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UK to issue 'hundreds' of new oil, gas licenses in North Sea

UAE oil giant pledges to 'accelerate' zero-carbon plan



A section of the BP ETAP (Eastern Trough Area Project) oil platform is seen in the North Sea, around 100 miles east of Aberdeen, Scotland on Feb 24, 2014. — AFP

LONDON/DUBAI: The UK government said Monday it would issue "hundreds" of new oil and gas licenses in the North Sea to secure energy reserves while still aiming for net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The announcement angered environmental groups and comes amid an internal debate within the ruling Conservative party on green policies. The main opposition Labour party has said it will not issue any new North Sea drilling licenses if it regains power in a general election due next year. "Investment in the North Sea will continue to unlock new projects, protect jobs, reduce emissions and boost UK energy independence," Downing Street said in a statement. Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February last year saw a global surge in energy prices as Western nations imposed sanctions against Moscow, targeting in particular its massive oil and gas exports.

On a visit to Scotland, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the licensing decision was "entirely consistent with transitioning to net zero". He said that even if Britain achieves net zero by mid-century, around a quarter of its energy needs will still come from oil and gas. "What is important then is that we get that oil and gas in the best possible way. And that means getting it from here at home better for our energy security, not reliant on foreign dictators, better for jobs... but also better for the climate," Sunak added. A study released Monday by the North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) said the carbon footprint from domestic UK gas production was one-fourth the footprint from imported liquefied natural gas. But the licensing announcement prompted a backlash from environmental groups with

Greenpeace calling it a "deliberate attempt to polarize the climate debate in the UK and score cheap political points". Hugo Tagholm, director of Oceana UK, an ocean advocacy organization, said the decision was a "betrayal of the British people" showing "no regard for a future for our children and generations to come". "July was the hottest month ever because of burning fossil fuels," Just Stop Oil, which wants the UK government to end all new oil and gas exploration, said. "Sunak is worse than a war criminal. He knows new oil and gas will impose unimaginable suffering and destroy the lives and livelihoods of billions of people," the group added. Also on Monday, the government confirmed plans to build two more carbon-capture facilities along the North Sea coast, at Acorn in northeast Scotland and

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Assembly to debate key issues before term ends on Wed

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly holds special sessions on Thursday and Wednesday to debate the second reading to the draft law for the establishment of a high election commission. It is also scheduled to debate the financial state of the country in a closed session, when the finance minister will present the state of the country's finances, including the performance of the sovereign wealth fund, which has assets worth over \$800 billion.

The Assembly is also due to close its first shortened term on Wednesday as the Cabinet on Monday approved an Amiri decree declaring the end of the first term of the Assembly elected on June 6. Last week, the Assembly overwhelmingly approved the first reading of amendments to the election law, which call for the establishment of the high election commission for the first time in the country. Only one lawmaker out of 57 present objected to the law.

MPs have also submitted a series of proposals to amend the draft law before it is debated and approved by the Assembly for the second and final reading. Other clauses in the proposed law call for pardoning political prisoners who were jailed or convicted for offending HH the Amir. This will allow them to run for public office. A large number of former opposition MPs are expected to benefit from the amendment and be allowed to contest future parliamentary elections.

MPs have proposed to lower the voting age to 18 from the current 21 and lift a ban on the voting by servicemen in the armed forces and the police force. Members of the national guard are allowed to vote. MP Marzouq Al-Ghanem has proposed to amend a clause requiring

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Lebanon's central bank chief leaves with no successor

BEIRUT: The central bank chief of crisis-torn Lebanon, Riad Salameh, who is wanted for alleged financial crimes in several European countries, handed over his post Monday with no designated successor in place. First vice-governor Wassim Manssouri, who will temporarily take over, warned that "we are at a crossroad" and urged politicians to implement reforms demanded by the International Monetary Fund in return for a bail-out loan.

"This is the country's last chance," Manssouri said at a press conference, as Lebanon has endured a four year economic crisis that the World Bank has la-

belled one of the worst in modern history. Lebanon's deeply divided political class has failed to agree on a permanent replacement for Salameh, 73, creating another power vacuum in a country that also has no president and is ruled by a caretaker government.

Salameh, who held the post for 30 years, is a key figure of the Lebanese political elite widely blamed for the country's economic meltdown that has seen the currency collapse and poverty rates soar. The central bank has extended credit lines from its depleted coffers to the cash-strapped state mainly to pay government employees, subsidize some medicine and finance the country's security forces.

Manssouri proposed to cut all central bank funding for the state while reforms are implemented, to save what is left of its depleted cash reserves. "We can either stick to the old policies, and we have seen the result... or adopt a new approach and stop funding the state completely," he said. Manssouri said halting funding was crucial to preserve

Amid scrutiny, UAE sets up anti-money laundering bodies

DUBAI: The UAE announced plans on Sunday to establish judicial bodies to prosecute money laundering and financial crime following increased monitoring by a global watchdog dedicated to battling illicit cash flows. The official WAM news agency reported that the United Arab Emirates has approved a "proposal to establish federal prosecution entities specialized in economic crimes and money laundering".

It said the move "represents a first step towards investigating and cracking down on" shady financial transactions. The proposal calls for the "creation of prosecution offices specialized in" illicit finance. It comes more than a year after the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) added the UAE to a "grey list" of nations subject to greater oversight because of concerns over illicit finance.

The FATF listing in March 2022 came as a blow to the UAE's reputation as a major financial and business hub. The watchdog has since upheld its decision, but a June report noted improved efforts in the UAE to tackle shortcomings. The step announced on Sunday aims to enhance "the confidence of international investors in the UAE's business environment" and encourage "them to bring their businesses to the UAE", WAM said.

the central bank's depleted reserves, which according to the IMF have plunged from \$36 billion in 2017 to \$10 billion.

Authorities must meanwhile implement reforms, including passing a 2023 budget, a capital control law and bank restructuring in the next six months, Manssouri said. Reforms should be rolled out as part of a six-month "transitional plan", to be approved by parliament and the government, he said. Manssouri stayed on the job after threatening to quit because the divided political leadership had promised to support him and his plans, according to local media.

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Riad Salameh

Iraq searches for cure amid drug crisis

BAGHDAD: Mohammed has been taking nearly a dozen captagon pills daily for seven years. Now, as Iraq grapples with a major drug crisis, the 23-year-old hopes for a fresh start. Iraq, which borders with Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia, has long been a transit country for the region's ballooning trade in the amphetamine-type drug and other narcotics. But in recent years, Iraq it-

self has witnessed a dramatic spike in drug abuse, prompting authorities to search for answers, both by cracking down on traffickers and by providing help to addicts.

Methamphetamine, or crystal meth, originating in Afghanistan or Iran, is among the most common drugs in Iraq today, alongside captagon, which is produced on an industrial scale in Syria and trafficked via Iraq to Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich Gulf states where it has gained notorious popularity. Mohammed, who asked to use a pseudonym, is one of about 40 patients being treated at a rehabilitation clinic which the Iraqi health ministry

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BAGHDAD: Patients exercise at the Al-Canal Center for Social Rehabilitation on July 11, 2023. — AFP



Morocco seeks to advance ties with Kuwait to higher levels

Kuwaiti-British joint steering group to meet in October in UK



Ambassadors and officials stand for the national anthem during the reception.



Officials are seen at the reception. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

In my view

Arab culture, entertainment



Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

There is a culture of laughter and entertainment, and this is the most traditional culture among people. We can say this type of culture is found around the world, without any society claiming any credit for creating it.

As I lived in Japan for a while, I found two types of entertainment methods in the Japanese society that are similar to what we have in our Arab societies. In Arab countries, the "storyteller" is a character embodied by many over many years, and it is a profession known in countries of the Levant since the start of the 19th century, and gained major popularity, making them part of the popular heritage in these countries. Damascus was famous for its many storytellers, as there was not a café in old Damascus without a storyteller.

Also, other Arab countries like Egypt, Morocco and Gulf countries had such a tradition. Kuwaiti actor Ibrahim Al-Sallal succeeded in embodying the storyteller character in Bint Al-Khabbaz (Daughter of the Baker), in the famous Kuwaiti series Al-Aqdar (The Fates). In Japan too they have the culture of storyteller, and it is said this started during the Edo era (1603-1868) and continues until now in general without change.

The storyteller sits on a square cushion called a zabuton, wearing traditional Japanese attire, on a simple stage. He holds a paper fan to knock at the table to draw the audience's attention or for sound effects suitable with the scene he talks about. The entertaining story he tells is often ramified and has many characters, but the storyteller is the one who says all dialogues between the various characters using his skills in changing the tone of his voice to take the role of the characters, and the story ends with a moral the storyteller wants to deliver to people.

In Japan, there is a type of comedy, similar to what we have, which is the "manzai". It began a long time ago, going back to the Heian era (794-1192), and evolved over time to become during the '30s of the last century as it is now, where two persons stand in front of the audience wearing modern fashionable attire with a microphone between them and exchange funny conversations, and during the dialogue between them, each one plays a role that is different than the other.

One of them called "boke" and his role is to say stuff that is strange, abnormal, unexpected or imagined in an answer to his colleague's questions, or commenting on what he says in order to make the audience laugh. The other is called "tsukkomi", and his role is to bring back his colleague to the right path and correct what he says or draw his attention to the wrong things he says in a sarcastic and humorous manner.

This Japanese comic style was successfully used in some Arab countries, particularly in Egypt, as one creates stories that are far from reality, and the other objects and become excited over the lies he hears. The most famous people who performed this style are actors Hamad Ahmad, known as Abu Lamaah, and Mohammad Fuad Ratib, known as Al-Khawajah Bijou. Abu Lamaah goes too far in exaggerating, so Al-Khawajah Bijou explodes with objection, so both get the audience to laugh. The culture of entertainment is similar between us Arabs and the Japanese, and we hope that serious work culture also becomes similar between us and them.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Morocco to Kuwait held a reception on Sunday on the occasion of the 24th anniversary of King Mohammed VI's ascension to the throne at Palm Hotel. During his opening remarks, Moroccan Ambassador Ali Ibn Issa said the Kingdom of Morocco has continued its success with a clear strategic vision to develop industry and make it a major source of jobs and a catalyst for productive investment. "These efforts were accompanied by the provision of a modern network of industrial, logistical and energy infrastructure aimed at improving the business climate and raising competitiveness that made the country rank on the top of the industrialization index," he said.

The ambassador praised the long-standing and strong relations between Morocco and Kuwait. "The beginning of economic cooperation started in the '90s of the last century through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. These relations developed over the years at the political and economic level, and further developed recently through the exchange of delegations between the two countries in the fields of education, sports and culture," he said.

"We are working under the directives of the leaderships of the two countries to advance these relations to higher levels. We are currently in the process of preparing for two economic and cultural events by the end of this year to advance bilateral relations. Last year, we witnessed the inauguration of a direct air route by Kuwait Airways between Morocco and Kuwait, which contributed to facilitating travel between the two countries and increasing the number of tourists and businessmen," Issa said.

Chest Hospital uses moxibustion to treat 14 critical VT cases

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Head of the cardiology department at the Chest Hospital Dr Abdullah Al-Enezi said the hospital succeeded in treating 14 critical cases of Ventricular Tachycardia (V-tach) with the moxibustion program and support of "Venoarterial extracorporeal membrane oxygenation" (VA ECMO), which is considered the first of its kind in Kuwait and GCC. Al-Enezi said some heart patients suffer from critical Ventricular Tachycardia, that threatens their lives, and are treated with the use of moxibustion technology by catheterization, yet some patients suffer from severe weakness in their heart muscle, and it is not possible to carry out the moxibustion process due to its high risk.

He said, that for the treatment of such difficult cases, there was cooperation between heart physiology doctors Fawziya Al-Kandary and Dr Abdullah Jamaan, and catheterization doctors

Ministry of Oil launches first book using AI

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Oil launched on Monday the first book using artificial intelligence technology, in a step that is the first-of-its-kind at the level of ministries and the oil sector, through which it aims to create new electronic content. The ministry announced: "The book, launched by the ministry's Public Relations and Media Department, deals with the emergence of the oil sector and reviews the efforts in developing the oil industry in the country."

The virtual presenter was given the name "Nouf" who becomes the first female employee working with AI technology and to be the new media face of the ministry on social networking sites with



KUWAIT: Ali Ibn Issa, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco, speaks during the reception held on the occasion of the 24th anniversary of King Mohammed VI's ascension to the throne.



(From left) Dr Jassim Al-Ostad, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Ali Ibn Issa, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco, cut a cake during the reception.

at a higher level.

The ambassador noted his country encourages boosting foreign investment, pointing out the Moroccan government provides facilities to businessmen with easy laws and legislations, revealing a joint committee meeting between the two countries will be held soon in Morocco.

On the sidelines of the ceremony, British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis revealed the meeting of the Kuwaiti-British Joint Steering Group is scheduled to take place in October

in the UK, describing the visit of her country's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs James Cleverly to Kuwait as very successful and distinguished, where he met several senior Kuwaiti officials, led by III the Crown Prince, and concluded his visit to learn about Kuwaiti culture. Lewis added the visit by three British officials to Kuwait in four weeks confirms the extent of her country's interest and keenness to strengthen friendship and work to develop the horizon of cooperation with Kuwait.



KUWAIT: Head of the cardiology department at the Chest Hospital Dr. Abdullah Al-Enezi and the team of doctors.

Khalid Al-Merri and Dr. Abdullah Al-Enezi, and that cooperation produced an integrated program to treat such cases.

Al-Enezi said 14 cases were treated during three years, saying the program relies on installing the VA ECMO by the catheterization doctors, then the mox-

ibustion is done by physiology doctors, and the process is done without high risk because of the use of the VA ECMO system. He said the program contributes to reducing patients' suffering through having an alternative to travelling abroad to receive treatment, in addition to reducing cost on the state budget.



Sheikha Tamadthur Khalid Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Ministry of Oil will provide news content that combines editorial development with technology in flexible templates," she said stressing that the ministry is continuing to expand this new type of artificial intelligence. She said the book is now available on the social media platforms of the Ministry of Oil such as You-



KUWAIT: Nouf, the first female employee working with AI technology at the oil ministry, is seen in this photo. — KUNA photos

Local

Cabinet assigns oil minister to review MPs' suggestions on work program

Ministers renew gratitude to allies on occasion of Iraqi invasion



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (center) is seen while chairing the Cabinet meeting on Monday July 31, 2023. — KUNA photos



Cabinet ministers are seen during their meeting on Monday.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet, during its meeting on Monday, assigned Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr Saad Al-Barrak, to study suggestions by parliamentarians on the government's work program, according to Kuwait's state media agency KUNA.

Barrak also serves as Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment and Acting Minister of Finance.

The Cabinet made the decision after discussing the affairs of the National Assembly and examining proposals approved during last week's parliamentary sessions. They also reviewed a letter from

the Speaker of the National Assembly Ahmad Al-Saadoun to which the remarks of MPs on the program were attached.

The four-year program, submitted to the National Assembly on July 16, includes 107 major projects covering all economic, social, entertainment and human resources fields. Under the plan, the government pledged to operate several mega projects such as Kuwait's part of the Gulf Railway project, repairing thousands of kilometers of roads and operating the long-delayed Mubarak Al-Kabeer Container Harbor on Boubyan Island.

At the meeting, ministers stressed the need to enhance fruitful joint work and continue coordination between the executive and legislative authorities, affirming its keenness to extend a hand of sincere and constructive cooperation between the government and the National Assembly.

Commemorating martyrs

The Council of Ministers recalled with appreciation the prominent role played by HH the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the late Father Amir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah

Al-Salem Al-Sabah and HH the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in working to liberate the State of Kuwait from the clutches of occupation.

"On the occasion of the 33rd anniversary of the brutal Iraqi invasion of the State of Kuwait, which falls on Wednesday, the State of Kuwait, the leadership and people of Kuwait recall with pain and bitterness the crime of treachery committed by the Iraqi regime army at dawn on the second of August 1990," Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Essa

Ahmed Al-Kandari said in a statement published on KUNA. "The Cabinet recalls the steadfastness of the Kuwaiti people and their heroic sacrifices in the face of treacherous aggression, which is a model of national unity."

The ministers also pointed to the great sacrifices made by the righteous martyrs of Kuwait, asking God Almighty to bless them with His mercy.

"The Cabinet renews its deep gratitude to all brotherly and friendly countries that contributed to the liberation of our dear homeland," the statement continued.

Woman speaks out against tattoo discrimination

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Living in a judgmental society is an ongoing concern for many Kuwaitis who choose to express themselves through forms of body art, such as tattoos. However, in Kuwaiti society, conservative values and traditional norms prevail. Therefore, many tattooed Kuwaitis often face negative stereotypes and are unfairly judged by others who associate tattoos with moral deficit. This prevailing perception can result in discrimination, limited opportunities at finding jobs or getting married, which results in social exclusion.

Kuwait Times interviewed Sarah, a tattooed Kuwaiti facing societal discrimination due to people passing judgment based on appearances. According to Sarah, one of the most significant consequences of living in a judgmental society is the detrimental effect on one's self-esteem. The fear of being judged can lead to suppression of one's true self and results in hypocrisy, because individuals are submitting to societal expectations rather than pursuing their genuine desires.

In such a society, individuals unwillingly confine themselves to certain roles or labels, disregarding their unique qualities and potential contributions to society. "It is extremely unfortunate that many individuals may be overlooked or dismissed simply due to societal judgments of their tattoos. Having tattoos can negatively impact your opportunity to find a job in Kuwait, regardless of your qualities," Sarah said.

Thus, living in a judgmental society can lead to a toxic environment. Instead of promoting collaboration and support, people become more focused on



finding fault in others, leading to a culture of blame instead of empathy. This creates a divide within the community, leading to a lack of trust and genuine connection between individuals, hindering social cohesion and unity. Hence, a judgmental society perpetuates a cycle of negativity, preventing the establishment of a supportive and inclusive community.

"One of the core issues experienced by tattooed Kuwaitis is the clash between personal expression and cultural norms because some individuals in Kuwait perceive tattoos as a direct violation of cultural norms and traditions. Consequently, tattooed Kuwaitis often find themselves struggling to reconcile their desire for self-expression with societal expectations," Sarah said.

Sarah further elaborated on the challenges faced by tattooed Kuwaitis, as she said it not only limits their job opportunities, but also their chances of getting married, because Kuwaiti families often prioritize reputation and social standing of both the individual and their potential spouse. They believe the presence of a visible tattoo can cause concern about the individual's background and character, believing a tattooed person is less likely to be mature for marriage. This potentially leads to rejection or judgment from potential matches and their families. Thus, tattoos are often seen as a deviation from expected and accepted norms, and can be perceived as rebellious or inappropriate, leading to potential difficulties in finding a suitable partner.

Kuwait not affected by rice export bans

KUWAIT: Kuwait's supplies of rice are sufficient to cover local demand for a year, Minister of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Aiban said on Sunday. Recent decisions by some countries to suspend rice exports will not impact Kuwait or affect scheduled shipments, he added. The minister is referring to recent decisions from the UAE and India to suspend rice exports. The UAE Ministry of Economy announced last Friday a temporary suspension of rice exports and reexports to foreign markets for four months.

The ban covers "various types of rice and their products that do not originate from India," the ministry said in a statement.

The UAE rice export ban follows a recent one from India, which saw the South Asian country and leading global rice supplier completely prohibit the export of non-basmati white rice on July 20.

The decision, which took effect immediately, was issued "in order to ensure adequate availability of Non-Basmati White Rice in the Indian market and to allay the rise in prices in the domestic market," said India's Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution in a press release.

Kuwait's ministry of commerce said in a statement that the Kuwait Supplies Company has direct instructions to maintain Kuwait's supplies of rice and other basic commodities to protect Kuwait's food security.

1 am restaurant closure to be reversed: MP

KUWAIT: MP Hamad Al-Medlej, who is on a parliamentary committee dedicated to small business affairs, said the committee has reached an agreement with the interior and municipal ministries to reverse a decision made on July 17 to shut down commercial activities in industrial areas at 1 am.

According to the decision in question, restaurants and cafes in Aswaq Al-Qurain and Ardhiya Industrial area must be closed at 1 am. The closure

includes takeout, dine-in and delivery. All main doors must also remain shut.

The decision caused uproar among several business owners in the area, who told local media that their business was severely affected by the move. Medlej said the agreement reached with the ministries will enforce the installation of security cameras to keep the area safe. He added that he expects the new changes to be officially publicized soon.

The committee has also arrived at an understanding with the manpower authority and the interior ministry on several issues that will be soon discussed by the economic parliamentary committee with Cabinet in preparation

for approval. Among the issues agreed upon is the urgent disbursement of employment support to micro-entrepreneurs. Granting Kuwaiti women working in the private sector the right to children's allowance, as is the case for women employed in the government sector, has also been examined.

Another matter discussed was allowing Kuwaiti citizens working in the private sector to get scholarships just as their counterparts in the public sector do. Medlej said they also agreed on providing employment support to private sector Kuwaiti employees for the duration of treatment abroad or when accompanying a patient during their treatment abroad.

struggle with debt and insufficient support, as reported by Kuwait Times last week.

At a press conference held Thursday by the Kuwaiti Fishermen Union, Head of Union Zahir Al-Suwayyan appealed to officials to resolve the problems facing the fishing sector, adding that many fishermen who have fishing licenses want to leave the profession due to the heavy burden on their shoulders.

He stressed the importance of meeting the demands of fishermen, including restoring the amount of subsidized diesel and gasoline to what it was before an "ill-conceived" decision by the subsidy committee to reduce it to half in May and opening entry visas to alleviate the shortage of labor faced by the sector.

"Our fuel ended in three weeks and there are still ships that have not been refueled with diesel, especially with the start of the shrimping season in regional waters on August 1," he said.



How young people are adjusting to post-COVID world

By Noor Abdulaziz

KUWAIT: Three years have gone by since a global pandemic hampered and altered the lives of millions worldwide. It is safe to say that most of us can vouch for the fact that our lives have never been the same since. Whether it's by being introduced to newer, better versions or having regressed back to the worst forms of ourselves, COVID has left a permanent mark on the trajectory of our lives. However, now living in a post-apocalyptic world, people have taken it within themselves to find the road to recovery.

When asked how they're finding life after a global pandemic, 24-year-old Farah said life after COVID has become entirely fast-paced. "I have a short attention span now! I feel like I'm not as patient as I used to be. I became so used to everything moving fast and obtaining new pieces of information through news outlets and the media every hour," she said. Adolescents have said due to quickly changing events, it is hard for them to rest, as it makes them feel unproductive. "Waves of guilt would hit me if I stayed inside the house all day without doing something productive," Farah states.

'Forgot how to rest'

"Doing 10 things at a time is the new normal for me. Even whilst watching a movie, I feel I must keep moving around. It's hard for me to stay put in one place for hours without getting up to do something else. I think this has to do with the fact that during what was supposed to be a time where everything was expected to stop, everyone expected us to keep going. I studied for quizzes, gave 30-minute presentations for professors, and had to work from home to run my business," Farah said.

"Also, due to the lack of physical communication, I struggled hard with feelings connected to the real world, so now I meet up for a coffee with loved ones every chance I get. Not to mention how your emotional well-being is also being compromised. During COVID, face-to-face conversations were out of the equation, and I was forced to communicate with friends all whilst finishing my tasks online at the same time on different tabs. So, my brain is used to being in five different places at once. I forgot how to rest," she added.

"The idea of staying at home makes me crawl out of my skin now. I think it's because everything was forced to be done at home, whether it'd be attending classes, buying gym equipment to set up at home, or watching movies in your living room that were meant to be experienced at a movie theater. We were forced to experience a multitude of different activities all in one closed space, and I'm still recovering from that three years later," Maryam, a 21-year-old college student, said. "I love my family to death, but you will never find me at home if I'm not needed there now. We've bonded enough!" she quipped.

It's no surprise that people are still finding ways to process what was an unusual experience, as no one was spared from the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic that forced people to shift and adapt to a different kind of 'normal'.

News in Brief

Eight stores without
permit closed in Jleeb

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality inspectors shut down eight stores in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh for not having municipality licenses, the municipality said in a statement. The closures came as inspectors raided the area to ensure stores were adhering to municipal regulations, said Acting Deputy Director General for supervision and inspection in Farwaniya governorate Nasser Al-Rashidi.

Fire force increases
course acceptance rate

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah directed to increase the number of applicants accepted in the Kuwait Fire Force courses (Corporal Undersecretary Course - Sergeant Course). Accordingly, the number of seats has now been doubled from an initial 300 to reach 600 in various specialties. Admission results will be announced next week in cooperation with the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training.

3 factories closed for
fire safety violations

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Fire Force administratively closed three factories in the Ahmadi and Sabhan area in violation of safety and fire prevention requirements. The factories were found to have ignored warnings from the fire force to remove chemicals and flammable liquids they had kept in violation of regulations. This comes as a continuation of the campaigns of the inspection teams of the prevention sector on various commercial and investment buildings, industrial plots, factories and others, which are subject to safety and fire protection systems. The Public Relations and Media Department called on the owners and tenants of factories, industrial plots, commercial and investment buildings to adhere to safety and fire prevention requirements and remove violations to avoid administrative closure and maintain public safety.

Cricket aficionados brave heat
to practice favorite activity

KUWAIT: Men are seen playing cricket despite the soaring temperatures in Kuwait. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Despite the relentless heat and rocketing temperatures, cricket aficionados in Kuwait choose to endure the harsh climate and practice their favorite pastime activity. The game, requiring 11 players per team, calls for immense physical effort, and a great deal of stamina and alertness. While cricket originated

in Britain, it gained popularity in south Asian nations of India and Pakistan. For the large Indian and Pakistani communities in the country, empty dirt lots in many areas of Kuwait have become sports stadiums where cricketers practice their favorite hobby, especially on weekends and public holidays. — KUNA

stc continues
campaign at
Khairan Mall

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that its latest summer campaign under the slogan "Summer needs a jet ski" will continue throughout the summer season. The campaign offers stc customers, whether new or existing, a chance to win a jet ski simply by subscribing to any of stc's postpaid packages, renewing their existing subscriptions, or adding a de-

vice through Zeed at stc's Khairan Mall branch only.

In a statement, stc highlighted that customers can increase their chances of winning the jet ski based on their activity. Customers renewing their subscription, subscribing to new postpaid plans, or adding devices can increase their chances of winning based on how many times they perform any of the 3 activities throughout the campaign period. Upon performing any of the 3 highlighted activities, customers will automatically be enrolled into the draw for a chance to win. The winner of the summer campaign will be announced during an event organized by stc, where one lucky customer will take home a brand new jet ski. Attendees will have the opportunity to participate in engaging competitions and have a chance to win exciting prizes from stc.

In addition to the jet ski draw, stc customers will also enjoy the benefits of stc's wide range of summer

offers and exclusive postpaid packages. The summer offers include additional benefits to stc's Always On postpaid voice and Internet plans, accompanied by the latest cutting-edge smartphone devices.

stc added in its statement that it is dedicated to enriching the lifestyles of its customers by organizing captivating campaigns like, "Summer needs a jet ski." These campaigns go beyond providing exceptional telecommunication services, and aim to create memorable experiences and add excitement to customers' lives. Through these initiatives, stc demonstrates its commitment to understanding and catering to the diverse needs and desires of its valued customers, enhancing their quality of life and fostering a deeper connection with the brand. With each campaign, stc reaffirms its position as a customer-centric telecom provider that goes the extra mile to make a positive impact on its customers' daily lives.

Kuwait, Bangladesh
discuss defense ties

KUWAIT: Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense Sheikh Dr Shamayel Ahmed Khalid Al-Sabah reviewed with the Chief of Army Staff of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Lt Gen SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, aspects of cooperation and bilateral work between the two friendly countries.

The Ministry of Defense announced on Monday: "Sheikha Shamayel Al-Sabah received General Shafiuddin Ahmed and her accompanying delegation, as they discussed during the meeting a number of issues of common interest in addition to reviewing aspects of cooperation and joint bilateral work between the two friendly countries." The meeting was attended by the General Staff of the Administration and Manpower Authority, Major General Dr Khaled Al-Kandari, and several army leaders. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense Sheikh Dr Shamayel Ahmed Khalid Al-Sabah is seen with the Chief of Army Staff of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Lt Gen SM Shafiuddin Ahmed during their meeting. — KUNA

MoH to hold
blood drive in
honor of martyrs

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health, represented by the Blood Transfusion Services Department, announced the launch of the annual blood donation campaign (Together Forever Marching for the Homeland 8) on Wednesday, coinciding with the 33rd anniversary of the brutal Iraqi invasion of the State of Kuwait under the patronage of the Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi.

The Medical Director of the Blood Transfusion Services Department, Dr Hanan Al-Awadhi, said on Monday: "The campaign will be launched at the Central Blood Bank in Jabriya and in all donation centers

of the department from 8 am to 8 pm. Souvenirs will be distributed to donors." The campaign comes for the eighth consecutive year within the framework of cooperation between the ministry represented by the Central Blood Bank and the participation of social responsibility authorities, civil society institutions and the government sector, as well as the military corps in its various bodies — the army, police, national guard and Kuwait fire force.

The participation, said Awadhi, stems from their belief in the importance of donation and based on their national role and humanitarian duty. The partnership comes to consolidate the concept of humanitarian and volunteer work, promote social solidarity and spread the culture of volunteering, she added, pointing out that "previous campaigns witnessed a large turnout of donors." She called on citizens and residents to express their love for Kuwait and participate in this national occasion by donating blood and to commemorate of the heroism of the righteous martyrs. — KUNA

More vacancies
in MoH as senior
official resigns

KUWAIT: Health Ministry Undersecretary Dr Mustafa Redha submitted his resignation effective Sept 2 for personal reasons less than two years into her term. Redha was appointed to his position on Feb 21, 2022. He was set to serve in that position for four years.

The resignation comes nearly one week after Health

Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued three ministerial decisions appointing ministry officials to fill vacant positions within the health ministry. The decisions took effect as of July 23, 2023.

Last April, Awadi appointed at least six other people to fill vacant leadership positions in the ministry as "acting" officials. An acting official is only there to fill the position for a temporary period until a proper replacement is found for an exiting or retiring official. The phenomenon of hiring acting officials has been rampant in ministries over the past few years, with nearly 2,000 leadership positions vacant across several ministries in late 2022. Critics say that work in multiple government agencies has been hindered due to these vacancies.



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Only four nations doing enough to stub out smoking

Bolivia security forces hunt drug lord

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Niger junta arrests ministers

France plotting to 'intervene militarily'



NIAMEY: Protesters cheer Nigerien troops as they gather in front of the French Embassy in Niamey during a demonstration that followed a rally in support of Niger's junta in Niamey. — AFP

NIAMEY: Four ministers in Niger, a former minister and the head of ousted president Mohamed Bazoum's party have been arrested by the junta which seized power on July 26, the party said on Monday. "After the president was detained last week, the putschists went on the attack again and carried out more arrests," the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS) said in a statement to AFP.

On Monday morning, Oil Minister Mahamane Sani Mahamadou—the son of influential former president Mahamadou Issoufou—and Mining Minister Ousseini Hadizatou were arrested, it said. The head of the PNDS's national executive committee, Fourmakoye Gado, was also arrested, it said. The junta had previously arrested Interior Minister Hama Amadou Souley, Transport Minister Oumarou Malam Alma and Kalla Moutari, an MP and former defense minister the party said.

It called for their immediate release, saying Niger risked becoming a "dictatorial and totalitarian regime." A source close to the presidency said the minister for vocational teaching, Kassoum Moctar, had also been arrested. The arrests coincided with a statement by the junta requiring "all former ministers and heads of

institutions" to hand back their office cars by noon.

Bazoum was toppled last Wednesday by members of the presidential guard, whose head, Abdourahmane Tiani, has declared himself the country's new leader. His claim is unrecognized internationally and the West African regional bloc ECOWAS has warned of possible military intervention if the putschists fail to hand back power by Sunday. Western allies of Niger have also suspended aid to the country or threatened to do so.

Meanwhile, the new junta on Monday accused France of seeking to "intervene militarily" to reinstate deposed President Mohamed Bazoum as tension mounted with the country's former colonial power and neighbors. Bazoum, a western ally whose election just over two years ago was a watershed in Niger's troubled history, was toppled on July 26 by the elite Presidential Guard. Guards chief General Abdourahmane Tiani declared himself leader - but his claim has been shunned internationally and the West African bloc ECOWAS has given him a week to hand back power.

On Sunday, French President Emmanuel Macron vowed "immediate and uncompromising" action if French citizens or interests were attacked after thou-

sands rallied outside the French embassy. Some of them tried to enter the compound but were dispersed by tear gas. The junta on Monday accused France of plotting an intervention.

"In its search for ways and means to intervene militarily in Niger, France with the complicity of some Nigeriens, held a meeting with the chief of staff of the Nigerien National Guard to obtain the necessary political and military authorization," it said on national TV. The putschists also said six people needed hospitalization after the embassy security services fired tear gas against the rally. On Sunday, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sounded a tough warning.

The bloc demanded that Bazoum be reinstated within a week, failing which it would take "all measures" to restore constitutional order, which "may include the use of force." "No more time for us to send a warning signal... It's time for action," said ECOWAS chairman Bola Tinubu, president of Nigeria - Niger's neighbor to the southeast and the regional superpower. Russia called for the swift return of "the rule of law" and "restraint from all parties so that this doesn't result in human casualties."

Niger became the third Sahel country in less than three years, following neighbors Mali and Burkina Faso, to be shaken by a military coup. In all three nations, a jihadist insurgency strained fragile governments, stoked anger in the military and rained economic blows on some of the world's poorest countries.

The overthrow of elected presidents has been accompanied by anti-French, pro-Russian demonstrations. Protestors say France, the country's traditional ally, has failed to shield them against the jihadists, whereas Russia would be a stronger ally. In Mali, a 2020 putsch led to a bustup with France which last year withdrew its troops as the junta brought in Russian paramilitaries.

France also quit Burkina Faso after two coups last year brought in a junta that adopted a nationalist line. The withdrawals prompted France to reconfigure its decade-long anti-jihadist strategy in the Sahel, concentrating its efforts in Niger, where it has 1,500 troops and a major air base near Niamey. The latest coup, according to the putschists, was a response to "the degradation of the security situation" linked to the jihadist conflict, as well as corruption and economic woes. — AFP

Blood-stained chairs, empty seats remain after bomb kills 54

KHAR: Blood-stained chairs, scattered ball bearings and shoes shed by the dead, wounded and panicked bore testimony Monday to the carnage caused by a suicide bombing at a Pakistan political event. At least 54 people were killed and more than 100 wounded on Sunday when a blast ripped through a gathering of Islamic Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) party members in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The marquee hoisted in the town of Khar lay mangled and charred the morning after the explosion, partly collapsed onto blood-soaked carpets with around 400 upended red chairs strewn about. "Upon arriving at the scene, I was confronted with a devastating sight," Khar resident Fazal Aman, 29, told AFP on Monday. "Lifeless bodies scattered on the ground while people cried out for help."

Party paraphernalia, including hats and scarves in JUI-F's black-and-white branding, were abandoned and trampled into the dusty ground, some flecked

with dried blood. The first funerals for the victims got underway on Monday, including for a pair of cousins aged 16 and 17 whose young boys wept by coffins. "These two were very serious and down-to-earth individuals in our family," said 24-year-old shopkeeper Najeeb Ullah. "This is a great injustice on our land."

Mound of sandals

Remnants of human flesh and hair could be seen as far as 30 meters (100 feet) from a shattered stage, the apparent epicenter of the blast near Khar's main bazaar. Gulistan Khan, a 40-year-old farmer being treated at a nearby hospital, said he was in the third row when the bomb detonated as local JUI-F leaders arrived to crowds chanting slogans.

"I was thrown backwards as if lifted off the ground," he said. "The blast was powerful. Flames coming out were very high so I couldn't see anything." A mound of about 40 sandals and shoes had been piled in the shade behind a cordon of yellow police tape as zebra-striped JUI-F flags fluttered in the breeze. Investigators in rubber gloves and face-masks picked through the scene on Monday morning, one using a trowel to scoop up a sample from a dark patch on the floor of the stage.

The site was swarmed by security forces carrying assault rifles and surrounding roads were peppered with



BAJAUR: Police officials examine the site of a bomb blast in Bajaur district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on July 31, 2023. — AFP

police checkpoints. Regional counter-terrorism deputy inspector general Sohail Khalid told AFP the bomber used around 40 kilograms (90 pounds) of explosives, bound up with ball bearings to cause maximum carnage. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack but the local chapter of the Islamic State group has recently targeted JUI-F, a key government coalition partner led by a firebrand cleric. — AFP

Renewed clashes in south Lebanon Palestinian camp

SIDON: Automatic weapons and anti-tank fire shook south Lebanon's Ain Al-Helweh Palestinian refugee camp on Monday, after fighting killed eight people over the weekend, an AFP correspondent said. The clashes between members of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's secular Fatah movement and Islamists have forced dozens of frightened residents to flee their homes in the camp, which has gained notoriety as a refuge for extremists and fugitives. Limited skirmishes erupted again Sunday night, escalating into heavy clashes with gunfire and shelling on Monday, said the AFP correspondent in the southern city of Sidon, where the camp is located.

"Things are supposed to go back to normal soon," an official involved in the ceasefire negotiations told AFP, asking for anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. The official added that they were working on "preventing further escalation". Palestinian factions said they had reached a ceasefire on Sunday, but the truce did not hold. On Monday morning, Lebanon's official news agency NNA reported "increased clashes" using heavy weaponry, with exchanges of gunfire concentrated in the al-Tawarek neighborhood—a stronghold for Islamist extremists.

Dozens of residents, mostly women and children, fled the camp carrying light luggage, while others took refuge in a nearby mosque, AFP's correspondent said. Fighting began overnight on Saturday, killing an Islamist and injuring eight others, a Palestinian source inside the camp had told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons. The next day, a Fatah military leader and four of his colleagues were killed during a "heinous operation", the group said.

Shells also fell outside the walls of the camp over the past two days, AFP observed. A nearby hospital evacuated patients and shops in Sidon closed fearing further escalation. Fighting between rival groups is common in Ain Al-Helweh, which is home to more than 54,000 registered Palestinian refugees who have been joined in recent years by thousands of Palestinians fleeing the war in Syria. By long-standing convention, the Lebanese army does not enter Palestinian refugee camps in the country, leaving the factions themselves to handle security. — AFP

Palestinian rivals form reconciliation committee

CAIRO: Rival Palestinian political leaders meeting in Egypt decided on Sunday to form a committee on intra-Palestinian reconciliation, a move that one analyst doubted would end their 17-year rift. President Mahmud Abbas and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh met for rare face-to-face talks in the coastal city of El Alamein along with representatives of most Palestinian political factions. The latest attempt at reconciliation aims to bridge the gap between the parallel governments of Hamas in the blockaded Gaza Strip and of the Palestinian Authority - controlled by Abbas's secularist Fatah movement - which administers Palestinian-run areas of the occupied West Bank.

Abbas and Haniyeh were joined by the heads of other factions, except for the powerful Islamic Jihad and two other minor groups. Islamic Jihad had made the release of prisoners held by PA security forces a condition for sending representatives to El Alamein. Haniyeh earlier Sunday called on Abbas to end "security collaboration" with Zionists and "political arrests", according to participants at the meeting.



EL ALAMEIN, Egypt: This handout picture shows Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas (center) meeting with a delegation of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) Egypt in El Alamein. — AFP

The Hamas leader also said "a new, inclusive parliament must be formed on the basis of free democratic elections". Hamas, which won the Palestinians' last legislative polls held in 2006, has repeatedly called for general elections. Abbas said Sunday "the coup d'etat and the division that befell us after... must end," referring to clashes between Hamas and Fatah that followed the 2006 vote. "We must return to a single state, a single system, a single law and a single legitimate army," Abbas added.

To work towards this, the 87-year-old president

announced "the formation of a committee to continue the dialogue... end divisions and achieve Palestinian national unity". A later statement from Abbas said he "hopes for an upcoming meeting soon in Egypt to announce to our people the end" of the 17-year split "and the return to Palestinian national unity". Palestinian political scientist Moukhaimeer Abu Saada told AFP that the formation of the committee was no cause for celebration. "The best way to kill something is to form a committee for it," he said, speaking from Gaza. — AFP

International

Four killed in Ukraine city

Russia intensifies attacks on Ukrainian military infrastructure

KYIV: At least four people were killed including a 10-year-old child after a Russian missile attack on the central Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rig on Monday, officials said. "There's already four dead in Kryvyi Rig," Sergiy Lysak, the head of the military administration for the Dnipropetrovsk region, wrote on Telegram. Among the dead were a 10-year-old girl and her 45-year-old mother, the head of the city's military administration Oleksandr Vilkul said in televised comments. The other two victims were two men, while another 53 people were injured, Vilkul said. "(Several) people may still remain under the rubble," he added.

Part of a nine-storey apartment block hit by the strike collapsed while the rubble was being cleared, the emergency ministry said. Two missiles landed close to the centre of the city just after 9:00 am, interior minister Igor Klymenko wrote on Telegram. One of the strikes hit the residential block, punching a huge hole in the facade that destroyed apartments on several floors and sparked a fire. Firefighters were using a cherry-picker crane to direct jets of water at the fire.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, who was born and grew up in Kryvyi Rig, said Russians were "continuing to terrorize peaceful cities and people". The strikes also hit a crossroads and an educational building, Zelensky said. Vilkul said the second damaged building was part of the Kryvyi Rig Professional College of National University of Economics and Management. The strikes came after a missile attack last month destroyed a five-storey apartment building in the city and killed 12 people.

Meanwhile, Moscow has intensified strikes on Ukrainian military infrastructure in response to attacks on Russian-controlled territory, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said on Monday. "Against the background of the failure of the so-called 'counterof-



KRYVYI RIG: Fire engulfs a nine-storey residential building partially destroyed as a result of Russian missile strike in Kryvyi Rig, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. - AFP

ensive', Kyiv... has focused on carrying out terrorist attacks on civilian infrastructure," Shoigu said. "The intensity of our strikes against Ukrainian military facilities... has been considerably increased," he added.

Russia said Sunday it downed Ukrainian drones targeting Moscow and the Crimea peninsula it annexed in 2014, the latest in series of attacks on the capital, border regions and annexed-Crimea.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky later said "war is returning to the territory of Russia... this is an inevitable, natural and absolutely fair process." Shoigu said the army had taken "additional measures to increase protection against attacks from the air and the sea". The Kremlin said the recent drone attack on Moscow was "an act of desperation" by Ukraine due to setbacks on the battlefield. — AFP

Released from UAE prison

Authorities said they believed Marsel Cabrera entered Bolivia last September, and maintained a relatively high profile, including acquiring a professional soccer club in the nation's Second Division. As recently as two years ago, Marsel Cabrera was in jail in the United Arab Emirates on charges of using a forged Paraguayan passport, but managed to obtain his freedom using Uruguayan documents.

Authorities accuse him of being one of the most powerful drug traffickers in the Southern Cone region, transporting multi-ton shipments through Uruguay. He has been linked to former Paraguayan president Horacio Cartes' uncle, who was convicted of marijuana trafficking. Colombian President Gustavo Petro tweeted last year

that Marsel Cabrera was behind the high-profile slaying of a Paraguayan anti-mafia prosecutor, Marcelo Pecci, who was killed at a resort on the Colombian island of Baru in May 2022.

Two Colombian brothers were sentenced last May in Colombia to 25 years and six months in prison for their role in the slaying. The brothers, Andres and Ramon Perez Hoyos, paid the gunman some \$340,000 to shoot Pecci on Baru, where he was on a honeymoon with his pregnant wife, prosecutors said. But Petro publicly identified Marsel Cabrera as the mastermind. "The investigation into the murder... committed by the Uruguayan drug trafficker Marsel in Colombian territory shows that long ago drug trafficking ceased to be a Colombian-American bilateral problem and is today an American and world problem," Petro tweeted last August. — AFP

Bolivia security hunts drug lord

LA PAZ: Bolivia has mobilized more than 2,250 security agents in a massive operation closing in on an alleged cocaine trafficker who has ricocheted around the world to elude capture, a senior official said on Sunday. The target of the hunt is Sebastian Enrique Marsel Cabrera, wanted on drugs charges in his native Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil and the United States.

"A series of raids have been carried out in the department of Santa Cruz... (for) a drug trafficker of high value for our region and the whole world," Bolivian Interior Minister Eduardo del Castillo said. "We have mobilized more than 2,250 police officers, more than 144 motorized vehicles, we have carried out more than 23 operations, six raids and the arrest of 12 people," Del Castillo said. Marsel Cabrera, who is 32, is believed to be in Santa Cruz, a sprawling energy-producing region of southeastern Bolivia abutting Brazil and Paraguay.

Del Castillo said Marsel Cabrera is accompanied by his Peruvian wife and three children. "In the coming hours, we will achieve the detention of Mr. Sebastian Enrique Marsel Cabrera," Del Castillo avowed. Heavily armed police raided a luxury home in Santa Cruz, a city of 1.9 million inhabitants that is capital of the department of the same name, and entered other properties, an AFP journalist witnessed. Del Castillo said raids during the day netted 17 long guns, a pistol, nearly 2,000 rounds of ammunition, bullet-proof vests and 31 vehicles.



SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia: This handout picture shows weaponry and drugs seized from a house searched by anti-narcotics police during an operation to try to arrest Uruguayan Sebastian Marsel in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. - AFP

Assembly to debate key issues before...

Continued from Page 1

women voters and candidates to abide by sharia rules by also adding men. The committee discussing

UK to issue 'hundreds' of...

Continued from Page 1

Viking near Humber, England, alongside two already under construction. It said the four clusters could support up to 50,000 jobs by 2030. Energy giant Shell, which is involved in one of the carbon capture projects, hailed it as a "central part of plans to decarbonize North Sea operations". The technology, however, has been criticized by some climate experts, who say it risks distracting from efforts to phase out hydrocarbons.

Greenpeace said carbon capturing is "often used for greenwashing by oil and gas companies so they can carry on polluting". "Talking up carbon capture and storage is an obvious attempt to put a green gloss on the prime minister's announcement," Mike Childs, head of policy at Friends of the Earth, said.

Environmental policies have been a hot topic in the UK, especially since Labour's surprise defeat by the ruling Conservative party in a west London by-election. Their defeat, by less than 500 votes, has been blamed on voter unease at Labour mayor Sadiq Khan expanding a scheme taxing the use of the most polluting vehicles, and appears to have emboldened Tory net zero opponents.

In a Telegraph interview on Sunday, Sunak insisted he was on the side of motorists and said he had ordered a review of so-called low traffic neighborhoods, contentious local authority-led measures to limit vehicle use in designated areas by blocking roads. Climate campaigners have accused the British leader of lacking conviction on climate policies and playing politics with the issue, with a general election looming amid a cost-of-living crisis.

Meanwhile, the national oil giant of the United

the amendments has accepted the proposal.

MP Majed Al-Mutairi proposed to amend the law to stop criminalizing tribal primary elections, which are banned by the law and punishable by imprisonment of up to two years. Courts have recently issued jail terms against dozens of tribesmen of two major tribes, including former MPs, for taking part in tribal primaries. HH the Amir has pardoned members of one tribe while the second tribe is pushing to get a similar amnesty.

Arab Emirates, host of this year's UN climate talks, said Monday it had accelerated its emission reduction goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045. The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company "is accelerating its decarbonization plan to advance its net-zero ambition to 2045, compared to its previous target of 2050," ADNOC said in a statement.

It said it intends to "increase its investments and redouble efforts in decarbonization," relying on an initial financing of \$15 billion for "low-carbon solutions" and achieving "zero methane emissions by 2030". Environmental groups charge that net-zero pledges from the world's energy giants are misleading when the companies in fact plan to increase their oil and gas sales, as ADNOC does.

The pledges to cut emissions apply to producing, refining and processing operations — not to the vastly greater emissions caused when the fuel is burnt to power cars, planes and factories. The oil giant said it has "reduced its greenhouse gas emissions" by about five million tons in 2022, mostly through the use of solar and nuclear energy, to power all of its onshore operations.

The UAE, one of the world's leading oil exporters, is set to host the COP28 climate summit in November and December. Its new plans set this month to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 19 percent by 2030 compared to 2019 levels were criticized by analysts as "insufficient". ADNOC CEO Sultan Al-Jaber, who will head up the UN climate talks, has argued that fossil fuels will continue to play a key role, and that carbon capture technologies will play contain emissions.

The world remains far off track on the Paris Agreement's goals to curb global warming to two degrees Celsius, and preferably 1.5C. Meanwhile, global temperatures have hit record highs this month as people across the planet have been pounded by floods, storms and crop-withering heatwaves. — AFP

Lebanon's central bank chief leaves...

Continued from Page 1

Politics in Lebanon, a country of only six million people, is intensely complex as power is shared under a confessional system that recognizes 18 Muslim and Christian sects. Lebanon has been governed by a caretaker cabinet with limited powers for more than a year, and has been without a president for nine months.

As Salameh left his post, he remains subject of judicial investigations at home and abroad into allegations including embezzlement, money laundering, fraud and illicit enrichment, charges which he denies. He is wanted in France and Germany, and Interpol has issued a Red Notice for his arrest, but Lebanon does not extradite its nationals. Salameh is soon to be tried

Iraq searches for cure amid...

Continued from Page 1

opened in the capital Baghdad in April. The young man, from the western Al-Anbar province on the border with Syria, told AFP he had been introduced to captagon, also known as "zero-one", by his work colleagues at a food store. "It makes you active, gives you energy and keeps you awake," he said of the drug. Since age 16, Mohammed would take "10 to 12" captagon pills a day, he confessed. Selling for the equivalent of \$2 apiece, the stimulant "is everywhere".

Like the other patients at Al-Canal Centre for Social Rehabilitation, he came to the clinic on his own initiative. After an initial two-week stay, he returned home, but then quickly headed back to the clinic, fearing a relapse. Captagon, Mohammed said, "leads you either to prison or to death". Around him, in the laid-back atmosphere of the rehab center gym, men of nearly all ages were playing table tennis and foosball, some of them smiling. Others were visibly tired or had blank expressions on their faces.

Patients usually stay for around one month at the facility, which also includes a women's wing

Briton who killed ill wife released on 'time served'

NICOSIA: A British pensioner in Cyprus who killed his terminally ill wife was sentenced Monday to two years' jail but then released because of time already served, his lawyer said. David Hunter, 76, was initially tried for the premeditated murder of his 74-year-old wife Janice, who suffered from blood cancer, on December 18, 2021. But he was convicted last week of the lesser charge of manslaughter for what the court heard was the mercy killing of his wife of more than half a century.

Factoring in the time Hunter has already spent behind bars since his arrest and good behavior, he was being freed imminently, his defense lawyer said. "David Hunter was given a two-year sentence which means that he will be released from custody immediately," said British lawyer Michael Polak of the group Justice Abroad. "We are very pleased with the sentence of the court today." The Paphos Criminal Court decision was unanimous, with the three judges saying they had taken into account the personal circumstances as well as the need to send a deterrent message.

Hunter, a retired miner from the English region of Northumberland, and his wife had been teenage sweethearts and married for 52 years. In December 2021, Janice, who was suffering from advanced leukaemia, begged her husband to end her life, the court heard. Hunter said he had finally acquiesced to his wife's wishes, smothering her to death in their sitting room in Tremithousa, near Paphos, on the Mediterranean island's west coast. Police found Hunter after he overdosed on prescription pills and alcohol in an attempt to take his own life.

'Tragic case'

In Cyprus, a largely Christian Orthodox country, euthanasia is taboo and there is no law on assisted suicide. The judges agreed with the defense case that Hunter had not committed premeditated murder but had acted spontaneously to end the life of his wife, who had been begging him to do so because of the pain she suffered.

"The way the accused acted at the material time does not show premeditation for his illegal act but, on the contrary, an impulsive act without a clear mind," said presiding Judge Michalis Drousiotis. "Murder must be the result of planning and committed in cold blood." Towards the end of her life, Hunter said his wife was so unwell that she could no longer walk upstairs, and they had to sleep in a lounge chair on the ground floor of their home. During repeated blood transfusions for cancer, Hunter said she repeatedly asked him to end her life.

Polak said that "the sentencing exercise was not a simple one, given that a case like this has never come before the courts of Cyprus before". "The result of today's hearing, and the court's previous decision finding Mr Hunter not guilty of murder, is what we have been fighting for in this case, and David is very pleased with the outcome today," he said. "This has been a tragic case and difficult for all of those involved with it, but today's decision was the right one and allowed David and his family to grieve together." — AFP

in Paris, a European diplomatic source told AFP.

In March 2022, France, Germany and Luxembourg seized assets worth 120 million euros (\$135 million) in a move linked to a probe into Salameh's wealth. In February, Lebanon also charged Salameh with embezzlement, money laundering and tax evasion as part of its own investigations. The domestic probe was opened following a request for assistance from Switzerland's public prosecutor, who is looking into more than \$300 million in fund movements by Salameh and his brother.

Defending his legacy, Salameh days ago told a local broadcaster that he had been made a "scapegoat" for the crisis, and blamed the rest of Lebanon's political class for abandoning him "a long time ago". At the central bank headquarters, employees gathered to bid farewell to Salameh on Monday, to the sound of music and applause. "The central bank has stood firm," Salameh told cheering employees in a video shared by local media. "During the crisis, it was a pillar that allowed Lebanon to carry on." — AFP

and offers psychological support. Once discharged, they return for weekly check-ups for a period of six months. "We host all ages. It starts at 14-15, but most are in their 20s," said the clinic's director, Abdel Karim Sadeq Karim. The most common substance abuse the facility treats is crystal meth. "From the very first dose, there's addiction," said Karim.

His deputy, Ali Abdullah, called it "a plague that totally destroys individuals", noting a hike in drug consumption in Iraq since 2016. Iraqi security forces now announce near-daily drug busts and arrests, in operations supported by intelligence and cooperation with neighboring countries. Hussein Al-Tamimi, spokesman for Iraq's narcotics directorate, told AFP that authorities had detained more than 10,000 suspects between October and June for "crimes related to narcotics — traffickers, resellers or consumers".

According to the government agency, security forces also seized 10 million captagon pills and 500 kilograms of other drugs including at least 385 kilograms of crystal meth. A regional meeting hosted by Baghdad in May saw "the creation of a shared database" to exchange information between authorities across borders, said Tamimi. That meeting also led to "the establishment of weekly contacts between our services and the competent services of Arab states" and of other countries in the region, he added. — AFP

International

Beijing on weather alert; 2 killed

Heavy rain batters north China

BEIJING: Heavy rains battered northern China on Monday, killing at least two people in Beijing while washing away cars and forcing the capital to issue its highest alerts for flooding and landslides. Storm Doksuri, a former super typhoon, has swept northwards over China since Friday, when it hit southern Fujian province after scything through the Philippines. Emergency personnel recovered two bodies from waterways in Beijing's Mentougou district on Monday, the state-run People's Daily said.

AFP reporters saw tree branches and dented cars, left by receding floodwaters, strewn on riverbanks in Mentougou on Monday afternoon. "This morning it was crazy, the water overflowed the Mentougou river and the whole avenue was flooded," Guo Zhenyu, a 49-year-old resident, told AFP. Yellow bulldozers, workers in orange mackintoshes and residents cleared away the mud and debris during a period of lighter rain on Monday afternoon.

"I'm old but I've never seen flooding like this before in my life," Mentougou resident Qin Quan said. She showed AFP a video on her phone, shared among residents of the area, of workers attempting to resuscitate an unconscious man, as well as footage of a man desperately clinging to a pole with one hand as water washes over him. The much larger and still swollen Yongding River in the same district churned up debris in brown torrents as residents looked on in shock from a bridge.

Other footage shared with AFP by a Mentougou resident showed a traffic barrier dozens of metres long snaking down a road as the water carried it away. Chen Hong, a resident of the southern Feng-

tai district, shared footage with AFP that showed a parked van half-submerged in fast-flowing brown water on Monday morning as the rain continued to fall. Residents in Chen's neighborhood cleared mud outside their homes with shovels during a brief respite from the downpour.

"Once it starts raining the road turns into a drain, and there's water on the first floor inside houses," said Chen, 52. "The houses here are all old houses, so there are definitely concerns about safety," she said. A section of road surface in the outer Fangshan district caved in under rising water, local media reported. Hundreds of bus services in the capital were suspended, according to state news agency Xinhua. The Beijing government issued the highest flood warning for the suburban Dashihe River, while nearby city Tianjin also issued a flood alert.

Social media users uploaded footage of vehicles swept away by muddy torrents and thoroughfares turned into rapids on the outskirts of the city. Murky water can be seen in one clip posted on the Instagram-like Xiaohongshu platform on Monday swamping a large intersection in the outer Mentougou district next to high-rise apartment blocks. The clip was geolocated by AFP. Rainwater also appeared to leak onto a subway platform in western Beijing's university district in another Xiaohongshu video from Sunday that was geolocated by AFP.

Extreme weather

The streets of central Beijing were quieter than usual on Monday morning as residents heeded offi-



CALUMPIT: Residents transport a motorcycle on a boat to avoid floodwaters left by typhoon Doksuri in Calumpit, Bulacan province.— AFP

cial recommendations to work from home, with only a handful of delivery drivers braving pools of water seen in usually packed bike lanes. The governments of Beijing and neighboring Hebei province renewed red alerts for rainstorms on Monday.

China has been experiencing extreme weather and posting record temperatures this summer, events that scientists say are being exacerbated by climate change. Experts have warned that the on-

going downpour could prompt even worse flooding than in July 2012, when 79 people were killed and tens of thousands evacuated, according to local media. An average of 170.9 millimeters of rain inundated Beijing in 40 hours between Saturday night and noon on Monday, the Beijing Meteorological Bureau said. That is almost equivalent to the average rainfall for the entire month of July, according to official records.— AFP

Migrants between life and death in the Tunisia-Libya desert

AL ASSAH, Libya: In the unbearable midday heat, a Libyan patrol near the border with Tunisia comes across a black African man collapsed on the reddish-brown desert sand. He is barely breathing, and officers try to revive him, gently, with a few drops of water on his lips. The man is just one among hundreds of migrants arriving daily in Libya after being abandoned in the desert borderland by Tunisian security forces, according to Libyan border guards and the migrants themselves.

By the time they reach Libya, the migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are ready to drop from exhaustion, in temperatures that have exceeded 40 degrees Celsius. AFP on Sunday witnessed the border guards rescue around 100 men and women from an uninhabited zone near Sebkhah al-Magta, a salt lake along the Libya-Tunisia border. In the distant shimmering heat haze, six figures emerge, the latest to reach the area. They speak Arabic and say they have come from Tunisia. Libyan border guards told AFP that, over the past two weeks, they have rescued hundreds of migrants who said they were left by Tunisian authorities in the border region near Al-Assah, about 150 kilometers west of Tripoli.

In early July, hundreds of migrants from sub-Saharan African countries were driven out of the Tunisian port city of Sfax as racial tensions flared following the death of a Tunisian man in a clash between locals and migrants.

Tunisians 'brought me here'

Haitham Yahya, from Sudan, said he worked for a year in Tunisia's construction sector after reaching

the country clandestinely through Niger and Algeria. "I was at work when they caught me and brought me here, first in a police car then in a (security forces) truck. Then they left me and told me to go to Libya," he said in Al-Assah. At its closest point, near Sfax, Tunisia is only about 130 kilometres from the Italian island of Lampedusa.

The North African country is a major gateway for migrants and asylum-seekers attempting perilous sea voyages in hopes of a better life in Europe, whose leaders have offered financial aid to help Tunisia manage the flow. Human Rights Watch said up to 1,200 black Africans were "expelled, or forcibly transferred by Tunisian security forces" in July to the country's desert border regions with Libya and Algeria. In mid-July, the Tunisian Red Crescent said it had provided shelter to at least 630 migrants who had been taken after July 3 to Ras Jedir, about 40 kilometers north of Al-Assah.

A few days later, though, AFP gathered testimony from hundreds of migrants still stuck in the Ras Jedir buffer zone. They said they had been forced there by Tunisian security forces. In Ras Jedir, 350 people remained in a makeshift camp, including 65 children and 12 pregnant women. "Their living conditions are very problematic," a humanitarian official told AFP, adding that "it is not sustainable in the long term, there are no toilets, no water tanks, no real shelters".

At Al-Assah, dazed migrants continue to stagger in, some with only sandals on their feet. In twos and threes or by the dozens, they come. Some collapse. The guards hold bottles of water over their parched mouths. Faced with the influx, Libyans from the border guards Battalion 19 of the army, and a unit against Saharan immigration, have been patrolling daily. "We are on the demarcation line between Libya and Tunisia and we see more and more migrants arriving every day," said Ali Wali, Battalion 19 spokesman. He said AFP received permission to accompany the units "to silence those (in Tunisia) who claim that we fabricated it all and brought the migrants here".—AFP



AL ASSAH: A migrant of African origin drinks water upon his arrival in an uninhabited area near Al-Assah in the Libya-Tunisia border.— AFP

Only four nations doing enough to stub out smoking

GENEVA: Only four countries—Brazil, Mauritius, the Netherlands and Turkey—have adopted all the anti-tobacco measures recommended in the fight against the "deadly scourge" of smoking, the World Health Organization said Monday. In a fresh report, the UN health agency urged countries to scale up their use of recognized measures to reduce tobacco use, including enforcing advertising bans, plastering health warnings on cigarette packages, raising tobacco taxes and providing assistance to those who want to quit.

It said Mauritius and the Netherlands had now joined Brazil and Turkey in implementing all of its recommended measures. WHO said 5.6 billion people, or 71 percent of the world's population, were now protected by at least one tobacco control measure—five times more than in 2007. The health agency said the global rate of the prevalence of smoking had dropped from 22.8 percent in 2007 to 17.0 percent in 2021.

Without this decline, there would have been 300 million additional smokers now, the WHO said. "Slowly but surely, more and more people are being protected

from the harms of tobacco," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, adding that his organization was eager to support national efforts to "protect their people from this deadly scourge".

8.7 million annual deaths

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death, killing 8.7 million people each year, including 1.3 million who die from inhaling second-hand smoke. According to the organization, eight countries are one policy step away from joining the leaders in tobacco control: Ethiopia, Iran, Ireland, Jordan, Madagascar, Mexico, New Zealand and Spain. However, 2.3 billion people in 44 countries remain unprotected by any WHO anti-tobacco measures. And a full 53 states still do not have complete smoking bans in healthcare facilities—something Ruediger Krech, the WHO's health promotion director, called "completely unacceptable".

The WHO report also decried far too little regulation of e-cigarettes. Globally, 121 countries have adopted some measure addressing e-cigarettes. But 74 countries—home to almost one third of the global population—have no regulations in place addressing such products, meaning no bans on use in public places, no labeling requirements and no bans on advertising. "Astoundingly, very few countries have measures in place to protect children," the report said, noting that 88 countries, covering 2.3 billion people, have no minimum age for buying e-cigarettes.—AFP

Pontiff to attend Lisbon youth event weeks after surgery

VATICAN CITY: Almost two months after undergoing hernia surgery, Pope Francis heads to Lisbon Wednesday for a five-day trip for World Youth Day, a major Catholic event expected to draw a million pilgrims. The 86-year-old Argentine pontiff has a typically packed schedule in Portugal despite his health issues, which saw him spend nine nights in hospital in June—his third stay in hospital since 2021.

An outspoken Jesuit who loves being among his flock, Pope Francis is hugely popular among young Catholics and is likely to address issues they particularly care about, such as climate change. He is also expected to talk about the war in Ukraine.

World Youth Day, a week of religious, cultural and festive events held every two or three years, is also an opportunity for the Catholic Church to show it is still relevant after many followers were left alienated by decades of scandal over clerical child sex abuse.

Church organisers are expecting about one million pilgrims from across the globe, although the Portuguese government has suggested it could be up to 1.5 million. In his first trip abroad since his surgery, the pope is due to make 11 public pronouncements and hold numerous meetings, and on Saturday will visit the shrine of Fatima north of Lisbon. Americo Aguiar, the auxiliary bishop of Lisbon who is organising the event, said some elements of the programme might change, however, depending on the health of the pope, who regularly uses a wheelchair.

"We are aware of the limits of the pope," Aguiar told AFP, saying organisers were doing their best to adapt, including reducing the amount of times the pontiff must get in and out of a car. Around 16,000 members of law enforcement, civil protection and medical staff are being deployed for the visit, officials said. Roads and metro stations will be closed, presenting a challenge for the city of 550,000 inhabitants already busy with summer tourists.

Meeting abuse victims

The pope arrives in Lisbon on Wednesday, the second day of World Youth Day, meeting with officials, diplomats and religious figures before a series of encounters with young people on Thursday and Friday. On Saturday morning Francis will visit the rural pilgrimage site of Fatima, where in 2017 he declared sainthood for two young shepherds who a century earlier had visions of the Virgin Mary.

That evening the pope will lead a vigil in Lisbon's waterfront Parque Tejo, ahead of a mass held at the park Sunday morning. Preparations are already well underway for the visit, with World Youth Day flags in green, red and yellow adorning the main square.

Pope Francis is also expected during his visit to meet privately with victims of sexual abuse by members of the Portuguese clergy. A report published in February by an independent commission found at least 4,815 children were sexually abused by clergy members—mostly priests—since 1950. The inquiry, based on testimony from over 500 victims, concluded that the Church hierarchy in Portugal "systematically" tried to conceal the abuse. The results of the inquiry, which was commissioned by the Church in the country, has been a damning blow to the institution in Portugal where 80 percent of its population of some 10 million people identify as Roman Catholic.

Distant relationship

But among some groups of Catholics, faith is still strong, particularly among students, noted Jose Pereira Coutinho, a sociologist at the Catholic University of Portugal. Americo Aguiar said the pope himself was hugely influential. "Many young people I've met don't regularly go to mass on Sunday... Pope Francis is a huge draw for these young people who have a very distant relationship with the Church," he told AFP. "This calls for a different model (of engagement) on our part." Initially scheduled for August 2022, but postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Lisbon World Youth Day is the 16th international edition of what has become the largest gathering of Catholics worldwide.—AFP



Jamshid Sharmahd

Years of anguish for family of German on Iran death row

PARIS: Frustration as other foreign nationals were set free. Occasional phone calls, months apart. And the constant fear that the executioner's noose could be tightened any day. The family of Jamshid Sharmahd have endured three years of torment as each day they await a breakthrough, while always fearing the worst, for the German citizen sentenced to death in Iran. Sharmahd was abducted three years ago in late July 2020 by the Iranian authorities and sentenced earlier this year to be hanged for "corruption on earth". Iran's Supreme Court in April confirmed the death penalty.

Activists regard him as one of more than a dozen foreign passport holders held by Iran as hostages in a bid to extract concessions from the West. His family says that Tehran-born Sharmahd, 68, a software developer who immigrated to Germany in the 1980s but then moved to live in the United States, was kidnapped by Iranian security services in the United Arab Emirates in July 2020, spirited over the border into Oman and then taken to Iran for trial.

Iran has never confirmed how Sharmahd was detained, saying only he was seized in a "complex operation". Amnesty International has said he was subjected to "enforced disappearance" followed by a "sham trial" and torture in detention. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has classified his detention as arbitrary and confirmed the family's details on his abduction.

His family, who say he only holds a German passport, are urging stronger action from the German and other Western governments to earn his release. Berlin expelled two Iranian diplomats in response to the death sentence, which it called "unacceptable." A protest is planned outside the German foreign ministry in Berlin on Monday afternoon to mark three years since Iran announced Sharmahd's capture.

'Was this goodbye?'

"There is no pressure. A German citizen was kidnapped and nothing happened," his daughter Gazelle Sharmahd, who lives in the United States, told AFP. "It's a game—they push and you push. The push for them is to hang my dad," she said. Sharmahd earlier in July was allowed to call his wife, also based in the US, for the first time in five months. He was also permitted to speak to Gazelle Sharmahd, the first time she had spoken to her father in two years.

But Gazelle Sharmahd said the one-hour conversation, in which he sounded tired, raised more questions than answers. "Phone calls are great but also a reason for concern," she said. "They always have a purpose. It could be either a window of opportunity to save his life or a goodbye call." "Was this to make us shut up before they execute him? Was this a goodbye?" she said.

The Mizan Online news agency of Iran's judiciary reported in February that a Tehran court sentenced Sharmahd "on the charge of corruption on earth through planning and directing terrorist acts" including a 2008 bombing in Shiraz which killed 14 people. His family ridicule these accusations, saying a "long series of baseless charges" were laid against him in addition to the mosque bombing. In Berlin, a German foreign ministry spokesman told AFP that the government was using "all channels" to ensure Sharmahd was not executed, while acknowledging his family was "going through something unimaginable and unbearable".—AFP

Business

TUESDAY, AUGUST 1, 2023

Fed to keep options open on rate hike

ECB could raise rates or pause at next meeting: Lagarde

WASHINGTON: A Federal Reserve official left open the possibility on Monday of pausing or stopping interest rate hikes at the central bank's next policy meeting in September, saying "there's nothing off the table." "Thus far we're on the golden path and we've got to walk that line," Chicago Fed president Austan Goolsbee said in an interview on Yahoo! Finance, referring to the path of lowering inflation without triggering a major recession.

But he signaled as well that the Fed will continue to be data dependent in making its next rate decision. To rein in surging costs of living, the Fed has lifted the benchmark lending rate rapidly since March 2022, and most recently raised rates to the highest level in 22 years.

While the full effect of policy will take time to ripple through the economy, inflation has cooled and retail sales is showing signs of easing, even as the labor market remains robust. "We've never been able to get inflation down even as much as we've gotten it down so far without a recession," Goolsbee said. "It's looking like we're walking the line pretty well," he added, calling it "fabulous news" to see inflation coming down.

But policymakers will have to "play by ear" when it comes to the restrictiveness of the policy rate, he said, signaling that the Fed will have to closely eye economic data in the coming months. Asked about the impact of regional bank failures earlier this year—including the dramatic collapse of Silicon Valley Bank—Goolsbee noted a stabilization in the sector.

The European Central Bank could hike interest rates again or pause at its next meeting and any

decision will depend on the latest data, president Christine Lagarde has said. The central bank for the 20 countries that use the euro lifted borrowing costs for the ninth consecutive time Thursday as it fights stubbornly high inflation.

But in comments after the meeting, Lagarde fuelled expectations the ECB may finally pause its historic hiking campaign soon, saying she had an open mind about future decisions. In an interview with French daily Le Figaro published Sunday, she stressed no decision had yet been made about what the ECB will do at its next meeting on September 14.

"I hear some people say that the final rate hike will take place in September," she said. "There could be a further hike of the policy rate or perhaps a pause. A pause, whenever it occurs, in September or later, would not necessarily be definitive. "Inflation must return durably to its target." Decisions would be based on the latest economic and financial data, she said. The ECB is due to release its latest forecasts, including for eurozone growth and inflation, at the September meeting.

Inflation has been slowing but still came in at 5.5 percent in June—well above the ECB's two-percent target. But there have been growing concerns about the impact of rate hikes after the eurozone slipped into recession around the turn of the year, with the economy shrinking for two straight quarters. But Lagarde said second-quarter economic growth data for Germany, France and Spain, released Friday, were "quite encouraging".

The French and Spanish economies both grew more than expected. The German economy—Europe's biggest—stagnated, despite expectations



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City. — AFP

for a slight rebound. She also shrugged off criticism coming from leaders of some countries, such as Italy, about the rate increases.

"As a central banker you need to have a thick

skin," she said. "And it's essential to keep sight of the objective of lowering inflation and to be as clear as possible about the tools deployed and the intended results." — AFP

Turkish locals mobilized to save trees

MILAS, Turkey: Protecting their faces with scarves, local women are taking the frontlines against water cannons and tear gas fired by security forces in the southwest Turkey, resisting cutting of trees for the expansion of a coal mine.

Akbelen forest, located in the Milas district in the Aegean province of Mugla, has been occupied by local villagers as well as environmental activists for over two years to defend the trees from an energy company that runs the coal mine. While Turkey has been battling wildfires since early this month, tensions erupted last Monday between local villagers and gendarmerie forces in Ikizkoy village when logging crews turned up in the forest area, prompting hundreds of ecologists to rush to the rescue.

The gendarmerie set up barricades to prevent villagers from entering the forest, leading to violent scuffles when the security forces fired tear gas and water cannon to push back the crowds. "They cut down our trees, uproot our olive groves, scrape and throw away our lands and burn it all in thermal power plants for gold and coal," Ikizkoy resident Ayse Coban, 54, told AFP. "The damage is done. They ruined the country. It tears my heart out," he added.

'Defending climate'

Some activists who managed to get by the security barricades occupied the forests and hugged trees last week. Several villagers were detained after they refused to heed the call to leave the area. "Akbelen, I think, has managed to send a marvelous message throughout Turkey and the world," said Deniz Gumusel, an environmental engineer and ecology activist.

YK Energy, a joint affiliate of IC Holding and Limak Holding, which is known to have close ties with the Turkish government, obtained permission in 2020 to cut down the trees in the 316-hectare section of the Akbelen forest to expand a mine to provide more lignite coal to power plants in the Mugla province. Coal supplies over a quarter of Turkey's primary en-



MILAS, Turkey: Protestors sit on the ground as Turkish soldiers of the Gendarmerie General Command and anti-riot police officers use water cannons and tear gas to push back demonstrators during clashes in Ikizkoy, in the Milas district of the Province of Mugla, on July 29, 2023. — AFP

ergy and the coal industry generates over a third of the country's electricity.

"These are the most powerful companies not only in Turkey, but also at global scale," Gumusel said. "Those women, whom we call uneducated, whom we think are unaware of the world, are here defending the climate, fighting for climate justice," she added. Local residents started a vigil in 2021 awaiting a court ruling on a lawsuit they filed and which is still ongoing. Last year, the court lifted its decision to temporarily halt forest clearance and logging crews moved in after the elections this spring.

'Saplings will be planted'

Ismail Hakki Atal, lawyer representing the protesting villagers, said the tree-cutting was suspended during the electoral campaign that saw the re-election of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in May. After the second round of presidential elections on May 28, "we heard rumors from inside the company, like, 'Now that we have won the election, we can start chopping the forest'", he said. On Sun-

day, the governor's office said in a statement that the deforestation work had come to a halt.

"After this process, the mining areas will be rehabilitated by the permit holder in compliance with the project, and 130,000 saplings will be planted," it said. Turkey ratified the Paris Climate agreement in 2021. The coal industry is responsible for a fifth of all global greenhouse gas emissions, more than any other single source.

Activists say Turkey has enormous renewable energy potential and does not need to rely on coal to produce electricity. However, as of the end of 2022, only 15.5 percent of the country's electricity is produced from solar and wind power. Mugla province is home to three power plants and activists say the coal mines that supply them threaten the region's centuries-old olive groves, a vital part of the local economy. "I love nature, I love the earth very much. Even when we die, the soil will accept us, not the concrete," Coban said. "When we die, no one digs the concrete, they dig the earth to put us in. Because we come from the earth, we will return to the earth." — AFP

series of strong corporate earnings announcements, suggesting that higher rates have not taken an outsized toll on the economy, have also encouraged investors, with bellwethers Apple and Amazon set to release their latest earnings on Thursday. "The outlook for economic growth is front and centre for markets this week as we get a series of data releases which should have a major influence on central bank monetary policy," said Laith Khalaf, head of investment analysis at AJ Bell.

"There are three data points on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday covering the health of the US jobs market, which has so far been solid as a rock despite rising interest rates making life harder for businesses." In the eurozone, official figures on Monday showed the economy grew 0.3 percent in the second quarter, while inflation eased to 5.3 percent in July from 5.5 percent the previous month.

That could support expectations for a pause in ECB rate hikes, after its chief Christine Lagarde said Sunday "we are reaching our goal" of inflation at around two percent. "We do expect a much lower reading in inflation by the end of the year," said Bert

Colijn, a senior economist at ING. Inflation remains much higher in the UK, at nearly eight percent, putting the Bank of England on course to raise interest rates once more on Thursday.

In the United States, Wall Street charged higher Friday after data showed that the Fed's preferred gauge of inflation fell last month to its slowest pace in two years, stoking optimism the Federal Reserve would not have to raise rates further. US rates were again raised last week but the Fed said future decisions would be data-dependent, suggesting it might have come to the end of the tightening cycle as the world's largest economy remains in rude health.

In China, the world's second-largest economy, the government announced fresh measures to boost consumption, days after unveiling a number of initiatives for light industry.

The move comes as spending by China's army of consumers remains subdued even after the lifting of strict COVID containment measures late last year. A fresh round of figures showed the country's manufacturing activity continued to shrink in July, albeit at a slightly slower pace than last month.

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 200 million for three months with a rate of return at 4.375 percent.

Sri Lanka records sharp decline in inflation

COLOMBO: Crisis-hit Sri Lanka's inflation moderated to 6.3 percent in July, official figures showed Monday, its lowest rate in nearly two years.

The island's worst-ever economic turmoil saw widespread shortages and the ouster of its president, with inflation peaking at 69.8 percent last September. But it has fallen since then, reaching 12.0 percent in June before dropping further in July, when data from the department of Census and Statistics showed a decline in food prices. Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign debt in April 2022 and many of its 22 million people endured months of food, fuel and medicine shortages.

The foreign exchange shortage has somewhat eased since, with the government securing a \$2.9 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund in March. Last month, the government unveiled a debt restructuring plan which offered a 30 percent haircut for international sovereign bondholders, who account for more than a quarter of Sri Lanka's outstanding foreign obligations. The IMF said last month that Sri Lanka's economy showed "tentative signs of improvement" but warned Colombo still needed to pursue painful reforms. Last year's economic crisis sparked months of civil unrest which eventually toppled then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa. — AFP

Global equities edge higher as inflation eases

LONDON: Global stocks mostly pushed higher on Monday as investors remained optimistic interest rates won't go higher and China made moves to boost lackluster growth. European stock markets were boosted by data showing the economy grew in the second quarter and inflation slowed in July, raising hopes the European Central Bank will indeed be able to hold off from hiking interest rates.

Asian equities closed with gains, tracing a pre-weekend bump on Wall Street and bolstered by new pledges from China of measures to stimulate its stuttering economy.

On Wall Street, the Dow opened flat and the S&P 500 and Nasdaq edged higher at the open of another busy week for company earnings reports and data. A



Close-up financial using online analyze exchange rate diagram.

Hopes for a government drive to kickstart the economy have provided much-needed support to markets over the past week, even as some observers warn the large-scale measures seen in the past were unlikely. — AFP

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Kuwait's credit growth muted in H1

Ongoing momentum in project awards may support business credit

KUWAIT: Domestic credit growth remained weak in Q2 at 0.2 percent q/q, translating into a YTD increase of 0.8 percent (+3.3 percent y/y). Higher interest rates, banks' lower price competition in terms of retail lending, and normalizing growth following a strong 2022 are some of the factors behind the weakness this year. Looking ahead, while a more favorable political backdrop and ongoing momentum in project awards may support business credit we note that, historically, business credit growth has been much weaker in the second half of the year than in H1.

Business credit increased by a limited 0.4 percent q/q translating into YTD growth of 1.6 percent. This follows a strong 6.8 percent growth in 2022, the fastest annual expansion since 2013. The trade sector was, by far, the main driver of growth in Q2, increasing by a solid 6.3 percent q/q while "other services" and "oil/gas" were the weakest, dropping by 3 percent and 2.1 percent, respectively. From a YTD perspective, "trade" and "construction" are the fastest growing, together accounting for 84 percent of the total increase in business credit. The particularly interest rate sensitive "real estate", the sector's heavyweight with a 41 percent share, is up by 0.9 percent YTD (+5.6 percent in 2022) after a strong rise in June, having been in the red for most of 2023. Looking ahead, we note that business credit growth is usually much weaker in the second half of the year.

However, an ongoing improvement in project awards, which are up by nearly 140 percent y/y in H1, especially if accompanied by a sustained favorable political backdrop may support business credit growth in the second half of the year.

Meanwhile, household credit remained flat for the second consecutive quarter, a sharp slowdown following two very strong years. Higher interest rates, easing price competition among the banks given the higher cost of funds, softening consumer spending growth, and lower real estate sales are all factors that have contributed to this major slowdown in household lending. On a y/y basis, total credit is up by 3.3 percent through June (business +2.1 percent, household +3.7 percent), slower than the 5.1 percent recorded at the end of Q1.

Deposit growth softening

Resident deposits increased by 0.6 percent q/q, lifting YTD growth to 2 percent (+1.6 percent y/y). In continuation of Q1, private-sector deposits increased, although marginally, in Q2 and government deposits soared while public institutions' deposits (accounting for 13 percent of resident deposits) remained on a downtrend, actually falling by a steep 20 percent since May 2022. YTD, private-sector deposits are up by 2.9 percent, government deposits soared by 16 percent while public institutions' deposits fell by 10 percent. Within private-sector

Table 1: Credit growth

Credit	Jun-2023		% growth		
	KD billions	q/q	YTD	y/y	2022
Business	23.4	0.4	1.6	2.1	6.8
o/w Real Estate	9.6	0.5	0.9	1.5	5.6
Household	18.5	0.1	0.1	3.7	9.1
Securities	3.2	-2.6	-1.1	5.8	14.3
Banks & financial institutions	2.2	3.0	1.1	9.7	-3.1
Total domestic credit	47.3	0.2	0.8	3.3	7.7
Non-resident credit	5.7	9.1	3.0	9.0	17.2
Total credit	53.0	1.1	1.0	3.9	8.6

Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

Table 2: Deposit growth

Deposits	Jun-2023		% growth		
	KD billions	q/q	YTD	y/y	2022
Private-sector	37.9	0.2	2.9	4.5	6.8
o/w Time dep.	20.3	5.6	10.9	25.1	19.3
o/w CASA dep.	15.9	-5.3	-5.0	-13.3	-4.3
Public Institutions	6.1	-3.8	-9.9	-18.2	-7.0
Government	3.9	12.7	16.1	12.9	18.2
Total resident dep.	47.8	0.6	2.0	1.6	5.3
Non-resident deposits	4.0	-12.2	-7.9	-10.8	-1.7
Total deposits	51.8	-0.5	1.2	0.5	4.6

Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

KD deposits, and for the fifth consecutive quarter, growth in time deposits outpaced that of CASA. Since March 2022, when interest rate-lift-off commenced, time deposits are up by 29 percent while CASA is down by 12 percent.

Discount rate hike

Finally, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) tracked the US Fed in hiking rates by 25 bps in

its July meeting, bringing cumulative hikes in the discount rate to 2.75 percent since March 2022, compared with a cumulative 5.25 percent increase by the Fed. While the Fed left the door open for further hikes in the remainder of the year, depending mainly on how inflation will evolve, the most recent (June) dot-plot indicates one final 25 bps hike in 2023 while current futures market pricing indicates that the hiking cycle is done.

ABK holds first half 2023 analyst conference call

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently held its analyst conference for the first half of 2023. Attended by Shiamak Soonawalla, Group Chief Finance Officer Abdulaziz Jawad, Chief Strategy Officer and Yaqoub Almulla, Senior Manager of Investor Relations, the call involved a discussion of ABK's first-half financial results. Hosted by EFG Hermes, an extensive presentation was conducted on the Group's performance and financial indicators during the first half of the year. Furthermore, the speakers also shared insights on ABK's upcoming strategic plans.

Ongoing growth

Soonawalla expressed his delight in delivering yet another successful half-year performance. He said, "ABK's results demonstrate good progress and delivered responsible growth for our shareholders with an achieved Net Profit of KD 23.9 million for the first half of 2023, representing a 30 percent increase over the comparable half of 2022. Furthermore, Earnings per share reached 11 fils, an increase of 38 percent compared to 8 fils in the previous year."

The Group CFO affirmed that the financial performance in the first half of 2023 reflects continued improvement in underlying operating drivers, strong loan growth, lower provisions and impairments, a healthy balance-sheet, comfortable liquidity levels, and as old capital base.

Furthermore, he highlighted that the Bank continues to benefit from a competitive advantage due to the distribution of ABK's operations across the UAE and Egypt. He said, "The Group's geographical footprint supports revenue generation, loan distribution, and deposit collection. The Group's international operations comprise the operations of its UAE branches and ABK-Egypt subsidiary, contributing about 39 percent of operating income and 35 percent of assets."

Soonawalla also announced that net operating profit totaled KD 44.3 million, which was led by a 2 percent improvement in Operating Income to KD 88.3 million in comparison to KD 86.3 million in the first half of 2022. Meanwhile, the non-performing loan ratio was at 1.36 percent with a loan loss coverage ratio for the group of 376 percent in 2023, and excess provisions of KD 195 million over IFRS requirements according to Central Bank of Kuwait guidelines.

Stable performance

Soonawalla highlighted that the Group maintained stable operating performance with a net interest margin of 2.1 percent and operating profit to average assets of 1.4 percent. These results once again reflect solid performance by the Group and demonstrate the continued growth in its businesses. He said, "The Group also has high liquidity levels with a net stable funding ratio of 110 percent, a Liquidity Coverage Ratio of 245 percent, and a self-funded balance sheet with a Customer Deposit of KD 4 billion with customer deposits accounting for 71 percent of total liabilities."

Soonawalla stated that the Group has shown stable total equity during the last three years and a strong capital position with a Tier 1 ratio of 12.7 percent, and a total Capital Adequacy Ratio of 15.1 percent in the first half of 2023. The Group's Operating Income of KD 88.3 million breaks down to 44 percent in commercial banking, 44 percent in retail banking, and 12 percent in treasury.

As for the Group's breakdown in assets, 59 percent is in commercial banking, 13 percent in retail, and 28 percent in treasury. Total Interest Income at KD 195 million for the first half of 2023 reflected a strong growth of KD 79.5 million (69 percent) over the first half of 2022, led mainly by strong asset growth and improved interest rate environment. Fees and commissions income contributed KD 16.7 million.

He continued, "The Group's operating ex-



Shiamak Soonawalla

penses reflect continued investments in key business initiatives, digital technologies and processes. This enables the Group to offer best-in-class service to customers and optimize resources to improve operational efficiency." Furthermore, Soonawalla mentioned that the Group has taken provisions in ordinary course of business for retail and corporate customers in Kuwait and overseas locations. The Group remains committed to its conservative approach in managing credit exposures and provisioning.

Strategic success

In his part, Jawad noted that during the first half of 2023, the macroeconomic global landscape experienced gradual improvements. Various economic indicators and key factors played a pivotal role in shaping the overall performance of the economy and a decline in global bank credit failures.

He said, "As central banks continue their campaigns to slow inflation, both the US and Europe are likely to avoid recessions by Federal Reserve (Fed) along with other central banks around the globe trying to defeat inflation by rapidly raising interest rates. The Fed raised the target range for the Fed funds rate by 25bps to 5.25 percent-5.5 percent in its July 2023 meeting, which continues to push borrowing costs to the highest level for the past 22 years. Subsequently, the Central Bank of Kuwait increased the discount rate by 25bps to reach 4.25 percent following the Fed increase."

Moving to Kuwait, Jawad elaborated that the economy is forecasted to be solid with numerous drivers to consider, including a newly elected cabinet and clear government plan of progression on large-scale projects. He mentioned a 2 percent projected rise in the country's oil and gas GDP, leaving the non-oil sector as the primary driver of overall GDP growth.

Kuwait's 2022-2023 budget reported a surplus of KD 6.4 billion, the first surplus achieved in the past 9 years. Moreover, Kuwait's government intends to undertake 107 projects in its 4-year program as part of the recently published Kuwait Development Plan.

Jawad continued, "ABK's profitability ratios also increased as ROAA and ROAE reached 0.65 percent and 8.3 percent respectively in tandem with improving asset quality ratios as well as coverage ratio. We are well above both our current 9.5 percent minimum CET1 and 13.5 percent minimum CAR including D-SIB." It is worth noting that ABK's long credit rating by Fitch stands with an (A) with a stable outlook and (A2) from Moody's with continued observed growth in many of the key markets ABK operates in.

Digital transformation

Jawad shared ABK's significant progress in its digital transformation efforts through the opening of its first fully digitized branch in Al-Khiran Mall in Kuwait. He commented, "This has enabled us to streamline our operations, provide better customer experience, and expand our customer base. Looking ahead, we remain committed to driving innovation and growth in our business. We are capable in our strategy and our ability to execute, and will continue to make investments in the areas that will drive long-term value for our stakeholders." On the strategy side, ABK continues to deliver on its three major pillars, namely (1) Scaling and Creating Value, (2) Sustaining and De-Risking, and (3) Innovation and Enablement, which were translated to almost 100+ key initiatives. He said, "These are monitored on a monthly basis in order to ensure the successful execution of our strategy, which is in



Abdulaziz Jawad

line with our first half 2023 financial results."

Credit facilities

Continuing his discussion on ABK's strategy, Jawad stated that, in line with the goal of becoming the international banking hub for the Group, the ABK DIFC branch successfully closed a 37-month (with a 12-month extension option) USD 600 million Asian focused syndicated term loan facility. This inaugural transaction will register ABK with the largest facility by volume from a Kuwaiti borrower targeting the Asian market to date. The deal was well received in Asian markets and, on the back of excessive demand, was upsize to USD 600 million from the initial launch target of \$500 million. The landmark financing closed with a total of 11 Asian lenders.

Capital increase

Commenting on the bank's capital increase, Jawad said, "ABK is also currently increasing its capital and has obtained the approval of the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) and Central Bank of Kuwait for the request to increase the bank's capital. The approval is to increase the share capital by KD 50 million (without the share premium), offering a rights issue of 500 million new shares for subscription with the right of preemption for the bank's shareholders. Additionally, an EGM was held on 17 July 2023 and the approval to increase capital was obtained. We are currently in the final stages for the CMA approval to commence the subscription process."

ESG and sustainable finance

He continued, "ABK achieved growth in all key performance indicators and has proven its commitment and leadership in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by participating in various community, relief, and humanitarian initiatives inside and outside Kuwait. Our commitment to sustainability goes beyond merely complying with regulations; it's a fundamental part of our strategic vision. We believe that ESG is crucial for the future success of our bank and the wellbeing of the communities we serve."

That being said, ABK is finalizing a comprehensive, updated ESG strategy that aligns with its core business objectives along with internationally renowned sustainability frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Principles for Responsible Banking and the recently introduced International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) standards.

Jawad highlighted that this strategy will act as a roadmap to integrate ESG elements into every aspect of ABK's operations, ensuring the proactive management of ESG risks and capitalization on the presented opportunities.

He continued, "We are also implementing an ESG policy that sets clear guidelines for responsible practices across all our business activities. Not only will this policy guide our internal operations, but it will also extend to our interactions with clients, partners, and suppliers, promoting sustainable practices throughout our entire value chain."

Jawad concluded his statement by highlighting one of the significant milestones in ABK's sustainability journey – the imminent implementation of a Sustainable Finance Framework. He said, "This framework will facilitate the funding of projects that positively contribute to society and the environment. By directing capital towards sustainable initiatives, we aim to accelerate the transition to a more inclusive and low-carbon economy, while maximizing value for our stakeholders."

Kuwait Airways achieves 30% growth in H1 '23

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways continues to achieve positive results in the first half of the year 2023, as compared to the first half of the year 2022, and to reach the best levels of excellence in the quality of services it provides to its valued customers, evident in the growth of the operating rates of its entire system. The company achieved 30 percent growth in revenues, reduced its debt by 39 percent, passenger traffic in Terminal 4 grew by 45 percent, aircraft utilization increased by 34 percent and the percentage of flight departures grew to 33 percent. In addition, the company achieved on time performance of 81 percent.

Kuwait Airways has had 115,000 new members joining the Oasis Club in the first half of this year, in addition, a 65 percent increase in passengers redeeming their Oasis points for tickets.

Kuwait Airways Chairman, Captain Ali Muhammad Al-Dukhan stated, "We are pleased to highlight the most prominent results of the first half of the year 2023, as Kuwait Airways, with the help of its dedicated employees, has achieved its goals within its strategic plans and vision emanating from the Board of Directors of the company, which extends to the year 2030, to develop and improve its entire system." Al-Dukhan stated after the board meeting that Kuwait Airways had reached exceptional advancements by keeping pace with the latest technologies in the air transport sector in the region and globally, as well as entering distinguished partnerships with major companies to develop operations, expand destinations or, exchange expertise. He added that the company's positive results, growth, and development over the course of the year culminated in Kuwait Airways receiving the award for the Most Improved Airline, according to Skyrax specialized in the evaluation of airlines, as the company achieved the 42nd rank for the year 2023, after it had been ranked at 76th place for the year 2022.

Al-Dukhan affirmed Kuwait Airways' is dedicated to provide its passengers who chose flying with the Blue Bird with the highest level of comfort and services aiming to exceed their expectations with every flight to the favorite destination.

Kuwait Airways' Chief Executive Officer Eng Maen Razouqi expressed his happiness with these positive results, which confirms the progress of the national carrier at a steady pace, as well as towards development and excellence in providing its services to its valued customers. This is in addition to striving towards introducing new destinations, linking Kuwait to the world through its new and diverse fleet, consisting of 32 modern aircraft of different types that include state-of-the-art technology keeping pace with the latest aspects offered by the commercial aviation sector, as well as being environmentally friendly. Razouqi stated that these results motivate Kuwait Airways to

continue flying to broader horizons and create new opportunities to embark on the next phase of its development program, to highlight new ideas and achieve the desired objectives through the company's mission statement, namely "Customer First".

Razouqi pointed out that Kuwait Airways has reached these achievements by introducing a wide range of new services to its passengers since the beginning of the year, such as, home check-in service for Royal and First Class passengers, complimentary limousine service to and from Terminal 4 for Premium class passengers (royal, first, and business), E-Boarding Pass, and the Just Upgrade feature to upgrade the travel class through bidding. This is in addition to developing and launching new menus on board, as well as the BlueFi inflight



Captain Ali Al-Dukhan



Eng Maen Razouqi

wifi service, where passengers can stay connected through various platforms of alphanumeric text messages throughout the flight, and the launch of the Elite Lounge at Terminal 4 to cater to the passengers of the national carrier.

On the other hand, Razouqi said, "Kuwait Airways has recently launched 13 new destinations for the summer season, bringing the total number of destinations to 58 direct destinations and more than 105 daily flights, in addition to 95 destinations via codeshare."

Razouqi continued, "Kuwait Airways seeks to introduce six new destinations in the winter season, most notably Washington DC, Barcelona, Taif, Athens, Izmir and Shiraz, in implementation of the strategic plans to expand the airline's network around the world and enter new markets that meet the desires of our valued passengers."

Razouqi concluded his statement by saying, "The Blue Bird is taking steady steps towards achieving unprecedented achievements in terms of developing the operational side, digital transformation in all departments and offering various services, which confirms the distinguished and exceptional services provided by Kuwait Airways to its esteemed passengers and the levels it has achieved."

Business

EU, Philippines agree to relaunch free trade talks

FTA negotiations to accelerate 'a new era of cooperation'

MANILA: The European Union and the Philippines will restart negotiations on a free-trade agreement as they seek to accelerate "a new era of cooperation", European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Monday.

Talks began in 2015 under then-Philippine president Benigno Aquino but stalled two years later under his successor Rodrigo Duterte, whose deadly drug war strained diplomatic relations with the West and sparked an international probe.

"I'm very glad that we have decided to relaunch negotiations for (a) free-trade agreement (FTA)," von der Leyen told reporters at a joint news conference with President Ferdinand Marcos in Manila.

"Our teams will get to work right now on setting the right conditions so that we can get back to the negotiations," she said, noting an FTA has "huge potential for both of us" in terms of jobs and growth. The European Union is the Philippines' fourth-largest trading partner and an FTA would be Manila's second bilateral deal after Japan.

Marcos described the Philippines and

the European Union as "like-minded partners" with "shared values of democracy, sustainable and inclusive prosperity, the rule of law, peace and stability, and human rights". The Philippines enjoys a Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status that allows it to export 6,274 products to the European Union tax-free, but this is set to expire at the end of this year.

Under the GSP+ scheme, which is extended to developing countries, Brussels cuts its import duties to zero on two-thirds of product categories in return for implementing 27 international conventions on human rights, labor rights, the environment and good governance. Rights monitors and some EU members of parliament have urged the European Union to withhold a deal extension for the Philippines because of Duterte's anti-narcotics crackdown that claimed thousands of lives.

The drug war has continued under Marcos even as he emphasized a greater focus on rehabilitation, but a local monitoring group estimates more than 350 people have been killed since he

took power in June 2022. Human Rights Watch's EU director Philippe Dam said it was concerning that von der Leyen "could not be heard tackling human rights and civil liberties issues".

"Make no mistake—the human rights situation in the Philippines remains dire," Dam said in a statement. "The EU should not look the other way and should tie a future trade deal to concrete labor and human rights improvements and accountability for past violations."

Von der Leyen, the first European Commission president to visit the Philippines, said the two sides had "learned the hard way the cost of economic dependencies".

A free-trade agreement was the basis for diversifying supply lines and could also be "a springboard for a new technology cooperation to modernize the broader economy". She said the European Union would provide 466 million euros (\$513 million) to help the Philippines develop "green energy" and plastics recycling, as well as provide satellite data to help it better prepare for extreme weather. — AFP



MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (second right) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen attend a signing ceremony at Malacanang Presidential Palace in Manila on July 31, 2023. — AFP

Gulf Bank receives customer complaints through mobile app

KUWAIT: As part of its efforts to communicate more quickly and effectively, Gulf Bank is receiving complaints through the Mobile Application, where the complaints are received by the Complaints and Customer Protection Unit and addressed within 15 working days. This aligns with the instructions of the Central Bank of Kuwait, in an effort to enhance the protection of customers – by establishing a balanced relationship between banks and their customers – that is guided by the best international practices in this field.



Bader Al-Ali

The Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, Bader Al-Ali stated that if customers would like to file a complaint through the specified mechanisms, they must take into account the following:

1. The Customer Complaints and Protection Unit work to find a solution, or explanation, for a customer's complaint, within the framework of the implementation of the terms of the contractual relationship between the customer and the bank.
2. The Customer Complaints and Protection unit works five days a week, from Sunday to Thursday, from 8 am to 3 pm, and is closed on weekends and public holidays.
3. Complaints submitted are addressed and responded to within 15 business days.
4. The work of the unit is limited to responding to customers' complaints; hence, the Customer Complaints and Protection unit cannot perform banking transactions such as: Activating accounts, canceling, requesting, activating bank cards, changing a mobile phone number, or updating customer information.
5. The response to the written complaint is done through the Customer Complaint and Protection Unit at Gulf Bank, and not through the Central Bank of Kuwait. In case the customer objects to the response, he must file a grievance to the Central Bank of Kuwait through the mechanism mentioned on Gulf Bank's website or the Central Bank of Kuwait's website.

Al-Ali added: "We are constantly communicating with our customers, listening to their requirements and studying complaints with great accuracy and attention, with the aim of quickly responding to their banking needs." Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

China announces measures to boost consumption

BEIJING: Chinese authorities announced new measures to boost consumption on Monday, as fresh economic data suggested that the country's post-COVID recovery is running out of steam and growth is slowing. Official figures released Monday showed factory activity contracting for the fourth straight month in July, adding to a run of dismal economic data that has ramped up calls for government support measures.

A sluggish job market and general uncertainty over the future mean consumer confidence is low.

China's State Council released on Monday a 20-point plan to increase consumption across the board, touching on housing, culture and tourism, as well as green consumption such as electric vehicles.

The measures aim to increase the supply of subsidized rental accommodation and try to solve other problems around housing, particularly for young people. Once a driving force behind the economy, a crisis in the real estate sector means many developers are now fighting for their survival, exacerbating a crisis of confidence among potential buyers. The State Council also said it would support the expansion of large-scale festivals and sporting events both on and offline, as well as an increase in spending on services involving catering and healthcare.

Infrastructure in rural areas will be improved to boost digital and green consumption, it added.

Officials told reporters they would "unleash consumption potential by optimizing policy and institutional design" in the second half of the year.

PMI contracts again

Earlier on Monday the official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) -- a key measure of factory output -- came in at 49.3, below the 50-point mark that separates expansion and contraction, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). July's reading was slightly higher than June's 49.0 figure and was better than forecasted in a Bloomberg survey.

"The overall level of manufacturing prosperity continued to improve," NBS statistician Zhao Qinghe said in a statement. The non-manufacturing PMI, which measures business sentiment in the services and construction sectors, fell to 51.5 in July from 53.2 in June, as activity in capital market services and real estate shrank. "The data release showed mixed messages," Zhiwei Zhang, an analyst at Pinpoint Asset Management, wrote in a note, adding "it seems the economic momentum is still quite weak".

China this month said its economy grew 6.3 percent in the second quarter, much weaker than the 7.1 percent predicted in an AFP survey of analysts. The



HANGZHOU: A worker produces automotive bearings at a factory in Hangzhou, in China's eastern Zhejiang province on July 31, 2023. — AFP

country's top leaders, known as the Politburo, have warned that the economy faces "new difficulties and challenges" as well as "hidden dangers in key areas". Zhao also pointed to a low volume of overseas orders, describing a "complicated and severe external environment" and lackluster demand as major challenges for Chinese manufacturers.

In June, exports dried 12.4 percent, their biggest decline in three years, according to customs figures. "The Politburo meeting acknowledged the challenge the economy faces," said Zhang, the analyst. "The key issue is what policies will be launched after the meeting and how effective they will be." — AFP

HK economy slows in Q2 after rebound

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's economy expanded by 1.5 percent in the second quarter, data released Monday showed, indicating slowing growth after a robust start to the year. Vast swathes of Hong Kong's economy were shut down in 2022 as the govern-

ment grappled with a deadly COVID wave by imposing travel restrictions and banning large gatherings around the city. After its reopening, the economy bounced back in the first quarter, growing by 2.7 percent on year.

But the "momentum softened on the back of the strong rebound in the preceding quarter," a government spokesman said Monday in a statement.

Imports and exports posted double-digit declines over the period, decreasing by 16.1 percent and 15.3 percent respectively, the data showed. Private household spending grew by

8.5 percent, down from last quarter's 13 percent increase.

Finance Secretary Paul Chan had warned in a blog posted Sunday that Hong Kong's economy "may be slightly slower" than the three months before. He attributed the slowdown in household spending to changes in consumer habits after three years of pandemic living, but said the economy was still on track to improve. "Looking ahead, inbound tourism and private consumption will remain the major drivers of economic growth for the rest of the year," said the government spokesman.

"The improving economic situation and prospects should bode well for domestic demand, though tight financial conditions may impose constraints." Hong Kong entered a deep recession in 2019 and 2020 after the former British colony was roiled by pro-democracy protests and the start of the pandemic.

The city found brief respite in 2021, as its strict COVID-19 controls largely kept it virus-free, with the economy rebounding by 6.4 percent—gains that were later wiped out by the 2022 outbreak. — AFP

Eurozone economy rebounds as inflation slows

BRUSSELS: Economic growth in the eurozone rebounded in the second quarter, data showed Monday, but concerns remain over inflation that is slowing yet still stubbornly high, and over stagnation in the German economy.

The EU's Eurostat data agency said growth in the 20-country single currency zone reached 0.3 percent over the April-June period after recording zero growth in the first three months of the year.

The first-quarter figure was revised from a decline of 0.1 percent that had signaled a technical recession. The figures came after data last week showed that Germany's gross domestic product (GDP) stagnated between April and June, though the French and Spanish economies grew more than expected.

The European Central Bank (ECB) has hiked interest rates to their highest level since May 2001 to tame red-hot inflation, though its president Christine Lagarde last week indicated that the aggressive rate-hiking campaign could be paused. Analysts suggest that another hike is still a possibility,

and could further constrain economic growth.

"With monetary tightening still expected to have its most dampening effect on growth later, continued broad stagnation of economic activity remains the most likely outcome for the coming quarters," said Bert Colijn, senior eurozone economist at ING. Colijn said the eurozone GDP reading would not be "a dovish argument" at the next ECB rate-setting meeting in September, "leaving a further hike on the table". While the eurozone registered a slight drop in overall inflation this month, to 5.3 percent from 5.5 percent in June, in line with analyst expectations, core inflation—which strips out more volatile elements—was unchanged at 5.5 percent.

Both figures remain far higher than the ECB's two-percent target, though Lagarde said before the data release that "we are reaching our goal". "By all accounts, monetary policy has started to have an effect for lowering inflation," she told French daily Le Figaro in an interview published late Sunday.

Food and drink prices surge

Also, food and drink costs are still rising sharply, at 10.8 percent compared with 11.6 percent in June, hitting European consumers' wallets. Energy prices, however, dipped further, falling by 6.1 percent in July on the back of a drop of 5.6 percent in June. The core inflation rate, which excludes fast-chang-



FRANKFURT: President of the European Central Bank (ECB) Christine Lagarde gestures as she addresses a press conference following the meeting of the governing council of the ECB in Frankfurt am Main. — AFP

ing energy, food, alcohol and tobacco prices, is the key indicator for the Frankfurt-based ECB.

Among the 20 countries that use the euro, Belgium had the lowest inflation rate, at 1.6 percent in July, Eurostat said. There will be further concerns over the health of Germany's economy as inflation remains high, reaching 6.5 percent in July, Eurostat said, down slightly from 6.8 percent in June. — AFP

BT appoints first female boss in 170-year history

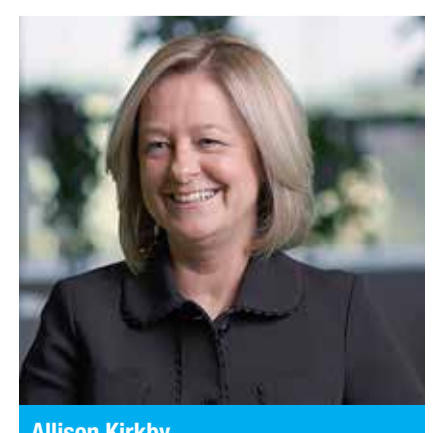
LONDON: British telecoms group BT announced Monday the appointment of Allison Kirkby as its new chief executive, the first woman to head the group in its 170-year history. Kirkby, a British national who has been CEO of Swedish telecoms group Telia for more than three years, will replace Philip Jansen, who recently said BT Group would

cut up to 55,000 jobs, or 42 percent of its workforce, by 2030.

The telecoms and technology sectors are slashing jobs in response to rampant inflation. Jansen will remain as CEO until the end of January at the latest, BT said in a statement. Kirkby has been a non-executive director of BT since 2019. "She is a proven leader, with deep sector experience and

a history of having transformed businesses," BT chairman Adam Crozier said Monday.

Kirkby, 56, said she was "fully supportive" of the group's strategy going forward. "BT is such an important company for the UK, and our many customers both in the UK and internationally and is uniquely placed to help everyone benefit from the rapid advances in digitalization. "Having been a member of the BT Group board for the past four years, I'm fully supportive of our strategy and am excited about leading it into its next phase of development." — AFP



Allison Kirkby



Men perform a traditional dance during the Sebeiba Festival, a yearly celebration of Tuareg culture, in the oasis town of Djanet in southeastern Algeria.



In a riot of color, music and dance, thousands of Tuareg have flocked to the Sebeiba festival that marks the end of an ancient tribal feud and which once a year transforms an oasis town deep in the Algerian Sahara. The Tuareg are a semi-nomadic people of Berber descent who practice Islam and whose traditional desert homeland stretches across parts of Algeria, Libya, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.



Local tour guides set up camp in the desert near the oasis town of Djanet in southeastern Algeria during the Sebeiba Festival, a yearly celebration of Tuareg culture.



The annual Sebeiba festival, held in Djanet, 1,500 kilometers (900 miles) southeast of Algiers, dates back over 3,000 years and is held to coincide with the Shiite Muslim Ashura commemoration. During the

10-day event, male dancers, dressed as warriors and wielding swords, perform to the singing and drumbeat of women who are adorned with glittering jewelry and henna tattoos.

The men parade their weapons and "then stand in a ritual circle rattling their swords continuously as the women sing traditional songs to the rhythm of the tambourine," says the UN cultural organization. The festival marks the time, three millennia ago, when two Tuareg tribes, El Mihane and Zelouaz, put an end to a war between them.

Oral tradition says their conflict ended when both sides learned of the death of the Egyptian pharaoh who—as in the biblical story—perished in the Red Sea while pursuing Moses and the fleeing Israelites. "Our ancestors kept the date of the day the pharaoh drowned in the sea and celebrated the death of the pharaoh," said local elder Elias Ali, 73.

In Djanet, a town of some 15,000 people, locals had been busy preparing long before the festival kicked off. One participant, 64-year-old Has-

san Echeikh, said that "during rehearsals, children learn to dance, and everyone can let off steam." UNESCO in 2014 added

the Sebeiba ritual and ceremonies to its List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

It also noted the role of local craftspeople who make the uniforms, weapons, jewelry and musical instruments for the ceremonies. Sebeiba is "an important marker of cultural identity for Tuareg people living in the Algerian Sahara," said the UNESCO listing. —AFP



Local tour guides set up camp in the desert near the oasis town of Djanet in southeastern Algeria during the Sebeiba Festival, a yearly celebration of Tuareg culture.



Men perform a traditional dance during the Sebeiba Festival, a yearly celebration of Tuareg culture, in the oasis town of Djanet in southeastern Algeria.



Men perform a traditional dance during the Sebeiba Festival, a yearly celebration of Tuareg culture, in the oasis town of Djanet in southeastern Algeria.



Men are dressed to perform a traditional dance during the Sebeiba Festival.



Local tour guides set up camp in the desert near the oasis town of Djanet in southeastern Algeria.



Men and women perform a traditional dance during the Sebeiba Festival, a yearly celebration of Tuareg culture, in the oasis town of Djanet in southeastern Algeria.



Women take part in the Sebeiba Festival, a yearly celebration of Tuareg culture, in the oasis town of Djanet in southeastern Algeria.

Lifestyle



Australian actress Margot Robbie poses on the pink carpet upon arrival for the European premiere of "Barbie" in central London. - AFP



'Barbie' stays atop 'hill of cash' in North America theaters

Warner Bros' blockbuster "Barbie" earned an estimated \$93 million in North American theaters this weekend as it continued "rolling down a hill of cash," industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. Taken together with Universal's dark biopic "Oppenheimer," which took in a mighty \$46.2 million in its own second weekend out, the two films provided a much-needed "Barbenheimer" boost during a middling Hollywood summer.

"July would have been a lukewarm month, but then 'Barbie' and 'Oppen-

heimer' arrived, moviegoing exploded, and within one week, July caught up to its pre-pandemic average," said analyst David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. Last weekend, "Barbie" scored the biggest opening weekend of the year, at \$80.5 million, showing eyebrow-raising appeal for a movie based on a small plastic doll living in a perfect pink world. With Margot Robbie as "Barbie" and Ryan Gosling as boyfriend "Ken," the Greta Gerwig film has now generated \$351.4 million in North American ticket sales, along with \$423 million abroad,

likely setting it on track to be the next billion-dollar flick. "Oppenheimer" also showed exceptional strength for a historical drama, with its second-weekend result — like that of "Barbie" — among the best in box-office history, said analyst Paul Dergarabedian. The story of the creation of America's atomic bomb has now earned \$174.1 million domestically and \$226 million abroad.

In third for the weekend was a new Disney release, "Haunted Mansion," at \$24.2 million. Disney spent \$150 million to produce the kid-centric film so it has

a way to go to reach profitability, according to Variety. The movie stars LaKeith Stanfield, Tiffany Haddish and Owen Wilson. Fourth spot went to the independent "Sound of Freedom," from Santa Fe Films and Angel Studios, at \$12.4 million. The low-budget action thriller has sparked controversy, with critics saying its story about child sex trafficking plays into Qanon conspiracy theories.

And hanging steady at fifth was Paramount's "Mission: Impossible — Dead Reckoning Part One." This latest in the popular Tom Cruise series took in

\$10.7 million, meaning all of the top five films scored in the double-digit millions. Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Talk to Me" (\$10 million)
- "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny" (\$4 million)
- "Elemental" (\$3.4 million)
- "Insidious: The Red Door" (\$3.2 million)
- "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse" (\$1.4 million). — AFP



Shoes of a Barbie doll on a shelf.



Barbie dolls at the "Barbie clinic."



A Barbie doll with a hearing aid.



The first Barbie doll with pink colors at the "Barbie clinic".



A Barbie doll with real fur.



It's fantastic: Movie boosts world's top Barbie collection

With her whopping 18,000 Barbies, Bettina Dorfmann was already in the record books, but the release of the blockbuster about the blonde icon has thrown a spotlight on her historic collection. "As a child I always played with Barbies," Dorfmann, 62, told AFP at her shrine to the plastic doll in the western German city of Duesseldorf.

"When I got out my dolls for my daughter, she wasn't interested because they were too old-fashioned. That's when I started collecting them myself." She's been living the pink dream for 28 years, lending her bevy of Barbies — recognized by Guinness World Records as the globe's biggest — to museums and shopping malls which put them on display for a few months.

"They usually draw between 5,000 and 20,000 visitors during the exhibitions but since the movie came out (last week), I heard the interest has really grown." Demand for her catalogues, which list her lovingly preserved Barbies representing various eras, ethnicities and professions — as well as a few Ken dolls — has also soared over the past week, she said.



The first Barbie doll with movable arms and legs.

Dorfmann, who has already seen the US movie twice and thinks it's "great," also owns a Barbie "clinic". "Repairing a doll can cost anything from 10 euros (\$11) to 500 or 600 euros if it's a rare model," she explained. At the North American box

office, "Barbie" turned in the best debut of 2023 with \$155 million in takings over the weekend. It also topped the German cinema charts with 732,000 tickets sold, according to industry figures. — AFP



A photo shows a Barbie doll with a prosthetic leg at the "Barbie clinic" of collector Bettina Dorfmann.



Barbie dolls at the "Barbie clinic" of collector Bettina Dorfmann.





Al-Thaid Date Festival reflects UAE's culture in preserving palm trees



Different crops of dates displayed at Al-Thaid Date Festival.



Crops of dates displayed at Al-Thaid Date Festival.



Women making woven baskets made from the date palm tree leaves.



Men making floor mats made of the branches of the date palm tree.

Al-Thaid Date Festival is one of the most prominent annual events held in the UAE, representing an interactive platform that brings together local farmers, reflecting their agricultural heritage and culture with their interest in preserving the date palm trees, harvesting its fruits and exchanging experiences to obtain the best types of dates.

The festival, held in Sharjah, is an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Emirates, cultivating over 120 varieties of dates such as Fard, Lulu,

Anbara and Barhi, with the aim of preserving the well-known culture relating to agriculture. The activities of the seventh edition festival included original traditional crafts that were made by the ancestors for the palm tree, including Al-Mikhrafah, which is a tool used to harvest fruits, and mats that are spread in the rooms.—KUNA



Farmers exchange tips and expertise on how to cultivate the best dates.— KUNA photos



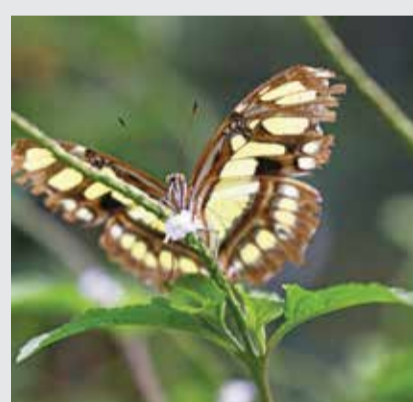
A Cydno Longwing Butterfly rests on a leaf.



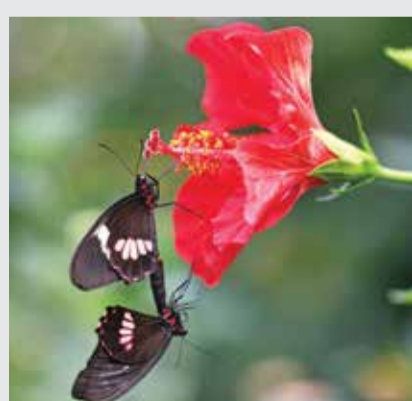
A butterfly rests on a flower.



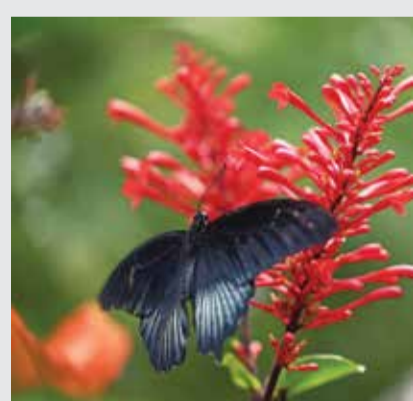
A Blue Morpho Butterfly rests on a leaf.



A Malachite Butterfly rests on a leaf.



A pair of mating Small Postman Butterflies hang from a flower.



A Scarlet Mormon Butterfly rests on a flower.



An Owl Butterfly.



Two Small Postman Butterflies.

Wildlife enthusiasts across Britain are being encouraged to log sightings of butterflies and some moths, as the world's largest annual survey of the increasingly endangered pollinating insects returns. The UK-wide "Big Butterfly Count"—which this year runs from July 14 to August 6 -- helps conservationists assess the health of the country's natural environment, amid mounting evidence it is increasingly imperiled.

Volunteers download a chart helping them to identify different butterfly species and then record their sightings in gardens, parks and elsewhere using a smartphone app and other online tools. It comes as experts warn the often brightly colored winged insects are in rapid decline in Britain as they fail to cope with unprecedented environmental change. "It's a pretty worrying picture," Richard Fox, head of science at the Butterfly Conservation charity, which runs the nationwide citizen-led survey, told AFP at Orley Common, a vast park in Devon, southwest England.

"The major causes of the decline are what we humans have done to the landscape in the UK over the past 50, 60, 70 years," he added from the site, which is seeing fewer butterflies despite offering an ideal habitat for them. A report published this year that Fox co-authored, based on 23 million items of data, revealed that four in every five UK butterfly species have decreased since the 1970s. Half of the country's 58 species are listed as threatened, according to a conservation "red list".

'Citizen scientists'

The UK, one of the world's most nature-depleted countries, has lost almost half of its biodiversity over recent decades, according to a 2021 UK parliament report. Agriculture, and its use of fertilizers and pesticides, alongside changes to landscapes including the removal of hedge rows to maximize space for growing crops, is partly blamed. Counting butterflies, which are among the most monitored insects globally, has helped track the grim trend.

Volunteers have been contributing to the effort since the 1970s but recording is more popular than ever, in part thanks to evolving technology. The Big Butterfly Count launched in 2010 and claims to have become the world's biggest such survey. Over 64,000 "citizen scientists" participated last year, submitting 96,257 counts of butterflies and day-flying moths from across Britain.

Butterfly Conservation and the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology have developed an iRecord Butterflies app to help identify and geo-locate dif-

ferent butterfly species sightings. It has logged nearly one million submissions since launching in 2014.

Butterflies help identify the health of an ecosystem because they react quickly to environmental changes and are seen as an early warning system for other wildlife losses, conservationists note. "One of the great things about butterflies and of this fantastic data that we have about butterflies is that they act as indicators about all the other groups," Fox explained. "So we know a bit about how our bees are doing, we know a little about how bugs, and beetles, and flies, and wasps, and other important insects are doing."

all the buzzy things, then the things that eat butterflies won't have any food," she noted. "The food chain is basically what we eat and if there is none of them we'll starve and we won't really be able to survive, will we?" Fox hopes that the latest annual count will help prompt policy makers to take more action, although he concedes the scale of the task is "enormous". The UK government has said it wants to reverse biodiversity loss and climate change, partly by planting tens of millions of trees in the next three years. Fox called the plan "fantastic" but said other areas such as low intensity agri-environment schemes are also needed, "so that the

Wildlife lovers urged to join UK's annual butterfly count

'We'll starve'

Amy Walkden, Butterfly Conservation's branch secretary in Devon, is one of many enthusiasts monitoring the insects year-round with the help of her eight-year-old daughter, Robin. "Having a yearly record of what is around and what is not around I think is really good scientific data to indicate changes such as global warming, habitat destruction," she said. Her daughter Robin appears equally aware of their value.

"If we don't have any butterflies and

public money paid to farmers will benefit the environment and support biodiversity". "There's a lot more we can do there to make sure that the margins around fields are being managed in a way to turn around the fortunes of our more common and widespread butterflies," he added.—AFP



Researcher at Zoological Society of London Sophie Ledger, poses inside the Butterfly enclosure at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) Zoo, in London.—AFP photos

Sports

Putsch throws Niger's team into disarray at Francophone Games

'Niger is still standing and it's our mission to represent it'

News in Brief

Saint-Maximin joins Al-Ahli

PARIS: French winger Allan Saint-Maximin on Sunday signed a three-year deal with Saudi Arabia's Al-Ahli after leaving English club Newcastle as the cash-rich and ambitious Gulf kingdom's league snared another top-level player. "We pick the best, and he's one of them," Al-Ahli said on social media. The financial terms of the deal were not revealed but English press reports have estimated it to be in the region of £30 million (\$38.5 million). Saint-Maximin, 26, made 124 appearances for Saudi-backed Newcastle and scored 13 goals since joining from Nice in 2019. A growing list of high-profile players have moved to the Saudi Pro League including Cristiano Ronaldo, Roberto Firmino, Riyadh Mahrez, Karim Benzema and Jordan Henderson. — AFP

Mohoric wins 2nd stage

PARIS: Slovenia's Matej Mohoric claimed the overall Tour of Poland lead after capturing the second stage on Sunday as opening day winner Tim Merlier came home in 11th place. Bahrain-Victorious rider Mohoric proved the strongest on the last climb to Karpacz, edging out Portugal's Joao Almeida on the line with Michal Kwiatkowski of Poland four seconds behind. In the overall standings, Mohoric leads Almeida by four seconds and is 10 seconds ahead of Kwiatkowski. Merlier, of the Soudal-Quick Step team, had claimed a 30th career stage win on Saturday but suffered a brutal reality check on the second stage to be 12min 58sec behind the winner. — AFP

Ex-wrestler sues sumo body

TOKYO: A former sumo wrestler who is suing the sport's governing body in Japan after he was allegedly forced to retire for refusing to fight during the COVID-19 pandemic, said Monday he had gone public in hopes of changing the secretive sport's culture. Daisuke Yanagihara, 25, said he told his master in January 2021 that he was reluctant to participate in a Tokyo tournament due to surging coronavirus infections in the capital. Yanagihara, who began wrestling when he was 15, said he had undergone heart surgery a few years earlier and was worried about the risks to his health if he got sick. He said his master and the Japan Sumo Association gave him two options: fight or quit. "I was desperate," Yanagihara told a press conference on Monday. His lawyers said a wrestler had died of COVID-19 in May 2020. Yanagihara said he felt he had "no other choice" but to leave the sport because he did not want to risk being a burden to his mother if he were hospitalized. — AFP

Vollering cements top status

PAU: Dutchwoman Demi Vollering succeeded compatriot and great rival Annemiek van Vleuten to win the second edition of the women's Tour de France in Pau on Sunday. To cement her status as world number one, all that was missing from the 26-year-old's trophy haul was a victory in a grand tour. On Sunday, she achieved that after finishing second in the final stage time trial behind Marlen Reusser of Switzerland to claim "the most beautiful success" of her career. The SD Worx team leader finished the eight-stage race over three minutes ahead of Belgian teammate Lotte Kopecky and Poland's Katarzyna Niewiadoma of the Canyon-SRAM team. Van Vleuten, 40, competing in her final season, finished off the podium nearly four minutes adrift of the winner. "Of course I worked a lot to achieve this result," said Vollering. "But this success is the result of a good personal balance thanks to a great entourage in particular." — AFP

Fritz wins Atlanta ATP crown

MIAMI: World number nine Taylor Fritz shrugged off a second-set wobble to claim the sixth title of his career with victory over Aleksandar Vukic in the ATP Atlanta Open on Sunday. US number one Fritz dug deep to overpower Australia's Vukic, ranked 82nd in the world, in 2hr 16min, winning 7-5, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4. Fritz looked to be heading for a straight sets victory after taking two match points on Vukic's serve while leading 6-5 in the second set. But Vukic showed great character to claw his way back from the brink, eventually holding serve with an ace to force a tie-break. The 27-year-old from Sydney then relied on his thunderous serve to grab the tie-break as Fritz was left ruing a golden chance to wrap up victory. However the American regained his composure in the deciding set, claiming the decisive break in the seventh game to take a 4-3 lead before holding for 5-3. Vukic then held comfortably but there was no way back as Fritz produced a dominant service game to seal victory. — AFP

KINSHASA: Nigerien participants in the Francophone Games, which have kicked off in DR Congo's capital, have been left struggling after a putsch in their home country last week. Gathering athletes and artists from mostly-French speaking states, the Games are being held for the first time in the Democratic Republic of Congo's capital Kinshasa, the world's largest French-speaking city. The event features athletic and cultural contests, and launched in the central African metropolis on Friday.

But just two days prior, army officers had appeared on television screens in Niger to announce the overthrow of president Mohamed Bazoum and the closure of the Sahel state's borders. Ibrahim Mahamane, who heads Niger's cultural delegation to the Games, said the putsch had thrown the team into disarray.

Some participants had planned to arrive in Kinshasa on the day of the coup, or shortly afterwards. "Due to certain circumstances prevailing in the country, the entire delegation was unable to travel, and some remained in Niger," he said. For example, sculptor Adamou Tchiombiano managed to fly to the DRC in time, but the giraffe sculpture made from recycled flip-flops that he was due to exhibit got stuck in Niger. "It's put the brakes on my career," said the artist, who thinks his sculpture was a winner.

But the 33-year-old is undaunted. On Sunday, he was hard at work in Kinshasa's Academie des Beaux Arts, chainsawing tropical wood into a new giraffe sculpture, which he aims to finish before the end of the Games. "They've welcomed me with open arms, it's like a family," said Tchiombiano. Some Nigerien artwork also turned up in Kinshasa without the accompanying artist, according to Mahamane. And members of a song group that was due to compete are missing.

With one of the largest teams in the Games, the 100-strong Nigerien delegation proudly waved flags during the opening ceremony on Friday. Niger is due to compete in 10 out of 11 cultural contests,



KINSHASA: Chad's Saleh Boubou Haraina (left) and Niger's Ibrahim Mahaman Aboubacar compete during their under 86kg bout at the 9th Francophone Games in Kinshasa. — AFP

and eight out of nine sporting events, according to the delegation. "It's hard, we feel the weight of what happened to us," said Mahamane, referring to the coup. But he added: "Niger is still standing and it's our mission to represent it".

Fears over safety, and standards of facilities have dogged the Games in Kinshasa, prompting some delegations to pull out or send reduced teams. The Canadian province of Quebec, for example, is not participating. But the Nigeriens are unfazed and uncomplaining, despite their substandard accommodation.

Their building in the so-called "Games Village" at the University of Kinshasa has patchy electricity and water, for example, and it's far away from the event facilities, leaving them vulnerable to Kinshasa's infamous traffic jams. They experienced a let-down on Friday when they were bussed away from the opening ceremony straight after their flag parade, missing the opening ceremony's sound and light show. "It's a very big disappointment," said Mahamane, who wanted to see the show. "But we want the Games to succeed, we can overcome all that, we're used to difficulties," he added. — AFP

Kuwaitis clinch first and second places at Waterjet World Series



PARIS: Kuwait's jet ski racers snatched Sunday the first and second places of the Pro Run GP category in the Waterjet World Series 2023 Round Two race, held in the French city of Vichy during the period July 27-30. Kuwaiti racer Mohammad Burabyea came first in the Pro Run GP category,

while his compatriot Mohammad Al-Baz came second place in the same category to maintain his lead in the general standings for the 2023 title.

The promising racer Fahad Al-Rayes was ranked third in the Novice Run Stock category. In statements to KUNA following the race, Bu-

abyea said that these results demonstrated the ability of Kuwaiti youth to vie for the top positions in international sports events. He affirmed his and fellow racers' determination to continue ascending the podiums and raising the country's flag high. — KUNA

Hodges claims first US PGA Tour title

LOS ANGELES: Lee Hodges fired two eagles in a four-under-par 67 on Sunday to claim his first US PGA Tour title with a wire-to-wire, seven-stroke triumph in the 3M Open in Blaine, Minnesota. Hodges finished with a 24-under par total of 260 at TPC Twin Cities, where he'd pushed his lead to as many as seven and seen it shrink to three over playing partner JT Poston before Poston's disastrous triple-bogey at the final hole.

That left Poston, who carded a two-under 69, tied for second with Kevin Streelman and Scotland's Martin Laird. Streelman carded a 66 while Laird produced a seven-under-par 64 that featured five birdies and a 20-foot eagle at 18. None of them ever really looked like catching Hodges, who started the day with a five-shot lead. He pushed that to seven after a birdie at the second and an eagle at the sixth, where his 255-yard approach with a three-wood left him an 11-foot putt.

After a bogey at the ninth he eagled the par-five 12th in spectacular style, again using a three-wood and landing his 257-yard second shot within three

feet. "Those were two of the greatest shots I ever hit," said Hodges, who has secured his berth in the FedEx Cup playoffs as well as an invitation to next year's Masters. "Anytime you win, you really set yourself up for some special stuff," he said. "My caddie was telling me on 18, I honestly didn't even think about it, we get to play Augusta next year. That's something else. That was probably the coolest thing I heard all day."

Hodges responded to a three-putt bogey at 15 with another birdie at 16, and answered a bogey at 17 - that saw his lead reduced to three shots - with a final birdie at the 72nd hole. He could enjoy the congratulations of the crowd as he walked to the 18th green having stuck his third shot from the fairway a foot from the cup. "It's just a dream week, the whole thing," said the 28-year-old ranked 110th in the world, who won for the first time in his 65th tour start. "Honestly, from Monday to Sunday I played really good golf, even in practice rounds."

Poston had looked a sure bet for solo second, arriving at the tough par-five 18th three strokes behind Hodges but three clear of Laird and Streelman. His tee shot landed in the right rough, narrowly avoiding the water hazard. From an awkward stance on the bank he opted to go for the green rather than laying up but his ball ended up in the lake. "I had



MINNESOTA: Lee Hodges of the United States celebrates with the trophy alongside wife Savannah Hodges after winning the 3M Open at TPC Twin Cities on July 30, 2023. — AFP

to try and give it a shot and see if there was some way I could make three there at the end and put some pressure on Lee," Poston said. "It was a shot that was going to be hard to pull off, but we weren't playing for second place." — AFP

Verstappen in a F1 league of his own

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS: Another masterful display and triumph from Max Verstappen ensured Red Bull finished the first half of the season, before the European 'summer' break, unbeaten after Sunday's Belgian Grand Prix. The defending double world champion's victory was his eighth consecutive success, his 10th in 12 races this year, and completed not only a hat-trick of Belgian wins, but also meant he has won every race in the last three months since team-mate Sergio Perez's victory in Azerbaijan on April 30.

AFP Sport looks at three things we learned from Sunday's race: Playful Verstappen toying with rivals

The 25-year-old Dutchman is so dominant that he can still win from sixth on the grid after taking a five-place penalty. He is on a different plane to his rivals to such an extent seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton resorted to humor to highlight it. Referring to the 2002 Austin Powers film Goldmember, Hamilton accepted it all seemed too easy for Verstappen when he said that "he is having a smoke and a pancake. You know the film?"

During the race, Verstappen playfully bickered with his race engineer about tyre degradation and making a pit-stop to give the team extra practice. Hamilton's Mercedes team-chief Toto Wolff said: "He has all reason to be a bit cheeky.... Just driving around. On merit. Nothing else to say - as much as it's annoying." Red Bull team boss Christian Horner said he was in awe of his star. "What we are witnessing with Max is something you see once in a generation," said Horner. Red Bull and Verstappen go next to his home Dutch Grand Prix at Zandvoort. Another win on August 27 will draw him level with four-time champion Sebastian Vettel's record

of nine straight wins for Red Bull in 2013 and extend the team's record to 13 consecutive season-opening wins and 14 overall.

Ferrari, Aston Martin, Mercedes and McLaren have taken turns in mounting a brief challenge to Red Bull in the opening 12 races, but none have been successful - on Sunday it was McLaren's turn to find mounting optimism dashed after two podium finishes. Australian rookie Oscar Piastri, who led Saturday's sprint race in the rain before being passed by Verstappen, was eliminated on the opening lap after tangling with Ferrari's Carlos Sainz. It was left to Lando Norris, who had been impressive in finishing second in both Britain and Hungary, to bemoan their lost pace as he battled to finish seventh. "We got it wrong," said Norris. "We were way too high on down-force and it didn't help us in any way.... I was barely making eighth gear --- we were so slow on the straights. "I couldn't defend and I couldn't attack. It was impossible to overtake." Alpine focus despite Renault management chaos. — AFP

Sports

USA focused on avoiding Portugal shock in World Cup group decider

Big win for Netherlands could relegate Americans to 2nd place

AUCKLAND: The United States may need a big win against Portugal at the Women's World Cup on Tuesday to top Group E, but coach Vlatko Andonovski has warned his team to focus on simply securing their place in the last 16. The holders and favorites to win an unprecedented third consecutive World Cup have not yet hit peak form, beating minnows Vietnam 3-0 in their opening game at the tournament and then drawing 1-1 with the Netherlands in a repeat of the 2019 final.

Level on four points with the Dutch at the top of their group, a big win for the Netherlands against a weak Vietnam could relegate the Americans to second place. But the priority for the record four-time world champions is to avoid defeat against tournament debutants Portugal, who have three points, and prevent a shock first-round exit. "The most important thing obviously is getting in the knockout stage first and foremost and that is our main focus right now," Andonovski said at Eden Park in Auckland on Monday. "We don't want to look two, three or four steps forward. If we start thinking too far ahead, our chance may never come."

Portugal beat Vietnam 2-0 last time out, having previously competed well in a 1-0 defeat against the Netherlands in Dunedin. They also held European champions England to a goalless draw in a friendly just before the tournament. "It will absolutely not be a walk in the park," Andonovski warned. "They are a great team, they are very well coached, they are disciplined, organized. We are so focused

on this game and making sure we get a favorable result."

Lavelle hint

The US coach also hinted that Rose Lavelle could have a greater role to play after appearing as a substitute against the Netherlands. Lavelle, who was struggling for fitness before the World Cup, replaced Savannah DeMelo at half-time against the Dutch with her team trailing, and duly set up the equalizer for captain Lindsey Horan. "Rose is one of the best players in the world and not having her for the full 90 minutes in the first two games obviously impacted the team because coming into this World Cup she was pencilled in as a starter a long time ago," Andonovski said.

"She makes things happen on the field. We are very happy that her minutes have been increasing and we are looking forward to seeing more of her on the field." Andonovski knows all about Portugal's threat as he is a friend of their coach Francisco Neto. "Francisco is a great guy and we have a great relationship. We have spent a lot of time together, I think he is an incredible coach but business is business," Andonovski said.

Portugal are ranked 21st in the world and a win would not just send them through to the last 16 - it would send shockwaves through the sport. "We know that the US needs to win and needs a lot of goals to come first but we have our goals in the World Cup and we want to continue in this competition," said Neto. "We are expecting to see the best USA in this World Cup and we are preparing our team to be the best Portugal for tomorrow." — AFP



AUCKLAND: USA's Head coach Vlatko Andonovski (center) monitors players during a training session at the Bay City Park in Auckland. - AFP

Colorful Colombian fans make Women's WCup feel like home

SYDNEY: Colombia's World Cup team are being roared on by thousands of fans in Australia who are playing a major part in spurring their country to new heights in women's football. A Colombian side led by 18-year-old sensation Linda Caicedo caused one of the upsets of the competition so far when they stunned Germany 2-1 on Sunday in Sydney. Manuela Vane-gas's header in the 97th minute against one of the favorites put Colombia on the cusp of the last 16 and dreaming of winning the World Cup for the first time. Colombia have appeared at the Women's World Cup only twice before, in 2011 and in 2015, when they reached the last 16 for the first time. But they failed to qualify for the event four years ago.

They need just a draw on Thursday against Morocco to top their group and could still reach the last 16 even with a defeat. Dubbed 'The Powerpuff Girls', Caicedo's Colombia were driven on against Germany by a large majority of the 40,000 spectators at a pulsating Sydney Football Stadium. The stadium was a sea of yellow shirts with deafening jeers and whistles greeting every German when they touched the ball. Germany star Lena Oberdorf said it felt like Colombia were at home.

She compared it to when Germany played hosts England at Wembley in the final of the Euros last summer in front of nearly 90,000, a match they also lost 2-1. "It's the same - but you don't expect it when you play against Colombia in Australia," said the midfielder. "The fact that there are so many Colombian fans travelling here shows how much women's football is progressing," Oberdorf said. Germany coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg, whose side can still reach the last 16, said she felt a few of her players shrunk a little in the face of the frenzied Colombian support.



SYDNEY: Colombia's forward #18 Linda Caicedo (left) is tackled by Germany's forward #09 Svenja Huth during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup Group H football match between Germany and Colombia at Sydney Football Stadium. — AFP

'Full of Colombians'

Most Colombians in the crowd seem to be living in Australia rather than having jumped on expensive long-haul flights across the Pacific. Team spokesman Carlos Lajud told AFP that some are students while others are people who moved to Australia looking for work. Census figures in 2021 said there were 35,000 people born in Colombia in Australia.

Like other countries, Colombia is enduring high inflation, while unemployment stood at just over 10 percent towards the end of last year. According to a 2021 report by the International Organization for Migration, about 80 percent of Colombian migrants are in the United States, Spain, Venezuela, Ecuador and

Canada. The rest are split between Australia, Mexico and Panama. There are nearly five million Colombians living overseas, according to the report. Outside the stadium before the Germany match, a corner of Sydney became a mini Bogota for a few hours, albeit 15,000 kilometers from the Colombian capital. Colombian fans decked in yellow held flares, danced and banged drums as bemused German fans and locals snapped pictures or observed sheepishly from a distance. "It's time we start supporting women's football in Colombia because they don't support it," one male fan told television cameras as jubilant Colombians streamed out of the stadium afterwards. "As you saw, we were playing as locals. It was full of Colombians, and we won." — AFP

EPL to clamp down on players harassing referees

LONDON: Premier League players have been warned they face harsher punishments for harassing referees as part of a raft of measures aimed at stamping out bad behavior on the pitch. English football's authorities aim to "reset" the attitude from players and managers towards officials in the coming season. A series of measures intended to tackle the issue were revealed on Monday ahead of the Premier League campaign kicking off on August 11.

The new 'Participant Charter' empowers referees to take tougher action against unacceptable behavior, backed up by stronger disciplinary action from the Football Association. Serious and repeat offenders can expect to face increased financial penalties, while referees will be encouraged to issue at least a yellow card if they are surrounded by two or more players. Managers can also expect to be punished if they leave the technical area on the touchline to "enter the pitch to confront any match official at half-time or full-time".

"We want players, managers and fans to continue showing their passion, but these new measures have been introduced to ensure that the line is not crossed when it comes to on-field and technical area behavior," said Premier League chief executive Richard Masters. FA chief executive Mark Bullingham added: "Football has the power to unite and inspire all those that play and watch the game. However, sometimes, this can be negatively impacted by a small minority of players, coaches and fans."

"Our collective approach is to reset this behavior on the pitch and from the sidelines, whilst giving our referees the respect and protection that they deserve." Off the field, clubs in the Premier League and the Football League will seek stronger sanctions against fans found to be involved in football tragedy abuse, such as chanting about the Hillsborough or Munich disasters. "Incidents such as dangerous conduct, discrimination, and chanting about football-related tragedies have no place in our game - and can lead to football bans and potential criminal action," Bullingham said. — AFP

Adidas, United seal new deal

LONDON: Manchester United said it had signed a new 10-year deal with German sportswear giant Adidas on Monday, worth a minimum £900 million (\$1.15 billion) according to the BBC. The two have been partners since the 2015/16 season, reuniting after a 23-year hiatus, and both parties said the new deal would focus substantially "on the Manchester United women's team". "The new

deal increases the focus on the Manchester United women's team since their reintroduction in 2018 - continuing Manchester United and adidas's commitment to drive the women's game forward," read a statement on United's website.

Bjorn Gulden, CEO of Adidas, said the two were a natural fit given their respective status in the sport. "Adidas and Manchester United are two of the most important brands in international football and it is very natural for us to continue our cooperation," he said in a statement. "We will combine tradition and innovation to please both the players and the fans." United gave no figure for the new deal but the BBC

said it was worth at least £900 million.

The BBC also reported that failure to qualify for the Champions League for two consecutive seasons would reduce the annual payments by 30%. United will play in the Champions League in the coming season. The announcement comes a week after Adidas announced its second-quarter operating profit plunged but that thanks to selling part of its huge inventory of Kanye West's Yeezy products it now expects a lower annual loss. Adidas now expects to end the year with an operating loss of 450 million euros (\$496 million), compared to its earlier forecast of a 700-million-euro loss. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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
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Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764

Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name

I, **Hussain**, holder of Indian Passport No. Z2690148, do hereby change my name to Hussain (as given name) Calcuttawala (as surname) for all purpose. I will henceforth be known in the name Hussain Calcuttawala and I also undertake to carryout this name change in all my documents. **(C#3838) 01/08/2023**

Australia, Nigeria surge into World Cup last 16

Co-hosts destroy Canada 4-0; Japan thrash Spain



MELBOURNE: Australia's defender #07 Stephanie Catley (right) celebrates with teammates after scoring her team's fourth goal from the penalty kick during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup Group B football match between Canada and Australia on July 31, 2023. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Co-hosts Australia surged into the Women's World Cup last 16 on Monday with Hayley Raso scoring twice in a 4-0 battering of Canada as Nigeria joined them in the knockout phase. Olympic champions Canada were knocked out at the hands of a fired-up Australian team who knew they had to win in Melbourne to progress. They did it in style, their big victory putting them through as Group B winners, meaning they will probably avoid European champions England in the next round.

That is likely to fall on Nigeria, who were held 0-0 by already-eliminated Ireland in Brisbane and finished second. Tony Gustavsson's Australian team came into the clash with Canada under huge pressure following a stunning 3-2 loss to Nigeria that left their tournament hopes on a knife-edge. But rather than wilt, the Matildas thrived, to the delight of a raucous 27,706 fans who were kicking every ball.

Star striker Sam Kerr, who missed Australia's first two games with a calf injury, declared herself fit but

remained on the bench as her team-mates more than compensated for her absence. Real Madrid's Raso put them ahead in the ninth minute, then made it two half an hour later with a close-range tap-in. A shell-shocked Canada made four changes at half-time as coach Bev Priestman attempt to salvage their World Cup. But the comeback never materialized and Mary Fowler bagged Australia's third from a counter-attack before Steph Catley sealed victory with an injury-time penalty.

Japan thrash Spain

Earlier, Japan sent a World Cup warning with a clinical 4-0 thrashing of Spain. The 2011 champions Japan were 3-0 up by half-time in Wellington as they romped to a victory that allowed them to finish top of Group C and set up a last-16 tie against Norway. Hinata Miyazawa scored twice either side of a Riko Ueki goal, with Mina Tanaka wrapping up a stunning win late on. Their first victory in five attempts over

Spain was so comprehensive it suggests 11th-ranked Japan may be contenders to win the tournament. They finish the group stage with 11 goals, more than any other team, while they are yet to concede.

Miyazawa, who was substituted at half-time, is also now the tournament's leading scorer with four goals. "I never imagined it. All of the goals are because of the other players giving me the right passes. So it's everybody's goal, not just me," she said. Spain, who like Japan had already qualified for the last 16 before this game, finish as runners-up in their group and now play Switzerland in Auckland on Saturday. In the other Group C game, Zambia won a Women's World Cup match for the first time with a 3-1 victory over Costa Rica as they ended their tournament on a high.

US, England next

On Tuesday the United States and England will look to seal their last-16 spots. The Americans are

pursuing a third World Cup title in a row but have been far from their best and were held 1-1 by the Netherlands last time out. The USA may need a big win to finish on top of Group E ahead of the Netherlands, but a shock defeat would almost certainly end their tournament. "The most important thing obviously is getting in the knockout stage first and foremost and that is our main focus right now," said their coach, Vlatko Andonovski.

"We don't want to look two, three or four steps forward. If we start thinking too far ahead, our chance may never come." The Dutch face already-eliminated Vietnam in the other match in the group. Also on Tuesday, England only need a draw against China to be sure of going through but will be without key midfielder Keira Walsh due to a knee injury. Denmark, who are in pole position to get out of Group D with England, face Haiti. If England top the group they will face Nigeria while the team that comes second in Group D meets Australia. — AFP

Dortmund down sloppy Man Utd in Vegas friendly

LAS VEGAS: Borussia Dortmund punished Manchester United's defensive lapses on Sunday as the English Premier League giants wrapped up their North American tour with a 3-2 defeat to the Bundesliga side in Las Vegas. A second-half strike by Dortmund substitute Youssoufa Moukoko proved the difference in an entertaining clash at the Allegiant Stadium, home of the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders. United manager Erik ten Hag named a virtual reserve team to start, leaving the likes of Marcus Rashford, Bruno Fernandes and new signing Mason Mount on the bench.

Yet United's makeshift starting XI were more than a match for Dortmund in the first half, dominating for long periods before Diogo Dalot handed the Red Devils the lead on 24 minutes with a long-range strike. But Dortmund turned the game on its head in the closing minutes of the first half, with two goals in a minute from Netherlands international forward Donyell Malen. The first came when United's defense failed to close down Karim Adeyemi's burst down the right.

Despite the attention of a cluster of United defenders, Adeyemi was able to square for Malen, who hooked in from close range. Malen grabbed his second a minute later, this time seizing on a United howler when Victor Lindelof lost possession inside the area trying to pass out from the back. United were lucky not to go 3-1 down in the opening minutes of the second half, when another defensive slip, this time by Harry Maguire, allowed Sebastien Haller a shot on goal.

United goalkeeper Andre Onana saved and then

watched in relief as Adeyemi blasted the follow-up wide with the goal gaping. United did get back on level terms in the 52nd minute, when Brazilian forward Antony swept home a low shot from inside the area after a botched clearance by Dortmund veteran Mats Hummels. Ten Hag rang in the changes with 30 minutes remaining, with Rashford instantly providing more of an attacking threat. But it was Dortmund who scored the decisive goal, with veteran Marco Reus working a clever opening to set up Moukoko for the winner. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: Salih Ozcan #6 of Borussia Dortmund and Marcus Rashford #10 of Manchester United battle for the ball during the pre-season friendly match at Allegiant Stadium on July 30, 2023. — AFP

Australian swim stars, Marchand lay down Olympic marker

FUKUOKA: Leon Marchand's performances at swimming's world championships gave a tantalizing glimpse of what he could achieve at next year's Paris Olympics, while Australia's stars will also be confident after an impressive display. French sensation Marchand was irresistible in Fukuoka, winning three gold medals and breaking Michael Phelps' long-standing 400m individual medley world record. The 21-year-old cut a relaxed figure in and out of the pool, rarely looking flustered. The Paris Olympics will be a different matter, with the expectations of the host nation cranked up to potentially overwhelming levels.

Marchand said he was "super-happy" with what he achieved in Japan, where he was named the competition's top men's swimmer. "It's not perfect, there are always things to improve," he said. "But I'm super-satisfied with what I've done this year." Australia's Kaylee McKeown took the women's MVP award after sweeping all three backstroke events. She was one of several outstanding performers in an Australian team that tied their best world championships tally of 13 golds to top the medal table for the first time since 2001.

McKeown said the prize was a reward for "how well we've done as a collective as an Australian team". "For me, as proud as I am, I feel like I should have shared that with my teammates," she said. Australia's Mollie O'Callaghan became the first woman ever to complete a 100m-200m freestyle world double, and won five gold medals overall. The 19-year-old also played a part in four world records both individually and as a team, including setting a new mark in the women's 200m freestyle.



FUKUOKA: France's Leon Marchand competes in the final of the men's 4x100m medley relay swimming event during the World Aquatics Championships. — AFP

Another Australian, Ariarne Titmus, won an epic women's 400m freestyle final, outduelling American Katie Ledecky and Canadian Summer McIntosh in a world-record time. Ledecky dusted herself down and went on to claim gold in both the 800m and 1500m freestyle, cementing her status as the most decorated woman in world championships history. The 26-year-old has said she wants to compete at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and she is likely to be a force at the Paris Games before then.

Ledecky's performances helped lift an American team that only really came alive late in the competition. Ledecky believes young Americans like men's 50m and 100m freestyle silver medallist Jack Alexy will learn from the experience. "It's a really young team - the things I'm hearing at the lunch table, dinner table, people are learning a lot," said Ledecky. "We want to be better next year in Paris so I think we'll continue to encourage each other." China enjoyed a more successful world championships than last year in Budapest, where they won only one individual gold. — AFP