

2 Kuwait Fire Force: Working hard to keep people safe



7 HK drives Tiananmen memories underground



13 10 yrs after 'Gangnam Style', Psy is happier than ever



16 Benzema drops appeal over 'sex tape' sentence



Shallow 5-magnitude quake jolts people in Kuwait awake

Oil facilities, roads, projects not affected by dawn tremor

Bid to smuggle 1m Captagon pills to Kuwait by glider foiled

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces have said they forced down a microlight aircraft near the Kuwaiti border headed to the state from Iran with one million pills of the amphetamine-type stimulant Captagon. Captagon has been sweeping the Middle East for years, with large seizures reported weekly, particularly in the oil-rich Gulf states which are its biggest market.

The Federal Intelligence and Investigation Agency said the microlight entered Iraqi airspace from neighboring Iran on Friday. It said agents were alerted to the flight by a tip-off and opened fire on the aircraft flying over Jraishan in Basra province. "That forced the pilot to land. He fled towards the border of a neighboring country," the agency



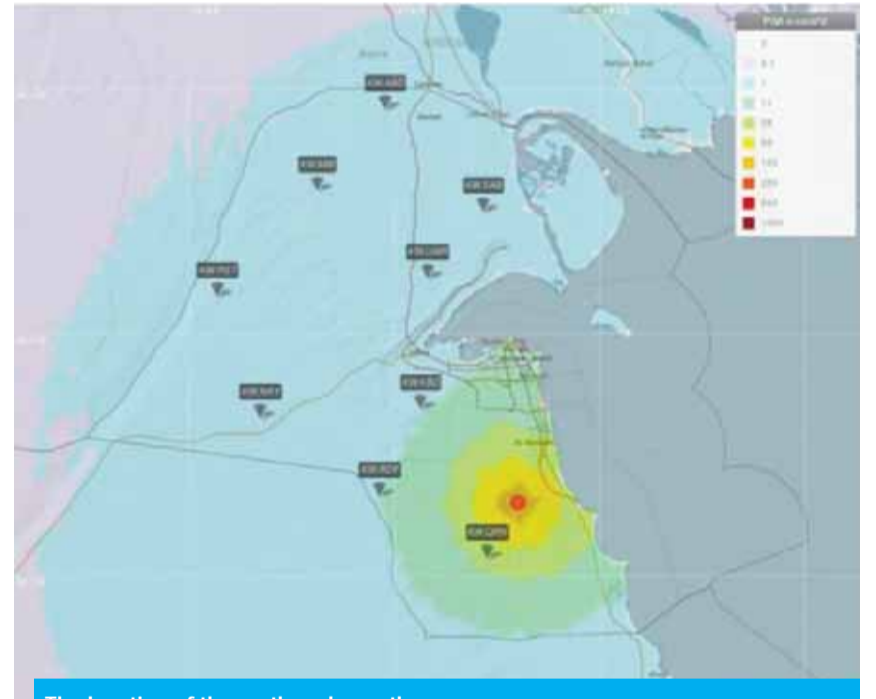
The glider that was forced to land.

said in a statement. The statement said the million Captagon pills recovered in a search of the abandoned aircraft were intended for sale inside Iraq. But a senior security forces officer told AFP the microlight "came from Iran" and was "headed for Kuwait" with its consignment of the highly addictive drug. — Agencies

KUWAIT: A 5.0-magnitude earthquake was recorded in Ahmadi early Saturday, the Kuwait National Seismic Network (KNSN) said in a statement to KUNA. KNSN Director Dr Abdullah Al-Enezi said the quake struck at 4:28 am local time in Kuwait at depth of 5 kilometers, which was felt by a number of citizens and residents.

Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) confirmed on Saturday that its facilities and oil and gas production were not affected by the dawn earthquake. KOC said in a press statement that oil facilities stopped for a short period during the quake as a precautionary measure in accordance with the company's safety regulations, noting that its facilities are equipped with sensors that function automatically when exposed to any natural disasters.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public Works and the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) announced on Saturday that no roads or projects were affected by the earthquake. In a statement for KUNA, Ministry Spokesperson Ahmad Al-Saleh said no damage was recorded, and the ministry is continuing to check on roads to make sure everything is undamaged. Kuwait Fire Force also said that there was no damage as a result of the earthquake. — KUNA



The location of the earthquake on the map.

News in brief

3 siblings drown off Anjifa beach

KUWAIT: Three Kuwaiti children drowned off Anjifa beach on Friday morning. Central operations received a call about three children playing on the beach who had gone missing - a 7-year-old boy and two girls aged 10 and 12. Salmiya sea rescue responded and found the three children, who were already deceased. Their remains were handed to forensics.

Turkey changes name to 'Turkiye'

UNITED NATIONS: Turkey has told the United Nations that, at the behest of its president, it wishes from now on to be called "Turkiye" in all languages, the UN announced. In addition to making the UN's nomenclature match how the nation is spelled in Turkish, the update would also help distinguish the country from the bird of the same name in English. — AFP

Oman and Iran ink deals

MUSCAT: Oman and Iran signed deals to develop two gas pipelines and an oil field along their maritime border, Oman's energy minister said Saturday, less than two weeks after Iran's president visited the sultanate. Mohammed Al-Rumhi said the agreements were "related to the development of the two gas pipeline projects linking the two countries and the Hengam oil field". — AFP

Two bodies found in Algeria plane

ALGIERS: The bodies of two men were found in the hold of an Air Algerie plane at Algiers International Airport on Saturday, Algerian police said. "Two lifeless male bodies aged between 20 and 23 years were discovered on Saturday at 5:00 am (0400 GMT) in the hold of an Air Algerie plane which was parked at Algiers airport," the police said in a statement. According to Algeria media, the two victims were Algerians seeking to reach Europe clandestinely. — AFP

Kuwait summons US diplomat over LGBTQIA+ posts

KUWAIT: Kuwait's foreign ministry summoned the top US diplomat in the country over American Embassy posts on social media in "support of homosexuality", it said on Friday. The US embassy in Kuwait had published a picture of an LGBTQIA+ flag on its Instagram and Twitter accounts to mark the start of Pride Month on June 1.

"All human beings should be treated with respect and dignity and should be able to live without fear no

matter who they are or whom they love," the embassy's tweet said. Many in Kuwait took to social media to express their discontent over the posts, saying they went against the country's Muslim beliefs.

Kuwait's foreign ministry said in a statement that it had summoned the US embassy's charge d'affaires James Holtsnider over "social media references and tweets supporting homosexuality". It said a memorandum had been handed to Holtsnider "confirming Kuwait's rejection of what was published and stressing the need for the embassy to respect the laws and regulations in force in Kuwait". The tenure of the former US ambassador to Kuwait, Alina Romanowski, ended in April, making Holtsnider the top US diplomat in the Gulf country for the time being.

Meanwhile, the ministry of foreign affairs disowned a woman who claimed on social media to belong to the Kuwaiti diplomatic corps and who supported trans-

gender people. The woman in question belongs neither to the diplomatic corps nor to the ministry of foreign affairs of Kuwait, according to a press release from the ministry. The diplomatic passport the woman holds is no longer valid, it said, saying she got it when her father was working for a technical office of a government body affiliated to an embassy. The contract of the man was terminated and his diplomatic passport as well as those of his family were invalidated, the statement affirmed.

Homosexuality is illegal in Kuwait, as in most Muslim countries. But in February Kuwait's constitutional court overturned a law that criminalizes "imitation of the opposite sex" in a move Amnesty International said was a breakthrough for transgender rights in the region. The US embassies in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also shared similar posts marking Pride Month. — Agencies

Saudi receives first foreign hajj pilgrims

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia on Saturday welcomed its first batch of hajj pilgrims since before the coronavirus pandemic, which prompted authorities to sharply restrict the annual ritual. The group from Indonesia landed in the holy city of Madinah and was set to travel south to the holy city of Makkah in the coming weeks to pre-

pare for the hajj next month, state media reported.

"Today we received the first group of this year's pilgrims from Indonesia, and the flights will continue from Malaysia and India," Mohammed Al-Bijawi of the country's Hajj Ministry told the state-run Al-Ekhabariya channel. "Today we are happy to receive the guests of God from outside the kingdom, after a two-year interruption due to the pandemic," he added, describing Saudi Arabia as "fully prepared" to accommodate them.

One of the five pillars of Islam, the hajj must be undertaken by all

Continued on Page 6

From behind the wheel to under the hood

JEDDAH: An auto repair garage in Saudi Arabia is turning to an untapped source for new car mechanics: Saudi women, who just four years ago weren't even allowed to drive. At the Petromin Express garage in Jeddah, on the Red Sea coast, new female recruits check oil and change

tyres alongside their male counterparts, part of a nationwide push to bring more women into the workforce.

Yet the women trainees have, perhaps inevitably, encountered a host of barriers as they enter a field that is male-dominated the world over - and even more so in the conservative Muslim kingdom. Several told AFP their first months on the job have brought flashes of self-doubt, skepticism from relatives and outright hostility from some customers.

One "old man" who came by the garage immediately ordered all the

Continued on Page 6



SURABAYA, Indonesia: Indonesian pilgrims prepare to depart from Juanda International Airport on June 4, 2022, for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP



JEDDAH: A picture taken on May 26, 2022 shows Ghada Ahmed (left) and Ola Flimban working on a car at a quick service garage. — AFP

Local

Firefighting: Difficult and dangerous job

'I feel very satisfied when I save a life'



KUWAIT: Photos show firefighting vehicles and other equipments

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Firefighting is one of the most difficult and dangerous professions. Head of the Salmiya Fire Station Col Mohammed Abdulkhudhur said: "Every day when I leave my house and come to work, I don't know if I will return home alive. Our work is hard, but I feel very satisfied when I save a life". The firefighters don't have regular working hours. "There are two work shifts depending on the fire station where the fireman works.

At urban centers, firemen work for 24 hours followed by 48 hours off. Work begins at 8:00 am, till 8:00 am the next day. In far-flung areas near the borders (both northern and southern), firemen work for 48 hours, followed by four days off. After returning from a blaze to the station, they have to refill their vehicles with foam, water and oxygen cylinders to be ready for the next call," Abdulkhudhur told Kuwait Times.

The number of fires increase during the summer season. "This increase is not only caused by the hot weather, but also because of the summer holidays of children, who are at home most of the time. Sometimes they like to play with dangerous objects and imitate adults. So, they play with lighters and cause fires," he added.

"Our work depends on the calls that we receive. Every day is different. Sometimes our station receives only one call, sometimes two, and sometimes the number may reach eight or more. Also, the season affects the number of accidents and its type. Every day at 8:00 am, the staff will start their duty. This includes checking the vehicles and their equipment to see if any needs to be fixed or replaced," Abdulkhudhur said.

The call starts from the emergency line 112. "If the call is related to the fire department, the call center will transfer it to us. The operator will get all the possible information including the address, type of fire, and other details. It's very important to include information such as landmarks near the accident location, which will help firefighters to reach the place faster. Based on that, we send the proper vehicle, as we have two teams - a rescue team and a fire team, and each of them have their



Head of the Salmiya Fire Station Col Mohammed Abdulkhudhur

role," he pointed out.

Kuwait Fire Service Directorate is following a strategy. "When we receive a call about a fire in a building, school, house or university, two centers will always head to the site. There should be 10 to 12 firefighting vehicles at the place, with between 45 and 50 firefighters. The officer in each of these vehicles gives instructions to the firefighters on the way to the site of the fire," stressed Abdulkhudhur.

Firefighters deal with different kind of accidents, and not only fires. "We deal with all kinds of fires in buildings, containers, cars, trees, camps and others. We also deal with road accidents when there are people stuck inside cars, to release them after cutting the vehicle with special equipment. After getting them out, medical emergency personnel will take care of them," he said.

"We also deal with elevator accidents, when people get stuck due to power cuts or poor maintenance. We also receive calls to rescue children who have locked the door from inside and are stuck. In these cases, we break the door, but now we have a

special tool to unlock the doors, which causes less damage. We also deal with suicide cases. Cutting rings stuck in people's fingers is also common, as well as extracting workers' hands from meat mincers. We also help policemen by cutting handcuffs whose keys they have lost," noted Abdulkhudhur.

"We also deal with cases of rescuing animals including cats, snakes and even bees, but this responsibility is now transferred to the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources. We also remove trees fallen on the road, as well as rescue people during floods. As part of our work, we also clean streets if an oil leak occurs to prevent accidents," he told Kuwait Times.

"During every shift, there should be a head of department, officers, firefighters and vehicle operators in each center. If we have more staff, our work will be quicker. In some fires, we stay for around five hours to extinguish it, while for others we stay even longer. All staff have passed training courses inside Kuwait and abroad. In addition to the firemen, there is a hazmat team to deal with hazardous materials. Every material has its own code, and the team is updated on this issue," highlighted Abdulkhudhur.

The most dangerous and difficult events for firefighters are fires in large building such as warehouses, where there is a possibility of roof collapse. "It makes it more difficult for us if the owner of the burning warehouse or building doesn't tell us about all the materials inside this building. If we know the contents of the building, we can choose the best way of firefighting. In some fires we use water, while in others foam. Our modern vehicles now contain a mix of extinguisher including water, foam and air. This technique is easier for us to use and safer for the affected area," he added.

Salmiya fire station is one of the oldest stations in Kuwait, built in the 1950s. There are over 50 fire stations now, and the number is always increasing depending on new areas being built. "Some stations are being equipped while some are still in the building process. We have top, international-standard fire stations - the Souq Mubarakiya blaze is evidence of this, as we succeeded in dousing the blaze within 12 hours, although it's an old market full of

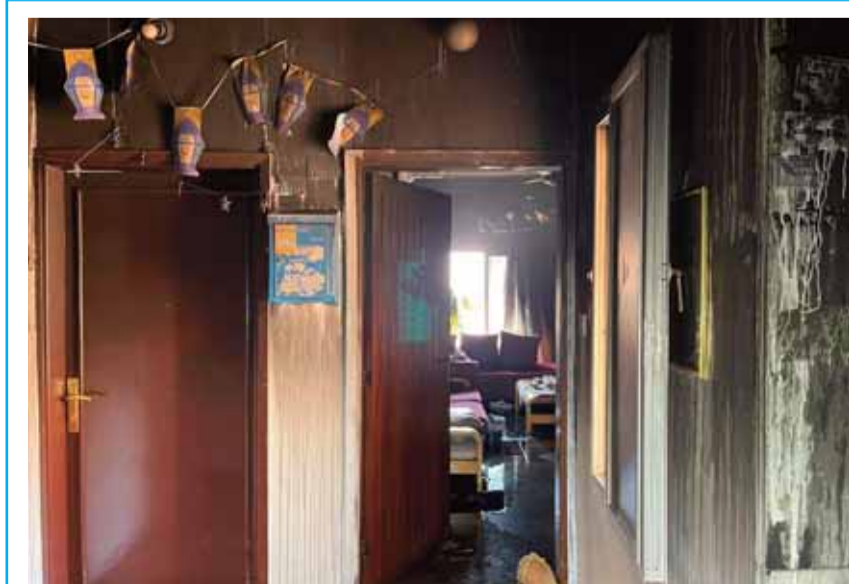
flammable materials and buildings close to each other," Abdulkhudhur said.

Electricity is also one of the main causes of fires. "Not only do increased load and consumption of electricity cause fires, but also using low-quality extensions is behind many cases of fires. People plug large appliances that consume a lot of power like a TV, receiver, washing machine, refrigerator and microwave in one extension, and when it gets old, the insulation will melt and the wires will come in contact, resulting in ignition and fire," explained Abdulkhudhur.

The number of fires is not geographically proportional, but based on the population, urbanization and the type of houses in a certain area. "For instance, Salmiya is a crowded area with huge population density, high buildings and a large number of businesses including medical centers, schools, clubs, institutions, nurseries and others. Also, the culture of the residents of each area affects the possibility of fire," he pointed out.

Abdulkhudhur has some advice for people. "People should install fire detectors in their homes. They should also have fire extinguishers, fire blankets and gas detectors installed in the kitchen. Also, parents should never lock the doors and leave their children inside when they go to work. In case of emergency, this can be very dangerous. Once two kids died inside a flat during a fire before we could bring them out. I also call upon people to call the emergency hotline to report an accident rather than shoot videos of the incident. Drivers should clear the road for us in emergency cases when they hear our sirens," he said.

Maj Ali Mohammed Hasan from the public relations department of Kuwait Fire Force said the directorate is always holding awareness campaigns in cooperation with both the public and private sectors. "We try to raise awareness amongst the community, so people will be ready to act properly in case of an emergency, before the arrival of firefighters. Safety measures are important in buildings to minimize damage. Our problem is with private homes, as there is no law to force people to install fire detectors in the house, so we advise them to install them," he stressed.



KUWAIT: A fire broke out on the fifth floor of a Salmiya building, so Bidaa and Salmiya fire station teams were dispatched and the fire was put

out after evacuating the residents. No injuries were reported.

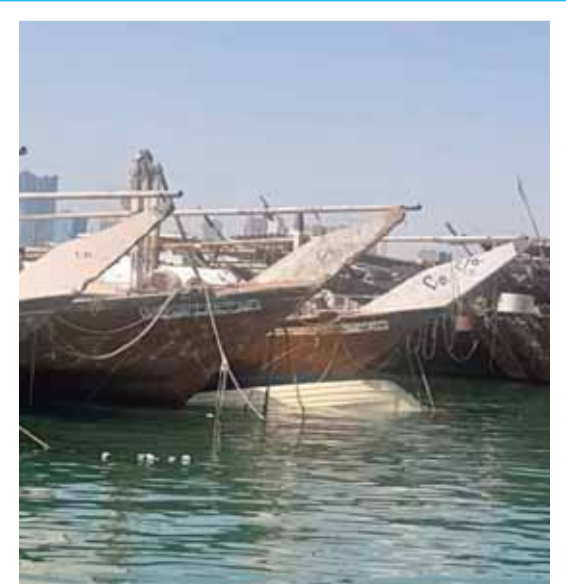
Fishermen injured

Three fishermen were injured



when a fishing boat collided with another vessel in Shamlan Marina on Friday. Shuwaikh fire and sea rescue responded to a call and found three

injured fishermen, one of them critically hurt. The three were transferred by another boat before the fire rescuers arrived.



Local

Thousands of vacant apartments; some tenants face strict conditions

Rents still high despite 10-15% fall



KUWAIT: Investment and residential areas are seen in this illustrative file photo. Kuwait Statistics published in 2021 by the Kuwait Real Estate Union showed there were 61,000 vacant apartments in Kuwait, compared to 335,100 occupied flats that constituted 84.6 percent of total apartments.

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Statistics published in 2021 by the Kuwait Real Estate Union showed there were 61,000 vacant apartments in Kuwait, compared to 335,100 occupied flats that constituted 84.6 percent of total apartments. "Prices in residential areas are stable and even rising, while investment areas have witnessed a fall of 10 to 15 percent in rental value," real estate expert Sulaiman Al-Dulaijan told Kuwait Times.

"Between 80,000 and 100,000 expats left the country during the pandemic due to several economic factors, which affected rental values in investment areas. The slump did not affect citizens in residential areas due to the stability of their income during the pandemic," he said. Dulaijan mentioned the average rent for a 60 sqm apartment in Hawally governorate is KD 270 to KD 300.

"High-quality decor, services, location and the availability of parking spaces impact the value of the rent, which can increase to KD 400 or higher," said. "We have only a tenancy law that governs the relationship between the owner and the lessor, otherwise there is no official party in Kuwait that determines the rental val-



Sulaiman Al-Dulaijan

ue," he added.

"Despite a 10 to 12 percent fall in investment apartment rents in the last six months, prices are still high according to the area and lack of services in investment buildings," real estate broker Salem Al-Barki told Kuwait Times. "Meanwhile, rents in residential areas are still maintaining their high prices, and demand has increased due to the better services provided, such as parking lots and free water and electricity," he said.

Barki explained that although residential areas have better services, many tenants are facing strict conditions despite agreeing to pay high rents. "Even if the tenant accepts a high rent, they are facing problems

with owners regarding the number of people allowed to live in the flat. Some of them refuse to rent to families with more than one kid, or to divorced women, even if the lessor is a Kuwaiti," he said.

Regarding the apartment pricing method, Barki said: "It depends on several elements including market price, supply and demand, owner's pricing and agreement between the parties. Entities that are responsible for the real estate sector can help reduce the units' prices by passing a law that sets the price of the apartment according to the area and the services provided with the investment."

Regarding the reason for high rents in residential areas, real estate office employee Abu Ahmad told Kuwait Times that "lessors have started to increase rents in residential areas more than investment apartments, which led to rising demand on residential properties and higher prices". He said prices saw a slight decrease in investment areas. "But based on the apartment space, rental prices are considered high," he said.

"After a slight decrease in apartment rentals, the average rent for a 60 square meter flat in Salmiya is KD 360 to KD 380 per month. As for residential apartments in areas

such as Rumaithiya, it is between KD 500 and KD 550 per month," Abu Ahmad added.

Violations

Abu Ahmad told Kuwait Times about the violations committed by real estate owners. "The Municipal Council determines the size of the apartment, but after the electricity is connected to the property, the owner divides the apartment to become two apartments instead of one, and prices them as if it is one big apartment, which leads to high prices," he said. "The Municipal Council obligates property owners to provide tenants a parking space in the basement, but after they get the building license, they transform it into storage areas and rent them to outsiders, while ignoring the tenants' needs for parking spaces."

Another real-estate office employee, Mustafa Ahmad, said a lack of construction workers led to a rise in their daily wages and eventually increased the contractor's total cost. "Ultimately, his issue affects rental prices, but tenants can still rent according to their budget. Despite a lack in the services provided to lessors, prices are not low," he said.

Kuwait Speaker pushes for Schengen visa exemption

BRUSSELS: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation on Saturday wrapped up four-day official visit to the Belgian capital Brussels during which he held talks with European parliamentarians on prospects of cancelling the Schengen visa for Kuwaiti nationals. "Al-Dustour" news network, voice of the Kuwaiti parliament, said in a statement that Al-Ghanem's delegation was seen off upon departure by Kuwait Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium, head of the mission at the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Jassem Al-Bedaiwi, and a number of Kuwaiti diplomats.

The delegation included Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Rajhi, Undersecretary of the Parliamentary Caucus MP Obaid AlMutairi, the Caucus Secretary MP Hamad Al-Matar, the Treasurer MP Salman Al-Azmi and the Caucus Member Musaed Al-Ardhi. Al-Ghanem, during the visit, held talks with European Parliament Chairperson

Roberta Metsola, heads of committees and blocs representing political parties in the EP, focusing on the Schengen issue.

He had expressed strong optimism that the EP would eventually vote in favor of relieving the Kuwaiti citizens of the Schengen visa, noting that such a step is necessary not only for the nationals but also for Kuwaiti-European businesses.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammed Obaid Al-Rajhi, met with Ylva Johansson, EU Commissioner for interior affairs in Brussels on Friday and discussed the issue of exemption of Kuwaiti citizens from the Schengen visa obligation.

In a statement to KUNA, Al-Rajhi said there was good cooperation between the two sides and he hoped to have good news for the Kuwait people on the completion of this file soon. Moreover, Al-Rajhi expressed his deep and special thanks for the Kuwaiti diplomatic mission in Brussels led by Ambassador Jassem Al-Budaiwi and all the staff for all their sincere



BRUSSELS: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem (left) and his accompanying delegation on Saturday wrapped up a four-day official visit to the Belgian capital.

efforts in this regard.

Minister Al-Rajhi is currently visiting the Belgian capital accompanying the Kuwaiti National Assembly speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and his delegation for talks with the European Parliament president and heads of other EP committees on the issue of Schengen visa. The European Commission announced on 27 April a proposal to lift visa requirements

between EU countries and Kuwait.

However, this means that when the proposal is approved by the European Parliament and the EU Council of Ministers, citizens of Kuwait would no longer need a visa to travel to the European Union (except for Ireland), as well as the Schengen associated countries (Iceland, Switzerland, Norway, and Liechtenstein). — KUNA

Kuwait backs Turkish-Arab foray

ISTANBUL: Kuwait joined the festivities as "Core Istanbul", billed as a collaborative Turkish-Arab firm, that was inaugurated on Saturday in what is touted as a more business-oriented approach towards philanthropy. Kuwait Islamic Charity Organization's participation in the inauguration of the firm is a show of support for any initiative undertaken by Arab youngsters, its chief Dr Abdullah Al-Matouq said.

He hailed the endeavor as a novel initiative in the world of philanthropy, hoping that more Arab and Islamic nations would follow suit in exploring this new approach that aims to give impetus to philanthropic projects. "This represents a new chapter in

global efforts to alleviate human misery," according to Kuwait's Ambassador to Turkey Ghassan Al-Zawawi, praising the initiative as one "worthy of support."

Another Kuwaiti participant, Jamal Al-Nouri, the chief of Kuwait-based Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri charity, said he hoped the new hub would be a launchpad for Arab youngsters into the job market, allowing them the chance to translate their ambitions into realities on the ground. The gathering was attended by a bevy of diplomats from across the wider Arab region, all of them have given their support for an initiative aiming to create an employment boom for youngsters. — KUNA



ISTANBUL: Chief of Kuwait Islamic Charity Organization Dr Abdullah Al-Matouq is pictured during "Core Istanbul" festival. — KUNA

local spotlight

One step closer to Kuwait women empowerment



By Atyab Al-Shatti

local@kuwaittimes.net

In June, we celebrated women's empowerment by having four female members appointed to the Municipal Council, which revealed two essential aspects that govern empowering women in Kuwait. The first is the fact that the four female members were appointed and not voted to the Municipal Council, which means we the public still lack awareness and sufficient knowledge of the importance of supporting women in reaching such positions.

Gender equality means providing equal opportunities for women to hold decision-making positions in the country, considering the fact that the election winners were all men who succeeded and won in a population known for having a majority of women! Raising public awareness regarding women's political empowerment is an important role that the civil society and official authorities should collaborate to achieve. On the other hand, the quota system as a legal structure and one of the mechanisms that could ensure women's presence in political positions.

The concept of the quota system operates by reserving certain seats for a specific segment of individuals, depending on each country's domestic matters. In some countries, the quota seats are always reserved for marginalized communities, while in other countries the quota system reserves seats for women. Coming to the current situation of women's rights in Kuwait, it is clear that there is an actual need for a national mechanism that could empower women and assist in ensuring their presence.

But the fact is that the quota system itself suffers from certain legal gaps and shortfalls, making it to fail to meet the required goals and expectations, while reserving certain seats does not necessarily include regulating the professional qualifications, credentials and expertise of the individual for whom the seat is reserved for. Looking back to the basic law that governs citizens' right to run in elections, we find crucial gaps related to acquiring a high professional degree or experience that determine the knowledge and the mindset of such a person, leading all these legal structures to seriously fail. It is needed at the moment to adopt the following legal recommendations:

(1) To amend national laws regulating running in elections for certain positions by adding chapters that obligates any citizen who wishes to run to obtain certain academic qualifications and/or sufficient experience for the potential post.

(2) To initiate national procedures that empower women in politics and assist women to reach decision making positions, ensuring that such procedures cover the needed requirements from the legal, technical and professional aspects.

Abal-Khail elected member of IFJ executive committee

KUWAIT: Treasurer of Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA) Dehairan Abal-Khail has been elected member of the International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ) executive committee during the union 31st congress hosted by Oman. The KJA said in a statement on Friday Abal-Khail won the post, having garnered 128 votes of the federation general assembly. The voting was held at the conventions hall in the Omani capital, Muscat, involving unions and societies under the IFJ's umbrella—grouping more than 120 entities.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Information has praised Oman's plan to host the triennial World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in Muscat. Minister of Information and Culture Dr Hamad Rouh-Eddin is delighted for the fact that the Sultanate of Oman was able to add knowledge, professional and humanitarian aspects to this important global gathering, said Anwar Murad, the spokesman of the Ministry.

The Sultanate honored the families of journalists who lost their lives while doing their jobs. It also dedicated an award for the best press photo and invited several international organization to the four-day gathering. Murad noted in a statement. Minister Rouh-Eddin congratulated Treasurer of Kuwait Journalists Association Dehairan Abal-Khail on his election to the IFJ Executive Board, the spokesman said, noting that the election reflects the high status of Kuwait's journalism and the freedom of the press. — KUNA



Dehairan Abal-Khail

Local

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Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
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Zain sponsors Oud Fashion Talks

Event discussed sustainable fashion and shed light on Kuwaiti talents



From the panel discussions

Workshop on tumor surgery

KUWAIT: Head of Tumors surgery at Kuwait Cancer Control Center Dr Medhat Oteifa said a specialized workshop about the most recent developments in head, neck and thyroid tumor surgery, as well as tongue, jaw, Parotid gland and mouth cancers, was organized under his supervision in the presence of two experts in advanced tumors surgeries in United Kingdom.



Dr Medhat Oteifa

They gave several lectures and moderated several scientific sessions in addition to conducting several surgeries for patients who suffered from advanced tumors at the center. Dr Oteifa

said the main goal of the workshop is to enhance the performance of Kuwaiti doctors, and enrich scientific discussions between visiting doctors and Kuwaiti counterparts through knowledge of the most recent developments in the most recent means of removing tumors in the thyroid gland in the neck, in addition to reducing the need to travel abroad.

He said the delicate and difficult operations included thyroid and other complicated cases adding that surgeries are the backbone of thyroid cancer treatment, especially that the success rate depends on the doctor's experience.



Al Khashti speaking during the event.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its sponsorship of Oud Fashion Talks, a cultural event on sustainable fashion that featured a number of panel discussions at Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC). The talks were attended by many local and global designers and fashion experts.

Zain's support to this cultural event came as part of its keenness to support the various social efforts that are of interest to the local community and contribute to spreading and implementing sustainable solutions across industries. The fashion industry is one of the biggest global industries that create a negative impact on the environment and consume energy and natural resources.

During his speech, Waleed Al Khashti, Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer, commented: "At Zain, we realize the important role played by the private sector in encouraging and supporting bright ideas and efforts of Kuwait's talents in the local market, especially the ones that offer a real-world added value and shine into the international arena. I'm happy to be here to announce our support as a national company to this unique event".

Al Khashti added: "We are proud of Zain's main sponsorship to Oud Fashion Talks, which includes

an exciting program of many cultural activities featuring celebrated international guests who visit Kuwait specially for this event. The goals of this initiative are well in line with Zain's sustainability strategy, through which we are committed to supporting similar local programs that serve and promote sustainability and preserving the environment".

Al Khashti continued: "Zain's social message seeks to preserve natural resources and increase awareness of the role of every individual in reducing energy consumption, recycling, and other sustainable ways that contribute to combating climate change, the very same goals called for by this event". Al Khashti concluded: "I'd like to stress on Zain's keenness and commitment in supporting similar national initiatives that have such clear goals. The Kuwaiti community is full of passionate young people who have bright ideas and real-life solutions to the local market's challenges".

Oud Fashion Talks aimed at creating a hub for the local and global fashion worlds. Many celebrated international guests were hosted to discuss the importance of sustainable solutions within the fashion industry. The event also shed light on local Kuwaiti talents, and allowed them to exchange and gain knowledge and experiences along with the global guests.

Sheikh Mubarak hosts Turkish Ambassador

KUWAIT: Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah received at the White Palace, Her Excellency Ayse Hilal Sayan Koytak ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Kuwait. The meeting dealt with cordial discussion on issues of common interest, as well as ways to enhance cooperation and working bonds between the two countries, and the investment opportunities available for developing the Kuwaiti-Turkish economic and investment partnership in all fields and sectors, and exchanging views on joint cultural activities.

The meeting was attended by Anas Koytak, Atilla Basbug, the Commercial Counselor at the Embassy, and Rahim Albayrak, Country Advisor of Investment Office of the Presidency of Turkey. Sheikh Mubarak commended the ambassador's efforts in bridging the relations between Kuwait and Turkey, and



KUWAIT: Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah received Her Excellency Ayse Hilal Sayan Koytak ambassador of Turkey to Kuwait at the White Palace.

strengthening cooperation in all fields, and her active and distinguished presence in the Kuwaiti society, expressing his delight at her visit, especially that Turkey means a lot to him.

For her part, the Ambassador commended

Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak's efforts and activities in various economic and investment fields in Kuwait and the region, and seeking to extend joint cooperation between the two friendly countries.



SANAA: Supporters of Yemen's Houthi rebels raise portraits of their leader Abdul Malik Al-Houthi during a rally in the capital Sanaa after the country's warring parties agreed to renew a two-month truce. — AFP

Kuwait Foreign Ministry praises Yemen's truce

KUWAIT: Kuwait Ministry of Foreign Affairs has lauded the announcement of UN's special envoy to Yemen on truce extension for two more months. The ministry stressed on Kuwait's support for the UN's efforts in reaching a permanent political solution for the Yemeni crisis, which reflects on the Yemen's people and its stability.

Also, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) welcomed the announcement by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg of an agreement to extend the current truce in Yemen for a period of two months. In a statement, the OIC said the General Secretariat appreciates the efforts of the Special Envoy. It hopes that the truce will be fully implemented and consolidated, in order to help create conditions for a sustainable political solution to the conflict in Yemen in response to the aspirations of the Yemeni people. The General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation reiterated its support for Yemen to alleviate the suffering of its people and achieve its aspirations for security, peace, stability and development. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: People shop at a fish market in Kuwait City. The Fish Market is on Gulf Road, where most of the city's prominent landmarks are located. Being a traditional fresh fish market, it is a very interesting place to visit. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



HK drives Tiananmen memories underground on 33rd anniversary

Texas fugitive dies in shootout after allegedly killing five

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IRPIN, Ukraine: A boy rides a kick scooter past a destroyed residential building in the town of Irpin, north-west from Ukrainian capital of Kyiv on the 100th day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

Russia forces pushed back in fierce battle

'Russian army throwing all its power, all its reserves in this direction'

KYIV, Ukraine: Ukraine said Saturday its forces were managing to push back against Russian troops in fierce fighting in Severodonetsk despite Russia "throwing all its power" into capturing the strategic eastern city. Lugansk regional governor Sergiy Gaiday said in an interview posted on his official social media that the invading forces had captured most of the city "but now our military have moved them".

"The Russian army, as we understand, is throwing all its power, all its reserves in this direction," said Gaiday, who on Friday claimed that Ukrainian troops had won back a fifth of the city. Severodonetsk is the largest city still in Ukrainian hands in the Lugansk region, where Russian forces have been making gradual advances in recent weeks.

Thousands of people have been killed, millions sent fleeing and towns turned into rubble since President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops into Ukraine 101 days ago. The advance of Russian forces has been slowed by stiff Ukrainian resistance, repelling them from around the capital Kyiv and forcing Moscow to focus on capturing the east.

The press service of Ukraine's presidential office on Saturday said Russian attacks killed four civilians in the Lugansk region as a whole. The situation in Lysychansk-Severodonetsk's twin city, which sits just across a river-looked increasingly dire.

About 60 percent of infrastructure and housing had been destroyed, while internet, mobile networks and gas services had been knocked out, said its mayor

Oleksandr Zaika. In the city of Sloviansk, about 80 kilometres (50 miles) from Severodonetsk, the mayor has urged residents to evacuate in the face of intense bombardment, with water and electricity cut off.

Ukraine also reported two victims from a missile strike on the port of Odessa in the southwest, without specifying if they were dead or injured. Russia's defence ministry said it had struck a "deployment point for foreign mercenaries" in the village of Dachne in the Odessa region. It also claimed a missile strike in the northeastern Sumy region in a place where it said Ukrainian soldiers were receiving training from foreign instructors on using howitzers.

'Shame and hatred'

Russian troops now occupy a fifth of Ukraine's territory and Moscow has imposed a blockade on its Black Sea ports. But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was defiant on Friday. "Victory will be ours," he said in a video speech marking the 100th day of the war. Later, in his nightly address, he dismissed the Russian army as being reduced to "war crimes, shame and hatred" after failing military objectives. But Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said "certain results have been achieved", pointing to the "liberation" of some areas from what he called the "pro-Nazi armed forces of Ukraine".

The West has sent ever-more potent weapons to Ukraine and piled on ever more stringent sanctions against Moscow, with the European Union on Friday

formally adopting a ban on most Russian oil imports. Putin's alleged girlfriend, former gymnast Alina Kabaeva, was also added to an assets freeze and visa-ban blacklist.



"Victory will be ours"

Food crisis

The war has sparked fears of a global food crisis-Ukraine and Russia are among the top wheat exporters in the world. The United Nations said it was leading intense negotiations with Russia to allow Ukraine's grain harvest to leave the country.

Putin in a televised interview Friday said there was "no problem" to export grain from Ukraine, via Kyiv- or Moscow-controlled ports or even through central Europe. The UN has warned that African countries, which imported more than half of their wheat consumption from Ukraine and Russia, face an "unprecedented" crisis.

Food prices in Africa have already exceeded those in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings and

the 2008 food riots. On Friday, Putin met the head of the African Union, Senegalese President Macky Sall, at his Black Sea residence in Sochi.

After the meeting, Sall said he was "very reassured", adding that Putin was "committed and aware that the crisis and sanctions create serious problems for weak economies". French President Emmanuel Macron, meanwhile, said Putin had made a "historic" error in starting the war. But he said the Russian leader should not be "humiliated", and to leave room for diplomacy.

Media driver killed

A driver transporting two Reuters journalists in eastern Ukraine was killed and the two reporters were lightly wounded, a spokesman for the international news agency said. A French volunteer fighter in Ukraine was also killed in combat, the French foreign ministry said.

In areas around the capital Kyiv, which Russian troops retreated from at the end of March, some residents remain in desperate need of assistance. At an aid distribution point in Horenka, northwest of Kyiv, on Friday a tearful Hanna Viniychuk, 67, said she had joined the long queue in search of some basic necessities after losing her home to Russian bombardment. "I'm grateful for this help," she said.

Arkadiy Maznychenko, 75, said: "A lot of houses were burnt, damaged, so people have nothing at all. Everything is shattered, destroyed." — AFP



Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador

Biden faces cloud on summit to reset Latin America ties

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden is hoping to show a new era of US engagement with Latin America at a long-heralded summit next week, but the meeting has been clouded by boycott threats and charges of an unambitious agenda.

Regional leaders will descend on Los Angeles starting Monday for the weeklong Summit of the Americas at a time when China, seen by the United States as a fast-emerging rival, has been making inroads in a zone Washington has historically considered its turf.

Days ahead of the summit, the White House was still finalizing the invitation list in a bid to please Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who has threatened not to come unless all nations are included. Biden, vowing to champion democracy, had planned to exclude the leftist governments of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela on the grounds that they are autocratic, and instead to welcome representatives of civil society from the three countries.

Juan Gonzalez, the top White House adviser on Latin America, told reporters that Biden plans to "advance a vision of a region that is secure, middle class and democratic," which is "fundamentally in the national security interest of the United States." Biden is expected to make announcements at the summit on economic cooperation and fighting both the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, Gonzalez said.

Biden also hopes to secure an agreement on regional cooperation on an issue over which he has faced domestic attacks from the rival Republican Party-migration. The number of Central Americans and Haitians seeking to enter the United States has been surging as they flee poverty and violence in their homelands.—AFP

Bomb kills two peacekeepers in Mali: UN

BAMAKO: Two UN peacekeepers were killed and one wounded on Friday after an improvised bomb exploded in central Mali, a spokesman for the MINUSMA mission tweeted. They were just the latest deaths in the centre of the country, which has since 2012 been wracked by a deadly jihadist insurgency.

In a separate incident, six civilians were killed when a cart hit another explosive device a day earlier, a military official and two councillors said. The soldiers were part of the Egyptian contingent of the UN peacekeeping mission, a security official said.

"The head of MINUSMA condemned the attack," mission spokesman Olivier Salgado said on social media. He said two blue helmets were killed and one wounded, correcting an earlier toll. Salgado said the incident took place near the town of Douentza, on the road to Timbuktu. The UN Security Council said it "condemned in the strongest terms the attack perpetrated against MINUSMA". In a statement, the Security Council also urged the Malian authorities "to swiftly investigate the attack against peacekeepers and bring the perpetrators to justice".

They were the second and third UN peacekeepers to be killed in three days. On Wednesday, a Jordanian blue helmet was killed in an attack on his convoy in Kidal, in northern Mali. "A hard, hard week for us. We cannot say enough about the difficulty of our task and the extreme dedication of our peacekeepers," tweeted MINUSMA chief El-Ghassim Wane.



KIDAL, Mali: File photo shows a soldier of the United Nations mission to Mali MINUSMA standing guard near a UN vehicle after it drove over an explosive device near Kidal, northern Mali. A peacekeeper of the United Nations mission in Mali was killed and three others injured in the attack on their convoy in Kidal. — AFP

With 13,000 members, MINUSMA—the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali—is one of the UN's biggest peacekeeping operations, and one of its most dangerous. It says 174 troops have died from hostile acts since its creation in 2013. "This is the sixth incident in which a UN peacekeeping convoy was hit since May 22," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in New York, condemning the latest attack. But, despite the difficulties, the UN peacekeepers continue their work in accordance with their Security Council mandate, he added, citing MINUSMA's involvement in the recent restoration of two bridges destroyed in the same region.

Improvised explosive devices are a weapon of choice for jihadists attacking MINUSMA and Malian forces. They also kill many civilians. In Thursday's incident, a cart returning from market hit a small bomb near Waya, killing five civilians and gravely wounding a sixth who died on Friday, the military official and councillors said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of jihadist retaliation.

Hotbed of violence

On Friday, the Egyptian peacekeepers were in an escort of a dozen UN vehicles accompanying a convoy of civilian trucks carrying fuel, Salgado said. Such convoys can stretch for miles. A mine exploded as the convoy passed, Salgado said. Mines can be detonated on contact or remotely. Central Mali is a hotbed of violence and jihadist activity that has spread from the north to the centre of the country, and on to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. Thousands of civilians and combatants have died and hundreds of thousands have been displaced. Two reports published this week—one from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and another from the human rights division of MINUSMA—expressed alarm at the intensification of the violence in central Mali. —AFP

Swiss block transfer of arms, APCs to Ukraine

GENEVA, Switzerland: Switzerland insisted Friday that it would not allow Swiss war material to be transferred via third countries to Ukraine, in line with its strict military neutrality. However it decided that individual parts and assembly packages could be delivered to European defence companies even if they will be used to produce war materiel that might later be transferred to Ukraine. Switzerland said it had received requests from Germany and Denmark to transfer war materiel to Ukraine. The German request concerned around 12,400 rounds of 35-millimetre ammunition produced by Switzerland for self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, and for Piranha III wheeled armoured personnel carriers (APCs) that were originally procured by Denmark and which have been stored in Germany since they were decommissioned.

The request made by Denmark concerns 22 Swiss-made Piranha III wheeled APCs. Under Switzerland's War Materiel Act, export requests cannot be approved if the recipient country is in an international armed conflict. "Given that exports of such goods from Switzerland to Ukraine cannot be approved due to the law of neutrality's principle of equal treatment and the provisions of the War Materiel Act, it follows that it is not possible to approve the transfer of Swiss war materiel by Germany and Denmark to Ukraine," the Federal Council government said in a statement.

The government also decided Friday on two requests by Swiss firms to export parts and assembly packages to defence companies in neighbouring Germany and Italy. The requests concerned components for both hand-held anti-tank weapons and for anti-aircraft weapons. "There is a risk that some of the components could be incorporated into war materiel abroad that could then be passed on to Ukraine," the government said. The War Materiel Act allows Swiss companies to participate in international value chains of the defence industry. In practice, the Swiss government has generally only tended to approve the export of parts and assembly packages if their share in the end product's value remains below a certain threshold—less than 50 percent in the case of Italy or Germany.

"The Federal Council has decided to continue this practice. Exports of this kind are compatible with the law of neutrality," it said. Within days of Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine, Switzerland decided to match the neighbouring European Union's sanctions on Moscow, breaking with the neutral Alpine country's traditional reserve.—AFP

International

Texas fugitive dies in shootout after allegedly killing five

Gonzalo Artemio Lopez, was serving a life sentence for murder

WASHINGTON: An escaped murderer suspected of killing five people while on the run was gunned down by Texas police, bringing an end to a three-week-long manhunt after the fugitive's dramatic escape from a prison bus. Gonzalo Artemio Lopez, 46, was serving a life sentence for murder, when he escaped from a prison bus on May 12.

Thursday that Lopez was killed during a shootout with authorities.

Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) spokesman Jason Clark said that on the day of Lopez's getaway, he had escaped his restraints and sawed through a metal cage in which he was being held on the bus before assaulting the driver and fleeing.

Authorities became aware of his whereabouts after police were contacted Thursday by someone who had not heard from relatives who were visiting a vacation home in Centerville. When police went to the home, they discovered the bodies of an adult and four boys—three brothers and their cousin, aged between 11 and 18, as well as their grandfather—and put out an alert for a Chevy Silverado pickup truck that was missing from the residence.

The stolen truck was located later that evening in Jourdan, about 200 miles (320 kilometers) from where Lopez escaped, authorities said, and was disabled with "spike strips." Lopez, who was armed with



Gonzalo Lopez

an AR-15 assault rifle and a handgun, was shot and killed during a gun battle with law enforcement, TDCJ spokesman Clark said.

"Those officers very swiftly shot and killed Lopez, bringing this whole ordeal to an end," he said, adding that it was "an absolute tragedy" that five individuals have lost their lives. "We are very saddened that the murders happened but I will tell you that we are breathing a sigh of relief that Lopez will not be able to hurt anyone else," he said.

Massive manhunt

The shaven-headed and heavily-tattooed Lopez, a Mexican mafia gang member, was sentenced to life in

prison in 2006 for a murder committed with a pickaxe and kidnapping. Lopez was being transported some 160 miles by bus from one prison facility to another in Leon County for a medical appointment when he escaped.

There were 15 other prisoners on the bus at the time, according to the authorities, and Lopez was being held in a special metal cage for "high-risk" inmates. He somehow managed to free himself from restraints, escape from the cage and cut open a gate to attack the bus driver.

Lopez stabbed the driver in the hand and chest in a fight and took the wheel of the bus, authorities said. Another prison guard shot out the back tires of the bus. Lopez lost control of the bus less than a mile away and crashed it into a cow pasture. He fled into nearby woods. He managed to escape detection until late Thursday despite a manhunt that involved hundreds of officers, helicopters, dogs, house-to-house searches and even agents on horseback. — AFP

In Biden's America, even babies are upset

WASHINGTON: If kissing babies has long been the politician's dream photo-op, then Joe Biden's clumsy response to a national baby food shortage is quickly turning into a political nightmare — and the symbol of a presidency struggling to stem discontent.

With his old school Washington ways, decades of political and diplomatic experience, and obvious decency, Biden won election in 2020 on a promise to "heal" the nation after four years of Donald Trump. But this week made clear again that the healing is not happening and that Biden — fairly or not — is being blamed. Courtroom exhibit A is the ramshackle response to a hole in supplies of baby formula, with supermarket shelves emptying and parents worrying about how to feed their newborns. The Biden administration had already been battered by anger over inflation and supply chain breakdowns for things like cars and building materials.

There's also grumbling over the unusually last-minute organization of what's meant to be a major regional forum in Los Angeles next week, the Summit of the Americas. It's not even clear which heads of state are coming. And now, the nation's babies, or at least their parents, are joining the ranks of the upset.

Competency?

The baby formula problem didn't begin with Biden. It began in February when Abbott, which controls about 40 percent of the US market, shut a plant and issued a product recall.

As supply shocks rippled through retailers, parents were presented with the seemingly unlikely scenario in the world's wealthiest nation of not being sure how to feed their infants. To reassure Americans, the White House organized a slickly produced baby formula summit Wednesday featuring the president, top officials and executives from major producers.

The discussion was meant to highlight the adminis-

tration's scramble to procure more formula, including by easing importation rules and providing military transport for shipping.

But the glossy messaging fell apart right in front of the television cameras when Biden tried to get the executives to agree that no one could have foreseen Abbott's recall leading swiftly to a nationwide crisis.

They contradicted him, saying they could. "From the very beginning," as one said.

Messaging muddle

The White House's ability to get out from under piles of bad news has been complicated by a reshuffle in the communications department.

Gone is the widely admired press secretary Jen Psaki. Her successor and previous deputy, Karine Jean-Pierre, is having a baptism of fire — while simultaneously bringing in replacements for a slew of departing assistants.

And this week's daily press briefings brought intense questioning.

Why didn't the president understand the severity of the baby formula issue earlier?

Does the president admit he was wrong to say inflation would be temporary?

Why, in the wake of the Texas school mass shooting and other slaughters, isn't he personally pushing senators to enact gun ownership reforms?

Jean-Pierre found herself on the defensive. Pressed over the 11th hour lack of a guest list for the Summit of the Americas, less than a week before the event, Jean-Pierre responded Wednesday with a frank admission.

"If you've been following this administration for the past year and a half, one week is not the eleventh hour when it comes to ... how things move," she said. "That is a lifetime away for us."

Biden's approval ratings have been below 50 percent since last year, and his Democrats are forecast to lose their slender control of Congress to the Republicans in the November midterm elections.

Things are so bad that even a six-point spike in his latest rating, a Reuters/Ipsos poll released this week, still only brought him to a measly 42 percent. — AFP



"It was an absolute tragedy"

Three weeks after a search that involved local, state and federal officers—as well as a \$50,000 reward offered to the public for his capture—police said late



HAVANA, Cuba: Men wade along a flooded street in Havana. The remnant of Hurricane Agatha is causing intense and persistent rains this Friday in the western and central provinces of Cuba.— AFP

Floods kill three in Cuba

HAVANA, Cuba: Heavy rains from the remnants of Hurricane Agatha flooded much of western Cuba on Friday, killing at least three people in Havana. Thousands of residents in the region lost power and a man in Pinar del Rio province also was missing, Cuban officials said. "Strong, heavy rain and electrical storms have been affecting the western and central regions of Cuba with accumulations greater than 200 millimeters (eight inches), which will continue for the rest of today and tomorrow, Saturday," the Cuban Weather Office (INSMET) said.

A 44-year-old man, initially thought missing, was found dead Friday evening in the western province of Pinar del Rio after falling into a stream, according to local news site CubaDebate. They also reported the disappearance of another person in the region.

Agatha had crashed into southern Mexico with the potential to redevelop as a tropical storm in the Atlantic, the Miami-based US National Hurricane Center had said. So far, heavy rains "have produced floods in localities from Pinar del Rio (western extreme) to Sancti Spiritus (Center) and in the Isla de la Juventud Special Municipality (south of Havana)," INSMET said.

With parts of the capital flooding, state media images showed rescuers in areas of central Havana evacuating people in canoes. Nearly 2,000 people have decided to evacuate their homes, authorities say, while about 50,000 customers in the province of Havana are without electricity.

"People are almost waist-deep in water," said Luis Antonio Torres, first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba (PPC) in the capital. He had visited the municipality of Cerro, one of the most damaged areas, where at least one bridge fell and floodwaters seeped into some homes. The Atlantic hurricane season begins each year on June 1 and ends on November 30, for the North Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. — AFP

Why US gun violence spikes in warm weather

WASHINGTON: From the Texas school massacre to a Tulsa hospital shooting and many less-reported incidents, a recent spate of gun violence across America bears out a trend police departments have long sworn by: murders go up in warmer weather. The link has been written about for decades by criminologists, with more recent research drilling down on the precise relationship between temperature and crime rates.

For those who have studied the question, there are common sense as well as potentially less obvious mechanisms at play. First, the more obvious: "It's hard to shoot somebody if there's nobody around," David Hemenway, a professor of health policy at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, told AFP, explaining why gun crime is lower in bad weather.

A second, more controversial idea is that heat itself — as opposed to weather that encourages people to be out — might rev up conflict. While there are many causes behind the rising tide of gun violence in the United States, weather could play an increasingly important role in world that is fast warming due to climate change.

Warm days in cold months

Hemenway said he had long been interested in the relationship between heat and higher crime given stereotypes about the north-south divide within the United States and Italy, as well as between the northern European states of Scandinavia and southern Mediterranean countries. In 2020, he co-wrote a paper in Injury Epidemiology led by his then-graduate student Paul Reeping examining the city of Chicago between 2012 and 2016.

The paper used reports from the Chicago Tribune to get the number of shootings per day, and then matched those against daily high temperature, humidity, wind speed, difference in temperature from historical average, and precipitation type and amount. They found a 10 degree Celsius higher temperature was significantly associated with 34 percent more shootings on weekdays, and 42 percent more shootings on weekends or holidays.

They also found a 10C higher than average temperature was associated with 33.8 percent higher

rate of shootings. In other words, said Hemenway, it's not just heat that's important, but relative heat: "In the winter, there were more shootings on those days which wouldn't have been hot in the summer but were warm for winter."

Another recent paper, led by Leah Schinasi of Drexel University and published in the Journal of Urban Health in 2017, looked at violent crime in Philadelphia. "I live in Philadelphia, and I remember biking home from work on a very hot day and observing how cranky everyone seemed. I was interested to see if this observation translated to higher rates of crime on hot days," she told AFP.

She and co-author Ghassan Hamra did indeed find violent crimes happened more often in the warmer months — May through September — and were highest on the hottest days. The contrast was most striking on comfortable days in the colder months — October through April — compared to colder days in those months. When temperatures reached 21C during that time period, daily rates of violent crime were 16 percent higher compared to 6C days, the median for those months.

'Harm reduction'

Hemenway believes that both of the main hypotheses on the subject — that more people being outside opens more possibilities of hostile interactions, and that heat itself makes people more aggressive — could be true. A striking study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research in 2019 involved placing university students in Kenya and California in either hot or cold rooms and measuring the impact on a number of behavioral categories.

It found "heat significantly affects individuals' willingness to voluntarily destroy other participants' assets" in the form of gift cards and vouchers. When it comes to the overall issue of gun violence, there are far bigger drivers than temperature, Hemenway acknowledged. These include the fact there were an estimated 393 million guns in circulation in the United States in 2020, more than the number of people, while many states have moved in recent years to ease rather than tighten restrictions.

But better understanding the relationship with weather could have policy implications — for example finding more activities for young males to keep them off street corners on the hottest summer days, and boosting police presence in key areas based on forecasts. "It's sort of a harm reduction," said Hemenway. "But even if this wasn't a gun problem, I suspect we would find the same thing if we had evidence about fights and assaults. What the guns do is make hostile interactions more deadly." — AFP

From behind the wheel to...

Continued from Page 1

women out, saying he didn't want them going near his car, recalled recruit Ghada Ahmad. "At the beginning, it's normal not to trust us, because I'm a woman and he doesn't trust my work as a woman," said Ahmad, wearing grease-streaked white gloves and a long blue overcoat. "It's something new for them... After years of only seeing men, now comes a woman."

As she struggled to learn the basics, Ahmad had moments when she wondered if such men might have a point. "I used to go home with swollen hands, crying and saying: 'This job is not for me. It looks like their words were correct,'" she recalled. But as her skills improved, so did her confidence — aided by other customers who were more encouraging. "One man came and said: 'I'm very proud of you. You are honoring us. You are a crown on our heads.'"

Expanding women's rights is central to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 agenda, intended to diversify the oil-dependent economy while softening Saudi Arabia's image. The highest-profile change came in 2018, when Prince Mohammed oversaw the end of a decades-old ban on women driving. The country has also eased so-called "guardianship" rules that give men arbitrary authority over female relatives.

Yet women mechanics in Jeddah told AFP they could never have started working without their husbands' consent. Ola Flimban, a 44-year-old mother of four, first heard about the jobs from a social media post, and immediately asked her husband, Rafat Flimban, if she could apply. Rafat agreed and

helped his wife prepare for the interview by teaching her the names of spare parts.

"Now she has experience in different car types, how to change oil, how to check cars. She's even checking my car," he said. The support at home has made it easier for Ola to deal with wary customers at the garage. "They are surprised that girls work in this field, and ask us to explain how we fell in love with this field," she said. "That is the most common question."

As she spoke, 20-year-old Mechaal drove up in his silver sedan for an oil change. He admitted being "shocked" that the task would be carried out by a woman, but he soon came around. "If they are here, it must mean they are trained," he said, "and maybe they understand my car better than me."

Petromin vice president Tariq Javed said his company was "confident that this initiative will encourage more women to join the automotive industry in all stages". The company says its training covers "all express services, including oil, battery, tyres, A/C, and other automotive requirements". Perhaps the biggest winners from the firm's initiative are the city's women drivers. "We make girls feel relaxed when we operate on their cars," said 30-year-old Angham Jeddawi, who has been at the garage for six months. "Some girls feel shy when dealing with men. They don't know how to talk with them, and they don't know what will be done with the car. But with us they are free to talk a lot."

For Jeddawi, the job has fulfilled a lifelong goal she once thought impossible. "My dream was to enter the automobile sector, but for a Saudi woman this field was not available. So when the opportunity came, I applied straight away," she said. The knowledge she's gained has encouraged her to hit the road herself. She has been studying for her driving test and hopes to have a license within a month. "If I face a problem in the middle of the road, now I know how to react," she said. — AFP

Saudi receives first foreign...

Continued from Page 1

Muslims who have the means at least once in their lives. Usually one of the world's largest religious gatherings, about 2.5 million people participated in 2019. But after the onset of the pandemic in 2020, Saudi authorities announced they would only let 1,000 pilgrims take part.

The following year, they increased the total to 60,000 fully vaccinated Saudi citizens and residents chosen through a lottery. Barring overseas pilgrims caused deep disappointment among Muslims worldwide, who typically save for years to take part. In April, the kingdom announced it would permit one million Muslims from inside and outside the country to participate in this year's hajj, which will take place in July.

The hajj consists of a series of religious rites that are completed over five days in Islam's holiest city, Makkah, and surrounding areas of western Saudi Arabia. Before the pandemic, Muslim pilgrimages were major revenue earners for the kingdom. — AFP

International

Hong Kong drives Tiananmen memories underground on 33rd anniversary

Unauthorised assembly risks a maximum penalty of five years

HONG KONG, China: Hong Kong authorities strove on Saturday to stop any public commemoration of the 33rd anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown, with police warning gatherings could break the law as China vies to remove all reminders of the deadly event.

On June 4, 1989, Beijing sent troops and tanks to break up peaceful protests, crushing demonstrations calling for political change and curbs on official corruption. Hundreds, by some estimates more than 1,000, were killed in the crackdown. Discussion of what happened is all but forbidden on the mainland.

Semi-autonomous Hong Kong had been the one place in China where large-scale remembrance was still tolerated — until two years ago when Beijing imposed a national security law to snuff out dissent after huge pro-democracy protests in 2019.

Authorities have warned the public that “participating in an unauthorised assembly” on Saturday risks a maximum penalty of five years’ imprisonment. They have also closed large parts of Victoria Park, once the site of packed annual candlelight vigils attended by tens of thousands. The park and nearby Causeway Bay shopping district were heavily policed Saturday, and multiple people were stopped and searched.

‘Nothing to see here’

One man, wearing a black T-shirt and carrying a white chrysanthemum, a sign of mourning, spoke to reporters after being searched. “The police warned me not to do anything to attract people to gather,” said the man, surnamed Lau. “But people are going to work and I am just passing by with a

white chrysanthemum.”

“This is infringing on Hong Kong people’s individual freedom,” Lau said he used to join the vigil every year. Pedestrian areas where pro-democracy groups would in the past set up booths were cordoned off.

“Keep going. Nothing to see here,” an officer told passersby through a loudspeaker.

AFP journalists saw one man in a black T-shirt being taken away in a police van. The previous night, a performance artist who whittled a potato into the shape of a candle and held a lighter to it was also tak-



“Keep going, nothing to see here”

en away from the same area.

Security was heightened in Beijing on Saturday as well, with officer numbers bulked up, and ID checks and facial recognition devices set up on roads leading to Tiananmen Square.

China has gone to exhaustive lengths to erase the crackdown from collective memory, omitting it from history textbooks and scrubbing references to it from the Chinese internet and social media platforms. A similar approach is now beginning to be applied to Hong Kong, as authorities remould the

and sending a request letter for the amendment of the sentence,” the spokesman said. “But the court rejected their appeal and request. There is no other step after that,” he added.

Two other men, who were convicted and sentenced to death for killing a woman they alleged was an informer for the junta in Yangon, will also be executed, the spokesman said. No date has been set for the executions, Zaw Min Tun said.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the junta’s decision, calling it “a blatant violation to the right to life, liberty and security of person”, according to his spokesman Stephane Dujarric. Guterres called for the two pro-democracy activists to be released and all the charges against them to be dropped. “The Secretary-General considers that the death penalty cannot be reconciled with full respect for the right to life,” Dujarric told reporters.

“Abolition is necessary and desirable for the enhancement of human dignity and the progressive development of human rights.” A spokesperson for Amnesty International called on the junta to “immediately drop such plans and for the international community to step up its efforts to intervene”.

‘Fuel to the fire’

The junta’s decision to “move towards executing two prominent political leaders will be like pouring gasoline on the fire of popular anti-military resist-



HONG KONG: Police stop a woman (C) as she holds blank sheets of paper in the Causeway Bay district of Hong Kong on June 4, 2022, close to the venue where Hong Kongers have traditionally gathered to mourn victims of China’s 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, on the 33rd anniversary of the incident. — AFP

city in the mainland’s image.

Since last September, the Victoria Park vigil’s organisers have been arrested and charged with subversion, their June 4 museum has been closed, statues have been removed and memorial church services cancelled. Commemoration events in Macau

were also cancelled this year.

One Hong Konger told AFP that in place of the Victoria Park vigil, she had lit a candle at home, and would walk around the city wearing a T-shirt with June 4 numerals as a more “subtle” form of remembrance. — AFP

Myanmar junta to carry out first judicial executions

YANGON, Myanmar: Myanmar’s junta will execute a former lawmaker from Aung San Suu Kyi’s party and a prominent democracy activist, both of whom were convicted of terrorism, in the country’s first judicial executions since 1990, a spokesman told AFP on Friday.

Four people, including former MP Phyo Zeya Thaw and democracy activist Ko Jimmy, “who were sentenced to death will be hanged according to prison procedures”, junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told AFP. The junta has sentenced dozens of anti-coup activists to death as part of its crackdown on dissent after seizing power last year, but Myanmar has not carried out an execution for decades.

Phyo Zeya Thaw, a former lawmaker from Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy who was arrested in November, was sentenced to death in January for offences under anti-terrorism laws. Prominent democracy activist Kyaw Min Yu—better known as “Jimmy”—received the same sentence from the military tribunal.

“They continued the legal process of appealing

Myanmar villagers accuse junta troops of burning spree

BANGKOK: Myanmar junta troops have torched hundreds of buildings during a three-day raid in the country’s north, local media and residents said, as the military struggles to crush resistance to its rule. The Sagaing region has seen fierce fighting and bloody reprisals since the coup last year, with local “People’s Defence Force” (PDF) members clashing regularly with junta troops.

Analysts say the informal militia has surprised junta forces with its effectiveness, and the military has on numerous occasions called in air strikes to support its troops on the ground. Troops torched hundreds of buildings in the villages of Kinn, Upper Kinn and Ke Taung over three days last week, locals and media reports said. On May 26, villagers in Kinn fled as soldiers approached and began shooting into the air, said one resident who requested anonymity. “The next morning we saw smoke rising from our village before they left. “Over 200 houses were burned down... my house was totally burned down, only the concrete foundation is left.”

Drone footage purporting to show the aftermath obtained by AFP showed columns of smoke rising into the sky from the villages, set along a roughly eight-kilometre stretch of the Chindwin river. A health clinic seen in the video matched the geolocation of one in Ke Taung village. AFP digital verification reporters confirmed the footage had not appeared online before last week but could not independently verify reports from the region. Soldiers “raided and destroyed our houses”, said Ke Taung villager Aye Tin, who requested to use a pseudonym.

“And they also burned motor boats that we use for transport and for carrying food for our village, including my boat. “My life is ruined, as I have lost my home... and I nothing left to do for a living.” Satellite images from US space agency NASA showed fires in locations that matched Ke Taung and Kinn villages last week. The junta has previously rebuffed claims its troops have torched houses, accusing “terrorist” PDF fighters of starting the fires. In a speech on Tuesday, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said “efforts were made to minimise the casualties as much as possible in performing the counterattacks to terror acts.” — AFP



KHARTOUM: Sudanese demonstrators take to the streets in Khartoum to demand justice for scores of pro-democracy protesters killed during the suppression of a 2019 sit-in against now ousted dictator Omar al-Bashir. — AFP

One shot dead as Sudan marks 3 years since crackdown

KHARTOUM, Sudan: Security forces shot a protester dead in Sudan’s capital Friday, medics said, as pro-democracy demonstrators demanded justice for those killed in a bloody crackdown three years ago to the day.

Thousands took to the streets in Khartoum and other cities to commemorate the 128 people who medics say were killed when armed men in military fatigues violently dispersed a months-long sit-in outside army headquarters.

The latest demonstrations came as UN human rights expert Adama Dieng visited Sudan and urged authorities to “refrain from use of excessive force”. The protests in 2019 were crucial to pressing the military into sharing power with civilians in the wake of the ouster in April that year of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

But a military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan in October last year derailed that fragile political transition, and protesters have



Kyaw Min Yu

attack on a commuter train in Yangon in August that killed five policemen.

A hip-hop pioneer whose subversive rhymes irked the previous junta, he was jailed in 2008 for membership of an illegal organisation and possession of foreign currency. He was elected to parliament representing Aung San Suu Kyi’s NLD in the 2015 elections, which ushered in a transition to civilian rule. The country’s military alleged voter fraud during elections in 2020 — which the NLD won by a landslide—as justification for its coup on February 1 last year. Suu Kyi has been detained ever since and faces a slew of charges in a junta court that could see her face a prison sentence of more than 150 years. — AFP

ance in the country”, said Phil Robertson, a deputy director at Human Rights Watch.

“Such a move will also lead to global condemnation and cement the junta’s reputation as among the worst of the worst human rights abusers in Asia.” Phyo Zeya Thaw had been accused of orchestrating several attacks on regime forces, including a gun

News in brief

S Lanka in diplomatic spat

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka’s main airport on Saturday denied the island nation’s government was behind a decision to detain an Aeroflot aircraft, after Russia lodged a diplomatic protest over the move. The Airbus A330 was seized at the Bandaranaika International Airport on Thursday, the same day it arrived from Moscow, after a directive from a court in the capital Colombo. Flight SU289 was about to return to the Russian capital with 191 passengers and 13 crew aboard. Sri Lanka’s top envoy was summoned to the Russian foreign ministry on Friday to receive a “resolute protest” over the detention, Russian state news agency TASS reported. But Airport and Aviation Services, which runs Bandaranaika airport, said in a statement the dispute was “purely of a commercial nature” and should not be subject to state involvement. The plane was stopped on the orders of Colombo Commercial Court in response to a commercial dispute filing by Celestial Aviation Trading 10 Limited of Ireland. — AFP

Train driver killed in China

BEIJING: A high-speed rail driver was killed and several passengers injured after a train derailed in southwest China’s Guizhou province on Saturday, state media reported. The train, which was en route to Guangdong province, derailed after running into debris that had fallen onto the tracks near a tunnel, official broadcaster CCTV reported. Video footage published by multiple Chinese outlets showed severe damage to the driver’s car, which was pulverised by the impact while the rest of the train remained largely intact. A rail conductor and seven passengers were injured and sent to hospital, CCTV said, adding that “their lives were not in danger”. “The train driver unfortunately died,” CCTV said. The footage in Chinese media showed confused passengers and children screaming in one of the train cars after the crash, with food and belongings strewn across the floor of the otherwise undamaged car. “Oh my gosh, what happened?” a man can be heard saying in English in the footage. — AFP

German train crash

BURGRAIN, Germany: The death toll from a German train derailment near a Bavarian Alpine resort climbed to five on Saturday as a further body was recovered from the wreckage, police said. Investigators were combing the overturned carriages for victims and clues as to the cause of Friday’s accident near Garmisch-Partenkirchen, a region gearing up to host the G7 summit in late June. “At the moment we do not believe there were further victims, but I cannot yet say for sure,” regional deputy police chief Frank Hellwig told reporters. He said four of the dead were women, with another 44 people injured, some of them children. The accident occurred just after midday on Friday as school holidays were starting in the two southern German regions Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria. Police said the regional train was “very crowded” with about 140 people on board as a new nine-euro (\$10) monthly public transport ticket valid across Germany also boosted demand. — AFP

returned to the streets at least weekly since then—often in the face of renewed deadly force.

“Blood for blood,” protesters in Khartoum chanted, while others urged the military “to go back to their barracks”. The police released a statement accusing demonstrators of attacking police stations, wounding policemen and causing damage.

‘We want justice’

Amna Behiri, whose son Abdel Salam Kesha was one of the demonstrators killed three years ago, joined one of the rallies Friday wearing a shirt emblazoned with a print of her son’s face. “We want justice before anything else,” she told AFP. “Without justice, we can’t have a democratic state.”

An investigation was launched into the June 2019 crackdown later that year, but even before last year’s military power grab, it struggled to make headway and it is still to announce its findings. “We lost youth who were dear to the people of Sudan,” said Diaa Eddine, whose nephew was also killed in the crackdown three years ago. “With this anniversary, God willing, the Sudanese revolution will win.”

Britain, Norway and the United States issued a tripartite statement Friday “calling for the prompt resolution of the government-appointed investigation into the (2019) massacre and disclosure of findings to the public.” — AFP

SUNDAY, JUNE 5, 2022

Business

US can confront inflation 'without sacrificing' economic gains: Biden

American employers added 390,000 jobs in May

WASHINGTON: The latest batch of solid employment figures shows the United States can weather the inflation surge while maintaining healthy growth, President Joe Biden said Friday. "We've laid an economic foundation that's historically strong," Biden said, emphasizing the resiliency of the US economy despite rising consumer prices.

"Now we're moving forward to a new moment where we can build on that foundation—build a future of stable, steady growth—so we can bring down inflation without sacrificing all the historic gains we've made." American employers added 390,000 jobs last month, the Labor Department reported, a sign of a slowdown in hiring but still a better-than-expected result amid a shortage of workers.

Wages rose again and were 5.2 percent higher than May 2021, but the annual pace of increases was slightly slower than recorded in April, the report said. That could be good news for the Federal Reserve, which has launched an aggressive campaign to raise interest rates to combat the highest US inflation in more than 40 years. "I know that even with today's good news, a lot of Americans remain anxious," Biden said, acknowledging the sky-high prices for essential goods such as food and gasoline, which has reached a record high at the pump.

But "because of the enormous progress we've made on the economy, the Americans can tackle inflation from a position of strength," the president said. Meanwhile, US job gains continued in May but at a slower pace, and rapid wage increases cooled as well, a welcome sign for US policymakers trying to ease red-hot inflation. President Joe Biden, who has been pummeled in opinion polls as prices have spiked, said the employment data released Friday

showed the world's largest economy weathering the inflation surge while maintaining healthy growth.

"We've laid an economic foundation that's historically strong," Biden said in comments in his home state of Delaware, emphasizing the resiliency of the US economy despite rising consumer prices. "Now we're moving forward to a new moment where we can build on that foundation—build a future of stable, steady growth—so we can bring down inflation without sacrificing all the historic gains we've made."

American employers added 390,000 jobs last month, the Labor Department reported, a sign of a slowdown in hiring but still a better-than-expected result amid the ongoing shortage of workers.

Employers have struggled to fill open positions, which has pushed wages higher, and average hourly earnings rose another ten cents compared to April, to \$31.95. The pay rate is 5.2 percent higher over the last 12 months ended in May, but that is slightly slower than the 12-month increase posted in April, the report said. That could be good news for the Federal Reserve, which has launched an aggressive campaign to raise interest rates to combat the highest US inflation in more than 40 years.

"Average hourly earnings growth remains moderate relative to last year," former White House economic advisor Jason Furman said on Twitter. "That's the most important number in this release for inflation and it's mostly reassuring." Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics noted that the annualized rate of increase in the latest three months was just 4.3 percent—the smallest since April of last year.

"The downshift from the 6.1 percent peak in January is clear, and the rate will slow further," he said, which "will bring a sigh of relief at the Fed." The



ALEXANDRIA, US: A waiter works at a restaurant in Alexandria, Virginia on June 3, 2022. US employers added 390,000 jobs last month, the US Labor Department reported on June 3, 2022, a sign of a slowdown in hiring but still a better-than-expected result. — AFP

US central bank began raising the benchmark borrowing rate in March and has made clear the increases are likely to continue the rest of the year, including two big hikes in June and July that together would take the level to 1.75 percent from zero, where it sat throughout the pandemic. Biden acknowledged that American families are anxious about sky-high prices for essential goods such as food and gasoline, which has reached a record high

at the pump, and again said much of the blame lies with Russian leader Vladimir Putin and his invasion of Ukraine. "I've been upfront with the American people from the outset, that there would be a cost here at home of Putin's decision to brutally and savagely invade a sovereign nation. But as your president, I remain committed to doing everything in my power to blunt the impact on American families," Biden said. — AFP

Global plastic use and waste on track to triple by 2060

PARIS: A world severely blighted by plastic pollution is on track to see the use of plastics nearly triple in less than four decades, according to findings released Friday. Annual production of fossil-fuel-based plastics are set to top 1.2 billion tons by 2060 and waste to exceed one billion tons, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Even with aggressive action to cut demand and improve efficiencies, plastic production would almost double in less than 40 years, the 38-nation body projects in a report. Such globally coordinated policies, however, could hugely boost the share of future plastic waste that is recycled, from 12 to 40 percent. There is increasing international alarm over volume and omnipresence of plastics pollution, and its impact. Infiltrating the most remote and otherwise pristine regions of the planet, microplastics have been discovered inside fish in the deepest recesses of the ocean and locked inside Arctic ice.

The debris is estimated to cause the deaths of



more than a million seabirds and over 100,000 marine mammals each year. "Plastic pollution is one of the great environmental challenges of the 21st century, causing wide-ranging damage to ecosystems and human health," OECD chief Mathias Cormann said.

Since the 1950s, roughly 8.3 billion tons of plastic have been produced with more than 60 percent of that tossed into landfills, burned or dumped directly into rivers and oceans. Some 460 million tons of plastics were used in 2019, twice as much

as 20 years earlier. The amount of plastic waste has also nearly doubled, exceeding 350 million tons, with less than 10 percent of it recycled.

On current trends, the use of plastics is projected to roughly double in North America, Europe, and East Asia. In other emerging and developing countries, it is expected to grow three- to five-fold, and more than six-fold in sub-Saharan Africa. The new report contrasts a business-as-usual trajectory with the benefits of more ambitious global policies of reduced plastic use and pollution. — AFP

Turkish inflation hits highest rate since 1998 at 73.5%

ISTANBUL: Turkey's inflation climbed to its highest level since 1998, hitting an annual 73.5 percent in May, official data showed Friday, an issue dogging President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ahead of elections next year. Critics have blamed the country's economic woes on Erdogan's unorthodox economic policy of pushing for lower interest rates to combat price rises.

The central bank refused again last week to raise its main rate, keeping it at 14 percent. Soaring food and energy prices pushed inflation even higher last

month. Transport prices jumped by 107.6 percent in May while food was up 91.6 percent. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the coronavirus pandemic have exacerbated the energy price spikes and production bottlenecks.

With elections looming in June 2023, the opposition and many economists have accused the national statistics agency of deliberately underestimating the magnitude of inflation.

The Inflation Research Group, made up of independent Turkish economists, said Friday that inflation actually accelerated by a whopping 160.8 percent, more than twice the official figure. The statistics agency did not publish the detailed list of prices per product that serves as a basis for its calculations, a move that raised fresh doubts about the accuracy of official figures.

"According to my own observations, the gap

between reality and what is measured has widened this month, with the goal of hiding impoverishment," economist Murat Kubilay wrote on Twitter.

The country's currency, meanwhile, has lost nearly 48 percent in value over the past year. The collapse of the lira has pushed up the cost of energy imports and foreign investors are now turning away from the once-promising emerging market. Rumors of a military intervention in northern Syria further hit the value of the Turkish lira, which was at 16.49 to the dollar on Friday. The currency has lost nearly 48 percent in value over the past year.

Erdogan's government has responded by using state banks to buy up liras in a bid to cut the currency's losses. Turkey has cut taxes on some goods and offered subsidies for electricity bills for vulnerable households but even this has failed to stem inflation. — AFP

court rejects the corresponding appeal." Uber drivers are typically paid for each ride and are considered self-employed which means they are not entitled to benefits including paid holidays, pensions and sick leave. But in 2019, the Geneva canton determined there was a "subordination link", meaning the drivers were not free to choose their clients, set their prices or pick their routes.

It ruled that Uber, which has faced regulatory issues in a range of countries, was therefore subject to Swiss employment law, meaning it was responsible for paying social charges for its drivers.

Geneva hailed Friday's ruling as a "historic victory", adding in a statement that the temporary ban on Uber's ride-hailing activities in the canton could take effect as of Sunday. Uber acknowledged in a statement that it now would have "no other choice but to temporarily suspend its (ride-hailing) services in the canton while we again con-

tact the authorities in search of an acceptable solution for all".

It slammed the decision, saying it "does not take into account the fact that the drivers ... do not want to be employees". It also insisted that while the ruling refers to how Uber operated in Geneva up until 2019, "it does not take into account the modifications carried out since then".

The San Francisco-based tech firm stressed that the Federal Court ruling only had implications in Geneva and not across Switzerland. But Geneva authorities highlighted that the Federal Court ruling provides precedence for other Swiss regions that might want to follow Geneva's example.

Fabienne Fischer, a member of the cantonal government in charge of labor issues, said in the statement that the ruling marked a "major advance for the respect of working conditions, salary protection and the fight against unfair competition". — AFP

Campaign launched to stop Musk buying Twitter

SAN FRANCISCO: Advocacy groups on Friday launched a campaign to stop Elon Musk from buying Twitter as the proposed purchase cleared review by US antitrust authorities. Twitter said that the deal for Musk to acquire the company was a step closer to being sealed with the passing of a deadline for it to be challenged under a US antitrust law.

The Tesla chief's \$44 billion deal to take the one-to-many messaging platform private still faces review by other regulators and must be approved by shareholders. A "Stop The Deal" campaign launched by a coalition of nonprofit groups aims to stop the takeover. "Elon Musk is a wolf in expensive sheep's clothing whose Twitter takeover is motivated by ego and grievance," Accountable Tech executive director Nicole Gill said in a release.

"If we don't stop this deal, he'll hand a megaphone to demagogues and extremists, who will cheer him as they incite more hate, harm, and harassment." The campaign will involve pressing the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and other agencies to closely scrutinize everything about the takeover deal.

The coalition will also work to convince Twitter shareholders and advertisers to oppose Musk buying the San Francisco-based tech firm. The list of more than a dozen organizations involved in the campaign includes MoveOn, SumOfUs, Media Matters for America, and the Center for Countering Digital Hate.

Musk became a major Twitter stockholder following his purchase of 73.5 million shares in early April, and less than two weeks later he launched a hostile takeover bid.

The SEC has asked Musk to explain why he didn't disclose within a required 10-day time period his increased stake in Twitter, especially if he planned to buy the company. "Your response should address, among other things, your recent public statements on the Twitter platform regarding Twitter, including statements questioning whether Twitter rigorously adheres to free speech principles," regulators said in a letter. Musk also faces a lawsuit filed by shareholders accusing him of pushing down Twitter's stock price in order to either give himself an escape hatch from his buyout bid or room to negotiate a discount.

The suit alleges the billionaire Tesla boss tweeted and made statements intended to create doubt about the deal. The claim seeks class action status and calls on a federal court in San Francisco to back the validity of the deal and award shareholders any damages allowed by law.

Musk is a frequent Twitter user, regularly firing off inflammatory and controversial statements about current events or other public figures with remarks that are whimsical or business-focused. — AFP

Swiss court upholds Uber ban in Geneva

GENEVA: Switzerland's highest court agreed Friday that Uber drivers should be considered employees and not independent contractors, backing a Geneva decision to temporarily ban activities by ride-hailing giant. Switzerland's Federal Court rejected Uber's appeal of a 2019 ruling in the Swiss canton of Geneva classifying its drivers as employees, and ordering it to halt its activities unless it pays their social charges.

In a statement, the court said the Geneva court's ruling was "not arbitrary", adding that "the federal

Business

Al-Shall Weekly Market Report

Kuwait's public budget likely to achieve a surplus of KD 9.924bn

By May end, Kuwait oil price reached \$117.3 per barrel

KUWAIT: By the end of May 2022, the second month of the current fiscal year 2022/2023 ended with the monthly average price of Kuwaiti oil reaching \$117.3 per barrel. It is \$52.3 or 80.5 percent higher than the new hypothetical price of \$65 estimated in the current budget and \$72.3 higher than the average hypothetical price of \$45 for the past fiscal year. The average oil price for the month of May is 46.8 percent higher than the yearly average price of \$79.9 per barrel recorded in the past fiscal year 2021/2022. According to the Ministry of Finance, the average price for May is \$42.3 higher than the new budget's parity price of \$75 (with-out the deduction of 10 percent of revenues for the future generations' reserve).

Kuwait is supposed to have achieved actual oil revenues of KD 2.652 billion in May. Assuming that production and prices would continue at the current levels -an unrealistic assumption- Kuwait's oil revenues for the entire current fiscal year would reach KD 29.795 billion, after deducting annual production costs pertaining to the entire current fiscal year. It would be KD 13.053 billion higher than the estimated revenues of KD 16.741 billion for the current budget. Adding KD 2.078 billion in non-oil revenues, total budget expected revenues for the current fiscal year would amount to KD 31.873 billion. Comparing this figure with the expected expenditures of KD 21.949 billion, it is likely that the public budget to achieve a surplus of KD 9.924 billion. With oil revenues being the only decisive factor, while the oil market situation due to the Ukrainian war is very exceptional and short-term, any prudent fiscal policy maker must estimate a discount rate to estimate future

risks, which are inevitable and substantial.

Performance of Boursa Kuwait

The performance during the month of May varied compared to that of April, with an increase in the average daily traded value coupled with a negative performance for all the indices. The Premier Market index dropped by -6.8 percent, the Main Market Index by -5.0 percent, the All-Share Market index (reflective of both mentioned markets) by -6.4 percent, and the BK Main 50 index by -4.5 percent. Boursa total liquidity during May achieved a higher level than that of April's liquidity. The traded value was at KD 1.602 billion, rising from KD 1.345 billion in April. The average daily trading value in May was KD 89 million compared to KD 67.2 million in April, reflecting a 32.4 percent increase from April's average. Traded value in the first 5 months of 2022 (99 trading days) totaled KD 7.095 billion, with an average daily trading value of KD 71.7 million, this represents a 42 percent increase compared to the average of the same period in 2021 of KD 50.5 million, and a 29 percent increase when compared with the same average of the entire previous year of KD 55.6 million. Liquidity analysis indicates that, since the beginning of the year, half of the listed companies captured only 1.9 percent of the total liquidity, out of which 50 companies capturing 0.5 percent and 2 companies with no trading. As for the small liquid companies, 12 companies whose market value equals 4.9 percent of all listed companies' value captured about 16.3 percent of total market liquidity. This means that with almost half of the listed companies deprived of market liqui-

ty, liquidity strongly favors small-cap companies. Liquidity distribution between the two markets during May 2022 was as follows:

Premier Market (26 companies)

It captured about KD 1.239 billion or 77.3 percent of total Boursa liquidity. Half of its companies captured 89.7 percent of its liquidity and 69.3 percent of total Boursa liquidity, while the other half captured the remainder or 10.3 percent of its liquidity. Liquidity concentration rate reached a high level, as 7 companies obtained 78.2 percent of its liquidity. During the first 5 months of 2022, the Premier Market captured 69.9 percent of total Boursa liquidity.

Main Market (132 companies)

It captured KD 363 million or about 22.7 percent of Boursa liquidity, 20 percent of its companies captured 86.8 percent of its liquidity while 80 percent of its companies captured only 13.2 percent of its liquidity. The Main Market obtained 30.1 percent of total Boursa liquidity during the first 5 months of 2022. When compared to the distribution of liquidity between the Premier and the Main markets, we notice an improvement, since the main market share of liquidity for the whole of 2021 was about 40.6 percent, the distribution of liquidity indicates a return to focus on the premier market, leaving only about 30.1 percent for the Main Market as mentioned previously.

GCC financial markets

Performance of May was negative for the majority

of the selected markets, during which 9 markets achieved losses (includes all GCC markets), while five markets achieved gains compared to the performance of April. By the end of May, the performance was divided equally between seven gaining markets and seven other losing markets compared to the levels of their indices at the end of last year. Although all GCC stock markets achieved losses in May, they still occupy the top six positions compared to the end of 2021.

The biggest loser in May was the Dubai market, which its index lost -10.1 percent, and accordingly its gains decreased since the beginning of the year to 4.7 percent. The second largest loser during May was Bahrain Bourse, dropping by -6.6 percent and thus its gains since the beginning of the year fell to 6.9 percent. Followed in May's losses by Boursa Kuwait at -6.4 percent, indicating that Boursa Kuwait's gains fell to 11.1 percent by the end of May compared to the end of last year. The Saudi market, Qatar Stock Exchange and the Indian market also lost by -5.9 percent, -4.9 percent and -2.6 percent respectively, at the end of May.

The weekly performance of Boursa Kuwait

The performance of Boursa Kuwait for last week was more active, where the traded value, traded volume, number of transactions and the general index (AlShall Index) increased. AlShall Index (value weighted) closed at 699 points as of last Thursday, showing an increase by 13 points or by 1.9 percent compared with its level last week. While it remained higher by 76.2 points or by 12.2 percent compared with the end of 2021.

EU seeks to unblock stalled trade deals

BRUSSELS: The EU is set to intensify efforts to finalize trade negotiations with Australia, New Zealand and Chile all while making sure adequate environmental norms are met, a top official said Friday. Following a meeting of trade ministers of the 27 member states, EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said there "was a very broad consensus" that the bloc needed to "intensify and... accelerate the work on concluding, signing and ratifying trade agreements".

Clinching trade deals with partners across the globe has long been the major priority of the European Commission, the EU's executive arm that handles trade policy for EU countries. Spooked by the highly protectionist turn taken by the United States under former president Donald Trump, as well as the reluctance of China to open its economy, the EU pivoted to a more defensive trade policy.

This was encouraged by France which currently holds the EU's six-month presidency and has asked for a more cautious approach on trade deals, especially one with Mercosur, the South American trade bloc that has been agreed but yet to be ratified. The Czech Republic and Sweden, which take over the EU's next two presidencies, are lobbying for the return of a more liberal trade stance, with free trade deals at their centre. "When it comes to a free trade agenda I think the EU needs to do much more and (be) much quicker," said Swedish trade minister Anna Hallberg before the talks in Luxembourg.

"We need to be relevant trading partners, an attractive trading partner and we have a number of trade deals on the table. We need to conclude them now," she added. Sweden takes over the EU presidency in January 2023 and will put pressure on the EU to conclude several deals, if they haven't crossed the finish line already. The most ambitious hopes are that the European Commission will conclude negotiations with Chile, New Zealand and Australia by the end of this year. The commission would also like to ratify agreements already struck with Mexico and Mercosur, but these are stuck in a legal limbo. The Mercosur deal was negotiated over two decades and still faces bitter opposition from European cattle farmers and fears it lacks safeguards against the deforestation of the Amazon. French Trade Minister Franck Riester said Paris wasn't opposed to a ramped up trade agenda, insisting trade deals should also be used to pressure partners into better practices. Trade deals "must be aligned with our commitments to sustainable development, societal development, the environment... They can offer leverage in accomplishing those policies," he added. — AFP



KUWAIT: Talal A Al Mulla (center), Ola Kallenius, Martin Schulz, Rohit Bhasin, Imad Flayhan, Steve Brown and senior executives from Al Mulla Automobiles Co during the event.



KUWAIT: Talal A Al Mulla with the visiting Mercedes-Benz Group AG top executives during a tour of Al Mulla Automobiles Mercedes-Benz Boutique at the Avenues.

Al Mulla Automobiles hosts Mercedes-Benz delegates to open new facilities in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Al Mulla Automobiles Co, a member of Al Mulla Group and the sole authorized distributor and exclusive service partner for Mercedes-Benz in Kuwait, recently hosted a high-level delegation from Mercedes-Benz AG to commemorate the opening of its new flagship Mercedes-Benz Service Center in Shuwaikh and groundbreaking ceremony to commemorate the start of construction of its expansion project.

In attendance were Ola Kallenius - Chairman of the Board of Management of Mercedes-Benz Group AG - and accompanied by Martin Schulz - President & CEO of Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East, as well as Steffen Hoffman - Head of Investor Relations Mercedes-Benz AG.

The notable visit started with a tour of Al Mulla Automobiles' approach to luxury retail at the Mercedes-Benz Boutique at the Avenues led by Talal A Al Mulla - Chief Executive Officer of Al Mulla Group, Rohit Bhasin - Chief Financial Officer of Al Mulla Group, Imad Flayhan - Managing Director of Al Mulla Automotive Group, Steve Brown - Director of Al Mulla Automobiles Co, and Senior Executives from Al Mulla Automobiles Co. This was followed by presentation of the latest strategic growth investments undertaken by Al Mulla Group and the extensive efforts by Al Mulla Automobiles Co to expand the Mercedes-Benz brand and network in Kuwait.

Commenting on this occasion, Talal A Al Mulla, Chief Executive Officer of Al Mulla Group said: "We are delighted to be hosting the Chairman of the Board of Management of Mercedes-Benz Group

AG Ola Kallenius along with the Mercedes-Benz delegation in Kuwait. This was a first-of-its-kind visit to an authorized Mercedes-Benz distributor in the region."

"Al Mulla Automobiles- Mercedes-Benz Kuwait has been working diligently in its efforts to expand the Mercedes-Benz network in Kuwait through a variety of new projects. From the start of our bilateral cooperation with Mercedes-Benz, we have undertaken a strategic approach to put into place an infrastructure of retail showrooms and service centers that adequately represents the brand's promise and offers our clients in Kuwait an unparalleled experience in the automotive sector. We are very excited to showcase our innovative investments with our guests, and we hope to host them in the near future to unveil our future expansion projects," Talal A Al Mulla added.

New flagship Mercedes-Benz service center in Shuwaikh

Built on a land area of 11,200sqm, this new state-of-the-art facility boasts an extensive number of services and operational capacity including a service lobby consisting of 10 service lane bays, and one dedicated solely for AMG, 11 Delivery Bays within the full air-conditioned service lobby. The service reception area, which fully adheres to the latest Mercedes-Benz approach to service, includes customer receiving areas, consisting of two private and six semi-private consultation areas respectively along with a beautiful lounge area, where customers can relax and enjoy the Barista services whilst

shopping the latest from the Mercedes-Benz Boutique and lifestyle collections.

At Al Mulla Automobiles we take our service quality very seriously. That is why we have built this new Flagship Mercedes-Benz Service Center in Shuwaikh that consists of 52 working bays, two wash lanes, two vacuum bays, and a dedicated spare parts retail area and a warehouse area. The Mercedes-Benz General Repair Workshop is equipped with the latest in advanced Mercedes-Benz approved technology and machinery. In addition, we are fully dedicated to investing in our highly skilled certified technical team who has undertaken in-depth technical training courses to provide our customers with the highest levels of service and support ensuring all elements of the customer journey are done in accordance with Mercedes-Benz standards.

Groundbreaking of further expansion projects

The visit was concluded with a ceremonial groundbreaking of a new fully integrated Mercedes-Benz facility in Shuwaikh. Built on a total area of 60,000sqm of built-up area, this state-of-the-art facility will serve upon completion as an exciting additional channel in Al Mulla Automobiles' network and a continuation of the company's commitment to innovative approaches to serving Mercedes-Benz clients in Kuwait. The new facility will encompass the latest auto retailing and after-sales experience, advanced customer engagement, and hospitality centers, in addition to many new surprising activities.

Germany passes €12 minimum wage measure

FRANKFURT: The German parliament passed legislation on Friday to raise the minimum hourly wage to €12 (\$12.85), a key promise made by Chancellor Olaf Scholz's during his campaign for election last year. The measure cleared the Bundestag lower house by a large majority, with support from deputies from the ruling centre-left-led coalition as well as the far-left Linke party. The conservative CDU and far-right AfD abstained.

The one-third increase will affect 6.2 million people, among an active working population of 45.2 million people. The law will see the minimum wage go up in two steps, from €8.82 to €10.45 on July 1, followed by a second increase to €12 on October 1.

Labor Minister Hubertus Heil called the move a

"matter of respect" for hard work, saying that for low-wage earners it would mean the "biggest pay increase of their lives". A flagship policy in Olaf Scholz's campaign manifesto for elections last September, the change is not without its critics. Some experts fear it will add to wage pressures and price rises at a point where inflation is already unusually elevated. In May, consumer prices rose at a 7.9 percent clip, a post-reunification record for Germany driven by the rising cost of energy.

A recent survey of 800 businesses by the commercial foundation Familienunternehmen found that 89 percent of leaders feared such a wage-price spiral. Sectors already under pressure from increases in the prices for raw materials are particularly concerned. The agricultural business lobby DBV warned against the "massive" impact of the wage hike.

Others argue the risks emanating from the measure are more limited. Reasonable salary increases were needed to "stabilize the economy" the president of the influential DIW economic institute, Marcel Fratzscher, wrote in a column.

At the same time, unions are calling for even more significant pay rises to match the soaring cost of liv-

ing. Temporary inflation was "not as damaging" for the state as the loss of purchasing power for employees, the head of the German trade union federation DGB, Yasmin Fahimi, said.

Workers in a variety of sectors are in the process of negotiating new pay settlements. In steel, several thousand employees held a strike in recent days to demand an increase of 8.2 percent.

Car sales

German car sales suffered another blow in May, official figures published Wednesday showed, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and tight supply chains compounded industry woes. New registrations in Europe's top economy fell by 10.2 percent year-on-year to just over 207,000 cars, the federal transport authority (KBA) said in a statement.

It came after the same indicator slumped by 21.5 percent in April and 17.5 percent in March. "The market and production continue to be limited by a lack of primary and intermediate products, high raw material prices and general uncertainty due to the continuing war in Ukraine," the VDA auto industry association said in a statement. EY sector analyst Peter Fuss said

the automobile industry was "stuck in its worst production crisis in the post-war period". Throughout 2021, auto manufacturers battled persistent supply issues, which hampered production and saw sales drop. Those problems worsened in recent months with China's most severe outbreak of COVID-19 in two years. With crucial components from Ukraine running short and Western sanctions against Moscow adding further pressure on already stressed supply chains, the outlook for the flagship industry has darkened further. The German market registered 1.0 million new vehicles in the first five months of the year, around nine percent fewer than in the same period of 2021 and down 33 percent from 2019 before the pandemic. However, domestic production showed a significant rebound, increasing 25 percent year-on-year. Compared to 2019, though, production in the first five months of the year came in 34-percent lower than before the crisis.

Electric vehicles proved an exception to the gloomy reports, with sales up 8.9 percent in May to represent 14.1 percent of new registrations, as petrol- and diesel-fuelled vehicles showed strong drops in sales. — AFP

Business

Bosphorus sea trade unaffected by Ukraine war and sanctions

Freighters, oil tankers continue to sail from Istanbul to Russian and Ukrainian ports

ISTANBUL: At the gates of the Black Sea, trade is in full swing as freighters and oil tankers sail from the heart of Istanbul to Russian and Ukrainian ports. Just after the Russian offensive in Ukraine on February 24 and the first Western sanctions, the largest vessels of international companies plying on these waters were replaced by smaller ships. The total number of ships on the route remains around the pre-war level of 40,000, according to experts. "Russia shamelessly steals Ukrainian grain and sends it overseas from Crimea, including to Turkey," said Vasyi Bodnar, Ukraine's ambassador to Ankara.

"In May alone, we counted at least 10 passages including two round trips from three vessels flying the Russian flag... Not to mention those that we would have collectively missed." From his terrace overlooking the Bosphorus, Yuruk Isik has been a passionate observer of ship movements on this key waterway between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean for a decade now.

While swiftly condemning the Russian offensive in Ukraine, Turkey positioned itself as a neutral mediator and refused to join Western sanctions against Moscow. Although Ankara has banned the passage of military vessels through its straits of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus since late February under the Montreux Treaty of 1936, it is not legally entitled to intercept commercial ships or to search them, a diplomatic source said in Ankara. "We don't follow the ships on their way out of the Straits. We monitor them 10 kilometers before they enter and 10 kilometers after they leave," the source said on condition of anonymity. Elizabeth Aunina, a researcher at Amsterdam University, said: "If we look at the vague words of the Montreux treaty it leaves a lot up for interpretation.

"It did not foresee that merchant vessels could be carrying stolen goods... Turkey has before showed a certain commitment to stick to the very basic interpretation of the Convention as a way to also protect itself

from entering deeper into the conflict". The European Union imposed an embargo on Russian imports but tankers flying the Greek or Maltese flags are seen sailing through the Bosphorus up to the Black Sea to the Russian ports.

Maritime corridors

Thanks to real-time tracking applications, a strong network of observers, Russian and Ukrainian activists and satellite images, no vessel escapes Isik's radar. "We can see from end to end, where the ship is getting loaded by the ship," he said. Some freighters loaded the wheat in Ukrainian ports under Russian blockade such as Odessa, Chornomorsk or Mariupol, he said. The destination? Syria—where Russia retains an operational base—and then Lebanon or Egypt.

Isik also identified a flotilla of old Turkish boats, "never seen before in the area" suddenly appearing under a flag of convenience in the Russian port of Novorossiysk—"likely under contract with the Russian government". He lists a few names: Kocatepe (now Tanzanian), Barbaros (Equatorial Guinea), Hizir (Malta) and Sampiyon Trabzonspor (Cameroon).

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will visit Turkey on Wednesday to discuss a possible establishment of "sea corridors"—although Ukrainian wheat is being covertly exported to Russia's benefit, according to experts. "This is the information we get but we cannot stop, or check, or question the intention of any cargo ship except if we feel a threat to Turkish peace or security," the diplomatic source said. But for Isik who keeps the list of cargo ships belonging to the Russian defense ministry and those of private companies operating on its behalf, "what is happening is unacceptable".

EU mulling tighter sanctions

Before the war, Ukraine was on track to becoming the world's third biggest exporter of wheat and many



ISTANBUL, Turkey: Bosphorus Strait ship spotter Yuruk Isik speaks with an AFP journalist at his home in Istanbul. Among the tall silhouettes gliding or ascending the Bosphorus, in the heart of Istanbul, commercial ships registered in Russia come and go in both directions. At the gates of the Black Sea, trade is in full swing. —AFP

countries in Africa and the Middle East depend on it. "If Russia exports Ukrainian products, nobody authorizes Turkey to stop the vessels," said Yucel Acer, professor of international law at the University of Ankara, adding "unless there is a United Nations resolution"—a futile move as long as Russia holds a veto power in the Security Council.

Without openly admitting it, the European Commission has found holes in the current sanctions regime and is preparing to tighten the screws again, said a source in Brussels. These foresee a new set of

sanctions targeting Moscow plans to deprive the European operators of their insurance if their vessels are caught red-handed. "Most of these vessels are covered by European and British insurance: with this new package, they will no longer be able to use them," said the source.

"This should have a significant impact." But Turkey could do more, said Aunina, from Amsterdam university. "Following the annexation of Crimea, Turkey technically banned ships from Crimea in its ports: This could be done as well!" —AFP

NBK announces winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara draw

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to reward its customers with an outstanding array of draws, prizes and offers all year round. In this context, the bank announced Najat Rashed Mohamed Al-Omaras the winner of Al-Jawhara monthly prize worth KD 125,000 for May 2022.

The draw was held in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, representatives from NBK, as well as a representative from Deloitte who oversee Al-Jawhara monthly and quarterly draws. On the other hand, NBK announced the names of the winners of Al-Jawhara weekly draws for May worth KD 5,000 each namely: Fatema Hassan Mirza Mohammad, Laila Hamad Ahmad Al-Hamad, Mishari Abdulrahman Al-Bbahar and Amal Wael Hasan Al-Mmuhana.

Al-Jawhara Account gives customers the opportunity to enter draws and win prizes of KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly as well as the grand prize of KD 250,000 quarterly. Every KD 50 deposited into Al-Jawhara Account gives the customer a chance to be one of the next lucky winners, and if no withdrawal or transfers are made on the account during the holding period, customers will receive an additional chance for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

On this occasion, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "Al-Jawhara Account provides customers a wide range of services and benefits, while doubling as an outstanding means for saving, making profit and planning for the future, noting that all customers have the chance to win."

"We are committed to reward our customers through weekly, monthly and quarterly draw, as we continue to offer them more unique rewards and campaigns to make them stand out and benefit more from NBK's excellence and leadership," he added. Al-Nusif continued: "We are constantly communicating with our customers to identify their needs, as well as measure their satisfaction with our products. In this regard, we have seen customer satisfaction growing remarkably as to the services and benefits provided by the bank, which come in line with our commitment to offer customers a richer banking experience."

Al-Nusif noted that Al-Jawhara Account can be opened very easily by visiting the nearest NBK Branch, while NBK Customers can open an account through NBK Mobile Banking or NBK Online Banking for existing NBK Customers. This comes in line with the bank's digital transformation strategy, which offers its customers an integrated digital banking experience by enabling them to make all their banking transactions without the need to visit the branch.

The minimum opening balance for Al-Jawhara Account is KD 400, and the maximum limit to be held by customer is KD 500,000 in all Al-Jawhara Accounts. Since 2012, National Bank of Kuwait has been rewarding loyal customers with a total worth of annual prizes amounting KD 2,200,000 in Al-Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly draws.

KIB raises awareness on financing services

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance financial literacy within the community, falling under the umbrella of its corporate social responsibility, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) continues to support the "Let's Be Aware" national campaign for banking awareness - launched in its second edition this year. KIB's participation in the Campaign involved sharing educational content periodically across its channels, having recently discussed the nature and benefit of the comprehensive financing services provided by banks, while identifying their types and the advantages that each type of financing provides. KIB also discussed the difference between the requirements of each type of financing - including real estate financing, given that KIB remains one of the leading banks in Kuwait with extensive comprehensive experience in this field.

In this regard, Mohammad Al-Obaid, Manager Retail Credit Review at KIB, pointed to the importance of improving a general understanding for customers on the different types of financing available to them. This includes those financing tools provided by banks that operate in accordance with the provisions of Islamic Sharia, and which KIB provides in the form of Murabaha for individuals. Al-Obaid noted that this is important in order for the public to fully understand all the details related to each type of financing and its requirements,



Mohammad Al-Obaid

and to be aware of all its applicable terms and conditions before applying for any form of financing. Al-Obaid further added that it is vital that customers understand their rights and liabilities in this regard, including the controls, laws, privacy policies, and other variables at play.

In his statement, Al-Obaid also clarified that the types of financing granted to individuals by KIB include Murabahas or Moasawamas for the purchase of consumer goods - without presenting a Guarantee certificate, or the purchase of cars; with both requiring a minimum salary threshold of KD 400, and offering financing of up to KD 25,000 but no less than KD 1,000. This also comes with a maximum repayment period of up to 5 years, with a grace period for the first installment up to 6 months.

And in a holistic approach to financing and in an effort to ensure the health and wellbeing of its customers, Al-Obaid stated that KIB offers top-level financing solutions that meet their health needs, by providing medical financing without profits, in cooperation with the bank's numerous noteworthy partners from across the healthcare sector in Kuwait. This financing does not require a salary transfer while its value ranges from KD 300 and up to KD 25,000, with flexible monthly installments starting from 3 months up to 5 years.

As for its support for customers wishing to build or renovate their homes, Al-Obaid stated that the bank also



ROTTERDAM, Netherlands: In this file photo taken on May 26, 2022, visitors walk across the sky bridge built for the Rotterdam Rooftop Walk in Rotterdam. —AFP

Dutch port's rooftop walk shows post-climate future

ROTTERDAM: As one of the world's most densely populated countries grapples with climate change, the Dutch are taking to their rooftops. An organization in the port city of Rotterdam has built a skywalk linking the roofs of the downtown shopping area to show what the future might look like.

From a village to food cultivation and rainwater storage areas, the "Rooftop Days" association is showing how to unlock the unused space of Europe's biggest port. "We want people to experience how great it is to be on a rooftop and what space we have there above the city," Rooftop Days director Leon van Geest told AFP.

"We are only using three percent of the full potential of the flat rooftops that we have here in our city." The bright orange skywalk runs for some 600 meters (1,969 feet), with a heart-stopping "airbridge" section linking the city's World Trade Centre to a department store, at 29.5 meters above street level. The walk,

which is open until June 24, also features wind turbines, solar panels, art galleries and a drone landing pad. If the city authorities give approval for a full-scale rooftop village in future, it is expected to include crops and tiny houses built of sustainable materials.

'Unique opportunity'

With around a third of its land lying below a sea level that creeps higher each year, the Netherlands has become a world leader in adapting to climate change. The urgency is even greater for the Dutch given that the nation's 17 million inhabitants are squeezed into Europe's most densely populated country after tiny Monaco, the Vatican City, Malta and San Marino. Known for its architectural daring in the decades after it was flattened during World War II, Rotterdam itself is something of a pioneer for the Netherlands, which only uses some 1.8 percent of its roof space.

Transforming the city could take decades but van Geest says he is "convinced that this will become a reality". As the Dutch population becomes increasingly urban, "space is becoming a rare commodity in the city, so we will have to exploit the roof", he added.

Rotterdamers are enjoying the change of perspective. "It is a unique opportunity to see Rotterdam from a higher distance," approved 69-year-old resident Harry Schouten. —AFP

Global markets fall after US jobs report

NEW YORK: Stock markets mostly fell worldwide on Friday after data showed US employers added jobs at a better-than-expected pace last month, raising the prospect the Federal Reserve's aggressive interest rate hikes will not be enough to contain inflation and avoid a recession. Major Wall Street indices fell sharply, with the Nasdaq losing 2.5 percent, and were in the red for the week after a brief positive respite last week.

Paris and Frankfurt both closed slightly down. London's FTSE 100 was closed for a holiday. Oil prices, meanwhile, pushed higher, a day after the OPEC+ group of major oil producing nations led by Saudi Arabia and Russia agreed to raise output more than expected in the wake of a European Union ban on most Russian crude. American employers added 390,000 jobs last month, a sign of a slowdown in hiring but still above forecasts amid a shortage of workers, according to the US Labor Department. The jobless rate held steady at 3.6 percent for the third consecutive month.

The Fed has hiked interest rates to combat sky-high inflation, but investors worry that more aggressive moves could backfire and hamper economic growth. The jobs report contained some positive news for the Fed: wage gains slowed in the month and more people returned to the workforce. But the central bank has signaled big rate hikes are coming, and the increases are likely to continue through the end of the year, adding to investor worries about the economic outlook.

"We are still in a bear market and until proven otherwise the path of least resistance is down," Maris Ogg of Tower Bridge Advisors, told AFP. She noted that major components of inflation are not improving. "Oil is not going to get better, labor is not going to get better, housing is not going to get better. Housing and labor are in shortage," she said. "As far as the stock market goes, I would be surprised if the worst is over."

The European Central Bank has indicated it will raise interest rates in July for the first time in over a decade. Tokyo's stock market closed higher ahead of the US jobs report. Hong Kong and Chinese mainland indices were closed for holidays. Among major companies, Tesla shares eluded 9.2 percent after the electric carmaker's CEO Elon Musk told employees the company plans to cut the salaried workforce by 10 percent and rely on more hourly workers because he had a "super bad feeling" about the economy. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Return of Harry and Meghan splits opinion

Cheers greeted Prince Harry and his wife Meghan outside St Paul's Cathedral on Friday as they made their first public appearance in Britain for two years. But opinions were split among the throng of fans waiting at the London landmark to catch a glimpse of the royals, reflecting a generational divide. The couple's return for Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee celebrations was always going to be watched closely as a test of their popularity.

They stood down as working royals in 2020 and settled in California, and their very public criticisms since have outraged fans of the monarchy. "They got a really big cheer," said Ana, a 23-year-old from Mexico studying in the UK, who was watching with a friend. On Thursday, the couple kept a low profile at the Trooping the Colour parade, which began festivities to mark the queen's record-breaking 70-year reign. But Ana said the "backseat" role was "unfair". "They should all be treated the same," she told AFP.

'Old-fashioned'

Harry's grandmother restricted appearances on the balcony of Buckingham



Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan attend the National Service of Thanksgiving for The Queen's reign at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London on June 3, 2022 as part of Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee celebrations. — AFP

Palace on Thursday to "working royals" only. The St Paul's service was the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's only official participation in the four days of celebrations. "They are part of the royal family," said Amy Thomas, 17, who travelled to London from northern England with her mother for the event.

"They should be able to do a bit of a different concept of what the royal family is now. "I just think the presentation of the

royal family is old-fashioned. They're just kind of stuck in their ways. Harry and stuff and all that went on. I think you can tell it needs to be dealt with differently." These opinions stood at odds with a YouGov poll published this week that suggested nearly two-thirds of Britons (63 percent) viewed both Harry and Meghan negatively.

But there is a generational gap. Among those aged 18 to 24, the couple are largely seen positively. Among the

over-65s, more than 60 percent hold a negative view. Gwyneth Cookson, 65, from Motherwell, near Glasgow in Scotland, said proudly she had shaken hands with Meghan at Edinburgh Castle. "I'm a fan," said Cookson, wearing a sparkly Union Jack badge. She was there with her daughter and grandson holding a toy corgi. "Hopefully there will be a wee reconciliation."

'Not welcome'

Other older royal watchers were noticeably chillier. "I'm not really interested anymore," said Ruth Horsfield, from Lancashire in northwest England, who came to London on a pensioners' coach tour. "Nothing against them but they've got their own lives now. They don't feel part of it any more. "They've divested themselves of it really. I don't think they should make any money out of it." "I think they're just gradually being forgotten about," added her friend Glynis Morgan from Yorkshire. As long as they don't rake muck and do too much damage to the queen."

Wearing a purple jubilee T-shirt and matching cap and a Swatch watch featur-

ing the queen and a corgi, Coleen, from the Canadian city of Toronto where Meghan once lived, was clearly not a fan. "I don't think she did anyone any favors," she said quietly. "I think he picked the wrong wife." Sitting beside her, Lorraine Frame from Northern Ireland cut in: "They have their own agenda. "They're coming back because they're scared of missing something and they are not welcome. I certainly booed them."

Wearing a Union Jack t-shirt and reading a newspaper royal supplement, she said she also came especially for the jubilee. "I don't think they can be trusted because of their dealings with Netflix, what they may or may not say, and I think shame on them. I mean Harry was brought up better," she said. Harry "wants his cake and he wants to eat it", she said. Megan, she claimed, "came into this royal family thinking she could change hundreds of years of history and tradition - and she didn't". "Let her have her day today and the sooner they get back to America the better." — AFP

LuLu Hypermarket starts summer in style

LuLu Hypermarket, the destination of choice for discerning shoppers in the region, launched a special 'Beauty World' promotion, on June 2 at all its outlets in Kuwait.

The promotion, which is part of the brand's 'Back to Home' celebrations, provides customers with the beauty products and accessories essential to kick-off the summer season in suave style.

The week-long promotion that began on June 1 and runs till June 7 was inaugurated at the LuLu Hypermarket outlet in Salmiya Mall by five of the leading fashionistas and online influencers in Kuwait. The inauguration ceremony, which was held in the presence of Lulu management in Kuwait, and high-level officials from

companies supporting the event, was attended by a large gathering of shoppers and well-wishers of the hypermarket.

Fashionistas and stylists were also on hand at the inauguration event to provide customers with demonstrations of tips and tricks in applying beauty products with flair and sophistication. Beauty World, which celebrates the concept of 'looking and feeling good all through summer', offers customers special prices and discounts throughout the promotion period on a wide range of cosmetics, perfumes, health, fitness and beauty products.

Among the top supporters of the 'Beauty World' promotion at LuLu Hypermarket are P&G, Nivea, Gillette, Revlon, Babyliss, Braun, Panasonic, Labello, Banana Boat, Intuition, and Oral B. The week-long Beauty World promotion is yet another demonstration of LuLu Hypermarket's commitment to providing customers with world-class products at competitive prices, and making shopping at any of the brands' outlets across Kuwait an enjoyable and exciting experience.



Ahmad Al-Amir giving his speech



Lujain Al-qenaei participating in one of the sessions

Gulf Bank wraps up first successful sustainable fashion conference

Gulf Bank successfully wrapped up OUD Fashion Talks, the first sustainable fashion conference in Kuwait. The conference, which the Bank held in partnership with 3oud.com, took place from May 31 to June 1 at the Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Cultural Center and highlighted the work of a group of international and Kuwaiti designers, as well as a large number of fashion investors, interested parties and specialized journalists. This year's conference was held under the sponsorship of Zain, Tamdeen Group, and Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive Company.

The first day witnessed a large turnout of local influencers and social figures, while the second day included a variety of discussion sessions between international and local designers on fashion and sustainability in the clothes industry.

In light of the occasion, the Deputy General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Ahmad Al-Amir, expressed his pride over the outstanding success of the conference, and highlighted how Kuwaiti designers' talents have attracted the recognition of their international counterparts. The conference was a testament to how fashion can blend both beauty and sustainability, with Al-Amir noting that such a successful first edition of the conference is inspiring Gulf Bank to consider organizing the conference on an annual basis.

Al-Amir explained that Gulf Bank's objectives in organizing this conference are to consolidate the concept of sustainability environmentally, economically and socially. Furthermore, Gulf Bank aims to highlight sustainable fashion's role in preserving the environment and support Kuwaiti designers in developing their skills and maximizing their global reach. By inviting international designers to come to Kuwait, the conference marks a great opportunity for local designers to present their talents and concepts to others, creating a rich cultural exchange of ideas and talents.

On a similar note, Al-Amir also added that this year's conference is an opportunity to support Kuwaiti talents and fashion designers, as well as encourage a cultural diffusion of experiences from world-class designers, all of which will assist local designers in keeping up to date with the latest trends in the world of sustainable fashion and the clothes industry.

Al-Amir also pointed out that Gulf Bank's corporate management team played an active role at the conference, presenting advisory and financing services to Kuwaiti designers. In doing so, Gulf Bank is assisting local designers by helping them to develop their ideas and ensure their projects have a global reach - all as part of Gulf Bank's continuous efforts to support entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises.

Consolidating Sustainability

The Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Lujain Al-Qenaei, also highlighted Gulf Bank's role in spearheading sustainability initiatives in Kuwaiti society. She noted that as one of the largest financial institutions in Kuwait, and one of the largest companies listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange, Gulf Bank has taken on the responsibility of consolidating the concept of sustainability at the environmental, economic and societal levels.

She pointed out that since the launch of its five-year strategy, Gulf Bank has prioritized sustainability. As one of the first Kuwaiti banks and companies to issue a sustainability report for the year 2020, Gulf Bank will also soon be issuing a second report covering the year 2021.

She added: "Since then, local banks have exerted multiple efforts to implement sustainability efforts both within the banks and our local community through a variety of events targeting the environment, economy and our communities. We are proud to note that this year's OUD Fashion Talks is one of them."

She mentioned that Gulf Bank was one of the first Kuwaiti banks to sign the fifth article of the United Nations' Principles for empowering women, also becoming the first bank in Kuwait to enact gender equality in employment benefits. In addition, Gulf Bank has continued to pave the way in supporting the youth segment.



INDIAN CLIMBER BANNED FOR FAKING EVEREST ASCENT REACHES SUMMIT

An Indian climber banned from Everest after faking a summit of the world's highest mountain has successfully scaled the peak for real, telling AFP he returned to "prove" himself. Narender Singh Yadav claimed to have reached the top of the 8,849-m mountain in May 2016. But photos of the 26-year-old at the summit were later shown to have been digitally altered, prompting the Nepal government to revoke recognition of his feat.

Yadav and two other climbers were issued a six-year ban backdated to 2016, and this was the first year he was able to return to the mountain. "Everest is a dream for all of us but Everest is life for me," Yadav told AFP on Friday. "There were a lot of allegations on me... that's why I (had to) prove myself and climb Everest." Yadav maintains he reached the summit but that the expedition leader doctored his photos and posted them on social media after he was nominated for India's prestigious Tenzing Norgay Adventure Award in 2020. The award was subsequently withheld, an experience Yadav said was "very painful for me and my family".

His ban ended on May 20. Seven days later, he was on the summit - this time with an ample cache of photos and videos

to prove his feat. "We granted him a certificate on Wednesday after he presented enough evidence of his Everest summit," said Nepal tourism department official Bishma Raj Bhattarai. Pemba Rita Sherpa, a guide with expedition organizer Pioneer Adventure, said that two guides accompa-



This handout photo taken on May 27, 2022 and released on June 3, 2022 shows Indian mountaineer Narender Singh Yadav posing with India's national flag at the summit of Mount Everest. — AFP

nied him instead of the usual one to make sure there were no disputes.

"We took many photos and videos of him," he said. "We have to speak what is real. It is about our Sherpas' reputation and the company's reputation." A successful Everest summit is the crowning achievement of any climber's career, and many go on to forge careers as motivational speakers and authors.

The current system of authentication requires photos along with reports from team leaders and government liaison officers stationed at the base camp - but it has been open to fraud attempts. An Indian couple were banned for 10 years in 2016 after they published doctored photos purporting to show them at the top of Everest.

The pair - both police constables - superimposed themselves and their banners onto photos taken by another Indian climber at the summit. This year, a rare window of good weather has allowed more than 500 climbers and guides to reach the Everest summit since a team of Nepali climbers opened the route on May 7. The Himalayan nation reopened its peaks to mountaineers last year after the coronavirus pandemic shut down the industry in 2020. — AFP

Shakira and Pique separate

Colombian superstar Shakira and FC Barcelona defender Gerard Pique announced Saturday they were calling time on their relationship of more than a decade. The 45-year-old "Hips don't Lie" songstress is one of the biggest names in the global music industry and has sold more than 60 million albums. Spanish football hero Pique, 35, won the 2010 World Cup and the 2012 European Championship, and is a three-time Champions League winner with Barcelona.

The couple share two sons and had been living together for years on the outskirts of Barcelona. "We regret to confirm that we are separating. For the well-being of our children, who are our utmost priority, we request respect for (our) privacy," they said in a statement. With her mix of Latin and Arabic rhythms and rock influence, three-time Grammy winner Shakira is one of the biggest stars from Latin America, scoring major global hits with songs such as "Hips don't Lie" and "Whenever, Wherever".

In 2020, she performed with Jennifer Lopez at the halftime show of the NFL's Super Bowl championship final in Miami, typically one of the most-watched half-

hours in US television. The couple announced their separation just over a week after Spanish court documents inched Shakira closer to standing trial in Spain for tax fraud after a Barcelona court dismissed an appeal from the singer.

Spanish prosecutors accuse her of defrauding the Spanish tax office out of €14.5 million (\$15.5 million) on income earned between 2012 and 2014. They say she moved to Spain in 2011 when her relationship with Pique became public but maintained official tax residency in the Bahamas until 2015. Her defence lawyers say she moved to Spain full time only in 2015 and insist that her "conduct on tax matters has always been impeccable in all the countries she had to pay taxes". In an interview with AFP in 2019, Shakira said temporarily losing her voice two years earlier had been "the darkest moment of her life" and affected her "deeply". — AFP



Shakira and Gerard Pique

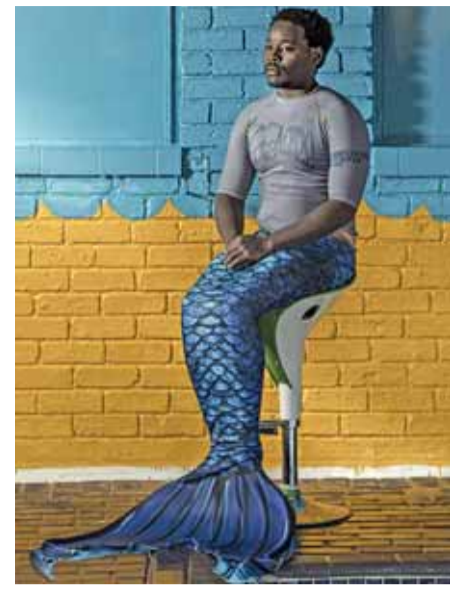
Lifestyle | Features



Students perform a routine during their mermaiding class at the Merschool in Kayalami, near Midrand, on June 3, 2022. — AFP photos



Ann Bender, 36, poses for a portrait in her mermaid attire.



Zizwe Ndwandwe, 29, poses for a portrait in his merman attire.



South Africans splash into mermaiding as a sport

Adozen South Africans dressed as mermaids and mermen frolic in a Johannesburg pool, mimicking the movement of the mystical sea creatures. Mermaiding is a fast-growing sport worldwide, and now South Africa has its own school to teach it - the "Merschool". Before diving in, students each slip on a brightly colored fabric tail ending in a monofin.

The swimmers are black and white, from 13 years old to in their forties. They include a schoolteacher, a yoga instructor and even an accountant. "It's lots of fun," says mermaiding instructor Izelle Nair. "It's

for fitness, it's for fun, it's for fantasy, it's therapy - but most of all, mermaiding is a sport."

In the water, students undulate up and down the pool perfecting their dolphin kicks, or practise sculling - hand movements to propel the body also used in synchronized swimming. "We swim with a dolphin technique and we use sculling, and then we put it all together and we work out a little sequence," Nair says.

To be a mermaid - or merman - all that is required is a little technique, some breath-holding skills and a love of cos-

tumes. Underwater, students attempt to perform a graceful aquatic backflip. Nadia Walker, another mermaid coach from the world of synchronized swimming, says both sports have much in common. "The back rolls, some of the warm-ups and activities that we do, come from swimming," she says. The school hopes to send at least one contender to next year's World Mermaid Championships in China - and that one day the discipline will become an Olympic sport. — AFP

Portugal at last gets to marvel at its crown jewels

It has taken 227 years, but Portugal's stunning crown jewels have finally gone on display in a giant strong room inside the country's long unfinished royal palace. The Ajuda Palace overlooking the capital's historic Belem district was home to Portugal's last royal dynasty, the Braganzas, whose reign ended when the country became a republic in 1910.

"After (Lisbon's) terrible earthquake and tsunami of 1755, the royal family decided to move here because it was away from the river and less prone to seismic activity," said Jose Alberto Ribeiro, the director of the palace and its new museum. The west wing of the imposing white edifice, which now houses the Royal Treasure Museum, lay unfinished for more than two centuries because of the change of regime and a lack of funds.

It was finally completed in 2021 at a cost of €31 million (\$33 million). In contrast to the rest of the neoclassical monument, the west wing is in resolutely contemporary style, with a grooved facade that offers staggering views of the city. On Thursday, the public were finally allowed to see the vast royal treasure collection - more than 1,000 items dating from the 17th to the 20th century, including numerous pieces of



gold jewelry encrusted with precious stones. Until this week, the treasures were scattered across the country and were generally out of public view. Some of them are now on display for the very first time.

Strong room

"I've been waiting for ages for the museum to open because I'm really interested in this treasure. It's amazing," 65-year-old retiree Gentile Gouveia told AFP. Visitors progress through the museum in darkness - an unsettling experience for some - guided past various symbols of royal power. There are crowns, scepters, insignia and medals, with gold nuggets and diamonds from Brazil, which was once a vast colony of the tiny European nation.

The collection is priceless - some items are worth more than a million euros each - so security at the museum is exceptionally

tight. "The Ajuda Palace was the ideal place for this museum because part of the collection was already held here... and the entire building was designed to avoid unpleasant surprises like thefts or hold-ups," Ribeiro said.

In fact, the museum is a huge three-storey strong room - one of the biggest of its kind in the world - bristling with surveillance cameras. Visitors enter through two armor-plated doors that each weigh five tons and all the artifacts in the collection are behind bulletproof glass. The security measures show just how exceptional the collection is. "These objects represent our heritage. They tell the history of Portugal," said 36-year-old visiting X-ray technician Raquel Morgado. — AFP



Pieces of jewelry are pictured at the newly opened Portuguese Royal Treasure Museum.

Spain eyes crackdown on video game 'loot boxes'

Spain's government will within days present a draft bill to regulate video game "loot boxes" for which users must pay, a minister said Friday, warning of the addiction risks for youngsters. An increasingly common feature in many video games, "loot boxes" are caches of virtual weapons and equipment which a player can buy to increase their prowess or status within the game.

But not all boxes contain useful tools and gamers can only see what's inside after paying, prompting widespread criticism for encouraging behavior similar to that associated with gambling. "We have drawn up a very specific law which we will present in the coming days" that will regulate the sale of such content, Spain's Consumer Affairs Minister Alberto Garzon told Radiocable. "It is like gambling... because it involves compulsive consumption behavior which provokes a series of issues for players, from stress to financial bankruptcy," he told the independent radio station. "At the end of the day, these are sums which pile up and can lead to gambling addiction," Garzon said.

Such features were aimed above all "at the under-18 age group, where in 2021, up to 30 percent admitted they had paid significant amounts of money to obtain such rewards" within a game, he said, citing health ministry statistics. The age ratings for such games "don't take into account the danger posed by this feature, so parents could buy a game for a 13-year-old, for example, without being aware it includes an element which, in real life, could not be bought by anyone under 18," he explained. In April, PEGI, the European body that issues age ratings for video games, introduced a labelling change that requires gaming companies to say if a game includes "paid random items" - a form of optional in-game purchases. Many other countries have also been struggling with the controversial question of "loot boxes" although few have taken steps to regulate them. — AFP



People visit the newly opened Portuguese Royal Treasure Museum, where the Portuguese Crown's jewels are exhibited in Lisbon on June 2, 2022. — AFP photos

Shoot 'em up video game a refuge for war-scarred Afghans

The crackle of gunfire. A gasp of a stranger. Explosions rumbling in the distance. In the Afghan capital of Kabul, such sounds would normally prompt panic. But they are coming from the tiny speaker of a mobile phone clutched by a young man, hunched over and absorbed in the bloody shoot 'em up video game "PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds", or PUBG.

"In this country, we are living but we are

not alive," said gamer Abdul Musawir Raufi, after peeling his gaze away from the phone screen, where his avatar duels with other players in an online arena. "We don't know what will happen from one moment to the next. It's the only way to pass the time," said the 23-year-old.

Afghanistan has been wracked by four decades of very real conflict, now largely subsided since the withdrawal of US-led troops and the return of the Taliban last year. But in a striking irony, youngsters say the wildly popular virtual violence simulator offers respite from the turmoil of the transition and the strictures of the hardline Islamist regime, as well as a rare channel of communication with the outside world. Meanwhile, the Taliban - who spent the past 20 years waging their own vicious and bloody insurgency - are currently working to cut off access to PUBG, having deemed it a

corrupting influence.

End of entertainment

Since storming back to power in August, the Taliban have not curtailed entertainment as harshly as they did during their previous stint in power between 1996 and 2001, when TV, cinema, photography and kite flying were all banned. In the capital, a few arcades and bowling alleys remain open and some sports are still being played. But music has been banned alongside female-fronted or foreign television series.

Many Kabul residents are wary of the Taliban fighters who patrol the streets and man checkpoints, and prefer to stay at home rather than risk an outing for entertainment. Raufi was once a keen football player, but most of the friends he played with fled the country during the chaotic

mass evacuation in the final days of the international withdrawal. "The fun we used to have, the laughing with friends... it's all over," he said.

But PUBG, published by Chinese digital giant Tencent and downloaded on mobiles



In this photo taken on May 27, 2022, Afghan boys play the video game "PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds" or PUBG in Kabul. — AFP

more than a billion times globally, has allowed him to stay in touch with friends and make new connections with foreign players online. "It allows us to learn about the culture of other countries and their language. The bonds I've created are very strong," he said.

Former student Abdul Mujeeb, 20, has also found refuge in the video game from the spiraling economic crisis that accompanied the Taliban's return. The United States has seized billions of dollars in Afghan assets, while international aid that propped up the domestic economy has dried up. "During the previous government, we were mostly busy with our jobs and studies," said Mujeeb. "Now, we can't study and there are no jobs." — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Split on drug culture, Mexican ballads flourish in digital age

With songs chronicling the lives of drug traffickers or railing against violence, a new generation of Mexican ballad singers are enjoying success and skirting censorship through digital platforms. Abraham Vazquez, 22, and Vivir Quintana, 32, are two of the new faces of the "corrido" genre that emerged during the Mexican revolution of 1910-1917 to tell an alternative story to the official narrative.

Vazquez, originally from the northern state of Chihuahua, boasts 1.1 million listeners monthly on Spotify. His rap-infused "narcocorrido" - a ballad about drug traffickers - "El de las dos pistolas" (The one with the two guns) has been played 52.8 million times on the digital music platform. The video for the song exalts the world of gangsters with wads of dollars, guns, and women in a swimming pool. It has been viewed 27.7 million times on YouTube.

Fed up with her students listening to such songs, Quintana, a teacher from the northern state of Coahuila, turned to "anti-narcocorrido", which emerged five years ago, to denounce gender and criminal violence. She recently released "El corrido de Milo Vela" (The Ballad of Milo Vela) - a tribute to journalist Miguel Angel Lopez, murdered in 2011 along with his wife and son in the eastern state of Veracruz.

"It was to replace drug traffickers with those who really defend the country, those who defend the truth... I think we're at a very critical moment," she told AFP, referring to the murders of 11 Mexican reporters this year alone. Another of Quintana's songs, "Cancion sin Miedo" (Song without Fear), has become a feminist anthem.

Accused of being apologists for organized crime, narcocorrido singers have seen their songs banned in the states of

Sinaloa, Baja California and Chihuahua, where punishments range from 36 hours' detention to fines of \$20,000. Even well-known bands have been punished, including norteno acts Los Tigres del Norte, who were fined in Chihuahua in 2012 and 2017, and Los Tucanes, who have been banned in Tijuana since 2008.

'Difficult to control'

The genre has flourished on digital platforms, which facilitate production, access and interaction between artists and audiences, researcher Juan Antonio Fernandez said. "With the platforms, it's very difficult to control it because unfortunately young people see drug trafficking as an aspirational activity, where they can get easy money," he told AFP. The genre's popularity is also helped by the rags-to-riches stories the songs tell.

"The imaginary drug trafficker goes from being an individual from a rural background - growing drugs - to be a more urbanized drug trafficker, more connected with today's youth," Fernandez said. In 2019, during the Coachella festival in California, hundreds of boys danced with Los Tucanes wearing shirts with the image of Joaquin "Chapo" Guzman, the notorious drug lord imprisoned in the United States.

In the government's view, the narcocorridos - three of whose performers have been murdered since 2006 - promote gang culture and represent a "social risk" that must be tackled, Fernandez said. But Teodoro Bello, a veteran composer of famous Los Tigres del Norte songs, rejects the label as he considers it stigmatizing. For him, there is only the corrido genre.

His 1997 song "Jefe de Jefes" (Boss of bosses) performed by Los Tigres del Norte was thought to have been inspired by Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, a major cartel boss in the 1980s. But, Bello told AFP, "the boss of bosses" is the one who is the best in his profession: a doctor, a lawyer or even a journalist." Despite the flirtation with crime, even President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador plays songs by Los Tigres del Norte at his daily news conference. He says one reason is to refute comments by Texas Governor Greg Abbott on immigration. — AFP



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



10 years after 'Gangnam Style', Psy is happier than ever

Ten years after "Gangnam Style" became a global phenomenon, South Korean rapper Psy is living his best life - proud of his "greatest trophy" and free from the pressure of repeating that unprecedented success. Uploaded to YouTube on July 15, 2012, the song's wacky music video became a runaway megahit, with its trademark horse-riding dance spawning thousands of imitations, spoofs and spinoffs.

It was the first YouTube video to reach one billion views, and with it Psy attained what K-pop acts before him could not: Global recognition. At the peak of the song's popularity, he was everywhere - sharing the stage with Madonna, leading a flash mob in front of the Eiffel Tower, and performing before then US president Barack Obama.

But the success of "Gangnam Style" was a double-edged sword - with fame came pressure to deliver another huge hit. Psy once described it as one of the most difficult periods of his life. Things became "heavier and harder because... every time I (had) to have that kind of strong song", Psy told AFP in an interview last week at his company's headquarters in Gangnam - the posh Seoul district he poked fun at in the track. "I had a huge dependency (on) the song... But you know, it's 10 years ago, so right now I'm really free."

"Gangnam Style" transformed not only Psy's career but the music industry too, demonstrating how an artist not performing in a dominant language such as English could reach international audiences through the Internet. It also prompted a change in how music charts were compiled, making Billboard take YouTube views and streams into account. K-pop acts "are very huge on YouTube, they are getting a lot of views", Psy said. "If Billboard didn't change, it (wouldn't) be that easy," the 44-year-old added.

Psy's groundbreaking role has been acknowledged by some of the biggest names in K-pop. "He's always someone I was grateful for," Suga, a member of hugely popular group BTS, said in a video last month. "With 'Gangnam Style', he

paved the way for K-pop in the United States... We were able to follow his footsteps with ease."

A frontman like Freddie Mercury

Psy, whose real name is Park Jae-sang, was a superstar in South Korea well before "Gangnam Style". He cites Queen as his earliest inspiration - while in middle school, he watched a video of the British band's famous 1986 concert at Wembley. "I thought: I want to be a frontman like him (Freddie Mercury)," Psy told AFP. "At that moment, I was not that good at music, not that good a singer... I was just a funny dancer."

deemed bad language.

'How lucky I am'

Since the explosive success of "Gangnam Style", Psy has put out three albums. The latest, "Psy 9th", was released in April by P NATION - the record label and artist agency he founded in 2019. Psy insists he is far from done, dividing his time between his own music and concerts and working with P NATION acts. And "Gangnam Style" remains a huge source of pride.

"It's the biggest and greatest trophy of my life," Psy told AFP. "When I do (a) show, it is my strongest weapon." This



In this picture taken on June 1, 2022, a woman walks past a bronze sculpture by artist Hwang Man-seok, modeled after the signature horse-riding hand motion of the 'Gangnam Style' song by Psy in the Gangnam district of Seoul.

While attending university in the United States in the late 1990s, he was exposed to what many have described as one of the golden ages of hip-hop, including the music of rappers Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. "I literally heard hip-hop every day on the radio," Psy said. "I thought: Oh, if I cannot sing that well, I gotta rap. Then I can be the frontman." Debuting in 2001, he quickly made a name for himself with humorous and explosive stage performances and won multiple awards. Unusually controversial for a Korean pop star, several of his earlier songs and music videos were given adult ratings because of what state censors

was demonstrated at a performance at Korea University in Seoul last week, when a heaving crowd sang along to every word during a high-energy set that included songs from his first album more than two decades ago, as well as his latest one.

The fact that the young audience knows all the words to songs that were released before many of them were even born is not lost on Psy. "These days, (I say to myself): 'Wow, dude, you are very popular. They love you!' 'How lucky I am as an artist. I'm happier than ever these days.'" — AFP



Mexican singer Vivir Quintana performs at the House of France Cultural Center during the Noche de las Ideas (Night of the Ideas) event in Mexico City on May 12, 2022. — AFP

Brazil bagpipe band channels sound of Scotland

It's a gorgeous day at the beach in Brazil: the bright blue ocean sparkles in the sun, the palm trees sway in the breeze and the peaceful sound of... er, bagpipes? Thousands of kilometers (miles) from the United Kingdom, the kilts are out on a Rio de Janeiro beach that suddenly looks like something out of the Scottish Highlands. Eleven-year-old Davi Portugal is playing a set of bagpipes nearly as big as he is, inflating his cheeks to tennis-ball-size with every breath.

"I love the sound. It's beautiful and different," says the young Brazilian, whose dream is to join the navy. He and his older brother Caio, 14, are both members of their school band in Sao Goncalo, a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Rio, where playing the bagpipes is a surefire way to turn people's heads.

"The first time I saw the bagpipes, I definitely did not want to play them, because I thought it was weird to wear a kilt. It looks like a skirt, which is kind of taboo in Brazil," says Jhonny Mesquita, 32, the director of

the school band. "But later, I fell in love with the sound. When I started learning about the history of the instrument and what it represents to the Scottish people, it turned into a passion."

'The Pele of bagpipes'

In 2017, Mesquita got the chance to pursue his passion back at its source when he traveled to Scotland for two weeks. He shot to fame there thanks to a video of him juggling a football at a stadium in Aberdeen, all while playing "Asa Branca," a Brazilian classic, on the bagpipes. "It was a huge success. The local newspapers called me the 'Pele of the bagpipes,'" he says, sporting a black, red and white tartan kilt and leather pouch,

called a sporran, like the other members of the group.

Mesquita, a grade school music teacher, is famous in Sao Goncalo, too: he has played the bagpipes on Brazilian TV and at Rio's famed Municipal Theater. But he says his proudest moments are seeing young people from tough neighborhoods fall in love with music via the bagpipes.

"The essence of the project is engaging young people and occupying their minds so they stay away from drugs and crime," he says. In addition to leading the school band, he is head of the Brazil-Scotland Association, a group of 18 bagpipers who play in "places people don't want to go," such as juvenile detention centers.



Bagpipe students, members of the Vieira Brum music band, play at the Marica beach, in Marica, Rio de Janeiro state, on May 28, 2022. — AFP photos



Bagpipe students cross a street to play at the Marica beach.



Bagpipe students and their teachers attend a rehearsal at a classroom of the Vieira Brum School in Sao Goncalo, Rio de Janeiro state, on May 21, 2022.



Japanese yachtsman Kenichi Horie waves from his yacht after arriving at Shin Nishinomiya Yacht Harbor in Nishinomiya, Hyogo prefecture on June 4, 2022. — AFP

Japanese man becomes world's oldest to sail solo across Pacific

An 83-year-old yachtsman arrived in Japan early Saturday morning after a solo, non-stop trip across the Pacific, becoming the oldest person ever to achieve the feat. Famed ocean adventurer Kenichi Horie's arrival in the Kii Strait off western Japan capped a two-month trip that started from a yacht harbour in San Francisco in March. It was only the latest seagoing achievement by the Japanese octogenarian, who in 1962 voyaged from Japan to San Francisco at age 23, becoming the first person in the world to sail alone across the Pacific.

The public relations team for his most recent voyage said Horie's Saturday return to Japan made him the world's oldest person to pull off a solo, non-stop crossing of the largest and deepest ocean on Earth. "I'm about to cross the finish line," Horie wrote on his blog Friday after what he described as a three-day battle with the pushback from a current. "I'm exhausted." — AFP

Sports

Brumbies join Blues, Chiefs in Super Rugby semi-finals

Blues beat Otago Highlanders; Waikato Chiefs crush Reds

CANBERRA: The ACT Brumbies kept Australian dreams alive Saturday with a huge second-half performance to down the Wellington Hurricanes and book a Super Rugby Pacific semi-final berth against the Auckland Blues. The Canberra side prevented an all-New Zealand presence in the final four with their 35-25 victory on a freezing night, after the Blues beat the Otago Highlanders and the Waikato Chiefs crushed the Queensland Reds. The 'Canes breached the Brumbies defense in the 16th minute with Joshua Moorby finishing off an 18-phase move after Jordie Barrett found him in the corner with a cross-field kick.

But despite a red card to centre Len Ikitau for a high-tackle, the Brumbies refused to give up with Folau Fainga'a dotting down from a trademark rolling maul before Irae Simone found a gap in the defense to rock the visitors with two quick tries. Moorby ran in his second of the night to send the 'Canes to the break 22-15 in front. But the Brumbies struck back with two penalty goals from Noah Lolesio after the restart, before Tom Banks and Tom Wright crossed to seal a huge win.

"It was an awesome effort, we spoke about our finishers coming on in the last 20 minutes and doing the job for us and we definitely saw that tonight," said Brumbies skipper Allan Alaalatoa. "It's great for us moving forward into next week." They will face the Blues at Eden Park for a place in the final after the in-form Auckland side overcame a nervous start to race past the Highlanders 35-6. Having qualified in top spot for the quarter-finals, the Blues looked rattled as they trailed 6-0 after half an hour. But they found their rhythm to power home, boosted by two tries to star playmaker Beauden Barrett. They have now notched 14 straight victories, although they only discovered their attacking fluency after Highlanders hooker Andrew Makalio was shown a red card for a reckless, no-arms tackle midway through the first half. Akira Ioane put the hosts in front, benefitting from a delightful assist from brother Rieko, before Barrett scythed across to establish a 14-6 lead at half-time. They were not threatened in the second spell, creating tries for Barrett, AJ Lam and former rugby league international Roger Tuivasa-Sheck.

'Awesome challenge'

"We took a bit of time to find our groove but that's probably expected," said Barrett. "Around finals footy time, everyone can go into their shell but it's great



CANBERRA: Hurricanes' Blake Gibson is tackled by Brumbies' Ollie Sapsford (center) during the Super Rugby Pacific quarterfinal match between the Australia's Brumbies and New Zealand's Hurricanes at GIO Stadium in Canberra on June 4, 2022. — AFP

that we finally expressed ourselves." The Blues were without captain Dalton Papalii, who underwent surgery for appendicitis on Friday. The in-form All Blacks loose forward is unlikely to feature in the finals and his availability for the Test series against Ireland in July is also in doubt. The Highlanders, who only won four of 14 matches to reach the quarters, were also missing All Blacks star power, with half-back Aaron Smith having a groin problem.

Earlier, Chiefs captain Brad Weber crossed twice

as his side outclassed the NSW Waratahs 39-15 in Hamilton to set up a semi-final against the 12-time champion Canterbury Crusaders, who swept past the Queensland Reds 37-15 on Friday. Alongside halfback Weber's double were tries to Luke Jacobson, Alex Nankivell and Pita Gus Sowakula. Weber said the prospect of facing the Crusaders did not fluster him. "What an awesome challenge to play the defending champs at home," he said. "We've beaten them once this season so we'll look to make it two." — AFP

Rochelle's forwards coach Donnacha Ryan told AFP. "We have to refocus on Lyon straight away because it's a big game. The Top 14 is such a tough league and Lyon themselves had a fantastic result on Friday." Like most sides at the dog end of the season, La Rochelle have a lengthy injury list with backs Brice Dulin, Dylan Leyds and Jonathan Danty as well as flanker Wiaan Liebenberg all absent in Lyon after being injured against Leinster.

"We have to get something out of the game this weekend to make sure we are in the top six because the top eight, nine teams have been very tight for the majority of the season," said Ryan. "They (Lyon) are a different opponent to the one we had last weekend but at the same time they are full of confidence. "Hopefully we will use the momentum we had last week to put a performance in this weekend." Clermont face the toughest task as they host leaders Montpellier, knowing that realistically then need a bonus point worth five points to have any hope of progressing.

The other mighty match-up sees Racing 92 (5th, 66pts) hosting Toulon (7th, 64pts) with the winner sure to progress. A Toulon defeat would also mark the final bow for former Italy captain Sergio Parisse, 38, who has intimated he is retiring at the end of the season. With all of the matches kicking off at 9.15pm local time, there are certain to be many worried finger nails before the night is out. "Someone will be looking at the other results, keeping us informed," said Ryan. "But we can only really focus on getting our own stuff in order and get the job done at the weekend." — AFP

Harigae, Lee share halfway lead in US Women's Open

WASHINGTON: World number four Minjee Lee fired a five-under-par 66 on Friday to grab a share of the 36-hole lead alongside Mina Harigae at the 77th US Women's Open in North Carolina. Australia's Lee, chasing a second major title after her triumph at the Evian Championship last year, had four of her six birdies on the front nine and rebounded from her only bogey at 14 with birdies at 15 and 16 to join Harigae on nine-under-par 133 at Pine Needles in Southern Pines.

America's Harigae, whose first-round 64 was one off the US Women's Open record, followed up with a two-under-par 69 that featured five birdies and a pair of bogeys. The duo were two strokes in front of Sweden's Anna Nordqvist and South Korean Choi Hye-jin. Nordqvist had four birdies in her three-under-par 68 while Choi raced up the leaderboard with an impressive seven-under-par 64 that featured nine birdies.

Lee said putting was again the key to her round. She poured in long birdie putts at the first, eighth and ninth holes and rapped in a four-footer at the second, making the turn at eight-under-one shot behind the early target set by Harigae. "My putting was pretty solid today, and even when I was in kind of tough spots I was able to get up and down," said Lee, who won the LPGA Founders Cup last month for her seventh LPGA title and her first since her Evian triumph.

"I just tried to take advantage of my birdie opportunities and that's pretty much what I did today." Lee said her approach on the weekend would be "pretty much the same as the first two days." She said regardless of how the light rain that began falling late in the day might alter the course, she would "just take whatever's in front of me and just take one step at a time because this golf course can really catch up to you quick." Harigae said her round was "a little shaky" compared to her sizzling effort on Thursday.

"A little more stressful today for sure, and things got a little shaky there, but I was really happy with the way I hung in there and made some good birdies coming in," said the 32-year-old from California, whose parents are from Japan. Seeking her first LPGA title and a first top-10 finish in a major, Harigae said she believes she has the maturity now to contend on the weekend. "Today, even when things weren't going great, I was really able to keep myself calm and just try to be really level-headed out there," she said.

Better tools

She led the Women's British Open at Carnoustie last year, ultimately finishing tied for 13th. "Since then, I have the better tools to navigate these new experiences," Harigae said. "I think just trying to be calm, just go about my day." World number one Ko Jin-young of South Korea and Swedish amateur Ingrid Lindblad shared fifth on six-under 136.

Ko's four-under 67 included an eagle at the par-five 15th. Lindblad-whose opening 65 was a record for an amateur in the championship-kept herself in the hunt with an even-par 71 that featured three birdies and three bogeys. "I was just trying to do the same thing," Lindblad said. "I know I made a lot of putts yesterday. I was a little bit further away from the pin today." Lindblad played alongside Swedish great Annika Sorenstam, winner of the 1996 US Women's Open on the same course. Sorenstam missed the cut with a 13-over-par total. — AFP



Nabil Ashour

Gulf Cup Champions Handball tournament

KUWAIT: Kuwait Sports Club Handball team will play its second match on Sunday as part of the Gulf Cup Champions tournament at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah Complex Hall. The match will be preceded by a match between Muscat (Oman) against Al-Ahly (Qatar). Chairman of UAE Handball Federation Board and member of the tournament's technical committee Nabil Ashour lauded the cooperation of the heads of delegations administrative and technical officials who participated in the technical meeting. He said the tournament's rules were explained during the meeting, as well as the mechanism of distributing the teams on the match schedule. Head of UAE Handball Federation said the tournament will see fierce competition for top places.

Mitchell and Blundell put New Zealand on top against England

LONDON: Daryl Mitchell and Tom Blundell were both eyeing coveted hundreds at Lord's after batting New Zealand into a commanding position on Friday's second day of the first Test against England. In a match where bowlers on both sides had previously been on top, the pair's unbroken partnership of 180 took the World Test champions to 236 for four in their second innings at stumps, a lead of 227, after they had come together with New Zealand in trouble at 56 for four. Mitchell was 97 not out and Blundell 90 not out—the first two fifties of the match.

They compiled the first century partnership of this match in classic Test-match fashion, displaying a sound defense while punishing anything loose or too full. And at the close they had equalled New Zealand's record fifth-wicket stand against England, set by Martin Crowe and Shane Thomson at Lord's in 1994. Mitchell finished Friday's play in style, driving the last ball of the day, from England debutant Matthew Potts, for four to move to within three runs of a second Test hundred following his unbeaten 102 against Pakistan at Christchurch last year.

'Tough toil'

"It was tough toil throughout but to build that partnership with Daz (Mitchell) was very pleasing," Blundell told Sky Sports. "I found it quite difficult at first, but it was all about being patient and cashing in on the bad balls." As for now just being 10 runs shy of

Tensions high ahead of 'tight' Top 14 games

PARIS: From the heights of winning the European Champions Cup last week, La Rochelle are back to earth this weekend, knowing that they must win their final regular season Top 14 game against Lyon to guarantee their passage to the play-offs. Montpellier, Bordeaux Begles and Castres have already stamped their tickets, while Toulouse, who are sixth, should be too strong at home for relegated Biarritz. That leaves La Rochelle as one of five who are vying for one of the other two places. The top two in the standings will go directly into the semi-finals with the teams finishing third to sixth going through a first play-off.

Ronan O'Gara's team is currently fourth with 67 points, one ahead of Toulouse and just five ahead of ninth-placed Clermont. To make life more awkward, they travel to Lyon, four points behind in eighth, who are themselves on a tremendous roll having blown Toulon away last Friday to win the European Challenge Cup. The celebrations in both camps have been cut short to prepare for Sunday's unofficial 'European Supercup'.

"A few boys have lost their voices from the singing but we are back in training. Back to normality," La

a hundred at Lord's, wicketkeeper Blundell added: "I'll sleep well tonight. Those milestones will take care of themselves." Mitchell's alliance with Blundell highlighted how a good pitch was blameless for the fact 17 wickets had fallen on Thursday.

Given England's struggle to make 141 in reply to New Zealand's first-innings 132, the visitors may already have enough runs to play with, even though there are still three days left in this opening contest of a three-Test series. But England assistant coach Paul Collingwood insisted all was far from lost for the hosts in their first Test under the new red-ball leadership duo of captain Ben Stokes and head coach Brendon McCullum, the former New Zealand captain.

"We have a new ball in the morning and some exceptional new-ball bowlers in the dressing room who can do some special stuff," said Collingwood. "So hopefully we can take some early wickets tomorrow (Saturday) and it is game on." The former England all-rounder added: "But credit to New Zealand this (Friday) afternoon because they have played really well."

Earlier, Potts—who enjoyed a superb first-innings return of four for 13 - struck again with a pre-lunch burst Friday of two for 11 in four overs. For the second time in the match, the 23-year-old Durham quick dismissed New Zealand captain Kane Williamson. Potts, who had needed just five balls Thursday to claim the scalp of the star batsman as his first Test wicket, produced a fine lifting delivery that Williamson, on 15, edged to third slip Jonny Bairstow.

After lunch, Devon Conway—who last year marked his Test debut with a brilliant double century at Lord's—fell cheaply for the second time in this match when a mistimed pull off Stuart Broad was caught down the legside by wicketkeeper Ben Foakes. But Mitchell, the son of former All Blacks rugby coach

John Mitchell, hit two fours off successive balls from pace-bowling all-rounder Stokes. Blundell square-drove Potts for four, his seventh boundary, after tea to complete a 101-ball fifty and, minutes later, Mitchell followed him to the landmark in 97 balls including five boundaries.

Their efforts ensured the work of new-ball duo Tim Southee (four for 55) and left-arm Trent Boult

(three for 21) in getting New Zealand back to almost level terms wasn't wasted. Debutant leg-spinner Matt Parkinson, England's inaugural concussion substitute after replacing the injured Jack Leach, made little impression while England's attack tiring seamers missed the extra pace that would have been provided by any one of injured express fast bowlers Jofra Archer, Mark Wood and Olly Stone. — AFP



LONDON: New Zealand's Tom Blundell plays a shot on the second day of the first cricket Test match between England and New Zealand at Lord's cricket ground in London on June 3, 2022. — AFP

Sports

Rangers edge Lightning 3-2 for commanding lead in East final

Avalanche down Oilers for lead in Western Conference Final

NEW YORK: The New York Rangers beat the two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning 3-2 on Friday to take a commanding 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven NHL Eastern Conference final. K'Andre Miller, Kaapo Kakko and Mika Zibanejad scored for the Rangers and goalie Igor Shesterkin stopped 29 shots as the Rangers notched their eighth straight home victory.

They ended the Lightning's streak of 17 straight post-season victories following a defeat-a run that stretched back to 2020 and was a key to their Stanley Cup title runs the past two seasons.

Zibanejad put the Rangers up 3-1 just 82 seconds into the third period, powering to the net after

Nikita Kucherov's casual clear attempt from the blue line was intercepted by Barclay Goodrow.

Zibanejad's wrist shot beat Andrei Vasilevskiy above his blocker, giving him a ninth goal of the playoffs. Kucherov had given Tampa Bay a 1-0 lead with a power play goal at 2:41 of the opening period. Miller tied it at 5:59 with a shot from a rebound after his first attempt was blocked by Brandon Hagel.

Kakko put New York up 2-1 at 17:32 of the first, deflecting a pass from Adam Fox past Vasilevskiy.

Nick Paul added a goal for the Lightning with 2:03 remaining, but the defending champions head home to Tampa for game three needing to regroup in their fight for a Stanley Cup Final berth.

Avs down Oilers

Meanwhile, Colorado scored three quick second-period goals and goalie Pavel Francouz made 24 saves on Thursday as the Avalanche beat the Edmonton Oilers 4-0 to take a 2-0 lead in the NHL Western Conference Final. Nazem Kadri assisted on all three of the Avs goals in a span of two minutes and four seconds of the second period, when Artturi Lehkonen and Josh Manson scored 15 seconds apart and Mikko Rantanen added another goal on a Kadri assist.

The best-of-seven series, with a Stanley Cup Final berth on the line, shifts to Edmonton on Saturday. The Oilers will be hoping to regroup, but

the Avs are 5-0 on the road so far in this post-season. Francouz, making his second start of the playoffs after Darcy Kuemper sustained an upper-body injury during Colorado's wild 8-6 victory in game one on Tuesday, came away with his second win.

Mike Smith made 36 saves for Edmonton, but was left reeling by Colorado's rapid-fire outburst in the second. Lehkonen started the onslaught with a wrist shot from above the faceoff circle at 3:58. Fifteen seconds later Manson scored from near the right circle. Rantanen scored on a 2-on-1 with Kadri at 6:02 to make it 3-0. Nathan MacKinnon added a power-play goal late in the third period to complete the scoring. — AFP

UEFA apologizes to fans over Champions League final chaos

LAUSANNE: UEFA apologized to spectators for the first time on Friday for their "frightening and distressing" experience ahead of the Champions League final, saying no football fan should go through such mayhem. Thousands of supporters were unable to access European club football's showpiece match between despite having genuine tickets, in chaotic scenes that saw the French police use tear gas at close range even against children.

"UEFA wishes to sincerely apologize to all spectators who had to experience or witness frightening and distressing events in the build-up to the UEFA Champions League final at the Stade de France on May 28, 2022 in Paris, on a night which should have been a celebration of European club football. "No football fan should be put in that situation, and it must not happen again," European football's governing body said in a statement.

Spanish giants Real Madrid beat England's Liverpool 1-0, but the match was completely overshadowed by the chaos outside the stadium. Before the game, thousands of Liverpool fans with tickets had to wait for hours to enter the ground, with police using tear gas and pepper spray on the crowds. Some Liverpool supporters said they feared being crushed after small openings were used to filter the queues. Many fans from both sides also reported being assaulted and robbed outside the stadium after the match.

Anger and uproar

The chaos sparked anger in Britain, political uproar in France a fortnight ahead of legislative elections, and raised questions about the French capital's capability to host the Olympics in 2024.

CONCACAF Champions League set for expansion from 2024

MIAMI: Eleven more teams will join an expanded CONCACAF Champions League from 2024 under a sweeping revamp of the competition unveiled on Wednesday. CONCACAF, the governing body for football in North America, Central America and the Caribbean, said in a statement that the club tournament would increase from 16 to 27 teams after the 2023 tournament.

Eighteen teams participating in the competition will come from North America, with as many as nine sides from the United States and Canada potentially able to qualify. Under the new format, 22 teams will play in 11 home-and-away first round games, with five other teams automatically



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's players wave to supporters from an open-top bus during a parade through the streets of Liverpool in north-west England, to celebrate winning the 2021-22 League Cup and FA Cup. Despite the disappointment of losing to Real Madrid in the final of the UEFA Champions League, Klopp has called on Liverpool fans to take to the streets of the city on Sunday when they parade the League Cup and FA Cup. — AFP

UEFA has commissioned an independent review led by Portugal's former government minister Tiago Brandao Rodrigues and aimed at finding the responsibilities and shortcomings of those involved in organizing the final.

"UEFA wishes-and needs-to understand what happened during the course of the day of the final, and determine lessons learnt to ensure there is no repeat of the actions and events of that day," it said in a statement. "The review will seek to establish a full picture and timeline of what occurred during the day, both within the stadium and the surrounding areas, including examining spectator flows to the stadium via the various access points," it said as it published the terms of reference.

The review will go through the security, ticketing and planning for the final and will also look at fan meeting points. It will engage with UEFA, fan groups, Liverpool and Real Madrid, the French

Football Federation (FFF), the police, the stadium operator and other public authorities. "Further information on how relevant parties can submit their testimonies (via a dedicated email address or an online questionnaire) will be communicated shortly," UEFA said.

The review will start immediately and be completed in the "shortest possible time-frame" and then set out its findings, conclusions and recommendations. Once completed, it will be published on UEFA's website. France's Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin has faced accusations of lying after he blamed the chaos on massive ticket fraud, and has since admitted that the organization around the final could "clearly" have been better. The Champions League final kicked off 36 minutes late due to the problems outside. The review is so far "the only investigation linked to the fans", Football Supporters Europe executive director Ronan Evain told AFP. I— AFP

advancing to the last 16.

The tournament will proceed as a home-and-away knockout tournament until the final, which will be played as a single game one-off fixture. The five teams given a bye into the last 16 will be the MLS Cup champion, the champion of Mexico's Liga MX, and the winners of three new sub-regional club tournaments - the Leagues Cup, which features teams from MLS and Liga MX, the Central American Cup and the Caribbean Cup. Major League Soccer is guaranteed at least five entrants under the revised format.

As well as the winners of the MLS Cup, places will also be given to the winners of the Supporters Shield, which goes to the team with the best regular season record, the conference winner opposite the Shield winner, and the two teams with the next best regular season records. The winner of the US Open Cup - the knockout competition which features more than 100 clubs from across the United States - will also earn a berth into the first round. The Seattle Sounders are the reigning CONCACAF Champions League winners, claiming victory over two legs last month against Mexico's UNAM. —AFP



PANAMA CITY: Panama's Adalberto Carrasquilla (left) vies for the ball with Costa Rica's Anthony Contreras (right) during a Concacaf Nations League football match at the Rommel Fernandez stadium in Panama City. —AFP

Ukraine aim to complete WCup dream in Wales

CARDIFF: Ukraine's footballers made a war-torn nation proud by beating Scotland in their first competitive clash since Russia's invasion, but the job of getting to the World Cup is only half done ahead of Sunday's play-off final against Wales. A place in Qatar later this year is the prize for the winners at the Cardiff City Stadium, where history also beckons for the home side.

Wales have not reached a World Cup since 1958 and manager Rob Page has described the Ukraine clash as "the biggest match in Welsh history". The same could be said for different reasons for Ukraine as they aim to provide some solace and national pride to a country devastated by Russian aggression. "We played for those who fight in trenches, who fight with their last drop of blood. We played for Ukrainians who suffer every day," said Ukraine coach Oleksandr Petrakov after his side outclassed Scotland to win 3-1 in Glasgow on Wednesday.

"We still have the Wales game in front of us. We will do everything to make Ukrainians proud." Petrakov admitted to being emotionally "empty" in the aftermath of victory at Hampden Park. However, the 64-year-old, who tried to sign up to Ukraine's territorial defence when war broke out, and his players must summon another huge effort to deliver their World Cup dream.

Six of the starting line-up against Scotland are still contracted to Ukrainian clubs and had not played a competitive game this year. As Artem Dovbyk broke clear to score the visitors' third goal with the final kick of the game, his teammates sank to their knees in exhaustion rather than joining in the celebrations. "We all understand that the game with Wales will no longer be about physical condition or tactics, it will be a game of survival," said Oleksandr Zinchenko. "Everyone will fight to the end and give their all, because we will play for our country."

Last WCup chance for Bale

Ukraine's visit to Scotland was postponed from March, just weeks after the war began, to give the visitors the chance to fulfil the fixture. But that change could still have a lasting effect on who joins England, USA and Iran in Group B of the World Cup. Wales beat Austria in their play-off semi-final three months ago thanks to Gareth Bale's brilliant double and were able to name a second-string side for their 2-1 Nations League defeat by Poland on Wednesday. Bale and Aaron Ramsey were among the key players given the night off to keep them fresh for Sunday. "We are well aware of the situation that Ukraine is in right now, and it must be incredibly tough to be in their shoes," said Tottenham defender Ben Davies. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khalidiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kaifan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shuwaikh	24814507
Chest Hospital	24849400	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Nuzha	22526804
Adan Hospital	23940620	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Qadsiya	22515088
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Dasmah	22532265
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
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SAINT-DENIS: France's forward Karim Benzema warms up prior to the UEFA Nations League - League A Group 1 first leg football match between France and Denmark at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, north of Paris, on June 3, 2022. — AFP

Benzema drops appeal over 'sex tape'

Extortion attempt shocked French football

PARIS: Real Madrid forward Karim Benzema has dropped an appeal against a one-year suspended sentence for complicity in a bid to blackmail former France teammate Mathieu Valbuena with a sex tape, his lawyer said Saturday. Benzema was sentenced in November 2021 and fined 75,000 euros (\$82,000) over the 2015 extortion attempt that shocked French football and saw him exiled from the French national team for five-and-a-half years.

The Real Madrid star has finally dropped his appeal, his lawyer Hugues Vigier told AFP, confirming a report on the Actu78 website. The Versailles court of appeal will notify the parties of the withdrawal order on Tuesday. Vigier previously

told French sports daily L'Equipe Benzema did so because he was "exhausted" by the process. "This withdrawal endorses a ruling of condemnation and apparently of guilt. It is a judicial truth. But it is not reality," he said. Scrapping the appeal makes definitive the November ruling against him.

Benzema was one of five people tried over the ultimately unsuccessful attempt to blackmail Valbuena with a sexually explicit video stolen from his phone. He was not accused of being behind the extortion attempt but rather of conspiring with the suspected blackmailers by putting pressure on Valbuena to pay them off. The 34-year-old footballer had been set to appeal on June 30-July 1 at

the court in Versailles, outside Paris. His former lawyer, Antoine Vey, had said Benzema would explain himself in person at the appeal trial.

In its November judgment, the Versailles criminal court ruled that Benzema had "implicated himself personally, through subterfuge and lies, to convince his teammate to submit to the blackmail". It added he had shown "no kindness towards Valbuena", as he had claimed, but "just the opposite" and had even appeared to take pleasure in his fellow player's plight. The affair rocked the French national team and led to the Madrid star being cast out of the side for five-and-a-half years before making a surprise return

to "Les Bleus" in 2021 in time for the European championship.

Benzema, who has always maintained his innocence, has on several occasions expressed his desire to turn the page on the affair as soon as possible. News of the star striker's announcement that he was dropping his appeal came just hours after he scored a brilliant opening goal in France's UEFA Nations League clash against Denmark in Paris. The Danes, however, recovered to win 2-1 after substitute Andreas Cornelius scored twice. Benzema is a favorite for the Ballon d'Or after helping Madrid beat Liverpool 1-0 in the Champions League final in Paris last weekend. — AFP

Benzema - The good, the bad and the ugly side of French football

PARIS: French football star Karim Benzema, who provokes passionate opinions-being adored or disliked in equal measure-has made a spectacular return to "Les Bleus" despite the "sex tape" scandal in which he has finally waived an appeal against his one-year suspended sentence. The 34-year-old's talent on the pitch is indisputable. He has a swathe of league titles with both Lyon and Real Madrid as well as five Champions League trophies and is a serious contender for the next Ballon d'Or. Even seven-time laureate Lionel Messi says he deserves it.

"There's no doubt, it's very clear that Benzema has had a spectacular year and has ended it by winning the Champions League," Messi said. But on Friday, his brilliant opening goal was not enough to save France from a 2-1 defeat against Denmark in Paris. The match came just hours before the surprise news that Benzema had decided to drop his appeal against a one-year suspended sentence for complicity in a bid to blackmail former France teammate Mathieu Valbuena with a sex tape.

His talent for becoming embroiled in off-the-field controversies has only fuelled the opinion of many in France that he is more trouble than he is worth. That was certainly the view of France coach Didier Deschamps, who until a surprise call-up for last year's Euro 2020 finals had kept the star player out in the cold for five-and-a-half years due to the sextape allegations. The recall was even more surprising given Deschamps had been at the end of unfounded allegations made by Benzema when he was omitted from the Euro 2016 finals squad hosted by France. Deschamps had "yielded to pressure from a racist party in France", railed Benzema. The consequences of his words impacted on Deschamps, whose house in Brittany was daubed with paint with the inscription "racist".

Fair to say the far right in France have led the charge against Benzema since a 2006 interview with French radio station RMC in which he suggested his footballing ambition had been pivotal in choosing to play for France. "It's (Algeria) my parents' country, it's in my heart," said Benzema, whose grandfather emigrated from Algeria and settled in Lyon. "I will be always present for the French team." "Then it's more for the sporting side, because Algeria is my country,



SAINT-DENIS: France's forward Karim Benzema reacts after scoring the opening goal during the UEFA Nations League - League A Group 1 first leg football match between France and Denmark. — AFP

my parents come from there." "After, France ... It's more sporty, that's it," added Benzema.

'Strength to persevere'

His parents, along with his Islamic faith, have been a common theme when describing his guiding lights. "My family inspires me. The values and morals my parents gave me helped me stay the same person," he told Vogue Man Arabia in 2019. "My faith also helps me to be focused every day. "It brings me benefits and it's my strength for me, my family, as well as for my work-for literally everything." Benzema has needed that strength, having given his detractors plenty of ammunition down the years.

He and close friend and then fellow French international star Franck Ribery were swept up in a tawdry tale with a prostitute named Zahia Dehar. However, the case against them for allegedly having sex with her when she was underage-Benzema denied ever doing so-collapsed in 2014. His timing on the pitch seems in tune with one of his favorite but unlikely passions-watchmaking. "It fascinates me to see and understand the different mechanisms, the movements and the designs," he told Vogue Man Arabia.

His greatest passion, though, are his two children-daughter Melia and son Ibrahim-who he says are his "biggest source of happiness". However, Benzema is blessed with a thick skin and it may be this that gets him through, as his mantra on life reflects. "Without trying, you can never achieve anything," he told Vogue Man Arabia. "Even when you fail, you will always be stronger than if you hadn't tried. "Living your life on a 'What if...' is never going to give you the strength to persevere." — AFP

Nadal aims to be French Open's oldest champion

PARIS: Rafael Nadal will become the oldest man to win the French Open title if he defeats Casper Ruud, the Norwegian whose clay court talents he has personally helped foster. Nadal will be playing in his 14th Roland Garros final on Sunday and 30th overall at the Grand Slams. Victory will deliver a record-extending 22nd major and 14th French Open, 17 years after his title winning debut in Paris. The 36-year-old Nadal is, however, as surprised as anyone to have got this far. A chronic left foot injury which has plagued him throughout his career flared up again in Rome last month, putting a serious question mark over even making it to the French capital.

"Without a doubt, I'd prefer to lose the final and have a new foot," admitted Nadal who has not hidden the brutal reality that every match he plays at Roland Garros may be his last. Despite his fears, Nadal has impressively battled his way into Sunday's championship match. He needed five sets and more than four hours to see off Felix Auger-Aliassime in the last 16 and another four hours to get past Novak Djokovic in the quarter-finals.

Alexander Zverev then pushed him all the way for three hours in the semi-finals until a sickening ankle injury forced the German world number three to quit on crutches. Despite the German's bold all-or-nothing challenge, Nadal still cut an impressive presence on court, at one point coming out on top in a lung-busting 44-shot rally. His record at the French Open now stands at 111 wins and just three losses. Djokovic was responsible for two of those defeats. Nadal was only 19 when he won his first French Open in 2005.

'The greatest'

Victory on Sunday will make him the tournament's oldest champion, eclipsing 34-year-old compatriot Andres Gimeno who took the title 50 years ago. World number eight Ruud, 23, is the tour's in-form clay court player. Not only have seven of his eight career titles come on clay, but he has won 66 matches on the surface since 2020 and played in nine finals. Ruud is the first Norwegian to reach a Grand Slam final. Robin Soderling, a fellow Scandinavian, is the only other man apart from Djokovic to have defeated Nadal in Paris back in 2009.



PARIS: Germany's Alexander Zverev falls injured on court during his men's semi-final singles match against Spain's Rafael Nadal on day thirteen of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament. —AFP

Ruud has been training at Nadal's academy in Manacor since 2018 alongside his father Christian, a former top 40 player, and Spaniard Pedro Clar. Nadal and Ruud have never met professionally but they are often hitting partners in Spain where the Norwegian admits "he has beaten me pretty much all the times in practice". "Casper has a very good character to play tennis. He's very relaxed, humble. He's always in a positive mood about learning," said Nadal.

"I think in the academy we were able to help him a little bit during this period of time." Ruud was just six years old when Nadal was first crowned French Open champion and describes the Spaniard as his "idol". "I could probably tell you all the finals and who he has played and who he has beaten, because I watched them all on TV," said the Norwegian. "He's the greatest clay court player of all time and one of the greatest all-around players."

Victory for Nadal will give him the Australian Open-French Open double in the same year for the first time. That would also put him halfway to a calendar Grand Slam, achieved only three times in history, the last of which was by Rod Laver in 1969. "I fought. I have done all the things possible to give myself another chance to play in the final of Roland Garros," said Nadal. "All the sacrifices and all the things that I need to go through to try to keep playing, really makes sense when you enjoy moments like I'm enjoying in this tournament." — AFP