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Business

26 tech startups qualify to pre-final phase of 6th Zain Great Idea program

Zain's entrepreneurs set to meet investors virtually

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the qualification of 26 tech startups to the pre-final phase of its sixth Zain Great Idea (ZGI) tech startup accelerator program. During this stage, the finalists from 8 GCC and Arab nations will take part in the ZGI Demo Day virtual event, where they are set to present their tech startups to investors and business partners for potential investment opportunities.

From a total of nearly 160 participating startups, 26 finalists qualified to the pre-final phase: TDALAL, DHANA, Amaakin, Punch, BNCHR+, and SNATCHR from Kuwait, Hayi, Shala, Bazaara, Sweech, Askwho, SCARLT, and Connected Community from the United Arab Emirates, Tamarran and Crowed Powered from Lebanon and Bahrain, Paw Arabia from Bahrain, Trenjh, Ketabilik, Rehla, and Breez from Saudi Arabia, Tanfees and Loy Club from Oman, OOSTOORA and Branper from Tunisia, and Qurba and Fulltact from Egypt.

Zain recently concluded the program's second stage: the ZGI bootcamp, which was held in a virtual format for four weeks. The bootcamp featured workshops, training sessions, panel discussions, and more, facilitated by world-class experts, academics, and trainers from top international educational institutions such as IE Business School, MIT, Stanford, and more. In addition, one-to-one sessions with top experts in various fields were offered for every finalist.

All of Zain Great Idea's phases came this year in an all-virtual format to abide by health guidelines imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 26 finalists will now move forward to the pre-final phase, ZGI Demo Day, where they will present their tech startups to representatives from the investment community and business partners for a chance to get promising investment opportunities that will push their startups forward towards growth and profitability.

After ZGI Demo Day, the 26 finalists will advance to the Zain Co-development and services phase, where they will have the opportunity to benefit from Zain's leading experiences in areas that are essential to any startup, including marketing, advertising, customer care, public relations, digital partnerships, business/consultancy/legal services, and much more.

This year, Zain received many submissions from local and regional talents to take part in Zain Great Idea 6. Many submissions were accepted, from both those who own startups that have just begun their journey and those in the process of establishing them. Accepted applications particularly centered around startups working in areas related to tech, digital transformation, and innovation.

ZGI offers a refreshed opportunity for local talents and Kuwait's entrepreneurial community, as it has been one of the most successful initiatives Zain presented to the Kuwaiti market as part of its comprehensive innovation and entrepreneurship strategy. Throughout 10 successful years, ZGI empowered, trained, and invested in hundreds of creative and driven Kuwaiti youth, of which many now own thriving and active Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to this day in local and regional markets. Zain's program comes in joint collaboration with Brilliant Lab, a startup Accelerator Service from Kuwait, and Mind the Bridge, a global organization based in Silicon Valley that bridges the world through entrepreneurship education for startups, enterprises, and investors to succeed in global markets. Zain is well aware of the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive impact through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most influential issues in the community, including the support of youth, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

Google prevails over Oracle in US copyright case

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court on Monday handed Google a major win in a long-running copyright battle with Oracle, ruling that the use of the Java programming language for the Android mobile operating system was "fair use." The 6-2 ruling had been closely watched as a key test of copyright in the digital era, and allows Google to avoid paying out billions to its technology rival.

Justice Stephen Breyer wrote in the 39-page majority opinion that even if Google used copyrightable material, "the copying here at issue nonetheless constituted a fair use. Hence, Google's copying did not violate the copyright law." The case revolved around whether copyright protection should be extended to application software interfaces (APIs), the bits of code that allow programs and apps to work together, and if so, whether Google's implementation was a "fair use" of Oracle's copyrighted material.

The decade-old case drew interest across the spectrum of technology firms and creative industries, and sparked heated debate on how much copyright protection should be afforded to bits of computer code. Two separate jury trials ended with a determination that Google's "software interface" did not unfairly use Java code, saving the internet giant from a possible multibillion-dollar verdict.

But an appeals court in 2018 disagreed, saying the software interface is entitled to copyright protection, prompting Google to take the case to the highest US court. Oracle obtained the rights to Java in 2010 when it acquired Sun Microsystems-which had supported Google's use of Java for Android-and sought $9 billion in damages in its original complaint.

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court Monday gave Google a major win in a long-running copyright battle with Oracle, ruling that the use of the Java programming language for the Android mobile operating system was "fair use." — AFP

Legal certainty

Google vice president Kent Walker called the ruling "a victory for consumers, interoperability, and computer science" adding in a statement: "The decision gives legal certainty to the next generation of developers whose new products and services will benefit consumers." Oracle contended that the decision legitimizes a theft by Google that enabled its growth. "The Google platform just got bigger and market power greater," Oracle general counsel Dorian Daley said.

"They stole Java and spent a decade litigating as only a monopolist can. This behavior is exactly why regulatory authorities around the world and in the United States are examining Google's business practices."

Threatening innovation?

Google and many Silicon Valley allies have argued that extending copyright protection to APIs would threaten innovation in the fast-evolving digital world. According to Google, a win for Oracle would have upended the longstanding expectation of software developers that they are free to use existing computer software interfaces. Oracle backers said Google would walk away with "intellectual property theft" in the court victory, arguing that it would make it hard to protect any digital property from Chinese misappropriation. In a dissent, Justice Clarence Thomas, joined by Justice Samuel Alito, wrote that the court should have taken a narrower view of copyright in view of Google's copying of 11,500 lines of code. "The court wrongly sidesteps the principal question that we were asked to answer: Is declaring code protected by copyright? I would hold that it is. Computer code occupies a unique space in intellectual property," Thomas wrote.

Breyer wrote that new technologies call for a broader view. "The fact that computer programs are primarily functional makes it difficult to apply traditional copyright concepts in that technological world." Breyer wrote that Google "reimplemented a user interface, taking only what was needed to allow users to put their accrued talents to work in a new and transformative program."

Law professor Steven Vladeck of the University of Texas said on Twitter the ruling was "a win for Google," though he argued that "the big issue got punted" because the justices failed to decide on whether this type of software code may be copyrighted. But Boston University law professor Tiffany Li called it a "huge win for fair use and people who understand how coding works!" John Bergmayer of the consumer group Public Knowledge likewise said the court "came to the right decision," adding: "this opinion bolstering and supporting fair use is great news for consumers and advocates who believe that the technology sector needs more competition-not more legal doctrines expressly designed to limit it." Justice Amy Coney Barrett, who joined the court last year after oral arguments, did not participate in the case. — AFP

NEW YORK: A Credit Suisse sign hangs outside of its Manhattan offices in New York City. — AFP

Credit Suisse takes $4.7bn hedge fund hit

ZURICH: Credit Suisse said yesterday that it had taken a $4.7 billion hit from its links to troubled hedge fund Archegos Capital Management, cut dividends and announced the departure of two senior executives. The Swiss bank and Japan's Nomura warned last month that they could face significant losses due to their exposure to a US hedge fund forced to liquidate its holdings.

"The significant loss in our Prime Services business relating to the failure of a US-based hedge fund is unacceptable," CEO Thomas Gottstein said in statement yesterday. Bloomberg News has reported that the fund was little-known Archegos Capital Management, which sold more than $20 billion in stocks from US media and Chinese companies as it sought to cover its obligations to its lenders.

Credit Suisse said its pre-tax loss of 900 million Swiss francs in the first three months of the year includes 4.4 billion Swiss francs ($4.7 billion, 3.9 billion euros) related to "the failure by a US-based hedge fund to meet its margin commitments as we announced on March 29". Trading on margin is the practice of using borrowed funds to invest in financial assets such as stocks. It can be very profitable for borrowers as they are often only required to put down a small percentage in cash while the stocks serve as collateral for the lender. But large shifts in share prices can force borrowers to put up more money to meet their margin commitments, or sell the shares and potentially lose more than their investment and default on their loan.

'Significant nightmare'

Credit Suisse also announced the departure of the head of its investment bank and chief risk and compliance officer, pulled bonuses for senior executives and chopped its proposed dividend payment to shareholders. The bank's board of directors opened an investigation into the matter.

It also pulled a traditional resolution for shareholders to discharge the board and executive committee members of responsibility for actions taken during the previous year. "The Board of Directors believes it is in the best interest of the shareholders to consider this proposal when the internal investigations into the recent developments have been completed and the outcome communicated," it said in a statement.

AvaTrade analyst Naeem Aslam said "the Archegos fallout ... has become a significant nightmare for Credit Suisse, and the bank has to take the right steps for its survival as losses are just too big to digest." —AFP

Air France gets EU green light for 4bn euro aid

PARIS: The EU authorized the French government yesterday to double its stake in Air France and inject up to four billion euros into the struggling airline after the pandemic hit passenger traffic.

The agreement, worth $4.7 billion, follows weeks of negotiations with the EU commission, which must ensure that state aid does not give companies an unfair advantage. Air France posted a 7.1 billion euro ($8.4 billion) loss in 2020 as its business, like that of the rest of the world's airlines, suffered from coronavirus restrictions which all but grounded global air traffic.

In return for its green light, the commission, which is the EU's anti-trust regulator, said Air France would relinquish about 18 slots per day at Orly, Paris' second-largest airport after Charles de Gaulle. "This gives competing carriers the chance to expand their activities at this airport, ensuring fair prices and increased choice for European consumers," EU competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager said. French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said the EU had also allowed the French state to raise its stake in Air France-KLM group to 30 percent, up from the current 14.3 percent.

Dutch consider KLM aid

The Netherlands' flag-carrier KLM, which forms an alliance with Air France, will not benefit from the aid. Nevertheless, the Dutch government welcomed the approval of additional aid. In a joint statement Le Maire and his Dutch counterpart Wopke Hoekstra said a recapitalization of KLM by the government of the Netherlands was being looked at. The recapitalization of Air France will take place by converting loans it received from the French state last year into perpetual hybrid Air France-KLM bonds that can be converted into equity.

Shares in Air France-KLM fell by 1.4 percent in Amsterdam and 1.6 percent in Paris, while both markets were trading higher.

Ryanair complaints

Independent aviation analyst John Strickland told AFP that "competitors will not be happy and it is important to see that the proposed slot remedy at Orly has real meaning in terms of facilitating additional competing services." Rival airline Ryanair, whose criticism of state subsidy for legacy airlines often finds a sympathetic ear at the European Commission, has lambasted previous French aid for Air France, saying it distorts competition. The Irish-based low-cost carrier has long railed against the support given to national champions, and is often backed by Brussels.

Ryanair-Europe's biggest airline in terms of ridership-is also seeking to challenge Germany's massive bailout of Lufthansa in the EU courts as well as schemes in Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark and Portugal. The French and Dutch ministers defended their support for their airline group.

"The connectivity of France and the Netherlands is of great importance for both economies and therefore the recovery of the Air France - KLM Group is in the best interest of the two states," they said in their statement. They also noted that the airlines have restructured to shore up their financial positions and made commitments to accelerate their transition towards environmental sustainability.

"It's not surprising to see further government investment in Air France but the key question is whether it will lead to attempts to impose political direction on the group's management beyond their commercial objectives," said Strickland. The ministers said France does not intend to raise its stake in the group any higher and that there are no plans to nationalize the respective airlines.

European airlines are hoping vaccination campaigns will pick up pace to allow for a resumption of travel ahead of the summer vacation season, which is when they traditionally make most of their money, to help them recover financially. — AFP

An aircraft of French airline Air France, the last plane to take off from Tegel 'Otto Lilienthal' Airport, departs for Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG), in Berlin. — AFP