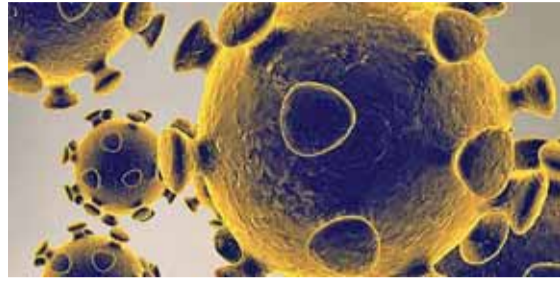


**5** Coronavirus subvariants cast shadow over Europe summer



**8** Iran's oldest pistachio trader readies daughter to take over



**11** Zionist entity uncovers rare early mosque in Negev

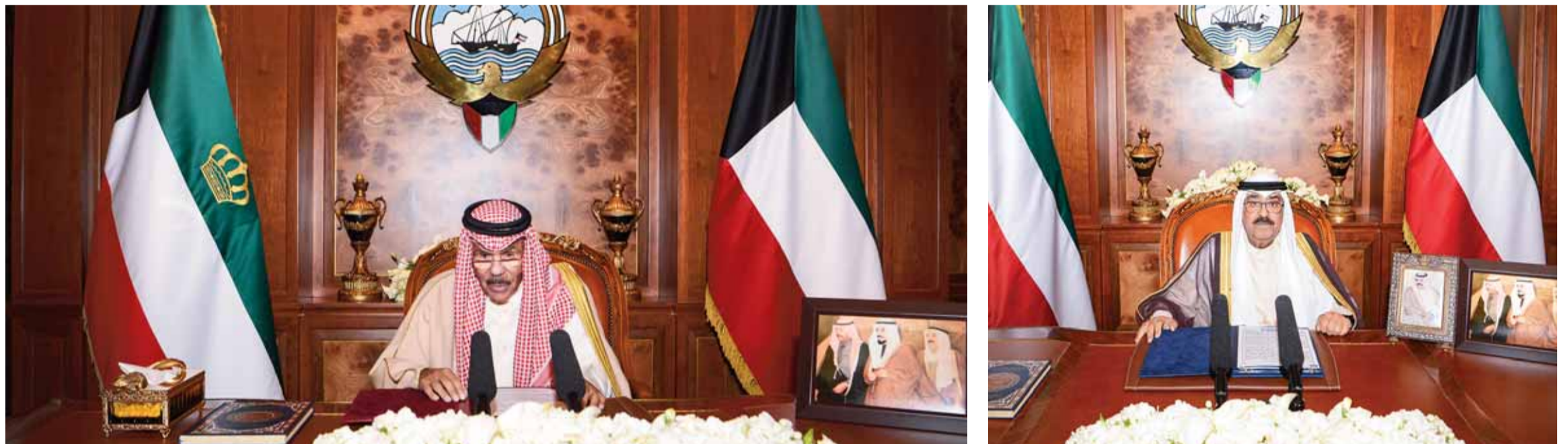


**16** 1.2 million tickets sold for Qatar World Cup



# Kuwait upholds democracy

Amir, Crown Prince address nation • National Assembly to be dissolved



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah address the nation on June 22, 2022. — KUNA

Amir: Speech will explain current developments • Crown Prince: Constitution won't be suspended

- Kuwaitis urged to elect new house that can bear great responsibility of maintaining state stability
- Heavy responsibility lies on shoulders of Kuwaiti people to reelect members of parliament

- Constitution untouchable and foundation of legitimacy to ensure security, stability, prosperity
- Call to be cautious and careful amid lingering repercussions of coronavirus crisis

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said on Wednesday he has decided to dissolve the National Assembly and call for fresh polls to end the ongoing political disputes between the government and MPs that threatened national unity. This was one of the opposition's major demands.

In a hard-hitting speech delivered on his behalf by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Amir said a decree will be issued "within months" to officially dissolve the Assembly and call for snap

polls after taking the necessary legal procedures. "We have decided the way out of the current political scene (deadlock), with all the non-agreement, non-cooperation, differences and disputes ... is to dissolve the National Assembly and

**SEE PAGE 3**

call for fresh general polls," he said in the speech.

He added that the decision to go back to the people will allow them to rectify the political scene marred by disputes and differences. This will be the ninth

time in Kuwait's 60 years of parliamentary democracy that the National Assembly is either dissolved or suspended due to political disputes.

Around 20 opposition MPs who had been on strike in the National Assembly building for the past week celebrated the announcement as they listened carefully to the speech on national television. They prepared to end the strike which they had staged to press for the protection of the constitution. In the speech, HH the Crown Prince stressed the government will not interfere in the elections nor in the election of the Assembly speaker.

## Speaker welcomes Amiri speech

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem welcomed the announcement by HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in a speech delivered on his behalf by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to dissolve the National Assembly and call for fresh polls.

Ghanem called on the people to rally around the political leadership amid ongoing political disputes between the government and MPs that threatened national unity. "We have to rally around the political leadership for what it takes to serve higher national interests, and back it in order to help the country reach the shores of safety," Ghanem wrote on Twitter.



Marzouq Al-Ghanem

## At least 1,000 killed in Afghan earthquake

**SHARAN, Afghanistan:** A powerful earthquake struck a remote border region of Afghanistan overnight killing at least 1,000 people and injuring hundreds more, officials said Wednesday, with the toll expected to rise as desperate rescuers dig through collapsed dwellings. The 5.9-magnitude quake struck hardest in the rugged east, where people already lead hardscrabble lives in a country in the grip of a humanitarian disaster made worse by the Taliban takeover in August.

"People are digging grave after grave," said Mohammad Amin Huzaifa, head of the Information and Culture Department in hard-hit Paktika, adding that at least 1,000 people had died in that province alone. He said at least 1,500 people were injured, some critically. "People are still trapped under the rubble," he told journalists.

The death toll climbed steadily all day as news of casualties filtered in from hard-to-reach areas in the mountains, and the country's supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, warned it would likely rise further. The earthquake struck areas that were



already suffering the effects of heavy rain, causing rockfalls and mudslides that hampered rescue efforts.

Photographs and video clips posted on social media showed scores of badly damaged houses in remote rural areas. Footage released by the Taliban showed local residents digging a long slit trench to bury the dead, who by Islamic tradition should be laid to rest facing Makkah. Even before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan's emergency response teams were stretched to deal with the natural disasters that frequently strike the country. — AFP (See Page 5)

## Saudi Crown Prince visits Turkey for talks

**ANKARA:** Saudi Arabia's crown prince paid his first visit to Turkey on Wednesday since the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate. The talks in Ankara between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan come one month before US President Joe Biden visits Riyadh for a regional summit. Those talks will focus on the energy crunch caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Turkish leader personally welcomed the crown prince at his presidential palace at a grand ceremony featuring a parade of horses and a military honor guard. They then held a two-hour meeting and a private dinner but no media event.

A joint statement issued by their foreign ministers said the meeting was held "in an atmosphere of sincerity and brotherhood embodying the depth of excellent relations between the two countries". It said the sides discussed Saudi investments but announced no concrete deals. A Turkish official had said the sides would discuss a range of issues, including cooperation between banks and support for small- and medium-sized businesses.

Analysts believe Prince Mohammed came to see if



ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan welcomes Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman upon his arrival during an official ceremony at the Presidential Complex on June 22, 2022. — AFP

he could win broader backing ahead of a possible new nuclear agreement between world powers and the Saudis' archenemy Iran. "There is increased confidence (in Riyadh) that Ankara could be more useful in the current geopolitical environment," the Eurasia Group said in a research note. Analysts also believe that Washington is watching this gradual return of regional calm with an approving nod. — AFP

## Local

# Kuwaiti women must prove they can do anything without external help: Maqroon

## Co-op member believes women shouldn't wait for quota to achieve success

By Majd Othman

**KUWAIT:** Women in Kuwait have achieved exceptional success recently in leadership positions, with the government empowering women through actual steps. For the first time in the history of Kuwait, the Supreme Judicial Council appointed eight female judges to preside over judicial departments in the courts, while the Municipal Council appointed four female engineers to its membership.

Some Kuwaiti women were able to reach international leadership positions, such as Maha Al-Barjas, Vice President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and Rehab Borelsly, a member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Locally, Haya Al-Maqroon, a member of Al-

Shaab Cooperative Society, succeeded to gain the trust of the local community, which led to selecting



**Maqroon says fighting corruption is her main goal**

her as the first and only woman to succeed in a co-op election without a quota system or direct appointment. Kuwait Times spoke to Maqroon about her success, her future plans to improve Al-

Shaab Co-op and women empowerment issues.

Maqroon stressed women in Kuwait should never wait for recommendations or a quota system to achieve success, adding she is against the quota system. "Kuwaiti women should exert the same efforts that Kuwaiti men are exerting. Women have to work harder due to the obstacles they face. However, she has to prove she can do anything without external help," she said.

Maqroon pointed out that women in Kuwait are not moving towards achieving their goals. "Co-ops opened the door for women to participate in elections since the '60s, but women neglected them and it became a tradition that women are not allowed to participate in co-op elections," she said. Maqroon aims to improve the co-op society field. "Amending the legislation of co-ops related to transparency and governance is my main goal, to eliminate bribery and corruption, especially

since this field, in particular, has many suspicions of corruption," she said.

"One of the goals is also to contact officials to take advantage of unused lands, which will help to improve services and benefit residents," Maqroon added. She aspires to take a place in the Co-ops Union in order to control the prices of goods and protect consumers. Recently, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem announced his intention to submit an amendment to the National Assembly elections law, which will facilitate opportunities for more Kuwaiti women to hold leadership positions in the country.



Haya Al-Maqroon



KUWAIT: A picture showing an operation room inside Jaber Hospital. —KUNA photos



Doctors inside an operation room at Jaber Hospital.

## At least 1,100 surgeries conducted at Jaber Hospital in six months

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Head of Surgery Department at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital Dr Suleiman Al-Mazeedi said the large surgical capacity of the hospital is due to having 28 operation theaters,

the most in Kuwait. He said at least 1,100 surgeries were conducted in the past six months.

Dr Mazeedi said operation theaters in Jaber Hospital are different, as each one is for a certain kind of surgery, with the possibility of adding other surgeries when necessary. He said there are theaters that are the first of their kind in the world, which works with the integrated system "Easy Suite 4K". The theater has the most modern equipment in the world, and information can be transmitted to any place in the world.

Surgeries can be transmitted live during

medical conferences and to seek medical opinions from anywhere in the world. The doctor can control most equipment in the room with a press of a button, in addition to conducting the most modern endoscopic surgeries. Dr Mazeedi said Jaber Hospital is characterized with various surgical specialties - general, ophthalmic, ENT, orthopedic, neurosurgery, cosmetic surgeries and obstetrics. Dr Mazeedi said the hospital has a surgical robot, and is the only surgery department that uses the robot. More than 50 surgeries were done with the use of the robot in the past six months.

## Breeding snails for skincare in Kuwait

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Using snail skincare products has become very popular in the last few years. People are also using live snails on their skin to get the best results. A few people in Kuwait have also started breeding snails. Salman Al-Matouq is one of them, who has even started selling the escargots after breeding a large number of them. Kuwait Times spoke to him to get more information about this strange hobby.

**Kuwait Times: How did you get the idea of breeding and selling snails?**

**Salman Al-Matouq:** When I visited a dermatology clinic in Malaysia, they used a snail to treat acne on my face, especially after shaving. I was impressed with the results, and decided to use snails myself.

**KT: When did you turn your hobby into a business? How many snails do you have now?**

**Matouq:** In 2009, I started breeding snails as a hobby. Two years ago, I turned this hobby into a small business. I now have 117 snails.

**KT: Do snails reproduce quickly and in large numbers? From where do you import the snails? How long do snails live on average?**

**Matouq:** They reproduce quickly, especially dur-

ing their mating season between April and October. They produce abundantly and lay between 30 and 100 eggs. I import snails from Thailand and Malaysia. Their average age is 5-9 years. One of my snails is already eight and a half years old.

**KT: Why do people buy snails? For eating or skincare?**

**Matouq:** Around half of my customers buy for breeding, with the other half for skincare. I have never met any customer who buys snails for eating. But I know that in many countries, they do eat them. The gel and collagen of the snail have great benefits for the skin.

**KT: Where do you keep the snails? Do they require a special environment?**

**Matouq:** The proper environment for snails to live is a suitable temperature and special soil. I have a special big plastic box with coconut soil, far from cold temperature and air conditioning. They should always stay in a warm environment.

**KT: How do you recognize the male from the female snail? And is there any difference in price?**

**Matouq:** There are no male or female snails - they are hermaphrodites. All snails can lay eggs. Their prices depend on their size and age, ranging from KD 1 up to KD 80. For instance, I have snails that are five months old, which cost KD 4. Prices of adult snails that are ready for reproduction range between KD 10 and KD 25. Only snail breeders and experts can recognize the age of the snail from their size and shell.



**KT: What are the most popular kinds of snails?**

**Matouq:** I have three kinds of snails. Regular snails with dark skin, albino with white skin, and caramel snails with light skin. Caramel snails are of two types - albino caramel and regular caramel depending on the color of the shell.

**KT: Are there other snail breeders in Kuwait?**

**Matouq:** There are around 10 other breeders in Kuwait, but I think they don't have enough experience. Snails can get dehydrated if a proper environment is not provided.

## Manpower authority points out rise in laborers working illegally for others

**KUWAIT:** The Public Authority of Manpower and other related authorities such as the Municipality, Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry believe a rise in labor recruitment costs is not due to the coronavirus pandemic and the exodus of worker or a shortage of labor. Rather it is due to workers working for other employers other than their sponsors, who keep them under cover. The laborer receives a higher salary, and those who hired him needed him and pay him more.

Official sources at PAM said the rise in the numbers of workers escaping from their actual workplaces is notable. PAM is monitoring this issue, as the issue is in violation of rules and a loss for employers. Meanwhile it is a clear violation by those "shielding" the workers, adding that PAM, in cooperation with the Interior Ministry, will have this issue as its top priority and will start a wide-ranging campaign as part of the current interior ministry campaign to make sure every worker is with his sponsor. Any worker who is found working for others will be deported immediately, while punishment will be toughened against those who harbor absconding workers.

Sources said labor shortage in some sectors will be dealt with by allowing them to bring workers from abroad according to actual needs. The sources said the housing authority will distribute plots to hundreds of Kuwaitis, who will need laborers to build their homes. Construction prices have increased, not because of a rise in construction material prices, but also because contractors take higher labor charges from the house owner, with the excuse that workers escape to work for those who pay more.

They said the door is open for bringing in labor for all sectors, but the aim is to concentrate on the market's real needs to prevent residency trade and suffocating the Kuwait market with labor it does not need.

## Kuwait Investment Authority prioritizes SDG-focused projects

**DOHA:** Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) Managing Director Ghanem Al-Ghunaiman stated Tuesday that the authority prioritizes investment in projects to serve sustainable development goals. The KIA has launched two initiatives, namely One Planet and Sustainable Markets, to enhance development and sustainability, said Ghunaiman during his participation in the second Qatar Economic Forum, hosted by Bloomberg in Doha. He added that the KIA checks up on its projects and investment partners' compliance with sustainability standards set by the two initiatives. The annual Qatar Economic Forum brings together global business leaders and heads of state to tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges, through the lens of the Middle East. —KUNA



DOHA: KIA Managing Director Ghanem Al-Ghunaiman attends the Qatar Economic Forum. —KUNA



WARSAW: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri meets Polish Undersecretary for Economic and Development Cooperation, Africa and the Middle East Pawel Jablonski. —KUNA

## Kuwait, Poland discuss cooperation

**WARSAW:** Kuwait Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri and Polish Undersecretary for Economic and Development Cooperation, Africa and the Middle East Pawel Jablonski discussed Tuesday political, economic, commercial and cultural cooperation between the two countries. The two sides also touched on bilateral ties between Kuwait and Poland. Both sides discussed allowing Kuwaitis visa-free travel to Schengen countries. —KUNA

Local

# Crown Prince urges electing right MPs to get Kuwait back on track

Constitution untouchable, pact to ensure security, stability and prosperity: Sheikh Mishal



The National Assembly.

- No interference in people's choices for their representatives
- People warned to stop unconstitutional and illegal behaviors that harm security and stability
- No amendments, revising or suspension of the constitution.
- Crises and dangers surround us while we are preoccupied with futile issues
- We hold ourselves accountable to not interfere directly in the administration of the state
- We gave advice and guidance, but no achievements were seen
- National Assembly will be dissolved constitutionally
- General elections will be called in accordance with constitutional and legal procedures

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday assigned His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to give a speech on his behalf. His Highness the Amir said "we hope it (speech) will explain the current developments. We know and are following the political scene." His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah to bestow "our beloved nation with security, and further progress and prosperity."

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah announced dissolving the Parliament in the coming months and called on the Kuwaiti citizens to elect a new house. His Highness the Crown Prince noted that according to article 107 of the Kuwaiti constitution "it is in the national interest that I seek dissolution of the National Assembly and I urge the Kuwaiti people to elect a new house that can bear great responsibility of maintaining state stability." An Amiri

decree of the National Assembly dissolution is to be issued in the upcoming few months, His Highness the Crown Prince added.



**"We must be cautious" amid current global challenges**

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah stressed the heavy responsibility that lies on the shoulders of the Kuwaiti people to re-elect members of parliament.

This came during his speech to the citizens, in which he greeted everyone with the greetings of Islam and showed the duty as Kuwait's leadership to take a stand against the disagreement and division of the legislative and executive authorities. His Highness the Crown Prince affirmed that the Kuwaiti constitution is untouchable and is the foundation of legitimacy in the pact between the leadership and the people to ensure Kuwait's security, stability and prosperity.

"Amidst this challenging world, we must be cautious and careful, as we have not gotten over the repercussions of the Coronavirus crisis and we face these political differences torn by personal interests at the expense of Kuwait and its people," said His Highness the Crown Prince. His Highness the Crown Prince called on the Kuwaiti people to take a moment and think for Kuwait's sake and choose the proper representatives in the parliament in order to get Kuwait back on the right

democratic track. His Highness the Crown Prince went on urging the Kuwaiti people to elect a new house that could bear significant responsibility for maintaining state stability and accomplishing the citizens' hopes and aspirations.

"And out of our keenness to strengthen popular participation, we would like to assure you that we will not interfere in the people's choices for their representatives," His Highness the Crown Prince added. His Highness the Crown Prince also called on the upcoming National Assembly and the Cabinet to cooperate, coordinate and pay great efforts to realizing the aspirations of the people. Moreover, His Highness the Crown Prince urged the Kuwaiti people to quit any unconstitutional and illegal behaviors that harms the country's security and stability. His Highness the Crown Prince prayed to Almighty to protect Kuwait and its people under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA

## UK lawmakers commend outgoing Kuwaiti envoy for role in boosting ties

**LONDON:** The Speaker of the House of Commons of the UK Lindsay Hoyle commended last night on Tuesday the role played by Kuwait's Ambassador to the UK and Northern Ireland Khaled Al-Duwaisan, throughout three decades of tireless diplomatic work in London. Hoyle said this in his speech during a ceremony held in the House of Commons over the end of the mission of Duwaisan, whether as ambassador or dean.

Duwaisan is distinguished by his great ability to lead dialogues on issues linked to the Middle East region and even various international issues, Hoyle underlined, considering that it is difficult to replace him in the roles and tasks he performed to the fullest. Every deputy or politician in the UK must have met Duwaisan at least once, he said, mentioning that their friendship dates back to 1997 after he was appointed as a member of the Labor Party in the elections won by former Prime Minister Tony Blair. He considered that Duwaisan deserves gratitude for everything he has done and worked for, to bring the Kuwaiti-British ties to their level of solidarity and interdependence. Hoyle then presented a souvenir to Duwaisan over the end of his tenure as an expression of the council's appreciation for the role he played in developing ties between both sides.

Meanwhile, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson acclaimed Duwaisan's role in strengthening strong ties between the UK, Kuwaiti government and people. In Johnson's written message to the official farewell ceremony for Al-Duwaisan, he said that the

sincerity and dedication to the work that Duwaisan did during his thirty years of service was not only reflected in the bilateral ties between them but worldwide, in his full capacity as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in London. Johnson wished Duwaisan more success in the future, adding that the UK government truly appreciates his contributions over the years of his service.

In turn, UK's MP UK Crispin Blunt extolled Duwaisan, saying that everyone who knew him states that he was and still is full of enthusiasm in a way that can be described as heroic, not to mention his ability to bring people of all walks of life together while discussing vital issues. Blunt revealed that he first met Duwaisan in 1993 when he worked as an advisor to the British defense minister. His friendship with Duwaisan was, is, and will continue to be a strong one with mutual respect that reflects the acceptance by the brigadier general among politicians and diplomats who knew him.

Blunt confirmed that his knowledge of Al-Duwaisan, Kuwait and the Gulf region in general was further enhanced after he held the position of special adviser to the British foreign minister, as he became close to Gulf issues that are of paramount importance. Meanwhile, UK's MP Andrew Murrison said that Duwaisan is a distinguished diplomatic personality who deserved being the dean. In his speech, Murrison was upset over the end of Duwaisan's roles, underscoring that he is giving and can offer a lot to his country and the Middle East. — KUNA



LONDON: The UK House of Commons honors Kuwait's Ambassador to the UK and Northern Ireland Khaled Al-Duwaisan. — KUNA

On the occasion of the



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

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext: 353-355-356



kuwaittimes.net

## Local

**Kuwait Times**  
Established 1961  
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher  
**YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN**

Editor-in-Chief  
**ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN**

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353/3561  
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

## News in brief

## Kuwait Amir offers condolences over death of Saudi royal's mother

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday sent a cable to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, offering sincere and heartfelt condolence over the death of Prince Nayef bin Majed bin Saud bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud's mother. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent the Saudi king two more cables of identical sentiments.

## Info Ministry takes action against 'violating' media outlets

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Information Hamad Rouh El-Din referred 73 media outlets to the public prosecution and gave orders to withdraw the licenses of 90 electronic news services for violating the press and publication, audiovisual and electronic media laws.

## Kuwaiti official meets UN Regional Director

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Acting Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations Affairs, Counselor Abdulaziz Al-Jarallah, met Wednesday with the visiting UN Regional Director for Development Coordination in the Arab Countries, Laila Baker. During the meeting, the two sides touched on the historic ties between Kuwait and the UN. The talks were attended by United Nations and the Resident Coordinator in the State of Kuwait Dr Tariq Sheikh.

## GCC chief welcomes GCC, UK meeting

**RIYADH:** The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf has welcomed the planned meeting between GCC commerce ministers and UK International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan in Riyadh on Wednesday. In a press statement on Tuesday, the GCC chief stated that the GCC states are interested in bolstering economic and trade cooperation with the United Kingdom. He admired the constructive moves taken by both sides to achieve this goal since their latest meeting in London last October. Hajraf noted that they have discussed during this meeting signing a joint free trade agreement to signal a new milestone in GCC-UK relations.



## Kuwait oil price went up \$3.31 to \$116.12 pb

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$3.31 to settle at \$116.12 per barrel on Tuesday in contrast with \$112.81 pb last Monday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said on Wednesday. Globally, Brent crude climbed 52 cents to \$114.65 pb, while the West Texas Intermediate crude edged up by \$1.09, settling at \$110.65 pb. The price of OPEC's basket of oils rose by \$2.58 to \$115.97 per barrel on Tuesday against \$113.39 pb on Monday. Bulletin of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries said Tuesday the annual average rate of the crudes' basket, last year, reached \$69.89 pb. A report published last week by OPEC detailed that oil futures hiked sharply due to geopolitical tensions in Europe as well as possibility of increased demand on crude oil as Chinese authorities gradually lift COVID-19 restrictions. Energy ministers of the OPEC+ coalition agreed, on June 2, on increasing the oil production by 648,000 barrels per day for coming July and August. OPEC+ countries are set to hold a meeting on June 30, 2022, to follow up on market conditions. —KUNA

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** A view of high-rise buildings in Kuwait City. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## Kuwaiti student Mishary Al-Rashed delivers graduates' speech at UCLA

## Kuwait small in size but large in youth ambitions: Rashed

**LOS ANGELES:** Kuwaiti student Mishary Khaled Al-Rashed affirmed that although Kuwait is a small country in terms of geographical size, it is large in the ambition of its youth. This occurred in his speech at the commencement ceremony of the department of physics and astronomy at UCLA, one of the top 10 universities in the world and the number 1 public university in the United States. Rashed graduated Magna Cum Laude with the highest honor in Physics and a minor in mathematics. He was the only Kuwaiti student in the Physics department.

Rashed had opened his speech by thanking the chair professor, students, and faculty staff, and congratulating the UCLA Department of Physics and Astronomy Class of 2022. "I am truly grateful for this opportunity to speak here today not only representing the people and the department that I have grown to love so much but also as a proud student from Kuwait," he said.

"While I am proud to be a student of UCLA, I am equally proud to be representing my country Kuwait, a country small in its geographic size but large in the ambition of its younger generation," he said in his speech. "Shoot for the stars, the sky is the limit in schools like UCLA. Choose majors that are important such as physics. Follow your heart and pursue the things you are genuinely interested in. As Ameenah Farhan, Chair of the Kuwait University Physics Department, once told me, 'saw iely et7ba ra7 it bad3 feet' which means do what you love and you will excel in it."

Rashed spoke extensively about his journey at UCLA and what led him to choose physics as his major. He spoke highly of Professor David Saltzberg, professor of physics and astronomy at UCLA, who inspired him to choose this path. "[Physics] is a set of



**Kuwaiti student Mishary Khaled Al-Rashed.**



**Kuwaiti student Mishary Al-Rashed with UCLA Chancellor Gene Block.**



**Kuwaiti student Mishary Al-Rashed with his family.**

ideas that aren't really attributed to one person but are ideas that anyone can experience — an experience that can be enjoyed by working out the equations and conducting the experiments," he said.

"I took a leap of faith in what I believed I would enjoy and I'm happy to say it has been the best decision of my life," he pointed out. "Not only did I get to learn about some of the most interesting ideas in the history of mankind, but I also became a part of one of the most vibrant, friendly, and inspiring communities at UCLA — the physics community." Rashed gave a shout out to UCLA Professor Andrea Ghez who received the Nobel prize for her discovery of the supermassive black hole in the center of the galaxy. "I will never forget the day the noble was announced, I walked proud-

ly into campus... knowing that I was in the same department as her," he said. Rashed also thanked his research advisor, "mentor, and friend Professor Zhongbo Kang for believing in me and cultivating such a welcoming environment in your group."

Rashed also addressed the "incredible group of undergraduate students in this department," expressing strong faith in their abilities. "My message to you all is that if you have something that you know you are passionate about, whether that's physics or something else entirely, follow it — even if it's challenging, no more how all of our unique challenges by being students here, especially during the pandemic," he said. "I am proud of all of you for overcoming these challenges."

## Zain participates in first KCST career fair

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its participation of the Kuwait College of Science and Technology Career Fair 2022. The first career fair was organized by KCST Public Relations and Marketing Department which runs from 22-23 June, 2022.

Zain took part in the opening ceremony held at the KCST campus in Doha, attended by Her Excellency Belinda Lewis, the United Kingdom's Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, President of KCST Professor Khaled Al-Begain, Dean of Engineering at KCST Professor Ali Chamkha, KCST Public Relations and Marketing Manager Ibrahim Al-Mutawa, and a number of students and graduates.

Through its booth, Zain introduced students and graduates to its leading experience in the telecom sector, as well as its internal policy and wonderful workplace environment. The company also presented the available job vacancies, provided a detailed explanation of the nature of work at various departments and divisions, and answered questions and inquiries from visitors.

The career fair is considered the first to be held at Kuwait College of Science and Technology, which offers exclusive majors in engineering and technology, most notably cybersecurity, 5G communications and artificial intelligence. The College also enjoys international relations with universities specializing in engineering and technology such as Kanagawa University of Japan, specializing in robotics, the IIT Technological Institute, one of the largest technological institutes in the world, as well as an internationally experienced academic staff from around the world.

Zain is always eager to participate in career fairs all year round as part of its Human Resources strategy, which closely focuses on supporting the education sector hand in hand with various universities, colleges, and educational institutions in Kuwait (both public and private), with the aim of providing



**KUWAIT:** UK Ambassador Belinda Lewis with President of KCST Professor Khaled Al-Begain and Zain's team at the exhibition.



**UK Ambassador Belinda Lewis and President of KCST Professor Khaled Al-Begain recognize Zain's participation during the exhibition.**

students and graduates with career opportunities in the private sector.

Zain is committed to playing an active role in the investment in the human capital of Kuwait. The

company seeks to provide young and eager Kuwaitis with job opportunities that allow them to apply their practical skills, achieve their potential, and fully develop their capabilities.



Journalists demand Assange be released from UK jail

## 'Life goes on' for unfazed Taiwanese on frontline islands

Page 7

Page 6



GAYAN, Afghanistan: Soldiers and Afghan Red Crescent Society officials stand near a helicopter at an earthquake hit area in Afghanistan's Gayan district, Paktika province. A powerful earthquake struck a remote border region of Afghanistan overnight killing over 1,000 people and injuring hundreds more, officials said. — AFP

# Over 1,000 killed in Afghan quake

## Government working within its capabilities as rescuers scramble for survivors

**ZURMAT, Afghanistan:** A powerful earthquake struck a remote border region of Afghanistan overnight killing at least 1,000 people and injuring hundreds more, officials said Wednesday, with the toll expected to rise as desperate rescuers dig through collapsed dwellings. The 5.9 magnitude quake struck hardest in the rugged east, where people already lead hardscabble lives in a country in the grip of a humanitarian disaster made worse by the Taliban takeover in August.

"People are digging grave after grave," said Mohammad Amin Huzaifa, head of the Information and Culture Department in hard-hit Paktika, adding that at least 1,000 people had died in that province alone. "It is raining also, and all houses are destroyed. People are still trapped under the rubble," he told journalists.

The death toll climbed steadily all day as news of casualties filtered in from hard-to-reach areas in the mountains, and the country's supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, warned it would likely rise further. Earlier, a tribal leader from Paktika said survivors and rescuers were scrambling to help those affected.

"The local markets are closed and all the people have rushed to the affected areas," Yaqub Manzor told AFP by telephone. Photographs and video clips posted on social media showed scores of badly damaged mud houses in remote rural areas. Some footage showed local residents loading victims into a military helicopter.

### Offers of help

Even before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan's emergency response teams were stretched to deal with the natural disasters that frequently struck the country. But with only a handful of airworthy planes and helicopters left since the hardline Islamists returned to power, any immediate response to the latest catastrophe is further limited.

"The government is working within its capabilities," tweeted Anas Haqqani, a senior Taliban official. "We hope that the International Community & aid agencies will also help our people in this dire situation."

The United Nations and European Union were quick to offer assistance.

"Inter-agency assessment teams have already been deployed to a number of affected areas," the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in Afghanistan tweeted.



### Pope offers prayers for the victims

Tomas Niklasson, EU special envoy for Afghanistan, tweeted: "The EU is monitoring the situation and stands ready to coordinate and provide EU emergency assistance to people and communities affected."

Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes—especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic

plates. Scores of people were killed and injured in January when two quakes struck rural areas in the western province of Badghis, damaging hundreds of buildings. In 2015, more than 380 people were killed in Pakistan and Afghanistan when a 7.5-magnitude earthquake ripped across the two countries, with the bulk of the deaths in Pakistan.

From the Vatican City, Pope Francis offered prayers for the victims of the latest quake. "I express my closeness with the injured and those who were affected," the 85-year-old pontiff said at the end of his weekly audience. Aid agencies and the United Nations say Afghanistan needs billions of dollars this year to tackle its ongoing humanitarian crisis.

Aid agencies have particularly stressed the need for greater disaster preparedness in Afghanistan, which remains extremely susceptible to recurring earthquakes, floods and landslides. The quake was felt as far away as Lahore in Pakistan, 480 kilometres (300 miles) from the epicentre, according to responses posted on the USGS and European Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) websites. — AFP



LONDON: A video grab from footage broadcast by the UK Parliament's Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) shows Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaking during the weekly Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) session in the House of Commons, in London. — AFP

## UK unveils plans to override ECHR after Rwanda spat

**LONDON:** The UK government Wednesday introduced legislation allowing it to override rulings by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), after a judge in Strasbourg blocked flights removing asylum seekers to Rwanda. Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab denied the government intended to join Russia in abandoning the European Convention on Human Rights, which is overseen by the Strasbourg court. But Raab, who is also justice secretary, said the new "Bill of Rights" would "restore a healthy dose of common sense" to Britain's judicial system.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson vowed anew to implement the Rwanda plan, aimed at deterring immigrants from making illegal crossings of the Channel. Rights groups and church leaders have criticised the policy as "shameful". British courts earlier this month gave the go-ahead for the first removal flight to leave, but the ECHR stepped in at the last minute with an interim ruling to block its departure. A UK judicial review of the plan's legality is due next month.

In the meantime, Raab told parliament the Bill of Rights would "strengthen our proud tradition of freedom" dating back to Magna Carta in 1215. Magna Carta is considered the cornerstone of freedom, modern democracy, justice and the rule of law and has formed the basis of legal systems across the world-and human rights conventions.

"We will strengthen the separation of powers in this country, affirming the supremacy of the Supreme Court, being explicit that the UK courts are under no obligation to follow the Strasbourg case law and indeed are free to diverge from it," said Raab.—AFP

## Egypt detains 3 over viral video of mosque dancing

**CAIRO:** Egypt has detained three men after a video clip allegedly showing one of them singing and dancing at a mosque went viral online, the prosecutor's office said.

In the footage, a man can be seen dancing, jumping and singing with a microphone in a mosque to a song by Ahmed Moza, a popular performer of "mahraganat" music. Mahraganat-Arabic for festivals—is a genre of electro street music that has gone mainstream in Egypt.

It emerged from working class neighbourhoods, with artists using cheap or free software to mix traditional music with electronic sounds, creating loud, eclectic beats. But authorities have banned performers of mahraganat since their songs are considered vulgar.

The prosecution said an investigation had been launched into the video "showing a man singing into a microphone and dancing inside a mosque", in a statement issued late Tuesday.

"The police were able to identify the three accused, the one who sings and dances, the one who filmed it and the one who posted the video on social networks," it said.

Mona Seif, sister of jailed Egyptian dissident Alaa Abdel Fattah, said the three men had been "interrogated by the state security" service.

They faced charges of "terrorism" and "dissemination of false information", the activist said in a Facebook post.

Egypt has regularly been denounced over its "abysmal" human rights record since President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took power in 2013. An estimated 60,000 political prisoners are behind bars in Egypt, according to human rights defenders.

Independent entertainers often complain of being under pressure or unable to find sponsors in a country where the state or branches of the security apparatus control more and more production companies.

Last month, three comedians were released after more than a month in detention on charges of "false information" and "terrorism" after posting a song on TikTok denouncing inflation that was shared widely. — AFP

## COVID subvariants cast shadow over European summer

**PARIS:** A resurgence of COVID-19 cases in Europe, this time driven by new, fast-spreading Omicron subvariants, is once again threatening to disrupt people's summer plans. Several Western European nations have recently recorded their highest daily case numbers in months, due in part to Omicron sub-variants BA.4 and BA.5. The increase in cases has spurred calls for increased vigilance across a continent that has relaxed most if not all coronavirus restrictions. The first resurgence came in May in Portugal, where BA.5 propelled a wave that hit almost 30,000 cases a day at the beginning of June. That wave has since started to subside, however. Italy recorded more than 62,700 cases on Tuesday, nearly doubling the number from the previous week, the health ministry said. Germany meanwhile reported more than 122,000 cases on Tuesday. France recorded over 95,000 cases on Tuesday, its highest daily number since late April, representing a 45-percent increase in just a week.

Cases have also surged in Britain, where there has been a seven-fold increase in Omicron reinfection, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The ONS blamed the rise on the BA.4 and BA.5 variants, but also said Covid fell to the sixth most common cause of death in May, accounting for 3.3 percent of all deaths in England and Wales.

### BA.5 'taking over'

Mircea Sofonea, an epidemiologist at the University of Montpellier, said Covid's European summer wave could be explained by two factors. One is declining immunity, because "the protection conferred by an infection or a vaccine dose decreases in time," he told AFP. The other came down to the new subvariants BA.4 and particularly BA.5, which are spreading more quickly because they appear to be both more contagious and better able to escape immunity. Olivier Schwartz, head of the virus and immunity unit at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, said BA.5 was "taking over" because it is 10 percent more contagious than BA.2.

"We are faced with a continuous evolution of the virus, which encounters people who already have antibodies—because they have been previously infected or vaccinated—and then must find a selective advantage to be able to sneak in," he said.

But are the new subvariants more severe? "Based on limited data, there is no evidence of BA.4 and BA.5 being associated with increased infection severity compared to the circulating variants BA.1 and BA.2," the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said last week. But rising cases can

result in increasing hospitalisations and deaths, the ECDC warned.

Alain Fischer, who coordinates France's pandemic vaccine strategy, warned that the country's hospitalisations had begun to rise, which would likely lead to more intensive care admissions and eventually more deaths. However, in Germany, virologist Klaus Stohr told the ZDF channel that "nothing dramatic will happen in the intensive care units in hospitals".

### Return of the mask?

The ECDC called on European countries to "remain vigilant" by maintaining testing and surveillance systems. "It is expected that additional booster doses will be needed for those groups most at risk of severe disease, in anticipation of future waves," it added.

Faced with rising cases, last week Italy's government chose to extend a requirement to wear medical grade FFP2 masks on public transport until September 30. "I want to continue to recommend protecting yourself by getting a second booster shot," said Italy's Health Minister Roberto Speranza, who recently tested positive for Covid. Fischer said France had "clearly insufficient vaccination rates" and that a second booster shot was needed. Germany's government is waiting on expert advice on June 30 to decide whether to reimpose mandatory mask-wearing rules indoors. The chairman of the World Medical Association, German doctor Frank Ulrich Montgomery, has recommended a "toolbox" against the Covid wave that includes mask-wearing, vaccination and limiting the number of contacts. — AFP

### DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE STATE OF KUWAIT

#### CALL FOR TENDERS FOR SECURITY SERVICES

Reference number  
**EEAS/DELKWTK/2022/CPN/0019**  
Contract notice  
**2022/S 115-323064 of 16/06/2022**

The Delegation of the European Union to the State of Kuwait has launched a call for tender for security services.

Please find under the link below all the information you need in order to participate:

<https://etendering.ted.europa.eu/cft/cft-display.html?cftId=10668>

## International

# France's eye in the sky: Tracking Russian vessels in the Baltic

## Equipment may look old-fashioned, but it is full of state-of-the-art technology

**ONBOARD ATLANTIQUE 2 OVER THE BALTIC SEA:** The cluster of dots on the Atlantique 2's screens may seem like a confusing mess to the untrained eye, but not to the crew of the French naval surveillance aircraft tasked with telling friend from foe in the Baltic Sea. "Another tarantula," says an operator as the Russian corvette of the Tarantul class becomes visible, travelling in a pack with other Russian vessels as several nearby NATO ships also criss-cross the placid northeastern European sea. "It's busy down there," the soldier observes. France's Atlantique 2 aircraft, in service since the 1980s to detect surface vessels and submarines, has been dispatched to track Russian and Russia-friendly ships, a task that became key after President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

### 'Rapidly distinguish'

The patrol aircraft took off from Brittany, western France, early in the morning and stopped over in Germany before heading north to scour much of the Baltic, now a strategic focal point for Western and Russian forces. Once the aircraft passes the island of Ruegen-where work for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline between Russia and Germany was abruptly frozen-the eyes of the 14-strong crew (12 men and two women) become focused. The plane's most senior officer Lieutenant Commander Guillaume-who according to French military tradition gives only his first name-gives the order for the radar's protective shell to emerge from the plane's hull. The equipment may look old-fashioned, but it is full of state-of-the-art technology. The sea is calm and the weather clear, but frantic action is visible in a zone, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) wide, between the Swedish and Polish coastlines. "We have to be able to rapidly distinguish between friendly, neutral and suspicious vessels so our forces can find the best navigation path," said Guillaume.

French forces have orders to avoid flying too close to some coastal waters and Russian ships to avert any escalation, or entering potential danger zones where Baltic rim countries may have flagged military activities.



### Eyes of the 14-strong crew

various databases hoping to properly identify the ship. "It has a strange crane near the bow," says Christopher as he zooms in on a ship that has attracted their attention despite looking civilian at first glance.

"In fact, it's a Moma class," responds Roxane, confirming that the vessel is a Russian water survey ship suspected of gathering intelligence. It promptly gets an AXRU label on the situation screen, an acronym for Russian auxiliary vessel. There's no shortage of acronyms: DDG UK, PBF LT, MLE FI and FFL SE designate British, Lithuanian, Finnish and Swedish vessels.

### 'Quite crowded'

Russians are marked in red, such as the Tarantul or Parchim-class corvettes identified on this flight. As soon as the Atlantique 2 flies over a quieter stretch, the Tacco hands his notes to Chief Petty Officer Roman.

Assange, 50, has said he will appeal against the decision. He is wanted to face trial for violating the US Espionage Act by publishing military and diplomatic files in 2010, and could face up to 175 years in jail if found guilty.

The Assange case has become a cause celebre for media freedom and his supporters accuse Washington of trying to muzzle reporting of legitimate security concerns. Wednesday's event slammed the British decision as a "flagrant violation of human rights and a showing of total contempt for freedom of the press".

Pierre Ruetschi, the head of the Swiss Press Club hosting the event, warned that "democracy is being taken hostage". "This attempt at criminalising journalism is a serious threat," Tim Dawson, of the National Union of Journalists of Britain and Ireland, agreed.

"If Julian Assange can be threatened with prosecution as a spy, what might that mean for other journalists?" he said. Assange has been held on remand at a top-security jail in southeast London since 2019 for jumping bail in a previous case accusing him of sexual assault in Sweden. Before that he spent seven years at Ecuador's embassy in London to avoid being removed

"We denounce the murder of our brothers (...) We demand justice and the recovery of the bodies," he said in a separate statement, adding the men had been killed "in the context of the violence this country is experiencing."

Experts say Chihuahua is an important transit route for illegal drugs bound for the United States and therefore violently contested between rival trafficking gangs. More than 340,000 people have been killed in a wave of bloodshed since the government deployed the army to fight drug cartels in 2006.

Father Jorge Atilano Gonzalez, also a Jesuit, told a local television station the priests had attempted to intervene because they knew the assailant, who was from the area. "He wanted to confess" after the shooting, said Gonzalez, citing the testimony of the third priest. "What we believe is that he was in a state of alcoholism or addiction because of the reaction he had," he added. The country's security secretariat on Tuesday evening said the alleged shooter had already been identified and a manhunt was under way.

### 'Important social work'

The office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico condemned the killings, saying the priests had carried out "important social and pastoral work" among the Indigenous Raramuri, or Tarahumara, people.

"The murder of these two well-known priests reminds us of the situation of extreme violence and

of Putin's two decades in power, remarkably little has emerged about his health, beyond the famous images provided by the Kremlin showing him bare-chested in a bid to project an image of macho strength. But scrutiny has now increased with the war that Putin unleashed against Russia's neighbour.

The most in-depth investigation into Putin's health was published in April by the Russian-language news site Proekt, which used open-source data to conclude that the president's trips to the southern resort city of Sochi were synchronised with those of a large number of doctors. They included specialist in thyroid cancer Yevgeny Selivanov, whose visits to Sochi frequently coincided with Putin's sudden absences from the public eye over the past years. It also alleged that one of the methods used by Putin to ensure longevity were baths in blood extracted from deer antlers in Siberia, a method recommended by his friend Defence Minister

### 'A strange crane'

The flurry of activity coincides with the end of the annual NATO military exercise BALTOPS, which the Russians responded to with manoeuvres of their own. Both undertakings demonstrate a determination on both sides not to give up any areas, even if it means sending huge numbers of warships into the Baltic where they co-exist with countless merchant ships and pleasure boats. A well-rehearsed procedure kicks off. Radar operator Chief Petty Officer Maxime watches the signals, known as "tracks".

Next to Maxime sits Lieutenant Alain, the tactical coordinator also known as "Tacco", who picks the tracks he believes require more detailed observation, such as traces from ships who fail to activate their automatic identification system (AIS), which is mandatory for civilian vessels.

Alain shares his observations with Chief Petty Officer Christopher, to his right, who operates the Wescam camera placed at the bottom of the aircraft and that yields a detailed picture of targets even tens of kilometres away. —AFP

Finally Christopher and Petty Officers Roxane and Nicolas frantically check



A military operator works on board the French navy patrol airplane Atlantique 2 on mission above the Baltic Sea. The aim of the maritime patrol vessel's mission is "to locate vessels of Russian interest". —AFP

The latter is in charge of electronic warfare and transmissions and sends the plane's observations via a dedicated chat system to French and NATO command centres. A full report can wait until their return. "This small space has gotten quite crowded, which shows how interested everybody is in everybody else," says Lieutenant Henri over the plane's noise.

The Baltic is where Russia's attack on February 24 has prompted rapid geopolitical change. Sweden and Finland have applied to join NATO which, if successful, will isolate Russia even more in the Baltic which Moscow needs for access to the world's oceans.

"The Baltic will in effect become a NATO lake," said Robert Dalsjo at the Swedish Defence Research Agency FOI. Sweden's membership in particular

would remove a factor of uncertainty, he told AFP, "because the Baltic countries couldn't be sure about how Sweden would act in a crisis".

The plane changes direction to fly close to the forbidden Kaliningrad zone to catch a glimpse of the military activity in the highly militarised enclave, then heads north. Once it reaches the latitude of Riga, the plane makes a U-turn and checks on the Russian ships in the southern zone one last time before heading home.

The day's work? Nearly 7,000 kilometres of flight and around a dozen Russian vessels identified including, to the crew's delight, the stunning sail training vessel Sedov, the world's largest sailing ship still in operation. —AFP

## Journalists demand Assange be released from UK jail

**GENEVA:** An international coalition of journalists, editors and publishers demanded Wednesday that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange be immediately released from a UK jail and that all charges against him be dropped. Fifteen representatives of journalist and publishers' unions and organisations from six countries gathered in Geneva for the "call to free Julian Assange in the name of press freedom".

The petitioners also called on Swiss authorities, who have said they have worked to protect Assange, to facilitate his release by offering him a safe haven from further prosecution in Switzerland. The call came after the British government last week approved Assange's extradition to the United States, to the dismay of his supporters and free press campaigners.

## Pope mourns priests killed defending sanctuary seeker

**MEXICO CITY:** Pope Francis on Wednesday mourned the deaths of two Jesuits and a sanctuary seeker whose bodies were spirited away by armed men after they were gunned down inside a church in northern Mexico. The pope, who also belongs to the Jesuit order, expressed sadness and dismay over the killings of men he called his "brothers" in the remote mountains of Chihuahua state.

"So many murders in Mexico. I am close, in affection and prayer, to the Catholic community affected by this tragedy," he said. Priests Javier Campos Morales and Joaquin Cesar Mora Salazar were shot dead in the town of Cerocahui on Monday "while trying to defend a man who was seeking refuge," according to the order also known as the Society of Jesus.

The pursued man, who worked as a tour guide, was also killed. The three bodies were then placed in the back of a pickup truck by armed men, covered with plastic and taken away, according to Father Luis Gerardo Moro Madrid, head of the order in Mexico.

Madrid said the shooter allegedly told a third priest who ran into the church: "I'm sorry, we're going to take the bodies."

## Putin's health: Pivotal yet shrouded in uncertainty

**PARIS:** Baths in blood extracted from the antlers of Siberian deer. Excrements scooped up by loyal officials to evade analysis. Mysterious absences for emergency medical treatment. The claims made about the health of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who will be 70 in October, are lurid and macabre, as well as impossible to verify.

But they illustrate how little is known about the health of a leader whose medical condition is fundamental to the future of Europe, all the more so after he ordered Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Over the course



NEW YORK: Julian Assange's father John Shipton speaks to the media in front of the British Consulate in New York to respond to the decision from UK Home Secretary Priti Patel to extradite Assange to the United States. —AFP

to Sweden. The Australian was arrested when the government changed in Quito and his diplomatic protection was removed. —AFP



VATICAN CITY: Prefect of the Pontifical House, Monsignor Leonardo Sapienza (L) helps Pope Francis reach his seat as he arrives to hold the weekly general audience at St. Peter's square in The Vatican. —AFP

vulnerability faced by the communities of the Sierra Tarahumara in Chihuahua," said Guillermo Fernandez-Maldonado, the UN human rights representative in Mexico.

The Mexican Episcopal Conference also issued a statement Tuesday, calling for a rapid investigation as well as increased security for the country's clergy. Earlier in the day, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador had confirmed the killings at his daily press conference, conceding several municipalities in Chihuahua state were struggling in the "presence of organized crime." —AFP

Sergei Shoigu, who is from Siberia.

French weekly Paris Match this month said that on visits to Saudi Arabia in 2019 and France in 2017, Putin was accompanied by a team whenever he went to the toilet, to keep his excretions so no foreign power could medically analyse his urine or stools. Even more sensationally, US publication Newsweek said in June that Putin had undergone treatment for advanced cancer in April, citing American intelligence. The US National Security Council denied the existence of such briefings.

Ukraine's military intelligence chief, Major General Kyrylo Budanov, in a mid-May interview with Sky News claimed without evidence that Putin has cancer. Proekt also alleged that the Kremlin set up a fake office in Sochi that purported to look like the one at his suburban Moscow residence to make it look like he was working in the Russian capital rather than resting at the Black Sea resort. —AFP

## Iran executed over 100 between January and March: UN

**GENEVA:** Iran executed more than 100 people in the first three months of 2022, continuing a worrying upward trend, according to a report by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that was presented Tuesday. Speaking before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, UN deputy human rights chief Nada Al-Nashif presented Guterres' latest report on Iran, decrying that executions in the country were on the rise.

"While 260 individuals were executed in 2020, at least 310 individuals were executed in 2021, including at least 14 women," she said, adding that the trend had continued this year. Between January 1 and March 20, she said, "at least 105 people were executed," many of whom belonged to minority groups.

Guterres' report had noted with deep concern the increase of executions for lesser crimes, including for drug-related offences, Nashif said. "The death penalty continues to be imposed on the basis of charges not amounting to 'most serious crimes', and in ways incompatible with fair trials standards," she told the council. Nashif said that in March, 52 people sentenced to death on drug-related charges were transferred to Shiraz prison for execution. She also lamented the continued use of the death penalty for juvenile offenders, in violation of international law.

### 'Excessive use of force'

Between August 2021 and March 2022, at least two people who committed their alleged crimes as minors were executed and more than 85 juvenile offenders remain on death row, she said. "In February 2022, in a positive development, the Supreme Court decided to revoke the death sentence against a child offender who had been on death row for 18 years," Nashif added.

The deputy rights chief also decried other rights abuses in Iran, especially in response to protests over a range of significant social, political and economic challenges over the past year. "Excessive use of force constitutes the default response by the authorities to managing assemblies," she said.

"In April and May 2022, at least 55 individuals-teachers, lawyers, labour rights defenders, artists and academics-were arrested during protests, many of whom are facing national security charges." To date, no steps have been taken to establish accountability for violations committed during the nationwide protests in November 2019, she added.

Unnecessary deaths caused by excessive force inflicted by the authorities, against border couriers, peaceful protesters and those in detention, has continued with impunity, Nashif told the council.

"The scale of deaths in detention... is of serious concern," she said. Mehdi Ali Abadi, Iran's deputy permanent representative in Geneva, slammed the report, saying it was based on a malicious mandate forced on the UN by Western countries to stigmatise Iran, insisting it was "biased by default".

"Reducing the lofty code of human rights into a petty political tool is appalling and disgraceful," he told the council. —AFP

## International

# Confidence vote puts Bulgarian government's fate in the balance

## Cracks in coalition began to appear soon after Russia's invasion of Ukraine

**SOFIA:** Bulgaria's coalition government faced collapse Wednesday just six months after taking office, as MPs prepared to vote on a no-confidence motion that if passed could mean fresh elections. But analysts say there is no guarantee that another national vote in this country of 6.5 million people, which last year went through three such polls, would end the country's political instability.

In the most recent elections last November, the party of liberal Kiril Petkov came out ahead and went on to form an unwieldy coalition government with three other parties. An energetic, pro-European prime minister, Petkov promised to end Bulgaria's endemic corruption after a decade of rule by the controversial conservative Boyko Borisov.

But cracks in the coalition began to appear soon after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and earlier this month, the anti-establishment ITN party led by entertainer Slavi Trifonov withdrew its support. Borisov's conservative GERB party swiftly filed a no-confidence motion citing "the failure of the government's economic and financial policy" as consumer inflation soared.

The vote is expected just after 7:00 pm local time (1600 GMT). The motion needs 121 votes in the 240-seat parliament to succeed. The ruling coalition can rely on the support of just 109 of 240 lawmakers. Six MPs from the ITN grouping are also expected to back the government, but its only hope of clinging to power hinges on more ITN lawmakers giving their last-minute backing.

In a defiant speech to his supporters outside parliament on the eve of the vote, Petkov vowed: "We

will never betray the cause we began with. "Sooner or later Bulgaria will be where it should be—prosperous, European, with a working judiciary, with good education and healthcare," he said.

### Aggravated tensions

In a country with strong historical ties with Moscow, the Ukraine conflict has "accentuated divisions and weakened the government", said Ruslan Stefanov of the Center for the Study of Democracy think-tank. Despite the country's heavy dependence on Russian gas and oil, Petkov opposed Moscow's demand to open a ruble account to pay for Russian gas—a response to European Union sanctions. As a result, the country faced a cut in supplies in response.

This meant "Bulgarian oligarchs who pocketed commissions" on energy deliveries found themselves deprived of income, said Ognyan Minchev, head of the Sofia-based Institute for Regional and International Studies. And that, he said, "aggravated tensions within the coalition as well as between business circles and the government".

Another source of tension was Ukraine's appeal for arms to fight the Russian invasion. While most of the parties in the government were ready to authorise such deliveries, the Socialists—also part of the ruling coalition—remained opposed.

The final straw however came from the EU's drive to settle longstanding historical and cultural disputes between Bulgaria and neighbouring North Macedonia. It was Petkov's advocacy of rapprochement with Skopje that the ITN says prompted them to quit the coalition.

### Thousands take to the streets



**SOFIA, Bulgaria:** Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov speaks during a demonstration to support the government in Sofia before facing a no-confidence vote. —AFP

### Fragmented landscape

Even if the government survives the no-confidence vote, it will still struggle to govern because of its lack of a clear majority, political analyst Dimitar Dimitrov told public broadcaster BNR on Wednesday. If the no-confidence motion does pass, President Rumen Radev can make three attempts to see if any party can form a governing majority.

Failing that, parliament will be dissolved, and the politicians will go back to campaigning for

elections that would have to be held within two months. But even if there were fresh elections, they would be unlikely to provide a durable solution to a political landscape that remains highly fragmented, says Dimitar Ganev of the Trend polling institute.

Thousands of Bulgarians took to the streets on Wednesday in a demonstration of support for Petkov's drive for reforms—which now looks doomed. —AFP

## Prince Charles pays tribute to genocide victims in Rwanda

**KIGALI, Rwanda:** Prince Charles laid a wreath on Wednesday at a memorial to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda during the first visit to the country by a British royal. The Prince of Wales and his wife Camilla paused in silent tribute at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, the final resting place for more than 250,000 victims of the massacres almost three decades ago.

The royal couple signed a note of remembrance to accompany a wreath of white flowers.

They also spoke with survivors of the genocide in which some 800,000 mainly Tutsi people were murdered by Hutu extremist forces over about 100 days between April and July 1994. Housing skulls, bone fragments and shreds of clothing, the memorial is a confronting testimony to the horrors of the

genocide and a customary stop for foreign dignitaries visiting Rwanda.

Charles and Camilla also toured the memorial museum where they viewed photographs of the victims and their possessions, and heard personal testimonials about the killings.

The royal couple touched down late Tuesday in Rwanda where the Prince of Wales is representing his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, at a Commonwealth summit this week.

The leaders of many Commonwealth nations are expected in Kigali in the coming days for the meeting of the 54-member club of mainly former British colonies.

Rwanda, a former German and Belgian colony, joined the Commonwealth in 2009 and has in recent years moved closer to the English-speaking world.

Inaugurated in 2004 during the 10th anniversary of the killings, the Kigali Genocide Memorial has an education centre, a garden, library, and a 1200-seat amphitheatre that hosts workshops, plays, and cultural films.

The victims' remains are laid out in three main



**KIGALI, Rwanda:** Britain's Prince Charles (C), Prince of Wales, and Britain's Camilla (3rd-L), Duchess of Cornwall pose for a photo with a group of Genocide survivors during a visit to the Kigali Genocide Memorial. —AFP

rows, and more have been buried as new graves are uncovered around the country. At the burial ground, The Wall of Names is dedicated to victims of the genocide. —AFP

## Two kidnapped Chibok girls freed in Nigeria after eight years

**MAIDUGURI, Nigeria:** Nigerian troops have found two former schoolgirls who were abducted by Boko Haram jihadists eight years ago, the military said Tuesday, freeing some of the last victims of the 2014 Chibok abduction.

The two women each carried babies on their laps as they were presented by the military, after captivity with militants who stormed their school in April, 2014 in northeast Nigeria in a mass kidnapping that sparked international outrage.

Major-General Christopher Musa, the military commander of troops in the region, told reporters the girls were found on June 12 and 14 in two different locations by troops. "We are very lucky to have been able to recover two of the Chibok girls," Musa said.

Dozens of Boko Haram militants stormed the Chibok girls' boarding school in 2014 and packed 276 pupils, aged 12-17, at the time into trucks in the jihadist group's first mass school abduction. Fifty-seven of the girls managed to escape by jumping from the trucks shortly after their abduction while 80 were released in exchange for some detained Boko Haram commanders following negotiations

with the Nigerian government.

In the recent releases, one of the women, Hauwa Joseph, was found along with other civilians on June 12 around Bama after troops dislodged a Boko Haram camp, while the other, Mary Dauda, was found later outside Ngoshe village in Gwoza district, near the border with Cameroon.

On June 15 the military said on Twitter that they had found one of the Chibok girls named Mary Ngoshe. She turned out to be Mary Dauda. "I was nine when we were kidnapped from our school in Chibok and I was married off not long ago and had this child," Joseph told reporters at the military headquarters.

Joseph's husband and father-in-law were killed in a military raid and she was left to fend for herself and her 14-month-old son. "We were abandoned, no one cared to look after us. We were not being fed," she said.

Thousands of Boko Haram fighters and families have been surrendering over the last year, fleeing government bombardments and fighting with the rival group Islamic State West Africa Province. The conflict has killed more than 40,000 people and displaced 2.2 million more since 2009.

Dauda, who was 18 when she was kidnapped was married at different times to Boko Haram fighters in the group's enclave in the Sambisa forest. "They would starve and beat you if you refused to pray," Dauda said about life under Boko Haram.

She decided to flee and told her husband she was



**MAIDUGURI, Nigeria:** Kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls Hauwa Joseph (L) and Mary Dauda pose with their babies at Maimalari Barracks in Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria. —AFP

visiting another Chibok girl in Dutse village near Ngoshe, close to the border with Cameroon. With the help of an old man who lived outside the village with his family, Dauda trekked all night to Ngoshe where she surrendered to troops in the morning.

"All the remaining Chibok girls have been married with children. I left more than 20 of them in Sambisa, she said. "I'm so happy I'm back." After the Chibok school mass abduction jihadists carried out several mass abductions and deadly attacks on schools in the northeast. —AFP

## 'Life goes on' for unfazed Taiwanese on frontline islands

**XIYU, Taiwan:** Since moving from Taiwan's capital to the outlying Penghu islands for the peace and the fishing 11 years ago, Lin Chih-cheng has grown accustomed to the roar of Chinese fighter jets puncturing the lull of the surf. "If there's a day where they don't take off, it feels weird," laughed Lin, an affable 61-year-old who runs a juice stall with his wife on the western Xiyu Islet.

The archipelago's location about 50 kilometres (30 miles) out in the Taiwan Strait means it is likely to be on the front line of any potential invasion by China—a perennial possibility that has loomed ever larger in the

last few years. Beijing claims all of Taiwan as its territory, and its pledge to take it by force if necessary has begun to seem less farfetched as China projects an increasingly aggressive stance on the world stage. But in the sleepy fishing towns on the islands, many locals are sanguine despite the frequent—and noisy—reminders of the military threat.

"Everyone says tension between both sides is high now, but I am not worried," said Lin. "I have confidence that our government is not beating the war drum." Xiyu's azure waters and twisting, heart-shaped stone weirs have made it an Instagrammer's paradise.

Business is good at the juice stall, where Lin and his wife blend cactus fruit and ice flower into sweet, cold drinks for a stream of thirsty tourists. Just down the road are a very different set of customers—the soldiers at a Sky Bow base, home to Taiwan's surface-to-air anti-ballistic missile and anti-aircraft defence systems.

"I actually do a lot of deliveries to the base," Lin

said. "I have been inside. It feels quite normal to me." The presence of troops has been a fact of life for decades on the island, where they are seen more as a source of income than one of dread. "People from both sides (of the strait), we actually share the same language and culture," Lin said. "Who wants war? We actually get along with each other. The affairs of those in power are none of our business."

But Penghu has found itself at the mercy of geopolitical forces many times throughout its history. "Penghu is a hard-to-defend place," Chen Ing-jin, a 67-year-old local historian and architect, told AFP. "It's flat and has many coastal areas, which makes it very hard to prevent possible landings."

The Dutch, French and Japanese all invaded with little trouble, and signs of war-past and present-are everywhere. The historic forts, now there for tourists rather than defence, have been replaced by serious modern firepower. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Swiss to lift ban on cannabis

**GENEVA:** The Swiss government on Wednesday decided to lift the ban on cannabis for medical use from August 1. Patients who are medically prescribed the drug will no longer need to seek exceptional permission from the health ministry. The sale and consumption of cannabis for non-medical purposes will remain prohibited. The government "intends to facilitate access to cannabis for medical use for patients" and was therefore lifting the ban on its use for that purpose, it said in a statement. Parliament backed amending the law in March 2021. "The decision to use a cannabis-based medicine for therapeutic purposes will rest with the doctor, in consultation with the patient," the government said. The new regulations could benefit thousands of people suffering from severe chronic pain, it added, including those with cancer and multiple sclerosis. —AFP

#### Passenger jet catches fire

**MIAMI:** Investigators were headed to Miami Wednesday after a passenger jet's landing gear collapsed and it caught fire as it touched down at the US city's international airport, forcing 140 people to flee the burning and mangled aircraft. Three people were hospitalized after the crash of Red Air Flight 203 late Tuesday, according to Miami-Dade fire officials, but no deaths or serious injuries have been reported among those on board. Dramatic video footage showed people being evacuated from the McDonnell Douglas MD-82 aircraft, lying askew on the runway with its nose crumpled as thick black smoke billows from its body. Red Air, a Dominican budget carrier which only launched in November last year, said the plane was arriving from Santo Domingo when it met with "technical difficulties." —AFP

#### Six dead in tribal dispute

**KUT:** Six people, including a soldier, were killed in Iraq on Wednesday during a clash between two tribes sparked by a dispute over agricultural land, police said. The violence in Al-Uzair district, south of Amarah in the southeastern province of Maysan, lasted several hours, said Saad al-Zaidi, police spokesman for the area. The soldier was from one of the two tribes and had been "on leave when the conflict broke out because of disputes over farmland", he told AFP. Despite beefed up security measures, Maysan province, which borders Iran, is a route for drug traffickers where tribal rivalry often degenerates into violence. In May, eight people were killed in the same region when clashes between members of the same tribe broke out over farmland. Further complicating the task of law enforcement, assassinations or attempted assassinations targeting judges or police officers are also common. —AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, JUNE 23, 2022



TEHRAN: Abbas Emami (left), 88, and his daughter Marjan display pistachios inside his shop in Tehran's famous Graz Bazaar. Tucked away in Tehran's famous bazaar, Iran's oldest pistachio wholesaler quietly prepares a small revolution—he will hand his business to his youngest daughter, in a trade dominated by men. — AFP photos



TEHRAN: Customers check pistachio at Iran's oldest pistachio wholesaler in Tehran's famous Graz Bazaar.

## Iran's oldest pistachio trader prepares a 'small revolution'

### Emami to hand over to daughter - a trade dominated by men

TEHRAN: Tucked away in Tehran's famed Grand Bazaar, Iran's oldest pistachio wholesaler quietly prepares a small revolution—he will hand his business to his youngest daughter, in a trade dominated by men. Abbas Emami, 88, began working for his own father at the age of 15. More than seven decades on, bags of pistachios at the family shop are emblazoned with the slogan "over a century of experience".

He doesn't know exactly when his family first got into the business. But "my father worked in the nut shop of my maternal grandfather, before striking out on his own," Emami recalled. "I helped my father during the day and I studied by night," he said. "It took me a decade to learn the secrets of the trade."

Emami is now in the process of transferring that expertise to his 50-year-old daughter Marjan, who will also take over his firm, Shams Roasted Nuts. The pistachios are generally grown in the provinces of Kerman and Semnan. Every two or three months, agents working on behalf of the growers come and place orders. Competitors attest to the fact that Emami—who took over the business from his father in 1975 — is the oldest pistachio wholesaler in town.

"We buy five types of pistachios," Emami said. "They differ in appearance, taste, size, quality and therefore price." "The best-tasting variety, in my opinion, is the Ahmad-Aghaei, which sells at 495,000 tomans (\$16) per kilogram," he said. Iran's last pistachio harvest, in October, yielded 280,000 tons, of which half was consumed at home and the rest exported to around 75 countries. The exports brought in the equivalent of \$900 million, making the industry a sizeable contributor to Iran's economy.

#### Tricks of the trade

Emami is reluctant to divulge too much about the know-how he is passing on to Marjan. "It's important

to buy at the right moment," he said, adding that adequate refrigeration was also important. Marjan, who first took on duties in her father's shop owing to concerns about his vulnerability to coronavirus, was a little more forthcoming. "Sourcing the product at the right price is not easy," she said. "It's crucial also to monitor processing, hygiene and storage." Iran is one of the top three global consumers of pistachios, after Turkey and China, and demand is particularly high during Nowruz, the Persian new year celebrations. "With the spread of the coronavirus, my father was not able to come" to the shop, said Marjan. "So during Nowruz, I stood in for him with my own two daughters, starting as a cashier and then staying on." Roasting the nuts is a crucial part of the process. A few streets away from Emami's shop, in the Ahangan district of the capital, 80 kilogram bags of raw pistachios are piled high. "Once the drum has been cleaned with coarse salt, we roast the pistachios before mixing them in a blender with salted water or saffron, before drying them," said Majid Ebrahimi, 31, who roasts two tons per day.

The pistachio trade has evolved considerably since the 1950s, according to Emami. "At the time, the pistachio trade was a domain of the rich. When I was an adolescent, there were only four wholesale trading houses. Today, there are 10 times that number," he said.

"It became more accessible in the 1950s. Part of the population grew wealthy and so the clientele grew. I still have around 100 clients," he added, sitting in the back of his shop, below a black-and-white photo of his father. But despite working for more than 70 years, he is not quite ready to relinquish the reins to his daughter yet. "First of all, it is necessary to learn," he said, with a mischievous smile. "It is not an easy trade, but she will learn." — AFP



### Opening of subscription for National Consumer Holding Company

KUWAIT: The subscription for the capital increase of National Consumer Holding Company (the Company), listed on the Main Market of Boursa Kuwait opens on Thursday, June 23, 2022 with an offering of 210 million ordinary shares, at an issue price of 100 fils per share and without an issue premium. The subscription will be under the supervision of the Lead Manager and Subscription Agent - National Investments Company KSC. The paid-up and issued capital of the Company will increase by approximately 233% through the issuance of these rights issue. The preemption rights will be allocated to the Company's shareholders recorded in the Company's shareholders' register as of June 22, 2022.

New shareholders will be entitled to subscribe to the new shares in the event there are additional shares that have not been subscribed by the pre-emption rights holders. The Subscription will continue for 15 days and end on Thursday, July 7, 2022. Subscribers could subscribe either through the

Kuwait IPO application, and the KCC website [www.ipo.com.kw](http://www.ipo.com.kw), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week throughout the Subscription Period, or visit the subscription office of the Clearing Agent ("Kuwait Clearing Company") located in Ahmad Tower, 5th floor, Arabian Gulf Street, during working hours. Upon completion of the Subscription of the Offered Shares, the Company's issued and paid-up capital will increase from KD 9 million to KD 30 million.

National Consumer Holding Company was established as a Kuwaiti shareholding company on June 5, 1996, and was listed on Boursa Kuwait (previously Kuwait Stock Exchange) on June 12, 2006. It invests mainly in the industrial sector in the Saudi market, in addition to one of its subsidiaries working in the real estate sector in the Kuwaiti market. The Company intends to use the proceeds of the capital increase to support the solvency of the Company, invest in new investments, in addition to expanding the current business of the Company and its subsidiaries.

### Price of air tickets to keep climbing

DOHA: Propelled by inflation, the price of air tickets has begun to take off again after tumbling during the pandemic, a reversal that looks set to intensify due to environmental pressures, experts say. For members of the International Air Transport Association, gathered in Doha for their annual meeting this week, minds are focused on how far such increases risk undermining passenger growth targets. The IATA is also pleading for government support in reconciling the long-term commitment to net zero carbon emissions with those ambitious targets. The aviation industry has just gone through two years where planes flew with rows of empty seats, even as they offered fares much lower than before the Covid-19 pandemic.

But with the sector still mired in the red despite movement restrictions being largely lifted, the bargain bonanza for passengers is very much over. In the United States, the average price of an internal flight has shot up, from \$202 in October 2021 to \$336 in May this year, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Saint Louis. In the European Union, the price of a return ticket before tax in April returned to that seen in the same month of 2019, after a near-20 percent fall in 2020, according to aviation research specialists Cirium.

The oil price shock stoked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the most obvious factor in these price rises. Airlines estimate that fuel prices will account for 24 percent of their total costs this year, up five percentage points from last year. Ticket prices are also being stoked by wider inflation - now at 40-year-highs in developed markets-as well as stronger-than-expected demand for tickets and labour shortages.

#### Reality check

But Scott Kirby, chief executive of United Airlines, said despite the trend clearly rising, prices had yet to



ARLINGTON: American Airlines planes are seen at Philadelphia International Airport in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. — AFP

shoot beyond historical norms. "In real terms, pricing is back to 2014 levels... and it's lower than it was essentially every year before" then, he said. "So... I don't think we're going to see demand destruction." But Vik Krishnan, a partner at McKinsey & Co, is cautious about how long the current high demand will last. "Some of the travel that we're seeing right now is a function of all the stimulus that governments" pumped into economies during the pandemic, boosting citizens' spare income, he said. "The number one discretionary income spending is travel and that's what people are doing. But "how long that lasts remains to be seen", he added.

#### Climate crisis v cheap holidays

Beyond rising costs and fears that government stimulus will fade, airlines face commitments that sit very uneasily alongside each other. On the one hand, they target carrying a total of 10 billion passengers by 2050, up from 4.5 billion in 2019. And yet over the same time horizon, they are beholden to achieving

"net zero" carbon emissions. The total cost of transitioning the sector to "net zero" is estimated by the IATA at an eye-watering \$1.55 trillion. "Airlines don't have the ability to absorb" the cost of that transition, IATA director general Willie Walsh said this week. To reduce carbon emissions, the industry focus is on sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs), which are currently two to four times more expensive than fossil-based aviation fuel. Some governments have already imposed SAF quotas, albeit in small quantities, resulting in airlines in turn imposing surcharges. On Tuesday, the IATA urged governments to provide subsidies to ensure SAF production reaches 30 billion litres in 2030, up from 125 million litres in 2021. It also wants price curbs. But even if such subsidies are forthcoming, "the transition to net zero will have to be reflected in ticket prices," Walsh said. Could that reverse the long-standing global trend of air travel progressively extending beyond the wealthy? Krishnan believes such "democratization" will become "harder". — AFP

### Facebook agrees to safeguard in advert discrimination case

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook owner Meta has agreed to change its ad targeting technology and pay \$115,000 to settle US government allegations the social media giant allowed discrimination in who saw housing advertisements, authorities said Tuesday. Under terms of a deal that must still be approved by a court, Meta will use artificial intelligence to make sure ads cross demographics to reach people regardless of age, gender or race. "We will be introducing a new method designed to make sure the audience that ends up seeing a housing ad more closely reflects the eligible targeted audience for that ad," Meta deputy general counsel Roy Austin said in a post. The Department of Housing and Urban Development had charged in 2019 that Facebook "unlawfully discriminates based on race, color, national origin, religion, familial status, sex and disability" by restricting who can view housing-related ads.

Facebook has become a multi-billion dollar advertising juggernaut with its large amounts of user data that allow companies to more precisely target certain demographics, but which have also prompted allegations of privacy infringement and discrimination.

While HUD accusations focused on housing ads, Meta will also put the new system to use to make sure ads for jobs or credit don't discriminate, Austin added. Meta has been working with HUD on a "variance reduction system" to prevent discrimination in ad targeting on its platform. Meta had already made changes to address housing ad discrimination concerns, and those will remain in effect, the proposed settlement stated. Facebook announced early in 2019 that it was revamping how it uses targeted advertising in a settlement with activist groups alleging it discriminated in messages on jobs, housing, credit and other services.—AFP



## Business

# Equities, oil prices plunge as recession fears build

## Brexit to further slash inflation-hit wages: Study

LONDON: Equities and oil prices tumbled Wednesday after a brief respite from last week's painful rout across world markets, with recession fears building as central banks hike interest rates to combat decades-high inflation. While Asia, Wall Street and Europe all enjoyed healthy gains Tuesday, analysts warned the downbeat mood on trading floors means the selling is unlikely to end any time soon.

Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell's two-day testimony to Congress this week will be pored over for an idea about officials' plans for fighting runaway prices, which are being fanned by supply chain snarls, China's lockdowns and the war in Ukraine. Most observers expect the Fed to aggressively hike US interest rates several more times this year having recently carried out the sharpest lift in almost 30 years. The prediction is handing support to the dollar, which pushed the yen briefly to a fresh 24-year low Wednesday.

The Bank of Japan is holding back from lifting interest rates, in sharp contrast to other major central banks. "Swiftly rising interest rates act as a vacuum for economic growth, and this isn't lost on the market today," noted Sophie Lund-Yates, equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. "This is a darker day for global markets than has been seen in a while. Serious questions remain about the resilience of consumers, and it appears traders are bracing for a harsh hand where interest rates are concerned."

Oil prices were feeling the heat from recessionary fears, with both main contracts tanking more than five percent at one point. Crude and gas prices have soared in recent months after major economies lifted

pandemic lockdowns and following the invasion of Ukraine by major energy producer Russia. Surging energy costs are fuelling global inflation, with official data Wednesday showing the British annual rate hitting a fresh 40-year high above nine percent.

In the United States, President Joe Biden will Wednesday ask Congress to suspend the federal gas tax for three months as skyrocketing prices cause widespread anger among Americans just months before crucial mid-term elections. The White House wants to discontinue the 18 cents per gallon tax until September and will call on state governments to do the same. A senior administration official noted that US gas prices - averaging near \$5 per gallon - had jumped almost \$2 since Russian President Vladimir Putin began building up forces on the Ukrainian border earlier this year.

### Inflation-hit wages

Meanwhile, Britain's exit from the European Union will further slash workers' wages in coming years, a study concluded Wednesday as the nation already faces a cost-of-living crisis from soaring inflation. The research, from the Resolution Foundation think tank and the London School of Economics, was published as official data showed UK inflation hitting a new 40-year peak at 9.1 percent.

And Wednesday's report claimed that Brexit had hit the UK economy's openness and competitiveness abroad. As a result, household incomes-already under intense pressure from rocketing inflation-were forecast to slide further. "It will take many years for the economy



KARACHI: Laborers work at a clay pot workshop on the outskirts of Karachi.— AFP

to adjust ... but the aggregate effect will be to reduce household incomes as a result of a weaker pound, and lower investment and trade," the report read.

A weaker pound had also ramped up import costs, it added. The report forecast that Brexit would cause a 1.8-percent drop to real wages-or earnings adjusted for

inflation-by the end of the decade. That equated to a loss of £470 (\$577) per worker per year, it added. "Brexit is not... expected to transform the nature of the UK economy," the report concluded. "Instead, the impact of Brexit is better thought of as a broad-based reduction in workers' pay and productivity."—AFP



BRANDENBURG: German Minister of Economics Robert Habeck (left) looks at a model of an Airbus ZEROe hybrid-hydrogen aircraft next to Michael Schoellhorn, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Airbus Defense and Space, during his tour at the ILA Berlin Air Show (Internationale Luft- und Raumfahrttausstellung) in Schoenefeld on June 22, 2022.— AFP

## Spain bets on green hydrogen in clean energy push

MADRID: As Europe seeks to move way from fossil fuels, Spain is racing ahead in developing green hydrogen, aided by a growing wind and solar power complex in efforts to decarbonize its economy. Spain accounted for 20 percent of the world's green hydrogen projects in the first quarter, second only to the United States, home to more than half of them, according to Wood Mackenzie consulting firm. "A lot of countries are interested in green hydrogen, but in Spain the sector has rapidly accelerated" in recent months, said Rafael Cossent, research associate professor in energy economics at Comillas Pontifical University in Madrid.

The sector is still in its infancy, but the war in Ukraine has prompted the European Union to double its production goal for 2030 as part of efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian energy supplies. "Spain has become a very attractive country for green hydrogen," EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said during a visit to the country in May. "A shift is happening ... to mass-scale competitive hydrogen".

Green hydrogen is produced by passing an electric current through water to split it between hydrogen and oxygen, a process called electrolysis. It is considered green because the electricity comes from renewable sources of energy that don't create any harmful emissions. And while fossil fuels emit harmful greenhouse gases when they burn, hydrogen only emits harmless water vapor. The technology is part of EU efforts to become climate neutral by 2050.

### 'Great potential'

Green hydrogen could replace coal in heavy industries such as steel mills. It can also be used to make fertiliser and is being considered as a potential fuel for buses, trains and aircraft in the future. A major drawback for green hydrogen, however, has been the high cost of producing it. It is much cheaper to make "grey" hydrogen, but its production requires using fossil fuels that emit greenhouse gases. But technological progress and the surge in prices of fossil fuels has made green hydrogen more competitive. Spain has "great potential" because it has a well-developed renewables sector, with important solar and wind resources, said Javier Brey, president of the Spanish Hydrogen Association (AeH2).

Cossent said that Spain has another advantage in its vast natural gas network and LNG terminals, which could be transformed to export hydrogen. The government launched last year a 1.5-billion-euro (\$1.8-billion) plan to support green hydrogen projects over the next three years, tapping a European Union Covid recovery fund to do so. Adding private investments, close to nine billion euros will be spent by 2030.

Spanish energy companies such as Iberdrola, Repsol and Enagas have all launched green hydrogen projects. Enagas teamed up with global steel giant ArcelorMittal and fertilizer maker Fertiberia for a huge project dubbed HyDeal Espana in northern Asturias region. The site will have around 15 solar parks that could produce 330,000 tons of hydrogen per year by 2030, making it the biggest project of this type in the world, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency.—AFP

## Fish trade's murky waters cloud double murder in Amazon

ATALAIA DO NORTE: The pirarucu is one impressive fish: a huge, thrashing Amazonian monster with red-and-black scales the size of serving spoons. Still, it's just a fish. How is it possible it could have gotten British journalist Dom Phillips and Brazilian Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira murdered?

Police say Phillips, 57, and Pereira, 41, were shot dead on June 5 returning from a research trip in Brazil's far-flung Javari Valley. At first glance, the jungle-covered region near the Peruvian and Colombian borders seems like one of the last untouched wildernesses, home to a sprawling Indigenous reservation with the biggest concentration of uncontacted tribes on Earth.

But the double murder lay bare growing violence in the region fueled by illegal fishing, logging, mining and drug trafficking. Pereira had received death threats for his work fighting poaching on the reservation, where non-natives are banned from hunting and fishing. "He waged a major crackdown on illegal fishing. All those guys (the poachers in the region) knew Bruno," says Orlando Possuelo, 37, who worked with Pereira coordinating Indigenous anti-poaching patrols—a job that has earned him death threats, too.

Investigators say Pereira and Phillips were motoring down the meandering Itaquai river in a small boat when a group sped up from behind and shot them. Police have identified eight suspects, and arrested three so far. Locals in Atalaia do Norte, a sleepy river town near the northeastern edge of the reservation, say all three are poachers who illegally fish in Indigenous territory for pirarucu, a protected species that is the biggest freshwater fish in South America.

### 'Everyone here knows'

Fishermen in Atalaia say poaching pirarucu—a tasty, coveted fish that can reach 4.5 meters (nearly 15 feet) and weigh up to 200 kilograms—is a big-money business linked to drug traffickers operating in Peru and Colombia. The traffickers allegedly use the black-market fish trade to launder drug money—part of what the Brazilian Forum for Public Security recently called the "complex national and transnational criminal chains that operate across different economies" in the Amazon. "What happened to Bruno and Dom is the result of an increase in organized crime, which is in turn explained by the absence of the state," said Antenor Vaz, ex-chief of

Brazilian indigenous affairs agency FUNAI's operations in the Javari Valley.

The alleged drug-trafficking link has raised the question of whether the suspects acted alone. Federal police said Friday they did, ruling out the involvement of a "mastermind or criminal organization." The statement infuriated the Indigenous-rights group where Pereira worked, UNIVAJA, which accused the police of ignoring "considerable" evidence a "powerful criminal organization" was behind the killings. "Everyone here knows organized crime was involved," UNIVAJA head Paulo Marubo told AFP.

### Pirarucu taboo

At Atalaia's fish market, a noisy hangar with concrete floors and white-tile stalls, pirarucu has disappeared since Phillips and Pereira went missing. Some pirarucu sales are in fact legal—there are six local lakes outside the Indigenous reservation where restricted fishing is allowed.

But much of the pirarucu on the market is likely illegal. A report by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature found 83 percent of the illegal fish seized in Brazil from 2012 to 2019 was pirarucu. With the army, federal police and world media in town to investigate the men's disappearance, fishermen are taking no chances on pirarucu these days, even if landing one of the giants can bring in hundreds of dollars—badly needed cash for most families in the region, one of the poorest in Brazil.

"Legal fishermen are afraid to even go out right now, with the army here and everyone blaming us for this atrocity," says Roberto Pereira da Costa, 49, president of the local fishermen's association. Legal fishermen are being unfairly villainized, he says. "You can see the difference between the illegal fishermen and us. They've got big boats, fast motors, they're not just catching 15 kilos of fish to feed their families, they're trying to take out everything they can."

### 'A bigger story'

In December, journalist Monica Yanakiew of Al Jazeera English joined Pereira on an expedition like the one Phillips accompanied. Her crew even captured him warning the fisherman who is now the lead suspect in the case not to fish on Indigenous land. Poachers got "infuriated" when Pereira's patrols seized their fish, says Yanakiew. But "it's a bigger story than that," she says.

Pereira would not have needed to mount independent patrols if President Jair Bolsonaro's administration had not dramatically cut enforcement operations by FUNAI and environmental authorities, critics say. "The fact that the government has turned a blind eye to everything that is going on has empowered" criminals, says Yanakiew. "They think they can get away with murder."—AFP



ATALAIA DO NORTE: Photo shows an aerial view of Atalaia do Norte, a municipality in the state of Amazonas, Brazil.— AFP

## Egypt calls for 'reality check' in climate talks

BONN: Egypt hopes to jump-start the action needed to face a warming world when it takes the presidency of major UN climate talks in November, but warns that countries need a "reality check" as progress stalls. Presiding over the inflection point when a decades-long United Nations climate process switches from negotiation to "implementation", Egypt has set a high bar for its leadership of this year's COP27 climate summit. But the challenge of maintaining international momentum on climate change has been made even harder as the world faces a catalogue of challenges, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and spiralling food, energy and economic crises.

"Because of the geopolitical situation, climate change is being pushed back," said Ambassador Mohamed Nasr at a meeting in the German city of Bonn meant to lay the groundwork for the Egyptian conference. "We are facing a big challenge." Outgoing UN climate leader Patricia Espinosa had told delegates that when global leaders gather in Sharm el-Sheikh in November the world will "look nothing like" it did during the climate talks in Glasgow last year.

The international community has agreed that climate change poses an existential threat to human systems and the natural world. But action to cut carbon pollution and prepare for the accelerating impacts is lagging, as is support for vulnerable countries confronting the ravages of a changing climate. "It's time to start the reality check. We have been planning and planning," said Nasr. Now the question must be: "Is it delivering on the ground or not?"

### Loss and damage

Nasr said that while Egypt's presidency of the conference would have "African flavour and African vision", it would remain resolutely international in focus. Added to the geopolitical crises are the surging frustrations of vulnerable nations least responsible for climate change over a lack of funding from rich polluters to help them cope with a warming world. A promise of \$100 billion a year from 2020 is still not met. Another flashpoint is "loss and damage", UN speak for climate damages already incurred. Developing countries have called for a separate financing facility but have only got a "dialogue" instead.

The issue dominated the Bonn talks last week and with little resolved looks likely to be a major theme at COP27 as developing countries push to get it on the agenda. "It is not what we hoped for," said Nasr. He said the historic 2015 Paris Agreement was a "very delicate balance" between pushing ever-more ambitious action on emissions reductions alongside work to help countries prepare for future impacts and deal with damages.

While countries have ramped up ambitions - if not action - to meet the Paris goal of capping warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, he said the other elements have yet to be afforded the same level of urgency. "We need to give assurances to the big constituency of developing countries that their priorities are being dealt with on the same level," said Nasr.

Another key challenge will be to harness the financial clout of the development banks and private sector to remove barriers hampering the investments needed to reduce emissions and build the infrastructure countries require to grapple with climate change. "We need this transformation that has happened here (in the UN process) to find its way into those institutions," said Nasr, calling for more innovative ways to open up access to investments. "We cannot continue in a business-as-usual scenario when it comes to finance."—AFP

## Business

# Afghanistan's ancient Buddhist city threatened by Chinese copper mine

## Consortium exploiting one of the world's largest copper deposits

**MES AYNAK:** An ancient Buddhist city carved out of immense peaks near Kabul is in danger of disappearing forever, swallowed up by a Chinese consortium exploiting one of the world's largest copper deposits. Located at the confluence of Hellenistic and Indian cultures, Mes Aynak—believed to be between 1,000 and 2,000 years old—was once a vast city organized around the extraction and trade of copper.

Archaeologists have uncovered Buddhist monasteries, stupas, fortresses, administrative buildings and dwellings, while hundreds of statues, frescoes, ceramics, coins and manuscripts have also been unearthed. Despite looting at the beginning of the century, Mes Aynak is "one of the most beautiful archaeological sites" in the world, says Bastien Varoutsikos, an archaeologist for the French company Iconem, which is working to digitise the city and its heritage. But the need for the Taliban—who returned to power in August last year to find new revenue streams after international aid was frozen—has made mining the project a priority, and could put an end to further archaeological work.

### Mining consortium

Objects discovered date mainly from the 2nd to 9th century AD, but an earlier occupation is also believed likely, and pottery dating back to the Bronze Age—well before the birth of Buddhism—has also been found. Forgotten for centuries before being rediscovered by a French geologist in the early 1960s, Mes Aynak, in Logar province, has been compared to Pompeii and Machu Picchu in size and significance.

The ruins, which cover 1,000 hectares, are perched high on a massive peak whose brown flanks betray the presence of copper. But in 2007 the Chinese mining giant Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) headed a state-owned consortium—that later took the name MJAM—and signed a \$3 billion contract to mine ore over 30 years. Fifteen years later, the mine still does not exist—insecurity and disagreements between

Beijing and Kabul over financial terms of the contract have caused delays. The project is once again a priority for both parties, however, and talks are ongoing on how to proceed.

### Duty of preservation

Fears are rising that a place once considered one of the most prosperous trade hubs on the Silk Road could disappear without oversight. In the early 2010s, it was "one of the largest archaeological projects in the world", Varoutsikos told AFP. MJAM originally suspended the start of operations for three years to allow archaeologists to focus on the area directly threatened by the mine.

That period was inadvertently lengthened as the security situation prevented the Chinese from building planned infrastructure. As a result, thousands of objects were unearthed—some were taken to the Kabul museum, others kept nearby. When it was last in power the Taliban shocked the world by dynamiting the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan in March 2001, but today they say they are determined to preserve the findings of Mes Aynak.

"It is the duty of the Ministry of Information and Culture to protect them," Esmatullah Burhan, the spokesman for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, told AFP. But while the rhetoric seems sincere, many of the remains are simply too bulky or fragile to be moved and seem destined to disappear. The Chinese favor open-pit rather than underground mining. If this goes ahead, it would open up the copper mountain and bury all the fragments of the past.

### Environmental consequences

Afghanistan is sitting on huge mineral resources of copper, iron, bauxite, lithium and rare earths estimated to be worth more than a trillion dollars. The Taliban hope to earn more than \$300 million a year from Mes Aynak—about 60 percent of the full state budget for 2022—and now want to speed up the process. "This



**MES AYNAK:** Photo shows an archaeological site in Mes Aynak, in the eastern province of Logar. An ancient Buddhist city carved out of immense peaks near Kabul is in danger of disappearing forever, swallowed up by a Chinese consortium exploiting one of the world's largest copper deposits. —AFP

project must begin, it must not be delayed any longer," they have repeatedly told MJAM in recent weeks, according to Burhan. The discussions are about "80 percent finished", says the spokesman, with only technical points remaining to be settled, which should be done soon.

The Taliban are demanding that the contract—which includes the construction of a power station to supply the mine and Kabul, and a railroad to Pakistan—be respected. They also insist that the copper be processed locally with an Afghan workforce. China, whose economy is in dire need of copper, is reluctant to meet these demands. MJAM, which did not respond to AFP, also con-

tinues to demand a reduction in royalties due. The project is also coupled with concerns about its environmental consequences. Copper mining is polluting and requires large quantities of water, and Logar is already an arid region.

According to Burhan, the Taliban are paying "strict attention" to these issues and will ensure that the consortium meets its obligations in this regard. For now, the delay is some salvation for archaeologists. While there is currently no work going on at the site, Varoutsikos hopes to restart the excavation before the start of mining operations. But even that will depend on international collaboration and funding, he notes. —AFP

## IEA: Clean energy spending rises, but still not enough

**PARIS:** Investment in clean energy will hit a record this year but fall short of what is needed to tackle the climate crisis, with coal spending rising, the International Energy Agency said Wednesday. Global energy investment will rise by eight percent to \$2.4 trillion in 2022, mainly thanks to renewables, although soaring inflation and Russia's invasion of Ukraine are weighing on costs, the IEA said in an annual report. Investment in all sectors will increase but the fastest growth will come from electricity, mainly in renewables and grids, and energy efficiency.

Clean energy investment is "finally" starting to pick up and is expected to reach \$1.4 trillion this year, accounting for almost three-quarters of the growth in overall spending in energy, the IEA said. Since 2020, investment in clean energy has grown at an annual rate of 12 percent, "well short of what is required to hit international climate goals, but nonetheless an important step in the right direction," according to the report.

This compares to an annual growth rate of just over two percent in the five years that followed the 2015 Paris climate pact. Inflation has soared worldwide as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has pushed energy prices higher. The IEA said almost half of the additional \$200 billion in capital investment in energy in 2022 "is likely to be eaten up by higher costs, rather than bringing additional energy supply capacity or savings." —AFP

## Kenya's Ruto vows to deport Chinese traders if elected

**NAIROBI:** Kenya's Deputy President William Ruto has said he would deport Chinese nationals in jobs that could be done by locals if he wins elections in August, sparking a mixed reaction online. East Africa's biggest economy will hold presidential and parliamentary polls on August 9, against a backdrop of economic hardship in the wake of the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine. "That Chinese nationals are roasting maize and selling mobile phones, we will deport all of them back to their country," Ruto said at an economic forum on Tuesday as campaigning gears up for the high-stakes vote. "All those businesses are for Kenyans," he said.

"Do not be worried about the foreigners engaged in those businesses. We have enough aeroplanes to deport them." The 55-year-old former agriculture minister is seeking to succeed President Uhuru Kenyatta who must stand down after serving the maximum of two five-year terms. "There is a level of business that is not allowed by law for someone to come from China to do," Ruto said, without elaborating. The Chinese embassy in Nairobi has not responded to a request for comment.

China is Kenya's second-largest lender after the World Bank and has funded a number of costly infrastructure projects that have raised concerns about Nairobi taking on more debt than it can afford. Like other African nations, Kenya has been turning to China for investment, technology, equipment and personnel to develop its infrastructure. But the plane loads of workers from China into Africa's fragile labor markets have created unease, with some



**MAUA, Kenya:** A van driving through a rural town transporting khat meant to Nairobi, fresh from the farm in Meru county. —AFP

complaining that they are taking jobs from locals.

### Debt mountain

The remarks drew a mixed reaction online. "We owe China trillions, by doing that, we will strain our relationship with the country and they will also seek a knee jerk reaction for loan repayment," one user said on Twitter. Others agreed with Ruto's proposals. "Good move, nothing of the sort happens in other countries. Local jobs cannot be taken over by foreigners," another user tweeted.

Beijing funded Kenya's most expensive infrastructure project since independence, loaning \$5 billion for the construction of a railway line from the port city of Mombasa to Nairobi and the Rift Valley town of Naivasha that opened in 2017. It has rejected sugges-

tions its extensive lending was trapping cash-strapped governments in debt dependency. Ruto—a former street hawk turned top-ranking politician—has been campaigning on a pledge to help "hustlers" trying to make ends meet in a country ruled by "dynasties".

He has lambasted Kenyatta over his economic policies, including the country's huge debt burden of almost \$70 billion, vowing to undo them if he wins power in August. Kenya's unemployment rate stood at 6.2 percent in 2021, according to the latest government data released in May, although the true figure is believed to be much higher. The finance minister in April unveiled a \$28 billion budget aimed at helping the economy recover after the COVID-19 pandemic threw hundreds of thousands of people out of work. —AFP

## What's next after WTO breaks the logjam?

**GENEVA:** The World Trade Organization may feel this week like it has risen from its slumber after striking breakthrough agreements, but the global trade body remains far from firing on all cylinders. "We succeeded, and we are determined to continue," WTO chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala boasted as she wrapped up the first ministerial conference under her leadership, having taken over the reins with gusto in March last year.

The talks at the WTO's Geneva headquarters were meant to conclude after four days on Wednesday last week, but went round the clock into early Friday as the former Nigerian finance and foreign minister pushed on for results. Despite feeling "exhausted" after two sleepless nights, she talked up the WTO's role in addressing major global challenges. "When I started this job, the expectations of the WTO were not very high," she said, with the organization often branded as dysfunctional, sclerotic and unable to

reach big decisions. But now, "we've shown that the WTO can produce outcomes". The conference concluded with deals on curbing harmful fishing subsidies, bolstering food insecurity and temporarily waiving patents on Covid-19 vaccines. Reaching these agreements at the WTO—where consensus is needed among all 164 members—has revived the organization, which had failed to strike any significant deals for nearly a decade.

### Reform

Time will tell whether it was beginner's luck for Okonjo-Iweala, or—more likely—sheer determination and an effective negotiation strategy. Australia's WTO ambassador George Mina called the results a "welcome boost" for the WTO, while France's Foreign Trade Minister Franck Riester said there was "lots left to do". Pascal Lamy, who ran the WTO from 2005 to 2013, told AFP that the conference was neither historic nor mediocre, but praised the fisheries deal as a "real breakthrough" after 21 years of talks, for taking the WTO into combating environmental issues.

He praised the efforts of Colombia's WTO ambassador Santiago Wills, who steered the fisheries talks, saying he had "really done remarkable diplomatic work".



**GENEVA:** World Trade Organization Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (right) is congratulated by Indian Minister of Commerce Piyush Goyal after a closing session of a World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference at the WTO headquarters in Geneva. —AFP

EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said that despite fruitful outcomes, the divergences between members "confirm that a deep reform of the organization is urgently needed".

Members agreed to a rough outline on how to proceed, envisioning "reforms to improve all its functions". But "ideas vary a

lot on the priorities and the directions to follow", said Sebastien Jean, professor of industrial economics at the French National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts university. Maria Pagan, the US WTO ambassador, said: "Everybody says we want to reform; everybody has a different conception of reform." —AFP

## IKEA, KIB sign strategic partnership agreement

**KUWAIT:** IKEA Kuwait and KIB (Kuwait International Bank) signed a strategic partnership agreement to provide financing solutions to their customers. The strategic agreement was announced on June 13th, 2022 in the latest IKEA shop located in The Assima Mall by Adil Kejjouj, Finance Director of IKEA, Elisa Albendea, Marketing and Communication Director of IKEA and the General Manager of KIB Retail Banking, Othman Tawfeq.

Year after year, IKEA continues to be by your side to create a better life at home. Through this strategic partnership, IKEA and KIB aim to help customers to create their dream home. They can use flexible monthly payments to change from one room to their whole home, with easy and small payments, free of interest and accessible for everyone.

"Our partnership with KIB will contribute to reach more people with great home furnishing solutions that are affordable. Our customers will have more flexible ways to pay for their IKEA solutions at no extra cost, always enjoying an easy and exciting shopping experience whether they decide to meet us in store or online," said Kejjouj. On her part, Albendea, said: "We are so excited to start this collaboration with KIB. Our vision is to create a better life for everyone in Kuwait and with this new service we are contributing to the dream of many people to have a beautiful, comfortable, and safe home for them and their families. A home that they can be proud of."



An aerial view shows Palestinian workers of Zionist's Antiquities Authority during work at a recently discovered ancient mosque, which dates back to the early Islamic period, in the Bedouin town of Rahat in Israel's southern Negev desert.



Muslim Palestinian workers of Zionist's Antiquities Authority pray amid the remains of a recently discovered ancient mosque. — AFP photos



## Jean-Paul Guerlain's partner says threatened by perfumer's son

The partner of Jean-Paul Guerlain accused the famous perfumer's son of waging a "harassment war" against her and of threatening her on several occasions. Stephane Guerlain, the only son of Jean-Paul Guerlain, was summoned to court in Versailles, outside Paris, by Christina Kragh Michelsen, his father's companion. However, he was not present and was represented by his lawyer.

The hearing was the latest judicial episode in the battle between Kragh, a 64-year-old French-Danish woman, and Stephane Guerlain, son of the man who ran Guerlain—one of the world's oldest perfume houses—for almost half a century. Jean-Paul Guerlain, 85, one of the richest men in France, now suffers from Alzheimer's disease. Kragh has been with him since 2005.



Kragh was acquitted last autumn by a court of "neglecting a person incapable of protecting himself". The public prosecutor has appealed against this acquittal. The woman's lawyer said that Guerlain's son is driven by his hatred for his client and wants to "break her down" by waging a "permanent harassment war".

When Stephane Guerlain "arrives in the house, he follows me everywhere", said Kragh. He takes unilateral decisions such as "turning off the heating" in their property in a Paris suburb, she added. Kragh has no "financial interest" in staying with Guerlain senior, but is doing so "out of love", said her lawyer Frederic Belot. She has "lost sleep, lost a lot of weight" and suffers from "psychological problems", he added. Stephane Guerlain's defense team described their client as "an extremely tired man who has been trying for 10 years to protect his father's interests".

The court listened to a recording in which Stephane Guerlain, a lawyer, called Kragh a "bitch" and a "scumbag" and threatened, according to her, to "put her head in a haystack". Kragh is seeking 70,000 euros (\$73,600) in damages. The public prosecutor's office did not agree with the plaintiff, noting that several of the claims were unsubstantiated. The court will deliver its decision on Friday. French luxury giant LVMH took over the Guerlain brand in 1994. Jean-Paul Guerlain remained as master perfumer until he retired in 2002. — AFP

# ZIONISTS UNCOVER RARE EARLY MOSQUE IN NEGEV

Zionist entity archaeologists on Wednesday unveiled a rare ancient mosque in the country's south that the antiquities officials said sheds light on the region's transition from Christianity to Islam. The remains of the mosque, believed to be more than 1,200 years old, were discovered during works to build a new neighborhood in the Bedouin city of Rahat, the Zionist Antiquities Authority said in a statement.

The mosque located in the Negev

desert contains "a square room and a wall facing the direction of Makkah", with a half-circle niche in that wall pointing to the south, the IAA said. "These unique architectural features show that the building was used as a mosque," the authority said, noting it probably hosted a few dozen worshippers at a time. A short distance from the mosque, a "luxurious estate building" was also discovered, with remains of tableware and glass artefacts pointing to the wealth of its residents, the

IAA said. Three years ago, the authority unearthed another mosque nearby from the same era of the seventh to eighth century AD, calling the two Islamic places of worship "among the earliest known worldwide". The mosques, estate and other homes found nearby illuminate "the historical process that took place in the northern Negev with the introduction of a new religion—the religion of Islam, and a new rulership and culture in the region," the IAA said.

"These were gradually established, inheriting the earlier Byzantine government and Christian religion that held sway over the land for hundreds of years." The Muslim conquest of the region occurred in the first half of the seventh century. The IAA said the mosques found in Rahat would be preserved in their current locations, whether as historic monuments or as active places of prayer. — AFP

## Fiery Scottish Viking festival lifts curbs on female participants



In this file photo participants dressed as Vikings march down a street in the annual Up Helly Aa festival in Lerwick, Shetland Islands. — AFP photos

Women will be allowed to take part in the main Viking-inspired torchlight procession on the remote Scottish island of Shetland for the first time next year, organizers said on Wednesday. The committee in charge of the "Up Helly Aa" festival, which commemorates the end of the Christmas season, said that it was time to lift restrictions on women taking part in the traditionally male-only procession.

"The decision means the festival in Lerwick on Tuesday January 31, 2023 will have a different dimension to it, but we have no doubt that its essence and spirit will remain the same," committee secretary Robert Geddes said. The

event, which is popular among tourists, traditionally involved around 1,000 male participants known as guizers in Viking dress, dividing into squads to parade through the town.

The walk is led by the "Guizer Jarl" or "chief guizer", and culminates in the participants using their flaming torches to set ablaze a replica Viking longship. The modern event, first held in 1881, is famous for its festive parties which often involve traditional Shetland dancing and copious alcohol consumption.

Rural "Up Helly Aa" processions on Shetland, which lies in the middle of the North Sea some 400 miles (640 kilometers) from Edinburgh, started allowing

women to take part in 2015. But the Lerwick committee stood firmly against allowing female participants to get involved in celebrating the island's Norse heritage.

"We felt that it was time to give squads a choice over their guizers, including allowing female participation," Geddes said. The other criteria for participation—that guizers be older than 16 and have lived in Shetland continuously for five years—remains the same for the event, which has not been held since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP



In this file photo guizers dressed as Vikings from the Jarl Squad gather around the longship with burning brands as they take part in the Up Helly Aa festival in Lerwick, Shetland Islands.

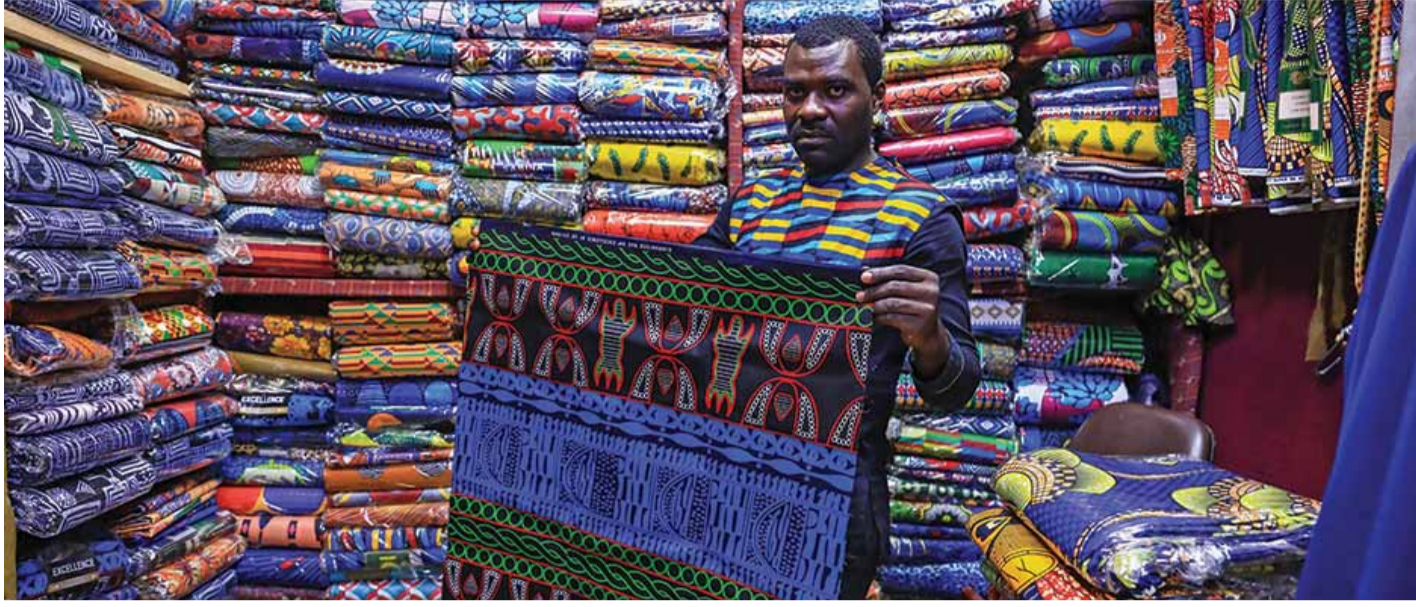


In this file photo participants dressed as Vikings carry torches.



In this file photo guizers dressed as Vikings from the Jarl Squad set fire to the longship with burning brands as they take part in the Up Helly Aa festival in Lerwick, Shetland Islands.

## Lifestyle | Features



A trader holds a piece of ndop cloth in his shop at Market B in Bafoussam. — AFP photos



Yougo Tegua Doriane, 24, a designer and stylist, poses in a shop selling ndop clothes and accessories at Market B in Bafoussam.

## Cameroon's 'cloth of kings' torn over future

Wambesso Fankam stands out elegantly from the crowd at a funeral ceremony in western Cameroon. As a prince, he's among a select few who are traditionally entitled to wear an eye-catching fabric of vivid indigo with intricate white patterns. "It's an ndop, not everyone can wear it," he said with pride, to the beat of tam-tam drums and the balafon, a type of xylophone, in the western town of Batie.

The ceremonial cloth was once the preserve of chiefs, dignitaries and members of secret societies in the central African country. But the culture around it is now being threatened by cheap imitations and crude rip-offs. Ndog's distinctive motifs—often animals or geometric shapes—are drawn on cotton fabric then embroidered with raffia before the material is dyed blue.

Its richness is down to the many different combinations of symbols that can be designed on the ndop. Cameroon is thought to have 13,500 traditional chiefdoms across its 10 regions.

And it is the north and the mountains of the west where chiefs are seen as all but divine guardians of tradition, where ndop and its culture is the strongest. Once warlords and masters of justice, these days chiefs' powers are limited to inheritance or matrimonial disputes. Even so ndop is "the most important ritual element" among the main western tribal group, the Bamileke, said Hermann Yongueu, head of the Sauvons le Ndog (Save the Ndog) group, which is trying to preserve its heritage.

Making the cloth is a costly affair that takes several days' work and requires specialized knowledge. Prices for a piece of ndop cloth can go up to 100,000 CFA



African fabrics, some styled in ndop fashion, hang in a Market B in Bafoussam.

francs (about 150 euros) — a small fortune in Cameroon where a third of the population lives on less than two euros a day.

## Royal garb

Back in Batie, an ndop cloth is symbolically hung on a wooden fence at the main entrance to the funeral. One woman is wearing a long dress entirely in ndop. "She is one of the few to wear an ndop outfit because she is a queen," said Gisele Monkam, who accompanies the traditional chief.

Ndog mostly features "drawings that symbolize our way of life", said Arsene Ngandjouong, head of a museum in the village of Bangoua in the west of the country. One of the principal motifs is "a circle

which represents the duality of the Bamileke world, a communication between the living and the dead," he added.

Sitting near the door of her house made of baked mud bricks in Baham, the main town high on the western plateau where ndop is still made, craftswoman Solange Yougo, 52, is busy on a piece of fabric she's been working on for over a week. Making ndop is extremely laborious, with some long pieces measuring up to 15 metres taking up to a month to complete.

"I'm adding the finishing touches," she said. The finished item will be white with an indigo tint. On a bamboo bench, her cousin, Sylvie Momo, 50, holds an already dyed piece. Cameroon's Ministry of Arts and Culture declared ndop a part of its offi-



Kristelle, a trader of cultural products and accessories made from Ndog, sits at her shop in Batie.

cial national heritage in February 2020 and some also want it to be given UNESCO status as further protection.

## 'Vulgar'

For hile it was once strictly reserved for royals and nobles, ndop has been fast losing its exclusivity, so much so that some of its motifs are now turning up on bottles of beer as well as low quality wraps and boubous, the loose unisex garment popular across West Africa. "It is even becoming a bit vulgar," complained museum head Ngandjouong. "In the past when someone who hadn't the right to wear ndop wore it, they had to pay a fine," said Prince Fankam.

"But the most important thing is that we

pass on knowledge of how to make it," said Hermann Yongueu. "Before ndop fabric was controlled by the chiefs and the kings made sure that the savoir-faire was passed on to the makers' children. From the age of seven, children began their apprenticeships."

But today few young people are prepared to take that on, preferring more lucrative jobs like driving motorbike taxis. Others hope that a little of the reflected glory the fabric is picking up abroad might tempt them back, with the French luxury fashion house Hermes using ndop motifs in one of its silk scarf collections four years ago. — AFP



A general view of traditional accessories made with Ndog fabric at market B in Bafoussam.



Momo Sylvie (right) and Yougo Solange (left), hold up ndop fabric they are working on in Baham.



Yougo Tegua Doriane, 24, a creative stylist, decorates her stand with products made with ndop fabric at a market in Bafoussam.

## France's music street party back at full blast

One of France's biggest street parties is back in full force after two years of Covid disruption—the annual Fete de la Musique returns to towns and cities across the country Tuesday night, boasting everything from classical to rap. Musicians have free reign every year on June 21 in France, taking over bars, street corners and rooftops, while landmarks from the Eiffel Tower to the old port in Marseilles to chateaux in the Loire Valley host their own events. Since 2018, President Emmanuel Macron has even thrown open the courtyard of the Elysee Palace to the festivities.

This year, which marks the festival's 40th anniversary, Ukrainian DJ Xenia will be among those performing in the Elysee courtyard, where the president normally greets visiting heads of state. It remains to be seen whether Macron and his wife Brigitte will be in the mood for dancing—as they have in previous years—after disappointing election results for his camp over the weekend. But many across France are no doubt ready to celebrate after the last two editions of the festival took place under the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## 'We were worried'

It has been four decades since the

first Fete de la Musique was launched by the then culture minister Jack Lang, appointed by Socialist president Francois Mitterrand a year earlier in 1981. Since then, it has been exported to cities and countries across the world including Berlin, Brussels, New York, Canberra and Lagos. But Lang still recalls the terror he felt in the days leading up to the inaugural event. "We told people: 'Go, go out, take over the streets with music,'" he told AFP. "We were worried they would just stay stuck indoors—but it worked!"

Lang, stage-designer Christian Dupavillon and musician and festival organizer Maurice Fleuret dreamed up the event together—and it was Fleuret who came up with the slogan: "Music will be everywhere and concerts nowhere".

"The first year, in 1982, it was not a great success, but people played along—and then from 1983, it really got going," said Lang, who now heads the Arab World Institute in Paris. Lang said he wanted this year's event to be dedicated to Steve Maia Canico, a young man who died after falling into the river Loire in Nantes, as police broke up a party that had run past the 4:00 am limit. The incident has become the focus of a bitter dispute between those who blame the police for Canico's death and the authorities who have defended their actions that night. For the most part, however, the festival remains a much-loved excuse to party—even if some folk expected at work the next morning grumble about the lack of sleep. —AFP

## Ben Stiller tells of 'harrowing stories' from Ukraine visit

US actor and comedian Ben Stiller said Tuesday he had been deeply affected by the stories he heard from Ukrainians after a surprise visit to the war-torn country. The "Zoolander" and "Meet the Parents" star was in Ukraine as an ambassador for the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR.

"The stories of the people who experienced the first few days of this war—speaking to them and hearing these really harrowing stories—was very affecting," Stiller told AFP in a phone call, while travelling from Ukraine to Poland. The 56-year-old actor-director visited Irpin, a suburb of Kyiv, which was particularly hard-hit in the early stages of the Russian invasion.

"To see the physical destruction of those neighborhoods, it's really massive, and it's impossible not to be affected by that," Stiller said. "There was one very young man who... talked about it like something out of a horror film, just being hit by these missiles, not knowing if he should stay or run."

"To see how traumatized, he was—he felt his life had been changed forever. It's really tough when you hear a young person say that, and you realize the effects of war are not always visible." Stiller met with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on Monday, and told him: "You're my hero."

"What you've done, the way that

you've rallied the country, the world, it's really inspiring," he told Zelensky. Asked by AFP if he could imagine trading in his job as a comedian in the event of an invasion, Stiller said he didn't know how he would react. "If everything you know is in danger of being obliterated—who knows? But I hope we could react like the people of Ukraine," he said.

"Yesterday, I was in a house that was almost fully collapsed with a woman, and we were sitting in her kitchen," he said. "And she was giving us strawberries and had this incredible resilience saying: 'We have to figure out how to go forward'. It's

hard not to think 'how would I react if my house had half collapsed.'"

Stiller, who has also visited Lebanon, Jordan and Guatemala as part of his UNHCR work, said he hopes people will hear his stories from refugees and "relate with these people and hopefully see themselves in them". "The work that UNHCR and other NGOs do is so important. This war has created 12 million displaced people and even if the war ends, the issues it has created will go on for years," he said. — AFP



This handout picture taken and released by Ukrainian President press-service shows Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (right) welcoming US actor and UN Goodwill Envoy Ben Stiller (left) during their meeting in Kyiv. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



# Burundi drummers forced to dance to official beat

A troupe of barefoot musicians wearing the national colors of Burundi strike huge wooden royal drums with tremendous force, precision and unabashed joy. Twirling and singing, a stick in each hand, the performers are the custodians of a centuries-old ritual recognized by UNESCO, and one jealously guarded by the Burundian state.

Too jealously guarded, according to some.

"We beat the drum because it's our life, because it's in our blood," said their leader Oscar Nshimirimana, his face dripping with sweat after a spirited performance in Gishora against a backdrop of rolling green hills. "It was not only my father who beat the drum, but all my great-grandparents," the 43-year-old said.

Troupes hailing from Gishora-home of a royal palace and the heartland of this musical tradition-enjoy a lofty and celebrated status. Burundi's President Evariste Ndayishimiye graced one of their performances in January, causing a stir. In the tiny landlocked nation of 12 million people, drumming troupes big and small perform at weddings, religious ceremonies and other celebrations-as well as competing against each other.

Across the globe, too, drummers in the Burundian diaspora are found on at least three continents. "The ritual dance with the royal drum" is the jewel in the country's intangible heritage, declares a culture ministry document. "The prodigious leaps, the pirouettes, the winks to the spectators... all this has always marked this dance, as the bearer of an uncommon tradition, in the whole of African and world percussion."

### 'Ascended the drum'

The drumming tradition known locally

as "ingoma" dates back to the 17th century, and honored the eternal rule of the royal family at a time when Burundi was a monarchy. Upon assuming the throne, a king was said to have "ascended the drum", which was considered the source of his power.

the ritual dance of the royal drum on its list of intangible world heritage. Since then, the Burundian government-an authoritarian regime that emerged from an armed rebellion-has enforced strict rules around the practice.

In 2017, a long-forgotten edict banning

Nkunuzumwami, adviser to the culture minister, said the government had a duty to ensure "respect for the cultural identity" of the drum, especially since the UNESCO listing. "It is the government that (must) protect the Burundian drum. That is why it has regulated the practice," he told AFP. In February, a troupe of drummers caused a scandal by playing at a festival in non-regulation black suits. The festival was stopped, and the troupe suspended for six months.

### 'Took something away'

In the economic capital Bujumbura, 27-year-old engineer Calixte Irantije practices twice a week after work in an open-air amphitheatre with his drumming troupe. "These rules have caused a reduction in demand... it has had a big impact on the market we used to have," he said. "Now we play at parties sanctioned by the government. We play at the weddings of those who have a permit, and official government ceremonies."

Some Burundians, particularly those in the diaspora, have balked at what they saw as government overreach. "The drum no longer belongs to the Burundian citizen. It belongs to the government," Pacifique Nininahazwe, a civil society leader living in exile, said in 2017. Julien Nimubona, a professor of political science at the University of Burundi, told AFP the restrictions were less about authoritarianism and more an opportunity for officials to make money off the UNESCO status. "It took away something that was ours," he said. — AFP



Elite drummers perform in front of a re-constructed house of the king's village at Gishora Drum Sanctuary in Gishora, Burundi.

The most hallowed drums are even given names. Many have vanished through the ages but two-known as Ruciteme and Murimiwa-are enshrined in a traditional straw hut in Gishora.

For a long time, these drums could only be carved from the gigantic trunks of "umuvugaangoma", or "the tree that makes the drum talk". In 2014, UNESCO recognized the cultural value of the tradition, inscribing

women from playing the drums was reimposed, while dress codes for performers were mandated. Troupes have since been required to formally register with the authorities, while those wishing to hire drummers for a private event need to apply for special permits costing \$250.

In Burundi, which is the poorest country in the world in terms of GDP per capita, this is no small imposition. Aimable



Elite drummers perform for tourists at Gishora Drum Sanctuary in Gishora, Burundi.



Elite drummers perform in front of the re-constructed house of the king's village at Gishora Drum Sanctuary in Gishora, Burundi.



Drummers bring a drum to keep in a re-constructed house of the king's village at Gishora Drum Sanctuary in Gishora, Burundi.



Elite drummers perform for tourists at Gishora Drum Sanctuary in Gishora, Burundi. — AFP photos

## 'The world's gone mad': Kate Bush on 'Stranger Things' and chart reprise

Kate Bush, in a rare interview, has described her return to the top of the music charts as "quite shocking" after Netflix drama "Stranger Things" wowed a new generation of fans. The much-loved British singer-songwriter also dwelt on her lockdown experience of binge-watching and gardening, and revealed that she prefers an old-style phone when out and about. Bush's classic song "Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)" has surged to number one in Britain and elsewhere after featuring prominently, and movingly, in the fourth series of the sci-fi Netflix series set in the 1980s.



An undated handout picture released by the Fish People record label shows British musician Kate Bush posing at an undisclosed location. — AFP

"It's such a great series, I thought that the track would get some attention," she told BBC radio in the interview, which was recorded Tuesday and broadcast Wednesday. "But I just never imagined that it would be anything like this. It's so exciting. But it's quite shocking really, isn't it? I mean, the whole world's gone mad." The 1985 song now holds the record for longest time taken for a single to reach number one, while Bush boasts the longest-ever gap between chart-toppers — 44 years after "Wuthering Heights" first revealed her astonishing talents to the world.

And at 63, Bush has also become the oldest female artist ever to score a number one hit in the UK. "There was some great music in the 80s, but I think it's an incredibly exciting time we're in now," she said. "I mean, okay, so it's an awful time on a lot of levels for people. Very difficult. But it's also a time when incredible things are happening." 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.

"Gardening is my thing now," she told the BBC, without going into whether she is working on any new music. Bush's last studio album was "50 Words for Snow" (2011), which featured aural trickery of the kind she pioneered in the 80s with the Fairlight digital synthesizer used on her 1985 masterpiece, "Hounds of Love". "Running Up That Hill", the lead single from "Hounds of Love", has become the most-streamed song on Spotify in the United States, the UK and globally. But Bush herself doesn't have a smartphone. "I have a really ancient phone. But I like that because I spend a lot of time on my laptop," she said. "And when I go out during the day, it means I don't have to deal with emails and everyone knows that. So I just get texts and calls on my phone, and it means that I have a bit of peace." — AFP



## Sheeran awarded costs for 'Shape of You' copyright win

A High Court judge in London on Tuesday awarded Ed Sheeran and his co-songwriters more than £900,000 in legal costs after winning a copyright trial over his hit "Shape of You". The 31-year-old Sheeran was taken to court and accused of copying a phrase from the British grime track "Oh Why" when writing the worldwide smash.

But judge Antony Zaccaroli ruled in April this year after an 11-day trial that the star "neither deliberately nor subconsciously" plagiarized the hook. On Wednesday, the judge said the artists who brought the claim-Sami Chokri and Ross O'Donoghue-should pay legal costs. He ordered an interim payment of £916,200 (\$1.1 million). Sheeran welcomed the initial ruling but said that "baseless" copyright claims were "damaging the songwriting industry". — AFP

## Sports

# LIV Golf rebels allowed to play in British Open

## Koepka - the latest big-name player to defect to LIV circuit

**LONDON:** Players who have signed up to the breakaway Saudi-backed LIV Golf series will be allowed to compete in next month's 150th British Open, organizers the R&A announced on Wednesday. The US PGA Tour has banned those involved in the rebel venture after the inaugural event in Britain earlier this month but organizers of last week's US Open did not follow suit. That stance will be followed at the year's final major, which starts at St Andrews in Scotland on July 14. "The Open is golf's original championship and since it was first played in 1860, openness has been fundamental to its ethos and unique appeal," said R&A chief executive Martin Slumbers.

"Players who are exempt or have earned a place through qualifying for the 150th Open in accordance with the entry terms and conditions will be able to compete in the championship at St Andrews. "We are focused on staging a world-class championship in July and celebrating this truly historic occasion for golf." Four-time major champion Brooks Koepka is the latest big-name player to defect to the LIV Golf circuit, along with Mexico's Abraham Ancer, the world number 20.

Koepka, 32, is expected to make his debut on the money-spinning circuit at its maiden US event in Oregon next week. Koepka's management team did not immediately respond when contacted by AFP on Tuesday. The American, who has removed "PGA Tour" from his Twitter profile, will follow a clutch of stars including Dustin Johnson and six-time major-winner Phil Mickelson by joining LIV. The series, which is bankrolled by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, has plunged the golf world into turmoil since its emergence.

LIV Golf has drawn stinging criticism from human rights groups, which say the series is an attempt to boost the kingdom's image through sport. The PGA Tour has adopted a zero-tolerance stance towards the series, with PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan suspending 17 former or current tour players for making the switch after the start of the inaugural event near London. He made it clear that other golfers who signed up would suffer a similar fate.

### PGA Tour revamp

Reports on Tuesday said the PGA Tour was planning to revamp its schedule with a series of lucrative new tournaments—the clearest indicator yet of a strategy to combat the rise of LIV Golf. Monahan is understood to have explained proposed changes to the schedule at a packed meeting of players ahead of this week's Travelers Championship in Connecticut. Plans outlined by Monahan include boosting purses to at least \$20 million in eight existing marquee tournaments and the introduction of three new \$25 million tournaments that would feature no cuts and limited fields. The schedule overhaul could be in place by the 2023 season.

LIV Golf has steadily been luring star names to sign with the upstart circuit that offers \$25 million in prize money for each of its 54-hole tournaments. Other changes proposed by Monahan on Tuesday included a return to a calendar year schedule running from January to December. The current "wraparound" season starts in the North American autumn and is unpopular with some players who complain it does not allow for a clearly defined off-



**BROOKLINE:** Brooks Koepka of the United States and caddy Ricky Elliott walk the 18th green during the third round of the 122nd US Open Championship at The Country Club in Brookline. —AFP

season.

Speaking at the Travelers Championship on Tuesday, defending champion Harris English said he hoped the PGA Tour's proposed revamp could persuade players to remain with the circuit. Patrick

Cantlay described the PGA-LIV confrontation as a fight to attract and retain talent. "If the PGA Tour wants to remain the pre-eminent tour for professional golfers, it has to be the best place to play for the best players in the world," he said. —AFP

### News in brief

#### England sweep ODI series

**AMSTELVEEN:** Jason Roy and Jos Buttler demolished the Netherlands on Wednesday as England coasted to an eight-wicket victory with nearly 20 overs to spare in the third one-day international, sealing the series 3-0. Roy's 101 not out was his 10th one-day international hundred in Amstelveen, with Buttler, standing in for injured captain Eoin Morgan, smashing an unbeaten 86. Earlier, the Netherlands collapsed from 203-3 in the 40th over to 244 all out, a total that never looked remotely enough against power-packed England. The 50-over world champions again underlined the gulf in quality between the two sides after piling up a world-record total of 498-4 in the first ODI before cantering to victory in the second game by six wickets. Roy and Phil Salt (49) scored briskly at the start of England's reply before Salt and Dawid Malan were both dismissed by Paul van Meekeren with the score on 85. —AFP

#### Chelsea names new chairman

**LONDON:** Todd Boehly was Wednesday named as Chelsea's new chairman to replace Bruce Buck and will act as interim sporting director after the club confirmed the departure of Marina Granovskaia. Granovskaia is stepping down from her role as director as part of a shake-up at Stamford Bridge, leaving co-controlling owner Boehly to spearhead Chelsea's negotiations in the transfer window. All the top Boehly-Clearlake Capital consortium figureheads have been added to Chelsea's new board following the purchase of the club from Roman Abramovich. "As custodians of Chelsea FC, we now begin executing our long-term vision and plan for the club, creating an outstanding experience for its passionate, loyal fans, and continuing to challenge for top honors in line with Chelsea FC's dedicated history," said Boehly.

#### Tokyo Olympics cost double

**TOKYO:** The final price tag for last year's Tokyo Olympics was more than double the city's original 2013 estimate after a one-year coronavirus postponement added to the already hefty bill. The organizing committee said Tuesday the Games had cost 1.42 trillion yen, the equivalent of \$13 billion at the time. At today's rates, with the yen at a 24-year low against the dollar, the figure would be \$10.4 billion. Tokyo 2020 was held a year later than planned because of the pandemic—the first Olympics postponed in peacetime—and spectators were banned from nearly all events, which were held under strict Covid-19 countermeasures. The Games cost twice the 734 billion yen that the Tokyo Games organizers had predicted in their bid to the International Olympic Committee in 2013, but less than the final pre-Games budget unveiled in December 2020.

#### Women's PGA doubles prize

**WASHINGTON:** Defending champion Nelly Korda and her rivals will chase a record \$9 million purse at this week's KPMG Women's PGA Championship after organizers announced a doubling of prize money for the event on Tuesday. The third women's major of the year tees off at Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland on Thursday with Korda attempting to repeat her 2021 Women's PGA victory. A successful title defense could see Korda earn a winner's cheque of \$1.35 million after the hefty boost in prize money announced by organizers on the eve of the tournament. PGA of America President Jim Richerson said the decision to double the purse—from \$4.5 million to \$9 million—was a result of support from sponsors KPMG and a desire to elevate women's golf.

## Djokovic, Nadal lead title chase at Wimbledon

**LONDON:** Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal headline the title chase at Wimbledon where eight-time champion Roger Federer, the world's top two players and cherished ranking points will all be missing. Djokovic is bidding for a seventh title at the All England Club to move level with US great Pete Sampras. Nadal, fresh from a 14th French Open victory and a record-extending 22nd major, is halfway to the first men's calendar Grand Slam in more than half a century.

The season's third Slam tournament has already made political waves even before the first ball is served on Monday. The decision to ban Russian and Belarusian players in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine means there is no place for world number one Daniil Medvedev or eighth-ranked Andrey Rublev. Both the ATP and WTA, who control the men's and women's tours, retaliated by stripping ranking points from the tournament.

For the first time since his debut

in 1999 - notwithstanding the COVID-cancelled 2020 edition - Federer will be a no-show as the 40-year-old recovers from knee surgery. Also missing is Germany's world number two Alexander Zverev, who suffered serious ankle ligament damage in an horrific injury in his French Open semi-final against Nadal. However, Medvedev and Zverev have never shone at Wimbledon with neither man making it past the fourth round. Djokovic and Nadal, ranked three and four, are the top seeds meaning if they are to face each other for the 60th time, it can only be in the final.

### 'I love Wimbledon'

Djokovic, the champion in 2011, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019 and 2021, could be playing in his final Slam of the year. His refusal to be vaccinated is likely to rule him out of the US Open later this year. A bruising quarter-final loss to Nadal at the French Open which saw him deposed as champion in Paris will also likely provide extra motivation. Nadal won the last of his two Wimbledon titles in 2010 having captured his first with an epic triumph over Federer two years earlier.

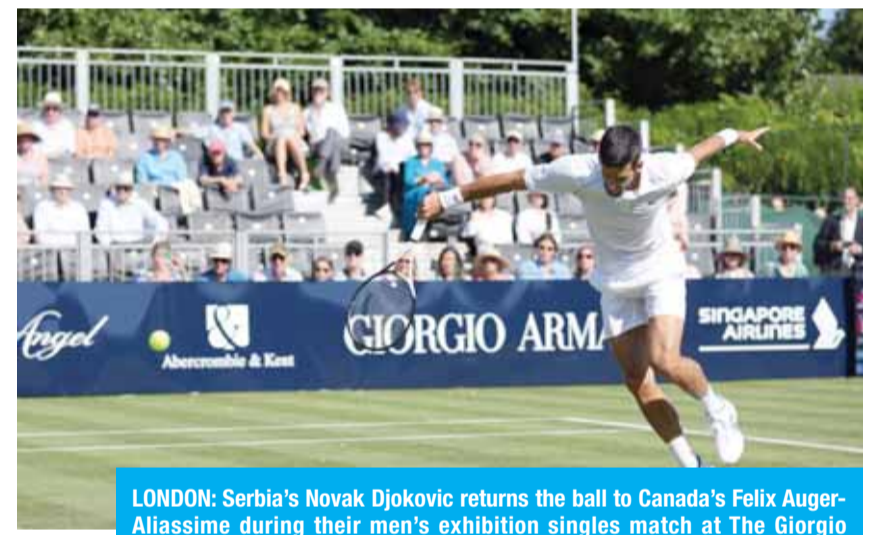
## Serena makes winning return in Eastbourne's doubles after year out

**EASTBOURNE:** Serena Williams made a winning comeback after a year on the sidelines as the American legend teamed with Ons Jabeur to beat Sara Sorribes Tormo and Marie Bouzkova 2-6, 6-3, 13-11 in the Eastbourne International doubles on Tuesday. Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam singles champion, was back in action for the first time since she made a tearful exit from Wimbledon last year. The 40-year-old suffered a leg injury during her Wimbledon first round match against Aliaksandra Sasnovich and had not been seen on court since.

Before Williams made the surprise announcement of her return last week, rumours of retirement had swirled around her for several months. But, with Wimbledon starting on June 27, Williams finally resumed her career, playing with Jabeur at the Wimbledon warm-up event by the Sussex seaside. Williams and Tunisia's Jabeur, who is third in the WTA singles rankings, saw off Spain's Sorribes Tormo and Bouzkova of the Czech Republic in the last-16 tie.

## 'Win for the whole country'; Sri Lanka clinch ODI series

**COLOMBO:** Skipper Dasun Shanaka dedicated Sri Lanka's sensational series victory over Australia to the country's people as the island nation suffers its worst-ever economic crisis. Australia needed 19 off the final over in Colombo but Sri Lanka held their nerve despite David Warner's 99 and some last-minute heroics from Matthew Kuhnemann to win on the last ball of the match by four runs. The victory in front of an ecstatic crowd at the R Premadasa



**LONDON:** Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns the ball to Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime during their men's exhibition singles match at The Giorgio Armani Tennis Classic tournament on June 22, 2022. —AFP

The 36-year-old Spaniard arrives at Wimbledon with the Australian and French Opens secured. He is halfway to becoming only the third man — and first since Rod Laver in 1969 — to complete a calendar Grand Slam. Nadal has endured a bittersweet relationship with Wimbledon. Two titles have been accompanied by three lost finals as well as injury-enforced absences in 2004, 2009, 2016 and 2021.

There remains a question mark over his durability for the two weeks at Wimbledon having played the entire French Open with his troublesome left foot anaesthetised. Nadal has since undergone a course of radiofrequency stimulation, a treatment aimed at reducing nerve pain in his foot. "I love Wimbledon," said Nadal. "I had a lot of success there. A player like me, I am always ready to play Wimbledon." —AFP

Although Williams was far from her vintage best, she will be encouraged by her first outing for 12 months. She and Jabeur will face Japan's Shuko Aoyama and Taiwan's Chan Hao-ching in the quarter-finals. Serena has been given a wildcard to play in the singles at Wimbledon as she restarts her history bid. Williams is one Grand Slam crown away from equaling Australian Margaret Court's record of 24 singles titles at the majors.

The last of Williams' 23 Grand Slam singles titles came at the Australian Open in 2017. Since then she has lost four Grand Slam finals, including at Wimbledon in 2018 and 2019. Williams won the seventh and most recent of her seven Wimbledon singles titles in 2016. Serena, who became a mother in 2017, has plummeted to 1,204th in the WTA rankings due to her period out of action. Her long-time coach, Patrick Mouratoglou, revealed in April that he had taken on a new role with Simona Halep.

### Tenacious spirit

Wimbledon is widely considered Williams' best chance of winning another Grand Slam and this was her first step towards that goal. After so long away, Serena soaked up the applause during a raucous reception from the crowd when she walked onto court in the early evening sunshine. Williams' husband Alexis Ohanian was watching from the stands as his wife made an understandably rusty start.



**EASTBOURNE:** US player Serena Williams (right) and Tunisia's Ons Jabeur celebrate after winning against Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo and Czech Republic's Marie Bouzkova at the end of their round of 8 women's doubles tennis match on June 21, 2022. —AFP

A missed smash at the net from Serena allowed her opponents to hold serve in the second game of the match before the Williams-Jabeur partnership fell 3-1 down. With Williams' groundstrokes initially lacking their usual precision, the first set quickly slipped away. Serena was appearing in doubles competition on grass for the first time since 2016, when she won Wimbledon with her sister Venus. The 14-time Grand Slam doubles champion was well short of peak form and Bouzkova and Sorribes Tormo twice led by a break at the start of the second set. —AFP

Stadium gave Sri Lanka an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match contest, and their first bilateral series win against Australia since 2010.

It was a rare moment of joy for Sri Lanka's 22 million people who are in the midst of a painful economic crisis with severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines. "Not only for me, my teammates, Sri Lanka cricket, the whole country, this is much needed at the moment," Shanaka said afterwards. "I think this should be celebrated by the whole of Sri Lanka." "Thank you Sri Lanka, Thank you my PEOPLE!" he tweeted on Wednesday.

Put into bat, Charith Asalanka made 110 to guide Sri Lanka to 258 all out. Asalanka rescued Sri Lanka from a precarious 34-3 as he put on 101 runs with Dhananjaya de Silva, who made 60. Australian bowlers kept coming back with crucial wickets but

Asalanka reached his century to the cheers of a raucous home crowd. Wanindu Hasaranga played a useful cameo of 21 not out as he put together 34 runs for the eighth wicket with Asalanka. Asalanka finally fell to Pat Cummins and Australia wrapped up the innings in 49 overs with two run-outs.

In reply, Australia lost skipper Aaron Finch for nought with Chamika Karunaratne trapping the opener lbw. Warner kept his cool and put on 63 runs with Mitchell Marsh who looked good for his 26 before he fell to Dunieth Wellalage's left-arm spin. Australia lost Marnus Labuschagne and wicketkeeper-batsman Alex Carey after they got starts but fell to the Sri Lankan spinners. The usually attacking Warner tried to grind down the opposition attack as he and Travis Head stitched together 58 runs for the fifth wicket. —AFP

Sports

# Mane's signing eases pressure on Bayern to keep wantaway stars

## Mane's transfer a coup for Bundesliga champions

**BERLIN:** Sadio Mane's transfer from Liverpool to Bayern Munich is a coup for the Bundesliga champions, who have signed a ready-made replacement for either wantaway striker Robert Lewandowski or winger Serge Gnabry. Mane, 30, arrives in Munich on a three-year contract with sufficient star status to enhance Bayern's attack.

"Often it's the other way around, but this time a Bundesliga club has signed a top Premier League player," German magazine Kicker commented last week. The Senegal forward reportedly cost the German giants around £35 million (41 million euros, \$43 million), only slightly less than the sum Liverpool paid for him in 2016.

Crucially for Bayern, Mane can replace either Lewandowski, who insists his Munich "story has come to an end" as he eyes a move to Barcelona, or Gnabry, who is stalling over signing a contract extension. In six years on Merseyside, Mane led Liverpool's transformation under Jurgen Klopp from Premier League also-rans into serious contenders for major trophies. One of Klopp's first major signings, Mane won a clean sweep of Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup, League Cup and Club World Cup titles in his time at Anfield.

### 'Low maintenance'

Liverpool legend Jamie Carragher sees Mane as a great signing for Bayern. "My favorite @LFC player of this era - low maintenance, high performance & never injured," Carragher said on Twitter this week. "Trophies & goals galore, a true Liverpool Legend. Thank you, Sadio." Another former Reds player, Dean Saunders, has claimed his talent will be wasted in the Bundesliga, where Bayern have just capped a decade of dominance by winning a 10th straight league title.

"The league is nowhere near a challenge for Mane. He'll get goals. They win 5-0 every week, only one team can win the league," Saunders told TalkSport. "It's not a challenge. He will get in his armchair, light a cigar up, he'll play for Bayern in third gear and he'll coast for two years and ruin the best two years of his life as a footballer."

Mane scored 120 goals in 269 games for Liverpool.



**MUNICH:** Bayern Munich's Senegalese new forward Sadio Mane plays with the ball during a press conference after he signed a three-year deal with German first division football club FC Bayern Munich on June 22, 2022. —AFP

That pales into comparison with the phenomenal tally of 238 Bundesliga goals in eight years which Lewandowski, twice voted FIFA's best male player, managed in 252 appearances games for Bayern. However, it is his all-round, high-energy game that made Mane a favorite at Liverpool. He can also perform just as well playing off both wings as through the middle.

Mane's career began far from the spotlight of the Allianz Arena. "In the village you're going to be a farmer, there's no other job to do. My dream as a kid was to make history and win all the trophies," he said in the documentary Sadio Mane: Made in Senegal. Spotted by French club Metz while playing in Dakar, around 400km from his native village, he moved to

France in early 2011. Three years later, he left for RB Salzburg, where he learnt German and impressed with 31 goals in 63 games.

He helped them win the Austrian league and cup double in 2014, then graduated to England's Premier League when he was snapped up by Southampton. After two years on England's south coast, Liverpool swooped for Mane, who became the second highest transfer in the club's history at the time when the Reds paid £37 million for him. After scoring the winning penalty to claim Senegal a first ever African Cup of Nations title and qualifying his country for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, Mane faces a new challenge with Bayern. —AFP

## Swedish veteran chases elusive swimming gold; youngsters eye records

**BUDAPEST:** Swedish great Sarah Sjöström, who is seeking a first World Championships gold in the 100m freestyle, advanced from a depleted talent pool in the heats in Budapest on Wednesday. While the 28-year-old Swede is trying to turn back the clock, the day could be dominated by a pair of youngsters, David Popovici and Leon Marchand, who are threatening world records in the evening finals.

Sjöström has 17 World Championship medals. She has four in the 100m free, but none are gold. She qualified fourth fastest in the heats. Australian teenager Mollie O'Callaghan set the best time. Another Australian, the number two seed Shayna Jack, who had already won two relay medals as she returned to major competition in Budapest after a drug ban kept her out of the last worlds and Olympics, was a late scratch after an accident.

"Due to an unfortunate incident in this morning's training session, I have broken my hand. I am broken hearted to announce that I have to withdraw from the rest of the competition," Jack posted on social media. She said she would focus on the Commonwealth

Games in Birmingham later this year.

The field had already been winnowed with the top three in last year's Olympics all out. Champion Emma McKeon is also focusing on the Commonwealth Games, silver medalist Siobhan Haughey of Hong Kong has been knocked out of the championships by an ankle injury and Australian Cate Campbell is taking a year off. Canadian Kelsey Wog was fastest in women's 200m breaststroke qualifying. American Lilly King, the silver medalist in Tokyo, was second.

After King missed a medal in the 100m breast on Tuesday, her college coach, Ray Looze, told American media that she was racing at "80 percent of what her capability is." Olympic champion Tatjana Schoenmaker of South Africa is skipping these championships. Another Olympic champion, Australian Zac Stubblety-Cook was narrowly quickest in the men's 200m breaststroke heats, edging Dutchman Caspar Corbeau by 0.06sec. American Shaune Casas topped qualifying in the men's 200m backstroke ahead of 19-year-old Australian Joshua Edwards-Smith.

### Third world record

Wednesday's finals offer another sighting of three of the teenage breakout stars of the week and the tantalising possibility of a third world record in the championships. Popovici, the 17-year-old Romanian who broke another world junior record in 100m freestyle qualifying. His big-name rival Caeleb Dressel withdrew after winning his heat for unspecified health reasons.

future Hall-of-Famer, regarded by many as one of the best tight ends in history, retired for the first time in 2019 after helping the New England Patriots clinch their sixth Vince Lombardi Trophy.

After sitting out the 2019-2020 season, Gronkowski came out of retirement to be reunited with former Patriots team-mate Brady, and was a pivotal figure in helping Tampa Bay clinch the Super Bowl in the 2020-2021 campaign. On Tuesday however Gronkowski said his second retirement was permanent. "I want to thank the whole entire first class Buccaneers organization for an amazing ride, trusting me to come back to play and help build a championship team," Gronkowski said in a statement on



**BUDAPEST:** Sweden's Sarah Sjöström competes in a heat for the women's 100m freestyle event during the Budapest 2022 World Aquatics Championships at Duna Arena on June 22, 2022. —AFP

That leaves Popovici, who swam 47.13sec on Tuesday, chasing the world record of 46.91, set by Brazil's Cesar Cielo in 2009, just before high-tech streamlined suits were banned. There is a slim chance that Marchand could challenge Ryan Lochte's 2011 record in the 200-medley final. The 20-year-old Frenchman swam the second fastest ever 400m medley when he won gold in that event on Saturday. In the women's 200m butterfly, the fastest qualifier, 15-year-old Canadian Summer McIntosh, is simply after her first gold to follow her silver in the 400m freestyle. —AFP

Instagram. "I will now be going back into my retirement home, walking away from football again with my head held high knowing I gave it everything I had, good or bad, every time I stepped out on the field. "From retirement, back to football and winning another championship and now back to chilling out, thank you to all."

Brady, who formed a near-telepathic understanding with Gronkowski during their seasons together in New England and Tampa, was among the first to offer congratulations. "Love you as a man, teammate and friend," Brady wrote on Instagram. "One of a kind in every way." A larger-than-life presence, "Gronk" was known for his effervescence and irreverence on and off the field. —AFP

## Smith, Holmgren tipped for top spot in NBA Draft

**NEW YORK:** US college star Jabari Smith Jr. is strongly tipped to be chosen with the top pick by the Orlando Magic when the 2022 NBA Draft takes place on Thursday. The 19-year-old Smith, who excelled for Auburn University's Tigers this year during his only season as a college player, has emerged as the bookmaker's favorite to be chosen first in Thursday's annual scramble for the top collegiate talent.

The 6ft 10in power forward impressed for the Tigers in a college season that saw him average 16.9 points per game along with 7.4 rebounds and 2.0 assists. Smith, whose father Jabari played four seasons in the NBA, is also a distant cousin of Kwame Brown, the No 1 pick in the 2001 draft.

Brown's NBA career ought to be a cautionary tale for Smith and other hopefuls in the draft, where top picks often fail to live up to lofty expectations. Brown, who ended his professional career with a scoring average of just 6.6 points per game, is routinely described as one of the "biggest busts" in NBA draft history. Conversely, players chosen way down the pecking order on draft day often emerge as dominant MVP-caliber talent.

Denver's Nikola Jokic, the NBA's Most Valuable Player for the past two seasons, was chosen with the 41st pick in the draft in 2014, while Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo, the back-to-back MVP in 2019 and 2020, was chosen 15th overall. There are strong grounds, however, for believing that Smith may have little difficulty living up to his expected top billing. The teenager has a rare combination of size and shooting touch, with deadly accuracy from three-point range and an athleticism likely to make him a defensive asset for any team that ends up recruiting him.

Smith's biggest rival for the No.1 pick is expected to be Gonzaga University's Chet Holmgren, who stands an imposing 7ft tall. The 20-year-old Bulldogs standout also offers a combination of elite ball-handling and footwork as well as being an expert shot-blocker. Holmgren averaged 14.1 points per game with 9.9 rebounds for Gonzaga. If Orlando fail to pick Holmgren with the first choice, he is almost certain to go to the Oklahoma City Thunder with the second pick.

James Jones, an assistant coach with the US Team at last year's Under-19 World Cup that Holmgren played in, describes him as a "Kevin Durant kind of player." "He has great instincts. He's the kind of guy that can do multiple different things," Jones told AFP. "He's not one kind of player, he can do a lot of different stuff, very versatile. "As a kid, leader, hard worker, great person, very friendly, very outgoing, and very dedicated into becoming the best basketball player he can." "He's a Kevin Durant kind of player in terms of his skill level, to be able to do some of those things."

He's obviously not Kevin Durant. But he has that skill, a similar skill set." Other talent in the top echelon of the draft on Thursday includes Duke University's Paolo Banchero, tipped to be taken by the Houston Rockets with the third pick. Jaden Ivey, who averaged 17.3 points per game for Purdue, could also feature high in the draft, with the Sacramento Kings lurking as a possible destination for the 20-year-old. —AFP

## Over and out as Gronkowski retires for the second time

**MIAMI:** Tampa Bay Buccaneers tight end Rob Gronkowski announced his retirement from the National Football League for the second time on Tuesday, walking away from a partnership with quarterback icon Tom Brady that included four Super Bowl victories. The 33-year-old

# Classifieds

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

### Now Hiring

**Driver**

- Familiar with all Kuwait areas
- Must speak and understand English
- Must be presentable and neat
- Desired age: between 25 and 45
- Transferrable Residency #18 or 20
- Duty Time: from 7 am to 7 pm

**Salary**

- KD 250 for light driving license
- KD 300 for heavy driving license

**Walk-in Interviews at**

Oxford Learning Center  
Shaab Bahri, Block 8,  
Mohamed Darwiche Al-Arabi Street

**Interview Date / Time**

Sunday, June 26<sup>th</sup>  
From 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Automated enquiry about the CivillD card is **1889988**

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call **MSALHOTLINE 128**

**EMERGENCY**  
☎ **112**



DAMMAM: Kuwait's player scores a goal against Somalia during the Arab Futsal Cup tournament in Dammam in Saudi Arabia.

## Kuwait overwhelm Somalia 9-2

### Arab Futsal Cup: Morocco hammer Mauritania 13-0

**DAMMAM:** Kuwait beat Somalia 9-2 on Wednesday to reach the quarterfinals of the Arab Futsal Cup being held in Dammam in Saudi Arabia. The Blues will accompany the Moroccan team to the next round. Morocco defeated in the group stages all their three opponents, namely Kuwait (6-4), Somalia (16-0) and

Mauritania (13-0), taking the lead in the group. Morocco is the defending champion of the Arab Cup that was held in Egypt.

Morocco's Futsal team also won 6-4 against Kuwait in the opening match. With yesterday's win, the Moroccan team have moved to the top of Group A,

with nine well-deserved points. Being the titleholders, Morocco's Atlas Lions started the game with a noticeable determination to clinch a much-needed victory to mount a campaign to win the precious competition for the second time in a row.

Morocco comprehensively defeated Somalia 16-0

on the second day of the 2022 Arab Futsal Cup at the Ministry of Sports Hall in Dammam. The 10-team tournament will run until June 28. After three rounds of matches, the Moroccans lead the table with nine points, while Kuwait is in second with six. Somalia remain at the bottom of the table with no points. — Agencies

### Matthews wins NHL MVP award

**MIAMI:** Toronto Maple Leafs ace Auston Matthews was named as the NHL's Most Valuable Player on Tuesday, scooping the prestigious Hart Trophy after a prolific goalscoring campaign. Matthews also earned the Ted Lindsay Award as most outstanding player in voting by the NHL Players Association earlier Tuesday. The two awards followed a 60-goal season from Matthews which led the NHL. Matthews has scored at least 34 goals in each of his six seasons in the league, and was top-scorer in 2021 as well as 2022. "I want to thank the Toronto Maple Leafs, top to bottom," Matthews said after receiving the MVP.

"I want to thank the fans, Leafs Nation, there is nothing like playing in front of you." Matthews beat out competition for the Hart Trophy from Edmonton's Connor McDavid and New York Rangers goaltender Igor Shesterkin. In other awards handed out Tuesday, the Colorado Avalanche's Cale Makar scooped the Norris Trophy for best defenseman. Makar was instrumental in helping Colorado top the Western Conference in the regular season with 28 goals.

The Avalanche are currently battling the Tampa Bay Lightning in the Stanley Cup finals with game four set for Wednesday. The Detroit Red Wings' Moritz Seider won the Calder Trophy for the NHL's rookie of the year. The 21-year-old led rookie defensemen in assists (43) and points (50) over the season. The Rangers' Shesterkin meanwhile won the Vezina Trophy for best goalie, beating the Calgary Flames' Jacob Markstrom and Nashville's Finnish shot-stopper Juuse Saros. — AFP



TAMPA: Auston Matthews of the Toronto Maple Leafs speaks after being awarded the Hart Memorial Trophy for the most valuable player during the 2022 NHL Awards on June 21, 2022. — AFP

### 1.2 million World Cup tickets sold

**DOHA:** About 1.2 million tickets have been sold for this year's World Cup in Qatar, organizers said on Wednesday, putting a figure on sales for the first time. Chief organizer Hassan Al-Thawadi said there had been "record-breaking" demand for the November-December World Cup, the first held in the Middle East. "I think about 1.2 million tickets have already been purchased," he told the Qatar Economic Forum. "So people are actually buying and people are excited to come there. There's no doubt about that."

The figure was confirmed by organizing committee officials, who said there were about 40 million requests in the two phases of online sales. Two million tickets will be sold in total, with another one million reserved for world body FIFA and sponsors. The Qatari capital Doha, with a population of about 2.4 million, is bracing itself for the huge influx of visitors, with hotel accommodation extremely scarce.

### 'Saudi's good': UK's Joshua ducks 'sportswashing' jab

**JEDDAH:** Britain's Anthony Joshua deflected concerns over "sportswashing" on Tuesday as he appeared in Saudi Arabia to promote his heavyweight boxing world title fight against Oleksandr Usyk of Ukraine. The August 20 rematch was announced after the launch of the controversial, Saudi-funded LIV Golf, which has threatened the regular tours by luring top players with huge prize pots.

The fight and the golf are the latest in a series of Saudi events to draw accusations of sportswashing, or attempting to detract attention from the country's human rights record. But when asked about sportswashing at a "Rage on the Red Sea" launch

The 32-team tournament will be held at eight stadiums in and around the capital, putting major pressure on infrastructure. Qatar says there will be 130,000 rooms in hotels, apartments, cruise ships and desert camps, where there will be 1,000 traditional tents. It has promised shared rooms for as little as \$85 a night. To limit the number of fans, only people with match tickets will be allowed to enter the tiny, gas-rich country during the World Cup, officials announced last month.

More than 160 round-trip shuttle flights a day will bring in fans from neighboring countries, easing the pressure on accommodation, while capacity has been doubled at Doha's two international airports. But Al-Thawadi admitted it was "tricky" reining in accommodation prices, which are soaring in line with demand. "We want to avoid price gouging," he said. "Obviously market forces always mean that as long as there's a lot of demand, prices skyrocket. We're trying to create an environment where the business community benefits but at the same time, it is affordable and accessible for the fans as well."

Al-Thawadi also played down the prospect of protests in Qatar, after steady criticism over the treatment of foreign laborers in a country that has the world's highest GDP per head. He did not say

event in Jeddah, Joshua laughed: "I don't know what that is. I'm here to win the heavyweight champion of the world. I like Saudi. I think Saudi's good. I'm having a good time here. I'm treated really well."

"All that allegation stuff, for me, I'm not caught up in any of that stuff. I'm here to have a good time, mix with the local people, bring entertainment to Saudi." The Jeddah clash will be the second in Saudi Arabia for Joshua, 32, who avenged a shock loss to Andy Ruiz Jr in Riyadh in December 2019. The towering Briton is out for revenge once again after losing his WBA, IBF and WBO belts last September in London to Usyk, who has since been shaken by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

#### 'My friends have died'

Usyk, 35, returned home to fight for his country before being given a special exemption from military duty. But he dismissed any notion that the war had given him extra motivation. "My friends, people close to me, have died in the war. When so many people are suffering I don't have any idea how it



whether protests would be allowed in Qatar, where demonstrations are rare, or whether fans could brandish the rainbow flag, representing the LGBTQ community. "Everybody's welcome. But in appreciating where you're coming from, we have a very rich culture. We ask for people to respect our culture," he said. Homosexuality is illegal in Qatar and authorities are struggling to convince lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer fans that they will be safe. — AFP

can influence anything positively," Usyk said. "I was there for one month, I saw with my own eyes what happened there: rockets flying and fighter jets flying. It's horrible."

Joshua also paid tribute to Ukraine and said he had been in touch with Wladimir Klitschko, the former heavyweight whose brother and fellow boxer Vitali is now the mayor of Kyiv. "Big up to Usyk, the Klitschko brothers, everyone in Ukraine. I know it's been tough, but tough times don't last," Joshua said.

"Keep your heads up, the world's watching. The world's in support... anyone that's going through tough times we're always with them so especially the Ukrainian people right now." He added that he had no concerns about the receding chances of his long-touted all-British super-fight with WBC heavyweight champion Tyson Fury, who retired after his April victory over Dillian Whyte. "I'll fight anyone, that's never been an issue. When the time's right, if he wants to fight we're here for it, definitely," Joshua said of Fury. "But no, if he wants to fight I'm here. Whenever he's ready I'll be available." — AFP