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Kuwait awaits new PM amid high expectations

'A decisive phase in the history of Kuwait'



Sheikh Dr Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah



Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwait is awaiting the appointment of a new prime minister, the fifth in less than two decades, amid high popular expectations to put the rich country back on track. Local media reported that Sheikh Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, a senior member of the ruling family who is close to the opposition, has been picked up by the Crown Prince to form the new cabinet.

The announcement was highly expected to be made earlier this week but got delayed amid unconfirmed reports that Sheikh Mohammed has turned down the offer to become the next prime minister over policy issues. The Harvard-educated Sheikh Mohammed is the son of Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, who ruled the country between 1965

and 1976. He served as Kuwait's envoy to Washington for several years before being appointed in the Cabinet for the first time in 2001 as minister of state for foreign affairs. He was promoted to a full foreign minister two years later.

Social media rejoiced over the reports on Sheikh Mohammed's appointment and some senior politicians welcomed the appointment. But it appears that the appointment has not gone as smooth as it was expected with local media reporting that Sheikh Mohammed has declined the offer over some policy issues, including the freedom to appoint his Cabinet members.

Former MP Mubarak Al-Duwailah wrote on his Twitter: "Back to Square One" in reference to Sheikh Mohammed's refusal. Interior Minister in the resigned **Continued on Page 6**

Heatwave kills 500 in Spain

MADRID: Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Wednesday that "more than 500 people" died during a 10-day heatwave in Spain, one of the most intense ever recorded in the country. Sanchez cited figures released Monday from the Carlos III Health Institute which estimates the number of heat-related deaths based on the number of excess deaths when compared to the average in previous years.

The institute has stressed that these figures are a statistical estimate and not a record of official deaths. "During this heatwave, more than 500 people died because of such high temperatures, according to the statistics," Sanchez said. "I ask citizens to exercise extreme caution," he said, noting that the "climate emergency is a reality".



A VEIGA DE CASCALLA: Photo shows burnt houses after a wildfire in A Veiga de Cascalla, near O Barco de Valdeorras, northern Spain. — AFP

Spain was gripped by a heatwave affecting much of Western Europe which pushed temperatures as high as 45 degrees Celsius in some regions last week, sparking dozens of wildfires. The blazes forced the evacuation of thousands of people and claimed at least two lives—that of a firefighter and a shepherd who got caught up in the flames in northwest Spain.

The July 9-18 heatwave was one of the most intense ever recorded in Spain, meteorological agency AEMET said Wednesday. "At a minimum, it is the third most intense heatwave in terms of its geographic extension and duration" since modern records began in 1975, AEMET spokeswoman Beatriz Hervella said. Only two other heatwaves lasted longer—one in July 2015 that lasted 26 days and another in August 2003 that went on for 16 days, she added.

Ozone pollution

Europe's searing heatwave is generating very high levels of harmful ozone pollution, the region's atmospheric monitoring service warned Tuesday, adding that large areas of western Europe also

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Local farmers 'crucial for food security'

KUWAIT: Locally made products, especially foodstuff, have proved much significance on the basis of their vital role during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the ongoing Ukraine war in answering the needs of the local market and curbing inflation. Compared to many other countries, Kuwait has a low inflation rate based on the government's subsidy policy mainly involving fuel that was the driver of hikes in many imported commodities worldwide.

In this context, the Kuwait Cabinet decided to set up an ad hoc food security committee last May with a view of setting out a congenial mechanism to stave off the fallout of looming global crises and disasters on the country's food security. Speaking to KUNA on this matter, chairmen of several foodstuff federations reassured that they are

able to boost their productive capabilities and ensure most of the local needs, particularly meat, dairy products, vegetables and fruits.

Chairman of the Kuwait Farmers Union Abdullah Al-Damak said the union is committed to promoting food security in the country, pointing out multiple challenges bugging Kuwaiti farmers such as surging production costs which was triggered by weather conditions. He reassured that Kuwaiti farmers are able to produce the majority of farm produce and ensure a large amount of the local market's requirements - a thing which they managed to do in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Al-Damak called on the Kuwaiti government to boost its subsidy to farmers, especially during these circumstances, speaking highly of the recently created food security panel, which he said, would help wipe out all obstacles and hurdles impeding the development of local produce, and draw upon high tech in cementing food security.

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KUWAIT: A fish seller sprays water on the fish at Mubarakiya Market. Chairman of the Kuwait Farmers Union Abdullah Al-Damak said the union is committed to promoting food security in the country. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Queen Elizabeth honors Kuwait ambassador

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II honored Kuwait's Ambassador to the UK Khaled Al-Duwaisan with the Order of St Michael and St George, which was launched by King George IV in 1818. In a statement to KUNA on Wednesday, Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps Alistair Harrison said the order is a rare and exceptional honoring, presented by

the Queen to an outgoing foreign ambassador, in appreciation of his efforts in boosting ties between the two countries.

He hailed the efforts of Ambassador Al-Duwaisan, who had attended all diplomatic events and meetings in the kingdom and had served for 30 years in the country. In appreciation of the ambassador, the Queen sent a special car from the Buckingham Palace to bring the ambassador and his wife for the honoring, Harrison noted.

On his part, Al-Duwaisan said he had a video-meeting with the Queen while in the palace, adding that his success in representing Kuwait was part of the Kuwaiti government's support. Al-Duwaisan has been Kuwait's ambassador in London since 1992 and became head of the diplomatic field in 2002. — KUNA



Khaled Al-Duwaisan

Six-time PM elected Sri Lanka president

COLOMBO: Six-time prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was elected as crisis-wracked Sri Lanka's new president in a parliamentary vote Wednesday, with the backing of the disgraced former leader's party. Official results gave the veteran politician 134 votes, an absolute majority in the 225-member parliament, after Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the country and resigned in the wake of protesters overrunning his palace.

"Our divisions are now over," Wickremesinghe said in a brief acceptance speech in parliament, urging his defeated rivals "to join me and work together to bring the country out of the crisis we are facing". Wickremesinghe takes charge of a bankrupt nation that is in bailout talks

with the IMF with its 22 million people enduring severe shortages of food, fuel and medicine.

But he was backed by the Rajapaksas' SLPP party - still the largest in parliament - and is despised as a proxy for the former leader by the protesters who forced him from his palace after months of demonstrations over the unprecedented economic crisis. They have also been demanding the departure of Wickremesinghe, who has pledged to crack down hard if protesters take to the streets.

Hundreds of heavily armed troops and police stood guard outside the parliament, but there were no signs of demonstrators. Outside the presidential secretariat, where protesters camped for months to demand Rajapaksa step down, actress Damitha Abeyrathne, 45, said: "We lost. The whole country lost." The struggle would continue, she told AFP. "The politicians are fighting for their power. They are not fighting for the people. They have no feeling for people who are suffering."

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COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's newly elected president Ranil Wickremesinghe addresses the media representatives during his visit at the Gangaramaya Buddhist temple in Colombo on July 20, 2022. — AFP

Kuwait downgraded in US 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report

Failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat trafficking

KUWAIT: Kuwait was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List in the US Department of State's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report. The report says that the Government of Kuwait "does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so."

The report further indicates that the Kuwaiti government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity. The government investigated fewer alleged trafficking crimes and prosecuted and convicted significantly fewer traffickers than in previous years; it also identified fewer victims compared with the previous reporting period. The government decreased funding for trafficking victim and domestic worker protection programs for the second consecutive year, according to the report. Additionally, the government did not take any new steps to reform its visa sponsorship system, which continued to render migrant workers highly vulnerable to exploitation, specifically trafficking.

Some officials continued to routinely use arbitration and administrative penalties to resolve grievances filed by migrant workers, including domestic workers, instead of investigating such cases as human trafficking crimes; protracted litigation and subsequent appeals processes led most potential victims to decline to file court cases, the report reads. The government did not regularly use standard procedures for proactively identifying victims by all front-line officials and referring them to protection services; it continued to detain, prosecute, and deport potential or unidentified trafficking victims, including those fleeing forced labor, without screening for trafficking indicators.

Kuwait fell to Tier 2 Watch List, which describes "countries whose governments do not fully meet the TVPA's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards, and for which the estimated number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing and the country is not taking proportional concrete actions; or there is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year, including increased investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of trafficking crimes, increased assistance to victims, and decreasing evidence of complicity in severe forms of trafficking by government officials."

Among the significant effort the Kuwaiti government did to eliminate trafficking were reporting disaggregated data for the first time, which highlighted a forced labor conviction under the antitrafficking law and the identification of male victims. The government also continued to implement the "Tamkeen" program to increase oversight over foreign worker recruitment and provide greater protections to vulnerable migrants through the labor recruitment process, the report reads.

Prosecution

The government decreased law enforcement efforts; it reported significantly fewer trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and convictions than in previous years and continued to convict traffickers, including allegedly complicit officials, under other criminal laws instead of the anti-trafficking law. However, the government reported disaggregated law enforcement data for the first time, which highlighted a forced labor conviction under the anti-trafficking law. The 2013 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to 15 years' imprisonment for offenses involving an adult male victim and up to life imprisonment for those involving an adult female or child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. In April 2019, the

Constitutional Court annulled an article from the 2013 anti-trafficking law that required judges to issue a verdict in trafficking cases, arguing the stipulation undermined judicial independence and precluded judges from exercising discretion. As a result, judges retained broad discretion to defer and delay issuance of verdicts in trafficking cases, as they did in other cases. The Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) and the Ministry of Interior (MOI)

any new investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees under the 2013 anti-trafficking law. Some government officials allegedly sold work visas to illegal recruiters or directly to migrant workers, potentially facilitating trafficking.

In May 2021, the government reported it upheld a conviction through a final ruling in the Court of Cassation from the previous reporting period with a sentence of three



Sponsorship system continues to render migrant workers vulnerable

continued to require all cases of buying and trading of fraudulent visas, withholding of salaries and passports in excess of three months, or forcing individuals into jobs different from those contractually agreed upon be prosecuted under the anti-trafficking law rather than the labor law. The MOI and PPO continued to maintain specialized trafficking units within their respective organizations, and for the first time, the government provided disaggregated law enforcement data by type of trafficking.

In 2021, the government investigated 23 potential trafficking cases, compared with 46 in the previous reporting period. Of these 23 cases, one was for sex trafficking involving one suspect, and 22 were forced labor cases, involving 29 suspects. Fourteen forced labor cases involving 21 suspects remained under investigation at the close of the reporting period. During the reporting period, officials initiated the prosecution of two forced labor cases involving eight suspects, compared with 35

years' imprisonment with hard labor for a former MOI police colonel and his Egyptian partners for illegally facilitating the entry of hundreds of workers into Kuwait. In a separate case from the previous reporting period involving a former Bangladeshi MP and several Kuwaiti officials, media sources reported the Court of Cassation upheld the conviction of the former MP for bribing Kuwaiti officials to issue work visas and issued a final ruling in November 2021, increasing the sentence for the MP from four years to seven years' imprisonment and from a fine of KD 1.9 million (\$6.29 million) to KD 2.7 million (\$8.94 million).

Kuwaiti authorities did not routinely categorize or investigate labor violations as potential trafficking crimes and typically treated such cases as administrative infractions. During the reporting period, the MOI established a hotline specifically to receive trafficking-related complaints. Although the hotline received 95 calls since its establishment in October 2021, officials did

not refer any complaints to the PPO for criminal proceedings.

previous reporting period. This included 138 vulnerable female domestic workers referred to shelter by DWED; the other 22 vulnerable female workers either self-referred or were referred by NGOs. NGOs reported the majority of those admitted to the shelter were potential victims of forced labor and had fled poor working conditions, including excessive hours and delayed payment of wages, or desired to return to their respective countries of origin. During the reporting period, the government-run shelter reported it received referrals from embassies, NGOs, international organizations, churches, private citizens, and other migrant workers. The shelter served as a one-stop facility, providing medical and psychological care, food, rehabilitation support, and access to officials from various ministries to facilitate legal and repatriation assistance. International organizations and NGOs continued to have access to victims and reported the shelter assisted workers with repatriation or finding new employment. Residents at the shelter had access to cell phones and legal assistance, as well as freedom of movement. Shelters were staffed by supervisors, medical staff, and investigators 24 hours per day. An international organization reported the average number of residents in the shelter had decreased significantly over the last few years, from 200-250 daily residents to approximately 20-40 residents during the reporting period. Furthermore, one NGO reported the government shelter did not allow domestic workers who were potential victims to self-refer without filing a complaint with DWED first, which may have left some unidentified trafficking victims without adequate care during the reporting period. During the previous reporting period, the Minister of Economic Affairs and Social Affairs announced that companies referred to the PPO on charges

and receiving kickbacks, which rendered an unknown number of workers vulnerable to trafficking or re-trafficking. In cooperation with international organizations and foreign embassies, the government could assist victims in retrieving documentation and funding for repatriation. In the case of administrative deportation of vulnerable migrant workers, officials provided airline tickets and worked to recoup associated costs from accused employers. The government allowed victims residing in its shelter to either change their employers and visa sponsors or be repatriated to their country of origin once their residency status was resolved or pending the resolution of a legal case or unpaid bills, without approval by their former visa sponsor. Also, once the shelter admitted a victim, employers could not press "absconding" charges. The government did not report deporting those who faced retaliation or retribution in their respective home countries. Rather, the government allowed all trafficking victims to change employers and maintain residency in Kuwait or otherwise be resettled to a third country at the victims' request; however, most shelter residents chose to be repatriated to their home country. As of November 2021, the government repatriated 185 vulnerable migrants to their respective countries of origin and, as of March 2022, in cooperation with two international organizations, provided repatriation, reintegration support, and transition assistance to 115 vulnerable domestic workers from nations without diplomatic representation in Kuwait who needed to procure travel documentation. In comparison, during the previous reporting period, the government repatriated 617 shelter residents to their respective countries of origin.

Authorities continued to arrest, detain, and administratively deport some workers who fled their employers without permis-

- The government investigated 23 potential trafficking cases in 2021, compared with 46 during the previous reporting period.
- The government identified 17 trafficking victims compared to 103 victims during previous reporting period.
- The government assisted 160 vulnerable female workers at the government shelter, compared to 461 during the previous reporting period.
- The government spent KD 77,017 on domestic workers' shelter in 2021 compared with KD 100,370 in 2020 and KD 2 million in 2019.
- Authorities continued to deport workers who fled their employers without permission.

cases involving 109 suspects in 2020. The government convicted two traffickers in one forced labor case under the anti-trafficking law, compared with convicting 28 traffickers in 2020 under unspecified laws. The Criminal Court convicted and sentenced a Kuwaiti woman to 10 years' imprisonment with hard labor and her husband to one year of imprisonment for assaulting and torturing a domestic worker to death. The court charged both individuals with forced labor under the anti-trafficking law and assault under the penal code; this was the first time the government reported a forced labor conviction under its 2013 anti-trafficking law. In previous years, the government did not specify which laws it used to convict traffickers. Separately, two defendants were originally prosecuted under the anti-trafficking law for forced labor but were instead convicted under the penal code, labor law, and foreigner's residency law and sentenced to 3.5 years' imprisonment and hard labor. The government also overturned seven convictions in one case on appeal and acquitted 42 defendants in 2021, compared with acquitting 13 defendants in 2020. Corruption and official complicity in trafficking and trafficking-related crimes remained a significant concern during the reporting period. While the government made law enforcement efforts on cases involving allegedly complicit officials in trafficking-related crimes, it did not report

Protection and prevention

The government decreased efforts to protect trafficking victims; it identified significantly fewer victims compared with the previous reporting period and decreased its funding to support the shelter and protection services. However, the government reported disaggregated victim identification data by gender for the first time, which highlighted the identification of male victims. The government identified 17 trafficking victims during the reporting period, including 11 adult males and six adult female victims; this was a significant decrease from its identification of 103 trafficking victims during the previous reporting period. The government referred two of these female victims to the government shelter, and three female victims were identified through the government shelter's screening process after admission into care. The government did not report if the remaining 12 identified victims received services; as the shelter was only available for vulnerable female migrants, observers noted that in most cases, identified male victims sought assistance from their respective embassies or other support groups. As of November 2021, the government reported it assisted 160 vulnerable female workers at the government shelter, a decrease compared to 461 during the

of visa trading, whereby a company fraudulently hires a worker for a fake position, would be required to cover all costs associated with sheltering and repatriating their registered employees; however, the government did not report if this announcement was implemented or if any companies referred to the PPO paid for shelter and repatriation costs of their employees during the reporting period.

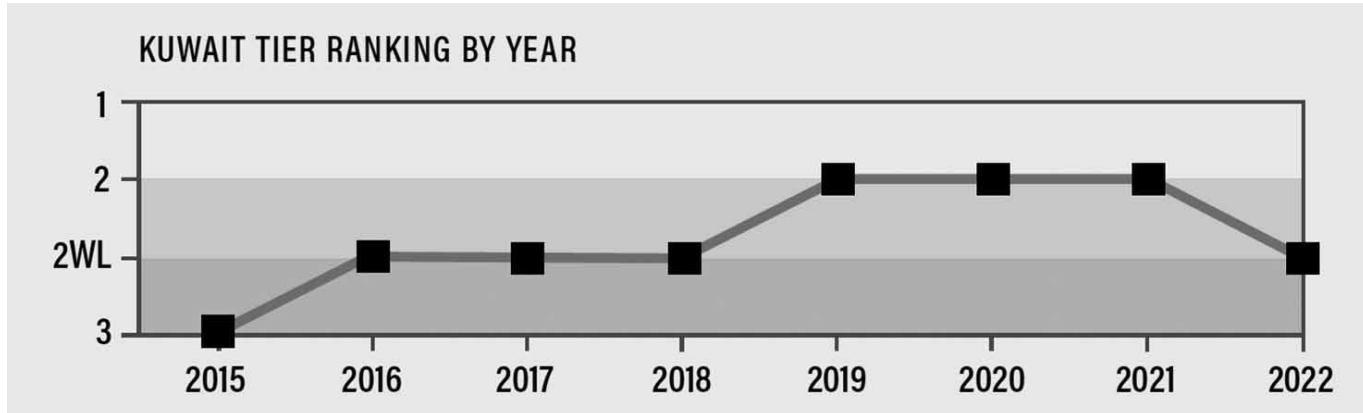
From January to November 2021, the government spent KD 77,017 (\$255,020) on domestic worker shelter operations and protection programs for trafficking victims; this was compared with KD 100,370 (\$332,350) in 2020 and KD 2 million (\$6.62 million) in 2019, although the government did not report whether these amounts were allocated as the total budget for shelter operations and protection programs or solely the amount spent during the year on such initiatives. Embassies of the Philippines and India maintained their own domestic worker shelters and worked with the Kuwaiti government to seek compensation and legal redress for their nationals subjected to exploitative working conditions in the country. International organizations and civil society reported other embassies had unofficial shelters for their nationals and reported allegations remained that embassy staff inappropriately facilitated the employment of workers from these shelters by providing the worker new employment through illegal chan-

The risk of penalization, coupled with protracted litigation processes and exorbitantly high legal fees, discouraged workers from appealing to police or other authorities for protection and adequate legal redress for their exploitation. In addition, it was not uncommon for sponsors to file counter-grievances, such as "absconding," against their employees, including trafficking victims who reported abuse. This sometimes resulted in administrative deportation or detention of the employees and victims. According to the Domestic Workers Law (68/15), the government could charge a domestic worker with absconding seven days after the employer's registration of the charge, unless the worker notified DWED or presented themselves at the government shelter. During the reporting period, one NGO and a labor-source country reported domestic workers had difficulty physically reaching the DWED to file a complaint or seeking assistance, and some workers were denied access to the government shelter without first filing a complaint with the DWED. The government-maintained efforts to prevent human trafficking, although it did not take any new steps to reform the visa sponsorship system, which continued to render migrant workers highly vulnerable to exploitation, including trafficking.

Local

Domestic workers remain the most vulnerable to trafficking in Kuwait

KUWAIT: As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit foreign victims in Kuwait, the US Department of State's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report reads. Men and women migrate primarily from Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and other countries in South and Southeast Asia and the Middle East to work predominantly in the service, sanitation, construction, transportation, hospitality, and domestic service sectors, with the vast majority arriving voluntarily. Unskilled laborers and female domestic workers are especially vulnerable to forced labor and physical and sexual abuse as they often have limited access to assistance outside their worksite or employer's home. In some cases, limited access to assistance is due to the absence of diplomatic representation in Kuwait, especially for undocumented workers who need consular services. In October 2018, Kuwait and India signed an agreement on broader protections for domestic workers that resulted in the end of India's 2014 ban on Indian female domestic workers working in Kuwait. However, as conditions for many remain perilous, numerous labor-source countries, including Bhutan, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Indonesia, Kenya,



abuse, and restrictions on movement, such as confinement to the workplace and passport confiscation. Although unlawful under Kuwaiti private sector labor law and the domestic worker law, passport withholding by employers is pervasive in Kuwait and is usually undertaken to prevent a worker from fleeing to another position, exercise control over an employee's conduct, or compel a worker to remain in a job through coercive conditions that may violate contract terms, such as working long hours without rest days or adequate breaks. Furthermore, many migrant workers pay exorbitant fees to recruiting agents in their countries of origin and/or are coerced into paying labor broker fees in Kuwait in contravention of Kuwaiti law stating fees should be paid by the

trafficking through the use of deceptive techniques to bring in migrant workers on the basis of unenforceable contracts, fraudulent visas, and nonexistent positions. Some officials allegedly take bribes or overtly sell work permits to illegal labor recruiting companies or directly to migrant workers. Civil society groups, press outlets, and members of parliament called for the government to increase its efforts to protect victims and punish traders and their enablers. As in most countries, Cuban nationals working in Kuwait may have been forced to work by the Cuban government.

Kuwait's sponsorship law, which ties a migrant worker's legal residency and valid immigration status to their employer, restricts workers' movements and penalizes them for leaving abusive

Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Haraj increased. Domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to forced labor inside private homes. Many workers report experiencing work conditions substantially different from those described in the contract. In addition, sources report domestic workers who flee their abusive employers are sometimes exploited in sex trafficking by recruitment agents or criminals, who utilize the worker's undocumented status to ensure workers will not report illegal activity to authorities.

Workers stranded

Due to the pandemic, many migrant workers were dismissed from employment and temporarily stranded in Kuwait due to travel restrictions and expensive flights without any means of support, rendering them undocumented and heightening their risk to trafficking. Others faced increased risk of abuse by employers as curfews and lockdowns left them confined to their employer's homes. In the previous reporting period, the government established two separate amnesty campaigns for undocumented workers between March and May 2020 and between December 2020 and February 2021. The first campaign allowed residency violators to return home without paying overstay fines and provided free airline tickets, and the second allowed undocumented workers the opportunity to legalize their stay or leave the country (by paying fines for both options) without being blacklisted in the future if the worker wanted to return to Kuwait. Since March 2020, the government halted the issuance of new work permits of domestic workers, and in January 2021, the MOI announced it would begin issuing new work permits to domestic workers; however, most new work permits were issued only to workers from India, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. At the close of the reporting period, the government had not yet begun issuing new domestic worker permits to other countries' nationals. The governments' amnesty campaigns, coupled with the limited number of new domestic worker permits being issued and the outflow of documented and undocumented workers due to the pandemic, caused a domestic worker shortage in Kuwait.

Between December 2020 and December 2021, the government reported at least 60,000 domestic workers departed the country. Furthermore, due to shortages in the domestic labor market, the last two reporting periods have seen an increase in press reports in which employers physically prevented their domestic workers from leaving the country or transferring to another employer. The use of fraudulently obtained visas and fake work permits remains common. The current reporting period saw more sit-ins and protests by employees who had been subcontracted to work for Kuwaiti ministries or companies than in 2020, but not as many as prior to the pandemic. These employees alleged their wages were withheld for up to several months by contractors and the respective officials and company representatives ignored their grievances.



Madagascar, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, continue to restrict their female nationals from domestic employment in Kuwait.

The Kuwaiti government has continued its recruitment of domestic workers from African labor-source countries, and many workers continue to defy the respective bans by transiting through third countries before arrival in Kuwait. Upon arrival, some visa sponsors subject migrants to forced labor and, to a much lesser extent, sex trafficking, through the following illegal measures: non-payment of wages, protracted working hours contrary to contractual agreements, deprivation of food, substandard housing, threats or harassment, physical or sexual

recruitment agency or employer in Kuwait, thereby plausibly rendering workers vulnerable to forced labor, including debt bondage. Visa trading continues to be a common manifestation of trafficking in Kuwait, and illicit visa trading markets increasingly expanded into social media in 2020 and continued during the current reporting period. In 2021, local media reported nursing companies traded residency permits of dozens of nurses without their approval and required the nurses to pay upwards of KD 4,530 (\$15,000) to remain in Kuwait. In some cases, officials do not provide workers copies of their contracts, or the contracts are not written in a language they can read. Some illegal labor recruiting companies facilitate

workplaces. Despite a 2016 reform that allows private sector workers to transfer visa sponsors without employer permission after three years of consecutive service and with three months' notice to the employer, employers and recruiters are also known to illegally charge workers for transferring a visa or residency permit from one sponsor to another. Moreover, workers routinely leave their original sponsors and take other jobs without transferring sponsorship, risking being fined, deported, or blacklisted for falling out of legal residency status, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. During the reporting period, reports of employers allegedly selling their workers to other employers on social media and online platforms like

CSC asks ministries to send lists of terminated expats

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) asked government entities to send lists of their expat employees whose contracts were terminated during the last six months, and those who will be let go before the end of the year. The state departments were told to provide the lists before the end of August, sources told Kuwait Times. This comes as part of decisions to Kuwaitize jobs at the public sector and implement the replacement policy, adding that the late entities in this regard will be reported to the council of ministers to take the suitable decisions.

Official sources said CSC plans to prepare a report for the government about the progress done regarding the Kuwaitization of jobs within five years, and which entities completed the decision by 100 percent and those who failed to meet the required percentage,

while excluding some ministries who cannot implement the decision in full at the present time such as health and education ministries.

According to the sources, the majority of ministries reached high percentages of Kuwaitization, and some reached 100 percent. However, the CSC believes some ministries are falling behind when it comes to terminating expat labor, especially subcontracted employees', said the sources, noting that this topic will be a focus of executive procedures by CSC.

Meanwhile, the sources said the housing authority is expected to terminate at least 200 expat employees before the end of the year including advisors and engineers, while the ministry of public work is expected to terminate 300 employees, and the education ministry plans to let go of 375 expats.



Prioritized recommendations:

- Continue to increase law enforcement efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, including Kuwaiti citizens and allegedly complicit officials, under the 2013 anti-trafficking law rather than other criminal laws, when applicable.
- Proactively screen for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, including those in government and embassy shelters and those arrested for immigration violations or "prostitution," or those who flee abusive employers and face countercharges, to ensure victims are not wrongfully penalized or deported for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit.
- Institute reforms to the visa sponsorship-based employment system, including allowing all workers at any time to change employers and leave the country without requiring employer approval, ensuring no recruitment fees are charged to workers and increasing oversight of recruitment agencies and companies.
- Increase the amount of training for all relevant officials and NGOs on the national referral mechanism (NRM) to strengthen proactive identification and referral procedures and ensure official guidelines are accessible to all frontline responders to routinely employ these procedures.
- Ensure unhindered access to the government shelter for victims who self-refer and do not require a complaint on file with authorities to be granted access at the shelter and provide adequate funding for shelter operations.
- Create protection services specifically for male victims, including accommodation and specify procedures for their access to care.
- In adherence to Kuwaiti labor law, increase the number of investigations and prosecutions of employers who illegally confiscate migrant workers' passports and strengthen penalties for passport confiscation to deter potential future perpetrators.
- Strengthen efforts to prosecute potential forced labor crimes criminally instead of administratively and refer cases with trafficking indicators, such as complaints of non-payment of wages, passport confiscation, and restriction of movement, for investigation as potential trafficking crimes.
- Continue to strengthen enforcement of the domestic worker law to ensure domestic workers' rights are protected by increasing access for domestic workers to file a grievance with authorities and increase inspections of registered and fraudulent recruitment agencies.
- Resume convening the full Permanent National Committee for the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Trafficking and strengthen implementation of the national anti-trafficking strategy.
- Expand efforts to raise awareness on existing protections for workers and penalties for traffickers, particularly among vulnerable populations, including migrant workers and domestic workers, as well as employers, company owners, and recruitment agencies.
- Given significant concerns about forced labor indicators in Cuban Medical Missions, screen Cuban medical professionals and refer them to appropriate services.

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News in brief

Embezzlers sentenced in absentia

KUWAIT: The criminal court sentenced in absentia an Egyptian man who worked as deputy of the central treasury at Fahaheel Cooperative Society for two years in prison in addition to ordering him to return the funds he embezzled before he escaped to his country. The suspect is accused of stealing KD 540,000 by forging invoices and registering goods that do not exist, then transferring the money to his account in Egypt. The Co-op Society officials reportedly discovered the embezzlements after the suspect left Kuwait.

Kuwait condemns Iraq

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Ministry condemned Wednesday the terrorist attack targeting an Iraqi police force, killing and injuring police personnel. The ministry, in a statement, affirmed Kuwait's support for Iraq's side as it takes measures to safeguard its security and combat terrorism. The foreign ministry also expressed condolences to the people and government of Iraq and to the families of the victims, wishing those injured a swift recovery.

Kuwait oil at \$111.01 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil hiked by \$2.22 to \$111.01 per barrel on Tuesday, compared with \$108.79 pb the day before, as announced by the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Wednesday. Globally, the Brent crude rose by \$1.08 to \$107.35 pb and the West Texas Intermediate went up by \$1.62 to \$104.22 pb.

Indian Naval Ship TEG visit to Kuwait highlights strong ties



KUWAIT: Indian and Kuwaiti officials pose for a group picture following the arrival of the Indian Naval Ship TEG at Shuwaikh Port. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Indian embassy held a reception on Tuesday onboard the Indian Naval Ship TEG at Shuwaikh Port. In his speech, Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George said, "This evening reception is taking place during the year when we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Kuwait, and when we celebrate Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav, the 75th year of India's independence. This important ship visit reflects the growing bilateral partnership between both countries in all sectors, particularly in the defense cooperation field." He stated that India and Kuwait enjoy a very traditional and vibrant relationship, adding that the long-standing dynamic partnership makes Kuwait, which is part of India's extended neighborhood, a key partner in India's economic progress, especially in energy security and healthcare.

"Despite the many difficulties and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, our relationship continued to grow in recent years. You would recall the dispatch of the emergency medical team from India to Kuwait and then the supply of 'Made in India' Vaccines to Kuwait. We recall the supply of largest medical oxygen from Kuwait to India. In this context, I recall the visit of six Indian Naval

Ships to Kuwait last year which further strengthened our bilateral cooperation," Ambassador George noted.

He pointed out that the ship has been deployed extensively for numerous missions including for anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and has been providing maritime security in the region, affirming the Indian Navy's commitment to establish a cooperative partnership with friendly nations of the Indian Ocean region and beyond to resolve maritime challenges.

Meanwhile, Brig General Hazza' Al-Alati, Commander of Kuwait Navy, stated "Kuwait and India have a long history of a great relationship that began many years ago when our fathers and grandfathers were able to travel to India by using wooden boats to bring goods and supplies from India to Kuwait, which confirm how deep this friendship. Kuwait used the Indian currency (Rupee) as the legal tender in the country until 1961."

He added "Kuwait navy always looking to increase the cooperation with the Indian navy. We have already started the discussions and coordination at a high level. Last year, I discussed with the former head of the Indian navy, Admiral Karambir some topics related to the cooperation between the two navies. I think there are many areas in which

we can cooperate, such as exchange of experience in maritime fields, conducting bilateral exercises, and ships visit." Alati revealed that the Kuwait navy will participate in the Milan exercise which will be carried out in India at the beginning of next year.

Meanwhile, Commanding officer of INS (TEG), Captain Kumar, said "We believe in common values that are underscored by mutual respect and shared understanding that the sea is a common resource of all humanity, and its openness is a vital necessity for the wellbeing of all nations."

"We are privileged to visit this beautiful port in Kuwait, one that has been due for some time. For most of us on this ship, this is the first visit to Kuwait, and we have been enthralled by the warmth and hospitality of the people. We are here for a short duration and yet most of us will carry lifetime memories of the visit," he added.

Indian Naval Ship INS TEG has been deployed extensively for numerous missions including anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, providing maritime security in the seas of India's maritime partner nations, and exercises with other regional navies. "INS TEG's visit to Kuwait will strengthen the deep-rooted, multi-faceted friendly ties and growing cooperation between the Republic of India and the State of Kuwait," the Indian embassy said in a statement.

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Health Minister inspects Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Khaled Al-Saeed made a surprise visit to Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital, accompanied by Hawally Health Zone Director Dr Bader Al-Enezi, Hospital Director Dr Mahdi Al-Fadhli and Head of the Medical Group at the Hospital Dr Moudhi Al-Mutairi. The minister was briefed on services presented at the hospital and challenges doctors are facing and discussed with them practical solutions to overcome the challenges.

The Minister of Health inspected the hospital's central pharmacy and checked means of coordination with the central medical stores and its stock of medicine and medical supplies, the ministry said in a statement. Dr Saeed also inspected the emergency department and its readiness, and listened to expla-



nation on providing quick response and instant care for life threatening cases. Furthermore, he visited the intensive care units and checked the strict rules implemented there, as well as the responsibilities of the medical teams.



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TEHRAN, Iran: Russian President Vladimir Putin (C), Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (R) and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hold a trilateral meeting on Syria in Tehran. —AFP

Erdogan presses case against Syria's Kurds

'We will continue our fight against terrorist organisations in the time to come'

TEHRAN: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pressed his case for a military offensive against Syria's Kurds at a summit in Tehran Tuesday, despite Iran's supreme leader warning against such a move. The summit, hosted by Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and also attended by Russia's President Vladimir Putin, was ostensibly aimed at ending more than 11 years of conflict in Syria, where Iran and Russia support the Damascus government and Turkey supports rebel forces against the regime.

But Turkey is also deeply opposed to a semiautonomous Kurdish administration in Syria's oil-rich northeast, and Erdogan has lately repeatedly vowed to launch an offensive against Kurdish militants, on the back of a 2019 onslaught.

A statement by the three presidents "expressed their opposition to the illegal seizure and transfer of oil revenues that should belong to Syria," while they also "rejected all attempts to create new realities on the ground... including illegitimate self-rule initiatives" in the war-torn country.

The trilateral statement came shortly after Erdogan had urged Russia and Iran to back his efforts to combat terrorism in Syria, contending that "it should be understood clearly that there is no room in our region's future for separatist terror organisations." "We will continue our fight against terrorist organisations in the time to come," he said.

But he had earlier Tuesday earned a rebuke for his push for an offensive against Syria's Kurds from Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei in a bilateral meeting ahead of the summit. Khamenei told Erdogan such an offensive would be "detrimental" for the region and called for the issue to be resolved through dialogue between Ankara, Damascus, Moscow and Tehran. It was not immediately clear whether the trilateral statement at the summit reflected any alteration in Iran's or Russia's position on Turkey's threatened offensive.

Energy ties, Ukraine grain

Khamenei also on Tuesday urged strengthened energy cooperation with Moscow in a meeting with Putin. Russia's president travelled abroad for only the second time since ordering Russia's February invasion of Ukraine in order to attend the gathering.

The summit came days after US President Joe Biden visited the Middle East for the first time in his presidency, with stops in Iran's regional foes Israel and oil-rich Saudi Arabia, a country his government has pressed to increase oil output to ease a price spike related to the Ukraine war. Khamenei called for stronger "long-term co-operation" with Moscow, according to a statement on his official website that noted both Moscow and Tehran are afflicted by Western sanctions.

Describing such ties as "deeply beneficial to both countries," the supreme leader called for bilateral contracts and understandings in hydrocarbons to be "followed up and implemented fully". Prior to Putin's arrival, the National Iranian Oil Company and Russia's Gazprom signed a memorandum of understanding "worth about \$40 billion," according to the Iranian oil ministry's official news agency.

Putin and Erdogan also held a bilateral meeting where the Russian president said he wanted to "thank" his Turkish counterpart for progress on talks over Ukraine's grain, according to the Kremlin. Russia's war on Ukraine has massively hampered shipments from one of the world's biggest exporters of wheat and other grain, sparking fears of global food shortages.

Turkey—a NATO member on speaking terms with both Russia and Ukraine—has spearheaded efforts to resume the grain deliveries. Erdogan has for months been offering to meet Putin in a bid to help resolve heightened global tensions.

"I want to thank you for your mediation efforts," Putin told Erdogan during the bilateral meeting, according to comments released by the Kremlin. "We have moved forward," Putin said, while adding "not all issues have yet been resolved." EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned on Monday that Russia's blockade of Ukrainian ports threatens

supplies to countless thousands vulnerable to starvation.

'Iran-phobia'

On Sunday, a day after Biden ended his tour of the Middle East, Iran accused the United States of provoking crises in the region. Biden had vowed the US would not "tolerate efforts by any country to dominate another in the region through military buildups, incursions, and/or threats", in reference to Iran.

In a speech at a Saudi summit of Gulf Arab states as well as Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, Biden assured those gathered that the US would remain fully engaged in the Middle East. "We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia or Iran," he said.

Following the meeting, a joint statement committed the leaders to "preserve regional security and stability". It also underscored diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, a goal the Islamic republic has always denied seeking.

On Sunday, Iran accused the US of having "once again resorted to the failed policy of Iran-phobia, trying to create tensions and crises in the region". The US last week alleged Iran plans to deliver "hundreds of drones" to Russia to aid its war on Ukraine, an accusation the Islamic republic dismissed as "baseless". —AFP

Indigenous Canadians hopeful of Pope's apology for abuse

MASKWACIS, Canada: For decades, trauma has lingered in the tiny Indigenous Canadian community of Maskwacis. But some hope to finally find a degree of closure during a visit by Pope Francis to apologize for the Church's role in a century of abuse.

The pontiff will stop in the community of 19,000 people some 62 miles (100 kilometers) north of Edmonton, Alberta, on July 25, to visit the site of one of the state boarding schools run by churches where Indigenous children were once forcibly sequestered.

Many of the children — those who survived — still live in towns such as Maskwacis. "Maybe they will hear something that will help them to move forward in their life," Ermineskin Cree Nation chief Randy Ermineskin tells AFP.

Indigenous rights champion Wilton "Willie" Littlechild was part of a delegation that travelled to the Vatican in April to press the 85-year-old pontiff to come to Canada on the once unimaginable tour. "The apology from his Holiness will have a great impact," he said.

"Once you have the apology and the forgiveness, then people will start to feel a sense of healing, and then they will find a conclusion," said the 78-year-old lawyer and former chief, who spent 14 years of his childhood at residential schools.

In Maskwacis, on the western edge of Canada's vast Prairies region, a simple plaque partially obscured by overgrown grass and dandelions identifies the location of the former Ermineskin Indian Residential School, where the Pope will appear.

Before closing in 1976, it was one of the largest of the 139 state schools run by churches across Canada which some 150,000 Indigenous, Inuit and Metis chil-



MASKWACIS, Canada: Gilda Soosay, the Chairperson of the Our Lady of Seven Sorrows parish council in Maskwacis is photographed at the church, where church-goers are anxiously awaiting the arrival of Pope Francis. —AFP

dren were forced to attend as part of a failed policy of assimilation.

Students were cut off from their families, language and culture. Many were physically and sexually abused by teachers and headmasters, and thousands are believed to have died of disease, neglect and malnutrition.

Canada has been grappling with this brutal past for years. But the discovery in recent months of the remains of hundreds of Indigenous children buried in unmarked graves on the school sites has branded the reality of how the state and churches made them suffer into the national consciousness.

In the town, a stray dog wanders the streets past abandoned tricycles and discarded mattresses outside houses charred by fire or tagged with graffiti.

Resident Connie Roan, 67, checking on her garden, says she hopes a "great blessing" by the pontiff will bring change to her community, plagued by gangs and illicit drugs. "It's rough here," she said. "People are unable to move forward" from the traumas inflicted on them at the schools. —AFP

forces failed early in the invasion to capture the capital Kyiv and were pushed back from Ukraine's second city Kharkiv. But Russian artillery outside the eastern urban hub has nonetheless pursued an almost constant shelling campaign, and strikes on Kharkiv Wednesday left three dead, local authorities said.

"There was a 13-year-old boy among them," the regional governor Oleg Synegubov said in a statement on social media. AFP journalists on the scene saw a man in shock kneeling over the body, covered by a blue sweatshirt and surrounded by shards of broken glass. In the southern city of Nikopol, meanwhile, Russian shelling on a residential neighbourhood left two people dead, authorities announced. While the brunt of fighting in Ukraine in recent months has focused on Donbas, a Ukrainian counter offensive in the south has slowly clawed back some Russian-held territory. Ukraine and military analysts credit Western-supplied long-range artillery with shifting battle field dynamics there and Russian officials have taken note.

Lavrov said Wednesday that Western arms deliveries to Ukraine had played into Moscow's decision to focus beyond the east and said its ambitions could expand even more if the shipments continue. "We cannot allow the part of Ukraine that (President Volodymyr) Zelensky will control or whoever replaces him to have weapons that will pose a direct threat to our territory and the territory of those republics that have declared their independence," Lavrov said, referring to Donetsk and Lugansk. —AFP

Russian military aims expanding in Ukraine

MOSCOW: Russia said Monday that its military aims in Ukraine have expanded beyond the industrial Donbas region as its forces launched deadly barrages over the east and the south of the country. The warning came as the European Commission called on EU countries to slash demand for natural gas to relieve dependence on Russian energy and sidestep Moscow's energy "blackmail".

Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview that Moscow's military was no long "only" focused on wresting control of the east Ukraine regions of Lugansk and Donetsk, which have been partially controlled by pro-Moscow rebels for years.

"The geography is different now. It is not only about the DNR and LNR, but also the Kherson region, the Zaporizhzhia region and a number of other territories" he explained to state media. Russian forces, since invading on February 24, have steadily advanced into each of those regions and seen destruction as they captured key cities and met fierce Ukrainian resistance.

The steady progress in the east came after Moscow's

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International

Europe counts cost of heatwave as French fires come under control

Cool air brings relief to people from Portugal to Britain

BORDEAUX, France: Europe counted the cost of a record heatwave on Wednesday as French firefighters brought twin blazes near Bordeaux under control and climate change protesters pointed to the sizzling weather as a wake up call for the continent. Temperatures of more than 40 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit) over previous days have spelled misery for millions and shattered heat records, focusing attention on the impact of global warming.

said. "Yesterday was the busiest day for the fire service in London since the Second World War," the city's mayor Sadiq Khan told Sky News on Wednesday, urging the public to remain vigilant despite temperatures now falling.

Khan also accused Conservative leadership candidates vying to succeed Prime Minister Boris Johnson of

ignoring "the elephant in the room" of climate change. Climate demonstrators triggered a lengthy tailback on Britain's busiest motorway encircling London on Wednesday as they sought to highlight the need for greater action to reduce greenhouse gases which are responsible for global heating.

Members of the group Just Stop Oil climbed gantries

over the M25 arterial motorway, causing police to intervene and vehicles to back up for several miles (kilometres) in one direction. "This is the moment when climate inaction is truly revealed in all its murderous glory for everyone to see: as an elite-driven death project that will extinguish all life if we let it," the activist group said in a statement. — AFP



Greek planes, helicopters also in action

Cooler air swept in Wednesday, bringing relief to people from Portugal to Britain, but thousands of firefighters continued to tackle mass fires that have broken out in multiple countries in recent days after months of drought-like conditions.

"Our assessment is generally positive. The situation improved overnight," French fire service spokesman Arnaud Mendousse told AFP from the southwestern Gironde region where two huge blazes have engulfed 20,600 hectares (50,900 acres) of tinder-dry forest since last week.

The infernos had barely expanded overnight, with lower temperatures and the construction of a 300-metre wide fire break helping stem the spread of the flames. President Emmanuel Macron was set to visit later on Wednesday to speak to emergency services members and some of the 37,000 people who have been evacuated in the popular Atlantic Ocean region that is teaming with tourists in the summer months.

Two firefighters were severely injured overnight, government spokesman Olivier Veran told reporters. Separate blazes in the Monts d'Arree area of north-western Brittany continued to rage on Wednesday, with aircraft dropping water from above. Greek planes and helicopters were also in action against a wildfire that has forced hundreds of people to flee mountainside suburbs north of Athens. Greece had been spared the scorching heatwave experienced in western Europe, but the flames fanned by high winds were threatening the suburbs of Penteli, Pallini, Anthoussa and Gerakas, home to tens of thousands of people.

"The civil protection authority was late in alerting us," a Pallini resident who lost his car and shed to the flames told ERT television. "The fire was scorching our backs, we left in the nick of time. Had we stayed another 30 seconds it would have burned us." Firefighters have also been pressed into action in Portugal, Spain and Italy in recent weeks to tackle wild fires.

Heat records

The heatwave saw a host of local records set in France and a new all-time record for Britain where the national weather service clocked 40.3C in eastern England, surpassing the previous high set in 2019. Grassland fires erupted on Tuesday on the edge of London, with one forcing the evacuation of 14 people as farm buildings, houses and garages were consumed by the flames.

Sixteen firefighters were injured around the capital with two taken to hospital, the London Fire Brigade



BRENNILIS, France: A De Havilland Canada Dash 8-400 MR aircraft drops water over a wildfire raging in the Monts d'Arree, near Brennilis, Brittany, on July 20, 2022. — AFP

Iran says nuclear policy unchanged after 'bomb' remark

TEHRAN: Tehran gave assurances Wednesday that its nuclear policy was unchanged and that it still adhered to a fatwa banning weapons of mass destruction, after an Iranian official said the country was able to make atomic bombs. It is the second time in the past 18 months that Iran has reiterated its opposition to nuclear weapons following comments by an official. "In regard to the topic of weapons of mass destruction, we have the fatwa", or religious edict, by Iran's supreme leader that prohibits the manufacture of such weapons, said foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani.

The fatwa declares the use of atomic bombs and other weapons of mass destruction to be "haram", or forbidden by Islam, and it is often cited by Iranian authorities as a guarantee of Tehran's good intentions. "It seems that there has been no change in the view and position of the Islamic Republic of Iran" regarding the nuclear policy, Kanani told a news conference. His comments came in response to a question about remarks made by Kamal Kharazi, head of Iran's strategic council of foreign relations to Al Jazeera on Sunday

about Iran's capability to manufacture nuclear weapons.

"It is no secret to anyone that we have the technical capability to make atomic bombs, but we have not made a decision in this regard," Kharazi said, before reiterating Iran's position that it does not want to make a nuclear bomb. Speaking to the media on Wednesday, Kanani said: "Iran's nuclear capacities are great, but, as it has mentioned many times, Iran's nuclear technology is completely peaceful and under continued monitoring of the (UN's) International Atomic Energy Agency." The remarks came amid heightened tensions between Iran and Western powers as talks in Vienna to revive a 2015 nuclear deal have been stalled since March.



Nasser Kanani

Vienna talks

Qatar hosted indirect talks last month between the United States and Iran in a bid to get the process back on track, but those discussions broke up after two days without any breakthrough. The Vienna talks, which began in April last year, aim to return the US to the nuclear deal, including through the lifting of sanctions on Iran, and to return Tehran to full compliance with its commitments.

The 2015 agreement gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its atomic programme to guarantee that Tehran could not develop a nuclear weapon—something it has always denied wanting to do. But the US unilateral withdrawal from the accord in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump and the reimposition of biting economic sanctions prompted Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments. On Tuesday, State Department spokesman Ned Price said US President Joe Biden "has made a commitment that Iran will not acquire a nuclear weapon".

"We continue to believe that diplomacy is the most effective, durable, and sustainable means by which to achieve that," he added. In February 2021, Iran reiterated its opposition to nuclear weapons after then intelligence minister, Mahmoud Alavi, said it would not be the Islamic republic's fault if it was ever "pushed" towards developing a nuclear bomb. Iran had claimed the existence of the fatwa for years before making the text public for the first time in 2010, at a time of crisis over its nuclear programme. — AFP

Local farmers 'crucial for food ...

Continued from Page 1

Chairman of the Kuwaiti Fishermen Union Thamer Al-Suwayan said the union works with everyone in the country, including the new governmental panel, in order to boost local products which is the key to stable prices. Al-Suwayan urged the government to raise its subsidy to local fishermen amid hiking costs and

heavy losses they are facing owing to high fishing equipment prices and periodical maintenance costs.

Chairman of the Federation of Fresh Dairy Producers Abdulhakeem Al-Ahmad said Kuwait's daily dairy consumption hits around 1,200 tons, while local farms only produce 200 tons - making roughly 18 percent of consumption. He emphasized that Kuwaiti farm owners are working side by side with different bodies nationwide in order to ensure food security, given that the current global food crisis could last longer. Al-Ahmad revealed that the federation has 50 affiliated farms, including 44 dairy ones that abounds with a total 9,505 milking cows. — KUNA

these pollutants is "crucial". Scientists have already detected "extremely high surface ozone pollution" across western and southern Europe, particularly over the Iberian Peninsula and parts of northern Italy.

Daily maximum levels of surface ozone, which normally peaks during the middle of the day, reached unhealthy levels in Portugal, Spain and Italy, according to Copernicus. Scientists now warn that, while the situation is likely to ease across the Iberian Peninsula, very high surface ozone levels are now being seen in areas of northern and western parts of the continent as temperatures rise. The ozone levels in these regions are forecast to peak in the next few days, before easing.

Copernicus also predicted no relief from the wildfires that have engulfed swathes of forests across parts of southern Europe. In southwest France, two massive fires have created apocalyptic scenes of destruction, despite much of the country's entire firefighting capacity being deployed. Copernicus said total carbon emissions from the wildfires in Spain so far in July are the highest seen for the June-July period since 2003.

Parrington said high surface ozone can lead to sore throats, coughing, headaches and an increased risk of asthma attacks. The Climate and Clean Air Coalition estimates that ozone pollution causes approximately one million additional deaths per year. Ozone is also a key concern for agricultural regions and food security. In January, researchers estimated that persistently high levels of ozone pollution in Asia are costing China, Japan and South Korea an estimated \$63 billion annually in lost rice, wheat and maize crops. — AFP

Six-time PM elected Sri Lanka president...

Continued from Page 1

One by one, the legislators entered ballot booths set up on the floor of the chamber to choose between the three candidates. Previous elections have been marred by allegations of corruption and vote-buying, and mobile phones were banned to prevent anyone taking photos of the ballots. Wickremesinghe is elected for the balance of Rajapaksa's term, which runs until November 2024, and the speaker's office said he would be sworn in on Thursday.

According to analysts he is likely to appoint his school-mate Dinesh Gunawardena, a strong ally of the once-powerful Rajapaksa clan, as prime minister. Wickremesinghe appears to be indebted to the

Rajapaksas, a clan of four brothers who have dominated Sri Lankan politics for much of the last two decades, for his victory.

Gotabaya's departure wounded the group after two of his brothers also quit their posts as premier and finance minister earlier this year. But former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, the deposed Gotabaya's elder brother and the head of the family, remained in the country, and party sources said he had pressed SLPP legislators to support the veteran operator.

As acting president, Wickremesinghe extended a state of emergency that gives police and security forces sweeping powers. On Wednesday, a court ordered the protesters to vacate their camp near the Presidential Secretariat and confine themselves only to an area designated as a protest site. A top police official said anyone damaging state property would be dealt with severely. Protesters occupying a part of president's office have been ordered to leave by Wednesday evening or face eviction. — AFP

Heatwave kills 500 in Spain...

Continued from Page 1

face "extreme" danger of wildfires. Record temperatures, which scientists say are driven by climate change, are predicted in France and Britain Tuesday as suffocating heat that has gripped southwest Europe and sparked ferocious wildfires moves northwards.

"Tinder dry conditions and extreme heat are exacerbating the risk of wildfires," according to a statement from the Copernicus monitoring service. The organization's emergency management service has warned that a large proportion of western Europe is in "extreme fire danger" with some areas of "very extreme fire danger". The heatwave is also causing high levels of ground-level ozone, Copernicus said.

Unlike the protective layer in the upper atmosphere, this is a major greenhouse gas and component of urban smog that harms human health and inhibits photosynthesis in plants. "The potential impacts of very high ozone pollution on human health can be considerable both in terms of respiratory and cardio-vascular illness," said Mark Parrington, Senior Scientist from the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service.

Ozone is formed as emissions from fossil fuels and other man-made pollutants react in the presence of sunlight and Copernicus said cutting emissions of

Kuwait awaits new PM amid high...

Continued from Page 1

Cabinet Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah was also nominated to form the new Cabinet if Sheikh Mohammed insisted on his rejection. Sheikh Ahmad is the son of the Amir and has gained huge popularity after his inclusion in the Cabinet just a few months ago.

MP Ahmad Al-Azemi yesterday described the current period as "a decisive phase in the history of Kuwait", adding that achieving stability in Kuwait requires a new government that avoids the mistakes of the past. MP Khaled Al-Otaibi said the next prime minister will inherit major challenges to reform what the previous government has damaged.

MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji described the political events in Kuwait as "unprecedented", saying they will impact the form of the next cabinet. Former liberal

MP Saleh Al-Mulla warmly welcomed earlier news about the appointment of Sheikh Mohammed, but he warned that the main thing for the new cabinet is to abandon the old-style of appointing ministers.

It's worth mentioning that Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, in power for less than three years, submitted his government's resignation in early April after 26 opposition MPs, two more than the required quorum, said they will back a non-cooperation motion filed by opposition MPs following a grilling over alleged mismanagement.

The resignation had been accepted by the Amir who asked Sheikh Sabah to continue as a care-taker premier to run urgent matters until a new premier is named. Last month, HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, in a speech read by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, said he has decided to dissolve the national assembly, a key demand by the opposition, and call for fresh polls "within months". The opposition welcomed the speech and called for appointing a new prime minister to introduce fundamental changes and reforms to the way the government has been operating.

International

'We lost': Disappointment at Sri Lanka protest camp after election

Politicians are fighting for their power, not fighting for the people

COLOMBO: A sullen crowd reacted to the election of Sri Lanka's new president with disappointment Wednesday, near the protest camp where they last week celebrated chasing his predecessor into exile. Around 200 people gathered under a sweltering morning sun to watch the contest outside the presidential secretariat in Colombo, one of several government buildings stormed by protesters earlier this month.

Some sitting on the steps of the sandstone building closed their eyes and clasped their hands in prayer as the ballot stretched into its second hour. But shortly after noon, word quickly spread among the thinning crowd that parliament had elected Ranil Wickremesinghe—a man now feared to be preparing a crackdown on their movement.

"We are disappointed, but not surprised," said Nuzly Hameem, a civil engineer and activist volunteering at the patchwork tent network that sprung up around the secretariat in April, at the beginning of the campaign to oust departed president Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Hameem said his peers had hoped for more from their politicians and would now need to reconsider their strategy, with many exhausted. Feelings of burnout have been heightened by despair over Wednesday's result.

"We lost the whole country lost," said Damitha Abeyrathne, a prominent Sri Lankan actress who has been a regular fixture at the protest site in recent months.

Wickremesinghe became acting president last week after his predecessor fled the country and announced his resignation from Singapore.

The six-time former premier is tainted in protesters' eyes by his association with Rajapaksa and his family, who have been blamed by critics for driving the country to the brink of economic ruin.

To the dismay of those seated outside his new office, Wickremesinghe earned the resounding support of his fellow lawmakers in Wednesday's vote—partly by positioning himself as a law-and-order candidate for MPs who had been victims of mob violence.

"The politicians are fighting for their power, they're not fighting for the people," Abeyrathne told AFP. "They have no feelings for the people who are suffering."

'We will continue'
The seafront promenade outside the secretariat was the scene of a weary but jubilant street party last week to mark Rajapaksa's resignation.

Veterans of the protest movement—exhausted after tear gas barrages and tense confrontations with security forces in preceding days—danced and handed out sweets in celebration.

Wickremesinghe has called on political opponents to put aside their divisions and work together in tackling months of severe food, fuel and medicine shortages.

But protesters argue that Sri Lanka can only extricate



COLOMBO, Sri Lanka: Demonstrators stage a protest against Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe at Presidential Secretariat in Colombo on July 20, 2022. —AFP

itself from its unprecedented economic crisis with radical political reforms. They want the curtailment of broad presidential powers that they blame for rampant corrup-

tion and a fresh election within a year to clear parliament of the Rajapaksa supporters who voted his successor into office. —AFP



We lost—the whole country lost

Myanmar military landmine use amounts to war crimes: AI

BANGKOK: Myanmar junta troops are committing war crimes by laying landmines on a "massive scale" around villages where they are battling anti-coup fighters, rights campaign group Amnesty International (AI) said Wednesday.

Fighting has ravaged swathes of the country since last year's putsch, which sparked renewed clashes with ethnic rebel groups and the formation of dozens of "People's Defence Forces" now battling the junta.

During a visit to Kayah state near the Thai border, Amnesty researchers interviewed landmine survivors, medical workers who had treated them and others involved in clearing operations, the organisation said.

It said it had "credible information" that the military had used mines in at least 20 villages, including on paths to rice fields, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries.

Amnesty also said it had documented several instances where the military had laid mines around a church and on its grounds. "Soldiers have placed landmines

in people's yards, at the entrance of homes, and outside toilets," Amnesty said.

"In at least one documented case, soldiers booby-trapped a house stairwell with a trip-wire improvised explosive device." Anti-junta group members were attempting to de-mine some areas, but the work was done "by hand with only rudimentary equipment and without any professional training," it added.

"We know from bitter experience that civilian deaths and injuries will mount over time, and the widespread contamination is already blocking people from returning to their homes and farmland," said Rawya Rageh, the group's senior crisis adviser.

Myanmar is not a signatory to the United Nations convention that prohibits the use, stockpiling or development of anti-personnel mines.

Its military has been repeatedly accused of atrocities and war crimes during decades of internal conflict.

Military violence against the Rohingya minority in 2017 sent an estimated 750,000 people fleeing into neighbouring Bangladesh, bringing with



KAYAH STATE, Myanmar: This handout photo from Amnesty International shows a civilian building destroyed after being landmined and burned down by the Myanmar military. —AFP

them accounts of rape, murder and arson. In March, the United States declared that the violence against the Rohingya amounted to genocide, saying there was clear evidence of an attempt to "destroy" them.

The Gambia dragged Myanmar before the International Court of Justice in 2019, accusing the predominantly Buddhist country of genocide

against the Muslim minority.

The Hague-based court is due to give its judgment on Myanmar's preliminary objections to the case later this week. Following the coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government, the military has waged a bloody crackdown on dissent that a local monitoring group says has killed more than 2,000 people and seen almost 15,000 arrested. —AFP

UN records hundreds of killings, rights violations by Taliban

KABUL: The Taliban have carried out hundreds of human rights violations in Afghanistan since seizing power last year, the United Nations said Wednesday, including extra judicial killings and torture. "There's no denying that the findings of our report are extremely serious," Markus Potzel, acting head of the United Nations mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), told a news conference in Kabul.

The Taliban have routinely denied accusation of rights abuses since overthrowing the previous Western-backed government, but a UNAMA report released Wednesday listed multiple accounts. It documented 160 allegations of extra judicial killings, 56 incidents of torture and ill treatment and more than 170 arbitrary arrests and detentions against former government officials and national security force members since August. The most common methods of torture included kicking, punching and slapping, beatings with cables and pipes and use of electric shock devices.

It documented more than 200 instances of cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments—including beating shopkeepers for not attending mosque—and more than 100 cases of excessive use of force. Since the end of the war, security has vastly improved across the country with a huge drop in civilian casualties. However, the Taliban—notorious for their brutal reign of terror between 1996 and 2001—have sharply restricted the freedoms of Afghans, particularly women and girls.

Job seekers in Africa easy prey for online scammers

NAIROBI, Kenya: From careers in banking to roles in globe-spanning agencies, social media in Africa is awash with lucrative job offers. But investigators with AFP Fact Check have found that many of these ads are bogus—they are scams designed to extract cash or steal personal data.

Fresh out of college in Kenya—a country with more than 1.6 million young unemployed—Job Mwangi believed he had been shortlisted for field assistant at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), a position advertised on LinkedIn.



KABUL: Markus Potzel, acting head of (UNAMA) United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (L), speaks next to Fiona Frazer, head of the UN's human rights mission in Afghanistan during a press conference in Kabul on July 20, 2022. —AFP

UNAMA had 87 reports of violence against women and girls including murder, rape, suicide, forced marriages including child marriage, assault and battery, as well as two cases of honour killing—none of which have been registered with the formal justice system. Among the cases documented, were a couple who were publically stoned to death after being accused of having an affair. Fiona Frazer, head of the UN's human rights mission in Afghanistan, said

"impunity prevails" in Afghanistan, and acknowledged there may be an under-reporting of allegations. She said UNAMA was "particularly concerned" about the involvement of the Taliban's religious police and intelligence service in abuses. UNAMA said more than 700 civilians have been killed and at least 1,400 wounded in attacks mainly attributed to the local Islamic State branch, as well as unexploded mines. —AFP

After passing two online tests, he was asked to pay 2,000 Kenyan shillings (about \$17) in "facilitation fees" in order to secure an interview. "Everything about the job posting seemed legit," Mwangi told AFP Fact Check in an interview. "I was asked to pay 1,000 Kenyan shillings (\$8.5) for medical and radiology tests... but the tests didn't happen since I was told that they would be done at the UN offices on interview day."

A shuttle bus that was supposed to transfer Mwangi and more than 30 other job-seekers to the UN office never showed up. "We waited for about one hour for the UN bus but it did not arrive, so we decided to take a bus on our own."

"On arrival at the gate, we mentioned that we had been invited for interviews with UNEP and the security officers manning the gate laughed at us, telling us that we'd been scammed." Mwangi filed a police report but says he has heard nothing since.

This particular hoax is far from uncommon in Africa—

indeed, UN agencies regularly warn job seekers about fake ads. "The United Nations Environment Programme does not charge a fee at any stage of its recruitment process (application, interview, processing, training) or other fees, or request information on applicants' bank accounts," UNEP says on its website.

Keyword searches on Facebook reveal dozens of pages featuring bogus vacancies cleverly crafted to lure hopefuls. Many of the pitches have the same telltale signs: They have short deadlines, promise high salaries and often include a hyperlink to an external online platform requesting personal information.

Scammers also use logos of reputable organisations and companies to lend credibility to spoof emails. Code for Africa, a data journalism and civic technology initiative, found that in 2020 — when job losses soared during the COVID-19 pandemic—some 30 Facebook accounts, groups and pages with over 184,000 followers targeted unsuspecting job hunters in Kenya with sham ads. —AFP

Sahel leaders face battle to keep G5 force alive

BAMAKO, Mali: Major challenges lie ahead for African leaders seeking to breathe new life into the G5 Sahel anti-jihadist force. The five-nation mission began operations in 2017, showcased as an unprecedented example of cooperation in one of the world's troubled regions.

But the force—originally gathering Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger—has achieved meagre results and the Sahel's security crisis continues to deepen. Added to this have been two hammer blows, delivered in quick succession this year.

In April, 1,200 Chadian soldiers based in Niger left in secret for N'Djamena, according to G5 and French military officials. The following month, Mali announced it would leave the group over a dispute with France, forcing all the force's commanders to abandon their base in Bamako and relocate to the Chadian capital N'Djamena.

"They left overnight, leaving everything behind, even the cars," a G5 official told AFP. "The G5 is dead," Niger's president, Mohamed Bazoum, told the French newspaper La Croix in May. But last week, he and President Mahamat Idriss Deby of Chad sounded a different tone, announcing an upcoming meeting between the force's four remaining members to "ensure that the G5 is viable."

"We have not yet considered that it is over for the G5 Sahel—we will fight," Bazoum said. "Let's remain optimistic."

An immense task

The regional grouping began with an ambitious idea to create a joint military force that would go hand in hand with development projects. The force was largely financed by the European Union (EU) and its operations were supported by France. It represented, in the eyes of international partners, a solution in a region plagued by jihadist violence.

Its eight battalions comprised about 5,000 troops, based in their own countries, with the exception of a Chadian battalion deployed in Niger. They were tasked with coordinating operations in the hotspot border areas. There are numerous reasons for its decline, two G5 officials told AFP.

These include chronic underfunding, disparate political will among member countries and regional politics. Mali has undergone two coups in two years, and there have been military takeovers in Burkina Faso and Chad.

In 2021, Chad was meant to hand the G5 presidency over to Mali but did not—a move that Bamako interpreted as French interference. Paris is reputedly close with N'Djamena, and Mali's ruling junta, led by Colonel Assimi Goita, lashed the G5's "instrumentalisation" before slamming the door.

"It would be hard not to see the French hand behind this refusal to transfer the presidency," said Malian researcher Boubacar Haidara.

The G5 Sahel "has been perceived since the beginning as being controlled by Paris," said Ornella Moderan, from the South Africa-based Institute for Security Studies (ISS). But, she said, it has above all "suffered from variable political support from one member state to another."

Since the creation of the G5, "there have been no joint operations between Burkina and Mali, let alone between Niger and Mali," Niger's foreign minister, Hassoumi Massoudou, said last week.

In Burkina Faso, people are questioning "the survival of the G5," according to a source close to the authorities, although no departure is in sight. Despite the force's travails, Burkina troops in the G5 have continued to operate with the Nigeriens in recent months. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, JULY 21, 2022

National Bank of Kuwait reports net profit of KD 237.8m for 1H of 2022

Board of Directors approves distribution of semi-annual dividends of 10 fils per share

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait ("NBK", the "Bank" or the "Group") has announced its financial results for the six-month period ended 30 June 2022. The bank reported a net profit of KD 237.8 million (\$775.4 million), compared to KD 160.8 million (\$524.2 million) for the same period in 2021, improving by 47.9 percent year-on-year.

Net profit for the three-month period ended 30 June 2022 reached KD 121.2 million (\$395.3 million), a year-on-year increase of 58.6 percent from the comparable period in 2021.

Total assets as of end of June 2022 grew by 8.6 percent year-on-year to reach KD 34.3 billion (\$111.8 billion), whereas total loans and advances increased by 8.8 percent year-on-year to KD 20.1 billion (\$65.7 billion), and total shareholders' equity reached KD 3.4 billion (\$11.0 billion), growing by 1.0 percent year-on-year.

NBK Board of Directors approved the distribution of 10 percent semi-annual cash dividends (10 fils per share) for the period ended June 2022. This marks a historical milestone for NBK as the first semi-annual dividend distribution post the General Assembly approval on the amendment of Articles of the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the bank with regards to dividends distribution.

Commenting on the Bank's 1H 2022 financial results, Isam Al-Sager, Vice-Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer, said: "NBK continued its growth momentum by recording yet another period of robust performance during 1H 2022; buoyed by the

economic recovery and normalization of business activities post-pandemic. We are pleased to demonstrate on the success of our diversification strategy, flexible business model, prudent risk management, robust capital, alongside our prosperous investments in technology and talent acquisition in

cutting the Group's digital agenda, we continued to proactively respond to market needs through offering a wide range of products and services; upscaling our customers' experience, satisfaction and retention. We believe that our achievements have put the Bank in a position of digital leader-

ship domestically and regionally," Al-Sager highlighted.

and its ability to generate profits", Al-Sager stated.

line with our announced targets to reduce our operational emissions by 25 percent by 2025 and taking a more active role in global efforts of transitioning to a low carbon economy."

"NBK's Board of Directors has approved the distribution of semi-annual dividends. This demonstrates NBK's solid capital adequacy, confidence in its financial position

"We take pride in the progress of the ranking that the Bank achieved in The Banker's 'Top 1000 World Banks' and in remaining Kuwait's pioneer; a further endorsement to the trust in our brand position. Likewise, Weyay, Kuwait's first digital bank, received 'Outstanding Innovation in Mobile Banking' award in Global Finance's annual Innovators Awards for 2022; testifying the prominent role of our digital investment in being growth streams in the short-to-medium term," Al-Sager asserted.

The most prominent results and indicators during the first half of 2022

- Net operating income of KD 480.2 million (\$1.6 billion), increasing by 6.1 percent compared to 1H 2021
- Total assets grew by 8.6 percent year-on-year, to KD 34.3 billion (\$111.8 billion)
- Total loans and advances grew by 8.8 percent year-on-year to KD 20.1 billion (\$65.7 billion)
- Customer deposits increased by 8.7 percent year-on-year to KD 18.9 billion (\$61.7 billion)
- Strong asset quality metrics, with NPL/gross loans ratio at 1.24 percent and an NPL coverage ratio of 311 percent
- Robust Capital Adequacy Ratio of 17.3 percent, comfortably in excess of regulatory requirements.



Isam Al-Sager

- NBK continued its growth momentum buoyed by the economic recovery and normalization of business activities
- The robust performance demonstrates the success of our strategy, prudent management practices and wise investments
- Our growth across markets and segments asserts the soundness of our diversification strategy and the Group's ability to continue generating income across its network

delivering the bank's objectives."

Al-Sager added that: "The continuity of growth trends across strategic markets and segments, including Wealth Management and Islamic banking, asserts the sound financial position of the Group and its ability to generate income from diverse streams. The bank delivered a healthy growth of 6.1 percent in operating income, reaching KD 480.2 million, supported by core banking activity; while the lower cost of risk levels contributed positively in uplifting our bottom line profits."

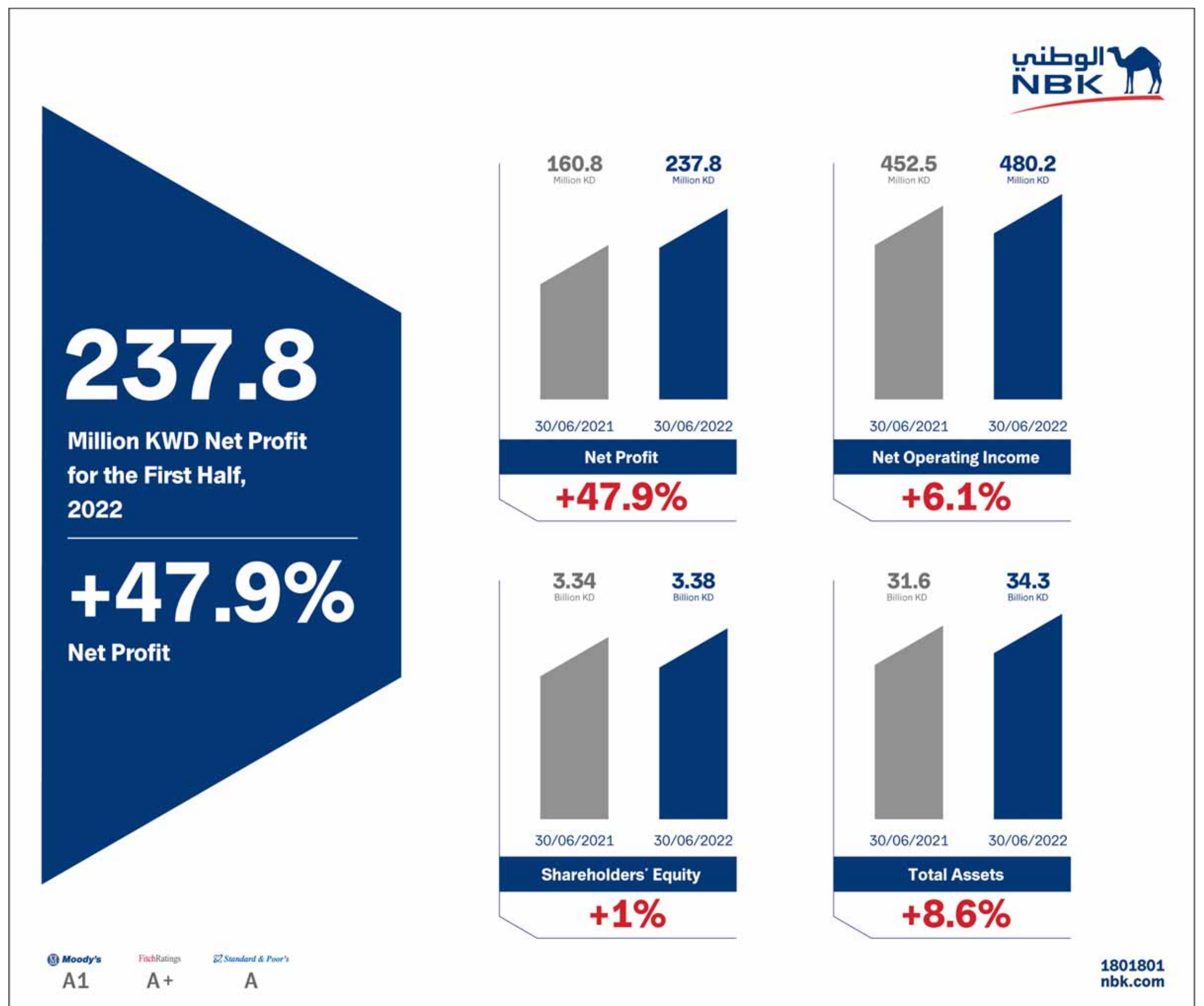
"Thanks to the accelerated pace in exe-

ship domestically and regionally," Al-Sager highlighted.

"The bank will continue to invest heavily in its strategic initiatives to ensure maximized returns for its stakeholders and contribute positively to its communities. Leveraging on the Group's resilience and its ability to continue to grow and progress, NBK is entering the second half of the year with a stronger momentum and will continue to preserve its position as a leading regional bank. Our diversification strategy, international presence, strong financial position alongside our unique talent and organiza-

and its ability to generate profits", Al-Sager stated.

Al-Sager also stated: "The Group continues to focus on embedding sustainable practices within its operations. We are working tirelessly and across all our network of subsidiaries and branches to lower our operational GHG emissions and promote more sustainable practices. During the second quarter, we announced our plan to accelerate our efforts of transitioning our branches in Kuwait to become more environment friendly and increasing its dependence on renewable energy. This comes in



Business

KFH gets approval from Bahrain Central Bank for AUB acquisition

Banking sector consolidation in Mideast gains further traction

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced on Wednesday that it has received the approval of the Central Bank of Bahrain for acquiring Ahli United Bank - Bahrain. KFH explained in a statement that the acquisition will take place according to the previously agreed and announced conditions, with the exception of the continued listing of Ahli United Bank on the Bahrain Financial Market.

The merged banking entity, a rare cross-border deal in the Middle East, will create the Gulf's seventh-largest lender with \$115 billion in assets, according to reports.

KFH underlined that the process is subject to the approval of the general assembly and the shareholders of both banks stating that the bank will disclose any developments in this regard at the time.

"Mergers and acquisitions in the Middle East's banking sector have gained traction in recent years mainly driven by economic pressure due to lower energy revenues and the impact of the pandemic," according to Arabian Business.

The local report pointed out that mergers and acquisitions of banks come at a time when regional lenders are seeking ways to improve competitiveness and enhance capitals in light of the slowdown in growth in the GCC countries as this affects gov-

ernment revenues which may lead to spending cuts that will reduce growth in the non-oil sectors, where banks do most of their businesses.

The report pointed out that banks across the world resort to merging with each other to form a stronger local economic entity that can withstand challenges in a better way and undertake larger projects.

The mergers of assets and liabilities of two or more banks result in a new larger banking entity that has the ability to compete and survive in the financial market, according to the report. Consolidation in the banking sector will also help encourage international investors and maintain investment flow into the local banking sector. It can support state development projects in a better way and limit the recourse to borrowing from international financial institutions to bridge the budget deficit. While enhancing the trend towards integration in various sectors, a larger banking entity could enhance the strength of national facilities and reflect positively on the economy, the report further revealed.

Despite the advantages of the mergers, the report also cite some risks from the banking sector consolidation as the lenders' preferential ability in financing as a result of explicit or implicit government support. The banks that agreed to merge are



subject to state control, directly or indirectly, and this may weaken fair competition. It will also lead to fewer benefits for customers and companies, and therefore, it is necessary to enforce the principle of competitive neutrality in general, the report said.

The report indicated that the current competition

law systems may not be able to ensure that mergers do not negatively affect state-owned banks from the application of the general competition law, and the financial sector regulators do not have a goal of ensuring competition, in addition to the traditional mandate to ensure financial stability.

Global electricity demand slowing sharply: IEA

PARIS: Global demand for electricity is slowing sharply this year due to sluggish economic growth and runaway energy prices and the trend will likely continue next year, the International Energy Agency said Wednesday. "Electricity demand growth is slowing significantly in 2022," the IEA wrote in its new Electricity Market Report.

"After global electricity demand grew by a strong six percent in 2021, propelled by rapid economic recovery as COVID-19 lockdowns eased, we expect growth to slow to 2.4 percent in 2022 — about the same as the average from 2015 to 2019," it said.

"This reflects slower global economic growth, higher energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and renewed public health restrictions, particularly in China." The electricity sector's carbon emissions were set to decline slightly this year, the report found.

"After having risen to an all-time high in 2021, CO2 emissions from the global electricity sector are set to decline in 2022, albeit by less than one percent," it said.

The agency said renewable sources of energy were growing faster than demand and replacing fossil fuels. "Strong capacity additions are helping global renewable power generation towards growth of more than 10 percent in 2022," the report said.

Nevertheless, due to high gas prices and supply constraints, coal is replacing gas for power generation in markets with spare coal plant capacity, the IEA observed. "In Europe, governments delayed coal plant phase-outs and lifted restrictions to increase the availability of coal generation, thereby reducing gas consumption to improve security of supply." The IEA said that wholesale electricity prices were skyrocketing in many countries. "In the first half of 2022, gas prices in Europe rose fourfold and coal more than threefold from the same period in 2021, resulting in wholesale electricity prices more than tripling in many markets."

It said its price index for major global electricity wholesale markets had "reached levels that were twice the



first-half average from 2016 to 2021." The IEA said that Europe was gearing up to reduce its reliance on Russian fossil fuel imports by accelerating its clean energy transition.

"The implementation of the European Commission's 'REPowerEU' plan would greatly accelerate deployment of renewables in the coming years, doubling their share in EU gross final energy consumption from 2020 to 2030 and significantly reducing fossil fuel use."

Looking ahead to next year, the IEA

said that the main uncertainties affecting its 2023 forecasts for electricity demand and generation mix would remain fossil fuel prices and economic growth.

"As of mid-2022, we expect global electricity demand growth in 2023 to remain on a similar path as this year. Strong renewables growth of eight percent and recovering nuclear generation could displace some gas and coal power, resulting in the electricity sector's CO2 emissions declining by one percent," the IEA said. —AFP

Saudi crude exports set to rise in July on stronger China flows

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's crude exports look set to increase in July due to a surge in flows to China. Total observed shipments are poised to reach about 7.7 million barrels a day, according to preliminary data through July 18. That compares with a revised 6.6 million daily barrels in June, vessel-tracking compiled by Bloomberg shows.

The partial picture for July may make the month-month change look more extreme than it actually is, and the figures are subject to revision. A few days of unusual cargo flows can have a significant impact on a short timespan.

If the trend continues, July's flows would be the highest observed since April 2020. Shipments for June were the lowest since September. Saudi officials declined to comment.

With oil prices still above \$100 a barrel, US President Joe Biden used a landmark visit to the

kingdom last week to push for more production from Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. He departed without a firm commitment for an increase. OPEC and its allies meet to reconsider production targets in early August.

Average retail gasoline prices in the US last month hit record levels, though they have since declined. Saudi crude production has been gradually rising since last year, under an OPEC+ agreement. The kingdom's target output for July is 10.833 million barrels a day in July and is set to top 11 million in August. So far in July, China has buttressed the jump in Saudi crude exports, even as some cities struggle to resume economic activity while dealing with COVID-related lockdowns. Shipments to China are poised to be about 1.8 million barrels a day, which would be the highest since April.

Saudi crude exports to other major destinations - Japan, South Korea and India - have been relatively steady since June. Shipments to the US are set to decline to about 333,000 barrels a day. However, this figure will almost certainly rise. Tankers hauling about 14.5 million barrels of Saudi crude still haven't signaled their final destinations. —Agencies

US home sales fall again in June as prices hit new record

WASHINGTON: US home prices hit another new peak in June amid short supply, while existing home sales fell for the fifth straight month amid the ongoing rise in mortgage rates, according to industry data released Wednesday. Sales sank 5.4 percent compared to May, topping to a 5.12 million annual rate, far below what economists were projecting, the National Association of Realtors (NAR) reported.

That was the weakest sales pace since January 2019, excluding the start of the pandemic in 2020, NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun told reporters. After topping \$400,000 for the first time ever, the median national home price continued to rise, hitting \$416,000 last month, the data showed.

"A combination of higher prices and higher mortgage rates clearly has shifted the dynamics in the housing market," Yun said. —AFP

UK inflation hits new 40-year high

LONDON: British annual inflation surged to a new 40-year high in June on rising motor fuel and food prices, official data showed Wednesday, adding to a cost-of-living crisis. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) jumped to 9.4 percent last month from 9.1 percent in May, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

Analysts said the data put pressure on the Bank of England to raise interest rates by as much as 50 basis points, or half a percentage point, at its next policy meeting in August. The central bank expects British inflation to top double figures this year.

"In the UK, we saw another eye-popping CPI reading and the pressure is on the BoE to do what it takes before it is too late to control inflation," said Naeem Aslam, chief market analyst at Avatrade.

Inflation has soared to the highest level in decades in many countries, fuelled by the war in Ukraine and the easing of COVID restrictions. That has forced cen-

tral banks to raise interest rates, risking the prospect of recession as higher borrowing costs hurt businesses and consumers.

The Bank of England has raised its key interest rate five times since December, lifting it to 1.25 percent from a record-low 0.1 percent. The BoE has not increased its rates by more than 0.25 percentage points each time. However, on Tuesday, BoE governor Andrew Bailey had said that "a 50-basis-point increase will be among the choices on the table when we next meet".

Summer of strikes

Separate data this week showed that soaring UK inflation has caused the value of British wages to fall at a record pace. And Britain is experiencing a summer of strike action as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. Aircraft refuellers at London's Heathrow airport will strike for three days later this week, while this month sees also telecoms giant BT facing its first staff walkout since 1987.

Railway staff are preparing for further stoppages having last month carried out their biggest strike action in decades.

State-employed lawyers are also striking, while teachers and workers for the National Health Service are mulling action. Britain's retail prices index (RPI) — which includes mortgage interest payments and



LONDON, UK: In this file photo taken on January 10, 2022 a customer shops for food items inside a Tesco supermarket store in east London. UK inflation accelerated in June to 9.4 percent year-on-year, hitting a new four-decade high - in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis - which may push the Bank of England to tighten its rate policy. —AFP

is used by unions and employers when negotiating wage increases-rose to 11.8 percent in June from 11.7 percent in May, the statistics office calculated.

"More pain is on the way for household budgets as the high rate of inflation continues to outpace wage growth, bringing

down the real value of incomes across the UK," said Yael Selfin, chief economist at KPMG UK. "We also expect the Bank of England to continue raising the base interest rate, which we now expect to reach 2.0 percent early next year, to stave off further rounds of inflation rises." —AFP

Saudi Arabia to launch new airline soon

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia is preparing to launch its new national airline "very soon", setting up a key pillar of the kingdom's Vision 2030, a plan that aims to attract three times as many foreign tourists by the end of the decade.

The carrier, to be based at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, will play a central role in the Saudis' plan to kick-start the country's "golden era of travel" and transform it into one of the leading aviation hubs in the Middle East. In May, Saudi officials announced an aviation strategy targeting 250 direct destinations, tripling traffic and the creation of a new carrier.

Mohammed Al-Khuraiji, vice president of strategy and business intelligence at Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation, said Wednesday that the final touches are being made to plans to unveil the carrier.

Al-Khuraiji however declined to say how many jobs the project aims to create, but pointed out that Vision 2030 aims to open up 1.1 million roles in multiple sectors. The aviation sector is key to the success of the plan, he said, and will prove to be "really crucial" in the delivery of the ambitious goal.

"Aviation enables multiple sectors: tourism, trade, foreign direct investments, bilateral relationships with different countries," he said. "The full tourism strategy can be enabled by strong aviation."

"We want to attract 100 million tourists by 2030, and need to ensure you have the right capacity." The introduction of a new airline, which will operate alongside the national carrier Saudia - formerly Saudi Arabian Airlines - will play a major role in the government's plan to diversify its economy, boost tourism and reduce reliance on oil. Sustainability is at the heart of the plan and increasing the number of women in the workforce is also high up on the agenda.

The plan is expected to propel Saudi Arabia to fifth position in terms of global air passenger traffic.

Al-Khuraiji said the kingdom is seeking to capitalize on its strategic location and serve as a hub for connections between Africa, Asia and Europe. The global aviation sector is grappling with staff shortages amid a sudden bounce back in demand for travel, and here have been scenes of chaos at airports in the UK and across Europe in recent weeks.

Al-Khuraiji said the Saudi aviation sector is making strong gains in terms of passenger numbers as international travel reopens, and has been spared the issues blighting airports in other regions. —Agencies

IMF sees heavy hit to German economy from Russian gas stop

FRANKFURT: Halting Russian gas supplies to Germany would cost Europe's largest economy 1.5 percent of its GDP in 2022, the International Monetary Fund said Wednesday, as concerns mount that Moscow will further squeeze supply.

This year's loss would be followed by a negative impact of 2.7 percent in 2023 and a 0.4-percent reduction in 2024, according to an IMF forecast where gas deliveries were assumed to have stopped on June 1. A potential shutoff "could cause sizable reductions in German economic activity and increases in inflation", the IMF said in a statement.

Supplies to Germany from Russia are currently at zero as the Nord Stream pipeline undergoes maintenance, after Moscow initially slashed deliveries by 60 percent in mid-June citing a delayed gas turbine repair. Berlin has rejected Gazprom's turbine explanation and believes Russia is squeezing supplies in retaliation for Western sanctions on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine. Works on the pipeline are due to finish Thursday, with officials watching closely to see if and at what levels supplies resume. —AFP

Business

Kuwait must capitalize on regional bond and sukuk markets: IBS report

A comprehensive legal framework needed to facilitate issuance and listing

KUWAIT: Kuwait must capitalize on the emergence of sizeable and dynamic regional bond and sukuk markets, said a report titled 'Developing the Bond Market in the State of Kuwait' by the Institute of Banking Studies. Within these regional markets, governments, and companies from across the region would be able to entice a large pool of institutional investors from neighboring countries, as well as investors from other parts of the world, the report said.

In brief, the state of Kuwait is urged to promote its financial markets and make them more profound for the sake of expanding the scope of financing opportunities for the private sector. Additionally, upgrading the financial system should be part and parcel of the authorities' strategy in order to diversify the economy of Kuwait away from oil-related activities. This, in return, will ease the financing of infrastructure projects of considerable size that lie ahead. In line with this, the legislative as well as institutional landscape should be optimized and tailored as much as possible to underpin the development of a corporate bond and Sukuk market.

Issues and challenges

The GCC economies were to bear an extra burden due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent fall in oil prices, budget deficits are becoming critical, and it is necessary to bridge them. By virtue of the unparalleled low interest environment, Bonds and Sukuk issuances were regarded as a significant source of funding within the region to cover deficits and weather worsening global economic conditions.

Based on statistics provided by London Stock Exchange on the recent Sovereign bond issuance of the state of Kuwait, which was on 20 March 2017 with 5 years and 10 years maturities, the size of issuance was \$3.5 billion and \$4.5 billion respectively, while the coupon was 2.75 percent and 3.5 percent respectively. The issue was oversubscribed 3.5 times, while the credit rating was AA and AA respectively. The \$27 billion book is the second biggest after Saudi, reflecting the double-A quality of State of Kuwait. This issue marked the debut of the State of Kuwait in the international debt markets. "Kuwait has scarcity value and is arguably the strongest credit in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) from a balance sheet perspective," said an emerging market syndicate banker after the deal.

Under good practices, the government should be empowered enough to lend to financially viable proj-

ects, meanwhile being capable of managing deficit prudently; however, this should be an agile behavior. The government should have in place a sound framework as well as the capacity for public debt and cash management with well-determined objectives. It should ensure that the macro-economy is stable along with inflation being under control. Additionally, the financial sector should be competitive, solvent, and adequately liberalized (e.g., in setting interest rates and making credit

bond/sukuk market, government and involved parties' efforts are growing by leaps and bounds to accomplish the development of the market. However, supporting measures, procedures and policies need to be in place. In addition, a couple of challenges and setbacks pertaining to transparency and disclosure are to be overcome to guarantee soundness of the market operation, as well as boosting investor confidence. As for sukuk, it requires a comprehensive legal framework in place to

in return, enhance Kuwait's financial position and place it among the most attractive and developed markets. Consequently, it would attract more institutional and foreign investments to the local market. To this end, Boursa Kuwait is to upgrade the Kuwaiti capital market's infrastructure and business environment to be in line with the international standards and developed vigorous processes, policies, and procedures for all its operations. In addition, the Capital Markets Authority is

Figure 1: State of Kuwait sovereign issue with 10 years maturity by investor (2017)

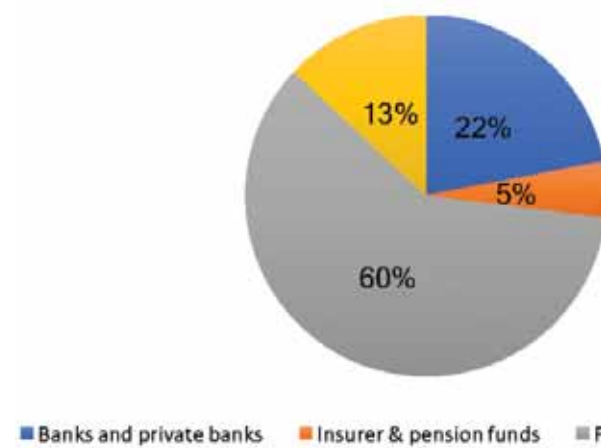


Figure 2: State of Kuwait sovereign issue with 5 years maturity by investor (2017)



decisions).

A considerable primary debt issuance market for GCC bonds and sukuk was witnessed in 2020, as a value of \$132.7 billion was issued, a growth of 16 percent year-on-year from \$114.2 billion issued last year was recorded. Moreover, 2020 saw a total of 360 issuances compared to 409 issuances in 2019, denoting a decrease in the number of issuances, but a growth in the average issue size in 2020 as compared to the previous year. The GCC Bond and Sukuk markets cover GCC Sovereign Issuances and GCC Corporate Issuances, but they do not include Central Banks Local Issuances (CBLIs).

The State of Kuwait is currently developing a

facilitate its issuance and listing. Most importantly, coordination and collaboration between involved parties and stakeholders, public or private, is imperative for the establishment of the market. In the same vein, IMF brought to the fore that: "The authorities should also establish a formal coordination mechanism between the agencies overseeing the financial sector".

Key bodies are expected to play a crucial role in the development of the market, namely the Capital Markets Authority, the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Kuwait, and clearing agency. Launching bond and sukuk markets in the state of Kuwait will increase stock exchange trading volumes and help in obtaining new promotions on international indices, which would,

currently making considerable efforts to finalize the regulatory and legislative structure for trading indices funds, which covers local indices that measure the performance of the stock exchange and its various sectors, similar to what is applied in regional and global markets. In the same vein, Boursa Kuwait is to upgrade the Repurchase Agreement (Repo) legislation following the launch of the bond market. This upgrade is attributed to the great conviction among some of the active parties in Boursa Kuwait whom this tool serves the most, and the view that dealing with it in the stock market may be open upon finishing and setting its regulations. Meanwhile, other investment instruments are available to serve the stock market.



BRUSSELS, Belgium: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen speaks during a press conference after the College meeting on the 'Save gas for a safe winter' package at the EU headquarters in Brussels on July 20, 2022. — AFP

Facing Russian 'blackmail', EU seeks to cut gas use

BRUSSELS: The European Commission on Wednesday urged EU countries to reduce demand for natural gas by 15 percent over the coming months to secure winter stocks and defeat Russian "blackmail". Announcing an emergency plan, EU commissioners also asked member states to give Brussels special powers to impose compulsory energy rationing if Russia cuts off Europe's gas lifeline.

A total shutdown of imports or a sharp reduction in the east to west flow could have a catastrophic effect on the European economy, shutting factories and forcing households to turn down the heat. Last year, Russia represented 40 percent of the EU's total gas use and any further disruption to supply would also push consumer prices ever higher and raise the risk of a deep recession.

"Russia is blackmailing us," European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen told reporters.

"Russia is using energy as a weapon and therefore, in any event, whether it's a partial major cut off of Russian gas or total cut off... Europe needs to be ready." Russian President Vladimir Putin has played hot and cold in recent days with his threats to cut off gas deliveries to the bloc of 27 members, but Brussels is asking EU countries to prepare for the worst.

Since Moscow invaded Ukraine on February 24 and the West responded with sanctions, Russia has begun reducing its gas deliveries, apparently to prevent EU countries from replenishing reserves.

'Not enough'

The EU has scrambled to replace Russia's supply from farther-flung sources such as the United States, Norway, Azerbaijan and Algeria. But the International Energy Agency warned on Monday that non-Russian gas resources "are simply not going to be enough".

According to the EU plan, each member state should "do its utmost" to reduce gas consumption by at least 15 percent between August 2022 and March 2023, compared to the average of the last five years over the same period. By the end of September, countries will have to detail their roadmap for achieving this. EU energy commissioner Kadri Simson also outlined a proposal, which like the rest of the package will have to be approved by member states, to give the EU powers to impose demand cuts.

"If the member states are not making sufficient progress, or the situation deteriorates, we propose that the commission can declare a state of EU alert at any moment," she said. "This will trigger a mandate or obligation for the member states to meet the 15 percent cost reduction target." There will be resistance among some EU capitals to mandatory measures.

But Von der Leyen told reporters the "binding phase" would only be triggered in the case of "a drastic reduction of Russian gas or a complete cut off of Russian gas".

'Winter test'

The plan showed that the commission's main focus is on energy consumption by electric power companies and industry, since households make up only 37 percent of total gas demand. Brussels also asks that states "switch to nuclear power where it is an option" and advises countries wishing to abandon atomic energy to postpone planned closures of nuclear power plants. And to minimize interruptions to gas-fired power plants, diesel-powered backup generators should be able to take over "for at least five days". The EU's plans to survive the winter comes amid increased concern over how badly a Russian gas crunch would affect the European economy in the coming months.

The plan will not include an energy price cap, an idea that has been strongly endorsed by the US but that Europeans have so far excluded as a viable fix to their overdependence on Russia.

"This winter will be a test for the EU's energy system and for our Union as a whole. And it is a test that we will pass if we act with solidarity and resolve," Simson said. — AFP

TotalEnergies says Myanmar exit now effective

YANGON: French oil and gas giant TotalEnergies said Wednesday that its planned withdrawal from Myanmar, announced six months ago, has now come into effect.

"TotalEnergies has definitively pulled out of Myanmar", the energy giant said in a statement.

"In line with the six-month timetable laid down in the agreements, the withdrawal is effective from Wednesday." The French energy giant and US partner Chevron had announced in January that they would pull out of the Yadana gas field, with TotalEnergies citing the "worsening" situation for human rights and the rule of law. "In light of the exceptional situation, TotalEnergies has chosen to withdraw from Myanmar without seeking any financial compensation for its assets," the company had said at the time.

The field in the Andaman Sea provides electricity to Myanmar and neighboring Thailand. TotalEnergies had been under pressure from human rights groups to cut its financial links to the junta since the army seized power from a civilian government in February 2021. Human Rights Watch says natural gas projects are Myanmar's single largest source of foreign currency revenue, generating more than \$1 billion every year.

TotalEnergies had said its withdrawal from Yadana and the MGTG pipeline would take effect on July 20.

The company's 31.4-percent stake in the Yadana gas field was the biggest in a consortium that included Chevron, Thai firm PTTEP and Myanmar's army-controlled MOGE. The French company's stake was to be taken over by PTTEP and Chevron. While Chevron would now hold the biggest stake at 41.1 percent, a spokesman for the US company confirmed its plan to leave Myanmar, though it had not yet fixed a date to do so. The spokesman told AFP Chevron favored an orderly and planned transition. PTTEP said earlier this week that it would take over the running of the Yadana gas field in July. — AFP

S Africa inflation hits 13-year high in June

JOHANNESBURG: Inflation in South Africa surged to its highest level in 13 years in June, driven primarily by rising prices for food and transport, official data showed on Wednesday.

"Annual consumer inflation jumped to 7.4 percent in June from 6.5 percent in May," the statistics agency, StatsSA, said in a statement. "The June rate is the highest reading since May 2009 (8.0 percent) when the economy was facing the headwind of currency depreciation during the global financial crisis." Inflation has soared to the highest level in decades in many countries, fuelled by the war in Ukraine and the easing of COVID restrictions.

That has forced central banks to raise interest rates, risking the prospect of recession as higher borrowing costs hurt businesses and consumers.

South African economist Thabi Leoka said the June increase was "much higher" than analysts had anticipated. She said the central bank was expected to hike



SEOUL: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen speaks at the LG Science Park in Seoul on July 19, 2022. — AFP

Yellen warns of risks to US economy, hopes to avoid recession

WASHINGTON: The US economy is on solid footing and in good position to avoid a downturn, even amid rising interest rates, but still faces a number of global hazards, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday. While it will be "appropriate" to see slower growth now that the world's largest economy has recovered from the pandemic downturn, the American consumer remains in good shape amid a strong job market, Yellen told NPR.

But inflation is imposing a "substantial burden" on families, and getting prices down is a "top priority" for President Joe Biden, she said. The Federal Reserve has been raising interest rates aggressively in a bid to quell demand and ease price pressures, after annual consumer price inflation surged 9.1 percent in June.

But the challenge for the Fed is to tame inflation without causing a downturn. Achieving a "soft landing... will require skill and good luck," Yellen said, but noted that she is "hopeful that that's achievable."

However, "let's be clear-eyed there are risks that our economy faces," she cautioned, including the ongoing war in Ukraine and other developments that could further raise food and energy prices, as well as the slowdown in China. — AFP

its benchmark interest rate by half a percentage point on Thursday.

That would mark the second consecutive 50 basis points hike, after the bank brought its repo rate up to 4.75 percent in May in the steepest increase in years.

Monetary policymakers of Africa's most industrialized power had sought to keep inflation within a range of three to six percent. Fuel prices in the country were up by 45.3 percent in June, marking the largest annual increase since 2009, according to StatsSA.

Prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages were instead up 8.6 percent year-on-year, with bread and cereals up 11.2 percent, while oils and fats jumped 32.5 percent driving the surge, it said.

"Higher commodity prices have fed through to increases in food and energy inflation, but core inflation has also been rising steadily," David Rees, senior emerging markets economist at investment management firm Schroders, said in a statement. Rees said there were concerns that inflation was yet to reach its peak across emerging markets at a time where countries were already under pressure as investors increasingly priced in a global recession. In South Africa, while petrol and diesel inflation was projected to "come off quite sharply" in the second half of the year, "there appeared to still be upside risks to food inflation," he added. — AFP

Business

Boubyan Bank records net profits of KD 33 million for first half of 2022

Al-Majed: Positive results are outcome of our expansion plans and increase in our market share

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank has announced KD 53 million in operating profits for the first half of this year, while continuing to allocate provisions amounting to KD 22 million, thereby recording KD 33 million in net profits at a growth rate of 54 percent compared with last year, with an earnings per share of 8.5 fils.

Boubyan Bank's Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer, Adel Al-Majed stated: "Thanks to Almighty Allah, we ended H1 of this year with positive results which are the outcome of our expansion plans and the increase in our market share."

He went on to add: "For the bank and other various economic sectors, this year represents our return to normal life after two years of instability due to the pandemic. God willing, this year will be a remarkable one in our journey with more expansion plans."

Positive results

Al-Majed highlighted the most significant numbers recorded by the bank during the first half of this year where the total of customers' deposits grew by 4 percent to reach KD 5.6 billion, while the financing portfolio grew by 12 percent to reach KD 5.7 billion, and with an operating income growth of 10 percent to reach KD 102 million compared to last year. Speaking on the bank's market share, the bank's share of local financing increased to 11 percent.

"Over the past years, Boubyan started its international expansion journey as it succeeded in completing the acquisition of the Bank of London and the Middle East, where Boubyan's current holding stands at approximately 71 percent, and subsequently launched Nomo Bank in Kuwait and UK which was the first Islamic digital bank from London that offers its services to Boubyan Bank's customers and non-cus-

tomers," Al-Majed added.

9 international awards

Al-Majed also stated: "Over the past two years, the bank's success of the strategy it has been adopting since many years is reflected in the strength of the bank and

kept the bank in the lead despite the fierce competition."

Boubyan Bank ended H1 of the year 2022 by receiving a record number of international awards from distinctive and prestigious institutions such as Euromoney, MEED and Global Finance. The bank received 9 different awards in digital services, creativity and innovations, CSR and SMEs' support in addition to MENA's Banker of the Year Award in Islamic Finance received by the CEO of Boubyan Bank, Adel Al-Majed, as well as the award for the Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait.

Al-Majed was also recognized this year as he was named "Arab Banker of the Year 2021", making him the first Kuwaiti banker ever to receive the highest recognition given by the Union of Arab Banks for excellent achievers in the Arab financial and banking business.

Stanford Graduate School of Business hosted Al-Majed who gave a lecture to MBA students about the bank's success story, thus becoming one of the most prominent leaders who were invited to give similar lectures; this included the CEOs of major companies.

Various events and activities

During H1 2022, the bank organized many events and social activities targeting various segments, especially during the holy month of Ramadan, where the bank organized its annual competition for the memorization of the Glorious Quran with the participation of 1,000+ participants in addition to Steps Campaign that aimed to support visually-impaired patients.

The bank also launched its "Neqsat Boubyan" initiative to offer ready-made meals to needy families.



Adel Al-Majed



Moreover, the bank celebrated Gargee'an with the kids, one of the traditional occasions in Kuwait, in addition to sponsoring many activities and events organized by various entities.

During H1 2022, Boubyan Bank and Visa International celebrated the launch of Boubyan's Visa FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Prepaid Card in the presence of many of officers from the bank, VISA International, media professionals, social media influencers, and customers of the bank.

Moreover, as a part of its health programs, the bank launched the first initiative of its kind in Kuwait concerned with psychological well-being to emphasize the bank's CSR role and to highlight its outstanding contributions in many areas serving the society by launching initiatives that focus on developing the society and positively influencing it.

Digital excellence and sustainability

During H1 2022, the Digital Cooperation Organization

"DCO" announced that Boubyan Bank joined them as an observer, thus completing the number of observers at the organization. This contributes to the fulfillment of DCO's mission that aims to facilitate the means of international cooperation in the area of digital inclusion, and enable everyone to contribute to the digital economy.

To continue highlighting the international and regional developments of sustainability and governance, Boubyan Bank issued its second sustainability report for 2021 that tackles sustainability indicators as well as the effect thereof on environmental, social, and economic sectors in addition to corporate governance, which are all among the important aspects to evaluate the bank's performance and positioning locally and regionally. Furthermore, the bank started reducing the use of plastic across all its branches and main buildings to contribute to safeguarding our environment and to reduce plastic waste, which is among most hazardous materials to our environment, and to protect it from the negative consequences of the increased use of plastic.

UK will seize 'benefits of Brexit': Zahawi

LONDON: Britain's new finance minister on Tuesday set out how Britain would seize the "benefits of Brexit" by revoking EU laws, despite fears in some quarters over excessive deregulation in London.

Andrew Bailey, the governor of the Bank of England, meanwhile said that in the battle to control inflation, next month's meeting on interest rates would not rule out a 50 basis point increase.

Nadhim Zahawi set out his plans in his first major speech as Chancellor of the Exchequer, at the annual Mansion House speech in the capital. "The British people can rest assured that we are getting on and delivering the benefits of Brexit," he said. Zahawi, who replaced Rishi Sunak as finance minister earlier this month, set out his plans to "unleash growth across our financial services sector" and "unlock tens of billions of pounds of investment into the UK economy".

The government announced it would set out planned legislation to "repeal hundreds of pieces of EU retained law" governing the finance sector.

They would be replaced with "an agile and coherent regime fit for the UK", a finance ministry statement said. "Consumers will remain protected, with legislation ensuring that victims of scams can be compensated while also acting to protect access to cash for the millions of people that rely on it," said Zahawi.

'We are not doomed'

The governor of the Bank of England set out his vision of monetary policy in his own speech at the Mansion House. "We are not doomed, far from it," said Bailey, reviewing Britain's current economic problems. "But we are in difficult times."

From a monetary perspective, the challenge of inflation was the largest in a quarter of a century, he said. But he insisted: "Let me be quite clear, there are no ifs or buts in our commitment to the 2-percent inflation target. That's our job, and that's what we will do."

And "a 50 basis point increase will be among the choices on the table when

we next meet", he added. The chancellor's Mansion House speech, given at the official residence of the Lord Mayor of the City of London, is habitually used by Britain's finance ministers to set out major policy statements.

That means the markets will be closely following it, especially as critics of current government policy say that it has already gone too far in down the deregulation path. Zahawi subscribes to the same view as his predecessor, Sunak—a candidate running to take over as prime minister from Boris Johnson—who had promised a new "Big Bang" in the finance sector after the deregulation of the 1980s.

Tackling inflation

On Tuesday, Zahawi confirmed that he was looking at measures to give the executive more powers to intervene in financial regulation, fuelling fears of a showdown with the Bank of England.

Bank of England officials including Bailey have defended the institution's independence after criticism over being too timid in the fight against inflation. UK inflation spiked in May to a 40-year peak of 9.1 percent, a level set to hit double figures this year.



Nadhim Zahawi

Zahawi said that one of his priorities in the coming months would be to get inflation under control.

The new legislation the government is proposing would give the financial regulators more responsibility for setting the rules governing UK financial services. And for the first time they would be given a secondary responsibility: to promote growth and competitiveness in the sector, said the government. But a parliamentary report in June warned against "any inappropriate weakening of the UK's strong regulatory standards", which could "reduce the financial resilience of the UK's financial system and undermine international confidence in that system". —AFP

China to fine ride-hailing giant Didi over \$1bn

BEIJING: China is preparing to hit ride-hailing giant Didi with a fine of more than \$1 billion to wrap up a long-running probe, media reports said, boosting investor hopes that the country's tech crackdown is winding down. Didi, once known as China's answer to Uber, has been one of the highest-profile targets of the widespread clampdown on the sector, which saw years of runaway growth and supersized monopolies before regulators stepped in.

The fine-imposed over Didi's cybersecurity practices would amount to more than four percent of its \$27.3 billion total revenue last year and pave the way for its new share listing in Hong Kong. The Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday.

Citing unnamed sources familiar with the matter, the Journal said that once the fine is announced, the government will ease its restrictions on Didi's operations.

The firm was prevented from adding new users and its apps were removed from online stores in China by regulators. The WSJ report triggered a rally in Chinese tech shares in Hong Kong on Wednesday, with investors hopeful that the two-year regulatory storm that swept the sector was nearing its end.

E-commerce giant Alibaba soared four percent, while gaming titan Tencent gained 2.5 percent in early trade. Didi got into hot water in June last year after it pressed ahead with an IPO in the United States, reportedly against Beijing's wishes.

Days after it raised \$4.4 billion in New York, Chinese authorities launched a cybersecurity probe into the company, sending its shares plunging.

If confirmed, Didi's fine would be the biggest imposed on a Chinese tech company since Alibaba was told to pay \$2.75 billion in April 2021 as punishment for anti-competitive practices.

Didi did not respond immediately to an emailed request for comment. Its shareholders voted to delist the firm from New York in May. That move is expected to pave the way for a Hong Kong listing that was reportedly put on hold after China's top internet watchdog told executives their proposals to prevent security and data leaks were insufficient. China's regulatory crackdown has eased this year as it grapples with the economic fallout from its zero-COVID strategy, with the country struggling to reach its 5.5 percent growth target. However, there is still a strict regulatory environment for tech firms: President Xi Jinping last month called for stronger oversight and better security in the financial tech arena. —AFP

Egypt's LNG exports to Europe receive boost amid gas crisis

CAIRO: Egypt is beefing up its liquefied natural gas exports to Europe, paving the way to becoming a regional energy centre, as the continent's biggest gas supplier, Russia, disrupts supply. In the first six months of this year, more than 72 per cent of Egypt's LNG exports went to Europe, compared with 29 per cent in all of last year, Refinitiv LNG flows data shows.

Although, the North African country has limited natural gas itself, piling in comparison to the US, the world's top producer, or Russia in second place, it has built a role through agreements with partners and its strategic geographic location.

The US produced 934.2 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas last year, about 23 per cent of the world's total, while Russia produced 701.7 bcm and Egypt produced 67.8 bcm, according to the latest BP Statistical Review of World Energy. "Egypt is not going to make up for all the Russian volumes," Olumide Ajayi, senior LNG analyst at Refinitiv, told The National.

However, "there is momentum for Egypt to become a regional energy exporter to Europe and connect Europe to the region", he said. Last month, Egypt, Zionist entity and the EU signed a preliminary agreement to increase LNG sales to Europe.

As part of the deal, Zionist entity will send more gas through Egypt, which has refineries to liquefy it for export to EU countries. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, speaking at a news conference with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Monday, said Egypt "could export all the natural gas that it can produce from the Eastern Mediterranean" to help to ease the Europe gas crisis.

While that means plugging Europe's need for fossil fuels in the short term, the partnership will also help in "Egypt's ambitious vision to become a prominent centre for the production and export of clean energy, especially green hydrogen, solar and wind energy", El Sisi said.



An LNG terminal under construction near Wilhelmshaven.

Russian gas accounted for about 45 per cent of EU's imports in 2021 and about 40 per cent of its total consumption, according to the International Energy Agency. Supply disruptions and artificial tightening since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February have led European countries to seek other natural gas sources. The Nord Stream 1, the biggest single gas pipeline between Russia and Europe, has been shut down for maintenance since July 11 and some worry it may not reopen on Thursday as planned.

IEA executive director Fatih Birol warned this week that immediate measures must be taken across Europe to prevent a "major gas crunch" and advised the EU to fill its gas storage plants to above 90 per cent of their capacity to survive the coming winter. To hit that level, Europe has to increase domestic production, import more pipeline fuel from countries such as Azerbaijan and Norway, and import

more LNG. Global LNG supply rose 7.5 per cent last year from 2020 levels to 520 bcm, led by the US, which registered a 49 per cent increase in exports to 98 bcm, according to Refinitiv's LNG Outlook 2022 report.

Egypt reported a fivefold year-on-year increase in LNG to 8.8 bcm, supported by the resumption of operations at the Damietta plant in February 2021 after nine years and the incentives provided by record high prices in the export market.

Between 2015 and 2019, Egypt was a net importer of gas as supply failed to keep pace with demand. The country returned to net exporter status, largely due to the discovery of offshore natural gasfield Zohr in 2015, which was brought on stream in December 2017. Considered the largest field in the Eastern Mediterranean region, Zohr was estimated in August 2015, by Italian energy company Eni, to hold 850 bcm of gas. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

UKRAINE'S REOPENING CINEMAS OFFER REFUGE FROM REALITY-AND AIR RAIDS

From the Hollywood blockbuster to the high-brow film noir, the silver screen offers a few hours' peace in a darkened refuge from the mundane grind of the nine to five. But Ukraine's filmgoers have begun seeking literal shelter in subterranean screenings offering protection from the ever-present threat of missiles from above. After Russia's invasion in February shuttered picture houses nationwide and production ground to a halt, the country's resilient film industry is making a tentative comeback.

KINO42, in downtown Kyiv, is among around 20 of the city's 50 or so cinemas that have reopened in recent weeks. As the capital's only underground cinema, it is a unique offering for movie buffs wary of air raids. The screen-which has 42 seats around four meters (13 feet) below street level-reopened in June, its program of upcoming screenings displayed on a backlit board above the newly added words "cinema shelter".

"It's a literal cinema shelter since it's located in a basement," Ilko Gladstein, a partner in the business, told AFP at the recent launch of its program of Ukrainian classics. The theatre, which first opened in 2019, has always been underground-but while this was once an unremarkable aspect of its architecture, Gladstein says it has become a "unique selling point". "KINO42 is the safest cinema in Kyiv right now. We don't interrupt screenings during air raids," he told AFP.

Sold out
The 37-year-old film festival manager and movie producer has been surprised by the size of the evening audiences,



Zhovten cinema director Yulia Antypova, 46, talks to an AFP journalist during an interview in Kyiv.

although the schedule has been bumped forward to accommodate an 11:00 pm wartime curfew. "June is a tough month for film distribution, but I can see that people are hungry for films. We've held three charity screenings and sent around \$1,000 to the Ukrainian army," he said. "It gives us the confidence to know not only that we are entertaining people, but also that we are doing something important for the troops on the front."

Unlike multiplexes that screen the big Hollywood releases of the day, KINO42 has always prioritized Ukrainian cinema, and preserving the country's cultural identity has become especially important since the invasion. The venue has teamed up with the Dovzhenko Centre,

the nation's biggest film archive, and has expanded from one weekly screening to three, all sold out. At a launch event on Thursday last week KINO42 put on "Odd, Bizarre and Fantastic," a series of animated shorts from the 1980s and '90s, with tickets all snapped up three days before the screening.

Stanislav Bitiutskiy, a 38-year-old researcher at the Dovzhenko Centre, says every social or political cataclysm forces a nationwide reckoning over Ukrainian identity. "It first happened during the Maidan revolution," he told AFP, describing the aftermath of the deadly 2014 clashes between protesters and security forces that led to the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovich. "Now, once



Members of the public watch 'Odd, Bizarre and Fantastic', a Ukrainian 1980s/1990s animation showcase, in KINO24 in Kyiv. — AFP photos

again, we need to redefine our identity by means of art."

'Another reality'

A little further down the street, the much larger above-ground Zhovten picture house-which is nearly a century old-was among the first of Kyiv's reopened venues. The multi-screen playhouse sold out a 400-seat auditorium on the launch night of its Ukrainian classics program with a showing of Sergey Paradzhanov's 1965 opus, "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors."

"We wanted to support the country's economy as well as people's psychological wellbeing," said its director Yulia Antypova, 46. "Psychologists say that this kind of mental decompression, and the

opportunity to escape to another reality, are extremely important."

Here, the possibility of missile strikes is a constant threat. Zhovten interrupts screenings for 20 minutes when the sirens begin and asks audiences to get to a nearby shelter. If the alert lasts longer, the screening is cancelled and the customers are asked to come back with their tickets another day. The return to the silver screen has been gradual, with ticket sales about 30 percent of pre-war figures. Attendance drops every time a Russian missile slams into a civilian area. "The human psyche is quite resilient though," says Antypova. "In a few days, attendance recovers-until the next strike." — AFP



Victoria Beckham

Victoria Beckham joins Paris Fashion Week

Victoria Beckham will join the official line-up of Paris Fashion Week with a live runway show this autumn, the organizers announced on Wednesday. The British designer and former Spice Girl has previously presented in London and New York, though she has not staged a live runway show since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

She will present her new luxury collection during the spring 2023 women's ready-to-wear shows, which run between September 26 and October 4. Paris Fashion Week has poached a number of British talents recently, including up-and-coming men's designer Craig Green, who returned to the catwalk in June, also for the first time since the pandemic.

Beckham last held a live show for her luxury brand in London in February 2020, then put on online shows in September 2020 and February 2021. She was notably absent from London Fashion Week in February, having previously stated that high costs were making it difficult to stage live shows. Beckham joined the London program in 2018 to mark the 10th anniversary of her brand, after several years in New York. — AFP

African cheetahs to be spotted soon in India thanks to Namibia deal

India and Namibia signed a deal Wednesday to bring cheetahs into the South Asian country, with the first batch of eight wild cats set to arrive next month, officials said. India has been working to relocate the animals since 2020, when the Supreme Court announced that African cheetahs could be introduced in a "carefully chosen location" on an experimental basis.

India in the past had Asiatic cheetahs, but the species was officially declared extinct within the country by 1952. The deal inked Wednesday will see Namibia's African cheetahs flown in next month to a wildlife sanctuary in the central state of Madhya Pradesh for captive breeding-a move expected to coincide with India's 75th Independence Day celebrations.

"Completing 75 glorious years of Independence with restoring the fastest terrestrial flagship species, the cheetah, in India, will rekindle the ecological dynamics of the landscape," India's environment minister Bhupender Yadav tweeted. "Cheetah reintroduction would also greatly enhance local community livelihoods through eco-tourism prospects in the long term."



scriber loss was expected but it remains a sore point for a company that is wholly dependent on subscription revenue from consumers," said analyst Ross Benes. Benes added that "unless it finds more franchises that resonate widely, it will eventually struggle to stay ahead of competitors that are after its crown."

Fewer free rides

Netflix executives have made it clear the company will get tougher on sharing logins and passwords, which allow many to access the platform's content without paying. "It's great that our members love Netflix movies and TV shows so much they want to share them more broadly," director of product innovation Chengyi Long said Monday in a blog post.

"But today's widespread account sharing between households undermines our

long term ability to invest in and improve our service." Long said that an "add a home" subscription feature that Netflix in March began testing in Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru will be expanded to Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Netflix said it is aiming to have an account-sharing payment system deployed broadly by next year. Meanwhile, Netflix is working with Microsoft to launch a cheaper subscription plan that includes advertisements, which The New York Times has reported could launch by the end of this year.

Netflix opted to develop the lowest-cost offering after a disappointing first quarter in which it lost subscribers for the first time in a decade-and after years of resistance against the very idea of running ads. Microsoft will be responsible for designing and managing the platform for advertisers who want to serve ads to Netflix users. "These earning results buy them time, and they need time to focus on stopping the bleeding," analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group told AFP. "Netflix is facing a significant amount of competition; to hold on as well as they have is an example of how resilient they are but they are not out of the woods." — AFP



Manolo Blahnik wins decades-long legal battle in China

Luxury shoemaker Manolo Blahnik announced Tuesday they had won a 22-year legal battle in China over a trademark dispute, after the country's top court ruled in its favor. The dispute started when a competitor started calling itself "Manolo & Blahnik" in 1999, a move approved by the Chinese authorities a year later. The British company, named after the company's founder and creative director, filed suit with the Chinese authorities in 2000.

Part of the problem, however, was that the Chinese system favors a first-come, first-served principle in the registering of trademarks. The case has only now been resolved by the Supreme People's Court of China. "We are truly humbled and grateful for the support we have received in China and internationally, both from within the fashion industry and beyond," said Spanish designer Blahnik in a company statement.

Blahnik's creations are known the world over, especially after they were one of the luxury accessories featured in the hit television series "Sex and the City". The legal battle meant they were kept out of the potentially lucrative Chinese market for more than two decades.



Manolo Blahnik

"We look forward with excitement to joining its dynamic future by sharing Manolo's story, creations and passions," said Blahnik's niece, company chief executive Kristina Blahnik. "Manolo Blahnik will continue to vigorously protect its trademarks worldwide in the interests of my uncle Manolo, our customers and our business," she added. Several western groups have experienced similar problems in China, discovering that when they tried to sell to that market a local firm had already set up a similarly sounding company.

In 2016, basketball mega-star Michael Jordan won part of his trademark suit against a China-based sportswear company, following a years-long struggle for control over the rights to his Chinese name. The rival company had used a Chinese rendering of the athlete's name widely known by the country's consumers to break into the market. In the same year, Disney won a copyright dispute over a Chinese knock-off of its animated movie Cars. — AFP

Danish 'Geranium' restaurant crowned world's best

Danish establishment "Geranium" has been crowned number one in the coveted list of the World's 50 Best Restaurants this year, which left a bad taste for shunned French chefs. The ceremony was due to be held in Moscow this year but was moved to London after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, and there were no Russian restaurants ranked. "Geranium" is run by chef Rasmus Kofoed in Copenhagen and is the second Danish restaurant to win in a row, taking over from Noma last year. Peruvian restaurant "Central" in Lima came runner-up in the coveted list of the best, established by British trade magazine Restaurant in 2002. Spanish restaurants "Disfrutar" in Barcelona and "Diverxo" in Madrid came third and fourth. Inspired by nature, Kofoed's restaurant received the first three Michelin stars for Denmark in 2016.

The awards named Colombian Leonor Espinosa as the "world's best female

chef" and her restaurant Leo was ranked 48th in the list. Despite France's famed cuisine, only three French restaurants-all in Paris-featured in the top 50: "Septime" in 22nd, "Le Clarence" in 28th and "Arpege" in 31st. The list is selected by 1,080 independent culinary experts including chefs, specialist journalists and restaurant owners who note their experiences in the past 18 months under the aegis of the magazine.

The experts are divided up into 27 regions with 40 voters each and they can each vote for 10 restaurants including at least three outside their region. The list, sponsored by several brands, often comes under fire, especially by French chefs who accuse it of complacency and a lack of transparency. French critics, as well as those from Japan and the United States, established their own "La Liste" in 2015, ranking 1,000 restaurants worldwide. — AFP





In this picture Kaleem Ullah Khan, locally known as the 'Mango Man', shows a successful graft of different varieties of mangoes on the same 100-year-old tree at his farm in Malihabad. — AFP photos

In this picture workers rest after sorting out harvested mangoes at an orchard in Malihabad.

India's mango man, father of 300 varieties

Every day, Indian octogenarian Kaleem Ullah Khan wakes at dawn, prays, then ambles about a mile to his 120-year-old mango tree, which he has coaxed into producing more than 300 varieties of the beloved fruit over the years. His footsteps quicken as he draws nearer and his eyes light up as he peers closely at the branches through his spectacles, caressing the leaves and sniffing the fruits to see if they are ripe. "This is my prize of toiling hard in the scorching sun for decades," the 82-year-old said in his orchard in the small town of Malihabad.

"For the naked eye, it's just a tree. But if you see through your mind, it's a tree, an orchard, and the biggest mango college in the world." The school dropout was just a teenager when he conducted his first experiment in grafting, or joining plant parts to create new mango varieties. He nurtured a tree to produce seven new kinds of fruit, but it blew down in a storm.

But since 1987, his pride and joy has been the 120-year-old specimen, source of more than 300 different types of mango, each with their own taste, texture, color and size, he says. One of the earliest varieties he named "Aishwarya" after Bollywood star and 1994 Miss World beauty pageant winner Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. To this day, it remains one of



Kaleem Ullah Khan, locally known as the 'Mango Man', peels a mango at his orchard in Malihabad.

his "best creations".

"The mango is as beautiful as the actress. One mango weighs more than a kilogram (two pounds), has a tinge of crimson to its outer skin and it tastes very sweet," Khan said. Others he named in honor of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and cricket hero Sachin Tendulkar. Another is "Anarkali", or pomegranate blossom, and has two layers of different skin and two different pulps, each with a distinctive aroma. "People will come and go, but the mangoes will remain forever,

and years after, whenever this Sachin mango will be eaten, people will remember the cricketer hero," said the father of eight.

Famed fruit

Standing nine meters (30 feet) tall, his treasured tree has a stout trunk with wide-spreading, thick branches that yield a pleasant shade against the Indian summer sun. The leaves are a patchwork of different textures and smells. In some places, they are yellow and glossy, and in others, a dark, dull green.

"No two fingerprints are the same, and no two mango varieties are similar. Nature has gifted mangoes with traits like humans," Khan said. His method for grafting is intricate, and involves diligently slicing a branch from one variety, leaving an open wound into which a branch from another variety is spliced and sealed with tape.

"I will remove the tape once the joint becomes sturdy, and hopefully, this new branch will be ready by next season, and bear a new variety after two years," he explained. Khan's skills have won him numerous accolades, among them one of India's highest civilian honors in 2008, as well as invitations to Iran and United Arab Emirates. "I can grow mangoes even in a desert," he says.

Climate threat

India is the largest producer of mangoes, accounting for half the global output. Malihabad, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, has more than 30,000 hectares of orchards and accounts for nearly 25 percent of the national crop. Mostly owned by families for generations, the orchards are a mango lover's paradise, with the best-known variety possibly the melt-in-the-mouth Dasherri, named for the nearby village where it originated in the 18th century.

But farmers are worried by climate change, with a heatwave this year destroying 90 percent of the local crop, according to the All-India Mango Growers Association. The number of varieties has also fallen, which Khan blames on intensive farming techniques and the widespread use of cheap fertilizers and insecticides. Growers also plant too many trees packed too tightly together, leaving no space for moisture and dew to settle on the leaves, he says. But he still has a good life, he says. "I recently moved into a new house inside the farm to be closer to my beloved tree, which I'll keep working on till my last breath." — AFP



In this picture vendors wait for customers at a roadside stall in Malihabad.



A man holds a recently harvested mango in Malihabad.

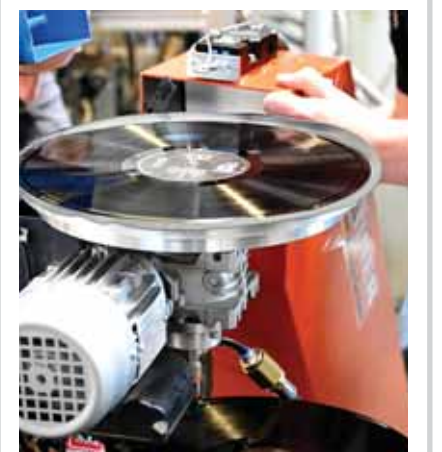


In this picture shows a mango variety from Kaleem Ullah Khan's 100-year-old mango tree in Malihabad.

World's first bioplastic vinyl record launched in the UK

A British firm says it has produced the world's first bioplastic vinyl record, which it hopes will reduce the need for highly toxic PVC. Bioplastics are derived from sources such as sugars and starches—rather than oil or gas—and do not create any toxic waste in their production. The new bioplastic vinyl by UK firm Evolution has been endorsed by NGO Music Declares Emergency, a climate change campaign group set up in 2019 by artists and music industry professionals.

"If Evolution can deliver an alternative guilt-free vinyl, it could get rid of one of the key polluting elements of the music industry completely," the NGO's co-founder Lewis Jamieson told AFP. Currently, all vinyl records are made from Polyvinyl chloride, or PVC—described by Greenpeace as "the most environmentally damaging plastic", whose production releases toxic, chlorine-based chemicals that are "building up in the water, air and food chain".



The issue has come to the fore thanks to the recent boom in vinyl sales—which surpassed \$1 billion last year in the United States alone (a first since the mid-1980s). Few anticipated the vinyl revival that began in the mid-2000s, so record companies found themselves scrambling to secure PVC—often relying on foreign firms with poor safety records.

Kyle Devine, who wrote a book on the environmental impact of the music industry, "Decomposed", said the PVC for 90 percent of US vinyls in 2015 came from a Thai company that was "pouring pollution into the Bangkok river". "PVC is an especially nasty plastic to make. It's a difficult one to dispose of, to recycle or decompose," he told AFP.

He added that it would be wrong to see the current dominance of streaming and digital music as an answer to the industry's climate impact. "Digital data still takes up space and uses energy. In fact, given the current size and spread of the music industry, it's likely more environmentally-taxing than ever before," Devine said.

Evolution released the first 20 records made with the bioplastic via a prize draw—a compilation of young artists including electro duo Bicep and US singer Angel Olsen. It has taken almost five years of testing due to delays caused by the Covid pandemic, but the firm says they are close to matching regular records. "It presses the same as PVC," said co-founder Marc Carey. "The final piece of the puzzle is there is a little bit of surface noise when you play the record so we are working on that. We think we are two weeks away from finalizing the recipe." Music Declares Emergency is clear that changing the production of vinyl records will do little for the bigger picture on climate change, but Jamieson said such innovations were symbolically important. "It reminds people that thinking sustainability doesn't mean you have to live in a mud hut and have no fun," he said. — AFP

'Counts' and 'castle districts': Hungary restores archaic names

Hungary's parliament on Tuesday approved legal changes to call counties "castle districts" and their commissioners "counts" in an effort to revive historical terms that has been ridiculed by the opposition. Since returning to power in 2010, nationalist premier Viktor Orban has embarked on what he has termed an "illiberal" revolution to restore

the central European country's "independence" after decades of communist rule that ended in 1989.

Under a constitutional amendment, counties will be called "castle districts" while regional government representatives will become "ispan," a medieval title equivalent to "count". The changes take effect next year. Restoring names abolished by

the communist regime "aims to preserve traditions" and to "strengthen the idea of national unity," said Mate Kocsis, parliamentary leader of the ruling Fidesz party.

Orban's party and its coalition partner have more than two-thirds of all parliamentary seats after Fidesz won another landslide victory in general elections in April. Opposition leaders have condemned

the change.

"Dealing with such a thing in the middle of galloping inflation, the fall of (the local currency) the forint and economic and energy crisis is ridiculous," Budapest mayor Gergely Karacsony said last month. "Forward to the past! Back to the Middle Ages!" quipped the opposition Democratic Coalition party. "Hungary now

has lords, and we buy the forint at the price of gold." In championing his "illiberal" revolution, Orban has frequently clashed with Brussels. On Friday, he said Europe had "shot itself in the lungs" with sanctions aimed at Russia over its war in Ukraine amid tensions over energy supplies. — AFP

Sports

American League keep the All-Star Game streak alive

Stanton and Buxton hit back-to-back home runs

News in brief

Roma sign forward Dybala

ROME: Roma on Wednesday announced the signing of Paulo Dybala on a three-year contract after the Argentina forward's deal with Juventus expired. "I arrive at a team that is growing, with a club that continues to lay an increasingly solid foundation for the future and a coach, Jose Mourinho, with whom it is a privilege to work," Dybala said in a statement. The 28-year-old had been touted for a move to Serie A runners-up Inter Milan, which would have ensured Champions League football next season. Roma finished sixth in Serie A last season. Sky reported that the contract was worth six million euros (\$6.08m) per season including bonuses. Dybala spent a trophy-laden seven years in Turin, scoring 115 goals for Juve, but has been dogged by injuries over the last two seasons. He joined Juve from Palermo in 2015, going on to win five Serie A titles and four Italian Cups. He also played in the team which reached the 2017 Champions League final but lost to Real Madrid.

Qatar's WCup final stadium

DOHA: The first official match at the Lusail stadium that is to host this year's World Cup final will be held next month. Qatar's national federation said Tuesday. Al Rayyan and Al Arabi will dispute a Qatar Stars League game in the 80,000 capacity stadium on August 11. Lusail is the biggest of the eight stadiums built or refurbished for the World Cup and will host the final on December 18. A spokesperson for Qatar's World Cup organizers said the match would be a "test event" and that an official inauguration would be held later. Lusail, whose futuristic design was inspired by the decoration on Arab bowls, will stage 10 World Cup matches in all, including several group matches, a quarter-final and semi-final as well as the final. After the tournament, the capacity is expected to be halved and much of the stadium space turned into community space.

Carlsen not to defend title

OSLO: Citing a lack of motivation, chess world number one Magnus Carlsen on Wednesday announced that he would not defend his world championship title in 2023, but stressed that he was not retiring from chess. "I am not motivated to play another match... I simply feel that I don't have a lot to gain. I don't particularly like it," Carlsen said in the first episode of his podcast "The Magnus Effect". Carlsen has repeatedly hinted that, bored with a title he has held for nearly 10 years, he may give up his throne without a fight. The 31-year-old crushed Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi 7.5-3.5 in his fifth straight victorious title match last December. "Although I'm sure a match would be interesting for historical reasons and all of that, I don't have any inclination to play and I will simply not play the match," Carlsen told the podcast released Wednesday.

Indian T20 owners confirmed

JOHANNESBURG: Cricket South Africa confirmed on Wednesday that the owners of six Indian Premier League teams were the successful bidders for franchises in the country's planned new Twenty20 tournament in January and February next year. CSA said there had been a "rigorous process over the past few months" before the franchise owners were confirmed. Tournament commissioner, former South African captain Graeme Smith, said the new league would be a world-class event. "We have already contracted a number of leading international players who will be announced shortly. Combined with our strong South African player base, fans and stakeholders can be assured that the new league will showcase exciting talent and skill," said Smith. CSA said there had been an open process which had attracted bids from 29 entities worldwide. Reliance Industries, owners of Mumbai Indians, will own a team based at Newlands in Cape Town, while Chennai Super Kings won the rights to a team with headquarters at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg. —From AFP

Tour takes to hills as France sizzles in heatwave

FOIX: As the nation baked in a searing heatwave on Tuesday, the Tour de France moved away from the cauldron-like stone citadel of Carcassonne toward the relative cool of the Pyrenean foothills. The weather has been a hot topic these last few days for the riders as they plough their way through the French countryside but it has also caused major problems for the organizers.

When the Tour arrived in the south-west on

LOS ANGELES: Yankees slugger Giancarlo Stanton and Minnesota's Byron Buxton hit back-to-back home runs to key the American League's 3-2 victory in the 92nd Major League Baseball All-Star Game on Tuesday. Stanton, who has 24 homers in the first half of the season, belted a 457-foot game-tying two-run home run off Dodgers pitcher Tony Gonsolin in the top of the fourth. It flew into the Dodger Stadium bleachers left of center field-right about where Los Angeles native Stanton used to sit as a youngster when he could find a way to scare up a ticket to a Dodgers game.

"To hit one out there is incredible," said Stanton, whose flock of friends and family in attendance included the man who taught him to love the game, his father, Mike. "My Pops took me to my first Dodger game, showed me how have love for this game and now we're here," Stanton, a five-time All-Star, said as he accepted the All-Star Most Valuable Player trophy. "So it's just incredible."

Buxton, playing in his first All-Star Game, said Stanton's monster effort didn't exactly have him thinking about making it the first back-to-back homers in an All-Star Game since 2018. "I kind of just went up there and I was like I can't strike out twice," Buxton said. "The back of your head you've always got that thought, your first All-Star Game, you want to get up there and just get a base hit-and I put a better swing on it than I thought."

The three-run inning gave the American League a 3-2 lead and the AL's pitchers made it stand up. Cleveland hurler Emmanuel Clase struck out three in the ninth to end it. Atlanta's Ronald Acuna Jr. had led off the bottom of the first with a double down the left field line and scored when the Dodgers' Mookie Betts singled off American League starting pitcher Shane Bieber of Tampa Bay. Cardinals slugger Paul Goldschmidt then added a solo homer to put the National League up 2-0 after one inning.

In the first All-Star Game at Dodger Stadium since 1980, the Dodgers' three-time Cy Young Award-winner Clayton Kershaw opened the game on the mound for the National League under the



LOS ANGELES: Tony Gonsolin #26 of the Los Angeles Dodgers pitches against the American League during the 92nd MLB All-Star Game presented by Mastercard at Dodger Stadium on July 19, 2022. —AFP

eyes of a sell-out crowd of 52,518. The raft of celebrities in attendance included such Hollywood stars as Denzel Washington and Jon Hamm as well as former Los Angeles Lakers great Magic Johnson, tennis legend Billie Jean King and Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr.

'Just awesome'

But it was Los Angeles Angels star Shohei Ohtani who made an immediate impression with a single on the first pitch that Kershaw threw. "He didn't hit it over the fence, so it was a win and we can move on," said Kershaw, who knew Ohtani was going to

swing at the first pitch. "You kind of had to give him a heater there. Had to do it."

Shortly thereafter, when Ohtani strayed cheekily far from first base during Aaron Judge's at-bat, Kershaw picked him off-the first pick-off in the All-Star game since 2008. Kershaw struck out Yankees star Judge and after walking Rafael Devers retired Vladimir Guerrero Jr. to end his lone inning of the contest. "I tried to take it all in right before," said Kershaw, the 34-year-old hurler who has played his entire 15-year MLB career for the Dodgers and became just the 13th pitcher to open the midseason showcase in his home ballpark. "It was just awesome." —AFP

International Boxing Championship begins in Kuwait

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Boxing Championship will begin on Thursday at Kuwait Boxing Federation Hall, in Sabah Al-Salem in the presence of President of International Boxing Association Umar Kremlyov, President of Asia Boxing Confederation Pichai Chunhavajra, President of Arab Boxing Federation Yousef Al-Kazem, Senior Public Authority for Sport, Kuwait Olympic Committee officials as well as several local clubs' Chairmen and participating countries' diplomats.

The tournament which will continue until July 16 has 100 boxers from 20 countries participating in seven different weights, as per the Olympics system. The technical meeting was held Wednesday in the presence of teams coaches, followed by the electronic draw for all seven weights. Chairman of the

Stenson stripped of Ryder Cup captaincy as LIV rumors swirl

LONDON: Henrik Stenson was Wednesday stripped of the captaincy of the European Ryder Cup team, with the Swede understood to be on the verge of joining the Saudi-funded rebel LIV Golf series. Following discussions with Ryder Cup Europe officials, the decision was made to effectively sack the 46-year-old as skipper of the team for the event in Italy next year.

The move will deepen the rifts in a sport wracked by internal division, with a growing number of major stars defecting to the lucrative new circuit. Ryder Cup Europe said in a statement that Stenson's tenure as skipper for the competition against the United States in Rome next year had been brought to an end "with immediate effect".

"In light of decisions made by Henrik in relation to his personal circumstances, it has become clear that he will not be able to fulfill certain contractual obligations to Ryder Cup Europe," it said. The statement added: "Confirmation of the new 2023 European Ryder Cup captain will be made in due course. Ryder Cup Europe will be making no further comment on any aspect of the process until that time." Stenson, the 2016 British Open

Sunday, tens of thousands of litres of water were used to cool melting roads that reached temperatures of 60C, as the race inched towards the ramparts of the ancient Cathar fiefdom. Ineos's young gun Tom Pidcock cooled down by leaping into a fountain while Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard and all his Jumbo-Visma team wore cooling vests until the very last second before Tuesday's stage got underway.

Defending champion Tadej Pogacar of Slovenia admitted on Monday that the 30C heat on stage 11 had contributed to his own meltdown. "Suddenly I didn't feel very well," he said. "But I'm getting used to the heat." But the 149 remaining riders on the world's most prestigious bike race would escape the worst of the heat on Tuesday as the Tour wound into the cooler, higher altitude of the Pyrenees. The fin-

ish-line at Foix, though, was as unbearable as Carcassonne, albeit with screeching cicadas and the odd sunbathing lizard.

Ahead of stage 16, only 149 of the 172 original members of the peloton remained, many of them dropping out due to brain fog in the heat. The official road temperature on Tuesday was between 45C and 55C, with only one small stretch of tarmac needing cold water poured onto it. Two days ago 20,000 litres of water were used at the most critical point of melting roads. The Tour freebie distributing 'caravan', so keenly awaited by fans packed along the route, was blocked when one of the vehicles, a giant strawberry sponsored by a French supermarket, broke down. "Nothing to worry about," a gendarme told AFP at the scene. "It's normal in this heat." —AFP



Mohammad Al-Mansi

Board of Kuwait Boxing Federation Mohammad Mansi said "we are pleased to welcome the best amateur boxers in Europe, Africa and Asia in the first of its kind championship in the world, and we wish them all a pleasant stay in Kuwait."

Al-Mansi, who is the organizing committee chairman, said Kuwait team prepared well - starting with a 10-day training camp in Georgia, followed by another camping in Kuwait that was led by Tunisian coach Fathi Al-Misawi and Kuwaiti coaches Mohammad Al-Hamrani, Mansour Al-Ajmi and Abdallah Al-Enezi.

Al-Mansi thanked Interior, Health and Information ministries for their contribution to ensure success. He also thanked PAS and Kuwait Olympic Committee - adding that they all worked as a team to place Kuwait on top of the list of countries hosting continental and international boxing tournaments. Boxers from Saudi Arabia, Palestine,



Qatar, Germany, China, Bulgaria, Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, Hong Kong, Iran, Ukraine, Thailand, Yemen, Uzbekistan, Guinea Bissau, Ghana, UAE, Kazakhstan and Morocco will be participating.



TULSA: Henrik Stenson of Sweden lines up a putt on the seventh green during the second round of the 2022 PGA Championship at Southern Hills Country Club on May 20, 2022. —AFP

is bankrolled by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. Human Rights groups have criticized the venture saying it is being used to boost Saudi Arabia's international reputation, a phenomenon labeled "sportswashing". —AFP



FOIX: UAE Team Emirates team's Polish rider Rafal Majka cycles ahead of UAE Team Emirates team's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar in the Pyrenees mountains during the 16th stage of the 109th edition of the Tour de France cycling race on July 19, 2022. —AFP

Sports

Barcelona thrash Beckham's Inter Miami 6-0 in friendly

Raphinha marks his Barcelona debut with a goal

MIAMI: Raphinha marked his Barcelona debut with a goal and two assists as the Spanish giants kicked off their four match US tour with a comprehensive thrashing of David Beckham's Inter Miami on Tuesday. The Brazilian, signed from Premier League Leeds United earlier this month for around \$60 million, capped a promising first outing for his new club with a well taken first-half strike after Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang had given the La Liga giants the lead at a sold-out DRV Pnk Stadium.

With fellow new signing Robert Lewandowski not involved ahead of his official unveiling in Miami on Wednesday - following his move from Bayern Munich - it was left to Raphinha, 25, to get the thousands of Barcelona fans in attendance excited about the future. "I was very happy to score my first goal and to play well and I hope that continues," Raphinha said. "This is a system which favors me and I think I can really help the team moving forward." The Brazilian was making his debut alongside fellow newcomer Andreas Christensen, who left Chelsea at the end of the season, and both were impressive against Phil Neville's side.

Predictably, Barcelona dominated possession against the MLS team and former Arsenal forward Aubameyang went closest on 15 minutes to opening the deadlock when his close range effort flashed past the post. There was no denying him soon after when he coolly chipped the ball past Inter Miami keeper Nick Marsman following good work from Pedri and then Raphinha. And on 25 minutes it was Raphinha's turn to get on the scoresheet, the Brazilian expertly

guiding home an Alejandro Balde cross to double Barcelona's lead.

'Another level'

It was completely one way traffic and Raphinha capped a good night's work with another assist just before half-time, teeing up Ansu Fati who expertly smashed home from close range. "It was a big challenge for us, we were playing against world class players, it was a brilliant occasion to be part of but from a playing point of view, this was something to enjoy," Neville said. "Some young players would have taken a lot away from an experience like that. This could be life changing for some of our team. We knew they would be on another level."

"We had to fight and accept they would have a lot of the ball and to keep it to 6-0 was a positive. This was a great learning experience for us but now we have to concentrate on MLS and a big game on Saturday against New York City."

Both teams made a raft of changes after the interval but the outcome was never in doubt, Gavi's excellent finish from a Memphis Depay corner making it four on 55 minutes before the Dutch forward produced a sublime turn and finish to make it 5-0. Ousmane Dembele's driving run helped set up a sixth of the evening with 20 minutes remaining as Neville's side were completely outclassed.

"Their movements are hard to track, they can mix it up and they are world class players and when you have so many on the pitch at one time, they make it



FLORIDA: Memphis Depay #9 of FC Barcelona heads the ball against Damion Lowe #31 of Inter Miami CF during the second half of a preseason friendly at DRV Pnk Stadium on July 19, 2022. —AFP

very difficult for you," said USA international DeAndre Yedlin. "That's why they are one of the best teams in the world." This was the first game of Barca's

US tour which will see them face Real Madrid, Juventus and the New York Red Bulls before the start of the new La Liga season on August 12th. —AFP

Bayern sign 'top target' De Ligt from Juventus

BERLIN: Bayern Munich announced the signing of Juventus defender Matthijs de Ligt on a five-year deal on Tuesday with the Dutch international expected to become "a mainstay" as the German champions embark on the post Robert Lewandowski era. "Matthijs de Ligt was a top target for us. With signings like this, the big aims that we have are achievable. The future face of our team is increasingly taking shape," said Bayern president Herbert Heiner. Juventus say securing the Dutch central defender has cost Bayern 67 million euros with 10 million in bonuses (\$78 million in total).

It constitutes the second biggest transfer deal in Bayern's history after the 80 million required to capture another defender, Lucas Hernandez, in 2019. Bayern will use the proceeds from the transfer of Polish striker Lewandowski to Barcelona, estimated at more than 45 million euros, to help finance the move. "This transfer is an important building block in the overall concept that we're gradually putting into place. De Ligt should become a mainstay at FC Bayern" added Hainer. His arrival follows that of Sadio Mane from Liverpool, and Ajax duo Ryan Gravenberch and Noussair Mazraoui at a combined cost estimated by German media of 120 million as Bayern dig deep in their pockets to invest in their future. De Ligt joined the Ajax academy at nine years of age, making his debut for the record Dutch champions at 17. He became their youngest ever captain and in 2019, after 117 appearances (13 goals) and the league and cup double, he moved to Juventus for 85 million.



Dutch defender Matthijs De Ligt

Alongside the likes of Frenkie de Jong, Donny van de Beek and Hakim Ziyech, De Ligt lifted Ajax to within seconds of the 2019 Champions League final. A goal in the sixth minute of injury time in that 2019 semi-final saw Tottenham dash that dream. His time with Juve earned him more silverware, with a Serie A title, an Italian cup and Super Cup.

On the international stage he was the Netherlands' youngest debutant since 1945, and has gone on to earn 38 caps for his national side, scoring twice. He said he had been won over by Bayern's sales pitch. "I felt the genuine appreciation from the sporting management, the coach and the board right from the start, which convinced me," he told a press statement issued by the buying club. "On top of that, FC Bayern is a brilliantly run club with big aims. I'm very glad that

I'm now becoming part of the FC Bayern story." Bayern chief executive Oliver Kahn suggested that as good a player as De Ligt is, his character could also prove to be enormously beneficial to Bayern. "Matthijs de Ligt has impressed at the highest international level, not just with his technical qualities but also as a character who leads in all his teams," said Kahn. He added: "At his young age he's already learned about taking responsibility. A strong team doesn't just require a strong attack, and with this signing we're really raising our defense to the top level." He is unlikely to be the last new recruit for Bayern who are thought to be monitoring a number of other players including Leipzig midfielder Konrad Laimer, French youngster Mathys Tel (Rennes), and the jewel in Tottenham's crown, Harry Kane. —AFP

Europe clubs fan flames of US fandom

LOS ANGELES: Barcelona and Real Madrid will play the fourth Clasico ever held outside of Spain on Saturday as powerhouse European football clubs return to the United States aiming to fan the flames of US fandom. The match at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, home of the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders, highlights the five-club, five-fixture Soccer Champions Tour organized by sports and entertainment giant AEG - which also owns Major League Soccer's Los Angeles Galaxy.

The inaugural edition of the event features just some of the pre-season matches European clubs have scheduled Stateside after a pandemic-induced hiatus. Real Madrid, coming off Champions League and LaLiga titles, and Barcelona are joined in the series by Italy's Juventus and Mexican clubs America and Chivas Guadalajara.

Meanwhile, English Premier League champions Manchester City and Premier rivals Chelsea, Arsenal and Everton and Germany's Bayern Munich are touring the United States simultaneously, all eager to rekindle the ardor of their US fans and strengthen and expand ties with North American corporate partners. "Right now I think largely a lot of people are really excited to see some of the teams that they typically see in the summer," said Tom Braun, AEG Senior Vice President of Soccer and Business Operations and Business Development.

"It's been such a long time since they've seen them that the absence has got people excited to come back and see the teams perform and see the players." Tickets for the Barca-Real Madrid match have nearly sold out, Ticketmaster showing prices ranging from around \$250 to \$900 for seats at pitch level. The only prior Clasico played in the United States was in 2017 before a sellout crowd at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami, Barcelona winning 3-2.

"It's still very new to the US, seeing these two teams play each other, so I don't think in any way it's getting diluted, I think it's just encouraging the interest not only in the clubs but in the sport," Braun said. "There's a lot of very strong followers of both teams in the US." With the European clubs in the build-up to their seasons, US fans won't necessarily see all the top players. Real Madrid star Karim Benzema will likely miss Saturday's match against Barcelona. The France international was due to join his teammates on Tuesday.

But the exhibition games can also feature tantalizing glimpses of new acquisitions. Erling Haaland, the 21-year-old goalscoring phenomenon recently obtained by Manchester City, could feature for his new club, who face America in Houston on Wednesday before playing Bayern Munich at the Green Bay Packers' Lambeau Field on Saturday. —AFP

Mane, Salah renew rivalry; top African award up for grabs

JOHANNESBURG: Another chapter in the personal rivalry between former Liverpool teammates Sadio Mane and Mohamed Salah will play out in Rabat on Thursday when the annual African award winners are announced. Mane was a key figure in the Senegal team that defeated Salah-captained Egypt in the 2021/2022 Africa Cup of Nations final and in a 2022 World Cup play-off. Both the African title decider in Cameroon and the Qatar eliminator in Senegal were won by the Teranga Lions after penalty shootouts. Mane scored in each shootout while the final was decided before Salah could take his kick, and he blazed wide in the play-off.

The Senegalese successes have made Mane favorite to win a second straight Player of the Year award after 2019 - the following two editions were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. Should Mane win in the Moroccan capital, he will become the first Bayern Munich star to be voted the top African footballer. The closest a player from the German giants has come to winning was in 1999 and 2001 when Ghanaian Samuel Kuffour finished second.

Mane moved to Bayern last month on a three-year deal after joining Liverpool in 2016 from Southampton and Anfield boss Jurgen Klopp calls him "a complete forward". "My only criticism of Sadio is that maybe at times he is the

only one not to realise just how good he is." Liverpool defender Andy Robertson hailed the predatory instincts of the 30-year-old: "Whenever he is in front of the goal you do not think he will miss." Salah lifted the award in 2017 and 2018 and the victory of Mane the following year raised to four the number of winners from Liverpool with another Senegalese, El Hadji Diouf, topping the 2002 vote.

South Africans dominate women hopefuls - The Egyptian had an outstanding 2021-2022 season for the Reds, sharing the Golden Boot award with South Korean Son Heung-min of Tottenham Hotspur. Salah was voted Premier League Player of the Season by both the Professional Footballers' Association and the Football Writers' Association. Algeria captain and Manchester City winger Riyad Mahrez is the other former winner among the 10 nominees having come first in 2016 after helping rank outsiders Leicester City become Premier League champions. Mahrez and Algeria have struggled lately, however, with the defending champions making a humiliating first round exit from the Cup of Nations, then losing a World Cup play-off against Cameroon. The 10 candidates for the Club Player of the Year include Brazilian Tiago Azualao, whose chart-topping seven goals in the CAF Champions League took Angolan outfit Petro Luanda to a surprise semi-finals spot.

South Africans dominate the Women's Player of the Year nominees with 2018 winner Thembi Kgatllana, Andile Dlamini, Refiloe Jane and Bambanani Mbane among 10 hopefuls. Ghana, notable absentees from the ongoing Women's Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco after losing a first round qualifier against Nigeria, have two representatives, Evelyn Badu and Doris Boaduwaa. Nigeria, the powerhouse of women's football in Africa for



Mohamed Salah of Liverpool

decades, have one candidate, highly decorated Asisat Oshoala, who plays for 2022 European Champions League runners-up Barcelona.

Ruled out of the Cup of Nations in Morocco by injury, Oshoala has been voted African Player of the Year four times, most recently in 2019. Choosing the best women's national team will be delayed until after the Cup of Nations final between Morocco and South Africa in Rabat on Saturday. African football legends, CAF technical committee members, coaches and captains of national teams and of some clubs and selected media pick the winners. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Adaliya	22517144
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Khaldiya	24848075
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Physiotherapy Hospital		Kaifan	24849807
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital		24874330/9		Shamiya	24848913
	25312700			Shuwaikh	24814507
Chest Hospital	24849400			Abdullah Salem	22549134
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010			Nuzha	22526804
Adan Hospital	23940620			Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Ranjit Khiva S/o Nachhatar Khiva R/o Mohalla Kesari Bagh, Kapurthala, Punjab, India. That I am holding an Indian Passport No. L1435090. That Nachhatar Khiva and Nachhattar Singh both names are belong to one and the same per-

son i.e. my Father. (C# 2020) 20-07-2022

I, Dalvir Singh S/O Mohinder Singh, holder of Indian Passport No. L1094061 having a permanent address of VPO Surapur SBS Nagar Pin 144506, Punjab, India residing in Kuwait at present and the company name is Ahmadiyah Contracting and trade. The address is Jleeb Al-

Shuyoukh Block 3 street no. 170 house number 476. My civil ID number is 273051517134. I hereby declare that hereafter my name will be read as under Dalvir Singh. (C# 2017) 19-07-2022

I, Boodevi, W.O late Ananda Kharvi, residing at Pithrachaya House, Bailurkar compound, Bunder road,

Gangolli, Kundapura Taluk, Udipi district have changed my name as Boodevi Kharvi for all purposes, vide affidavit dated 14.03.2022 sworn before notary H.Vasanth Kumar Shetty, Udipi, India. I have a Kuwait residency permit no. 266071903504 valid upto 10.05.2023. (C# 2018) 19-07-2022



EUGENE: Brazil's Alison Dos Santos (center) celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the men's 400m hurdles final during the World Athletics Championships at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon on July 19, 2022. —AFP

Dos Santos dethrones Warholm as Wightman shocks Ingebrigtsen

Kerley's sprint double dream over, Lyles marches on

EUGENE: Alison Dos Santos ended Karsten Warholm's reign as hurdles king at the world championships on Tuesday while Britain's Jake Wightman won his country's first 1500m gold in 39 years on a day of upsets. Warholm may have been behind one of the most iconic moments in Olympic history when he smashed the 29-year-old world record to win the 400m hurdles at the Tokyo Games in a time of 45.94sec.

But the 26-year-old came to Eugene on the back of a hamstring injury which ultimately put paid to his medal attempt here. Instead, Dos Santos ran the third fastest time of all time and a championship record of 46.29sec to win gold ahead of Americans Rai Benjamin and Trevor Bassitt. "It's pretty awesome to win the world title on this track. I didn't care about the time because this is the first time I win a world title," said Dos Santos.

Warholm led coming into the home straight but seized up badly and eventually came in seventh (48.42), breaking a winning streak of 22 races, including 18 finals, dating back to September 2018. "It was a very tough race," Warholm said. "I had an injury but to me it's always your fight and giving your all and leaving it all on the track. I felt I did that. I hope looking back I'll feel proud of that even though I prefer to take a medal."

Whilst everyone knew Warholm was coming back from injury, serious hopes were pinned on Olympic champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen in the men's 1500m. But Wightman had not read the script, playing the Norwegian at his own game by kicking with 200 meters to run and holding his form through to the line. Wightman sealed victory in 3min 29.23sec, Ingebrigtsen taking silver in 3:29.47, with Spaniard Mohamed Katir claiming bronze (3:29.90).

Messi scores as PSG labor past Kawasaki

TOKYO: Lionel Messi scored but Paris Saint-Germain were made to work hard for a 2-1 win over Kawasaki Frontale on Wednesday in the first match of their pre-season Japanese tour. Star forwards Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe all started in new PSG manager Christophe Galtier's first game in charge of his full squad in front of a crowd of 65,000 at Tokyo's National Stadium. Messi opened the scoring with a 32nd-minute shot but a much-changed PSG line-up in the second half could manage only one more goal through substitute Arnaud Kalimuendo. J-League champions Kawasaki pulled a goal back in the 84th minute when Kazuya Yamamura headed home unmarked to set up a nervy finish. PSG will play two more J-League sides on their Japanese tour, taking on Urawa Reds in Saitama on Saturday and Gamba Osaka in Osaka the following Monday.

PSG had most of the early possession but the first

Family affair
In a bizarre twist, Wightman's father Geoff is in Eugene doing the in-stadium commentary. Geoff, also his son's coach, was reduced to a cracked voice as he announced to Hayward Field: "That's my son and he's world champion." "For him to be part of my journey to get to this point, and actually part of the actual race itself is so unique," Wightman said of his father. "I talked to him and he's very happy. I'm glad he showed some emotion."

Following on from Norway's Olympic gold medalists in failing to nail a world title was 2019 champion Daniel Stahl, the Swede eventually finishing fourth in the discus. Australian Eleanor Patterson won high jump gold in the fourth final of the night with 2.02m on countback from Ukraine's Yaroslava Mahuchikh, Italian Elena Vallortigara taking bronze. "I'm honestly speechless right now," Patterson said afterwards. "I'm already starting to get sore cheeks from smiling."

Kerley out of 200m
Day five of action at the world champs also saw newly-crowned 100m champion Fred Kerley fail to advance from the semi-finals of the 200m. Kerley set off smoothly from the blocks but was left grimacing as he hit the home straight at Eugene's Hayward Field, eventually finishing sixth in 20.68 seconds. Kerley later said he had cramped up in the later stages of the race, but insisted he would be fit to race in the relays. "Bit of cramp, but it's all good," Kerley said. "I'm not in pain, I'll be good." While Kerley was left digesting a disappointing early exit, there were no such worries for defending 200m world champion Noah Lyles, who romped home in his semi-final with a blistering 19.62sec.—AFP

real chance fell to Kawasaki. A pass forward split the PSG defence and released striker Marcinho, only for the Brazilian to put the ball wide with the goal at his mercy. Kawasaki goalkeeper Jung Song-ryong denied Mbappe a minute later after Messi had played him in on goal.—AFP



TOKYO: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (right) controls the ball next to Kawasaki Frontale's Japanese midfielder Kento Tachibana (left) during PSG's Japan Tour football match against Kawasaki Frontale on July 20, 2022. —AFP

Kuwait Handball team qualify for World Cup



KUWAIT: Kuwait Handball national team qualified on Wednesday for the World Youth Handball Championship, set to take place in Germany-Greece 2023, after reaching the semi-finals of the Asian Youth Handball Championship in Bahrain. Kuwait team defeated the Iranian team (26-20). — KUNA

Pakistan break Galle record to beat Sri Lanka

GALE: Abdullah Shafique hit an epic 160 to anchor Pakistan's record chase of 342 at Galle as the tourists won a thrilling opening Test against Sri Lanka on Wednesday. The opener capped his marathon display with the winning runs in the final session on day five, jumping for joy and pumping his fist as Pakistan triumphed by four wickets for a 1-0 lead in the two-match series. Left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya took a match haul of nine wickets but his efforts were in vain as the visitors battled past the previous best chase in Galle of 268 by Sri Lanka against New Zealand in 2019.

The 22-year-old Shafique excelled with his second Test ton. He built crucial partnerships including a 101-run third-wicket stand with skipper Babar Azam, who made 55 after his 119 in the first innings on a tricky pitch to bat on. "We know how to play spin so we believed," Azam said after the tense win. "When I was

batting with Abdullah Shafique we were just trying to build a partnership. He has shown his class."

Shafique, who was named man of the match, said: "It was difficult but with time it was easier. Babar is one of the best in the world. We have learnt so much from him. I enjoyed batting with him in the middle." The unbeaten Shafique finally combined with Mohammad Nawaz, 19 not out, to take the visitors home after a brief rain interruption halted their charge. The teams had taken early tea before returning for the third session of play.

Shafique survived three dropped catches, on 70, 135 and 151, but deserved his luck and played the anchor's role to perfection as he surpassed his previous Test best of 136 not out. Pakistan had a few anxious moments after Jayasuriya, who sent back talisman Azam before the close on day four, struck at the stroke of lunch to get debutant Salman Ali Agha out for 12. Hasan Ali fell for five in the second over of the second session after being promoted up the order to hit out the remaining runs. Jayasuriya, who took 12 wickets on debut in a series-leveling Test win over Australia last week at the same venue, six in each innings, kept up the pressure but Shafique stood firm. Pakistan resumed the day on 222-3 and Sri Lanka soon used up their remaining two umpire reviews, with Jayasuriya involved in both calls.—AFP