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8 Judge lets Musk amend Twitter claims, rejects delaying case



12 Gaza children get tablets to connect with world



16 Chelsea sack Tuchel after poor start to the season



376 candidates to contest 50-seat Assembly as registration closes

34 former lawmakers bidding for re-election • 27 women in fray



KUWAIT: The door for registration for the Sept 29 Assembly elections closed on Wednesday. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Forty-four members of the dissolved National Assembly are among 376 candidates who have filed their nomination papers to contest the Sept 29 snap polls, called after HH the Amir dissolved the Assembly over continued political disputes. At the close of registration of candidates on Wednesday, there are 34 former MPs from previous national assemblies, spearheaded by 87-year-old opposition leader Ahmad Al-Saadoun. Twenty-seven female candidates are in the fray.

The speaker of the Assembly since 2013, Marzouq Al-Ghanem, sprang the biggest surprise of the current elections so far by announcing he will not bid for re-election. In a statement issued late Tuesday, 53-year-old Ghanem said his absence from the Assembly will be "temporary" and that he plans to return with a stronger influence. Ghanem, who played a pivotal role in the country's politics during the past decade, said he will remain involved in the Kuwaiti political scene.

Saadoun, who was speaker for three terms between 1985 and 1999, is the most likely replacement for Ghanem if he wins a seat in the next Assembly. Many leading candidates have already

expressed their total support for Saadoun to become the next speaker. The number of candidates is short by 19 from the 2020 elections. The number is expected to shrink further as some candidates are expected to withdraw. In the previous polls, only 321 candidates actually remained in the race. Withdrawal of candidacy will close on Sept 22, as per the Kuwaiti election law.

Registration of candidates is done in Kuwait on an individual capacity as political parties are barred by the law, although de facto parties of various political affiliations operate openly under groups. Fifty-three candidates, including three women, have registered in the first constituency, 67 candidates including seven women, have filed to run in the second constituency, while 56 hopefuls including nine women are contesting for the 10 seats in the third constituency. As many as 99 candidates, including five women, have registered in the fourth constituency, and 101 hopefuls, including three women, have filed to contest in the fifth constituency.

Kuwait is divided into five electoral districts and each district elects 10 lawmakers. Cabinet ministers become members of the Assembly like elected members, even if they are not elected.

Continued on Page 6

News in brief

Kuwait backs GCC stance on Netflix

KUWAIT: Two Kuwaiti state bodies on Wednesday said they support a demand by Gulf Cooperation Council member countries for US streaming giant Netflix to remove content they deem "offensive" and an affront to Islamic social values. Kuwait will "closely monitor" how compliant Netflix will be with the GCC request, according to a joint statement by the Information Ministry and the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority. Any content seen as "inappropriate" will be strictly banned, the statement warned, saying Netflix risks facing legal action if the demand by Gulf Arab countries is not met. — KUNA

EU seeks closer ties with Qatar

DOHA: The European Union opened an office in Qatar on Wednesday in a sign of the Gulf state's growing influence in solving the international energy crisis. EU Council President Charles Michel met Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and other top officials in Doha. Michel said his visit was "an important signal of our political will to strengthen ties with Qatar", as he opened the EU mission. The EU wants closer ties on "the energy sector, economic development, security challenges", he told reporters. Qatar is one of the world's top suppliers of liquefied natural gas and growing requests have been made by Germany and other European nations. — AFP

Qatar reopens Doha airport

DOHA: Qatar will reopen the mothballed Doha International Airport next week, airlines said Wednesday, ahead of the 2022 World Cup that is expected to draw more than a million visitors. The Doha airport has been in semi-retirement since it was replaced in 2014 by the nearby Hamad International Airport, which has since become a major hub in parallel with the growth of flag carrier Qatar Airways. Kuwait's Jazeera Airways, the UAE's flydubai, Oman's SalamAir and Turkey's Pegasus Airlines have begun selling tickets to Doha airport from Sept 15. Jazeera Airways said on its website that from next Thursday "all of our regular Doha flights will be temporarily moved to Doha International Airport". — AFP

Albania cuts ties with Iran over 'cyberattack'

TIRANA: Albania broke diplomatic ties with Iran on Wednesday over an alleged cyberattack against the government this summer, as Washington vowed to hold Tehran accountable for targeting its NATO ally. Albania and Iran have been bitter foes for years, stemming from Tirana's hosting of the Iranian opposition group the

People's Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK) on its soil. Prime Minister Edi Rama on Wednesday accused Iran of directing a cyberattack against Albanian institutions on July 15 in a bid to "paralyze public services and hack data and electronic communications from the government systems".

It was the first time Tirana spoke about the alleged attack, and Rama said his country cut ties with Iran over it. "The Council of Ministers has decided on the severance of diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran with immediate effect," said Rama. "The said attack failed its purpose. Damages may be considered minimal compared to the goals of the aggressor. All systems came back fully operational and there was no irre-

versible wiping of data."

The prime minister went on to say that Iranian diplomats and embassy staff had 24 hours to leave the country. Following the announcement, Washington lambasted Iran for the alleged cyberattack, vowing to provide support to its ally in the Balkans. "The United States strongly condemns Iran's cyberattack against our NATO ally, Albania," National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said in a statement. "The United States will take further action to hold Iran accountable for actions that threaten the security of a US ally and set a troubling precedent for cyberspace," Watson added.

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Gandhi channels namesake in 'long march'

SRIPERUMBUDUR, India: Emulating Indian independence hero Mahatma Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday began his "long march" seeking to halt the seemingly inexorable slow decline of his once-mighty Congress party. The Grand Old Party, which governed for decades after India's 1947 independence from Britain, is a shadow of its former self, discredited and crushed under the electoral juggernaut of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The BJP thrashed Congress at the last two elections, with Modi deriding Gandhi - descended not from the Mahatma but from India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru - as an out-of-touch pampered princeling and playboy. Before setting off on the trek Gandhi prayed at a monument in Sriperumbudur in the southern state of Tamil Nadu where in 1991 his father Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated-like his grandmother Indira seven years earlier. "I lost my father to the politics of hate and division. I will not lose my beloved country to it too," Gandhi, 52, said on Twitter. He then headed to the southernmost tip of India, before traversing the nation, covering 3,500 km across 150 days and ending in Kashmir - although it was unclear if he will actually walk all the way.

Continued on Page 6



SRIPERUMBUDUR, India: Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi pays tribute at his father, slain former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi's assassination memorial on Sept 7, 2022, before starting his party's Kanyakumari to Kashmir rally. — AFP

Ancient skeleton reveals surgery 31,000 years ago

TOKYO: A skeleton discovered in a remote corner of Borneo rewrites the history of ancient medicine and proves amputation surgery was successfully carried out about 31,000 years ago, scientists said Wednesday. Previously, the earliest known amputation involved a 7,000-year-old skeleton found in France, and experts believed such operations only emerged in settled agricultural societies.

The finding also suggests that Stone Age hunter-gatherers living in what is now Indonesia's East Kalimantan province had sophisticated medical knowledge of anatomy and wound treatment. "It rewrites our understanding of the development of this medical knowledge," said Tim Maloney, a research fellow at Australia's Griffith University, who led the work.

The skeleton was uncovered in 2020 in the imposing Liang Tebo cave known for its wall paintings dating back 40,000 years. Surrounded by bats, terns and swiftlets, and interrupted by the occasional scorpion, scientists painstakingly removed sediment to reveal an astoundingly well-preserved skeleton. It was missing just one notable feature: Its left ankle and foot.

The base of the remaining leg bone had a surpris-

ing shape, with knobby regrowth over an apparently clean break, strongly indicating that the ankle and foot were removed deliberately. "It's very neat and oblique, you can actually see the surface and shape of the incision through the bone," Maloney told a press briefing. Other explanations, like an animal attack, crushing injury, or fall, would have created bone fractures and healing different from those seen in the skeleton's leg. A tooth and surrounding sediment showed the skeleton is at least 31,000 years old and belongs to a person who died at around 20 years old.

Despite the incredible trauma of amputation, they appear to have survived six to nine years after the operation, based on the regrowth on the leg bone, and suffered no major post-operative infection.

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Local

Schools blame staff shortages on frozen fees

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: While the Ministry of Education has announced that school fees for the current academic year are fixed and that there cannot be any increases, there have been concerns that private schools are suffering from a severe shortage of staff. Kuwait Times spoke with Noura Al-Ghanem, President of the Private Schools Union, to discuss the effect of this shortage on the educational system, who highlighted the importance of raising the tuition fees to upgrade the level of private education in Kuwait.

"Private schools in Kuwait are suffering from a shortage of employees, mostly support workers, due to administrative decisions that are not issued by responsible government institutions," she said. "We have another problem in the private school sector. When teachers resign at the beginning of the academic year, it is difficult to replace them. To avoid this problem, we need quick decisions to attract new teachers, in addition to reducing the documentary cycle for recruiting to meet the needs of schools," Ghanem said, adding that transfers are normal in any educational system in the world.

"The documentary cycle for hiring workers, whether from Kuwait or abroad, now takes more

time than before and has become longer and slower, especially after the pandemic and closures. Therefore, the situation has become harder, and it is not easy to bring in workers like before," she said. "Teachers' salaries in Kuwait are much lower than in other GCC countries. This issue cannot be resolved in Kuwait unless we raise school fees, especially since the last hike was almost six years ago. At the same time, we are affected by global inflation, and all prices have increased except the fees of private schools in Kuwait," said, Al-Ghanem.

"If we do not provide teachers a comfortable environment, and other countries provide them with better benefits and higher wages, nothing will force them to stay in our schools. If we cannot raise school fees to pay higher wages to teachers, we will not be able to provide our schools with highly qualified teachers," she argued.

Ghanem pointed out that a decision to cut fees that was taken in 2020 during the pandemic - 25 percent for private English schools and 40 percent for private Arabic schools, was a random and improperly thought-out decision that caused huge damage to private schools due to mass dismissals and resignations. "We need to understand that qualified teachers are like hard currency. It is a global issue - the US is also suffering to find



teachers for their schools, as well as European countries, and we are a part of this global situation. So, if we do not provide teachers with bene-

fits to stay, other countries will attract them with better opportunities," she warned.



RIYADH: Arab leaders at the GCC Foreign Ministers Council. — KUNA photos

Kuwait FM leads delegation to GCC Ministerial Meeting

RIYADH: Foreign Minister Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, led the Kuwaiti delegation to the 153rd session of the GCC Foreign Ministers Council, held at the GCC Secretariat in Riyadh. The agenda of the meeting was to discuss the latest developments on regionally and internationally, with a special emphasis being placed on ways to strengthen the GCC presence in various fields. —KUNA



RIYADH: Dr. Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

Gulf Health Council (GHC) holds executive meeting

RIYADH: The GHC has conducted its 95th meeting in Riyadh, initiated by Sulaiman Al-Dukhayil, the head of the GHC, with Kuwait being represented by Dr Abdullah Al-Bader and Dr Buthaina Al-Mudhaf.

The meeting discussed issues related to improving the level of health services in the Gulf Cooperation Council, which has always been a priority for the council. Strategic plans and programs of the council were also discussed, as well as the role of current and future awareness campaigns which the council carries out, through campaigns such as the ones aimed at drug pre-



Sulaiman Al-Dukhayil

Dr Buthaina Al-Mudhaf

vention and providing assistance to the elderly.

The representatives at the council were - Dr Eisa Al-Mansour and Nasser Al-Budoor from the UAE, Dr Mariam Al-Hajeri, Naif Al-Jashaam from Saudi Arabia who headed the discussion, Dr Saeed Al-Lumaki from Oman and Dr Muhammad Al-Thani from Qatar. — KUNA

Malaysia International Halal Showcase kicks off

KUALA LUMPUR: The 18th Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) commenced with the participation of nearly 400 companies from around the world and seven Kuwaiti companies at the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) pavilion.

Hala Badra, Business Development Manager at Kuwaiti Danish Dairy Company (KDD) said, "PAI is always working to create a positive atmosphere with the participation of Kuwaiti companies and factories abroad, within a pavilion that displays all Kuwaiti products." She also added that KDD's contribution in MIHAS is a good place to understand the opportunities available in the Malaysian market, its challenges and conditions, including the Malaysian experience in the halal industry and its requirements.

"Kuwait's pavilion, with an area of 234 square meters, is characterized by its classic design and is considered one of the largest pavilions in the exhibition", she said, underlining how crucial it is "to participate in such exhibitions and attend global events to develop brands and provide a platform for their marketing." The Kuwaiti companies participating in MIHAS are KDD, Al-Seedawi Sweets

Factories Company, Al Ahli Group Company, Jana Dates Company, Mujezat Al-Shifa Company, Kuwait Packing Materials Manufacturing Company, and Organic Honey factory.

Meanwhile, the CEO of Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE), Mohd. Mustafa welcomed all the countries participating in the exhibition, stating that the exhibition was a global platform for creating communication networks between companies and factories in the halal industry and discussing mutual ways of cooperation. "This year's exhibition will present several digital tools to assist partners and participants, and help Malaysian exporters reach target markets around the world," he said.

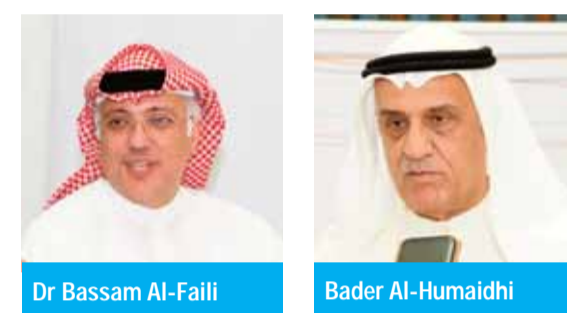
The organization of MIHAS comes this year as a continuation of the Malaysian government's plan to develop the halal industry, he said, adding that he hoped that "the industry would contribute to the national economy with exports amounting to 56 billion Malaysian ringgit (USD 13 billion) by 2025. MIHAS will be organized this year from September 7-10, and is an important regional event organized annually by MATRADE of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. — KUNA

Sabah Al Ahmad Center honors engineers for new patents

KUWAIT: Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) honored four engineers from Equate Petrochemical Company for obtaining a patent from the US Patent Office, for their respective inventions. The engineers were lauded for creating a mobile maintenance robot, to check the efficiency and safety of indoor spaces, with the aim of raising the levels of indoor safety and their maintenance quality. The robot is expected to reach higher altitudes and smaller, confined sites during routine inspection and maintenance operations without any human intervention.

Bader Al-Humaidhi, Chairman of Board of Directors at SACGC, said that the average cost of a single invention, up to the stage of obtaining a patent is USD 25,000, provided by the Center to support Kuwait's young inventors and creators. "The winners were appreciated to encourage inventors and young Kuwaiti creators to provide innovations that were more beneficial to humanity and for Kuwait to achieve a better position in the Global Innovation Indicators list." He also praised the efforts made by Equate to obtain the patent that not only provided assistance for Kuwait's factories, but was also used by the Dow factories in the United States to help with the company's maintenance.

On his part, Deputy Director Manager at Equate for Technical Services, Dr Salman Al-Ajmi, said, "This patent is the third of its kind obtained by the company and we were successful in registering the patent, which was developed by a team of engineers in cooperation with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) and the Sabah Al Ahmad Center for



Dr Bassam Al-Faili

Bader Al-Humaidhi

Giftedness and Creativity."

Al-Ajmi also explained that the invention demonstrates the company's firm commitment to innovation and its continuous endeavors to enhance the technical environment. "It provides assurance of safety and efficiency standards that are adhered to in all aspects of the tasks provided" adding that "the invention is a qualitative and important leap in the use of advanced and effective technologies to support advanced maintenance." Al-Ajmi stressed that EQUATE's achievements, were in line with the vision of New Kuwait 2035, as part of its endeavors to contribute to the manufacturing industry, through innovations with the ability to play an operational role in pushing the industry forward. In turn, the Commissioned Director of SACGC, Dr. Bassam Al-Faili added, "We celebrate today a special achievement after registering a patent for a project that concerns the oil sector". She also indicated that "this achievement is the result of close cooperation between the center and EQUATE through the development of ideas, the transformation of these ideas into prototypes to prove their feasibility and effectiveness, which leads to obtaining a patent and finally turning them into a commercial product."

Since its establishment, the Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness has obtained 495 patents, of which 107 inventions have been turned into commercial products.



KUWAIT: Engineers honored for creating a mobile maintenance robot.



KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia Int'l Halal Showcase kicks off with 7 Kuwaiti firms participating. — KUNA

Local

New announcements for schools and nurseries

KUWAIT: The MoE has announced the opening of new schools in different areas across Kuwait. Jassem Al-Saffar, Maintenance Supervisor at the Engineering Affairs department in Farwaniya, has announced the opening of twenty schools across all levels in West Abdullah Mubarak, Farwaniya, all equipped with the latest technology in the field.

"Seven schools have been planned — one high school for boys, two nurseries, two middle school and two elementary schools, designed with

advanced technological facilities including solar panels which saves 60-80 percent of electrical power consumption," he added.

"Every school has its theater, a management department and gymnasiums, along with thirty classes for elementary schools, twenty-four for middle schools and thirty for high schools including other rooms such as laboratories," he said.

Meanwhile, Fahad Al-Shuraian, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Minister of Social Affairs, has made announcements about a number

of regulations related to nurseries including the issuance of licenses, role of nurseries and the activities that they are allowed to do.

The executive list includes stipulations that the licensee has to follow including the cancellation or renewal of the nursery as well as the facilities that the kindergarten must have, such as building type or area it is located in.

Moreover, the list also specifies rules to be followed in accepting children in the kindergarten and the formation of a supervisory role for the

school and the system of supervision and inspections in the role of private kindergartens.

The regulations for nurseries include — maximum fee of KD 1,800 per child a year, maximum KD 200 monthly payment per child, license applicants must be Kuwaiti with a degree (graduate or diploma), the prohibition of male workers in managerial and supervisory positions and a minimum of Bachelor's degree for the manager of the nursery or a five-year experience in the field with an educational diploma.

Municipality to give allowances to inspectors

KUWAIT: Dr Rana Al-Fares, Minister of Municipality, contacted the civil service commission to give danger and pollution allowance for hygiene

inspectors and to those officials involved in the handling of pollution, noise, garbage and violations.

She has also requested that the inspectors responsible for judicial arrests and those responsible to issue construction violations be given a similar allowance.

Meanwhile, the municipality has asked those who have applied for the vacancies of lawyers at the legal department to visit the online site of the municipality and confirm the status of their applications and also choose a date for their examination by Kuwait University.

Cabinet asks for government expatriate employees' list

KUWAIT: The Cabinet has asked for an official list of all expatriate workers in the government, their qualifications and salaries, after two previous reports prepared by the audit bureau and the financial panels showed the illegal employment of expatriates in the government sectors, where they were given high salaries and employed in positions allotted for citizens.

In an exclusive interview to Kuwait Times, official sources said that, the reports, which were verified by the Civil Service Commission, also spoke of oth-

er observations that were not in line with the nationalization processes outlined to them or with the government's request to Kuwaitize all government jobs within 5 years, especially among independent government sectors.

"The government has assigned a team to immediately review the expatriate employees' list and to ensure that their academic qualifications and salary certificates have been verified by the Ministry of Higher Education, to ascertain their suitability for the job," added the sources.

"Instructions include that any person found in violation of the employment regulations will be sacked and the persons involved in their employment will be held responsible and legally prosecuted, even if they resign or are retired, as what they have done will be considered as a waste of public funds and in violation of the regulations put in place by the Cabinet."



KUWAIT: Health minister with doctors at the meeting.

Health minister meets doctors, discusses parity issues

KUWAIT: Dr Khaled Al-Saeed, Health Minister and Undersecretary, Dr Mustafa Redha, met with several doctors to address their demands regarding the equivalency of the board and its parity with a Postgraduate degree in their respective fields, as there were several doctors who were negatively affected and wished to see a decision taken in this regard. The minister responded by saying that the issue was discussed at the respective technical committees and that there were plans to approve the equivalency based on a further study and recommendations.



KUWAIT: Municipal inspectors from various branches of Kuwait Municipality and across different governorates, held a protest at the Municipality headquarters, over a decision to transfer them to branches in other governorates. Abdullah Ukash, Manager of the municipality minister's office, met the inspectors and noted their requests to discuss with Minister Rana Al-Fares.

Customs seize illegal substances

KUWAIT: The customs at the Kuwait airport has confiscated from different smugglers a variety of illegal substances including marijuana, Tramadol, Hashish and intoxicating pills.

A statement released by the Customs department

said that a variety of drugs had been found with passengers coming from abroad with - two expatriates being arrested with drugs, an Arab national caught with Hashish and Tramadol, an Asian national found with illegal pills and marijuana and another Asian national caught with five pieces of Hashish hid at the bottom of the bag he was carrying.

The customs has proceeded with legal formalities and transferred the arrested travelers along with their belongings to the necessary departments.



KUWAIT: Drugs seized by the customs department at the airport.

On the occasion of the



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News in brief

Foreign Minister congratulates UK's
Commonwealth Secretary of State

KUWAIT: Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Kuwait's Foreign Minister, tweeted his compliments to James Cleverly, on being appointed as the new Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of the United Kingdom.

Judicial members to be rewarded
for election participation

KUWAIT: Jamal Al-Jalaawy, Minister of Justice has announced plans to distribute rewards for members of the justice department, in the upcoming election. "The Civil Service Commission has to formally accept the award distribution after which managerial and financial affairs sectors will be asked to finalize the process," Al-Jalaawy added. He also appreciated the swift completion of the initiative by the justice authority and other employees of the Ministry of Justice.

Ministry of Social Affairs
plans reshuffle

KUWAIT: Fahad Al-Shurayan, Minister of Social Affairs, announced plans to alternate or end the services of some of the undersecretaries in the ministry. Sources revealed that the decision is expected to be formally announced within the next few days and before the national assembly elections. "The government has previously asked ministries to finish the recruitment of all undersecretaries and their assistants before the election so that they are prepared, for the parliament committee which will be discussing new laws and projects," sources added.

Sports commission
head resigns

KUWAIT: Dr Humoud Fulaiteh, Head of the sports commission, Ministry of Information and Youth Affairs, has sent in his resignation letter to the minister, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi. His resignation comes in days after an announcement to dissolve the current commission and in the wake of Cabinet reforms.

Finance minister forms
tourism department council

KUWAIT: Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid, Minister of Finance, has announced plans to form a department to manage tourism projects, to be headed by Mohammad Al-Saqaf. The tourism project company, is a government institution which oversees all aspects of tourism and entertainment in Kuwait. The company, which was formed in 1976, works with many different sectors including public commissions and global companies to market tourism and entertainment in Kuwait. The team will be responsible in organizing entertainment, sporting and social events and aims to develop tourism projects in order to support and host events in the future.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Early morning fog envelops Kuwait City. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Commerce ministry assigns firms for product verification



KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry with members of the Gulf Accreditation Centre. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Fahad Al-Shuraian, Minister of Commerce and Industry, announced that the public authority for industry has admitted six companies from the private sector to support the government's plans for the supervision and inspection of products in markets and at border ports.

"The quality of the products that come into the market rest on a proper inspection and verification process, as it brings in consumer trust and support within the industry, he said. "It also paves the way for labs and inspectors to provide certificates to offer their services and reduces the monopoly of the government services, opening doors to the private sector which has many technological advancements to its credit." While distributing certificates to these companies, Al-Shuraian explained that "verification is the process which allows for proper product and service quality to be recognized, as carried out in some countries, to verify the quality of education and health services in order to



Fahad Al-Shuraian



Engr. Mohammad Al-Adwani

enhance trust in their services."

Al-Shuraian also added that "international trade recognizes the process of verification and proper inspection even in sectors such as the design industry, rating local inspection sides, in order to give

them a certificate of trust and to standardize products to match global standards."

"In cooperation with the Gulf Verification Center, we have also placed advertisements in daily newspapers last October to invite verification and certification bids, which were reviewed, in order to ensure that they meet the stipulations of the program."

On his side, Mohammad Al-Adwani, General Manager of the commission of industry has added, "Applications were received from local and international participants and their documents and work verified to enable them to work in Kuwait." "These companies have also been verified by more than 120 countries in the world, therefore, any product that has been imported into Kuwait has also been officially inspected in the laboratories of these countries." He also said that the application 'Tabeq' has been authorized by the commission to allow importers to provide their documents online and be granted permission to work on the same day itself.



KUWAIT: Kits being prepared by KRCS staff. —KUNA photos

KRCS provides school kits

KUWAIT: KRCS distributed school kits to poor and low-income families, in an initiative that is aimed at supporting school-going children in the new academic year.

"As a society, we need to be committed to the cause of easing the financial burden of such families," said Khaled Al-Zaid, KRCS Public Relations and Media Director General. He also praised contributions by donors, individuals and private establishments, to help the society make the humanitarian initiative. The KRCS also covers the school fees for low-income families.



Children receive school kits.



Ushayrij to become ship scrapyard

KUWAIT: Plans are underway to transform Kuwait Bay's Ushayrij into a ship scrapyard, to store maintenance parts, owing to its close proximity to workshops nearby. The area was previously home to a rich and diverse marine life, with huge boulders often taken away from the area by people to build homes.



Thousands told to flee California wildfire; 2 killed

Hong Kong court convicts 5 of sedition over children's books

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SICHUAN: Rescuers walk past uprooted trees from a landslide as they head to an earthquake-affected area following a 6.6-magnitude earthquake that struck Shimian county, Ya'an city, in China's southwestern Sichuan province. — AFP

China's quake death toll hits 74

Thousands evacuated as heavy rains threaten to cause more landslides

BEIJING: The death toll from a strong earthquake that struck southwest China has risen to 74, state media reported Wednesday, as thousands were evacuated into temporary shelters and heavy rains threatened to cause more landslides. The magnitude 6.6 quake hit about 43 kilometers southeast of the city of Kangding in Sichuan province at a depth of 10 kilometers on Monday, according to the US Geological Survey.

The state-run People's Daily said that 34 people died in Sichuan's Ya'an city, while 40 deaths were reported in neighboring Ganzi prefecture. More than 21,000 people have been evacuated from areas prone to landslides or building collapse,

state broadcaster CCTV said. Rescuers are still scouring remote villages in the country's mountainous southwest in a race to find survivors of the earthquake, with dozens of people believed stranded or missing.

"My head was stuck between the two columns, and my legs were sandwiched between the tables," one woman who was trapped for nearly five hours under a collapsed hotel in the town of Moxi, one of the worst-affected areas, told state-run Red Star News. "I could only lie in one position, resigned to my fate. I don't know who saved me," she added, saying she had worried for her children and whether their school building had collapsed. "I

could only think about whether the children were crying for their mother."

Dramatic footage aired by state broadcaster CCTV showed kindergarten teachers waking up napping children and rushing them out when the quake hit. The quake also rocked buildings in the provincial capital of Chengdu—where millions are confined to their homes under a strict COVID-19 lockdown—and in the nearby megacity of Chongqing, residents told AFP. At least 13 aftershocks of magnitude 3.0 and above had been detected as of 7 am local time (2300 GMT) on Tuesday, the China Earthquake Networks Center said.

The provincial grid operator yesterday said power had been restored to over 22,000 households and that 12 emergency shelters in Ya'an were connected to a temporary power supply after the quake knocked out electricity across swathes of countryside. Beijing's cabinet on Monday said it had dispatched a special team to lead the efforts, with CCTV reporting more than 6,500 people had been sent as part of the emergency rescue response. But the China Meteorological Administration warned that quake-stricken areas would experience "significant rainfall" until Thursday and that landslides could hamper rescue work. — AFP

32 die in Vietnam karaoke bar fire

HANOI: The death toll from a fire that tore through a karaoke bar in southern Vietnam has risen to 32, state media said Wednesday. The blaze engulfed the second floor of the building on Tuesday night, trapping customers and staff as dense smoke filled the staircase and blocked the emergency exit, reports said.

Many crowded onto a balcony to escape the flames, which grew quickly as they caught the wooden interior, while others were forced to jump from the building, state media added. Photos showed plumes of smoke billowing out of the bar located in a crowded residential neighborhood in Thuan An city, north of commercial hub Ho Chi Minh City—as firefighters on cranes tried to extinguish the blaze. Cong An Nhan Dan newspaper, the official mouthpiece of the Public Security Ministry, said the death toll from the karaoke fire had risen to 32, with 17 men and 15 women killed.

Mai Hung Dung, a top official with the ruling Communist Party in Binh Duong province where the bar is located, earlier put the death toll at 23, with 11 injured. He told AFP officials were still searching for more victims. State media reported that eight people were found dead in the toilet. The initial cause of the fire was said to be an electrical short circuit, according to a report by Binh Duong authorities cited by state media.

Witness Nguyen Sang, who lives near the



BINH DUONG: Firefighters are seen at the scene of a deadly fire that engulfed a karaoke bar in Binh Duong province, north of Ho Chi Minh City. —AFP

karaoke bar, told the VnExpress news site that when fire trucks arrived at the scene a receptionist said there were 40 people stuck inside. "Many people ran outside through the main entrance, but many others could not stand the heat and they jumped down, breaking their hands and legs," Sang said. Rescue workers searched through the night for anyone trapped in the 30-room bar, according to state media. The karaoke facility's fire prevention regulations had been checked prior to the blaze, police told state media.

In what was previously Vietnam's deadliest fire, 13 people died in a 2018 blaze in an apartment complex in Ho Chi Minh City. In 2016, a fire at a karaoke facility in the capital Hanoi left 13 people dead, prompting a country-wide assessment of fire prevention measures at bars and clubs. Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh on Wednesday ordered a further inspection of high-risk venues, especially karaoke bars. Last month, three firefighters died after trying to extinguish a fire at another karaoke bar in Hanoi. —AFP

Heatwaves, wildfires to worsen pollution

GENEVA: More frequent and intense heatwaves and wildfires driven by climate change are expected to worsen the quality of the air we breathe, harming human health and ecosystems, the UN warned Wednesday. A new report from the UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO) cautioned that the interaction between pollution and climate change would impact hundreds of millions of people over the coming century, and urged action to rein in the harm.

The WMO's annual Air Quality and Climate Bulletin examined the impacts of large wildfires across Siberia and western North America in 2021, finding that they produced widespread increases in health hazards, with concentrations in eastern Siberia reaching "levels not observed before".

Tiny particles with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometres (PM2.5) are considered particularly harmful since they can penetrate deep into the lungs or cardiovascular system. "As the globe warms, wildfires and associated air pollution are expected to increase, even under a low emissions scenario," WMO chief Petteri Taalas said in a statement. "In addition to human health impacts, this will also affect ecosystems as air pollutants settle from the atmosphere to Earth's surface."

'Foretaste of the future'

At the global scale, there has been a reduction over the past two decades in the total burned area, as a result of decreasing numbers of fires in savannas and grasslands. But WMO said that some regions like western North America, the Amazon and Australia were seeing far more fires.

Even beyond wildfires, a hotter climate can drive up pollution and worsen air quality. Taalas pointed out that severe heatwaves in Europe and China this year, coupled with stable high atmospheric conditions, sunlight and low wind speeds, had been "conducive to high pollution levels," warning that "this is a foretaste of the future."

"We expect a further increase in the frequency, intensity and duration of heatwaves, which could lead to even worse air quality," he said.

This phenomenon is known as the "climate penalty", which refers to how climate change amplifies ground-level ozone production, which negatively impacts air quality. In the stratosphere, ozone provides important protection from cancer-causing ultraviolet rays, but closer to the ground it is very hazardous for human health. If emission levels remain high, this climate penalty is expected to account for "a fifth of all surface ozone concentration increase," WMO scientific officer Lorenzo Labador told reporters.

He warned that most of that increase will happen over Asia, "and there you have about one quarter of the entire world population." The WMO called for action, stressing that "a worldwide carbon neutrality emissions scenario would limit the future occurrence of extreme ozone air pollution episodes." The report points out that air quality and climate are interconnected, since chemicals that worsen air quality are normally co-emitted with greenhouse gases. "Changes in one inevitably cause changes in the other," it said. —AFP

West staging 'provocations' against Russia

BELGRADE: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday accused the West of staging "provocations" against Russia that have forced it to cut energy supplies to Europe. Erdogan has maintained good working relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin while trying to stay neutral in the conflict and supplying Ukraine with weapons and combat drones.

He told reporters on a visit to Belgrade that he understood Putin's decision to cut off natural gas supplies to Germany via the Nord Stream pipeline. "I can say very clearly that I do not find the attitude of the West—no need to mention names—to be correct, because it is a policy based on provocations," Erdogan said. "As long as you try to wage such a war of provocations, you will not be able to get the needed result."

Erdogan has tried to use his open relations with both Moscow and Kyiv to try to arrange direct talks between Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Turkey. "As Turkey, we have always maintained a policy of balance between Ukraine and Russia. From now on, we will continue to follow that balanced policy," he said. Erdogan is expected to meet Putin at a regional summit in Uzbekistan next week. Turkey has not joined the Western sanctions regime against Russia and signed a new economic cooperation agreement with Moscow during a summit between Putin and Erdogan in Sochi earlier this month. —AFP



BELGRADE: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) shakes hands with his Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vucic in Belgrade on September 7, 2022. —AFP

International

Burundi president sacks PM after warning of coup plot

Tension, high drama in troubled central African country

NAIROBI: Burundi's President Evariste Ndayishimiye sacked his prime minister and a top aide in a high-level purge Wednesday after warning of a "coup" plot against him. The former army general replaced Alain Guillaume Bunyoni and civilian chief of staff General Gabriel Nizigama on a day of high drama in the troubled central African country. At a hastily called parliamentary session, lawmakers approved the appointment of security minister Gervais Ndirakobuca to replace Bunyoni in a unanimous 113-0 vote, the national broadcaster RTNB said.

Ndayishimiye, who has been in power for just over two years, gave no reasons for Bunyoni's dismissal, but last week warned of a coup plot. "Do you think an army general can be threatened by saying they will make a coup? Who is that person? Whoever it is should come and, in the name of God, I will defeat him," Ndayishimiye had warned at a meeting of government officials on Friday in the political capital Gitega.

The fate of Bunyoni, a former police chief and security minister who has long been a senior figure in the ruling CNDD-FDD party, was not immediately known. Ndayishimiye's new chief of staff - a post

sometimes described as a "super prime minister" - is Colonel Aloys Sindayehura, who was in charge of domestic intelligence within the National Intelligence Service. Lawmakers had been called to attend the National Assembly session on Wednesday via urgent messages sent overnight on WhatsApp.

2015 crackdown

Analysts say a cabal of military leaders known as "the generals" wield the true political power in Burundi and the president himself alluded to his isolation in a 2021 speech. Ndayishimiye, 54, took power in June 2020 after his predecessor Pierre Nkurunziza died of what the Burundian authorities said was heart failure.

He has been hailed by the international community for slowly ending years of Burundi's isolationism under Nkurunziza's chaotic and bloody rule. But he has failed to improve its wretched record on human rights and the African Great Lakes nation of 12 million people remains one of the poorest on the planet. Nkurunziza had launched a brutal crackdown on political opponents in 2015 that left 1,200 people dead and made Burundi a global pariah.

The turmoil erupted after he had launched a bid for a third term in office, a move the opposition said was unconstitutional and violated a peace deal that ended the country's bloody civil war in 2006. The United States and the European Union had imposed sanctions over the unrest that also drove 400,000 people to flee the country, with reports of arbitrary arrests, torture, killings and enforced disappearances. Ndirakobuca was among those sanctioned in 2015 by the United States for "silencing those opposed" to Nkurunziza's third term bid.

Burundi has been in the grip of an economic malaise since the 2015 unrest, with a lack of foreign exchange and shortages of basic goods such as fuel, certain foodstuffs, building materials and medicines. In February, both Brussels and Washington resumed aid flows to the landlocked nation after easing the 2015 sanctions, citing political progress under Ndayishimiye. Civil society groups have returned, the BBC is allowed to broadcast again and the EU - Burundi's largest foreign donor - has commended efforts to fight corruption.

But concerns over rights abuses remain. Human Rights Watch in May described politically motivated murders and kidnappings



GITEGA: In this file photo, Evariste Ndayishimiye Burundi's elected President from the ruling party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy - Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), and First Lady Angeline Ndayubaha attend the swearing-in ceremony at Ingoma stadium in Gitega, Burundi. —AFP

by police and state-backed youth groups, while a UN inquiry last year characterized the situation as "disastrous". Since independence in 1962, Burundi's history has been littered with presidential

assassinations, coups and ethnic massacres. It was gripped by a brutal civil war from 1993 to 2006 between majority Hutu and minority Tutsi that left some 300,000 people dead, mainly civilians.—AFP

Thousands told to flee California wildfire; 2 killed

LOS ANGELES: At least two people are dead and thousands have been ordered to flee a rapidly spreading fire in California, with the region's oppressive heatwave expected to peak Tuesday. Several buildings were destroyed as the Fairview fire erupted southeast of Los Angeles, racing to consume 2,400 acres in less than 24 hours. Firefighters said two people were known to have died in the blaze, and one person had been hospitalized with burn injuries. More than 3,000 homes are under orders to evacuate, and all local schools have been shuttered.

The blaze was "spreading very quickly before firefighters even got on scene," a local fire department spokesman said on Twitter. The cause of the fire was under investigation, but utility Southern California Edison (SCE) reported what it called "circuit activity" in the area at the time the blaze broke out. The company has in the past paid out billions of dollars after its equipment was found to be the cause of wildfires in California, including a number of fatal incidents.

SCE has embarked on a lengthy process of shoring up ageing power lines, chopping back nearby vegetation and burying cables in an effort to reduce fires. California is suffering through a ferocious heatwave, with temperatures of 110 Fahrenheit (43 Celsius) being recorded daily in several areas. That, coupled with a two-decade drought that has left the countryside tinder dry, is creating ideal conditions for explosive wildfires.

The heat hit the state, as well as parts of neighboring Arizona and Nevada, last week, and forecasters said it was not over yet. "Following another day of record heat on Tuesday from California to the central High Plains, expect sizzling temperatures to stick around through mid-week," the National Weather Service said. "Numerous daily record high temps are likely to be broken from the northern Rockies and High Plains on south to southern California."

Outages

With demand for air conditioning high, grid conductor California Independent System Operator (ISO)



CALIFORNIA: A firefighting aircraft drops fire retardant as the Fairview Fire burns near hillside homes on September 6, 2022 near Hemet, California. The 4,500 acre bush fire has left two dead and forced thousands to evacuate while destroying several homes amid an intense heat wave in Southern California. —AFP

issued an urgent call Tuesday for households to cut back on power use, and warning them to be ready for outages. The body has asked consumers to save electricity every day for much of the last week between 4:00 pm and 9:00 pm when demand is high and supply is falling. But with temperatures exceptionally high Tuesday, it warned there could be a shortfall leading to brown-outs.

"Electricity demand is currently forecast at more than 52,000 megawatts (MW), a new historic all-time high for the grid," California ISO said. "As the state faces the hottest day in this prolonged, record-breaking heat wave, grid conditions are expected to worsen." If needed, ISO could order utilities to begin rotating power outages to maintain stability of the electric grid. California has abundant solar installations, including on homes, which typically provide for around a third of the state's power requirements during daylight.

But when the sun goes down, that supply falls quickly, leaving traditional generation to plug the gap. The problem is particularly acute in the early evening when temperatures are still high, but solar starts dropping out of the power mix. Scientists say global warming, which is being driven chiefly by humanity's unchecked burning of fossil fuels, is making natural weather variations more extreme. Heat waves are getting hotter and more intense, while storms are getting wetter and, in many cases, more dangerous.—AFP

Ancient skeleton reveals surgery...

Continued from Page 1

That suggests "detailed knowledge of limb anatomy and muscular and vascular systems," the research team wrote in a paper published Wednesday in the journal Nature. "Intensive post-operative nursing and care would have been vital... the wound would have regularly been cleaned, dressed and disinfected."

Humans have been operating on each other for centuries, pulling teeth and drilling skull holes in a process called trepanation. But amputation is so complex that in the West it only became an operation people could reasonably hope to survive about a century ago. The oldest previous example was a 7,000-year-old skeleton with a forearm found in France in 2010.

It appeared to confirm that humans only developed sophisticated surgery after settling in agricultural societies, freed from the daily grind of hunting food. But the Borneo find demonstrates hunter-gath-

ers could also navigate the challenges of surgery, and did so at least 24,000 years earlier than once thought. For all that the skeleton reveals, many questions remain: How was the amputation carried out and why? What was used for pain or to prevent infection? Was this operation rare or a more common practice?

The team speculates that a surgeon might have used a lithic blade, whittled from stone, and the community could have accessed rainforest plants with medicinal properties. The study "provides us with a view of the implementation of care and treatment in the distant past," wrote Charlotte Ann Roberts, an archaeologist at Durham University, who was not involved in the research. It "challenges the perception that provision of care was not a consideration in prehistoric times," she wrote in a review in Nature.

Further excavation is expected next year at Liang Tebo, with the hope of learning more about the people who lived there. "This is really a hotspot of human evolution and archeology," said Renaud Joannes-Boyau, an associate professor at Southern Cross University who helped date the skeleton. "It's certainly getting warmer and warmer, and the conditions are really aligned to have more amazing discoveries in the future." — AFP

dates, one each in the five districts.

Many candidates have already launched their election campaigns, which has focused on the need to capitalize on the promise by HH the Amir that the government will not interfere in the elections and the election of the Assembly speaker. Under Kuwaiti law, ministers are allowed to vote for the speaker. The results of the elections are expected to be announced on the night of Sept 29 or the next day. Counting of votes in Kuwait remains manual.

Burundi president walking tightrope

NAIROBI: Burundi's President Evariste Ndayishimiye has faced a tricky balancing act to bring change to the troubled nation while accommodating the elites who helped put him in power, even as activists warn that his government's human rights record remains dire. But he has been praised for ending the country's global pariah status, prompting the United States and the European Union to lift sanctions earlier this year.

Since he took power in June 2020, the former army general has taken some high-profile steps to distinguish his regime from that of his predecessor Pierre Nkurunziza, whose brutal crackdown on political opponents in 2015 left 1,200 people dead. But his talk of a "coup" plot against him, followed by a purge of top officials, including former prime minister Alain Guillaume Bunyoni, was a reminder of his authoritarian roots. Handpicked by the ruling CNDD-FDD party to run in the 2020 elections, Ndayishimiye, 54, was expected to remain under the wing of Nkurunziza, who was known as Burundi's "eternal supreme guide" until his sudden death in June 2020.

At first, there was little sign that Ndayishimiye would depart from his predecessor's policies. His maiden speech as president featured a long homage to Nkurunziza as he vowed to follow in his footsteps, lambasting the international community for interfering in Burundi. But he soon began to chart a different course. He declared the coronavirus pandemic "the greatest enemy of Burundians", sharply breaking with Nkurunziza who denied the gravity of Covid-19.

Whereas Nkurunziza had closed off the country - feuding with neighbors, expelling diplomats, and blacklisting UN investigators - Ndayishimiye ventured abroad, slowly putting Burundi back on the map. Earlier this year, the United States and the European Union resumed aid flows to the impoverished landlocked nation of 12 million, despite warnings from rights campaigners. "We see Ndayishimiye moving things slowly, step by step," said Julien Nimubona, professor of political science at the University of Burundi. "He would like to go further, but faces stiff resistance."

Gandhi channels namesake in...

Continued from Page 1

The aim, he said, is to highlight rampant unemployment, soaring inflation and growing polarization between majority Hindus and religious minorities like Muslims under Modi, 71. "I want to ask you whether price rises or hatred strengthens the country... Narendra Modi and the BJP are weakening the country," Rahul told a rally in New Delhi on Sunday

Albania cuts ties with Iran over...

Continued from Page 1

Albania agreed in 2013 to take in members of the exiled group at the request of Washington and the United Nations, with thousands settling in the Balkan country over the years. Following the collapse of its communist government in the early 1990s, Albania has transformed into a steadfast ally of the United States and the West, officially joining NATO in 2009.

The MEK backed Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the 1979 revolution that ousted the shah but rapidly fell out with the new Islamic authorities and embarked on a decades-long campaign to overthrow the regime. The MEK regularly hosts summits in Albania that have long attracted support from conservative US Republicans, including former vice

president Mike Pence who delivered a keynote address at an event in June.

A month later, the group postponed another summit citing unspecified security threats targeting the event. The summit was called off "upon recommendations by the Albanian government, for security reasons, and due to terrorist threats and conspiracies", the MEK said in a statement released in late July. The gathering was supposed to be attended by or joined online by various high-profile political delegations, including hundreds of lawmakers from six continents, organizers said.

Iranian opposition groups in exile have accused Tehran of targeting their events and personnel for years. In 2018, Belgian police thwarted a terrorist attack that was supposed to target an Iranian opposition rally outside Paris, after which an Iranian diplomat was convicted for supplying explosives for the plot. Albania has expelled a string of Iranian diplomats from the Balkan country over the years, including Tehran's ambassador to the country in Dec 2018. — AFP

376 candidates to contest 50-seat...

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The main Islamist group, the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, has fielded five candi-

International

Hong Kong court convicts 5 of sedition over children's books

'Defenders of the Sheep Village' spark reactions

HONG KONG: Five Hong Kong unionists were found guilty of sedition on Wednesday for producing a series of illustrated children's books that portrayed the city's democracy supporters as sheep defending their village from wolves. The convictions are the latest using a colonial-era sedition offence which authorities have deployed alongside a new national security law to stamp out dissent. The prosecution focused on members of a speech therapists' union who produced three illustrated e-books aimed at explaining Hong Kong's democracy movement to children.

In one book, called "Defenders of the Sheep Village", a group of wolves try to occupy a village of sheep, who fight back and drive their attackers away. In another, the wolves are portrayed as dirty and bringing disease to the sheep's village. Lai Man-ling, Melody Yeung, Sidney Ng, Samuel Chan and Fong Tsz-ho, all founding members of the union, were charged with sedition and held in jail for more than a year ahead of their verdict.

After a two-month trial Kwok Wai-kin, a District Court judge handpicked by the government to try national security cases, found the five guilty of conspiring to spread seditious content. "The seditious intention stems not merely from the words, but from the words with the proscribed effects intended to result in the mind of children," Kwok wrote in his judgment. "Children will be led into belief that the PRC (People's Republic of China) Government is coming to Hong Kong with the wicked intention of taking away their home and ruining their happy life with no right to do so at all," he added.

'Unrelenting repression'
Amnesty International, which recently left Hong Kong because of the national security law, described the convictions as "an absurd example of unrelenting repression". "Writing books for children is not a crime, and attempting to educate children about recent events in Hong Kong's history does not constitute an attempt to incite rebellion," Amnesty's China campaigner Gwen Lee said. During the trial, prosecutors argued the books contained "anti-China sentiment" and were aimed at "inciting readers' hatred against the mainland authorities".

They also said the books were meant to encourage Hong Kongers to discriminate against "mainland Chinese people living in Hong Kong". The defense argued that the sedition offence was vaguely defined and that each reader should be allowed to make up their own mind about what the characters in the books represent. They also warned that a guilty verdict would further criminalize political criticism and have a chilling effect on society.

Ukraine students, schools return to the sound of war

POKROVSKE: Antonina Sidorenko has put on her favorite clothes, selected the prettiest ribbon to adorn her hair and can recite by heart the poem given by her schoolteacher. But with lessons taking place at home to the background sound of gunfire and shelling, this is no ordinary first day back at school for the nine-year-old Ukrainian. Sitting behind a desk in the middle of her sitting room, "Tonia" adjusts the mobile phone screen showing her teacher Natalia Vasylyvna, best friend Igor and other classmates she has not seen since Russia's February invasion. "I'm happy to be back at school but I would be even happier if there was no war because I miss my teacher and my friends," she told AFP, saying her best friend had fled to Poland. Antonina, five-year-old sister Sonia and parents Natalia and Andriy live in Pokrovske, a hamlet of 24 people in the southern region of Mykolaiv near the frontline. Remote learning is in place

How Bellingcat became Russia's 'nightmare'

PARIS: Digital investigators from the Bellingcat group have spent eight years exposing the lies of the powerful and gathering evidence of their crimes - work that has a grave human cost, the organization's chief told AFP in an interview. Bulgarian journalist Christo Grozev said he and his colleagues received regular threats but he was driven to continue by "adrenalin" and "the feeling you can do something that law enforcement does not do".

The investigative group has been closely associated with uncovering misdeeds by Russian agents across Europe, including intelligence involvement in the poisoning of opposition figure Alexei Navalny. "When you get stopped in the street by Russian citizens, telling you thank you for what you are doing once a day, I think that it is

A new life begins for the Titkovs, far from Ukraine

VIENNA: After months of anguish and hesitation, the Titkov family - who fled to Vienna from Ukraine just after Russia invaded - have finally decided to stay. Their three boys - Danylo, nine, Denys, 11, and Dmitry, 15 - began the new school year there this week, another landmark in their new life in the Austrian capital. Despite being "a bit stressed" about their German, they wrote little messages to go with the presents for their teachers.

Back home in Ukraine, they would have brought them flowers. Mother Irina, 39, wore her traditional Ukrainian "gerdan" necklace for the occasion, knowing that school is the first step to integration. AFP is following the refugee family from Irpin, one of the Kyiv suburbs that saw the worst of the fighting in the war's early weeks, during the first



HONG KONG: Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee speaks to the media before an Executive Council meeting in Hong Kong on September 6, 2022. —AFP

Political crackdown
Until recently Hong Kong was a bastion of free expression within China and home to a vibrant and outspoken publishing industry. But Beijing has unleashed a sweeping political crackdown on the city in response to huge and sometimes violent democracy protests three years ago.

Sedition was originally a law from the British colonial era and carries a sentence of up to two years in prison. Until recently, it had not been used for decades. But it has been embraced by police and prosecutors over the last two years, alongside the national security law which Beijing imposed on Hong Kong in 2020.

Since then the city's once-popular democracy movement has been dismantled. Most prominent local democracy activists either are in jail, are awaiting trial or have

across the region due to the fighting. For Natalia and Andriy, that posed significant technical challenges, and they only managed to configure the Zoom app on their mobile phone a few days before September 1, when schools returned nationwide. They also made sure the internet router was working. After their electricity was cut off in the summer, the family gets its power from a solar panel supplied by an NGO. But there's little they can do against cannons. The boom of Ukrainian artillery fire reverberates at regular intervals, followed by the Russian reply. Two days previously, their kitchen windows were smashed by shrapnel.

'I'm not scared'
Antonina, a young girl with bright blond plaits, has already stopped flinching when the sounds of war echo in the distance. "At the start, when there was shelling near the house, I used to hide and lie on the floor. But now, when it's far away, I'm used to it and I'm not scared," she said. While her teacher attempts to get to grips with Zoom, Antonina shows off the room she shares with Sonia. "Now we sleep on the floor, that way we won't be killed by the shrapnel," she said.

In the courtyard, she feeds the rabbits, her favorite animals. The rabbits and two cows are the reason why the family is staying put despite the danger. The animal

enough to continue," he said. During a meeting in Paris earlier this week, he described the organization as the "Kremlin's biggest nightmare" though he stressed to AFP that Russia was not the main focus of their work. "Russia today produces a lot of government crime and that's why a lot of our investigations are focused on Russia," he said. "But we equally try to pay attention to bad actors from wherever they come." He cites investigations into the Syrian war, EU police agency Europol and others focused on Greece, Turkey, Hungary and the far right in the United States and Europe.

'Undesirable' in Russia
Bellingcat was founded in July 2014 by a British blogger, Eliot Higgins, along with a band of internet "nerds", said Grozev, who joined later and brought a wealth of journalism experience from his career in the Bulgarian media. They used information freely available to the public - anything from satellite images to telephone directories - to piece together evidence of wrongdoing. Their work on the downing of Air Malaysia flight MH17 over

year of their new life in a land where a quarter of the population are immigrants.

'Miracle' birthday
After six months of uncertainty, little Danylo has taken to school like a fish to water. He lists out all the pens and stationery he needs in class in German. But his oldest brother prefers to hang around with his Ukrainian friends than knuckle down to his school work. Worried - and doing her best so her boys finally feel at home - Irina is meeting the headmistress to talk about how they can help Dmitry. The family have just moved into a pretty two-bedroomed apartment that looks onto a leafy courtyard in a residential area half an hour from the centre of Vienna.

Irina Titkova welcomed AFP into their new home with delicious Ukrainian dumplings and varenyki raviolis, served with a steaming bortsch soup. It's a huge relief to finally have their own place, and not to have to depend on the goodwill of others. Up to then, the five of them shared the same room in a flat they found through friends of friends. "After three months of searching every day, I got a call from the (Protestant charity) Diakonie" saying they had found an

fled overseas. Dozens of civil society groups, including multiple trade unions, have folded while a mainland-style censorship rule has been created for the film industry. Books have been removed from libraries and curriculums rewritten with authorities ordered to instill patriotism into the city's children.

Only people deemed "staunch patriots" are now allowed to run for office. Even before the latest crackdown, publishing had become a key target for Chinese authorities. In 2015, five Hong Kong publishers behind a bookstore that put out salacious tomes on leaders of the Chinese Communist Party went missing, later reappearing in mainland custody. The missing bookseller case was itself a partial catalyst for the 2019 democracy protests, which began as a movement against a law allowing extraditions to the mainland's party-controlled court system. —AFP



POKROVSKE: Antonina, 9, attends an online lesson, past her mother Natalya, on the first school day at her home in the village of Pokrovske amid Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

owes its survival to the irregular electricity supply, which makes the preservation of any choice cutlets impossible, Natalia explained. "What would we do in town? Where would we stay, how would we live?" asked Andriy, showing the damage left by the last strike as another explosive sound is heard behind him. "Did you hear that? It never ends!" —AFP

Ukraine in 2014 - which killed 298 people and sparked global outrage - won plaudits around the world and brought the group to the attention of the Kremlin.

The investigators pieced together photos, videos and public documents that supported the theory that the plane was shot down by a Russian missile from an area controlled by pro-Russian separatists. Since then, the group has identified Russian agents responsible for poisoning opposition figure Alexei Navalny and other dissidents, exposed alleged war crimes in Ukraine and helped uncover many more scandals.

One of its main focuses right now is the war in Ukraine, where it has a two-track approach. Grozev said one approach uses journalistic methods to debunk false information, the other is more judicial, gathering evidence of war crimes for eventual use in the courts. The Netherlands-based platform, which takes its name from a fable in which mice join forces to hang a bell around a cat's neck, has rarely been out of the Kremlin's firing line. Russia recently described it as a security threat and deemed it "undesirable". —AFP

apartment, said Irina. "It was a miracle on my birthday!" Their teenager now has a room where he can play his guitar. The younger boys - both bundles of energy - have bunk beds. There's a hammock on the balcony, an invitation to dream of better days ahead. And all for a rent of 400 euros (\$397) a month. "It gives us a feeling of comfort," Irina said with a smile. Starting all over again is not easy, particularly when you have had to leave your home, your family, your job and your status behind. The former English teacher now works at the checkout of an American fast food restaurant. Her husband, Valeri, a physiotherapist back home, also works there in the storeroom.

'We need to be useful'
"It's tough... but it's money, and I can earn it, and it's not a donation. Maybe I am too proud, but I feel we need to be useful to society." The Titkovs want to "feel equal... and not just like refugees". The family ended up in Vienna by accident because Irina had taken a school trip there when she was teaching. "I remember how beautiful it was and multicultural. Vienna impressed me." Yet in June the Titkovs almost returned to Ukraine. Hearing about friends who had

News in brief

Nun killed in Mozambique

JOHANNESBURG: An Italian nun was killed in Mozambique as her missionary compound came under attack from "terrorists" who set fire to a church, her religious order said Wednesday. The Comboni Missionary Sisters said assailants had killed sister Maria De Coppi as they entered the nuns' quarters in the group's Chipene mission in Mozambique's northern Nacala diocese on Tuesday. "The mission of Chipene ... was attacked by terrorists," the religious group said in a statement. "They killed a sister ... destroyed and set fire to the church, the house of the Sisters, the hospital and the mission's cars". Mozambique's restive north has suffered a spate of jihadist-related attacks in recent years. But the Nampula region where the religious mission is located had so far been spared the worst of the violence, which has focused on the neighboring Cabo Delgado province. The Comboni sisters said two other nuns, one Italian and one Spanish, "managed to escape and hide in the forest" with a group of young girls.

3 dies as crane collapses

HONG KONG: Three men were killed and six others injured after a Hong Kong crane collapsed at a construction site on Wednesday with rescuers trying for hours in vain to reach a victim trapped under the wreckage. One man was certified dead at the site in Kowloon after suffering a skull fracture while another died after being rushed to hospital, authorities said. Dozens of workers from the city's Urban Search and Rescue Team worked around the crumpled tower crane, which had fallen onto multiple cargo containers used as temporary offices, trying to retrieve a third victim. "We can only see the lower half of his body, and he was unresponsive when we tried to communicate with him," fire services official Yim Ying-kit told reporters. "(The crane) is quite heavy so we need various tools and risk assessment before we can rescue the trapped worker." Police later confirmed that the man was also killed.

HK journalist arrested

HONG KONG: The head of Hong Kong's journalist union was arrested on Wednesday, just weeks before he was set to leave the city and begin an overseas fellowship. Ronson Chan, chairman of the Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA), was arrested for allegedly obstructing a police officer and disorderly conduct in a public place. Channel C, the online news outlet Chan works for, said the veteran reporter was taken away by police officers who asked to check his identity while he was reporting on a meeting of public housing flat owners. Police said a 41-year-old man surnamed Chan was arrested after he refused to show officers his ID card and behaved in an "uncooperative" way despite multiple warnings. Chan was set to leave Hong Kong at the end of September for the six-month Reuters Institute fellowship program at Oxford University.

IS seizes northern Mali town

BAMAKO: Jihadists affiliated to the Islamic State group have seized a town in northern Mali after bitter fighting with local rebels and rival militants linked to Al-Qaeda, several sources said Wednesday. The insurgents on Tuesday took Talataye, a town 150 kilometers from Gao that has been repeatedly fought over in Mali's decade-long security crisis, they said. They battled local rebels, as well as the pro-Qaeda Support Group for Islam and Muslims (GSIM), the main jihadist alliance in the Sahel, they said. "The ISGS people arrived this afternoon on motorbikes, the fighting lasted three hours," one of the local rebels told AFP by phone late Tuesday, referring to the so-called Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. The rebel was a member of the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA), part of an ethnic Touareg movement in the north. MSA fighters retreated in the face of the offensive, and the town fell at dusk, he said. A local elected official confirmed the account, saying "Talataye town hall and the town" were in the hands of the ISGS as of Wednesday morning. —From AFP



VIENNA: Ukrainian parents Irina Titkova (right), her husband Valeriy Titkov (left) and their sons Danylo (2nd left) and Denys have a dinner in their newly rented apartment in Vienna, Austria. —AFP

been killed, about war crimes, and from those who had stayed behind to fight, Irina was wracked by guilt for not being able to help. —AFP

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2022

Business

Putin warns 'no gas, no oil' to countries that cap prices

With key pipeline shut, Putin denies weaponizing energy

MOSCOW: Russia will stop delivering oil and gas supplies to countries that introduce price caps, President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday. Capping prices, as some Western countries are considering, "would be an absolutely stupid decision," Putin told the Eastern Economic Forum in the Pacific port city of Vladivostok.

"We will not supply anything at all if it is contrary to our interests, in this case economic (interests)," he said. "No gas, no oil, no coal, no fuel oil, nothing." G7 industrialized powers on Friday vowed to move urgently towards implementing a price cap on Russian oil imports, in a bid to cut off a major source of funding for Moscow's military action in Ukraine.

Putin said Russia would respect its contractual obligations and hoped other countries would do the same. "Those who are trying to impose something on us are in no position today to dictate their will," Putin said. "They should come to their senses." Pointing to rising energy prices in Europe ahead of winter, Putin insisted Russia would supply nothing outside of existing contracts, quoting a Russian fairy tale: "Freeze, freeze, the wolf tail".

"They have several solutions. Either subsidizing high prices, which is bad because it won't change

consumer behavior... or reduce consumption," he said. "From an economic point of view, it is correct. From a social point of view it is dangerous, it can lead to an explosion. It is better to adhere to contractual obligations, to civilized rules," Putin said.

Putin denied that Moscow was using its energy exports as a "weapon" after Russia halted natural gas deliveries via a key pipeline to Europe.

The Nord Stream pipeline has been closed for several days after Russia said it would be under repair for an indefinite period of time, reinforcing fears of an energy price crisis in Europe with winter approaching. Europe, which is heavily dependent on Russian supplies, has accused Moscow of using energy as blackmail in response to sanctions over Russia's military campaign in Ukraine.

"They say that Russia uses energy as a weapon. More nonsense! What weapon do we use? We supply as much as required according to requests" from importers, Putin told the Eastern Economic Forum in the Pacific port city of Vladivostok.

Russian gas giant Gazprom said Friday that Nord Stream—due to reopen last weekend after three days of maintenance—would remain shut for repairs after oil leaks were found in a turbine.

The Kremlin insists sanctions have prevented the

proper maintenance of Russian gas infrastructure and, in particular, blocked the return of a Siemens turbine that had been undergoing repairs in Canada. "Give us a turbine, we will turn Nord Stream on tomorrow", Putin said at the Vladivostok forum.

"We are ready to do this tomorrow, just need to press a button. But we were not the ones who introduced sanctions," Putin added.

'Another stupidity'

Speaking about the possibility of a price cap on Russian natural gas, Putin said it was "another stupidity" and "another non-market solution with no prospects". Putin warned that Moscow will stop deliveries to countries that introduce price caps on Russian energy exports. "We will not supply anything at all if it is contrary to our interests, in this case economic (interests)," he said. "No gas, no oil, no coal, no fuel oil, nothing."

"Those who are trying to impose something on us are in no position today to dictate their will," Putin said. "They should come to their senses."

Pointing to rising energy prices in Europe ahead of winter, Putin insisted Russia would supply nothing outside of existing contracts, quoting a Russian fairy tale: "Freeze, freeze, the wolf tail".



VLADIVOSTOK, Russia: Russian President Vladimir Putin attends the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok on September 7, 2022. — AFP

Following the imposition of economic sanctions over the Kremlin's offensive in Ukraine, Russia has reduced or halted supplies to different European nations, causing energy prices to soar. The EU has looked to reduce its dependence on Russian energy resources and has agreed a plan to decrease natural gas consumption across the bloc. — AFP

Oil tumbles to pre-war level on recession fears

LONDON: Oil prices tumbled back to pre-war levels Wednesday as recession fears returned to the forefront. Stocks were also hit by the negative outlook for the global economy, while currency markets were gripped by the prospect for interest rate hikes.

Oil prices briefly climbed on Wednesday as Russia's President Vladimir Putin said his country would stop delivering oil and gas supplies to countries that introduce price caps.

G7 industrialized powers have vowed to move urgently towards implementing a price cap on Russian oil imports to cut off a major source of funding for Moscow's military action in Ukraine. But oil prices then turned sharply lower, with Brent crude, the main international contract, passing under \$90 per barrel for the first time since February. OPEC and its allies earlier this week cut production targets for the first time in more than a year in a bid to lift prices.

"While the 100,000 barrel cut wasn't fundamentally significant, it was clearly intended as a warning not to drive the price lower or face further cuts," said OANDA trading platform analyst Craig Erlam.

"Unfortunately, it seems traders are in no mood to be told what to do and growth fears are instead dictating the price direction." Recession concerns also dampened sentiment towards equities, with European indices lower, although Wall Street managed small gains at the open.

"Investors appear reluctant to buy anything in this macro environment, where inflation is soaring, global growth is weakening, and central banks are tightening," said City Index and FOREX.com ana-



TOKYO: People walk past an electronic board showing the rate of the Japanese yen against the US dollar, in a business district of Tokyo on September 7, 2022. —AFP

lyst Fawad Razaqzada. "Something must fundamentally change before we see the onset of a serious recovery," he added. Recession fears are being driven in large part by central banks moving aggressively to rein in surging inflation.

The dollar continues to gain strength from expectations of a third-straight blockbuster hike to US interest rates later this month. US Federal Reserve officials have lined up in recent weeks to say their main focus is bringing inflation down from four-decade highs, even if that means tipping the economy into recession. The different pace in lifting rates taken by central banks is fuelling swings in currency values.

The European Central Bank is Thursday forecast to deliver another bumper rate increase, mirroring aggressive moves by the Fed and Bank of England.

Nevertheless, it has moved slower and the euro

remains lodged below parity with the dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar rose to 144.99 yen—the Japanese currency's weakest showing since 1998. "The reason that we are seeing this much strength in the dollar against the yen is purely because of the difference in two central banks' policies," noted Naeem Aslam, chief market analyst at AvaTrade.

"The Fed is as hawkish as it can be, and the BoJ still doesn't seem to be bothered much about inflation or changing its stance on monetary policy." Japan's finance minister, Shunichi Suzuki, on Wednesday expressed concern about the yen's drop. "For now, we're monitoring with a sense of urgency how it's developing, but if this continues, it makes sense that we will take necessary measures," he said, without detailing what the measures might be. —AFP

US judge lets Musk amend Twitter claims

NEW YORK: A US judge permitted Elon Musk to amend his complaint against Twitter on Wednesday, but rejected delaying the lawsuit over the disintegration of the billionaire's deal to acquire the social media company. In a mixed ruling, Kathaleen McCormick, the chancellor of the Delaware court, said Musk could add whistleblowing revelations from a Twitter ex-security chief that surfaced in August.

But she denied his request to push back the litigation, saying prolonging the suit "would risk further harm to Twitter too great to justify." Musk has been locked in a bitter legal battle with Twitter since announcing in July that he was pulling the plug on his \$44 billion purchase of the company following a complex, volatile, months-long courtship.

Musk has said he canceled the deal because he was misled by Twitter concerning the number of bot accounts on its platform, allegations rejected by the company. Revelations from Twitter former security chief Peiter Zlatko criticizing Twitter's security practices first became public in August following a report in the Washington Post.

In a hearing Tuesday, attorneys for Musk sought to amend his appeal and be granted additional time for document discovery to investigate Zlatko's assertions. Twitter attorneys argued Musk's request was another delay tactic designed to derail the takeover. —AFP

Truss rules out windfall tax to fund energy bills

LONDON: Liz Truss on Wednesday faced her first parliamentary grilling as British Prime Minister, ruling out a windfall tax to fund any freeze on energy bills to offset huge rises in the cost of gas and electricity. Truss, who formally took over from Boris Johnson on Tuesday, said she would spell out her plans on Thursday for an economic support package to forestall a growing crisis in the months ahead.

She is preparing measures reportedly worth upwards of £130 billion (\$150 billion) to freeze energy bills for hard-pressed households and businesses, many of whom risk going to the wall this winter. But when asked by opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer if this would be funded by a windfall tax on energy companies' profits, Truss responded: "I am against a windfall tax."

"I believe it is the wrong thing to be putting companies off investing in the United Kingdom, just when we need to be growing the economy." She added: "This country will not be able to tax its way to growth." The exchange set the tone for the debate over how to tackle the predicted economic pain ahead, with inflation already in double digits at 40-year highs. Truss campaigned on a promise to cut taxes, despite warnings that it could further fuel inflation and questions over where funds will come from.

Truss was bullish about the economic outlook as she entered Downing Street for the first time as premier on Tuesday. "I am confident that together we



LONDON: A video grab from footage broadcast by the UK Parliament's Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) shows Britain's Prime Minister Liz Truss (fourth left) speaking during her first weekly Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) session at the House of Commons, in London, on September 7, 2022. — AFP

can ride out the storm," she said. But Starmer said that ordinary people faced paying for her policies.

Truss convened her new-look cabinet earlier Wednesday, which includes the most diverse top team in British history: Kwasi Kwarteng as finance minister, James Cleverly as foreign secretary and Suella Braverman as interior minister. Along with the urgent issue of energy prices, Truss's government must also navigate the combustible problem of post-Brexit trading arrangements in Northern Ireland.

In her first contacts with foreign leaders, the new Conservative leader spoke late Tuesday by phone to Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky and then US President Joe Biden.

According to Downing Street, she agreed with Biden "on the importance of protecting" peace in Northern Ireland. In parliament, Truss said she was "determined" to break through the impasse, and favored a "negotiated settlement" with the EU.

To Zelensky, Truss vowed to maintain the full-throated support for Ukraine against Russia given by her scandal-tainted predecessor, Boris Johnson. Truss, 47, won an internal ballot of Tory members on Monday, securing 57 percent of the vote, after a grueling contest against former finance minister Rishi Sunak that began in July. But the initial stage of the contest saw her net the support of less than a third of the parliamentary party. —AFP

US trade gap drops in July on lower imports

WASHINGTON: A steep drop in imports, especially of consumer goods, narrowed the US trade deficit in July to its lowest level since October, the government reported Wednesday. Exports rose only slightly, boosted by an increase in international travel, but the gain was enough to set yet another record, the Commerce Department reported.

The overall trade deficit fell by more than \$10 billion to \$70.6 billion compared to June, almost entirely due to the decline in imports, the report said. Companies in recent months rushed to replenish depleted inventories amid strong demand from American shoppers—but sky-high inflation has raised concerns that consumers will pull back, causing firms to become more cautious.

The Federal Reserve is raising interest rates aggressively to dampen demand and cool inflation, and many families are having to spend a greater share of their incomes on staple goods.

Higher interest rates have strengthened the US dollar, making American goods relatively more expensive, which could trim exports, but so far the data are likely to boost growth in the world's largest economy. Goods and services exports edged up to \$259.3 billion, just enough to beat the record set in June, according to the report. Imports fell \$8.5 billion, including a \$3 billion plunge in pharmaceuticals, and \$1.8 billion drop in industrial supplies including crude oil, while auto imports jumped \$1.8 billion. —AFP

Business

Preparing for harsh winter in Ukraine's war-torn Donbas

Gas has been cut off and fighting shows no signs of stopping

KRAMATORSK, Ukraine: In a lush garden between two apartment blocks in the city of Kramatorsk, Oleskandr Matviyevsky chops dead trees into kindling. Everyone in this part of the city around 25 kilometers (16 miles) from the frontline, knows that winter will be harsh.

The gas has been cut off and the fighting shows no signs of stopping, with soldiers around the city preparing for battle. Residents are stocking up on wood for the brick furnaces that have been set up in front of each building and for their heating stoves.

"We will group together to stay warm... and what will be, will be," said Matviyevsky, chainsaw in hand, as artillery fire echoes in the background and air-raid sirens blare out.

"We were friendly before, we've only grown closer," the 42-year-old worker said.

The gas was cut off in May in the Donetsk region, which is partly controlled by Russian forces, and in the neighboring occupied Lugansk region after damage to infrastructure. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for mandatory evacuation of civilians from the Donetsk region in July, both to avoid the fighting and ahead of the winter season. "Please, evacuate," Zelensky urged.

'We are standing strong'

But Olga, 60, said she had no intention of leaving her flat, even though a strike recently hit a building in her neighborhood. Local media have reported that some residents have been asked to sign waivers stating their decision to stay despite the warnings. "I'm not signing anything," said Olga.

"We will all die here together. If it's one grave for everyone, then so be it. But we are standing strong," she said, raising her fist in the air. After living in Kramatorsk for 36 years, she has nowhere else to go.

Sitting on a bench in front of her building, surrounded by her neighbors and her cat, she said she feared her young grandchildren would struggle in the cold winter. Around 60,000 people remain in Kramatorsk, out of the 220,000 living there before the war, according to local officials.

"We don't have the resources to heat up the residential areas," said Igor Yeskov, a spokesman for the city council. But the city has been making preparations, including asking a local businessman to provide around a thousand traditional wood stoves to help those who remain. The stoves are not suited to heating the city's numerous apartment blocks, however.

'Trying to live with dignity'

Olga's cousin Andrii Kasionkin, 54, has opted for another solution. Since February, he has been living in his cellar with his family both to protect them from the bombing and in the hope that it will provide some warmth in winter. He said temperatures inside the cellar could be kept at 10 degrees Celsius (50 Fahrenheit) in winter even when it is minus 10 degrees Celsius outside.

"We live here for now and we try not to think about tomorrow," he said.

"We are trying to live with dignity. Even in this situation." In the city of Sloviansk, closer to the



KRAMATORSK, Ukraine: A family gather inside a bunker in Kramatorsk, Donetsk region on September 6, 2022. According to local authorities, gas supplies in the Donetsk and Lugansk region has been suspended because of heavy shelling in the region —AFP

front line, a local hospital has been preparing by installing a new heater that can burn waste, coal or wood. Valentyna Glushchenko, the director of the hospital, said she was "very worried".

"A healthy person can feel comfortable in different conditions, but a sick person requires a certain temperature. They need warmth during their treatment." —AFP

BoE defends itself against planned Truss review

LONDON: The Bank of England on Wednesday defended itself against accusations of being too slow to tackle sky-high inflation, as new Prime Minister Liz Truss plans a review of its independence. BoE Governor Andrew Bailey told a parliamentary committee that maintaining independence on how to meet a government-set inflation target of two percent was "very important".

He also expressed confidence in bringing down the rate of UK inflation, even as the BoE forecasts it to keep soaring beyond the current 40-year high above ten percent.

Bailey told lawmakers that Britain was "heavily exposed" to the surging price of gas after key producer Russia's attack on Ukraine. Truss, who took office Tuesday following the resignation of scandal-hit Boris Johnson, has proposed examining the statute that gave the BoE operational independence over monetary policy in 1997.

Market watchers and some MPs within Truss' own Conservative Party have hit out at the BoE, accusing it of being too slow to react to soaring prices.

Truss will Thursday outline plans to freeze a looming surge in domestic energy bills as Britain suffers a cost-of-living crisis. BoE chief economist Huw Pill, sitting alongside Bailey on Wednesday,



LONDON: Front pages of a selection of British national newspapers, each leading with a front page story of Britain's new Prime Minister Liz Truss, are arranged for a picture in central London on September 7, 2022. —AFP

said the package that is expected to be worth tens of billions of pounds (dollars) could "lower headline inflation".

Bailey told lawmakers that, since the BoE gained independence 25 years ago, "inflation has averaged pretty much on target" until the last few months. He said the current 10.1-percent annual UK inflation rate "does not suggest that the regime has failed."

"What it suggests is that the regime has to do its work and respond to a much bigger shock-and we are confident that it will do so and we will do so."

Bailey did acknowledge, however, that it was "good practice" for central banks to face a review of their framework. In a bid to cool soaring global inflation, the BoE and other major central banks have raised interest rates several times this year. The most recent BoE increase was by 0.5 percentage points, its biggest hike since 1995 and which leaves British borrowing costs at 1.75 percent. The BoE, which has forecast an inflation-induced UK recession starting this year, is widely expected to deliver another sizeable rate hike next week. —AFP

'Turn down, switch off' to save energy, Greek civil servants told

ATHENS: Civil servants in Greece will be urged to turn off the lights, air-conditioning and heating on leaving work under a new energy saving plan announced Wednesday as a European winter crunch looms. With energy-linked price hikes sparking Greece's highest inflation in three decades, the government aims to cut public sector energy consumption by 10 percent.

Greece's public sector is famously cavalier about energy usage, with lights often left on during the day in public buildings and on highways. "This is a triple energy crisis... with dizzying prices in natural gas, electricity and petrol," Energy Minister Costas Skrekas told a news conference. "For this reason, it's much deeper and harder to deal with than even the oil crisis" of the 1970s, he said.

Greece is the latest European Union nation to launch power-saving drives as they seek to reign in soaring gas and electricity bills and conserve evermore scarce resources following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As well as civil servants being urged to turn off air-conditioning and heating when not in the office, thermostats will be fixed at 27 degrees Celsius (80.6 Fahrenheit) in summer and 19 degrees (66.2 Fahrenheit) in winter, officials said.

Office lights should also be turned off in the daytime, they said. State buildings and installations account for nearly 11 percent of Greece's energy consumption, Skrekas said. Last year, energy usage increased by 20 percent in some 212,000 buildings and installations run by the state, he added.

The government last year spent 700 million euros (\$694 million) just on the public sector's electricity bills, junior finance minister Thodoros Skylakakis told the news conference. The plan also includes better monitoring of road lighting.

A study conducted for the European Trade Union Confederation this week found that soaring electricity and gas bills are becoming unaffordable for low-paid Europeans, costing them more than a month's wages. —AFP



SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador: People walk by an ATM of the state-owned Chivo electronic wallet in San Salvador's historic center. The prolonged fall in its value worries them and, although less enthusiastic than at the beginning, users are confident of a recovery. —AFP

El Salvador marks 1st year of Bitcoin use as confidence wanes

EL ZONTE, El Salvador: A year ago, El Salvador began accepting Bitcoin as legal tender following a controversial and much criticized decision by President Nayib Bukele. All seemed rosy for the first few months as citizens enthusiastically embraced the new opportunity, but Bitcoin's value has plummeted since and some experts say the move has been a failure.

Maria Aguirre, 52, a shopkeeper in the El Zonte seaside resort that has been a major center for Bitcoin use, says things were going well last year as Bitcoin's value rose from \$52,660 at opening on September 7, 2021, to briefly over \$68,000 a couple of months later. "But over the last five months it's been only falling," said Aguirre, who continues to accept Bitcoin transactions.

Bitcoin has dipped under \$20,000 for most of this September. In El Zonte, around 60 kilometers

southwest of capital San Salvador, Bitcoin was already being used before Bukele's move, which was designed to encourage a population where only 35 percent of people owned an account at a financial institution in 2021, according to the World Bank.

El Salvador became the first country to accept Bitcoin as legal tender, alongside the US dollar that has been the official currency for two decades. The government even created the Chivo electronic wallet and granted each user the equivalent of \$30.

By January, the application had been downloaded four million times, according to Bukele—an impressive amount in a country of 6.6 million, although with a diaspora of three million living mostly in the United States. Bukele's idea was to ensure that remittances, which make up 28 percent of El Salvador's GDP, be sent by Chivo meaning less money lost in commission to exchange agencies.

However, former central bank president Carlos Acevedo says the body's records show that "less than two percent of remittances are arriving through digital wallets, which means that this hasn't been a benefit either." University student Carmen Majia, 22, said she used Bitcoin in the beginning "but given how things are going, now I don't trust it and I uninstalled the application." —AFP

African nations meet in Egypt for climate funds

CAIRO: Officials from two dozen African nations and US climate envoy John Kerry are due to gather in Egypt from Wednesday for a conference to drum up funding for tackling climate change.

The three-day forum comes days after African leaders lashed out at industrialized nations for failing to show up at a summit in the Dutch city of Rotterdam dedicated to helping African nations adapt to climate impacts. It also comes two months before Egypt hosts the crucial COP27 climate conference in Sharm El-Sheikh in November.

The African continent emits only around three percent of global CO2 emissions, former UN chief Ban Ki-moon noted this week. And yet African nations are among those most exposed to climate impacts, notably worsening droughts and floods.

The forum will be held in Egypt's New Administrative Capital 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of Cairo. It seeks to "leverage African leaders' voices to mobilize greater international support for a green and resilient recovery in Africa," according to the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

Alongside Kerry, the regional meeting will also be attended by UN Deputy Secretary General Amina J. Mohamed, international organizations, NGOs and private companies.

Funding to help poorer countries curb their emissions and strengthen their resilience will be a key flashpoint at COP27, as a long-standing goal to spend \$100 billion a year from 2020 on helping vulnerable nations adapt to climate change remains unmet. The summit in Rotterdam on Monday was the first to focus on helping Africa adapt to climate change fallout, bringing together the African Union (AU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

But Senegalese President and AU chief Macky Sall noted with "a touch of bitterness the absence of the leaders of the industrialized world" at that summit, which aimed to raise \$250 million in capital.

According to the African Development Bank, the continent will need as much as \$1.6 trillion between 2020 and 2030 for its own efforts to limit climate change and to adapt to the adverse impacts that are already apparent. In late August, Group of 20 climate talks in Bali ended without a joint statement despite host Indonesia warning the world's leading economies they must act together to combat a warming planet or risk plunging into "uncharted territory." —AFP



TUNIS: Senegal's President Macky Sall (right) speaks during a press conference after the closing session of the eighth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in Tunisia's capital Tunis in this August 28, 2022 file photo. —AFP

Business

EU chief proposes measures to face Russia war energy shock

European energy ministers to meet on Friday to discuss action

BRUSSELS: The European Commission proposed a series of measures on Wednesday to control skyrocketing energy prices in Europe and punish Moscow for invading Ukraine, including a price cap on Russian gas. EU countries are scrambling to face up to a challenging winter ahead, with European consumers facing eye-watering heating bills with natural gas and electricity prices hovering at record levels.

Friday's announcement by Russian energy giant Gazprom of a complete shutdown of the crucial Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany has increased fears of hard months ahead for European households. Russia's President Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, warned that any country that introduces a price cap will receive no Russian energy supplies at all: "No gas, no oil, no coal, no fuel oil, nothing."

Against this threatening backdrop, European energy ministers are to meet on Friday to discuss action, and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said she had proposed them a series of meas-

ures, including a price cap.

"We are facing an extraordinary situation, because Russia is an unreliable supplier and is manipulating our energy markets," she warned. "Our unity and our solidarity will ensure that we will prevail," she added.

Laying out her plan, von der Leyen urged that member states agree a price cap on Russian gas imports, a measure that Putin has warned would be "an absolutely stupid decision".

"The objective here is very clear. We must cut Russia's revenues which Putin uses to finance this atrocious war against Ukraine," von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission told reporters. Von der Leyen also said that certain European power companies that are benefiting from high power prices would see a levy on their revenue and profits.

Crisis in Europe

She said this will target firms that are producing electricity at low cost, such as wind or nuclear energy companies, but benefitting from the sky-

high prices caused by the war in Ukraine. "Low carbon energy sources are making unexpected revenues, which do not reflect their production costs," von der Leyen told reporters.

The EU executive will also ask member countries to "re-channel" profits of fossil fuel companies that are seeing historically high revenues thanks to the energy shock caused by the war.

"Oil and gas companies have also made massive profits. We will therefore propose a solidarity contribution for fossil fuel companies," she said. The EU's energy ministers are set to debate the commission's ideas, with many countries expected to come to the table with their own proposals.

The rotating EU presidency is held by the Czech Republic, and industry minister Jozef Sikela, who will chair Friday's talks, warned that any price cap on gas could be a distraction from efforts to secure energy supply. "I think it's not a constructive proposal," he told the Czech senate on Wednesday.

"This is rather another kind of



BRUSSELS, Belgium: President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen gives a press conference on energy at EU headquarters in Brussels, on September 07, 2022. —AFP

sanctions against Russia than an actual solution to the energy crisis in Europe. And we don't want to prepare further sanctions now, we want to tackle the energy situation."

Energy policy in the 27-member European Union remains largely a national competence despite deep interdependence among many of the countries. —AFP

Spain's domestic workers to get labor benefits

MADRID: Spain is to extend labor benefits to hundreds of thousands of domestic cleaners and carers meaning they can no longer be dismissed without justification, the government said Tuesday. The move came some six months after the EU's Court of Justice (CJEU) said Spain was discriminating against domestic workers by failing to offer them social protections, with women overwhelmingly affected.

Spain is "settling a historic debt with domestic workers," Labour Minister Yolanda Diaz said after the government approved a legal decree to end "discrimination" against them. The reform means domestic cleaners and carers will be able to claim unemployment benefit, with employers required to make the relevant contributions as of October 1. It also means an employer can no longer dismiss a domestic worker without justification.

Domestic staff will also be covered by healthcare "protection" and will be able to access training to allow them to improve their "professional opportunities" and "working conditions," said Diaz, a member of the Communist party. The reform was unveiled in March by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's government following the CJEU's February ruling which found that the legislation which excluded domestic workers from unemployment benefits—"almost exclusively women"—was "contrary to EU law".

In its findings, the court noted that "more than 95 percent" of domestic workers were female, meaning the proportion of women affected was "significantly higher" than men.

"Consequently, the national legislation places female workers at a particular disadvantage and thus gives rise to indirect discrimination on grounds of sex," it said in its February 24 ruling.

Spain's UGT union hailed the government's decision as a "historic step forward" and vowed to keep fighting for domestic workers who are often "of foreign nationality", notably from Latin America.

"Following years of struggle, domestic workers will be workers with rights," said Carolina Vidal Lopez of the CCOO union. The decree will affect some 600,000 people working in that sector in Spain, the CCOO said. But another 200,000 who are working in the black economy without an employment contract will not benefit from this reform, it added. —AFP

Germany's nuclear stay fails to quell debate

BERLIN: Germany's decision to keep two atomic plants on standby through the winter amid a power crunch has exposed cracks in the government and unleashed criticism from economic and energy experts. The major u-turn in government policy was made after a second stress test to assess Germany's energy security as Russia reduces gas supplies to Europe.

China export growth slows sharply in August: Official data

BEIJING: China's export growth slowed significantly in August, customs authorities said Wednesday, as economic uncertainty is exacerbated by strict COVID-19 lockdowns across the country. The weakness in trade comes as global demand for Chinese products weakens with energy prices soaring and the United States facing the threat of recession.

At the same time the domestic property sector—which accounts for about a quarter of the world's number-two economy—continues to struggle with firms staggering under vast amounts of debt.

Overseas shipments increased 7.1 percent on-year, against 18 percent growth in July, China's General Administration of Customs said, while imports were up only 0.3 percent, compared with a 2.3 percent.

Analysts surveyed by Bloomberg forecast export growth of 13 percent and a 1.1 percent increase in imports. Sporadic COVID-19 lockdowns around China have dampened consumer enthusiasm and business confidence, while searing temperatures across large parts of the country this summer prompted power rationing for factories. China's factory activity shrank for the second month in a row in August, but officials are showing few signs of relaxing strict pandemic curbs, with southwestern megacity Chengdu locking down its 21 million inhabitants last week.

And while officials have announced a range of measures aimed at bolstering the economy, commentators warned that there will not likely be any concerted recovery until the tough COVID measures are removed for good. "As rising energy prices and monetary policy tightening hit US and Western European households, demand for Chinese manufacturing exports is cooling," Rajiv Biswas, APAC Chief Economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence told AFP.

Biswas said he expected these factors to continue dampening Chinese exports for the rest of the year,

Scholz: Germany can 'survive' winter despite energy crisis

BERLIN: Chancellor Olaf Scholz voiced confidence Wednesday that Germany was well prepared to "survive" the winter despite turmoil in the energy markets in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In a speech heavily critical of his predecessor chancellor Angela Merkel's energy policies that left Germany dependent on Russia for power, Scholz said Germany will keep moving "at great speed" to shed the reliance in the wake of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Germany has not only raced to fill up its gas storage tanks, but also sped up the building of terminals to receive liquefied natural gas, Scholz told parliament.

"Because we started so early, when it wasn't even such a big awareness of the problem in Germany, we are now in a situation that we can head into the winter courageously and bravely—our country can survive," he said. As Germany

Germany's three remaining nuclear plants were set to be retired at the end of the year. Instead, two of the fleet will be kept in reserve "until mid-April 2023 in case needed", Economy Minister Robert Habeck said on Monday. But the decision has become a "stress test for the coalition" of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats, Habeck's Greens and the liberal FDP, according to the Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily. Finance Minister Christian Lindner of the FDP has made no attempts to hide his push for the three plants to remain in use rather than just kept on standby.

"We shouldn't be too picky, but instead do everything that makes our lives easier," he told the Sueddeutsche Zeitung Monday ahead of the nuclear announcement.



QINGDAO, China: Trucks make their way at a port in Qingdao, in China's eastern Shandong province on September 7, 2022. —AFP

while the country faces "continued weak domestic demand due to the ongoing impact of pandemic-related restrictive measures on consumer spending as well as the residential construction slowdown".

"Single-digit export growth is more likely for the rest of the year," Zhang Zhiwei, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, told Bloomberg News. Chinese leaders had originally set a full-year GDP growth target of around 5.5 percent, but with economic expansion of just 0.4 percent in the second quarter, analysts believe it is unlikely to hit that goal. Michael Hewson of CMC markets said the latest figures "merely serve to underscore how weak domestic demand still is, and how far away that end of year GDP target of 5.5 percent is." "The target may well have been downgraded to an aspiration only last

month, but it's further away than ever after today's data and we could be lucky to see half that number at this rate." Nomura analysts on Tuesday lowered their 2022 growth forecast for China to 2.7 percent from an earlier estimate of 2.8 percent, with nearly every province in the country fighting COVID outbreaks in recent days.

"The picture is not pretty, as China continues to battle the broadest wave of COVID infections thus far," analysts wrote in a note. At the same time, China's property market, a major driver of growth, is struggling with a debt crisis and disruptions to construction.

China's central bank last month cut the five-year Loan Prime Rate—a benchmark for mortgages—in an effort to boost the flagging sector. —AFP

turns its back on Russian supplies, it was sealing new cooperation with its closest European partners, said Scholz.

"We have spoken with our friends on the west European coast, with the Netherlands and Belgium for them to expand (LNG) terminals and pipeline capacities with France which will for the first time deliver gas to us. "What we have achieved with the terminals in the north and with those on the German west European coasts, we will guarantee a secure energy supply for Germany," he said.

Europe's biggest economy has also restarted mothballed coal power plants, and this week decided to keep two nuclear plants on stand-by through mid-April instead of completely ending the usage of atomic energy by the end of the year.

But Friedrich Merz, the leader of Merkel's CDU conservatives, said it was "insanity" to keep the atomic plants only on standby and not on the grid. The power plants needed to be active "in order for us to bring down prices and costs for companies," he said. Merz's criticisms earned a sharp rebuke from Scholz, who said it was under the conservatives leadership that Germany had failed to make the right decision for its future.

The conservatives, who were in power from

That included "the continued operation of the nuclear power plants until at least 2024", the FDP boss said. In a sign that he has not shifted his position, Lindner also retweeted several voices in his party criticizing Monday evening's decision as not going far enough.

Habeck's decision partly delays the nuclear exit decided under former chancellor Angela Merkel after the Fukushima disaster in 2011. He said the subject of nuclear energy was "bound with a lot of emotions" but that the partial extension was needed to avoid an "extremely unlikely" electricity crisis.

But in light of skyrocketing electricity bills, all possible resources needed to be mobilized, according to Veronika Grimm, a member of the government's council of economic advisors. —AFP



BERLIN, Germany: German Finance Minister Christian Lindner speaks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (left) during a session at the Bundestag (lower house of parliament) in Berlin on September 7, 2022. —AFP

2005 to 2021, are "completely responsible for the fact that Germany made decisions to exit coal and nuclear but without engaging in anything else," said Scholz, who was finance minister in Merkel's coalition. Rather, the conservatives "fought against every wind power installation," said Scholz, saying it was "irresponsible CDU policies that have brought us to our current situation". —AFP



BERLIN: Greenpeace activists stage a demonstration as German Minister of Economics and Climate Protection Robert Habeck arrives to give a press conference on condition of nuclear power plants in front of the BPK (Bundespressekonferenz) building in Berlin. —AFP

Lifestyle | Feature

Scientists fight to protect DR Congo rainforest as threats increase



This aerial view shows trees in the Yangambi forest, 100 km from the city of Kisangani, in the province of Tshopo, north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. —AFP photos



A general view of a rainbow seen on the pilot farm in Yangambi.



People stand in front of the administrative building of the National Institute for Agronomic Study and Research (INERA) in Yangambi.



This aerial view shows trees in the Yangambi forest with the flux tower.



Thomas Sibret, scientist and student at the University of Ghent, verifies the devices installed in the trees in the Yangambi Biosphere Reserve.

A tower bristling with sensors juts above the canopy in northern Democratic Republic of Congo, measuring carbon dioxide emitted from the world's second-largest tropical rainforest. Spanning several countries in central Africa, the Congo Basin rainforest covers an immense area and is home to a dizzying array of species. But there are growing concerns for the future of the forest, deemed critical for sequestering CO₂, as loggers and farmers push ever deeper inside. Scientists at the Yangambi Biosphere Reserve in the DRC's Tshopo province are studying the rainforest's role in climate change—a subject that received scant attention until recently.

Standing 55 meters tall, the CO₂-measuring flux tower came online in 2020 in the lush reserve of 250,000 hectares (620,000 acres). Yangambi was renowned for tropical agronomy research during the Belgian colonial era. This week, it also hosted scientists as part of meetings in the DRC dubbed pre-COP 27, ahead of the COP27 climate summit in Egypt in November.

Thomas Sibret, who runs the CongoFlux CO₂ measuring project, said that flux towers are common worldwide. But until one was set up in Yangambi, there had been none in Congo, which had “limited our under-

standing of this ecosystem”, he said. Around 30 billion tonnes of carbon are stored across the Congo Basin, researchers estimated in a study in *Nature* in 2016. The figure is roughly equivalent to three years' of global emissions. Sibret said more time is required to draw definitive conclusions from the data gathered by DRC's flux tower, but one thing is certain: The rainforest sequesters more greenhouse gases than it emits.

'No more trees'

Paolo Cerutti, the head of the Center for International Forestry Research's operations in Congo, said this was good news. In Latin America, “we're starting to see evidence that the Amazon (rainforest) is becoming more of an emitter,” he said. “We're betting a lot on the Congo Basin, especially the DRC, which has 160 million hectares of forest still capable of absorbing carbon.” But Cerutti warned that slash-and-burn agriculture poses a particular threat to the future of the rainforest, pointing out that half a million hectares of forest were lost last year.

Slash-and-burn agriculture sees villagers cultivate lands until they become depleted, then clear forests to create new lands, and repeat the cycle. With the DRC's

population of about 100 million people set to expand, many worry the forest is in dire threat. Jean-Pierre Botomoto, the head of the Yanonge area about 40 kilometres (24 miles) from Yangambi, said that he once thought the forest was inexhaustible. But “here, there are no trees,” he said.

Villagers in his once-forested region now have to travel long distances along narrow muddy paths to find tree-dwelling caterpillars—a local delicacy. Charcoal used for cooking in the absence of electricity and gas is similarly hard to obtain. There are efforts to help farmers in the remote and impoverished region to make a living while sustaining the environment. A largely EU-financed project, for example, trains farmers to rotate cassava and groundnut crops between fast-growing acacia trees. Farmers can harvest the acacia trees to make charcoal after six years. Experts also encourage the use of more efficient kilns to produce more charcoal and teach loggers how to select which trees to fell.

Vandalism

Jean Amis, the head of a local farmers' organization, was enthusiastic about the project. “We didn't necessarily have the right practices” before, he said. Others are

too. Helene Fatouma, the president of a women's association, says fishponds on the edge of the forest now yield 1,450 kilos of fish in six months, as opposed to 30 previously. But not all residents of the surrounding area support the various schemes. Some people believe that the flux tower is stealing oxygen, for example, or that it is a prelude to land appropriation.

Researchers often find dendrometers—devices that measure tree dimensions—vandalized, and some traditional chiefs think the forest will grow back by itself without outside interference. The Indonesia-based Center for International Forestry Research says that resistance to the schemes can be overcome through raising awareness.

Dieu Merci Assumani, the director of the DRC's National Institute for Agricultural Research, agreed. But he said there needs to be more financing for locals, who have seen little benefit from promised funds to protect the rainforest. Assumani pointed as an example to the \$500-million deal to protect the Congo Basin rainforest, signed by President Felix Tshisekedi and then British prime minister Boris Johnson in Glasgow last year. “Commitments are all very well, but they need to be disbursed,” he said. —AFP



A general view of a sign board promoting Precop 27, a session for scientists held in Yangambi.



Tresor Bolaya, 26, a technician at the wood laboratory, looks at a piece of wood under a microscope in Yangambi.



People walk along a road covered by primary forest in Yangambi Biosphere Reserve.



A general view of trees in the Yangambi forest



This aerial view shows a deforested farm in Yangambi.



A staff member walks at the base of the Flux tower in Yangambi.

Belarus exiles find home from home in 'travelling' bar

Tucked under a bridge in downtown Warsaw is a bar like no other. Over the years, Karma has relocated from Belarus to Ukraine and Poland, in the face of repression and war. Along the way, the watering hole has become a home away from home where tattooed young people chill, smoke cigarettes and mix and mingle in their mother tongue. "This bar never wanted to be a travelling bar... It was just to keep our community together," said co-owner Gleb Kovalev, sporting a dark scraggly beard and inked from head to ankle. "After things became much more political, we had to move and we had to stay together," the hyperactive 31-year-old told AFP over a hotdog and a whiskey and coke.

The Belarusian regime staged a brutal crackdown on historic protests in 2020. More recently, the country has served as a springboard for its ally Russia's assault on Ukraine. The events have led thousands of Belarusians and Ukrainians to take refuge in neighboring Poland—a staunch critic of both the regime in Minsk and the Kremlin. Some of the new arrivals end up at Karma. Kovalev, who speaks seven languages, is sitting in a makeshift living room on the pavement behind the bar. There are a couple of armchairs, a tattered rug and potted plants.

It is a weekday and the night is young but already a dozen Belarusians are standing around with drinks, their laughter intermingling with the traffic overhead. "I was in every Karma bar," said Anton Lutsevich, a 3D artist from the central town of Bobruisk, noting the familiar faces from the original location. "Many of them are now here, many of them were in Kyiv... Karma is like a sitcom. You come here and you see the same characters," the tall 23-year-old told AFP.

His friend Andrey Makarevich once highailed it from riot police across a night cemetery. "You know, your motherland is not a place—it's the people from your country," said Makarevich, a 27-year-old quality assurance engineer from the northeastern city of Vitebsk. "So



Gleb Kovalev, co-owner of Karma Bar kisses the hand of his wife Julia in front of his bar in the downtown Warsaw, Poland. — AFP photos



Veronika Lindorenko (right) is seen chatting with her friend in front of Karma Bar in the downtown Warsaw, Poland.

here I feel like I'm at home."

Police 'smashing faces'

Karma first opened in the Belarusian capital in late 2017 as an art bar with music and free tattoos raffled off every Monday, a place to "make parties" as Kovalev puts it. Then came August 9, 2020, when veteran strongman Alexander Lukashenko crushed the protests that erupted after allegations of fraud in his election to a sixth term. "It was the night that changed everything in our lives... My bar was assaulted by riot police," Kovalev said. "I was inside hiding people and I saw police being out of control, just like smashing faces," he added. "I was like two meters from being arrested. So yeah, I decided to leave absolutely."

Kovalev opened another Karma in the Ukrainian capital last year, before he was again forced to pack his bags when Russia invaded. The Warsaw edition of Karma has been up and running since June, mainly drawing Belarusians but also Ukrainians, Russian oppositionists, other foreigners and the occasional Pole. "It's pretty much a migrant bar now... We welcome everyone who shares our val-



Gleb Kovalev (second right), co-owner of Karma Bar smokes in front of his bar in the downtown Warsaw, Poland.

ues," Kovalev said.

"Like art, music, tattoos, a certain way of democracy and freedom that we didn't have in the places we escaped, and also peace." Alex Chekonov, a regular,

describes Karma as a safe place where "everybody will help you". "It's always happy, always joy. Always funny and everybody is beautiful here," the 32-year-old IT guy told AFP.

'Russian roulette'

While young and cheerful, many in the crowd have a traumatic tale or two from back home. "I'm not going back because, yeah, I'm afraid," said Veronika Lindorenko, 32, who wore white and carried flowers at women's protests after the Belarusian election. "There is a high risk of me being imprisoned, as I was quite active, and it's like Russian roulette—you never know," she said, firing with her thumb and index finger like a gun. The start-up consultant has reason to be scared: she spent 10 days locked up after one tense run-in with police while supporting striking factory workers in court.

"I don't want to remember all this stuff because for me it's quite painful," she told AFP. Lindorenko left for Ukraine when she heard the powers-that-be wanted to interview her—and then again started from scratch in Poland. Kovalev has a theory about being an immigrant. "You know, it's very hard to lose everything only for the first time. Then the second time, it's fine. And the third," he said. "It's going to be even easier now because there are so many people who lost everything, like me. "You just have to unite and recreate it."—AFP

Indian mum fights tiger with bare hands to save son

An Indian mother fought off a tiger with her bare hands to save her toddler from its jaws, an official said Wednesday. Archana Choudhary stepped out of her house in the central state of Madhya Pradesh on Sunday night as the 15-month-old boy wanted to relieve himself. A tiger believed to have strayed from the nearby Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve pounced on them, local official Sanjeev Shrivastava told AFP.

It attacked and tried to sink its teeth into the child's head but the mother leapt to the rescue, he said. The tiger kept trying to snatch the boy until villagers heard her screams and rushed to her rescue. The tiger then slunk away into the forest. "She has been admitted to the hospital. She is out of danger and recovering. The baby is also doing fine," Shrivastava said. The mother suffered punctured lungs and wounds to her abdomen while the toddler had deep gashes on his head.

The Times of India newspaper said a search operation was underway to push the tiger back to its territory and that villagers had been told to stay indoors at night. A rise in human-animal conflicts has been seen across South Asia as ever more forest is lost to urban expansion. Nearly 225 people were killed in tiger attacks between 2014 and 2019 in India, according to government figures. More than 200 tigers were killed by poachers or electrocution between 2012 and 2018, the data showed. India is home to around 70 percent of the world's tigers and the tiger population was estimated at 2,967 in 2018. —AFP



Students at a school run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) use new electronic tablets in class. — AFP photos



Students at a school run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) pose with new electronic tablets in class, in Gaza City.

UN gives Gaza children tablets to connect with world

The United Nations said Wednesday it was helping connect Palestinian children in the blockaded Gaza Strip to the outside world by distributing tablets to hundreds of pupils. Children make up nearly half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million. Most of them have never been able to leave the coastal territory, which is ruled by the Islamist movement Hamas. Some 890 tablets are being handed out this week at schools run by UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, following a pilot that saw a few dozen devices given to children last year.

"We're very conscious that for children as they grow, they're going to have to be able to engage with an increasingly digitalized world," Thomas White, the agency's Gaza director, told AFP. The 15-year blockade of the enclave led by Israel has crippled Gaza's economy, leaving 74 percent of young graduates unemployed, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

The European Union-funded project to boost children's computer skills is seen by UNRWA as a way to increase their chances of getting a job in the growing tech sector, either locally or remotely. This could "provide opportunities for young Gazans to make an income and get ahead," White said, standing in a school yard in Gaza City. The project could help young Gazans go into coding, providing back office IT support for companies or customer support online, he added. But Gazans still have to con-

tend with frequent power cuts and internet access limited to 2G. Thirteen-year-old Salma Shamiah was among those to receive a new tablet, after excelling at a tech summer school. "I hope to learn programming in the future and have a programming company in Gaza," she said in a classroom filled with computers. "I feel that Gaza is behind in programming. I expect in the future programming will be dominant in the world and we will do useful and beautiful things." —AFP



Thomas White, director of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), instructs students at an UNRWA school on how to use electronic tablets in class, in Gaza City.

Lifestyle | Features

Roots rock: Chimpanzees drum to their own signature beats

The drummers puff out their chests, let out a guttural yell, then step up to their kits and furiously pound out their signature beat so that everyone within earshot can tell who is playing. The drum kit is the giant gnarled root of a tree in the Ugandan rainforest—and the drummer is a chimpanzee. A new study published Tuesday found that not only do chimpanzees have their own styles—some preferring straightforward rock beats while others groove to more freeform jazz—they can also hide their signature sound if they do not want to reveal their location.

The researchers followed the Waibira chimpanzee group in western Uganda's Budongo Forest, recording the drum sessions of seven male chimps and analyzing the intervals between beats. The chimps mostly use their feet, but also their hands to make the sound, which carries more than a kilometer through the dense rainforest. The drumming serves as a kind of social media, allowing travelling chimpanzees to communicate with each other, said Vesta Eleuteri, the lead author of the study published in the journal *Animal Behavior*.

The PhD student said that after just a few weeks in the rainforest she was able to recognize exactly who was drumming. "Tristan—the John Bonham of the forest—makes very fast drums with many evenly separated beats," she said, referring to the legendarily hard-hitting drummer of rock band Led Zeppelin. Tristan's drumming "is so fast that you can barely see his hands", Eleuteri said.

Hiding their style

But other chimps like Alf or Ila make a more syncopated rhythm using a technique in which both their feet hit a root at almost the same time, said British primatologist Catherine Hobaiter, the study's senior author. The research team was led by scientists from Scotland's University of St Andrews, and several of the chimpanzees are named after Scottish single malt whiskies, including Ila-for Caol Ila—and fellow chimp Talisker.



This handout combination of undated photographs released by University of St Andrews shows a chimpanzee drumming on a tree in Uganda's Budongo Forest. Chimpanzee drummers puff out their chests and let out a guttural yell before stepping up to their kits and furiously pounding out their signature beat so that everyone can tell who is playing. —AFP

Hobaiter, who started the habituation of the Waibira group in 2011, said it long been known that chimpanzees drummed. "But it wasn't until this study that we understood they're using these signature styles when they're potentially looking for other individuals—when they're travelling, when they're on their own or in a small group," she told AFP.

The researchers also discovered that the chimps

sometimes choose not to drum in their signature beat, to avoid revealing their location or identity. "They have this wonderful flexibility to express their identity and their style, but also to sometimes keep that hidden," Hobaiter said. Michael Wilson, a specialist on chimpanzees at the University of Minnesota who was not involved in the research, said the study's methodology was sound. But he was not "completely convinced, though, that the drumming is sufficiently distinctive that you could reliably tell all individuals apart," because some patterns seemed very similar, he said, calling for more research.

'A sense of music'

While plenty of animals produce sounds we think of as music—such as birdsong—the research could open the door to the possibility that chimpanzees enjoy music on a level generally thought to only be possible for humans. "I do think that chimpanzees, like us, potentially have a sense of rhythmicity, a sense of music, something that touches them on an almost emotional level, in the way that we might have a sense of awe when we hear an amazing drum solo or another kind of dramatic musical sound," Hobaiter said.

Most research on the culture of chimpanzees has looked at their tools or food, she said. "But if we think about human culture we don't think about the tools we use—we think about how we dress, the music we listen to," she added. Next the researchers plan to investigate how neighboring and far-off communities of chimpanzees drum in their own differing styles.

Hobaiter has already been looking at chimpanzees in Guinea, where there are very few trees to drum in the open savannah. "We've got early hints that they might be throwing rocks against rocks" to make sound, she said. "Literal rock music in this case." —AFP

Filmmakers dissect Leonard Cohen through 'Hallelujah'

A filmmaker duo retracing Leonard Cohen's life through his legendary anthem "Hallelujah" said they were so in awe of the Canadian singer that it took them years of preparation before tackling the documentary. Presenting "Hallelujah: Leonard Cohen, A Journey, A Song" at the American Film Festival that opened at the weekend in Deauville, France, Dan Geller and Dayna Goldfine told AFP they studied Cohen's personal notebooks, rare footage and even his selfies for eight years before making the film.

"When we first thought about the project, and then

approached the life of the singer—who gave his blessing to the project two years before he died aged 82 in 2016 — through "Hallelujah", his most famous song, which has acquired cult status in the world of rock.

When Cohen first released the song, tucked away on the "Various Positions" album from 1984, it went almost unnoticed. But then Bob Dylan performed a cover, followed by The Velvet Underground's John Cale, and Jeff Buckley, and then some 300 artists recording their own versions of "Hallelujah". "It's looking at Leonard Cohen through the prism of his most famous song," Goldfine said.

'He's a human being'

Focusing on the one song relieved the filmmakers of "the burden of having to do like a cradle to grave by a biography", she said. Instead, they highlighted "his influences and the parts of Leonard's spiritual journey that illuminated why he was the only person in the universe who could have possibly written 'Hallelujah'", Goldfine said, adding: "The song is so much about everyone's spiritual journey."

Geller and Goldfine, based in San Francisco and whose previous work includes "Ballet Russes" and "Isadora Duncan," acknowledged that obtaining Cohen's blessing was crucial. "Without that, we would have gotten nowhere," Geller said. It still took the duo years to access Cohen's notebooks, now owned by his family, which contain detailed insights into the several years it took the singer to get "Hallelujah" right.

As they studied the archives, they also discovered that Cohen had developed an early knack for photographic self-portraits. "We like to say Leonard was the first selfie taker because he was way ahead of his time, he started taking selfies of himself using this old Polaroid camera, probably going back to the 70s," Goldfine said. The film also contains a moving scene when a young, nervous Cohen broke off a performance of his first hit "Suzanne" in 1967, choking with stage fright, only to be coaxed back onto the stage by his duet partner, US singer Judy Collins. The incident added to the filmmakers' growing realization that even the great Cohen was only human. "He's a man. He's not a normal man," Goldfine said. "He's a human being who worked very hard on himself. Every day of his life." —AFP



US film directors Dayna Goldfine (left) and Dan Geller pose on the red carpet of the 48th Deauville US Film Festival in Deauville, western France. —AFP

even when we were first embarking upon it, my feelings about Leonard were that he was an unexceptional man. You know, it was the great Leonard Cohen," Goldfine said. "How were we possibly going to do justice to this unexceptional man?" Geller and Goldfine



In this file photo Canadian singer Justin Bieber performing on stage at the AccorHotels Arena in Paris. —AFP photos



In this file photo Canadian singer-songwriter Justin Bieber arrives for the 64th Annual Grammy Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas.

Justin Bieber scraps world tour over health issues

Justin Bieber said Tuesday he is once again taking a break from touring, months after revealing he'd been diagnosed with a syndrome that caused him partial facial paralysis. In June the 28-year-old megastar had pushed back the North American leg of his "Justice" tour due to Ramsay Hunt Syndrome, a complication of shingles. Bieber recently went back on the road, performing six live shows in Europe as well as the Rock in Rio festival in Brazil this weekend. But he said Tuesday his return to the stage had been premature.

"This past weekend I performed at Rock in Rio and I gave everything I have to the people in Brazil. After getting off stage, the exhaustion overtook me and I realized that I need to make my health the priority right now," Bieber said. "So I'm going to take a

break from touring for the time being," the "Peaches" singer continued.

"I'm going to be OK, but I need time to rest and get better. I've been so proud to bring this show and our message of justice to the world." Ramsay Hunt Syndrome is a rare neurological disorder that can inflame and paralyze the facial nerve, and cause a painful rash around the ear or mouth. In addition to facial paralysis, it can cause hearing loss. Bieber had dozens of performances across the globe scheduled through March 2023.

The superstar did not give an estimated timeline of recovery or indicate whether the "Justice" tour would ever resume. Covid-19 had forced two postponements even before the singer's health began suffering. —AFP

Tilda Swinton on the importance of believing in ghosts

Tilda Swinton spoke on Tuesday about the "therapeutic importance" of believing in ghosts as she presented a haunting, semi-autobiographical new film about a woman dealing with the death of her mother. Swinton's latest collaboration with British director Joanna Hogg is "The Eternal Daughter", competing at the Venice Film Festival, which draws heavily on both women's experience of losing their mothers in recent years. Set in a spooky country mansion, it is a deeply emotional film with a ghostly, haunted atmosphere. "I certainly believe that we need to project ourselves into the idea of ghosts. There's something very important and therapeutic about that relationship," Swinton told AFP.

"One of the main motors of grief is the feeling that you have to give up that relationship. And then you come to realize, if you're fortunate, that you can keep the relationship going," she added. "They may not be present but you can keep the conversation going." Hogg has become a favorite of the festival circuit following her two-part film "The Souvenir", based on her younger years with a drug-addicted boyfriend and her attempts to turn the trauma into art. But she told AFP that the new film was even more personal.

"It's a bit terrifying to be honest," she said of the imminent premiere of the film. "All my films are personal but... I feel more exposed with this one than I have with the other ones." Swinton, who lost her mother in 2012, said the film was "a joint autobiography in a way". "We were very brave, there were no holds barred," added Hogg. "There was nowhere we weren't going to go in looking at the minutiae of this relationship between mother and daughter."

Hogg said she, too, believes in ghosts—or at least wants to. "I think we project a lot as human beings and sometimes these projections are confused—is it coming from me or someone else? "But I can believe that people hang around after they die, some are ready to go more easily than others. "I feel that I've sensed things, seen things, heard things and I don't think they were just coming from me." —AFP



British actress Tilda Swinton poses during a photocall for the film "The Eternal Daughter" presented in the Venezia 79 competition as part of the 79th Venice International Film Festival at Lido di Venezia in Venice, Italy. —AFP photos



(From left) British director Joanna Hogg, British actress Tilda Swinton and British actress Carly-Sophia Davies during a photocall for the film "The Eternal Daughter" presented in the Venezia 79 competition.

Uganda bans 'immoral' festival linked to sex, drugs, LGBTQ

Uganda's parliament on Tuesday slapped a ban on a popular music festival, the second time that authorities have taken steps against the annual event over accusations that it promotes sex, drugs and homosexuality. The four-day Nyege Nyege festival on the banks of the Nile in the southern town of Jinja brings together artists from across Africa to entertain around 10,000 revellers and is usually held in September.

But nine days before the event was due to resume—following a pandemic-induced shutdown since 2020 — parliament said on Twitter that it had "stopped the 'Nyege Nyege' festival, an annual social event scheduled to take place next week". Uganda's ethics and integrity minister Rose Lily Akello told reporters that the festival "promotes a lot of immorality and this immorality is something which is not wanted in our country."

Uganda's state minister for tourism, Martin Mugarura, told AFP that the ban would have a destructive impact on the economy, as the travel industry limps back to life after the Covid-19 pandemic. "Over 8,000 foreign tourists have already booked tickets and were to stay in the country during the duration of the festival and even beyond," he said. "We hope there is a reversal of this decision," he added.

The festival was banned in 2018 by former ethics minister Simon Lokodo, a fervent Christian and outspoken homophobe, who described it as an orgy of homosexuality, nudity and drugs akin to "devil worship". But he was forced to lift the ban barely a day later, following outrage on social media. Lokodo, who died in January, said at the time that the event encour-



aged "the celebration and recruitment of young people into homosexuality".

"The very name of the festival is provocative. It means 'sex, sex' or 'urge for sex,'" he said. Nyege Nyege means an irresistible urge to dance in the local Luganda language, but it can have a sexual connotation in other languages in the region. Uganda is notorious for its intolerance of homosexuality—which is criminalized in the country—and strict Christian views on sexuality in general. In 2013 Ugandan lawmakers passed a bill that called for life in prison for people caught having gay sex, although a court later struck down the law. Last month the government suspended the country's leading gay rights organization, Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), accusing it of operating illegally in the East African nation. —AFP

Sports

Sri Lanka prove a World Cup point with India win

India great Tendulkar backs under-fire Sikh cricketer

DUBAI: Batsman Bhanuka Rajapaksa said Sri Lanka have shaken off their underdogs tag and proved they can challenge at next month's T20 World Cup, after beating India to stand on the verge of the Asia Cup final. Rajapaksa's side bounced back from a crushing opening defeat against Afghanistan to register three straight wins in the Twenty20 tournament, which was moved from Sri Lanka to the United Arab Emirates because of political unrest and an economic crisis.

Skipper Dasun Shanaka and Rajapaksa put on unbeaten stand of 64 to help Sri Lanka chase down 174 to beat pre-tournament favourites India by six wickets in the Super Four match in Dubai on Tuesday. "We were underdogs from the time that we came to the UAE. We all know how Pakistan and India are on their day," said Rajapaksa, who hit an unbeaten 25.

"So we had less pressure and all we wanted to was prove a point to the world, especially to our nation because with all the crisis happening back home this is the only thing with which we could bring smile to their faces." If Pakistan beat Afghanistan later on Wednesday, they will face Sri Lanka in Sunday's final and knock out arch-rivals India in the process. Sri Lanka, who won the 50-over World Cup in 1996 and the T20 World Cup in 2014, have enjoyed success on the field this year despite the country reeling from fuel and food shortages and rolling blackouts.

"After the statements that we have made, I don't think we could be called underdogs any more," said Rajapaksa. "I think so far we have done it quite well and we have really good chance of clinching the World Cup." The team won rich praise for the win over India with former captain Mahela Jayawardene, tweeting: "Great win boys!!!

Attitude was brilliant. Never gave up... keep it going." Rajapaksa added: "No matter what state we come to UAE, the end goal is to win the trophy, we want to clinch the title. "So I think we are pretty confident as a team. Everyone is clicking."

Another ex-captain, Kumar Sangakkara, lauded the team's "never say die attitude" and "sparkling talent and ability". Rajapaksa said that keeping faith with a settled squad of Sri Lankan players had helped to build confidence. "From captain's view, and selectors and coaches, they have been backing the players and it's a very good sign," he said. "Going forward it will really help Sri Lankan cricket to rebuild their brand, which was there a couple of decades back."

Under-fire Sikh cricketer

In another development, cricket great Sachin Tendulkar called on Indians to keep sport "free from personal attacks" after a Sikh player from the national team suffered a torrent of online abuse for dropping a catch in a match against Pakistan. Most of the vitriol directed against Arshdeep Singh, after he dropped an easy catch at a crucial moment in the Asia Cup clash on Sunday, focused on the fact that he is from India's Sikh minority. His Wikipedia entry was briefly altered to link him to the Khalistan Sikh separatist movement and Twitter users accused him of having ties to Pakistan.

There were also large numbers of tweets supporting him. Former player Tendulkar, the top run-scorer of all time who still enjoys huge adulation in India, tweeted on Tuesday that all "athletes representing the country give their best and play for the nation always. "They need our constant support & remember, that in sports you win some & you lose some. Let's keep cricket or any other sport free



DUBAI: Sri Lanka's captain Dasun Shanaka (right) and Bhanuka Rajapaksa take a run during the Asia Cup Twenty20 international cricket Super Four match between India and Sri Lanka on September 6, 2022. —AFP

from personal attacks," he wrote.

Tendulkar, 49, who is from India's Hindu majority, also tagged 23-year-old Singh, telling him to "keep working hard". It is not the first time that cricketers from Hindu-majority India's religious minorities have faced such attacks. Last year Muslim player Mohammed Shami became a target

of abuse after India were thrashed by Pakistan in the T20 World Cup. India's hopes of qualifying for the Asia Cup final on Sunday are all but over after defeat to Pakistan was followed by losing to Sri Lanka on Tuesday in Dubai. If Pakistan beat Afghanistan later Wednesday, they will knock out India and face Sri Lanka in Sunday's final. —AFP

French rugby boss Laporte graft trial opens

PARIS: Bernard Laporte, a towering figure in French rugby, goes on trial on Wednesday on charges of corruption and influence-peddling in a high-profile case making big waves only a year before France hosts the World Cup. The 58-year-old former France coach is accused of favouritism in awarding a shirt sponsor contract for the national side to a close friend, Mohamed Altrad, the billionaire owner of Top 14 champions Montpellier.

The five officials in the dock also include Claude Acher, who was recently suspended as managing director of the 2023 World Cup organisation, and French Rugby Federation (FFR) vice-president Serge Simon. "The accusations against Bernard Laporte are completely trumped-up, notably because everything he did was in the best interest of the Federation," his lawyer, Jean-Pierre Versini-Campinchi, told AFP. But France's financial crimes unit PNF disagrees.

Its investigation into the dealings of Laporte, who was minister for sports in president Nicolas Sarkozy's government from 2007 to 2009, concluded he was guilty of illegal influence-peddling and passive corruption, mostly for the benefit of Altrad. The two men's friendship and business links are at the heart of the case, which goes back to February 2017 when they signed a deal under which Laporte, head of the French Rugby Federation (FFR), agreed to appear in Altrad group conferences, and sold his image reproduction rights, in return for 180,000 euros (then around \$190,000).

'A fighter'

But while that sum was indeed paid to Laporte, prosecutors claim that he never actually provided the services he signed up for. He did, however, make several public statements backing Altrad and, in March 2017, signed a 1.8-million-euro deal with the businessman making his eponymous firm the first-ever sponsor to appear on the French national team's jerseys. Even now, Altrad's logo features on team's shirts thanks to a follow-up deal negotiated by Laporte in 2018 and which prosecutors say bears all the hallmarks of corruption.

Laporte is further accused of intervening with French rugby's federal disciplinary commission which reduced a fine against an Altrad company to 20,000 euros after a call from Laporte, from an original 70,000 euros. While prosecutors see this and several more incidents as proof of illicit favouritism, Laporte himself claimed there was no "cause-effect relationship", and said he himself cancelled the contract in the summer of 2017 when press reports began to question the nature of the relationship between the two men.

The trial will also examine the links between Claude Acher and the FFR from 2017 to 2018 when Acher's company, Score XV, won contracts for four missions, mostly linked to the French bid for the 2023 World Cup. Prosecutors say one of those missions, worth 21,000 euros, was never carried out, but Laporte still signed off on a bonus payment to Score XV of 30,000 euros. —AFP

Duplantis bids to end annus mirabilis on a high note

ZURICH: Pole vault king Mondo Duplantis has vowed to bring his enthralling season to a more satisfactory end at Thursday's Diamond League final in Zurich after suffering a rare defeat in Brussels last week. On the back of winning Olympic gold at last year's Tokyo Games, the US-born Swede has gone on to totally dominate his event this year, winning the world indoor title in Belgrade in March and world outdoor gold in Oregon in July.

Both titles were claimed in world record heights of 6.20 and 6.21 metres respectively. In a dream summer, Duplantis also sealed European gold in Munich before failing three times at 5.91m in Brussels to break a 17-strong season win streak and hand Filipino Ernest John Obiena a shock victory.

"It's rare for me to jump the way I did. Maybe I needed a bit of a wake-up call," conceded Duplantis. "In Zurich I'll try to come back a little stronger than in Brussels. I want to put up another good performance at the end of the year and end on a high." Duplantis is one of three world record holders on show in Zurich along with Nigerian 100m hurdler Tobi Amusan and triple jump queen Yulimar Rojas of Venezuela.

There are loaded fields in the sprints, Jamaica's

Judge orders retrial of ex-Man Utd star Giggs

LONDON: Former Manchester United footballer Ryan Giggs will face a re-trial on domestic violence charges, a UK judge ruled on Wednesday, after a jury last month failed to reach a verdict. Judge Hilary Manley at Manchester Crown Court set a new trial date of July 31, 2023, after jurors were deadlocked following the initial four-week hearing. Ex-Wales international Giggs, 48, denied controlling and coercive behavior against his former girlfriend Kate Greville as well as assaulting her and her younger sister. Prosecutor Peter Wright told court Wednesday that "we do seek a re-trial in respect of Mr Giggs."

"The matter has been considered at a senior level within the Crown Prosecution Service and also the willingness of the complainant to give evidence. "They indicate a preparedness so to

LIV Golf's Gooch hits back at Horschel over hypocritical comment

LONDON: Talor Gooch has hit back at Billy Horschel after the defending champion criticized the presence of 17 LIV players at this week's PGA Championship at Wentworth. High-profile DP World Tour members Ian Poulter, Sergio Garcia and Lee Westwood are eligible for the tournament near London after their suspensions for playing in the inaugural event of the Saudi-backed breakaway series were temporarily stayed on appeal. US golfer Gooch and Mexico's Abraham Ancer are in the field due to their rankings in the top 60, but Horschel believes they are being "hypocritical" in chasing ranking points having never shown any interest in the event before.

'pocket rocket' Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce again going head-to-head in the 100m with world 200m champion Shericka Jackson. Jackson beat Fraser-Pryce over the shorter distance in Brussels, the five-time champion insisting, however, thigh contractions that saw her miss Lausanne were behind her. Jackson plans to double in the 200m, with Switzerland's newly-minted European champion Mujinga Kambundji her likeliest rival.

Two-time world champion Noah Lyles of the United States headlines the men's 200m as he bids for a fifth Diamond League trophy. Winners of the 32 disciplines, six to be decided in a city event on Wednesday, also bag \$30,000 (30,300 euros), while in addition there are wildcard entries up for grabs for next year's World Athletics Championships in Budapest. Dutch hopes ride on 400m hurdler Femke Bol, who was arguably the stand-out performer at the European champs as she sealed three golds in Munich.

The Olympic bronze medalist had to settle for silver behind world record holder Sydney McLaughlin in Eugene, but in the American's absence, Bol will be hot favorite in Zurich with Dalilah Muhammad her closest rival. Middle-distance events sees Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen, the world 5,000m champion and Olympic and European 1,500m gold medallist, competing in the latter at what is expected to be a sold-out Letzigrund Stadium.

Ingebrigtsen, still only 21, was forced to swallow a bitter pill when he was beaten to world

do." Giggs said in a statement that he was "obviously disappointed that a retrial has been ordered. "My not guilty plea remains in relation to all charges. I am confident that justice will eventually be done and my name will be cleared of all the allegations," he added.

Giggs will remain on bail until next year's trial. Manley dismissed the jury of seven women and four men in the original trial, which had been given the option of delivering a majority verdict after she determined there was no "realistic prospect" of a decision following almost 23 hours of consideration. If eventually found guilty, the three counts could lead to a five-year jail term.

Prosecutors alleged that the ex-star headbutted Greville in the face as she tried to end their relationship, and had subjected her to a "litany of abuse, both physical and psychological". Former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson was among those to give evidence in the case, which also saw Giggs take the stand and admit to being unfaithful in all his past romantic relationships but

"I honestly don't think that the American guys who haven't supported the (European) Tour should be here," Horschel said. "Abraham Ancer, Talor Gooch... you've never played this tournament, you've never supported the DP World Tour. Why are you here? "You are here for one reason only and that's to try to get world ranking points because you don't have it (on LIV Golf). It's hypocritical because of what some of these guys have said when they said they wanted to play less golf."

But Gooch pointed out on social media that Horschel had played few regular DP World Tour events himself. "He supports what's best for his career. Like all of us do," Gooch wrote on Twitter. In response to being asked if Jon Rahm was correct in stating that he was only at Wentworth to try to earn world ranking points, Gooch replied: "World ranking points and first time I've earned a spot into this event. Super excited to play. "Name a top-50 player in history who hasn't chased world ranking points." —AFP



Mondo Duplantis

1,500m gold in Oregon by Britain's Jake Wightman. The Briton has since stepped down a distance to the 800m, notching up an impressive victory in Brussels over Kenya's world and Olympic champion Emmanuel Korir. There will be hopes for a British double in the two-lap race as European gold medallist Keely Hodgkinson takes on Korir's teammate Mary Moraa, who beat her to the Commonwealth title in Birmingham. —AFP



Former Manchester United star and Wales manager Ryan Giggs

deny ever being violent. He resigned as the Wales manager in June, after being on leave since his arrest.



BOLTON: Talor Gooch of the United States hits his tee shot on the 18th hole during the final round of the LIV Golf Invitational - Boston at The Oaks golf course. —AFP

Sports

Khachanov stuns Kyrgios, sets up Ruud duel for US Open final spot

Norwegian fifth seed Ruud beats Italy's Berrettini

NEW YORK: Karen Khachanov set-up a US Open semi-final duel with Casper Ruud on Tuesday when he battled past "devastated" Nick Kyrgios in a big-hitting five-setter, shattering the Australian crowd-pleaser's dreams of a maiden Grand Slam title. Russian 27th seed Khachanov triumphed 7-5, 4-6, 7-5, 6-7 (3/7), 6-4 over the Wimbledon runner-up to make the last-four at a major for the first time.

Earlier Tuesday, Norwegian fifth seed Ruud defeated Italy's Matteo Berrettini 6-1, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) to make his second Slam semi-final of 2022 having finished runner-up to Rafael Nadal at the French Open. Khachanov fired 30 aces and a total of 63 winners past Kyrgios. "I did it, guys. Finally, you are showing me some love," Khachanov told the mostly pro-Kyrgios crowd on Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"It was a crazy match I was expecting it would be like this. I'm ready to run, to fight to play five sets. We played almost four hours and that's the only way to beat Nick." The Russian said he had "nothing to lose" when he faces Ruud on Friday. "I would like to win it," said Khachanov who lost to the Norwegian on clay in Rome in 2020 in their only previous meeting. "But as deep as you go the expectations rise up. I did the step forward, I made my first semi-final and I think I have nothing to lose."

"I just want to go for it and be ready for the next match and hopefully it will be a good one." Kyrgios, who had knocked out defending champion Daniil Medvedev in the last-16, hit 31 aces in his 75 winners.



NEW YORK: Russia's Karen Khachanov celebrates after defeating Australia's Nick Kyrgios in the 2022 US Open Tennis tournament men's singles quarter-finals on September 6, 2022.



NEW YORK: Norway's Casper Ruud celebrates defeating Italy's Matteo Berrettini on September 6, 2022. —AFP photos

However, his unforced error count of 58 was almost double the 31 of Khachanov. "I'm devastated. It's heart-breaking for me and everyone," said Kyrgios. "I feel like I have let so many people down."

After Kyrgios had levelled the contest just after midnight with a dominant tiebreaker, he allowed Khachanov to break for a 1-0 lead in the final set. Kyrgios then failed to convert break points in the second and fourth games and his chance was gone. They were two of seven break points saved by the

Russian on the night. Khachanov went to match point off a net cord and claimed victory from an unreturned serve after three hours and 39 minutes of action.

'Walk on water'

Ruud reached the US Open semi-finals for the first time after breaking Berrettini five times while saving seven of nine break points. He raced through the first two sets under the roof of Arthur Ashe Stadium before 2019 semi-finalist Berrettini stopped the rot with a break for

2-0 in the third. At 2-5 down, the 23-year-old Ruud saved two set points before recovering and going on to dominate the tiebreak.

"It was a better start to a match than I ever had before. Everything was going my way plus Matteo didn't serve as well as he usually does," said seventh-ranked Ruud who could finish the US Open as the new world number one. "I got a little nervous towards the end of the second set because things were going a little too well. "You think you can walk on water,

which is not possible. The third set was very tough." Berrettini, who missed the French Open because of a hand injury and Wimbledon due to Covid, admitted he had endured a day to forget. "Nothing more I can say than the worst day of the tournament probably in the most important moment," he said. The remaining quarter-finals take place on Wednesday. Frances Tiafoe, the conqueror of Rafael Nadal, takes on Andrey Rublev while Carlos Alcaraz, the third seed, meets Jannik Sinner. —AFP

Brady's return puts Bucs in spotlight as NFL season kicks off

LOS ANGELES: Tom Brady's dramatic retirement U-turn has the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the spotlight as the NFL season kicks off with the superstar quarterback in search of an eighth Super Bowl title. Brady's retirement, announced shortly after the Bucs fell to the eventual Super Bowl champion Los Angeles Rams in last season's playoffs, lasted just weeks before he reversed his decision. Needless to say he was welcomed back with open arms by Tampa Bay, where new coach Todd Bowles is at the helm and Bruce Arians, who coached Brady and the Bucs to a Super Bowl title two seasons ago, is now a consultant.

Arians's take is that Brady is "throwing better than I've ever seen him" heading into his 23rd NFL campaign, his body holding up thanks to an efficient throwing style and scrupulous attention to fitness. Brady's excused absence from some pre-season activities for personal reasons raised eyebrows around the league. But the 45-year-old insisted that despite the tug of off-field obligations "the competitive fire still burns."

"I've got a lot to prove this year," Brady said. "I'm out there to prove that I'm still capable of leading a team to a championship." His teammates don't question that. "Tom's Tom," rookie running back Rachaad White said. "He's our leader. He's everything we want. He's our captain. He's iconic." Brady's presence puts the Bucs firmly in the spotlight in a season that features the Rams' bid to become the first team in 18 years to repeat as Super Bowl champions.

Once again, however, the NFL finds itself touched by unsavoury scandal with Cleveland Browns quarterback Deshaun Watson banned for the first 11 games after accusations of sexual assault and inappropriate conduct during massage sessions. Watson, who missed the entire 2021 season amid the allegations while with the Houston Texans, didn't face criminal charges and landed a five-year, \$230-million deal with the Browns. He'll be eligible to return on November 28 — just in time for his first possible game to be a December 4 contest at Houston.

The Buffalo Bills, meanwhile, did what they could to sidestep controversy when they jettisoned rookie



Tom Brady #12 of Tampa Bay Buccaneers

punter Matt Araiza two days after a civil lawsuit was filed alleging he was among a trio of San Diego State University players who raped a 17-year-old girl last year—allegations Araiza denies. The immensely popular but controversy-prone NFL also goes into the season facing a lawsuit from three Black coaches-led by former Miami Dolphins head coach Brian Flores—alleging racism in league hiring practices.

The NFL is counting on the start of the season to turn attention to the field. The Rams kick things off on Thursday against a Bills team widely touted as a Super Bowl contender. Perhaps the biggest question mark for the Rams in their repeat bid is quarterback Matthew Stafford's balky throwing arm. Stafford, who played through pain last season, declared himself "ready to go" with no limitations as the tough season-opener loomed.

The Bills are hoping to launch their campaign with a statement win as they seek to end the franchise's 0-4 record of Super Bowl futility. They fell to the Kansas City Chiefs in the AFC championship game two years ago and to the Chiefs in overtime in the second round of the playoffs last season—a defeat that quarterback Josh Allen says only solidified the Bills' resolve.

"Guys are hungry," Allen said. "We know the taste that was left with us and we want to get rid of that." Allen said the arrival of new offensive coordinator Ken Dorsey means the Bills offense will be even better this year. And the club added a key defensive piece in two-time Super Bowl champion Von Miller to bolster their pass rush. They're hoping the changes take them all the way to Super Bowl 57 in Phoenix, Arizona, on February 12. —AFP

United, Arsenal, Roma headline Europa line-up

PARIS: Premier League heavyweights Manchester United and Arsenal begin as the leading contenders for this season's Europa League, although Jose Mourinho's Roma are eyeing back-to-back continental titles after claiming the inaugural Europa Conference League earlier this year. It is a long road to this season's final at the Puskas Arena in Budapest on May 31, 2023, with clubs facing a packed schedule in order to complete the group stage before the World Cup in Qatar starts on November 20.

That means the likes of United and Arsenal will be relying on their squad depth to get them through some of their less glamorous Thursday night fixtures while they try to maintain challenges at the top of the Premier League. Returning to the Champions League has to be the priority for both, although winning Europe's second-tier trophy is

one way of getting there. Eintracht Frankfurt were the surprise victors last season, beating Rangers in a breathless final in Seville, and it is notable that the last four winners of the trophy all began the campaign in the Europa League group stage, rather than dropping out of the Champions League. The last club to fall out of Europe's elite club competition and go on to win the Europa League was Atletico Madrid in 2018.

Erik ten Hag's United should not face too many obstacles in advancing from Group E up against Real Sociedad, Sheriff Tiraspol and Neil Lennon's Omonia Nicosia. Real Sociedad, who finished sixth in La Liga last season, will come to Old Trafford for their opening game with a 36-year-old David Silva in tow but without Alexander Isak following the Swedish striker's departure for Newcastle United.

Europa League winners in 2017 and runners-up in 2021, United will not fear their other opponents, even if perennial Moldovan champions Sheriff beat Real Madrid away in last season's Champions League. Arsenal, off to a fine start in the Premier League, have landed in a Champions League group in the sense that all three opponents dropped out of the qualifying rounds of that competition. —AFP

CAF Champions League: Things to know

JOHANNESBURG: The final edition of the CAF Champions League as the premier African club competition kicks off on Friday, with title-holders Wydad Casablanca among 58 contenders. Staged annually since 1964, the competition will surrender its marquee status next year to the Africa Super League, a new, much richer 24-team event scheduled to kick off in August 2023. The Super League will offer winners \$11.5 million (11.6 million euros) compared with the \$2.5 million pocketed by Champions League victors. Here, AFP Sport lists five things about the 2023 Champions League, with Wydad hoping to become the fifth club to win back-to-back editions.

The three-time African champions have a new coach with Hussein Ammouta replacing Walid Regragui, who quit soon after a 2-0 victory over

Egyptian outfit Al Ahly in the last final. Regragui has since replaced Bosnian Vahid Halilhodzic as coach of Morocco, one of five African qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, which kicks off on November 20. Wydad have received a bye to the round of 32 in October and should see off Rivers United of Nigeria or Watanga of Liberia and secure a place among 16 qualifiers for the group phase.

Record 10-time Champions League winners Ahly are experiencing tough times, finishing outside the top two in the Egyptian league this season for the first time in 30 years. Arch rivals Zamalek finished first for the second straight season and Pyramids, bankrolled by Saudi and Emirati petro dollars, pipped Ahly for second spot. Portuguese coach Ricardo Soares is reportedly on his way out and Halilhodzic, who guided Raja Casablanca to 1997 Champions League glory, has been linked with the post. Petro Luanda were the surprise packets of last season as they reached the semi-finals before falling 4-2 on aggregate to Wydad. A team coached by Portuguese Alexandre Santos will hope to fare better than fellow Angolans Primeiro Agosto, who got to the 2018 semi-finals but have made no impact in Africa since. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Adaliya	22517144
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Khalidiya	24848075
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Kaifan	24849807
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shamiya	24848913
Chest Hospital	24849400	Shuwaikh	24814507
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Adan Hospital	23940620	Nuzha	22526804
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Qadsiya	22515088
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Dasmah	22532265
		Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
Kaizen center	25716707	Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Rawda	22517733	Mirqab	22456536

Clinics

CHANGE OF NAME

I Murtuza holder of Indian Passport number M1041934 issued in Kuwait on 18th September 2014 have changed my given name from "Murtuza" to "Murtuza Shabir Kadarbhai" with Surname : Dudhwala. My full name now should read as "Murtuza Shabir Kadarbhai Dudhwala (C# 2403) - 06-09-2022

Ravinderjit Singh currently holder of Indian

Passport No. S9734510 issued in Kuwait on 17/09/2018 and expiry on 16/09/2028, I want to change my name to JOHAL (as a Surname) Ravinderjit Singh. (C# 2402) - 05-09-2022

I, MOHAMMAD holder of Indian Passport No. T8766760 change my new name MARRIPATI RAJENDRA REDDY and my Wife name ASHA MOHMED change new name MARRIPATI RAJESWARI. (C# 2401) — 02-09-2022.



Mr. Beethoven Francisco Fernandes, son of Mr. Filipe Bras Fernandes, resident of H. No. 80 Vaddy Stolim, Bardez, North Goa-403517, Goa and Ms. Jeromin Coutinho, daughter of Mr. Antonio Domingo Coutinho, resident of H.No. 33 Cotto, Amona Quepem, South Goa-403705, Goa both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters/ telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

Prat Secretary (Community Affairs) and Marriage Officer, Embassy of India, Kuwait. Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

Mbappe, Haaland shine in PSG, Man City wins as Chelsea lose

Madrid masterclass teaches Celtic Champions League lesson



SEVILLE: Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland (top) jumps over Sevilla's Moroccan goalkeeper Yassine Bounou 'Bono' during the UEFA Champions League Group G first-leg football match between Sevilla FC and Manchester City on September 6, 2022. — AFP

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe and Erling Haaland starred Tuesday as Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City made winning starts in the Champions League group stage, but big-spending Chelsea suffered a shock 1-0 defeat away to Dinamo Zagreb. Real Madrid rode their luck at times before demonstrating their class to kick off their title defense with a 3-0 win at Celtic despite the loss of Karim Benzema to injury.

Mbappe showed why PSG were so desperate to keep him at the end of last season when he seemed set to depart for Real by scoring both goals in PSG's 2-1 victory at home to Juventus, to launch the French champions' quest for the biggest prize in European club football. "We played well and we got a win in a tremendous atmosphere at home," Mbappe told Canal Plus. "We always want to play against big teams—that's why you play in the Champions League. It's that sort of atmosphere we love; matches like this, in which you have to show character."

The France forward volleyed Neymar's delightful scoop past Mattia Perin in the fifth minute at the Parc des Princes before adding another brilliantly-worked

goal midway through the first half. Substitute Weston McKennie headed Juventus back into the game but PSG held on and are level with Benfica in Group H. The Portuguese side beat Maccabi Haifa 2-0 courtesy of goals from Rafa Silva and Alex Grimaldo.

Pep Guardiola has warned Haaland alone can not lead City to Champions League glory this season, but the Norway striker kept up his scintillating form for his new team with two goals in their 4-0 rout of Sevilla. "He has an incredible sense of goal. We have incredible numbers in scoring goals, so we want to continue like that," said Guardiola. Having already scored 10 times in six Premier League outings, Haaland put City in front on 20 minutes in Spain as he poked in a Kevin De Bruyne cross.

Phil Foden doubled the lead on the hour before Haaland struck again. Ruben Dias bagged a fourth to compound the misery for a struggling Sevilla side. Haaland faces a reunion next week with old club Borussia Dortmund, who eased to a 3-0 win over FC Copenhagen earlier in Group G. First-half goals from Marco Reus and Raphael Guerreiro had the hosts cruising, with 19-year-old England international Jude

Bellingham delivering a late third.

Real up and running

Scottish champions Celtic were left to rue not making the most of a bright start against Real in Glasgow as Callum McGregor rattled the post before the Spanish giants made their experience count. Vinicius Junior, who grabbed the winning goal in last season's final, opening the scoring on 56 minutes and Luka Modric soon doubled the advantage. Eden Hazard, who came on for the ailing Benzema, netted his first goal for the club since January to seal victory. "It was like two games, first half we suffered a bit with intensity, second half we had control," Ancelotti told BT Sport. "We were not surprised (with Celtic's start). We knew they could start really fast. We were lucky because they hit the post."

Shakhtar Donetsk romped to a memorable 4-1 win over RB Leipzig in Germany in the other Group F game. Shakhtar, who have not played in their home town since 2014, did not have any competitive matches this year until August 23 due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They have lost multiple key play-

ers since as FIFA allowed foreign players and coaches to suspend their contracts and leave the club.

Marian Shved scored twice on his full debut either side of Mohamed Simakan's equaliser. Mykhaylo Mudryk and Lassina Traore made sure of the win for Shakhtar. Chelsea made a miserable start to their Champions League campaign as Dinamo Zagreb ruined Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's debut. Thomas Tuchel's side were expected to cruise through Group E after being drawn with Dinamo, Red Bull Salzburg and AC Milan.

But their task might not be so simple after Mislav Orsic's first-half strike punished the Blues for another sloppy display. Having spent £250 million (\$280 million) on new signings since the end of last season, Tuchel is under pressure to deliver silverware in return for that huge investment. "We are clearly not there, where we need to be and where we can be. So it's on me, it's on us, we need to find solutions. At the moment, everything is missing," said Tuchel. Italian champions Milan began with a 1-1 draw at Salzburg as Alexis Saelemaekers cancelled out Noah Okafor's opener for the hosts. — AFP

Reigning champion Roglic out of Vuelta after crash

MADRID: Primoz Roglic's hopes of a fourth successive victory in the Vuelta are over after injuries from a fall saw him withdraw from the race prior to the 17th stage. "Unfortunately, @roglic will not be at the start of stage 17 as a consequence of yesterday's crash," tweeted his Jumbo-Visma team on Wednesday.

"Get well soon, champion! Thank you for all the beautiful moments in this Vuelta. You had ambitious plans for the final days, but sadly it isn't meant to be." The 32-year-old Slovenian came to grief when he launched a late attack in Tuesday's stage, hoping to pick up bonus seconds in the sprint to close the gap on Belgian race leader Remco Evenepoel. But 100m from the finish line Roglic, the three-time reigning champion, swerved and fell hard. His left knee and hand were covered in blood.

He still crossed the line but was clearly in pain and holding his side, before slumping to his knees after he dismounted. Roglic, who also retired early

from this year's Tour de France as a result of a fall, was 1 minute 26 seconds adrift of Evenepoel with the race due to finish on Sunday. Evenepoel's closest rival now is Spaniard Enric Mas, who needs to make up 2min 01sec. Wednesday's stage is a challenging 162.3 kilometers ride which finishes high up at the Tentudia Monastery.— AFP



TOMARES: Team Jumbo's Slovenian rider Primoz Roglic (left), injured after a fall, crosses the finish line with Team Jumbo-Visma's Dutch rider Mike Teunissen during the 16th stage of the 2022 La Vuelta cycling tour of Spain on September 6, 2022. — AFP

Chelsea sack Tuchel after poor start to the season

LONDON: Chelsea on Wednesday sacked manager Thomas Tuchel just seven games into the new season, hours after they suffered a chastening Champions League defeat at Dinamo Zagreb. The former Borussia Dortmund and Paris Saint-Germain boss leaves Stamford Bridge after a tumultuous period at the club, which included a Champions League triumph and the end of Roman Abramovich's reign.

Chelsea said they would move "swiftly" to appoint a replacement, with former Tottenham and PSG boss Mauricio Pochettino and Brighton manager Graham Potter among the early favourites. "On behalf of everyone at Chelsea FC, the club would like to place on record its gratitude to Thomas and his staff for all their efforts during their time with the club," the Premier League club said in a statement.

"Thomas will rightly have a place in Chelsea's history after winning the Champions League, the Super Cup and Club World Cup in his time here." The Stamford Bridge club, bought by Todd Boehly's consortium in late May, defended the timing of the decision, which is understood to have been made before

the loss in Croatia.

"As the new ownership group reaches 100 days since taking over the club, and as it continues its hard work to take the club forward, the new owners believe it is the right time to make this transition," the statement said.

Chelsea are sixth in the Premier League table after three wins, one draw and two defeats in their opening six matches—already five points behind leaders Manchester City. Tuchel, who was in charge for less than 20 months at Chelsea, admitted "everything is missing" after their shock 1-0 defeat on Tuesday. "Too much to analyze," he said. "I'm a part of it. We are clearly not there, where we need to be and where we can be. So it's on me, it's on us, we need to find solutions."

Tuchel replaced Frank Lampard as Chelsea boss in January 2021, immediately adding steel and focus to the Blues, whose expensively assembled squad were badly under-performing. The German, 49, steered Chelsea to their second Champions League triumph just four months later, with a stunning 1-0 win over Manchester City in Porto. — AFP



Thomas Tuchel