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Opposition will not give premier a blank cheque

Top courts to meet to settle election disqualifications

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition candidates said on Wednesday that their support to the next prime minister will be linked to his program of action, insisting that their support will be based on actions. "If the government advances one step, we will advance two steps and we will not block the government from applying reforms. On the other hand, we will not give the prime minister a blank cheque,"

said former opposition MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf, bidding for re-election from the fourth constituency.

The current Prime Minister, HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, hailed by the opposition as a reformist, is highly expected to be asked to form the next Cabinet after the election. "The prime minister has a golden opportunity to form a Cabinet of statespersons and not public servants as has been the case in the past... Today we launch the New Kuwait," he said. "We will back the next govern-

ment if it comes up with a reformist program... We will extend a hand of cooperation, but we will continue to monitor," he added.

Another former opposition MP Muhammad Al-Sayer said the opposition will support the next Cabinet, provided it presents a program of reforms with a timetable to implement it, warned they are ready to hold the premier to account. "The same hand that is cheering you now will seek to hold you to account" in case the program is not

implemented, said Sayer, adding no new page will be opened without holding corrupt officials to account. He said that the country has suffered tremendously in the past years, claiming "just 7-8 people control political decisions".

Former opposition lawmaker Mussallam Al-Barrak said Kuwait is passing through a delicate period and needs a "Kuwaiti Mahathir Mohamad (former PM of Malaysia) to clean corruption

Continued on Page 6

Eight killed as protests in Iran spread

PARIS: At least eight people have been killed by Wednesday in a crackdown on protests in Iran over the death of Mahsa Amini after the young woman was arrested by morality police, according to a combined toll. Public anger has flared in the Islamic republic since authorities on Friday announced the death of 22-year-old Amini, who had been held for allegedly wearing a hijab headscarf in an "improper" way.

Activists said the woman, whose Kurdish first name is Jhina, had suffered a fatal blow to the head, a claim denied by officials who have announced an investigation. Some women demonstrators have defiantly taken off their hijabs and burned them in bonfires or symbolically cut their hair before cheering crowds, video footage spread virally on social media has shown.

"No to the headscarf, no to the turban, yes to freedom and equality!" protesters in Tehran were heard chanting in a rally that has been echoed by solidarity protests abroad, including in New York and

Istanbul. Iranian state media reported on Wednesday that, in a fifth night of street rallies that had spread to 15 cities, police used tear gas and made arrests to disperse crowds of up to 1,000 people.

London-based rights group Article 19 said it was "deeply concerned by reports of the unlawful use of force by Iranian police and security forces" including the use of live ammunition. Demonstrators hurled stones at security forces, set fire to police vehicles and garbage bins and chanted anti-government slogans, the official IRNA news agency said, adding that rallies were held in cities including Mashhad, Tabriz, Isfahan and Shiraz.

"Death to the dictator" and "Woman, life, freedom", protesters could be heard shouting in video footage that spread beyond Iran, despite online restrictions reported by internet access monitor Netblocks. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei spoke publicly without mentioning the spreading unrest on Wednesday, before ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi began addressing the UN General Assembly in New York.

Also at the UN, British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly told AFP that "the Iranian leadership should notice that the people are unhappy with the direction that they have taken. There is another path that they could take."

Continued on Page 6



ISTANBUL: Nasibe Samsaei, an Iranian woman living in Turkey, cuts her ponytail off during a protest outside the Iranian consulate on Sept 21, 2022. — AFP

Rising obesity to hit economies; NCDs cause 74% of deaths

NEW YORK/GENEVA: Rising levels of obesity are set to cost the world economy 3.3 percent of GDP by 2060, slowing development in lower-income countries and making it hard for people to lead healthy lives, according to a new study published Wednesday. The peer-reviewed paper, published in BMJ Global Health, provides the first country-by-country estimate of the economic impacts of obesity, a major driver of other non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart conditions.

It also included projections for the numbers of people in each country who are overweight or obese - defined as a body mass index in adults greater or equal to 25 and 30, respectively. "Globally, nearly two in three adults are now living with overweight and obesity. And we project that will be three in four adults by 2060," lead author Rachel Nugent told reporters at a briefing on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

The conditions currently cost 2.2 percent of global GDP, and the biggest increases are expected to be seen in lower-resourced countries. China, the United States and India are projected to experience the highest impact in absolute terms - costing the countries \$10 trillion, \$2.5 trillion and \$850 billion, respectively. As a proportion of the economy, the worst impacted countries are set to include the

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Putin orders mobilization in Russia

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin ordered a partial military mobilization and vowed on Wednesday to use "all available means" to protect Russian territory, after Moscow-held regions of Ukraine suddenly announced annexation referendums. The votes, already denounced by Kyiv and the West as a "sham", will dramatically up the stakes in the seven-month old conflict in Ukraine by giving

230 whales stranded in Australia

SYDNEY: A pod of 230 pilot whales was found stranded on the rugged west coast of Tasmania Wednesday, with Australian officials saying only half appeared to be alive. Aerial images showed a devastating scene of dozens of black glossy mammals strewn across a long beach, stuck on the waterline where the frigid southern ocean meets the sand. Locals covered survivors with blankets and doused them with buckets of water to keep them alive, as other whales nearby tried in vain to twitch free and yet more lay dead.

The whales were "stranded near Macquarie Harbour" said the state's Department of Natural Resources and Environment. "It appears about half of the animals are alive." Officials said marine conservation experts and staff with whale rescue gear were en route to the scene. They will try to refloat animals that are strong enough to survive and likely tow the carcasses out to sea, to avoid attracting sharks to the area.

It is almost two years to the day since Macquarie Harbour was the scene of the country's largest-ever mass stranding, involving almost 500 pilot whales. More than 300 pilot whales died during that stranding, despite the efforts of dozens of volunteers who toiled for days in Tasmania's freezing waters to free them.

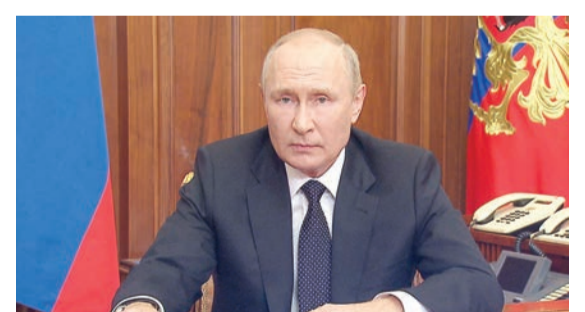
Continued on Page 6

Moscow the ability to accuse Ukrainian forces of attacking Russian territory.

Four Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine - Donetsk and Lugansk in the east and Kherson and Zaporizhzhia in the south - said on Tuesday that they would hold the votes over five days beginning Friday. In a pre-recorded address to the nation early on Wednesday, Putin accused the West of trying to "destroy" his country through its backing of Kyiv, and said Russia needed to support those in Ukraine who wanted to "determine their own future".

The Russian leader announced a partial military mobilization, with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu telling state television that some 300,000 reservists would be called up.

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MOSCOW: Handout picture released on Sept 21, 2022 by the Kremlin shows Russian President Vladimir Putin speaking during a televised address to the nation. — AFP



MACQUARIE HARBOUR, Australia: This handout photo taken on Sept 20, 2022 shows the carcasses of pilot whales beached in Tasmania. — AFP

KNPC launches awareness campaign among workers

in my view

The identity dynamics



By Jethu Abraham

jethu@kuwaittimes.net

I have often wondered on the concept of identity and how we, as human beings, relate to it. While sociologists often point out solidarity and allegiance as strong characteristics in forming one's identity, there is, I believe, a certain fluidity that we often experience, as expatriates or residents, when we are away from surroundings that do not naturally form a part of who we are.

Being born and raised in the UAE to Indian parents means that I have had a dual concept of identity from a very young age - with home in its geographical sense being the UAE and the whole Indian culture, cuisine and experiences being part of my ethnocultural identity. I did read a piece elsewhere on the posthumously published book about the British-Jamaican sociologist Stuart Hall, which speaks about his dual identities and subsequently his split sensibilities - what I found interesting was the changes that he observed through the lens of time in both his identities. A reason why perhaps Hall, in his essays, explored the concept of identity in detail, defining it as an idea constructed on the back of some common origin or shared characteristic with another person, group or an ideal.

Yet, despite the 'oneness' of it, identities even within the confines of such a group or ideology, are subject to the play of difference and power and as such always undergoes radical changes, as despite the shared ancestry or history that binds people together, individuals or units are different in their own ways. This is why it is significant to view the creation of identities as something that is constructed through, not outside differences.

Furthermore, Hall underlines the fact that it is not their power to attach but rather their capacity to exclude - a self-constructed form of closure, even though it is unspoken, that is deemed as fundamental to the creation of identities. This is why Hall argued that technically the concept of identity was an imaginary concept, as it unsettled the 'I' to form the 'we'. As a child I often felt, like many of my friends raised abroad, that I fell short of both cultures in different ways, but as an adult, I appreciate today the fact that I have an identity which is a synthesis of both cultures and have traits that are from both these worlds.

Health Minister lauds private sector's role in healthcare

KUWAIT: The private sector is an important partner in developing the healthcare system in Kuwait, said Minister of Health, Dr Khaled Al-Saeed on Wednesday. Speaking to the press after visiting the National Bank of Kuwait Hospital for Children, the minister commended the private sector's role in providing good healthcare. Al-Saeed also said that NBK and the ministry were working together to open a new hospital saying that such cooperation reflected the strong relations between the state and the private sector.

Meanwhile, Isam Jaseem A. Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), revealed that NBK was cooperating with the ministry to open a third children's hospital, adding that cooperation between the two sides began in the 1980s. The new hospital would be built on an area of 8,000 square meters at a cost of KD 13 million said Al-Sager, noting that, the construction would be concluded in three years' time. The facility would be dedicated to treating children with incurable diseases. Also speaking on the occasion, the Director of the National Bank of Kuwait Hospital and the pediatric Hematology and Cancer Consultant, Dr Ali Mulla Ali said that the hospital has been receiving patients for two decades, while the building 'B' of the hospital has been receiving cancer patients for 16 years now. The NBK hospital is the only facility of its kind in Kuwait that treats children with cancer, treating around 100 to 120 cases annually. —KUNA

Minister of Commerce awards inspectors

KUWAIT: Fahad Al-Shuraian, Minister of Commerce and Industry, has awarded a group of inspectors in the presence of the undersecretary, Mohammed Al-Enezi. The inspectors who worked in the commercial supervision and consumer protection departments have been rewarded for their dedication to their duties, in ensuring the enforcement of the law and in their role in detaining violators involved in market swindling as well as those that pose a threat to the safety of the consumer. The minister has also appraised the work of employers within the sector and encouraged them to contribute more efforts to develop the nation.



KUWAIT: The complaint and social care committee at the KNPC has launched an awareness campaign among foreign workers, to let them know of their employee rights, as written in their contracts. The campaign which lasted for two days was titled, 'Know your rights,' and involved field trips to workers' dormitories in Mangaf, Mahboula and Al-Shuaiba Industrial areas.

The campaign aimed to spread awareness among workers, about their rights and ways to ensure them and the duties that they needed to discharge, in accordance with their rights. Committee members also distributed brochures and informative docu-

ments in several languages in order to achieve the committee's goals, to reach as diverse an audience as possible.

The campaign documents covered many issues regarding the worker's rights such as financial rights, security regulations, overtime, residence allowances and other rights related to their job. In the meeting, the panel also stressed the importance of observing health and safety regulations and encouraged the careful usage of the workers' equipment as well as the observance of other safety protocols such as the right kind of uniform, anti-fire clothes, helmets and gloves.



KUWAIT: Ambassador Bhandari with Sami Abdulaziz Al Hamad



KUWAIT: Guests at the event examine products at the stall.



Embassy of Nepal hosts national day celebrations

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Nepal to Kuwait, Durga Prasad Bhandari and his spouse Bindhya Bhandari hosted a reception on the occasion of Constitution Day and the National Day of Nepal on Sept 20 at Hotel Crowne Plaza, Farwaniya in the presence of a number of distinguished guests. His Excellency Sami Abdulaziz Al Hamad, Assistant Foreign Minister for Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the chief guest at the event. Ambassador Bhandari also expressed gratitude to all the invitees, during the event which was held after two years due to the

COVID-19 pandemic, which had affected all social activities adversely. He congratulated the Nepali community residing in the country of his accreditation and extended best wishes for their welfare on this special day.

He also wished for good health and happiness of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, as well as for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of the people of Kuwait.

Bhandari briefly explained about the trade, tourism and investment opportunities in Nepal, highlighting Nepal's commitment and contribution to maintain international peace and order under the aegis of United Nations. Shedding light on the Nepal-Kuwait relationship, Bhandari mentioned that the Nepal-Kuwait relations have always been

cordial and friendly and added that the year 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. He further said that this important milestone was being celebrated with a number of activities.

Ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions in Kuwait, government officials, members of the business community, media representatives, members of the Nepali community and other distinguished invitees also attended the program.

On the occasion, cultural performances by local Nepali artists were also held. A short video prepared by the Nepal Tourism Board was also presented during the program. Meanwhile, a separate stall was set up to display Nepali handicraft items and other products of Nepali origin like Khukuri, metallic and wooden products carved by Nepali craftsman, pashmina shawls as well as products like tea and coffee brought in from the country.



KUWAIT: Fahad Al-Shuraian, Minister of Commerce and Industry with the inspectors who were rewarded for their efforts.

Local

MoH readies team for medical support during elections

KUWAIT: Dr Khaled Al-Saeed, Health Minister, said that the ministry is ready and prepared for the upcoming parliamentary elections in Kuwait, to be held on Sept 29. He said that medical staff and ambulances have already been assigned for the polling stations. Al-Saeed was speaking on the sidelines of the opening of a symposium on Islamic medicine and its effectiveness in fighting the use of drugs in the society, an event held on Wednesday by the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences (IOMS). He said that timing of the symposium was appropriate, as it was held at a time when the "society needs to recognize the illegal usage of drugs, so that efforts can be intensified to stop it."



Dr Khaled Al-Saeed



Ahmad Al-Shatti



Dr Mohammad Al-Jarallah

Al-Saeed also commended the efforts carried out by the Ministry of Interior and added that the Ministry of Health was studying the issue of drug usage and was trying to spread awareness about the problem among young people and adults in the country. He said that, "prevention is better than treatment and if we apply

internal scrutiny which in most cases is religious scrutiny, it will serve as a strong foundation to combat this problem in our society," adding that "IOMS is a rich source of information on this subject."

Dr Mohammed Al-Jarallah, Head of IOMS, said that the act of criminalizing drugs, served as a strong moral foundation for prohibiting the use of drugs in the society, adding that "the organization must work in cooperation with regional and international agencies to combat this problem." He also highlighted the crucial role played by Islamic forums in confronting the issue of illegal drug usage in the society and said that the



KUWAIT: Dr Khaled Al-Saeed with other officials at the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences symposium. —KUNA

IOMS was keen to work with the heads of Islamic countries and relevant Arab and Gulf organizations to put up a joint fight against the problem. Al-Jarallah said that, "the ministries in Kuwait as well as the local institutions play a major role in combatting this problem, especially the security officers," but he urged lawmakers in the National Assembly as well, to bring in stricter laws to fight the issue.

Meanwhile, Ahmad Al-Shatti, Director of Al-Ahmadi Health District, said that the symposium was held as a

response to the drug crisis in the country. He said that he hoped Islamic values would help to fight this social evil in the country, adding that the meeting also discussed 12 working papers on the legal, preventive and rehabilitative measures to be taken and reviewed some of the achievements already made by the country, noting that "fighting the illegal use of drugs was a shared responsibility between individuals and institutions." He said that the symposium hoped to use religion to raise awareness and spread knowledge in the society. —KUNA

Alghanim Industries and INJAZ-Kuwait conclude summer program

KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries (Kutayba Alghanim Group) recently concluded its second annual summer internship program organized in partnership with INJAZ-Kuwait. The graduation ceremony took place at the Chairman's Club in KIPCO Tower and the second graduating cohort were celebrated by CEO of Alghanim Industries Samir Kasem, CEO of INJAZ-Kuwait Laila Hilal Al Mutairi, in addition to executives from both organizations.

Commencing in August, the summer internship program followed a series of rigorous interviews with hundreds of applicants. Following the competitive application phase, the human resources teams [NVI] from Alghanim Industries and INJAZ-Kuwait carefully selected the best prospects and examined their interests, capabilities, and expectations before matching them with the appropriate field at Alghanim Industries.

In alignment with the country's vision of

encouraging nationals to join the private sector as part of the 'New Kuwait 2035' initiative, the internship program is tailored to transform local talents into promising professionals. One of the key goals in designing and executing the program is to supply a direct and interactive path with the professional world for the youth to learn from. With the program's successful completion, Alghanim Industries and INJAZ-Kuwait are eager to continue facilitating greater relations between the youth and the private sector.

The annual summer internship program reflects the Alghanim Industries' dedication to developing the youth's potential as it provides interns with an opportunity to utilize their skills, hone their talents, and acquire professional experience in a proactive and dynamic workplace. Throughout the 5-week internship program, students were trained then assigned different projects, working closely with professionals in different fields to accomplish a variety of day-to-day tasks.

Alghanim Industries and INJAZ-Kuwait mark a continued partnership in providing educational and professional opportunities for Kuwaiti youth. Enriching the relationship between education and professionalism within young individuals is at the



KUWAIT: Participants at the Alghanim Industries and INJAZ-Kuwait graduation ceremony.

core of the partnership, with activities ranging from seminars and training programs to internships and direct exposure to work environments. Through the support of leading private sector

entities such as Alghanim Industries, INJAZ-Kuwait has trained thousands of students with educational programs on entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and work readiness.

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News in brief

PM congratulates Armenia and Belize on national day

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to Vahagn Khachaturyan, President of Armenia on his country's national day celebrations. The PM also sent felicitations to Froyla Tzalam, Governor General of Belize on the celebration of their country's national day. —KUNA

Crown Prince expresses condolences to Nepal President over landslides

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday, a cable of condolences to President of Nepal, Bidhya Devi Bhandari, expressing his deepest sorrow and condolences over the victims of the deadly landslides, which resulted in several deaths, injuries and destruction of properties as well as public facilities. His Highness the Crown Prince said that he prayed to God for a swift recovery of the injured and for guidance to the officials of the country to help overcome the disaster. —KUNA

CSC approves rewarding of pandemic frontliners

KUWAIT: Ali Al-Mousa, Minister of Public Works and Electricity has announced the approval of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), to reward employees who worked in the front-lines during the pandemic, from the electricity, water and renewable energy departments. Al-Mousa thanked the political leadership for their consideration and the prime minister, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf for his support. He also expressed his appreciation for all the efforts of workers in the ministry during the pandemic and the efforts of CSC and the finance ministry for finishing the procedures required to give away the awards.



KUWAIT: Kuwait and UK representatives meet to discuss cybersecurity measures.

Kuwait discusses cyber security measures with UK representatives

KUWAIT: The fourth Cybersecurity Education and Research Conference meeting was held on Wednesday between Kuwait and UK representatives. The meeting was attended by undersecretaries, technicians and representatives from the UK Embassy. Bilateral ties, cooperative measures as well as procedures to be undertaken were discussed during the conference.

Burgan Bank renews sponsorship with Ahmadi Music Group

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank renewed its strategic sponsorship of the Ahmadi Music Group (AMG) and its new season's program of events starting with the world-renowned Ayoub Sisters' musical duo concert at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center. Commenting on the Bank's continuous support for Ahmadi Music Group, Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Senior Manager - Corporate & CSR Communications at Burgan Bank, said "We are very proud of our strategic partnership with AMG. This sustained fruitful collaboration over the years has enabled us to contribute to the success of many prestigious cultural events. Our partnership with Ahmadi Music Group reaffirms our commitment to supporting

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A seagull takes flight across the Kuwait Bay. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

GCC chief highlights negative role of racism in the region

RIYADH: Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf, Secretary General of the GCC, said on Wednesday that racism plays a major role in triggering violence and conflicts between groups of society and countries. Al-Hajraf gave the statement on the International Day of Peace which is observed on Sept 21 annually. This year's theme is 'Ending racism, building peace'.

"The GCC observes the celebration of the day together with the international community, as peace constitutes a fundamental value in our society and

is also part of a well-established vision in the policies and legislative measures practiced by all GCC member states," he said.

Al-Hajraf also said that the true teachings of the Islamic religion propagate principles of peaceful coexistence between people of all nationalities and also calls for avoiding wars, rejecting conflicts as well as all forms of extremist behavior. "Racism triggers conflicts between people, especially hate speech, ethnic discrimination as well as contempt

for other religions." He also lauded the historic role of the GCC countries in achieving peace and stability in their respective countries and in mediating as well as resolving conflicts in regional and international platforms.

"Peace is what nations and people yearn for as it is the best solution for addressing conflicts and building the foundations of stability in a sustainable manner, as well as in achieving economic, social and cultural prosperity for people across the world." —KUNA



Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf

Students exhibit creative artworks at CAP

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: An art exhibition opened on Tuesday at the Contemporary Art Platform (CAP) titled "Students of the Visual Arts". Teacher Dima Ali Quttaineh said participants include a number of talented children, adding she wants to show their creative artworks over the next two weeks. She explained the exhibition showcases the art of dedicated and passionate students exploring freedom of expression.

"As an artist, I always believed in talented people, especially when I met many of them in the beginning of my artistic journey, who hoped their paintings could be displayed at art galleries. Therefore, I felt the importance of supporting others to become artists and not give up on their dreams. This is how I started my journey in teaching art and decided to adopt the idea of supporting artists to publish and show the beauty of their works," Quttaineh said.

"Despite the difficulties and struggles in the beginning of my artistic journey, it was important to share this experience with my students to help them improve their talents, in addition to my constant attempts to give them the freedom to express themselves, which helps them draw with more creativity," she said. "The ages of participating artists start from six years. While they try to apply different concepts in their paintings, my main role is to guide them to reach the most creative result, hoping they will continue their journey in the field of art."

Students participating in the exhibition are Lara Al-Barrak, Nourra Al-Husaini, Lama Al-Husaini, Hussain Esam Adel Al-Kazemi, Mohammed Hashem Al-Refai and Hussain Hashem Al-Refai. Hussain Al-Refai, 7, told Kuwait Times he is thrilled to participate in the exhibition to show the paintings he is proud of. He said his most wonderful painting took him

two days to complete, adding his mother and teacher Dima helped him.

Mohammed Al-Refai, 12, said: "My artworks displayed at this exhibition are a mix of my old and new paintings. Because I like Picasso, I try to imitate his art in a simple way, in addition to adding my own touch." Hussain Al-Kazemi, also 12 years old, said: "I don't think a lot about the idea - I just start drawing randomly and the painting is ready." He said every artist creates a different atmosphere to paint.

Caroline Rogers, a teacher, told Kuwait Times: "It is just amazing that the children had such an opportunity over the summer to do these different types of artworks. It is amazing for the children to show what they have done! I spoke to some of the young artists, who were very passionate about the artworks they created. I was completely astounded by the art and colors and the process of creating this art."



KUWAIT: Visitors at the art exhibition. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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KUWAIT: Dima Ali Quttaineh with some of her students.



KUWAIT: Burgan Bank officials with Ayoub Sisters and Richard Bushman.

institution, Burgan Bank will continue to play an active role at all levels of social development, including art and culture and confirm this commitment through its comprehensive and multipurpose

social responsibility program, which invests extensively in supporting the Bank's partner organizations and institutions that dedicate their efforts to enhancing the arts and culture scene in Kuwait.



Man sets himself on fire near Japan PM's office

Court delays trial of Istanbul mayor who upstaged Erdogan

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KHARKIV, Ukraine: Communal workers look at a residential building damaged after shelling in Kharkiv on September 21, 2022, amid Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

Missiles hit apartments in Ukraine city

'The war is a disaster, it's terrifying, it's painful... it's miserable'

KHARKIV, Ukraine: Residents of Ukraine's second city Kharkiv found themselves under bombardment again Wednesday after Russian missiles struck apartment blocks wounding at least one civilian just as Moscow announced an escalation in its war.

"Our area was relatively quiet, and now you see what happened," Lyubov Grygorivna, 65, told AFP outside a badly damaged housing block. Kharkiv, a major hub in the northeast just 40 kilometres (24 miles) south of the Russian border, was attacked on the first day of the February 24 invasion, but its Ukrainian defenders held out and it has since been regularly bombed.

In recent weeks the city has been spared more intense bombardment as a Ukrainian counter-offensive swept Russian land forces from the region. Russia can, however, still launch missiles from its own territory.

Approaching retirement after 45 years working in the neighbourhood municipal services, Grygorivna was loudly directing clean-up crews clambering through rubble. "The war is a disaster. It's terrifying. It's painful... It's miserable. How can

you stand things like this?" she asked. "So many have lost their homes and winter is coming. It's terrible. Every night we go to bed



How can you stand things like this?

scared. But we keep on working. They shoot and we work," she added. The mayor of Kharkiv, Igor Terekhov, said four projectiles had struck the Kholodnogorsky district overnight, hitting two housing blocks, a building site and some civil infrastructure.

In one block, 10 residents were trapped until rescuers could arrive, but officials spoke of only one

wounded. Air raid sirens continued through the morning at the scene, mingling with bells from the gilded domes of the Saint Sofia Church, where Orthodox worshippers gathered to mark the nativity of the Virgin Mary.

Renewed bombardment

Lyubov Prokopivna, an 85-year-old retiree, surveyed the wreckage in her apartment on the upper floor of the nine-storey Slavi 11 block of modest privately-owned flats in the Zalintyne neighbourhood. She had been staying at her son's house at 2:00 am when the missile hit.

"I usually sleep in the bedroom. All the windows were broken, the TV, everything is a mess. If I had been here, I wouldn't have survived," she said. Anna Verbitska, 41, was asleep with her husband on a lower level. Her family were unharmed, but the windows blew in and the water is now cut off. She swept up the glass quietly, as 12-year-old daughter Sofia slept on the sofa, exhausted after a night caring for Tasya the cat.

"The heating system is damaged, and winter is

coming. The car was damaged too," she said, as four burly neighbours carried a stunned elderly lady down the dusty staircase in a blanket. The renewed bombardment of their homes was a bitter blow for many Ukrainians, coming as Russian President Vladimir Putin mobilised reservists in a bid to seize back the initiative in the conflict.

"I ask all the Russians, may God give them the wisdom to escape, to ignore (the mobilisation), to leave... to wake up finally, but not to come fight us," said 63-year-old Svitlana. "You see? They kill civilians. There's nothing here expect gardens and civilian homes. I'm turning to you, the international community, close the sky above Kharkiv. Don't let (Putin) destroy us," she said.

Another local resident, Galyna, 50, said she "can't understand the people he is calling on to fight us". "We are protecting our homeland. This is Ukraine and they are fighting a war... for what? Against who?" she said. "They want to liberate us from what? From our homes? From our relatives? From friends? What else? From life... they want to free us from being alive," she said. —AFP



BAIKONUR, Kazakhstan: Russian cosmonauts Sergey Prokopyev (C) and Dmitry Petelin (R) and NASA astronaut Frank Rubio, members of the International Space Station (ISS) Expedition 68 main crew, walk to report to Russia's Roscosmos space agency head prior to the launch at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on September 21, 2022. —AFP

American, Russians blast off for ISS as war rages in Ukraine

BAIKONUR, Kazakhstan: A US astronaut and two Russian cosmonauts blasted off to the International Space Station (ISS) Wednesday on a Russian-operated flight, in a rare instance of cooperation between Moscow and Washington.

The Russian space agency Roscosmos and NASA both distributed live footage of the launch from Kazakhstan and commentators speaking over the feed said it was stable and that "the crew is feeling well".

NASA's Frank Rubio and Russia's Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitry Petelin make up the crew that launched from the Russia-leased Baikonur cosmodrome at 1354 GMT. Rubio is the first US astronaut to travel to the ISS on a Russian Soyuz rocket since President Vladimir Putin sent troops into pro-Western Ukraine on February 24.

In response, Western capitals including Washington have hit Moscow with unprecedented sanctions and bilateral ties have sunk to new lows. Space remained an outlier of cooperation between the two countries.

Russia's only active female cosmonaut Anna Kikina is expected to travel to the orbital station in early October aboard a SpaceX Crew Dragon.

She will become only the fifth professional woman cosmonaut from Russia or the Soviet Union to fly to space, and the first Russian to fly aboard a spacecraft of SpaceX, the company of billionaire Elon Musk.

Russian cosmonauts and Western astronauts have sought to steer clear of the conflict that is raging back on Earth, especially when in orbit together. A collaboration among the United States, Canada, Japan, the European Space Agency and Russia, the ISS is split into two sections: the US Orbital Segment, and the Russian Orbital Segment.

Russia leaving ISS

At present, the ISS depends on a Russian propulsion system to maintain its orbit, about 250 miles (400 kilometres) above sea level, with the US segment responsible for electricity and life support systems. Tensions in the space field have grown after Washington announced sanctions on Moscow's aerospace industry-triggering warnings from Russia's former space chief Dmitry Rogozin, an ardent supporter of the Ukraine war.

Rogozin's recently appointed successor Yuri Borisov later confirmed Russia's long-mooted move to leave the ISS after 2024 in favour of creating its own orbital station. US space agency NASA called the decision an "unfortunate development" that would hinder scientific work on the ISS. Space analysts say that the construction of a new orbital station could take more than a decade and Russia's space industry—a point of national pride—would not be able to flourish under heavy sanctions. —AFP

Hurricane Fiona heads north toward Bermuda

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico: Hurricane Fiona continued its slow and devastating march northward after slamming the Turks and Caicos Islands on Tuesday and leaving a trail of destruction in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said Wednesday morning that the storm had grown stronger, registering maximum wind speeds of 130 miles per hour (210 kilometers per hour) as it barreled toward Bermuda.

The NHC said Fiona was 105 miles (170 kilometers) north of Turks and Caicos and had been upgraded to a Category 4 hurricane, the second highest level on the Saffir-Simpson scale. "Swell from Fiona are expected to reach Bermuda by early Thursday. The swells could cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions," the NHC said in its latest advisory.

At least five people have died as the storm churned across the Caribbean—one in the French overseas department of Guadeloupe and two each in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. "Hurricane Fiona has proven to be an unpredictable storm," Anya Williams, the deputy governor of Turks and Caicos, said in a broadcast.

Williams said no casualties or serious injuries had been reported in Turks and Caicos, but she urged residents to continue to shelter in place. Blackouts were reported on Grand Turk and several other islands in the archipelago and 165 people were admitted to shelters, she said, adding that Britain's Royal Navy and the US Coast Guard are standing by to provide assistance.

Dominican Republic President Luis Abinader has declared three eastern provinces to be disaster zones: La Altagracia—home to the popular resort of Punta Cana—El Seibo and Hato Mayor. Authorities said Tuesday that more than 10,000 people had been moved to "safe areas," while about 400,000 are without electricity.

Footage from local media showed residents of the east coast town of Higuey waist-deep in water trying to salvage personal belongings. "It came through at high speed," Vicente Lopez told AFP in Punta Cana, bemoaning the destroyed businesses in the area.



SAMANA, Dominican Republic: View of damages at a restaurant located on the Malecon de Samana, after the passage of Hurricane Fiona, in Samana, Dominican Republic. —AFP

'I have food and water'

US President Joe Biden has declared a state of emergency in Puerto Rico and dispatched the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency to the island, which is still struggling to recover from Hurricane Maria five years ago.

"We're sending hundreds of additional personnel to support all affected communities," FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell said Tuesday after a tour with Pedro Pierluisi, the island's governor.

Pierluisi said the storm had caused catastrophic damage on the island of three million people since Sunday, with some areas receiving more than 30 inches (76 centimeters) of rain. Michelle Carlo, medical advisor for Direct Relief in Puerto Rico, told CBS News that "a lot of people in Puerto Rico are suffering right now."

"About 80 percent of Puerto Ricans are still without power and about 65 percent are without water service," Carlo said. Across Puerto Rico, Fiona caused landslides, blocked roads and toppled trees, power lines and bridges, Pierluisi said.

A man was killed as an indirect result of the power blackout—burned to death while trying to fill his generator, according to authorities. On Monday afternoon, Nelly Marrero made her way back to her home in Toa Baja, in the north of Puerto Rico, to clear out the mud that surged inside after she evacuated. "Thanks to God, I have food and water," Marrero—who lost everything when Hurricane Maria hit—told AFP by telephone. —AFP

International

Court delays trial of Istanbul mayor who upstaged Erdogan

Imamoglu was stripped of his narrow March 2019 win over ruling party's candidate

ISTANBUL: A Turkish court on Wednesday delayed until November a highly controversial trial that could see Istanbul's popular mayor banned from politics over a remark he made after beating President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ally in 2019 polls.

Ekrem Imamoglu's fate is being watched closely for signs of judicial independence nine months before a general election in which Erdogan will struggle to extend his two-decade rule. The 52-year-old mayor is the most internationally recognised of the opposition leaders who might run against Erdogan.

But a court could keep him from seeking higher office—and possibly force him to give up his post—as punishment for an offhand remark he made about Erdogan's ruling party in the aftermath of the heated mayoral race.

Imamoglu's office accuses the ruling party of trying to "eliminate him from the upcoming elections". The presiding judge opened Wednesday's session and immediately postponed hearings until November 11 without an explanation. The courtroom itself was closed to reporters—an unusual step in Turkey.

The police also sealed off the roads leading to the courthouse with metal fences to keep away protesters in the highly anticipated trial. "This trial should not be taking place at all," Imamoglu said

after the hearings were delayed.

'Suspicious votes'

Imamoglu was stripped of his narrow March 2019 win over the ruling party's candidate after Erdogan—who launched his own career as Istanbul mayor and views the city as his second home—refused to recognise the result.

Election officials reported discovering hundreds of thousands of "suspicious votes" after Imamoglu had already been sworn into office. Their decision to call a re-run election for that June sparked global condemnation and mobilised a groundswell of support for Imamoglu that included former ruling party voters.

Imamoglu won the second election by more than 800,000 votes. But the usually soft-spoken mayor let his lingering bitterness at the ruling party spill over in November 2019. "Those who cancelled the March 31 election are idiots," he told reporters at the time.

'Insulting'

Erdogan's ruling party seized on the remark and sued the mayor for "insulting" public officials. Prosecutors have asked for Imamoglu to be banned from politics and jailed for 15 months—a relatively light sentence that almost never sees people put behind bars.



ISTANBUL: Supporters stand in front of Anadolu justice palace in Istanbul on September 21, 2022 during the trial of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, on charges of "insulting" election officials in the Kartal district. — AFP

Defence lawyer Kemal Polat told AFP the mayor would immediately appeal against any ban and keep his job while the case wound its way through the courts. "Imamoglu can remain in his current position as mayor until the end of the appeals process. He would not have to resign," Polat said.

Turkey's Western allies accuse Erdogan of stacking the courts with allies and using them to jail his rivals in the aftermath of a failed military putsch in 2016. Erdogan responded to the coup attempt with sweeping purges that saw thousands jailed on "terrorism" and other charges. — AFP

French left accused of violence against women

PARIS: Two key parties in France's left-wing alliance were Wednesday facing crises after senior figures were accused of violence against women, with a Greens party chief stepping back from his role days after a colleague from hard-left France Unbowed.

Julien Bayou was "suspended from his role" as co-president of the Greens' bloc in the National Assembly (lower house), the party said late Tuesday, after he was accused of psychologically abusing an ex-partner.

"We are a feminist party, and so we place ourselves at the service of women's testimony... we acknowledged that the only way to show we weren't pretending and weren't hiding was a temporary suspension," Sandra Regol, vice-president of the Green MPs' group, told broadcaster Franceinfo on Wednesday. One of the most prominent MPs of France Unbowed (LFI) — allied with the Greens in a broad left alliance against President Emmanuel Macron—Adrien Quatennens on Sunday admitted to slapping his wife. He stepped down from a senior role as party coordinator.

Party leader and three-time presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon leapt to Quatennens' defence



PARIS: French Greens party Europe Ecologie - Les Verts (EELV) National Secretary Julien Bayou looks on during a debate at the annual "Fete de l'Humanite" political event organized by the French Communist newspaper L'Humanite in Breigny-sur-Orge, south of Paris. — AFP

on Twitter, blasting "police ill-will, media voyeurism and the social networks" while hailing his protege's "dignity" and "courage".

It was not until hours later that Melenchon posted another message gesturing towards Quatennens' wife—too late for many critics.

Macron's Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said Tuesday that it was "extremely shocking to have someone playing down domestic violence". And some 550 feminist activists on Wednesday co-signed an editorial in left-wing daily Liberation calling for Quatennens to resign his seat in parliament. — AFP

Palestinian murder suspect found hanged in Tel Aviv

TEL AVIV: A Palestinian suspected of beating an 84-year old Zionist woman to death was found hanged in the heart of Tel Aviv Wednesday, Zionist police said.

Police had launched a massive manhunt for the suspect identified as Mousa Sarsour, 28, following Tuesday's murder in the town of Holon just outside the Zionist metropolis.

"The body of a man has been found on Bar Kochba Street in Tel Aviv and a preliminary examination shows it to be the body of the murder suspect," police said in a statement.

The body was found hanged at the corner of Bar Kochba and Dizengoff Streets, a busy nightlife and shopping district, by a passerby who notified the police, the officer in charge of the area said.

Zionist media quoted police as saying his death was an apparent suicide.

They said Sarsour, from the town of Qalqilya in the occupied West Bank, had entered Zionist entity with a valid permit to work on a building site in Holon. Authorities have not identified his victim, who was killed with a metal pole.

In a statement late Tuesday, Zionist Prime



TEL AVIV: Zionist security forces stand at the site where a man identified as Mousa Sarsour, 28, from the West Bank town of Qalqilya, died of an apparent suicide. — AFP

Minister Yair Lapid described the incident as "a shocking attack by a despicable and cowardly terrorist who murdered an elderly woman who could not fight back."

Overnight, the Zionist army said it had arrested 11 suspects in raids across the West Bank, among them "five individuals suspected of assisting in the terror attack".

Zionist entity has stepped up operations in the northern West Bank in particular after a wave of attacks against Zionist targets killed 20 people, mostly Zionists, since March. — AFP

Eight killed as protests in...

Continued from Page 1

The wave of protests over Amini's death "is a very significant shock, it is a societal crisis," said Iran expert David Rigoulet-Roze of the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs. "It is difficult to know the outcome but there is a disconnect between the authorities with their DNA of the Islamic revolution of 1979 and an increasingly secularized society. It is a whole social project that is being called into question. There is a hesitation among the authorities on the way forward with regard to this movement."

230 whales stranded in...

Continued from Page 1

The cause of mass strandings is still not fully understood. Scientists have suggested they could be caused by pods going off track after feeding too close to shore. Pilot whales - which can grow to more than six meters long - are highly sociable and can follow podmates who stray into danger. That sometimes occurs when old, sick or injured animals swim ashore and other pod members follow, trying to respond to the trapped whale's distress signals.

Others believe gently sloping beaches like those

found in Tasmania confuse the whales' sonar making them think they are in open waters. The news came just hours after a dozen young male sperm whales were reported dead in a separate mass stranding on King Island-between Tasmania and the Australian mainland. The young whales' deaths may be a case of "misadventure", wildlife biologist Kris Carlyon from the state government conservation agency told the local Mercury newspaper.

"The most common reason for stranding events is misadventure, they might have been foraging close to shore, there might have been food and possibly they were caught on a low tide," Carlyon said. "That's the theory at the moment." In nearby New Zealand strandings are also common. There, around 300 animals beach themselves annually, according to official figures and it is not unusual for groups of between 20 and 50 pilot whales to run aground. — AFP

that allowed the eight disqualified candidates to run in the Sept 29 snap polls.

The constitutional court will decide if a highly controversial law that bars political dissidents from running for public office is in line with the country's 1962 constitution. The law, passed by the 2013 parliament and amended by the 2016 Assembly, bars all those convicted in a final verdict over crimes of abusing the Almighty, prophets or HH the Amir.

Several leading politicians have already been barred from taking part in the election and even voting because of the law which opposition MPs and candidates had charges it violates the constitution.

In the meantime, the withdrawal of candidates from the election race closes today with around 340 candidates left in the fray to contest the 50-seat national assembly.

Putin orders mobilization...

Continued from Page 1

"When the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, we will certainly use all the means at our disposal to protect Russia and our people. This is not a bluff," Putin said. Germany branded the partial call-up as a "wrong step" while jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said it would result in a "massive tragedy, in a massive amount of deaths".

Putin said that through its support for Ukraine the West was trying to "weaken, divide and ultimately destroy our country", while Shoigu said Moscow was "fighting not so much Ukraine as the collective West" in Ukraine. The sudden flurry of moves by Moscow this week came with Russian forces in Ukraine facing their biggest challenge since the start of the conflict.

A sweeping Ukrainian counter-offensive in recent weeks has seen Kyiv's forces retake hundreds of towns and villages that had been controlled by Russia for months. In a rare admission of military losses from Moscow, Shoigu said Wednesday 5,937 Russian soldiers had died in Ukraine since the launch of the military intervention in February.

As Putin made his announcement, residents

Rising obesity to hit economies; NCDs...

Continued from Page 1

United Arab Emirates, where obesity would account for 11 percent of GDP, and Trinidad and Tobago at 10.2 percent.

The report analyzed both direct costs, made up primarily of medical fees, and indirect costs from premature mortality and lost productivity. Previous papers had only focused on the former. "Less visible costs constitute a drag on development," said Nugent, vice president of non-communicable diseases at non-profit research firm RTI International.

Population and economic growth are the primary drivers of obesity prevalence - as countries increase their incomes, they experience changes in diet to highly processed foods, she explained. In rich nations, aging populations are also a major factor as older people find it harder to lose weight. Francesco Branca of the World Health Organization

clearing rubble and broken glass from a nine-storey apartment block hit by an overnight missile strike in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. Svetlana, 63, gathered with friends to look on as neighbors and municipal workers cleared debris, urged the region's Russian neighbors to ignore the mobilization and "to wake up, finally."

Meanwhile her neighbor, 50-year-old Galina, expressed bewilderment at Moscow's aims against Ukraine. "They want to liberate us from what? From our homes? From our relatives? From friends? What else? From over life? They want to free us from being alive?" she told AFP. The referendums follow a pattern first established in 2014, when Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine after a similar vote.

Like in 2014, Washington, Berlin and Paris denounced the latest referendums and said the international community would never recognize the results. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said they were a "sham", French President Emmanuel Macron called them a "travesty", and White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said they were "an affront to the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity". "Sham referenda and mobilization are signs of weakness, of Russian failure," the US ambassador in Ukraine, Bridget Brink, said on Twitter. "I thank all the friends and partners of Ukraine for their massive and firm condemnation of Russia's intentions to organize yet more pseudo-referendums," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in response. — AFP

said there were a number of ways to respond to the obesity epidemic and avoid the worst outcomes.

"Having policies that, for example, shape the pricing of food - so the foods which are contributing most to obesity, such as drinks or foods high in fat and sugars need to be priced higher," he said. Other steps include better labeling - and in addition to prevention measures, better access to counseling and drug therapies as treatments. The report stressed the economic costs of high weight and obesity "are not attributable to individual behavior" but rather a consequence of social and commercial priorities shaping environments. As such, responsibility for tackling the issues lies with those in power.

Meanwhile, non-communicable diseases like heart disease, cancer and diabetes are responsible for 74 percent of deaths globally and cracking down on risk factors could save millions of lives, the WHO said Wednesday. A report from the UN health agency shows that so-called NCDs, which are often preventable and caused by an unhealthy lifestyle or living conditions, kill 41 million people every year, including 17 million under the age of 70. — AFP

Opposition will not give premier...

Continued from Page 1

in Kuwait". Speaking at the election campaign of candidate Basel Al-Bahrani, Barrak said corruption in Kuwait is rife and has no parallel.

Meanwhile, the court of cassation and the constitutional court, Kuwait's top courts whose rulings are final, meet on Thursday to settle the cases of eight candidates who were disqualified by an interior ministry commission over political and criminal offences. The cassation court will look into petitions filed by the government against rulings by the court of appeals

International

Philippine protesters vow to 'never forget' Marcos era abuses

'A nation that doesn't remember its history is doomed to repeat it as they say'

MANILA, Philippines: Philippine protesters vowed Wednesday to "never forget" the human rights abuses under former dictator Ferdinand Marcos as they held rallies to mark 50 years since his imposition of martial law. Amnesty International estimates thousands of people were killed and tens of thousands tortured and imprisoned after Marcos imposed martial law on September 21, 1972, unleashing security forces on rivals, critics and dissidents.

Marcos's son is now the president of the Philippines, and campaigners have urged him to recognise his family's role in the violence. "The Marcoses need to at least acknowledge their role in those dark days," said Carlos Conde, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, as activists and victims marked the 50th anniversary.



Christian groups held peaceful demonstrations

"Without truth-telling, without the space for Filipinos to understand and accept what happened during martial law, we can never find closure, we can never move forward." Hundreds of protesters, including human rights activists and Christian groups, held peaceful demonstrations across the capital Manila, carrying placards with slogans such as "never again" and images of martial law victims.

"A nation that doesn't remember its history is doomed to repeat it as they say," said John Magtibay, a 22-year-old film student protesting at the University of

the Philippines. "We are beginning to see that now."

Half a century after martial law began, 11,103 people have been officially recognised as victims of torture, killings, enforced disappearances and other abuses. They have been compensated with some of the wealth-estimated to be in the billions of dollars-stolen by Marcos and his wife Imelda.

But human rights groups say there has never been a true reckoning of the abuses—or those responsible held to account. Marcos was toppled from power by a bloodless "people power" revolt in 1986 and the family was chased into exile.

After the patriarch's death in 1989, they returned to the Philippines and began a remarkable political comeback that culminated with Ferdinand Marcos Jr's victory in the May 9 presidential election. "The fact that we allowed the Marcoses to re-enter Malacanang is really messed up," said Patricia Pobre, a 24-year-old protester, referring to the presidential palace.

'One of the darkest periods'

His landslide win was helped by a massive online misinformation campaign that whitewashed abuses and corruption during the dictatorship. Martial law victims and activists have described the Marcos regime as "one of the darkest periods" in the country's history.

They accuse Marcos Jr and his supporters of distorting the facts about martial law and falsely portraying it as a "golden age" for the Philippines. "There are young Filipinos who are interested in learning what really happened in spite of many others who were really blinded," said former political prisoner Bonnie Ilagan, who spent two years in jail where he was repeatedly tortured.

"The fight continues. We must never forget," Ilagan and others accused Marcos's allies in Congress of slashing budgets and weakening the government agencies responsible for preserving the nation's past. In the run-



QUEZON CITY, Philippines: Protesters wearing masks depicting President Ferdinand Maros Jr, and former president Rodrigo Duterte, carry a placard during a rally to commemorate 50 years anniversary of the imposition of martial law at the university grounds in Quezon City, suburban Manila. — AFP

up to Wednesday's anniversary, documentary screenings and exhibitions have been held to educate the public about the horrors of martial law.

But a left-wing political party said they were forced to scrap a film screening in suburban Manila on Tuesday after five members of the local police intelligence unit showed up and "harassed" them and "shot video".

Marcos Jr, who has repeatedly praised his father's rule, last week defended martial law as "necessary" to protect the country against communist and Muslim insurgencies. "We do recognise the problems that hap-

pened, the abuses that occurred like in any war," Marcos Jr said.

But he said critics were "wrong" to call his father a "dictator". "There's no reason to revise history," he said, while suggesting school textbooks need to be rewritten "only if they're wrong". Cristina Palabay of the Karapatan human rights alliance accused Marcos Jr and his administration of peddling "one lie after another".

"There needs to be institutionalised acknowledgement and great reckoning on the crimes committed by Marcos and his ilk," she said. — AFP



TOKYO: Police stand guard at the entrance to the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo on September 21, 2022. A man set himself on fire near the Japanese prime minister's office after expressing opposition to a state funeral for assassinated ex-premier Shinzo Abe, local media said. — AFP

Man sets himself on fire near Japan PM's office

TOKYO, Japan: A man set himself on fire near the Japanese prime minister's office on Wednesday after expressing opposition to a state funeral for assassinated ex-premier Shinzo Abe, local media reported. Police declined to confirm the incident, but the government said an individual with burns had been found near government property.

"We are aware that a man with burns was found by a police officer at 7:00 am (2200 GMT) this morning at an intersection below the cabinet office," top government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno said. "But details are currently being examined by police," he added, declining to answer further questions on the incident. Local media said the man was taken to hospital and was conscious. TV Asahi said he told police he was opposed to the planned ceremony for Abe.

According to the television station, a police officer who tried to extinguish the fire was injured in the process. Jiji news agency said handwritten notes found near the man said he was "staunchly opposed" to the state funeral. The man was believed to be in his 70s and told police he had doused himself in oil, the agency added.

By mid-morning, the only sign of the incident was a scorched patch of grass and bush, with police and media nearby. Abe, Japan's longest-serving prime minister, was shot dead on July 8 while campaigning, and a publicly funded state funeral honouring him will be held on September 27.

State funerals are rare in Japan, and the decision has been controversial. Recent polls show more than half of the public is opposed to the idea. Abe was Japan's best-known politician and remained a prominent public figure after resigning for health reasons in

2020. He was campaigning for ruling-party candidates in upper-house elections in the Nara region when he was shot by a man who allegedly believed the former leader had ties to the Unification Church.

World leaders expected

The assassination prompted shock and international condemnation, but sitting Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's authorisation of a state funeral has proved contentious. Abe was far from universally popular, and many opposed his hawkish nationalist views or were angered by persistent allegations of cronyism.

The ceremony for Abe is expected to cost at least 1.7 billion yen (\$12 million.) Kishida, who is currently in New York to address the UN General Assembly, has defended the plan, insisting Abe's record-breaking tenure and international standing mean he merits the ceremony.

The prime minister's approval ratings have taken a hit over the decision, as well as a controversy over ties between politicians and the Unification Church. The church, whose members are sometimes colloquially called the "Moonies" after Korean founder Sun Myung Moon, has been accused of pressuring believers to make sometimes ruinous donations — accusations it denies.

Tetsuya Yamagami, the man accused of shooting Abe, reportedly resented the church over his mother's membership and hefty donations that left his family bankrupt. While Abe was not a member of the church, he addressed affiliated groups, and his death caused renewed scrutiny of the sect and its political connections.

An investigation by Kishida's ruling Liberal Democratic Party found that around half its lawmakers had ties to the sect. He has pledged that the party will cut all links to the church, which has denied any wrongdoing.

Abe's state funeral will be held at Tokyo's Budokan, a large venue for concerts and sporting events. World leaders, including US Vice President Kamala Harris and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, are among those expected to attend. — AFP

and one died of his injuries, he said. A low-level conflict has simmered in Thailand's southernmost provinces since 2004, killing more than 7,000 people, as rebels in the Muslim-majority region battle for greater autonomy from the state.

Early on Wednesday morning, police were investigating the scene of the bomb blast. Local media reported that the force of the explosion had pushed the police car into a power pole. The southern region—heavily policed by Thai security forces—is culturally distinct from Buddhist-majority Thailand, which colonised the area bordering Malaysia over a century ago.

Last month, more than a dozen arson attacks and explosions targeted convenience stores at petrol stations in the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat—with seven people suffering minor injuries.—AFP

Roadside bomb kills policeman in Thai south

BANGKOK, Thailand: A roadside bomb blast killed one police officer and wounded three others in Thailand's troubled deep south, authorities said Wednesday. The attack happened on Tuesday night on the side of a road near an abandoned shop in Mai Kaen district, Pattani province, police captain Wasuwat Kongtuk said.

All four officers were taken to hospital for treatment

Japan PM willing to meet North Korea's leader

UNITED NATIONS, United States: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Tuesday renewed his offer to meet North Korea's reclusive leader Kim Jong Un, as tensions simmer over Pyongyang's nuclear program.

Addressing the United Nations General Assembly, Kishida said that Japan still stood by diplomacy set out two decades ago by former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi on his historic visit to Pyongyang.

US, Canadian warships sail through Taiwan

TAIPEI, Taiwan: A US destroyer and a Canadian frigate sailed through the Taiwan Strait on Tuesday in the latest joint operation aimed at reinforcing the route's status as an international waterway. Beijing views as its own both democratic Taiwan and the narrow body of water separating the island from mainland China—one of the world's busiest shipping channels.

The United States has long used "freedom of navigation" passages through the Taiwan Strait to push back against Chinese claims and Western allies have increasingly joined these operations. The USS Higgins, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, in cooperation with the Royal Canadian Navy's Halifax-class frigate HMCS Vancouver "conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit September 20 (local time)... in accordance with international law", the US Navy's Seventh Fleet said.

"The ship transited through a corridor in the Strait that is beyond the territorial sea of any coastal State." Canada said the HMCS Vancouver was en route to join an ongoing mission to enforce UN sanctions against North Korea when it transited with the USS Higgins.

"Today's routine Taiwan Strait transit demonstrates our commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-

Pacific." Canadian Defense Minister Anita Anand said in a statement, using another term for the Asia-Pacific region.

A spokesman for China's Eastern Theatre Command described the latest transit as "public hype". "The troops are always on high alert, resolutely counteract all threats and provocations, and resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Colonel Shi Yi said, according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

British, Canadian, French and Australian warships have made passages through the Taiwan Strait in recent years, sparking protests from Beijing. They also frequently ply the South China Sea, another vital shipping area that Beijing insists comes under its domain despite a 2016 Hague ruling that dismissed its claims as well as rival ones from multiple neighbours.

The last time US and Canadian warships sailed through the Taiwan Strait was 11 months ago when the destroyer USS Dewey and frigate HMCS Winnipeg made the trip. The latest joint passage came a day after President Joe Biden again declared that US troops would come to Taiwan's aid in the event of a Chinese invasion.

This was the fourth time Biden made such comments, despite Washington's longstanding official policy of "strategic ambiguity"—designed both to ward off a Chinese invasion and discourage Taiwan from provoking Beijing by formally declaring independence. Each time after Biden's comments, the White House said there was no change in US policy on Taiwan. — AFP



AT SEA, UNDEFINED: In this handout photo courtesy of the US Navy taken on September 20, 2022 the Royal Canadian Navy Halifax-class frigate HMCS Vancouver (FFH 331) transits the Taiwan Strait with guided-missile destroyer USS Higgins (DDG 76) while conducting a routine transit. — AFP

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2022

Business

ADB slashes 2022 Asia growth forecast as fuel, food prices rise

War in Ukraine and supply chain disruptions drive up prices

MANILA: The Asian Development Bank on Thursday slashed its 2022 growth forecast for developing Asia and warned economic conditions could worsen, as the war in Ukraine and supply chain disruptions drive up prices. While the impact of COVID-19 had eased, the region was now grappling with the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, lockdowns in China and aggressive interest rate hikes, the Philippines-based bank said.

To reflect the deterioration across developing Asia—which stretches from the Cook Islands in the Pacific to Kazakhstan in Central Asia—the bank cut its 2022 growth forecast to 4.6 percent.

While easing pandemic restrictions had spurred consumer spending and investment in the region, the Philippines-based bank warned of “global headwinds” to the recovery as food and fuel prices soared and central banks hiked interest rates.

That compares with its previous prediction in April of 5.2 percent and the 6.9 percent growth chalked up last year. It also increased its inflation forecast for the region this year to 4.2 percent, from 3.7 percent, due to surging food and fuel prices.

Risks to the outlook “remain elevated”, the bank warned. “A substantial slowdown in global growth could hurt exports, manufacturing activity and employment prospects, and cause turbulence in financial markets,” it said. Double-digit inflation has hit most of the Caucasus and Central Asia—which have close trade and financial ties to Russia—as well as Mongolia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Laos and Myanmar.

India's inflation was above target at seven percent, but in the rest of the region's large economies it was “manageable”. But the bank warned: “A wors-

ening fallout from the war in Ukraine could lead to a further surge in global energy and commodity prices, with likely knock-on effects on growth and inflation in developing Asia.”

Adding to the region's woes was the strengthening US dollar, seen as a safe haven during periods of uncertainty, which the bank said was weighing on regional currencies and stock markets.

“With financial conditions tightening, growth in advanced economies is softening,” the bank said.

“And with activity in the PRC (China) hampered by supply chain disruptions, domestic demand and exports in developing Asia are set to face significant challenges.” The growth forecast for East Asia, which includes China, was cut to 3.8 percent from 4.7 percent, as COVID-19 lockdowns batter the world's second-biggest economy. In South Asia, where bankrupt Sri Lanka is reeling from its worst economic crisis, the bank lowered its growth forecast to 6.5 percent from 7.0 percent previously.

But the bank revised up its forecast for the Pacific to 4.7 percent, from 3.9 percent, on a surprising rebound in tourism in Fiji.

ADB chief economist Albert Park warned “risks loom large” for the region's outlook and urged governments to remain “vigilant”. “A significant downturn in the world economy would severely undermine demand for the region's exports,” Park said.

“Stronger-than-expected monetary tightening in advanced economies could lead to financial instability. And growth in the PRC (China) faces challenges from recurrent lockdowns and a weak property sector.” China's growth forecast for 2022 was reduced to 3.3 percent from 5.0 percent, as Beijing pursues a zero-COVID strategy that has devastated



COLOMBO: Motorists queue to buy petrol at a Ceylon Petroleum Corporation fuel station in Colombo. —AFP

the world's second-largest economy.

Chinese officials are under pressure to curb even the smallest virus outbreaks swiftly, ahead of a key political meeting in October where President Xi Jinping is expected to secure an unprecedented third term. Officials have imposed targeted lockdowns and travel restrictions, disrupting businesses

and forcing millions of people to stay home. Park said the slowdown was “weighing heavily” on the region's projections. Excluding China from the overall forecast, the rest of developing Asia will grow 5.3 percent. “For the first time in more than three decades, the rest of developing Asia will grow faster than (China),” the ADB noted. —AFP

Walmart hiring fewer US holiday staff this year

NEW YORK: Walmart announced Wednesday it will hire 40,000 workers for the upcoming holiday season, far fewer than last year, as inflation weighs on US households and curtails consumption.

The big-box retailer, the biggest private employer in the United States, said the additional staff will help “millions of families across the country bring the holidays to life,” according to a company blog post. A year ago, Walmart said it would hire 150,000 workers for temporary and permanent posts as it competed for employees with other retailers and logistics companies in a torrid labor market.

But the economy has changed significantly from that time. In July, Walmart cut its profit outlook in the wake of the worst inflation in decades that has forced many Americans to spend more on food and other household staples that have lower profit margins than many discretionary goods. Neil Saunders, an expert in retail at GlobalData Retail, said the more modest hiring reflects Walmart's desire to protect profit margins given the “marked slowdown” in consumer demand since last year.



NEW YORK: Walmart will hire fewer seasonal workers this year compared with 2021, reflecting an economy challenged by inflation. —AFP

“They don't need anywhere near as many associates to serve consumers as they did during the holidays of 2021,” Saunders said. “Holiday sales won't be terrible this year, but a lot of growth will be driven by inflation and underlying volumes will be down. This

necessitates fewer staff on the shop floor, in warehouses and in fulfillment facilities processing online orders.” Earlier this month, delivery company UPS said it would hire more than 100,000 workers by the end of the year, the same level as in 2021. —AFP

US Fed poised to raise rates amid recession fears

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve opened its second day of deliberations Wednesday that are expected to produce another big increase in interest rates as it tries to cool the economy to tamp down the highest inflation in 40 years, but recession fears are rising.

Soaring prices are putting the squeeze on American families and businesses and already have become a political liability for President Joe Biden, as he faces midterm congressional elections in early November. But a contraction of the world's largest economy would be a more damaging blow to Biden, to the Fed's credibility and the world at large.

Economist Diane Swonk of KPMG warned the central bank will come under increasing pressure, especially if unemployment begins to rise, and Fed officials “will become political pinatas.” Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has made it clear that officials will continue to act aggressively to cool the economy and avoid a repeat of the 1970s and early 1980s, the last time US inflation got out of control. It took tough action—and a recession—to finally bring prices down in the 1980s, and the Fed is unwilling to give up its hard-won, inflation-fighting credibility.

Many economists are expecting a third straight three-quarter point rate hike when the meeting concludes Wednesday, which would be an unprecedented action since that era. But there is a chance the Fed could opt for a full point increase. Powell and other central bankers have been sending the same message: A downturn is better than continued high inflation given the pain that would inflict, especially on those least able to withstand it.

“Since inflation began to accelerate in early 2021, Fed officials have been overly optimistic that it would quickly recede to the central bank's 2 percent target,” economists Mickey Levy and Andrew Levin wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*. “The economy now faces a serious risk of persistent high inflation.”

Powell's press conference after the meeting will be closely scrutinized for clues on how much more he thinks the Fed will have to do before it declares victory in the inflation fight. Markets have been roiled in recent days by the Fed's resolve to continue its forceful action. But stocks opened higher on Wall Street Wednesday ahead of the decision, with investors perhaps hopefully Powell will soften his tone. —AFP



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on July 27, 2022 US Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell speaks during a news conference in Washington, DC. —AFP

Biden announces \$2.9bn to fight global food insecurity

UNITED NATIONS: US President Joe Biden announced Wednesday another \$2.9 billion for a fund aimed at helping to resolve global food insecurity caused in part by Russia's invasion of grain-producing Ukraine. Biden will make the announcement in his speech to the UN General Assembly, the White House said. The money “builds on the \$6.9 billion in US government assistance to support global food security already committed this year,” a statement said.

The White House said food supplies are being dangerously disrupted by “the compounding impacts of the pandemic, the deepening climate crisis, rising energy and fertilizer costs, and protracted conflicts — including Russia's invasion of Ukraine.” The turmoil has “disrupted global supply chains and dramatically increased global food prices.”

In particular, long-term drought has left parts of Somalia at risk of famine, the White House said. “This new announcement of \$2.9 billion will save lives through emergency interventions and invest in medium to long term food security assistance in order to protect the world's most vulnerable populations from the escalating global food security crisis.” —AFP

Pacific atoll nations launch global plan to preserve heritage

NEW YORK: Pacific atoll nations on Wednesday launched a new global partnership to preserve their sovereignty and heritage as their countries disappear under rising seas triggered by climate change. The Rising Nations Initiative was announced at an event on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly by Tuvalu Prime Minister Kausea Natano and President David Kabua of the Marshall Islands, with countries including Germany, the United States and Canada as early supporters.

“The climate crisis is creating an increasingly uncertain future for people in most parts of the world,” Natano said.

“Paradoxically, in my region, the Pacific, it is making our future increasingly certain — but not in a way that gives any kind of comfort.” Pacific island nations account for just 0.03 percent of global emissions yet are set to lose considerable territory in this century, with some becoming uninhabitable even if the world meets the Paris accord goal of limiting long-term warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Accordingly, Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands are calling for a global settlement guaranteeing their states a “permanent existence” beyond the habitable lifetime of their atolls.

The initiative puts forward a four-point plan: reaffirming the international community's commitment to preserving their sovereignty; launching an adaptation program to increase resilience and pro-



High-tide flooding hitting low sections of Majuro Atoll in the Marshall Islands. —AFP

tect livelihoods; creating a repository for the islands' cultural heritage; and supporting the nations to acquire UNESCO World Heritage Status.

“We know that even at 1.5C average global temperature rise, our lands will eventually be submerged,” said Kabua.

“Now we seek the same deep partnership from the international community to preserve our right to nationhood long into the future, retaining full rights to our national identity, and sustaining our rich heritage.”

Rising sea levels are already threatening Pacific atolls — contaminating their aquifers with salt water, bringing higher tides, increasing storm intensity and flooding, and weakening natural defenses. Coral reef bleaching is reducing fish stocks and imperiling tourism, pushing up costs and forcing people to leave their homes. —AFP

Business

Europe's cars get a second life in Africa, but at a cost

Benin is one of the five largest importers of used vehicles in Africa

COTONOU, Benin: His Toyota Matrix has driven the equivalent of four times around the world and it would never pass an inspection in Europe. But for its delighted new owner, Adam Adebisi, the ageing hatchback with more than 170,000 kilometers (105,000 miles) on the clock may just as well have rolled off the factory floor. Like millions of other Africans, the Beninese computer scientist has turned to the second-hand market to buy a quality car that would normally be well beyond his budget.

Africa is the world's biggest destination for used vehicles. More than a quarter of second-hand autos exported between 2015 and 2020, or 5.6 million vehicles, ended up on the continent, according to the UN. These vehicles come mainly from Europe and Japan, and increasingly from South Korea or the United States, but are often very old or high-pollution models.

Adebisi's Matrix Toyota went into circulation in 2004 in Canada, before it was shipped by sea 15 years later to Benin, where it was purchased by a first owner, who then sold it to him. Not far from the port of Cotonou, the economic capital of Benin, sales lots packed with second-hand vehicles, mainly from Europe, stretch for kilometers. Benin is one of the five largest importers of used vehicles in Africa, according to a UN report published at the end of 2021.

The West African country has only 11 million inhabitants, but it is the gateway to the markets of Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and especially its giant neighbor Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa. In one of these huge car lots near the border with Nigeria, Zakari Cisse recently sat with his hand on the steering wheel of his just purchased car, a model put into circulation in Belgium in 2002. He would have liked to buy a new one from a dealership. But lacking resources, he fell back on this 20-year-old second-hand vehicle, which is "clean and well maintained". "The engine responds very well and you can tell by the noise," he said.

"We don't import rubbish," said Ossama Allouch, an importer of used vehicles in Cotonou, who says vehi-

cles are subject to controls before purchase. "They are not just any vehicles that are banned from use." In Benin, a 15-year-old imported saloon, also called a sedan, typically changes hands for around 1.5 million CFA francs (\$2,300). That's quite a bargain in a country where a brand-new model will cost a dozen times as much, and the average salary is little more than \$100 per month.

Stolen converters

According to a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report in 2021, most vehicles exported to developing countries are old, polluting, energy-inefficient, potentially dangerous and undermine efforts to reduce carbon emissions. During an inspection by Dutch authorities at the end of 2019 in Amsterdam port—from where boats transporting these cars to Africa leave every week—the average age of the vehicles waiting was 18 years and they exceeded 200,000 kilometers (120,000 miles) mileage on average. No fewer than 93 percent were Euro 3 or lower—a category meaning they were marketed before the start of the 2000s. Some of the vehicles had broken down and some had been stripped of their catalytic converters—attachments that reduce emission of polluting toxic non-carbon gases such as nitrogen oxide.

To filter the noxious gases, converters use precious metals such as gold, silver, rhodium and platinum. Their value can exceed \$100, providing a rich incentive for them to be removed and trafficked.

Amen Djidjoho, head of one of the sales parks in Benin, dismissed those concerns. "All imported vehicles come with catalytic converters because in Europe and America, it is strictly forbidden to remove them," he said. To avoid converter theft after the vehicles have arrived, security guards watch over the assignments until they are transferred to Beninese sales parks, Djidjoho said. Importer Ossama Allouch said converters are often stolen after the purchase, resold by owners or removed from garages.

"I don't accept this argument that cutting taxes is somehow unfair," Truss told Sky News in New York, ahead of her bilateral meeting with Biden and debut speech Wednesday at the UN General Assembly.

"What we know is people on higher incomes generally pay more tax. So when you reduce taxes, there is often a disproportionate benefit because those people are paying more taxes in the first place," she said. The contrasting economic visions are only one point of dispute between Truss and Biden.

The White House has made clear its unhappiness about the new prime minister's hard line on Brexit and Northern Ireland. Truss conceded that a post-Brexit UK-US trade deal was unlikely for years.

But in her speech to the UN, she was set to defend her economic vision as a way to corral Western democracies against foes such as Russia. "We want people to keep more of the money they earn, because we believe that freedom trumps instruction," Truss was expected to say, according to excerpts released by Downing Street. "We are reforming our economy to get Britain moving forward once again.

"The free world needs this economic strength and resilience to push back against authoritarian aggression and win this new era of strategic competition."

Truss was to say that Ukraine's recent battlefield advances against Russian forces was "the story of freedom fighting back". "But this must not be a one-off," she will say, urging Western unity. — AFP



Ekpe, Benin: Second hand cars are seen on September 16, 2022 on display at a dealer in Ekpe, Benin. Africa is the world's biggest destination for used vehicles. — AFP

Pollution worry

Conservationists say pollution generated by these old vehicles is a major concern, given Africans' thirst for a set of wheels. Old cars, together with the poor quality of fuels used in West Africa, are "one of the main causes of the increase in air pollution levels in the cities of the region", UNEP said. "Children, who walk to schools and use busy roads, and informal vendors along these roads" are most at risk, it said. Regulating this important sector of the Beninese economy and a major provider of jobs is predictably not an easy task.

The 15-member regional bloc Economic Community of West African States adopted a directive in 2020 aimed at bringing cleaner fuels and vehicles to the market, with implementation planned for January 2021. Imported second-hand vehicles must in particular meet at least Euro 4 standards, which means they have been put into circulation after 2006.

But it is clear that in Benin, vehicles sold in car parks are much older. Contacted several times, the Ministry of Transport had not answered AFP's questions about legislation in force in the country. — AFP

UK's new PM veers away from Biden's economic script at UN

LONDON: Britain's new Prime Minister Liz Truss was Wednesday to outline an economic rescue program focused on tax cuts—even as US President Joe Biden rejected that approach as the two prepared to meet at the UN. "I am sick and tired of trickle-down economics. It has never worked," Biden tweeted ahead of his first meeting with Boris Johnson's successor in New York.

"We're building an economy from the bottom up and middle out," the president said, contrasting his approach to Republican opponents whose philosophy is more akin to the UK's new Conservative leader. Truss has underscored in New York her contentious belief that tax cuts for the better-off would benefit everyone, as her new government tries to get a grip on soaring energy prices.

An emergency budget on Friday is expected to roll out tax changes that would disproportionately benefit Britain's rich. The Times newspaper said it could also come with a surprise cut to property purchase taxes.



New York: British Prime Minister Liz Truss walks through the United Nations headquarters in New York City on September 20, 2022. — AFP

Jordan resumes oil imports from Iraq after brief halt

AMMAN: Jordan has resumed importing about 10,000 barrels per day of crude oil from Iraq, the Jordanian energy minister said on Monday, after a several-week halt. "Loading has started from a new location," Saleh Al-Kharabsheh said in a statement. He was referring to a loading site in Kirkuk, instead of a previous site in Baiji, according to media reports.

Jordanian official media said logistical problems had forced the halt of the oil flows. Iraq agreed in 2006 to export 10,000 bpd of oil to Jordan, the first exports to the kingdom since the US-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003. The 10,000 barrels comprise nearly 7 per cent of Jordanian oil imports of 142,000 bpd. Most of Jordan's crude needs are supplied by lorry from Saudi Arabia.

Flows from Iraq have been frequently interrupted, either because of political differences, price changes or transport problems. Jordan says it buys Iraqi oil at a \$16 discount to Brent, partly because the imports are of lower quality. Oil prices, which rose more than 67 per cent last year amid a faster-than-expected economic rebound, have been volatile this year, rocked by the Russia-Ukraine conflict and growing concerns about a global economic slowdown. Brent, the benchmark for two thirds of the world's oil, was down 0.96 per cent at \$90.47 a barrel on Tuesday while West Texas Intermediate, the gauge that tracks US crude, was trading 1.09 per cent lower at \$84.18 a barrel.

Iraq, OPEC's second-largest producer, depends on oil revenue to meet 90 per cent of government expenditure. The country exports an average of 3.3 million barrels of oil per day, while production in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region amounts to a little more than 450,000 bpd.

Iraq is aiming to boost its total production to 8 million bpd by 2027, from about 4.5 million bpd currently. Last month, the country announced the discovery of several new oil wells in the province of Anbar, in the west of the country. — Agencies

S African inflation slows slightly as fuel prices drop

JOHANNESBURG: Inflation in South Africa slowed slightly in August as fuel prices dropped, but it remained near a 13-year record high, official data showed on Wednesday. Hundreds of South Africans marched to the seat of government in the capital Pretoria last month to demand action against power cuts and the rising cost of food and fuel.

Inflation soared to 7.8 percent in July. While petrol and diesel prices pulled annual inflation down to 7.6 percent last month, food prices continued to rise, according to the national statistics agency, StatsSA.

The August reading is the lowest since January, StatsSA said in a statement. "The welcome decrease in the cost of fuel had an impact on the overall transport index, which declined by 1.0 percent between July and August," the agency said. But the price of corn flour, a staple for most South Africans, surged to 29.1 percent in August, while prices for bread and cereals also accelerated to 17.8 percent.

In a bid to stabilize inflation, the country's central bank in July hiked its key interest rate by 75 basis points to 5.5 percent, the highest increase in 10 years. The bank is due to announce a new rate on Thursday with economists forecasting another 75-basis-point increase. Inflation began to rise as countries emerged from COVID pandemic lockdowns and it shot higher after Russia's war in Ukraine sent global energy and food prices soaring. — AFP

Ex-Wirecard CEO Braun to be tried for fraud in Germany

BERLIN: A German court on Wednesday gave the go-ahead for the trial of Markus Braun, the former CEO of Wirecard, accused of fraud in the accounting scandal that led to the company's spectacular collapse in 2020. Braun and two other senior Wirecard managers will go on trial for "commercial gang fraud", the superior regional court in Munich said in a statement, though a date for proceedings has not yet been set.

Once the standard-bearer for the German tech industry, Wirecard collapsed in June 2020 after admitting that 1.9 billion euros (\$1.9 billion) missing from its balance sheets likely didn't exist. The scandal was "unparalleled" in Germany's history, according to then finance minister Olaf Scholz, who is now chancellor.

Braun and the other two managers, accounting boss Stephan von Erffa and Oliver Bellenhaus, the former head of a Wirecard's Dubai subsidiary, were charged with fraud by prosecutors in March. The trio had worked "in an industrial fashion" to commit the fraud, prosecutors said. Wirecard's chief operating officer Jan Marsalek is wanted by German prosecutors and remains at large.

The former executive, who has been on the run since the collapse, was reported earlier this year to be hiding out in Moscow. — AFP

UK to pay half of winter energy bills for businesses

LONDON: Britain on Wednesday launched a six-month plan starting in October to pay about half of energy bills for businesses, as Prime Minister Liz Truss seeks to stop companies going under as a result of rocketing prices. The news precedes a mini-budget Friday when finance minister Kwasi Kwarteng is expected to unveil tax cuts to help a nation struggling with decades-high inflation.

Wholesale electricity and gas prices for businesses—except the energy sector—as well as charities, hospitals and schools will be capped at half the expected cost on the open market, the government said in a statement. The announcement comes after Truss launched plans for a two-year household energy price freeze which also starts next month. "We have stepped in to stop businesses collapsing, protect jobs and limit inflation," Kwarteng said Wednesday.

The chancellor of the exchequer will Friday set out the overall cost of both energy freeze schemes. His budget will seek to boost economic growth amid forecasts that Britain will this year sink into recession on sky-high energy bills fuelled by the invasion of Ukraine by major oil and gas producer Russia.

'Eases worries'

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) welcomed Wednesday's announcement. "The package will ease worries about otherwise viable businesses shutting-up shop," said Matthew Fell, chief policy director at the lobby group. The CBI meanwhile urged a long-term energy solution to increase Britain's supplies while ramping up efficiency measures to lower demand. Truss took office on September 6, two days before the death of Queen Elizabeth II, after winning an election of Conservative party members on a tax-cutting platform.

She is committed to scrapping planned tax hikes on both company profits and salaries that predecessor Boris Johnson signed off upon. Media reports suggest that the government will also scrap an EU limit on bankers' bonuses following Brexit. On the London stock market, homebuilders saw their shares rebound on speculation that Truss could cut tax levied on purchases of residential properties.

The tax-cutting plans like those proposed by Truss have come in for criticism from US President Joe Biden, who spoke out against the policy of "trickle-down economics" favored by the Democrat's Republican opponents. The approach hinges on hopes that policies which immediately boost the wealthy will trickle down the economy to reach the less well-off. "I am sick and tired of trickle-down economics. It has never worked," Biden had tweeted on Tuesday. Speaking ahead of Biden's tweet, Truss addressed this point. "I don't accept this argument that cutting taxes is somehow unfair," she told Sky News earlier this week. — AFP

TRUSS'S ENERGY AID	
HOMES	BUSINESSES
Energy bills frozen for two years	Discount on wholesale costs
Typical cost £2,500 a year	Tariff set at half expected winter peak
Average saving of £1,150	Will run from October to March
Starts on October 1	Targeted sectoral help after March
Expected to cost £150 billion	

Business

Germany in deal to nationalize debt-laden gas giant Uniper

Energy sector reels from the fallout of Russia's war in Ukraine

BERLIN: Germany has reached a deal to nationalize troubled gas giant Uniper, the government said Wednesday, as the energy sector reels from the fallout of Russia's war in Ukraine. The deal will leave Germany with a 99 percent stake in the debt-laden gas company, the economy ministry said in a statement.

"Uniper is a central pillar of German energy supplies," the ministry said. Under the agreement, Berlin will inject eight billion euros (\$8 billion) in cash into Uniper and buy 500 million euros of shares from its majority shareholder, the Finnish state-owned energy company Fortum.

Fortum will also be repaid for an eight-billion-euro loan it gave Uniper. "The situation has become much more dramatic" for Uniper since the shutdown in late August of the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, Economy Minister Robert Habeck told a press conference.

One of the biggest importers of Russian gas, Uniper has been squeezed as Moscow has reduced supplies to the continent in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine in February.

Gas crisis

Missing deliveries have had to be replaced with expensive supplies from the open market, where prices for gas have skyrocketed. The German state had already agreed in July to take a 30 percent stake in Uniper as part of an initial bailout agreement.

But Uniper announced earlier this month that the two sides were exploring a possible nationalization as the energy crisis showed no signs of abating.

Fortum provided an eight-billion-euro loan to Uniper in January as the price of gas had already begun to climb amid tensions with Moscow before the invasion of Ukraine. The Finnish company held a near-80-percent stake in Uniper, which would have been cut to around 56 percent under the July bailout plan.

Fortum said Uniper has accumulated close to 8.5 billion euros in gas-related losses "and cannot continue to fulfill its role as a critical provider of security of supply as a privately-owned company". "New measures to resolve the situation were needed, as both Uniper and Fortum were exposed to significant risks," said Fortum chief executive Markus Rauramo at a press conference.

'No longer viable'

"The role of gas in Europe has fundamentally changed since Russia attacked Ukraine, and so has the outlook for a gas-heavy portfolio. As a result, the business case for an integrated group is no longer viable," Rauramo also said in a separate statement. Fortum had taken an "inevitable decision in exceptionally uncertain circumstances", said Tytti Tuppurainen, the Finnish minister responsible for state companies.

"The situation is a result of Russia's attack on Ukraine. Putin is using energy as a weapon," Tuppurainen said in a statement. Russia's war in Ukraine has triggered an earthquake on European energy markets, cranked up the pressure on suppliers and raised fears of possible shortages over the winter.

Germany has found itself particularly exposed



The logo of energy supplier Uniper in the entrance hall at the company's headquarters in Dusseldorf, western Germany.

due to its previous heavy reliance on Russian energy imports. Since the outbreak of the war, Berlin has worked to wean itself off Russian gas and secure alternative supplies.

Officials have seized key pieces of energy infra-

structure which were in the hands of Russian energy companies and mandated gas stores to be filled. Earlier in September, the German government entered into discussions with another gas supplier, VNG, over a possible bailout package. —AFP

Germany raids properties of Russian oligarch

BERLIN: German investigators on Wednesday raided properties belonging to a Russian oligarch suspected of tax evasion and breaking EU sanctions, police and prosecutors said, with sources naming billionaire Alisher Usmanov as the target. The searches focused on two properties belonging to a 69-year-old Russian businessman in the Bavarian district of Miesbach, the BKA federal police said in a statement.

Police did not name the suspect, but sources close to the investigation told AFP that it was Usmanov, a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and former president of the International Fencing Federation. Between 2017 and 2022, the suspect is accused of funneling several million euros acquired as part of illegal activities, including tax evasion, through an "extensive and complex network of companies and corporations" to conceal their origin, the BKA said.

Around 250 officers were involved in the raids, with the alleged tax evasion amounting to 550 million euros (\$545 million), according to a report in Der Spiegel magazine. The operation targeted a total of 24 properties belonging to the Russian oligarch and four other people, according to prosecu-



ROTTACH-EGERN, Germany: A property that allegedly belongs to a Russian oligarch close to Putin is pictured in Rottach-Egern, near the resort town of Tegernsee, southern Germany, on September 21, 2022. —AFP

tors in Munich. The Russian suspect is also accused of using funds frozen under EU sanctions to pay for properties to be monitored by a security company, according to the Munich prosecutors.

The four others are suspected of providing the surveillance services and enabling or receiving payment for them. German media reported earlier this year that authorities had seized the "Dilbar", the world's biggest yacht by tonnage

owned by Usmanov.

The yacht had been docked in a Hamburg shipyard since October 2021 for repairs. Usmanov was ranked at number six in the Sunday Times list of the world's richest people in 2021. He is one of dozens of Russian billionaires hit by Western sanctions following the start of the invasion of Ukraine. Usmanov is currently believed to be residing in Uzbekistan, according to Der Spiegel. —AFP

ECB determined to stop inflation becoming 'embedded'

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank is determined to stop soaring inflation becoming the norm, its president said, as the coronavirus pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine put lasting pressure on prices.

The twin shocks have led to consumer price rises that are "much higher and more persistent" than expected, Christine Lagarde said in a speech in Frankfurt, adding that the central bank had to

ensure sky-high inflation does not become "embedded".

"This is what the ECB is doing," Lagarde said. Inflation in the eurozone climbed to 9.1 percent in August, an all-time high, with analysts predicting the rate could reach double digits by the end of the year.

At its last meeting earlier this month the ECB raised its interest rates by a record large 75 basis points, as it sought to tame the surge in consumer prices. The shock decision came just a few weeks after the bank had hiked rates for the first time in over a decade, bringing an end to a period of negative interest rates.

The aggressive moves had been a "key tool to signal our determination" to bring inflation back to the ECB's two-percent target, Lagarde said.

Looking ahead, the ECB expected to "raise interest rates further over the next several meetings", she said.

How fast and how far rates would rise would depend on the "inflation outlook", she added.

Soaring inflation rates were driven by the economic shocks of the coronavirus pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has sent the price of energy soaring, Lagarde said. The cuts to Russian gas imports would "have ramifications for several years", keeping energy prices elevated, while pandemic bottlenecks would lead supply chains to be restructured at higher cost, she said.

The constraints on supply in both cases were "likely to last longer than in the past", Lagarde said, meaning it was "taking longer for the inflationary effects of those shocks to fade out." —AFP

Hertz to buy some 175,000 GM EVs through 2027

WASHINGTON: US rental car giant Hertz will buy up to 175,000 electric vehicles from General Motors by the end of 2027, the companies announced Tuesday, as the auto industry grapples with concerns over climate change and petroleum dependency. First deliveries, which will consist of BOLT EVs and EUVs, should take place in the first quarter of 2023, according to the joint statement.

Subsequent purchases will depend on how fast General Motors (GM) ramps up production of electric vehicles. The automaker says it plans to manufacture one million a year in North America by 2025.

Hertz will be able to select from GM's Chevrolet, Buick, GMC, Cadillac and BrightDrop EV brands, according to the press release. "With the vehicle choice, technology and driving range we're delivering, I'm confident that each rental experience will further increase purchase consideration for our products and drive growth for our company," GM CEO Mary Barra said.

Hertz, which is aiming for one-quarter of its fleet to be comprised of electric vehicles by 2024, has already signed agreements for 100,000 Teslas and 65,000 Polestars, an electric car firm controlled by Sweden's Volvo and its Chinese owner Geely.



A Hertz counter at Miami International Airport. Hertz will be able to select from GM's Chevrolet, Buick, GMC, Cadillac and BrightDrop EV brands. —AFP

While gasoline-powered cars still dominate US roads, auto giants are unveiling more and more EVs as they pump billions of dollars in investment in a bid to wrest control of a growing market from Tesla and newer upstarts. In addition to its agreement with Hertz, GM announced Tuesday it has

entered into a partnership with the Environmental Defense Fund to ensure that at least 50 percent of its new vehicles sold by 2030 are zero emitting.

The end goal is to eliminate all tailpipe emissions from passenger vehicles sold by GM by 2035, Barra said. —AFP



HBR burger brand building its way to top in Kuwait

KUWAIT: HBR is a local burger concept brand that started from scratch and is now building its way to the top. The ingredients are very precisely picked out to give the customers an unforgettable dining experience. The meat used is Certified Angus from the US and the chicken is fresh and local from Kuwait. The chicken is breaded daily to perfection, creating their famous CLS CKN, SPC CKN, CKN Toastie, and CKN Strips. They also offer Grilled CKN as a lighter option. HBR captivates its customers with its unique flavors and freshly made food items that make their customers always come back for more.

HBR currently serves their customers in three dine in locations; Crystal Tower-Kuwait City, Dhai Complex-Bida'a and Arkan Square-Bnaider. HBR also delivers to a large radius of residential areas through online delivery platforms including Talabat and Deliveroo.

Adding on, HBR participates in many different events throughout the year to further enhance their bond with customers. They also offer catering services to have an onsite experience that can be reserved through the call center or through the Bilbayt platform.

Zero-COVID harming 75% of European firms in China: Group

BEIJING: China's "inflexible" and "inconsistent" zero-Covid policy is crippling European business operations in the country, a major business lobby said Wednesday, warning that the presence of the companies "can no longer be taken for granted". The report by the European Union's Chamber of Commerce in China marks the latest statement by the foreign business community that Beijing's hardline virus curbs are harming the world's second-largest economy and isolating it on the international stage. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



This photograph shows a view of Stevo Stepanovski's library in the village of Babino in western Macedonia. — AFP photos



A visitor looks through a volume in the library of Stevo Stepanovski in the village of Babino.

Bookish Balkans hamlet a 'village of enlightenment'



Stevo Stepanovski shows a volume from his library in the village of Babino.

Most people packed up and left the remote North Macedonia village of Babino years ago. But Stevo Stepanovski and his remarkable collection of 20,000 books stayed put in his almost abandoned valley. The library began with Stepanovski's great-grandfather who was given his first tranche of books by passing Ottoman soldiers in the late 19th century. Along with history books and novels in the Macedonian language, there are tomes in Farsi, Arabic and Turkish along with a whole host of books in Serbo-Croat, the main language of the old Yugoslavia of which the village was once a part.

The library is home to original photographs by a journalist who covered World War I, antique maps and a Babel of dic-

tionaries covering the region's many languages. "This is a village of enlightenment and education," said Stepanovski, 72, who regularly welcomes guests with cups of coffee and shots of homemade fruit brandy in the centuries-old stone home where the library is housed. The library helped make the villagers highly literate, with an inordinately large number of them becoming teachers.

'No house without a teacher'

"There was no house without a teacher," according to Stepanovski. But their very learning was also the village's undoing. In the 1950s, the Yugoslav government called up the valley's teachers for a nationwide literacy drive-effectively rob-

bing the area of much of its population. Like much of this impoverished corner of southeastern Europe, North Macedonia has been clobbered by a demographic slump. The triple whammy of an ageing population, sinking birth rate and mass migration has left many villages across its rural hinterland abandoned. Babino has been hit particularly hard. Once it had more than 800 inhabitants, but now there are just three permanent residents.

And while Stepanovski's adult children have moved elsewhere, he is determined to stay on with his books in Babino. Instead the world comes to him, with between 3,000 and 3,500 people a year visiting the library. Most come from nearby towns and villages or from neighbouring

countries, but there are also occasional travelers from Brazil, Egypt and Morocco along with a host of literary scholars and researchers.

"I am surprised titles can be found here that cannot be found in city libraries," said Goce Sekuloski, a music professor at a seminary in the capital Skopje who visited Babino recently after hearing about the place from friends. Stepanovski has also built a small amphitheatre for public readings and concerts. "We offer a peaceful mindset for people to come and sit here and experience the atmosphere," he said. "If you want to discover the magic of books... you can do that perfectly here." — AFP



A visitor looks through a volume in the library of Stevo Stepanovski in the village of Babino.



Stevo Stepanovski shows a volume from his library in the village of Babino.



Streaming giant shines new light on Thai boys cave rescue

It is the rescue retold around the world: 12 boys, their coach, and impossible odds. Now, a new series debuting Thursday promises an intimate Thai perspective on the extraordinary effort to save 13 lives from a flooded cave back in 2018. The world was captivated by the young "Wild Boars" football team trapped inside a cave complex in northern Thailand, as an international diving team scrambled to extract them. Netflix's six-episode drama "Thai Cave Rescue" is the latest screen interpretation of the event, and comes only a month after Amazon released its feature-length film "Thirteen Lives".

Amazon's production, directed by Oscar winner Ron Howard, focuses on the life or death efforts by the divers-played by

Hollywood stars Colin Farrell and Viggo Mortensen-to reach and rescue the boys. The latest retelling seeks to take a closer look at the young players and their families. "I think the series covers some parts that haven't been portrayed enough, such as the world of the kids and their coach before it happened," said director Nattawut Poonpiriya.

The 41-year-old, perhaps best known for the award-winning Thai heist thriller "Bad Genius", said one of the biggest challenges was covering all sides of the complex rescue. The length of the series-with each episode clocking in at around 50 minutes-gave him the freedom to tell that story. "It allowed us to show the details, and really emphasize the characters and situations they were in," he said. He highlighted the pressure of accurately depicting former Thai Navy SEAL Saman Gunan, who died during the operation and was subsequently treated as a national hero, with a statue erected outside the cave.

'We dig deep'

While previous productions have brought the subterranean complex to life through recreations, "Thai Cave Rescue" actors filmed outside and around the actual cave itself. "It's very intense in

there," said actor Urassaya Sperbund, better known to Thai audiences by her nickname Yaya. She plays a fictionalized hydrologist battling to keep the cave's water levels under control. "It was freezing cold, and you could hardly talk through the rain because it was so hard," the 29-year-old said.

Beyond the cave, hundreds mobilized

to explore any other chance to get the boys out-from climbers searching for different access points, to teams diverting the mountain's waters. "We dig really deep into every section of the rescue team," said Sperbund. "So you will get to see how difficult it was to complete the mission, how many times we failed, and how that affected the families of the boys," she said.

Her role highlights efforts to divert water, showing how rice farmers' fields were deliberately flooded as a result. "That was a very touching scene and it's important to know that the local people also contributed a lot," she said. For actor Thaneth Warakulnukroh, who plays local governor Narongsak Osottanakorn, one of the most important things about the rescue was the sense of unity around the aim of saving the "Wild Boars" and their coach. "No matter how time flies, I hope this series will remind people about that, because sometimes we forget it," he said. —AFP



Thai-Norwegian actress of the upcoming Netflix series "Thai Cave Rescue", Urassaya 'Yaya' Sperbund speaks during an interview with AFP in Bangkok.

'Athena' brings French violence to Netflix

Having cut his teeth with striking music videos for the likes of Kanye West and MIA, director Romain Gavras brings an explosive vision of French inner-city unrest to Netflix on Friday. "Athena", which shows France descending into civil war following riots over police violence, has echoes of recent unsettling trends such as the "Yellow Vest" protests and the rise of the far right. The director, son of the legendary-and highly political-French-Greek filmmaker Costa-Gavras, insists the film is not trying to influence anyone. "We never really know whether films have an impact on people," he told AFP during the Venice Film Festival, where the film got its world premiere earlier this month.

"Personally, it was Marlon Brando who made me want to start smoking... but when we're filled with anger, I don't know if watching a film can stop it," he added. "Athena" plunges the audience, from its very first frames, into the rage and tumult of an inner-city suburb where riots break out over the death of a young man at the hands of the police. Fanned by the far right, the unrest drags the whole country into civil war.

It bears comparison with "La Haine", the hugely successful tale of unrest in the Paris suburbs from 1995 — though its heightened imagery has more in common with mythological Hollywood films such as "Gladiator" or "Apocalypse Now". What makes it all the more tragic is that France's strict rules, aimed at curbing the influence of streaming platforms, mean "Athena" cannot be shown in French cinemas, though it will get a limited theatrical release in other countries. "The film could not have been made without Netflix," Gavras said, while adding his "great dismay" that it will not be shown on the big screen in his home country. It is the third full-length feature by the 41-year-old director, who gained international attention with music shorts such as "Bad Girls" by MIA, "No Church in the Wild" by Jay-Z and Kanye West, and "Nothing Breaks Like a Heart" by Mark Ronson. —AFP



(From left to right) Cast of the upcoming Netflix series "Thai Cave Rescue", Varintorn Yaroojanont, Manatsanun Phanlerdwongsakul, Urassaya 'Yaya' Uberbund, Thaneth Warakulnukroh and Suppakorn Kitsuan pose for a photograph in Bangkok. — AFP photos



This picture shows patrons watching a band perform in a studio via a live stream, at music venue 'The Wanch' in Hong Kong. — AFP photos



In this picture a laptop and projector screen shows a live stream of a band performing in a studio for patrons at music venue 'The Wanch' in Hong Kong.

COVID curbs leave Hong Kong musicians on their 'last dollar'

A thundering thrash metal riff reverberated through a Hong Kong bar, but the music was being live-streamed from a studio across town to obey pandemic rules that have outlawed small gigs for more than 650 days. The coronavirus has battered live performances around the world, especially in the first 18 months of the pandemic, but nowhere has that hardship lasted longer than in Hong Kong. While gigs, festivals and international touring have returned with a vengeance globally, Hong Kong's musicians have had no such luck. For the vast majority of the pandemic the Chinese city has banned live performances in any place that serves food or drink.

Venues such as The Wanch, one of the city's oldest live music bars, have had to get creative. "We're just trying to do what we can to stay alive and keep the music going," John Prymmer, the bar's co-owner and a fixture of Hong Kong's live music scene, told AFP from Sunset Studios, from where the live music was being streamed. In a sound-proofed recording studio next door, local metal act Ozmium are careening through a mixture of their own tracks as well as covers of Iron Maiden and Metallica.

For now, a laptop screen perched in front of the band showing revelers inside The Wanch is the closest they can get to their fans. Frontman Ashish Jerry Justin said he had looked on with desperation as other businesses such as karaoke rooms, cinemas, banquets and hotpot restaurants have been allowed to resume. "And still in a place like a bar or a club, you cannot have live music even if there is a plexiglass separating us from the people who are watching us," he said. "I think it's highly unfair."



This picture shows band members of Occasionally Soft performing in a studio, for an audience watching a live stream at a music venue in Hong Kong.



This picture shows band members of Occasionally Soft performing in a studio, for an audience watching a live stream at a music venue in Hong Kong.

International isolation
Hong Kong has stuck to a version of China's zero-Covid system throughout the pandemic, which has hammered the local economy. While business hubs rivals such as Singapore, London and Tokyo have reopened, Hong Kong has kept up mandatory hotel quarantine, currently at three days. International acts including Billie Eilish, Justin Bieber, Maroon 5, Green Day and Guns N' Roses have all added Singapore to their world tours. But Hong Kong remains a touring dead zone. Live music has been classified as a high-risk activity by authorities, and banned for more than 650 of the slightly over 900 days since restrictions were first introduced in early April 2020.

Lito Castillo, head of the Hong Kong Musicians Union, estimates the job loss-

es to be "in the thousands". A professional keyboardist who is married to a singer, he says his family's income is now 30 percent of what it was before the pandemic, mainly earned from working tables in restaurants. "I'm down to my last dollar, at the moment we are just surviving, that's all," he told AFP. Others have pawned instruments and switched to the gig economy. One of the city's most talented guitarists now works for an international courier company, Castillo lamented. Many venues have closed, including Peel Fresco which shut its doors this month after 16 years. "The past three years have made it impossible to run a live music business in Hong Kong," the owners wrote on Facebook.

'Survival mode'

The mental toll has been intense. In a

recent survey, the Hong Kong Musicians Foundation found 11 percent of its members have had suicidal thoughts in the last year. Ten percent were in debt to the tune of HK\$100,000 (\$12,740) or more, and 13 percent had sold their instruments. "I think 'grim' is an understatement," said Adrian Fu, a singer-songwriter and former Cantopop recording artist who is one of the foundation's directors. Both the foundation and Castillo's union said letters and lobbying to the government had gone unnoticed.

Fu said he hoped authorities could see the importance of live performances to the economy but also Hong Kong's reputation as an international city of culture. "It is a huge, huge factor in the incubation of talent," he said of small venues and live bars. A spokesperson for city leader John Lee said the govern-

ment "understands the ardent expectations of the live music sector for relaxing social distancing measures" but gave no details on when or whether the ban would be lifted. The Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau-set up in July to promote Hong Kong as a "centre for international cultural exchange"-declined to comment. Alicia Beale, owner of live music venue The Aftermath, said she had tried to focus on the positive creativity artists had shown. Her venue has done live-streamed gigs, recorded fundraising albums and pivoted to whatever it can to draw people in, from quiz and game nights to support groups. "It's just been survival mode throughout the pandemic," she said. "I want to get to thriving mode, hopefully soon." — AFP



A King's Guard soldier walks along the lawn covered with flowers at the Windsor Castle in Windsor, England on the day of the state funeral for Queen Elizabeth II. — AFP

Flowers left for Queen Elizabeth to be composted, re-used in parks

The sea of floral tributes left in London's parks for Queen Elizabeth II will be composted and re-used on planting projects, the city's Royal Parks said Tuesday. A huge volume of flowers have been left in parks across London following the death of Britain's longest-serving monarch, who was laid to rest on Monday. Work to remove the bunches of flowers will begin next Monday, a week after the state funeral for the late sovereign, who died on September 8 aged 96 after 70 years on the throne.

Well-wishers will still be able to leave tributes but bunches of flowers which have already deteriorated will be taken away. The Royal Parks include well-known London green spaces such as Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens and Green Park, which is the scene of the main floral tribute site. The compost will be used on landscaping projects and shrubberies across the parks. — AFP

Theatre project aims to ease isolation of Japan's social recluses

Disillusioned by work and tired of life, Seiji Yoshida withdrew from the world for seven years, but now he's taking part in a play about the experiences of Japan's "hikikomori", or social recluses. The 42-year-old spent most of his thirties shut inside his home. "I was going through the motions of life, but lying to myself. Apart from work, I had nothing. I'd just had enough," he told AFP at a workshop for the international production. Yoshida was among more than a million Japanese aged 15 to 64 who lead highly reclusive lives, withdrawing from all social contact for at least six months, according to a 2020 government estimate.

Through an experimental theatre project, two French artists are hoping to offer

hikikomori-or "shut-ins" as they are often referred to in English-a chance to express themselves and regain self-confidence. Their play "Hiku" to be shown next year in France, Belgium and elsewhere in Europe aims to give hikikomori a platform for self-expression, while respecting their desire for isolation. It features robots controlled by participants at home in Japan and voice recordings of conversations held through bedroom doors. It also includes footage from small but noisy street demonstrations staged by hikikomori who are taking steps towards leaving their confinement-but who feel oppressed by Japan's demanding work culture. "We don't want to be forced to work! Stop oppressing us!" participants chanted at one demonstration filmed in the city of Takatsuki in western Japan. Yoshida, who took part in the protest, told AFP he was "very proud" to be part of the theatre production.

Robot 'avatars'

The producers are working in Takatsuki with a local organization, New Start Kansai, which provides support and company for hikikomori to help them gradually readjust to life in society. "It's a social prob-

lem... but society has made (hikikomori) believe that the problem comes from them," said Atsutoshi Takahashi, a mediator at the association. Nicolas Tajan, a psychoanalyst and associate professor at Kyoto University, said hikikomori often faced difficulties in childhood. In Japan, "childhood and adolescent psychological difficulties are not addressed and not treated," he told AFP. "That means in adulthood it can crystallise into a type of social withdrawal".

As adults, they face additional problems as they "are looked down on because they don't work," he added, noting that "work is really a very important part of Japanese identity." Around a dozen recovering hikikomori are taking part in the project. Some will control robots from 10,000 kilometers (6,200 miles) away during the play, painting messages on the floor and talking to spectators through microphones. The robots are "a sort of avatar" to explore "being present and absent at the same time, a recurring theme for hikikomori," said co-director Eric Minh Cuong Castaing, a visual artist and dancer. He hopes the production will help audiences reflect on their own lives, arguing that while hikiko-

mori are sometimes regarded as weak, their actions represent a kind of resistance to being "a soldier in a suit and tie".

'Prejudices'

When the French artists began researching the project in Japan, they took time to build connections with the isolated people introduced to them by New Start Kansai. "It was a big challenge for some of them to let us into their homes and speak to us," said co-director Anne-Sophie Turion, who will perform in the play as a narrator. She said being strangers from another country may have made things easier, "because the usual prejudices weren't there." "We found people who we felt closer to than we ever could have imagined."

Recovery can be difficult for hikikomori, who fear once they have withdrawn from society, they won't be allowed back in, psychoanalyst Tajan said. "This reinforces their avoidant behavior." But art can help reclusive individuals "reconnect with creativity" and envisage "another world" beyond psychiatric treatment or re-entering employment, he said. — AFP



Former "hikikomori", or shut-ins, and friends preparing banners at a park ahead of a demonstration in Takatsuki, Osaka prefecture.





Models present creations for Fendi as part of the Women's Spring Summer 2023 fashion week in Milan. — AFP photos



Milan Fashion Week opens with a spring in its step



Chinese buyers are back and business is booming—Milan Fashion Week opens Wednesday on an optimistic note, despite the shadows cast by the soaring cost of energy. Almost 70 catwalk shows and 110 presentations are scheduled over the next six days, featuring the giants of Italian fashion, from Gucci to Fendi, Prada, Versace, Armani, Dolce & Gabbana and Bottega Veneta. The return of a mostly full live program in February after two years of coronavirus was marred by Russia's invasion of Ukraine two days in. But this season the international jet set are back in force, from 300 journalists to 450 buyers expected—including the first Chinese delegation since the pandemic closed borders across the globe.

after the 2020 lockdowns, leading the chamber to forecast annual turnover for 2022 of more than 92 billion euros.

Exports up

There are clouds on the horizon, however, with Europe facing rampant inflation and an energy crisis linked to the Ukraine war. The growth this year is partly explained by the increase in prices but stripping taking that into account, turnover still increased by more than 18 percent, returning to levels seen before the 2008 financial crisis. Exports increased significantly in the first five months of 2022, up 21.9 percent for fashion, and 30.2 percent in related sectors. The US and South Korean markets had the strongest performance, while there were slowdowns in China and in Russia, where the luxury goods industry has been hard hit by Western sanctions.

Exports to Russia fell 26 percent in clothes fashion, 68 percent for jewelry and 56 percent for eyewear. "The energy crisis has a significant impact on fashion because the entire upstream supply chain is energy intensive," Capasa said. "To manufacture fabric or a bag you need raw materials that consume a lot of energy." He said the cost of energy previously made up about 10 percent of the final product, and is now at



Among the key events of spring/summer 2023 are Moncler's 70th birthday celebrations and Ferragamo's catwalk show at the site of its future Milan hotel. Meanwhile a number of personnel changes are causing interest, with Marco de Vincenzo having taken over as new creative director at Etro, Filippo Grazioli at Missoni and Andrea Incontri at Benetton. New faces Valentina Ilardi, Marco Rambaldi and Matty Bovan will also be closely watched as an indication of future trends.

And the mood is upbeat. After the pain of the pandemic, Italian fashion has found its feet again, with industry turnover up by 25 percent in the first half of 2022. It represents "the strongest growth in the sector for 20 years", noted Carlo Capasa, head of Italy's chamber of fashion, at a recent press conference. The growth is similar to that of the first half of 2021, when it rebounded



least 30 percent. "Prices cannot be adjusted indefinitely and that puts companies in the difficult position of asking if it is worth bothering," he said. With Italy facing a new government after elections on Sunday, he expressed hope that "dramatic measures" to help counter rising energy costs. — AFP

Sports

Presidents Cup players tamp down talk of a US blowout

Record five Asians at Presidents Cup sign of golf's growth

News in brief

Federer's farewell match

LONDON: Roger Federer said Wednesday he wants to team up with long-time rival Rafael Nadal for the final match of his career at the Laver Cup in London. The 20-time Grand Slam winner announced last week he intended to retire after the tournament at London's O2 arena, which starts on Friday. Federer, whose last competitive match was a loss to Hubert Hurkacz in last year's Wimbledon quarter-finals, has been struggling with a knee problem. He will play in the doubles on Friday evening but will not play a singles match in London. The Swiss does not yet know whether he will be able to team up with Nadal but said that would be the dream scenario. "Of course, no doubt," he told a packed press conference. "I think it would be quite a unique situation if it were to happen. For as long as we battled together, there was always this respect for one another - our families, our coaching teams, we always got along really well."

Badosa bundled out

TOKYO: Spanish top seed Paula Badosa fell at the first hurdle at the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo on Wednesday, losing 6-3, 6-2 to fast-rising Chinese teenager Zheng Qinwen. World number four Badosa, who was eliminated in the round of 64 at the recent US Open, struggled to gain a foothold against 36th-ranked Zheng and joined number two seed Caroline Garcia in making an early exit from the tournament. Badosa failed to hit a single ace and lost seven straight games before ending a miserable evening in the Japanese capital by swatting a return straight into the ground on match point. The 19-year-old Zheng, who reached the last 32 at the US Open, said her win over Badosa was "not a surprise" for her. "I always know that I have the level," said Zheng. "It's just when to make it. I'm so happy that I can make this match and I want to repeat it again."

Raducanu survives wobble

SEOUL: Former US Open champion Emma Raducanu overcame a late wobble before defeating Japan's 126th-ranked Moyuka Uchijima in her opening match at the Korea Open on Wednesday. The 19-year-old Briton, whose US Open defense collapsed in the first round last month, won 6-2, 6-4 to make the last 16 in Seoul. The sixth seed will face Yanina Wickmayer of Belgium. Raducanu reached a career-high 10th in the world, but is now 77th, having failed to build on her shock success at Flushing Meadows last year. After rattling through the first set, the teenager picked up the pace in the second to surge into a 5-0 lead in less than 20 minutes. A Raducanu double-fault in the sixth game gave Uchijima a whiff of survival and the Japanese won four straight games, before Raducanu finally sealed the match with an ace.

Neuer, Goretzka ruled out

BERLIN: Germany Captain Manuel Neuer and midfielder Leon Goretzka have been ruled out of the upcoming Nations League clashes with Hungary and England after recording positive COVID tests. The news was confirmed by the German team in Frankfurt on Wednesday, where the squad are in training. The pair, who are teammates at Bayern Munich, have left the camp and will not take part in either of the upcoming fixtures. Hoffenheim keeper Oliver Baumann has been called in to replace Neuer, with another player set to be nominated for Goretzka sometime on Wednesday afternoon. Germany's Bild tabloid reports the tests were carried out due to a positive test for a close personal contact of one of the players. Both players tested negative on Monday when they entered camp.

Socrates award for players

BOULOGNE-BILLANCOURT: The Ballon d'Or organisers said on Wednesday they are adding a humanitarian prize to this year's ceremony named for Socrates the elegant Brazil midfielder, who also held a medical degree. "The Socrates Prize will identify the best social initiative by committed champions," said a statement from France Football magazine, which awards the Ballon d'Or. Those initiatives will include those promoting social integration, protection of the environment or aid to groups who are disadvantaged, threatened or victims of conflict. France Football said they chose Socrates, who died in 2011 aged 57, because of his commitment to a campaign he helped organize at his club, Corinthians in Sao Paulo, while Brazil was under a military dictatorship called "Corinthian Democracy". While they were warned to stop interfering in political affairs, the players escaped unpunished because of their high profile and because they focused on introducing democracy only at their club, insisting there was a vote on decisions on how the club was run. — From AFP

CHARLOTTE: There's a blowout expected this week at the Presidents Cup, but you wouldn't know it listening to favored Americans downplay their advantages and the Internationals talk of a stunning upset. The United States boasts 12 of the world's top 25 golfers, including top-ranked Masters champion Scottie Scheffler, for the team showdown that begins Thursday at Quail Hollow.

The Internationals, who counter with five of the world's top 30, lost half a squad with defections to the LIV Golf Series, including British Open winner Cameron Smith, the world number three from Australia. They have eight rookies and a sense of nothing to lose, but it would be an epic shocker for them to defeat one of the best American lineups ever assembled.

"That's on paper. The games aren't played on paper," US captain Davis Love said. "We have a higher-ranked team, but I know a bunch of those young guys on their team and they're going to come in with a chip on their shoulder and together." Internationals captain Trevor Immelman is counting on both. "They will be ready come Thursday because they've got something to prove," Immelman said. "This is the stage to find out if you've got what it takes or not."

"There's a magical amount of respect for the US team. We can see if we can match up with their skills. We can see how good we are. The exciting part for us is it does free us up... have a blast and let 'er rip." The Americans own an 11-1-1 edge in the all-time rivalry, taking the past eight from the global squad. Their only loss came at Melbourne in 1998. "It has stung," said 10th-time starter Adam Scott said of the drought. "It has been frustrating. A lot."

Past Masters winners Scott and Hideki Matsuyama and South Koreans Im sung-jae and Kim Si-woo are the only Internationals players with Presidents Cup experience. They are joined by rookies Kim Joo-hyung, Lee Kyoung-hoon, Corey Conners, Taylor Pendrith, Cameron Davis, Sebastian Munoz, Mito Pereira and Christiaan Bezuidenhout. "I still remain incredibly optimistic that we have a shot," Scott said. "I'm leaning into the younger guys."

USA likely to start basketball WCup with just 7 players

SYDNEY: The United States could begin their bid to win a fourth straight women's basketball World Cup on Thursday with just seven players, but coach Cheryl Reeve is adamant they can cope. Their 12-strong roster features five players who took part in the WNBA Finals and are currently making the long trek to Australia. The coach said the quintet - Chelsea Gray, Kelsey Plum, A'ja Wilson, Brianna Jones and Alyssa Thomas - would be allowed to recharge and acclimatise after the Las Vegas Aces

PGA players say LIV must wait, change for world ranking

CHARLOTTE: PGA players at the Presidents Cup pushed back Tuesday on a call by Saudi-backed LIV Golf Series players for world ranking points, saying they must wait and make major changes. In an open letter to rankings board chairman Peter Dawson, all 48 players in last week's Chicago Invitational asked for retroactive recognition of the 54-hole, shotgun start events.

"An OWGR (Official World Golf Rankings) without LIV would be incomplete and inaccurate," the players said, comparing it to England, Argentina and Belgium being left out of the FIFA rankings. But Billy Horschel, a rookie on the US squad facing the Internationals at this week's team matches in Charlotte, said LIV doesn't meet the criteria for ranking points and players knew the risks when they left the PGA for the record riches on offer from the upstart series.

"I know it's a year to an 18-month process before they even get world ranking points. So just wait it out. Meet the criteria," Horschel said. "They don't meet, from what I've been told, the first nine things on the criteria list. They don't have an average field size of 78. They don't have a cut. They don't have open qualifying. They don't award points or spots to local qualifiers. They don't have a Q-School. All

'Gentle soul' Griner's fate on USA minds at basketball World Cup

SYDNEY: Coach Cheryl Reeve admitted Wednesday the fate of "gentle soul" Brittney Griner was weighing heavily on the USA team at the basketball World Cup in Sydney and the jailed star's number 15 jersey would not be worn at the tournament. Griner, a standout when they won gold at the Tokyo Olympics last year, would normally be with the squad as they attempt to claim a fourth straight title and 11th overall, starting Thursday against Belgium.

But the 31-year-old is instead in a Russian prison, sentenced to nine years in a penal colony after being arrested at a Moscow airport in



CHARLOTTE: Scottie Scheffler (right) of the United States Team chips with coach Randy Smith during a practice round prior to the 2022 Presidents Cup at Quail Hollow Country Club. —AFP

Their enthusiasm and excitement is good for a long fart like me to see."

Three-time major winner Jordan Spieth, who makes a US-best fourth start, has seen rivals win titles this year, including Matsuyama, Lee and Kim Joo-hyung. "If you look at the guys on their team, they have been on great form the past six months," he said. "Every one has either won or almost won a tournament."

Record five Asians

Meanwhile, a record five Asian players will be part of the Internationals lineup attempting to pull off an upset over the United States at the Presidents Cup starting on Thursday. Japan's Hideki Matsuyama, the 2021 Masters champion, is joined by a record four South Koreans - Im Sung-jae, Kim Joo-hyung, Lee Kyoung-hoon and Kim Si-woo in

sealed the WNBA Finals 3-1 against the Connecticut Sun on Monday. "We're giving them the time that they need because they are making huge sacrifices to jump on a plane right after a grueling series and a grueling WNBA season," Reeve said.

The USA coach said they would be short-handed for their opener against Belgium on Thursday and possibly again on Friday against Puerto Rico. "A full roster has been named but whether all the players will be present, that is not likely," said Reeve. "It's a fluid process and for me as a coach when they show up for practice, then I know they're there. For now, we'll go with what we have and when some of those players start to come here, we'll be able to get them up to speed very quickly."

"I mean it'll be a factor, for sure, the short-term situation. You get through those games as best you can and then obviously they'll be able to feature a

little bit more as the competition goes on."

the Internationals team at Quail Hollow. While the larger than usual Asian contingent owes something to the slew of players who are unavailable due to signing with LIV golf, Internationals captain Trevor Immelman believes it also highlights the rise of Asian golf. "It's a nod and a testament to the work countries have done at the grass-roots level," Immelman said. "It's exciting for me to see the explosion. It's working."

Immelman has been able to blend players from vastly different cultures and unite them as a team. "You do it in a very simple way - spend more time together," Immelman said. "They start to learn to love each other and once that happens it's easy." Kim Joo-Hyung, who won his first PGA title last month at nearby Greensboro, has enjoyed being among eight rookies on this year's squad. "Can't put it into words. Everyone is just fired up," he said. — AFP

dominant Americans, gunning for an 11th title overall, are already without retired legends Sue Bird and Diana Taurasi, while Brittney Griner continues to languish in a Russian jail. But Breanna Stewart, Jewell Loyd, Kahleah Copper and Ariel Atkins all played in their Tokyo Olympic gold medal-winning side last year.

Stewart, the MVP at the last World Cup, is at her third consecutive World Cup, while Loyd, Plum and Wilson are playing their second after beating Australia to win gold in 2018. The rest are making their World Cup debuts. "Whatever numbers we have, we'll go with it," said Stewart. "We'll make sure our schemes are right, our scouting report is right, not look at the disadvantage," she said. "We know we have reinforcements coming and we just need to hold it down till then." — AFP



CHARLOTTE: Billy Horschel of the United States Team plays an approach shot on the 15th hole as fans look on during a practice round prior to the 2022 Presidents Cup at Quail Hollow Country Club. —AFP

these things that they don't have."

The move comes as LIV Golf chairman Greg Norman visits US lawmakers in Washington this week to discuss the upstart circuit and its anti-trust lawsuit against the US PGA Tour. But he'll also get questions about Saudi Arabia's human rights record. Obtaining world golf ranking points is vital for LIV players if they hope to qualify for majors based upon their world ranking, a pivotal step in playing in future major championships.

February for possessing vape cartridges with a small amount of cannabis oil. Reeve said Griner would be "top of mind" throughout the 10-day tournament, and revealed players had been in touch with her to send messages of support. "The mindset is just trying to stay strong for her and doing what we can," Reeve said, describing Griner as "a gentle soul, just full of love."

She added that players had been able to communicate with their teammate via email, sending "messages of love and support and strength". "It's on their minds every day. It's heavy, it is really, really heavy especially as we participate in this USA basketball competition," she added. "She's such a big part of many of our lives, so it's challenging." No USA team member will don Griner's number 15 jersey in Sydney. "To keep Brittney top of mind, no one will wear the number 15. That will be the first way to honor her and keep her in our thoughts," said Reeve. — AFP



MOSCOW: In this file photo, US Women National Basketball Association's (WNBA) basketball player Brittney Griner is escorted to the courtroom to hear the court's final decision in Khimki outside Moscow. —AFP

Sports

Storm clouds gather over France team ahead of World Cup defense

French Football Federation locked in a row over image rights

SAINT-DENIS: Just two months before France begin their defense of the World Cup, the mood around the team is in stark contrast to the celebrations that followed their win over Croatia in the 2018 final. The clouds have been gathering over coach Didier Deschamps and his squad as key players struggle with injuries and personal problems.

Meanwhile the French Football Federation (FFF) is locked in a row over image rights with its biggest star and its president faces accusations of inappropriate behavior. It all threatens to derail France's campaign in Qatar. More immediately, they go into their final matches before the World Cup this week against Austria and Denmark in the UEFA Nations League with a depleted squad. Paul Pogba, a goalscorer in the 4-2 win over Croatia in 2018, is among the players sidelined.

As the Juventus star battles to recover from knee surgery he has filed a complaint with Italian prosecutors saying he was the target of a 13 million-euro (\$13m) blackmail plot. Pogba's brother Mathias is one of five people charged and detained in the case. Paul Pogba reportedly told investigators he was effectively kidnapped by childhood acquaintances and threatened by two men in balaclavas carrying assault rifles, who accused him of not having helped them financially.

The ex-Manchester United midfielder also said the blackmailers wanted to discredit him by claiming he asked a witch doctor to cast a spell on Kylian Mbappe, another 2018 World Cup hero. "It is his word against his brother's. I am going to trust my teammate," Mbappe said recently of Pogba and those claims. "I think it's in the interests of the national team as well with a big tournament coming up."

Mbeumo eyes WCup place with Cameroon

JOHANNESBURG: France-born English Premier League forward Bryan Mbeumo hopes switching national team loyalty to Cameroon can win him a place at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Brentford star Mbeumo is one of many wanting to impress from Thursday as the five African qualifiers - Cameroon, Ghana, Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia - play two warm-up matches each. Brighton defender Tariq Lamptey and Athletic Bilbao forward Inaki Williams, both born in Europe to Ghanaian parents, are among others taking advantage of a FIFA rule that permits changing allegiance.

An increasing number of footballers from Europe are choosing to represent the African country where their parents or grandparents were born. Opponents for the African quintet between Thursday and Tuesday range from record five-time World Cup winners Brazil to Nicaragua, ranked 139th in the world. Here, AFP Sport reveals how the qualifiers are shaping up for the last international window until club football halts just seven days before the World Cup kicks off on November 20.

Cameroon

Apart from selecting Mbeumo for the first time, coach Rigobert Song has recalled Nicolas Nkoulou and George Mandjeck for matches in South Korea against the host nation and Uzbekistan. Defender Nkoulou last lined up for the Indomitable Lions five

'Super-hot' title race heads to first Japan MotoGP since COVID

MOTEGI: A thrilling MotoGP season moves to Japan this weekend after world champion Fabio Quartararo crashed in Aragon to blow the title race wide open with five grands prix to go. The Frenchman still heads the standings but his lead has been slashed to 10 points by hard-charging Italian Francesco Bagnaia and Spain's Aleix Espargaro is also firmly in the title hunt. Ducati rider Bagnaia had ramped up the pressure on Yamaha's Quartararo by winning four races in a row going into last weekend at Aragon, Spain, where Quartararo made a spectacular and painful first-lap exit after clipping the Honda of six-time world champion Marc Marquez.

Bagnaia was denied a fifth straight win by Enea Bastianini on the last lap after a nerve-jangling duel, but second place was good enough to tighten the squeeze on the shaken Quartararo and the Italian now has all the momentum. "I gave my best and I would like to have another fight in Japan,"

Mbappe dispute

Mbappe himself is involved in a row with the FFF that risks damaging squad morale. On Monday, their get-together at the chateau of Clairefontaine, an hour's drive from Paris, was overshadowed by Mbappe's refusal to participate in a photo shoot because of the FFF's unwillingness to modify an agreement regarding players' image rights.

The Paris Saint-Germain superstar has boycotted a shoot before, and on Monday the federation responded quickly, promising to "revise as soon as possible the agreement". Mbappe's representatives insisted the matter "obviously does not call into question his total commitment and determination to contribute to the collective success of the national team".

Meanwhile, the FFF's veteran 80-year-old president is in the firing line. Noel Le Graet was last week summoned to a meeting with the country's Sports Minister, Amelie Oudea-Castera. The government then announced it was launching an audit of the federation. That came after So Foot magazine published accusations that the FFF suffered from organizational problems and that some former employees had alleged they had not been treated properly.

One accusation is that Le Graet sent text messages of a salacious nature to female employees. The federation has launched legal action against the magazine. Le Graet told Le Monde newspaper this month that "there aren't any text messages". He has not yet replied to AFP's request for a comment on the allegations. "It's not the calmest atmosphere that I have known," admitted Deschamps. "But it is not unsettling for me. My staff and I are focused on

what is happening on the pitch." years ago and midfielder Mandjeck has not featured for the five-time African champions since 2019. "We need experienced players like Nicolas and George, who will help our new generation of players grow. They are passionate and patriotic," said Song.

Ghana

Ghana have included Lamptey, Williams and former Germany youth international Stephan Ambrosius and Ransford-Yeboah Koningsdorffer for matches against Brazil and Nicaragua in France and Spain. There is also a place in the squad for Southampton defender Mohammed Salisu, who was born in Ghana but declined previous call-ups, saying he wanted to concentrate on his club career. Coach Otto Addo, mastermind of a shock qualification at the expense of Nigeria, has picked five Premier League players, including Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey and Crystal Palace forward Jordan Ayew.

Morocco

Most attention will be on Chelsea winger Hakim Ziyech when six-time World Cup qualifiers Morocco tackle Chile and Paraguay at Spanish venues. He has been recalled by new coach Walid Regragui after being shunned by Bosnian Vahid Halilhodzic, who accused the Premier League player of being "untruthful" and "a trouble maker". "We look forward to the Hakim that all Moroccans love, the one who fights on the pitch and gives everything for his country," said former international Regragui. —AFP

Senegal

African champions Senegal have been hit by a

said the 25-year-old Bagnaia, who is chasing a first MotoGP world title.

The Italian said he was happy to settle for the 20 points that came with finishing second rather than risk going for broke in the pursuit of 25 points for the win. Just 17 points divide the top three in the title race heading to Motegi for the first MotoGP in Japan since the pandemic. Bastianini is not out of the championship fight in fourth, 48 points behind Quartararo. Bagnaia, though, is uneasy about any title talk.

"For sure now we are more close and now we can speak more about the championship, but I don't want to," he said. "I want to do more weekends in Japan like we are doing this second part of the championship and see what happens. "I know that our potential is so high but it's three years since we went there so it will be tough at the start." While Bagnaia was being circumspect, Aprilia Racing's Espargaro is relishing being in the mix for his first MotoGP world title. "The championship is getting super hot," the 33-year-old said after coming third in Aragon behind Ducati duo Bastianini and Bagnaia.

He believes that Bagnaia is the man to beat and "now riding better than us". "He has the best bike



YVELINES: (From left) France's head coach Guy Stephan, France's head coach Didier Deschamps and France's physical trainer Cyril Moine arrive for a training session in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines on September 20, 2022 as part of the team's preparation for the upcoming UEFA Nations League. — AFP

what is happening on the pitch."

Chance for emerging stars?

Nevertheless, his squad will be without key players Hugo Lloris, N'Golo Kante and Karim Benzema, as well as Pogba, for the upcoming games. Just five players from the 2018 final are involved, including recalled veteran Olivier Giroud. Among the other members of the 2018 squad, Manchester City

defender Benjamin Mendy is on trial in England charged with a number of sexual offences.

Mendy last played for France in November 2019. Les Bleus went out of Euro 2020 to Switzerland in the last 16 but bounced back to win the Nations League last year. That latter victory showcased the benefits of recalling Benzema - himself recently given a suspended sentence for complicity in a bid to blackmail a teammate. — AFP



LONDON: Brentford's French midfielder Bryan Mbeumo (left) heads the ball towards goal, but fails to score during the English Premier League football match between Brentford and Arsenal at the Gtech Community Stadium in London on September 18, 2022. — AFP

string of blows before facing Bolivia and fellow qualifiers Iran in France and Slovakia. Bayern Munich full-back Bouna Sarr will miss Qatar due to knee surgery and forward Keita Balde can only play at the World Cup after the second round due to an anti-doping violation. A further concern for coach Aliou Cisse is defender Noah Fadiga - the son of 2002 Senegal World Cup midfielder Khalidou - who suffered concussion playing in France last weekend. —AFP



ARAGON: Yamaha French rider Fabio Quartararo rides his bike during the MotoGP fourth free practice session ahead of the Moto Grand Prix of Aragon at the Motorland circuit in Alcaniz. — AFP

and is riding at a really, really high level so it's not going to be easy for Fabio and me," said Espargaro. "But this is MotoGP you never know what can happen. "Now we are going to very strange circuits, far from Europe with different temperatures, with different (tyre) grip so anything can happen." —AFP

Australian Rules club hit by 'heartbreaking' mistreatment claims

SYDNEY: Australian Rules' chief executive said Wednesday it was "hard to find more serious allegations" after a top club was accused of separating Indigenous players from their families and pressuring one couple to have an abortion. In the latest racially tinged scandal to hit Australia's most popular spectator sport, Hawthorn Football Club said an internal investigation into how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players were treated had raised "disturbing" historical claims. The club did not go into detail, saying the matters were "confidential".

But public broadcaster ABC reported harrowing accounts of young Indigenous players pressured to end contact with their families and focus on their sporting careers. The ABC said in a period about a decade ago, players were relocated away from family and pressed to change their mobile phone numbers. One allegation related to a prospective father who told the club he and his partner were expecting a child and was advised to terminate the pregnancy. "At face value it's hard to find more serious allegations," Australian Football League (AFL) chief Gillon McLachlan said.

"There are so many people hurting today and have been hurting for a long time. As a game we will do everything to ensure the hurt you experienced is not a hurt experienced by others," McLachlan said an external panel of four independent, appropriately qualified people would conduct a separate investigation for the AFL. "We need to run a proper investigation to get to the bottom of it and this is important out of respect for those making the allegations and out of respect for those being accused," he said.

Hawthorn, the 13-time premierships-winning side with the Latin motto translated as "let us be judged by our acts" - are based in Melbourne. Allegations of separating Indigenous players from their families and forced estrangement are particularly sensitive in Australia. Until the 1970s, white-dominated Australian governments forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their parents in an attempt to eradicate Indigenous cultures.

Indigenous AFL legend and former "Australian of the Year" Adam Goodes retired in 2015 after being subjected to months of racially motivated booing by spectators. In 2021, the president of top Australian Rules side Collingwood resigned after evidence of systemic racism at the club. Hawthorn chief Justin Reeve backed the AFL's independent investigation, calling the findings of their internal review "heart-breaking". Asked whether Hawthorn had a culture problem, Reeve replied: "I think Australia has a culture problem, historically, and I think like all of us, we focus on every day being better and building a great environment for our club. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics	
Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9
Clinics	
Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Michelle Henry Fernandes, holder of passport No. T5337449, do hereby change my name to Michelle Antonet D'Costa for all purposes. I will henceforth be known by the name of Michelle Antonet D'Costa and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C# 2405) — 20-09-2022
Yalla Venkatamma holder of Passport No. L1432096 do hereby change my name to Konka Parvathi given name Yalla Venkatamma surname all purposes I will henceforth be. (C# 2406) — 21-09-2022

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Villa in Jabriya
For rent in Surra One floor Flat for rent in Jabriya, Salwa and Salmiya
One floor in Surra
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24911325



LUSAIL: This picture shows the Katara Towers in the Qatari coastal city of Lusail ahead of the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup. —AFP

Two months from WCup, Qatar emerge from training lockdown

Qatar says no 'discrimination' in bid to ease World Cup doubts

DOHA: Qatar's World Cup team will emerge from four months in near-lockdown on Friday to take on Canada with most of their fans nervously watching from afar. All their games since June 2 have been behind closed doors and the Qatar Football Association has even kept sponsors away from training camps in Spain and Austria as they prepare players for a baptism of fire—a World Cup debut on home territory—in 60 days.

Having spent tens of billions of dollars preparing for the first World Cup in an Arab nation, Qatar is desperate to see the national side get past the first round where they are grouped with Netherlands, Senegal and Ecuador. But they lost 3-0 to a Croatia under-23 team behind closed doors on Tuesday. And while public games in Vienna against Canada on Friday and Chile on Tuesday are only friendlies, they will still be seen as a key test of how much steel Spanish coach Felix Sanchez has put into the side.

Team spokesman Ali Salat told AFP that Sanchez and the QFA had agreed to keep the 30 players away from Qatar and the prying eyes of intrigued rivals. "The coach and the federation were in discussion over the past season. This was agreed." Sanchez and the players will briefly return to Qatar in early October and will hold an open training session before returning to Spain for more isolation before the World Cup starts, Salat said. Qatar are the bottom ranked team in Group A - 48th on

FIFA's list. Sanchez was named coach in 2017 on a mission to make an impact this year.

'They need to sacrifice'

Qatar failed to reach the 2018 World Cup but won the Asian Cup in 2019 and reached the semi-finals of the CONCACAF Gold Cup last year. With many eyes on 2019 Asian player of the year Akram Afif, Qatar's fans are praying for a repeat of South Korea's dream run to the World Cup semi-finals when they co-hosted the event in 2002. Former national player Mohamed Mubarak Al-Mohannadi said Qatar must beat Ecuador in the opening game on November 20 to stand a chance of reaching the last 16.

"They are preparing for a World Cup for the first time in their lives. These players are sacrificing their time, they are staying away from home, from their families," Mohannadi told AFP. "To go abroad for this amount of time is difficult but the players know their mission. The federation and coaches explained it and they are ready. They need to sacrifice. "Qatar people will come out to support but they want to see quality football that they can cheer and be proud of."

Mohannadi believes that the World Cup will provide a crucial boost to the Qatari league which has been dominated by Al-Sadd and Al-Duhail for the past five years. Both have slumped this season, however, as key players are with the national

squad. Stadium crowds have increased and Mohannadi said this was because other teams are getting a chance to win. "If my team can come close to a top place I would be happy and I will take my family to support them. If they are losing no-one wants to go to the stadium. Now more people are enjoying the stadiums."

No 'discrimination'

Meanwhile, Qatar's ruler said Tuesday that all fans will be welcomed to this year's World Cup "without discrimination" in a bid to ease fears. Homosexuality is illegal in the Gulf state and organizers have battled to reassure rights groups that same sex couples would not face action at the tournament that starts November 20.

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani told the UN General Assembly that Qatar's people would be "opening our doors for all (fans) without discrimination to enjoy the football matches and the amazing atmosphere of the tournament." "The Qatari people will receive with open arms football fans from all walks of life," the Amir told the assembly of world leaders, without mentioning any specific group. "The world will see that one of the small and medium-size countries is able to host global events with exceptional success, in addition to its ability to provide a spacious ambience for diversity and constructive interaction between peoples."

The host nation has struggled to convince rights



NEW YORK: Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani speaks at the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) at UN headquarters on September 20, 2022 in New York City. —AFP

groups with its message that "all will be welcome" despite the law. Organizing committee and government officials have said that the million plus fans expected to attend the World Cup should respect local cultural norms. "We don't believe in public displays of affection but we are also ingrained towards welcoming everyone from all backgrounds," organizing committee chief Hassan Al-Thawadi told a New York conference on Monday when asked about LGBTQ fans. —AFP

Top seeds fall on day of Tokyo tennis shocks

TOKYO: Top seed Paula Badosa joined US Open semi-finalist Caroline Garcia and Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina in making shock early exits from the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo on Wednesday. World number four Badosa lost 6-3, 6-2 to fast-rising Chinese teenager Zheng Qinwen, failing to hit a single ace and losing seven straight games.

Badosa, who had a bye into the second round, compounded a miserable evening in the Japanese capital by swatting a return straight into the ground on match point. The 19-year-old Zheng, who reached the last 32 at the US Open, said her win over Badosa was "a big jump" after beginning the year ranked number 126 in the world.

"There was a lot of emotion there on court—even though the score was like this, it wasn't an easy win," said Zheng, who will

play American Claire Liu in the quarter-finals. "I always know that I have the level to be here—it's just that I have to show up on court in the tournament." Number two seed Garcia put up a fight but still crashed out in her first match, squandering a match point to be ousted 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/5) by China's Zhang Shuai.

France's Garcia has been in red-hot form, winning the Cincinnati Masters last month before reaching her first Grand Slam semi-final at Flushing Meadows two weeks ago. But she came up short against world number 28 Zhang in Tokyo despite hitting 27 aces—the best on the WTA tour this year—and holding a match point at 5-4 in the second set. Zhang fought back to level the match via a tiebreak before munching on a sandwich during the changeover.

It seemed to energise Zhang as she outlasted Garcia in the final set, taking it on her second match point when the Frenchwoman hit long after two hours and 30 minutes. "It was not the best tennis I can play but I really tried hard and kept fighting," said Garcia. "She just got better at the end and it was a few points here and there." Zhang will now face either

sixth seed Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic or Croatia's Petra Martic in the quarter-finals.

Hectic schedule

Kazakhstan's Rybakina lost 6-2, 6-4 to Russia's Liudmila Samsonova just one day after arriving in Tokyo as a late wild card. Rybakina, who was drafted in when countrywoman Yulia Putintseva tested positive for COVID, said her hectic schedule had been "very tough". "I felt that if I stayed here for maybe a few more days it would be much better, especially as I was closer in the second set so I started to play better and better," she said.

"But I just came from another tournament and I played a lot, so it was a question of it being not easy physically." Number three seed Garbine Muguruza advanced with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Greek qualifier Despina Papamichail. The two-time Grand Slam champion said she wanted to end a "roller-coaster" season with "a different feeling", and will face Samsonova or Xinyu Wang in the quarter-finals.

"I think also trying and trying and trying, at some point I will get rewarded," said former world number one Muguruza.



TOKYO: Paula Badosa of Spain serves a ball to Zheng Qinwen of China during their women's singles match on day three of the Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament in Tokyo on September 21, 2022. —AFP

Japan's Naomi Osaka will return to action on Thursday when she faces Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia in the second round. Osaka advanced when her first-round

opponent, Australia's Daria Saville, retired after tearing an anterior cruciate ligament in her knee just seven minutes into their match on Tuesday. —AFP