

8 Protests after 'chilling' arrest of Indian activist



9 Turkey's troubled lira rallies on 'backdoor capital controls'



13 Iranian weavers make 'world's largest' kilim



16 Tunisian tennis player Ons Jabeur rises to world no. 2



Panel approves budget surplus as oil price soars

Wages, subsidies eat up 74% of spending



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends a ceremony celebrating the winners of Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Informatics Award on June 27, 2022. — KUNA (See Page 2)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's budgets committee approved on Monday the 2022/2023 fiscal budget, projecting a surplus for the first time in many years on the back of a sharp rise in oil prices, head of the panel said. MP Adnan Abdulsamad said revenues are estimated at KD 23.4 billion, a jump of 114 percent over the last fiscal year's estimates. Oil income is projected to make up 91 percent of all revenues, while non-oil income is projected at KD 2 billion, he said.

Spending is projected at KD 23.1 billion, leaving a surplus of slightly in excess of KD 300 million, the lawmaker said. Oil revenues were calculated on the basis of \$80 a barrel, while actual prices today are \$114 a barrel, Abdulsamad said. The conservative price is adopted in case of possible fluctuations in the price of oil, he said.

Kuwait has posted deficits in budgets since the 2015/2016 fiscal year after a crash in oil prices due to abundant supplies and a drop in demand, in addition to economic woes during the years of the coronavirus pandemic, during

which demand slumped to unprecedented levels. During those years, accumulated deficits surpassed KD 50 billion, resulting in the government withdrawing funds from the state general reserves, which almost dried up.

Abdulsamad said wages at KD 12.8 billion and subsidies at KD 4.4 billion accounted for as high as 74.5 percent of total spending, a problem that Kuwait's government finances have been facing for long. Capital spending, which represents expenditures on projects, is estimated at KD 2.9 billion or 12 percent of the budget, according to Abdulsamad.

The lawmaker said reports on the state budget and the budgets of 39 government agencies and departments have been approved and sent to the Assembly for approval. An emergency Assembly session is expected to be convened when the government and the Assembly agree, he said. HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said in a speech last week that he has decided to dissolve the Assembly and call for snap polls. The decree, however, has not been issued yet and the process could take months.

PAM director Mousa retires after 8 years

KUWAIT: Public Authority of Manpower Director Ahmad Al-Mousa has retired, sources told Kuwait Times. Mousa did not request an extension at the end of his eight-year term, the sources said, adding that Justice Minister Jamal Al-Jalawi approved Mousa's request and referred him to retirement.



Ahmad Al-Mousa

Ojairy Observatory launches Kuwait's official e-calendar

KUWAIT: Al-Ojairy Observatory launched the new electronic version of the official calendar of Kuwait as a new form of astronomical calendar.

In a statement to KUNA, the observatory's General Director Yousif Al-Ojairy said on Monday that the calendar app combines technology and scientific information. Through the Al-Ojairy application, users can access astronomical information in addition to other information related to astronomy, which is needed daily, including prayer times according to the time difference between areas.

He noted the application includes information about sea tides and the direction of the qibla. It

also enables the user to know in advance official holidays, in addition to an agricultural calendar. Ojairy said the observatory coordinated with many authorities to provide all information accurately and from official sources, such as weather information, which was added in the app in cooperation with the meteorological department. Ojairy pointed out the app will be constantly updated and more information will be added in the future, according to a plan by the observatory to develop astronomy in Kuwait. — AFP

10 dead, 200+ hurt in Jordan toxic gas leak

AMMAN: Ten people were killed and more than 200 injured Monday in a toxic gas leak in Jordan's Aqaba port, the government spokesman said. Footage on state TV showed a large cylinder plunging from a crane on a moored vessel, causing a violent explosion of yellow gas.

The death toll rose to 10, Faisal Al-Shaboul told AFP, revising an initial

toll of five killed. Prime Minister Bishr Khasawneh and Interior Minister Mazen Al-Faraya headed to the site of the accident, state media reported. Civil defense spokesman Amer Al-Sartawy had earlier reported that 234 people were injured after the tank filled with toxic gas fell.

"Specialists and the hazardous substances team in the civil defense are dealing" with the incident, Sartawy added. According to Jordanian official sources, Aqaba's southern beach was evacuated following the incident. Jordan's Aqaba port is the country's only marine terminal and a key transit point for a vast portion of its imports and exports. — AFP



AOABA, Jordan: Image grab shows the moment a tank filled with toxic gas fell and exploded in Aqaba port on June 27, 2022. — AFP

Kuwait, GCC first to benefit from UK ETA scheme

KUWAIT: The UK government announced that all Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states will move to the electronic travel authorization (ETA) scheme from 2023. The new system allows citizens of Kuwait and other GCC countries to apply for an ETA valid for multiple trips over an extended period. Before the introduction of ETAs in 2023, travelers from the Gulf can continue to use electronic visa waivers which allows individuals to complete an online waiver for each visit to the UK, and is available for short visits only, said a statement released by the UK Embassy in Kuwait.

By moving to ETAs, all six Gulf states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE - will become non-visa nationals, meaning they will not require a visa to visit the UK, according to the statement. "This move means that Gulf states will be among the first countries in the world to benefit from ETAs and visa-free travel to the UK," UK Home Secretary Priti Patel said. (See Page 3)

UN chief warns oceans in state of 'emergency'

LISBON: A long-delayed conference on how to restore the faltering health of global oceans kicked off in Lisbon on Monday, with the head of the UN saying the world's seas are in crisis. "Today we face what I would call an ocean emergency," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres told thousands of policymakers, experts and advocates at the opening plenary,

describing how seas have been hammered by climate change and pollution.

Humanity depends on healthy oceans. They generate 50 percent of the oxygen we breathe and provide essential protein and nutrients to billions of people every day. Covering 70 percent of Earth's surface, oceans have also softened the impact of climate change for life on land. But at a terrible cost.

Absorbing around a quarter of CO2 pollution - even as emissions increased by half over the last 60 years - has turned sea water acidic, threatening aquatic food chains and the ocean's capacity to absorb carbon.

Continued on Page 8



LISBON: (From left) UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and Fiji's Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama take part in the UN Ocean Conference at Altice Arena on June 27, 2022. — AFP

Local

Amir congratulates Kuwait's outstanding high school students

Crown Prince represents Amir at Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Awards



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a memento from Head of the Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Awards' board of trustees Sheikh Aida Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah delivers a speech.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and head of the awards' board of trustees Sheikh Aida Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah attend the ceremony.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah listens to an explanation from a participant.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah speaks with some of the participants.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent cables on Monday to outstanding high-school students enrolled in all educational facilities in the country. His Highness the Amir commended the students on their phenomenal performances, calling on them to continue their quest to gain knowledge and experience to benefit themselves as well as their country in the future.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also sent cables of congratulations to high-school overachievers who performed phenomenally during the school year. His Highness the Crown Prince commended the students in all high-school educational facilities for their hard work and determination, saying that it was paramount to continue to gain academic excellence and experience, which would hopefully be of use during their future careers. Furthermore, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent cables to outstanding high-school students who did well during this past semester. In the cables, His Highness the Prime Minister displayed pride over the students' achievement in all of the country's educational facilities.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of

congratulations to the Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf on the success of high-school exams for grade 12 in the academic year 2021-2022. His Highness the Amir praised the efforts exerted by the ministry officials at all levels, in preparing, correcting, and evaluating the tests, and all the facilities they offered to the students, wishing for further success and prosperity to the graduates in their future. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the education minister.

Informatics award

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sponsored on Monday His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Awards ceremony, also celebrating 20 years since establishment, and was represented by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

During the ceremony, taking place at Bayan Palace, His Highness the Crown Prince gave a speech in which he conveyed the greetings of the Amir, his pride in the 20 years of invaluable efforts, perseverance,

and diligence, all to enable local informatics, and help youth and establishments develop necessary skillsets. His Highness the Crown Prince honored the memory of late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's by speaking of his continuous sponsorship of this award. He also hailed His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, calling him an extraordinary character.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Sabah commended the efforts of all those working on the award, valuing their efforts, and voiced his pride in those who won. The leadership of Kuwait is well aware of the importance of technological scientific innovations, the limitless digital horizons, and the effect of this sector on the world in making it a safer more prosperous world, the Crown Prince stated affirming their support to such technological developments in what serves the citizens residents and establishments.

Groundwork of digitalization

After that, Head of award's board of trustees Sheikh Aida Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah stated in speech that their long-term vision of the future and the groundwork of digitalization they had laid helped combat the emergent conditions posed by the coronavirus pandemic. She also touched on role

of late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and went on to say that His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is steering the ship to the much sought-after, digitalization, with the Crown Prince by his side. Sheikh Aida praised the winners of the award and the volunteers for their tireless work and excellent performance.

Furthermore, Amiri Diwan undersecretary Sheikh Sabah Nasser Al-Sabah gave speech on occasion of awarding late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah the honorary award of informatics, in which he voiced his pride and honor at having received this award on behalf of the late Amir. Head of the organizing committee, Bassam Al-Shamari, also gave a speech hailed the establishment of the award some 20 years ago award to encourage the youth and equip them with a language spoken by only a few at the time. He mentioned that as of today the award has been granted to 332 people from Kuwait and the Arab world, and 14 notable persons and establishments who made change in the world, and organized an international informatics conference for seven years. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah handed the awards to the winners, and was given a commemorative gift on this occasion. — KUNA



A group of participants in the awards.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah checks participants' inventions while touring the premises.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen during the tour.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah speaks with officials at the ceremony.



Celebrating 20 years of the Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Awards.

Local

Kuwait, GCC states amongst first to benefit from UK ETA scheme in 2023

ETA valid for multiple trips over an extended period with no visa required

KUWAIT: The UK government announced that all Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states will move to the Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) scheme from 2023. The new system allows citizens of Kuwait and other GCC countries to apply for an ETA valid for multiple trips over an extended period. Prior to the introduction of ETAs in 2023, travelers from the Gulf can continue to use Electronic

visas from the region to visit the UK for business or tourism," it says, adding that the step "will bring the requirements of Gulf nationals in-line with other key partners including the USA and Canada."

"Waiving the visa requirement for Kuwaiti nationals making short visits to the UK next year is fantastic news. It will bring our two countries even closer together, reflecting our longstanding bonds of friendship, trade and cooperation across a wide range of areas," British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis said. "With so many direct flights between Kuwait and the UK, including Kuwait Airways' new route into Manchester, it will be easier than ever to keep in touch and enjoy the best that each country has to offer."

"This move means that Gulf states will be among the first countries in the world to benefit from ETAs and visa-free travel to the UK," UK Home Secretary Priti Patel said. "Our number one priority is the security of the UK border and by launching ETAs we can ensure that everyone wishing to travel to the UK has permission to do so in advance of travel and refuse those who pose a threat."

"ETAs enhance the Government's ability to screen travelers and stop those who pose a threat to the UK by ensuring everyone wishing to travel to the UK (except British and Irish citizens) has permission to do so in advance," the statement reads. "The ETA scheme is an important part of the UK Government's move to a fully digital border by the end of 2025. It will broadly apply to passengers



visiting or transiting through the UK who do not currently need a visa for short stays (for example, because they can already use the EVW scheme), or do not currently hold another UK visa."

The ETA will not apply to students attending courses or other categories of travelers who wish to visit the UK for longer than a short stay,

according to the statement. "It is a straight-forward application process and will act as an additional security measure allowing the government to block threats from entering the UK, whilst also providing individuals with more assurance at an earlier point in time about their ability to travel," it further explains.



Move brings UK, Kuwait even closer: Ambassador

Visa Waivers which allows individuals to complete an online waiver for each visit to the UK, and is available for short visits only, says a statement released by the UK Embassy in Kuwait.

By moving to ETAs, all six Gulf states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE - will become non-visa nationals, meaning they will not require a visa to visit the UK, according to the statement. "The move will bolster UK security and improve border processes, making it easier for visi-



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives the letter from Qatari Ambassador Ali bin Abdullah Al-Mahmoud. — KUNA photos



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives the letter from Egyptian Ambassador Osama Shaltout.



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives the letter from Yemeni Ambassador Dr Ali Mansour bin Safaa.

received a written letter from Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on boosting the bilateral relations. The message was delivered by the Qatari Ambassador to Kuwait, Ali bin Abdullah Al-Mahmoud, to Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a written letter from Egyptian President Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi, about strengthening the bilateral relation between both countries. Sheikh Dr

Ahmad received the letter during a meeting with Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Osama Shaltout.

In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a written message from Chairman of the Presidential Council of Yemen Dr Rashad Mohammad Al-Alimi, related to strengthening the bilateral relations. Sheikh Dr Ahmad received the letter during a meeting with Ambassador of Yemen in the country Dr Ali Mansour bin Safaa. — KUNA

Kuwait Amir receives letter from Qatari Amir

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday

'Permanent' govt program unaffected by reshuffles eyed

KUWAIT: A specialized government team has prepared a new permanent approach for the new government following the National Assembly elections, expected to take place before the end of the year, following an announcement by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah that the current Assembly will be constitutionally dissolved in the coming months, in the speech that was delivered by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah last week.

High ranking sources said, "the preparation of a new approach by the government team is a new move that makes the government program permanent that does not change with the change of ministers; rather each ministry will be committed to implementing its program to fulfill a major reform plan that fights corruption and achieves transparency, remedies the structural, administrative and financial loopholes in each ministry and integrates official entities to eliminate bureaucracy."

The sources said the next government program is based on three main targets: Economic and financial reforms, slimming the government administrative system to reduce the number of government employees and send them to the private sector, and decisively remedying the population structure to make Kuwaitis 70 percent of the population and expats 30 percent.

Sources said the economic reforms include an increase in investment spending and reducing consumption. Among the reforms is to increase Kuwaitis' employment in the private sector and

boost the percentage of Kuwaiti labor to more than 59 percent in some current sectors in which Kuwaitis do not make more than 25 percent. Also, there will be a strong start of the Kuwaitization policy to reach a percentage of up to 70 percent like in some sectors like banks and communications. The first of these sectors is insurance, where Kuwaitis' presence does not match that of expats.

The sources said a law to appoint leaders and those in supervisory positions will be present in the government program, as there will not be an

Nations' efforts aiming to boost peace, safety and security in Yemen. The secretariat added in statement this came during Dr Hajraf's meeting with the UN special envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg, at the GCC headquarters in Riyadh. The meeting handled discussion of the treaty announced by special envoy, and outcome of Yemeni-Yemeni negotiations. The secretariat further affirmed necessity of executing resolutions relating to the issue at hand, and enforcing regional and international efforts to support development, relief and economy in Yemen. — KUNA

appointment of a supervisor without the presence of certain conditions and a certain period. They said the current state administrative system of the government is highly inflated and suffers from poor productivity.

They said remedying the population structure is now the worry of both the government and private sectors. The plan is to get rid of thousands of excess marginal laborers, while concentrating on only bringing in academically qualified workers after a joint decision by the Cabinet and Public Authority of Manpower (PAM).



RIYADH: Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf meets with the UN special envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg. — KUNA

GCC supports UN efforts to restore peace in Yemen

RIYADH: Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf affirmed on Monday Gulf States support to United

In my view

Wheel of time is the strongest

By Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

local@kuwaittimes.com



The journey between strength and weakness is similar to the human being's life cycle. It starts by relying on others, then comes the strength stage, followed by weakness, then life is over, to be reborn somewhere else. Nations have a similar cycle too. Nations that are strong today were weak in a previous era, while nations that were strong in the past are suffering from weakness and backwardness today. This is the life cycle the human being does not realize because it is much longer than the human being's age.

This has been time's journey since the old days, but there are attempts today to halt this journey - the journey of history. Today, those among the "educated" who believe in Western theory attempt to stamp human history with liberal democracy, as the Japanese American Francis Fukuyama wrote in his famous column about the end of history in 1989 to expose repeated attempts by Western scientists to stop the wheel of history and preserve Western democratic principles. Not only this, but also the expansion of these values to cover the world and remain above the turn of time.

Away from philosophers and theorists, Western military and politicians seem to be happy with these "educated" people, who gave them the green light to control the world's nations and people. Politicians know that the sources of raw materials of the world are limited and will vanish. They also know that what they cultivate and manufacture need markets that are larger than theirs. They know that they need followers, as masters need supporters and followers. Western politicians know that to remain on the summit requires them to push others downhill. They believe life is hard and there is no place for other values and for the weak in it.

When Western-educated people gave politicians and military people a certificate of forgiveness, the world began to boil. When they do not find an enemy, they will create one to keep up the struggle and impose power. If someone wants to bring back the movement of time to its natural state, they condemn him to death. If a ruler wants to use his raw materials to develop his country, they destroy and defame him.

We, in our countries for example, can sell oil at market prices, and buy with that money all that we desire from industries in the West and East. We can live in luxurious houses, bigger than those Americans live in, yet we cannot use this money to advance our development. Although we are a small country, the model that may result worries the world's decision makers, so what about major countries?!

This is what our educated people sought for the past 50 years, that we must consume our oil only for our luxury, and who dares to do otherwise must bear all the risks that may hit him. If the end of history theory succeeds, and Western politicians and military succeed in their continuous wars, there will come a day in which the fast food culture will totally dominate the world. Cultures of various nations will disappear, and Western culture will be everywhere in the universe.

Despite the attempts of the Western world and those who support it, there will somewhere be other powers able to build a new civilization with a new culture that will make the wheel of time turn again. So the strong of today will become weak tomorrow, and the weak today will become strong tomorrow.

This is the wheel of time, which is stronger than people's hands.

Education ministry starts preparations for next year

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education began back-to-school plans a bit early, preparing new contracts and extending cleaning workers' deals, while opting against hiring new staff for catering at kindergartens for the next academic year starting September 2022. Speaking to Kuwait Times, sources working at the Ministry confirmed that the ministry has officially signed a contract to provide buses in three educational zones for this coming year. The ministry plans to sign similar contracts for the remaining districts by the end of this week, the sources added.

Furthermore, the ministry plans to extend cleaning and security workers' contracts at all five educational zones for an additional three years, the sources noted. In the meantime, the ministry has no plans to add kindergarten catering staff for next year, which will help move catering tenders smoothly, the sources further noted.

The source also made clear that the Ministry of Education did not receive any official letter about the new budget to set the official financial plan the coming academic year, which is said to be announced in July. "In all circumstances, spending won't be a big issue now that the government has green lighted support to anything related to government schools in Kuwait, such as offering sport for the educational sector and provide management and teaching staff for a successful academic year," the sources explained.

Sources have also stated that the Ministry will start next month accepting and signing contracts with teachers from Jordan and Palestine who are willing to teach during the new academic year. Signing new teachers will help vacate empty teaching slots in new schools as new Kuwaiti teachers, either recent graduates from Kuwait University or graduates holding a diploma in Education, offer to teach; and they will become a higher priority in employment, followed by GCC citizens, bedoons and children of Kuwaiti women, whose acceptance will only be confirmed on demand.



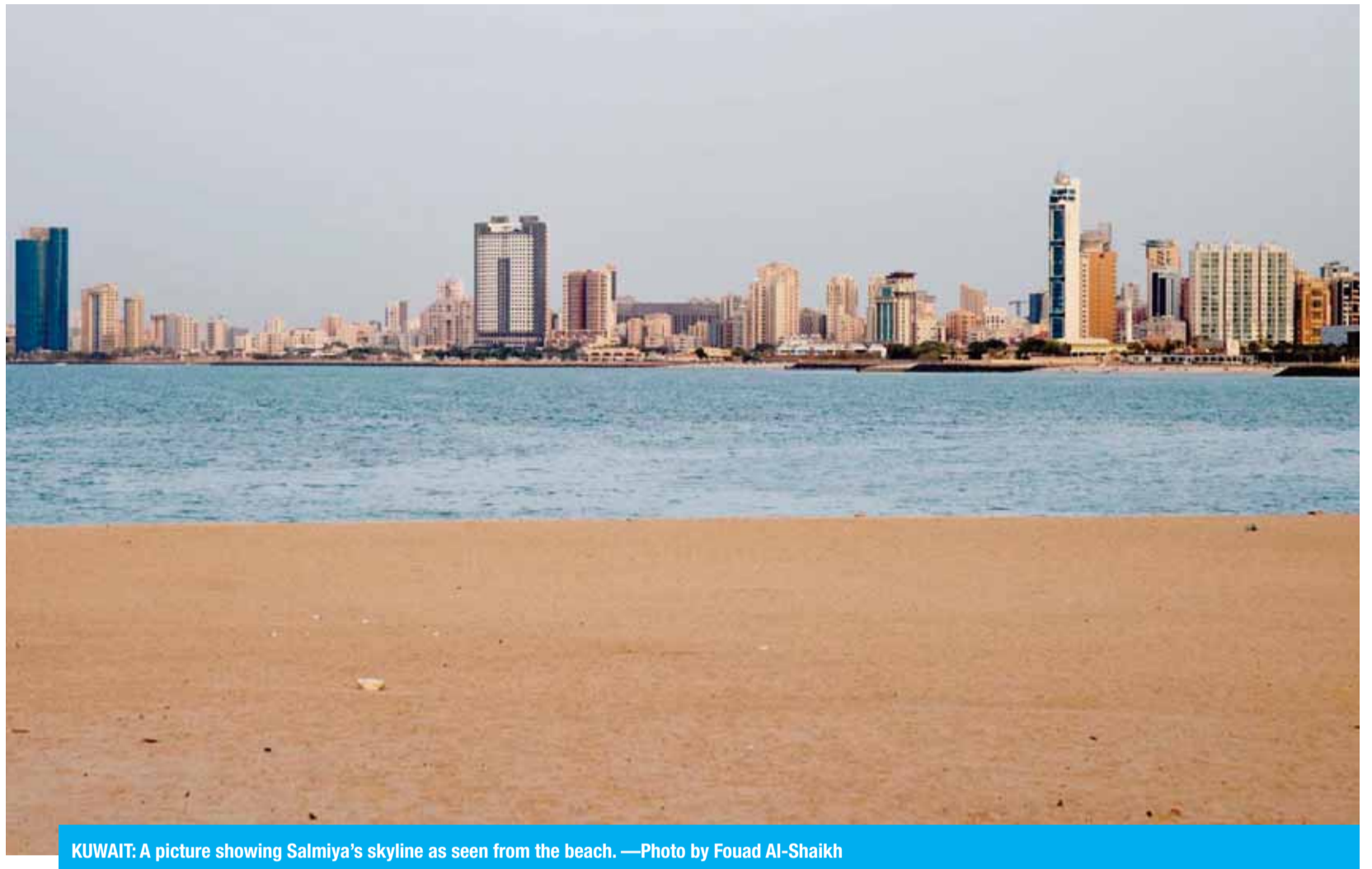
Kuwait Fire Force raises beach risks awareness

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force launched in cooperation with National Bank of Kuwait the "Your Safety is our Concern" campaign to spread awareness among citizens and residents about the risks they may face when they go to the beach or go on boat trips or jet skis. The campaign began at Khairan resort and will continue until mid-July.



KUWAIT: Fire broke out in a storeroom of a Doha house. Sulaibikhat and Sour stations responded and the fire was put out.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture showing Salmiya's skyline as seen from the beach. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Experts say listing banks' shares stimulates, balances Boursa Kuwait

Banking sector's capital worth over KD 4.5 billion

KUWAIT: The listing of regular and Islamic banks shares in Boursa Kuwait, Kuwait's stock exchange, is an act that stimulated and balanced the market, said a number of experts on Monday. The capital of the banking sector is worth over KD 4.5 billion (\$16.2 billion). The rolling of shares in Boursa Kuwait is still at normal and fair levels, experts said in separate interviews. Banks' shares have proven to be robust and steady in the last four years due to tight central auditing and international regulations and standards, which attracted regional and foreign investments, said Waleed Al-Houti, chairman of the board for Al-Dorra Petroleum Services Company. He noted that the transparency in sharing news of shares and maintaining the rights of shareholders led to foreign investors and funds to seek such shares. He pointed out that foreign shares in the banking sectors reached over 20 especially after the recent decision by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), which agreed to distribute banks' half-year profits and that increased liquidity of the sector in the market.

Digital transactions was another perk that the banking sector took advantage of in favor of clients and fair competition, said Al-Houti who predicted that activities of the banking sector would continue to thrive for the remainder of the year. Member of the board for the Sorrooh International Holding Company Suleiman Al-Wugayyan revealed that banks shares were of great interest for individuals and portfolios because of their flexibility and regu-

lar distributing of annual shares, a matter that has a positive impact on the market's main index. Shares of banks are mostly stable and safe due to being mostly out of the reach of strong speculations affecting other shares of other sectors in the bourse, Wugayyan said, adding that banking shares were active whether owned by individuals or portfolios.

Meanwhile, head of Al-Namesh Investment Group Ali Al-Namesh saw that the shares of banks



Banks' shares proven robust and steady



KUWAIT: This file photo shows a man checking trade lists at Boursa Kuwait.

Head of traders' society Mohammad Al-Tarrah pointed out that the banking sector had contributed positively to the activities of the Kuwaiti and GCC markets, indicating that the auditing of the CBK and positive governance were key components of the sector's success. The banking sectors performance is usually high during trading, he affirmed, adding that shareholders would reap the benefits of their investments. The 10 banks listed in Boursa Kuwait had gained KD 229.4 million (around \$778.2 million) in profits in the first quarter of this year, an increase by 39.4 percent from last year's KD 186 million (around \$558 million). —KUNA

Al-Raja School for Girls celebrates 2021/2022 graduates

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Al-Raja School for Girls held on Sunday a ceremony for its graduating class of the 2021/2022 academic year. The ceremony was attended by General Inspector of Educational Affairs Abdulrahman Khuraibet, parents of students, teachers and heads of departments of the school. School Principal Mona Bu-Hamad said the school is keen on taking care of students with special needs according to the general education curriculum, adding an outstanding student graduated from this school who joined college and achieved exceptional success.

Bu-Hamad stressed the importance of utilizing the energies and capabilities of people with special needs, and the necessity of integrating them into society and activating their role in the work environment. Engineer Alaa Hassan said that this ceremony is not only a celebration for outstanding students, but the celebration includes families and parents who provided the means for success of their daughters, thanking the school members and teachers for their tireless efforts.

Student Retaj Al-Failakawi expressed her pride for being part of a school that has teachers who envelop her and other students with love and complete care, hoping her peers achieve their dreams. Student Retaj Al-Harbi remembered in her speech the good moments at school that encouraged her to keep on achieving success, crediting her teachers for their great efforts.

The Al-Raja School graduation ceremony included competitions, and gifts were distributed to students by Bu-Hamad. At the end of the ceremony, she handed graduation certificates to the graduates and mementos of thanks to teachers for their efforts.



Education ministry and school officials honor a graduate.



KUWAIT: A group of graduates at the graduation ceremony. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



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Funeral held in Brazil for slain British journalist

Frustration and hope: African migrants in limbo in Rwanda

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EAST LONDON, South Africa: Police and investigators put on protective clothing before going into a township pub in South Africa's southern city of East London, after 21 teenagers died. — AFP

S African police search bar for clues

Survivors spoke of strong, suffocating smell in jam-packed building

EAST LONDON: South African police were on Monday combing a township tavern where 21 teenagers mysteriously died as survivors described a battle to escape the jam-packed premises and one reported a suffocating smell. Most of the victims, some as young as 13 years, were found dead inside a popular bar in the southern city of East London.

Seventeen were died inside the bar, while four died in hospital. Thirty-one others were hospitalised with symptoms including backache, tight chests, vomiting and headache, official said. Most were discharged on Sunday, leaving two in hospital, they said. The fatalities bore no visible signs of injury, sparking initial speculation among local officials and politicians that this was a case of under-age drinking that went tragically wrong.

But new details emerged Monday as survivors spoke of a strong and suffocating smell in the jam-packed double-storey building. Sinovuyo Monyane, 19, who was hired by the bar to promote an alcohol brand, said she was still "confused" but felt lucky to be alive.

She said she struggled to escape through a door gridlocked with people. "We tried moving through the crowd, shouting 'please let us through,' and others were shouting 'we are dying, guys,' and 'we are suffocating' and 'there are people who can't breathe,'" she told AFP.



'I could have died'

"I passed out at that moment. I was running out of breath and there was a strong smell of some type of spray on in the air. We thought it was pepper spray," she said. She later regained her consciousness after someone sprayed water on her. "I got up and realised that

there were bodies lying around. I saw people being poured water, but those people did not even move," she said in a phone interview. "I could have died."

Special investigators from Pretoria have been rushed to the scene. "The detectives will be resuming their work at the crime scene today," regional police spokesman Thembinkosi Kinana told AFP.

'Traumatised'

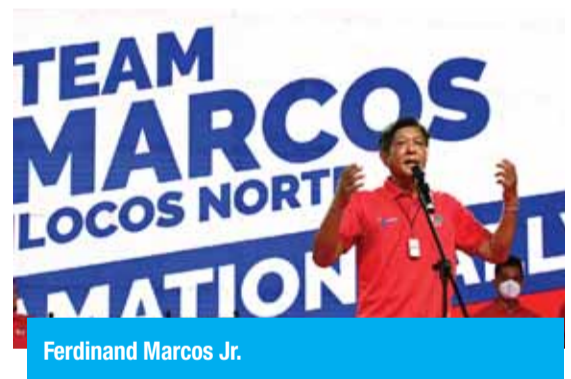
Many of the victims are thought to have been students celebrating the end of their high-school exams, officials said. Autopsies are being conducted to see if the deaths could be linked to poisoning. "Post-mortems (were) completed by last night and the bodies will be released to their families today," said Yonela Dekeda, provincial spokeswoman for the health department.

Forensic analysis will be conducted this week. "Samples were taken and were on first flight today to Cape Town, where the tests will be conducted," said Unathi Binqose, a government official on safety.

Drinking in South Africa is permitted for over-18s.

But in township taverns which are often located cheek-by-jowl with family homes, safety regulations and drinking-age laws are not always enforced.

President Cyril Ramaphosa is among those who have voiced concern. The teenagers reportedly "gathered at a venue which, on the face of it, should be off-limits to persons under the age of 18," he said. A resident DJ, who was also celebrating his birthday on the night, spoke of a rush of revellers who forced their way into an already packed venue. "We tried to close the door but people kept pushing. The bouncers could not handle the crowd that was pushing from outside the entrance door. There were so many people," the DJ said. He turned off the music to try discourage revellers, but to no avail. The crowd was just "unruly and could not be managed," he said, adding he was "traumatised." In a tweet, African Union Commission chief Moussa Faki Mahamat expressed his thoughts and prayers "during this time of unspeakable grief and sorrow." — AFP



Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Marcos Jr takes over Philippines' top job

MANILA: Ferdinand Marcos Jr, whose dictator father and namesake plundered and brutalised the Philippines, has reached the end of a decades-long campaign to rehabilitate the family brand: the presidency. Marcos Jr, known by his nickname "Bongbong", will succeed Rodrigo Duterte in the top job on Thursday after his landslide victory in last month's elections. His win followed relentless whitewashing of the family's past and leveraging of alliances with rival families that control large swathes of the country. In the 36 years since a popular uprising toppled the patriarch and chased the family into US exile, the Marcoses have been rebuilding their political fortunes.

Despite his own father's concerns about his "care-free and lazy" nature, Marcos Jr, 64, made it to the ultimate post. After narrowly losing the vice-presidential race to Leni Robredo in the 2016 election, he was determined their rematch in the presidential contest on May 9 would end differently.

Vowing to unify the country, Marcos Jr made sweeping promises on the campaign trail to boost jobs and tackle rising prices in the lower-middle-income country. Marcos said last month he was "humbled" by his success at the ballot box and vowed to "always strive to perfection". "I want to do well, because when a president does well the country does well, and I want to do well for this country," he told reporters after Congress formally ratified the results. Growing up in the presidential palace in Manila, Marcos Jr wanted to be an astronaut before he followed his father's footsteps into politics. He served as vice governor and twice as governor of the family's northern stronghold of Ilocos Norte province, and also had stints in the House of Representatives and the Senate. His 92-year-old mother, Imelda, said she had dreamed of him becoming the country's leader. Marcos Jr's links to his father, whose rule was marked by the bloody repression of the martial law years, have made him one of the nation's most polarising politicians. —AFP

Rival camps dig in for fight after US abortion ruling

WASHINGTON: Elected leaders across the US political divide rallied Sunday for a long fight ahead on abortion — state by state and in Congress — with total bans in force or expected soon in half of the country. Two days after the US Supreme Court scrapped half-century constitutional protections for the procedure, abortion rights defenders kept up their mobilization, with several hundred gathered outside the high court during a candlelight vigil in Washington Sunday.

Dozens of arrests and some instances of vandalism were reported during a weekend of mostly peaceful protests that turned disorderly in places — as the country grapples with a new level of division: between states where abortion is or will soon be illegal, and those that still allow it. Conservative-led US state legislatures have moved swiftly, with at least eight imposing immediate bans on abortion — many with exceptions only if a woman's life is in danger — and a similar number to follow suit within weeks.

In a first glimpse of the legal battles ahead, the nation's largest abortion provider Planned Parenthood filed suit in Utah seeking to block the state's ban. And Democratic governors in Michigan and Wisconsin have stepped in to try to keep abortion legal in their Midwestern states. Defending the ban now in effect in South Dakota, which makes no exception for victims of rape or incest, Republican Governor Kristi Noem called the Supreme Court's ruling "wonderful news in the defense of life." Speaking on ABC's "This Week," Noem also voiced support for legislation banning "telemedicine abortions" in which a doctor prescribes pills to end a pregnancy — set to become a key resource in many places where abortion is illegal.

Governor Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas likewise argued that "forcing someone to carry a child to term" in order to save an unborn baby was an "appropriate" use of government power. States should now focus on helping mothers and newborns by expanding services including adoption, he said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

But the Republican also opposed calls to go further with a federal abortion ban — an ultimate goal of many on the religious right — or restrictions on contraception, which he said is "not going to be touched" in Arkansas.

Fears that the Supreme Court's strong conservative majority — made possible by Donald Trump — will now seek to target other rights like same-sex marriage and contraception have fueled the nationwide mobilization since Friday. President Joe Biden has condemned the Supreme Court's ruling as a "tragic error" — but with power now resting with often anti-abortion state legislatures, he has also acknowledged his hands are largely tied. —AFP



AZ ZALLAQ, Bahrain: Diplomats pose for a group picture ahead of the Negev Forum's first Steering Committee meeting in the town of in Zallaq, south of the Bahraini capital of Manama on June 27, 2022. — AFP

Zionist entity, Arab states deepen co-op ahead of Biden visit

MANAMA: The United States, Zionist entity and four Arab countries agreed to closer cooperation and annual foreign ministers' meetings on Monday, two weeks before President Joe Biden's first visit to the Middle East. Bahrain, host of the six-way talks, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco all opened ties with Zionist entity under the US-brokered Abraham Accords in 2020, while Egypt made peace with the Jewish state in 1979.

Monday's meeting follows a foreign ministers' summit in the Negev desert in March, and comes ahead of Biden's visit to Zionist entity, the Zionist-occupied West Bank and Saudi Arabia from July 13 to 16. "We're trying to build a new regional framework... and tangible initiatives that can put flesh on the bones of the Negev forum," said Yael Lempert, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.

Working groups will investigate cooperation in six areas, including security, clean energy and food and water security. A joint statement also expressed the group's support for a negotiated settlement to the Palestinian-Zionist conflict.

"It's a very holistic approach, towards trying to advance this goal of building a new architecture that really has meaningful results," Lempert told reporters.

Foreign ministers from the six countries are expected to meet annually and the next ministerial talks should take place later this year, the statement said.

The Manama meeting is part of a flurry of diplomatic activity in the region ahead of Biden's visit, which Washington has played up as a boost for regional ties. The US president has drawn heavy criticism over the trip, which contradicts his description of Saudi Arabia as a "pariah" over the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents.

His visit to the world's top oil exporter follows a sharp rise in crude prices since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, causing pain for US voters and economies around the world. Among the rash of official visits, Saudi's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman last week was in Turkey for the first time since Khashoggi's killing in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Iraq's prime minister was in Saudi Arabia and Iran, and Qatar's Amir visited Cairo for the first time since the countries restored relations following a Saudi-led rift. On Monday, Egyptian flags fluttered in the Bahraini capital ahead of the visit of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who is expected in the kingdom after a trip to Oman.

The UAE and Bahrain forged ties with Zionist entity under the Abraham Accords, brokered by former US president Donald Trump, and later Morocco re-established relations with the Jewish state. The Abraham Accords infuriated the Palestinians, who argued that they marked a betrayal of a decades-old Arab consensus to isolate Zionist entity until it agrees to the establishment of a Palestinian state, with its capital in east Jerusalem. — AFP

International

Afghanistan earthquake relief focus shifts to long term

Aid and shelter have reached almost all affected areas

KABUL: International and local relief organisations are shifting their focus from the immediate to longer term for areas of Afghanistan hit by last week's killer earthquake, officials said Monday. The 5.9-magnitude quake early last Wednesday hit hardest in impoverished Paktika province in the east, killing more than 1,000 people and leaving tens of thousands homeless.

While aid and shelter have reached almost all areas affected, the longer-term prospects look bleak and assistance limited in a country already in the grip of a humanitarian crisis made worse since the Taliban's return to power in August.

lives. "We will discuss (with partners) a long-term plan. Currently, enough first aid has been delivered-whether it is tents, shelter, food or other items." The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said it believed women would be at the centre of rebuilding communities hardest hit by the quake.

"When it comes to reconstruction of the local economy... we will make sure that women are at the core of that," said Abdallah Al Dardari, the UNDP resident representative.

'Testing ground'

Afghanistan's Taliban rulers have been criticised for reintroducing a hardline version of Islamic rule that imposes severe restrictions on women-including their right to education, work and travel. "This will be a testing ground on how we are moving forward with this women's economic empowerment," Al Dardari told AFP.

"We are determined, there is no way around that-and we believe, in fact, from the early signs from the ground, it will be women, who are actually today keeping those local communities alive." The World Health Organization (WHO) said it was sending trauma teams to Paktika to help survivors deal with the psychological effects of the earthquake. Hardly a family in rural Gayan district escaped untouched by the tragedy, and there are multiple reports of households with more than a dozen members being killed. "The exact numbers of casualties and houses/premises destruction are still not



GAYAN: In this photograph taken on June 25, 2022, a Taliban fighter stands guard beside the aid supplies for the people affected by recent earthquake in Gayan district of Paktika province. — AFP

fully identified and not yet confirmed," the WHO said in its latest bulletin.

"Challenges remain in accessibility... traffic and road conditions in the affected areas have delayed the delivery of supplies." Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said

that having dealt with the immediate needs of those injured in the quake, focus was now on the weeks and months ahead. "Now health needs are turning to dehydration and diarrhoea caused by a lack of safe water," said Jose Mas, MSF emergency coordinator. — AFP



'We will discuss a long-term plan'

"Our teams have observed that currently, there is not so much of a need for food or non-food items," Nooruddin Turabi, deputy president of the Afghan Red Crescent Society, told a news conference in Kabul. He said the most pressing need was for cash to enable those affected to buy basic materials to rebuild their



NITEROI, Brazil: Alessandra Sampaio (C, left) and Sian Phillips (C, right, partially covered), widow and sister respectively, of British journalist Dom Phillips, who was killed in the Amazon forest along with indigenous expert Bruno Pereira, and friends, embrace after speaking to the press during his funeral. — AFP

Funeral held in Brazil for slain British journalist

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil: Grieving family and friends paid their last respects Sunday to British journalist Dom Phillips, who was murdered in the Amazon earlier this month along with an Indigenous expert. Phillips, 57, and Bruno Pereira, 41, were shot dead while returning from an expedition in a remote region of the rainforest that is plagued by drug trafficking, illegal gold mining and fishing.

"Dom will be cremated in the country he loved, Brazil, which he had chosen as home," his widow, Brazilian Alessandra Sampaio, told reporters through tears after his funeral at the Parque da Colina cemetery outside Rio de Janeiro.

"Dom was a very special person, not only for defending what he believed in as a professional, but also for having a huge heart and a great love for humanity," Sampaio said. "Let's celebrate the sweet memory of Dom and his presence in our lives."

The journalist's sister Sian Phillips said he was killed "because he was trying to tell the world what was happening to the Amazon and its people." Three

suspects have been arrested in the crime, including a fisherman who confessed to burying the bodies and led investigators to the scene.

Sampaio said the family will pay close attention to the investigation into the murder of her husband and his colleague, thanking all the Indigenous people who helped look for the two men before their remains were found.

The disappearance of Phillips and Pereira on June 5 sparked an international outcry. Activists have blamed the killings on President Jair Bolsonaro for allowing commercial exploitation of the Amazon at the cost of the environment and law and order.

Phillips, the author of dozens of articles on the Amazon and a long-time contributor to The Guardian newspaper and other major news organizations, was traveling to the Javari Valley as part of research for an upcoming book. Pereira was serving as his guide, and had previously traveled with him in 2018 to the area.

An outspoken defender of Indigenous rights, Pereira had received multiple death threats before the double murder. He was laid to rest Friday in his home state of Pernambuco, in northeastern Brazil, to solemn funeral Indigenous hymns performed by members of a tribe he spent his life and work defending.

So far, three suspects are in custody over the killings. A fourth turned himself in last week, but police said his version of events was not credible. Police have said five other people who helped hide the bodies have been identified. — AFP

S Korean former SEAL has no Ukraine regrets

SEOUL: A former South Korean Navy SEAL turned YouTuber who risked jail time to leave Seoul and fight for Ukraine says it would have been a "crime" not to use his skills to help. Ken Rhee, an ex-special warfare officer, signed up at the Ukrainian Embassy in Seoul the moment President Volodymyr Zelensky asked for global volunteers and was fighting on the front lines near Kyiv by early March.

To get there, he had to break South Korean law- Seoul banned its citizens from travelling to Ukraine, and Rhee, who was injured in a fall while leading a special operations patrol there, was met at the airport by 15 police officers on his return.

But the celebrity ex-soldier, who has a YouTube channel with 700,000 followers and documented much of his Ukraine experience on his popular Instagram account, says he has no regrets. "You're walking down the beach and you see a sign by the water saying 'no swimming'-but you see someone drowning. It's a crime not to help. That's how I see it," he told AFP. Rhee was born in South Korea but raised in the United States. He attended the Virginia Military Institute and planned to join the US Navy SEALs, but his father-a "patriot", he says-convinced his son to return to South Korea to enlist.

He served for seven years, undergoing both US and Korean SEAL training and doing multiple stints in war zones in Somalia and Iraq before leaving to set up a defence consultancy. "I have the skillset. I have the experience. I was in two different wars, and going to Ukraine, I knew I could help," he said, adding that he viewed breaking South Korea's passport law to leave as equivalent to a "traffic violation".

Backlash in Korea

But the reaction in South Korea-where Rhee shot to fame as a trainer in the popular YouTube series "Fake Men"-was swift and unforgiving. "It was instant. People in Korea, they just criticised me about breaking the law," said Rhee.

His critics claim the 38-year-old's decision was criminally irresponsible, and point to his posting of war footage on his YouTube and Instagram accounts as evidence of showboating. Rhee says he tries not to let the furor get to him. "I think it's pretty obvious who the good guys are and who the bad guys are," he said of Russia and Ukraine.

On his first day on the frontline in Irpin-which he

describes as "the Wild West" and "chaos"-he says he witnessed Russian war crimes. "I saw a civilian get shot. He was driving... and they shot him through the windshield and he died in front of us," he said.

"It was like: there's my proof. There's definitely war crimes going on. It reminded me and my teammates what we were doing and why we were there," he said. Because of his military training, Rhee was told to set up his own team, so he recruited other volunteers with combat experience and set up a multi-national special operations group.



Ken Rhee

"I was eating Canadian MREs. My gun was from the Czech Republic. I have a Javelin missile from the United States. I have a rocket that's from Germany... but nothing is Korean," he said. He tried to take his Korean-made night vision goggles but was not given government export permission. Seoul has provided non-lethal aid to Kyiv, but Rhee said they could do more. "Korea has state-of-the-art equipment... they're very good at making weapons," he said.

'See you in Taiwan'

Russia said earlier this month that 13 South Koreans had travelled to Ukraine-including four who were killed. Seoul said it was trying to verify the claims. Although Rhee did not know the fate of all his teammates, he said "a lot of my friends have died". "I don't want my friends' sacrifices to be forgotten," he said, adding that he plans to write a book-and maybe a screenplay-about his team's experiences. But first, he needs to deal with the official repercussions of his trip. He is quietly optimistic South Korea's new conservative administration won't put him in jail. Rhee is not allowed to leave the country until his case is resolved, and is receiving treatment for his injuries. But he hopes one day to fight alongside his teammates again, for a cause they believe in. The joke as people left the frontline was: "See you in Taiwan," he said, referring darkly to the risk that Beijing will follow Moscow's lead and invade a neighbouring democracy. — AFP

The difficult search for truth at France's biggest terror trial

PARIS: During the nine-month trial stemming from France's worst ever terror attacks in November 2015, the moment hundreds of victims were hoping for came late in proceedings. "I'm going to explain myself because it's the last time that I'll have the opportunity to do so," said Salah Abdeslam, the sole surviving Islamic State jihadist from the group that attacked the Bataclan concert hall and other targets in the French capital.

Spoken in the defendants' glass box in April, the words sent tremors through the courtroom where victims and their families had been ever-present during the hearings. Those caught up in the carnage of November 13, 2015, had expressed different hopes for the trial, the biggest in French history which comes to climax this Wednesday when verdicts are expected.

Many survivors thought that by taking part, it would help them to heal psychologically. Others felt a deep desire for justice to be served, even though most of the attackers were dead. And many more hoped for clarity: why had 10 young men from Muslim backgrounds, most of them born in Europe, slaughtered 130 people as they enjoyed themselves on a Friday night?

"We come here because we're trying to understand things which are completely irrational," a widow of a



PARIS, France: This court-sketch made on June 27, 2022, shows defendant Salah Abdeslam (R) standing next to the 13 other defendants in front of Paris' criminal court during the trial of the November 2015 attacks that saw 130 people killed at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, bars, restaurants and the Bataclan concert hall in Paris. — AFP

victim, who asked not to be named, told AFP as she headed into court in October. She also hoped to meet people "who saw my husband just before he died," she added, her voice catching in her throat.

The attacks on the national sports stadium, bars in bustling neighbourhoods, and the Bataclan were the worst peace-time atrocity in modern French history.

The trial opened on September 8 and has been held in the specially built courtroom in central Paris-an airy wood-framed construction, with chairs and benches for 550 people. For some, the desire for explanations seemed in vain. Abdeslam "thinks he's a star, he teases us, keeps quiet, enjoys the reactions he provokes," one of the prosecution lawyers, Nicolas Le Bris, said angrily

ly in late March. Two weeks later, the main suspect, wearing a striped t-shirt and blue jacket, appeared to have a change of heart. "All these people in here need my responses. I can't promise anything, but I'll do my best," said the 32-year-old, who had refused to cooperate during his six years behind bars.

'Not going to do it'

The Belgium-born son of Moroccan immigrants recounted what he said was his role in the attacks that sent shockwaves through France and Europe. During a meeting in Belgium, where the IS cell was based, he had been asked to take part in the attacks two days beforehand by the ringleader, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a long-time friend. During the assault, which was coordinated from Syria, Abdeslam's role was to blow himself up in a cafe in a fashionable area of the 18th district of northern Paris. Before this, he would drive three suicide bombers to the Stade de France where France was playing Germany in a football game attended by then-president Francois Hollande.

But when he arrived in the bar, he had a change of heart. Abdeslam claimed. "I go into the cafe, I order a drink. I look at the people around me and I say to myself 'no, I'm not going to do it,'" he told the court.

A few kilometres to the southeast, his older brother Brahim embraced his mission, gunning down young people in cafes before blowing himself up. A third group of jihadists ran into the Bataclan during an Eagles of Death Metal concert, shooting indiscriminately. Ninety people died there. After his alleged change of heart, Abdeslam said he travelled to the south of Paris before calling some friends in Brussels to come to pick him up. —AFP

International

Frustration and hope: African migrants in limbo in Rwanda

None want to stay in the country that gave them shelter

GASHORA, Rwanda: Ismail Hmdan Banaga says he's had a "frustrating and fruitless" time waiting in vain in Rwanda for his Canadian asylum request to be approved. The 33-year-old Sudanese told AFP he is so fed up he is considering a trek back to war-torn Libya to try to make it to Europe across the Mediterranean, a perilous voyage that has taken the lives of many.

He is one of hundreds of Africans once stranded in Libya who are now in limbo at the Gashora Transit

area, basketball/volleyball court and driving practice area—some say they want to become taxi drivers when they reach Europe—and a centre where people can learn skills such as weaving and hairdressing.

"There's freedom here at the camp to do whatever I like, way better than the conditions in Libya and I like it here, but the processing speed for asylum to leave is very slow," Banaga said. Another refugee discussed his situation with AFP on condition of anonymity, saying he cannot speak freely in the presence of Rwandan and UN refugee agency officials for fear of reprisals.

"I regret coming to Rwanda," he said. "First, I left Sudan, leaving my children and my father behind under conditions of war... and looting and robbery everywhere." He said he stayed in Libya for three years before arriving in Rwanda where he said he was initially greeted with kindness.

"It has been a year now in Rwanda and am not sure if I will get asylum or not. If it turns out that they abandoned me, then returning to Libya is more merciful than staying here in Rwanda under this humiliation."

'Rwanda to the rescue'

But for Zemen Fesaha, a 26-year-old Eritrean, dreams of a new life are about to come true. "Next week I will be flying to Canada. I am very excited," he said, adding that he would like to find a job as a social worker there.

He recounted a horrific ordeal trying to make it out of Libya, paying \$20,000 to traffickers to cross the Mediterranean. "One day the boat overturned and many people drowned and died. I swam for hours with some other survivors all the way to the shore and we got arrested by Libyan officials. They took us to jail and we stayed there for months until Rwanda came to the rescue."

More than 600 refugees have been resettled in third countries, but UNHCR and government officials say they have not had a single request to stay in Rwanda permanently. "Our problem is that we come



KIGALI, Rwanda: (L/R): Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson yawns as he sits alongside Rwanda's President Paul Kagame and Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations Patricia Scotland during the Leaders' Retreat executive session. —AFP

to Rwanda to go, not to stay here," said Nyalada Gatkouth Jany from South Sudan.

Jany said she left her mother and brother behind, but ended up in a Libyan prison after trying four times to cross the Mediterranean: "I saw the death of people with my own eyes." Now Jany's request for asylum in Finland for herself and her one-year-old son has been accepted. —AFP



Frustrating and fruitless time waiting in vain

Centre on a dusty road outside the capital Kigali—but none want to stay in the country that gave them shelter.

Their fate has come under the spotlight since Britain hatched a controversial deal with Rwanda in April to deport unwanted asylum seekers to the East African country. "I have done several interviews to go to Canada but there is no feedback. The officials are not being very clear about the way forward," said Banaga, who has been at Gashora for almost a year. "The fact is I'm not going back to Sudan, and not staying here for life. I would rather go back to try and cross the sea."

'I regret coming'

Residents live in small brick maisonettes at Gashora, which has seen almost 1,100 people come through its doors since 2019 when Rwanda agreed to offer shelter to refugees from Libya. It has a cafete-

Protests after arrest of India rights activist

NEW DELHI: Protests were held in several Indian cities Monday over the arrest of a rights activist who attempted to have Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared complicit in deadly sectarian riots 20 years ago. One of India's worst outbreaks of religious violence saw at least 1,000 people—mostly Muslims—hacked, shot and burned to death in Gujarat when Modi was premier of the western state in 2002.

Activist Teesta Setalvad was detained on Saturday, a day after India's top court rejected a lawsuit filed by her and her NGO challenging a ruling that cleared Modi over the bloodshed. Hindu nationalist Modi, who ran Gujarat from 2001 until becoming Indian prime minister in 2014, was briefly subject to a travel ban by the United States over the violence.

The unrest began after 59 Hindus died in a fire on a train returning from one of Hinduism's most sacred sites. Thirty-one Muslims were convicted of criminal conspiracy and murder over the incident. Setalvad was a co-competitor in the appeal to the Supreme Court filed by Zakia Jafri, the widow of a former lawmaker, Ehsan Jafri, who was killed in the riots. "I am not a criminal," Setalvad shouted to waiting journalists Saturday after anti-terrorist police detained her for alleged criminal conspiracy, forgery and placing false evidence in court. The Mumbai Press Club expressed "shock and dismay" at the arrest, calling for an end to the "politics of vengeance".

"Setalvad and others, who lent their voice to the victims of communal violence in 2002 and after, have now been made scapegoats in a chilling process of vendetta unleashed by the executive and judiciary," the organisation said. Mary Lawlor, UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders, said she was "deeply concerned".

"Teesta is a strong voice against hatred and discrimination.



NEW DELHI, India: Demonstrators hold placards during a protest in New Delhi on June 27, 2022. Protests were held in several Indian cities over the arrest of rights activist Teesta Setalvad. —AFP

Defending human rights is not a crime. I call for her release and an end to persecution by #Indian state," Lawlor tweeted. "It's not just politically motivated, it's beyond that. It is a fascist mindset," said Balan, 60, one of several dozen lawyers and activists protesting in Bangalore on Monday. He declined

to give his last name.

"Whoever is working for the people, who is working for the downtrodden communities, (the government) treats this as a crime," Balan added. A larger protest involving about 150 people took place in Mumbai and a smaller one in New Delhi. —AFP

UN chief warns oceans in state...

Continued from Page 1

And soaking up more than 90 percent of the excess heat from global warming has spanned massive marine heatwaves that are killing off precious coral reefs and expanding dead zones bereft of oxygen.

"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. Making things worse is an unending torrent of pollution, including a garbage truck's worth of plastic every minute, according to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). On current trends, yearly plastic waste will nearly triple to one billion tons by 2060, according to a recent report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Microplastics - now found inside Arctic ice and fish in the ocean's deepest trenches - are estimated to kill more than a million seabirds and over 100,000 marine mammals each year. Solutions on the table range from recycling to global caps on plastic production. Global fisheries will also be in the spotlight during the five-day UN Ocean Conference, originally slated for April 2020 and jointly hosted by Portugal and Kenya.

"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." One culprit is nearly \$35 billion in subsidies. Baby steps taken last

week by the World Trade Organization (WTO) to reduce handouts to industry will hardly make a dent, experts said.

The conference will also see a push for a moratorium on deep-sea mining of rare metals needed for a boom in electric vehicle battery construction. Scientists say poorly understood seabed ecosystems are fragile and could take decades or longer to heal once disrupted. Another major focus will be "blue food", the new watchword for ensuring that marine harvests from all sources - wild caught and farmed - are sustainable and socially responsible.

Aquaculture yields - from salmon and tuna to shellfish and algae - have grown by three percent a year for decades and are on track to overtake wild marine harvests that peaked in the 1990s, with each producing roughly 100 million tons per year. The Lisbon meeting will be attended by ministers and even a few heads of state, including French President Emmanuel Macron, but is not a formal negotiating session.

But participants will push 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 UN biodiversity negotiations, recently moved from China to Montreal. Oceans are already at the heart of a draft treaty tasked with halting what many scientists fear is the first "mass extinction" event in 65 million years. A cornerstone provision would designate 30 percent of the planet's land and ocean as protected areas.

But preparatory negotiations in Nairobi ended on Sunday in deadlock. "The agreement is at risk of collapsing on the question of finance," the environmental diplomacy lead for WWF France told AFP. For climate change, the focus will be on carbon sequestration - boosting the ocean's capacity to soak up CO2, whether by enhancing natural sinks such as mangroves or through geoengineering schemes. At the same time, scientists warn, a drastic reduction in greenhouse gases is needed to restore ocean health. —AFP

Fear, defiance for families of drug war dead

MANILA: Six years after four policemen burst into her Manila slum shack and shot dead her husband and teenage son, Mary Ann Bonifacio fears for her own life as she fights for justice. Bonifacio is pursuing the men in court in the hope of proving they unlawfully killed her loved ones - a rare example of officers tasked with carrying out Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's drug war facing trial.

Official data show more than 6,200 people have died in police anti-narcotics operations since Duterte swept to power in 2016 promising to rid the country of drugs. But rights groups estimate tens of thousands of mostly poor men have been killed by officers and vigilantes, even without proof they were linked to drugs. While the crackdown has been widely condemned and sparked an international investigation, only three policemen have been convicted for killing a drug suspect.

Lawyers say most families are too scared to go after their relatives' killers or do not have the money or time to pursue a case in the Philippines' creaky judicial system. For Bonifacio, who has five other children, the decision to take legal action meant giving up a normal life. Fearing the officers, who are on bail, or their supporters could go after her and her family, Bonifacio has moved house several times and is always looking over her shoulder. "There is that possibility (of being killed)," she said, appearing older than her 48 years.

Bonifacio, who washes clothes and cleans houses to make ends meet, added: "I also have to think about my children's safety." She filed a criminal complaint for murder in 2017, insisting her husband Luis, an

NATO allies to boost high readiness forces to 300,000

BRUSSELS: NATO allies will boost high readiness forces to "well over 300,000" troops as they strengthen their defences in response to Russia's war on Ukraine, alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg said Monday.

Leaders from the US-led military alliance will meet in Madrid this week for what Stoltenberg said would be a "transformative" summit as it grapples with the fallout of Moscow's invasion of its pro-Western neighbour. Stoltenberg said allies would bolster some of their battle group deployments along NATO's eastern flank "up to brigade level" - tactical units of several thousand troops - and ratchet up high readiness numbers to "well over 300,000".

In addition, more heavy weaponry, including air defence systems, would be shifted forwards and forces pre-assigned to defend specific NATO members on the alliance's exposed eastern edge. "This constitutes the biggest overhaul of our collective defence and deterrence since the Cold War," Stoltenberg said.

Stoltenberg did not give further details of the additional high readiness forces or how they could be deployed by the alliance. NATO currently has a high readiness force of around 40,000 troops under its command.

The more than 300,000 troops are expected to form a larger pool that the alliance could tap into in the case of an emergency. Stoltenberg also said that leaders would agree to bolster NATO's essential support to embattled Ukraine, whose President Volodymyr Zelensky is set to call in via video link. —AFP

unemployed decorator, and son Gabriel, a waiter, were not involved in drugs and were unarmed when police opened fire. But it took the Ombudsman four years to bring the lesser charge of homicide against the policemen after finding their actions "went beyond the call of (self-) preservation".

The officers said they acted in "self-defense" after the men shot at them, and have asked the court to dismiss the case for lack of evidence. In court, Bonifacio sits next to the accused killers due to a lack of space. The men are set to give evidence on Aug 9. "I do not wish them dead. I want to make them understand that what they did was wrong and ensure they will not do it to other people again," Bonifacio said.

But accessing evidence held by the police, the same institution that prosecutes the drug war, is a major stumbling block, Bonifacio's lawyer Kristina Conti said. "For these kinds of crimes, the burden of accountability cannot simply fall upon the victims or survivors," Conti added.

Raquel Fortun, one of only two forensic pathologists in the Philippines, has been working with a Catholic priest and families to gather evidence she hopes could be used in court. She has been examining some of the exhumed remains of drug war victims whose bodies are being removed from temporary burial sites and cremated. Her findings cast doubt on the most common police claim that suspects "fought back".

"I'm seeing some cases where you've got gunshot wounds on the wrists, on the forearms, on the hands, and these are what we would typically call defense-type injuries," she told AFP. "So instinctively that individual must have put up an arm, a hand. So how can that person have fought back?"

At the height of the drug war, Bonifacio said killings happened almost "every night" in her hard-scrabble neighborhood. Her traumatized youngest son, now 13, often wakes up crying from nightmares about being chased by police trying to kill him. He turns off the television when Duterte appears, and runs away when he sees an officer. —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, JUNE 28, 2022



ANKARA: A woman buys fish at a market in Ankara as Turkey's troubled lira nosedived after Turkish President cited Muslim teachings to justify not raising interest rates to stabilize the currency. Erdogan has pushed the central bank to sharply lower borrowing costs despite the annual rate of inflation soaring to more than 20 percent. — AFP

Turkey's troubled lira rallies on 'backdoor capital controls'

Erdogan pushes for 'liratisation' to prevent dollarization



ISTANBUL: A picture shows US dollars banknotes and Turkish lira banknotes. Turkey's annual inflation rate jumped after a currency crisis in which the Turkish lira hit record lows against the dollar. — AFP

ISTANBUL: Turkey's beleaguered lira extended its biggest rally of the year on Monday in response to a new rule that effectively forces many banks to part with some of their foreign currency. The banking regulation - announced after the market had closed on Friday night - represents Turkey's latest attempt to prop up the lira without raising the main interest rate. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's pressure on the central bank to keep borrowing costs well below the rate of inflation has sparked an economic crisis that has seen the lira slump and prices explode.

Erdogan rejects conventional economics and affirms that high interest rates cause inflation instead of slowing it down. The annual rate of consumer price increases now officially stands at 73.5 percent. Independent economists believe it could be nearly double that figure. The dollar dropped to 16.1 liras early Monday before recovering slightly and trading around the 16.7 mark.

The US currency was worth around 17.4 liras before the measure was announced. It stood at 7.4 liras at the

start of last year and 5.9 liras in January 2020. Turkey's real interest rate of minus 59.5 percent provides a major incentive for consumers to spend money before it loses value and for banks to convert their holdings into dollars and euros. The new rule attempts to put a stop to that by limiting banks' foreign-denominated assets.

It requires banks with more than 15 million liras (\$900,000) in foreign currency - should that figure represents more than 10 percent of their assets or annual sales - to sell their dollars and euros before issuing any more loans. The measure meant that some big banks whose lira loans matured Monday had to sell their foreign currencies in order to make the payments. BlueBay Asset Management economist Timothy Ash called the regulation "backdoor capital controls". The banking regulator clarified Sunday that the measure did not apply to individuals or independent entrepreneurs.

'Liratisation'

Erdogan's economic team has ruled out imposing

strict currency control and is espousing its allegiance to the markets. The head of Turkey's MUSIAD big business association also welcomed the measure - seen by economists as another step in Erdogan's push for the "liratisation" of the emerging market's economy. The new rule will "prevent dollarization, which is the main factor behind the rise in the exchange rate," MUSIAD chief Mahmut Asmali told reporters.

But OMG Capital Advisors consultancy head Murat Gulkan said the measure could have a damaging long-term effect on Turkey's business climate. The new rules will "complicate the operating conditions of banks and companies," Gulkan said. "The cornerstone of the system is the policy rate of the central bank. When that cornerstone is misplaced, it is necessary to take extraordinary steps like this latest decision." Ash agreed that the measure "over-complicates things for business and banks when what everyone knows Turkey needs is plain and simple interest rate increases." — AFP

French borrowing at a 'danger level'

PARIS: France's borrowing has reached a "danger level", Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said on Monday amid calls for more public spending to help low-income households cope with galloping inflation. Until recently, many Western states could borrow at no cost as investors lent them money freely, but the return of inflation and the war in Ukraine have spiked rates.

"Not everything is possible, simply because we have reached the danger level for our public finances," Le Maire said, explaining that changed market conditions meant that France was now paying interest of "more than two percent" on newly issued debt. "Additional spending of 20-25 billion euros (\$21-26 billion) on fuel as some political parties are proposing is too costly, or otherwise we will have to cut other things," Le Maire told BFM television.

Several opposition parties including the far-right National Rally and the right-wing Republicans party are pushing for a cut to fuel taxes as part of a new

package of measures intended to ease the cost-of-living crisis in France. The government of centrist President Emmanuel Macron is expected to propose a package in the coming weeks, but it will have to rely on the support of opposition parties, having lost its majority in elections earlier this month.

After huge bailouts in the wake of the global financial crisis in 2008 and the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020, France's public debt has soared to the equivalent of 114.5 percent of GDP, or 2.9 trillion euros, according to national statistics. "Politics is about choices... it's imperative that we reduce the public debt," Le Maire said. "We need to protect our most vulnerable fellow citizens at the same time, but protect them in a responsible fashion," he added.

In recent weeks, the interest rates paid by heavily indebted countries in the eurozone have jumped sharply higher compared with low-debt Germany, reviving memories of the 2011-2012 European debt crisis. French annual inflation hit 5.9 percent in June, official statistics showed. This is lower than in many developed countries thanks to government efforts to help households, including capping power prices and duty cuts on petrol and diesel, to the tune of 26 billion euros since the end of 2021. — AFP



PARIS: A man pays his parking fee to a parking meter in a street of Paris, on June 27, 2022. Paris is set to introduce paid parking for thermal two-wheelers on September 1, 2022. — AFP

Russian govt denies defaulting on debts

MOSCOW: Russia said Monday that two of its debt payments were prevented from reaching creditors, pushing the country closer to its first foreign default in a century due to sanctions over the Ukraine offensive. The announcement came on the 124th day of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, with Western sanctions so far failing to force the Kremlin to change its course. The Western economic penalties have largely severed the country from the international financial system, making it difficult for Moscow to service its debt. The Russian authorities insist they have the funds to honor the country's debt and accuse the West of seeking to drive Moscow into a default artificially.

"There are no grounds to call this situation a default," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters after a key payment deadline expired Sunday. "These claims about default, they are absolutely wrong," he said, adding that Russia settled the debt in May. A 30-day grace period for the payment of \$100 million in interest payments expired on Sunday night, most of which had to be paid in foreign currency. In a statement, the Russian finance ministry said that two of its debt payments had not been transferred to creditors, but denied that the event amounted to a default.

International settlement and clearing systems "received funds in full in advance" but the payments were not transferred to the final recipients due to "the actions of third parties", the ministry said. "The non-receipt of money by investors did not occur as a result of the absence of payment, but due to the actions of third parties," the ministry added, saying such an event did not amount to a default. "The actions of foreign financial intermediaries are beyond the Russian finance ministry's control," the statement said. Finance Minister Anton Siluanov has earlier dismissed the situation as a "farce".

'Vicious circle of decline'

While some experts dismiss the event as a technical default, others say it will have far-reaching consequences. "This default is important as it will impact on Russia's ratings, market access and financing costs for years to come," said Timothy

Ash, an emerging markets strategist at BlueBay Asset Management.

"And that means lower investment, lower growth, lower living standards, capital and human flight (brain drain), and a vicious circle of decline for the Russian economy." Russia lost the last avenue to service its foreign-currency loans after the United States removed an exemption last month that allowed US investors to receive Moscow's payments. In response, Russia said it would pay in rubles that could be converted into foreign currency, using a Russian financial institution as a paying agent, even though the bonds do not allow payments in the local currency.



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin makes a toast as he takes part in the XIV BRICS summit in virtual format via a video call, in Moscow. — AFP

Russia has accused the West of seeking to push it into an "artificial default" through unprecedented sanctions imposed after President Vladimir Putin sent troops to Ukraine on February 24. The measures included freezing the Russian government's stockpile of \$300 billion in foreign currency reserves held abroad, making it more complicated for Moscow to settle its foreign debts.

The country last defaulted on its foreign debt in 1918, when Bolshevik revolution leader Vladimir Lenin refused to recognize the massive debts of the deposed tsar's regime. Russia defaulted on domestic debt in 1998 when, due to a drop in commodity prices, it faced a financial squeeze that prevented it from propping up the ruble and paying off debts that accumulated during the first war in Chechnya. The International Monetary Fund's number two official, Gita Gopinath, said in March that a Russian default would have "limited" impact on the global financial system. — AFP

Business

Central bank chiefs meet to discuss inflation challenge

200 delegates attend ECB forum on central banking

SINTRA: Central bank chiefs and economists gather Monday evening at their annual forum in southern Portugal to discuss the best approach to the inflationary challenges exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Some 200 delegates will attend the ECB Forum on Central Banking at a luxury hotel in Sintra, west of Lisbon, after two years of COVID-imposed virtual gatherings. When ECB President Christine Lagarde last attended this event, it was in her previous role as director general of the International Monetary Fund back in 2014. Also attending will be Jerome Powell, head of the US Federal Reserve, and Andrew Bailey, governor of the Bank of England.

They will be joined by Agustin Carstens, general manager of the Bank for International Settlements and all four are set to discuss the issues at a seminar on Wednesday, the last day of the forum. In its annual report released on Sunday, the BIS warned that central banks must not let inflation become entrenched, with the threat of stagflation looming over the global economy. "The key for central banks is to act quickly and decisively before inflation becomes entrenched," said Carstens in the report.

G7 touts \$600 billion global infrastructure plan to rival China

ELMAU CASTLE: The G7 group of rich democracies on Sunday announced an attempt to compete with China's formidable Belt and Road Initiative by raising some \$600 billion for global infrastructure programs in poor countries. The Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, unveiled with fanfare by US President Joe Biden and G7 allies from Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan and the European Union, aims to fill a huge gap left as communist China uses its economic clout to stretch diplomatic tentacles into the furthest reaches of the world. Biden said the target was for the United States to bring \$200 billion to the table, with the rest of the G7 another \$400 billion by 2027.

Funding the kinds of projects that China currently dominates—everything from roads to harbours in far-flung corners of the world—is not "aid or charity," Biden said. Highlighting the geostrategic thinking behind the plan, Biden said such projects "deliver returns for everyone, including the American people and the peo-

Lagarde's speech key for markets

Tuesday morning's speech by Lagarde will be closely followed by the markets. The European Central Bank is preparing to raise its interest rates in July—for the first time in 11 years—in response to rising inflation. That has increased concern about the risk of a debt crisis in the eurozone, with a growing difference in the interest rates being required in the northern and southern European states for borrowing and financing their deficits. The ECB has recently had to work to reassure investors on this issue, and any fresh details of what it plans to do will be closely followed. The mood of the meeting is likely to be serious. According to European sources, Lagarde told EU leaders gathered in Brussels on Friday that the war in Ukraine was having a marked effect on the eurozone.

The rising price of gas and imported raw materials was putting pressure on inflation and that was set to last for some time. The uncertainty created by the war was hitting economic activity, she said, according to the same source. After the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, central banks initially saw the return of inflation as temporary, as the economy picked up again. But the rise in prices has sharply accelerated since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February.—AFP

ple of all our nations." Around the world, the role of China's democratic rivals is "a chance for us to share our positive vision for the future" and for other countries to "see for themselves the concrete benefits of partnering with democracies," he said.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen echoed this, saying "it is up to us to give a positive, powerful investment impulse to the world, to show our partners in the developing world that they have a choice." Although China was not referred to by name, the rivalry loomed large over the leaders' presentation, a relaunch of a first attempt at a Western infrastructure fund that Biden laid out during last year's G7 summit in Britain. Unlike China's state-run BRI initiative, the proposed G7 funding would depend largely on private companies being willing to commit to massive investments and is therefore not guaranteed. According to US officials, however, that is a good thing. In this capitalist vs communist scenario, US officials say, recipient countries will be able to avoid the debt traps and other strongarm tactics allegedly used by the Chinese.

'Not too late'

Between now and 2027, the US government and allies will shoot for the \$600-billion figure "through grants, federal financing, and leveraging private sector investments," the White House said. "This will only be the beginning: the United States and its G7 partners



SINTRA: Technicians work at the esplanade of the Pena Palace in Sintra. Hard-hit Portugal has gradually eased a general lockdown.—AFP

will also seek to mobilise hundreds of billions in additional capital from other like-minded partners, multilateral development banks, development finance institutions, sovereign wealth funds, and more." With the investment target largely aspirational, a senior US official acknowledged that the West is currently in second place behind China.

"There's no doubt that the Belt and Road Initiative has been around for several years and it's made a lot of cash disbursements and investments—and that we're coming to this after years of their investments," the official said. "But I would argue that it is definitely not too late. And I'm not even sure that it is late." The official, briefing reporters on condition of anonymity, said that "many countries" which partnered with China were suffering buyer's remorse, concluding that Beijing was more interested in establishing economic and geostrategic footholds than benefiting locals.

By contrast, "we're coming to you with an offer to make investments to actually improve your country, to improve the economy and to have lasting effects on GDP and your populations," the official said. "I think that is the deal that is being offered." While the obvious targets for the US-led initiative are in Africa, South America and much of Asia are also on the radar. Fallout from Russia's devastating invasion of Ukraine means that "even places in eastern Europe" could be brought into the fold, the official said.—AFP

Northern Ireland Protocol: What's the problem?

BELFAST: As the UK prepared to leave the European Union, respecting the terms of a 1998 peace deal for Northern Ireland proved problematic given it would share a land border with an EU member. The answer found was the "Northern Ireland Protocol", an adjunct to both sides' Brexit divorce deal that sought to respect the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement by ensuring no checks on goods across the border in Ireland.

Why no checks?

The UK and EU agreed that despite Brexit, a vital plank of the Good Friday Agreement had to be preserved: the elimination of physical border infrastructure on the island of Ireland. During the three-decade "Troubles" in Northern Ireland, such infrastructure and the associated British Army presence became a hated symbol for nationalists who want to reunify the island. But checks had to happen somewhere—so the UK agreed a de facto trade border down the Irish Sea to ensure goods coming from England, Scotland and Wales did not enter the EU free market unchecked via Northern Ireland. That has infuriated pro-UK unionists in the territory, although a majority of members of its newly elected assembly led by the nationalist party Sinn Féin back the protocol.

What's in the protocol?

To keep the border open, Northern Ireland effectively remained in the EU's single market. That meant it had to stay in line with certain EU rules on tax and product standards, unlike the rest of the UK. Supporters say that gives Northern Ireland the best of both worlds, with access also to the UK's single market. But unionists fear a fraying of their bonds with the rest of Britain and are refusing to rejoin a post-election power-sharing government in Belfast. Siding with them, the UK accuses Brussels of applying the protocol too zealously and says the deal must be renegotiated.

What is the UK proposing?

London has unveiled legislation to drastically overhaul the protocol unilaterally, to try to end the political paralysis in Northern Ireland and force the EU into concessions. The UK has never fully implemented the protocol, arguing that many of the checks are unnecessary and that Northern Ireland could ill afford more red tape on top of the economist costs of the Covid pandemic. Under the new proposals, it intends to create a "green channel" for British traders to send goods to Northern Ireland without making any customs declaration to the EU. Brussels would have access to more real-time UK data on the flow of goods, and only businesses intending to trade into the single market via Ireland would be required to make declarations. The EU would need to trust the UK to monitor the flow, with London vowing "robust penalties" for any companies seeking to abuse the system. The UK plan would also harmonize tax policy between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. And it would seek to end oversight of the protocol by the European Court of Justice.

What does the EU say?

The EU says Johnson knew full well what he signed up for, and is trying to wriggle out of the real-world consequences of his government's headline vision for Brexit. For Brussels, the paramount need alongside protecting the Good Friday Agreement is keeping shoddy, unsafe or untaxed goods out of its single market via the Republic of Ireland. It has made concessions, including proposing fewer checks on goods heading east-west from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, and has already suspended checks on UK medicines shipped to the territory.—AFP



ELMAU CASTLE: Representatives of Seven rich nations (G7) and Outreach guests are pictured at the start of their fifth working session about 'Investing in a better future: Climate, Energy, Health' on June 27, 2022 at Elmau Castle, southern Germany, during the G7 Summit.—AFP

Stock markets extend recovery as rate hike fears subside

LONDON: Asian and European markets rallied Monday, building on last week's advances and following a strong pre-weekend performance on Wall Street as speculation that inflation may have peaked tempered expectations about central bank interest rate hikes. With prices surging at a pace not seen in a generation, finance chiefs have been forced to lift borrowing costs and wind back their ultra-loose monetary policies in recent months, sending a chill across trading floors. But a string of weak data has led many investors to believe that inflation may have plateaued or is about to, giving room for banks to be

less hawkish.

The prospect that rates will not go as high as initially expected helped send Wall Street stocks higher Friday, with the S&P 500 and Nasdaq ending up more than three percent. Asia and Europe continued the rally on Monday. Hong Kong led gainers, climbing more than two percent thanks to a strong performance in Chinese tech firms. Indications that China's crackdown on the sector could be coming to an end added to the upbeat mood in the city.

"Market conviction that perhaps the Fed won't now hike rates as aggressively as previously feared and/or that rate cuts before the end of 2023 are now an even more realistic prospect... have had a big hand" in boosting sentiment, said National Australia Bank's Ray Attrill. While Fed chiefs continue to flag further big interest rate hikes in the pipeline, expectations for a prolonged period of increases have waned, which has in turn taken some heat out of the dollar. Bitcoin has also won some support, trading above \$21,000 after a recent slump.—AFP

Climate activists block IMF Paris office doors

PARIS: Climate activists on Monday blocked entry to the International Monetary Fund's Paris office with some gluing their hands to its doors, demanding developing countries' debt be scrapped to help tackle climate change. The Paris protest is part of a "Debt for climate" global campaign calling on wealthy-nation leaders attending the G7 summit in Germany to cancel the debts of poorer and less industrialized countries, known as the global south.

While low-emitting countries in the global south contribute the least to climate change, they tend to be the hardest-hit by the consequences, experts say. "We need to give these countries the resources to fight against the climate crisis. They are the first victims and the last ones responsible," said an Extinction Rebellion activist calling herself "Chalou", one of dozens in front of the IMF building in Paris' wealthy 16th district.

Several activists from Extinction Rebellion, Youth for Climate and 350.org glued their hands to glass doors at the building's entrance, while others sat in front with their arms linked together inside tubes to make it harder to move them. The group spread a banner reading "G7 responsible, IMF guilty" in front of the building, while some activists scattered fake banknotes marked with the slogan "Stop fossil fuels".

"The debt crisis is first and foremost the result of an unjust financial system dominated by the richest countries," activist groups Extinction Rebellion, Attac-France and Youth for Climate France, who organized the Paris action, said in a statement. "The G7, the IMF and the World Bank have historical responsibilities in the development of this vicious circle of debt (and) over-exploitation of resources", they added.—AFP



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange during morning trading in New York City.—AFP



BELFAST: A lorry passes an anti 'Northern Ireland Protocol' sign as it is driven away from Lamee port, north of Belfast in Northern Ireland, after arriving on a ferry.—AFP

Business

Shortages of key goods start to bite in protest-hit Ecuador

Ecuador to cut fuel prices that sparked protests

QUITO: Holding rotten peppers in her hands, Mariana Morales says she has been unable to open her stall at the Santa Clara market north of Ecuador's capital Quito for a week. Usually overflowing with fruits and vegetables, the market now is home to tarp-covered display cases, empty trays and deserted stalls - the effects of two weeks of nationwide Indigenous-led protests that are being felt far and wide. In Guayaquil, the country's second largest city, Andean produce such as potatoes and corn are already in short supply.

"The situation is difficult because there is no one left to bring food from the highlands," said Rosa, an Indigenous woman who has sold vegetables in a port market in the southwestern city for 15 years. An estimated 14,000 protesters are taking part in the nationwide show of discontent against rising hardship, particularly increased fuel prices, in an economy dealt a serious blow by the coronavirus pandemic. The ironic side effect of their demonstrations has been a worsening of several economic factors: rising prices, shortages and deserted markets.

While the largest mobilization has by far been in the capital, where the number of protesters is close to 10,000 - numerous checkpoints and barricades block the main roads throughout the country, in particular on the vital Panamerican highway. The country's energy ministry warned Sunday that those roadblocks and barricades could end up forcing a halt to oil production within 48 hours, which would be a dire development for an economy depending on oil exports.

'Everything is too expensive'

Since the beginning of the roadblocks, Guayaquil's only wholesale market has been out of stock. The supply center normally receives nearly 3,000 truckloads of food from the Andean highlands every day, but that figure has dropped by almost 70 percent. In Quito, where main access roads are blocked intermittently, authorities are trying to organize protection for trucks by the army and police. On Thursday, an attack on one of these convoys left 17 soldiers injured.

Santa Clara, like five other markets in the capital, was forced to close for several days and only partially resumed operations on Saturday. "The peppers were brand new and now it's all wasted," Morales said, plunging her fingers into the rotten produce. Despite the ruined vegetables, the 69-year-old has not gone to the wholesale market to stock back up due to the explosion in prices, explaining: "A bag of carrots that used to cost \$25 is now worth \$100."

Consumers are finding it difficult to afford a number of products, from eggs to chicken to cooking fuel. Morales said it gives her a "guilty conscience" to charge customers a dollar for just one green onion stalk. Silvana Quimi, a housewife in Guayaquil where food prices have doubled in one week, said that now "everything is too expensive." "Before, I was sold a kilo of tomatoes for half a dollar, now it costs me a dollar."

Things are similar in the capital where a bunch of bananas, which used to cost \$1.00, now costs \$2.00. "What is available costs an arm and a leg," said Agustin Pazmino, a 56-year-old trader. Conservative President Guillermo Lasso "during his campaign promised us heaven, but we live in hell," he said. A no-confidence hearing over what opposition lawmakers say is Lasso's role in the protests resumed in Congress for a second day late Sunday. Five people have died so far. The National Assembly will eventually vote on whether to oust Lasso, a former banker who took power a year ago.

Fuel prices

Meanwhile, President Guillermo Lasso announced Sunday that Ecuador will cut fuel prices, which had sparked weeks of demonstrations, though not by as much as protesters have demanded. "I have decided to reduce the price of gasoline by 10 cents per gallon and diesel also by 10 cents per gallon," he said in a television and radio address. The powerful Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Conaie), which since June 13 has been blocking roads and occupying oil wells in different parts of the country, had demanded a reduction in prices by an

France's SNPC said 36 out of 80 Ryanair flights were cancelled due to the strike on Saturday, listing a further 16 on Sunday. Spain's Union Sindical Obrera said 75 flights were cancelled on Saturday in Madrid, Barcelona, Palma, Ibiza, Santiago and Girona, with 42 flights cancelled and around 60 delayed on Sunday.

Belgium's Charleroi airport was the worst hit with 44 cancelled return flights on Saturday but none on Sunday, according to Ryanair's Scorebuddy website. SNPC representative Damien Mourgues has previously said Ryanair does not respect rest time laws and is calling for a raise for cabin crew still paid at the minimum wage. Ryanair cabin crew unions in Spain have called another strike from June 30 to July 2. The airline said it had notified "passengers whose flights were disrupted by any ATC (air traffic control) delays/strikes or weather disruption", but did not say if it was setting up a refund procedure. —AFP



QUITO: Aerial view of Ecuadorian government supporters holding a demonstration demanding for peace in northern Quito. —AFP

additional 30 cents and 35 cents, respectively.

Earlier on Sunday, the country's energy ministry warned that oil production had reached a "critical" level and could be halted entirely within 48 hours if the protests and roadblocks continued. The protests, which are also against rising living costs, have crippled transportation in Ecuador, with roadblocks set up in 19 of the oil-rich country's 24 provinces.

"Oil production is at a critical level," the ministry said in a statement. "If this situation continues, the country's oil production will be suspended in less than 48 hours as vandalism, the seizure of oil wells and road closures have prevented the transport of equipment and diesel needed to keep operations going." "Today, the figures show a decrease of more than 50 percent" in production, which was at roughly 520,000 barrels per day before the protests, it said. Ecuador's economy is highly dependent on oil

revenues, with 65 percent of output exported in the first four months of 2022.

Impeachment debate

Late on Sunday, the country's parliament suspended seven hours of debate over whether to impeach Lasso, with proceedings set to resume on Tuesday. At least 20 members of parliament are still due to speak. The president's impeachment would require 92 of the 137 possible votes in the National Assembly, where the opposition holds a fragmented majority.

MPs will have a maximum of 72 hours to vote following the end of the debate. An estimated 14,000 protesters have taken part in the nationwide demonstrations, most of them in Quito. Shortages are already being reported in the capital, where prices have soared. —AFP

Ryanair downplays impact of strikes

PARIS: Budget airline Ryanair has downplayed the impact of staff strikes this weekend, saying there was "very minor disruption" to its schedule. Ryanair cabin crew unions called a three-day strike over pay and working conditions starting on Friday in Spain, Portugal and Belgium, and in Italy and France on Saturday. In a statement on Sunday, the company said less than two percent of its 9,000 flights operating since Friday had been affected by what it called "minor and poorly supported crew strikes".

Europe's biggest airline blamed cancelled flights in Spain, Italy, the UK and France on thunderstorms in southern Europe and a strike at Marseille's air traffic control centre. But trade unions dispute this.

Bankrupt S Lanka seeks discounted Russian oil

COLOMBO: Cash-strapped Sri Lanka on Sunday announced sending ministers to Russia and Qatar to try and secure cheap oil a day after the government said it had all but run out of fuel. The government meanwhile extended a two-week closure of non-essential state institutions until further notice in order to save fuel, maintaining only a skeleton staff to provide minimum services.

Energy Minister Kanchana Wijesekera said two ministers will travel to Russia on Monday to discuss getting more oil following last month's purchase of 90,000 tonnes of Siberian crude. That shipment was arranged through Coral Energy, a Dubai-based intermediary, but politicians have been urging the authorities to negotiate directly with President Vladimir Putin's government.

"Two ministers are going to Russia and I will go to Qatar tomorrow to see if we can arrange concessionary terms," Wijesekera told reporters in Colombo. Wijesekera had announced on Saturday that Sri Lanka was virtually out of petrol and diesel after several scheduled shipments were delayed indefinitely due to "banking" reasons. Fuel reserves were sufficient to meet less than two days' demand and it was being reserved for essential services, Wijesekera said while apologizing for the situation.

The state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation on Sunday hiked the price for diesel by 15 percent to 460 rupees (\$1.27) a litre and petrol by 22 percent to 550 rupees. Since the beginning of the year, diesel prices have gone up nearly four-fold and gasoline has almost tripled. Wijesekera said there would be an indefinite delay in getting new shipments of oil and urged motorists not to queue up until he introduces a token system to a limited number of vehicles daily.

India, EU resume free trade talks after 9-year gap

NEW DELHI: India and the European Union resumed talks Monday on a free-trade deal after a nine-year gap, as Western countries seek to wean



COLOMBO: Motorists queue along a street to buy fuel at a Ceylon petroleum corporation fuel station in Colombo on June 26, 2022. —AFP

US takes stock

A delegation from the US Treasury and the State Department meanwhile arrived to "explore the most effective ways for the US to support Sri Lankans in need", the US embassy in Colombo said. "As Sri Lankans endure some of the greatest economic challenges in their history, our efforts to support economic growth and strengthen democratic institutions have never been more critical," US ambassador Julie Chung said in a statement.

US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Treasury for Asia Robert Kaproth and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Kelly Keiderling were in the delegation. The embassy said it had committed \$158.75 million in new financing in the past two weeks to help Sri Lankans. About 1.7 million residents need "life-saving assistance", according to the United

New Delhi off its close economic ties to Russia. Dubbed the "tariff king" by ex US president Donald Trump, India has become more open to lowering trade barriers in recent years and is negotiating pacts with several other countries.

The Asian giant has refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, even increasing oil purchases from its long-standing strategic ally and biggest supplier of arms. The European Union is India's second-biggest trading partner after the United States but talks with the bloc broke down



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

Nations which issued a flash appeal last week. Four out of five people in the nation of 22 million have reduced their food intake due to severe shortages and galloping prices, the UN noted.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe warned parliament on Wednesday that more hardships were on the way. "Our economy has faced a complete collapse," Wickremesinghe said. "We are now facing a far more serious situation beyond the mere shortages of fuel, gas, electricity and food." Unable to repay its \$51 billion foreign debt, the government declared it was defaulting in April and is negotiating with the International Monetary Fund for a possible bailout. Sri Lanka's official inflation at the end of May was 45.3 percent, according to official data, but private economists have placed it at 128 percent, the second-highest in the world after Zimbabwe. —AFP

in 2013 over issues including tariff reductions and patent protection.

Merchandise trade hit an all-time high of \$116 billion in 2021-22, with India's exports to the 27-member European Union hitting \$65 billion, according to New Delhi. "Both sides are aiming for the trade negotiations to be broad-based, balanced and comprehensive, based on the principles of fairness and reciprocity. There will also be discussions on resolving the Market Access Issues which are impeding bilateral trade," India's commerce ministry

Aleid Foods 'exclusive authorized distributor' of fresh foods

KUWAIT: Aleid Foods Company announced that it will be the exclusive authorized distributor of Freshly Foods brand products in Kuwait in all local sale outlets, central markets, and hypermarkets of various regions, in addition to restaurants and hotels. Freshly Foods brand is distinguished by a wide product offering of frozen high-quality products including beef, poultry, and seafood, made from the finest ingredients carefully selected from the most renowned regional and international suppliers.



The brand also provides delicious food additives and vegetarian substitutes for meat and more. Freshly Foods focuses on the selection and development of food safety-related technology and creating recipes that promote healthy eating habits, following the highest production standards with accredited international certificates.

This valued cooperation supports Aleid Foods Company's products portfolio development in Kuwait and entering the food services sector of international and local restaurant chains since Freshly Foods products are the choice of various internationally renowned restaurants like Burger King, Pizza Hut, IKEA, and more, in addition to being distinctive for providing innovative frozen products and easy to make meals for the gourmet consumer. Diversifying Aleid Foods' products portfolio will support the company's expansion plans in the local market and solidify its operations to achieve continuous growth and sustainable returns for shareholders and partners.

said earlier this month when announcing the first round of talks in Delhi, which were due to run until Friday.

India in February signed a major economic partnership agreement with the United Arab Emirates and in April agreed an interim free-trade deal with Australia, aiming to finish off a full pact by the end of the year. India is also in trade negotiations with Canada, Israel and Britain. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on a visit in April that Britain and India hoped to nail down an accord by October. —AFP



Models present creations for Celine during the Menswear Ready-to-wear Spring-Summer 2023 Fashion Week in Paris. — AFP photos

MENSWEAR REGAINS ITS MUSCLE AT PARIS FASHION WEEK

Menswear proved to be in reinvigorated form as Paris Fashion Week ended on Sunday, with spectacle, innovation and the return of big-name designers to the catwalk. The week concluded with the surprising return of fabled French designer Hedi Slimane, formerly of Dior and Saint Laurent and now with Celine. Two years ago, he had announced he was done with the official fashion calendar.

Slimane became hugely influential as a stylist and photographer for musicians such as David Bowie, Mick Jagger, The Libertines and Daft Punk in the early 2000s. But he has not presented a live show since February 2020, having dismissed them as "obsolete", preferring to present collections with videos shot in luxurious French locales.

He gave no explanation for his reappearance on the catwalk but returns amid a sense of a renaissance in menswear. Fashionistas mobbed the gates to the Palais de Tokyo in central Paris on Sunday. Slimane's new collection harked back to the indie-rock vibes that made his name—skinny black trousers, even skinnier ties, golden suits and leather jackets, and lots of dark sunglasses.

'A boom'

The past few seasons have often seen men's and women's shows merging into one—with London Fashion Week doing away with the distinction altogether. But this week in Paris seemed to reaffirm the divide, with houses wanting to boost their focus on menswear at a time when demand is rising. US designer Matthew Williams presented his first-ever standalone menswear show for Givenchy this week.

"It's good to give space to men and women, to each and everyone their platform to tell a story," Williams told fashion site WWD. "There's more room for more looks." His show was grounded in real-life styles from his native California, he said, with a lot of utilitarian knee-length shorts, cargo trousers and relaxed knitwear—much of it in monochrome with a few splashes of pastel colors. "Commercially, menswear is a market that has developed a lot with a particularly strong dynamic in Asia that has created a boom for pret-a-porter men's designers," said Serge Carreira, fashion expert at



Sciences Po University.

'More accessible'

Also marking her first menswear show was France's Marine Serre, one of the biggest names to emerge in recent years. The 30-year-old has made sustainability and inclusivity central to her brand, and that was evident at her sports-themed show in a stadium outside Paris on Saturday. Many pieces were upcycled from old scarves and linen—that had been turned into everything from speedos to flags and leotards.

The models came in all shapes and sizes, from children to older people, alongside celebrities such as ex-footballer Djibril Cisse and Paralympic gold medalist Alexis Hanquiquant, as well as Madonna's daughter Lourdes Leon in one of the house's trademark moon-patterned bodysuits. "Thirty percent of our sales have been for menswear in the last collections—we're not at 50/50 but we do quite a bit of men's and we have no intention of doing less," Serre told AFP after the show.

"Upcycling is quite rare in men's but the locker-room lends itself very well to it," she added. "These are shapes that are less complex: it's easier and we can have better prices that mean it is more accessible for everyone to wear upcycled pieces." Meanwhile, familiar names also made a mark this week.

Dior took inspiration from the childhood Normandy home of the label's founder, with a flower-filled garden runway and some straw hats and chic outdoor loungewear among the outfits. Hermes was also in a relaxed, pastel-infused mood, which designer Veronique Nichanian told AFP was inspired by "lightness, comfort, fun and colors that pop." — AFP



Lifestyle | Features

Iran weavers make world's largest kilim

Iran announced Monday that weavers in the southern province of Fars had produced the world's largest kilim rug, measuring an enormous 105 sq m. The 7x15-metre kilim was the handwork of seven expert weavers and three assistants in the town of Qirokarzin, said Mohammad-Jafar Ebrahimi, the local cultural heritage chief, as quoted on state television.

He said it was commissioned by the energy-rich Gulf state of Qatar. Kilims, which are flat and not knotted, have traditionally been woven by hand by nomads in Turkey, the Caucasus, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, for use in tents. According to statistics provided by state news agency IRNA, the export of Iran's world-renowned carpets raise between \$400 million and \$500 million a year. — AFP



QIROKARZIN, Iran: Iranian women weave the largest kilim in the world in the southern Fars province on June 25, 2022. — AFP

Billionaire Italian eyewear mogul Del Vecchio dead at 87

Italy's second richest man, eyewear magnate Leonardo Del Vecchio, has died aged 87 after building an optical empire that saw him buy up major brands like Ray-Ban, Persol and Oakley. Del Vecchio was one of Italy's most successful businessmen, building from scratch an international company that helped turn eyeglasses into a coveted-and pricey-fashion accessory.



This file photo taken and handout by Essilor shows founder and chairperson of Italian eyewear manufacturer Luxottica, Leonardo Del Vecchio in Paris.— AFP

His fortune was worth an estimated \$27.3 billion, according to Forbes' 2022 World's Billionaires List. His company EssilorLuxottica confirmed on Monday that he had "passed away" at the age of 87. Del Vecchio had been in intensive care at Milan's San Raffaele hospital in

recent weeks, according to Italian news agency AGI.

Born in Milan on May 22, 1935, to a poor family, he spent part of his youth in an orphanage and began working as a teenager. He founded his own company, Luxottica, in 1961, supplying the optical industry with components. A decade later, Del Vecchio made the strategic decision to control all parts of the production process.

Luxottica began making its own eyeglasses, distributing them throughout Italy before expanding in Europe through joint ventures. He spotted the advantage of partnering with fashion design brands, including Giorgio Armani, branched out into retail and snatched up trendy eyewear brands like Ray-Ban, Persol and Oakley. He signed a first licence agreement with Giorgio Armani in the 1980s, as eyewear morphed into a fashion accessory, a trend that continues today. Luxottica also bought such retailers as LensCrafters and Sunglass Hut, allowing the company to tap the consumer market directly without intermediaries. In 2018, Luxottica merged with France's Essilor to become EssilorLuxottica, with Del Vecchio serving as chairman. In 2021, the publicly traded company posted 19.8 billion euros (\$20.9 billion) in revenue. "Leonardo Del Vecchio was a great Italian," said Prime Minister Mario Draghi. The European Union commissioner for economic affairs, Italian Paolo Gentiloni called Del Vecchio's success "an example for today and tomorrow". — AFP

Murdered rapper's song pulled from YouTube in India

YouTube has removed a viral music video in India released posthumously by murdered Sikh rapper Sidhu Moose Wala following a complaint by the government. The song "SYL" talks about the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal which has been at the center of a long-running water dispute between the late Sikh rapper's home state of Punjab and neighboring Haryana.

The track, released posthumously on Thursday, also touches on other sensitive topics such as deadly riots targeting the Sikh community that broke out in India in 1984 and the storming of an important Sikh temple in Amritsar by the army the same year. It had garnered nearly 30 million views and 3.3 million likes on the singer's YouTube page before it was pulled down over the weekend.

"This content is not available on this country domain due to a legal complaint from the government," said a message posted on the song link. The song is still available in other countries. In an email to AFP, a YouTube spokesperson said it had only removed the song in "keeping with local laws and our Terms of Service after a thorough review". The government did not immediately respond to enquiries.



Sikh rapper Sidhu Moose Wala

Moose Wala's family termed the removal of the song "unjust" and appealed to the government to take back the complaint, local media reports said. "They can ban the song but they cannot take Sidhu out of the hearts of the people. We will discuss legal options with lawyers," uncle Chamkaur Singh was quoted as saying by the Hindustan Times daily.

Moose Wala-also known by his birth name Shubdeep Singh Sidhu-was shot dead in his car in the northern state of Punjab last month. The 28-year-old was a popular musician both in India and among Punjabi communities abroad,

especially in Canada and Britain.

His death sparked anger and outrage from fans from across the world. Last week, Indian police arrested three men accused of murdering Moose Wala and seized a cache of weaponry including a grenade launcher. The men had allegedly acted at the behest of Canada-based gangster Goldy Brar and his accomplice Lawrence Bishnoi who is currently in jail in India.

Moose Wala rose to fame with catchy songs that attacked rival rappers and politicians, portraying himself as a man who fought for his community's pride, delivered justice and gunned down enemies. He was criticized for promoting gun culture through his music videos, in which he regularly posed with firearms.

His murder also put the spotlight on organized crime in Punjab, a major transit route for drugs entering India from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many observers link the narcotics trade-mostly heroin and opium-to an uptick in gang-related violence and the use of illegal arms in the state. — AFP

'Elvis' puts the King back in spotlight in N American theaters

Baz Luhrmann's rock'n'roll biopic "Elvis" hip-swiveled to the top of the box office on its opening weekend in North America, taking in an estimated \$30.5 million in a rare tie with "Top Gun: Maverick," industry watcher Exhibitor

Relations reported Sunday. The nearly three-hour long extravaganza by director Luhrmann, known for glitzy films like "Moulin Rouge!" and "The Great Gatsby," brought in nearly double the average for the musical biography genre, said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

Despite being a "risky proposition," in part for casting relative newcomer Austin Butler as Elvis Presley alongside Tom Hanks as his exploitative manager, Colonel Tom Parker, the film has impressed audiences and critics, Gross said. "This is the Baz Luhrmann show, a music, dance and

sex appeal spectacular-it's a hit," he said.

"Elvis" was locked in a crowd heat with "Top Gun: Maverick"-the crowd-pleasing sequel to the original 1986 film that once again features Tom Cruise as cocky Navy test pilot Pete "Maverick" Mitchell. It also earned an estimated \$30.5 million in its fifth weekend of release.

It is now the highest grossing film of the year worldwide, breaking the \$1 billion mark with nearly \$522 million in ticket sales in North America and \$484 million overseas. In third place was "Jurassic World Dominion," Universal's sixth installment in the "Jurassic Park" franchise, at \$26.4 million.

The latest dinosaur frightfest stars Chris Pratt and Bryce Dallas Howard alongside franchise originals Sam Neill, Laura Dern and Jeff Goldblum. Fourth spot went to horror film "The Black Phone" starring Ethan Hawke as a serial killer, which earned \$23.4 million on its opening weekend.

"Lightyear," Pixar and Disney's latest computer-animated offering from the "Toy Story" empire, took the fifth position with \$17.7 million in its second week. The spin-off from the wildly successful animation series stars Chris Evans and has taken \$88.8 million domestically and \$63 million overseas, after a lackluster opening. Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" (\$1.7 million)
- "Jugjugg Jeeyo" (\$604,000)
- "Everything Everywhere All At Once" (\$533,346)
- "The Bob's Burgers Movie" (\$513,000)
- "The Bad Guys" (\$440,000). — AFP



US actor Jason Momoa (right) delivers a speech during the Youth and Innovation Forum at Carcavelos beach in Oeiras, outskirts of Lisbon. — AFP photos

Save the oceans, 'Aquaman' star urges

The star of the hit "Aquaman" film on Sunday called for the world's oceans to be protected, on the eve of a long-delayed UN conference on the issue. "The ocean needs us," Jason Momoa said. "Without a healthy ocean life, our planet as we know it would not exist."

"We must seek to right the wrongs we have done against our children and grandchildren, turn the tide on our irresponsible stewardship and build a moment for a future where humanity can once again live in harmony with nature." Hawaiian-born Momoa, who portrays

Aquaman in the DC Extended Universe movies, was speaking at a youth gathering outside the Portuguese capital Lisbon.

They were joined at the Carcavelos beach by Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who is Portuguese. Guterres said the world was "moving too slowly" to rehabilitate the oceans. "It's time for the behaviors to be seriously condemned," he added. Guterres is on Monday due to address the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, co-organized by Portugal and Kenya. Originally due to take place in April 2020, the gathering was postponed in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. It will run through Friday. — AFP



In this file photo US actor Austin Butler poses on the red carpet upon arrival to attend the UK special Screening of Elvis at the BFI Southbank, in London. — AFP

Sports

S Korea's Chun In-gee wins Women's PGA Championship

South Korean captures her third major title

BETHESDA: Chun In-gee captured her third major title on Sunday, winning the Women's PGA Championship to claim her first major since 2016 and snap a victory drought of almost four years. The 27-year-old South Korean fired a three-over par 75 in windy conditions at Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland, to finish 72 holes on five-under 283. That was good enough for a one-stroke triumph over American Lexi Thompson and Australian Minjee Lee to take the \$1.35 million top prize from a record \$9 million purse.

"It just means a lot because I didn't have any wins for almost 3 1/2 years," Chun said, her voice cracking with emotion. "My loyal fans in Korea, they never gave up on me no matter how I did." Chun, ranked 33rd, had not won since October 2018 at the Hana Bank Championship in South Korea, a 76-event worldwide winless streak. But after squandering what had been a three-stroke lead when the day began, Chun added a third career major trophy after the 2015 US Women's Open and 2016 Evian Championship.

Chun dominated the first two rounds and led by as many as seven strokes before struggling to 75s in each of the final two rounds while sixth-ranked Thompson charged. Thompson, however, could not end an eight-year major win drought since her 2014 Kraft Nabisco Championship trophy at age 19 or a three-year overall victory drought. The American settled for her 11th top-five major finish since capturing her first major victory and her

fourth major runner-up effort.

Thompson, tied for the lead with Chun at the par-4 17th, made a three-putt bogey to give the Asian star a one-stroke lead as they reached the 72nd hole of the week. At the par-4 18th, Chun went into back greenside rough with her approach while Thompson had a long birdie putt. Chun rolled her putt over a ridge and five feet past the cup while Thompson two-putted for par, leaving Chun one last putt for the title. Chun calmly rolled in the tension-packed putt and pumped her right fist as the ball fell into the cup and gave her a third career major title.

Chun stumbles early

Chun began the final round on 8-under with a three-stroke lead over Thompson, but Chun made bogeys on three of the first six holes while Thompson birdied the first and third to seize the lead. Thompson stumbled with a bogey at the par-3 seventh but Chun made a bogey at the par-5 ninth and Thompson again enjoyed a two-stroke edge. Thompson and Chun matched birdies at the par-5 11th and bogeys at the par-4 12th, Chun lipping out her five-foot par putt at 12 to remain two back. But Thompson missed a tap-in par putt at the par-4 14th and fell to 5-under with Chun one adrift.

At the par-4 15th, however, Thompson sank a 12-foot birdie putt and restored a two-stroke lead at 6-under with three holes remaining. Chun responded with an eight-foot birdie putt at the par-5 16th while Thompson made a bogey, leaving



BETHESDA: In Gee Chun of South Korea celebrates with the championship trophy after winning during the final round of the KPMG Women's PGA Championship at Congressional Country Club on June 26, 2022. —AFP

them deadlocked for the lead to set up the closing drama. Thailand's Athaya Thitikul was fourth on 285 while a fifth-place pack on 287 included

Japan's Nasa Hataoka, Australian Hannah Green and South Koreans Kim Hyo-joo, Kim Sei-young and Choi Hye-jin. —AFP

World champ Lyles edges Knighton at US trials

EUGENE: World champion Noah Lyles schooled youngster Erriyon Knighton in winning the men's 200m in 19.67sec at the US athletics championships on Sunday. The 18-year-old Knighton, who stunned the athletics world with a time of 19.49sec in May, held a commanding lead coming off the curve but Lyles remorselessly chased him down, playfully pointing a finger in Knighton's direction as they barreled across the line. "I do what it takes to win," said Lyles—who insisted he was pointing not at Knighton but at the clock.

"Erriyon got the best of me on the turn—I wasn't worried about it. I said I'm going to catch him. I'm going to take the rest of this 100 and that's what I did." Knighton finished second in 19.69 and Fred Kerley, who posted times of 9.76 and 9.77 on the way to a 100m victory on Friday, was third in 19.83 to nab the third berth for the World Championships, which will be held on the same Hayward Field track in Eugene on July 15-24. Abby Steiner continued her upward trajectory in the women's 200m, improving her own world-leading time with a victory in 21.77sec.

Two hours earlier, Steiner had matched the previous world-leading time of 21.80 in the semi-finals as she continues to shine in a season that saw her claim the NCAA collegiate title this month. "Coming off a collegiate season, a lot of people want to put limitations on you, say you're going to be burned out," she said, adding that she believes she can car-

ry her form through Worlds. "Me and my coach trust the process."

Tamara Clark set the early pace but finished second in 21.92 while Jenna Prandini was third in 22.01. Tokyo bronze medalist Gabby Thomas, who is nursing a torn hamstring, finished eighth. The disappointment left her in tears, but she vowed to continue training with the aim of completing the Diamond League season. Sprint darling Sha'Carri Richardson bowed out in the 200m semi-finals, failing to earn a World Championships team berth after crashing out of the first round of the 100m. She, too, said she'd redirect her attention to the Diamond League.

Allen grabs 110 hurdles berth

Rai Benjamin, silver medalist at the 2019 Worlds and the Tokyo Games last year, posted the fastest time in the world this year in winning the 400m hurdles in 47.04sec. Benjamin improved on the previous season-leading 47.23 posted by Alison Dos Santos at the Eugene Diamond League in May and provided a tantalizing glimpse of what the event could offer at Worlds, where he'll be aiming to avenge his loss to Karsten Warholm in the Tokyo final—when both ran under the previous world record.

"It was a very nasty 47-0," Benjamin said of a somewhat ragged race, his first since the Doha Diamond League. Since then he has battled Covid and hamstring tendinitis. In other events, Chase Ealey won the women's shot put with a world-leading throw of 20.51m. Adelaide Aquilla was second at 19.45 and Jessica Woodard was third at 19.40. Donald Scott won the men's triple jump with a leap of 17.07, followed by Will Claye at 16.93 and Chris Benard at 16.38.

Four-time and defending world champion Christian Taylor, who missed the Tokyo Olympics with a ruptured Achilles tendon, finished fifth (16.54)



EUGENE: Noah Lyles (center) competes in the men's 200 meter first round during the 2022 USATF Outdoor Championships at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon. —AFP

as he prepares for his title defense courtesy of his champion's bye. The 110m hurdles produced a nail-biter, with Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver Devon Allen barely making the team. Defending world champion Grant Holloway skipped the final, which was won by Daniel Roberts in 13.03sec. Trey Cunningham was second in 13.08.

Allen, who caused shockwaves around the sport when he beat Holloway with the third-fastest time ever at the New York Grand Prix, narrowly edged Jamal Britt for third, both credited with a time of 13.09. Tokyo Olympic gold medalist Athing Mu held off the late challenge of Aje Wilson to win the women's 800m in 1:57.16. Mu couldn't match the world-leading time of 1:57.01 she set at the Rome Diamond League, but she had enough at the end to hold off the hard-charging Aje with Raevyn Rogers third in 1:57.96 to grab a World Championships berth. —AFP



CROMWELL: Xander Schauffele of the United States poses with the trophy after putting in to win on the 18th green during the final round of Travelers Championship at TPC River Highlands on June 26, 2022. —AFP

Schauffele captures PGA Travelers title

NEW YORK: Tokyo Olympic champion Xander Schauffele birdied the final hole on Sunday to win the Travelers Championship, holding off Sahith Theegala for his sixth career US PGA Tour title. The 28-year-old American fired a two-under par 68 to finish on 19-under 261 after 72 holes at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut. That was enough to defeat Theegala, who fell from the lead with a closing double bogey, and fellow American JT Poston, who shared second on 263.

It marked the first time Schauffele had converted a 54-hole PGA lead into a triumph, but that happened only after Theegala seized the lead with a birdie at the 17th—and then found a bunker off the 18th tee to set up a nightmare finish. "It's incredible," Schauffele said. "I was looking at birdie just getting into a playoff. I saw a little hiccup for Sahith and I knew I had to get it into the cup." World number 15 Schauffele captured his fifth US PGA title in April at the pairs event in New Orleans with pal Patrick Cantlay.

Schauffele had not won a solo tour event since the 2019 Tournament of Champions. US amateur Michael Thorbjornsen fired his second consecutive 66 to finish fourth on 265, the top amateur showing in tournament history. "It was surreal. It was crazy," he said. "I think it was louder than last week at the US Open. It was special. I felt pretty comfortable out there." World number 120 Theegala settled for his best PGA finish, improving on his share of third from February's Phoenix Open.

Dramatic finish

Schauffele and Theegala were deadlocked on 18-under with two holes remaining. Theegala then sank a birdie putt from just inside 11 feet at 17 to seize the lead at 19-under, pumping his fist in celebration while Schauffele watched stoically from the fairway.

While Schauffele two-putted from 25 feet for par at 17, Theegala found a fairway bunker near a high slope at the par-4 18th and tried to blast out. Instead, Theegala left the ball in the sand at his feet before punching it out into the fairway with his third shot and pitching to 12 feet from the cup. His bogey putt lipped out off the left edge and he tapped in for double bogey, falling one adrift of Schauffele, who was comfortably in the 18th fairway.

"I knew it was going to be close to the lip, but not that close," said Theegala. "Never in a million years did I think I would allow myself to blade it. All I had to do was chunk it. 'I had room there. I just straight bladed it. And then from there, got to try and make five. I nearly bladed it again.'" Schauffele dropped his approach just beyond three feet from the cup and sank the clutch putt for the triumph. "I know, and all the guys out here know, how hard it is to win and how few opportunities there are," said Theegala. "That's why something like this is really going to hurt." —AFP

Wolff latest to leave the PGA for LIV Golf

WASHINGTON: World number 77 Matthew Wolff, a 23-year-old American, is the latest player to leave the US PGA Tour for the Saudi-backed LIV Golf Series, according to multiple reports Sunday. The Golf Channel and ESPN reported that Wolff has joined the rebels who will depart for the upstart series, which stages its second event starting Thursday at Portland, Oregon. Wolff, who won his only US PGA title at the 2019 3M Open in suburban Minneapolis in just his third tour start, was the 2020 US Open runner-up and shared fourth in the 2020 PGA Championship, each result coming in his event debut.

Wolff was a runner-up in last October's Shriners' Children's Open at Las Vegas and shared 40th on Sunday at

the PGA Travelers Championship. According to reports, Wolff will be among the players who will compete at Pumpkin Ridge in Oregon. That likely will mean he will join the list of players placed on an indefinite suspension by the US PGA Tour, which listed 17 current and former members on its banned list when they played in England earlier this month in LIV Golf's debut event.

That group included six-time major winner Phil Mickelson and past Masters winners Sergio Garcia and Dustin Johnson. The LIV series, which is bankrolled by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, has plunged the golf world into turmoil since its emergence. It has drawn stinging criticism from human rights groups, which say the circuit is an attempt to boost the kingdom's image through sport. The controversial series offers record prize money of \$25 million per 54-hole event with shotgun starts and no cut. Reports said Wolff's move will be confirmed on Monday. Portland was already slated to be the LIV Golf debut for major winners Bryson DeChambeau,



CROMWELL: Matthew Wolff of the United States prepares to play his shot from the 12th tee during the second round of Travelers Championship at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell. —AFP

Brooks Koepka and Patrick Reed of the United States and Mexico's Abraham Ancer. Both ESPN and Golf Channel also reported that Spaniard Eugenio

Chacarra, the world amateur number two, has agreed to leave Oklahoma State for LIV Golf and will make his LIV debut at Pumpkin Ridge. —AFP

Schmidt gets call as COVID hits All Blacks, Ireland

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's preparations for the first Test against Ireland were thrown into disarray Monday after head coach Ian Foster, two of his assistants and two players tested positive for Covid-19, with the visitors also hit by the virus. To help cope with the disrupted build-up New Zealander Joe Schmidt, who coached Ireland from 2013-2019, was rushed into camp to attend All Blacks training sessions.

Ireland also suffered a setback with wing Mack

Hansen testing positive, while forwards Iain Henderson and Rob Herring both picked up knocks in weekend training and will undergo scans later Monday. Munster's Niall Scannell has been added to the squad to provide additional cover at hooker and is expected to arrive on Tuesday, Ireland said in a statement.

Foster, forwards coach John Plumtree and defense coach Joe McLeod are all isolating while infected New Zealand players David Havili and Jack Goodhue — both specialist midfield backs — have not joined the squad in Auckland ahead of Saturday's series opener. Braydon Ennor, who has played four Tests and is a teammate of Havili and Goodhue at newly-crowned Super Rugby Pacific champions Canterbury Crusaders, was called in as cover. New Zealand regulations require COVID-positive patients to undergo seven days of home isolation from when they first notice symptoms.

This potentially rules out Foster, Plumtree and

McLeod from attending the Test at Eden Park, although it is unclear when their isolation periods began. But they have a secret weapon in Schmidt, who has an intimate knowledge of Ireland's senior players and management. He was due to join the All Blacks staff for the upcoming Rugby Championship, but Foster said it made sense for him to get involved now. "Joe will come in for Tuesday and Thursday's trainings this week, and we're really grateful to have his help," he said in a statement.

"We've planned for this kind of disruption and we've got back-up plans and people on stand-by. Joe was one of those people we could call on. 'I've got every confidence in our coaching group, and in our senior leaders who are all stepping up in what's a massive test for us,'" he added. "Everyone has had to deal with these kinds of disruptions over the past couple of years. This is a real opportunity for the coaching group and team to pull together." —AFP

Sports

Colorado Avalanche win Stanley Cup Final for third NHL crown

Avalanche win first Stanley Cup Final in 21 years

WASHINGTON: The Colorado Avalanche won their first Stanley Cup Final in 21 years on Sunday when Nathan MacKinnon scored one goal and set up another to spark a 2-1 victory over Tampa Bay. The Avalanche captured the National Hockey League's best-of-seven championship series four games to two for Colorado's third NHL crown after 1996 and 2001. "It feels like disbelief," MacKinnon said. "It's hard to describe. To see all these warriors battle, it's unbelievable. Words can't describe what I feel right now."

With the emotional road triumph, the Avalanche denied the Lightning a third consecutive title and fourth overall. Colorado defenseman Cale Makar was named winner of the Conn Smythe Trophy as the Most Valuable Player of the Stanley Cup playoffs. Makar, a 23-year-old Canadian, scored eight goals and added 21 assists in 19 playoff games. "All the work these guys have put in, it's just so awesome to be part of them getting rewarded," Makar said. "I'm just so proud of the boys."

He smiled as he looked at the Stanley Cup. "You see that thing as a kid, grow up with pictures of it on the wall," Makar said. "It's surreal. It's amazing." Tampa Bay captain Steven Stamkos opened the scoring 3:48 into the first period off an assist from Czech left wing Ondrej Palat. It was the Canadian center's career-best 11th goal of the playoff run. MacKinnon netted the equalizer 1:54 into the second period, an angled shot just inside the near post for his 13th goal of the playoffs.

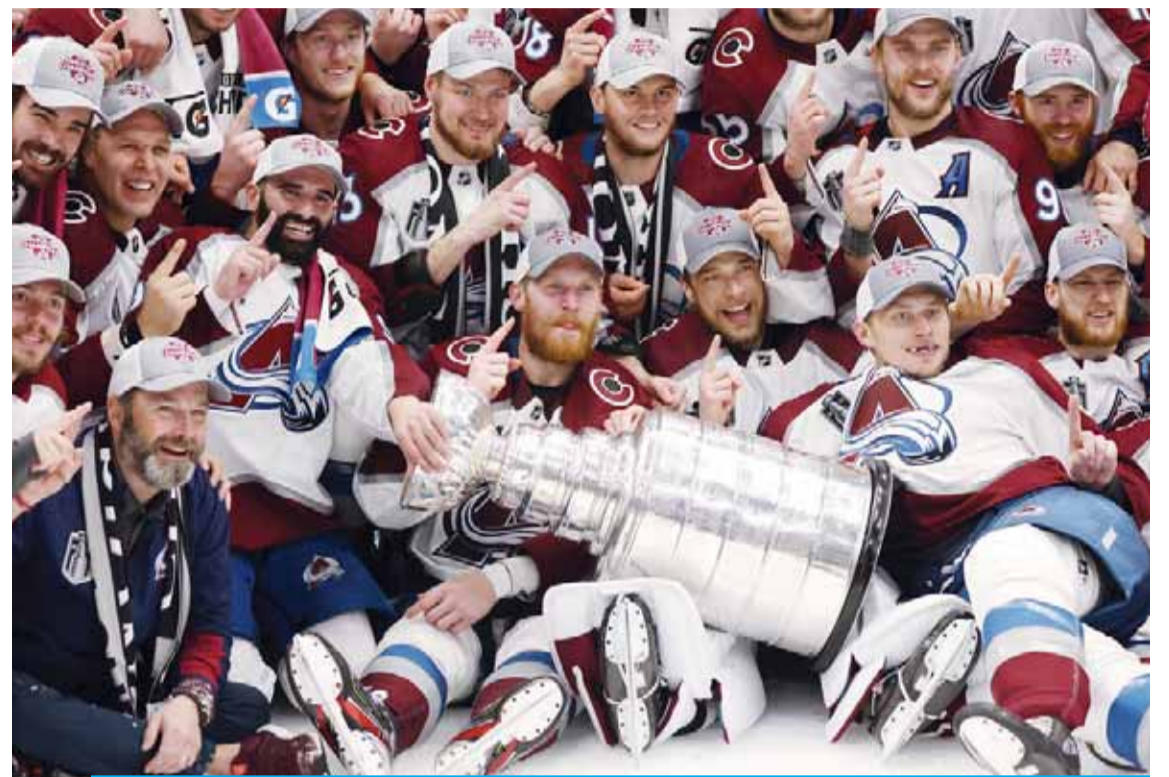
The Avalanche seized the lead by the final margin with 7:32 remaining in the second period on a goal from

Finnish left wing Artturi Lehkonen, his eighth of the post-season, off a pass from Canadian center MacKinnon. The Lightning pulled goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy in the dying seconds for an extra attacker to try and score an equalizer, but could not stop the Avalanche from hoisting the Stanley Cup. Colorado players dropped their sticks to the ice and hurled their gloves into the air to begin their celebration after the final second ticked off the clock.

In a trophy ceremony minutes later, Colorado players took turns lifting the trophy over their heads and passing it to teammates, many pausing to kiss the hardware as they skated around the ice. Avalanche captain Gabriel Landeskog thought of those who helped nurture his championship dreams as he skated with the Cup, his dream made real. "That's 20-plus years of dreaming and wanting it and working for it," the Swedish left wing said. "It's the culmination of a lot of years and working for it. It's incredible. I still can't believe it."

'It all adds up'

Landeskog smiled as he watched his teammates celebrate. "They just want to win so bad and do whatever it takes, and it all adds up and makes us a hard team to play against," he said. "The expectations we put on ourselves to be great, to work on ourselves. We had eight or nine come-from-behind wins. That's hard to do." The only team in NHL history to trail 3-1 and rally to win the Stanley Cup Final, as the Lightning attempted to do, was the 1942 Toronto Maple Leafs. —AFP



TAMPA: Colorado Avalanche coaches and players pose for a photo after defeating the Tampa Bay Lightning 2-1 in Game Six of the 2022 NHL Stanley Cup Final at Amalie Arena on June 26, 2022. —AFP

Roach runs through Bangladesh top order after 250th Test wicket

GROS-ISLET: Kumar Roach became just the sixth West Indian to claim 250 Test wickets as the senior pacer swept through the top order of the Bangladesh second innings to put his team on course for victory on the third day of the second and final Test at the Daren Sammy Stadium in St. Lucia on Sunday. Roach's three wickets led the assault of the hapless visitors who closed the truncated day at 132 for six in their second innings, still needing another 42 runs to avoid an innings defeat after Kyle Mayers' topscore of 146 anchored the West Indies first innings total of 408.

Poised on 249 wickets after his "Man of the Match" performance in the first Test but wicketless through the visitors' first innings of 234 on Friday, Roach made amends second time around with the wickets of Tamim Iqbal, opening partner Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Anamul Haque to rock the south Asians back at 32 for three.

Another brief respite followed courtesy of another series of showers. However the reprieve proved temporary with Alzarri Joseph unsettling the batsmen with pace and bounce to claim the wickets of Najmul Hossain Shanto and captain Shakib al Hasan while Jayden Seales chimed in by removing the experienced Liton Das. It left wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan and Mehidy Hasan Miraz to hang on to close, which came earlier than scheduled thanks to more rain.

With their discomfort on these types of playing

surfaces again cruelly exposed, not even a forecast of further precipitation over the next two days seems enough to save them from the inevitability of another heavy defeat and a 2-0 loss in the series. For the Bangladeshis, whipped by seven wickets in the first Test in Antigua a week earlier, there was at least a moment of supreme satisfaction on another otherwise disappointing day as Khaled Ahmed claimed his first five-wicket innings haul in Test cricket as the West Indies were eventually dismissed after lunch.

With the early wickets of Raymon Reifer and Nkrumah Bonner a day earlier, the medium-pacer removed Joseph in the rain-shortened morning session before ending the innings on a damp afternoon by getting Mayers for 146 and then having last man Seales caught behind to finish with figures of five for 106 off 31.3 overs. West Indies had started the day already well placed at 340 for five but suffered an immediate setback when Joshua da Silva, who had contributed 29 in a 96-run sixth-wicket partnership with Mayers, fell leg-before to Mehidy.

Joseph's equally swift demise to Khaled brought in Roach, who finished unbeaten on 18 as the wickets tumbled at the other end. Mayers' second Test century - his first was a monumental unbeaten 210 on debut against the same opponents in Chattogram in February of last year - spanned just over five hours in which he faced 208 deliveries, striking 18 fours and two sixes before lifting a catch to Shoriful Islam at mid-on off Khaled to be eighth out. "I just wanted to keep playing my game, which is to be counter-attacking and stay on top of the bowling throughout the innings," said Mayers in reflecting on his innings. "It really is about being decisive with my stroke-play and also when defence is necessary. I give it my all both ways." Any expectation of top-order Bangladesh



GROS ISLET: Tamim Iqbal of Bangladesh got in trouble with a delivery from Kumar Roach of West Indies during 1st day of the 2nd Test between Bangladesh and West Indies at Daren Sammy Cricket Ground, Gros Islet, Saint Lucia. —AFP

resistance in the second innings evaporated when Tamim essayed an expansive off-drive for wicketkeeper da Silva to take the catch and give Roach the cherished 250th Test wicket, edging him ahead of legendary fast bowler Michael Holding. —AFP

He then had Hasan Joy taken by Jermaine Blackwood and third slip before earning an LBW verdict against Anamul just as rain was sweeping across the ground again. On 252 wickets going into the fourth day, Roach will be keen for more success to not only seal an emphatic West Indies win but also pull him closer to fellow-Barbadian and another fast bowling giant of the past, Joel Garner, who stands fifth on the all-time West Indian list with 259 wickets. —AFP

Jackson completes 100-200 double at Jamaica trials

KINGSTON: Shericka Jackson delivered on her promise to produce something special in the women's 200m with a world-leading 21.55 seconds (0.0m/s) on Sunday's final day of the Jamaican National Athletics Championships. Jamaica track stars produced the third-fastest event ever at the world team trials in the national stadium at Kingston, with Jackson completing the 100-200 sprint double impressively. After Friday's 100m victory, Jackson surprised herself with a 200m performance that trails only US legend Florence Griffith-Joyner's 34-year-old world record 21.34 seconds and the Jamaican record 21.53 by Elaine Thompson-Herah at last year's Tokyo Olympics.

"Honestly, I am shocked by the time," Jackson said. "I never expected to go that fast. I knew that I had something special in my legs but to run that fast. I'm just grateful." Jackson surpassed her previ-

ous best of 21.81 from last year this year's prior world best of 21.77 set earlier Sunday by American Abby Steiner to win the US crown. Jackson, 28, has also won a national senior crown at 400m. Olympic champion Thompson-Herah was second in 22.05 with Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce third in 22.14.

American-born Andrew Hudson won the men's 200m in 20.10secs (0.5m/s), beating 100m champion Yohan Blake's 20.31 with Nigel Ellis third in 20.41. Tokyo Olympic champion Hansle Parchment won the 110m hurdles final in 13.14 secs (1.0m/s), taking charge late in the race after former World and Olympic champion Omar McLeod got off to a flying start. Rasheed Broadbell was second in a season-best 13.20 with Orlando Bennett third in 13.28. McLeod, who hit the third hurdle, finished eighth.

Britany Anderson, eighth in the Tokyo Olympics, won the 100m hurdles, coming from behind over the last three hurdles to win in 12.53(0.6m/s). Defending champion and Olympic bronze medalist Megan Tapper was second with a season-best equalling 12.60 with 2015 world champion Danielle Williams third in her season's best 12.66. Chris-Ann Gordon-Powell upset eight time national champion and Olympic finalist Natoya Goule-Topping in the



Jamaica's Shericka Jackson

women's 800m, running 2:00.25 as Goule took second in 2:00.83 and Adelle Tracey was third in 2:01.18. —AFP

Wimbledon 'relieved' to host stars despite loss of ranking points

LONDON: Wimbledon chief executive Sally Bolton said Monday she was relieved the world's top stars had showed up at the Grand Slam even though no ranking points will be on offer. Both the ATP and WTA, which control the men's and women's tours, removed the points after the All England Club banned Russian and Belarusian players in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

It means players such as US Open champion Daniil Medvedev, Andrey Rublev, Aryna Sabalenka and Victoria Azarenka cannot play in London. Bolton, who said the decision to ban the players had been "incredibly difficult", reiterated that Wimbledon organizers were disappointed with the decision taken by ATP and WTA. "We thought it was a disproportionate decision in the context of the situation we found ourselves in and in the context of the global situation," she said before the start of play on the first day on Monday.

"And of course it punishes all the players so we felt it was disproportionate and I think the quality of the field we have playing in the Championships speaks for itself." Former world number one Naomi Osaka, who last month pulled out of Wimbledon with an Achilles injury, had said previously she could skip it over the decision to remove ranking points. But two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray it would "never feel like an exhibition" despite the absence of points.

Record crowds

Bolton said she expected record crowds for the Championships this year, with the tournament switching to a permanent policy of playing on the middle Sunday, which used to be a rest day. "The history of why we didn't used to play on middle Sunday was about the courts needing a rest but as grass-court technology, care and attention has improved over many years we arrived at a place where we believe the courts... could withstand 14 days," she said.

"And so we're very confident it can and we're really excited about adding the extra day but particularly the extra day on a Sunday when we think about available audiences and we think about trying to take tennis to as many people as we can globally," Bolton also welcomed back Wimbledon's traditional queues for tickets, which did not take place during last year's coronavirus-disrupted event. —AFP

Bairstow seals England clean sweep of NZ

LEEDS: Jonny Bairstow led England to a whitewash of Test world champions New Zealand with a stunning fifty on his Headingley home ground on Monday. England, set a target of 296 for victory, finished on 296-3 to win the third Test by seven wickets. Bairstow was 71 not out, having compiled England's second-fastest Test fifty of all time by reaching the landmark in just 30 balls.

Former England captain Joe Root was 86 not out, having started the day on an unbeaten 55 before sharing a partnership of 111 with Yorkshire team-mate Bairstow. Rain washed out the morning session to leave England, 183-2 overnight, with a nominal 78 overs in which to score the

113 more runs they needed for victory.

But they required just 15.2 overs, with Bairstow ending the match after just over an hour's play Monday with a six over deep midwicket off spinner Michael Bracewell. Victory gave England a 3-0 clean sweep of New Zealand in their first series under new captain Ben Stokes and red-ball coach Brendon McCullum, a former New Zealand skipper. England will not have long to rest on their laurels, however, with the Covid-delayed final Test of last year's series against India starting at Edgbaston on Friday.

Morgan to retire

Meanwhile, England's World Cup-winning captain Eoin Morgan is set to retire from international cricket, with an official announcement expected as soon as Tuesday, according to the BBC. Under Morgan, England won the 2019 50-over World Cup-their first major global limited-overs title-and reached the top of the one-day and Twenty20 rankings. But the

35-year-old Dublin-born batter has been struggling with form and fitness issues this year. He was twice out for nought during the recent ODI series away to the Netherlands in Amstelveen and withdrew from the third match with a groin issue. England face India in a three-match T20 international series starting on July 7, while the T20 World Cup in Australia begins in October.

If Morgan does indeed step down ahead of the 2023 50-over World Cup in India, vice-captain Jos Buttler would appear to be the favorite to replace him as England's white-ball skipper. Morgan is England's leading run-scorer of all time in ODI and T20 cricket with 6,957 and 2,458 runs respectively. His tally of 225 ODIs and 115 T20Is is also an England record. But he has made just two fifties from his past 28 international innings across the two white-ball formats.

Prior to the Netherlands series he confessed to feeling his age and strug-

gling to recover physically from matches, telling Sky Sports: "If I don't think I am good enough or I don't feel I am contributing to the team, then I will finish." Morgan switched allegiance from his native Ireland in 2009, having forged an English county career with Middlesex. He was a pioneer in becoming an England white-ball specialist after calling time on a 16-Test career featuring two hundreds that ended in 2012 to concentrate on the shorter formats.

A dynamic middle-order batter, Morgan was also a trailblazer in the English game with his then unusual ability to hit the ball to all parts of the ground. He succeeded Alastair Cook as England's ODI captain on the eve of the 2015 World Cup in Australia, where the team suffered a humiliating first-round exit. Despite that reverse, Morgan remained in post and together with former England head coach Trevor Bayliss oversaw the side's transformation into a major force in limited-overs cricket. —AFP



LEEDS: England's Jonny Bairstow (left) and England's Joe Root celebrate their win on day 5 of the third cricket Test match between England and New Zealand at Headingley Cricket Ground in Leeds on June 27, 2022. England won the Test by 7 wickets, and the series 3-0. —AFP



WIMBLEDON: Tunisia's Ons Jabeur returns the ball to Sweden's Mirjam Bjorklund during their women's singles tennis match on the first day of the 2022 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, on June 27, 2022. —AFP

Jabeur becomes world no. 2

Djokovic brings curtain up on Wimbledon

LONDON: Ons Jabeur marked her rise to number two in the world by easing into the Wimbledon second round with a 6-1, 6-3 win over Swedish qualifier Mirjam Bjorklund on Monday. Jabeur, a quarter-finalist in 2021 and fresh from the grass-court title in Berlin, raced to victory in just 54 minutes under the Court One roof. "Today I achieved my highest ever ranking and dropping just four games is a great start to the tournament," said the Tunisian. "It's amazing to be back on Court One. The grass suits my drop shots and slice. "Now I hope to go further than the quarter-finals." Jabeur will face either Rebecca Marino of Canada or Poland's Katarzyna Kawa for a place in the last 32.

Meanwhile, Novak Djokovic begins his bid to match Pete Sampras as a seven-time Wimbledon champion on Monday, with British Grand Slam title winners Andy Murray and Emma Raducanu also on Centre Court's opening day agenda. In the absence of the banned Daniil Medvedev and injured Alexander Zverev, 20-time major winner Djokovic takes top seeding. The 35-year-old defending champion starts his title bid against South Korea's Kwon Soon-woo, the world number 75.

Djokovic has extra motivation this year as Wimbledon will be his last Slam of 2022. His continued refusal to get vaccinated against COVID-19 means he will remain barred from entering the United States for the US Open later this summer. Also adding fuel to the Djokovic fire is the chance to win a fourth successive Wimbledon title and join a select group. In the Open era, only Bjorn Borg, Sampras and Roger Federer have managed to complete such a streak of dominance at the All England Club.

Wimbledon struggles to avoid shadow of Russia ban

LONDON: It's been nine years since Sergiy Stakhovsky stunned Roger Federer at Wimbledon in a Centre Court seismic shock. This weekend Stakhovsky is 2,500km away from London, dressed in fatigues rather than tennis whites. The 36-year-old is armed, desperately fighting to hold back Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"This used to be us.... Now this is our @Wimbledon ... Last night 62 rockets were launched to attack different cities in Ukraine.. #stoprussia #boycotrussia #helpukraine @TheDolgo," tweeted Stakhovsky. In his tweeted photographs, Stakhovsky is seen shaking hands with Federer after his 2013 victory. Also pictured is Ukrainian compatriot Alexandr Dolgoplov after his match against Federer at Wimbledon in 2017.

Ban 'not fair'

Both men are retired from tennis; both are now in the military. Wimbledon, which starts on Monday, has banned all Russian and Belarusian players from this year's tournament. That ruled out men's world number one Daniil Medvedev and eighth-ranked Andrey Rublev. On the women's side, three of the top 20 are missing—Aryna Sabalenka, Daria Kasatkina and two-time major winner and former number one Victoria Azarenka.

'Dreamt of winning'
"As a seven, eight-year-old boy I've dreamt of winning Wimbledon and becoming number one," said Djokovic. "Pete Sampras winning his first Wimbledon was the first tennis match I ever saw on the TV." After a cancelled edition due to the pandemic in 2020 and a reduced capacity tournament last year, Wimbledon returns to full house crowds for 2022.

However, missing from the line-up are a host of Russian and Belarusian players who were banned following the invasion of Ukraine. As well as Medvedev, world number eight Andrey Rublev is absent as are three of the top 20 women - Aryna Sabalenka, Daria Kasatkina and two-time major winner and former number one Victoria Azarenka. In retaliation for the ban, the ATP and WTA tours have stripped Wimbledon of ranking points.

Murray, the Wimbledon champion in 2013 and 2016, is unseeded this year but remains a dangerous floater in the draw. He made the Stuttgart grass-court final earlier this month before an abdominal injury forced him out of Queen's. "I think he's one of the most dangerous players on grass still," said Australia's Nick Kyrgios. "I definitely think the way he can handle speed, return, compete, slice, volley, as long as his body is feeling well."

Murray takes on Australia's 77th-ranked James Duckworth who has yet to register a win on the main tour in 2022. However, the 30-year-old did make the third round at Wimbledon in 2021. Duckworth's career had been undermined by requiring nine surgeries in the last decade. Raducanu, the shock 2021 US Open champion, plays Wimbledon for the first time as a Grand Slam winner. She made the fourth

round last year but has been plagued by inconsistent form since her triumph in New York.

Stakhovsky wants Russians banned from all sports. However, six-time Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic believes that would be a step too far. "I just don't see how they have contributed to anything that is really happening. I don't feel it's fair," said Djokovic, adding that Russian and Belarusians be allowed to play under neutral flags.

That's what happens in the week-in, week-out ATP and WTA tours. When Wimbledon announced its ban, the two tours retaliated by stripping the tournament of ranking points. "In terms of the response from the ATP, I didn't really agree with it. I just don't see who it helps," said two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray. "All the players have still showed up to play here, so I don't see how it puts the ATP in a stronger position moving forwards."

In a further move, Wimbledon said it will provide tournament tickets to Ukrainian refugees living in the local areas of south-west London. All England Club officials will also donate £250,000 (290,000 euros/\$306,000) to the refugees' charity. That humanitarian gesture, however, hasn't softened Nick Kyrgios' belief that the ban was ill-advised. "I don't think it was a good idea to ban the Russian players. Medvedev is the best we have in our sport right now," said the Australian player.

"Whenever we have cameras on and a lot of people tuning in, you want our best players to be on showcase for the sport to grow. "I'm disappointed they're not here. It's weird not seeing Medvedev here." US superstar Serena Williams opted to sidestep the controversy. "Another heavy subject that involves a tremendous amount of politics, from what I understand, and government. I'm going to step away from that," said the seven-

time Wimbledon champion. Despite the official ban, there are still plenty of Russian-born players taking part at Wimbledon.

'Ready to go'
The 19-year-old has been battling a side strain but insisted she is "ready to go" against 46th-ranked Alison Van Uytvanck. The Belgian player made the last 16 four years ago. Also in action on the first day is French Open runner-up and third seed Casper Ruud. The Norwegian starts against Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. Ruud has lost in the first round on his two appearances at the tournament.

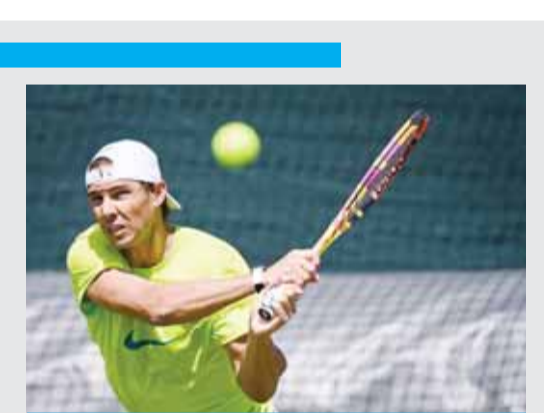
He was also defeated in his only grass-court outing this summer by world number 180 Ryan Peniston at Queen's. Spanish 19-year-old and fifth-seed Carlos Alcaraz faces Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff. Women's second seed Anett Kontaveit tackles Bernarda Pera of the United States as the Estonian looks to reach the second week of Wimbledon for the first time. Despite her lofty ranking of two in the world, the 26-year-old Kontaveit has a mediocre record at the Slams, making the quarter-finals just once in 28 appearances.

Eight-time champion Roger Federer is missing Wimbledon as he recovers from knee surgery. However, Serena Williams will play her first singles match since last year's championship as she bids again to equal Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slams. The American star, a seven-time champion at Wimbledon, gets her campaign underway on Tuesday as does Rafael Nadal. The Spaniard has already collected the Australian Open and French Open this year to put himself halfway to a first men's calendar Grand Slam since 1969. —AFP



WIMBLEDON: US player Frances Tiafoe serves the ball to Italy's Andrea Vavassori during their men's singles tennis match on the first day of the 2022 Wimbledon Championships on June 27, 2022. —AFP

Alexander Bublik was born in Gatchina and Mikhail Kukushkin hails from Volgograd but they represent Kazakhstan. Yulia Putintseva and Elena Rybakina also play for Kazakhstan despite being born in Moscow. One player has got round the Russia-Belarus ban with a last-minute switch. Moscow-born Natela Dzalamidze, a 29-year-old doubles player, last week changed her nationality from Russian to Georgian and will compete in the women's doubles at Wimbledon with Serbia's Aleksandra Krunic. —AFP



LONDON: Spain's Rafael Nadal eyes the ball as he returns it during a training session at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London. —AFP

Tsitsipas: Nadal feels 'immortal'

LONDON: Stefanos Tsitsipas believes Rafael Nadal must feel "immortal" after winning the French Open and moving halfway to the first men's calendar Grand Slam in more than half a century. The great Spaniard captured a 14th title at Roland Garros earlier this month to add to the Australian Open he secured in January. His win in Paris, which also extended his Grand Slam record to 22 titles, came despite him needing his injured left foot to be anaesthetised.

"I have a lot of respect for what he did at the French Open, playing with that foot. It was a broken foot in a way. It kind of makes him feel like he's immortal with the things he's able to pull off," said Tsitsipas. "The matches, the level of intensity he's able to reach in times where it's very uncomfortable, it would be uncomfortable for most players to compete under these conditions physically."

Nadal goes into Wimbledon, which starts on Monday, claiming he is pain-free for the first time in a year and a half after undergoing treatment to cure nerve pain in his troublesome foot. Tsitsipas believes that Nadal, the champion at the All England in 2008 and 2010, has a psychological edge if rivals believe the Spanish star is often just one injury away from retirement. "We're used to seeing Rafa not being able to play and win multiple Grand Slams or tournaments," added the 23-year-old. "That's where I think the opponents need to be more careful. When he says he can't play and has foot problems, that's where I feel he's the most threatening in terms of his performance. "It's actually reverse psychology in a way." World number six Tsitsipas arrives at Wimbledon with a first grass-court title under his belt having triumphed in Mallorca on Saturday. Now he needs to translate that form to the All England Club where he has fallen at the first round three times in four visits.

That included 2021 when he was knocked out in straight sets by Frances Tiafoe. "Last year was difficult for me. I didn't play a single match before Wimbledon on grass. I was trying to play on grass like I did on clay, which was a huge mistake," he admitted on Sunday. "Technique-wise, tactic-wise, it all fell apart. Looking back last year, I watched a few videos, highlights. —AFP