

3 Concern over vaping's growing popularity among Kuwait teens



9 End of an era as McDonald's in Russia reopens under new name



12 Turkey bets on cruise hub to boost tourism



16 Verstappen cracks Baku as fault lines widen in Leclerc title assault



Panel approves KD 3,000 grant law for pensioners

Experts, oil executives deny drillings link to earthquakes

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A joint committee comprising of the National Assembly's financial and economic affairs and legal and legislative panels approved on Sunday a draft law allowing the government to offer a grant of KD 3,000 to every retired Kuwaiti, the head of the financial committee said. MP Ahmad Al-Hamad said that only one member objected to the bill, which also stipulates to increase the salaries of pensioners by KD 30 in August this year and by KD 20 every year from next year.

The cost of the grant is estimated at KD 590 million and will benefit close to 200,000 Kuwaiti pensioners. The bill also allows the government to withdraw KD 500 million a year from the budget in favor of the Public Institution for Public Security, the agency that manages the fund for pensioners.

The government says the amount is needed to cover what is called the actuarial deficit faced by the agency. Hamad said the joint committee will send its report to the Assembly, which is scheduled to hold an emergency session on Tuesday called by Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.

Continued on Page 6

12th grade students sit for final exams



KUWAIT: 12th grade students are screened as they arrive for their final exams for the 2021-2022 scholastic year on Sunday. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh (More pics on Page 2)

Kuwait seeks UN help to deport 450 long-term patients

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The health and foreign ministries are moving to involve the UN in deporting around 450 expat patients who refuse to leave government hospitals, with some remaining hospitalized for more than three years.

The health ministry has placed the issue of expat patients who remain in public hospitals although their treatment is complete on its priorities list, and asked the foreign ministry to take practical steps to deport them, after being frustrated due to a lack of action by their embassies in Kuwait and a lack of response for demands to take them, especially after some of their family members abandoned them, while others do not have relatives in Kuwait.

Official sources said such patients number around 450 of various nationalities and are a burden on health ministry services, as they occupy beds without a need that can be used by other patients waiting to be admitted.

Continued on Page 6

News in brief

Norway to label settlement products

OSLO: The Zionist entity on Saturday condemned Norway's decision to label products from Zionist settlements with their place of origin. The measure mainly concerns imports of wine, olive oil, fruits and vegetables, and will apply to products from the occupied West Bank "including East Jerusalem" and occupied areas of the Golan Heights, Oslo said. — AFP (See Page 4)

Limited US gun proposals

WASHINGTON: A bipartisan group of US senators on Sunday announced measures aimed at curbing rampant gun violence plaguing the country, but the limited proposals fall far short of changes called for by the president. The proposals include tougher background checks for gun buyers under 21 and increasing resources for states to keep weapons out of the hands of people who are dangerous to others or themselves. — AFP (See Page 6)

Sonia Gandhi hospitalized with COVID

NEW DELHI: Sonia Gandhi, president of India's main opposition Congress party, has been admitted to hospital with "COVID-related issues," a party spokesman said Sunday. Gandhi was admitted to the Ganga Ram Hospital in the capital New Delhi, Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala said in a tweet. The 75-year-old had tested positive for COVID-19 on June 2. — AFP

Lanka announces weekly fuel quotas

COLOMBO: Crisis-hit Sri Lanka announced weekly fuel quotas for motorists on Sunday, as an acute shortage worsened and longer queues formed outside the few pumping stations still operating. Energy minister Kanchana Wijesekera said the state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation was struggling to finance oil imports, while consumption had shot up due to shortages of electricity and liquefied petroleum gas. — AFP (See Page 8)

Total takes \$2bn foothold in Qatar gas expansion

DOHA: Qatar on Sunday named France's TotalEnergies as its first foreign partner to expand the world's largest natural gas field and eventually help ease Europe's energy fears. The French energy major will spend an estimated \$2 billion for a 6.25-percent share of the giant North Field East project that will help Qatar increase its liquefied natural gas (LNG) production by more than 60 percent by 2027, TotalEnergies chief executive Patrick Pouyanne told AFP.

Qatar's Energy Minister Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi called the joint venture "a marriage more than an engagement" as it will last until 2054. Other foreign firms will also take stakes in North Field with state-owned QatarEnergy (QE) but none will be bigger than TotalEnergies, said Kaabi, who did not reveal names. Industry sources say ExxonMobil, Shell and ConocoPhillips are all in line to take part in the giant \$28-billion expansion, that Qatar had originally wanted to finance alone.

"We have finished the selection process and we have signed the agreements," Kaabi said, adding that names would be announced in the "near future". With European nations scrambling to find alternatives to Russian oil and gas, LNG from North Field is expected to start coming on line in 2026. Pouyanne said the company's biggest deal with Qatar would help make up for the company's withdrawal from Russia in the wake of the Ukraine invasion. — AFP (See Page 8)



SUAKIN, Sudan: Sheep are rescued after the ship Badr 1, crammed with thousands of animals, sank in this Red Sea port on June 12, 2022. — AFP

Thousands of sheep drown as Sudan ship sinks

KHARTOUM: An overladen ship crammed with thousands of sheep sank Sunday in Sudan's Red Sea port of Suakin drowning most animals on board but with all crew surviving, port officials said. The live-

stock vessel was exporting the animals from Sudan to Saudi Arabia when it sank after several thousand more animals were loaded on board than it was meant to carry. "The ship, Badr 1, sank during the early hours of Sunday morning," a senior Sudanese port official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "It was carrying 15,800 sheep, which was beyond its load limits."

The official said the ship was supposed to carry only 9,000 sheep. Another official, who said that all crew were rescued, raised concerns over the economic and environmental impact of the accident.

Continued on Page 6



DOHA: Qatar's Minister of State for Energy Affairs and President and CEO of QatarEnergy Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi (R) and French energy group TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanne attend a signing ceremony at the QatarEnergy headquarters on June 12, 2022. — AFP

Saudi offers \$10m to prevent oil spill disaster off Yemen

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia on Sunday pledged \$10 million to help prevent an ageing Yemeni oil tanker from unleashing a potentially catastrophic spill in the Red Sea bordering its waters. The decaying 45-year-old oil tanker known as the FSO Safer, long used as a floating storage platform and now abandoned off the rebel-held Yemeni port of Hodeida, has not been serviced since Yemen was plunged into civil war.

A Saudi-led military coalition intervened in Yemen in 2015 after Houthi rebels seized the capital Sanaa the previous year. The tanker, which lies some 150 km south of the border with Saudi Arabia, is in "imminent" danger of breaking up, the United Nations warned last month. The Safer contains four times the amount of oil that was spilled by the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster, one of the world's worst ecological catastrophes, according to the UN.

Last week environmental campaign group Greenpeace urged the Arab League to drum up funds for an operation that would transfer its 1.1 million barrels of oil to a different vessel. A UN pledging conference last month fell far short of its \$80 million target, bringing in just \$33 million. Environmentalists warn the cost of the operation is a pittance compared to the estimated \$20 billion it would cost to clean up a spill.

Continued on Page 6

Local

Civil Service Commission not pleased with Kuwaitization plans

GCC countries discuss Syria's participation in Arab Summit

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission expressed displeasure with several government bodies and accused them of hindering plans to Kuwaitize ministries and authorities. "Appointing residents on rewards or special contracts systems in notable numbers is a circumvention of the state decision to implement the replacement policy and plans to correct the population structure," CSC said.

Instructions by CSC to concerned authorities indicated that many government bodies suffer from overemployment due to the presence of expats on the rewards system, while their jobs can be carried out by Kuwaiti employees, especially since the majority of the jobs on the rewards system are administrative and do not require special skills or rare degrees. "It is proven that the appointment of residents benefits them at the expense of state

funds, with the inability of administrations to distribute work duties and control employees so they perform their jobs without laxity," it added.

"Government bodies are required to dismiss expat workers on the reward system just like their colleagues who work according to employment grades, especially as the time for completing the Kuwaitization of the government sector is here and supposed to be at 100 percent," the CSC said. It said the appointments do not include service jobs such as office boys and janitors because of a lack of Kuwaiti candidates for such jobs.

Arab meeting

As Algeria is preparing for the Arab Summit to be held in November, and wishes to invite Syria to participate after more than 10 years of absence, high-ranking sources said GCC countries will discuss this issue during the meeting of their foreign ministers to agree on a unified stand on how to

participate, especially since some GCC countries are not ready to accept the return of the Syrian regime to Arab meetings despite the change in events and the resumption of relations between Syria and UAE and Oman.

Sources said Kuwait does not mind attending the summit at a high level, adding the Gulf discussions do not commit countries to participate at a certain level. "Saudi Arabia does think it is necessary for Syria to participate, though it is a sovereign matter for the summit host, especially since the meeting of the ministerial council of the Arab League did not decide whether Syria participates or not, so it is not expected for the Saudi presence to be at a high level and thought to be at the level of foreign minister," sources said. Arab foreign ministries decided earlier to hold the Arab Summit on Nov 1-2, which coincides with the 68th anniversary of the launch of the liberation revolution against French colonialism in 1954.



KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission.

News in brief

Kuwait's Crown Prince meets top state officials

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Sunday Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. His Highness Sheikh Mishal also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. He also hosted Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Venezuelan President arrives in Kuwait Monday

KUWAIT: President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro arrives in Kuwait on Monday on an official visit, during which he will hold talks with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

US Dollar stabilizes at KD 0.306

KUWAIT: The US Dollar stabilized on Sunday at KD 0.306, and the Euro dropped by 1.86 percent to KD 0.322 compared with Thursday's rate. The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said in its daily bulletin the British sterling pound was down by 1.63 percent to reach KD 0.377, and the Swiss franc by 0.88 to KD 0.310, as well as the Japanese Yen by 0.14 to KD 0.0022. The CBK publishes daily average exchange rates that do not necessarily reflect actual prices of the currencies' trade for the day.



KUWAIT: A doctor is awarded during the ceremony. —KUNA



The Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed.



CEO of the Royal Canadian College Dr Susan Moffatt-Bruce.

Over 800 doctors benefited from Kuwaiti training program: Ministry

KUWAIT: The Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed said on Sunday that the beneficiaries of the training program of Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations (KIMS) amounted to over 800 doctors and trainees in various fields. In his speech at a ceremony to renew the institutional recognition of KIMS from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, he added that KIMS' training content included 25 training programs for doctors and an internship program for over 400 doctors currently registered. The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the importance of Kuwaiti doctor graduates in adapting to the unprecedented

rapidly evolving needs of the health system and highlighted the role of doctors in combating the virus, he stated.

Meanwhile, Secretary General of KIMS Dr Fawaz Al-Refaee said in his speech that the renewal of institutional recognition from the Royal Canadian College of Canada reflected KIMS' insistence on institutional excellence and ambition to keep pace with the latest global developments. This stems from the vision of the Board of Trustees and the family of the institute's employees on the importance of recognition and renewal to enhance the institute's performance, he added. In turn, CEO of the Royal Canadian College Dr Susan

Moffatt-Bruce commended in her speech the progress made and KIMS' achievements, pointing out the successful partnership with the institute. Improving postgraduate medical education in Kuwait, the Gulf region and Canada, has a common goal, which is the constant quest to prepare specialized doctors to meet the ever-changing health care needs of patients.

At the end of the event, Refaee indicated in statements to reporters that there was communication with some countries to send doctors to them soon, including Sweden, Australia and Singapore. There are several agreements for completion soon, including



Secretary General of KIMS Dr Fawaz Al-Refaee.

an agreement with the UK Royal College of General Practitioners and a similar agreement with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, he explained. The partnership with Canada is close, dating back to the eighties, he added, pointing out that there has been an increase in the number of scholarships for Kuwaiti doctors to Canada. —KUNA

Grade 12 final exams start in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Final exams of the second semester of the scholastic year 2021-2022 for the 12th grade students began on Sunday, amid a normal atmosphere. The Ministry of Education has taken all necessary measures for the final examinations for all classes and teaching levels. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh and KUNA

Local

Concern over vaping's growing popularity among teens in Kuwait

E-cigarettes sold illegally despite health ministry ban

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Vaping among teens has skyrocketed and become widespread in society. There is a concern in Kuwait over the growing numbers of vapers, especially teenagers. Although e-cigarettes are banned by the ministry of health, they are still illegally sold on social media and in stores.

Studies have shown that the use of e-cigarettes is unsafe for teens because it contains nicotine, which is highly addictive and can harm adolescent brain development. Its effects continue into the early to mid-20s. Kuwait Times spoke with psychologists, teenagers, parents and experts to learn more about this issue to find the best way to resolve a problem that troubles many.

Sama Naeem, 13, told Kuwait Times that vaping was a stress reliever from all issues going on in her life. "Social media made it a cool trend to be followed. Most of my friends at school vape and offered me to try it," she said. When Kuwait Times asked her how teens can afford the cost of vaping and refills, she said: "All teens buy it from the supermarket. There is also a single-use (disposable) vape, which you can smoke and throw away. It costs only KD 1.5." Sama revealed the main reason behind vaping. "Attention is all I want from my parents, to care more about what I'm doing and prevent me from ruining my life," she said.

"To be cool"

Maya Kheder, 16, said that most of her friends vape to be cooler. "They imitate family or friends. Also, anxiety is mostly the reason, including social issues," she said. She mentioned smoking helps to integrate quickly in social groups - many students try to be more social by vaping and showing off their smoking skills.

As for Rayan Waleed, 15, vaping does not compare to smoking. For him, teenagers do much worse, and vaping is the last thing to worry about. "Vaping is just a modern way to smoke, and according to many, vapes are not like cigarettes, and damage is way less. People vape to quit smoking," he reasoned.

Ahmed Assaf, a parent of a teenager, said that the main reason teens smoke is curiosity, but many other reasons could be behind it. "When a boy grows up and reaches a critical age, he needs special attention from his family. During this period, he is restless and faces a lot of fluctuations in his life, which makes monitoring his behavior an important thing," he said.

"Likewise for a girl who goes through this stage; the mother has a great role in accompanying her, teaching her, and supervising her friends, so that she does not fall into a trap. Teenagers reject direct guidance and only accept indirect advice, so do not try to advise or direct them directly. You have to be their friend and give advice in hidden messages," Assaf pointed out.

Barehan Azam, a parent of a teen and psychologist,



told Kuwait Times: "Young people who vape may be more likely to smoke cigarettes in the future. Teenagers always feel rebellious and their rejection is not a real refusal, but an expression of their attempt to discover the world around them. I know their needs are different from their parents, because simply it is a different era, and to

Safe and confident

On how to deal with a vaping teenager, she said: "Parents must talk to a smoking teenager gently. Do not shout at them, control yourself and do not get angry. Maintain the tone of your voice, make your phrases clear and understandable, make them feel safe and confident, and make it clear that you want to help them get rid of their bad habits and mistakes. Most importantly, be a good listener and don't underestimate their feelings, and appreciate them when they do something positive."

In an earlier statement, the Head of the Healthy Cities Office at Kuwait's Ministry of Health Dr Amal Al-Yahya said the annual cost of direct and indirect smoking in Kuwait is KD 419 million, adding the rate of smoking among male adolescents aged between 13-15 is 24 percent. Among girls of the same age, the rate is between 6 and 8 percent.

In Feb 2022, a study published by researchers at Ohio State University College of Medicine gave an insight into what happens to the cardiovascular system of adolescents when they vape. In a mice study, researchers found vaping had a significant and long-term cardiovascular effect on adolescent males, but not females.

Researchers said the findings heighten the concern about vaping, especially among youth. A survey by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found more than half of high school seniors have tried e-cigarettes and nearly a third reported current use of the products. Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, an addictive drug that can harm the developing adolescent brain.



Kids find stress relief in vaping

gain their trust, parents must understand their needs."

She noted adolescence is one of the most important stages of development, because it largely determines the formation of the personality of the individual and their future. The adolescent faces many biological, social and psychological changes that affect how they deal with their new world and the requirements of their transition from the stage of complete dependence on the family to achieving the required independence.



Efforts to hire women in govt leading posts

KUWAIT: There are intentions to create a quota for leading women in every government ministry and institute, a local daily reported Sunday quoting government sources, adding that there are attempts to implement a mechanism to appoint at least a woman leader in each state department through a government decision proposal.

"The step will hasten the woman empowering program in government posts and achieve the goals of the development plan by raising women's

positions to 35 percent of the state public leading posts," said the sources, adding that one of the solutions to enable women to reach leading posts and reach the said percentage is to set certain numbers of women in leading posts in each government body.

According to the sources, there are many vacant leading posts at the current time which may meet the sought-after percentage for women in leading posts, "especially that the rearrangement of appointment percentages and use of leaders will become smoother and more flexible, bearing in mind appointment of leading women based on competence and skill."

The sources said recommendations will be submitted soon, as the government is responding to efforts to support women's appointment in leading posts "as evident in the appointment of four women in the Municipal Council for the first time."



Used tires found in Jleeb basement

KUWAIT: Commerce and Industry Ministry inspectors raided the basement of a residential building in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, which was used for storing large quantity of used tires and expired new ones. A store had rented the basement to keep the tires with the purpose of sale, the ministry said in a statement. The raid took place following investigations and identification of the supplier. Legal action is under way.



Legalese

Paying for tickets during the pandemic



By Fajer Ahmed

fajer@kuwaittimes.net

As most people are aware, the pandemic changed many different aspects of our lives, including the working environments we are used to. Although it has been two years, we are still dealing with and understanding some aspects. The Kuwaiti government did issue ministerial decrees to discuss important labor issues, such as stating that an employer cannot force his employees to take their annual leave during a lockdown and that an employee's salary may not be cut. With that said, we are still anticipating court decisions regarding these matters, which usually take years to be issued, but will help us understand the laws and consequences of the pandemic.

One question that has been left unanswered is whether foreign employees are entitled to airfare - an airline ticket once a year to go back home - during a pandemic.

Question: My contract says I am entitled to airfare equivalent of KD 200 every year to go back to my home country. But during the pandemic, since I could not fly, I was not able to get a ticket, and my workplace did not provide me with the money for the ticket. I have been receiving it for the past 20 years. Am I legally entitled to it?

Fajer: This is a tough question to answer, and it might be considered a grey area. My opinion though is if the contract strictly and clearly states that you are entitled to not an airline ticket but a certain amount for an airline ticket, and you have been receiving the amounts consistently throughout the 20 years, then you should be able to receive it, as under law, any bonuses or yearly entitlements become part of your salary.

With that said, the pandemic did hit companies hard, and the law did state that as an employee, you can let go of some of your rights for the benefit of the company, with your consent of course. If you feel this way, and you think the company is struggling financially, then maybe you can reach an agreement with the company to be paid later or in installments for these tickets.

For readers whose contracts did not specifically state an amount equivalent for a ticket and just a ticket, this will depend on the wording and the agreement, and also as stated above, the consistency and the way that the ticket has been given previously. But there could be a chance that you are not entitled to a ticket in the years that flying was not possible.

On the occasion of the



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

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext: 353-355-356



kuwaittimes.net

Local

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

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Oil announced on Sunday wrapping up project that digitalized the country's oil archive making all the documents, photos books and magazines easily accessible. Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Dr Nimer Al-Sabah said in press release that the project, dubbed Oil's Digital Memory, aims to preserve and document Kuwait's oil heritage. He added that the project utilizes OCR technology to enable researchers from searching with keywords within the document itself, to get the desired results in a timely manner. Sheikh Dr Nimer explained that this project, a turning point in archiving, comes as part of Ministry's plan to keep up with ongoing developments and achieve Kuwait 2035. Meanwhile, Head of Media and Public Relations Department in the Ministry Sheikh Tamadher Al-Sabah clarified that all documents could be accessed via the ministry's official website in both Arabic and English and available in both QR code and PDF. She added that the project, accomplished in six months, protects legacy from being damaged or lost as well as makes it more readily available to the public. —KUNA

Arab League
commends
Norway labeling
settlements' products

CAIRO: The Arab League commended Sunday the Norwegian government's decision to label products of the Zionist entity's illegal settlements in the occupied territories of the Golan Heights and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

In a press statement, Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine and the occupied Arab territories in the Arab League Dr Saeed Abu Ali said that the Norwegian decision was an important legal and moral step in the right direction, leading to a boycott of Zionist entity's settlement products and preventing their entry to European countries and the world. He added that it is a step to fulfilling international obligations, including imposing sanctions on the Zionist occupation, for what settlement constitutes a grave violation of international law and signed agreements, which rises to the level of a war crime and crimes against humanity.

This Norwegian decision came in accordance with the 2015 European Commission, which was affirmed by the European Court of Justice 2019, as well as the Norwegian and European position, which abides by the international law and the resolutions of international legitimacy that rejects illegitimate settlements. In a similar context, Abu Ali condemned the daily attacks of extreme Jews on the Aqsa Mosque and the Islamic and Christian holy sites.

He warned that the continuation of these incursions would lead a religious based war that would be hard to control, noting that all Jerusalem neighborhoods are targeted, stressing that the Zionist entity did not respect the agreements it signed, leading to the failure of all peace talks.

Abu Ali called again to boycott the occupation and its colonial settlements to face the aggressive racist practices and work to enforce international legitimacy resolutions and apply it to end the occupation and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their rights of freedom and independence. —KUNA

Zain, Sesame Workshop partner to offer
premium content to Zain Kids platform

Partnership will result in inclusive access to educational content

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces that its recently rebranded API platform and homegrown digital ecosystem provider, Dizlee has entered a collaboration with Sesame Workshop's Ahlan Simsim, an Arabic-language program that follows the adventures of Basma and Jad, two best friends exploring their world.

The partnership between Zain's Dizlee and Sesame Workshop is also aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal number four, related to the provision of quality education for all. The collaboration sees Ahlan Simsim content and characters becoming available on the Zain Kids platform to customers in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Bahrain as well as to Omantel customers.

The initiative is in line with two of Zain Group's objectives to provide top quality digital services through Dizlee, while at the same time aligning with the Zain Group's corporate sustainability objectives.

From the creators of Iftah Ya Simsim and Sesame Street, Ahlan Simsim offers content that fosters ear-

Under Zain's
corporate
sustainability
strategy

ly learning for young children in the Middle East and North Africa, especially those affected by crisis and displacement. Ahlan Simsim is part of a wider humanitarian initiative of the same name. For more than 50 years, Sesame Workshop has been a torchbearer in the 'edutainment' space and a household name across continents.

This agreement marks yet another effort from Zain to ensure that its educational offerings to the market solve the dual purpose of providing quality digital content to the youth, and at the same time ensuring that the company is in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, that every child in the region has access to quality education, regardless of where they are based.

Rene Celaya, Vice-President for International Programs at Sesame Workshop said, "Sesame Workshop is extremely pleased to partner with Zain Group. Through the Zain Kids platform, children are able to enjoy the educational and inclusive content of Ahlan Simsim, which promotes playful learning and teaches skills to help young children grow smarter, stronger, and kinder."

Zain recognized the importance of providing



access to qualitative educational content that caters to its communities, particularly given the impact of the pandemic as well as the need to establish digital inclusive communities. This partnership leverages

Ahlan Simsim's content and Zain's digital reach to build resilience and empower young people. Technical support for this integration was provided by Digital Virgo, a Dizlee trusted partner.

Kuwaiti artist participates in int'l art symposium



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti painter Mahmoud Ashknani participated in the 30th version of Ludwig's International Art Symposium in Hungary. Speaking to the press, Ashknani affirmed that such international participation reflects Kuwait's growing visual art scene, adding that

a documentary of his showcasing his works across the last 50 years, dubbed Zari, was played during the symposium. He further underscored the role of artists in representing their homeland, and conveying a positive image, stating that Kuwaiti art has a special flare.

Ashknani illustrated that the symposium, taking place in city of Kendlimajor southwest of capital Budapest, provides a valuable opportunity to gain knowledge and expertise from experienced artists. —KUNA





'Like it or not',
Britannia still
rules part of Cyprus

US abortion rights advocates, opponents brace for court decision



WASHINGTON: Thousands of gun control advocates join the "March for Our Lives" as they protest against gun violence during a rally on the National Mall in Washington. — AFP

Protesters want action on gun violence

Activists place over 45,000 white vases holding flowers in Washington

WASHINGTON: Thousands of people took to the streets in the United States on Saturday to push for action on the devastating gun violence plaguing the country, where Republican politicians have repeatedly blocked efforts to enact stricter firearms laws.

Protesters of all ages streamed onto the National Mall in Washington, where activists placed more than 45,000 white vases holding flowers — one for each person killed by a firearm in the United States in 2020.

"Protect People Not Guns," said one sign held by a protester near the Washington Monument. "Fear Has No Place In Schools," read another.

Two horrific shootings last month — one at a Texas elementary school that killed 19 children and two teachers, and another at a New York supermarket that left 10 Black people dead — helped spur the rallies, organized by March For Our Lives.

The student-led organization, founded by survivors of a shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, held a rally that drew hundreds of thousands of people to the nation's capital in March 2018. Four years later, the demonstration was marked by frustration at the lack of progress.

"Enough is enough" rang out repeatedly from the podium, with speakers including Parkland survivor X Gonzalez and Martin Luther King Jr's granddaughter Yolanda King.

"We are here to demand justice," said Garnell Whitfield, whose 86-year-old mother was killed in the racially motivated supermarket shooting in Buffalo, New York on May 14. "We are here to stand with those who are bold enough to demand sensible gun legislation."

Widespread outrage, little change

The problem of gun violence in the United States — which has killed more than 19,300 people so far this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive — goes far beyond high-profile mass killings, with more than half of those deaths due to suicide.

Outside of Washington, hundreds of other demonstrations were planned around the country Saturday, including in Parkland, where protesters carried signs with messages such as "Am I Next?"

Thousands also turned out in New York City. In Brooklyn, white crosses were erected for the children killed in Uvalde and portraits of those killed in Buffalo fastened to shopping carts.

Ease of access to firearms, and mental health problems that can lead to them being used in attacks, have both been in the spotlight in the wake of the May 24 shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.

The massacre was carried out by a gunman who bought two assault rifles shortly after turning 18.

Gun control advocates are calling for tighter restrictions or an outright ban on such rifles. But opponents have sought to cast mass shootings as primarily a mental health issue, not a weapons problem. Gerald Mendes, a physical education teacher in Texas who joined the rally in New York said he supports the US constitutional right to bear arms, but that "as far as AR-15s and weapons of war, we regular citizens don't need those."

The majority of Americans support tighter gun laws, but opposition from many Republican lawmakers has long been a hurdle to major changes.

"The will of the American people is being subverted by a minority," said Cynthia Martins, a 63-year-old resident of the US capital, referring to the Republican Party. "There's a reason that we're still in this situation," she said.

'Fear that we live with everyday'

Some lawmakers are trying to pass gun regulations. The Democrat-controlled House of Representatives passed a broad package of proposals this week that included raising the purchasing age for most semi-automatic rifles from 18 to 21 — but the party does not have the requisite 60 votes to advance it in the Senate.

A cross-party group of senators has also been working on a narrow collection of controls that

could develop into the first serious attempt at gun regulation reform in decades.

But it does not include an assault weapons ban or universal background checks, meaning it will fall short of the expectations of President Joe Biden.

Faith Barrett, a teacher who traveled to the rally with her daughter, also a teacher, voiced the frustration shared by many on the Mall.

"We're still back in the same place," the 47-year-old said, voicing only "tentative" hope change would come. Both she and her daughter have plans in place in case of a shooting at their school.

"Most teachers look at every single classroom they go into and think, where am I going to put my kids if something happens," Barrett said.

The spectre of gun violence also hung over the rally, where police and security forces had a heavy presence. A moment of silence for the Uvalde victims was shaken by a brief panic when a disturbance near the stage sent people sprinting away in terror.

While the crowd quickly calmed and the man creating the disturbance was detained, with Park Police telling local media no weapons were found, some were left in shock and tears.

Fred Guttenberg, the father of a Parkland victim, took to the podium to ease the crowd. "Unfortunately somebody decided to show up and put the fear that we live with everyday to life." — AFP

Russia strikes depot in west Ukraine

KRAMATORSK, Ukraine: Russian forces said Sunday they had struck a site in western Ukraine storing large amounts of weapons supplied by the United States and European countries, as the battle intensified for the key eastern city of Severodonetsk.

The strike on the town of Chortkiv, a rare attack by Russia in the relatively calm west of Ukraine, left

22 people injured, the regional governor said. Meanwhile the situation in Severodonetsk was "extremely difficult", after the Russian army destroyed a second bridge into the city and was heavily bombarding the last one, regional governor Sergiy Gaiday said.

Away from the battlefield, the head of the European Commission on Saturday promised it would provide a clear signal by the end of next week on Ukraine's bid to become a candidate to join the European Union.

"Ukraine has achieved a lot in the past ten years and much still needs to be done. Our opinion will reflect this carefully," Ursula von der Leyen said after a surprise trip to the capital Kyiv. Despite reservations among some member states, EU lead-

ers are expected to approve the bid at a summit later this month, although with strict conditions attached.

"The challenge will be to come out of the (EU) council with a united position, which reflects the enormity of these historic decisions," von der Leyen said as she travelled back to Poland. Ukraine's geopolitical vulnerability has been laid bare by Russia's February 24 invasion, which has killed thousands, sent millions fleeing and reduced swathes of the country to rubble.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Saturday that it was a "decisive time". "Russia wants to ruin European unity, wants to leave Europe divided and wants to leave it weak. The entirety of Europe is a target for Russia." — AFP

UK urged to aid Moroccan facing death penalty

LONDON: The UK's government Sunday came under pressure to win the release of a Moroccan man who has been sentenced to death alongside two Britons by a pro-Russian court in Ukraine. The court in Donetsk, one of two self-proclaimed statelets in eastern Ukraine, last week ordered the death penalty for the trio after they were captured by Russian troops.

Brahim Saadoun along with UK nationals Aiden Aslin and Shaun Pinner were said to have surrendered in April after fighting with Ukrainian forces in the besieged port city of Mariupol. British cabinet minister Brandon Lewis told Sky News the government was "fully engaged" with Ukrainian authorities in trying to help Aslin and Pinner after their "sham trial".

The Britons were legal combatants serving with Ukraine's armed forces and fully entitled to protection for prisoners of war under the Geneva convention, Lewis said. The UK should also intervene on Saadoun's behalf, his friend Zina Kotenko told Sky from her new home in northern England, after fleeing Russia's invasion.

Kotenko said she had first met the 21-year-old Saadoun in a Kyiv nightclub, described him as a "kind", "open-minded" and "cheerful" person. Kotenko said he had been accepted into the Ukrainian army after several attempts, being found previously by recruiters to be underweight. — AFP

Macron seeks majority in parliament vote

PARIS: France voted in the first round of parliamentary elections on Sunday with President Emmanuel Macron hoping to win a majority backing his reform plans while a resurgent and newly unified left seeks to thwart his ambitions. Elections for the 577 seats in the lower house National Assembly are a two-round process, with the shape of the new parliament becoming clear only after the second round on June 19.

The ballots provide a crucial coda to April's presidential election, when Macron won a second term and pledged a transformative new era after a first mandate dominated by protests, the coronavirus pandemic and

Russia's war against Ukraine.

After a dismal performance in April, the French left has united in a coalition for what its leader Jean-Luc Melenchon dubs "the third round" of the presidential elections. Opinion polls show the president's centrist alliance, Ensemble (Together), and Melenchon's NUPES coalition of hard left, Socialists, Communists and Greens neck-and-neck in the popular vote-although the actual breakdown of parliamentary seats will depend on turnout in the second round.

The abstention rate is predicted to be well over 50 percent in the first round, in what would be a new record for elections already marked by feeble participation in recent years. At midday (1000 GMT) turnout was 18.43 percent, according to an interior ministry estimate, down 0.8 points from the last election in 2017.

"I voted tactically in the presidential election, and that didn't change a thing," unemployed 59-year-old Alain Mendez told AFP at an outdoor cafe in Toulouse, southwestern France. — AFP



LE TOUQUET, France: France's President Emmanuel Macron waves, flanked by Touquet's mayor Daniel Fasquelle as he leaves after voting in French parliamentary elections at a polling station in Le Touquet, northern France on June 12, 2022. — AFP

International

US abortion rights advocates, opponents brace for court decision

Final ruling on the highly contested issue is expected by June 30

WASHINGTON: Odile Schalit is preparing for "the worst." Schalit is the executive director of The Brigid Alliance, an organization that helps women in the United States who are forced to travel long distances to obtain an abortion.

And with the Supreme Court poised to potentially restrict abortion access, her group's services may soon be more essential than ever. A draft opinion leaked in May would have the conservative majority on the nine-member court overturn Roe v. Wade, the 1973 landmark decision allowing nationwide access to abortion.

The final ruling on the highly contested issue is expected by June 30. In the meantime, both defenders and opponents of abortion are engaged in preparations for what is being called the "post-Roe world." "I've stopped assuming that the worst won't happen," Schalit told AFP. The Brigid Alliance organizes and finances trips for women seeking abortions after the first trimester. That often involves travel from states with strict abortion laws to other states.

"We're adding more staff. We're doing outreach," Schalit said. "We're reaching out and trying to grow our donor base. We're really doubling down on all of those efforts." The Brigid Alliance currently employs 10 people full-time and assists some 125 women a month. It hopes to boost that number to 200 a month by adding six more employees. Even then, Schalit said, and despite an increase in donations, "we will not be able to meet the need of every single person needing our services."

'Trigger' laws

Twenty-two of the 50 US states, mostly in the conservative South of the country, are prepared to ban abortion if the Supreme Court goes ahead and overturns Roe v. Wade. According to the Guttmacher Institute, nine states, including Arizona and Michigan, have pre-1973 laws banning abortion on the books that they could immediately revive.

Others have so-called "trigger" laws that would go into force virtually automatically if the Supreme Court goes ahead and restricts abortion rights. Iowa, Georgia, Ohio and South Carolina are among the states that have passed laws restricting abor-



WASHINGTON: A flag reading "Don't Tread On My Uterus" is displayed outside the US Supreme Court in Washington, DC. —AFP

tion after six weeks, before many women even know they are pregnant.

While currently blocked by the courts, those laws could take effect if the Supreme Court changes the legal landscape. Democratic-ruled states, where abortion would remain legal, are preparing, meanwhile, for an influx of women seeking abortions.

Connecticut and Delaware, for example, have expanded the categories of professionals who are authorized to carry out abortions to include nurses and midwives. Lawmakers in California have allocated \$152 million to assist access to abortion and the governor of New York has pledged \$35 million.

Planned Parenthood, which performs more than one-third of the 850,000 annual abortions in the United States, is reinforcing its network in places such as Colorado and Illinois, which border states where the procedure may be banned.

Ordinary citizens are also mobilizing—and have been for a while. Since May 2019, the online discussion platform Reddit has hosted a group called the "Aunties" which offers assistance and anonymity to

women seeking an abortion. Since last month, the number of users has exploded from just 45 to more than 75,000. A retired woman in her 60s in Tennessee was among those offering to help on Reddit, saying she could drive abortion-seekers to neighboring states.

"It's amazing," Schalit said. "More hands is phenomenal." At the same time, she said she would prefer that volunteers "consider instead connecting with pre-existing organizations like ours, to build out what already exists." Abortion opponents have opened their own "crisis pregnancy centers" during the past few years where they seek to persuade women seeking abortions not to go through with the procedure. Abortion pills, which account for about half of the abortions in the United States, are another battleground.

Easily available through the internet from sites abroad, the pills can be used without significant risk up until 10 weeks of pregnancy. Several conservative US states, including Kentucky and South Dakota, have sought to cut off access to the pills by banning their delivery through the mail. —AFP

Frequent mass shootings

The president had pushed for more substantive reforms, including a ban on assault rifles - which were used in both the Texas and New York shootings - or at least an increase in the age at which they can be purchased. He had also urged lawmakers to ban high-capacity magazines, mandate safe storage of firearms, and allow gun manufacturers to be held liable for crimes committed with their products.

The Democrat-controlled House of Representatives passed a broad package of proposals that included raising the purchasing age for most semi-automatic rifles from 18 to 21. But the party does not have the requisite 60 votes to advance it in the Senate, leaving the bipartisan deal as the only hope for federal measures to address firearms violence.

Frequent mass shootings have led to widespread outrage in the United States, where a majority of people support tighter gun laws, but opposition from many Republican lawmakers and voters has long been a hurdle to major changes. A strong supporter of gun rights is the National Rifle Association, which has been weakened by scandals and was hit by a lawsuit from New York State's attorney general, but it still wields considerable influence.

"The media, leftist politicians, and gun-hating activists are bullying NRA members and gun owners because they want us to give up. We won't bend a knee," the lobby tweeted on Saturday. That day, thousands of people took to the streets in the United States to push for action on gun violence, protesting in Washington, New York and locations across the country. —AFP

Selim called for an investigation into the incident. Last month, a massive fire broke out in the cargo area of Suakin port, lasting hours and causing heavy damage. It was not clear what caused the blaze. An investigation has been launched to determine the cause of the fire, but has yet to release its findings.

The historic port town of Suakin is no longer Sudan's main foreign trade hub, a role which has been taken by Port Sudan, some 60 km away along the Red Sea coast. There have been moves to redevelop Suakin port, but a 2017 deal with Turkey to restore historic buildings and expand the docks was suspended after the ouster of longtime president Omar Al-Bashir.

Sudan remains gripped by a chronic economic crisis, which has deepened following last year's military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan. The military takeover triggered punitive measures, including aid cuts by Western governments, who demanded the restoration of the transitional administration installed after Bashir was toppled. —AFP

lion to the effort through the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center, the official Saudi Press Agency reported Sunday.

"The Kingdom calls on the United Nations to quickly take the necessary measures to ensure the prevention of oil leakage... and also calls on the international community to contribute urgently to support this initiative and prevent a serious environmental disaster," the agency said. Saudi Arabia's current defense spending is \$36.8 billion per year, according to the Military Balance+ database prepared by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. —AFP

Senators announce limited deal on gun violence measures

WASHINGTON: A bipartisan group of US senators on Sunday proposed steps to curb gun violence following devastating mass shootings in Texas and New York, but the limited measures fall far short of the president's calls for change. The shootings in May - one at a Texas elementary school that killed 19 young children and two teachers, and another at a New York supermarket that left 10 Black people dead - have piled pressure on politicians to take action.

But Republicans lawmakers, who have repeatedly blocked tougher measures, are still resisting major changes to gun regulations, instead pointing to mental health issues as the root of the problem. The new proposals include tougher background checks for gun buyers under 21, increasing resources for states to keep weapons out of the hands of people deemed a risk, and cracking down on illegal gun purchases.

"Today, we are announcing a commonsense, bipartisan proposal to protect America's children, keep our schools safe, and reduce the threat of violence across our country," the group of 20 Democratic and Republican lawmakers said in a statement. "Our plan increases needed mental health resources, improves school safety and support for students, and helps



WASHINGTON: A gun control advocate participates in the "March for Our Lives" to protest against gun violence during a rally near the Washington Monument on the National Mall on June 11, 2022. — AFP

ensure dangerous criminals and those who are adjudicated as mentally ill can't purchase weapons."

The senators also called for increased investment in mental health services and school safety resources, as well as including domestic violence convictions and restraining orders in the national background check database. President Joe Biden praised the announcement and urged lawmakers to pass it quickly, while making clear that the proposals do not go far enough.

"Obviously, it does not do everything that I think is needed, but it reflects important steps in the right direction, and would be the most significant gun safety legislation to pass Congress in decades," he said in a statement. "With bipartisan support, there are no excuses for delay, and no reason why it should not quickly move through the Senate and the House."

Kuwait seeks UN help to deport 450...

Continued from Page 1

They said this is a humanitarian issue and they cannot be forced out, especially since many of them are elderly. The sources said after embassies of these patients did not act, their numbers, the hospitals they are in, the time they have spent there and their health conditions have been tallied, adding the ministry will not ask for treatment fees in exchange for their departure. The sources said the files of these patients will soon be sent to the foreign ministry to find another way to resolve the issue, which is to contact the United Nations office in Kuwait to deal directly with embassies, or for the UN to transfer these patients to their countries in cooperation with Kuwaiti authorities.

Panel approves KD 3,000 grant law...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, the head of the Assembly's environment committee MP Hamad Al-Matar said a number of experts and oil executives told the panel during a meeting on Sunday that there is no relation between the recent strong earthquake that hit Kuwait and oil operations. The lawmaker said earthquakes normally happen deeper than five kilometers, while oil drillings and operations normally take place at under two kilometers.

Thousands of sheep drown as...

Continued from Page 1

"The sunken ship will affect the port's operation," the official said. "It will also likely have an environmental impact due to the death of the large number of animals carried by the ship."

Omar Al-Khalifa, the head of the national exporters' association, said the ship took several hours to sink at the pier - a window that meant it "could have been rescued". The total value of the lost livestock "is around 14 million Saudi riyals, the equivalent of four million dollars," said Saleh Selim, the head of the association's livestock division. He said livestock owners recovered only around 700 sheep "but they were found very ill and we don't expect them to live long."

Saudi offers \$10m to prevent oil spill...

Continued from Page 1

The UN has said an oil spill could destroy ecosystems, shut down the fishing industry and close the lifeline Hodeida port for six months. It has said the operation needs to be completed by the end of September to avoid "turbulent winds" that pick up later in the year. Riyadh will donate \$10 mil-

News in brief

Italy helicopter crash

ROME: Seven bodies were found Saturday in the wreckage of a helicopter that disappeared in the mountains of northern Italy two days ago, with no survivors, emergency services said. Four Turkish citizens were on board the helicopter which went missing on Thursday, the Turkish foreign ministry said, while Lebanese President Michel Aoun said he mourned the death of two nationals on board. The pilot was Italian, originally from Venice, according to the ANSA news agency, which reported that the others had been on a business trip. "After the discovery on Mount Cusna of the remains of the aircraft that disappeared on June 9, the unfortunately lifeless bodies of the seven people on board were found in the wreckage," Italy's fire service announced. —AFP

Bomb attack kills 4

KABUL: A bomb blast on a minibus killed at least four people and injured several others in the Afghan capital on Saturday, police said. The explosion in an eastern district of Kabul was the latest in a series of deadly attacks that have rocked Afghanistan in recent months, a little under a year since the Taliban takeover. A team of Taliban security personnel had been deployed to the area to investigate the bombing, police spokesman Khalid Zadran told AFP. No group has so far claimed responsibility for the bombing that occurred in a district mainly inhabited by members of the Sunni Pashtun community. While the number of bombings has fallen across the country since the Taliban seized power in August, attacks have ticked up recently. Dozens of civilians were killed in Kabul and other cities in primarily sectarian attacks during the holy month of Ramadan, which ended on April 30 in Afghanistan, with some claimed by the Islamic State group. — AFP

Attack on poultry farm

CHILPANCINGO, Mexico: Six people were killed and two others wounded Saturday in a gun attack on workers at a chicken farm in Mexico's troubled southeastern state of Guerrero, the regional prosecutor's office said. Authorities are investigating "the events that occurred in Petaquillas (Guerrero) where two people were injured with firearms and five men and one woman were killed," the Guerrero prosecutor's office tweeted, without giving further details. Local media reported that the "woman" was actually a 14-year-old girl. The gunman opened fire on the employees of the chicken production and sales farm, located on the side of the Mexico-Acapulco federal highway in the town of Petaquillas, near a military checkpoint. Police and National Guard forces cordoned off the area. —AFP

Sinn Fein leader alleges Tory 'games' over N Ireland

LONDON: The leader of Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein on Sunday accused UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson of sacrificing Northern Ireland to shore up his own enfeebled position. Johnson's government will on Monday introduce legislation to rewrite its post-Brexit commitments on Northern Ireland, but denied that it was breaking its treaty obligations to the European Union.

Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis insisted the bill was "lawful" and necessary to fix problems in the EU protocol, so as to restore a power-sharing government in the troubled territory. But Sinn Fein's all-Ireland president Mary Lou McDonald said the bill would unilaterally break the UK's EU withdrawal treaty, and pointed to Johnson's narrow escape in a Conservative leadership vote last Monday.

"It is disgraceful to use the north of Ireland, to use Ireland, as a bargaining chip," she told Sky News, accusing the Conservatives of "games and gamesmanship". The government's proposals were rather "designed to boost the ego, the leadership ambitions of either Boris Johnson or one of his would-be successors", McDonald added. "It's dishonourable stuff, by any measure extraordinary stuff." Lewis, also speaking in a Sky interview, said the Northern Ireland Protocol was disrupting trade and lacked support from the territory's pro-UK unionist parties.

"So it's right that we repair that," he said, adding that the need to protect a 1998 peace agreement in Northern Ireland had "primacy" over the protocol. McDonald countered that public opinion and most lawmakers in Northern Ireland backed the protocol.

"Brandon Lewis is talking through his hat, and not for the first time," she said, accusing the government of "undermining, attacking and damaging the (1998) Good Friday Agreement". In a historic first, Sinn Fein emerged as the biggest party in Northern Ireland elections last month. —AFP



Brandon Lewis

International

Australia, China defence ministers meet for first time in three years

Meeting was 'an important first step' and 'very significant'

SINGAPORE: Australia and China's defence ministers met for the first time in three years on Sunday, with the talks described as "an important first step" following a period of strained ties. Richard Marles, whose centre-left government came to power in May, held talks for over an hour with China's Wei Fenghe on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit in Singapore.

Marles described the meeting as "an important first step" and "very significant". "It was an opportunity to have a very frank and full exchange in which I raised a number of issues of concern to Australia," said Marles, who is also Australia's deputy prime minister.

The Chinese government did not offer any immediate comment following the meeting. Relations between Beijing and Canberra have grown frosty in recent years after the latter called for an independent probe into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic and banned telecom giant Huawei from building Australia's 5G network.

China-Australia's biggest trading partnership responded by imposing tariffs and disrupting more than a dozen key industries, including wine, barley and coal. Marles said the recent interception of an Australian patrol plane in international airspace by a Chinese warplane as well as Australia's "abiding

interest in the Pacific" were among topics discussed. This included Australia's focus on ensuring "that the countries of the Pacific are not put in a position of increased militarisation", he said.

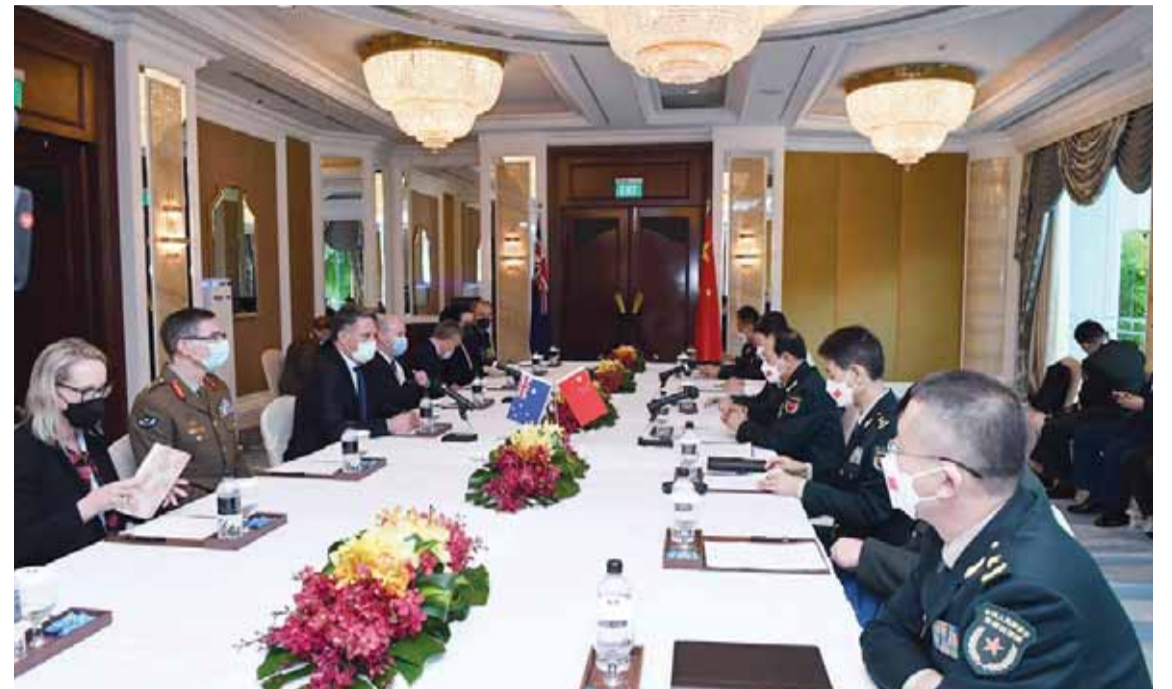
'Change of tone'

The patrol plane incident, described by Canberra as "very dangerous", happened on May 26, when a Chinese aircraft intercepted the Australian jet and released a cloud of small aluminium strips, known as chaff. Australia is battling for influence with China among Pacific island states, with the new government playing catch-up after years of relations being soured by the previous Australian leadership's foot-dragging on climate change.

Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi has recently been visiting the region and, while he failed to secure support for a regional security pact, he still inked a series of deals. Australia's new foreign minister, Penny Wong, has paid visits to the Pacific islands since taking office.

Marles underscored the importance of "open lines of dialogue" with China. "Australia and China's relationship is complex. And it's precisely because of this complexity that it is really important that we are engaging in dialogue right now."

Asked about next steps, he said Australia wanted



SINGAPORE: Handout photo released on June 12, 2022 from the Australian Department of Defence shows Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles (3rd L) meeting with China's Defence Minister Wei Fenghe (3rd R) on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue summit in Singapore. —AFP

to move in a "very sober and very deliberate manner. We don't underestimate the difficulties that we've had in our bilateral relationship". He stressed

that "while there is a change of tone, there is absolutely no change in the substance of Australia's national interests". —AFP

Pope says hopes to reschedule Africa trip soon

VATICAN CITY, Holy See: Pope Francis said Sunday he hoped to visit the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan as soon as possible, after cancelling an upcoming visit due to a knee problem. "Dear friends, with great regret, due to problems with my leg, I have had to postpone my visit to your countries," the 85-year-old said after delivering his weekly Angelus prayer in St Peter's Square.

"I truly feel great sorrow for having had to postpone this trip, which means so much to me. I apologise for this. Let us pray together that, with the help of God and medical attention, I will be able to be with you as soon as possible. Let us be hopeful!"

The Vatican on Friday announced that the trip planned for July 2 to 7 would be rescheduled, although no new date was set. "At the request of his doctors, and in order not to jeopardise the results of the therapy that he is undergoing for his knee, the Holy Father has been forced to postpone," spokesman Matteo Brunni said.

Francis has been suffering from pain in his right knee in recent weeks and last month relied on a wheelchair for the first time at a public event. He has cancelled numerous engagements—a scheduled trip to Lebanon in June was postponed—and has sometimes been seen struggling to walk.

The Vatican has not said officially what the problem is, although sources have told AFP he has chronic arthritis. The pope himself has also spoken of an injured ligament in his knee.

Also on Sunday, the pope urged the world not to forget about the war in Ukraine, triggered by Russia's invasion in late February. "The thought of the people of Ukraine, afflicted by war, remains vivid in my heart," he said.

"Let the passage of time not temper our grief



VATICAN CITY: Faithful listen as Pope Francis leads the Angelus prayer from the window of the Apostolic Palace overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, on June 12, 2022. —AFP

and concern for that suffering population. "Please, let us not grow accustomed to this tragic situation! Let us always keep it in our hearts. Let us pray and strive for peace." —AFP

Volcano ash blankets Philippines

JUBAN, Philippines: A volcano in the Philippines spewed a huge column of ash into the sky on Sunday, blanketing a region still recovering from last week's eruption. The blast from Bulusan volcano lasted 18 minutes, the Philippine seismological agency said, impairing road visibility and forcing airlines to cancel flights.

On June 5, Mount Bulusan sent a grey plume shooting up at least one kilometre (0.6 miles) and covered 10 villages with ash. Residents of Juban town in Sorsogon province, still reeling from last week's eruption, were woken up Sunday by the volcano's thundering.

"I thought it was just raining, but when I looked outside there was ash everywhere," resident Antonio Habitan told AFP. "Our river was once clear but now it is ash-coloured." No casualties were reported, but the seismological agency raised the alert level to one on the five-level system, indicating "low-level unrest".

"We still can't say that it is over. It's still possible that this eruption could be followed by another one,

that's why we need to be careful with the Bulusan volcano," agency head Renato Solidum told local radio station DZBB.

Emergency workers were deployed to clean ash-laden roads and guide drivers struggling to see oncoming vehicles. Five flights in the area were cancelled. Juban's local disaster office said 366 people were in emergency shelters, with most evacuated days before the eruption due to a series of volcanic earthquakes.

Bulusan volcano has been active in recent years, with a dozen similar eruptions recorded in 2016 and 2017. The Philippines is located in the seismically active Pacific "Ring of Fire" and has over 20 active volcanoes. —AFP

'Like it or not', Britannia still rules part of Cyprus

DHEKELIA, United Kingdom: Next to a palm tree, the Union Jack hangs limply on a pole outside a simple courthouse built decades ago on this eastern Mediterranean island. "Morning your honour," the clerk said in English to the British judge, beginning another day at Her Majesty's Court in Waterloo Road, Dhekelia.

In this part of Cyprus, a former British colony, Britain is still in charge and Cypriots appear before the court. Some on the island liken the arrangement to continued colonisation. Scholars called it "undeniably anachronistic" and "highly unusual".

"It is different," said Major General Rob Thomson, the top official in the sovereign areas, "but it's different because it serves a different purpose." Cyprus became independent from Britain in 1960 after a bloody guerrilla campaign.

Under that treaty, which Greece and Turkey also signed, Britain retained control over two military zones in the east and south of the island, Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) where thousands of Cypriots live — outnumbering British troops. They comprise the only British overseas territory effectively run through the defence ministry, Thomson, 55, told AFP, a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II hanging in his office. His three "guiding principles" are to operate the bases, cooperate with Cyprus and to "look after the interests of the people who live there".

Thomson oversees SBA police, courts, customs and immigration, and a prison — all run separately from the Republic of Cyprus — though laws in the base areas reflect Cypriot regulations. SBA officers, most of whom are Cypriots, have jurisdiction over 12,000 compatriots living on base land along with 5,662 British troops and their families.

Since no physical borders separate SBA land from

the Republic of Cyprus, it's difficult to tell where their jurisdiction begins — except for the tell-tale cricket pitch lying in a spectacular valley. Beaches, ancient ruins and bird-rich wetlands are attractions for tourists, who are also subject to SBA law.

Nicos Costa, one person before the court, was charged with driving while disqualified. It "is a serious offence", the judge said, as Costa faced a possible two-year jail term.

Colonial 'remnants'

"It's a bit strange. Don't you think?" said Costas Evripidou, a community councillor in Akrotiri, a hilltop village on SBA land on Cyprus's southern tip. For Evripidou, the court symbolises an odd arrangement which limits his rights and is seen by many as "remnants of the colonies".

Akrotiri lies just outside the fences of a Royal Air Force base, from where warplanes thunder off as part of the international coalition against the Islamic State group. The base has supported operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and helped reinforce NATO's eastern flank after Russia invaded Ukraine.

British administration of Cypriots is "not logical anymore", argued George Perdakis, who protested at the base during two decades as a Green party lawmaker. Officials from Cyprus and Britain conceded there had been unequal treatment of Cypriot SBA residents due to restrictions on developing their property, which have now changed under new rules adopted last month.

Andreas Theophanous, head of the University of Nicosia's politics department, said allowing non-military development on base land is "a positive step" but "it's not enough". The island has been divided since 1974 when Turkey invaded following a Greek-sponsored coup. The Republic of Cyprus, a European Union member with an overwhelmingly Greek-Cypriot majority, controls the southern two-thirds of the island. Only Ankara recognises the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Theophanous and other Cypriots see Britain's role as intertwined with what they call the "Cyprus problem". "Britain has benefited from the bases," he said,



AKROTIRI, United Kingdom: File photo shows members of the RAF Akrotiri multi-role 84 Squadron march during a parade marking the centenary of the 84 Squadron at the Sovereign Base Area (SBA) of Akrotiri, a British overseas territory located ten kilometres west of the Cypriot port city of Limassol. —AFP

but did not in turn fulfil its treaty obligations "to protect the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Cyprus".

Anti-British anger resurfaced when Cypriot groups withdrew from an SBA charity concert marking the queen's Platinum Jubilee. Critics have linked her to Britain's hanging of nine Cypriots during the 1955-59 armed struggle by Greek nationalists to unite Cyprus with Greece.

Apart from warplanes and what Thomson called a "significant" intelligence capability, the bases host two infantry battalions, one on standby for rapid deployment. They help make Britain, its NATO allies, and the region safer, he said.

"It gives us global presence," he said, offering "strategic advantage" to the West, with no disadvantages for Cypriots. Ypsonas Mayor Pantelis Georgiou can see things from both sides. About 25 percent of his community, and roughly 1,000 residents, live inside the base. Despite questions about the arrangement "whether we like it or not it's within" the 1960 agreement, Georgiou said. —AFP

China vows 'fight to the end' to stop Taiwan independence

SINGAPORE: China will "fight to the very end" to stop Taiwanese independence, the country's defence minister vowed Sunday, stoking already soaring tensions with the United States over the island. The superpowers are locked in a growing war of words over the self-ruled, democratic island, which Beijing views as part of its territory awaiting reunification.

Frequent Chinese aircraft incursions near Taiwan have raised the diplomatic temperature, and on Saturday US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin accused Beijing of "destabilising" military activity, in a speech to the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit.

Defence Minister Wei Fenghe hit back in a fiery address at the same event, saying Beijing had "no choice" but to fight if attempts are made to separate Taiwan from China. "We will fight at all cost, and we will fight to the very end," he told the summit, which brings together defence ministers from Asia and around the world.

"No one should ever underestimate the resolve and ability of the Chinese armed forces to safeguard its territorial integrity." "Those who pursue Taiwanese independence in an attempt to split China will definitely come to no good end," he added.

Wei urged Washington to "stop smearing and containing China... stop interfering in China's internal affairs and stop harming China's interests". But he also struck a more conciliatory tone at points, calling for a "stable" China-US relationship, which he said was "vital for global peace".

During his address, Austin stressed the importance of "fully open lines of communication with China's defence leaders" in avoiding miscalculations. The pair held their first face-to-face talks on the sidelines of the summit in Singapore on Friday, during which they also clashed over Taiwan.

Tensions over Taiwan have escalated in particular due to increasing Chinese military aircraft incursions into the island's air defence identification zone (ADIZ). President Joe Biden, during a visit to Japan last month, appeared to break decades of US policy when, in response to a question, he said Washington would defend Taiwan militarily if it was attacked by China. The White House has since insisted its policy of "strategic ambiguity" over whether or not it would intervene had not changed.

Disputed sea 'rampage'

Despite the heightened tensions, analysts said the fact Austin and Wei were willing to meet in person offered a small sign of hope. "Talking is better than not talking," Ian Chong, associate professor of political science at the National University of Singapore, who is attending the summit, told AFP.

"But I think at this point, we won't be seeing any breakthroughs. Maybe it'll lead to something in future." The dispute is just the latest between Washington and Beijing, who have clashed over everything from the South China Sea to human rights and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

China's expansive claims to the sea, through which trillions of dollars in shipping trade passes annually, have stoked tensions with rival claimants Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. China, whose historical claims were rejected in a landmark 2016 Hague ruling, has been accused of flying its planes and sailing its boats close to the coastlines of rival claimants, and of intercepting patrol planes in international airspace in a dangerous fashion. —AFP

MONDAY, JUNE 13, 2022

Business

France's TotalEnergies gains foothold in Qatar gas expansion

Partnership will help Qatar increase its LNG production by more than 60%

DOHA: Qatar on Sunday named France's TotalEnergies as its first foreign partner to develop the world's largest natural gas field and eventually help ease Europe's energy fears. The French energy major will have a 6.25-percent share of the giant North Field East project that will help Qatar increase its liquefied natural gas (LNG) production by more than 60 percent by 2027, Qatar's Energy Minister Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi told a news conference. Kaabi said it was "a marriage more than an engagement" as the accord will last until 2054.

Other foreign firms will also have joint venture stakes with state-owned Qatar Energy (QE), but none will be bigger than TotalEnergies, said Kaabi, who did not reveal names.

Industry sources say ExxonMobil, Shell and ConocoPhillips are all in line to take part in the giant \$28-billion expansion, that Qatar had originally wanted to finance alone. "We have finished the selection process and we have signed the agreements," Kaabi said, adding that names would be announced in the "near future".

With European nations scrambling to find alternatives to Russian oil and gas, LNG from North Field is expected to start coming on line in 2026. TotalEnergies chief executive Patrick Pouyanne said the company's biggest deal with Qatar would help make up for the company's withdrawal from Russia in the wake of the Ukraine invasion.

Hard bargain

Without giving figures, Pouyanne indicated that Qatar had demanded a high price in the talks that started in 2019. "Your team and yourself have been a very good

defender of Qatar's interests in this project," he said in comments to the minister who is also the QE chief.

"Qatar Energy certainly drove a hard bargain. But for the biggest global LNG players like Shell and TotalEnergies, Qatar is too good to pass up. A stake in these LNG trains delivers scale, low-cost supply, great marketing opportunities, and a good partner," said Ben Cahill, an energy security specialist at the Center for Security and International Studies in Washington.

Qatar is already one of the world's top LNG producers, alongside the United States and Australia. QE estimates that North Field holds about 10 percent of the world's known natural gas reserves.

The reserves extend under the sea into Iranian territory, where Tehran's efforts to exploit its South Pars gas field have been hindered by international sanctions. South Korea, Japan and China have become the main markets for Qatar's LNG but since an energy crisis hit Europe last year, the Gulf state has helped Britain with extra supplies and also announced a cooperation deal with Germany.

Europe has for long rejected the long-term deals that Qatar seeks for its energy but the Ukraine conflict has forced a change in attitude. Qatar's expansion "underlines its position as a leader in this industry", said Bill Farren-Price, head of macro oil and gas research at the Enverus energy consultancy.

"With gas balances tight globally amid reduced Russian gas exports to Europe, LNG is a key and growing component in the energy transition and Qatar is determined to leverage its world-class North Field reserves to capture additional value through this deal.



DOHA: Qatar's Minister of State for Energy Affairs and President and CEO of Qatar Energy Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi (right) and French energy group TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanne attend a signing ceremony at the Qatar Energy headquarters in Doha on June 12, 2022. — AFP

"Its partnership with TotalEnergies reinforces Doha's political partnership with Western powers while giving it even more marketing options." The Ukraine conflict has also injected a new urgency into efforts around the world

to develop new sources. Tanzania on Saturday signed a framework agreement with British and Norwegian energy giants Shell and Equinor towards implementing a \$30-billion project to export its natural gas. — AFP



GENEVA, Switzerland: World Trade Organization Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (center) leaves a press conference at the start of a four-day WTO Ministerial Conference in Geneva on June 12, 2022. — AFP

WTO chief 'cautiously optimistic' ahead of high-stakes meet

GENEVA: The World Trade Organization chief voiced cautious optimism Sunday as global trade ministers gather to tackle food security threatened by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, overfishing and equitable access to COVID vaccines.

Speaking just hours before the opening of the WTO's first ministerial meeting in nearly five years, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala acknowledged that "the road will be bumpy and rocky, there may be a few landmines on the way." But she told journalists she was "cautiously optimistic that we'll get one or two deliverables", adding she would consider that "a success".

With its first ministerial meeting in years, the WTO faces pressure to finally eke out long-sought trade deals and show unity amid the still raging pandemic and an impending global hunger crisis.

Top of the agenda as the four-day meeting kicks off is the toll Russia's war in Ukraine, traditionally a breadbasket that feeds hundreds of millions of people, is having on food security. EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said the bloc had been "working hard with all the members to prepare a multilateral food security package," and slammed Russia for "using food and grain as a weapon of war". The WTO is hoping to keep criticism of Russia's war in Ukraine to the first day of talks, when many of the more than 100 ministers due to attend are expected to issue blistering statements. But with many flatly refusing to negotiate directly with Moscow, there are fears this could bleed into the following days, when the WTO wants to focus on nailing down elusive trade deals. "There is a real risk that things could go off the rails next week," a Geneva-based diplomatic source said.

Fisheries deal in sight?

The tensions have not curbed Okonjo-Iweala's zeal to press for agreements on a range of issues during the first ministerial gathering on her watch, especially as the global trade body strives to prove its worth after nearly a decade with no new large trade deals.

There is cautious optimism that countries could finally agree on banning subsidies that contribute to illegal and unregulated fishing, after more than 20 years of negotiations. The WTO says talks have never been this close to the finish line, but diplomats remain cautious.

The negotiations "have made progress recently, but these remain difficult subjects," a diplomatic source in Geneva told AFP. One of the main sticking points has been so-called special and differential treatment (SDT) for developing countries, like major fishing nation India, which can request exemptions.—AFP

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka announces weekly fuel quotas

COLOMBO: Crisis-hit Sri Lanka announced weekly fuel quotas for motorists on Sunday, as an acute shortage worsened and longer queues formed outside the few pumping stations still operating.

Energy minister Kanachana Wijesekera said the state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation was struggling to finance oil imports, while consumption had shot up due to shortages of electricity and liquefied petroleum gas. "We have no choice but to register consumers at filling stations and give them a guaranteed weekly quota until we are able to strengthen the financial situation," the minister said.

"I hope to have this system in place by the first week of July." He did not say how much fuel motorists will be allowed to buy under the new system. Sri Lanka has been struggling with its worst economic crisis in decades, with the country unable to import basic necessities such as food, fuel and medication due to a lack of foreign exchange reserves.

In mid-April, the government ordered all fuel stations not to pump more than four liters of petrol for a motorcycle, five for a three-wheeler and 19.5 liters of gasoline or diesel for cars and SUVs.



COLOMBO, Sri Lanka: A woman carrying a Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinder walks past LPG cylinders placed by people queuing to buy LPG during shortages of essentials across Sri Lanka, in Colombo on June 10, 2022. — AFP

WTO gathering: The battlegrounds

GENEVA: Ministers start meeting at the World Trade Organization for the first time since 2017 on Sunday, hoping to break the logjam on several hot-button issues in the global trade body's in-tray. Led by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the WTO takes decisions by consensus, making agreements harder to reach.

Here are the main issues on the table at the 12th WTO ministerial conference, which runs until Wednesday in Geneva:

COVID-19 pandemic

In October 2020, India and South Africa asked the WTO for a temporary suspension of intellectual property rights on COVID-19 innovations to aid poorer nations' pandemic responses.

Washington backed the idea of a time-limited IP waiver, but only on vaccines. With discussions deadlocked, the United States, India, South Africa and the European Union formed a group to negotiate a com-

promise. Home to major vaccine manufacturers, the four drafted a compromise text temporarily suspending some patent protections for jobs, which has been submitted to other WTO members.

It would only apply to developing countries and those representing less than 10 percent of annual global COVID-19 vaccine exports—thereby excluding China. "I'm feeling cautiously optimistic now that we will get this text ready for adoption by ministers," Sierra Leone's Ambassador Lansana Gberie, who chairs the WTO's IP issues council, said in the build-up. The big pharma lobby is against waiving IP and says the idea is out of date, with vaccine supply now outstripping demand. Public interest groups meanwhile say the text is inadequate, by time-limiting the waivers and applying them only to vaccines and not COVID treatments and diagnostics.

The WTO has spent more than 20 years negotiating a ban on subsidies that encourage overfishing and threaten the sustainability of world's fish stocks. There is cautious optimism that an agreement can be struck during the conference. However, disagreements persist, particularly over so-called special and differential treatment (SDT) for developing countries.—AFP

Under that system, many motorists would top up, drain fuel into cans to build a buffer stock, and then return to the queue for more. This week, queues at fuel stations had become longer, with hundreds of cars and thousands of motorcycles waiting in line, sometimes for days.

Two weeks ago, Sri Lanka received a shipment of Russian crude oil to be refined on the island, but the finished product from the Sapugaskanda refinery was less than a tenth of the country's daily requirement. Around 90,000 tons of Siberian light crude was sent to Sri Lanka's lone refinery after the shipment was acquired on credit from Dubai-based intermediary Coral Energy last month. The Sri Lankan government has also approached Moscow's envoy in Colombo to help secure direct supplies of Russian oil, Energy Minister Wijesekera said.

Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt in mid-April and has since opened talks with the International Monetary Fund for a bailout. The United Nations has issued an appeal for \$47 million to buy essential food for 1.7 million Sri Lankans in the next four months.

The worst economic crisis since the country gained independence in 1948 has sparked widespread protests calling for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down. He has refused, and instead got his brother Mahinda to step down as prime minister on May 9. President Rajapaksa then appointed opposition politician Ranil Wickremesinghe to succeed Mahinda and help lead the country out of the unprecedented economic chaos. — AFP

Resurging US inflation puts Fed on track for more big rate hikes

WASHINGTON: Red-hot US inflation is showing few signs of cooling, putting the Federal Reserve on track to continue its aggressive interest rate increases to help cool high prices that are challenging Joe Biden's presidency. The hoped-for signs of relief for American families did not materialize in May as consumer prices hit a new four-decade high, rising 8.6 percent and topping what economists thought was the peak in March.

With Russia's war on Ukraine continuing to pressure global fuel and food prices, and amid ongoing supply chain uncertainties due to COVID-19 lockdowns in Asia, analysts now say the expected easing of inflationary pressures will take much longer to materialize.

The US central bank already had signaled plans for more big increases in the benchmark borrowing rate this week and next month, but chances are rising that the Fed might have to be even more aggressive—which increases the risk the economy might tip into a recession. The latest inflation report—the last major data point before the Fed's policy meeting Tuesday and Wednesday—also douses hopes central bankers will be able to call a ceasefire in September ahead of key congressional elections, where Biden's Democrats are widely expected to suffer damaging losses.

Prices continued to rise last month for a range of goods, including housing, groceries, airline fares and used and new vehicles, setting new records in multiple categories, according to the Labor Department data. Energy has soared 34.6 percent over the past year, the fastest since September 2005, while food jumped 10.1 percent, and the cost of fuel oil more than doubled, jumping 106.7 percent, the largest increase in the history of CPI, which dates to 1935. The CPI surge "raises the probability of even more aggressive Fed rate hikes to tamp down on inflationary expectations," said Mickey Levy of Berenberg Capital Markets. If the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee decides on a giant step-three quarters of a point rather than the expected half-point increase—it would be the first 75 basis point rate hike since November 1994. Diane Swonk of Grant Thornton indicated such a move is possible. "They are behind the curve and eager to catch up," she said on Twitter. "Fed has to reduce demand to meet a supply-constrained world. Ugly in many ways." Economists at Barclays are now calling for a 0.75-point increase, though Ryan Sweet at Moody's says chances are low, and Karl Haeling at LBBW expects three more half-point hikes.—AFP



PARSIPPANY, US: In this file photo taken on May 06, 2021, Ben Rich charges his Tesla vehicle at a super charging station in Parsippany, New Jersey. Record-high prices at the pump in the US are inflating motorists' bills but also impacting many parts of the economy, straining truckers' budgets, driving up airline tickets or rekindling interest in electric cars.—AFP

Business

Russia's McDonald's renamed ahead of grand re-opening

'Vkusno i tochka' means 'Delicious. Full Stop'

MOSCOW: Former McDonald's restaurants in Russia have been renamed "Vkusno i tochka" ("Delicious. Full Stop"), the new owner said ahead of their grand re-opening later on Sunday. "The new name is Vkusno i tochka," Oleg Paroyev, the director general of the new group, told a press conference in Moscow. Russian businessman Alexander Govor, who had been a licensee of the chain, bought it after McDonald's announced in May it would sell its Russian portfolio of 850 restaurants.

Sunday marks a new dawn for Russia's fast-food lovers as former McDonald's Corp restaurants reopened under new branding and ownership, more than three decades after the arrival of the hugely popular Western fast food chain.

The relaunch began on Russia Day, a patriotic holiday celebrating the country's independence, at the same flagship location in Moscow's Pushkin Square where McDonald's first opened in Russia in January 1990.

The new name
"The new name is Vkusno i tochka," Oleg Paroyev, the director general of the new group, told a press conference in Moscow. Russian businessman Alexander Govor, who had been a licensee of the chain, bought it after McDonald's announced in May it would sell its Russian portfolio of 850 restaurants.

Sunday marks a new dawn for Russia's fast-food lovers as former McDonald's Corp restaurants reopened under new branding and ownership, more than three decades after the arrival of the hugely popular Western fast food chain.

The relaunch began on Russia Day, a patriotic holiday celebrating the country's independence, at the same flagship location in Moscow's Pushkin Square where McDonald's first opened in Russia in January 1990.

In the early 1990s, as the Soviet Union crumbled, McDonald's came to embody a thawing of Cold War tensions and was a vehicle for millions of Russians to sample American food and culture. The brand's exit is now a powerful symbol of how Russia and the West are once again turning their backs on each other.

McDonald's last month said it was selling its restaurants in Russia to one of its local licensees, Alexander Govor. The deal marked one of the most high-profile business departures since Russia sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24.

McDonald's iconic 'Golden Arches' have been taken down at sites in Moscow and St Petersburg, where they will make way for a new logo comprising two fries and a hamburger patty against a green background. The reopening will initially cover 15 locations in Moscow and the surrounding region. — Agencies



Tanzania signs natural gas deal with Shell, Equinor

DAR EL SALAAM: Tanzania on Saturday signed a framework agreement with British and Norwegian energy giants Shell and Equinor towards implementing a \$30-billion project to export its natural gas.

The deal foresees a final investment decision by 2025, and a start of operations by 2029-2030 at a liquefied natural gas plant to be built in the southern coastal town of Lindi. It marks a significant step forward in Tanzania's efforts to jumpstart the export of part of the vast gas deposits off its coast, estimated at more than 57 trillion cubic feet (1.630 billion cubic metres).

"We have never reached this stage of natural gas development in the history of our country," Energy Minister January Makamba said during the signing ceremony in the capital Dodoma.

"This project will significantly change our economy." "Tanzania's geographical positioning makes it easy to transport the natural gas to other countries, especially Asian (ones), which are looking for new sources of energy." President Samia Suluhu Hassan, also present, welcomed the preliminary agreement. "We have reached a good stage of discussions about the LNG project, but much work is still waiting for us to talk and make it competitive," she said.

Plans for the LNG plant had stalled for several years under her predecessor John Magufuli, and she relaunched efforts after becoming head of state last year. Equinor country manager for Tanzania, Unni Fjaer, said the deal had been long in the making. — AFP



MOSCOW, Russia: An employee holds a food order on a tray in the Russian version of a former McDonald's restaurant after the opening ceremony in Moscow on June 12, 2022. — AFP



MOSCOW: Customers wait next to a mirror wall as they stand in a queue to get in the Russian version of a former McDonald's restaurant after the opening ceremony in Moscow on June 12, 2022. — AFP

The US McDonald's fast-food giant announced on May 16 that it would exit Russia in the wake of Moscow's Ukraine offensive. Three days later, Russian businessman Alexander Govor, who had been a licensee of the chain, bought the 850-restaurant operation.

"I am very proud of the honor that developing this enterprise has given me," Govor said on Sunday. "I am ambitious and I don't only plan to open the 850 restaurants but to develop new ones."

Under the sale conditions, Govor agreed to retain employees for at least two years and fund exiting liabilities to suppliers, landlords and utilities, McDonald's said. The price of the transaction was not disclosed but in announcing its exit, McDonald's said it planned to take a one-time charge of \$1.2 billion to \$1.4 billion to write off the investment.

McDonald's had employed 62,000 workers in Russia. Govor, a licensee since 2015, has operated 25 restaurants in Siberia. He is co-founder of Neftekhimservice, a refining company, and a board member of a firm that owns the Park Inn hotel and private clinics in Siberia.



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 09 JUN 2022

(965) 22 675 140
Al-Safat Tower, Hawalli, Beirut St.
alsafatinvest.com
research@alsafatinvest.com
alsafatinvestment
al-safat-investment-company

Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	35,282	8,436.89	-1.8%	-2.8%	10.4%	363,328,056	172,500,298	32,493	30.1	2.8	78.1%
Main Market	9,892	5,908.79	-2.8%	-2.7%	0.4%	499,012,336	74,290,874	24,072	14.7	1.4	21.9%
All Share	45,173	7,609.42	-2.0%	-2.7%	8.0%	862,340,392	246,791,172	56,565	25.9	2.5	100%

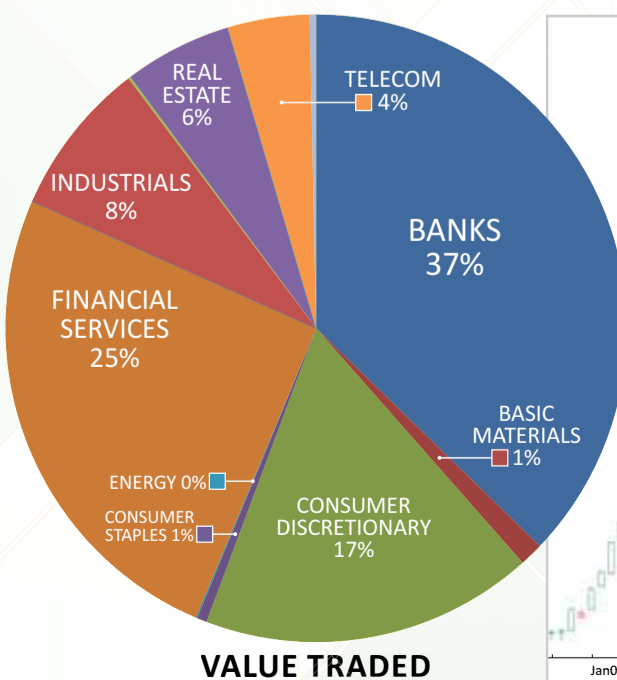
Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	26,664	1,782.23	-1.5%	-2.4%	9.8%	214,219,391	104,050,386	15,519	28.6	2.7	58.63%
BASIC MATERIALS	1,023	1,147.47	-3.8%	-4.9%	12.0%	4,453,361	3,418,322	751	14.5	1.5	2.25%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	788	1,529.17	-2.7%	-3.5%	14.4%	58,297,393	48,424,605	7,494	19.2	8.9	1.73%
CONSUMER STAPLES	184	604.49	-6.6%	-7.3%	-17.3%	2,839,392	1,436,057	508	19.7	1.3	0.40%
ENERGY	232	1,117.78	-5.9%	-4.2%	-21.7%	5,119,669	217,179	347	14.9	1.1	0.51%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	4,308	1,477.81	-3.9%	-4.0%	3.8%	428,730,377	70,754,358	18,834	14.9	2.2	9.47%
HEALTH CARE	238	480.10	0.0%	0.0%	-39.8%	0	0	0	16.1	2.3	0.52%
INDUSTRIALS	4,576	1,287.95	-2.3%	-2.6%	12.8%	45,188,366	22,468,469	7,074	42.4	1.5	10.06%
INSURANCE	653	1,568.36	1.8%	4.3%	2.3%	1,042,089	339,808	226	7.4	1.0	1.44%
REAL ESTATE	2,757	1,281.67	-2.2%	-2.9%	-3.4%	114,307,746	15,686,055	5,774	14.0	1.3	6.06%
TECHNOLOGY	9	0.00	-100.0%	-100.0%	-100.0%	1,500	138	1	-	0.8	0.02%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,810	1,243.23	-2.5%	-3.9%	14.1%	19,812,151	11,912,838	3,637	15.4	2.3	8.38%
UTILITIES	237	568.42	0.5%	0.5%	-5.3%	4,371,560	941,844	366	16.7	2.7	0.52%

Stock	Last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KNOT	162	20.90	146,295	21,151	127
MARAKEZ	55.5	19.61	1,119,802	59,695	145
WETHAQ	37.5	11.28	40,291	1,401	17
KINS	420	8.25	743,622	301,915	124
AINS	567	5.59	1,478	786	5

Stock	Last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
ALKOUT	406	-25.50	8	4	6
KCPC	355	-16.86	417,144	167,866	187
NINVC	294	-13.27	28,804,789	8,799,042	1,910
TIJARA	60.1	-12.64	14,795,381	912,472	547
SHIP	651	-12.26	1,869,839	1,295,599	585

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
AAYAN	162	-11.96	123,554,408	22,016,832	3,869
AUB	269	-2.18	67,155,606	18,071,756	1,619
GFH	94.3	-1.87	66,032,473	6,220,340	2,184
ALG	847	-4.19	50,802,198	45,695,977	6,125
KFH	855	-2.62	44,206,673	38,156,959	5,645

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
ALG	847	-4.19	50,802,198	45,695,977	6,125
KFH	855	-2.62	44,206,673	38,156,959	5,645
AAYAN	162	-11.96	123,554,408	22,016,832	3,869
AUB	269	-2.18	67,155,606	18,071,756	1,619
NBK	1,029	0.00	17,506,394	18,007,659	2,163



Market Summary:

- Premier and Main Market M. Cap is 35.2 and 9.9 Billion KD, respectively.
- Premier and Main indices failed to overcome the resistance and fall back to previous support levels.
- Technically, the All-Share index closed at 7609, with support levels at 7556, 7503, 7481, and 7461, while resistance at 7677. Premier index closed at 8436, support levels at 8335, 8273, and 8184, while resistance at 8527. The Main index closed at 5908, with support levels at 5902, 5880, 5865, and 5845, while resistance at 5959.

Business

Price spike: Higher fuel prices a litmus test for US economy

Some consumers absorbing higher costs, while others shifting behavior

WASHINGTON: Surging energy costs are being felt across the US economy with varying effects. Some consumers are absorbing higher costs, while others are shifting behavior or cutting back.

Here's a sampling of how the story is playing out in different sectors.

Trucker sees austerity

As he contends with surging fuel prices, truck driver Lamar Buckwalter sees signs all around that consumers are cutting back. Demand for refrigerated pet food—a torrid business just three months ago—has virtually disappeared. Humans are also shifting their own diets, ordering less high-end meats like veal and crab cakes.

"People are starting to cut off the extras," said Buckwalter, a third-generation trucker who lives in Pennsylvania. "They're not buying filet mignon steak." The last time he fueled up, Buckwalter spent \$5.79 a gallon for diesel, more than double the price from a year ago, a shift exacerbated by lower job rates as demand for trucking services cools. Mitigating things a bit is Buckwalter's membership in a national small trucker association that offers discounted fuel. He can also pass on a fraction of the fuel price spike to consumers.

But the pain from fueling up is "enough to make a preacher man curse," said Buckwalter, who has been turning down trips that pay insufficiently. He is also planning to tighten the belt on perks for his three employees, such as a summer family picnic.

"We'll still do Christmas bonuses," he said. "Unfortunately, I have to cut back where I can."

Tough times for taxis

Also taking a hit is Rutz Alliance, a New York taxi driver who feels the pinch daily. "I used to put \$25 of gas every day," Alliance told AFP. "Now it's up to \$45." That computes to weekly pay of about \$600 to \$650, one-third less than the pre-pandemic amount.

"We're trying to live. We have no choice. Inflation is all over. Rent, food, everything, but it's take it or leave it." Dubbing the jump in prices an "emergency," the New York Taxi Workers Alliance called in March for a 75-cent temporary fuel surcharge. But city officials have not taken action thus far.

Airlines pass on the pain

Airlines have been among the sectors most directly affected by spiking energy prices, with jet fuel prices jumping almost 50 percent since mid-March, according to Argus.

That would normally amount to a huge drag on the industry, given that fuel and labor are two major sources of costs. "The rule of thumb in this industry is that you can pass through two-thirds of a fuel price increase within three to six months, the full amount within six to 12 months," said Savanthi Syth, an industry expert at Raymond James.

But in a twist of fortunes in a pandemic-dominated era, airlines are benefitting from "pent-up demand" of consumers desiring travel after more than two years of being hemmed in.

Airline tickets are currently up 38 percent compared with the level of the year prior, with industry executives saying they are having no trouble passing on the hit from higher fuel costs.

A higher bar on vacations

For Chayzz Devyant, one casualty of spiking gasoline prices has been a summer visit to Atlantic City. Just traveling back and forth to the casino town would cost some \$162 in gas, on top of lodging costs.

"Big Oil is to blame," said Devyant, who hopes to work from home to save on fuel costs. But travel experts still expect a busy summer even if more consumers like Devyant cut some trips.

"We are seeing mixed messages. Oil prices obviously have an effect," said Aaron Szyf, economist



MCLEAN, US: In this file photo taken on June 10, 2022, a sign displays the price of fuel at a gas station in McLean, Virginia. —AFP

for the US Travel Association. "But pent up demand is so high that hotels/attractions/national parks/flights are all expected to be at full capacity this summer."

Electric vehicles get a closer look

Higher gasoline prices have prompted greater interest from consumers in electric vehicles (EV). Since January, website visits to EV options have soared 73 percent, according to Cox Automotive.

However, the share of visits to EVs remains a

relatively small 5.7 percent of overall page views, according to Cox. Moreover, the shortage of semiconductors and other key supplies has left car dealerships with limited inventories, crimping sales.

In May, Toyota and Lexus sold 46,000 hybrid vehicles, down 17 percent from the year-ago period amid tight supplies. At Tesla, the top-selling EV maker in the United States, the wait time is at least three months for delivery of a Model 3 and six for the Model Y. —AFP

US gas price hits a record \$5 a gallon

NEW YORK: The average price of premium gasoline at the pump has surpassed \$5 a gallon for the first time in the United States, the American Automobile Association (AAA) reported Saturday. That record level, coming on top of months of soaring inflation, represents the latest bad news for President Joe Biden just five months before crucial midterm elections. A year ago, the average price of gas in the US was just \$3.07; since then it has shot up by 62 percent.

While Europeans have long been accustomed to paying much more at the pump, US gas taxes are lower — leaving car-loving Americans in shock over surging prices. The increase in gas prices follows a steady rise in oil prices — which had plummeted in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic as demand sagged, but have risen again as world economic activity resumes. Oil prices soared further after Moscow invaded Ukraine in late February, and as international sanctions against Russia — a major petroleum producer — began to bite. A barrel of crude currently sells for more than \$120 in both London and New York.

Overall US energy prices in May were nearly 35 percent higher compared to the same month in 2021, according to government data. This has contributed to the overall rise in US consumer prices, which were up 8.6 percent in May from a year earlier — a 40-year record.

As the summer vacation season nears, Americans — with their longtime love affair for big gas-guzzling vehicles — can expect to see energy prices rise still further. That will pile even more pressure on consumers already struggling with higher prices for food (up 10.1 percent in May), housing, automobiles and health care.

All this complicates Biden's position. For months he has sought to reassure Americans that his administration is doing everything in its power to bring down prices without derailing the economic recovery. But in November, Americans vote to elect all members of the House of Representatives and one-third of senators — and polls show voters listing the economy, inflation and high gas prices as their top issues. On Friday, the president again lashed out at the American oil industry, cautioning it in a statement "not (to) use the challenge created by the war in Ukraine as a reason to make things worse for families with excessive profit taking or price hikes." —AFP

Climate: Offshore methane gas leak spotted from space

PARIS: Scientists have for the first time used satellite data to detect a major offshore leak of the potent greenhouse gas methane, according to peer-reviewed research. The findings add a crucial tool to an expanding space-based arsenal for pinpointing previously invisible methane plumes from the oil and gas industry.

Fossil fuel operations globally emitted about 120 million tons of the planet-warming gas in 2020, nearly one-third of all methane emissions from human activity, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). The new study in the journal Environmental Science and Technology Letters identified a plume from an oil and gas production platform in the Gulf of Mexico that spewed some 40,000 tons over a 17-day

period in December.

The platform, near Campeche in southern Mexico, is in one of the country's biggest oil producing fields. "Our results demonstrate how satellites can detect methane plumes from offshore infrastructure," senior author Luis Guanter, a professor at Valencia Polytechnic University, said in a statement. "It opens the door to systematic monitoring of industrial emissions from individual offshore platforms."

Satellite-based methods for spotting methane leaks over land have developed rapidly in the last few years, training an uncomfortable spotlight on regulators and industry. But equivalent techniques have been lacking for leaks from offshore oil and gas operations, which account for about 30 percent of global production.

Huge short-term potential

Up to now, ocean water's capacity to absorb short-wave infrared radiation has limited the amount of reflected light reaching space-based sensors. Guanter and colleagues overcame this problem with a new method for measuring solar

radiation bouncing off the water's surface, called Sun-glint observation mode.

Methane is responsible for roughly 30 percent of the global rise in temperatures to date. While far less abundant in the atmosphere than CO₂, it is about 28 times more powerful as a greenhouse gas on a century-long timescale. Over a 20-year time frame, it is 80 times more potent.

Methane lingers in the atmosphere for only a decade, compared to hundreds or thousands of years for CO₂. This means a sharp reduction in emissions could shave several tenths of a degree Celsius off of projected global warming by mid-century, helping keep alive the Paris Agreement goal of capping Earth's average temperature increase to 1.5C, according to the UN Environment Program (UNEP).

Last year saw a record jump in the atmospheric concentration of methane, US government scientists reported in April. Methane is generated by the production, transport and use of fossil fuels, but also from the decay of organic matter in wetlands, and as a by-product of livestock digestion in agriculture. —AFP

NBK Money Markets Report

Peaking inflation data sends the dollar higher

KUWAIT: In the United States the highly anticipated and closely monitored inflation data surfaced early on Friday showcasing an increase in price pressures. On an annual basis, the consumer price index in the US reached 8.6 percent from the previous reading of 8.3 percent. Core inflation, which excludes food and energy, reached 6 percent and beat expectations by 0.1 percent. Futures on the S&P 500 fell more than 1 percent after the data, exacerbating concerns that the Fed's efforts to control inflation will tip the economy into a recession. The two-year Treasury rate rose, while yields on longer-dated maturities were little changed. The flattening of the yield curve indicates expectations for a faster pace of central-bank tightening. Inflation is still running at the highest in 40 years even after the Fed began winding down monetary support for the economy in March. The central bank

signaled it will likely raise rates by 50 basis points when it meets next week.

The market is still pricing in 8 hikes worth 25 basis points each till year end, with the next three meetings having a 100 percent probability of a 50 basis point hike. The latest inflation data seems to support the rhetoric of the market that the Fed will need to continue to be aggressive in its tightening policy to contain inflation.

Market movement

On the forex front, the dollar remained on top of the currencies hill and almost reached 104 last week following the release of the inflation data. The divergence in the forward guidance between the Fed and the BOJ continued to weigh in on the yen. The pair has reached a 20-year high of 134.55 while the Swiss franc is depreciating against the dollar and traded close to the 0.9900 level.

ECB sets the tone for future hikes

The June ECB policy statement was unusually explicit in laying out the ECB's near-term intentions and its new forecasts. It stated that the "Governing Council intends to raise the key ECB

interest rates by 25 basis points at its July monetary policy meeting". But for now, as widely expected, the ECB did not change its key interest rates as the deposit rate still stands at -0.50 percent.

The ECB "expects to raise the key ECB interest rates again in September ... If the medium-term inflation outlook persists or deteriorates, a larger increment will be appropriate at the September meeting." This suggests that unless the inflation outlook improves between now and September, the door is very much open to a 50bp rise then.

Markets are currently pricing in 100 percent probability of a 25 basis point hike by the ECB in July and September and a total of 1.5 percent worth of hikes from now till year end, which will raise the policy rate to 1.00 percent. Although the ECB was clear in its tightening framework and forward guidance, it was below the market's expectation of a 50 basis point hike, which pressured the euro and sent it tumbling below the 1.06 level.

UK PM survives

Prime Minister Boris Johnson survived a no confidence vote motion with 211 Tory MPs voting for him and 148

against him. The rebellion was bigger than the one suffered by predecessor Theresa May, who was ousted as premier six months later after failing to unite the party over leaving the European Union.

The Reserve Bank of Australia hiked its benchmark cash rate by 50 basis points to 0.85 percent, whereas markets were expecting a hike of 25 basis points only. The Aussie hit a high of 0.7245 after the decision before retreating to 0.7100 levels on the back of a stronger US dollar. The Australian equity market declined by 1.5 percent as a result of the higher than expected hike by the central bank.

Oil prices remain supported

Worries over inflation and monetary tightening are stoked further in the commodities complex, where oil prices advanced past \$124 a barrel, its highest level in three months. Tightening US crude stockpiles and wakening global demand have contributed to rising prices.

Kuwaiti dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30615.

Meta to launch 'metaverse academy' in France

PARIS: Facebook's parent company Meta and a French digital training firm will launch a "metaverse academy" in France for the new academic year, the two organizations said on Sunday.

Seen as the internet's next great technological development, the metaverse refers to an immersive digital world that aims to recreate real life via

augmented or virtual reality and take the web from 2D to 3D.

The school's goal in its first year will be to train for free around 100 students in two roles, specialist immersive technology developers and support and assistance technicians, Meta's vice president for southern Europe Laurent Solly told AFP. The teaching method will be in-person and revolve around projects, with a focus on the 3D world and interactions in the virtual universes, said Frederic Bardeau, co-founder and boss of Simplon, the French firm working with Meta.

Located in the capital Paris and other cities including Lyon, Marseille and Nice, the metaverse academy will train 20 students per city each year.

Particular attention will be paid to diversity. Solly said the target was for 30 percent of the first cohort to be women, while Bardeau said he would not look at applicants' CVs and endorse positive discrimination.

In October 2021, Meta said it intended to create 10,000 jobs in Europe in five years' time to build the metaverse, the US technology giant's new strategic priority.

The goal is tied to predictions that future job skills demanded by employers will be closely tied with the metaverse. Meta and Simplon said 80 percent of the careers that will exist in 2030 have not been invented yet, highlighting the need to develop training schemes now. —AFP





Tea picking season peaks in Turkey's Black Sea regions



In this time of the year, picking of tea leaves peaks in Rize's fields where large numbers of farmers reap the money-yielding crop. In this town, situated on the Black Sea shores, and in the nearby top resort and the agricultural lush and green region, Trabzon, there

are many tea factories with a record of earning a total of \$204 million in the last decade. The aromatic Turkish tea reaches markets of up to 120 countries worldwide. — KUNA



Morocco bans film about daughter of Prophet Muhammad

Morocco announced Saturday it had banned a British film about the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which Muslims in a number of countries have denounced as blasphemous. "The Lady of Heaven" will not receive a license to be shown in the country, the Moroccan Cinematographic Centre (CCM) said in a statement issued late Saturday.

The CCM ruling bans the film, directed by Eli King, from being screened on either

a commercial or cultural basis in the country. The drama is billed as the first film on the life of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatimah, and draws links between the Islamic State group in the 21st century and historical figures in Sunni Islam.

The CCM's ruling comes hours after Morocco's Supreme Ulema Council, firmly condemned the film in a statement Saturday. In the statement, they said the film was a "flagrant falsification of the established facts of the history of Islam". The film was released in Britain on June 3 but after protests outside cinemas, the world's second-largest cinema chain, Cineworld, cancelled all screenings. Egypt, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq are among the countries to have denounced the film as blasphemous. — AFP

Overcoming hate, Brazilian heads to Trans Miss Universe

Looking resplendent in a bejeweled red ball gown, Brazilian beauty queen Eloa Rodrigues knows how lucky she is: in the world's deadliest country for trans people, she is daring to live out her dreams. The slender, striking 29-year-old from the Rio de Janeiro suburbs is leaving Sunday to represent Brazil at Miss International Queen in Thailand, the pageant considered the "Trans Miss Universe."

She considers herself a fortunate "outlier," given where she comes from: the poor, violent city of Sao Goncalo, across the bay from Rio, in the country that has set the record for murders of trans people for the past 14 years. Rodrigues, the reigning queen of Brazil's top trans pageant, was raised by her aunt and grandmother in a loving, accepting home, and has had the opportunity to study at university, pursue modeling and acting, and now jet halfway around the world to the famed beach resort of Pattaya.

But it is still difficult for a black trans woman like her to dream in Brazil, she says. "I went through a lot of very difficult processes to get where I am today," she tells AFP as she prepares lunch in their comfortable, roomy home, whose beige walls are decorated with family photos—and, in Rodrigues's room, her trophy collection. "There were times I came very close to giving it all up, even came close to abandoning life itself."

Rodrigues, who studies social sciences at Fluminense Federal University, is reluctant to go into detail about her childhood and transition. She says of that time: "I had to be very strong to face my family and say, 'Look, I'm a woman,' when that kind of refer-

ence just didn't exist here," she says. "But I found the strength to articulate that to my family and get them to understand and respect me—and to myself understand and respect the processes they had to go through."

Her aunt, Ivone, has been a rock of support. "It's important to support her dream," Ivone says. "She's given everything to get where she wants to be." Not everyone in Rodrigues's situation has that backing. "The large majority of trans people face a reality of very scarce possibilities, dreams and affection," Rodrigues says.

Sobering statistics

The numbers on violence against trans people in Brazil are disturbing. The country of 213 million people, which has a deep-rooted culture of machismo, has led the world in murders of trans people every year since the organization Transgender Europe began keeping statistics in 2008.

There were 92 such murders last year, and a total of 1,645 since 2008, according to the group's annual reports. Black trans people account for a disproportionate amount of those murdered in Brazil — 80 percent in 2018, according to another rights group, Antra. "I think for most trans and

transvestite people I know, their biggest fear is dying," says Rodrigues.

"That used to be my reality, too," she says. "But not anymore. Of course, I'm not privileged, because I'm still trans and black, but I'm getting the chance to chase my dreams." Not that it has been easy. Rodrigues has struggled to put together her trip to Thailand, where she will be competing against 23 other finalists from around the world when the contest opens on June 25 — delayed for two years by the coronavirus pandemic.

It has been an uphill battle to find sponsors. She is mostly funding her travels and wardrobe herself—with nearly 30 different outfits required. "A lot of people and brands don't want to link their image to a person like me," she says.

"When I won the national title (in 2020), I got lots of hate and racism on social media." If she wins, she plans to use the 450,000-baht (\$13,000) prize to help her family and fulfill one of her biggest dreams of all: become a mom, she says. "I want people to look at me and think, 'Wow, she did it-so I can, too.'" — AFP



Transgender model Eloa Rodrigues, 29, poses for pictures for AFP in the street outside her house in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP

Is AI the future of art?

To many they are art's next big thing—digital images of jellyfish pulsing and blurring in a dark pink sea, or dozens of butterflies fusing together into a single organism. The Argentine artist Sofia Crespo, who created the works with the help of artificial intelligence, is part of the “generative art” movement, where humans create rules for computers which then use algorithms to generate new forms, ideas and patterns.

The field has begun to attract huge interest among art collectors and even bigger price tags at auction. US artist and programmer Robbie Barrat—a prodigy still only 22 years old—sold a work called “Nude Portrait#7Frame#64” at Sotheby's in March for £630,000 (\$821,000). That came almost four years after French collective Obvious sold a work at Christie's titled “Edmond de Belamy”—largely based on Barrat's code—for \$432,500.

A ballet with machines

Collector Jason Bailey told AFP that generative art was “like a ballet between humans and machines”. But the nascent scene could already be on the verge of a major shake-up, as tech companies begin to release AI tools that can whip up photo-realistic images in seconds. Artists in Germany and the United States blazed a trail in computer-generated art during the 1960s.

The V&A museum in London keeps a collection going back more than half a century, one of the key works being a 1968 piece by German artist Georg Nees



Argentinean artist Sofia Crespo holds one of her works as she poses for a photo at the Estrela garden in Lisbon. — AFP photos

called “Plastik 1”. Nees used a random number generator to create a geometric design for his sculpture.

'Babysitting' computers

Nowadays, digital artists work with supercomputers and systems known as Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) to create images far more complex than anything Nees could have dreamed of. GANs are sets of competing AIs—one generates an image from the instructions it is given, the other acts as a gatekeeper, judging whether the

output is accurate.

If it finds fault, it sends the image back for tweaks and the first AI gets back to work for a second try to beat the gamekeeper. But artists like Crespo and Barrat insist that the artist is still central to the process, even if their working methods are not traditional.

“When I'm working this way, I'm not creating an image, I'm creating a system that can create images,” Barrat told AFP. Crespo said she thought her AI machine would be a true “collaborator”, but in reality it is incredibly tough to get even a sin-

gle line of code to generate satisfactory results. She said it was more like “babysitting” the machine. Tech companies are now hoping to bring a slice of this rarefied action to regular consumers. Google and Open AI are both touting the merits of new tools they say bring photo-realism and creativity without the need for coding skills.

Enter the 'transformers'

They have replaced GANs with more user-friendly AI models called “transformers” that are adept at converting everyday speech into images. Google Imagen's webpage is filled with absurdist images generated by instructions such as: “A small cactus wearing a straw hat and neon sunglasses in the Sahara desert.” Open AI boasts that its Dalle-2 tool can offer any scenario in any artistic style from the Flemish masters to Andy Warhol.

Although the arrival of AI has led to fears of humans being replaced by machines in fields from customer care to journalism, artists see the developments more as an opportunity than a threat. Crespo has tried out Dalle-2 and said it was a “new level in terms of image generation in general”—though she prefers her GANs.

“I very often don't need a model that is very accurate to generate my work, as I like very much when things look indeterminate and not easily recognizable,” she said. Camille Lenglois of Paris's Pompidou Centre-Europe's largest col-



Argentinean artist Sofia Crespo holds one of her works as she poses for a photo at her home in Lisbon.

lection of contemporary art—also played down any idea that artists were about to be replaced by machines. She told AFP that machines did not yet have the “critical and innovative capacity”, adding: “The ability to generate realistic images does not make one an artist.” — AFP



The Costa Venezia cruising ship is moored in Istanbul. — AFP photos

TURKEY BETS ON MODERN CRUISE HUB TO BOOST TOURISM

A state-of-the-art port in Istanbul with an underground terminal, a celebrity chef's restaurant and a shopping centre, welcomes yet another 5,000-passenger cruise ship, bringing more cash to Turkey's struggling tourism industry. Hit hard by Covid, Turkey's tourism sector could get a shot in the arm from the revenue generated at Galataport, which opened in 2021 — a year later than planned due to the pandemic.

The port could also provide a boost to an economy that has been weighed down by double-digit inflation and a currency in free fall, though the project has drawn criticism over the destruction of historical monuments and the potential environmental impact. Figen Ayan, chief port officer at Galataport, said “ships began to arrive one after the other” after the facility opened in October.

“Galataport has become the face of tourism,” she told AFP. The 20-story Costa Venezia vessel from Italy was taking passengers from an 11-day voyage to the Aegean Sea when it docked in Galataport, its gangway connecting directly to the futuristic underground customs terminal.

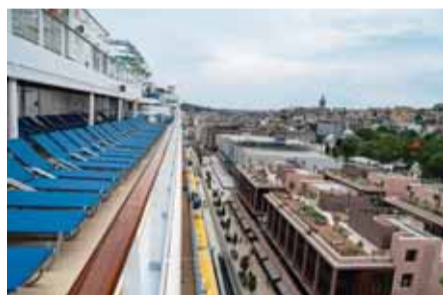
The port is home to a shopping centre, a hotel, cultural venues and a restaurant owned by Turkish butcher Nusret Gokce, better known as Salt Bae, the social media star who sprinkles salt on steaks in front of celebrity customers. “Galataport Istanbul is much more than a cruise port,” Ayan said.

High-spending passengers

Around 30 cruise ships have so far anchored at Galataport and 200 more are expected by the end of the year, which amounts to 450,000 passengers. The pandemic caused havoc in the glob-

al cruise ship industry as vessels were hit by outbreaks and vessels were banned in several countries.

“Now we can say that we have left the pandemic behind and that the cruise sector, which is an important segment of tourism, has revived and is on the move,” Ayan said. The target is 1.5 million cruise passengers and 25 million visitors annually. “If a regular tourist spends \$62 daily, a cruise passenger



Galataport is pictured from The Costa Venezia cruising ship moored in Istanbul.

spends \$400. He spends up to eight times more in one day,” she said.

Environmental cost

The project also opened up a 1.2-kilometre (three-quarter-mile) coastline that had been closed to public use for 200 years. But critics, including some urban planners and architects, say the gentrification of the area destroyed old neighborhoods, with the shopping centre replacing a historical post office building, and also posed a risk to the environment. Cruises threaten marine life, discharging large quantities of sewage and other waste, said Muharrem Balci, associate professor of biology at Istanbul University. “The

environmental cost of cruises is seven times higher than the financial return they provide,” Balci told AFP.

“The consumption level of each traveler is higher than in the host cities, therefore, cruise tourism has the potential to create stress (for the environment) for the regions they visit.” Large ships were banned from Venice last year after years of warnings that the giant floating hotels risked causing irreparable dam-



The Costa Venezia cruising ship is moored in Istanbul.



Bystanders feed seagulls and watch a Costa Venezia cruise ship in Galataport, Istanbul.

age to the lagoon city.

Burak Caliskan, country manager for MSC Cruises, said no such danger awaited Istanbul. “We don't think Istanbul will face a similar situation. We don't have a city structure like Venice,” he told AFP. Caliskan also said newly built ships addressed environmental concerns. “To give a few examples, the exhaust gases from the ships are filtered. The paints used on the ships have been completely changed. Paints that will not harm the sea are used,” he said. “We even have efforts to reduce the sound of the ships' engine so that while our ships are navigating in the open seas, they do not cause any disturbance to the living things, especially the whales.” — AFP



The Costa Venezia cruising ship is moored in Istanbul.

Far from home, new chance in Mexico for Frida the rescued 'pet' tiger

As a tiny cub four years ago, Frida the Bengal tiger was found chained up in a restaurant parking lot in Mexico City, dirty, emaciated and unable to walk. Rescued and rehabilitated, she is now a popular attraction at the Reino Animal (Animal Kingdom) park along with hundreds of other exotic creatures taken from misguided Mexican “pet” owners—including showy drug traffickers. Far from the Asian forests where she belongs, Frida has made a full recovery and “no longer suffers,” said park employee Agustin Bastida as the tigress gave a big yawn.

Lying on a grassy patch she looked disinterestedly at the humans ogling her from the other side of a fence. Frida is one of six big cats among 1,100 animals — 40 percent of them rescued exotic creatures—at the park in Otumba, north-east of the Mexican capital. Fellow residents include zebras, giraffes, wolves and a variety of birds. According to authorities, some 150 to 200 exotic animals are seized in Mexico City every year, often after reports from neighbors.

Some of the worst culprits are drug lords such as Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, who had a pet monkey called “Boots.” In one major rescue in 2007, officials busting a “narco-mansion” found two jaguars, two tigers, two lions and a macaque, according to Lucio Garcia Gil, head of the PROFEPA environmental crimes office for Mexico City. “There are many exotic birds, such as macaws or parrots, reptiles, many primates and big cats; it is what we have most detected that people have,” he told AFP. Two big cats were rescued in the megacity in 2021 and four—including a lion cub—so far this year.

\$5,000 for a lion

According to Gil, a tiger or lion sells for between \$1,000 and \$5,000 on the Mexican black market. Mexican law allows people to legally purchase exotic animals from registered dealers “as long as they keep them safe and provide the appropriate protection,” he told AFP. “Unfortunately... hardly anybody complies with the conditions,” he said. Illegal possession is punishable by up to nine years in prison or a fine of up to \$15,000, though Gil said he could not remember

anyone ever going to jail.

Keeping a big cat is expensive—they can eat as much as 30 kilograms (66 pounds) of meat per day, and many private owners abandon the animals in the end. Like lions or jaguars, Bengals—which grow to stand over a meter tall and can weigh as much as 260 kilograms (570 pounds) — are not easy housemates and many have their fangs and claws removed so that they do not destroy their surroundings, or owners.



A male bengal tiger (Panthera tigris tigris) called Moba is seen at the “Reino Animal” shelter for wild animals at the Municipality of Otumba.

‘They are not pets’

According to the UN Environment Program, global wildlife trafficking generates as much as \$23 billion per year. It is the seventh-most lucrative illicit business, according to the Washington-based Global Financial Integrity. In Mexico City, the lucky trafficked animals that do get rescued are taken to zoos and parks such as the 53-hectare (130-acre) Animal Kingdom northeast of the capital.

In Frida's case, she was brought in with a broken hip, which has since completely healed. “She could not walk, it was very sad, very sad,” said Bastida. “People buy these animals to keep them as pets, but they are not pets,” he added. “They have to be in the wild or in open spaces where the conditions are adequate for a good quality of life.” — AFP



A female bengal tiger (Panthera tigris tigris) called Monalisa and a male jaguar (Panthera onca) are seen at the “Reino Animal” shelter for wild animals at the Municipality of Otumba, State of Mexico.



This photograph shows aromatic medicinal chamomile in the agricultural farm 'The Caserma of Herbs' run by the Social Cooperative of the Dodecanese Department of Mental Health on Leros island in Greece. — AFP photos



An employee with a mental illness holds a hive of bees at the agricultural farm 'The Caserma of Herbs'.

'Soul relief': Bees help mentally ill on Greek island

On a hillside overlooking the azure blue waters of Greece's Leros island harbor, a small group of workers in protective gear are busy smoking beehives. But these are not ordinary beekeepers. Some of them are patients from the nearby psychiatric hospital, participating in a two-decade project combining therapy with professional fulfillment. The social cooperative in Leros, housed in a former barracks known as the Caserma estate, is the first of its kind in Greece, explains project manager Andreas Georgiou.

The cooperative "aims to socially and professionally integrate persons with psychosocial problems", he tells AFP. "Through the program... they acquire self-respect and self-esteem," he says. On the fields of the estate, patients care for the bees and cultivate their high-quality diet-lavender, oregano and other aromatic herbs.

"This is a bee's paradise," says Georgiou, an occupational therapist and president of the Dodecanese social



Social workers along with employees with a mental illness (right) work at the agricultural farm 'The Caserma of Herbs'.

cooperative (KOISPE), which runs the estate. In Lepida, to the south of the port, the employees package and label the honey, and dry the herbs in dedicated rooms inside the psychiatric hospital.

The estate produce is then sold in various locations on the island.

"I love what I do here, it's a real relief for the soul," says Artemis, a patient in his 60s as he seals honey jars. "We try

to be as traditional and pure here as possible," he adds, briefly switching into salesman mode. The Leros cooperative employs 13 salaried workers, supervised by specialist beekeepers, in addition to a team of nurses and occupational therapists from the island's psychiatric hospital.

Leros is an island with a rich history going back to antiquity, and the site of a major World War II battle that later inspired war epic "The Guns of Navarone". Among other islands of the Dodecanese group, it was occupied by Italy for more than 30 years, giving rise to fascist-era rationalist architecture that is unique to the area. But the island's modern image is closely associated with the local mental asylum, which was the scene of a major scandal involving the serious neglect of patients in the early 1990s.

'Immense' therapeutic gain

Georgiou says it was precisely the shock of the scandal that prompted the

reforms which gave rise to the cooperative. "The reforms launched more than 20 years ago radically changed the way patients are treated, with a view to de-institutionalizing asylums," adds Giannis Loukas, a former director of the Leros psychiatric centre.

The therapeutic gain for patients is "immense", he notes. They can also enjoy the rights of employees instead of working illegally, as was the case for a long time in Leros and elsewhere in Greece, he adds.

While some patients live in the asylum, a large number are allowed to live in flats on the island for better integration into society, Loukas adds. Georgiou notes that a handful of people have been able to make a full rehabilitation through the cooperative. One is working as an assistant plumber in Leros, while another is working in a hotel in Rhodes, he said. — AFP



Photos show an employee with a mental illness holding a hive of bees at the agricultural farm 'The Caserma of Herbs'.



A social worker uses smoke to calm bees at the agricultural farm 'The Caserma of Herbs'.



Employees with a mental illness work in the Social Cooperative of the Dodecanese Department of Mental Health on Leros Island in Greece.



This aerial photograph shows the agricultural farm 'The Caserma of Herbs'.

Theatre legend Kani turns eye to modern South Africa

When John Kani launched his acting career in the 1960s, the only stage he could find was an empty snake pit at a shuttered South African museum. His latest production, "Kunene and the King", opened with the Royal Shakespeare Company and played on London's West End. It's now resuming a South African tour that was interrupted by the pandemic's theatre closures.

"In 2018, I had the idea that the following year, we are going to celebrate 25 years of South Africa's democracy since the dawn of the new, non-racial, non-sexist rainbow nation," Kani told AFP. The play he wrote tasks Lunga Kunene—an older, black, male nurse—with caring for an older white actor dying of liver cancer but desperate to survive long enough to accept the role of Shakespeare's "King Lear". "I wanted to create something that would force the one not able to live without the other one," Kani said.

He's definitely created a theatre about theatre, with Shakespeare running through its veins. "I suddenly found myself engrossed in the history of these two men, from opposite sides in one country, who see South Africa differently, but the only thing that would bring them together is their love of Shakespeare," he said. "And that's how King Lear got interwoven into the story."

The two characters run lines from Shakespeare's tragedy, accentuating Lear's grappling with death. And they recite lines from "Julius Caesar", both from the original play and a translation into Kani's mother tongue of Xhosa, which he remembers performing in high school in 1959.



South African stage actor and voice artist Michael Richard, poses for a portrait in the backstage of the Johannesburg Theatre in Johannesburg.

On the current tour, Kani performs with the prolific South African actor Michael Richard, who said the story uses King Lear's evolution to show how South Africa is also changing. "Lear learns humanity in the play. And in this play, my character learns humanity, in a way of coming to terms with South Africa," Richard said.

Theatre about theatre

The tragedies in Kani's play unexpectedly started appearing in real life. His co-star in the British productions was South African-born actor Anthony Sher, a knighted Shakespearean performer. Sher died in December of liver cancer, the same disease that kills his character in Kani's play. And his younger brother also died of liver cancer in 2019, as the play was taking shape.

For all the sadness, the play is also very funny, and perhaps a revelation for younger fans who may know Kani best for playing the Black Panther's father in the Marvel films, or voicing the shaman mandrill Rafiki in the 2019 "Lion King" remake. In South Africa, Kani is a legendary figure of protest theatre. His 1960s plays in the snake pit brought him into collaboration with Athol Fugard, widely regarded as one of the nation's greatest playwrights.

They defied the apartheid-era segregation laws by meeting in secret, and staging rehearsals in classrooms and garages, under the constant harassment of the feared police. They adopted the name the Serpent Players, and per-

formed classics like "Antigone" in the snake pit at an under-loved museum.

"It was a museum, an amusement place with the museum," Kani said. "On the other side, you would see the dolphins, and when Port Elizabeth was economically really down, everybody would say, would someone please let the dolphins out before you lock up the place."

By the early 1970s, Kani, Fugard and fellow performer Winston Ntshona were writing new plays that exposed the harsh realities of life under apartheid. Kani and Ntshona won a Tony in 1975 for their New York performance of "Sizwe Banzi is Dead". All three also wrote "The Island", a seminal play about prison conditions on

Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela and other leader activists were jailed.

Today theatre in South Africa is struggling, with audiences still limited to 50 percent occupancy under COVID regulations. After the pandemic inflicted so much illness and death on the world, Kani said the play is now received somewhat differently. Now bringing the play post-COVID, people "understand the process" of illness and dying, he said. "Africans have a great reverence for death and life. And they understand the process and the journey, but they see it as a continuation of life." — AFP



South African stage and movie actor John Kani, 79, who is also an author, director and play-writer, pose for a portrait in the backstage of the Johannesburg Theatre in Johannesburg. — AFP

Schwartzel celebrates win as golf power struggle deepens



ST ALBANS: South African golfer Charl Schwartzel celebrates with the trophy during the podium ceremony after winning the LIV Golf Invitational Series event at The Centurion Club on June 11, 2022. — AFP

ST ALBANS, United Kingdom: Charl Schwartzel's victory at the first event of the rebel LIV Golf series brought the curtain down on one of the most dramatic weeks in the history of a sport now in deep turmoil. The breakaway circuit, fronted by former world number one Greg Norman and bankrolled by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, is now a real and present threat to golf's established tours.

The stars at the opening tournament outside London, which finished on Saturday, included six-time major winner Phil Mickelson and two-time major champion Dustin Johnson. But there were other big names in the 48-man field too, including major winners Schwartzel, Sergio Garcia, Martin Kaymer, Graeme McDowell and Louis Oosthuizen. During the event at the Centurion Club in St Albans, the organizers trumpeted the signings of 2020 US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau and former Masters winner Patrick Reed. Organizers have vowed to "supercharge" golf, offering 54-hole tournaments with no cuts, simultaneous "shotgun starts" and a team element.

Play got under way on Thursday but was quickly overshadowed by a brutal statement from the US PGA Tour, banning the rebel golfers, who had not been given permission to play in the LIV tournament. Ten of the 17 listed had already resigned their membership. PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan said the "same fate holds true" for any players who compete in future

LIV events, with Reed and Bryson DeChambeau due to be in the field in Oregon later this month.

There was uncertainty in the run-up to the inaugural event about who would be in the field. Norman himself had previously said the tournament did not need the biggest names to be an instant success, arguing it could be a showcase for future stars. But the Australian managed to attract enough big names to make the sport's power brokers sit up and take notice and he can now count nine major winners on his books. A number of high-profile players had previously pledged their allegiance to the PGA Tour, including Johnson and DeChambeau, before making U-turns. Others are staying loyal - at least for now. Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy, currently playing in the PGA Tour's Canadian Open, said Monahan had simply enforced membership regulations and had "done the right thing".

Court battle?

The dispute could be heading for the courtroom if any of the players banned by the PGA Tour pursue a legal challenge. Norman's big pitch is for a "free and open market" in golf and he has pledged to back his players to the hilt, even saying LIV Golf would pay any fines. Ryder Cup star Ian Poulter plans to appeal against the PGA Tour ban, saying it makes "no sense" to limit players' choice.

The DP World Tour, previously known as the European Tour, has yet to react but the LIV players have been reassured they can play in next week's US Open. Another unknown is the issue of world ranking points, currently unavailable at LIV tournaments. The points are crucial because they help players qualify for the four majors, which are the sport's marquee tournaments.

Aside from the bitter power struggle, two issues have pursued players at the event in St Albans - accusations of greed and questions over human rights. The money involved is undeniably mind-blowing. There was a record \$25 million prize pot at the Centurion Club and there is a total of \$255 million on offer at this year's eight tournaments.

Mickelson did not dispel rumors he was receiving a fee of \$200 million to compete, while Johnson is reportedly getting \$150 million. Norman said last month he had secured an extra \$2 billion to turn the initial eight-event invitational series into a 14-event league by 2024.

Mickelson faced an uncomfortable grilling by reporters on the eve of the tournament over the Saudi funding but insisted he did not "condone human rights violations", adding that golf could be a force for good. The questions are unlikely to go away as LIV Golf heads to the United States, with the sport braced for the next instalment in a gripping drama. — AFP

PGA, LIV Golf stars to fight for major title at US Open

BROOKLINE, Massachusetts: Expect some uncomfortable moments for Phil Mickelson and Dustin Johnson at this week's US Open, where LIV Golf rebels and US PGA loyalists chase a major title in formidable conditions. Players who departed for the rich new Saudi-funded series that debuted in England last week were suspended from US PGA Tour events, but the US Golf Association is allowing them to play in the 122nd US Open.

That's going to add to the intensity when the showdown starts Thursday on The Country Club's 7,254-yard, par-70 layout in suburban Boston. "I'm sure it will be awkward," said Justin Thomas, who won his second PGA Championship last month. "When I saw DJ last week, I didn't know what to say, if it was a congrats or a bye or whatever it was. I think we're all grown-ups and we understand there's going to be some guys you can make some jokes to and some guys you have to leave it alone, but in the end, we're all there to win a major." Sixth-ranked Thomas knows there won't be much time for small talk. "I would say a lot of guys, myself included, aren't at a US Open to socialize," the 29-year-old American said. "I'm not there to have a conversation and catch up." Former world number one Johnson and six-time major champion Mickelson were among several stars who jumped to LIV Golf, which had a record \$25 million purse for its inaugural three-day event.

Other major winners on the PGA banned list include Sergio Garcia, Graeme McDowell, Louis Oosthuizen, Martin Kaymer - who withdrew from the Open on Saturday due to injury - and Charl Schwartzel, who won the \$4 million LIV Golf debut event. Bryson DeChambeau and Patrick Reed, also major champions, joined LIV Golf over the weekend.

The US PGA Tour banished those who played the LIV tournament from any PGA Tour events. But the USGA stuck with its Open qualifying standards and rewarded all who had made the field of 156. "We simply asked ourselves this question - should a player who had earned his way into the 2022 US Open, via our published field criteria, be pulled out of the field as a result of his decision to play in another event? And we ultimately decided that they should not," the USGA said in a statement.

American Kevin Na, who opted for LIV Golf, was happy to hear it. "Majors are very important to me," Na said. "That's one thing that's missing in my career and that has been a dream of mine, to win a major championship, since I can remember."

Tiger skips US Open

Tiger Woods, a 15-time major winner making a comeback from severe leg injuries suffered in a February 2021 car crash, will skip the US Open to better prepare for the British Open, which starts July 14 at St Andrews. "My body needs more time to get stronger for major championship golf," Woods tweeted. "I'm excited to get back out there soon."

Woods, 46, made the cut at the Masters in April and last month's PGA Championship, but withdrew from the last day at Southern Hills after limping to the third-worst major round of his career. He has also supported the PGA Tour, citing its legacy to such legends as Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus. Shotmaking accuracy will be at a premium with the US Open's usual lightning-fast greens and thick rough. American Billy Horschel, who won the Memorial earlier this month, took his only top-15 finish at a major by sharing fourth at the 2013 US Open. "I've always felt like US Open venues and the way they set them up favors me very well," Horschel said. "Obviously my major record is pretty abysmal, but I feel very confident."

American Will Zalatoris, who lost a PGA playoff to Thomas at the PGA Championship, expects a difficult test at Brookline. "I played the US Am there in 2013. It was the hardest golf course I ever played," he said. "It was a big-boy golf course. US Open. Expect nothing different." The Country Club has hosted three prior US Opens, all won by Americans, including the historic 1913 triumph by amateur Francis Ouimet, and the 1999 Ryder Cup, when the Americans rallied on the final day to defeat Europe in the "Battle of Brookline." — AFP



JAKARTA: Denmark's Viktor Axelsen poses with his gold medal after the men's singles final at the Indonesia Masters badminton tournament on June 12, 2022. — AFP

Badminton number one Axelsen wins Indonesia Masters

JAKARTA: Danish badminton ace Viktor Axelsen clinched the men's singles title at the Indonesia Masters on Sunday, beating Taiwan's Chou Tien-chen in straight sets. The world number one beat Chou 21-10, 21-12 in a 41-minute match held at the Istora sporting arena in Jakarta. "I love playing here in Istora and I always dreamt of winning a tournament at Istora. It's a legendary venue, so to have done that is something that is really special to me," 28-year-old Axelsen told reporters.

Norwegian climber sets her sights on 14 peaks record

KATHMANDU: A Norwegian climber is on track to beat the time record for summiting the globe's 14 highest peaks, part of her quest to change how the mountaineering world views women athletes. Kristin Harila has already climbed six mountains over 8,000 m high, including Everest, in the last two months.

The 36-year-old hopes to match or surpass Nepali adventurer Nirmal Purja and his groundbreaking 2019 record of six months and six days, an achievement that smashed the previous record and was profiled in a popular Netflix documentary. "In history and until now, it has been the strong macho men going out climbing mountains," Harila told AFP this week. "When I talk to people that are not in this sport, they believe



This handout photograph taken on May 13, 2022 shows Norwegian mountaineer Kristin Harila posing on route to summit Mount Everest. — AFP

that men are more capable than women... If we are going to change, we need to get attention and show that women are just as capable." Male climbers and guides far outnumber women in the top tier of the sport, with only a handful of women mountaineers getting attention and sponsorships for their expeditions. Out of nearly a thousand climbers who visited Nepal's famed Himalayan peaks this year, only around a fifth were women, according to Nepali government data.

"I am very pleased to get the gold medal today. I faced some difficulties during the game but I'm very pleased to overcome them and secure the win," world number four Chen said. Chen secured a place in the final after defeating compatriot He Bingjiao 21-17, 21-14 in the semis. After the Indonesia Masters, the Indonesia Open is set to begin on June 14 and will last until June 19. The back-to-back tournaments were highly anticipated by badminton fans after almost three years without live audiences in the Indonesian capital due to the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

Harila's first notable climb was on Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro in 2015, but she made headlines last year for becoming the fastest woman to travel between the summits of Everest and Mount Lhotse in Nepal. She accomplished that feat in 12 hours, but broke her own record this year, knocking four hours off her time. But neither record was enough to convince major sponsors to back her current endeavor.

"There are lots of girls and women (who want) to climb, they want to have the sponsorship from the brands," she said. "It's easier for the brands to believe in what the men are presenting." The former cross-country skier was able to find support from Bremont Watches and some other brands, but still had to sell her apartment to fund the project, she said.

'Inspire women'

Only around 40 people in history have summited all 14 of the world's 8,000-m-plus peaks. None have come close to Nirmal Purja's 2019 expedition. He demolished the previous record for accomplishing the feat with supplemental oxygen, set by Poland's Jerzy Kukuczka in the 1980s at seven years, 11 months and 14 days. Harila said the Nepali climber was an "inspiration". "But for me, it is not a competition against him, I don't care much about that," she added.

Nonetheless, she climbed her first six peaks in just 29 days, accompanied by her Nepali guides Pasdawa and Dawa Ongju Sherpa, breaking an earlier record set by Purja. "She is a very strong and determined climber. The first phase has been record-breaking," Lakpa Sherpa of 8K Expeditions, Harila's expedition organizer, told AFP.

The team is now preparing to leave for Pakistan to climb their next five mountains, including K2 and the 8,126 m Nanga Parbat, while she raises more funds for the expedition. Maya Sherpa, the president of the Everest Summiters Association, said Harila's project was a welcome effort to bring more women into the male-dominated climbing world. "Climbers like her are very important to set an example," Sherpa said. — AFP

Mo Donegal wins Belmont as Rich Strike finishes sixth

NEW YORK: Mo Donegal won the 154th Belmont Stakes on Saturday, giving trainer Todd Pletcher a one-two finish ahead of stablemate Nest in the 1 1/2-mile event as Kentucky Derby winner Rich Strike finished sixth. Pletcher claimed a fourth Belmont triumph after wins with Rags to Riches in 2007, Palace Malice in 2013 and Tapwrit in 2017. Fifth in the Kentucky Derby, Mo Donegal went off as the 5-2 favorite with Irad Ortiz in the irons.

He swept past early pacesetter We the People and powered down the stretch for the win. The filly Nest, ridden by Irad's brother Jose Ortiz, stumbled out of the gate but also closed strong to take second ahead of Skippy Longstocking. "We were really pleased with the way both horses were training," Pletcher said. "It was sort of deja vu when Nest stumbled, but she recovered and got in good position and I thought both horses travelled great the whole way."

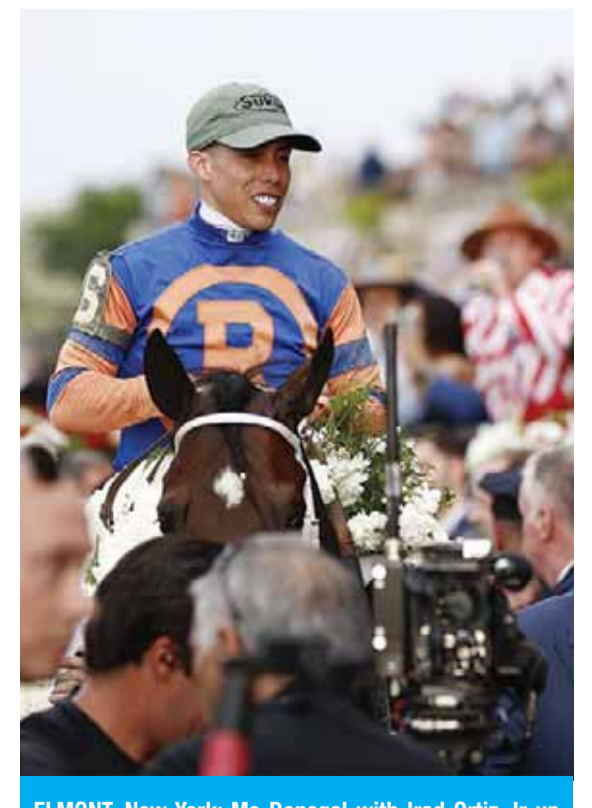
It was an emotional win for Mike Repole, the New York native who is a co-owner of both Mo Donegal and Nest. "This is my Derby," Repole said. "This has been a dream that I've had for 40 years. This is the biggest goal I had in my racing life, and I just accomplished it, and I ran one-two."

"I used to cut out of school and it made me an entrepreneur. I used to bet \$20 and that's a lot of pressure when you had to pay back your parents. I'm always going to be Mike from Queens. This is New York's biggest race and to win it here, with my family and friends and 70 people here, this will be a big winner's circle."

We the People, saddled by US-based French trainer Rodolphe Brisset and ridden by French jockey Flavien Prat, broke smartly from the first gate and led for almost a mile before finishing fourth. Rich Strike, who stunned the racing world with a Kentucky Derby victory as an 80-1 longshot, couldn't repeat the magic.

Breaking from the fourth post in the eight-horse field with Venezuelan Sony Leon again aboard, Rich Strike trailed the field early and unlike at Churchill Downs five weeks ago couldn't find a way through and finished sixth. "I guess we made a mistake not putting him on the fence," trainer Eric Reed said of the decision not to have Leon take Rich Strike to the rail, hoping instead to "give him a good, open run where he could take off."

He said Rich Strike "was not aggressive" running in the middle of the track and never dug in for a late move. "I think we made a tactical error," Reed said. "We'll have to teach him how to run around horses." After his Kentucky Derby upset, Rich Strike sat out the Preakness Stakes, won by Early Volting over heavily favored Epicenter - neither of which ran in the Belmont. — AFP



ELMONT, New York: Mo Donegal with Irad Ortiz Jr up celebrates in the winner's circle after winning the 154th running of the Belmont Stakes at Belmont Park on June 11, 2022. — AFP

Sports

England and Italy in Nations League draw as Germany held by Hungary

PARIS: England are bottom of their UEFA Nations League group without a win after drawing 0-0 with Italy in a repeat of the Euro 2020 final on Saturday, while Germany settled for a point in a 1-1 stalemate in Hungary. The meeting in Wolverhampton between Gareth Southgate's side and the European champions was played before just 3,000 people, largely school-children, as a punishment for the incidents that marred the Euro 2020 final between the same nations at Wembley last year.

UEFA rules say a match ordered to be played behind closed doors can still be attended by children accompanied by an adult, as happened last weekend when Hungary beat England in Budapest. England followed that reverse by drawing 1-1 in Germany and another draw at Molineux leaves them bottom of League A, Group 3 with just two points from three outings before they host Hungary at the same venue on Tuesday in their final game of a long campaign.

Mason Mount hit the bar early on for England, while Aaron Ramsdale produced a fine save to deny Sandro Tonali for an Italy side featuring just two starters who also lined up in the European Championship final. "We had two or three really good chances we need to score, but just lacked that sharpness in front of goal," said Southgate.

Roberto Mancini's Italy are rebuilding after failing to qualify for the World Cup and are top of the group after Hungary and Germany cancelled each other out in Budapest. Zsolt Nagy gave Hungary an early lead, smashing in after Manuel Neuer had palmed out a Roland Salai header. However, Germany needed just three minutes to draw level as Borussia Moenchengladbach's Jonas Hofmann latched onto a long ball forward and rounded the goalkeeper before slotting in.

"I said beforehand that this was the hardest game you could have after England," Germany coach Hansi Flick told RTL after his side's third consecutive 1-1 draw. "But we are in a development process. We have to see that we learn the lessons from this game."

Depay misses late penalty

The Netherlands are top of League A, Group 4 after coming from two goals down to draw 2-2 with Poland in Rotterdam, but they could have claimed a third win in as many games had Memphis Depay not squandered a late penalty. English-born full-back Matty Cash gave Poland an 18th-minute lead with a fine low strike, and the visitors doubled their advantage five minutes after half-time as Przemyslaw Frankowski squared for Piotr Zielinski to finish.

Yet the home side pulled one back almost immediately when Daley Blind's cross from the left was swept in by Davy Klaassen, and they were level by the 54th minute as Denzel Dumfries made it 2-2. They could have won it in stoppage time when Cash was penalized in the box, but Barcelona forward Depay saw his spot-kick come back off the post. Meanwhile Brennan Johnson - a star for Nottingham Forest as they won promotion to the Premier League this season - came off the bench to score a late leveller as Wales drew 1-1 with Belgium in Cardiff.

Ireland hammer Scotland

Youri Tielemans gave Belgium the lead early in the second half in Cardiff, but Wales earned their first point of the Nations League campaign. Their attention had previously been on their decisive World Cup qualifying play-off against Ukraine, which they won 1-0 last weekend to qualify for the



CARDIFF: Belgium's midfielder Axel Witsel fights for the ball with Wales' midfielder Gareth Bale during the UEFA Nations League - League A Group 4 match at Cardiff City Stadium on June 11, 2022. —AFP

global showpiece for the first time since 1958. Wales now travel to play the Netherlands in Rotterdam on Tuesday.

In League B, the Republic of Ireland got their first win in Group 1 in emphatic fashion, beating hapless Scotland 3-0 in Dublin. Alan Browne and

Troy Parrott netted in the first half for Ireland before Michael Obafemi smashed in an emphatic third early in the second half. In the same group Ukraine got their second win in as many games since losing to Wales, as they beat Armenia 3-0 in a match played in the Polish city of Lodz. —AFP

Kuwait futsal team in final

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait national futsal team reached the final of the 4th West Asia Championship after beating Lebanon 6-3 Saturday. Kuwait players were in control in the first half in both defense and attack, despite the strength of the Lebanese team. Kuwait ended the first half with a lead of three goals scored by Abdelrahman Al-Taweel, Yousuf Al-Khalifa and Hamad Hayat, while Lebanon had one goal by Mustafa Raheem.

The second half witnessed Kuwaiti players at their best mentally and physically along with excellent performance by goalkeeper Mohammad Al-Hazeem. Kuwait scored three more goals by Saleh Al-Fadhel, Khalifa and Hamad Al-Awadhi. Raheem scored two goals for Lebanon. Kuwait will play the final on Monday.



Football lawmakers to discuss semi-automated offside

DOHA: A semi-automated offside system could be used at this year's World Cup with the International Football Association Board, the guardian of the laws of the game, set to discuss the introduction of the technology in Doha on Monday. The optical tracking system was trialled at the FIFA Club World Cup in Abu Dhabi earlier this year and had also been tested at the Arab Cup in Qatar last December.

The IFAB will not itself decide whether the technology should be in place at the World Cup but if it offers

approval then world football's governing body could go ahead with its introduction. "The semi-automated offside system still needs to be evaluated before a final decision is taken," FIFA told AFP, adding that it was simply "an additional tool to help the VAR".

Pierluigi Collina, chairman of FIFA's referees committee, said earlier this year that the introduction of Video Assistant Referees - first used at the World Cup in 2018 - had been "very successful" but that making offside decisions semi-automated would mean greater accuracy and greater speed. "It's important the video officials get an accurate decision, but we are aware we need to reduce the time, particularly with offside," Collina said in February during the trials at the Club World Cup.

The data-driven, limb-tracking technology uses both dedicated and broadcast cameras around the stadium to give the exact position of players on the pitch, offering referees precise information within seconds. The aim is for

the system to generate 29 data points per player - tracking the various parts of the body to create a skeletal, three-dimensional model.

Once a final decision is made, the artificial-intelligence driven technology turns the images into a 3D animation that can be displayed on the big screen at grounds. The term "semi-automated" is used because FIFA insist that match officials will still make the final call, with a dedicated VAR assistant in place to monitor offside. "I know that someone called it 'robot offside'; it's not. The technology is simply a tool used by human beings," said Collina. Monday's meeting will also discuss the topic of concussion substitutes, which the IFAB approved in late 2020 on a trial basis for any league wishing to take part until August of this year. The English Premier League was one of the leagues to begin trialing the use of concussion substitutes in response to growing concerns about the damage caused by head injuries in football. —AFP

Australia, NZ, Peru, Costa Rica fight for 2 World Cup places

DOHA: The last two places at the World Cup finals will be decided this week, with Australia, New Zealand, Peru and Costa Rica digging into their stamina reserves for do-or-die battles. Both international playoffs are single-leg showdowns in the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium in Doha, a 40,000 capacity venue that will host matches in the World Cup finals in the autumn. Australia take on Peru on Monday. New Zealand face Costa Rica 24-hours later.

All four nations are used to the last-chance scrap for a World Cup place. Four years ago Peru beat New Zealand 2-0 to clinch a slot at Russia 2018 where they beat Australia in the first round group - their first World Cup win in four decades. Graham Arnold's Australia are looking for a fifth straight appearance at the finals, but they needed playoffs for two of the past four and in 2006 that meant a penalty shootout against Uruguay.

Peru are ranked 22 in the world, 20 places above Australia, who beat United Arab Emirates 2-1 in the Doha stadium last week to reach the final playoff.

But Arnold plays up the Socceroos' "underdog" status and says he has driven a never-say-die psyche into the team. "We like people saying that we have no chance and we cannot achieve anything," he said after the UAE win secured with an 84th minute Ajdin Hrustic goal.

"You know sometimes you don't play well but you can still win by fighting and running, and chasing and being aggressive and that also can be a success. "Fight, scratch and do whatever you have got to do to win the game. However we win it, who cares? Just win it," said Arnold, who will be without injured key striker Adam Taggart. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Khaldiya	24848075	Dasmah	22532265
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Kaifan	24849807	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Maternity Hospital	24843100			Shamiya	24848913	Shaab	22518752
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700			Shuwaikh	24814507	Qibla	22459381
Chest Hospital	24849400			Abdullah Salem	22549134	Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Kaizen center	25716707	Nuzha	22526804	Mirqab	22456536
Adan Hospital	23940620	Rawda	22517733	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764	Sharq	22465401
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Adaliya	22517144	Qadsiya	22515088	Salmiya	25746401

Clinics

Now Hiring

Part-Time Summer Teachers

- Early Childhood Educators (Pre-K through KG2) small classes
- English Teachers (Elementary-High School)
- Math Teachers (Elementary-High School)

Oxford Learning offers a professional working environment and an opportunity to earn extra income during summer. No lesson planning required. Maximum of 3 students per group. Flexibility in terms of working hours/days. Full training provided.

- Only Native English speakers are invited to apply for English teaching positions

Interested applicants may send cover letter and resume to: kuwaitoxford5@gmail.com

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSALHOTLINE 128

EMERGENCY
☎ 112

Automated enquiry about the Civild card is 1889988



BAKU: Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen wins the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit on June 12, 2022. (Inset) Verstappen celebrates with the trophy. —AFP

Verstappen wins Azerbaijan Grand Prix

BAKU: World champion Max Verstappen led a Red Bull 1-2 in Sunday's Azerbaijan Grand Prix in a potentially key moment of the title race after Charles Leclerc and Ferrari endured another dose of raceday misery. Sergio Perez had jumped pole sitter Leclerc to the first turn before Verstappen took control as first the Ferrari of Carlos Sainz and then Leclerc retired with engine problems.

George Russell took third with teammate Lewis Hamilton fourth for Mercedes who suffered badly from bouncing on the streets of Baku this weekend. Verstappen's fifth win of the season tightened his grip

on the drivers' standings with Perez now moving into second, 21 points behind, while the luckless Leclerc slipped to 34 points adrift. "Was that a good drive or was that a good drive?" a pleased Verstappen asked over the team radio, mindful that he had ended his Baku jinx having never made the podium on any of his previous visits.

He hailed his car's "incredible pace", adding "we were a tiny bit lucky because of the retirement but nevertheless our car was really quick today, so I could have closed that gap, then you have a race on your hands". It was a memorable day for Red Bull who are

now 80 points clear of Ferrari in the constructors' championship ahead of round nine of the season in Montreal next week. As for Ferrari their habit of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory through a combination of questionable strategy or unreliability issues is beginning to look potentially fatal for their title ambitions. Leclerc for the fourth time was unable to convert pole into a win, and he had his head in his hands in frustration. "Better days will come" if the team just sticks together, Sainz suggested.

That's what Mercedes have been saying all season as they keep trying to unlock the full potential of their

car which suffers more than most of the grid on the so-called 'porpoising' effect. Hamilton had said before the race his back may not withstand being jolted around for the full 51 laps and he had difficulty: the Briton needed support to lift himself out of the cockpit after making it across the line.

Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff apologized to the seven-time world champion, saying: "This is a bit of a box to drive. And sorry for the back problems." "Well done guys," Hamilton responded. "And well done on the strategy. Thank you on continuing to push." —AFP



TAMPA: The Tampa Bay Lightning pose with the Eastern Conference Prince of Wales Trophy after defeating the New York Rangers to win the Eastern Conference Final of the 2022 Stanley Cup Playoffs at Amalie Arena on June 11, 2022. —AFP

Bolts beat Rangers to book return to Stanley Cup final

MIAMI: The two-time defending NHL champion Tampa Bay Lightning are headed back to the Stanley Cup final for a third straight year after beating the New York Rangers 2-1 to clinch the Eastern Conference final. The Lightning, who trailed 2-0 in the best-of-seven series, won their fourth straight game for a 4-2 series triumph and a chance to take on Western Conference champions Colorado. The Avalanche host game one of the Stanley Cup final in Denver on Wednesday.

Captain Steven Stamkos scored both goals for the Lightning. He opened the scoring with an angled wrist shot that got past Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin at 10:43 of the second period. Stamkos was in the penalty box when Frank Vatrano knotted the score at 1-1 on a power play at 13:07 of the third. Just 21 seconds later Stamkos scored again. His initial shot was saved by Shesterkin - who made 29 saves - but the rebound bounced off his leg and found the net.

"These are the games you live for as a kid," said Canada's Stamkos. "It was everything I thought it would be and more, to give ourselves a chance to go to the final three years in a row is something that's amazing and to have a part in it tonight was certainly icing on the cake. "It was an unbelievable team effort." Stamkos added after Tampa Bay dominated possession throughout the contest.

Ondrej Palat had two assists and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 20 saves for the Lightning, who are

trying to become the first team to win three straight Stanley Cups since the New York Islanders won four in a row from 1980-83. They're the first team to reach three straight Stanley Cup finals since the Edmonton Oilers in 1983-85. Stamkos acknowledged that the Lightning got off to a slow start in the series after a nine-day layoff following their sweep of the Florida Panthers in the previous round. "We stuck with it," he said. "There's no panic on this team."

Now they face a formidable opponent in the Avalanche, who swept the Edmonton Oilers in the Western Conference final to reach the championship series for the first time since winning the title in 2001. The Avs will try to claim a third Stanley Cup, having also lifted the trophy in 1996. "We know what it takes," Stamkos said. "But now we've got the best team in the league in the Colorado Avalanche. They have it all. "We have a huge challenge, but tonight we'll enjoy the victory." —AFP

Global media giants battle for IPL cricket rights

MUMBAI: Global media giants including Disney and Sony and Asia's richest man reportedly battled Sunday for the broadcast rights for the Indian Premier League cricket tournament, one of the world's most-watched sporting events. The winning bidders were expected to pay up to \$7.7 billion in an online auction held by India's cricket board on Sunday to show and stream the two-month contest for five seasons from 2023 to 2027, according to analysts.

This dwarfs the \$2.55 billion shelled out by Star India, owned by US behemoth Disney, for the previous five-year deal which ended last month with the 15th edition of the tournament involving an expanded 10 franchises playing 74 matches. Attracting some of cricket's top stars from India and abroad with large salaries, the league has helped make Twenty20, a shorter and more exciting format of the sport, hugely popular, spawning copycat events worldwide.

This time the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is selling off four different packages including domestic and international television and online streaming rights as well as for special matches. Besides Disney and Sony, bidders in the auction, which could stretch into Monday, include a consortium including Viacom as well as Reliance, owned by Asia's wealthiest man Mukesh Ambani, reports said.

Fellow tycoon Jeff Bezos's Amazon, which has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on rights for European soccer and American football and had earlier shown interest in the IPL, pulled out of the contest, reports said on Friday. —AFP