



**5** Lanka prez seeks seaborne escape after airport standoff



**10** Pakistan's prized mango harvest hit by water scarcity



**13** Madrassas revive 'Golden Age' in Morocco's Fez



**16** Mo Farah was trafficked to UK, forced to be child servant



# Kuwait has no plans to increase petrol prices

## Gasoline prices rising across the Gulf, remain cheapest in Kuwait

### Kuwait hajj pilgrims return home



**KUWAIT:** The Directorate General of Civil Aviation has developed an integrated and strategic blueprint to welcome pilgrims returning home following the end of the hajj season. Two Saudia flights with 355

pilgrims on board landed at Kuwait International Airport on Monday, with nine more flights of Saudia, Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways arriving on Tuesday. — KUNA (More pics on Page 2)

**KUWAIT:** Government sources said the Cabinet's subsidies committee does not have on its agenda any recommendation to raise prices of petrol. It added it also has no plans to consider recommendations by international ratings agencies to raise gasoline prices as part of financial reforms to remedy Kuwait's budget.

Sources said the subsidies committee is supervised by finance ministry and submits recommendations to increase or decrease subsidies in order to maintain prices and prevent hurting consumers and Kuwaitis' housing needs to build up their allocated plots. Sources said KNPC has affirmed it is able to supply enough fuel to the market at current prices with no effect on its work and the available budget, so there is no need to increase fuel prices, at least in the near future.

But among Gulf states, petrol prices remain the cheapest in Kuwait. Mere years ago, fuel was cheaper than bottled water in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates. Now, long lines snake outside gas stations on the eve of price hikes each month. Fuel prices in the major OPEC producer, set in line with global oil price benchmarks, have soared over 70 percent since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, accentuating differences with neighboring petrostates

that heavily subsidize gasoline.

At about \$1.23 a liter after July's price rise, the unprecedented fuel cost in the UAE remains below the grim records reached in the United States and Britain as the war in Ukraine unleashes the biggest commodity shock in decades. But the region's citizens have long considered cheap fuel a birthright. In Kuwait's lavish welfare state, the cost per liter is nearly four times less.

As pressure mounted last week, the UAE and Saudi Arabia allotted a combined \$13 billion in social spending for low-income citizens - an option clearly unavailable to the region's less affluent economies such as Egypt and Lebanon, where the price of bread is surging and hunger is spreading. Still in the UAE, where expats outnumber locals nearly nine to one, fuel price hikes are costliest for legions of workers from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia who power the economy.

Inflation has cut into laborers' already meager salaries. Other Gulf Arab countries have also curbed state benefits to balance their budgets in recent years. But fearing backlash from angry consumers, none have gone as far as the UAE, where fuel prices are nearly double the average among Gulf Arab states.

Continued on Page 6

### Euro drops to dollar parity

**LONDON:** The euro struck parity with the dollar for the first time in nearly 20 years on Tuesday as a cut in Russian gas supplies to Europe heightened fears of a recession in the eurozone. The European single currency hit exactly one dollar - its lowest level since Dec 2002 - before bouncing back to as high as \$1.0070. Oil prices plunged on concerns of a wider recession as central banks hike interest rates to fight decades-high inflation, with both main contracts falling back under \$100 per barrel at one point.

"Rising inflation, stalling economic growth and more recently fears that Russia could cut gas supplies have pulled the euro lower," said Fiona Cincotta at City Index. "The nail in the coffin today was dire data showing that economic confidence in Germany fell to a decade low," she added. Russian energy giant Gazprom on Monday began 10 days of maintenance on its Nord Stream I pipeline - with Germany and other European countries watching anxiously to see if the gas comes back on.

With relations between Russia and the West at their lowest in years because of the invasion of Ukraine, Gazprom may not reopen the valves, according to analysts. Worries about a COVID flare-up in China - fueling fears of more lockdowns - added to the downbeat mood, just as investors prepared for a week of economic data and corporate earnings that could have huge implications for markets.

The European single currency is also under pressure from the Federal Reserve hiking US interest rates more aggressively than the European Central Bank. The dollar has jumped 14 percent against the euro since the start of the year. US inflation data due out Wednesday could also solidify the case for the Fed to continue raising interest rates aggressively.

"In anticipation of that, investors have retreated to the safety of the US dollar once more, steering clear of risky assets in favor of haven" assets, said market analyst Craig Erlam at trading platform OANDA. — AFP

### Japan mourns as Abe funeral held in Tokyo

**TOKYO:** Mourners lined the streets of central Tokyo on Tuesday to bid farewell to assassinated former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, as his hearse was driven past political landmarks after a private funeral. The country's longest-serving prime minister was gunned down on Friday while campaigning, in a crime that rattled Japan and prompted an outpouring of international condemnation and grief.

His funeral was held at Tokyo's Zojoji temple on Tuesday, with relatives and close acquaintances in atten-

dance. But elsewhere in the temple compound, thousands of well-wishers lined up in the humid heat to pay their respects before a photo of the late leader, who held office until 2020. "I can't get over my sadness, so I came here to lay flowers," consultant Tsukasa Yokawa, 41, told AFP, describing Abe as "a great prime minister who did a lot to elevate Japan's presence" globally.

After the service, a hearse carrying Abe's body departed for a final tour of some of the political landmarks he served in: The parliament, the prime minister's office and the headquarters of his ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Residents gathered along the route, while staff and officials, including ministers and senior LDP figures, stood somberly outside each venue.

Continued on Page 6



**TOKYO:** People watch the hearse transporting the body of late former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe as it leaves Zojoji Temple on July 12, 2022. — AFP

### BBC probe reveals Afghan war crimes by elite UK forces

**LONDON:** Commandos in Britain's elite Special Air Service (SAS) corps killed at least 54 Afghans in suspicious circumstances but the military chain of command concealed concerns, a BBC investigation

said Tuesday. Unarmed Afghan men were routinely shot dead "in cold blood" by SAS troops during night-time raids during the long war, and weapons were planted on them to justify the crimes, the four-year probe found.

Senior officers including General Mark Carleton-Smith, who headed UK Special Forces at the time, were aware of concerns within the SAS about the operations but failed to report them to military police, it said. Under UK law governing the armed forces, it is a criminal offence for a commanding officer to fail to inform the military police if they

become aware of potential war crimes, the BBC noted.

Carleton-Smith, who retired last month as head of the British army overall, declined to comment to the BBC program "Panorama", which said its investigation was based on court documents, leaked emails and its own journalists' travel to sites of the operations in Afghanistan. The ministry of defense said prior investigations into the conduct of UK forces in Afghanistan found insufficient evidence to bring charges.

Continued on Page 6

### New era of Webb: Cosmic cliffs and dancing galaxies

**NASA GODDARD SPACE FLIGHT CENTER:** The cosmic cliffs of a stellar nursery, a quintet of galaxies bound in a celestial dance: the James Webb Space Telescope released its next wave of images Tuesday, heralding a new era of astronomy. "Every image is a new discovery," said NASA administrator Bill Nelson. "Each will give humanity a view of the universe that we've never seen before."

Released one by one, the new images demonstrated the full power of the \$10 billion observatory, which uses infrared cameras to gaze into the distant universe in unprecedented clarity. On Monday, Webb revealed the clearest image to date of the early universe, going back 13 billion years. The latest tranche included the "mountains" and "valleys" of a

Continued on Page 6



This handout composite image released on July 12, 2022 shows the dawn of a new era in astronomy has begun as the world gets its first look at the full capabilities of the James Webb Space Telescope. — AFP

Local

# Kuwait's Amir, Crown Prince congratulate Saudi King on successful hajj season

## Sheikh Nawaf praises Saudi's 'dedicated and diligent efforts'

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday sent a cable of congratulations to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on the success of the hajj season 1443 H. In his message, His Highness the Amir attributed the success to Divine Providence, and the gracious care from King Salman and his wise government. The dedicated and diligent efforts of all government agencies and sectors in the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia contributed to this success, His Highness the Amir wrote, citing the continuous expansions at the Grand Mosque and the leveraging of modern technologies across the holy sites for pilgrims' convenience.

His Highness the Amir spoke highly of the efforts made by Prince Khaled Al-Faisal - Advisor to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, Governor of Makkah Region and Chairman of the Central hajj Committee, and Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Naif Al-Saud - the Minister of Interior and Chairman of the Supreme hajj Committee, to



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

ensure interagency cooperation and implement the hajj plans. He prayed to Allah Almighty to reward the wise leadership of Saudi Arabia for all the good they have done and grant the sisterly Kingdom more progress and prosperity under

King Salman bin Abdulaziz. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on

**Kuwait extols use of modern technologies to serve pilgrims**



Monday sent a cable of congratulations to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on the success of the hajj season of 1443 H. In his message, His Highness the Crown Prince said the hajj season was a complete success thanks to God, and the

gracious care from King Salman and his wise government. The dedication of all government agencies and sectors of the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia contributed to this success, His Highness the Crown Prince wrote, extolling the expansion of the Grand Mosque and the leveraging of modern technologies across the holy sites for pilgrims' convenience.

His Highness the Crown Prince spoke highly of the diligent efforts by Prince Khaled Al-Faisal and Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Naif Al Saud to ensure interagency cooperation and implement the hajj plans. He prayed to Allah Almighty to reward the wise leadership of Saudi Arabia for all the good they have done and grant the sisterly Kingdom more progress and prosperity under King Salman bin Abdulaziz. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah Al-Sabah also on Monday sent a cable of congratulations to King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on the success of the hajj season of 1443 H. — KUNA

## Instructions of Kuwait's political leadership roadmap for next stage: Defense Minister

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah affirmed that instructions of Kuwait's political leadership are a roadmap for the Ministry of Defense to implement in all military and civilian sectors during the next stage. This came in a statement by the Ministry of Defense during his visit to Saleh Al-Mohammad Al-Ali Brigade/94, Monday, to convey the greetings of His Highness the Amir, 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 on Eid Al-Adha. He stressed the need to support competencies, achievements, achieve justice and equality for all, with full commitment to the law, and preserving and protecting the public money. The Minister of Defense discussed the tasks and duties carried out



by the brigade's personnel within the framework of the periodic training and rehabilitation plans and programs prepared for them, and the extent of the existing joint coordination with other military sectors. He was then briefed on the weapons, equip-

ment and military machinery used in the brigade, the nature of its work, its role and the assigned tasks. He praised the high morale of the Saleh Al-Mohammad Brigade's personnel and their efficiency, and constant readiness to carry out various

tasks entrusted to them in coordination with the Ministry of Interior. Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled concluded his tour by urging the brigade's personnel to continue their work and efforts to utilize all capabilities to best serve Kuwait. — KUNA

On the occasion of the



Subscribe or renew your subscription  
KD 20 instead of KD 30 for 1 year

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext: 353-355-356



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti advance pilgrimage flights have commenced returning home from Makkah amid smooth and even measures at Kuwait International Airport. — KUNA photos

Local

# Social media spurs overbuying, changes Kuwait's consumer habits: Economist

## Some consumers to take out loans for social shopping: Ramadan

By Majd Othman

**KUWAIT:** The purpose of social media has shifted from being a platform that connects people to a marketing tool that feeds buyers' desire to purchase products whether they need them or not, turning them into shopaholics. According to new data from Sprout Social, more than 68 percent of consumers have purchased directly from social media, and nearly 98 percent of consumers plan to make at least one purchase through social media or influencers this year. Social shopping is set to become a \$1.2 trillion medium by 2025.

ple compete in collecting products, traveling and purchasing things they don't need, "only for showing off".

"Increasing demand has had a positive effect on the economy. However, people should not overbuy because of price increases that have affected products, due to the availability of money and a decrease in the number of products in the market," Ramadan pointed out. "Social media has not only led to overbuying of products, but it has also pushed some consumers to take out loans to buy bags or watches or travel in the summer," he said. "Social gatherings in Kuwait played a role in people's purchasing decisions before the media revolution. Now, everything is published on social media - what people eat, wear and drink or where they visit. This has created a kind of guideline for everyone to follow," Ramadan added.

Ramadan believes that the era of social media influencers has waned, and has been replaced by direct influence from actual consumers due to credibility and personal experience that is more important for them than what influencers say, especially after the inefficacy of plenty of products that they recommended for advertising purposes was proven.



Mohammad Ramadan



Research by the Finnish Turku University of Applied Sciences estimates that 78 percent of consumers are "severely" affected by consumer trends and what they are exposed to on social media, not only through advertisements, but also through following the accounts of friends or groups. A Harvard study reveals 59 percent of social media users make "unplanned" purchases based on what

they see on it, and accordingly, "presentation" on social networks becomes much more important for companies than on other advertising media.

The study adds that 61.5 percent of social media users turn to friends through social media or specialized pages to evaluate the product they want to buy and consider it a "reference" for them, and adhere to the choices of some pages or celebrities.



### Social gatherings play role in purchasing decisions

Regarding the effects of social media on consumer behavior, economist Mohammad Ramadan told Kuwait Times the young generation is the most affected by social media, constantly seeking to compete with their peers. He added other peo-

## People demand action to address rising crime rates in Kuwait

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The hashtag of the interior ministry started trending on Twitter after Kuwait recently witnessed a spate of crimes and murders, which worried many citizens and residents. Within no time, MoI became one of the top trending hashtags on Twitter. People are alarmed due to the rise in crimes on one hand, and the changing patterns of how they are committed on the other. Security sources warned that 72 percent of murders, aggressive behaviors and thefts are due to drug addiction.

MP Khaled Al-Mounes said interior ministry statistics on drug abuse need legislation in which all ministries and authorities participate. "Drugs made a mother kill her son, and led a son to kill his parents. Serious actions must be taken," he alleged. "There is a need to intensify penalties and speed up their implementation, especially against drug dealers and distributors."

Lawyer Khaled Al-Awadhi called on the judicial authority in a tweet to

apply the maximum punishment against drug traffickers, abusers and dealers. Likewise, the head of the Kuwaiti Federation of Restaurants, Cafes and Catering Services Fahd Al-Arbash tweeted: "The ministry of interior and its forces are not negligent. Many countries worldwide have witnessed a doubling of murders, crimes, drugs and thefts. Detectives, state security, and the interior ministry are working around the clock and arresting criminals the next day of the crime. We only need execution galleys at Naif Palace."

Citizen Mohammad Zainal tweeted: "There must be random checkpoints every month or random drug tests every two months in ministries, schools, universities and even in streets. Why until now we haven't witnessed an execution of a drug dealer?" Another Kuwaiti Hamed Al-Sahban complained how unsafe Kuwait has become, saying: "It is annoying when you feel unsafe in your own country. There must be a solution as soon as possible and drug dealers



must be sentenced to death."

Citizen Mohammed Al-Suwait tweeted: "The crime rate has frighteningly increased on the streets of Kuwait, and the main reason is substance abuse. The solution is to conduct annual drug tests of students and employees, tighten control over customs, and publish drug smugglers' names in newspapers."

Al-Anoud appealed to the interior ministry to save citizens from criminals, affirming that the country needs

drug tests. "We are afraid to go out alone. A mother kills her son... and a husband is stabbed for defending his wife, and the excuse is either 'drug abuse' or 'psychiatric problems'! Kuwait has become unsafe," she tweeted. Sara Al-Nejadah wondered in a tweet: "How could you leave children in the custody of a drug addict who already has a criminal record? The mother is an addict - how is she not under supervision? The ministry of interior has fallen short of its duty."

## KFF officials visit patients at Babtain Burns Center



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Fire Force PR Manager Colonel Mohammad Ibrahim, accompanied by acting Awareness and PR Supervisor Lt Col Yousuf Ghuloum, visited Saud Al-Babtain Burns Center to convey greetings to patients there. Gifts and awareness brochures were distributed to them. Meanwhile, Kuwait Fire Force Chief Lt Gen Khalid Al-Mikrad visited on Saturday several fire stations in the southern region. He conveyed greetings of the political leadership to the firemen on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha.

In other news, Kuwait Fire Force said First Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Gen (Rt) Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah issued a decision to form a senior committee chaired by Kuwait Fire Force with the ministries of interior, commerce and industry, and electricity and water, Kuwait

Municipality, state property department, Environment Public Authority, Kuwait Ports Authority, Fatwa and Legislation Department and the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, to remove violations in various areas as required by the Kuwait Fire Force.



**KUWAIT:** Acting Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber visited the Coast Guard Department, and was received by the Acting Guard Director General Brig Talal Al-Mones. Lt Gen Sheikh Salem conveyed greetings of first Deputy Premier, Interior Minister Lt Gen Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Coast Guard men on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha.

## Firemen battle plastic plant, carpentry shop fires

**KUWAIT:** Three fire stations fought a fire in a plastic plant of a cement company. Vocational Jahra, Shagaya, Kazma and backup firemen fought the blaze, which resulted in material losses. Meanwhile, firemen put out a fire in a Shuwaikh carpentry shop. Industrial Shuwaikh, Shuhada, Ardiya and backup stations responded to the blaze. No injuries were reported. Separately, a Kuwaiti suffered several injuries when he fell from a height at a Mahboula building. Mangaf firemen pulled him out and handed him to paramedics.



Legalese

## Eid holiday under the labor law



By Fajer Ahmed

fajer@kuwaittimes.net

**E**id Mubarak to all readers and their families and loved ones. This is the time to celebrate, eat good food and more importantly, show people compassion and care. Eid Al-Adha is a public holiday, and under Kuwait's labor law, it is a three-day official holiday. In this article I am answering questions from readers regarding the Eid holidays.

**Q: I am working during Eid. Am I entitled to overtime?**

**Fajer:** Article 68 of Kuwait labor law states: "Fully-paid official holidays are as follows:  
a- Islamic New Year: 1 day  
b- Israa and Miraj day: 1 day  
c- Eid Al-Fitr: 3 days  
d- Waqfat Arafat: 1 day  
e- Eid Al-Adha: 3 days  
f- Prophet's Birthday (Al-Mawlid Al-Nabawi PBUH): 1 day  
g- National Day: 1 day  
h- Gregorian New Year: 1 day

In the event where a worker is required to work during any of the abovementioned holidays, they shall be entitled to double remuneration and an additional day off."

I think the law is extremely clear that you should be compensated with double your daily wage, which is your monthly salary divided by 26, as well as an additional day off!

**Q: Are some employees exempt from the holidays, for example non-Muslims or people working in retail?**

**Fajer:** No, there are no exemptions. The Eid off days are for everyone to enjoy. For those working in environments or jobs that require them to be at work on Eid, they are entitled to overtime compensation as mentioned above.

**Q: The government circular announcing the Eid holiday was for nine days, but I am only getting three days in the private sector. How come?**

**Fajer:** The government circular is for government/public employees. As for private sector employees, the holiday is according to the Kuwait labor law for the private sector. With that said, some companies do provide more off days to their employees, matching the public sector, if their job allows them to do so.

You can contact me on fajer@kuwaittimes.net

## Local

Kuwait Times  
Established 1961  
The First Daily in The Arabian GulfTHE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961Founder and Publisher  
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYANEditor-in-Chief  
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYANEDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353/3561  
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

## UN, Kuwait to mull removing citizens from terror list

**KUWAIT:** The Foreign Ministry has unveiled that a senior UN official would visit Kuwait next month to discuss with Kuwaiti officials removing names of nationals from the UNSC terror list after they successfully passed a foreign ministry-approved rehabilitation program. UN Ombudsperson Richard Malanjum would visit the country in the third week of August upon an invitation from the Foreign Ministry to hold a meeting with chairman of Kuwait's committee for the implementation of the UNSC resolutions, adopted under the seventh chapter of the UN charter, Hamad Al-Mashaan. The meeting would focus on completing the requirements for removing names of Kuwaiti citizens, who passed the foreign ministry rehabilitation program, from the UNSC terror list. —KUNA

## Kuwait charities distribute meat to 20,000+ Yemenis

**ADEN:** The Kuwait-based International Islamic Charitable Organization and the Kuwait Zakat House have distributed sheep and goat meat to more than 20,000 needy people in the war-ravaged Yemen. Albdelwasa Al-Wasae, head of the Human Access society, a local Yemen organization which handed the meat to the beneficiaries on behalf of the Kuwaiti charities, said that meat were distributed to 3,400 families of the poor and displaced people in six Yemeni governorates on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha. The meat distribution had brought smiles to the faces of these needy families, he said, expressing gratitude to the Kuwaiti leadership and people for their support to Yemen. —KUNA



## Kuwait carries out sacrificial meat project in Iraq

**IRBIL:** The State of Kuwait on Monday started distributing meat of cattle, slaughtered as 'adhahi' (sacrifices) during Eid Adha festival, to nearly 12,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) at Hassan Sham camp, east Erbil city, Kurdistan region, in northern Iraq. The aid project, part of "Kuwait stands by you" campaign, is funded by Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) executed by Iraq's Hebaa Foundation for Sustainable Development. The project comes at a time when residents of the camp are in dire need of aid due to lukewarm response to their needs from international aid agencies, Hebaa Director Mohammad Selim said. He expressed gratitude for Kuwaiti Amir, government and people, as well as everybody who contributed to the campaign. It is an annual tradition that Kuwait hands out dozens of tons of sacrifices' meat to IDPs and needy people in Kurdistan region. —KUNA

## KRCS hands out sacrificial meat to Gazans

**GAZA:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) on Monday started distributing meat of cattle, slaughtered as 'adhahi' (sacrifices) during Eid Adha festival, to needy Palestinian families in Gaza Strip. The aid campaign, organized jointly with Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), benefits 1,300 needy families in five governorates across the Strip, said Amr Ali, a media and public relations officer at the PRCS. "As part of the campaign, 11 head of cattle were slaughtered in Rafah City, to the southwest of Gaza Strip and their meat have been handed out to marginalized families," Ali said. He expressed gratitude for Kuwaiti Amir, government and people, as well as everybody who contributed to the campaign. —KUNA

## Photo of the day

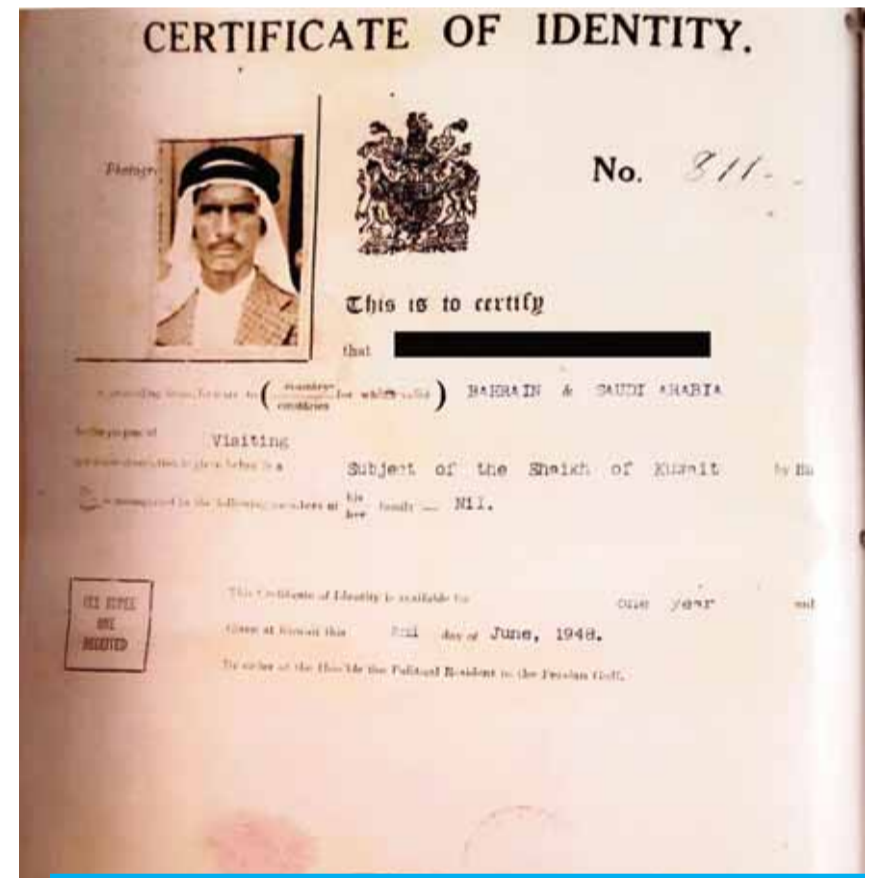


**KUWAIT:** People bring their sheep to be slaughtered on the Eid Al-Adha holiday at a slaughterhouse in Kuwait on July 9, 2022. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Ministry of Interior marks 60th anniversary of Kuwaiti passport



**KUWAIT:** Changes in the Kuwaiti passport in 60 years. —KUNA photos



An old Kuwaiti passport.

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait marked this past Sunday the 60th anniversary of the issuance of the Kuwaiti passport, which serves as a reminder of the adoption of Act 11 (1962) on this important sovereign document in the reign of late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. The issuance of the first passport gained additional significance as it following the independence of the country in the previous year, which opened the way for a new historical era marked with renaissance, construction and development in all areas. Over the past six decades the passport underwent several stages of modernization till it reached the current state-of-the-art form, said Co. Mohammad Al-Khedr, deputy director of the General Directorate of Nationality and Travel Documents at the Ministry of Interior. "The new biometric passport, or the e-passport, first issued in 2018, is one of the latest passports in the Arab region meeting the world technical and security standards," he said.

Col Khedr noted three types of smart passports being issued at present, namely the ordinary, the diplomatic and the special, are in keeping with the requirements and standards of the UN International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in terms of size,

color of cover, design of front cover and technical sophistication. The passport is made up of 64 pages and all data are written in Arabic and English. "According to Henley Passport Index, the Kuwaiti passport ranks 56th as the world's best passport and third on the Arab scale," he said, noting that holders of Kuwaiti passport enjoy visa waivers for travel to 95 countries around the globe.

During the international High Security Printing Conference, held in Warsaw, Poland, in 2018 with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior participating, the Kuwaiti passport won the award for outstanding achievement and technical sophistication of a travel document, he recalled. For citizens' convenience, the General Directorate of Nationality and Travel Documents added the online passport renewal service in last September, he said, noting that nearly 188,000 passports have been issued during the first half of 2022. More services are under study, including the home delivery of passport and the launching of outlets for renewal of passports at public areas such as shopping malls and the airport. Col Khedr went on.

On the chronicle of passport development, Basem Alloghani, a Kuwaiti researcher and historian, said

Kuwait and the United Kingdom signed in 1899 a treaty allowing Kuwait to take charge of the issuance of travel documents instead of the British viceroy. "The then travel document was just one paper for one rupee (nearly 75 fils) and valid for just one year," he said. For a Kuwaiti citizen to travel to Iran at the time, he or she had to get a small paper carrying their names and one sentence reading: "In reference to so-and-so, he/she is one of the citizens of Kuwait; please make his/her travel easy."

It used to cost one rupee while a similar document for travel to Saudi Arabia cost two rupees (150 fils) and it was valid for just one trip. Alloghani added. In early 1950s, the Public Security Department took charge of the issuance of passports. Act 15 (1959) in the reign of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah provided for launching a department for police and public security which assumed the mission of issuing travel documents until the independence of Kuwait in 1961. Following the independence, the state departments were reshuffled and the Ministry of Interior as assigned the mission of issuing passports for the first time on July 10, 1962, Alloghani added. —KUNA





Cubans decry clampdown on protest 'versary

## Palestinians say US economic push no substitute for peace

Page 6

Page 7



COLOMBO, Sri Lanka: People line up to visit presidential secretariat in Colombo on July 12, 2022, after it was overrun by anti-government protesters. — AFP

# S Lanka president seeks seaborne escape

## Immigration officers refuse to go to the VIP suite to stamp Gotabaya's passport

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's president was considering using a navy patrol craft to flee the island Tuesday following a humiliating standoff with airport immigration, official sources said. Gotabaya Rajapaksa has promised to resign on Wednesday and clear the way for a "peaceful transition of power" following widespread protests against him over the country's worst economic crisis. The 73-year-old leader fled his official residence in Colombo just before tens of thousands of protesters overran it on Saturday. He then wanted to travel to Dubai, officials said. As president, Rajapaksa enjoys immunity from arrest, and he is believed to want to go abroad before stepping down to avoid the possibility of being detained.

But immigration officers refused to go to the VIP suite to stamp his passport, while he insisted he would not go through the public facilities, fearing reprisals from other airport users. The president and his wife spent the night at a military base next to the main Bandaranaik International airport after missing four

flights that could have taken them to the United Arab Emirates. Rajapaksa's youngest brother Basil, who resigned in April as finance minister, missed his own Emirates flight to Dubai early Tuesday after a similar standoff with airport staff. Basil—who holds US citizen-



### Airport standoff

ship in addition to Sri Lankan nationality—tried to use a paid concierge service for business travellers, but airport and immigration staff said they were withdrawing from the fast track service with immediate effect. "There were some other passengers who protested

against Basil boarding their flight," an airport official told AFP. "It was a tense situation, so he hurriedly left the airport."

### Hasty retreat

Basil had to obtain a new US passport after leaving his behind at the presidential palace when the Rajapaksas beat a hasty retreat to avoid mobs on Saturday, a diplomatic source said. Official sources said a suitcase full of documents had also been left behind at the stately mansion along with 17.85 million rupees in cash, now in the custody of a Colombo court.

There was no official word from the president's office about his whereabouts, but he remained commander-in-chief of the armed forces with military resources at his disposal. A top defence source said the president's closest military aides were discussing the possibility of taking him and his entourage overseas aboard a naval patrol craft. A navy boat was used on Saturday to take Rajapaksa and his aides to the north-

eastern port city of Trincomalee, from where he was helicoptered back to the international airport on Monday. "The best option now is to take the sea exit," the defence official said. "He could go to the Maldives or India and get a flight to Dubai."

Another alternative, he added, would be to charter a plane to fly him from the country's second international airport at Mattala, opened in 2013 and named after the president's elder brother Mahinda. It is widely considered a white elephant, with no scheduled international flights and described as probably the world's least-used international airport. Rajapaksa is accused of mis-managing the economy to a point where the country has run out of foreign exchange to finance even the most essential imports, leading to severe hardships for the 22 million population. If he steps down as promised, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will automatically become acting president until parliament elects an MP to serve out the presidential term, which ends in November 2024. — AFP



LONDON: Rishi Sunak, Britain's former chancellor of the exchequer and candidate to become the next prime minister, leaves after delivering a speech at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre in London on July 12, 2022. — AFP

## UK's Sunak refuses to attack Johnson in leadership bid

LONDON: Former finance minister Rishi Sunak said Tuesday his campaign to be Britain's next prime minister would avoid any attempt to "demonise" Boris Johnson, despite having helped trigger his dramatic downfall. Sunak, 42, and another minister quit last week in protest at Johnson's scandal-hit administration, setting off a wave of government resignations that forced him to step down as Conservative leader.

Johnson is staying on in Downing Street as prime minister until an internal party contest finds his successor. The result is due on September 5. But the main opposition Labour party said it would try to force a vote of no confidence in the government to try to get him out of office sooner. Labour leader Keir Starmer said that by their actions last week, the Tories had "concluded that the prime minister is unfit for office" "They can't now let him cling on for weeks and weeks and weeks until September 5," he argued. "It would be intolerable for the country." The no-confidence motion is expected to be voted on by the House of Commons on Wednesday.

### 'Remarkable'

Sunak, who was appointed chancellor of the exchequer in early 2020 just as the COVID pandemic hit, is seen as one of the frontrunners for the Tory leadership. But he refused to distance himself from Johnson's administration, in which he played a key role

supporting businesses and workers during the pandemic. He called Johnson "one of the most remarkable people I've met". "Whatever some commentators may say, he has a good heart," he told cheering supporters, after one Johnson ally accused Sunak of being a treacherous "snake".

"But did I disagree with him? Frequently. Is he flawed? Yes, and so are the rest of us. Was it no longer working? Yes, and that's why I resigned. "But let me be clear, I will have no part in a rewriting of history that seeks to demonise Boris, exaggerate his faults or deny his efforts." Johnson's departure was a spectacular fall from grace for a politician who secured a landslide election win in December 2019 and took the country out of the European Union just a month later. Sunak said he would not shy away from praising that or recognising Johnson's stewardship of the fightback against Covid or his hawkish support for Ukraine.

"Some people might advise that I should avoid saying all of this in case of alienating people but that wouldn't be honest," he added. "If telling you what I think-positive and negative-costs me the leadership, so be it."

### Votes

So far, 10 candidates, including Sunak, his replacement at the Treasury Nadhim Zahawi and Foreign Secretary Liz Truss are vying to replace Johnson. Transport Secretary Grant Shapps withdrew and threw his weight behind Sunak's campaign. Justice Secretary Dominic Raab is also backing Sunak.

Candidates each need 20 nominations from Tory MPs by 1700 GMT on Tuesday, which will whittle down their number before a first vote Wednesday. Those failing to get 30 votes will then be eliminated. A series of votes will be held into next week until there are just two left in the race.—AFP

## Iraqi Kurd plans new escape to Europe

SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq: Iraqi Kurd Haresh Talib says he struggles to get paid and his children's schooling is disrupted in his conflict-riddled country, so he wants to try to flee with his family to Europe—again. "There is no future here," says the 36-year-old from the autonomous Kurdistan region in Iraq's north.

Talib, his hair gelled back and beard neatly trimmed, lives on the first floor of a pastel yellow house with his wife, two sons and a pet bird in a well-kept neighbourhood of Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan's second-largest city. Their living room television is showing the British cartoon hit "Peppa Pig", to the great amusement of Talib's eight-year-old son, Haudin.

Outside, his older brother Hajant dribbles a football. "I love Real Madrid. I'm a fan of Benzema," the 12-year-old says in English, referring to Real's French star Karim Benzema. On the surface it might seem the picture of a contented middle-class family, but Talib says they will soon be packing their belongings and hitting the irregular migration trail. They, and thousands of other Iraqi Kurds, have done it before. He declines to reveal how he and his family will travel or by what route, but says he wants to reach Britain where he has friends.

"But if that doesn't work I will go to Germany." In November, at least 27 migrants, most of them Iraqi Kurds, drowned when they tried to cross the English Channel from France to Britain in an inflatable boat. Despite the risks, Talib says he wants to try again—not so much for his own sake, but for his sons, whose schooling is frequently interrupted by teachers' strikes over unpaid salaries. "In those countries there is work. You can guarantee that children will get an education," he says.

### Corruption, unemployment

Talib holds down two jobs to help his family get by. He's a printer and a civil servant. "The government asks us to work but it hasn't paid us on time for years," he complains. While the rest of Iraq struggles to overcome decades of war, Kurdistan has fashioned an image of a stable region suitable for foreign investors.

But its more than five million inhabitants see a different reality. Unemployment there last year exceeded 17 percent, against 14 percent nationwide, according to Baghdad's planning ministry. Two out of three households in Iraqi Kurdistan rely on a government salary or pension, but payments are chronically late because of tensions between the regional government in Erbil and authorities in Baghdad.

Erbil accuses the central government of not passing along its part of the federal budget for civil servants. "We've seen over the last several years an economic crisis, along with perceptions of widespread corruption

and soaring inequality and political stagnation" in Iraqi Kurdistan, said Shivan Fazil, a researcher with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

These have been "among the main drivers of the latest wave of migration" from the area, he said. At the same time there is "an increasingly repressive pattern of active curtailment of freedom of expression", through intimidation, arbitrary arrest and other means, a United Nations report said last year.

The threat of conflict, too, is never far away. In northern Iraq, the Turkish military has been targeting what it says are bases of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is listed as a terrorist group by Ankara and its Western allies. The PKK has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984. Several civilians died in May during strikes by the two sides.

### False passports

Then there are the local political conflicts between rival clans, the Barzanis of Arbil and the Talabanis of Sulaimaniyah. Their "struggle for power has nothing to do with the interests of the people", Talib said, citing unspecified "threats" against him.

Last autumn, thousands of Iraqi Kurds found themselves on the doorstep of the European Union, stuck in bitterly cold conditions on the Belarus border. The West accused Minsk of luring them there in revenge for sanctions against its regime. Talib and his family were among the crowds after having flown to Minsk by plane. Between October and December, Talib twice paid a smuggler to help get him and his family into Poland. In one failed effort, "a dog from the border guards jumped on my son, so I hit the dog. Then the police beat me and we were arrested," Talib said.—AFP



SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq: Iraqi Kurd Haresh Talib walks on the streets of Iraq's northeastern city of Sulaimaniyah in the autonomous Kurdistan region. Talib says he struggles to get paid and his children's schooling is disrupted in his conflict-riddled country. — AFP

## International

# Palestinians say US economic push no substitute for peace

## US-Palestinian ties have improved under Biden

**RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories:** Ahead of Joe Biden's first visit to Jerusalem as US president, Washington's ambassador said his team will "pound tables" to press Zionist officials into making concessions to the Palestinians.

But ambassador Thomas Nides was talking about ensuring Palestinians have access to economic benefits such as 4G internet, not throwing American diplomatic muscle into reviving a peace process

"But it's obviously not a substitute for solving the bigger issues like Jerusalem, like sovereignty or like freedom," he told AFP. "Zionists think people will forget about the bigger picture," he added.

### Hamas expects 'nothing'

The 4G pledge, which ambassador Nides highlighted in an interview with the Times of Israel, would offer an immediate boost to Palestinian businesses, Mostafa said. Palestinians are currently forced to either buy Zionist SIM cards or struggle with slower 3G connections.

"Zionist operators have a significant part of the Palestinian telecoms and broadband market," Mostafa said. "This would be a chance to bring that back to Palestinian companies." But "the Zionists think 'we're going to give you 4G so you'll keep quiet on the other things,'" Mostafa added. "We are interested, but we also want bigger things."

Until July 1, Zionist entity was led by prime minister Naftali Bennett, a right-winger who opposed the Palestinians' over-arching demand-the establishment of their own state. Bennett embraced an approach known as "shrinking the conflict," seeking to defuse tensions by improving economic opportunities in the West Bank and the blockaded Gaza Strip, which is controlled by the Islamist group Hamas.

One such key policy was to increase permits for Palestinians, including from Gaza, to seek relatively lucrative work in Zionist entity. Asked about the expectations from Biden's visit, Hamas official Basem Naim said: "Nothing." Yair Lapid, Bennett's replacement as Zionist premier and a centrist, supports a two-state solution to the Palestinian conflict.

But he is only serving as a caretaker leader ahead of elections in November, and is therefore seen as having little space to launch bold peace initiatives. When Lapid visited Paris last week, French President Emmanuel Macron said there was "no alternative to a resumption of political dialogue between Zionists and Palestinians." Senior Zionist officials have told AFP that Lapid was "open" to



**JERUSALEM:** Flags of the Jerusalem municipality, the US, and Zionist entity are hung up along streets by the municipality, ahead of US President Joe Biden's upcoming visit to Zionist entity. — AFP

meeting Abbas, but not to launching a new peace initiative for the moment.

### 'Throwing money at occupation'

In an opinion piece for the Washington Post at the weekend, Biden asserted that his administration has restored approximately \$500 million in support for Palestinians, after Trump slashed funding. But while Zionist authorities have promised to raise a sea of flags to welcome Biden in Jerusalem, there are few signs of ceremonial anticipation across the West Bank.

For Sam Bahour, a prominent Palestinian-

American businessman in the West Bank, apathy about Biden's visit transcends the latest fluctuations in Zionist governance. "The Biden administration has fallen into the Zionist trap—that trap is fragmenting all of the Palestinian rights under international law, and then using them as playing cards as if they were giving concessions back to the Palestinians," he said. Backing Zionist's initiatives in the West Bank is simply "throwing money at the occupation". Bahour said Palestinians can manage with slower internet, but not without statehood. "We don't need 4G," he said. "We need the fourth generation of Palestinians not to live under military occupation." — AFP

gait cautious.

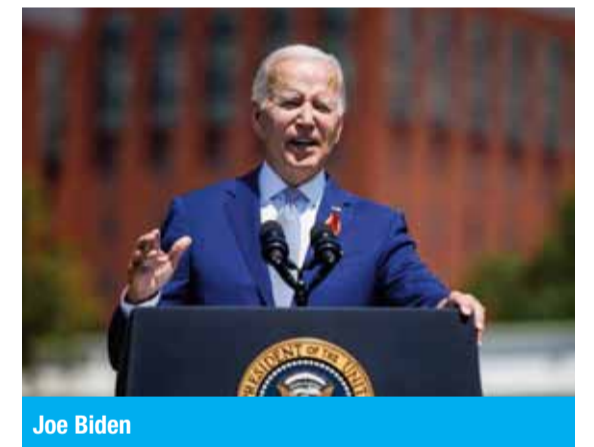
He sometimes loses his train of thought or stumbles while reading from a teleprompter, and the stutter he overcame as a child periodically resurfaces. The White House has several times had to walk back inopportune remarks by the president on sensitive diplomatic issues.

Biden gives fewer news conferences and interviews than his predecessors, preferring to publish op-eds in newspapers, the content of which can be carefully controlled. On the weekends, he often disappears to one of his two homes in Delaware for two or three days. White House correspondents only see him once, at a distance, when he goes to mass.

And when G7 leaders posed for a photo at a June summit, it was impossible to ignore the age gap between Biden and Canadian premier Justin Trudeau, 50, or French President Emmanuel Macron, 44.

### 'Life begins at 80!'

But his aides defend him vigorously, with senior advisor Mike Donilon telling The New York



**Joe Biden**

Times that the president wants "to spend four hours planning for how we hit the ground running on domestic policy, when all much younger staff want to do is sleep" on the plane.

Biden, after a minor but much-publicized bike crash on June 18, made a point of getting back in the saddle on Sunday and joking about his misadventure with reporters. — AFP

## Prospect of faster internet

moribund since 2014. Biden's first Middle East tour since entering the White House last year begins on Wednesday, and he is expected to meet Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas on Friday in Bethlehem, in the Zionist-occupied West Bank.

US-Palestinian ties have improved under Biden, after hitting an all-time low under his predecessor Donald Trump, a staunch backer of the Zionists. Along with the prospect of faster internet, the visit may also see the US restore funding to hospitals in Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem, which have historically served Palestinians.

But some Palestinians said they are weary of US diplomacy which, they claim, emphasises economic benefits above core issues of the seven-decade conflict. "It would be nice to have the 4G," said Mohammed Mostafa, a former Palestinian Authority deputy prime minister and ex-chief executive of Paltel, the largest telecoms operator in the Palestinian territories.

## Joe Biden's age in the spotlight

**WASHINGTON:** Is Joe Biden too old to be president?

It's a question that has provided ample fodder for Republicans and right-wing outlets, while Democrats and most of the American media have been reluctant to broach it. But as the oldest person ever elected to the top US office prepares for a grueling Middle East tour, debate is mounting over his apparent desire to run again in 2024.

The issue puts Democrats in a difficult position as there is no clear alternative to Biden—who turns 80 on November 20. "He's fit to be president right now. But he's too old for the next election," The Atlantic concluded in recent article, while sharply criticizing right-wing claims that Biden is suffering from dementia.

Disenchantment with Biden runs deep inside his own camp, with a New York Times poll

released Monday showing that 64 percent of Democratic voters would prefer another candidate in 2024. His age was cited as the main reason for those who want a change.

The president would be 82 at the beginning of a second term, and 86 at its conclusion. By comparison, Ronald Reagan was 77 when he left office in 1989. Biden's "age has become an uncomfortable issue for him and his party," The New York Times wrote on Saturday, describing a White House that has become protective, even anxious.

Like his predecessors, Biden has exhausting responsibilities, from the war in Ukraine and runaway inflation to gun violence plaguing the country and a fiercely conservative Supreme Court.

### Quiet weekends

There are certainly many Americans who envy his health, with a checkup last November concluding that he is a "vigorous" man suffering from mild problems with acid reflux and arthritis. But his appearance betrays the heavy toll taken by the office: his white hair is increasingly thin, his

## Kuwait has no plans to increase...

Continued from Page 1

The country can get away with this partly because the burden falls on its 9 million expat residents, experts say. Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia - a country of 35 million, two-thirds of which are citizens - the government's fuel price cap has kept inflation under control even as food costs have spiked. The tiny Emirati population benefits from a generous welfare state that helps with everything: Free education, health care and housing, grants for marriage, scholarships to foreign universities and well-paid government jobs.

That contract emerged across the region as states cashed in from the oil boom and distributed some of the bounties to citizens. Last week, UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan

unveiled plans to double the state's social support for low-income Emirati families - classified as those who make less than \$6,800 a month. The \$7.6 billion packages will cover 85 percent of recent fuel price hikes and 75 percent of food inflation, among other things like housing allowances and support for job-seekers. The government portal received so many applications that it crashed.

In Saudi Arabia, the world's second-biggest oil producer, King Salman announced \$5.33 billion in direct cash transfers to citizens "to protect beneficiaries from the effects of global price rises". But that help will not reach those who need it most. Desperation over the cost of living is growing among the region's low-paid migrant workers.

Uber drivers and food delivery riders who pay for their own fuel in Dubai say they're barely breaking even. Riders for two main delivery companies went on strike over their slim salaries in May - defying the UAE's ban on labor protests. Uber said it would raise fares as much as 11 percent for some trips to account for new gas fees in Dubai, but some drivers say that's inadequate. — Agencies

the explanations didn't make sense. Once somebody is detained, they shouldn't end up dead," one senior officer at special forces headquarters told Panorama. "For it to happen over and over again was causing alarm at HQ. It was clear at the time that something was wrong." There was particular concern that SAS bullet holes found at the scene of Afghan residential compounds after the raids were all low down - indicating that suspects were kneeling or prone on the ground. Several warnings were relayed up the chain of command, the BBC said. But the SAS squadron was allowed to finish its six-month tour - and was deployed for another in 2012.

In 2014, the Royal Military Police launched an investigation into more than 600 alleged offences by British forces in Afghanistan, including a number of killings by the SAS squadron. But RMP investigators told the BBC that they were "obstructed" by the British military, and the investigation ended in 2019. Colonel Oliver Lee, who was commander of the Royal Marines in Afghanistan in 2011, told the program that the allegations were "incredibly shocking" and merited a full public inquiry. — AFP

## BBC probe reveals Afghan war crimes...

Continued from Page 1

"No new evidence has been presented, but the service police will consider any allegations should new evidence come to light," it said in a statement to the BBC. "The UK armed forces served with courage and professionalism in Afghanistan and we will always hold them to the highest standards." The Panorama investigation identified 54 people shot dead in suspicious circumstances by one SAS unit during one six-month tour of Helmand province from November 2010 to May 2011.

After-action reports showed other officers were surprised at the high casualty rate being inflicted by the unit, when none of the SAS troops reported injuries in apparent firefights with Taliban militants. "Too many people were being killed on night raids and

## New era of Webb: Cosmic cliffs ...

Continued from Page 1

star-forming region called NGC 3324 in the Carina Nebula, dubbed the "Cosmic Cliffs," 7,600 light years away.

"For the first time we're seeing brand new stars that were previously completely hidden from our view," said NASA astrophysicist Amber Straughn. Webb also revealed never before seen details of Stephan's Quintet, a grouping of five galaxies including four that experience repeated close encounters, which provide insights into how early galaxies formed at the start of the universe. The telescope dramatically captures shockwaves as one of the galaxies smashes through the center of the cluster.

A dim star at the center of the Southern Ring

Nebula was revealed for the first time to be cloaked in dust, as it spews out rings of gas and dust in its death throes. Understanding the molecules present in such stellar graveyards can help scientists learn more about the process of stellar death.

The telescope also found water vapor in the atmosphere of a faraway gas planet. The spectroscopy - an analysis of light that reveals detailed information - was of planet WASP-96 b, which was discovered in 2014. Nearly 1,150 light-years from Earth, WASP-96 b is about half the mass of Jupiter and zips around its star in just 3.4 days.

"We've seen the effect of what happens when a planet and its atmosphere passes in front of the star, and the star light filters through the atmosphere, and you can break that down into wavelengths of light," said NASA's Knicole Colon. "So you're actually seeing bumps and wiggles that indicate the presence of water vapor in the atmosphere of the planet."

Launched in Dec 2021 from French Guiana on an Ariane 5 rocket, Webb is orbiting the Sun at a distance of 1.6 million km from Earth, in a region of space called the second Lagrange point. — AFP

## Japan mourns as Abe funeral...

Continued from Page 1

They pressed their hands together and bowed their heads in respect as the car arrived.

Abe's widow Akie sat in the front of the hearse - carrying her husband's mortuary tablet inscribed with his posthumous Buddhist name - and bowed back. Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi, Abe's brother, called the murder "an act of terrorism" on Tuesday. "I've lost my brother. At the same time, Japan has lost an irreplaceable leader," he tweeted. "My brother loved Japan and risked his life to be a politician and protect this nation."

In a speech at the funeral, 81-year-old Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso recalled drinking and playing golf with his close ally. "You were supposed to read an eulogy for me. This is very painful," he said, according to Japanese media. Abe was campaigning in the western city of Nara when he was shot. The

murder suspect, 41-year-old Tetsuya Yamagami, is in custody and has told police he targeted Abe because he believed the politician was linked to an organization he resented.

Yamagami approached him from behind in broad daylight, in circumstances that have raised questions about security. Satoshi Ninoyu, the chairman of the National Public Safety Commission, a cabinet position overseeing national police, pledged Tuesday to hold a full review of any security failings. Local police have already admitted flaws in their guarding program for the high-profile politician.

Police searches of the suspect's home have found pellets and other possible components for building a gun like the crude weapon used in the attack. Japanese media reported Tuesday, citing unnamed investigative sources. Yamagami spent three years in Japan's navy and reportedly told investigators that his mother's large donations to a religious organization had caused the family financial troubles. The Unification Church, a global religious movement founded in Korea in the 1950s, said on Monday that Yamagami's mother was a member, but did not comment on any donations she may have made. — AFP

## International

## Pacific leaders struggle to keep focus on climate at key summit

## Kiribati quit premier bloc of Pacific island nations

SUVA: US-China rivalry and an inter-island rift overshadowed the start of a landmark Pacific summit Tuesday, hampering efforts to focus world attention on the islands' dire climate crisis. This year's Pacific Islands Forum is the region's most important meeting in years, coming after a COVID-enforced hiatus and as low-lying tropical isles run out of time for climate action.

Fiji president and forum chair Voreqe Bainimarama opened Tuesday's first meeting with a warning that the "runaway climate change crisis" threatened the security and sovereignty of many Pacific nations. But instead of a singular focus on the threat of rising sea levels and ever-more-powerful storms, a shock decision by Beijing-allied leaders in Kiribati to quit the forum altogether, revealed on the eve of the summit, loomed over proceedings.



## 'Runaway climate change crisis'

## 'Fight this emergency'

## Geopolitical jostling

between the United States and China has been building since Solomon Islands controversially signed a security pact with Beijing in April. United States Vice President Kamala Harris announced Tuesday that she would make an unprecedented video appearance at the summit—usually restricted to Pacific nations, Australia and New Zealand.

Leaders gathered at Suva's luxurious Grand Pacific Hotel will discuss a strategy to guide the Pacific

through to 2050, keenly focused on the existential threat posed by climate change. They will also debate announcing a climate emergency in the Pacific and whether to endorse a push, spearheaded by Vanuatu, to ask the International Court of Justice to weigh in on nations' climate obligations.

Vanuatu prime minister Bob Loughman said Tuesday that the people of the region "are calling on us, Pacific leaders, to take action to fight this emergency". But Kiribati's exit from the forum has sparked concerns about a fracturing of the Pacific's closely held unity, which gives the region of small island states heft in global climate negotiations.

Tuvaluan foreign minister Simon Kofe told AFP he was "surprised and saddened" by Kiribati's departure, but was optimistic the nation could be enticed to rejoin. Last year, Kofe made headlines when he addressed the COP summit standing knee-deep in water to draw attention

to the threat climate change poses to his low-lying nation, which may disappear below rising seas in the next 50 years.

Faced with such a threat, his priority at the summit is climate change—Tuvalu will be pushing for a focus on statehood and climate financing. Concerns about regional security—brought to the fore by the Solomons-China pact—"draw a bit of attention away from climate change", Kofe said.



SUVA: Leaders arrive for traditional welcoming ceremonies at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in Suva on July 12, 2022. —AFP

## Security versus climate

The summit will be a test of Australia's newly elected Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, who has pledged to do more on climate and to heal his country's fractured relationship with the Pacific.

At the last Pacific Islands Forum leaders' meeting, held in 2019, negotiations descended into shouting and tears as Australia's former government attempted to muzzle

leaders who wanted to issue a global call for climate action. But Albanese also wants to use the summit to raise his concerns about security developments in the region in the wake of the Solomons-China deal. Speaking to media Tuesday, the leader sought to knit the issues of climate and security together. "Our neighbours in the Pacific understand that climate change is a national security issue," he told a press conference in Sydney. —AFP

## HK jails terminally ill activist for Olympics protest

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong activist with terminal cancer was jailed Tuesday for attempted sedition over a planned protest against Beijing's Winter Olympics that was foiled by a pre-emptive arrest. Koo Sze-yiu was arrested on February 4, the opening day of the Winter Olympics, after he had announced plans to protest outside Beijing's liaison office in Hong Kong.

The 75-year-old was formally charged the next day with "attempting to do or making any preparation to do an act or acts with seditious intention"—a colonial-era offence—and denied bail. Principal magistrate Peter Law on Tuesday jailed Koo for nine months, saying that the "serious" case required a deterrent sentence.

The longtime activist was defiant in court, saying that "getting jailed is a part of my life". "I don't mind being a warrior for the democracy movement, and I don't mind being a martyr for democracy and human rights," he said.

Koo is the latest activist to be jailed in Hong Kong's crackdown on dissent, which has been propelled by the national security law imposed by Beijing after the city's pro-democracy protests in 2019. While sedition is a colonial-era law, the courts now treat it with the same severity as acts that endanger national security.

Koo's lawyers had argued that his planned protest was an exercise in free speech and that the sedition charge was unconstitutional. But the magistrate said the slogans on his protest materials—which read "down with the Communist Party and one-party dictatorship"—aimed to overthrow the regime, and were provocative given the context of 2019's protests.

"During the movement, many people directed blame toward the Chinese Communist Party, and despite the movement ending, many have not yet recovered emotionally," Law said. "(The slogans) will once again provoke emotions of discontent and disaffection." He added that Koo could have also emboldened calls for boycotting the Winter Olympics.

## Lifelong activist

Born in the Chinese city of Zhongshan, Koo has spent most of his life in activism, from opposing the Portuguese colonial government in Macau to fiercely criticising Beijing's crackdown in Hong Kong. He has been jailed at least 11 times in Hong Kong since 2000, and was diagnosed with terminal rectal cancer in 2020.

His latest stint in prison ended in July last year after he served five months for violating the government's ban on protesters covering their faces during the 2019 protests. The veteran activist was unbowed Tuesday after his sentencing, telling the court he had no regrets.

"The Chinese government has destroyed freedom and democracy in Hong Kong," he said, and blasted China's treatment of dissidents in the mainland—pointing to opaque trials and lengthy jail terms. "Compared to what they have experienced, my sacrifice is nothing." —AFP

## China locks down city over single COVID case

BEIJING: Hundreds of thousands of people were under lockdown in a small Chinese city Tuesday after just one case of COVID-19 was detected, as Beijing's strict no-tolerance virus strategy showed no sign of abating. China is the last major economy glued to a zero-COVID policy, crushing new outbreaks with snap lockdowns, forced quarantines and onerous travel curbs despite mounting public fatigue and damage to the economy.

Authorities in several regions have imposed a range of restrictions as they struggle to tamp down fresh flare-ups driven by the fast-spreading Omicron variant. After reporting a new domestic infection, the steelmaking hub of Wugang in Henan province announced Monday that it would implement three days of "closed control" in response to "the needs of disease prevention", according to an official notice.

None of the city's 320,000 people are allowed to set foot outside their homes until midday Thursday, the notice said, adding that basic necessities would be delivered by local authorities. Residents are not allowed to use their cars without permission and must obtain official authorisation to travel under "closed-loop" conditions in case of

emergencies, the notice said.

The city is home to one of China's biggest steel firms, Wuyang Iron & Steel Co., which exports to the United States, Japan and other major Western economies, according to Bloomberg.

## '250 million under restrictions'

The nearby city of Zhumadian—home to some seven million people—also announced Tuesday that it would impose a similar three-day closure of its city centre after two people tested positive. But the curbs appeared lighter than Wugang, with residents in the area ordered not to leave their homes "unless essential" and one person per household allowed out every two days to buy essentials, the city government said in a notice.

Entertainment venues such as bars, cinemas, gyms and karaoke parlours have been suspended and restaurants are only allowed to offer food on a takeaway basis, the notice added. Nearly 250 million people in China are now under some kind of virus control measures—more than double last week's number—Japanese bank Nomura said Monday. Persistent outbreaks and hardline official responses have dampened hopes that Beijing is ready to pivot away from the type of draconian curbs seen earlier this year, when tens of millions were confined to their homes, sometimes for weeks on end.

The country recorded 347 new domestic cases on Tuesday, more than 80 percent of which showed no symptoms, according to the National Health Commission. Fears have grown about



BEIJING: A health worker takes a swab sample from a woman to be tested for the COVID-19 at a swab collection site in Beijing. —AFP

tighter COVID measures in Shanghai, which endured a gruelling two-month lockdown earlier this year punctuated by supply shortages and isolated protests.

Most of the megacity's 25 million residents have been ordered to get two COVID tests between Tuesday and Thursday, as daily case figures continue to hover in the double digits. In eastern Anhui province, where authorities last week plunged 1.7 million people into lockdown, residents of one county were due to undergo a 15th round of mass testing on Tuesday, according to an official notice. —AFP

## Cubans decry clampdown on protest 'versary

HAVANA: Havana's streets were calm Monday on the one-year anniversary of unprecedented anti-government demonstrations, with Cubans denouncing a preemptive security clampdown to avoid a repeat. Amid fresh accusations of human rights abuses and calls from the United States for the Cuban government to "respect" dissident voices, President Miguel Diaz-Canel said he was convinced the country would emerge from what he described as a "complex situation."

There had been calls for new protests on the anniversary, but more than a dozen dissidents, artists and independent journalists said on Twitter they had received warnings from the police not to leave their homes, from where some reported seeing patrols outside.

They also included the parents of protesters in jail. "I am under siege," tweeted Yurka Rodriguez, the mother of 25-year-old Yunaikis Linares, one of hundreds placed behind bars

by the communist regime.

Rodriguez used the hashtag #SOSCuba. "No one will go out on the street," student Carlos Rafael Dominguez, 18, told AFP. "There is no bringing it (the government) down," he said resignedly. Added 64-year-old Maria de los Angeles Marquez: "People are resisting going out" because of the heavy sentences—up to 25 years in some cases—meted out for participation in last year's spontaneous outburst of anti-government ire.

Mass protests broke out across Cuba on July 11 and 12 last year, with demonstrators clamoring for food and freedoms amid the island's worst economic crisis in 30 years, and shortages of fuel, medicines and food.

A crackdown by security forces left one dead, dozens injured and 1,300 people detained, according to rights observers. Hundreds, including minors, have since been given jail sentences for such crimes as "public disorder," "contempt" or "sedition."

## 'Prison or exile'

In a report published on the protest anniversary, Human Rights Watch detailed "systematic human rights violations" committed by the government to quash further dissent.



HAVANA, Cuba: People chat in a street in La Guinera neighbourhood of Havana, on June 30, 2022. As Cuba marks the first anniversary of the unprecedented protests of July 11 and 12. —AFP

The report listed claims of "arbitrary detention, abuse-ridden prosecutions, beatings and other cases of ill-treatment that in some cases constitute torture."

"A year ago today, thousands of Cubans protested, demanding rights and freedoms, but the government gave many of them only two options: prison or exile," said Juan Pappier, senior Americas researcher at HRW.

Diaz-Canel, who has described the protests as "a vandalistic coup,"

tweeted Monday that "if anything is to be commemorated this 11th of July, it is the victory of the Cuban people, the Cuban revolution."

Cuba has for the past six decades been the target of US sanctions that the government blames for the island nation's economic woes. Citing a backdrop of "constant economic, political and ideological siege," the president said he was "convinced that we will also emerge from this complex situation." —AFP

## China slams Taiwan over Abe's funeral trip

BEIJING: China on Tuesday accused Taiwan of "political manipulation" after its Vice President William Lai attended former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe's funeral—Taipei's highest-ranking official visit to Japan in decades.

Beijing views the self-ruled democratic island of Taiwan as its own territory, and countries that have diplomatic relations with China usually refrain from having official exchanges with Taiwan. "After the former Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo unexpectedly passed away, Taiwan authorities seized it as an opportunity for political manipulation," said foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters at a routine briefing.

"Taiwan is a part of China, there is no so-called Vice President." The Chinese government had already made "representations" to Japanese officials at its embassy in Beijing as well as in Tokyo, Wang added. Taiwanese officials remained tight-

lipped about the visit, likely to avoid further antagonising Beijing. But Taiwanese media reported that Lai made the trip on the orders of President Tsai Ing-wen, in what one ruling party lawmaker called a "diplomatic breakthrough". While Japan does not formally recognise Taiwan, relations between the two have warmed in recent years, with Tokyo donating several batches of COVID vaccines to the island and becoming more outspoken about China's growing influence in the region.

Japanese officials have also sought to downplay the visit, with foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi saying Tuesday that Lai had attended the funeral "as a private individual". "There has been no change to

our country's basic policy to keep our relationship with Taiwan as a non-governmental, working relationship," Hayashi told reporters.

Abe was dubbed "the most Taiwan-friendly Japanese prime minister" by Taiwanese media and he continued to voice support for the island in the face of Chinese military and economic pressure after stepping down in 2020. But he had a mixed legacy in China, where he was criticised for visits to Yasukuni, a shrine that venerates the souls of Japan's war dead—including some convicted by a US tribunal of war crimes—and his death triggered a wave of jubilation on social media. —AFP

WEDNESDAY, JULY 13, 2022

# Business

## Leaked Uber documents reveal bare-knuckle expansion tactics

### Potentially illegal tactics used to fuel global expansion



**JOHANNESBURG:** A city power contractor stands in an underground work area beneath Johannesburg, South Africa. Blackouts - called load shedding - intensified late last month in South Africa due to 'illegal' strike action at the nation's monopoly energy provider Eskom, resulting in coal plants unable to operate or undergo maintenance. — AFP

**SAN FRANCISCO:** A leaked cache of confidential files from ride-sharing company Uber illustrates ethically dubious and potentially illegal tactics it used to fuel its frenetic global expansion beginning nearly a decade ago, a joint media investigation showed Sunday. Dubbed the "Uber Files," the investigation involving dozens of news organizations found that company officials leveraged the sometimes violent backlash from the taxi industry against drivers to garner support and evaded regulatory authorities as it looked to conquer new markets early in its history.

Culled from 124,000 documents from 2013-2017 initially obtained by British daily the Guardian and shared with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, the revelations are the latest hit for a company dogged by controversy as it exploded into a disruptive force in local transportation. The cache includes unvarnished text and email exchanges between executives, with standouts from co-founder and former chief executive Travis Kalanick, who was forced to resign in 2017 following accusations of brutal management practices and multiple episodes of sexual and psychological harassment at the company.

"Violence guarantee(s) success," Kalanick messaged other company leaders as he pushed for a counter protest amid sometimes heated demonstrations in Paris in 2016 against Uber's arrival in the market. Uber's rapid expansion leaned on subsidized drivers and discounted fares that undercut the taxi industry, and "often without seeking licenses to operate as a taxi and livery service,"

reported The Washington Post, one of the media outlets involved in the probe. Drivers across Europe had faced violent retaliation as taxi drivers felt their livelihoods threatened. The investigation found that "in some instances, when drivers were attacked, Uber executives pivoted quickly to capitalize" to seek public and regulatory support, the Post said.

According to the Guardian, Uber has adopted similar tactics in European countries including Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy, mobilizing drivers and encouraging them to complain to the police when they were victims of violence, in order to use media coverage to obtain concessions from the authorities. A spokesperson for Kalanick strongly denied the findings as a "false agenda," saying he "never suggested that Uber should take advantage of violence at the expense of driver safety." Uber, however, placed the blame Sunday on previously publicized "mistakes" made by leadership under Kalanick. "We've moved from an era of confrontation to one of collaboration, demonstrating a willingness to come to the table and find common ground with former opponents, including labor unions and taxi companies," it said, noting that his replacement, Dara Khosrowshahi, "was tasked with transforming every aspect of how Uber operates."

#### 'Kill switch'

The investigation also found that Uber worked to evade regulatory probes by leveraging a technological edge, the Post wrote. It described an instance when Kalanick implemented a "kill switch" to remotely cut off

access of devices in an Amsterdam office to Uber's internal systems during a raid by authorities.

"Please hit the kill switch ASAP," he wrote in an email to an employee. "Access must be shut down in AMS (Amsterdam)." Kalanick spokesperson Devon Spurgeon said the former chief executive "never authorized any actions or programs that would obstruct justice in any country." Kalanick "did not create, direct or oversee these systems set up by legal and compliance departments and has never been charged in any jurisdiction for obstruction of justice or any related offense," she said.

But the investigation charged that Uber's actions flouted laws and that executives were aware, citing one joking that they had become "pirates." The reports say the files reveal Uber also lobbied governments to aid its expansion, finding in particular an ally in France's Emmanuel Macron, who was economy minister from 2014 to 2016 and is now the country's president. The company believed Macron would encourage regulators "to be 'less conservative' in their interpretation of rules limiting the company's operations," the Post said.

Macron was an open supporter of Uber and the idea of turning France into a "start-up nation" in general, but the leaked documents suggest that the minister's support even sometimes clashed with the leftist government's policies. The revelations sparked indignation among leftist politicians, who denounced the Uber-Macron links as against "all our rules, all our social rights and against workers' rights," and condemned the "pillaging of the country." — AFP

## Chinese banks to repay customers after protests

**BEIJING:** Customers of rural Chinese banks whose withdrawals have been frozen will begin to get some money back Friday, regulators said, after depositors clashed with authorities at a rare protest over the weekend. China's rural banking sector has been hit hard by Beijing's efforts to rein in a property bubble and spiralling debt, in a financial crackdown that has had ripple effects across the world's second-largest economy.

Four banks in Henan province froze cash withdrawals in mid-April in the face of regulatory scrutiny into alleged mismanagement, leaving thousands of savers without funds and sparking sporadic demonstrations. In one of the largest such rallies, hundreds gathered Sunday outside a branch of the People's Bank of China in Henan's capital Zhengzhou demanding their money.

The protests prompted a harsh official response, with demonstrators forced onto buses by police and beaten by plain clothes men, according to eyewitness accounts given to AFP and verified photos on social media. Some depositors will now be able to get their money back, Henan's provincial banking and insurance regulator said in a statement on Monday. Individual customers with deposits of up to 50,000 yuan (\$7,442) will be repaid starting Friday, the regulator said, while arrangements for

repaying others will be separately announced. "Funds that are involved in illegal or criminal (activity) will temporarily not be repaid," the regulator said. The announcement came a day after local police said it had arrested members of a "criminal gang" accused of taking over local banks and making illegal transfers through fictitious loans. Protesters in a social media chat group seen by AFP were sceptical about the repayments, with one suggesting that "people with more than 50,000 yuan (in deposits) will have to continue waiting endlessly".

#### Deepening crisis

The Henan banks are among a wave of small local financial institutions hit by cash flow and management woes. Anhui province also announced Monday that it would begin repaying the deposits of some customers of a Bengbu city bank after online complaints and local media reports of frozen withdrawals. Protests are rare in tightly controlled China, where authorities enforce social stability at all costs and opposition is swiftly repressed. But desperate citizens have occasionally succeeded in organizing mass gatherings, usually when their targets are local governments or individual corporations.

The Henan demonstrations - and subsequent crackdown - have prompted an outpouring of support, with many on the Weibo platform pointing the finger at local officials. "Why are you treating ordinary people like this?" one user asked in a post on Monday. Some of Sunday's demonstrators accused officials of colluding with local banks to suppress rallies. Provincial authorities were accused last month of abusing the country's mandatory COVID-19 health code to effectively bar protesters from public spaces. — AFP

## Macron under pressure over Uber links

**PARIS:** French President Emmanuel Macron was under pressure Monday to explain his past support for taxi app Uber while he was economy minister, following media revelations that have been seized on by critics. According to investigations by media including France's Le Monde newspaper and Britain's The Guardian, Macron held several undeclared meetings with Uber executives while minister from 2014-2016.

Citing leaked internal documents and text messages, Le Monde also alleged that Uber struck a secret "deal" with Macron on regulation of the company's services at a time when it was upending the traditional taxi market. Opposition MPs on the left and far-right slammed the president, a former investment banker who positioned himself as a pro-enterprise, pro-innovation politician when named as economy minister. Macron was "a lobbyist at the service of foreign private economic interests," senior far-right MP Sebastien Chenu told France Info radio on Monday morning. The 44-year-old president was "an ideologue for deregulation, for globalisation," Chenu added.

Hard-left MP Alexis Corbiere from the France Unbowed party suggested a parliamentary enquiry, which could prove embarrassing for the 44-year-old leader who lost his majority in the National Assembly last month. "It's very serious the idea that with this secret pact Mr Macron de-regulated the regulation of the taxi industry," he told Public Senat television. "What lessons should be drawn? 'Obviously, we'll ask the questions to the government when we can, and a parliamentary enquiry as well,' he added.

France Unbowed tabled a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne on Monday - which had been planned last week - but it was not passed. At the time, Macron's Socialist predecessor Francois Hollande was president and on Monday he denied knowledge of the issue. "There never was, at the level of the Elysee (presidency), knowledge of any deal whatsoever. If that is what happened, the Elysee was not party to it," Hollande told Liberation daily.

#### Uber 'partner'?

According to the reports, the "secret deal" entailed Macron promising to help Uber work around legislation introduced in 2014 which sought to regulate the new app-based taxi hailing services. Le Monde described Macron as "more than a supporter, almost a partner" for



**WASHINGTON:** Uber app is seen on an iPhone 13 Pro in Washington, DC. — AFP

Uber over the course of 17 meetings held by him or his staff with company executives.

At the time, the firm faced multiple legal enquiries over its business practices which undercut French labor law and caused sometimes violent protests from traditional taxi drivers. Macron's agenda on Monday included a meeting with the heads of multinational investors in France at the annual "Choose France" summit at the Versailles chateau outside Paris. The biggest announcement was a 5.7-billion-euro (\$5.8-billion) investment by French-Italian chipmaker STMicroelectronics and US-based GlobalFoundries.

Around 180 executives are expected, more than in previous years which demonstrated "the very strong interest from foreign bosses after the president's reelection," an aide said. Macron beat far-right veteran Marine Le Pen to win a second term in April, but his allies failed to secure a parliamentary majority last month. He is set to give a television interview on Thursday to mark the country's Bastille Day celebrations and is bound to face questions about Monday's so-called "Uber Files".

Contacted by AFP, Uber France confirmed that the company had been in contact with Macron during his time as minister. The meetings had been in the normal course of his ministerial duties, which covered the private-hire sector, it said. The president's office told AFP that at that time Macron had "naturally" been in contact with "many companies involved in the profound change in services that has occurred over the years mentioned, which should be facilitated by unravelling certain administrative or regulatory locks".

Macron was a vocal and public supporter of Uber when it arrived in France - unlike many colleagues in the Socialist government of the time. He defended it as providing employment for people in low-income areas and as a means of breaking the monopoly held by taxi companies. — AFP



**BEIJING:** Sales staff (background center) fold clothes at the entrance of a shop as pedestrians walk and cycle past in Beijing on July 12, 2022. — AFP

## Twitter stock sinks as Musk mocks lawsuit threat

**NEW YORK:** Twitter shares plunged Monday as Elon Musk issued a mocking, defiant commentary about a looming court battle after he ditched a \$44 billion buyout of the social media giant. Shares of the microblogging platform fell 11.3 percent to finish at \$32.65, with analysts saying Musk's exit places the company in a vulnerable state at a challenging moment for its core business. After weeks of threats, Musk on Friday pulled the plug on the deal, accusing Twitter of "misleading" statements about the number of fake accounts, according to a letter from his lawyers included in a US securities filing.

In his first public remarks since the announcement,

Musk took to Twitter late Sunday night to troll the company after it said it would sue to enforce the deal. "They said I couldn't buy Twitter. Then they wouldn't disclose bot info. Now they want to force me to buy Twitter in court. Now they have to disclose bot info in court," he wrote in a tweet, with each of the four statements accompanied by pictures of Musk laughing with increasing glee.

A second tweet showed an image of martial arts star Chuck Norris behind a chess board, which Musk captioned, "Chuckmate." Twitter offered a fresh rebuttal of its own late Monday, releasing a letter from its legal team to Musk's lawyers that called the Tesla boss's grounds for ending the deal "invalid and wrongful," according to a securities filing.

"Twitter demands that Mr. Musk and the other Musk Parties comply with their obligations under the Agreement, including their obligations to use their respective reasonable best efforts to consummate and make effective the transactions contemplated by the Agreement," said Twitter attorneys at Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz. The termination of the takeover agree-

ment Musk inked in April sets the stage for a potentially lengthy court battle with Twitter, which initially opposed a transaction with the unpredictable billionaire entrepreneur.

The original merger agreement contained a \$1 bil-



**NEW YORK:** A Twitter logo is displayed on a screen at the New York Stock Exchange during morning trading in New York City. — AFP

lion breakup fee. Twitter has defended its fake account oversight and said it will sue to force Musk to complete the deal. The social network says the number of fake accounts is less than five percent, a figure challenged by the multi-billionaire who believes the percentage to be much higher.

S&P Global Ratings said Musk's latest move "carries multiple downside risks" for Twitter, pointing to the precariousness of company revenues tied to advertising given rising recession risk. The ratings agency said there was risk from even a successful recouping of the \$1 billion breakup fee. "While the breakup fee could be credit positive, we believe the negative publicity could harm Twitter's relationships with its advertisers, employees, and investors in all possible scenarios," S&P said.

The latest back-and-forth follows weeks of public squabbling between the sides after Musk amplified the fake accounts issue, causing some analysts to speculate that he was getting cold feet about the deal, which drew criticism from progressive advocacy groups concerned about his political agenda. — AFP



## Business

# Apple's self-driving car effort stuck in low gear

## Team plagued by setbacks as rivals race ahead

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Apple's quest to produce a viable self-driving car remains stalled despite years of work, with its team plagued by setbacks as rivals race ahead. The Information tech news website reported Monday. Buzz surrounding a potential Apple car began some eight years ago with the vehicles being touted as the first new "big thing" from the company since its iconic co-founder Steve Jobs died in October 2011.

However, self-driving Apple cars have had trouble on streets near its Silicon Valley headquarters, bumping curbs, straying from lanes, and almost hitting a jogger legally crossing a road. The Information said, citing interviews with people who worked on the project. The article maintained that team troubles resulted from ever-shifting goals and leadership, staff turnover, and lack of faith in the project by high-ranking Apple executives.

Apple chief Tim Cook early last year portrayed self-driving cars as an ideal match for the technology giant during an interview released by the New York Times. "An autonomous car is a robot and so there are a lot of things you can do with autonomy; we will see what Apple does," Cook told journalist Kara Swisher's "Sway" podcast. Cook hinted that an option could be for Apple to build an autonomous-driving technology

platform used by automakers. He expressed admiration for electric carmaker Tesla, which is among companies developing autonomous driving capabilities.

Apple first revealed its self-driving tech aspirations in 2016 and Cook has since then said he saw autonomous driving systems as a "core technology" for the future. Apple acknowledged last year that it trimmed its team devoted to self-driving car technology but stressed that it's still in the race. Most major auto manufacturers and many technology groups are currently developing autonomous vehicles, considered to be the future of the automobile, along with electric power.

Less than a year ago, Waymo, the self-driving unit at Google's parent company Alphabet, expanded its robotaxi service to riders in San Francisco in another step toward fully autonomous ride-hailing. The company allows "trusted testers" to hail rides in self-driving cars with an "autonomous specialist" on board for backup. The move expanded the Waymo ride-hailing program which has been operating in Phoenix, Arizona since 2017 as rivals work to launch similar operations. Waymo has been moving ahead of most competitors and has raised billions of dollars in anticipation of a wider launch.—AFP



TOWSON: Customers shop at The Apple Store at the Towson Town Center mall in Towson, Maryland. — AFP

## Europe frets over reduced Russia gas supplies

**BERLIN:** Russian energy giant Gazprom began 10 days of maintenance on its Nord Stream 1 pipeline on Monday—with Germany and other European countries watching anxiously to see if the gas comes back on. The annual work on the gas link was scheduled long in advance. But the fear is that—with relations between Russia and the West at their lowest in years because of the invasion of Ukraine—Gazprom might take the opportunity to simply shut off the valves.

"Putin is going to turn off the gas tap... but will he turn it back on one day?" German mass-market daily Bild asked on Sunday on its website. After the Nord Stream stop on Monday morning, Italian energy company Eni and Austrian Group OMV both reported their supplies from Gazprom had also been reduced. "There are a number of scenarios in which we could end up in an emergency," Klaus Mueller, the head of Germany's federal gas network regulator, told public broadcaster ZDF on Monday.

### 'Unprecedented'

"We are confronted with an unprecedented situation—anything is possible," German vice-chancellor Robert Habeck told public radio over the weekend. "It is possible that the gas will flow once more, even at a higher volume level than before." But, he warned, "it is possible that nothing comes through, and we still have to prepare for the worst" as Europe scrambles to transition away from Russia for energy supplies.

Moscow had already wound down supplies by 60 percent in recent weeks, blaming the absence of a turbine even as Berlin denounced what it calls a "political" decision. Those cuts had a knock-on effect on supplies to a number of EU states, while Poland and Bulgaria have also seen theirs stopped altogether. One issue at least was resolved over the weekend, when

Canada agreed to return to Germany the turbine, which had been undergoing maintenance, despite the objections of Ukraine.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, via his spokesman, on Sunday welcomed "the decision of our Canadian friends" to grant what Ottawa termed a time-limited and revocable permit for Siemens Canada to allow the machine's return. Berlin has also speculated that for technical reasons it would be difficult for Gazprom to stop deliveries via Nord Stream entirely. As Habeck put it, "it is not like a water tap" that can simply be turned on or off, with gas extracted in Siberia not able to be stored indefinitely.

### Ration fears

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, Germany suspended certification of a second pipeline, Nord Stream 2, as fears grew over Europe's massive dependence on Russian gas supplies. But even now, a long-term shutdown of the pipeline would hit Germany and its EU neighbours hard, deepening an energy crisis in which uncertain supplies have pushed prices up ahead of Europe's winter. Germany imports some 35 percent of its gas from Russia compared with 55 percent before the Ukraine conflict started.

In France, Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire said Sunday the country should ready itself for a "complete cut" in supplies from Russia. "That is currently the most likely outcome," he said. German industry is very vulnerable to shortages, with authorities discussing the possibility of having to ration supplies. Chemical trade group VCI president Christian Kullmann told the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* daily Monday an end to supplies would amount to a "heart attack for the economy".

If deliveries cease altogether, German multinational chemical firm BASF is considering furloughing part of its roughly 100,000 workforce. "We need to do everything to start saving gas now. Optimizing heating, discussing it among families, preparing industry. We are not powerless," gas network regulator boss Mueller said Monday. On Thursday, the German parliament adopted a plan which includes limiting winter heating on its premises to a maximum 20 Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit) and cutting hot water supplies in individual offices.—AFP

## Stocks fall, euro nears dollar parity; recession fears build

**HONG KONG:** Equities fell Tuesday, along with oil, on fears that central bank moves to fight inflation will spark a recession, while the euro fell towards parity with the dollar as cost-of-living crises loom over the eurozone economy. Worries about a COVID flare-up in China—fuelled fears of more lockdowns—added to the downbeat mood, just as investors prepare for a week of data and earnings that could have huge implications for markets. Wall Street ended with more losses, with tech firms taking the brunt of the selling on expectations for an extended period of hefty interest rate hikes—the sector is particularly susceptible to higher borrowing costs.

A forecast-beating US jobs report last week suggested the world's top economy was coping with higher Federal Reserve rates, but it also gave the bank more room to continue lifting—leading to concerns it could go too far and cause a contraction. "While the jobs report on Friday highlighted that the US is faring better than the rest in the race to avoid a recession, the rest of the world is sinking under the weight of a cost-of-living crisis and higher interest rates," said OANDA's Craig Erlam. He added that a recent bounce in stocks had faded "and we now head into earnings season and another week of major economic reports fearful of what may lie ahead". Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Seoul, Singapore, Wellington, Mumbai and Taipei all fell, though Sydney and Jakarta edged up. London, Paris and Frankfurt were also down at the open. Bets on a drop in demand caused by a possible recession also hit the crude market, with both main contracts extending Monday's losses.

### Euro nears dollar parity

The Fed's sharp rate hikes have sent the dollar soaring, with the euro particularly under pressure as the European Central Bank moves more slowly in tightening monetary policy and the region faces an energy crisis caused by the Ukraine war.

Sanctions on oil imports from Russia and Moscow's warnings that it will shut off gas to Europe have led analysts to predict the eurozone will fall into recession, and pushed the euro to a 20-year low and close to parity with the greenback. But commentators said that even if the ECB lifted rates more quickly, that would add to

the economic pain. While the single currency picked up slightly after hitting a low of \$1.0003, there is a broad expectation that it is a matter of time before the \$1.0000 level is breached.

There is a fear that a planned 10-day shutdown of Russia's key Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline for maintenance could be extended by Moscow in retaliation for European sanctions linked to its invasion of Ukraine. French Economy and Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire warned over the weekend that there is a strong chance Moscow will turn off the taps in the winter. "The next few weeks could be challenging for Europe, with possibly maximum uncertainty stretching into August," said SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes.



TOKYO: A man walks past an electronic share price board showing the closing numbers on the Tokyo Stock Exchange on July 12, 2022. — AFP

"Investors increasingly believe that gas may not start to flow through Nord Stream 1 again following the scheduled maintenance on July 11-21, with further 'temporary' interruptions seen as likely." Investors are also awaiting the upcoming corporate reporting season with the dollar in mind. The currency's strength will not only "affect this quarter's earnings, but more likely it's going to affect the revenue generation outlook for the next couple of quarters and that, I think, is a big problem", Kimberly Forrest, of Bokeh Capital Partners, told Bloomberg Radio.

And markets strategist Louis Navellier added: "Earnings will be very revealing, the outlook for the second half (of the year) more so, as far as the state of consumer demand and the impact of inflationary pressures on profit margins and revenue growth." "There is already early downward pressure with 71 S&P companies having already issued negative guidance versus outlook given in the first quarter earnings", the highest since the final three months of 2019.—AFP

## GlobalFoundries and STMicro plan 5.7 bn euro French factory

**PARIS:** French-Italian chipmaker STMicroelectronics and US-based GlobalFoundries will plough 5.7 billion euros (\$5.8 billion) into a new semiconductor factory in France, the firms and President Emmanuel Macron's office said Monday. The two firms aim "to create a new, jointly-operated semiconductor manufacturing facility adjacent to ST's existing 300mm facility in Crolles," STMicroelectronics said in a statement, referring to its plant outside Grenoble in southeastern France.

Expected to employ around 1,000 people, the factory should reach full capacity by 2026, the company added, with the factory seen as part of efforts to reduce European dependency on Asian manufacturing. Chip factories like STMicroelectronics's produce integrated circuits on 300-millimetre (12-inch) circular "wafers" of silicon. GlobalFoundries and STMicroelectronics plan to produce their latest designs at the plant, with some elements as tiny as 18 nanometres—around 5,000 times smaller than the thickness of a sheet of paper.

Such chips "are expected to remain in high demand for automotive, internet of things and mobile applications for the next few decades," STMicroelectronics said. The company added that the factory would receive "significant financial support from the state of France". "This is the biggest industrial investment of recent decades outside of the nuclear industry," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire wrote on Twitter. "It's a big step for our industrial sovereignty."

### Push for European supply

President Macron plans to visit the existing factory on Tuesday to outline government plans to support chip manufacturing with "more than five billion euros" as

part of an industrial programme dubbed "France 2030", his office said. He was one of the loudest voices pushing for more chipmaking capacity in the EU, where the European Commission earlier this year proposed a 43-billion-euro "Chips Act" to boost the field.

Disruption to supply chains during the Covid-19 pandemic has focused policymakers' minds on diversifying sources of key components. Shortages of chips mostly produced in Asia have held up vital European industries like carmaking even after health restrictions were relaxed. US chip giant Intel said in March it would pump up to 80 billion euros into its EU operations over the coming decade, especially in Germany, France and Ireland.

In France, the new Crolles factory would "strongly contribute to the objectives of the European Chips Act, including the goal of Europe reaching 20 percent of worldwide semiconductor production by 2030," STMicroelectronics said. The Elysee said Crolles "will become France's biggest semiconductor production site and one of the largest in Europe". Monday's announcement of the new factory was a top prize for Macron on the day of his annual "Choose France" summit.—AFP



France's President Emmanuel Macron (right) is surrounded upon his arrival for a speech during a visit at STMicroelectronics in Isere region.—AFP



SEINE-MARITIME: Photo shows the entry of the electrification part of the Renault factory, in Cleon, northwestern France. — AFP

## Renault sales hit by microchip shortages

**PARIS:** French carmaker Renault said Tuesday that sales of its conventional and electrical vehicles fell in the first half of this year, impacted by the worldwide shortage of semiconductors. It said it sold 1,000,199 units in the first half of 2022, down 12 percent compared to the same period last year. The data for both years did not include sales in Russia.

Renault said the dip in sales comes "in a context disrupted by the semiconductor crisis and marked by the shutdown of the group's activities in Russia". Semiconductors are electronic components that are

indispensable in both conventional petrol-powered and electrical vehicles. The global shortage of such parts has forced carmakers around the world to throttle and even halt production temporarily. Renault said its own brand continued to post strong growth in the electrified market.

"Electrified markets are booming in Europe and Renault is well placed to meet this new customer demand with suitable products," said Fabrice Cambolive, deputy chief of the Renault brand. "In the second half of the year, we will accelerate the electrification of our range with the launches of the all-New Megane E-Tech electric, Kangoo E-Tech electric and New Austral," Cambolive said. The E-Tech range-electric vehicles and hybrid powertrains—accounted for 36 percent of passenger car sales in Europe in the first half of 2022, compared with 26 percent in 2021, Renault said.—AFP

## Business

# Biden seeks to persuade Saudi to pump more oil as prices soar

## US inflation pushed to highest rate in more than 4 decades

**LONDON:** Joe Biden will make his first visit as US president to Saudi Arabia on Friday, where he will seek to persuade Riyadh to pump more oil to bring down prices that are fuelling inflation to the highest levels in decades. Prior to his election, Biden had vowed that Saudi should be a "pariah" state following the 2018 murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi, in a recalibration of relations with the oil-producing country that is a kingpin of the OPEC oil cartel.

However, since then, key crude producer Russia had invaded Ukraine, propelling oil prices to levels last seen during the 2008 global financial crisis. That pushed US inflation to the highest rate in more than four decades—and this could yet persuade Biden to set aside human rights concerns before key US midterm elections in November, experts say. "It highlights his desperation ahead of the midterms to at least be seen to be trying to alleviate the tightness in the market and bring prices back down," OANDA analyst Craig Erlam told AFP. "Desperate times call for desperate measures."

### OPEC deal expiring

Biden's chances could be boosted by the looming expiry of a crucial deal among the wider so-called OPEC+ group to boost oil production. OPEC+ comprises the 13-nation Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries led by Saudi Arabia and its 10 partners headed by Russia. The group had previously slashed output in 2020, when demand was decimated by Covid pandemic lockdowns worldwide. But since last year, countries have been gradually reopening the taps as economies rebound.

Last month, OPEC+ stuck to a previously agreed output hike, shrugging off calls for bigger increases to tame elevated prices. The deal will soon run its course once OPEC+ returns to pre-pandemic production after August. "The expiration of the OPEC+ deal in September does create an opportunity and perhaps (Biden) would not be making such a move if he had not been assured that something is possible," said Erlam. The grouping will hold its next production gathering in August.

### Hopes dashed?

Yet Biden's hopes for more oil could be dashed because elevated crude prices, despite recent losses, have energized state revenues and economies across the Middle East. "It would be a massive surprise if Saudi Arabia produced more oil," said independent analyst Stephen Innes.

Saudi Arabia's oil-driven economy expanded by 9.6 percent in the first quarter, its strongest growth rate in a decade. There is a "significant economic incentive to not increase production", said XTB analyst Walid Koudmani. Riyadh is already pumping close to maximum capacity. In May, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan stated that the kingdom had "done what it could" for the oil market. The industry needed to increase refining capacity instead of simply pumping more barrels of crude, he argued.

### The Iran question

Iran is another major bone of contention between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Riyadh is leading a fight against the Houthi rebels in Yemen, who are supported by Tehran.



DUBAI: A trader walks beneath a stock display board at the Dubai Stock Exchange in the United Arab Emirates. —AFP

Meanwhile, Washington wants to restore the Iran nuclear deal abandoned by Biden's predecessor Donald Trump in 2018. That could lead to the lifting of US economic sanctions on Iran—and pave the way for a return to the OPEC member's full export capacity.

Chief negotiators from the US and Iran held indirect talks in Qatar in June, in a bid to revive the

nuclear deal. A nuclear deal "appeared to be within reach several times in the recent past, particularly after the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict", said analyst Koudmani. "It has failed to gain any traction and would likely be passed up by the US if they were to receive assurances (of higher oil output) from Saudi Arabia after this visit from President Biden," the expert concluded. —AFP

## 'Desperate for water': Drought hits Mexican industrial powerhouse

**MONTERREY:** Maria Celia Navarro smiles wistfully as she remembers the now-unthinkable luxury of taking a shower in her home before a water shortage struck one of Mexico's wealthiest cities. Nestled in mountains a few hours' drive from the US border, industrial powerhouse Monterrey boasts living standards that many Mexicans could only dream of. Residents of the northern city, whose metropolitan area is home to around five million people, have in general been spared the chronic lack of services that plagues many poorer areas of the country. But for several weeks, a heat wave and dearth of rain means that Monterrey has had running water for only a few hours a day.

In disadvantaged neighborhoods perched on hills, it has been more than 50 days since some residents last saw a drop from their faucets. "I'm desperate for water," said Navarro. The 73-year-old, who is in frail health, said she feels "very depressed" sheltering from the sun in her small, poorly ventilated house in the municipality of Garcia. Even the city's elderly residents say they cannot remember a time when Monterrey's households had to cope with so little water.

### Filling buckets

Despite being a modern and thriving city, home to transnational firms, few houses are equipped with water tanks, which are common in other large cities including the capital Mexico City. "They weren't needed," said municipal councilor Javier Torres, who supervises tanker trucks bringing water to Garcia, where whole families run outside with buckets to collect the precious liquid.

Many residents of Monterrey—capital of the prosperous state of Nuevo Leon—fill improvised storage containers in their homes, unable to afford a large tank due to skyrocketing prices. A semi-arid climate means that each summer, when the average temperature hits around 38 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit), authorities have to monitor the level of several reservoirs supplying the city.

The water in one had dwindled to less than one percent of its capacity by the end of June, while another was at seven percent and a third at 44 percent, according to the national water authority. Samuel Garcia, Nuevo Leon's 34-year-old state governor, has said a pipeline leak is partly to blame, adding that he "is not Tlaloc"—referring to the Aztec rain god. Cloud seeding—a technique used elsewhere in Mexico to try to provoke rain by dispersing chemicals in the sky—is one of his proposals to tackle the problem.

### Companies lend hand

Monterrey faces an uncertain outlook due to 15 months of scant rainfall and insufficient management of water resources, according to expert Antonio Hernandez, who closely follows the city's environmental woes. Farmers and a booming industrial sector dominated by production of soft drinks, beer, steel and cement have been subject to few restrictions despite the drought, he said. Radical measures such as halting commercial activities "seem unthinkable to me at the moment," Hernandez said. Last week, after negotiations with federal authorities, businesses and farmers agreed to take steps to ease the shortage. —AFP

## Pakistan's prized mango harvest hit by water scarcity

**MIRPUR KHAS:** Mango farmers in Pakistan say production of the prized fruit has fallen by up to 40 percent in some areas because of high temperatures and water shortages in a country identified as one of the most vulnerable to climate change. The arrival of mango season in Pakistan is eagerly anticipated, with around two dozen varieties arriving through the hot, humid summers.

This year, however, temperatures rose sharply in March—months earlier than usual—followed by heatwaves that damaged crops and depleted water levels in canals farmers depend on for irrigation. "Usually I pick 24 truckloads of mangoes... this year I have only got 12," said Fazle Elahi, counting the bags lined up by his farm. "We are doomed." The country is among the world's top exporters of mangoes, harvesting nearly two million tons annually across southern parts of Punjab and Sindh.

The total harvest is yet to be measured, but pro-

duction is already short by at least 20 to 40 per cent in most areas, according to Gohram Baloch, a senior official at the Sindh provincial government's agriculture department. Umar Bhugio, who owns swaths of orchards outside Mirpur Khas—locally known as the city of mangoes—said his crops received less than half the usual amount of water this year. "Mango growers confronted two problems this year: one was the early rise in temperatures, and secondly the water shortage," he said. Pakistan is one of the most water-stressed countries in the world, a problem made worse by poor infrastructure and mismanagement of resources.

It also ranks as the country eighth most-vulnerable to extreme weather due to climate change, according to the Global Climate Risk Index compiled by environmental NGO Germanwatch. Floods, droughts and cyclones in recent years have killed and displaced thousands, destroyed livelihoods and damaged infrastructure. "The early rise of temperatures increased the water intake by crops. It became a contest among different crops for water consumption," said food security expert Abid Suleri, head of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI).

A rise in temperature is generally expected in the mango belt in early May, which helps the fruit ripen before picking starts in June and July. But the arrival



SINDH: A street vendor waits for customers while selling mangos in Mirpur Khas city in Pakistan's southern Sindh province. —AFP

of summer as early as March damaged the mango flowers, a key part of the reproductive cycle. "The mango should weigh over 750 grams but this year we picked very undersized fruit," Elahi said. Known in South Asia as the "king of fruits", the mango originated in the Indian subcontinent. The country's most treasured variety is the golden-yellow Sindhri, known for its rich flavour and juicy pulp. —AFP

## BASF profits rise despite looming gas crisis

**FRANKFURT:** German chemicals giant BASF on Monday reported a rise in second-quarter profits, even as concern mounts over the possible impact on the sector of stoppages of deliveries of Russian gas. BASF said in a statement that net profit rose to 2.1 billion euros (\$2.1 billion) in the period from April to June from 1.7 billion euros a year earlier, according to preliminary figures. The chemicals giant attrib-

uted the increase primarily to higher income from its shareholding in oil and gas company, Wintershall Dea, as energy prices have risen dramatically recently. The Ludwigshafen-based group said its second-quarter sales were also up by 16 percent at 23 billion euros, despite falling volumes. "Increased prices for raw materials and energy were largely passed on through higher selling prices", BASF said. Underlying or operating profit, was largely stable at 2.4 billion euros in the April-June period, the company said.

The favorable numbers come after the German chemical industry warned of the potentially existential consequences if Russia were to cut gas supplies completely. On Monday, Russian energy giant Gazprom halted supplies to Germany via the Nord

Stream 1 pipeline as it began maintenance work on the link. But concern in Europe's largest economy is widespread that the pipeline will not come back online after the service period, as relations between Russia and the West are at their lowest in years following the invasion of Ukraine.

A long-term shutdown would hit Germany hard, with authorities discussing the possibility of rationing supplies. A complete end to supplies would amount to a "heart attack for the economy", the head of the VCI chemicals industry federation, Christian Kullmann, told the Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily on Monday. The chemicals industry is reliant on gas as an energy source and as a raw material in production. "Without chemicals, this country would come to a standstill," Kullmann said. —AFP

## Consequences of the euro's fall to dollar parity

**PARIS:** The euro on Tuesday fell to parity with the dollar for the first time in nearly 20 years. Here are the concrete consequences of the decline in the value of the single European currency.

### On inflation, purchasing power

Nearly half of all goods imported into the eurozone are invoiced in dollars, compared to less than 40 percent in euros, according to the European statistics authority, Eurostat. Oil and gas, for example, are traditionally paid for in dollars, and the price of these two commodities has soared in recent months as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine.

That means more euros are needed to pay for an equivalent amount of goods in dollars. "Imported goods become less competitive, compete against each other and therefore become more expensive," which fuels inflation and erodes households' purchasing power, said Isabelle Mejean, professor at Sciences Po university. One specific effect of the euro's fall against the dollar is that it will "dampen European tourism to the United States in particular," said BNP Paribas economist, William De Vijlder.

Because European visitors will need to spend more euros to buy the equivalent amount in dollars, substantially pushing up the overall cost of their trip to the United States, but also to other countries whose currencies are pegged to the dollar, such as Qatar or Jordan. By contrast, visitors to Europe from the United States, Qatar and Jordan benefit from the exchange rate, as their dollars buy them a lot more in the eurozone than before.

### On businesses

The effect of the decline in the value of the euro varies, depending on how reliant a business is on foreign trade and energy. "Companies that export outside the euro area benefit from the euro's fall because their prices become more competitive" when converted into dollars, said Philippe Mutricy, research director at the public-sector bank Bpifrance. "By contrast, import-oriented businesses are at a disadvantage."

In the case of local craftsmen, who are dependent on raw materials and energy, but export little, the weaker euro can lead to a veritable explosion in costs. The biggest winner from the euro's falling exchange rate are export-



WASHINGTON: A stack of newly redesigned \$100 notes sits on a bench at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Washington, DC. —AFP

orientated manufacturing sectors such as the aerospace, automobile, luxury goods and chemicals industries. And major players are "better prepared for shocks" as they can hedge against exchange fluctuations, said Mutricy. "They purchase foreign currency in advance at advantageous rates to cushion them against sharp swings in the exchange rate."

### On growth and debt

The fall in the value of the euro makes prices outside the single currency area more competitive, theoretically providing a boost to the export of European goods and services

abroad. But the positive effect can be mitigated by the rising prices of commodities in the wake of the war in Ukraine, particularly in export-oriented economies such as Germany. The effect on debt repayment is less clear cut. The higher the pace of economic growth, the faster a country can repay its debt, said Mejean of Sciences Po Paris. But only on the proviso that the financial markets consider European debt to be sufficiently safe and interest rates remain low. For countries that issue dollar-denominated debt, the decline in the value of the euro against the dollar pushes up the cost of debt repayment. —AFP

## Lifestyle | Features



In this file picture taken on May 27, 2022, South Korean singer and producer Psy performs his biggest hit song, 'Gangnam Style', during a concert at an outdoor venue in the grounds of the Korea University in Seoul. — AFP photos



In this file photo taken on Nov 20, 2020, South Korean K-pop boy band BTS members pose during a press conference for their new album 'BE (Deluxe Edition)' in Seoul.

## The art detective who recovered precious relic

It was 10:30 pm on a Friday when Arthur Brand got the delivery he was nervously expecting. His doorbell rang, and when he opened the door no one was there. Instead, a cardboard box was waiting for him at the door in the dark. In that box he said was one of the most sacred artefacts ever stolen from the Catholic Church: the "Precious Blood of Christ" relic.

"(My) heart was beating in (my) chest," the Dutch art detective told AFP in an interview about the recovery of the stolen treasure. Brand is dubbed the "Indiana Jones of the Art World" for his remarkable recoveries of stolen art, including the "Hitler's Horses" bronze statues, a Picasso painting and a ring that once belonged to Oscar Wilde.

At 52, he is one of the most famous art sleuths in the world, trusted by both thieves and police for his unprecedented access to the criminal trade in stolen art. But getting his hands on the "Precious Blood of Christ" relic was a particularly special experience for him. "As a Catholic myself, this is about as close to Jesus (PBUH) and the legend of the Holy Grail you can get. It was a religious experience," he said.



Dutch Art detective Arthur Brand poses with the relic of the "Precious Blood of Christ" in Amsterdam, on July 6, 2022. — AFP

## 'Massive shock'

When he opened the box, he discovered what he hoped he would: The relic perfectly intact. The ornate container, about 30 cm high, has two metal bulbs inside and is said to hold drops of Jesus' (PBUH) blood collected in the Holy Grail during the crucifixion. It is held in a heavily gilded copper box with encrusted precious stones and depictions of Christ on the cross and other saints.

The holy relic is believed to date back to the death of Christ and has been a source of worship for Catholic pilgrims for more than 1,000 years. It was held by the Fecamp Abbey in France's Normandy region until the night of June 1-2, when it was stolen, just two weeks before the annual "Mass of the Precious Blood" celebration. "The thief most likely got inside by being locked in after hours and made off with the artefact," Brand said. "It was a massive shock that this famous piece, this legendary piece was stolen," he told AFP in his home, the relic on display nearby.

## 'The real thing'

The relic and its copper box were not the only objects waiting in the cardboard box on Brand's doorstep on that fateful July evening. There were several copper liturgical plates, depictions of saints and an ornate goblet, which were also stolen from the abbey in June. Brand carefully showed AFP the ornate and heavy copper box with a miniature roof and four angels on its corners, called a reliquary.

Brand was to hand the "Precious Blood" artefact to Dutch police Tuesday, who will give it to French authorities to be eventually returned to the Fecamp Abbey. AFP could not independently verify the authenticity of the objects, and they have not yet been examined by police or experts. The abbey could not immediately be reached for comment. But Brand has no doubt about their authenticity. "I have no doubt in my mind that it is the real thing. Religious objects are almost impossible to forge."

## 'A curse'

Brand said his involvement in the case started a few days after the theft, when he received a protected email from an anonymous writer, claiming to have the stolen loot in their possession. "This person was approaching me on behalf of another, at whose home the stolen relics were being stored," said Brand. But "to have the ultimate relic, the blood of Jesus in your home, stolen, that's a curse," he said. "When they realized what it was, that you in fact cannot sell it, they knew they had to get rid of it." Brand showed AFP an email written in Dutch in which the person asked him to take back the stolen property, as it was too risky to return it to the abbey itself. — AFP

## Global talent, Korean-trained: K-pop's new recipe for world domination

From Indian K-pop idols to Swedish songwriters, South Korea's music industry is now a hotbed of global talent - a smart strategy as it aims for world domination, experts say. K-pop bands have long included non-Koreans: Blackpink's Lisa is Thai, while Japan and China are both well represented, and Korean-American singers have topped the local charts.

But after megastars like Psy and BTS brought K-pop to a global audience, the South Korean entertainment agencies behind almost all the popular groups are recruiting further afield. DR Music's girl group Blackswan only has two Koreans in its six-woman line-up, and last month added the industry's first Indian "idol", who joins Brazilian and Senegalese members.

In the United States a Korean-American K-pop singer, AleXa, recently won NBC's American Song Contest, the US version of Eurovision. Though she sang in English, her training in Seoul made her stand out. Staff at NBC said they had "never worked with an artist who could find a camera on stage faster", according to Angelina Foss, creative director at South Korea's ZB Label. By the end of filming, other contestants were asking AleXa for tips, Foss said, adding that it was "just part of the training".

## 'Next step'

With comprehensive training programs covering everything from acting and etique



Korean American K-pop star AleXa

quette to stunt coordination, K-pop artists make some Western pop stars look like they are not even trying. Recruited in open castings or found through online audition tapes, South Korea's entertainment agencies identify the raw talent and then get to work. At ZB Label, part of industry powerhouse Zanybros which has produced thousands of K-pop music videos, the bosses are "always thinking - what's the next step in K-pop", Foss said.

They signed AleXa because they believe she has the "full package" and saw her potential as a young Korean-American to appeal to K-pop's growing global fandom. AleXa has studied dance since she was two but said the training regime was still grueling. "I trained every day of the week. I had dance classes every single day," said AleXa, who also did years of competitive cheerleading



Dancer, actor and model Iyanu Anderson

while growing up in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

"I had weekly evaluations, which is a very big thing in the K-pop industry," she said, explaining that trainees perform for company staff to assess their progress. After "months and months and months" of work, her bosses decided she was ready to "debut" as a fully fledged star. In K-pop machinery the concept of an artist's debut is very important, and obsessive detail is put into styling, staging and cinematography. "Concept and execution are very, very critical," said AleXa, whose songs are written in Sweden but produced in Seoul with a US audience but global YouTube views in mind.

## 'Strive for perfection'

K-pop recruiters are fanning out across the world, with BTS's agency Hybe hosting auditions in cities including London,

Bangkok, Sydney and Tokyo, but at the same time global talent is flocking to South Korea. Iyanu Anderson, 24, discovered K-pop as a teenager in Britain where she studied Korean at university before moving to Seoul, now working as a dancer, actress and model. "I'd love to be trained," said Anderson, who has appeared in a Samsung commercial with BTS and performed as a backing dancer at their three March concerts in Seoul.

"But to debut as an artist, I'm not sure," she told AFP, citing the huge pressure, scrutiny and workload facing K-pop idols. Even as a backup dancer "there is a certain amount of pressure, just because when we're shooting a commercial, they strive for perfection". "Sometimes we're shooting for hours and hours and one thing is out of line. And then it's a whole new setup," she said.

It is "quite difficult" for overseas performers to adapt to the hard-driving K-pop system, said Michelle Cho, assistant professor at the University of Toronto. But the industry itself is being forced to adapt to draw top talent from across the globe, she added. K-pop managers are "paying attention to pop cultural or youth cultural aesthetics and styles... in lots of different places", Cho explained. If they manage to successfully diversify casting and train new types of stars, "that can only be a good thing" for the industry and its global prospects, she said. — AFP

## Back from the dead, VHS tapes trigger a new collecting frenzy

Long relegated to an obscure corner of the collectibles market, VHS tapes have been fetching eye-popping prices at auctions in recent months, thanks to nostalgia and an appetite for new investment opportunities. At a sale by Heritage Auctions in June, a "Back to the Future" videocassette went for \$75,000, while "The Goonies" and "Jaws" copies were sold for \$50,000 and \$32,500, respectively. Videotape collectors have been around since the late 1970s, when the format was first introduced, but these days most "VHS tapes are worth next to nothing", according to John, from Newmarket in Canada, who claims to have sold around 3,000 of them over span of more than 20 years. "You'll be lucky to get \$5 each", says this active eBay user, who declined to give his last name.

Until recently, only some movies that hadn't been released online or on other medium, as well as little known horror movies, could command higher prices, sometimes above \$1,000. But this new trend is mostly focused on blockbuster titles, particularly from the early 80s. To be deemed valuable, a tape has to meet some specific criteria, with a premium put on first editions and sealed copies. A limited edition, such as a larger box version of "Star Wars", would also draw interest.

The George Lucas sci-fi cult classic is widely considered a must-have and several copies have already been sold for over \$10,000. The Holy Trinity could be movies from the first slate ever released on the US market in 1977, namely "MASH", "Patton" and "The Sound of Music", by a financially troubled 20th Century Fox with Magnetic Video. Jay Carlson, VHS Consignment director at Heritage Auctions, said these could reach "a six-digit number, maybe seven." Many long-time collectors are wondering about the sudden surge, 16 years after the last release of a film in this format ("A History of Violence"). The last video recorders were manufactured in 2016. "I think a lot of it is nostalgia and the compulsion to collect", says Philip Baker, who runs the www.video-collector.co.uk website. — AFP



In this file picture taken on Oct 2, 2012, a Costa Rican dance group performs Psy's signature horse-riding dance from his song "Gangnam Style" during a street parade in Seoul.

## 'Gangnam Style' impact endures a decade after it broke the Internet

When South Korean rapper Psy released "Gangnam Style" a decade ago, few anticipated the scale and speed of its success, and how it would help usher in the streaming revolution. Its madcap music video with the now-trademark horse-riding dance was released on July 15, 2012. It focused on the local, poking fun at Seoul's wealthy Gangnam district - but within weeks it went global.

By December that year, it had reached one billion views on YouTube. It birthed countless memes and parodies, with the giddy-up dance performed by flash mobs from Azerbaijan to New Zealand. And "Gangnam Style" showed the music industry what could be achieved through Internet platforms and social media, especially by artists outside the West who did not perform in English.

Psy "broke the rules of the game. The traditional marketing and promotional playbooks were essentially thrown out the window," said Bernie Cho, president of the Seoul-based DFSB Collective artist and label services agency and an expert on the South Korean music industry. It showed "the importance, the impact, the influence of YouTube on pop music and pop culture worldwide".

In 2012, the streaming industry was still in its infancy, providing less than seven percent of global music revenues, according to industry group IFPI. But the stunning success of "Gangnam Style" - as well as viral videos from performers such as Justin Bieber and Carly Rae Jepsen - showed a new way for acts from anywhere in the world to not only release music but also tap into online ad revenue, find sponsors and get booked for concerts, analysts say.

## 'Imagine the possibilities'

A decade later, streaming is the main source of revenue in the global music industry - 65 percent in 2021, IFPI reported - with content available online via subscription-based services, YouTube, and short-form video apps such as TikTok. "Gangnam Style" is "an example of the power that a platform like YouTube could have to create interest in a particular video from a lot of different places in the world," said Michelle Cho, an assistant professor at the University of Toronto who studies Korean pop culture.

"The significance of the video... goes far beyond the content of the video. And it really has more to do with the way that it enabled people to imagine the possibilities of the platform." Within months of its release, "Gangnam Style" was the most-viewed video on YouTube. It held that spot for more than three years. As of July 12 this year, it had close to 4.5 billion views.

Such was the online buzz for "Gangnam Style" and viral phenomena such as "Harlem Shake" that Billboard in 2013 changed how it compiles charts, adding streams on YouTube and other platforms to then-mainstream metrics such as radio and sales. "My one good job, helping K-pop, was changing the rules

of Billboard," Psy told AFP during an interview in May, pointing to the popularity of Korean acts on YouTube.

## 'Authentic, original, unique'

"Gangnam Style" shook South Korea too, becoming the country's biggest cultural export and a source of national pride overnight. K-pop acts had tried to break into international markets before 2012 with some regional success in Asia, but they had failed to make a mark in huge and lucrative Western markets such as the United States. And then came Psy, who did not fit the profile of polished K-pop idols. "Industry executives, government officials, pundits, critics, fans... just assumed that the breakout star from Korea would likely be either a boy band or a girl band," said DFSB's Bernie Cho. Psy "proved to everybody that instead of a Korean version of a Western pop star or an international pop star, what the world wanted was something very authentic, original, unique."

The horse-riding dance was everywhere - performed on prime-time TV in the United States, in an English football stadium, and by Bollywood stars in India. Then-US President Barack Obama said his daughters had taught him "a pretty good Gangnam Style". South Korea is a global entertainment powerhouse today, but in 2012, "Gangnam Style" was the first encounter with Korean pop culture for many audiences.

"It was really influential in perhaps making Korea or Korean music or Korean media more of a common element of general knowledge in lots of places... certainly in the US, but also globally," said scholar Michelle Cho. "That knowledge, that... familiarity definitely helps other content gain a foothold." — AFP



This photo taken on June 22, 2022 shows waiting customers gathering round septuagenarian Mbah Satinem as she prepares lupis, a traditional sweet dish made from glutinous rice and served with grated coconut and liquid palm sugar, at her street stall in Yogyakarta. — AFP photos



## Elderly Indonesian culinary legend's sweet treats stand the test of time

As the morning twilight approaches in an Indonesian city famed for its street food scene, a queue of sleepy customers snakes its way along the road in anticipation of a local culinary legend. The clock hits 5 am in Yogyakarta and out of the darkness appears a small and frail sarong-clad woman on the back of a black motorbike. She climbs off slowly, tightly holding a basket that carries the sweet snacks she has been selling for more than half a century.

Now 76 years old, Mbah Satinem was the Indonesian cultural hub's best-kept secret for decades but is today a cooking sensation after shooting to fame in the 2019 Netflix series "Street Food: Asia". Every day, she opens her stall before dawn and hunches over a table to prepare

and dish out traditional market snacks known as jajan pasar. Displayed on a banana leaf is a selection of treats that includes an Indonesian sweet cake known as lupis made from glutinous rice.

Alongside the star dish is tiwul, which is made using cassava flour, palm sugar and cenil, a worm-shaped tapioca flour jelly. "I've been selling lupis for a very long time, nothing has changed," she said from the stall she has run since 1963. "Lupis and I are fated with each other," she added, quietly laughing.

### Food fits

She cuts it with a nylon thread, carefully placing it on the banana leaf before dripping thick liquid palm sugar and sprinkling grated coconut over the breakfast fare.

The secret to the recipe passed down from her mother, she said, is firewood that gives the sweet treat a smokey flavor. "I used to help my mother making these snacks. When she found me getting better at it, she asked whether I wanted to sell them. I said yes," she said. "She asked again whether I would feel embarrassed about it, but I said I wouldn't. So, she agreed to make some snacks for me to sell."

Satinem's stall is now surrounded daily by dozens of fascinated customers who watch her every move and document the process with their phones. "The taste of her lupis is still the same," said 49-year-old Budi, a local who like many Indonesians goes by one name. "The savoriness and stickiness of the lupis, and the thickness of

the brown sauce, it is delicious." Her version of jajan pasar, sold until 9 am at 10,000 rupiah (\$0.67) a pop, has proven so popular that she has introduced a number system for customers after fights broke out over her treats.

### 'It's worth it'

Customers who have to wait more than an hour to satisfy their sweet tooth come from all corners of Java, the Indonesian island where Yogyakarta sits in the middle. One of them is Rama Luhur from the capital Jakarta, who waited nearly two hours to get a taste of the famous lupis after seeing Satinem on Netflix. "It's worth it. You can find jajan pasar everywhere, but I value her hard work," the 39-year-old told AFP.

That hard work only subsides during

the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. But every other day of the year, she rises early to begin her preparation. "I usually wake up at 1 am in the morning and go to bed after Isha (prayer around 8 pm)," she said.

Due to her age, Satinem's stall is now a family affair. Her husband is in charge of the sticky rice, her son handles the firewood and her daughter drives her to work and accompanies her through the four-hour shift. Asked why she refuses to quit what is usually a young person's game, the enduring street food granny brushes off the question with a laugh. Her daughter Mukinem steps in to answer for the shy chef. "She likes it, she enjoys cooking the snacks," she said. "And she can't stay put." — AFP

## Troubled waters: Iraqi spa reborn after IS massacres

A mineral spa in northern Iraq is regaining popularity as renovation work has brought back visitors, in a city once ruled by jihadists who carried out mass executions. Hisham Khaled often visited the Hamam al-Alil baths as a child with his father but since the facility's restoration he comes alone. His father, a policeman, was executed near the baths by the Islamic State (IS) group in 2016.

Located 30 km south of Mosul, Hamam al-Alil - meaning the baths of the sick in Arabic - built a solid reputation over decades with its therapeutic sulfurous waters. But the spa and surrounding village, which shares the same name, is now also known for massacres committed by IS during its occupation of the area. "I lost the people who were dearest to me," says Khaled, 21, sitting shirtless and in his underpants near the spa's circular pool.

His father, a police colonel, was among hundreds of local officers rounded up and executed by IS. Their bodies were discov-



Men gather at the Hamam al-Alil baths, south of the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, on June 30, 2022. — AFP

ered in Nov 2016 in a mass grave close to an agricultural college in the village. "It pains my heart. My father and I used to come to the baths together. Now he's gone and I've come here alone," adds the 21-year-old father of twins.

### Rebuilding

Like other parts of the Mosul area, the slow pace of reconstruction, five years after the jihadists were driven out, leaves locals frustrated. But last month's reopen-

ing of the baths, on the banks of the Tigris River, contributes to a return to normality, even if the scars of conflict remain. Khaled is now a masseur at the spa and bathes regularly. He says the sulfur-rich waters have cured him of an allergy and dermatological problems.

In its newly tiled rooms, men and children enjoy a moment of therapeutic relaxation for 5,000 dinars (\$3). In underpants or shorts they fill tubs with green, hot spring water, pouring it over their heads and then

vigorously rubbing their bodies - despite the nauseating smell characteristic of sulfur. An old man exits his wheelchair and bathes in the waters, doing stretching exercises with his arms.

The resort, built in 1984, accommodates between 75 and 100 people, with men and women using separate areas. On surrounding sidewalks, makeshift stalls sell plastic bottles filled with sulfurous mud. Salam Adel Hassan has made the trip from Baghdad and says he first visited the spa 20 years ago. "The spa was very rudimentary, not like now. The renovations are a success. I'm delighted," the 30-year-old says with a smile. "My brother has psoriasis. He couldn't come. I'm going to take him water and mud," he says.

After the defeat of IS in 2017, the baths remained popular although the building had fallen into disrepair, with chipped tiles and broken windows. In 2019, authorities undertook renovation work costing \$500,000. Construction materials were carefully selected to resist wear and oxidation caused by sulfurous waters, says Ahmed Aziz Ahmed, an employee at the spa. "The day after the inauguration, we began to receive groups of visitors from all the provinces" of Iraq, he says. Families originally from Mosul but now living abroad have come, as have British and German tourists, he adds. — AFP

## Qatari children help give endangered turtles second chance

On a beach in northeastern Qatar, six-year-old Lolwa waves goodbye to two baby hawksbill turtles - a species that has a one in a thousand chance of surviving to adulthood. Predators, climate change, fishing nets and marine pollution all contributed to the classification of these narrow-beaked creatures as "critically endangered" in 1996. But a conservation program in Qatar is hoping to revive the dwindling species, releasing thousands of hatchlings into the sea each year, now with the help of young children.

"As adults we are kind of beyond hope," said Clara Lim, a representative of the Dadu children's museum that organized the initiative for youngsters. "But children have the power to really internalize all these things that they are learning... and they make these habits part of their life." The Qatari program was launched as far back as 2003, and in the last five years has sent some 30,000 hatchlings into the sea, including 9,000 in 2020 when the pandemic cleared the waters of their human visitors.

Between April and June, Qatari environmentalists watch for female hawksbills that have arrived at Fuwairit beach to give birth, measuring them, providing care if needed, and sometimes attaching tracking devices. The nests are moved from under the sand on the main beach and placed under an awning to protect them from tides and predators.

Sixty days later, at the time of hatching, "the good and healthy ones... we release to the sea," said Mohamed Seyd Ahmed, a wildlife expert at the Qatari environment ministry. "Other small or tired ones... we release in a pool" to allow them to grow stronger first, he added. The turtles "act as a vacuum (cleaner)", Ahmed explained, consuming jellyfish and seagrass, so their decline has an effect "on all marine life".

### Confronting threats

On an evening in June, young Lolwa is joined by eight-year-old Shaikha and nine-year-old Abdullah to release the baby turtles out to sea. Close contact with the turtles has created a bond between them and the children, who have affectionately given the creatures names like Sassa and Blueberry. As hoped, attitudes are already changing in this young generation. "We cannot throw plastic in the sea because they (the turtles) will get caught in the plastic," says Shaikha.

Poaching and a lack of space also threaten these animals that reach adulthood at 25 and live for an average of 50 years. Since turtles instinctively return to lay eggs on the beaches where they were born, it will be possible to measure the success of the program, but not until 2028, when the first hatchlings released in 2003 come back to lay their eggs. But with 97 nests - each containing between 80 and 120 eggs - on Fuwairit beach this year compared to 15 in 2012, there is already cause for optimism. "The statistics show that there are more turtles coming to breed here," says Thierry Lesales, president of the Qatar Natural History Group. — AFP



Archaeologist Skender Mucaj inspects holes dug by illegal treasure hunters at the ruins of the Church of St Mary in Brrar near Tirana on June 13, 2022. — AFP photos

## 'Everywhere they dig': Looters hunt Albanian antiques

Shards of ceramics litter the fields of an ancient city in southeastern Albania, where looters have raided the area's highlands in search of antiquities to sell to international traffickers. Illicit treasure hunters operate with near impunity in the country, stirring outrage among archaeologists over the theft of priceless national heritage that feeds a global black market.

The government says it is working on measures to protect and preserve the sites looters prey on, but so far little avail - even though removing archaeological artifacts is a crime, as in most countries. Now

covered in wild vegetation, the region near present-day Korçe was once home to the city of Hija e Korbit, or the "Shadow of the Raven". The site, nestled against a hillside, has been ravaged in recent years by looters armed with shovels and backhoes searching for rare metals and artefacts. "There are people from all regions who rush to these places," says Axhem Lageshtari, 60, a local resident. "Everywhere they dig. They search in the hope of finding gold, silver or other valuables."

The area gained notoriety after the 1980s discovery of more than 600 silver coins - including some dating back centuries to the rule of Alexander the Great. Experts tell AFP that illegal excavations have been detected at almost every important archaeological site in the region, which is home to historic necropolises, forts and other remains dating from the Bronze Age to the early Middle Ages.

"The problem is particularly worrying in Hija e Korbit, an important archaeological



This picture taken on June 13, 2022, shows silver coins found in 1982 at "Hija e Korbit", an area near the city of Korçe, exhibited at the Bank of Albania Museum in Tirana.

city that has not yet been explored by archaeologists," laments Rovena Kurti, the head of the department of prehistory at the Tirana Institute of Archaeology. "They damage the site and plunder the heritage," adds Kurti.

### 'Powerless'

The scavengers often destroy scientific data and remove objects from their environmental context which is needed for experts to understand the site's history, explains Cecile Oberweiler, the former director of the Franco-Albanian mission in Korçe. Northeast of the capital Tirana, the remains of a church from the 11th or 12th century have been disfigured with gaping holes left by looters.

The church of the Holy Virgin Mary was supposed to be protected as a recognized cultural monument, but that failed to stop the trespassers from ransacking the area. "We can give it any name but in truth, it is currently a ruin preyed upon by looters,"

says archaeologist Skender Mucaj. The pillaging of the site has been particularly painful for local resident Nora Braia, 80. Experts say not enough is being done legally to stop the looting. Albania's ministry of culture told AFP that efforts are under way to fight the "illicit trafficking of cultural property", including a national action plan unveiled in 2018 along with initiatives to improve coordination with international organizations.

There are no official estimates of the market value of the objects taken from Albania. But researchers are certain that some of the artefacts have fallen into the hands of international traffickers and then been sold in auctions to museums and private collections abroad. "It is a fight that Albania cannot lead alone, the responsibility also falls on the authorities of other countries who turn a blind eye when these objects are displayed in their museums," said Neritan Ceka, an archaeologist and art historian. — AFP



A woman visits the Bou Inania Madrasa, a theological school built between 1350 and 1355 AD, in the ancient Moroccan city of Fez on June 8, 2022.



A man is pictured at the Qarawiyyin Mosque, which is also a theological university that was built between 857 and 859 AD, in Fez on June 8, 2022.



A woman walks past shops in Fez.

## Madrassas revive 'Golden Age' in Fez

In the narrow streets of Fez's Old City, Morocco's first capital, centuries-old places of learning are being revived to promote moderation in Islam, as their founders originally intended. Studying at the 14th century Bou Inania madrasa (religious school), inside the UNESCO-listed walled city, offers a life "in the embrace of a venerable academic history", according to student Moaz Soueif.

The Bou Inania madrasa is one of six such institutions to be renovated since 2017, under a program funded by Morocco's government to preserve the city's heritage and promote tourism. Soueif, 25, shares the madrasa's upper floor with around 40 students of the Qarawiyyin University, which was a world-leading spiritual and educational hub centuries before the European renaissance.

Adorned throughout with intricate inscriptions and mosaics, students are not Bou Inania's only visitors. Tourists also flock to see the elegant open-air courtyard, graced by a central fountain and walls of carefully maintained tilework. The madrasa sits just inside Bab Boujelloud, one of the Old City's main entrances and a key landmark for tourists.



A man walks past homes in Fez. — AFP photos

The nearby Cherratine and Attarine madrassas were also recently renovated for the benefit of tourists, who "usually say their time here feels spiritual and the Old City is really genuine", according to guide Sabah Alawi. Today, Fez serves as a monument to a highpoint of Islamic civilization, the 13th and 14th centuries when Muslim rulers governed from Morocco to western China. That period also represents a golden age in the city's history, which had just been reinstated as

Morocco's capital after three centuries of being overshadowed by Marrakech further south.

### Polymath pope

Down a steep alley from Bou Inania lined with stalls selling traditional wares and local food, stands the Qarawiyyin mosque, built when the city was founded in the ninth century. It later became the heart of the university of the same name - one of the oldest in the world. Fez

University history professor El-Haj Moussa Aouni said the city thrived in the 13th-14th centuries along with other centers across the Maghreb region - from Marrakech to Oran in Algeria and Kairouan in Tunisia.

The madrassas of Fez are "add-ons to the main university, which were used for teaching sciences such as maths, medicine, mechanics and music, as well as Islamic studies and literature", he said. The Qarawiyyin mosque has a large, roofless courtyard surrounded by pillars separating it from the covered sections, which are set aside for prayer and study. The site is off-limits to tourists - although some take advantage of the doors being opened shortly before prayers to snap photos in the courtyard.

At the time of its establishment the university was one of the best in the world and hosted noted scholars such as Tunisian Ibn Khaldoun, seen as the founding father of sociology. Another prominent figure believed to have studied there was Gerbert of Aurillac, a polymath who introduced Arabic numerals to Europe, is credited with inventing the mechanical clock, and later became Pope Sylvester II. As well as preserving the city's architectural treasures, the ren-

ovation work is part of Morocco's wider efforts to promote moderation in Islam.

### Model of tolerance

The scholars have left their mark on the city - such as at the Qarawiyyin library, home to some 4,000 manuscripts including an original donated by Ibn Khaldoun himself. "It's among the oldest libraries in the Islamic world," said its rector Abdulfattah Boukachouf. The 14th-century institution sits on a courtyard filled with the ringing of hammers of brass and silver workers. But in the reading room, last extended by Sultan Mohammed V - grandfather of the current King Mohammed VI - silence reigns.

In a corner, a team of women expertly restore delicate manuscripts. Qarawiyyin University has started a new program for post-graduate students who have excelled in writing and memorizing the Holy Quran. Students cover "various Islamic studies, comparative religion, French, English and Hebrew, allowing them to understand other cultures", said Soueif, from the northern town of Ksar El-Kebir. "We should be a role model for tolerant Islam, at the same level of the great scholars who passed through here before us," he said. — AFP



A man walks down a street in the Casbah of Algiers on July 5, 2022.



A damaged building in the Casbah of Algiers.—AFP photos



People climb stairs in the Casbah.



A damaged building in the Casbah of Algiers.—AFP photos

## After war, Syrians in Jordan find joy and jobs in dance

Singing joyfully to beating drums, Syrian refugees who fled brutal civil war perform traditional "Arada" dances in neighboring Jordan, honoring their home culture and earning extra income. Their performances, featuring traditional robes and whirling swords, have become increasingly popular in Jordan for marking festivities like weddings and parties.

"They add an atmosphere of joy to our celebration," said Fahed Shehadeh, who hired the Bab al-Hara dance troupe in the capital Amman to mark the graduation of his two sons from university. "I am Jordanian but of Syrian origin, and I brought the group because I admire their dancing skills, music, clothes and their songs," said 55-year-old Shehadeh, celebrating with family, friends and neighbours.

Traditionally seen at weddings, the popularity of Arada - rooted in the Arabic for a "performance" - has had its songs modified to fit various celebrations. A troupe typically consists of 10 to 20 dancers, wearing loose-fitting black trousers, white cotton shirts, embroidered vests, white skullcaps and a shawl wrapped around the waist.

### Whirling swords

Swords and decorative shields are worn, and the dance culminates in members spinning their blades in the air, before engaging in ceremonial fighting. The troupe leader, Moutaz Boulad, 60, said Arada had grown in popularity in Amman, with daily events in the summer months and several engagements each week in winter. Boulad, who left Syria in 1988, says the shows have become an important means to earn cash for some of those who fled the war that erupted in 2011.

"Some of the dancers were not good when they first came to us, but they

learned from my sons and I in order to improve their financial situation," he said. Syria's war is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions; more than 6.6 million fled to neighboring Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. Jordan hosts almost 650,000 Syrians registered with the United Nations, but Amman estimates close to 1.3 million Syrians have arrived since 2011.



The UN has said that close to 80 percent of Syrians in Jordan live below the national poverty line, surviving on three dollars per day or less. Boulad said his dancers came from various professional backgrounds. "Most dancers have different jobs beside the Arada," Boulad said. "Some are university students, accountants, restaurant workers, tailors and electricians - but this is something that gives an amount of money to help cope with life."

For dancers like Ahmed Abu Shadi, 43, who fled Syria in 2013 and works as a plumber, performing the Arada helps him raise his three children. "With plumbing there are days when I work, and days with no customers," he said. "For Arada, they pay me 15 dinars (\$20) every time I go out to dance. Although it is a small amount, it helps in my life."

Another member, who worked in a medical laboratory and asked for his name to be withheld, fled the Syrian city of Homs in 2018. The dancing helps add some \$300 each month to his regular \$700 salary from the laboratory to support his family, while they wait for applications through the UN refugee agency to be processed. "I have applied for asylum through the UNHCR and hope we can start a new life abroad," he said. — AFP



Syrian "Arada" folklore dancers of the "Bab al-Hara" troupe perform for a celebration for the graduation of two of the sons of one of their members from universities in Amman on June 24, 2022. — AFP photos

## Renovate the Casbah: Efforts speed up to restore historic Algiers district

A UNESCO-listed rabbit warren of 16th-century battlements and Ottoman palaces, the Casbah of the Algerian capital is falling into disrepair, but efforts to save it have been accelerating. The densely populated district, about a kilometer across, perches above the Bay of Algiers and has been the site of key moments in the North African country's history.

Some buildings weakened by earthquakes, floods or fires are still propped up with scaffolding, but a plan launched in 2012 is seeking to rehabilitate the area. Work to restore the Casbah had first started right after Algeria's independence from France in 1962. That was some six years after a battle between French colonial forces and the urban guerrillas of the National Liberation Front (FLN), later immortalised in Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film "The Battle of Algiers", shot on location in the Casbah.

Efforts to restore the buildings involved "several plans and several stakeholders", said Aissa Mesri of Archimed, a firm working on studies of the Casbah and monitoring the work. "Restoration operations were started and then halted for financial, technical or legal reasons related to ownership," he added, lamenting the lack of a "clear vision" for a "Casbah project". The 2012 plan was adopted with a budget of 170 million euros (now \$170 million). The

project aims to restore the Casbah's "authentic face", protect it in the long term and keep at least some of its residents in their homes.

### Battle of Algiers heroine

The state-run project has already restored a number of prominent buildings, including part of the citadel, which includes the Dey's palace, mosque and ammunition store, partially open to visitors since Nov 2020. The mosque has been decorated with earthenware, marble and Arabic screen printing. A cluster of four houses that once served as a refuge for key independence war figures, including militant Djamilia Bouhired, a heroine of the Battle of Algiers, has been renovated.

The Ketchaoua mosque, closed since 2008 after being seriously damaged by a powerful earthquake five years earlier, has also been restored. The Ottoman-era mosque was reopened in April 2018 after 37 months of work, funded entirely by the Turkish government. Before the start of the restoration plan, Algerian authorities had launched emergency work to "consolidate buildings that were in danger of collapsing", said Mehdi Ali Pacha, head of an architectural firm specializing in heritage work. "The shoring up of more than 300 buildings was carried out in 2008 and 2013," added the architect, whose agency has conducted studies on the restoration.

### 'Residents a problem'

Restoration work on the many small traditional houses in the Casbah is sometimes hindered by residents who refuse to grant access to architects or work crews. "The residents remain a problem. There are some small old houses that have been emptied and walled up by the town hall. There, there is no problem, we can work. "When the houses are inhabited, the study is done as best as possible with difficulties of access," bemoaned Ali Pacha.

In late 2018, the rehabilitation of the Casbah was at the heart of a controversy, both in France and Algeria, after Algerian authorities decided to entrust a development plan to French architect Jean Nouvel. Some 400 people, mainly architects, planners and academics, asked Nouvel to withdraw from the project. The petitioners were concerned that a French architect could propose transformations of a major site of the Battle of Algiers. The venture was eventually abandoned. Currently, seven restoration projects of historical buildings are underway, according to Fatima Larbi, architect at the Algiers public works department, quoted by the official news agency APS. "The aim is to revive the Casbah and enhance it," said Ali Pacha. — AFP

## Sports

# Biles' meltdown sparks superstars into going public on mental health

## 'Fight or Flight: My Life, My Choices'

## News in brief

### Pogacar loses 2nd teammate

**MEGEVE:** Tour de France leader Tadej Pogacar lost a second UAE Emirates teammate ahead of stage 10 on Tuesday as New Zealander George Bennett was withdrawn. Vegard Stake Laengen of the UAE team pulled out on Saturday and Bennett's loss means Pogacar has only five teammates left with 12 stages remaining. With three days in the Alps coming up and sizzling temperatures expected, Pogacar's rivals will take the news as a boost to their chances. "George displayed some symptoms on Monday night and tested positive," team doctor Adrien Rottuno said. Rottuno revealed last Saturday the extreme measures the team have gone to in order to avoid infection. "All the riders have their own room, when normally they would share. They also all have their own masseur," he said. Just ahead of the Tour, Matteo Trentin, a key member of Pogacar's team, also pulled out of the race with COVID.

### African Player of the Year

**JOHANNESBURG:** Former Liverpool teammates Sadio Mane and Mohamed Salah are among 10 stars shortlisted for the 2022 African Player of the Year award, the Confederation of African Football (CAF) announced on Monday. Salah won the award in 2017 and 2018 and Mane in 2019. The 2020 and 2021 editions were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. Mane moved to Bayern Munich last month while Salah signed an extension to his contract at Anfield. Playing key roles as Senegal won the Africa Cup of Nations for the first time this year and qualified for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar could give Mane the edge over Salah. Another contender is 2016 African Player of the Year Riyad Mahrez, the Algeria captain and Manchester City winger. Senegal and Chelsea shot-stopper Edouard Mendy is hoping to become the first goalkeeper to lift the trophy since Moroccan Ezzaki Badou in 1986.

### Avalanche, Nichushkin ink deal

**NEW YORK:** Russian right wing Valeri Nichushkin signed an eight-year NHL contract with the Stanley Cup champion Colorado Avalanche on Monday, two days before he would have become a free agent. The deal, worth a reported \$49 million, follows a season in which Nichushkin, 27, set NHL career highs with 25 goals and 27 assists in 62 games and added nine goals and six assists in 20 playoff games as the Avs won their first NHL crown since 2001. "Signing 'Val' to a long-term deal was a top priority for us this off-season," Avalanche president of hockey operations Joe Sakic said. "Val is a big, strong, fast, tenacious winger who is relentless on the puck. He's such an important player in our lineup and a huge reason why we won the Stanley Cup." Since being selected by Dallas with the 10th overall pick of the 2013 NHL Draft, Nichushkin has scored 71 goals and assisted on 103 others in 405 regular-season games.

### US Dept probes PGA

**WASHINGTON:** US Justice Department officials are investigating the US PGA Tour over possible anti-competitive behavior regarding the Saudi-backed LIV Golf Series, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday. The report comes three days before the start of the year's final major tournament, the British Open at St. Andrews, where LIV Golf players will be allowed to compete for the Claret Jug. The Justice Department refused to comment on the report but Golf Channel and Golf Digest reported the PGA Tour had confirmed the investigation. American stars Phil Mickelson, Dustin Johnson, Patrick Reed, Bryson DeChambeau and Brooks Koepka are among those who have defected to upstart LIV Golf, which offers the richest purses in golf history at \$25 million and 54-hole events instead of the usual 72. The US PGA Tour responded by banning players indefinitely who competed in LIV Golf's first two events, 17 players last month in England and seven more earlier this month in the United States.

### Jamaica book Women's WCup

**MONTERREY:** Jamaica secured a berth at the 2023 Women's World Cup on Monday, while reigning world champion United States and Olympic champion Canada stayed unbeaten in the CONCACAF W tournament. Jamaica's Trudi Carter scored in the 26th minute, captain Khadija Shaw followed in the 59th and 70th and Drew Spence struck in the 79th as the "Reggae Girlz" defeated Haiti 4-0 to claim the last available semi-final berth at the tournament, and a spot in next year's global football showdown in Australia and New Zealand. US reserve Kristie Mewis scored in the 90th minute to give the Americans a 1-0 victory over 10-woman Mexico, who lost Jacqueline Ovalle to a red card for fouling Rose Lavelle in the 73rd minute. The win gave United States the Group A crown. Canada's Jessie Fleming scored in the fifth minute and Sophie Schmidt followed in the 70th to produce a 2-0 victory over Costa Rica and gave their team the Group B title. —From AFP

**PARIS:** American gymnastics superstar Simone Biles' legacy may not be the four Olympic gold medals she won in her career but a remarkable meltdown at the Tokyo Olympics which sparked other sports greats to speak out about their battle with mental health issues. Biles' attack of the twisties - a condition meaning gymnasts lose the ability to orientate themselves in mid-air - is perhaps the most abiding image of the Games. Since then, retired French football icon Thierry Henry and Irish rugby great Keith Earls have spoken frankly about their problems.

Biles's travails followed Japan's four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka who had admitted to her battles with depression in May last year. Henry usually cut a very composed and assured figure on and off the pitch so his admission came out of the blue and a surprise to many. "To cry was impossible," Henry told L'Equipe newspaper in March. "You are not allowed to show your weaknesses. 'It was: 'Thierry, do not cry, do not cry, do not cry!' 'I did cry when I was on my own, but I struggled with myself not to crack in public.

"Now I cry," added the Arsenal legend. Earls has accrued over 90 caps for Ireland and was a pivotal member of the 2018 Six Nations Grand Slam winning side. He was diagnosed as bi-polar in 2013 after biting the bullet and going to see a psychiatrist. The 34-year-old's openness in his 2021 autobiography 'Fight or Flight: My Life, My Choices' was described as "inspiring" by his Ireland team-mate James Ryan.

"My admiration of him (Earls) has grown more, the way he's able to normalize that, that it doesn't matter who you are... Mental health doesn't discriminate," said Ryan. Earls says that on the back of his revelations other team-mates have decided to go and see a psychiatrist. This transparency seems to have broken the taboo where it was not seen as the done thing for sports people to go and see someone to discuss their mental health.

"Twenty years ago it was the same thing regarding mentally preparing for events," Greg Decamps, a researcher in sports psychology at Bordeaux University told AFP. "Nobody said 'I am seeing a mental coach'. 'We are beginning to see the same thing in terms of consultations at sports psychology clinics.' 'Because we cannot expect athletes to perform if there are unresolved psychological problems.' England's men's cricket Test captain Ben Stokes is another who has opened the



**WASHINGTON:** US President Joe Biden presents gymnast Simone Biles with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, during a ceremony honoring 17 recipients, in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP

door on mental health issues.

The 31-year-old followed a long list of cricketers such as Marcus Trescothick, Sarah Taylor and Andrew Flintoff who have struggled with mental health when he admitted his problems last year, taking four months away from the game to manage his illness. "I was in a real dark place and having some difficult thoughts," he said in May when he was elevated to the captaincy. "I now realize talking is such a powerful thing and it has completely changed me."

### 'There was suffering'

That is not to say in the unforgiving world of sport the floodgates have opened entirely over something that some still see as a stigma. "Sport is a world that prides itself on excellence, strength, virility and where any sign of weakness is prohibited," said Decamp. "Those who speak out will be regarded, often wrongly, as incapable of going to a national championships or to an Olympics," Decamp says teams still keep their lips sealed if the reason for a player or an ath-

lete's absence is due to mental health issues.

Some sporting bodies, though, have taken steps to address the issue. In the United States the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) brought in in February this year "six months of paid mental health leave." This was welcomed by many players, including Cari Roccaro, who played a leading role in getting the NWSL to adopt such a policy after she suffered mental health issues. "Girls who tear their ACL are still getting paid, even though they are away from the team for months," said Roccaro in March.

"Why treat a mental injury any different?" Perhaps surprisingly success on the court or pitch does not protect you from the black dogs of depression. According to Olivier Krumbholz, coach of France's Olympic gold medal women's handball winning team, mental health problems are more evident than ever before and "even more so when there are good results." He told AFP that following the team's moment of glory in Tokyo "there was suffering." —AFP

## 'Awesome' Ireland get revenge over New Zealand Maori

**WELLINGTON:** Ireland produced a much-improved performance, headlined by two tries to Jordan Larmour, in a 30-24 win over the Maori all Blacks in Wellington Tuesday. It was the display that pleased coach Andy Farrell as he looked to develop experience throughout his squad ahead of the World Cup next year. Memories of Ireland's dismal first week on tour when they lost to the Maori and the All Blacks faded into the background as they completed wins over both sides in the past three days. "I'm delighted for the boys. A lot of them have come over here for the first time, they've grown massively over the last three weeks and that's what this tour is all about for us," Farrell said.

"It was a very mature performance in the way that the young lads managed the game. Territory was obviously vital. We managed to control the game, play in the right parts of the field and we got the reward for that." In a match that produced four yellow cards and a penalty try, the

largely second-string Ireland-with only three players in the run-on side having played more than 10 Tests-looked a much more cohesive unit than they did in their first match.

Their opening try to Larmour came from inspired thinking by Keith Earls, the captain for the night, who caught the Maori napping, and the second to Nick Timoney started from a lineout steal at the other end of the field. Defensively, Ireland were quick to shut down attacks by the Maori, forcing multiple errors by a side keen to play a running game despite greasy conditions after a day of heavy rain. They also benefitted from a smart kicking game by halves Craig Casey and Cian Frawley.

Maori All Blacks skipper TJ Perenara said his side had their chances but were shut down every time. "We did create a lot of opportunities out there and that's probably what's most disappointing that we didn't execute on that," Perenara said. "The Irish were awesome and when



**WELLINGTON:** New Zealand Maori perform a Haka as Ireland players look on during the second rugby match between New Zealand's Maori All Blacks and Ireland at Sky Stadium in Wellington on July 12, 2022. —AFP

they created opportunities they took them and they punished us for that." Following an early try to Maori wing Shaun Stevenson, smart improvisation by Earls put Ireland in front in the seventh minute.

As the Maori forwards slowly made their way to a lineout, Earls threw the ball in quickly to Larmour who raced, untouched, to score under the posts

and leaving Frawley with a simple conversion. Frawley was on target again 20 minutes later with a handy penalty. From the restart, when repeated offences saw Cian Prendergast yellow-carded, the Maori preference to kick for the corner rather than take a shot at goal inadvertently turned into more points for Ireland. —AFP

## Leclerc spoils Verstappen's party; Sainz escapes fireball

**SPIELBERG:** Charles Leclerc held off world champion Max Verstappen to win the Austrian Grand Prix on Sunday and reboot his world championship challenge but Ferrari's hopes of a 1-2 went up in flames. As Leclerc ended a miserable seven-race winless run his teammate Carlos Sainz was reflecting on a lucky escape from his burning car after an engine blow out. Lewis Hamilton took third ahead of his Mercedes teammate George Russell in cars that had both needed hefty repairs after crashes in Friday qualifying.

This was Leclerc's third win of the year and Ferrari's first at the Red Bull Ring since Michael Schumacher in 2003. After a series of disappointing results Leclerc was thrilled to finally get back on the title trail. He had to retain all his composure, though, in the closing laps as he report-

ed an issue with a sticking throttle pedal. "I definitely needed that, to finally show we've got the pace in the car is incredible," said the relieved man from Monaco. Verstappen was far from disheartened despite failing to take the chequered flag in front of his 'orange army' of expectant 50,000 travelling Dutch fans. "I couldn't give them a win today but second isn't too bad," said the Red Bull driver who didn't leave the circuit empty handed having pocketed Saturday's sprint. Verstappen still has a comfortable cushion in the overall standings - leading Leclerc by 38 points at the halfway point of the championship.

Sainz - who won the British Grand Prix last Sunday for his maiden Formula One success - was going strongly before disaster struck on lap 58. Steering his stricken car onto the safety gravel there was a terrifying moment when smoke engulfed the car with Sainz still stuck in the cockpit, his car rolling backwards. But marshalls arrived and the Spaniard pulled himself out of the car to safety. "There was a lot of fire, I'm lost for words, a 1-2 was more than possible" said the Spaniard.

With the mercurial Styrian mountain weather behaving itself this 11th round of the season was shaping up to be another Austrian pay day for Verstappen. With wins



**SPIELBERG:** Ferrari's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz Jr (front) drives on the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria, during the Formula One Austrian Grand Prix. —AFP

from pole in the last three races staged at the circuit - the two grand prix last year and Saturday's sprint - the 24-year-old Verstappen was the undoubted favorite to land the spoils again as the Austrian national anthem was delivered from a grand piano rolled onto the front of the grid. —AFP

## The Sting redux: Fake IPL set up to dupe Russian punters

**AHMEDABAD:** A gang of conmen set up a fake Indian Premier League tournament with farm laborers acting as players to dupe Russian punters in a betting scam reminiscent of the Oscar-winning

1973 movie "The Sting". The grifters managed to reach the quarterfinal stage of their so-called "Indian Premier Cricket League" before the racket was busted by Indian police.

The tournament began three weeks after the actual IPL concluded in May, according to police, but that proved no hindrance to the gang, who they said leased a remote farm in the western state of Gujarat. They installed a cricket pitch, complete with "boundary lines and halogen lamps," police inspector Bhavesh Rathod told reporters.

"Besides this the accused had set up high resolution cameras on the ground and used computer generated graphics to display scores on a live streaming screen," he added. The gang hired laborers and unemployed youths for 400 rupees (\$5) per game and broadcast the matches live over a YouTube channel called "IPL". Players took turns to wear jerseys of the Chennai Super Kings, Mumbai Indians and Gujarat Titans, police said, acting on the instructions of the Russia-based mastermind. —AFP

Sports

# Sri Lanka thrash Australia to level series after protests and COVID-19

## Chandimal's double century, Jayasuriya bowling heroics lift Lanka

**GALLE:** Dinesh Chandimal's double century and bowling heroics by debutant Prabhat Jayasuriya led Sri Lanka to a series-leveling win over Australia on Monday in a second Test affected by protests and COVID. The hosts hammered Australia by an innings and 39 runs on the fourth day of the match, which had witnessed dramatic scenes outside the Galle stadium amid political unrest in the island nation.

But Chandimal brought the home supporters joy two days later with an unbeaten 206 in Sri Lanka's 554 all out, as the hosts managed a first innings lead of 190. Jayasuriya, a left-arm spinner, then took six wickets to improve his match haul to 12 and help dismiss Australia for 151 in the final session on day four as the hosts bounced back from their opening loss to end the series level at 1-1. "We are here to bring smiles on people's faces," skipper Dimuth Karunaratne told reporters, adding that the players were there "to play cricket". "I don't want to mention what we are going through," he said. "Unfortunately it's what we are going through." The morning session on day two saw hundreds of protesters looking down on the Galle fort demanding the resignation of Sri Lanka's president, who fled his home on Saturday shortly before a huge crowd of protesters stormed his residence.

### 'Protests to party'

Australia Test skipper Pat Cummins said their tour to Pakistan, where they won the Test series 1-0, and then in Sri Lanka gave them a new perspective. "We spent two years basically stuck at home during Covid and our last two tours had been to Pakistan where we hadn't toured for 20-odd years, and now Sri Lanka in the middle of a country in crisis," Cummins told reporters.

"We've got protests round the ground, it really hits home how lucky we are to be travelling the world but also in some ways it's more than just being here to play cricket, you can see the impact it can have." "You could hear when it changed from protests into a party," Cummins added. Australia, though, retained the Warner-Muralitharan trophy after they had won their previous series back home against the touring Sri Lankan team in 2019. The tourists posted 364, with Steve Smith hitting an unbeaten 145 in the first innings, but their batting faltered the second time around.

Off-spinner Ramesh Mendis trapped David Warner lbw for 24 before tea and Jayasuriya soon took over with his left-arm spin in the final session to send back Usman Khawaja (29) and Steve Smith (0) in one over to rattle the opposition batting. The 30-year-old Jayasuriya, who claimed a six-for in the first innings, kept up the charge with another twin strike to expose the Australian tail. Ramesh and debutant spinner Maheesh Theekshana took two each, and Jayasuriya got the final wicket to trigger celebrations in the Sri Lankan camp and crowd.

Jayasuriya's match figures of 12-177 are the best ever by a Sri Lankan bowler on debut as he went one better than Praveen Jayawickrama, who took 11 wickets in his first Test last year. But it was Chandimal who set up victory after he launched an assault on the opposition bowlers with his final 47 runs coming from just 28 balls. Chandimal, who recorded his 13th Test hundred on Sunday, took on the opposition bowlers after losing Jayasuriya for nought as he went past his previous best of 164.

The 32-year-old smashed left-arm quick Mitchell Starc for a four and two sixes on consecutive balls to go past 200 as he leapt in joy amid raucous applause from the crowd. Opening batsman Pathum Nissanka, mean-



**GALLE:** Australia's Marnus Labuschagne plays a shot during the fourth day of the second cricket Test match between Sri Lanka and Australia at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle on July 11, 2022. —AFP

while, was ruled out with Covid-19 before play started Monday, becoming the sixth Sri Lanka player to contract the virus during the past two weeks. In a five-week tour,

Australia won the three-match Twenty20 series 2-1 and then went down to the hosts 3-2 in the one-day internationals. —AFP

## Zimbabwe sink Singapore in T20 WCup qualifier

**BULAWAYO:** Sikandar Raza struck 87 off 40 balls as hosts Zimbabwe defeated Singapore by 111 runs on Monday to make a great start in their bid to qualify for the 2022 Twenty20 World Cup in Australia. Put into bat after losing the toss, Zimbabwe posted 236-5 in 20 overs with Raza, Sean Williams (53) and captain Craig Ervine (34) the leading run makers at Queens Sports Club in southern city Bulawayo. Singapore never looked like matching the run rate of the home team and managed just 125-7 with unbeaten Janak Prakash (32) top scoring and Surendran Chandramohan (21) the only other contributor of note.

Tendai Chatara (3-14) and Blessing Muzarabani (2-21) were the most successful bowlers for Zimbabwe, who are seeking a sixth T20 World Cup tournament appearance. New Zimbabwe coach and former star bats-

man Dave Houghton had called for exciting, positive cricket from a team that last month suffered 3-0 series losses to visiting Afghanistan in both white-ball formats. Batting at number five, Pakistan-born right-hander Raza heeded the rallying cry with a man-of-the-match performance that included five sixes and eight fours.

"This was a great start. The coach has emphasized the need to not only start the tournament well but finish it equally well. Our goal is to qualify for Australia," said Raza. "We want the other seven teams to know that we are determined to secure one of the two qualifying places on offer and I think we did that really well. "The win over Singapore is history now. The focus of my teammates and I has already shifted to the match against Jersey tomorrow."

### Taylor ton for USA

A United States side including former South Africa fast bowler Rusty Theron defeated Jersey by eight wickets in the other Group A clash. Jersey, one of four contenders in Bulawayo hoping to reach the T20 World Cup for the first time,

made 154-5 off 20 overs. Batting at number three, Asa Tribe struck an unbeaten 73, including six sixes, for Jersey, a tiny London-ruled island between England and France. The USA surpassed that total by reaching 159-2 with 11 balls to spare and opener Steven Taylor (101 not out) starred. He faced 55 balls and fired five sixes and 12 fours.

If Zimbabwe beat Jersey and the USA defeat Singapore on Tuesday both will secure semi-finals places, leaving the hosts and the Americans to fight for first place in the group on Thursday. Four-time qualifiers the Netherlands lived up to their billing as Group B favourites with a 52-run victory over Papua New Guinea. The Dutch won the toss and posted 163-7 with Stephan Myburgh (39) top scoring while Semo Kamea and Charles Amini took two wickets each for the Pacific islanders.

Papua New Guinea were all out for 111 in 19.4 overs having never matched the Netherlands run rate. Sese Bau (35) was the only batsman to impress while Logan van Beek (3-17) was the pick of the Dutch bowlers. Uganda surprised Hong Kong in the same group, winning



Sikandar Raza

by two wickets in a low scoring affair. Replying to 87-9, the Africans reached 88-8 off the third ball of the final over. Wins for the Netherlands over Hong Kong and Uganda against Papua New Guinea on Tuesday will seal semi-finals places. The Bulawayo finalists will join 14 other nations at the T20 World Cup in Australia from October 16. —AFP

## France start Euro 2022 in style after thrashing Italy 5-1

**ROTHERHAM:** France brushed off suggestions of dressing room disquiet to smash Italy 5-1 and launch their Euro 2022 campaign in style on Sunday. Grace Geyoro hit a first half hat-trick as Les Bleues were 5-0 up by the break in Rotherham with Marie-Antoinette Katoto and Delphine Cascarino also on target.

France boss Corinne Diacre controversially left out the experienced Amadine Henry and Eugenie Le Sommer from her squad for the tournament. That move had been questioned as further proof of Diacre's inability to handle big characters after criticism of her handling of the 2019 World Cup on home soil. However, the strength of French women's football still left Diacre a wealth of talent to choose from and it showed as Italy were blown away at the New York Stadium.

"We wanted to get off to a flying start and show what we are made of from our first game," said Diacre. "Hats off to my players, we felt great synergy between the players on the pitch." The rise of Juventus as a force in the Champions League and upcoming professionalisation of the women's Serie A had seen Italy arrive in England with high hopes. Milena Bertolini's women even had the first big chance of the game when France goalkeeper Pauline Peyraud-Magnin produced a stunning stop to turn Barbara Bonansea's powerful shot behind.

Geyoro opened the floodgates on nine minutes when Italy captain Sara Game failed to clear and the Paris Saint-Germain midfielder swept home a loose ball in the box. Italy gave the French another gift three minutes later when goalkeeper Laura Giuliani dropped a cross at the feet of Katoto to roll into an empty net. "We came apart at the seams," said Bertolini. "We knew there was a big gulf between France and Italy but we didn't expect a result like this."

Katoto hit the post and Cascarino failed to connect



**ROTHERHAM:** France's midfielder Grace Geyoro runs around Italy's goalkeeper Laura Giuliani to score the team's fourth goal, her second, during the UEFA Women's Euro 2022 Group D football match between France and Italy at New York Stadium in Rotherham. —AFP

with the goal gaping at the back post as the chances continued to flow for France. Soon the goals did too as Cascarino drilled a low shot from outside the box into the bottom corner. Katoto then played provider by picking out Geyoro's perfectly timed run and she kept a cool head to round Giuliani and slot into the empty net. Geyoro completed her hat-trick before the half-time whistle with another composed finish from Sandie Toletti's cross.

### Italy restore pride

Italy did restore some pride in the second period and reduced the deficit through Martina Piemonte's towering header. Despite being taught a lesson, the Azzurre are still expected to make the knockout stages too with Belgium and Iceland to come in Group D. "This result can leave

months, 12 months," Bale said. "I've come here to try and be here as long as possible."

Five-time UEFA Champions League winner Bale made it clear his MLS journey is not planned as a stopover on the way to retirement. "I want to do as well as I can and I want to try and make my mark on this league, on this team," Bale said. "I'm looking forward to the future. It's not just a short thing." Bale, who turns 33 on Saturday, sees MLS as his best path to playing for Wales beyond this year's Qatar World Cup, the nation's first in 64 years.

His goal is playing in Euro 2024 and he has an eye on the 2026 World Cup that will be co-hosted by the United States with Mexico and Canada. "It also gives me the best opportunity to keep going into the next

scars but we need to make sure we don't lose our way," added Bertolini. "We'll go again with the attitude the girls showed in the second half. It's not easy when you go in 5-0 down, we were in danger of it being a big debacle."

Italy's case was aided by a 1-1 draw between Belgium and Iceland earlier in Manchester. Iceland were left to rue a missed first half penalty at when Berglind Thorvaldsdottir's spot-kick was saved by Nicky Evrard. Thorvaldsdottir made amends by heading in at the back post early in the second half. However, Belgium did take their chance when given a penalty 23 minutes from time as Justine Vanhaevermaet coolly converted. Iceland are back in Manchester for their next game against Italy on Thursday, while Belgium face France in Rotherham. —AFP

Euros, maybe further, so my plan is to really work hard," Bale said. "We've got a great plan going forward to get me up to speed and hopefully last as long as possible. "Being here gives me the best possible chance to get to the Euros - and maybe even one more. That's my goal. I feel like I'm here to play a big part."

Bale praised MLS, saying the league is better than Europeans believe. "The standard here is really increasing. It's a lot better than the people in Europe really think," Bale said. "It's a league that's really on the rise." Bale will face such challenges as time zones and a season that starts in February and runs to October plus playoffs. "The transition is not, I guess, an easy one but I'm looking forward to the challenge," Bale said. —AFP

## England set Euro record in 8-goal rout of Norway

**BRIGHTON:** England recorded the biggest win in European Championship history as Beth Mead's hat-trick inspired an 8-0 demolition of Norway that booked the hosts' quarter-final place on Monday. Sarina Wiegman's side scored six in the first half on route to smashing their own women's Euro record margin of victory set when they beat Scotland 6-0 in 2017. No team, either male or female, had ever scored eight at a European Championship until England's incredible goal-spree against the overwhelmed Norwegians in Brighton. Georgia Stanway's 12th-minute penalty opened the floodgates and Lauren Hemp struck three minutes later.

Ellen White and Mead both netted twice in the first half to leave Norway reeling. Underling their status as leading contenders to win the tournament on home soil, England showed no mercy after the interval. Alessia Russo bagged the record-breaking seventh goal and Mead completed her hat-trick to cap an astonishing performance from the Lionesses. England's win guaranteed they will finish top of Group A with one match still to play.

They face Northern Ireland in Southampton on Friday in a dead rubber before returning to Brighton a week on Wednesday to play the runners-up in Group B, which features Germany and Spain, in the quarter-finals. A crowd of 28,847 lapped up the blistering display, chanting "football's coming home" as England's unbeaten run under Wiegman extended to a 16th match including 14 victories. "It was a very special night. We didn't expect to make such a big win but we played really well. We really exploited their weaknesses and we're really happy, but at the same time it's just one game," Wiegman said.

"What's going on here? That was going through my mind. Norway didn't have the answers. We created chances, scored goals and it was very enjoyable to watch. "We showed how good we are. When we go through we'll get tested at a higher level. We need to do better every game." Mead added: "I'm really enjoying my football, I love being part of this team. Honestly, it's an incredible feeling to feel how I do right now. "The girls need to enjoy this one. These are the moments we need to enjoy."

### Lethal Mead

Northern Ireland, who lost 2-0 against Austria earlier on Monday, have now been eliminated. Third placed Norway, expected to be among the title contenders, and second placed Austria both have three points after two games. They will meet on Friday in a shoot-out to decide the other quarter-final qualifier from the group. England had opened their campaign with last week's 1-0 win over Austria at Old Trafford.

But that tense tie was a far cry from the barrage of goals that rained down on Norway. Stanway fired her spot-kick past Guro Pettersen after White was fouled by Maria Thorisdottir. Three minutes later, England scored again when Mead's cross was flicked hom by Hemp, with the goal given via a VAR check after the flag had initially gone up for offside. White took advantage of sloppy play by Thorisdottir in the 29th minute, seizing possession, advancing into the box and slotting home.

Mead was next to get in on the act with a quick-fire double, heading in from Hemp's cross in the 34th minute, then shooting beyond Pettersen in the 38th. Three minutes after that, White took her record haul of goals for the Lionesses to 52, converting at the far post as she met Fran Kirby's delivery. Russo made it seven in the 66th minute, heading in Lucy Bronze's cross, before the lethal Mead produced a simple finish to claim her fourth goal of the tournament and cap a remarkable evening. —AFP

## Bale aims for 2024 Euros and beyond

**LOS ANGELES:** Wales captain Gareth Bale says his jump to Major League Soccer gives him the best chance to play in the 2024 European Championship and maybe even the 2026 World Cup. The long-time Real Madrid and Tottenham star winger was introduced Monday after his first workout as a member of Los Angeles FC, where he is signed through 2023 but hoping for a much longer stay. "I have many years to come. I haven't come here just to be here for six



**SOUSSE:** Supporters of Tunisian tennis player Ons Jabeur watch her final Wimbledon match at a coffee shop in Tunisia's Mediterranean city of Sousse, her hometown. Hailing her as the 'nation's pride' and 'ambassador of happiness', Tunisians remained enthralled with tennis star Ons Jabeur, celebrating her presence in the prestigious Wimbledon final despite her loss. (Inset) Second-placed Tunisia's Ons Jabeur celebrates with her trophy during the podium ceremony after losing against Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina. —AFP

# Jabeur slips in rankings

## Djokovic drops in rankings despite Wimbledon triumph

**PARIS:** Despite playing her first Grand Slam final at Wimbledon two days earlier, Ons Jabeur dropped three places to fifth in the WTA rankings on Monday. The WTA, like the ATP on the men's side, decided not to award ranking points for the Grand Slam event after Wimbledon barred Russian and Belarusian players due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Even so a Russian-born player won the competition. Elena Rybakina, who plays as a Kazakh also gained no reward for her first grand slam title and remains ranked 23rd in the world. Tunisian Jabeur lost the 430 points she collected

for her quarter-final appearance at Wimbledon last year. Poland's Iga Swiatek remains untouchable in first. Behind her Estonian Anett Kontaveit climbed one spot to second place. Greece's Maria Sakkari jumped two places to third as Jabeur slid. Czech Karolina Pliskova, who lost last year's final to the now retired Ashleigh Barty, fell eight places to 15th.

### Djokovic drops

Meanwhile, Novak Djokovic slipped four places in the world rankings on Monday despite retaining his Wimbledon title due to the men's

tour governing body's controversial decision not to award ranking points for the Grand Slam event.

The ATP and WTA made the call after Wimbledon organizers barred Russian and Belarusian players due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russian and Belarusian players have been permitted by the ATP and WTA to carry on competing at tour events but under a neutral banner. Australian Nick Kyrgios, beaten by Djokovic in Sunday's final at Wimbledon, slips to 45th in the rankings, a drop of five places. Russian Daniil Medvedev retains the number one spot, well clear of the injured Alexander Zverev.

Spanish great Rafael Nadal—who is one ahead of Djokovic in total Grand Slams with 22 — moves up one place to number three as he had no points at stake after missing last year's Wimbledon due to injury. Another big loser in the rankings is Matteo Berrettini, who lost to Djokovic in last year's final at the All England Club. The Italian, who withdrew from this year's edition due to COVID-19, drops four spots to 15. His compatriot Jannik Sinner, who gave Djokovic a fright in taking him to five sets in their quarter-final clash at Wimbledon, rises three places to number 10. —AFP

## Novak Djokovic: Seeking love alongside tennis immortality

**LONDON:** Novak Djokovic is already a sporting immortal but he will be desperately hoping he is finally becoming a "people's champion" after winning a seventh Wimbledon crown on Sunday. The Serb has long been seeking the missing ingredient to make him an equal of Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal in the hearts of tennis fans.

His four-set victory over unseeded Nick Kyrgios nudges him ahead of Federer into second place in the all-time list of Grand Slam men's winners with 21 titles, one behind Nadal. Djokovic nibbled a blade of grass in his customary celebration before making his "cup of love" gesture to all corners of the Centre Court, who roared their approval for the champion. While Federer and Nadal enjoy an almost god-like status in the game, the Serb has been a player that fans have found more difficult to love. Many had already picked either the Swiss or the Spaniard as "their man" by the time Djokovic won his first major in 2008, leaving him in a position as the awkward interloper. The Serb, who left Belgrade when he was 12 to train in Munich and escape NATO's bombardment of his home city, is a spikier character than the smooth, unruffled Federer or the self-effacing Nadal.

### Fiery character

His infamous default from the US Open in 2020 for petulantly swiping at a ball that hit a female line judge gave a glimpse of his fiery character. And some of his personal beliefs have drawn criticism—including his refusal to have the coronavirus vaccine, a decision that cost him a place in this year's Australian Open.

One claim that raised eyebrows was his belief that it was possible to alter the composition of water and food through positive thinking. Djokovic—so used to battling the crowd along with his opponent—appeared to have turned a corner at last year's US Open final, which he lost to Daniil Medvedev. He received heartfelt support from fans urging him to fight back against Medvedev but it was ultimately in vain as he missed his chance to become the first man to win a calendar Grand Slam since Rod Laver in 1969.

"The amount of support and energy and love I got from the crowd was something I'll remember forever," he said, giving an indication of how much it means to him. Time appears to be on the side of the Serb in his quest to be considered the greatest player of all time and to further win



**BELGRADE:** Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates his victory at the Wimbledon tennis tournament with supporters during a welcoming ceremony in Belgrade, on July 11, 2022. —AFP

over the fans. Federer, approaching his 41st birthday, has been out of action for a year after a knee operation while Nadal, 36, pulled out before his semi-final at Wimbledon with an abdominal injury.

Djokovic, just a year younger than Nadal, shows no sign of losing his physical edge—if anything, he appears to be getting better with age. But he appears likely to be kicking his heels when the US Open starts next month at Flushing Meadows. Under current US law, he would not be allowed to travel to play as he has not been vaccinated against COVID. It is also unclear whether he will be able to travel to Melbourne to play in the Australian Open in January after his deportation earlier this year following a row over his vaccination status.

Djokovic, who has spent a record number of weeks as world number one, is already assured of his place in tennis history. To add lustre to his achievements, he has winning records over both Federer and Nadal — 27-23 over the Swiss and 30-29 over the Spaniard. Djokovic captured the first of his majors at the Australian Open in 2008 but it was three years before he added his second. —AFP

## Olympic great Farah 'was trafficked to UK'

**LONDON:** Olympic great Mo Farah was illegally trafficked as a child to Britain from Djibouti and forced to work as a servant, he has revealed, saying his real name is Hussein Abdi Kahin. The distance runner was flown to the UK from the East African country aged eight or nine by a woman he had never met, given the name Mohamed Farah, and then made to look after another family's children, he tells a BBC TV documentary "The Real Mo Farah" to be aired Wednesday. Farah, who completed the 5,000m-10,000m double at both the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympics, has previously said he came to the UK as a refugee from Somalia with his parents. But in stunning revelations, the 39-year-old now says his parents have never been to the UK. His father was killed in civil unrest in Somalia when Farah was four years old and his mother, Aisha, and two brothers live in the breakaway state of Somaliland, which is not internationally recognized.

"The truth is I'm not who you think I am," says Farah. "Most people know me as Mo Farah, but it's not my name or it's not the reality." The woman who flew with him to the UK told him he was being taken to live with relatives and to say his name was Mohamed as she had fake travel documents that showed his photo next to the name "Mohamed Farah". Farah said his children motivated him to tell the truth about his past. "That's the main reason in telling my story because I want to feel normal and don't feel like you're holding on to something."

### 'Get out and run'

Farah's wife Tania said in the year leading up to their 2010 wedding she realized "there were lots of missing pieces to his story" but she eventually "wore him down with the questioning" and he told the truth. When he arrived in the UK, Farah says the woman who accompanied him took a piece of paper from him that had his relatives' contact details and "ripped it up and put it in the bin." "At that moment, I knew I was in trouble," he says.

Farah says he was forced to do housework and childcare "if I wanted food in my mouth", and was told: "If you ever want to see your family again, don't say anything." "Often, I would just lock myself in the bathroom and cry," he says. His life was transformed for the better once he went to live with Kinsi Farah, the sister of the man who is



Britain's Mo Farah

alleged to have aided in his journey to England. She tells him in the documentary that she wanted to protect him and adds she does not know why her sister-in-law brought him to England.

"Do you think that was her reason when she bought me to the UK, in helping her with cooking, cleaning?" asks Farah in a video call. "I don't know," she replies. The athlete is also reunited with his mother in Somaliland in the documentary. "I sent you away because of the war," his mother tells him. "You were given a name that was not yours, sent away to England, a country you knew nothing about. "It's important that you tell your story. Lying is a sin." Farah's physical education teacher, Alan Watkinson, noticed how the youngster's mood changed when he was on the running track. "The only language he seemed to understand was the language of PE and sport," says Watkinson. Farah says it was athletics that enabled him to escape. "The only thing I could do to get away from this (situation) was to get out and run," he says. Farah eventually told Watkinson the truth and he informed local authorities.

It was Watkinson who applied for Farah's British citizenship which he described as a "long process" and on July 25, 2000 Farah was recognized as a British citizen. "I often think about the other Mohamed Farah, the boy whose place I took on that plane and I really hope he's OK," said Farah. Farah was told by lawyers during the making of the documentary due to "false representations" he risked being stripped of his British citizenship. However, a Home Office spokesman told The Times "No action whatsoever will be taken" against Farah—often called 'Sir Mo' after he was ennobled by Queen Elizabeth II in 2017. —AFP