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Crown Prince commends role of private sector in development

Sheikh Mishal hosts heads of Kuwait, GCC, Arab chambers of commerce



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives heads of GCC, Arab chambers of commerce on Nov 9, 2022. — KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Wednesday at Bayan Palace Chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Industry and Commerce Mohammad Jassem Al-Sager and heads of the Arab and Gulf chambers of commerce. The representatives of these chambers are participating in the 59th session of the Federation of the GCC Chambers of Commerce and the 133rd session of the General Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture for Arab Countries.

HH the Crown Prince addressed the guests, relaying greetings from HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He noted that leaders of the Arab states are doing their best to serve the interests of their countries and people.

"And they have been quite aware that cooperation and integration are the bases for growth and progress and that consultation is the key to reach

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News in brief

KU eyes more expat students

KUWAIT: Informed sources said Kuwait University plans to increase the number of fee-paying expatriate students admitted to its colleges, after starting this policy from the current academic year by admitting 300 students. Sources said the KU's supreme council may approve increasing the number of foreign students to 500, but still limited to certain colleges. They will not be admitted to medicine, dental and pharmacy colleges because of the presence of many Kuwaiti students. They said the current fee of KD 100 per unit will remain, although the proposal calls to increasing it to KD 350.



Kuwaiti wins travel influencer award

LONDON: Kuwaiti travel content creator Fatima Al-Mattar won the Travel Media Influencer of the Year Gold Award during the Wanderlust Travel Awards 2022. The annual awards are presented by the UK's Wanderlust magazine to the world's best tourism boards, tour operators, guides and destinations, as well as travel personalities and influencers.

MP asks about impact of US rate hike on Kuwait

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf asked the finance minister on Wednesday about the impact of rising US interest rates on the Kuwaiti economy.

Reps make gains in midterms but no 'red wave'

WASHINGTON: Republicans appeared poised on Wednesday to carve out a slim majority in the US House of Representatives but their hopes of a "red wave" in midterm elections were dashed as President Joe Biden's Democrats defied expectations. With four key races yet to be called after Tuesday's vote, the Senate remained in play but it was leaning Democratic and control may hinge on a runoff election in the southern state of Georgia in early December.

Republicans seemed on track to reclaim the House for the first time since 2018, but the

Meta to lay off 11,000 staff

NEW YORK: Facebook owner Meta will lay off more than 11,000 of its staff in "the most difficult changes we've made in Meta's history", boss Mark Zuckerberg said on Wednesday. He said the cuts represented 13 percent of the social media titan's workforce and would affect its research lab focusing on the metaverse as well as its apps, which include Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. The tech industry is in a serious slump and several major firms have announced mass layoffs - Twitter's new owner Elon Musk fired half its staff last week.

"I want to take accountability for these decisions and for how we got here," Zuckerberg said in a note to staff. "I know this is tough for everyone, and I'm

prices of imported commodities and the value of the local currency. The lawmaker said that after a series of interest rate hikes by the United States, Kuwait's discount rate at 3 percent is one percent lower than that of the US. This is in addition to interest rate increases on other currencies composing the basket of currencies to which the Kuwaiti dinar is pegged.

He asked the finance minister about measures taken by the central bank to avert any possible adverse effects on the Kuwaiti economy as a result of the US Fed increases. The lawmaker also asked if the increase of the US interest rate would result in any pressure on the Kuwaiti dinar and its rate of

exchange. He also enquired if the rise in the interest rate could raise the value of imports and consequently prices in the domestic market.

Mudhaf also asked the minister about measures taken by the government to counteract any possible increases in local prices. Additionally, the lawmaker asked the minister about measures taken by the central bank to fight rising inflation and enquired about the targeted inflation rate. The lawmaker also asked the minister of justice about the policies and measures adopted by the ministry to curb encroachments on public funds over the past 12 years.

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PITTSBURGH: Pennsylvania Democratic Senatorial candidate John Fetterman waves onstage at a watch party at Stage AE on Nov 8, 2022. — AFP

midterms delivered a mixed bag for Donald Trump, who was widely expected to announce another White House run next week. While the night saw wins by more than 100 Republicans



TAMPA: Republican gubernatorial candidate for Florida Ron DeSantis holds his daughter Mamie at a watch party at the Convention Center on Nov 8, 2022. —AFP

embracing Trump's "Big Lie" that Biden stole the 2020 election, several high-profile acolytes of the former president came up short.

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especially sorry to those impacted." Ad-supported platforms such as Facebook and Google are suffering with advertisers looking to cut costs as they struggle with inflation and rising interest rates. Zuckerberg told 87,000-strong staff he had expected the boost in e-commerce and online activity during the Covid pandemic to continue, but added: "I got this wrong, and I take responsibility for that."

The downturn has affected companies across the sector, with Apple and Amazon also recently announcing results that disappointed investors. But Meta also faces some unique problems of its own. The California-based company is being squeezed by Zuckerberg's decision to devote billions of dollars to developing the metaverse, an immersive version of the web accessed via virtual reality headsets.

Zuckerberg renamed the company Meta a year ago to reflect the commitment to the project, but



the division working on metaverse technology has since made losses of more than \$3.5 billion. Facebook is also struggling to fend off Chinese-owned TikTok, the now dominant social media for younger users to the detriment of Meta's Instagram.

Mike Proulx, a research director at Forrester, said "Meta is amidst an identity crises" and that

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Kuwait reiterates importance of UNRWA, urges mandate renewal

UNRWA official expresses appreciation for Kuwait's cooperative efforts

NEW YORK/AMMAN: Kuwait has called on the international community anew to provide funding for the UN Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA in order to help protect Palestinians from poverty and unemployment, as well as provide basic needs. Supporting UNRWA will guarantee sustainable development for Palestinian refugees, Attache Mohammad Al-Sawwagh said, by investing in sectors of health and education as well as giving Palestinian refugees a chance to have a better future and decent life.

Sawwagh, addressing the UN General Assembly's fourth committee late Tuesday to discuss UNRWA, reaffirmed Kuwait's firm support for the UN agency and the Palestinian people. "The Palestinian cause is still at the centerstage of the Arab and Islamic worlds, and the question of Palestinian refugees is at its top," he said, underlining the importance of the right of the Palestinians in line with UN General Assembly resolution 194 and the Arab peace initiative.

Sawwagh commended UNRWA workers who have been functioning in "difficult and extraordinary circumstances" to provide services to more than 5.7 million Palestinian refugees in its five operation zones. He rejected undermining the mandate of UNRWA or transferring its authorities to another

agency. Sawwagh expressed concern over the "difficult conditions" in the Palestinian refugee camps, specially in Syria, Lebanon and occupied Palestinian territories.

He condemned the Zionist occupation authorities' systematic attempts to hamper the services of UNRWA, as well as closure of its centers in Jerusalem. The Zionist occupation authorities are fully responsible for the downgrading of UNRWA services due to their "illegal and immoral" practices against the Palestinian refugees, he said, calling for extending UNRWA's mandate.

Meanwhile, UNRWA official Marwan Adwan voiced Wednesday gratitude and appreciation for Kuwait's cooperation with the organization, adding that it has donated \$23.5 million in the past two years. This came after Adwan's meeting with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Abdulaziz Al-Dehani. The UNRWA official, speaking to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), said the meeting conveyed a message of support, indicating that talks will be held to translate such support to achieve the goals of the agency.

Ambassador Dehani affirmed Kuwait's support to efforts of the UN and its organizations, and collaborates with them to achieve societal development goals. Dehani, speaking to KUNA, dubbed



NEW YORK: Diplomatic Attache Mohammad Al-Sawwagh attends a UN session.



AMMAN: UNRWA official Marwan Adwan with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Abdulaziz Al-Dehani.

Kuwait's firm stance on the Palestinian case as a source of pride for all. He further asserted Kuwait's support of international efforts to safeguard refugee rights and alleviating their burdens by relief projects, while also commending the role of

UNRWA in providing primary services of health-care and education to Palestinian refugees. UNRWA was established in 1949 and was commissioned to provide aid and protection to 5.7 million Palestinian refugees. — KUNA

KU celebrates constitution's 60th anniversary

KUWAIT: The Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies at Kuwait University organized an event to commemorate the 60th anniversary of constitution. Political Science Professor Dr Ghanem Al-Najjar explained the history of the constitution and electoral culture in Kuwait. Late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah had vast knowledge about foreign culture, and was praised by late Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser for opening up the political scene, which had a great impact on the Kuwaiti society at the time.

The constitution played an important role in the independence of Kuwait in 1961. "Kuwait since the 1950s was ambitious, with the growth of oil income and the development of many sectors as well as improving the living standards of Kuwaitis. The constitution as an idea came to organize life as a representative of the people by electing a council with the help of Arab consultants," Najjar said. "The constitution transformed Kuwait into a country of institutions, as today we are ambitious about the future,"



Photos of the members of the Constituent Assembly.

Najjar added.

A photo exhibition depicting the efforts of Kuwait's statesmen in the establishment of the modern state was also held. The pictures, displayed at Kuwait University's campus in Shuwaikh, illustrate



Photos of late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

the story of Kuwait's Constitutional Assembly in which the constitution was promulgated. The articles of the constitution organize the nature of relations between the governors and the governed, as well as various aspects of life.

News in brief

Old buildings cannot be razed

KUWAIT: Municipality Affairs Minister Abdulaziz Al-Mojel approved a recommendation by the technical committee at the Municipal Council on contacting the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters before demolishing any government buildings older than 40 years. The Municipality agreed not to give permits for new buildings adjacent to registered historical and heritage buildings without getting their approval first.

School nurse absent

KUWAIT: A middle school student suffered from shortness of breath because of asthma and was rushed to hospital. The school nurse has been absent for a week, and the student did not have anyone to treat her before the arrival of the ambulance. The school informed her parents, and called on the ministry to assign two nurses for urgent cases.

Oral cancer: What should I know?

By Dr Jana AlMunifi
General Dental Practitioner

KUWAIT: Oral cancer is simply a cancerous lesion that is found in three distinct sites - the mouth, which is known as the oral cavity; the throat, which is known as the oropharynx region; and the outer surface of the mouth, which is the lip. In 2020, it was estimated that more than 377,700 cases of oral cancer were diagnosed worldwide.

Overall, oral cavity and lip cancers were the 16th most common cancers. It was found to be the 11th most common cancers found in men and the 18th most common cancers found in women. In Kuwait, especially in recent years, tobacco use and smoking, which are linked to oral cancer, have become a very common practice among teenagers and adults.

It is important to consider the major risk factors of oral cancers. First, smoking tobacco and alcohol consumption, as well as using smokeless tobacco such as gutkha, paan and chewing tobacco. Also, some viruses such as human papilloma virus (HPV) can increase your risk of getting cancer. Being excessively exposed to ultraviolet light known as UV light is also a risk factor, as well as having a family history of oral cancers.

There are numerous symptoms that can be experienced by oral cancer patients. The following are the most common signs and symptoms that may be seen. Having painful mouth ulcers that do not heal for several weeks. Experiencing persistent, unexplained lumps in the neck or mouth that do not go away within weeks. Developing sudden, unexplained difficulty or pain when swallowing or chewing, as well as experiencing constant, unexplained numbness on the tongue or other parts of the mouth.

Early signs can be white or red patches or a mixture of both colors found on the tongue or the

mouth's lining, as well as having constant, unexplained difficulty in moving the tongue or jaw. When experiencing such symptoms, it is important to book an appointment with your dentist or general dental practitioner to have a thorough examination and rule out any suspicions.

Although oral cancer has been estimated to affect many people, when integrating simple key elements in our daily lives, we can reduce the risk. It has been known that diets that contain low fruits and non-starchy vegetables are deleterious and harmful for our general health. There has been evidence that people who indulge in such diets are moderately at an increased risk of getting different cancers. Including fruits and non-starchy vegetables in our diet is very important. They are rich in vitamins, fibers, antioxidants, minerals and types of chemicals that play an important role in protecting our bodies against cancers.

Sticking to what we call "5 a day" routine, which is basically consuming at least 5 portions of fruits/non-starchy vegetables per day. Examples of non-starchy vegetable include artichoke, asparagus, baby corn, green bean and bean sprouts. Remember: Dried, frozen, canned, fresh and juiced vegetables/fruits all count! Also, 150 ml juice of vegetables or fruits is equivalent to one of your "5 a day".

Things that can help in reducing your risk of getting oral cancers include avoiding outdoor activities from 11 am to 3 pm. If you need to be outdoors, ensure that you use sunscreen, sunglasses and hats. Also, a crucial element is maintaining dental visits every six months to have a thorough dental examination. This will help in avoiding any late diagnoses.

Avoiding alcohol consumption, smokeless tobacco and smoking, a significant factor that helps in reducing risk. When quitting smoking, you can contact your doctor regarding more information about smoking cessation. Considering these small changes and incorporating them in your daily life plays a major role and creates a huge difference in reducing your oral cancer risk.

Firemen control fire at garage

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force announced a fire broke out on Tuesday in a garage in Rai. "The central command sent squads from Shuwaikh industrial Area and Ardiya to the location after the fire erupted at an oil and tyre replacement garage, which the public relations department of KFF said. The incident caused only material losses without any injuries.





Kuwait, Years From Now
Student Art Competition 2022

10 October - 13 November 2022

We are excited to welcome each and every youngster to our Student Art Competition 2022. We hope everyone is ready to showcase and create beautiful artworks of Kuwait in the future. We're searching for great art - so get your paintbrushes, color pencils and markers ready. Let your talent flow and start painting. Good luck to our young artists!

- The competition is open to students aged 6-18 years under the categories of 6-8 years, 9-11 years, 12-14 years, 15-18 years and special abilities students.
- The competition is open to all schools in Kuwait (government and private).
- 5 winners from each category will receive valuable prizes.
- All participants will receive a certificate of appreciation.
- All schools and individuals interested in participating in this competition are welcome.
- You can use any drawing sheet, but of A3 size.
- All artworks must be hand drawn and not computer generated.
- All paintings should be submitted by email at art@kuwaittimes.com in PDF format only.
- Kuwait Times reserves the right to retain the drawings for future use.
- Participants should include on the bottom of the artworks the following: Name, age, email address, phone number and school in legible font.




Strategic Partner



Local

Weak job performance main reason why companies reject remote work

Desire to control employees also a factor for employers in Kuwait

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Working online or remotely is a system that many companies in Kuwait refuse to implement for their employees, despite the great benefits this could bring to the companies in increasing employees' productivity or reducing major costs, such as rent. Aref Abdullah Al-Ajmi, a human resource expert, explained the reason behind companies rejecting this system, pointing out that weak performance standards and the desire to control employees are the main reasons behind this.

"Companies in Kuwait have a lack of confidence that employees will perform their work perfectly if they work remotely, although companies are supposed to have a system to monitor employee productivity. Since most companies do it, it will be a problem for them. The second reason is that many companies in Kuwait like to control their employees, as the company wants to see the employees every day at the office, for no reason," Ajmi explained.

"The general pattern in the country, whether in the public or private sector, is that evaluation only depends on the employee's attendance at work, whether the employee performs their job or not. As for the achievement part, it is a separate matter with a different assessment. The part of attending work in Kuwait could be the decisive factor in the relationship between the employee and the company in both sectors," Ajmi said.

Ajmi pointed out the private sector in Kuwait is greatly affected by the pattern of work in the public sector. Most officials working in the private sector have come from a government work environment. "Therefore, we find that many evaluation policies and work systems in private companies are similar to the public sector. As evidence of this, Kuwait is the only country in the world whose banking sector closes for a whole week when the public sector closes for the same period," he said.

"COVID proved to us many things in the business sector, including that the private sector suffers from a large number of employees who are not needed in companies, as the case is in the government sector. I do not exaggerate when I say that many private sector companies were able to manage very well with only 40 percent of their employees," Ajmi claimed.

Regarding implementing online work at large, medium or small companies, Ajmi said the prevailing belief of corporate management is that small companies can work remotely easier because the number of employees they have is limited, so it is easy to follow-up with them continuously. "That is partly true, so many small companies closed their offices and relied entirely on working from home or via the Internet. In addition to the fact that most owners of small companies are from the new generation, so it is easier for them to accept a new method of work, especially since circumstances forced them to do so," he said.

"As for big companies, the large number of employees makes it difficult to follow-up with them on a continuous basis. Meanwhile, the acceptance of these companies for their employees to work remotely is slower and harder, especially for companies that have been in the market for more than 70 years, not to mention that as long as these companies have the solvency to pay rent, they will not change to work remotely, as their mentality is to stick to the idea that it is better to physically be in the company," Ajmi argued.

"It is a psychological and cultural issue, and the biggest proof of this is that the largest companies in the world have announced transformation to remote work. Companies' experience in Kuwait with employees working remotely during the pandemic was excellent, because productivity was very high among employees, as much time is wasted every day to reach work in traffic jams. In addition, the employee works in their own comfort zone.



Aref Abdullah Al-Ajmi

Companies noted that most employees were more cooperative even after their working hours were over," Ajmi said.

"Despite the positive experience during the pandemic, we have to note that we had a curfew at that time. Most employees had more free time during the day. But now, working remotely can face obstacles in terms of employee discipline due to the less free time they have. So to implement this system, it must be followed by commitment and discipline from by them and certain controls," he said.

"Therefore, it must be taken into account that shifting to remote work must be evaluated away from the experience of the pandemic period, because at that time there were many jobs that were suspended as a result of the closures in the country and there was no need to do many tasks that needed employees to be present. If the same evaluation procedure was adopted during the pandemic, this means that there is definitely a defect in the evaluation process," Ajmi told Kuwait Times.

From a social angle, Ajmi said it is not a positive system that can be adopted as employees are humans who need social networking, unless if the companies implement the international system that gives employees the opportunity to choose a specific day in the week to work at the office and work remotely during other days, while the company will not lose communication with them. "International companies were able to implement this system because they have clear performance standards and assessments, which we in Kuwait lack," he concluded.

In my view

Restructuring of administrative responsibility-III

By Yousuf Awadh Al-Azmi



Local@kuwaittimes.com

Lots of folks confuse bad management with destiny. — Kin Hubbard

Each country has its own characteristics, features and milestones - Kuwait is rich with agricultural characteristics, features and milestones, and the state pays great interest to productive agricultural areas in Wafra, Abdaly and Sulaibiya. The financial support derived from the government's general budget forms a significant part of the general financial value. Kuwait, of course, is not categorized as an agricultural state, rather a desert one, but with the advent of modern technologies, it became possible to overcome many obstacles in order to achieve the legitimate ambition of suitable and realistic food security.

As I mentioned, there are three agricultural areas in Kuwait, and they cover an area of tens of kilometers, but regrettably they are not used in the best way, as many farms became mere leisure areas and warehouses of no real benefit to the state. It is important to start looking for suitable and fruitful solutions for ambitious results, and this requires a team that plans with poise and realism to sort, organize and arrange farming benefits, and for this I propose reorganizing, sorting and arranging farms scientifically with consideration of quality of soil and water.

Dividing farms according to a thoughtful layout as follows: Animal feed farms, chicken and egg farms, cattle farms (for dairies), leafy vegetable farms, palm tree farms according to certain specifications that produce the best types of dates.

Also work on benefitting from farming production in the food industry of all types, and here I focus on dairy derivatives, chilled and frozen poultry, industries related to dates and canned food. So, it is important to establish an infrastructure to be a launchpad for food industries of all types, and this will not happen without government backing, through which it provides all what practitioners of these industries need. Here comes the role of financing with equipment, financing based on suitable bases and without prejudice to general rules regulating these matters.

The agriculture sector suffers the most from marketing, and this can be resolved by establishing a shareholding company to market farming products in a way that serves the three sides of the formula - farmer + consumer + state. All solutions of agricultural management are available - it only needs the government's real belief in the role of this important sector, from which the best solutions can be presented away from useless talk that is void of any effective actions in supporting, supervising and organizing.



KUWAIT: (From left) Secretary-General of NCCAL Issa Al-Ansari, Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianwei and Director-General of the National Library Sheikhna Rasha Nayef Al-Sabah open the festival. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and KUNA



China culture fest pays tribute to 5,000-yr history

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of China to Kuwait, in cooperation with the National Library and National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, inaugurated on Tuesday the "Chinese Cultural Festival: Cuisine and Movies" to celebrate the historical diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and Kuwait. During his speech at the opening ceremony, Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei said despite being thousands of miles away, China and Kuwait have maintained friendly relations between their peoples, noting he is impressed by Kuwaitis' great passion for China and their interest in Chinese culture.

"Fifty-one years ago, Kuwait became the first Arab state in the Gulf to establish diplomatic relations with China. In the ensuing years, China and Kuwait have walked hand in hand and shown mutual understanding and support. We have conducted fruitful cooperation in various fields and made our friendship grow firmer," he said.

"The China-Arab summit and the China-GCC summit, both to be hosted next month, are expected to be historic gatherings between China and Arab and GCC states to exchange experiences in development and promote win-win cooperation. China stands ready to work with the rest of the world to promote humanity's shared values of peace, development and democracy and build a community with a shared future for mankind," Zhang said.



The ambassador affirmed that the diversity of Chinese culture is the result of China's commitment to respecting and carrying forward the fine traditional culture throughout its 5,000-year history, adding that China is glad to share its experience in development.

Secretary-General of NCCAL Issa Al-Ansari praised the strategic relationship between the two countries, saying they are cooperating at all levels in the political, educational and cultural fields. "This event demonstrates the Chinese presence as a multicultural and multinational country. Its geographical and population numbers present to the world a diverse civilized model that all the people of the East can be proud of," he said. Ansari said Kuwait believes that China is a supporter of peace and a great strategic partner, calling on China, through its embassy in Kuwait, to have more cultural events through cooperation with NCCAL.

Director-General of the National Library Sheikhna Rasha Nayef Jaber Al-Sabah stressed the importance of Kuwaiti-Chinese relations, which are close in various fields, including cultural, commercial, industrial, technology and others. She stressed the keenness of Kuwait National Library to highlight the culture of Kuwait to the world, present the different cultures of the world and bring everything useful to the local audience.

The three-day festival witnessed a presentation of a variety of Chinese foods such as jiaozi, Chinese dumplings, spicy chicken and spiced beef. Visitors can also experience other elements of traditional Chinese culture like Taiji, Cha Dao, calligraphy and folk music, in addition to trying on the traditional Chinese Hanfu dress. There is also a photo exhibition showing the past decade that presents the historic changes China has undergone in the new era, as well as Chinese movies.



World Adoption Day marked

KUWAIT: Director of the family care department Dr Khaled Al-Ajmi participated in an event to celebrate World Adoption Day, marked annually on Nov 9. The management plays a principal role in helping fostered children and expends effort to achieve stability and family security for children who lack parental care. "Our Islamic religion always cares for orphans and transforms their lives positively, as the Prophet (PBUH) called for caring for orphans," Ajmi said.

"The management seeks to reduce social problems that may occur by pushing families to help foster children," he added. The number of fostered children this year reached 14 among a total of 651 fostered children, adding more requests are pending. "This shows that we are greatly interested in social responsibility undertaken by foster families, so we are thankful to these families and their supportive efforts," Ajmi said.

Dr Khaled Al-Ajmi





Boubyan delegation's visit to one of the villages.

5th Noor Boubyan campaign held in Mauritania

KUWAIT: The 5th Noor Boubyan campaign organized by Boubyan Bank in collaboration with the International Islamic Charitable Organization and the Dinarain Initiative succeeded in confirming the renowned charitable and humanitarian role of Kuwait worldwide, by achieving the campaign's goals of successful removal of cataract, along with other charitable activities.

Noor Boubyan is no longer a campaign that merely targets eyesight-restoration, as it is now considered one of the most important humanitarian campaigns that confirms Kuwait as a leader in charity work in the four corners of the world.

The campaign lasted for about a week in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and succeeded in drawing great attention in Kuwait and Mauritania through the several various activities performed by the campaign's team, which comprised of many ophthalmologists accompanied by volunteers from Boubyan Bank, the International Islamic Charitable Organization, and the Dinarain Initiative.

The campaign's target was Mauritania, which is somehow unknown to many who do not know that it is an Arab and Islamic country, and which is known as "The Land of a Million Poets" due to the wide spread of classical Arabic poetry among people there. This country was selected to be the fifth destination of Noor Boubyan campaign which was launched in the beginning of 2016 as an idea of the then CEO of Boubyan Bank, Adel Al-Majed, who wanted to make Boubyan Bank synonymous with charitable activities and work in a different and influential manner.

Accordingly, the Corporate Communications Division at the bank started acting on the idea in order to implement it in collaboration with the International Islamic Charitable Organization and the Dinarain Initiative. Preparations took almost a year until the launch of the first Noor Boubyan campaign to the Niger in Dec 2016 with the participation of 20 volunteers including doctors, a group of youths from the bank, the IICO and the Dinarain Initiative.

Over four consecutive years from 2016 to 2019, the campaign successfully restored the eyesight of more than 10,000 persons in the Niger and Uganda. Following a 2-year pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the campaign returns strongly to Mauritania this year. Cataracts, which impairs vision and may even lead to utter blindness in some cases, is the most widespread disease in Africa despite the minimal treatment cost thereof, which does not exceed KD 45.

Busy Agenda

Over the past years, the Noor Boubyan Campaign



Drilling an artesian well.



Kuwait's ambassador with the delegation.



Checking on patients after performing the surgeries.



Engaging with orphans.

was not a mere campaign for eyesight-restoration or cataracts surgery; rather, it has become a comprehensive campaign that comprises of many events and activities.

During the period of Oct 21-28 in Mauritania, the campaign offered 10 masters and doctoral scholarships in ophthalmology to doctors in Mauritania so that they may be able to perform these operations in the future and help volunteer medical teams that visit them from around the world.

Moreover, the campaign distributed more than

1,500 prescription glasses to children and adults after performing the necessary medical tests, emanating from the belief that "prevention is better than cure". The campaign comprised of many events and activities including meetings with orphans, widows, those with special needs, and visually impaired persons, in addition to visiting prominent Islamic sites in Mauritania and meeting with university students as well as other students.

Various activities

During the campaign, Boubyan organized the "Recite with Boubyan Competition" with the participation of more than 400 participants of both genders starting with those aged 8 and above. The competition is considered one of the biggest ever to be held in the country over the past years.

Additionally, it laid the foundation stone for one of the schools of Dinarain Initiative, in addition to commissioning a water well in a distant village, which was drilled and prepared at the expense of the

International Islamic Charitable Organization, thus enabling more than 5,000 families to benefit from pure water. Many workshops were also held and saw the attendance of representatives from charitable societies, and the private sector in Mauritania, as well as civil society organizations, etc.

Highlights

The Ambassador of Kuwait to Mauritania Ebadah Magaad Al-Dosari played a major role in the success of the campaign by facilitating all the procedures and arrangements for the delegation, and he accompanied it in all its events from the first day of the campaign. It is worth noting that all members of the embassy played a major role in making it a success through the embassy's many entities in the country.

The Mauritanian "Upper Hand Society" played a major role in the success of this campaign as they handled all logistical and organizational matters in Mauritania under the leadership of the society's Secretary General Dr Mohammad Abdulrahman Ould Al-Sabar, and Ali Al-Sheikh, Media Manager.

The campaign's volunteers represented 6 Kuwaiti doctors, 11 volunteers from Boubyan, 7 volunteers from IICO and Dinarain Initiative and 8 social media influencers. The official Mauritanian mass media reacted to a great extent to the campaign with daily coverage of all its events through Mauritanian newspapers, radio, and TV in addition to social media platforms. Mauritanian official authorities were very interested in the campaign, which witnessed the participation of 3 ministers; namely the Minister of Social Work, Childhood, and Family, the Minister of Health, and the Minister of Islamic Affairs and Traditional Education of Mauritania in addition to senior state officials, who either attended the events or met with the delegation.

The costs of Noor Boubyan are raised through 3 sources; the main source is the revenues of Steps Campaign organized by the bank in the holy month of Ramadan, where the bank donates KD 1 for every 5 minutes of walking completed by the participants throughout the holy month; the second source is the donations of the International Islamic Charitable Organization; and the third is the donations of Kuwaitis throughout the campaign.



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KFH concludes breast cancer awareness campaign

KUWAIT: As part of its leading and distinguished role in society and continuous participation in health initiatives, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) concluded its annual integrated breast cancer awareness campaign titled "Be Aware", which coincided with the International Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Senior Public Relations and Event Management Coordinator at KFH - Maryam Abaalkhail said: "The campaign comprised many social and sporting events for women to increase awareness level regarding breast cancer and encourage them to conduct early examination, in addition to explaining its early symptoms and the methods of prevention against this disease."

She added that KFH organized several activities and events during the month of October including Padel championships for its female employees and another one for female customers. The championships witnessed a large turnout and winners were awarded valuable prizes. Abaalkhail pointed out that KFH was present at the College of Business



Maryam Abaalkhail

Administration at Kuwait University for a whole week to offer full services which included awareness messages to college students on breast cancer and the importance of early check-up to mitigate its risks.

She indicated that in line with its belief in effective public awareness, KFH was also present in the Avenues Mall for two days during the campaign to educate people on breast cancer in cooperation with Kuwait Red Crescent Society. In conclusion to its campaign, KFH organized a two-day course on (Candle-Making) for its female employees in collaboration with one of the leading global companies.

It is worth noting that KFH has a long record in supporting the health sector and considers it as one of the main priorities in its social responsibility strategy. In this respect, KFH has continuously fostered and supported events and initiatives in the health field, such as diabetes awareness events, organizing first aid courses, blood donation as well as holding several seminars and campaigns to spread awareness about prevention from various diseases.



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TAMPA, United States: Republican gubernatorial candidate for Florida Ron DeSantis with his wife Casey DeSantis and children Madison, Mason and Mamie, waves to the crowd during an election night watch party at the Convention Center in Tampa, Florida. — AFP

DeSantis wins Florida in landslide

We've got so much more to do and I have only begun to fight'

WASHINGTON: Florida Governor Ron DeSantis won a landslide election victory over his Democratic rival, securing a second term, cementing his status as a Republican presidential contender, and confirming the one-time swing state's tilt to the right.

Although neither he nor his erstwhile backer Donald Trump have announced their candidacy for the White House, the race for the 2024 Republican nomination may well have unofficially begun with Tuesday's midterms.

"We've got so much more to do and I have only begun to fight," the 44-year-old DeSantis—who emerged as perhaps the biggest winner of Election Day 2022 — said in his victory speech. According to unofficial results, the man who ran an incendiary campaign against President Joe Biden's administration and turned Florida into a laboratory for right-wing policies won nearly 60 percent of the vote against Democrat Charlie Crist.

"I believe the survival of the American experiment requires a revival of true American principles. Florida has proved that it can be done," DeSantis said to cheers from his supporters. He did not men-

tion Trump, whose support gave DeSantis a boost in his first race for the governor's mansion in 2018.

The former president seems both aware and visibly annoyed by the threat posed by the rise of

On Monday, Trump sought to discourage DeSantis from entering the race for the White House in 2024. "I think he would be making a mistake, I think the base would not like it," Fox News quoted Trump as saying. "I don't think it would be good for the party." As he often does with his opponents, Trump has branded DeSantis with a derogatory moniker: Ron DeSanctimonious.

Florida's rightward tilt

The resounding DeSantis victory also confirms a clear shift to the right in Florida, long considered a swing state that could go to either Democrats or Republicans. The governor was not mistaken when he said on Tuesday that "we not only won election, we have rewritten the political map."

"It's clearly apparent that this election we will have garnered a significant number of votes from people who may not have voted for me four years ago," DeSantis said. In a result that would have been all but unthinkable a few years ago, DeSantis won the predominantly Hispanic county of Miami-Dade, which no Republican gubernatorial candidate had carried in two decades.

Democrats are concerned that while Hispanics have traditionally voted for their party, more and more are now being drawn to the other side, with many in the Cuban and Venezuelan communities especially sensitive to Republicans' anti-socialist rhetoric.

DeSantis' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic may have also boosted his appeal and contributed to his decisive victory. The governor, who fiercely opposed mandatory vaccination and masks, allowed Florida businesses and schools to reopen well before many other areas of the country.

He also recently caused controversy—and delighted many Republicans—by sending dozens of migrants to Martha's Vineyard in the Democratic-ruled state of Massachusetts. And he is one of the loudest voices in the culture wars that divide the country, signing the so-called "Don't say gay" bill, which prohibits discussing LGBTQ topics in classrooms, into law earlier this year.

In recent days, a video tweeted by his wife Casey has also garnered extensive attention: the short black-and-white clip presents the governor as being invested with a divine mission. — AFP



Setting stage for 2024 run

Florida's popular leader, Trump gave a brief speech Tuesday night in which he congratulated himself on some Republican victories in the hotly contested midterm elections, but was careful not to mention the win by the politician who is already seen as his primary rival.

Iran cities strike in solidarity with 'Bloody Friday'

PARIS: Cities in western Iran went on strike Wednesday in solidarity with mourners marking 40 days since security forces killed dozens in a crackdown on protests in the country's strife-torn southeast, a rights group said.

Security forces opened fire on protesters that erupted on September 30 after weekly prayers in Zahedan, capital of the flashpoint province of Sistan-Baluchistan on Iran's border with Pakistan. It came two weeks after demonstrations broke out across Iran over the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian of Kurdish origin, following her arrest in Tehran for allegedly flouting the country's strict hijab dress rules for women.

The crackdown on nationwide protests

since her death has killed at least 304 people, including 41 children and 24 women, according to a combined toll issued by the Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights (IHR). Activists were seen distributing fliers calling for protests in all cities Wednesday for the 40-day mourning ceremony of Zahedan's "Bloody Friday", in a video shared by the 1500tasvir social media channel.

Widespread strikes were underway in the Kurdish western cities of Baneh, Kermanshah, Marivan, Sanandaj and Amini's hometown of Saqez, said the Hengaw rights group. The work stoppage was being observed "in solidarity with the fatalities in Zahedan on their 40th day death ceremonies", said the Norway-based group, which monitors abuses in Kurdish areas.

Video posted online by activists showed shops shuttered in Saqez and in Zahedan itself. The trigger for the violence that erupted in Zahedan on September 30 was the alleged rape in custody of a 15-year-old girl by a police commander in the province's port city of Chabahar.

Security forces opened fire on men who took to the streets after emerging from mosques following weekly Friday prayers, killing dozens. "What happened that Friday... in Zahedan, based on international law, is a clear instance of mass murder of civilians," Hengaw said.

"This mass murder must be recognised by international organisations and Western governments," it tweeted. IHR said at least 92 protesters were killed on September 30 in Zahedan, one of the few Sunni-majority cities in predominantly Shiite Iran.

Since then, at least another 28 people have been killed at protests in Sistan-Baluchistan, it told AFP on Wednesday. Poverty-stricken Sistan-Baluchistan province is a flashpoint for clashes with drug smuggling gangs as well as rebels from the Baluchi minority and Sunni extremist groups.

Activists have long complained the region has been the victim of discrimination by Iran's Shiite clerical leadership, with disproportionate numbers of Baluch killed in clashes every year and also hanged in executions. — AFP



ATHENS, Greece: File photo taken on October 29, 2022 shows Iranian refugees and Iranians living in Greece lighting candles forming the name 'Mahsa' during a demonstration to commemorate 40 days from the death of Iranian Mahsa Amini while in police custody in Iran, in central Athens. — AFP

Britain, France look to reset frayed ties

PARIS: After years of mutual incomprehension, public rows and even a brief naval stand-off in the Channel, UK-French relations appear to be finally improving under new British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Sunak and French President Emmanuel Macron met for the first time as leaders on the sidelines of the UN's COP27 climate summit in Egypt on Monday, where they embraced and vowed to work together. "Friends," wrote Sunak over a tweeted picture of the two statesmen in an obvious reference to his short-lived predecessor Liz

Truss, who said in August she was yet undecided on whether the French leader was a "friend or foe".

"I think there has been a fundamental shift in the tone between ourselves and the French," British Work and Pensions Secretary Mel Stride told Sky News on Tuesday. Macron and Sunak have much in common at a superficial level, being of similar height and age, as well as sharing a love for slick communications and a sharply tailored navy-blue suit.

But the similarities run deeper: their fathers were medics, both are privately educated, and each of them had a career in banking before entering politics—Macron at Rothschild, Sunak at Goldman Sachs. Most importantly, Sunak is seen as a "serious, reflective person" in Paris unlike his one-time boss Boris Johnson who stepped down as PM in September, former British ambas-

sador to Paris Peter Ricketts told AFP.

"The style is important because Boris Johnson's style clearly grated on the French: the mockery, the playing of the UK-French relationship as a political football for domestic effect, the fact they could never trust what he said," Ricketts added.

Relations between Paris and London went through one of their most turbulent periods in decades during Johnson's premiership due to tensions over Brexit and deep personal differences between the leaders. A senior former French ambassador once claimed ties had "never been as bad since Waterloo".

Low points included Johnson sending a navy ship to the Channel during a dispute over fishing rights in 2021 and telling Macron in a mix of French and English that he should "prenez un grip" (get a grip) after a row about selling submarines to Australia. — AFP



SHARM EL SHEIKH, Egypt: French President Emmanuel Macron meets with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on the sidelines of the COP27 climate summit in Egypt's Red Sea resort city of Sharm El Sheikh. — AFP

International

Iran detains 'unprecedented' number of women journalists

They must be released immediately and unconditionally: RSF

PARIS: Iran is systematically trying to silence women by arresting an unprecedented number of female journalists in its crackdown on protests over Mahsa Amini's death, a media watchdog said Wednesday.

"As the Iranian regime continues its crackdown on the protests initiated by Mahsa Amini's death, almost half of all newly arrested journalists are women, including two who are facing the death penalty," said Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

"The increasing detention of female journalists symbolically reveals the Iranian regime's intention to systematically silence women's voices," it said in a statement. The Islamic republic has been gripped by protests that erupted when Amini, 22, died in custody on September 16 after her arrest for an alleged breach of Iran's strict dress code for women.

This week, it indicted Niloufar Hamed and Elahe Mohammadi, two newspaper journalists who first drew public attention to Amini's death, for "propaganda against

the system and conspiracy to act against national security"—charges that can carry the death penalty.

RSF said it was "deeply concerned about the fate of these journalists who risk paying a very high price, including the death penalty, for having had the courage to reveal a truth that the authorities seek to stifle. "They must be released immediately and unconditionally."

Since the protests erupted, at least 42 journalists have been arrested across Iran, RSF said. So far eight of them have been released, and women account for 15 of the 34 still in detention, the Paris-based organisation added.

"There are now five times more women imprisoned than before the protests started. The number of detained female journalists has never been so high." RSF said the cases of Hamed and Mohammadi were of particular concern.

"Niloufar Hamed and Elahe Mohammadi... have now been imprisoned

for more than a month and have been charged with accusations that could result in the death penalty," it said. Hamed, who reported for the reformist Shargh newspaper from the hospital where Amini was in a coma before she died, was arrested on September 20.

Mohammadi, a journalist who went to Amini's hometown of Saez to cover her funeral for the Ham Mihaan newspaper, was detained on September 29. The watchdog also raised concern about Nazila Maroufian, a reporter for the Rouydad24 news website who was arrested on November 4 after interviewing Amini's father.

In the interview published on the Mostaghel website, Amini's father denied she had any health issues, as claimed by the authorities. RSF said a total of 48 journalists were now behind bars in Iran, making the Islamic republic the third largest jailer of journalists in the world after China and Myanmar. — AFP



TEHRAN: Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi speaks during a rally outside the former US embassy in the capital Tehran to mark the 43rd anniversary of the start of the Iran hostage crisis. — AFP

Lebanon eyes sea border talks with Syria

BEIRUT: Lebanon wants talks to demarcate its maritime border with Syria, so that it can begin offshore gas extraction after reaching a similar agreement with Zionist entity, its top negotiator told AFP.

Last month — despite the countries technically remaining in a state of war — Lebanon struck a US-brokered sea border agreement that will potentially open up lucrative offshore gas fields.

Beirut now wishes to define its maritime borders with Syria, to the north, and Cyprus, to the west, to consolidate its offshore rights.

"The Lebanese government must engage directly and publicly with the Syrian government... and publicly demarcate our sea borders," Elias Bou Saab told AFP in an interview Tuesday.

"Any future government must undertake this task and put Lebanon's interest first," he insisted, while "leaving regional political conflicts out of this matter." Syria, which once had a controlling hand in Lebanon's affairs, has repeatedly refused to delimit land and sea borders with its neighbour.

According to Bou Saab, the disputed maritime area between Lebanon and Syria is "perhaps more than 800 square kilometres (310 square miles)".

Lebanon cannot begin gas exploration in the northern part of the waters off its Mediterranean coast without first resolving its border dispute with Syria, Bou Saab said.

And Lebanon also needs an agreement with Syria to be able to trace its Exclusive Economic



Lebanon's MP Elias Bou Saab

Zone (EEZ) with Cyprus.

The Lebanese presidency announced in late October that a delegation would travel to Damascus to discuss the issue, but the trip did not take place.

Syria's ambassador to Beirut, Ali Abdel Karim Ali, spoke of "confusion" around the date.

But Bou Saab, the deputy speaker of parliament and close to outgoing President Michel Aoun, said Syria had "demands and reservations".

Lebanese security officials and politicians have made several visits to Syria in recent years, but almost exclusively in their personal capacity or on behalf of political parties that support President Bashar al-Assad, including the powerful Hezbollah movement, supported by the Iran.

The Shiite movement's military wing has been fighting alongside Assad's forces since the early stages of the conflict.

Lebanese officials are betting on the potential revenues from the country's offshore energy reserves to try to revive its devastated economy, which has been mired in crisis since 2019.

But Lebanon has been without a president since the beginning of the month, with lawmakers unable to agree on a successor. — AFP

Egypt dissident's family demands proof of life

CAIRO: The family of Egypt's jailed dissident Alaa Abdel Fattah, who is refusing food and water, demanded information on his health Wednesday amid what they said were "rumours of force-feeding". International concern has mounted since Abdel Fattah, 40, escalated his months-long hunger strike by also declining liquids since Sunday, the start of the UN climate summit COP27 hosted by Egypt.

His UK-born mother Laila Soueif has made daily trips this week to the Wadi al-Natroun prison, about 100 kilometres (60 miles) north of Cairo, but has received no update or proof of life.

The activist's sister Mona Seif said their mother was back at the prison Wednesday "to try and get any letter or anything that proves Alaa is alive, conscious, and has not been exposed" to any more "violations".

The dissident's aunt, novelist Ahdaf Soueif, tweeted that "we cannot explain two days without letters" and said that the family was concerned about "rumours of force-feeding and of sleep-inducing drugs".

She demanded that the British-Egyptian activist be moved to Cairo's largest state hospital, the Qasr al-Aini University Hospital, and given access to lawyers and British embassy officials. Abdel Fattah, a veteran pro-democracy and rights campaigner, is serving a five-year prison sentence for "spreading false news" by sharing a Facebook post about police brutality.

The United Nations, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, French President Emmanuel Macron and



SHARM EL SHEIKH, Egypt: Sanaa Seif (C behind), sister of imprisoned British-Egyptian activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, attends the COP27 climate conference in Egypt's Red Sea resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh. — AFP

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz have all voiced concern and called for his release. The only update in recent days has come from Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, the COP27 president.

Shoukry told multiple media at the summit that Abdel Fattah-whose dual citizenship Cairo does not recognise-has access to "all the necessary care in prison". Macron said after meeting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi Monday that he had received an assurance that Cairo is "committed to ensuring" Abdel Fattah's health "is preserved" and that the situation will be resolved "in the coming weeks and months".

But Soueif, the aunt, said that "the prison hospital is probably not equipped to care for the rare case of a patient who has been living for six months on 100 calories a day" in his hunger strike. Activists at COP27 have posted widely on Twitter under the hashtag #FreeAlaa, and several speakers have ended with the words "you have not yet been defeated"—the title of the jailed activist's book. — AFP

Crown Prince commends role...

Continued from Page 1

solutions we all aspire to. We are also aware of the vital and significant role played by the chambers of commerce and industry in our Arab countries," HH the Crown Prince said, noting that these chambers have been seeking to revitalize the private sector amid hard circumstances and grave challenges, also facing all states of the world.

Countries have been suffering from the repercussions of these challenges and are seeking to tackle them, most notably the coronavirus crisis and the economic situation from which many countries have been suffering from recently. HH the Crown Prince affirmed

MP asks about impact of US rate...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, MPs filed two separate draft laws calling to allow courts to hear cases related to Kuwaiti citizenship. Under the current law, courts are barred to hear cases related to citizenship because the issue is sovereign and only the govern-

Meta to lay off 11,000...

Continued from Page 1

severe cost-cutting was "inevitable". "The company has one foot in a risky long-term metaverse bet and another foot failing to compete with TikTok," he added. Zuckerberg has hinted several times this year that belt-tightening measures were just around the corner and said in his letter on Wednesday that staff layoffs were a "last resort."

Meta would also keep a hiring freeze going

the private sector's key role in Arab states' economic development. "We count on you through your relentless efforts to recover Arab economies...while we advise you to conduct positive contacts and exchange information and economic indices with relevant government departments," he said.

While emphasizing role of these chambers to attain economic recovery, HH the Crown Prince also underlined role of the "private information" sector to disseminate facts about the states and communities rather than "spreading rumors for narrow and personal gains".

The head of the Kuwaiti chamber also addressed the audience, expressing gratitude to His Highness the Crown Prince, noting that Kuwait has always been proud of its Arab affiliations and has been hosting a number of Arab agencies. He also extended thanks and expressed good wishes to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf. — KUNA

ment can handle it. The two draft laws stipulate that revoking Kuwaiti citizenship is not a sovereign issue and thus courts can hear such cases. This is one of the most sensitive reforms in the nationality law that lawmakers have been trying to pass. The government had in the past revoked citizenship of Kuwaitis, allegedly over political issues.

Also, MP Obaid Al-Wasmi sent a question to the government asking for a list of names of senior officials appointed by the government on Monday. The lawmaker also demanded the types of tests the new officials had undertaken to qualify for the posts.

into next year, he said, and other spending cuts were envisaged. "Fundamentally, we're making all these changes for two reasons: our revenue outlook is lower than we expected at the beginning of this year, and we want to make sure we're operating efficiently," Zuckerberg wrote. The measures were also a message to Wall Street, where the company's poor performance has sent the Meta share price plummeting by 70 percent since the start of the year.

Last month, Meta announced profits of \$4.4 billion in the third quarter, a 52 percent decrease year-on-year. The slump in profits comes despite its platforms dominating the world in terms of users—Facebook alone claims to have around two billion people who log on daily. — AFP

Reps make gains in midterms but...

Continued from Page 1

And Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a likely challenger to Trump for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, scored a resounding victory in his re-election bid. Among other races, Maura Healey of Massachusetts will make history as the first openly LGBTQ governor in the United States, and in New York, Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul fended off a Republican challenge.

In ballot initiatives in five states, preliminary results indicated that voters supported abortion rights in a pushback to the anti-abortion movement which won a crucial Supreme Court decision in June. Aiming to deliver a rebuke of Biden's presidency against a backdrop of sky-high inflation and bitter culture wars, Republicans needed just one extra seat to wrest control of the evenly divided Senate.

But by early Wednesday the only seat to change party hands went to the Democrats, with John Fetterman, a burly champion of progressive economic policies, triumphing in Pennsylvania over Trump-endorsed celebrity doctor Mehmet Oz. In the 435-member House, results suggested Republicans were on track for a majority — but only by a handful of seats, a far cry from their predictions.

"Never underestimate how much Team Biden is underestimated," White House chief of staff Ronald Klain tweeted. Top Republican Kevin McCarthy — who hopes to be the lower chamber's next speaker — struck an upbeat note, telling supporters in the early hours: "It is clear that we are going to take the House back." But Senator Lindsey Graham, a top Trump ally, bluntly conceded to NBC that the election is "definitely not a Republican wave, that's for darn sure."

A Republican-controlled House could still derail Biden's agenda, launching aggressive investigations, scuttling his ambitions on climate change and scrutinizing the billions of US dollars to help Ukraine fight Russia. The president's party has traditionally lost seats in midterm elections, and with Biden's rat-

ings stuck in the low 40s and Republicans pounding him over inflation and crime, pundits had predicted a drubbing.

That would have raised tough questions on whether America's oldest-ever commander in chief, who turns 80 this month, should run again. Instead, Biden stands to emerge in much better shape than either of his Democratic predecessors, Barack Obama or Bill Clinton, who both took a hammering at the midterms. Democrats need two more wins to successfully hold the Senate, while Republicans need three to flip it. In Arizona, Nevada and Wisconsin, counting the remaining votes for Senate could take days. And Georgia may well go to a runoff on Dec 6 if neither candidate crosses the 50 percent threshold.

On a night of close contests, one of the most decisive wins was for DeSantis, who won the gubernatorial race overwhelmingly in Florida, cementing his status as a top potential White House candidate in 2024. DeSantis, who has railed against COVID-19 mitigation measures and transgender rights, won by nearly 20 points against a former Democratic governor in what used to be a swing state. "We will never, ever surrender to the woke mob," DeSantis told a victory party, using a derisive term for social justice campaigners.

But if the 44-year-old views his victory as a presidential mandate, he will likely face a stiff challenge from another Florida resident — Trump, who has teased an "exciting" announcement on Nov 15. Trump, who faces criminal probes over taking top secret documents from the White House and trying to overturn the 2020 election, returned on Tuesday to his playbook of airing unsubstantiated claims of fraud.

In Arizona, Trump and his chosen candidate for governor, Kari Lake, alleged irregularities after problems with voting machines. Officials in the most populous county of Maricopa said about 20 percent of the 223 polling stations experienced difficulties related to scanners but that no one was denied the right to vote. Biden has warned that Republicans pose a dire threat to democracy, calling out their growing embrace of voter conspiracy theories that fueled last year's storming of the Capitol. In the run-up to the election, an intruder espousing far-right beliefs broke into the San Francisco home of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and bludgeoned her husband with a hammer. — AFP

International

North Korea fires ballistic missile: Seoul's military

South Korean military maintains full preparedness while closely cooperating with US

SEOUL, South Korea: North Korea fired a ballistic missile Wednesday, Seoul's military said, the latest launch from Pyongyang following a record-breaking testing blitz earlier this month. The launch comes as the United States counted votes in the midterm elections for the House and Senate, which Seoul's spy agency had previously warned would be a possible moment for Kim Jong Un to conduct a long-expected nuclear test.

Seoul's military said it had "detected a short-range ballistic missile launched by North Korea into the East Sea from Sukchon, South Pyongan Province, at around 15:31 (06:31 GMT)", referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.



Japan also confirmed the launch

"Strengthening surveillance and vigilance, the South Korean military maintains full preparedness while closely cooperating with the United States," it added. The missile's "flight distance was detected at about 290 kilometres (180 miles), an altitude of about 30 kilometres, and a speed of about Mach 6," according to Seoul's military.

Japan also confirmed the launch, with the government tweeting that Pyongyang "has launched a suspected ballistic missile". Earlier this month, North Korea conducted a flurry of launches, including an intercontinental ballistic missile, which Seoul said

appeared to have failed.

Pyongyang also fired a short-range ballistic missile that crossed the de facto maritime border and landed near the South's territorial waters for the first time since the end of the Korean War in 1953. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol said at the time that it was "effectively a territorial invasion".

Both launches were part of a Wednesday November 2 barrage, when Pyongyang fired 23 missiles—more than it launched during the whole of 2017, the year of "fire and fury" when Kim traded barbs with then-US president Donald Trump on Twitter and in state media.

"If you look at North Korea's behaviour since September 25, they have used a lot of money to consistently escalate tensions, so they need to maintain it," Park Won-gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha University, told AFP. North Korea fired a ballistic missile on September 25, which kicked off a spate of launches, including an intermediate-range ballistic missile which overflew Japan. Pyongyang later claimed these were "tactical nuclear drills". "At the end, there will be a seventh nuclear test. Even though the joint drills are done for now, it's unlikely that North Korea will lower tensions," Park said.

Drills, predictions

November's flurry of launches came as hundreds of US and South Korean warplanes were participating in large-scale joint air drills, called Vigilant Storm, which Pyongyang has described as "aggressive and provocative". Pyongyang ramped up missile launches in response to the drills. Such exercises have long provoked strong reactions from North Korea, which sees them as rehearsals for an invasion. On Monday, the South's military kicked off its four-day computer-simulated Taeguk drills.

"North Korea seems to have sufficiently achieved its

demerit. A 38-year-old Malaysian Chinese man called Roy described flying to Phnom Penh and being met by a woman in smart office wear who whisked him through immigration and into a car for the five-hour drive to Sihanoukville. There, he was taken to a complex of apartment blocks a dozen or so storeys tall, housing a mix of accommodation and office rooms. "It just looked like a normal office, with three rows of tables with monitors and keyboards, just like a cybercafe," Roy told AFP.

But he said "once you get in you know you're not doing customer service". Roy and others like him had their passports taken away, and were instructed to set up fake profiles on apps and dating sites including TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Under the constant threat of violence, they would groom targets to pour money into crypto currency or other investment platforms. Others were forced to build online "love" relationships with their targets and to scam them under the guise of needing help to pay debts off.

There are no reliable figures on how much money the gangs have netted from the scams, though the UN's Douglas said the numbers are "staggering". It is not clear where the money ends up, he added, though criminal proceeds are often bundled together with online betting profits, with many of the scam compounds located near legal gambling businesses. The gang member in Sihanoukville told AFP he did not know who he was ultimately working for. "We don't know who is who," he said. "They are the real mafia."

'Shock, kick, shock'

Forced scammers who resisted paid a high price. Construction worker Lu said he was "beaten quite often" because he was caught trying to escape. Others said gang members used electric batons to inflict shocks, or forced workers into rooms too small to stand in, depriving them of water, food and light for hours. "They ask someone to lie down and then kick them, like a dog," Roy said. "Sometimes (they would) get an electric shock, kick and shock. They would get a five-minute to 10-minute beating." Some, like Roy, were fortunate.

After being told he would have to buy his way out for \$20,000, he was rescued after contacting Taiwanese victims group the Global Anti-Trafficking Organisation (GASO). The group works with Cambodian officials to facilitate rescues and repatriate citizens.

Others have taken a more dramatic approach—in August dozens of Vietnamese workers escaped a casino in southern Kandal province and swam across a river back to their homeland. Attention on the issue has grown: In July the United States downgraded Cambodia in its annual human trafficking report.

After months of official denials, Prime Minister Hun Sen ordered a hunt for ringleaders and authorities launched a string of high-profile raids in August. In September, police freed more than 1,000 foreigners from three Sihanoukville compounds. At one site, a swoop netted nearly 9,000 mobile phones, 800 computers and chillingly, handcuffs and electric shock instruments. It was during one such raid that Lu was released. — AFP

'The real mafia'

AFP interviewed four trafficking victims who said they too received lucrative job offers during the pan-



SEOUL: The debris of a three-meter-long and two-meter-wide piece, which it identified as a North Korean SA-5 missile according to South Korea's military, is seen at the Defence Ministry in Seoul on November 9, 2022. — AFP

political and diplomatic purposes by its massive missile launches earlier this month," North Korean studies scholar Ahn Chan-il told AFP. "It seems to be in the process of testing where to deploy strategic military units to mount tactical nuclear weapons for its next nuclear test."

Seoul and Washington have been warning for months that the North is ready to conduct another nuclear test—which would be the country's seventh—at any time. But

analysts questioned the utility of trying to predict exactly when it was to come. "I really don't get the fascination with trying to predict when #NorthKorea's next nuclear test will be," Korea specialist Jenny Town wrote on Twitter. "How has this been going on for so many months now? The reality is #DPRK does need to do additional testing to achieve the goals that they set. Not just one, but a few," she wrote, referring to North Korea by its official name. — AFP

Inside the 'living hell' of Cambodia's scam operations

SIHANOUKVILLE, Cambodia: Trafficked, beaten and locked up far from his family in China, Lu was one of thousands of people in Cambodia forced to operate online scams to line their captors' pockets.

COVID shutdowns had left the builder out of work, so when he heard he could earn \$2,000 a month on a construction project in Cambodia, he jumped at the chance. But he soon realised he had been lured by a scamming gang to a compound in the seaside resort of Sihanoukville, along with hundreds of others. There he was forced to work 12 to 16 hour shifts, trawling social media and dating apps on a hunt for victims to scam out of huge sums. "Once I arrived it was too late to escape," Lu told AFP. "But as long as I was alive, I would keep trying." People from countries around Asia—including Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Bangladesh and India—have been sucked into similar operations. Some, like 34-year-old Lu, have made it out, though thousands of others are feared still trapped. In August, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Vitit Muntarbhorn, said the trafficking victims "were experiencing a living hell often resulting in torture and even death".

Metal bars and barbed wire

Sihanoukville was once a sleepy resort town, but it was transformed by a vast influx of Chinese investment. Dozens of casinos sprang up in recent years, making it a hub for Chinese gamblers and drawing in international crime groups. As travel restrictions bit during the pandemic, these groups shifted their focus. Jeremy Douglas, of the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said "criminal groups moved casino businesses online, and some then did a pivot and added online and phone scams".

One gang member told AFP on condition of anonymity that the first people to fall prey to operations like his were Chinese nationals already in Cambodia. Then gangs started trafficking people into the country. Douglas of the UNODC said "thousands, and some have estimated possibly tens of thousands" of people have been ensnared. To stop victims from escaping, compounds were installed with metal window bars and barbed wire.

"Once they arrived in the compound, they could not leave," the gang member said. "People were beaten or tortured and sold if they refused to scam others." Within Cambodia, some were sold on to other gangs, the source said. Those with good IT or English-language skills could be sold for up to \$50,000.



SIHANOUKVILLE, Cambodia: File photo shows shops closed at Chinatown district in Sihanoukville in Preah Sihanouk province. Dozens of casinos sprang up in recent years in Sihanoukville following Chinese investment, making the City a hub for gamblers and drawing in international crime groups. — AFP

HK charges four for reposting election boycott calls

HONG KONG: Four people in Hong Kong were charged on Wednesday for reposting social media content by democracy activists calling for a boycott of the city's "patriots only" election last December. Authorities last year made it illegal to encourage anyone to boycott elections or to spoil their ballots, with offenders facing up to three years in jail and a maximum fine of HK\$200,000 (\$25,000).

After Hong Kong saw huge and sometimes violent democracy protests in 2019, authorities cracked down on dissent and arrested opponents while Beijing imposed new rules that ensured only "staunch patriots" could stand for office. Some overseas Hong Kong campaigners—including former pro-democracy lawmaker Ted Hui—decided the new rules and urged the public to reject the latest elections as a sham. The four people charged on Wednesday, aged 29 to 58, allegedly reposted or displayed material that "incited others to cast blank votes or not to vote", according to Hong Kong's anti-graft agency. Two of them — 42-year-old physiotherapist Wong Chi-yan and 58-year-old Mabel Yick—were accused of sharing content authored by former legislator Hui. The other lawbreaking content allegedly originated from democracy campaigner Sunny Cheung and former district councillor Yau Manchun, both of whom are also overseas. Arrest warrants have been issued against all three original authors since late last year, the Independent Commission Against Corruption said in a statement. At least six exiled democracy activists are wanted by the ICAC over the offence of inciting others not to vote. — AFP

Australian sentenced to 129 years in child sex abuse case

MANOLA: An Australian man has been sentenced to 129 years in a Philippine jail as part of a child sexual abuse case involving victims as young as 18 months, a prosecutor said Wednesday. It was the second conviction for Peter Gerard Scully, who is already serving a life sentence for an initial batch of charges involving the rape and trafficking of girls. The Philippines has become a global hotspot for child sex exploitation, helped by poverty, English fluency and high internet connectivity in the country, experts warn. "I hope this sends a very strong message to all abusers, all human traffickers, that crime really does not pay," Merlynn Barola-Uy, a regional prosecutor in the southern city of Cagayan de Oro, told AFP.

A Cagayan de Oro court handed down the sentence on November 3 after Scully and his three co-accused entered into a plea bargaining agreement. They had been charged with 60 offences, including trafficking, child pornography, child abuse and rape.

Scully's girlfriend, Lovely Margallo, was sentenced to 126 years in jail. Two others were given sentences of more than nine years. Victims and their families have accepted the terms of the agreement and consider it a "sweet victory", according to a statement posted on the regional prosecution office's Facebook page. "They all want to put closure to this dark phase of their lives and move on," the statement reads.

'Big victory'

There was a total of nine victims in the two batches of charges against Scully. The November 3 conviction involved seven victims, including an 18-month-old baby girl and a child whose body was found buried under the floor of a house rented by Scully, Barola-Uy said. "This is a big victory, not only for us prosecutors in the Department of Justice, but more importantly this is a big victory for the victim-survivors," she said. Barola-Uy said the youngest victim was now in grade two at school

Myanmar releases former top election commission officials

YANGON: Myanmar's junta said Wednesday it has released two top election commission officials jailed for fraud during the 2020 vote won by Aung San Suu Kyi's party. Election commission chairman Hla Thein and spokesman Myint Naing were detained shortly after the military took power last year, alleging massive fraud in polls that international observers said were largely free and fair.

They were later jailed for three years each in closed-door trials for "failing to give explanations to the people over vote frauds". The pair—both in their 70s—had their sentences quashed last month due to their age and health and the "benevolence of the state", the junta said in a statement.

A junta spokesman did not respond to a request for comment. The junta has cancelled the results of the 2020 elections, in which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy trounced its military-backed rival.

It has said it will hold fresh elections next year, plans that have been slammed by the United States but praised by close ally and arms supplier Russia. All political parties must ask for permission if they wish to meet foreign organisations or individuals, the junta-stacked election commission said in August. — AFP



CAGAYAN DE ORO, Philippines: File photo taken on June 16, 2015 shows Peter Scully of Australia (R), accused of raping and trafficking two girls in the Philippines, leaving the court handcuffed to another inmate (L) after his arraignment in Cagayan de Oro City. — AFP

while others were adults. Philippines-based child rights campaigner Father Shay Cullen said the rare conviction showed "the world that justice can be done" in the Southeast Asian country. But he said the Philippine agency tasked with investigating cybersex crimes lacked manpower.

"There are only 10 police officers investigating the cybersex crimes in the Philippines—only 10 for a population of 110 million people," Cullen told AFP. Scully was arrested in 2015 in Malaybalay, another southern Philippine city, after fleeing from Australia in 2011. He had come to the Philippines to escape fraud charges in his home country. He then set up a cybersex business, filming teenage girls from impoverished families as he had sex with them or used sex toys, investigators said previously. The videos were allegedly sold to customers in Germany, the United States and Brazil. Barola-Uy said Scully and his girlfriend meted out "extreme kinds of abuses" to their victims. "They were very graphic, they were very brutal," she said. Most of the people who pay to view these types of sex videos are abroad, with potentially thousands of children being abused, often with their parents' consent, authorities say. — AFP

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2022

Business

European workers go on strike as cost of living crisis spirals

Stoppages threatening to paralyze parts of Britain, France and Spain

BRUSSELS: European workers squeezed by the soaring cost of living went on strike in Belgium and Greece on Wednesday, with stoppages threatening to paralyze parts of Britain, France and Spain in coming days. Spreading industrial unrest poses a problem for governments which are already spending billions trying to blunt the worst effects of rising prices, at least for the most vulnerable.

Europe is acutely affected by the fall-out of the war in Ukraine, which is exacerbating a global energy crisis, inflation and a scarcity of some food products. The onset of winter, when energy bills spike, and repeated predictions of a looming, continent-wide recession are souring the labor mood even further.

Belgium and Greece saw general strikes on Wednesday, disrupting transport in their respective capitals, impacting businesses. In Brussels, home to the European Commission and other EU institutions, workers were protesting inflation running higher than 12 percent—well above the 10.7 percent average across the eurozone. The country's biggest union, the FGTB, is demanding greater leeway to negotiate pay rises. But the Belgian government counters that Belgian salaries are already indexed to inflation—an arrangement not seen in most other countries.

The strike cut train services by 75 percent and closed the airport in the southern city of Charleroi, the main hub in the country for Europe's leading airline Ryanair.

Strikes in Britain and France

In Greece, ferries serving its many islands were among the transport lines halted by a general strike, the second to hit the country since September. Greek unions are insisting on salary rises to cope with inflation which nationally has risen to 12 per-

cent. "The cost of living is untenable," read a large poster for the country's biggest union, the GSEE, calling for "social protection for all".

Stoppages were to be felt on Thursday in Britain and France, with the underground urban rail networks and busses in London and Paris to be severely affected. A French union leader, Celine Verzeletti of the CGT confederation, predicted up to 200 "demonstration points", roughly the same as the last national strike in France, on October 18, when more than 100,000 people protested.

France is not as badly affected by inflation as its European peers, as the state holds stakes in the main energy companies and has minimized how far energy bills can rise. Inflation in France is just over six percent—better than elsewhere—but with economic activity across the eurozone nosediving, hatches are being battened for what looks like a period of stagflation.

In Britain, where inflation is above 10 percent, worker protests over not being able to make ends meet are coming to a crescendo. The Bank of England predicts the country is headed for a two-year recession, even though it was forced to hike interest rates, making it even tougher for UK households.

EU energy moves

On top of Thursday's stoppage in London's Underground, British nurses are to hold the first strike in the 106-year history of their RCN union at a date yet to be announced. Late next week, hundreds of workers at Heathrow airport are to down tools for three days, between November 18 and 21, to demand better pay. Their action could force the cancellation of flights to Qatar, which is to host the World Cup football tournament that



ATHENS: Health workers hold banners and shout slogans as they demonstrate over price hikes and spiraling inflation, in Athens, on November 9, 2022. —AFP

kicks off on November 20.

British dockers, university staff, postal employees and the legal profession have all held, or threaten to continue strikes over pay eaten away by inflation. In Spain, truck drivers have called an indefinite strike from next Monday. Their last stoppage, in March, led to empty supermarket shelves.

With labor protests mounting, the EU is looking at ways to take some of the sting out of energy prices. The European Commission and member states are working on proposals to promote the

joint purchase of gas and possibly impose a mechanism to cap the price of wholesale gas within the EU. Details are not expected to be finalized until late this month, but the steps—and unseasonably warm weather last month—contributed to a fall in gas prices, though they are expected to rise again as winter bites. The head of the European Central Bank, Christine Lagarde, said last week a "mild" eurozone recession looked likely—but warned it would not be enough to bring down record-high inflation. —AFP

Dark clouds over China economy

BEIJING: A slew of lackluster indicators for October show strict and enduring COVID curbs as well as a global slowdown are dragging on China's economy, analysts told AFP, with prospects looking increasingly grim for 2023. The world's second-largest economy reported its first decline in exports since the early days of the pandemic last month, while factory activity and gate prices also fell.

The ultra-wealthy have seen their fortunes shrink, too, with the Hurun China Rich List this week recording its sharpest drop in the number of individuals worth at least five billion yuan (\$690 million) since the 1990s. Multiple analysts pointed to slumps abroad as a key factor behind the falling exports, long a major driver of growth for the Chinese economy.

"Monetary conditions are tightening quickly in other countries, while inflation continues to stay elevated amidst high energy costs," Erin Xin, Greater China economist at HSBC, said in a note, pointing to a sharp decline in global demand for exports of discretionary items like clothing and electronics.

"With global demand slowing, the domestic economy will need to pick up the slack." And those falling exports will have a knock-on effect on manufacturing

as well as the job market, Iris Pang, chief economist for Greater China at ING, explained. Weakening demand risks "lower inflation and even deflation," she said.

Zero-COVID blues

Deepening the pain is Beijing's insistence on maintaining its strict policy of snap lockdowns and travel curbs whenever COVID cases arise—leaving businesses reeling from sudden disruptions and consumers reluctant to spend. Economic powerhouses including Shanghai, Shenzhen and Beijing have been hit by either protracted lockdowns or restrictions limiting retail, construction and logistics this year as outbreaks of the more infectious Omicron variant spread across the country.

An area accounting for more than 12 percent of China's gross domestic product is now under some form of COVID restriction, according to calculations by Nomura China economists on Monday. China's National Health Commission vowed Saturday to "unswervingly" stick to zero-COVID, dashing a major stock market rally on the back of unsubstantiated rumors that Beijing would imminently loosen its strict virus policy. And the man who oversaw a grueling two-month lockdown of Shanghai, Li Qiang, was last month elevated by President Xi Jinping to the Communist leadership's number two position.

"Given policymakers have invested so much political capital in the great zero-COVID campaign, it's



NANJING, China: A customer shops for vegetables at a supermarket in Nanjing in China's eastern Jiangsu province on November 9, 2022. —AFP

quite unlikely for them to abruptly declare the end of zero-COVID any time soon," Macquarie economists Larry Hu and Yuxiao Zhang said. "China's economy has two major headwinds this year: zero-COVID and property."

Property and construction account for around a quarter of China's GDP, but crippling debts have forced multiple developers to default on loans this year, while buyers furious over unfinished homes have turned to mortgage strikes. —AFP

Germany blocks sale of 2 chipmakers to China

BERLIN: Germany on Wednesday blocked the sale of two chipmakers to Chinese investors because of a potential threat to security. "We must look very closely at company takeovers when it relates to important infrastructure or when there is a danger that the technology would flow to buyers from non-EU countries," said Economy Minister Robert Habeck.

Chinese company Sai MicroElectronics had been seeking to buy the Dortmund factory of Elmos through its Swedish subsidiary Silix. The German government had rejected the planned takeover because "the purchase could endanger the order and security of Germany," said the economy ministry.

Other ways of reducing the risks, including allowing the acquisition under certain conditions, were "unable to eliminate the identified dangers", it added. A second acquisition had been turned down, Habeck said, without naming the companies involved because of "trade secrets". But Germany's minister for research Bettina Stark-Watzinger named the company as Bavaria-based ERS Electronic, which supplies a cooling technology to wafer manufacturers. Fears have been growing in Europe's economic powerhouse about an over-reliance on Beijing, and letting critical infrastructure fall into the hands of Chinese state-linked companies.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its subsequent dwindling of crucial gas supplies to Europe has further accentuated the concerns. In particular, the microchip industry has come under scrutiny, as it produces key components used across industry from consumer electronics to battery-powered vehicles. Earlier this year, the European Union unveiled a multibillion euro "Chips Act" aimed at doubling Europe's market share in semiconductors and reducing dependence on supplies from Asia.

'Not naive'

Elmos, which primarily builds components for the automobile industry, said late last year it intended to sell the production facility at its headquarters. Silix was seeking to buy the site for 85 million euros (\$85.4 million).

But business weekly Wirtschaftswoche said Elmos had been the recipient of 5.9 million euros from the German state for two research projects. It had also received 8.1 million euros from an EU project on autonomous driving. Habeck said that Germany remained open to investors, but that "we are also not naive". Beijing has been trying to glean knowledge about production and development, underlined the minister, saying that the "statements from China are very clear". —AFP

Tumbling gas prices fail to subdue energy bills

BRUSSELS: European wholesale gas prices have fallen from record peaks reached after producer Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but energy bills remain sky high despite government help aimed at easing consumers' pain. In Britain and the European Union, the impact of soaring gas and electricity bills has been cushioned to an extent by state aid measures that seek to soften the blow of decades-high inflation. But consumers still face unusually high bills, even if the worst of the winter has yet to come in the northern hemisphere.

"Energy bills will go down but there is a lag in the reaction because the utilities buy forward on the wholesale market a lot of the energy they then sell to the end-users," said Georgi Slavov, analyst at financial group Marex. "This means that the extortionate prices we saw in the last three-six months have not fully gone through the system yet," he told AFP.

Slavov added that "unless something bad happens again between now and January, we expect consumer prices—including headline inflation—to start falling in the first quarter of 2023". Unusually warm autumnal temperatures have reduced demand and allowed most European nations—though not Britain—to ramp up gas storage. —AFP

Tata Motors extends losses on chip woes, weak exports

MUMBAI: India's Tata Motors announced a seventh consecutive quarter of losses Wednesday as chip shortages and weak demand in export markets hurt sales. Net losses at the Mumbai-headquartered automaker narrowed to 9.45 billion rupees (\$116 million) in the July-to-September quarter, compared to a loss of 44.42 billion rupees in the same period last year.

But revenue from operations rose nearly 30 percent year-on-year to 796.11 billion rupees, as wholesale demand improved despite continued supply chain bottlenecks, such as semiconductor chip shortages. "Demand continues to remain strong," the company said in a stock exchange filing, but warned it remained vulnerable to "global uncertainties".

COVID-19 lockdowns in China have also hurt sales this year. But Tata Motors said "improving chip supply and cooling commodity prices" will aid business recovery in the quarters ahead.

Revenues at British subsidiary Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) rose 35.9 percent to £5.26 billion (\$6 billion) in the quarter as production of new Range Rover models improved, but it still lost £173 million. "Demand for our most profitable and desired vehicles remains strong," JLR chief Thierry Bollere said in a statement. "We expect to continue to improve our performance in the second half of the year, as new agreements with semiconductor partners take effect," he added.



Net losses at the Mumbai-headquartered Tata Motors narrowed to 9.45 billion rupees (\$116 million) in the July-to-September quarter, compared to a loss of 44.42 billion rupees in the same period last year.

Pending orders at JLR, Britain's biggest carmaker, stood at 205,000 units at the end of September, as chip supply constraints persisted. Revenue from Tata Motors' commercial vehicle business jumped 35 percent year-on-year to 164.20 billion rupees, as India bounced back from a 2021 pandemic sales dent.

But commercial vehicle exports fell 22 percent in the quarter, impacted by "financial crisis in (a) few export markets", with commodity price inflation and foreign exchange movements also eating into profit margins. Demand for passenger vehicles remained strong, with revenues up 71 percent on-year to 125.47 billion rupees, buoyed by Indian festival season demand during the quarter. Shares in Tata Motors closed 0.44 percent lower in Mumbai ahead of the earnings announcement. —AFP

Business

Turbulence ahead: Airline on the block in Sri Lanka reforms

Dozens of state-owned firms to shed jobs in IMF bailout plan

COLOMBO: Dozens of state-owned Sri Lankan companies employing tens of thousands of people could be restructured or closed as part of an IMF bailout of the bankrupt country, with the country's airline top of the list for reform. With nearly 6,000 staff, Sri Lankan Airlines is the biggest and most expensive of the cash-hemorrhaging, sclerotic companies that have drained the budget and compounded the worst financial crisis in national history. According to treasury figures, the carrier was losing \$4.50 for every dollar it earned at the start of this year. It has not turned a profit since 2008, when its chief executive was sacked for offending the country's then-leader.

"Even those who have never stepped into a Sri Lankan aircraft are paying to subsidise the airline," government spokesman Manusha Nanayakkara told reporters this month. "We can't continue like this."

Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt in April and is now neck-deep in the arduous process of renegotiating its obligations with creditors. Its 22 million people suffered through months of food and fuel shortages, and at the peak of the crisis, a furious mob stormed government buildings and chased Sri Lanka's former president into exile.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has given preliminary approval to a \$2.9 billion bailout, and the government hopes to be able to access the first tranche by the end of the year. Terms of the deal have yet to be released, but IMF cash is usually conditional on painful reforms, such as tax hikes, removing consumer subsidies, and privatizing or closing underperforming state firms.

The country has more than 300 state enterprises, ranging from nut farms to fuel retailers, and the top 52 firms lost nearly \$2.4 billion between January and April—around \$140 million a week. Sri Lankan Airlines' future is the most urgent priority, and the government last month instructed the finance ministry to begin its restructuring, ideally by attracting outside investment.



KATUNAYAKE, Sri Lanka: In this picture taken on September 26, 2022, members of ground staff work on the tarmac beside a Sri Lankan Airlines aircraft at the Colombo International Airport in Katunayake. — AFP

But finding a company willing to pour money into the airline will be immensely challenging, analysts say, given its history of interference, mismanagement and turbulent partnerships.

'It's even more difficult now'

In 1998, Emirates bought a minority stake in the carrier and took over its management. It stayed in the black for most of the next decade, although one of its most profitable years was ironically — 2001, when the Tamil Tigers separatist movement attacked the country's main international airport. Several of the airline's planes were destroyed in the July attack, but insurance payouts and the removal of excess capacity

offset a downturn in ticket sales. But the partnership was terminated and the chief executive sacked by then-president Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2008 after the carrier refused to bump fare-paying passengers to make room for members of his family returning from a jaunt in London.

The leader packed Sri Lankan's management with relatives and loyalists, several of whom now face corruption charges, and the airline has bled cash since. Rajapaksa even started a rival state-owned airline named after himself, a colossal failure that was eventually merged into Sri Lankan—along with its accumulated losses. Authorities tried to sell a 49 percent stake in Sri Lankan back in 2017 when the island nation's

tourism market was booming, but even then private equity firm TPG eventually withdrew its bid after deciding it was not a viable operation.

Airlines are "generally not that attractive" to investors, Singapore-based aviation analyst Brendan Sobie told AFP, "particularly airlines that are government owned and have a lot of legacy issues, have a lot of debt, like Sri Lankan does". "There's not many foreign airlines, particularly in this post-COVID environment, that are even looking or considering buying stakes in airlines overseas," he added, and the track record for strategic investments in the sector was "very bad". "It's very difficult," he said.

'We are a bankrupt country'

Sri Lankan chairman Ashok Pathirage acknowledges the airline's current balance sheet is not an attractive proposition. "If you try to privatize the whole thing, people will come and ask the government to take half of the debt," Pathirage told AFP. But he said Sri Lankan could settle about half of its liabilities by splitting off and selling profitable business arms, including its virtual monopoly on catering and ground handling at Colombo airport.

Trade union leaders and employees support a restructuring along those lines, on the condition that no jobs are cut. "The airline is losing money not because of the staff, but expensive leases and poor financial structures," a cabin crew member, who requested anonymity, told AFP.

But selling off the airline's profitable divisions would leave the rump operations generating even bigger losses for the government. Former state finance minister Eran Wickramaratne told AFP that if authorities could not find an investor, the airline should be grounded permanently before it could burden the public further. "We are a bankrupt country," he said. "We have not been able to service our debt and that reality has struck home." — AFP

China's ultra-rich squeezed by slowing economy

BEIJING: The wealth of China's billionaires this year dropped by the largest amount in more than two decades, according to an annual ranking, as zero-COVID curbs and a property market crisis stall the world's second-largest economy. The Hurun China Rich List, released Tuesday, said the total wealth of all individuals with a minimum net worth of 5 billion yuan (\$691 million) dropped by 18 percent to \$3.5 trillion.

Only 1,305 people made it onto the list—an 11 percent net decrease compared with last year, and the biggest drop in 24 years. The fortunes of China's ultra-rich have been battered by Beijing's harsh zero-

COVID policy, which has heavily disrupted production and supply chains.

They have also taken a hit from stock market routs during a two-year crackdown on the tech industry, and suffered from geopolitical volatility caused by events such as the war in Ukraine. The property and health-care sectors were hit especially hard, according to the list. Property developer Yang Huiyan of Country Garden Holdings lost the most personal wealth at \$15.7 billion this year, while Pony Ma, founder of tech and gaming giant Tencent, lost \$14.6 billion after a sweeping crackdown on the gaming industry last year. China's three richest people stayed the same as last year, with Zhong Shanshan, founder of bottled water company Nongfu Spring, increasing his wealth by 17 percent to \$65 billion.

Zhang Yiming, the founder of TikTok parent ByteDance, retained second place but saw his wealth drop by 28 percent to \$35 billion after the company's valuation dropped.

Alibaba founder Jack Ma fell from fifth to ninth place after losing 29 percent of his wealth to \$25.7 billion, while Pony Ma slipped from fourth place to fifth. Nearly 300 individuals listed last year were absent from this year's list, most from the property industry, which has faced a spiraling debt crisis after the government imposed borrowing curbs in 2020. The chairman of property giant Evergrande, Xu Jiayin, fell out of the 100 richest to 172nd place as his company sagged under over \$300 billion of debt. The International Monetary Fund has predicted that China's annual GDP growth will only reach 3.2 percent this year. — AFP



Jack Ma

Striking Kenya Airways pilots return to work

NAIROBI: Kenya Airways pilots returned to work on Wednesday, after a court ordered them to end their days-long strike which had led to hundreds of flight cancellations and stranded thousands of passengers. The strike, which began on Saturday, exacerbated the woes facing the troubled national carrier, which has vowed to "do everything possible to return to normalcy in the shortest time".

"The strike is off, we are back to work," a spokesperson for the Kenya Airline Pilots Association (KALPA) told AFP Wednesday, hours after a Nairobi court ordered the union to end the walkout. Despite the announcement, Kenya Airways' latest online update showed just 19 flights operating on Wednesday, fewer than the 26 scheduled the day before, although it

said on Twitter that normal operations should resume by November 12.

Officials at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport said the airline was still struggling to clear the backlog from earlier flight cancellations. "We have had several KQ flights on schedule today take off after the pilots resumed work," an official at the Kenya Airports Authority told AFP, using the shorthand airline code.

"Things are getting back to normal," he said. The dispute has added to the challenges facing Kenya's recently elected President William Ruto, who has inherited a country already battling a cost-of-living crisis and a record drought. Passengers at the airport told AFP they were cautiously optimistic after being forced to reschedule their travel plans because of the strike. Peace Wamala told AFP she was hoping to finally make it to the Ugandan town of Entebbe following a cancellation on Tuesday. She said she didn't yet know "the exact time for our flight but we have been assured we will fly today". Another passenger, who only gave her name as Londiwe, told AFP: "I have had the worst experience on KQ during the strike for the past two days, but finally I have been told I will fly this evening." — AFP



NAIROBI, Kenya: In this file photo taken on November 05, 2022 shows Kenya Airways planes at the parking bay, amid a strike by pilots organized by Kenya Airline Pilots Association (KALPA), at the Jomo Kenyatta International airport in Nairobi. — AFP

China unveils orders for homegrown passenger jet

BEIJING: China announced Wednesday hundreds of new orders for its first domestically manufactured large passenger jet, with the aircraft poised to make its commercial debut early next year. The state-owned Commercial Aircraft Corp of China (COMAC) said it had sealed orders for 300 of the narrow-body C919 at a major airshow on Tuesday.

The announcement did not clarify whether the orders had been fully confirmed, and gave no details about the value of the deals or expected delivery dates. If the orders go through, it would take the number of known deals for the C919 to more than 1,100, based on figures from previous COMAC statements.

Authorities hope the C919 — the country's first homegrown jetliner with mass commercial potential—will challenge foreign models like the Boeing 737 MAX and the Airbus A320. Beijing also anticipates that the aircraft will help reduce the country's reliance on foreign technology amid testy ties with Western countries—though most of the plane's parts are sourced from abroad. COMAC said it had reached agreements with seven leasing firms for a combined 330 aircraft, including 30 of the C919's predecessor, the ARJ21 regional jet, which came into operation in 2008. The orders "fully expressed the confidence of our leasing partners" in the two models, COMAC said. The company showed off the C919 on Tuesday at the China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition. The sleek aircraft taxied down a runway in the southern city of Zhuhai before soaring into

the skies in front of hundreds of onlookers. Few details of existing orders for the C919 have been disclosed.

But domestic media have reported that four aircraft are expected to be delivered to China Eastern Airlines—the country's second-largest carrier by passenger numbers—by the end of this year, and go into operation in the first quarter of 2023. China sealed a deal for Airbus jets worth \$17 billion earlier this year. The company began producing its A321 model in the eastern city of Tianjin on Wednesday with a view to making deliveries early next year, according to Xinhua. The state-owned news agency quoted Airbus China CEO George Xu as saying the move displayed the company's "unwavering support for the Chinese market". The Boeing 737 MAX has been grounded in China since 2019 after two fatal crashes, though Boeing said in July that it may be approved for delivery by Chinese regulators this year. — AFP



ZHUHAI, China: This file photo taken on November 8, 2022 shows a Commercial Aircraft Corp of China (COMAC) C919 aircraft, China's first domestically produced large passenger jet, performing during the Airshow China 2022 in Zhuhai, in southern China's Guangdong province. China announced on November 9, 2022. — AFP

Hackers leak Australian health records on dark web

SYDNEY: Hackers have followed through on a threat to leak sensitive medical records stolen from a major Australian health company that counts the country's prime minister among nearly 10 million customers. Medibank told investors that a "sample" selection of customer data was posted on a "dark web forum" on Wednesday after it refused to pay a ransom demand.

The data included names, birth dates, passport numbers and information on medical claims for hundreds of customers who were separated into "naughty" and "nice" lists.

Some on the "naughty" list had numeric codes that appeared to link them to drug addiction, alcohol abuse and HIV infection. For example, one record carried an entry that read: "p_diag: F122".

F122 corresponds with "cannabis dependence" under the International Classification of Diseases, published by the World Health Organization. Medibank is Australia's largest private health insurer and the hack is likely to include some of the country's most influential and wealthy individuals.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he himself was a Medibank customer and that the attack was a "wake-up call" for corporate Australia.

Potential Russian link

The perpetrator of the hack has not yet been publicly identified. But the Australian Federal Police's Justine Gough said it was the work of a "criminal or criminal groups" that could be operating outside the country. Sanjay Jha, chief scientist at the University of New South Wales's Institute for Cyber Security, said it was difficult to attribute any attack to a single group. However, he told AFP it carried some of the hallmarks associated with a Russian hacker group

called REvil—which has previously targeted everything from Brazilian meat company JBS to Lady Gaga.

"The pattern matches the behavior in parts. So that is why there is a serious indication it could be them selling the data," Jha said. A defunct REvil website has been redirecting traffic to the dark web forum where the Medibank data was leaked. REvil—an amalgam of ransomware and evil—was the subject of a US\$10 million reward from US authorities before being reportedly dismantled by Russia this year.

JBS Foods, one of the largest beef producers in the world, paid REvil a ransom of US\$11 million in 2021. Jha said the hackers could now look to sell the sensitive data to blackmailers and other scammers.

'Scumbags' and 'crooks'

The hackers also uploaded what they said were a series of messages sent to Medibank in the days before the leak. "We will do everything in our power to inflict as much damage as possible for you, both financial and reputational," one message from the hackers read. Hundreds of millions of US dollars have been wiped off Medibank's market value, with the company's share price down more than 20 percent since October, when news of the leak first emerged. Troy Hunt, a cyber security expert working for Microsoft, wrote on Twitter that the breach was "about as bad as we feared it would get".

The Medibank hack followed an attack on telecom company Optus in September that exposed the personal information of some nine million Australians. Jha said the enormous Medibank and Optus data breaches could make it easier to carry out cyber attacks on different systems in the future.

"A lot of credentials have been stolen in recent months," he said. "That makes the job of attackers easier—they can go and try other systems with millions of credentials." Australia's assistant treasurer Stephen Jones said the perpetrators were "scumbags" and "crooks". "We shouldn't be giving in to these fraudsters," he told local media. As Medibank tried to contain the leak, it was also staring down the barrel of a potentially costly class action lawsuit. — AFP

Business

IMF agrees \$4.5bn support package for Bangladesh

Package will help Dhaka cope with soaring energy and food prices

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund said Wednesday it reached a preliminary agreement to provide Bangladesh with a \$4.5 billion support package to help it cope with soaring energy and food prices. Bangladesh in common with other Asian economies has been hit hard by the sharp rise in prices in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, prompting angry street protests.

The South Asian nation of around 170 million people approached the IMF earlier this year for support. An IMF delegation and Dhaka representatives "reached a staff-level agreement to support Bangladesh's economic policies" with a total of \$4.5 billion under various facilities, the institution said in a statement, adding the deal was subject to IMF management approval.

Bangladesh plans to use the IMF loan to prop up its foreign exchange reserves, which have nosedived from \$46 billion to \$34 billion. The Bangladeshi taka has depreciated some 25 percent against the greenback in recent months, while according to official figures inflation has approached 10 percent-but independent economists say the true figure is closer to 20 percent.

Household budgets have been hit hard and the government has pledged to cap the price of several staple foods, including rice, to quell public discontent. "Bangladesh's robust economic recovery from the pandemic has been interrupted by Russia's war in Ukraine, leading to a sharp widening of the current account deficit, rapid decline of foreign exchange reserves, rising inflation and slowing

growth," said IMF team leader Rahul Anand. "Even as Bangladesh tackles these immediate challenges, addressing long-standing structural issues remains critical, including threats to macroeconomic stability from climate change," he added.

Power cuts

The depreciating currency and dwindling foreign exchange reserves have left Bangladesh unable to import sufficient fossil fuels. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government has been forced to close diesel plants, leave some gas-fired power stations idle and impose lengthy power cuts of up to 13 hours a day to conserve existing stocks. Last month at least 130 million people were left without power after a grid failure caused widespread blackouts.

And tens of thousands of mosques around the Muslim-majority country have been asked to curtail the use of air conditioners to ease pressure on the electricity grid.

The blackouts have sparked widespread public anger and helped mobilize large demonstrations on the streets of Dhaka. At least three people were killed in one demonstration and around 100 others injured in another in a police crackdown. In August the government raised the prices of petroleum and diesel by up to 50 percent. Bangladesh's precarious financial position was compounded this year by unprecedented floods in the northeast, inundating the homes of more than seven million people and causing nearly \$10 billion in damage, according to government estimates.



DHAKA: International Monetary Fund representative Rahul Anand (center) speaks during a press conference in Dhaka on November 9, 2022. —AFP

The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has blamed the government for the crisis, accusing it of squandering cash on multibillion-dollar vanity projects. It has organized a series of rallies demanding Hasina's resignation and a general election under a caretaker government. Bangladesh hopes to graduate from Least Developed Country status and become a "middle-income" nation by 2031. Hasina's government has put together a program, which the

IMF said it supports, to achieve the goal, as well as measures to contain inflation, change its monetary policy framework, and strengthen the financial sector. Bangladesh will also support large-scale climate investments and seek additional climate financing. Elsewhere in the region, Sri Lanka has also sought a bailout from the IMF, its economic crisis—which saw its president ousted by street protests—exacerbated by the global rise in energy and food prices. —AFP

KFH sheds light on customers' rights and regulations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues efforts to support "Diraya" financial and banking awareness campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association for the second year in a row. The campaign aims to shed light on customers' rights, rules and regulations of dealing with banks, information safety and security against intrusion, combating fraud transactions in addition to other warnings and regulations. This campaign comes as part of the bank obligation to keep the customers informed about their rights and duties towards banking and financial transactions and their cyber security.

The campaign discusses finance types, banking cards, awareness of customers with special needs, tips on cyber security and protection of bank accounts. Also, it provides the mechanism to lodge complaints, protect customers' rights and identify the banking sector duties and its role in enhancing and developing national economy. KFH's contribution in the campaign comprises the dispatch of various messages on different topics related to the main components of the campaign. These messages are sent to all types of customers to suite the culture and nature of each tier. Also, messages are sent on continuous basis to employees who are considered as the second main component in the awareness triangle (customers - employees - public) who are either potential or targeted customers, thus aiming to achieve the targets of the campaign.

The main targets of the campaign comprise awareness, identification of and warning against any possible risks of failing to follow safety and security instructions upon using modern technology means. Regulations include refraining from extending any information about accounts and personal transactions to any unknown parties or reply to messages from unknown sources as this would be a violation to data privacy and banking protection regulations.

KFH is keen on spreading financial education, saving and investment knowledge and customer's awareness of the bank's products and services. KFH appreciates the efforts extended by the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association in organizing the Be Aware "Diraya" campaign to spread awareness in society regarding banking and financial transactions and e-banking services. Technology has opened vast business opportunities. However, several risks and challenges were also detected considering the several attempts, most of which failed, to hack customers' accounts and cause system damage. Accordingly, this situation has called for a comprehensive awareness plan and enhancement of the cyber security systems, anti-money laundering systems and prevention of other legally incriminated and suspicious activities.

KFH's messages highlight the clear and defined policies placed by the Central Bank of Kuwait to supervise the lending and finance operations at banks. These policies provide that the customer shall be provided with the loan details, value and number of instalments, settlement dates, instalment/net salary ratio and default penalties. The customer is given at least two days grace period to review the contract fully before signing. Once signed, a draft copy of the contract shall be given to the customer including type of loan, payment term, instalment value and profit. There are two types of loans offered to customers, consumer loan and residential loan.

According to CBK instructions, the bank is required to provide financial advice and all information concerning the finance contract and explain all details related to the finance transaction including rate of return/finance amount, No. of instalments to be paid by customer and components of each instalment before signing the contract with the customer. Customer shall be given two days period to review the contract and read the terms and conditions carefully and be aware of his rights and obligations before signing the contract.

solutions by stc offers a range of Cloud application packages

KUWAIT: solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, announced its latest Cloud productivity application packages that are specially designed to cater to small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kuwait. The packages are cost-effective, provide seamless connectivity and boost productivity levels, further building on the Company's long-standing commitment to support SMEs, especially those impacted by the repercussions of the pandemic.

The wide range of Cloud solutions introduced under solutions by stc's latest campaign aim to aid B2B customers' transition into the digital world by enabling their digital transformation strategies. As a one-stop solutions provider, solutions by stc possesses the portfolio strength and technical prowess to support SMEs in uplifting their current business models or supporting new business in launching their ventures with the right set of solutions to back their operations and business needs. Through its reinforced campaign, solutions by stc will be offering three plans through Microsoft 365 and Google workspace solutions in addition to domains for businesses, smart office devices, DaaS, PBX, connectivity solutions, as well as other solutions.

solutions by stc indicated in a statement that the Microsoft 365 Cloud solutions will be offered through two plans, Microsoft 365 Business and Office 365 Enterprise. Microsoft 365 Business is a purely cloud-based solution that provides access to email, files and Office programs including Word, PowerPoint, Excel and other Microsoft applications. Office 365 Enterprise offers a suite of applications including

ABK launches the next generation digital onboarding service

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is pleased to launch its next-generation digital onboarding feature. Potential customers can now enjoy the convenience of instantly opening ABK accounts either through the mobile app or eahli.com.

Digital onboarding joins an array of other digital services that the bank developed as part of the bank's dedication to offer customers a simpler banking experience. By simply downloading the ABK mobile application, the bank has offered a fast-track solution to open accounts online. In addition to the accelerated experience, digital onboarding is a service that represents ABK's commitment to sustainability where it has adopted a digital plat-

form to replace traditional paper and courier-based documentation processes.

Commenting on the new service, Loai Muqames, Chief Executive Officer of ABK - Kuwait said, "Put simply, we're bringing banking into the homes of our potential customers where they can now open ABK accounts online. The Bank has always been committed to providing customers with a user-friendly experience. Not only is this a positive step in a streamlined customer journey, as we have also simplified our internal processes and this is further evidence of that commitment."

The digital onboarding service is integrated with the Kuwait Mobile ID (Hawiyati) application that is verified by the Public Authority for Civil

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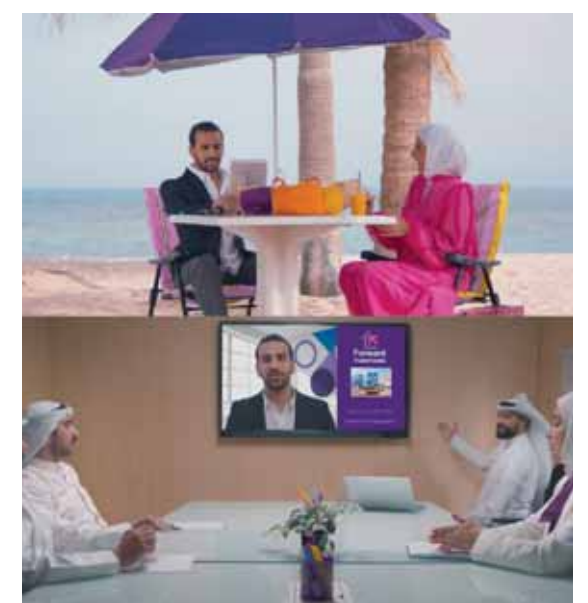
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reliable solutions and services that showcase the strength of stc's 5G network and ICT integrated solutions that cater specifically to their business needs, in their path to recovery following the pandemic. solutions by stc will continue supporting the SME market through various relief packages and cost-effective solutions that aim to empower the sector, in line with Kuwait's 2035 Vision. Following its strategy to offer business solutions all under one roof, solutions by stc has taken great strides to introduce new products that cater to the growing and diverse customer base. These include a range of connectivity solutions such as fixed or wireless services, 5G technology led by stc, as well as ICT, IoT, AI, and other IT products and services. solutions by stc will continue to introduce pioneering technology enabled solutions based on the latest innovations in this digital era, serving as the preferred gateway to its customers through digital transformation.

Information (PACI). This is a mandatory step in the process as customers would need to ensure that they have a verified digital signature before using the new next generation digital onboarding. From there, the account opening process is simple. Potential customers are invited to download the ABK mobile application or visit eahli.com, select 'Open New Account,' enter their mobile number, verify it with an OTP, and fill in some personal and financial information.

If customers don't have a listed digital signature with Kuwait Mobile ID and PACI, the account may still be opened but will remain inactive until a physical signature is made at an ABK branch.

Loai Muqames continued, "ABK remains committed to digitizing core banking capabilities, processes, and platforms, all in an effort to facilitate customers' dealings with the Bank. Customer satisfaction remains a high priority for management and the Bank as a whole. Therefore, we are determined to continue to introduce more worthwhile digital banking solutions in the future."

Mizuho, said the failure showed "liquidity in crypto exchanges could be very fickle". "There is little actual capital backing crypto tokens," he said in a note.

And he added that FTX's rapid fall was a "red flag" for platforms such as Coinbase, which mainly offers token and digital currency trading. Fans of cryptocurrencies and blockchain-related technologies have become used to a vicious cycle of booms and busts since bitcoin was launched in 2009.

The notional value of the cryptocurrency market rose to \$3 trillion in November 2021 before falling back below \$1 trillion in June. It is still too early to determine the wider impact of FTX's rout, said Jamiel Sheikh, founder of several companies in the crypto world. "Centralized exchange balance sheets are opaque, and so it is impossible to determine which exchange can withstand a run," he said. But he added that Binance was offering to take over FTX's assets one-for-one, which showed "some confidence" in the business. —AFP

FTX collapse gives crypto sector 'another black eye'

NEW YORK: Even for a sector regularly rocked by bankruptcies, the collapse of FTX—a cryptocurrency platform worth \$32 billion at the beginning of the year—came as a shock. FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried had cultivated friends in Washington and basked in glowing tributes when he stepped in to rescue other ailing crypto companies earlier in the year.

Yet, all it took for his firm to unravel was a report on a specialist website raising doubts about FTX's accounts, followed by a few tweets from his big rival Changpeng Zhao, boss of Binance. Just days later, Zhao—who had feuded for weeks on Twitter with

'Red flag'

FTX fell quickly when Zhao said he would get rid of Binance's holdings of FTX's in-house token FTT, sparking a collapse in its value and evaporation of confidence in the firm. Dan Dolev, an analyst for

Lifestyle | Features

'BLACK PANTHER' FIGHTS ON WITHOUT CHADWICK BOSEMAN



"Black Panther" returns to cinemas worldwide this week, having lost its star with the tragic early death of Chadwick Boseman, but none of its determination to push for greater diversity in superhero movies. Boseman, who died from cancer two years ago aged 43, makes several flashback appearances in "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever". The real-life grief of the filmmakers is reflected in the film as Wakanda struggles to survive following the death of Boseman's character, King T'Challa.

Director Ryan Coogler had been preparing the sequel for almost a year when Boseman died, causing him to take a new direction focused on T'Challa's sister, Shuri, played by Letitia Wright. "When you lose somebody, there's a blast radius. It's like a bomb that goes off," Coogler said at a press conference. "The worst nightmare that you can

have is if something were to happen to you, the people who you love and leave behind would be unmoored, would be lost. We were exploring all of those things," he said. Wright praised Coogler's handling of her character's journey as she tackles her grief and becomes queen. "We were able to bring something that felt real, that felt truthful. And I was able to really give my heart to it and give Shuri a full arc," she said.

'Time to change'

The new film also marks the return of singer Rihanna with "Lift Me Up", a tribute to Boseman and her first single as a lead artist since 2016. Boseman was the first black lead in a Marvel film and proved that was no hindrance to popularity, with "Black Panther" bringing in no less than \$1.34 billion at the box office. The rest of the industry has taken notice, and the new installment comes hot on the heels

of "Black Adam" from rival superhero behemoth DC Comics, starring Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, which is currently dominating the box office worldwide.

"Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" continues the first film's mission to raise issues around diversity and colonialism. Its plot partly revolves around Wakanda's efforts to fend off the United States and France as they try to get their hands on its precious natural resource, vibranium, at all costs.

It also introduces an old Marvel character, Namor the Sub-Mariner, who speaks Mayan in the film—a detail welcomed by Mexican actor Tenoch Huerta. "In Latin America, especially Mexico, we deny our indigenous roots," Huerta said. "It's time to change and reconcile who we are with our ancestors... and embrace them. And now it's happening in this movie... and that is exciting." — AFP



In this file photo Talk show host Jimmy Kimmel arrives for the 74th Emmy Awards at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles, California.— AFP

Jimmy Kimmel to return as Oscars host

Late-night comedian Jimmy Kimmel will host the Oscars for a third time, organizers said Monday, as Hollywood's biggest award show tries to leave behind the controversy still swirling around its most recent edition. Kimmel is seen by the industry as a safe pair of hands for the 95th Academy Awards, after the last Oscars in March this year featured a shocking moment in which Will Smith slapped Chris Rock live on stage. "Being invited to host the Oscars for a third time is either a great honor or a trap," said Kimmel in a statement.

"Either way, I am grateful to the Academy for asking me so quickly after everyone good said 'no,'" joked the host, best known for ABC's long-running late-night show "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" Kimmel previously hosted the Oscars in 2017 and 2018. On the first of those occasions, "La La Land" was accidentally announced as the best picture winner, before "Moonlight" was awarded the night's final prize. He also drew near-universal praise for his hosting of television's Emmys in 2020, when organizers scrambled to produce a socially distanced show from a near-empty Los Angeles theater early in the pandemic.

Glenn Weiss and Ricky Kirshner, producers of the next Oscars, said Kimmel "will be funny and ready for anything!" Academy CEO Bill Kramer and Academy President Janet Yang said Kimmel would be the "perfect host" for the ceremony, noting his "live TV expertise." ABC Entertainment president Craig Erwich said Kimmel "can handle anything with both heart and humor." Oscars television ratings have markedly declined in recent years—like nearly all award shows—although they rebounded to 16.6 million last year, from a record-low 9.9 million for the previous edition.

The moment when Smith struck comedian Rock for quipping about his wife's hair-loss condition drew enormous attention, but was criticized for overshadowing the night's winners. In a September meeting with Academy members, Kramer set out plans to "reinvigorate" the Oscars "to a position of power, honorability, and importance," including a renewed focus on "love and reverence for film." While recent Oscars have been largely dominated by smaller, more arthouse-oriented films, many analysts predict crowd-pleasers such as "Top Gun: Maverick" and "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" could feature prominently next time. The Oscars will be held on March 12, 2023, at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood. — AFP

Science confirms: To light up the dance floor, turn up the bass

Electronic music lovers know the drill: as soon as the DJ turns up the bass, the crowd goes wild and dances with heightened enthusiasm. But to what extent is this a conscious reaction? Researchers have taken a closer look at the relationship between bass frequencies and dancing, thanks to an experiment conducted during a real-life electronic music concert. The results, published Monday in the journal Current Biology, showed that participants danced almost 12 percent more when researchers introduced a very low frequency bass-one that dancers could not hear.

"They couldn't tell when those changes happened, but it was driving their movements," neuroscientist David Cameron of McMaster University, who led the study, told AFP. The results confirm the special relationship between bass and dance, which has never been scientifically proven.

The pulse of the music

Cameron, a trained drummer, notes that people attending electronic music concerts "love when they can feel the bass so strong" and tend to turn it up very loud. But they are not alone. In many cul-

tures and traditions across the world "it tends to be the low-frequency instruments like the bass guitar or the bass drum, that give the pulse of the music" that gets humans moving. "What we didn't know is, can you actually make people dance more with bass?" said Cameron.

The experiment took place in Canada, in a building known as LIVElab, which served both as a concert hall and a research laboratory. About 60 out of 130 people who went to see a concert by electronic music duo Orphyx were equipped with motion-sensing headbands to monitor their dance moves. During the concert, researchers intermittently turned very-low bass-playing speakers on and off. A questionnaire filled out by concertgoers confirmed that the sound was undetectable. This allowed researchers to isolate the impact of the bass and avoid other factors, such as dancers reacting to a popular part of a song.

Below the level of consciousness

"I was impressed with the effect," said Cameron. His theory is that even when undetected, the bass stimulates sensory systems in the body, such as the skin and the vestibular system—more commonly

known as the inner ear.

These systems have a very close connection to the motor system—responsible for movement—but in an intuitive way that bypasses the frontal cortex. He compares it to the way the body keeps the lungs breathing and the heart beating. "It is below the level of consciousness." Cameron said the research team believes the stimulation of these systems "give a little boost to your motor system. And that adds a little bit of energy and vigor to your real-world movements." He hopes to verify this hypothesis in future experiments.

As for why humans dance at all, the mystery endures. "I've always been interested in rhythm, and especially what it is about rhythm that makes us want to move," in the absence of a specific function of dance. Most theories revolve around the idea of social cohesion. "When you synchronize with people, you tend to feel bonded with them a little bit afterward. You feel good afterwards," said Cameron. "By making music together, that allows us to feel better together as a group, and then we function better as a group, and we can be more efficient, and we can have more peace." — AFP



George Daniels watch sells for \$4 million

A timepiece by legendary mechanical watchmaker George Daniels fetched more than \$4 million under the hammer—the second-highest price ever achieved by an independent watchmaker, auctioneers Phillips said Monday. The watch was estimated at one million Swiss francs but eventually sold to a bidder in the room at the Geneva Watch Auction for 4,083,500 Swiss francs (\$4.125 million). "This marks the highest price ever achieved for a wristwatch by a British maker but also the second-highest price achieved by an independent watchmaker—a true milestone in the market," Phillips said.

The double-dialled Spring Case Tourbillon in yellow gold, completed in 1992, was a unique watch, and one of two that Daniels made for his own use. Daniels, who died in 2011 aged 85, is considered among the greats in the field of luxury mechanical watches. He completed 27 unique watches during his career, outside of prototypes. Daniels invented coaxial escapement, which is now used by Omega and was "the first practical new mechanical watch escapement to be launched in 250 years", according Omega's parent company The Swatch Group.

The escapement is the "heart" of a mechanical watch, with Daniels' invention reducing the friction, resulting in greater stability of the watch's precision. The Phillips sale over the weekend saw 226 watches fetch a total of 44.9 million Swiss francs.—AFP



Blue tick accounts suspended from Twitter after impersonating @elonmusk

Verified Twitter accounts with millions of followers have been suspended after their user name was changed to Elon Musk, as the platform's users test the new owner's commitment to free speech he does not like. Comedian Kathy Griffin, whose blue-ticked account has two million followers, was among those who were locked out after crossing the mercurial CEO. Musk, who has previously described himself as a "free speech absolutist" tweeted Sunday that "any Twitter handles engaging in impersonation without clearly specifying 'parody' will be permanently suspended."

The Twitter account for h3h3Productions, which also changed its user name to Elon Musk, was also banned, despite labeling itself a parody. User @jephjacques changed their display name to Elon Musk, and posted a series of satirical tweets referencing Musk's hands-on approach to his new company,

including: "look can everyone just stop tweeting for a second? it's too fast for me to moderate by myself." The account, which has over 80,000 followers was suspended a short time later.

Compounding the impression that he was personally involved in decisions to ban accounts that target him, Musk responded to a tweet announcing Griffin's suspension from the service. "Actually,



In this file photo Tesla CEO Elon Musk speaks during the unveiling of the new Tesla Model Y in Hawthorne, California.— AFP

she was suspended for impersonating a comedian," he quipped, prompting a response apparently from Griffin, who said she was now using her dead mother's account.

"I mean... you stole that joke," @TiptMaggieG—whose username was also Elon Musk—tweeted. "People have been posting that joke for hours, you hack. Look, please do a better job running this company. It used to mean something." Other users, including "Star Wars" actor Mark Hamill, joined the fray, with the hashtag #FreeKathy. Since completing his \$44 billion takeover of the social media company, Musk has publicly mused about how to turn a profit.

Actions so far have included firing half the firm's global workforce, and announcing an \$8 a month charge for the previously free blue tick verification. On Monday he waded into the US elections, urging "independent-minded voters" to vote Republican. "Shared power curbs the worst excesses of both parties, therefore I recommend voting for a Republican Congress, given that the Presidency is Democratic." — AFP

Veteran French designer Philippe Starck now looks to space

Philippe Starck, the prolific French architect and designer who has made everything from lemon juicers to wind turbines, shows no sign of slowing down and is increasingly turning his eye to space. Visiting an exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris featuring some of his early works, the 73-year-old seemed bemused by the volume of items on display. "I don't have the software for periods and dates," he told AFP when asked about the period. "To me, the 1980s were like being abandoned in an Amazon jungle with nothing to eat, wild animals everywhere, a rusty machete... I just did what I could. And when you do what you can, you don't remember what's going on elsewhere."

Starck made his name as an interior decorator for Paris nightclubs in the 1970s, before landing a dream commission to refurbish the Elysee Palace apartments for president Francois Mitterrand in 1983. He went on to design luxurious hotels and restaurants around the world. But he also gave the world an uber-electric range of everyday items, from his futuristic lemon juicer to electric bikes,



Philippe Starck

toothbrushes, water bottles—and on to boats, wind turbines and control towers.

There was always a hint of humor and surrealism, he said, but also a desire to "democratize design" by keeping things affordable. "We managed to remove two zeros from prices," he said. "At the time, in today's prices, sitting on something designer cost 20,000 euros, which wasn't right. Today, it's 700 euros, which isn't bad." These days, Starck cares less about household objects and has his eyes on bigger things.—AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Fortune Pink diamond sells for more than \$28.5m

The Fortune Pink diamond, an exceptionally rare giant gemstone, sold for more than \$28.5 million at auction in Geneva on Tuesday to a private Asian customer. At 18.18 carats, the jewel is the largest pear-shaped "fancy vivid pink" diamond ever sold under the hammer, Christie's auction house said. The dazzling diamond fetched a hammer price of 24.5 million Swiss francs (\$24,615,150), rising to 28,436,500 Swiss francs (\$28,570,150) with the buyer's premium added on. The bidding, which lasted for a tense four minutes, started at 17 million Swiss francs and was a three-way battle between telephone bidders, with the winner eventually claiming the gem by upping the bid by half a million. "The buyer is happy. It's a dream come true," the Christie's employee taking the winning telephone bid told AFP, while maintaining the buyer's anonymity. The Fortune Pink, mined in Brazil, had been estimated to fetch between \$25 million and \$35 million.

Christie's noted that the carat weight, 18.18, was considered a lucky number in

Asia, where it signifies "definite prosperity", and gave the diamond its name. "Very aptly it was purchased by an Asian private customer," Rahul Kadakia, Christie's international head of jewelry, told reporters after conducting the sale. "It's a very select group of customers who are buying at this level. I'm very happy that it's gone to a new family who will enjoy it, who will wear it, and I hope it brings them good fortune."

Rare gems

Pink diamonds are only found in a few places and fewer than 10 percent weigh more than one fifth of a carat. Big jewels like the Fortune Pink are therefore among the rarest diamonds and are some of the most in-demand on the global market. On Friday, the 11.15-carat Williamson Pink Star pink diamond sold in Hong Kong for HK\$453.2 million (\$57.7 million), setting a record for price per carat paid at auction for any diamond or gemstone, according to Sotheby's.

It was fetched the second-highest price paid at auction for any jewel. Tobias



This file photo taken in Geneva shows the Fortune Pink, an exceptionally rare giant gemstone, that is expected to bring in up to \$35 million when it will come up for sale in Geneva by Christie's auction house. — AFP

Kormind, managing director of online diamond jeweler 77 Diamonds, said the Fortune Pink price was disappointing in comparison. "Hong Kong has trumped Geneva and whether we like it or not, the centre of gravity of wealth creation is moving towards Asia," he said. The world

record for a pink diamond was set in 2017, when a stone known as the CTF Pink Star was sold in Hong Kong for \$71.2 million.

Standing room only

The Fortune Pink was auctioned in

the Magnificent Jewels sale at the Hotel des Bergues, part of Christie's Luxury Week of sales in Geneva. The jewels sale of 71 lots fetched nearly 56.6 million Swiss francs. Five other diamond lots went for more than a million Swiss francs. "It was an exciting night," said Kadakia. "There is appetite, people want to pay the prices. I have not, since COVID, seen the room packed all the way to the end of the ballroom where there was standing room only."

"It gives you a sense of how the market is feeling so much more buoyant." Sotheby's Geneva Luxury Week is also under way, with a fancy vivid blue cushion-shaped diamond weighing 5.53 carats estimated to fetch 11 to 15 million Swiss francs on Wednesday. It is part of the De Beers Exceptional Blue Collection—a group of eight rare fancy blue diamonds with a total value of more than \$70 million, being sold in Geneva, New York and Hong Kong. — AFP



'The Crown' star insists series will give king's side of Diana story

Dominic West, who plays the now King Charles in the new series of "The Crown", on Tuesday said he hoped the Netflix hit would give viewers "perspective" on the monarch despite furor over untrue depictions of the family. "The Wire" star West, 53, plays Charles during a tumultuous period in the then-prince's life, covering his affair with Camilla—now his wife—and his divorce from Princess Diana.

Before the show's stars gathered in London for the world premiere of its fifth season, West said he hoped the public would give Charles the "benefit of the doubt" after watching the latest installment. But he acknowledged the show would tackle sensitive issues, and "covers a time when he had bad press." "It was a divorce and there's always two sides in a divorce. I suppose viewers heard one or the other," he told a news conference. "And hopefully there's a bit of perspective now and I hope everyone gets a fair hearing."

"I obviously love the guy and... inevitably, you take their side or you give them the benefit of the doubt and I hope that will maybe happen." Diana's bombshell 1995 television interview, emotional turmoil and the divorce are all set to get an airing, along with Charles' tensions with his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, who died two months ago.

The next series will deal with the death of Diana in a car crash in Paris in 1997, according to reports. The strength of criticism over untrue storylines has forced Netflix to defend both itself and screenwriter Peter Morgan. A disclaimer has been added saying the production is a "fictional dramatization" that is "inspired by real events".

Oscar-winning actor Judi Dench blasted Netflix for "crude sensationalism" after reports of scenes showing Charles lobbying then prime minister John Major to force the abdication of his mother, played this series by Imelda Staunton. Major himself called the storyline a "barrel-load of nonsense". The former Conservative leader is played by Jonny Lee Miller, who said he had learned a new respect for the Tory politician despite their ideological differences. "Really what anyone's trying to do when you're playing whoever you're playing is you're trying to... inhabit someone, you're trying to sort of fall in love with them," said the 49-year-old *Trainspotting* star. "So there's always a fascinating journey, and especially with somebody I think has (been) very misunderstood, actually, and who I respect greatly." — AFP

Shakira, Pique reach child custody deal after split

Colombian music superstar Shakira and Spanish footballer Gerard Pique have reached an agreement over the custody of their two children following their breakup, their representatives said Tuesday. The 45-year-old "Hips don't Lie" songstress plans to move to Miami with the couple's two sons and Pique will have them for 10 days each month plus during school holidays, the player's lawyer, Ramon Tamborero, said.

"It is not that one has won and another has lost, if anyone won it has been the children," he told AFP after the conclusion of the custody negotiations which lasted months. In a surprise move Pique, 35, last week announced he was retiring from football. The Barcelona defender broke down in tears on Saturday during a farewell speech on Saturday at his final game at the club's Camp Nou stadium.

He also kicked a ball around on the pitch with his sons - Milan, nine, and

Sascha, seven. "We have signed an agreement that guarantees the well-being of our children and that it will be ratified in court," Shakira's representative said in a message jointly signed by the singer and Pique. "Our sole objective is to provide them with the greatest security and protection, and we trust that their privacy will be respected," the statement added without providing further details.

Shakira and Pique announced their romantic relationship in 2011 but never married. They met during the filming of the video for her infectious "Waka Waka", the official song of the 2010 World Cup, in which Pique made an appearance.

The couple, who had been living together for years on the outskirts of Barcelona, announced in June that they were separating. Shakira, one of the biggest names in the global music industry, is facing trial in Spain for allegedly defrauding the tax office of 14.5 million euros (\$14.5 million) on income earned between 2012 and 2014. She told *Elle* magazine in September that the combination of her looming tax fraud trial, separation from Pique and her father's illness meant this was "the most difficult, darkest hours of my life". — AFP



In this file photo Barcelona's defender Gerard Pique (left) and his wife Colombian singer Shakira pose with the trophy at the end of the Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) final football match Athletic Club Bilbao vs FC Barcelona at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona. — AFP



In this file photo a customer picks up her California Powerball lottery tickets in Hawthorne, California. — AFP

One winner of record \$2bn US lottery

A single ticket sold in California scooped an eye-watering \$2 billion on Tuesday after a delayed draw in the US lottery. Only one of the millions of tickets sold across the country matched all six numbers in the Powerball draw, California Lottery said. "California Lottery makes its FIRST EVER Billionaire!" the organisation tweeted. "One lucky ticket sold at Joe's Service Center in Altadena matched all 6 numbers in the November 7 #Powerball draw. The final jackpot amount for this draw came to \$2.04 BILLION dollars."

The draw, which was originally supposed to take place on Monday night, was postponed after a participating lottery needed more time to complete security protocols due to high demand for tickets. The winner, who had not been named on Tuesday, can choose to take a lump sum all at once, estimated to be around \$1.4 billion, or the entire amount in annuities over three decades. — AFP

Eager beaver: Dams improve quality of river water hit by climate change

Hotter, drier weather means beaver populations are spreading in the western United States, and their dams are helping to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change on river water quality, according to a new study on Tuesday. The findings—discovered almost by accident—offered a "rare bright spot" in an otherwise bleak landscape of climate change news, the lead author told AFP.

Stanford University scientists and colleagues conducted the research over three years on the East River, a main tributary of the Colorado River in the US state of Colorado. It has long been known that beaver dams can improve the quality of river water by filtering out contami-

Ethiopians mourn 'musical genius' Birra

Artists, politicians and ordinary music fans came together in the Ethiopian capital on Tuesday to pay tribute to legendary Oromo singer Ali Birra, who died at the weekend at the age of 74. A hearse carried his coffin, draped in the Ethiopian flag, into an Addis Ababa park for a memorial ceremony as police officers formed a guard of honor and black-clad mourners looked on. A giant of the Ethiopian and "Ethio-jazz" scene, Birra was also a standard-bearer for the Oromo community, the largest of Ethiopia's some 80 ethnic groupings.



"During his 50-year musical career he has been recognized internationally for his talent and his incredible musical skills," said Mahmoud Ahmed, a star of the golden age of Ethiopian music in the 1960s and 1970s. "The guitar, harmonica, piano, and even the keyboard are just a few instruments Ali mastered over his lifetime," he said in his eulogy at Tuesday's ceremony.

Born on May 4, 1948 in a village near

the city of Dire Dawa in eastern Ethiopia, Birra died in a hospital southeast of Addis Ababa on Sunday. Only a week ago, Birra had one of his legs amputated, Ahmed said. His body was buried on Tuesday afternoon in his hometown, government-affiliated broadcaster Fana Broadcasting Corporate reported. "Through his songs, he promoted unity, perseverance, and culture," Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, himself from the Oromo community, tweeted shortly after Birra's death.

Life continues 'through his art'

Both Ahmed and Birra began their musical careers in the early 1960s during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, playing in the Imperial Guard Orchestra which produced some of the greatest names in Ethiopian music at the time, particularly in jazz. "He was an old man with old folks, a young man with the youngsters, and a child with kids," added Ahmed.

But his songs in the Oromo language and his political stance landed him in prison several times, in an era when Ethiopia's rulers clamped down on any claims of ethnic identity. Birra sang not only for the Oromo people but Ethiopia at large, said Dawit Yifru, president of the Ethiopian Musicians Association, hailing the late singer as a "musical genius".

Birra boasted a vast catalogue of more than 250 songs and sang in seven different languages—Ethiopia's tongues of Oromo, Amharic, Somali and Harari but also English, Arabic and Swedish, Dawit said. "Ali will not die," Dawit told AFP. "His life will continue through his art." — AFP

Born on May 4, 1948 in a village near the city of Dire Dawa in eastern Ethiopia, Birra died in a hospital southeast of Addis Ababa on Sunday. Only a week ago, Birra had one of his legs amputated, Ahmed said. His body was buried on Tuesday afternoon in his hometown, government-affiliated broadcaster Fana Broadcasting Corporate reported. "Through his songs, he promoted unity, perseverance, and culture," Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, himself from the Oromo community, tweeted shortly after Birra's death.

When the beavers' dams raise water levels upstream, water is diverted into surrounding soils and secondary waterways, collectively called a riparian zone. "These zones act like filters, straining out excess nutrients and contaminants before water re-enters the main channel downstream," according to a press release about the study, published in *Nature Communications*.

The same contaminants—potentially harmful to humans, animals or plants in river water—are thus dispersed with little or no negative impact in soils. This is good news in the area where the research was conducted, as the Colorado River provides drinking water and supports livelihoods for some 40 million people, according to the US government. — AFP



In this file photo a beaver enters the water in the forest near Puerto Williams, Chile.

Please don't lick psychedelic toads, warn US park officials

US park officials have asked visitors to stop licking psychedelic toads, warning that anyone seeking a hallucinogenic high from the wart-covered amphibians is more likely to end up seriously ill. The National Park Service posted cautionary messages on social media last week against licking Sonoran Desert toads, a practice long depicted on popular animated television shows including "The Simpsons" and "Family Guy."



"As we say with most things you come across in a national park, whether it be a banana slug, unfamiliar mushroom, or a large toad with glowing eyes in the dead of night, please refrain from licking," said park officials. The toads—among the largest in North America, at nearly seven inches (18 centimeters) long—secrete a potent toxin from their glands which "can make you sick if you handle the frog or get the poison in your mouth," they wrote.

The messages did not indicate how many people have been seeking recreational highs by licking the slimy green creatures, also called Colorado River toads, which live in the southwestern United States and northwest Mexico. To defend themselves from predators, the toads secrete a milky substance containing various toxins, among which is 5-MeO-DMT—a psychoactive compound that triggers hallucinogenic effects.

Smoking extracted 5-MeO-DMT induces a powerful, short psychedelic experience, and has become popular in recent years, including at expensive underground "load ceremonies" in the US, where it is a controlled substance, and in Mexico. Celebrities such as boxing champion Mike Tyson and podcaster Joe Rogan have discussed the use of the substance for therapeutic, recreational, and even spiritual purposes. But the toad's venom also contains other toxic substances which can be fatal when ingested. Scientists have also warned that the growing demand for Sonoran Desert toads' secretions could endanger the species. — AFP

Sports

US livid as basketball star Griner moved to Russian penal colony

Griner loses appeal against a drug conviction

MOSCOW: Russia is moving US basketball star Brittney Griner to a penal colony after she lost an appeal against a drug conviction, her lawyers said Wednesday, drawing a sharp rebuke from the White House. Griner, who has been jailed for nine years for possession of a small quantity of cannabis oil, was transferred out of a detention centre on November 4, her legal team said. She "is now on her way to a penal colony," lawyers Maria Blagovolina and Alexander Boykov said in a statement. "We do not have any information on her exact current location or her final destination," they added.

Russia generally notifies of a prisoner's transfer to a different address by mail, taking up to two weeks, the lawyers said. Griner's case has drawn outrage in the United States, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken seeking a deal with Russia to free her despite soaring tensions over Moscow's offensive in Ukraine. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre reiterated that the United States had put forward a "substantial offer" to Russia to resolve her case.

'Wrongful detention'

"Every minute that Brittney Griner must endure wrongful detention in Russia is a minute too long," Jean-Pierre said. "As the administration continues to work tirelessly to secure her release, the president has directed the administration to prevail on her Russian captors to improve her treatment and the conditions she may be forced to endure in a penal colony." Griner, a two-time Olympic basketball gold medalist and Women's NBA champion, had been in Russia to play for the professional Yekaterinburg team during her off-season from the Phoenix Mercury Women's National Basketball Association side.

She said the cannabis in vape cartridges was to treat pain from her sporting injuries, but Russia does not allow medical marijuana use. Observers have suggested that Griner and another American jailed in Russia, Paul Whelan, a retired US Marine arrested in December 2018 and accused of spying—could be traded for Viktor Bout, a famed Russian arms trafficker serving 25 years in prison on a 2012 conviction.

'Totalitarian system'

Prisoners' rights activist Vladimir Osechkin said



MOSCOW: In this file photo, US' Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) basketball player Brittney Griner holds a picture of her team as she stands inside a defendants' cage before a court hearing in Khimki.— AFP

conditions in penal colonies are much harsher than in detention centers. "It is a more totalitarian system with Gulag uniforms and 100 people per room in barracks," Osechkin, who founded the Gulagu.net rights group, told AFP, warning that prison officials routinely orchestrate conflicts and fights between inmates.

"If the Kremlin decides not to torture the basketball player and creates VIP conditions for her, she will be allowed to eat separately, play sports and keep fit," said Osechkin. "But if a decision is made and the federal prison service receives an order to put pressure on her then of course her life and health will be in danger." Activists say abuse and torture are frequent in Russia's vast network of prisons run by the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN), a successor to the notorious Gulag system of the Stalin era.

Penal colonies are the most common type of prisons and are known for their harsh treatment of inmates,

unsanitary conditions and lack of access to proper healthcare. Prison officials also often limit inmates' contact with lawyers and family. Harassment of prisoners sometimes leads to prison riots. A number of US citizens including Whelan are currently behind bars in Russia. Whelan's brother David regularly describes Paul's life in the IK-17 colony in the central region of Mordovia, saying he has undergone sleep deprivation and that suicides are common in prisons. The treatment of the jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny has also highlighted abuses in prisons, activists say. The 46-year-old has been repeatedly placed in solitary confinement, which his supporters say amounts to torture. Anti-torture project Gulagu.net has drawn attention to what it calls systemic abuse and sexual violence towards prisoners. Last year it released harrowing video footage of a naked man being raped with what appeared to be a broom stick at a prison hospital.— AFP

Formulas. In addition, all attendees and athletes were treated to free 3-month Deliveroo Plus, a membership service that allows members to receive unlimited free delivery on all food, coffee and grocery on orders worth KD 5 or more, at only KD 3,500 per month.

"We are excited to partner with Borgan Bank to make the first edition of the Borgan Bank Padel tournament an event to remember," said Seham Al-Husaini, Deliveroo's General Manager. "Padel is an incredibly popular sport in Kuwait, and we are happy to seize every opportunity to connect with our local community. We are amazed at the level of talent that all the athletes displayed throughout the competition, and we look forward to surprising them and their friends and families with more surprises in the future."

This year's tournament took place at El Padel Academy, a padel courts complex located in one of the most scenic locations in Kuwait.

Deliveroo, Borgan Bank partner in first edition of Padel Tournament

KUWAIT: In keeping with its commitment to actively contribute to the local community and support causes it believes in, Deliveroo partnered with Borgan Bank to participate in its first annual Padel Tournament, which took place last weekend, November 3-5, 2022. The tournament took place at the scenic El Padel Academy outdoor courts on Gulf Road and included a variety of prizes, competitions and activities for spectators, padel lessons for kids, and much more.

Throughout the competition, Deliveroo riders surprised both participating athletes and attendees with healthy refreshments in collaboration with its partner



Arab Badminton Championship

KUWAIT: The Arab Badminton Championship competitions continue on Thursday at Kuwait Olympic Committee courts in Jaber Al-Ahmad area. 120 players of both genders are participating in the age groups of 15, 17, 19 years - representing 12 countries - Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt and Algeria.

Executive committee of the Arab Federation approved the admission of Qatar to the Arab Federation to become member number 19, beside Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya and Djibouti. Assistant Secretary General at KOC, Chairman of Kuwait Federation Ali Al-Merri welcomed the Arab participants to the 'land of friendship and peace' to participate in the Arab Championship. He said Kuwait has become a destination for badminton as it hosted the West Asia Badminton Championship few days earlier.

Australia make flying start at Billie Jean King Cup

GLASGOW: Australia made a strong start to their Billie Jean King Cup Finals campaign as Ajla Tomljanovic and Storm Sanders sealed a 2-1 victory against Slovakia on the opening day of the tournament. Billed as the world cup of women's tennis, the Billie Jean King Cup Finals kicked off on Tuesday with Australia once again contenders for the title at Glasgow's Emirates Arena.

After reaching the semi-finals last year and finishing as runners-up in the competition's previous Fed Cup format in 2019, the Australians brushed aside Slovakia to show they will be in the hunt for the trophy. Alicia Molik's team, who have taken the place of banned 2021 champions Russia, won both singles matches in the Group B tie. Sanders defeated Viktoria Kuzmova 6-4, 6-3, while Tomljanovic beat Anna Karolina Schmiedlova 6-1, 6-2. Slovakia's Kuzmova and Tereza Mihalikova saw off Sanders and Ellen Perez 2-6, 6-3, 10/6 in the dead rubber doubles.

The 12-team event comprises four groups of three countries, with each winner advancing to the semi-finals. Each group tie consists of two singles

matches and one doubles. Australia can book their place in the semi-finals with a victory in their next tie against Belgium on Thursday. "We have such a good team spirit. In our country we love sport, we love camaraderie and we love team events. I think a



Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic

lot of our players thrive in this environment," Tomljanovic said.

Tomljanovic's dominant display was in keeping with an impressive year that saw her reach two Grand Slam quarter-finals and climb to a career-high 33rd in the WTA rankings. The Australian number one, who has now won 22 of 31 matches, said: "If I have to put it to one thing, it's just where my head is at in life. I'm happy. Tennis is fun again." Britain's hopes of causing an upset in their Group C opener against Kazakhstan were dashed in a 2-1 defeat.

Britain were given a place as hosts but without injured former US Open champion Emma Raducanu, they were outgunned by Kazakhstan. Katie Boulter's 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 loss to Yulia Putintseva was followed by Harriet Dart's 6-1, 6-4 loss to reigning Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina. In the doubles, Britain's Alicia Barnett and Olivia Nicholls produced an impressive performance to defeat Rybakina and Anna Danilina 7-5, 6-3.

Britain could still qualify with victory over Spain on Thursday but that will be a dead rubber if Kazakhstan win their match against the Spaniards on Wednesday. The Kazakhs claimed the noisiest supporters of the day, with their band of followers far louder than the sparse British crowd. "I just appreciate having anyone supporting me right now. It would be nice to see a little bit more rowdy crowd out there for sure," Boulter said of the modest attendance.— AFP

News in brief

Police raid rugby WCup HQ

PARIS: Organizers of the 2023 Rugby World Cup in France said police raided their offices Wednesday as part of a legal probe into the management of the competition under former chief executive Claude Atcher. Atcher was sacked last month after an internal investigation reported "alarming managerial practices" amid allegations of bullying and harassment from staff. The national financial crimes prosecutor's office confirmed Wednesday for the first time that it had opened an investigation into possible favoritism, corruption and influence-peddling. The probe followed a referral from auditors at the finance and sports ministries, the prosecutor's office said in a statement that confirmed raids were underway at different locations. France's L'Equipe newspaper said investigators were looking into the misuse of personal expenses, "certain contracts in the past and also alleged irregularities linked to the ticketing system for the 2023 World Cup."

Cricketer accused of assault

SYDNEY: Sri Lankan cricketer Danushka Gunathilaka is accused of sexually assaulting a woman in Australia multiple times and choking her so hard she required a brain scan to check for injury, local media reported Wednesday, citing unsealed court documents. The 31-year-old, who was arrested Sunday just hours after his country lost to England in the Twenty20 World Cup, has been charged with four counts of sexual assault and denied bail. Magistrate Robert Williams had agreed to suppress details of the allegations and other elements of the case, issuing a wide-ranging gag order. But the suppression order was successfully challenged by Australian media, which have now reported graphic details of the alleged assault against the unnamed woman. Court documents cited by public broadcaster ABC say the pair connected on a dating app before meeting at a popular bar near Sydney's Opera House on November 2.

Fans face 'lager shampoo'

LONDON: Fans at Premier League matches could be drenched with a "lager shampoo" if the ban of drinking alcohol in stands is lifted, according to football policing chief Mark Roberts. Supporters are currently prohibited from consuming alcohol within sight of the pitch during English top-flight matches. There are calls to overturn the law which has been in place since the worst days of football hooliganism in England in 1985. But Roberts said claims that removing the ban, which has been suggested as a remedy for fans turning up late to stadiums after drinking in local pubs, would actually cause more problems. The chief constable said supporters in stadiums could be subjected to scenes similar to those witnessed in BOXPARK, a venue where fans without tickets for matches can gather. Drinks are routinely thrown wildly in the air by fans in BOX-PARK when a goal is scored. "I don't accept the argument (to lift the ban) at all," Roberts said while giving evidence at a Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee hearing on Tuesday.

Benzema misses training

MADRID: France forward Karim Benzema was absent from Real Madrid's training session on Wednesday, hours before Didier Deschamps announces his World Cup squad, an AFP journalist witnessed. Ballon d'Or winner Benzema has missed four games due to a thigh problem with Les Bleus coach Deschamps naming his 26-man list at 1900GMT later on Wednesday. "He has not been able to come back from this little irritation, it is nothing major," Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti told reporters. "He has tried, but it has not been possible," he added. Deschamps, who guided France to the 2018 title, is already without injured midfielders Paul Pogba and N'Golo Kante. Experienced centre-back Raphael Varane will not feature before the World Cup for his club Manchester United due to a thigh problem but has not been ruled out of the competition. Deschamps' side start the defense of their title on November 22 against Australia, before also playing Denmark and Tunisia in Group D.

Ligue 1's Troyes sack coach

PARIS: Bruno Irlès became the sixth Ligue 1 coach to lose his job this season when Troyes announced Tuesday that the 47-year-old had been laid off "as of today". In a short statement on their website Troyes said that Irlès's assistant Claude Robin would take over as caretaker "until further notice". Irlès had only been in place since January when he replaced Laurent Batlles. He was charged with developing young players at Troyes, a club owned by the City Football Group, whose flagship club is Manchester City. But Troyes have struggled since their last win in mid-September and currently stand 13th in Ligue 1. There is added pressure this season as four teams, rather than three will be relegated, as Ligue 1 slims from 20 clubs to 18. Irlès, a former Monaco player, follows Peter Bosz (Lyon), Michel Der Zakarian (Brest), Jean-Marc Furlan (Auxerre), Oscar Garcia (Reims) and Olivier Dall'Oglio (Montpellier) on this season's French managerial sacked list.— From AFP



Group H favorites: Portugal targeting Uruguay revenge

Questions abound for football's record goalscorer

PARIS: Portugal's hopes of challenging for a first World Cup title will likely be heavily dictated by how well they fare in an accessible group where their main rivals are Uruguay, the country that dumped them out in the last 16 four years ago. The recent record for Portugal at the World Cup makes for sorry reading, with just a combined three wins in three appearances since reaching the semi-finals in 2006.

And while they boast of international football's record goalscorer in Cristiano Ronaldo, questions abound as to whether the 37-year-old should still be the team's primary option in attack. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner has started on the bench more often than not for Manchester United this season, and has yet to score in the knockout phase at a World Cup. Ronaldo and coach Fernando Santos were criticised after Portugal missed out on a place in the Nations League finals following a home loss to neighbours Spain in September.

With a wealth of talent and Ronaldo leading the way for almost two decades now, Portugal belong among the world's best teams but have a reputation as underachievers despite winning Euro 2016 and the Nations League three years later. "We definitely are a generation with a lot of talent, but other teams have talent, too," Manchester City defender Ruben Dias told the FIFA website. "You can have the best players in the competition, but if you don't know how to make the most of the strengths of each player, then you won't be able to operate properly as a team. People will see you as just another ordinary team."

Beaten by a Zinedine Zidane penalty in the last four of the 2006 World Cup, Portugal have not gone beyond the last 16 since. They risk facing Brazil at that stage in Qatar if they fail to top Group H above Uruguay, South Korea and Ghana. Uruguay, world champions in 1930 and 1950, turned to Diego Alonso to rescue their faltering qualifying campaign after parting with the long-serving Oscar Tabarez,



and sealed their spot at a fourth consecutive finals with four straight wins.

Uruguay's old guard

They will rely on a blend of youth and experience. The 36-year-old Diego Godin is captain of a side that also includes Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani, all of whom were part of Uruguay's run to the 2010 semi-finals—their best performance since coming fourth in 1970.

Fede Valverde, who has been in outstanding form this season for Real Madrid, and Liverpool's Darwin Nunez are among the new faces set for their World Cup bow. "We have a mix of experienced players and quality. I think Uruguay can have a great World

Cup," said Suarez, whose 2014 tournament ended early after a four-month ban for biting Italy's Giorgio Chiellini. Uruguay overcame South Korea and Ghana to reach the last four in South Africa, where Suarez's infamous handball at the end of extra time prevented the Black Stars from becoming the first African nation to make the semi-finals.

Ghana's chances of emulating that performance 12 years on look remote. Sitting 61st, Otto Addo's side are the lowest ranked of the 32 teams present in Qatar. German-born Addo, who juggles his role as Ghana coach with his job at Borussia Dortmund, has turned to members of the diaspora to bolster a squad that failed to get past the Africa Cup of Nations group stage in January. Athletic Bilbao

striker Inaki Williams, capped once by Spain in 2016, and former England Under-21 international Tariq Lamptey of Brighton have switched allegiances.

South Korea will play at their 10th World Cup in a row, but an injury to captain and talisman Son Heung-min threatens to ruin their campaign. The Tottenham Hotspur forward fractured his eye socket last week and faces a race against time to be fit after undergoing surgery. Son shared last season's Premier League golden boot with Liverpool's Mohamed Salah. "We think it's not the time to talk about Son's status for the World Cup. We are not saying it's impossible, we are just saying now is not the time to discuss," a Korea Football Association (KFA) official said.—AFP



Cristian Volpato

Roma teen star Volpato rejects last-gasp call

SYDNEY: Roma teenager Cristian Volpato rejected numerous 11th-hour attempts to convince him to play for Australia at this month's World Cup, Soccerroos coach Graham Arnold said. The 18-year-old attacking midfielder was born in Sydney but plays for Jose Mourinho's Roma and has featured for Italy's under-19 and under-20 sides. He made his Serie A debut last year and has scored twice in five league appearances, including a goal and assist in a recent 3-1 win at Verona. Arnold, who named his 26-man squad for Qatar on Tuesday, said he had tried to persuade Volpato "right up until 11:00 pm".

"It's not my decision, I spoke to Cristian yesterday three times, before that I'd spoken to him on numerous occasions," he told reporters. "I pretty much told him yesterday that he was in the 26-man squad, he wanted to go away and think about it, wanted to speak to the people around him who help guide his career. "He came back last night and declined the offer to come and play for Australia at the World Cup." Arnold, who included Newcastle United-bound 18-year-old forward Garang Kuol in his squad, said he respected Volpato's decision.

Despite playing for Italy at youth level, Volpato would have been eligible to represent the country of his birth. He appears to be holding out for a call-up to Italy's senior squad. After online criticism from Australia fans, Volpato wrote on Instagram that he had yet to make a decision about his international future. "I am still just at the start of my professional career and I am totally focused on continuing that process at Roma," he wrote.

"Making any sort of rushed decision about my international future at this early stage risks being extremely premature," Mourinho said that Volpato should not be hurried into committing himself to Italy or Australia. "He is currently in a development phase where he needs to focus on building his future and not on certain decisions that perhaps others want to bring forward to speed up a process that should not be sped up," said the Portuguese. Australia are in Group D at the World Cup with France, Denmark and Tunisia. They face the holders France in their opener on November 22.—AFP

CAS clears Ecuador to play at the WCup

LAUSANNE: Ecuador have been given the green light to take their place at the World Cup after the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Tuesday upheld their qualification which had been contested by Chile and Peru over the eligibility of their defender Byron Castillo. CAS ruled that Castillo was eligible to play but sanctioned the Ecuador federation (FEF) for the "falsification" of his passport.

"The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) confirms the eligibility of the player Byron Castillo (Ecuador) but imposes sanctions against the Ecuadorian football federation for a violation of the FIFA regulations," the court said in a statement. The ruling ends several months of a battle started by Chile and Peru to displace Ecuador who finished fourth in South American World Cup qualifying to secure the last automatic regional berth. They have been drawn in Group A alongside hosts Qatar, Netherlands and Senegal. Peru finished fifth and lost a playoff to Australia. Chile ended up seventh, five points behind Ecuador.

"The CAS ruling tells us that we were right, but not as we wanted, we wanted to go to the World Cup," said Chilean football federation president Pablo Milad. The complaint centered around Castillo who played in eight of Ecuador's qualifiers, including both games against Chile. The Chilean football federation (FFCH) said there was evidence that Castillo, who plays for Leon in Mexico, was born in Colombia in July 1995 and not in Playas, Ecuador in November 1998.

The FFCH alleged "use of a falsified birth certificate, false declaration of age and false nationality". The claim was dismissed by FIFA in September, prompting the case to go to CAS who "partially upheld the appeals and set aside the decision of the FIFA Appeal Committee". However the court crucially concluded that Castillo was eligible, regardless of his birthplace, because "Ecuadorian authorities acknowledged Byron Castillo as an Ecuadorian national".

The panel, though, was "comfortably satisfied that the player's date and place of birth were incorrect since the player was actually born in Tumaco, Colombia, on 25 June 1995", leading CAS to hold the FEF "liable for an act of falsification". Ecuador will have to pay a fine of 100,000 Swiss francs (100,650 euros) within 30 days, and the national men's team will begin "with three penalty points" for the qualifying campaign for the 2026 World Cup, co-organized by the United States, Mexico and Canada.—AFP

Suarez-Cavani: Uruguay's star attacking duo

Edinson Cavani and Luis Suarez will play their last World Cup in Qatar



End of an era for Uruguayan duo Suarez, Cavani

MONTEVIDEO: For the last decade and a half, Uruguay's national football team has been led by a formidable attacking duo but now veterans Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani are heading into their final World Cup with retirement edging ever closer. Born just 21 days apart in the northern Salto department, the two 35-year-olds have graced some of Europe's most prestigious clubs while never failing to light up their homeland shores. Their remarkable careers have left them as the two greatest goalscorers in the Celeste national team's history: Suarez has 68 goals in 134 matches with Cavani scoring 58 from 133 games.

For the better part of 15 years they have been pillars of a plucky Uruguay outfit that reached the World Cup semi-finals in South Africa in 2010 before lifting the Copa America the following year. This will be their fourth World Cup and despite their advancing years they remain heroes to their compatriots. They are "the best forward pairing in the history of the Celeste", ESPN journalist Diego Munoz told AFP. "They put their egos aside, always put the team first and strengthened each other. (They were) essential to a generation that gave back the national team and hope to the people."

Once their boots are hung up for good, they will be sorely missed. The attacking duo guaranteed "an important goalscoring potential that the Celeste has rarely had, at least in the last 60 years," said journalist Luis Prats, an author of many books on football history. "Relying on them gave you the confidence that you could even win tight games with few chances. You just had to give them the ball and they finished it. "On top of that they had great understanding: Cavani created many of Suarez's goals and vice versa."

Passing the baton

The Qatar World Cup will bring to an end the transformative era under iconic former coach Oscar Tabarez, who spent 15 years at the helm and brought back glory to a side that had not won the Copa America since 1995 nor reached a World Cup semi-final since 1970. But Cavani says there will be no special emotion attached to this tournament. "For those that live, feel and love football, and more so for those that wear their country's jersey, there is no mystery: it's a World Cup," Cavani told a local radio station. "Whether it's the first or the fifth" makes no difference. "If this doesn't motivate you, we're in trouble."

Neither Suarez nor Cavani are quite the players they once were. Having played for Napoli, Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester United, Cavani is currently at a Valencia side that is a shadow of the team of the early 2000s, when they won two La Liga titles and reached successive Champions League finals. And after Ajax, Liverpool, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid, Suarez stunned the footballing world earlier this year by returning to his first professional club, Nacional.

But Suarez is as competitive and confident as ever. "We have a mix of experienced and quality players—I believe Uruguay can have a great World Cup," he said. Under new coach Diego Alonso, Uruguay are building a new team of talents with Real Madrid's Federico Valverde, Darwin Nunez of Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Rodrigo Bentancur. Even so, there is something unique about the Suarez-Cavani partnership that may never be repeated.

"It's very difficult to find a Suarez-Cavani duo," said Prats. Although new talents have appeared on the horizon, "they still need to complete their development." But Munoz points to the fact that alongside Diego Godin, Suarez and Cavani took over the mantle from Diego Forlan and Diego Lugano when they retired. "The key is to maintain the legacy and to learn to play without them, to modify the power axis towards the midfield and for Valverde-Bentancur to lead the next generation," said Munoz.—AFP

Sports

Gnabry hits hat-trick as Bayern thrash Bremen

Bayern Munich move 4 points clear at top of Bundesliga

WOLFSBURG: Serge Gnabry scored a hat-trick as Bayern Munich moved four points clear at the top of the Bundesliga with a dominant 6-1 win against Werder Bremen on Tuesday. Bayern's win ensured they will finish the midweek round of matches in top spot. The reigning champions are four points above second-placed Freiburg who visit RB Leipzig on Wednesday.

The win initially appeared to be bittersweet for the Bavarians, with Senegal forward Sadio Mane substituted early in the match with an apparent leg injury. Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann said the extent of the injury was unclear. "He copped a knock on his kneecap," he told Sky. "We hope it isn't too bad but we don't know too much yet." With goals from Jamal Musiala and Leon Goretzka alongside two from Gnabry, Bayern led 4-1 after just 28 minutes, before taking their foot off the pedal against an outclassed Bremen.

In the dying stages, Bayern again turned up the heat, with Gnabry scoring his third on 82 minutes and French teenager Mathys Tel adding another with five minutes remaining. "The first half started brilliantly... (It) was very spectacular. There could have been even more goals," said Bayern's Joshua Kimmich. Earlier on Tuesday, goals from defender Micky van de Ven and Germany hopeful Lukas Nmecha helped Wolfsburg end Borussia Dortmund's three-match Bundesliga winning streak with a 2-0 victory.

Dortmund slipped six points behind Bayern in fourth place. Wolfsburg—who are unbeaten in their

last eight games dating back to October 1 — dominated the opening exchanges, taking the lead in the sixth minute when Van de Ven, 21, headed in a corner unmarked at the far post. Dortmund eventually found their feet towards the end of the first half, with defender Niklas Sule hitting the post just before the break.

Dortmund roared out of the blocks in the second period, with teenage striker Youssoufa Moukoko forcing a reflex save from Wolfsburg goalkeeper Koen Casteels. Dortmund midfielder Jude Bellingham fell to the turf in the second half clutching his shoulder and required treatment, but was able to continue and finish the game. With Dortmund pushing forward in injury time, Wolfsburg hit the visitors on the counter, with Nmecha scoring to seal his side's third straight win.

The goal was Nmecha's fourth of the campaign, with the former England youth international taking his final chance to impress Germany coach Hansi Flick ahead of Thursday's squad announcement. The loss was the visitors' fourth defeat from seven away games this season, while for Wolfsburg it was their first win over Dortmund in their last 15 meetings. Stuttgart defender Konstantinos Mavropanos scored a header in the eighth minute of injury time to give his team a 2-1 home win over Hertha Berlin.

Stuttgart have won four of their six matches since caretaker boss Michael Wimmer replaced American coach Pellegrino Matarazzo with the side winless and sitting in the relegation spots. Elsewhere, Bochum won their third home game in a



MUNICH: Bremen's German forward Eren Dinkci (left) and Bayern Munich's Austrian midfielder Marcel Sabitzer vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match on November 8, 2022. — AFP

row, defeating Borussia Moenchengladbach 2-1. Bochum ran out to an early two-goal lead after just 11 minutes through goals from Christopher Antwi-

Adjei and Philipp Hoffmann, before French forward Lassane Plea got one back for Gladbach in the second half. — AFP

Napoli extend Serie A lead; Milan held at Cremonese

NAPLES: Napoli extended their lead at the top of Serie A to eight points on Tuesday after beating Empoli 2-0 to claim their 10th straight league win, before nearest challengers AC Milan drew 0-0 with struggling Cremonese. Hirving Lozano's 69th-minute spot-kick and a neat late finish from Piotr Zielinski ensured hosts Napoli made their way past a resilient Empoli side and moved further ahead of Milan, whose title defence is faltering.

Napoli now have an ominous lead on the rest of the league heading into the final matches of 2022 this weekend, as they hunt their first league title in over three decades. "The road ahead is still long and there are many pitfalls. We need to stay at it and be aware of the importance of the challenges ahead of us," said coach Luciano Spalletti to DAZN. Empoli, who finished with 10 men as Sebastiano Luperto picked up a second booking shortly after Lozano's goal, stay 14th and seven points above the relegation zone.

The Tuscans beat Napoli twice last season and all-but ended their Scudetto challenge in April when they came back from two goals behind to stun Spalletti's side. And on Tuesday they frustrated Napoli, who were without injured wing wizard Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, for large periods of the match. Napoli were awarded their soft penalty after Razvan Marin was judged to have fouled Victor Osimhen, five minutes after the Nigeria striker had headed over the home side's only previous real chance.

"I'd rather not talk about the penalty," Empoli coach Paolo Zanetti said later. "The contact didn't seem that obvious as to be a penalty but the referee saw it that way and there's nothing we can do about it." Luperto's sending off effectively ended Empoli's challenge and Zielinski sent the Stadio Maradona into party mode with two minutes left when he perfectly met Lozano's cross with a first-time strike which opened his league account for the campaign.

Milan's defense falters

Milan can be joined by Lazio and Atalanta on 30 points with wins over Lecce and Monza on Wednesday after a poor night for Stefano Pioli's side at Cremonese. The away side were without suspend-



NAPLES: Napoli's Italian forward Giacomo Raspadori and Empoli's Slovenian defender Peter Stojanovic (right) go for a header during the Italian Serie A football match on November 8, 2022. — AFP

ed stars Olivier Giroud and Theo Hernandez and a clutch of injured players, and that pair's combination of incisiveness and clinical finishing was sorely missed at the Stadio Giovanni Zini. Pioli also started with explosive winger Rafael Leao on the bench as he switched things up against a team nestled just inside the relegation zone after failing to win in the opening 14 games of their first Serie A season since 1996.

Milan created chances, in particular in the first half, but were kept out by an inspired Marco Carnesecchi. Cremonese goalkeeper Carnesecchi made impressive saves from Divock Origi, Malick Thiaw and Junior Messias, while Ante Rebic missed a huge chance to put Milan ahead in the 25th minute when he sent a free header wide. Origi had a goal rightly ruled not given for offside in the 57th minute, and after Leao was eventually brought on by Pioli he was denied the winner 11 minutes later by the outstretched hand of Carnesecchi. Milan couldn't conjure up anything else and let Napoli stretch even further away from the chasing pack. "We could have done more. We played OK in the first half but the second half wasn't good enough," Pioli said to DAZN. "We should have created more, there should have been more movement, we shouldn't have been so sloppy technically. We didn't create the amount of chances we needed to be more dangerous." Udinese's slump in results continued after drawing 1-1 at Spezia, their fifth draw in a six-match winless run which has left them eighth ahead of their trip to Napoli on Saturday. — AFP

Chelsea boss defends misfiring star Sterling

MANCHESTER: Chelsea boss Graham Potter insists Raheem Sterling will overcome his poor form ahead of the World Cup because the England winger has already proved his quality at the highest level. Sterling has struggled since joining Chelsea from Manchester City in the close-season. The 27-year-old has scored just twice since Potter's arrival on September 8 to replace the sacked Thomas Tuchel, with his latest lacklustre display coming in Chelsea's limp 1-0 loss to Arsenal on Sunday.

Despite his prolonged dip, Sterling is still expected to be a key figure for Gareth Southgate's team when the World Cup gets underway in Qatar in two weeks. Potter is confident Sterling's track record will ensure he returns to his best sooner rather than later. "You can tell by his reaction he is honest," Potter said ahead of Chelsea's League Cup third round tie at Manchester City on Wednesday.

"Players go through moments in their career when it isn't so positive and sometimes everything

they touch is gold. "I don't think you can zoom in to the individual. The team is not functioning as I would like. "That has an impact on the individuals and Raheem is an individual within the team. The work for us is to try to improve the team and the structures. "I have no doubts about Raheem's quality and ability. He is a proven top player."

Sterling scored three times for Chelsea before Potter took charge, but his last Premier League goal came against Southampton on August 30. Chelsea have lost their last two league games, their first defeats under Potter, and have not won in four top-flight matches. The Blues' slump has left them languishing 13 points behind leaders Arsenal, with even a top-four finish far from certain as the pressure mounts on former Brighton boss Potter. "It's been a tough period. Lots of things happening, lots of transition, lots of change," Potter said.

"New faces in the dressing room, new faces everywhere. Trying to get it all to gel, settle down and develop a playing style. "We've got a lot of work to do in terms of that. But that's why we came here, to produce a top team." Meanwhile, Potter refused to put a timescale on England right-back Reece James' recovery from a knee injury suffered last month. James has not given up hope of being fit to play some part in the World Cup, and Potter said the defender was "outside today having a little jog". — AFP

Everton humbled as Brentford shocked in League Cup

LONDON: Everton's long wait to win a trophy will not end with the League Cup after Frank Lampard's men were well beaten 4-1 by Bournemouth on Tuesday, as Brentford bowed out on penalties to League Two Gillingham. In the first of two meetings between the clubs in five days, Bournemouth got the better of two much-changed sides as Jamal Lowe, Junior Stanislas, Emiliano Marcondes and Jaidon Anthony struck on the south coast. Demarai Gray briefly gave the Toffees hope when he reduced the arrears to 2-1 early in the second half. But Everton have now won just once in their last seven games with the FA Cup their only hope of ending a 28-year drought without silverware.

Brentford suffered the biggest shock of the night despite taking a third-minute lead through England World Cup hopeful Ivan Toney. The Gills had just one shot on target but made it count when Mikael Mandron headed in an equaliser 15 minutes from time. Mikkel Damsgaard is going to Qatar with Denmark, but he was the only man to miss in a high-quality shootout as the visitors won 6-5 on penalties. Leicester continued their upturn in form with a comfortable 3-0 win over fourth-tier Newport County.

James Justin opened the floodgates just before half-time and Jamie Vardy tripled his tally for the season with a double in the final 20 minutes. Championship leaders Burnley bounced back from their first defeat in 18 games to Sheffield United on Saturday to beat Crawley 3-1 thanks to two goals from Anass Zaroury. MK Dons, Lincoln City and Charlton also progressed to the last 16. Manchester City take on Chelsea in the pick of Wednesday's ties with holders Liverpool, Arsenal and Tottenham also in action. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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CHANGE OF NAME

That I am holder of Passport No. M3187048 issued on 16-11-2014 and valid up to 15-11-2024 issued by RPO Chandigarh, in which my name is mentioned Dharvinder Kumar. That now I have changed my name from Dharvinder Kumar to Dharminder Singh. That in future in all known to me with my new name as Dharminder Singh.

That the facts stated above are true and correct. (C#2438)

I, MOHAMMED ABDUL GAFOOR holder of Passport No. L3852205 does hereby change my name to ABDUL GAFOOR SHAIK for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name SHAIK ABDUL GAFOOR and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. vide affidavit. (C#2439) — 10-11-2022.

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Pakistan power past N Zealand, cruise into T20 World Cup final

Rizwan and Azam slam half centuries



SYDNEY: Pakistan's Mohammad Nawaz (center) celebrates with teammates after his dismissal of New Zealand's Glenn Phillips during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2022 semi-final cricket match between New Zealand and Pakistan on November 9, 2022. — AFP

SYDNEY: Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam slammed half centuries as Pakistan powered past New Zealand by seven wickets and into the Twenty20 World Cup final Wednesday, moving within one win of a second title. They will meet either England or India—who play on Thursday in Adelaide—in the November 13 decider at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Pakistan set the tone at the Sydney Cricket Ground with some razor sharp fielding and disciplined bowling that restricted New Zealand to just 152-4.

In front of 36,443 strongly pro-Pakistan spectators, Rizwan (57) and Azam (53) took apart the Black Caps' renowned bowling attack in a 105-run opening stand, and despite a nervous finish after both fell, they completed a deserved victory with five balls to spare. Pakistan last claimed the title in 2009 at Lord's in England when they beat Sri Lanka

by eight wickets, and it has been a rollercoaster ride in Australia to make another final.

After agonizing last-ball losses to India and Zimbabwe in the group phase, they bounced back to topple the Netherlands and South Africa. Then against the odds they went through when the Proteas were stunned by the Dutch and Pakistan eased past Bangladesh. New Zealand, who topped Group 1, were aiming to make the final for the second consecutive time, but their hunt for a maiden T20 title again fell short. Teams batting first had won five from six games played in Sydney this tournament and when Kane Williamson won the toss he had no hesitation in asking Pakistan to bowl, but it proved to be tough going.

Azam hits form

In an eventful opening over, Finn Allen hit

Shaheen Afridi for four off the first delivery then was given out the next ball lbw. It was overturned on review because of an inside edge only for Afridi to promptly do the same again and this time it was plumb. Devon Conway and Williamson steadied the ship but some fine fielding restricted them in the six-over powerplay, where only two fielders are allowed outside the 30-yard circle. It included the spectacular run out of Conway for 21 by Shadab Khan, who scored a direct hit from mid-off. They suffered another big blow when danger man Glenn Phillips was caught and bowled by Mohammad Nawaz for six.

Daryl Mitchell and Williamson began taking more risks after the 10-over mark with the first six coming in the 13th over. Williamson was undone on 46 by an Afridi yorker after a knock

that yielded only two boundaries before Mitchell, unbeaten on 53, and Jimmy Neesham, who scored 16, added 29 runs in the final three overs. Pakistan skipper Azam, who was desperate for runs after making just 39 in five matches before the semi-final, was dropped first ball by wicket-keeper Conway off Trent Boult in the reply.

But after his nervy start he hammered a four off Boult and partner Rizwan also helped himself to two boundaries in a costly 15-run over for New Zealand. They plundered more boundaries off Tim Southee in another 15-run over, racing to 55-0 from the powerplay. Azam brought up his half-century before New Zealand got a glimmer of hope when he was caught in the deep off Boult and the same bowler then removed Rizwan. But Mohammad Haris (30) and Shan Masood (3 not out) kept their nerve to steer them home. — AFP

Sacrifice, ambition: N Africans chase football dreams

TUNIS: From a Tunisian teen seeking a career in women's football abroad to a Moroccan eyeing the national team, the beautiful game offers opportunity and hope to youth across the Middle East and North Africa. In a video project looking into young people's aspirations in the region, where more than half of the population is under 30, AFP speaks to athletes about what football offers them as the 2022 World Cup in Qatar nears kick-off. The first part of the series focused on artists in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Gaza Strip, the Zionist entity and Iraq.

'Making more sacrifices'

For 17-year-old Tunisian Eya Mejri, a football career is her only goal. "My life today is training. I left school because I wanted to focus on football," she says after a session with her club in the capital Tunis. Her long hair tied back and sporting Neymar socks, Mejri hones her skills on the field with her all-girls team-or in the street with the boys in her working-class neighborhood. She says she always knew what she wanted to do with her life, but hopes for a career away from home. "There's no future in football in Lebanon," she says, adding that country is "at a standstill".

The birthplace of the Arab Spring uprisings more than a decade ago, Tunisia is in the grips of an economic crisis. In five years' time, Mejri wants to be playing with French club Olympique Lyonnais-and to have her family with her. She will be rooting for Tunisia during the World Cup, but her focus remains firmly on her own career. "I'm making more sacrifices to make my dream a reality," she says. "I hope I can go back to school soon."

On a beach under the clear blue Algerian sky, Abdelmajid Kourtel dribbles a football along the sand, weaving through colored markers as the waves roll in. "In the mornings I go to train... in the afternoons, I come back home and see my friends," he says. "My daily life is cool." The 21-year-old striker plays for second-league team Olympique de Medea, based southwest of the capital Algiers.

He too has set his sights set on a career overseas. "If you work hard and stay serious, it's possible to have a future as a footballer in Algeria. But apart from that, if you can go abroad, it's much better," Kourtel says. In Algeria if you are injured, "there are some teams that take care of you, but in general you're on your own", he says. "In Europe, they look after you." Within five years, he aims to be on the national team, who he was disappointed failed to qualify for Qatar 2022. "You have to work. Everything comes through work and hard training," Kourtel says. "The rest is down to God."

'Serve my country'

At 20, Moroccan Mahmoud El Kayssoumi has already made his debut with a top-flight team and is hoping for a bright future in football. "It's very difficult to get to the level of Lionel Messi, but I am very ambitious," says the striker, who has signed with Union Sportive de Tanger. "Why not get to such a level that can make the people of my city and my family proud-make all those people who support us happy?" Wearing his Tanger team's blue strips, he practices his skills at a stadium southwest of the Mediterranean city.

"Moroccan football has evolved a lot," he says, pointing to the national team's qualification for the World Cup in Qatar. "The women's team has made us all proud too," he adds, noting they came runner-up in this year's Women's Africa Cup of Nations, which Morocco hosted. Anxious to prove himself, Kayssoumi says he would like to move to a bigger team in Europe, but his long-term goal is closer to home. "There are opportunities in Morocco," he says. "I would like... to be selected for the Moroccan

Pique sent off at half-time in final Barcelona match

PAMPLONA: Gerard Pique was sent off at half-time of his final match before retirement, seemingly for remonstrating with the referee, but Barcelona fought back to beat Osasuna 2-1 and move five points clear at the top of La Liga on Tuesday. The 35-year-old Pique, who waved goodbye to the Camp Nou last weekend, was incensed by referee Jesus Gil Manzano's decision to show Barca striker Robert Lewandowski a second yellow card just after the half-hour mark.

Pique, who was only named as a substitute by Barca coach Xavi Hernandez, angrily approached Manzano at the break. "I was going to bring him on, yes," said Xavi. "We knew that Andreas (Christensen) was coming back from injury, that he lacked a bit of rhythm. Eric Garcia was feeling pain... So Gerard was left and we thought we'd play him, yes. "But they sent him off at half-time. It was the result of the tension of the moment. We felt injustice, hence Gerard's reaction." Spanish media reported that Pique asked the referee: "But do you realise who you sent off?" It was only the second dismissal of Lewandowski's career, with his second yellow given after an aerial challenge with David Garcia, who had earlier given Osasuna a sixth-minute lead. Osasuna were hoping to climb into third place in La Liga with victory, but were pegged back despite Barca's woes when Pedri levelled early in the second period. Xavi was also booked before the hour mark as tempers

threatened to boil over further. But the Catalan giants had the final say when Brazil winger Raphinha headed home Frenkie de Jong's cross with five minutes to play.

Barcelona are now five points clear of rivals Real Madrid who suffered a shock 3-2 defeat at Rayo Vallecano on Monday. "It was a game that we could have lost, but the team pulled together. I'm very proud of them," added Xavi. Pique, a 2010 World Cup winner with Spain, won four Champions League titles with Barca. The red card was his 11th for Barcelona, equalling Hristo Stoichkov's club record. Earlier on Tuesday, Athletic Bilbao climbed to third with a 3-0 win over Real Valladolid. — AFP



Gerard Pique