that doesn't listen to the people or care about their concerns." "It is easy to express anger on X and TikTok, but quite another to come out in numbers braving police truncheons, tear gas, water cannons and bullets." Millennials are also protesting alongside Gen-Z, with 37-year-old Sheila Olang saying she felt compelled to join her younger compatriots. "There's nothing more powerful than when a revolution is at a grassroots level," she said. — AFP

The Basij, a plain-clothes arm of the elite Revolutionary Guards, deployed alongside uniformed security during the 2022 unrest and helped suppress demonstrations with deadly force. Over 500 people including 71 minors were killed in the protests, hundreds injured, and thousands arrested in unrest that was eventually crushed by security forces, rights groups said.

Iran carried out seven executions linked to the unrest. Authorities have not given any official estimated death toll but said dozens of security forces were killed in "riots".

"I will sacrifice my life for the leader and the Islamic Republic. It is my religious duty to vote. My participation will strengthen the Nezam (system)," said Reza, from the low-income Nazi Abad district in south Tehran. Reza said he will support a hardline candidate who champions Khamenei's "resistance economy", a phrase meaning economic self-sufficiency, strengthening trade ties with regional neighbors and improving economic interaction with China and Russia.

The economy is beset by mismanagement, state corruption and sanctions reimposed since 2018 after the US ditched Tehran's 2015 nuclear pact with six world powers.

Reza and Atousa, both born after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, have regrets about the 2022 demonstrations, albeit for different reasons. Reza blames the protests for bringing mounting pressure on Iran from Western countries, which imposed sanctions on Iranian security forces and officials for alleged human rights abuses. Iran accused Western powers of fomenting the unrest.

"I wish the protests had not taken place ... our enemies used it as a pretext to mount pressure on our country," he said. Atousa looks back on that period with sadness. "I was hopeful," she said. "I thought finally the change will come and I will be able to live a life with no suppression in a free country ... I paid a heavy price, but the regime is still here." — Reuters

Hikes, nosy neighbors afflict Zimbabweans in quest for mobile network

MATOBO, Zimbabwe: As the sun sets over Zimbabwe's Matobo Hills, boys throw stones to chase baboons away. Their goal isn't to enjoy the view of dusk but to search for a mobile network without interference from wild animals. Silozwe, a village less than 50 kilometers (31 miles) from the southern city of Bulawayo, the southern African country's second largest, sits in a connectivity black hole. To an outsider, the daily stream of villagers clambering up the hill might look like a pilgrimage to a rain-making ceremony, but it's a communal trek to make phone calls, send messages and check social media. "Grown up as I am, it's hard for me to get up the hill, and sometimes I still fail to connect," said Sakhile Sibindi, 60, a grandmother who walks five kilometers to reach the spot from her home.

Rural connectivity issues are not unique to Zimbabwe. About a third of the world's population, or 2.6 billion people, do not have internet access, according to the United Nations, which has a target to get everyone online by 2030. "The internet is an essential tool to access information, employment opportunities and education. People without meaningful access may be left behind," the UN's International Telecommunication Union said in a 2023 report. In sub-Saharan Africa, about one in four people use mobile phones to get online — but 15 percent of the population live in areas with no coverage, according to GSMA, a telecom industry group.

Prying ears

The Matobo Hills, a UNESCO World Heritage site famed for its distinctive rock boulders, provide some relief to Silozwe's residents. But it has some clear drawbacks, like nosy fellow connectivity hunters eavesdropping on phone calls, said Sibindi. "If you get the connection, you don't have privacy," she said after stopping there on her way back from a routine health check. "Sensitive family issues end up being known by the whole village."

Accessibility is also an issue. "If someone gets sick at night, you cannot come here to make a phone call. If it's death, you will stay with a corpse in your house because you cannot reach out for help," said Sibindi.

Some local residents have found ingenious workarounds. Mobile phones attached to sticks in yards or strapped on tree branches in a desperate search for network coverage are a common sight. Anna Tiyo, a 42-year-old whose husband works in South Africa, used an old metal barrel to set up a makeshift network station under a fortuitously discovered, well-connected tree. "One day, I got tired of walking in the sun across the field, so I sat here under this tree, watching some videos on my smartphone," she said. "WhatsApp messages started coming in, and that's how I found this network spot." Others ask bus drivers and shopkeepers to deliver written or oral messages for them.

Living in an offline area can be costly for those trying to do business, in a country with high poverty and unemployment rates. Bukhosibethu Moyo, a 29-year-old building contractor, said coverage gaps cost him clients and money, as he can't take calls or mobile payments. "Most of my clients say they fail to reach me for several days," he said. "They end up hiring people from the city who are readily available online."

Mobile penetration is over 97 percent in Zimbabwe, and there are more than 14.5 million active subscriptions in a country of 16 million people, according to the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe. But the government has acknowledged that connectivity is problematic in rural areas. — AFP



MATOBO: Buyelani Moyo uses her mobile phone placed on a guava tree to boost network connectivity at her homestead. — AFP

Legacy of 2022 clashes shapes presidential race for Iran's youth

DUBAI: Atousa, a young Iranian woman, joined angry protests against Iran's rulers in 2022 that loyalists like Reza, a young Iranian man, helped crush. Two years on, the two young Iranians' political views remain at odds, reflecting a rift that will shape the outcome of presidential elections this week. Now 22, Atousa says she will abstain from voting in Friday's ballot to choose a successor to Ebrahim Raisi after his death in a helicopter crash, regarding the exercise with derision.

But Reza, 26, a religiously devout member of the hardline Basij militia, intends to vote, a contrasting view of the worth of the election that underscores the division in Iran between supporters and opponents of the 45-year-old Islamic Republic. All six candidates — five hardliners and a low-key moderate approved by a hardline watchdog body — have been wooing youthful voters in speeches and campaign messages, using social media to reach the 60 percent of the 85 million population aged under 30.

"This election, like all elections in Iran, is a circus. Why should I vote when I want the regime to be toppled?" Atousa told Reuters. She declined to be identified by her full name for security reasons. "Even if it was a free and fair election and if all candidates could enter the race, the president in Iran has no power," she said.

The hashtag #ElectionCircus has been widely posted on social media platform X by Iranians in the past few weeks, while some Iranians at home and abroad have called for an election boycott.

Under Iran's clerical system, the elected president runs the government day-to-day but his powers



TEHRAN: A man gestures during a protest over the death of Mahsa Amini, a woman who died after being arrested by the Islamic republic's "morality police", in Tehran, Iran on September 19, 2022. — Reuters

are circumscribed by those of the hardline supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the last word on top issues such as nuclear and foreign policy.

'Religious duty to vote'

Like many women and young Iranians, Atousa joined protests in 2022 sparked by the death of a young Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, in police custody, following her arrest for allegedly violating Iran's mandatory Islamic dress code. The unrest spiraled into the biggest show of opposition to Iran's clerical rulers in years.

Atousa, then a student, was arrested during the protests and her dream of becoming an architect was shattered when she was expelled from university as a punishment for participating in the demonstrations.

TUESDAY, JUNE 25, 2024

Covestro opens door to ADNOC deal after it raises bid to \$12.5bn

Firms in 'concrete negotiations' • Covestro shares jump 6%

FRANKFURT: Germany's Covestro said on Monday it was stepping up talks with ADNOC after the Emirati energy company made an improved 11.7 billion euro (\$12.5 billion) takeover bid following more than a year of pursuing the chemicals firm.

Covestro, which makes plastics and chemicals for construction and engineering, said it was opening its books to ADNOC and believed the two sides could "generally reach a common understanding regarding core aspects of a possible transaction including support for Covestro's further growth strategy".

Talks, which had previously been described as open-ended, will now be "concrete negotiations", with Covestro saying it will provide Abu Dhabi National Oil Co with due diligence information after it made a 62 euros per share offer. That was up from 60 euros previously, based on what people familiar with the talks had told Reuters.

Shares in Covestro, which said talks would proceed "in a timely manner" and there was no certainty of an agreement, were up 6 percent to 54.3 euros at 1356 GMT. "We welcome the fact that Covestro is now negotiating with ADNOC," said Arne Rautenberg, fund manager at Union Investment, which LSEG data shows as one of

Covestro's top-10 shareholders. "But from an investor's point of view, there is still room for improvement regarding the 62 euros-per-share offer price."

It has taken more than a year to get to this stage. ADNOC's initial informal offer was reported in June 2023, but it was not until September last year that the Covestro entered into talks. "We look forward to jointly working with Covestro to swiftly progress due diligence for this important transaction," an ADNOC spokesperson said, adding that this was a final offer. The length of talks would suggest that many of issues are likely to be well advanced, Jefferies analyst said in a note.

Covestro said it had postponed until further notice its capital markets day scheduled for June 27 "in light of the recent developments". ADNOC has been pursuing several European targets.

It has also been in talks with Austria's OMV to create a chemicals giant with combined annual sales of more than \$20 billion. And in December, it agreed to buy European chemical producer OCI's stake in ammonia and urea producer Fertiglöbe for \$3.6 billion. Reuters reported in April that it had for a while considered buying Britain's BP. — Reuters



A worker at Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) checks the robotic fueling arm pilot in a demonstration during a media tour in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. — Reuters

Canada considers import tariffs on Chinese EVs

OTTAWA: Canada is considering whether to impose import tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles (EVs) and will seek the public's opinion about the idea, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said on Monday. Freeland told reporters in Vaughan, Ontario, that Ottawa would open a 30-day consultation period on July 2 as to how Canada can respond. One option is a tariff on imports.

Freeland said the domestic auto sector faced unfair competition from what she called China's "state-directed policy of overcapacity." "Chinese producers are quite intentionally generating a global oversupply that undermines EV producers around the world, including here in Canada," she said.

The premier of Ontario, Canada's most populous province and the main auto-making center, last week urged Ottawa to impose tariffs of at least 100 percent on Chinese-made electric vehicles to protect jobs. US President Joe Biden last month unveiled a bundle of steep tariff increases on an array of Chinese imports, including electric vehicles.

The European Commission, which oversees trade policy in the 27-nation, is planning to impose additional duties of up to 38.1 percent on Chinese producers. — Reuters

EU accuses Apple of breaking bloc's digital rules

BRUSSELS: Apple risks billions of euros in fines after the European Union on Monday accused the iPhone maker of violating the bloc's landmark digital rules by hindering competition on its App Store. The European Commission informed Apple in a "preliminary view" that the "App Store rules... prevent app developers from freely steering consumers to alternative channels for offers and content".

The finding opens a new front in the increasingly bitter fight between the US tech giant and Brussels over the EU's new Digital Markets Act (DMA), and may force changes to the way the App Store operates in the bloc.

On Friday, Apple said it would delay rolling out recently announced AI features in Europe because of "regulatory uncertainties" linked to the DMA. The sweeping law seeks to rein in the world's biggest tech firms, including Apple, by forcing them to open up to competition in the 27-country EU.

But for Apple, the new rules are a significant challenge to its walled garden and it has openly accused the DMA of creating greater privacy and security risks for users. This is the first time the commission has leveled a formal accusation against a tech firm under the new rules, after opening the first DMA probes into Apple, Google and Meta in March.

Apple said Monday that it has made "a number of changes" to comply with the rules in response to feedback from developers and the EU regulator over the past months, and would "continue to listen and

engage with the European Commission." Apple can now access the commission's investigation file and reply to the findings. If Apple falls in line with EU rules, it can avoid a fine and Brussels believes it will give European users easier access to cheaper offers. If the commission's view is confirmed, it would adopt a "non-compliance decision" by late March 2025 -- opening the way to fines.

Under the new law, the commission has the power to impose fines of up to 10 percent of a company's total global turnover. This can rise to up to 20 percent for repeat offenders.

Apple also faces daily penalties of up to five percent of its average daily worldwide turnover if found to be non-compliant. Apple's total revenue in the year to September 2023 stood at \$383 billion (358 billion euros). The EU also has the right to break up companies, but only as a last resort.

The App Store has been at the centre of a long-running dispute with the EU, even before the DMA entered into force this year. The commission in March hit Apple with a 1.8-billion-euro fine after reaching similar conclusions in a probe launched in 2020 following a complaint from Swedish music streaming giant Spotify.

Parallel investigation

"Without prejudice to Apple's right of defense, we are determined to use the clear and effective DMA toolbox to swiftly bring to an end a saga which has already lasted for way too many years," said the EU's top tech enforcer, Thierry Breton. The firm is also under investigation over whether it allows users to easily uninstall apps on its iOS operating system, and the design of the web browser choice screen.

The DMA forces the biggest digital companies to offer choice screens for web browsers and search engines to give users more options. The EU's com-



LOS ANGELES: This illustration photo shows the Apple app store logo reflected from an iPhone onto the back of an iMac in Los Angeles. — AFP

petition commissioner, Margrethe Vestager, defended the law during an event in Amsterdam on Monday. "The DMA is not excessive in its ask."

She also admitted she found it "surprising" that the big companies did not "take compliance as a badge of honor".

On Monday, the commission also opened a parallel investigation into Apple over changes already made to comply with the DMA by allowing third-party app stores. Brussels said it will look at whether the core technology fee—a new fee structure for third-party store developers—complies with the law.

It will also investigate the steps a user has to take to download an alternative app store and whether this is in line with the DMA. The commission separately announced it had closed an antitrust case opened in 2020 against Apple and its App Store terms, since there is now a probe under the DMA.

Apple is not the only tech titan in the EU's sights. Google parent Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, Microsoft and TikTok owner ByteDance must also comply with the DMA. Online travel giant Booking.com will need to later this year. — AFP

India buys more sunflower oil as market fight rages

MUMBAI: Indians bought a record 500,000 metric tons of sunflower oil for June delivery, as competition between leading suppliers Russia and Ukraine made it cheaper than soyoil and palm oil, two leading buyers and a customs official told Reuters.

Higher sunflower oil purchases by the world's biggest importer of vegetable oils will help to reduce sunflower oil inventories in the Black Sea region and lift sunoil prices. A leading buyer who declined to be named said sunoil was trading at a discount to soyoil and even palm oil, which was tempting Indian buyers especially given robust demand in southern states. A few weeks ago, crude sunoil was available at \$940 a metric ton, including cost, insurance and freight (CIF), in India for June delivery, while soyoil and palm oil were offered around \$1,015 and \$950 a ton, respectively, dealers said.

Sunoil usually holds a premium of more than \$100 per ton over soyoil and palm oil, Rajesh Patel, managing partner at edible oil trader and broker GGN Research, said.

Russia and Ukraine, as well as another big supplier Argentina, were aggressively competing and offered sunoil at a lower price than other oils, another buyer based in Hyderabad said. He has reduced palm oil



GUWAHATI: In this file photo, a farmer checks his sunflower field, used for the production of sunflower oil, at Singimari village on the outskirts of Guwahati in India's northeastern state of Assam. — AFP

and soyoil purchases to make space for sunoil. The currencies of Russia and Ukraine have depreciated since the war started in February 2022, allowing them to offer sunflower oil at competitive prices in dollar terms, the buyer said.

Russia and Ukraine account for more than 70 percent global shipments of sunoil. Around 320,000 metric tons of sunflower oil have been discharged at various Indian ports so far this month, said a custom official, who also declined to be identified as he was not allowed to speak to media.

India on an average bought 250,000 tons of sunflower oil every month in the last marketing year, mostly from Black Sea region. The industry will need time to refine and distribute the 500,000 tons of sunflower oil imported in June, which will reduce imports in July, the Hyderabad based buyer said. In January 2023, India had imported a record 461,458 tons of sunflower oil. India buys palm oil mainly from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, while it imports soyoil from Argentina, Brazil, and United States. — Reuters

Citi's 'living will' flaws manageable but distracting: JPMorgan

NEW YORK: The problems with Citi-group's so-called living will, which details how it would be unwound in the event of bankruptcy, are manageable but could be bothersome for its executives, according to JPMorgan. Citi was one of four banks whose living wills were found lacking by the US Federal Reserve and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp due to shortcomings tied to their derivatives portfolios.

"We expect this will require more work by lawyers, consultants, and management and add to the expense base but we expect the impact should be manageable," JP Morgan said. "It adds to the list of issues that management needs to focus on," the brokerage said, noting reports about the setbacks Citi is facing over its consent orders and a recent lawsuit by a former managing director who alleged she was fired for opposing what she said were attempts to give regulators false information.

Citi has said the lawsuit is "without merit" and vowed to "vigorously defend against it". The bank has been battling concerns around its data management for years. Last week, it told investors it is automating processes and improving data reporting to meet



regulators' orders. "The liquidity crisis has set regulators on a path for more stringent follow up when resolution of issues aren't addressed in a timely manner," said Laurent Birade, senior director at Moody's.

The collapse of three major US banks last year and fears stemming from lenders' exposure to potential bad loans have prompted strict oversight from the industry's watchdogs. "Citi's recent resolution plan (living will) weakness underscores the need for banks to take earlier warnings seriously," Birade said.

The bank declined to comment, and reiterated its statement from last week where it said it was fully committed to addressing the issues identified by regulators. — Reuters

Business

Burgan Bank adopts GCC real time payments system AFAQ

Under the umbrella of bank's committed digital transformation strategy

Indonesian economy to steadily grow, says World Bank

JAKARTA: Indonesia's economy is expected to steadily grow over the next two years on the back of domestic consumption and investment despite weak exports, a World Bank report said Monday. Household spending, traditionally a strong contributor to Indonesia's GDP, and election-related spending helped to expand Southeast Asia's largest economy 5.11 percent in the first quarter of 2024.

And it is expected to expand five percent overall this year, followed by 5.1 percent in 2025 and 2026, according to the World Bank's Indonesia Economic Prospects report.

The latest projection was an increase from the Bank's previous estimates of 4.9 percent this year and next, followed by five percent in 2026. "The economy is expected to benefit from a pick-up in public consumption and investment but will face headwinds, notably from worsening terms of trade," the report said.

It noted several risks to the economy, including high interest rates and geopolitical shocks, which could further weigh on exports already impacted by lower prices. "The outlook is stable, but risks are tilted to the downside," World Bank senior economist Wael Mansour told a news conference.

"Our baseline (projection) assumes continuity in policy, especially those linked to boosting investment." The latest projection assumes a large contribution from public consumption - with government spending expected to increase - while foreign direct investment as a share of GDP is projected to return to pre-pandemic levels, Mansour said.

He added that Indonesia's "credible" fiscal rule had helped attract investments and lower Indonesia's risk premiums. But president-elect Prabowo Subianto, who will take office in October, is reportedly looking to increase the country's debt-to-GDP ratio to 50 percent - from less than 40 percent - to fund his campaign promises including free school meals. A member of Prabowo's campaign team has denied the plan. The government's 2025 budget, due by October, is expected to outline an implementation plan for the new administration's economic goals, and signal its fiscal policy stance. — AFP

Fast-fashion retailer Shein filed for London listing in early June



LONDON: A person walks past an advertisement for Shein in London. — Reuters

HONG KONG: Shein confidentially filed papers with Britain's markets regulator in early June for a potential London listing, two sources said, as the online fast-fashion retailer moves ahead with what could be one of the largest IPOs globally this year. The China-founded company, which was valued at \$66 billion in a fundraising round last year, started engaging with its financial and legal advisors to explore a listing on the London Stock Exchange early this year, Reuters reported in May, citing sources.

A spokesperson for Shein declined to comment. The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), the UK markets watchdog, did not immediately respond to Reuters request for comment. Both the sources, who have knowledge of the deal, declined to be named as they were not authorized to speak to the media.

It is not immediately clear when Shein, known for its \$5 tops and \$10 dresses, plans to launch the initial public offering (IPO). Shein has updated China's securities regulator officially about its change of listing venue, said the sources. The company however has yet to receive a nod from the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC), one of them said.

The CSRC did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Shein's London filing marks a shift from its long-running US IPO plan, which has run into obstacles at home and abroad, Reuters has reported. The group confidentially filed for an IPO with the US Securities and Exchange Commission in November and approached the CSRC to seek Beijing's nod in the same month, sources have said. The CSRC earlier this year informed Shein that the regulator would not recommend a US IPO due to the company's supply chain issues, Reuters has reported. — Reuters

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced adopting the GCC real-time payments system AFAQ, becoming one of the earliest Kuwaiti banks to join the cross-border platform in line with the Central Bank of Kuwait's (CBK) plans to keep pace with the latest developments in financial technology (fintech). Plugging into the AFAQ system comes as part of the Bank's committed digital transformation strategy, which aims to enhance its customers' banking experience and add unprecedented convenience, safety, and speed to their everyday transactions and banking operations. Burgan customers can now utilize the AFAQ service through direct digital channels, online banking and the Bank's branches.

In light of Burgan's adoption of AFAQ, Mohammad Al-Zayed, General Manager - Operations at Burgan Bank, said: "For several years, we have



Mohammad Al-Zayed, General Manager - Operations at Burgan Bank

worked tirelessly to reinforce Burgan's digital infrastructure, which continues to support the ever-evolving, comprehensive, intuitive, and completely

secure digital banking experience that we offer our customers. Today, we are delighted to join more than 60 central, domestic, and international banks across the GCC by deploying the AFAQ payments system, guaranteeing a swift and secure real-time money transfer experience in any of the GCC currencies for all our customers - and at a lower cost than ever before."

Al-Zayed added that AFAQ is a vital tool for increasing the flow of cross-border trade in the GCC and driving Kuwaiti banks' regional expansion, which aligns with the New Kuwait Vision 2035 goal of economic diversification. It also creates stronger economic ties among neighboring GCC countries, leading to stronger interconnected economies with integrated financial policies and monetary strategies. Guided by its vision to become the most

modern and progressive bank in Kuwait by delivering an excellent customer experience and leading with innovation, Burgan Bank continues to adopt the latest financial technology (fintech) solutions and adjust them to suit the Kuwaiti market's unique and evolving needs. The bank's most recently deployed fin-tech solutions include a wide range of digital payment solutions, such as eco-friendly virtual cards in addition to Google and Apple Pay which customers can choose as bank-supported payment options on checkout.

Burgan Bank also adopted the latest innovations that allow customers to open numerous Burgan accounts in less than a minute, followed by SMS or online onboarding that enables customers to enjoy the vast array of account benefits in the easiest and fastest manner possible.

Climate change impacts threaten global wheat harvests

RAMBA, India: When all else fails, Satveer Singh knows his family will manage if they have a sack of wheat flour in the kitchen to make rotis. Served hot and stuffed with sliced raw onion, the simple meal of Indian flatbreads keeps hunger at bay. For now, the family can just about cover their needs - thanks in part to the ration they receive from a government program that distributes food to 800 million people across India.

"It is not enough, but ... on a bad day when money is tight, this wheat helps," Singh said, gesturing towards the sack of grains lying in a corner of his ramshackle house in a slum area known as Gheja village outside the capital, New Delhi. Ruminating over when to take the grains to be milled, he said supplies from the government program were not always regular. A year or two ago, the family's wheat ration was partly replaced by rice - for their taste, a poor replacement.

In 2022, hot weather arrived early in India's major wheat growing regions, shrivelling crops and leading the government to ban wheat exports and reduce rations of the grain under the food distribution program to protect domestic stocks. A year later, history repeated itself. Even this year's crop will be 6.25 percent lower than a government estimate of 112 million metric tons, a leading industry body forecasts, setting the stage for the country to import for the first time in six years.

Climate change impacts - including harsher heat, drought and floods - pose a major emerging threat to food security in India and elsewhere, accelerating diverse efforts to introduce crops that are better able to withstand shifting conditions. In India, the world's second-biggest wheat producer, scientists in government research institutes and universities are racing to develop and distribute a broad range of climate-resilient wheat varieties that could prove vital to shoring up food security for its 1.4 billion people.

Traditionally, crop breeding programs focused on boosting yield, "but that alone is no longer enough", said Aditi Mukherji, director for climate change adaptation and mitigation at the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), a research partnership on food systems.

"Now, (we) need seeds that can withstand higher temperatures and are drought-resilient, or those that incorporate several climate-resilient features," she

What are Fed's bank 'stress tests' and what's new this year?

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve is due to release the results of its annual bank health checks on Wednesday at 4:30 pm ET (20:30 GMT). Under the "stress test" exercise, the Fed tests big banks' balance sheets against a hypothetical scenario of a severe economic downturn, the elements of which change annually. The results dictate how much capital those banks need to be deemed healthy and how much they can return to shareholders via share buybacks and dividends. This year, big US lenders are once again expected to show they have ample capital to weather any fresh turmoil in the banking sector.

The Fed established the tests following the 2007-2009 financial crisis as a tool to ensure banks could withstand a similar shock in future. The tests formally began in 2011, and large lenders initially struggled to earn passing grades.

Citigroup C N, Bank of America BAC.N, JPMorgan Chase & Co JPM.N, and Goldman Sachs Group GS.N, for example, had to adjust their capital plans to address the Fed's concerns. Deutsche Bank's US subsidiary failed in 2015, 2016 and 2018. However, years of practice have made banks more adept at the tests and the Fed also has made the tests more transparent. It ended much of the drama of the tests by scrapping the "pass-fail" model in 2020 and introducing a more nuanced, bank-specific capital regime.

The test assesses whether banks would stay above the required 4.5 percent minimum capital ratio - which represents the percentage of its capital relative to assets - during the hypothetical downturn. Banks that perform strongly typically stay well above that. The nation's largest global banks also must hold an additional "G-SIB surcharge" of at least 1 percent. How well a bank performs on the test also dictates the size of its "stress capital buffer," an additional layer of capital introduced in 2020 which sits on top of the 4.5 percent minimum. That extra cushion is determined by each bank's hypothetical losses. The larger the losses, the larger the buffer.

The Fed will release the results after markets close. It



Combines load wheat into a truck during harvest in a field of a local agricultural enterprise in the Cheriak-sky district of the Omsk region, Russia. — Reuters

said. For farmers like Sukha Singh, who grows wheat on a 20-acre (eight-hectare) plot in the village of Ramba in northern Haryana state, supplies of new, hardier seeds could not arrive quickly enough after hefty climate-related losses in recent years.

Sukha Singh lost more than 30 percent of his wheat crop due to the heatwave that swept into northern India's wheat belt in Haryana and neighboring Punjab state in March 2022, before the normal hot season between April and June. "Wheat is my main crop, any shock in the harvest puts a strain on my income that takes me at least two years to recover from," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation on his farm, where this year's crops were nearing harvest.

Studies have shown how temperature increases linked to climate change could reduce global wheat yields by up to 30 percent by mid-century, potentially slashing exports from major producers such as India and driving up global food prices.

In India, yields could fall by more than 8 percent by 2035 due to higher maximum temperatures and reduced rainfall, according to a government assessment. The decline could top 20 percent by the end of the century. Following harvest losses over the last two years, more and more farmers in Haryana and Punjab are demanding and sowing climate-resilient varieties.

They are not always easy to find at local seed deal-

ers, but Sukha Singh said he had been lucky. "Fortunately ... there was one that had just reached the dealer," he said. Developed by the Indian Institute of Wheat and Barley Research (IIWBR), a government-run research entity, the new variety has shown greater resilience against temperature fluctuations and untimely rains, and also came with the promise of increasing yields. In 2023, as other farmers in Haryana counted their climate-related harvest losses for a second consecutive year, Sukha Singh's wheat crop had a healthy yield of 25 quintals (2.5 tons) per acre - in line with his long-term average.

More than 70 climate-resilient wheat varieties are being developed or are already on the market in India, catering to the vast country's diverse range of weather and soil conditions. "These varieties save wheat crops against heat, drought, waterlogging and prevalent diseases," said IIWBR Director Gyanendra Pratap Singh. Most were developed by cross-breeding indigenous seed genetics, while 20 percent used genetic materials supplied by international organizations such as the Mexico-based International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, a leading global grains research institute. But as climate change alters weather patterns around the world, developing new varieties quickly enough to respond and adapt is challenging, scientists say. — Reuters

typically publishes aggregate industry losses, and individual bank losses including details on how specific portfolios - like credit cards or mortgages - fared. The central bank typically does not allow banks to announce their plans for dividends and buybacks until a few days after the results. It announces the size of each bank's stress capital buffer in the subsequent months.

The performance of the country's largest lenders, particularly JPMorgan, Citigroup, Wells Fargo & Co WFC.N, Bank of America, Goldman Sachs, and Morgan Stanley MS.N, are closely watched by the markets.

The Fed changes the scenarios each year. They take months to devise and test a snapshot of banks' balance sheets at the end of the previous year. That means they risk becoming outdated. In 2020, for example, the real economic crash caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was by many measures more severe than the Fed's scenario that year. After the failures of mid-size lenders Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank and First Republic last year, the Fed was criticized for not having tested bank balance sheets against a rising interest rate environment, and instead assuming rates would fall amid a severe recession. This year's test is broadly in line with the 2023 test, with the hypothetical unemployment rate under a "severely adverse" scenario rising 6.3 percentage points compared with 6.4 last year.

The exam also envisages a 40 percent slump in the prices of commercial real estate, an area of concern over the past two years as lingering pandemic-era office vacancies and higher for longer interest rates stress borrowers. In addition, banks with large trading operations will be tested against a "global market shock," and some will also be tested against the failure of their largest counterparty.

For the second time, the Fed is also conducting "exploratory" shocks to banks. This year's test also includes additional exploratory economic and market shocks which won't help set capital requirements, but will help the Fed gauge whether it should broaden the test in the future. The market shocks will apply to the largest banks, while all 32 will be tested on the economic shocks. Fed Vice Chair for Supervision Michael Barr has said multiple scenarios could make the tests better at detecting banks' weaknesses.

In 2024, 32 banks will be tested. That's up from 23 last year, as the Fed decided in 2019 to allow banks with between \$100 billion and \$250 billion in assets to be tested every other year. — Reuters

Former head of EU bank faces corruption probe

BRUSSELS: The former head of the European Union's lending arm is under investigation for corruption and abuse of influence - accusations he rejects as "absurd," his lawyer said Monday.

Werner Hoyer ran the European Investment Bank (EIB) for 12 years until 2023. The European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) said in a statement there was an ongoing investigation involving "two individuals suspected of corruption and abuse of influence, as well as the misappropriation of EU funds". The Luxembourg-based EPPO has the job of cracking down on fraudulent use of EU funds.

It would not name the two individuals but a lawyer for Hoyer, 72, confirmed that the German economist was the subject of an investigation. The case revolves around the departure of an EIB employee and the compensation the individual received, Hoyer's legal team said.

Hoyer signed off on the exit package, in accordance with EIB rules, but was never involved in the negotiations surrounding the employee's departure, the team added. Hoyer said the allegations against him were "downright absurd and unfounded". "I now expect them to be fully investigated and clarified and ask the EIB to co-operate fully with the EPPO," he said in a statement through his lawyer.

"I am also co-operating fully with the EPPO and demand a full clarification of the facts from there."

Hoyer's lawyer Nikolaos Gazeas said they were "calmly awaiting the investigations", adding that the former EIB chief had "expressly requested" his immunity be waived. "The legal requirements for starting an criminal investigation by the EPPO is very low. It is therefore not unusual in legal terms for the signatory of an agreement to also become a subject in an investigation," the lawyer added. — AFP

Business

China wants EU to scrap EV tariff plans as talks start

Beijing says retaliatory measures ready if EU does not back down

BEIJING: Beijing wants the EU to scrap plans to impose preliminary tariffs on Chinese electric vehicle imports by July 4. China's state-controlled Global Times reported, after both sides agreed to negotiate a possible compromise.

Provisional European Union duties of up to 38.1 percent on imported Chinese-made EVs are set to kick in by July 4 while the bloc investigates what it says are excessive and unfair subsidies. The European Commission said it would host technical talks with Chinese officials in Brussels this week.

"The EU side has emphasized that any negotiated outcome of the investigation must be effective in addressing the injurious subsidization," a commission spokesperson said. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said there needed to be "serious movement and progress" from China too.

China has repeatedly called on the EU to cancel its tariffs, expressing a willingness to negotiate. Beijing does not want to be embroiled in another tariff war, still stung by US tariffs on its goods imposed by the Trump administration, but says it would take all steps to protect Chinese firms should one happen. China's Global Times, citing observers, said the best outcome would be for the EU to scrap its tariff plans before July 4.

Analysts and European trade lobby groups stressed that China would need to come to negotiations willing to make major concessions. Alicia Garcia Herrero, senior fellow at Bruegel, an influential EU affairs think tank, doubted the planned curbs could be dropped before elections in France on June 30 and July 7. "The Commission can't change a decision it has been pondering for months on months on months," she added. "Yes, China is putting pressure on the member states, but they would need to vote with a qualified majority against the Commission."

The European Commission is set to make a final decision on tariffs by Nov. 2 at the end of the

anti-subsidy investigation. The Chinese commerce ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Siegfried Russwurm, head of Germany's biggest industry association BDI, said it was a "good sign" both sides would hold talks. "You know the old saying: as long as there are talks you're not shooting at each other," he told German public broadcaster Deutschlandfunk. Russwurm, who also serves as chairman for German conglomerate and car supplier Thyssenkrupp TKAG.DE, said tariffs were the last thing Germany needed as a major exporting nation. At the same time, Brussels' move to apply tariffs of varying degrees suggested a thorough analysis had taken place and that this was not an effort that targeted the entire Chinese car sector in equal measure. Meantime, Maximilian Butek, executive director at the German Chamber of Commerce in China, said there was "zero chance" the preliminary tariffs would be removed by July 4 unless China eliminated all the issues flagged by the European Commission.

EU trade policy has turned increasingly protective over concerns that China's production-focused development model could see it flooded with cheap goods as Chinese firms look to step up exports amid weak domestic demand. China has rejected accusations of unfair subsidies or that it has an overcapacity problem, saying the development of its EV industry has been the result of advantages in technology, market and industry supply chains. "When European Commission President Von der Leyen announced she would investigate China's new energy vehicles ... I had an intuitive feeling it was not only an economic issue but also a geopolitical issue," said Zhang Yan-sheng, chief research fellow at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

Although calling for talks, Beijing has also indicated it has retaliatory measures ready if the EU does not back down, and that it considers Brussels wholly



Flags of European Union and China are pictured during the China-EU summit at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China. — Reuters

responsible for the escalating tensions.

China has opened an anti-dumping investigation into EU pork imports. The Global Times said China was also teeing up an anti-subsidy investigation into European dairy goods and tariffs on large-engined petrol cars. Chinese authorities have dropped hints about possible retaliatory measures through state media commentaries and interviews with industry figures.

"It seems probable that Beijing will raise tariffs

up to 25 percent for Europe-made cars with 2.5 or above liter engines," said Jacob Gunter, lead analyst at Berlin-based China studies institute MERICS.

"Pork and dairy are already on the table for Beijing, and likely more agricultural products will be threatened," he added. "On the EU side, there are a variety of ongoing investigations ... so we should expect some sort of measures targeting distortions on (Chinese) products ranging from medical devices to airport security scanners to steel pipes." — Reuters

Dominance, data, disinformation: Big Tech battle

PARIS: The European Union warned Apple on Monday that its App Store is breaching its digital competition rules, placing the iPhone maker at risk of billions of dollars in fines.

It is the latest in a years-long battle between Brussels and giant tech firms, covering subjects from data privacy to disinformation.

Brussels has doled out over 10 billion euros in fines to tech firms for abusing their dominant market positions. The latest threat for Apple comes three months after the bloc hit the California firm with a 1.8-billion-euro (\$1.9 billion) penalty for preventing European users from accessing information about cheaper music streaming services.

Among big tech firms, only Google has faced a bigger single antitrust fine - more than four billion euros in 2018 for using its Android mobile operating system to promote its search engine.

Google has also incurred billion-plus fines for abusing its power in the online shopping and advertising sectors. The European Commission, the EU's executive, recommended last year that Google should sell parts of its business and could face a fine of up to 10 percent of its global revenue if it fails to comply.

Ireland issues the stiffest fines on data privacy as the laws are enforced by local regulators and Dublin hosts the European offices of several big tech firms. The Irish regulator handed TikTok a 345-million-euro penalty for mishandling children's data last September just months after it hit Meta with a record fine of 1.2 billion euros for illegally transferring personal data between Europe and the United States.

Luxembourg had previously held the record for data fines after it slapped Amazon with a 746-million-euro penalty in 2021.

The EU has had little success in getting tech companies to pay more taxes in Europe, where they are accused of funneling profits into low-tax economies like Ireland and Luxembourg. In one of the most notorious cases, the European Commission in 2016 ordered Apple to pay Ireland more than a decade in back taxes - 13 billion euros - after ruling a sweetheart deal with the government was illegal.

But EU judges overturned the decision saying there was no evidence the company had broken the rules, a decision the commission has been trying to reverse ever since. The commission is also fighting to reverse another court loss, after judges overruled its order for Amazon to repay 250 million euros in back taxes to Luxembourg.

Web platforms have long faced accusations of failing to combat hate speech, disinformation and piracy. The EU passed the Digital Services Act last year, which is designed to force companies to tackle these issues or face fines of up to six percent of their global turnover.

Already the bloc has begun to show how the DSA might be applied, opening probes on Facebook and Instagram for failing to tackle election-related disinformation.

The bloc has also warned Microsoft that the falsehoods generated by its AI search could fall foul of the DSA. Google and other online platforms have also been accused of making billions from news without sharing the revenue with those who gather it. — AFP

US Treasury to outlay \$100m for affordable housing

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen was expected to announce \$100 million in new financing to increase the supply of affordable housing, the Treasury department said in a statement.

The measure is one of several moves by the Treasury to try to address a chronic housing shortage - a concern of voters, a contributor to inflation and a source of dissatisfaction with President Joe Biden's handling of the economy ahead of the Nov 5 presidential election. The additional \$100 million over three years comes from payments that the Treasury is receiving from prior COVID-era investments in community lenders to support small businesses, consumers and affordable housing projects. The 2021 Emergency Capital Investment Program injected over \$8.57 billion into community lenders, who in turn invested \$1.2 billion in 433 affordable

housing projects, the Treasury said.

It said it will create a new program at the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund that it estimates could support the financing of thousands of affordable housing units.

In excerpts of remarks at a public housing development project in Minneapolis, Yellen said she expects shelter inflation to moderate. "But we face a very significant housing supply shortfall that has been building for a long time. This supply crunch has led to an affordability crunch," Yellen said in excerpts of remarks. She added that the burden was greatest on low-income and Black households.

Yellen also is calling on the 11 Federal Home Loan Banks to devote at least 20 percent of their net income to housing programs, up from the legal requirement of 10 percent and the banks' voluntary commitment of 15 percent.

Had this commitment been in place over the last five years, the 11 government-sponsored enterprises would have contributed nearly \$2 billion more to housing programs than legally required, the Treasury said. The Treasury is also providing state and local governments with guidance on using their remaining COVID-19 recovery funds to increase the supply of housing. This includes a "how-to guide"



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen testifies before a Senate Appropriations Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee hearing on President Biden's proposed budget request for the Department of Treasury, on Capitol Hill in Washington. — Reuters

on using the funds to support construction. Another step Yellen will announce is the update of a rule for an existing housing program in the CDFI Fund that reduces the administrative burden, allowing more resources to support construction and preservation of housing. — Reuters

German business morale falls unexpectedly

FRANKFURT: German business sentiment unexpectedly fell in June, a key survey showed Monday, pouring cold water on hopes Europe's biggest economy is on course for a strong rebound. The Ifo institute's confidence barometer, based on a survey of around 9,000 companies, declined to 88.6 points from 89.3 in May.

It was lower than a forecast of 89.8 points from analysts surveyed by financial data firm FactSet. "Sentiment has deteriorated at companies in Germany," said Ifo president Clemens Fuest. "The German economy is having difficulty overcoming stagnation."

Faced with surging inflation, a manufacturing downturn and weakness in key trading partners, Germany was the only major advanced economy to shrink in 2023. A pick-up is expected and indicators had been improving in early 2024, with the Ifo survey generally on an upward trend - meaning Monday's reading came as a setback. The fall was driven by worsening expectations among companies while their assessment of the current situation was unchanged.

The readings for the manufacturing sector and trade deteriorated although there were improvements in the service sector and construction, the survey showed.

China's LNG imports set to slow

LONDON: China appears to have taken advantage of low prices in the spot market so far in 2024 to boost the amount of gas in storage, absorbing some of the extra fuel that would otherwise have been sent to Europe. But as storage facilities fill and spot prices rise, the intake is likely to taper over the summer, redirecting more liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargoes to Europe and accelerating the fill rate at the other end of Eurasia.

To the frustration of foreign analysts, China does not publish statistics on gas, oil or coal inventories, which are considered commercially sensitive and a matter of national security. But the country consumed a record 55 million metric tons of gas from overland pipelines and sea-borne LNG in the first five months of 2024, according to data from the General Administration of Customs.

The intake rose from 47 million tons in the first five months of 2023 and 46 million in the same period of 2022, when Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent spot gas prices soaring. It comfortably exceeded the pre-invasion record of 50 million tons set in the first five months of 2021. LNG imports ran above prior-year levels every month between January and

May, and pipeline imports were also above prior-year levels in every month except April.

At the same time, domestic production surged to a record 76 million tons in the first five months of 2024 from 72 million tons in 2023, 68 million tons in 2022 and 64 million tons in 2021. Output from Sichuan, easily the largest gas-producing province, has doubled since 2016, as the government has prioritized expansion of domestic fields to reduce reliance on imports.

As a result, the total amount of gas available from domestic production and imports hit a record 130 million tons in the first five months of 2024, up from 118 million in 2023 and 114 million in 2021.

China continues to connect more

urban households to the gas network to reduce coal burning and improve air quality. But the enormous increase in the amount consumed so far this year far outstrips additional demand from households and industry.

Much of the extra imported gas has likely been used to top up domestic storage after inventories were allowed to deplete in 2023 and 2022.

China has a long tradition of actively using government-run inventories to stabilize commodity prices, which has been seen as a core function of the state. In imperial China, the government's "ever-normal granaries" purchased surplus grain when supplies were plentiful and sold when supplies were low to stabilize prices at a moderate level. — Reuters



FRANKFURT: The German share price index DAX graph is pictured at the stock exchange in Frankfurt, Germany, June 24, 2024. — Reuters

"The upturn in business sentiment is faltering," said Fritz Koehler-Geib, chief economist at public lender KfW. Economic risks "remain high," she said. "This also includes the increased support for populist parties at home and abroad, as the European elections at the beginning of the month showed." The survey contrasted with recent improvements in forecasts.

The German government in April nudged up its

2024 growth prediction to 0.3 percent, from 0.2 percent previously, while Ifo itself has slightly upgraded its forecast. ING economist Carsten Brzeski sought to sound a positive note.

"Despite today's cold shower, the German economy should still gain some momentum over the summer months," he said. "It will take a bit longer than we thought but strong wage growth should still fuel a cautious recovery in private consumption." — AFP

TUESDAY, JUNE 25, 2024



Natural Sciences students of University of Tirana, take part in an expedition to observe the butterfly population in the picturesque district of Zvernec, near the city of Vlore, some 160 km South West of Tirana.



'Nature's mirror' Climate change batters Albania's butterflies



Altin Hila, an agronomist and owner of a private museum for butterflies, admires a small Emperor larva (*Saturnia pavonia*), at his office in Divjake, some 90 km, South West of Tirana.



A Natural Sciences student of University of Tirana takes part in an expedition to observe the butterfly population in the picturesque district of Zvernec.

Bright yellow, black, red and blue, Alexanor butterflies once fluttered abundantly on southwestern Albania's flowery slopes. Now, like many related species, scientists say they are disappearing due to human impacts, including climate change. Increasingly absent from the picturesque district of Zvernec, the Alexanor is one of 58 of the Balkan country's 207 butterfly species that researchers say are at risk. "Sensitive to changes, they are a true mirror of the conditions of the ecosystem in which they live," said Anila Papparisto, an entomologist at Tirana University.

In Zvernec, Papparisto leads a team of researchers and students working to identify the country's remaining butterfly species along with those that are now extinct. Numerous scientific studies have measured the impact of climate change on butterfly populations, though researchers also cite other environmental factors. They blame a combination of rapid urbanization, pesticides and warming temperatures for the decrease.

"Human activity and climate change have had major impacts on nature," said biology student Fjona Skenderi, who was helping conduct research in Zvernec. In the nearby Divjaka Natural Park, Albanian agronomist Altin Hila points to the disappearance of the Giant Peacock Moth and the Plain Tiger as another worrying sign. "It's a disaster marked by climatic disruptions, an early spring and excessively high temperatures in



A Painted lady (*Vanessa cardui*) butterfly, is seen in Zvernec, near the city of Vlore, some 160 km, South West of Tirana.



An Aglais io butterfly is seen in Divjake, some 90 km, South West of Tirana.

January and February," explained Hila, who is also a passionate collector and oversees a butterfly museum in Divjaka. "It encouraged the eggs to hatch and the butterfly larvae to grow, but in April the temperatures were too low" for them to survive, he added.

'Butterfly effect'

The butterflies' decline also affects other species. "It will impact the entire food chain and biodiversity, which is also essential for humans," Papparisto said. "When there are fewer butterflies, you expect... the butterfly effect." Like large swaths of Albania, coastal areas near Zvernec have become increasingly overrun with resorts and apartment blocks, built with little oversight.

Scientists say the rapid urbanization in the area, along with overfishing and climate change, has also played a part in the dramatic drop in migratory bird populations. And while some butterfly populations are in decline, other similar species are prospering - to the detriment of the environment.

The arrival of a non-native moth through imports of ornamental plants from China has ravaged more than 80 percent of Albania's boxwood forests since 2019, according to experts. "It is very aggressive, it can reproduce three to four times a year, and it is a real misfortune which reduces entire areas to nothing," said forest engineer Avdulla Diku.

With their distinct neon green and black bodies, the larvae are easily spot-

ted when clinging to the boxwoods' leaves and stems. On the road along Lake Ohrid to Pogradec in northwestern Albania, the once vibrant green rows of boxwoods are reduced to husks after being devoured by the moths' larvae. "It is a firm reminder of the fragility and subtle balance of the environment in which we live," said Sylvain Couvelier, an entomological researcher who co-authored the first Albanian butterfly atlas. "It is obviously urgent to unite our efforts to find solutions, to rethink in depth our use of natural resources and the way forward for the protection and restoration of our environment." — AFP



People visit a private museum for butterflies in Divjake, some 90 km, South West of Tirana.



Altin Hila, an agronomist poses for a photograph at his private museum for butterflies in Divjake, some 90 km, South West of Tirana. — AFP photos



Natural Sciences students of University of Tirana and their Professor Anila Papparisto (right), take part in an expedition to observe the butterfly population in the picturesque district of Zvernec.

Lifestyle



Lee Kyoung-hyun, a popular YouTuber shaman, organizes tools for fortune-telling at her shaman parlor in Seoul, South Korea. — Reuters photos



Lee Kyoung-hyun, poses for a photo at her shaman parlor in Seoul.

South Korea's young shamans revive ancient tradition with social media

With statues of the Buddha and local gods, candles and incense sticks, Lee Kyoung-hyun's shrine looks similar to those of Korean shamans from centuries past. But the 29-year-old shaman - also known as Aegi Seonnyeo, or "Baby Angel" - reaches her clients in a thoroughly modern way: through social media accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers. "Shamanism ... was believed to be an invisible, mysterious and spiritual world," Lee said, adding that she had noticed more South Korean shamans posting videos about the spiritual practice since she started her own YouTube channel in 2019.

The spiritual tradition was central to the plot of a blockbuster South Korean film this year, 'Exhuma', in which shamans are tasked with lifting a curse on a family. The movie depicts well-dressed shamans in their 20s and 30s and director Jang Jae-hyun said he discovered many young shamans while doing his research. The movie has grossed at least 132 billion won (\$97 million) internationally, raising interest in the religious tradition. Roughly one in five South Koreans has seen 'Exhuma,' according to Korean Film Council data.

"People used to hide that they live as a (shaman). There was a lot of stigma," said 51-year-old Eunmi Pang,

They also sing, dance and walk on the edge of a knife to call on divine intervention. While practices vary, many Korean shamans worship local deities such as the Mountain God, Great Spirit Grandmother and Dragon King. Park Chea-bin, a 33-year-old Buddhist, visited Lee when she was struggling to find a job in 2020. She said she felt "peace of mind" after consulting the practitioner. "I was very anxious at the time but I became a little relaxed after deciding to let things go and focus on what I need to do," said Park, who found employment at roughly the same time. "I'm a Buddhist but I know Christians around me who come for their giggles."

Economic anxiety

Lee says she has felt physical pain and experienced psychosis since she was a teenager - symptoms that some believe are signs of a deity possessing a budding shaman. She decided to embrace her calling in 2018 and soon started a YouTube channel that now has over 300,000 subscribers. She posts videos on topics such as the items she carries in her bag and the country's fate for in 2024. (She's not optimistic.) "The current state of South Korean society is a factor that can't be ignored," she said, adding that many of her millennial and Gen Z clients come to her with concerns about affordable housing and the cost of raising children.

In Seoul, where Lee is based, the price of a home was more than 15 times the median salary in 2022, up from 8.8 in 2017, according to a government report. The country has also suffered from high inflation and interest rates. The younger generation of shamans who live in the city can connect well with younger clients facing economic challenges that they can't find an answer for, said Han Seung-hoon, an assistant professor at the Academy of Korean Studies, a research and education institute that operates under the Ministry of Education.

Battling stigmas

A culture ministry agency estimat-



Statues are placed in the room where Lee Kyoung-hyun, a popular YouTuber shaman, prays for people at her shaman parlor in Seoul.



Candles are placed in the room where Lee Kyoung-hyun, a popular YouTuber shaman, prays for people at her shaman parlor in Seoul.



A plaque certifying Lee Kyoung-hyun, a popular YouTuber shaman, for passing 100,000 YouTube subscribers, hangs on the wall at her shaman parlor in Seoul.

South Korea is among the world's most modern and high-tech economies. More than half its population of 51 million is not religiously affiliated, polls show. But the appeal of shamanism has stood the test of time. Kim Dong-kyu of the Academic Center for K-Religions at Sogang University, a private research university in Seoul, said shamans used to promote themselves in newspapers. It was a "natural phenomenon" to turn to social media, he said. Google Trends shows that searches on YouTube for "shaman" and "fortune-telling" in Korean have nearly doubled over the past five years.

who has been a practitioner for almost 20 years. She said that shamans today were more willing to express and promote themselves. Shamans - who are believed to have divination abilities - typically charge around 100,000 won (\$73.09) for a consultation of between 30 and 60 minutes, according to Pang and online pricing lists seen by Reuters. They offer relationship advice, guidance on job searches and predictions about the future, said Lee. Shamans typically answer queries after conducting rituals that may involve ringing bells and tossing grains of rice.

ed in 2022 that there were between 300,000 and 400,000 shamans and fortune-tellers in South Korea. Shamanism is an "important and powerful part of the Korean character," the agency wrote on its website. The roots of shamanism on the Korean peninsula go back at least 2,000 years, said Han. The Japanese colonial administration of the early 20th century and the military dictatorship of the 1970s attempted to suppress shamanism, which they saw as an obstacle to modernization.

Politically powerful Christians - who make up roughly a quarter of the population - have also criticized shamans and their followers. Han noted that larger religions such as Christianity and Buddhism - which about 40 percent of South Koreans say they are followers of - are more influential in society, yet do not draw similar levels of criticism. Lee said Christians also visit shamans in South Korea. "Even ... churchgoers want to have their bad dreams read," she said.

More recently, some practitioners have found themselves in legal trouble. A 66-year-old shaman in Seoul was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in February after being convicted of defrauding a client of more than \$200,000, according to local media

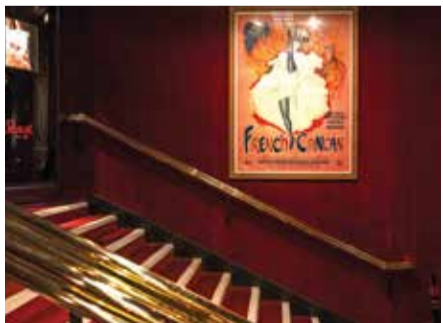
reports. The court ruled that the shaman had been pretending to speak to the client's dead mother. Lee thinks it's wrong for shamans to make decisions for clients. Instead, she said that shamans served as guides - like friends and family offering advice - rather than decision makers. Some in South Korea's elite have links to shamans.

Min Hee-jin, a top entertainment executive embroiled in a business dispute with a major K-pop label, defended herself in an April press conference against allegations that she consulted a shaman for business purposes. Min said that she had a conversation with a shaman in hope that talking would make her feel better: "Don't you guys all do that too?"

A 2022 study in the journal BMC Psychiatry noted a "huge" gap between South Koreans needing mental health treatment and getting it, which it partly attributed to stigma. "Shamans have been playing the role of counselors," said Kim, the religious professor. "People have stigmatized shamanism as something dirty, suspicious, and scary," said Han, adding that people were sometimes accused of visiting shamans in attempts to hurt their reputation. —Reuters



A detail view shows the neon tubes on one of the four temporary windmill sails installed on the top of the Moulin Rouge cabaret following the collapse of the former ones, in Paris.



This photograph shows a poster at the entrance of the Moulin Rouge cabaret in Paris.



A passerby takes a picture of a crane lifting one of the four temporary windmill sails during its installation on the top of the Moulin Rouge cabaret following the collapse of the former ones, in Paris.



Workers install one of the four temporary windmill sails on the top of the Moulin Rouge cabaret following the collapse of the former ones, in Paris. — AFP photos

Paris's Moulin Rouge gets new sails in time for Olympics



This photograph shows a crane lifting one of the four temporary windmill sails during its installation on top of the Moulin Rouge cabaret following the collapse of the former ones, in Paris.

Paris's Moulin Rouge cabaret club, whose landmark windmill sails fell down in April, received new blades on Monday just 10 days before the Paris Olympic torch is due to pass the venue. One of the most visited tourist attractions in the French capital, Moulin Rouge plans to install the four new temporary sails for a special ceremony on July 5. The red aluminum and steel blades arrived by lorry early on Monday at the club, located in the touristy Pigalle district. The first blade or sail was attached with the aid a crane under the gaze of curious and pleased locals.

Over the next four days, the three

other sails will be winched up onto the terrace before being bolted into place and the electric cables linked up. Moulin Rouge officials said it would take a further four days to remove the tarpaulin and scaffolding that has enveloped the windmill since the night of April 25. The first three letters on the cabaret's facade—M, O and U—also fell off. No-one was injured in the incident.

"Our little Moulin Rouge is back! We're so happy," exclaimed Raymonde Rogojarski, looking at the windmill on the way to take her eight-year-old daughter to school on Monday morning. "It's very moving to see the sails back so soon,"

added Rogojarski. She said she lived "just round the corner" from the club, which has put on risqué nighttime entertainment since it opened in 1889 and been immortalized by French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

Mathieu Feltz, another local, got off his bike to take a picture of the first blade being bolted into place. "I was stunned when the sails fell off," he told AFP. "This morning, I came past here on the way to work. It's interesting to see how they put the blade back up." The sails are only provisional and will not rotate but they enable the landmark to look the part in time for the Paris Olympics. "The Olym-

pic torch is due to pass the Moulin Rouge on July 15, so it's very important for us to be ready by then," said Virginie Clerico, the Moulin Rouge brand manager.

In late April, the management confirmed the incident was not a "malicious act". The birthplace of the can-can and the location for Baz Luhrmann's film "Moulin Rouge", the club has remained open to the public since April 25. For the ceremony on July 5 to celebrate the arrival of the new sails, the venue has promised an outdoor "sound and light show, with a score of performers dancing the French can-can" on the street. —AFP

Lifestyle



Italian jewelry designer Sabine Getty poses during a photocall upon arrival to attend the Spring/Summer 2025 menswear ready to wear joint fashion show hosted by Vogue World as part of Paris Fashion Week at Place Vendome in Paris ahead of the upcoming Paris 2024 Olympic Games. — AFP photos



US designer Willy Chavarria (right) poses with US singer Becky G.

VOGUE WORLD BRINGS TOGETHER FASHION AND SPORT IN PARIS

The bar was set high a month before the Olympic Games as the Vogue World event brought together fashion and sport for an unprecedented crossover show in the heart of Paris. "We are here to celebrate the wonders of French fashion. I am very grateful for the support of everyone here in France and the fashion world," said the Sunday show's organizer, Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour.

Raising her trademark dark glasses towards the column of Place Vendome, Wintour, dressed in a multi-colored sequined ensemble, said she was grateful "it wasn't raining" on the square, which had been locked off for the occasion. "The challenge was to honor the big houses and dedicate this evening to all the creators," Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo told AFP. In front of the Ritz, the emblematic hotel of the City of Lights where Wintour is a regular, a select list of 800 guests included Pharrell Williams, Jared Leto, Diane Kruger and Eva Longoria.

The show began with Jean Paul Gaultier putting the finishing touches to the dress of singer Aya Nakamura,



French designer Simon Porte Jacquemus



US rapper, artist and fashion designer Pharrell Williams

while an orchestra delivered a classical take on Daft Punk's "Around the World", escorted by a squad of Parisian waiters carrying trays. The performance by Nakamura, the most popular francophone singer in the world, came at a fraught time in France with the far-right surging ahead of a snap election next week.

It felt like a strong political act given the huge controversy earlier this year when far-right figures denounced rumors that the Franco-Malian singer

may perform at the opening ceremony for next month's Olympic Games. There followed an hour-long show in which different eras of fashion were matched with Olympic sports, performed by models, dancers and athletes leaping, surging and twirling in all directions. Ten decades of fashion were represented from the past century -- marking 100 years since Paris last hosted the Games in 1924.

Cyclists from the French nation-

al team spun past while five Chanel dresses from the 1920s were presented, including three from Gabrielle Chanel's 1924 collection. At one point, supermodels Gigi Hadid and Kendall Jenner rode horses around the square -- all four wearing Hermes. Fencing and Paco Rabanne were combined for the space-age 1960s, footballers Djibril Cisse, Blaise Matuidi and Emmanuel Petit modelled for the 1990s, while Venus and Serena Williams appeared for the tennis and 2000s era. Other brands taking part included Balenciaga, Balmain, Dior, Louis Vuitton and Saint Laurent.

The show ended with three-time Olympic athletics champion Marie-Jo Perrec in a huge dress with a tricolor train, fresh from carrying the flame across the Atlantic, dancing around the column in the center of the square. Vogue World has said it will donate one million euros to charity French Popular Relief, which tackles poverty and discrimination from the proceeds. — AFP



CEO of LVMH Antoine Arnault poses with his wife Russian model Natalia Vodianova.



British writer Alexa Chung (left) poses with her partner actor Tom Sturridge.



Russian tennis player Maria Sharapova



Belgian designer Diane von Furstenberg



Swiss Co-President of Chopard Caroline Scheufele

Infamous Bangladesh hangman dies after turning writer, TikTok star

Bangladesh's deadliest executioner died Monday a year after he was released from prison where he hanged some of the country's notorious serial killers, opposition politicians convicted of war crimes and coup plotters, police said. Since he was released from prison last June, Shahjahan Bouya, 70, wrote a top-selling book narrating his experiences as a hangman, briefly married a young girl 50 years younger than him, and in recent weeks took TikTok by storm with short clips with teenage girls.

He felt chest pain on Monday morning at his home in Hemayetpur, an industrial town outside the capital Dhaka, and was rushed to Dhaka's Suhrawardy Hospital, police said. "He was brought in dead -- doctors haven't ascertained the actual cause of his death," Sajib Dey, a police station chief in Dhaka, told AFP. "He had breathing difficulties," Abul Kashem, Bouya's landlord, told AFP. "He rented one of our rooms only 15 days ago. He lived alone". Bouya had been serving a 42-year-old jail term over a murder. But the dozens of hangings he did in the jails helped reduce his sentence leading to his release from Dhaka's top jail last year. Bangladesh ranks third in the world for death sentences passed ac-

cording to rights group Amnesty International, and assigns convicts to carry out the hangings.

'So much power'

A well-read Marxist revolutionary, Bouya in the 1970s joined the outlawed Sarbahara rebels trying to topple a government they saw as puppets of neighboring India. He was convicted for the 1979 death of a truck driver in crossfire

with police. In custody during his trial -- a glacial 12-year process -- he noticed the "first class" treatment afforded to executioners, watching one being massaged by four other inmates. "A hangman has so much power," he said to himself, and volunteered his services. Prison authorities put Bouya's total at 26 executions, but he says he participated in 60.

Those to die at his hands included military officers found guilty of plotting

a 1975 coup and killing the country's founding leader, the father of current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Activists say that Bangladesh's criminal justice system is deeply flawed, but Bouya shrugged off their criticisms, even though he believes at least three of those he executed were innocent. In February, his book on his years as a hangman was published and became a best-seller at Bangladesh's largest book

annual book fair. His 96-page book narrates the procedures of hanging by ropes the country inherited from the British colonial rulers. He described the process nonchalantly, never wading into the debates over the abolition of executions. He also dwelled on the final moments of some of the country's controversial figures and serial killers. — AFP



Landlord (left) and sister of Bangladesh's hangman Shahjahan Bouya sit at a hospital bench as they wait to receive Bouya's body after he died in a hospital, in Dhaka.



Police officials address a news conference at a hospital where Bangladesh's hangman Shahjahan Bouya died, in Dhaka. — AFP photos

Sports

S Africa beat West Indies to reach T20 WCup semi-finals

South Africa join England as the semi-final qualifiers from Super Eight Group 2

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: South Africa edged the West Indies by three wickets in a rain-affected Super Eights match on Sunday to reach the T20 World Cup semi-finals and eliminate the hosts.

We get ourselves into tricky positions and then have to battle to get over the line." South Africa join England as the semi-final qualifiers from Super Eight Group 2.

Chasing a revised 123 off 17 overs, South Africa stuttered to 110-7 as Roston Chase took three wickets, but they reached their target when Marco Jansen hit the first ball of the final over for six. Man of the match Tabraiz Shamsi took 3-27 after South Africa won the toss and restricted the West Indies to 135-8 at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua.

All-rounder Chase top scored with 52, featuring in an 81-run third-wicket partnership with Kyle Mayers (35 off 34 balls) before giving the West Indies hope by taking 3-12 with his off-spin. Jansen's unbeaten 21 saw the Proteas to victory at 124-7 when he smashed the final six off Obed McCoy.

"The last time I played here I went for 50 runs and there was a lot of chatter going around," said Shamsi. "I was happy to come back and perform my role, but credit as well to the guys who bowled before me because they set it up beautifully."

Brought in for seamer Otnel Baartman, the left-

arm wrist-spinner got excellent support from fellow slow bowlers Keshav Maharaj (1-24) and captain Aiden Markram (1-28). Chase was dropped on 11 by Anrich Nortje and made the most of his luck, clearing the ropes twice and hitting three fours.

His partnership with Mayers helped rescue the hosts after they fell to 5-2 in the second over. Once Shamsi removed Mayers to a sliced catch at deep cover, a steady stream of wickets enabled South Africa to restrict the West Indies.

With the score on 117-6, Nortje made amends for his earlier error with a direct hit to run out the dangerous Andre Russell who had hit two sixes in his 15 off nine balls. "This is one batting performance we will try our best to forget," said West Indies captain Rovman Powell.

"It was a commendable bowling effort by us. We said at the halfway mark that we were going to give it our all and the guys really gave everything to defend that total." Winning captain Markram admitted to nerves during the tense chase.

"There's a lot of relief at making the semi-finals but we're not going to be brainwashed by that because we would have liked to be a lot more convincing," he said. "Maybe we tried to kill off the game too early, but that's been the story of the competition so far. — AFP



ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: West Indies' Sherfane Rutherford (C) looks on after being caught out during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2024 Super Eight cricket match between West Indies and South Africa at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda. — AFP

Shamsi hits out at 'ridiculous' T20 WCup critics

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: South Africa leg-spinner Tabraiz Shamsi lambasted his team's "ridiculous" critics after the Proteas won another T20 World Cup nail-biter to reach the semi-finals. Shamsi claimed 3-27 in Sunday's three-wicket win over two-time champions West Indies as South Africa chalked up a seventh win in seven games at the tournament.

The 34-year-old took the wickets of dangerous opener Kyle Mayers and top-scoring Roston Chase in his four overs. Four days earlier, he had conceded 50 runs on the same ground as the United States threatened a shock victory and he was dropped for the victory over England.

"In the previous game I bowled later in the innings and I went for 50 and there were certain critics coming out from the woodwork, speaking about pressure and how I can't handle pressure," said Shamsi. "I think in a quarter-final match I hope that was enough pressure for me to respond to."

Shamsi said he was dismayed by the criticism he and his team have faced in their campaign. "It's just a little bit ridiculous when it's ex-players," said Shamsi. "When they were on the field they did the same things. As cricketers we know sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't."

South Africa topped their first round group as well as their pool in the second stage Super Eights with defending champions England also going through to the last four. However, it has been a roller-coaster ride for the Proteas who are still without a world title after a succession of painful near-misses.

At this tournament, they have had to dig deep to preserve their winning momentum. They defeated the Netherlands by four wickets after being 12-4 at one stage chasing just 104 to win. A four-run win over Bangladesh followed before they avoided what would have been a seismic shock in a one-run victory over Nepal.

"Obviously most of the games have been a lot closer than we would have personally liked," added Shamsi. "But the amazing thing is that this new Proteas team always seems to get over the line. "We've been put under huge pressure basically in every single game that we've played and the boys have managed to find a way to win no matter what the situation, no matter how close the game."

"So that's really pleasing for us as a unit, and in a funny way we're looking forward to it." For co-hosts West Indies, the exit from their own World Cup was a crushing disappointment. They had swept through the first round with four wins in four games but lost to England and South Africa in the Super Eights.

"We are disappointed because we think we had the personnel within our room to actually win a home World Cup," admitted captain Rovman Powell. "Over the last 12 months or so we have played fantastic cricket. It's maybe one of the first times a West Indies team is ranked number 3 in T20 in the world and that must say something." — AFP

Scheffler downs Kim to win Travelers Championship

NEW YORK: World number one Scottie Scheffler parred the first playoff hole to beat Tom Kim at the post-rain Travelers Championship title on Sunday, claiming his sixth US PGA Tour title of the year.

Scheffler is the first player since Arnold Palmer in 1962 to pile up six wins before July 1 on the PGA Tour, a haul that included his second Masters crown in April. "It's pretty special," Scheffler said. "It's been a great season. I've

Jordan, Buttler star as England thrash US to reach T20 s-finals

BRIDGETOWN: Chris Jordan took four wickets in five balls, including the third hat-trick of the T20 World Cup, as defending champions England qualified for the semi-finals with a 10-wicket thrashing of the United States in his native Barbados on Sunday.

The 35-year-old all-rounder, born and educated on the Caribbean island, justified his recall for this match in spectacular fashion with the remarkable figures of 4-10 in 2.5 overs as the United States were dismissed for 115.

England captain Jos Buttler then led from the front in a blistering chase with an unbeaten 83, featuring five sixes in an over from Harmeet Singh, as his side raced to their target in a mere 9.4 overs.

By winning so quickly, England secured a place in the last four, regardless of the outcome of Sunday's final Group Two Super Eights match between co-hosts the West Indies and South Africa in Antigua and any associated net run-rate calculations.

Buttler faced just 38 balls, including six fours and seven sixes, but the day belonged to Jordan, whose hat-trick was the third of this tournament, with Australia's Pat Cummins achieving the feat against both Bangladesh and Afghanistan, and the first by an England bowler in any men's T20 international.

"Unbelievable feeling, more importantly to restrict USA and to do it in a special place like this is always nice," said Jordan. "Been on a hat-trick a few times, nice to get it on target this time." Buttler added: "I wanted to bring CJ back in to add a little bit of depth to the batting and we know what he is capable of with the ball. He executed it fantastically well, and a World Cup hat-trick is a great effort."

As for his own form, Buttler said: "Personally it's really important I continue this into the semi-finals. I have been feeling good all year, I feel I am



BRIDGETOWN: England's captain and wicketkeeper Jos Buttler hits a four during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2024 Super Eight cricket match between USA and England at Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados. — AFP

hitting the ball well and it is nice to get that confidence." The United States, one of the surprise packages of the event after defeating Pakistan on their way to the second round, were 115-6 when Jordan came onto bowl the 19th over.

His first ball of the over saw Corey Anderson hit a fast and low full toss to Harry Brook at long-on as the former New Zealand all-rounder fell for 29. Two balls later, paceman Jordan clean bowled Ali Khan for a duck, the off-stump knocked out of the ground.

Next ball Nosthush Kenjige was plumb lbw and Jordan then completed his hat-trick—and ended the innings—by bowling Saurabh Netravalkar between bat and pad to remove the last man's mid-

most recent prior LPGA title at last November's Tour Championship, her first triumph on US soil. Despite a large lead late, Yang faced some tense moments down the stretch.

Yang made her second three-putt bogey of the week at 16, trimming her lead to five strokes. After her group was given a time warning, Yang plunked her tee shot into the water at the par-3 17th and made double bogey, slicing her lead to three over Ko and Vu.

At the par-5 18th, Yang found the fairway but sent her second shot into left rough short of the green. She pitched her third shot onto the green and two-putted for par from just inside 12 feet for the triumph.

World number 22 Yamashita, a 22-year-old with 11 wins on the LPGA Japan Tour and closed with a birdie to shoot 73 and grab a share of second. Vu and Ko shots 71s. Americans Ally Ewing and Lauren Hartlage shared fifth on 285. Hartlage, ranked 272nd, managed her first top-five LPGA finish.

Ewing appeared to just miss out on qualifying for the Paris Olympics. She needed to climb four spots in the rankings into Monday's top 15. "If the rankings come out tomorrow and I'm an Olympian, that would be great," Ewing said. "It would be really special."

Yang shined early

Yang, who began the day with a two-stroke lead over Yamashita and Hartlage, opened with a tap-in birdie and answered a bogey at the third with a birdie at the par-3 fifth, holing out from off the green from 67 feet.

Kim, who started the day at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut, with a one-shot lead, fired a final round 66. But it was a shootout on the rain-softened course, with half a dozen players holding a piece of the lead and five sharing the top spot for much of the afternoon. Scheffler and Kim were at the top through 13 holes. Scheffler inched in front with a second straight birdie at 14, where his approach from the fairway left him three feet for birdie. Kim bombed a massive drive but his wedge to the green left him 16 feet and he settled for a par.

After Scheffler left his 14-foot birdie putt at the par-three 16th inches short, Kim missed a golden opportunity to pull level when he left his own 10-foot birdie try short. Both parred 17, where Scheffler's 16-foot birdie putt settled on the lip of the cup. After Scheffler's approach at 18 got hung up in the fringe, Kim fired at the flag, his ball

dle stump. The United States were relatively well-placed at 48-2 at the end of the six-over play.

But leg-spinner Adil Rashid then bowled two excellent googlies to dismiss Aaron Jones and Nitish Kumar, whose 30 was the highest score of the innings, in a miserly haul of 2-13. England started their reply knowing victory in 17.4 overs would see them advance to the semi-finals regardless of events elsewhere.

Buttler signalled his intentions early on with an extraordinary 104-metre six before Mumbai-born left-arm spinner Singh then felt the full force of his bat. England must now wait another 24 hours to discover the identity of their semi-final opponents. — AFP



SAMMAMISH: Amy Yang of South Korea poses with the trophy after winning the 2024 KPMG Women's PGA Championship at Sahalee Country Club in Sammamish, Washington. — AFP

Yamashita sank a six-foot birdie putt at the second to stay within two of Yang. Hartlage birdied the par-5 second from just inside 12 feet and holed out from just inside 45 feet to birdie the par-3 fifth to pull within one.

But after a horseshoe lip-out on a birdie putt from inside five feet at the par-5 sixth, Hartlage fell back with double bogeys at the seventh and eighth, ending her run of 35 holes without dropping a shot. Yang sank a seven-foot birdie putt at the eighth while Yamashita found rough and a greenside bunker on her way to a double bogey that left Yang five strokes ahead on nine-under with 10 holes to play. — AFP

bouncing within inches of the cup before leaving him a 10-foot birdie putt.

As the players were sizing up their putts the protesters, some of them wearing T-shirts reading "No golf on a dead planet" raced onto the green. They were quickly tackled by police and security staff and marched away.

"It was a lot to go with," Kim said, noting that whatever the protesters sprayed left distracting splashes of color on the greens. But, Kim added, there was an upside. "Obviously it is a disruption and you don't want it to happen, but for me it kind of slowed things down and I just took my time and I felt really confident in myself just to give myself that putt to force a playoff." Scheffler stepped up to putt first and after he settled for a par Kim rattled in his birdie putt to tie it up. "It's what I practice for and I'm glad I made it," Kim said. — AFP

Sports

Germany survive Euro 2024 scare as Hungary victory marred by injury drama

Denmark, two points behind leaders England, play Serbia in their last group game

FRANKFURT: Germany survived a scare to finish top of Group A at Euro 2024 as Niclas Fuellkrug's stoppage-time goal rescued a 1-1 draw against Switzerland on Sunday, while Hungary's Barnabas Varga suffered a sickening injury in a 1-0 win that eliminated Scotland. Dan Ndoye's first-half goal in Frankfurt had put Switzerland on course to climb above hosts Germany into top spot. But Fuellkrug's late header ensured Julian Nagelsmann's side advanced to the last 16 in pole position with seven points.

"In the end it's a well-deserved point. We did well to come back. We deserved it," Nagelsmann said. "Niclas is important for us. It's important to have players who can score decisive goals coming on as substitutes." In Stuttgart, meanwhile, Varga was described as being in a "stable" condition after a second-half collision halted play for eight minutes while the stricken striker was treated by medics. The 29-year-old was surrounded by worried teammates as red sheets were used to shield him as he lay on the pitch.

The scene immediately drew comparisons with Christian Eriksen's collapse after suffering cardiac arrest during Denmark's Euro 2020 match against Finland. Varga was stretchered off and taken to hospital where he was conscious but diagnosed with what was believed to be a fractured cheekbone.

Hungary winger Roland Sallai described the incident as a "terrible moment". The Germans, who last won the Euros in 1996, will take on the Group C runners-up - currently slated to be Denmark - in the last 16. Denmark, two points behind leaders England, play Serbia in their last group game on Tuesday. Germany are also on track for a potential quarter-final clash with Spain, who have been among the best teams at the tournament so far.

Switzerland have now made the knockout stage in six successive major tournaments. As Group A runners-up with five points, the Swiss will face the second-placed team in Group B in the last 16. "We fought,

but against such an opponent it's difficult. We did a great job. It was a huge challenge," said Switzerland coach Murat Yakin. Already through to the last 16 after beating Scotland and Hungary, Germany fell behind in the 28th minute. Ndoye met Remo Freuler's cross with a close-range volley that flashed past Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer.

Ndoye's first international goal was made in Bologna as both he and Freuler played for the Serie A club last season. Adding to Germany's problems, Jonathan Tah was booked, earning the centre-back a ban for the first knockout game. Germany dominated possession but Ilkay Gundogan scuffed wide with the goal at his mercy after Yann Sommer parried Jamal Musiala's stinging strike into the midfielder's path. Their pressure was finally rewarded in stoppage-time when Fuellkrug rose highest to power his header into the top corner.

Scotland misery

In Stuttgart, Scotland were unable to secure the victory that would likely have taken them into the knockout stage of a major tournament for the first time. In 11 previous appearances at major competitions - eight World Cups and three European Championships - Scotland had bowed out at the group stage. Once again, they will fly home early after taking just one point from their three matches. Steve Clarke's team, who lost to Germany and drew with Switzerland in their first two games, were sunk by a goal 10 minutes into stoppage-time from Kevin Csoboth.

Bemoaning a rejected penalty appeal for a challenge on Stuart Armstrong, Clarke said: "I don't understand how VAR can look at that and say it's not a penalty. The over-riding feeling is to be sad for everybody that we are out."

Hungary may not secure a last 16 berth despite their victory as they have only three points from their three games. The four third-placed teams with the best re-



STUTTART: Hungary's forward #19 Barnabas Varga (C-R) collides with Scotland's goalkeeper #01 Angus Gunn (3R) during the UEFA Euro 2024 Group A football match between Scotland and Hungary at the Stuttgart Arena in Stuttgart. - AFP

ords from the six groups will move into the last 16. The result was overshadowed by the Varga incident which occurred as he chased a long cross into the area as Scotland goalkeeper Angus Gunn came to collect the ball. Hungary captain Dominik Szoboszlai appeared to be in tears as he consoled his stricken teammate. "The condition of Barnabas Varga is stable," the Hungarian Football Federation (MLSZ) wrote on X. "Fortunately we can say now that Barnab is not under

any kind of risk," added Hungary coach Marco Rossi. "Probably he will be operated in the coming hours because he suffered a fracture here (pointing to his cheek/eye socket). If we go through the competition of course he will not be part of the team any more." In Group B on Monday, Italy take on Croatia, while Spain, already qualified in first place, face Albania. Italy are second in the group with three points, while Croatia and Albania both have one point. - AFP



BERLIN: (From L) Austria's midfielder #10 Florian Grillitsch, Austria's midfielder #06 Nicolas Seiwald, Austria's midfielder #09 Marcel Kibitzers, Austria's defender #05 Stefan Posch, Austria's midfielder #26 Marco Gruell, Austria's forward #25 Maximilian Entrop and Austria's midfielder #22 Matthias Seidl takes part in a MD-1 training session at the Amateur Stadion in Berlin on June 24, 2024, on the eve of their UEFA Euro 2024 Group D football match against Netherlands. - AFP

Austria eye knockouts

BERLIN: Austria captain Marko Arnautovic said on Monday his third European Championship has been "amazing" after disappointing previous experiences in the tournament, as his team eye a last-16 place. Arnautovic was part of the Austria squad that managed just one goal and one point at Euro 2016, before they suffered an extra-time last-16 defeat by eventual champions Italy at the COVID-delayed finals three years ago. A victory against the Netherlands in Berlin on Tuesday would secure a top-two finish in Group D, while a draw would almost certainly at least wrap up a spot in the knockout phase as one of the best third-placed sides.

"When I played my first Euros, that wasn't great. Second one was COVID so that wasn't great, but this

one has been amazing, lots of fun," said Inter Milan striker Arnautovic. "The optimal scenario would be to win tomorrow and then we'll see but most important is the game tomorrow."

Arnaoutovic only came on as a substitute in the opening 1-0 loss to France, but started and scored in the 3-1 win over Poland which put Austria on the brink of going through. He started his professional career as a teenager in the Netherlands with FC Twente and says it will be a special moment personally to face the Oranje. "It was my second home, I went there when I was very young," said the 35-year-old, who counts Dutch among the six languages he can speak. "I learned a lot from the country and from the people there so yes it's special tomorrow... "Dutch people are very nice, I lived with a host family, they treated me very well and everything in those three years was a great experience." Austria can only go through as group winners with a victory if France fail to beat already-eliminated Poland in the other final Group D game. - AFP

France wait for Mbappe to return at Euro 2024

DORTMUND: France appear almost certain to reach the last 16 at Euro 2024 but they are hoping to have Kylian Mbappe back, and rediscover their goal-scoring touch, when they face Poland in their final group game on Tuesday.

One of the leading favorites coming into the tournament, France have four points from two matches in Group D but have only scored one goal, and that was courtesy of Austrian defender Maximilian Woeber putting through his own net.

That gave France a 1-0 win against Austria in their opening match in Duesseldorf, before they drew 0-0 with the Netherlands in Leipzig on Friday in the absence of Mbappe. The new Real Madrid signing played no part against the Dutch as he recovers from the broken nose he suffered in a collision late on against Austria.

He will need to wear a protective mask over his nose when he returns to action but he trained on Sunday at the French team's base in Paderborn and his teammates are optimistic of having their captain back against the Poles.

"I think everyone knows he is really eager to play in the next match. That won't surprise anyone," said midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni. "As for the mask, I think he is starting to get used to it. Of course he would rather not wear it but I think if you ask the doctor he would say there is no choice."

"But that won't change anything for him. We know that when he is on the field he will bring a lot to the team." It was Mbappe whose cross was headed in by Woeber for France's only goal so far at the Euros and he is by a long way the biggest attacking threat available to coach Didier Deschamps.

Marcus Thuram led the line against the Dutch, but he has scored only twice in 22 appearances for his country. Antoine Griezmann has only netted twice in his last 30 caps, while Ousmane Dem-

bele's only goal for France in the last three years came against Gibraltar.

Kingsley Coman is still building up his fitness after missing the end of the season with Bayern Munich due to injury, and Randal Kolo Muani is coming off a difficult campaign in Mbappe's shadow at Paris Saint-Germain.

"It is frustrating but nothing to be alarmed about," Griezmann said after the Netherlands game in reference to his own missed chances. "The defence and midfield are doing a remarkable job, we are leaving very little to the opposition, but we must improve in attack and be more deadly."

Almost through

That defensive solidity is important and could take them a long way, even if the goals do not flow at the other end. The centre-back pairing of Dayot Upamecano and William Saliba have impressed in front of goalkeeper Mike Maignan, while N'Golo Kante has been outstanding in midfield on his return to the international stage after two years out of the picture. "It is important to underline how solid we have been defensively because I think that is vital when you are trying to win titles," insisted Tchouameni.

"Obviously we will need to score goals if we are to win matches. That will make things a little easier, but we are not having doubts about that. "The most important thing is that we are creating chances, so we just need to start putting some of them away."

France just need a draw to be certain of reaching the last 16 against a Poland team who have already been eliminated after two defeats in their first two outings. Even a defeat will not stop them going through, as long as Austria do not beat the Dutch.

However, the 2022 World Cup runners-up need to better the Netherlands' result against Austria - or at least win by a wider margin - in order to take top spot. Wherever they finish in the group may not change too much in terms of their potential last-16 opponents, but it could have an impact further down the line in terms of possible ties in the quarter-finals and beyond.

Poland's veteran striker Robert Lewandowski, now 35, will hope to start after returning from injury as a substitute against Austria. - AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381

Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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

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I, Radhe Krishna, holder of Indian Passport No. M3065406, having permanent address B-907, 1st Floor, Block - B, Gate No. 4, Green Field Colony, Sector-43, Faridabad, Haryana - 121010, India, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name Radhe and surname Krishna.
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I, Taher Ali, holder of Indian Passport No. V6089420, having permanent address Rajasthan, India, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name Taher and surname Raj.
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USA, Uruguay make winning starts to Copa campaigns

Justiniano, Villamil, Haquin shown yellow cards in an indisciplined start



ARLINGTON: USA's midfielder #08 Weston McKennie fights for the ball with Bolivia's midfielder #20 Fernando Saucedo and Bolivia's defender #02 Jesus Sagredo during the Conmebol 2024 Copa America tournament group C football match between the USA and Bolivia at AT&T Stadium in Arlington. — AFP

ARLINGTON: Christian Pulisic scored one goal and set up another as the United States launched their Copa America campaign with a clinical 2-0 victory over Bolivia on Sunday.

Also in Group C, Darwin Nunez was on target as 15-time Copa winners Uruguay beat Panama 3-1 at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami, offering a reminder of their status among the favorites. US captain Pulisic curled in a superb early goal before teeing up a second for striker Folarin Balogun just before half-time at the AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

"We came out flying with a lot of intensity," Pulisic said. "Obviously an early goal helped us a lot, but all around a pretty dominant performance." US coach Gregg Berhalter had warned his team against complacency against a Bolivia side who had won only one game in nine previous editions of the Copa America since 1999.

Pulisic was clearly in no mood to let the South Americans improve that record, firing the hosts into the lead after only three minutes. Receiving the ball from a corner on the left, Pulisic darted towards the edge of the area and whipped a rasping shot goalwards.

Bolivia goalkeeper Guillermo Viscarra got a hand to it but could not stop the ball flying into the roof of the net. Despite that early breakthrough the US struggled to convert their dominance into chances and were frustrated by a combative Bolivian team

who had three players booked in the first 31 minutes.

Leonel Justiniano, Gabriel Villamil and Luis Haquin were all shown yellow cards in an indisciplined start by Bolivia. The US doubled their lead in the 44th minute and once again Pulisic was heavily involved. Picking up the ball near halfway, the AC Milan forward accelerated towards the penalty area and squared to Balogun, who took a touch to drag defender Jesus Sagredo wide before drilling a low shot into the bottom corner.

The superior movement of the US forward line continued to cause problems after the restart. Balogun just failed to get a toe on a low shot by Tim Weah in the 50th minute and had the ball in the net moments later but was adjudged marginally offside. Pulisic then drew a fine save from Viscarra in the 60th minute after weaving into the penalty area and unleashing a ferocious shot.

Substitute Ricardo Pepi should have made it 3-0 in the 65th minute, moments after coming on for Gio Reyna, but saw his shot from an Antonee Robinson cross roll wide. Pepi was then denied a goal in the 90th minute after a desperate double save by Viscarra.

Relentless Uruguay

Marcelo Bielsa's Uruguay began in trademark fashion, swarming opponents Panama and pressing relentlessly. Maximiliano Araujo put Uruguay ahead

in the 16th minute with a beautifully executed left-foot shot into the top corner. Panama keeper Orlando Mosquera had to be at his best to deal with the wave of attacks, parrying a Nunez blast and then producing an outstanding save to keep out a header from Giorgian de Arrascaeta.

Mosquera's reflexes served him well again in the 29th minute when he denied Nunez from close range, the Liverpool striker having connected on a low cross from Federico Valverde. It was a very different story after the break, though, with Uruguay looking a little tired and Panama enjoying some sustained pressure.

But Bielsa's side gave themselves breathing space when Nunez doubled their lead in the 85th minute, showing his superb technique to volley home a half-clearance from inside the box. Matias Vina's perfectly timed header from a Nicolas de la Cruz free-kick put an end to the contest, although Panama received some reward in the final minutes with Michael Amir Murillo finishing off a swift break.

"In the first half we were better. In the second half they controlled the game for the first 15 or 20 minutes," Nunez said. "We suffered a bit, but with the second goal we improved again and ended up playing well," said the striker.

"We missed a lot of chances, a lot of plays that ended badly. But you learn from mistakes and we never gave up," he added. — AFP

Manuel caps US Olympic swimming trials with 50m win



INDIANAPOLIS: Simone Manuel of the United States and Gretchen Walsh of the United States react during the medal ceremony for the Women's 50m freestyle final on Day Nine of the 2024 US Olympic Team Swimming Trials at Lucas Oil Stadium. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Simone Manuel will go for gold in the 50m freestyle at a third straight Olympics in Paris after snatching victory at the US swimming trials on Sunday by two-hundredths of a second.

Manuel, who won 100m freestyle gold and 50m free silver at the Rio Olympics but struggled through a disappointing Tokyo campaign as she battled the effects of over-training syndrome, clocked 24.13sec to edge Gretchen Walsh, the top seed going into the final who had opened her trials with a world record in the 100m butterfly.

As she checked the scoreboard, Manuel shook her head and smiled, the crowd at Lucas Oil Stadium - home of the NFL's Indianapolis Colts - erupting in cheers. "Yes and no," she said when asked if she surprised herself. "I put in a lot of work to get to this point."

"I wasn't feeling too confident after last night," added the 27-year-old, who posted just the fourth-fastest time in Saturday's semi-finals.

"I spent a lot of time watching races where I won. I really wanted to channel that Simone, because I know I'm a winner and that's what I did tonight."

Manuel's 100m free victory in Rio made her the first African-American woman to win an individual Olympic swimming medal. But she struggled through the trials for the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games, where she finished out of the medals in the 50m free.

Now, she said, she's focused on getting faster, and having some fun with her US teammates. "The last experience was tough for me, but I still had amazing teammates that got me through it and so I'm just looking for a really fun experience with Team USA this summer," she said. — AFP

Lyles wins 100m at US trials to qualify for Paris Olympics

EUGENE: World 100 meters champion Noah Lyles claimed a measure of redemption by winning the 100m at the US athletics trials on Sunday, booking his ticket to the Paris Olympics. Three years after failing to reach the Tokyo Olympics in the 100m over a trials fiasco, Lyles won in a personal best 9.83 seconds at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon.

"Three years ago I got second to last. This year I came and won it," Lyles said. "Part of the plan. Nothing changed. Might be a shock to everybody else but when you know the goal, you know the goal." Kenny Bednarek, the 200m Olympic runner-up at Tokyo, ran a personal best of 9.87 to finish second with Fred Kerley, the 2022 world 100m champion, third in 9.88. "On to the next one at the Olympic Games," Kerley said. "We're ready to go put on a show."

Christian Coleman, the 2019 world 100m champion, missed out on a chance at 100m gold, finishing fourth in 9.93 in a race with a wind at 0.4m/sec. Lyles settled for 200m bronze at Tokyo after being the favorite for gold but last year captured world titles in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay and is fancied for gold once more in France.

"If I didn't get that third place in Tokyo, I wouldn't have had that desire, I wouldn't have had that fire burning. I wouldn't have accomplished what I have accom-



EUGENE: Noah Lyles celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the Men's 100m final on Day Three 2024 US Olympic Team Trials Track & Field at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon. — AFP

plished in the past," Lyles said. "And now we constantly look to the future with open eyes because anything can happen." Lyles, 26, led all semi-final qualifiers from Saturday preliminary heats in 9.92 then won his semi-final heat in a wind-aided (3.0m/sec) 9.80 to lead all eight qualifiers for the final. Bednarek reached Paris after a near miss in the Tokyo trials.

"I just stayed calm and collected and executed my race. That's all I needed to do," Bednarek said. "I got edged out in the Tokyo Olympic trials but I'm finally getting the hang of the 100 and the sky is the limit for me."

Athing Mu, the Tokyo Olympic women's 800m

champion who returned to competition in heats after a nine-month hiatus, was the fastest qualifier for Monday's final, winning her semi-final heat in 1:58.84. "I felt way more in control this race," Mu said. "It was helpful this one was at a faster pace so I know what it's going to be like in the final."

Sam Kendrick won the men's pole vault by clearing a meet record 5.92m, breaking his old mark by .01, with Tokyo Olympic runner-up Chris Nilsen sharing second with Jacob Wooten on 5.87. Quincy Hall, third in last year's worlds, won his men's 400m semi-final heat in 44.42 to lead all finalists. — AFP