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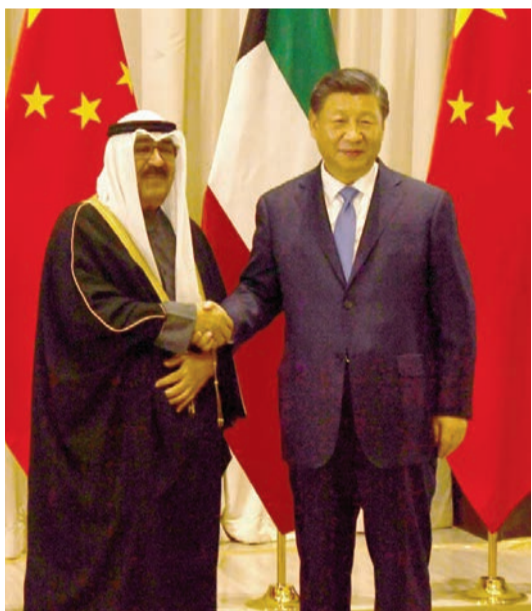
16 Hakimi fires Morocco into WCup uncharted territory



Xi meets Saudi leaders; \$30 billion deals signed

Saudi records bumper budget surplus, first in nearly a decade

Crown Prince, China president hold talks



RIYADH: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the latter's residence in Riyadh on Thursday. During the meeting, His Highness the Crown Prince conveyed to President Xi the

greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

They discussed the deep-rooted friendship between the State of Kuwait and the People's Republic of China and explored ways to boost cooperation in all fields, strengthen the strategic partnership and promote the welfare of both nations. They reviewed a range of regional and international issues of common concern and exchanged views on the agendas of the GCC-China and the Arab-China summits being hosted by Riyadh.

The cordial tone and atmosphere of the meeting reflected the depth of friendship and mutual understanding between both nations. The meeting gathered also Kuwait's Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Chief of Staff of His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan Jamal Al-Thiyab, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Dept. at His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan Mazen Al-Issa and Ambassador to China Sadeq Maarafi.

His Highness the Crown Prince arrived on Thursday in Saudi Arabia to partake in the 43rd GCC Summit, the GCC-China Summit and the Arab-China Summit. — KUNA



RIYADH: This handout picture provided by the Saudi Royal Palace shows Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz (center right) meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping (center left), as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (right) looks on, in the capital Riyadh, on December 8, 2022. — AFP

RIYADH: Chinese President Xi Jinping and Saudi Arabia's powerful crown prince met on Thursday on an Arab outreach visit that has earned a rebuke from Washington, reaching deals in areas including energy and infrastructure. Agreements worth about \$30 billion were being signed on Thursday, Saudi state media said, as China seeks to shore up its COVID-hit economy and as the Saudis, long-term US allies, push to diversify their economic and political alliances.

Xi and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman,

the 37-year-old de facto ruler of the world's biggest oil exporter, met at Yamamah Palace in Riyadh, flanked by high-ranking officials wearing face masks, footage aired on state television showed. They oversaw the signing of energy agreements on hydrogen as well as a plan to "harmonize" Saudi Arabia's ambitious economic reform agenda, Vision 2030, with China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, the official Saudi Press Agency said.

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CBK: Apple Pay meets all legal requirements

KUWAIT: Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) on Thursday announced the complete launch of Apple Pay services provided by Apple International by several Kuwait banks that fulfilled all the legal and regulatory requirements. In a statement, the CBK expressed keenness to support and help develop easy and quick digital services to the public at the highest security standards that ensure protection of the customer banking information.

CBK also added that in approved for Kuwaiti banks in 2019 to provide Apple Pay services in Kuwait in line with its endeavors to develop all digital services modes and encourage Apple International to fulfill the legal requirements of the other regulatory authorities. CBK pointed out that as of December 6 several Kuwaiti banks started providing Apple Pay, while the rest are in the process of launching the service soon, noting that Kuwaiti banks and Shared Electronic Services Company (K-Net) are conducting tests before launching the service to ensure the highest security and privacy standards.

CBK has previously approved similar digital payment services that have been operating in the market for years, adding that with Apple Pay, the main global digital payment services are now present in Kuwait. — KUNA

Pearl of the West drills' significance underscored

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah underscored the importance of the Pearl of the West 2022 drills in acquiring expertise, developing skills and increasing efficiency, capacity and readiness of armed forces. Sheikh Abdullah on Thursday attended a ceremony to mark the end of the Pearl of the West 2022 exercise in the Al-Adira area, northwest of the country.

He stressed the importance of cooperation, coordination and joint work between the Kuwaiti armed forces and the armed forces of countries, which would contribute to carrying out various tasks, duties and joint military exercises. Sheikh Abdullah commended the high morale and the outstanding performance of the participants in the exercise, which echoes the level of readiness and field skill experienced by the armed forces with a unified military action system. — KUNA (See Page 3)



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti and French army forces take part in a joint drill code-named 'Pearl of the West', held at Al-Udaira shooting range, 95 km northwest of Kuwait City, on December 8, 2022. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Outrage as Iran hangs protester

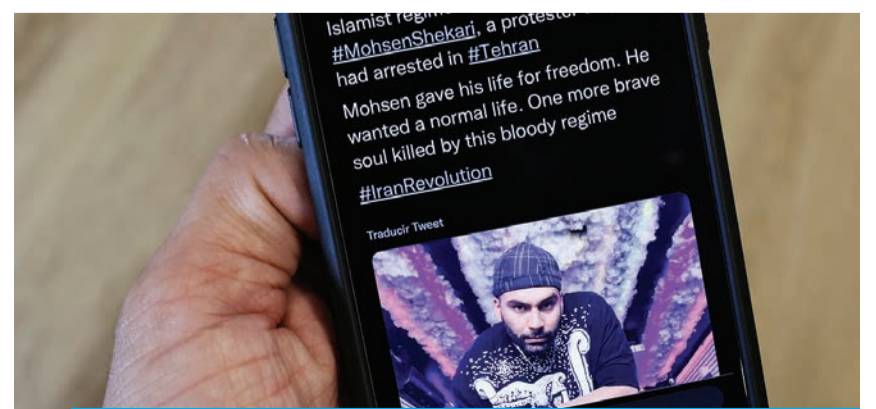
PARIS: Iran carried out its first known execution Thursday over the protests that have shaken the regime since September, sparking an international outcry and warnings from rights groups that more hangings are imminent. Mohsen Shekari, 23, had been convicted and sentenced to death for blocking a street and wounding a paramilitary during the early phase of the protests, after a legal process denounced as a show trial by rights

groups.

At least a dozen other people are currently at risk of execution after being sentenced to hang over the protests in recent weeks, human rights groups warned. Demonstrations have swept Iran for nearly three months since Iranian Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini, 22, died after her arrest by the morality police in Tehran for an alleged breach of the country's strict hijab dress code for women.

The protests, described by the authorities as "riots", are posing the biggest challenge to the Islamic republic since it was established following the ouster of the shah in 1979.

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NICOSIA: A person in the Cypriot capital Nicosia, checks a mobile phone on December 8, 2022, displaying a Tweet about the hanging by Iranian authorities of Mohsen Shekari. — AFP



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Local

Digital transformation holds key to combating corruption: Nazaha chief

'Kuwait committed to improving public services and governance'



KUWAIT: Al-Ibrahim with other officials. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The audience attending the forum.

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: The Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) organized on Thursday the second edition of its forum on the occasion of the International Anti-Corruption Day, titled "Digital Transformation and its Role in Promoting Integrity and Fighting Corruption" at the Authority's headquarters. The forum coincided with the 20th anniversary of the issuance of the United Nations Convention against Corruption in December 2003 when the UN launched a slogan entitled "Towards a United World Against Corruption" with the participation of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and a number of government agencies, civil society experts, academics and specialists.

"Despite international and national efforts, the world still faces many challenges and great difficulties in extending its efforts to combat corruption and prevent its causes," said Chairman of the Authority Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim in his opening speech. He said, "Perhaps the most prominent of them is the use of modern technology in corruption crimes. With the expansion and development of technology in the world, keeping pace with digital transformations, it has become one of the most important goals of countries to ensure growth in all fields while protecting them against corruption and enhancing the causes of their sustainability," he said.

"Nazaha was keen on highlighting this topic and the second integrity forum was chosen under the title "Digital Transformation and its Role in Promoting Integrity and Fighting Corruption". This comes in the context of Kuwait Vision 2035, the objectives of the government's action program, and Kuwait's strategy to

promote integrity and combat corruption in order to create an environment for improving the efficiency and governance in public services and reforming the government's performance system. These efforts will also help the authorities in transforming government transactions into digital transactions and improving the Corruption Perceptions Index by 2026," he added.

Regional Director of the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in the GCC countries Hatem Ali participated in a recorded speech during which he praised the commission's efforts, the right choice of the topic of the forum and its impact on combating corruption and supporting the pillars of integrity, transparency and accountability. He appreciated such initiatives that seek to automate the general system for tenders, procurement and administrative and financial transactions in various sectors of the state.

"When there are strict standards and rules in place for digital transactions, it becomes difficult for the corrupt people and those who try to exploit the existing systems. Digital transformation provides the state with an opportunity to monitor its administrative and financial system," he pointed out.

Khaled Al-Muzaini, Director of the Planning and Follow-up Office at Nazaha underlined that digitization would reduce discretionary power; increase transparency and enable accountability, in addition to limiting human interactions leading to a disruption in corruption attempts. "The Council of Ministers confirmed, through a draft government action program 2022-2026, to work on digitizing government services," he said, adding that the Central Agency for Information Technology is entrusted with the task of implementing it under the axis

of monitoring, evaluation and digitization.

Meanwhile, Al-Muzaini provided a number of recommendations in this regard, including the need for all agencies that provide public services to complete an inventory of the procedures of all services and prioritize the services that are prone to corruption risks in preparation for their digitization.

Bandar Al-Hazani, Director General of the General Department of Digital Analysis at the Control and Anti-Corruption Authority in Saudi Arabia, said that the kingdom attaches great importance to promoting the values of integrity, transparency, and combating corruption in all forms.

He added, "The kingdom is keen on participating with the international community in its efforts to fight corruption, given that its risks and ways of dealing with it are a shared responsibility. Therefore, the Kingdom has initiated several efforts, most notably the launch of the National Strategy for the Protection of Integrity, the establishment of the Oversight and Anti-Corruption Authority," he said. Pointing out that the kingdom harnesses all capabilities, ways and mechanisms in this field, in order to achieve the Kingdom's Vision 2030, he said, digital transformation is an important goal to achieve in order to enhance the level of performance, develop government services and boost spending efficiency, transparency and accountability. This will reflect positively on enhancing integrity and fighting corruption," he added.


Dhari Al-Huwail, associate professor at the College of Life Sciences at Kuwait University, spoke about data governance and information transparency, its importance and the need for it, in order to adopt policies that



KUWAIT: Nazaha Chairman Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim delivers his opening speech. —KUNA


enhance information transparency in state institutions and their dealings. This will help in building systems, mechanisms and frameworks for information governance, data and digital operations in institutions and companies and provide accurate and updated data in an open source format in an easy way, in addition to establishing a central national data bank.

Shorouq Al-Sayegh, a member of the Kuwait Information Technology Society, spoke about the most important challenges in implementing digital transformation. The most important element in society's acceptance of digital transformation is awareness of the importance of this step towards achieving economic, educational and health development, as awareness begins with the citizen, teacher and employee," he pointed out.




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KUWAIT: Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Hamad Al-Adwani during the opening of the exhibition. —KUNA

'Our Gold Threads' art expo opens

KUWAIT: "Our Gold Threads" art exhibition was inaugurated on Thursday with the participation of the Ministry of Education's art teachers that created crafts using traditional hand knitting to introduce Kuwait's cultural identity.

The exhibition introduced future generation to their cultural heritage by displaying various forms and colors of Al-Sadu, which is a traditional form of weaving to produce soft furnishings and decorative accessories for camels and horses. The Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Hamad Al-Adwani sponsored and attended the opening of the exhibition. —KUNA



Local



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah watches the shooting of live ammunition using a binoculars.



KUWAIT: Sheikh Abdullah Ali Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah and Ambassador of France to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher with senior military leaders in the Kuwaiti army and KNG during the exercise on Thursday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Defense minister stresses significance of 'Pearl of West' drills in honing skills

Kuwait Army, National Guard hold joint exercises with French armed forces



KUWAIT: The Defense Minister talks to a military official as Ambassador Le Flecher looks on.



KUWAIT: Sheikh Abdullah, Lt General Khalid Saleh Al-Sabah, MoD's Undersecretary Abdullah Meshal Al-Sabah, Ambassador of France to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher and other officials during the military exercise.



KUWAIT: The Defense Minister takes a look at a M1A2K tank.



KUWAIT: Military personnel pose for a picture in front of a military tank.



KUWAIT: A live-fire exercise going on as part of the Pearl of the West 2022 drills.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah underscored the importance of the Pearl of the West 2022 drills in acquiring expertise, developing skills and increasing efficiency, capacity and readiness of armed forces.

This was during the presence of Sheikh Abdullah Thursday at the end of the Pearl of the West 2022 exercise in the Al-Adira area, northwest of the country, which is being implemented by the Kuwaiti Army and Kuwait National Guard (KNG) in cooperation with French armed forces, achieving a high degree of training for the participating military sectors, according to a statement by the Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Sheikh Abdullah stressed the importance of cooperation, coordination and joint work between the Kuwaiti armed forces and the armed forces of countries, which would contribute to carrying out various tasks, duties

and joint military exercises. He commended the high morale and the outstanding performance of the participants in the exercise, which echoes the level of readiness and field skill experienced by the armed forces with a unified military action system.

He turned to Allah Almighty to protect the homeland from all harm and to maintain security, safety and stability under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Upon his arrival at the exercise site, Sheikh Abdullah listened to a detailed explanation from the Director of the Pearl of the West 2022 exercise Brigadier General Raed Al-Sakran, during which he reviewed the scenario of the final exercise, the capabilities of the forces participating in it, and the most crucial

tactical positions. The attendees witnessed the final activities of the exercise, which included shooting live ammunition with various weapons, having a high-level of professionalism in performance and accuracy in implementation, which everyone approved.

Sheikh Abdullah observed shooting with live ammunition of the M1A2K tank of the ground force, where he expressed his happiness with the accuracy of hitting targets, reflecting competence and skills of the Kuwaiti army in dealing with various types of weapons and equipments. The final exercise was attended by Chief of the General Staff of the Army Lieutenant General Khalid Saleh Al-Sabah, MoD's Undersecretary Abdullah Meshal Al-Sabah, Ambassador of France to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher, and several senior military leaders in the Kuwaiti army and KNG as well as armed forces of Bahrain, France and the US. —KUNA

KU holds 3-day exhibition on 'Our Media Role'

KUWAIT: Social Affairs Ministry public relations department participated in a three-day exhibition titled 'Our Media Role' organized by Kuwait University Exhibition in which many government and private entities participated.

PR Director Ahmad Al-Enezi said the participation was as an implementation of council of ministers' decision to activate the role of public relations in state entities and at the instructions of Social Affairs Minister Eng Mai Al-Baghli to be at par with the latest developments to present the best services for the public.

Al-Enezi said that the exhibition was a major opportunity to introduce students and exhibition patrons to the services the ministry presents. He thanked Kuwait University for its invitation and the students who organized the event well.



KUWAIT: During the exhibition 'Our Media Role' organized by Kuwait University.



KUWAIT: Yousef Al-Ruwaieh addresses a press conference.

KFH official sponsor of Winter Wonderland Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) participated in the launch announcement ceremony of Winter Wonderland Kuwait. Speaking at the ceremony, Group DGM - Public Relations and Media at KFH, Yousef Al-Ruwaieh said: "KFH is pleased to be the official sponsor and strategic partner of Winter Wonderland Kuwait, which is one of the most important strategic projects implemented under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance and Kuwait Touristic Enterprises Company."

Al-Ruwaieh added: "KFH's presence in this big event confirms its leadership in social responsibility and the comprehensive development. With this exclusive official sponsorship, KFH supports Kuwaiti enterprises participating in this project and sponsors initiatives that are of interest to the society as part of its strategy in supporting

Kuwaiti businesses." Driven by its prestigious position as one of the largest private sector entities in Kuwait, Al-Ruwaieh pointed out that KFH has been at the forefront in contributing to supporting Winter Wonderland Kuwait, which reflects KFH's commitment towards the community and its keenness to be a key player in the strategic initiatives implemented by the State.

He said: "As a pioneer in enhancing its banking and customer experience, KFH will provide ATMs, and Point of Sales (POS) through electronic devices and channels in the location of the project, which is considered a major destination for families. The Winter Wonderland Kuwait project is located within an area of 100,000 square meters, while linking Kuwaiti small businesses with the Corporate Banking Department at KFH and creating a new channel of communication with the young segment of society in a vital place that serves the bank's strategy to support and provide the best services to the youth." Al-Ruwaieh commended the efforts of the Ministry of Finance, Kuwait Touristic Enterprises Company, and all those in charge of the project, which was completed in record time, wishing continuous progress and prosperity for Kuwait.

In my view

Administrative restructuring for education



By Yousuf Awadh Al-Azmi

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"Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army" - Edward Everett

What do we want from education? What are the basis and strategies that organize it? Is there a tangible return for the exerted effort in this regard?

Let us start first with the name of the concerned ministry — it is education ministry. So let us first pause at this name. Does the education ministry care in interpreting this responsibility into reality? Did anyone feel that the ministry places the education duty as a top priority subject? This question is directed at everyone!

Before getting into the details, we must look seriously into school curricula, its benefits and analyze what they produced. We also must look in general at the educational process through its progress. I hope that a realistic scientific standard can be used rather than the standard of the student's success or failure based on the end of term tests which may be exposed to factors that may influence them, (and the smart person can understand by signal).

The world is developing, and the means of education and evaluation are also developing. We still use plans that are there for decades and they were not proven successful up to 70 percent.

Let us start with the most important on the scale and the rules of the education ministry. That is the most important elements of the formula (school/student/teacher). We will talk frankly here. What was improved in buildings and school premises for a long time? Did anything change? Rather is there any maintenance and continued development plans for those large and costly buildings? Is there a specialized productive department that can carry out the roles of periodical maintenance and monitor the works related to maintenance.

Before answering that, it may be pointed out that maintenance and operation do not mean bringing in school custodians or cleaning labor. Many know that even the issue of guarding and cleaning need separate columns. There is a clear laxity in maintenance, operation and preparing schools and their specialized administrations. And I think that the general view is supposed to be reviewed in regards to these very important departments, to form, design and implement an ambitious plan that is able to get the best possible benefit. The issue only needs a sincere official, who could follow up and decide, that is all.

As for the students, they suffer the most from the weakness of some teachers, or their laxity in presenting the subject and managing the school term, especially in some difficult subjects. This makes the student in need of some private tuitions, which is something that further burden parents as they pay large amounts of money for that.

The solution is easy for who wants a solution. That is appointing qualified and sincere teachers. It needs continued follow-up for them and following students' educational progress, in addition to security follow-up and decisive action if any teacher gives private tuitions in exchange of money. No doubt, the matter is difficult. And there is development in this matter through teaching online and even from outside the country. When intentions are true and the work is in dedication according to clear plans and strict decisions, there may be a realistic success.

We must believe that bad intentions will not be prevented by good conscience rather it is stopped by a deterrent law.

As for the teacher, the first thing is that the teacher must get a 'teacher's license' to make sure about his/her ability to carry out the academic mission. These days, higher education certificates are no longer a credible standard to judge a person's competence. So it is important to make sure about the competence of the teacher in addition to motivating him/her morally, financially and practically.

While talking about the previous formula, we will not ignore the importance of qualification of school administrations as well and provide them with what is necessary to carry out their duties at best. Also activate true supervision over school administration because it is the backbone.

The above is just a broad outline of the topic and the details will be discussed in other writings in future.

News in brief

Municipality frontliner awards

KUWAIT: The general manager of the Kuwait Municipality, Ahmad Al-Manfouhi, has announced that disbursement of frontliner awards for the services during the COVID-19 pandemic will be disbursed next week as most financial and administrative procedures have been completed. "The number of beneficiaries of the awards has reached 2,694 employees at the Municipality with a total of KD 1.3 million to be credited," Al-Manfouhi said. Appreciating the Municipality employees' efforts, he said, "They did not spare a moment in providing services and support during the pandemic which has been successfully contained as their persistence through assisting all government departments."

Kuwait crude oil drops

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil dropped \$3.08 in Tuesday's trading sessions to reach \$78.10 per barrel compared with \$81.18 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Thursday. Brent crude futures shed \$1.62 falling to \$77.73pb and West Texas Intermediate crude oil declined \$1.80 to settle at \$72.45pb. —KUNA

Dollar drops to KD 0.306

KUWAIT: The US dollar on Thursday dropped by 0.03 percent to KD 0.306 but the euro rose by 0.28 percent to KD 0.322, compared with Wednesday's prices, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said in its daily bulletin. The pound sterling climbed by 0.37 percent to KD 0.373, but the Swiss franc firmed at KD 0.325, as well as the Japanese yen, trading at the unchanged rate of KD 0.002. The CBK publishes daily average exchange rates that do not necessarily reflect actual prices of currencies for the day. —KUNA

Suspension of work permits for Egyptian workers to continue

New procedures for recruitment of Egyptian labor likely in two months

KUWAIT: The procedural delay in issuing work permits for Egyptian workers in Kuwait would continue for the next two months, according to sources. The Kuwaiti side is studying new procedures related to bringing in Egyptian workers, which include conditions and regulations for recruitment agencies. The Kuwaiti and Egyptian authorities are working towards ensuring that the implementation of the conditions are strictly followed in order to prevent any possible visa (iqama) trafficking, as well as to avoid any deviation from regulations in force in the country, the sources added.

"Minimum wage is in force in Kuwait as salaries are indicated on every work permit. Moreover, the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) lifted the ceiling on the annual increase in salaries, and made it open to the decision of employer and workers.

Some embassies impose certain conditions that go against the decisions of the Kuwait government and as such they have been strictly prohibited," the sources told Kuwait Times.

"Bringing in Egyptian labor is open, but it will be strictly regulated and will be limited to technical labor and to bring down marginal labor which constitutes a major problem in Kuwait," the sources explained, indicating the problem caused by marginal workers in Kuwait.

"The new measures for Egyptian workers could be implemented next month, including the employer's commitment to housing their workers, treating them humanely, and paying special fees to the state for each worker," the sources revealed pointing out that these measures will include all expatriate workers in implementation of the Audit Bureau's conditions and recommendations.



KUWAIT: The procedural delay in issuing work permits for Egyptian workers in Kuwait would continue for the next two months, according to sources.

Kuwait's Islamic charity aids poor families in Jordan

AMMAN: The International Islamic Charity Organization launched on Thursday a humanitarian campaign for delivering winter clothes to 570 impoverished families. Representative of the Kuwaiti embassy in Jordan, Mohammad Al-Kandari, said in remarks to KUNA that the Kuwaiti aid is a contribution to local humanitarian efforts to aid low-income segment of the people in the kingdom. The campaign, launched by the ISCO in coordination with the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization, covers five provinces and aims to help poor families of the kingdom and other nations cope with the difficult winter conditions.

Each family of the targeted sample would receive a bag including a heater, a blanket, fuel and a clothes purchase coupon. Value of the granted materials is estimated at \$1,000. —KUNA

KRCS: Important to raise climate change awareness

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society emphasized the importance of raising community awareness among all residents about climate change issues and their impact on humans and their role in confronting them in order to preserve the environment on Thursday.

The Director of Public Relations and Media Department at the Society, Khaled Al-Zaid, said in a press statement on the sidelines of the 'Foundational Workshop on Climate Change' organized by the Society. "The workshop aims to educate the community and researchers about the damages of climate change."

"The workshop lasted for three days and discussed the impact of climate change on sustainable development, its regional and international dimension, as well as confronting environmental risks resulting from climate change at all levels, especially in Kuwait," Al-Zaid explained.

"The workshop comes within national efforts

to confront climate change and integrate adaptation with climate change in policies, plans and programs. This is in addition to training volunteers to deal with climate change and manage it in providing humanitarian assistance when countries are exposed to natural disasters," he added.

"The workshop recommended the inclusion of environmental culture in educational curricula, as well as coordination with civil society organizations to carry out awareness campaigns in schools and universities by holding specialized lectures in this regard, in addition to implementing media plans for crisis management to educate the community. Moreover, it also dealt with the role of the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in facing the climate crisis by harnessing humanitarian action in reducing current and future negative impacts and adapting to them," he clarified. —KUNA



CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times management and staff convey our deepest condolences to our colleague

Sahar Moussa

and her family members on the sad demise of her

Father

May Allah the Almighty bestow His mercy on his soul



Survivors angered by release of Bali bombmaker

Austria to veto Bulgaria, Romania joining Schengen area



KHERSON, Ukraine: Local residents walk past a graffiti reading "Lets bring all our people back home" in central Kherson on December 8, 2022, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

Putin says nuke tensions 'rising'

'We have not gone crazy, we are aware of what nuclear weapons are'

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin said that nuclear tensions were rising, though he insisted "we have not gone crazy" and Moscow would not be the first to deploy atomic weapons in the Ukraine conflict. Speaking more than nine months after his forces launched their military operation, Putin warned the conflict could be "lengthy". Russian forces have missed most of their key military goals since February, raising fears that the battlefield stalemate could see Russia resort to its nuclear arsenal to achieve a breakthrough.

"We have not gone crazy, we are aware of what nuclear weapons are," Putin said Wednesday at a meeting of his human rights council. "We are not going to brandish them like a razor while running around the world." But he acknowledged the growing tensions, saying "such a threat is rising. Why make a secret out of it here?" He added, however, that Russia would use a nuclear weapon only in response to an

enemy strike.

"When we are struck, we strike back," Putin said, stressing that Moscow's strategy was based on a "so-called retaliatory strike" policy. "But if we aren't the first to use it under any circumstances, then we will not be the second to use them either, because the possibilities of using them in the event of a nuclear strike against our territory are very limited," he said. His comments drew an immediate rebuke from the US.

"We think any loose talk of nuclear weapons is absolutely irresponsible," US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters. "It is dangerous, and it goes against the spirit of that statement that has been at the core of the nuclear non-proliferation regime since the Cold War," he said. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, however, declared that the risk of nuclear weapons being used in the Ukraine conflict has lessened thanks to international pressure heaped on Russia.

"One thing has changed for the time being: Russia has stopped threatening to use nuclear weapons," Scholz said in an interview with Germany's Funke media group, saying it was "in response to the international community marking a red line". "The priority now is for Russia to end the war immediately and withdraw its troops," he added.

Intense shelling continued along the front in eastern Ukraine, with President Volodymyr Zelensky announcing that strikes in Donetsk region's Kurakhove killed 10 civilians on Wednesday. "The Russian army carried out a very brutal, absolutely deliberate strike at Kurakhove, precisely at civilians," the president—who was named Time Magazine's "Person of the Year" earlier in the day—said during his nightly address.

The shelling in Kurakhove comes a day after Ukrainian artillery strikes killed six people in the Donetsk region's capital city of the same name,

according to the Moscow-installed mayor. Moscow had expected the fighting to last just days, but more than nine months after its forces entered Ukraine, Putin said its military operation could be a "lengthy process". But he praised the announced annexation of four Ukrainian territories following September referendums held by Moscow proxies—denounced in the West as a sham. "New territories appeared—well, this is still a significant result for Russia," Putin said, referring to Donetsk, Lugansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. He also made special reference to Russia's gaining control of all the land along the Azov Sea. "The Azov Sea has become an internal sea to the Russian Federation, that's a serious thing," he noted. Despite its best efforts, Russian troops at no point have entirely controlled any of the annexed territories and were even forced out from the capital of Kherson after a months-long Ukraine counter-offensive. —AFP

Peru gets new president after Castillo's arrest

LIMA, Peru: Peru's new President Dina Boluarte was on Thursday facing pressure to form a government, a day after the country was thrown into political chaos by the dramatic arrest of her predecessor who stands accused of attempting a coup. The South American country's first-ever woman leader asked the opposition for a truce as she tried to end the turmoil sparked by Pedro Castillo, who had attempted to dissolve parliament and rule by decree.

Castillo's efforts were quickly stamped out by lawmakers who voted him out of office in a dizzying day of high drama, by the end of which former vice-president Boluarte had emerged as the country's new head of state.

She took the oath of office within two hours of the impeachment vote, donning the presidential sash in front of Congress and vowing to serve out the rest of Castillo's term, until July 2026. In her first words as president, she called for "national unity" and urged lawmakers to put aside their ideological differences, in a tacit reference to the confrontation between Castillo's leftist government and the right-wing dominated Congress.

The 60-year-old lawyer must now form her first ministerial cabinet, which will be an early indica-

tion of whether she is likely to survive in office. Her initial appointments will signal the support she can muster for her government. If she is unable to rule, calls will grow for her resignation or the calling of early elections.

Dizzing hours

Earlier in the day, Castillo had faced his third impeachment attempt since the former rural schoolteacher unexpectedly won power from Peru's traditional political elite 18 months ago. In a televised address, the 53-year-old announced he was dissolving the opposition-dominated Congress, imposing a curfew and would rule by decree for at least nine months.

As criticism poured in over the speech, lawmakers defiantly gathered earlier than planned to debate the impeachment motion and approved it with 101 votes out of a total of 130 lawmakers. Castillo had left the presidential palace after the vote with the intention of seeking asylum in Mexico's embassy before he was arrested, according to a police report published by local media.

By Wednesday night, Castillo had been transferred to a police facility in east Lima, where graft-convicted former president Alberto Fujimori—himself removed by Congress in 2000—is serving out his sentence.

Authorities said he was staging a power grab. Hundreds of protesters, some of whom supported the former president and others who opposed him, took to Lima's streets after his impeachment.

"We are tired of this corrupt government that was stealing from day one," said 51-year-old



LIMA: President of the Peruvian Congress Jose Williams Zapata (L) swears in Dina Boluarte (R) as the new President hours after former President Pedro Castillo was impeached in Lima. —AFP

Johana Salazar. The European Union expressed its support for the "political, democratic and peaceful solution adopted by the Peruvian institutions," and urged "all actors to a dialogue that ensures stability," according to a statement.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres "calls on the parties involved to uphold the rule of law, as well as to remain calm and refrain from inflaming tensions," his spokesman said in a statement. —AFP

US basketball star Griner freed

WASHINGTON: US basketball star Brittney Griner is "safe" and headed home to the United States after being freed from a Russian prison ordeal in a swap for the notorious arms dealer Viktor Bout, the two countries announced on Thursday.

President Joe Biden delivered an early-morning address to the nation to announce the breakthrough, and said he had spoken to Griner just "moments ago." "She is safe. She is on a plane. She is on her way home," Biden said, adding that she should be back in the United States within 24 hours.

The Olympic legend, who was being held in a remote penal colony, was arrested at a Moscow airport in February and handed nine years in prison in August for possessing vape cartridges with a small

quantity of cannabis oil.

Biden said she would need time to recover from "needless trauma" after time spent in Russia's IK-2 penal colony, a facility in the town of Yavas in the central region of Mordovia. Reporting that Griner was in "good spirits" Biden said she deserved "space, privacy and time with her loved ones to recover and heal from her time being wrongfully detained."

Biden was flanked by Griner's wife Cherelle Griner as well as Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken. "I'm just standing here, overwhelmed with emotions," Cherelle Griner said, describing the ordeal of her wife's imprisonment as "one of the darkest moments of my life."

Moscow confirmed it had exchanged Griner for Bout, who was serving a 25-year sentence in the United States. "On December 8, 2022, at the Abu Dhabi airport, the exchange of Russian citizen Viktor Bout for US citizen Brittney Griner... was successfully completed," the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement.

According to Biden, the United Arab Emirates facilitated Griner's release. She transited through the country en route back to the United States, where she was expected within 24 hours. Despite the heightened mood, Biden also conceded that the United States had not yet succeeded in freeing Paul Whelan, a retired US Marine arrested in December 2018 and accused of spying.

Cherelle Griner acknowledged his fate, saying: "Today my family is whole, but as you all are aware there's so many other families who are not whole." When Griner was arrested, the two-time Olympic basketball gold medalist and Women's NBA champion had been in Russia to play for the professional Yekaterinburg team, during her off-season from the Phoenix Mercury.

She pleaded guilty to the charges, but said she did not intend to break the law or use the banned substance in Russia. Griner had testified that she had permission from a US doctor to use medicinal cannabis to relieve pain from her many injuries, and had never failed a drug test. —AFP

Sister of Iran's leader blasts his 'despotic' rule

PARIS: The sister of Iran's supreme leader has slammed his "despotic" rule and thrown her support behind protests ignited by Mahsa Amini's death, in a letter published Wednesday by her son. Protests have gripped Iran since Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian of Kurdish origin, died on September 16 after her arrest in Tehran for an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women.

Tehran says more than 200 people have been killed in the unrest, but Oslo-based non-governmental organisation Iran Human Rights says the country's security forces have killed at least 458 protesters, including 63 children.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 83, has accused Iran's arch foe the United States and its allies of stoking the protests, which Tehran has sought to portray as "riots". Rights activists say the demonstrations were sparked by anger over the repression of women, before expanding to include other grievances.

"I oppose my brother's actions," Khamenei's sister Badri Hosseini Khamenei, who is believed to be in Iran, said in a letter published online by her France-based son Mahmoud Moradkhani. "I express my sympathy with all mothers mourning the crimes of the Islamic republic regime," from the time of its founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini "to the current era of the despotic caliphate of Ali Khamenei", she wrote.

"My concern has always been and will always be the people, especially the women of Iran," she added. She accused the regime of bringing "nothing but suffering and oppression to Iran and Iranians" since it was established following the 1979 Islamic revolution that toppled the shah.

"The people of Iran deserve freedom and prosperity, and their uprising is legitimate and necessary to achieve their rights. I hope to see the victory of the people and the overthrow of this tyranny ruling Iran soon," she said.

Badri Hosseini Khamenei called on the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to "lay down their weapons as soon as possible and join the people before it is too late". She lamented that "due to physical ailments" she was unable to take part in the protests. —AFP

International

Austria to veto EU's two poorest members Bulgaria, Romania joining Schengen area

'I think it is wrong that a system that does not work in many places should be enlarged'

BRUSSELS: Austria on Thursday said it will veto the EU's two poorest members Romania and Bulgaria joining the bloc's Schengen visa-free zone, dashing their decade-long bid. Decisions on Schengen enlargement have to be taken unanimously.

The EU ministers were expected to approve Croatia joining Schengen, which would expand the area to include 23 of the EU's 27 member states, plus Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland. "I will vote today against the Schengen enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria," Austrian Interior Minister Gerhard Karner said as he went into a Brussels meeting with EU counterparts.

"I think it is wrong that a system that does not work in many places should be enlarged," Austria, which is experiencing a strong increase in asylum requests, fears that admitting Bulgaria and Romania would increase irregular immigration.

Karner said his country had recorded "over 100,000 illegal border crossings this year". Europe has taken a harder stance against migration after a massive inflow of asylum-seekers in 2015-2016, when hundreds of thousands of Syrians fled the war in their country. But reforms demanded by frontline EU states receiving the inflows—Italy, Spain, Malta and Greece—have stalled, with some other EU countries—including Austria, the Netherlands, Hungary and Poland—reluctant to share hosting duties on a systematic scale.

The European Commission has stepped up efforts to make source countries of irregular migrants—especially those with a high proportion trying to enter Europe for economic reasons rather than persecution—take back their deported citizens.

Lebanon again fails to elect new president

BEIRUT: Lebanon's divided parliament failed to elect a new president Thursday for a ninth time, despite the damage the political deadlock is doing to efforts to bail out its bankrupt economy. Parliament is split between supporters of the powerful Iran-backed Hezbollah movement and its opponents, neither of whom have a clear majority.

"Holding a session every week won't change anything," said lawmaker Alain Aoun, of former president Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). Hezbollah opponent Michel Moawad, who is seen as close to the United States, won the support of 39 MPs but fell well short of the required majority.

Only 105 of parliament's 128 lawmakers showed up for the vote and as many of them spoiled their ballots. Some MPs wrote in mock choices for the vacant presidency, with one vote cast for late South African leader Nelson Mandela.

Moawad's candidacy is opposed by Hezbollah, whose leader Hassan Nasrallah called last month for a president ready to stand up to Washington. Parliament speaker Nabih Berri reiterated calls for dialogue among lawmakers to find a consensus candidate to prevent the process dragging on for months.

Aoun's election in 2016 followed a more than two-year vacancy at the presidential palace as

Xi meets Saudi leaders; \$30...

Continued from Page 1

The signed deals also covered a petrochemicals project, housing development and the teaching of the Chinese language, SPA said, though it did not detail their substance or monetary value. Earlier, state television showed Xi being greeted with a handshake by Prince Mohammed before the two men stood side-by-side as a brass band played the two countries' national anthems. They then chatted while walking into the palace, which is the king's official residence and seat of the royal court. Xi also met with Prince Mohammed's father, 86-year-old King Salman, state media reported.

Upon his arrival on Wednesday, Xi said bilateral ties with Saudi Arabia had grown "by leaps and bounds" since the two countries established a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2016. This "has not only enriched both countries' peoples but promoted regional peace, security, prosperity and development," Xi said, according to Chinese state media.

The crown prince sees China as a critical partner in his sweeping Vision 2030 agenda, seeking the involvement of Chinese firms in ambitious mega-projects meant to diversify the economy away from fossil fuels. Saudi investment minister Khalid Al-Falih said this week's visit "will contribute to raising the pace of economic and investment cooperation between the two countries", offering Chinese companies and investors "rewarding returns", according to SPA. Earlier on Thursday, Saudi state media announced 34 investment agreements in sectors including green hydrogen, information technology, transport and construction. State broadcaster Al-Ekhabriya said another 20 agreements worth 110 billion riyals (\$29.3 billion) were due to be signed.

Arab leaders began Thursday to converge on the Saudi capital ahead of summit meetings with Xi, the leader of the world's number-two economy, who will hold separate talks with the six-member Gulf

Boats to UK

Migration is also a hot political issue in former EU member Britain, which, like EU member Ireland, was never part of Schengen. Britain's conservative government is trying to reduce the number of asylum-seekers and irregular migrants arriving in small boats from the continent.

Just before the EU ministers' meeting, the interior ministers of Britain, France, Germany, Britain and the Netherlands met to discuss that issue. French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said they had agreed to boost information-sharing on people-smugglers and law enforcement cooperation.

The EU is also dealing with a new right-wing government in Italy that is rejecting boatloads of migrants rescued in the Mediterranean. The Schengen zone allows people travelling between its member countries to cross without having to show a passport or visa.

Interior ministers are often wary of how it allows individuals to enter other EU countries when they don't have the right to do so. Yet it is often touted as an example of the EU's cherished freedom of movement principle, and has tangible benefits for participating countries, particularly boosting tourism.

German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said "I cannot yet understand the vote of my Austrian colleague" and pledged to again talk to him about it. But Austria had some support from the Netherlands when it came to keeping Bulgaria—which borders Turkey—out of Schengen.

"For us, it is a yes to Croatia and it is yes to Romania," Dutch Migration Minister Eric van der



BRUSSELS: Czech Interior Minister Vit Rakusan speaks with Germany's Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (R) prior to a Justice and Home Affairs Council on Schengen area, asylum and migration at the EU headquarters in Brussel. —AFP

Burg said. "But we don't agree with the commission (recommendation) when it comes to Bulgaria," he said, advancing concerns about "corruption and human rights". However the Bulgarian and Romanian bids to join Schengen are joined and meant to be decided together. The Croatian one is considered separately. —AFP



BEIRUT, Lebanon: Handout photo shows prime minister Najib Mikati (C) chairing a cabinet meeting at the government palace in Lebanon's capital Beirut. —AFP

lawmakers made 45 failed attempts to elect a president before reaching a consensus on his candidacy. By convention, Lebanon's presidency goes to a Maronite Christian, the premiership is reserved for a Sunni Muslim and the post of parliament speaker goes to a Shiite Muslim.

A cabinet meeting on Monday exacerbated divisions between Hezbollah and its main Christian ally the FPM, which says the caretaker government should not meet until a new president has been named.

Lebanon can ill afford a prolonged power vacuum as it grapples with a financial crisis dubbed by the World Bank as one of the worst in modern history, with a currency in free fall, severe electricity shortages and soaring poverty rates.

The country's caretaker government has limited powers and cannot enact the sweeping reforms demanded by international lenders to release billions of dollars in bailout loans. Parliament will convene for a 10th attempt to elect a president on December 15. —AFP

Outrage as Iran hangs...

Continued from Page 1

"Mohsen Shekari, a rioter who blocked Sattar Khan Street in Tehran on September 25 and wounded one of the security guards with a machete, was executed this morning," the judiciary's Mizan Online website said.

Amnesty International said it was "horrified" by the execution, which came just three weeks after Shekari was condemned in a "grossly unfair sham trial". "His execution exposes the inhumanity of Iran's so-called justice system as dozens of others face the same fate," it added. Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, director of Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights (IHR), urged a strong international reaction, warning that otherwise "we will face mass execution of protesters".

"Mohsen Shekari was executed after a hasty and unfair trial without a lawyer," he said, adding it had been carried out a mere 75 days after his arrest. Iran's Fars news agency carried a video report of Shekari talking about the attack while in detention, which IHR described as a "forced confession" with his face "visibly injured". Western governments echoed the anger of the rights groups. "The Iranian regime's contempt for human life is boundless," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock tweeted, describing the legal process as a "perfidious summary trial". But she added: "The threat of execution will not suffocate the will for freedom." "This execution comes on top of other serious and unacceptable violations," said French foreign ministry spokeswoman Anne-Claire Legendre.

UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said he was "outraged" and added: "The world cannot turn a blind eye to the abhorrent violence committed by the Iranian regime against its own people." The revolutionary court in Tehran heard Shekari had been arrested after striking the member of the Basij paramilitary force in the shoulder with the blade, an injury

Netanyahu moves a step closer to coalition deal

JERUSALEM: Zionist entity's prime-minister designate Benjamin Netanyahu struck a deal with an ultra-Orthodox Jewish party Thursday on allocating cabinet jobs in a key step towards forming a government ahead of a looming deadline.

The deal announced overnight promises the Shas party five ministerial jobs in Netanyahu's incoming government, which is expected to be the most right-wing in Zionist's history. "We have achieved another step towards forming a government," said Netanyahu, Zionist entity's longest-serving premier, whose victory in a November 1 election set him up to retake power after just 14 months in opposition.

Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party has already signed coalition deals with three controversial extreme right parties — Religious Zionism, Jewish Power and the virulently anti-LGBT Noam. Likud's agreements with Shas and another ultra-Orthodox bloc, United Torah Judaism, are provisional, not binding coalition deals. Additional pacts will be required before a government is announced, the parties have said. One complication is that Shas leader Aryeh Deri has been convicted of tax offences, which, according to Zionist's attorney general, bars him from serving in cabinet.

Zionist entity's parliament, where Netanyahu and his allies now control a majority, may seek to pass legislation allowing Deri to serve in cabinet before firming up a coalition deal. Under the Shas-Likud deal, Deri will be both interior minister and health minister in Netanyahu's next government, in addition to being named deputy prime minister. —AFP

that required 13 stitches, Mizan Online said.

The Basij is a state-sanctioned volunteer force that is linked to Iran's powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The judiciary said Shekari was found guilty of fighting and drawing a weapon "with the intention of killing, causing terror and disturbing the order and security of society". It convicted him of "moharebeh"-or waging "war against God" under Iran's Islamic sharia law on November 1, said Mizan, adding he appealed the ruling but the supreme court upheld it on November 20.

Iran executes more people annually than any nation other than China. IHR said this week it had already executed over 500 people in 2022, a sharp jump on last year's figure. The 1500tasvir protest monitor said on social media that the execution of Shekari had happened with such haste that his family had still been waiting to hear the outcome of the appeal.

The largely peaceful protest movement has been marked by actions included removing and burning headscarves in the streets, chanting anti-government slogans and confronting the security forces. In a relatively new tactic, protest supporters staged three days of nationwide strikes up to Wednesday which closed down shops in several major cities including Tehran, according to rights groups.

The security forces have responded with a crackdown that has killed at least 458 people, including 63 children, according to an updated death toll issued by IHR on Wednesday. A court on Tuesday sentenced five more people to death by hanging for killing a member of the Basij, bringing to 11 the number of people in Iran sentenced to death in connection with the protests, according to IHR.

Freedom of expression group Article 19 said urgent action was needed "as the lives of others on death row in relation to the uprising are in imminent danger". Superstar Iranian actor Taraneh Alidoosti, a strong supporter of the protest movement, wrote on Instagram that "every international organization who is watching this bloodshed and not taking action, is a disgrace to humanity." Prior to the latest execution, Amnesty had said at least 28 people, including three children aged under 18, could face the death penalty in connection with the nationwide protests. —AFP

International

Challenging last mile for China's vaccine push after zero-COVID retreat

Of more than 10,500 deaths in that wave, 67 percent were unvaccinated

BEIJING: China is finally beating a retreat from its strict zero-COVID policy, but low vaccination rates among its elderly have seeded fears that the coronavirus could kill as many as 2.1 million people. Around a third of Chinese aged 80 and above have not yet received a full course of vaccines, compared with under 10 percent of the population as a whole. With China on Wednesday announcing the lifting of the most restrictive zero-COVID policies, experts have warned of the possibility of an uncontrolled outbreak for which China's patchy healthcare system is underprepared.



Among the most at risk are the elderly

Among the most at risk are the elderly, such as 76-year-old Sun who told AFP she "wouldn't take any more jabs" after receiving a single shot in return for a gift of 100 yuan (\$14) and a bag of rice. "There haven't been cases nearby, and I rarely travel outside my local area. So it's not necessary," said the resident of eastern Zhejiang province.

Health risk analysis firm Airfinity has predicted as many as 2.1 million COVID fatalities at current immunity levels. The company modelled its projections on an outbreak in Hong Kong this year—the fifth wave of the virus in the city—when vaccine hesitancy among older people was a major factor in the high death toll.

Of the more than 10,500 deaths in that wave, 67 percent were unvaccinated. And more than 95 percent of the dead were aged 60 and above, according to the government. The median age was 86 years.

No mandate

Beijing's headline pandemic policy has seen entire cities locked down, children separated from their parents in quarantine, and residents forced to get daily PCR tests

to go about their day. But China has been reluctant to implement a vaccine mandate, instead offering enticements—from shopping vouchers to free dim sum—to try and nudge people to get shots.

An attempt in July to impose a jab mandate to access public spaces in the capital Beijing was swiftly abandoned after a strong backlash in a public traumatised by domestic vaccine scandals in recent years.

That policy U-turn was likely "the result of direct intervention from a central leader", Yanzhong Huang of the Council on Foreign Relations wrote then, noting that other unpopular measures were not overturned. The zero-COVID strategy, which the ruling Communist Party was committed to at the time, "tends to marginalize the role of vaccines in policy implementation", he said. And unlike in other countries where elderly citizens were prioritised for vaccinations, China's initial push in 2021 mainly targeted employees in "high-risk" industries, later expanding to the working-age population.

Officials have vowed to boost immunisation rates among stubborn seniors, but "substantial improvement" is needed to guarantee supply and promote uptake, said Xi Chen, associate professor at the Yale School of Public Health.

Distrust, complacency

Ben Cowling, chair of epidemiology at Hong Kong University's School of Public Health, said a persistent lack of clear guidelines has left seniors uncertain about the safety of vaccines. Further, China's longstanding approach towards outbreaks and relatively low case numbers have bred complacency about the likelihood of catching COVID.

Under the zero-COVID policy, "the perceived benefit of vaccination is still quite low", Cowling told AFP. "If you aren't likely to get infected... you may not benefit from vaccination." Officials have also been hesitant to push too hard. "There is always the fear of reprisals," Singapore-based infectious diseases expert Leong Hoe Nam said, noting a history of confrontations between patients' family members and doctors in China after deaths or medical complications.

Fixing the problem "requires the government to



HONG KONG: People wear masks as they ride the mass transit rail (MTR) in Hong Kong on December 8, 2022. — AFP

invest in building trust with the Chinese people", said Nancy Qian, a China policy expert at Northwestern University. Local governments need to produce "easy-to-understand publicity materials" and lean on family members to encourage vaccine uptake among the elderly, China's State Council said last week.

A Beijing resident surnamed Tian said her elderly parents and in-laws readily got their shots after seeing neighbours do the same. "If a lot of people you know are all lining up to get the vaccine, then you probably won't be too worried," she said.

Homegrown vs foreign vaccines

Even if China manages to close the immunisation gap, there are persistent doubts about the long-term effectiveness of homegrown vaccines. Beijing has so far refused to greenlight foreign vaccines such as the mRNA-based shots from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna for public use.

"Nationalism plays an important role," Huang, J. Stephen Morrison and Scott Kennedy wrote in a commentary on China's zero-COVID policy for the Center for Strategic and International Studies. That, they said, "means Western solutions in the form of Western-owned mRNA vaccines and antivirals are out of bounds".

Studies have suggested that Chinese jabs—developed using older technology—offer less effective long-term protection and prevent fewer severe cases and deaths than foreign mRNA shots. But that does not mean Chinese vaccines are not helpful.

A Hong Kong University study this year found that three shots from China's Sinovac provided "very high levels of protection against severe outcomes", including in people aged 60 or above. While three doses of domestic vaccines will "effectively minimise" deaths, said Yale's Chen, China should also offer mRNA jabs to boost long-term immunity. — AFP

Survivors angered by release of Bali bombmaker

SYDNEY: Survivors of the 2002 Bali blasts were incensed on Thursday after one of the bombmakers was released from an Indonesian prison halfway into his 20-year sentence, with one Australian terming the release "laughable". Umar Patek was a member of an Al Qaeda-linked group that detonated two bombs outside a Bali bar and nightclub in October 2002, killing 202 people—including 88 Australians. Patek was released on parole Wednesday by Indonesian authorities, despite repeated pleas from the Australian government to keep him behind bars.

Australian attack survivor Peter Hughes, who spoke at Patek's trial in 2012, said the convicted extremist deserved to serve the "harsh sentence". "For him to be let out, it's laughable," he told Australian national broadcaster ABC. Indonesian authorities said they believed Patek had rehabilitated himself inside prison after completing a deradicalisation program. Patek has said he wanted to devote himself to deradicalising other inmates.

Australia's deputy prime minister Richard Marles urged Indonesia to keep Patek under "constant surveillance". "We will continue to make representations to make sure that there is constant surveillance of Umar Patek," he told ABC.

"I think this is going to be a very difficult day for many Australians," Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in August said he had nothing but "contempt" for Patek's actions and that his early release would be traumatic for victims' grieving families. Hundreds of mourners and survivors gathered in Bali and Australia in October to mark the 20th anniversary of Southeast Asia's deadliest terror attack. Back in Bali, speaking at a monument for victims built metres from the site of the blasts, Indonesian survivor Thiolina Marpaung said she felt "very sad" after hearing of Patek's parole and cast doubt on whether the Indonesian government would "properly" supervise him.

Patek is required to follow a training programme until 2030 as part of his parole. His release came on the same day as a suicide bombing carried out by an Islamic militant who had already spent four years in jail for his involvement in a 2017 attack.

A police officer was killed and 10 people were wounded in the bombing targeting a police station in the Javan city of Bandung. "The bomber in Bandung was just released in 2021 but less than a year later, he committed a suicide bombing. So, how about controlling Umar Patek until 2030?" Marpaung said.

Another survivor, I Dewa Ketut Rudita Widia Putra, said he was "very shocked" to learn about Patek's release, while also calling on the government to review early releases for terrorism convicts. "I feel that it's odd that such a crime against humanity can be granted parole," Putra said. — AFP



JAKARTA, Indonesia: Picture shows Indonesian terror suspect Umar Patek arrives at a Jakarta court to hear the judge's verdict. — AFP



BENI, DR Congo: Residents hold candles as they gather in Beni on December 7, 2022 during a prayer vigil in remembrance of the victims of the ongoing unrest in the East of the country. — AFP

131 killed in DR Congo by M23 rebels

KINSHASA: M23 rebels last month massacred at least 131 civilians in eastern DR Congo and committed more than two dozen rapes, according to a preliminary probe into the killings, the UN mission in the country said. The government has said some 300 people, almost all civilians, died in the massacre in North Kivu province on November 29-30.

The group has denied any responsibility, blaming "stray bullets" for the deaths of just eight civilians. In a statement issued overnight Wednesday, the UN's MONUSCO peacekeeping mission said investigators found 131 people had died, killed "as part of reprisals against the civilian population." The evidence comes from witnesses and other sources as investigators were unable to reach the villages where the massacre took place, which means the toll "could change," MONUSCO warned. The victims — 102 men, 17 women and 12 children—were "arbitrarily executed" by bullets or knives, it said.

"Eight people were wounded by bullets and 60 others kidnapped. At least 22 women and five girls were raped," it said. "This violence was carried out as part of a campaign of murders, rapes, kidnappings and looting against two villages in Rutshuru territory as reprisals for the clashes between the M23 and other armed groups, the statement said.

The probe, carried out by the UN Joint Human

Taliban carry out first execution since takeover

KABUL: An Afghan man convicted of murder was executed in public Wednesday, the Taliban said, the first confirmation of such a punishment since the hard-line Islamists returned to power. Last month, Taliban supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada ordered judges to fully enforce aspects of Islamic law that include public executions, stonings and floggings, and the amputation of limbs from thieves.

They have carried out several public floggings since then, but Wednesday's execution in Farah—capital of the western province of the same name—is the first the Taliban have acknowledged. "The supreme court was instructed to implement this order of qisas in a public gathering of compatriots," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement, referring to the "eye for an eye" justice in Islamic law.

In a later tweet, Mujahid said the victim's father had carried out the sentence, shooting the condemned man three times with a Kalashnikov. The statement named

Rights Office (UNJHRO) and MONUSCO, centred on events in the neighbouring villages of Kishishe and Bambo. Investigators could not go to the villages themselves because of security concerns, but interviewed 52 victims, witnesses and other sources in the town of Rwindi 20 kilometres (12 miles) away, MONUSCO said.

"Kishishe at the moment is controlled by the M23 and (there is) a high risk of reprisals against victims and witnesses who are still in the area," it said.

'Fabricated'

Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been restive for years. Dozens of militias operate in the region, many of them legacies of two regional wars that raged at the end of the last century. The M23, a mostly Congolese Tutsi group, resumed fighting in late 2021 after lying dormant for years. It claimed among other things that the DRC had failed to honour a pledge to integrate its fighters into the army. The group then went on the offensive, advancing towards the city of Goma and causing tens of thousands of people to flee.

The group's political spokesman, Lawrence Kanyuka, lashed the UN report as a sham. "It's regrettable to see a respectable organisation... compile a report that has been completely fabricated," he said. "We are staggered." Kanyuka said the group had told MONUSCO "several times that it could come" to Kishishe to carry out its investigation. Instead, he charged, MONUSCO "went and did an investigation 20 kilometres away... and decided to bring out a report which supports the accusations of the Congolese government—this shows its bias." —AFP

the executed man as Tajmir, son of Ghulam Sarwar, and said he was a resident of Anjil district in Herat province.

It said Tajmir had murdered a man, and stolen his motorcycle and cell phone. "Later, this person was recognised by the heirs of the deceased," it said, adding he had admitted his guilt. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres voiced "deep concern" about the public execution, spokeswoman Stephanie Tremblay said. "Our position has never changed. The United Nations is against the death penalty... So we call for a return to the moratorium on the death penalty" in Afghanistan, she said. US State Department spokesman Ned Price said "despicable" public executions break Taliban promises to the world. "This indicates to us that the Taliban seek a return to their regressive and abusive practices of the 1990s," Price said.

Severe restrictions

The Taliban regularly carried out punishments in public during their first period of rule that ended in late 2001, including floggings and executions at the national stadium in Kabul, which Afghans were encouraged to attend.

"I remember when they were implementing these punishments in their first stint, where they would

Quake jolts Indonesia's Java island

JAKARTA: A 5.8-magnitude earthquake hit Indonesia's main island of Java on Thursday with no immediate reports of damage, less than a month after another quake in the same province killed more than 300 people.

The quake struck at 07:50 am local time (0050 GMT) around 15 kilometres from the town of Cianjur, epicentre of November's devastating tremor, the United States Geological Survey said.

It said there was a low likelihood of casualties or damage following the quake, which struck at a depth of 123 kilometres (76 miles). No damage was immediately reported in Cianjur or Sukabumi, the city nearest the epicentre, local disaster mitigation agency officials said Thursday.

But schools were temporarily evacuated in Sukabumi, according to local TV. "The epicenter of the earthquake is in Sukabumi, so it was only lightly felt in Cianjur. No reports of damage to houses or casualties," said Wawan Setawan, a disaster agency official in Cianjur told AFP. "We have yet to receive reports of damage caused by the earthquake", Inran Wardhani, an official in Sukabumi, said soon after the tremor. Last month, a shallow 5.6-magnitude earthquake hit Cianjur, triggering landslides and collapsing buildings, killing at least 334 people, injuring thousands and leaving tens of thousands more homeless.

Save the Children warned this week that evacuees faced a "ticking time bomb" of disease and infection due to poor living conditions. Thousands of cases of respiratory infections and hundreds of cases of diarrhoea have been reported. Indonesian President Joko Widodo is visiting the area on Thursday to distribute aid to affected residents. The tremor that struck Cianjur on November 21 was the deadliest in the archipelago nation since a 2018 quake and resulting tsunami killed more than 4,000 people on the island of Sulawesi. —AFP

announce for the public to gather," rights activist Ogai Amil told AFP. She said Wednesday's execution reminded her of those days, adding it "shakes the human conscience".

"Why should it happen only in Afghanistan?" she asked. The headline Islamists had promised a softer rule this time round, but have introduced increasingly severe restrictions on the lives of Afghans.

Women in particular have been incrementally squeezed out of public life since the Taliban's return. Those in government roles have lost their jobs—or are being paid a pittance to stay at home—while women are also barred from travelling without a male relative, and must cover up with a burqa or hijab when out of the home.

Schools for teenage girls have also been shuttered across most of the country for over a year. Mujahid said the case for Wednesday's execution had been thoroughly examined by a series of courts before the supreme leader gave the order. "This matter was examined very precisely," he said in the statement. "In the end, they gave an order to apply the Shariah law of retribution to the murderer." Akhundzada, who has not been filmed or photographed in public since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, rules by decree from Kandahar, the movement's birthplace and spiritual heartland. —AFP

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2022

Business

Oil and gas firms' production plans spell 'catastrophic' warming: Report

Fossil fuel firms approved \$166bn of investment in new oil and gas fields

PARIS: Oil and gas companies are spending tens of billions of dollars on new fossil fuel production that would push global temperatures to catastrophic levels, research found Thursday. An analysis by the financial think tank Carbon Tracker found that fossil fuel firms approved \$166bn of investment in new oil and gas fields between January 2021 and March this year.

Almost all of that expenditure is incompatible with the Paris Agreement's more ambitious target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius since the pre-industrial era, the report said. And around a third of the total—some \$58 billion—was committed by Chevron, Eni, Shell, TotalEnergies and others to projects that would imply demand for oil and gas pushing global temperatures beyond 2.5C.

"Oil and gas companies are marketing themselves as part of the solution to climate change while simultaneously planning production increases that would lead to climate catastrophe," said report author Thom Allen, an oil and gas analyst at Carbon Tracker. The report used decarbonisation pathways set out by the International Energy Agency (IEA), which says no new long-lead oil or gas fields are compatible with 1.5C and consumption must fall rapidly.

But Carbon Tracker said most companies are planning to increase production, potentially locking

in high carbon emissions for decades. Projects highlighted include the \$10 billion Lake Albert oilfield development in Uganda led by TotalEnergies and a \$12 billion liquefied natural gas project in Western Australia being developed by Woodside.

These "high cost and large" projects are of particular concern because they would take a long time to build and likely have a longer production period, said report co-author Mike Coffin, Carbon Tracker's head of oil, gas and mining. Of the major fossil fuel firms, the report said only BP was planning production broadly in line with Paris goals—with a reduction of 43 percent by 2030.

That compares with European firms Eni, Shell and TotalEnergies, which only plan to reduce oil-while increasing gas. Carbon Tracker calculates that TotalEnergies' overall fossil fuel production will be 13 percent higher in 2030 than in 2019.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has stoked a "dash for gas" that scientists have warned imperils global efforts to stop warming exceeding 1.5C. Carbon Tracker said although the crisis has pushed up energy prices—and oil and gas profits—it has also led to increased recognition of renewables as a cheaper and more secure power source.

"It's becoming ever clearer that renewables provide a solution to affordable and secure energy in the medium to long term," Coffin told AFP. —AFP



PARIS: Fossil fuel firms approved \$166bn of investment in new oil and gas fields between January 2021 and March this year.

French-built train in Ethiopia still 'a blessing'

DIRE DAWA, Ethiopia: The train pulled out of Dire Dawa station with a creak and disappeared into the pre-dawn gloom, the lights that once illuminated its decades-old carriages having stopped working long ago. Over a century after the French laid a railroad in eastern Ethiopia, the old track remains indispensable for trade and transport, even with the recent arrival of a modern, Chinese-built line.

Twice a week, passengers and cargo pile into carriages dating from 1955 to make the 12-hour, 200-kilometre (125-mile) journey by diesel locomotive from Dire Dawa to Dedebe, on the border of Djibouti. There, they trade vegetables and khat—a mildly narcotic shrub—for food and other items.

"We use it as transport," said a young shopkeeper who declined to give her name, and said she exchanged goods for rice, sugar, pasta, spices, tomato sauce and oil.

The journey today spans the only functioning part of the original 784-kilometre line, which once ran between Addis Ababa, the capital of landlocked Ethiopia, and Djibouti City on the Gulf of Aden. Since 2016, a modern, electrified railway line built by China connects the two capitals in anywhere between 12 hours and 18 hours. But in Dire Dawa, which was built by the French to accommodate rail workers with the advent of the "Franco-Ethiopian Railway", the "Chinese train" as it is locally known does not suit everyone.

'A blessing'

Stops along the Chinese line are outside city lines, and the ticket price is higher. Crucially, it only makes three stops between Dire Dawa and Dedebe, compared to eight along the French line.

"The (Chinese) train doesn't stop at any station near us," said the young shopkeeper. "The railway was built along small towns and districts, and people settled near the stations," said Mulugeta Kebede, 70, a driver on the old train for four decades. "There are places that cars can't go, and the only means of transportation is the train."

Ismail Khayad, deputy general manager of the 'Dire Dawa-Dedebe Railway', said the new route did



Passengers look on after boarding the old train in Shinile, Ethiopia. —AFP

not service the region in the same way the French-built line did. "People say the old railway is a blessing; the other one is... useless for us," he said. People have come to depend on the train as a bringer of food and other essentials, said Ayoub Asafa, 62, who mans the first stop after Dire Dawa, a shack about 10 kilometers from the city. "This train is tied to the existence of the people," he said. "It will affect people's daily lives if this train stops."

Slow decline

Nostalgia and bitterness is evident among the railway workers of Dire Dawa, a pretty town with tree-shaded streets. At the old train station, signs in Amharic and French—a language still spoken by some of the older railway workers—are a reminder of its storied past.

Ordered by Emperor Menelik, work on the line began in 1897 in modern-day Djibouti, then a French colony. The line reached Dire Dawa, 311 kilometers to the south, by Christmas 1902, and Addis Ababa by the summer of 1917. Sitting at an economic crossroads, Dire Dawa was for a long time Ethiopia's second-most populated city. "It was the railroad that

diesel in a bid to stabilise the economy. His moves followed the government declaring bankruptcy in mid-April and defaulting on its \$46-billion foreign debt for the first time since independence from Britain in 1948. But the main opposition said Wickremesinghe's first full budget was unrealistic and warned that the economic crisis could worsen next year.

"This is a failed budget," opposition legislator Eran Wickramaratne said on Thursday. "The numbers in the budget are unrealistic." The budget expects a 69-percent increase in tax revenue next year and projects a narrowing of the budget deficit to 7.9 percent of GDP in 2023, down from 9.8 percent this year.

The central bank had initially expected a \$2.9-billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund to materialise by August. The bank later said it hoped a deal could be concluded by early December, but now say talks could drag onto early next year. An agreement with all external creditors, including China which accounts for 52 percent of Colombo's bilateral debt, is a pre-condition to drawing down any IMF support. Beijing has made

founded this city," said Ismail.

But the railway went into decline in the 1970s with the rise of road transport and greater access to the sea via Eritrea, then part of Ethiopia.

Neglect, frequent derailments and a plodding pace saw the line fall into disuse. The Addis-Dire Dawa line was abandoned in the early 2000s, followed by the Djibouti leg.

Just 300 of its 2,500 employees remain, and the luxury sleeping cars that once ferried guests in style now lie rusting by the station. The city, too, has deteriorated economically and socially over the years, said Ismail, who accused the Ethiopian government of having "abandoned" the railroad and its workers.

To keep these historic trains running, the original rail workshops are kept operational, manned by a few dozen technicians. Some of the machinery is as old as the railroad itself. "Elwell&Seyrig, Plaine St-Denis, 1903", reads a steel plate on a particularly vintage machine operated by veteran technician Belay Mulu, who switches it on to prove it still works. Today he relies on a newer model, but all parts are repaired and repurposed on site because they don't buy spares, the 53-year-old said. —AFP

no public statements on Colombo's pleas to "restructure," a euphemism for a debt haircut, but officials say talks are still underway.

Japan and India are the other two major bilateral creditors owning 19.5 percent and 12 percent of Sri Lanka's bilateral debt respectively.

Much of the foreign debt is in international sovereign bonds (ISBs) held by private investors and talks with them are also ongoing, officials said adding that a deal was yet to be struck. The IMF has said Sri Lanka's foreign debt must be "sustainable" to unlock any new external funding and the country should also restructure its myriad loss-making state enterprises. Wickremesinghe has proposed the sale of the country's loss-making national carrier, Sri Lankan airlines, and several other entities to raise foreign exchange and boost the country's external reserves. Official figures show that major state businesses, including Sri Lankan airlines, lost \$2.38 billion in the first four months of this year alone. The World Bank has warned that the economy could shrink by 9.2 percent this year, worse than the 8.7 percent contraction the central bank of Sri Lanka had forecasted. —AFP

Musk briefly loses top spot on Forbes billionaire list

PARIS: Tesla owner Elon Musk briefly lost the top spot on Forbes' billionaire list Wednesday to Bernard Arnault, whose family owns the world's leading luxury group, LVMH. With US tech stocks sliding as interest rates and recession fears rise, Musk's fortune briefly fell below that of the Arnault family. But around 1730 GMT Musk was back on top at \$184.9 billion, followed by Arnault and his family at \$184.7 billion. Indian businessman Gautam Adani was in third place at \$134.8 billion, with Amazon founder Jeff Bezos fourth at \$111.3 billion. Arnault had also topped the Forbes list for several hours in 2021.

His LVMH group, which includes dozens of brands including Louis Vuitton, Givenchy, and Kenzo, has continued to post strong revenue and profit growth despite the latest global economic headwinds.

Musk's fortune is primarily tied to the share price of Tesla, and the entrepreneur has been at the centre of controversy after having taken over Twitter in late October. The other major wealth ranking compiled by financial data provider Bloomberg also has Musk and Arnault running nearly neck-and-neck. According to Bloomberg's ranking, calculated after US markets closed on Tuesday, had Musk in the lead at \$178.9 billion, followed by Arnault at \$165.1 billion. —AFP

Kazakhstan moves to reel in crypto mining

ALMATY: Kazakhstan, one of the world's leading locations for cryptocurrency mining, has moved to reel in the power-hungry industry that has often burdened the ageing energy grid of the Central Asian country. The ex-Soviet country's lower house of parliament on Wednesday passed legislation which introduced a tax and a mandatory license for companies mining cryptocurrencies among other measures, state news agency Kazinform reported. In recent months, Kazakhstan, the region's largest economy, has looked to promote the expansion of cryptocurrency mining while cracking down on illegal mining farms.

"The goal of the bill is to eliminate illegal mining and create an adequate legal environment for legal entrepreneurs," lawmaker Yekaterina Smyshlyayeva, who introduced the bill, told AFP on Thursday. She added that this activity is a "capital intensive business and the risks are very high". "Miners will only be able to buy electricity from the general electricity network in the event of a surplus," she said Wednesday as quoted by Kazinform.

According to data from the University of Cambridge, Kazakhstan was the world's third-largest miner of cryptocurrency as of January 2022, behind the United States and China. Mining for cryptocurrency, such as bitcoin, requires powerful computers to solve complex mathematical puzzles, resulting in the consumption of huge amounts of electricity. Kazakhstan has many benefits for the industry, including some of the cheapest electricity in the world and a cold climate favourable for cooling computers. —AFP

Bankrupt Sri Lanka clears budget as IMF bailout delays

COLOMBO: Crisis-hit Sri Lanka's parliament Thursday approved President Ranil Wickremesinghe's 2023 budget, vital to raising government revenue and securing a twice-delayed IMF bailout.

The island nation has been reeling from more than a year of severe shortages and runaway inflation, prompting protests that ousted Wickremesinghe's predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa in July. Parliament voted overwhelmingly to sign off on Wickremesinghe's plan to raise overall tax revenue by nearly 70 percent and privatise loss-making state enterprises after a month-long debate.

Wickremesinghe, a six-times prime minister, has already sharply raised taxes and increased fuel, water and electricity tariffs and rationed petrol and

Business

Spain's business anxiety grows as trade deadlock with Algeria lingers

Sales blocked, investment frozen and projects at a standstill since June

MADRID: Six months after Algeria cut ties with Spain following a spat over disputed Western Sahara, trade between the two countries remains paralyzed, much to the dismay of the worst-hit companies. With sales blocked, investment frozen and projects at a standstill since June, businesses are struggling.

"We can't export or import anything, all our operations are on standby," said Julio Lebrero, head of Aecomel, a Spanish company specializing in the manufacture of machinery for public works.

The firm, which owns 40 percent of the Algerian group Europactor, conducts almost all of its business operations in Algeria, which has left it in a difficult position. "We haven't brought in a single euro over the past six months, which is completely unsustainable," admitted Lebrero, who said he was "very worried". Dozens of other small-and-medium sized Spanish firms (SMEs) are in the same boat, their business activity slowed because they cannot sell their products in Algeria.

Similar struggles have beset SMEs in Algeria whose businesses are dependent on raw materials and spare parts that are "made in Spain".

The problem began in mid-March, when Spain suddenly reversed its decades-long stance of neutrality on the Western Sahara conflict, saying it would back Morocco's autonomy plan for the disputed region as it sought to end a lingering diplomatic spat. Spain's move, widely seen as a victory for Morocco, infuriated its regional rival Algeria, which has long backed the Polisario Front, Western Sahara's independence movement.

In response, Algiers suspended on June 8 a cooperation treaty with Madrid which had been signed in 2002, later moving to restrict commercial transactions and to freeze bank operations. The freeze on business ties, announced by Algeria's Association of Banks and Financial Establishments (known by its French acronym, ABEF), has had "a major impact on business transactions" between the two countries, said Alfonso Tapia, head of Omnicrea Consulting, which specializes in the Algerian market.

'Everything has stopped'

To get around the problem, some firms have managed to supply their products through third countries, but that has proved impossible for small companies given the added cost. Spain has paid a high price, with trade ministry figures showing



Abdelmadjid Tebboune and Pedro Sanchez in this file photo.

exports to Algeria reached just 138 million euros (\$145 million) between June and September, compared with 625 million euros for the same period a year earlier—a loss of some nearly 500 million euros in just four months.

And the slump has hit everything from agribusiness to chemicals, as well as textiles and the construction industry. "Everything has stopped," Djamel Eddine Bouabdallah, head of the CCAIE Algerian-Spanish trade and industry association, said, adding that some companies had even been forced to close. The only exception is gas.

Spain depends on Algeria for natural gas and deliveries by Algeria's state-owned energy giant Sonatrach have continued untouched, albeit at a higher price. As to how long the situation would continue, nobody knows. In June, the Spanish government appeared confident its relationship with Algeria was solid. But since then, it has said little.

State of uncertainty

For the companies hit by the freeze, Madrid's silence does not bode well.

"We've asked the authorities to come up with solutions, but they've not come back to us," said a

spokeswoman for ANFFECC, which groups Spanish producers of ceramic glazes, pigments and glass-like materials. In this sector, which is very dependent on the Algerian market, the freezing of business ties has already cost it some 70 million euros. And many fear it could lead to a permanent loss of market share to its French and Italian competitors.

"The Spanish government is acting like there's no problem, they have left us completely on our own," said Lebrero. His view is shared by another Spanish business owner who, speaking on condition of anonymity, denounced the "passivity" of the government and accused Algiers of blowing "hot and cold". In a statement at the end of July, Algeria's Association of Banks and Financial Establishments announced the end of the restrictions with Spain. But nothing changed, leaving companies in a state of uncertainty.

"There are currently negotiations ongoing between the two governments, because they cannot leave the situation like this," said Bouabdallah, his words echoed by Alfonso Tapia. "The current situation is no good for anyone. We need to get back to normality," he told AFP, calling for a "quick resolution" of the deadlock. —AFP

EU rejects Hungary blame for fuel shortage

BRUSSELS: The European Commission on Thursday rejected accusations from Hungary that an EU oil price cap on Russian crude was responsible for a fuel shortage at its petrol stations. The allegation, made by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government, makes "absolutely no sense," commission spokesman Daniel Ferrie said.

The decision by the European Union and G7 partners to cap Russian oil exports at a level of \$60 per barrel "has no impact on Hungary's ability to import oil via its pipeline, as the cap applies only to seaborne oil," Ferrie said. He added that additional sanctions on Russia, on oil-derived products and refined oil "haven't entered into force yet, so there is no way whatsoever that EU sanctions are currently impacting supplies in Hungary".

Hungary, which has the closest relations with the Kremlin of any EU country, gets its oil through a pipeline from Russia, and sits outside the scope of the oil price cap. But Budapest and Brussels are currently locked in a fraught blame game over billions in EU funds frozen for Hungary over backsliding on European democratic standards. Hungary has responded by blocking EU financial aid to war-savaged Ukraine, and the EU's adoption of a global minimum corporate tax on multinational companies. Orban, a populist leader, has been forced to scrap a government-imposed ceiling on fuel sales in Hungarian petrol stations because of shrinking supplies.

Hungarian media have shown images of long lines of panicked motorists trying to fill their vehicles at the stations that were open. Many stations were closed for lack of fuel. Hungary's energy company MOL said the fuel supply situation was "critical", and caused by a 30 percent drop in imported fuel as well as maintenance at one of its refineries. Hungary's economy is in a fragile state, with recession looming, inflation among the highest rates in the EU and its currency, the forint, sliding to a record low against the euro. —AFP



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KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 8 DECEMBER 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,119	1,094	1,121	1,075	46	19,858,712	-27	-2.41%	15.22%	1,075	1,100	17.8	2.07	2.2%	1.01
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	339	328	340	324	16	12,164,803	-11	-3.24%	23.44%	325	329	17.4	1.51	2.0%	1.26
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	199	199	201	196	5	10,656,179	0	0.00%	-5.06%	194	203	35.7	0.63	1.9%	1.16
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	230	225	231	222	9	2,018,180	-4	-1.75%	-5.88%	225	230	22.5	0.82	2.1%	1.28
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	862	850	865	828	37	61,784,489	-11	-1.28%	12.38%	840	855	28.5	3.48	1.3%	1.16
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	833	821	839	810	29	3,491,431	-14	-1.68%	15.25%	813	822	53.4	3.25	0.5%	1.09
204	National Investments	Financial Services	271	251	271	245	26	1,983,135	-19	-7.04%	14.61%	248	257	18.6	1.03	17.8%	1.85
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	124	117	125	116	9	34,086,451	-6	-4.88%	-17.61%	116	122	-	0.61	4.2%	0.97
252	Al Intiaz Investment	Financial Services	78	75.2	78	74	5	8,337,217	-2	-2.59%	-36.27%	72.8	78	-	0.44	12.0%	1.23
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	110	110	115	108	7	63,154,341	0	0.00%	-36.70%	108	119	16.1	0.81	2.6%	1.09
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	880	854	880	847	33	1,972,772	-23	-2.62%	14.15%	850	875	17.8	1.89	1.5%	1.03
501	National Industries	Financial Services	243	235	243	225	18	43,595,865	-7	-2.89%	-2.47%	232	247	11.7	1.03	4.8%	1.49
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,313	1,270	1,313	1,230	83	213,773	-24	-1.85%	45.81%	1,260	1,290	12.2	1.22	4.8%	1.00
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	823	805	823	805	18	2,088,474	-18	-2.19%	-5.52%	790	820	8.5	1.60	7.4%	0.94
603	Agility	Industrials	775	760	784	755	29	10,075,467	-17	-2.19%	-3.49%	738	769	50.0	1.40	2.2%	1.55
605	Zain	Telecommunications	590	582	590	577	13	18,087,766	-5	-0.85%	-2.18%	580	589	13.4	2.09	5.7%	0.77
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,400	3,388	3,400	3,302	98	337,048	8	0.24%	5.09%	3,350	3,400	7.0	3.36	12.0%	0.68
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	209	212	216	194	22	49,181,644	7	3.41%	-2.75%	206	217	-	0.78	0.0%	1.19
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,796	1,747	1,802	1,747	55	846,431	-23	-1.30%	35.43%	1,700	1,820	13.7	10.63	2.6%	1.44
821	Warba Bank	Banking	249	242	249	238	11	23,221,162	-6	-2.42%	-11.68%	240	249	24.3	1.32	0.0%	1.08
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	391	414	448	391	57	6,648,343	24	6.15%	-28.31%	405	432	-	1.33	3.8%	0.48
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	367	346	367	344	23	1,877,836	-18	-4.95%	-6.49%	345	358	22.7	1.42	2.9%	0.76
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	198	190	198	189	9	2,866,382	-7	-3.55%	-16.67%	189	195	15.8	1.78	9.4%	0.48
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,349	2,290	2,349	2,283	66	540,438	-40	-1.72%	13.37%	2,287	2,350	23.8	7.34	2.8%	0.94
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	839	812	839	806	33	1,954,070	-20	-2.40%	-8.14%	800	830	11.7	4.09	5.8%	0.54

* As of end of week closing

Business

Meta sees itself as dwarfed by 'Giant Tech' Apple

Meta's market capitalization slides from \$1.07tn in August 2021 to \$300bn

BRUSSELS: Facebook parent Meta may be in the Big Tech club but it sees itself as being dwarfed by "Giant Tech" company-and corporate foe-Apple, a top executive, Nick Clegg, said Wednesday.

"There's Big Tech and there's Giant Tech," Clegg told an audience in Brussels, where Meta was courting policymakers with its latest virtual-reality (VR) gear.

"I mean Apple is now, what, eight times the size of Meta" in terms of stock market capitalisation, he said. "I mean, it's just there is very, very, very, very big" in the Big Tech sector and Apple is it, added Clegg. The comparison underlines Meta's steep market slide over the past 16 months-and the bad blood with Apple, which has eviscerated Meta's data collection strategy. Apple last year introduced a data privacy option on its hugely popular iPhones that prevents Meta and other online data collectors getting user tracking information they previously relied upon to target advertising.

That has contributed to a halving of Meta's third-quarter profits this year.

The US company's costly focus on the metaverse, a virtual world where users appearing as digital avatars can interact, has also played a role. Meta-rebranded to reflect its focus-has spent a staggering \$100 billion to date on building that technology, whose widespread adoption is forecast to be many years away. Meta last month announced it was axing 11,000 employees — 13 percent of its workforce-in a general tech belt-tightening that has also seen jobs shed at Twitter, Amazon and Hewlett-Packard.

Challenge from China

Meta's stock market capitalization has slid from an all-time high of \$1.07 trillion in August 2021 to just over \$300 billion today—a 72 percent drop. Apple's over the same period has stayed steadily above \$2 trillion since late 2020, and is currently around \$2.3 trillion.

Meta has long complained that Apple is building a "walled garden", with its users locked into its devices, operating system and app store, at the expense of Meta and other online players.

Both Meta and Apple, as well as other Big Tech ones, have repeatedly come under the regulatory microscope in the European Union and the United States as commercial strategies butt up against anti-trust and data privacy concerns. But Clegg said China was increasingly challenging the US domination of the online world. "You've got US and Chinese big tech now really kind of looming over the whole scene," he said.

"And don't, by the way, underestimate how aggressively Chinese big tech is investing in the metaverse," he added, pointing to the Pico VR headsets being marketed by ByteDance, the Chinese owner of popular social app TikTok. Meta's own investment into VR and Augmented Reality—collectively known as XR, or extended reality—showed its belief that "the biggest bets are the bets which are furthest away... and they're also the ones where the



BRUSSELS: Meta President Global Affairs Nick Clegg (left) speaks during a press conference at the Meta showroom in Brussels on December 07, 2022. —AFP

technology is most expensive," Clegg said.

Investor criticism of that focus, and a "narrative of pessimism" about Meta's focus on it,

"profoundly underestimates the very, very strong health of the underlying business" of the company, he said. —AFP

South Korea orders truckers in fuel, steel sectors back to work

SEOUL: South Korea on Thursday ordered striking truck drivers in the fuel and steel sectors back to work as a walkout that has caused havoc in Asia's fourth-largest economy prepares to enter its third week. The strike, which started on Nov 24 over minimum pay, delayed the supply of goods worth an estimated 3.5 trillion won (\$2.65 billion) in its first 12 days, according to Seoul's trade ministry.

The second major industrial action in less than six months, the walkout has triggered concerns about the impact on global supply chains, already strained by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"At today's cabinet meeting, the government decided to expand the scope of the order to restart work for transportation deniers to the steel and petrochemical industries," finance minister Choo Kyung-ho told reporters. Thursday's order to around 10,000 drivers comes after Seoul last week ordered striking cement truck drivers back to work, which President Yoon Suk-yeol said was necessary as their action posed a danger to the economy.

Due to the strike, shipments of steel materials were down to about 48 percent compared to normal levels, while petrochemical products were shipping at only 20 percent of normal levels, Choo said.

"Our economy is facing a crisis due to the decrease in exports, inflation, and high interest rates—we have no time and energy to waste on an unnecessary conflict," Choo told reporters. Truckers who fail to comply with the order can be punished with jail terms of up to three years or a fine of up to 30 million won (\$22,690) and have their licenses suspended. The 25,000-strong Cargo Truckers Solidarity Union told AFP they were working on a statement in response to the government's decision.

With fuel prices rising, the drivers have been demanding the government make permanent a "safe freight rate" minimum pay scheme, which is set to expire at the end of the year.

The government said last month it would extend the program for three years but truckers say more of them will become vulnerable to overwork and safety risks without a permanent minimum wage guarantee. South Korea has one of the highest industrial fatality rates for a rich economy, with more than 4,000 work-related deaths reported from 2020 to last year, according to Seoul's labour ministry. —AFP

Canada central bank hikes key rate to 4.25%

OTTAWA: Canada's central bank on Wednesday hiked its key lending rate by 50 basis points to 4.25 percent, saying its aggressive moves to rein in inflation were working but that the economy was still too hot. This is the highest interest rate in 15 years, after having started 2022 with a record low of just 0.25 percent.

The Bank of Canada said economic growth was stronger than expected in the third quarter, bolstered by robust commodity exports. But in a statement hinting that this was likely to be its last rate hike for now, it said "there is growing evidence that tighter monetary policy is restraining

Misery in Zimbabwe over 19-hour power cuts

HARARE: When midnight strikes, most Zimbabweans jump out of bed to make stews, iron their clothes or collect water—capitalising on a few hours of electricity as the country reels from crippling power cuts. The southern African country has long battled with outages but the problem has sharply worsened since its main generator, a hydro plant at the giant Kariba Dam, began to struggle with low water levels caused by recurring droughts.

Since last week, the authorities have been imposing up to 19 hours of cuts each day, usually turning on power between midnight and 5am. "The situation is now painful," said Irvine Magede, a fruit vendor in front of a block of apartments in Harare's oldest township of Mbare.

"We simply wake up during (the) time they switch on local grids to charge our phones and iron our clothes," said Magede, who is in his 30s. Life has become a daily grind for most Zimbabweans as the shrinking levels of water in one of the world's largest reservoirs inflict prolonged blackouts and devastate livelihoods.

University students this week had to do their exams in a half-lit hall, and hospitals are sometimes left without water because pumps are inoperative. The latest wrench in Zimbabwe's power crisis began at the end of November, when the hydro plant in the Kariba Dam had to be switched off for lack of vol-

Markets jostled by recession fears, China optimism

NEW YORK: Wall Street stocks attempted to stage a relief rally and Hong Kong soared on Thursday, but elsewhere equity trading was still dominated by recession fears.

Oil prices, meanwhile, rebounded slightly from recent sharp losses. Equity markets had been rising ahead of US jobs figures last week, boosted by a surprise drop in inflation and comments from Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell that the bank was likely to raise rates at a slower pace.

But robust jobs figures and a jump in wages, plus data on Monday showing a forecast-busting jump in activity in the US services sector last month, raised the prospect that the Fed will not back down from sharp rate increases when it meets next week. Following several days of losses, Wall Street opened to the upside, with the Dow rising 0.4 percent.

"What we have today, then, is a little rebound spirit—an assumption that the stock market is due for a bounce after behaving so poorly in more recent action..." said market analyst Patrick O'Hare at

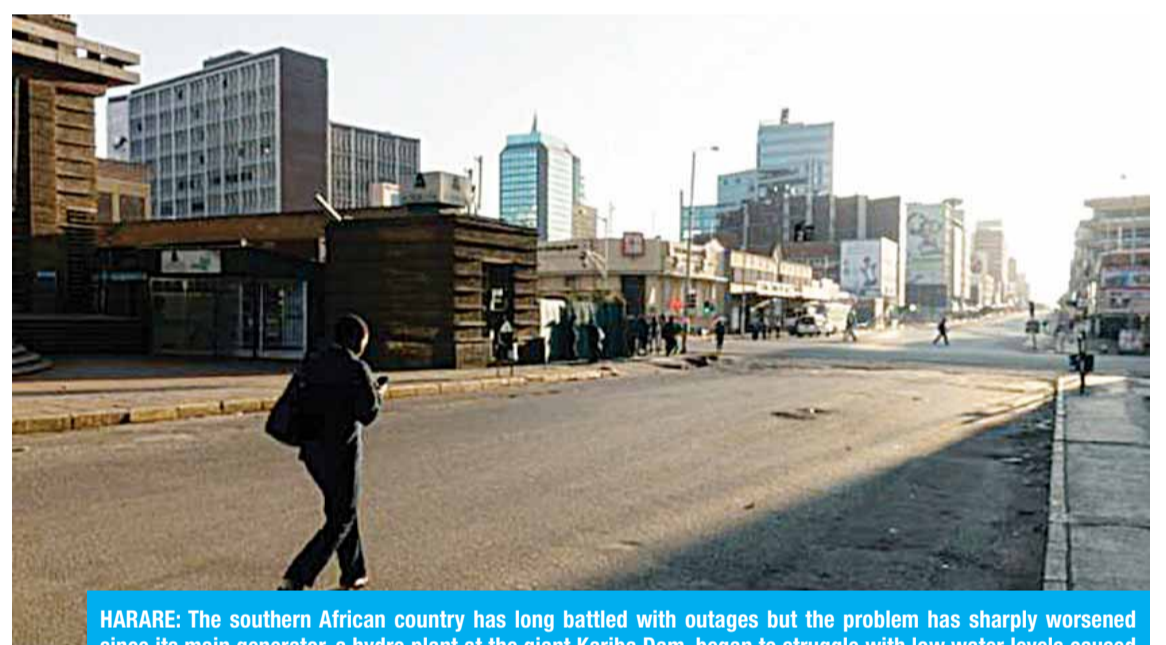
domestic demand."

It pointed to consumption slowing as the year's end approaches, a pullback in the housing market and other data that suggested "growth will essentially stall through the end of this year and the first half of next year."

Desjardins analyst Royce Mendes noted that the size of the rate increase was "more hawkish than what was anticipated." Most economists had predicted the bank would announce a 25 basis point increase. The bank, Mendes concluded in a research note, "continued to worry about inflation becoming entrenched and that's what this rate hike is really about."

"Policymakers," he added, "seem a little less sure about what comes next."

Looking ahead, the bank said its governing council would be "considering whether the policy interest rate needs to rise further to bring supply and demand back into balance and return inflation to target." —AFP



HARARE: The southern African country has long battled with outages but the problem has sharply worsened since its main generator, a hydro plant at the giant Kariba Dam, began to struggle with low water levels caused by recurring droughts.

ume passing through its turbines, according to the Zambezi River Authority which manages the water supply. The blackouts have wreaked havoc on small businesses, already battered by a nearly two-decade-old economic downturn.

Charles Svidzi, a 59-year-old barber, said he had had to close his shop as he depends on electric hair clippers and there are no customers at night. "My clients can only come during the day," Svidzi explained. He is now instead offering a phone-charging

service for clients, using a small solar-powered battery.

The welder he shares his business unit with has started sleeping on the workshop floor. He now works at night, making use of the available power supply to weld metal frames for windows and doors. Most families have stopped buying perishables in bulk, especially meat, and instead ration grocery purchases daily to avoid the produce going off. But butchers are also badly hit by the outages. —AFP

Briefing.com. European stocks tried to rally before Wall Street opened, but failed to hold onto gains. London was flat, while both Frankfurt and Paris were down 0.2 percent as trading got underway in New York. "The risk-off sentiment... remains hard to kick into touch as concerns about recession stay front and centre," noted Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown.

"The evil twins of recession and persistently higher inflation are lurking, keeping investors on edge."

Analysts pointed out that two-year US Treasury yields were much higher than those of 10-year bonds, which is usually considered a clear indication of a looming recession. This week also saw the heads of some of Wall Street's biggest banks warn of a downturn.

China COVID shift

The fear of a US recession is playing off against China's shift away from its zero-COVID strategy of lockdowns and mass testing that has been blamed for clattering the world's number two economy.

After widespread protests last month against the strict measures and calls for more political freedoms, authorities have scaled back many of them and on Wednesday announced a nationwide loosening of restrictions. While there are worries that the more liberal approach will spark a surge in infections, it has helped fan a rally in Hong Kong where Chinese tech firms and property developers are listed.

Fresh protests in Mongolian capital

ULAANBATAR: Protesters took to the streets of Mongolia's capital for a fifth day Thursday after the arrests of officials allegedly tied to a coal industry embezzlement scandal that has sparked public outrage. Since Sunday, thousands have marched in freezing temperatures in central Ulaanbaatar in a broad popular movement fuelled by anger over corruption as well as the East Asian nation's struggling economy. Celebrities and social media influencers have joined calls for justice over claims that a so-called "coal faction" of lawmakers and executives had stolen billions of dollars from public coffers.

Implicated lawmakers are alleged to have leveraged their ownership of coal mines and transportation companies that move the fossil fuel across the border into China to make illegal profits.



TOKYO: A man walks past an electronic board showing the values of various companies trading on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, along a street in Tokyo. —AFP

The Hang Seng Index closed up more than three percent Thursday. "Developments in China have a big role to play, although as we're seeing once again, COVID-related moves are almost exclusively impacting stocks in domestic markets," said Craig Erlam, senior analyst at OANDA trading group. "We can see that again overnight, with reports of looser mask and isolation requirements in Hong Kong lifting the Hang Seng and making it the clear outperformer in the region, while most other indices tread water." —AFP

Rallies on Thursday saw over a thousand people brave minus 17 degrees Celsius (1.4 degrees Fahrenheit) temperatures to gather in Ulaanbaatar's Sukhbaatar Square—under the watchful eye of an imposing statue of national hero Genghis Khan. Rows of police were present but protests were peaceful, according to an AFP reporter at the scene, after rallies earlier in the week saw minor clashes. Scores of police have been dispatched to the Tavan Tolgoi deposits, a key component of Mongolia's state budget, to investigate the alleged theft as well as corruption by customs officials.

Justice Minister Nyambaatar Khishgee on Thursday announced the arrest of Gankhuyag Battulga, former CEO of Erdenes Tavan Tolgoi—one of the country's largest coal mining firms—along with seven others accused of laundering money from embezzled coal. He also said camera recordings from a border crossing showed customs officials failing to register some vehicles, possibly allowing coal to be exported off the books. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

In Netflix series, Harry slams press, family, over 'feeding frenzy'

Prince Harry slammed the media "feeding frenzy" over his relationship with Meghan in an explosive Netflix docuseries aired Thursday, also criticising his family for failing to protect her and his mother Diana. The royal family has been braced for the first three episodes of six-part series "Meghan & Harry".

The family was largely spared during

"As far as a lot of the family were concerned, everything that she was being put through, they'd been put through as well. So it was almost like a rite of passage," he said. "I said the difference here is the race element."

Harry went on to claim there was a "huge level of unconscious bias" within the family, with the documentary referencing a

"When I got to meet 'M' I was terrified of her being driven away by the media, the same media that had driven so many other people away from me," said the prince.

"I knew that the only way that this could possibly work is by keeping it quiet for as long as possible." In the first episode, Harry compares the US television actress to Diana. "So much of what Meghan is and how she is, is so similar to my mum. She has the same compassion. She has the same empathy. She has the same confidence. She has this warmth about her," he said.

The early episodes also focus on Harry's childhood and difficult teen years, often with paparazzi in tow. He describes how he found refuge in frequent trips to Africa, and in an apparent barb at his blood family, said: "I have a second family out there, a group of friends that literally brought me up."

But the most serious revelations about royal life and the breakdown of his relationship with brother Prince William appear to be saved for the final three parts, due to be released on December 15. "It's seriously threatening... the royal family," commentator Richard Fitzwilliams told AFP, branding it "a form of revenge". "It could be explosive," he said, adding: "It's very difficult to know what the royal family can do about it."

Racism claims

Netflix showcased the first trailer last week just as Harry's brother William made his first trip to the US as prince of Wales and heir to the throne, prompting accusations of sabotage. The timing could barely have been worse for William after Buckingham Palace sacked one of his godmothers as a courtier for using racially charged language to a black British woman at a reception.

For some, the incident reinforced incendiary claims by mixed-race Meghan, 41, that racism within the royal household was one of the reasons for leaving. The docuseries airs three months exactly since the death of Harry's grandmother Queen Elizabeth II, and a month before the long-awaited publication of his memoirs, "Spare". — AFP

racially charged brooch worn by Princess Michael of Kent to an event that Meghan attended in 2017.

"The thing with unconscious bias, it is actually no one's fault. But once it has been pointed out, or identified within yourself you then need to make it right." Harry reiterated feeling "ashamed" about being photographed wearing a Nazi uniform to a fancy-dress party in 2005, calling it "probably one of the biggest mistakes of my life".

'Explosive'

The documentary is lifting the lid on events that prompted the pair to quit royal life and move to the United States in 2020. Several British newspapers said the couple had declared "war" on the royal family.

The first parts trace the budding love story, interspersed with personal photographs and videos of the early courtship, and their attempts to keep it a secret.



A woman poses as she watches an episode of the newly released Netflix docuseries "Harry and Meghan" about Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, and Britain's Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, in London. — AFP

the first episodes broadcast, but was still on the end of accusations of "unconscious" racial bias and that it did not help Meghan or Diana after her 1992 divorce from Harry's father Charles, now king.

"To see another woman in my life who I love go through this feeding frenzy, that's hard," said Harry. "It is basically the hunter versus the prey." "The moment that she divorced, the moment she left the institution, then she was by herself," Harry, 38, said of his mother, who died in a Paris car crash in 1997. "Yes, she may well have been one of most influential, powerful women in the world, but she was completely exposed to this."

Meghan also took aim at the family for failing to counter negative press reports about her, saying "it was horrible, but I continued to hold the line, like say nothing". Her husband said the family ignored racist undertones in the reports.



Prince Harry (C), Duke of Sussex, Meghan (L), Duchess of Sussex, and Kerry Kennedy arrive at the 2022 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Ripple of Hope Award Gala at the Hilton Midtown in New York. — AFP

Royals brace as 'Harry & Meghan' airs on Netflix

The first three episodes of a docuseries on Prince Harry and his wife Meghan air on Thursday, with expectations of more damaging claims about British royal family life. The six-part fly-on-the-wall documentary, "Harry and Meghan", promises to lift the lid on events that prompted the pair to quit royal life and move to the United States in 2020.

Trailers aired in the run-up to the much-hyped Netflix release suggest it will further deepen the couple's rift with Harry's family since their acrimonious departure dubbed "Megxit". One British newspaper said the royal family were viewing the series as a "declaration of war" on the back of the content of promotional clips.

In one, Harry, 38, appears to accuse some within the royal household of leaking and planting stories about the couple in the British press, calling it "a dirty game". "No one sees what's going on behind closed doors," the prince says. "We know the full truth," he adds in another clip. "When the stakes are this high, doesn't it make sense to hear our story from us?" Meghan chips in. The first three episodes of what the US streaming giant vows will be "an unprecedented and in-depth documentary series" will be available from 0800 GMT.

The final three parts are released on December 15. "It's seriously threatening... the royal family," commentator Richard Fitzwilliams told AFP of the docuseries, branding it "a form of revenge". "It could be explosive," he said, adding: "It's very diffi-

cult to know what the royal family can do about it."

Diana

The timing could barely have been worse for William after Buckingham Palace sacked one of his godmothers as a courtier for using racially charged language to a black British woman at a reception.

For some, the incident reinforced incendiary claims by Meghan, 41, a mixed-race former television actor, that racism within the royal household was one of the reasons for leaving. The docuseries also appears set to draw parallels between her alleged treatment and that of Harry's mother Princess Diana, who died in a Paris car crash in 1997 while trying to shake off paparazzi photographers.

In the years before her death, Diana had opened up about the torment she felt after marrying into the hidebound British monarchy. "I was terrified, I didn't want history to repeat itself," Harry says in one trailer, adding: "I had to do everything I could to protect my family." Meghan notes that she "realised they (Buckingham Palace) are never going to protect you".

The docuseries airs three months exactly since the death of Harry's grandmother Queen Elizabeth II, and a month before the long-awaited publication of his memoirs, "Spare". As well as the potential for further reputational damage to the monarchy, it is also likely to fuel fresh hostilities with William.

The siblings, who were close after their mother's death, have grown increasingly estranged over recent years. Although both attended the queen's state funeral in September, relations were noticeably frosty as they failed to even make eye contact. — AFP



Kuwaiti fashion designer Montaha Al-Ajeel.



Kuwaiti fashion designer Montaha Al-Ajeel participates in the Third International Thai Silk Fashion Show held in Bangkok. — KUNA photos

Kuwaiti designer participates in Int'l Royal Thai Silk Fashion Week

Kuwaiti fashion designer Montaha Al-Ajeel participated in the Third International Thai Silk Fashion Show held in Bangkok with traditional pieces, alongside designers from 60 countries, including Italian designer Roccobarocco. The show, which lasts from the 6th to the 10th of December, is part of the activities of the annual celebration of costumes made of Thai royal silk, in honor of the Thai Queen Mother Sirikit and Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, with representatives of Kuwait Embassy attending.

Kuwait's participation in the annual celebration comes at an official invitation from the Thai government, said the Embassy in a

statement received by KUNA, stressing keenness to participate considering the strong bilateral relations. In a speech on behalf of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister for Legal Affairs of Thailand Wissanu Krea-ngam welcomed all countries participating in the annual celebration, stressing his country's endeavor to consolidate cooperation with all countries and boost the support of Thai silk, describing it as "silk diplomacy" Thai Mother Queen Sirikit provided designers with more than ten thousand meters of natural silk, to compete in designing traditional costumes that represent the heritage and culture of all nations, with the aim of strengthening the cultural aspect between Thailand and the participating countries. In this regard, a competition for the best design was announced under the supervision of an international jury and the membership of international designers Jimmy Choo and Roccobarocco, where the winners will be announced at the end of the Third International Royal Silk Fashion Show. — KUNA

Sexuality, fame in focus as Sundance film festival returns

Documentaries exploring sexuality and fame via the life stories of supermodel Brooke Shields, singer Little Richard and author Judy Blume are among the lineup for next month's Sundance film festival unveiled Wednesday.

Co-founded by Robert Redford and renowned for launching major independent, art house and documentary films, the festival is set to return in-person to the mountains of Utah from January 19, after two previous editions were forced to take place online due to COVID.

Stars including Anne Hathaway, Emilia Clarke, Jason Momoa and Chiwetel Ejiofor all have feature films in the lineup, while Emilia Jones returns to the festival that first played her best picture Oscar winner "CODA," with two new movies of her own.

On the documentary side, "Pretty Baby: Brooke Shields" tells the story of the global supermodel and actress who first achieved fame aged 12, and reflects on the objectification, sexualization and commodification of women and young girls. "Judy Blume Forever" charts how the US young adult fiction author came under attack for sexual content and offensive language in the 1980s, leading her to take a stand against book banning and censorship.

Both films "reflect the trends that we've seen in the last few years of biographically driven work" which allows viewers "to reopen history and to look at it from a different perspective," said Sundance senior programmer John Nein.

Similarly, "The Disappearance of Shere Hite" tracks the pioneering feminist author of "The Hite Report," whose bestselling 1976 book on the female orgasm provoked a sexual revolution, but who was forced to vanish from the public eye after drawing vicious criticism. And documentary "Little Richard: I Am Everything" tackles the Black queer origins of rock 'n' roll via the late, flamboyant singer, who renounced homosexuality and became a born-again Christian in later years.

The films each provide "a chance to engage with history in a very different way" via "the framework of a notable person within the arts and culture field," said Nein. Another prominent and topical theme in the lineup is films by and about Iranian women.

Documentary "Joonam," and feature films "The Persian Version" and "Shayda" all explore the stories of women in Iran and its diaspora communities, at a time when



Emilia Jones attends The 2022 Gotham Awards at Cipriani Wall Street on November 28, 2022 in New York City. — AFP

the country has been rocked by protests over its strict female dress code.

And Hollywood A-listers are expected to return to the festival in force after two years of virtual Q&As and Zoom interviews. Former "Game of Thrones" star Clarke appears alongside Ejiofor in "The Pod Generation," a near-future social satire in which a company has invented a detachable womb, enabling couples to share their pregnancy.

Hathaway and Thomasin McKenzie star in "Eileen," about a young secretary working at a prison who befriends a glamorous counselor with a dark secret.

"Aquaman" star Momoa narrates a documentary about the deep ocean and a mysterious organization planning to extract metals from the seabed. And Jones stars in dramas "Cat Person," adapted from a famous New Yorker short story, and "Fairland," based on a best-selling memoir about San Francisco's AIDS crisis. The 2023 Sundance Film Festival runs January 19-29. — AFP

Celine Dion cancels shows due to 'rare neurological disorder'

Celine Dion cancelled and postponed a series of European shows on Thursday over problems related to a "very rare neurological disorder" that is affecting her singing.

In a five-minute video posted on Instagram in French and English, a clearly emotional Dion said she had been suffering from health problems "for a long time". "Recently I have been diagnosed with a very rare neurological disorder called 'stiff person syndrome' which affects something like one in a million people," the Canadian diva said.

It has been causing spasms that "affect every aspect of my daily life, sometimes causing difficulties when I walk and not allowing me to use my vocal chords to sing the way I'm used to," she said. "It hurts me to tell you today this means I won't be ready to restart my tour in Europe in February."

She said she was supported by her children and a team of doctors every day to improve her condition, "but I have to admit I struggle". "All I know is singing, it's what I've done all my life and it's what I love to do the most," she added.

The singer had mentioned the spasms when she postponed the European tour earlier this year. "I miss seeing all of you, being on the stage, performing for you," she said, breaking into tears. Her spring dates in Europe, which were due to begin in Czech Republic in February, have been postponed to 2024, while eight of her summer shows have been cancelled entirely.

The "Courage World Tour" began in 2019, and Dion had completed 52 shows before the Covid-19 pandemic put the remainder on hold. She later cancelled the North American section of the tour due to her health problems. — AFP



Celine Dion

'DOWNTON SHABBY': US PRODUCER QUILTS HOLLYWOOD TO DO UP UK FAMILY PILE

As a child, Hopwood DePree heard stories about the family owning an ancestral country home in England but always thought it was the stuff of legends. That was until the Hollywood producer tracked down a red-brick 15th century pile with 60 rooms in the countryside in northwest England.

In 2017 the American quit California to live full-time near Manchester and restore the building, which had fallen into a state of disrepair, to its former glory. The unlikely chain of events began one evening in 2013 when DePree was looking on a genealogy website and found an old photo of the property.

"My gosh. It's the place my grandfather was talking about," he recalls thinking. The property was Hopwood Hall, explaining DePree's unusual first name passed down the generations, which he had always felt embarrassed about.

Soon afterwards DePree got on a plane on a mission to find Hopwood Hall, "just out of curiosity". His arrival was inauspicious: when he pushed open the door, there were rodents and part of the roof had collapsed.



A sign in the construction workers' rest area in Hopwood Hall.

But coming from Los Angeles, he remembers his sense of "emotion" at being surrounded by history: the original chimneys and doors and the nursery where his ancestors were born. Locals who showed DePree around were quick to warn that "if nothing is done in the next five to 10 years, it would crumble and turn into a ruin and be lost forever," he told AFP.



An aerial view shows Hopwood Hall, the ancestral home of US film producer Hopwood DePree, that dates from the 15th century, which he is in the process of restoring, in Middleton, northern England.

Hopwood Hall had been abandoned for decades. The owners, distant relatives of Hopwood, died without an heir after their two sons were killed in World War I. It was then used to make uniforms during World War II before being taken over by monks.

'Downton Shabby'

Five years have now passed since DePree began his renovations. The results are still far from Downton Abbey, the fictional stately home that is the setting for the hit British television series about an aristocratic family in the early 1900s.

DePree has written a book about the restoration process called "Downton Shabby", detailing his new life in glowing terms despite the slow progress. "Everywhere you look, there's something to do," says the 52-year-old, who fits the Hollywood mould with his blond hair and

blue eyes.

"I knew it was a massive project, but I had no idea of the many challenges, the delays... It's exciting." Touring the building site in a hard hat, DePree warns of a hole in the parquet floor or a badly placed beam, while construction workers repair the building's facade.

The 39 chimneys are being renovated, along with part of the roof. Now the most urgent task is to finish the windows. He calls it "a race against time, above all with the heavy rains here"-and the bats.

Despite the dilapidation, treasures have survived the ravages of time and robbers: the family crest on the chimney pieces, intricate wood carvings and the lozenge-shaped stained-glass windows.

One of the fireplaces was a gift from the poet Lord Byron, DePree said. The Romantic poet wrote many of his verses in

the castle. The composer Frederic Chopin played in the banqueting hall.

In the 1970s, such abandoned places began attracting various subcultures and Beatle John Lennon is rumoured to have visited. Street art painted on the walls dates back to this era.

Concerts and weddings

Hopwood has launched a YouTube channel where he shares his adventures and draws mockery for his meagre DIY skills. "I try to learn. But that's not my strength," he says. "Most of the project, I do it behind my computer".

DePree is seeking further investment as the project is set to cost around another £10 million (\$12.2 million). Several charitable foundations, including Historic England, are contributing financially, as are Rochdale Borough Council, local resi-

dents and of course DePree himself.

"We need private investment," he explains. Some local people have been helping out on the building site. "Many in the community have a link with Hopwood. Their ancestors used to work here. It was one of the biggest employers in the area," DePree says.

Now, the house is in one of England's most deprived regions. Hopwood Hall should eventually become a community hub, used for concerts and exhibitions and wedding parties in the gardens.

DePree hopes to finish in five years. "I miss the sun in LA. Sometimes my friends call me from the beach and it's pouring rain here," he says. "I have no regrets. This does feel like home." — AFP



US film producer Hopwood DePree inspects the interior of Hopwood Hall.



A newly-created cast that will replace the water damaged original in Hopwood Hall.



Hopwood DePree inspects a model of the original layout of Hopwood Hall inside one of the rooms of the Hall, his family's ancestral home.



Construction workers landscape the grounds of Hopwood Hall.

After 20 years in a cage, freedom for Albania brown bear

After more than two decades in a cage at an Albanian restaurant for diners to look at, brown bear Mark is heading towards a better life in an Austrian sanctuary. Until now, he has spent his life entertaining visitors to the Sofra e Ariut (Bear's Table) restaurant in Tirana along with his sister Liza.

But on Wednesday, under heavy

anaesthetic, he started his journey to the Aberbach shelter in northern Austria, thanks to the Four Paws animal welfare group. Their rescue operation came too late for his sister however. She died two years ago.

Both bears were brought to the restaurant as cubs two decades ago after their mother was shot dead, according to its then owners. There, they lived in the cage of some 100 square metres (1,075 square feet), with concrete floor, in poor conditions and on an inadequate diet, said Sajmir Shehu, the Four Paws project coordinator in Albania.

Left out in the open and at the mercy of extreme weather the bears were never allowed to hibernate, said Four Paws.

Now Mark, at 250 kilos (550 pounds) is overweight and has difficulties moving. Due to boredom and stress he has developed anxiety disorders, becoming aggressive and growling at the slightest noise.

And his condition only worsened in 2020 when Liza died. "Mark couldn't stop crying for two or three months," Higmet Murati, the bears' keeper for 20 years, told AFP. Their owners even let the pair mate, but none of the cubs survived because their stressed-out parents bit them to death, he added.

Wider problem in Albania

As a result of his ill-treatment, the bear needs emergency care to survive,

said Shehu. His poor diet and 20 years in a cage means he suffers from joint, muscle, eye and vital organs problems, said the Four Paws experts.

Once in the sanctuary, Mark will get the veterinary care and proper food he needs "so he can recover quickly and enjoy a life worthy of a bear", said Shehu. But this bear's plight is not the only case that Four Paws has had to deal with, said Shehu, who is a biodiversity expert.

This the 34th wild animal the organisation with help of its peers has moved out of Albania, he said. "Urgent action is also needed against the growing illegal wildlife trade in the country," said Four Paws coordinator Magdalena Scherk-Trettn.

The authorities in Albania say they are considering opening a sanctuary for confiscated wild animals. Four Paws says Mark is the last of Albania's so-called "restaurant bears". But it added in a statement: "While Mark's rescue is a significant milestone, bears in Albania are still in danger of being abused as pets or tourist attractions in the future without a change in legislation."

Big cats too were being traded illegally and suffering from poor treatment from private owners, it added. The restaurant meanwhile will be removing the cage that held them the bears - but it will keep its name. — AFP



Photograph shows the brown bear Mark, inside his cage at a restaurant in Tirana.



Animal welfare activists of "Four Paws" animal welfare organisation prepare the brown bear Mark to move from his cage.



After more than two decades entertaining guests at an Albanian restaurant, brown bear Mark is heading towards a better life in an Austrian sanctuary. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

SCIENTISTS FIND TWO MILLION YEAR-OLD DNA IN GREENLAND

Scientists in Greenland announced Wednesday they had found DNA dating back two million years—the oldest ever extracted—in sediment from the Ice Age, opening a new chapter in paleogenetics. “We are breaking the barrier of what we thought we could reach in terms of genetic studies,” said Mikkel Winther Pedersen, co-author of a new study published in science journal Nature. “It was long thought that one million years was the boundary of DNA survival, but now we are twice as old” as that, told AFP. They found the DNA fragments in sediment from the northernmost part of Greenland known as Kap Copenhagen, said the University of Copenhagen lecturer.

The fragments “come from an environment that we do not see anywhere on Earth today,” he added. Frozen in a remote unpopulated area, the DNA had been very well preserved. New technology enabled the scientists to determine that the 41 fragments were more than a million years older than the oldest known DNA, from a Siberian mammoth.

They had to first determine whether there was DNA hidden in the clay and quartz, then see whether it could be removed from the sediment to examine it. The method used “provides a fundamental understanding of why minerals, or sediments, can preserve DNA”, said Karina Sand, who heads the geobiology team at the University of Copenhagen and who took part in the study. “It’s a Pandora’s box we’re just about to open up”, she added.



This undated handout photo received on December 6, 2022 shows Eske Willerslev and Kurt H Kjr exposing fresh layers for sampling of sediments at the Kap Kobenhavn geological formation in northern Greenland, Denmark.



Handout photo shows a two million-year-old trunk from a larch tree still stuck in the permafrost within the coastal deposits - the tree was carried to the sea by the rivers that eroded the former forested landscape - at the Kap Kobenhavn geological formation in northern Greenland, Denmark. — AFP photos

Species adaptability

The “rivers running through the environment transported minerals and organic material into the marine environment and this was where these terrestrial sediments were deposited”, said Winther Pedersen. Then, at some point around two million years ago, “this land mass beneath the water was raised up and became a part of North Greenland”, he explained. Today, Kap Copenhagen is an Arctic desert, where different types of deposits, including plant and insect fos-

sils preserved in excellent condition, have already been discovered.

But scientists hadn’t tried to establish the fossils’ DNA, and very little was known about the presence of animals at the time. The research team, which began its work in 2006, has now made it possible to paint a picture of what the region looked like two million years ago.

“We had this forested environment with mastodons and reindeer and hares running around in the landscape together with a lot of different plant species”, he

said, they had found 102 different kinds of plant. The presence of mastodons was particularly noteworthy, he added, never having been found so far north before. The discovery has also given researchers more information about the adaptability of species. Two million years ago, Greenland had temperatures 11 to 17 degrees warmer than today, but at its latitude, the sun doesn’t set in summer nor rise in winter.

“We don’t see this environment anywhere, this mix of species anywhere on

Earth today”, said Winther Pedersen. “The plasticity in species, how species are actually able to adapt to different types of climate, might be different than what we previously thought.

“And obviously, it makes us look for newer and older sites. “There are several different sites across the world that actually have geological deposits that go this far back. And even further back,” he added. — AFP



A cafeteria employee hands one of the meals of the day to a student at the cafeteria at Polytechnique in Montreal. — AFP photos

Canadian university identifies low carbon foods for student meals

Trays in hand, Polytechnique Montreal students line up at the cafeteria and through a fogged up buffet counter glass, check out dishes that now come with information about their carbon footprint. “I’m surprised to see that a dish with meat is better than a vegetarian dish,” comments Elizabeth Labonte, a chemical engineering student, referring to their environmental impact.



Carole-Anne Lapierre, Analyst for agriculture and food systems at Equiterre, poses for a portrait after an interview about the carbon footprint calculation system implemented by Polytechnique in Montreal.

Every Thursday, three hot meal options receive a grade from A to F which corresponds “to a range of equivalent CO2 emissions in kilograms,” explains Patrick Cigana of the school’s Office of Sustainable Development.

Supported by the student body, the project aims to educate and raise awareness, says Cigana. “It can help students know what is best for the environment,” confirms Marie Louroux, a 22-year-old student who also suggests reducing the price of the least-polluting dishes.

“For there to be a real change in our



A student waits in line to get a meal at the cafeteria at Polytechnique in Montreal.

viewpoints, we really have to become aware of this parameter,” adds Daniel Fernandez. He is a master’s student who is about to dig into his lunch of meat and potatoes, rated B compared to the D+ given to the vegetable focaccia because of its au gratin cheese.

From farm to plate

In order to calculate the carbon footprint of each dish, the engineering school had each recipe analysed by the on-campus International Reference Center for Life Cycle Analysis and Sustainable Transition (CIRAIG).

A small team of researchers and students were able to calculate the carbon footprint of each ingredient based on previously compiled data bases. “It really starts from the field, from the moment we cultivate the plant, until the dish is served in the cafeteria”, explains Francois Saunier, deputy general manager of the research center. Pointing to diagrams on his computer, he specifies that these calculations include all transport but also food waste as well as cooking in the cafeteria. “There are certain results that lead the consumer to ask questions, and that breaks down preconceived ideas,” adds the researcher, noting the unexpectedly high carbon footprint of cheese or rice, for example. Both are a major source of methane emissions, he says.

Top CO2 emissions source

Often misunderstood, the food system—including production, packaging and distribution—represents the “primary source of greenhouse gas emissions at the global level,” according to Carole-Anne Lapierre, an agriculture and food systems analyst at Equiterre. Polytechnique’s initiative “gives us immense power as consumers, because we can make different choices,” adds the expert, who nevertheless recognizes the difficulty of completely changing one’s diet and so recommends doing it “in the form of challenges,” step by step.

Although the Quebec university’s pilot project is unique in Canada, similar concepts were developed for menus of certain British restaurants and at a French university in 2019. But for some, their choices are dictated primarily “by price above all else,” especially during the current period of soaring inflation, says Chelbali Ryad, 24, after a stop at the checkout counter to pay for his meal. For the university’s Cigana, the most important thing is to raise awareness, saying “all that people learn through this program, they can apply it at home too”. — AFP

Snow problem! The icy city where nothing stops cyclists

Winter temperatures that drop to minus 25 degrees Celsius do not stop cyclists in the Finnish city of Oulu. The city which calls itself the “capital of winter cycling” has become a pin-up of sustainable transport, with most children still biking to school at minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus 4 degrees Fahrenheit).

“I cycle all year around. I don’t even own a car,” Ari Karjalainen told AFP as he returned home after shopping for groceries. Despite the snow, bike racks are jam-packed in downtown Oulu, with bundled-up locals leaving vapour trails in their wake as they cycle around the city in the icy air.

“Just put on enough clothes,” quipped 22-year-old Mimmi Kahkonen when asked how she manages to cycle in the frosty weather. For many locals, even the term “winter cycling” sounds odd, as biking all year round is so common despite the city being only a little more than 100 miles (160 kilometres) south of the Arctic Circle.

Many cyclists use wider winter tyres with better grip, sometimes with steel spikes, but some people bike with the same tyres year-round. “We are so used to the winter that we don’t consider it much of a challenge,” Harri Vaarala, one of the city’s traffic engineers, told AFP.

While the seaside city averages five months of snow and below-zero temperatures, a fifth of all journeys within Oulu are done by bike. Part of what makes this possible is the priority its main bike lanes get over roads for snow ploughs, said Vaarala.



A man is seen as he rides a bicycle on a snowy cycle track. — AFP photos

Bike ‘highways’

That means that 1,000 of the 1,200 pupils at Metsokangas school bike to school throughout the winter. In recent years, the city has opened multiple new

“cycling highways”, six-metre-wide roads paved in red asphalt, adding to the nearly 1,000 kilometres of existing bike lanes.

According to Vaarala, the city has made “a clear value-based decision” to support cycling, at times prioritising cyclists over motorists. “In some cases, we have moved motorways to fit in a good quality bike lane,” he said.

When the city sought out contractors for its winter maintenance, one of the conditions was that the snow plough drivers as well as their supervisors had to cycle the routes they maintain. “This gives them a first-hand understanding of how different conditions affect cycling,” Vaarala said.

The city also employs a number of “cycling agents” that report weekly on how well the bike lanes are maintained, which directly affects the contractors’ bonuses. To combat snow covering traffic signs, Oulu is also experimenting with new technological solutions to make winter cycling safer. In some locations along bike lanes, traffic signs are illuminated on top of the snow using projectors. — AFP



This picture taken on December 1, 2022 in Oulu, Finland shows a man as he rides a bicycle on a snowy cycle track.



Picture shows people with bicycles. Winter’s first snowfall and freezing temperatures do not mean the end of the cycling season in the northern Finnish city of Oulu, which brands itself the “capital of winter cycling”.

Sports

Head, Labuschagne slam centuries as Australia take charge against Windies

Labuschagne smacks 204; Head hits a ton

News in brief

Chen outshines Yamaguchi

BANGKOK: Top-ranked women's singles star Akane Yamaguchi suffered a shock defeat at the season-ending Badminton World Tour Finals in Bangkok on Thursday at the hands of Olympic champion Chen Yufei. The Badminton World Federation shifted the \$1.5 million flagship event to Bangkok's Nimibutr Arena because tough pandemic restrictions forced the tournament out of Guangzhou in China. It was a vital win for fourth-ranked Chen - who had a disappointing opening round, losing to Indonesian rising star Gregoria Mariska Tunjung on Wednesday. Chen claimed the first game 21-19 but only after Yamaguchi - who retained her world title in August - saved three game points.

Portugal deny walkout threat

DOHA: The Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) on Thursday denied Cristiano Ronaldo threatened to abandon the World Cup squad after being benched against Switzerland. The 37-year-old striker was surprisingly dropped for the last 16 clash on Tuesday, with his replacement Goncalo Ramos netting a hat-trick in the 6-1 victory. Ronaldo appeared from the bench, but a report from Portuguese publication Record said the striker had previously threatened to leave in a tense conversation with coach Fernando Santos. "The FPF clarifies that at no time did the captain of the Seleccion, Cristiano Ronaldo, threaten to leave the national team during the stay in Qatar," said the federation.

Dutch Grand Prix extended

PARIS: The Dutch Grand Prix has been extended through until 2025, Formula One organisers announced Thursday. The new agreement adds on two more races to the original three-year contract, which began in 2021 when the Dutch Grand Prix returned to the calendar for the first time since 1985. Held at the seaside town of Zandvoort, the 2021 and 2022 events were both won by home hero and reigning world champion Max Verstappen. "The Dutch Grand Prix has quickly established itself on the calendar as a fan favourite, bringing incredible energy and a great fan experience every year," said Stefano Domenicali, president and CEO of Formula 1.

Tite defends celebrations

DOHA: Brazil coach Tite has hit back at criticism of his players' dancing goal celebrations in their World Cup win over South Korea, dismissing suggestions they showed a lack of respect. The tournament favorites produced some carnival football as they crushed the Koreans 4-1 on Monday and celebrated their goals with choreographed moves, while even Tite himself joined in at one point. The celebrations divided opinion outside Brazil and the dancing by Neymar and his teammates has been one of the main talking points going into Friday's quarter-final clash with Croatia in Doha. "This is not my national team. It is the Brazilian national team for which I have responsibility as coach," Tite said when asked about the celebrations at a press conference on Thursday.

Record \$360m MLB deal

NEW YORK: Superstar slugger Aaron Judge has agreed to a Major League Baseball record nine-year deal worth \$360 million to return to the New York Yankees, according to multiple reports on Wednesday. The 30-year-old US free agent outfielder, who smashed an American League record 62 home runs last season, had rejected a seven-year Yankees offer worth \$213.5 million before the 2022 campaign. His new deal, according to ESPN and MLB's website plus multiple New York media outlets, means Judge made \$150 million by betting on himself in the 2022 campaign, when he led MLB in homers, runs scored with 133 and runs batted in with 131. Judge, who batted .311, was named the 2022 American League Most Valuable Player.

Tennis chiefs slam ATP

LONDON: British tennis chiefs said Wednesday they were "disappointed" at being fined \$1 million by the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) for banning Russian and Belarusian players from their events. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) came under pressure from the British government to impose a ban. Russian and Belarusian players were eventually barred from all five ATP tournaments staged by the LTA, including the longstanding Queen's Club event in London. The All England Club, which organizes Wimbledon, also banned them from competing at this year's edition of tennis' oldest Slam. — From AFP

ADELAIDE: Run machine Marnus Labuschagne belted a third successive Test century and Travis Head also made a ton Thursday as Australia seized control on day one of the pink-ball second Test against an injury-hit West Indies. Consistent number three Labuschagne smacked 204 then 104 not out at the first Test in Perth to overtake England's Joe Root this week as the world's top-ranked Test batsman.

And he carried that form to Adelaide with a patient unbeaten 120 to again torment the Caribbean team, as the hosts amassed 330-3 by stumps. The chanceless Head was not out 114, relieved at converting to three figures after he was out for 99 in the first Test. The visitors, who are missing three first-choice bowlers, enjoyed some success on a flat track that offered little for the fast bowlers, removing David Warner (21), Usman Khawaja (62), and captain Steve Smith for a duck. Khawaja surpassed 1,000 Test runs for the year in his knock, becoming only the third man in 2022 to hit the landmark after Root and fellow Englishman Jonny Bairstow, who have both played more matches.

He departed lbw to debutant Devon Thomas, who earned his first Test wicket. Like Labuschagne, Smith smacked 200 in Perth but he only lasted eight balls, caught and bowled by Jason Holder, while Warner nicked Alzarri Joseph to wicketkeeper Joshua Da Silva. The home side, who have won every day-night Test they have contested, including six-from-six in Adelaide, are looking to wrap up the two-match series after winning the opener by 164 runs. Both sides were without key players.

Australian pace spearheads Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood were ruled out, with Scott Boland and Michael Neser replacing them. Three West Indian mainstays were also omitted injured, with all-rounder Kyle Mayers joining fast bowlers Kemar

Ballance leaves Yorkshire amid racism row

LONDON: Former England batsman Gary Ballance is to leave Yorkshire in search of a "fresh start" following his part in the Azeem Rafiq racism row that sent shock waves through the English game. Ballance, 33, has agreed a release from his Yorkshire deal but will not return to county cricket until 2024 at the earliest. The Zimbabwe-born left-hander, who represented England in 23 Tests and 16 one-day internationals from 2013-2017, did not play for the White Rose county last season, with his career derailed by racism allegations and mental health struggles.

He was named by Rafiq as one of the Yorkshire team-mates who used racially discriminatory language, something Ballance admitted to and apologized for in a meeting between the former friends earlier this year. Ballance is also facing an England and Wales Cricket Board disrepute charge. He subsequently requested the final two years of his Yorkshire contract to be cancelled, with the Headingley-based club agreeing on the understanding he would not play for a rival English county in the 2023 season. "It has been a privilege to play for this great club," said Ballance in a statement issued Wednesday.

"On a personal level, I have gone through a challenging period - and after much discussion I decided, together with my family, that it would be right to make a change." He added: "I asked the

Stormers tackle Clermont in Cup

JOHANNESBURG: Champions Cup newcomers Stormers will lack five regulars, including Springboks Frans Malherbe, Marvin Orie and Evan Roos, when they face "fearsome" Clermont in France on Saturday. "When Clermont are at home and on fire, they are really fearsome," said Rugby World Cup-winning former Springboks coach Jake White, who spent several seasons in charge of Montpellier.

White now coaches Bulls, who will host another French club, Challenge Cup title-holders Lyon, as South African sides debut in the premier European club competition. Stormers and South Africa prop Steven Kitshoff agrees with White, telling AFP that "when I played for Bordeaux-Begles it (Clermont) was one of the toughest places to go".

It will not help Stormers' hopes of success that, apart from prop Malherbe, lock Orie and No.8 Roos, they will also miss loose forwards Willie Engelbrecht and Nama Xaba through injury. Coach John Dobson, who guided the Cape Town outfit to the United Rugby Championship (URC) title last season, shrugged off the blows. "Making our Champions Cup debut is a special occasion and we want to do justice to our talents," he said. Dobson can call on three forwards who toured Europe with South Africa last month - Kitshoff, lock Salmaan Moerat and flanker Deon Fourie.

Out-of-favor Springboks hooker Joseph Dweba is also in a 26-man squad and knows what to expect in France having spent two seasons with Bordeaux. While Stormers' pack is depleted, they boast an exciting backline, including Damian Willemse, one of the finds of the 2022 Springbok season. In the absence of injured fly-half Handre Pollard, Willemse



ADELAIDE: West Indies bowler Alzarri Joseph (right) bowls to Australia's Marnus Labuschagne (center) on the first day of the second cricket Test match between Australia and the West Indies on December 8, 2022. — AFP

Roach and Jayden Seales on the sidelines. Anderson Phillip, Marquino Mindley and Thomas started instead, with the latter two on debut. But in another setback, Mindley, who only arrived in Adelaide on Tuesday after a dash from Jamaica, lasted just two overs before limping off to have a scan for a hamstring problem.

Their situation is so dire that former Test player Omar Phillips, who was playing club cricket in

club if it was willing to release me from my contract, and I am grateful for its understanding as we have reached agreement. "The support Yorkshire has given me off the pitch over the past year has been fantastic and I am appreciative of the club's help, but I hope that my decision will mean that my career can have a fresh start."

Yorkshire managing director Darren Gough explained the club had "reluctantly" agreed to Ballance's request. "We are sad to see Gary go, but he leaves with our best wishes," Gough said. "He has been a mainstay of our side for many years, and a superb batsman." The former England fast bowler added: "As a club, we recognise that the last 18 months have been difficult for Gary, for numerous reasons, and the most important thing for him is to get better and play again."

Rafiq, a 31-year-old former spinner, first raised allegations of racism and bullying in September 2020, related to his two spells at Yorkshire, which eventually led to a mass clear-out of senior boardroom figures and coaching staff. Pakistan-born Rafiq, who said the abuse helped curtail his career, recently revealed plans to move overseas in the near future with his wife, children and parents in order to protect his family from further attacks.

English cricket disciplinary proceedings against Yorkshire and seven individuals regarding Rafiq's treatment were due to take place last month. But they have been delayed due to appeals against any hearings being held in public. Rafiq previously gave public testimony to a committee of British lawmakers but that hearing, unlike any convened by English cricket chiefs, was protected by parliamentary privilege that prevents witnesses from being sued. — AFP

was the playmaker in narrow losses to Ireland and France and convincing victories over Italy and England. The 24-year-old can also play full-back, inside centre, which some coaches consider his best position, and on the wing.

Bulls look to Goosen

With recently-capped Springbok Manie Libbok the Stormers' first-choice fly-half, Willemse could start at full-back against Clermont. Another South Africa versus France showdown pits Bulls against Lyon in Pretoria. Bulls' preparations have been overshadowed by the disappearance of winger Sibusiso Nkosi, who was found at the home of his father on Monday after going missing for three weeks. Nkosi, who has made 16 appearances for the Springboks, blamed mental stress for his action, which triggered a nationwide search by police.

Coach White is pinning his hopes of winning on fly-half Johan Goosen, whose previous clubs included Racing 92 and Montpellier. "If he can play like he did against Cardiff with limited training time, we are excited about what Johan can do," said the coach after a 45-9 triumph over the Welsh in the URC last weekend. Goosen spent most of this year sidelined by injuries, which forced him out of the Springboks tour to Europe. Sharks are the only South African debutants not facing French opponents this weekend - they host English club Harlequins before playing in Bordeaux next Friday.

The Durban franchise fired coach Sean Everitt last week after a 35-0 URC loss at home to Cardiff and replaced him with their director of rugby and former national sevens team coach Neil Powell. Powell has won the approval of World Cup-winning Springboks captain and flanker Siya Kolisi, who described the coach as "an honest and direct man who gets stuck in with the boys". Kolisi is among six current Springboks who could confront the Harlequins, but prop Thomas du Toit misses out after being sent off against England two weeks ago. — AFP

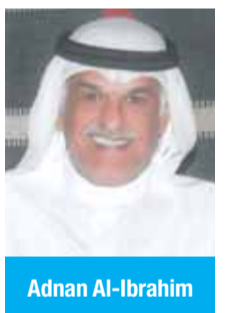
Shooting tournament ends in style

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sport Club (KSSC) will conclude the Late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem Championship Saturday with an awarding ceremony (at 3:30 pm). Shooters winning top places in the 10m air pistol and rifle and Olympic archery will be awarded. KSSC

Assistant treasurer Adnan Al-Ibrahim thanked, on behalf of the shooting community, the organizing committee for its efforts. He also thanked the family of the Late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem for their continued support.

Al-Ibrahim was happy for the participation of shooters from Kuwait, Bahrain and Kazakhstan - making the number to reach 200. Meanwhile Deputy Technical Director for Pistol and Rifle Abdallah Barakat said the Cup of Late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem is a dear one for all those involved in shooting. He expected the competitions to be hard.



Adnan Al-Ibrahim



Bader and Mohammad Al-Mailam

Show Jumping Championship

KUWAIT: Al-Sakeb Equestrian Sports Club will organize its first Show Jumping Championship on Friday (8:30 am) at Messila Equestrian Club in Subhan area. Chairman of Al-Sakeb Club Mohammad Al-Mailam said there is a major development in Show Jumping lately due to the declaration of several local clubs - adding that "Sakeb" was the first horse of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He rode it during the battle of Uhud.

Chairman of Messila Club Bader Al-Mailam said the championship is being held in partnership with Sakeb Club, adding that he noticed the appearance of new riders both male and female during local championship, competing well in the beginners rounds. Referees committee is headed by Nidhar Al-Mostafa along with Raghad Al-Dabbous, Dalal Al-Obaid and Lama Abdelal. Competitions will be at 70-90, 105, 115, 125 and 135cm heights.

Dutch, Argentines meet again with WCup history in the air

Netherlands, Argentina face off in quarter-final

DOHA: Merely a glance at their iconic orange or blue and white striped shirts is enough to evoke memories of World Cups past and more history will surely be written on Friday when the Netherlands face Argentina in their quarter-final. Argentina have the pride that comes from being two-times world champions while the Netherlands carry the baggage of being three-times beaten finalists. The game is far from being a nostalgia-fest, however, pitting one of the greatest forwards of all time against one of the finest defenders of the modern era, with Lionel Messi trying to unpick a defense marshaled by Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk.

The game also pits the youngest manager in the tournament against the oldest. Argentina's 44-year-old coach Lionel Scaloni, in his first major tournament, will have to out-think the wily 71-year-old Louis van Gaal, whose resume includes league titles with Barcelona and Bayern Munich as well as a Champions League victory with Ajax. The South Americans came into the tournament, as always, with high hopes in their homeland of a victory to match those celebrated in 1978 and 1986, while the Dutch had more tempered expectations given their failure to qualify four years ago.

Smooth Progress

It has been smooth progress in Qatar for the Dutch though, who topped their group and then beat the United States in the last 16 with some com-

fort and style, looking solid at the back and - despite critics labeling them dull - increasingly effective in their attacking play. With Memphis Depay's fitness gradually improving and Cody Gakpo having enjoyed a good tournament, the Dutch have a punch to their attack that many feared would be missing. Argentina began the tournament with a shock loss to Saudi Arabia, one of the biggest upsets in World Cup history, but recovered to finish first in the group. Messi then turned on the style as they overcame Australia to book their place in the last eight.

Van Gaal unsurprisingly sees Messi's creativity as a serious threat but he raised some eyebrows when he also hinted at the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner's lack of defensive work-rate. "Messi is the most dangerous creative player, he is able to create a lot and to score goals himself. But when they lose the ball he doesn't participate much, this gives us chances", he said. Surprisingly, given their pedigree, Argentina have never beaten the Netherlands inside 90 minutes in their nine meetings in World Cup and friendly encounters. But it is their victory on penalties in Sao Paulo in the semi-final in 2014 that lingers in the mind for Van Gaal, who was in charge of the Netherlands at the time. Van Gaal noted that while Messi was neutralized by the Netherlands in that game it counted for little given that the Argentines advanced after a shootout to end the Dutch dream of finally celebrating a World Cup title. — AFP



DOHA: This combination of pictures shows a file photo of Netherlands' forward #10 Memphis Depay and Argentina's forward #10 Lionel Messi during the Qatar 2022 World Cup round of 16 football match. Netherlands and Argentina will meet in one of the quarter-finals of the Qatar 2022 World Cup on December 9. — AFP

The importance of exercise physiology in World Cup

By Ricardo Guerra

Over the last few decades, the field of exercise physiology has made great strides in its research, and various international soccer clubs have increasingly begun to integrate its principles into their methodologies, bringing them into line with other sports such as track and field, cycling and weightlifting, which have a long history of being influenced by the exercise sciences. During the second phase of the World Cup, where matches are played back-to-back, squads hoping to advance in the competition may need to apply this scientific research more than ever.

The Brazilians are coming from a relatively easy match against the South Koreans, unequivocally beating them with a score of 4 to 1. By contrast, the Croatians fought a grueling battle against the Japanese that went into overtime and was decided on penalty kicks. Brazil even had the opportunity to take some of their main players out of the game, allowing them to rest before the end of the second half. Neymar, for example, did not play the full second half, while Modric looked physically exhausted and depleted after playing almost 100 minutes.

Croatia is going into their quarterfinal match against the Brazilians with a huge disadvantage from the start. Their attempt to recover in time to start the match on equal footing will be a gargantuan challenge. As mentioned earlier, during the second phase of the World Cup, players are at times given only two or three days of recovery time before the next match. Therefore, implementing recovery strategies and controlling the workload become paramount.

A squad may get by without using some of these strategies when only one match is played, with plenty of rest time beforehand. But physiological recovery strategies become essential when back-to-back matches significantly curtail the time for recuperation, and they are more important still when one of the teams in question played overtime while their opponent did not—precisely the situation that Croatia faces when they meet Brazil on Friday for the quarterfinal of the World Cup.

Detrimental alterations to musculoskeletal systems and subsystems can be significant following an extremely stressful bout of physical exertion such as a soccer match. Some of these physiological subsystems may take weeks to be fully reconstituted. It's a race against time to implement nutritional and supplementation strategies targeting specific physiological systems. For instance, the hours following an exhausting soccer match are critical for the replenishment of glycogen, a fuel stored in muscle that is vital for its function.

Think of glycogen as the gasoline that fuels skeletal muscles. Without enough gas to finish a race, even an F1 McLaren will be rendered useless. Likewise, even a team made up entirely of superstars will sputter on the field if their glycogen reserves are depleted before the day of the match. In tandem with supplementation, during the days following a hard-fought match, the training load needs to be reassessed and placed under strict control mechanisms that abide by the findings of exercise physiology research.

What teams should avoid at all costs is to keep players in a state of perpetual fuel depletion. This can only be done with a tandem strategy: carefully controlling the workload in between matches while using all proper recovery protocols. However, knowledge of this dual dynamic-load control and supplementation strategies-is not universal in the field, and even in countries with access to this knowledge, a given manager may impede the implementation of these tools. One would be very surprised at what some management teams subject their own players to during the 48 hours before a match.

Having said that, even though Croatia is going into this match with a huge disadvantage, they have showed plenty of grit over their years of competition. Their mental fortitude is apparent. It may be worthwhile to note the traumatic recent history of the Croatian people, whose unity was forged during the bloody conflict that followed the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Some players in the squad directly faced the brunt of that trauma. Undoubtedly, events such as these can galvanize a group of united men to accomplish extraordinary feats.

But this time around, grit may not be enough to surpass the challenge that faces them. Brazil is a formidable opponent. The individual talent contained in the Selecao is so mind-boggling that it may make up for any tactical or methodological shortcomings. To make matters worse for the Croatians, they play a high-tempo soccer characterized by hard and deep pressing for extended periods of time. If they don't avoid or at least curtail the use of such tactics, they may be in for a long night. With their abundance of individual talent, the Brazilians may obliterate that strategy and find further gaps at the opponent's end of the field.

It may be more advisable for Croatia to implement Systemic Economical Cohesive Play (SECP) strategies that slow down the game and conserve energy. Pacing and managing the intensity of play during the game are critical characteristics of SECP, and certain tactical systems of play are more conducive to such a strategy. Morocco and the Netherlands have successfully adopted some of these SECP schemes, such as dropping back into a defensive formation, and so far they have reaped the rewards.

That said, soccer does not always follow a predictable script. There is a transcendental and enigmatic element to a soccer match, and the history of sports in general is full of black swan events. Who among us does not remember the "Hand of God" goal of 1986? On Friday we will find out which team the force that governs the universe supports. Croatia may just need a hand!

Flick to remain Germany coach despite fiasco

BERLIN: Germany coach Hansi Flick will keep his job and lead the team at Euro 2024 despite their crushing World Cup disappointment, the German Football Association (DFB) said on Wednesday. "We have full confidence in Hansi Flick that he will master this challenge together with his team," Bernd Neundorff, president of the DFB, said in a statement after a crisis meeting with Flick. The move means Flick, 57, will get the chance to seek redemption at the Euros on home soil in Germany.

"My coaching team and I are optimistic about the European Championship in our own country," Flick said. "We as a team can achieve much more than we showed in Qatar. We missed a great opportunity there," he added. "We will learn our lessons from this." Flick took over as Germany coach from former mentor Joachim Loew after the European Championship in 2021. He had previously served as deputy to Loew in Germany's 2014 World Cup triumph as well as leading Bayern Munich to a treble in 2020.

He made a flying start to the job with eight wins, leaving Germany confident heading into the tournament in Qatar. However, the four-time World Cup winners crashed out in the group stages after losing to Japan in their opening game. Flick had said on the night that he wanted to remain in the job and see out his contract. However, the same was true of team director Oliver Bierhoff, who nevertheless went on to stand aside earlier this week—much to Flick's disappointment.

Speculation had since been rife that Flick may also resign. He will now be faced with the task of leading Germany to victory at the European Championships without his close confidant. With regard to Bierhoff's successor, Neundorff said the DFB had agreed to "first discuss the future structure of this area of responsibility within the DFB and then make a personnel decision". Flick helped mastermind a golden era as Loew's assistant coach for eight years up until 2014, culminating with Germany's World Cup win in Brazil. After leaving the German Football Association (DFB) in 2017, he then became a coaching star in his own right thanks to a whirlwind spell in charge of Bayern Munich.

In just 18 months at the helm of Germany's biggest club, Flick racked up seven trophies, including a historic Bundesliga, German Cup and Champions League treble in the 2019/20 season. His success at Bayern Munich and historic ties to the DFB made him strong favorite to take over the national team after Loew announced he would end a 15-year reign following the delayed Euro 2020. In 19 international matches under



Germany's head coach Hansi Flick

Flick's leadership so far, Germany have 11 wins, six draws and two defeats—including the painful loss to Japan in Qatar. Born in 1965, Flick enjoyed a short but successful playing career, winning four Bundesliga titles with Bayern Munich in the late 1980s. — AFP

After injuries forced the midfielder to retire at 28, he had spells coaching lower-league clubs, and notably kickstarted Hoffenheim's eventual rise to the Bundesliga with promotion from the fourth to the third tier in 2001. Yet it was as Loew's assistant from 2006 to 2014 that Flick gained national fame, helping Germany to five successive semi-final appearances at major tournaments. — AFP

Today's matches on TV

FIFA World Cup 2022	
Croatia v Brazil	18:00
beIN Sports HD 3 Max	
beIN Sports HD 1 Max	
beIN 4K HDR	
beIN Sports Connect	
beIN Sports HD 5 Max	
TOD App - beIN SPORTS	
Netherlands v Argentina	22:00
beIN Sports 1 FR	
beIN Sports HD 3 Max	
beIN Sports HD 1 Max	
beIN 4K HDR	
beIN Sports Connect	
beIN Sports HD 5 Max	
TOD App - beIN SPORTS	

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwalkh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Industrial Shuwalkh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

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WCup heavyweights brace for quarter-finals; Spain fire coach

Brazil gear up for a showdown with Croatia



Spain's coach Luis Enrique

DOHA: Brazil were gearing up for a showdown with Croatia while Argentina prepared to face the Netherlands as anticipation mounted on Thursday on the eve the World Cup quarter-finals. After three weeks of pulsating action, just eight teams are left standing as the 32-nation tournament heads into the final rounds of the knockout competition after a two-day break. A blockbuster set of quarter-finals gets under way on Friday when five-times champions Brazil face 2018 runners-up Croatia. That clash is the appetiser for another heavyweight World Cup collision between Lionel Messi's Argentina and three-time losing finalists the Netherlands.

On Saturday, Morocco will carry the flag for African football in their quarter-final clash with Portugal before holders France face England in an eagerly anticipated showdown. Wins for Argentina and Brazil on Friday would set up a titanic semi-final between the two South American heavyweights. For now though Brazil are looking no further than Friday's assignment against Croatia at the Education City Stadium in Doha.

"They have individual quality and collective quality as well as a resilience and persistence," Brazil coach Tite said of Croatia. "We are aware of their virtues but my focus is on maintaining our standards and whoever plays best will go through." Croatia captain Luka Modric said Thursday that his side were determined to progress beyond the last eight. "We did a great thing by going to the quarter-finals, but regardless of that we would like to do more," the Real Madrid midfielder said. "We have to play our best match. And if we do that we have a chance of winning."

Ronaldo bust-up denied

On Saturday, all eyes will be on France and England's battle at the Al-Bayt Stadium, the Bedouin-tent inspired structure located in the desert outside Doha. England said Thursday that forward Raheem Sterling is set to return to the squad after initially leaving the team's World Cup base following a break-in at his family home. Sterling did not feature in England's squad for the 3-0 last-16 win against Senegal, and it would be a major surprise if the 28-year-old starts against France. In Saturday's other quarter-final, buoyant Portugal will be looking to end Morocco's fairytale run to the last eight.

Portugal produced one of the most scintillating displays of the tournament by dismantling Switzerland 6-1 in the last 16 after coach Fernando Santos opted to drop Cristiano Ronaldo. Ronaldo's replacement, 21-year-old Goncalo Ramos, fired a brilliant hat-trick as Portugal ran riot. According to reports in Portugal, Santos's bombshell decision to drop Ronaldo prompted the 37-year-old superstar to threaten to walk out of the team camp. But the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) issued a statement denying the reported bust-

up with the former Real Madrid and Manchester United star.

"The FPF clarifies that at no time did the captain of the Selecao, Cristiano Ronaldo, threaten to leave the national team during the stay in Qatar," said the federation. "Every day Ronaldo is building up a unique track record at the service of the national team and the country, which must be respected."

Elsewhere on Thursday, Spanish football authorities announced the dismissal of coach Luis Enrique following the team's shock elimination against Morocco, naming under-21s boss Luis de la Fuente as his replacement. Spain hammered Costa Rica 7-0 in their opening game in Qatar but suffered a shock defeat by Japan that resulted in a second-place finish in Group E. Spain were strong favorites to beat Morocco in the first knockout round but lost 3-0 on penalties after the game finished 0-0 following extra-time. "Both the president, Luis Rubiales, and the sporting director, Jose Francisco Molina, have told the coach their decision," the RFEF (football association) said in a statement. — AFP

Nerveless Hakimi fires Morocco into uncharted territory



DOHA: Morocco's defender #02 Achraf Hakimi talks to fans after winning the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group F football match between Canada and Morocco at the Al-Thumama Stadium in Doha. — AFP

DOHA: If Achraf Hakimi was feeling the weight of expectation on his shoulders as he stepped up to take a history-making penalty for Morocco against Spain, he did not show it. The defender showed nerves of steel to dink the ball over goalkeeper Unai Simon and seal a 3-0 shootout win over the hapless Spaniards, after the match finished goalless on Tuesday. The Madrid-born Paris Saint-Germain player steered Morocco into uncharted territory, with the north African side becoming the first from the Arab world to reach the last eight at a World Cup.

Wild celebrations erupted in Morocco and across Europe as the diaspora rejoiced, from Paris to Brussels to Barcelona, while other African and Arab countries felt buoyed by their success. Although coach Walid Regragui prefers to credit the team rather than individuals, Hakimi is one of his standout players. A dynamic, explosive presence, he is fond of lung-bursting sprints to join the attack, while maintaining discipline in defense. Hakimi trained with Spain at youth level, before deciding to pledge his allegiance to the country of his parents.

"I also went to a Spanish national team to try it," he told Spanish newspaper Marca before the game. "I was at Las Rozas for a couple of days and I saw that it wasn't the right place for me, I didn't feel at home." "It wasn't because of anything in particular, but for what I felt, because it was not what I had at home, which is the Arab culture, being Moroccan. I wanted to be here." Those family bonds have played an important role in sustaining Morocco's historic charge. A photograph of Hakimi, 24, kissing his mother in the stands after their 2-0 group stage win over Belgium made waves on social media.

The team's families have been allowed to stay in close proximity and it lets the players feel the love which in many cases led to them choosing to play for Morocco. As well as Hakimi, several other players were born elsewhere but opted for the North African nation. "For me, my mum is the most important thing in my life," an elated Sofiane Boufal-born in Paris-said after beating Spain. "Of course (she was crying), the emotions in this game make you crazy. The support of your family is the most important thing."

Rising up

Hakimi came from a modest family, living in the Madrid suburb of Getafe. His mother cleaned houses, while his father was a street vendor. "I fight every day for them," said Hakimi in 2018. "They sacrificed themselves for me, they deprived my brothers of many things, for me to succeed." Hakimi made his Morocco debut back in 2016, while still a Real Madrid player, winning the Champions League with Los Blancos but never fully establishing himself. He was loaned for two years to Borussia Dortmund and then signed permanently for Inter Milan.

After a strong season in Italy, winning Serie A, PSG snapped him up in 2021. With a Ligue 1 title in his pocket, Hakimi arrived with Morocco at the World Cup willing to perform the job the team needed him to do despite his star status. Hakimi has occasionally thrilled in Qatar, setting up Youssef En-Nesyri with a perfectly weighted pass against Canada, but has also helped form part of the strongest defence at the World Cup.

Morocco's only goal conceded came in that 2-1 win over Canada, while they shut out 2018 runners-up Croatia, plus fancied Belgium and Spain. Winger Hakim Ziyech has also drawn praise after returning from a period of exile due to a falling out with the previous coach, but through thick and thin, Hakimi has been there for his country. Now, packed densely into stadiums in Doha and supporting from afar, Hakimi's people are there for him too. — AFP

Celtics improve NBA's best record with blowout win

WASHINGTON: Boston's Jaylen Brown and Jayson Tatum turned a matchup of NBA conference leaders into a rout on Wednesday while Ja Morant's triple double sparked the Memphis Grizzlies over Oklahoma City. Tatum and Brown each scored 25 points as the Celtics improved the NBA's best record to 21-5 with a 125-98 blowout victory at Western Conference leader Phoenix. Boston stayed two games atop Milwaukee in the Eastern Conference while Phoenix fell to 16-9 and a half-game behind New Orleans (16-8) in the West.

The Suns trailed 69-42 at halftime, their largest deficit of the season to that point, and by as many as 45 points in the third quarter. "We were just really connected," Tatum said. "We're just making the right plays. We hit a lot of shots tonight." The Celtics, who lost to Golden State in last season's NBA Finals, improved to 10-3 on the road.

"We're happy with the way we're playing," Tatum said. "But we're far from satisfied. This doesn't mean anything if we don't get back to where we want to get to (the NBA Finals) and get over that hump. "It's a long process but we're trending in the right direction." Phoenix welcomed back guard Chris Paul, who missed a month with a heel injury. He had four points, four rebounds and four assists. Morant, meanwhile, delivered a triple double with 26 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists to lead host Memphis over the Thunder 123-102.

It was a club-record sixth career triple double for the 23-year-old US guard. "It means a lot," Morant said.

"A lot of credit goes to my teammates and my coaches putting me in positions to excel at a high level. "We knew rebounding was important. I took it upon myself early on, I think I had seven early. Every other stat was from my teammates. Them knocking down shots opened up shots for me on the floor as well." Memphis allowed only 15 points in the fourth quarter. "It was pretty much just locking in, getting stops and rebounds," Morant said. "We've got to continue fighting and play hard."

Greek star Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 35 points and added six rebounds and seven assists while Jrue Holiday contributed 31 points in Milwaukee's 126-113 victory over visiting Sacramento. The Bucks improved the NBA's second-best record to 18-6. Kyrie Irving scored a game-high 33 points with nine assists, five rebounds and four blocked shots while Kevin Durant added 29 points, nine rebounds and eight assists in Brooklyn's 122-116 home victory over Charlotte.

Jazz edge Golden State

Simone Fontecchio made the winning basket with 1.4 seconds remaining to give Utah a 124-123 home victory over the Golden State Warriors. Golden State's Jordan Poole scored a game-high 36 points but his bad pass set up the Italian forward's decisive inside shot. Jordan Clarkson led the Jazz with 22 points while Fontecchio added 18 off the bench. Zion Williamson scored 29 points and grabbed 10 rebounds to spark New Orleans over Detroit 104-98.

The host Pelicans took the West



PHOENIX: Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics lays up a shot past Josh Okogie #2 and Bismack Biyombo #18 of the Phoenix Suns during the second half of the NBA game at Footprint Center on December 07, 2022. — AFP

lead with their fifth consecutive victory. D'Angelo Russell scored a game-high 28 points and Frenchman Rudy Gobert added 16 points and 21 rebounds to power Minnesota's 121-115 home win over Indiana. Pascal Siakam and Fred VanVleet each scored 25 points to lead the Toronto Raptors over the visiting Los Angeles Lakers 126-113.

The Lakers, without Anthony Davis due to illness and LeBron James with a sore ankle, were led by German guard Dennis

Schroder's 18 points. Orlando's Paolo Banchero made six free throws in the last seven seconds of overtime to give the Magic a 116-111 home triumph over the Los Angeles Clippers. Italian-American Banchero scored a game-high 23 points and went 13-of-14 from the free throw line. Chicago defeated visiting Washington 115-111 behind 27 points from DeMar DeRozan while Julius Randle had 34 points and 17 rebounds to lead New York over visiting Atlanta 113-89. — AFP