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Expatriate quota a priority for next National Assembly

MoI decision to disqualify candidates blasted, court to hear petitions

Amir returns home from Italy



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah returned to his homeland on Wednesday after a special visit to Italy. He was received at the airport by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other senior officials. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Expatriate quotas are now a priority for candidates running in the upcoming National Assembly election. Candidates from all movements and of all political ideologies are adamant in applying it, especially since the population of expatriate workers is increasing despite there being no need for them, while marginal workers are a majority over skilled expatriate workers.

Many candidates' campaigns have insisted that this issue is of great importance in the next National Assembly, while issues that were approved in parliamentary committees in the previous Assembly in the presence of the government but were not discussed will be adopted. The candidates pointed out that the government must cooperate with these suggestions, because its efforts to reduce the number of expats to less than 30 percent of the population have not been successful, as evidenced by the latest statistics released by the Public Authority for

Civil Information.

Some proposals from former lawmakers and candidates who are expected to be elected call to set priorities, including taking a serious step to address the demographic imbalance by setting quotas, stressing the government's fears of applying the quota and its reluctance to implement it are not justified, especially since the largest communities in Kuwait have marginal workers that are not needed or can be replaced by workers from countries whose nationals in Kuwait are low in number.

The proposals also point out that children of expatriate workers exceed 700,000, which is a national security concern and places a burden on authorities on how to deal with them in case of any problems in the future. They said these communities are concentrated in some areas that could threaten the stability of the country, with rising crime and an increase in residency violators.

They said fears of upsetting friendly countries by reducing the numbers of

workers of some nationalities should not be an obstacle to implementation, because the matter is first and foremost of Kuwait's supreme interest and sovereignty and not of courtesy, no matter how sisterly those countries are. Candidates have stressed that this issue is going to be a priority in the elections as it correlates with the current phase of reforms.

The candidates stressed that applying a quota does not mean getting rid of expatriates, as this is very difficult in Kuwait, but what is required is to rearrange their numbers, so that no community exceeds 25 percent of the number of Kuwaitis. For example, both the Indian and Egyptian communities exceed 650,000 (excluding domestic workers), compared to 1.5 million Kuwaitis.

If quotas are implemented, the population of these two communities will not exceed 300,000 each, they said, indicating that the implementation of the quota could be easier after the approval of the new residency law proposed in the previous parliament.

Continued on Page 6

News in brief

Philippines lifts maid ban to Saudi

MANILA: The Philippines will lift a ban on deploying domestic workers to Saudi Arabia and resume it on Nov 7 after Riyadh agreed to boost protective measures for Filipino migrants, officials said. Among other things, workers will be allowed to quit before the end of their contracts if their employer is abusive, and insurance coverage will be provided for unpaid wages. "Any acts of violence, any acts of immorality, those are grounds for pre-termination," Philippine migrant workers secretary Susan Ople said. — AFP

Qatar, Egypt sign MoUs

DOHA: Qatar and Egypt signed several memoranda of understanding Wednesday during President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's visit. Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and Sisi "witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Qatar Investment Authority and the Sovereign Fund of Egypt for investment and development", the Amir's office said. They also signed an MoU on "cooperation in the field of ports" and another on "cooperation in the field of social affairs", it added. — AFP

Iran wants closer ties with UAE

TEHRAN: Iran's top diplomat said Wednesday his country wants to boost relations with the United Arab Emirates, welcoming an Emirati ambassador back to Tehran after a six-year absence. "We would like to broaden our relations with our neighbors, including the United Arab Emirates," Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told the new Emirati ambassador, Saif Mohammed Al-Zaabi, when they met Tuesday. — AFP

Plane evacuated after engine fire

MUSCAT: An engine fire sparked a rush to evacuate an Air India Express plane that was preparing to take off from Oman, leaving some passengers with light injuries, officials said Wednesday. Footage aired by Omani TV showed smoke billowing from the plane, which had been taxiing for departure for Kochi, as passengers streamed across the tarmac. — AFP

Woman robs bank to pay for sis' treatment

BEIRUT: A woman held up a Beirut bank Wednesday with a toy gun and walked out with thousands of dollars to pay for treatment for her ill sister, in a desperate heist cheered by many in crisis-hit Lebanon. It was the latest in a series of heists in Lebanon, where the savings of depositors have been devalued and trapped in banks for almost three years amid a crippling economic crisis.

Sali Hafiz streamed a live video on Facebook of her raid on a Beirut branch of Blom Bank, in which she

could be heard yelling at employees to release a sum of money while entrances to the bank were sealed. "I am Sali Hafiz, I came today... to take the deposits of my sister who is dying in hospital," she said in the video. "I did not come to kill anyone or to start a fire... I came to claim my rights."

In an interview with a Lebanese broadcaster after the raid, Hafiz said she managed to free about \$13,000 of the \$20,000 she said her family had deposited. Cancer treatment for her sister costs \$50,000, she said. An AFP correspondent at the scene said gasoline had been poured inside the bank during the heist, which lasted under an hour. Hafiz told media outlets she had used her nephew's toy pistol for the hold-up.

Continued on Page 6



BEIRUT: The glass facade of a bank is broken after a woman stormed it demanding access to her sister's deposits on Sept 14, 2022. — AFP

End of COVID pandemic in sight: WHO

GENEVA: The number of newly reported COVID-19 cases has dropped dramatically, the World Health Organization said Wednesday, urging the world to seize the opportunity to end the pandemic. Newly

reported cases of the disease, which has killed millions since being identified in late 2019, last week fell to the lowest level since March 2020, said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"We have never been in a better position to end the pandemic," he told reporters. "We are not there yet, but the end is in sight." But the world needed to step up to "seize this opportunity", he added. "If we don't take this opportunity now, we run the risk of more variants, more deaths, more disruption, and more uncertainty."

According to WHO's latest epidemiological

report on COVID-19, the number of reported cases fell 28 percent to 3.1 million during the week ending Sept 11, following a 12-percent-drop a week earlier. But the agency has warned that the falling number of reported cases is deceptive, since many countries have cut back on testing and may not be detecting the less serious cases.

"The number of cases that are being reported to WHO we know are an underestimate," Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO technical lead on COVID, told reporters. "We feel that far more cases are actually

Continued on Page 6

First public mourners view queen at rest

LONDON: After a long and patient wait in the sun and the rain, the first members of the public, some in tears, gained access to Queen Elizabeth II's lying-in-state Wednesday in the cavernous, thousand-year-old Westminster Hall. The hall was opened for the public - many of whom had braved downpours to camp out overnight - to pay their respects after the queen's flag-shrouded coffin was

brought from Buckingham Palace.

Prior to the start of the public part, the lying-in-state began with a short Anglican service before black-clad members of parliament including Prime Minister Liz Truss filed past the coffin, bowing their heads. To the strains of a military band playing funeral marches, King Charles III had earlier led his family in procession behind a horse-drawn gun carriage bearing the coffin, before it was placed on a platform guarded by soldiers inside the most historic part of parliament.

The king, his siblings, and sons, princes William and Harry, walked at 75 steps a minute behind the gun carriage.

Continued on Page 6



LONDON: Pallbearers carry the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II as they arrive at Westminster Hall at the Palace of Westminster on Sept 14, 2022, where the coffin will lie in state. — AFP

Local

Japan highlights bilateral ties in JSDF event



KUWAIT: Japanese and Kuwaiti officials at the cake cutting ceremony. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat.



KUWAIT: Japanese and Kuwaiti officials at the 68th anniversary reception of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF)

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Japan hosted on Tuesday, a reception on the 68th anniversary of Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF). Ambassadors, government officials, the diplomatic corps and the media attended the celebration. In his welcome remarks, Ambassador of Japan to Kuwait, Morino Yasunari said, "Japan Self Defense Forces with their 68-year history have now become very active contributors to world peace and security by conducting various missions."

Ambassador Yasunari emphasized that Japan and Kuwait enjoy a long tradition of friendship and helping each other, "Japan will never forget the enormous support Kuwait extended to Japan, when it was hit by a major earthquake and tsunami in 2011. Kuwait, as an essential player for stability in the Middle East, is our critical partner in the area of peace and security. We are proud that the JSDF carried out humanitarian and reconstruction assistance activities in Iraq from 2004-2008 with great support from Kuwait. We hope to further develop our cooperation with the Kuwaiti Armed Forces, especially for education and training of personnel," he said.

The ambassador highlighted that JSDF is strengthening its cooperation with its ally, the US, and other partners to address security challenges and contribute to security in the Indo-Pacific region. "Japan emphasizes the importance of further efforts to be made to uphold and strengthen the rules-based international order. I would like to continue to promote cooperation



Major General Fahad Altraiji



Morino Yasunari

In 1991, Japan underlined this friendship as a vocal member of the international coalition during the liberation of Kuwait

between Japan and Kuwait for world peace and prosperity," Yasunari affirmed. He also cited the efforts of JSDF in the sea off Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, where it is participating in international anti-piracy operations. Also, its personnel are now working with troops from other countries in the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai Peninsula. Chairman of the

Kuwait Military Education Authority at the Ministry of Defense, Major General Fahad Altraiji expressed his regards and appreciation on behalf of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces chief to Ambassador Yasunari and Defense Attaché Col Takada Naoki. He said Kuwait and Japan have enjoyed excellent relations for over six decades - both countries pursuing a policy of proac-

tive peace within the regions of Asia and the Middle East. "We are considering enhancing cooperation into the field of professional military education and training. Our military schools have developed into highly capable institutions; well-regarded both regionally and across the globe. It would be a privilege to receive students from Japan among the current international cohort, as perhaps some form of the student exchange program," Altraiji said.

"In 1991, Japan underlined this friendship as a vocal member of the international coalition during the liberation of Kuwait. Japan provided strong support for peace restoration activities within the Gulf region, contributing to transportation, goods and materials, and clearing the Gulf waters from sea mines, as well as medical services," Altraiji said. "The Kuwaiti people will not forget Japan's stance and solid support in our hour of need."

He stressed that the defense cooperation between the two countries has continued to grow in multiple sectors, where defense officials have been meeting to explore and seek prospects of cooperation, sharing of ideas and the exchange of insights and viewpoints, which enhance the national security interests of both countries. Altraiji also noted, "As Kuwait and Japan seek to maintain the security of our people and sovereignty over our lands, we have much in common. As peace-seeking nations, we hold dear the same defense principles, — both have policies based on deterrence and international cooperation and both are underpinned with a force established only to be defensive."

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NEW YORK: Representative of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad A-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Kuwait's Ambassador to US Jassem Al-Budaiwi and Kuwait's permanent representative to the UN Tareq Al-Bannai. — KUNA

Amir's representative calls to end wars, promote human rights

NEW YORK: Representative of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad A-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, called on the international community to work towards ceasing wars, promote human rights and reject violence and terrorism.

"The international community should live up to its responsibilities in order to stop wars, end conflicts, boost human rights, reject all kinds of violence and terrorism and fight poverty," HH the Prime Minister said in a statement shortly after arrival in New York early Wednesday to represent HH the Amir at the UN General Assembly's 77th session, reiterating Kuwait's firm support for efforts of the

UN and its agencies in this regard.

HH the Prime Minister, who was received at the airport by Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Kuwait's Ambassador to US Jassem Al-Budaiwi and Kuwait's permanent representative to the UN Tareq Al-Bannai, reaffirmed support to UN's endeavors to achieve just and comprehensive peace regionally and internationally. He praised the UN's role in supporting stability and development in different areas around the globe.

HH the Prime Minister, who expressed pride in representing HH the Amir, said UNGA's 77th session will be held amidst critical challenges around the world. Since joining the UN, he said, Kuwait's diplomacy has always been based on preserving sovereignty of nations, good neighborliness and mutual respect. Kuwait, said HH the Prime Minister, will continue its humanitarian role to addressing the aftermath of crises, helping the needy, supporting global development and cooperating with the UN and its agencies in achieving this objective. — KUNA

Oil and gas sector needs to acknowledge risk factors

KUWAIT: Even as the global oil and gas sector looks at a full positive recovery with pre-pandemic prices, it is undeniable, even to the most undiscerning of observers, that oil and gas countries need to include sustainable environmental practices in the production of crude oil and also lead the global efforts to achieve a net zero future. The industry also has to take into consideration other risk factors such as the fairly unfenced and dangerous world of cybercrime, the unethical practices associated with industry supplies and a more elaborate investment pledged to support its employees and their communities. Kuwait, which is a pioneer in leading the industry's conversation globally need to also acknowledge and act on these initiatives to sustain industrial growth as well as reduce the

supply-chain and talent pool uncertainties that currently shadow the industry. Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) recently announced, in its 2040 strategy, its commitment to use sustainable practices in the production of oil. While this has been a commendable effort, more needs to be done to stay ahead of the industrial challenges regionally and globally and to relieve the obvious tautness that is seen in the industry.

A detailed sector report published in KPMG's Drilling Down magazine outlines several upcoming risk factors that stand to impact the oil and gas sector for the year 2022 and beyond. A primary risk priority, according to the article, is the geopolitical tension in Europe that has triggered US and EU economic sanctions, which in turn, has not only affected European gas supplies, but has also dampened the European efforts at initiating "green policies" as the EU shifts its focus to tackle the socio-political challenges in the region. The report also highlighted that the oil and gas sector has to weigh its traditional employment practices, to incorporate more flexible working methods and be agile enough to catch speed with changes happening in work styles across other sectors in the world.

Local

EU stresses on enhanced GCC ties

BRUSSELS: The European Union (EU) has a lot to gain from stronger ties and from building bridges with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and its member states, an EU official told journalists in Brussels. The Gulf is a dynamic region, strongly connected with Asia, Europe and Africa, he said, on condition of anonymity.

The official was speaking on the sidelines of the European Council President Charles Michel's visit, to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, as part of a regional trip to the Gulf, to step up the partnership between the EU and the GCC countries. The EU adopted, in June this year, a Joint Communication on 'A Strategic Partnership with the Gulf'.

The global order as "we know it, has been profoundly challenged in the last couple of years - with the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, terrorism, growing food and energy insecurity," he said.

Saudi Arabia, the most populated country in the region and a member of the G20, is undergoing significant economic and societal transformations, said the official. Michel's visit to Jeddah was the first by a President of the European Council and the first high-level EU visit in a long time to the kingdom, he noted.

Meanwhile, discussions between Michel and the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman held previously, focused on bilateral EU-Saudi relations, improving trade and investments

between the EU and Saudi Arabia, as well as between the EU and the GCC bloc. Further on, they discussed global issues - climate change being the most important common challenge that was highlighted in the meeting.

"Climate change is closely linked to energy security and it is important to successfully accomplish the transition towards carbon neutrality," explained the EU official.

On security issues, the two sides discussed ways to develop strong political dialogue on issues of mutual interest pertaining to global peace and security such as the war in Ukraine, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon and the fight against terrorism. Regular exchanges on these matters is expected to enhance mutual understanding, stressed the EU official.

The human rights dialogue that the EU has established with Saudi Arabia is an important tool to engage with Saudi partners, he added. Besides the meeting with the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, Michel also met with a number of Saudi ministers over a working lunch, as well as with Hussein Ibrahim Taha, Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and also met a group of Saudi women representing Shura Council, businesses, academia, arts, media in Jeddah.

Meanwhile, Michel also visited Doha on Sept 7 and met with the Amir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and on Sept 8, he visited Abu Dhabi,



RIYADH: European Council President, Charles Michel on his visit to Saudi Arabia. — KUNA

United Arab Emirates and met with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates. The GCC, established in the

early 80s was formed, to bolster inter-Gulf cooperation in diverse fields across Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Al Marzouq and Al Mejhem with Zain and Boubyan officials.

Zain signs MoU with Boubyan Bank

KUWAIT: In line with their vision to continue strategic partnerships to support local SMEs, Zain, which is the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Boubyan Bank, where both parties agree to collaborate on serving a comprehensive suite of business needs for startups and small and medium enterprises (SME) in the Kuwaiti market by offering Zain's Z-HUB solutions and advanced financial services from Boubyan Bank's B2B Marketplace. The announcement was made during the MoU signing ceremony held at the Zain Innovation Campus (ZINC), at the company's main headquarters in Shuwaikh, attended by Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al Marzouq, Chief Private Banking and Consumer Banking at Boubyan Abdullah Al Mejhem and both partners' executive management teams.

Through this MoU, Boubyan Bank will become a partner of Z-HUB, offering Zain SME customers a wide range of financial, banking, and e-payment services. Zain will also become a partner of Boubyan Bank's all-new Marketplace platform, serving the bank's SME customers by providing e-commerce, marketing, HR, location and online presence, insurance, tendering, Zain Business solutions and more. Commenting on the new partnership, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer, Hamad Al Marzouq said, "Today we welcome Boubyan Bank as part of the Z-HUB family to serve the local SME community. Having a leading bank like Boubyan to serve our customers' financial and banking needs will strengthen our platform's position as a comprehensive destination for startups and SMEs."

Al Marzouq continued: "Since its early days, Zain has always enjoyed a solid ecosystem of strategic partnerships with leading companies and institutions, whether on the local, regional, or international levels. This made us the first destination to serve the technical needs of companies of all sizes. Today, we expand this ecosystem by partnering with Boubyan Bank to reinforce the portfolio of financial services we offer our SME customers, which feature the highest quality and security levels," adding that, "without a doubt, this step reflects our continuous efforts to grow our services portfolio for Kuwait's SME community. Through this partnership, we are keen on solidifying Z-HUB in line with our digital transformation strategy that aims at empowering a more efficient business sector in the local market."

Z-HUB is an integrated hub where customers can find a variety of services tailored to meet the needs of SMEs in one user-friendly place to ensure the swift expansion of their business. Zain offers special and exclusive offers to its customers, tailored to every customer's company, customer base, and business partners, ensuring efficiency and flexibility in their everyday operations. The hub features tools and solutions in over six essential business areas, including e-commerce services and integrated platforms, where customers can manage their products with ease, marketing services, like analysis, strategies and branding customizable for every customer, HR services that aid



KUWAIT: Al Marzouq and Al Mejhem sign the MoU.



Al Marzouq: Since its early days, Zain has always enjoyed a solid ecosystem of strategic partnerships with leading companies and institutions, whether on the local, regional, or international levels. This made us the first destination to serve the technical needs of companies of all sizes.

business owners to manage their employees, location services to help customers get recognized on Google Maps and create an online presence, insurance services to provide consultation and risk assessment, tendering services to facilitate the tendering process across all sectors, as well as a wide range of tech services and tools from Zain Business.

Chief Private Banking and Consumer Banking at Boubyan Abdullah Al Mejhem said: "This agreement confirms the bank's strategic partnership with Zain, which recently included several joint initiatives between the two parties. Al Mejhem continued: "The new agreement comes within the Boubyan B2B Marketplace platform, the first of its kind in Kuwait at the banking level, which aims to provide e-commerce services, financial consulting, accounting services, human resources, insurance, Zain Business services, and others to Boubyan customers through the online banking and the Boubyan corporate App, which serves SMEs." "Boubyan Bank's management sees a focus on the SME sector as becoming an influential sector in the Kuwaiti economy and a vital supporter of the develop-

ment and diversification of income sources. The Bank's senior management has decided that it is necessary to support their projects and diversify their opportunities towards greater innovation and creativity, to stimulate their growth opportunities and help them gain footage in various sectors and fields." He also said that business banking at the bank is specifically designed to offer smart banking solutions that understand the needs of SMEs and offer them a variety of exceptional advantages that allow smooth and easy managing of many banking transactions with a wide range of easy-to-use and 24/7 banking services.

Zain strongly believes in the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects, as well as further pushing the entrepreneurial community's growth in the country. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive print through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most influential issues in the community, including the support of entrepreneurship and innovation.

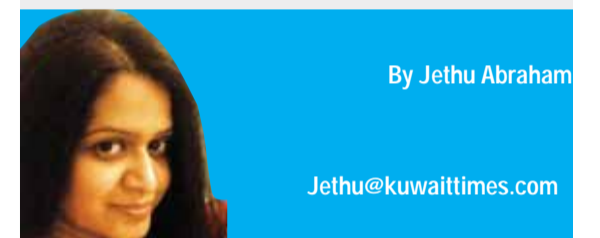
Zain strongly believes in the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects, as well as further pushing the entrepreneurial community's growth in the country.

In my view

The power of narratives

By Jethu Abraham

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At its core, strategic narratives may be the answer to Joseph Nye's question on how to understand changing influence in a changing environment. This was prophetically put forward in 1990, as Nye, dubbed the father of soft power science, wondered on which road the US would have to take, if it still hoped to maintain continued influence in a world that would no longer be impressed by Cold War style military hegemony alone.

Strategic narratives are an inherent part of soft power and if utilised well, sets the stage to draw people towards a common goal or objective, through attraction and consensus. These narratives which help to propagate soft power values, culture or policies aims to engage audiences in common thought and action.

Strategic narratives have been quite useful for countries in the Global South especially, as it has created a more levelled playing field for international relations and a pluralistic marketplace. Though strategic narratives, as an ideology, lacks an analytical framework to measure its effectiveness, it may still be used as a means to project a country's character to the rest of the world. Strategic narratives can also be looked at as a fluid concept which can be modified depending on the context.

A study done by Khaldarova in 2021, on Russia's popular television network, Channel 1's narrative about Ukrainians before and after the Euromaidan revolution, for over two years from 2012 to 2014, illustrates how strategic narratives can change over time and how the mass media can play a role to facilitate that portrayal. The data, which was a selection done on the basis of word tags and social media engagement showed how the channel, prior to the protests, portrayed Ukraine initially as a younger brother and Russia as the big brother and after the protests, vilified Ukrainians—identifying them as an enemy and a threat to the Russky Mir (Russian world). On the domestic front, national elections in a country are an interesting time to unleash narrative power, when candidates analyse gaps in the system and cleverly weave it into their campaigning plans, to put it up as their party manifesto. This has been a time-tested initiative, that has often squared the opinions of even the most discerning voter — to opt for someone he would never have done otherwise.

With the advent of the digital age and the overwhelming rush of content today, narratives very often are loosely coupled with misinformation, disinformation or just plain old fake news to garner likes or alter perceptions. This means that today, be it in a democracy or a hybrid democratic setup, the average voter does not, in fact, go through a simple step of selecting the best candidate who represent him or the national interests, but also have the agonizing process of steering clear from the partisan politics that surround the candidates. Yet, the magnetic power of narratives on the international platform or a national election is undeniable, just like a good old story, and as Nye himself adds—"its all about whose story wins."

News in brief



KUWAIT: Majdi Al-Dhafiri, Deputy Foreign Minister, meets with Jordanian Ambassador Saqer Boushtal. — KUNA

Kuwait, Jordan discuss ties, regional issues

KUWAIT: Majdi Al-Dhafiri, Deputy Foreign Minister, met with the Jordanian Ambassador Saqer Boushtal, where they discussed bilateral relations between Kuwait and Jordan, as well as the local, regional and international developments. — KUNA

Kuwait marks Arab Meteorological Day

KUWAIT: Together with other Arab states, Kuwait celebrated the Arab Meteorological Day on Thursday, highlighted at an event titled, 'Weather and society's safety', where stakeholders would discuss a number of issues such as global warming, drought and the unstable climatic conditions observed in several places across the world. "Kuwait was the first country to propose the idea of an Arab Meteorological Day, during the 34th meeting of the Arab permanent meteorological commission, which had been held at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo. The proposal was unanimously approved on Sept 15, 2018," noted Imad Al-Jalawi. Speaking about the significance of the event, Al-Jalawi said that it is important to promote a public awareness of the meteorological center's role, especially, as the world was facing climatic challenges such as weather fluctuations, adding that "government and private institutions should cooperate to limit the repercussions that would arise from climatic changes."

Amiri Diwan minister expresses condolences

KUWAIT: Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs, sent a cable of condolences to the family of the deceased poet, Amer Hammad Amer Al-Azmi, who was a co-founder of the Nabat Poets Diwan. Al-Sabah also recalled the noticeable contributions made by Al-Azmi, to develop the cultural and literary libraries in the country. — KUNA

Municipality instructs stores to close by midnight

KUWAIT: The municipality announced the decision to close all stores located in residential areas, cooperatives, public transport stations and other blocks by midnight. Ahmad Al-Manfouhi, Manager of Kuwait Municipality have designated the work timings for all stores. The new law excludes all pharmacies and malls belonging to cooperatives, while stores with more than one entrance or which has a separate door are allowed to make home deliveries but are prohibited to take any take-away orders. These stores are also expected to close their main entrances. Stores that require any exemptions to the law can submit a request to the interior ministry.

KOC union highlights lack of petroleum jobs for citizens

KUWAIT: The Union of Kuwait Oil Company Workers announced its support for Kuwaiti degree holders to be employed in several sectors. "The Kuwait Petroleum Company's advertisement for job vacancies for fresh graduates in different companies in the oil sector are few in number, as there are vacancies and a serious need for new employees," Al-Aameri, Vice President of the union, said during a press conference. Al-Aameri also called for the importance of applying the succession plan urgently for fresh Kuwaiti graduates as per the instructions of his Highness the deputy Amir. "The KOC union is adamantly continuing its policy of supporting the needs of national workers and will not back down, unless all technical and managerial specialties are included in the next employment ads," he added. Other requests include "removing the insurance stipulation on all specializations, increasing the age of admission and prioritizing requests based on the year of when the degree was obtained." "It is important to remove the impossible regulations in entrance exams, change previous procedures in order to facilitate employment and occupy vacancies in the oil sector to reduce the number of unemployed people," he concluded.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Pedestrians walk across a bridge by Fahaheel road. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Role of Kuwaiti youth stressed in New Kuwait vision



KUWAIT: Tarek Al-Sheikh, United Nations Secretary General Representative and Resident Coordinator to Kuwait speaking to students. — Photos by KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Dr Tarek Al-Sheikh, UN's Secretary General Representative and Resident Coordinator to Kuwait expressed the organization's interest to propagate the youth in Kuwait, to play a role in implementing the plan of Kuwait's 2035 vision (New Kuwait) and in achieving sustainable development. Dr Al-Sheikh was speaking at a student training event being carried out in the KUNA office - its seventh annual training program - to train students to work at the UN headquarters in the country.

He also extolled KUNA's role in spreading news to the society shedding light on the efforts made by Kuwaiti youth and commending the constructive and continuous cooperation between the UN office to the country, KUNA and Kuwait University (KU). The visit of the university students included a tour of the headquarters, where they were briefed on the Office of the UN's Secretary General Representative, UN Development Program, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Human Settlements Program, UN International Organization for Migration, World Health Organization, World Food Program, International Labour Organization and UN International Children's Emergency Fund. KUNA launched the seventh training program from Aug 21 to Sept 24, to train university students for the season 2022-23 - with 18 students being trained from KU at KUNA where they will be taught media practices.

Meanwhile, Sara Al-Ramzi, Secretary Editor, Kuwait Cooperative Society for the protection of the environment, has called for the participation of environmental engineers to showcase their potential in the field, carried out as an unprecedented initiative, to encourage the youth in the country.

Speaking about the concept, Al-Ramzi said that the idea of the initiative took shape, from her time

Tanzanian ambassador meets Lulu officials

KUWAIT: His Excellency, Said Shaib Mussa, Tanzania Ambassador to Kuwait paid a visit to the regional head-office of LuLu Hypermarket in Kuwait. The ambassador was received on arrival, by top management of the hypermarket. During his visit, the ambassador held talks with the hypermarket's officials, that centered around enhancing the imports of fresh produce items from Tanzania. In the course of discussions, the Tanzania Ambassador underlined the strong bilateral relations between Tanzania and Kuwait, outlining plans to further strengthen these ties, including initiatives such as focusing more in the areas of fresh fruits and vegetables, where retailers like LuLu Hypermarket



KUWAIT: Kuwait University students with UN officials.



KUWAIT: Students attending the session.

studying Environmental Engineering in the US and has only been acknowledged in Kuwait recently. "Furthermore, the Environmental Engineering major has been an attractive specialization for fresh high school graduates," Al-Ramzi added.

"The number of Environmental Engineering majors graduating in Kuwait has been increasing because of the increased awareness of students about the importance of this major," she said, adding that "the term 'Environmental Engineer' needs to be included within the Civil Service Commission plan for employment in order to encourage graduates of the major".

"The initiative to start an environmental engineering team has been received well by the council of the Kuwait Society for the protection of the environment as it represents a plan to incorporate all

students in related fields including water, power, petroleum studies and garbage management among others," she noted.

Al-Ramzi highlighted the significance of the formation of a team as a plan in line with Kuwait's 2035 vision (New Kuwait) adding that, "the main goal of the team is to put forth ambitious plans to make use of young energies that are reflected by the graduates' immense knowledge as strategies can be put to truly reflect their abilities and introduce the Kuwaiti society to the importance of environmental engineering and include it in many different fields. She has also said that the initiative could be extended to include the participation of high school students in playing a role in Kuwait's 2035 vision, as sustainable environment is a significant pillar in the country's vision.



KUWAIT: His Excellency, Said Shaib Mussa with Lulu officials.

could have a major role to play. On their part, LuLu officials expressed their utmost satisfaction with the products already sourced from Tanzania. Pointing out that the hypermarket already imports fresh meat from Tanzania, the officials added that they planned

to import even more products in the future. The talks also revealed the hypermarket's plan to hold a major Tanzanian promotion in the upcoming months, to showcase the wide variety of Tanzanian items available on the hypermarket's shelves.



Two dead in shooting at Thai military facility

40 years on, survivors recall horror of Lebanon's Sabra and Shatila massacre

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NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan: Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev meets with China's President Xi Jinping in Nur-Sultan on September 14, 2022. China's leader landed in ex-Soviet Kazakhstan, in his first trip abroad since the early days of the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

Xi on first trip abroad since pandemic

Beijing to work with Kazakhstan to deepen cooperation in law enforcement, security

NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan: China's President Xi Jinping arrived in ex-Soviet Kazakhstan Wednesday in the Chinese leader's first trip abroad since the early days of the coronavirus pandemic. Xi, during his three-day visit to Central Asia, is scheduled to attend a summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Uzbekistan, where he is expected to meet with Russian leader Vladimir Putin. Their highly-anticipated meeting comes as Russia is suffering serious setbacks in Ukraine, but China has stood firm in its support of President Vladimir Putin and a "no limits" friendship.

The Chinese leader's plane touched down in the Kazakh capital Nur-Sultan around 0830 GMT, and he was greeted on the red-carpeted runway by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Both leaders and their respective delegations—as well as the guard of honour that met Xi on arrival—were wearing masks.

Xi, in an article for Chinese state media ahead of the trip, said Beijing was prepared to work with Kazakhstan to "deepen cooperation in law enforcement, security and defence". He said also China wanted to work with Kazakhstan on drug trafficking and transnational organised crime as well as what China calls the "three evils".

China's government has previously used the term "three evils"—defined as terrorism, separatism and religious extremism—to refer to its crackdown in its far western region of Xinjiang, which borders Kazakhstan.

'Mutual respect, fairness'

Beijing stands accused of detaining over one million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang—including some Kazakhs—under a years-long security campaign that the United States and some lawmakers in other Western countries have labelled a "genocide".



Xi due to meet with Putin

China vociferously denies the allegations, saying its actions are aimed at combating terrorism. The highlight of Xi's trip however was expected later in Uzbekistan, where he is due to meet with Putin, Tokayev and leaders from India, Pakistan and three more ex-Soviet Central Asian countries.

The SCO was established in 2001 as a political,

economic and security organisation to rival Western institutions. Xi wrote ahead of the visit that the group had "set a fine example of a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation, and proved itself an important and constructive force".

Those were comments echoed by the Kremlin's foreign policy advisor Yuri Ushakov who told reporters in Moscow that the SCO members "stand for a just world order". "The SCO offers a real alternative to Western-centric organisations," he added.

Ushakov said that among Putin's talks with Xi would be "of particular importance," focusing on the conflict in Ukraine and Russia's growing economic ties with China.

In a separate article for Uzbek media, Xi pledged to "strengthen security cooperation and resolve risks and challenges" and said Uzbekistan had a "unique role to play in resolving the Afghanistan issue", CCTV reported.

"The two sides must take a clear stand against any forces undermining the regional security situation," CCTV reported Xi as writing. The ex-Soviet Central Asian region is also key to China's Belt and Road Initiative, a trillion-dollar push to improve trade links across the globe by building landmark infrastructure. —AFP

US sets up fund for Afghan money after talks flop

WASHINGTON: The United States said Wednesday it was setting up an outside, professionally-run fund to manage \$3.5 billion in Afghanistan's reserves, concluding it cannot trust the Taliban leadership with the country's money.

The new Afghan Fund, based in Geneva, will be put in charge of core central bank functions such as paying Afghanistan's international arrears and for its electricity imports and potentially for future necessities such as printing currency.

The decision comes after talks between the Taliban and the United States failed to convince President Joe Biden's administration that it should hand over assets frozen when the Islamist militants returned to power 13 months ago, despite the dire humanitarian needs in Afghanistan. In a letter to Afghanistan's central bank, US Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo voiced regret that it had not addressed US concerns including demonstrating independence from the Taliban, enforcing pre-Taliban commitments against counter-terrorism funding and money laundering, and bringing in a reputable outside monitor.

"There is currently no institution in Afghanistan that can guarantee that these funds would be used only for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan, including DAB," he wrote, using the acronym of the central Da Afghanistan Bank.

"Until these conditions are met, sending assets to DAB would place them at unacceptable risk and jeopardize them as a source of support for the Afghan people," he wrote in a letter obtained by AFP.

The Afghan Fund will be incorporated in Switzerland with a board of two appointed Afghan economists unaffiliated with the Taliban and representatives of both the US and Swiss governments.

It will maintain an account with the Bank for International Settlements, which is owned by the world's central banks, and also pay for key functions such as Afghanistan's access to the global SWIFT banking payment system.

The United States expects the bulk of the reserves to be preserved and "responsibly managed" until the situation changes, a senior official said.

Dim US view of Taliban

The United States froze \$7 billion in Afghan assets maintained in New York in August 2021 when the two-decade-old Western-backed government swiftly collapsed with Biden's pullout of US troops.

Biden in February said that half of the assets would be made available to victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks, which prompted the US invasion of Afghanistan that toppled the Taliban, who had given sanctuary to Al-Qaeda.

The decision outraged the Taliban but the militants later opened talks with the United States on a way forward, with momentum building after Afghanistan suffered a devastating earthquake in June.

Then in August, the United States killed Al-Qaeda's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in a strike on his home in Kabul. Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared that the Taliban had violated promises to reject terrorism made during a deal with former president Donald Trump to withdraw US troops.

The new fund will not go to assistance. In a statement, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said that the United States has contributed \$814 million in humanitarian aid since the Taliban takeover, channeled through international agencies and aid groups and not given to the Taliban. —AFP

Russian Orthodox Church ready for new pope meeting

NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan: The Russian Orthodox Church said Wednesday it was ready for a new meeting between Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis after weeks of diplomatic tensions sparked by the Ukraine war.

The news came after the pope opened an inter-faith meeting in ex-Soviet Kazakhstan where he lashed the manipulation of faith for political ends. The gathering is being attended by around 100 delegations from 50 countries, but Putin's close ally, Patriarch Kirill, is a notable absentee.

The pope has previously called for peace and denounced a "cruel and senseless war", but Kirill has firmly defended Putin's operation. After opening the meeting in the capital Nur-Sultan, the pope spoke with Kirill's "foreign minister," Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, for around 15 minutes.

Anthony said a meeting between the two pontiffs was "a possibility," provided it was "well prepared." "We need to see when, where (this would happen) and the most important thing is that we want something concrete to come out of the meeting, such as the joint call that we had in Havana," he told journalists, referring to a historic 2016 meeting between Francis and Kirill in Cuba—the first since

the schism in the Christian church in 1054.

Anthony said the pope himself thought a meeting was "needed" and regretted that a meeting planned in June in Jerusalem had been scrapped "by the Holy See." "We were ready for this meeting but it was cancelled by the Holy See," after an announcement by Pope Francis in an interview to Italian daily Corriere della Sera.

"This interview was really unexpected, this type of statement clearly doesn't strengthen unity among Christians, we were surprised," Anthony said. "But we need to move forward, it is important that the two religious leaders forge that path so that we, Christians, can help people."

'Manipulations'

Pope Francis, in remarks that drew applause, warned on Wednesday that faith should not be manipulated to defend conflict or buttress power. "May we never justify violence. May we never allow the sacred to be exploited by the profane. The sacred must never be a prop for power, nor power a prop for the sacred," he said.

"Let us free ourselves of those reductive and destructive notions that offend the name of God by harshness, extremism and forms of fundamentalism, and profane it through hatred, fanaticism, and terrorism," he said.

"Our time (is) still plagued by the scourge of war," Francis said. "A leap forward is required, and it needs to come from us," he said, although he did not name the Ukraine war specifically.

A message from Kirill, published on the Orthodox Church's website and sent to participants of the meeting, said that "we have witnessed distortions of historical facts and unprecedented manipulations of mass consciousness."

Clinton began when he was appointed special counsel in 1994 to investigate a land deal known as Whitewater involving Bill and Hillary Clinton.

That expanded into a probe of the president's affair with the 24-year-old Lewinsky, which Clinton initially denied. The so-called Starr Report documented the president's sexual relationship with the White House intern in graphic detail and resulted in Clinton being accused of perjury and obstruction of justice.

Starr, who was once touted as a potential Supreme Court justice, later wrote a book about the probe — "Contempt: A Memoir of the Clinton Investigation." Time magazine chose Clinton and Starr as its "Men of the Year" in 1998.

Named a judge at the age of 37 by president Ronald Reagan, Starr went on to serve as solicitor general from 1989 to 1993 under president George H.W. Bush, arguing 25 cases before the Supreme Court. Starr served as president of Baylor University from 2010 to 2016, when he left over the handling of sexual assault complaints against American football



NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan: Pope Francis meets with Egyptian Islamic scholar and the current Grand Imam of al-Azhar mosque, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb on the sidelines of the VII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions at the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation in Nur-Sultan. —AFP

"More than ever before, people find it difficult to navigate the flow of information, resist ideological indoctrination, and maintain a sober mind and peace of mind" Kirill said. Russia paints itself as a target of anti-Russian campaigns that it says "the collective West" are conducting to try to shore up waning influence.

The 85-year-old Argentinian pope, who is forced by knee pain to use a wheelchair, arrived on Tuesday in Nur-Sultan for his 38th trip abroad since becoming pontiff in 2013. He is the second pope to visit Kazakhstan after John Paul II's trip in September 2001. —AFP

Ken Starr, who investigated Clinton, dies

WASHINGTON: Ken Starr, who headed the investigation that led to the impeachment of president Bill Clinton for lying about his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, died on Tuesday. He was 76.

Starr died in Houston, Texas, of complications from surgery, his family said in a statement. A former judge and conservative legal stalwart, Starr was best known for leading the probe that resulted in Clinton's December 1998 impeachment by the then Republican-controlled House of Representatives.

The Democratic president was acquitted by the Senate the following year. Starr's involvement with

players at the Baptist school.

'Impeachment is hell'

In January 2020, Starr joined the legal team that defended Republican president Donald Trump in his first impeachment trial before the Senate. Starr lamented that the Senate was being called on "all too frequently" to try impeachments.

"Indeed we're living in what I think can be aptly described as the age of impeachment," he said. "Like war, impeachment is hell," Starr added. "At least presidential impeachment is hell." Like Clinton, Trump was impeached by the House but acquitted by the Senate. —AFP



Ken Starr

International

Two dead, one hurt in shooting at Thailand's military facility

59-year-old tried to flee the scene but surrendered himself

BANGKOK: A Thai soldier killed two people and wounded one other in a shooting at a military facility in Bangkok on Wednesday, police and army officials said. Sergeant Major Yongyuth Mungkornkim, a clerk at the Royal Thai Army War College, shot three other soldiers around 8:45 am (0145 GMT), the military said in a statement.

The 59-year-old tried to flee the scene but surrendered himself around 10 am, deputy national police spokesman Kissana Phathanacharoen told reporters. "The army would like to offer condolences to the families of the deceased soldiers and the wounded. This incident was a loss for both the families and organisation. It is something that wasn't expected to happen," deputy army spokesperson Senior Colonel Sirichan Nga-thong said in a statement.

"The cause and motivation for the incident is under investigation." In the aftermath of the shooting, police officers and soldiers guarded the gates of the facility, part of a large complex of military buildings in the north of the capital.

The military in its statement named the victims as

Sergeant Major Nopparat Inthasunthorn and Sergeant Major Prakarn Sinsong. The third soldier, Sergeant Major Yongyuth Panyanuwat, was taken to hospital for treatment, the military added.

Acting Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan told reporters that police were investigating but it was too early to be sure of the shooter's motives. Another senior army officer, Major General Burin Thongprapai, told reporters the suspect is thought to have suffered mental health problems following brain surgery after a motorbike accident.

Police spokesman Kissana said that as the suspect was a serving soldier, the case would be handled by a military court. While Thailand has high rates of gun ownership, mass shootings are extremely rare.

But in the past year, there have been at least two other cases of shooting murders by serving soldiers, according to the Bangkok Post. And in 2020, in one of the kingdom's deadliest incidents in recent years, a soldier gunned down 29 people in a 17-hour rampage and wounded scores more before he was shot dead by commandos.

That mass shooting, which shocked Thailand, was



BANGKOK, Thailand: Policemen and army personnel patrol inside the gates after an alleged shooter was detained in the Army Training Command in Bangkok on September 14, 2022. A gunman killed one person and wounded two others in a shooting at a military facility in Bangkok. —AFP

linked to a debt dispute between gunman Sergeant-Major Jakrapanth Thomma and a senior officer, and the military top brass were at pains to portray the killer as a rogue soldier.

The military has powerful influence in many aspects of life in Thailand from politics to business, and has intervened to seize power numerous times over the decades, most recently in 2014. —AFP



Mass shootings are extremely rare

Sudanese recall queen's visit before partition

KHARTOUM, Sudan: It has been more than 50 years since Queen Elizabeth II visited Sudan but there are still some who remember her tour of the formerly British-ruled territory in its first decade of independence.

In subsequent decades, repeated military coups and civil war between north and south have led to protracted isolation and partition into two independent nations. There is not much nostalgia for British rule. Many in the rump Sudan left behind by the south's secession in 2011 blame it for fanning the ethnic and religious differences that eventually led to the bloody divorce.

But there was genuine fondness for the queen personally when her death at the age of 96 last week brought down the curtain on a reign lasting more than 70 years. "I was a schoolgirl in my uniform and we were pulled out of school to greet the queen," recalled Khartoum resident Belqis Rikabi, now in her 70s.

Rikabi remembered that she had been impressed by the queen's dress and had tried to get through the jostling crowd to touch the fabric. "One of the guards hit me very hard but then the queen saw this and called out: 'No, no, no,'" Rikabi said. "He stopped and then she held up the hem of the dress for me to examine it."

'Good resonance'

During her stay in the Sudanese capital in February 1965, the queen stayed in the colonial-era Grand Hotel overlooking the Nile, where a portrait of her still takes pride of place alongside pictures of other eminent Britons, including wartime prime minister Winston Churchill.

"The hotel holds memories, photos and records for all the world's greatest people who visited the country in different periods, most notably Queen Elizabeth," said the hotel's general manager, Abdelmoneim Abdelmehmoud al-Hassan.



KHARTOUM: A portrait of the late Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom hangs on September 12, 2022 at the Grand Hotel, a Khartoum colonial-era hotel overlooking the Nile where Queen Elizabeth II of Britain stayed in 1965. — AFP

The hotel was built in 1902 and other visitors over the years have included anti-apartheid hero Nelson Mandela and US civil rights leader Malcolm X. Though it was long ago, the queen's visit "has good resonance" among Sudanese people, Hassan said.

Surviving newsreel footage of the visit is dominated by camel racing and camel-mounted cavalrymen in traditional robes. But the queen also visited development projects first conceived when Sudan was still ruled under a British-dominated joint administration with Egypt.

'Great woman'

Outside Khartoum, she toured the Gezira agricultural scheme in the fertile soils between the Blue Nile and the White Nile, still one of the world's largest irrigation projects. She visited

farmers in the Gezira state capital Wad Madani and the Roseires Dam on the Blue Nile, which was completed the year after her visit. Now 73, Manahel Abou Kashwa was among those who greeted the queen in Wad Madani. As a 16-year-old, Abou Kashwa says she was among 10 pupils chosen to escort the monarch around their school.

"As a young girl, I was amazed at the queen and how people were doing everything for her. I was however happy to be chosen to accompany her." Thirty-five years later and now married to a senior Sudanese diplomat, Abou Kashwa met the queen again when her husband, Hassan Abdeen, presented his credentials as Sudan's ambassador to the United Kingdom. "I told her we met before and she laughed," Abou Kashwa said. When Abou Kashwa learnt of the queen's death, she said: "I was saddened. She was a great woman." —AFP

Taleban 'looking into' video showing executions

KABUL: The Taleban are "looking into" a video circulating on social media that appears to show its fighters executing captured members of an Afghan insurgent group, a government spokesman said Wednesday.

The National Resistance Front (NRF), a nascent group operating mainly out of the Panjshir Valley, said the video showed some of its fighters being executed, and accused the Taleban of "war crimes".

The video, being shared widely on social media, shows two groups of men squatting on a hillside with their hands tied behind their backs before being shot with automatic rifles by Taleban fighters. The fighters can be heard shouting "Allahu Akbar", and a man is later heard saying "stop it, stop it" after the captives slump forward, apparently dead.

Checks by AFP's digital verification team show the first versions of the video only appeared online in the last 24 hours, and government spokesman Bilal Karimi said authorities were investigating.

"We are looking into it to know exactly when these videos were filmed and to know whether they are old," Karimi told AFP. "But so far, we absolutely don't know about the place, timing of the videos, or who the people in them are." The footage went viral a day after the Taleban said its forces had killed at least 40 NRF fighters in clashes in the Panjshir Valley.

The NRF said those shown being executed in the video were captured during fighting in the valley.

"The criminal Taleban... committed a war crime



HERAT: Taleban fighters stand on the back of a vehicle as they conduct a 'house to house' inspection in Herat. — AFP

again by shooting & martyring eight" members of the NRF, the insurgent group's spokesman Sibghatullah Ahmadi said on Twitter.

The scenic Panjshir Valley is famed for being the centre of Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation of the 1980s and the Taleban's first stint in power in the late 1990s. It was the last part of Afghanistan to hold out against the Taleban when they returned to power in August last year.

The NRF is headed by Ahmad Massoud, the son of legendary anti-Soviet and anti-Taleban fighter Ahmad Shah Massoud. The elder Massoud, known as the Lion of Panjshir, was assassinated in

2001 by Al-Qaeda, two days before the September 11 attacks in the United States. His son has since picked up the mantle against Taleban forces, repeatedly denouncing the Islamist regime as "illegitimate".

In July, the United Nations mission in Afghanistan accused the Taleban of carrying out hundreds of human rights violations, including extra-judicial killings and torture, since they seized power. Many of the victims were former government officials and national security force members, the mission said, an accusation denied by the Taleban. —AFP

Thai court to decide PM's fate

BANGKOK: Thailand's Constitutional Court said Wednesday it will rule on September 30 whether suspended prime minister Prayut Chan-O-cha should be thrown out of office permanently. The former army chief, who came to power in a 2014 military coup, was suspended last month while the court examined a legal challenge arguing he has reached his term limit as premier. Under the 2017 Thai constitution, a prime minister cannot serve more than eight years in office, but there are question marks over when Prayut's term began. The court said in a statement that it will issue its verdict on September 30 at 3pm (0800 GMT).

"The Constitutional Court deliberates that the case is a legal issue and there is sufficient evidence to rule," the statement said. Prayut's deputy Prawit Wongsuwan has taken over as caretaker prime minister, while Prayut continues to serve as defence minister.

Prayut launched the coup that ousted Yingluck Shinawatra's democratically elected government, and led a junta regime before retaining the prime ministerial post after elections in 2019. Supporters of the 68-year-old leader argue the clock on his term began when the 2017 constitution came into law, or even after the 2019 general election. If the court agrees, Prayut could technically continue to serve until 2025 or 2027 — if he wins a general election due by March. But Prayut is increasingly out of favour with voters and under his watch the kingdom registered its worst economic performance in three decades. —AFP

10 killed in twin air strikes on Ethiopia's Tigray

NAIROBI: Ten people were killed in a second day of air strikes on Ethiopia's Tigray region Wednesday, hospital officials said, in attacks that came after authorities there expressed readiness for a ceasefire. Twin drone attacks hit a neighbourhood in Tigray's capital Mekele at around 7:30 am (0430 GMT), killing 10 and injuring more than a dozen others, two officials from the biggest hospital in the war-torn region said.

The air raids follow an announcement by Tigrayan authorities on Sunday that they were ready for talks led by the African Union (AU) to end almost two years of brutal warfare in northern Ethiopia. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government is still yet to officially comment on the overture, as the international community presses the warring sides to seize the opportunity for peace.

"Death toll raised to 10," Kibrom Gebreselassie, a senior official at Ayder Referral Hospital in Mekele, told AFP via text message. In a later statement, he said 14 people were injured.

Fasika Amdelesie, a surgeon at the same hospital, confirmed the death toll, adding that the first bombing injured two women followed by a second strike "on the people gathered to help and see the victims". "Among the victims, a father was dead and his son is taken to surgery", he said on Twitter.

AFP was not able to independently verify the claims. Access to northern Ethiopia is severely restricted and Tigray has been under a communications blackout for over a year. The reported attack followed another drone strike on Tuesday on Mekele University, which Tigrayan authorities said caused injuries and property damage. Dimtsi Weyane, a TV network run by Tigrayan authorities, said its station was also hit on Tuesday, forcing it off air and "causing heavy human and material damage". —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2022

Gripes over electric car tax credit as Biden visits Detroit Auto Show

Detroit's Big 3 have made tens of billions of dollars in EV investment

DETROIT: Fresh off of recent legislative triumphs aimed at supporting US manufacturing, President Joe Biden made an upbeat appearance Wednesday at the first Detroit Auto Show since the pandemic. After months of inaction in Congress, Biden capped the summer by signing into law major new investments in semiconductor production and combating climate change, lending the US president's Democratic Party some momentum heading into the November midterm elections.

But not far below the celebratory surface, the auto industry is grumbling over a change in the consumer EV tax credit policy that industry officials warn could slow the transition to emission-free vehicles. At issue are sourcing requirements in the recently passed Inflation Reduction Act meant to prod automakers into using EV batteries produced in North America as well as critical materials sourced from North America or countries with which the United States has a free trade agreement.

The restrictions come as Washington seeks to wean its economic dependence on Russia and China, and as pandemic-induced shortages underscored the vulnerability of having far-flung supply chains.

But auto industry officials and EV experts worry the measure—which affects a consumer tax credit of up to \$7,500 on EVs—will slow their adoption in the United States. “You’re going to see a stalling in the rate of growth,” said John Eichberger, executive director of the Fuels Institute, a nonprofit research group which is funded by a range of energy and transportation companies



DETROIT: A charger stands next to a Jeep Wrangler 4xe at the 2022 North American International Auto Show in Detroit, Michigan on September 14, 2022. —AFP photos



DETROIT: Workers unveil the new Chrysler 300C in Spirit of Detroit Plaza at a press event ahead of the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, Michigan on September 13, 2022.

but does not engage in policy advocacy.

‘Missed opportunity’

A self-professed “car guy,” Biden has made previous presidential visits to tour General Motors and Ford plants in Michigan—a key electoral swing state. Biden’s appearance Wednesday at the Detroit Auto Show lends some shine to the revived event following a three-year pandemic hiatus.

Since the last show in 2019, Detroit’s “Big 3”—GM, Ford and Chrysler (now called Stellantis) — have announced tens of billions of dollars in EV investment and unveiled numerous new offerings.

Last Thursday, GM unveiled the Equinox EV, a model with a starting price of \$30,000, less than half the average price of EVs now available in the

market. On the same day, Stellantis brand Jeep showed images of two new electric SUVs and confirmed that its all-electric SUV for Europe would launch in 2023.

The arrival of EV versions of popular models like the Ford F-150 has meant that EV sales in the United States surged more than 66 percent in the second quarter compared with the period a year ago, according to Cox Automotive.

EVs comprised 5.6 percent of the total US market, according to Cox. Still, a meaningful transition to EVs from the internal combustion engine faces several challenges, including shortfalls of lithium and other key battery materials and doubts over consumer demand, in part because of lofty price tags—something the \$7,500 tax credit aims to combat. The Alliance for Automotive Innovation,

a Washington trade group representing big automakers, highlighted fine print around the tax credit that it said would derail EV growth.

One of those is the requirement that automakers gradually increase minimum levels for choice materials through 2026. The alliance praised tax credits in the bill for EV manufacturing plants, but said they were offset by the consumer provisions.

‘A bumpy road’

“Unfortunately, the EV tax credit requirements will make most vehicles immediately ineligible for the incentive,” said John Bozzella, president of the lobby group. “That’s a missed opportunity at a crucial time and a change that will surprise and disappoint customers in the market for a new vehicle,” he added. Alan Amici,

chief executive of the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Michigan, said the industry sees economic benefits to sourcing locally in light of the issues that surfaced during the pandemic.

But it takes time to adjust supply chains, he said. “The industry needs to figure that out,” said Amici, adding that companies are studying the measure and hoped Washington officials might show flexibility in implementing the policy. Eichberger cited analysis showing that, in certain years, only a few EV models would qualify for the credit under the standard. He warned that a leveling off or decline in EV sales in the next couple of years could kill momentum for a transition that remains at an early stage. “It’s going to be a bumpy road, and this is another bump,” Eichberger said. — AFP

Shareholders back Musk’s Twitter takeover deal

WASHINGTON: Twitter whistleblower Peiter Zatkó told the US Congress Tuesday that the platform ignored his security concerns, in testimony that came as company shareholders greenlit Elon Musk’s \$44 billion takeover deal. Nearly 99 percent of the votes cast by stock owners endorsed the agreement with Musk to sell him the tech firm for \$54.20 per share, Twitter said in a release.

Zatkó added that it was ready to consummate the merger agreement immediately, and no later than September 15 as per a timeline mandated by the agreement. The shareholder decision clears the way for the contract to close, even as billionaire Musk tries to exit it. Twitter has sued him to force it through. “I’m here today because Twitter leadership is misleading the public, lawmakers, regulators and even its own board of directors,” Zatkó, a hacker widely known as “Mudge”, told the hearing.

He said that, during his time as head of security for the platform from late 2020 until his dismissal in January this year, he tried alerting management to grave vulnerabilities to hacking or data theft—but to no avail. “They don’t know what data they have, where it lives, or where it came from. And so, unsurprisingly, they can’t protect it,” Zatkó said during his opening remarks to the Judiciary Committee.

He contended that employees across the company had too much access to user data.

Zatkó testified that he brought evidence of

problems to the executive team and “repeatedly sounded the alarm”. “To put it bluntly, Twitter leadership ignored its engineers because key parts of leadership lacked competency to understand the scope of the problem,” he said.

“But more importantly, their executive incentives led them to prioritize profits over security.”

Zatkó’s attorneys called the hearing a “watershed moment” that he hopes will enlighten the public and contribute to sorely needed legislation aimed at tech platforms. Twitter has dismissed the 51-year-old’s complaint as being without merit. But revelations of his whistleblower report in the US press in August were perfectly timed for Tesla chief Musk, who has used it as part of his justification for abandoning his unsolicited \$44 buyout bid.

‘Elephant in the room’

In his report, Zatkó directly refers to questions asked by Musk about bot accounts on Twitter, saying the company’s tools and teams for finding such accounts are insufficient.

Musk has listed bot accounts as among the reasons to justify his walking away from the deal. Twitter is suing to force him to complete the buyout, with a trial set to go ahead on October 17.

Zatkó’s testimony “puts more pressure on Twitter camp ahead of Musk/Twitter trial,” Wedbush analyst Dan Ives told AFP. “The Twitter shareholders approving this deal was a no brainer but now the major challenge begins with the Musk trial,” he said.

“The elephant in the room is the Zatkó situation which could be an albatross for the Twitter camp and throw this deal off track.” If Twitter prevails at trial, the judge could order the Tesla chief to pay billions of dollars to the company, or even complete the purchase. Twitter CEO Parag Agrawal declined

expectations of about eight percent. Prices actually rose on a monthly comparison.

‘Caught up’

European markets are “caught up in the negative sentiment that has taken hold across global markets,” said Victoria Scholar, head of investment at Interactive Investor. “Hotter-than-expected US inflation figures prompted heavy selling on Wall Street,” she added. Global consumer prices have soared for months, exacerbated by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine—which has hiked energy and food costs—as well as owing to supply chain strains and COVID lockdowns in China.

The Fed has already instituted two consecutive 75-basis-point hikes, and a third such move is widely expected at its meeting next week. After the latest US inflation data, some investors are even predicting the next Fed hike could be a full percentage point.

Aggressive rate tightening by central banks worldwide is denting economic

activity as consumers and businesses face higher loan repayments. Investors “still appear to be in a state of shock, trying to process how high the Fed will go with its policy rate and how low the economy and earnings growth will go as a result of the restrictive policy,” said market analyst Patrick O’Hare at Briefing.com.

In the UK, inflation slowed to 9.9 percent in August but remained almost in double digits. The news boosted the pound on hopes of another interest rate hike next week from the Bank of England. “There has been a fresh bout of anxiety on financial markets amid worries that inflation is still proving to be a formidable opponent to take down,” said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Susannah Streeter.

In Asia, Tokyo led the region’s losses with the Nikkei plunging 2.8 percent. Hong Kong stocks closed down more than two percent, with Chinese conglomerate Fosun hit hard by media reports that the group was under regulatory scrutiny. — AFP



WASHINGTON: Independent Security Consultant and Twitter Whistleblower Peiter “Mudge” Zatkó testifies before the US Senate Judiciary Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on September 13, 2022. —AFP

to testify at Tuesday’s hearing, citing the Musk litigation, Senator Chuck Grassley said. Zatkó insisted he had not made his revelations “out of spite or to harm Twitter.”

“Far from that, I continue to believe in the mission of the company,” he told Tuesday’s hearing. Musk, himself an avid Twitter user, did not comment immediately on the hearing—but tweeted a popcorn emoji as Zatkó spoke, suggesting he was watching the proceedings closely. “Zatkó’s testimony didn’t provide much new information,” said Insider Intelligence analyst Jasmine Enberg. “There was also almost no mentions of bots, but that doesn’t mean that Musk won’t use Zatkó’s allegation that Twitter was disinterested in removing bots to try to bolster his argument for walking away from the deal.” — AFP

China lockdowns weigh on global oil demand: IEA

PARIS: China’s repeated COVID lockdowns and a slowdown in developed economies are weighing on the growth of global oil demand this year, the International Energy Agency said Wednesday. The deceleration of demand for crude is partly offset by a switch from gas to oil for power generation, as soaring gas prices have prompted countries to change fuels, said the IEA.

Global oil demand is now expected to grow by two million barrels per day this year, slightly down from the previous forecast of 2.1 mbd. Total demand is projected to reach 99.7 mbd in 2022 before returning to pre-Covid levels next year, at 101.8 mbd, if China reopens to the world, said the Paris-based agency, which advises developed countries on energy policy.

“A deteriorating economic environment and recurring COVID lockdowns in China continue to weigh on market sentiment,” the IEA said in its monthly report on global oil demand. China is the world’s biggest importer of crude, so a slower economic activity there affects global demand for the fossil fuel. Meanwhile, Russian oil production and exports “have proved resilient”, with August levels only 400,000-450,000 barrels per day under pre-war levels, the IEA said, despite Western sanctions against the country over the Ukraine conflict. — AFP

US gloom casts dark shadow over global markets

NEW YORK: Global equities sank further Wednesday as stronger-than-expected US inflation data sparked fears of a prolonged campaign of Federal Reserve interest rate hikes.

London was the heaviest faller in Europe after news that UK inflation slowed last month but held close to a 40-year high. Asia tanked after Wall Street took its worst beating in weeks Tuesday on news of hot US inflation. US stocks opened to the upside, but then dipped into the red. The dollar edged down in choppy trade, while oil prices climbed. US inflation slowed slightly in August to 8.3 percent on an annual measure, but this trumped market



HONG KONG: Pedestrians pass a display showing the numbers for the Hang Seng Index in Hong Kong on September 14, 2022. —AFP

Business

Google handed setback as EU court upholds record fine

Fine for Google's unlawful restrictions on manufacturers of Android mobile devices



BRUSSELS: EU antitrust chief Margrethe Vestager gives a press conference in Brussels in this file photo. — AFP

LUXEMBOURG: The European Union's second-highest court on Wednesday overwhelmingly upheld the EU's record fine against Google over its Android operating system for mobile phones, slightly reducing the fee for technical reasons. In a statement, the EU's General court said it "largely confirms the commission's decision that Google imposed unlawful restrictions on manufacturers of Android mobile devices" in order to benefit its search engine.

The court, however, said the fine should be slightly reduced to 4.125 billion euros (\$4.1 billion), instead of the 4.3 billion euros decided by the commission in 2018, after reviewing the duration of the infringement. The levy remains the EU's biggest ever despite Google's arguments that the commission's case was unfounded and falsely relied on accusations it imposed its search engine and Chrome browser on Android phones.

The company also pushed the case that the EU was unfairly blind to the strength of Apple, which imposes or gives clear preference to its own services such as Safari on iPhones. "We are disappointed that the Court did not annul the decision in full," a Google spokesperson said in a short statement. "Android has

created more choice for everyone, not less, and supports thousands of successful businesses in Europe and around the world," it added.

The complainants welcomed the decision as it confirmed that Google "can no longer impose its will on phone makers", said Thomas Vinje, a lawyer representing the industry group FairSearch, whose original complaint launched the case in 2013. "This shows the European Commission got it right," he added. The commission said it "took note" of the decision and "will carefully study the judgment and decide on possible next steps". The decision by the General Court is not necessarily the end of the story. Both sides can turn to the EU's highest court, the European Court of Justice, for a final say on the fine, which was the equivalent of \$5 billion when levied.

Global action

The Android case was the third of three major cases brought against Google by the EU's competition czar Margrethe Vestager, whose legal challenges were the first worldwide to directly take on the Silicon Valley giants. Since then, global regulators have followed suit, with Google facing a barrage of cases in

the United States and Asia based on similar accusations. Last year, South Korea fined Google nearly \$180 million for abusing its dominance in a similar case targeting Android. Vestager has already won against Google in its appeal of a separate case, a 2.4-billion-euro fine for the company for abusing its search engine dominance. As expected, the tech giant appealed that setback to the high court.

The EU, however, has lost recent cases involving the microchip industry. Vestager's team lost an appeal against a \$1 billion fine imposed on Qualcomm in the same court in June. That followed another setback in January when the EU lost the court's backing for a 1.06-billion-euro fine on Intel.

Frustrated at the length of time it takes to pursue competition cases, Brussels has since adopted the Digital Markets Act (DMA), which puts a much tighter leash on the way Big Tech can do business.

The new law, set to come into force next year, would set up a rulebook of do's and don'ts for Big Tech companies such as Google and Facebook.

The DMA includes specific bans or limits on Google, Apple and other gatekeepers from promoting their own services on platforms. — AFP

Japan central bank conducts 'rate check' as yen sinks

TOKYO: Japan's central bank on Wednesday conducted an operation often seen as a precursor to currency intervention, local media said, as the yen continues to crater against a strengthening dollar.

The financial daily Nikkei and other local media said the Bank of Japan (BoJ) carried out a "rate check". A Bank spokesman contacted by AFP declined to comment. A rate check involves asking market participants about their foreign exchange trading, said Toshikazu Horiuchi of IwaiCosmo Securities. "Basically it's a warning, which is the next best thing to an intervention when the exchange rate is fluctuating," he told AFP.

The yen has tumbled from around 115 per dollar in March to below 140 in recent weeks, as the BoJ maintains its monetary easing policies despite sometimes sharp rate hikes elsewhere, including from the Federal Reserve, to tackle inflation. In early Tokyo trade, a dollar fetched 144.94 yen, after worse-than-expected US inflation data raised the prospect of even steeper US rate hikes to tame prices.

The rate check reports saw the yen strengthen quickly, with the dollar touching a low of 143.53 within an hour. Japanese government officials also sought to calm the waters by insisting they were monitoring the currency swings and would not rule out any option to prevent further falls. Speaking to reporters Wednesday evening, Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki declined to

comment on the rate check reports. But he said that if falls continued, "necessary steps will be taken in the market with all options on the table". He was tightlipped on whether intervention had been decided or implemented, adding only: "in cases where it is, it's done swiftly, without missing a beat." Horiuchi said a rate check is often seen as a precursor of an intervention, "so that's why the market reacts very sensitively." "But its actual impact hinges on whether an intervention is really possible."

'Many moving parts'

Japan's government has few options though, particularly before the next Federal Reserve meeting, said Hideo Kumano, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. "There are so many moving parts, like preparation for interventions and behind-the-scenes negotiations with the United States," he told AFP.

"That leads me to believe that this series of verbal interventions is not directly linked with the work to put bullets in the gun (and carry out an intervention)." A weaker yen can help Japanese companies sell products overseas, but the levels seen in recent weeks are starting to put pressure on households and businesses due to higher import prices. Inflation more broadly has risen to seven-year highs in Japan, partly due to the impact of the war in Ukraine on energy prices, though it is still less severe than in many major economies. Japan's central bank has been in no hurry to shift course on its ultra-loose monetary policy, viewing the measures as necessary to achieve its long-standing goal of sustained two percent inflation.

The bank sees recent price increases as temporary and linked to exceptional factors like the Ukraine conflict and pandemic-related supply chain issues. — AFP



TOKYO: The Japanese national flag flutters in the wind on part of the Bank of Japan (BoJ) headquarters buildings in Tokyo on September 14, 2022. — AFP

Europe's battle with Big Tech: Billions in fines and tough laws

BRUSSELS: The European Union is on a mission to rein in US tech giants, which have been accused of tax avoidance, stifling competition, raking in billions from news without paying for it and spreading misinformation. In the past few years, the EU has slapped eye-watering fines on Apple and Google in tax and competition cases, and drawn up a landmark law to curb the market dominance of Big Tech. Brussels has also toughened its code of conduct on disinformation and hate speech.

As a European court on Wednesday rejected Google's appeal against a 4.3-billion-euro antitrust fine (\$5 billion at the time it was levied), we look at the battle between Brussels and Silicon Valley:

Stifling competition

The digital giants are regularly criticized over dominating markets by elbowing out rivals. In July, the European Parliament adopted the Digital Markets Act to curb the market dominance of Big

Tech, with violations punishable with fines of up to 10 percent of a company's annual global sales.

Brussels has slapped over eight billion euros in fines on Google alone for abusing its dominant market position. In 2018, the company was fined 4.3 billion euros—the biggest ever antitrust penalty imposed by the EU—for abusing the dominant position of its Android mobile operating system to promote Google's search engine.

Google lost its appeal against that decision on Wednesday, though the fine was reduced to 4.1 billion euros. The firm is also challenging a 2.4-billion-euro fine from 2017 for abusing its power in online shopping and a separate 1.5-billion-euro fine from 2019 for "abusive practices" in online advertising.

The EU has also gone after Apple, accusing it of blocking rivals from its contactless iPhone payment system, and fined Microsoft 561 million euros in 2013 for imposing its search engine Internet Explorer on users of Windows 7. Italy joined in the action last year, hitting Amazon with a 1.1-billion-euro antitrust fine for abusing its dominance to push its logistics business.

Taxation

The EU has had less success in getting US tech companies to pay more taxes in Europe, where they are accused of funneling profits into low-tax economies like Ireland and Luxembourg.



FLEUREY-SUR-OUICHE, France: An employee manipulates mustard pots at the Reine de Dijon mustard factory in Fleurey-sur-Ouche, eastern France on September 7, 2022. — AFP

Seeds of change for Dijon mustard amid shortage

DIJON, France: France's favorite condiment, Dijon mustard, is hard to find these days, with signs on supermarket shelves warning the lucky few who spot jars that they can only take one home.

A heatwave across the ocean in Canada, the world's top mustard seed producer, is to blame for the drastic shortage that has dragged on for months in France. Canada supplies around 80 percent of the mustard seeds used by French makers of the spicy condiment, the rest coming mostly from Burgundy, the region that surrounds Dijon.

But a drought slashed the Canadian harvest by half in 2021. Now French mustard makers are aiming to boost production at home in Burgundy. "It's very important to increase that share so we can face weather risks that differ from one country to the other," Luc Vandermaesen, president of the Burgundy Mustard Association, an industry group, told AFP. "We can't put all our eggs in one basket," said Vandermaesen, who is also the chief executive of France's third biggest mustard maker, Reine de Dijon (Queen of Dijon).

Double the price

The Dijon region has been famous for its mustard seeds since the Middle Ages, but production has been decimated by pests as chemicals used to kill them have been banned. Output was divided by three between 2017 and 2021, falling from 12,000 tons to 4,000 tons.

In June, local producers were urged to more than

double the area planted with mustard seeds to 10,000 hectares. "The Canadian problems revived the importance of the Burgundy sector," said Fabrice Genin, president of the Association of Mustard Seeds Producers of Burgundy.

As an incentive, mustard makers agreed to pay 2,000 euros (\$2,008) per tonne for Burgundy seeds in 2023, up from 1,300 euros last year and more than double what they paid in 2021.

The appeal appears to have worked, with 10,000 hectares planned for mustard seeds, said Jerome Gervais, a mustard expert at the chamber of agriculture in Burgundy's Cote d'Or department. The number of seed producers jumped from 160 to more than 500, he added.

"It's more than hoped," Gervais said.

'Revenge'

Francois Detain, a farmer in Agencourt, gave up mustard seed production in 2019 after his fields were wrecked by a dry spring and an insect infestation. But the price offered for mustard seeds allowed him to bring them back, even though Russia's invasion of Ukraine has made fertilizers more expensive.

A drop in the prices of grains and oilseeds has also made mustard seeds more attractive.

"It's sort of a revenge for us to be able to replant a local crop," Detain said. Shipping costs—which have soared due to supply chain bottlenecks since COVID pandemic lockdowns were lifted—have also given an edge to Burgundy seeds over those from Canada. By next year, Burgundy should be producing 15,000 tons of mustard seeds, meeting 40 percent of the needs of mustard makers, Gervais said.

"(Store) shelves should be replenished in October," Vandermaesen said. "The shortage will be completely over in early 2023. We are very confident for Christmas." — AFP

Earlier this month, Irish authorities fining Instagram, a Meta subsidiary, 405 million euros for breaching EU regulations on the handling of children's data.

Fake news and hate speech

Social networks, particularly Facebook and Twitter, are often accused of failing to tackle disinformation and hate speech. In July, the European Parliament approved a Digital Services Act that forces big online companies to reduce risks linked to disinformation or face fines of up to six percent of their global turnover.

Paying for news

Google and other online platforms are also accused of making billions from news without sharing the revenue with those who gather it. To tackle this, an EU law in 2019 created a form of copyright called "neighboring rights" allowing for print media to demand compensation for use of their content.

France was the first country to implement the directive.

After initial resistance, Google and Facebook agreed to pay French media, including AFP, for articles shown in web searches. That did not stop the company being fined half-a-billion euros by France's competition authority in July 2021 for failing to negotiate "in good faith", a ruling Google has appealed. Facebook has also agreed to pay for some French content. — AFP

Personal data

Tech giants are regularly criticized over how they gather and use personal data. The EU has led the charge to rein them in with its 2018 General Data Protection Regulation, which has since become an international reference.

Companies must now ask for consent when they collect personal information and may no longer use data collected from several sources to profile users against their will. Amazon was fined 746 million euros by Luxembourg in 2021 for flouting the rules.

Business

EU plans a 'comprehensive reform' of electricity market

Cap on producers' profits and cushion consumers from high prices among proposals

STRASBOURG: The EU plans a "deep and comprehensive" reform of the electricity market to cope with an energy crisis sparked by Russia's war in Ukraine, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said Wednesday. The measures include a cap on electricity producers' profits that would raise 140 billion euros (\$140 billion) and "cushion" consumers from high prices, she said in her annual State of the European Union address.

Other steps involve rationing energy, temporary state aid and decoupling the prices of gas and electricity. She also announced the creation of a new bank designed to spur investment of up to three billion euros in hydrogen as a Green alternative to fossil fuels.

The measures were in response to soaring energy costs as Europe painfully unhitches its decades-long dependency on Russian fossil fuels. Sanctions on Russia and retaliation by Moscow by cutting off gas supplies have sent prices skyrocketing, leaving Europe to confront a difficult coming winter.

"Russia keeps on actively manipulating our energy market. They prefer to flare the gas than to deliver it," von der Leyen said. "This market is not functioning anymore."

Gas reserves

To partly prepare for a tough winter, the bloc has hastily stockpiled gas reserves, hitting 84 percent of capacity well ahead of an October deadline, von der Leyen said.

But the hole left by missing Russian supplies will still hurt. The idea to tax profits by non-gas electricity providers is to divert the money to households and businesses to weather the situation.

"These companies are making revenues they

never accounted for, they never even dreamt of," von der Leyen said. "In these times it is wrong to receive extraordinary record profits benefiting from war and on the back of consumers," she said.

She said "major oil, gas and coal companies" would also "have to give a crisis contribution".

At the same time, von der Leyen highlighted that the EU is pivoting to "reliable suppliers", naming the United States, Norway and Algeria among them. Longer-term, the EU wants greater reliance on renewable energies, von der Leyen said, hammering a key promise of her mandate. The hydrogen investment bank proposal is another step towards that future.

Kyiv trip

Another announcement made by von der Leyen was planned legislation to secure critical raw materials for the EU as it shifts towards greater use of electric vehicles and other more environmentally friendly technologies. In her speech, she highlighted the stranglehold China has over resources such as lithium that are key to the energy transition.

"Today, China controls the global processing industry. Almost 90 percent of rare earths and 60 percent of lithium are processed in China," she said in her annual State of the European Union address.

The proposed law would identify "strategic projects all along the supply chain" and "build up strategic reserves where supply is at risk," she said. As for Russia, the EU chief signalled that the bloc would maintain its sanctions pressure on Russia as long as it waged its war in Ukraine.

"I want to make it very clear, the sanctions are here to stay. This is the time for us to show resolve, not appeasement," she said. Ukraine's first lady



STRASBOURG, France: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen delivers a speech during a debate on "The State of the European Union" as part of a plenary session in Strasbourg, eastern France, on September 14, 2022. —AFP

Olena Zelenska attended the gathering in Strasbourg, receiving a standing ovation from lawmakers. Von der Leyen told MEPs that she would travel to Kyiv to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, her third trip to the Ukrainian capital since the war started.

"I will travel to Kiev today to meet President

Zelensky" to discuss "in detail" the continuation of European aid, she said in her major annual political address. "For the first time in its history, this Parliament is debating the state of our Union while war is raging on European soil," said von der Leyen, dressed in Ukrainian colors. —AFP

News in brief

Air France cancels Friday flights

PARIS: French flag carrier Air France said Wednesday it would cancel more than half its short- and medium-haul flights on Friday, as the country's air traffic controllers wage a strike. "We can't rule out delays and last-minute cancellations" among the flights that remain, the airline said in a statement, adding that affected customers would be warned by text message and email. Air France said just 45 percent of short- and medium-haul services would operate on Friday, while 90 percent of long-haul connections would go ahead. The carrier's move comes after the biggest air traffic controllers' union SNCTA called members out on strike. —AFP

Lufthansa back in private hands

BERLIN: Lufthansa said Wednesday the German state had sold the stake it took in the airline as part of a rescue package at the peak of the COVID pandemic, and booked a healthy profit in the process. In the spring of 2020, borders were shutting worldwide, forcing airlines everywhere to ground planes and put staff put on forced leave. To save Lufthansa from bankruptcy, the German government took a 20-percent stake in the group under a nine-billion-euro (dollar) state aid package. Under the deal, the government agreed to sell the stake by October 2023. But with the airline's finances stabilizing as travel resumed, Berlin was able to start selling its holdings as early as November last year. —AFP

Germany's Uniper in talks with govt

BERLIN: Struggling energy giant Uniper said Wednesday it was in negotiations with the German government for a possible nationalization of the group, as Russian supply cuts put the company under severe pressure. The German state had already taken a 30 percent stake in the group in a rescue package in July. Credit lines have also been extended to keep Uniper afloat. But Uniper warned that there were no signs that an energy crisis rocking Europe would soon abate. Negotiations were therefore now ongoing for a heavier state bailout. "Due to the increased uncertainties in the operating environment, the parties are also looking into alternative solutions, inter alia a straight equity increase that would result in a significant majority participation by the German government in Uniper," it said. —AFP

Finland package for energy groups

HELSINKI: Finland's parliament on Wednesday approved a 10-billion-euro (\$10 billion) rescue package for energy companies facing a cash crunch due to high volatility in the markets following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The package, consisting of loans and guarantees, is designed to stabilize the market and help cover companies' liquidity needs arising from increased collateral requirements for electricity futures contracts. Announcing the package on September 4, the government had stressed that ensuring the effective functioning of the electricity market was "critical for the functioning of the Finnish economy, society and security of supply". —AFP

EU plans to cut energy bills

BRUSSELS: The European Commission on Wednesday set out proposals to bring down the soaring price of gas and electricity in the EU, notably by taxing excess profits of power producers. EU energy ministers are to review the plans in an extraordinary meeting in Brussels on September 30.

Levy on electricity producers

In the EU's electricity market, the price is based on the last source used to meet demand—often a gas-fired power plant—and that is applied to all electricity operators, regardless of whether they use nuclear, hydro-power, solar or other sources.

Wholesale energy prices thus soared together when the war in Ukraine sent the cost of gas skyrocketing. The commission is calling for a "cap" on exceptional profits raked in by energy producers using cheaper sources but priced at the much higher market rate—effectively a tax, though it veers from calling it that because that would require unanimity by all 27 EU countries.

According to a commission draft seen by AFP, the cap would be set at 180 euros per megawatt hour, and anything above that would go to EU member states' coffers, to be shared out to struggling households and businesses. Coal and methane production is excluded. Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said the levy, or cap, would raise at least 140 billion euros (\$140 billion).

Going further, she also called for a "deep and comprehensive reform" of the EU's energy market

Shares in Chinese conglomerate Fosun dive

BEIJING: Club Med owner Fosun, one of China's largest private-sector conglomerates, saw billions wiped off its value on Wednesday as jittery investors reacted to a media report that the group was under regulatory scrutiny. There has been growing concern about the debts of Chinese companies, particularly after a run of high-profile defaults in the property sector last year that rippled through the wider economy.

Bloomberg News on Tuesday cited unnamed sources as saying that regulators, including China's banking watchdog and the local commission overseeing state investments, have told large lenders and state-owned enterprises to closely examine their exposure to Fosun.

Shares in Fosun International Limited, the conglomerate's flagship company, slid as much as 9.6 percent in

Foxconn strikes \$19.4bn deal to make chips in India

TAIPEI: Taiwanese electronics giant Foxconn will invest \$19.4 billion to make semiconductors in India with local conglomerate Vedanta, backed by New Delhi's push to boost tech self-reliance after a global chip shortage. Semiconductors are an essential component of nearly all modern electronics, from smartphones to kitchen appliances and cars, but the coronavirus pandemic kneecapped global production and leading manufacturers are still struggling to meet demand.

India approved a \$10 billion incentive plan last December to kickstart its own domestic industry by covering up to half of all project costs. The deal announced

which would include decoupling the price of gas from electricity production from other sources. The effects of the levy would vary from country to country in the EU. In France, where most electricity comes from nuclear plants and is sold via fixed-price contracts, much of the profit already goes to the government.

'Crisis contribution'

Brussels wants to impose a temporary "crisis contribution" on major oil, gas and coal companies that are pulling in big profits because of the global scramble for energy resources.

"Because we are in a fossil fuel crisis, the fossil fuel industry has a special duty, too," von der Leyen said. "In these times it is wrong to receive extraordinary record profits benefiting from war and on the back of consumers," she said. The commission draft envisages a 33 percent levy on excess profits, defined as profits going more than 20 percent beyond the average earned between 2019 and 2021.

Peak-hour demand

The commission wants to place a requirement on EU countries to cut electricity consumption "by at least five percent" during peak hour, when the price of electricity is at its highest. Brussels calculates that this would reduce gas consumption for electricity in the bloc by 3.8 percent.

It also wants the countries to reduce monthly consumption by 10 percent. It would be up to each EU country to decide how to meet those goals.

Aid for suppliers

Acknowledging the precarity faced by energy suppliers facing liquidity problems because of price

Hong Kong on Wednesday. They later pared some of those losses, ending the day down 6.6 percent at HK\$4.56, the lowest level since late 2012. Fosun's Chief Financial Officer Alex Gong rejected the Bloomberg report as "completely false". "Neither the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC) nor the Shanghai Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission have asked commercial banks to find out about Fosun's financial exposure, and those institutions have not received any notice of this," Gong told the South China Morning Post.

The public had a "one-sided interpretation" of Fosun's recent reductions in shareholdings and divestments and failed to see that they were part of a long-term financial strategy, the Shanghai-based company added in a statement.

Circus and football

Co-founded by tycoon Guo Guangchang in 1992 during the heady days of China's initial "reform and opening" period, Fosun started off in pharmaceuticals and real estate but has since built a sprawling business empire that includes tourism and finance.

A prolific buyer of global assets, Fosun owns French brand Club Med and has a controlling stake in

Tuesday is the scheme's most ambitious investment to date and will see a manufacturing facility built in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat.

"India's own Silicon Valley is a step closer now," Vedanta group chairman Anil Agarwal tweeted on Tuesday, thanking the government for helping "tie things up so quickly". Vedanta, one of India's biggest mining companies, will take a 60 percent share in the joint venture for its first step into chip-making. Foxconn, the world's top iPhone assembler, will take the minority stake.

"The improving infrastructure and the government's active and strong support increases confidence in setting up a semiconductor factory," Foxconn vice president Brian Ho said in a statement. The facilities will be operational by 2024 and will also manufacture display screens for phones and tablets, the companies said.

Shares in Vedanta rose six percent in Mumbai a day after the announcement. India has sought to boost its domestic production capacity in a range of strategic sectors, including military hardware and advanced technology. "In the current geopolitical scenario, trusted sources of



volatility, Brussels intends to loosen regulation and bring in anti-speculation mechanisms. "We will amend the temporary state aid framework in October to allow for the provision of state guarantees, while preserving a level playing field," von der Leyen said.

Gas price ceiling?

The commission wants to slash the revenues Russia is earning from its gas exports and has floated the idea of putting a lid on how much the bloc will pay for those supplies. But some eastern EU countries highly dependent on Russian gas—and wary of President Vladimir Putin's warning that he would cut all supplies to any country imposing a price cap—are balking. The issue is still being negotiated, after some EU energy ministers last week suggested a ceiling on all gas imports into the bloc, including liquefied natural gas (LNG).

The commission is eyeing more a cap on pipeline gas only, which would impact Russia, and avoid problems related to capping prices for LNG, which can be shipped anywhere around the globe, to where prices are highest. —AFP



BEIJING, China: In this file photo taken on December 12, 2015, the logo of Chinese conglomerate Fosun is seen on top of a building near a military slogan (right) in Beijing. —AFP

the fashion house Lanvin. It owns English Premier League football club Wolverhampton Wanderers and has a major stake in Canadian circus producer Cirque du Soleil.

In 2020, Fosun struck a deal with Germany's BioNTech to manufacture its coronavirus vaccine in China and later became its exclusive distributor to the Greater China region. —AFP



semiconductors... are key to the security of critical information infrastructure," India's technology ministry said earlier. The government's semiconductor incentive scheme has already successfully wooed several investors, with Singapore's IGSS Ventures announcing \$3.2 billion in July to make chips in Tamil Nadu state. Another partnership between NextOrbit of the UAE and Israel's Tower Semiconductor signed on in May for a \$2.9 billion plant in Karnataka state. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo taken on February 28, 1998 French singer Johnny Hallyday (right) applauds Franco-Swiss film director Jean-Luc Godard (left) receiving an Honorary Cesar during the 23rd Cesar Awards ceremony at the Theatre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. — AFP

French cinema giant Jean-Luc Godard dies aged 91

Jean-Luc Godard, one of the most influential filmmakers of the 20th century and the father of the French New Wave, died "peacefully at home" on Tuesday aged 91, his family said. His legal counsel later confirmed he died by assisted suicide. The legendary maverick blew up the conventions of cinema in the 1960s, shooting his gangster romance "Breathless" on the streets of Paris with a hand-held camera, using a shopping trolley for panning shots. He continued to thumb his nose at Hollywood and an older generation of French filmmakers by breaking all the rules again in "Contempt" (1963) with Brigitte Bardot and "Pierrot le Fou" in 1965. "No official (funeral) ceremony will take place," his family said.

"He will be cremated... And it really must happen in private." Godard's legal counsel Patrick Jeanneret confirmed a report in French daily Liberation that he had died by assisted suicide. The practice is regulated in Switzerland and permitted if offered without a selfish motive to a person with decision-making capacity to end their own suffering.

"Godard had recourse to legal assistance in Switzerland for a voluntary departure as he was stricken with 'multiple invalidating illnesses', according to the medical report," said Jeanneret. Godard has lived as a virtual recluse for decades in the Swiss village of Rolle.

'National treasure'

It was there that he died "peacefully at home", his wife Anne-Marie Mieville at his side, his producers said. Godard's influence is hard to overestimate, with directors from Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino and Paul Thomas Anderson to Robert Altman, the maker of "M*A*S*H" and "The Player", often speaking of their debt to him. French President Emmanuel Macron hailed the director's talent and mourned the loss of a "national treasure". "Jean-Luc Godard, the most iconoclastic filmmaker of the New Wave, invented a resolutely modern, intensely free art. We have lost a national treasure, a genius," Macron tweeted.

Figures from the film industry paid tribute to the director including Bardot who tweeted a black and white photo of the two of them walking down stairs and wrote: "By making Contempt and Breathless, Godard joined the firmament of the last great creators of stars." American filmmaker Darren Aronofsky tweeted "thank you maestro" while actor Antonio Banderas credited the late filmmaker with "expanding the boundaries of the cinema."

British director Edgar Wright described him on Twitter as "one of the most influential, iconoclastic film-makers of them all. It was ironic that he himself revered the Hollywood studio film-making system, as perhaps no other director inspired as many people to just pick up a camera and start shooting..." Godard's house, with green shutters and a green bench out front, had its shades drawn Tuesday, with an abandoned ashtray and teapot on the windowsill, an AFP reporter said.

Despite the filmmaker's often difficult relationship with critics, The Guardian's Peter Bradshaw heaped praise on Godard, saying, "The last great 20th-century modernist is dead". He compared him to other 1960s rebels like John Lennon and Che Guevara. "Or maybe Godard was the medium's Socrates, believing that an unexamined cinema was not worth having," he added.

'Every edit is a lie'

Guy Lodge, of the screen bible Variety, tweeted that it was "glib to say 'he changed everything', but he sure changed a hell of a lot of things". Indeed, Godard became a "god" to many 1960s political and artistic radicals who would hang on every word of his often contradictory-and tongue-in-cheek-declarations on the state of cinema and the world. "All you need for a movie is a gun and a girl," he once proclaimed, in a nod to US actress Jean Seberg, star of "Breathless".

The movie was a fashion as well as a film landmark, her pixie haircut copied by millions bowled over by her effortless

Parisian cool. "A story should have a beginning, a middle and an end-but not necessarily in that order," Godard later famously declared, and "every edit is a lie". Godard would occasionally emerge from his Swiss bolthole to make low-budget films well into his 80s.

Jean-Luc Godard: Key dates in the life of a cinema great

December 3, 1930: Born in Paris into a well-to-do Franco-Swiss family.

1949: Begins ethnology studies in Paris and develops an interest in cinema.

1960: Makes his first feature "Breathless", hailed as a classic of the French New Wave movement of experimental filmmaking.

1961: Marries his actress muse Anna Karina. They divorce three years later.

1963: Releases "Contempt" starring Brigitte Bardot, one of his most internationally popular films.

1967: Directs "La Chinoise" starring Anne Wiazemsky, whom he marries the same year and will divorce in 1970.

1971: A serious motorbike accident puts him in hospital for six months.

1977: Moves to Switzerland with his third wife, film director Anne-Marie Mieville.

1980: Releases "Every Man for Himself", the first of a string of bigger budget features.

1987: Awarded an honorary Cesar, the French equivalent of the Oscars, for his body of work.

1998: Completes the monumental "Histoire(s) du cinema", a sweeping history of film which comes out in three books and on screen, mixing images, extracts of poetry, prose and philosophy.

2010: Wins an honorary Oscar for his life's work but does not attend the award ceremony.

2014: "Goodbye to Language" wins the Jury Prize at Cannes, his only success at the festival.

2017: "Redoubtable", a tragi-comedy about his short marriage to Wiazemsky, by the Oscar-winning director of "The Artist", Michel Hazanavicius, is nominated for the top prize at Cannes. — AFP

He never regained the capacity to shock or move mainstream audiences as he had in the 1960s, though a small band of disciples remained doggedly loyal to the master. His periodic appearances at the Cannes film festival-often via FaceTime-still drew crowds, though he no longer held the sway he did when he had managed to shut down the festival entirely in 1968 in solidarity with the student protests in Paris. Cannes also saw the premiere in 2017 of "Redoubtable", a tragi-comic film about Godard's doomed romance with the French actress Anne Wiazemsky, directed by the Oscar-winning director of "The Artist", Michel Hazanavicius.—AFP

The late Jean-Luc Godard, a leader of French New Wave cinema

Alphaville wins Golden Bear at Berlin in 1965

Inspired by the French civil unrest of **May 1968**, he participates in cancellation of **Cannes film festival** with other film directors such as Claude Berri, Francois Truffaut and Claude Lelouch

After **May 1968**, Godard became more politically involved and radical. He founded **Groupe Dziga Vertov** to take a collective and Maoist approach to film-making

Genius, provocateur, famous for his often contradictory and tongue-in-cheek declarations on the state of cinema and the world

Already experimenting with **video format** in the mid-1970s

Godard completely changed movie **editing** and participated in the reinvention of cinema

Born December 3, 1930 in Paris

Writes in film magazine **Les cahiers du cinema** in the 1950s while also making short films

Pierrot le Fou (1965), one of his most critically acclaimed films featuring actor **Jean-Paul Belmondo**

Leading member of the French **New Wave** cinema in 1960s with Francois Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Agnes Varda...

Breathless with Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg catapulted him to fame in 1960

1930 **Le Cahiers du Cinema**

1963 **PROVOCATION**

1968 **Le Cahiers du Cinema**

New Wave

Breathless

Editing

Video

Dziga Vertov Group

AFP

Kate's daunting task of following Diana as Princess of Wales

As the new Princess of Wales, Prince William's wife Catherine is inevitably drawing comparisons with her superstar predecessor, William's late mother Diana, whose legacy still frames Britain's view of its royal family. Outside Kensington Palace in London, where Diana continued to live after separating from the new King Charles III in 1992, members of the public voiced their views on the task facing Kate. "Diana will never be forgotten. But I'm sure that she'll continue the legacy. And she'll be a wonderful tribute to Diana," said Keith Lowing, 73. The retiree and his wife Kathleen were sat on a bench in the palace gardens, where Diana and King Charles's sons William and Harry unveiled a statue of the late princess only last year. The death of Queen Elizabeth II on Thursday saw Britain enter a new era, after her 70 years on the throne.

But the accession of King Charles also heralded another symbolic change: the first Princess of Wales since Diana's death 25 years ago. Before Diana, the previous Princess of Wales was Mary of Teck, from 1901 until 1910, when her husband became King George V.



Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales is driven behind the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II, adorned with a Royal Standard and the Imperial State Crown and pulled by a Gun Carriage of The King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery, during a procession from Buckingham Palace to the Palace of Westminster, in London.

Helping those on the margins

The title of Prince of Wales is granted by monarchs to their eldest living son. Charles was created Prince of Wales aged nine in 1958, and, on his first full day as king, gave the title to 40-year-old William. The Prince of Wales's wife becomes the Princess of Wales. "Our new Prince and Princess of Wales will, I know, continue to inspire and lead our national conversations, helping to bring the marginal to the centre ground where vital help can be given," King Charles said on Friday. Charles's second wife Camilla was



Britain's Prince William (left), Prince of Wales, Britain's Katharine (second left), Duchess of Kent, Britain's Prince Harry (second right), Duke of Sussex, and Meghan (right), Duchess of Sussex, stand after participating in the procession of the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II, to Westminster Hall, at the Palace of Westminster, in London where she will Lie in State on a Catafalque. — AFP photos

entitled to use the style Princess of Wales after their wedding in 2005. But she chose not to do so as the title was so strongly associated with Diana, who had publicly blamed Camilla for being the third person in her marriage to Charles. Camilla used her husband's secondary title and became the Duchess of Cornwall. "The problem of comparison with Diana won't arise because Kate is not Camilla-and because things have moved on," royal commentator Richard Fitzwilliams told The Guardian newspaper.

High standard to match

That said, Diana remains a revered figure in Britain and around the world. Her tragic death aged 36 in car crash in Paris on August 31, 1997 left her frozen in time and a near-saintly figure to many. "Diana was a very important princess and was very much loved by the public. She doesn't represent the crown so much as the people," Maria Aragon, a 21-year-old Spanish tourist, told AFP outside Kensington Palace.

Not far from the new Diana statue, Rebecca Brunswig, a 74-year-old US tourist, recalled her "many humanitarian visits", her commitment to AIDS sufferers and her "wonderful compassion for the less fortunate".

Even before Catherine married William in 2011, questions arose as to whether she could ever measure up to Diana, whose engagement ring she wears. Since joining the royal family, Kate has conducted herself with poise and projected a happy family image, choosing her charitable engagements carefully as she raises Princes George and Louis and Princess Charlotte.

Fitzwilliams said: "Kate has been increasingly hands-on and has shown a particular interest in early-years development, so I imagine she would like her legacy to show that she made a difference in that area." But a palace source sought to dampen down Diana comparisons. "The new Princess of Wales appreciates the history associated with this role," the source told reporters. "But she will understandably want to look to the future as she creates her own path."

Outside Kensington Palace, lawyer Selma White, 40, said: "She's very elegant, beautiful. And she represents the monarchy very well. "I love Diana, I also love Kate, but I don't think you can compare them, and people shouldn't. They will have to give Kate the chance to be Kate."

Popularity

A YouGov poll earlier this year put Kate as the most popular member of the royal family-on a 68 percent approval rating-after Queen Elizabeth, on 75 percent. Experts believe she can now anchor the British royal family's popularity, as Diana once did. "Clearly the focus is now on William, Catherine-Prince and Princess of Wales-working alongside our new king and queen consort," royal historian Ed Owens told Channel 4 television.

Robert Hazell, a constitutional expert at University College London, said Kate would privately be a good sounding board for William in the "lonely" position of Prince of Wales and heir to the throne. Publicly, "the younger royals help to maintain the popularity of the royal family among younger people", he added.— AFP



Ukrainian flag is projected on the wall during the BEVZA Spring 2023 runway show during New York Fashion Week in New York. — AFP photos



Models walk the runway during the Coach Spring 2023 fashion show during New York Fashion Week at The Plaza Hotel in New York.



Models walk the runway at the BEVZA Spring 2023 fashion show during New York Fashion Week in New York.

UKRAINE DESIGNER EVOKES THE PAIN OF WAR AT NY FASHION SHOW



Ukrainian fashion designer Svitlana Bevza, founder and creative director of fashion line BEVZA, acknowledges attendees at the BEVZA Spring 2023 fashion show.

Fashion shows rarely begin with a moment of silence, but that is what Ukrainian designer Svitlana Bevza did Tuesday night for her country to decry the Russian invasion. She went on to present a collection rich in patriotic symbols. Bevza is an old hand at New York's Fashion Week, where she has appeared since 2017. She is based in Kyiv and has her workshops there but was forced to leave after the invasion in late February, and its endless explosions and sirens, to protect her two children.

Her husband Volodymyr Omelyan, a politician who was a government minister from 2016 to 2019, stayed home to fight. You can see him on her Instagram account, dressed in military

garb and carrying a gun. Bevza's spring-summer collection, entitled 'Fragile motherland' and unveiled at a building on Wall Street, was highly political. The blue and yellow Ukrainian flag was projected onto a wall.

"Some people maybe do not understand that this is going for real. And today is the 202nd day of war in Ukraine. And there's thousands of people dead," she told AFP. "I was forced to leave the country with my kids. And my husband is at war," she added. She presented tops that are sensual when worn with skirts or pants but still recall bullet-proof vests. Some look like shields that expose the shoulders and navel.

Grains of wheat—symbols of fertile

Ukraine as a bread basket to the world—have a narrative stream through the collection. A Bevza necklace depicts them, charred black because "a lot of wheat was burned by Russians," she said. The ample cut of some of her skirts also recalls the fit of Ukrainian farm women harvesting wheat. "There is a deep sacred meaning of the bread itself and the wheat that came through centuries," she said, pointing to famine in the 1930s that was blamed on Stalin. "What we protect now, we protect the fertile lands. And what we are basically fighting for is to live free, to live in peace in our land," the designer said.—AFP

Activism and '90s glamour on display at New York Fashion Week

Glamour on the one hand, activism on the other: designers Tory Burch and Gabriela Hearst showcased two different approaches to New York Fashion Week on Tuesday.

2019, Burch has entrusted her husband, Pierre-Yves Roussel, with managing the company, while moving into the roles of chief creative officer and executive chair.

sophistication and eroticism in vogue in the early '90s. "I do think it's a bit sexier than what we have done in the past," she said. "And I think that women are feeling that right now. I see that that's

Women's empowerment

Uruguayan designer Gabriela Hearst's show was imbued with ambiance. In an enormous warehouse with opaque windows, her models paraded down a runway lined with a gospel choir. Gold dominated, shimmering across a cape, on a breastplate and popping against white and black accompaniments. Long yellow and orange ponchos handsewn in Uruguay and red pantsuits also brought to mind the colors of fire.

Some pieces appeared to have been directly molded onto the models with the collection notes describing how leather had been soaked in water and then draped over a form to create unique pieces. The theme of women's empowerment was also woven into the show.

Hearst, who is also the creative director at Chloe, said her 2023 Ready-to-Wear Collection was inspired by the ancient Greek poet Sappho and how she had shed light on the hardships women had to endure. "This Joy," a gospel song written by Grammy winner Shirley Caesar, was performed by the Resistance Revival Chorus, which was billed as a collective of women and non-binary singers that addresses how "historically marginalized women have been in the music industry."

The catwalk cast included women's rights activist Cecile Richards, Mexican Chilean climate activist Xiye Ba and anti-toxic shock syndrome campaigner Lauren Wasser. Hearst also said she had aimed to offset the climate footprint of her show by working with Swiss company Clime works, which uses technology to capture carbon dioxide directly from the air.—AFP



'Richness and minimalism'

American designer Burch offered New York a vintage-inspired collection that veered away from her well-known prints and bright colors. "The collections have been for me much more personal now that I'm not running the business," she told AFP after the show. Since

For the Spring/Summer 2023 edit, Burch said she thought back to when she moved to New York in the 1990s and wanted to highlight "the concept of richness and minimalism" at the same time.

With sheer cotton tops, lace bras and silver shoes, Burch evoked the sleek

how women want to dress, but I also love a certain elegance to it." She said she also experimented with layering, using a jersey bandeau skirt as a recurring motif, sometimes worn over pants. "I wanted to challenge us to push it a little further and also to have a more focused point of view," she explained.



Models walk the runway at the Coach Spring 2023 fashion show during New York Fashion Week.



Models walk the runway at the Tory Burch Spring/Summer 2023 fashion show during New York Fashion Week in New York.

Shy male albatrosses prefer divorce to confrontation

Most albatrosses mate for life but shy males who avoid confrontation are more likely to get dumped, researchers said Wednesday, adding it was the first time personality had been shown to predict divorce in a wild animal. Wandering albatrosses, which traverse the Southern Hemisphere and have the largest wingspan of any bird at more than three meters (10 feet), are among the most monogamous animals.

They can live for more than 50 years, and while they spend much of that time on the wing, they meet up every two years with the same partner to breed. Divorce is a "super rare event", occurring around 13 percent of the time, Ruijiao Sun, the lead author of a new study published in the journal *Biology Letters*, told AFP. But "if they find that their breeding success is too low with a specific partner they may look for another one," said the PhD student at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in the US.

To find out how an individual bird's personality affects their likeliness of getting divorced, the researchers drew on a unique database. Since 1959, scientists have been tracking a colony of wandering albatrosses on Possession Island, in the southern Indian Ocean's Crozet archipelago. "We put a stainless ring on the leg with a number," marine biologist and study co-author Stephanie Jenouvrier told AFP. "Because they're not really scared we can approach very slowly and we can read the number," she added, saying it allowed the team to "reconstruct the entire history of these birds". Sun said the birds "breed every two years because they take a whole year to rear their chick and it's super energy-consuming, so they take a one-year sabbatical after to recover and they do not spend that time together".

Shy guys finish last
Over more than a decade, the researchers measured the boldness of



nearly 2,000 birds by observing how they respond to a human approaching their nest. They found that shyer male albatrosses were up to twice as likely to get divorced than their bolder rivals-but no difference was found in females. "We

show for the first time the link between personality and divorce in a wild species, thanks to probably the best dataset in the world," Sun said.

Wandering albatrosses have "elaborate courtship processes", the study said,

as the birds raise up their wings, squawk and generally dance around. Sometimes during the process, a pushy outsider male couple tries to cut in. That is when the shy males avoid confrontation-and accept divorce. However there are other factors affecting divorce rates, the researchers said. There are more male than female albatrosses, because females tend to forage in areas where they are more likely to get caught up in fishing lines.

The surplus of males means that females quickly find a new mate, but it can take males more than four years, the study found. Also, "individuals that are in a long-term relationship are less likely to divorce than the ones that are new to each other," Jenouvrier said. Last year research indicated that climate change could also be driving albatrosses to divorce, as the birds have to travel farther to find decreasing numbers of fish.—AFP

Grins and engine growls: Thai motorbike drag racing kicks back into gear

A Thai racer locked his eyes ahead, the heat shimmering from the concrete as he gripped his stripped-back motorbike before it leapt up, back wheel spinning furiously, and bounced forward with a screech of rubber. Teenager Anawat Duangdara was

money ranging from 1,500 to 60,000 baht (\$40 to \$1,600). "When I was about to let the bike loose, I wasn't scared or excited at all-I was calm," 19-year-old Duangdara said of tackling the 200-metre course, which riders completed in around six seconds. "I was completely in

dangers of racing on the streets. "You have a very small window for mistakes, and if you make one you either die or you become disabled," he explained. "But on the race track, if you crash, you crash alone and you have medics taking care of you." "I have crashed a few times on the track, but I only got some scratches," he said, despite racing in jeans and a black polo-neck with only a helmet for safety.

Tinpot attitude
As dusk fell, the pattering roar of hundreds of engines took over from the steady scream of one, soon obliterating the pop music and bantering commentary. Mechanic Samrit Khamtubtim, a former racer himself, explained why the final free-for-all rally was so important. The 51-year-old, who hires himself out to racers looking for a day's work, sees himself as a kind of "father figure" to many who still need that adrenalin burst-but away from the streets. "The kids who are still growing up have a place to vent their love for speed, and that's why the organizers let all of the kids race together on the tracks," he said. Shortly afterwards, the air around the starting gate was dense with exhaust smoke as hundreds of spectators gunned their bikes forward for the last round free-for-all. The mixed crowd performed wheelies and whoops as they went full throttle, the track becoming a chaotic mess.

Saranyu Hananthisingh, 24, had driven up on his motorbike to watch the competition and was waiting for this madcap round. "I just love the speed and I love all of the bikes-that's why I'm here," he said before jumping on his bike to join the roaring fray. — AFP



This photo shows Thai youth racing their scooters during the NGO Street Drag Race event in Thailand's Chonburi province.

among scores competing in front of enthusiastic crowds in the raucous NGO Street Drag Race in Chonburi on Sunday, which aimed to take popular and dangerous-motorbike street racing off the roads and onto the tracks.

The 13th annual event, halted for two years during the coronavirus pandemic, gathered enthusiasts to watch semi-professional teams competing for prize

the moment and so happy. It was just speed."

He has been racing for years, learning the ropes of running sprints, as the timed races are known, on the streets of the capital Bangkok. Thailand has a lax attitude towards road safety and reckless driving is rarely punished, contributing to the ninth-highest fatality rate in the world. But Duangdara acknowledged the



This photo shows Thai youth racing their two-wheelers during the NGO Street Drag Race event in Thailand's Chonburi province. — AFP photos



A Thai drag racer racing his modified motorbike during the NGO Street Drag Race event.



A Thai youth doing a wheelie with his electric bike during the NGO Street Drag Race event.



Thai mechanics working on a modified motorbike during a NGO Street Drag Race event.



A Thai youth (center) wearing a cooking-pot as a helmet taking part in the NGO Street Drag Race event.

Sports

Golf rankings risk becoming a 'laughing stock' if LIV excluded

Emergence of LIV Golf plunges the sport into turmoil

MELBOURNE: LIV Golf chief Greg Norman Wednesday warned the world rankings risk becoming a "laughing stock" if they refuse to award points to players from the Saudi-backed breakaway circuit. The issue of LIV Golf's events being recognized by the Official World Golf Ranking (OWGR) system could be pivotal to its future.

If players can earn rankings points from LIV events, it becomes easier to qualify for the sport's four majors. "It makes OWGR look obsolete if they don't (accept LIV)," Norman told The Age newspaper in Melbourne. "If they wake up at the end of the year and Dustin Johnson is 102 in the world, is that not a laughing stock to the OWGR?"

"There's two ways they can go: they can either fold, or they include LIV into OWGR. We'll move on. Everyone's happy after that." The emergence of LIV Golf this year has plunged the sport into turmoil, with a host of top players from the PGA Tour opting to switch to a series that offers some of the richest purses in history. The new circuit has been accused of "sportswashing" Saudi Arabia's human rights record, backed by the almost unlimited resources of the kingdom's sov-

ereign wealth Public Investment Fund.

The PGA Tour has adopted a zero-tolerance stance towards the series - which plays no-cut tournaments over three days and includes a team competition - with those defecting being suspended. Norman urged the custodians of the major tournaments to let LIV players take part, despite the PGA Tour's stance. "They (PGA Tour) have no right to tell each of those majors what to do. They're independent organizations. Yes, certain members sit on their board. I get it and I understand that," he said.

"(But) if you were a broadcaster you would be questioning the value of your investment for television if you don't have the strongest field in each and every one of them. I hope they stay (neutral like) Switzerland." The highest profile golfer to make the switch so far was Norman's fellow Australian Cameron Smith, the British Open champion, who was world number two when he made the move this month. He will join other major winners such as Johnson, Phil Mickelson, Bryson DeChambeau and Sergio Garcia in leading one of the 12 Liv Golf four-player teams in 2023. —AFP



BOLTON: Cameron Smith of Australia waves to the crowd on the third hole during the final round of the LIV Golf Invitational - Boston at The Oaks golf course at The International on September in Bolton, Massachusetts. —AFP

Refereeing basketball to escape violence in Venezuela

CARACAS: Venezuelan Yorsibeth Teran scans the court as players scream at her to blow her whistle while locals watch, some drinking coffee. She is one of 20 young people from a Caracas neighborhood engulfed by violence that have been trained as basketball referees by a local NGO. "I want to make my parents proud and for the kids in the neighborhood to look up to me as an example to follow, knowing that they don't have to be thieves, they can be referees or players," the 18-year-old told AFP.

The Caracas Mi Convive NGO has trained dozens of young people in the impoverished El Cementerio neighborhood in refereeing, bakery, confectionary, hairdressing and graphic arts. In El Cementerio, which is famous for its huge cemetery, the entrance to the recently painted basketball court is emblazoned with the words: "We are playing for a world of more love and less violence."

It adds: "Let your faith be greater than your fear." In July 2021, residents of El Cementerio and neighboring areas were paralyzed with fear as 2,500 police officers launched an operation that resulted in two days of shoot-outs with local criminals. "I had a terrible experience during the clashes between gangs and police," said Teran. Four police officers and 22 locals died during the operation. Since then, Teran trained as a baker but she also learnt how to referee basketball matches.

'Corridor of death'

Venezuela has one of the highest rates of violence in the world, with 11,000 violent deaths in 2021, according to the local violence observatory. It has the seventh highest murder rate in the world with almost 41 per 100,000 inhabitants. To get to the basketball court, people have to use a passageway known as "the corridor of death" due to it being used by gangs. "Many people are afraid to walk this way because you never know when there could be a clash," said Saray Figueredo, who became an activist after the death of her older brother, a gang member.

"You could lose your life because of a stray bullet," she added. Figueredo is trying to change the image of a neighborhood marked by criminality and extreme poverty. In Venezuela, more than three-quarters of the population live in extreme poverty, according to a report by the Andres Bello Catholic University. "We want people to see the other side of the coin, the side where young people are productive," said Figueredo.

New threat

It is a Saturday and basketball coach Miguel Ruiz shoots a hoop during a match where his 26 students are working as the referees and table officials. They are learning about the International Basketball Federation's rules, officials' signals, time-keeping and how to manage a game.

Some of the students have been in trouble for taking drugs or carrying weapons. "We try to get them away from this situation and into the basketball world," said Ruiz. However, there is another threat around the corner as new criminal groups look to move into the territory vacated by those "neutralized" in 2021. "Insecurity has increased, we live in fear, now they steal and many things happen," said one student, who did not give a name. "Before they did not steal because it wasn't allowed (by the gangs). It wasn't a better life but it was calmer." —AFP

WCup door open for Rogic as Mooy makes headlines

BRISBANE: Australia coach Graham Arnold kept the World Cup door open Wednesday for Tom Rogic despite leaving the influential midfielder out of an enlarged squad for games against New Zealand. There was a first call-up however for 17-year-old Garang Kuol, who impressed when an A-League All-Stars team played Xavi's Barcelona this year. Former Celtic star Rogic, 29, withdrew just before Australia's crunch World Cup qualifiers in May, citing personal reasons.

He is not in a 31-man squad for games against New Zealand in Brisbane on September 22 and Auckland three days later, which Arnold says is a last chance for players to claim a spot for the World Cup in Qatar in November. Arnold said Rogic was overlooked because of a lack of recent game-time, but left the door open after he signed for West Bromwich Albion in the English Championship this week.

"He's a player that's top quality. He brings a lot to the national team," Arnold told reporters of Rogic, who has 53 caps for the Socceroos. "At this moment he hasn't been selected for New Zealand because he hasn't

kicked the ball in a game since May. "It's all about Tommy getting out there and working hard and making sure he's in the best form of his life," he added. "We need our best players."

Arnold included seven debutants in a squad spearheaded by Celtic midfielder Aaron Mooy. The new faces include teenage attacker Kuol. "This camp is the last opportunity we will have to work with the squad ahead of the World Cup tournament and all players are competing for a spot in the final squad, which will be announced in early November," said Arnold.

"The incentive couldn't be bigger," he added. "There's a place at the World Cup at stake and if you're working hard and playing well then there's an opportunity for you to represent your country on the biggest stage." Mooy leads a seven-strong contingent competing in the Scottish Premiership, including striker Martin Boyle and defender Nathaniel Atkinson. FC Copenhagen goalkeeper Maty Ryan was named captain.

Australia squad: Nathaniel Atkinson (Hearts/SCO), Keanu Baccus (St Mirren/SCO), Aziz Behich (Dundee United/SCO), Martin Boyle (Hibernian/SCO), Jason Cummins (Central Coast Mariners/AUS), Harrison Delbridge (Incheon United/KOR), Milos Degenek (Columbus Crew/USA), Thomas Deng (Albirex Niigata/JPN), Cameron



Australian midfielder Tom Rogic

Devlin (Hearts/SCO), Mitchell Duke (Fagiano Okayama/JPN), Tyrese Francois (Gorica/CRO), Denis Genreau (Toulouse/FRA), Ajdin Hrustic (Hellas Verona/ITA), Jackson Irvine (St. Pauli/GER), Fran Karacic (Brescia Calcio/ITA), Joel King (Odense Boldklub/DEN), Garang Kuol (Central Coast Mariners/AUS), Mitch Langerak (Nagoya Grampus/JPN), Mathew Leckie (Melbourne City/AUS), Awer Mabil

(Cadiz/ESP), Jamie Maclaren (Melbourne City/AUS), Riley McGree (Middlesbrough/ENG), Connor Metcalfe (St Pauli/GER), Aaron Mooy (Celtic/SCO), Andrew Redmayne (Sydney FC/AUS), Mathew Ryan (FC Copenhagen/DEN), Trent Sainsbury (Al-Wakrah/QAT), Ryan Strain (St Mirren/SCO), Adam Taggart (Cerezo Osaka/JPN), Marco Tilio (Melbourne City/AUS), Bailey Wright (Sunderland/ENG) —AFP

Wallabies out to avoid 'world of hurt' against All Blacks

MELBOURNE: Captain James Slipper warned his Australia side that they face "a world of hurt" if they linger on defeat to South Africa and underestimate the stuttering All Blacks on Thursday. The Wallabies and All Blacks have both lacked consistency this season but it will be New Zealand who go into their Rugby Championship clash in Melbourne on a high. After four defeats in the previous six Tests, they thumped Argentina 53-3 in Hamilton to ease some of the pressure on head coach Ian Foster. In contrast, Slipper's side crashed 24-8 to world champions South Africa in Sydney, a defeat he said Wednesday still hurt.

"Two weeks ago was very hard for us against South Africa. We have reviewed it and had honest chats," said the 121-Test veteran, who continues to stand in as skipper with Michael Hooper on mental

health leave. "I said after the game that we just needed to be better and we have found ways to do that in training and in our reviews. "One thing in rugby is you have to dust off because around the corner are the All Blacks and if you're still thinking about South Africa come tomorrow, you're going to be in a world of hurt."

"For us, we have to move forward and make sure we perform tomorrow." With just one point separating all four teams in the table, the southern hemisphere Rugby Championship is one of the tightest in recent memory with Thursday's clash crucial to both teams' title hopes. Also in play is the Bledisloe Cup, which New Zealand has held since 2003. To change that, Australia must win at a sold-out Docklands Stadium before repeating the feat at Eden Park in Auckland nine days later.

Hard to beat

Asked if this could be their best chance in years to break the drought given New Zealand's inconsistency, Slipper said: "I've heard that commentary a fair bit. "But history tells us they're a pretty hard team to beat. "Historically, they've had the wood on us for 20 years so us as a playing

group, we understand what's coming and it's going to be a hard task to win the Bledisloe and it starts tomorrow here."

Like the Wallabies, the usually dominant All Blacks have failed to string wins together this year, suffering two defeats to Ireland and one each to South Africa and Argentina. All Blacks skipper Sam Cane said the hammering of Argentina in Hamilton had given them confidence, and it was now time for the team to back it up. "We haven't been pleased with our consistency this year," he said. "It's a tough place to play in Australia, but we've always had great success here."

New Zealand have won 16 of their last 20 Tests against Australia, by an average margin of 24 points, but Cane remains wary of a side that always "front up". "They've got a really good pack, they've had a lot of success with their driving maul. When they get humming, they can score points quickly," he said. "The thing about the Aussies, it doesn't matter what's going on, they've always got plenty of confidence in themselves and their ability and they have shown time and time again how they can front up. "I expect the intensity to be right up there, from the outset." —AFP

Bangladesh axe Mahmudullah from T20 squad

DHAKA: Bangladesh on Wednesday axed former cricket captain Mahmudullah Riyad and recalled batsman Najmul Hossain in a shake-up to its struggling Twenty20 squad ahead of next month's World Cup in Australia. This month's disappointing Asia Cup campaign highlighted the team's 20-over woes, with Bangladesh turfed out in the group stage after losing to Afghanistan and eventual winners Sri Lanka. Mahmudullah's inclusion was under a cloud after a lacklustre 151 runs across his eight match appearances in 2022. Indian cricketer Sridharan Sriram, appointed last month as the team's T20 consultant, said it was time for the team to think of its future beyond the 36-year-old.

"I think this was the right time for all of us to come together and think of... who can fill in the big shoes of Mahmudullah," he said. Chief selector Minhajul Abedin hailed Mahmudullah's record but

added that the decision to omit the all-rounder from the squad was unanimous. "We have respect for Mahmudullah who has played well for the national team," he said. "We haven't been doing well in this format," Minhajul added. "Our T20 consultant has given us a one-year plan, which will take us in a different direction. We have gone with this plan."

Najmul returns after he was left out of contention during the Asia Cup campaign while Liton Das, Nurul Hasan and Yasir Ali have recovered from injury. Bangladesh will also be without the experienced Mushfiqur Rahim, who retired earlier this month. The World Cup gets underway in Australia on October 16 and Bangladesh will appear in Group 2 alongside India, Pakistan, South Africa and two qualifiers.

The squad named Wednesday will travel to New Zealand beforehand to take part in next month's tri-nation tournament alongside Pakistan. - Bangladesh Squad: Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Sabbir Rahman, Mehidy Hasan, Afif Hossain, Mosaddek Hossain, Liton Das, Yasir Ali, Nurul Hasan, Mustafizur Rahman, Mohammad Saifuddin, Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, Hasan Mahmud, Nasum Ahmed, Najmul Hossain. —AFP



Mahmudullah Riyad

Sports

Bundesliga leaders Union aim to bring Berlin cool to Europe

Union on Bundesliga's longest unbeaten run

BERLIN: Cult club Union Berlin have enchanted German football on their fairytale rise all the way to the top of the Bundesliga, and this season they are hoping to carry their domestic form onto the European stage. Union head to Portugal to play Braga in their second group game in this season's Europa League on Thursday, having lost at home to Union Saint-Gilloise last week.

"The only thing that matters on Thursday is that we get our first points on the board. We want to show our league face," Union goalkeeper Lennart Grill told German media on Tuesday. The 1-0 loss to their Belgian opponents is the only blemish on a brilliant start to the campaign for Union, who reached new heights last weekend as they stormed to the top of the Bundesliga for the first time in their history. The popular minnows from East Berlin are full of confidence after notching up four wins from their opening six games in Germany's top flight.

Union are on the Bundesliga's longest unbeaten run, having not lost in 13 games, despite having faced Bayern Munich, RB Leipzig (twice) and cross-town rivals Hertha Berlin (twice) during that spell. "I'm particularly happy about the 14 points, which will help us, because there will certainly be phases in which we are not doing well," said coach Urs Fischer. "It's a nice moment to remember", the notoriously stoic Swiss said of his side's view from the top.

'Cool' Union

Union Berlin's outsider appeal existed a long time before their promotion to the Bundesliga in

2019, but in recent weeks the club have won the support of German football's mainstream. After his side was held to a 1-1 draw away at Union on matchday four, Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann was full of praise for Union. "The fans are cool, the stadium is cool, the club is cool, Urs is cool," he said.

Even former Bayern president Uli Hoeness served up one of his famous backhanded compliments — a sure sign Union have captured German football's attention. "(They are) very successful, very likeable, I like it," he said. "They do a great job, but that's a different concept. You can't win the Champions League with that." Whether Union will ever be able to win the Champions League remains to be seen, but the fact the club could even take part shows how far things have come in the eastern Berlin borough of Koepenick.

Greatest asset

Despite their promotion ahead of the 2019-20 season, most observers expected Union to quickly fall back to the second division, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic robbed them of their greatest asset — fans at the Stadion am Alten Forsterei, their 22,000-capacity home ground. However, they finished an impressive 11th — equal on points with Hertha — in their first top-flight season, before seventh and fifth-placed finishes in their next two campaigns secured them European football.

They failed to make it beyond the group stage of last season's Europa Conference League before los-



COLOGNE: Union Berlin players celebrate after the German first division Bundesliga football match between FC Cologne and 1 FC Union Berlin in Cologne, western Germany. —AFP

ing to Union Saint-Gilloise last week, although that was just their fifth loss at home in all competitions since the summer of 2020. While Union may have avoided some of the larger clubs like Manchester United, Arsenal, Monaco and Jose Mourinho's Roma

in the draw, Braga, their opponents on Thursday, are in the middle of a purple patch of their own. With five wins and a draw they sit narrowly behind Benfica — and ahead of Porto and Sporting Lisbon — in the Portuguese league. —AFP

Klopp mocks Boehly's plan for all-star game

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp has poured scorn on the idea of a US-style all-star Premier League game floated by new Chelsea chairman Todd Boehly, asking whether the Harlem Globetrotters (exhibition basketball team) as well? "Maybe he can explain that. I'm not sure people want to see that — (Man) United players, Liverpool players, City players, Everton players all together. It is not the national team. Did he really say it?"

Boehly, whose consortium completed its takeover of Chelsea in May, also lifted the lid on the club's sacking of Thomas Tuchel. Tuchel, who led Chelsea to Champions League glory in 2021, was fired last week after an embarrassing 1-0 defeat to Dinamo Zagreb, with Graham Potter installed as his successor. Boehly hinted at a deterioration in his relationship with the German. "When you take over any business, you have to make sure you're aligned with the people who are operating the business," said the American.

"Tuchel is obviously extremely talented and someone who had great success at Chelsea. Our vision for the club was finding a manager who really wanted to

Premier League, for whatever the pyramid needed quite easily." But Klopp strongly criticized Boehly's proposal, pointing to the already congested English football calendar.

"He doesn't wait long," said the Liverpool manager. "When he finds a date for that he can call me." In American sports these players have four-month breaks. Does he want to bring the Harlem Globetrotters (exhibition basketball team) as well? "Maybe he can explain that. I'm not sure people want to see that — (Man) United players, Liverpool players, City players, Everton players all together. It is not the national team. Did he really say it?"

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"Tuchel is obviously extremely talented and someone who had great success at Chelsea. Our vision for the club was finding a manager who really wanted to



Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp

collaborate with us, a coach who really wanted to collaborate. "It wasn't about Zagreb, it was about the shared vision for what we wanted Chelsea to look like." Boehly also confirmed Chelsea's plans to run a multi-club model similar to the City Football Group, which owns Premier League champions Manchester City. "We're going to be continuously adding resources," he said. "We've talked about having a multi-club model. I would love to continue to build out the footprint." —AFP

Queiroz returns 'home' to take up Iran post

TEHRAN: Carlos Queiroz said he feels "at home" after he returned to Tehran on Wednesday to take charge of Iran for a third successive World Cup finals campaign. The 69-year-old Portuguese coach was appointed to the post last Wednesday having previously been in charge of Iran for eight years, the longest stint in the national team's history.

That included appearances at the 2014 and 2018 World Cup finals where Iran exited in the group stage, although in the latter they beat Morocco for only their second win in football's global showcase. "As I said yesterday I feel (at) home, that's the best feeling that you can have," he said on arriving at the airport where he was surrounded by media and Iran supporters. "I

just hope that our work together can drive the dreams of Iran in the near future."

The appointment of the former Real Madrid coach followed a campaign pledge by the new head of Iran's football federation, Mehdi Taj. Taj was elected president of the Iranian football federation last week, after previously occupying the role from 2016 to 2019. Queiroz — who is perhaps best known for being assistant coach to Alex Ferguson at Manchester United on two occasions — replaced Dragan Skocic. Skocic was sacked in July only to be reinstated days later. Iran will be appearing at their sixth World Cup finals in Qatar.

They begin their campaign against England on November 21 and will also play Wales and round it off with the high-octane clash against the United States in Group B. A previous meeting in a World Cup finals saw Iran beat the USA 2-1 in a 1998 group match. Queiroz was last in charge of Egypt, quitting in April after failing to agree terms on a new contract. The former South Africa, Portugal and Colombia national coach's first task will be two warm-up matches in September, against Uruguay and African champions Senegal in Austria on September 23 and 27 respectively. —AFP



TEHRAN: The new Portuguese coach of the Iranian football team, Carlos Queiroz, signs the T-shirt of a fan as he arrives at the Imam Khomeini Airport in Tehran, on September 14, 2022. —AFP

Serie A to introduce semi-automated offside technology

MILAN: Semi-automated offside technology is set to be introduced to Serie A before the coming World Cup, a source told AFP on Tuesday, after VAR controversy swept Italian football at the weekend. The source said the technology, developed by global governing body FIFA, would be ready for use in the Italian league "within a few weeks" after testing at recent matches.

Juventus will host the new technology when they take on Benfica in the Champions League in Turin on Wednesday. The optical tracking system was trialed at February's FIFA Club World Cup in Abu Dhabi and last year's Arab Cup. It utilizes both dedicated and broadcast cameras around the stadium to give the exact position of players on the pitch, offering match officials precise information within seconds. Specialized cameras enable the system to generate 29 body points per player.

The technology, which has the aim of making offside calls faster and more accurate, was approved for use at the Qatar World Cup which starts in November and is being used in the group stage of this season's Champions League. Confirmation from the source comes after Juve were denied a

stoppage-time win against Salernitana on Sunday with an offside decision that baffled supporters. A VAR review led to Arkadiusz Milik's header deep in stoppage time, which would have given Juve a 3-2 win, being ruled out for Leonardo Bonucci being offside and interfering with play.

Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri, winger Juan Cuadrado and Salernitana defender Federico Fazio were all sent off as tensions flared on the sidelines in the aftermath of that decision. Footage revealed later showed that Salernitana's Antonio Candreva had kept everyone outside but as he was stood by the corner flag he was not spotted by the VAR officials. The decision caused outrage not just at Juve but among football fans and pundits all over Italy, incredulous as to how the decision could have been gotten wrong with so many cameras in place at the Allianz Stadium.

Italian referees' association AIA released a statement on Monday saying the VAR officials did not have access to cameras which would have shown that Milik's goal should have stood. However despite reports to the contrary the source told AFP the introduction of the technology "was not linked to what happened on Sunday". —AFP

L AFC scrape draw against Minnesota

LOS ANGELES: Carlos Vela's long-range blast in the 64th minute gave Los Angeles FC a 1-1 draw with Minnesota United on Tuesday. LAFC again unable to clinch Major League Soccer's Western Conference top seed. A victory in St Paul, Minnesota, would have secured the West's top seed in the MLS Cup playoffs for LAFC, who will still secure it if Austin FC lose or draw against Real Salt Lake on Wednesday. LAFC clinched a playoff spot three weeks ago, but their 2-1 defeat to Dallas last weekend was their fourth in five matches.

After holding a significant lead in the race for the Supporters' Shield they are now two points behind Philadelphia in the hunt for the award for the club that tops the regular-season standings. Vela's 64th minute strike secured a crucial point for the Angelenos, who saw prized summer acquisition Gareth Bale start and play for 62 minutes. Vela's left-footed shot from almost 25 yards out sailed into the top of the net, out of the reach of Loons goalkeeper Dayne St. Clair.

Brent Kallman had put Minnesota up 1-0 in the 45th minute, heading a ball off a corner kick into the top right corner of the net. As Kallman rose to meet the ball he appeared to push off on Christian Arango, but LAFC's pleas to have the goal reviewed were futile. Minnesota hadn't scored in their prior three matches. The hosts nearly got a game-winner in stoppage time after Joseph Rosales's long ball bounced high over Maxime Crepeau as the LAFC keeper rushed forward.

Kellyn Acosta averted the threat, safely clearing the ball as Minnesota's Emanuel Reynoso closed in to attempt a shot. In the final minute of stoppage time, the Loons' Jonathan Gonzalez fired a header wide. Both teams missed scoring chances before Kallman struck. Minnesota's Luis Amarilla hit the right post in the 21st minute, while Reynoso put a close-range shot just wide right in the 39th minute. Vela, meanwhile, fired high in the 33rd minute and Cristian Arango saw his close-range header slide left of the net in the 43rd. —AFP



Bayern beat Barca on Lewandowski return; Liverpool grab late winner

Leverkusen's late goals sink Atletico in Champions League



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's German forward Thomas Mueller (2nd left) and Bayern Munich's Senegalese forward Sadio Mane (2nd right) collide next to Barcelona's French defender Jules Kounde (right) during the UEFA Champions League Group C football match between FC Bayern Munich and FC Barcelona on September 13, 2022. — AFP

PARIS: Bayern Munich got the better of Barcelona as Robert Lewandowski returned to face his former club on Tuesday, while a late Joel Matip goal allowed Liverpool to beat Ajax and get their Champions League campaign up and running. There was also a surprise defeat for Tottenham Hotspur at Sporting Lisbon, and Atletico Madrid were beaten on their trip to play Bayer Leverkusen.

Both Spanish visitors to Germany came away on the losing side, with Barcelona going down 2-0 at the Allianz Arena in Group C as Lewandowski came back to the club he left in the summer after eight prolific seasons in Bavaria. The Pole scored a hat-trick on his Champions League debut for Barca as the Catalans beat Viktoria Plzen 5-1 last week.

He was desperately close to opening the scoring in the first half in Munich, but it was Bayern who went in front five minutes into the second half when Lucas Hernandez headed in from a corner.

Leroy Sane burst through four minutes later to make it 2-0 as Julian Nagelsmann's Bayern made it two wins out of two in the group. They have now won their last five meetings with Barcelona, including two in last season's

group stage and their 8-2 victory in the 2020 quarter-finals.

"I think for 'Lewy' it was really an emotional game to come back - a little bit like coming home, because he was so successful here," Bayern captain Manuel Neuer told Amazon Prime of his old teammate. "The luck in the decisive moments wasn't on his side - and that became our luck." Barcelona next face Inter Milan, who got their first points with a 2-0 win away to Plzen in the Czech Republic. Edin Dzeko and Denzel Dumfries got the goals for Inter while the home side had Pavel Bucha sent off in the second half.

Matip the hero

Liverpool got off to a disastrous start in Group A when they lost 4-1 to Napoli in Italy, but they bounced back from that to beat Ajax 2-1 at Anfield. Mohamed Salah shook off a poor run of form to put Jurgen Klopp's side ahead in the 17th minute, only for the Dutch champions to equalise before the half-hour courtesy of an emphatic finish from their thrilling Ghanaian talent Mohammed Kudus. Liverpool were heading for a third game without a win in all competitions until Matip rose in front of the Kop to head in

from a corner in the 89th minute, the ball crossing the line before it could be cleared out.

"I think everybody could see that we understood and that we had to put a completely different shift into the game. The boys did that," Klopp told BT Sport. "We played a lot of good stuff against a hard fighting opposition." That match was preceded by a minute's silence to mark the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The other game in Group A, between Rangers and Napoli, was postponed until Wednesday due to severe limitations on police resources in Scotland as a result of the Queen's death.

Spurs shocked

Meanwhile Antonio Conte's Spurs slumped to a 2-0 defeat against Sporting in Portugal in Group D, with the home side scoring both goals late on at the Jose Alvalade stadium. It looked like the English side would escape with a point after Hugo Lloris produced a stunning late save to deny Pedro Porro.

But Paulinho headed in from the resulting 90th-minute corner, and Brazilian Arthur Gomes came off the bench to make it 2-0 with a superb solo strike in injury time. "It was a difficult



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Greek defender Kostas Tsimikas (up) fights for the ball with Ajax's Serbian forward Dusan Tadic (center) during the UEFA Champions League group A football match between Liverpool and Ajax at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on September 13, 2022. — AFP

result. When you lose the game you are not happy," admitted Conte. Sporting top the group with six points, while Eintracht Frankfurt joined Spurs on three points thanks to a 1-0 win in Marseille, with Jesper Lindstrom scoring in the first half.

Leverkusen claimed their first points in Group B as they beat Atletico 2-0 with two late goals, Robert Andrich and

Moussa Diaby both finding the net. Belgian champions Club Brugge top the section with six points after a stunning 4-0 win at FC Porto. Former Barcelona striker Ferran Jutgla opened the scoring with a penalty before Kamal Sowah, Andreas Skov Olsen and Norwegian teenager Antonio Nusa all netted in the second half. — AFP

NBA suspends Suns owner Sarver after racism probe

NEW YORK: The NBA has suspended Phoenix Suns owner Robert Sarver for one year and fined him \$10 million dollars after a probe of claims of racism and misogyny, the league said Tuesday. In announcing the punishment, the league said the independent investigation found that Sarver "engaged in conduct that clearly violated common workplace standards, as reflected in team and League rules and policies. "This conduct included the use of racially insensitive language; unequal treatment of female employees; sex-related statements and conduct; and harsh treatment of employees that on occasion constituted bullying."

The NBA commissioned the independent investigation of Sarver, who also owns the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury, in November of 2021 after ESPN published an article citing more than 70 Suns employees who alleged Sarver had created a "toxic" work environment in 17 years as owner of the club. Sarver denied the allegations and said at the

time he welcomed the investigation, which was conducted by the law firm of Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz.

"Good leadership requires accountability," Sarver said in a statement on Tuesday released through the Suns. "For the Suns and Mercury organizations, that begins with me. "While I disagree with some of the particulars of the NBA's report, I would like to apologize for my words and actions that offended our employees. I take full responsibility for what I have done. I am sorry for causing this pain, and these errors in judgment are not consistent with my personal philosophy or my values."

The NBA said the \$10 million fine is the maximum permitted by the league's constitution and by-laws and will be donated "to organizations that are committed to addressing race and gender-based issues in and outside the workplace." But Sarver escaped the fate of former Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling, who in 2014 was banned for life from the NBA after he was recorded using racist lan-

guage in a private conversation.

The league later forced the sale of the team to new owners. The NBA said the investigation included interviews with 320 people, including current and former employees of the Suns as well as Sarver himself. More than 80,000 documents and other materials, including emails, text messages and videos were also scrutinized and the league said Sarver and the clubs cooperated fully with the process. The investigation found that Sarver on at least five occasions during his tenure "repeated the N-word when recounting the statements of others".

He also "engaged in instances of inequitable conduct toward female employees, made sex-related comments in the workplace, made inappropriate comments about the physical appearance of female employees and other women, and on several occasions engaged in inappropriate physical conduct toward male employees." In one instance cited in the report, Sarver told a pregnant employee that she would be unable to do her job upon becoming a mother because she would be "breast-feeding" and a baby "needs their mom not their father."

The probe also substantiated instances of workplace misconduct by



Phoenix Suns owner Robert Sarver

other Suns employees and "a lack of proper organizational policies and controls." Multiple witnesses told investigators that Sarver's aggressive behavior often seemed intended "solely to provoke a reaction from employees-to embarrass them or assert dominance over them," investigators said in their report. However, they added that the

investigation "makes no finding that Sarver's conduct was motivated by racial or gender-based animus."

NBA commissioner Adam Silver said in a statement he found the findings "troubling and disappointing." But the league noted that most of the employees who were implicated in misconduct are no longer employed by the Suns. — AFP