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Arabs reaffirm Zionist boycott

Zionists pound Gaza as thousands flee after evacuation order



GAZA: Displaced Palestinians from areas in east Khan Yunis flee after the Zionist army issued a new evacuation order for parts of the city and Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on July 2, 2024. — AFP

CAIRO/GAZA: The Arab League on Tuesday affirmed the significant role of the Arab boycott of the Zionist entity as an effective and legitimate means to resist the occupation. Saeed Abu Ali, assistant secretary general for Palestine and the occupied territories, stressed the necessity to activate regional boycott bureaus and boost the coordination among the offices in this dangerous phase, amid bids to eradicate the Palestinian cause.

Abu Ali was speaking at the inauguration of the 96th session of the officers of the regional offices for boycotting the Zionist entity in Arab states. Arab summits and ministerial councils have maintained the call upon Arab states, establishments, companies and individuals to stop all forms of dealing with Zionist settlements, established on occupied Palestinian lands, he said, alluding in particular to a ban on imports of products of these settlements or investing in them.

War crimes against the Palestinians in Gaza warrant firm and decisive international intervention to halt the continuing annihilation and genocide, Abu Ali said. The session kicked off Tuesday at the Arab League headquarters, chaired by Abu Ali, with Kuwait's participation. The league said in a statement that the conference discussed several topics related to the Arab economic boycott of the Zionist occu-

pation, in implementation of the league's resolutions, taken at the foreign ministers meeting and the Arab summit held in Bahrain in May.

The May Arab Summit affirmed taking all necessary measures to ensure the boycott of all companies and business establishments that operate in the illegal Zionist settlements in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories and holding them responsible for the consequences of their illegal acts.

The conference agenda includes many topics related to the Arab boycott, including enforcing the ban, including companies on the boycott list, warning or removing other companies from the ban list for their response to the boycott provisions, and focusing on continuing to activate the regional boycott offices in Arab countries.

Attendees also discussed a special item regarding the international boycott movement against the Zionist occupation (BDS) by monitoring its activities and achievements, which express the solidarity of the peoples of the world with the Palestinians. The statement stressed the importance of the role of the boycott in exposing companies and institutions that support the colonial and apartheid regime and cooperate with it.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Gulf space industry worth \$10bn

MANAMA: The space industry across the Gulf Cooperation Council states is worth more than \$10 billion in revenue, the bloc's chief Jassem Al-Budaiwi said on Tuesday, citing the sector as an integral part of national development plans. He was speaking at an international space forum in Manama, the first such gathering in the region. — KUNA (See Page 2)

Meta lifts ban on 'shaheed'

SAN FRANCISCO: Meta has ended its ban on the use of the term "shaheed", the Arabic word for "martyr", on Facebook and Instagram. "[Shaheed] has multiple meanings, many of which are not intended to glorify or convey approval of violence," a statement from the oversight board which recommended the policy change said. The oversight board had previously called on the company to end its blanket ban on "shaheed" after a year-long review found Meta's approach was "overbroad" and had unnecessarily suppressed the speech of millions of users.

Iran exporting oil to 17 countries

DUBAI: Iran is selling crude oil to 17 countries, Oil Minister Javad Owji was quoted as saying by the semi-official Mehr News Agency on Tuesday, indicating some states may not be honoring US sanctions. "We sell our oil wherever we want to. In fact, we export to 17 countries, including (countries in) Europe," Owji said in a video shared by Mehr when asked about foreign reports about European countries importing Iranian crude oil. — Reuters

Halving food waste can feed 153m

PARIS: Halving food waste could cut climate-warming emissions and end undernourishment for 153 million people globally, the OECD and the UN's food agency said in a joint report Tuesday. Around a third of food produced for human consumption gets lost or wasted globally, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization — resulting in useless emissions and less available food for those who need it. — AFP

Stampede at India religious event kills 116

LUCKNOW: At least 116 people were crushed to death at an overcrowded Hindu religious gathering in northern India on Tuesday, government officials said, the worst such tragedy in more than a decade. A large crowd had gathered for a sermon by a popular preacher near the northern Indian city of Hathras, but as they were leaving, a fierce dust storm sparked panic.

Many were crushed or trampled, falling on top of each other, with some collapsing into a roadside drain in the chaos. "The attendees were exiting

the venue when a dust storm blinded their vision, leading to a melee and the subsequent tragic incident," said Chaitra V, divisional commissioner of

Aligarh city in Uttar Pradesh state, told AFP. "We... are focusing on providing relief and medical aid for the victims," she added.

Senior police officer Shalabh Mathur said that it appeared "more people had come than permission was asked for". Several hours after the crush, Chaitra said that "the death toll stands at 116", with at least 18 others injured. Most of the dead were women, according to state chief medical officer Umesh Kumar Tripathi. Deadly incidents are common at places of worship during major religious festivals in India, the biggest of which prompt millions of devotees to make pilgrimages to holy sites.

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HATHRAS, India: Policemen carry a person who died in a melee during a sermon in Uttar Pradesh state on July 2, 2024. — AFP

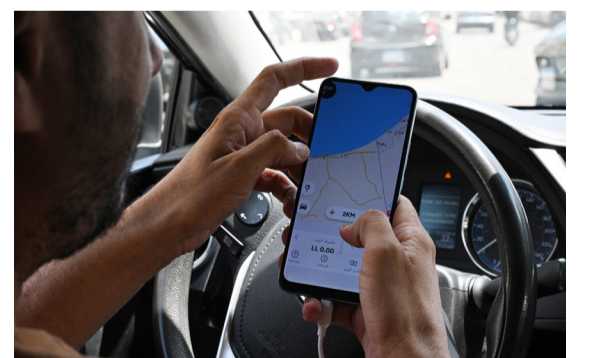
Zionist jamming disrupts Lebanon ground, air traffic

BEIRUT: Uber driver Hussein Khalil was battling traffic in Beirut when he found himself in the Gaza Strip — according to his online map, anyway — as location jamming blamed on the Zionist entity disrupts life in Lebanon. "We've been dealing with this problem a lot for around five months," said Khalil, 36. "Sometimes we can't work at all," the disgruntled driver told AFP on Beirut's chaotic, car-choked streets. "Of course, we are losing money."

For months, whacky location data on apps have caused confusion in Lebanon, where the Hezbollah group has been engaged in cross-border clashes with the Zionist entity. In March, Beirut lodged a complaint with the United Nations about "attacks by (the Zionist entity) on Lebanese sovereignty in the form of jamming the airspace around" the Beirut airport.

Khalil showed AFP screenshots of apps displaying his locations not only in the Gazan city of Rafah — around 300 km away — but also in east Lebanon near the Syrian border, when he was actually in Beirut. With online maps loopy, Khalil said "one passenger phoned me and asked, 'Are you in Baalbek?'" referring to a city in east Lebanon. "I told her: 'No, I'll be at your location (in Beirut) in two minutes'."

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BEIRUT: Lebanese Uber driver Hussein Khalil shows his GPS jammed geolocation at Gaza's southern city of Rafah, as he sits in his vehicle in Beirut's Hamra Street on June 11, 2024. — AFP

Jill Biden: A first lady in the trenches

WASHINGTON: Ever present by the US president's side after his calamitous debate — and foursquare behind him as he vowed to fight on in his reelection bid — First Lady Jill Biden has been fighting her husband's battles from the front lines. "I think she is as influential as pundits are claiming and

her opinion likely matters more to him than anyone else's," said Tammy Vigil, a professor of communications at Boston University. "Without her support, it would be impossible for him to continue in the race."

The 73-year-old community college professor was making headlines of her own on Monday, as Vogue unveiled the cover of its August issue — with the first lady looking seraphic in a long white tuxedo gown by Ralph Lauren. The picture and the article date from April, long before President Joe Biden struggled to make himself understood

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WESTHAMPTON BEACH, New York: US President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden step off Air Force One upon arrival at Francis S Gabreski Airport on June 29, 2024. — AFP



Strategic partnership between Zain and NUKS USA continues

Company supports all NUKS programs in Kuwait and USA throughout the year



Hamad Al Musaiibeh and Khalid Al Doukhi announce the partnership.



Al Musaiibeh and Al Doukhi with Zain and NUKS USA officials.

KUWAIT: Zain's strategic partnership with the National Union of Kuwaiti Students in the United States (NUKS USA) continues, as the company supports all NUKS programs and initiatives to be held across Kuwait and the United States throughout the year. With this announcement, Zain strengthens its position as the top supporter of the biggest gathering of Kuwaiti students abroad for over 21 years.

The announcement was made during

a visit made by the NUKS USA team to Zain's headquarters in Shuwaikh. In attendance were Zain Kuwait Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al Musaiibeh, Head of NUKS USA Khalid Al Doukhi, along with other Zain and NUKS USA officials. During the visit, both teams explored collaboration opportunities and discussed preparations for the current academic year. The NUKS team also outlined their upcoming plans for special programs and

activities to be held in Kuwait and the United States, serving freshmen, enrolled students, and graduates.

Under this partnership, Zain supports all community programs and initiatives organized by NUKS USA, including the annual conference in the US that brings together Kuwaiti students from across the states for days of engaging activities. Zain will also support the annual orientation session, NUKS Talks discussion panels, activities from the local NUKS

USA office to guide freshmen, academic sessions, cultural seminars, sports competitions, entertainment programs, workshops, and more. These programs receive a wide positive reaction and participation from students every year.

The company takes pride in its ongoing strategic partnership with NUKS USA, through which it strives to provide young, enthusiastic Kuwaitis with a rich social experience and listens to their ideas and experiences while they pursue

their education abroad. Zain is proud to have been part of the NUKS USA family for over two decades. NUKS USA serves thousands of Kuwaiti students in the United States. The union aims, through its events and programs, to connect Kuwaiti students with each other and with their nation and local community. The union was recognized by the United States government, a proud milestone for Kuwait's youth and a testament to the strong relations between Kuwait and the US.

CMA issues its strategic plan

KUWAIT: The Capital Markets Authority of Kuwait (CMA) issued the annual strategic plan performance report (2023-2024), which provides a comprehensive summary of the status of the strategic plan performance for the period ending with the first year of implementation of the Authority's third strategy. The Authority said in a press release on Tuesday that the report provides a presentation of the status of the plan's performance and the progress of achieving the strategic objectives until March 31, 2024. The completion rate of the plan reached 32.7 percent during the years with the completion of the implementation of 26 sub-initiatives out of 118 sub-initiatives listed to date.

The CMA indicated that the overall deviation rate of implementation reached 4 percent, and this percentage is among the acceptable ratios between the actual and planned completion rates. It stressed its endeavor through its initiatives in the field of digital transformation and the adoption of digital technology to raise the efficiency of operational work and integration with auxiliary entities to provide high-quality services and focus on strengthening corporate governance, developing work procedures, and improving operational efficiency.

The Authority pointed to its strategic plan, which is in line with the vision of New Kuwait 2035. These include a sustainable, diversified economy, effective government management, and creative human capital, in addition to the pillar of distinguished international standing. The CMA pointed out that it seeks, through the implementation of capital market development initiatives, to enhance the image of Kuwait and put it on the international investment map.

The authority was established in accordance with Law No. 7 of 2010 regarding the establishment of the Capital Markets Authority and Regulating Securities Activities and is responsible for regulating and monitoring securities activities, achieving the principles of transparency, justice, and efficiency, obliging listed companies to implement the principles of corporate governance, and protecting investors from unfair practices that violate the CMA's law. The aforementioned law also calls for supervision of mergers, acquisitions, and disclosures and aims to provide awareness programs on securities activities. — KUNA

OIC appreciates Kuwait's efforts

JEDDAH: The head of the Independent Human Rights Commission (IPIHC) for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi, said on Monday that his chairmanship of the commission "comes in appreciation" of the OIC member states' role in boosting human rights. Al-Mutairi was speaking to KUNA after partaking in a senior-level meeting of the commission on "the verdict of the International Court of Justice on Gaza" during a regular session held at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah.

Ambassador Al-Mutairi said he was honored to head "this senior-level event" that constituted an opportunity "to ponder deeply the next steps regarding the legal status of the Palestinian cause." The event, he continued, mirrored a sincere desire to pursue support for the Palestinian people, indicating that views expressed by international experts and other participants would be taken into consideration in preparing the reports "regarding the Palestinian case." — KUNA

Understanding the menopause phase

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: One of the most challenging phases in women's lives is when they reach menopause. Although this phase is a natural transition, it plays a major role in shifting women's hormones, emotions and physical changes, and it is often encountered with misconceptions and uncertainties. To gain better understanding about women's menopause phase, Kuwait Times spoke to Dr. Mona Youssef Abdullah, Consultant in Internal Medicine and Oncology, University of Toronto, Canada.

What happens during menopause?

Dr. Mona explained that menopause is a natural stage in a woman's life characterized by a decrease in the level of the female hormone (estrogen). It typically occurs around the age of fifty, but this age can vary. With the cessation of menstruation, women experience physical changes, emotional fluctuations, and hormonal disturbances.

What are the common symptoms?

"Symptoms of menopause vary in severity and type from one woman to another, but commonly include hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, weight gain, headaches, vaginal dryness, joint and

muscle pains, dry eyes, and sleep problems. In the early years of menopause, night sweats and hot flashes are among the most common symptoms experienced by women," Dr. Mona explained.

How can women deal with symptoms?

According to Dr. Mona, there are many ways to manage and alleviate these symptoms, including Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), which is considered a hormonal treatment to supplement low estrogen levels in women. Other methods include using natural herbs and supplements proven effective in reducing symptoms, such as black cohosh or soybeans. However, it is important for women, especially those with conditions like a history of estrogen-dependent breast cancer, to consult their specialist before starting any treatment, as these options may not be suitable for everyone. "It's worth noting that some methods to alleviate symptoms do not require prescription medication. Women may turn to antihistamines or cold medications containing soothing ingredients like diphenhydramine to reduce hot flashes. Non-medication methods such as taking warm baths before bedtime can also be used as external heating sources or heating pads," she added.



Dr. Mona Youssef Abdullah



Is it true that menopause leaves an impact on women's emotions and body parts?

"Indeed, women may experience psychological changes or mood swings during this period, and they may be more prone to depression than at other times. These symptoms may be due to the critical period and the associated sleep disturbances caused by hormonal changes, or they may occur for other reasons unrelated to hormonal changes. Mood swings can impact her general psychological state, manifesting as increased anxiety, discomfort, or fear of this critical period due to lack of preparation and acceptance. Therefore, women need emotional support and acceptance from family and friends during this phase. Engaging in regular exercise, maintaining a healthy diet, and accepting this stage of life are also beneficial, as over time, the severity of these symptoms tends to diminish significantly," Dr. Mona advised.



KU offers guidelines, launches exhibition for students

KUWAIT: Kuwait University (KU) launched on Tuesday an exhibition "Here Your Future Begins" at the Avenues Mall in cooperation with the Civil Service Commission to introduce students wishing

to join the institution. The exhibition will continue until July 6th. The acting dean of admission, Dr. Fadhel Aziz, told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the admission exhibition targets high school graduates. The program is organized by the admissions department in cooperation with the Civil Service Commission.

The mechanism for submitting applications for admission will be explained to high school graduates wishing to transfer from foreign universities and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. The presence of civil service employees

is to answer inquiries related to the need of the labor market for some specialties and the financial advantages related to those specialties. The university has introduced the Bachelor of Nursing Program. Interested students can find out the requirements by visiting the exhibition. — KUNA



Dr. Fadhel Aziz

GCC space industry worth over \$10 bn

MANAMA: The space industry across Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states is worth more than \$10 billion in revenue, the bloc's chief, Jassem Al-Budaiwi, said on Tuesday, citing the sector as an integral part of national development plans. The space industry's increasing significance and me-

theoric growth have paved the way for innovative techniques and creative platforms within the sector, the Riyadh-based bloc's chief told an international space forum in the Bahraini capital, Manama, the first such gathering seen in the region.

Space exploration initiatives have grown in importance in recent times, where total investments in the industry have skyrocketed to some \$272 billion over the course of the past decade, while Gulf Arab states have successfully forayed into space through the establishment of relevant bodies and institutions, he underlined.

On the said initiatives, he cited the United Arab Emirates' first mission to Mars as among the most notable, in addition to similar endeavors seen in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in collaboration with their international partners, the GCC chief added. He went on to mention Gulf Arab astronauts who managed to shoot to fame through successful space missions, chief among them the UAE's Sultan Al-Neyadi, whose spacewalk garnered much fanfare, saying such accomplishments give the region's nationals something to be proud of. — KUNA

Local

Kuwait reiterates support for Palestinians, lauds ICJ

Envoy calls for immediate delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza

JEDDAH: Kuwait reiterated its unwavering and ongoing support for the Palestinians' cause until their rights are fully realized. This stand was expressed by Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Sheikha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah during her speech at the 23rd session of the Independent Human Rights Commission (IPIHC) for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Sheikha Jawaher Al-Sabah affirmed the commitment of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the people of Kuwait in leading the support for Palestinian rights. The statement emphasized that Kuwait strongly praised the International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision, which called for an immediate ceasefire and the ending of military operations by the occupying forces.

Kuwait also urged compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2720 and the immediate delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. Al-Sabah confirmed that the State of Kuwait, through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), had provided around \$200 million by April to finance vital projects in the Gaza Strip. Additionally, she mentioned Kuwait's continued support for the efforts of international organizations amid the tragic conditions in the Gaza Strip, particularly through supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) with \$30 million to carry out its humanitarian role.

Al-Sabah highlighted the significant participation from Kuwaiti institutions and companies, as well as the notable involvement of 60 embassies accredited to Kuwait. Furthermore, she explained the popular campaigns that were arranged to support people in Palestine, including the launch of a national campaign under the hashtag #FazaafPalestine. She also emphasized the importance of issuing arrest warrants against the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

She stressed that holding all perpetrators accountable is essential to stopping the repeated vi-



Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Sheikha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah

olence and the violations of the rights of the Palestinian people. Ambassador Sheikha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Human Rights Affairs, headed the Kuwaiti delegation at the session.

The delegation also included Turki Al-Daihani, Counselor at the Kuwaiti Permanent Mission to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as Maha Al-Kulaib and Jana Al-Dhafiri, Diplomatic Attaches from the Human Rights Affairs Department at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The session's agenda features both open and closed discussion sessions covering a range of topics, with the final report scheduled for issuance next Thursday.

New evacuation order

The UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees estimated Tuesday that a quarter of a million people had been impacted since Zionist army issued a new evacuation order for parts of southern Gaza a day earlier. "We've seen people moving, families moving, people starting to pack up their belongings and try to leave this area," UNRWA spokeswoman Louise Wateridge told reporters in Geneva via video-link from Gaza.

rise or fall, which provides the opportunity for quick reservations in the event of a low-priced ticket."

"In order to guarantee the lowest prices, people must be flexible in dates, as ticket prices during the weekdays are considered much cheaper than traveling on the weekend or during peak periods and holidays," he continued. Yassin revealed that some airlines offer travelers their transit tickets to extend their trip to the transit destination, noting that people can travel to two countries with one ticket.

For his part, Abdullah Baraa, a traveler, said that he uses credit card points to cut costs, saying, "Points allow me to buy travel tickets or book hotels, which can save me a lot of money. In addition, travelers can also enjoy some lounges for free in some airports, depending on the type of credit card."

Baraa indicated that while traveling, he always makes sure he travels in groups or to get to know other travelers so as to share the costs. "I go on a lot of road trips. Sharing the costs of transportation, food, and accommodations with other travelers makes it easier to explore more cities or travel to neighboring countries," he explained. Regarding eating during travel, he said, "If there is a long layover, it is better to eat and stay outside rather than eat and wait at the airport. You can also benefit from airline loyalty programs. One of the airlines gave me



GAZA: Destroyed buildings are pictured in an area near the border with the Gaza Strip on July 2, 2024 amid the ongoing conflict in the Palestinian territory. — AFP

The agency "estimates that around 250,000 people have been impacted by these orders", she said, adding: "We expect these numbers to grow". Her comments came after the army Monday issued a new evacuation order for parts of Khan Yunis and Rafah in southern Gaza. The 250,000 number was UNRWA's estimate for the people in the area of new evacuation orders in eastern Khan Yunis, Wateridge said. "We expect that almost all of these people will move from this area," she said, adding that the agency hoped to get a better idea later Tuesday of the numbers who have physically left.

Monday's evacuation order followed mass displacement from large parts of Rafah that began

with a similar order nearly two months ago, which signaled the start of a long-feared ground offensive. The fighting since then has again uprooted many Palestinians and led to the closure of a key aid crossing. "This is another devastating blow to the humanitarian response here," Wateridge said.

"It's another devastating blow for the people and the families on the ground. It seems that they are forcibly being displaced again, and again." She pointed out that following the start of the Rafah incursion in May, people had flooded back into the largely destroyed Khan Yunis area. "And now already, because of the orders last night, the same families are having to move again," she said. "There is absolutely no safe place in the Gaza Strip." — Agencies

Travelers and experts explore best options

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Summer is the peak time for travel, and with the increase in travel demand, costs often soar, making it essential for travelers to find ways to reduce expenses. The Kuwait Times spoke with travel experts to learn more about the best ways to travel on a budget that can offer the best solution to explore more areas. In order to guarantee the best ticket prices, you must book months before the trip date.

According to Muhammad Yassin, an employee at a tourism company, ticket prices that were booked six months ago are usually 10 percent lower compared to tickets booked days before the trip date. He added, "People usually make the mistake of deciding to travel late, and this causes them to pay more. With the development of technology, it is possible to know and compare ticket prices by using some websites. Turning the notification on can help track price changes, as alerts can be received when prices

Government keen on developing the cooperative society

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs, Family Affairs, and Childhood, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, said on Monday that the political leadership is keen on developing the cooperative sector. In a statement to KUNA marking International Cooperative Day, Minister Al-Huwailah affirmed her keenness to ensure effective participation of cooperative societies in the national economy through overhauling the labor legislative and supervisory work environment, the financial and administrative systems, as well as the marketing policies.

"The Kuwaiti cooperative movement is a product of the Kuwaiti community and a natural outcome of the cooperative spirit enjoyed by the ancestors, which has been developing until this present time," the minister said. Currently, there are 77 cooperative societ-



two coupons to eat for free inside the airport."

For exploring the country, Baraa revealed that he uses many applications to cut costs, saying, "I use free tours, where you can explore the place with locals for free. I also use Google Maps a lot since it shows the time and cost of all kinds of transportation, which makes you arrange everything according to your budget." As for accommodation, he chooses hostels, saying that they are the best option for solo travelers, but if the person is traveling with her or his family, they can search and compare between the apps or search for a house swap for free accommodation.

ies, proclaimed according to the cooperative societies law - including 70 consumer societies, two agricultural (Al-Wafra and Al-Abdali), the livestock one, the society for the Kuwaiti civil servants society for saving, the Al-Sadu handicraft association, in addition to the consumer cooperative societies union and the federation of the societies for production and livestock - with the total number of shareholders amounting to 498,109.

Shedding light on some historic phases of the movement, Al-Huwailah said the year 1974 witnessed the first steps for establishing the consumer cooperative movement at some quarters; thus, the cooperative society for personnel of the department of Social Affairs and the association for the "Al-Maaref" department were set up. She alluded to the watershed step when Law 20/1962 was enacted.

Also in the same year, the first consumer society was established in Kaifan district. The society federation, she continued, was established in 1971, creating the framework for coordination among the cooperative bodies. In 1979, Law 24 was issued, and later, in 2013, it was amended. The minister has affirmed that her department's care for these societies has proven instrumental to their prosperity. — KUNA

Chief of staff, commanders discuss visions, strategies



KUWAIT: The Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Pilot Bandar Al-Mazin, discussed on Tuesday with the military Defense Council and a number of army commanders the latest developments related to military aspects, visions, and future strategies of the Kuwaiti army. The Chief of Staff said in a press release that the meeting began with discussing the latest developments, the most important issues related to military aspects, and many other topics of interest. The decorated team emphasized the implementation of various tasks and duties, seeking to overcome various obstacles that may hinder the implementation of military plans, programs, strategies, and ways to develop them. — KUNA



Acting Chief of Kuwait Fire Force Lieutenant General Khaled Fahad meets with the Head of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Regional Office for Arab States Nora Achkar. — KUNA

KFF, UNDRR prepare for 6th Disaster Risk Reduction Forum

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) discussed preparations to host the sixth Arab Regional Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction, which will be held in Kuwait in October. The Acting Chief of Kuwait Fire Force, Lieutenant General Khaled Fahad, met with the Head of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Regional Office for Arab States, Nora Achkar, to discuss the forum's preparations.

This came in a press statement by the Fire Force on Monday during the reception of Lieutenant General Khaled Fahad to the UNDRR Regional Office for Arab States' delegation in preparation for hosting the forum, which would be headed by the First Deputy Minister, Minister of Defense, and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah. He stated that the forum would discuss the progress made in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 as well as adopt a strategy for disaster risk reduction to be implemented during the next three years, which will be developed in the name of Kuwait and implemented by all Arab countries. — KUNA

In my view

Tobacco industries and the conflict of interest



Dr. Khalid A Al-Saleh

local@kuwaittimes.com

The tobacco industry plays a dangerous role in disrupting real development, particularly in less developed countries, as tobacco and its derivatives are the true enemies of human health. The more money the tobacco industry makes, the more money countries spend in order to treat their citizens for tobacco-related diseases. This phenomenon affects third-world countries more.

The owners of tobacco companies and their subsidiaries are mostly from developed nations. They spend huge amounts of money in order to develop the industry. They promote it and make huge profits from it. Although these companies place health warnings like "Tobacco kills and destroys life," they also increase their promotion and advertisements at the expense of human health. The larger problem is that decision-makers in developed countries are the ones who support the tobacco industry. They only care about their economies without caring about people's health.

Studies have revealed that more than seven million people die every year due to direct use of tobacco, and around 1.3 million non-smokers die due to passive smoking. Most of these dead people were of productive age, mostly in developing countries. So, there is a hidden war between tobacco industries and policymakers. We do not find it strange why there is lack of development in most developing countries, as smoking has become one of the means the developed world is using to keep the third world countries sick and underdeveloped.

There will be a conference in Kuwait at the end of the month of October about 'the tobacco industry and the conflict of interest'. This conference, which will be under the patronage of health ministries, may unveil the secret ways and strategies the tobacco companies are using to deceive people and promote their industries. Any developing country that wants to improve its economy and develop its services must (first) declare war on smoking. Without this war, all developmental plans will fail. Development is linked to good health. Without good health, there will not be effective personnel to drive the development.

EU special envoy visits Kuwait to mark 5th 'versary

KUWAIT: EU Special Representative for the Gulf Region Luigi Di Maio will arrive in Kuwait on Wednesday, July 3, on a two-day official visit coinciding with the 5th anniversary of the opening of the EU Delegation in Kuwait. During his visit, Di Maio will give a keynote speech at an event organized by the EU Delegation in Kuwait to mark this important anniversary, which reflects the strong partnership between the EU and Kuwait.



Luigi Di Maio

During the visit, Di Maio will meet the Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and other senior Kuwaiti officials. Di Maio said: "This is my third visit to Kuwait since I took office as EU Special Representative one year ago and I am honored to participate in the celebration of the fifth anniversary of the opening of the EU Delegation. I look forward to productive and insightful discussions with my Kuwaiti counterparts on regional issues and concrete ways to further strengthen the relationship between the EU and Kuwait, and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to engage with the young Kuwaiti diplomats at the Sheikh Saud Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute."

Anne Koistinen, EU Ambassador to Kuwait said: "We are delighted to have the EU Special Representative for the Gulf region Luigi Di Maio in Kuwait, as we mark the fifth anniversary of the opening of the EU Delegation in Kuwait. The EU Delegation was opened in 14 July 2019 by the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and the then EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini. Since then, our relationship with Kuwait has gone from strength to strength, and we are looking forward to continue working closely with the Kuwaiti Government and society to further enhance the strong EU-Kuwait relations."

Use strong passwords, never share them with anyone: NBK

Be updated with latest phishing trends, take precautions

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always seeks to promote financial awareness and inclusion among all sectors of society. In this context, the bank continues to intensify its engagement in the "Let's Be Aware" campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in collaboration with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA). With the increasing fraud attempts using various schemes, NBK strives to protect customers' rights and following all CBK instructions in this regard. It also publishes educational material to familiarize customers with their rights and the mechanism of filing complaints on all its social media platforms and other digital channels, as well as awareness tips and precautions to avoid falling victim to fraud attempts.

NBK calls on customers to follow the latest publications and awareness messages provided by the bank through its various channels, to stay informed about the latest scams and how to avoid them, as scammers always use devious and changing schemes to steal customer information. Among the key tips provided, the bank advised customers to use strong passwords to protect different per-

sonal accounts online, create different passwords and not to use the same password for all accounts, highlighting that each account should have a unique password as when computer or smartphone is hacked, using the same password may expose all online accounts to hacking as well.

NBK also urged customers to use long passwords that contain at least 8 characters with a mix of letters, numbers, and symbols, as the longer the password, the more difficult it is to hack. It also warned against using personal information in passwords, such as birth date, family names, and simple number sequences, to ensure protecting the security of your important information. It is worth mentioning that NBK makes consistent efforts to educate customers, considering this as a crucial part of its strategy. To this end, it always uses all communication channels to advise them to keep their passwords/PINs, OTPs and financial/personal account information strictly confidential, and not to share them with anyone impersonating a bank employee.

NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives to increase financial and



banking awareness among different sectors of society. As a leading financial institution in Kuwait, it frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as various training courses in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime. As a leading financial institution in Kuwait and across the region, NBK firmly observes its responsibilities towards the communities it serves. Accordingly, it always takes the initiative to provide all necessary support to important and strategic campaigns which serve the interests of the national economy and society, like the "Let's Be Aware" campaign.



Participants pose for a group photo. — KUNA

GCC strengthens cooperation in cybersecurity

DOHA: Kuwait participated in the GCC's third meeting of the Executive Committee for Cybersecurity, hosted by Qatar, with the participation of undersecretaries of ministries and deputies of

bodies and centers concerned with cybersecurity in the region. Kuwait was represented at the meeting by Vice President of the National Center for Cybersecurity for Governance and Risk Management, Taiba Al-Qabandi.

The National Center for Cybersecurity said in a press release that the meeting aims to strengthen cooperation, exchange ideas and expertise in the fields of cybersecurity to protect the system in the GCC countries and the common interests of the member states. The meeting also discussed the Gulf security strategy, the first Gulf hackathon,

the executive plan of the work of the Ministerial Committee for cybersecurity, and the Gulf cyber exercise program to be held in the Qatari capital Doha next November.

The importance of these meetings is to take all necessary measures to strengthen partnerships and international cooperation in the fields of cybersecurity, benefit from international experiences, provide full support and encourage talents in research and innovation, and develop them in an effort to advance in various fields of cybersecurity in the Arab Gulf countries. — KUNA



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KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters of Kuwait (NCCAL) launches Summer Cultural Festival. — KUNA photos

Summer Cultural Festival preserves Kuwait's heritage

KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters of Kuwait (NCCAL) launched the Summer Cultural Festival in its 16th session on Monday by holding a ceremony titled "Night of Al-Huraibi," in which a bouquet of songs by the late able artist Saleh Al-Huraibi was presented. The secretary-general of the Council, Dr Mohammed Al-Jassar, said in a speech on behalf of the Minister of Information and Culture and the chairman of the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, that the festival, which lasts about two months, includes a lot of activities.

Al-Jassar added that the expansion of the activities and the participation of external parties in the preparation of these events reflect the role of the state. He pointed out that the strategic plan of the council is characterized by openness, listening to the opinions of employees in various sectors, and communicating with stakeholders. He noted the increasing demand for following up with the activities of the festival year-after-year from all categories and ages, expressing hopes that these activities will achieve the desired



Mohammed Al-Jassar



Ahmed Al-Huraibi

goal by instilling a spirit of loyalty and enhancing the role of culture, thus preserving our values and national identity.

In a statement to the Kuwaiti news agency (KUNA), Al-Jassar said that the reason for holding the festival this year for two months is to provide an opportunity for the large number of citizens and residents to relax during the summer period, especially for the children and the youths. The festival offers more than 10 workshops in drawing, reading, wood painting, foreign languages, and literary studies, in addition to performances by popular bands, in order to revive and preserve Kuwait's heritage. During the opening ceremony, Ahmed Al-Huraibi's son presented his late father's songs, as the orchestra, led by Maestro Dr Mohammed Al-Baijan.



Indian women campaigning to criminalize marital rape

Myanmar conscription exiles struggle in Thailand

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OISTINS, Barbados: People visit a pier during a high tide after the passage of Hurricane Beryl in Oistins near Bridgetown, Barbados on July 1, 2024. — AFP

Hurricane Beryl pummels Caribbean

Category 5 storm hurtling towards Jamaica

BRIDGETOWN, Barbados: Hurricane Beryl was Tuesday hurtling towards Jamaica as it strengthened into a record top-level Category 5 storm after sweeping across several islands in the southeastern Caribbean.

Dumping heavy rain and unleashing devastating winds, Beryl was described as a "potentially catastrophic" storm by the US National Hurricane Center (NHC). One person was killed in the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the country's government said, while officials elsewhere reported widespread destruction.

Beryl is the earliest Category 5 storm in the Atlantic on record, according to the NHC and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The hurricane had maximum sustained winds of 165 miles (265 kilometers) per hour as it headed towards Jamaica and the Cayman

Islands, the NHC said in its latest update from 0900 GMT. "The center of Beryl will move quickly across the southeastern and central Caribbean Sea today and is forecast to pass near Jamaica on Wednesday and the Cayman Islands on Thursday," said the NHC.

NHC forecasts Beryl will start "weakening" later Tuesday, but warned it "is still expected to be near major hurricane intensity". Grenada's Carriacou Island took a direct hit from the storm's "extremely dangerous eyewall" early Monday, with sustained winds at upwards of 150 mph, the NHC said.

Nearby islands, including Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, also experienced "catastrophic winds and life-threatening storm surge," it said. Beryl "has left in its wake immense destruction, pain and suffering," Vincentian

Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves said late Monday. "Sadly there has been reported... that one person died. There may well be more fatalities, we are not yet sure," said Gonsalves in a video published on Facebook.

He said that "90 percent of the houses have been severely damaged or destroyed" on one of the islands, where the airport's roof was also ripped off. Further south in Grenada, Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell said "in half an hour, Carriacou (island) was flattened." "We are not yet out of the woods," Mitchell told a press conference, noting that while no deaths had been reported so far, he could not say for sure that none had occurred. Video obtained by AFP from Grenada's capital St George showed heavy downpours with trees buffeted by gusts.

Beryl became the first hurricane of the 2024 Atlantic

season on Saturday and quickly gathered strength. Experts say that such a powerful storm forming this early in the Atlantic hurricane season—which runs from early June to late November—is extremely rare.

It is the first hurricane since NHC records began to reach the Category 4 level in June, and the earliest to reach Category 5 in July. The WMO said that Beryl "sets an alarming precedent for what is expected to be a very active hurricane season".

"Hurricane Beryl poses a major threat to communities in the Caribbean after intensifying at an explosive rate," WMO said in a situation report. Barbados appeared to have been spared the worst of the storm but was still hit with high winds and pelting rain, although officials reported no injuries so far. —AFP

China's Xi arrives in Kazakhstan for state visit, summit

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Kazakhstan on Tuesday for a state visit, during which he will attend a meeting of Shanghai alliance nations in the Kazakh capital Astana. The nine-member Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which encompasses a vast stretch of the globe from Moscow to Beijing, includes around half the world's population.

Its permanent members are this year's host Kazakhstan, India, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and, as of last year, Iran. This

year, Belarus is expected to join after being told at 2023's SCO summit, hosted virtually by India, that it would become a member.

"Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived here Tuesday for the 24th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and a state visit to Kazakhstan," state news agency Xinhua reported from Astana. China's state broadcaster CCTV said Xi's plane was escorted by two Kazakh fighter jets when it entered the country's airspace.

Xinhua reported that Xi's entourage included Cai Qi, a top-ranking member of the Chinese Communist Party, and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning on Monday said Beijing believed the SCO summit would "help build more consensus among all parties and make contributions to promoting security, stability and development of member countries", and advance "lasting peace and common prosperity in the world". — AFP



NAVI MUMBAI, India: Billionaire tycoon Mukesh Ambani (front third left) along with his family attends a mass wedding ceremony at Reliance Corporate Park in Navi Mumbai on July 2, 2024. — AFP

Ambanis celebrate son's nuptials with mass wedding

NAVI MUMBAI: Asia's richest man, billionaire Indian tycoon Mukesh Ambani, launched Tuesday the start of the lavish finale of his son's wedding celebrations with mass nuptials for 52 "underprivileged" couples. Pre-wedding parties for his son have already included multi-day galas, a European cruise for 1,200 guests, a specially-built Hindu temple, and entertainment provided by performers ranging from R&B star Rihanna to the Backstreet Boys. Ambani, 67, is chairman of Reliance Industries—India's biggest company by market capitalization—and took part with his family in Tuesday's Hindu ceremony with some 800 guests. "Starting with this function, the family pledged to continue supporting hundreds more such weddings across the country," his company said in a statement.

Ambani's younger son Anant and fiancée Radhika

Merchant, both 29, are set to marry in a three-day Hindu ceremony in India's financial capital Mumbai from July 12. The billionaire father is no stranger to throwing a costly wedding. Ambani held the most expensive wedding in India to date for his daughter in 2018, which reportedly cost \$100 million and saw US singer Beyonce perform.

India is the fastest-growing major economy, but despite massive advances the world's most populous country has a jobs crisis to match. National per capita income is just \$1,174, according to government data. Many couples face intense social pressure to throw a costly wedding, sometimes pushing them into crippling debt.

India was ranked 111 of 125 countries in the Global Hunger Index report last year, a peer-reviewed measure calculated by European aid agencies. Ambani, for his son, has already thrown two extraordinary parties ahead of the main celebrations later this month. That included a three-day gala in February for 1,500-plus guests in Gujarat state.

At that party, Rihanna performed her first concert since last year's Superbowl to guests including Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, and ex-US president Donald Trump's daughter Ivanka. — AFP

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International

Indian women campaigning to criminalize marital rape

AIDWA rights group challenges 'colonial-era legal loophole'

NEW DELHI: Raped by her husband on her wedding night aged 17, Divya described her repeated suffering—an all-too-common account in India, permitted by a terrifying colonial-era legal loophole.

What followed her arranged wedding in 2022 was 19 months of sexual and physical abuse. "If I was hurt, it was invisible to him," said Divya, whose name has been changed to protect her identity.

Six percent of married women aged 18-49 report spousal sexual violence, according to the government's latest National Family Health Survey. In the world's most populous country that implies more than 10 million women have been sexual victims of their husbands. Nearly 18 percent of married women feel they cannot say no if their husbands want sex, according to the health survey.

And 11 percent of women thought a husband was justified in beating his wife if she refused, it found.

'Victorian mentality'

Under India's inherited British-era penal code, an exception clause stated that "sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape". India introduced a new penal code on Monday but the exception clause remains—although it does raise the minimum age that a man can rape his wife to 18.

Lawyer Karuna Nundy is challenging that. Nundy, who has a case for the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) rights group at the Supreme Court, condemned the clause as "colonialism from a Victorian mentality". She holds a "fervent hope" for change, mentioning some of the more than 50 nations who have outlawed it. Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud called it an "important issue" this year.

But the decade-long case has made painfully slow progress. In May 2022, a two-judge bench in the Delhi High Court issued a split verdict. One judge, C Hari Shankar, said that while "one may disapprove" of a



NEW DELHI: In this photograph taken on May 27, 2024, lawyer Karuna Nundy speaks during an interview at her residence in New Delhi. — AFP

husband forcibly having sex with his wife, that "cannot be equated with the act of ravishing by a stranger".

The other judge, Rajiv Shakdher, disagreed. Shakdher said it "would be tragic if a married woman's call for justice is not heard even after 162 years", referring to the British-era statute.

Monika Tiwary from Shakti Shalini, a rights group which supports sexual violence survivors, said marriage should not shield a crime. "How can marriage change the definition of rape?" she said. "Getting married does not take away the rights over your body."

"Most of the survivors do not really have this understanding that it is not okay, and it is marital rape," Tiwary added. "The moment we label it and attach

a law to it, people start recognizing it, awareness increases", Tiwary added. Divya's marriage was arranged, like many in India.

But her family did not pay the usual hefty cash dowry to the husband—something he used against her. "He would taunt me by saying 'It's not like your parents gave any dowry, I can at least do this,'" Divya said. "At times he would put a knife on my throat and dare me to say no. (He would say) 'You are my wife, I have full rights on you!'"

Swati Sharma, a 24-year-old mother of two, said she married a man for love. The first time her husband assaulted her was after their first daughter was born. "I used to think: 'Okay, we are married, so we can do this,'" she said.

Dutch PM sworn in with mission to curb asylum

THE HAGUE: Dutch King Willem-Alexander swore in former spy chief Dick Schoof as new prime minister Tuesday, at the head of a right-wing coalition cabinet with a mission to implement the country's "strictest-ever" immigration policy. Two hundred and twenty-three days after far-right leader Geert Wilders swept to an election victory that stunned Europe and the world, Schoof took over from Mark Rutte after 14 years in power.

Schoof presented his ministers to Willem-Alexander in the ornate "Oranjestaal" in the royal palace, who each stepped forward to swear allegiance to the king and the constitution.

"I am very much looking forward to getting to work as prime minister," Schoof wrote on X, formerly Twitter, under a picture of him signing decrees alongside the king. "For a safe and just Netherlands with social security for everyone. A grip on migration, dialogue, making choices and being clear about it. You can count on me," he added. Wilders was forced to shelve his own ambitions to be prime minister to keep rocky coalition talks on track—some negotiation partners considered his anti-Muslim and eurosceptic statements too extreme to lead the nation.

Instead, the four coalition partners agreed their

party leaders would not be in government, compromising on Schoof, 67, who was previously running the Dutch Secret Service.

Keen marathon runner Schoof will need all his stamina and experience in the halls of power in The Hague to keep the shaky coalition partners on track. Schoof "will have a lot of work keeping ideological and personal conflicts under control", Sarah de Lange, professor of political pluralism at the University of Amsterdam, told AFP.

He has vowed to implement "decisively" the coalition plans for the "strictest-ever admission policy for asylum and the most comprehensive package for getting a grip on migration".

The 26-page coalition agreement, titled "Hope, courage and pride", also called to examine the idea of moving the Dutch embassy in Zionist entity from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Schoof has said he aims to be "a prime minister for all Dutch citizens", adding: "I am without a party."

I don't see myself kowtowing to Mr Wilders". De Lange said Wilders will have plenty of work keeping his own PVV (Freedom Party) in check and Schoof would be given space.

"Given his extensive experience leading government agencies, he will surely know how to defend his position," she said. "It is still an open question though, how he will respond if Wilders tries to put him under pressure by voicing public criticism of his functioning on X", formerly Twitter.

A new Ipsos I&O poll published Tuesday showed confidence in the government had increased to 42 per-



THE HAGUE: Dutch king Willem-Alexander (left) shakes hands with prospective Prime Minister Dick Schoof at Huis ten Bosch Palace on July 1, 2024. — AFP

cent from a low of 29 percent in September 2022.

Schoof has played a key role in crisis situations, leading the Dutch probe into the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in July 2014 over war-torn Ukraine.

All 298 people on board were killed -- 196 of them Dutch—by a Russian-made BUK (medium-range) missile fired from territory held by pro-Russian fighters. A former Labour Party member, Schoof has won the backing of left-wing opposition leader Frans Timmermans, who nevertheless described him as "emphatically Wilders' candidate".

The Dutch lurch to the right comes as far-right parties in several European countries have seen their popularity rise. — AFP

Arabs reaffirm Zionist boycott...

Continued from Page 1

Zionist forces bombed several areas of the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday and thousands of Palestinians fled their homes. Eight Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded, health officials said. The Zionist military said that two soldiers had been killed in battle a day earlier. Later on Tuesday, 17 Palestinians were killed in Zionist tank shelling of a street in the densely populated Zeitoun neighborhood in Gaza City in the north of the Strip, medics said. Footage on some Palestinian social media showed the scene at a local market, with bread scattered on a floor stained with blood.

The Zionist army ordered residents of several towns and villages in eastern Khan Younis to evacuate their homes on Monday, prior to tanks re-entering the area the military had left several weeks ago. Thousands who had not heeded the call were forced to flee their homes in the dark overnight, as Zionist tanks and planes bombed Karara, Abassan and other areas that had been named in the evacuation orders, residents and Hamas media said.

"Where will we go?" said Tamer, a 55-year-old businessman, who has been displaced six times since

Oct 7. "Every time people go back to their homes and begin to rebuild some of their lives even on the rubble of their houses, the occupation sends the tanks back to destroy what is left," he told Reuters via a chat app. The Zionist offensive has killed at least 37,925 people, mostly women and children, according to data from the health ministry in Gaza.

The Zionist military said its forces had struck areas in Khan Younis from where around 20 rockets had been fired on Monday. Islamic Jihad, an allied group of Hamas, said it was responsible for firing the rockets. Within the areas subject to evacuation orders was the European Gaza Hospital, which serves both Khan Younis and Rafah, and medical officials had to evacuate patients and families who had taken shelter in the facility, witnesses and medics said. Some residents headed west towards the Mawasi area via the beach, which is designated as a humanitarian area but is overcrowded by displaced families.

An AFP photographer saw Palestinians leave eastern Khan Younis on foot, in cars and on horse or donkey carts, carrying their belongings with them. Some displaced people with nowhere to go were sleeping on the streets, witnesses said. Ahmad Najjar, a resident of the town of Bani Suhaila, said the Zionist evacuation order had caused "a large displacement of residents" and spurred "fear and extreme anxiety". — Agencies

on the site was high above Lebanon and parts of Syria, Jordan and the Zionist entity.

An AFP journalist in Jerusalem said her location appeared as if she was in Cairo, Egypt's capital about 400 km away. The interference has at times extended to European Union member Cyprus, some 200 km from Lebanon, where AFP journalists have reported their GPS location appearing at Beirut airport instead of on the island. ("The Zionist entity) is using GPS jamming to disrupt or interfere with Hezbollah's communications," said Freddy Khoueir, global security analyst for the Middle East and North Africa at risk intelligence company RANE.

It is "also using GPS spoofing... to send false GPS signals, aimed at disrupting and hindering drones' and precision-guided missiles' abilities to function or hit their targets," he added. The Iran-backed Hezbollah has "a large arsenal" of such GPS-assisted weapons, he noted. The cross-border exchanges have killed more than 490 people in Lebanon, according to an AFP tally, with 26 people killed in the Zionist entity, according to authorities there. Fears have grown of an all-out conflict between the foes that last went to war in 2006. — AFP

Stampede at India religious...

Continued from Page 1

Lines of ambulances rushed the injured to hospitals. Wailing women and crying men gathered outside one mortuary in the town of Etah, where many of the dead were taken, seeking news of their relatives. "When the sermon finished, everyone started running out," Shakuntala, a woman who gave only one name, told the Press Trust of India news agency. "People fell in a drain by the road. They started falling one on top of the other and got crushed to death."

Video clips showed bodies piled into the back of trucks and laid out in vehicles. Purses and bags covered in dust, were heaped up at the venue, with people sitting on their haunches sifting through them to identify their belongings. Mobile phones were similarly piled together, waiting to be claimed by their owners.

A video on social media showed a large crowd packed into a tented area, standing and listening to devotional tunes as they waved their hands in the direction of the religious leader who sat on a stage. It also showed some women hanging onto the bamboo poles holding up the canopy to get a better view above the heads of the large crowd. "There must have been about

50,000 people... at the gate on the highway, some people were going left and some people were going right, the stampede was caused in that confusion," Suresh Chandra, a witness who was at the gathering, told local media. Seema, a woman who traveled from a town almost 60 km away to attend the event, said she was leaving the venue when the stampede occurred. She was accompanied by three relatives, two of whom were killed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced compensation of \$2,400 to the next of kin of those who died and \$600 to those injured in the "tragic incident". "My condolences are with those who have lost their loved ones... I wish for the speedy recovery of all the injured," Modi wrote on social media platform X. President Droupadi Murmu said the deaths were "heart-rending" and offered her "deepest condolences". Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh chief minister who is also a Hindu monk, expressed his condolences to the relatives of those killed and ordered an investigation into the deaths, his office said.

Religious gatherings in India have a grim track record of deadly incidents caused by poor crowd management and safety lapses. At least 112 people were killed in 2016 after a huge explosion caused by a banned fireworks display at a temple marking the Hindu new year. The blast ripped through concrete buildings and ignited a fire at a temple complex in Kerala state, where thousands had gathered. — Agencies

Zionist jamming disrupts Lebanon...

Continued from Page 1

Numerous residents have reported their online map location as appearing at Beirut airport while they were actually elsewhere in the capital. Since Hamas' October 7 attack, the Zionist entity has taken measures to disrupt Global Positioning System (GPS) functionality for the group and other opponents. The Zionist army said in October that it disrupted GPS "in a proactive manner for various operational needs". It warned of "various and temporary effects on location-based applications".

Specialist site gpsjam.org, which compiles geolocation signal disruption data based on aircraft data reports, reported a low level of disruption around Gaza on Oct 7. But the next day, disturbances increased around the Palestinian territory and also along the border between the Zionist entity and Lebanon. On June 28, the level of interference showing

Jill Biden: A first lady in...

Continued from Page 1

during a halting, unfocused performance at a CNN debate against Republican rival Donald Trump.

But in a note introducing the article, the magazine's editors revealed they'd had a telephone conversation with the first lady shortly after the debate, as calls mounted for her 81-year-old husband to withdraw his candidacy. She told Vogue the Biden family "will not let those 90 minutes define the four years he's been president". The woman who has shared her last 47 years with the Democratic leader also told a weekend meeting of donors: "Joe isn't just the right person for the job, he's the only person for the job."

On Thursday, after the debate, Jill Biden was shown taking her husband's arm to help him down a few steps in the CNN studio. The following day, she was there again in a dress that read "vote", as

a much more energetic Joe Biden headlined a rally in North Carolina. Before they married in 1977, Joe Biden had been turned into a widower by a horrific car crash five years earlier that had claimed the lives of his first wife and their infant daughter. His two boys, Beau and Hunter, survived.

The family was revisited by tragedy years later as Beau, a cherished son at the start of what looked like a promising political career of his own, died of cancer. Adding to the family's difficulties, Hunter struggled for years with a crack addiction. The first lady is now the center of gravity of the troubled but burgeoning clan, bolstered with the birth of Jill and Joe's daughter Ashley a few years after their wedding — and eventually the arrival of their grandchildren.

Without her support, the Democrat would not have embarked on his quest for a second term. When she arrived at the White House, she continued to teach English at a college near Washington, unheard of for a president's wife. Meanwhile, she assumed the traditional role of first lady — in charge of Christmas decorations and gala dinner menus, as well as promoting pet causes — in her case, literacy. — AFP

International

India parliament removes parts of Gandhi's speech targeting Modi

'Truth cannot be expunged'

NEW DELHI: Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi's first speech in the new parliament ran into controversy with parts of it, including accusations against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party, redacted on Tuesday for violating the rules of the legislature. The decision by the speaker of the lower house came a day after Gandhi made his maiden speech as the leader of the opposition in the chambers, his first official position after two decades as a lawmaker representing the main opposition Congress party.

Among the sections removed from the speech, which was telecast live by TV channels, were Gandhi's attacks on Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and what he said were their links to religious hate and violence.

Gandhi also made multiple references to industrialists Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani and linked them to Modi and his government, which were removed by speaker Om Birla, parliament records showed. Following the speech, federal ministers Ashwini Vaishnaw and Kiren Rijiju told reporters that they met Birla to point out "inaccuracies" in Gandhi's speech and were assured their complaint would be examined.

Under Indian parliamentary rules, the speaker can expunge or redact words used by lawmakers in the chambers that are deemed defamatory, indecent, unparliamentary, or undignified, following which they cease to exist in parliament's records and can no longer be reported by the media.

Responding to the speaker's decision, Gandhi said "truth cannot be expunged". He wrote to Birla requesting the redacted remarks be restored, saying they were not violations and conveyed the "ground reality" and "factual position". "Taking off from records my considered remarks goes against the very tenets of parliamentary democracy," he said.

The scion of a dynasty that gave India three prime ministers, Gandhi is the first leader of the opposition in a decade in the lower house, where no opposition party was able to secure the numbers to claim the position in the last two terms. He led an opposition alliance of two dozen parties that denied Modi an outright majority in the April to June multi-phase general election, forcing him to depend on regional parties for the first time and form a coalition government to return as prime minister for a rare third straight term. — Reuters



NEW DELHI: Indian National Congress party leader and India's Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi (center) arrives at the Parliament in New Delhi on June 26, 2024. — AFP

Midwife on frontline of climate change on Pakistan's islands

BABA ISLAND, Pakistan: On a densely populated island off Pakistan's megacity of Karachi, a group of pregnant women wait in a punishing heatwave for the only midwife to arrive from the mainland. Each week Neha Mankani comes by boat ambulance to Baba, an old fishing settlement and reportedly one of the world's most crowded islands with around 6,500 people crammed into 0.15 square kilometers (0.06 miles).

Climate change is swelling the surrounding seas and baking the land with rising temperatures. Until Mankani's ambulance launched last year, expectant mothers were marooned at the mercy of the elements. At the gate of her island clinic waits 26-year-old Zainab Bibi, pregnant again after a second-trimester miscarriage last summer.

"It was a very hot day, I was not feeling well," she recalled. It took her husband hours of haggling with boat owners before one agreed to ferry them to the mainland - but it was too late.

"By the time I delivered my baby in the hospital, she was already dead," she said.

Heatwaves are becoming hotter, longer and more frequent in Pakistan, one of the countries most vulnerable to extreme weather conditions resulting from climate change. In May and June, a string of heatwaves have seen temperatures top 52 degrees Celsius (126 degrees Fahrenheit) for days.

"Climate change doesn't affect everyone equally," 38-year-old Mankani told AFP during the 20-minute boat journey. "Pregnant women and newborns,

postpartum women are definitely more affected," she said. "In the summer months, we see a real increase in low-birth weights, preterm births, and in pregnancy losses."

Women are at higher risk of stillbirth when exposed to temperatures above 90 percent of the normal range for their location, according to experts published in the British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology last year. "Before we didn't have the evidence, a lot of it was anecdotal," said Mankani. "But we've been seeing the impact of climate change for a while."

In Pakistan, 154 women die for every 100,000 live births - a high maternal mortality rate shaped by socioeconomic status, barriers to healthcare access and limited decision-making powers, especially among young women, according to the United Nations. Mankani began her 16-year career as a midwife in a Karachi hospital, where she worked at a high-risk ward, often treating women from the five islands dotted off the coast. She founded the Mama Baby Fund in 2015 and set up the first clinics on the islands for expectant and new mothers. "Everyone opened their homes to us," she said.

The free 24/7 boat ambulance followed last year, crucially equipped to navigate rough seas in a region increasingly prone to flooding.

Sabira Rashid, 26, gave birth to a girl she named Eesha two months ago, following one stillbirth and a miscarriage at seven months - painful losses she blames on not reaching the hospital in time. "At the dock, they make us wait because they don't want to ferry only two or three people. They told us to wait for more passengers, no matter what the emergency," she said. Girls on the impoverished islands are often wed as young as 16, with marriage considered the source of security for women in an area where polluted water is killing off the fishing trade. "Most of these girls don't



KARACHI: In this photograph taken on June 6, 2024 Neha Mankani (left), a midwife examines an infant at a clinic in Baba Island along the Karachi Harbor, in Karachi. — AFP

know how to take care of themselves, they get severe infections from the dirty water they are constantly exposed to," said Shahida Sumaar, an assistant at the clinic, wiping the sweat from her face.

The 45-year-old said basic advice is offered to young mothers during heatwaves, such as using dry, clean towels to wrap their newborns in, washing their breasts before feeding and staying hydrated.

But with no access to running water and little electricity, warding off heat stress is a challenge for all the islanders. Women are at particular risk, typically responsible for cooking over open flames in small rooms with no fans or proper ventilation.

Ayesha Mansoor, 30, has four children and lives on the fringes of Baba, with just four to five hours of electricity a day. The path to her home is covered by a carpet of discarded plastic bags which disappear underwater when the tide is high. "Only those who have solar can deal better with the heat. We can't afford it," she said, swatting away flies that settled on her baby. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Wife of Pakistan's Khan gets bail

KARACHI: A special court in Pakistan's city of Rawalpindi granted interim bail on Tuesday to the wife of former Prime Minister Imran Khan in a graft case, media outlet ARY News said. Khan, in jail since last August, was convicted in some cases ahead of February's general election, but a UN human rights working group said on Monday his arbitrary imprisonment violated international law. "The special accountability court granted bail," ARY News said in a message on X, referring to the interim bail. Both Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, deny wrongdoing in the case against them regarding the alleged receipt of financial help from a land developer in setting up an educational institution, Al Qadir University. — Reuters

Cambodian court jails activists

PHNOM PENH: A Cambodian court handed jail terms of up to eight years to 10 activists of environmental group Mother Nature, on charges of plotting against the government and insulting the king, the group's founder and a lawyer said on Tuesday. The verdict comes amid growing concerns about freedom of expression in Cambodia under Prime Minister Hun Manet, who took power last year after the decades-long rule of his father, Hun Sen. Five defendants who belonged to the group, which had called the case politically motivated, were arrested outside the court in Phnom Penh immediately after the verdict, as supporters dressed in white held placards reading, "Justice is Dead". — Reuters

Kazakh activist dies after being shot

KYIV: Kazakh activist Aydos Sadykov died in Kyiv on Tuesday nearly two weeks after being shot outside his home in Ukraine, where he had been granted asylum, his wife said. Natalia Sadykova blamed Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev for the death of her husband - an outspoken critic of the Central Asian country's leadership. "Aidos Sadykov passed away today at 3:00 Kyiv time," Sadykova wrote on social media. "My beloved husband, father of our three children, great son of the Kazakh people. Aydos dedicated his life to Kazakhstan and suffered martyrdom at the hands of killers," she added. — AFP

19 dead in Mexico drug gang clash

MEXICO CITY: At least 19 people were killed, four of them Guatemalans, in a turf battle between two drug gangs in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, authorities said Monday. A cargo truck was found with 16 men shot dead inside, while three others were found dead outside the vehicle, the ministry of public safety said in a statement, after initially giving a death toll of 20. The events occurred Friday in the municipality of La Concordia, near the border with Guatemala, where violence has been on the rise in recent years. — AFP

Maduro talks with US to resume

CARACAS: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said Monday that talks would soon resume with the United States, which has reimposed crippling sanctions on the South American country's oil industry, as he looks towards this month's election. Maduro claimed that Washington had initiated the proposal and that Caracas had agreed to it after two months of careful consideration. "Next Wednesday, negotiations with the United States will resume," Maduro said on state television. Last year, the United States and Venezuela launched secret negotiations in Qatar. — AFP

Child laborers at India's liquor unit worked 11 hours a day

NEW DELHI: An Indian state government's inspection of a Som Group distillery said child laborers, some aged between 13 and 17, were made to fill and pack liquor bottles and worked long hours. Police are investigating the use of child labor at the distillery in Madhya Pradesh state after the federal government's National Commission for Protection of Child Rights said last month it had found 58 children working illegally at the factory.

The commission released photos of some with hands showing chemical burns and said some children were transported in school buses for factory work. A day after the children were found on June 15, an inspection report was drafted by the state's industrial health and safety department based on in-

terviews with 27 workers, the youngest among them being 13 years old. The state says those aged under 21 cannot work in a liquor factory. The report, which is not public but was seen by Reuters, says children were working 11-hour shifts starting at 8 a.m.

Som and the Madhya Pradesh government did not respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

In a submission to the state government on June 18, also seen by Reuters, Som said some children would visit the company to deliver food and medicines to their parents, and no worker was younger than 21. Som is one of the smaller distilleries in India's thriving alcohol industry, where both foreign and domestic players operate. Its website describes it as an "internationally acclaimed brand" available in more than 20 markets including the United States, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The incident has drawn attention to child labor in Indian supply chains. In 2021, Reuters reported an external audit of two Carlsberg warehouses found underage laborers at a location in the eastern state

"We are fighting each other."

Shortly after enacting the law, the junta tightened requirements for people crossing Myanmar's land borders, and temporarily halted issuing foreign work permits for young men. Yangon-based film critic Ngwe Yan Thun, a pseudonym, said he had "no choice" but to leave illegally. Through friends he contacted a "broker" who said he could be smuggled over the border into Thailand for around \$220.

Ngwe Yan Thun sold off all of his belongings, arranged for friends to look after his dog and bought an air ticket to Tachileik on the Thai border. At the airport, he had to pay "tea money" to officials at the airport who were suspicious of why he was travelling to the remote provincial town.

He was dropped at a safehouse near the border where around 30 others were waiting to be taken into Thailand. Then, at short notice, he was crammed into a car with eleven others and they set off.

"I didn't feel like a human being, I felt like I was black market goods," Ngwe Yan Thun said from Thailand's Chiang Mai. Thailand has long been home to a sizeable Myanmar community, with a bustling market in Bangkok and towns along the border. The conflict has made it difficult to conduct surveys or verify how many young people had fled abroad to escape conscription, said an official from the International Labour Organization. But, the organization said it had received estimates from ground sources that suggested "hundreds of thousands" had fled the law.

Wai Yan said he was surprised at how many people from Myanmar were in Thailand. "I even joke with my friends 'Am I still in Myanmar?'" After arriving in Bangkok, Khaing was unable to reach her parents as fighting around her home village cut Internet and mobile networks. "I was worried about getting caught by the Thai police. So, I didn't dare to go outside when I arrived," she told AFP.

of Jharkhand. Carlsberg at the time said it had terminated the services of the third-party provider.

In the Som inspection report, the state government said the children working there were not given training on how they could protect themselves from harmful chemicals. "Since it is hazardous work, there should have been a health centre at the factory," the report said. The Madhya Pradesh government temporarily suspended the Som distillery's manufacturing licenses, but the company has challenged the decision, saying there has been no conclusive finding of wrongdoing.

After Som's challenge, a local court put the state's decision on hold and said it would next hear the case later this month. In a statement to the stock exchange last month, Som Distilleries and Breweries Ltd SDB, NS said the Madhya Pradesh plant was run by its "associate private limited company" and used labor supplied by contractors who may not have carried out proper age checks. The listed company's shares have fallen by 8 percent since the children were found at the factory. — Reuters



BANGKOK: This photo taken on June 4, 2024 shows "Khaing," a former teacher with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), sitting in a restaurant where she works after fleeing from Myanmar to Thailand to avoid conscription by Myanmar's military junta, in Bangkok. — AFP

"I cried every day in my first month here." She found part-time work at a friend's shop and returns in the evenings to her sparse room where she sells medicine and beauty products on TikTok. A large teddy bear gifted to her by a friend who knew she was feeling lonely takes up much of the bed. The first batch of conscripts finished their training and would soon be sent to their posts, state media reported last week, as fighting rages in the west and north of the country. Ngwe Yan Thun is grateful he is far away, but is kept up at night wondering what to do next.

"I think about what I should do if I don't get a job and official documents to stay," he said. "I can't go back to Myanmar. I feel overwhelmed by thoughts and worries all the time." — AFP

WEDNESDAY, JULY 3, 2024

Rise in sinkholes spreads fear in Turkey's parched breadbasket

Increasing droughts has led to overuse of wells for irrigation



KARAPINAR, Turkey: This aerial photograph shows a 800-year-old Seljuk caravanserai in front of Kizoren Sinkhole in Karapinar in the central Anatolian province of Konya. — AFP photos



KONYA, Turkey: Arif Delikan, an associate professor of Konya Technical University, inspects a large sinkhole in Karapinar in the central Anatolian province of Konya.

Talaat Moustafa Group to invest \$21bn in tourism project

CAIRO: Egypt's Talaat Moustafa Group (TMG) is to invest \$21 billion in the SouthMED tourism development that includes luxury villas and a marina on Egypt's Mediterranean coast, its chief executive said on Tuesday. The SouthMED development, which spans 23 million square meters of land on the Mediterranean coast west of Alexandria, is expected to generate sales of about \$35 billion, CEO Hisham Talaat Moustafa said.

Initial bookings for purchases at the development reached about 60 billion Egyptian pounds (\$1.25 billion) in 12 hours of pre-launch sales, TMG said in a disclosure to the Egyptian stock exchange.

SouthMED is a "fully integrated development" that includes shops, restaurants, golf courses and other facilities and services as well as villas, according to the TMG website. SouthMED has been heavily advertised in Egypt in recent weeks, including with a commercial featuring Sylvester Stallone as a wealthy foreigner being persuaded to buy a villa.

The announcement comes after Egypt received a windfall of investment and financing earlier this year which eased a shortage of foreign currency that had crippled the economy. The largest influx of funds came from a deal with Abu Dhabi sovereign fund ADQ, which agreed to pay \$24 billion for the rights to develop a new city at the site of Ras El Hekma, also on the north coast. TMG has said it will also be involved in the development of Ras El Hekma.

Separately, Egypt expanded its program with the International Monetary Fund to \$8 billion and received billions in pledged money from the European Union and the World Bank. Until now, Egypt's north coast and its white sand beaches have mainly been a destination for affluent Egyptians who stay in villas and hotels there during the hottest months of the year. The government is now promoting it as an international destination, and has built a new city with glass-fronted tower blocks at El Alamein, about 100 km (62 miles) west of Alexandria.

SouthMED is located on the coast close to Dabaa, where a nuclear power plant is under construction by Russia's Rosatom, and El Alamein international airport. It is about 55 km (34 miles) east of Ras El Hekma. Speaking at Tuesday's press conference, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said the project showed Egypt's confidence in local investment after the influx of foreign investment in the Ras El Hekma deal.

"We as a country are determined to attract investments, whether local or foreign," he said. "These projects would attract millions of tourists. More importantly, they create job opportunities to attract Egyptian youth to settle" (on the north coast), he added. Neither Talaat Moustafa nor Madbouly gave details on where the funds for SouthMED would come from, referring only to TMG's "local investment," and they took no questions. — Reuters

KARAPINAR: Every time Turkish farmer Fatih Sik drives his tractor across his cornfields he knows the earth could open up and swallow him at any moment. Two giant sinkholes have already appeared on his land in Konya, a vast agricultural province known as Turkey's breadbasket. "Anywhere could sink, I keep thinking. And I know I'd be dead at the bottom," the 45-year-old farmer from Karapinar told AFP.

"But I have to work otherwise my family will starve." This part of central Anatolia has had sinkholes for centuries. But their numbers have risen in recent years as increasing droughts has led to the overuse of wells for irrigation, experts say.

Many are dizzyingly deep—plunging up to 50 meters (165 feet). Invisible from a distance, you can suddenly come upon them in the large fields of corn, beetroot, wheat and clover that dot the Konya plain. "One of the major factors with sinkholes is climate change," says Arif Delikan, an associate professor of Konya Technical University, who has counted 640 sinkholes in Konya—with more than 600 of them in Karapinar alone. "Around 20 holes have emerged over the past year in Karapinar," he said, using a hammer to test the ground around the edge of one.

He and the government's AFAD disaster agency has identified more than 2,700 surface deformations and non-seismic fractures which indicate a sinkhole risk and need to be investigated.

Sinkholes occur where water dissolves the bedrock below the surface, causing it to cave in. They can form naturally or through "anthropogenic" causes, due to the direct or indirect action of people.

'Google is broken': How an algorithm tweak cost livelihoods

PARIS: Google made major changes to its search algorithm and spam filters earlier this year to get rid of low-quality content—but the effects have proved devastating to some smaller websites. Online businesses have been left considering layoffs and even site closures after Google's massive upgrade in March and April caused catastrophic drops in traffic.

Gisele Navarro is one of the unlucky ones whose website got caught up in Google's dragnet. The 37-year-old Argentine runs the HouseFresh website with her husband, and they had been building a healthy niche in product reviews for air purifiers since 2020.

There were no ads, no product placements and no soft-peddaling—if a product was bad, the site's reviewers would say so. They earned commissions from clickthroughs to Amazon.

But Google's update changed all of that. "We

found that we went from ranking number one—because we were one of the only people who had actually done a review—to not even showing up," she told AFP. HouseFresh used to get around 4,000 referrals from Google search a day, but this has since collapsed to around 200.

The drop-off in business has been so bad that Navarro said she had been advised to shutter the site and start over with a new domain name. Underpinning the frustration for Navarro and many other sites is the lack of clarity over how Google ranks results. The US firm is notoriously secretive about its algorithms—so much so that an entire industry known as "search engine optimization" has grown up trying to game the algorithm to get more clicks. The latest update sent SEO experts into a tailspin, desperately trying to unpack why some sites were boosted and others getting downranked.

Google told AFP in an email that its update was designed specifically to give users "fewer results that feel made for search engines". "The only changes we launch are ones that our experiments have shown will meaningfully improve results for people. And we do believe that these updates have been helpful," Google said. Yet Navarro showed in a widely shared blog post in May that people

continue to weigh on European stocks," noted Joshua Mahony, chief market analyst at Scope Markets. "Overall, underlying (European) inflation remains on a downward path, not least because of weak growth, and June data support the expectation of more ECB rate cuts in 2024, perhaps starting next September," said GianLuigi Mandruzzato, senior economist at EFG Asset Management.

Candidates in France on Tuesday faced a deadline to register for the run-off round of a high-stakes parliamentary election, as President Emmanuel Macron's centrist camp and a left-wing alliance scrambled to prevent the far-right from taking power. On Sunday, French voters go to polls for the decisive final round of the snap election. Macron called after his camp received a drubbing in European elections last month.

His gamble appears to have backfired, with the far-right National Rally (RN) of Marine Le Pen scoring a victory in the first round of voting last Sunday. Ahead of the vote, official data Tuesday showed eurozone inflation cooled in June—but experts said it would be insufficient to convince the European Cen-

tral Bank, or ECB, to accelerate its rate-cutting cycle despite sluggish economic growth.

Elsewhere Tuesday, Asia's main stock markets closed higher, with Hong Kong enjoying a rare surge after a recent run of losses. Tokyo piled on more than one percent to end above 40,000 points for the first time since April. — AFP

illegal wells, weakening the bedrock. "There are tough days ahead," admitted farmer Yigit Aksel who knows drilling and irrigation is partly to blame as they cultivate thirsty crops like corn and beetroot in this drought-stricken region. Delikan said the region had been losing surface water due to drought over the past 20 years, with farmers turning to groundwater deep below for irrigation.

He said the water level in Karapinar was dropping "by 10 to 20 meters per year". At Lake Meke, a volcanic crater lake in Karapinar, the water has disappeared over the past decade, its dried-up lakebed covered with salt. But even a badly-needed rain could be harmful, putting extra pressure on the bedrock and accelerating its collapse, experts say.

Some entrepreneurs have turned the sinkhole crisis into an opportunity. Last week, Cem Kinay opened a luxury 13-room hotel inside an 800-year-old Seljuk caravanserai—an ancient roadside inn—that sits on the brink of Turkey's oldest and most famous sinkhole.

Half-filled with water, it looks like a lake. "We need to turn these fears into something positive," Kinay, 66, told AFP. Gazing at the sinkhole, South Korean tourist Seongmo Kim was mesmerized.

"It's the first time I have seen this, it's impressive." Local villager Gumus Uzun recalled her grandfather telling stories about using the sinkhole to water their sheep and wash clothes about 60 years ago.

Back then, the water level was much higher, she said. "Today it keeps shrinking." — AFP



searching for product reviews were increasingly being fed ads and content that appeared to be AI-generated or SEO-maximized.

Other material boosted by Google's update included user-generated content from websites like Reddit and Quora. Google defended this approach saying "people often want to learn from others' experiences", adding: "We conduct rigorous testing to ensure results are helpful and high quality."

But staff at one European news website said their articles were now being routinely outranked by largely irrelevant content from Reddit. — AFP

Global stocks, euro slip ahead of major elections

LONDON: Global stock markets slipped while the euro retreated Tuesday on concerns about the potential economic fallout should the far-right win power in France in weekend elections.

London was also lower and the pound traded mixed heading into a UK general election Thursday which the opposition Labour Party is expected to win. The dollar firmed as investors weighed the possibility of another Donald Trump presidency after last week's poor debate performance by incumbent Joe Biden.

Wall Street stocks struggled to find direction in early trading as markets await employment data, with analysts pointing to caution while Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell participates in a panel discussion with other central bankers. "Political concerns



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk past a currency exchange shop in central Tokyo. — AFP

Business

German industry turns to solar in race to slash energy costs

Industrial, commercial solar installations up 81 percent in early 2024

BERLIN: For months, Philip Matthias tried to convince his father to install solar panels on their company's roof in the eastern German state of Thuringia, aiming to cut electricity costs and carbon emissions at the metal products factory. Initially skeptical of the 2.3-million-euro (\$2.5 million) investment, a substantial sum for the medium-sized Tridelta, his father crunched the numbers and decided to nearly double the project capacity, opting to install photovoltaic modules that could power around 900 households in addition to the factory.

"The PV systems amortize after about 7-1/2 years. The manufacturer gives a guarantee of 20 years. That means this is an extremely lucrative investment," Matthias told Reuters.

Since the war in Ukraine and the sudden drop in Russia fossil fuel exports to Germany, Berlin has introduced laws to accelerate solar power expansion, part of its plan to cover 80 percent of the country's energy from renewables by 2030. Encouraged by a feed-in tariff providing a guaranteed price to renewable energy producers selling their power, as well as reduced solar panel costs, German companies are increasingly turning to solar to get around high energy costs.

Although Germany has Europe's biggest capacity of solar and wind power generation, its small and medium-sized companies have yet to benefit from lower electricity prices because of high grid fees and taxes they must pay. By generating their own solar power, they avoid those fees and taxes. Companies consumed around 69 percent of Germany's national electricity in 2023, data by the BDEW utilities association showed.

"As electricity prices in Germany show no signs of decreasing as previously anticipated, companies are

increasingly recognizing the economic viability of installing solar panels," said Marie-Theres Husken, an energy expert for the BVMW association for small- and medium-sized businesses.

Newly installed photovoltaic capacity on business rooftops rose by 81 percent year-on-year in the first four months of the year, outpacing the 1 percent growth in the residential sector, data by the BSW solar power association shows. A May survey by pollster YouGov showed more than half of German companies with suitable roofs planned to install solar power systems in the next three years. BVMW forecasts that nearly all manufacturing companies in Germany will use solar energy by 2030.

In response to increasing demand, Germany's largest residential solar power developer, Enpal, said in April it was expanding into the commercial sector. "The demand was not as instant... but the growth is going to be very sustainable," Melchior Schulze Brock, CEO of commercial and industrial solar startup Envia. An April study by the Freiburg-based Institute for Applied Ecology showed there was potential to install up to 287 gigawatts (GW) of solar capacity, more than enough to meet Berlin's 2030 target of 215 GW, along German roads, railways, parking lots, and industrial areas. This could significantly reduce reliance on agricultural land where permitting and planning approvals can take up to a decade. A drop in solar panel prices globally since last year has spurred companies to embrace solar energy.

"The market is overrun with cheap but good panels from China. That means that the system that we are building now is about 20 percent cheaper than a year ago," Matthias said. A German legislative package passed in April easing regulation and in-



Houses with solar panels on the roofs are seen in Herzogenaurach, southern Germany. - AFP

creasing subsidies for large rooftop systems as well as a pending tax investment reform for real estate funds operating rooftop solar panels, is expected to drive demand further.

State feed-in subsidies for large scale rooftop photovoltaic projects, introduced in 2021 and which are selected via tender, have also boosted the trend. The last tender for the subsidized projects in February saw a 107 percent rise in the number of offers year-on-year, data by the federal grid network agency showed. A feed-in tariff of 9.3 euros cents per kilowatt-hour, higher than Tridelta's power purchasing price, makes

it currently cheaper for the company to sell future generated electricity to the grid and buy it back, Matthias said. Germany's economy ministry declined to comment on companies' electricity trading strategies. "There's a high correlation between the feed-in tariffs and the build-up of solar PV roof top projects," Hugo Willink, Executive Director at solar roofs developer Sunrock told Reuters.

Sunrock, which won an order from Mercedes Benz in May to build a 23-megawatt solar project on the carmaker's factory roofs, sees Germany as its core market for the coming year. - Reuters

Philippines' Cebu Pacific to buy up to 152 Airbus planes

MANILA: Philippine carrier Cebu Pacific said Tuesday it will buy up to 152 Airbus planes worth \$24 billion in a deal it described as the "largest aircraft order" in the country's aviation history. "The order is designed to provide Cebu Pacific with maximum flexibility to adapt fleet growth to market conditions, with the ability to switch between the A321neo and A320neo," Cebu Pa-

cific chief executive Michael Szucs said in a statement.

The company said it had signed a binding memorandum of understanding with Airbus that covered "firm orders" for up to 102 A321neo aircraft and purchase rights for 50 A320neo.

The order was worth \$24 billion based on list prices, it added. Cebu Pacific said it would use Pratt & Whitney engines for the planes despite previously reporting problems with the firm's engines that had forced the airline to ground at least 10 planes. "When finalized, the deal will be a significant milestone for the local airline industry," Szucs said. The transaction would be finalized in the third quarter of the year, according to the statement.

Airlines have roared back after the COVID-19

pandemic, with passenger numbers and revenues expected to hit record highs this year, trade body IATA said in June. The International Air Transport Association said nearly five billion passengers were expected to fly in 2024 and revenues would near \$1 trillion. But airlines are also facing a sharp rise in costs caused by shortages of parts and labor, and challenges related to climate change. Their total expenses are also expected to hit a record high this year, climbing 9.4 percent to \$936 billion, IATA said. At a Singapore airshow in February, Szucs told AFP that Cebu Pacific had a "shortfall in capacity" owing to aircraft grounded or delays in deliveries.

"It's just never been more difficult to keep the fleet flying," he said. - Reuters

Italian firms bridge skills gap with own schooling

ROME: After years of informal work as a farm laborer, Federico Olivieri, 29, could not believe it when a huge building site appeared next to his home in Sicily with training on offer for the numerous specialized jobs required. The program by Italy's largest construction group Webuild is among a growing number of 'academies' run and financed by companies frustrated by many job-seekers lacking the know-how.

"We are being proactive about the problem. If the skills aren't there, then we will create them ourselves," Webuild's Chief HR, Organization & Systems Officer Gianluca Grondona told Reuters of the group's program, which it launched in November. Skill mismatches are an international problem but for Italy, with the lowest employment rate in the EU and productivity that has stagnated for more than two decades, it is acute.

Despite a large pool of people seeking work or outside the labor market, vacancy rates stood at 2.5 percent in the first quarter of 2024, in line with the EU average, data from European Union statistics agency Eurostat shows. This compares with 2.8 percent in France and 0.9 percent in Spain in the same period. Vocational schools and colleges are fewer and less popular in Italy than in most European countries, think-tank Prometeia highlighted in a June report, and even those that are there fail to produce students with the right expertise.

At the same time, too many young people are still studying subjects with lower market demand, such as humanities, it said. The problem has become more severe with the rapid development of new technologies, as Rome invests in European-Union-backed infrastructure projects as part of its post-COVID recovery plan, worth about 200 billion euros (\$214 billion).

Big firms like Webuild, shipbuilder Fincantieri, and state railway group Ferrovie dello Stato (FS) are taking matters into their own hands.

On top of its apprenticeships, FS liaises with universities and schools to offer students more targeted courses. "As the company changes, skills change and we need specific capabilities, particularly when it comes to digital and artificial intelligence-based jobs," said Adriano Mureddu, its Chief Human Re-

sources Officer. Olivieri, who trained as an agronomist, was frustrated by a succession of temporary, underpaid contracts in a Sicilian agricultural sector undercut by cheap imports of citrus fruit.

He joined Webuild's program this year and now works with tunnel-boring machines at its site on Sicily's eastern coast. "The courses are an incredible opportunity for those who are willing to learn something new ... you can't miss a chance like this," he said.

Webuild aims to source from its work academies some 3,000 people out of 10,000 new hires it envisages over the next three years. The academies are close to its infrastructure work sites, mainly in southern regions where unemployment is high. Lorenzo Esposito Corcione, a 19-year-old who studied at nautical school in Genoa, is one of 80 people hired by Fincantieri after being trained under its 'Masters of the Sea' program launched eight months ago. The program drew 17,000 applicants. "Without the course I wouldn't be here," Esposito Corcione told Reuters at the end of his shift as an electric fitter in the shipyard of the north-eastern port of Monfalcone. "There is a world of difference between what I studied in school and what is actually being done here in the yard."

Italy faces a problem not only of skills but also of numbers. It has one of the world's oldest populations and lowest fertility rates at 1.2 children per woman and meanwhile, the baby-boomers of the 1960s are now retiring. This means in the next five years Italy will need 3.1 to 3.6 million new workers, business group Unioncamere estimates. By 2050, Italy will have almost 5 million fewer people, and more than a third of them will be over 65, national statistics office ISTAT predicts. Younger blood is badly needed in a host of industries, from construction and tourism to agriculture.

Despite its anti-immigration rhetoric, Giorgia Meloni's right-wing government last year quietly raised quotas for work visas for non-EU citizens to 452,000 for the period 2023-2025, an increase of nearly 150 percent from the previous three years. Italy has attracted workers from elsewhere in the EU, despite its wages being relatively low, but this has not helped resolve its skills mismatch.

For now, the academies and training offered by big firms are alleviating the problem, providing priceless opportunities to people like Pasquale Infante, 28, who has just starting work as a pipe fitter at Fincantieri's Marghera plant near Venice. "These programs are good for workers and good for companies ... they are teaching people the skills they need," he said. - Reuters

are trading near their highest level in more than two months. Palm oil imports in June jumped to 788,000 metric tons, the highest since December, according to estimates from dealers.

"Buyers made purchases anticipating demand from the upcoming festival season. Additionally, palm oil was nearly \$80 per ton cheaper than other oils, which made it attractive," said Sandeep Bajoria, CEO of Sunvin Group, a vegetable oil brokerage. Palm oil imports could rise to 850,000 tons in July, Bajoria added. Crude palm oil's (CPO) imports are offered at about \$985 a metric ton, including cost, insurance and freight (CIF), in India for August delivery, while soy oil and sunflower oil are offered around \$1,065 and \$1,050 a ton, respectively, dealers said.

India's sunflower oil imports in June jumped 14

Lula worried about weakness of Brazil's currency

SAO PAULO: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on Tuesday he is worried about the recent weakness of the country's currency, adding that "something" needs to be done to tackle what he called "speculation". Lula did not elaborate on what measures could be taken to support the Brazilian real BRBY, which has weakened more than 16 percent against the US dollar so far this year and currently trades at its lowest level since January 2022. "I'm obviously worried about it, it's speculation. I've been talking to people to see what we're going to do," Lula told a local radio station. "We have to do something - but I can't tell you what, or I'd be warning my opponents."

Traders have linked recent foreign exchange moves to a stronger dollar globally and local fiscal concerns, as the market has doubts about the Brazilian government's ability to meet its goal of eliminating its primary deficit this year. Lula on Tuesday once again said that the government could not spend more than what it has and pledged to cut expenses if needed.

Lula's economic team has been working on measures to reduce spending amid growing pressure to balance public accounts, although the leftist leader has underscored benefits for the poor will not be cut. In his latest criticism of central bank head Roberto Campos Neto, a public clash that many cite as one of the reasons behind the real's weakness, Lula said that the Brazilian monetary authority cannot be led by someone with political bias. Lula and his allies have long seen Campos Neto as a political rival, arguing that he was appointed by former far-right President Jair Bolsonaro and blaming him for high interest rates in the country. - Reuters



Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva

percent from a month earlier to a record 467,000 tons, dealers said. Sunflower oil imports could have exceeded 500,000 tons in June, but a few vessels were unable to berth at the ports before the month's end, said Rajesh Patel, managing partner at edible oil trader and broker GGN Research.

Soy oil imports fell 16 percent in June to 273,000 tons, dealers said. Industry body the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA) is likely to publish its data on June imports by mid-July. Higher imports of palm oil and sunflower oil lifted the country's edible oil imports by 2 percent to 1.53 million tons, the highest in 10 months, they said. India buys palm oil mainly from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, while it imports soy oil and sunflower oil from Argentina, Brazil, Russia and Ukraine. - Reuters



Christine Lagarde

Lagarde: ECB not in a hurry to cut rates further

SINTRA, Portugal: The European Central Bank needs more time to conclude that inflation is firmly on a path to 2 percent and benign economic developments indicate that rate cuts are not urgent, ECB President Christine Lagarde said on Monday.

The ECB lowered rates for the first time in June after its most aggressive rate hike spree on record, but held back on committing to any subsequent moves, arguing that the outlook was far too uncertain to telegraph a second cut. "It will take time for us to gather sufficient data to be certain that the risks of above-target inflation have passed," Lagarde told the ECB Forum on Central Banking, the bank's hallmark policy conference.

"The strong labor market means that we can take time to gather new information," she added.

The ECB is trying to walk a narrow path, reconciling inflation uncertainty and weak growth. Uncertainty would warrant caution in cutting rates, but persistent economic weakness strengthens the case for easing, tugging the ECB in opposing directions. Lagarde acknowledged this dilemma, warning that it was still not a given that the bloc would avoid a recession, despite a modest growth uptick last quarter.

"A 'soft landing' is still not guaranteed," she said. "We also need to be mindful of the fact that the growth outlook remains uncertain." Growth indicators in recent weeks have come in on the weaker side of expectations, challenging a widely held view that a year and a half of economic stagnation was over and a recovery was taking hold.

Still, investors are betting that inflation concerns will outweigh recession fears and the ECB will be very slow in cutting rates, especially since the US Federal Reserve also signalled patience. They now price in between one and two more cuts this year and only four cuts between now and the end of 2025.

This is mostly because the inflation outlook remains far too murky. Price growth is expected to hover on either side of 2.5 percent for the rest of the year, before falling back to the ECB's 2 percent target by the end of 2025. While disinflation has been relatively quick over the past year, high services costs threaten to derail the process and policymakers are now focusing on whether firms are starting to absorb quick wage growth or continuing to push higher wages on to customers.

"We are still facing several uncertainties regarding future inflation, especially in terms of how the nexus of profits, wages and productivity will evolve and whether the economy will be hit by new supply-side shocks," Lagarde said. - Reuters

India's June palm oil imports rise to 6-month high

MUMBAI: India's palm oil imports rose by 3 percent in June from the previous month to reach the highest level in six months on robust demand from refiners for upcoming festivals and as the oil traded at a discount to rival oils, five dealers told Reuters.

Higher palm oil purchases by India, the world's biggest importer of vegetable oils, could support the benchmark Malaysian palm oil futures that

Business

Hindenburg denies India's SEBI allegations on Adani short bet

Regulator says six entities violated certain rules

WASHINGTON: Hindenburg Research has denied allegations by India's securities regulator that it colluded with a US asset manager to use non-public information to set up a short bet against Adani Group last year, which if proven would breach the country's rules. Hindenburg posted a copy of a 46-page "show cause" notice from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) outlining the allegations on its website on Monday, in the latest twist to a saga that began last year when the US-based short-seller alleged improper business dealings by Adani.

The notice said that six entities including Hindenburg, Kingdon Capital Management and a Mauritius-based trading fund set up by Kotak Mahindra Bank violated certain rules under the Prevention of Fraud and Unfair Trade Practices regulation. It was dismissed in a statement by Hindenburg as "nonsense".

Kingdon did not respond to an emailed request for comment on Tuesday. Hindenburg's statement did not mention its relationship with Kingdon and did not respond to an email requesting comment. "SEBI has neglected its responsibility, seemingly doing more to protect those perpetrating fraud than to protect the investors being victimized by it," Hindenburg said in its statement on the notice, which two sources at SEBI with direct knowledge of the matter confirmed to Reuters as authentic.

Adani, which has consistently denied Hindenburg's allegations, suffered a loss of as much as \$150 billion in combined market value after the report, but its share price has since recovered to the same levels as before. SEBI did not respond

to a request for comment on Tuesday on Hindenburg's statement or the show cause notice. If proven, the alleged breaches could result in financial penalties and the repayment of any gains deemed to have been illegal.

Hindenburg said in its statement that it made \$4.1 million in gross revenue through "gains related to Adani shorts from that investor relationship" and just \$31,000 through its short position of Adani's US bonds. It did not name the investor. "It was a tiny position," said Hindenburg, whose response sheds some light on its Adani short, which intrigued other investors because Indian securities rules make it hard for foreigners to bet against companies there.

SEBI alleges Hindenburg colluded with its client Kingdon Capital Management by providing a draft of its report on Adani Group before it was released publicly.

Mark Kingdon, the owner of Kingdon Capital, then set up a fund able to trade Indian equities known as K India Opportunities Fund, SEBI alleges. That fund created short positions in Adani group stocks between Jan 10, 2023, and Jan 20, 2023, five days before Hindenburg's report was published.

Hindenburg said a Mauritius registered unit of Kotak Mahindra Bank, an Indian firm, created and oversaw an offshore fund structure that was used by its "investor partner" to bet against Adani's shares. The positions were squared off in February, leading to gains of \$22.25 million, the SEBI documents said.

A spokesperson for Kotak Mahindra International Ltd, under which the fund operated, said Hindenburg had never been a client of K India Op-



MUNDRA, India: This photograph taken on January 11, 2024, shows a general view of the Adani Group owned Mundra Port in Mundra. — AFP

portunities Fund and that its Mauritius registered unit has received a declaration from the fund's investor that its investments were not made on behalf of anyone else. "The Fund was never aware that

Hindenburg was a partner of any of its investors," the statement said. Shares of Kotak Mahindra Bank which fell as much as 3.93 percent, trimmed some of the losses after the statement. — Reuters

Shell to pause Dutch biofuels project as market sags

LONDON: Shell will pause construction work at one of Europe's largest biofuel plants due to weak market conditions, the latest low-carbon project to suffer a setback as CEO Wael Sawan strives to boost returns. While it is rare for companies to suspend development of projects underway, rival BP BPL also said last week it was pausing two biofuel projects in Germany and the US.

Under Sawan, who took office in January 2023, Shell has scrapped and sold renewable and hydrogen projects, retreated from European and Chinese power markets and sold refineries in order to focus on the most profitable operations, primarily in oil and gas. Shell shares were up 1.3 percent at 1106 GMT, and have gained more than 12.5 percent so far this year.

The company gave the green light for the development of the 820,000-ton-a-year plant in the Netherlands in September 2021, with plans to bring it online in 2025. The project is now expected to start production towards the end of the decade. The facility at Shell's chemicals park in Rotterdam was slated to produce sustainable aviation fuel and renewable diesel made from waste.

Biofuel prices have come under pressure in recent months due to weaker demand in Europe, including after Sweden cut a biofuel mandate, and rising supplies in the US. The market is expected to remain well supplied in the coming years as more production comes on line, analysts said.

Shell said in a statement that following the decision to pause construction, "contractor numbers will reduce on site and activity will slow down, helping to control costs and optimize project sequencing". UBS analyst Joshua Stone said the pause was consistent with Shell's strategy to focus on returns. — Reuters

ECB, Canada join G10 central bank easing push in June

LONDON: The European Central Bank and the Bank of Canada in June joined the ranks of big central banks easing policy, while emerging markets ploughed ahead in their quest to lower interest rates. Three of the nine central banks overseeing the 10 most heavily traded currencies that held meetings in June reduced their lending benchmarks, with Switzerland delivering its second rate cut in this cycle.

This makes June the month with the highest number of rate cuts delivered by G10 central banks since March 2020, when policymakers slashed rates to shore up faltering economies in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak. Meanwhile, the US Federal Reserve, the Bank of England, and central banks in Australia, Sweden, Norway and Japan - which is inclined to tighten not ease policy - kept lending rates unchanged in June. "We're in this global disinflation path - it's just probably a bit slower than what we'd hoped for six months ago," said Paul Greer, portfolio manager at Fidelity International.

"We started to see G10 central banks cut rates - Sweden and Switzerland, Canada, the ECB. I have confidence that the Federal Reserve will cut rates this year as well, maybe even a couple of times." The Fed is now expected to deliver a first full quarter-point rate cut in November.

Emerging market central banks soldiered on in their rate cutting endeavor, albeit at a slower pace. Fourteen of the Reuters sample of 18 central banks in developing economies held rate-setting meetings in June, with four delivering cuts. Central banks in Brazil, the Czech Republic, Colombia and Chile reduced lending rates by 150 basis points between them. None hiked rates. — Reuters

Careem Rides launches 'Luxe' service in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Careem Rides, the region's choice for facilitating reliable, convenient and stress-free everyday commutes through the Careem Everything app, is excited to announce the official launch of the new "Luxe" car service in Kuwait. The new service will allow customers to book everyday reliable commutes in elegant premium vehicles, offering customers an experience that combines luxury with comfort and convenience. The newly introduced service available today in Kuwait, caters to customers who choose an elevated and luxurious everyday commuting experience, with top rated Captains and in premium new vehicles.

Commenting on the announcement, Antonio Al-Asmar, General Manager of Careem Rides in Kuwait, UAE, Jordan & Morocco said: "We are thrilled to launch Luxe in Kuwait, allowing customers to enjoy a truly elegant and premium experience during

their everyday commutes. This new service is part of our commitment to continuously innovate and understand market needs to deliver locally tailored solutions, and is a great option for special occasions or simply if you prefer the finer things in life."

He further added: "Customers in Kuwait can now book the Luxe service through the Careem app, with a push of a button and experience in ride comfort and luxury, while enjoying the same reliability and convenience they are used to from Careem Rides." In addition to the new Luxe car service, customers can choose from a number of commuting options that already exist from Careem Rides which include Taxi: the most cost-effective choice, enabling customers in Kuwait to book a regular taxi through the Careem app, Taxi Select: Offers rides in newer cars driven by top-rated taxi Captains, Comfort: An option that provides reliable and convenient rides with for everyday commutes, Comfort Plus: This option features mid-size SUVs, and is ideal for larger groups and families, shopping trips, and other occasions requiring extra space. Customers who book a ride through the Careem app, can also choose their preferred method of payment using cash or a secure credit card transaction through the app.

Careem's ride-hailing business is one of the oldest in the region, was launched in Kuwait in 2017 and has



KUWAIT: Careem Rides launches the new "Luxe" car service in Kuwait.

since been transforming, improving, and setting new benchmarks for everyday reliable commutes. Since launching, Careem Rides has understood market needs and through continuous innovation brought a diverse portfolio of locally catered products for everyday reliable and convenient commuting needs for millions across the region.

Sri Lanka to save \$5bn from debt deal

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka will save \$5 billion following the restructuring of its bilateral debt, much of which is owed to China, through slashed interest rates and longer repayment schedules, the president said Tuesday. The island nation defaulted on its foreign borrowings in 2022 during an unprecedented economic crisis that precipitated months of food, fuel and medicine shortages.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe said a deal struck last week had secured a moratorium on debt payments until 2028, extending the tenure of loans by eight years and cutting interest rates to an average of 2.1 percent.

Wickremesinghe said bilateral lenders led by China, the government's largest single creditor, did not agree to a reduction on their loans but the terms agreed would nonetheless help Sri Lanka.

"With the restructure measures we have agreed, we will make a saving of \$5.0 billion," Wickremesinghe told parliament in his first address to the legislature since the debt deal. Some of Sri Lanka's loans from China are at high interest rates, going up to nearly 8.0 percent compared to borrowings from Japan, the second largest lender, at less than 1.0 percent. Sri Lanka struck separate deals with China and the rest of the bilateral creditors, including Japan, France and India.

Bilateral creditors account for 28.5 percent of Sri Lanka's outstanding foreign debt of \$37 billion, according to treasury data from March. That excludes government-guaranteed external loans.

China accounts for \$4.66 billion of the \$10.58 billion that Sri Lanka has borrowed from other countries.

Coal reliance in Philippines and Indonesia growing

BANGKOK: Coal accounts for a growing share of electricity generation in the Philippines and Indonesia, which are failing to ramp up renewables fast enough, a new report has warned. The growing reliance on coal in Indonesia comes despite a \$20 billion international deal intended to help Jakarta wean itself off the fossil fuel. Coal is a key source of climate-warming carbon emissions, and many major economies have pledged to move away from the fuel.



COLOMBO: People watch a live telecast as Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe addresses the nation in Colombo. — AFP

Wickremesinghe said he expected to complete shortly the restructure of a further \$14.7 billion in external commercial loans, including \$2.18 billion from the China Development Bank. Japanese foreign minister Yoko Kamikawa hailed the agreement after a meeting with her visiting Sri Lankan counterpart Ali Sabry in Tokyo, according to a news release from the Japanese foreign ministry.

She said Japan would be prepared to resume lending to existing yen-loan projects once Japan confirms the Sri Lankan government's intention to work expeditiously towards the conclusion of a bilateral

deal on top of the latest debt agreement. Sri Lanka's 2022 crisis sparked months of public protests that eventually forced the resignation of then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa after an angry mob stormed his compound. Wickremesinghe said the nation was bankrupt when he took over and he hoped the \$2.9 billion International Monetary Fund bailout he secured last year would be the island's last.

Colombo had gone to the IMF, the international lender of last resort, on 16 previous occasions and the debt restructuring is a condition of the IMF bailout. — AFP

But in 2023, the share of electricity generated from coal in Indonesia increased marginally to reach a new record high of 61.8 percent, according to Ember, a London-based climate and energy think-tank.

Coal use in the Philippines meanwhile jumped nearly three percent to 61.9 percent, the think-tank said Monday. Indonesia is the world's fourth-most populous nation and Southeast Asia's largest economy. The increase comes with coal being used to meet rising demand in both countries, though in the Philippines, coal generation grew by more than the rise in demand.

That was because it was also used to meet a drop in production from other sources, including bioenergy and gas, Ember said. Both countries are falling behind their regional counterparts when it comes to wind and solar energy, the group said.

Regionally, the two renewables account for an aver-

age of 4.4 percent of electricity generation, but just 3.2 percent in the Philippines and 0.3 percent in Indonesia. And while Indonesia generates renewable energy from hydropower, that fell 10 percent last year, possibly because of drought conditions. "Overall, Indonesia and the Philippines are the two most coal dependent countries in Southeast Asia and their reliance on coal is growing fast," the group warned.

Last year, Indonesia also became the world's fifth-largest coal power generator, overtaking South Korea for the first time, Ember said. The Philippines aims for renewable energy to make up 35 percent of its power generation by 2030, while Indonesia is committed to reaching 44 percent the same year.

The International Energy Agency says that to reach net zero by mid-century, all coal generation that does not capture emissions must end by 2040. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, JULY 3, 2024



Alcides Peixinho Nascimento walks at his plantation of mandacaru - also known as cardeiro (*Cereus jamacaru*) - in Serra da Canabrava, Bahia State, Brazil.



Alcides Peixinho Nascimento removes a damaged part of a cactus at his plantation of mandacaru - also known as cardeiro (*Cereus jamacaru*) - in Serra da Canabrava, Bahia State, Brazil.



Alcides Peixinho Nascimento shows fruits in a reclaimed Caatinga area of his farm.

Planting giant *cactus* to stave off desertification in Brazil



A goat is seen on the side of the road in Pinhoes, Bahia State, Brazil.



View of the high school students' vegetable garden at Irpaa (Regional Institute for Appropriate Small Farming and Animal Husbandry) in Juazeiro, Bahia State, Brazil.

Giant spiky cacti tower over farmer Alcides Peixinho Nascimento, 70, one of the residents of Brazil's unique Caatinga biome who is on a mission to plant native vegetation in a bid to halt desertification. "In the absence of laws, it is up to us to act," said Nascimento, who is trying to regenerate his land by planting mandacaru, an emblematic cactus from the region that grows up to six meters tall. The Caatinga stretches across ten northeastern states, a unique area boasting a tapestry of thorny shrubs, twisty trees and succulents adapted to its semi-arid conditions.

Its plight attracts little interest compared to the lush Amazon, but the vegetation of this dry forest plays a key role in absorbing carbon emissions and is rapidly disappearing. The MapBiomas NGO reports it has lost 40 percent of its original surface area due to agriculture, mining and the installation of wind farms.

It is in the Caatinga, which has been facing increasingly severe periods of drought, that scientists recently identified the first arid zone in Brazil. "Preserving the Caatinga means keeping the land alive," said the farmer Nascimento. Communities are adopting various sustainable farming methods to ensure their survival. Nascimento's drought-resistant cacti grow fruit that can feed both animals and humans, and protect the soil from the extreme climate. Their thorns repel predators and are often planted around other crops and native species. Excess mandacaru production is sold to a French cosmetics brand to make creams and soaps.

'Guardians of the Caatinga'
Luiz Almeida Santos, of the local ag-



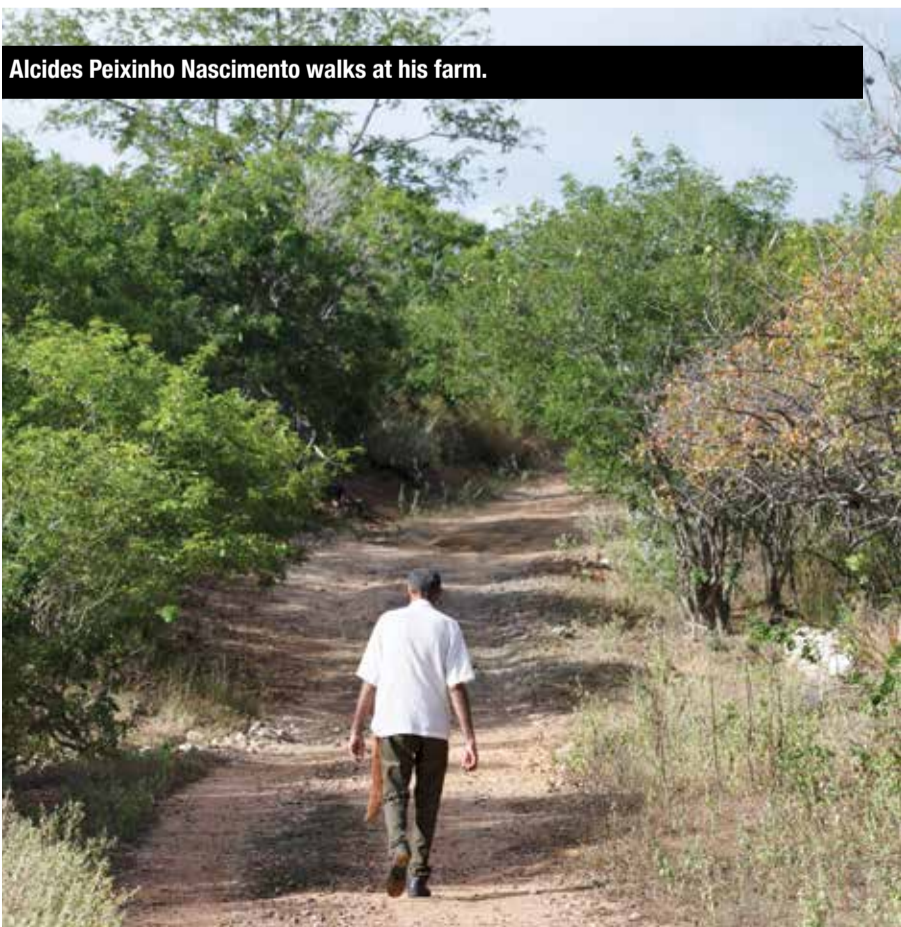
Aerial view of the high school students' vegetable garden at Irpaa (Regional Institute for Appropriate Small Farming and Animal Husbandry) in Juazeiro, Bahia State, Brazil.

ricultural NGO IRPAA said the Caatinga was being preserved in areas where "traditional communities live" who adopt sustainable farming practices. "They are the guardians of the Caatinga". A recent study predicted nine out of 10 species of fauna and flora in the Caatinga could disappear by 2060. The IRPAA also teaches local communities how to stretch their water to last through severe drought. On her land in northern Bahia, Maria Gonçalves dos Santos, 60, shows how rainwater is collected and stored in a cistern.

"Here, all the water is reused," she said. Wastewater is filtered and used to water animal pastures. Gonçalves measures the level of the 16,000-liter tank with a ruler and logs her consumption in a notebook. The government has set up nearly a million tanks like this in the region since 2003.

Installations slowed dramatically under far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro, but the program has recently been relaunched under President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Another threat to the Caat-

inga is the rural exodus, and the IRPAA has set up a training center where it has taught some 200 young people about sustainable farming methods. "In our region, we do not have many opportunities, we have to travel to seek knowledge. I am happy to be able to contribute to the well-being of my community," said Anderson Santos de Jesus, 20, who traveled 200 kilometers (124 miles) to reach the training center. — AFP



Alcides Peixinho Nascimento walks at his farm.



View of a solar panel in a conservation area of Caatinga biome at the Fundo do Pasto de Malhada da Areia community in Juazeiro, Bahia State.



A water storage tank is seen at the Malhada da Areia community in Juazeiro, Bahia State, Brazil.



People get their drinking water from a water reservoir in a conservation area of Caatinga biome at the Fundo do Pasto de Malhada da Areia community in Juazeiro, Bahia State, Brazil.

Lifestyle



Models of bells used during Olympic Games are seen in the headquarter of Swiss Timing in Corgemont.



Alois Huguenin holds a freshly crafted bell in his foundry, in La Chaux-de-Fonds. —AFP photos



The air is stifling hot, with a heavy, metallic smell that sticks in the throat and stings the eyes. In his foundry with smoke-blackened walls, Alois Huguenin uses an enormous ladle to pour molten bronze at 1,250 degrees Celsius (2,282 degrees Fahrenheit) into a metal frame. For three generations, the century-old

father made the first bell for the Moscow Olympics in 1980, Huguenin was preparing the bells for the upcoming Paris Games. "If all goes well, one Olympic bell is three hours of work," the 30-year-old, equipped with an apron, gloves and a protective screen, told AFP recently. Huguenin said he had already delivered 38 bells for Paris, at the request of the Games' official timekeeper Omega, which has its chronometric testing laboratory around 30 kilometers away in Biel.

"The bell is used to indicate to the athletes, as well as to the spectators, when the last lap has started," said Alain Zobrist, who heads OmegaTime and is in charge of chronometry within the wider Swatch Group. It tells the athletes "they must give it their all to reach the finish line as quickly as possible", he told AFP. Recalling that Omega has been timekeeping at the Olympics since 1932, he acknowledged that the bells constitute "a very traditional element". "Today, chronometry is done electronically. The bells are a nod to our past," he said.

work that remains to be done: deburring, sanding, filing and polishing. Huguenin made his first Olympic bell for the 2020 Tokyo Games. While not as obsessed by bells as some collectors can be, Huguenin says he is proud his creations are seen by billions.

"I put the same energy, the same passion into all the bells I make," he

if we can spot them," he said, recalling how he kept an eye out for his father's bells when he was younger. And "for a few years now, I have been looking out for the bell that I made".

"One step ahead"

The bells used for each Olympics remain the same, with only the edition logo changing. They are always emblazoned with the colorful Olympic rings, stand about 20 centimeters (7.9 inches) high and measure 14 centimeters (5.5 inches) across. But each bell is nonetheless unique, Huguenin insisted, due to the use of traditional techniques, and recycling. The clayey Paris sand used for his mold is not synthetic and is re-used several times, he said, noting that some grains have been in service for 100 years.

As for the copper-tin alloy used for the bronze, it is made of individually-sourced recycled materials. On the shelves near his wooden workbench, Huguenin keeps a souvenir collection of bells with defects that were made for previous Games in Atlanta, Rio and Athens. But a few weeks before the opening of the Paris Olympics, he already has one eye on the future. Bells need to be made for the 2028 Los Angeles Games, of course, he said, but "first there are the Winter Olympics in Milan Cortina" in 2026. "I'm going to get started on it this autumn," he said. —AFP



Alois Huguenin shows a template used to craft the bells of Paris 2024 Olympics, in his foundry.



Alois Huguenin holds a Olympic Games bell in his foundry.



Alois Huguenin is polishing a bell in his foundry, in La Chaux-de-Fonds.



Alois Huguenin is unmolding a bell in his foundry.

traditional foundry in La Chaux-de-Fonds in northwestern Switzerland -- the cradle of the country's famous watch-making industry -- has been crafting the bells used at the Olympic Games. The bells are rung for a range of disciplines including athletics, track cycling, mountain biking and boxing.

Almost half a century after his grand-

'Pride'

Ten minutes after pouring the molten bronze -- with the texture and bright orange-yellow color of volcanic lava -- Huguenin can unmold the thick liquid, with a temperature of just 200C. With heavy blows of his hammer, he breaks the hard, black-sand mold in the frame, as smoke billows out. The bell that emerges is covered with a crust, revealing the

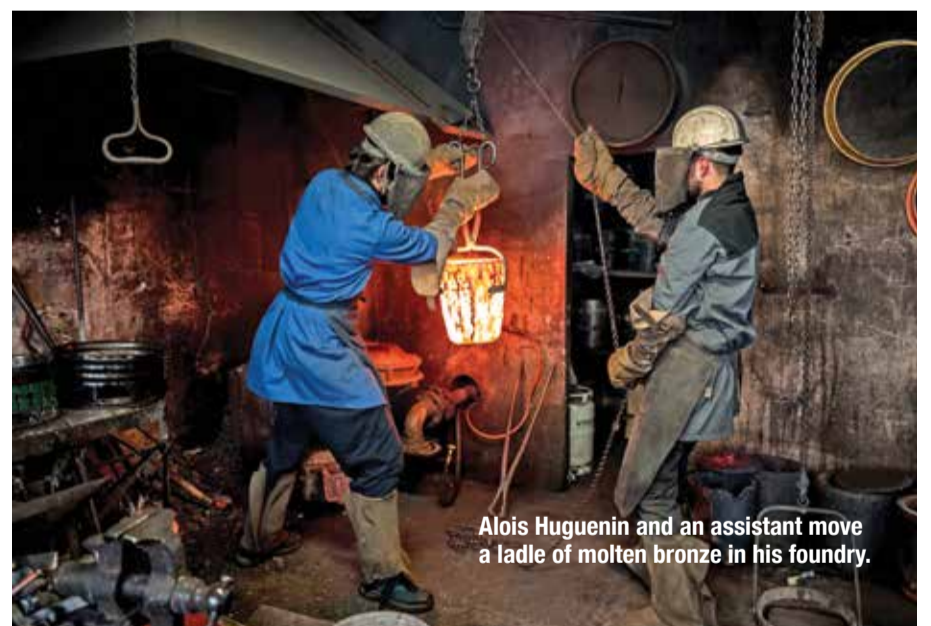
said, explaining that he also makes bells for livestock, and increasingly for individual events like weddings. "But to know that we are participating in our own small way in the big Olympic celebration is a source of pride." Huguenin said Olympic bells had been part of his life as far back as he could remember. "Each edition, we watch TV to try to see



Alois Huguenin and his assistant uses a crucible to pour molten bronze into a metal frame in his foundry.



Alois Huguenin shows a template used to craft the bells of Paris 2024 Olympics, in his foundry.



Alois Huguenin and an assistant move a ladle of molten bronze in his foundry.



A staff member shows the box containing two pistols, which belonged to Emperor Napoleon I, during the preview before their auction, in Paris. —AFP photos

Napoleon pistols up for auction

Two pistols that Napoleon Bonaparte once intended to use to kill himself are up for auction this weekend, expected to reach up to 1.5 million euros, the auction house said Monday. The richly decorated guns inlaid with gold and silver feature the engraved image of Napoleon in full imperial pomp. They are said to have almost been used to end the French ruler's life in 1814 when he was forced to give up power after foreign forces defeated his army and occupied Paris.

"After the defeat of the French campaign, he was totally depressed and wanted to commit suicide with these weapons but his grand squire removed the powder," auctioneer Jean-Pierre Osenat told AFP. Napoleon instead took poison but vomited and survived, and

later gave the pistols to his squire to thank him for his loyalty, Osenat added. They are expected to fetch 1.2-1.5 million euros (\$1.3-1.6 million) at Sunday's auction in Fontainebleau, south of Paris. Memorabilia of the emperor is extremely sought-after among collectors.

His famous black cocked hat with its blue, white and red trimmings sold for 1.9 million euros in November. Upon his abdication, Napoleon went into exile on the island of Elba off the coast of Italy. He would soon grow bored and make a dramatic return to France, only to have his career definitively ended when he was defeated by the British at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, dying in exile on the island of St Helena six years later. —AFP



A staff member shows a detail of one of the two pistols, which belonged to Emperor Napoleon I, during the preview before their auction, in Paris.



A staff member shows a detail of one of the two pistols, which belonged to Emperor Napoleon I.

Lifestyle



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri inspects one of his framed artworks with a magnifying glass at his workshop.



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri poses for a picture with his artwork in his workshop.



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri poses for a picture as he holds one of his brushes in his workshop.

SLOW ART: THE MASTER ILLUMINATOR OF TEHRAN

Iranian artist Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri sometimes labors for six months on a single design, very carefully -- he knows a single crooked line could ruin his entire artwork. In the age of AI-assisted graphic design on computer screens, the centuries-old tradition of Persian illumination offers an antidote to rushing the creative process. Aghamiri's fine brush moves natural pigments onto the paper with deliberate precision as he creates intricate floral patterns, religious motifs and elegantly flowing calligraphy.

The exquisite artwork has for centuries embellished literary manuscripts, religious texts and royal edicts as well as many business contracts and marriage certificates. Aghamiri, 51, is one of Iran's dozen or so remaining masters of the ancient illumination art of Tazhib, which was inscribed last year on UNESCO's list of intangible heritage. "It is a very unique job that requires a lot of patience and precision," Aghamiri, a veteran of the craft with over 30 years' experience, told AFP in his downtown Tehran studio. "It's not accessible to everyone."

Tazhib's non-figurative and geometric flourishes have traditionally adorned the margins of holy books and epic poems. The artform dates back to the Sassanid era in pre-Islamic Iran but flourished after the seventh century advent

of Islam, which banned human depictions. Aghamiri says it often takes him months to finish one design and that a single misplaced stroke that disrupts its symmetrical harmony can force him to start over.



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri works on one of his pieces depicting Al-Fatiha, the first chapter of the Quran at his workshop.

Global workshops online
When AFP visited, he was working on a so-called shamsa design, a symbolic representation of the sun, about 50 centimeters across with intertwined abstract, geometric and floral patterns. He said he started the piece over four months ago and aimed to finish it within

six weeks, using natural pigments such as lapis lazuli, saffron, gouache and pure gold, from China. "Gold has a very strong visual appeal," said Aghamiri. "It's expensive and it enhances the perceived value of the work."



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri poses for a picture with his artwork in his workshop.

Aghamiri hails from a family of artists and artisans with a rich history in Iranian craft traditions including calligraphy, miniature painting and carpet design. His work has been showcased in museums in Iran and in nearby Arab countries of the Gulf region where interest in Oriental and Islamic art continues to grow.

"Eighty percent of my works are sold in the region, especially in the Emirates and Qatar" as well as in Turkey, he said. In recent years, Aghamiri garnered interest abroad and even began teaching the ancient art online to students

landscapes, and often illustrate biblical scenes. UNESCO labelled the Persian art of illumination as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2023, at the request of Iran as well



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri poses for a picture with his artwork in his workshop.

from across the world, notably the United States. Soon, he also hopes to hold workshops in Britain for his craft, which he says is fundamentally different from European illumination art, which flourished in the Middle Ages. European designs, he said, are more figurative and can depict human faces, animals and

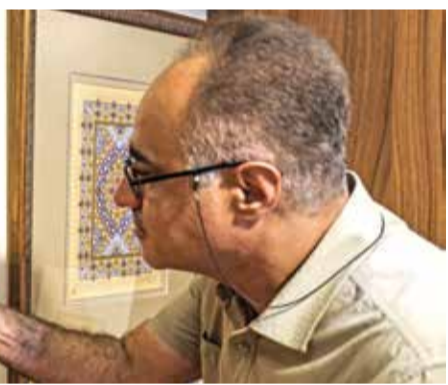
as Turkey, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. "Twenty years ago, I didn't have much hope" for the future of Persian illumination, said Aghamiri. "But things have changed, and I see that this art is becoming more and more popular."—AFP



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri reaches for one of his brushes while working on a piece in his workshop.



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri inspects one of his framed artworks with a magnifying glass at his workshop.



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri, an artist who specializes in Persian miniatures, works on one of his pieces depicting Al-Fatiha, the first chapter of the Quran (Islam's Holy Book), at his workshop in Tehran.—AFP photos



(From left) US actor Willem Dafoe, US-Canadian actress Catherine O'Hara, US actor Justin Theroux, US actor Michael Keaton, Italian actress Monica Bellucci and US director Tim Burton pose during a Warner Bros Pictures photo op as they arrive to promote "Beetlejuice Beetlejuice" during CinemaCon 2024 at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada.—AFP

Beetlejuice sequel to open Venice Film Festival

The sequel to Tim Burton's 1988 "Beetlejuice" will premiere at this year's Venice Film Festival, bringing back actor Michael Keaton as the havoc-wrecking demon, organizers said Tuesday. "Beetlejuice Beetlejuice" will kick off the glitzy festival running from August 28 through September 7 on Venice's Lido, showing out of competition. It comes 36 years after the original, which helped cement the reputation of Burton, 72, as a master of unique and quirky fantasy films marked by visual effects and gothic horror.

"Beetlejuice Beetlejuice is the long-awaited return of one of the most iconic characters in Tim Burton's cine-

ma," said festival director Alberto Barbera. Barbera called Burton "one of the most fascinating auteurs of his time" and the sequel "a surprising swing of creative imagination and driving hallucinatory rhythm". Actor Michael Keaton reprises his original role, as do Catherine O'Hara and Winona Ryder. The film also stars Justin Theroux, Monica Bellucci and Willem Dafoe. Burton's three-decade career includes films such as "Edward Scissorhands" (1990), "Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas" (1993) and "Alice in Wonderland" (2010). —AFP

Don't camp out, Amsterdam tells Swifties

Fans of Taylor Swift have been warned not to camp out overnight to secure the best spots when the US pop sensation rolls into Amsterdam for her record-breaking Eras Tour. Swift is playing three sell-out shows in the Dutch capital on July 4, 5 and 6 -- part of her world tour that has smashed records for the highest-grossing ever. "You are not allowed to camp or spend the night in the public space around the Johan Crujff Arena," said the Amsterdam council, warning police would fine offenders.

Amsterdam officials also warned against so-called "Taylor-gating", where Swifties without tickets turn up to listen outside the stadium and swap friendship bracelets. "Only come to the Arena area if you are going to the concert," said Mick Werkendam, crowd manager at the council. "And the roof of the Arena is closed. So you won't hear or see anything of Taylor Swift or the concert," added Werkendam. For her first European stop in Paris, some fans camped out two days in advance to ensure they got as close as possible to their idol.

The Eras Tour has already worked its way across North and South America and Asia since starting in March 2023. By the end of the year, it had already become the first to sell more than \$1 billion in tickets and is on track to more than double that by the time it concludes in Vancouver this December. Swift's popularity shows no sign of dimming—her new album shifted 1.4 million copies on its first day and broke every streaming record going, reaching a billion streams on Spotify within five days. —AFP



In this file photo, fans of US singer Taylor Swift, also known as Swifties, queue for merchandise at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) ahead of Swift's three shows in Melbourne on Feb 16, 2024. — AFP

Sports

Japan's skateboarding youth turn street culture into Olympic gold

National team coach: Number of skaters in Japan has tripled

TOKYO: Japan used to think skateboarding was a pastime for delinquents but the country has grown into a global powerhouse in the sport and is expected to dominate at this month's Paris Olympics. Children as young as six can be seen zipping up ramps and grinding down rails at skate parks all over Japan, with instructors teaching tricks while parents wait patiently nearby.

It is a far cry from skateboarding's original street culture image, but it is producing spectacular results, with Japan winning three of the four available golds on the sport's Olympic debut in Tokyo three years ago.

National team coach Daisuke Hayakawa told AFP that the number of skaters in Japan had tripled since and believes his team can clean up at the Paris Games. Ominously for everyone else, he says they will have a steady production line of talent for years to come.

"It's become something that kids take lessons in," said the 50-year-old. "Parents used to tell their kids to stop skateboarding. Now parents take their kids to skate parks. If their shoes or boards wear out, they buy them new ones."

"It has become a very well supported sport," he added. Hayakawa was speaking at a Tokyo skate park that opened in 2022, one of several to spring up since the Olympics. Despite the punishing summer heat, the sound of wheels clacking against concrete and wood scraping against metal hangs in the air as skaters young and old practice.

"Things have completely changed because of the Olympics. It has had a big impact," said Takumi Shimabukuro, a parent watching his nine-year-old son Yuya fearlessly fly up and down a halfpipe.

Teenage kicks

International competitions are regularly won by young skaters but the ages of Japan's medalists at the Tokyo Games were eye-catching by any standard. Kokona Hiraki took silver in the women's park competition at the age of 12, while women's street gold medalist Momiji Nishiya was 13.

Japan will head to Paris with another fresh-faced squad featuring a pair of 14-year-olds in men's prodigy Ginwoo Onodera and women's street skater Coco Yoshizawa. Hayakawa believes the fearlessness of youth was a big factor in Japan's Tokyo Games success.

"They were too young to understand the importance of the Olympics," he said. "They didn't really know how big a stage they were competing on, so they weren't nervous." Japan's team for Paris will also feature defending men's street champion Yuto Horigome, who clinched his place by winning the qualifying competition in Budapest in June.

The 25-year-old was on the verge of missing out after a disappointing showing at the previous qualifying event but he came through when it counted. Hayakawa describes Horigome as an elder statesman who has been an inspiration for Japan's younger generation. "He set his sights higher, he entered international competitions, he got better and better and became recognized as the best street skater in the world," said Hayakawa. "Young kids here saw that and thought, 'If Yuto can do it, we have a chance as well.'"

Strength in depth

Horigome is determined to retain his street title in Paris but he will face stiff competition from his own team-mates. Sora Shirai is the reigning world champion, while Onodera finished second in Budapest, where half of the eight finalists were Japanese.



TOKYO: Japan skateboarding national team coach Daisuke Hayakawa performing during an interview with AFP at a skateboard training area in Tokyo. — AFP

Competition for squad places was so fierce that world silver medalist Kairi Netsuke missed the cut. "It really feels like you're representing your country," Horigome said after locking up his spot. "It's different from other competitions."

Coach Hayakawa started skateboarding almost 40 years ago and has seen it evolve from its shady roots

on the streets to become an Olympic sport. He says he will be happy if the Paris spotlight brings more kids to skateboarding and believes Japan can remain a hotbed of talent. "We're diligent and we put in a lot of practice," he said. "We think about how best to win a competition. We're also not so big physically, so the way we move our bodies is suited to skateboarding." — AFP

News in Brief

Tottenham sign Gray

LONDON: Tottenham have completed the signing of Leeds midfielder Archie Gray in a player-plus-cash deal which sees Joe Rodon return to Elland Road, it was announced Tuesday. The 18-year-old Gray won plaudits in an impressive breakout season at Leeds and Brentford had a reported £35 million (\$44 million, 41 million euros) bid rejected last weekend. That allowed Spurs to come in for the England Under-21 international, who has signed a six-year deal. No fee has been disclosed, but British media reported Gray had signed in a deal worth £25-30 million, with the added inducement of former loanee Rodon returning to Leeds on a permanent basis. Leeds' failure to gain promotion to the lucrative Premier League from the second-tier Championship in May put pressure on the Yorkshire club to make big-money sales to comply with financial fair play rules. Gray, who can play at both right-back and in central midfield, became a regular under Leeds boss Daniel Farke last season. The teenager made 52 appearances in all competitions following his league debut against Cardiff in August. — AFP

Empoli to change coach

ROME: Empoli became the 13th Serie A club to change coaches for the new season after they announced on Tuesday the arrival of Roberto D'Aversa as boss. Italian D'Aversa returns to management with Empoli, who finished 17th out of 20 last season, after being sacked by Lecce in March for headbutting an opposition player. The 48-year-old has also had spells in charge of Sampdoria and Parma having come through AC Milan's youth academy as a player. "Empoli announce that it has entrusted the technical guidance of the first team to Roberto D'Aversa," they said. "The coach has signed a contract until June 30, 2026," the three-time Serie B winners added. Milan, Juventus and Napoli are among the other Italian top-flight clubs to have changed coaches this summer. — AFP

Woodman-Wickliffe to retire

PARIS: Double Rugby World Cup winner Portia Woodman-Wickliffe said on Monday that she will retire from the sport after this summer's Paris Olympic Games. Winger Woodman-Wickliffe, 32, and the Black Ferns are defending Olympic women's gold medal during the tournament in July. She won the World Cup in the shorter form of the sport in 2013 and 2018 having lifted the 15s title in 2017 and 2022. "After 12 incredible years representing New Zealand in 7s and 15s, the upcoming Paris Olympics will be my last time playing in the black jersey," Woodman-Wickliffe said on Instagram. "Rugby has provided me more than a career, it's given me a second whanau (family) in my sisters, opportunities to see the world and experience things I never would have otherwise. "One last dance with my sisters in Paris." 2015's World Rugby sevens player of the year added. The women's sevens at the Paris Games begin on July 28 at the Stade de France with the gold medal match two days later. — AFP

Toulouse to play former winners in Champions Cup pool

TOULOUSE: Champions Cup holders Toulouse will face three former winners and the Sharks in next season's groups, after tournament organisers made the draw for the pool stages on Tuesday.

The French Top 14 champions beat Leinster 31-22 in May's final to claim a record sixth crown and will play Exeter, Leicester and Ulster in Pool 1, with Bordeaux-Begles and the Challenge Cup winners from South Africa the Sharks also in the group. Teams will come up against all the sides in their pool apart from a club from the same league.

In Pool 2, Irish province Leinster will once again play La Rochelle in a repeat of the 2022 and 2023 finals. The highlight of Pool 3 is a re-run of 2000's decider as Munster face Northampton while three-time winners Toulon are in Pool 4 alongside United Rugby Championship holders Glasgow.

In the second-tier Challenge Cup, French side Vannes, newly-promoted to the Top 14, are in Pool 3 in their debut season alongside Georgians Black Lion, French club Bayonne, Welsh side Scarlets, Scottish outfit Edinburgh and Gloucester from England.

The fixtures will be announced at a later date, with games to be played on the weekends of December 6-8, December 13-15, January 10-12 and January 17-19. The Champions Cup final will be held on May 24 at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, the city that hosted the first ever final in 1996. The Challenge Cup's decider will take place in the same ground but on the previous day.

Chinese swimmers in murky waters after doping scandal

SHANGHAI: China's swimmers head to the Paris Olympics under fierce scrutiny with 11 of the squad among a group who tested positive for a banned substance in the lead-up to the Tokyo Games. Swimming is always one of the most eagerly anticipated events and along with the United States and Australia, China are expected to be among the medalists when the Games begin on July 26.

Any success will face immediate questions, however, after revelations in April that 23 Chinese swimmers tested positive for trimetazidine (TMZ) at a domestic competition in late 2020 and early 2021.

They were allowed to compete in Tokyo a few months later after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) accepted the Chinese authorities' conclusion that the adverse findings were caused by contaminated food at a team hotel.

Eleven of the 23, including reigning Olympic and world champions, will be in the French capital, making up a third of China's swim team. The way the news of the failed tests was revealed—via the media and only years later—sparked accusations from the United States' anti-doping body of "a potential cover-up", something WADA and China have strenuously denied.

TMZ is a prescription heart medication but it is banned in athletes because it can enhance performance. The swimmers were found to have "consistently very low levels" of the drug, WADA said. TMZ was the medication at the centre of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics doping scandal involving teenage Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva. She was banned for four years in January.

'No winners here'

The New York Times, which together with German broadcaster ARD first reported the 23 failed



MARSEILLE: Toulouse's Italian full back Ange Capuozzo celebrates scoring a try during the French Top 14 rugby union final match between the Stade Toulousain (Toulouse) and Union Bordeaux-Begles (UBB) at the Velodrome Stadium in Marseille, southeastern France. — AFP

Champions Cup

Pool 1: Toulouse (FRA), Bordeaux-Begles (FRA), Sharks (RSA), Exeter (ENG), Leicester (ENG), Ulster (IRL)

Pool 2: Leinster (IRL), Clermont (FRA), La Rochelle (FRA), Bristol (ENG), Treviso (ITA), Bath (ENG)

Pool 3: Northampton (ENG), Munster (IRL), Bulls (RSA), Stade Francais (FRA), Saracens (ENG), Castres (FRA)

Pool 4: Glasgow (SCO), Racing 92 (FRA), Sale (ENG), Stormers (RSA), Toulon (FRA), Harlequins (ENG)

Challenge Cup

Pool 1: Cardiff (WAL), Connacht (IRL), Cheetahs (RSA), Perpignan (FRA), Lyon (FRA), Zebre (ITA)

Pool 2: Montpellier (FRA), Pau (FRA), Newcastle (ENG), Dragons (WAL), Lions (RSA), Ospreys (WAL)

Pool 3: Vannes (FRA), Black Lion (GEO), Bayonne (FRA), Scarlets (WAL), Edinburgh (SCO), Gloucester (ENG). — AFP



HANGZHOU: (FILES) Gold medalist China's Zhang Yufei celebrates on the podium during the medals ceremony for the women's 50m freestyle swimming event during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou. — AFP

tests, then said in June that three of those had also tested positive for another banned substance years earlier. Chinese authorities argued the three had ingested the substance inadvertently through contaminated meat, and no disciplinary action was taken.

WADA said the trio were found to have levels of clenbuterol which were between "six and 50 times lower" than the minimum reporting level currently used by the agency. Following the initial furor in April, WADA—which has come under fierce criticism in some quarters—ordered an independent review into its handling of the case of the 23.

"This is a huge mess and one largely of WADA's own making," anti-doping expert April Henning, from Edinburgh's Heriot-Watt University, told AFP. The scandal affects not just WADA but other athletes and governing bodies, as well as "the Chinese swimmers in this case who will now forever be labelled as dopers even if there truly was a contamination issue", said Henning.

"There are no winners here." China has consistently denied there was any intention to cheat and railed against "fake news". Some Chinese media have presented the story as an American-led plot to discredit the country and its team. — AFP

Springboks choose Pollard at fly-half for Ireland Test

JOHANNESBURG: Handre Pollard was given the key fly-half role when South Africa named an experienced team on Tuesday to face Ireland in the first match of a two-Test series in Pretoria on Saturday.

There had been speculation that the more creative but inconsistent goal-kicker Manie Libbok might get the nod for the highly anticipated clash of the top-ranked teams. But coach Rassie Erasmus kept faith in Pollard, whose 100 percent goal-kicking record played a crucial role in South Africa achieving back-to-back Rugby World Cup titles last October.

Pollard did not make the initial 2023 World Cup squad for France due to injury but came in during the tournament as a replacement after hooker Malcolm Marx was ruled out. The goal-kicking of the Leicester fly-half proved crucial in France as South Africa edged France, England and New Zealand in the knockout rounds to retain the title.

Libbok did not even make the bench with South Africa opting for a 6-2 forwards-backs split with Grant Williams and Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu covering all the backline positions. Pollard is one of 12 starters from the 2023 World Cup final against the All Blacks who will start against Ireland before a sell-out 52,000 crowd at Loftus Versfeld stadium.

Injuries have sidelined full-back Damian Willemse and prop Steven Kitshoff and back-rower Duane Vermeulen retired after helping the Springboks win back-to-back World Cup finals. Veteran Willie le Roux replaces Willemse, Ox Nche takes over from Kitshoff and Kwagga Smith comes in for Vermeulen. Le Roux, Nche and Smith all came off the bench in the 2023 World Cup final, won 12-11 by South Africa against 14-man New Zealand at the Stade de France. — AFP

Sports

USA crash out of Copa in group phase, Uruguay, Panama advance

USA captain Christian Pulisic blamed a lack of attacking quality

KANSAS CITY: The United States crashed out of the Copa America on Monday after a 1-0 defeat to Uruguay, as Panama sealed their place in the quarter-finals with a 3-1 win over Bolivia. The tournament hosts suffered an upset 2-1 defeat to Panama last week and went into Monday's final Group C game at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City needing to match or better Panama's result against Bolivia to advance. But US coach Gregg Berhalter's side never looked like doing enough to seriously threaten a well-drilled Uruguay who advance to the last eight as group winners. "Just looking at the faces of the staff and the players, we're bitterly disappointed with the results," Berhalter said.

"We know that we're capable of more and in this tournament we didn't show it. It's really as simple as that. We should have done better. We'll do a review and figure out what went wrong, why it went wrong, but it's an empty feeling right now for sure."

USA captain Christian Pulisic blamed a lack of attacking quality. "We had a good start and brought a lot of energy, but just didn't have enough quality," he said. "We just couldn't find a solution." Hopes of a great escape for Berhalter's men faded inside the first 30 minutes as news filtered through that Panama had taken a 1-0 lead against Bolivia in Orlando.

US hopes were revived early in the second half after Bolivia equalized, leaving the hosts on course for qualification, provided they continued to hold Uruguay. Yet the US optimism was punctured just moments later when Uruguay took the lead in controversial circumstances through Mathias Olivera on 66 minutes.

'Pretty crazy'

Ronald Araujo's powerful header from Nicolas de la Cruz's free-kick was parried away by US goalkeeper Matt Turner, but only into the path of Olivera, who

tucked away the rebound. Replays appeared to show that Olivera was offside when Araujo first made contact with the ball, but despite a lengthy VAR review, Peruvian referee Kevin Ortega ruled that the goal should stand. "It's pretty crazy," Berhalter said. "I don't understand it, I feel like I know the offside rule pretty well. It's disappointing. It really is. But you know that that happens in football, and we have to live with it." The mathematics of qualification looked even more bleak for the US after news that Panama had scored again through Eduardo Guerrero to regain the lead at 2-1, and the final nail in the coffin came when Cesar Yanis added a third for Panama in stoppage time.

The USA's first-round exit raises fresh questions about the future of Berhalter, who remains deeply unpopular amongst swathes of American fans. Berhalter was only reappointed to the US job in June last year following a hiatus after leading the team to the 2022 World Cup. The nature of Monday's early exit is certain to reignite debate about whether he is the best man to lead the United States into the 2026 World Cup on home soil. Failure to defeat Uruguay, 14th in the latest FIFA rankings, extends Berhalter's poor record against top 20 teams. Berhalter has just five wins in 20 matches against top-20 teams during his reign, and four of those victories came against regional rivals Mexico - who were also eliminated from the Copa in the first round.

That dismal sequence continued after a toothless attacking performance against Uruguay, where the US registered only three shots on goal in a misfiring offensive display. Defender Antonee Robinson described the officiating as "amateur hour" but stressed responsibility for the defeat lay with the players. "Just not enough quality in the final third," Robinson said. "At the end of the day we weren't good enough to get the result today. This is on us." - AFP



ORLANDO: Panama's defender #02 Cesar Blackman fights for the ball with Bolivia's midfielder #10 Ramiro Vaca during the Conmebol 2024 Copa America tournament group C football match between Bolivia and Panama at Inter&Co Stadium in Orlando. - AFP

Kuwait's Al-Waleed nominated for VP of Arab Pentathlon

CAIRO: The General Assembly of the Arab Modern Pentathlon Union has nominated the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwaiti Modern Pentathlon Union, Nasser Al-Waleed, for the post of first Vice-President of the Union. Al-Waleed said in a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Monday that the General Assembly of the Arab Union was held in Alexandria in the presence of representatives of 10 Arab countries out of a total of 15 countries including Kuwait, Libya, Syria, Sudan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq in addition to Egypt (the headquarters).

He explained that the association concluded its work last Saturday by choosing a new board of directors headed by engineer Walid Khalil from Egypt. He added that the council includes Dr Huda Al Matrooshi (UAE); Obaid Al Hammour (Sudan); Fathi Youssef (Libya); Ibrahim Zein (Lebanon) and Omar



Nasser Al-Waleed

Ashour (Syria); with a seat reserved for Palestine according to a regulation to be determined later, as well as a seat for Qatar to be determined later.

Al-Waleed stressed the importance of reviving the Arab Federation of Modern Pentathlon, especially which the Arab countries have begun in establishing players in the sport of modern pentathlon. He continued, "We are honored that Kuwait was the one who raised this file to reactivate this important entity and for our expertise International and local achievements in sports have earned us the trust of the General Assembly and now we are

striving to hold the Arab Championships in Modern Pentathlon this year".

He expressed thanks to the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee headed by Sheikh Fahd Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and vice president Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah for its continuous support to the youth of Kuwait as well as its support for the establishment of modern pentathlon sport in Kuwait.

The meeting was attended by the President of the International Federation of Modern Pentathlon, Dr Klaus Schurman, the president of the Federation of African Sports Federations (OXA), Major General Ahmed Nasser, the president of the Egyptian Federation of Modern Pentathlon, the vice president of the International Federation of the game, engineer Sherif El-Erian, the President of African Union of Modern Pentathlon Seydou Sylvestre Zari.

The modern pentathlon sport is one of the composite sports consisting of five games practiced by one player and performed in one day, namely (archery, sword fencing, swimming, equestrian, cross-country). The participant receives certain points according to the result he achieves in each competition and the players are ranked according to what points they get. - KUNA

Training troubles

The political reality of the West Bank - dotted by the Zionist army checkpoints that restrict movement - means Abu Sal is fighting hurdles even before he makes history. "Athletes from the West Bank can't easily come to us," he said. His usual sparring partner in Ramallah outweighs him by several weight classes - 71 kilograms to Abu Sal's 57 kg. Another partner closer to him in weight is based in Jerusalem, on the other side of the Zionist entity's security barrier, making regular training difficult.

"This makes it hard to hold tournaments, leading to less competition in the country," he said. Travelling abroad to train or compete comes with its own difficulties. "Many countries deny visas to those with Palestinian passports, causing us to miss out on tournaments while waiting for visas," he said. When Abu Sal flies for Paris in July, he will do so from the Jordanian capital of Amman, which he will travel to from Ramallah by road, as he usually does when going abroad for competitions. Nader Jayousi, head of the Palestinian Olympic delegation that will send seven athletes to Paris this year, is a mentor to Abu Sal. At the official's Ramallah gym, Waseem trains alongside other promising young boxers under his watchful eye. As the Olympic prospect spars, a mix of rap and traditional Palestinian songs fills the gym. "It's a proud moment, not just for me, but for Palestine as the first-ever Palestinian boxer will repre-

Hurzeler eager to 'challenge the establishment'

LONDON: Fabian Hurzeler said on Tuesday he wanted to "achieve big things and challenge the establishment" during his first press conference as Brighton manager.

The 31-year-old, the youngest full-time manager in Premier League history, has taken over at the south coast club after guiding St Pauli to promotion into Germany's elite Bundesliga last season. The Texas-born German coach said he had moved to "the best league in the world" ahead of Brighton's opening league fixture of the 2024/25 season at Everton on August 17.

"I'm aware this is a huge job. It's a big challenge and I think I need a lot of courage and ability so I need to stay humble," said Hurzeler. "My targets, I want to discuss them with my players, they need to be convinced of that, they need to feel what we can achieve, that's the main thing for me. "I want to achieve big things and I want to challenge the establishment. "The Premier League is the best league in the world with a lot of good coaches. You need your own philosophy and identity but it's important to take other elements and adapt."

Hurzeler, who has signed a contract with Brighton until 2027, has replaced Roberto De Zerbi at the Amex Stadium after the Italian left at the end of last term after two successful seasons in charge before taking over at French club Marseille. De Zerbi took charge at the Amex Stadium in September 2022 and led Brighton to their highest ever top-flight finish when they came sixth in 2022/23. - AFP



BRIGHTON: (FILES) Brighton's Italian head coach Roberto De Zerbi applauds fans as he leaves the pitch after the English Premier League football match between Brighton and Hove Albion and Liverpool at the American Express Community Stadium in Brighton. - AFP

First Palestinian Olympic boxer fights hurdles

BEITUNIA: Every morning Palestinian boxer Waseem Abu Sal checks texts from his Cairo-based coach - a Gazan who cannot travel to him in the occupied West Bank - to see his daily Olympics training schedule as he prepares to make history. The 20-year-old will be the first Palestinian boxer to participate in the Olympics after he bagged a wildcard spot and now dreams of delivering the first-ever medal for the Palestinians when he competes in Paris.

"This has been my dream since I was 10 years old," he told AFP the day after receiving the invitation last week. "Every day I went to sleep and woke up thinking about how I could reach the Olympics." Abu Sal will take on his first Olympic fight on July 28 after an unusual training routine with his remote coach Ahmad Harara, 32, who is held back by Zionist travel restrictions.

"I only see him when I travel" for international competitions, Waseem Abu Sal told AFP at his gym in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian Authority (PA). "He writes my train-



RAMALLAH: A picture taken on June 22, 2024 shows Palestinian lightweight boxer Waseem Abu Sal training at a gym in Ramallah city in the occupied West Bank. - AFP

ing schedule every day, and I train in the morning, and again in the evening with coach Nader Jayousi."

Harara said he could not see his star fighter because of "the occupation barriers between the West Bank and Gaza" as an ID holder of the latter territory. "Since then, I have been overseeing Waseem's training remotely," Harara said. The Palestine Olympic Committee has been represented on the International Olympic Committee since 1995 despite a lack of statehood. Though Abu Sal did not make it through the Olympic qualifying rounds, he received a wildcard spot in a system that ensures representation for all countries at the Games.

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764

Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22465636
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, Santan Francis Ferrao, holder of Indian Passport No. S0586990, do hereby change my name to Santana Francisco (as given name) Ferrao (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known by the name Santana Francisco Ferrao and I will also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#5630, 03/07/2024)

I, Mahesh Kumar, holder of passport No. R5452716 do hereby change my name to Manish (as given name) Patel (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known by the name Manish Patel and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#5629, 02/07/2024)

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Portugal edge past Slovenia at Euros

Goalkeeper Costa's penalty heroics rescue Ronaldo



FRANKFURT: Portugal's players celebrate after winning the UEFA Euro 2024 round of 16 football match between Portugal and Slovenia at the Frankfurt Arena in Frankfurt am Main on July 1, 2024. — AFP

FRANKFURT: Portugal goalkeeper Diogo Costa saved three Slovenia penalties to earn his side a 3-0 shoot-out victory after Cristiano Ronaldo redeemed himself from the spot in a dramatic Euro 2024 last 16 clash on Monday.

Portugal forward Ronaldo broke down in tears after missing a penalty in the first period of extra-time in the goalless tie in Frankfurt. But he recovered to convert in the shoot-out as Portugal scraped through to set up a blockbuster clash with France in the quarter-finals.

Slovenia battled valiantly to keep Portugal at bay, with Jan Oblak making a stunning save to keep out Ronaldo's penalty after Diogo Jota was fouled. However, Ronaldo, Bruno Fernandes and Bernardo Silva all scored in the shoot-out and Slovenia's trio missed, sending the Selecao through in heart-stopping fashion.

"First it was sadness and then it was joy, that's what football gives you, inexplicable moments, a bit of everything," said Ronaldo. "I didn't make a single mistake this year and when I needed something

the most, Oblak saved it." Slovenia spent the whole game defending and when that happens, it all becomes difficult."

Ronaldo, 39, is still without a goal at the tournament in four appearances, having scored in the five previous editions of the Euros. The Euro 2016 winners dominated the ball and created their first chance after 12 minutes when Silva's inviting cross just evaded Ronaldo and Fernandes could not turn home at the far post.

Slovenia, playing in their first ever knock-out match at a major competition, maintained their defensive shape well and limited Portugal's opportunities. Former Real Madrid striker Ronaldo directed a soft header at his old nemesis, Atletico Madrid keeper Oblak, under vital pressure from Vanja Drkusic.

The Slovenian defender was booked moments later for bringing down the surging Rafael Leao as he charged towards Oblak's goal. Ronaldo smashed the free-kick narrowly over the bar with the goalkeeper at full stretch.

Slovenia produced their first effort

on target just before half-time when RB Leipzig striker Benjamin Sesko fired at Costa from the edge of the box. Portugal's holding midfielder Joao Palhinha hit the outside of the post with a low drive, the final kick of the first half, after more good work by the menacing Leao.

Ronaldo forced a solid stop by Oblak with another venomous free-kick early in the second half as the Al-Nassr forward tried in vain to break down Slovenia's defensive wall. Matjaz Kek's side had a golden chance to take the lead on a rare burst forward, but Sesko dragged wide after beating the oldest player in the competition's history, 41-year-old Pepe, for pace.

Portugal captain Ronaldo thumped yet another free-kick over the crossbar with 20 minutes remaining and Oblak denied him with two minutes to go when he was through on the left.

Oblak thwarts Ronaldo

The pace dipped in extra-time and the first period was uneventful, until the 103rd minute when Jota barged into

the area and went down over Drkusic's leg for a penalty. Ronaldo fired it hard to Oblak's left but the goalkeeper produced a stunning save to deny him, tipping his effort against the post and out.

In half-time of extra-time, Ronaldo was in tears after his miss, and Portugal fans sang his name to try to raise his shattered morale. Slovenia missed another huge opening of their own when Pepe gave the ball away with a loose pass and Sesko stole it to race through on goal.

The forward fired too close to Costa who produced an excellent save with his leg, forcing a penalty shoot-out - Slovenia's first ever. Slovenia went first and substitute Josip Ilicic's effort was brilliantly saved by Costa.

Ronaldo buried his kick and asked for forgiveness from the fans behind the goal for his extra-time miss, before Costa saved Slovenia's second from Jure Balkovec. The brilliant Costa made a third consecutive penalty save from Benjamin Verbic after Fernandes converted and Silva won it as he sent Oblak the wrong way. — AFP

Murray out of Wimbledon as Novak makes bow

LONDON: Andy Murray lost his race to be fit for the Wimbledon singles on Tuesday as Novak Djokovic prepared to launch his bid for a record-equalling eighth Wimbledon men's crown. The withdrawal of two-time champion Murray means Djokovic is the only member of the fabled "Big Four" in the men's draw at the All England Club.

Roger Federer has retired and Rafael Nadal opted to skip Wimbledon to prepare for a shot at another Olympic title. Murray, 37, is hoping to end his stellar career at the upcoming Paris Games but desperately wanted to make a final singles appearance at Wimbledon, where he was champion in 2013 and 2016.

The Scot, who has been ravaged by injuries in recent years, will still play doubles with his brother Jamie in what is bound to be an emotional farewell in front of his adoring British fans. Murray underwent surgery to remove a cyst from his back last month after being forced to pull out of Queen's, a procedure he described as "not insignificant".

But he admitted defeat in his race to be fit on Tuesday. "Unfortunately, despite working incredibly hard on his recovery since his operation just over a week ago, Andy has taken the very difficult decision not to play the singles this year," said a statement from Murray's representatives.

"As you can imagine, he is extremely disappointed but has confirmed that he will be playing in the doubles with Jamie and looks forward to competing at Wimbledon for the last time." Murray was replaced in the draw by Belgium's David Goffin, a lucky loser from qualifying.

History-chasing Djokovic

Djokovic, born a week apart from Murray in May 1987, had a knee operation after pulling out before his French Open quarter-final - sparking fears he would not be fit in time for Wimbledon. But the Serbian world number two, who was beaten by Carlos Alcaraz in last year's final, has said he is "pain-free" and opens against Czech qualifier Vit Kopriwa.

He knows time is not on his side as he bids to equal Federer's Wimbledon title record and become the first player - man or woman - to win 25 Grand Slam singles titles. "I do have something that is described as a feeling of not missing out at a Grand Slam while I can still play and while I'm still active and at this level," said the Djokovic, who has reached the past five finals at the All England Club.

"I wouldn't call it a fear of missing out. I would just say it's this incredible desire to play, just to compete. "Particularly because it is Wimbledon, the tournament that always has been a dream tournament for me when I was a kid. Just the thought of me missing Wimbledon was just not correct. I didn't want to deal with that." — AFP

Pogacar wins to reclaim Tour de France lead

VALLOIRE: Two-time former champion Tadej Pogacar won stage four of the Tour de France on Tuesday to reclaim the overall leader's yellow jersey on the first major mountain challenge in the Alps. Slovenian superstar Pogacar's triumph was built by his UAE Team on the ascent of the Galibier mountain with three teammates still with their leader when all their rivals had seen their sherpas dropped.

Belgian Quick Step rider Remco Evenepoel finished second 35 seconds off the pace with two-time defending champion Jonas Vingegaard of Denmark finishing fifth at 37sec. Vingegaard's Visma team appeared visibly weaker than during their dominant 2023 showcase second triumph on the Tour.

Overnight leader, Education First's Richard Carapaz, was the big loser of the day as the Ecuadorian gave up over five minutes. Pogacar, winner in 2020 and 2021, is attempting to become the first rider since 1998 to win both the Giro d'Italia and Tour in the same year.

The short 134km run from Pinerolo marked the end of an entertaining and picturesque race start in Italy. The first four stages took in Florence, the Adriatic coast, Bologna and the Piedmont region on the French border beside Turin.

Pogacar's Team UAE hogged the front of the 25km final ascent taking it in turns on the front as



VALLOIRE: UAE Team Emirates team's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar celebrates on the podium with the overall leader's yellow jersey after the 4th stage of the 111th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 140 km between Pinerolo in Italy, and Valloire in France, on July 2, 2024. — AFP

their rivals wilted. Runner-up in the past two editions behind Vingegaard, Pogacar attacked less than 1km from the summit, and it was the last his rivals saw of him so winding was the route.

Massed ranks of fans, many of whom had camped overnight, packed the roadsides all the

way up the magnificent beyond category mountain. On Wednesday, stage five will see Biniam Girmay, Jasper Philipsen, Mark Cavendish and the fast men jostle for position as the 177km snakes through valleys between Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne and the village of Saint-Vulbas. — AFP