

5 Trump hosts 'coolest dictator' Bukele amid migrant crackdown



6 Katy Perry roars into space with all-female crew on Blue Origin



11 Nobel Literature Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa dies in Peru

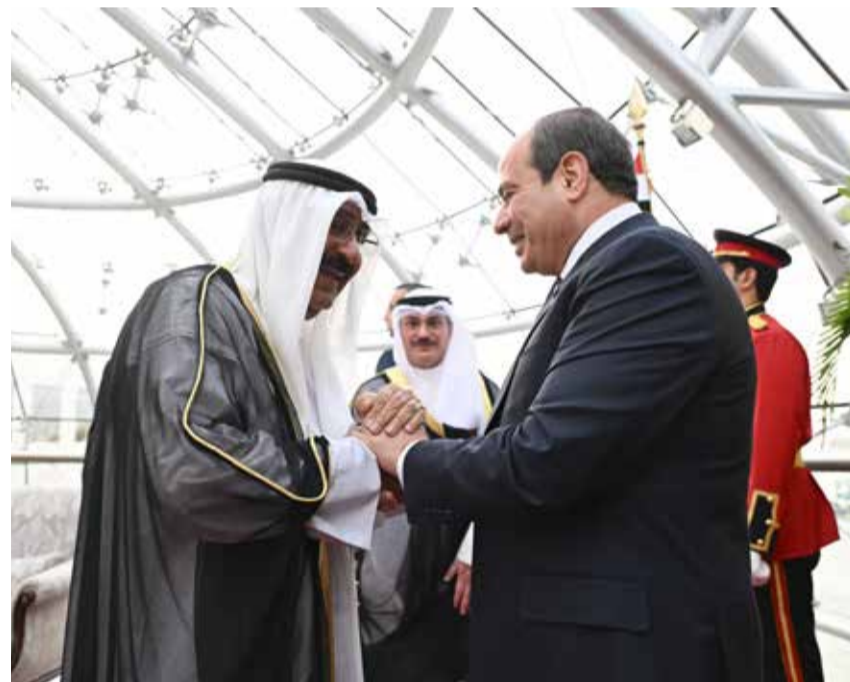


14 McLaren's Piastri powers to 'mega' win in Bahrain



Amir welcomes Egyptian President

Pomp and pageantry as Sisi arrives in Kuwait on state visit



KUWAIT: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi arrived in Kuwait Monday on a state visit. HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, along with HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, received the Egyptian President and his accompanying delegation at the Amiri Airport.

Acting Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Deputy Premier and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Shareeda Al-Maousherji and Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya were also present.

Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah is heading the mission of honor accompanying the distinguished guest. Upon arrival, the national anthems of both countries were played, as HH the Amir greeted the Egyptian delegation.

As the official motorcade departed Amiri Airport, children lined both sides of the road, waving the flags of both nations and chanting welcoming phrases in honor of the president. Upon the motorcade's arrival at Bayan Palace, a 21-gun salute was fired to mark the occasion. A group of horsemen and several traditional folk troupes were also present, performing cultural displays as a warm welcome for Sisi. — KUNA (See Page 3)

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah welcomes Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi as he arrives in Kuwait on a state visit on April 14, 2025. — Amiri Diwan photos

NEWS IN BRIEF

New CMA board named

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signed a decree on Monday assigning the Capital Markets Authority's board of commissioners for a period of four years. The board, whose mandate can be renewed once, include Chairman Emad Tifoni and Vice Chairman Rayyan Al-Zaid, and members Tareq Shihab, Hessa Al-Roumi and Thamer Al-Nisf. The decree ordered Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel to execute the decree upon publication in the official gazette. — KUNA



Lebanese PM visits Syria

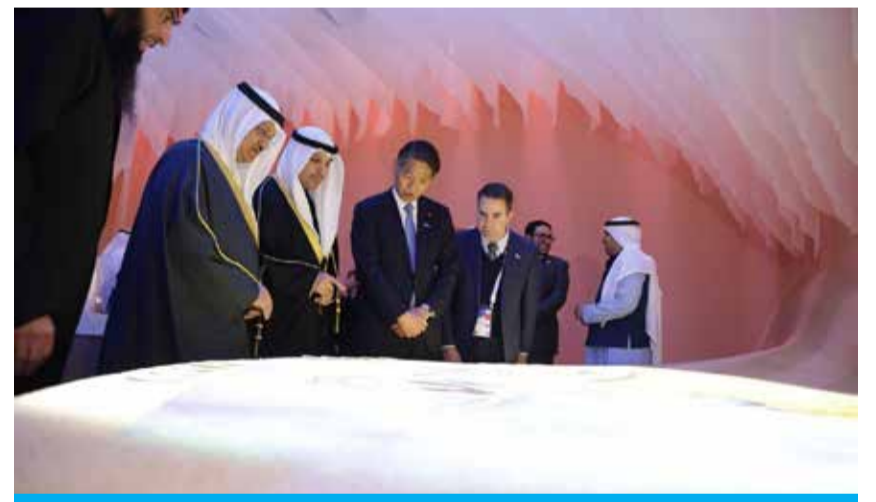
BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam on Monday travelled to Syria on his first official visit to meet interim President Ahmed Al-Sharaa, seeking to readjust bilateral ties, a Lebanese official said. The official said discussions were expected to include controlling and demarcating the porous, 330-km shared border, as well as combating smuggling. Beirut is expected to seek the new authorities' assistance on "the formation of a commission of inquiry into a large number of assassinations in Lebanon over which the former regime is accused", the official said. Salam, who is accompanied by several senior ministers, is also expected to raise "the return of Syrian refugees", the official added. — AFP

Kuwait opens pavilion at 2025 Osaka Expo

OSAKA: Kuwait's participation in 2025 Osaka Expo reflects its strong cultural ties with Japan and its commitment to innovation and heritage, said Information and Culture Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi. Speaking to KUNA after inaugurating Kuwait's pavilion on Sunday, Al-Mutairi, who also serves as Minister of State for Youth Affairs, said the exhibit highlights Kuwait's support for arts, education, and entrepreneurship, especially among youth.

The six-month event, themed "Designing Future Society for Our Lives", features 158 countries and regions on Osaka Bay's Yumeshima island. The pavilions are housed within the Grand Ring, the world's largest wooden structure, promoting the concept of "Unity in Diversity". Over 28 million visitors are expected.

Kuwait's pavilion, called Visionary Lighthouse, offers an immersive journey through four showrooms showcasing the country's heritage and future aspirations. The base level focuses on tradition, while the upper level presents innovation and ambition. A central area known as the pearl honors Kuwait's pearl diving and maritime history. Interactive technologies and AI are used to tell Kuwait's story. The country also took part in Expo 1970 in Osaka, one of only four Arab nations to



OSAKA: Information Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi visits Kuwait's pavilion at the 2025 Osaka Expo on April 13, 2025. — KUNA

Schools out, caution urged as heavy dust storm blankets Kuwait

KUWAIT: A powerful dust storm swept into Kuwait from the west on Monday, reducing visibility across the country and prompting health and safety warnings from authorities. The meteorological department confirmed that the dust storm sweeping across the country on Monday covered all areas and will continue through the night.

The ministry of education announced that classes will be held remotely on Tuesday across all schools due to the ongoing dust storm, prioritizing student safety while maintaining the learning process. Teaching and administrative staff are required to report to school in person, while lessons will be held via the Teams platform.

Acting Meteorological Department Director Dherar Al-Ali told KUNA that horizontal visibility ranged from 1,000 m to less than 100 m and was completely absent in some areas. He explained northwesterly winds reached speeds of over 60 km/h, with the department's automated monitoring stations — operated by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation — recording gusts exceeding 80 km/h, driving waves over six feet high and pushing dust across the country. Al-Ali noted that weather conditions are expected to gradually improve starting Tuesday morning, and urged the public to stay updated through the department's official website, mobile app and social media accounts.

The ministry of interior urged everyone to exercise caution and adhere to safety guidelines. In a press statement, it emphasized the importance of following instructions and avoiding going outdoors unless absolutely necessary. Citizens, residents and seagoers were urged not to hesitate to contact the emergency hotline (112) in case of any urgent situation.

The ministry also called on motorists to avoid using



KUWAIT: A massive dust storm advances on Kuwait City on April 14, 2025. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

hazard lights except for signaling danger, to follow weather alerts, maintain safe distances while driving and reduce speed when visibility drops. Drivers were also reminded not to use mobile phones while driving, to keep windows closed, use air recirculation mode, avoid driving near sand accumulations, and switch to alternative routes when visibility is severely reduced.

The ministry of health affirmed the importance of adhering to health and precautionary guidelines and avoiding leaving home except in necessary cases. It stressed the need to wear masks in open spaces, particularly for highly affected groups such as asthma patients, allergy sufferers and people with weakened immune systems. The ministry

also urged individuals with allergies and chronic respiratory diseases to regularly take their prescribed preventive medications, closely monitor their health and not hesitate to visit the nearest health center or hospital if respiratory symptoms worsen or if assistance is needed.

The meteorological department earlier issued a weather warning forecasting a sharp shift in conditions due to the passage of a cold front. Temperatures reached highs of 38°C Monday, but are expected to drop overnight, with lows around 20°C and highs of 31°C forecast for Tuesday. Drivers were urged to take extreme caution on highways due to poor visibility, and seagoers were warned to avoid venturing out amid high wave activity. — Agencies



Zain Kuwait unveils new TVC to promote new traffic law

In partnership with MoI and in conjunction with the kick-off of the 38th GCC Traffic Week



Scan the QR code to watch the TVC



Al-Nawaf and Al-Khadda honor Al-Khashti in recognition of Zain's support.

KUWAIT: Zain announced a new collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, represented by the General Directorate of Traffic, to launch a brand-new television production, coinciding with the 38th Unified GCC Traffic Week under the theme Driving Without a Phone, and in line with the upcoming implementation of the new traffic law starting from 22 April 2025.

The TVC was unveiled during the opening ceremony of the 38th Unified GCC Traffic Week and its accompanying exhibition, held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and the Avenues Mall, under the patronage and presence of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf, with the attendance of Assistant Undersecretary for Traffic and Operations Affairs, Major General Yousef Al-Khadda, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer, Waleed Al-Khashti, senior security leaders from the General Directorate of Traffic, and representatives of partners and sponsors.

This collaboration reflects the ongoing strategic

partnership between Zain and the Ministry of Interior over the past years, which has resulted in many joint efforts and initiatives to raise public awareness around important security topics, including traffic safety and road security. The television production

A creative production starring Kuwaiti children to educate the next generation of road users

tion, titled Salute to the Police Officer, aims to raise awareness about the new traffic law, which introduces several amendments designed to enhance road safety, strengthen adherence to traffic regulations, and protect road users. The production stars a group of Kuwaiti children expressing their admiration and respect for Ministry of Interior officers through various

interactive scenes on the road, in the operations room, and beyond.

The TVC specifically targets the next generation of road users, while key amendments to the new traffic law are displayed on-screen to inform adult viewers. The production features lyrics by Ahmed Al-Sharqawi, music by Abdullah Al-Shatti, and is produced by Joy Productions. Zain's participation stems from its ongoing commitment to collaborating with various governmental bodies, including the Ministry of Interior, in adopting initiatives and projects that serve all segments of the community, contribute to the nation's progress and prosperity, and support the country's development goals.

The exhibition accompanying the ceremony aimed to promote awareness of the key amendments in the new traffic law, scheduled for implementation on 22 April 2025, raising awareness among visitors—particularly young people and parents—of the importance of adhering to these

regulations to ensure the safety and security of all road users. The exhibition also featured many interactive activities and awareness initiatives to deliver its message in a creative way.

The 38th Unified GCC Traffic Week seeks to spread traffic awareness, promote a culture of compliance with road regulations, and protect lives and property, while embedding safe driving behaviors within GCC communities. It also represents an important opportunity to strengthen cooperation between security authorities and community institutions, helping to reduce traffic accidents and foster a safer, more disciplined traffic environment. As one of the nation's major economic entities, Zain consistently aligns with the state's social, economic, and security development strategies. The company also expressed pride in being among the first organizations to collaborate with the Ministry of Interior in supporting this initiative, which it hopes will help save lives.

MoFA organizes UPR workshop to boost reporting efficiency

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) organized a technical cooperation workshop aimed at enhancing the efficiency of members of the National Standing Committee responsible for preparing Kuwait's national reports for the upcoming fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council, scheduled to take place in May 2024. The workshop was held under the initiative of the Ministry's Human Rights Department, in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen national human rights mechanisms and ensure alignment with Kuwait's international obligations.

The primary objective of the workshop is to build the capacities and raise the awareness of specialized personnel in the field of human rights. It also aims to equip members of the National Standing Committee with the necessary tools to engage effectively with the UPR mechanism, ensure the submission of comprehensive and accurate national reports, and formulate clear and constructive responses to recommendations received during the review process.

This initiative falls within the broader context of Kuwait's preparations to participate in the UPR, a



First Secretary Mohammed Al-Abduljalil, Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ambassador Sheikhaw Ibrahim Duaj Al-Sabah, and officials from the Human Rights Commission. — KUNA photos

key United Nations mechanism established to periodically examine the human rights performance of all UN member states. The workshop highlights Kuwait's commitment to fostering a culture of human rights, promoting transparency, and engaging in constructive dialogue with international bodies. Experts from the OHCHR are participating in the event, offering in-depth presentations on the objectives, stages, and best practices of the UPR process. Topics include how to present national reports effectively and how to respond to recommendations in a manner that reflects Kuwait's human rights priorities and progress.

This workshop reaffirms Kuwait's dedica-

tion to strengthening cooperation with the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including through the Human Rights Technical Assistance Program. It underscores the State's firm commitment to active and constructive engagement in international human rights mechanisms and to advancing cooperation and knowledge-sharing in this vital domain. The Universal Periodic Review was established following UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251 in 2006, which mandated the Human Rights Council to conduct periodic, objective, and equitable reviews of the human rights records of all member states, based on reliable information and consistent standards. — KUNA



Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs, Ambassador Sheikhaw Ibrahim Duaj Al-Sabah

'Quality culture' key to industrial competitiveness

KUWAIT: Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) Shamlan Al-Jahedli emphasized on Monday the pivotal role of fostering a culture of quality within local factories to elevate institutional performance and enhance the competitiveness of Kuwaiti products. This, he noted, contributes significantly to cementing Kuwait's position as a trusted industrial hub in both regional and global markets.

"Investing in standards development and product quality control is a direct investment in the strength of the national economy and a vital pillar in achieving the New Kuwait Vision 2035," Al-Jahedli told KUNA on the sidelines of a ceremony held at the PAI headquarters to honor recipients of the Arab Quality Award. Al-Jahedli pointed out that the recognition of Kuwaiti factories with prestigious regional awards reflects not only the high standards of institutional performance but also highlights the sector's potential to serve as a dynamic engine of economic development.

"Our industrial sector is well-positioned to deliver sustainable investment and job creation opportunities," he added. In his opening speech, Al-Jahedli expressed pride in celebrating the achievements of Kuwaiti factories that were recognized by the Arab Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining Organization during the third edition of the award, in appreciation of their distinguished performance across the Arab region.

He stressed that such accolades are a testament to the ongoing efforts of the national industry to achieve excellence and leadership. "The



Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Industry, Shamlan Al-Jahedli, honors the companies that won the competition. — KUNA photos



Officials take a group photo during the ceremony honoring Kuwaiti factories that won the Arab Quality Award.

participation of Kuwaiti factories in regional and international competitions underscores the country's commitment to Arab economic integra-

tion and reinforces Kuwait's standing in industrial excellence," he said. "These awards inspire continued progress and encourage the exchange

of expertise to advance the industrial landscape across the Arab world."

Speaking at the event, Walid Al-Majni, official spokesperson for the Public Authority for Industry, reiterated the Authority's commitment to supporting and modernizing Kuwait's industrial sector in line with international best practices. He stated that the recognition is a reflection of the Authority's appreciation for industrial institutions that adopt a strategy of continuous development and strive to enhance institutional performance. Al-Majni further underlined the importance of encouraging Arab industrial entities to improve operational efficiency, reduce costs, and boost product quality.

The Arab Quality Award, launched in 2010 by the Arab Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining Organization, aims to encourage industrial excellence across the Arab world. In its third cycle for 2023/2024, two Kuwaiti factories emerged among the winners: Kuwait Drilling Fluids and Oil Services Company and Kuwait Insulating Materials Manufacturing Company (KIMMCO). — KUNA

Local



KUWAIT: Egyptian President AbdelFattah El-Sisi arrived in Kuwait Monday on a state visit. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, along with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received the Egyptian President and his accompanying delegation at the Amiri Airport.



Sisi's visit a 'historic milestone'

CAIRO: Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt Ghanem Al-Ghanem has described the visit of Egyptian President AbdelFattah El-Sisi to Kuwait as a historic milestone, emphasizing its significance amid ongoing regional challenges. In a statement to KUNA, Ambassador Al-Ghanem said the visit underscores the depth and strength of Kuwaiti-Egyptian relations, which have been marked by close coordination and mutual respect since the early days of Kuwait's independence.

He noted that diplomatic relations between the two nations were formally established shortly after Kuwait's independence, with the exchange of ambassadors and the opening of embassies laying the groundwork for a solid and enduring partnership. Over the years, bilateral cooperation has expanded across multiple fields—including political, economic, cultural, and developmental spheres—within the framework of the Joint Higher Committee, which convened for its 13th session in Cairo last September under the chairmanship of the two countries' foreign ministers.

Ambassador Al-Ghanem also highlighted Egypt's early and unwavering support for Kuwait's sovereignty, recalling its prompt recognition of the newly

independent state and its backing of Kuwait's membership in the Arab League. He praised the ongoing alignment between the two countries on key regional and international issues, describing their cooperation as consistent and strategic. Reflecting on historical milestones in the relationship, the ambassador pointed to Kuwait's support for Egypt during the 1967 and 1973 wars, and Egypt's principled stance during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

He further noted the growing strength of economic and trade ties, with Egypt emerging as a leading destination for Kuwaiti investments. More than 1,000 Kuwaiti companies are currently active in Egypt, with investments exceeding \$20 billion in sectors such as infrastructure, roads, tourism, and agriculture. Kuwait now ranks as Egypt's third-largest Arab trading partner. The ambassador also praised the developmental role played by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), which has completed 50 projects across various sectors in Egypt. He revealed that new projects are currently under review for future implementation.

Al-Ghanem lauded Egypt's recent economic reforms and modernization of its legislative framework,



which have enhanced its appeal to foreign investors. He noted the growing presence of international firms in the Egyptian market and the steady rise of Kuwaiti private sector ventures across the country. He con-

cluded by expressing optimism that President El-Sisi's visit would further solidify the strong historical ties between the two nations and open new avenues for strategic cooperation. — KUNA

Kuwaiti pavilion at Osaka Expo blends culture, progress, AI

TOKYO: Kuwait's Ambassador to Japan, Sami Al-Zamanan, affirmed on Monday that Kuwait's participation in Osaka Expo 2025 reflects the country's forward-looking vision and commitment to fostering global cooperation. Speaking to KUNA, Ambassador Al-Zamanan said Kuwait's presence aims to deliver an inspiring and immersive experience that mirrors the nation's developmental aspirations and highlights its contributions toward a more sustainable and interconnected world.

Describing Osaka Expo 2025 as a premier global platform for exchanging knowledge and presenting national strategies, Al-Zamanan underlined the significance of Kuwait's involvement in shaping international dialogue on innovation and sustainable development. "Kuwait's pavilion embodies our identity, developmental achievements, and dedication to progress in fields such as clean energy, innovation, and human empowerment," he noted.

The ambassador highlighted that Kuwait's participation is a testament to its active role in global events that influence humanity's shared future. He further emphasized that this involvement is rooted in the enduring and robust bilateral relations between Kuwait and Japan, which are marked by decades of mutual respect and collaboration. Osaka Expo, he added, presents an opportunity to deepen these ties and explore new avenues of partnership.

This year's Kuwaiti pavilion features a unique blend of cultural heritage and modern innovation, offering visitors a multisensory journey through Ku-



Kuwait's Ambassador to Japan Sami Al-Zamanan with Kuwait's Information Minister Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi at Osaka Expo 2025. — KUNA photos

wait's past, present, and future. Spanning two levels, the pavilion is structured around four exhibition halls that incorporate advanced technologies and interactive elements. The lower floor celebrates Kuwait's rich traditions, while the upper floor projects its aspirations and strategic goals for the future.

At the heart of the pavilion lies a symbolic feature known as "The Pearl," commemorating the pivotal role of pearl diving in Kuwait's maritime history and economy. The integration of artificial intelligence and immersive storytelling techniques ensures that each section of the pavilion offers a distinct and engaging narrative. Ambassador Al-Zamanan also recalled Kuwait's historic participation in Expo 1970, the first such event held in Japan, noting that Kuwait was one of only four Arab nations to take part in that landmark exhibition, which drew over 64 million visitors.

Osaka Expo 2025 officially opened to the public on Sunday and is set to run until October 13 on Yumeshima Island in Osaka Bay. Held under the



Japan Pavilion



Kuwait Pavilion



Information and Culture Minister Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi poses for group photo at Osaka's 2025 World Expo.

theme "Designing Future Society for Our Lives," the six-month event features participation from 158 countries and regions, with an estimated 28.2 million visitors expected. One of the highlights of the

venue is the Grand Ring, the world's largest wooden architectural structure, measuring approximately two kilometers in circumference and symbolizing the concept of "unity in diversity." — KUNA



Governor of the Capital Governorate made a field visit to the General Traffic Department building. — KUNA photos

Governor underscores importance of traffic awareness

KUWAIT: Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah emphasized the vital role of traffic awareness and adherence to road regulations in reducing accident-related injuries and safeguarding

lives and property. His remarks came during a statement issued by the Capital Governorate following a field visit on Monday to the General Traffic Department headquarters.

The visit comes in conjunction with the implementation of the new traffic law, set to take effect on April 22, and the launch of the 38th Unified Gulf Traffic Week under the theme, "Driving Without a Phone." Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali noted that the new legislation is designed to foster a safer and more organized traffic environment through a series of amendments and regulatory measures aligned with recent

technological advancements in traffic services.

The governor lauded the professionalism and commitment displayed by the personnel of the General Traffic Department, expressing his appreciation for their ongoing efforts to enhance road safety. He also wished them continued success in meeting national traffic safety objectives. During the visit, Sheikh Abdullah was briefed on the department's operational workflow and strategic plans aimed at curbing traffic accidents. He was also introduced to the latest technical initiatives developed to improve services for both citizens and residents. — KUNA



Local

Degrees don't open doors; connections do

By Ghalia Abdullah Al-Qaoud

The idea of getting a job seems simple at first. You study hard, graduate and build a strong CV. Then you expect that when a job opens up, you apply, go through the interview, and get hired in the position you worked hard for. But in reality, it's not that straightforward. The process feels like a locked system, and the key isn't your degree and effort — it's your connections.

As a university student studying marketing, I've been searching for a part-time job or internship in my field. My goal is not just to make money, but to gain more experience that might benefit me in the future. I want to deepen my knowledge beyond the classroom.

Although it wasn't easy, I actually joined a few internships and worked part-time jobs at different companies. But to get those opportunities, I had to fight. I took online courses, attended training sessions, and worked really hard to build a strong resume that would have my back. Despite all my hard work, every time an internship or a contract ended, I was right back at the starting line. All the experience I had, all the courses, all the internships — they didn't seem to be enough.



Students' Corner

Still, I didn't give up. I sent numerous emails to the companies I wanted to work with and updated my resume over and over. But most of the time, I didn't even get a reply, and when I did, it was an email that said: "We'll keep your application on file."

I don't think I'm asking for anything big — just a chance to keep working in a field I see my future in. I enjoy every second while I'm working and I take great pride in my achievements. But with the way the job hunt is going, I'm now very concerned. After all this hard work and the strong resume I built over the years, will I have the job and position that I believe I'm worthy of?

It seems without connections, the doors to a job are closed, and they just wouldn't open. And that's the part that hurts the most. No matter how much effort you put in, someone with less experience but a better "wasta", or connection, will always get the opportunity.

Friends and family around me are also struggling to find a job. For example, one of my relatives who graduated with an engineering degree and with a very high GPA applied for a job hoping he would get accepted without a "wasta". At first, he was told his name had been nominated for a position, but when he followed up, he was shocked — they said they weren't even accepting applications.

Just like that. No explanation. No real reason. The door that was supposedly open had suddenly closed. Then he watched others with lower GPAs get the opportunity instead. When he asked how they did it, the answer was always the same: they knew someone on the inside.

We did everything we were told to do — studied hard, built our skills, applied everywhere we could. We believed that effort would be enough. But it turns out, it's not. Too often, it's a phone call that decides who gets the opportunity. No one listens to us unless we have the right connections. That reality has created real injustice for many of us. It's frustrating and exhausting. But I still believe that effort should matter. Because I know that I'm not alone — and that gives me hope.

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Italy ambassador stresses international solidarity to counter global instability

Defense cooperation remains a 'cornerstone of bilateral relationship'

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Italy is seeking to deepen its diplomatic and defense ties with Kuwait, with upcoming official visits and new areas of cooperation in the pipeline, according to Italian Ambassador to Kuwait Lorenzo Morini. Speaking on the sidelines of a cultural event titled "Murano Glass and the Venice Carnival" - hosted in partnership with the International Women's Group (IWG) - Ambassador Morini said preparations are underway to welcome Kuwaiti delegations to Italy in the coming weeks, with reciprocal visits by Italian officials expected soon after.

Morini emphasized that defense cooperation remains a cornerstone of the bilateral relationship, pointing to the Eurofighter program and joint efforts within the international coalition against Daesh. Italian military personnel currently stationed in Kuwait continue to collaborate closely with local authorities. "These are challenging times," the ambassador remarked, emphasizing the vital role of international solidarity in maintaining global security and preventing terrorism from gaining ground in vulnerable regions. He stressed the need for strong partnerships with friendly countries to confront rising instability, adding that "peace must be pursued through dialogue - not violence."



Italian Ambassador to Kuwait Lorenzo Morini



President of IWG Polina Dlamini

Beyond defense, both countries are exploring broader avenues of partnership. Italian companies are showing strong interest in Kuwait's current wave of public tenders, particularly in infrastructure, information technology, and the energy sector. Investment flows are also increasing in both directions, reflecting strong economic ties. Morini highlighted the growing presence of the Italian community in Kuwait, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. Professionals from Italy are contributing to a range of sectors including hospitality, oil and gas, construction, and defense. He described this steady growth

as a sign of deepening social and economic engagement between the two countries.

"After the coronavirus period, we've witnessed continuous growth in the number of Italians in Kuwait, and I hope to see that trend accelerate even further," he remarked. The evening event, held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, showcased the craftsmanship of Murano glass and the rich traditions of the Venice Carnival, offering guests a glimpse into Italy's vibrant cultural heritage - a soft power pillar that continues to enrich its diplomatic outreach in Kuwait and across the region.



Board members of the IWG, attendees of the event and the Italian Ambassador with his wife pose for a group photo.

National Guard celebrates graduation of 63 officers

KUWAIT: The National Guard celebrated the graduation of 63 new officers on Sunday, marking their induction into service following their successful completion of studies at Ali Al-Sabah Military College and Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences. The ceremony was held under the patronage and

presence of National Guard Chief Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, alongside Deputy National Guard Chief Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, National Guard Undersecretary Lieutenant General Hashem Al-Rifai and several senior commanders and officers.

In a press statement, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah extended his congratulations to the graduating officers, praising their efforts and commitment throughout their academic and training journey. "Today, you stand at the threshold of a new phase — one that reflects your sense of responsibility, military discipline, and dedication as officers of the National Guard," he said. Sheikh Mubarak emphasized that success in

their future roles requires more than just discipline, highlighting the importance of upholding Islamic values, following orders, and embracing teamwork. "Be role models in your conduct, and let your ultimate objective be the advancement of the National Guard — whether in security, technical, or administrative fields," he added. He concluded by praying for the continued security and stability of Kuwait under the leadership of His Highness the Amir and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, wishing them guidance and success in leading the nation forward. — KUNA



National Guard Chief Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses for a group photo with the graduates.



Chief of the National Guard delivers a speech during the ceremony. - KUNA photos

KFF shuts down basement storing hazardous materials

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) carried out an inspection campaign on Sunday targeting the basement of a commercial building in Bneid Al-Gar, where flammable and chemical substances were being improperly stored. Authorities subsequently ordered the administrative closure of the facility. In a statement issued Monday, KFF said the inspection formed part of its ongoing efforts to enhance public safety and reinforce fire prevention measures, under the direct supervision of KFF Chief Major General Talal Al-Roumi. The force reaffirmed its continued commitment to enforcing safety regulations and minimizing risks to safeguard lives and property. - KUNA



KRCS pledges support for earthquake victims

KUWAIT: Ambassador Khaled Al-Mughamis, Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), reiterated the organization's commitment to international humanitarian relief efforts in Myanmar following the devastating earthquakes that struck the country in March. The powerful quakes displaced thousands from their villages, leaving many in dire need of aid.

In a statement issued after his meeting with Myanmar's Ambassador to Kuwait, Chan Aye, on Monday, Al-Mughamis expressed the KRCS' readiness to provide immediate humanitarian support. He emphasized that aiding those affected by the disaster is not only a humanitarian obligation but also a moral duty. The Chairman further emphasized the society's willingness to cooperate with various humanitarian organizations to offer relief to those in need.

Al-Mughamis also welcomed Ambassador Chan Aye's visit to the KRCS headquarters, where the Myanmar diplomat was briefed on the society's activities and achievements. He expressed hope for deepening the partnership between the two sides to enhance efforts in providing support to those in distress. In response, Ambassador Chan Aye commended the KRCS for its exemplary role in global humanitarian efforts. He highlighted the society's consistent support for communities afflicted by both natural and man-made disasters. Chan Aye conveyed his gratitude for the KRCS' swift and effective response in providing relief services. — KUNA



Solar park boom threatens Spain's centuries-old olive trees

Tensions flare as Algeria expels 12 French officials

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GAZA: Palestinians gather around a large crater following a Zionist entity strike on a metalsmith workshop at the Zaytoun neighborhood in Gaza City on April 13, 2025. — AFP

Macron calls for 'reform' of the Palestinian Authority to run Gaza

Hamas willing to release captives but says 'weapons of the resistance are not up for negotiation'

PARIS/RAMALLAH: French President Emmanuel Macron Monday urged "reform" of the Palestinian Authority as part of a plan for the West Bank-based body to govern a post-war Gaza without Hamas. France is among European nations to have backed a plan for Gaza to return to the control of the Ramallah-based authority after nearly two decades of Hamas rule if a ceasefire deal is reached to end the Zionist entity's attacks on the territory.

The entity resumed its deadly air strikes in Gaza on March 18 after cutting off aid to the Palestinian coastal territory, ending a two-month ceasefire. Macron called his Palestinian counterpart Mahmoud Abbas on Monday after last week announcing France could take the unprecedented step of recognizing a Palestinian state in coming months, sparking ire from the Zionist entity.

"France is fully mobilized to obtain the return of all hostages, the return of a lasting ceasefire and immediate access for humanitarian aid into Gaza," Macron said on X after the phone call.

"It is essential to set a framework for the day after: disarm and sideline Hamas, define credible governance and reform the Palestinian Authority," he said. "This should allow progress towards a two-state political solution, with a view to the peace conference in June, in the service of peace and security for all." Macron has said France could recognize Palestine during a United Nations conference in New York in June.

Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that Abbas and Macron had "emphasized the urgent need

for a ceasefire, the acceleration of humanitarian aid delivery, the rejection of the displacement of the Palestinian people from their land". France has thrown its support behind a plan put forward by Arab nations, including Jordan, to rebuild Gaza without evicting its 2.4 million Palestinian residents. The Arab League-endorsed plan was put forward to counter a US proposal to send the war-ravaged territory's inhabitants elsewhere.

'Gravely mistaken'

Abbas and Macron called for an "urgent" ceasefire in Gaza, as Hamas said it is prepared to free all hostages provided it receives guarantees the Zionist entity will end the war. Senior Hamas official Taher Al-Nunu indicated that the group was willing to release all hostages in exchange for a "serious prisoner swap". "The issue is not the number of captives," Al-Nunu said, "but rather that the occupation is reneging on its commitments, blocking the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and continuing the war". "Hamas has therefore stressed the need for guarantees to compel the occupation to uphold the agreement," he added after the group held talks with Egyptian and Qatari mediators in Cairo. However, he said Hamas will not give up its arms. "The weapons of the resistance are not up for negotiation," Al-Nunu said.

Hamas has governed the Gaza Strip since 2007, when it seized control from the Palestinian Authority after it blocked Hamas from exercising real power despite winning a parliamentary election the previous year. Both France and the United States under

Joe Biden have pressed for the Palestinian Authority, which has limited autonomy in parts of the West Bank, to root out corruption and bring in new faces in the hope it could take charge of Gaza.

The Ramallah-based administration, led by 89-year-old Abbas, has been hamstrung by the Zionist entity's decades-old occupation of the West Bank and the Palestinian president's own unpopularity.

Paris has long championed a two-state solution. But formal recognition of a Palestinian state would mark a major policy switch and risk antagonizing the entity, which insists such moves by foreign states are premature. Macron's remarks last week sparked a wave of criticism from right-wing groups in France and from Netanyahu and his son Yair Netanyahu. "President Macron is gravely mistaken in continuing to promote the idea of a Palestinian state in the heart of our land - a state whose sole aspiration is the destruction of (the Zionist entity)," Netanyahu said in a statement.

Zionist teacher Nurit Sperling told AFP, in French, that Macron "absolutely shouldn't have done that". "I think we saw on October 7 that it's not feasible. We can't live like this, next to them, in this way," she said, referring to Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on the Zionist entity. The United States has also long resisted recognition of a Palestinian state. Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi met in Doha where they supported creating a Palestinian state. The two leaders "emphasized the centrality of the Palestinian cause as the foremost Arab issue". — AFP



LUXEMBOURG: Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa (left) shakes hands with EU High Representative and Vice-President for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas ahead of a meeting in Luxembourg City on April 14, 2025. — AFP

EU announces €1.6bn in new aid to PA

LUXEMBOURG: The European Union on Monday announced a new three-year financial support package for the Palestinian Authority (PA) worth up to 1.6 billion euros (\$1.8 billion). The fresh aid pledge came just ahead of a meeting between Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa and EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg. "We are stepping up our support to the Palestinian people. €1.6 billion until 2027 will help stabilize the West Bank and Gaza," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas wrote on X. "This will reinforce the PA's ability to meet the needs of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and prepare it to return to govern Gaza once conditions allow," Kallas said.

EU officials hope the Palestinian Authority, which runs the West Bank, may also one day take responsibility for Gaza after the Zionist entity stops attacking the territory. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, however, has so far rejected the idea of handing over Gaza to the PA and shunned the EU's broader aim of a two-state solution, which would include the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Brussels — the biggest international donor to the Palestinians — said the package would include 620 million euros in grants for the Palestinian Authority. Dubravka Suica, the European Commissioner for the Mediterranean, said the financial support would go hand in hand with reforms of the Palestinian Authority, which has been accused by critics of corruption and bad governance. "We want them to reform themselves because without reforming, they won't be strong enough and credible in order to be an interlocutor, not for only for us, but an interlocutor also for (the Zionist entity)," Suica said.

The funds will be linked to reforms on "fiscal sustainability, democratic governance, private sector development and public infrastructure and services", the EU said. The rest will be made up of 576 million euros in grants for projects aimed at helping economic recovery in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. — Agencies

El Salvador's Bukele rules out returning wrongly deported man

WASHINGTON: El Salvador President Nayib Bukele said on Monday he had no plans to return a man mistakenly deported from the United States as he met with President Donald Trump at the White House. In an Oval Office meeting, Trump praised Bukele for opening his country's prison system to house alleged gang members and detainees Trump wants to deport, and said he would send as many people living in the US illegally to El Salvador as possible. The US would help El Salvador build new prisons, Trump added.

The Trump administration has deported hundreds of people, mostly Venezuelans, to El Salvador under the 1798 Alien Enemies Act, including a Maryland resident it has acknowledged deporting by mistake. Bukele said he did not have the power to return Salvadoran Kilmor Abrego Garcia to the United States. "The question is preposterous. How can I smuggle a terrorist into the United States?" Bukele said, echoing the Trump administration's claim that Abrego Garcia is a member of the MS-13 gang.

Trump, who came into office in January promising to reform US immigration policy, has found a kindred spirit for that effort in Bukele. The migrants El Salvador accepts from the US are housed in a high-security prison critics say engages in human rights abuses.

Trump met Bukele at the White House to discuss further cooperation on security and migration, El Salvador's embrace of Bitcoin, and tariffs. Rights groups say Bukele has jailed thousands of people without due process in a sweeping crackdown on



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump meets with El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, April 14, 2025. — AFP

gangs, claims Bukele rejects. Bukele told Trump he is accused of imprisoning "thousands" of people. "I like to say that we actually liberated millions," he said. The US president reacted gleefully to Bukele's comment. "Do you think I can use that?" Trump asked, and criticized his Democratic opponents over their handling of the US border. "It's a sin what they did, and you are helping us out. We appreciate it," Trump said.

The State Department last week lifted its advisory for American travelers to El Salvador to level one, the safest level, crediting Bukele for reducing gang activity and violent crime. The US on Saturday deported 10 more people it alleges are gang members to El Salvador, said Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who called the alliance between Trump and Bukele "an example for security and prosperity in our hemisphere."

Lawyers and relatives of the migrants held in El Salvador say they are not gang members and had no opportunity to contest the US government as-

sertion that they were. The Trump administration says it vetted migrants to ensure they belonged to gangs including Tren de Aragua and MS-13, which it labels terrorist organizations. Last month, after a judge said flights carrying migrants processed under the Alien Enemies Act should return to the US, Bukele wrote "Oopsie ... Too late" on social media alongside footage showing men being hustled off a plane in the dark of night.

'Bring Kilmor home'

The case of Abrego Garcia, who was sent to El Salvador's so-called Terrorism Confinement Center on March 15 despite an order protecting him from deportation, has drawn particular attention. The US Supreme Court upheld an order from Judge Paula Xinis directing the administration to "facilitate and effectuate" his return but said the term "effectuate" was unclear and might exceed her authority. Trump told reporters on Friday that his administration would bring the man back if the high court directed it to.

However, in a court filing on Sunday, the administration said it was not obligated to help Abrego Garcia get out of prison in El Salvador. White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller, speaking ahead of Bukele's visit, insisted that Abrego Garcia's deportation was legal, despite the court order. "His status was he's an illegal alien who's been ordered deported, which means he can be indefinitely detained and removed to any other country in the world," Miller said.

An immigration judge had previously granted Abrego Garcia protection from being deported to El Salvador, finding that he could face gang violence there, and he held a permit to work in the United States. Demonstrators, including Abrego Garcia's wife, a US citizen, gathered outside the White House ahead of Trump's meeting with Bukele. "President Trump, bring Kilmor home now!" a speaker addressing the group outside the White House said. — Reuters

International

Tensions flare as Algeria expels 12 French officials

Latest dispute comes after France arrested 3 Algerians over kidnapping of social media influencer

PARIS: Fresh tensions flared between France and Algeria on Monday as the French foreign minister said its former colony had ordered 12 French officials to leave in 48 hours. The announcement was linked to the arrest of three Algerian nationals in France, Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said. For decades, ties between France and Algeria have gone through diplomatic upheavals, and Monday's announcement comes at a delicate time in relations and underscores the difficulties in repairing ties. "I am asking Algerian authorities to abandon these expulsion measures," Barrot said, adding: "If the decision to send back our officials is maintained, we will have no other choice but to respond immediately."

The 12 include some members of the French interior ministry, a diplomatic source told AFP. Despite the new tensions, French diplomatic sources said that "contacts are being maintained" and that Paris would like to "return to an easing of tensions" with Algeria. Earlier this month, Barrot visited Algeria on a fence-mending trip after months of tensions that had brought the two countries to the brink of a diplomatic breakdown.

After a meeting with Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune during the visit, Barrot said both countries wanted to "rebuild a partnership of equals". On Friday, French prosecutors indicted three Algerians, including a consular official, on suspicion of involvement in the 2024 abduction of an opponent of the Algerian regime, Amir Boukhors, in a Paris suburb. The men, who are also being prosecuted for "terrorist" conspiracy, were placed in pre-trial detention.

'Rotten arguments'

The indictment comes at a sensitive time between the two countries, with Algiers claiming the move was aimed at scuppering recent attempts to repair ties. Boukhors, an influencer known by the nickname "Amir DZ", has more than a million followers on TikTok. He has been in France since 2016 and was granted political asylum in 2023. He was abducted in April 2024 and released the following day, according to his lawyer. Algiers is demanding the influencer's return to face trial, having issued nine international arrest warrants against him on accusations of fraud and "terror" offences.

France has refused to extradite him.

On Saturday, the Algerian foreign ministry denounced "rotten arguments" by the French interior ministry and criticized an "unacceptable judicial conspiracy", referring to the arrest of its consular agent. Boukhors, 41, has been the target of two attacks, in 2022 and in 2024 on the day of his abduction in the southern suburbs of Paris, according to his lawyer Eric Plouvier.

The Algerian foreign ministry also warned that the incident would cause "great damage to Algerian-French relations". Relations between Paris and Algiers came under strain last year when France recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara, where Algeria has long backed the pro-independence Polisario Front. Relations soured further when Algeria arrested the French-Algerian writer Boualem Sansal in November on national security charges, after he told a French far-right media outlet that Morocco's territory was truncated in favor of Algeria during French colonial rule. In March, an Algerian court sentenced him to five years in jail.



ALGIERS: France's Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot (left) is received by Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune in Algiers on April 6, 2025. — AFP

The latest spike in tensions sparked criticism from right-wing politicians in France. "Brilliant results of Emmanuel Macron's strategy of appeasement,"

Jordan Bardella, head of the far-right National Rally party, said on X, denouncing what he called Barrot's "prostrations" in Algeria. — AFP

Attackers kill nearly 50 in volatile central Nigerian state

JOS, Nigeria: Unidentified attackers have killed nearly 50 people in Nigeria's Plateau state, a Red Cross source said Monday, in the latest bout of violence in a religiously mixed region known for intercommunal conflict and deadly land disputes. The Sunday night attack on the villages of Zike and Kimakpa, in the Bassa local government area, comes less than two weeks after armed men struck multiple villages in the Bokkos area, also in the central state of Plateau, killing 48. The attack struck some 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the Plateau state capital Jos.

Land disputes, often between Muslim Fulani herders and mostly Christian farmers, are prone to descend into deadly violence in Plateau, especially in rural areas where law enforcement is largely absent and impunity is widespread. "I can confirm ... that 47 persons have died, 22 others were injured and taken to hospital, five houses were burnt down," the Red Cross official told AFP. Dorcas John, a resident of Zike, told AFP: "The attackers, unknown to us, came into the community and were shooting anywhere, and they killed eight people." John Adamu, of Kimakpa, said the attackers killed 39 people in his village. The motive for the killings and the identity of the attackers were unknown as of Monday. Police officials did not respond to a request for comment.

Intercommunal violence

Though millions of Nigerians of different backgrounds live side by side, intercommunal violence often flares in Plateau state. Researchers say that the drivers of conflict in Plateau are often complicated. As Africa's most populous country has continued to grow, so has the amount of land that farmers use, while grazing routes have come under stress from climate change.

Land grabbing and political and economic tensions between local "indigenes" and those considered outsiders, as well as the influx of hardline Muslim and Christian preachers, have heightened divisions in recent decades. When violence flares, weak policing all but guarantees reprisal attacks, experts say. Last week, army troops recovered the headless body of a 16-year Fulani herder in the Bassa area. His cattle were also stolen.

After the killings in Bokkos earlier this month, a local official told reporters that the violence was the result of "ethnic and religious cleansing" by attackers "speaking the Fulani dialect". A local herder association slammed the remarks, saying that the Fulfulde language, as it is formally known, is widely spoken in the country, "even by criminals". Muslim community group JN1 warned after last week's attack: "We fear that the way things are going, if not well-managed, it could lead to anarchy."

The Plateau state government condemned the most recent killings "in strong terms", calling them "unprovoked." The state commissioner of information and communication, Joyce Ramnap, said that the "series of attacks pose an existential threat to the lives and livelihoods of the peace-loving people of the state".

Global rights group Amnesty International condemned the latest killings and called on President Bola Tinubu to set up an independent panel "to investigate the apparent failure of security agencies to halt the bloodshed". "The bloodshed must end now, and suspected perpetrators brought to justice," Isa Sanusi, country director for Amnesty International in Nigeria, told AFP. — AFP

Turkey seeks more influence in Africa

ISTANBUL: Turkey has long sought to extend its influence in Africa by mediating in conflicts and building military partnerships with countries on the continent. Those efforts have picked up speed in recent months with diplomatic successes in resolving local conflicts, and as traditional powers such as France and the United States pull back from the continent, according to analysts and diplomats.

An annual diplomacy forum in the southern Mediterranean resort of Antalya on April 11-13 drew many African officials, including the president of Somalia, as part of Ankara's efforts to consolidate its foothold in Africa. "Today African countries are looking for alternatives, and Turkey represents one of those options, so it has resonated well in Africa," Professor Eghosa Osaghae, director general of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, who attended the forum, told AFP.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has boosted his international standing after backing rebels who overthrew Syrian ruler Bashar al-Assad and brokering a key Horn of Africa peace deal between Somalia and Ethiopia. Ankara, which also hosted two rounds of talks between Russia and Ukraine at the start of the war, has often said it is ready to support any initiative leading to peace between its two Black Sea neighbors.

The Antalya forum was also attended by Syria's new

leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andriy Sybaha. For Osaghae, whether Turkey can fill the vacuum in Africa left by France, which has seen many of its former colonies turn away from it in recent years, would "depend a great deal on how attractive Turkey's offers to African states will be".

Speaking to AFP on the sidelines of the forum in Antalya, Ivory Coast's foreign minister, Kacou Leon Adom, said: "We have relations with France that we are very proud of. But France doesn't prevent us from having other partnerships." The west African nation is keen to work with Turkey in all sectors, including communications, trade, security, education, or training, he said. "All of that interests us. And from this perspective, Turkey is making us offers, and we will consider them."

Many African countries are faced with challenges to their security, with groups such as Somalia-based Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram from Nigeria and the Lord's Resistance Army, which originated in Uganda, wreaking havoc. "If it is possible for Turkey to give assistance in these areas, why not?" Osaghae said. "The good thing is that many African countries already have military cooperation with Turkey. And that can be the building block for Turkish influence."

Turkey has signed defence agreements with a number of states spanning the breadth of the continent, including Somalia, Libya, Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Ghana. Those agreements have opened up contracts for Turkey's defense industry, notably for its reputedly reliable and inexpensive drones.

According to Turkish diplomat Alp Ay, Turkey offers

dialogue — he noted its success in getting Somalia and Ethiopia to end a bitter dispute that had sparked fears of conflict in the restive Horn of Africa. "We are trying to ensure that Africa can find its own solutions to African problems," said Ay, who works as Ankara's special representative in negotiations between Somalia and the breakaway Somaliland region.

Tension mounted last year after Ethiopia struck a deal with Somaliland — which unilaterally declared independence from Somalia in 1991 in a move not recognized by Mogadishu — to gain access to the sea. But Ethiopia and Somalia announced a full restoration of diplomatic ties following a December deal mediated by Turkey. Ay said the responsibility from now on would be on both sides to uphold the deal but Turkey would continue to play its facilitator role. "We are hopeful".

A senior Somali diplomat likewise said Turkey played "a very assistive role in bringing the two countries together to resolve this issue". In a sign of Ankara's growing influence, Erdogan met his Somali counterpart, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, on Saturday in Antalya. "I think Turkey is playing a key role in Somalia," the Somali diplomat said.

"And it is a positive role. Turkey is not only involved in security, it is also involved in other developmental projects in Somalia." Nigerian political scientist Osaghae said because there are many conflicts in the region. "Africa desperately needs mediators that are not only credible but are capable of doing the kinds of things that Turkish experience suggests." — AFP

Katy Perry roars into space on all-woman flight

WASHINGTON: Pop star Katy Perry completed a brief foray into space Monday, roaring to the edge of the cosmos with an all-women crew on one of billionaire Jeff Bezos's rockets. The "Firework" and "California Gurls" singer was lofted more than 100 km above the Earth's surface in a vessel from Blue Origin, the space company owned by the Amazon founder.

Five other women — including Bezos's fiancée Lauren Sanchez — were on the flight, which took off from western Texas shortly after 8:30 am (13:30 GMT) before safely landing again some 10 minutes later. The flight brought the passengers beyond the Karman line — the internationally recognized boundary of space. One of the other passengers, TV presenter Gayle King, said Perry sang "What a wonderful world" in space. "It's a 10 out of 10. That's my review. Definitely go for it," the singer said after she was safely back on Earth.

Their fully automated craft rose vertically before the crew capsule detached mid-flight, later falling back to the ground slowed by parachutes and a retro rocket. The jubilant women then emerged, with Perry kissing the ground after exiting the capsule. "I think this experience has shown me you never know how much love is inside of you, like how much love you have to give and how loved you are until the day you launch," she said.

Monday's mission was the first all-woman space crew since Valentina Tereshkova's historic solo flight in 1963. It is also the 11th sub-orbital crewed operation by Blue Origin, which has offered space tourism experiences for several years. The company does not publicly communicate the price of trips made possible by its New Shepard rocket. They were expected to have a brief period when the women could unbuckle from their seats and float in zero gravity.

Perry, launched onto the international stage with a 2008 hit, was also travelling alongside Sanchez, King, film producer Kerianne Flynn, former NASA scientist Aisha Bowe and Amanda Nguyen, founder of a campaign group against sexual violence. They follow 52 previous Blue Origin passengers, including longtime "Star Trek" leading man William Shatner.

King's close friend — talk show legend Oprah Winfrey — was among those watching the launch in Texas. "It's oddly quiet when you get up there... you look down at the planet and think, 'That's where we came from?' And to me it's such a reminder about how we need to do better and be better," King said.



This handout photograph released on April 14, 2025 by Blue Origin, shows (from left) US TV personality Gayle King, Bahamian-US former NASA scientist Aisha Bowe, US journalist Lauren Sanchez, US research scientist Amanda Nguyen, US singer Katy Perry and US film producer Kerianne Flynn posing in their space suits at an undisclosed location ahead of the all-woman sub-orbital mission aboard the company's New Shepard rocket. — AFP



The New Shepard capsule lands on April 14, 2025 in Van Horn, Texas.



US singer Katy Perry kisses the ground upon return to Earth.

Perry recently told Elle magazine that she was taking part "for my daughter Daisy", whom she shares with actor Orlando Bloom. "To inspire her to never have limits on her dreams".

Such high-profile guests are intended to keep public interest in Blue Origin's work, as it battles multiple rival firms in the space tourism field. Bezos'

top challenger in passenger flights is Virgin Galactic, which offers a similar sub-orbital experience. But Blue Origin aims in the future to bring space tourists into orbit, competing directly with Elon Musk's SpaceX. In January, Blue Origin's much more powerful New Glenn rocket successfully completed its first unmanned orbital mission. — AFP

International



LOPERA, Spain: A solar panel is pictured near olive trees amid a project to install photovoltaic plants, in Lopera, near Jaen, on March 24, 2025. — AFP photos



Spanish farmers demonstrate to save their olive trees and against expropriation amid a project to install photovoltaic plants.

Solar park boom threatens Spain's centuries-old olive trees

Andalusian government seizes olive farmland for renewable energy firms, citing 'public interest'

LOPERA, Spain: At his farm in southern Spain, Francisco Campos looked worriedly at a green sea of centuries-old olive trees that he fears will face the axe to make way for a proposed solar park. "Cutting down olive trees to install solar panels is a crime," the 64-year-old farmer told AFP in Lopera, a town of whitewashed buildings with 3,600 residents in the sunny southern region of Andalusia, Spain's olive-growing heartland.

Spain is the world's top producer of olive oil, but the fertile agricultural land long used by olive producers is now in high demand from power firms looking to install solar farms. And with nearly 3,000 hours of sunshine per year, Andalusia is one of the Spanish regions with the highest number of solar panels as a renewables boom makes the country a European leader in green energy. Renewable energy firms such as Greenalia and FRV Arroyadas have requested permission to build multiple solar farms near Lopera, which farmers say will affect up to 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres) of property.

The businesses negotiated agreements to lease the bulk of the land required for their projects but encountered significant opposition from hundreds of small landowners. This prompted the regional government of Andalusia to announce it will expropriate some land needed for the plants, declaring them to be in "the public interest". "Is it in the public interest for them to take my land and give it to a company so that the company can profit? This has no benefit for us," said Campos. "Our way of life is going to be destroyed," he added.

'From our ancestors'

Campaigners predict that the eight solar projects planned for the area will require the removal of nearly 100,000 olive trees. The regional government puts the figure significantly lower, at 13,000. Local res-



Olive grove owner Francisco Campos poses during an AFP interview as farmers struggle to save their olive farmland from expropriation.



A worker fills a bottle of olive oil in Lopera cooperative in Spain, on March 24, 2025.

idents anticipated power companies would seek to install solar panels in the area, but they never imagined "they would come and take away your property," said Rafael Alcalá, a spokesman for a platform that represents the solar plants' opponents.

In support of landowners impacted by the latest round of expropriations, dozens of farmers on tractors — some holding signs that read "We don't want solar plants" — gathered on a recent morning outside Lopera. "These lands come from our ancestors. What am I going to leave to my children now?" Maria Josefa Palomo, a 67-year-old pensioner, said at the protest.

Losing 500 hectares of olive groves would wipe out more than two million euros (\$2.3 million) in an-

nual revenues, according to local olive oil cooperative La Loperana. Campaigners say 5,000 olive trees have already been uprooted from land belonging to a farmer in Lopera who signed an agreement with one of the firms behind a solar park. More could follow. In an effort to stop the projects, opponents have filed lawsuits against the regional government and the companies involved.

'Until the end'

Spain generated a record 56.8 percent of its electricity last year from renewable sources such as wind and solar, according to grid operator Red Eléctrica. Leveraging on its sunny plains, windy hillsides and fast-flowing rivers, Spain intends to raise the share of renewable-generated electricity to 81 percent

of the total by 2030 as part of efforts to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions.

The regional government has defended the renewables projects, saying less than one percent of the land they use in the region had to be expropriated from reluctant landowners. Spanish solar industry group UNEF, which represents more than 800 companies, says the projects boost tax revenues in rural communities. They generate "significant amounts" that can be used to improve public services, said UNEF head Jose Donoso. Solar park opponents in Lopera disagree and vow to continue their fight. "Until the end. Nobody is going to take what is ours away from us," said Juan Cantera, a 28-year-old farmer. "Olive oil is everything in Lopera". — AFP

'West Philippine Sea' now visible on Google Maps without search



MANILA: A man looks at a map showing the "West Philippine Sea" in Manila on April 14, 2025. — AFP

MANILA: A Google Maps scan on Monday of the body of water directly west of the Philippines now shows a name once invisible to most users — the West Philippine Sea. The Philippine government's preferred name for the disputed waterway better known as the South China Sea was previously viewable only if specifically sought by name, according to AFP journalists who kept screenshots of earlier searches. The name South China Sea remains visible to the north and west of the area newly identified as the West Philippine Sea.

Beijing claims the South China Sea almost in its entirety despite an international ruling that its assertion has no merit. China has deployed navy and coast guard vessels in a bid to bar the Philippines from strategically important reefs and islands in the strategic waterway, leading to a string of confrontations in recent months. Philippine armed forces spokeswoman Franciel Margaret Padilla welcomed on Monday "the inclusion of 'West Philippine Sea' on Google Maps". "As defenders of national sovereignty, the (military) sees this as a valuable contribution to truthful representation and public awareness," she said in a statement.

Then-Philippine president Benigno Aquino issued a directive in April 2012 calling for the sea's renaming as a standoff over the Scarborough Shoal was heating up between Beijing and Manila. The administrative order said the renamed areas specifically included "the Luzon Sea as well as the waters around, within and adjacent to the Kalayaan Island Group and Bajo De Masinloc, also known as Scarborough Shoal". AFP journalists who visited Google Maps last year discovered the name West Philippine Sea was visible only if searched by name but invisible to those who simply scrolled over the area otherwise. — AFP

Pope puts Sagrada Familia architect Gaudi on path to sainthood

VATICAN CITY: The Catholic Church has put Antoni Gaudi, the designer of Barcelona's Sagrada Familia basilica, on the path to sainthood, the Vatican said Monday. Pope Francis recognized the Catalan architect's "heroic virtues" and authorized a decree declaring him "venerable", the Vatican said in a statement. This acknowledgement comes before beatification, and the next step after that is sainthood. Beatification is reserved for three categories of people: martyrs, those who have lived a life of heroic values and others with a clear saintly reputation.

Candidates must also be credited with a miracle after their death, at which point they can move towards becoming saints. The Church began in 2003



BARCELONA: The Sagrada Familia (Holy Family) basilica, designed by Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi, is pictured in this 2016 file photo. — AFP

to vet Gaudi, a visionary and pious architect who died in 1926. Two decades later, in 2023, Cardinal Juan Jose Omella, Archbishop of Barcelona, commissioned a group of religious and lay people to press

Noboa wins Ecuador presidential runoff, rival claims fraud

QUITO: Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa claimed a runaway reelection victory after campaigning on a promise to take an "iron fist" to the country's drug cartels. With over 90 percent of the votes counted in Sunday's election, the National Election Council said Noboa had an unassailable 12-point lead over his leftist rival Luisa Gonzalez. Official results showed Noboa with 56 percent of the vote, against Gonzalez's 44 percent — a far bigger winning margin than expected after a virtual tie in the first round. US President Donald Trump congratulated Noboa on his Truth Social platform, calling him a "great leader" and saying "he will not let you down!"

Speaking to jubilant supporters in his hometown Olon, the 37-year-old president claimed a "historic victory." "A huge hug to all those Ecuadorians who always believed in this young president!" he said. "Ecuadorians have spoken, from tomorrow morning we will go to work." Gonzalez — seemingly shocked by her weak showing and perhaps the end of her dream of becoming Ecuador's first woman president — immediately questioned the results. She accused Noboa of "the most grotesque electoral fraud" and called for a recount of the ballots. "I refuse to believe that the people prefer lies over



GUAYAQUIL: Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa gestures as he speaks to supporters during his final campaign rally in Guayaquil, Ecuador on April 10, 2025. — AFP

the truth," she said. She did not immediately provide evidence for her claims of fraud.

'Ecuador is divided'

The campaign was dominated by worries about the lackluster economy and cartel violence that has transformed Ecuador from one of the safest countries in Latin America into the most deadly. Noboa, the guitar-strumming son of a billionaire banana magnate, has staked his political fortunes on tough security policies designed to snuff out the gangs. He has deployed the military to the streets, captured drug capos and invited the United States to send special forces.

On the eve of the ballot, Noboa declared a 60-day state of emergency in the capital Quito and several provinces, underscoring the tense state of

his cause. Gaudi designed the unfinished monumental Basilica of the Sagrada Familia, which was consecrated in 2010 by pope Benedict XVI, paving the way for its use as a place of worship.

At the time, Benedict praised "the genius of Antoni Gaudi ... (who), inspired by the ardor of his Christian faith, succeeded in transforming this church into a praise to God made of stone". The signing of the decree was the first official appointment on Francis's agenda since the 88-year-old was discharged on March 23 following five weeks in hospital battling life-threatening pneumonia.

Construction of the Sagrada Familia began in 1882, but the project, known for its soaring Gothic spires, remains unfinished even after Gaudi devoted the last 12 years of his life exclusively to the project. It was meant to be completed by 2026, the centenary of the death of Gaudi. The target date was postponed indefinitely after the COVID-19 pandemic reduced tourist revenues used to fund construction. — Agencies

affairs. The once-peaceful nation averaged a killing every hour at the start of the year, as cartels vied for control over cocaine routes that pass through Ecuador's ports. Rampant bloodshed has spooked investors and tourists alike, fueling economic malaise and swelling the ranks of Ecuador's poor to 28 percent of the population. In the volcano-ringed capital, voters wrapped up against the Andean chill and flocked to the polling stations. "I think Ecuador is divided, but I think we all understand we're in a situation where we have to unite, whoever is leading the government," said 21-year-old architecture student Camila Medina. In total, about 13.7 million Ecuadorians were obliged to vote.

Noboa's win is likely to see him double down on hardline security policies and further nurture a budding bromance with Trump. "These next four years, I hope everything goes well," said 26-year-old Noboa supporter Natalie Ulloa. "I hope he manages to better implement what he has been proposing from the beginning." Analysts said that Gonzalez's close ties to populist firebrand ex-president Rafael Correa may have hurt her at the polls. Correa now lives in exile in Belgium, avoiding a corruption conviction he claims is politically motivated. But he remains a deeply polarizing figure in his homeland. "There is a strong anti-Correa sentiment" among some voters, said Ruth Hidalgo, a political scientist at the University of the Americas. Gonzalez and her party "didn't manage to overcome that, they didn't manage to convince people, they didn't connect, so this is the result." — AFP

TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 2025

Trade tensions can lead to stock market crashes: IMF

Fund urges financial institutions to hold enough capital and liquidity



SHENZHEN: Shipping containers and gantry cranes are seen at the Yantian port at night in Shenzhen, in southern China's Guangdong province on April 14, 2025. — AFP

Qatar to invest \$2bn in Indonesia sovereign fund

JAKARTA: Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto said Qatar is set to invest \$2 billion in his country's new sovereign wealth fund as he looks to boost economic growth. Prabowo is on a five-nation tour of the Middle East, visiting the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Egypt, Qatar and Jordan to boost bilateral ties with the region.

He said Sunday he had a "productive" meeting with Qatar Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and that the country would invest in the Danantara Indonesia fund. Danantara Indonesia was launched in February by President Prabowo Subianto who pledged to ramp up annual growth from five to eight percent, while ordering billions of dollars in government cuts.

The fund will take control of government holdings in state companies with an initial budget of \$20 billion. It is the country's second sovereign wealth fund, after the Indonesia Investment Authority, which was launched in 2021 and holds \$10.5 billion in assets.

Danantara announced its full board lineup last month with American billionaire Ray Dalio and former Thailand prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra appointed as advisors. Jakarta has planned more than 20 energy projects worth around \$40 billion this year, energy and mineral resources minister Bahilil Lahadalia said in March, partly funded by Danantara. — AFP

China, Vietnam sign agreements after Xi warns of protectionism

HANOI: China and Vietnam signed dozens of cooperation agreements Monday, strengthening ties between the communist-run countries after Chinese leader Xi Jinping warned that protectionism "leads nowhere" and that a trade war would have "no winners".

Xi is in Vietnam for the first leg of a Southeast Asia tour, as Beijing tries to present itself as a stable alternative to an erratic US President Donald Trump, who announced — and then mostly reversed — sweeping tariffs this month. The Chinese president was welcomed to Hanoi Monday with a 21-canon salute, a guard of honor and rows of flag-waving children at the presidential palace, before holding talks with Vietnam's top leaders including General Secretary To Lam.

The two neighbors signed around 40 cooperation agreements. Details were not immediately available but prior to the visit it was expected that deals would be reached in areas including trade and aviation.

Xi's visit comes almost two weeks after the United States — manufacturing powerhouse Vietnam's biggest export market in the first three months of the

WASHINGTON: Major geopolitical risk events, including trade tensions, can trigger large corrections in stock prices, the International Monetary Fund said in a report on Monday. That in turn can generate market volatility which can threaten financial stability, it said in a chapter from its forthcoming Global Financial Stability Report.

The IMF did not mention specific events, such as the sweeping tariffs US President Donald Trump has announced in recent weeks. But it noted that news-based measures of risk, including conflicts, wars, terrorist attacks, military spending and trade restrictions had increased sharply since 2022.

In an accompanying blog, the IMF urged financial institutions to hold enough capital and liquidity to help them deal with potential losses from geopolitical risks, and urged them to use stress tests and other analyses to identify and manage

Gulf Bank launches third edition of 'Fekrety' competition

KUWAIT: As part of its continued commitment to promoting innovation and creativity among its employees, Gulf Bank has introduced the third edition of the Fekrety Innovation Competition for 2025. The competition aims to inspire employees to submit creative ideas that will drive the development of banking services and products, in alignment with the Bank's strategy and Kuwait Vision 2035. This vision prioritizes digital transformation, enhancing customer experience, and adopting advanced technologies to support the national economy and improve quality of life.

Gulf Bank views Fekrety as a platform to inspire employees across all departments to actively engage in improving the customer experience, under the theme "Innovation for All." The competition invites employees from different departments to submit in-

novative and creative ideas that can positively impact both the Bank and the wider banking industry. The Bank emphasized that the competition provides employees with the opportunity to share their ideas without constraints, regardless of how unconventional or innovative they may be. The Digital Transformation and Innovation Unit will provide support to help employees refine and develop their ideas, ensuring they align with customer needs and contribute to delivering accessible, innovative banking services. This initiative builds on the success Gulf

Bank has achieved in its digital transformation journey, which plays a pivotal role in driving employee performance and fostering collaboration across departments. The Bank believes that continuous innovation is only possible by empowering employees to turn their ideas into reality.

Furthermore, Gulf Bank highlights the importance of investing in its diverse and talented workforce,

while also supporting the development of local skills within the community.

The bank remains committed to supporting Kuwait Vision 2035 through initiatives such as the Datathon and Hackathon competitions, which equip future generations with the skills to leverage data and digital technologies in achieving sustainable development goals and boosting the national economy. Gulf Bank aims to be Kuwait's leading bank, fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace to deliver exceptional customer service while contributing sustainably to the community. Through its extensive branch network and innovative digital services, the Bank empowers customers to conduct banking transactions conveniently and efficiently, ensuring a seamless experience.

In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships, Gulf Bank is dedicated to driving robust sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions. The Bank is committed to implementing strategically selected and diverse sustainability programs both internally and externally.

— striving to stay on good terms with both China and the United States.

The two countries have close economic ties, but Hanoi shares US concerns about Beijing's increasing assertiveness in the contested South China Sea. China claims almost all of the South China Sea as its own but its claims are disputed by the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Brunei.

The Chinese leader insisted in his article on Monday that Beijing and Hanoi could resolve those disputes through dialogue. "We should properly manage differences and safeguard peace and stability in our region," Xi wrote. "With vision, we are fully capable of properly settling maritime issues through consultation and negotiation," he said.

Vietnam's Lam said in his article on the government news portal that "joint efforts to control and satisfactorily resolve disagreements... is an important stabilizing factor in the current complex and unpredictable international and regional situation". After Vietnam, Xi will visit Malaysia from Tuesday to Thursday. Malaysian Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil said Xi's visit was "part of the government's efforts... to see better trade relations with various countries including China". Xi will then travel on Thursday to Cambodia, one of China's staunchest allies in Southeast Asia and where Beijing has extended its influence in recent years. — AFP

HANOI: Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and China's President Xi Jinping pose for photos before their meeting at the Office of the Party Central Committee on April 14, 2025. — AFP

\$161.9 billion, followed by Malaysia with Chinese imports worth \$101.5 billion. Firming up ties with Southeast Asian neighbors could also help offset the impact from a closed United States, the largest single recipient of Chinese goods last year. Xi is visiting Vietnam for the first time since December 2023.

China and Vietnam, both ruled by communist parties, already share a "comprehensive strategic partnership", Hanoi's highest diplomatic status. Vietnam has long pursued a "bamboo diplomacy" approach

— striving to stay on good terms with both China and the United States.



A group photo featuring Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, KIPCO Group CEO, and Tony Daher, Group CEO at Burgan Bank, alongside team members from various Burgan Bank subsidiaries at the "Empower Her" seminar.



Ro'ya program trainees pose for a photo with Manaf Al-Menaifi, Acting General Manager – Retail Banking, and Nageeb Amin, General Manager – Human Resources and Development at Burgan Bank.

Burgan Bank publishes its 6th annual Sustainability Report

Bank confirms its commitment to embedding ESG principles across its operations and culture

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank has released its sixth annual Sustainability Report, marking a major milestone in its ESG journey and reinforcing its excellence in sustainable financial practices. As the first bank in Kuwait to publish its 2024 Sustainability Report, Burgan continues to demonstrate its commitment to transparency and proactive sustainability leadership. The report highlights the Bank's key accomplishments across Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) domains, reflecting the deep integration of sustainable practices into its operations, culture, and stakeholder engagement. The Report was created in alignment with the Global Reporting Initiative's (GRI) Universal Standards 2021, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB), Kuwait Vision 2035, and Bursa Kuwait ESG Reporting Guidelines.

overseen through the Management ESG Committee (MESGC), chaired by the CEO-Kuwait and composed of senior executives from across business and support departments. The Committee convenes quarterly to set direction, monitor performance, and support integration of ESG into core banking operations. This is underpinned by a comprehensive ESG roadmap, framework, and materiality matrix, which collectively ensure that the Bank's initiatives remain adaptive, pertinent, and aligned with the evolving expectations of its stakeholders.

Close-Up on 2024:

Tangible progress on all fronts

Burgan Bank's sixth Sustainability Report highlights a year of significant progress and performance in integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into its core operations. The Bank recorded continuous improvement in ESG ratings from top agencies such as MSCI, S&P, and Sustainalytics, reflecting continued commitment to sustainable development, demonstrating advancements in environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and transparent governance practices. It outlines key initiatives aimed at mitigating climate risks, fostering financial inclusion, and enhancing stakeholder engagement. Through this comprehensive report, Burgan Bank reaffirms its dedication to creating long-term value while aligning with global ESG standards and expectations.

Environmental sustainability

In 2024, Burgan Bank made significant headway in environmental sustainability, driven by a commitment to tackling climate change and reducing its environmental footprint. A key highlight was achieving LEED Gold certification (O&M v4.1) for its head office—a recognition of energy-efficient design and sustainable operations.

The Bank initiated in 2023 a structured approach to mapping its Green House Gas (GHG) emissions across its value chain and continues to expand the scope every year to include Scope 3 emission categories. The bank is on track to design a long-term decarbonization strategy in line with Kuwait's vision for a low carbon economy. Along with this, the Bank also introduced the ESG Risk Assessment Scorecard for systematic evaluation of ESG risks in lending activities. Further, the Bank is conducting climate-related risk stress testing covering physical as well as transition risks. It is noteworthy to say that in alignment with its sustainability agenda, Burgan bank was among the first banks in Kuwait to develop a Sustainable Financing Framework in line with internationally accepted principles.

As part of its broader decarbonization efforts, the Bank made strides in green operations and responsible resource consumption. This included the installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations at its head office to encourage cleaner mobility among staff and visitors, as well as the deployment of rooftop solar panels and motion-sensor lighting to optimize energy efficiency.

The Bank also reinforced its environmental stewardship through collaborative initiatives. In partnership with Tadwire, the first recycling facility of its kind in Kuwait, Burgan launched a head office waste management and recycling program targeting paper, plastic, and e-waste. Its participation in DHL's GoGreen Plus program—aimed at re-

ducing shipment-related emissions through sustainable aviation fuel—further supported its supply chain decarbonization efforts.

Additionally, Burgan played a role in community-based environmental efforts, which included the redevelopment and greenification of a public park in Daiya residential area and internal efforts to phase out single-use plastic water bottles, promoting a culture of environmental responsibility among employees.

Social sustainability

Burgan Bank's social sustainability efforts in 2024 were centered on empowering its people, championing inclusion, and strengthening national talent. For the second consecutive year, the Bank earned the "Great Place to Work" certification, with employee participation rising to 89 percent—a clear indicator of improved engagement and workplace satisfaction, reinforcing its stance as an employer of choice.



The Kuwaiti athletes who participated in the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The Bank boasts a gender-diverse workforce, with women comprising 46 percent of total staff and 11 percent of leadership positions. Burgan launched the "Empower Her" initiative aimed to empower women with professional skills, mentorship and networking opportunities. Burgan's human capital strategy is focused on developing our local talent which prioritizes recruitment and development of nationals contributing to Kuwait's socio-economic development. Kuwaitization reached an all-time high of 86 percent. Burgan focused on investing in the development and career progression of Kuwaiti employees through mentorship programs, succession planning, and tailored leadership development all created to actively prepare high-potential talent for future roles. Programs like Ro'ya, the flagship leadership training initiative, and the Lab Academy—launched with CODED to cultivate future tech leaders—are shaping a pipeline of local expertise aligned with future banking needs.

The Bank continued to prioritize work-life balance and employee wellbeing by introducing innovative benefits such as reduced working hours on Thursdays, increased paternity leave to five days, and a birthday leave policy. It also launched wellness initiatives, including the "Rock Your Habits" challenge, and opened a new in-house medical clinic to support employee health and mental wellbeing. Fostering a culture of recognition and excellence, the Burgan Beacon program was launched to celebrate employees for outstanding performance.

Burgan's commitment to employee de-



Fadel Abdullah, CEO of Burgan Bank Kuwait

velopment remained steadfast, with an average of 33 hours of training per employee in 2024. Learning opportunities were delivered through a blend of digital platforms and in-person sessions, supporting varied learning styles and ensuring inclusive development access.

Community engagement and CSR

Burgan's commitment to the local community continued to grow in 2024 through a variety of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. It also actively participated in the Central Bank's "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) campaign to enhance public financial literacy and banking awareness.

In addition, Burgan supported numerous initiatives across the areas of health, sports, education, and inclusion. Highlights included its continued support for Team Kuwait at the Paris 2024 Olympics, backing youth empowerment through sports and national pride. For 23 years, Burgan has also proudly partnered with the Kuwait Association for Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH) and Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice (BACCH), ensuring vital palliative care services for children in need. Further community contributions in 2024 included support for the Kuwait Association for Learning Differences, cancer awareness and treatment campaigns, and sponsorship of local sports events that promote wellbeing and social inclusion. The Bank also partnered with several NGOs to provide assistance to families in need, reinforcing its role as a community-first institution.

Digitalization: Technology as a driver

In 2024, Burgan Bank made significant strides in advancing its digital transformation strategy, emphasizing accessibility, efficiency, and a user-centric approach to services. The Bank introduced a range of enhancements to its mobile banking platform, offering a more seamless, intuitive, and secure experience that caters to the evolving needs of its customers, reflected in the 15 percent YoY increase in active online banking users. These improvements not only made banking more convenient but also reinforced the Bank's commitment to providing innovative and reliable digital solutions.

Internally, the Bank focused on automating core processes, which streamlined operations and facilitated faster decision-making. By reducing manual errors and enhancing compliance and control mechanisms, the Bank improved its operational efficiency and risk management. These internal advancements also aligned with Burgan's broader

ESG goals by promoting greater inclusion, ensuring wider financial accessibility, and fortifying the Bank's operational resilience in the face of an increasingly digital world. Through these efforts, Burgan Bank continues to demonstrate its commitment to innovation, sustainability, and customer-centric solutions.

Governance sustainability

In 2024, Burgan Bank further solidified the governance foundation underpinning its ESG agenda, ensuring sustained alignment with best practices and regulatory standards. The ESG materiality matrix was updated for 2024-2026 based on stakeholder input to enable more informed decision-making process on sustainability, emphasizing topics of shared importance to the Bank and our stakeholders, and a comprehensive review and expansion of ESG-aligned policies was completed. New and updated policies included those covering Human Rights, Sustainable Procurement, Climate Risk Management, ESG, Debt Collection, and Responsible Lending and Investment. These policies help embed ESG into every level of the Bank's operations and risk management framework.

On cybersecurity, the Bank has implemented strengthened internal controls, advanced systems, and comprehensive employee training programs to enhance data protection, mitigate digital risks, and maintain customer trust. These initiatives focus on adopting cutting-edge technologies, AI-driven threat monitoring, and proactive incident response protocols to ensure the security of digital transactions and sensitive data. By prioritizing robust cybersecurity measures, Burgan Bank not only protects its clients but also reinforces its operational resilience in an increasingly digital landscape. These efforts demonstrate the Bank's long-term commitment to ethical governance, responsible digital leadership, and maintaining the highest standards of security in the financial sector.



Looking ahead

With six reports published and a growing legacy of impactful initiatives, Burgan Bank continues to lead the way in ESG integration within Kuwait's banking sector. In the years ahead, the Bank will continue to expand its impact across environmental action, inclusive growth, governance excellence, and community advancement across all our geographies. With clear direction, committed leadership, and a purpose-driven strategy, Burgan is poised to build a better future for its stakeholders, employees, and the wider community. To access the full 2024 Sustainability Report, visit the Burgan Bank website.



Burgan Bank achieves LEED Gold certification for Operations and Maintenance.

"This milestone reinforces Burgan Bank's proactive and purpose-driven ESG strategy," said Fadel Abdullah, Chief Executive Officer – Kuwait at Burgan Bank. "We are proud to celebrate the significant advancements we've made in 2024. Our ESG journey builds on a strong ESG foundation that began in 2019 and has since evolved into a strategic and bank-wide commitment. From achieving LEED Gold certification to empowering local talent and enhancing our governance framework, our progress reflects our mission to finance responsibly, promote ethical practices, minimize environmental impact, and deliver lasting value to our community."

Sustainability as a strategic pillar

Burgan Bank's ESG strategy is anchored in a long-term vision to be a responsible financial institution that helps build a resilient and equitable future for all stakeholders. At the heart of our approach are four strategic pillars: Good Governance, Responsible Banking, Community Betterment, and Environmental Impact Reduction. These pillars guide the Bank's operations, drive internal alignment, and support delivery of its ESG mission—to finance responsibly, achieve positive community impact, endorse ethical practices and transparency, and minimize environmental impact.

The ESG governance framework is spearheaded by the Board of Directors and



Business

Nomo Bank announces new competitive property finance rates for GCC customers

Al-Mutawaah: Bank offers various options for ownership or investment in UK real estate market

KUWAIT: Nomo Bank, the digital arm of the Bank of London and the Middle East "BLME", a subsidiary of Boubyan Bank Group, announced its new competitive finance rates for GCC customers. This comes in an attempt to meet their aspirations in the UK residential properties market or for investing in leasehold properties in the United Kingdom, in addition to offering the possibility of refinancing their existing properties at competitive rates and flexible conditions.

These financing solutions stand out as they are fully digital and Sharia-compliant, thus giving customers the opportunity to avail property financing with rates starting from 4.99 percent to 5.49 percent for residential and investment properties, with refinancing rates starting from 4.99 percent to 5.25 percent.

Flexible banking experience that meets customers' expectations

On this occasion, Sarah Al-Mutawaah, Nomo Bank's Executive Manager, said: "With the increased interest in property investment in the United Kingdom, Nomo Bank continues to offer

innovative financing solutions that keep up with its GCC customers' needs. The new rates offer a great opportunity for purchasing or refinancing properties starting from £100,000 and up to £2.5 million in value, with flexibility in selecting from finance solutions that suit various customers' needs, whether for residential or investment purposes."

She added: "Nomo's property finance stands out with payment tenors starting from 5 years and up to 30 years, with financing up to 75 percent of the property's value, making it easier for customers to own their property." Al-Mutawaah elaborated: "GCC residents have a clear interest in the UK real estate market, whether for personal residential or investment purposes, or for their children who study over there.



Sarah Al-Mutawaah

With the continued demand growth in this sector, Nomo's property finance solutions cater for the needs of this growing segment of customers in the Middle East, who have international banking needs."

"Amid the ongoing economic challenges, investors are looking for investment instruments that strike the needed balance between revenues and stability. Hence, we offer Sharia-compliant property finance solutions that combine good financial performance with well-studied diversification opportunities in a reliable investment environment", she pointed out.

Al-Mutawaah reiterated: "Nomo Bank offers a fully-digital experience where customers can complete all property finance procedures easily through the App. This makes our procedures faster and more efficient. Ever since the start of Nomo, we have seen accelerated growth in the number of customers owing to Nomo's innovative digital services that cater for their banking needs. Moreover, the bank allows customers to manage their savings and investments conveniently and securely while employing cutting-edge Sharia-compliant digital solutions."

Germany struggles to revive growth, boost consumer spending

BERLIN: With global trade deeply uncertain and a tariff war causing havoc on financial markets, Germany's next government is hoping to unleash domestic consumption to revive stalled growth in an economy that has been driven for decades by exports. Conservative chancellor-in-waiting Friedrich Merz, in a newly forged coalition with the centre left Social Democrats (SPD), has announced policies such as tax cuts and raising the minimum wage.

He hopes these measures will increase purchasing power and support domestic demand. However, economists, retail groups and consumer behavior experts question whether they will be enough to persuade Germans - already among the world's biggest savers - to break open their piggy banks and spend. "I doubt that we will really see a sharp consumption revival this year," Carsten Brzeski, global head of macro told Reuters.

Germany's attempts to wean itself off its exports dependency predate the trade turmoil unleashed by the Trump administration, as it has long struggled to deal with declining competitiveness. Since 2023, domestic consumption has been stagnant however, with the household savings rate reaching 20 percent last year due to political uncertainty, above the EU average of 15 percent.

To avoid a third year of contraction in 2025, economists agree that boosting consumption in Europe's biggest economy is crucial. "Looking at it in a very simple way you can say, okay, there is a fall in demand for our export goods, so we have to strive for more domestic demand, which is investment and consumption," Cyrus de la Rubia, chief economist at Hamburg Commercial Bank AG, told Reuters.

Merz's coalition has agreed to lower income taxes for middle and lower income households, which could help consumption, the German retail association HDE told Reuters. "However, we do not expect a significant upturn." The government will make overtime pay tax-free and offer tax benefits for those working beyond retirement age. The minimum wage is expected to rise to 15 euros (\$17.10) per hour and the value-added tax (VAT) on food in restaurants will be lowered to 7 percent from a current 19 percent.

Deutsche Bank, however, said these "miscellaneous fiscal gifts" will provide only limited relief in the near term. Since unveiling the measures, Merz's coalition has started bickering about the contents of the agreement, with Merz warning that tax cuts would only happen if there was enough money in the budget.

Moreover, the measures would likely take time to change household habits, Salomon Fiedler, an economist at Berenberg, told Reuters. "German consumers seem to need a more psychological kickstarter: a policy or political breakthrough," Brzeski said. Despite a borrowing bonanza announced by Merz after the election, consumer sentiment was broadly unchanged afterwards, with a cooling labor market also making households hold back. In the heart of Berlin is Kleideri, a labyrinth of aisles with clothing from virtually every decade and style imaginable that customers can borrow for a monthly fee, like "a clothing library." — Reuters

How China went from courting Trump to 'never yield' tariff defiance

BEIJING/WASHINGTON: China has put civilian government officials in Beijing on "wartime footing" and ordered a diplomatic charm offensive aimed at encouraging other countries to push back against US President Donald Trump's tariffs, according to four people familiar with the matter.

Communist Party propaganda officials have played a leading role in framing China's response, one of the people said, with government spokespeople posting defiant clips on social media featuring former leader Mao Zedong saying "we will never yield."

As part of the "wartime" posture, the details of which are being reported by Reuters for the first time, bureaucrats in the foreign affairs and commerce ministries have been ordered to cancel vacation plans and keep mobile phones switched on around the clock, two of the people said. Departments covering the US have also been beefed up, including with officials who worked on China's response to Trump's first term, they said.

The combative all-of-government approach after Trump's "Liberation Day" salvo marked a hard turn for Beijing, which had tried to avoid a spiraling trade war. For months, Chinese diplomats had tried to establish a high-level channel of communication with Trump's administration to defend what China's cabinet has described in state media campaigns as a "win-win" trading relationship.

Optimistic Chinese observers even held out hope for a grand bargain with Trump over trade, TikTok - and perhaps even Taiwan. This account of how China shifted from seeking a deal to punching back with retaliatory tariffs and threatening all-out defiance is based on interviews with more than a dozen people, including US and Chinese government officials, as well as other diplomats and scholars briefed on bilateral exchanges.

Four of them also described how Beijing's diplomats have been engaging other governments targeted by Trump tariffs, including sending letters seeking cooperation to several countries. Longstanding US allies in Europe, Japan and South Korea have also been contacted, two people said. Most of the people spoke on condition of anonymity to describe confi-

dential government deliberations.

"China is a responsible major country. We stand up against hegemony, not only to safeguard our own rightful interests, but also to uphold the common interests of the international community," the Chinese foreign ministry said in a faxed statement.

It added that, "This trade war was started by the US and imposed on China... If the US really wants to resolve the issue through dialogue and negotiations, it should stop applying extreme pressure. Any dialogue should be established on the basis of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit."

Even after Trump was elected on the promise of high tariffs, relations with Beijing got off to a polite start. Trump invited Xi to his inauguration, which was eventually attended by Chinese Vice President Han Zheng. Things started deteriorating soon after.

Chinese ambassador to the US Xie Feng made unsuccessful attempts before the election to reach Trump's billionaire ally Elon Musk, said a US scholar who recently visited China for unofficial exchanges that Beijing has historically used to communicate with Washington policymakers. Musk didn't immediately return a request for comment.

While many countries were hit by US tariffs this month for the first time, China honed its response during previous bouts of the Sino-American trade war. Drawing on lessons from Trump's first term, China created a retaliatory playbook that includes tariffs as well as restrictions on about 60 US companies and curbs on exports of rare earths.

The effort was a result of weeks of preparations by Chinese government officials who had been tasked with studying Trump's policies and suggesting countermeasures that could be gradually scaled up, according to two people familiar with the situation. Xi opted for a strong response, hitting back with across-the-board levies even before Trump's announced tariffs went into effect. The duties were announced shortly before Wall Street opened on April 4 - a public holiday in China. US equities dropped sharply lower.

'Never yield'

China's foreign ministry has summoned many of the heads of its overseas missions back to Beijing for a special meeting held this week to coordinate the response, according to two Beijing-based diplomats. China has also sent formal letters to government officials of other countries pressured by Trump to engage in trade negotiations. The letters, which were described to Reuters by four people familiar with their contents, outlined the Chinese



Chinese President Xi Jinping (left) and US President Donald Trump. — AFP

position as well as the need for multipolarity and for countries to stand together. The messaging also included criticism of US policy that echoed China's public statements.

China has approached some G20 governments with wording for a joint declaration voicing support for the multilateral trading system, an EU diplomat told Reuters. But the diplomat said that the messaging did not address concerns also held by non-US governments about Chinese overcapacity, its subsidy regime and alleged unfair competition. Beijing has said those concerns are overblown and that the rise of its high-tech industries is due to its comparative advantages and benefits the world. China is also heavily focused on the domestic reaction to the tariffs, with social media users this week widely reposting an April 7 editorial in the official People's Daily warning against panic.

China has also recently started encouraging households to spend more and has dramatically changed its language about domestic consumption. Beijing is aiming to shift the engine of growth from exports to consumers at a time when the economy remains hobbled by a crisis of failed real estate development. "The real battlefield is on the domestic front, rather than bilateral negotiations," said Zhao of Fudan University.

China officials also published on Musk's X platform a clip of Chairman Mao giving a speech in 1953 - the last time the US and China were in direct military conflict during the Korean War. In the clip, Mao, whose oldest son died in the war, says peace is up to the Americans. "No matter how long this war is going to last, we'll never yield," he said. "We'll fight until we completely triumph." — AFP

BP makes new oil discovery off US Gulf coast

LONDON: British energy giant BP, which recently shelved carbon-reduction targets to focus on more profitable fossil fuel output, said Monday it had made a new oil discovery off the US Gulf coast. The company said it had located oil at the Far South prospect.

"This discovery in the deepwater Gulf of America underscores how BP is in action to step up investment in exploration and strengthen its upstream portfolio under the strategy reset announced in February," BP said in a statement, using President Donald Trump's new name for the Gulf of Mexico.

In an executive order signed hours after he returned to the White House, Trump called the water body an "indelible part of America" critical to US oil production and fishing and "a favorite destination for American tourism and recreation activities." Andy Krieger, BP senior vice president for Gulf of America and Canada, described its Gulf business as "central to BP's strategy". The company's history with the US Gulf coast is synonymous with the explosion on the BP-leased Deepwater Horizon rig in April 2010 that triggered the worst oil spill in US history. The disaster killed 11 employees and cost the firm tens of billions of dollars in damages and compensation.

Almost 15 years later, BP on Monday said the exploration well that led it to the new oil discovery is located in western Green Canyon, approximately 120 miles (192 kilometers) off the coast of Louisiana.

BP operates Far South owing to its majority 57.5-percent holding, while US peer Chevron owns the remainder. Krieger added that BP is "focused on delivering more affordable and reliable energy" from the Gulf. BP said it is ramping up its global exploration program, with around 40 wells planned over the next three years, including as many as 15 to be drilled this year. — AFP



TOKYO: A woman cycles past an electronic board showing the numbers of morning trading on the Tokyo Stock Exchange along a street in Tokyo on April 14, 2025. — AFP

Japan: US tariffs slash company profits 'day by day'

TOKYO: Japan's envoy for upcoming tariff talks with the United States said on Monday that Japanese company profits were falling "day by day" as he called for a swift solution. Economic Revitalization Minister Ryosei Akazawa will visit Washington for the negotiations this week, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told lawmakers on Monday. The government has so far failed in attempts to secure exemptions from the US tariffs, including 25 percent on the global auto sector that took effect in early April.

US President Donald Trump is also planning a separate levy of 24 percent on Japanese goods, which has been paused. "As some tariffs have already

taken effect, Japanese companies' profits are being cut day by day," Akazawa said in parliament.

"The sooner (the issue is addressed), the better," he said. In Washington, Akazawa will reportedly issue a strong call for a review of Trump's tariffs. "I will do my best, bearing in mind what's best for our national interests and what is most effective," he said.

Japanese media, citing government sources, said Akazawa's talks with Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Trade Representative Jamieson Greer were set for Wednesday. Japanese firms are the biggest investors into the United States, and vehicles accounted for around 28 percent of Japan's 21.3 trillion yen (\$142 billion) of US-bound exports last year. Ishiba held a telephone call on Monday afternoon with Singapore's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong to discuss the impact of US tariffs and China's retaliatory actions. Ishiba told Wong that "the current situation is serious for Japanese companies operating in Southeast Asian countries including Singapore", Tokyo's foreign ministry said. — AFP

Goldman Sachs profits rise on equity trading

NEW YORK: Goldman Sachs reported Monday higher first-quarter profits on strength in equity trading and financing, offsetting a hit from losses in investments on public stock markets.

The investment giant reported profits of \$4.6 billion, 16.6 percent above the year-ago level in results that topped analyst expectations. Revenues were \$15.1 billion, up six percent.

Revenues tied to equity trading soared 27 percent from the year-ago level, with Goldman benefiting from strong demand for its services to facilitate trading and providing financing to clients trading stocks. The bank said its advisory revenues were "significantly lower" than in the year-ago period. However, Goldman's investment banking fees backlog increased compared with the end of 2024.

Investment bankers had been eyeing more deals with the shift to the Trump administration from the Biden years, where mergers had been viewed skeptically.

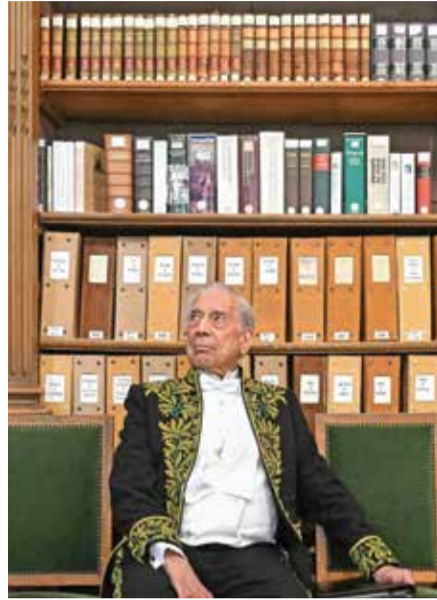
But deal flow has so far lagged expectations, with analysts citing a weakening macroeconomic backdrop amid Trump's shifting tariff policies. Goldman's Asset and Wealth Management business posted a drop in revenues, due to significantly lower revenues in equity and debt investment, partially offset by higher management fees. Goldman's strong results show "that in times of great uncertainty, clients turn to Goldman Sachs for execution and insight," said Chief Executive David Solomon.

"While we are entering the second quarter with a markedly different operating environment than earlier this year, we remain confident in our ability to continue to support our clients." Shares rose 1.3 percent in pre-market trading. — AFP

TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 2025



Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa receives the Nobel Literature Prize from King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden during the Nobel prize award ceremony at the Stockholm Concert Hall in Stockholm on Dec 10, 2010. - AFP photos



Vargas Llosa poses for a photograph ahead of his induction into the Academie Francaise (French Academy) in Paris on Feb 9, 2023.

Nobel Literature Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa dies in Peru

Peruvian writer and Nobel literature laureate Mario Vargas Llosa died on Sunday at the age of 89, his family announced, ending the era of Latin America's literary golden generation. "It is with deep sorrow that we announce that our father, Mario Vargas Llosa, passed away peacefully in Lima today, surrounded by his family," his eldest son Alvaro wrote in a message on X also signed by his siblings Gonzalo and Morgana Vargas Llosa.

Born into a middle-class Peruvian family, Vargas Llosa was one of the greats of the Latin American literary "boom" of the 1960s and 1970s, along with Colombia's Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Argentina's Julio Cortazar. Rumors of the writer's deteriorating health had spread in recent months, during which he had been living out of the public eye.

In October, his son Alvaro said he was "on the verge of turning 90, an age when you have to reduce the intensity of your activities a little". The writer's "passing will sadden his relatives, his friends and his readers around the world," the family statement read. "But we hope that they will find comfort, as we do, in the fact that he enjoyed a long, adventurous and fruitful life, and leaves behind him a body of work that will outlive him." Peru declared a day of mourning for the author on Monday, with flags flying at half-mast on government premises.

'Enduring legacy'

The family said that "no public ceremony will take place," in accordance with instructions left by Vargas Llosa himself. "Our mother, our children and ourselves trust that we will have the

space and privacy to bid him farewell in the company of family members and close friends," the siblings added. Vargas Llosa's body will be cremated, in accordance with his wishes, they said.

Gustavo Ruiz, a reader of Vargas Llosa's works, was among a small group of young people gathered around the writer's home to pay tribute. "I didn't believe it and I wanted to come close



Portrait taken on Sept 9, 1990 shows Vargas Llosa during the last day of the Deauville US film festival.

to his house since they are not going to give him a wake," Ruiz told national radio station RPP. David Marreros, a 30-year-old visual artist, told AFP that Vargas Llosa proved "one can live doing what one is most passionate about".

The writer's "intellectual genius and enormous body of work will remain an enduring legacy for future generations," Peru's President Dina Boluarte posted on X. "We express our sincerest condolences to the family, to his friends and to the whole world. Rest in peace,

illustrious Peruvian for the ages." Former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe called Vargas Llosa a "Master of Masters". "He leaves us a path for the future," Uribe said on X.

Fellow Peruvian writer Alfredo Bryce Echenique hailed Vargas Llosa's "enormity," telling RPP his friend's death was "a sorrow for Peru". US Deputy State Secretary State Christopher Landau said that "to label him as just Peruvian would be a disservice because his themes and interests were timeless and universal". "He will live on in my bookshelves and many others in Latin America and around the world," Landau wrote on X.

Mario Vargas Llosa moved to Lima last year and celebrated his 89th birthday on March 28. A few days before, his son Alvaro posted on X three photos of him showing the writer in spots around Lima where he wrote his last two novels, "Cinco Esquinas" ("Five Corners", 2016) and "Le Dedicó Mi Silencio" ("I Dedicate My Silence To You," 2023).

Vargas Llosa was hailed for his close description of social reality in works like "La ciudad y los perros" ("The City and the Dogs", 1963) and "Conversacion en la catedral" ("Conversation in the Cathedral", 1969). But he was criticized by some South American intellectuals for his conservative stances. Vargas Llosa's works were translated into around 30 languages. A Francophile, he lived in Paris for several years, becoming in 2016 the first foreign author added to the prestigious Pleiade literary collection during his lifetime. He was named to France's Academy of prominent intellectuals in 2021. - AFP

Vargas Llosa, last of Latam's literary golden generation

Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa was the last survivor of a golden generation of Latin American literary giants, his writing exploring universal themes often set outside his native Peru. Admired for his depiction of social realities but criticized within Latin American intellectual circles for his conservative positions, Vargas Llosa — who died Sunday at age 89 — was a leading light of the "boom" generation that included greats like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Julio Cortazar. Winner of the 2010 Nobel Prize for Literature, Varga Llosa passionately believed writers should be involved in civil society. "We Latin Americans are dreamers by nature and we have trouble telling the difference between the real world and fiction," he said. "That is why we have such good musicians, poets, painters and writers, and also such horrible and mediocre rulers."

But he courted controversy over his support for the war in Iraq and was a passionate admirer of Britain's "Iron Lady" prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. Author of a vast body of work, spanning historical novels, erotic romances, crime novellas, light-hearted comedies, plays, memoirs and essays, Vargas Llosa also kept his hand in current affairs by working as a journalist.

Unlike Garcia Marquez and other Latin American greats, he rarely strayed into magical realism, his style marked by graphic descriptions of murder, rapes and other violence, perhaps harking back to his days as a crime reporter in Peru's capital Lima when he was just 16. "A writer must never turn into a statue. I have never liked the idea of a writer stuck in his library, cut off from the world like Proust was," he told AFP in an interview. "I need to keep a foothold in reality. That's why I do journalism."

Military school trauma

Born in Arequipa in southern Peru on March 28, 1936 to a single mother, Vargas Llosa was taken to Bolivia as a baby, only returning a decade later when he met his father for the first time. It was not a happy relationship, his father being "very authoritarian and severe", Vargas Llosa said in 2019. "I lost my innocence and discovered loneliness, authority, adult life and fear. My salvation was reading good books, taking refuge in worlds... where I could feel free. And I became happy again."

At 14, his father sent him to Lima's Leoncio Prado Military Academy, an experience which he described as "traumatic", seeking solace in the world of books and writing. On leaving, he worked at La Cronica tabloid before studying law and literature at San Marcos University while dictator Manuel Odría was in power, becoming very politically active.

A scandalous marriage

At 19, Vargas Llosa married his aunt Julia Urquidi. Although not a blood relative, she was a divorcee 10 years older than him and it was socially scandalous. She encouraged his writing and when they moved to Madrid, he began his first novel "The Time of the Hero" (1963) based on his military academy experience, which he later finished in Paris. Their decade-long marriage inspired his 1977 novel "Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter".



Vargas Llosa speaks at a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington on Sept 21, 1989.

He worked for a period in Paris as a journalist for Agence France-Presse (AFP) and Radio Television Francaise. After his marriage broke up in 1964, Vargas Llosa married his cousin Patricia Llosa and had three children. The couple separated in 2015.

'Unreserved admiration' for Thatcher

All of his early novels are set in Peru, among them "The Green House" (1966), "Conversation in the Cathedral" (1969), and "Captain Pantoja and the Special Service" (1973). Later writings were set further afield: "The War of the End of the World" (1981) tackled a military conflict in late 1890s Brazil, while "The Feast of the Goat" (2000) portrayed the 1961 assassination of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo.

After his Nobel win, he published "The Dream of the Celt" about Roger Casement, a gay British consul who wrote a 1904 report about colonialism's abuses in the Congo before becoming an Irish nationalist. Like most of Latin America's intelligentsia in the early 1960s, Vargas Llosa initially supported Fidel Castro's leftist revolution, but later grew disillusioned, becoming an advocate of free-market capitalism whose political idol was Thatcher.

After her resignation in 1990, Vargas Llosa wrote of his "unreserved admiration" for Thatcher, praising her 11-year rule as "the most successful revolution in Europe this century and the one with the most powerful effect on the rest of the world". -AFP

Ketchup to Moon rock: What's the point of a World Expo?

Expo 2025 kicked off Sunday in the Japanese city of Osaka but in the age of online information and mass tourism, what is the purpose of a World's Fair? The huge events, which draw millions of visitors to a chosen city every five years or so, hark back to London's 1851 Great Exhibition held inside the Crystal Palace. As 160 countries and regions show off their technological and cultural achievements at the six-month Osaka Expo, AFP looks at what it's all about.

What is a World Expo?

Expanding on national expositions in Paris at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, Imperial Britain built an immense glass Crystal Palace to host 14,000 exhibitors from 40 countries. That marked the start of the Expo phenomenon that over the decades introduced the world to ketchup, the telephone and X-ray machines among myriad other technologies.

The Paris edition of 1889 featured the Eiffel Tower — intended as a temporary attraction — and Pablo Picasso's anti-war



Visitors walk along the "Grand Ring", made of wood, at the 2025 Osaka Expo.

painting "Guernica" was first shown at one in 1937. Historically, World's Fairs did not just exhibit new technologies but also included racist displays of actual people from the colonies of the time.

Do we still need Expos?

While World Expos still showcase future technologies, some argue that the advent of the internet, mass media and cheaper foreign travel have made them

redundant. Global turmoil in the form of conflicts and trade wars has also led critics to question the idealistic values of unity and development touted at the events. But organizers of Expo 2025 in Osaka have stressed that in-person exchanges between nations and the resulting "unexpected encounters" are still important.

Middle school teacher Yusuke Nagasawa said attending was a "valuable learning experience, to be able to actu-

ally experience the realism and warmth of the people, which cannot be conveyed through a screen". "I've seen the excitement, and people from various countries have approached me for chats," added Nagasawa, who plans to bring about 140 pupils to the Expo next month. Among the dizzying number of displays this year are a meteorite from Mars, a beating "heart" grown from stem cells, and the world's largest wooden architectural structure.

Where are they held?

Since 1928, the Paris-based International Exhibitions Bureau has run the Expos. More than 180 countries are members and the host city is chosen by a vote of its general assembly. This is Osaka's second World Expo after the 1970 edition — featuring a Moon rock — that was attended by 64 million people, a record until Shanghai in 2010.

The United States once held frequent World's Fairs, as they are known there, leaving behind landmarks such as the Space Needle in Seattle and New York

City's Unisphere. But the world's largest economy last hosted one in 1984, with some experts saying their popularity has been overtaken by the Olympic Games and attractions such as Disneyland.

What's in focus at an Expo?

Buildings often take center stage at World Expos and this year is no exception, with each country dressed to impress. The Chinese pavilion's design evokes a calligraphy scroll, while the Portuguese one created by Japanese architect Kengo Kuma features ropes that "evoke the movement of the ocean". "Expos have always acted, and continue to act, as places of architectural experimentation," said Isaac Lopez Cesar from Spain's University of A Coruna. They offer a forum "where new architectural forms, new materials, new designs and structural typologies, and, in general, new technological advances applied to architecture are tested", he said. -AFP



The Gundam pavilion at the 2025 Osaka Expo.



An exhibition inside the France pavilion



Visitors look up at a visual presentation highlighting space travel at the USA pavilion.



US rapper Post Malone performs on stage during the 2025 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival at Empire Polo Club on April 13, 2025 in Indio, California. — AFP photos

POST MALONE WRAPS COACHELLA WITH GENRE-FLUID PERFORMANCE

Post Malone electrified Coachella as Sunday's headlining set, melding his early rap hits with his recent country turn to close out the first weekend of the California desert festival. Around 100,000 festival-goers braved scorching temperatures to attend the sprawling desert weekend festival that also saw performances by Lady Gaga, Charli XCX and Green Day.

Post Malone sported jeans with a tucked-in tee for his laid-back set that saw him light up a cigarette and lavish praise on his audience. As he performed his smash "Sunflower", he left them with a parting message: "Keep spreading love, keep giving love, keep receiving love. No matter what you're going through right now, ladies and gentlemen, you're loved more than you know it."

Ahead of Post's marquee performance, hip-hop superstar Megan Thee Stallion ruled the main stage, bringing guest stars Queen Latifah and Ciara out to play. And German electronic pioneers Kraftwerk packed a tent of fans eager for their trailblazing conceptual soundscapes. The iconic group whose work is frequently cited as era-defining delivered, playing hits including "Computer Love" and their best-known song, "Autobahn".

Shaboozey kicked off Sunday with his viral brand of country that recently earned him a Grammy nomination for Best New Artist. South Korea's Jennie electrified the stage with a solo performance days after her Blackpink bandmate Lisa — fresh off a role in HBO's hit show "The White Lotus" — did the same.

And France's Polo & Pan — the duo that has found fame with its brand of electronic infused with tropical influ-



Filipino-British singer/songwriter Beabadoobee performs.

ences — are preparing for a primetime DJ slot for their second round playing Coachella. The group is formed by Paul Armand-Delille and Alexandre Grynspan, the latter of whom told AFP backstage they feel honored to return to the desert and feel "a responsibility to represent France". "Coachella is definitely a global institution when it comes to festivals," he said.

On Saturday Charli XCX bathed the desert in her signature "brat" lime green to close out her banger set that pays homage to her sensational year, with cameos including Troye Sivan, Lorde and Billie Eilish, whose appearance whipped the crowd into a frenzy. The appearance of Eilish triggered hysteria rivaled only by the crowd's mad dash to the stage next door, where Senator Sanders made a surprise appearance to thunderous applause. The self-described socialist from Vermont has been



South Korean singer and rapper Jennie Kim performs.

on his own "Fighting Oligarchy" tour with US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a bid to harness anger over the actions of President Donald Trump's administration.

Green Day, Gaga, Gustavo

The one-two punch of Charli XCX's club-ready performance followed immediately by Sanders's rousing call to action left Coachella fans ready to rock by the time headliners Green Day took the stage. The career-spanning performance filled more than 90 minutes with hits — including "Brain Stew," "Minority", "Basket Case" and "When I Come Around" — a reminder of the grip the rockers had on popular music throughout their 1990s and 2000s heyday. Gustavo Dudamel led the Los Angeles Philharmonic in a sweeping sunset show that married orchestral arrangements with an eclectic crop of collaborators,



US singer-songwriter Shaboozey performs.

including rapper LL Cool J, country star Maren Morris and Icelandic jazz-inspired pop singer Laufey.

Lady Gaga kicked off the festival with a three-act tale of mayhem channeling her latest album, but did dole out her classics to the delight of her ardent fans. Her rendition of "Poker Face" saw Gaga playing against her dancers in a giant chess game — the type of performance art that made her one of the contemporary era's seminal pop stars.

And Missy Elliott dealt a blistering, headliner-worthy show featuring trippy visuals, lasers and her smashes including "Lose Control", "Get Ur Freak On" and "Work It". Coachella's second weekend — which features the same lineup, save for cameo shakeups and occasional special features — will take place April 18-20. — AFP



Bands perform on stage during the 2025 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival.



Children's show 'Yo Gabba Gabba!' takes Coachella by storm

The wide-eyed, permanently smiling, colorful characters of cult kids musical "Yo Gabba Gabba!" gave Coachella A-listers a run for their money over the weekend, as joyous fans flocked to their celebrity-packed set in the California desert. "There's a party in my tummy / So yummy," shrieked fans in a sing-along intended to help the audience get its "wiggles" out.

The children's musical television series whose original run began in 2007 centers on costumed toys come-to-life, whose songs, visuals and interaction aim to teach children life skills, while also entertaining parents. The show gained notoriety for its laundry list of celebrity guests, especially from the indie music world, and spawned a franchise including a touring live show.

So while at first glance its booking at Coachella — the major music festival whose headliners this year include Lady Gaga, Green Day and Post Malone — seemed odd, show creators Christian Jacobs and Scott Schultz told AFP it's actually a natural fit. "We were

dads going to Coachella, and working at Coachella, and we were all hyped about Coachella — so in a lot of ways there's a lot of DNA in the creation of the show that comes directly from live music, and a lot of the bands that have played here, and the legacy of Coachella," Jacobs said during an interview at the artists' trailer backstage.

Hype man and Public Enemy rapper Flavor Flav had a top cameo during the trippy performance Saturday afternoon: the "Flavor of Love" star beat-boxed about loving bugs. Thundercat, the multi-hyphenate artist who has worked with Kendrick Lamar, arrived in a furry cat suit to perform "The Orange

Cat's Special Time Outdoors". The set closed with a rollicking rendition of the Muppet classic "The Rainbow Connection", a performance that included rock band Portugal the Man, its legendary songwriter Paul Williams, and the beloved pop music satirist "Weird Al" Yankovic.

"We don't consider 'Yo Gabba Gabba!' as like a TV show that's dabbling in music — it's a music show," Scott Schultz said. And the nostalgia-conjuring Coachella performance was a full-circle moment. "The kids who were children for 'Gabba'... have grown up, and they're their 20-year-old selves," Schultz said. "It's sort of like we're per-

forming for them a second time." "That feels awesome," Jacobs added, to "see our own little baby show grow up."

'Kids at heart'

Each of the creators has four kids of his own, some of whom are now grown and also work on the show. "We are kids at heart, and when we had our first children we didn't want to just put them in front of kids' television and leave them," Schultz said. "We wanted to participate with them, and that felt sort of limited." So they created their own show, drawing on their youthful backgrounds as punk rockers and their mutual love of music to invent something interactive, visual and educational.

"Music is such an amazing tool, not just for teaching, but for feeling," Jacobs said. "How do you create feeling in songs and emotion and emotional intelligence — can that accompany a song or a vibe? Absolutely, yes." And it was definitely a vibe at Coachella: a throng of fans spanning generations played interactive games with the characters on stage and sang along to tracks like "Don't Bite Your Friends". "We're transporting you to a fantastical universe where we can be kids and have permission to be kids again, and it's not so much different than ours," Schultz said. "It just is sort of fun and more colorful and more exciting and full of music." — AFP



(From left) Muno, Toodee, Plex, Foofa and Brobee from the children's musical television show "Yo Gabba Gabba!" pose during the 2025 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival at Empire Polo Club on April 11, 2025 in Indio, California. — AFP

Music, revolution and Y2K: Coachella 2025 takeaways

Coachella 2025 boasted A-list-er guest appearances, a dose of leftist politics, orchestral fusion and Y2K fashion. Here are takeaways from the first weekend of the premier festival that draws hundreds of thousands of revelers to the California desert:

Pop reigns... with a hint of classical

Lady Gaga, Post Malone, Benson Boone, Charli XCX, Tyla, Lisa, Jennie... the pop lineup ran deep at Coachella 2025, a reflection of the charts and the fanbases that ride or die with their idols. Boone performed his hit of the moment "Beautiful Things" — and did his signature show-time backflip, as well as a rendition of "Bohemian Rhapsody" backed by none other than Queen guitarist Brian May.

And Gaga's rendition of "Poker Face" was an example of the arena-ready performance art that made her one of the contemporary era's seminal pop stars. Celebrated conductor Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic meanwhile gave one of the weekend's most eclectic performances. Their sunset show featured half a dozen guest appearances from the likes of LL Cool J, Maren Morris and Laufey in a sweeping performance that included country, jazz, rap and pop set to rich orchestral arrangements.

Rock revival

Coachella was a rock festival in its early days, but over the past decade it has gone full pop. The 2025 edition of the festival featured a number of acts that returned to its roots. Green Day's headlining performance on Saturday was akin to a greatest hits album: "American Idiot," "Brain Stew," "Minority," "Basket Case" and "When I Come Around" were among the classic tracks that recalled just how deep the band's catalogue stretches.

And then there were The Go-Gos, the legendary all-woman rock band who donned glittering, metallic outfits as they reunited to perform hits including "Vacation" and "We Got the Beat". Other rock acts included Weezer, the original Misfits, Jimmy Eat World and cult punk legends the Circle Jerks, who packed their tent with moshers.

Bernie steals the show

Billie Eilish, Queen Latifah and Lorde made major cameos but the cheers for an unbilled appearance by US senator Bernie Sanders were in the same league. As he was introduced to the stage, screaming fans sprinted to film the Vermont representative, who introduced Clairo's set but not before making an impassioned plea. "I'm not gonna be long but this country faces some very difficult challenges and the future of what happens to America depends on your generation," said the self-described socialist to cascading applause.

He urged his rapt audience to stand up against billionaires, the fossil fuel industry and US President Donald Trump's administration, while also supporting causes like universal health care, women's rights and ending the war in Gaza. Samara Guillory was among the music fans who dashed over to see Sanders. "Coming here, talking to us, spreading awareness — I think this was exactly the move, honestly," said the 21-year-old.

Leather, lace and Y2K

Over the years Coachella fashion has become something of a cliché, a boho amalgam of mid-aughts trends like flower crowns, crochet, wide-brim hats, bold jewelry and cowboy core including suede vests and frayed denim. Much of that remains standard fare at the festival, but Coachella 2025 saw a handful of other trends take center stage. One popular look was giving Italian grandmother: Silk scarves knotted at the chin were all the rage.

And many attendees wielded paper parasols to shield themselves from the midday sun. But a baffling number of people sported leather looks — pants, boots, corsets, even jumpsuits — despite scorching temperatures exacerbated by a lack of shade and lengthy walks between stages. But then again, being seen has never been about comfort.

Other festivalgoers had an easier time beating the heat by wearing as little as possible. And in case you missed it, street fashion is still decidedly Y2K: Halter tops, tube tops, pleated miniskirts and hip bone baring low-rise bottoms remain youthful favorites. — AFP



This picture taken on March 21, 2025, shows film conservator Firdaus displaying a reel of a 1981 horror film about 'Sundel Bolong' (a ghost widely known in Indonesia) in Jakarta. - AFP photos



An actor portrays a 'pocong' (a ghost widely known in Indonesia) at a horror entertainment venue at a mall in Jakarta.



Director Ismail Basbeth speaks during an interview in Jakarta.



Ekky Imanjaya, a film studies lecturer at Jakarta's Bina Nusantara University, poses for photo in Jakarta.



Film conservator Firdaus projects a film at the film archive and data centre 'Sinematek Indonesia' in Jakarta.



Horror film director Anggy Umbara poses next to a 'kuyang' (a ghost widely known in Indonesia) at a horror entertainment venue at a mall in Jakarta.



Director Nanang Istiabudi poses for photo at the 'Avant Garde Productions' office in Jakarta.

Indonesia's horror movie industry rises from the grave

Crunching popcorn and screaming, Indonesians are flocking to watch homegrown horror films in cinemas that draw on the country's penchant for ghost and monster stories. The genre now dominates Indonesia's theatres after this folklore helped the industry rise from the grave at the start of the century, when almost no horror films were produced locally, compared to scores last year. "Our parents and grandparents used these stories to scare us," said Ekky Imanjaya, 52, film studies lecturer at Jakarta's Bina Nusantara University. "These tales are very close to us."

According to the Indonesian Film Board (BPI), 60 percent of the 258 productions made domestically in 2024 were horror films. They accounted for 54.6 million tickets sold – or 70 percent of the total audience. Moviegoer Elang, a 25-year-old consultant, said while leaving a theatre that the genre's success was down to "emphasis on local traditions and monsters" like Pocong, a ghost still wrapped in a burial cloth.

Another movie enthusiast Ajeng Putri, 29, said films that drew inspiration from the country's urban legends were "easier to understand... more exciting".

Those include Tuyul, a living-dead child, and Kuntilanak, a woman unable to give birth while her stillborn baby remains inside her.

'Renaissance'

Indonesia's film production "declined drastically" in the 1990s due to lack of funding, according to Jakarta-based production company Studio Antelope. The film archive and data centre, Sinematek Indonesia, counts just 456 movies made between 1990 and 2000. "Among them, 37 are horror films," said archive worker Wahyudi, 55.

Yet the country's industry earned the Guinness World Record two years ago for the film industry most focused on the genre. Last year, Indonesia's largest cinema operator XXI recorded five of its top 10 movies as horror films, drawing 27.8 million ticket sales. Indonesia's first horror film was made in 1971 under the rule of dictator Suharto, who led the country with an iron fist for almost three decades. It was not until the 2010s "that a new wave began" for the domestic industry, said Ekky.

New directors, the most famous being Joko Anwar, "changed every-

thing by making very good independent horror films of high quality," said Ismail Basbeth, a 39-year-old director from Yogyakarta. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry roared back to life with the 2022 film KKN di Desa Penari, which sold 10 million tickets. The film is based on a supposedly true story of students experiencing supernatural events in a rural community service program. "It launched a new wave of more realistic films, based on real events," said director Nanang Istiabudi, 53.

Indonesian cinemas generated \$136 million in gross revenue in 2022, according to website Film Indonesia. PwC Indonesia estimates the cinema industry contributed billions to the country's economy in that year, and says it is expected to grow more than six percent annually until 2027. The boom also earned the industry a program at the 2023 Busan International Film Festival, often considered Asia's most important, titled "the renaissance of Indonesian cinema".

Western interest

Alongside urban myths, Indonesian horror films call on religious themes,

which dominate society in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation. In some feature films, passages from the Holy Quran are used or the entire plot line can be inspired by Islam. The rise of streaming services has allowed certain movies to reach a wider international audience, said director Ismail Basbeth, who attended Busan in 2023.

Even small production houses like Jakarta-based Avantgarde Productions are finding success in exporting films to neighboring countries. "The latest films have been released in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and we are negotiating with Vietnam," said Marianne Christianti Purnaawan, a 27-year-old producer at the company.

It is the curiosity of Indonesians in horror movies and the appetite of international viewers that leaves experts predicting Indonesia's unique export will be far from dead for years to come. "Indonesian films are successful abroad because they are unique, exotic, and unimaginable," said Ekky. "The horror film audience seeks the unknown." – AFP



A man walks past several horror movie posters titled 'Past Midnight' at the Usmar Ismail Film Center.



A man walks past horror movie posters titled 'Queen of the Southern Sea' and 'The Bloody Ring' at the Usmar Ismail Film Center in Jakarta on April 11, 2025.

Moviegoers digging 'Minecraft Movie,' tops in N America

"A Minecraft Movie" easily held on to the top spot in North American theaters this weekend with estimated ticket sales of a solid \$80.6 million, analysts said Sunday. That was roughly half the total of its huge opening last weekend. But with \$281 million in domestic ticket sales to date, along with \$269 million internationally, "Minecraft" has set records in its short run. The Warner Bros/Legendary PG film, starring Jack Black and Jason Momoa, ranks as the most successful film adaptation from a video game.

The film's huge popularity helped put the movie industry's overall box

office performance on a par with the same period last year, Hollywood Reporter said. Four new releases came in far behind. "The King of Kings", an animation, placed second at an estimated \$19.1 million during its strategic release a week before Easter, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported.

Kenneth Branagh, Pierce Brosnan, Uma Thurman and Mark Hamill lead the voice cast for the latest production from Angel Studios, the Utah-based indie media company known for its faith-based films. Angel offered free admission to children coming with paying adults, and the family-friendly movie received a rare

A+ rating from ComScore.

In third place was Disney and 20th Century's thriller "The Amateur", at \$15 million. Rami Malek plays a nerdy, self-effacing CIA analyst who turns vicious as he tracks down those behind an attack that killed his wife. Rachel Brosnahan, Laurence Fishburne and Jon Bernthal also star.

Combat thriller "Warfare" from A24 placed fourth, at \$8.3 million. The film, based partly on the experiences of co-director Ray Mendoza as a navy SEAL, follows a platoon of soldiers - the ensemble cast includes Joseph Quinn of "Stranger Things" fame - moving warily

through unfriendly territory.

And in fifth place was Universal and Blumhouse's horror film "Drop", at \$7.5 million. It tells the story of a widowed mother ("White Lotus"'s Meghann Fahy) who receives a creepily ominous phone call while in the middle of a first date. Rounding out the top 10 were: "The Chosen: Last Supper Part 3" (\$5.8 million); "A Working Man" (\$3.1 million); "Snow White" (\$2.8 million); "The Woman in the Yard" (\$2.1 million); "The Friend" (\$621,000). – AFP

Sports

Piastri puts McLaren in driving seat

Norris leads his teammate by three points, with Verstappen slipping to third

SAKHIR: Oscar Piastri wrapped up a dream weekend in Bahrain to leave McLaren with their two drivers atop the drivers standings.

The Australian bossed practice and qualifying, and then produced a controlled drive under floodlights in Sakhir to follow up his success in China last month. Teammate Lando Norris was being characteristically hard on himself after a qualifying session that left him starting in sixth. A brilliant start in Sunday's nocturnal dust-up in the desert jumped him up to third, and despite a five-second penalty for positioning his car out of place on the grid, he secured a valiant third, with only George Russell's Mercedes denying a famous McLaren 1-2.

The result lengthened McLaren's lead in the constructors' championship. In the drivers' title race, Norris leads his teammate by only three points, with Max Verstappen slipping to third, a further four points away. Red Bull left Bahrain looking for answers on their problematic car after Verstappen had to settle for sixth.

McLaren face a welcome but none-

theless potentially complex question of how to deal with two talented teammates battling for the same prize. McLaren chief principal Andrea Stella's man-management skills could be tested to the full over the next 20 races. For now, the papaya team owned by Bahrain's sovereign wealth fund, are enjoying the moment, not that Piastri plans to overindulge in the celebrations.

"I'm sure there's going to be a hell of a party! I'm not going to get involved, because I've got to race again next week (in Saudi Arabia)" said the man from Melbourne. "I'm very proud of what I've done this weekend and proud to do it here in Bahrain as well. It's obviously a very important race for us, given our ownership."

"It's never been a track that's been kind to us, so it's great to finally get the first win for the team in Bahrain," he said after McLaren finally clicked in the Gulf kingdom at their 21st attempt.

'Right on the limit'

Norris was more measured. "An up and down race today," he said. "Some frus-

trating mistakes but still plenty of positives to take away with a strong points finish for the team in Bahrain." "It was a really good race throughout, everyone pushing hard, right on the limit, which is always fun to be part of."

"Congratulations to Oscar and the whole team for today's result. I'll now keep my head down and work hard as we head to Saudi Arabia next weekend," Stella praised the backing the team has received from Bahrain - through good times and bad. "When we were building the team and not achieving the results we are seeing now, they were patient and gave us the resources we needed to set out on our current trajectory," he said.

"Oscar drove pretty much the perfect weekend. He was very solid in each session, every situation, and took the car to a deserved victory. "Lando, starting P6, was always going to have to work hard this evening, and a five-second penalty made his job even harder - but he put in a very strong performance and ensured we get to celebrate a double podium finish, which is important for both Champion-



SAKHIR: McLaren's Australian driver Oscar Piastri holds the trophy during the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir. — AFP

ships. "I hope everyone will be enjoying the victory this evening." Everyone except Piastri, who if he is true to his word

will be getting some shut eye in preparation for Jeddah's Corniche circuit on the Red Sea next week. — AFP

Marquez survives brotherly shove to win Qatar MotoGP

LUSAIL: Marc Marquez survived a first-lap collision with his brother Alex to win the Qatar MotoGP on Sunday, for a seventh victory in eight races this season. "Luckily for both of us we stayed on the bike," said Marc Marquez.

Alex Marquez ran into the back of his brother's Ducati at the second corner. Marc Marquez lost ground but recovered to finish 1.8sec ahead of Spaniard Maverick Vinales on a KTM. Vinales was later penalized for illegal tyre pressure, promoting Francesco Bagnaia, on a factory Ducati, to second and Franco Morbidelli, on a Ducati VR46, to third.

Reigning champion Jorge Martin, racing this weekend for the first time after a couple of bone-breaking pre-season crashes, fell again and was later admitted to hospital with a chest injury. Marc Marquez started from pole but at the first corner Alex rammed into Marc's rear wheel. "First corner I did a mistake, for that reason Alex hit me," said Marc. "I slide a bit and maybe he didn't expect that." Alex agreed. "I didn't expect him there," he said.

Italian Morbidelli pounced, but did not have the pace to stay clear. Vinales worked his way through the pack and took the lead while Bagnaia also briefly passed Marc Marquez. With seven laps to go, Marc Marquez swept past Vinales and then pulled away. "I told you before the race, I need to manage the tyres," said Marc Marquez at the finish.

"The way we managed the race today was super clever," he said. "I just pushed the last five laps." "For that reason, in the first part of the race I was quiet. When Pecco (Bagnaia) overtook me I thought



LUSAIL: Winner Ducati Lenovo's Spanish rider Marc Marquez (C), second-placed Red Bull KTM Tech3's Spanish rider Maverick Vinales (L) and third-placed Aprilia Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin celebrate on the podium at the end of the Qatar MotoGP Grand Prix at the Lusail International Circuit in Lusail, north of Doha. — AFP

"OK, now I start to race". "Vinales was surprising. He had pace. But I had this margin at the end," said the winner. The 32-year-old finished the weekend at a track where he had not won since 2014 by taking two victories, pole position and the course lap record. After starting the weekend one point behind his brother, Marc Marquez ended it 17 points clear in the standings.

"The most important weekend of the season so far because it is one of my weak circuits," he said. "But I was able to come back to the top of the championship." Marc Marquez took his third Sunday victory in four race weekends this season. He has also won every sprint. His only miss came in Austin where he crashed while leading.

"One way to make up for the mistake of Austin," he said, adding that he needed to learn from the last two races. "When it's difficult, I'm more concentrated. When it's easy I make stupid mistakes I need to avoid." Alex Marquez lost a bit of his bike in his first-lap collision. He later incurred a long-lap penalty for running into Fabio Di Giannantonio. After finishing second in every previous outing this season, he ended up sixth on Sunday.

Martin still troubled by his healing left hand, slid out with eight laps to go and knelt in the gravel, head bowed. His team, Aprilia, later released a statement saying the Spaniard had undergone a chest scan in hospital which showed pneumothorax swelling which required "the installation of suction drainage". — AFP

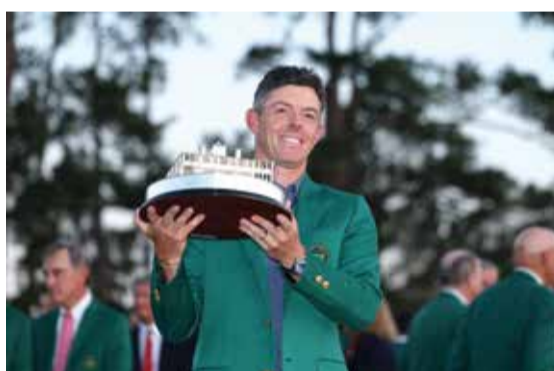
McIlroy completes career Grand Slam with playoff win

AUGUSTA: Rory McIlroy completed golf's career Grand Slam with a tearful Masters victory on Sunday, sinking a tense four-foot birdie putt on the first hole of a sudden death playoff to defeat Justin Rose.

World number two McIlroy snapped an 11-year major win drought despite squandering the solo lead three times in the final round, weeping as he finally captured the green jacket that so long eluded him. "It feels incredible," McIlroy said. "This is my 17th time here, I was wondering if it would ever be my time. I'm thrilled and so proud to be able to call myself a Masters champion."

McIlroy joined Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods, Gary Player, Gene Sarazen and Ben Hogan as the only players to win all four majors. "The last 10 years coming here with the burden of the Grand Slam on my shoulders and trying to achieve that, I'm sort of wondering what we're all going to talk about going into next year's Masters," McIlroy said.

Needing a par on the 72nd hole to win, McIlroy plunked his approach at the par-4 18th into a green-side bunker, blasted out to five feet but then missed



AUGUSTA: Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland poses with the Masters trophy during the Green Jacket Ceremony after winning the 2025 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club on April 13, 2025 in Augusta, Georgia. — AFP

a tension-packed par putt, the ball going left of the hole as the crowd groaned. "My battle today was with myself," McIlroy said. "How I responded to setbacks, that's what I'll take from this week." That set up the playoff at the 18th, which Rose had birdied from 20 feet in regulation. Rose dropped his approach 15 feet from the hole but McIlroy then landed his second shot four feet from the pin.

Tension built as Rose missed right of the hole and tapped in for par, leaving McIlroy a second chance

back to winning ways with just their second victory in six matches.

Needing 23 runs off the last 12 balls, Ashutosh Sharma raised hopes with two boundaries off Jasprit Bumrah but the last three balls of the 19th over threw up three run-outs. "I always believe fielding is something which can change the game upside down," said Pandya. "We were switched on, didn't give up and they got the chances and converted. Amazing."

The win dampened the return of Delhi's Nair, who hit a valiant knock off 40 balls in his first IPL match after three years. Nair, 33, came in as an impact substitute with Delhi on 0-1 after Jake Fraser-McGurk fell to the first ball of the team's chase.

Nair, who hit an unbeaten 303 against England in a home Test in 2016 but soon lost favor with the selectors, reached his fifty—his first after seven years in IPL—off 22 balls to set up the chase in a stand off 119 with Abhishek Porel. Karn, coming in as an impact player, broke the stand as he cut short left-hander Porel's 33-run knock, and soon left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner bowled Nair to hurt Delhi. Karn dismissed Tristan Stubbs for one and then caught and bowled KL Rahul for 15 as Delhi lost their way.

Earlier, Tilak Varma smashed 59 and put on a key stand with Naman Dhir, who hit an unbeaten 38, to help Mumbai reach 205-5. In game one, England's Phil

to win and make history. This time, McIlroy's stroke was true and the emotions exploded after 10 prior failed attempts to complete a career Slam at Augusta National. "I've dreamed about that moment for as long as I can remember," McIlroy said.

As the crowd roared, McIlroy grabbed his head, sank to his knees and put his head down on the 18th green and began crying. "There was a lot of pent up emotion that came out on that 18th green," McIlroy said. "A moment like that makes all the years and all the close calls worth it." McIlroy recalled when he led by four strokes in 2011 seeking his first major at age 21 only to collapse on the back nine at shoot 80. "I would say it was 14 years in the making, from going out with a four-shot lead in 2011 and feeling I could have done something there," McIlroy said.

McIlroy hugged caddie Harry Diamond, put his head down and hands on his knees and wept again. He stepped off the green and hugged his wife and daughter, again crying as emotions poured out while the crowd chanted his name. In addition to the champion's green jacket, McIlroy received a record \$4.2 million winner's prize from a record \$21 million purse.

The 35-year-old from Northern Ireland endured a nightmare start, back-nine collapse and the 72nd-hole bogey to secure his fifth major title in epic fashion with an iconic day-long fightback for the ages. "It's the best day of my golfing life," McIlroy said. "I'm very proud of myself for never giving up and always fighting back." — AFP

USA, Japan win to qualify for BJK Cup finals

PARIS: The USA and Japan became the final teams to book their place at the Billie Jean King Cup Finals with 2-1 victories over Slovakia and Canada respectively on Sunday. USA took an unassailable 2-0 lead against Slovakia in Group C after the two singles rubbers in Bratislava, before the hosts claimed the doubles on a retirement.

Earlier in Tokyo, victory in the deciding doubles rubber put Japan top of Group A and meant they and the USA will be heading to Shenzhen in September to join hosts China, defending champions Italy and fellow qualifying group winners Ukraine, Spain, Great Britain and Kazakhstan.

Hailey Baptiste got the Americans off to a flyer against last year's runners-up in the first singles rubber, beating Renata Jamrichova 6-3, 6-4 in one hour and 29 minutes. Bernarda Pera then held her nerve to book the USA's place in China this autumn with a 7-6 (7/2), 7-5 victory against Slovakian No. 1 Rebecca Sramkova.

"Honestly, I'm so overwhelmed by the emotions, so happy," Pera said. "This has been one of the best weeks ever. I had so much fun with the team: the girls are amazing. I got so much support from all of them and I'm super happy." Slovakia picked up a consolation point in the doubles when American Asia Muhammad was forced to retire through illness when trailing 0-3 in the first set to Tereza Mihalikova and Mia Pohankova.

'Not the end'

In Group A, Canada and Japan had both blanked Romania 3-0 in their opening matches, setting up the head-to-head finale which was played out in front of a noisy Tokyo crowd. The Canadians made the better start with Victoria Mboko edging Ena Shibahara over three sets, 6-4, 6-7 (8/10), 7-5.

Moyuka Uchijima then levelled the tie when she breezed through the second match against Marina Stakusic, winning 6-3, 6-3. That left everything on the doubles where Japan could call on the experienced Shuko Aoyama, now 37, and Shibahara against Rebecca Marino and Kayla Cross.

The Japanese took the first set 6-3 but the Canadians hit back strongly to lead 5-1 in the second, at which point they wobbled, losing four games in a row. They held their nerve to break again and take the set 7-5 but were immediately in trouble in the decider when Marino was broken.

As pressure mounted and errors crept into the Canadians' game, the Japanese pair turned the screw to see out a 6-2 final set which qualified them for the China showpiece. "I'm really happy that I got the doubles done today," said Shibahara.

"This is not the end," said Japanese captain Ai Sugiyama. "We're really looking forward to go to Shenzhen. "It feels great. The first match wasn't our way, the second match, Moyuka played really great, and then the doubles could go either way and we fought for every point. We got through and it was an unbelievable day." The BJK Cup qualifiers featured six groups of three nations with the winners booking a ticket to the eight-team final tournament. — AFP

Kohli, Karn star as Mumbai, Bengaluru win in IPL

NEW DELHI: Virat Kohli hit a landmark half-century and spinner Karn Sharma returned 3-36 to trigger an opposition collapse in the IPL as Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Mumbai Indians won on Sunday. Kohli hit 62 for his 100th half-century in T20 cricket to lead Bengaluru to a crushing nine-wicket win over Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur.

The second match of the day was a thriller with Mumbai pulling off a 12-run victory to end Delhi's winning streak in their home at Feroz Shah Kotla ground. Chasing 206 for victory, Delhi looked to be cruising at 135-2 when Karun Nair departed on 89. Leg-spinner Karn soon triggered a collapse to bowl out the hosts for 193 in their home Feroz Shah Kotla ground.

"Winning is always special, said Mumbai skipper Hardik Pandya. "Especially in games like this. You have to keep fighting and it means a lot." It was Delhi's first defeat after four wins in this edition of the T20 tournament. Five-time champions Mumbai got

back to winning ways with just their second victory in six matches.

Needing 23 runs off the last 12 balls, Ashutosh Sharma raised hopes with two boundaries off Jasprit Bumrah but the last three balls of the 19th over threw up three run-outs. "I always believe fielding is something which can change the game upside down," said Pandya. "We were switched on, didn't give up and they got the chances and converted. Amazing."

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NEW DELHI: Delhi Capitals' Karun Nair (R) is clean bowled by Mumbai Indians' Mitchell Santner as wicketkeeper Ryan Rickelton (L) reacts during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Delhi Capitals and Mumbai Indians at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi. — AFP

Salt set up Bengaluru's chase of 174 with his 33-ball 65 before fellow opener Kohli took charge to anchor the chase. The in-form Kohli smashed his third half-ton of this season and 66th in the T20 tournament to

go level with Australia's David Warner. Warner leads the fifty count in the T20 format with 108 half-centuries and Kohli second with 100 in 401 matches. Pakistan's Babar Azam is third with 90. — AFP

Sports

Lazio, Roma share derby spoils as Atalanta relaunch CL bid

It is to Ranieri's credit however that Roma are only two points away from Lazio

MILAN: Lazio and Roma failed to land a blow in the race for Champions League football as the capital city rivals played out a tense 1-1 draw on Sunday. Matias Soule earned Roma a point with a sensational first time strike in the 69th minute at a packed and loud Stadio Olimpico where Lazio failed to capitalize on their dominance.

Marco Baroni's side stay sixth, three points behind fourth-placed Juventus in a tight top-four battle which could go down to the final day of the season. The derby draw and Fiorentina only managing a goalless stalemate with Parma made it a perfect day for third-placed Atalanta who beat rivals Bologna 2-0 in the early fixture. "It's a shame because the boys gave everything and they created a chances. These are the sorts of matches where you need a bit of luck," said Baroni to DAZN.

"On the balance of play we deserved to win but we'll take the point." Lazio looked set to secure local bragging rights and close in on the top four when lifelong fan Alessio Romagnoli thumped home a perfect header two minutes after half-time. They had created the majority of chances up to that point and were only denied the lead early on by some spectacular goal-keeping from Mile Svilar.

Soule punished nominal hosts Lazio when he strode onto Alexis Saelemaekers' pass and from well outside the penalty area let rip with a curling strike which snuck behind the line via the crossbar. Argentinian Soule's fourth goal of the season saved Roma but the draw ended Claudio Ranieri's perfect Rome derby record as coach and left his team five points behind Juve.

It is to Ranieri's credit however that Roma are only two points away from Lazio as that gap was 12 when he took charge for the third time in his long managerial career back in November. Ranieri, 73, will retire for the second time at the end of this season before taking up

what sporting director Florent Ghisolfi called a "sporting consultant" role with the club. "I would have liked to have closed my career with another derby win, but that's football: You get good things and not so good things and you have to learn to accept both," said Ranieri.

Atalanta bounce back

Atalanta are four points above fifth-placed Bologna thanks to a third-minute tap-in from Mateo Retegui and Mario Pasalic's first league goal since November not long afterwards. Retegui's early strike was his 26th goal of the season in all competitions for Atalanta. The Italy forward also set up Pasalic to guide home a delicate volley with a brilliant cross in the 21st minute. Those goals ended a three-match losing run without scoring for Atalanta and were their first in a home league fixture since the start of February.

"I'm happy because it had been a few months that we'd not won here, we need to make our home matches count in the final weeks of the season," said Pasalic. "Scoring straight away really helped us because it gives you more freedom to play."

Atalanta came into Sunday's key clash without a Serie A win in Bergamo since before Christmas but they stopped the home rot with a mature performance at the Gewiss Stadium. Bologna looked to have the initiative in a tight fight for two Champions League spots, with Inter and Napoli contesting the league title and almost guaranteed of qualification.

Vincenzo Italiano's team had won five of their previous six matches and were unlucky to only draw with second-placed Napoli last weekend. The only negative note for Gian Piero Gasperini was seeing defender Sead Kolasinac stretchered off with a knee injury just before half-time, the latest in a long line of physical problems for both the Bosnian and Atalanta this term. - AFP



ROME: Lazio's Montenegrin defender #77 Adam Marusic heads the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Lazio and Roma at the Olympic Stadium in Rome. - AFP

Emery says home fans can inspire Villa comeback

LONDON: Unai Emery says his players can feed off the energy of their fans as Aston Villa seek to overturn a 3-1 deficit in Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final second leg against Paris Saint-Germain. The newly crowned French champions came from a goal down at the Parc des Princes last week, with a stoppage-time Nuno Mendes strike changing the complexion of the tie. "Our expectation is to get a good result in the second leg," Villa manager Emery told reporters on Monday. "Of course the fact that they won 3-1 is changing something."

"But a lot? No. Why? Because we have to win. We had to win with 2-1 and with 3-1 now. But now, we have to win with one more goal." PSG have won 17 of their past 18 games in all competitions, the only exception being a 1-0 first-leg home defeat to Liverpool in the Champions League last 16, which they overturned at Anfield.

They have not lost by more than one goal since October and only once in 47 matches this season. But Villa themselves are in good form—they have won eight of their past nine matches in all competitions, with their only stumble coming in France last week. Villa have not lost a Premier League or Champions League game at home since a 2-0 defeat to Arsenal in August, who could be waiting for the victors in the semi-finals.

Emery said Villa's supporters could play a key role on Tuesday as they seek to extend their stay in a competition they last played in during the 1982/83 season. "If we are connecting with our supporters, if we are transmitting energy, positive energy, if we are playing more or less, getting tactically and individually good things on the field, the supporters, they are going to add to us their energy, they are going to help us a lot, and they are going to transmit to us the energy," said the Spaniard.



Unai Emery

Winter Olympics torch unveiled in Milan and Osaka in joint ceremony

MILAN: The 2026 Winter and Paralympic torches were unveiled at a dual event held in Milan and Osaka on Monday as the countdown continues for next year's Milan-Cortina Games.

Designed by the Carlo Ratti Associati studio in Turin, the torches were presented for the first time in a theatre at Milan's Triennale art and design museum and the Italian pavilion at the World Expo in Japan.

In Milan, former cross-country skiing Olympic gold winner Stefania Belmondo and Beatrice Vio, a two-time Paralympic wheelchair fencing champion, brought out the torches which are made from recycled aluminium.

The Olympic torch is light blue while the Paralympic

pic torch is bronze, with both designed to highlight the flame and to keep it high and away from the athletes. Vio joked with the audience that the torches used for last year's Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris "practically went in my face". "Thanks for being concerned about people's faces!" she said. As per tradition, the Olympic torch will be lit at the Temple of Hera in Olympia, Greece, on November 26 before being taken to Athens for the handover ceremony, scheduled for December 4.

The flame will begin its journey around Italy in Rome two days later, snaking across the country until it arrives in Milan on February 5, one day before the opening ceremony in the Mediterranean nation's economic capital.

The opening ceremony will be held at the iconic San Siro stadium which usually hosts matches for Italian football giants Inter Milan and AC Milan.

Once given the official kick-off, the Games will then take place over a vast area of northern Italy stretching from Milan to ski resort Cortina d'Ampezzo near the border with Austria. - AFP



MILAN: Antonio Tajani (C), Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs poses alongside Italy's figure skater Carolina Kostner (L) holding the torch of the Milano Cortina 2026 winter Olympic games and Italy's paralympic athlete Martina Caironi holding the torch of the Paralympic games, during the unveiling ceremony at the Italy Pavilion in Osaka on April 14, 2025, on the second day of the six-month 2025 Osaka Expo. -- AFP

Liverpool set for 'big summer' of transfers: Van Dijk

LIVERPOOL: Virgil van Dijk says he expects a "big summer" for Liverpool in the transfer market as he reportedly closes in on a deal that will secure his future at Anfield.

Arne Slot's men are on the brink of a record-equaling 20th English league title after Sunday's 2-1 victory at home to West Ham, in which Van Dijk scored the winner. They are 13 points ahead of second-placed Arsenal with just six games to go and could wrap up the title next weekend if results go their way.

Van Dijk's own future is likely to be secured later this week, with the announcement of a two-year contract to match Mohamed Salah's new deal. Forward Federico Chiesa was the only outfield signing in last year's post-season transfer window but he has rarely featured and Liverpool manager Arne Slot will be eager to strengthen.

"I think Liverpool should be able to challenge for titles in the upcoming years," said Van Dijk, who captained the team for the 100th time in the league against West Ham. "Whatever happens in terms of players going out, players coming in, I think it should be a big summer. I think they're planning to make it a big summer, so we all have to trust the board to do the right job."

"I think we 100 percent can improve. I think we shouldn't forget the quality that the Premier League possesses, especially this season. It's incredible how everyone can beat everyone." The Dutch international, 33, said Liverpool would also benefit from a pre-season, with no major international competition taking place this year.

"This year, there is a training camp and there is time for the team to work on what the manager wants and I think that will then improve the team," he said. "I think a proper pre-season would definitely help the club in order to be even more consistent than we already have been."

Van Dijk is set to become only the second Liverpool captain to lift the Premier League trophy and he is looking to add to that. "Being successful with Liverpool, the culture of the club, everything that embodies Liverpool—that is just part of me," he said. "I love the club, that's pretty obvious. I think you can see that in the way I speak about the club, the way I work for the club in terms of what I do on the pitch and off the pitch, and that will always be the same." - AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, **ANIL PV**, holder of Passport No. T2417687, do hereby change my name to **MUHAMMED ASHIQ PV** as per my Aadhaar number 492660113809 for all purposes. I also undertake to effect this change in my public documents.

#7005, 14-04-2025

I, **AJIM AJIT MAYYAR**, holder of Indian passport No. N9718182 having permanent address Rukhmuddin Chawl, Patap Nagar road, Sambhaji Chowk, Pathan, Tabela, Mumbai, Bhandup West, Maharashtra, 400078, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Given Name **AJIM RAFIQUE** And Surname **DU-KANDAR**.

15-04-2025

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSAL hotline 128

Mbappe sent off as Real beat Alaves

Defeat leaves Alaves 17th, one point above the relegation zone



VITORIA: Real Madrid's Brazilian forward #07 Vinicius Junior (R) tussles with Alaves' Spanish forward #07 Carlos Vicente during the Spanish league football match between Deportivo Alaves and Real Madrid CF at the Mendizorrosa stadium in Vitoria. — AFP

VITORIA: Real Madrid superstar Kylian Mbappe was sent off for an ugly lunge, but his side still beat Alaves 1-0 on Sunday to stay four points behind Barcelona at the top of La Liga. Mbappe's dismissal put his team-mates under pressure but Alaves were also reduced to 10 players in the second half when Manu Sanchez hacked down Vinicius Junior.

Eduardo Camavinga's first-half curling effort from the edge of the box was enough to split the teams as Madrid produced a gritty display to match Barcelona's single-goal victory over Leganes on Saturday. "It was a hard game, tricky at first because of how intense our opponents were, and then after Kylian's red card the team pulled together," Real Madrid's Dani Ceballos told his club's television channel.

Assistant coach Davide Ancelotti took the place of his father Carlo Ancelotti, who was suspended, in the Madrid dug-out. "The win gives us confidence, we knew it wouldn't be easy and what happened in

the game didn't make it easy," said Davide Ancelotti after the match. "I haven't spoken with (Mbappe) after the game, he's not a violent guy and he said sorry, he realized the error he made, it's clearly a red card and he paid the price.

"I'm not justifying it, but it happened after he was fouled several times in a row." Los Blancos began with Vinicius on the bench, with the Brazilian's inconsistent form and the upcoming Champions League battle against Arsenal in mind. Carlo Ancelotti had called for his team to defend better after conceding 11 goals in the last four games, including the painful 3-0 quarter-final first-leg defeat to the Gunners on Tuesday.

That call may have fed into Mbappe's wild foul on Antonio Blanco which caused the striker's dismissal. By then Madrid had taken the lead in a hotly-contested clash at Alaves' Mendizorrosa stadium. The visitors appealed for a penalty early on when Arda Guler and goalkeeper Jesus Owono collided.

Raul Asencio's header hit Joan Jordan and bounced in but the goal was ruled out for an Antonio Rudiger foul on Owono. Eventually, Camavinga curled home from the edge of the box after being teed up by Fede Valverde to send the Spanish champions ahead on 34 minutes. Mbappe's red card four minutes later was a set-back for Madrid, who came under pressure in the second half.

"Together we are stronger"

Los Blancos fought off the hosts and brought on Vinicius and Jude Bellingham, who had also been given a rest. Alaves were reduced to 10 men when Vinicius broke loose and Sanchez hacked him down with a poor challenge, which might have merited a red card even if the defender was not the last man.

That made life easier for Madrid in the final stages and they came closer to scoring a second than Alaves did to an equaliser. Valverde whistled a long-range effort inches wide of the top corner, while

Madrid were also able to bring on midfielder Ceballos for a few minutes as he returns from injury.

The clean sheet will be a morale boost for Los Blancos, who can turn their attention to Arsenal's visit to the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday. "The only chance that we have is (knowing that) together we are stronger," added Ceballos.

"Thanks to the fans for their continuous support, we need you more than ever." Defeat left Alaves 17th, one point above the relegation zone. Later Sunday, Athletic Bilbao came from behind to beat Rayo Vallecano 3-1, further tightening their grip on fourth place. Villarreal, fifth, also made a comeback to edge sixth-placed Real Betis 2-1, with Ayoze Perez scoring the winner against his former side.

The Yellow Submarine are three points clear of Betis with a game in hand, with fifth place potentially a Champions League qualification spot depending on Spanish teams' performance in European competition this season. — AFP



KUWAIT: (From left) Obaid Al-Osaimi, Duaij Al-Otaibi, Governor Bader Al-Sabah and Maj. Gen. Hazim Hosni with the men winners.



KUWAIT: (From left) Duaij Al-Otaibi and Governor Bader Al-Sabah are seen with the women winners.

Kuwait wins first medal at Amir's Shooting Grand Prix

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait won its first medal in His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Annual International Shooting Grand Prix organized by Kuwait Shooting Sport Club with the participation of 220 shooters, in addition to the accompanying administrative and technical staff from 18 Arab and foreign countries on Monday as shooter Abdulaziz Al-Mandeeel won the silver medal in the men's skeet competition, while Italian shooters Marco Sablone and Valerio Palmucci won the gold and bronze medals.

In the women's skeet competition, Finland's Elisabet Heinonen won the gold medal, Kazakhstan's Olga Khalilova won the silver medal, and Italy's Chiara Di Marziantonio won the bronze medal.

Meanwhile, the men's and women's trap shooting competition will kick off on Tuesday as part of the championship. The official training for the competition will take place at 9:00 am, and the competitions will be held starting at 2:30 pm.

The competitions witness a high level due to the participation of a large number of shooters who have previously participated in the Olympic Games, world and continental championships. HH the Amir Grand Prix is respected and appreciated by all national shooting federations, both for the high technical level and the remarkable organization.

For his part, Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Hasher Al Maktoum, President of United Arab Emirates Shooting Federation, emphasized his keenness to be present in the beloved State of Kuwait, in order to closely follow HH the Amir Grand Prix, in order

to enjoy all its competitions. "Certainly, shooting has made many achievements that raised the country's flag in all Olympic, international, continental, regional and Gulf forums," he said.

He added: "As for the organization of major tournaments, it has achieved remarkable success in previous tournaments, and perhaps HH the Amir Grand Prix, which is held annually, is the best proof of my words, as the organizers have surpassed the stage of success, and are now competing with themselves in creativity and excellence, which gains the satisfaction and appreciation of the participating delegations."

Al Maktoum praised the shooters participating in the Grand Prix, stressing that all of them are looking for competing at the highest level, through HH the Amir Grand Prix. Al Maktoum concluded his statement by explaining that he is keen to meet as many Kuwaiti shooters as possible during each visit, stressing that he has strong ties with them, and wishing all the shooters success and achieving the desired results.

Clippers edge Warriors to clinch play-off spot

LOS ANGELES: James Harden scored 39 points as the Los Angeles Clippers defeated the Golden State Warriors 124-119 in overtime to clinch the final playoff spot in a thrilling last day of the NBA regular season on Sunday.

Harden's superb display in San Francisco helped the Clippers bag the fifth seed in the Western Conference and sets up a first-round postseason series with the fourth-seeded Denver Nuggets. The 35-year-old Harden's points tally included two crucial back-to-back three-pointers in overtime which ultimately proved decisive in a back-and-forth duel that saw the lead change hands 23 times. The defeat for Golden State means the Warriors must now secure their place in the playoffs via the four-team play-in tournament starting this week, hosting Memphis on Tuesday. Harden meanwhile praised the Clippers' composure in closing out victory in front of the Warriors' vociferous home support.

"We knew it was gonna be a hostile environment, and the main goal was just to win the game," Harden told ESPN. "Whether it's scoring, whether it's playmaking...it's whatever it takes at this point." The win was the Clippers' eighth straight victory to close out the regular season, ensuring they will enter the playoffs as the form team in the Western Conference after a campaign where few gave them much hope. "We know we're a good team and we're excited to show the world that we're a good team," Harden said. Harden was backed with 33 points from Kawhi Leonard while Ivica Zubac added 22. Stephen Curry led Golden State's scoring with 36 points while Jimmy Butler added 30 points. Golden State coach Steve Kerr praised the Clippers performance after a gripping contest. — AFP