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# Ghanem sends pensioners' KD 3,000 grant law to govt

## Assembly says power cut automatic after protesting opposition MPs complain

### MoH: Health situation stable

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti health authorities said Wednesday that despite an increase in COVID-19 infections, the health situation in Kuwait remains stable, and taking precautionary measures will reduce the chances of infection. Health Ministry Spokesman Abdullah Al-Sanad said the recent increase in COVID-19 infections around the world and in the Gulf region including Kuwait should not cause any alarm in the country, adding that none of the COVID patients in Kuwait are under intensive care.

Dr Sanad said there is coordination with the World Health Organization (WHO) concerning the spread of the coronavirus.

He called on the public to take precautionary measures to reduce the chances of infection, saying individuals with respiratory symptoms should self-isolate, children should not go to summer clubs, and people traveling abroad need to avoid enclosed or crowded spaces. The Kuwaiti government lifted all COVID-19 restrictions in May. — Agencies

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem sent to the government on Wednesday a law passed by the Assembly to give a grant of KD 3,000 to all retired Kuwaitis. The move comes in order to speed up the payment of the handout, which can be done only after HH the Amir signs the legislation for it to become effective.

In his letter to caretaker Prime Minister HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, the speaker vowed to continue to work for the benefit of retired people, adding he will leave insignificant matters to others, alluding to a number of opposition MPs who boycotted the Assembly session on

Tuesday that passed the law, which will benefit some 160,000 pensioners. The Public Institution for Social Security, the agency that looks after pensioners, said it was ready and prepared to deposit the grant in the accounts of retired people as soon as the government approves the law.

Meanwhile, a group calling themselves the Diwaniyas of Kuwait, called on MPs and the government on Wednesday to reach a compromise to lift Kuwait out of lingering disputes that have plunged the country into a deep political crisis. The group urged the two sides in a statement to work together to salvage Kuwait's democracy and resolve all outstanding issues between the two bodies to be able to serve the interests of the country.

As many as 17 opposition MPs continued on Wednesday their open and indefinite sit-in protest in the National Assembly building to protest against preventing the Assembly from holding sessions. Some of the lawmakers, who are sleeping in their assembly offices, complained that electricity and air-conditioning was cut off from their offices and people were stopped from visiting them. But the Secretariat General of the National Assembly said the lights are programmed to go off in the MPs' office building to save power after working hours. This system has been in effect since the opening of the building in 2016 on the instructions of the ministry of electricity and water.

### News in brief

#### Saudi seizes rainbow toys

**RIYADH:** Saudi officials are seizing rainbow-colored toys and articles of clothing from shops in the capital as part of a crackdown on homosexuality. Targeted items include rainbow-colored bows, skirts, hats and pencil cases, according to a report broadcast by Al-Ekhbariya news channel. "We are giving a tour of the items that contradict the Islamic faith and public morals and promote homosexual colors targeting the younger generation," says an official from the commerce ministry. Gesturing towards a rainbow flag, a journalist says: "The homosexuality flag is present in one of the Riyadh markets." The colors send a "poisoned message" to children, the report says. — AFP

#### 8 dead in Iran party fire

**TEHRAN:** Four children were among eight people who died of smoke inhalation after fire tore through an underground restaurant hosting a birthday party outside Tehran. The blaze broke out on Tuesday evening in the town of Andisheh west of the capital. County prosecutor Hamid Asgari said the blaze quickly spread throughout the restaurant. "All the fixtures and fittings... were flammable," he said. — AFP

#### Netflix seeks 'Squid Game' recruits

**PARIS:** Want to play "Squid Game" for real? Netflix is looking for recruits to compete for millions of dollars - and even promises not to have you violently murdered if you lose. "With the largest cast in reality TV history, 456 real players will enter the game in pursuit of a life-changing cash prize of \$4.56 million," the streaming platform said on a site set up to look for candidates. — AFP (See Page 11)

#### Qatar to house fans in tents

**DOHA:** Qatar hopes to house some of the 1.2 million fans expected to attend the FIFA World Cup later this year in 1,000 'traditional tents', organizers said on Tuesday. The tents will be supplied with water, electricity and drainage systems, but no air conditioning during its moderate winters. — AFP (See Page 16)

## Most Gaza kids suffer 'distress' over blockade

**GAZA:** Four out of five children in Gaza suffer from emotional distress, Save the Children said Wednesday, 15 years after the Zionist entity slapped a strict blockade on the Palestinian territory. The Zionist entity imposed the measure in June 2007, as fighters of the Islamist Hamas movement took control of the densely populated enclave. The Zionist entity and Egypt continue to severely restrict the flow of people and materials in and out.

In a report called "Trapped",

Britain-based Save the Children said the mental health of Gazan children has continued to deteriorate. Since 2018, the number reporting symptoms of "depression, grief and fear", had risen from 55 percent to 80 percent, the report said. Save the Children's director for the occupied Palestinian territories, Jason Lee said: "The children we spoke to for this report described living in a perpetual state of fear, worry, sadness and grief, waiting for the next round of violence to erupt, and feeling unable to sleep or concentrate."

"The physical evidence of their distress - bedwetting, loss of ability to speak or to complete basic tasks - is shocking and should serve as a wake-up call to the international

Continued on Page 6

## Pakistanis urged to cut back on chai

**ISLAMABAD:** A Pakistani minister has caused a storm in a teacup by urging citizens to cut back on drinking "chai" as a way to preserve foreign currency that pays to import the leaves used in brewing the popular beverage. Pakistan is the world's biggest importer of tea - known locally as "chai" - with the latest government figures showing it pays over \$515 million a year to bring in the commodity, mostly from Kenya.

The country is suffering a long-brewing economic crisis, however, with

dwindling foreign reserves used to pay crippling debt. "I would also appeal to the nation to cut down one or two cups of tea because the tea we import is also imported on credit," Ahsan Iqbal, minister for planning and development, said Tuesday.

Pakistanis drink tea in many forms - black, green, hot, cold, sweet, salted and spiced - but the most popular is made by brewing the leaves in boiled sweetened milk. Iqbal's comments prompted outrage Wednesday on social media and in tea rooms across the country. "Why should we reduce the use of tea... we drink at our own expense, we don't drink with government money," said Jan Muhammad, 45, a truck driver who says he drinks between 15 to 20 cups a day.

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## Life in the slow lane for Iraq's jammed traffic

**BAGHDAD:** Five years ago, Iraqi taxi driver Osama Mohammed would make about six trips a day across Baghdad. Today, traffic is so bad he feels lucky to do three. "The first thing you see in the morning is traffic jams,"

said 40-year-old Mohammed, describing his "exhaustion" at the stop-and-go traffic he endures across the sprawling capital.

It has become so bad that he now often turns down fares. "It is better to forget about it because you will spend two hours on the road," he said. "Your day will end in traffic jams." Experts point at many reasons for the growing chaos: A post-war mini boom has brought more people and more cars, while the war-battered infrastructure has barely changed.



**GAZA:** Palestinian corn vendor Muhammad Mukhaimer, 26, dressed in a mouse costume, enlivens his stall named "Uncle Mimi's corn" while serving young customers at the beach in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, on June 13, 2022. — AFP



**ISLAMABAD:** An employee pours tea for customers at a restaurant on June 15, 2022. — AFP

Security checkpoints still add to the gridlock, a legacy of the years of war and sectarian conflict when Baghdad was rocked by frequent car bombings. Most importantly, political paralysis and a state sector hobbled by widespread corruption have snarled road and rail projects that could bring relief.

In a city of eight million, the number of vehicles has surged from 350,000 before 2007 to over 2.5 million today, said Baghdad municipality spokesman Mohammed Al-Rubaye.

The research group Future of Iraq estimates that the fuel each vehicle wastes daily by idling in Baghdad traffic jams is equivalent to driving 20 km. The problem intensifies air pollution in a country already struggling with more frequent sandstorms, a trend linked to climate change, and blistering summer heat that peaks above 50 degrees Celsius.

Baghdad's roadside concrete blast walls may have largely gone, but decades of war have left a legacy of

Continued on Page 6

## Local

# Kuwait seeks int'l recognition in stem cell transplantation

## Twenty-five pediatric HCTs performed between October 2020 and June 2022



KUWAIT: Health ministry officials pose for a group picture with children who have had stem cell transplant procedures, and their families. — KUNA photos

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Under the patronage of the Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed, the first pediatric stem cell transplant conference in Kuwait (KPSCTC) opened on Wednesday. On behalf of the minister, Secretary-General of the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations (KIMS) Dr Fawaz Al-Rifai



### Kuwait hosts pediatric stem cell transplant conference

said there is wide interest on the part of the Ministry of Health in the field of pediatrics, oncology and cell transplantation, stressing that KIMS is working to make Kuwait an internationally-accredited center for stem cell transplants.

Rifai added that the conference is an unprecedented event of its kind after efforts were made over the past years by conducting many stem cell transplants, hoping for more achievements to provide this service to children in need. Dr Sondus Al-Sharidah, Chairperson and Director of Pediatric SCT program in Kuwait, and Head of Pediatric SCT unit in NBK's Specialized Hospital for Children, highlighted the launch of the pediatric transplant and cellular therapy unit and the Kuwaiti experience in this field.

"Hematopoietic cell transplantation (HCT) is an advanced therapeutic intervention for malignant and non-malignant conditions, often for critically ill patients. The establishment of an HCT program requires the efforts of experienced and appropriately trained personnel to lead the program," she explained. Sharidah noted that for the newly-started Kuwaiti pediatric program, it is essential to identify minimal requirements for establishing the pediatric HCT unit in order to optimize resource utilization as well as maintain patient safety, adding the children's transplant unit was launched in Oct 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In hematopoietic cell transplantation, patient



Secretary-General of the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations (KIMS) Dr Fawaz Al-Rifai speaks during the conference.



Dr Sondus Al-Sharidah, Chairperson and Director of Pediatric SCT program in Kuwait, makes her address.

and disease characteristics including age, comorbidities and disease status must be considered. The dose intensity of the pre-HCT conditioning varies between MAC, RTC, RIC, and NMA treatment models. Also, it may include irradiation, chemotherapy, serotherapy, monoclonal antibodies and targeted therapy, which varies in different malignancies and types of donors," she explained. Regarding Kuwait's experience, she revealed

that 25 pediatric HCTs were performed between October 2020 and June 2022. Sharidah said there will be plans in the future for starting several services including the NBK stem cell process lab, TBI, accreditation, membership with international bodies, cellular therapy, CAR T cell and CAAR T therapy, gene therapy and starting KNSC registry for matched unrelated donor (MUD) hematopoietic stem cell transplantation.

## Bursa Kuwait, Kuwait Clearing Company organize blood donation drive

**KUWAIT:** Boursa Kuwait and the Kuwait Clearing Company (KCC) organized a blood donation drive on Monday, June 13, 2022, in collaboration with the Central Blood Bank - Kuwait (KCCB). The initiative was held at the Boursa Kuwait premises to help commemorate World Blood Donor Day and raise awareness to the importance of voluntary donations, as well as highlight the important role each and every one of us can play in saving lives. The blood drive was part of the exchange's Corporate Sustainability initiatives to create a lasting meaningful impact on the community where it operates and is in line with Goal 3 - Good Health and Well-Being - and Goal 17 - Partnership for the Goals - of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A World Health Organization initiative, World Blood Donor Day takes place on June 14 each year, and was created to raise global awareness of the need for

safe blood and blood products for transfusion; highlight the critical contribution voluntary, unpaid blood donors make to national health systems; as well as support national blood transfusion services, blood donor organizations and other non-governmental organizations in strengthening and expanding their voluntary blood donor programs by reinforcing national and local campaigns. The day also provides an opportunity to call to action governments and national health authorities to provide adequate resources to increase the collection of blood from voluntary, unpaid blood donors and to manage access to blood and the transfusion of those who require it.

For 2022, the World Blood Donor Day slogan is "Donating blood is an act of solidarity. Join the effort and save lives" and aims to draw attention to the roles that voluntary blood donations play in saving lives and



enhancing solidarity within communities. The objectives of this year's campaign include thanking blood donors in the world and create wider public awareness of the need for regular, unpaid blood donation; highlighting the need for committed, year-round blood donation, to maintain adequate supplies and achieve universal and timely access to safe blood transfusion; recognizing and promoting the values of voluntary unpaid blood donation in

enhancing community solidarity and social cohesion; as well as raising awareness of the need for increased investment from governments to build a sustainable and resilient national blood system and increase collection from voluntary non-remunerated blood donors.

Boursa Kuwait's Corporate Sustainability strategy stipulates ensuring initiatives apply and fall in line with the company's corporate social responsibility



(CSR), industry best practice standards and investor expectations, creating strong and sustainable partnerships that ultimately achieve success and allow Boursa Kuwait to leverage the capabilities and strengths of other companies or organizations that have experience in different fields, and integrating sustainability efforts with the company culture, in order to achieve longevity and an ongoing impact that is carried on and instilled in

the day-to-day operations of the stock exchange.

As part of the strategy, Boursa Kuwait has launched many initiatives in partnership with local and international organizations, focusing on support for non-governmental organizations and charity programs, financial literacy and capital market awareness, the empowerment of women, environmental protection as well as safety and preventive measures against COVID-19.

## Ministry begins early preparations for winter vaccines

**KUWAIT:** The health ministry has begun early preparations for winter vaccinations, and is awaiting the arrival of shipments of vaccines in October and November after supervisory authorities approved their contracts and agreed to make them available without delay, sources told Kuwait Times. Vaccinations will be given to all, contrary to the past two years of the coronavirus pandemic, when jabs were limited to Kuwaitis and those with prior appointments.

Official sources said the vaccines will be

enough for all those who need them, both citizens and residents, and will be given first at certain health centers. There will be two or three centers in each governorate, which is expected to make things easier and avoid crowding, and if it is necessary to open additional centers, the ministry can do so.

Sources said winter vaccinations will be given to all and will not be limited to a certain nationality. Inoculations will start with children and the elderly, then will be given to all. They said the Health Ministry will announce the procedures later, and the vaccinations will be for flu and pneumonia. In other news, the sources told Kuwait Times that the Health Ministry extended the objection period for two more weeks for those not receiving the frontliners' rewards but believe they deserve it.

## Residency law amendments won't scrap kafeel system

**KUWAIT:** Official sources explained to Kuwait Times ambiguities in the new residency law, affirming that it does not scrap the kafeel (sponsor) system, rather certain groups including investors and children of Kuwaiti women will get residency permit for up to 15 years. "Studies regarding this issue did not reach a clear view about self-sponsorship by residents regardless of their job or academic qualifications," the sources said. They said talk about cancelling the kafeel system in some Gulf countries is not true; rather it is to find a kafeel in a different form, and this is what will happen in Kuwait.

"The kafeel system will remain, but the presence of the Public Authority of Manpower when signing

the contract with the employee will be strong and clear through supervising the contract and its contents and authenticity, with the sponsor giving certain undertakings. If he does not comply with it, he will face penalties, in addition to the worker's commitment to what is in his contract, otherwise he will be deported," the sources told Kuwait Times. They said this aims to prevent iqama trade, control workers the marketplace does not need and maintain government plans with regards to the population structure.

"The cornerstone of the new foreigners' residency law is to remedy the wrong situation of loose laborers in Kuwait, which constitutes the largest number of expats in Kuwait. They pose a security risk, and most of them are in violation of the residency law. This forced decision makers to place this issue on top of the priorities that need to be decided," sources said. They said PAM will be present strongly to guarantee that bringing in workers to Kuwait will rely on the quality of their academic degrees and the number of workers needed.

Local

# Hajj prices in Kuwait sky high amid limited availability

## Kuwait hajj operators charge up to KD 5,000 per pilgrim

By Majd Othman

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has among the highest prices for hajj in the Gulf, with hajj tour operators charging up to KD 7,000 per pilgrim. This led hundreds of citizens who want to perform hajj to travel to Saudi Arabia to register with local hajj campaigns there at prices of only KD 50 to KD 290, with KD 900 being the highest price.

Kuwait Times spoke to hajj tour operators to learn more about the reasons behind the steep

enjoy special service, such as reserving a room adjacent to Al-Haram, the prices will be higher. Before the pandemic, VIP rooms were between KD 7,000 and KD 8,000, but today the rate is around KD 5,000 for 5-star hotels," he said. But he pointed out that Kuwait also provides hajj tours at a lower cost, at around KD 1,650 per pilgrim, with basic services only.

### One million pilgrims

Regarding the number of Kuwaiti pilgrims, Abdulrahman said: "In order to reduce crowding, Saudi authorities took a decision to cap the hajj season at only one million pilgrims, compared to 2.5 million in 2019. Saudi Arabia allows every country to send only their own citizens through the hajj campaigns, and sets a fixed number for each country. Kuwait's share is only 3,600 pilgrims." Kuwait had earlier submitted a request to Saudi Arabia to increase the number of pilgrims, but no response has been received until now, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

"Due to the reduction in the number of pilgrims this year by Saudi authorities, the cost of hajj increased automatically in order to cover the expenses of the campaigns," Assad Ahmad, another hajj campaign employee, told Kuwait Times. "Before the pandemic, each hajj campaign comprised of 100 pilgrims, while today the number cannot exceed more than 41 people due to social distancing procedures," he said.

"Value added tax has increased to 15 percent in Saudi Arabia, which definitely affected the hajj season, while hotels have separate taxes, which also increased by 10 percent recently, which means the total amount will double," Ahmad said. "After a pause in hajj tours for almost two years due to the pandemic and the increase in prices in Saudi



**KUWAIT:** Muslim pilgrims circle around the Kaaba at the Grand Mosque in the Saudi holy city of Makkah in this file photo. — AFP

Arabia, the campaigns raised their prices by KD 700 to KD 800 for each pilgrim, in addition to the increase in charges at Arafat and Mina by around KD 400," Ahmad added.

### Taking advantage

He pointed out that most airlines are taking advantage of the hajj season. "The prices of tickets during the hajj season increase every year. While airfare during regular days to Jeddah is around KD 60 roundtrip, tickets during hajj rise to around KD 350, a more than 500 percent hike," Ahmad said, adding prices at hajj operators in Kuwait can be considered as one of the cheapest compared to other countries in terms of services provided.

Ahmad told Kuwait Times that irrespective of the type of services provided for pilgrims by hajj campaigns, the 30 percent profit margin set by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in Kuwait remains in place and will not be reduced even if the services are fewer than those offered by other campaigns.

Kuwait Times contacted the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs on the sharp increase in prices of hajj campaigns but received no response, while the Hajj and Umrah Campaign Union refused to give a statement. However, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs issued a statement on Tuesday denying price violations by Kuwaiti hajj campaigns and stressed it is continuously monitoring prices.



### Airlines are taking advantage of the hajj season

increase in prices. Khaled Abdulrahman, a hajj campaign employee, stressed prices in Saudi Arabia have increased more than ever. "Value added tax was hiked recently by the Saudi authorities, while hotels doubled their prices compared to before the pandemic. The Saudi hajj organizing company also increased prices threefold," he said.

Despite these reasons, pilgrims have expressed their dissatisfaction with the price hikes by hajj campaigns on social media. "Prices depend on the hotel's rating and the operator's services. For 5-star hotels, a triple room costs KD 3,750 for each pilgrim, while before it was KD 2,000 to KD 2,400," Abdulrahman said.

"If pilgrims want to upgrade their hajj trip and

## Kuwait oil price up \$2.98 to \$123.03 pb

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$2.98 to \$123.03 per barrel on Tuesday as opposed to \$120.05 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum

Corporation (KPC) said Wednesday. The price of the Brent crude globally went down by \$1.10 to \$121.17 per barrel, the same occurred to the West Texas Intermediate, which went down by \$2.00 to \$118.93 pb. The Price of OPEC's basket of oils rose by \$3.7 to reach \$123.73 per barrel on Tuesday against \$120.66 pb on Monday. Bulletin of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries said on Wednesday the annual average rate of the

crudes' basket, last year, reached \$69.89 pb. The OPEC+ alliance countries agreed on June 2 to increase their production by 648,000 barrels for July and August. The current additional quantities are exceeding the previously agreed monthly increases of 432,000 barrel per day, a statement issued by OPEC+ alliance countries said. OPEC+ countries are set to hold a meeting on June 30, 2022, to follow up on market conditions. — KUNA



## Kuwait's Boresly elected to UN committee

**NEW YORK:** Rehab Boresly, the candidate of Kuwait, was elected as member of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The ballot, held on Tuesday as part of the 15th Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COSP-15) at the UN Headquarters in New York, resulted in Boresly winning 150 votes, or 82.4 percent of the total 182 votes. Coming second to the frontrunner candidate of Mexico who got 151 votes, she will serve a four-year term in the CRPD (2022-2026). Speaking to the press after the polls, Boresly expressed joy for the outcome of the vote, which "materializes the eminent status and leading role of the State of Kuwait on the global scale."

"Kuwait has a trailblazing experience in the humanitarian action, notably the care for persons with disability," she pointed out. Boresly dedicated "today's important achievement" to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as well as the government and people of Kuwait. She also thanked the Kuwaiti government and non-government bodies, which contributed to the bright and noble picture of Kuwait at the current UN forum, including the Kuwaiti Society for Guardians of the Disabled, Al-Tamoooh sport club of persons with intellectual disabilities, the Public Authority for

Sport, and the Public Authority for Disability Affairs. Boresly vowed to exert relentless effort during her tenure in the CRPD to enhance care for persons with disability and reflect the ambitious vision of Kuwait set forth in Act No. 8 (2010) and the candidacy file presented to the Committee. She appreciated the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the successful lobbying effort by the Permanent Mission of the State of Kuwait to the United Nations led by Permanent Representative Mansour Ayyad Al-Otaibi.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Otaibi congratulated Boresly on her election to the Committee, expressing gratitude for the States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. "Congratulations to #Kuwait's candidate Rehab Boresly on her election to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) for the term 2023-2026! Thank you to Member States for their support," he wrote on the Permanent Mission's Twitter account. Boresly, who holds a bachelor's degree in politics and a master degree in information systems, serves as chairperson of the boards of Al-Tamoooh sport club of persons with intellectual disabilities and Kuwaiti Society for Guardians of the Disabled. — KUNA



Rehab Boresly

## GCC Chambers Federation holds 58th meeting

**MUSCAT:** The Federation of GCC Chambers Council held Wednesday its 58th meeting in the Omani Capital, Muscat, with participation of a delegation from Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry headed by the Chambers' General Director Mohammad Al-Saqr. In a statement, the Kuwait Chamber said the participating delegation included office member Osama Al-Nasf, board member Fahd Al-Dabbous, general director Rabah Al-Rabah, assistant general director Imad Al-Zaid and director of public relations Khaled Al-Manea. The chamber said that prior to the meeting, the heads of the chambers met with the Secretary-General of the GCC Council Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf, where several issues related to the Gulf private sector were discussed: a happening that will strengthen ways of cooperation between them.

One of the most important matters that was discussed was issuance of a unified guide for citizens of the GCC countries to invest in the GCC countries, which includes special conditions and procedures for imports and exports process between the GCC countries. They also discussed role of the Gulf private sector in searching for alternative resources for basic products in light of the expected food crisis as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict, added the statement. The chamber indi-

cated in its statement effects of inflation resulting from high oil prices and tense conditions globally and their repercussions on economic and commercial activity among the GCC countries and the need to adopt coordinated economic policies among the GCC countries.

Furthermore, they discussed necessity of concluding a free trade agreement between the GCC countries and India, especially considering current food crisis in the world, while the General Secretariat of the Federation of Gulf Chambers underlined importance of directing support to encourage the Gulf private sector to increase investment in agriculture and food industries. The participants in the meeting expressed their willingness to cooperate with the Gulf private sector and seek establishing the desired Gulf unity by 2025. The council adopted the annual report, which included the economic harvest of the GCC countries by knowing the expected performance on the prospects of economic performance in the GCC countries during the period from 2020 to 2023, in addition to studies and economic reports that dealt with the expected future effects of Coronavirus pandemic on Gulf private sector.

The meeting dealt with strengthening the relationship of the General Secretariat of the Union with Gulf organizations, bodies, institutions and centers by holding economic activities, most importantly the 3rd session of the Jordanian Gulf Communication Forum. It is scheduled to be held from 27 to 28 September, in addition to the establishment of the Gulf Economic Forum in its 2nd session in the Emirate of Ras Al-Khaima will be held on November 2-3. The Council was also informed of the postponement of the first Swiss Gulf Economic Forum and Exhibition, scheduled to be held on June 28-29, until further notice. — KUNA

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## Local

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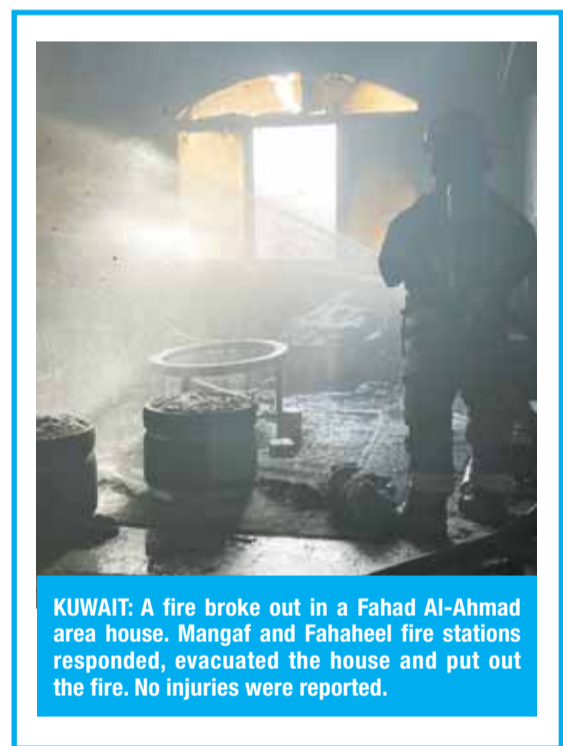
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## Inspectors close car rental offices

**KUWAIT:** Commerce and Industry Ministry inspectors closed two car rental offices for violating ministry decisions. The offices reportedly compelled customers to rent for a certain number of days, failed to produce car repair records and failure to produce commercial license. The emergency team documented the violations, as legal action is being processed.



**KUWAIT:** A fire broke out in a Fahad Al-Ahmad area house. Mangaf and Fahaheel fire stations responded, evacuated the house and put out the fire. No injuries were reported.

## Arab officials discuss regulations for keeping inmates

**TUNIS:** Participants in the 21st Arab meeting for administrators of punitive and correction institutions have discussed reference standards to classify and distribute inmates. Secretary General of the Arab Interior Ministers Council Mohammad bin Kouman said in an inaugural statement on Wednesday that the reference criteria have been put on the table examination for sake of setting scale of the dangers' level among the inmates. Such an approach is necessary for preventing issues that may be caused by inmates of high tendency for violence, he indicated. The imprisoned come from various backgrounds thus they cannot be kept in a random manner behind the bars, otherwise such a chaotic situation may lead to higher rates of crime, or promoting fanaticism and creating a ground for coordination among illicit terrorist organizations and organized crime gangs, he elaborated. —KUNA

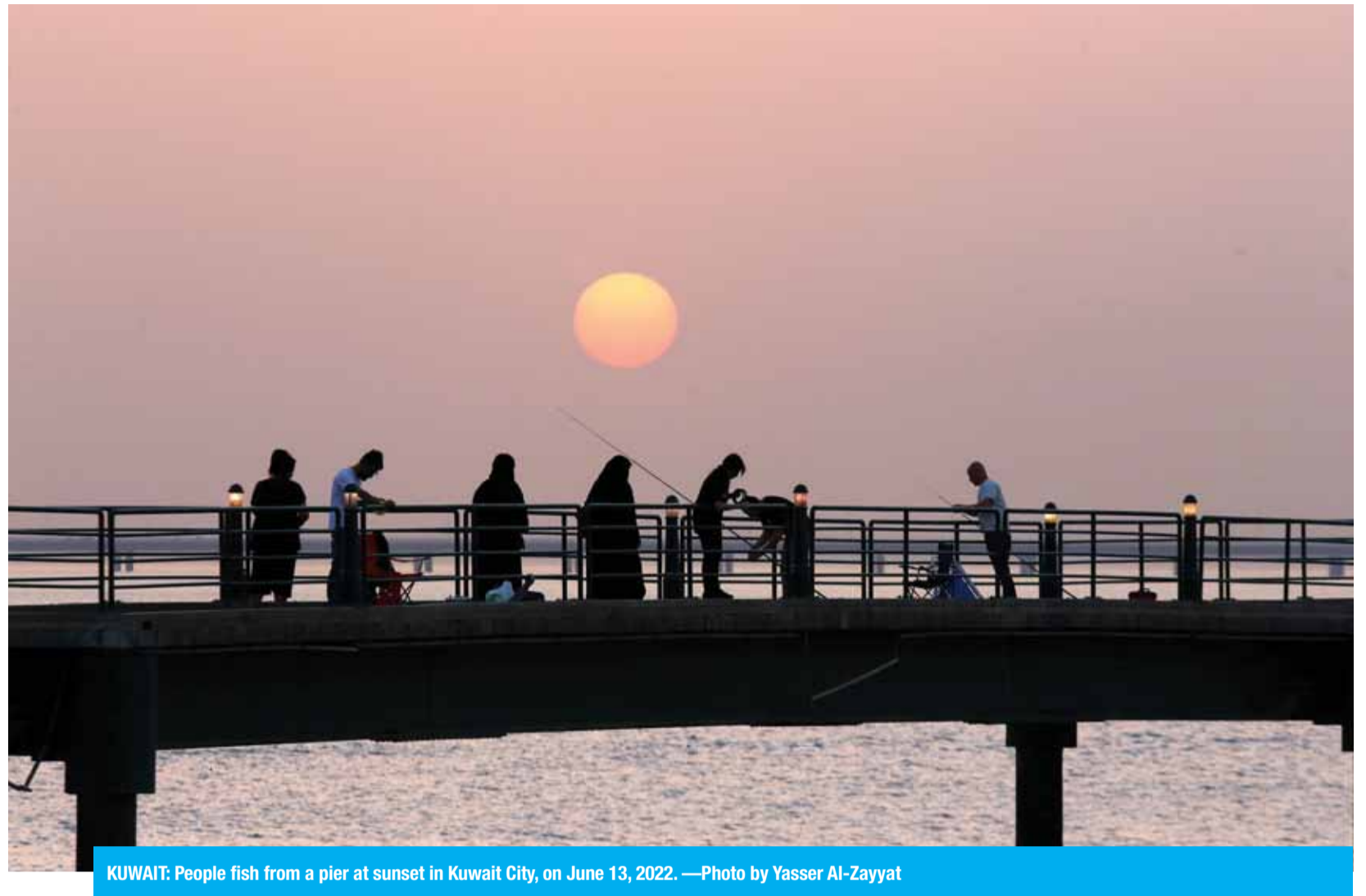
## Kuwait human rights diwan says stands by police brutality victim

**KUWAIT:** A delegation from the National Diwan for Human rights represented by the head of the Permanent Committee for Anti-Torture, Racial Discrimination and Combat Human Trafficking, Zakaria Al-Ansari, the Head of the Complaints Committee, Ali Al-Baghli and a member of the Permanent Committee for Anti-Torture, Taher Al-Baghli, visited Abdullah Fahad Tami in the hospital after news of being mistreated by the men of the General Department of Weapons Investigation.

Tami said that he was arrested in connection with a case of being accused of possessing a weapon by the General Department of Weapons Investigation. He stated that he was deprived of his right to call or contact a lawyer during the investigation period and was mistreated, he also stated that he submitted an official complaint to the prosecution against those who mistreated him.

The National Diwan for Human Rights believes

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** People fish from a pier at sunset in Kuwait City, on June 13, 2022. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Kuwait beachgoers wary of jet skis with summer's arrival

## Jet skis not allowed to approach coast closer than 200 meters

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** With the arrival of summer, going to the beach to cool down by swimming in the sea is the most popular activity in Kuwait. With the closure of most sea clubs, public beaches are the only remaining option to enjoy swimming. Unfortunately, visitors at most public beaches are annoyed by jet ski riders approaching the beach closely.

Visitors to public beaches from Kuwait Towers till Mangaf have complained of not feeling safe while swimming in the sea due to the threat posed by reckless riders of jet skis. People are especially worried about the safety of their children, who could be hit by a fast-moving jet ski that may not notice them swimming.

According to the law, jet skis and boats are not



allowed to approach the coast or beach closer than 200 meters. "Jet skis can only ride up to 2 nautical miles (3,704 meters) from the coast. It's also forbidden to rent jet skis for riding after sunset, as they are not equipped with marine safety devices and navigational lights," Acting General Director of the Coastguard Department of the Ministry of Interior Brig Talal Al-Muwanes told Kuwait Times.

Coastguards can penalize those breaking the law. "The minimum fine for approaching the beach is KD 100. Reconciliation may be refused, and the case will be transferred to the misdemeanor investigation department. More serious sanctions can be taken, depending on each case or violation," he explained.

Jet skis should only be ridden by persons older than 18. "If a violation is committed by a minor, then they can only be sanctioned for driving a jet ski with-

out a license. If the jet ski renting person agrees to rent a jet ski to a minor below 18, then he will be ticketed and his renting license may be suspended. Other violations committed by a renter who has a license will be registered on their name," Muwanes pointed out. The coastguard officers conduct daily tours of

locations where jet skis gather. "We also receive calls from the public over violations by jet skis, and officers then go to the site. Also, sudden inspections are frequently conducted, and many times violating jets are seized," concluded Muwanes. People can report any violation by calling 112 or 1880888.

that the torture claim made by Abdullah Tami carries much evidence that supports his claims, and urges the investigation authorities and the General Directorate of implementation to deal with the case transparently with allowing the National Diwan to follow up with the procedures.

The national Diwan for Human Rights also supports what the Ministry of Interior has done by forming an investigation committee to deal with the claims and hopes that appropriate measure will be taken to prevent repeated cases of torture, and requests to participate with the Ministry of Interior to review all procedures that provide safeguards to protect the accused person from being tortured or mistreated.

The Diwan also expresses its concern about the procedures of protecting the accused and suspects in general, which requires developing the procedures of the Public Prosecution and to train the members of the Ministry of Interior more on the rights of the accused, with a fair investigation without violating their rights to treat them humanely.

The Diwan also stresses the need to develop the legislative system for protection against torture, especially separating the forensic medicine and



criminal evidence from the Ministry of Interior, instead of being two departments affiliated to the General Department of Investigation, reducing the

period of detention and pretrial detention, and many important legislative amendments that require a special law on protection from torture.



China's middle class looks to flee as COVID policies bite

## More crew of grounded plane prevented from leaving Argentina

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LONDON, United Kingdom: Children gather with protestors outside the Home Office in central London on June 13, 2022, to demonstrate against the UK government's intention to deport asylum-seekers to Rwanda. — AFP

# Calls in UK to ditch European rights pact

## Judge blocks plan to fly asylum-seekers to Rwanda

LONDON: Furious Conservatives called on Britain's government Wednesday to abandon a European human rights pact after a judge dramatically blocked its plan to fly asylum-seekers to Rwanda. The last-gasp intervention by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) forced the government to abandon the first flight, after the number of claimants aboard had already been whittled down by legal challenges in the UK.

Cabinet member Therese Coffey said the government was "surprised and disappointed" at the ruling late Tuesday, but echoed interior minister Priti Patel in vowing that preparations would proceed for the next flight. "And we will continue to prepare and try and overturn any future legal challenges as well," Coffey told Sky News.

The ECHR is unrelated to the European Union, which Britain left in January 2020. But Tory backbenchers, fresh from rebelling in large numbers against Prime Minister Boris Johnson's leadership, said the ruling infringed on British sovereignty. "Yes, let's withdraw from European Court of Human Rights and stop their meddling in British law," MP Andrea Jenkyns tweeted, echoing others in the party and banner headlines in right-wing newspapers.

The European convention was enshrined in UK

law in 1998 by the Labour government of Tony Blair. It notably underpins the Good Friday Agreement of the same year, which brought peace to Northern Ireland after three decades of blood-



"Surprised and disappointed"

shed.

Johnson's government is already on a collision course with the EU over post-Brexit trading rules for Northern Ireland, and critics allege it is picking a separate fight over asylum-seekers after a series of electorally damaging scandals.

The convention has been used frequently by human rights lawyers to frustrate Johnson and Patel's hardline policy against illegal migrants.

### Johnson's grandfather

Coffey said she was "not aware of any decisions or even hints" in the government about withdrawing from the convention. But last month, in the "Queen's Speech" opening a new session of parliament, the government committed to replacing the 1998 act with a new bill of rights.

Johnson's own maternal grandfather, James Fawcett, helped to write the European convention and was the commission's president for a decade in the years after World War II. Anneke Campbell, a cousin to Johnson's late mother, wrote last week that Fawcett would have been "appalled" at the government's actions.

She noted that Johnson had previously described human rights lawyers working to halt deportations as "lefty activists". "Would you have called your grandfather a lefty human rights activist to his face? Where did you pick up this kind of contempt?" Campbell wrote in the Byline Times newspaper. Under the UK's agreement with Rwanda, all migrants arriving illegally in Britain are liable to be sent to the East African nation thousands of miles away for processing and settlement.

The government, after arguing that Brexit would lead to tighter borders, says the plan is needed to

deter record numbers of migrants from making the perilous Channel crossing from northern France.

### 'Cruel farce'

More than 10,000 migrants have crossed since the start of the year. On Tuesday, 444 people were detected coming from France in 11 small boats, the Ministry of Defence said. The ECHR, ruling in favour of an Iraqi claimant, said his expulsion should wait until London's High Court has taken a final decision on the policy's legality at a hearing next month.

For Britain's opposition Labour party, home affairs spokeswoman Yvette Cooper said the government only had itself to blame for what the Daily Mirror newspaper called a "cruel farce". "They have pushed ahead with a policy they knew was unworkable, unethical, and incredibly expensive because they just wanted a row and someone else to blame," she said.

The legal challenges had highlighted concern over human rights in Rwanda. But the government in Kigali insists it is a safe country. "We are not deterred by these developments. Rwanda remains fully committed to making this partnership work," government spokeswoman Yolande Makolo told AFP. — AFP

## How Brazil's Javari Valley became a criminal haven

BRASILIA, Brazil: The far-flung Amazon region where a British journalist and a Brazilian Indigenous expert disappeared has become a haven for drug trafficking and environmental crimes because of increasing lawlessness and an absent state, experts say.

The Javari Valley, where veteran correspondent Dom Phillips and respected indigenous specialist Bruno Pereira went missing on June 5, is one of the remotest places on Earth, a vast expanse of thick jungle in northwestern Brazil near the Peruvian and Colombian borders.

Phillips, 57, and Pereira, 41, were last seen boating up the Itaquai river just outside the Javari Valley Indigenous Reservation, a territory bigger than Austria that is home to an estimated 6,300 Indigenous

inhabitants, including 19 uncontacted tribes.

The region is suffering from a surge of illicit activity, blamed on drug gangs with links to other crimes including illegal fishing on Indigenous lands—something Pereira had long fought, making him a target of death threats. The men's disappearance remains unsolved, but investigators have found their belongings and are analyzing suspected human remains, fueling fears they were murdered.

Experts on the Javari Valley told AFP drug gangs and illegal mining, logging and poaching rings have capitalized on weaker enforcement by Brazilian authorities in recent years to expand their presence. "What happened to Bruno and Dom is the result of an increase in organized crime, which is in turn explained by the absence of the state," said Antenor Vaz, head of Brazilian Indigenous affairs agency FUNAI's operations in the region from 2006 to 2009.

The very things complicating the investigation are what make the region an attractive base for criminal operations. The region is hard to reach, and harder to patrol: Huge, remote, densely forested and criss-crossed by meandering rivers that flood the surrounding area for several months a year. — AFP

## Two black women bidding to make VP history in Colombia

BOGOTA: For the first time, Colombia will have a black woman vice president, as voters decide Sunday between a pair of rival candidates aiming to make history in the South American nation. Colombians head to the polls for a run-off to choose their new president, either leftist former guerrilla Gustavo Petro or eccentric millionaire construction mogul Rodolfo Hernandez.

Both men have named a woman running mate with African roots. Environmentalist Francia Marquez, 40, is running alongside Petro, with Hernandez having chosen conservative academic Maren Castillo, 53. Whichever one replaces outgoing Vice President Marta Lucia Ramirez—the first woman to hold the position—will break new ground

as the first person of African descent named to the post. "In political, symbolic and cultural terms it is very important because Colombia is a country with a lot of racism," Cristina Echeverri, an analyst from the National University, told AFP.

Just over nine percent of Colombia's 50 million people identify as black but few, especially women, manage to reach positions of power. There is only one black person in the current cabinet and just two out of almost 300 members of Congress.

Marquez was born into a poor family in the southwestern department of Cauca—a region ravaged by violence linked to armed groups battling over drug trafficking and illegal mining resources. A single mother at just 16, she fled her native region following threats and went to work as a maid while studying law.

But she returned home to take part in local politics and can often be seen frequenting public squares in her African print clothing, defending the marginalized. Marquez has made headlines with her feminist, environmentalist and leftist speeches, but she has also made enemies. — AFP

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## International

# More crew of grounded plane prevented from leaving Argentina

## Iranian crew passports temporarily seized, Venezuelans freedom curtailed

**BUENOS AIRES, Argentina:** The Venezuelan crew of a cargo plane grounded outside Buenos Aires since last week may not leave Argentina, a judge ruled Tuesday after their hotel rooms were searched in a probe into possible Iran terror group links. Police raided the 14 Venezuelan and five Iranian crew members' rooms the day after officials raised suspicions of a link to Iran's Revolutionary Guards, listed as a foreign "terrorist organization" by the United States.

The Iranian crew had already had their passports temporarily seized, and on Tuesday the Venezuelans had their freedom curtailed after police confiscated cell phones, computers and documents in the early-morning raid.

They had been on board a Venezuelan Boeing 747 cargo plane reportedly carrying car parts that came in from Mexico to land in Córdoba, Argentina on Monday last week. The plane then tried to travel to neighboring Uruguay, but was denied entry and returned to Ezeiza outside Buenos Aires where it has been grounded since last Wednesday. The plane belongs to Emtrasur, a subsidiary of Venezuela's Conviasa, which is under US sanctions.

A judge grounded the plane given a "reasonable suspicion that the reason given for entering

(Argentina) might not be true."

Police did not comment on the reason for the hotel search, but on Monday, Security Minister Anibal Fernandez said information had been received from "foreign organizations" that some among the crew may be linked to companies with ties to the Revolutionary Guards, Iran's ideological army. Fernandez said a smaller crew had been reported on the flight log than the number actually on the plane, though none were on Interpol's wanted list. The crew list did include "a relative of the Iranian interior minister," said Fernandez, whose name "coincides with that of a member of the Revolutionary Guards."

### 'Terrorists'

Also Tuesday, Paraguay said two officials who had authorized the landing of the plane there in May had been dismissed and two anti-drug agents were under investigation. Interior Minister Federico Gonzalez said the plane landed in Paraguay on a "commercial" entry permit with 18 crew—an unusually high number for a cargo flight, according to expert sites.

It spent nearly three days at the Guarani international airport near the borders with Argentina and

Brazil before departing on May 16 for the Caribbean island of Aruba with a load of Paraguayan cigarettes.

After it left, "we received a communication that the aircraft is sanctioned by the United States Treasury Department and that seven of the crew members are members of the Al Quds forces (of the Guards) and that the United States has them on a list of terrorists," said the minister.

Paraguay alerted the intelligence services of other countries in the region. A Mexican official said Tuesday the plane had arrived in the state of Queretaro on June 4 with four crew members and in full compliance with all protocols.

It arrived with a two-day delay due to initial problems with airworthiness, insurance and other certificates as well as "documentation of the crew," Queretaro official Marco Antonio Del Prete told AFP.

After refueling and loading "industrial goods", the Boeing jet departed from Queretaro on June 5 with authorization for a Caracas-Queretaro-Caracas-Buenos Aires-Caracas flight route, he added. "I don't know if there were any modifications to the flight plan once it left Mexican airspace," said Del Prete.



**CANNING, Argentina:** View of the facade of the hotel where the crew of the Boeing 747-300 of Venezuelan Emtrasur Cargo airline, 14 Venezuelan and five Iranian, is staying, in Canning, near Ezeiza international airport, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina. —AFP

Iran said Monday that Argentina's move was part of a "propaganda" campaign against Tehran amid tensions with Western countries over negotiations to revive a 2015 nuclear deal. The grounding of the cargo plane came days before Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro visited Tehran on Saturday so that the allies, both subject to US sanctions, could sign a 20-year cooperation pact. —AFP

## Ukrainian mothers abroad stuck between guilt, uncertainty

**BRUSSELS, Belgium:** For more than three months Oleksandra Osadcha, who fled Ukraine with her two children at dawn on February 24, drove from one country to another trying to find a place that "feels like home". Russia invaded Ukraine that day, and the 26-year-old social media and marketing manager immediately made a decision to leave, threw things into her car and set off for the Polish border.

But, after two weeks in Poland and a month and a half in Portugal, the young woman finally resigned herself to the idea that she would feel like a stranger everywhere.

Now, she has to start building a new life for the sake of her seven-year-old daughter and four-year-old son. "The most difficult thing psychologically is to settle down and stop running around looking for a place that feels like home, to start arranging a new life, to accept that you will not go back home any time soon and accept that now you're nobody here," Osadcha told AFP from Bologna, Italy.

The UN refugee agency UNHCR says nearly five million Ukrainians have been registered as refugees across Europe since the Russian invasion, in what it has dubbed "one of the largest human displacement crises in the world". And the refugees are mostly women with young children, as Ukrainian men aged between 18 and 60 are unable to leave the country due to military conscription. These women have to "adapt in stressful conditions", psychologist Anna Prosvetova said.

"The absence of the usual social circle plus the lack of familiar support, plus a feeling of loneliness and isolation from home, plus the understanding that there's no one to rely on in this situation—it's all mentally difficult," she explained.

### Full responsibility

"The woman takes full responsibility. She has to earn money, she has to organise her life, she has to organise her kids' leisure time by herself," said Anna Kaliukh, 34-year-old French teacher, who fled to Poland with her two children. She also managed to persuade her parents to leave her native



**ALBUFEIRA, Portugal:** Handout photo released by Oleksandra Osadcha, shows Oleksandra Osadcha with her two children in Albufeira, Portugal, on March 27, 2022. Oleksandra Osadcha, a 26-year-old social media and marketing manager, fled Ukraine at dawn on February 24, 2022, the day Russia invaded Ukraine, and set off for the Polish border. —AFP

Severodoneck, a city in the east of Ukraine which is now the scene of one of the fiercest battles of the war.

Kaliukh's mother had first refused to leave her house, fearful to start a new life abroad at the age of 61 without knowing the language. "The biggest challenge is finding a job," Kaliukh said, adding that her mother finally succeeded in Krakow, as she has extensive experience as a hairdresser.

Osadcha said her two children are still constantly with her, which makes it even more difficult to look for a job. "I was lucky, because I had some savings and was able to do at least part of my work remotely, but in general, of course, it's difficult," she added.

Psychologist Daria Bondar says there's another problem for Ukrainian women abroad and it lies in the contrast between the peaceful life they see around them and the horrors of the war they know from the news from home. These women are "downplaying their feelings and experiences in comparison with the grief of the whole country/other people" and they feel a certain sense of guilt because they are safe in the distance, Bondar said. —AFP

## Ukraine war sparks debate over Finland's 'Achilles heel'

**MARIEHAMN, Aland Islands:** Sprayed between Sweden and Finland, the autonomous Aland Islands are a picturesque archipelago once part of Russia and demilitarised since 1856. But the region's unique status is the object of intense debate since Russia's invasion of Ukraine rattled neighbouring Finland into applying for NATO membership in May.

Under international treaties signed after the Crimean War, no troops or fortifications can be placed on the strategic Baltic Sea islands. "It is the Achilles' heel of Finland's defence," Alpo Rusi, a professor and former presidential advisor, told AFP.

Home to about 30,000 mostly Swedish-speaking Finns, the area is characterised by rocky islands, lush green forests, old stone churches and wooden architecture—all under the watchful eye of a Russian consulate. "We have always thought, 'Who would want to attack us when we have nothing worth taking?'," 81-year-old Ulf Grussner told AFP.

"But that has changed with Putin's war on Ukraine", said the pensioner, one of many here who want Aland to remain demilitarised. In June, a poll showed 58 percent of Finns would approve of a military presence on Aland, which celebrated the 100th anniversary of its autonomy on Thursday.

"There is concern over whether Finland could react fast enough militarily in the event of a sudden intrusion on Aland," Rusi said. Armies wrestled for control of the archipelago in both World Wars.

"Why should we trust the idea ... that troops would not rush to control Aland as fast as possible," said Charly Salenius-Pasternak, a researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

### Aland rejects troops

Alanders, on the other hand, are keen to protect their special status and have so far firmly rejected the idea of ending the demilitarisation. "Why should we change it? I think it's a stabilising factor in the Baltic Sea area that we are demilitarised," Veronica Thornroos, 59, premier of the Aland government, told AFP.

## Most Gaza kids suffer 'distress'...

Continued from Page 1

community," he added. Children make up nearly half of Gaza's population of 2.1 million. Around 800,000 young people in the territory who have "never known life without the blockade," Save the Children said.

Over the past 12 months, the Zionist entity has granted more work permits for Gazans seeking better paid jobs inside the Zionist entity. It has also relaxed some restrictions on the flow of goods in

and out of the territory. But the blockade remains broadly unchanged, with Palestinians generally barred from leaving Gaza through the Erez crossing to the Zionist entity. Gazans also face huge obstacles exiting through the Rafah crossing to Egypt.

In a statement marking the anniversary of the blockade, Human Rights Watch said that "(the Zionist entity), with Egypt's help, has turned Gaza into an open-air prison". HRW's director for the Zionist entity and Palestine, Omar Shakir, told AFP: "Young people face the brunt of (the blockade) because they don't know of a Gaza before the closure. Their horizons are forcibly narrowed to a 40 by 11 kilometer strip of land and that prevents them from the chance to interact and engage with the world," Shakir said. —AFP



**Men drink tea at a restaurant in Islamabad on June 15, 2022.** —AFP

ings?" he asked. Chai usually sells for around 45 Pakistani rupees (20 cents) a cup at stalls across the country. "The government has increased its expenditure. They travel in big cars with protocol but we only enjoy tea," said driver Muhammad. —AFP

## Life in the slow lane for Iraq's...

Continued from Page 1

pockmarked roads and dilapidated infrastructure. The country suffered through the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, the US-led invasion in 2003, years of sectarian fighting and the battle against the Islamic State group's jihadists who were finally defeated in 2017.

Since then, entire new neighborhoods and high-rise buildings have sprung up, such as the futuristic new central bank headquarters designed by the firm of late Iraqi-British star architect Zaha Hadid. The relative stability has accelerated domestic migration, particularly an influx of laborers from the impoverished south. But the capital still lacks a robust public transport system, with no trains or trams and only infrequent buses.

A metro rail system would "reduce congestion by 40 percent", estimated Rubaye, but for now this is a distant dream. One such project was envisioned in 2011 with French firm Alstom. And in 2020 a letter of intent was signed to develop a 20-km 14-station elevated metro system. Some \$45 million has already been spent on the project plans, according to former Baghdad governor Faleh Al-Jazairi, but with no visible impact so far.

The large infrastructure projects have been stalled amid political logjams in Iraq's dysfunctional parliament. Since Iraq held legislative elections in October, the MPs have failed to elect a new president and government, due to political wrangling among powerful Shiite factions. The inaction and waste are exacerbated by large-scale graft in a country ranked among the worst in Transparency



**BAGHDAD:** An Iraqi policeman directs traffic in the streets of the capital on May 31, 2022. —AFP

International's Corruption Perceptions Index.

And so the rush-hour traffic keeps grinding to a standstill on Abu Nawas road, the capital's main thoroughfare running along the bank of the Tigris River. A police traffic officer who gave his name only as Hussein grumbled that many roads "haven't been modernized" for decades and that now "it's like there are more cars than people".

Some suggest that in Iraq, known in Arabic as the Land of the Two Rivers, water transport on the Tigris could offer a much-needed remedy to the city's traffic problem. But for now, only a handful of tourist boats ply its waves, offering views of another wartime legacy, the heavily fortified "Green Zone" district of government buildings and embassies. The prospect of a riverine public transport system seems unlikely, opined one resident, Yasser Al-Saffar. "Everyone who lives in the Green Zone," he said, "will consider such a project a threat." —AFP

## Pakistanis urged to cut...

Continued from Page 1

"When you drive and you can't see the road... then there is a risk of an accident. That's why 20 cups are compulsory," he told AFP. At a tea stall in Islamabad's Aabpara market, baker Muhammad Ibrahim said he drank 12 cups every day. "I take three, four cups in the morning, then three in the afternoon and three, four late night," he said. "This is my addiction."

At the same restaurant, Tanveer Iqbal agreed that people should cut down - even as he and his four children sipped piping hot cups of the drink. The university professor noted tea was routinely served at almost every meeting - especially those held by government officials. "How will we reduce the use of tea when tea is the main drink in all the official meet-

## International

# China's middle class looks to flee as COVID policies bite

## Schools have been closed and exams called off

**BEIJING:** Alan Li no longer sees any future for his family in China after harsh COVID rules decimated his business, upended his son's education and left his country out of step with the rest of the world. He has given up hope of a return to normal after months of lockdowns in Shanghai, and now plans to close his firm and move to Hungary, where he sees better opportunities and his 13-year-old son can attend an international school.

"Our losses this year mean that it's over for us," he told AFP wearily, asking to withhold his real name. "We have been using our own cash savings to pay 400 workers (during the lockdown). What if it happens again this winter?"

Shanghai's long shutdown, which brought food shortages and protests, has driven some to reconsider staying in a country where livelihoods and lifestyles can vanish at the whim of the state. Schools have been closed and exams called off, including assessments for applying to American universities.

Li is frustrated that his son's expensive bilingual schooling has been mostly online for two years, and he is anxious about the way Beijing has tightened oversight of the curriculum. "This is a waste of our children's youth," Li said. Being fairly well off, he has been able to take advantage of a European investment scheme that grants him and his family residency in Budapest.

"Many people know that if they sold all their assets they could 'lie flat' in a European country," he said, using a slang phrase meaning to take it easy. Beijing-based immigration consultant Guo Shize told AFP his company has seen an explosion of enquiries since March, including a threefold

increase in Shanghai clients. Even after the lockdown eased, requests continued flooding in at more than double the usual level. "Once that spark has been lit in people's minds, it doesn't die down quickly," he said.

### Exit ban

Censors have sought to suppress discussion of emigration, prompting nimble internet users to adopt the term "run" instead. Searches for the term on messaging app WeChat peaked during Shanghai's shutdown.

But as more people consider ways to leave, Beijing has doubled down on strict exit policies for Chinese citizens. All "unnecessary" travel out of the country has been banned. Passport renewals have been all but halted, with authorities blaming the risk of Covid being carried into the country.

In the first half of 2021, immigration authorities issued only two percent of the passports given out in the same period in 2019.

One woman who emigrated to Germany told AFP she receives dozens of messages from Chinese people looking for tips on escaping.

### 'Absolutely insane'

Emily, who did not want to use her real name, tried to help a relative obtain a new passport to take up a job in Europe, but the application was denied. "It's like being a child who wants to go to their friend's house to play but their parents won't let them leave," she said, adding that she has heard of passports being sold for up to 30,000 yuan (\$4,500) on the black market.

over a youthful population disenchanted with the country's business-as-usual, money-driven politics.

### North and south

A key part of campaigning, experts say, will be Nigeria's "zoning," an unwritten deal calling for the presidency to alternate between south and north. After two terms with northern Muslim Buhari, many expect a southern president.

That accord—and a tradition of candidates choosing running mates from a different religion and region—is seen as a balance in a country almost equally split between a mostly Christian south and predominantly Muslim north.

Tinubu and Abubakar this week must select vice presidents who will signal how they plan to balance their appeal to voters across the north, southwest and southeast. "Zoning will be the main talking point," Songhai Advisory risk consultancy's Aledayo Ademuwagun said in a note.

"This election will effectively be viewed by voters as a contest between the north and south, overshadowing economic and security developments," Tinubu, as a southern Muslim, is likely to benefit from the All Progressives Congress (APC) party structure and has a strong power base in southwest which he built up after being governor of Lagos. He also has support from a powerful alliance of northern governors, who are looking for a say in his choice of a vice president. But he faces serious hurdles.

In the buildup to the primaries, the APC—originally a coalition of smaller parties that came together to elect Buhari in 2015—had to overcome major internal splits. Tinubu won the candidacy without the open support of Buhari, and his

detected near Trincomalee on the island nation's east coast with 50 men, 11 women and three children aboard as passengers, navy spokesman Indika de Silva told AFP. "The boat had just left from somewhere along the Trincomalee coast when it was detected by a navy craft," he said. "The suspects will be handed over to the police for further investigations."

Four other boats aiming to ferry passengers to Australia had attempted to embark from Sri Lanka in the past month, he said, adding that 300 people had been arrested for immigration-related offences over the same timeframe. Security officials have said Sri

once been seen as a potential successor to former IS-GS leader Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, who was killed by French forces in August 2021.

An explosives expert, Albakaye was a regional chief in the group, commanding the areas of Gourma in Mali and Oudalan in neighbouring Burkina Faso. He is responsible for a large number of abuses against civilians in those countries, the military said. France is to complete its withdrawal from Mali within the next few months when its main military base at Gao will be returned to Malian forces.

### 'Re-positioning'

On Wednesday the French defence ministry called the capture of Albakaye "another success for the Barkhane force, which is pursuing its fight against armed terrorist groups while re-positioning itself outside Mali".

Relations between Mali and France plummeted after the military seized power in Bamako in August 2020. The junta has resisted setting an early date to restore civilian rule and tightened ties with Moscow, bringing in "military instructors" that France and its allies condemn as mercenaries hired from the pro-Kremlin Wagner group.

For most of the previous decade, France had



BEIJING: People queue for a swab test for COVID-19 coronavirus at a swab collection site in Beijing. —AFP

A Chinese freelancer told AFP he was turned back by immigration officers while attempting to fly to Turkey for work last October, despite having already checked in. "My itinerary sounded too suspicious to them. They took my passport into an office and 15 minutes later told me I do not meet the requirements" for leaving, he said on condition of anonymity. "It was absolutely insane."

He managed to leave weeks later by entering semi-autonomous Macau on a different travel document, before catching an onward flight. Some are

disillusioned with Beijing's growing controls, which have been ramped up during the pandemic.

"I just want to live in a country where the government won't crudely interfere in my personal life," said Lucy, a 20-year-old student at an elite Beijing university involved in LGBTQ and Marxist activism. The virus policies had "allowed the government to control and monitor everything", she said.

"Perhaps rather than accepting and adapting to this system, we must go elsewhere and create a new life." —AFP

## Two political veterans face off in fight for Nigeria's presidency

**LAGOS:** When Nigeria's opposition named veteran operator Atiku Abubakar as its 2023 election candidate, ruling APC party chief Bola Tinubu quickly welcomed a chance to compete against a "worthy" opponent. Two wealthy, Muslim, septuagenarian political warhorses who both shook off corruption scandals, Tinubu and Abubakar have much in common.

Now they face off in the February election after winning their primaries. Tinubu, 70, is a former Lagos governor nicknamed the "Godfather" for his clout. Abubakar, 75, is a tycoon and former vice president who is champion of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on his sixth bid to govern Africa's most populous nation.

Initial battle lines are drawn to replace President Muhammadu Buhari, who steps down after the two terms allowed in the constitution. But eight months from the vote, analysts say the campaign risks sliding into a race between south and north in a polarised Nigeria struggling with insecurity and economic woes, from high inflation to weak oil output.

Campaigning may become divisive with a longer-than-usual run-up to the February 25 vote in past elections, candidates were announced shortly before the ballot. Seen as longtime fixtures of Nigeria's politics, both men may struggle to win

## Sri Lankan navy stops Australia bound migrant boat

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka's navy said it stopped a fishing trawler transporting dozens of migrants to Australia on Wednesday, the fifth such attempt to be blocked in the last month. The boat, crewed by five members, was

## French troops claim capture of senior IS figure in Mali

**PARIS:** French troops in Mali have captured a senior member of the Sahel affiliate of the Islamic State group, the French military said Wednesday. The arrest comes as France prepares to complete its withdrawal from Mali after almost a decade battling a jihadist insurgency in the country with the French-led Barkhane anti-insurgency force.

"In the night of 11-12 June, an operation of the Barkhane force allowed the capture of Oumeya Ould Albakaye, a senior figure in the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (IS-GS)," a spokesman for the chief of staff told AFP. The operation, carried out near the border with Niger, took weeks of preparation involving air force and ground army units, the defence ministry in Paris said.

Albakaye will be held by French forces for questioning for several days and then handed to the Malian authorities, the military added. A security source who asked not to be named told AFP that Albakaye had



ABUJA, Nigeria: A man walks past a poster of Nigeria's ruling All Progressive Congress party chieftain, Bola Tinubu at the venue where the party is holding its special convention to elect the party's presidential flag bearer for 2023 election at the Eagle Square in Abuja. —AFP

presidential bid may exacerbate party tensions as he clashes with Buhari loyalists, said SBM Intelligence analyst Ikemesit Effiong.

"Tinubu securing the nomination is the first salvo in a lot of political machinations that will unfold," he said. "Both at a party level, in terms of how the PDP and APC dynamic shapes up, but also internally with the APC."

His choice of vice president will be key. As a Muslim from the south, he has fewer options for selecting a high-profile Christian running mate from the north. Winning the northern regions, where voter numbers and rates were higher in 2019, is vital. —AFP

Lanka's worsening economic crisis may be encouraging illegal emigration.

The country has for months faced severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines after running out of foreign exchange to import essential goods. Australia's hardline immigration stance bans anyone who arrives by boat without authorisation from staying permanently. Christmas Island, the nearest Australian territory to Sri Lanka, is located about 3,500km southeast of Sri Lanka. The Australian mainland is 5,500km from the South Asian country. —AFP

been Mali's staunchest ally in its fight against jihadists who have claimed thousands of lives and driven hundreds of thousands from their homes.

France began its anti-jihadist operations in the Sahel in 2013, helping Mali, its former colony, to snuff out a revolt in the north. But the jihadists regrouped to attack the volatile centre of the country, initiating a full insurgency that elected president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was unable to break.

In August 2020, protests against Keita culminated in a coup by disgruntled colonels—a move followed by a second military takeover in May 2021. Relations with France kept deteriorating, propelled by the junta's resistance to setting an early date to restore civilian rule and by Bamako's charges that France was inciting the region to take a hard line against it. In January this year, the French ambassador to Bamako was expelled and the following month France announced the pullout of its troops from Mali, and those of the French-led Takuba force which comprises nearly 1,000 soldiers drawn mostly from EU countries.

An unknown is the impact of the turmoil on the United Nations' peacekeeping force in Mali (MINUSMA), which with 14,000 troops and police is one of the biggest UN operations in the world. —AFP

## Xi tells Putin China will keep backing Russia

**BEIJING:** Chinese President Xi Jinping told his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in a call Wednesday that Beijing would keep backing Moscow on "sovereignty and security", according to state media. China is "willing to continue to offer mutual support (to Russia) on issues concerning core interests and major concerns such as sovereignty and security," Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported Xi as saying.

It was the second reported call between the two leaders since Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine on February 24. China has refused to condemn Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and has been accused of providing diplomatic cover for Russia by blasting Western sanctions and arms sales to Kyiv.

According to CCTV, Xi praised the "good momentum of development" in bilateral relations since the start of the year "in the face of global turmoil and changes". Beijing was willing to "intensify strategic coordination between the two countries", Xi reportedly said.

China was ready to "strengthen communication and coordination" with Russia in international organisations and "push the international order and global governance towards more just and reasonable development," he added.

The European Union and the United States have warned that any backing from Beijing for Russia's war in Ukraine, or help for Moscow to dodge Western sanctions, would damage ties with China. China as well as India are two major economies that have not taken part in retaliatory measures against Moscow over its invasion.

In the eyes of Chinese officials, the Europeans have allowed themselves to be sucked into backing Ukraine, at Washington's initiative, in a move contrary to their interests as Russian gas consumers. Once bitter Cold War enemies, Beijing and Moscow have stepped up cooperation in recent years as a counterbalance to what they see as US global dominance.

The two countries have drawn closer in the political, trade and military spheres as part of what they call a "no limits" relationship. The two sides last week unveiled the first road bridge linking the two countries, connecting the far eastern Russian city of Blagoveshchensk with the northern Chinese city of Heihe.

Wednesday's call between the two leaders fell on Xi's 69th birthday and was their first reported communication since the day after Russia launched its invasion of its European neighbour.

Xi, who has described Putin as an "old friend", also invited his Russian counterpart to the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics in early February. Beijing is Moscow's largest trading partner, with trade volumes last year hitting \$147 billion, according to Chinese customs data, up more than 30 percent on 2019. —AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, JUNE 16, 2022

## As climate impacts grow, so do calls for 'loss and damage' funds

### Horn of Africa was gripped by a record drought, fears of famine

**BONN:** From crop-wilting drought to the creeping devastation of rising seas, climate change is already bringing death, destruction and hefty costs to vulnerable nations, spurring growing calls for richer countries to help them cope in a warming world. The contentious issue of "loss and damage" has been a major focus of an ongoing United Nations climate talks in Germany tasked with laying the groundwork for the COP27 summit later this year. "The impacts of climate change are borderless," out-going UN climate change chief Patricia Espinosa told delegates last week. "They continue to particularly affect the most vulnerable people, communities and countries disproportionately."

While climate negotiators met in Germany, the Horn of Africa was gripped by a record drought, raising fears of famine for tens of millions of people. "These kinds of impacts make the clear case for loss and damage funding," Mohamed Adow, of the think tank Power Shift Africa, told AFP. "Those rich countries blocking progress on loss and damage will increasingly have the blood of these climate victims on their hands."

Developing nations want a specific funding "facility" to help poorer nations least responsible for climate change to cope with its impacts. But that call has been rejected by wealthy nations, particularly the United States, who have said funding can be channeled through a network of existing humanitarian, development and climate organizations. As a compromise, the UN's COP26 conference in Glasgow set up a formal dialogue, which is set to run until 2024.

It has no target outcome, leading to fears that it could become just a "talking shop". "We wanted a facility, but we were given a process that has no clear focus or vision," Michai Robertson, a representative for the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), told AFP. After several days of discussion on the topic wrapped up in Bonn, developing countries are now calling for the official inclusion of loss and damage on the agenda at COP27 summit in Egypt, set for November.

#### 'Human suffering'

Nearly 1.2 degrees Celsius of warming since the mid-nineteenth century has been enough to unleash a torrent of disasters across the planet. A landmark report on the impacts by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) this year-dubbed an "atlas of human suffering"—said effects will continue to escalate with every fraction of a degree of warming. Science is now able to trace the fingerprints of climate change on a given extreme weather event.

The crippling heatwave in India and Pakistan in March and April was made 30 times more likely by climate change, according to scientists at the World Weather Attribution. Campaigners say the current system puts the economic burden on the shoulders of the most vulnerable. A single disaster can reverberate for generations, but Teresa Anderson of Action Aid said



**LOMUSIAN, Uganda:** A boy looks on as goats grazing in Lomusian, Karamoja region, Uganda. More than half a million people are going hungry in the Karamoja region of Uganda, some 40 percent of the overall population eking out survival in an often-overlooked region between South Sudan and Kenya. — AFP

communities often face "multiple shocks over successive years".

#### Growth 'wiped away'

Vulnerable countries released a report last week, spearheaded by Ghana, that found rising temperatures and modified rainfall patterns have already reduced their wealth by 20 per cent over the past two decades. The economic impact is particularly acute in Africa, according to the IPCC, which cited estimates that gross domestic product per capita was around 13 percent lower in 2010 than it would have been without the previous two decades of global warming.

"It's heart-breaking to see the great development gains we've made over the past 50 years being wiped away by a climate crisis which we in Africa haven't caused," said Adow. Increasing climate risks are compounded by a shortfall in separate funding from rich polluters to help nations prepare for future warming, with a promise of \$100 billion a year from 2020 still not met.

#### Frustrations

Wealthy nations are concerned about any suggestion of legal liability that would put them on the hook for billions, if not trillions. "We know that vulnerable countries and communities are confronting devastating

impacts of climate change, as indeed, is happening in communities across the United States as well," US representative Trigg Talley told delegates on Saturday.

While the US did not see a need for a new funding body, he said there were a range of measures to increase the amount of money available. This could include boosting humanitarian responses, a new UN push for every country to have early warning systems, a German-backed plan to increase access to insurance, and expanding the remit of existing climate funds.

But vulnerable nations are wary. Robertson said AOSIS has made several attempts to change or expand existing funding, but those efforts were rebuffed. "It does get to a point of being quite frustrating," he said. As it stands, aid funding is often "a drop in the bucket" compared to losses, Robertson said, while strict criteria for climate funds meant some countries ended up paying more than market rates for loans to rebuild after a disaster. Meanwhile, coastal communities facing the insidious threat of rising seas, can suffer losses that will never trigger an emergency humanitarian response. Other issues are ignored because they are considered "non-economic", like the loss of heritage, said Robertson. Marshall Island representative Kathy Jetnir-Kijiner told delegates last week that there was "no funding for addressing the loss of cultural sites now inundated by rising seas". — AFP

## Indonesian president replaces trade minister over cooking oil crisis

**JAKARTA:** Indonesian President Joko Widodo replaced his trade minister Wednesday over a cooking oil crisis that has roiled global markets, saying "the people need someone experienced". Despite being the world's biggest palm oil producer, Indonesia has been dealing with domestic shortages and sharp price increases for months as the Ukraine war chokes global supplies. In April, the government imposed a now-lifted palm oil export ban, further stunning global markets after Russia invaded its neighbor.

On Wednesday Widodo removed Muhammad Lutfi from his post in a cabinet shake-up, naming Zulkifli Hasan, who sits in the ruling coalition, as his successor. "He (Hasan) will be good as the trade minister. Right now for food problems, the people need someone experienced, someone who goes to work on the ground directly," Widodo told reporters.

The new minister said his first priority would be to "immediately" fix the cooking oil crisis plaguing Indonesia's 270 million people, many of whom rely on the commodity for food and business. Lutfi, who once served as Indonesia's envoy to Japan, had blamed a "palm oil mafia" for stymieing efforts to bring cooking oil prices down. Indonesia produces about 60 percent of the world's palm oil, which is used in products from chocolate spreads to cosmetics, with one-third consumed by its domestic market.

The cabinet revamp came as Widodo tries to respond to a series of issues in Southeast Asia's biggest economy with domestic shortages of edible cooking oil the most pressing, experts said. "It's okay to replace the players during injury time as long as it is aimed for better performance and not for political consolidation," Hendri Satrio, a political analyst from Paramadina University told AFP. A survey published Monday by pollster Charta Politika on Monday found nearly two-thirds of respondents supported Widodo reshuffling his cabinet. — AFP



**GENEVA:** NGO activists stage a demonstration at the World Trade Organization headquarters' atrium urging government to demand real Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waivers during the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference on June 15, 2022. — AFP

## WTO extends talks, tries to seal deals

**GENEVA:** The World Trade Organization's ministerial conference will run over into a fifth day Thursday in the hope of striking thus-far elusive deals on fishing subsidies, food security and combating COVID-19. The gathering of trade ministers at the WTO's headquarters in Geneva was due to wrap up on Wednesday, with the global trade body hoping to conclude landmark deals to prove it still has a role to play in tackling big global challenges.

But WTO chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who has staked her leadership on breathing new life into the sclerotic organization, said it seemed remaining sticking points could be resolved if ministers ploughed on. "Progress is being made but it needs a little more work and more time," the director-general said. The gathering is the first WTO ministerial conference in nearly five years. The global trade body only takes decisions by consensus among its 164 members. "It requires that we work harder and work nights, whatever it takes," Okonjo-Iweala said.

"It is really time for ministers to make the requisite decisions that need to be made." She said countries "feel that we really can cross the line on some of these things if we gave it a bit more time". The former finance and for-

eign minister of Nigeria, who took office in March 2021, is keen to make the WTO a relevant player on the international stage. The last WTO ministerial conference, in December 2017 in Buenos Aires, was widely considered a flop, closing without a major agreement.

#### Fishing reform sunk?

Okonjo-Iweala was hoping to pull off a coup by securing a long-sought deal on curbing harmful fishing subsidies. Negotiations towards banning subsidies that encourage overfishing and threaten the sustainability of the planet's fish stocks have been going on at the WTO for more than two decades. The mood music on Monday was that a deal was now closer than ever.

But India threw a spanner in the works late Tuesday, insisting it would not sign up without a 25-year exemption-far longer than many are comfortable with. "The transition period of 25 years sought by India is not intended as a permanent carve-out. It is a must-have for us and for other similarly placed non-distant water fishing countries," Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said in a statement. "Without agreeing to the 25-year transition period, it will be impossible for us to finalize the negotiations. This is completely unacceptable. And that is the reason India is opposed to the current text." Besides fisheries, the WTO conference is trying to strike deals on e-commerce, agriculture, food security, COVID-19 vaccine patents, the WTO's response to pandemics, and reform of the organization itself. — AFP

## It is (not) alive! Google row exposes AI troubles

**SAN FRANCISCO:** An internal fight over whether Google built technology with human-like consciousness has spilled into the open, exposing the ambitions and risks inherent in artificial intelligence that can feel all too real. The Silicon Valley giant suspended one of its engineers last week who argued the firm's AI system LaMDA seemed "sentient," a claim Google officially disagrees with. Several experts told AFP they were also highly skeptical of the consciousness claim, but said human nature and ambition could easily confuse the issue.

"The problem is that... when we encounter strings of words that belong to the languages we speak, we make sense of them," said Emily M Bender, a linguistics professor at University of Washington. "We are doing the work of imagining a mind that's not there," she added. LaMDA is a massively powerful system that uses advanced models and training on over 1.5 trillion words to be able to mimic how people communicate in written chats.

The system was built on a model that observes how words relate to one another and then predicts what words it thinks will come next in a sentence or paragraph, according to Google's explanation. "It's still at some level just pattern matching," said Shashank Srivastava, an assistant professor in computer science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "Sure you can find some strands of reality what would appear meaningful conversation, some very creative text that they could generate. But it quickly devolves in many cases," he added. Still, assigning consciousness gets tricky.



**BERLIN:** A woman passes by a booth of Google at the re:publica 2022 digital media convention in Berlin. — AFP

It has often involved benchmarks like the Turing test, which a machine is considered to have passed if a human has a written chat with one, but can't tell. "That's actually a fairly easy test for any AI of our vintage here in 2022 to pass," said Mark Kingwell, a University of Toronto philosophy professor. "A tougher test is a contextual test, the kind of thing that current systems seem to get tripped up by, common sense knowledge or background ideas—the kinds of things that algorithms have a hard time with," he added.

#### 'No easy answers'

AI remains a delicate topic in and outside the tech world, one that can prompt amazement but also a bit of discomfort. Google, in a statement, was swift and firm in downplaying whether LaMDA is self-aware. "These systems imitate the types of exchanges found in millions of sentences, and can riff on any fantastical topic," the company said. "Hundreds of researchers and engineers have conversed with LaMDA and we are not aware of anyone else making... wide-ranging assertions, or anthropomorphizing LaMDA," it added.

At least some experts viewed Google's response as an effort to shut down the conversation on an important topic. "I think public discussion of the issue is extremely important, because public understanding of how vexing the issue is, is key," said academic Susan Schneider. "There are no easy answers to questions of consciousness in machines," added the founding director of the Center for the Future of the Mind at Florida Atlantic University.

Lack of skepticism by those working on the topic is also possible at a time when people are "swimming in a tremendous amount of AI hype," as linguistics professor Bender put it. "And lots and lots of money is getting thrown at this. So the people working on it have this very strong signal that they're doing something important and real" resulting in them not necessarily "maintaining appropriate skepticism," she added. In recent years AI has also suffered from bad decisions—Bender cited research that found a language model could pick up racist and anti-immigrant biases from doing training on the internet. Kingwell, the University of Toronto professor, said the question of AI sentience is part "Brave New World" and part "1984," two dystopian works that touch on issues like technology and human freedom. — AFP



## Business

# China factory output, retail sales weak as COVID shadow persists

## Shanghai lockdown sees quarter of US firms cut investment plans

BEIJING: China's factory output and retail sales remained weak in May, official data showed Wednesday, with tepid demand and lingering COVID restrictions putting a damper on growth in the world's second-largest economy. The government is persisting with a zero-COVID strategy to stamp out clusters as they emerge, but this has placed companies and consumers at the mercy of snap, economically damaging lockdowns.

Retail sales sank 6.7 percent on-year in May, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said, though that was an improvement from April's 11.1 percent drop. The figure was also slightly better than forecasts from analysts polled by Bloomberg. "In May, our economy gradually overcame the adverse impact of the pandemic," NBS spokesman Fu Linghui told reporters.

"But we also have to see that the international environment has become more complex and severe, and the domestic economic recovery still faces many difficulties and challenges." It was the third straight month of contraction in retail sales, according to official data, suggesting nervous consumers are tightening their purse strings with the persistent threat of lockdowns. But industrial production was up 0.7 percent after falling 2.9 percent in April, while the urban unemployment rate ticked down to 5.9 percent. Shanghai, China's most populous city, started emerging from a grueling two-month lockdown in June, providing a boost to economic sentiment. Tommy Wu, lead China economist at Oxford Economics, speculated that "the worst of lockdowns is probably behind us." However, he added that it will be "difficult for household consumption to recover strongly" while China's zero-COVID strategy remains in place.

Meanwhile, concerns are mounting over the trend



NANTONG: A worker produces silk products that will be exported at a textile factory in Nantong in China's eastern Jiangsu province on June 15, 2022.— AFP

in unemployment as millions of students graduate in the summer, Zhiwei Zhang, of Pinpoint Asset Management, said. Unemployment among rural migrant workers remained elevated, data showed, while home sales in the first five months dropped 34.5 percent. Observers remain cautious in part because of a property sector slump and the government's reluctance to transition away from zero-COVID despite recent fine-tuning. "There is no guarantee that a new wave will not hit in coming months," Nomura analysts said Wednesday.

### Shanghai lockdown

Meanwhile, Shanghai's lengthy COVID-19 lockdown pushed a quarter of US firms in the city to cut

investment plans and nearly all to drop revenue forecasts, a business group said Wednesday. The downbeat findings of the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) Shanghai survey were the latest sign of the impact of virus controls in China—the only major economy still pursuing a zero-COVID strategy, using lockdowns and mass testing to eliminate all outbreaks.

But such measures left its biggest city Shanghai sealed off for around two months, with a shortage of truckers leaving goods piled up at its port and business closures battering firms. Over 90 percent of US companies in the metropolis surveyed by AmCham Shanghai have cut their revenue projections for the year, the group said in a report on Wednesday.

limits. "There can be no doubt that, if and when needed, we can and will design and deploy new instruments to secure monetary policy transmission and hence our primary mandate of price stability," she said.

### 'Flexibility'

The ECB was prepared to respond in a "very short period of time" if necessary, Schnabel said. "In that case, reinvestments from maturing securities under the PEPP can be adjusted flexibly across time," she said. PEPP is the ECB's pandemic-era stimulus program to stoke economic growth and keep credit flowing in the 19-nation currency club.

The ECB brought an end to net purchases under the 1.85-trillion-euro (\$1.94-trillion) scheme in March this year. Another option would be to design a new "tool", Schnabel said, though its scope would depend on "the situation we are facing". Schnabel is only the latest senior ECB figure to intone on the risks of rising spreads. President Christine Lagarde said the ECB would show "flexibility" in response to pressure on borrowing costs at the ECB's regular meeting last week in Amsterdam.

"Some spread widening amid an overall rise in yields is normal," said Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg Bank. "As long as it remains consistent with the inflation backdrop and the pace of nominal growth, it should not present an imminent risk even for fiscally challenged Italy," Schmieding said.—AFP



FRANKFURT: The headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB) is pictured in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on June 15, 2022.— AFP

Wednesday. The euro rose against the dollar before giving up gains after the ECB announcement. Markets.com analyst Neil Wilson called the announcement "somewhat underwhelming" and did not merit a special meeting. Earlier, Wilson had said the emergency meeting "smacks of panic and a lack of control — but the market is happy to see it happen". The ECB is due to raise eurozone interest rates and end its massive bond-buying stimulus program in July.

Asian stock markets closed mixed Wednesday with investors on edge over the looming Fed decision that has taken on greater significance since forecast-busting US inflation recently sent shockwaves through world markets. Wall Street's major stock indices advanced ahead of the Fed announcement. Traders' screens were awash with red at the start of the week after data on Friday revealed that US consumer prices had soared at the fastest pace in four decades.

That confounded hopes that US inflation was stabilising and intensified pressure on policymakers to act. The news ramped up bets that the Fed would hike interest rates at a steeper and faster pace than expected as it struggles to retain credibility. Before Friday's data, the Fed had been tipped to lift borrowing costs by half a percentage point at Wednesday's meeting, but investors are now widely anticipating a three-quarter point increase, with some even suggesting one percentage point.

The moves fuelled worries that the tighter monetary conditions will deal a blow to the US economy and potentially send it into recession next year. Data released Wednesday showed US retail sales declined by 0.3 percent in May, confounding analysts who had expected a modest rise. "These numbers were worse than expected and point to a US economy that appears to be weaker than thought," said CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson.—AFP

## ECB calls for surprise meeting as borrowing costs rise

FRANKFURT: European Central Bank policymakers called an emergency meeting on Wednesday, as more indebted eurozone states have come under pressure from rising borrowing costs. A week after a regular gathering, the governing council will hold an "ad-hoc meeting" to discuss "current market conditions," an ECB spokesperson said.

The ECB drew a line under years of ultra-loose monetary policy at last week's meeting, calling an end to its massive bond-buying stimulus program at the beginning of July. Under pressure from soaring inflation in the eurozone, the ECB also announced its first planned interest rate hike in over a decade for the same month. Consumer prices rose at an 8.1-percent pace in May, an all-time high for the currency club and well above the ECB's own two-percent target.

The switch in the central bank's policy has raised the spectre of "fragmentation" in the eurozone, where the borrowing costs for some, more indebted members rise faster than for others. Following the meeting last week, the so-called spread between the yields for 10-year Italian bonds and those of Germany—seen as a benchmark for stability—climbed even further, reaching levels not seen since the very start of the pandemic in 2020.

Yields on Italian 10-year bonds fell following the announcement of the ECB meeting, reducing the spread with German government debt. Eurozone stock markets also rose after falling this week ahead of a regular US Federal Reserve meeting where policymakers could hike rates even higher than expected to combat decades-high inflation.

Speaking at an event in Paris on Tuesday, ECB executive board member Isabel Schnabel said the bank would "not tolerate" unwarranted increases in borrowing costs that would "undermine" the bank's policy. Schnabel said the ECB's response to the risks of fragmentation would "depend on the situation we are facing", but insisted that the bank's commitment had "no

## Central banks in focus as Equities rebound

LONDON: Europe's equities pushed higher Wednesday as the European Central Bank pledged to ease the stress in volatile eurozone bond markets, while US stocks advanced ahead of a major US rate hike. Frankfurt, London and Paris stocks rallied, as investors were reassured by news of an emergency ECB meeting.

All three main indices had slid Tuesday, joining a global slide in equities on growing expectations that the US Federal Reserve will move aggressively to combat inflation at the conclusion of its latest scheduled monetary policy meeting on Wednesday. Bitcoin extended this week's precipitous slide to approach the key level of \$20,000 as investors continued to shun risky crypto assets, while oil prices retreated further on lower energy demand expectations.

### 'somewhat underwhelming'

The ECB said after its surprise meeting that it would use "flexibility" to ease stress on in sovereign debt markets and design a new instrument to ward off a fresh crisis in the eurozone. The borrowing costs of some eurozone countries have risen faster than those of others as the ECB tightens its monetary policy. The bank has vowed to prevent such "fragmentation" which occurred during the eurozone debt crisis a decade ago.

The yield on 10-year Italian bonds fell on



ROVINJ: People take pictures of the city of Rovinj, on the west coast of the Istrian peninsula.— AFP

## Lacking tourism workers, Croatia recruits abroad

ROVINJ: Tourists are flocking back to Croatia after the pandemic decimated its vital travel industry, except the Adriatic nation has a problem: it lacks workers to cater to the legions of visitors. Faced with a chronic shortage of tourism workers, Croatia is recruiting people in neighboring Balkan countries and as far as Asia to fill the gap. It is a problem that other top tourist destinations in Europe—France, Spain and Greece—have also experienced since the lifting of COVID restrictions. But it is an issue that Croatia—famous for its idyllic coast line dotted with more than 1,000 islands and islets—already struggled with for years and has worsened since the pandemic. The tourism industry could be short of 10,000 workers this year, according to official estimates.

"The situation is alarming," said Stanislav Briskoski, owner of a restaurant in the tourist hotspot of Rovinj, in northern Istria peninsula, and head of Istria caterers and tourism workers guild. Croatia is primed for a tourism rebound: it has already hosted nearly three million visitors in the first five months of the year, nearly triple the number from last year, which bodes well for the peak summer season in July and August. The country of 3.8 million people greeted a record 21 million visitors in 2019. "The desire for travel is big ... tourists will come," the head of the Croat tourism association, Veljko Ostojic, said. Tourism is a major source of revenue for Croatia, accounting for one-fifth of its economy. Ostojic said the industry could break its 2019 record, unless the war in Ukraine escalates. But the sector needs workers.

### 'Once in lifetime opportunity'

Since Croatia joined the European Union in 2013, more than 250,000 Croats have left the country seeking a better life in Germany, Austria or Ireland. More recently, COVID lockdowns forced catering and tourism employees to look for jobs in other sectors, where they eventually stayed, having better wages and better working hours. Last year, Croatia lifted quotas for foreign workers hailing mostly from its non-EU Balkan neighbors as well as Asia. By June, it issued more than 51,000 work permits for foreign nationals, mostly in the construction sector, followed by catering and tourism. It was almost double compared with the same period in 2021 and some 100,000 permits are expected to be issued this year. "It's a once in a lifetime opportunity to work here, in Europe," James Pepito, a gardener at Mon Perin camping, near Rovinj, told AFP.

The 32-year-old Filipino, who worked in Oman and Qatar before arriving in Croatia two years ago, hopes to stay for another year. "I have a good experience, that's why I'm still here in Croatia," he said, praising the wages, weather and good colleagues. Pinoy 385, an employment agency for Filipinos, has found job for Pepito and some 1,700 other people, with another 500 expected to be hired by the end of the year to work as assistant cooks, maids, waiters and bakers. "We should realize that the worker shortage is not a current but rather a long-term issue and plan employment accordingly," the agency's owner, Stjepan Jagodin, said.—AFP

The survey of 133 companies also found a quarter were expecting revenues to be more than 20 percent lower than projected. Nearly 25 percent of companies surveyed have cut investment plans, AmCham Shanghai said. The commercial hub of 25 million people was closed in sections from late March, when the Omicron variant fuelled China's worst COVID outbreak in two years. Signs of resentment and anger emerged throughout the lockdown, with some residents struggling to receive fresh produce or access non-COVID medical care.

Although authorities drew up a "white list" of companies that could continue production, this was generally with limitations to minimize virus spread and many smaller firms continued to grapple with restrictions. AmCham said around a quarter of manufacturers surveyed were speeding the localization of their China supply chains while moving production of global goods out of the country. As of early June, only 35 percent of the manufacturers polled were operating at full capacity and close to three-quarters of all firms surveyed had yet to enjoy economic support measures since Shanghai's lockdown.

AmCham Shanghai president Eric Zheng said the lockdown's impact on businesses has been "profound". "The Shanghai government must act quickly to ensure unhindered supply chains, logistics and worker mobility and to accelerate the provision of financial support to businesses," Zheng said. This week, analysts at Fitch ratings downgraded China's growth predictions for the year to 3.7 percent based on "the cautious pace at which pandemic-related restrictions have been eased". This would be far below China's target of around 5.5 percent full-year growth.—AFP

### News in brief

#### Australia hikes minimum wage

SYDNEY: Australia raised the minimum wage by over five percent on Thursday, a slower-than-inflation increase as prices for basic goods soar. The Fair Work Commission set the new minimum rate at Aus\$21.38 (US\$14.75) an hour, a 5.2 percent increase. Inflation is forecast to hit seven percent by the end of the year, according to central bank governor Philip Lowe. Food, fuel and other costs have been pushed higher by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, supply chain problems from COVID lockdowns in China and floods on Australia's east coast. At the same time wage growth has been stalled in Australia for years, despite ultra-low unemployment of 3.9 percent and many businesses struggling to find staff.—AFP

#### Tanzania targets internet giants

DAR ES SALAAM: Tanzania will introduce a digital tax this year, the country's finance minister said, in a move targeting global internet giants offering services in the East African nation. The two-percent tax will come into effect in July and follows similar attempts by other countries to force US multinational tech companies to pay at least a portion of their revenues in local tax. Tanzania's Minister for Finance and Planning, Mwigulu Nchemba, announced the measure on Tuesday as he presented the nation's annual budget. "Tanzania Revenue Authority shall establish a simplified registration process to accommodate digital economy operators who have no presence in Tanzania," Nchemba told lawmakers.—AFP

#### Gazprom to cut gas flow

ROME: Russia's Gazprom told Eni it would cut its gas supply by around 15 percent, the Italian energy giant said, amid tensions between Moscow and the West following its invasion of Ukraine. "Eni confirms that Gazprom has announced a limited reduction in gas supplies for today, amounting to around 15 percent," a spokesman told AFP. "The reasons for the decrease have not been notified at the moment," he said, adding that Eni was "constantly monitoring the situation". On Tuesday, Gazprom said it would be reducing the daily gas deliveries via the Nord Stream pipeline to Germany due to the "repair" of compressor units by German company Siemens. Italy buys the majority of its natural gas from overseas—and more than 40 percent of its imports come from Russia.—AFP

#### Steelworkers get 6.5% pay leap

FRANKFURT: Tens of thousands of steel workers in western Germany will get a 6.5-percent pay hike this year—the biggest jump in three decades—in a settlement that could set the tone for industry as inflation soars. The agreed increase would come into effect "from August 1", the IG Metall union in the region of North Rhine-Westphalia said in a statement Wednesday. The 68,000 steelworkers in the industrial region would also receive a one-off payment of 500 euros for the months of June and July, the union said. The outcome of the negotiations was "the biggest increase in wages in the steel industry in percentage terms in 30 years," said IG Metall boss, Joerg Hofmann. Germany's largest union, IG Metall launched a strike action at steelworks in the west in May after management failed to meet its demands for an 8.2 percent pay increase. On Thursday at the peak of the movement, around 16,000 workers across 50 firms downed tools, the union said.—AFP

## Business

# Canada businesses hire young teenagers to fill labor shortage

## In Quebec, no minimum age to work-only parental authorization

**SAINT-MATHIAS-SUR-RICHELIEU:** Sofia-Rose Adams skillfully scoops ice cream onto cones and manages the cash register at Les Gourmandes cafe and ice cream parlor in Canada's Montreal region. The 13-year-old, who wears a blue cap and round glasses, is one of an increasing number of teens who have decided to work after school, helping to address the country's labor shortage.

"I wanted a part-time job, work hours here and there, to earn some pocket money," said Adams. For the teenager, who is into music and improvisational theatre, it is "normal to start working" at her age. In Canada's francophone province of Quebec, there is no minimum age to work—only parental authorization is required for those under 14 years old.

There is also no limit on the number of hours worked as long as it is not during school hours or at night for those who are under 16. In Les Gourmandes' kitchen, other teenage girls prepare soups. Seven of the eight employees of the small

business are under 18 years old. "After the pandemic, we found ourselves with major hiring problems," said owner Marie-Eve Guertin, who had to turn to employees under 15 this year for the first time in almost a decade of operating the restaurant.

"For full-time jobs, it's very difficult. I haven't received any resumes," Guertin said, so she turned to teenagers to keep her business afloat. "You want to grow a business, you don't want to restrict it," she said, wanting to avoid reducing opening hours as many other restaurants have done. In Quebec, the latest unemployment rate is 3.9 percent, while the country wide figure is 5.1 percent. The lack of workers in almost every sector has forced businesses to be creative to meet their needs. For some, that has meant hiring teenagers, and in some cases, pre-teens.

### 'Demonstration of autonomy'

While there is no data available on the number

of children under 14 in the labor market, statistics show that half of Quebecers aged 15 to 19 have jobs. "I started working at 14," said Philippe Marcil, now 17 and an employee of a men's clothing store in a Montreal suburb. "I understood from a young age that it was important to gain experience in the labor market, so I wanted to experiment with that," said the young man, who previously worked for two years as a supervisor at a fast food chain.

The avid hockey player and runner, who wants to become a lawyer, said he manages to find a balance between social life, work and studies by making "pretty precise schedules," which he tries to stick to as much as possible. Marcil, who is also very invested in school, has imposed a limit of 15 hours of paid work per week on himself, so his professional life does not encroach on his studies.

Charles Fleury, a sociologist and industrial relations professor at Laval University in Quebec City, said child labor "has always been somewhat pres-

ent in Quebec, especially if we compare to European countries." "Whether you are a child from a privileged or disadvantaged family, there is really this kind of validation of work as a demonstration of autonomy," he said. But what is new is that with the labor shortage, the type of jobs are changing. Today, teenagers are no longer content with babysitting, delivering newspapers or picking fruit on a farm.

And this is beginning to stir concerns: Quebec Minister of Labor Jean Boulet recently commented that he did not find it "normal" for 11-year-old children to be working and suggested that Quebec was considering legislation to better regulate the work of most youth. Elsewhere in Canada, minors are also allowed to work, but the minimum age and parental permissions required vary from province to province. Even if these teenagers decide on their own to enter the labor market, "there is still a risk of encouraging school failure and dropping out," Fleury warned. —AFP

## KFH launches new Al-Rabeh campaign

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched the new Al-Rabeh campaign for the year 2022 with more prizes and draws, which grant customers more chance of winning "weekly, monthly and quarterly". The campaign enables 536 customers to win during the year. The campaign is part of KFH's ongoing efforts to offer exceptional products and services that meet customers' aspirations, enhance the Bank's leadership in the local and global markets, as well as reflect its excellence in offering innovative banking solutions as per the highest quality standards.

The newly formed draws started in May 2022, under the supervision of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The Al-Rabeh account is a salary account available to customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts.

Customers can open Al-Rabeh account in any of KFH branches in Kuwait, or through the Bank's online channels. The account can be opened in the Kuwaiti Dinar and is targeted for customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Salary transfer is a prerequisite for customers to enter the draw provided that the transfer of salary to Al-Rabeh account is constant.

Regarding the terms and conditions of the prizes and draws, a customer is able to deposit 3 salaries during the 3 months prior to the draw, and the minimum balance of the account should not be less than KD 50 at the end of each month during the 3 months prior to the draw. Ten draws take place on a weekly basis for amount of KD 1,500 for 10 winners each. 1 KG of KFH gold will be drawn monthly for one winner and KD 25,000 for one winner every quarter, reaching a total number of 536 winners during the year.

KFH is keen to further meet customers' requirements and aspirations and their increasing needs as well as offer innovative and modern services, therefore achieving customer satisfaction, which is one of the fundamentals at KFH. The Bank has achieved a qualitative shift in the level of financial services by utilizing technology.

## Ultra-fast delivery firms face pandemic hangover

**PARIS:** By Joseph Boyle and Corentin Dautreppe with Glenn Chapman in San Francisco, Thomas Urbain in New York and Cat Barton in Seoul Prathamesh Jathar is one of many brightly dressed riders zipping through the streets of Berlin, dropping off groceries just minutes after the orders come in. The 25-year-old Master's student from Mumbai could be a poster-child for the multibillion-dollar "quick commerce" sector, but instead he symbolizes the malaise.

"Working conditions are terrible," he said, complaining that his employer, Turkish start-up Getir, fails to supply safety equipment or managerial support and did not tolerate unionisation-claims the firm denies. Worker discontent, a drop-off in investment and reduced demand all suggest a hard landing from the stellar growth of the pandemic era.

Millions turned to grocery delivery firms during pandemic lockdowns, and the firms gobbled up billions in venture capital and other investment. But Getir recently announced "with a heavy heart" it was letting go 14 percent of its global workforce—several thousand staff. German-based outfit Gorillas fired 300 people, with its boss in France, Pierre Guionin, telling AFP it was a necessary step "to be stronger and more profitable in the long term". The path to profitability, though, is beset by potential pitfalls.

"Some of these companies raised too much money and the valuations at which they raised make absolutely no sense," said Hendrik Laubscher, an analyst at Blue Cape Ventures in South Africa. Getir achieved a valuation of almost \$12 billion earlier this year. US start-up Gopuff was valued at \$15 billion. But rising inflation and slowing economic growth have sent investors fleeing from riskier tech investments and left many consumers facing a cost of living crisis. Smaller firms like Fridge No More and Buyk have gone to the wall, and analysts say some of the remaining platforms have burnt through cash in pursuit of customers and could face a tricky future. The rapid growth in customer numbers seems likely to end—almost one quarter of Europeans using ultra-fast delivery intend to reduce or end their use of such apps, according to a recent survey by McKinsey consulting firm. As competition intensifies and firms look for margins, online message boards are abuzz with complaints from staff with all the main platforms, and workers collectives have begun to spring up. —AFP

## Fashionable HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 launched in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Huawei Consumer Business Group (BG) launched the new HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 in Kuwait, the latest addition to its fashionable WATCH FIT series. Originally launched in 2020, the series encourages users to explore new types of exercise through a range of animated fitness courses, workout modes and scientific health tracking features. With its lightweight feel and sleek design, it ushered in a new era of smartwatch, challenging users to scale up their fitness with a device that is as fashionable as it is useful.

The HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 takes this perfect combination of fashionable flawless form and exceptional function to a whole new level. It is compatible with Huawei devices as well as other Android and iOS devices. The smartwatch is available in two Editions - Active Edition and Classic Edition. Huawei's latest smartwatch is available for purchase in Kuwait starting from KD 46,900 on Huawei's official website and select retailers.

### HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2

With its 1.74-inch HUAWEI FullView Display, it inherits the stylish DNA of the original HUAWEI WATCH FIT. Unlike previous iterations, HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 comes with a speaker, making it easy for users to accept calls via Bluetooth without even having to pick up their smartphone. The HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 also comes with a durable 10-day long battery life for a hassle-free and uninterrupted experience. The fitness animation and audio coach have been upgraded, while a host of health functions - monitoring everything from heart rate, to blood oxygen, to sleep - help users effortlessly keep track of their health every day.

### Fashion on your wrist

The design is smoother and sleeker than ever, feeling feather-light and comfortable on the wrist. The 1.74-inch display is 18.6% larger than the previous iteration, with 336 PPI and 336 x 480-pixel resolution providing rich and vivid colors, so it is easy to take in every detail at a glance. The display also features Huawei's new chessboard design, which allows users to zoom in and out, effortlessly and intuitively. Each edition of the HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 comes with a unique choice of colors.

HUAWEI WATCH FIT Active Edition continues the design of the previous generation, in Sakura Pink, Isle Blue, and Midnight Black; while the new HUAWEI WATCH FIT Classic Edition comes in Nebula Gray and Moon White. Users can choose straps in soft and comfortable silicone, or elegant leather, in different colors and styles. A press-to-release design makes

## Institute of Banking Studies honors KGDP graduates

**KUWAIT:** The Director-General of the Institute of Banking Studies, Prof Dr Yaqoub Alrefaei, honored the graduates of the Kuwaiti Graduates Development Program (KGDP) Group 9, which was held from September 6, 2020 until November 22, 2021. The program is part of the "Kafaa" initiative, launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and the management of the Institute of Banking Studies, which aims to enhance the banking sector's contribution to developing the capabilities of newly graduated Kuwaitis and qualify them to work in the banking sector.

In a speech delivered by Professor Alrefaei congratulating the participants on their graduation, and in the presence of those responsible for implementing the program from the Institute of Banking Studies, Professor Alrefaei urged the participants to benefit from the experiences they gained during their training on this distinguished program, and to make every effort to achieve the desired benefits from their training in their field of work.

The program is one of the best options for recent graduates wishing to work in the banking and financial sector, as it includes a variety of training and specialized materials in the banking and financial field, as they have acquired a high level of skill and knowledge in this field.

The annual organization of this program is facilitated by the continuous cooperation between the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwaiti banks within the framework of the social responsibility of the banking sector, and by building national cadres and competencies capable of supporting the development process in the State of Kuwait. It is implemented under the supervision and management of the Institute of Banking Studies with the support of the local Kuwaiti banks participating in it. A group of new Kuwaiti graduates are selected and employed in the banks, who train and qualify them to work in this important



them seamless to remove, so users can easily swap their strap to suit their mood or their outfit. The device also supports the one-hop watch face, allowing users to transfer images from their smartphone to the smartwatch with a simple tap.

### Smart living

HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 now comes with a speaker, in addition to the microphone. Calls can be pushed from users' smartphone to their smartwatch via Bluetooth, so they can chat on the go, wherever they are. They can also add frequently used contacts in the HUAWEI Health App, to make it easy to call loved ones. If users are not available to answer the phone, they can quickly reply in the form of a short message with one tap. The reply can be customized in the HUAWEI Health App, allowing users to always stay online and not miss anything important. Users can also reply quickly to messages via instant messaging apps from the watch itself.

### Long lasting battery

To ensure a comfortable and uninterrupted experience, the HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 features fast charging technology. With a 5-minute charge, the smartwatch can be used for 24 hours. Under typical usage scenario, the smartwatch can be used for 10 days, and 7 days in heavy usage scenarios.

### Technology for healthy living

Other than smart living, the HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 also offer new features, including the HUAWEI Health app, to make exercise management and health monitoring easy. The smartwatch also tracks a range of health data, with Huawei's upgraded HUAWEI TruSeen 5.0 heart rate monitoring technology accurately measuring users' BPM and blood oxygen saturation (SpO2); and the ability to track sleep patterns. The smartwatch

can analyse the different stages of each night's sleep, and identify a range of different sleep problems and offer solutions.

The Huawei Health App has a range of other ways to promote a healthy lifestyle. Users can use the Healthy Living Management, to create a unique wellness plan, including daily steps, water intake, workouts and more; which the app reminds them of every day, offering positive feedback to keep users feeling good about maintaining a healthy lifestyle. There is even a stand-up reminder with audio and animation, to help users remember to stay active throughout their day.

### Favorite music

The HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 supports offline music playback. You can play music directly from your smartwatch while working out and use an exclusive BGM (Back Ground Music) while running. You can also manage music playback through mobile apps, match different playlists to different sports, and enjoy your music anytime, anywhere.

### Brand new workout modes

The HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2 is packed with intelligent features specifically designed to help users work out anytime, anywhere; including 97 workout modes for everything from running and cycling, to weight training, dancing, ball games, winter sports and more. There's also a built-in animated fitness coach for 7 selected modes, offering easy-to-follow audio instructions and demonstrations - including warm-up and cool down - making it easy users to fit their workouts into their lives and track their progress as they go. Runners especially will love the HUAWEI WATCH FIT 2. It features Huawei's Running Ability Index (RAI), which analyses a user's height, age, weight, fitness and running experience to create a comprehensive training plan.



sector. They are trained for a full year before receiving their work duties, and this training includes several aspects and different applications, namely: theoretical and practical as well as field training, which provides participants with the opportunity to gain practical and professional experience, in preparation for their involvement in the field of banking, to be able to carry out the tasks entrusted to them with high efficiency. The certificate of this program is accredited by The London Institute of Banking & Finance (LIBF), which is one of the oldest international institutions in the field of banking and financial services, and this professional accreditation is not granted until after verifying that the entity that will obtain it follows the latest professional training techniques and methods.

One of the most important features of this program is that the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with local banks, appoints the trainees who have been selected in those banks and then works on enrolling them for a full year at the Institute of Banking Studies to receive intensive and vital training, which includes training in lecture halls with the aim of developing their basic skills and specialization in banking.

They are trained in the use of electronic learning, which is provided in cooperation with the most prestigious com-

panies specialized in this field. The program also includes field training in local Kuwaiti banks, with the aim of obtaining practical experience and linking theoretical aspects with practical reality. After that, the field training phase begins outside Kuwait, where participants are dispatched to many developed countries in the field of banking to be trained on the latest state-of-the-art technology in the banking and financial sector, with the aim of identifying external banking practices and gaining international experience. In view of the circumstances of the Corona pandemic, which prevented the ninth batch of trainees from traveling to complete the field training phase outside the State of Kuwait, the London Institute of Banking and Finance (LIBF) was hired to provide an intensive training program with a selection of international lecturers.

Professor Alrefaei also thanked His Excellency the Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Institute of Banking Basel A Al-Haroon, and the members of the Board of Directors of the Institute for their support of this program, as well as the directors of human resources in the participating banks, for their efforts and follow-up to achieve the success of its convening each year.

Lifestyle | Features

# Roman gate closed after bits of ancient stone fall off

Rome's ruins are such an integral part of the Eternal City that it can be surprising when sometimes bits of them fall off. Nobody was hurt after a few fragments fell early Tuesday morning from the Porta Maggiore gate, whose monumental double arches once provided a gateway through the third-century Aurelian Walls.

But the monument—which originally supported two of the city's aqueducts and is now located behind Rome's main train station—was temporarily closed off while it was checked, according to a statement from the city authorities. The fragments of tufa—a type of easy-to-cut rock used in Roman-era construction—fell off around 6:15 am, landing on a pavement “without

causing any damage to people or things”, it said.

“At first glance, there does not seem to be any further damage,” said the statement, which added that “the overall state of conservation of the monument is good”. Normal pedestrian and road traffic was not affected.

Residents have long complained about the state of monuments and roads in the city, which draws millions of tourists each year to see such wonders as the Colosseum. “We really need maintenance here in Rome,” said Veronica Rinaldin, 33, who works near the Porta Maggiore, which is often marred by overgrown weeds and garbage.

A police officer told AFP on condition of anonymity that tufa provided an excellent base for certain plants to grow, and their roots often split the stone. “It doesn't happen often. It happens if they are abandoned and neglected,” the officer said. — AFP



A view shows the cordoned off Porta Maggiore gate in Rome after a part of an arch fell off. — AFP

## No, Happy the elephant isn't a person, New York's top court says

As intelligent as she is, Happy the elephant doesn't meet the definition of a “person” and is therefore not being illegally confined in the Bronx Zoo, New York's top court ruled Tuesday in a closely watched case for animal rights. The state's Court of Appeals 5-2 verdict against the habeas corpus proceeding filed by the Nonhuman Rights Project (NRP) means Happy will remain in her one-acre lot, where she has lived for 45 years, rather than moving to a much larger sanctuary. NRP had contended Asian elephant, who was born in the wild in 1971, is an “extraordinarily cognitively complex and autonomous nonhuman” who should be “recognized as a legal person with the right to bodily liberty protected by the common law.”

It was the latest legal defeat for the organization, which has previously made similar petitions on behalf of other elephants as well as chimpanzees throughout the United States. The majority decision, written by Chief Justice Janet DiFiore, acknowledged “no one disputes that elephants are intelligent beings deserving of proper care and compassion.”

But she affirmed the decisions of lower courts that previously heard the case, writing: “Because the writ of habeas corpus is intended to protect the liberty right of human beings to be free of unlawful confinement, it has no applicability to Happy, a nonhuman animal who is not a ‘person’ subjected to illegal detention.” “Granting legal personhood to a nonhuman animal in such a manner would have significant implications for the interactions

of humans and animals in all facets of life, including risking the disruption of property rights, the agricultural industry (among others), and medical research efforts,” DiFiore added.

If such relief were granted to elephants, “What of dolphins or dogs? What about cows or pigs or chickens—species routinely confined in conditions far more restrictive than the elephant enclosure at the Bronx Zoo?”

Reacting to the news, NRP praised the two dissenting judges, and said their views, as well as the fact that the case was heard in New York's highest court, represented hope for the cause in the future. Justice Rowan Wilson wrote: “When the majority answers, ‘No, animals cannot have rights,’ I worry for that animal, but I worry even more greatly about how that answer denies and denigrates the human capacity for understanding, empathy and compassion.”

Wilson recalled the case of Ota Benga, a member of the Mbuti pygmy people who was kidnapped from Africa and placed on exhibit at the Bronx Zoo in 1906, attracting a quarter of a million visitors. Wilson said that while Benga was a human being and Happy was not, “The crucial point from both Mr Benga's and Happy's confinement... is that both suffered greatly from confinement that, though not in violation of any statutory law, produced little or no social benefit.”

DiFiore retorted that was “an odious comparison with concerning implications,” adding, “We are unpersuaded.” She concluded with the observation that enormous interest generated by the case was “a testament to the complicated and ever-evolving relationship between human beings and other animals,” but stressed that ongoing debate should be settled by legislation, not the courts. — AFP



## English bulldogs ‘suffering’, twice at risk of health issues

English bulldogs are twice as likely to get common health problems than other dogs, new research published Wednesday found, as vets urged people to look beyond the cuteness of flat-faced breeds to see that they are “suffering”. The hugely popular dogs are 38 times more likely to develop skin fold infections, 27 times at greater risk of a disorder called “cherry eye” and nearly 20 times more likely to have breathing problems than other dogs, the research found. Dan O'Neill of Britain's Royal Veterinary College, one of the authors of the study, emphasized that it is not the dogs' fault, saying they “often are truly lovely”.

“This isn't a dog problem, the dogs are suffering, this is a human problem,” he told AFP. The researchers took a random

sample of more than 2,650 English bulldogs and 22,000 other companion dogs that had veterinary care in the UK in 2016, collected from the database of the Royal Veterinary College's VetCompass project.

The study, published in the journal Canine Medicine and Genetics, found that English bulldogs have double the odds of having at least one common health disorder per year than other dogs. Research using VetCompass data earlier this year showed that English bulldogs have a life expectancy of 7.4 years, compared to the average of 11.2 years for other companion dogs.

There have also been recent studies using VetCompass data showing the health problems suffered by fellow flat-faced pugs and French bulldogs. Wednesday's study meanwhile found that English bulldogs were less likely to get some illnesses, such as dental disease, heart murmur and flea infestation.

But even these positives are likely connected to their extreme breeding, O'Neill said. Because bulldogs “have so many head and oral issues they salivate all the

time... that drooling might actually be helping their teeth because it's flushing out their mouth,” he said.

**Pricy pup**  
Sonia Saxon of the UK's Bulldog Breed Council said a big problem was

that many dogs were not being bred to the country's breed standard. Saxon, her bulldog Martha snoring gently at her side, told AFP from Britain that some English bulldogs were being bred to be smaller, or have different colors, as a way to market them as unique. “On social media they're

classing them as rare and charging 30,000 to 40,000 pounds (\$36,000 to \$48,000),” she said. “The more extreme, the more money they ask for.”

O'Neill, who worked as a vet for more than 20 years, said that simply banning English bulldogs would not solve the problem—the wider problem is “extreme conformation”. Conformation is how dogs are bred to conform with the expected standards of their breed. What needs to change is “our mental image of what a bulldog should look like,” he said.

“They can have longer noses, get rid of those skin folds, smaller heads—they can still be a bulldog, but not like the ones we have.” He told those considering buying a flat-faced breed to “walk a day-even an hour-in that dog's life”. “Every minute of every day, struggling to breathe. Every minute of every day with skin that is likely to be painful and infected because of all the folds,” he said. “Why not choose a puppy with good innate health,” he said, “as opposed to a puppy that is highly likely to have severe health issues?”



## Algeria's Sidi M'Cid suspended bridge: A marvelous architecture

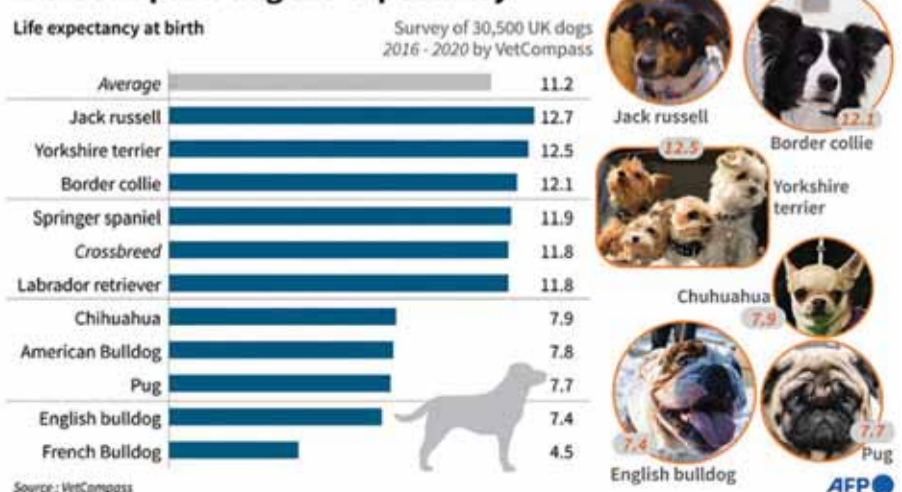
The Sidi M'Cid suspended bridge in Constantine, Algeria, is a marvelous piece of architecture that attracts visitors from near and far. The

bridge, designed by French Engineer Ferdinand Arnodin, began construction in 1909 and finished in 1912. It is 175 meters high from the ground and 186

meters in length. It weighs around 17 tons and is five meters wide. — KUNA



### A breed apart: dog life expectancy



## Lifestyle | Features



Visitors pose with cardboard cutouts of K-pop group BTS members for their souvenir photos at a tourist information center in Seoul. — AFP photos



A fan poses for photos during an exhibition of artwork on K-pop group BTS in Jakarta.



A fan takes a photo of artwork depicting V, a member of K-pop group BTS, during an exhibition of BTS-related memorabilia in Jakarta.

## EMOTIONAL BTS TELLS FANS THEY'RE TAKING A BREAK TO 'FIGURE THINGS OUT'

K-pop megastars BTS told fans they were taking a break from the supergroup to focus on their solo careers, citing exhaustion and the pressures of stratospheric success in an emotional video appearance. But the Grammy-nominated septet's label HYBE pushed back on Wednesday as their share price went into freefall, telling AFP that the pop juggernaut would still be working together. The seven members of BTS, credited with generating billions of dollars for the South Korean economy, dropped the bombshell on Tuesday, telling fans that they were "exhausted" and needed time apart.

"We're going into an off phase now," said Suga, 29, speaking Korean to his bandmates at a group dinner, a video of which was posted to the group's official YouTube channel. The clip included English subtitles, which used the word "hiatus", but HYBE quickly disputed that, saying group activities would not be suspended. "They will be doing team and individual projects simultaneously," a representative for the label, whose share price was down 27 percent early Wednesday, told AFP.

In the video, RM, 27, said they were "exhausted" and that they "didn't know what kind of group we were anymore."

"The problem with K-pop and the whole idol system is that they don't give you time to mature," he said, referring to South Korea's notoriously hard-driving music business model. "Somehow, it's become my job to be a rapping machine," he said, adding that this made him feel "trapped". "I wanted to shed that for a little bit, but the world wouldn't let me be." Jimin, 26, said the members are "slowly trying to figure things out now". "I think that's why we're going through a rough patch right now, we're trying to find our identity and that's an exhausting and long process."

### 'Overwhelming'

By the end of the dinner, several of the members of the group behind "Dynamite" and "Butter" had grown tearful as they voiced gratitude for their supporters, a fandom known online as the "ARMY". J-Hope, 28, said the group "should spend some time apart to learn how to be one again". "I hope you don't see this is a negative thing," the artist implored fans. "And see that it's a healthy plan." "It's not that we're disbanding—we're just living apart for a while," said Suga.

Jungkook, 24, said, "we promise we will return someday even more mature



A fan poses for photos during an exhibition of artwork on K-pop group BTS in Jakarta.

than we are now", and asked for the "blessing" of fans. ARMY's online reaction was tearful but supportive, with tens of thousands of comments quickly posted under the YouTube video. "I can't imagine how much pressure they felt these latest years. Being called the biggest band in the world, having all that responsibility... must be overwhelming," one fan wrote. "I really love how honest they are here," wrote another.

"They are also people like us. They get exhausted and worn out. They deserve to rest and enjoy what they love to do," the

commenter added. BTS has said they were going on short breaks before, first in 2019 and later in December 2021. The news comes just days after the group released "Proof", an anthology album that included a new single, "Yet To Come (The Most Beautiful Moment)". J-Hope, who is slated to headline Chicago's Lollapalooza on his own later this summer, said in the clip that time apart could help BTS "become a stronger group".

### 'Confusing'

BTS's label enjoyed a surge in profits

despite holding fewer concerts during the pandemic. But their messaging around the band's next steps was "confusing" and "not clear", Lee Moon-won, a K-pop culture commentator, told AFP. "It appears that they meant is BTS will continue their 'supplementary' group activities (such as on YouTube) while pursuing solo careers," he said, while not releasing music as a band. "It would have been more appropriate had the label first issued a statement clearly detailing what it would mean," Lee said, adding that it was a bad decision to have the band announce the development, which was sure to send fans into a tailspin.

BTS are the first all-South Korean act to reign over Billboard's US top singles chart, a milestone they achieved with "Dynamite", the first BTS song sung completely in English. They're also one of few acts since The Beatles to release four albums that hit number one stateside in less than two years. The group has twice been nominated for a Grammy but has yet to win. BTS recently made headlines for visiting the White House to deliver a message to President Joe Biden on the fight against anti-Asian racism. —AFP



In this file photo South Korean boy band BTS poses in the press room with their awards during the 2019 Billboard Music Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas.—AFP

## K-pop megastars BTS on 'hiatus': Five things to know

During a candid YouTube video showing them eating dinner while chatting in Korean, K-pop megastars BTS dropped a bombshell announcement on their global fans: the supergroup were taking a break. Their record label quickly clarified that the megastars would still work together, but the entertainers' emotional pleas for time off to focus on solo projects quickly won fan support online. Here's what we know about the group's decision:

### Who are BTS?

They've been called "icons of progressive globalism" and have been said to embody the 21st century zeitgeist, but at heart, they're just entertainers. The Grammy-nominated septet are the first all-South Korean act to dominate the US and UK charts, raking in billions of dollars and building a global fandom, known as ARMY, in the process.

Their embrace of social media meant they barely missed a beat during the pandemic, using direct engagement with fans online to cement their position as the world's biggest and most influential boy-band. Despite earlier breakthrough hits like Psy's Gangnam Style, BTS are also widely credited with bringing K-pop into the mainstream in the US.

### Have they split up?

Not exactly. The band, who are known to be extremely hard working and have maintained a relentless pace of new release in their nine years on top of the charts, said Tuesday they were "exhausted". "We're going into an off phase now," said Suga, 29, who confessed that he found writing lyrics to be a huge grind and no fun.

The English-language captions to their announcement video used the word "hiatus" but their label HYBE quickly pushed back, saying they would still work together, in addition to pursuing solo careers.

Member RM said the K-pop industry-known for its cut-throat competition-was not allowing him to mature as an artist,

saying he felt like a "rapping machine". The group told their fans they would take some time apart, but hoped to come back stronger and recharged.

### How long will it last?

Some experts have blamed South Korea's mandatory military service for the septet's break. All South Korean able-bodied young men under 30 must perform around two years of military service, largely thanks to nuclear-armed North Korea, with whom the South remains technically at war. The spectre of conscription has long hovered over BTS, with their seven male stars ranging in age from 24-year-old Jungkook to Jin, 29 — who must sign up by next year or risk jail time. Local media say the break may take as long as seven years if the septet decides to wait until all members to complete their military duties.

### So what's next?

In the YouTube video, band member Jin hinted that he might have some interest in pursuing an acting career. The band also announced that J-Hope—who is slated to headline Chicago's Lollapalooza on his own later this summer—will be the first member to release a solo album. But given the emotional video, the group's main aim seems to be to have time to learn about themselves, away from the K-pop industry. "Becoming an idol is a process of making a person into a commercial product," CedarBough Saeji, a professor at Pusan National University, told AFP. "BTS members are asking for time to explore who they are, not as a group and not as idols, but as individuals, after all the years of pressure to meet expectations of their huge fandom and their company and the world."

### What about their activism?

Aside from music, the band long championed global progressive causes, from the Black Lives Matter protests to anti-Asian racism in the United States. The group themselves have found themselves on the receiving end of racist mockery and jokes in western media. Jiyoung Lee, a professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, told AFP. This adds "symbolic meaning" to their campaigning against racism in the US, she added. And experts say their work on such issues is likely to continue. —AFP

## K-pop legends and kings of 'soft power': South Korea's BTS

Popstars, diplomats, activists: South Korean megastars BTS are like modern day Renaissance men, dominating the charts even as they represent their country and campaign for causes close to their heart, analysts say. The trailblazing boy band, who announced they would go on a break Tuesday, are credited with transforming the global music industry—the first all-Korean group to dominate the US and UK charts and build a truly global fanbase.

They've spoken at the United Nations and appeared at the White House to fight racism, while still remaining one of the most popular bands in the world on TikTok, Instagram and Twitter. There is "no one with greater global cultural power or soft power than BTS," Linda Hasunuma, a political scientist at Temple University, told AFP.

"They have more power to influence culture than any politician or celebrity," she said, pointing to their record-breaking social following. But at the height of their powers, the band said Tuesday that they were "exhausted" and would take a break, telling their fans that they needed time apart. "The problem with K-pop and the whole idol system is that they don't give you time to mature," member RM, 27, said, referring to South Korea's notorious-



In this file photo South Korean boy band BTS performs onstage during the KIIS FM's iHeartRadio Jingle Ball at the Forum Los Angeles in Inglewood, California. — AFP photos

ground hip hop scene for his rapping skills, while Jimin had been enrolled in an arts school in Busan, majoring in contemporary dance.

The group have since ascended to global superstardom, having been twice nominated for a Grammy and staging a string of sold-out shows in cities including London, Paris and Los Angeles. Their lyrics are socially conscious and they consistently and candidly engage with fans at home and abroad through social media, accumulating some 86 million followers on Twitter alone.

The band has become "an icon of progressive globalism," said Vladimir

think equality begins when we open up and embrace all of our differences." The group "has already exceeded the level of a famous pop star in some ways," Jiyoung Lee, a research professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, told AFP. "The symbolic meaning of them is believed to embody to some extent the zeitgeist of the present era."

### Cut-throat competition

Beneath its glitz and glamour, South Korea's K-pop industry is known for cut-throat competition and relentless public pressure to maintain a wholesome image at all times and at any cost. In Tuesday's YouTube video the members of BTS, credited with generating billions of dollars for the South Korean economy, candidly shared their struggles within the industry. "I don't have time to grow because I have to keep filming and keep doing something," RM said, referring to the team's busy work schedule.

Although the group are currently at the "very peak" of their success, RM said he "didn't know what kind of group we were any more." Member Suga confessed he's not had much fun writing lyrics since their debut in 2013. "It was always painful, always hard, and I had to squeeze something out," he said. Local media say the band could be on hiatus for up to seven years, given the members' upcoming mandatory military service in South Korea.

But experts say the group will not be forgotten. "Beyond their music, they've woven a multi-faceted story... bringing their messaging and story beyond just the elements typically associated with K-pop," author Tamar Herman said. "BTS do it in a way that is immensely relatable and resonates on a personal level with many across the world," Herman, who wrote "BTS: Blood, Sweat & Tears", told AFP. — AFP



In this file photo Korean band BTS appears at the daily press briefing in the Brady Press Briefing of the White House in Washington, DC, as they visit to discuss Asian inclusion and representation, and addressing anti-Asian hate crimes and discrimination.

ly hard-driving music business model.

### Relentless industry

Like almost all K-pop groups, BTS—or Bangtan Sonyeondan, which translates as Bulletproof Boy Scouts—were formed by an entertainment agency. Big Hit Entertainment assembled J-Hope, Jimin, Jin, Jungkook, RM, Suga and V through a combination of direct recruitment and auditions.

Local reports say the group—who are known to be relentlessly hardworking—went through intensive training ahead of their debut in 2013. Leader RM was already known in the South's under-

Tikhonov, professor of Korean Studies at the University of Oslo. "They are part of the entrepreneurial world, being managed by a for-profit agency and earning astronomical sums... But at the same time, they and their fans supported anti-racist movements," he said.

In 2020 they donated \$1 million to the Black Lives Matter movement, inspiring fans to contribute the same amount. And they spoke in Korean at the White House on May 31 seeking to raise awareness of anti-Asian racism in America—a phenomenon many blame on fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Member Suga appealed for tolerance, saying that "it's not wrong to be different. I

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo Boy band BTS arrive for the 61st Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles.



In this file photo (from left to right) V, Suga, Jin, Jungkook, RM, Jimin, and J-Hope of BTS, winners of the Favorite Pop Song, Favorite Pop Duo or Group, and Artist of the Year awards, pose in the press room during the 2021 American Music Awards at Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles, California.— AFP

Nine years at the top:  
The unstoppable  
rise of BTS

At the peak of their success, K-pop megastars BTS made an emotional announcement to fans: they were taking a break from the supergroup to focus on their solo careers.

The bombshell announcement late Tuesday night sent shockwaves through the septet's global fanbase, and caused the share price of their label HYBE to plunge, even as it pushed back, saying the band-mates would still work together. AFP takes a look back at the band's record-setting run to global superstardom:

2013 Debut

On June 13, 2013, BTS debuts as a seven-member boy band. The members-J-Hope, Jimin, Jin, Jungkook, RM, Suga and V-are selected through a combination of recruitment and auditions, and undergo intensive training before the group's launch.

2017 US breakthrough

Already stars in their native South Korea, the band sets their sights on the world's largest music market: the United States. They become the first K-pop act to perform on the televised American Music Awards.

2018 Billboard success

In a vivid illustration of the band's growing appeal, BTS becomes the first K-pop group to top the US album charts. In May 2018, the band led the Billboard 200 — which rank albums via sales, downloads and streams—with their album "Love yourself: Tear".

United Nations

As their cultural clout grows, BTS are invited to speak at the United Nations. They use the platform to tell young people to be themselves. Addressing a packed hall at the launch of a UNICEF youth campaign, group leader RM urges youth to "just speak yourself" regardless of their race, gender or identity.

2019 UK chart success

The band sets another record, becoming the first Korean act to top Britain's album chart with "Map of the soul: Persona". The milestone comes ahead of the group's two sold-out shows at London's famed Wembley Stadium.

First break

After topping charts in the US and Britain, BTS takes their first "long-term" break since their debut, citing a need to "recharge and refresh". But the band is back within weeks, with a tour that included a show in Saudi Arabia.

2020 'Hot 100'

In September 2020, BTS becomes the first South Korean act to dominate the top US singles chart, with their English-language hit "Dynamite" going to number one on the Billboard Hot 100. The achievement comes hours after BTS beat American musical heavyweights including Lady Gaga, Ariana Grande and Taylor Swift to score the Best Pop award at MTV Video Music Awards. The group goes on to top the US singles chart repeatedly with other songs including "Butter" and "Permission to Dance".

Grammy nominations

BTS become the first Koreans to receive a Grammy nomination. The group is nominated for best performance by a pop duo or group for its English-language hit "Dynamite", but fails to win. BTS is nominated again in 2021, but after being disappointed, Suga says: "I'm thankful there are still barriers and challenges we can try to work to overcome."

2021 Artist of the Year

BTS becomes the first Asian group to win Artist of the Year at the American Music Awards, the world's largest fan-voted awards show. The septet also scoops awards for Favorite Pop Duo or Group and Favorite Pop Song for their hit "Butter" at the glitzy ceremony in Los Angeles. The win marks the band's ninth AMA.

Second break

In December 2021, HYBE announces that BTS will take a "second official extended period of rest" in order to recharge and seek fresh inspiration. The band are quickly performing again, with a sold-out series of concerts in Seoul in March 2022, their first post-pandemic performances in their native land.

2022 White House

In June 2022, BTS visits the White House for a meeting with US President Joe Biden. The group uses the trip to call out growing anti-Asian hate crimes in the United States.

A new hiatus?

BTS announce they're taking a break from the group to focus on their solo careers in an emotional video appearance. Speaking to fans in a YouTube video marking the band's ninth anniversary, the members say they are "exhausted" and need time apart. Their label HYBE pushes back, saying BTS will be doing "team and individual projects simultaneously". — AFP

# No way around BTS break as military service looms: Analysts

Why would K-pop titans BTS decide to step back from their supergroup and focus on solo careers while at the pinnacle of their success? South Korea's mandatory military service, analysts say. Many of the group's fans-known as ARMY-were moved by the "exhausted" pop stars' emotional plea for time apart to grow, but analysts say there may be a more strategic reason behind the pending hiatus.

All South Korean able-bodied young men under the age of 30 must perform around two years of military service, mainly due to the fact that the country remains technically at war with nuclear-armed North Korea. The spectre of conscription has long hovered over BTS, with its seven male stars ranging in age from 24-year-old Jungkook to Jin, 29, who must sign up by next year or risk jail time. "The issue of military service was clearly involved in the announcement," Lee Moon-won, a K-pop culture commentator, told AFP, adding that it seemed clear the band did not want to continue making music unless all members were available.

Allowing the band members to focus on their solo careers was a "logical move", said Lee, as successive stints of military service look set to disrupt the septet's globetrotting schedule for the next several years. Other K-pop groups, such as Super Junior, have tried to continue performing and recording while some of their stars take enforced career breaks during active-duty service.

Exemption questions

South Korea grants exemptions from military service to some elite athletes, such as Olympic medalists, and classical musicians-but pop stars do not qualify. The lack of exemptions for BTS, who are credited with generating billions of dollars for the South Korean economy, sparked debate and even prompted a possible law revision.

But the draft bill went nowhere in parliament, and with mandatory service looming, the band made a "sensible decision to halt their group activity", Lee said. From K-pop stars like G-Dragon to Hallyu heartthrobs like Song Joong-ki, many South Korean male entertainers have performed their military service

and continued their careers after.

Who does-and does not-undertake military service is a highly-charged issue in South Korea and suspicions of evading active duty can sound a death knell for careers. One 1990s pop star, Steve Yoo, renounced his South Korean citizenship to avoid service but inadvertently torpedoed his career as his popularity plunged after he was seen as shirking his duty.

Refusing to serve is a crime, and can lead to imprisonment and social stigma, but even so some South Koreans go to extreme measures-trying to gain weight or having unnecessary surgery, for example-to evade service, AFP has reported. But BTS have not shown any signs of trying to evade the draft.

"As a South Korean young man, I believe military service is a natural course. And as I have always said, I will answer the country's call whenever it comes," Jin said in 2020. The group had already benefited from a 2020 revision to South Korea's conscription law, which moved the age limit for some entertainers to sign up from 28 to 30 years old. A majority of South Koreans — 59 per-

cent-favor expanding military service exemptions, but there is staunch opposition from young men who have already done it, local reports say.

Going solo

For BTS, who have been making music non-stop for nine years, it is likely that creative burnout is a factor in their decision to take time apart, Jeff Benjamin, Billboard's K-pop columnist, told AFP. Although the band have announced breaks before, this time feels more "significant" as all members will work independently on new projects, he said. All BTS members remain signed to their label until 2026, which "is key to keeping them together", Benjamin said.

"If they get the freedom to try new things creatively then it can help them come work together in a better place," he said. "I've always said that BTS' key to connecting in a larger way has been their honesty and openness, and this continues... even if this news feels more ominous." — AFP

## New Spider-Verse film 'tests limits of animation'

With more than 240 characters across six dimensions, the makers of "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse" are pushing animation and storytelling to their limits with the follow-up to their Oscar-winning hit. Early, unfinished images of the sequel-one of the most anticipated of 2023 — received a standing ovation at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival in France on Tuesday.

It once again centers on New York teenager Miles Morales, who is just one of several different forms of spider superhero spread across parallel dimensions. Like the first installment, 2019's "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse", it is set to be a demonstration of technical wizardry, with different visual styles used for each of the universes the superhero visits.

Among the scenes unveiled on Tuesday was a wildly impressive fight with a vampire in New York's Guggenheim Museum, with a heavily pregnant Spider-woman crashing into the scene on a motorcycle. Morales "has always been the core of it. But we didn't want to rest on our laurels and take the easy path," Kemp Powers, one of the film's three directors, told AFP.

The team feels the weight of expectation this time around. The first film was a sleeper hit, gradually building up steam thanks to strong reviews and audience reactions-ultimately winning the best animation Oscar. "It's very

ambitious-the idea was to push ourselves creatively and test the limits of what technology can do," said co-director Joachim dos Santos, while promising that the plot would still be comprehensible to everyone from "babies to grandparents".

The team is having particular fun creating new villain The Spot, to be voiced by Jason Schwartzman, whose body is a series of holes that look like a shape-shifting, unfinished drawing. "Animation is a wonderful medium because there's things you can only do with animation," co-director Justin Thompson told AFP.

"You couldn't imagine any live action medium being able to replicate what we're doing right now with The Spot in terms of his appearance, his movement, his interaction with multiple people at the same time... it would look so cheesy in live action, but it actually looks fluid in animation." While the directors enjoy escaping the limits of reality- "none of the film is bound by physics or gravity," said Powers-there are some unavoidable constraints.

"We take five or six years per film. We have large crews but no one can imagine how much time it takes to make only a few seconds," he said. "While our imagination has no limits-time is a limit." The film is due for worldwide release in June 2023 and a third installment is planned for the following year.

The creators are determined that both get a full theatrical release, especially after Powers had to see his previous film, Pixar's "Soul", go straight to streaming because of the pandemic. "We make these for the big screen, and these will be on the big screen, barring an alien invasion or a world war!" he said. — AFP



## 'Lightyear' banned in 14 markets after controversy

Disney's latest animation "Lightyear," which features a same-sex kiss, has been denied release in more than a dozen mainly Muslim countries, a source close to the company told AFP on Tuesday. Countries across Asia and the Middle East have refused to give Pixar's "Toy Story" spinoff a showing, in the latest development for parent company Disney as it tries to navigate differing public and political attitudes on LGBTQ issues. Regulators in the United Arab Emirates this week announced they were banning the movie for "violation of the country's media content standards," tweeting a picture of titular hero Buzz Lightyear in a red "No" symbol. Indonesia-the world's largest Muslim-majority country-said it had not banned the film, "but suggested the owner of the movie think about their audience in Indonesia where an LGBT kissing scene is still considered sensitive."

Rommy Fibri Hardiyanto, head of Indonesia's censoring office overseen by the Ministry of Education and Culture, told AFP that Disney has not offered a re-cut version of "Lightyear." In neighboring Malaysia, the Film Censorship Board said if cuts were not made the film would not be screened in the country.

"It is not appropriate to show the two scenes, and they are not suitable to be viewed by children," an official, who declined to be named, told AFP. Disney is understood to have declined to make any cuts, offering the film "as is" in all markets.

As a result, a total of 14 countries and territories where the company wanted to show "Lightyear" have not granted the film a release, AFP has learned. The others are: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Backstory

"Lightyear" tells the backstory of the main character from the hit franchise "Toy Story", an action figure who believes he is real. The film follows Buzz Lightyear-supposedly the astronaut adventurer that inspired the figurine-as he and his fellow space rangers crash land on a hostile planet.

One scene depicts Buzz's best friend Alisha Hawthorne kissing her wife. The scene was already the subject of controversy in the United States, where it had originally been cut from the final film. Pixar and Disney backtracked after employees called them out, saying one of the world's largest entertainment companies was not sufficiently committed to defending the rights of LGBTQ people.

The controversy came on the heels of a law adopted in Florida, where Disney employs some 75,000 people, which bans the discussion of sexual orientation in public schools. The company was initially silent on the measure. Under pressure from the public and his own employees, Disney CEO Bob Chapek eventually denounced the so-called "Don't Say Gay" law, but in doing so drew the ire of Republican lawmakers in the state.

Conservative politicians are now seeking to remove certain perks the company has long enjoyed. The episode has led to Disney becoming a whipping boy for right-wing media, where the name is shorthand for what they say is performative "wokeness." — AFP



## Sports

# Yorkshire charged by ECB over cricket racism row

## Bairstow's England heroics fuelled by IPL pressure

LONDON: Yorkshire and a "number of individuals" have been charged by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) following the governing body's investigation into how the county dealt with racism allegations made by former player Azeem Rafiq. The ECB did not name any of the people involved in a statement issued on Wednesday. The board said the charges arose from alleged breaches of the ECB's anti-discrimination code as well as rules concerned with the conduct of players and officials.

The governing body added an independent panel of the Cricket Discipline Commission (CDC) would now hear the cases, expected to take place in September and October. The ECB said it was standard practice for the CDC panel to publish its decisions and written reasons in full. Pakistan-born former off-spinner Rafiq first raised allegations of racism and bullying in September 2020, related to his two spells at Yorkshire.

It was not until a year later that the club finally released a statement saying the retired player had been the victim of "racial harassment and bullying", upholding seven of his 43 allegations. But the following month the club confirmed nobody would be disciplined, a decision that was greeted with widespread incredulity. Pressure mounted on Yorkshire, leading to a mass clear-out of senior boardroom figures and coaching staff at its Headingley headquarters.

Earlier this month, however, former Yorkshire coach Andrew Gale won a claim for unfair dismissal, leaving the club facing the prospect of paying out huge sums in compensation. The ECB had previously warned Yorkshire it was prepared to remove lucrative England international matches from Headingley unless the club made changes. But those games, including next week's third Test against New Zealand and a one-day interna-



Azeem Rafiq

tional against South Africa in July, are set to go ahead as scheduled after a package of governance reforms was approved.

### Bairstow's England heroics

Meanwhile, England's Jonny Bairstow says playing twenty20 cricket in the Indian Premier League has given him the tools he needed to launch his astonishing demolition of New Zealand in the second Test. The Yorkshireman powered England to a five-wicket victory at Trent Bridge on Tuesday, smashing 136 not out from just 92 balls, including 14 fours and seven sixes. In a sustained assault that was reminiscent of a T20 match, Bairstow's 77-ball century—the second-fastest Test hundred for England-enabled Ben Stokes's side to race to their target of 299 in just 50 overs.

Bairstow, 32, said arriving for the Test series hot on the heels of his spell with the IPL's Punjab Kings helped him put New Zealand to the sword. "There was

a lot of people that were saying I should not be at the IPL and I should be playing county cricket," he said. "Yes, people say it would be fantastic if you had four games of red-ball (first-class) cricket under your belt (before a Test series) but, unfortunately, that doesn't happen with the current scheduling of everything around the world.

"There are elements to it where you are playing against the best in the world at the IPL. Being able to have those gears, to be able to go and switch them up, switch them down, is important." Bairstow's Test career was in the balance when he went the whole of 2020 without a single five-day appearance despite remaining an important member of the limited-overs set-up.

But he has silenced his critics in recent months, scoring hundreds in Australia and the West Indies before Tuesday's blaze of glory. "I'm hugely proud of the fact that sometimes when the chips are down, you have to stand up, when you can say backs are against a wall," Bairstow said. "That might be something that you're born with, it might be something that you have deep down that springs out of you at those moments. But, for me as a cricketer, that's something I'm very proud of."

England's victory over New Zealand in Nottingham gave them an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series—their first series win since January 2021. Bairstow is one of several players who appear to have responded well to the new regime under captain Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum. "I'm extremely excited about what vision Ben and Brendon have, the way in which we're able to go about our cricket, the enjoyment that everyone's having on the field," he said.—AFP

where you just get thrown some adversity, and it's like, how are you going to handle it? "Those are the times, especially in a major, that I've learned I become a little impatient. I almost try to force the issue sometimes. That's how a lot of guys are going to end up losing the tournament."

### 'Small things' win majors

Reigning British Open champion Collin Morikawa says acceptance is the best sign of good mental attitude. "We're the best players in the world and we set ourselves to high standards. Sometimes when you don't perform to the way you want, you can get upset. It can be frustrating," the seventh-ranked American said.

"You just have to accept that you're going to hit bad shots. It's just how do you go through the process and make sure you're doing the right things leading up to the ball. "There are so many little things that aren't said or heard or no one else would know other than yourself, but that's the thing. It's the small things that really make a difference.

"That's what it takes to win majors." Top-ranked Masters champion Scottie Scheffler missed the cut at last month's PGA Championship but says he learned from it. "Mentally I could have been a little bit different approaching this shot," Scheffler said. "It's more stuff like that versus, 'I missed the cut, what am I doing out here?' "It was more just sitting back and saying, 'I could have been better mentally here and here.' Just little changes. It's nothing big."

Four-time major winner Brooks Koepka, the 2017 and 2018 US Open champion, says discipline is crucial to winning majors. "A lot of discipline," he said. "Whether that means laying up off tees just to hit fairways, missing in the correct spots, not being suckered into any pin locations even though it might be a go yardage for you or anything like that. "You're going to make a bunch of bogeys. Try not to make a double bogey. That has always been my big goal in majors. You get out of trouble, then get back in position. That's the key to US Opens." —AFP

## Mental toughness of golfers will get a workout at US Open

BROOKLINE: The mental fortitude of the world's finest golfers will be tested by unrelenting challenges and moments of adversity when the 122nd US Open starts Thursday at The Country Club. Defending champion Jon Rahm, who won his first major at oceanside Torrey Pines last year, seeks a repeat on a 7,254-yard layout at a 140-year-old urban club where golf has been played since the 1890s. "I always love coming to courses that were designed so long ago," Rahm said. "The uniqueness of the architecture from back then still stands."

But it's the usual formidable US Open set-up. "It's going to be long rough and firm and fast greens," said fifth-ranked American Justin Thomas. "It's old school." It is a mental toughness test as much as a shotmaking one. Spain's second-ranked Rahm said. "It's a US Open. You need everything," he said. "You need to drive well, hit your irons well, chip well and putt well and be mentally sane for four days. You can't hide. Period."

"Your biggest asset is mental strength out here and that's what you need. You're going to have a lot of holes where things are going to go wrong, but I just have to know going into it and accept certain things that happen. Par is a good score." Thomas, coming off his second major triumph at last month's PGA Championship, agrees that adversity will provide the true test of mental discipline.

"A lot of it is depending on how you're playing," Thomas said. "If you're cruising and everything feels good, you just basically keep doing what you're doing, stay focused and in the moment. "It's when things start going south or maybe you get a couple of bad breaks or some wind gusts, whatever it is, to



BROOKLINE: Alex Noren of Sweden plays a shot from a bunker on the tenth hole during a practice round prior to the 122nd US Open Championship at The Country Club on June 15, 2022.—AFP

## Impey wins 'special' Tour of Switzerland

PARIS: South African Daryl Impey said it was "special" to clinch the fourth stage of the Tour of Switzerland in a sprint finish on Wednesday a year on from breaking his pelvis and collarbone. Welshman Steve Williams, who won Sunday's opening stage, kept hold of the overall lead. Israel Premier-Tech's

Impey, 37, pipped Australian Michael Matthews and Dane Soeren Kragh Andersen after 190.8km of racing from Grenchen to Brunnen on the banks of Lake Lucerne.

Impey, who wore the Tour de France's yellow jersey for two days in 2013, claimed the 30th victory of his career. He spent almost five months away from competition after suffering the serious injuries in May 2021 and returning to minor races in Italy last October. "I'm ecstatic. It was a tough day. After everything that happened last year, I didn't know if I was going to get back on top of the step," Impey

### News in brief

#### Yoshida fires WCup warning

OSAKA: Captain Maya Yoshida warned Japan they will have no chance at the World Cup if they "fall apart after conceding one goal", following a sobering 3-0 home defeat to Tunisia. The four-time Asian champions ended an encouraging run of results on a sour note on Tuesday with a second-half collapse in Osaka. The experienced Yoshida gifted Tunisia a penalty in the 55th minute and made another defensive howler just over 20 minutes later as the visitors—who are also going to the World Cup—doubled their lead. A third Tunisian goal in injury time completed a miserable evening for Japan and Yoshida warned a repeat is likely to be fatal in Qatar, with Germany, Spain and Costa Rica their opponents in an ominous Group E this winter. "We have to learn our lessons from this game. The things we need to address are clear and we need to get to the bottom of them," said the 33-year-old Sampdoria defender.—AFP

#### PSG's Pochettino on brink

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain are close to confirming the sacking of coach Mauricio Pochettino, according to French media reports late on Tuesday. L'Equipe and Le Parisien reported that meetings had been held between lawyers for Pochettino and the club to come to an agreement that would see the Argentine leave the French capital. Pochettino, who was appointed in January last year and led the club to the Ligue 1 title in the season just ended, has another 12 months remaining on his contract. Le Parisien said that "the separation agreement has already been reached and there are only a few details still to be finalized". It is understood that sacking Pochettino would cost between 15 and 20 million euros (\$15.6m-20.8m) in severance payments to him and his backroom staff. PSG have already parted company with Brazilian sporting director Leonardo and replaced him with Portuguese super-scout Luis Campos in the role of football advisor.—AFP

#### Apple, MLS seal deal

NEW YORK: Major League Soccer and Apple TV announced a 10-year media rights agreement on Tuesday worth a reported \$2.5 billion that will see every single MLS game broadcast from the 2023 season onwards. "Apple is the perfect partner to further accelerate the growth of MLS and deepen the connection between our clubs and their fans," MLS Commissioner Don Garber said in a statement. The new agreement will see MLS games made available on Apple TV+ via an app. Season ticket-holders for MLS clubs will be able to access the app for free. "For the first time in the history of sports, fans will be able to access everything from a major professional sports league in one place," said Eddy Cue, Apple's senior vice president of Services. "It's a dream come true for MLS fans, soccer fans, and anyone who loves sports. No fragmentation, no frustration — just the flexibility to sign up for one convenient service that gives you everything MLS, anywhere and anytime you want to watch." —AFP

#### Crusaders' Matera cleared

WELLINGTON: Canterbury Crusaders forward Pablo Matera was cleared on Wednesday to play in the Super Rugby Pacific final against the Auckland Blues in a major boost for the 10-time champions. Argentina captain Matera successfully defended his case after accumulating four yellow cards across the season, triggering an automatic Sanzaar judicial committee hearing for repeat sin-bin offences. It found there was "no pattern of persistent offending" in the 28-year-old's playing style, leaving him free for selection in Saturday's decider at Auckland's Eden Park. Matera picked up two yellow cards, resulting in a sending off, in the Crusaders' 20-7 semi-final win over the Chiefs. His availability is critical, given the Christchurch-based side are without the services of injured All Blacks loose forward Ethan Blackadder and are awaiting the diagnosis of the thumb injury which ruled Test veteran Sam Whitelock out of the semi-final.—AFP



KANDY: Australia's Marcus Stoinis plays a shot during the first one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Sri Lanka and Australia at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy on June 14, 2022.—AFP

## Australia's injury woes deepen as Stoinis ruled out

PALLEKELE: Australia's injury woes in Sri Lanka deepened Wednesday with all-rounder Marcus Stoinis ruled out of the rest of the ODI series and spinner Ashton Agar also joining the wounded list. Fast bowler Kane Richardson has already flown home with a hamstring problem and Mitchell Starc, Sean Abbott and Mitchell Marsh are also out of action and Cameron Green not fit enough to bowl.

Stoinis strained his side smashing 44 off 31 in Tuesday's two-wicket win in Pallekele and Cricket Australia said Wednesday that the 32-year-old will play no further part in the five-match series. Agar also got hurt as he took two wickets but "will remain with the squad to continue to rehabilitate and ongoing assessment," a statement said. Batsman and part-time spinner Travis Head and left-arm spinner Matthew Kuhnemann, currently playing a four-day Australia A match in Hambantota, will join the ODI squad on Thursday.

Speaking before the announcement, Test skipper Pat Cummins—who played his first ODI in 18 months on Tuesday—said that Australia still have "plenty of options". "All the planning was going to be for a perfect preparation, we had the Aussie A team over here, a big squad, but there were always going to be things that crop up." Cummins said on the eve of the second one-day international.

"It's not ideal, the amount of injuries, but we will strike that balance," said the 29-year-old Cummins. "Scott Boland has come in, hopefully Starc (Mitchell Starc) will be back soon, Mitch Marsh back bowling, Cam Green back bowling," Cummins said. "It feels like we still have plenty of options." After the ODI series Australia are also due to play two Tests in Sri Lanka in Galle from June 29.

"National selectors will continue to monitor the squad through the ODI series before deciding if any changes need to be made ahead of the two Test matches in Galle," Cricket Australia said. Asked about a new \$6.2 billion mega-deal for the broadcast rights for the Indian Premier League, Cummins said it was "great for the game". "It shows millions and millions of fans are out there that love watching cricket," said Cummins, who played for Kolkata Knight Riders in the recently concluded IPL.—AFP

Sports

# England suffer worst home defeat in 94 years; Southgate 'chastened'

## Depay grabs Dutch thrilling victory over Wales in Nations League

**WOLVERHAMPTON:** England manager Gareth Southgate accepted responsibility for the Three Lions' worst home defeat since 1928 as Hungary stormed to a 4-0 win in Wolverhampton on Tuesday. Southgate's men are staring at relegation from the top tier of the Nations League after a fourth consecutive game without a win. But he called for fans to stand by his players ahead of the World Cup in five months' time.

"I totally understand tonight is a chastening experience," said Southgate who was the target for most of the anger coming from the stands at Molineux. "What I would say is this group of players have been unbelievable for the country and it's important people stay with them because they are still going to be strong going forward."

England surpassed all expectations to reach the semi-finals of the 2018 World Cup and backed that up by reaching the final of a major tournament for the first time in 55 years at Euro 2020 last summer. "It's no time to panic," said England captain Harry Kane, who dismissed any suggestion that Southgate should be sacked. "It was a night to forget but we've got to take it on the chin. We've got to move forward. We are preparing for a big World Cup and that's the most important thing."

### England toothless

Hungary secured their first win over England for 60 years in Budapest 10 days ago and followed that up with their first victory on English soil since a famous 6-3 success at Wembley in 1953. A double from Roland Sallai and late goals from Adam Nagy and Daniel Gazdag kept Marco Rossi's side on course to reach the Nations League finals next year.

Hungary are not headed to the World Cup after they finished a distant fourth behind England in their qualifying group.

But they lead Germany by a point in Nations League Group A3, with European champions Italy a further point behind with two games to go. England are three points adrift at the bottom of the section and need a revival in September away to Italy and home to Germany to avoid relegation. However, of greater concern for Southgate is how he rallies his squad with just two more matches before their World Cup campaign kicks off against Iran on November 21.

Fatigue at the end of a long season that began just weeks after losing the Euro 2020 final to Italy has been blamed for England's lacklustre form. Southgate has rotated his side heavily over the four matches this month and admitted his decisions have backfired. "The results are my responsibility," added Southgate. "We picked a young team with energy and when the game started to go against them, it started to look that way."

"That's my responsibility in the end. I felt at half-time we needed to go for the game. We made changes to have a more attacking impetus, but then we were more open as well." Southgate has bemoaned a reliance on Harry Kane and Raheem Sterling for goals and Kane's penalty remains the only goal they have scored in four games this month. However, there are also major defensive issues for Southgate to address before the World Cup. John Stones rounded off a miserable evening when he was harshly sent off for a second yellow card eight minutes from time.

The Manchester City centre-back was also at



**WOLVERHAMPTON:** Hungary's midfielder Roland Sallai (center) celebrates after scoring their second goal during the UEFA Nations League, league A group 3 football match between England and Hungary at Molineux Stadium on June 14, 2022. —AFP

fault for the opening goal as he turned a free-kick into Sallai's path, whose shot had too much power for Aaron Ramsdale. Sallai produced another deadly finish to double Hungary's lead 20 minutes from time when he latched onto Martin Adam's inch-perfect

pass to fire in between Ramsdale's legs. Nagy drilled home a powerful shot from the edge of the area to put the result beyond any doubt. Stones was then given his marching orders before Gazdag broke clear to rub salt into England's wounds. —AFP

## Prosecutor calls for suspended sentence for Blatter, Platini

**BELLINZONA:** The Swiss prosecutor's office on Wednesday demanded a 20-month suspended jail sentence for Michel Platini and ex-president of FIFA Sepp Blatter, accusing them of defrauding football's governing body. Blatter and Platini are being tried over a two-million-Swiss-franc (\$2 million) payment in 2011 to the former France captain, who by that time was in charge of European football's governing body UEFA.

The prosecutor's demand is more lenient than he could have asked for—a maximum of five years in prison if found guilty. "Only their behavior with regard to criminal law counts," said prosecutor Thomas Hildbrand, leaving out any link to football politics. The prosecution accuses Blatter of having signed off an invoice for two million Swiss francs presented to FIFA by Platini in 2011, almost nine years after the end of his work as Blatter's adviser.

Giving evidence at the start of the trial last

week, Blatter said he had struck a "gentleman's agreement" with Platini to pay him the money. Platini was employed as an adviser to Blatter between 1998 and 2002. They signed a contract in 1999 for an annual remuneration of 300,000 Swiss francs, which was paid in full by FIFA. But they claimed that they had agreed to pay an additional 700,000 annual francs when the finances of the organization would allow it.

Hence Platini presented an invoice for two million Swiss francs at the beginning of 2011, signed by Sepp Blatter and presented to FIFA as an outstanding part of the salary. Hildbrand said on Wednesday in his four-and-a-half hour discourse that agreeing on such a sum without a written record, without witnesses and without provisioning it in the accounts was "contrary to commercial practices" as well as the habits of FIFA.

He also dismissed the claim the signed invoice was for back pay arguing that FIFA's finances were healthy enough in 1999 - it "would have had more than 21 million francs in reserves" and which had ballooned to 327 million in 2002. Hildbrand said there was no reason for the delay, adding that Blatter "had perfect knowledge" of FIFA's solvency. "When a chameleon feels threatened, it changes color: Blatter does the same thing," said



Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter

Hildbrand. The trial follows an investigation that began in 2015 and lasted six years.

The case is due to run until June 22 with both FIFA—a civil party in the trial—and the defence both due to lay out their closing arguments. The Federal Criminal Court of Bellinzona will deliver its decision on July 8. Platini, 66, is regarded among world football's greatest-ever players. He won the Ballon d'Or, considered the most prestigious individual award, three times in the mid-1980s. Blatter, now 86, joined FIFA in 1975 and became the president of world football's governing body in 1998. —AFP

## La Liga files complaints against City and PSG

**MADRID:** La Liga confirmed on Wednesday it has filed complaints to UEFA about Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City "continuously breaching the current regulations of financial fair play". La Liga said the complaint to UEFA against City was made in April while the complaint against PSG was filed "this week". The Spanish league insisted it will continue to ramp up legal action against the two state-backed clubs.

La Liga has hired legal firms in France and Switzerland "with the aim of undertaking adminis-

trative and judicial actions before the relevant French bodies and the European Union as soon as possible", read a statement from the league. And in Switzerland, La Liga is "studying different representation options" to investigate the "possible conflicts of interest" of Nasser Al-Khelaifi, who is PSG chairman, in charge of Qatar-owned BeIn Sports, leads the European Club Association and sits on UEFA's executive committee.

Manchester City won the race to buy Erling Haaland from Borussia Dortmund after paying the striker's £51 million (\$63 million) release clause but the deal, including salary and agents fees, could reportedly exceed £250 million. And PSG will pay Kylian Mbappe a yearly salary of between 40 and 50 million euros, after the Frenchman chose to reject Real Madrid and sign a new three-year contract with the Qatari-owned club.

PSG suffered a 224.3-million-euro (\$240m) loss

in 2020/21, an increase of 80 percent on the previous year, the annual report from French football's financial authority (DNCG) said earlier this month. "La Liga considers that these practices alter the ecosystem and the sustainability of football, harm all European clubs and leagues, and only serve to artificially inflate the market, with money not generated in football itself," the Spanish league's statement read.

"La Liga understands that the irregular financing of these clubs is carried out, either through direct injections of money or through sponsorship and other contracts, that do not correspond to market conditions or make economic sense." La Liga continuing fight against state-owned clubs - La Liga has been accused of sour grapes after Mbappe decided against playing in Spain, although the Spanish league and its president, Javier Tebas, have long rallied against the financial might of the state-owned clubs. —AFP

## Brilliant Germany equal biggest win over Italy

**BERLIN:** Germany equalled their biggest ever win over European champions Italy as Timo Werner scored twice in a thumping 5-2 Nations League victory on Tuesday. The result in Muenchengladbach matched the Germans' 5-2 triumph over the Azzurri at Berlin's Olympic Stadium back in 1939. Germany captain Manuel Neuer said the result was an "important milestone" for the hosts. "You could tell today that we wanted to dominate," he said.

An early goal by Joshua Kimmich and Ilkay Gundogan's penalty at Borussia Park put Germany 2-0 up before the floodgates opened early in the second half. Thomas Mueller scored his 44th goal for Germany on his 116th international appearance before Werner scored twice in quick succession. Italy's consolation goals came late on through 18-year-old striker Wilfried Gnonto and Alessandro Bastoni. "We played really good football at times and deserved to win," said Gundogan. "If we play like we did today, many teams will have a hard time against us."

The result sees Germany move second in Group A3 as previous leaders Italy dropped to third, with Hungary top after a shock 4-0 win over England in Wolverhampton. Germany could only scramble a 1-1 draw thanks to a late Kimmich goal when the sides last met in Bologna in early June, but this was a vastly improved performance. Italy coach Roberto Mancini paid the price for making nine changes from the team which drew with England last weekend as only Gianluigi Donnarumma and David Frattesi kept their places in an experimental side.

German coach Hansi Flick made five alterations to the team which drew with Hungary in Budapest last Saturday as Gundogan seized his chance on his return. The Manchester City star bossed the Italian midfield, creating more space up front. Germany took the lead when Werner and Hoffenheim's David Raum combined to set up Kimmich, who fired in on 10 minutes. Italy conceded again just before half-time when Bastoni brought down Jonas Hofmann and Gundogan swept the resulting penalty past Donnarumma. —AFP

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

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

### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

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### CHANGE OF NAME

Banswara (Raj.) (C 0870)

I have changed my name from SAIFUDDIN RAJAB ALI to SAIFUDDIN RAJAB ALI TAKDIR. In future I should be known by my new name. My Passport No. L3441234 & Civil ID No. 275010184475. Address: SAIFUDDIN RAJAB ALI TAKDIR R/o Sailyypura, Nai Abadi,

My son Vemula Jesse Aarush S/O Vemula Sagar House No. 1-3/1, Rudraram, Ramadagu, Karimnagar, Telangana, India, pincode: 505531. We have changed my son name to Vemula Aarush for future use as per birth certificate. Hawally, Kuwait. (C 2011)

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DOHA: The official poster of Qatar's FIFA World Cup is unveiled at Hamad International Airport in Doha on June 15, 2022. —AFP

## Qatar to house fans in 'traditional tents'

### Official poster unveiled for World Cup 2022

DOHA: Qatar hopes to house some of the 1.2 million fans expected to attend the FIFA World Cup later this year in 1,000 "traditional tents", organizers said on Tuesday. "This is one of the options that will go live in the next two weeks," said Omar Al-Jaber, an official responsible for accommodation at the supreme committee organizing the tournament. "It is real camping," he said during a press briefing. "We need to give people the experience of a desert and tent in normal Bedouin style." The tents will be supplied with water, electricity and drainage systems, but no air conditioning in the country known for extreme summer heat but moderate winters.

Held from November 21 to December 18, the World Cup will be the first staged during the northern

winter to avoid summer temperatures that at times surpass 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit). Another luxury camp with 200 tents is also planned for football fans visiting the gas-rich Gulf country. They will be set up along a beach called the Sealine in the country's south, on the edge of the desert, with other areas also to be announced, Jaber said.

He added that "more than 100,000 rooms" will be available at the time of the tournament, seeking to allay concerns over accommodation capacity in the tiny emirate. Fans will be able to choose between taking up residence in specially designated villages, as well as apartments, villas, cabins and two cruise ships. A large portion of the country's hotel rooms have already been pre-booked by organizers for the teams, referees and the

press, but FIFA will release any unused rooms, Jaber said.

He added that there are more hotels under construction, vowing that more rooms would become available in the coming months. A peak in bookings is expected on November 25-27, to coincide with the midpoint of the group stage, but "it does not mean that we don't have rooms on those days", he said. More than 160 round-trip flights are scheduled daily from neighboring Gulf countries to allow them to accommodate supporters.

#### Official poster

In another development, the Official Poster is on display at Hamad International Airport, where it will remain at Gate D18 throughout the FIFA World Cup 2022. Everyone will have the chance to see the poster as

they travel from and transit through Qatar. This series of eight posters were created through close collaboration with prominent Qatari artist Bouthayna Al Muftah. The artworks combine to convey the values and messages of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 in a subtle, unique and relevant way - while remaining closely connected with local culture and heritage.

The main poster focuses on the football itself, featuring the agal - a traditional head piece worn in Qatar - alongside typography expressing the voices of a cheering crowd. Just like the beautiful game, the artist's approach is raw and emotive, packed with palpable movement and energy. This approach aims to create a dialogue with fans - igniting all their senses. —Agencies

## Taiwan slams Qatar WCup over 'unfriendly' labeling

TAIPEI: Taiwan on Wednesday demanded organizers of the FIFA World Cup in Qatar correct an official fan identification card which labels its citizens as Chinese, and urged that politics be kept out of sports. The "Hayya" fan ID card acts as a visa to enter the country and a pass to access stadiums. But neither Taiwan or "Chinese Taipei"-the name used for the island in international sports events-are listed on the online portal as options. China claims self-ruled, democratic Taiwan as part of its territory, a stance Taipei firmly rejects.

The island lives under the constant threat of invasion by China, which Beijing has vowed to retake one day, by force if necessary. Taiwan's foreign ministry said it has demanded that organizers in Qatar correct its "unfriendly" and "improper" measures against Taiwanese fans, said spokeswoman Joanne Ou in a statement. "We again urge the World Cup organizers not to allow improper political factors to interfere in a pure sports event ... to let sports be sports and return a clean World Cup to global fans," she said.

The issue of Taiwan's name has cropped up in nearly every major global sporting event, as authoritarian China baulks against even the merest signal of the island's sovereignty. The sporting world's use of the name "Chinese Taipei" is based on a 1981 compromise made with the International

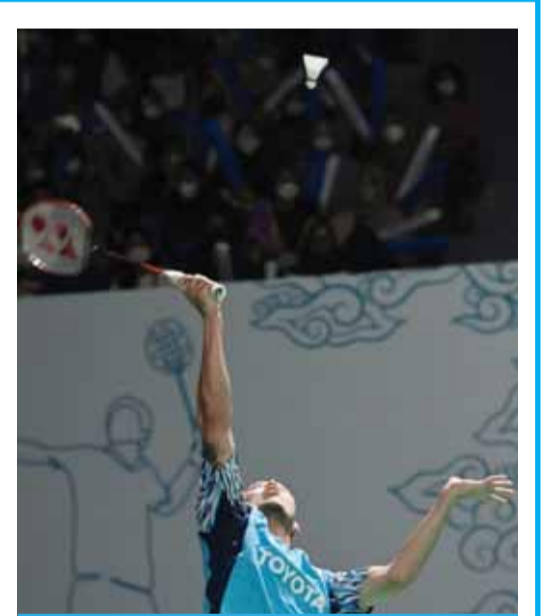


SUITA: This picture shows the official FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 footballs called 'Al Rihla.' —AFP

Olympic Committee to allow Taiwan to compete on the international stage.

Hayya program chief Saeed Al-Kuwari told reporters he "believed" the card system would list China for the nationality of Taiwanese passport holders. He said fans should follow the country designation provided when the application reads

the fan's passport, rather than try to select a nationality. Organizers have insisted that all nationalities will be welcomed to the tournament. Qatar is expecting more than one million fans to visit during the World Cup, which runs from November 21 to December 18, and all must register for the ID card. —AFP



JAKARTA: Siththikom Thammasin of Thailand hits a return against Lee Zii Jia of Malaysia during their men's singles qualifying round at the Indonesia Open badminton tournament in Jakarta. —AFP

## Badminton world No 2 bows out of Indonesia Open

JAKARTA: Badminton world number two Kento Momota bowed out of the Indonesia Open 2022 after losing against Denmark's Rasmus Gemke in the first round of the tournament on Wednesday. The 25-year-old Gemke, currently ranked 13th in the world, beat Japan's Momota 21-19, 19-21, 21-14 in an 82-minute match at the Istora sporting arena in Jakarta.

"I'm disappointed because I made so many mistakes today," said Momota after the match. "I will do much more practice to get a better result for the next tournament." Momota, a former world number one now ranked second behind Denmark's Viktor Axelsen, has failed to rediscover his scintillating top form after being badly injured in a career-threatening car crash in January 2020. He also lost his opening match in the Thailand Open last month and failed to get past the quarter-finals at the prestigious All England championship.

In the other men's singles matches, world number four Chou Tien-chen from Taiwan defeated Thailand's Kunlavut Vitidsarn 22-20, 19-21, 21-12, while Indonesia's Jonatan Christie won against Thailand's Kantaphon Wangcharoen 22-20, 21-8. In women's singles, world number two Tai Tzu-ying advanced to the next round after outplaying Singapore's Yeo Jia Min 21-14, 21-14 in a 30-minute match. Meanwhile, top seed Ratchanok Intanon of Thailand also secured a place in the next round after defeating compatriot Pompaewee Chochuwong 21-17, 21-17. —AFP