

7 One killed as gunmen storm Sikh temple in Afghan capital



8 WTO strikes landmark deals package after marathon talks



11 RIP Internet Explorer: South Korean engineer's browser 'grave' goes viral



16 Curry, Warriors storm to seventh NBA crown



'Loose laborers' aplenty, but nationality quotas unlikely

Crackdowns continue to arrest residency law violators, wanted people

KUWAIT: A government team that was commissioned to study the population structure said it is unlikely to accept parliamentary proposals to set a quota for each expat community in Kuwait. It said such a plan is difficult to implement, as some nationalities still have security restrictions against their entry in the country, in addition to the large numbers of some communities. The local market's dependence on them makes it difficult to reduce their population

overnight; rather this needs many years. A report by the team included several recommendations, most important of which is to reduce the numbers of large communities by 100,000 every two to three years, starting with unskilled workers such as vendors, taxi drivers and those working elsewhere other than their official sponsors.

The study showed that a decrease of 120,000 workers in the marketplace during the pandemic does

not mean a remedy of the demographic imbalance, because the exodus was random and included specialists. It also resulted in making the position of "loose laborers" stronger, in addition to complaints by some sectors about a shortage of workers they need, which led to an increase in wages.

Meanwhile, efforts are being made to arrest more than 150,000 residency law violators who do not want to leave the country despite the many opportu-

nities given to them to leave without punishment or fines. The interior ministry has included Abdaly, Wafra and Kabd in their plans to crack down on loose and absconding laborers. The campaigns will be launched soon, without setting a date to ensure the surprise factor. Sources said the three areas, where mostly farm workers and shepherds work, are full of wanted individuals, and there is a need for warrants in case farms need to be entered and searched.

Kuwait celebrates 61st anniversary of independence

KUWAIT: June 19, 1961 has always been engraved in hearts and minds of the Kuwaiti people. It was the day Kuwait announced its independence and sovereignty as an Arab nation. The historic day marked the beginning of modern Kuwait. It was the day when the declaration of independence was signed and the protectorate treaty with the British government ended, the first step towards prosperity and development.

The late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah realized that the protectorate treaty, signed by Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah in 1899, was not valid anymore because of the development of the political and economic conditions in Kuwait. The first independence anniversary was held in 1962,



KUWAIT: The late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah signs the independence document on June 19, 1961. — KUNA

and a decree was signed on May 18, 1964, which merged the national day with the day on which Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem assumed office (February 25). Celebrations have been held on this day since 1965. — KUNA (See Page 2)

Italian adventurer stops in Kuwait on Vespa world tour

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Since 2017, Italian adventurer Ilario Lavarra has been on a non-stop solo trip on his Vespa scooter through 93 countries. Lavarra, 40, who was born in Milan and studied economics, believed following his passion for travel and discovery was worth giving a try. Kuwait Times spoke to Lavarra, who arrived in Kuwait in June 2022 on his Vespa Granturismo, to learn more about his epic journey. 'I was supposed to stay in Kuwait for three days, but it has been more than a week now. I want to stay longer because I met good people here,' he said. (See Page 3)



KUWAIT: Italian adventurer Ilario Lavarra stands on his Vespa in front of the Kuwait Towers.

Zionist entity strikes Hamas sites in Gaza

JERUSALEM: Zionist warplanes hit Hamas military sites in the Gaza Strip on Saturday in retaliation for rocket fire from the Palestinian enclave run by the Islamist movement, the Zionist army said. After the strikes, balls of flame shot into the air, leaving dark smoke drifting over the territory. Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said the air raids, in the southeast of Gaza City, "are an extension of the aggression against Palestinian territory in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank," after the killing of three

Palestinians on Friday.

Twelve Palestinians were also wounded in that same incident during a Zionist army raid in Jenin, a stronghold of armed Palestinian factions in the West Bank. The men were killed when Zionist forces opened fire on their vehicle, the Palestinian news agency Wafa said. The Zionist army said soldiers had come under fire during an operation to search for weapons. One of the dead was a Hamas commander, the group said, vowing that the killings "will not go unpunished".

Qassem made no mention of whether Saturday's air strikes caused any casualties. The Zionist army said hours earlier that air raid sirens sounded in the southern Zionist city of Ashkelon and in areas near the blockaded Gaza Strip.

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: Fire erupts following a Zionist airstrike south of Gaza City on June 18, 2022. — AFP



SAMAWAH, Iraq: This handout photo dated May 27, 2022 shows rhin gazelles that died of malnutrition and lack of care at the Sawa wildlife reserve. — AFP

Gazelles dying of hunger in parched Iraq

SAMAWAH, Iraq: Gazelles at an Iraqi wildlife reserve are dropping dead from hunger, making them the latest victims in a country where climate change is compounding hardships after years of war. In little over one month, the slender-horned gazelle population at the Sawa reserve in southern Iraq has plunged from 148 to 87. Lack of funding along with a shortage of rain has deprived them of food, as the country's drought dries up lakes and leads to declining crop yields.

The elegant animals, also known as rhin gazelles, are recognizable by their gently curved horns and sand-colored coats. The International Union for Conservation of Nature classes the animals as endangered on its Red List. Outside Iraq's reserves, they are mostly found in the deserts of Libya, Egypt and Algeria but are unlikely to number "more than a few hundred" there, according to the Red List. — AFP (See Page 13)

Biden falls from bike but unhurt

REHOBOTH BEACH, Delaware: US President Joe Biden took a tumble as he was riding his bicycle near his beach home in the state of Delaware Saturday morning, but was unhurt. A video from a White House pool report showed the 79-year-old president immediately getting up after his fall. He then says: "I'm good."

He was biking with First Lady Jill Biden in a state park near their beach home in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware and had stopped to talk to onlookers when he fell. The presi-

dent told a small crowd of well-wishers and reporters that he had lost his balance as he tried to pull a foot out of a bike clip.

The result: "a mad scramble of Secret Service and press," a White House pool report said, adding there were no visible scrapes or bruises from the fall. "No medical attention is needed," a White House official said. "The President looks forward to spending the rest of the day with his family."

As the oldest US president, Biden's health is the subject of constant attention, particularly as speculation rises on whether he will seek a second term in 2024. In Nov 2020, shortly after his election but before taking office, Biden broke a foot while playing with his pet German shepherds.

Continued on Page 6



REHOBOTH BEACH, Delaware: US President Joe Biden falls off his bicycle as he approaches well-wishers following a bike ride at Gordon's Pond State Park on June 18, 2022. — AFP

Local

local spotlight

Administrative
deportation

By Atyab Al-Shatti

local@kuwaittimes.net

Administrative deportation is a decision taken by an authority to permanently expel an expatriate from Kuwait without the need to support it with legal grounds or investigations. The decision is taken under the sole discretion of the administration.

A deportation decision can be either imposed by a public authority, known as administrative deportation, or imposed as a penalty along with other penalties like fines by a judge through a court verdict against an expat who commits punishable violations, known as judicial deportation. An expat is more likely to challenge judicial deportation and succeed in removing this penalty by appealing the verdict, which in this case will be reviewed by the higher court, which will decide whether to keep or lift the deportation decision from the penalties.

In many cases where deportation was one of the penalties imposed against an expatriate, the appeal court succeeded to lift the deportation order and rule with justice for the individual who deserved it, considering every human has the right to defend themselves against fraudulent and falsified accusations and retaliation that could be pressed by people who misuse the law.

But administrative deportation is an unchallenged decision based on the sole discretion of the administration, which shall impose the penalty against whoever they find eligible to be deported, without having to justify this decision with legal aspects and investigations. In administrative deportation, the individual does not have access to justice to challenge the decision or even to reach out to the judicial system to appeal the decision or explain their defense and prove their innocence in order to amend the decision.

Decree bylaw no. 20/1981 in article 1, paragraph 5, states that residency and deportation matters of non-Kuwaitis are not subject to judicial oversight, and therefore the administrative court is not competent to consider disputes related to administrative deportation of non-Kuwaitis. It is a decision made by the administrative authority for reasons such as public interest, public security or public morality, or if the foreigner does not have an apparent means of subsistence in accordance with article 17 of the expatriate residence law no. 17 of 1959. The order to deport the foreigner may include members of their family.

Administrative deportation in some cases may not reflect the reality of the accusations imposed against the expat, as many cases including running a red traffic light is cause for administrative deportation and a reason to cut ties with a person who wishes to stay and earn a living.

The main legal gap and shortfalls with administrative deportation lies in the fact that the administrative court is not competent to oversee such a decision, so it cannot be appealed and an expatriate cannot present their defense. Also, no legal grounds are needed for such a deportation as it's based on the sole discretion of the administration.

Kuwait marks Sunday the 61st
anniversary of independence

Historic day marked beginning of modern Kuwait era



KUWAIT: The late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah signs the document of independence on June 19, 1961. — KUNA



The late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem delivers a speech on the occasion of Kuwait's independence on June 19, 1961.

KUWAIT: June 19, 1961 has always been engraved in hearts and minds of the Kuwaiti people. It was the day the State of Kuwait announced its independence and sovereignty as an Arab nation. The historic day marked the beginning of modern Kuwait era. It was the day when the declaration of independence was signed and the protectorate treaty with the British Government ended; the first step towards prosperity and development. The late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah realized that the protectorate treaty, signed by Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah in 1899, was not valid anymore

because of the development of the political and economic conditions in the State of Kuwait.

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem announced the cancellation of the treaty by signing the declaration of independence with the British Government Chief Political Resident in the Arabian Gulf Sir George Middleton. "On this memorable day of our beloved nation, on which we move from one phase to another of history and fold another page of the past with all its components and contents, to open a new page represented in this declaration which you read now, whereby Kuwait

gained its full independence and sovereignty," Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem said after signing the declaration.

Date change

The first independence anniversary was held in 1962, and a decree was signed on May 18, 1964 which merged the national day with the day on which Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem assumed office, making it February 25, and celebrations were held on that date since 1965. Since assuming office in 1950, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem took carefully

constitution was a gift for the Kuwaiti people, putting them on the path of progress and prosperity as well as offering a new democratic life.

Achievements

The 15-year reign of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, who was called "father of independence" and "father of constitution", was full of achievements. The State of Kuwait accomplished 43 laws and legislations, including the nationality law, monetary law, passports law and the organization of government departments. New departments were established in order to cope with the development of the nation, like public works, health, publication, knowledge, municipality, post and telephone, electricity and water, social affairs, awqaf, radio and television.

Over 61 years, the State of Kuwait took steady strides towards comprehensive development, supporting international legitimacy and human rights, rejecting interference in affairs of other countries, as well as being a strong believer in the role of the UN in protecting international peace and security. The State of Kuwait, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, continued its domestic development process, and pursued its preventive diplomacy vis-a-vis conflicts worldwide. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Ambassador of Ukraine to Kuwait Dr Oleksandr Balanutsa paid a courtesy visit to Kuwait Times on June 15, 2022 and met with Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan. The two sides discussed current developments of Ukraine's national liberation war and touched upon the prospects of media cooperation. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Anniversary
celebrated on
February 25
since 1965

studied steps towards independence, achieving stability and instructing the writing of the nation's Constitution. On September 7, 1961, an Amiri decree was signed specifying the shape and colors of the Flag of Kuwait. The State of Kuwait became member in the Arab League on July 20, 1961. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem signed a decree on August 26, 1961 to hold elections of the Constituent Assembly, which had a mandate of writing a constitution. The 183-article constitution was completed in nine months. The

CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times | كويت نيوز
Established 1961
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Management and staff convey their
deepest condolences to
Saleh Busalha
on the sad demise of his
mother

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on her

Local



Ilario Lavarra is pictured at a beach in Kuwait.



Ilario Lavarra poses in front of Kuwait Towers.

Italian adventurer Lavarra makes Kuwait stop in Vespa world tour

Kuwait has the perfect mix between Arab, Western cultures, says Lavarra

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Since 2017, Italian adventurer Ilario Lavarra has been on a non-stop solo trip on his Vespa scooter through 93 countries. Lavarra, 40, who was born in Milan and studied economics, believed following his passion for travel and discovery was worth giving a try. Kuwait Times spoke to Lavarra, who arrived in Kuwait in June 2022 on his Vespa Granturismo, to learn more about his epic journey.



Ilario Lavarra reads a copy of the first issue of Kuwait Times.



KUWAIT: Italian adventurer Ilario Lavarra speaks to Kuwait Times.

The Vespa is my business card - people smile and open doors for me, and I get the chance to discover their culture, keep in touch, talk with people and start new relations. Also, it has a very simple engine that I can fix easily, and its parts can be found everywhere.

Perfect mix

KT: How did you find Kuwait?

Lavarra: I was supposed to stay in Kuwait for three days, but it has been more than a week now. I want to stay longer because I met good people here. Every day I meet new people and find new things to do. I am enjoying my time in Kuwait. The diwaniya is a unique traditional culture in Kuwait. I enjoyed the generosity of the Kuwaiti people and their social and political conversations. In Kuwait, there is a high standard that you cannot see in other parts of the world.

Kuwait has the perfect mix between the culture of Arab countries and the Western world, due to Kuwaitis' constant travels. I noticed that people are really open-minded and almost everyone speaks English, which you cannot find in other Gulf countries. I communicated with my Italian roots through the many Italian restaurants spread

around Kuwait. Kuwait is a country worth visiting for a second time, but in the winter.

KT: Did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your journey?

Lavarra: The pandemic affected my travels a lot. I was going to Australia but got stuck in Iran when the entire world closed its borders. I stayed in Iran for eight months. The pandemic was the luckiest thing that happened to me. I enjoyed my stay in Iran very much, because I got deep into the wonderful Persian culture, places, food and wonderful people.

After that, I spent eight months in Turkey. Thanks to corona, I had the chance to enjoy more of my travels. Before it was merely going from country to country, but after the pandemic, I want to learn and spend more time in each place and enjoy it properly. Like here in Kuwait, I enjoy the culture and the place. It is a one-time experience - it is now or never.

Dubai experience

KT: What was the most exciting experience during your trip?

Lavarra: It was in Dubai. I have a very low budget and always sleep in a tent, but in Dubai, there is no place to camp, so I asked the Catholic Mission in Dubai if I could sleep for a couple of days in the church. But it was the Easter holiday and it was full of people, so they refused. While talking to the priest, there was a guy from Nigeria who told me if you can wait for 40 minutes, I can help you. He told me to follow his car. He then stopped in front of the biggest hotel in the city and booked me a room for four nights. I discovered later that he is one of the 10 richest people in the world, according to Forbes.

KT: What are your plans after Kuwait?

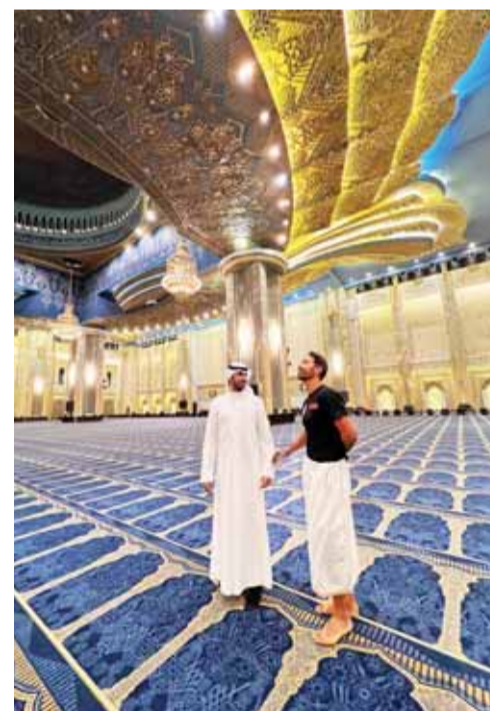
Lavarra: My plan is no plan. I will go to Iraq and then to Turkey to relax. When the weather gets cooler, I plan to travel back to Iran and then to Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka until I reach Australia, New Zealand and America, then go back to Italy, then probably go to the moon!

KT: Do you have a plan to quit traveling and settle in one place?

Lavarra: I do not have plans to settle in my own country. I feel I'm more related to the world. When you live abroad, you don't feel like you want to stay in one place. But I may spend one year in Turkey. People there are very kind. You are always in contact with the sea and everything is very cheap.

KT: What is the scariest situation you faced during your travels?

Lavarra: In Africa, it was late at night, so I set up my tent around 50 meters from the road, then went to sleep under the beautiful stars. At around 3 in the morning, I heard some noises besides the tent. I thought it was a mouse, bird or something insignificant. Then I heard a roar, so I opened the tent to see what the sound was. It turned out three lions were playing with my bag outside.



Ilario Lavarra visits Kuwait's Grand Mosque.

Someone advised me that when you see a lion, try to relax as much as you can. Do not hurt them, do not make a sound, and just lie down. If they do not see you, they do not attack if they are not hungry. So I closed the tent, lay down and relaxed for 20 minutes, shaking a little. They then left.

KT: What is your message to our readers?

Lavarra: People are always afraid of traveling to new countries because of how media exaggerates negative news. I discovered the world is much better than they show in the media. There are some risks, but the world will surprise you. You only have one life - live it. Follow your heart, not your fears.



Kuwait Times: When did you start your trip? How many countries have you been to so far?

Lavarra: When I was 28 years old, I traveled around all of America for the first time for two years - from 2010 to 2012 - and it was my first experience traveling on a Vespa. I began my journey from New York all way down to Argentina and back.

Traveling and Vespa are my passions. It was an amazing experience, so I returned to Italy to work and save some money. In 2017, I started my journey to see the rest of the world. I began by visiting all European countries, then headed to Morocco and all way down to South Africa, and from there up to Egypt. I covered the entire African continent in two years.

KT: What kind of Vespa do you ride and what is special about it?

Lavarra: I ride the 1968 Vespa Granturismo. The Vespa is my wife and I will never 'cheat on her' and replace it. I had a few troubles with fixing my Vespa, but I'm experienced now and I know her like a real husband knows his wife.

Vespa is my big love. It is a philosophy. It goes at 60 km/h, not as fast as a motorbike, so it allows me to see the world. When you travel on faster motorbikes, usually you only see what is in front of you, but with the Vespa, you can see your surroundings and enjoy your trip.



Ilario Lavarra sits for a TV interview during his visit to Kuwait.



News in brief

Ministry bans publishing appeals to Amir, Crown Prince in press

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Information banned publishing public appeals to His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince in local newspapers. The ban becomes effective simultaneously with its publishing in the state's official gazette 'Kuwait Al-Youn' Sunday.

Youth centers' padel courts to be available at KD 10 per hour

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Youth Affairs has set the price for renting padel courts operated by the authority's youth centers at KD 10 per hour for individuals and KD 30 per hour for state departments, unions and clubs.

Health ministry to recruit new Pakistani medical team

KUWAIT: It is almost certain that a new Pakistani medical team including doctors and technicians will be contracted by the health ministry to work at hospitals and clinics in Kuwait, sources told Kuwait Times. They added that a new batch of Indian and Filipino nurses will join hospitals and medical centers soon.

Residency employees collected bribes to pass transactions

KUWAIT: Residency department detectives arrested two female employees red-handed while receiving a bribe in exchange of processing transactions illegally, the interior ministry said. Both were charged and referred to concerned authorities, it added in a statement.

Kuwait oil price up \$1.33 to \$120.67 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$1.33 to \$120.67 per barrel on Friday, compared with \$119.34 pb the day earlier, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Saturday. Internationally, the price of the Brent crude globally fell by \$6.69 to \$113.12 per barrel, and the West Texas Intermediate dropped by \$8.03 to \$109.56 pb.



Ayse Koytak

Turkish envoy hails bilateral ties with Kuwait

ANKARA: Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Ayse Koytak hailed her country's ties with Kuwait, stressing its important role in maintaining stability in the region. Turkey and Kuwait have similar approaches to many regional and international causes, as developments in the region and the world require more frequent and regular dialogues, the Turkish Anadolu news agency quoted Koytak as saying. She stressed that Turkey attaches importance to consultation, close dialogue and cooperation with Kuwait on regional issues, and its relationship with Turkey in this context contributes to peace and stability.

Moreover, she touched on the importance of developing cooperation with Kuwait in the health and academic fields, in addition to cooperation in the military and defense industry. The ambassador said that the number of companies operating with Kuwaiti capital rose in Turkey to 382, and direct investments from Kuwait amounted to \$2 billion. Turkey is one of the best tourist destinations for Kuwaitis, and the number of Kuwaitis who visited it in the first four months of this year has already exceeded 100,000, she added. —KUNA

Czech Republic, Slovakia, Turkey top medical tourism destination for Kuwait residents

Difficulties getting Schengen visa creates huge demand for Turkey

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Medical tourism is popular among residents of Kuwait for many reasons. In general, medical services in Kuwait are expensive and people love travelling, so they combine leisure with medical care. Also, some treatments are specific to certain countries due to experts there and the natural environment.

There are two types of medical treatment abroad. Either the treatment abroad is paid for by the government (for Kuwaitis) - these patients are sent to various destinations depending on their health problems, or medical tourism, where patients choose the destination and pay for treatment themselves.

There are only a few travel agencies that organize medical travel tours. According to all the travel agencies Kuwait Times contacted, the most popular destination for medical tourism is the Czech Republic. "The most in-demand destinations are Czechia and Slovakia for medical treatment and physiotherapy. But recently after the pandemic, Turkey is competing with them for many reasons, especially after medical spas in Czechia and

Slovakia increased their prices," Rita Joubanian of Al-Kharafi International Co for Travel and Tourism told Kuwait Times.

"The difficulty of getting a Schengen visa at this time of the year due to huge demand has made Turkey an attractive choice. Also, due to the cheap prices in Turkey, travelers are choosing to stay for longer periods, and combine leisure and treatment. So instead of traveling for one week or 10 days, they travel for three weeks or more and enjoy medical tourism," she added.

Turkey is also popular for cosmetic surgeries. "Many clients book for hair implants, and Turkey is their favorite destination. Also, people here are very familiar with all places in Turkey. Recently, demand has increased for the less popular locations such as small villages," Joubanian explained.

Travel agency provides additional services to travelers. "Some people choose to book online as it may be slightly cheaper, but we provide more secure travel. In case they face problems at their destination, we can always help them. Also, for medical treatment, I choose for them the best spa depending on their medical problems based on their medical reports," Joubanian pointed out.



Fadwa from Al Waseet Travel and Tourism Services confirmed that the Czech Republic is the top destination for medical tourism, while Turkey is most in demand for plastic surgeries. "Other destinations such as the United States or United Kingdom are popular for medical treatment abroad by the government, but not for medical tourists who pay for themselves," she said.

India and Sri Lanka have also become very popular for medical tourism in the last few years. "Kerala in India is very popular for the medical resorts there. They get complete care at the resort including food, drinks, massage, relaxation and so on. So, they don't have to leave the resort, and enjoy eating healthily the organic food planted at the same place, according to their program," stressed Fadwa.



Combining leisure with medical care

CAN honors 'Mama Anisa'

KUWAIT: Cancer Aware Nation Campaign (CAN) organized a function to honor long-time Kuwaiti media figure Anisa Jaafar, commonly known as 'Mama Anisa'. CAN Chairman of the Board Dr Khalid Al-Saleh expressed appreciation for the opportunity to "honor the Chairman of the Board Mama Anisa," saying that she has succeeded during her illustrious career in "teaching our children the humanitarian, spiritual and educational values through unlimited contributions, during which she raised several generations on patriotic principles that served the social system of the country in all aspects."

Dr Saleh spoke about the challenges Jaafar faced, particularly her success as a woman at the beginning of her career. He described her success story as one of the earliest examples of true women's empowerment in Kuwait. "It was very difficult for a woman to go ahead among men and the society and excel in her field while maintaining the society's values and instilling the love of values and morals among young children," he said. Meanwhile, Jaafar expressed thanks and gratitude to CAN for hosting the functions, as well as their contributions that include awareness campaigns on children's cancer.



KUWAIT: Members of the Cancer Aware Nation Campaign (CAN) honor long-time Kuwaiti media figure Anisa Jaafar. —KUNA

Kuwait committed to Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities

NEW YORK: Kuwait has renewed its commitment to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure their full and comprehensive integration into societies, in accordance with the 2030 UN sustainable development goals. This came during a speech delivered by the Director of the Public Services Department at the Public Authority for Disability Affairs Al-Khansa Al-Husseini on Saturday, during the 15th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention

on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

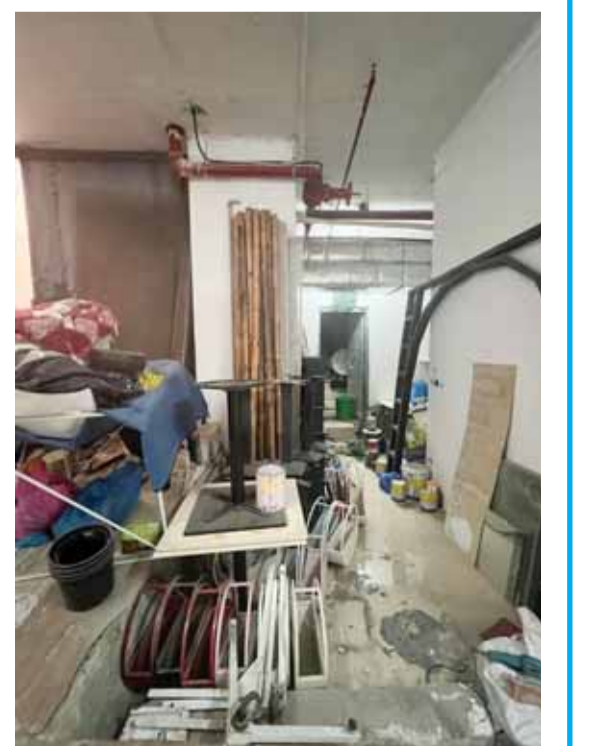
She said she shares the international community's welcome and satisfaction with the remarkable improvement and progress in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in societies and the enhancement of their rights and abilities to access services and information since the adoption of the convention in 2006. She cited international reports as showing that there is still more to do at the national, regional and international levels in order to improve the conditions of people with disabilities and to ensure their greater and effective participation in life activities.

The Kuwaiti diplomat indicated that this comes through empowering them in various fields, providing them with the necessary care and harnessing the technology for them. She noted that Kuwait has coordinated to allow rehabilitation centers and institutions and schools for people with disabilities to receive students and attend in person or teach remotely under strict precautionary health measures. —KUNA



NEW YORK: Director of the Public Services Department at the Public Authority for Disability Affairs Al-Khansa Al-Husseini attends the 15th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. —KUNA

Kuwait Fire Force issues 680 citations



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force inspectors issued 680 citations for violations that endanger safety of citizens and residents. PR Director Colonel Mohammad Ibrahim said there were thousands of warnings which license owners were cooperative and removed the violations. Meanwhile, Ibrahim said the prevention sector issued 5,264 licenses in the first half of 2022.



Police fire on crowd protesting India army plan

50 yrs after Watergate, Woodward still wonders why Nixon did it

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LYSYCHANSK, Ukraine: Ukrainian soldiers inspect a destroyed warehouse reportedly targeted by Russian troops in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on June 17, 2022. —AFP

Zelensky visits war-torn southern city

Fierce battles rock Donbas • Russian state TV airs videos of two missing Americans in Ukraine

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited the war-damaged southern city of Mykolaiv on Saturday for the first time since the Russian invasion as “fierce battles” raged again in the eastern Donbas region. Making a rare trip outside Kyiv, Zelensky surveyed a badly-damaged high-rise building and met officials in Mykolaiv, which has been holding the defense of the Black Sea coast against Moscow’s troops.

Russian forces have directed their firepower on the east and south of Ukraine in recent weeks since failing in their bid to take the capital Kyiv after the February 24 invasion. Zelensky has appealed for western support and weapons, and he hailed an announcement from Brussels on Friday that it backed Ukraine’s EU membership drive as a “historic achievement”. “Ukrainian institutions maintain resilience even in conditions of war. Ukrainian democratic habits have not lost their power even now,” Zelensky said in a video address overnight.

A video released by Zelensky’s office showed the Mykolaiv governor taking the president to see a tall building with a gaping hole, before the president met officials in what appeared to be a basement. “Special attention was paid to threats from land and sea. We do not stop working for victory,” a statement by his office said. Mykolaiv is a key target for Russia as it lies on the way to the strategic

Black Sea port of Odessa. It is around 100 km northwest of Kherson, which fell to Russia in the first weeks of the war.

‘Abandoning everything’

The worst of the fighting continues to be in the eastern Donbas region, with battles raging in villages outside the city of Severodonetsk, which Russia has been trying to seize for weeks. “Now the most fierce battles are near Severodonetsk. They (Russia) do not control the city entirely,” the governor of the eastern Lugansk region, Serhiy Gaiday, said on Telegram. Gaiday said there was “more destruction” at the besieged Azot chemical plant in Severodonetsk, where he said 568 people were sheltering, including 38 children.

He also said Lysychansk - a Ukrainian-controlled city across a river from battered Severodonetsk - is being “heavily shelled”. Lysychansk residents were preparing to be evacuated. “We’re abandoning everything and going. No one can survive such a strike,” said history teacher Alla Bor, waiting with her son-in-law Volodymyr and 14-year-old grandson.

With Ukraine trying to shore up western support as the war drags on and intensifies global food and energy crises, Kyiv got a boost on Friday when the European Commission backed it for EU candidate status. Full mem-

bership could take years but the bloc’s 27 leaders could add Ukraine to the list of countries vying for membership as early as a summit next week.

“We all know that Ukrainians are ready to die for the European perspective. We want them to live with us for the European dream,” Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. The leaders of the bloc’s biggest members - France, Germany and Italy - backed the idea during a visit to Kyiv.

‘Defend their country’

Moscow has warned against outside involvement in its ex-Soviet neighbor, saying it invaded to “de-nazify and de-militarize” a country that was getting too close to the West. Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday he had “nothing against” Ukraine joining an economic union like the EU, unlike the security risk he sees in Ukraine joining NATO. But he said EU membership would turn Ukraine into a “semi-colony” of the West. Putin also insisted that the Russian invasion was not the cause of global inflation and grain shortages, blaming Western sanctions that he said threatened starvation “primarily in the poorest countries”.

Russian state television aired social media videos of two US military veterans who went missing last week while

fighting alongside the Ukrainian army, stating they had been captured by Russian forces. US President Joe Biden had said on Friday he did not know the whereabouts of Alexander Druke and Andy Huihn, after their relatives lost contact with the pair. A third American is also missing.

Ukrainian civilian volunteers however continue to sign up, with a group performing military exercises on Friday in fortified positions left by Russian troops in Bucha, a town synonymous with war crimes blamed on Moscow’s forces. “Most of those who are here aren’t soldiers. They’re just civilians who want to defend their country — 50 percent of them have never held a weapon until today,” a sergeant known as “Ticha” told AFP.

Soldiers in Mykolaiv meanwhile are trying to keep their pre-war routines alive, with one saying he will not give up his vegan diet on the frontlines. Oleksandr Zhuhan said he had received a package from a network of volunteers to keep up his plant-based diet. “There was pate and vegan sausages, hummus, soya milk... and all this for free,” the 37-year-old drama teacher said happily. Ukraine is also battling on another front - the right to host next year’s Eurovision song contest after its morale-boosting win this year. Kyiv condemned a decision by organizers to move the 2023 version of the world’s biggest live music event on security grounds, possibly to Britain. —AFP

59 dead, millions stranded as floods hit B’desh, India

SYLHET, Bangladesh: Monsoon storms in Bangladesh and India have killed at least 59 people and unleashed devastating floods that left millions of others stranded, officials said Saturday. Floods are a regular menace to millions of people in low-lying Bangladesh, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency, ferocity and unpredictability.

Relentless downpours over the past week have inundated vast stretches of Bangladesh’s northeast, with troops deployed to evacuate households cut off from neighboring communities. Schools have been turned into relief shelters to house entire villages inundated in a matter of hours by rivers that suddenly burst their banks. “The whole village went under water by early Friday and we all got stranded,” said Lokman, whose family lives in Companiganj village.

“After waiting a whole day on the roof of our home, a

neighbor rescued us with a makeshift boat. My mother said she has never seen such floods in her entire life,” the 23-year-old added. Asma Akter, another woman rescued from the rising waters, said her family had not been able to eat for two days. “The water rose so quickly we couldn’t bring any of our things,” she said. “And how can you cook anything when everything is under-water?”

Lightning triggered by the storms has killed at least 21 people around the South Asian nation since Friday afternoon, police officials told AFP. Among them were three children aged between 12 and 14 who were struck by lightning on Friday in the rural town of Nandail, said local police chief Mizanur Rahman. Another four people died when landslides hit their hillside homes in the port city of Chittagong, police inspector Nurul Islam told AFP.

At least 16 people have been killed since Thursday in India’s remote Meghalaya, the state’s chief minister Conrad Sangma wrote on Twitter, after landslides and surging rivers that submerged roads. Next door in Assam state, more than 1.8 million people have been affected by floods after five days of incessant downpours. Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told reporters he had instructed district officials to provide “all necessary help and relief” to those caught in the flooding.

above 40 degrees Celsius were forecast in parts of the country on Saturday - with highs of 43 degrees C expected in the north-eastern city of Zaragoza. There have also been fires in Germany, where temperatures topped 40 degrees C on Saturday. A blaze in the Brandenburg region around Berlin had spread over about 60 hectares by Friday evening.

Temperatures in France could reach as high as 42 degrees C in some areas on Saturday, French state weather forecaster Météo France said, adding that June records had already been beaten in 11 areas on Friday. Farmers in the country are having to adapt. Daniel Toffaloni, a 60-year-old farmer near the southern city of Perpignan, now only works from “daybreak until 11.30am” and in the evening, as temperatures in his tomato greenhouses reach a sizzling 55 degrees C.

“This is the earliest heatwave ever recorded in France” since 1947, said Matthieu Sorel, a climatologist at Météo France. With “many monthly or even all-time temperature records likely to be beaten in several regions,” he called the weather a “marker of climate change”. Dutch authorities said they expect Saturday to be the hottest day of the year so far.

The Netherlands’ national meteorological agency has



SYLHET: People wade along a road in a flooded area following heavy monsoon rains on June 18, 2022. —AFP

Flooding in Bangladesh worsened on Saturday morning after a temporary reprieve from the rains the previous afternoon, Sylhet region chief government administrator Mosharraf Hossain told AFP. “The situation is bad. More than four million people have been stranded by flood water,” Hossain said, adding that nearly the entire region was without electricity. The flooding forced Bangladesh’s third-largest international airport in Sylhet to shut down on Friday. —AFP



HELMOND, Netherlands: A child plays in the sand and the water of the Berkendonk recreational lake on June 17, 2022, as a heatwave spreads across Europe. —AFP

issued a warning for the southern city of Limburg where temperatures could rise to 35 degrees C. “The elderly and people with vulnerable health can develop health problems due to the heat,” the agency said. The UK recorded its hottest day of the year on Friday with temperatures reaching over 30 degrees C in the early afternoon, meteorologists said.—AFP

IS gains ground in the Sahel as massacres pile up

BAMAKO: Islamic State-linked jihadists, whose power was once thought to be waning in the Sahel, have expanded their reach recently, marking their presence with an unprecedented series of civilian massacres. Six months ago, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) appeared to be in a weakened position after losing several leaders, including its founder, Adnan Abou Walid Al-Sahraoui.

He was killed in Mali in August 2021 by France’s anti-jihadist Barkhane force. In January 2020 France had designated ISGS as its chief target in the immense and remote “three borders” area where Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger meet. By February 2021, President Emmanuel Macron declared that ISGS “had lost its grip,” while groups fighting under the rival al-Qaeda banner were said to have gained the upper hand, at least in Mali.

But Souley Oumarou, an expert with an NGO called the Forum for Responsible Citizenship, said ISGS was very far from vanquished. “At a time when we thought we had got rid of the ‘terrorists’, they were reorganizing,” said Oumarou, an adviser to the former president of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou.

France and its allies eliminated key ISGS leaders but mid-ranking commanders remained in place and took over recruitment, said Mathieu Pellerin, a French researcher specializing in the region. An elected Malian official, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons, said ISGS was expanding from Gourma in Mali to the Mali-Niger border and Oudalan province in northern Burkina Faso.

This month alone, ISGS seems to have carried out operations in an area spanning hundreds of kilometers. It has fought Malian soldiers and pro-government armed groups in Anderamboukane near Mali’s border with Niger to reportedly slaughtering 86 civilians in northern Burkina Faso. The group did not claim that attack in the Burkinabe village of Seytenga but the incident bore its hallmarks. —AFP

Europe braces for blistering June weekend heat

PARIS: Spain, France and other western European nations braced on Saturday for a sweltering June weekend that is set to break records, with forest fires and warnings over the effects of climate change. The weather on Saturday will represent a peak of a June heatwave that is in line with scientists’ predictions that such phenomena will now strike earlier in the year thanks to global warming. Forest fires in Spain on Saturday had burned nearly 20,000 hectares of land in the north-west Sierra de la Culebra region. The flames forced several hundred people from their homes, and 14 villages were evacuated. Some residents were able to return on Saturday morning, but regional authorities warned the fire “remains active”.

Firefighters were still battling blazes in several other regions, including woodlands in Catalonia. Temperatures

International

50 yrs after Watergate, Woodward still wonders why Nixon did it

Reporters praise late Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham for her support

WASHINGTON: Fifty years after the Watergate burglary that led to the downfall of US president Richard Nixon, Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward is still haunted by one question. "The unanswered question that pulses through all of this is 'Why?' Woodward said at an event at Post headquarters with his former reporting colleague Carl Bernstein.

Why did top members of Nixon's re-election committee organize a break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate on June 17, 1972? Nixon had won the White House in 1968, the 79-year-old Woodward noted, and was cruising to what looked like another certain victory in the 1972 election. "He had the brass ring," Woodward said of Nixon, who resigned in 1974 rather than face impeachment over a cover-up of the burglary.

"And so what is the psychology - which I think we never cracked really - of somebody who's attained their goal and fails to ask the question... what do the people need? For Nixon, it really didn't come up," he said. Woodward and Bernstein praised the late Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham for the support she gave them while reporting the Watergate story.

The 78-year-old Bernstein recounted a visit to the

paper one day by someone bearing a subpoena to seize his notes. Managing editor Ben Bradlee went to see Graham and came back five minutes later, he said. "And he says, 'Katharine says they're not your notes. They're her notes. And if anybody's going to go to jail, it's her,'" Bernstein recalled. "To me, it's one of the historic moments in American journalism history," he said.

'Are you dumb?'

Woodward said the pair received a note from Graham after Nixon resigned warning them to keep their feet on the ground. "It said 'Dear Carl and Bob, now that Nixon has resigned, you did some of the stories, fine. Don't start thinking of yourself too highly,'" Woodward quoted the note as saying. "Let me give you some advice and the advice is 'Beware the demon pomposity.'"

Woodward and Bernstein also recalled encounters

with Mark Felt, the FBI deputy director whose identity as the source famously codenamed "Deep Throat" was revealed decades later. They said Felt was constantly pushing them to look beyond the Watergate burglary to a more wide-ranging conspiracy. "It was kind of like

"Don't you understand what you have here? This is not just the Watergate burglary, it's dirty tricks," Woodward said. "Mark Felt kind of laid it out and said, 'No, this is a much bigger thing. Are you dumb?'"

Artifacts from the Watergate break-in and the newspaper's coverage were on display during the event at the Post's new glittering headquarters in downtown

Washington. Clips were shown from the 1976 movie "All the President's Men" starring Robert Redford as Woodward and Dustin Hoffman as Bernstein. The artifacts included a door latch from the Watergate which had been covered by a piece of tape by the burglars



WASHINGTON: Journalists Bob Woodward (left) and Carl Bernstein participate in an event marking the 50th anniversary of the Watergate burglary at the Washington Post office on June 17, 2022. —AFP

and was spotted by an alert security guard - a key step in the plot coming to light. Woodward said it had been purchased at auction by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, the owner of the Post. "We're trying to find out how much Bezos paid," he said. —AFP

'Watergate Girl' and lessons on scandal in the Trump era

WASHINGTON: A sprawling conspiracy, a cornered president clinging to power, a White House cover-up: for Watergate prosecutor Jill Wine-Banks, the mushrooming controversy around Donald Trump's alleged plot to take down US democracy is a movie she's seen before. It is 50 years to the day since five burglars were arrested at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate complex in Washington - touching off a firestorm that would bring down president Richard Nixon.

The break-in plunged Wine-Banks - barely out of her 20s - into a starring role in the most enduring political scandal in US history, as the only woman on the Watergate prosecution team. Half a century later, she has been watching with the rest of Washington as Trump finds himself in similar peril to Nixon, as a straightforward accusation - incitement of a riot at the US Capitol - metastasizes into a much bigger deal.

Numerous top officials - all Republican or conservative, many among Trump's closest allies - have testified that the deadly violence was the culmination of his plot to overthrow an election. In some respects the parallels are uncanny, but as she watches the congressional hearings into the burgeoning Trump scandal, Wine-Banks reflects on how much the world has changed.

"It is, first of all, a very different environment, both in terms of politics and in terms of the media," the 79-year-old, now a cable news legal analyst, tells AFP in her unmistakable Chicago contralto. Now,

with hundreds of live TV channels and streaming services competing for America's attention - not to mention a political landscape attenuated by tribalism - getting people to care about political scandal is a tougher challenge, Wine-Banks says.

'Riveted'

"During Watergate, the media had three networks and they all have the same facts. They all broadcast the hearings... and all of America was riveted," she said. Wine-Banks began her career as the first woman to serve as an organized crime prosecutor at the US Justice Department. Four years of impressive trial wins brought her to the attention of the Watergate team and she became the only woman to try the obstruction of justice case that saw Nixon's top aides jailed.

Never setting out to be a trailblazer, Wine-Banks found she had no choice given the numerous barriers placed in front of successful women in the 1970s. Her own boss, special prosecutor Leon Jaworski, insisted on calling her "lady lawyer" despite her repeated objections, and she was demeaned as "young lady" in court when her colleagues were addressed as "esteemed counsel."

Her appearance took up far too many column inches in newspapers that dubbed her the "mini-skirt prosecutor" and the judge even said of her famous dismantling of Nixon's secretary Rose Mary Woods: "We have enough problems without two ladies getting into an argument." The title of her 2021 memoir - "The Watergate Girl: My Fight for Truth and Justice Against a Criminal President" - is in part an ironic reference to the hurdles she faced to be taken seriously. —AFP



Jill Wine-Banks

winemakers. The Prespa agreement added "North" to Macedonia's name to distinguish the Balkan state from Greece's neighboring northern region of Macedonia.

The former Yugoslav republic signed the agreement on June 17, 2018 in exchange for Athens promising to stop blocking its efforts to join NATO and the European Union. In Skopje the treaty was seen as a major breakthrough that would accelerate its accession to both organizations. It did join NATO in 2020, but EU membership has proven more elusive - first because of French and then Bulgarian objections.

Problems embitter historic Greece, N Macedonia deal

THESSALONIKI, Greece: Four years to the day after a historic treaty between Greece and North Macedonia ended a long-running name dispute, unresolved problems are again stirring nationalist bitterness with sour grapes particularly among

Landmines sow tragedy, chaos in war-torn Yemen

HODEIDA, Yemen: Mourad Al-Marouai was just nine when a landmine killed him on a beach in war-torn Yemen, a tragedy that will haunt his family forever. After a swim, the little boy "suddenly disappeared" when he and his two brothers were beach-combing for garbage to sell. "All I saw were hands and legs," elder brother Yahya, 15, told AFP, clasping the rosary that Mourad had found in the sand and given to him.

The chilling incident in January, in the western province of Hodeida, is all too common in Yemen, where mines are a constant threat and hobble economic activity and aid. Mourad's father, Ahmed, is left grappling with the wrenching memory of his son's remains scattered across the ground. "I will never forget the sight of

birds pecking at my son's flesh as we waited for help to arrive," the 50-year-old told AFP. "I could not wash him or wrap him in a shroud (according to Muslim tradition). I just buried pieces of him in a plastic bag."

Landmines are part of the legacy of the war in Yemen, long the Arab world's poorest country, where Iran-backed Houthi rebels have been fighting a Saudi-led coalition since 2015. Hundreds of thousands have died, directly from fighting as well as indirectly, and millions have been displaced in what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. And despite a truce since April that has drastically reduced clashes, stark dangers remain.

This month, the UN said 19 civilians had been killed and 32 injured during the truce, mostly by landmines, home-made bombs and other ordnance. According to the UN-linked Civilian Impact Monitoring Project, landmines, unexploded shells and other explosive detritus were responsible for 338 civilian casualties in 2021, including 129 fatalities. They are among victims caused every day around the world by

landmines, the United Nations says.

Almost a third of Yemen's landmine casualties were reported in Hodeida province, even though it has been spared much of the fighting after a 2018 ceasefire agreement aimed at protecting its Red Sea port, a lifeline for the country. Hodeida province is "a strategic center" for the north, which is largely controlled by the Houthi rebels, said Ibrahim Jalal, a researcher at the Middle East Institute in Washington.

"The indiscriminate spread of landmines across multiple Yemeni governorates creates dozens of victims every day, including farmers, travelers and other civilians," he told AFP. "People are living under numerous uncertainties," he said, explaining that mines complicate the transport of aid and take a heavy toll on the agriculture-dependent economy.

Experts estimate that at least one million mines have been planted during Yemen's years of turmoil, often with tragic results. In March, Abdou Ali, 23, was in the car with his brother, son and nephews,

Kosovars tire of knocking Europe's closed doors

PRISTINA: Of all the passports in the world, Kosovo's opens fewer doors than most, even the doors to other parts of Europe. "It's a contradiction to be called European when you are not allowed to see, touch or travel around Europe," 27-year-old journalist Aulona Kadriu told AFP. "I don't see why an entire population should be locked out and isolated."

Of the 199 countries ranked by the number of destinations their passport holders can visit according to the Henley index, only 10 offer fewer opportunities than Kosovo. The former province of Serbia languishes in the company of places like Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and North Korea.

Kadriu gave up trying to travel within Europe for work or for leisure, because she found the hoops Kosovars have to jump through too frustrating. The landlocked country's 1.8 million citizens are the only people in the Balkans to need a visa to do so, and that magic pass is tricky to obtain. "It's beyond humiliation," she grumbled.

'EU reservations'

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 but is not universally recognized. Five European Union countries are among the opponents, alongside Serbia itself - with whom relations remain unstable - and its Russian and Chinese allies. So the tiny country applauded when the European Commission - the EU's executive body - decided in 2018 that Kosovars should be eligible to travel freely to all 26 countries in Europe's borderless Schengen Area.

North Macedonia's perception of the bloc as their strongest ally duly plummeted from 43.2 percent in 2019 to 13.1 percent, according to a February poll. Athens and the EU's ambivalent position is likely to encourage pro-Russian and eurosceptic forces there, warned Marilena Koppa, a professor of politics at Panteion University in Athens.

"The whole story with Prespa agreement leaned on EU and NATO membership," North Macedonia's former deputy prime minister for European affairs, Vasko Naumovski, told Radio Free Europe recently. If the country's European future "is not clearly con-



PRISTINA: Kosovo-Albanians wait in front of an embassy to apply for visas on June 12, 2022. —AFP

But EU governments, who have the final say, have yet to follow suit and four years on, Kosovars still need visas and the queues to get them are as long as ever. Pensioner Igballe Kryeziu hopes to visit her children in Germany, where around half the 800,000 Kosovars living abroad currently reside. It has taken her five months and 200 euros (\$210) in paperwork just to get a place in the queue outside the consulate.

Work and study permits are just as hard to come by. Berlin's embassy in Pristina said it had received more than 100,000 requests in December and January alone. It only has capacity to issue 5,500 in a full year.

Local charities believe the hold-up is due to reserves on the part of EU heavyweights like France about Kosovo's ability to tackle corruption and organized crime. More than 80 local NGOs wrote recently to French President Emmanuel Macron, whose country holds the EU's rotating presidency, urging him to end the "isolation of Kosovo citizens". —AFP

firm, the structure of the Prespa agreement will be put into question," he said. "There will be a strengthening of the voices that say that all sacrifices and concessions that (North) Macedonia made with the Prespa agreement basically did not bring anything that was promised."

Hristijan Mickoski, president of North Macedonia's main opposition party VMRO-DPMNE, said the people of North Macedonia "were promised a better life and European standards of education and health" when the agreement was signed. "But all we got were humiliations," he concluded. —AFP



HODEIDA: Ahmed Omar, who lost his son in a landmine explosion, is pictured in his home with his family on June 14, 2022. —AFP

heading to Hodeida city. On their way, they passed by their hometown, which they had fled because of fighting, and decided to check to see if it was safe for

them to move back. Abdou refused. He got out of the car and left them to go without him. "It hadn't been five minutes before I heard a loud explosion. —AFP

Zionist entity strikes Hamas...

Continued from Page 1

In April, Zionist warplanes also hit Gaza after Palestinian armed groups fired rockets from the territory. That exchange came after nearly a month of deadly violence focused on Zionist-annexed east

Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound, the third holiest site in Islam. The impoverished Hamas-controlled Gaza coastal enclave of 2.3 million people has been under a Zionist blockade since 2007.

Last year, the Zionist entity and Hamas fought an 11-day war triggered in part by unrest over the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The Zionist entity occupied the West Bank and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War. It later annexed east Jerusalem in a move never recognized by most of the international community. — AFP

Biden falls from bike...

Continued from Page 1

But a year later, in Nov 2021, his doctor gave Biden a clean bill of health, describing him as "healthy" and "vigorous". Taking a few questions

from reporters on Saturday, Biden said he was "in the process of making up my mind" about easing some Trump-era tariffs on Chinese goods in order to soften inflationary pressures. He said he would be speaking to Chinese President Xi Jinping soon.

And asked if he was satisfied with progress on gun legislation - after mass shootings in Texas and New York brought new demands for action - Biden said only that he was happy with action by his home state of Delaware, which passed a ban on assault-style weapons. — AFP

International

One killed as gunmen storm Sikh temple in Afghan capital

Some of Kabul's other gurdwaras close for security reasons

KABUL: Gunmen stormed a Sikh temple in the Afghan capital on Saturday, killing at least one member of the community and wounding seven more, the interior ministry said. Ministry spokesman Abdul Nafi Takor said the attackers lobbed at least one grenade when they entered the temple, setting off a blaze in the complex. Minutes later, a car bomb was detonated in the area but caused no casualties, he added.

"One of our Sikh brothers has been killed and seven others (were) wounded in the attack," Takor said in a statement. Two attackers were killed in an operation to secure the temple following the raid, he said, with one Taliban fighter also killed. While the number of bombings across Afghanistan has dropped since the Taliban seized power in August, several fatal attacks have hit the country in recent months.

"I heard gunshots and blasts," Gurnam Singh, a Sikh community leader, told AFP from close to the scene of Saturday's attack soon after the raid began. "Generally at that time in the morning we have several Sikh devotees who come to offer prayers at the gurdwara (temple complex)." Footage posted on social media after the attack showed shattered pillars and walls in the temple's main prayer hall, with debris scattered across the floor.

A section of a building near the temple also caught fire, an AFP correspondent reported from the area. The windows of several residential buildings were broken from the impact of the car bomb. Nearby streets were littered with shattered glass. Taliban forces cordoned

off the neighborhood, preventing journalists from speaking with residents and witnesses.

Repeated attacks

A Taliban fighter deployed in the area told AFP that some Sikhs in the temple at the time of the attack managed to flee from a back door. Some of Kabul's other Sikh temples were closed for security reasons as reports of the attack spread. No group has so far claimed responsibility for the raid. The attack came days after an Indian delegation visited Kabul to discuss the distribution of humanitarian aid from India to Afghanistan.

Afghan and Indian media reports said the delegation also discussed with Taliban officials the possibility of reopening the Indian embassy. New Delhi, which had close relations with the previous US-backed Afghan government, shut its mission in Kabul and evacuated all its diplomatic and other staff when the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan on Aug 15.

Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar in a tweet condemned Saturday's "cowardly attack" on the temple. The number of Sikhs living in Afghanistan has dwindled to around 200, compared to about half a million in the 1970s. Most of those who remain are traders involved in selling herbal medicines and electronic goods brought from India.

The community has faced repeated attacks over the years. At least 25 people were killed in March 2020 when gunmen stormed another Sikh temple in

would "not hesitate to start a war" to stop Taiwan becoming independent. One US admiral has said an attack could come by 2027, the centenary of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA). "If we were to go head to head militarily, we don't stand a single chance," retired admiral Lee Hsi-min, who was head of Taiwan's armed forces until 2019, told AFP bluntly.

But Russia's failure to quickly overrun Ukraine stands as a cautionary tale to Beijing, while simultaneously providing Taipei with both tactical blueprints and inspiration on how to hold off a much larger enemy. "Our soldiers here are all Taiwanese and will be fighting to defend their homeland," said Chen Ing-jin, a Penghu historian and architect. "That makes a difference. Just look at Ukraine."

'A defender's dream'

Taiwan's biggest advantage is its geography. Amphibious assaults are exceedingly difficult and if China was to invade Taiwan - and crucially hold it - Beijing would need to move hundreds of thousands of troops as well as equipment across the Taiwan Strait. Even at its narrowest point the strait is 130 km and weather conditions are notoriously unforgiving with two monsoon seasons.

That leaves just two brief "windows of attack" - May to July and October - for such a large-scale operation, according to a US Naval War College report. In addition, studded into the waters are

basically returned to normal."

The Shanghai government added that its emergency management bureau has launched an investigation into the cause of the accident. The company said in a separate Weibo post Saturday afternoon that it would cooperate with the investigation, and that the closure of relevant facilities "will not have a significant impact on the market".

The person who died was a "third-party transport vehicle driver" and an employee was suffered minor injuries, the company said. The refinery is located near the south Shanghai seaford and a wetland park. The company said it was conducting environmental monitoring of the nearby area. "At present, no environmental impact on the surrounding bodies of water has been found," it said.

The fire erupted as Shanghai, China's industrial engine and most populous city, gingerly resumes business after being sealed off for around two months to counter a coronavirus outbreak driven by the Omicron variant. While the lockdown was officially lifted at the beginning of June, the snarling of supply chains and shutting of factories continues to have far-reaching consequences for the global economy.

At the petrochemical plant, an early morning and millionaire construction magnate Rodolfo Hernandez, 77, are neck-and-neck in opinion polls.

The polls suggest 45 percent of the population will abstain and between two and five percent are undecided. Among these groups are many of Colombia's nine million registered voters aged between 18 and 28. "People blame us for not voting, but many of us youths have waged a hard battle in this campaign, in the streets, so that this government will fall," said Stefanny Ramirez, 22, a volunteer for Petro's Historic Pact coalition.

'We need opportunities'

Even though the two run-off candidates do not represent Colombia's traditional conservative and liberal parties, many young people remain disillusioned. "I feel the same people as always are coming back to govern," complained cashier Sebastian Rodriguez, 22, who is planning on submitting a blank vote. His skepticism is not uncommon among young people distrustful of state institutions in Colombia.

Of 2,200 people aged 18 to 32 surveyed in April by



KABUL: A Taliban fighter stands guard in front of a Sikh temple following an attack by gunmen on June 18, 2022. —AFP

Kabul. The jihadist group Islamic State claimed responsibility for that attack, which forced many Sikhs to leave the country even before the Taliban returned to power. IS has a history of targeting Afghan Sikhs, Hindus and other members of minority communities - including Muslim Shites and Sufis.

A string of bombings hit the country during the

Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which ended in Afghanistan on April 30, some of them claimed by IS. IS is a Sunni Islamist group, like the Taliban, but the two are bitter rivals. The Taliban have pursued an Afghanistan free from foreign forces, whereas IS want an Islamic caliphate stretching from Turkey to Pakistan and beyond. —AFP

Chinese invasion of Taiwan: Too costly to countenance?

MAGONG, Taiwan: On Taiwan's tiny Penghu islands, the missile bases that sit next to white-sand beaches and bustling fish markets are a visceral reminder of the constant threat of attack from China. Despite the huge military discrepancy between the two sides, many analysts believe Taiwan's location, inhospitable terrain and US support mean China would find a full-scale invasion extremely hard - and possibly too costly to countenance.

Communist China and Taiwan split at the end of a civil war in 1949 with the losing Kuomintang forces retreating to the island. But Beijing insists now-democratically run Taiwan is part of its territory, and that it will one day re-take it, by force if necessary. Recent record Chinese fighter jet incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone and increasingly aggressive rhetoric under President Xi Jinping have raised fears China might contemplate acting on that pledge sooner rather than later.

The Chinese defense ministry last week said it

One dead in Shanghai chemical plant explosion

SHANGHAI: Shanghai authorities on Saturday announced an investigation into a massive chemical plant blaze that left one person dead and another injured in the first major industrial accident since the city lifted lockdown in early June. The fire at a Sinopec Shanghai Petrochemical Co. plant in outlying Jinshan district broke out at around dawn on Saturday, and was brought under control within hours, according to state news agency Xinhua.

Aerial drone footage shared with AFP by a resident showed thick clouds of smoke hanging over a vast industrial zone as three fires blazed in separate locations, turning the sky black. "At present, on-site disposal work is being implemented in an orderly manner, and protective combustion is being carried out," the Shanghai government said on social media, adding that "safety risks" were "controllable". "Monitoring data ... show that the air quality has

The enigma of Colombia's abstaining youth

BOGOTA: A year ago, Colombia's streets were flooded with anti-government protesters angered by a proposed tax increase as citizens reeled from the economic impact of the pandemic. At the helm were many young people. But while they can "dynamize" election campaigns, young people here rarely vote on election day, political expert Danny Ramirez from the University of Rosario told AFP.

In Sunday's presidential runoff, attracting this demographic that is often apathetic could be the difference between winning and losing. Colombians will vote for a successor to the hugely unpopular right-wing President Ivan Duque, who is barred from standing for reelection. Leftist former guerrilla Gustavo Petro, 63,



CHIXI, Taiwan: This picture taken on May 29, 2022 shows an aerial view of a couple walking in front of the basalt formations at the Chixi Rock Waterfall along the coast in the Penghu island's Xiyu township. —AFP

outlying islands like the Penghu chain - bristling with radar and missiles pointing straight out into the strait.

With the likely early warning, and the weaponry Taipei has at its disposal, the PLA would probably incur high losses even in that first stage of transit, said James Char, an Associate Research Fellow at Singapore's S Rajaratnam School of International Studies. And while the small, flat outlying islands might in the end prove easy for Beijing to subdue, on Taiwan's main island, the opposite applies. —AFP



SHANGHAI: This aerial photo taken on June 18, 2022 shows a large fire at a Sinopec Shanghai Petrochemical plant in the outlying Jinshan district. —AFP

explosion was heard by residents up to six kilometers away, according to local media. One person said that tremors from the explosion caused their apartment door to shake violently. "Half the sky was full of red fire and thick black smoke, there was dust and cotton-like things floating in the air," the anonymous resident told Chongqing-based newspaper Upstream News. —AFP



MEDELLIN: In this file photo taken on June 16, 2021, demonstrators take part in a protest against the government. —AFP

the polling firm Cifras y Conceptos, around four-fifths said they had no faith in the executive branch, congress or political parties. And more than half said none of the first round candidates represented them. —AFP

Police fire on crowd protesting India army plan

SECUNDERABAD, India: Indian police fired at an angry mob who set trains on fire Friday during protests against a new short-term military recruitment scheme that have flared around the country. Authorities are reeling from a sudden and violent backlash after this week announcing a plan to modernize India's 1.4 million-strong armed forces that would strip benefits and job security from aspiring soldiers.

Hundreds of protesters stood on rail tracks in the southern city of Secunderabad, burning piles of debris to block passenger services and setting alight carriages on at least four trains. Officers fired live rounds to disperse the crowd, an AFP photographer at the scene witnessed, with at least one demonstrator wounded in the incident. Local police and officials in Telangana state could not be reached for comment.

Protests have raged in several cities around the country since Thursday and have been especially fierce in the eastern state of Bihar. Crowds there have set fire to more than a dozen trains and attacked the residence of the state's deputy chief minister, as well as offices belonging to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). More than 100 people have been arrested across Bihar, senior police officer Sanjay Singh told AFP.

"Video recordings are being made of protests," he added. "Protesters will be identified and action will be taken against them." Authorities imposed a curfew in Gurgaon, a satellite city of New Delhi, and temporarily closed some metro stations in the capital to stop unrest spreading.

'The government cares'

The "Agnipath" (Path of Fire) scheme aims to induct young adults into the armed forces for four years - a major break from the past, as enlistment is seen as a pathway to a lifetime job. Only a quarter of the new recruits will be offered permanent positions in the army at the end of the program, missing out on entitlements enjoyed by existing personnel including pensions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government pitched the recruitment plan as a pathway to modernize India's armed forces with a younger and leaner soldier corps, while also creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs. After the protests began the government announced it was raising the upper age limit for Agnipath applicants to widen eligibility and make up for disruptions to recruitment during the coronavirus pandemic. "The relaxation of age indicates that the government cares for our youth," defense minister Rajnath Singh said Friday. —AFP



CHENNAI: Police detain protesters during a demonstration against the government's new 'Agnipath' recruitment scheme for the army, navy and air forces on June 18, 2022. —AFP

SUNDAY, JUNE 19, 2022

Business

WTO strikes landmark deals

Fishing deal hailed as historic though 'not perfect'

GENEVA: The World Trade Organization concluded a landmark bundle of deals Friday covering fishing subsidies, food insecurity and Covid-19 vaccines following hectic round-the-clock talks. WTO director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said trade ministers had struck an "unprecedented" number of agreements that would affect the lives of people everywhere.

The talks in Geneva began Sunday and had been due to wrap up on Wednesday. But instead the WTO's 164 members went through two straight nights before getting the package over the line at around 5:00 am (0300 GMT) Friday. "DEAL!" tweeted EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis after the conference went nearly 36 hours into overtime. The WTO's 12th ministerial conference (MC12) reeled in a deal to halt harmful fisheries subsidies after more than two decades of negotiations, and also reached agreements on e-commerce, responding to pandemics and reforming the organization itself.

"Not in a long while has the WTO seen such a significant number of multilateral outcomes," Okonjo-Iweala said. "The package of agreements you have reached will make a difference to the lives of people around the world." But she acknowledged that "there were many moments when I feared we would come out of MC12 with nothing at all". As negotiations dragged on, delegates at one point had even danced to songs like "I will survive" and "Final Countdown" to blow off steam, US ambassador Maria Pagan told reporters.

Fish deal netted

The fisheries deal was the last one to get over the line, with negotiators hammering out the final points into the early hours of Friday. Talks towards banning subsidies that encourage overfishing and threaten the sustainability of the planet's fish stocks had been going on at the WTO since 2001. The text was watered down significantly, but Okonjo-Iweala insisted it was better to get an agreement rather than keep negotiating for years to come. Dombrovskis acknowledged to reporters that the agreement fell short of



GENEVA: Delegates attend the closing session of a World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference at the WTO headquarters in Geneva.— AFP

what the EU would have wanted, but "we decided that taking this first step... was better than not getting any agreement".

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai also hailed the agreement, as "a positive step forward", highlighting that countries had committed to continue talks towards a more ambitious text. Myron Brilliant, head of international affairs at the US Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the importance of moving forward on banning harmful fisheries subsidies. "This is a rare case where trade rules could make a huge contribution to addressing a major environmental problem," he said.

year exemption to the ban within their exclusive economic zones. But the text was dramatically slimmed down amid pressure from India especially, which balked at calls to ban subsidies that contribute to overfishing more broadly. WTO chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala insisted it was better to get an initial agreement on paper while countries continue talks towards a more substantive deal. She hailed that the trade body had "concluded an agreement with environmental sustainability at its heart." This marks "a first but significant step forward" towards reducing the fishery subsidies that contribute to overfishing on unregulated high seas, she said.

Food security

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, traditionally a breadbasket to the world, has spurred dramatic shortages of grain and fertilizer, driving up prices and threatening hundreds of millions of people with hunger. Countries agreed on a declaration on the way forward for tackling the global food insecurity, but the text does not mention Russia's war in Ukraine or the impact it is having on the crisis. Instead, it stresses the importance of "not imposing export prohibitions or restrictions" which are inconsistent with WTO rules. The text highlighted that trade disruptions, record prices and excessive volatility for food and agricultural products have a disproportionate impact on poorer countries. It also voiced concern that rising prices and costs "could have lasting consequences for global food security in the coming years". It said any emergency measures introduced to address food security concerns should "minimize trade distortions as far as possible" and be "temporary, targeted, and transparent".

And it recognized that building up food stocks can contribute to domestic food security goals, but encourages members wishing to get rid of surplus stocks to release them on international markets in line with WTO rules. In a separate agreement, members also decided not to impose export prohibitions or restrictions on foodstuffs bought for non-commercial humanitarian purposes by the UN's World Food Program. The decision was taken because WFP's "critical human support" has been "made more urgent as global hunger levels have increased sharply".

WTO reform

The sclerotic WTO has been badly in need of updating its ways of working, with its rules having hardly changed since it was founded in 1995. As expected, countries did not elaborate a detailed program, but they did lay out a rough sketch of a way forward. The text envisions "reforms to improve all its functions" to ensure it can function properly. It calls in particular for the organization's dispute settlement system to be fully operational again by 2024. Washington brought the system to a grinding halt in December 2019 after years of blocking the appointment of new judges to the key Appellate Body, freezing the tribunal.

E-commerce

Since 1998, WTO members have agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic transactions. The moratorium has been extended at each ministerial meeting since then, but this time, a group of countries, with India and South Africa in the lead, argued that it was having a negative impact on their customs revenues and should not be continued. In the end, these countries were convinced to stick with the moratorium until the next ministerial meeting, which should be held before the end of 2023. If no new decision is reached, it will automatically expire on March 31, 2024.— AFP

Fisheries

After more than two decades of negotiations towards banning harmful subsidies that encourage overfishing and threaten the sustainability of the planet's fish stocks, a deal, albeit watered down, was finally sealed in the early hours Friday. The agreement bans subsidies that contribute to fishing that is illegal, unreported or unregulated, or of overfished stock.

The deal recognizes so-called special and differential treatment for developing countries, handing them a two-

As for why the discussions went on so long, some delegations accused India of being intransigent on every topic under discussion at the WTO—where decisions can only pass with the agreement of every member. But Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal insisted: "India is not a roadblock on anything... We were the ones who actually helped create the sole consensus."

Patents waiver

The second major issue on the table was the plan for a Covid-19 vaccine patents waiver, aimed at providing more equitable access to the jabs. After months of wrangling, and talks going down to the wire this week to win over some major players in pharmaceutical manufacturing to a compromise text, the United States and China finally clinched the deal by agreeing on which countries would benefit from the waiver.

China provided a binding commitment not to take advantage of the waiver. Tai hailed the deal, saying it would "get more safe and effective vaccines to those who need it most". This agreement shows that we can work together to make the WTO more relevant to the needs of regular people.

The pharmaceutical industry organization IFPMA however voiced "deep disappointment" at the deal, warning that "dismantling" patent protections would strangle innovation. Public interest groups meanwhile condemned the deal for not going far enough. "It is a technocratic fudge aimed at saving reputations, not lives," said Max Lawson of the People's Vaccine Alliance, while the Doctors Without Borders charity labeled it a "devastating global failure".

WTO members also agreed to help ease supply shortages that some countries faced during the pandemic. With Russia's war in Ukraine fuelling a global food security crisis, ministers agreed on the importance of not imposing export restrictions. But the need to secure consensus from all members, including from Moscow, meant their declaration did not mention Russia or its role in the crisis.— AFP

Consensus

The fisheries agreement marks the first large multilateral deal agreed at the WTO in nearly a decade. Okonjo-Iweala, who took over in March 2021, hinged her leadership on breathing new life into the sclerotic organization. She wanted to prove that the organization could still make itself relevant in tackling the big global challenges. The former foreign and finance minister of Nigeria positioned herself as someone who can bang heads together and get business done.

"I prefer to talk less and do more," she said Friday.



KUWAIT: Photo shows the headquarters of Boursa Kuwait. Boursa Kuwait organized its first physical Corporate Day since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in London, in collaboration with HSBC, one of Europe's biggest banks from 8-9 June.

Boursa Kuwait highlights investment opportunities

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait organized its first physical Corporate Day since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in London, in collaboration with HSBC, one of Europe's biggest banks from 8-9 June. The event brought together eight companies listed in the "Premier" Market, including Boursa Kuwait, with 36 world-renowned asset management firms and investment companies, who conducted 126 meetings between them.

The meetings provided international investors with the opportunity to learn more about the companies listed in the Kuwaiti capital market and the benefits and prospects of investing in Kuwait, as well as offering deeper insights into the financial performance and business strategies of the publicly traded companies. Leading Boursa Kuwait's delegation during the roadshow were Chief Financial Officer Naim Azad Din, and Head of Markets Sector Noura Al-Abdulkareem.

Boursa Kuwait has been consistently promoting the Kuwaiti capital market and its participants through its series of Roadshows and Corporate Days, which gives listed companies the opportunity to meet with some of the world's biggest and most well-renowned asset management firms and investment companies, highlighting their financial health, business outlook, and business strategies going forward.

This gives prospective institutional investors from all over the world a deeper understanding of the Kuwaiti capital market and the investment opportunities that reside within it. Throughout the pandemic, Boursa Kuwait has worked diligently to develop and enhance Kuwait's capital market in an effort to attract institutional investors from across the world.

Boursa Kuwait's Chief Financial Officer Naim Azad Din expressed his contentment on the organization of Boursa Kuwait's ninth Corporate Day in London, considered one of the world's leading investment capitals. Naim added that he was proud to see Boursa Kuwait

participate as one of the listed companies, which is a signal that the exchange has emerged as a model issuer and one of the standout performers in the market during the past few years and since its self-listing in the "Premier" Market. "Boursa Kuwait's enhanced financial performance in the last few years has led to increased interest from several international investors," Naim said.

Boursa Kuwait's Head of Markets Sector Noura Al-Abdulkareem reinforced the importance of the company's strategy which continues to evolve with the company's vision and the needs of its diverse stakeholder community, taking into account the rapidly changing technological and economic landscape, saying that, "Through our series of Roadshows and Corporate Days, we have remained committed to keeping issuers in the market in touch with the world's leading investment companies and asset management firms to highlight the investment opportunities in the market, which is something that we have continued doing throughout the pandemic."

She added: "Boursa Kuwait has continuously worked towards advancing its position by focusing on our four key objectives to create an attractive issuer base, increase depth and breadth of products, upgrade our infrastructure and business environment to international standards, and broaden our investor base."

Boursa Kuwait's series of Roadshows and Corporate Days showcases some of the standout listed companies and the investment opportunities that reside in the Kuwaiti capital market. Putting these companies in touch with some of the world's leading investment firms and financial institutions, the events aim to highlight these companies' financial health and business strategies and outlooks, which help investors gain an in-depth understanding of the benefits and opportunities of investing in Kuwaiti companies.

Since its inception, Boursa Kuwait has worked diligently to create a credible exchange built on efficiency and transparency, creating a liquid capital market, a progressive exchange platform and developing a comprehensive set of reforms and enhancements that has allowed it to compete on an international level. Over the past five years, the company has rolled out numerous market reforms and new initiatives as part of its comprehensive multi-phase market development (MD) plans.



GENEVA: World Trade Organization Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (right) reacts with delegates after a closing session of a World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference at the WTO headquarters in Geneva.— AFP

Business

No petrol, no cars: Cubans turn to electric transport

Fuel shortages and US sanctions taking their toll

SANTA CLARA: There is a new sight on the streets of Havana: increasing numbers of electric vehicles whizzing among the old American cars so emblematic of the Cuban capital. As fuel shortages and US sanctions take their toll, and even though electricity generation can be spotty, Cubans are turning to smaller, cheaper, plug-in alternatives. "Gasoline? Imagine. After 50 years battling to get hold of it, I don't even want to smell it anymore!" taxi driver Sixto Gonzalez, 58, told AFP atop the shining, electric-blue quadricycle with which he moves through the streets at a top speed of about 40 kilometers (25 miles) per hour.

Gonzalez has abandoned his old, combustion-engine car—one of about 600,000 registered on the island of 11.2 million people, according to official data. The last time he tried to fill it up, he stood in a queue for eight hours. By far the majority of cars in circulation in Cuba are American models from the 1950s—before sanctions started—and compact Ladas from the Soviet era.

Newer models are practically impossible to lay one's hands on and come with a hefty price tag of between about \$20,000 and \$100,000. The quadricycle Gonzalez bought, by comparison, can be obtained for between \$4,000 and \$8,000 and though slower, can get four or five people from Point A to Point B. Also increasingly popular are electric motorbikes—of which there are an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 in Cuba—and three-wheelers all the more frequently seen dragging a carriage full of passengers or goods.

'Museum on wheels'

In a once-abandoned Soviet-era truck factory in the central city of Santa Clara, about 100 workers of the company Minerva assemble electric vehicles with parts imported from China or Vietnam. The objective for 2022 is to produce 10,000 electric motorbikes, Minerva boss Elier Perez told AFP—double the factory's previous record—as well as 2,000 three-wheelers. "I had to buy one because the fuel ran out and the queues are endless," said Raul Suarez, a 52-year-old security guard who got himself an electric motorbike. "I have to be able to get around."

Not only are cars prohibitively expensive and scarce, but public transport in the capital is a daily ordeal for many. Half of buses are out of service for a lack of tires and batteries that cannot be imported due to US sanctions, said transport ministry official Guillermo Gonzalez. Havanans sometimes wait for hours for a bus to get to work or back home. At the same time, fuel shortages have worsened since the US reinforced its six-decade-old economic blockade of the communist island in 2019, preventing the arrival of fuel tankers from Venezuela, a Cuban ally.

Petrol supply plummeted from 100,000 barrels a day to about 56,000 barrels per day on average in 2021, said Jorge Pinon, a Cuban energy policy expert

at the University of Texas. Three years ago, the government began to promote the use of electric cars, introducing them to state-owned companies to be used by workers. "Cuba is a museum on wheels," said Gonzalez of the abundance of decades-old gas guzzlers. It is hoped that a rollout of electric cars will lower "fuel consumption... and at the same time reduce pollution," he added.

Like a fridge

But electricity supply, too, is a concern. For weeks now, Cubans have had to deal with regular cuts, sometimes lasting hours at a time, due to generation failures and maintenance work on thermo-electric plants. And in a bid to make up some of the shortage, the authorities have turned to generators that use up much of the limited diesel stock. "There has never been a situation as difficult as the one we have now, and there are still three months of summer to come," said Pinon, alluding to the annual warm-weather rise in demand for energy to run air conditioners.

Ramses Calzadilla, director of strategy at Cuba's energy ministry, said he was confident that electricity generation would be restored to full capacity shortly and insisted the situation did not threaten the burgeoning electric vehicle sector. "An electric motorcycle uses about as much energy as a refrigerator," he told AFP, and can be charged quickly and cheaply between programmed power cuts.—AFP

UK's rail strikes to go ahead after talks fail

LONDON: Britain's biggest strike action on the railway network in over 30 years will go ahead, after talks over pay broke down, the Rail Maritime and Transport Workers union said Saturday. RMT general-secretary Mick Lynch said there had been discussions in recent weeks with rail infrastructure body Network Rail, train companies and London Underground. But he added that "no viable settlements" were found. The failure of talks means more than 50,000 workers will take part in a three-day national strike on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday next week. London Underground workers will also stage a 24-hour walk-out on Tuesday.

The action coincides with major events including the Glastonbury music festival, as well as national exams for teenagers. Major disruption is predicted but the RMT defended the industrial action and blamed the Conservative government for cutting billions of pounds (dollars, euros) in funding from the transport network. Jobs had been lost across the sector, while wages for staff that remain were failing to keep pace with soaring inflation, which is at a 40-year high, it argued.

"In the face of this massive attack on our people the RMT cannot be passive," said Lynch. "So... we are confirming that the strike action scheduled to take place on 21st, 23rd and 25th June will go ahead." The Rail Delivery Group, an industry body for passenger and freight operators, predicted that "millions of people" would be affected. It promised to try to keep as many services running as possible but warned that "significant disruption will be inevitable and some parts of the network will not have a service". The strikes, which the RMT said are the biggest since 1989, will likely compound travel chaos, after airlines were forced to cut flights due to staff shortages, causing delays and frustration. The Department for Transport said the RMT's decision was "hugely disappointing and premature" and warned that jobs could be at risk if passengers turn away from rail, just as the sector tries to recover from a slump during the pandemic.—AFP



HAVANA: Men ride on a bicitaxi along a street of Havana. — AFP



HAVANA: An old American car rides along a street of Havana.—AFP

Problems soar for airlines despite pandemic recovery

PARIS: Desperate to put the coronavirus pandemic behind them, airlines will hold talks on Sunday ahead of a potential summer of chaos with shortages and strikes that could threaten their recovery. While trade is roaring back to life, representatives from the aviation sector meeting for three days in Qatar have a packed agenda with multiple geopolitical crises including the war in Ukraine and the environment. Cracks are already showing in the sector's recovery, though industry figures are optimistic about the future despite the issues. In the past few weeks, delays and cancellations caused by a lack of staff at airports and strikes for better pay have wreaked havoc upon travelers.

The problems originate with the pandemic when airlines and airports laid off thousands of workers during its worst-ever crisis. Now, they are scrambling for workers. Passenger numbers dropped by 60 percent in 2020, and in 2021 it was still down 50 percent. Airlines lost nearly \$200 billion over two years. While some firms in the sector went bankrupt, others—backed often by states—have emerged from the pandemic with profits intact.

European airlines are excited about the prospect for a "beautiful summer", with some data showing booking rates higher than in 2019. In the United States, the domestic market has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels. "Airlines are generating cash again, which is a real positive," said Willie Walsh, head of the International Air Transport Association, during a visit to Paris earlier this month. The sector's morale was buoyant after "a very long and barren two years", he told reporters.

'Not up to speed'

The International Air Transport Association (IATA), which represents 290 airlines accounting for 83 percent of global air traffic, will host its annual general meeting in

Doha instead of Shanghai after record-high Covid case counts forced it to relocate the forum. There will be cause for celebration during the event.

In terms of Revenue Passenger Kilometers (RPKs), a measure of total distance flown by paying passengers, activity in April reached 62.8 percent compared with the same month in 2019. That was the best figure since March 2020. Domestic routes, meanwhile, hit 74.2 percent in April, better than international markets which reached 56.6 percent compared with the same period in 2019. After the Easter holidays fiasco at European airports, Walsh admitted "the system is not up to speed", but vowed the issues would be addressed. He was hopeful despite the war in Ukraine and its wider impacts, surging inflation and record prices for jet fuel. Fuel makes up 25 to 30 percent of companies' spending, and given the still-fragile state of airlines' balance sheets, higher costs will be passed on to customers to preserve their profits. But the effects of Russia's war in Ukraine are already being felt. European flights to Asia are constrained by long diverted routes to avoid Russian airspace after having slapped heavy sanctions on Moscow.

Costly decarbonisation

With inflation eroding people's purchasing power, higher costs could weaken demand at a time when companies need to make serious investments to cut their carbon dioxide emissions. The IATA pledged last October to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The issue will be raised at a general assembly meeting of the International Civil Aviation Organization in the autumn, but a deal between countries is far from certain.

The IATA, which expects 10 billion air passengers annually by the middle of the century compared with 4.5 billion in 2019, refuses to consider any restrictions on growth in order to contain the effects of climate change. Commercial air travel, often the target of environmental activists, is responsible for between 2.5 and 3 percent of global emissions. Between "cleaner" planes and sustainable fuel, investment worth \$1.5 trillion over 30 years is needed to improve the sector's environmental impact. The costs will be most likely handed down to the customer, again.—AFP



DULLES: A United Airlines worker guides a passenger plane at the Dulles International Airport on June 17, 2022 in Dulles, Virginia. — AFP

Invitation to participate in the Capital Increase of National Consumer Holding Company K.S.C.P (Commercial Registration 71953)

Pursuant to the resolution passed at the Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting of National Consumer Holding Company K.S.C.P. ("NCCI", the "Issuer", or the "Company") held on 09 May 2022, approving an increase of the Company's issued and paid-up capital from KD 9,000,000 to KD 30,000,000 through issuing and allocating 210,000,000 ordinary shares at an offer price of 100 fils (Kuwaiti fill One Hundred) per share (capital increase of approximately 233.33% of the issued capital); and pursuant to the approval of the Kuwait Capital Markets Authority ("CMA") dated 24 February 2022, for the issuance of the new shares, and dated 08 June 2022 for the Prospectus, NCCI's Board of Directors is pleased to invite all the shareholders registered in NCCI's shareholders' register as of 22 June 2022 ("Record Date"), to subscribe to the new shares ("Offering Shares") in accordance with the following terms:

Subscription Period:	From Thursday 23 June 2022 (inclusive of this date) to Thursday 07 July 2022 (inclusive of this date).												
Offering Price:	100 Kuwaiti fill per Share.												
Pre-emption Rights / Eligible Subscribers:	The Pre-emption rights are for shareholders recorded in NCCI's shareholders' register with the Kuwait Clearing Company as of the Record Date of Wednesday 22 June 2022, or those who obtained Pre-emption rights ("Pre-emption Rights"), whether during the Pre-emption Rights trading period or by assignment ("Eligible Subscribers").												
Subscription to Additional Shares:	Eligible Subscribers have the right to subscribe for Offering Shares in addition to their Pre-emption Rights shares and they also have the right to subscribe in the additional Offering Shares.												
Trading of Pre-emption Rights and ISIN:	Pre-emption Rights may be traded or assigned without consideration and without any restriction and according to the applicable rules at Boursa Kuwait and the Kuwait Clearing Company on Thursday 23 June 2022 (inclusive of this date) to Thursday 30 June 2022 (inclusive of this date). The ISIN for the trading of Pre-emption Rights is: KW000560076.												
Lead Manager and Subscription Agent:	National Investments Company K.S.C.P. Al Khaleeja Complex, Floor 7, Jaber Al Mubarak Street, Sharq, Kuwait.												
Clearing and Depository Agent:	Kuwait Clearing Company K.S.C., Al-Ahmad Tower, Floor 5, Arabian Gulf Road, Kuwait.												
Subscription Process:	Subscription amounts will not be accepted in cash. 1. Subscription for an amount of KD 10,000 or less: The Subscriber shall: A. Log in via the mobile application (iOS/Android) or the website via the link: www.ipocom.kw. B. Select an NCCI IPO from the list. C. Enter the following subscriber details: Civil ID number for Individual Subscribers (commercial registration number for Corporate Subscribers), email address and mobile number. D. The number of shares to be subscribed for. E. At the K-NET payment gateway page, enter Subscription Bank Account details for the payment. F. Receive the subscription payment receipt through email and mobile SMS notification. 2. Subscription for an amount more than KD 10,000: A. Repeat the same aforementioned steps from A to D. B. Print out the Subscription Application Form via link: www.ipocom.kw. C. The Subscriber shall visit his bank and submit a copy of the printed Subscription Application Form and transfer the required amount by way of electronic bank transfer from the subscriber's bank account (a bank transfer from a non-subscriber's bank account will not be accepted), net amount without any charges, to the following Subscription Bank Account: <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-top: 5px;"> <tr><td>Name of the Bank:</td><td>National Bank of Kuwait</td></tr> <tr><td>Account number:</td><td>252789439</td></tr> <tr><td>IBAN:</td><td>KW97NBOK000000000002789439</td></tr> <tr><td>SWIFT:</td><td>NBOKWQW</td></tr> <tr><td>Beneficiary:</td><td>National Investments Company-NCHC</td></tr> <tr><td>Reference/Narration:</td><td>NCHC capital increase + Trading number</td></tr> </table> D. The Subscriber shall obtain an original Deposit Voucher of the amount transferred from his bank to the Subscription Bank Account. E. The Subscriber shall go to the head office of Kuwait Clearing Company located in Al-Ahmad Tower, Floor 5, Arabian Gulf Road, Kuwait, to submit the Subscription Application Form along with the documents listed in the Prospectus - Appendix "Documents required when Submitting the Subscription Application Form", during normal working hours Sunday through Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 13:00 p.m. (except for Public Holidays). F. Kuwait Clearing Company shall provide the Subscriber with a Deposit Receipt for the Subscription. In the event that any of the Subscribers fail to submit a duly completed Subscription Application Form (along with all required supporting documentation) at the office of the Kuwait Clearing Company, after transferring the Subscription Amount stated in the Prospectus, then the Subscriber's Subscription Application Form will be null and void. Subject to other reasons for rejection, the Issuer and Kuwait Clearing Company have the right to reject the Subscription Application if the Subscriber has not already paid the required value and is not fully credited to the Subscription Bank Account at the time of submission with the Lead Manager.	Name of the Bank:	National Bank of Kuwait	Account number:	252789439	IBAN:	KW97NBOK000000000002789439	SWIFT:	NBOKWQW	Beneficiary:	National Investments Company-NCHC	Reference/Narration:	NCHC capital increase + Trading number
Name of the Bank:	National Bank of Kuwait												
Account number:	252789439												
IBAN:	KW97NBOK000000000002789439												
SWIFT:	NBOKWQW												
Beneficiary:	National Investments Company-NCHC												
Reference/Narration:	NCHC capital increase + Trading number												
Required Documents:	Each Subscriber must submit the Subscription Application Form and proof of payment of the Subscription Amount along with the Subscriber's IBAN number, accompanied by the following documents, as the case may be: Individual Subscribers: - Original and copy of personal Civil Identification Card; - Original and copy of passport for citizens of GCC countries; - Original and copy of special legal power of attorney (for proxy subscribers); - Original and copy of Certificate of Guardianship (for minor/orphan subscribers); - Original and copy of Limitation of Succession Deed (for heirs); - In the event that the Subscriber does not attend in person, the original authorization form issued by the Subscriber to the person authorized to deal with the administration regarding the Subscription Application Form (provided that the signature contained in the authorization form is verified by the Subscriber's bank). Corporate Subscribers: - Original and copy of Commercial Registration Certificate; - Original and copy of Authorized Signatories Certificate or an Extract of the Commercial Register; - Original and copy of personal Civil Identification Card of the authorized signatory; - Original and copy of specimen of signature for the authorized signatory issued by the Public Authority for Manpower or attested by Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry; - In the event, the authorized signatory does not attend in person, a letter issued by the authorized signatory on behalf of the entity authorizing the Subscription. Non-Kuwaiti Subscribers: Non-Kuwaiti Subscribers (whether legal or natural persons, as applicable) are required to provide the equivalent of the aforementioned documentation as issued by their jurisdictional authorities if they do not have Kuwait issued documentation.												
Risk Factors:	Investors should carefully check the risk factors set out in the Prospectus before investing in the shares and before making any investment decision. These include risks related to the Issuer's activity and operations, geopolitical, economic and health risks, fluctuations in the performance of the industrial sector and increased competition, and the relationship of the Issuer's performance with the performance of other sectors, the risk of not having liquidity permanently or at a high cost, market risks, customer credit and credit risks, operational risks, information technology systems, high costs of managing, operating and maintaining industrial projects, risks of industrial investments and difficulty in exiting from such projects, the ability to implement company strategies, lawsuits and fines, the company's ability to meet all requirements of corporate governance rules and regulatory bodies' rules, amendment of laws, investment and business environment, legal and regulatory systems, application of the Kuwaiti bankruptcy law, force majeure, risks of investing in securities in developing and emerging markets, risks related to priority rights, and risks related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the appropriateness of investment and stock liquidity, stock price change, dividend distribution, tax risks, and the possibility of GCC countries entering into a monetary union.												
Terms and Conditions of Subscription:	The Terms and Conditions of the Subscription set out in the Prospectus and Subscription Application Form shall apply.												
Notice to Investors:	Investors are hereby advised to read and fully understand the contents of the Prospectus and seek the advice of a licensed advisor specialized in advising on the contents of the Prospectus and investment in shares and the associated risks, prior to making a decision as to whether or not to subscribe to the Offering Shares.												
How to Obtain the Prospectus:	Investors can obtain an electronic copy of the Prospectus from the following: - Issuer's website: www.nccik.com - Lead Manager and Subscription Agent's website: www.nic.com.kw - Boursa Kuwait website: www.boursakuwait.com.kw												
Disclaimer of Capital Markets Authority:	The CMA assumes no responsibility whatsoever for the contents and accuracy of the Prospectus or this announcement and is not liable for any losses arising from the reliance on any part of the Prospectus or this announcement, as CMA expressly and explicitly disclaims itself from any liability of any kind due to any loss that may arise or occur due to reliance on any part of the Prospectus or this announcement and that it will not be a party to any claim for damages arising from the Prospectus.												
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Business

Russian farmers seeking to ride out Western sanctions

Ukraine war disrupts crucial deliveries, fuelling concern

KHATMANOVO: Yevgeny Shifanov, co-owner of an organic farm, says his business has felt the sting of Western sanctions and he is no longer able to sell his grain to Europe. But the 42-year-old puts on a brave face, saying he is pivoting to ex-Soviet countries such as Belarus as well as domestic clients. "We are more interested in our internal market, our economy," the co-owner of Chyorny Khleb ("Black Bread") told AFP. Shifanov's business-located in the village of Khatmanovo, some 150 kilometers south of Moscow on the banks of the Oka River-is one of numerous small farms that have mushroomed in Russia over the past decade.

Moscow's military intervention in Ukraine has devastated crops and farming in the pro-Western nation and disrupted crucial deliveries from Ukraine fuelling concern about hunger and food prices worldwide. The military campaign also put a major focus on Russia's own agriculture sector. The country is the largest wheat exporter in the world and has been accused by the West of using grain as a geopolitical tool. While Russia appears to be calling the shots in the current grain standoff with the West, experts say that its own agricultural sector is also bracing for tough times.

At Chyorny Khleb, which cultivates cereals on just over 1,000 hectares of land, green wheat stalks are knee-high. The farmers are enjoying a relative lull before harvesting starts in late July. "In March or April, we begin to prepare the land, then we plant. Soon we will reap the results of our work," said Alexei Yershov, a 28-year-old tractor driver before climbing into his red-and-black tractor and setting off into a buckwheat field.

New reality

The outlook for the season is good, with the agriculture ministry forecasting a harvest of 130 million tons including a record 87 million tons of wheat. But

the farmers admit they have struggled since the onset of unprecedented Western sanctions. "We have faced logistical problems," said Shifanov, adding that he has partners in Europe and Israel but the trucks carrying his farm's produce abroad were blocked at the border.

"We have buyers abroad, but we can't do anything, we can't deliver there, now we can only make do with our domestic market," he said. He added that he was also searching for partners in Belarus, Armenia and Kazakhstan. The farm is gradually adjusting to the new reality. Like many other Russian businesses, the farm went on a "panic buying" spree in the first few weeks of the crisis, purchasing a year's worth of packaging supplies that are now gathering dust.

One of Shifanov's partners is now running out of glue needed to make labels. "It was imported from Europe," said Shifanov, standing in a shed between mounds of wheat. "They are trying to solve the problem via China but the logistics remain complicated," he added. In a nearby building, Roman Tikhonov, 40, works on an Austrian-made wooden milling machine. The miller said that the farm is learning to operate without foreign-made spare parts.

"Recently, something broke, we found the material and fixed it," he said. "Before the spare parts arrived from Austria, we waited a long time, now we make them ourselves, it's faster." The Ukrainian-made milling machine next-door has been receiving its spare parts via Belarus since the outbreak of hostilities between Ukrainian forces and Moscow-backed separatists in 2014. Shifanov nevertheless says he is relieved that his tractors were mainly made in Russia or Belarus.

Trading at a discount

The grain market is also adjusting to the new



TULA: A tractor tows a harrow on the field of Chyorny Khleb (Black Bread) enterprise in the village of Khatmanovo in the Tula region some 150 kilometers outside Moscow. Yevgeny Shifanov, co-owner of an organic farm, says his business has felt the sting of Western sanctions and he is no longer able to sell his grain to Europe. —AFP

conditions. Before Russia's military campaign, the price of wheat was already high at around \$300 per ton but now it is more than \$400. Andrey Sizov, the head of Sovecon, a Russian agriculture consultancy, said that Russia is now selling its grain-just like its oil-at a discount.

"The war discount for Russian grain is \$20 per ton," he told AFP. "Russian grain has become cheaper than, for example French grain, because you have

to reflect and price in those additional costs like freight, insurance, problems with payments." Sizov also pointed out that not only do farmers face higher production costs due to inflation, authorities in 2021 introduced strict export taxes that take about "30 percent of farmers revenue". "The irony is current record high wheat prices were driven mainly by the Russian war but at the same time Russian farmers are not benefiting from them." —AFP

Russia gas squeeze threatens Europe's stockpiling plans

PARIS: With France becoming the latest country to be cut off from Russian natural gas, and supplies sharply reduced in Italy and Germany, Europe's summer stockpiling plans are looking shaky. As the war in Ukraine nears its fourth month, Moscow is hitting Europe - which gets some 40 percent of its gas from Russia - where it hurts. Several European countries, including Italy and Germany, are highly reliant upon Russian gas for their energy needs and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi has bluntly accused energy giant Gazprom of lying over the reasons for the cuts.

Europe uses less gas in summer months as it does not need to heat buildings, but countries are racing to replenish their reserves for the following winter. The EU wants the gas storage infrastructures of its member states to be filled to at least 80 percent of their capacity by November. The gas squeeze, which pushes prices up, "has consequences, not immediately on consumption, but on stockpiling", Draghi said Thursday, adding that Italy's reserves were at 52 percent.

'Gas as weapon'

The reduction in supplies will also be costly for manufacturers - especially in countries like Germany, where factories in the chemical, steel, cement and fertilizer industries need huge quantities of gas. "The Russians have been using gas as a

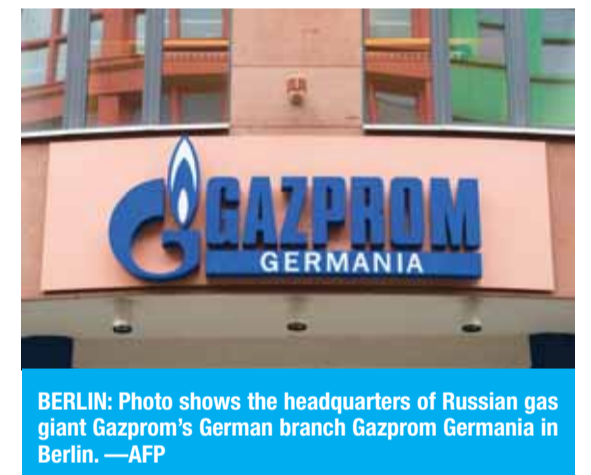
weapon for a long time," Thierry Bros, a professor at the Sciences Po university in Paris, told AFP. "The Kremlin uses the principle of uncertainty, one day something and the next day something else, to... stretch the commodities market and drive up prices".

Poland, Bulgaria, Finland and the Netherlands have had their natural gas deliveries suspended over refusing to follow Russia's demand that it be paid in rubles. The latest blows hit France Friday, where operator GRTgaz said it had not received any Russian gas by pipeline since 15 June, and Italy, which faced a third day of reduced supplies. On Friday, Europe's reference natural gas price, Dutch TTF, reached 130 euros (\$137) per megawatt-hour compared to 100 euros on Wednesday - and 30 euros a year earlier.

Breaking European unity

France had been relying on Russia for about 17 percent of its gas, most of which arrived via pipeline, with the rest being brought in liquid form by LNG ships. The reason for the cut is unknown - but follows a 60 percent reduction in deliveries to Germany via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline. Italy's Eni said it will receive only 50 percent of the gas requested Friday. Draghi has rejected Gazprom's excuses, saying the reasons "we are told, are technical". "We and Germany and others believe that these are lies". The Russian company, he insisted Thursday, was using gas for "political" ends. Germany's economy and climate minister, Robert Habeck, has described the gas cuts as "a showdown with (Russian President Vladimir) Putin".

"This is a decision he is making arbitrarily - that's how dictators and despots act." Gazprom, however, says Moscow has every right to play by



BERLIN: Photo shows the headquarters of Russian gas giant Gazprom's German branch Gazprom Germania in Berlin. —AFP

its own rules over the cuts. Bros at Sciences Po said Gazprom "does not need any justification". "It is cutting in a differentiated way to break European unity." EU countries have scrambled to wean themselves off Russian energy but are divided about imposing a natural gas embargo because several member states are heavily reliant on Moscow's supplies.

Some are considering installing new terminals to boost their capabilities for liquefied natural gas (LNG). France has already greatly upped purchases of LNG since the February invasion and its terminals are close to their maximum, according to GRTgaz. The country has become the largest buyer of Russian LNG in the world, according to Lauri Myllyvirta, an analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), which published a report on Russian oil and gas sales this week. —AFP

Brazil's Petrobras raises fuel prices

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's state-owned oil company Petrobras announced Friday it is raising fuel prices, infuriating President Jair Bolsonaro as he faces an inflationary spike and a re-election bid in October. Painful price increases, especially for food and fuel, have emerged as a key weak spot for the far-right incumbent. Petrobras, the largest company in Latin America, said it will hike gasoline prices by 5.18 percent and diesel prices by 14.26 percent starting Saturday.

It blamed "a challenging scenario in Brazil and the world," the latter a reference to the war in Ukraine, which has triggered higher oil prices around the world. Brazil has already seen fuel prices surge by over 33 percent in the past year, according

Germans turn to food banks as inflation hits

BERLIN: German pensioner Gabriele Washah waits in line to fill her trolley with bags of carrots for 50 cents, yoghurts just past their sell-by date and bunches of wilting flowers. With the cost of living soaring across Europe, the 65-year-old retired shop assistant is one of many Germans turning to food banks to make ends meet.

"Sometimes I go home from the shop almost crying because I can't afford it any more," she told AFP outside the row of stalls in Bernau, near Berlin. Nestled in an alleyway behind a big chain supermar-

ket, the food bank sells at greatly reduced prices groceries donated by supermarkets, as well as cheap prepared meals. Here, customers can pick up a full trolley of food for around 30 euros (around \$32).

For Washah, that means bread, butter and her favorite sandwich filling, sausage-"which used to cost 99 cents (\$1.02) but now sometimes costs more than two euros". Driven by the war in Ukraine, inflation in Germany soared to 7.9 percent in May-its highest level since reunification in 1990, with food prices among those worst affected. Demand for food banks across the country has increased "significantly" since the start of the year and doubled in some areas, according to a spokeswoman for the Tafel food bank network.

There are around 1,000 such schemes in Germany, run by volunteers and available to customers on a means-tested basis. Groceries, while donated, are still sold rather than given away free to



SAO PAULO: A man on a bicycle passes by the Sao Paulo Stock Exchange (B3) in downtown Sao Paulo, Brazil. Shares of Petrobras plunged more than 10% on the Sao Paulo Stock Exchange amid political tensions after another fuel price hike strongly criticized by President Jair Bolsonaro. —AFP

the customers as the Tafel has to cover running costs, including rents and electricity. The organization too has had to put up prices because their running costs have risen. "It's not just one product," said 69-year-old pensioner Peter Behme. "All the prices are going up."

Poverty line

In a bid to ease the pressure on squeezed finances, the government has lowered taxes on fuel, drastically slashed the cost of public transport and promised all taxpayers a one-off payment of 300 euros. But Behme remains unimpressed. "I don't know where the government help is going," he said. Even the food banks themselves are feeling the effects of the massive inflation. "We have had to raise some prices by 20 or 50 cents because we need money to replenish our stocks," said Malina Jankow, manager of the Bernau food bank. —AFP



CALIFORNIA: A Tesla car arrives at a service center in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

Tesla shareholder sues Musk over harassment and racism complaints

NEW YORK: A Tesla shareholder has filed legal proceedings against Elon Musk and the company's board of directors, accusing them of ignoring employee complaints of racism and sexual harassment. The lawsuit - brought forward Thursday by plaintiff Solomon Chau in Texas where Tesla is headquartered - argues that an unaddressed "toxic workplace culture" at the company has caused "irreparable" reputational damage and financial harm.

The action was the latest against Tesla, which has been hit by a spate of sexual harassment lawsuits and Black employees complaining of rampant racism. In February, the state of California sued Tesla over alleged discrimination and harassment against Black employees at its Fremont plant near San Francisco, saying in a complaint that the company had created a "racially segregated workplace."

Thursday's court filing stated that a "toxic environment took shape internally for years and the truth about Tesla's culture has only recently emerged, leading to actions by both regulators and private individuals." The lawsuit asserts that Musk, who is Tesla's executive director, and its 11 board members ignored several "red flags", which resulted in the departure of numerous highly qualified employees and set off a series of costly legal proceedings.

"These wrongs resulted in significant damages to Tesla's reputation, goodwill, and standing in the business community", the lawsuit states, and "exposed Tesla to hundreds of millions of dollars in potential liability for violations of state and federal law." In another lawsuit last year, Tesla was ordered to pay \$137 million plus interest to a former elevator operator at its Fremont factory for turning a blind eye to racism. Earlier this year, the penalty was reduced to \$15 million.

Other legal proceedings, in particular from Black women employees who claim to have been victims of racial slurs and inappropriate sexual remarks by colleagues or superiors, are underway. Tesla, which has barely responded to requests from journalists since late 2020, did not respond to a request from AFP. Musk was also sued on Thursday by an investor in dogecoin, who says he lost money after investing in the cryptocurrency, and described himself as an "American citizen who was defrauded" by what he called a "Dogecoin Crypto Pyramid Scheme." —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Students undergo tutorials on film production at EbonyLife Creative Academy in Lagos. — AFP photos



A cameraman films student actress during the production of a six-minute film "Father Forgive Me" by Esther Abah at EbonyLife Creative Academy studio.



Student member of crew (right) holds clapperboard to signal commencement of shooting during the production of a six-minute film "Father Forgive Me" by Esther Abah at the studio of EbonyLife Creative Academy.

Lagos film school helps focus Nollywood's global push

Inside the cavernous Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic church in Lagos, a man in a dark hoodie stops menacingly at the entrance and glares at the Christ statue before him. He crosses himself slowly, staggers against the pews and freezes. Black baseball cap shielding her eyes, director Esther Abah squints into her monitor. The shot was off. Time for another take. "Come back, come back," she calls out to her actor.

With a crew of student actors, lighting gaffers and sound engineers, cameramen and grips, Abah is part of a project to sharpen the skills of a new generation of Nigerian film-makers to help them appeal to international audiences. The church scene is part of a six-minute piece "Father Forgive Me", Abah is filming halfway into an 11-week intensive course with EbonyLife Creative Academy.

The joint project between EbonyLife production house—a Nigeria film powerhouse—and Lagos State government, wants to train students like Abah to make African stories for a wider international public. Films like "Father Forgive Me"—a

tale of a priest struggling with a moral dilemma—may not get to the foreign market, but they are teaching young moviemakers how to appeal beyond Nigeria.

Massive industry

"You can have an original story, but you have to present it in a way that anyone will watch it," said Theart Korsten, the South African head of the Lagos academy. "We want them to tell Nigerian stories for the international audience." Nigeria's domestic film industry, Nollywood, is massive, and prolific—second only to India's Bollywood in terms of quantity of movies produced and ahead of Hollywood.

Its films, along with the dominance of the Afropop music scene with stars like Burna Boy and WizKid, have guaranteed Nigeria's place as a cultural powerhouse on the continent. Nollywood has come some way since its roots in the early 1990s when directors made low-budget videos and DVDs that rarely made it to the cinema screen.

But Nigeria's film industry made up 2.3

percent of the national GDP or \$660 million last year, according to the PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook report. A shift to television, cinemas and streaming has made films more accessible to Nigeria's elite and the African diaspora, eager for content with bigger budgets, said Alessandro Jedlowski, an anthropologist specializing in Nollywood at Science Po university in Bordeaux, France. The rise of platforms like Netflix and Amazon is also creating demand for better films from beyond the western studios that have traditionally dominated the entertainment industry.

Intense training

Already some of the academy's students helped in the production of Netflix's first original from Nigeria, "Blood Sisters", which tells the tale of two friends caught up in an accidental killing. "Netflix is global, so it's getting traction, not only from the Nigerian or African diaspora, (but) traction from Europe and America also," said Nigerian filmmaker and EbonyLife teacher Daniel Oriahi.

"It's great our stories are getting global attention but what are we going to do differently?" Opened just over a year ago, the school takes up part of an EbonyLife building in Lagos' Victoria Island commercial district, where students specialize in one aspect of filmmaking from scriptwriting to post-production. About 500 hopefuls apply for 120 posts in the program, which is free and taught by film-makers from South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria. After a few weeks of training, they move on to filming in an intense program. Four of the films are selected to get a screening at the graduation ceremony.

"I made a couple of short films, but I knew I needed to understand more about film," said young director Abah. "I see film now from a different perspective and I really understand what film is all about."

'Have to make do'

For the Lagos State government, the investment was part of a drive to help the city's creative industries. Another Lagos school, Africa Film Academy, this month said it also signed a deal with Lagos State

to offer a free six-week course in film skills.

"The government has invested hugely in this training, and we are happy that we are seeing the results," said Lagos tourism and culture commissioner Uzamat Akinbile Yussuf. Back at the Lagos church, an actor's makeup is touched up by the light of a cell phone as lighting crews look how to capture the colors of the stained-glass windows.

"We have to make do with what we have," said Elijah, one of the lighting crew. The camera rolls as a character moves off the sellotape cross on the floor marking his starting point. Patience is wearing thin, and the crew gets restless. South African cinematography lecturer Jan du Toit steps in with a touch of guidance. He moves lighting into the pews and guides the cameraman to smoothly follow the actor. "Now that looks better," he said. "Fantastic." — AFP



US singer Mariah Carey speaks onstage during the Songwriters Hall of Fame 51st Annual Induction and Awards Gala in New York.



US musician Lil Nas X speaks onstage.



US musicians Pharrell Williams (left) and Chad Hugo speak onstage.

Mariah Carey, Eurythmics, Pharrell enter Songwriters Hall of Fame

Mariah Carey sparked Thursday as her peers inducted the beloved diva into the prestigious Songwriters Hall of Fame, part of a class that also includes Pharrell, Steve Miller and the Isley Brothers. This edition of the gala that honors the composers behind pop culture's most indelible hits was years in the making, after the 51st annual edition originally slated for 2020 was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A true industry award and who's who of music, the Songwriters Hall of Fame gala foregoes a televised event in favor of a festive dinner and intimate concert.

But even without a broadcast, the Manhattan ballroom was glowing with star power, not least thanks to Carey, who strutted the stage in a glittering, curve-hugging gown as she accepted the coveted honor. Carey—whose songwriting talent has long been overshadowed by her elastic vocal range and pop star image—doubled as the night's stand-up comedian, making light of her own reputation as high-maintenance, at one point donning sunglasses to make a point about the less than ideal lighting.

But she struck a more earnest note in celebrating her fellow inductees and songwriters more broadly, calling them "unsung heroes." For artist Jimmy Jam, who along with Terry Lewis produced a slew of massive hits including for Janet Jackson, Carey is among an elite class of songwriters whose work is timeless.

"There's nobody that's more savvy than her, that works harder, that knows all the intricacies of writing and is passionate about it," he told AFP on the red carpet. Carey chose self-taught singing prodigy Lيامani Segura to perform at the ceremony in her honor, and the 13-year-old led the crowd through a medley of the Long

Miller-born singer's smashes including "Fantasy," "One Sweet Day" and, of course, "All I Want For Christmas Is You."

Earlier in the night, inductee Miller shredded through his space dream of a hit "Fly Like An Eagle," after being inducted by his friend, the actor Bryan Cranston. "It's really the highest honor—the most intellectual honor," Miller, 78, told AFP on the red carpet of entering the songwriting pantheon. "It means the most to me."

'Sense of direction'

Miller's performance followed a showstopper of an opening from St. Vincent, who inducted the Eurythmics—the duo comprised of Annie Lennox and Dave Stewart—after delivering a spot-on version of "Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)" that had Lil Nas X on his feet, a shock of blond curls bobbing atop his pale pink suit. Lil Nas X accepted a special honor for gifted young songwriters on the night that also celebrated the songwriting talents of Rick Nowels, the songwriter behind megahits including Lana Del Rey's "Summertime Sadness" along with "Heaven Is a Place On Earth" and "Circle in the Sand" by Belinda Carlisle.

Motown icon Smokey Robinson lit up the room with a set honoring Mickey

Stevenson, whose success includes the classic "Dancing In The Street." And Usher joined artist of the moment Jon Batiste in celebrating The Neptunes—the duo of Pharrell Williams and Chad Hugo — taking the audience through a hip-swaying medley of hits they wrote and produced including Usher's "U Don't Have To Call."

The ever-luminous Pharrell, wearing a showstopping cherry red leather suit, gave a lengthy ode to songwriting and advised young writers to push forward: "When that sparkle hits you feel it in your bone, you feel it in your body... you feel this sense of direction." Earlier in the night, he told AFP it felt "surreal" to accept the accolade.

This year's gala comes at a time that the songwriting and publishing side of the music business that's oft-overlooked is experiencing roaring success, with catalogs seen as coveted assets for investors. Jody Gerson, the Chairman and CEO of Universal Music Publishing—which in recent years has acquired catalogs including those of Neil Diamond and Sting—accepted the night's publishing honor, and praised the songwriters that make her work possible.

And Paul Williams—the songwriting legend behind hits like "Rainy Days and Mondays" from The Carpenters as well as the Muppet classic "Rainbow Connection"—hailed songwriting's ability to connect. "People respond to what we create, and that's the biggest prize of all," he said in accepting the night's highest honor, a lifetime achievement prize of sorts for songwriters already inducted. "We feel a little less alone in this world, while sharing a stack of vulnerabilities and dreams and self-doubt."

"Endless love songs—I mean I write codependent anthems, I'm sorry," he quipped. "I won't last a day without you" is not a healthy thought—I've done some therapy." But jokes aside, Williams was unequivocal in emphasizing the importance of his fellow lyricists: "My God, we never needed your songs more than right now." — AFP



US musician Questlove speaks onstage during the Songwriters Hall of Fame. — AFP photos

Ukraine to fight decision to stop it hosting next Eurovision

Ukraine on Friday condemned the European Broadcasting Union's decision to strip it of the right to host next year's Eurovision song contest on security grounds after Russia's invasion. "We will demand to change this decision, because we believe that we will be able to fulfil all the commitments... We demand additional negotiations on hosting Eurovision-2023 in Ukraine," Ukrainian Culture Minister Oleksandr Tkachenko said in a statement. Earlier Friday the EBU in Geneva said that given the current circumstances in war-torn Ukraine "the security and operational guarantees required for a broadcaster to host, organize and produce the Eurovision Song Contest... cannot be fulfilled" in Ukraine.



Instead Britain, whose singer was runner-up in this year's contest, is being considered as a possible replacement host. Ukraine's Kalush Orchestra last month won the world's biggest live music event, and according to tradition, the country should host next year's competition.

But the EBU said "given the ongoing war" since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, that would not be possible. The authorities in Kyiv said the EBU had got it all wrong. "Ukraine does not agree with the nature of the decision taken by the European Broadcasting Union," Tkachenko added, assuring that his country had "fulfilled all the conditions" and "provided answers and guarantees on safety standards" for the contest.

Kalush Orchestra won the Eurovision Song Contest final which took place in Turin, Italy thanks to the votes from national panels of judges and the general public. The result had been widely tipped with European audiences demonstrating their solidarity with Ukraine in the face of Russia's invasion. — AFP



This undated handout photo shows a grave for Microsoft's Internet Explorer. — AFP

RIP Internet Explorer: South Korean engineer's browser 'grave' goes viral

A South Korean engineer who built a grave for Internet Explorer—photos of which quickly went viral—told AFP Friday that the now-defunct web browser had made his life a misery. South Korea, which has some of the world's fastest average internet speeds, remained bizarrely wedded to Microsoft's Internet Explorer, which was retired by the company earlier this week after 27 years. In honor of the browser's "death", a gravestone marked with its signature "e" logo was set up on the rooftop of a cafe in South Korea's southern city of Gyeongju by engineer Kiyoung Jung, 38. "He was a good tool to use to download other browsers," the gravestone's inscription reads.

Images of Jung's joke tombstone quickly spread online, with users of social media site Reddit upvoting it tens of thousands of times. Once dominant globally, Internet Explorer was widely reviled in recent years due to its slowness and glitches. But in South Korea, it was mandatory for online banking and shopping until about 2014, as all such online activities required sites to use ActiveX—a plugin created by Microsoft.

It remained the default browser for many Seoul government sites until very recently, local reports said. The websites of the Korea Water Resources Corporation and the Korea Expressway Corporation only functioned properly in IE until at least June 10, according to a report by the Maeil Economic Daily.

'Suffering' for IE

As a software engineer and web developer, Jung told AFP he constantly "suffered" at work because of compatibility issues involving the now-defunct browser. "In South Korea, when you are doing web development work, the expectation was always that it should look good in Internet Explorer, rather than Chrome," he said. Websites that look good in other browsers, such as Safari or Chrome, can look very wrong in IE, which often forced him to spend many extra hours working to ensure compatibility. Jung said that he was "overjoyed" by IE's retirement. But he also said he felt genuinely nostalgic and emotional about the browser's demise, as he remembers its heyday—one of the reasons he was inspired to erect the grave stone. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Marilyn dress owner says Kim Kardashian did not damage it at Met Gala

Kim Kardashian did not damage the Marilyn Monroe dress she wore to the Met Gala in New York, the museum that owns it said Thursday, after fans complained the gown had been torn. Kardashian turned heads last month when she appeared at the event in the skin-tight dress the screen siren wore to serenade then-president John F. Kennedy on his birthday in 1962.

But a Monroe memorabilia collector complained this week the dress had been ripped, and published what he said were before-and-after pictures showing missing crystals and tears by its fasteners. Los Angeles-based Museum

Ripley's Believe It or Not! pushed back Thursday, saying the reality star-turned-entrepreneur had not left her mark on the gown.

"Kim Kardashian wearing the 'Happy Birthday' dress has been hotly contested, but the fact remains that she did not, in any way, damage the garment in the short amount of time it was worn at the Met Gala," the museum said on its website. "From the bottom of the Met steps, where Kim got into the dress, to the top where it was returned, the dress was in the same condition it started in," said Amanda Joiner, Ripley's Vice President of Publishing and Licensing, who looked

after the dress on the day.

The museum bought the dress at auction in 2016 for \$4.8 million. A report on its condition written in 2017 says: "a number of the seams are pulled and worn. This is not surprising given how delicate the material is." At that time there was already "puckering at the back by the hooks and eyes," the museum's website said. Kardashian, who reportedly went on a diet to be able to squeeze into the dress, has made no public comment on the controversy. — AFP

French screen legend Jean-Louis Trintignant dead at 91

France lost a screen legend on Friday-actor Jean-Louis Trintignant, who died at the age of 91, was hailed by President Emmanuel Macron as "a wonderful artistic talent". Among the legends that emerged during French cinema's New Wave in the 1960s, Trintignant had one of the most durable careers, still making ground-breaking films into his eighties. His quiet authority and sonorous voice left their mark on some 120 films, from the notorious "And God Created Woman" alongside Brigitte Bardot in 1959, through classics like "A Man and a Woman" and "Z", to later powerful dramas such as "Three Colors: Red" and "Amour". "He accompanied our lives through French cinema," said Macron when he was informed of the news during a tech conference in Paris.

"It's a page that turns on a wonderful artistic talent and voice." Trintignant's life was, however, marked by one terrible trauma when his daughter Marie was beaten to death by her rock-star boyfriend Bertrand Cantat in 2003. He was surrounded by his family in the Gard region of southern France when he passed away, his wife said in a statement sent to AFP. No cause of death was given.

Traitors, thugs and crooks

Trintignant announced his retirement from cinema in 2017 but returned two years later for a sequel to the film that made his name—the 1966 classic "A Man



This file photo taken in 1980 shows French actor Jean-Louis Trintignant.

and a Woman". The New Wave love story from director Claude Lelouch starred Trintignant as a racing driver—his real-life passion—and turned him into an international star after it won two Academy Awards and the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. He won the best actor award at the festival three years later for political thriller "Z". "The most beautiful voice that we've heard in theatre or cinema," Lelouch told French radio on Friday.

"He made us a gift of his scars. He was a remarkable man... I owe him everything," added Lelouch, who worked with Trintignant on seven films. Despite his screen success, Trintignant was known to

say that he preferred the theatre. "I could have spent my whole life doing theatre," he said in 2017, adding: "But cinema paid better!"

After his breakout role alongside Bardot—with whom he had a brief affair—Trintignant went on to be seen as one of the most gifted actors of the postwar generation, playing an array of traitors, thugs and crooks or ambiguous and perverted types. "Trintignant was one of my all-time favorite actors: sexy, pensive, mischievous, capable of deep and searching sadness," tweeted Variety film critic Guy Lodge. "What a body of work. What a face."

Images of him crying at his daughter's funeral touched French hearts in 2003. "Inside me, everything is destroyed," he said, and disappeared from cinema for a decade. But he refused to give in to bitterness and even forgave Cantat, the lead singer of the French band Noir Desir, when many others refused. And he returned to triumph in 2012, starring in Michael Haneke's Oscar-winning "Amour" as a man in his eighties struggling to look after his wife after a stroke. Trintignant first married actress Stephane Audran, then film director Nadine Marquand, with whom he had three children—Marie, Pauline and Vincent. The couple divorced and he then went on to marry Marianne Hoepfner, a former racing driver like himself. — AFP



Kate Bush

Kate Bush classic 'Running Up That Hill' tops chart after 37 years

Almost 37 years after its release, "Running Up That Hill" by enigmatic British songstress Kate Bush finally hit the top of the UK charts on Friday thanks to Netflix series "Stranger Things". The song has enjoyed a renaissance globally after featuring in the hit sci-fi horror series. The hit has seen Bush, 63, set a slew of records in her home country, according to the Official Charts Company.

The 1985 song now holds the record for longest time taken for a single to reach number one, while its ethereal singer boasts the longest-ever gap between chart-toppers, 44 years after "Wuthering Heights" first revealed her talents to the world. Bush has also become the oldest female artist ever to score a number one hit in the UK.

She thanked the Netflix show's creators the Duffer Brothers for her newfound success. "I'm overwhelmed by the scale of affection and support the song is receiving and it's all happening really fast, as if it's being driven along by a kind of elemental force," she wrote on her official website. "I have to admit I feel really moved by it all."

"I believe the Duffer Brothers have touched people's hearts in a special way, at a time that's incredibly difficult for everyone, especially younger people," she wrote on Twitter. "By featuring Running Up That Hill in such a positive light—as a talisman for Max (one of the main female characters) — the song has been brought into the emotional arena of her story," she added. Bush has largely spent recent decades out of the public eye, but performed a 22-night residency in London in 2014, with tickets selling out in 15 minutes. After being included on the soundtrack for season four of "Stranger Things", "Running Up That Hill" became the most-streamed song on Spotify in the United States, the UK and globally. It was originally the lead track on her "Hounds of Love" album. — AFP

found the debate bizarre considering the lack of concern over children's movies in which the mother dies, such as "Bambi". "Personally... I didn't want my children, when they were young, watching films where we kill off the mother," she said. "We all have different ideas about what makes an acceptable film for family watching."



'Empathy'

The debate has been an unwelcome distraction from film itself—which is presented as the movie that spawned the Buzz Lightyear toys in the original "Toy Story".

Set many centuries in the future, it follows the arrogant captain as he struggles to save his crew from an inhospitable alien planet. Much more than any debate about LGBT characters, what is more likely to excite kids is the loveable and extremely well-equipped robot cat, Sox. MacLane said they wanted to avoid the cliché of a cute, wise-cracking sidekick. "It's really easy to have the rogue character who laughs at danger and is always having punchlines. That kind of thing can be funny but we've seen it a lot. There's something interesting about making comedy from simplicity and empathy," he said. — AFP

Jean-Louis Trintignant: Five of his best films

Jean-Louis Trintignant starred in many classics of French and international cinema, but here are five of the best from his long career.

"And God Created Woman" (1956)

Notorious at the time for its frank depiction of sexuality, this film made stars of its two newcomers: Brigitte Bardot and Jean-Louis Trintignant. Director Roger Vadim was married to "BB" when he brought the pair together, and ended his marriage in the process.

The actors were not immediately enamoured of each other. "He's awkward—no one will believe I could fall in love with him," Bardot said. "She was a little bitch," was Trintignant's review. But the process of falling in love on screen made them fall in love for real, even if the affair didn't last for long. "I loved Jean Lou like crazy," Bardot later said. "My moments of love with Trintignant were the happiest of my life."

"A Man and a Woman" (1966)

The classic by New Wave director Claude Lelouch won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and two Oscars. It is the tale of two recently widowed people—a racing driver and a script-girl (played by Anouk Aimee) — who meet and fall in love in the seaside town of Deauville.

After watching the film again 50 years later, Trintignant told Paris Match: "We don't feel the effort it demanded of us, the lack of means. It's a sublime film. I already had about 30 feature films behind me, but for the first time, I felt good on set. Something magical happened." Lelouch, Aimee and Trintignant reunited for a belated sequel in 2019, "The Best Years of a Life", which was to be the actor's final film.

"Z" (1969)

The classic political thriller from Greek director Costa Gavras won Trintignant the best actor award at Cannes. Though set in France, it was a sharp critique of Greece's recent descent into fascism, and follows a magistrate investigating the death of a politician. Trintignant brought a quiet authority to the role. "We always say that actors should not do politics. But we have to do it, we do too little," he said at the time.

"The Conformist" (1970)

Bernardo Bertolucci's film was another examination of the dangers of fascism—this time set in 1930s Italy. Trintignant plays a bureaucrat who seeks to bury his memories of childhood trauma by throwing himself into whatever political currents are dominant at the time and ends up agreeing to murder an academic. The actor said it was "definitely the most beautiful film in which I participated."

"Amour" (2012)

For recent international audiences, this is perhaps the defining movie in Trintignant's career. It was particularly poignant in France as his return to acting almost a decade after the death of his daughter at the hands of her abusive husband—which he agreed to do out of admiration for Austrian director Michael Haneke. He played alongside Emmanuelle Riva as a man in his eighties struggling to look after his wife after a stroke. It went on to win the Palme d'Or at Cannes and best foreign language film at the Oscars. — AFP



In this file photo taken on May 12, 1986 French actress Anouk Aimee (left) and actor Jean-Louis Trintignant smile to the photographers during the 39th Cannes International Film Festival, twenty years after "Une femme et un homme" directed by Claude Lelouch.



In this file photo French actor Jean-Louis Trintignant poses during a photocall for the film 'Happy End' at the 70th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP photos

Disney fairytale meets R-rated violence in 'The Princess'

For a Disney film called "The Princess," Joey King's new movie has a lot of R-rated violence, death, and even the odd use of the word "b***h." But from the moment her tough-as-nails royal heroine stabs a hairpin into a henchman's eyeball, it is clear 20th Century Studios' "The Princess"—out July 1 on streaming platforms—is not your typical family-friendly fairytale.

"I mean it wouldn't be fun if it wasn't violent, you know!" King told AFP on the red carpet at Thursday's premiere in Hollywood. "I was constantly telling our producer Toby [Jaffe], I was, like, 'we need more blood on the dress!'" Described as "Rapunzel" meets action-thriller "The Raid," the live-action film begins with King's sleeping princess, clad in a wedding dress, awakening as a prisoner at the top of a dizzying tower.

A series of highly stylized, female-led fight scenes unfurl as she bids to escape from nemeses including former Bond girl Olga Kurylenko ("Quantum of Solace.") The action is more reminiscent of "Game of Thrones" than "Sleeping Beauty" or "Snow White."

"The idea of doing a princess movie with Disney that completely goes against anything they've ever done is just perfect," said Ben Lustig, who co-wrote the

film. His original premise was "how can we take the trope of that princess stuck at the top of the tower, that everybody knows, and then flip it on its head?"

Lustig and Jake Thornton's script was bought by 20th Century Studios, a Disney subsidiary, and the film is released on Hulu in the US and Disney+ internationally. Among the film's producers is Derek Kolstad, who created the "John Wick" action films starring Keanu Reeves as a violent hitman. — AFP



US actress Joey King arrives for the premiere of Disney's "The Princess" at the Hollywood Legion Theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP

'Lightyear' makers unfazed by bans in places with 'backward beliefs'

The makers of Disney-Pixar's new blockbuster about Buzz Lightyear told AFP on Thursday that they were warned of a likely backlash against the same-sex marriage it features, but did not care. More than a dozen Muslim-majority countries have refused to show "Lightyear"—a sci-fi spin-off from the Pixar classic "Toy Story", set for global release on Friday—in opposition to the marriage between two female side characters.

"We had been warned this would be a likely outcome," producer Galyn Susman told AFP in a Zoom interview. "We weren't going to change the movie we wanted to make just because of a few countries with-for a lack of a better term—backward beliefs," she said.

Although many reports have focused on a supposed "lesbian kiss" in the film, the scene in question is actually more of a brief peck between two long-married characters who have a child. Director Angus MacLane said no efforts were made to alter the film to please censors. "We made our movie and they didn't want to watch it, so fine," he told AFP. Susman said she



These photos show Rhim gazelles grazing at the Sawa wildlife reserve in the desert of Samawa in Iraq's southern province of Al-Muthanna. — AFP photos

IN A PARCHED LAND, IRAQI GAZELLES DYING OF HUNGER

Gazelles at an Iraqi wildlife reserve are dropping dead from hunger, making them the latest victims in a country where climate change is compounding hardships after years of war. In little over one month, the slender-horned gazelle population at the Sawa reserve in southern Iraq has plunged from 148 to 87. Lack of funding along with a shortage of rain has deprived them of food, as the country's drought dries up lakes and leads to declining crop yields.

President Barham Saleh has warned that tackling climate change "must become a national priority for Iraq as it is an existential threat to the future of our generations to come". The elegant animals, also known as rhim gazelles, are recognizable by their gently curved horns and sand-colored coats. The International Union for Conservation of Nature classes the animals as endangered on its Red List. Outside Iraq's reserves, they are mostly found in the deserts of Libya, Egypt and Algeria but are unlikely to number "more than a few hundred" there, according to the Red List.

Turki Al-Jayashi, director of the Sawa reserve, said gazelle numbers there plunged by around 40 percent in just one month to the end of May. "They no longer have a supply of food because we have not received the necessary funds" which had come from the government, Jayashi said.



Rhim gazelles graze at the Sawa wildlife reserve.

Iraq's finances are under pressure after decades of war in a poverty-stricken country needing agricultural and other infrastructure upgrades. It is grappling with corruption, a financial crisis and political deadlock which has left Iraq without a new government months after October elections. "The climate has also strongly affected the gazelles," which lack forage in the desert-like region, Jayashi added.

Barren soil

At three other Iraqi reserves further north, the number of rhim gazelles has

fallen by 25 percent in the past three years to 224 animals, according to an agriculture ministry official who asked to remain anonymous. He blamed the drop at the reserves in Al-Madain near Baghdad, and in Diyala and Kirkuk on a "lack of public financing". At the Sawa reserve, established in 2007 near the southern city of Samawah, the animals pant under the scorching sun.

The brown and barren earth is dry beyond recovery, and meagre shrubs that offer slight nourishment are dry and tough. Some gazelles, including young-



This aerial view shows Rhim gazelles grazing at the Sawa wildlife reserve.

sters still without horns, nibble hay spread out on the flat ground. Others take shelter under a metal roof, drinking water from a trough. Summer hasn't even begun but temperatures have already hit 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) in parts of the country. The effects of drought have been compounded by dramatic falls in the level of some rivers due to dams upstream and on tributaries in Turkey and Iran. Desertification affects 39 percent of Iraqi land, the country's president has warned. "Water scarcity negatively affects all our regions.

It will lead to reduced fertility of our agricultural lands because of salination," Saleh said. He has sent 100 million dinars (over \$68,000) in an effort to help save the Sawa reserve's rhim gazelles, Jayashi said. But the money came too late for some. Five more have just died, their carcasses lying together on the brown earth. — AFP



A young Rhim gazelle receiving medical care at the facility.



Rhim gazelles which died of malnutrition and lack of care at the facility in Iraq's southern province of Al-Muthanna.



This aerial view shows a Rhim gazelle grazing at the Sawa wildlife reserve.



Turki Al-Jayashi, director of the Sawa wildlife reserve, adds nutrition supplements to water trough at the reserve.

Thailand to drop mask rule, foreign tourist registration

Thailand announced Friday it would drop rules requiring people to wear masks outdoors and no longer require foreign visitors to register before travel, as COVID-19 cases fall and the kingdom seeks to lure tourists back. Facemasks have been compulsory in public in Thailand, including outdoors, since mid-2021 when the Delta variant was running rampant. But as the pandemic has subsided, the tourism-dependent kingdom has gradually relaxed covid restrictions in a bid to boost visitor numbers.

Thailand's relaxation on facemasks comes after similar moves by regional peers including Cambodia and Singapore. Taweasin Visanuyothin, spokesman for the Thai COVID taskforce, said wearing masks outside would become voluntary, but was still recommended in crowded areas, entertainment venues and on public transport. He said the health ministry

would announce further details of the mask relaxation, including when it would come into force. On July 1 the government will also end the "Thailand Pass" system, under which foreign tourists had to register and show proof of vaccination and health insurance before they could fly to the kingdom.

Visitors will have to carry vaccine certificates or take Covid tests on arrival. The move is seen as an attempt to bolster the sputtering economy, which has seen growth hammered by the pandemic and living costs rising. There were more than 1.6 million foreign tourist arrivals during the first six months of 2022, with foreign tourist receipts logged at 99.7 billion baht, according to government data.

This compares with around 40 million foreign tourists visiting Thailand in 2019, the last year before the pandemic. Daily Covid-19 cases have hovered below 3,500 in recent weeks, with the number of deaths registering below 50 a day for a month. More than three quarters of the population has been jabbed with two vaccine doses, with more than 40 percent also getting a booster dose. —AFP

'Game of Thrones' Jon Snow spin-off in early development

A"Game of Thrones" sequel focused on the fan-favorite, impossible-to-kill character Jon Snow is in early development at HBO, according to Hollywood trade reports. Kit Harington—whose stoic warrior Snow was last seen banished from Westeros in the "Thrones" finale—is attached to star if the spin-off series goes ahead, the Hollywood Reporter and Variety said, citing anonymous sources.

HBO declined to comment, and Harington's representatives did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment. If the show gets a green light, it would be the latest in a rapidly expanding television universe based on George RR Martin's fantasy novels. Three live-action prequel series are already in the works—including "House of the Dragon," which hits screens this August—as well as three animated prequels. But the purported Jon Snow series would be the first to be set

after the events of smash hit "Game of Thrones," which bowed out with a deeply divisive final season in 2019.

While several major characters died, Snow—who was revealed to be Aegon Targaryen, a potential heir to the Iron Throne—left Westeros in exile, headed for the icy and wild North. His character had already been brought back from death after being betrayed earlier in the show's run.

News of the possible spin-off drew mixed reaction from fans online, with some delighted to see more of arguably the standout character from "Thrones," and others questioning the logic of picking up from the original show's disappointing

finale. "Bro just re-do the last season at this point... We ain't gonna get mad at you and you get to make all that money again and have a chance at a competent ending," said one popular post on Reddit.

During its eight-year run from 2011, "Thrones" was a global phenomenon, scooping a record 59 Emmys with its warring families and fire-breathing dragons, medieval violence and non-stop sex. Martin signed a five-year deal with HBO in 2021, reportedly worth "mid-eight figures" in dollars, to develop shows both within and beyond the "Thrones" universe. —AFP



Sports

Hamilton disagrees with Verstappen, welcomes 'porpoising' intervention

'Car is getting worse,' admits struggling Hamilton

MONTREAL: Lewis Hamilton on Friday welcomed the FIA's intervention to overcome 'porpoising' on health and safety grounds and said any steps taken were unlikely to affect the grid for Sunday's Canadian Grand Prix. The seven-time champion's comments came after world champion and current leader Max Verstappen said he opposed the introduction of any mid-season rule changes. The governing International Motoring Federation (FIA) said on Thursday it would take steps to beat the phenomenon that has left many drivers suffering severe back pain this season.

Hamilton's Mercedes team said he had suffered up to 6G in vertical forces in his car during last Sunday's race in Azerbaijan, making it painful to race and difficult to climb out of the car afterwards. The FIA plan to monitor the vertical forces closely in Friday's practice sessions ahead of introducing new safety rules on car set-up. Hamilton said he was glad to see the FIA taking action to protect drivers as a priority.

"It's always interesting seeing people's perspectives and opinions in different lights," he told reporters. "I think safety is the most important thing. And I think there at least one driver in every team has spoken on it." He added Mercedes were trying a range of experiments to solve their performance problems. "You'll see today, for example, something relatively extreme," he explained. "If it doesn't work, it's definitely a lot slower because it's got less down-force."

"But that's my role and I take the responsibility seriously - and whilst, yes, it's not been ideal on some weekends, often setting us back because we lost a session or two, that's OK, because eventually we'll get there and I'm proud to be a part of that process. "I'd like to think I'm the best team-mate I've ever been - to George, but also to all the engineers and everyone working in the factory." Team-mate George Russell said he felt "the vertical loads are far beyond what you'd expect is safe to deal with."

Local hero Lance Stroll of Aston Martin said: "It has been very bad and both porpoising and the stiffness are things the FIA needs to address because it's not sustainable." Four-time champion Sebastian Vettel, his team-mate, said: "It can't be that us drivers should suffer injury, short or long term, or possibly for the rest



MONTREAL: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton takes a turn during practice ahead of the F1 Grand Prix of Canada at Circuit Gilles Villeneuve on June 17, 2022 in Montreal, Quebec. — AFP

of our lives. "Every sport to the extreme is not healthy, but it cannot go on for another four or five years like this so it's good the FIA is looking into it."

'Car is getting worse'

Meanwhile, Hamilton declared his Mercedes car to be "getting worse" and dismissed any hope it will improve before next year after struggling in Friday's practice for this weekend's Canadian Grand Prix. The seven-time world champion, who claimed his maiden Formula One victory at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in 2007 and has triumphed a record seven times at the track, finished a lowly 13th in second practice.

He admitted that the Mercedes he has struggled with this season is "here for the year" and unlikely to change or be improved sufficiently to bring an upturn in form or results. Blighted by performance problems, notably with "porpoising" and bouncing, the team had chosen to try some radical set-up ideas in a bid to solve their problems. "The car is getting worse the more we do to it," said Hamilton.

"It's pretty much like every Friday for us - trying

lots of things, including an experimental floor on my side, which didn't work. "Nothing we do to this car seems to work. We were going in different ways but nothing works. For me it was a disaster. "We keep working on it, but it is what it is and I think this is the car for the year so we just have to tough it out and work hard on building a better car for next year." Hamilton said that he and team-mate George Russell, who was seventh fastest on Friday, had gone in opposite directions with radical set-up proposals to improve performance, notably the "porpoising" that has left them both with acute back pain this season.

The team's chief technical officer James Allison was at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve on Friday to help Mercedes find a solution to their problems. Hamilton laughed as he described the experience of driving his car as it bounced, jumped and moved around on the track. In the closing minutes, with a new floor fitted, he told the team "this car is now undrivable". Hamilton said also that he felt relieved to have completed the day without more serious physical concerns after suffering acute back problems last Sunday in Baku. — AFP

aspires to raise the flag of Kuwait in international forums, hoping to win more championships at international and local levels.

Al-Hawal has accomplished many international and local victories, and achieved first place in several local and Asian championships. The International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) Grand Prix Shotgun started in the Turkish city, Konya, on 13 June, with participation of more than 100 athletes from 19 countries, and will continue until June 22nd. Meanwhile Al-Hawal along with her teammate in the mixed doubles event won the silver medal. Shooter Nasser Al-Miqled won the silver medal of the men's trap singles. — KUNA

Kuwaiti shooter wins gold in GP

ANKARA: The Kuwaiti shooter Sarah Al-Hawal took the first place and won the gold medal in the "Trap" competition of the Grand Prix Shotgun championship in Konya, Türkiye. Al-Hawal dedicated this win to the Kuwaiti political leadership and the Shooting Club for their unlimited support for the sport. In a phone call with (KUNA) on Friday, Al-Hawal said that she always



BUDAPEST: USA's Katie Ledecky competes in the women's 400m freestyle finals during the Budapest 2022 World Aquatics Championships at Duna Arena on June 18, 2022. — AFP

Ledecky lays down an early marker at championships

BUDAPEST: While other stars conserved their energy on the opening morning of the World Swimming Championships in Budapest on Saturday, Katie Ledecky made a statement in her first qualifying swim. In the women's 400m freestyle qualifying, the 25-year-old American was the only swimmer to break four minutes, finishing in 3min 59.79sec, 3.40sec ahead of Canadian 15-year-old sensation Summer McIntosh. Ledecky's greatest rival, Australian Ariarne Titmus, is skipping the championships. Titmus overhauled Ledecky on the final lap in the last worlds in 2019. The first time Ledecky had lost in the event in a major championship.

Titmus then edged Ledecky in the Olympic final last year and ended the American's eight-year grip on the world record in May, with a time of 3min 56.40sec. On Saturday, Ledecky may have left the field trailing in her wake but she was still more than 2 seconds behind her phantom foe. Home favorite Katinka Hosszu opened the championships, in the women's 200m individual medley first round. Hungary's 'Iron Lady', who won two world titles the last time the championships were in Budapest, qualified 11th 2.36 slower than American Alex Walsh and five-and-a-half seconds outside her own world record. — AFP

Berrettini into semi-finals as Peniston's dream run ends

LONDON: Champion Matteo Berrettini booked his place in the semi-finals of the Queen's Club ATP grass-court tournament with a straight sets win over Tommy Paul on Friday as British rookie Ryan Peniston's dream run finally came to an end. Berrettini, last year's Wimbledon runner-up, was 4-1 down in the first set but he rallied to defeat the American 6-4, 6-2. The Italian will now play Botić van de Zandschulp of the Netherlands in the last four of the Wimbledon warm-up event.

Marin Čilić is also through to the last four, the first time he has got this far in a grass-court tournament, after the Croatian beat Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori 7-6 (7/2), 6-4. Čilić will play Filip Krajinović, who finally put an end to Peniston's remarkable ATP main draw debut, with a 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 victory. Peniston, a lowly 180 in the rankings prior to this week, had already knocked out world number five and French Open finalist Casper

Ruud on Tuesday. He looked on course to make it into the last four when he took the first set against Krajinović before the Serbian's greater experience of match play proved decisive. Nevertheless 26-year-old left-hander Peniston, who survived cancer as a baby, could console himself with a cheque for £50,000 (\$61,000) - almost double his earnings for the rest of the year - having secured a Wimbledon wild card which guarantees he will earn at least as much again.

"It's definitely a lot of money," said Peniston, who will now move up 35 places in the rankings to 145 in the world. "I was playing on the Futures Tours a couple of years ago and then the Challengers. So it's definitely going to help my career a lot. I'm just going to reinvest it in myself. "Just being able to pay for training and travel and now I'm starting to be able to afford a coach to travel with."

"The next step is being able to afford a physical

trainer on the road, which I think is super important, and trying to basically improve the team and have them as much with me as possible." Peniston, from London, added: "I'm going to remember a lot from this week I think, for sure." A forehand winner which clipped the baseline gave Peniston the first set in 47 minutes on a swelteringly hot day in London, with temperatures on centre court touching 33 Celsius (91 Fahrenheit).

Krajinović, however, kept his cool sufficiently to level the match with the only break of the second set and edged ahead in the third before Peniston's overhit forehand gave the world number 48 the match. "That was really tough," said Krajinović. "The conditions were hot, windy. He played really well and for a set and a half he was the better player. "But I started to play more aggressively and he made some mistakes, and I'm very happy to be in my first semi-final on grass." — AFP

News in brief

Bagnaia takes pole position

SACHSENRING: Francesco Bagnaia continued his domination of the Sachsenring track on Saturday by taking pole position at the German MotoGP. Italy's Bagnaia will start Sunday's race at the top of the grid with reigning world champion and current overall leader Fabio Quartararo of France in second. This is the third pole position of the season for Ducati rider Bagnaia, who is fifth overall in the championship standings and 66 points behind Quartararo. Bagnaia kept his cool as temperatures exceeded 30 degrees Celsius in the shade, soaring to 50 degrees on the track. "We did a great job today in these conditions, it's very hot and tomorrow it will be even hotter," said Bagnaia. Frenchman Johann Zarco secured the third spot at the front of the grid for the 10th MotoGP race of the season. Less than a tenth of a second separated the three fastest riders. — AFP

Castres upset Toulouse

PARIS: Fiji winger Filipo Nakosi set-up the crucial try as Castres surprise champions Toulouse 24-18 on Friday to reach next weekend's French Top 14 final. Nakosi assisted full-back Julien Dumora in the final five minutes as record 21-time winners Toulouse added this semi-final defeat to May's last-four loss to Leinster in the European Champions Cup. Castres will face Montpellier or Bordeaux-Bègles, who met on Saturday in Nice, in next Friday's final at the Stade de France in Paris. "We will remain humble, there's still one more step to take for us to have what we really want, to win the title," Nakosi's team-mate Thomas Combezou told reporters. "The job's not done. The aim is next week," he added. Former New Zealand prop Charlie Faumuina returned to Toulouse's side after his three-week ban for dangerous play was reduced. — AFP

Halep books semi-finals

BIRMINGHAM: Former Wimbledon champion Simona Halep booked her place in the semi-finals of the WTA Birmingham grass-court event with a straight sets win over Britain's Katie Boulter on Friday. Boulter had been in career-best form at the tournament, defeating Alison Riske in the first round of the Wimbledon warm-up before knocking out former top-10 player Caroline Garcia. But second seed Halep ultimately proved too strong in a 6-4, 6-1 victory. The 30-year-old Romanian, however, did not have things all her own way in a tightly-contested first set. Boulter, who only returned from nearly three months out with a leg injury at Nottingham last week, kept pace with Halep for the opening eight games. The 25-year-old, to her credit, saved three break points at 4-4 only to double fault on the fourth. That proved to be the cue for Halep to pull away in what is her first grass-court event since a superb straight sets win over Serena Williams in the 2019 Wimbledon final. — AFP

Morikawa shares Open lead

BROOKLINE: A weekend showdown of golf's top stars was set Friday at the US Open as two-time major winner Collin Morikawa seized a share of the lead while Jon Rahm and Rory McIlroy were one stroke adrift. Seventh-ranked Morikawa fired a four-under par 66 and American Joel Dahmen, who shot 68, joined him on five-under 135 after 36 holes at The Country Club. Second-ranked defending champion Rahm, third-ranked McIlroy and Americans Hayden Buckley, Aaron Wise and Beau Hossler shared third on 136. "No one has taken it deep so far and run away," Morikawa said. "But you know what, right now my game feels really good. "The last few days is a huge confidence booster for me heading into this weekend, and hopefully we can make some separation somehow." — AFP

Japan cruise past Uruguay

TOKYO: Japan stepped up their preparations for next year's Rugby World Cup with a 34-15 win over Uruguay in Tokyo on Saturday. The 2019 World Cup hosts were kicking off a series of home Test matches that will see them play Uruguay twice and Six Nations champions France twice over the coming weeks. Japan fielded a mix of up-and-coming development players and veterans of their historic run to the 2019 World Cup quarter-finals and had too much firepower for Uruguay. Head coach Jamie Joseph handed control of the team to coach Takanobu Horikawa but the New Zealander will be back in charge for next week's second game against Uruguay in Kitakyushu. "Over the 80 minutes we were in control and we were able to play with composure," said Horikawa. "We were able to show our style and do the things we have been working on for the past two weeks in attack and defense. I'm very satisfied with today's game." — AFP

Sports

Crusaders outclass Blues to win Super Rugby Pacific final

Canterbury Crusaders confirm their status as the greatest team

AUCKLAND: The Canterbury Crusaders unleashed a mix of precision and power to beat the Auckland Blues 21-7 in the Super Rugby Pacific final in Auckland on Saturday and confirm their status as the competition's greatest team. A decider between two fierce New Zealand rivals that many predicted would be tight proved far from it as the Crusaders took command from the outset and bagged a 13th title.

Despite wet conditions, the visitors played with an accuracy that has been a hallmark of their enduring success, much to consternation of a full house of 42,000 at Eden Park. Precise tactical kicking, unflinching work at the breakdown and utter domination of the lineouts were at the heart of coach Scott Robertson's sixth title from his six seasons in charge.

Two of those, in 2020 and 2021, came under the Super Rugby Aotearoa internal format, with 10 titles having been claimed in the pre-Covid era. With his pack laying the groundwork, Crusaders five-eighth Richie Mo'unga's was able to dictate terms, as well as kick 11 points. Robertson said the plan to pressure the Blues from the outset was followed to the letter, giving space to Mo'unga, who he compared to four-time NBA-winning basketball star Steph Curry of the Golden State Warriors.

"Richie Mo, what a player... he's Steph Curry for us," Robertson said. "We love him and he stood up for us again, just like in the last six finals. That first 15 minutes, my lord. The pressure we wanted to put on the Blues, it happened. They just didn't get out of their half for a long period of time." The Blues, chasing their fourth trophy and their first since 2003, were considered strong contenders to halt the Crusaders juggernaut. They secured a rare win in Christchurch two months ago, midway through a 15-match winning streak to earn home advantage for the decider.



AUCKLAND: Josh Goodhue (center) of the Blues is tackled during the Super Rugby Pacific final match between the New Zealand's Blues and the Crusaders at Eden Park in Auckland on June 18, 2022. —AFP

Squandered lineouts

However, they squandered 10 of their 19 lineout throws and couldn't get enough quality possession to in-form playmaker Beauden Barrett, who was outshone by Mo'unga, his rival for the New Zealand No 10 Test jersey. Mo'unga said criticism that the Crusaders had been below their best for much of the season was accurate but they nevertheless used it as motivation. "The Blues got one over us in round-robin. We wanted to embrace the feeling coming here, backs against the wall. That's when we perform at our best," he said. "We didn't want to be shackled by the occasion. To win six in a row, and to achieve it here in Auckland, it's pretty special." For all their early dominance, the Crusaders' lead was just 3-0 after half an hour, via a Mo'unga dropped goal.

He doubled the advantage with a penalty goal before the lead was stretched to 13-0 when scrum-half Bryn Hall popped the ball over the tryline off the back of a ruck on the stroke of halftime.



AUCKLAND: Scott Barrett of the Crusaders (center) and teammates celebrate winning the Super Rugby Pacific final between the Blues and the Crusaders at Eden Park in Auckland on June 18, 2022. —AFP

Mo'unga's second penalty was followed by a lone Blues try, when scrum-half Finlay Christie darted across after the ball came loose from a scrum. It ensured the hosts wouldn't be the first team held scoreless in a Super Rugby final but they never threatened again and conceded a late try to Sevu Reece after failing to control a kick.

Barrett, the brother of victorious Crusaders captain Scott Barrett, said the outcome would sting for a Blues

side who featured 10 players named this week in the All Blacks squad to face Ireland in three Tests next month. "We'd had a really good season and wanted to come here and do a job tonight so it's a tough one to swallow," he said. "We knew that we didn't fire a shot in the first half and we needed to look hard at ourselves and come up with some solutions. We had no option but to throw everything at it but their defence and set piece was exceptional." —AFP

India crush South Africa to level Twenty20 series

RAJKOT: Dinesh Karthik's blazing half-century and four wickets by Avesh Khan led India to a series-leveling 82-run victory over South Africa in the fourth Twenty20 international on Friday. Karthik smashed 55 off 27 deliveries to guide India to 169-6, a total their bowlers defended by dismissing South Africa for 87 and level the five-match series at 2-2 in Rajkot. The Proteas slipped to their lowest ever T20 total, two lower than their 89 all-out against Australia at Johannesburg in 2020.

Avesh returned his T20 best figures of 4-18 as the hosts in Rajkot defended their total with ease for the second time in a row with the series decider on Sunday in Bangalore. The in-form Karthik set up the crushing victory with his maiden T20 fifty to lift India from a precarious 81-4 in the 13th over to take the attack to the opposition. He put on a crucial 65-run stand with Hardik Pandya, who hit 46 off 31 deliveries, as the pair hammered the opposition bowlers to all parts of the ground.

The 37-year-old Karthik, who is enjoying his second coming with the national team, smashed nine fours and two sixes as he surpassed his previous best of 48 to make India plunder 73 runs from the final five overs. Returning fast bowler Lungi Ngidi took two wickets. In reply, the visitors were never in the chase after skipper Temba Bavuma



RAJKOT: South Africa's David Miller (center) plays a shot during the fourth Twenty20 international cricket match between India and South Africa at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Rajkot on June 17, 2022. —AFP

retired hurt on eight with an injured elbow and the team soon lost two wickets. Wicketkeeper-batsman Quinton de Kock was run out for 14 and Dwaine Pretorius out to Avesh in the fifth over.

Wickets kept tumbling and Harshal Patel raised the pitch at the nearly packed house after he bowled the dangerous David Miller for nine. Avesh

returned to take three wickets including Rassie van der Dussen for 20 in the 14th over to flatten South Africa on a seemingly tough pitch to bat. Spinner Axar Patel got the ninth wicket to end South Africa's innings in 16.5 overs as Bavuma, who sat in the dugout with an ice pack on his elbow, did not come out back to bat. —AFP

Time to 'chillax' as Dettori bounce back in Coronation

ASCOT: Frankie Dettori said he could "chillax" after he bounced back from a "tough week" to get off the mark and win the feature Coronation Stakes on the third day of Royal Ascot with the impressive unbeaten filly Inspiral. The 51-year-old Italian superstar lapped up the adulation and a warm welcome back in the winners enclosure from trainer John Gosden, who said it was good for Dettori to have "got the monkey off his back which had been strangling him".

It was a stark contrast to the icy atmosphere when he returned to see Gosden on Thursday after a heavily criticised ride on Stradivarius which saw him finish a gallant third but fall short of a record-equalling fourth Ascot Gold Cup. Inspiral too looked to be having problems in finding a clear run but once Dettori found a gap the favorite sped clear to make a top class field look very ordinary.

"She has an engine and got me out of trouble," he said. "It's been a tough week and we're on the

board now. We can chillax a bit." Dettori said he had been down in the dumps following racing on Thursday as he had also not pleased Gosden with his ride on Saga owned by Queen Elizabeth II when they finished second beaten only a head in the Britannia Stakes.

"My head was thumping last night," he said. "I thought I have a couple of chances today and not all is lost yet so you have to make peace. It's hard to do, but you have to think out of the box, pull yourself together and concentrate." Gosden—who was responsible in 2013 for resurrecting Dettori's career after he served a doping ban—said matters had been dealt with. "You can't keep looking back," he said. "You discuss it, deal with it and move on. Horses need your full attention and can't deal with you having your lip down. You just get on with it."

'A modest approach'

Christophe Soumillon has 142 winners under his belt in France already this year—including the French Derby—but he reserved his biggest smile for when he steered Perfect Power to Group One success in the Commonwealth Cup. The 41-year-old Belgian was recording just his third success ever at the meeting and celebrated by sticking his head in a bucket of cold water after dismounting.

He had certainly earned his fee as he conjured up



BERKSHIRE: Frankie Dettori riding Inspiral (front right) wins The Coronation Stakes on the fourth day of the Royal Ascot horse racing meeting in Ascot, west of London, on June 17, 2022. —AFP

a great run in bringing Perfect Power from way back to take the honors. "Now we know he is a top sprinter," said Soumillon. "He is a great horse. He has such a big heart." Whilst Soumillon praised trainer Richard Fahey to the rafters it was more than reciprocated. "Christophe Soumillon is the man," said Fahey. Fahey was welcoming home his second winner of the week after 50/1 outsider The Ridler landed the Norfolk Stakes on Thursday. —AFP

ly the plan today," said Buttler, who sent officials scurrying for the ball all across the scenic cricket ground with his seven sixes.

Liam Livingstone, batting at number six, made the fastest half-century in England's ODI history off just 17 balls—the joint second-fastest of all-time. In reply, the Dutch were all out for 266 with Scott Edwards top scoring with an unbeaten 72. England made their intentions clear early in their innings when Salt smacked Dutch right-arm medium pacer Shane Snater for six—the first in slugfest of 25 sixes and 36 fours to follow — in near-perfect batting conditions. —AFP

England hit world record to crush Netherlands

AMSTELVEEN: England hit a world record one-day international score of 498-4 to crush the Netherlands by 232 runs in Amstelveen on Friday, with three men scoring centuries. Eoin Morgan's side beat their own

Holding: Education 'key to racism fight'

PARIS: Educating the young is the most effective way of combating racism as armed with the facts they can challenge their peers, West Indies cricket legend and anti-racism campaigner Michael Holding has told AFP. The 68-year-old - nicknamed 'Whispering Death' when he formed a pivotal part of the fearsome West Indies pace attack in the 1970s and 1980s - has raised his profile among a new generation unaware of his sporting achievements, with his impassioned stance against racism.

His award-winning book "Why We Kneel, How We Rise" - which includes contributions from black sports stars including Usain Bolt and Thierry Henry - is, he says, part of aiding that education process. The 2021 book came about after Holding made an extraordinarily moving discourse during Sky Sports coverage of a 2020 Test between England and the West Indies. It came at the height of sports people taking the knee following the murder of George Floyd by a Minnesota policeman in May 2020.

Since then Holding has delivered 60 talks, which he says is a more constructive way of channelling his emotions. "I feel frustration, I do not feel fury," he said in a phone interview from his home in the Cayman Islands. "So much wrong has gone on and people do not want to do right even though they face all these facts and still ignore it and pretend otherwise. I do not want to get upset and infuriated because then you do rubbish and speak rubbish."

Holding's latest talk was with 90 head teachers in England. "I was not asking them to change the history books but to broaden the curriculum," he said. "To not just talk about one set of people, as in white history, but to include those that have been erased from history. It does not suit the narrative but they should teach about everyone not just Cromwell and Churchill. You cannot ignore half of history and highlight others and not ever mention what black and Asian people have accomplished."

One such example is black inventor Lewis Howard Latimer, who invented the carbon filament to ensure the world is not constantly changing light bulbs. "(Thomas) Edison obviously invented the light bulb but it was not very practical as the filament burned out in no time," said Holding. "A black man invented the carbon filament which made it operational. Latimer made an effective source of light but nobody talks about him, you do not learn about those things in school because he is not a white man. That has been the narrative for centuries, that the black man is insignificant."

Holding sees the battle as one against the influences of an older generation on children. "One headmaster said basically in their school their kids get it, they understand," he said. "But, as they said, kids spend 17 percent of time at school under tutelage of their masters and 83 percent at home, which is a problem." Holding believes he knows how to counterbalance that. "My answer was you have got to encourage them to challenge their parents and grandparents, not in a confrontational or disrespectful way, but by facts. Teachers have to give those facts and instill confidence in the children... so that they can go home and challenge their parents." —AFP



JEDDAH: Kuwait Women's Futsal players celebrate after beating Oman 6-1 during the 2022 WAFF Women's Futsal Championship in Jeddah on Saturday June 18, 2022.

Kuwait thrash Oman 6-1

Women's Futsal Championship - Kuwait book semis

JEDDAH: Kuwait Women's Futsal team beat Oman 6-1 on Saturday. Kuwait's Shorouk Pasha, Abeer Al-Rifais and Nihal Al-Saqbi scored three, two and one goal respectively. Meanwhile, Oman's Linat Al Muslimi scored the only goal for her team. The Kuwait team have now book a semifinal place.

The 2022 WAFF Women's Futsal Championship kicked off in Jeddah on Thursday, with the host nation Saudi Arabia losing 3-1 to Kuwait, after

Bahrain had beaten Palestine 6-0 in the tournament opener. The competition, organized by the West Asian Football Federation and the Saudi Arabian Football Federation is being held at King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah and will continue until June 24.

In the opening match of Group B, Saudi Arabia found themselves 3-0 down after 24 minutes, and despite pulling a goal back on 37 minutes, could not

stage a comeback. Saudi Arabia will complete their group matches against Oman on Monday. Bahrain kicked off the action in Group A with a comprehensive win over Palestine, the six goals coming from a hat trick by Hessa Alsa, a double from Alanood Al-Khalifa, and a strike from Manar Ebrahim. Bahrain now top the group with six points after beating Iraq 1-0 on Saturday. The final group match between Palestine and Iraq will take place on Monday.

This is the third edition of the competition and is being held in Saudi Arabia for the first time. The previous two tournaments were both won by Iran, in 2008 and 2012. The West Asian Football Federation (WAFF) is an organization founded by 6 member associations. Respectively in 2009 and 2010, 3 and 4 more associations joined. Iran left the federation on 10 June 2014 with the creation of the Central Asian Football Federation.

FIFA vows 'invasion' as 2026 World Cup venues revealed

NEW YORK: FIFA President Gianni Infantino warned Canada, Mexico and the United States to prepare for a football "invasion" as the host cities for the 2026 World Cup were revealed. The first ever World Cup co-hosted by three different countries will also see a record number of teams taking part, increasing by 16 from 32 to 48 as the tournament returns to North America for the first time since the 1994 finals.

The 16 venues named on Thursday include 11 in the United States, three in Mexico and two in Canada. All of the US games will be held in venues that are home to NFL teams, with the likes of the \$5 billion SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles and the New York Giants' 82,000-seater MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford tipped to host the final.

A total of 60 of the 80 games in the tournament - including all knockout games from the quarter-finals onwards - will take place at US venues. Mexico City's iconic Azteca Stadium - host of the 1970 and 1986 World Cup finals - was included among three Mexican venues along with the cities of Monterrey and Guadalajara.

Vancouver and Toronto will stage the Canadian games in the tournament.

Infantino meanwhile said 2026 would eclipse the 1994 finals in the United States - which holds the record for the highest total attendance - in every respect. "2026 will be much, much bigger," Infantino said. "I think this part of the world doesn't realise what will happen in 2026. "These three countries will be turned upside down and then flipped again. The world will be invading Canada, Mexico and the United States. "They will be invaded by a big wave of joy and happiness."

Infantino said he hoped the World Cup would spur the development of football in the region further. "In this part of the world you are leading the world in many areas. But in the number one sport in the world, soccer or football, you are not, yet," he said. "The objective must be that you are leading the world in the world's number one sport." A decision on which venues would host marquee matches such as the World Cup final and opening game had not yet been taken.

"We still have to discuss that, we still have to analyse that," Infantino said. "We

will take a decision in due course." However, Infantino revealed that given the vast geographical spread of staging the tournament across North America, FIFA was looking at basing teams in regional "clusters" to minimize travel. "When you're dealing with such a large region as North America we need to care about the fans and make sure that teams are playing in clusters, that fans and teams don't have to travel crazy distances," Infantino said.

Super Bowl pedigree

The list of US venues stretch from coast to coast, featuring several cities that hosted games in the 1994 World Cup finals. However no actual stadium venues from the 1994 tournament will repeat in 2026. Other venues include the Dallas Cowboys giant AT&T Stadium in Arlington and the Miami Dolphins' Hard Rock Stadium. Seven of the 11 venues named Thursday have hosted the Super Bowl. The Kansas City Chiefs' Arrowhead Stadium - the loudest stadium in the world according to the Guinness Book of World Records - also made the cut.

NFL venues in Seattle, San Francisco, Atlanta, Houston, Boston and Philadelphia were also on the list. However there was no place for Washington DC on the venues list. It means the 2026 tournament will be the first World Cup since the 1974 finals in the then West Germany not to feature a



NEW YORK: FIFA President Gianni Infantino (left) and CONCACAF President Victor Montagliani pose with the FIFA World Cup trophy during an event in New York after an announcement related to the staging of the FIFA World Cup 2026. — AFP

host's capital city. Colin Smith, FIFA's chief competitions and events officer, acknowledged Washington's absence after an "incredibly competitive" bid process.

"This was a very very difficult choice," Smith said. "It's hard to imagine a World Cup coming to the US and the capital city not taking a major role." Smith meanwhile said some of the NFL venues would

require slight modifications to widen "pinch points" but said stadium capacity would not be affected. "The number of fans who are going to be able to experience this World Cup will probably be double than what we've previously had," he said. "World Cup 1994 holds the record for attendance - and that's going to be blown out of the water." — AFP

Curry, Warriors storm to seventh NBA crown

BOSTON: A dazzling performance from Stephen Curry powered the Golden State Warriors to a seventh NBA Finals crown - securing a 103-90 victory over the Boston Celtics to clinch a 4-2 series triumph. Warriors' talisman Curry produced yet another masterpiece with 34 points, seven assists and seven rebounds as Golden State wrapped up their fourth title in eight years to silence Boston's raucous TD Garden.

The 34-year-old Curry was named NBA Finals Most Valuable Player after the victory -

the first time the four-time NBA champion has scooped the award. "I'm so proud of our group, I thank God every day that I get to play this game with some amazing people," an emotional Curry said afterwards. "This is what it's all about, especially after everything we've gone through in the past three years."

The win completed a dramatic journey back to the pinnacle of the NBA for the Warriors, who just two seasons ago had the worst record in the league as the franchise battled injuries and the departure of key personnel. "At the beginning of the season nobody thought we'd be here - except everybody on this court right now. It's surreal," Curry added.

"We were so far away from it. We hit rock bottom with injuries and the long road of work ahead, trying to fill in the right pieces with the right guys. "You never take this for

granted because you never know when you'll be back here." Delighted Warriors coach Steve Kerr admitted the fourth championship of his Golden State coaching reign had been the most unexpected. "This might be the most unlikely one," Kerr said. "But I hang around superstars - and if you hang around superstars, good things happen."

Boston coach Ime Udoka said his team paid the price for another high turnover count. "Once again you look at the numbers," Udoka said. "Give them 20-plus on turnovers, 20-plus on second chance points. Don't really give ourselves a chance as far as that." Udoka said the Celtics locker room had been "emotional" after the loss. "It's going to hurt," Udoka said. "It will hurt for a while...obviously getting to your ultimate goal and fall a few games short is going to hurt. "There are a lot of guys in there, very emotional right now." —AFP



BOSTON: The Golden State Warriors pose for a photo after Game Six of the 2022 NBA Finals at TD Garden in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP