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Protests after top US court strikes down abortion right

Pro-life groups jubilate • At least eight states impose immediate bans



WASHINGTON: Pro-life supporters hug outside the US Supreme Court on June 24, 2022. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Abortion rights supporters prepared to fan out across America Saturday for a second day of protest against the Supreme Court's thunderbolt ruling, as state after conservative state moved swiftly to ban the procedure. Deeply polarized America woke up to a new level of division: Between states that will now or soon deny the right to abortion, enshrined for 50 years, and those that still allow it.

Dozens of new protests were planned Saturday from coast to coast, a day after demonstrations across the country that were largely peaceful - although police fired tear gas on protesters in Phoenix, Arizona and police in riot gear moved to disperse a hard core of protesters in downtown Los Angeles. Fueling the mobilization, many fear that the Supreme Court, with a clear conservative majority made possible by Donald Trump, might now set its sights on rights like same-sex marriage and contraception.

At least eight right-leaning states imposed immediate abortion bans - with a similar number to follow suit in coming weeks - after the court eliminated constitutional protections for the procedure, drawing criticism from some of America's closest allies around the world. The court overturned the landmark 1973 Roe. Wade decision enshrining a woman's right to an abortion, saying individual

states can restrict or ban the procedure themselves. Hundreds of people - some weeping for joy and others with grief - gathered outside the fenced-off Supreme Court as the ruling came down.

President Joe Biden, who called the ruling a "tragic error" stemming from "extreme ideology", spoke out again Saturday morning as he signed a gun control bill, calling the decision shocking. "I know how painful and devastating the decision is for so many Americans," Biden said at the White House. Of the state laws taking effect to ban or severely restrict abortion, Biden added: "My administration is going to focus on how they're administered and whether they violate other laws." On Friday Biden urged Congress to restore abortion protections as federal law, and said Roe would be "on the ballot" in November's midterm elections.

Hundreds of people demonstrated into the night outside the Supreme Court on Friday - and were set to return on Saturday. In Missouri - which immediately banned abortion, making no exception for rape or incest - protesters gathered Friday night in St Louis at what had been the state's last abortion clinic. Pamela Lukehart choked back tears as she recalled how things were before abortion became a legal right.

Continued on Page 6

Qatar, Egypt cement ties as Amir visits



CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi welcomes Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani at the presidential palace on June 25, 2022.— AFP

CAIRO: Egypt's leader on Saturday discussed energy and investment with Qatar's Amir, who was in Cairo for the first time since the countries restored relations following a Saudi-led rift. Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani told President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi that his country was keen to "maximize Qatari investments in Egypt and take advantage of the vast investment opportunities available", according to an Egyptian presidency statement.

The pair discussed developing cooperation "in various fields, especially in the energy and agriculture sectors", and in trade and investment, "particularly the flow of Qatari investments towards Egypt", the statement added. In late March, Cairo said the gas-rich Gulf state would be investing \$5 billion in Egypt. At the same time, Qatari hydrocarbon giant QatarEnergy announced an agreement with ExxonMobil to acquire a 40 percent stake in a gas exploration block off Egypt in the Mediterranean.

No new agreements were announced during the Amir's two-day trip, which concluded Saturday and was his first to Cairo since 2015. After relations

Continued on Page 6

Crackdown on products in 'LGBTQ colors'

KUWAIT: Ministry of Commerce and Industry inspectors confiscated items at a phone accessory shop in Kuwait with colors conveying "immoral expressions", the ministry said, referring to the LGBTQIA+ flag colors. The ministry released pictures showing smartwatch straps in colors which it said violate regulations that ban displaying all forms of LGBTQIA+ expressions publicly in Kuwait.

The ministry had earlier released a

list of LGBTQ+ flags and banners that are banned from being displayed in public in Kuwait. It posted the flags on its social media account and urged people to report seeing similar banners or "any logos or expressions that violate religion and public morals on products or in stores" in the country.

The ministry had previously urged the public to report incidents where they see LGBTQIA+ flags, banners, slogans or any form of LGBTQIA+ expressions in stores or any commercial establishment in Kuwait. The ministry explained in posts on its social media accounts that the LGBTQIA+ flag - "which goes against public morals" - is different from the rainbow because it has six colors instead of seven.



KUWAIT: Watch straps in colors of the LGBTQIA+ flag were confiscated from a phone shop by inspectors.

Iran nuclear talks to resume in days: EU

TEHRAN: Talks to revive the Iran nuclear deal will resume within days after being stalled for months, the EU's top diplomat Josep Borrell said Saturday during a surprise visit to Tehran. The negotiations began in April last year but hit a snag in March amid differences between Tehran and Washington, notably over a demand by Iran that its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps be removed from a US terror list.

"We will resume the talks on the JCPOA in the coming days... I mean quickly, immediately," Borrell told a news conference in the Iranian capital, referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The landmark nuclear deal has been hanging by a thread since 2018, when then US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the accord and began imposing harsh economic sanctions on America's arch enemy.

The administration of incumbent US President Joe Biden has sought to return to the agreement, saying it would be the best path with the Islamic republic. "We agreed today that this visit will be followed by the resumption of negotiations also between Iran and the US facilitated by my team to try to solve the last out-



TEHRAN: Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian meets Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, at the foreign ministry on June 25, 2022. — AFP

standing issues," said Borrell.

The EU foreign policy chief was speaking after a two-hour meeting with Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, on the second day of a previously unannounced visit to Tehran. Amir-Abdollahian confirmed the resumption of the negotiations. "We will try to solve the problems and differences through the talks that will resume soon," Amir-Abdollahian said, adding the key for Tehran was "the full economic benefit of Iran from the agreement concluded in 2015."

Continued on Page 6

UN says Zionist fire killed Jazeera reporter Abu Akleh

GENEVA: The United Nations said Friday it found that Zionist forces fired the shot that killed Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, with the Zionist entity swiftly branding the UN's findings unfounded. The Palestinian-American TV reporter, who was wearing a vest marked "Press" and a helmet, was killed on May 11 while covering a Zionist army operation in Jenin camp in the northern West Bank.

"We find that the shots that killed Abu Akleh came from (Zionist) security forces," UN Human Rights Office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva. "It is deeply disturbing that (Zionist) authorities have not conducted a criminal investigation." She said the Human Rights Office had concluded its own independent monitoring into the incident.



Shireen Abu Akleh

Continued on Page 6

Local

Royal dignitaries to hold Informatics Award celebration in honor of late Amir of Kuwait

Sheikha Aida thanks Amir for sponsoring awards' 20th anniversary celebrations

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is sponsoring a ceremony for the Informatics Awards on Monday, June 27, 2022, at Bayan Palace. The event will be attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and numerous royal dignitaries.



Sheikha Aida Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah

His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Award will celebrate its 20th year anniversary and will honor the late Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, with the 2020 Informatics Medal. The medal is in recognition of his philanthropic leadership and dedication to information technology and sciences. Sheikh Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Sabah will receive the Informatics Medal on behalf of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The ceremony will further celebrate the 2020 winners and host an exhibition to showcase all the award's accomplishments to date.

Encouragement of achievements

Speaking on the upcoming ceremony, the

Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Award, Sheikha Aida Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, said the late Amir's patronage of the Informatics Award was established in 2006 and lasted 14 years. It included all the award's activities such as the Global Informatics Forum. The patronage also included the Informatics Academy, which offers free courses to encourage students, and the Hackathon competitions, to stimulate creativity and innovation skills among students of public and private universities.

She expressed her gratitude to the royal dignitaries. She said that the consideration proves the political leadership's dedication to civil society and its encouragement of its achievements and social contributions, especially in this age of digital transformation.

"In only 20 years, there have been hundreds of participants and winners. The pandemic has struck all walks of life but did not deter the work of the Informatics Award and its commitment to the world of digital and information technology," Sheikha Aida stated. "The award is able to withstand global challenges and adapt to changes and developments. Therefore, the 20th Edition was entitled 'Best Technical Projects', apart from the Informatics Medal. The Award further provided a training course through the Informatics Academy to children aged 11-17 years on the basics of digital manufacturing."

Sheikha Aida Al-Sabah added the event will also host an exhibition to showcase the Informatic

Awards' most prominent achievements since its establishment in 2001, including the 332 winners from 12 Arab countries with information on their projects. It will also showcase the 14 winners of the Informatics Medal, winners of the "Shift Kuwait"



Informatics Medal awarded to late Amir

competition throughout the years, as well as the 486 volunteers from the State of Kuwait and other global and Arab countries.

List of winners

Sheikha Aida said the winners of the 20th Edition of Informatics Award are: The Kingdom of Bahrain, the General Directorate of Traffic of the Ministry of Interior, for its project Traffic Services, as well as the Ministry of Education for its project Electronic Educational Portal. The Ministry of Health of the Sultanate of Oman for its project

Trassod Plus. The Communications and Information Technology Commission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its project Platform for Delivery Applications via Electronic Platforms, as well as the Saudi Red Crescent Authority for its project Asfeni. The Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) of the State of Kuwait for its project Shlonik, The Public Institution for Social Security for its project Thukher Insurances, Jif Company for the design and management of websites for its project Jif, as well as Fanajeen General Trading Company for its project Fanajeen.

Sheikha Aida Al-Sabah noted that an honorary medal will also be given to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in appreciation of his support of the Informatics Award. Furthermore, the exhibition will showcase other cultural activities hosted by the award during its successful career, such as the World Informatics Forum, dialogue boards, informatics bureaus, blogging competitions, and the award pavilions held at the Kuwait International Book Fair for several years.

Sheikha Aida Al-Sabah concluded her comments by expressing thanks and gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and to His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince, and to His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Head of the National Guard, for their continuous support and their unlimited encouragement for the award.

Govt mulls salaries' ceiling for labor allowance benefactors

KUWAIT: A team from the Cabinet's financial committee prepared a proposed decision that adjusts the mechanism of granting support to Kuwaiti employees in the private sector that will set a ceiling for salaries. Those who exceed it will not receive the support starting from the financial year that begins in April next year, sources with knowledge of the discussions told Kuwait Times.

The official sources said studies done by a technical team of the ministerial committee decided that a person whose salary exceeds KD 5,000 will not receive labor support regardless of their academic qualifications, adding the new proposal is characterized by justice and impartiality, and meets the necessity to rationalize spending and payments for salaries and wages that make up two thirds of the budget.

Sources said that this move agrees with the recommendations of the same team that had asked the government to hasten a strategic payroll alternative law to the National Assembly for approval after the previous elections. This proposal has been delayed, although it presents a basic solution to overcome the salaries item that

increases every year and eats up money that can be used for investment and development the state needs to achieve economic and financial reform, attract investments, provide job opportunities and improve infrastructure.

Sources confirmed that strategic payroll alternative can save the country KD 5 billion annually during the first years of its application, and the savings can double in 10 years. They added the proposal unifies salaries for similar specialties in all government entities including the oil sector, instead of huge variations and contradictions between one ministry and another, which does not achieve equality between employees with similar academic qualifications.

Ministry struggling to Kuwaitize co-op jobs

KUWAIT: Official sources said the ministry of commerce and industry is serious about Kuwaitizing workers at ration distribution centers at cooperatives to strengthen supervision over them. Presently, expat employees from the majority at these centers that witness theft and smuggling of subsidized items to sell in local markets or take them out of the country.

The sources told Kuwait Times the commerce ministry attempted to woo Kuwaitis, but did not find any citizen

who wanted to work at these centers and replace the expats. This is what has delayed the implementation of this matter until now, so the ministry is only appointing Kuwaiti supervisors to have stricter supervision, they added. The ministry plans to seek the help of bedoons who have valid IDs, as well as children of Kuwaiti women, especially after a decision of the Civil Services Commission gave priority to bedoons and children of Kuwaiti women in employment.

On the occasion of the



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Al Safat Investment Co. receives students as part of its youth support program



KUWAIT: Al Safat Investment Company received a group of male and female students as part of its "Knights of Industry" program, which comes within its efforts to support Kuwaiti youth and live up to its national responsibility in training students training and polish their skills.

Al Safat Investment Co. is keen on developing investment skills and practical abilities of Kuwait's youth, which it considers among its main priorities in order to create a generation capable of bearing administrative and technical responsibilities in the future.

Al Safat Investment Co. believes that learning and training with advanced means and open intellect with the new generation will have major returns and can yield positive effects on the private sector and national economy in the future.

The student delegation spent a day at Al Safat Investment Co. during which they were oriented with the company's fields and its investment interests including in Boursa Kuwait, Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority, and management of assets and property locally and internationally.

Director of Allied Services at Al Safat Group Sahib Khajah and Deputy Director of Investment Assets Management Talal Al-Yousuf participated in the meeting. They lauded the youth and their interest to learn about the experience of the investment sector, particularly about Al Safat's experience and its achievements in various fields.

Khajah emphasized the importance of learning



Support Services Department Manager Saheb Khajah

and improving capabilities while keeping up with fast changes that happen in the market so that they become ready for the next stage. He said academic qualifications are necessary, "but there are special skills for each person that must be developed so they can be qualified to join major companies."

Meanwhile, Yousuf said Al Safat Investment Co. is committed to training male and female students within the framework of its national role and social responsibility. He said youth are the pillar of nations, and cooperation with knowledge seekers must be expanded in a way that serves the country and its economy.



Asset Management Deputy Manager Talal Al-Yousuf



Local

Law enforcement defects among causes of spreading violence against women: Lawyer

‘A lot needs to change’ to make society safer for women, says activist

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Violence against women has increased recently in the Arab world, where two female students were brutally murdered on campus in Egypt and Jordan, respectively, in broad daylight for saying “no” to their killers. The murders sent shockwaves in the region, bringing gender-based violence into the spotlight. Mohammad Al-Jassem, lawyer and Interpol-accredited expert in international law enforcement cooperation, told Kuwait Times the problem of gender-based violence is widespread in Kuwait, even as several social and legal shortcomings continue to hamper proper action.

“Any act of harassment is punishable by law under ‘incitement to immorality’ in case of verbal harassment and ‘indecent assault’ in case of touching. The two acts are legally criminalized, but there is a defect in the law enforcement mechanism in Kuwait. There is slackness or lack of familiarity by employees of their tasks and a lack of education about these matters. The law is there, but the implementation is not,” Jassem said.

Jassem noted that law enforcement officers must deal with such matters as a human being rather than merely as an employee. Law enforcement officers must educate themselves to remain updated, but the big problem is ignorance in the society. “These kinds of crimes are always repeated because of the ignorant and corrupt society. You find these mistakes made again and again unintentionally because of their ignorance and lack of awareness of matters,” he said.

Jassem affirmed that women must always inform the authorities for such men to face the right punishment, which may reach a fine and imprisonment. Parents can file a case against harassment against a man for taking their under-18 daughter to inappropriate places, even if she agreed to go with him or even if she suggested it. “It is considered a kidnapping crime by deceiving the victim - kidnapping by ruse, even if it was



Alanoud Alsharekh



Mohammad Al-Jassem



The law is there, but the implementation is not

with her consent or if she suggested it,” he said.

Student’s assault

In Kuwait last week, a young female child was beaten and carried off by her father at school in front of her friends, teachers and school security, but they all failed to protect her from violence. “A complaint must be submitted to the ministry of education and an investigation should be held. The punishment will not be only against the father, but everyone who witnessed this act and refrained from assisting, as in the eyes of the law, a witness is considered a participant in the crime according to the ‘refusal to act’ law,” Jassem said.

“A case must be filed against the father and he should be referred to investigation and held accountable under the law of neglect of a minor, which is an article from the ‘60s. If the father is

found to be negligent, the child will be transferred to a shelter to protect her from her criminal guardians,” he added.

Kuwait law and the Kuwait Child Protection Program specify that all schoolteachers are mandated reporters. They are legally obliged to report suspected child abuse. The law criminalizes abuse of a child in any form.

Change needed

“A lot needs to change to make it safer for women, starting from applying the safety from family violence legislation passed in the summer of 2020, other resources such as shelters and hotlines, and making protection from harassment whether at home or in the workplace a priority,” said Alanoud Alsharekh, Kuwaiti women’s rights activist and a founding member of Abolish 153 campaign.

“I think it’s inevitable that this heinous article (153) will be abolished. Now that awareness has been raised around its existence and dangers and three separate bills have been presented to abolish it since 2017, it just needs to be made a priority by lawmakers to make it a reality,” she told Kuwait Times.

The murders and abuse of women have triggered widespread fury across the Middle East, with calls for greater protection against gender violence and femicide in the region. According to a report by UN Women titled “Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women and Girls”, 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime - mostly by intimate partners.

In some countries, the rate of violence against women is as high as 70 percent, while 37 percent of Arab women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. There are indicators that the percentage might be higher. Nearly 4 in every 10 of all women victims of homicide worldwide are killed by intimate partners. Every year 400 to 500 women are killed brutally in Iran to protect men’s “honor”. The killers are usually close relatives - often the victim’s father, husband or brother.

large amounts of drugs and detained many dealers. “First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Mol Undersecretary Anwar Al-Barjas place the combating of the drugs among the top priorities,” the ministry noted.

The ministry added that it is continuing to launch awareness campaigns and playing the main role in facing this phenomenon as it observes the World Drug Day for combating narcotics, which falls on June 26. The ministry’s public relations and security information directorate has carried out in coordination with the anti-drugs department, state institutions and civil societies, an awareness campaign themed “Wiyac” (with you). The campaign aims to enhance the level of awareness, check spread of addictions, with emphasis on the family guidance role, it said, noting parents’ responsibility to notify the relevant authorities if any of their children fall victims of this scourge.



fickers.” It added that the general directorate for combating narcotics recorded 2,360 cases, with 2,990 accused persons in 2021, in contrast to 1,825 cases and 2,489 charged individuals in 2020. In the first half of 2022, the security apparatuses seized



Kuwait provides rehab for young drug addicts without facing charges

KUWAIT: Kuwait’s Ministry of Interior urged parents to report their children in case they abuse drugs or were addicted to drugs so that they can be enrolled in rehabilitation and therapy programs without facing criminal charges. Concerned authorities are reachable round the clock via the emergency number 112 in addition to the services on the number 1884141, the ministry said in a press statement Saturday.

The ministry said meanwhile that the number of drugs-related deaths dropped by 24 percent in 2021 “due to the successful interior security personnel efforts in clamping down on dealers and traf-

Ministry inspectors raid shops accused of commercial fraud

KUWAIT: Commerce and Industry Ministry inspectors closed down a shop in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh for selling counterfeit clothes that carried labels of famous brands. Large quantities of sports clothes were found and confiscated, the ministry said in a press stating, noting that legal action will be taken.

Separately, the ministry said its inspectors raided a company in Farwaniya which committed commercial fraud, saying violators repaired used tablets and packaged them in boxes to be resold as new items.

The ministry made its move after surveillance for a number of days, it explained, adding that the inspectors confiscated a large quantity of tablets in the company’s office. Further legal action is in progress, it further pointed out.

local spotlight

The road to a constitutional dissolution

By Atyab Al-Shatti

local@kuwaittimes.com

The televised Amiri address reflects public indignation, which was a result of the executive authority not carrying out all its duties. To determine whether a certain procedure executed by the Cabinet is constitutional or unconstitutional, then it’s crucial to scrutinize article 103 of the constitution stipulating the Cabinet of execution of urgent matters.

The constitution expressly stipulates in article no. 103: “If the prime minister or the minister relinquishes his position for any reason, he shall continue to execute urgent matters.” An explanatory memorandum regarding the interpretation of article 103 states: “The minister continues to execute urgent affairs related to his mission, until his successor is appointed,” so as to avoid what is constitutionally called a “constitutional vacuum”.

But the explanatory memorandum does not specify what is recognized as an urgent matter that the Cabinet has the capacity to execute regardless of the resignation and what is not an urgent matter that will wait till the final official formation of the new Cabinet. So this legislative vacuum led to a clash between parliamentarians and the Cabinet. While MPs believed that the grant for retirees is not an urgent matter, the Cabinet acted as if it was one. This legislative vacuum in the explanatory memo has caused ambiguity and escalated anger and wrangling among the public.

Such a dissolution might face nullification by the constitutional court if it takes place under the current political and legal circumstances. While the dissolution of the parliament can be imposed either through a law or a decree, for laws to be passed, a parliament and a stable Cabinet should exist, which is not our current situation. For a decree law to be passed, a stable Cabinet and prime minister shall file the dissolution matter to HH the Amir for his ratification.

This could be subjected to nullification by the constitutional court presently because the Cabinet resigned without stating non-cooperation with the Assembly, which is a crucial statement that HH the Amir would have considered to dissolve the current Assembly, if such a statement of non-cooperation was ever submitted by the Cabinet at the time of resignation. The Cabinet of urgent matters does not have the ability to file for dissolution before HH the Amir, which makes the dissolution procedure contrary to the constitution, and with it the decree issued in this regard becomes null and void.

Article 129 of the constitution states that if a new prime minister is appointed to replace the resigned prime minister, the powers of all ministers in the resigned Cabinet cease, and the prime minister and other ministers in his resigned ministry no longer have any right to continue their work. The Amiri order appointing the new prime minister included in his assignment to nominate members of the new Cabinet, and therefore it is not constitutional that he will practice any work unless the formation of the new Cabinet is accomplished.

It is also crucial to differentiate between the dissolution of the parliament by a parliamentary request or an Amiri dissolution by HH the Amir in line with article 107, which states that HH the Amir may dissolve the National Assembly by a decree stating the reasons for such a dissolution, provided the Assembly shall not be dissolved for the same reasons a prior Assembly was dissolved by an Amiri decree, so it is crucial that the aspects and causes of dissolution are different.

If the Assembly is dissolved, the elections for the new Assembly must be held within two months of the date of dissolution. If elections are not held during this period, the dissolved Assembly regains its full constitutional authority, meets immediately as if the dissolution had not occurred, and continues its work until a new Assembly is elected.

The second stage after assigning the prime minister is for the prime minister to assign the Cabinet, which is crucial, and it needs to take the oath before HH the Amir as a fundamental procedure for the Cabinet’s legitimacy. Afterwards, only the new legitimate Cabinet, in light of the Amir’s address on June 23, shall file the dissolution matter of the Assembly before HH the Amir to issue the dissolution decree according to constitutional article 107. Then in line with the constitution, the period of two months in which the elections of the new Assembly shall take place will begin from the date of issuing the dissolution decree.

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News in brief

Kuwait grade 12 finals' results announced Sunday

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Education said it will announce the 12th grade finals' results for students of public schools and Arab private schools on Sunday June 26. The ministry is set to announce the top achievers during a press conference starting at 7:00 pm. The announcement will be broadcasted live on Kuwait TV.

UK Royal College nominates Kuwaiti doctor

KUWAIT: The UK Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) has nominated Dr Abeer Al-Thaydi, head of the obstetrics and gynecology department at Al-Adan Hospital as the chair of its representative committee in Kuwait for three years.

Kuwait oil rises to \$110.86 pb: KPC

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by five cents to \$110.86 per barrel on Friday, compared with \$110.81 pb a day earlier, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Saturday. Globally, Brent crude rose by \$3.07 to \$113.12 pb, as the West Texas Intermediate crude jumped by \$3.35 to \$107.62 pb.

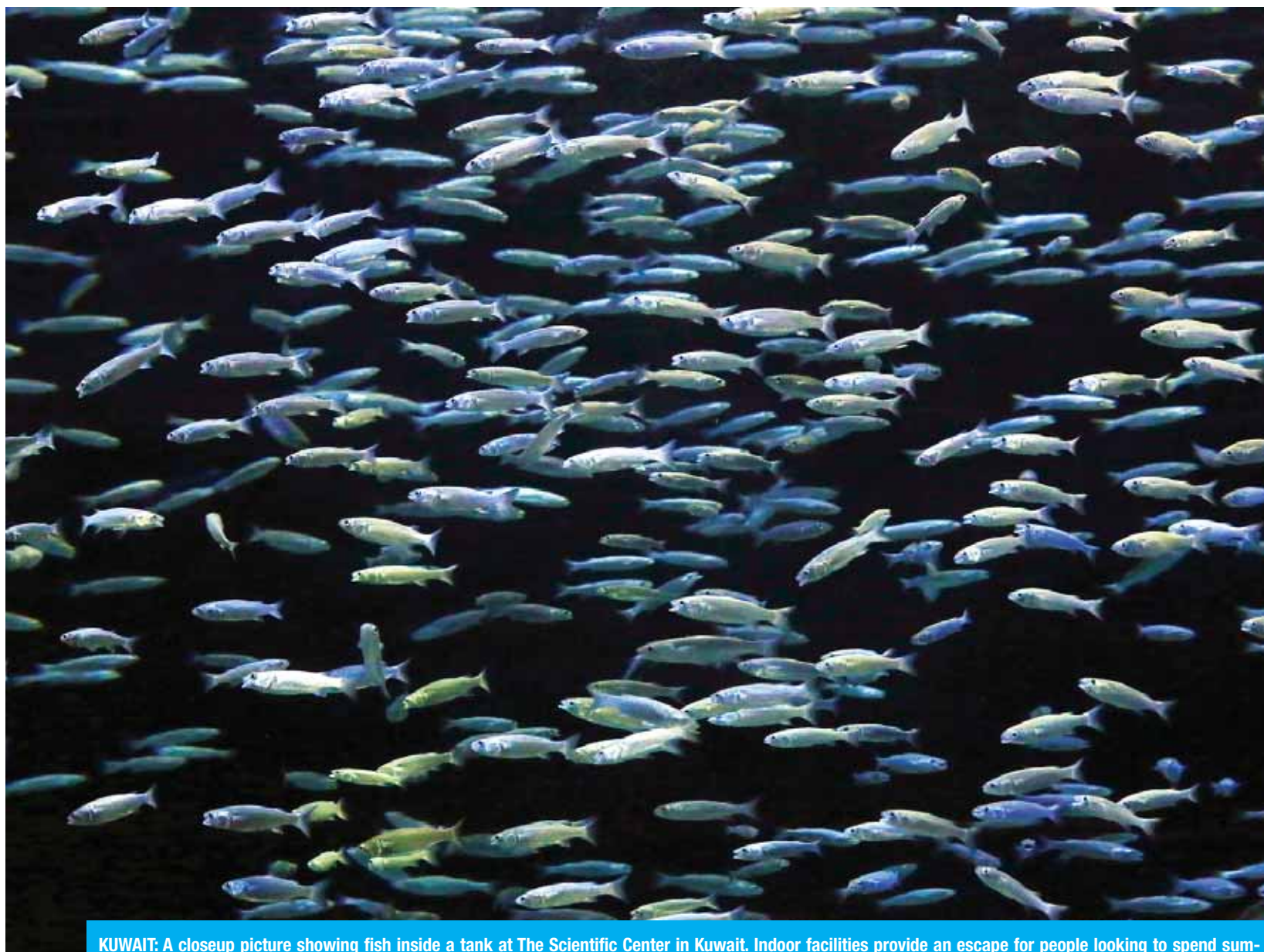
Tunisia appreciates Kuwait's support

TUNIS: Tunisian Prime Minister Najla Bouden expressed appreciation for Kuwait's solidarity with the country during the peak of the coronavirus crisis. The Tunisian government said in a statement that the premier expressed the cordial sentiments during a meeting with the outgoing Kuwaiti Ambassador Ali Dhafiri. She congratulated the outgoing ambassador for fulfilling his tasks successfully in the country underlining his role in advancing the Kuwait-Tunisia cooperation. The premier voiced admiration of the State of Kuwait for the brotherly solidarity with Tunisia during the coronavirus crisis and asked that her greetings be relayed to the Kuwaiti leadership. Dhafiri expressed gratitude for the hospitality and care accorded to him by the Tunisian authorities during his service in the country.

Kuwait underlines commitment to aid Yemeni people

BRUSSELS: Kuwait Thursday expressed its strong commitment to support and assist Yemen in humanitarian aid programs to overcome the current humanitarian challenges facing the war-torn country. This was expressed by Ghazi Al-Mutawa, Acting Deputy Director of Operations for Arab Countries in Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, at the fourth Yemen Humanitarian Senior Officials meeting co-hosted by the European Union and Sweden in Brussels today. "We always should be optimistic that sooner or later the Yemenis will have better and prosperous lives, and therefore we at the state of Kuwait and Kuwait Fund will continue to fulfill our commitments towards various projects," he told the meeting which met at a time when the humanitarian situation in Yemen is worsening due to rising global prices of food and energy. He said that Kuwait Fund recently signed five project-based agreements with various UN agencies and will continue its support in different provinces and to reach all in need in Yemen. Mutawa said that this fourth meeting "assures that the humanitarian issues in Yemen are always prioritized, but that also means that the need is still there to improve the quality of aid, whether it is fighting cholera, reduction of famine, vaccinations, or education programs." He underlined that "consistent and ongoing support is a mandate we shall never leave out of option or consideration; it shall always be there, for there is a need among women and children." The Kuwaiti official concluded that "hope is our only choice here, let us all acknowledge our responsibilities towards our humanitarian values, and together we can make a difference." —KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A closeup picture showing fish inside a tank at The Scientific Center in Kuwait. Indoor facilities provide an escape for people looking to spend summertime activities away from the scorching heat. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait affirms support to UNRWA: 'Cornerstone of regional stability'

UN refugee agency, Kuwaiti charity renew Syrian refugee relief partnership

NEW YORK/AMMAN: Kuwait has affirmed its firm support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and its objectives, as it is a cornerstone of stability in the region. This came in a speech delivered by Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mansour Al-Otaibi during a recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to UNRWA. Kuwait's latest show of support was in October of 2021 as it pledged \$21.5 million for the agency to support Palestinian refugees, as well as two million dollars designated for the agency's regular budget.

Otaibi commented that Kuwait's support to UNRWA's work stems from its firm belief in the fairness of the Palestinian cause and the agency's pivotal role in alleviating the suffering of Palestinian refugees. He added that Kuwait is following the agency's unprecedented political and financial challenges with great concern, calling on the international community to take a solid stance in supporting work of agency.

'Very essential'

Otaibi went on to say that the agency's work is now more essential than ever as coronavirus pandemic took the world by storm, paralyzing all flanks of life and affecting people and countries involved in political and military conflicts, with Palestinians at the helm.

He reiterated Kuwait's support to the reformative path the agency is taking, and its efforts in bolstering transparency, commending its priorities as it works on updating its internal affairs, including digitalization, governance, decentralizing decision-making and abiding by principles of objectivities.

Otaibi also hailed UNRWA's commitment to insuring a stable, sustained and diverse financing base via working with international institutions, global funds, and private sector. Moreover, Otaibi stated that clear political support to the agency is

not a matter of dispute but is essential to helping it carry on its humanitarian activities.

Donors pledge \$160 million

Donor countries have pledged \$160 million for UNRWA to finance essential services provided to Palestinian refugees in West Bank, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. "The amounts pledged today will go straight to fund education, health and social protection services to Palestine refugees," said UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini in a press release on Friday. "They will also be used to purchase food and deliver cash assistance to the most vulnerable Palestine refugees."

The pledges were made at a Pledging Conference held at the United Nations General



Kuwait pledged \$21.5 million in October 2021

Assembly in the presence of the Secretary-General. The conference brought together dozens of nations to address the Agency's funding gap, which remains substantial despite the pledges announced. The UN Agency unveiled that with the confirmed contributions and those that are forecast over the summer, it expects a shortfall of over \$100 million on its core budget.

But even with today's contributions, it will be very challenging to reconcile the requirements of the mandate, the immense hardships of Palestine refugees and the funding shortage that remains," Lazzarini added. The Agency pointed out that it will continue its immense efforts to mobilize the



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during the Ad Hoc Committee meeting of the General Assembly for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to UNRWA. —KUNA

funds it needs to keep essential services running until the end of the year. "I truly hope that today's pledges will encourage other partners to step up and provide additional crucial assistance," Lazzarini said.

Refugees' aid

In other news, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Jordan and Kuwait's Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity Society renewed their partnership deal, which provides relief for nearly 2,100 Syrian refugee families worth \$500,000.

The UN refugee agency honored the visiting delegation from the registered Kuwaiti charity, headed by Board Chairman Jamal Abdulkhaleq Al-Nouri, for their efforts targeting displaced Syrians at several refugee camps in Jordan. The event saw UNHCR Deputy Representative Carolyn Ennis praise the support provided by the charity to the agency's endeavors, reiterating pride in their partnership, which aims to support efforts to alleviate the suffering of the refugees. —KUNA

Kuwaiti diplomat urges exchanging Arab, regional expertise in science diplomacy

PARIS: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Adam Al-Mulla stressed the importance of exchanging Arab and regional expertise in science diplomacy. He made the remark to the press following his participation Friday in a UNESCO conference entitled "New Horizons for Science Diplomacy", organized in the framework of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Mulla said that the conference was an opportunity for the participants to explore and learn "interactively" the most pressing issues in science diplomacy, tools and possible solutions, with experts of important bodies like UNESCO and the European Union (EU) attending. He stressed that through his

participation, he referred to the vital role Kuwait plays through effective initiatives and activities, and its efforts to enhance international cooperation and ensure continuing education. He also pointed to the fourth goal of the sustainable development goals related to education until 2030, which is part of the United Nations initiative.

The InsSciDE (Inventing a shared Science Diplomacy for Europe) project's Concluding Conference showcases more than four years of work, address ongoing transformations in science and diplomacy, and look to the future with the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance. InsSciDE is a Horizon 2020 project centered on historical research on science diplomacy. The project has developed a range of resources to support



PARIS: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UNESCO Adam Al-Mulla speaks during the conference. —KUNA

European science diplomacy theory and strategy and to facilitate policy action and training programs, to be displayed at the event. —KUNA



Chinese leader Xi to attend Hong Kong handover celebration

Morocco activists seek probe after 18 migrants die in surge to enter Spain



LOS ANGELES: Abortion rights activists protest after the overturning of Roe Vs. Wade by the US Supreme Court, in Downtown Los Angeles. — AFP

Abortion reversal hits divided US

Decision opens the door for states to restrict or forbid abortion

WASHINGTON: Beaming young women chanted in joy as a machine spat out bubbles and party music blared in front of the US Supreme Court, which had just revoked the federal right to abortion.

Someone shouted “We won” and another cheer rose from the anti-abortion campaigners, one of whom waved a sign bearing a tombstone marked 1973-2022 — the lifespan of that right in America.

“I am so over-the-moon, overjoyed, excited at the overturning of Roe v. Wade. This is a new era of feminism,” Faith Montgomery, an 18-year-old student, shouted over the music.

A parallel demonstration just steps away was filled with rage, disbelief and pledges of resistance against the ruling on one of the most politically incendiary issues in a deeply polarized nation.

“Coat hangers... and whatever crazy things women used to think they could do to get rid of a pregnancy — now we’re going to be back to that again,” said Amy Senkowicz, 63, who was visiting from Florida.

She had a legal abortion when she was 16, just a few years after the 1973 Supreme Court decision that guaranteed women’s right to the procedure, and she was horrified to see that right taken away.

“I think it’s awful,” said the mother of three. America’s split on the issue was brought into clear relief by the competing demonstrations that at times engaged in shouted debates that did not appear to spill over into violence.

The scene was under heavy police surveillance and riot officers with helmets and shields stood by as some members of Congress spoke outside the fenced and guarded court building.

Congresswoman Sara Jacobs, a Democrat from California, told AFP: “This takes us back to a time when I will have less rights than my mother and grandmother. I’m furious.”

‘What’s next?’

The decision will likely become a rallying cry for Americans supportive of women’s ability to choose to have an abortion, the way Roe V. Wade was one for decades for conservatives.

Anna Lulis, 24, with an anti-abortion group called Students for Life of America, said activists are already moving on to the next steps in their advocacy.

They will be “informing our community but also going to the states, which are going to now push radical pro-abortion laws, in order to cultivate a culture of life there,” she said. The decision opens the door for states to restrict or forbid abortion, but does not prevent them from allowing the procedure.



Americans overjoyed or furious

Lulis noted that abortions done with medication will rise after Friday’s ruling, and added her group would be making sure there’s “nothing illegal going on behind the scenes.” “Our goal is to abolish abortion completely,” she said, arguing there needed to be “common sense medical standards” to protect women’s health in cases where pills are used.

Abortion proponents were also looking at what comes next, especially with key legislative votes coming in November that could sweep away Democrats’ narrow hold on Congress. “It’s going to be a long, long, long fight to bring things back to the way they were,” said Senkowicz, the mother of three.—AFP

US passes first major gun bill in decades

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers broke a decades-long stalemate on firearms control Friday, passing the first major safety regulations in almost 30 years, less than 24 hours after the Supreme Court bolstered the right to bear arms.

Gun regulation is a touchstone issue for both conservatives and liberals in the United States that has consumed national politics amid multiple mass shootings in recent years. The Democratic-led House of Representatives voted to rubber-stamp a bipartisan Senate gun bill that—while modest—amounts to the first significant piece of legislation to regulate firearms since 1994. “Let us not judge this legislation for what is not in it, but respect it for what it does. And what it does is save lives. And we are very, very proud of that,” the top Democrat Nancy Pelosi said on the House floor.

Fourteen Republicans defied their leader Kevin McCarthy to cross the aisle and approve the 80-page package, which advanced from the evenly-divided upper chamber with cross-party backing late Thursday. That vote came hours after the Supreme Court’s conservative majority had struck down a century-old New York law requiring permits for concealed-carry handguns. The gun legislation includes enhanced background checks for younger

buyers and federal cash for states introducing “red flag” laws that allow courts to temporarily remove weapons from those considered a threat. Billions of dollars have been allocated to crack down on “straw purchasers” who buy firearms for people who are not allowed them and to curb gun trafficking.

‘Long-sought triumph’

The deeply-divisive issue of gun control was reignited by two massacres in May that saw 10 Black supermarket shoppers gunned down in upstate New York and 21 people, mostly young children, slain at a school in Texas. The Supreme court had voted along party lines, with the six Republican appointees in favor of bolstering the constitutional right to bear arms and the three Democratic appointees dissenting.

The ruling was hailed by campaigners for boosted gun rights, but took the shine off what was expected to be a day of jubilation for weapons control activists. Liberals had been celebrating the congressional action despite disappointment at the limited scope of the legislation, which doesn’t include universal background checks and omits any ban on semi-automatic weapons or high-capacity magazines. “This decision won’t stop our grassroots army from doing what we’ve done for a decade: fighting to keep our families safe,” added Shannon Watts, founder of gun safety group Moms Demand Action, said after the Supreme Court ruling was announced.

“Just as we’re breaking the logjam in Congress, we’re going to work day-in, day-out to mitigate the fallout in New York and any other states impacted by this decision and elect gun-sense lawmakers up and down the ballot.”—AFP

Woman denied Malta abortion treated in Spain

ROME: A pregnant American woman who suffered heavy bleeding while on holiday on Malta but was denied an abortion has flown to Spain where she is “out of harm’s way”, her partner said Friday. Andrea Prudente, 38, and Jay Weeldreyer, 45, were told their baby had no chance of surviving but, despite her fear of deadly infection, doctors refused to intervene due to Malta’s total ban on terminations. “Medical evacuation got us safely to Spain where Andrea is out of harm’s way and finally receiving the medical care and treatment denied her in Malta,” Weeldreyer said in a text message to AFP. Asked how they were feeling, he said: “Relief. And the sudden, smashing waves of grief at losing our little girl.”

“We’ve been so consumed with fear and intense focus on Andrea’s safety, that now she’s finally out of harm’s way, there are cascades of mixed emotions that just come in waves.” As he wrote, the Supreme Court back home in the United States ended the right to abortion in a seismic ruling that shreds half a century of constitutional protections. “Anyplace that implements laws like Malta is sentencing women to suffer and potentially die,” Weeldreyer said in response. “Strict bans on abortion will kill innocent women.” In an interview by telephone on Wednesday with AFP, he had condemned the “callous” and “cruel” treatment of Prudente, after she was rushed to hospital during their holiday to Malta. She had suffered heavy bleeding in her 16th week of pregnancy and later her waters broke, with an ultrasound showing a partially detached placenta, he said. An ultrasound two days later showed no amniotic fluid left, and despite its heartbeat the foetus has “no chance of survival”, according to a doctor with “campaign group Doctors for Choice, which was involved with the case. But doctors had refused to intervene, waiting for Prudente to miscarry naturally, for the heartbeat to stop or “for her to have a life-threatening infection” that would spur them to act, Weeldreyer had explained.—AFP



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International

World is burning,
we need renewables
revolution

Op-ed

By Antonio Guterres,
Secretary-General of UN

The only true path to energy security, stable power prices, prosperity and a livable planet lies in abandoning polluting fossil fuels and accelerating the renewables-based energy transition.

Nero was famously accused of fiddling while Rome burned. Today, some leaders are doing worse. They are throwing fuel on the fire. Literally. As the fallout of Russia's invasion of Ukraine ripples across the globe, the response of some nations to the growing energy crisis has been to double down on fossil fuels - pouring billions more dollars into the coal, oil and gas that are driving our deepening climate emergency.

Meanwhile all climate indicators continue to break records, forecasting a future of ferocious storms, floods, droughts, wildfires and unlivable temperatures in vast swathes of the planet. Our world faces climate chaos. New funding for fossil fuel exploration and production infrastructure is delusional. Fossil fuels are not the answer, nor will they ever be. We can see the damage we are doing to the planet and our societies. It is in the news every day, and no one is immune.

Fossil fuels are the cause of the climate crisis. Renewable energy is the answer-to limit climate disruption and boost energy security. Had we invested earlier and massively in renewable energy, we would not find ourselves once again at the mercy of unstable fossil fuel markets. Renewables are the peace plan of the 21st century. But the battle for a rapid and just energy transition is not being fought on a level field. Investors are still backing fossil fuels, and governments still hand out billions in subsidies for coal, oil and gas - some \$11 million every minute.

There is a word for favouring short-term relief over long-term well-being. Addiction. We are still addicted to fossil fuels. For the health of our societies and planet, we need to quit. Now, the only true path to energy security, stable power prices, prosperity and a livable planet lies in abandoning polluting fossil fuels and accelerating the renewables-based energy transition.

To that end, I have called on G20 governments to dismantle coal infrastructure, with a full phase-out by 2030 for OECD countries and 2040 for all others. I have urged financial actors to abandon fossil fuel finance and invest in renewable energy. And I have proposed a five-point plan to boost renewable energy round the world.

First, we must make renewable energy technology a global public good, including removing intellectual property barriers to technology transfer. Second, we must improve global access to supply chains for renewable energy technologies components and raw materials.

In 2020, the world installed 5 gigawatts of battery storage. We need 600 gigawatts of storage capacity by 2030. Clearly, we need a global coalition to get there. Shipping bottlenecks and supply-chain constraints, as well as higher costs for lithium and other battery metals, are hurting deployment of such technologies and materials just as we need them most.

Third, we must cut the red tape that holds up solar and wind projects. We need fast-track approvals and more effort to modernize electricity grids. In the European Union, it takes eight years to approve a wind farm, and 10 years in the United States. In the Republic of Korea, onshore wind projects need 22 permits from eight different ministries.

Fourth, the world must shift energy subsidies from fossil fuels to protect vulnerable people from energy shocks and invest in a just transition to sustainable future.

And fifth, we need to triple investments in renewables. This includes multilateral development banks and development finance institutions, as well as commercial banks. All must step up and dramatically boost investments in renewables.

We need more urgency from all global leaders. We are already perilously close to hitting the 1.5°C limit that science tells us is the maximum level of warming to avoid the worst climate impacts. To keep 1.5 alive, we must reduce emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by mid-century. But current national commitments will lead to an increase of almost 14 per cent this decade. That spells catastrophe.

The answer lies in renewables - for climate action, for energy security, and for providing clean electricity to the hundreds of millions of people who currently lack it. Renewables are a triple win.

There is no excuse for anyone to reject a renewables revolution. While oil and gas prices have reached record price levels, renewables are getting cheaper all the time. The cost of solar energy and batteries has plummeted 85 per cent over the past decade. The cost of wind power fell by 55 per cent. And investment in renewables creates three times more jobs than fossil fuels.

Of course, renewables are not the only answer to the climate crisis. Nature-based solutions, such as reversing deforestation and land degradation, are essential. So too are efforts to promote energy efficiency. But a rapid renewable energy transition must be our ambition.

As we wean ourselves off fossil fuels, the benefits will be vast, and not just to the climate. Energy prices will be lower and more predictable, with positive knock-on effects for food and economic security. When energy prices rise, so do the costs of food and all the goods we rely on. So, let us all agree that a rapid renewables revolution is necessary and stop fiddling while our future burns. — UN

Morocco activists seek probe after 18
migrants die in surge to enter Spain

Over 500 managed to enter a border control area

Nador, Morocco: Moroccan rights activists on Saturday demanded an investigation into the deaths of at least 18 African migrants who were among hundreds that tried a mass crossing into the Spanish enclave of Melilla. The latest deadly drama on the doors of the European Union took place at dawn on Friday when around 2,000 migrants approached the Moroccan border with the tiny territory.

More than 500 managed to enter a border control area after cutting a fence with shears, Melilla authorities said in a statement. Moroccan officials said late Friday that 13 migrants had died of injuries sustained in the incursion, in addition to five confirmed dead earlier in the day.

"Some fell from the top of the barrier" separating the two sides, a Moroccan official said. On Saturday calm returned to the border area, with Moroccan security forces lightly deployed along the frontier, in a forested area where no migrants were to be seen.

A local resident said several buses had passed through to take migrants away. Others "have probably moved away for fear of being displaced by the Moroccan authorities," Mohamed Amine Abidar of the AMDH rights group told AFP.

The AMDH has demanded a "comprehensive, quick and serious enquiry to determine responsibilities and shortcomings", and warned against burying the migrants' bodies until their deaths had been properly investigated.

Images on Spanish media on

Friday had showed exhausted migrants lying on the pavement in Melilla, some with bloodied hands and torn clothes. Speaking in Brussels, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez condemned the "violent assault", which he blamed on "mafias who traffic in human beings".

Melilla and Ceuta, Spain's other tiny North African enclave, have the European Union's only land borders with Africa, making them a magnet for migrants. Friday's was the first such mass incursion since Spain and Morocco mended diplomatic relations last month.

The AMDH said it was "a true catastrophe that shows the consequences of the latest Moroccan-Spanish entente". In March, Spain ended a year-long diplomatic crisis by backing Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara going back on its decades-long stance of neutrality.

Sanchez then visited Rabat, and the two governments hailed a "new stage" in relations. The row began when Madrid allowed Brahim Ghali, leader of Western Sahara's pro-independence Polisario Front, to be treated for Covid-19 in a Spanish hospital in April 2021.

A month later, some 10,000 migrants surged across the Moroccan border into Spain's Ceuta enclave as border guards looked the other way, in what was widely seen as a punitive gesture by Rabat. Rabat calls for the Western Sahara to have an autonomous status under Moroccan



NADOR, Morocco: Photo shows Moroccan security forces on the border fence separating Morocco from Spain's North African Melilla enclave, near Nador in Morocco. The death toll following a mass attempt by a huge crowd of African migrants to cross from Morocco into Spain's Melilla enclave climbed to 18. — AFP

sovereignty but the Polisario Front wants a UN-supervised referendum on self-determination as agreed in a 1991 ceasefire agreement.

In the days just before Morocco and Spain patched up their ties, there were several attempted mass crossings of migrants into Melilla, including one involving 2,500 people, the largest such attempt on record. Nearly 500 made it across.

The mending of ties has meant a drop in migrant arrivals in Spain, notably in the Canary Islands. The number of migrants who reached the Canary Islands in April was 70 per cent lower than in February, government figures show.

Sanchez warned earlier this month that "Spain will not tolerate any use of

the tragedy of illegal immigration as a means of pressure". Spain will seek to have "irregular migration" listed as one of the security threats on the NATO's southern flank when the alliance gathers for a summit in Madrid on June 29-30.

Over the years, thousands of migrants have attempted to cross the 12-kilometre (7.5-mile) border between Melilla and Morocco, or Ceuta's eight-kilometre border, by climbing the barriers, swimming along the coast or hiding in vehicles. The two territories are protected by fences fortified with barbed wire, video cameras and watchtowers. Migrants sometimes use hooks and sticks to try to climb the border fence, and throw stones at police. — AFP

Ecuador's leader warns of
coup over indigenous protests

QUITO: Violent clashes between indigenous protesters and police broke out for a second straight day in Ecuador's capital on Friday, as the country's president accused demonstrators of attempting a coup. Nearly two weeks into protests that have left six people dead and dozens injured, thousands of demonstrators angry at rising fuel prices threw rocks and Molotov cocktails and shot off fireworks near the congress building in Quito.

Security forces repelled protesters with tear gas, and clashes eventually stopped late in the evening, according to AFP reporters on the scene. "The real intention of these violent people is to stage a coup," President Guillermo Lasso said in a speech earlier Friday in which he again offered dialogue to end the protests.

An estimated 14,000 protesters are taking part in a nationwide show of discontent against rising hardship in an economy dealt a serious blow by the coronavirus pandemic. Most of the ire is

concentrated in the capital Quito, where some 10,000 people, most from other parts of the country, have gathered.

Both sides accused each other of intransigence on Friday, as the protests entered their 12th day. "They have unmasked themselves. They don't want to negotiate. They don't want to come to an agreement... They don't want peace. Until now, the only thing they have demonstrated is that they want violence," minister of government Francisco Jimenez told broadcaster FM Mundo.

Six of the country's 24 provinces are under a state of emergency and a night-time curfew is in place in Quito. Protesters are demanding a cut in already subsidized fuel prices, which have risen sharply in recent months, as well as jobs, food price controls, and more public spending on healthcare and education.

But the action has been costly, with losses of some \$50 million per day to the economy, and production of fuel-Ecuador's biggest export-halved, according to the energy ministry. On



QUITO, Ecuador: A riot police officer throws a tear gas canister to disperse demonstrators on the twelfth consecutive day of protests against the government in Quito. — AFP

Thursday, protesters won a limited concession from President Guillermo Lasso who granted them access, "for the sake of dialogue and peace," to a cultural center emblematic of the Indigenous struggle that had been commandeered by police.

Hours later, however, a group of protesters headed for Congress, where police fired tear gas in response to a barrage of rocks, fireworks and Molotov

cocktails. Three people died in confrontations on Thursday, bringing the toll to six since the movement started on June 13 on the initiative of the powerful Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Conaie). Conaie leader Leonidas Iza told AFP the revolt would continue "until we have results. We can no longer hold back the anger of the people." People were desperate, said Iza. — AFP

Protests after top
US court strikes...

Continued from Page 1

"Women died getting abortions back then," the 68-year-old told AFP, her voice breaking. "We were trying to protect women's rights, women's lives, and now they've taken all that away from us."

As of Saturday morning, at least eight states had already banned abortion - Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Utah. The court tossed out the legal argument in Roe v Wade that women had the right to abortion based on the constitutional right to privacy with regard to their own bodies. Altogether about two dozen states are now expected to severely restrict or outright ban and criminalize abortions. Women in those states will either have to continue with their pregnancy, undergo a clandestine abortion, obtain abortion pills, or travel to another state where it remains legal.

In the majority opinion, Justice Samuel Alito said Roe v Wade was "egregiously wrong". "Abortion pres-

ents a profound moral issue on which Americans hold sharply conflicting views," he said. "The Constitution does not prohibit the citizens of each State from regulating or prohibiting abortion." The court tossed out the legal argument in Roe v Wade that women had the right to abortion based on the constitutional right to privacy with regard to their own bodies.

While the ruling represents a victory in the struggle against abortion by the religious right, leaders of the largely Christian conservative movement said it does not go far enough and they will push for a nationwide ban. Several Democratic-ruled states, anticipating an influx of patients, have already taken steps to facilitate abortion and three of them - California, Oregon and Washington - issued a joint pledge to defend access in the wake of the court's decision.

"God made the decision," Trump said while praising the ruling. The decision was made possible by Trump's nomination to the court of three conservative justices. The three liberal justices on the court dissented from the ruling, which came a day after the court ushered in a major expansion of US gun rights.

Criticism of the move also came from abroad, including from US allies including Britain, whose Prime Minister Boris Johnson called it "a big step backwards". —AFP

seven journalists arrived at the western entrance of the Jenin camp soon after 6:00 am.

At around 6:30 am, as four of the journalists turned into a particular street, "several single, seemingly well-aimed bullets were fired towards them from the direction of the (Zionist) security forces. One single bullet injured Ali Sammoudi in the shoulder; another single bullet hit Abu Akleh in the head and killed her instantly."

Several further single bullets were fired as an unarmed man attempted to approach Abu Akleh's body and another uninjured journalist sheltering behind a tree, said Shamasani. Shots continued to be fired as this individual eventually managed to carry away Abu Akleh's body, she added. In response, the Zionist entity's army said it was "not possible" to determine how Abu Akleh was killed.

The official Palestinian investigation found that the Qatari television channel's star reporter was killed after being hit by a bullet just below her helmet. Their report said Abu Akleh was killed with a 5.56 mm armor-piercing round fired from a Ruger Mini-14 rifle. — AFP

Qatar, Egypt
cement ties...

Continued from Page 1

between Egypt and Qatar were restored in January 2021, Sisi and the Qatari Amir had only met twice, both times on the sidelines of summits abroad. Egypt had joined Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in breaking off relations with Qatar in June 2017.

According to Egyptian presidency, the emir also "praised Egypt's ongoing efforts on reconstruction in the Gaza Strip". Doha and Cairo - key US allies in the Middle East - have both provided reconstruction aid to the territory and have been involved with mediation efforts between the Zionist entity and the Gaza Strip's Islamist rulers Hamas. The two leaders also welcomed next month's Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Saudi Arabia that will also be attended by the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and the US, the presidency statement said. — AFP

Iran nuclear
talks to resume...

Continued from Page 1

"We hope that specifically the US side, this time around, realistically and fairly makes responsible and committed efforts in the negotiations and on the path to reach the final point of the agreement," he added. On the eve of Borrell's trip, the US point man on Iran, Robert Malley, had "reiterated firm US commitment to come back to the deal" over a meal with the EU diplomatic chief, according to the EU's coordinator for the talks, Enrique Mora. "We remain committed to the path of meaningful diplomacy, in consultation with our European partners," Malley said in a tweet.

France, one of the six world powers that agreed the 2015 deal, had on Friday appealed to Iran to "seize this diplomatic opportunity to conclude now, while this is still possible". — AFP

International

Taleban pledge no interference with quake aid, but many await relief

Disaster poses a huge logistical challenge for the government

SERAI, Afghanistan: Afghanistan's Taleban rulers pledged on Saturday they would not interfere with international efforts to distribute aid to tens of thousands of people affected by this week's deadly earthquake.

Even before Wednesday's quake the country was in the grip of a humanitarian crisis, with aid flows and financial assistance severely curtailed since the Taleban's return to power. The 5.9-magnitude quake struck hardest in the rugged east along the border with Pakistan, as people slept, killing over 1,000 and leaving thousands more homeless.

Aid organisations have complained in the past that Taleban authorities have tried to divert aid to areas and people that supported their hard-line insurgency — or even seized goods to distribute themselves and claim the credit.

But Khan Mohammad Ahmad, a senior official in hard-hit Paktika province, said international organisations helping relief efforts would not be interfered with. "Whether it is WFP, UNICEF or any other organisation... the international community or the United Nations... they will do the distribution by themselves," said Khan.

"The responsible people from the Islamic Emirate are here... our members will be always with them (to help)," he added, referring to the Taleban's new name for Afghanistan.

Huge challenge

The disaster poses a huge logistical challenge for the government, which has isolated itself from much of the world by introducing hardline rule that subju-

gates women and girls.

But the international community has been quick to respond to the latest disaster to befall the country and aid is starting to flow — although not always where it is needed most.

"What don't we need? We need everything," Said Wali told AFP in Serai, a small village close to the epicentre of the quake, around 200 kilometres (125 miles) southeast of Kabul.

"We are alive, but there is no one listening to us and we have not received any aid so far." Many of the buildings in the village — like most in the Afghan countryside, made out of mud bricks — had been flattened in the quake.

"Our beds and all our stuff are buried under our home. Our homes are destroyed... there is nothing left," he said. "Currently we need money so that we can buy our necessities — clothes, mattresses, equipment. We also need flour and rice."

Aid is starting to flow

'Courage and resilience'
Ramiz Alakbarov, the UN's top official in Afghanistan, praised Afghans for their resilience and courage after touring

the area Saturday.

"What signs of resolve in face of this adversity — I would say endless adversity," he told AFP. "Endless difficulties, endless tragedy, and yet these people are so gracious, so strong. And they are willing to overcome, and they are coming together as a community and as a society."

Delivering aid has been made more difficult because the quake struck areas already suffering the effects of heavy rain, causing rockfalls and mudslides that wiped out hamlets perched precariously



GAYAN: Afghan men talk amongst themselves as they look for their belongings amid the ruins of damaged houses after an earthquake in Gayan district, Paktika province. —AFP

on mountain slopes. Communications have also been hit with mobile phone towers and power lines toppled.

Officials say nearly 10,000 houses were destroyed, an alarming number in an area where the average household size is more than 20 people.

Even before the Taleban takeover, Afghanistan's emergency response teams were stretched to deal with the natural disasters that frequently strike the country.

But with only a handful of airworthy planes and helicopters left since they returned to power, their response to the latest catastrophe is further limited. Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates. Afghanistan's deadliest recent earthquake killed 5,000 in 1998 in the northeastern provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan. —AFP

Chinese leader Xi to attend Hong Kong handover celebration

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping will attend events to celebrate 25 years since Hong Kong's handover to China, state media reported Saturday, with the Communist Party looking to showcase its control over the city after crushing a democracy movement.

If Xi attends in person, the trip would be his first outside of the Chinese mainland since the pandemic began. But state media and Hong Kong officials did not explicitly say whether he would travel to the city or attend virtually.

A trip would also coincide with the inauguration of Hong Kong's new administration, led by former security chief John Lee. The Chinese Communist Party places great importance on anniversaries, and Hong Kong's handover presents Xi with an opportunity to emphasise China's authority over Hong Kong after three years of political upheaval there.

Hong Kong is at the halfway point of the "One Country, Two Systems" political model, which promised that the former British colony's way of life would remain unchanged for 50 years after its handover. But a national security law imposed after huge and often violent pro-democracy protests in 2019 has seen dissent quashed, with scores of opposition fig-

ures arrested in an ongoing political crackdown.

The new Hong Kong government, to be sworn in on July 1, will be led by Lee, who oversaw the controversial police response to the democracy protests. Lee on Saturday said he was delighted by the news of Xi's attendance and thanked the Chinese leader for his "caring and support" for Hong Kong. "Hong Kong is at the crucial stage of advancing from chaos to governance, and gradually towards prosperity," Lee said in a statement.

COVID concerns

Xi last visited Hong Kong in 2017 to swear in city leader Carrie Lam, a three-day trip marked by heavy public police presence. China's top leaders have attended the swearing-in of every Hong Kong chief executive since the 1997 handover, but Xi has not left the mainland since January 2020, when the coronavirus first emerged from the central Chinese city of Wuhan.

Ongoing virus outbreaks in both mainland China and Hong Kong have prompted doubts over whether Xi would risk travelling, with Beijing committed to a zero-COVID strategy. State news agency Xinhua reported on Saturday that Xi "will attend a meeting celebrating the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to the motherland", but did not specify whether it would be in person. Two top officials in the incoming Hong Kong administration tested positive for the coronavirus on Thursday and had to go into quarantine. Daily case numbers in Hong Kong have climbed to nearly 2,000, though hospitalisations have remained low, with outgoing city leader Lam



China's President Xi Jinping

earlier reassuring the public that the situation was "not an alarm bell". Hong Kong has its own version of zero-Covid, which has kept the international business hub isolated for much of the pandemic, but it is less strict than what is practised in the mainland. The difference in policy means Hong Kongers coming into close contact with Chinese officials will likely be required to undergo quarantine.

Senior government officials have entered a "closed-loop" system to minimise infection risk ahead of their attendance of handover celebration events, according to local media. Last month, Lee was chosen as Hong Kong's leader by a small group of political elites, after being the sole candidate in the race and facing no opposition. —AFP

Cuba jails two dissident artists

HAVANA: A Cuban court has sentenced two artists critical of the communist state to nine and five years in prison, officials said Friday, the latest in a string of heavy penalties doled out to government dissenters.

Rapper Maykel Castillo, 39, better known as Osorbo, was sentenced to nine years, while 34-year-old performance artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara was given five years in prison, the attorney general's office said on Friday.

Alcantara, leader of the San Isidro (MSI) free speech protest movement, was found guilty of "offending the symbols of the homeland, contempt and public disorder," and Castillo of contempt and assault, it said. Both men, considered prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International, have already spent months behind bars. Washington and rights groups have repeatedly called for their liberation. The ruling, Human Rights Watch America's investigator Juan Pappier said on Twitter: "is a sham that openly violates freedom of expression and association. We demand the immediate and unconditional release of Maykel and Luis Manuel."

Alcantara was arrested on July 11 last year when he set out to join thousands of Cubans who took to the streets in unprecedented protests against the government. He has been held in prison ever since, awaiting trial, and his family has said he was in poor health.

Hundreds of people who took part in the July rallies, many chanting "Freedom!" and "We are hungry," have been prosecuted and given sentences of up to 25 years. The charges against Alcantara, named one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people of 2021, all related to events prior to the protests.

Insulting State symbols

Osorbo, for his part, is co-author of the song "Patria y Vida" ("Fatherland and Life"—a play on Fidel Castro's "Fatherland or Death" slogan) which has become a refrain for protesters and government critics, but has angered the authorities.

The Latin Grammy winner has been in prison for over a year, charged for participating in another, smaller protest in Havana. Prosecutors had asked for prison terms of seven and 10 years for the pair.

They were tried with three other people behind closed doors at the end of May. This was not the men's first brush with the authorities. To protest a decree governing the work of artists in 2018, Alcantara sought to cover himself in human excrement outside parliament, but was arrested before the work was complete. Once, he wore the Cuban flag over his shoulders for a month and was sued for insulting State symbols.

Last year, he spent almost a month in hospital following an eight-day hunger strike after authorities seized several of his works when he was arrested during a demonstration. He was freed but rearrested several more times for trying to leave his home, which had been surrounded by police who cut off his internet service and kept visitors away.

The Cuban government accuses Alcantara of fomenting a political revolt funded by the United States, which has had sanctions in place against Cuba for six decades. Osorbo's "Patria y Vida" angered authorities with its rebellious message, denounced by the state-controlled Cuban press as an attempt at "gross political interference. Lyrics include "It is over" and "We are not afraid," with images of poverty and police violence on the music video. A photo of Osorbo, a handcuffed fist raised in resistance after he escaped a previous attempt to arrest him, has become a symbol of protest on the island. —AFP

Padma multipurpose bridge: A symbol of pride and dignity of Bangladesh

DHAKA: It is no more a dream; it is now a reality. It is a symbol of pride and dignity of Bangladesh. It is a symbol of courage of the Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina as she has made it happen overcoming multiple challenges and obstructions, including local and international conspiracies. Yes, the Padma Bridge is the epitome of Sheikh Hasina's visionary and bold leadership.

To turn a dream into reality, one needs determination, dedication and boldness. Sheikh Hasina has all these qualities as a great statesman. Bangladesh is moving forward at an irresistible speed under her dynamic leadership. When it comes to the Padma Bridge issue, we cannot but mention that the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman first thought about constructing a bridge over the mighty Padma River.

The double deck multipurpose, four-lane road cum single-track rail bridge of 6.15 km long, with separate rail and road viaducts in both ends, having an approach road of 13.6 km has constructed over the mighty river Padma to connect south-western part of the country with the capital Dhaka. Now the Padma Bridge is the longest bridge in south Asia of its kind.

Length of the Padma Bridge is 6,150 km and width is 18.18 meter. Total span 41 and each span is 150 meter long.

The Padma Multipurpose Bridge has made three world records. The first is about the piling of the bridge. Steel piles have been placed at a maximum depth of 122 meters under the pillars of the Padma Bridge. These piles have a radius of three meters. No bridge in the world has yet required such deep piling and no thick piles have been laid.



The second record is earthquake bearing-related. The capacity of 'Fractional Pendulum Bearings' on this bridge is 10,000 tons. So far no bridge has been fitted with bearings of such capacity. The Padma Bridge is being built to resist a magnitude 9 earthquake. The third record is related to river governance. Around \$1.10 billion contract has been signed with Chinese contractor Sinohydro Corporation for river management in single contract. Earlier, there has never been such a big tender over river training.

The Padma Bridge, a dream project of Bangladesh, will transform trade and connectivity significantly, ushering a new era of economic development in the country. Apart from the economic aspects, the implementation of the Padma Bridge project with the country's own fund has also proved the capacity of Bangladesh before the world. Padma Bridge will play a pivotal role in the development of Bangladesh. Connectivity of south and west part of the country will get stronger to boost economic activities.

There is no doubt that stronger connectivity is



the prime factor for any sort of development and Padma Bridge will bring a major change in the life and livelihoods of people in around 21 districts.

The Padma Bridge is expected to contribute around 1.3 to 2% to the annual GDP growth, reduce poverty and increase economic activities of the people of the south-western region of Bangladesh. It will benefit about thirty million people across 21 south-western districts of Bangladesh. These districts will be connected with the growth centres through better connectivity.

Just as the headline reads, the brand new bridge over the mighty Padma River is now one of the greatest symbols of the nation's pride. Let us not calculate the construction cost of the longest bridge of Bangladesh in terms of any currency as no amount of money can actually measure the value of this landmark achievement of the country.

The Padma Bridge which marks the biggest milestone on the road to Bangladesh's economic development was the most challenging construction project in the history of the nation.

—Bangladesh Embassy

SUNDAY, JUNE 26, 2022

Business

Ryanair, Brussels Airlines strikes disrupt air travel

Strikes add more headaches to passengers, aviation sector

MADRID: Strikes by staff at Ryanair and Brussels Airlines over pay and working conditions forced the cancellation of dozens of flights in Europe on Friday as the busy summer travel season gets underway. The strikes are adding more headaches to passengers and the aviation sector, which has struggled with staff shortages as it struggles to recruit people after massive layoffs during the COVID pandemic.

Ryanair cabin crew unions in Spain, Portugal and Belgium called a three-day strike starting on Friday, and in Italy and France on Saturday. The biggest impact was felt in Belgium, where the work stoppage led Europe's biggest budget airline to cancel 127 flights to and from Charleroi airport near Brussels between Friday and Sunday. Ryanair could only guarantee 30-40 percent of its scheduled flights at the airport, said a spokeswoman for Brussels South Charleroi Airport.

The situation in Belgium was further complicated by a three-day strike by staff at Brussels Airlines, a unit of German airline Lufthansa, which began on Thursday. The company has cancelled 315 flights to and from Brussels' international airport during the three-day strike. The Ryanair strike had very little impact in Portugal and none in Spain where no flights were cancelled.

"We didn't even know there was a strike...we didn't have any problem at all," said Manuel Carrion, a Spanish passenger with a Ryanair flight at Madrid airport. Spain's transport ministry on Thursday ordered Ryanair to operate 73 percent to 82 percent of flights over the strike period to maintain minimum services. It argued there needs to be a balance between the "right to strike" and the "interest of travellers".

'Threats'

But unions said Ryanair had gone beyond what was required and forced staff to maintain all 438 flights scheduled in Spain on Friday. "The company informed staff that all flights were subject to the minimum service, and threatened them with disciplinary action," Ernesto Iglesias of local USO told reporters at Madrid airport. The airline was not "respecting the law," he added. Ryanair cabin crew unions in Spain have called



MADRID: Passengers stand near the Ryanair check-in counters during a strike at Adolfo Suarez Madrid Barajas airport Madrid.— AFP

another strike from June 30 to July 2. A strike on the weekend of June 12 and 13 already prompted the cancellation of about 40 Ryanair flights in France, or about a quarter of the total. Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary has been dismissive of the strikes, saying earlier this month that most of the company's flights "will continue to operate even if there is a strike in Spain by some Mickey Mouse union or if the Belgian cabin crew unions want to go on strike." Less than two percent of the airline's 3,000 flights on Friday have been affected by strikes, Ryanair said in a statement.

'Pushed to the brink'

Ryanair's low-cost rival easyJet also faces nine days of strikes on different days in July at the Barcelona, Malaga and Palma de Mallorca airports. British Airways workers at London's Heathrow airport have voted to strike over pay as the cost-of-living crisis worsens in the UK, though no dates were set yet. The strikes come as air travel has rebounded since COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted. But the staff shortages have forced airlines to cancel flights, with German carrier Lufthansa can-

celling more than 3,000 of them during the summer holidays.

On Monday, the European Transport Workers' Federation called "on passengers not to blame the workers for the disasters in the airports, the cancelled flights, the long queues and longer time for check-ins, and lost luggage or delays caused by decades of corporate greed and a removal of decent jobs in the sector." The Federation said it expects "the chaos the aviation sector is currently facing will only grow over the summer as workers are pushed to the brink."— AFP

Global trade unions

International transport trade unions on Friday urged London to negotiate a swift end to Britain's biggest rail strike in over 30 years, on the eve of the latest walkout. More than 100 unions have written an open letter to UK Transport Secretary Grant Shapps calling on him to help settle the bitter row over pay, as surging inflation sparks growing industrial unrest. The letter, coordinated by the International Transport Workers' Federation, comes one day before the third of this week's three rail strikes.

"We are writing to call on you to meet with the transport unions to discuss rail workers' concerns and enable the unions to reach a negotiated settlement to the disputes with rail employers," the letter read. And it called upon the government to "defend rail workers' jobs, pay, conditions and pensions". Shapps has so far refused to get involved in negotiations, arguing that they should be held between workers' trade unions, Network Rail and private-sector railway operating firms. The letter was signed by unions from across the world, including Asia, Europe, South America and the Middle East.

"We are shocked that ... the UK government is set to impose cuts to railway services and scrap infrastructure projects at exactly the time when it should be investing, expanding and promoting public transport, especially the railways to help reduce global emissions from transport," the letter continued. "We call on you to do what's right by these workers and their communities, and call on you to meet urgently with the transport unions."

The RMT rail union insists strikes are necessary as wages have failed to keep pace with UK inflation, which has hit a 40-year high and is on course to keep rising. The RMT also accuses Shapps of having "wrecked" negotiations by not allowing Network Rail to withdraw a letter threatening redundancies of 2,900 RMT members. However, Shapps has called that "a total lie". Rail staff went on strike on Tuesday and Thursday-and are also set to do so on Saturday in the absence of a deal.— AFP

UK hit by 3rd rail strike in a week

LONDON: Britain's railway system once again came to a virtual standstill on Saturday as union workers staged their third walkout of the week in strike action billed as the biggest in decades. Tens of thousands of rail workers staged the latest day-long walkout over pay and job security, hampering weekend plans for those already hit by strikes on Tuesday and Thursday.

Only around a fifth of services are set to operate on heavily reduced hours, with those still running starting much later in the morning than usual and set to end as early as 6:30 pm. The RMT rail union insists this week's actions are necessary as wages have failed to keep pace with UK inflation, which has hit a 40-year high and is on course to keep rising. It also wants a threat of compulsory redundancies withdrawn. RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said its members are "standing up for all working people trying to get a pay rise and some job security". "In a modern economy, workers need to be properly rewarded for their work, enjoy good conditions and have the peace of mind that their job will not be taken away from them," he added. With Britain suffering from rocketing inflation and stagnant economic growth, the industrial action-which could be mirrored by workers in other sectors over the summer-has echoes of the 1970s.

Then, the country was crippled by a wave of strikes across various industries while struggling with rampant price rises and non-existent growth, a toxic combination known as stagflation. Network Rail chief executive Andrew Haines said: "Unfortunately, the RMT's decision to carry out another day of needless and premature strike action means our passengers will suffer again on Saturday. "A fraction of trains will run compared to a usual Saturday service, with trains starting later in the morning and finishing much earlier in the evening."



KENT: Paddock Wood Station remains closed in Kent, southeastern England as the biggest rail strike in over 30 years hits the UK.— AFP



MALA ROHAN: Photo shows cows in the farm of the 62-year-old owner Lyubov Zlobina, in the village of Mala Rohan, near Kharkiv, amid Russian invasion of Ukraine.— AFP

Ukraine farm animals burned alive in Russia bombing

MALA ROGAN: At a farm in northern Ukraine, a spooked-looking heifer has been limping since one of her hind legs was shredded by shrapnel in a Russian attack that has been mirrored on farms across the country since the war began. The four-month-old survived bombardments that killed around a third of animals on the meat and dairy facility in Mala Rogan, a village around 25 kilometers south of Ukraine's second city Kharkiv. It was a "nightmare" recalls owner Lyubov Zlobina, 62, who says she is "haunted by the howls of cows burned alive" during the attacks on March 26.

"I cling on to this little miracle," she said, referring to the injured heifer, the distant thuds of shelling echoing in the background. "I gave her antibiotics twice but sadly the wound is still oozing and she isn't putting on weight," she added. "If we could take out the shard, maybe she would recover. For surgery, we'd have to take her very far away and we can't," said Zlobina visibly upset. In the first weeks of the war, Mala Rogan was captured by Russian forces. They have since been beat back, leaving behind a battle-scarred hellscape.

Zlobina's husband, who served in the Soviet army in Afghanistan, showed AFP journalists several videos taken during the attacks. "We were running in every direction out of the shed," Mykolai Zlobin, 57, recalled, describing how hay in the shed burst into flames. A cow that was giving birth had its head severed. They had to knock down a segment of wall with a tractor to get the

trapped cows out, all while explosions were falling around the panicked herd.

"I tried to save a few piglets but their mothers were protecting them under their bellies," said Zlobina. The hens, she said, clucked and pecked through the attack as if nothing was happening. Yulia Koval, a 38-year-old farm employee said part of a roof fell in while she was trying to hurry calves from a farm building. "We could have not done it because everything around was falling apart. But we didn't have time to think it over, she says. We just wanted to save them, that's all." Animals with serious injuries have since had to be put down.

'Attacking the cattle'

The shed now is a burnt out, rusted skeleton. Animals graze and mull about in fields surrounding the farm, which, unlike much farmland in eastern Ukraine does not appear to have been mined. For the youngest and most vulnerable animals, a hastily-constructed shelter offers some protection but a more robust alternative will have be found for the winter. Farms and agricultural land across Ukraine have been devastated by the war. Local media routinely report huge losses caused by Russian shelling. Government figures suggest that 15 percent of the country's livestock have been killed since Russia invaded on February 24. The NGO Open Cages Ukraine said in a June report that it expects the number of farm animals killed during the conflict to be around 300,000 by the year's end.

Also roaming the two-hectare farm in Mala Rogan are exhausted and starving stray dogs, abandoned by their owners who fled Russia's advance to towns and cities in eastern Ukraine. "Look at this injured ewe with her three lambs," Zlobina says, pointing at her as she tries to hide. "She was attacked not even 24 hours ago." "At first, the dogs ate the bodies of abandoned Russian soldiers and we sometimes found a foot or a hand on our land. Now they are attacking the cattle," she said.— AFP

Business

No miracle gas price fix as big Oil US govt meet

High prices weigh on consumers, damaging Biden's rating

WASHINGTON: Biden administration officials and oil industry executives huddled in Washington to discuss potential steps to address runaway gasoline prices, and while both sides called the talks constructive, no concrete plans for relief emerged. High prices at the pump are weighing on American consumers - and damaging President Joe Biden's approval rating. Heading into the gathering, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said she hoped the meeting would result in refiners boosting gasoline supplies to lower prices for the summer vacation driving season.

Afterwards, the Energy Department said the talks had had a "productive focus on dissecting the current global problems of supply and refining," and promised "ongoing dialogue" to "alleviate the current supply and price challenges." Similarly, the American Petroleum Institute and American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers called the meeting a "constructive discussion about ways to address rising energy costs and create more certainty for global energy markets."

Chevron, Phillips 66 and Shell all released upbeat statements, with Shell US President Gretchen Watkins praising Granholm for setting a "collaborative tone" by noting that Shell and others had shifted some refining capacity to produce biofuels. But no practical steps to immediately boost supply were revealed. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called the gathering a "first step." "Clearly we want to come up with solutions," Jean-Pierre told a press briefing. "There's going to be other steps to get there."

Uneasy ties

Biden and the oil industry have an uneasy relation-

ship, in part over the White House's efforts to restrict drilling in some federal areas due to environmental concerns, and decisions like canceling the Keystone pipeline project on his first day in office. The US president has also blasted industry leaders in recent days over skyrocketing profits and their reluctance to boost capital spending. Industry leaders released a letter to Biden ahead of Thursday's meeting that alluded to his upcoming trip to Saudi Arabia, urging him to visit US refineries and other industry sites to understand the potential for "American-made energy solutions." But with Biden's approval ratings plunging due to soaring inflation, the president has turned to the industry for relief.

Short-term solutions?

Gasoline prices currently stand at \$4.94 a gallon, a bit below all-time highs, but up more than 60 percent from the year-ago level. In a letter earlier this month to oil giants, Biden said high fuel prices were a key factor in the "intense financial pain the American people and their families are bearing." He urged ExxonMobil, Chevron and other industry players to "provide concrete, near-term solutions that address the crisis."

In response, Chevron Chief Executive Mike Wirth pledged to work with the administration, but faulted Biden's comments that "at times vilify" the industry - drawing a Biden quip that Wirth was being "mildly sensitive." The price surge follows Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which exacerbated an already tight energy supply situation, sending crude oil prices sharply higher. The rise in prices also reflects the diminished state of refining capacity after the industry mothballed some plants during COVID-19 lockdowns, and did not reopen them amid uncertain long-term growth

the equivalent period of 2021. One small plant near Piacenza, southeast of Milan, was shut indefinitely on June 21 due to low levels on the River Po that feeds it, the Enel energy company said.

"Considering the current drought situation, other hydro plants are not operating at full capacity," a spokesman added, without giving further details. The Po River is Italy's largest reservoir of fresh water. Much of it used by farmers, but is suffering its worst drought for 70 years. Italy's largest agricultural association, Coldiretti, said the drought is putting over 30 percent of national agricultural production and half of livestock farming in the Po Valley at risk.

On Friday, the northern region of Lombardy called a state of emergency due to the drought, that recommends, among other measures, less water use by consumers and directs mayors to curtail non-essential water use, such as street washing and watering parks and sportsgrounds. Further to the west in Piedmont, water is being rationed in more than 200 municipalities, according to the ANSA news agency. The Maggiore and Garda lakes are both far lower than usual for this time of year, while further south, the level of the River Tiber that runs through Rome has also dropped.— AFP



MONTEREY PARK: Cars pull in to fill their tanks at an Arco gas station displaying the price per gallon at over \$6 in Monterey Park, California. — AFP

prospects with the buildup of electric vehicles.

Biden's policy thus far has centered on a huge increase in crude oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. On Wednesday, the US president proposed a temporary fuel tax break, a measure that received a lukewarm reception on Capitol Hill. For energy specialist Andrew Lebow of the Commodity Research Group consultancy, "there is very little refiners can do at this point." "If they could produce more, certainly they would be given that the margins are incredible," he said.

Germany facing 'difficult decisions' in gas shortage

FRANKFURT: Germany would be confronted with "difficult societal decisions" in the event of a gas shortage, its economy minister said Friday, as Russian supplies of the fuel dwindle. "When there is not enough gas some industries that need gas will have to be turned off," Economy Minister Robert Habeck told magazine Der Spiegel. On Thursday, Habeck raised the alert level under Germany's emergency gas plan after supplies of gas from Russia were slashed, bringing Europe's economy one step closer to rationing.

Russian energy giant Gazprom last week reduced deliveries via the Nord Stream pipeline to Germany by 60 percent, attributing the move to a delayed repair. Germany has dismissed the gas company's technical justification, seeing a "political" motive behind the decision: retaliation for the West's support for Ukraine following Moscow's invasion. The reduction in supplies has put Germany in a position it had never been before, Habeck said, with both German industries and households both reliant on energy imports to meet their needs.

Without enough gas, Germany would "have to make

On Wednesday, Granholm acknowledged that building new refineries could not be done overnight, but said the administration wanted answers about plants that had been taken offline. She also wanted to talk about supply chain issues, questioning if the industry could help on that front. Kevin Book, head of research at Clearview Energy Partners, said there were areas where the government could provide aid, such as facilitating procurement of truck drivers and sand for fracking. Adopting a broadly constructive tone on regulation could also boost investment, he said.— AFP

difficult societal decisions", Habeck said, adding that there were "no good decisions only less wrong ones". The consequences for some sectors could be "catastrophic" with the effects felt for "a long time", the minister said. Germany has mandated for its gas storage facilities to be 90 percent full by the beginning of December. But projections put forward by Habeck's ministry on Thursday showed the target was unlikely to be met if gas flows continued at their new lower level.

In response to the supply squeeze, Germany has reactivated mothballed coal power plants to take the burden off gas. Habeck, a member of the German Green party, called the coal restart "painful". The "half step back" meant Germany would need to make "bigger steps" forward in future to wean itself off fossil fuels and onto renewables, he said. The government has also encouraged energy savings among private households and industry to mitigate the impact of potential shortages.

Germany's 41 million households turning their heating down in winter a little would make a big difference, Habeck said, while warning that not everyone would be able to save more. Under European rules, a gas rationing plan would see households prioritized over industry, a situation not designed for long-term shortages, he said. "Our goal is not to let anyone go to the dogs," Habeck said, but warned a "difficult winter" could mean "companies must stop production, workers lose their jobs" and "people become poorer".— AFP

Slovakia, where Mondelez also produces Milka and Suchard chocolates, "will unlock significant capacity" at the Bern site, which will eventually allow it to "manufacture millions of additional bars," Mondelez said.

Seven billion bars

But the new plant in Bratislava means they will have to change the labeling. "For legal reasons, the changes we are bringing to our production require us to adjust our packaging to comply with Swiss law, in particular to remove the word 'Switzerland' from the front of the packaging," the company said. Swiss newspaper Le Temps added Toblerone to a list of emblematic products no longer exclusively produced in Switzerland, including Sugus sweets, Milka chocolate and Ovaltine. Toblerone produces seven billion chocolate bars a year, with 97 percent exported to 120 countries.

They are ubiquitous at airport duty-free shops around the world, where one bar is sold every two seconds, according to Mondelez. "For the export, I would not assume that this plays a role, at least for its current customers," said Tobias Schalger, professor of marketing at Lausanne University. "Some like Toblerone for its taste, some for its form, some for its packaging-and some as it is Swiss. This may have an impact, but I assume this impact will be fairly small and not long-lasting." The name is a play on words from Tobler and "torrone"-the Italian name for honey-almond nougat.— AFP

Toblerone chocolate to be made outside Swiss homeland

ZURICH: Toblerone will have to drop "of Switzerland" from its packaging as the world-famous mountain-shaped chocolate will no longer be exclusively produced in its home country from 2023. Established in 1908 in the Tobler family factory, the instantly-recognizable triangular chocolate is produced exclusively in Bern, the Alpine nation's capital. But the brand's owner, US food giant Mondelez International, said Toblerone will open a new production line in Slovakia by the end of 2023 "to respond to the growing demand". The move proved hard to swallow for some in Switzerland, unhappy to see a cherished national icon going abroad-especially one which features the famous pyramid-shaped Matterhorn mountain on its packaging and the bear of Bern, symbol of the city.

Mondelez International told AFP in an emailed statement that it was continuing to invest in the Bern plant, "the homeland of Toblerone". "Bern is an important part of our history and will continue to be so in the future," it said. The launch of a production line in

Drought hits Italy's hydroelectric plants

ROME: Hydroelectric power in Italy has plunged this year thanks to a drought that has also sparked water restrictions and fears for agriculture, industry sources said Friday. Hydropower facilities, mostly located in the mountains in the country's north, provide almost one fifth of Italy's energy demands.

But the lack of rain is causing problems, at a time when Rome is desperately trying to wean itself off its dependence on Russian gas due to the war in Ukraine. "From January to May 2022, hydro production fell by about 40 percent compared to the corresponding period in 2021," a spokesman for Utilitalia, a federation of water companies, told AFP.

"Hydro production has been steadily decreasing since July 2021," he said, blaming "the severe shortage of water even at high levels". An industry source told AFP that while the situation was constantly changing, estimates for the first six months of 2022 suggest nationwide hydroelectric generation will be almost half



Enjoy new experiences on the Road with Nissan 2022 Patrol NISMO

KUWAIT: As part of the summer celebrations, Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babbain Company (AABC), the authorized dealer of Nissan vehicles, is offering its fans the ultimate deal on its latest high-performance, luxury SUV in Kuwait - 2022 Patrol NISMO. Catering to Kuwait's appeal for performance and prestige on the road, the new 2022 Nissan Patrol NISMO is a race-inspired version of the legendary Patrol combining a bold exterior design and a technologically advanced interior to offer customers the refinement of a luxury SUV with the thrill of a sports car.

Nissan Al Babbain is offering its 2022 Patrol NISMO owners a grand luxury package that comprises of a 2-year comprehensive insurance, 5-year service or 100,000 KM, 5-year warranty, and 5-year roadside assistance alongside free premium services such as window tinting and full body protection. The distinctive design of the 2022 Patrol NISMO reinforces the build of the Patrol V8, with a honeycomb three-dimensional mesh that, along with the new Nissan logo and iconic NISMO emblem, emphasizes the signature V-motion grille to create an imposing presence on the road. It also includes LED rear fog lights inspired by the Formula 1 cars, emitting the same brightness as the

car's brake lights in adverse conditions.

The interiors of the Patrol NISMO's come with premium quality seats with crafted quilting, together with a black Alcantara steering wheel, and is balanced with a redesigned center console, which now features an all-new 12.3-inch infotainment screen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity, as well as an ergonomically-designed Intelligent Driving dial in addition to the latest Nissan Intelligent Mobility (NIM) technologies including Intelligent Emergency Braking with Pedestrian Detection, Intelligent Forward Collision Warning, Smart Rear-View Mirror and High Beam Assist.

The Patrol NISMO's V8 engine is tuned to flawlessness by Nissan's Takumi craftsmen, a group of five master engine builders allowed to hand-build the Nissan GT-R engines - resulting in a concentrated 428hp and a peak torque of 560NM.

Honouring Patrol's legacy of conquering every terrain while delivering a thrilling driving performance that is synonymous with the NISMO brand, Nissan Al Babbain invites customers to visit its showrooms located in Al Rai, Ahmadi, and Jahra to explore the coveted SUV combined with the peace of mind offer.



ZERMATT: A tourist poses while holding a Swiss chocolate bar of the brand Toblerone, owned by US food giant Mondelez International at the Gornergrat, with the Matterhorn mountain in background, 3,089 meter height above the resort of Zermatt.— AFP

Business

India delivers medicine and food to bankrupt Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka banks on ‘Casino King’ to woo investors

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka accepted a rice and pharmaceuticals shipment from neighboring India as the island nation battles an unprecedented economic crisis that has left supermarket shelves and pharmacy cabinets empty. A critical shortage of foreign currency has left Sri Lanka unable to pay for enough imported food, fuel and medicines to meet demand since the end of last year, causing widespread hardship.

Its 22 million people have also been forced to endure prolonged daily blackouts and galloping inflation that has strained household budgets. India has extended \$1.5 billion in credit lines to allow Sri Lanka to keep meeting a portion of its food and energy needs, and Friday's shipment followed a visit by Indian experts for aid talks. "Both parties discussed at length the future course of action of the Indian aid program to stabilize and revive the Sri Lankan economy," Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office said after the meeting. An acute lack of petrol has immobilized Sri Lanka this week, with parliament cancelling two days of sittings to help conserve fuel.

‘Casino King’

The United Nations last week appealed for emergency food aid after a survey showed that four out of five Sri Lankans were skipping meals to cope with the crisis. A US Treasury delegation is expected in the capital Colombo next week to assess the crisis, with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe telling lawmakers Wednesday that the nation's economy had reached the point of "complete collapse". Sri Lanka has already defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt and is in bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund, which could take months.

In another development, cash-strapped Sri

Lanka's president Friday appointed the island's biggest casino operator Dhammika Perera as Investment minister with responsibility over a Chinese-funded tax-free enclave in the impoverished South Asian nation. The 54-year-old businessman known as Sri Lanka's "Casino King" was sworn in by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa at his sea-front residence to attract foreign capital into the country, his office said.

Perera replaced Rajapaksa's youngest brother Basil who resigned from parliament two weeks ago as the ruling clan came under intense pressure to step down over economic mismanagement. The president has refused to step down and instead appointed opposition legislator Ranil Wickremesinghe as the new prime minister last month to salvage the economy. The president's office said Perera's investment ministry will have responsibilities over the \$1.4 billion "Port City" land reclamation project which has been turned into a tax-free enclave in Colombo.

The United States has expressed fears that the Port City could be "a haven for money launderers and other sorts of nefarious actors." Western countries, as well as regional power India, have long expressed concern over growing Chinese influence in strategically placed Sri Lanka. Perera will be in a cabinet with premier Wickremesinghe, who in 2015 described the Casino King as one of four top corrupt businessmen in the country supporting the Rajapaksa clan.

Perera himself has publicly pledged his admiration and loyalty to Mahinda Rajapaksa, who stepped down as prime minister on May 9 after nation-wide violent protests over shortages of essentials, including fuel. Sri Lanka is facing its worst economic crisis with the 22 million people enduring acute shortages



PUGODA: Motorists queue along a street to buy fuel at a Ceylon petroleum corporation fuel station in Pugoda, some 50 km from Colombo. —AFP

of food, fuel and medicines for months as the government ran out of dollars to finance even the most essential imports.

Perera has claimed on his website that he has a plan to raise Sri Lanka's GDP per capita income more than threefold from its current \$3,682 to \$12,000. He has said he will raise \$5.0 billion in

foreign currency deposits by selling 10-year resident visas to some 50,000 foreigners willing to deposit \$100,000 in a local bank account, a scheme already in place since April. The country defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt in April and is in talks with the International Monetary Fund for a possible bailout. —AFP

US consumer confidence plunges to a historic low

WASHINGTON: Surging US inflation has eroded consumer confidence, sending a closely-watched measure of how Americans feel about the economy to a record low, according to a survey released Friday. The University of Michigan's consumer sentiment index fell to 50 in June, the lowest in the 45-year history of the survey, a more than eight-point drop from May and more than 41 percent below last year's level.

Strong consumer demand has undergirded the robust recovery in the world's largest economy from the COVID-19 downturn, but families are now feeling squeezed by painful price increases for housing, gasoline and food, worsened by the fallout from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. +ACI-Inflation continued to be of paramount concern to consumers, +ACI-survey director Joanne Hsu said in a statement. She noted that the final survey data showed +ACI-47 percent of consumers blamed inflation for eroding their living standards, just one point shy of the all-time high last reached during the Great Recession. +ACI-

The Federal Reserve last week implemented the biggest interest rate increase in nearly 30 years, a 0.75 percentage point hike, in its ongoing effort to douse inflation pressures. But that had little impact on the consumer outlook for prices, and Hsu said the median inflation expectation remains at 5.3 percent, little changed from recent months.

The Fed is hoping the aggressive rate hikes will reassure consumers and businesses that the pace price increases will trend downward, but economists note the risk they will fall short. Rising prices for energy and food +ACI-will continue to threaten a deanchoring of long-term inflation expectations, +ACI-said Mahir Rasheed of Oxford Economics. And a +ACI-further uptick in expectations could trigger an even more aggressive tightening campaign from the Fed, restraining growth and weighing on sentiment. +ACI- There are growing fears that the Fed's rate hikes could trigger a recession.

New home sales

Meanwhile, American home buyers snapped up new single-family houses at a rapid rate in May after a decline in the prior month, even as prices continued to rise, the government reported Friday. New home sales jumped 10.7 percent to an annual rate of 696,000, seasonally adjusted, recovering most of the sharp retreat in April, the Commerce Department reported.

The results were far stronger than the consensus among economists, who expected to see another decline. The sale pace was 5.9 percent slower than May 2021. Mortgage rates have been climbing sharply in recent months as the Federal Reserve cranks up interest rates in its battle against surging inflation. Central bankers hope the aggressive moves will cool overheated demand throughout the economy, including the housing market, where builders have struggled to keep up amid supply snarls and a labor shortage.

Those factors have contributed to the steady climb in home prices, the median cost of a new home rising to +ACQ-449,000 from +ACQ-454,700 in April. However, the sales data can be volatile and subject to big revisions, an issue that Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics stressed. +ACI-These data are wild - the margin of error in the May print is gigantic, 18.9 percent - and we were always suspicious of the reported extent of the April plunge, which has now been revised up, +ACI- he said in an analysis. +ACI-But the May bounce does not change the big picture at all+ADs- the housing market is rolling over, and sales will fall sharply over the next few months. +ACI. —AFP

US recession would be ‘necessary price’ to defeat inflation

WASHINGTON: With inflation rising sharply, and the Federal Reserve raising interest rates, the United States is facing an increased risk of a downturn, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said Friday. But any temporary pain caused by a recession would be "a necessary price to pay" to defeat damaging inflation, she said. The Washington-based crisis lender again slashed its US growth forecast to 2.9 percent, from the 3.7 percent forecast in April, which was cut from the rate predicted at the start of the year.

The world's largest economy rebounded strongly from the pandemic downturn, but that has come with "unwelcome side effects" of rising prices, Georgieva said. While the IMF is confident the Fed's rate hikes will bring down inflation, "We are conscious that there is a narrowing path to avoiding a recession," she said in a statement.

The Fed last week implemented the biggest increase in its benchmark lending rate in nearly 30 years, as part of its aggressive effort to quell inflation that is at a four-decade high and squeezing American families struggling with rising prices for gasoline, food and housing. The US economy already was seeing strong demand clashing with supply snarls due to pandemic lockdowns in China and elsewhere, when Russia invaded Ukraine, which has intensified the inflationary pressures.

Africa economies see reasons for optimism despite crises

ABIDJAN: From COVID-19 to the war in Ukraine, external crises have put pressure on African economies, but many on the continent see opportunities to undertake radical reforms. Africa already showed some resilience during the pandemic as its economic contraction was less severe than in the rest of the world, shrinking by two percent compared to 3.3 percent globally in 2020.

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine is weighing on the world economy, Africa faces a better outlook again in 2022. "Africa is headed towards growth of around 3.7 percent, while in North America and Europe there is a real risk of recession", said economist Lionel Zinsou, formerly prime minister of Benin. "We haven't been the biggest victims of the pandemic, and we won't be the biggest victims of the collateral consequences of the war in Ukraine", added Zinsou. The conflict in Europe has fuelled a surge in global inflation, but Zinsou said growing prices for raw materials will compensate for the higher costs of imports in Africa. Another positive signal is that investor confidence in Africa is up to a higher level than that before the pandemic. Of 190 business owners in Africa who were questioned, 78 percent voiced confidence about their development prospects — compared to 61 percent before the Covid crisis, according to a report by the Deloitte accountancy firm.

‘Opportunity to transform’

The fallout from the war in Ukraine, however, remains a threat as it has driven up prices for wheat and other key agricultural products, sparking fears of famine in some countries. "We are concerned about the slowdown in global growth and the availability for Africa of certain products such as wheat or fertilizers", Ivory Coast President Alassane Ouattara said during the Africa CEO Forum in Abidjan this month.

Makhtar Diop, general director of the International

For 2023, growth is expected to slow to 1.7 percent, but "narrowly avoid" a recession, according to the annual review of the US economy, known as the Article IV consultation. The IMF chief said the battle against inflation must be the "top priority" despite the impact a US slowdown might have on the global economy. "Success over time will be beneficial for global growth, but some pain to get to that success can be a necessary price to pay," she said in response to a question from AFP.

Georgieva met with US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Fed Chair Jerome Powell and the officials "left no doubt as to their commitment to bring inflation back down." Nigel Chalk, deputy chief of the IMF's Western Hemisphere division, said any US recession is likely to be short-lived, given the stockpile of savings and strong business and household balance sheets, and the strong labor market. "All of those things would help support the economy," he said. "So if it was hit by negative shock, it should pass relatively quickly and have a relatively quick recovery afterwards."

Roll back tariffs

The IMF also urged Washington to remove punitive trade duties imposed under former president Donald Trump-something President Joe Biden said he is considering and Yellen appears to favor. "Especially at a time when inflation is high and supply chains are strained... we can see clear benefits in rolling back the tariffs that were introduced over the last 5 years," Georgieva said in a statement.

However, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai has said the steep tariffs on China offer negotiating "leverage" with Beijing which she is reluctant to give



ABIDJAN: Wheat is offloaded from a vessel moored at the port of Abidjan on June 24, 2022. —AFP

Finance Corporation (IFC), a branch of the World Bank, said African economies "have taken a hit and haven't regained their pre-2019 growth rates". "The situation remains particularly difficult with inflation which disproportionately affects the poorest populations," he added. But some see the situation as a chance for African countries to map out new strategies. "We lose a good part of our crops each year due to lack of electricity and cold chain," said Zinsou, referring to the transport of goods that need to be kept cool across the supply chain.

These losses could be reduced through infrastructure investment, he added. For Diop, "every crisis is an opportunity to transform the situation structurally. There is potential for the economic transformation of African countries by increasing the added value created on the continent." Some countries have stepped up the pace in recent years. Ivory Coast has built new cashew processing plants, while Nigeria is building a major oil refinery in Lagos. In Guinea, foreign companies have recently been tasked with building bauxite processing plants. "One of the consequences of the pandemic is that many groups wanted to depend less on foreign imports," said Emmanuel Gadret, head of Deloitte in francophone Africa. Georges Wega, deputy director of international banking networks for the Africa region at France's Societe Generale financial group, believes that Africa has "a lot of potential" to finance its essential projects. —AFP



VIRGINIA BEACH: An employee carries a mop in a hotel in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The US economy remains strong but a series of aggressive rate hikes meant to cool soaring inflation could eventually trigger a recession. —AFP

up. The IMF report said removing tariffs on steel, aluminum, and a range of products from China "would support growth and help reduce inflation." The rapid US recovery, helped by low interest rates and hefty government aid, had domestic benefits, reducing poverty and creating more than 8.5 million jobs since the end of 2020, according to the IMF analysis.

It also offered a boost to the pandemic-ravaged global economy, but fund economists cautioned that it will be "tricky" to avoid recession. "The stakes are clearly high. Misjudging the policy mix-in either direction-will result in sizable economic costs at home and negative outward spillovers to the global economy." However, the report pushed back against comparisons to the inflationary era of the 1980s, noting the economy and the central bank actions are "markedly different." —AFP

Stocks and oil rally as rate-hike worries ebb

NEW YORK: Global stock markets and oil prices jumped higher on Friday following recent heavy losses as the weakening economic outlook moderates expectations about central bank monetary tightening. With a spate of data pointing to an economic slowdown, market watchers said investors now believe central banks may need to deal out less punishing interest rate hikes, and thus the pushing of equity markets into bear market territory may have been an overreach.

The broad-based S&P 500 added 3.1 percent to stand at 3,911.74 at the end of Friday's session, up almost 6.5 percent for the week in one of the best seven-day stretches in an otherwise downcast 2022. Earlier, London stocks rallied 2.7 percent with investors brushing aside news of bruising defeats for Britain's ruling Conservatives in by-elections on Thursday. The pound firmed against the dollar, despite data showing a drop in UK retail sales volumes as inflation soars.

Paris stocks jumped 3.2 percent in eurozone trade, while Frankfurt rose 1.6 percent with gains tempered by news of the worsening German business climate. "Stock markets are taking a breather after being beat up... as recession fears took their toll." OANDA trading platform analyst Craig Erlam told AFP. But he warned that stock markets remain "vulnerable to another onslaught if the news does not improve".

Asian stock markets closed higher after Thursday's gains on Wall Street. The recoveries come after global markets have been thrown into turmoil for months owing to soaring inflation, interest-rate hikes, the Ukraine war and China lockdowns. US equity markets tumbled into bear market territory-a drop of more than 20 percent from recent highs-as the US Federal Reserve began to aggressively raise interest rates. Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell this week told lawmakers a recession was "certainly a possibility". —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



This undated photo handout on June 24, 2022 shows the remains of a land tortoise, unearthed in a shop near Pompeii's Stabian Bath complex at the Archaeological Park of Pompeii.— AFP photos



The remains of an egg of a land tortoise found enshrined in the carapace of a land tortoise.

Tortoise and her egg unearthed at Pompeii ruins

Archaeologists at Pompeii have discovered the remains of a small, pregnant tortoise, who died before Mount Vesuvius erupted in AD79 and destroyed the city. The 14-cm long reptile provides more clues to the final phase of the city, which was being rebuilt after an earthquake in AD62. The pregnant "Testudo hermanni" appears to have buried into a ruined, unused shop as a

safe space to lay her egg but died with her egg still inside her. "The animal's intrusion was not noticed by those in charge of the shop's refurbishment and its remains were covered up unseen," the Pompeii archaeological park said in a statement. Pompeii saw large-scale rebuilding after the powerful quake, which caused major damage. "When many houses were being

rebuilt the whole city was a building site - evidently some spaces were so little utilized that wild animals could move around and enter and try to find a place to lay eggs," said Pompeii's director general, Gabriel Zuchtriegel. The tortoise was found near Pompeii's Stabian Baths complex, which was expanded following the earthquake. The giant eruption of Vesuvius, nearly 2,000

years ago, devastated the ancient city, covering everything in its path with volcanic ash. That sediment helped to preserve many buildings in almost their original state, as well as the curled-up corpses of Vesuvius' victims. Pompeii is Italy's second most visited tourist destination after the Colosseum in Rome. — AFP

Indonesian designer's wheels behind leaders' bamboo bike bromance

As Indonesian President Joko Widodo led Anthony Albanese around the lush gardens of a presidential palace south of Jakarta earlier this month, he presented the new Australian prime minister with an unusual gift: a bamboo bike. The night before, designer Singgih Susilo Kartono learned it would be the Spedagi model he crafts in a small village on the island of Java that the leaders would ride side-by-side in a unique moment of bicycle diplomacy.



Prime Minister Albanese would tuck his trousers into his socks after the statesmen stripped off their jackets and ties and donned helmets, setting off on the light and environmentally friendly two-wheelers for the symbolic bike ride. The 54-year-old designer told AFP the diplomatic gesture was a "special, magical moment" for him after years spent working on the bike. "It's not about the bike being bought by Jokowi, but the fact that it was used to welcome PM (Albanese)," he said.

When not arming world leaders with new bamboo wheels, Kartono is using his sustainable bike craftsmanship to bring jobs to locals and show Indonesian villagers how they can make use of the environment around them. "I train youths

here who lack skills. We have a system to train unskilled people until they can create quality products," he said. The model, named after the Indonesian words "sepeda" for bicycle and "pagi" for morning, is built by a team of 15 employees at a workshop in Kartono's village in Central Java, where he saddles up for his own bike ride every day. Fast-growing bamboo stalks are cut by his team, coated with preservatives, dried, then laminated before being combined with other parts to assemble the sturdy bike frame. Pound for pound, bamboo is as strong as steel when used in lightweight structures, studies have shown, with a high tensile strength that makes it a worthy and environmentally friendly substitute. A fully assembled Spedagi bamboo bike can take a week of intricate work, fetching up to 15 million rupiah (\$1,000), and some have been sold as far away as Japan, company co-founder Tri Wahyuni told AFP.

Friendship on wheels

The green wheels used by the two leaders were built with more expensive parts, said Kartono, declining to disclose the price of their rides. Widodo, famous at home for gifting bikes to ordinary Indonesians, is a Spedagi fan and bought one personally from Kartono in 2015. Albanese was similarly beaming about the bike, taking it back to Canberra and saying people would see him on the streets riding what might be "the only bamboo bike" in the Australian capital. Both bicycles and bamboo - affordable and plentiful in Indonesia - are closely linked with the archipelago nation's lower classes, something that struck a chord with the two leaders from humble backgrounds. But while the Kartono creation merged two symbols of Indonesian heritage, it is now tied to a blossoming bromance cultivated in the first weeks of Albanese's premiership. "Every time I ride on the bike, I will remember the friendship with President Widodo," he said.—AFP



This picture taken on June 18, 2022 shows Indonesian designer Singgih Susilo Kartono posing with a bamboo bicycle he crafted in Temanggung, Central Java. — AFP



This file photo taken on June 14, 2022 shows an aerial view of Hong Kong's Jumbo Floating Restaurant being towed out of Aberdeen Harbor. — AFP

Mystery deepens over fate of HK's Jumbo Floating Restaurant

Mystery over the fate of Hong Kong's Jumbo Floating Restaurant deepened Friday after its owner stirred confusion over whether the financially struggling tourist attraction had actually sunk while being towed away from the city last week. On Monday Aberdeen Restaurant Enterprises released a statement saying the vessel had capsized on Sunday near the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea after it "encountered adverse conditions" and began to take on water.

"The water depth at the scene is over 1,000 meters, making it extremely difficult to carry out salvage works," it added. On Thursday night, Hong Kong's Marine Department put out a statement saying it had only learnt of the incident from media reports, and had immediately requested a report from the company. The department said the report was delivered on Thursday, saying the restaurant had capsized but that "at present, both Jumbo and the tugboat are still in the waters off Xisha islands", using the Chinese name for the Paracels.

Hours later an AFP journalist was contacted by a spokesman representing the restaurant who said the company had always used the word "capsized" not "sank". Asked directly if the boat had sunk, he said again the statement had said "capsized", and did not explain why it had referred to the depth of the water when mentioning salvage.

The South China Morning Post reported a similar conversation with a spokeswoman for the company, in which they insisted the boat had "capsized", not "sank", but refused to clarify whether it

was still afloat. The newspaper said it had been told by the Marine Department that the company might have breached local regulations if it had not notified the authorities of a sinking incident within 24 hours. Widespread reporting in both local and international media at the beginning of the week that Jumbo had sunk was not contradicted by the company. AFP has requested a formal statement from Aberdeen Restaurant Enterprises on the status of Jumbo, as well as a detailed explanation of what happened. The company previously said marine engineers had been hired to inspect the floating restaurant and install hoardings on the vessel before the trip, and that "all relevant approvals" had been obtained.

Financial woes

The tourist attraction closed in March 2020, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as the final straw after almost a decade of financial woes. Operator Melco International Development said last month the business had not been profitable since 2013 and cumulative losses had exceeded HK\$100 million (\$12.7 million). It was still costing millions in maintenance fees every year and around a dozen businesses and organizations had declined an invitation to take it over at no charge, Melco added.

It announced last month that ahead of its license expiration in June, Jumbo would leave Hong Kong and await a new operator at an undisclosed location. The restaurant set off shortly before noon last Tuesday from the southern Hong Kong Island typhoon shelter where it had sat for nearly half a century. Opened in 1976 by the late casino tycoon Stanley Ho, in its glory days it embodied the height of luxury, reportedly costing more than HK\$30 million to build. Designed like a Chinese imperial palace and once considered a must-see landmark, the restaurant drew visitors from Queen Elizabeth II to Tom Cruise. It also featured in several films - including Steven Soderbergh's "Contagion", about a deadly global pandemic. — AFP

TikTok releases first album of viral hits

Some of the biggest viral hits on TikTok have been given the full orchestral treatment and will get a traditional release on CD and vinyl this summer, the platform announced Friday. The tie-up with Warner Classics is the first time TikTok has ventured into the traditional music market and will see the 18 songs released on streaming platforms as well as in record stores.

Anyone who has spent any significant time on the video streaming platform will recognize songs such as "No Roots" by Alice Merton which has been used on 1.3 million videos. Or pleasant piano ditty "Pieces" by Danilo Stankovic, used by some 3.4 million TikTokers. All have been given a full work-over by Germany's Babelsberg Film Orchestra. "Listening to No Roots in a new musical context is inspiring," Merton said in a statement. "I'm excited about the project and I'm looking forward to seeing how it comes to life."

Some cuts reflect the strange tunes that can blow up on the platform, such as "Monkeys Spinning Monkeys", the upbeat, flute-filled ditty that makes perfect background music for many light-hearted videos (27.1 million and counting). "Wellerman Sea Shanty" harks back to the sea shanty craze that took over TikTok in early 2021 after a Scottish postman, Nathan Evans, recorded himself singing the 19th century folk song.

It spread like wildfire, with Queen's Brian May and veteran composer Andrew Lloyd Webber among those offering their versions of the viral tune. Thirty-second clips of the 18 augmented songs were available for use on TikTok from Friday. Six full-length singles from the album will be released across streaming platforms on July 8, with the full album, "TikTok Classics: Memes and Viral Hits", hitting streamers and shops in August. — AFP

Forever young: Many cold-blooded creatures don't age

Scientists have discovered the secret to eternal youth: Be born a turtle. Two studies published in the journal Science on Thursday revealed scant evidence of ageing among certain cold-blooded species, challenging a theory of evolution which holds that senescence, or gradual physical deterioration over time, is an inescapable fate.

Although there have been eye-catching individual reports - such as that of Jonathan the Seychelles tortoise who turns 190 this year - these were considered anecdotal and the issue had not been studied systematically, Penn State wildlife ecologist David Miller, a senior author of one of the papers, told AFP. Researchers have "done a lot more comparative, really comprehensive work with birds and animals in the wild," he said, "but a lot of what we knew about amphibians and reptiles were from a species here, a species there." For their paper, Miller and colleagues collected data from long-term field studies comprising 107 populations of 77 species in the wild, including turtles, amphibians, snakes, crocodilians and tortoises.

These all used a technique called "mark-recapture" in which a certain number of individuals are caught and tagged, then researchers follow them over the years to see if they find them again, deriving mortality estimates based on probabilities. They also collected data on how many years the animals lived after achieving sexual maturity, and used statistical methods to produce ageing rates, as well as longevity - the age at which 95 percent of the population is dead. "We found examples of negligible ageing," explained biologist and lead investigator Beth Reinke of Northeastern Illinois University. Though they had expected this to be true of turtles, it was also found in one species of each of the cold-blooded groups, including in frogs and toads and crocodilians. "Negligible ageing or senescence does not mean that they're immortal," she added. What it means is that there is a chance of dying, but it does not increase with age.

By contrast, among adult females in the US, the risk of dying in a year is about one in 2,500 at age 10, versus one in 24 at age 80. The study was funded by the US National Institutes of Health which is interested in learning more about ageing in ectotherms, or cold-blooded species, and applying them to humans, who are warm blooded. Scientists have long held ectotherms - because they require external temperatures to regulate their body temperatures and therefore have lower metabolisms - age more slowly than endotherms, which internally generate their own heat and have higher metabolisms. This relationship holds true within mammals. For example mice have a far higher metabolic rate than humans and much shorter life expectancy.—AFP



This file photo taken on June 22, 2020 shows shared electric scooters parked in front of the Coliseum in Rome. — AFP photos



In this file photo taken on May 28, 2020, then Rome mayor Virginia Raggi takes part in a presentation of Italian-American intra-urban transportation company Helbiz electric scooters at the Trevi Fountain in Rome.

Rome slams brakes on electric scooters

Had Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck hopped on an electric scooter rather than a Vespa in the classic film "Roman Holiday", their spin around the Eternal City might have ended in tears. The number of crashes and near-misses involving the two-wheelers has prompted Rome authorities to impose some order on a booming rental market that began two years ago. The havoc came to a head earlier this month when two US tourists attempted a night-time drive down the Spanish Steps, causing over A25,000 (\$26,300) worth of damage to the 18th century monument. Caught on security footage, the couple in their late 20s were fined A400 each.

For now, it's remarkably easy - requiring just a cell phone app - to hire one of the 14,500 scooters currently available in Rome, provided by seven licensed companies. They're cheap too, costing just one euro to unlock the scooters and between 15 to 25 cents a minute after that. And in the city known for its traffic jams and limited public transport, they appeal to everyone from commuters to tourists and teenagers, who often squeeze two at a time onto the narrow deck.

But there are challenges to navigating the cobbled streets of Rome's cramped historic center - where bike paths are virtually non-existent - leading some scooter drivers to weave dangerously around cars.

"They cut you off. They pass on the right, on the left, they get stuck in front of us and risk being crushed," said Paolo Facioni, a 59-year-old bus driver. Residents also complain they are dumped haphazardly on narrow sidewalks, blocking access for prams and wheelchair users.

Like a 'video game'

Rented electric scooters have become a fixture in major cities around the world, from London to Paris and New York, part of a global move to diversify transport away

from vehicles. But Rome taxi driver Gianni Ranucci, 56, called them "a real disaster". Tourists freewheeling around the bustling streets seem to "think they are in a video game!" he told AFP. Figures on the number of scooter-related deaths and injuries show it is no such thing.

Seventeen people have been killed in Italy in the past two years in incidents involving electric scooters, according to consumer protection association Codacons. Its chief Carlo Rienzi described Rome last month as "a Wild West, with



In this file photo taken on June 22, 2020, a man rides a shared electric scooter on Via dei Fori Imperiali in Rome.

scooters going where they shouldn't, often with two people on board, breaking the speed limit". Rome police record an average of 15 accidents a month. In light of the dangers, city hall is readying to tighten the rules, restricting use of the scooters to adults who must provide formal ID.

The number of operators will be limited to three and there will be restrictions on parking - a move anticipated by one US company, Bird, which recently announced its scooters in the city center could only be left in designated areas. Under new draft regulations seen by AFP, intended to come into force in January 2023, the speed limit will also be reduced from 25 kilometers an hour to 20 kilometers an hour on roads and six kilometers in pedestrian areas without cars.

Not all are happy with the proposed changes, however. Twenty kilometers an hour "is too slow, we'll be run over" by other vehicles, said 60-year-old Mariano Giorgi, who uses a scooter every day to get to work - and is one of the few people to be spotted wearing a safety helmet while riding. "I live in the center and they are very useful, otherwise I would have to take the car which would pollute a lot more," he said, as smog-belching traffic crawled around Piazza Venezia near the Colosseum. "If it's not practical, I won't use it anymore." — AFP

Turkey's banned musicians sing the blues in run-up to 2023 vote

A tattooed pop star banned for her slinky dresses and support for women's rights. Kurdish artists blacklisted and concerts cancelled out of concern for alcohol-fueled frolicking between boys and girls. Turkey's summer festival season is off to a politically charged start that foreshadows the cultural battles brewing in the polarized country in the run-up to next year's election - the toughest of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's two-decade rule.

Artists fear that the fun is being drained out of Turkey to flatter the conservative Islamic core of Erdogan's eroding support. Guitar-strumming folk singer Abdurrahman Lermi - known as Apolas Lermi on stage - offers a case in point. Lermi saw two of his concerts cancelled and social media light up in anger after he refused to take the stage in solidarity with a Greek violinist banned from performing in the traditionally conservative northern port of Trabzon.

Lermi's decision to back a fellow artist from a country Turkey has spent much of its history fighting appeared too much for organisers in a municipality run by Erdogan's ruling party. "I was accused of being the enemy of Turkey, the enemy of the Turks, and a separatist," Lermi recalled. Turkey's main musicians' association is understandably upset. "These bans are unacceptable," Musical Work Owners' Society of Turkey's president Recep Ergul told AFP.

Frequent targets

Musicians and other performers have often felt unfairly singled out by Erdogan's government for their socially liberal views. A sweeping crackdown that followed a failed 2016 coup attempt saw numerous independent theatres closed. Music venues reopened during the coronavirus pandemic long after almost everything else. Many now worry that their concerts might be sacrificed in the months to come as a show of strength aimed at burnishing Erdogan's image before his nationalist and conservative voters.

Musicians who sing in minority languages such as Kurdish appear to have been affected the most. Popular ethnically-Kurdish singer Aynur Dogan was banned in May from taking the stage in a ruling party-run municipality after organizers deemed her concerts "inappropriate". Dogan had previously been targeted by

pro-government circles on social media for defending big protests against Erdogan when he was still prime minister in 2013.

Other minorities banned in the past few months include Niyazi Koyuncu - whose repertoire includes songs in dialects of Armenian and ancient Black Sea region tongues-as well as the ethnically Kurdish but German-based Metin and Kemal Kahraman brothers. "These arbitrary and political decisions amount to discrimination against languages, cultures, lifestyles and genders," the bar associations of 57 Turkish cities said in a joint statement.

'Immoral' dresses

The conservatives' resurgent cultural influence under Erdogan is perhaps most vividly visible on the Turkish music scene. One Islamic group managed to successfully pressure the governor of the north-western city of Eskisehir to ban a festival because "girls and boys who camp together" engage in "inappropriate scenes because of alcohol". Another group managed to get pop star Melek Mosso's shows cancelled in the western city of Isparta because of her "immoral" low-cut dresses.

The tattooed star is a strong proponent of the Istanbul Convention combating violence against women that Erdogan - under pressure from the most conservative elements of his ruling coalition - pulled Turkey out of last year. Turkey's Supreme Court is

due to rule in the coming weeks whether Erdogan had the authority to annul the treaty in an overnight decree.

The European convention was ratified by parliament and would theoretically need its approval for Turkey to leave. Mosso pushed back against those who "question" her morality and vowed to sing in Isparta "one day". She then drew a large crowd at a public concert in the more liberal Istanbul organised by Turkey's culture ministry.

'Blow to women'

Culture Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy denies the existence of a government policy targeting minorities and embracing conservative values. "Let's try to look at the wider picture," the minister told a private broadcaster. "We support art and culture. This is our government policy." The performers do not agree. More than 1,000 artists and composers have published a joint declaration proclaiming that "music and musicians cannot be silenced".

Many of the younger women attending Mosso's Istanbul performance said they felt victimized by Erdogan's government. These bans "are a blow to women's presence in social and working life," said concertgoer Ezgi Aslan. "Values such as women's rights are not being defended by the ruling party," added fellow audience member Selin Cenkoglu. — AFP



Turkish singer Melek Mosso performs on stage in Shishane Square in Istanbul, on June 1, 2022. — AFP photos



Apolas Lermi (left), a Turkish singer, poses with fellow musician Eren Demir in Istanbul on June 7, 2022.



Recep Ergul, Musical Work Owners' Society of Turkey's President, poses in Istanbul on June 2, 2022.

Friends at first sniff: People drawn to others who smell like them

It's often said that people who click right away share "chemistry". This expression could be true in the literal sense, according to a new study published in the journal Science Advances on Friday, which finds people with similar body odors are more likely to hit it off as friends. "Nonhuman terrestrial mammals constantly sniff themselves and each other and, based on this, decide who is friend or foe," wrote a group of researchers led by Inbal Ravreby at Weizmann Institute of Science.

Since people seek friends who are similar to themselves, the team hypothesized that humans may smell themselves and others to subconsciously estimate body odor similarity and judge their compatibility. To find out, they set about collecting samples from pairs of same-sex, non-romantic friends who described themselves as having clicked at first sight, that is to say "where a sense of friendship was formed before extensive biographical information was exchanged," according to the paper.

After an extensive recruitment effort, they found 20 pairs, half of whom were male, and the other half female, all aged between 22 and 39 years old. In order to prevent contamination or outside factors influencing their samples, all participants had to follow a strict protocol that included avoiding pungent foods and sleeping away from their partner and pets in a clean cotton T-shirt that was provided to them.

The T-shirts were collected in ziplock bags and tested with an electronic nose - a device equipped with sensors to analyze chemical composition. The researchers found that the odor signatures of "click friends" were statistically more closely matched than odors between non-friends. To assess whether the eNose results accurately mirrored human perception, the team recruited human smellers and devised a set of tests to check the validity of their result. In one of these tests, for example, the human smellers were presented with three odors: two from a pair of click friends, and one outlier. They successfully identified the pairs and rejected the outlier.

Smell predicted friendships too

These results seemed to confirm the hypothesis that similar smells might spur friendship, but an alternative explanation was that people who are friends spend a lot of time together and so have similar body-odor shaping experiences, such as where they live and what they eat. To disentangle these two possibilities, the team devised another test to see whether smell could be a successful predictor in whether two people who've never met go on to click.

They recruited 17 strangers and had them all interact with one another in a test called the "Mirror Game" - standing half a meter apart so they could subconsciously smell each other, they were asked to mimic each other's hand movements for two minutes, without talking to each other. Chemical similarity in their odors, as tested by the eNose, successfully predicted mutual clicks in 77 percent of cases, and predicted 68 percent of cases where both sides said they did not click.

What's more, the closer people's smell was, the more they reported liking each other, understanding one another, and feeling greater chemistry between themselves. Together, the study's results "converged to suggest that human same-sex nonromantic click friends smell more similar to each other than expected by chance," the team concluded.

Humans, unlike other terrestrial mammals, use complex language to interact, and so it's possible the effects of smell in lab settings were amplified compared to how important they may have been in real life, the team wrote. "Nevertheless, we think our results imply that we may also be more like other terrestrial mammals in this respect than we typically appreciate." — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



People gather at the beach, along the shore of Gaza City, on June 13, 2022. — AFP photos



Sabah Abu Ghanem, a 22-year-old Palestinian surfer, trains with her brother off the shore of Gaza City, on June 13, 2022.

Swimming and surfing, Gazans savor cleaner sea

Palestinians in the Zionist-blockaded Gaza Strip are rediscovering the pleasures of the Mediterranean Sea, after authorities declared the end of a long period of hazardous marine pollution. "It has been a year since I entered the water," said 22-year-old surfer Sabah Abu Ghanem. "As soon as I enter the water and ride the waves, I feel free and happy; all the negative energy is replaced with positive energy," she told AFP.

Marine pollution has worsened in recent years in Gaza, where insufficient wastewater solutions have turned the Mediterranean into a dump. The problem has been further exacerbated by the dilapidated infrastructure of the impoverished and overcrowded enclave. The Gaza Strip is home to 2.3 million Palestinians who have been living under a strict land, sea and air blockade imposed by the Zionist entity since the Islamist movement Hamas seized power in 2007.

Only the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt is outside Zionist control and it too has remained largely closed. Gaza's only power station, which supplies electricity to wastewater plants, has been repeatedly damaged by Zionist strikes. But six months ago, a German-funded plant began operating in central Gaza, and now treats 60,000 cu m of wastewater per day, which is half the enclave's sewage, according to Mohammed Masleh, an official at Gaza's environment ministry.

'I missed swimming'

This is just the first phase of the project, and eventually, the plant could treat all wastewater in the territory. The quality of marine water in Gaza has already improved significantly. Now, according to samples collected by Gazan authorities, two-thirds of the enclave's beaches are suitable for swimming, said Masleh. With



Palestinians gather by the beach during sunset in Gaza City on June 24, 2022.

the start of school holidays and hot summer temperatures, the beach offers a refreshing solace for the residents of Gaza, a narrow sliver of land wedged between the Mediterranean, the Zionist

entity and Egypt.

It's a turning point for the enclave, where \$300 million has gone into wastewater projects over the past decade, according to Maher Najjar, deputy director

of the coastal waters authority. The new treatment plant, located in Bureij, features generators and solar panels for electrical supply. Najjar said it recovers 60 tons of solid waste each day, all of which would previously have ended up in the sea.

But although Sabah Abu Ghanem is back on her surfboard, she is still reluctant to bring along her children, who "have sensitive skin and could be infected". Sitting on the beach in Gaza City with her children and grandchildren, Umm Ibrahim Sider was also cautious. "I said no one is to go in the water but when the kids saw all the people, they went in and we couldn't stop them," said the 64-year-old Palestinian. One of her grandchildren, Ibrahim, 13, insisted on staying in the water despite his eyes having turned red from the salt. "I have missed swimming in the sea," he said. — AFP

Oceans saved us, now we can return the favor

Humanity must heal oceans made sick by climate change, pollution and overfishing in order to rescue marine life and save ourselves, experts warned ahead of a major UN conference opening Monday in Lisbon. By absorbing - decade after decade - a quarter of CO2 pollution and more than 90 percent of excess heat from global warming, oceans have kept Earth's terrestrial surface liveable.

Our species has returned the favor by dumping mountains of plastic waste into the sea, emptying the deep blue of big fish, and poisoning coastlines with toxic chemicals and agricultural runoff that create dead zones bereft of oxygen. "At least one-third of wild fish stocks are overfished and less than 10 percent of the ocean is protected," Kathryn Matthews, chief scientist for US-based NGO Oceana, told AFP. "Destructive and illegal fishing vessels operate with impunity in many coastal waters and on the high seas."

Nearly \$35 billion in subsidies that aggravate overfishing will fall under a harsh spotlight in Lisbon, despite first steps towards a partial ban put in place by the World Trade Organization (WTO) last week. At the same time, ocean water made acidic by CO2 along with vast marine heatwaves lasting months or longer are killing coral reefs that support a quarter of marine life and provide livelihoods for a quarter of a billion people. "We have only begun to understand the extent to which climate change is going to wreak havoc on ocean health," said Charlotte de

Fontaubert, the World Bank's global lead for the blue economy.

'It's scary'

Jointly hosted by Portugal and Kenya, the five-day UN Ocean Conference - delayed from April 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic - brings together thousands of government officials, businesses, scientists and NGOs in search of solutions. While they do not all see eye-to-eye on what needs to be done, they largely agree on what is at stake. "If we don't do the right thing, we might end up with a dead ocean," Rashid Sumaila, a fisheries expert and professor at the University of British Columbia, told AFP. "Think about that - Oh man, it's scary."



In this file photo taken on Aug 11, 2015, an eagle head-shaped wave breaks off Lege-Cap-Ferret in southwestern France.

Pollution that could, on current trends, see as much plastic in the seas as fish by mid-century is also on the agenda, with proposals ranging from recycling to outright banning of plastic bags. From East Asian factory ships prowling the high seas to artisanal fishing boats hugging tropical coastlines, how to make wild fisheries sustainable will be high on the Lisbon agenda.

The new watchword is "blue food" - sustenance from the sea that is both sustainable and equitable. "Wild ocean fish

can provide a climate-friendly, micro-nutrient protein source that can feed one billion people a healthy seafood meal every day - forever," said Matthews. Also under the microscope is the booming aquaculture industry, where issues range from the destruction of precious mangrove forests to rampant antibiotic use.

Year-end summits

The conference may report trend lines for wild fisheries - which peaked in the 1990s - and seafood farming for the first time, with each producing about 100 million tons per year. The Lisbon meet will see ministers and even a few heads of state, including French President Emmanuel Macron, but is not a formal negotiating session.

That won't stop participants, however, from pushing for a strong oceans agenda at two critical summits later this year: The COP27 UN climate talks in November, hosted by Egypt, followed by the long-delayed COP15 biodiversity negotiations, recently moved from China to Montreal. Oceans are already at the heart of a draft biodiversity treaty tasked with halting what many scientists fear is the first "mass extinction" since a meteor wiped out terrestrial dinosaurs more than 65 million years ago.

A coalition of nearly 100 nations supports a cornerstone provision that would designate 30 percent of the planet's land and ocean as protected areas. For climate change, not so much. Despite global warming's dire impact and the key role oceans play in soaking up atmospheric CO2, the seven seas have barely rated a mention within ongoing UN climate talks until recently. But science has made it clear they need each other: Oceans will continue to suffer unless greenhouse gas concentrations stabilize, and the fight against global warming will be doomed if oceans lose their capacity to draw down CO2 and soak up heat. — AFP

'Deepest shipwreck': US WWII ship found off Philippines

A US navy destroyer sunk during World War II has been found nearly 7,000 m below sea level off the Philippines, making it the world's deepest shipwreck ever located, an American exploration team said. The USS Samuel B Roberts went down during a battle off the central island of Samar on Oct 25, 1944 as US forces fought to liberate the Philippines - then a US colony - from Japanese occupation.



This undated handout photo received on June 25, 2022 shows torpedo tubes of the wreck of navy destroyer USS Samuel B Roberts after it was discovered off the Philippines. — AFP photos

A crewed submersible filmed, photographed and surveyed the battered hull of the "Sammy B" during a series of dives over eight days this month, Texas-based under-sea technology company Caladan Oceanic said. Images showed the ship's three-tube torpedo launcher and gun mount. "Resting at 6,895 meters, it is now the deepest shipwreck ever located and surveyed," tweeted Caladan Oceanic founder Victor Vescovo, who piloted the submersible. "This small ship took on the finest of the Japanese Navy, fighting them to the end," he said.

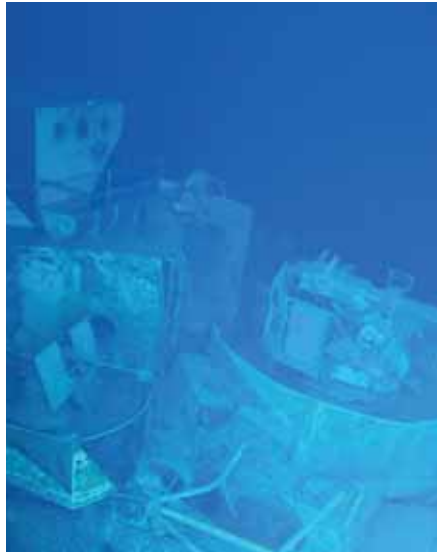
According to US Navy records, Sammy B's crew "floated for nearly three days awaiting rescue, with many survivors perishing from wounds and shark attacks". Of the 224 crew, 89 died. The battle was part of the larger Battle of Leyte, which saw intense fighting over several days between US and Japanese forces. Sammy B was one of four US ships sunk in the Oct 25 engagement.

The USS Johnston, which at nearly 6,500 m was previously the world's deepest shipwreck identified, was reached by Vescovo's team in 2021. In the latest search, the team also looked for the USS

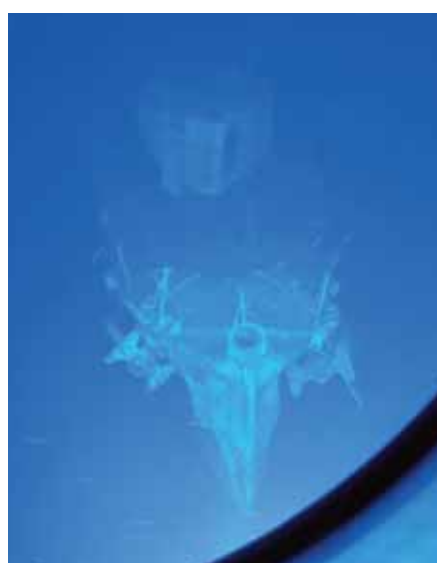
Gambier Bay at more than 7,000 m below sea level, but was unable to locate it. It did not search for the USS Hoel due to the lack of reliable data showing where it may have gone down. The wreck of the Titanic lies in about 4,000 m of water. — AFP



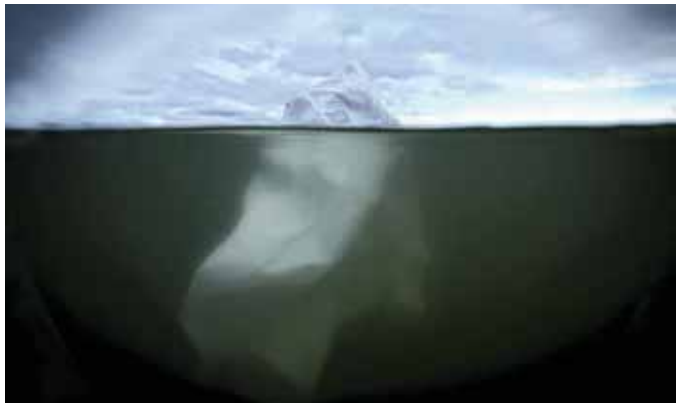
Front view of the wreck.



The pilothouse of the wreck.



AFT gun mount of the wreck.



This file photo taken on Dec 4, 2021 shows a plastic bag in the Baltic sea near Korsholm in Finland. — AFP photos



This file photo taken on March 10, 2016 shows the beach of Unstad in Norway during strong wind in the Lofoten archipelago, Arctic Circle.

Sports

Kerley blazes to 9.76sec in 100m semis at US World Championship

Kerley throws down World Championship challenge at US trials

EUGENE: Fred Kerley clocked a world-leading 9.76sec in the semi-finals then followed up with a 9.77 to win the 100m at the US trials on Friday and stamp himself a favorite for the World Championships next month. Kerley's semi-final run, with a legal wind of 1.4m/sec, came a day after he posted a 2022 season-leading 9.83 in the heats. The Tokyo Olympics silver medalist set a tone for the final and didn't disappoint.

Although he didn't get off to as strong of a start, he powered through the middle section of the race to seize control and finish ahead of Marvin Bracy Williams and Trayvon Bromell. "My top-end got me to the finish line today," said Kerley, who added that he'd been "expecting something faster." Williams clocked a career-best 9.85sec and Bromell grabbed a World Championships berth in 9.88. Reigning world champion Christian Coleman was missing from the final. He was a late scratch after finishing with the fourth-fastest time in the semi-finals.

His semi-final time tied him for sixth-fastest all-time in the 100m-with Bromell and Coleman. Among Americans, only Tyson Gay and Justin Gatlin have run faster-but not on US soil. Kerley, who took 100m silver at the Tokyo Olympics behind Italian Lamont Marcell Jacobs, made it clear he was aiming to go higher on the all-time list, right to the top. "Whenever I can get to Usain Bolt's record, that's what I'm aiming for," he said.

Coleman's 2019 world title gives him a bye into the World Championships, to be held on the same Hayward Field track in July. He had said he planned to run every round as he continues his

return to peak form after serving an 18-month suspension for missing drug testing appointments. But an hour and a half after the semi-finals, he was a no-show at the starting line for the final. The women's 100m final was also missing an expected star after Sha'Carri Richardson's shock exit in the heats on Thursday.

'Kind of like wow'

Melissa Jefferson was the surprise winner in an impressive albeit wind-aided career-best of 10.69sec with Aleia Hobbs second in 10.72 and Twanisha Terry third in 10.74. "It's kind of like, wow, did that really just happen," Jefferson said of making her first World Championships team. She said "Wow" was her first response when she saw the time, then she saw the wind gauge reading of 2.9m/sec - above the legal limit of 2.0m/sec. Even so, she said the time showed her "that I can do it." It was a bounce-back performance for the 21-year-old, who finished eighth in the 100m at the NCAA collegiate championships earlier this month after winning the 60m at the NCAA Indoor championships in March.

World record holder and two-time Olympic gold medalist Ryan Crouser improved his own world leading performance in the shot put with a throw of 23.12m, with reigning world champion Joe Kovacs second at 22.87. Sandi Morris, a two-time indoor world champion and twice runner-up at the outdoor worlds, won the women's pole vault with a height of 4.82m-improving her own previous world leading mark of 4.81.

Vashti Cunningham won the women's high



EUGENE: Fred Kerley wins the final of the Men 100 Meter during the 2022 USATF Outdoor Championships at Hayward Field on June 24, 2022 in Eugene, Oregon. —AFP

jump with a jump of 1.93m and Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Valarie Allman won the women's discus with a throw of 66.92m. Seven-time Olympic gold medalist Allyson Felix made it into the 400m final to keep alive the chance of at least a relay berth at a one last World

Championships before she retires. Felix's time of 51.32 was the seventh-fastest in the semi-finals, with Talitha Diggs leading the way into the final with a time of 50.88. "I just wanted to squeak into that final and just be ready (for relay duty) if they need me," Felix said. —AFP

News in brief

Jackson wins Jamaica trials

KINGSTON: Shericka Jackson upset Olympic champion Elaine Thompson-Herah to power to victory in the women's 100m at the Jamaican National Championships in Kingston on Friday. Jackson took advantage of the absence of in-form Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce to storm to victory in 10.77sec and claim her first national title. The women's 100m final got under way after technical problems delayed the start. However Jackson brushed off the disruption and powered her way to a convincing win. Kemba Nelson was second in a time of 10.89sec while two-time Olympic 100m champion Thompson-Herah was third in 10.89sec, never recovering after a slow start. Fraser-Pryce meanwhile was a no-show for the final despite clocking a scorching 10.70sec in Thursday's heats. Reigning world champion Fraser-Pryce—who is already qualified for next month's World Championships in Oregon—did not finish her semi-final, pulling up as soon as she left the blocks. It was not immediately clear why she had stopped.

Rooney quits as Derby manager

LONDON: Former Manchester United and England star Wayne Rooney has resigned as manager of troubled Derby as the club prepare for their first season in the third tier for 36 years. Rooney was unable to keep Derby in the Championship last season after the crisis-torn club were hit by a 21-point deduction as punishment for financial issues. In his first managerial role, Rooney impressively kept Derby in contention to avoid relegation into the final weeks of the season. That valiant effort had suggested the 36-year-old would be able to lead Derby to promotion from League One next season. But with Derby remaining in administration throughout a turbulent close-season, Rooney has opted to quit the Rams with the new campaign starting on July 30.

Man City, Phillips agree deal

LONDON: Manchester City have agreed to sign England midfielder Kalvin Phillips from Leeds in a £45 million (\$55 million) deal, according to reports on Friday. Premier League champions City reportedly made a bid of £42 million, with a possible extra £3 million in add-on fees for Phillips. The blockbuster transfer is subject to Phillips agreeing personal terms with Pep Guardiola's side. Guardiola has picked Phillips to bolster his midfield after the departure of long-serving Brazilian Fernandinho at the end of last season. Phillips came through the youth ranks at Leeds and played a key part in their promotion back to the Premier League two years ago. He went on to establish himself as an England international, featuring in their run to the European Championship final last year. Phillips would become City's second major addition since the end of last season after the arrival of Borussia Dortmund's Norway striker Erling Haaland.

Tsitsipas, Bautista Agut book final

SANTA PONCA: Stefanos Tsitsipas will face Roberto Bautista Agut in the Mallorca Open final after seeing off last four opponent Benjamin Bonzi 6-4, 6-4 on Friday. The Greek second seed took a little over an hour and a half to dismiss France's Bonzi at the tournament he is using as a stepping stone to Wimbledon. Waiting for Tsitsipas, who needed three sets to get past American Marcos Giron in the quarter-finals, is Bautista Agut after the Spaniard defeated Antoine Bellier 7-6 (7/5), 6-2. Local hope Bautista Agut had booked his place in the last four by beating world number one Daniil Medvedev. Still seeking a first title on grass, Tsitsipas has lost in the first round on three of his four appearances at Wimbledon. He was pitted against Swiss qualifier Alexander Ritschard in Friday's draw for the third Grand Slam of the season which starts on Monday. Bautista Agut, seeded 17th and a semi-finalist in 2019, has a first round date with Hungary's Attila Balazs. —From AFP

Joseph hails 'good start' as Japan thrash Uruguay

TOKYO: Japan rugby union head coach Jamie Joseph hailed his team's "good start" to their preparations for next year's World Cup, after they thrashed Uruguay 43-7 on Saturday. Japan reached the World Cup quarter-finals for the first time when they hosted the tournament in 2019 and Joseph is looking for a repeat performance at next year's showpiece event in France.

The New Zealander was taking charge of his team for the first time this year. He said it was an "exciting time", as Japan prepares to face England, Argentina, Samoa and a qualifier from the Americas at the World Cup. "This game was a starting point for us," he said. "We're trying to create a team in a very short period of time. When I look at that as the circumstance under which we played the

match, I thought we had a very good start today."

Japan beat Uruguay 34-15 last week in Tokyo but Joseph did not coach the team for that match, instead placing coach Takanobu Horikawa in charge of a line-up largely made up of development players. Joseph was back at the helm as the countries met again in the southern Japanese city of Kitakyushu, and Japan took control through first-half tries from captain Atsushi Sakate and centre Dylan Riley.

Further scores from Sakate, Gerhard van der Heever and Yusuke Kajimura saw Japan increase their lead after the break, but Uruguay gave the home side problems late in the game and scored through Manuel Ardao. "The last 15, 20 minutes got a little bit sloppy," said Joseph, whose team will face Six Nations champions France twice at home over the coming weeks. "Those are the sorts of things we can't afford to do when we play Tier One sides," he added.

Uruguay have been handed a tough World Cup assignment against



KITAKYUSHU: Uruguay's Felipe Etcheverry (left) kicks the ball during the Lipovitan D Challenge Cup 2022 rugby test match between Japan and Uruguay at Mikuni World Stadium on June 25, 2022. —AFP

hosts France, New Zealand, Italy and an African qualifier. Head coach Esteban Meneses said his team had "learned a lot" from their two games against Japan. "When you play against a team like Japan, just one

mistake can lead to a try," he said. "We've seen how important the technical and physical side of the game is from these matches and we'll be putting in the work to try to do well at the World Cup." —AFP

Alvarez plans to finish Golovkin's career

LOS ANGELES: Saul "Canelo" Alvarez said he plans to finish Gennady Golovkin's career when the two boxing rivals meet for the third and probably final time later this year. Five years after their first bout ended in a controversial draw, Mexican icon Alvarez and the heavy-hitting Golovkin face a trilogy bout in Las Vegas on September 17 to settle their rivalry once and for all. The bout will see Golovkin move up a division to super-middleweight, aiming to snatch Alvarez's World Boxing Council (WBC), International Boxing Federation (IBF), World Boxing Association (WBA) and World

Boxing Organization (WBO) belts.

The long-awaited contest at the T-Mobile Arena will draw a line under a rivalry that has become increasingly acrimonious over the years. Hints of that tension flared on Friday as the two men came face-to-face, going nose-to-nose for nearly two solid minutes before a press conference got under way. The 31-year-old Alvarez (57-2-2, 39 knock-outs) said he plans to send the 40-year-old Golovkin into retirement by knockout.

"And I will do it for sure," Alvarez said. "That's the only way I want to finish this fight." Alvarez added that beating Golovkin had become personal, accusing the Kazakh of trash-talking against him in certain situations. "It's personal for me," Alvarez said. "This is the way I am. I'm not pretending to be another person or saying things in the media and then come here and pretend I didn't say anything. "He's two different people. He pretends to be a nice guy, but he's not, he's an asshole.

also the selectors' choice in opting for an additional seamer in Phillip at the expense of first Test debutant and spinner Gudakesh Motie. Given their reputation of vulnerability in these conditions against a concerted fast bowling attack, the visitors were indebted to a counter-attacking 53 from middle-order batter Liton Das and Tamim Iqbal's 46.

It looked very ominous for Bangladesh at the start of play when, with just the third delivery of the match, Kemar Roach forced Tamim to fend off a sharp lifter in an experience reminiscent of what the West Indies endured a year earlier when they were battered, bruised and humiliated by the South African fast bowlers in back-to-back Tests at the venue.

This time the shoe was on the other foot though, even if Roach, poised on 249 Test wickets, went wicketless through the first innings with the supporting bowlers more than eager to fill the breach left by the luckless senior seamer. Tamim gives Bangladesh strong start - Tamim and opening partner Mahmudul Hasan Joy displayed much more determination than many would have expected in an opening stand of 41 and it took the introduction of Phillip just before the end of the first hour's play to make the breakthrough.

With a full-length delivery, the fast-medium bowler breached the defense of



GROS-ISLET: Anderson Phillip (left) of West Indies celebrates the dismissal of Anamul Haque of Bangladesh during 1st day of the 2nd Test between Bangladesh and West Indies at Darren Sammy Cricket Ground on June 24, 2022. —AFP

Hasan Joy to get the West Indies going. Tamim continued to bat resolutely, mixing solid defense with unrestrained aggression when the rare loose ball came along. However the left-hander's own impetuosity proved his undoing as a loose drive at Joseph gave Jermaine Blackwood a comfortable catch at cover-point with the lunch interval looming.

Four wickets in the afternoon session

kept Bangladesh on the back foot although Liton's experience and occasional aggression ensured that his team were not completely bogged down. He reached his half-century in the final session but lost Mehidy Hasan Miraz to an excellent diving catch by Devon Thomas at backward-point off Mayers, the substitute fielder setting the standard for a good day in the field for the West Indies. —AFP

Sports

Ledecky, Sjostrom extend their reigns in world championships

Artistic swimmer, who fainted in pool, forced out of team event

BUDAPEST: Katie Ledecky won a record-breaking fifth straight 800m world title on Friday, just over an hour after Sarah Sjostrom surged to her fourth consecutive victory in the women's 50m butterfly. Local hero Kristof Milak sparked delirium in the Duna Arena in Budapest when he grabbed the gold medal in the 100m butterfly, his second of the week.

The Australian mixed 100m freestyle team ended the evening by setting a world record in an event only added to the world championships in 2015. Their time of 3min 19.38sec beat the record set by the United States in last World Championships in 2019 by 0.02sec. Canada were second, the Americans third. Ben Proud claimed Britain's first gold of the championships as he grabbed victory in the 50m freestyle.

Australian Kaylee McKeown won the women's 200m backstroke for a first world title to go with three Olympic golds. Ledecky led throughout the 800m as she took her tally of World Championship medals to 22, a record for a woman. She finished in 8min 8.04sec to beat Australian Kiah Melverton by 10.73sec and Italian Simona Quadarella by 10.96sec. "Year after year it's really hard work," said the 25-year-old American who won her first major title in the 2012 Olympics.

"In London I won my first gold 10 years ago, back then they said I was a one-hit wonder, and here we are, 10 years later and I have another gold. "I'm so excited for the future as well. This was only my seventh fastest time in the last couple of years but after a long week the gold counts. "Everyone's pushing me and I'm working on my stroke and these World Championships were tremendously exciting for me."

Sjostrom won her race in 24.95sec to edge Frenchwoman Melanie Henique by 0.36sec with China's Zhang Yufei third at 0.37. "I had a lot of pressure on myself because of my past successes," said Sjostrom. Sjostrom has 19 world championship medals, three behind Ledecky and is also chasing Michael Phelps' record of 10 World Championship butterfly medals set between 2001 and 2011. She has nine. "Yes, I can do it," she said.

"It feels unreal that I've been at this level for so long. I won my first title in 2009, Michael Phelps

was still swimming at that time and I was really looking up to him." Sjostrom fell on ice in Sweden in February 2021 and broke her elbow, but still won a silver in the Tokyo Olympics last July. "It feels amazing to be here, to still be around and still be winning medals. It is not something I can take for granted."

'I missed him'

Milak, who had already won the 200m butterfly title, delighted the home crowd at what he calls "my pool" as he finally won gold in the 100m. Caeleb Dressel, the reigning world and Olympic champion, pulled out of the competition on Wednesday. "I missed him for sure, as you know I love good races, although this was also one," said Milak.

Milak won in 50.14sec, a comfortable 0.80sec ahead of Naoki Mizunuma of Japan, with Canadian Joshua Liendo a further three hundredths of a second back in third. "I'm so proud to be Hungarian and I'm overjoyed that here in the arena 4,000 people were cheering for me," said Milak. "I hope, in front of the TVs and all around the world, all 15 million Magyars gave me their support. "I am so tired now, I can hardly wait for a rest."

In another event where Dressel was the reigning champion, Proud exploded from the blocks and held on to win in a time of 21.32. American Michael Andrew was second on 21.41. Frenchman Maxime Grousset grabbed third. "Great race, great field, great fans and great job!", said Proud. McKeown chased American Phoebe Bacon down in the last lap to win at the touch by just 0.04sec. "Everything turned out positively in the end," said McKeown.

Fainted in pool

Meanwhile, US artistic swimmer Anita Alvarez, who was dramatically rescued from the bottom of the pool after fainting in her solo routine, was omitted from the team event on Friday at the request of governing body FINA. "That was a decision FINA had made," said Selina Shah, US artistic swimming's team doctor. "In my opinion she could have competed. I am very confident," Shah said. FINA said it had organized a medical examination on Friday morning that included three representatives of its

the Eastern Conference finals.

"It was a great play, lucky it went in," Palat said of his decisive effort on Friday. "Right now we feel pretty good. We're excited to be able to go back before our fans. It's going to be a great game." Tampa Bay took the lead in a hard-fought first period, with Jan Rutta's shot from the right circle somehow sneaking past Avs goaltender Darcy Kuemper to make it 1-0. It was a rare goal from Rutta, who has scored just 12 times in 238 regular season games and had only scored two postseason goals before Friday.

Colorado got back on level terms early in the second period though, when Valeri Nichuskin was on hand to sweep home a rebound after Bolts goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy failed to hold on to the puck after saving a Cale Makar shot. But Tampa Bay responded superbly to punish Colorado after the Avs were reduced to just three men on the ice following back-to-back penalties. Tampa Bay moved the puck patiently to work an opening, and it fell to Nikita Kucherov to lash home a one-timer past Kuemper for a 2-1 lead.

Colorado looked increasingly frustrated by Tampa Bay's relentless physicality, but early in the third period they finally broke through the resilient Bolts defense. Makar's long-range shot glanced off

high. "So it was a little tough to make focus, but I believe it's another process in my life ... So I just want to enjoy my next two days."

Chun's nearest rivals are New Zealand's Lydia Ko, who moved up the leaderboard with a five-under-par 67, and in-form Jennifer Kupcho, who shot seven birdies and three bogeys in a four-under-par 68. Kupcho and Ko are five under for the tournament. Former world number one Ko is chasing her first major victory in six years. The last of her two majors came at the ANA Inspiration in Rancho Mirage in 2016 - the same year she finished second at the Women's PGA Championship.

"It is hard to win, but I'm just trying to put myself more in that kind of position, and I think when you keep knocking on the door, you hope that one day that door will open," Ko said. Kupcho, chasing her second major win of the season after victory at the Chevron Championship in Rancho Mirage in April, said she will not change her strategy to try and catch Chun. "If she's going to continue to play well, that's her game, and there's really nothing anyone can do about it," Kupcho said.

Five players are tied for fourth on four under, including Canada's Brooke Henderson, Australia's Hannah Green and South Korea's 2020 Women's PGA champion Kim Sei-young. Lexi Thompson and Australia's Minjee Lee are eight off the lead on three under, tied for ninth with three other players including Thailand's Pornanong Phatlum and South Korea's Choi Hye-jin. —AFP

Wintry conditions did not dampen the enthusiasm among a sold-out crowd of 26,000 mainly Tonga supporters, starved of an international game that went into hibernation during the coronavirus pandemic. Rugby league officials found a way to keep running their primary professional club competitions-Australia's National Rugby League and England's Super League-but only one men's Test between major nations has been played since 2019, with France hosting England last October.

Before Saturday's match, New Zealand coach Michael Maguire said he feared the pandemic had sucked some appeal from what he believes should be the sport's pinnacle. "You probably can't really



BUDAPEST: USA's Katie Ledecky competes to take gold in the women's 800m freestyle finals during the Budapest 2022 World Aquatics Championships at Duna Arena in Budapest on June 24, 2022.—AFP

medical committee, its executive director, Dr. Shah and US team officials.

"Following these discussions, FINA determined that Anita Alvarez should not compete today," FINA said in a statement. "The health and safety of athletes must always come first. While FINA understands why this decision will have been disappointing to the athlete, it was a decision that was made with her best interests in mind. The governing body said it was "delighted" that Alvarez had made "such a strong recovery" and looked forward to seeing her in competition again soon.

Shah said she did not know how FINA had reached its conclusion that Alvarez should not compete. "I'm not aware of their decision making



DENVER: Darcy Kuemper #35 of the Colorado Avalanche makes a save on Ondrej Palat #18 of the Tampa Bay Lightning during the third period in Game Five of the 2022 NHL Stanley Cup Final on June 24, 2022. —AFP

Tampa Bay defenseman Erik Cernak's skate to beat Vasilevskiy for 2-2. Once again, though, Tampa Bay conjured a goal to regain the initiative, with Ondrej Palat latching on to a feed from Victor Hedman and smashing home the puck to leave Denver's home crowd in stunned silence. —AFP



BETHESDA: In Gee Chun of South Korea plays her second shot on the 17th hole during the second round of the KPMG Women's PGA Championship at Congressional Country Club on June 24, 2022. —AFP

measure what it has done to the game," he said. "The international community needs to make sure they get it going again now. Everyone's got a responsibility to do that... the NRL, everyone." The occasion was not lost on Kiwis captain Jesse Bromwich after full-time.

"It's really nice to be home, the atmosphere is crazy. Rugby league's back in New Zealand again and it's great to be part of it all," he said. Tongan counterpart Jason Taumalolo is one of the NRL's leading players but has always wanted more emphasis placed on Test matches and promoting the sport in his home nation. "Three years is too long to be coming back here to Auckland and seeing the red sea (crowd) again," he said. —AFP

process." Alvarez fainted and dropped to the bottom at the end of her individual routine on Wednesday and was saved by her quick-thinking coach, Andrea Fuentes.

Alvarez had been entered in the team event on Friday and was on every official startlist until just before the event was scheduled to begin when she was replaced on the eight-woman team by Yujin Chang. Standing in the warm-up area before the event, as the US swimmers made their final preparations behind her, Shah said she was sure Alvarez would be cheering the team on. "I think she is very excited for the team to compete and she's a great athlete and she's going to be there supporting them." —AFP

Impressive Mercer helps Montpellier to first Top 14 title

PARIS: Montpellier beat Castres 29-10 on Friday to win their maiden French Top 14 title in a re-run of the 2018 final, as English No. 8 Zach Mercer played a leading role. Mercer, who joined the Mediterranean side this season from Bath, set up Arthur Vincent for Montpellier's opening try as the 2018 runners-up gained revenge for the defeat four years ago. "It was really exceptional. We had a huge season, we really deserved that," Montpellier's Paolo Garbisi told Canal+. "We knew with Castres that you have to surprise them with desire from the start. We knew they never give up, that's what they did. "We managed to hold on until the end and now it's superb."

Kick-off was delayed by 19 minutes after French President Emmanuel Macron was whistled on and off the field as he was presented to the players. Both Castres and Montpellier named the same starting XV's which won last weekend's semi-finals against record 21-time champions Toulouse and Bordeaux-Begles respectively. Philippe Saint-Andre's Montpellier dominated from the off and they were rewarded after six minutes as winger Vincent dived over in the corner from a grubber-kick by Mercer, who is ineligible for his country as he plays abroad.

By the 13-minute mark Montpellier led 17-0 as lock Florent Vanverberghe and full-back Anthony Bouthier, who was beautifully set-up by a Vincent loop pass, added to Castres' woes, who seemed to be frozen by the pre-match build-up. "That start to the match was catastrophic," Castres captain Mathieu Babillot told Canal+. "We're very disappointed tonight. That's how sport goes, it's difficult, it's cruel."

Castres head coach Pierre-Henry Broncan's early worries intensified just a quarter of an hour in, as influential fly-half Benjamin Urdapilleta left the field with an ankle issue, and without a recognized stand-off on the bench, full-back Julien Dumora deputised in the No. 10 shirt. Montpellier's retiring ex-France captain Guilhem Guirado left the field for the final time as a professional player on 27 minutes as he suffered a neck injury, and was replaced by Australia hooker Brandon Paenga-Amosa.

The score was 23-3 at the break after Dumora opened his team's account, while Benoit Pailaugue kicked two penalties for Montpellier to put the seal on an almost perfect first half. Castres began the second 40 minutes on a positive note and were denied shortly after the interval as Mercer and Vincent held up Dumora over the line. Montpellier, last season's European Challenge Cup winners, were then able to clear their lines as captain Yacouba Camara won a penalty at a ruck a quarter of an hour into the second half.

Castres, who finished the regular season top of the table despite only having the league's 10th highest budget, were denied a second time as replacement prop Wayan de Benedittis failed to ground with 32 minutes left. The final quarter was a turgid affair in humid early summer conditions and Garbisi extended the advantage for the two-time runners-up with a penalty goal with 12 minutes remaining. Castres scored a consolation try as Vilimoni Botitu glided over with four minutes to go but it failed to dampen the Montpellier fans' long-awaited celebrations. —AFP

Chun tightens grip at Women's PGA Championship

BETHESDA: Chun In-gee extended her lead at the Women's PGA Championship on Friday, firing a three-under-par 69 to open up a six-stroke advantage at the halfway stage as she hunts down a third major title. The 27-year-old South Korean had demolished Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland, in Thursday's first round, shooting a course record eight-under-64 that left awed rivals in disbelief-and five shots adrift.

Chun found the going slightly harder on Friday, opening with three early birdies before back-to-back bogeys checked her progress just before the turn. However, she regained those two strokes with birdies on the 10th and 18th to maintain a vice-like grip on the lead heading into the weekend on 11 under with a 36-hole aggregate 133.

Chun admitted she had felt under pressure after her scintillating opening round. "I got a little pressure for sure because after I had a great first round, everyone (talked) about how you are, like, five-shot lead," she said. "Now I'm in a good position. Everyone's expectations are really

NZ thrash Tonga as international rugby league returns

AUCKLAND: Both teams hailed the return of international rugby league after New Zealand outclassed Tonga 26-6 on Saturday in their first Test for nearly three years. The Kiwis dominated the match at a damp Mt Smart Stadium in Auckland, scoring four tries and justifying the number one ranking they will take into this year's World Cup.



BAGHDAD: Members of the Iraqi national football team for amputees take part in a training session at Al-Shaab stadium of the ‘National Centre for Nurturing Sports Talent’ in Iraq’s capital Baghdad. —AFP

For Iraq amputees soccer team, healing is the goal

‘The creation of this team brought me back to life’

BAGHDAD: As a seven-year-old boy in Baghdad, Mohamed Ali dreamt of becoming a goalkeeper – until a car bomb in the central Tahrir Square ripped away his left arm. The child had become another casualty of the sectarian blood-letting that raged in Iraq in the years after the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein. “I was deprived of playing football,” he said, recalling the traumatic event of 2007 that also ended his time with the junior football team of the Air Force Club in Baghdad.

Today, at age 22, Ali is a member of an all-amputee football team, made up entirely of players who lost arms or legs in Iraq’s many years of war and turmoil. “The creation of this team brought me back to life,” he said. “It helped me regain my self-confidence.” The team has some 30 players and has qualified for the Amputee Football World Cup to be held in Turkey in late 2022. Its founder Mohamed al-Najjar was studying in England when he discovered a Portsmouth amputee team and decided to replicate the experience. Back in Iraq, he posted an announcement on social networks. “Applications started pouring in and we formed the team in August 2021,” recalls the 38-year-old lawyer.

‘Severe depression’

Najjar’s right leg was amputated after he was

wounded in 2016 “while taking part in the fight against the Islamic State group”. At the time Najjar, like several of his teammates, was fighting with the pro-Iranian Hashed Al-Shaabi, a paramilitary force that has since been integrated into Iraq’s regular forces. Three times a week, he now meets up with the group to train on one of the fields of the brand new Al-Chaab complex in Baghdad.

Using crutches, one-legged players warm up by sprinting in the green jersey of the national team, then practice penalty kicks. The goalkeeper, his left arm amputated, intercepts the ball by blocking it with his stomach. Before they found the camaraderie of the team, Najjar said, “most of the players were suffering from severe depression”. “Some even had thought of suicide because they had lost a limb and they had been professional players before.

“But we overcame these psychological problems,” he said, adding that it pleased him to now see his players “posting their pictures with the team on social networks”. In the official competition, matches are played in teams of seven on fields measuring 60 by 40 meters. The goals are two meters high and five metres wide – smaller than the 2.4 by 7.3 meter goals used in traditional football.

‘Daddy, go train’

The Iraqi state offers financial aid to victims of attacks and of battles against jihadists. The players receive monthly allowances of between \$400 and \$700. Most make ends meet by working as day laborers in the markets, said Najjar.

But a major obstacle for the team is a lack of official recognition, and therefore funding, from Iraqi sports bodies. The Poland-based International Amputee Football Federation is not part of the International Paralympic Committee. The Iraqi team therefore receives no state subsidies, said Aqil Hamid, the head of the parliamentary committee on disability sports. For equipment and transport, the team depends on donations from associations, said Najjar. There is also occasional help from some Hashed bodies.

“They helped us with a trip to Iran, they paid for the plane tickets,” said Najjar, adding that he hoped for “wider support”. Another team member, Ali Kazim, lost his left leg to a Baghdad car bomb in 2006, which abruptly ended his professional football career with the Air Force Club. “I couldn’t pursue my ambitions, I stayed at home,” said the 38-year-old. Today, his four children are his biggest supporters. “They are the ones who pack my sports bag,” he said. “They tell me: ‘Daddy, go train’. My morale has totally changed.” —AFP

Iranian girls arrested for removing hijab at skateboarding event

TEHRAN: Iranian police have arrested several teenage girls for not wearing headscarves at a skateboarding day in the southern city of Shiraz, along with some of the event’s organizers, state media reported Friday. A number of girls “removed their hijab at the end of the sports event without observing the religious considerations and legal norms”, state news agency IRNA quoted Shiraz police chief Faraj Shojaei as saying.

“With the coordination of the judiciary, a number of perpetrators and people related to this gathering were identified and arrested on Thursday,” he said. A video purporting to show Tuesday’s “Go Skateboarding Day” event went viral in Iran on social media.

“Holding any mixed sports or non-sports gathering without observing the religious and legal norms is prohibited... and the organisers will be dealt with according to the law,” Shojaei added. Shiraz governor Lotfollah Sheybani said the event was “held with the intention of breaking social, religious and national rules and norms”, IRNA reported. Under Islamic law in force in Iran since its 1979 revolution, women must wear a hijab that covers the head and neck while concealing the hair.

But many have pushed the boundaries over the past two decades by allowing their head coverings to slide back and reveal more hair, especially in Tehran and other major cities. Iranian media on Sunday reported that police had arrested 120 people for alleged “criminal acts” including drinking alcohol, mixed-sex dancing and uncovering the hijab at a party in the forest in the country’s north. Under Iranian law, only non-Muslim citizens are permitted to consume alcohol for religious purposes, while dancing with the opposite sex is forbidden. —AFP

Iraq crowned WAFF champs

JEDDAH: The Iraqi national futsal team were crowned champions of West Asian Football Federation’s (WAFF) major futsal championship for women on Friday, with an Iraqi player finishing as the tournament’s top goal scorer. A total of six teams participated in the WAFF’s Women’s Futsal Championship for 2022, which was held from June 16 to June 24 in Saudi Arabia.

The Iraqi team beat their Saudi counterpart in the final – winning the tournament after a 4-2 victory over the host country’s national team. The Iraqi team’s campaign in the tournament began with a rocky start, losing 1-0 to Bahrain in the first match, but they were able to come out victorious in their following matches on its way to the final.

The championship’s top goal scorer, Shokhan Salih, scored seven goals throughout the tournament. This is the first time Iraq’s women have been crowned champions of the Asian cup. The Iranian team had won the previous two tournaments in 2008 and 2012. Salih was awarded the tournament’s top goal scorer award in Saudi Arabia.

Kuwait men book semis

In another development, Kuwait national futsal team for men qualified for the semifinals at the 2022 Arab Futsal Championship after defeating their Palestinian counterpart through penalty shootout 4-1 after the match ended in a 4-4 draw in Dammam on Friday. The



Palestinian team managed to end the first half of the match 3-2, as both teams continued to the second half until the end of the match with a tie of 4-4. The teams decided on penalty kicks to decide the winner which ended with Kuwait beating them 4-1.

Kuwait’s team player Saleh Al-Fadil won the award for player of the match. In another development, the Moroccan team qualified for the semifinals after beating Libya 3-0, while Egypt qualified for the same round by defeating Mauritania 3-2. Iraqi team were also able to

go to the semifinals after their victory over Saudi Arabia 3-2. The Kuwait team will meet their Iraqi counterpart in the semifinals on Sunday, while the Moroccan team will face their Egyptian counterpart to determine the final which is due on June 28. — Agencies