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10 US consumer prices surge 9.1%, a new 40-year high



13 Mattel unveils Jane Goodall Barbie, complete with chimp



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Call to boost local production for food security, low prices

Ministerial committee submits urgent recommendations to Cabinet



KUWAIT: The full buck supermoon rises near the Liberation Tower in Kuwait City on July 13, 2022. The July full moon is the largest supermoon of 2022. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: The ministerial committee for food security has prepared a wide-ranging report that includes a roadmap and presented it to the Cabinet. The report is the first after two months since its formation, with requests and recommendations the next government must execute immediately to obtain the desired results to shield the country from global food price fluctuations during crises.

The committee emphasized supporting local agricultural production and diversifying production, while increasing yield and improving marketing. The committee prepared a schedule with dates to boost self-sufficiency in many food items within three years. It called for opening up agricultural land ownership and hold violators who disregard the production output mentioned in their contract.

The plan has new stipulations for allocation of new plots to achieve the goals of vertical expansion through modern agricultural techniques, save water and increase production to meet consumption demands. The

report calls for ensuring a local supply of meat through follow up and supervision of products livestock farmers send to the local market, which has resulted in shortages and a dire need for imports, which led to a rise in prices.

The committee said the same recommendations apply to poultry and egg companies to avoid repeated crises. The recommendations applicable to animal husbandry also include fish farms and fish stocks. It added fish farming sites must be increased, as the infrastructure in Kuwait is ready for such projects, calling on fish farmers to supply all varieties of fish all year round at lower prices.

The committee advised coordination between the interior ministry, customs department and ports authority should reach the maximum level to ease the transport of products to stores and warehouses. It called to quickly build new multipurpose warehouses, while emphasizing the role of cooperative societies in maintaining food security.

Global economic outlook 'darkened significantly': IMF

WASHINGTON: The global economic outlook has "darkened significantly" and could deteriorate further, the IMF's managing director said Wednesday, citing Russia's war in Ukraine and the rapid inflation it has caused, threatening widespread hunger and poverty. The warning comes just months after the IMF already cut its global growth forecast for 2022 and 2023.

The Ukraine war hit as the world was struggling to recover from the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has caused an acceleration of inflation that endangers the gains of the past two years. The international crisis-lender is "projecting a further downgrade to global growth" in 2022 and 2023, Kristalina Georgieva said in a blog post published ahead of the meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bankers, scheduled for Friday and Saturday in Bali.

"It is going to be a tough 2022 - and possibly an even tougher 2023, with increased risk of recession," she wrote. The IMF is due to release its updated World Economic Outlook later this month, which Georgieva said will further downgrade the estimate for global growth from the April estimate of 3.6 percent. "We warned this could get worse given potential downside risks. Since then, several of those risks have materialized-and the multiple crises facing the world have intensified," she said.

The outlook remains "extremely uncertain", and Georgieva warned that the poorest will be hit the hardest. The risk of "social instability" was also increasing due to food and energy prices rising. After a decade of low inflation, prices worldwide have surged amid strong demand for goods that outstripped supply as economies began to return to normal, but the Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February and the sanctions imposed on Moscow pushed fuel and food prices up sharply.

Continued on Page 6

Abu Akleh kin invited to US as Biden visits

JERUSALEM: US President Joe Biden's administration has invited relatives of slain Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh to Washington, an American official said Wednesday, as Biden arrived in the Zionist entity. Secretary of State Antony Blinken "has invited the family to the United States to be able to sit down and engage with him directly", Biden's National Security Advisor Jake

Sullivan told reporters aboard Air Force One.

Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American, was killed while covering a Zionist army raid in the occupied West Bank in May. The United Nations has concluded the Palestinian-American journalist was killed by Zionist fire. Washington has agreed this was likely, but also said there was no evidence the killing was intentional.

Abu Akleh's family has voiced outrage over the Biden administration's "abject response" to her death. Lina Abu Akleh, Shireen's niece, confirmed she had spoken to Blinken on Wednesday. "We got a call a few hours ago, around noontime and we

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JERUSALEM: Lina Abu Akleh, the niece of slain Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, watches on TV the speech of US President Joe Biden upon his arrival in Tel Aviv on July 13, 2022. — AFP

Sri Lanka PM office stormed as prez flees

COLOMBO: Protesters in Sri Lanka defied tear gas, water cannon and a state of emergency to storm the prime minister's office on Wednesday after the president fled overseas, with the crowd demanding both men step down in the face of an economic crisis. In a televised statement Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said he had instructed the military and police to do "what is necessary to restore order".

But footage showed armed security personnel standing by in the grounds of his office as protesters, some holding national flags, milled and took pictures. Other demonstrators at one point broke into state television studios, as the country's months-long political and economic crisis appeared to be moving towards a climax.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa promised at the weekend to resign on Wednesday after escaping his own official residence in Colombo just before tens of thousands of protesters overran it. As president, Rajapaksa enjoys immunity from arrest, and he is

Continued on Page 6



COLOMBO: Demonstrators shout slogans and wave flags during an anti-government protest inside the office building of the prime minister on July 13, 2022. — AFP

Superfood puts healthy burgers on UAE menus

DUBAI: A hardy plant grown using salt water is thriving in the UAE's desert farms and helping create "healthy" burgers, showing sustainable agriculture's potential in the toughest conditions. Salicornia, a succulent, is already being used as a salt replacement in burger patties - a rare farming success in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, which imports nearly all of its food. The asparagus-like plant reduces sodium content by 40 percent in the company's healthy burgers, which also contain chicken, quinoa and kale. Native to parts of North America, Europe, South Africa and South Asia, the plant is ideal for the UAE's inhospitable climate, and contains anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.

Agriculture produces less than one percent of GDP in the UAE, a country on the frontline of climate change with temperatures regularly topping 50 degrees Celsius and rising rapidly. Salicornia cultivation began last year in a number of farms across the UAE as part of an experiment using brine run-off from desalination plants by the Dubai-based International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA). — AFP (See Page 11)

Local

Despite rising prices, Kuwait remains cheapest in Gulf

Kuwait ninth cheapest in Arab world according to Numbeo ranking

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: A recent study showed Kuwait is the cheapest Gulf country in the first half of 2022 and the ninth cheapest in the Arab world. The ranking by Numbeo, the world's largest cost of living database, includes costs of groceries, eating out at restaurants, transportation and utilities.

Athoob Al-Shuaibi, a Kuwaiti currently living in Dubai, told Kuwait Times that Dubai is considered expensive in some ways compared to Kuwait.

Dubai and available in all seasons.

Regarding real estate, Shuaibi noted Dubai is a lot cheaper than Kuwait. "This is the key factor, which is why expats settle here, with entire communities owned by expats." She said the price of land in Kuwait in an urban area can reach a quarter of a million dinars or more, but a property with three bedrooms, a maid's room, a large outdoor area and two parking spaces in Dubai costs around KD 140,000.

For Razi Salman, who used to live in Saudi Arabia, the cost of living in Kuwait is similar to Saudi Arabia, but there is a good difference in prices. "If a person wants to live in Kuwait, on average he will need KD 220 per month without rent. Rent for a one-bedroom apartment ranges between KD 160 and KD 350, while a two-bedroom flat ranges from KD 300 to KD 500," he said. Salman said prices of foodstuff are reasonable and even cheaper than in many countries, but after the coronavirus pandemic, prices have risen significantly, as most vegetables cost more than earlier.

As for the cost of education in Kuwait, he said this generally ranges between KD 400 to 800 annually per child, without the cost of additional children's activities. "As for meals, a meal at a fast-food restaurant costs KD 2 to KD 4. As for a mid-range restaurant, price ranges between KD 4 and



KD 12, while prices at an high-end restaurant range from KD 12 to KD 25," he explained.

Meanwhile, Kuwait is third in the Gulf and Arab countries in terms of rental hikes, after Qatar and the UAE. Kuwait ranks higher than several European countries such as France, Germany, Sweden, Finland, and Italy, as well as China.

Numbeo calculated the estimated monthly expenses for a family of four is KD 783.790 without rent, and KD 209.110 for a single person without rent. The study revealed the cost of living in Kuwait is, on average, 34.25 percent lower than in the United States, while the rent is, on average, 41.04 percent lower than in the US.



High property costs remain a problem

"Fuel is more expensive than Kuwait - it costs me KD 20 for regular fuel to fill up my SUV. Clothes however are cheaper," she said. Shuaibi added organic food (vegetables, fruits and fresh baked goods) and flowers of all types are also cheaper in



KUWAIT: Commerce and Industry Ministry inspectors cited a supermarket in Farwaniya for selling goods carrying symbols that go in violation of the state's laws. The violation was checked after a call about shoes carrying the symbol, the ministry said. Further legal action will be taken.



Interior Minister forms committee to organize beaches

KUWAIT: First Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Lt Gen Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah issued a decision to form a committee of senior officials to organize and secure beach-

es. The committee will be headed by Kuwait Fire Force, and features members from the interior, health, commerce and industry ministries, Kuwait Municipality, Environment Public Authority, Fatwa and Legislation Department, and Touristic Enterprises. Kuwait Fire Force Public Relations Department said in a press statement that the goal behind the formation of the committee is to maintain public health and avoid drowning incidents, which calls for finding solutions to organize beaches and setting certain times for swimming.

Patients Helping Fund distributes Eid gifts to children

KUWAIT: The Patients Helping Fund Society (PHFS) held several activities in hospitals on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha. The women activities department held activities at Farwaniya, Jahra, Zain, Salem Al-Ali, Genetics and Razi hospitals, during which gifts were distributed to children. The children clubs department held an activity at Sabah Hospital with entertainment and educational programs, and gifts, corn, popcorn, ice cream and cotton candy were distributed. At the Chest, Physiotherapy, Psychiatric, Babin Burns Center and Bahar ophthalmology hospitals, female supervisors of children clubs held a program with contests and entertainment programs, as gifts were distributed. The awareness and guidance department held activities for child patients at Mubarak Hospital. Gifts were distributed by head of the scholars Iman Saad.



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Local

Cutting plastic waste essential for Kuwait's SDGs: Environmentalist

KEPS official urges use of reusable bottles to cut plastic waste



KUWAIT: This photo provided by environmentalist Jenan Bahzad shows a camel near a stack of plastic bags at a desert location in Kuwait.



This photo provided by Jenan Bahzad shows remains of fishing gear in the marine environment.

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: According to the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, the amount of plastic waste in Kuwait is estimated at about 18 percent of total solid waste, or around 200,000 tons annually. Member of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Environment Protection Society Jenan Bahzad spoke to Kuwait Times about the importance of reducing the use of plastics and its dangers to the environment.



Jenan Bahzad

"Every year, according to scientific and field studies, more than 8 million tons of plastic end up in the oceans, which causes damage to marine life, fisheries and tourism, and incurs losses to the world of at least \$8 billion due to the damage it causes to marine ecosystems," Bahzad said, adding 80 percent of all trash floating in our oceans is plastic waste. "With the current rate of dumping of waste such as single-use plastic cans, plastic bags and cups in the oceans, by 2050 the oceans will carry more plastic than fish and 99 percent of seabirds will have ingested plastic waste," she said.

500 billion

Bahzad said global reports estimated the world uses around 500 billion plastic bags every year, but the danger lies in the way of disposing them, as they mostly end up in oceans. She spoke about steps that should be taken by people to reduce plastic waste. "Everyone can reduce their daily consumption of plastic by replacing plastic water bottles with those that can be reused or made with biodegradable materials."

Bahzad stressed: "To achieve the 2030 sustainable development goals of Kuwait, we should contribute to protecting environmental, economic and social sustainability by advancing the application of laws and supporting local and international decisions. Changing environmental culture on the extent of plastic damage and societal awareness of alternatives is the solution. All solutions are available, and the consumer is the one who chooses - the choice is only limited by their culture and concern for the environment."

"This in addition to setting a helpful law to prevent the use of products that are not environmentally friendly and finding alternatives subsidized by Kuwait for both consumers and investors, in order to facilitate the use of alternatives," she added.

Bahzad said all types of waste are expected to grow to 3.40 billion tons by 2050, more than double



This photo provided by Jenan Bahzad shows the remains of marine fishing lines among the microfluidics marine organisms.



This photo provided by Jenan Bahzad shows macro plastics washed on the beach.

the population growth over the same period. By 2050, total waste generation will triple, stressing all countries in the world must unite towards reducing the use of plastic and finding environmentally friendly alternatives, and this requires urgent action.



Waste expected to grow to 3.40 billion tons by 2050

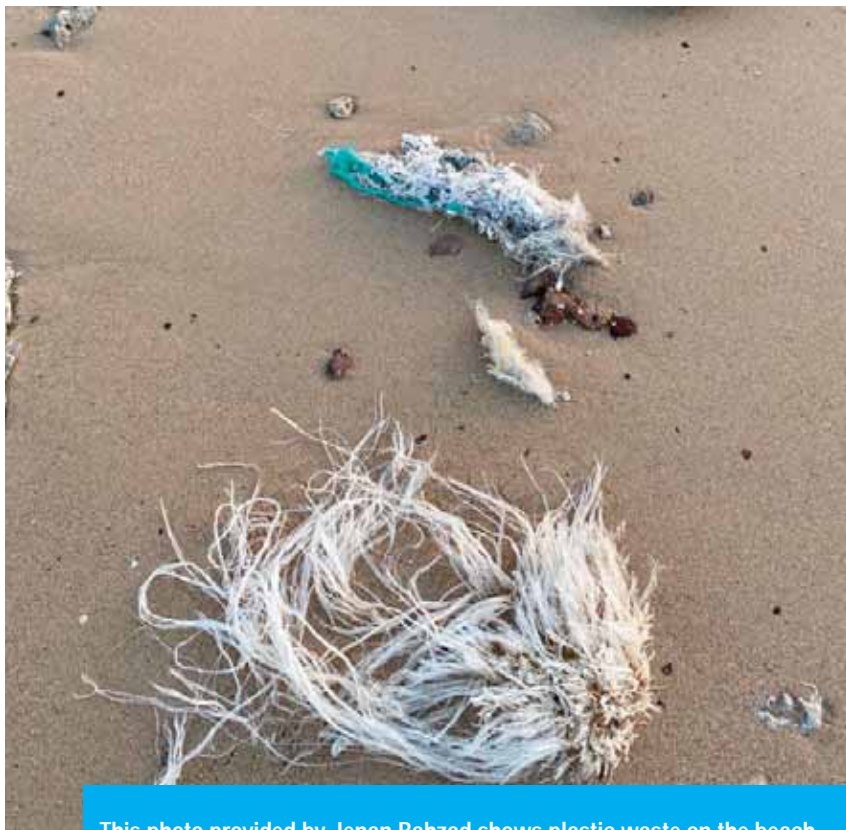
Solutions

About the steps KEPS has taken towards the waste issue, she said the society presented in July 2021 a list of solutions to reduce waste in Kuwait, in cooperation with the Research Group for Natural Environmental Systems and Technology, Warah Environmental Consultancy and Vision Consulting Company, which includes reusing surplus foods by turning it into organic fertilizer and encouraging home

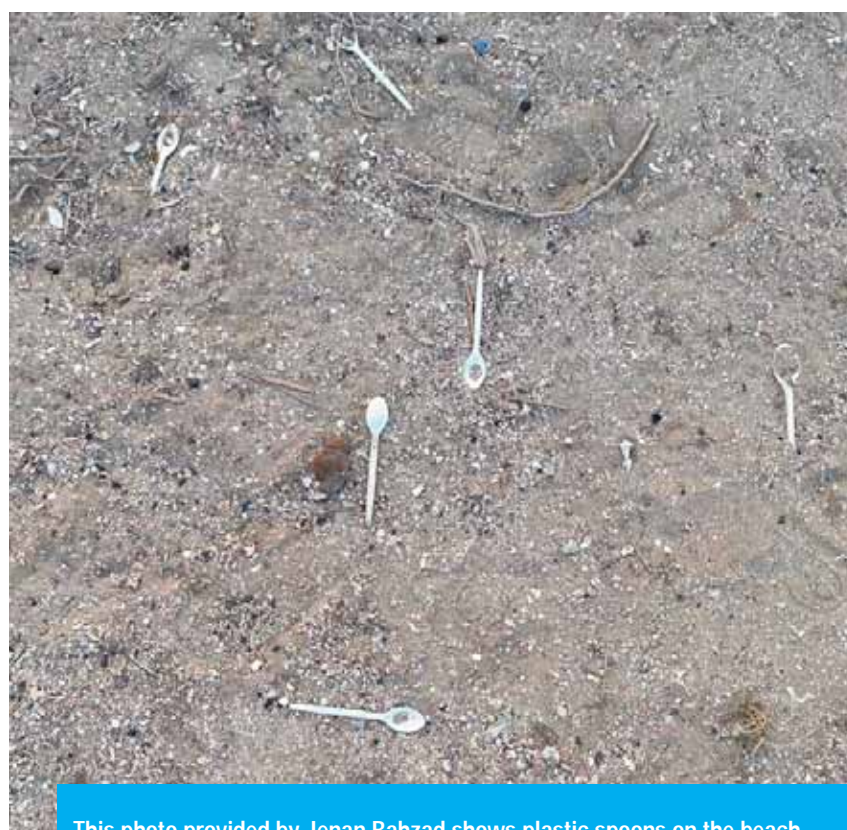
farming, motivating and empowering young people to engage in self-employment in waste recycling projects, such as waste sorting centers, organic fertilizer industry projects, centers dedicated to collecting one type of waste, and identifying shops of symbolic value to sell recycled products," Bahzad explained.

She said other steps include improving the waste recycling system and facilitating the collection of recyclable waste with household waste once a week; integrating awareness, environmental education and training on waste separation and reducing food waste; activating the laws related to littering violations in disposing garbage in places not designated for it; stopping the import and use of non-recyclable or single-use plastic, including plastic bags; awareness to reduce waste and surplus food, especially in restaurants and weddings.

Bahzad also recommended a national initiative in agreement with legislative bodies to develop an organizational structure to reduce waste and recycling; making industries dependent on waste, and this leads to solving major societal problems such as unemployment, thus transforming society from a consumer to a producer; urging schools and universities to adopt Islamic values that urge us to rationalize our consumption of food; and work on preparing a new generation based on the culture of achieving sustainable development.



This photo provided by Jenan Bahzad shows plastic waste on the beach.



This photo provided by Jenan Bahzad shows plastic spoons on the beach.

In my view

Re-Engineering Administrative operations (2)



By Yousuf Awadh Al-Azmi

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"A successful administrator is one who can organize matters in a way that work will no longer need his presence".

— Ghazi Abdelrahman Al-Gosaibi

It is supposed, in the general administration of various entities, to have an administrative mentality and the charisma and tools of a leading personality to be able to manage in the best way possible. Administration begins with the human being managing himself, then managing his close relationships with his parents and brothers, then his management of relations with people such as those near his residence, school-mates and friends, until we reach marital relations and family members.

In public and private work, we see the same concept, but with greater development, as a relationship is built to achieve the goals of this work, be it in the public or private sectors. Here stages of administrative mentality start with early confrontation of crises, followed by maturity and gaining of experience that qualify for administration.

There is no doubt that there are exceptions with merits, but I am talking about the general framework. It is worth mentioning that for the post of manager or general supervisor, it is not necessary to be specialized in the same field. The most important thing is administrative mentality, and when administrative mentality is innovative, a specialist in general management can run a group of hospitals while not being a doctor, or manage specialized entities dealing with roads or even culture and arts, because what is wanted is a brain that understands how to manage and places the right person in the right place.

Misunderstanding by some occupiers of higher administrative positions creates a problem within the administration. Imagine a minister who has signing routine administrative papers that are considered part of daily work among his responsibilities - is this not wrong? This is the duty of executives. How will he set policies and how will he follow them up? He will hold executives to account, but not as long as he carries out the job himself!

There is, of course, a bad explanation of this phenomenon, which is one of two:

- To keep signatures to himself and freeze executives whose job is supposed to be this, for moral gains such as to build a reputation among people, or to have relations with politicians and parliamentarians to serve interests based on the give and take policy to protect the ministerial chair from any repercussions that may affect him negatively, such as facing a grilling, etc.
- Not to trust his executive assistants and consider them a hindrance, so he does not rely on them!

Likewise in the private sector, the manager, as the most senior figure in the entity, is not supposed to preoccupy himself with jobs any executive can do. He should focus on supervision and development of plans and policies and choose qualified executives in order to achieve the general interest of the entity. Of course, the intention is profits and achieving the highest returns.

To be continued...

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Sibi George

Indian envoy George to leave Kuwait

KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George is tipped to be the new envoy to Japan, according to reliable sources. George will replace the current Indian Ambassador to Japan Sanjay Kumar Verma, who in turn will move to Canada.

However, it is not clear who will replace George in Kuwait as an official confirmation regarding the reshuffle is still awaited, the sources added.

George, over the last two years as Indian ambassador to Kuwait, has earned considerable reputation among Kuwaiti citizens and Indian community with his skillful diplomatic acumen and pragmatic community outreach programs. He has radically overhauled the consular services at the embassy and made the embassy services more accessible to the mammoth Indian diaspora.

News in brief

MoH urges pilgrims to do PCR test

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health on Tuesday demanded pilgrims to take a PCR test within a period of three days from their arrival to Kuwait. In a press statement, the ministry said the pilgrims can take the tests at the government-run Jaber Bridge Center every day from 05:00 pm to 10:00 pm and the Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital from 08:00 am to 12 pm or at any of the private medical laboratories. It advised the pilgrims to check the test result at the ministry's Immune app and ask for help if they felt ill during the first ten days of their return.

Rumaihiya man falls to death

KUWAIT: An Arab resident fell to his death from a house under construction in Rumaihiya. The victim, a laborer, fell in the elevator's well, Kuwait Fire Force said, adding that Bidaa rescue men recovered the body and handed it to forensics. In another case, Mishref firemen opened the door of a house in Salwa area and found the body of a dead Asian domestic helper, KFF said.



Kuwait oil price down to \$108.37 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down 87 cents to \$108.37 per barrel on Tuesday, compared with \$109.24 pb since last Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Wednesday. The price of the Brent crude at the global market was also down by \$7.61 to \$99.49 per barrel, the same with the West Texas Intermediate, which went down by \$8.25 to \$95.84 pb.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: An ice cream vendor pours water on his head to cool off as he waits for customers near a street in Mutlaa, northwest of Kuwait City. The weather is expected to remain very hot in the coming few days, with the temperature reaching up to 48 degrees Celsius. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Kuwait's Minister of Defense underlines importance of recruiting youths to join army



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in a group photo during his visit to Kuwait Air Defense Force base. —Defense Ministry photos

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah affirmed Wednesday on the process of recruiting Kuwaiti youths to join the army, which he described represent one of the top priorities of Kuwait leadership. Sheikh Talal made his remarks during a visit Wednesday morning to Kuwait Air Defense Force base, adding that this interest comes from the wise leadership's keenness to open the way for national cadres and competencies and to provide them with the opportunity to participate and contribute to achieving the desired goals, objectives and aspirations. During the visit, the minister conveyed greetings and congratulations 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 Mishaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to members of the Kuwaiti army on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha and their appreciation for the role they play in preserving the security and safety of the country. The minister stressed that the tasks, duties and continuous work the army and air force are performing around the clock shows level of professionalism, competence, and technical capabilities in dealing with defense systems that require high skill and accuracy.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah expressed condolences over the death of a Kuwaiti serviceman who was shot by one of his colleagues on Tuesday. "Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled condemns this regrettable act which runs counter to the values of our conservative Islamic society," a statement from the Ministry of Defense. Soon after the incident, the Minister convened a meeting with the leaders of the Military Security Directorate at the Army General Staff to find out the details and circumstances of the incident. He stressed that he is following up in person the probes, being conducted by the Military Security Directorate and the competent authorities at the Ministry of Interior, to know the findings of the investigations and the details and motives of this incident. "The Kuwaiti army lost one of its loyal sons," the statement quoted the minister as saying. He issued directives to conduct a comprehensive review of the security and health procedures followed in all army units and camps, and should there be any fail to implement them, the person responsible will be held accountable. "The safety of the



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attends a meeting with leaders of the Military Security Directorate at the Army General Staff.

service members is our first priority," he underscored.

The General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army had said Tuesday a serviceman was shot dead by his colleague who was immediately referred to interrogations. The competent investigators continue probing the incident, which took place at Al-

Mubarakiya camps, to determine all circumstances around it, according to a statement called on social media to avoid circulating inaccurate news on such incidents and, instead, seek news from credible official sources, notably the Moral Guidance and Public Relations Department. —KUNA



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is greeted at Kuwait Air Defense Force base.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah speaks with officers at Kuwait Air Defense Force base.



HK's 'Grandma Wong' jailed for democracy protests

Lawsuit filed in US over Beirut blast for \$250m

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SUVA, Fiji: US Vice-President Kamala Harris speaks via video-link to the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in Suva on July 13, 2022. — AFP

US launches Pacific push with new embassies

Harris pledges \$600 million in funding for the region

SUVA, Fiji: The United States launched a major push into the Pacific Wednesday as it seeks to hold off China's advances in the region, with Vice President Kamala Harris announcing the opening of two new embassies at a key regional summit.

Washington will open missions in Tonga and Kiribati and also appoint its first-ever Pacific regional envoy, Harris said as she pledged \$600 million in funding for the region in her address to the Pacific Islands Forum in Fiji. The video-link appearance was a diplomatic coup for the United States, with China's attempts to secure a meeting on the sidelines of the summit rebuffed.

The forum marks the first time Pacific leaders have met since the Solomon Islands signed a controversial security pact with China earlier this year. And the mounting US-China rivalry in the Pacific has directed intense interest towards this year's meeting, which brings together leaders from across the strategically important region.

Tongan Prime Minister Siaosi Sovaleni told AFP his country was "really happy that the US will be opening an embassy in Tonga, it will be the first time". "It is a big milestone. We are very happy we are finally having

a US presence in Tonga," he said. Forum secretary general Henry Puna also welcomed Harris' announcements, calling them "a breath of fresh air". "We have a long history of association and friendship with the US. But in recent years, they've gone missing from the region," he told AFP.



'We are finally having a US presence in Tonga'

US v China

At least one official from the local Chinese embassy was in the room for the vice president's address and was asked to move from an area reserved for media, causing a stir among organisers. Harris said she and President Joe Biden acknowledged the Pacific may not

have previously received enough attention or support in the past.

"We are going to change that," she promised, adding the United States wanted to "significantly deepen our presence in the Pacific region". Washington's Pacific push-backed by a decade-long pledge of \$60 million annually to the Forum Fisheries Agency and the relaunch of the Peace Corps in the Pacific-reflected a desire to "embark on a new chapter", Harris said.

The United States will also appoint its first-ever regional envoy and launch an inaugural national strategy for the region. Harris said the United States wanted to collaborate on maritime security, disaster relief and infrastructure projects that "do not result in insurmountable debt"—a subtle swipe at Beijing's lending policies. Pacific expert Tess Cain said "it was a bit of a surprise that the vice president got that speaking slot", given the forum is traditionally restricted to Pacific leaders, Australia and New Zealand.

Australia arrives

New Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese landed Wednesday in Fiji to attend the forum, his first

visit to the Pacific since his election victory. Albanese will try to mend his nation's fractured relationships within the region after Australia's attempts to muzzle climate change announcements saw the last forum meeting descend into shouting and tears.

"Under the previous Australian government, they simply refused to do anything meaningful on climate change. And this has been felt as a personal affront by a generation of Pacific leaders," Pacific expert Wesley Morgan of the Climate Council said.

But US-China rivalry and a shock decision by Kiribati's Beijing-aligned leaders to withdraw from the forum on the eve of the summit have threatened to sideline climate at the talks. Tuvaluan Foreign Minister Simon Kofe told AFP it was "the responsibility of the Pacific to reaffirm the importance of climate change". New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said there was a need for "greater transparency" about what China had agreed with the Solomon Islands. The United States and its allies worry China is using security aid to develop a military foothold in the Pacific Islands. Ardern expressed "deep concern" about any moves that caused "the militarisation of our region." — AFP



LONDON: Conservative MP and Britain's Minister of State for Trade Policy, Penny Mordaunt (2R), leaves after attending the launch of her campaign to become the next leader of the Conservative party, in central London. — AFP

Tories hold first round of voting for new PM

LONDON: Britain's ruling Conservative party was Wednesday to winnow down the eight candidates vying to succeed Prime Minister Boris Johnson amid growing acrimony over alleged dirty tricks. Johnson was to face one of his last sessions of Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons before his successor is announced on September 5, after controversially blocking an opposition bid to evict him sooner.

The Labour party had been seeking Wednesday to force a Commons vote of no confidence in Johnson's premiership, arguing the UK can ill-afford weeks more of Tory infighting given a cost-of-living crisis and other challenges, such as the war in Ukraine.

But the government refused to give the motion time for debate, in a move dubbed unprecedented by constitutional experts. Johnson was forced last week to announce his resignation after a stunning cabinet revolt-including by then finance minister Rishi Sunak-following a string of scandals that left the Conservatives sliding in opinion polls against Labour. It was a spectacular fall from grace for a politician who secured a landslide election win in December 2019 and took the UK out of the European Union a month later, before the COVID pandemic struck. Conservative MPs were to vote on the eight candidates who survived an initial cull Tuesday, with the final vote expected around 1600 GMT Wednesday.

Those failing to get 30 votes will be eliminated. A series of votes will be held into next week until there are just two left in the race. Grassroots party members will then be balloted. While Johnson himself says he will stay above the fray, his remaining loyalists have not held back in rubbishing frontrunner Sunak, and have been coalescing behind the right-wing foreign secretary, Liz Truss.

Sunak's camp denied orchestrating a plot to boost the standing of less favoured candidates in the hope of seeing off stronger contenders such as Truss, before the final runoff vote by party members.

Mordaunt and McCartney

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, who withdrew from the race to support Sunak, also pushed back at the claims that his candidate had been a "socialist chancellor" for overseeing a massive support package during the pandemic. Sunak has since been stressing the need to balance the books, in contrast to a free-for-all series of tax cuts promised by leadership rivals that has drawn concern from the Bank of England and independent economists. Sunak came top in Tuesday's list of nominations from Tory MPs, ahead of former defence minister Penny Mordaunt, Truss and foreign affairs committee chairman Tom Tugendhat.

Former junior minister Kemi Badenoch, new chancellor Nadhim Zahawi, ex-health secretary Jeremy Hunt and Attorney General Suella Braverman rounded out the eight. Giving her first campaign speech Wednesday, Mordaunt built on the patriotic themes that suffused her launch video—which had to be taken down after complaints from individuals who featured in it without permission. The Royal Navy reservist said she was inspired to a life of service in 1982, aged nine, when she watched a taskforce of warships leaving her home city of Portsmouth to retake the Falkland Islands from Argentina.

"I think our party has lost its sense of self," Mordaunt said, likening the Conservatives to Beatles legend Paul McCartney's set last month at the Glastonbury music festival. "We indulged all those new tunes, but what we really wanted was the good old stuff that we all knew the words to: low tax, small state, personal responsibility," she said. Braverman, an "anti-woke" outsider in the race, denied that the hostile sniping seen so far would damage the Conservatives longer term.—AFP

Iran: Biden Mideast trip won't bring security to Zionists

TEHRAN: Iran said US President Joe Biden's trip to the Middle East, which starts on Wednesday, will not bring about security for Zionist entity, the Islamic republic's regional arch-enemy.

"If the visits of the American officials to the countries of the region are to strengthen the position of the Zionist regime and to normalise the relations of this regime with some countries, their efforts will not create security for the Zionists in any way," President Ebrahim Raisi said in a statement, referring to Zionist entity.

Biden's Middle East trip will take him to Zionist entity on Wednesday, followed by a direct flight to Saudi Arabia on Friday, amid hopes that the visit will pave the way to establishing relations between the Jewish state and the Gulf kingdom.

Iran has repeatedly criticised the normalisation of ties between Gulf Arab states and Zionist entity, calling it "a stab in the back" to the Palestinians. Raisi on Wednesday emphasised that the Islamic republic is closely monitoring "all of the developments" in the region. "We have repeatedly told those who have brought messages from

the Americans that if the slightest move is made against Iran's territorial integrity, it will be met with our decisive response," he added. Zionist's Prime Minister Yair Lapid had said on Sunday that expanding joint action to counter Tehran would top the agenda during Biden's visit. It came after the White House had said days earlier that the visit would see discussions on enhancing regional air defence collaboration, particularly with regards to countering Tehran-plans Iran denounced as a "threat" to its security.

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani told reporters earlier on Wednesday that the creation of regional coalitions by the US will not ensure security for the region. "The policy of making groups and blocs and creating military coalitions, especially under the supervision of a non-regional country, will definitely not contribute to security and stability," he said.

"Security is neither purchasable nor importable. We believe that creating stability and security in the region can only be achieved through the collective cooperation of regional countries, which are the true owners of the region," Kanani added.

Meanwhile, Iran's president said Wednesday his country's demands were "reasonable" during negotiations to restore its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. "Iran has always acted completely rationally and put on the table reasonable demands," President Ebrahim Raisi said during a cabinet meeting, according to his official website.—AFP

Belarus journalist given extra 8 years for 'state treason'

MOSCOW: Belarus on Wednesday sentenced a young journalist who covered protests against President Alexander Lukashenko to an additional eight years in prison for "state treason", the channel she worked for said. Katerina Bakhvalova—who uses the pen name Katerina Andreyeva—was already serving a two-year sentence for "violating public order" and was due to be released in September.



Katerina Bakhvalova

The 28-year-old was detained in November 2020 with fellow journalist Daria Chultsova while filming one of the anti-government rallies that swept Belarus that year. "Our colleague Katerina Andreyeva was sentenced to eight years in prison," the Poland-based Belsat TV channel and media said on Telegram.

It said she was transferred from the prison colony where she was held in Gomel, south-eastern Belarus, and brought to a pre-trial detention centre in February. "For 55 days, her relatives did not know the details of the case," Belsat said.

The Viasna rights group said on its website that her family was informed in April that she was given a new "state treason" charge. Viasna considers Bakhvalova to be one of 1,244 political prisoners in the country.

Belarus's exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya said the sentence was punishment for showing "the truth." "It makes me so angry to see the regime take revenge on those who dare to resist," she said on Twitter.

"She dared to show the truth about the regime's brutality to the world." Lukashenko's regime has orchestrated a brutal crackdown on any pockets of dissent after unprecedented protests swept Belarus in 2020. The Belarus strongman, in power since 1994, relies on neighbouring Moscow for support.

His country had served as a springboard for the Russian army to launch its assault on Ukraine in late February. — AFP

International

Western Europe wilts under second heatwave in weeks

Wildfire ripped through 800 hectares of pine trees just south of Bordeaux

BORDEAUX, France: France and Britain were set to suffer soaring temperatures on Wednesday, with a heatwave in Western Europe fuelling wildfires across vast stretches of forestland. Since Sunday, large parts of the Iberian Peninsula have seen temperatures surpassing 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in Spain and Portugal, where firefighters have battled wildfires.

In southern France since Tuesday afternoon, a wildfire ripped through 800 hectares of pine trees just south of Bordeaux, pushing 150 residents to evacuate their homes, according to the local fire department.

ed to become more intense.

The previous such phenomenon to blight France, Portugal and Spain occurred in mid-June. "We do expect it to worsen," World Meteorological Organization spokeswoman Clare Nullis told a briefing in Geneva on Tuesday. "Accompanying this heat is drought. We've got very, very dry soils," she said.

She added that despite being early in the summer, "it's been a very bad season for the glaciers". Last week an avalanche triggered by the collapse of the largest glacier in the Italian Alps—due to unusually warm temperatures—killed 11 people.

'Oppressive' temperatures

The high temperatures are expected to spread to other parts of western and central Europe in the coming days. Britain issued an "amber" alert—the second-highest of three levels—which indicates that the extreme heat will have a "high impact" on daily life and people. Temperatures are forecast to hit 35C in the southeast of the country in the coming days.

Britain's highest recorded temperature was on July 25, 2019 — reaching 38.7C at Cambridge Botanic Garden, in eastern England—and a UK climate official said that the chances of a new UK record were increasing due to "strongly embedded warming".

In Spain, temperatures are forecast to keep rising until Thursday, with highs of up to 44C expected in Guadalquivir valley in Seville in the south. Spain's health ministry warned the "intense heat" could affect people's "vital functions" and provoke problems like heatstroke. It advised people to drink water frequently, wear light clothes and "remain as long as possible" in the shade or in air-conditioned places.

But for those who make a living working outdoors, it was a struggle. "It's hard because the temperature is a bit oppressive," said Miguel Angel Nunez, a 54-year-old bricklayer at a construction site in central Madrid.

In its eastern region of Extremadura, some 300 firefighters backed by 17 planes and helicopters battled a wildfire Tuesday which ravaged 2,500 hectares (6,180 acres), local officials said. The blaze

Norwegian geophysical services group TGS. The company owns British firm Spectrum Geo, which a decade ago chartered the Rhosus ship, which was carrying the ammonium nitrate that was subsequently unloaded at Beirut port and exploded on August 4, 2020.

The blast—described as one of the largest non-nuclear explosion in recent history—killed more than 200 people, wounded thousands and ravaged entire neighbourhoods. Accountability Now said Spectrum had "entered into a series of highly profitable but suspicious contracts with the ministry of energy of Lebanon" to transport seismic survey equipment from Lebanon allegedly to Jordan aboard the Rhosus.

only be addressed through "multilateral" financial aid and debt relief, she said. "Reducing debt is an urgent necessity - especially in emerging and developing economies with liabilities denominated in foreign exchange (FX) that are more vulnerable to tightening global financial conditions."

Georgieva stressed the top priorities were bringing down inflation, including through government spending cuts that would aid central bank efforts. She called on the G20 to boost "coordinated international action," including wealthier countries providing essential aid to poorer ones. Most of the world's economies are "completely shut out" from global markets due to financial pressures, and lack the safety net of a large domestic market, Georgieva warned. "They are calling on the international community to come up with bold measures to support their people. This is a call we need to heed." — AFP

Zionist entity opposes.

Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia on Friday will be the major focus of the tour. Air Force One will make a first direct flight from the Zionist entity to Saudi Arabia amid efforts to build ties between the Zionist entity and the conservative Gulf kingdom, which does not recognize the Zionist entity's existence. Moments after Biden landed, the Zionist military showed him its new Iron Beam system, an anti-drone laser it claims is crucial to countering Iran's fleet of unmanned aerial vehicles.

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi warned earlier Wednesday that if Biden's goal on the trip was to bolster the Zionist entity's security, he was destined to fail. If US visits "to the countries of the region are to strengthen the position of the Zionist regime... their efforts will not create security for the Zionists in any way," Raisi said.

Biden, 79, will also meet Palestinian leaders angered by what they describe as Washington's failure to curb Zionist aggression. The persistent frustrations of Zionist-Palestinian diplomacy are nothing new for Biden, who first visited the region in 1973 after being elected to the Senate. Palestinians claim Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem as their capital and, ahead of the visit, accused Biden of failing to make good on his pledge to restore the United States as an honest broker in the conflict.

"We only hear empty words and no results," said Jibril Rajoub, a leader of the secular Fatah movement of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas. Biden will meet Abbas in the occupied West Bank city of Bethlehem on Friday, but there is no expectation of bold announcements toward a fresh peace process. — AFP



SEVILLE, Spain: People cool off with a fountain's water during a heatwave in Seville on July 12, 2022. Firefighters battled wildfires in Spain and Portugal as Western Europe faced its second heatwave in less than a month. — AFP

began Monday due to a lightning strike and "will probably last several days", the head of the regional government of Extremadura, Guillermo Fernandez Vara, told reporters. Between January 1 and July 3, more than 70,300 hectares of forest went up in smoke in Spain, the government said—almost double the average of the last ten years.

'A maximum of caution'

Firefighters in neighbouring Portugal were combating a similar inferno, which torched some 2,000 hectares of land in the central municipality of Ourem since last week. The blaze was brought under control Monday but flared up again by Tuesday.

With temperatures set to climb past 40C,

Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa urged "a maximum of caution". "We have experienced situations like this in the past and we will certainly experience them in the future," he said.

The whole country is under a "situation of alert" for wildfires until at least Friday, raising the readiness levels of firefighters, police and emergency medical services. The current inferno is stirring memories of devastating wildfires in 2017, which claimed the lives of over 100 people in Portugal.

Officials in the town of Sintra near Lisbon closed a series of tourist attractions such as palaces and monuments in a verdant mountain range popular with visitors as a precaution. — AFP

nine plaintiffs are all US citizens and include Sarah Copland, the mother of two-year-old Isaac Copland, who was one of the explosion's youngest victims.

The lead counsel in the "strict liability" case is US firm Ford O'Brien Landy LLP, and Accountability Now's lawyer Zena Wakim said TGS's response should be known "in the coming months". "This lawsuit is a first. It's a way of circumventing the obstruction that has the investigation had faced in Lebanon," Wakim told AFP.

"The evidence that will be generated by this lawsuit can also benefit the Lebanese investigation," she said. "The spirit of the claim is to benefit all the victims." — AFP

Lawsuit filed in US over Beirut blast for \$250m

BEIRUT, Lebanon: Victims of Lebanon's deadly 2020 port blast have filed a quarter-billion-dollar lawsuit against a US firm for its suspected links to the tragedy, a Swiss foundation assisting the plaintiffs said Wednesday.

Accountability Now said in a statement that the claim was filed this week in Texas against US-

Global economic outlook 'darkened...'

Continued from Page 1

Ukraine and Russia are major grain producers, and Russia also is a key source of energy for Europe, and has throttled back natural gas supply to the region. Inflation also has complicated policymaking: major central banks are raising interest rates to contain prices, but that increases borrowing costs for emerging markets and developing nations, which face high debt burdens.

But Georgieva said fighting the price surge is critical, despite the recession risk. "Acting now will hurt less than acting later." Offsetting the effects of the war and the pandemic are top priorities, which can

Abu Akleh kin invited to US...

Continued from Page 1

reiterated our demands and our request to meet the president on his arrival" in Jerusalem, she told AFP. She said the family voiced its "disappointment" with Washington's July 4 statement on Abu Akleh's killing that appeared to clear Zionist forces of intentional wrongdoing. Blinken gave no indication as to whether the family would meet a top US official while Biden's delegation was in Jerusalem, Lina Abu Akleh said.

Biden - whose first regional tour since taking office will also take him to Saudi Arabia - pledged strong backing for the Zionist entity, which has forged ties with several Arab states in recent years and hopes to do so with Riyadh as well. "We'll continue to advance (the Zionist entity's) integration into the region," Biden said after Air Force One touched down at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv to a red-carpet welcome.

The Zionist entity's caretaker prime minister Yair Lapid said that "we will discuss building a new security and economy architecture with the nations of the Middle East", following US-brokered accords in 2020 with the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco. "And we will discuss the need to renew a strong global coalition that will stop the Iranian nuclear program," he added, amid ongoing efforts by world powers to salvage Iran's frayed 2015 nuclear deal, which the



COLOMBO: An army personnel fires tear gas to disperse demonstrators outside the office of the prime minister on July 13, 2022. — AFP

Sri Lanka PM office stormed...

Continued from Page 1

believed to have wanted to go abroad before stepping down to avoid the possibility of being detained. The 73-year-old, his wife and two bodyguards took a military aircraft to the neighboring Maldives, immigration sources told AFP.

Hours later, with no formal announcement he was stepping down, thousands of demonstrators mobbed the office of Wickremesinghe - whom Rajapaksa named as acting president during his absence - demanding both officeholders should go. "Go home Ranil, Go home Gota," they shouted. Tear gas and water cannon fired by police and the declaration of both a nationwide state of emergency and a curfew failed to disperse them and the crowd poured into the building.

Wickremesinghe, also 73, would automatically become acting president if Rajapaksa steps down, but has himself announced his willingness to resign if consensus is reached on forming a unity government. "We can't tear up our constitution," he said in his statement. "We can't allow fascists to take over. We must end this fascist threat to democracy," he said, adding that the official buildings occupied by protesters must be returned to state control.

The protesters' actions were a repeat of the capture of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's home and office on Saturday, when Wickremesinghe's private

home was also set ablaze. The prime minister's office confirmed that Rajapaksa had left the country, but said it had no schedule for any presidential resignation announcement. The succession process could take between three days - the minimum time needed for parliament to elect an MP to serve out Rajapaksa's term, which ends in November 2024 - and a maximum of 30 days allowed under the statute.

Rajapaksa is accused of mismanaging the economy to a point where the country ran out of foreign exchange to finance even the most essential imports, leading to severe hardships for its 22 million people. Earlier Wednesday, smiling Sri Lankans again thronged the corridors of the president's official residence after his departure, with young couples walking around hand in hand in a mood of quiet celebration.

"People are very happy, because these people robbed our country," said retired civil servant Kingsley Samarakoon, 74. "They've stolen too much money, billions and billions." But he held little hope for an immediate improvement in Sri Lanka's plight. "How are people going to run the country without money?" he asked. "It's a problem."

Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt in April and is in talks with the IMF for a possible bailout. The island has nearly exhausted its already scarce supplies of petrol. The government has ordered the closure of non-essential offices and schools to reduce commuting and save fuel. The departure of Rajapaksa, 73 and once known as "The Terminator", had been stymied for more than 24 hours in a humiliating standoff with immigration personnel in Colombo. — AFP

International

South Korea vows probe of 2019 North Korean repatriations

Men were sent back because they would 'pose a threat' to society

SEOUL, South Korea: The South Korean government on Wednesday slammed the controversial 2019 repatriation of two North Koreans, after releasing photos that appeared to show one of them resisting the handover. Then-president Moon Jae-in's administration had expelled the men after investigators said the pair murdered 16 crewmates before taking their fishing boat to South Korean waters.

The government said at the time that the men — described by officials as “dangerous criminals” — had no intent to defect. At least two officials said the pair did not want to stay in South Korea. But images of their transfer at the truce village of Panmunjom, released on Tuesday by the new, conservative government, showed one man desperately resisting the handover.

If they were “forcibly sent” to North Korea, it would be “a crime against humanity that violates both international law and the constitution,” President Yoon Suk-yeol's spokeswoman Kang In-sun told reporters. The government will “fully determine the truth behind this case”, she said.

One image showed a man collapsed on the ground, with officials apparently dragging him to the Military Demarcation Line between the two Koreas.

In other photos, the two men appeared tied with ropes and blindfolded before their repatriation. Rights groups have said in the past that the transfer was a violation of international law because of the likelihood of the men being tortured or worse in North Korea.

South Korean media had reported at the time that

the two men were blindfolded on their journey and only became aware of their fate when their masks were removed to reveal North Korean soldiers ready to take them into custody. One of them immediately collapsed, the conservative Chosun Ilbo had reported.

'Disgusting and callous'

The hawkish Yoon has been sharply critical of his predecessor's dovish approach, accusing the liberal Moon of appeasing Pyongyang. The 2019 case was the first-ever transfer from the South to the North since the end of the Korean War. It was roundly condemned at the time as a breach of law by human rights groups, which also accused Moon of trying to curry favour with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Under the South Korean constitution, all North Koreans are automatically considered citizens, and those who reach its territory and express a desire to defect are routinely able to stay. A Moon government official said in 2019 that the two men were sent back because they would “pose a threat” to society, and that as “dangerous criminals” they could not be considered refugees.

And Kim Yeon-chul, Moon's unification minister, told lawmakers at the time that the fishermen did not want to stay. He said they told South Korean authorities: “Even if we die, we'd like to die in our home country.” But Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said Wednesday that the men's “desperate resistance to being forced back” was clear

Buddhist clergy he was the reincarnation of Sinhalese warrior king Dutugemunu the Great, who is known for vanquishing a Tamil ruler.

Dutugemunu reigned for 24 years, but Rajapaksa fled less than three years into his rule — and a resignation would make him Sri Lanka's shortest-lived directly elected president. The 73-year-old leader flew to the neighbouring Maldives on Wednesday, four days after his presidency crumbled and tens of thousands of protesters overran his official residence.

That came after months of demonstrations demanding his resignation over an economic crisis, triggered by the coronavirus pandemic but exacerbated by mismanagement. The former soldier marketed his lack of political expertise as a virtue but Tamil legislator Dharmalingam Sithadthan said what Rajapaksa projected as his strength was actually his weakness.

“His lack of political knowledge showed in the way he worked,” Sithadthan told AFP. “He flip-flopped from one crisis to another. He thought by simply issuing orders things would materialise. “Every time I met with him, he would say he is focused on the economy and law-and-order, but he failed in both.”

'Prosperity and Splendour'

Rajapaksa came to power on a manifesto promising “Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour”, but according to the UN the country now desperately needs humanitarian aid. The coronavirus pandemic hammered tourism and overseas remittances — both mainstays of the

End of the line for Sri Lanka's 'Terminator'

COLOMBO: Known as “The Terminator” to family and foes alike for his ruthless crushing of Tamil rebels to end a decades-long civil war, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's rule is drawing to a close with him a fugitive and his island's economy in ruins.

Rajapaksa, one of a clan of four brothers who have dominated the country's politics in recent years, was defence secretary under his brother Mahinda's Rajapaksa's presidency from 2005-15. He denied allegations that at least 40,000 minority Tamil civilians were killed by troops under his command during the closing months of the war, but the accusations bolstered his tough-guy image in the eyes of the majority Sinhalese.

He was also considered the architect of “white van” abductions under Mahinda, when dissidents and journalists were grabbed in unmarked vehicles and disappeared, allegedly the victims of extrajudicial killings.

He made no bones about winning the 2019 elections with the overwhelming support of his own majority Sinhala-Buddhist community. For Sri Lanka's influential

HK's 'Grandma Wong' jailed for democracy protests

HONG KONG: An elderly woman who became a fixture of Hong Kong's democracy protests was jailed on Wednesday for unlawful assembly, a day after courts imprisoned a terminally ill 75-year-old activist. Alexandra Wong, 66, popularly known as “Grandma Wong”, was a regular presence at the protests three years ago, usually waving a British Union Jack flag.

Prosecutors accused her of participating in two unlawful assemblies on August 11, 2019 and shouting “offensive words”, adding that her flag-waving and slogans encouraged an illegal gathering. Principal Magistrate Ada Yim jailed Wong for eight months citing the “scale and disruption to social order” of the democracy protests.

Unlawful assembly is one of the primary charges used by prosecutors against participants of the huge and sometimes violent democracy rallies that convulsed Hong Kong for months in 2019. More than 2,800 people have been prosecuted for protest related offences, while a security law imposed by Beijing in 2020 has effectively now criminalised dissent in Hong Kong.

Wong earlier this year pleaded not guilty but she switched her plea on Wednesday, the first day of her trial. From the dock, the bespectacled and grey-haired Wong struck a defiant note and criticised Hong Kong's government as an “authoritarian regime”.

She also reiterated an earlier claim that she had been interrogated and detained by security agents in the Chinese mainland for nearly 14 months and was forced to give written and filmed confessions. Wong disappeared half way through the 2019 protests.

She later re-emerged saying she was intercepted dur-

ing a trip back to Shenzhen, the mainland city next to Hong Kong. She alleged that she was kept in detention facilities in the mainland, taken on a “patriotic trip” and was kept in de facto house arrest until she was later allowed to return to Hong Kong.

In April, Wong was convicted of obstructing a police officer in a separate case and sentenced to six days in jail with an 18-month suspension. In July last year, she was

marked a public holiday for a Buddhist festival. “When we arrived there, injured people were scattered about and there was blood on the roadside,” a member of a rescue team told AFP. “According to the information we collected, eleven people were injured and two were killed,” he added, requesting anonymity.

The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since a coup last year, with self-declared “People's Defence Forces” (PDF) targeting the military and officials or organisations perceived to be working with the junta.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for Tuesday's attack, and a junta spokesman was



This undated handout photo provided by the South Korean Unification Ministry on July 13, 2022, shows (C, wearing black), one of two alleged North Korean mass murderers who were controversially deported by Seoul in 2019, appearing to physically resist as authorities try to hand him over to Pyongyang officials, via the truce village of Panmunjom. —AFP

in the newly released photos. He accused Moon — a former human rights lawyer — and his administration of having “a disgusting and callous disregard for human rights”.

The photos show that the deported men “understood they were fighting for their lives”, Robertson

added. Since Yoon took office in May, prosecutors have reopened the case. And last week, South Korea's intelligence agency also requested a formal investigation into allegations that its former chief under Moon, Suh Hoon, ordered the premature closure of an internal investigation into the matter. —AFP



Gotabaya Rajapaksa

economy — leaving it facing a foreign exchange crisis.

Lengthy power cuts are in place as the country does not have dollars to import oil for generators, the nation's 22 million people have been enduring acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines since late last year, and poverty is spreading.

When he took over in November 2019, Sri Lanka's foreign reserves were at \$7.5 billion, but dropped to just “one million dollars” recently, according to prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. Under Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka defaulted on its foreign debt for the first time in April. The country declared bankruptcy and inflation soared in June. —AFP



HONG KONG: Photo shows activist Alexandra Wong (C), also known as Grandma Wong, being taken away by police while protesting on the 24th anniversary of Hong Kong's handover from Britain, in Hong Kong. —AFP

sentenced to one month in prison after she was found guilty of assaulting a security guard at the High Court lobby in January 2019.

Her jailing came a day after a Hong Kong court gave veteran activist and terminal cancer patient Koo Sze-yiu nine months in prison. Koo was convicted of “attempted sedition” over a planned protest against Beijing's Winter Olympics that was foiled by a pre-emptive arrest. —AFP

not available for comment. Local media reported that the two people killed had died in hospital. Another rescue team said they had taken six people to hospital with non-serious wounds.

In May, a blast near a bus stop in a busy Yangon neighbourhood killed one man and wounded nine people. The junta later said the bomb had gone off accidentally and that the victim had been in contact with PDF groups it has declared “terrorists”.

More than 2,000 people have been killed and at least 14,000 arrested in the junta's crackdown on dissent since the coup, according to a local monitoring group. —AFP

Mexican schoolboy set on fire for being indigenous

MEXICO CITY: A Mexican schoolboy was set on fire and badly burned in a classroom - his “only crime” was speaking an Indigenous language in a country struggling to end racial discrimination.

Two classmates are accused of pouring alcohol on Juan Zamorano's seat at a high school in the central state of Queretaro in June. When the 14-year-old realized his trousers were wet and stood up, one of them set Zamorano on fire, according to his family.

He suffered second and third degree burns and was only this week discharged from hospital. Juan had already suffered weeks of bullying because of his Indigenous Otomi roots, according to his family's lawyers, who filed complaints against the alleged attackers and school authorities.

With an estimated population of 350,000, the Otomi are one of dozens of Indigenous groups in the Latin American country. The Otomi language is Juan's mother tongue “but he doesn't like to speak it much because it's a cause of ridicule, harassment and bullying,” Ernesto Franco, one of the family's lawyers, told AFP.

The family has alleged to the media that even Zamorano's teacher harassed him because of his origin. “She thinks that we're not her class, we're not her race,” Zamorano's father, who described the attack as “attempted murder,” told the newspaper El Universal.

'Recurring attacks'

Queretaro state prosecutors have announced an investigation into the attack and the alleged perpetrators face possible legal proceedings. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said that if necessary, the country's attorney general's office might handle the case.

Juan's “only crime was speaking Otomi,” tweeted Lopez Obrador's spokesman Jesus Ramirez, who said that eradicating racism was everyone's responsibility. Mexico's National Institute of Indigenous Peoples urged the authorities to “sanction minors and adults involved in harassment and recurring attacks on minors.”

Urgent measures are needed in schools to prevent further cases of discrimination and racism, it said. Discrimination is common in Mexico, a country of 126 million where 23.2 million people identify as Indigenous and more than 7.3 million speak an Indigenous language, according to a 2020 census.

In a case in March, an Otomi woman accused staff at a restaurant in a trendy Mexico City neighborhood of preventing her from using the toilet, telling her it was only for customers.

Systemic racism

Around 40 percent of the Indigenous population complained of having faced discrimination in a survey published by the national statistics agency in 2018. Almost half felt that their rights were respected little or not at all.

The survey also revealed prejudices against the Indigenous population. Three out of 10 people questioned agreed with the statement: “The poverty of Indigenous people is due to their culture.”

Cases like Zamorano's are not isolated but part of systemic racism, said Alexandra Haas, the Mexico head of the international charity Oxfam. In 2019, an Oxfam study in Mexico found that speaking an Indigenous language, identifying with an Indigenous, Black or mixed ethnicity community, or having a darker skin tone, meant less chance of educational and labor advancement. —AFP

Bomb in Myanmar's Yangon kills two, wounds nine

YANGON: A bomb blast near a shopping mall in Myanmar's commercial hub Yangon has killed two people and wounded eleven, rescue workers and local media said on Wednesday. No group has so far claimed responsibility for the explosion, which took place on Tuesday afternoon, as the country

Business

THURSDAY, JULY 14, 2022



QINGDAO: Workers look at a cargo ship at a port in Qingdao, in China's eastern Shandong province on July 13, 2022. — AFP



SHANGHAI: People walk on The Bund in the Huangpu district of Shanghai. — AFP

China growth slumps on virus lockdowns, real estate woes

Biggest city Shanghai sealed off for two months

BEIJING: China's economic expansion slumped in the second quarter to levels not seen since early 2020, an AFP poll of analysts found, owing to painful COVID lockdowns and lingering weakness in the real estate sector. Leaders of the world's second-biggest economy remain firmly wedded to a zero-COVID approach of stamping out clusters as they emerge, but the fallout has sapped growth and is pushing policymakers' annual target of around 5.5 percent out of reach.

The slowdown comes after the country's biggest city Shanghai was sealed off for two months over a virus resurgence - snarling supply chains and causing factories to shut - while dozens of others grappled with tightened rules to fight local outbreaks. Gross domestic product is estimated to have expanded 1.6 percent on-year in April-June, according to the AFP poll of experts from 12 financial institutions. Several analysts expect the economy to shrink on a quarterly basis - a first since 2020 at the height of the pandemic. According to key

gauges, activity in both the services and manufacturing sectors contracted in April and May, said Rabobank senior macro strategist Teeuwe Mevisissen.

China's property sector, an important economic driver, was also "still in limbo", while lockdowns have severely hit supply and demand, he told AFP. New home sales for the top 100 developers was 43 percent down on-year in June, according to China Real Estate Information Corporation data, with Nomura analysts adding that metro passenger trips in major cities remained below 2021 levels.

China has only logged a GDP contraction once in recent decades, and analysts expect the latest reading will drag full-year growth to around four percent, slashing earlier estimates. Economists have long questioned the accuracy of official Chinese data, suspecting that figures are massaged for political reasons. And Friday's official release will be closely watched as the Communist Party gears up for its 20th Congress when

Xi Jinping is expected to be given another five-year term as president.

Zero-COVID vs growth

China's policymakers want both zero-COVID and growth, an aim made clear during April's Politburo meeting, said Macquarie economist Larry Hu in a recent report. Authorities have vowed efforts to meet this year's target, a goal reiterated by Xi last month, and leaders will likely "decide whether to double down or back down" in July, Hu said. "Rhetorically, policymakers are unlikely to drop the name of 'zero-COVID' any time soon. That said, they could still redefine 'zero-Covid' to make it less and less disruptive to the economy," he added. Last Thursday, Premier Li Keqiang said the foundations for China's recovery are "still unstable" and called for more work to stabilize the economy.

And "multiple uncertainties" also surround the latest rebound, said ANZ Research in a report. Besides

unexpected COVID outbreaks which could trigger more restrictions on movement, "a slowdown in the US economy and the Fed's hiking moves may cloud the outlook for China's exports," ANZ added. Domestically, consumer inflation climbed in June to the highest in two years as pork prices spiked, official data showed Saturday, threatening relative stability from a global surge in food prices. China's economy has started to recover after lockdown restrictions were lifted in Shanghai from June 1, said Oxford Economics' lead economist Tommy Wu. But even if future outbreaks are less disruptive as authorities fine-tune their strategies, "pressure on consumption will likely persist", he added. This week, an auto industry association downgraded its 2022 sales forecast on weaker demand. "Consumer sentiment is unlikely to turn sanguine as strict mobility restrictions will be imposed even when the number of COVID cases in a small neighborhood is very low," Wu added.— AFP

Ukraine, Russia hold grain talks; war sends food prices soaring

ISTANBUL: Russia and Ukraine met UN and Turkish officials on Wednesday in a bid to break a months-long impasse over grain exports that has seen food prices soar and millions face hunger. The high-stakes meeting in Istanbul came with Russia's invasion of Ukraine showing no signs of abating and the sides locked in a furious long-range shooting battle that is destroying towns and leaving people with nothing.

Ukrainian officials said at least five people were killed in Russian shelling on the region surrounding the Black Sea port city of Mykolaiv. "You can't run away from war and you never know where it will find you," 60-year-old agronomist Lyubov Mozhayeva said, while picking up a humanitarian food package in the partially destroyed frontline city of Bahmut.

The first face-to-face talks between Russian and Ukrainian delegations since another meeting in Istanbul on March 29 comes with the threat of food shortages spreading across the poorest parts of the world. Ukraine is a vital exporter of wheat and grains such as barley and maize. It has also supplied nearly half of all the sunflower oil traded on global markets. But shipments across the Black Sea have been blocked by Russian warships and mines Kyiv has laid to avert a feared amphibious assault.

'Two steps from agreement'

The Istanbul negotiations are being complicated by growing suspicions that Russia is trying to export grain it has stolen from Ukrainian farmers in regions under its control. US space agency data released last week showed 22 percent of Ukraine's farmland falling under Russian control since the February 24 invasion. The two sides say they have made progress but are sticking to firm demands that could collapse the talks.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Kyiv was "two steps from an agreement with Russia". "We are in the final stages and everything now depends on Russia," he told Spain's El Pais newspaper. Russia said its requirements included the right to "search the ships to avoid the contraband of weapons"-a demand rejected by Kyiv. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres tried on Tuesday to play down expectations of an imminent breakthrough. "We are working hard indeed, but there is still a way to go," the UN chief told reporters.

Grain corridors

NATO member Turkey has been using its good relations with both the Kremlin and Kyiv to try and broker an agreement on a safe way to deliver the grain. Turkey says it has 20 merchant ships waiting in the region that could be quickly loaded and sent to world markets. A plan by the UN proposes the ships follow

safe "corridors" that run between the known location of mines. Kyiv has also asked that its vessels be accompanied by warships from a friendly country such as Turkey. Experts say de-mining the Black Sea is a complex operation that could take months-too long to address the growing global food crisis. Kuleba said he did not think Moscow actually wanted to reach an agreement because proceeds from grain sales would help support a Western-backed government in Kyiv that the Kremlin brands as "Nazis". "They know that if we start to export, we will get proceeds from world markets, and this will make us stronger," Kuleba said.

'Operational pause'

The talks in Istanbul precede a meeting in Tehran next Tuesday between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. The war in Ukraine has contributed to Turkey's mounting economic problems and further complicated Erdogan's path to a third decade in power in elections due within the next year.

Erdogan's ultimate goal is to bring Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky down to Istanbul for talks aimed at pausing the fighting and launching formal peace talks. But the Ukrainian army warned this week that Russia was preparing to stage its heaviest attack yet on the Donetsk region-the larger of the two areas comprising the Donbas war zone. The Russian army has not conducted any major ground offensives since taking the last points of Ukrainian resistance in the war zone's smaller Lugansk region at the start of the month.—AFP



UNDISCLOSED LOCATION: This satellite image of farmland in the Ukraine is part of NASA's Harvest program studying global food production. Russian forces now occupy about 22 percent of Ukraine's farmland since the February 24, 2022 invasion, impacting one of the major suppliers to global grain and edible oils markets, NASA said.— AFP

Twitter's lawsuit accuses Musk of contract breach

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter on Tuesday sued Elon Musk for breaching the \$44 billion contract he signed to buy the tech firm, calling his exit strategy "a model of hypocrisy," court documents showed. The suit filed in the US state of Delaware urges the court to order the billionaire to complete his deal to buy Twitter, arguing that no financial penalty could repair the damage he has caused. "Musk's conduct simply confirms that he wants to escape the binding contract he freely signed, and to damage Twitter in the process," the lawsuit contended. "Twitter has suffered and will continue to suffer irreparable harm as a result of defendants' breaches."

The social media company's shares edged up slightly in after-market trading when the news broke. Legal experts and market analysts see Twitter as having a strong upper hand heading into court, Wedbush analyst Dan Ives said in a note to investors. "This will be a Game of Thrones battle in court with the fake account/bot issue front and center, but ultimately Twitter's board is holding Musk's feet to the fire to finish the deal at the agreed upon price," Ives said.

"Overall this has been a black eye for Musk and horror movie for Twitter (and its employees) with no winners since the soap opera began in April." After weeks of threats, Musk last week 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 over the weekend 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 included pictures of Musk laughing with glee. The termination of the takeover agreement sets the stage for a potentially lengthy court battle with Twitter, which initially had opposed a transaction with the unpredictable billionaire entrepreneur. Twitter has defended its fake account oversight and has vowed to force Musk to complete the deal, which contained a \$1 billion breakup fee.

'Bent over backwards'

The social network says the number of fake accounts is less than five percent, a figure challenged by Musk, who says he believes the percentage is much higher. "Twitter has bent over backwards to provide Musk the information he has



WASHINGTON: A phone screen displays the Twitter account of Elon Musk with a photo of him shown in the background in Washington, DC. - AFP

requested, including, most notably, the full 'firehose' data set that he has been mining for weeks," the lawsuit said.

"From the outset, defendants' information requests were designed to try to tank the deal." Musk made his unsolicited bid to buy Twitter without asking for estimates regarding spam or fake accounts, and even sweetened his offer to the board by withdrawing a diligence condition, the lawsuit said. The way Musk used a large chunk of his Tesla shares to back financing for the deal meant that if stock in the electric car maker declined, he would have to pony up or sell more of it, according to the suit.

"Not only were there no financing or diligence conditions, but Musk had already secured debt commitments that together with his personal equity commitment would suffice to fund the purchase," it said. Musk's ability to terminate the deal to buy Twitter before the "drop-dead" date of October 24 of this year is extremely limited, and closing is subject to little more than approval of Twitter shareholders and regulatory approvals, the suit added.

His norm-defying conduct has come as little surprise to watchers of the Tesla and SpaceX chief after years of statements that flout or test convention and sometimes provoke a crackdown from regulators. While Twitter has asked the court to enforce the deal, the company's legal action could yield a variety of outcomes. "There are a range of possibilities that can come from the Delaware court including settlement, breakup fee paid, deal enforced, and a myriad of other outcomes," analyst Ives wrote.— AFP

Business

European stocks fall, traders on edge; oil rebounds slightly

German investor morale slumps as gas crisis looms

LONDON: European equities fell Wednesday with traders on edge before key June inflation data in the United States. The London stock market sank by nearly one percent, around half-way through the session, despite news of rebounding UK economic growth in May. Eurozone stocks were down by about one percent after a mixed close in Asia. The euro clawed back slightly, one day after hitting dollar parity for the first time in two decades on concerns about a possible recession in the eurozone. Oil rebounded slightly having fallen sharply Tuesday on weaker demand expectations.

Tenterhooks

"Markets are on tenterhooks ahead of the US inflation data which will hold great sway over the Fed's rate-hike plans," said Exinity Markets analyst Han Tan. "A fresh four-decade high, along with more signs of unabating inflationary pressures, may well force the Fed to punch harder and faster in its battle against runaway consumer prices." Markets fear more evidence of red hot US inflation will prompt the Fed to keep hiking interest rates aggressively after it ramped up borrowing costs by three-quarters of a percentage point last month.

US inflation had spiked to a four-decade high of 8.6 percent in May. Inflation is soaring worldwide after economies reopened from pandemic lockdowns and as the Ukraine war keeps energy prices elevated. In a further sign of the pressure being felt around the world, the New Zealand and South Korean central banks each lifted interest rates by 0.5 percentage points Wednesday. It was the steepest increase by Seoul since 1999.



PANAMA CITY: Protesters tear down a barrier during a march against the high cost of food and gasoline in Panama City.— AFP

Panama protests continue despite fuel price cuts

PANAMA CITY: Thousands of Panamanians took to the street again on Tuesday to protest rising inflation and government corruption, despite the announcement of price cuts for fuel and some food products. The demonstrations, called for by the Central American country's numerous unions, have lasted for two weeks and resulted in some main highways being closed.

President Laurentino Cortizo announced Monday that the price of gasoline for private vehicles will be reduced to \$3.95 per gallon from July 15, a drop of 24 percent from the price at the end of June. He also announced that his government would draft a decree to freeze the prices of a dozen essential food products.

Uber's litany of controversies

PARIS: Even before new leaks emerged revealing bare-knuckle expansion tactics at ride-hailing giant Uber, the app was dogged by controversy over harassment, hacking and standoffs with the authorities over its workers' rights. This is what we knew about Uber, founded in 2010, before the joint media investigation.

Riders fight for rights

Since the outset Uber has been fighting an ongoing battle over the status of its workers, which it insists are freelancers, a flashpoint issue across the gig economy. In March 2021, following a ruling by Britain's High Court, Uber agreed to give its UK drivers workers' entitlements including holiday pay and a pension. Its 70,000 drivers there should now earn at least the minimum wage.

In the US the Biden administration in May 2021 blocked a rule handed down under former president Donald Trump that would have prevented gig workers from demanding a minimum wage or overtime. In December 2021 the European Union tabled plans that could force Uber and other platforms to treat their workers as fully-fledged employees. French and Dutch courts have ruled the contract between Uber and its drivers is an employment contract.

Harassment

Co-founder Travis Kalanick resigned from Uber in June 2017 amid heavy pressure following reports about a cutthroat workplace culture, harassment and other ills. His exit followed a probe led by former US attorney general Eric Holder, who investigated allegations of misconduct and ethical lapses at the company. Uber fired 20 people following the probe, which examined 215 claims of discrimination, harassment, unprofessional behavior, bullying, retaliation and "physical security". Also that month a woman raped by an Uber driver in India filed a

Europe gas crisis

The euro held above \$1 a day after hitting parity for the first time since late 2002, as a worsening energy crisis fanned expectations that the eurozone would plunge into recession. With Russian energy giant Gazprom starting 10 days of maintenance Monday on its Nord Stream 1 pipeline, the bloc - and particularly gas-reliant Germany - is waiting nervously to see if the taps are turned back on. The single currency has been hit also by the European Central Bank's reluctance to raise rates - in contrast to monetary policy elsewhere.

"A prolonged cut to the gas supply would halt a lot of economic activity, sending (Germany) deep into recession," said Tapas Strickland at National Australia Bank. He said July 21 - when the gas should be switched back on - will be a crucial date. "That date also happens to be the day of the next ECB meeting," Strickland added. "Either of these events are key risk events. Russia playing gas politics by not switching on the gas supply would likely see the euro lurch much lower."

German investor morale

Meanwhile, German investor confidence dropped in July, a closely watched survey showed on Tuesday, as industry fretted over the potential impact of a halt in Russian gas supplies on Europe's largest economy. The ZEW institute's economic expectations index fell 25.8 points to minus 53.8 points, its lowest level since 2011.

For its survey, ZEW quizzes experts about the current economic situation and the outlook for the coming six months. A negative reading means that most



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, gas prices are displayed on a sign in Washington, DC. US consumer price inflation surged 9.1 percent over the past 12 months to June, the fastest increase since November 1981, according to government data released on July 13, 2022. - AFP

experts are pessimistic. The July reading was "slightly lower" than the level seen in March 2020 at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, when shutdowns effectively halted large parts of the economy, ZEW said in a statement.

Concerns surrounding Germany's energy supply, an imminent rise in European Central Bank interest rates and continuing coronavirus-related restrictions in key market China contributed to a "significant worsening of the economic outlook", ZEW president Achim Wambach said. Morale among export-oriented and energy-intensive industries fell "particularly sharply",

Wambach said.

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, threatening Germany with a winter shortage. A long-term shutdown would hit industry hard, with authorities already preparing for the possibility of rationing supplies. Investors' assessment of the current economic situation also fell by 18.2 points in July to minus 45.8 points, according to the survey.— AFP

Supply risks haunt market despite high oil prices

PARIS: High oil prices have yet to dampen demand which is set to continue rising and may soon outstrip supply, the International Energy Agency warned Wednesday. It cautioned that the global economic recovery could be derailed unless governments take measures to reduce consumption and fuel prices that pose a threat to stability in some nations.

"Without strong policy intervention on energy use, risks remain high that the world economy falls off-track for recovery," the Paris-based agency that advises industrialized nations on energy policy said in its latest monthly report on oil markets. Oil prices have surged from around \$80 per barrel earlier this year to over \$120 at times as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sparked supply concerns and the reopening of China's economy from COVID lockdowns has boosted demand.

If high petrol prices have started to dent demand in

industrialized nations, the IEA said this has been counterbalanced by larger-than-expected rebounds in demand by China and some emerging and developing nations. The IEA now expects oil demand to rise this year to 99.2 million barrels per day (mbd) and to 101.3 mbd next year.

Meanwhile, supply climbs to 100.1 mbd this year. But even if it hits an expected record of 101.1 mbd next year, it will fall below demand. The IEA noted that the world has little spare capacity to increase production, with the combined buffer of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates set to fall to just 2.2 mbd in August. It said the production of OPEC+ nations could even fall next year if Russia's supply is impacted as expected by tightening international sanctions.

Coupled with tight refinery margins causing imbalances in certain product markets and putting upward pressure on prices, "it may be up to demand side measures to bring down consumption and fuel costs that pose a threat to stability, most notably in emerging markets," the IEA said. It added the strengthening of the dollar versus other currencies as the US Federal Reserve hikes interest rates has compounded the pain of already rising import costs for food and oil for numerous developing and emerging nations, including Sri Lanka which has been gripped by social unrest.— AFP



LUANDA: A general view of the refinery at the state oil company, Sonangol, in Luanda. Oil-rich Angola on Thursday unveiled a new production unit that will increase fourfold the output at its sole refinery as it seeks to reduce dependency on fuel imports.— AFP

UK's economy rebounds despite soaring inflation

LONDON: Britain's economy rebounded in May, official data showed Wednesday, dampening fears of a slowdown despite surging inflation and rising interest rates. Gross domestic product expanded 0.5 percent, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement, beating expectations of zero growth. "The economy rebounded in May with growth across all main sectors," said Darren Morgan, ONS director for economic statistics.

The broad rebound was driven by a bounceback in construction, manufacturing and services. That followed a 0.2-percent decline in April, which was revised up from a 0.3-percent contraction. "Health was the biggest driver, with many more people seeing GPs, despite test and trace and the vaccination programs winding down," added Morgan. "Road hauliers also had a busy month while travel agencies fared well with pent-up demand for summer holidays."

"There was widespread growth across manufacturing after several tough months while construction also fared well with housebuilding and office refurbishment driving growth." The Bank of England has hiked interest rates five times since December in a bid to tame runaway inflation, which has sparked a cost-of-living crisis in Britain. UK inflation spiked in May to a 40-year peak of 9.1 percent, a level set to hit double figures this year on soaring energy and food prices

according to the BoE. The UK government meanwhile welcomed Wednesday's upbeat data.

"It's always great to see the economy growing but I'm not complacent," said finance minister Nadhim Zahawi. "I know people are concerned so we are continuing to support families and economic growth." Zahawi is among eight Conservative MPs vying to become Britain's next prime minister following last week's resignation of scandal-hit Boris Johnson as Conservative Party leader. Capital Economics analyst Paul Dales said the economy was "resilient" but warned over the ongoing risk of recession due to rampant price rises.

Poisoned chalice?

"It is far too soon to conclude that the economy will be able to get through this period of unusually high inflation largely unscathed," Dales said. "With real household disposable incomes set to fall further in the third quarter, a recession is still a real risk. "That may mean the economy proves to be a poisoned chalice for whoever wins the race to be the next Prime Minister." Many economists fear the economy could also stumble in June due to the long bank holiday weekend that marked Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee.

Wednesday's data could encourage the BoE to implement a half-point rate hike at its next meeting in August, Dales added. The central bank in June lifted the cost of borrowing by a quarter-point to 1.25 percent, the highest level since the global financial crisis in 2009. Britons, like others in many countries, are grappling with soaring consumer prices fuelled partly by fallout from Russia's war on Ukraine, which has destabilized energy markets.— AFP

Business

US consumer prices surge to new 40-year high, 9.1%

High inflation heaps pressure on President Joe Biden

WASHINGTON: US inflation surged to a fresh peak of 9.1 percent in June, further squeezing American families and heaping pressure on President Joe Biden, whose approval ratings have taken a battering from the relentless rise in prices. Government data released Wednesday showed a sharp, faster-than-expected increase in the consumer price index compared to May driven by significant increases in gasoline prices.

The 9.1 percent CPI spike over the past 12 months to June was the fastest increase since November 1981, the Labor Department reported. Energy contributed half of the monthly increase, as gasoline jumped 11.2 percent last month and a staggering 59.9 percent over the past year. Overall energy prices posted their biggest annual increase since April 1980.

While acknowledging the inflation rate was "unacceptably high," Biden argued that it was also "out of date" as it did not reflect a clear drop in energy prices since mid-June. The recent price drop had provided "important breathing room for American families. And, other commodities like wheat have fallen sharply since this report," the president said in a statement.

Insisting that tackling inflation was the top priority, Biden admitted his administration needed "to make more progress, more quickly, in getting price increases under control." The war in Ukraine has pushed global energy and food prices higher, and US gas prices at the

pump last month hit a record of more than \$5 a gallon. However, energy prices have eased in recent weeks, which could start to relieve some of the pressure on consumers.

But the Federal Reserve is likely to continue its aggressive interest rate increases as it tries to tamp down the price surge by cooling demand before inflation becomes entrenched. The US central bank last month implemented the biggest rate hike in nearly 30 years, and economists say another three-quarter-point increase is likely later this month. Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics summed up the data in one word: "Ouch." "This report will make for very uncomfortable reading at the Fed," he said. "It rules out the chance of the Fed hiking by only 50bp this month."

Signs of cooling?

Driven by record-high gasoline prices, the consumer price index jumped 1.3 percent in June. But Shepherdson noted some signs of cooling prices in the data and predicted "this will be the last big increase." When volatile food and energy prices are stripped out of the calculation, "core" CPI increased 5.9 percent over the past year - still a rapid pace but slowing from the pace in May, according to the data.

Food and housing prices also rose in June, as did car prices, though the rate has stabilized or slowed from the past month, the report said. The White House came out ahead of the report to predict it would show "highly elevated" infla-



NEW YORK: People walk past the New York Stock Exchange during morning trading on July 13, 2022 in New York City. The stock market opened on a low note amid the release of inflation data by the Labor Department that showed US inflation reaching 9.1% in June, the highest rate in nearly 41 years. Americans are seeing increased prices, including gas, food and rent. —AFP

tion. But press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre noted that the "backwards looking inflation data" does not take into account recent declines in gasoline prices. According to AAA, the national average price at the pump was down to \$4.63 a gallon, from \$5.01 a month ago. —AFP

Haiti to lose 4,000 textile jobs due to fall in US demand

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haiti's textile industry will shed at least 4,000 jobs by year's end due to the slowdown in the US market, further hurting an impoverished Caribbean country already racked by unemployment, instability and gang violence. The Haitian subsidiary of the South Korean textile group Sae-A, which currently employs 10,000 people in the Caribbean country, announced the sharp cut in its workforce via a press release dated July 4.

"Due to the recent economic decline in the US market, 45 percent of orders from our US retail customers have been cancelled," said S&H Global, which supplies the Gap, Target and Walmart, among others. That drastic reduction in activity is pushing the industry to "lay off up to 4,000 employees by the end of the year," said the company, calling it "a heartbreaking situation."

S&H Global started operating in Haiti in 2012, when the Caracol industrial park opened near the country's second city Cap-Haitien on the northern coast. In its warehouses, where scores of sewing machines are lined up, many members of the overwhelmingly female workforce found their first formal job in a country where nearly half of the population suffers from food insecurity.

The expected reduction in industrial activity comes as Haiti slips ever deeper into political crisis, a year after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. With no election in sight to fill the power vacuum, the police force does not have the manpower or resources to take on the gangs across the country that have risen from their slum bases to take over several key strategic highways. The gangs have unleashed a wave of kidnappings and fought turf wars that have paralyzed most socio-economic activity in Port-au-Prince.

In an economy at half mast for several decades, with almost non-existent international tourism due to political instability and insecurity, subcontracting factories have been the main provider of formal jobs, with nearly 50,000 people currently employed. Under US law, any textile company established in Haiti can export its goods to the United States without customs fees. The Haitian minimum wage, slightly increased in February, is just 0.73 euros per hour, another strong argument for setting up factories in the country. —AFP

S Korea delivers a historic hike to tame inflation

SEOUL: South Korea's central bank on Wednesday delivered a historic half-point interest rate hike to tame fast-growing inflation, particularly soaring energy costs linked to the war in Ukraine. The Bank of Korea (BOK) raised its benchmark policy rate by 50 basis points to 2.25 percent, it said in a tweet, the largest increase since its current framework was implemented in 1999.

The decision comes as Asia's fourth-biggest

India accuses China's Oppo of evading \$551 million in import tax

NEW DELHI: Indian authorities Wednesday accused Chinese smartphone maker Oppo of evading customs duty worth \$551 million, the latest tech company from China to face scrutiny by local investigative agencies. India's Directorate Of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) found evidence that Oppo wrongfully used duty exemptions for items imported for use in mobile phone production, a government statement said.

DRI officials searched Oppo India offices and key managers' residences, it said, and recovered "evidence indicating wilful mis-declaration in the description of certain items imported by Oppo India for use in the manufacture of mobile phones". Relations between New Delhi and Beijing have been at a low ebb since a deadly Himalayan military stand-off between the countries in 2020. The searches make Oppo the latest Chinese tech company to come under New Delhi's spotlight, after similar raids against Vivo, Xiaomi and Huawei earlier this year.

Oppo, which is owned by China's BBK Electronics, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Oppo India, which also manages other brands including OnePlus and Realme, is one of the largest smartphone vendors in the country. India's home ministry has banned hundreds of mobile applications of Chinese origin, including the hugely popular social media platform TikTok. The government justified the bans as a necessary safeguard against threats to India's sovereignty.

NZ hikes interest rates to six-year high; prices soar

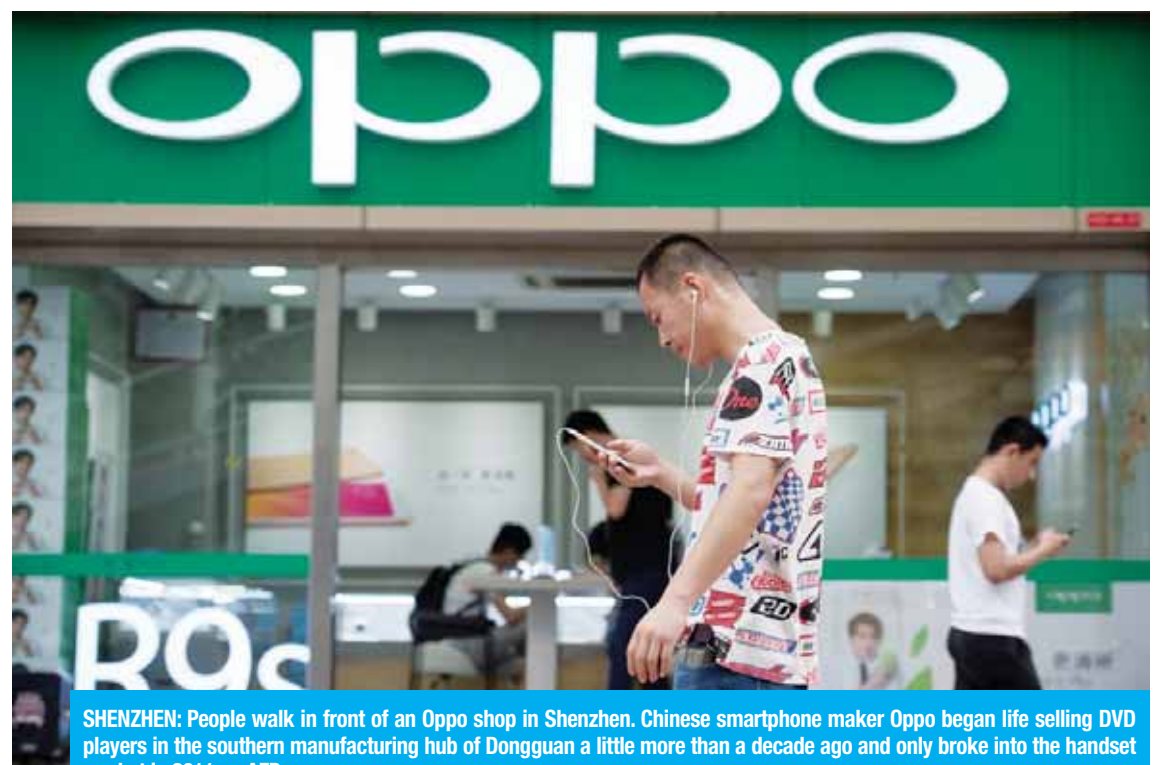
WELLINGTON: New Zealand's central bank on Wednesday raised its benchmark interest rate to the highest level in six years and warned further rises were on the cards as it joins a global fight against surging inflation. The Reserve Bank of New Zealand's official cash rate was lifted 50 basis points for the third successive meeting, to 2.5 percent.

Borrowing costs are now at their highest level since January 2016 and the monetary policy committee reaffirmed a hawkish approach to tackling inflation, which sits at a 30-year peak of 6.9 percent. "The committee is resolute in its commitment to ensure consumer price inflation returns to within the one to three percent target range," it said in a statement.

The local dollar barely moved after a decision that had been widely anticipated. "The name of the game is reining in 30-year high inflation. And there are few signs of price

economy recovers from a COVID-induced slowdown while struggling with rising fuel and raw material prices. Last month, the country's consumer price index jumped six percent on-year, hitting its highest point since the Asian financial crisis more than two decades ago.

While South Korea's exports remain a major driver of economic growth, the country posted a trade deficit for the second consecutive month in May as a result of rising import costs, according to government data. Central banks around the world have launched a series of rate increases as Russia's war in Ukraine has fuelled a surge in energy and food prices that has driven up inflation. The BOK reduced its 2022 growth forecast to 2.7 percent in May, down from 3 percent three months earlier. —AFP



SHENZHEN: People walk in front of an Oppo shop in Shenzhen. Chinese smartphone maker Oppo began life selling DVD players in the southern manufacturing hub of Dongguan a little more than a decade ago and only broke into the handset market in 2011. —AFP

Anti-China sentiment has grown in India since the fatal 2020 troop clash, sparking calls for consumer boycotts of Chinese goods. China continues to be a key economic partner for India, with more than \$125 billion in bilateral trade last year. India is home to the

second-highest number of smartphone users in the world, after China. Its smartphone market grew 27 percent year-on-year in 2021, according to tech research firm Counterpoint, with annual sales exceeding 169 million units. —AFP



SUVA: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern (left) speaks as Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta looks on during a press conference at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in Suva on July 13, 2022. —AFP

pressures letting up," said economists at Kiwibank. The move comes as central banks around the world are forced to lift rates as they battle decades-high inflation, fanning fears of another recession and sending equity markets tumbling. —AFP



SEOUL: Pedestrians cross a road in front of the Bank of Korea headquarters in Seoul on July 13, 2022, after South Korea's central bank delivered a historic half-point interest rate hike to tame fast-growing inflation. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



This picture shows a view of the succulent salicornia plants growing on a farm in the desert outside the Gulf emirate of Dubai. — AFP photos



A worker prepares a salicornia plant-based mix to be made into burger patties at a food processing plant in the Gulf emirate of Sharjah.



Salicornia plant-based burger patties are prepared for packaging off a production line at a food processing plant in the Gulf emirate of Sharjah.



A mincer produces shreds of salicornia plant-based mix to be made into burger patties at a food processing plant.

Desert-grown superfood puts 'healthy' burgers on UAE menus

A hardy plant grown using salt water is thriving in the UAE's desert farms and helping create "healthy" burgers, showing sustainable agriculture's potential in the toughest conditions. Salicornia, a succulent, is already being used as a salt replacement in burger patties—a rare farming success in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, which imports nearly all of its food.

"You have the salty flavor with less sodium, but you also have other benefits," said Tina Siegmund, head of marketing and innovation at UAE-based Global Food Industries, a frozen food manufacturer. The asparagus-like plant reduces sodium content by 40 percent in the company's healthy burgers, which also contain chicken, quinoa and kale.

Native to parts of North America, Europe, South Africa and South Asia, the plant is ideal for the UAE's inhospitable climate, and contains anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties, according to Siegmund. Agriculture produces less



A worker cooks salicornia plant-based burger patties in a pan at a food processing plant in the Gulf emirate of Sharjah.

than one percent of GDP in the UAE, a country on the frontline of climate change with temperatures regularly topping 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) and rising rapidly.

Salicornia cultivation began last year in a number of farms across the UAE as part of an experiment using brine run-off from desalination plants by the Dubai-

based International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA). Augusto Becerra Lopez-Lavalle, chief scientist at ICBA, said research was now underway into generating more of the "high-value crop", which sells for \$20 a kilo (2.2 pounds) in France.

"We went from... building this prototype, to piloting at scale with eight farmers, and now the question is how to scale up," Lopez-Lavalle told AFP. In the future, salicornia could "become a really important food ingredient" he added. "If there is an economic value and the production system is developed for this, it can become a replacement for salt and any other micronutrients that are added today artificially to processed food." For now, salicornia remains a niche product, its health benefits unknown to most, admits Siegmund. "It's not a product that makes big, big profit, but we believe in it and we will continue," she said.—AFP

Webb Telescope: What will scientists learn?

The James Webb Space Telescope's first images aren't just breathtaking—they contain a wealth of scientific insights and clues that researchers are eager to pursue. Here are some of the things scientists now hope to learn.



This image released by NASA shows the dimmer star at the center of this scene has been sending out rings of gas and dust for thousands of years in all directions, and the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) has revealed for the first time that this star is cloaked in dust.

Into the deep

Webb's first image, released Monday, delivered the deepest and sharpest infrared image of the distant universe so far, "Webb's First Deep Field." The white circles and ellipses are from the galaxy cluster in the foreground called SMACS 0723, as it appeared more than 4.6 billion years ago—roughly when our Sun formed too. The reddish arcs are from light from ancient galaxies that has traveled more than 13 billion years, bending around the foreground cluster, which acts as a gravitational lens.

The hunt for habitable planets

Webb captured the signature of water, along with previously undetected evidence of clouds and haze, in the atmosphere surrounding a hot, puffy gas giant planet called WASP-96 b that orbits a distant star like our Sun. The telescope achieved this by analyzing starlight filtered through the planet's atmosphere as it moves across the star, to the unfiltered starlight detected when the planet is beside the star—a technique called spectroscopy that no other instrument can do

at the same detail.

WASP-96 b is one of more than 5,000 confirmed exoplanets in the Milky Way. But what really excites astronomers is the prospect of pointing Webb at smaller, rocky worlds, like our own Earth, to search for atmospheres and bodies of liquid water that could support life.

Death of a star

Webb's cameras captured a stellar graveyard, in the Southern Ring Nebula, revealing the dim, dying star at its center in clear detail for the first time, and showing that it is cloaked in dust. Astronomers will use Webb to delve deeper into specifics about "planetary nebulae" like these, which spew out clouds of gas and dust.

These nebulae will eventually also lead to rebirth. The gas and cloud ejection stops after some tens of thousands of years, and once the material is scattered in space, new stars can form.

A cosmic dance

Stephan's Quintet, a grouping of five galaxies, is located in the constellation Pegasus. Webb was able to pierce through the clouds of dust and gas at the center of the galaxy to glean new insights, such as the velocity and composition of outflows of gas near its supermassive black hole.

Four of the galaxies are close together and locked in a "cosmic dance" of repeated close encounters. By studying it, "you learn how the galaxies collide and merge," said cosmologist John Mather, adding our own Milky Way was probably assembled out of 1,000 smaller galaxies. Understanding the black hole better will also give us greater insights into Sagittarius A*, the black hole at the center of the Milky Way, which is shrouded in dust.

Stellar nursery

Perhaps the most beautiful image is that of the "Cosmic Cliffs" from the Carina

Nebula, a stellar nursery. Here, for the first time, Webb has revealed previously invisible regions of star formation, which will tell us more about why stars form with certain mass, and what determines the number that form in a certain region. They may look like mountains, but the tallest of the craggy peaks are seven light years high, and the yellow structures are made from huge hydrocarbon molecules, said Webb project scientist Klaus Pontoppidan.



This image released by NASA from the Mid-Infrared Instrument (MIRI) on the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) shows never-before-seen details of Stephan's Quintet, a visual grouping of five galaxies.

In addition to being the stuff of stars, nebular material could also be where we come from. "This may be the way that the universe is transporting carbon, the carbon that we're made of, to planets that may be habitable for life," he said.

The great unknown

Perhaps most exciting of all is journeying into the unknown, said Straughn. Hubble played a key role in discovering that dark energy is causing the universe to expand at an ever-growing rate, "so it's hard to imagine what we might learn with this 100 times more powerful instrument."—AFP

US prosecutor says Polanski case transcripts can be unsealed

Los Angeles prosecutors said Tuesday they will no longer oppose the release of sealed transcripts in the statutory rape case against Roman Polanski—documents which the fugitive director has previously argued could reveal judicial misconduct. George Gascon, the Los Angeles County district attorney, said his office had "determined it to be in the interest of justice to agree to the unsealing of these transcripts." "This case has been described by the courts as 'one of the longest-running sagas in California criminal justice history,'" said Gascon in a statement.

"For years, this office has fought the release of information that the victim and public have a right to know." While it is not known what exactly the transcripts contain, they include testimony by former Deputy District Attorney Roger Gunson, the first prosecutor to handle Polanski's case. In 1977, French-Polish director Polanski was arrested after 13-year-old Samantha Gailey accused him of plying her with drugs and champagne and forcibly sodomizing her.



Roman Polanski

Seeking to spare the child a trial, prosecutors dropped the most serious charges in a plea deal, with Polanski accepting guilt for unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor. He served 42 days in prison while undergoing psychiatric evaluation. When it appeared that the judge, Laurence Rittenband, was set to reconsider and hand down a much lengthier prison sentence, Polanski fled to France, where he still resides.

The "Rosemary's Baby" and "Chinatown" director has not returned to the United States since, and has been engaged in a decades-long cat-and-mouse game with officials seeking his extradition, before a global audience split between continuing outrage and forgiveness for his acts. According to Gascon's statement, Polanski first requested the transcripts be unsealed "several years ago" in order to "conduct an investigation into alleged judicial misconduct."—AFP



This image released by NASA from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) shows a landscape of "mountains" and "valleys" speckled with glittering stars which is actually the edge of a nearby, young, star-forming region called NGC 3324 in the Carina Nebula. — AFP photos



This image released by NASA is a composite of the information captured by the Near-Infrared Camera (NIRCam) and Mid-Infrared Instrument (MIRI) on the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) showing a landscape of "mountains" and "valleys" speckled with glittering stars which is actually the edge of a nearby, young, star-forming region called NGC 3324 in the Carina Nebula.



In this photo Korean-American K-pop star Alexa (left), holds her recently won American Song Contest trophy with Christopher Del Corso, the US charge d'affaires ad interim in Seoul, at the residence of the US ambassador in Seoul.—AFP photos



Korean-American K-pop star Alexa performs during a mini concert at a television studio in Seoul.



Korean-American K-pop star Alexa sings during a mini concert at a television studio in Seoul.

FINDING FAME... AND FAMILY? ALEXA'S KOREAN-AMERICAN K-POP DREAM

Korean-American K-pop star Alexa has wanted to be on stage since she was a kid, but her search for fame in South Korea was also fuelled by another reason—to help her mother find her birth family. Adopted from South Korea by an American family, her mother knows little about her birth culture nor does she speak the language. The blue-haired 25-year-old who recently won the American Song Contest—the US version of Eurovision—told AFP that eating kimchi was one of her few cultural links to her Korean heritage growing up.

That is, until Alexa discovered K-pop in 2008. “That kind of sparked my dream and my drive to become a K-pop artist,” said the Tulsa-born rising star, who has been dancing since she was two. Growing up in Oklahoma, Alexa said seeing entertainers on-screen she could identify with as a Korean American showed her “an interesting path to follow”.

At university, she took home the top prize at a K-pop competition—a trip to South Korea to film a reality show where she met executives from her future company and entered the grueling star-making training so many young hopefuls embark on. She moved to Seoul in 2018



Korean-American K-pop star Alexa records a social media message for her fans before her performance and throwing of the first pitch before the start of a baseball match between South Korean teams Kiwoom Heroes and LG Twins at the Gocheok Sky Dome in Seoul.

and having never spoken it while growing up—studied Korean at an academy for a few months, continuing her lessons by watching movies and TV shows while undergoing intensive dance classes.

Search for family

While Alexa has found success as a K-pop idol, her quest to find her mother's family is proving to be a more arduous process, foiled by South Korea's restrictive adoptive laws. Born in Ilsan, northwest of Seoul, her mother was adopted when she was five. Like many adoptees, she would like to trace her birth family, but “the laws here in Korea are a little strict regarding if the child can find their birth parents and vice versa,” Alexa said.

South Korea places the right to privacy of the birth parent above the rights of the adoptee. The country has long been a major exporter of overseas adoptees, with hundreds of thousands sent away since the 1950s.

After the Korean War, it was a way to remove children—especially those born to local mothers and American GI fathers—from a country that emphasizes ethnic homogeneity. Even today, unmarried pregnant women still face stigma in a patriarchal society and are often forced to give up their babies. “The opposite party must be in search of the other in order for the first party to gain information,” the singing star said.

That has not happened in their case, so her mother is still unable to find Alexa's grandma. However, she has had some success through the internet and DNA testing, and found some cousins in other countries. Alexa said they haven't given up hope. “Hopefully in the future, we can find some of my Korean family here. It would be nice,” she told AFP, adding that she now considers Seoul her “second home”.

'Representation'

When NBC decided to put together the American version of the Eurovision song contest, Alexa—a “Eurovision fan”—was invited to enter to represent her home state. It gave her and her team a chance to bring K-pop to American audiences, and they immediately began planning. “How can we do staging, what concept would work, what would really grab the American audience while staying true to the K-pop?” she told AFP of their process.

Beyond nationality or language, for Alexa, K-pop is a commitment to concept, styling and execution—the hair and make-up, sets, staging and cinematography must be perfect. “I really

enjoy, you know, the spectacle, the art, the wonder, the beauty that is K-pop,” she said.

For her American Song Contest finale, Alexa descended from the rafters to the stage on a throne, then launched into choreography of military precision with her dancers as she sang “Wonderland”. Her win has K-pop fans applauding her for bringing the genre front-and-centre to American reality television.

She hopes the growing diversity in the industry will bring the music to more countries. “Growing up, some of the only representation that I saw for myself was Mulan, an animated Chinese character, and I'm a Korean-American,” she quipped. But since Korean bands like BLACKPINK and BTS went global, “K-pop has become such a safe space for so many kids”.

She believes the growing number of non-Korean idols within the industry is also good for her adopted home. “Korea is a rather homogenous country. So having all of these foreign idols, I think it's a really cool eye-opening opportunity for Korea as well,” she said. — AFP



Korean-American K-pop star Alexa takes part in a rehearsal with her dance crew in a dance studio of South Korea's ZB Label in Seoul.



Korean-American K-pop star Alexa performs her song 'Wonderland' with her crew during a mini concert at a television studio in Seoul.



Korean-American K-pop star Alexa poses with her trophy in a dance studio of South Korea's ZB Label in Seoul.

From 'Anti' to 'V Live': A K-pop glossary for newbies

Newcomers to the K-pop world will often find themselves lost in an online culture riddled with inside jokes, confusing terms and a unique vocabulary. AFP takes a look at some of the most common K-pop terms:

K-pop

Korean popular music, or “K-pop”, is the genre of music originating from South Korea. Originally sung in Korean—but now often in English—K-pop songs may have musical elements from hip hop, electronic dance, jazz or rock. It is mostly performed by boy bands and girl groups. Key components include tight choreography, high production values and original concepts.

Anti-fan

Also shortened as “anti”, it refers to someone who hates a particular celebrity so much that they devote their time to mocking and criticising that artist.

Comeback

A K-pop “comeback” means a group releasing new music or an album — with no long passage of time required. Often a multi-step process, a comeback is teased out for weeks with images, videos, and in some cases, even pre-album singles.

Fan chant

These are words shouted by fans during performances. A chant usually includes naming all the members of a group during the intro and then repeating specific words or lines throughout a song. The chants are often tailored to specific songs.

Fingerheart

A gesture of forming a small heart

shape with thumb and index fingers. It is frequently used by K-pop artists to express their fondness towards their fans.

Idol

An “idol” is a K-pop star, who has been trained before “debuting”—releasing their first music—through an entertainment agency. Idols can be solo artists or members of a group.

Leader

Most K-pop bands have a designated “leader” who is responsible for guiding

Sasaeng fan

The super-obsessed fan who goes over the top for the attention of their favourite K-pop artist. In Korean, “sa” means private and “saeng” means life, referring to the fans' intrusion into the stars' private lives. In some cases, this may amount to borderline criminal acts, such as breaking into their homes, stealing their personal items or information, and sending inappropriate gifts such as lingerie.



In this file picture fans watch a performance of K-pop groups during the 2022 Dream Concert at Jamsil stadium in Seoul. — AFP

and overseeing the group. The person usually starts any public introductions off and will be the first to speak at events.

Lightstick

Don't dismiss them as mere glow sticks. K-pop lightsticks have evolved to become symbols of the fans' devotion to their artists. They are custom-made for many groups, and fans show their unity by waving them at concerts.

V Live

If you want to keep up with your favorite K-pop star, “V Live” is a must. It's a livestream platform used by most K-pop idols to connect with their fans. Some upload behind-the-scenes footage, while others use it to livestream after shows.—AFP

'Hallelujah', a dud turned classic song, the focus of new Cohen doc

Leonard Cohen's song “Hallelujah” pretty much flopped when it came out nearly 40 years ago. Today, it enjoys cult status and has been performed by everyone from Bob Dylan to Jeff Buckley and Bon Jovi—even appearing in animated hit “Shrek”—in a unique evolution detailed in a new documentary film. The tune rich in religious and erotic references by the Canadian poet, who died in 2016, has made the rounds. In 2008, a gospel version of the song was performed by Alexandra Burke on the British TV talent show “The X Factor.” That year the song placed 1st, 2nd and 36th in the British music charts: the versions by Burke, Buckley and the original by Cohen himself. “I do not know of any other song with that trajectory,” said music journalist Alan Light, who wrote a book on the song called “The Holy or the Broken,” published in 2012.

'Snowball is rolling'

“This song took 10 years, 20 years, going through all these different versions, around these different corners and then it gains this momentum. The snowball is rolling, and it gets bigger and bigger and bigger,” Light told AFP. He spoke in New York at a showing of the new documentary “Hallelujah: Leonard Cohen, a Journey, a Song,” for which was an adviser and producer. The film shows that, at first, the work was destined for obscurity. A practicing Jew who eventually retired to a Buddhist monastery, poet-turned-singer Cohen took years to write the spiritual and image-rich lines of the song, which evokes King David, his music and his temptations.

Cohen left out dozens of the verses he had written. The Columbia record label refused to release “Various Positions,” the

LP that included “Hallelujah,” in the United States. It did come out in Europe, among other the places. Competition was stiff that year, and slow, poetic songs were not crowding the top of the charts.

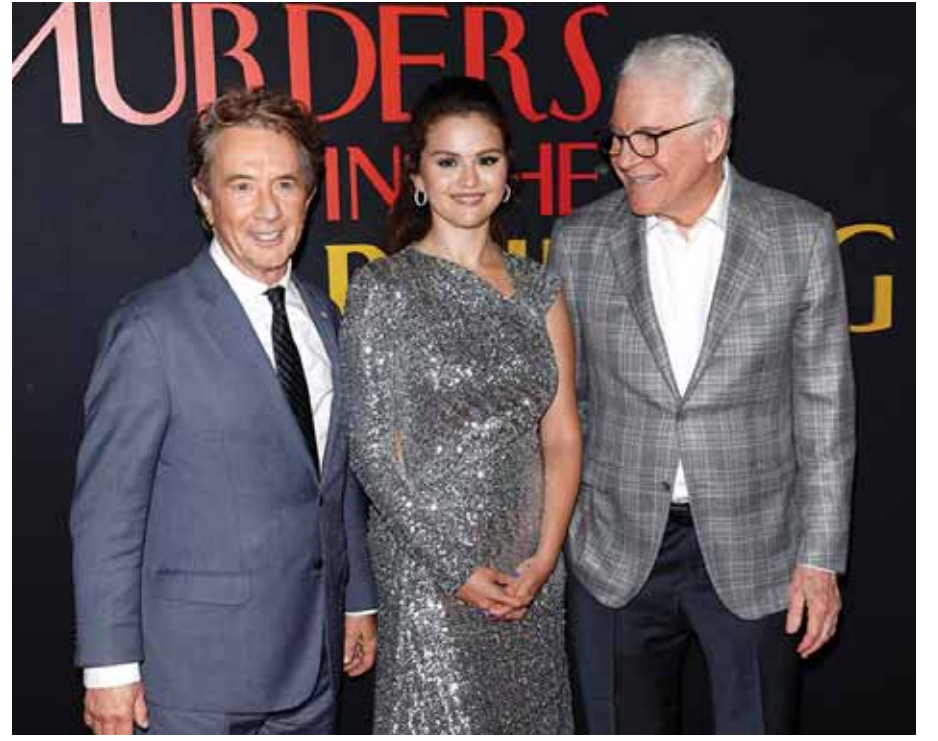
“It's 1984. It's boom time in the music business. This is the year of ‘Born in the USA,’ and ‘Like a Virgin’ and ‘Purple Rain,’” Light said, referring to huge hits by Bruce Springsteen, Madonna, and Prince. A few years later, Dylan lifted the song out of the darkness with a blues version. Then John Cale, one of the founders of The Velvet Underground, covered it in 1991, followed by Buckley's in 1994.

Bono apologizes

The documentary shows how “Hallelujah” became a feature of popular culture, with new generations discovering it in the first “Shrek” movie in 2001 and in “Sing” in 2016. In 2010, the Canadian singer K.D. Lang belted it out at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver. And 11 years later “Hallelujah” was performed again at a tribute to victims of the coronavirus pandemic, with President Joe Biden in attendance on the eve of his swearing in. Light says the song has a beautiful melody and but also lyrics open to interpretation. “If to you it's a religious song, that's there. If to you, it's a heart-break song, great, that's there. You can do that,” Light said. “There's no wrong way to do it,” he added, noting a ukelele version by US musician Jake Shimabukuro. Not all agree, however. In an interview for his book on “Hallelujah,” Light recalled how U2 frontman Bono apologized for a 1995 trip-hop version of the song he recorded, in which he talked his way through the lyrics, rather than sang.—AFP



In this file photo Scottish actor Brian Cox (third right), US actor Jeremy Strong (right) and members of the cast from "Succession" pose with the award for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series, in the press room during the 28th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards in Santa Monica, California.— AFP photos



In this file photo, (from left) Canadian actor Martin Short, US actress and singer Selena Gomez and US actor Steve Martin arrive to the premiere of "Only Murders in the Building" season 2 at the Directors Guild of America in Los Angeles.

'SUCCESION' TOPS EMMY NOMS WITH 25 AS 'SQUID GAME' MAKES HISTORY

HBO's "Succession" topped this year's Emmy nominations, earning 25 nods on Tuesday, as "Squid Game" became the first non-English-language drama series shortlisted for glory for television's equivalent of the Oscars. "Succession," which follows a rich, powerful family vying to inherit a media empire, led the drama nominees, while "Ted Lasso" and "The White Lotus" topped the comedy and limited series categories with 20 nominations each.

Two other comedies-HBO's "Hacks" and Hulu's "Only Murders in the Building"-each racked up 17 nominations for the 74th Emmy Awards, to be handed out at a glitzy ceremony in Los Angeles on September 12. "With production at a historic high, the Academy has received a record number of Emmy submissions this season," said Television Academy CEO Frank Scheraga, praising "this platinum age of television."

Television productions have ramped back up, after being shuttered or scaled back in the first year of the coronavirus pandemic. "Succession" will compete for best drama with "Squid Game," a violent South Korean satire in which society's marginalized compete for cash in fatal versions of children's games-and Netflix's most-watched series ever. "Squid Game" also picked up multiple



In this file photo (from left) South Korean actors Park Hae-soo, O Young-so, Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos and South Korean actor Lee Jung-jae (right) attend Netflix's 'Squid Game' Special Event at Netflix FYSEE at Raleigh Studios in Los Angeles, California.

acting nominations, including best lead actor for Lee Jung-jae, to earn 14 nods in total. The groundbreaking show is hoping to follow in the footsteps of South Korean film "Parasite," which rocked Hollywood in 2020 by becoming the first non-English-language film to win best picture at the Oscars.

Others in the running for the best drama Emmy include "Euphoria," "Ozark," "Better Call Saul" and "Stranger Things." "Succession" stars Brian Cox and Jeremy Strong will compete with Lee for best actor in a drama series, while former Oscar winner Adrien Brody earned a guest actor nomination.

"I am a huge fan of 'Succession' and am beyond thrilled to have been included in such an extraordinary show," said Brody of the series, which already won best drama in 2020 with its second season. "Euphoria" star and past winner Zendaya, 25, became the youngest acting nominee to be shortlisted twice, for best actress in a drama-a category in which "The Morning Show" actress Jennifer Aniston missed out to co-star Reese Witherspoon.

'Emmy nominated, baby!'

HBO-and its streaming platform HBO Max-won the network nominations battle, earning a combined 140 compared to Netflix's 105. In the comedy categories, past winners Jason Sudeikis ("Ted Lasso"), Bill Hader ("Barry") and Donald Glover ("Atlanta") will battle it out for best actor, as will Jean Smart ("Hacks") and Rachel Brosnahan ("The Marvelous Mrs Maisel") for best actress.

Selena Gomez missed out on an acting nomination for "Only Murders in the Building"-even though her male co-stars Steve Martin and Martin Short earned nods. But she still made history as the second ever Latina nominated as a producer in the category.

"Abbott Elementary," ABC's school-based mockumentary, earned seven nods including acting, writing and come-

dy series nominations for creator Quinta Brunson. "Crying shaking and throwing up has new meaning to me because I real life did all three," Brunson tweeted. "Still speechless... Emmy nominated, baby!"

In the limited series categories, "The White Lotus"-a satirical look at hypocrisy and wealth among the visitors to a luxury Hawaii hotel-scored eight acting nominations for an ensemble cast including Jennifer Coolidge and Murray Bartlett. Elsewhere, A-listers including Colin Firth ("The Staircase"), Andrew Garfield ("Under the Banner of Heaven"), Oscar Isaac ("Scenes From a Marriage") and Michael Keaton ("Dopesick") will vie for best actor in a limited series.—AFP

But there were notable big-name omissions on the short list for best actress in a limited series, including Julia Roberts ("Gaslit") and Jessica Chastain ("Scenes from a Marriage"). Instead, the category will feature Amanda Seyfried ("The Dropout"), Julia Garner ("Inventing Anna") and Sarah Paulson ("Impeachment: American Crime Story") among others. The Emmys will be broadcast in the United States on NBC and Peacock. — AFP

Mattel unveils Jane Goodall Barbie, complete with chimp

American toy manufacturer Mattel has unveiled new specialty Barbie dolls modeled after the famous English primatologist Jane Goodall and her beloved research specimen, a chimpanzee named David Greybeard. The Goodall doll, which Mattel says will be partly made with recycled plastic, sports

the researcher's classic beige collared shirt and shorts, as well as a pair of binoculars and a blue notebook.

David Greybeard was the chimpanzee on whom Goodall wrote her initial research papers, which documented for the first time the species' usage of tools. "I'd been suggesting it for a long time that girls don't want just to be film stars and things like that," said Goodall in a promotional video. "Many of them, like me, want to be in the out in nature studying animals."

The new Barbie is the latest in a series of dolls Mattel has dedicated to feminist or other inspirational icons.

Before Goodall, the toy-maker had produced dolls modeled off tennis star Naomi Osaka, the co-creator of AstraZeneca's Covid vaccine, Sarah Gilbert, and an anonymous female "robotics engineer." "My heroes, my models were Tarzan, Dr. Dolittle," said Goodall. "There weren't women doing the kind of things I wanted to do... so in all my dreams, I was a man." To all the little girls who like her would like to be changemakers, the primatologist recommends to "go for a walk in nature, learn to love it and then protect it."—AFP



In this undated handout image courtesy of the Jane Goodall Institute, famous British primatologist Jane Goodall holds a Barbie doll in her likeness.— AFP photos



Three men charged in plot to sell stolen Eagles notes

Manhattan's district attorney on Tuesday charged three people with conspiring to illegally possess and sell some 100 pages of handwritten notes and lyrics for the Eagles album "Hotel California." Glenn Horowitz, Craig Inciardi and Edward Kosinski allegedly knew the documents-collectively valued at

over \$1 million-were stolen, but conspired to sell them anyway. According to court documents, the men manufactured false provenance and lied to auction houses, potential buyers and law enforcement about how they acquired the notes by Don Henley, which included lyrics to the hits "Hotel California" and "Life in the Fast Lane." A biographer for the band originally stole the manuscripts in the late 1970s, according to the legal filing, eventually selling them to Horowitz, who in turn sold them to Inciardi and Kosinski.

Court documents say Eagles founding-member Henley filed police reports upon learning that Inciardi and Kosinski had the pages, allegations the duo fought for

years. "New York is a world-class hub for art and culture, and those who deal cultural artifacts must scrupulously follow the law," said Manhattan prosecutor Alvin Bragg.

"These defendants attempted to keep and sell these unique and valuable manuscripts, despite knowing they had no right to do so. They made up stories about the origin of the documents and their right to possess them so they could turn a profit." Inciardi, 58, is an "employee with curator responsibilities" at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio, the museum confirmed to AFP.—AFP

Emmy nominations: Five takeaways

"Succession" led the way in Tuesday's Emmy nominations, which saw the Television Academy's 20,000 voters sift through record submissions as production ramped back up from the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Here are five takeaways from the announcement of the nominees for the 74th Emmy Awards:

No love for 'Yellowstone'

Soapy neo-Western "Yellowstone" stars Kevin Costner, racked up a whopping 11 million views for its fourth season premiere... and yet failed to land a single Emmy nomination. In fact, it has only ever earned one Emmy nomination, for a minor technical category last year. Academy voters appear to have been put off by the show's slot on Paramount's relatively small cable network, or its ostensible conservative leanings-though "Yellowstone" has recently soared in popularity along the liberal US coasts too.

Chappelle gets nod despite controversy

Comedian Dave Chappelle has attracted controversy over jokes criticized as transphobic, notably in last year's Netflix special "The Closer." Protesters gathered outside the streaming giant's Los Angeles premises in October, accusing Netflix of profiting from hate speech with the show, in which Chappelle asserts that "gender is a fact."

In May, Chappelle was attacked onstage by an audience member while finishing a set during the "Netflix Is A Joke" comedy festival at the Hollywood Bowl. None of that dissuaded Emmy voters, who nominated "The Closer" for best pre-recorded variety special.

Women make gains

Tuesday's nominations saw gains for women, who have traditionally been under-represented in directing, writing and technical fields at the Emmys and other entertainment award galas. Almost half of the directors nominated in scripted categories were women, including Amy

Poehler for documentary "Lucy and Desi," and "Succession" helmer Lorene Scafaria in the best drama category. Women received almost 40 percent of scripted writing nominations.

Posthumous nods for Boseman, Walter

"Black Panther" star Chadwick Boseman died in August 2020 after battling colon cancer-a diagnosis he never publicly discussed. Last year, he narrowly missed out to Anthony Hopkins on a posthumous Oscar, for best actor in blues drama "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom."

This year's Emmys likely represent a final chance at awards glory for the late star, who earned a nomination for voicing a version of his "Black Panther" character in Marvel's animated series "What If...?" Former "Arrested Development" star Jessica Walter also earned a posthumous nomination for her voice-over work in "Archer."

Obama v Abdul-Jabbar?

Award shows frequently find creative ways to nominate big names from beyond the traditional entertainment ranks, and this year's best narrator Emmy category is no exception. It includes veteran naturalist David Attenborough ("The Mating Game") and Oscar-winning actress Lupita Nyong'o ("Serengeti II.")

More unusually, it pits basketball great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar ("Black Patriots: Heroes Of The Civil War") against former US president Barack Obama ("Our Great National Parks.") Obama will find out in September if he can add an Emmy to his Nobel Peace Prize... and two Grammy Awards. — AFP



File photo shows an Emmy statuette at the 70th Emmy Awards Governors Ball press preview at the LA Live Event Deck in Los Angeles, California.— AFP

Sports

Africa's fastest man Omanyala on a 'sprint mission' for Kenya

Kenyan targets 100m at World Athletics Championships

News in brief

\$750,000 Indonesia golf event

JAKARTA: Major winners Lydia Ko and Kim Hyo-joo will be the star attractions when women's professional tour golf returns to Indonesia for the first time in a decade next month. World number five Ko of New Zealand and South Korea's eighth-ranked Kim will head a 40-player field for the inaugural Simone Asia Pacific Cup, the first event in the country since the 2012 Indonesia Ladies Open. They will compete over 54 holes of stroke play from August 18-20 for a total of \$500,000 in individual prize money at the Pondok Indah Golf Course, Jakarta, the Ladies Asian Tour announced. Their scores will also count towards a team event, where an additional \$250,000 purse is up for grabs for 20 two-player teams formed from 15 golf associations across the Asia-Pacific region.

NBA adopts play-in tournament

NEW YORK: NBA club owners voted Tuesday to have the play-in tournament become a full-time path to the playoffs and toughened rules on teams making intentional fouls to deny fast-break scoring runs. Both changes were made after unanimous recommendations from the NBA's competition committee for both moves. The NBA staged a play-in tournament on a one-year basis in the 2020-21 season and extended that for an extra season in 2021-22. Under that format, teams who finish the regular season with the seventh-highest through 10th-highest winning percentages in each conference compete to decide the seventh and eighth playoff seeds. In the 2022-23 NBA campaign, the play-in tournament will be staged April 11-14, between the end of the regular season on April 9 and the start of the playoffs on April 15.

Raphinha set to join Barcelona

BARCELONA: Brazil winger Raphinha, who played a pivotal role in Leeds United retaining their place in the Premier League last season, is poised to sign for Barcelona after the clubs agreed to the deal in principle on Wednesday. The 25-year-old will cost the Catalans a reported 55 million euros (\$55.3million) - with a potential 15 million euros in add-ons - and sign a five year contract. "Barcelona and Leeds United Football Club have reached an agreement in principle for the transfer of Raphael Dias Belloli, Raphinha, pending the player passing his medical," read a statement on the Barcelona website. Barcelona said they were buying: "a winger who is excellent in one on ones, taking on defenders being a key part of his game." Raphinha spent two seasons at Elland Road, scoring 17 goals and providing 12 assists after they signed him from Ligue 1 outfit Rennes for £17 million - the French side are due a cut of the transfer fee.

Djokovic to open tennis courts

VISOKO: Recently-crowned Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic arrived in Bosnia on Wednesday to inaugurate tennis courts at a 'pyramid park' that he regularly visits to recharge his batteries. The tennis star, known for his new-age spiritual interests, is fond of a hill town of Visoko, where thousands flock every year to what some believe are an ancient man-made pyramid complex with healing powers - a claim rejected by scientists. The 35-year-old Serb, who claimed his 21st Grand Slam title on Sunday, visited the site for the first time in 2020 and called it a "paradise on earth". He has returned to the "Bosnian Pyramids of the Sun" complex at least four times, either alone or with his family, to be always warmly welcomed by its founder Semir Osmanagic. Bosnian businessman and ancient civilisation aficionado Osmanagic said the idea to construct a regional tennis training centre was born during Djokovic's last visit in March.

Suzuki confirms MotoGP exit

PARIS: Suzuki said on Wednesday they had come to an agreement with championship promoters Dorna to leave MotoGP at the end of this season, four years before the end of their contract. Their current deal with the sport started in 2015 and was due to finish in 2026. In May, the Japanese manufacturer said they wanted to quit MotoGP for financial reasons, which were also cited by the team on Wednesday. "Motorcycle racing has always been a challenging place for technological innovation, including sustainability, and human resource development," Suzuki's representative director and president Toshihiro Suzuki said in a team statement. "This decision means that we will take on the challenge to build the new motorcycle business operation by redirecting the technological capabilities and human resources we have cultivated through the motorcycle racing activities to investigate other routes for a sustainable society," he added. —From AFP

NAIROBI: Africa's fastest man Ferdinand Omanyala is on a mission to put sprinting on the map in Kenya, a country where the long-distance runner is king. The 26-year-old Kenyan is hoping to shine in the 100m at the World Athletics Championships opening this week in Eugene, Oregon.

But he was facing a race against time on Wednesday to obtain a US visa to enable him to get to Oregon for the 100m heats on Friday. "Sad that I haven't travelled to Oregon yet and 100m is in 2 days. Visa delays!!" he posted on Instagram. "We are anxiously waiting for the US embassy to issue visas for a number of athletes, including Omanyala. Hopefully they will be able to fly out today," Athletics Kenya executive member Barnabas Korir told AFP.

Omanyala is the third quickest man in the world this season behind Americans Fred Kerley and Trayvon Bromell. He wears two wristbands on his right arm: one, made of black and green beads, bears the numbers 9:85, his season-best 100m time set in May. The other, a bracelet crafted from leather and metal, is inscribed with 9:77, the African record he set last September. It made him the ninth fastest man ever, behind four Americans and three Jamaicans.

Making the podium in Eugene would be an historic first for an African runner. Namibia's Frankie Fredericks twice won Olympic silver in the 100m in the 1990s, but his one gold and three silvers in the World Championships were all over 200m. Omanyala said he has set his sights on at least reaching the final on July 16. "I'm targeting 9.6," he told AFP in an interview during a training session at the main stadium in the Kenyan capital Nairobi. "That will be my biggest achievement. And of course, I am going for the win."

'Something big'

As well as Kerley and Bromell, his opposition in Oregon should include Olympic gold medalist Marcell Jacobs of Italy and the 2019 world champion Christian Coleman. "I am an athlete who runs

Murray breezes into last 16 at ATP Hall of Fame Open

NEWPORT: Britain's Andy Murray cruised into the second round of the ATP Hall of Fame Open on Tuesday with a 6-2, 6-0 romp over American Sam Querrey. In windy conditions, the 35-year-old Scotsman captured the last 10 games, taking advantage of all six of his break-point chances to advance in 54 minutes over 281st-ranked Querrey. "It was really awful conditions to play tennis in, to play well, so breezy and difficult," Murray said. "I'm sorry maybe the tennis wasn't that much fun to watch but we're doing the best we can given the conditions."

Sixth seed Murray next plays for a quarter-final berth in the grass-court event against 202nd-

McIlroy chasing 'Holy Grail' as St Andrews hosts 150th Open

ST ANDREWS: St Andrews hosts the 150th British Open on Thursday with Rory McIlroy starting as the favourite for the Claret Jug while a determined Tiger Woods hopes to make an impact at a venue where he has triumphed twice before. Record crowds for the week of 290,000 are expected on Scotland's east coast for this landmark edition of the world's oldest golf tournament, which comes to the Old Course for the 30th time. With fine weather expected to continue for much of the week, it is shaping up to be a fitting way to mark a historic British Open, even if the sport continues to be rocked by the fallout caused by the breakaway LIV Series.

Tour de France's protest reaches global audience

ALBERTVILLE: When French environmental campaigners "Dernier Renovation" briefly halted the Tour de France in the Alps on Tuesday, they hooked into a global audience with sport becoming an increasingly popular medium for viral stunts by protestors. Climate activists "Just Stop Oil" garnered a great deal of publicity at the British Grand Prix Silverstone circuit in July while, others have also glued themselves to artistic treasures from the likes of Vincent van Gogh.

But sports appears to reach more people and some estimates say the Tour de France, over the 21 stages, reaches up to 3.5 billion viewers across the 190 countries in which it is broadcast. Broadcasters cut away to a view of the Alps where holiday crowds were enjoy-

ing a sunny day out in 24 degrees Celsius (75 degrees Fahrenheit) temperatures for the 15 minutes or so that the Tour de France stage 10 was held up. But the protest has gone viral.

The same group members who sat on the road between the ski resort Les Ports du Soliel to the altiport of Megeve, recently interrupted the French tennis Open at Roland Garros in June. "Alize", as she was identified at the time of the May protest, chained her neck to the net and knelt on the iconic red clay, also reaching a huge audience. With the group's name written at neck level on her white T-shirt bearing the simple and powerful slogan written in English, not French "We have 1028 days left", the images reached a global platform.

On Tuesday the same woman chained herself by the neck to a fellow protester, her T-shirt bearing the same slogan but this time adding a sense of the clock ticking - "We have 989 days left". Identified as "Alice, 32" on the group's website, the protester explained her action, and her words have reached a global audience.

"I would prefer not to have had to do



NAIROBI: Kenya's sprinter Ferdinand Omanyala runs during a training session at the Kasarani stadium in Nairobi. In six years of dazzling rise, he has made a place for himself in a country where long-distance runners are kings: Ferdinand Omanyala intends to continue popularizing the sprint in Kenya by shining in the 100m at the 2022 World Athletics Championships which start on July 15, 2022. —AFP

well under pressure. So I am looking forward to getting better in Oregon, because now everybody who is an athlete will be there," said Omanyala, who beat Kerley in May. The young athlete and his coach Duncan Ayiemia have been mapping out ways to make sprinting more popular in Kenya, renowned for its top middle and long-distance runners.

"Normally it's long distance in Kenya, so I want the 100 metres to be something big in Kenya this year," said Ayiemia. Omanyala became the first Kenyan sprinter to reach an Olympic semi-final at the Tokyo Games last year. The chemistry student took up athletics six years ago after playing rugby sevens. "When I started athletics, my aim was to make people know that Kenyans can sprint, that is

something that has changed," he said.

'Beating the odds'

Omanyala, who hails from western Kenya and is the third of five brothers, said he has had to overcome obstacles, not least the distance. "In a medium- and long-distance country, it's a challenge coming up as a sprinter," he said. "Even the national federation at some point did not believe there could be a sprinter in Kenya. You have to beat all these odds." One hurdle he overcame was being allowed to represent Kenya at the Tokyo Olympics after Athletics Kenya relaxed a decision to prohibit any banned athletes from taking part in international competitions. —AFP



Andy Murray

upcoming events to grab a seeded spot at the US Open. "That's a big goal of mine these next few weeks," Murray said. "I've been playing better the last few months. But if you want to have deep runs in the biggest tournaments it does help to have a seeding so I'll try my best to do that. "One match closer today. Hoping for a good run here." —AFP



ST ANDREWS: Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy plays from the 17th tee during a practice round for the 150th British Open Golf Championship on The Old Course at St Andrews in Scotland on July 13, 2022. —AFP



ALBERTVILLE: Team Arkea-Samsic's French rider Warren Barguil (center) cycles in a lone breakaway leading the race during the 11th stage of the 109th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 151.7 km between Albertville and Col du Granon Serre Chevalier on July 13, 2022. —AFP

this," she says, explaining she would rather have been with her grandfather watching the Tour on the television from his sofa.

She goes on to predict a dystopian future without a Tour de France before finishing her message by stating she "decided instead to react and help avoid human suffering and create a new world. Everything can change". There is con-

sensus in France that by fighting against the Tour de France, publicity can be attained - but that it is so popular that movements risk damaging their reputations. Green politics is growing fast and the narrative of a concerned young woman wanting to watch the Tour with her grandfather, likely bridged a generation gap. —AFP

Sports

French enquiry blames organizers for Champions League final fiasco

Champions League final chaos caused by 'dysfunctions', not supporters

PARIS: An enquiry by the French Senate into crowd chaos at this year's Champions League final in Paris concluded that organizers were to blame, not supporters, undermining claims by the police and Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. A fact-finding mission led by two senators was set up after the Liverpool-Real Madrid game on May 28 which was marred by a delayed kick-off, crushes, teargas and street crime.

The investigation concluded that the problems were caused by a "string of dysfunctions" including a lack of preparation by French authorities and European football body UEFA, as well as poorly executed security arrangements. "These dysfunctions were at every level, not only during the implementation but also during preparations in advance," the co-chair of the enquiry Laurent Lafon told reporters at a press conference.

The final report contradicted repeated statements from Darmanin that Liverpool fans were mostly responsible, with the minister claiming that up to 40,000 of them travelled to the stadium either with no tickets or with fake ones. "The first statements (by the minister) do not match up with reality," Francois-Noel Buffet, a fellow co-chair of the investigation, told reporters.

"It was not because there were Liverpool supporters who travelled with their team that things went badly," Lafon added, noting that thousands of fans without tickets had been welcomed in fanzones set up in the French capital. Those with tickets struggled to travel to the stadium because of a transport strike, then found themselves in bottlenecks and crushes at the entry gates. Faced with the build up of frustrated crowds around the Stade de France, police used tear gas and pepper spray to move them back, affecting many children as well as disabled fans in wheelchairs.

After the game, supporters were preyed on by local gangs as they made their way to local transport connections, with many reporting pickpocketing, muggings and threats as the police looked on. The tele-

vised events were a national embarrassment and are thought to have influenced parliamentary elections in June when President Emmanuel Macron lost his majority. They caused alarm bells just a year from the start of rugby World Cup, which will be held in France, and the 2024 Paris Olympics.

'Failure'

Darmanin survived a recent government reshuffle and has been given extra responsibility as interior minister despite his claims, which caused fury in Liverpool and tensions with the British government. Liverpool football club is particularly sensitive to the scapegoating of its fans after they were falsely blamed for the Hillsborough stadium disaster in Sheffield in 1989. Supporters' group Spirit of Shankly thanked the Senate on Wednesday for "welcoming the testimonies of fans and consequently vindicating them from any responsibility," but said this was not enough.

"We want a full apology from the French government with a complete retraction of the lies purported on their behalf on and since 28 May 2022, and will continue to lobby to achieve it," it said in a statement. Darmanin, a law-and-order hardliner, issued his first partial apology at the end of June, telling RTL radio: "Should things have been managed better at the Stade de France (stadium)? The answer is yes. Am I partly responsible? The answer is yes."

The head of the Paris police, Didier Lallement, admitted during a Senate hearing on June 9 that security operations had been a "failure" and offered his excuses to fans who were unable to attend the game. But he defended the use of teargas to move fans back from the stadium, saying there was "no other way." The Senate commission did not recommend any sanctions against the police or Darmanin. "The role of a commission like ours is not to call for the resignation of someone in the government," Buffet explained.

Instead, its final report made a series of recommen-



PARIS: In this file photograph, Liverpool fans stand outside unable to get in time leading to the match being delayed prior to the UEFA Champions League final football match between Liverpool and Real Madrid at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, north of Paris. - AFP

dations to authorities to improve security arrangements at major sporting events. France is to host the Rugby World Cup next year and the Olympics in 2024. The Senate report recommended that the police draw up clearer guidelines for the use of teargas and adopt other crowd-control methods such as greater use of mounted officers and water cannons.

Authorities have also been under pressure to explain

why security camera footage from the stadium was not saved, removing a potentially vital source of information for investigators. "The images will always be missing. That's our biggest regret," Buffet said. European football body UEFA is also conducting a parallel investigation into the debacle which came after France offered to host the game when it was stripped from Russia over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

Germany see off Spain to reach Euro quarters

BRENTFORD: Germany booked their place in the Euro 2022 quarter-finals as Klara Buhl and Alexandra Popp sealed a 2-0 win against Spain on Tuesday. Martina Voss-Tecklenburg's side crushed Denmark 4-0 in their opening fixture, but had to show their more gritty side to see off Spain. Germany had only two shots on target and just 30 percent of the possession, but their opportunistic finishing proved the difference at Brentford's Community Stadium.

Buhl gave Germany the perfect start with her third minute opener and Popp doubled the lead eight minutes before half-time. Germany sit top of Group B with maximum points after two successive victories, while Spain are in second place with three points. Bottom of the group Finland, beaten 1-0 by Denmark earlier on Tuesday, were eliminated by the result from the day's late game.

Spain were one of the pre-tournament favourites, but now sit level on points with Denmark, who they face on Saturday in a shoot-out to decide who will

advance along with Germany. Germany, eight-time European champions, were gifted the lead when Spain goalkeeper Sandra Panos tried to make a clearance from a routine back-pass but the ball struck Buhl, who turned inside Irene Paredes to drill a low shot into the bottom corner.

Spain were suddenly presented with a golden chance to score themselves when Lucia Garcia was played clear of a high German backline. The Athletic Bilbao forward raced into the penalty area and took the ball wide of goalkeeper Merle Frohms, but sent her angled shot into the side netting. Spain continued to press for an equaliser as Mariona Caldentey fired a dipping effort from the edge of the box just wide.

It was Germany, though, who were on target again seven minutes before half-time. A corner was floated over into the six-yard box, where captain Alexandra Popp got up to flick in a backward header via a slight deflection. Spain looked to regroup once more and went close again just before the break when Aitana Bonmati's chipped effort dropped just wide. Wolfsburg forward Popp almost had a third for Germany soon after the restart when she headed wide at the back post from a corner.

Popp was centre stage again as the hour mark approached, going down under what looked like a tug on the front of her shirt from Spain captain Paredes as she aimed to run clear on goal. French referee



LONDON: Spain's midfielder Patricia Guijarro (left) vies for a header with Germany's defender Kathrin Hendrich during the UEFA Women's Euro 2022 Group B football match between Germany and Spain at Brentford Community Stadium in west London on July 12, 2022. —AFP

Stephanie Frappart waved play on and VAR did not overturn the decision. Spain almost pulled a goal back with 18 minutes left when a deep ball was floated into the penalty area and Caldentey sent a volley goalwards, which was brilliantly tipped over by Frohms. —AFP

Rooney excited for challenge as new DC United head coach

WASHINGTON: Former England and Manchester United star Wayne Rooney was named on Tuesday as the new head coach of DC United and has been tasked with reviving the moribund Major League Soccer team. It was a reunion for the 36-year-old British icon, who played for DC United from July 2018 to October 2019, scoring 25 goals in 52 appearances before leaving to serve as a player and coach at England's Derby County. "To come back to MLS, to DC United, was an exciting challenge for me and something which I feel can develop me as a coach, but also the team needs to improve," Rooney said. "I'm an ambitious person. One day I want to manage at the top level. This is part of that process."

DC United stands 5-10 with two drawn on 17 points, sharing last overall in the 28-team league. United fired coach Heman Losada after six matches, replacing him with interim manager Chad Ashton. "I really believe with my abilities to develop young players, we can really get this club back to successful ways again," Rooney said. "It's going to take a lot of hard work but that's what I'm here to do and really improve the team." Rooney resigned as coach of Derby County last month after the team's relegation to League One, England's third-tier, opening the door to his MLS return.

"I've seen a few (news articles) certainly back in England on this as possibly a backward step in my managerial career," Rooney said. "I really find that disrespectful to this league. I feel the experience of guiding Derby County over the past 18 months has been great in my development as a coach." DC United hasn't made the playoffs since Rooney helped the squad get there in 2018 and 2019 as a player, but must duplicate his revival of a league-worst club from four years ago to reach the post-season.

"There a mentality I have to put into the players so when they go on the pitch they become a real horrible team to play against," Rooney said. "That's exciting. That's what I plan on doing. We know it's going to be difficult. We have to go on a good run. They know how I want to play. If we can do that right off, then why can't we make the playoffs?" Philadelphia beat DC United 7-0 last week, matching the league record for the largest margin of defeat. "I believe they have been underperforming," Rooney said. "I believe there's a lot more for those players to give."

DC United's next match is Wednesday at home against Columbus but Rooney awaits final visa paperwork before his official coaching role can begin. DC's following match is Saturday at Minnesota. Rooney's family will stay in England but he said, "That's not an issue whatsoever," and that he had support from his wife to take the job. "I'm excited to bring my skills," Rooney said. "It's going to be a lot of hard work I have to put in. I'll have demands and principles the players will have to stick by. I want players to come to this club who are hungry. I'm committed to getting the best out of myself and the players."

DC United captain Steve Birnbaum was a former Rooney teammate and says players are looking forward to learn from Rooney. "The group is excited to have him," Birnbaum said. "We know the energy and passion that he brought as a player and we know he's going to do the same thing as a coach. The guys are excited to learn from him. He has a soccer IQ that's probably second to none. The group is extremely excited to see him uplift us." —AFP

Underdogs Queensland stun NSW 22-12 to win Origin thriller

BRISBANE: Underdogs Queensland stunned New South Wales 22-12 in a thrilling State of Origin decider to clinch the series 2-1 against the odds in Brisbane on Wednesday. An emotional Queensland Maroons, reduced to just 15 fit men after a brutal start to the game that saw them lose two players to concussion in the opening minutes, celebrated wildly at the end in front of 50,000 fans packed into Suncorp Stadium. A flurry of mistakes from the NSW Blues allowed depleted Queensland to find reserves of energy and dominate possession in the second half, keeping an exhausted New South Wales from further scoring after they led 12-10 at the break.

"It is what Queensland is all about. Hard work and really digging in when backs are against the wall. We did it again tonight," said Queensland hooker Ben Hunt, who scored the match-winning try with less than two minutes remaining. The Maroons had won the first game in Sydney, while New South Wales fought back on neutral territory in Perth to force a winner-takes-all showdown. Before kickoff Queensland lost five-eighth Cameron Munster and wing Murray Taulagi to COVID, leaving New South Wales as strong favorites.

A torrid opening four minutes saw Blues second row Cameron Murray forced off after being concussed in tackle with Queensland's Selwyn Cobbo and Lindsay Collins suffering the same fate in quick succession. Despite the setback it was Queensland's Valentine Holmes who made the breakthrough, crashing his way through in the 14th minute. New South Wales were quick to respond, as centre Jarome Luai dived to score off a kick four minutes later.



BRISBANE: Queensland's Kalyn Ponga (right) beats the tackle of New South Wales' Stephen Crichton during the State of Origin rugby league match between Queensland and New South Wales in Brisbane on July 13, 2022. —AFP

The Blues continued to be relentless in attack and were rewarded with a try through bench player Jacob Safiti. But Queensland got fortunate seconds before half-time, when a defensive error led to Kurt Capewell getting over the line to reduce the deficit to only two points. "We made too many mistakes as well and you can't do it in Origin games," said New South Wales half-back Nathan Cleary. The physical battle during the first half was intense and did not let up after the break.

Opposing centers Dane Gagai and Matt Burton

already submitted an official bid to the Asian Football Confederation to host the 24-team competition, scheduled for June and July 2023. When asked if the Japan Football Association planned to bid, JFA technical director Yasuharu Sorimachi told reporters "we are considering it but there is little chance".

China was due to host the tournament but pulled out in May due to challenges related to its strict zero-COVID strategy. The AFC invited new bids to host the quadrennial competition and set a deadline of June 30, which was then extended until July 15.

Japan, who have won the Asian Cup four times, last hosted the tournament in 1992.

South Korea has not hosted the Asian Cup since 1960, the only time it has staged the event. COVID restrictions have pushed China off the global sporting map. In May, organizers of the Olympic-sized Asian Games, due to be held in September in Hangzhou, postponed the event over logistical problems caused by COVID. The World University Games, originally set to be held in Chengdu in June, were also postponed for a second time due to "continued uncertainty over conditions". —AFP

JFA: Little chance of Japan hosting 2023 Asian Cup

TOKYO: Japanese football chiefs said Wednesday there is "little chance" they will bid to replace China as hosts of next year's Asian Cup, two days before the deadline to declare interest. South Korea has



LONDON: Combination of photos shows some footballers covering their mouths while talking to their teammates during soccer games.

Why do footballers cover their mouths while talking?

Mouth-covering 'used as a tactic in many sports'

LONDON: As far as habits go, professional footballers sure do have some weird ones. Spitting is one, as is the slapstick tumble knee-hug 'ouch that hurt' roll, and of course, sliding on the ground with arms in the air. But fans watching soccer games have noticed another one, which defies easy explanation - the covering of the mouth when they are talking.

Why do they do this such a lot, and are there different reasons for the move (apart from camp disbelief)? Footballers are not paid thousands of

pounds a day to speak, though occasionally, and grudgingly, they do. But speaking to team mates on the pitch to discuss tactics is essential for most pro players. They cover their mouths to make sure that the other team, cameras, and spying managers can't see what they're saying.

Yet this does not go far enough to explain the extent of hand-to-mouth action seen in football. Quite often you'll see members of opposing teams covering their mouths when they speak to each other. Messi and Ronaldo once did this on the pitch

while playing for their respective countries, Argentina and Portugal. This makes them look as if they are so disgusted by the other player they're trying not to breathe their air.

However, the common belief is that actually they are hiding their mouths so that their words cannot be interpreted via lip reading from footage. When you're a high-profile player, one of the world's most famous, you don't want to have the press asking you about why you called Ronaldo "a bellend". Some players have also been known to use the covering of

the mouth as a signal, to indicate to team mates what they're about to do.

Occasionally a player will even cover their mouth while training, if they think photographers or video cameras are around. And talking to a referee behind your hand can be an easy way for them to hear you and keep your perspective on the action a secret as well. Therefore, while mouth-covering is used as a tactic in many sports, most notably tennis and badminton, footballers use it in a much wider context. —Agencies

Farah relieved at govt support after a shock revelation

LONDON: Olympic great Mo Farah expressed relief Wednesday after receiving fulsome backing from the UK government despite his admission that he was illegally trafficked into Britain as a child. The revelation in a new BBC documentary could have raised questions about Farah's UK citizenship, but the interior ministry said it was taking no action. A spokesman for Prime Minister Boris Johnson said: "He is a sporting hero, he is an inspiration to people across the country. "It is a shocking reminder of the horrors that people face when they are trafficked. And we must continue to clamp down on these criminals who take advantage of vulnerable people."

The 39-year-old distance runner, one of Britain's best-loved and most successful athletes, revealed his real name is Hussein Abdi Kahin, and he was forced to work in domestic servitude after entering the country aged eight or nine. London's Metropolitan Police said it was "assessing" the allegation that Farah was trafficked, after his mother sent him away to escape civil war in their native Somalia. Asked in a follow-up interview on BBC radio how he felt about the government's response, Farah said: "I feel relieved: this is my country."

"No child would be in that situation. I had that choice made for me," he said. "And I'm just grateful (for) every chance I got in Britain and... proud to represent my country the way I did, because that's all I could do, in my control. I had no control when I was younger." Farah was later helped to obtain UK citizenship by his physical



Britain's Mo Farah

education teacher at school, Alan Watkinson, while still using the assumed name Mohamed Farah given to him by a woman who trafficked him to Britain.

"I don't think Alan did anything wrong there," the athlete told BBC radio. "Alan did go to social services. We did report it, we did tell them exactly what was my name... So we went through the right channels, but I don't know why nothing was ever done," he said. Rather than moving to the UK as a refugee from Somalia with his mother and two of his brothers to join his IT consultant father as previously claimed, Farah said he came from Djibouti with the woman he had never met, and then made to look after another family's children.

In fact, he said, his father was killed in civil unrest in Somalia when Farah was aged four and his mother, Aisha, and two brothers live in the breakaway state of Somaliland. He was encouraged to speak out now by his wife and children, after burying the truth for decades. "I honestly don't want to be talking about it because I told myself I would never talk about it. I'm gonna lock it up," he said. —AFP

Ten Hag off to great start as Man United thump Liverpool 4-0

BANGKOK: Erik Ten Hag said he was "satisfied" Tuesday after getting off to a perfect start as Manchester United manager, but insisted he would not be getting carried away after a 4-0 thumping of arch-rivals Liverpool in a preseason friendly in Thailand. United started strongly against an unfamiliar Liverpool line-up, cruising to a 3-0 half-time lead through goals from Jadon Sancho, Fred and Anthony Martial at Bangkok's Rajamangala Stadium, despite being without the unsettled Cristiano Ronaldo who missed the trip for family reasons.

Both managers made wholesale substitutions throughout the 90 minutes and Jurgen Klopp's stronger second-half Liverpool line-up dominated possession before Facundo Pellistri grabbed United's fourth on the break, 14 minutes from time. It gave Ten Hag and his new side a morale-boosting win in their first warm-up outing ahead of the new Premier League campaign beginning next month. "I am satisfied today," said Dutchman Ten Hag, who took the reins at Old Trafford less than two months ago. "It was a team with a great spirit and we know we are just getting started. "We made some mistakes in the press, we conceded some chances, but we created a lot."

Liverpool were unlucky not to get on the scoresheet, hitting the woodwork three times after Sancho opened the scoring in the 12th minute, the England winger slotting home to capitalise on a sloppy clearance from Isaac Mabaya. Fred's instinctive, measured chip over the unsighted Liverpool goalkeeper Allison Becker and a crowd of defenders extended the lead in the 30th minute. And it took just another three minutes for man-of-the-match Martial to make it 3-0 with a fine finish over Allison, after another Liverpool defensive mistake had allowed the striker a clear run at goal.



BANGKOK: Manchester United's Tyrell Malacia (right) and Liverpool's English defender Trent Alexander-Arnold (left) fight for the ball during the exhibition football match between English Premier League teams Manchester United and Liverpool FC at Rajamangala National Stadium in Bangkok. - AFP

'A bit early for us'

"The game came up a bit early for us. But I saw some good things," said Klopp. "That is just the start of the pre-season. "It is all a learning process and we are at the start of it." More substitutions after half-time saw Liverpool bring on experience and flair in the shape of Virgil van Dijk at the back and Mohamed Salah up front.

Big-money signing Darwin Nunez, bought for nearly 100 million euros from Benfica, played the last half an hour, the Uruguayan coming close to opening his account for Liverpool in the 70th minute. Four minutes from time the lively Salah curled a trademark left-footed shot goalbound, only to see it cannon off the post with Nunez blazing the rebound over the bar when it seemed easier to score. By then Pellistri had slotted home the fourth after a flowing counter-attack. "We have to work hard to cut out the mistakes but of course we are happy," said Ten Hag. "I know we have good players. We have started to build a team and I am happy with the first game," he added. "It will take a lot of time. I have seen a lot of mistakes. Liverpool played three teams, they were not at their strongest. We will not overestimate this result." —AFP