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Saudi names non-resident ambassador to Palestine

Kuwait welcomes Australian decision to revive term 'occupied Palestinian territories'

Amiri Diwan: Amir in good health

KUWAIT: The Amiri Diwan refuted allegations circulating on social media claiming HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was admitted to hospital after suffering a health setback, stating that HH the Amir is in good health. The Amiri Diwan urged the public to avoid sharing or posting unconfirmed news from unauthorized sources. — KUNA



HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia on Saturday named a non-resident ambassador for the Palestinian Territories who will also serve as consul general in Jerusalem, a new position announced amid speculation about possible future ties with the Zionist entity. The role will be filled by Nayef Al-Sudairi, the current ambassador to Jordan, according to a social media post from the embassy in Amman confirmed by a Saudi foreign ministry official.

The appointment represents "an important step" underscoring the desire of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman "to strengthen relations with the brothers of the State of Palestine and give it a formal boost in all areas", Sudairi said in a video broadcast by the

Saudi state-affiliated Al-Ekhbariya channel. The file for the Palestinian Territories has traditionally been handled by Saudi Arabia's embassy in Amman.

After a meeting on Saturday at which Sudairi presented a copy of his credentials, Majdi Al-Khaldi, Palestinian presidential adviser for diplomatic affairs, said he "welcomed" the appointment, official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported. It "will contribute to strengthening the strong and solid brotherly relations that bind the two countries and the two brotherly peoples," Khaldi said. A spokesman for the Zionist foreign ministry offered no immediate comment, referring AFP to recent comments by Foreign Minister Eli Cohen that "peace between (the Zionist entity) and Saudi Arabia

is a matter of time".

Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti foreign ministry on Saturday welcomed the Australian foreign minister's decision to reuse the term "occupied Palestinian territories" and consider Zionist occupation settlements "illegitimate" as per international law. The ministry, in a press release, commended the Australian government's stance that came in line with international law and international legitimacy. It further reiterated Kuwait's relentless and principled position on the Palestinian cause and its support for the Palestinian people and their choices. The ministry also restated Kuwait's backing for all efforts to achieve comprehensive and just peace based on a two-state solution.

Continued on Page 6

Pain, anger as Hawaii fire death toll climbs to 80

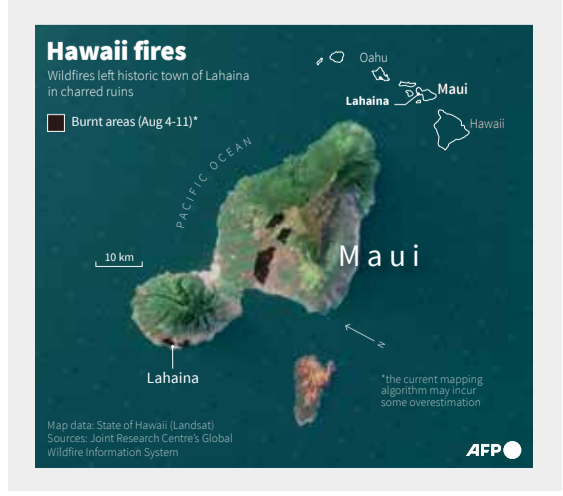
LAHAINA, Hawaii: The death toll from a horrific wildfire in Hawaii climbed to 80 as residents confronted the devastation and criticisms grew Saturday over the emergency response. Over 2,200 structures were damaged or destroyed in the fire, the Federal Emergency Management Agency said, estimating that it would cost some \$5.5 billion to rebuild affected communities. Hawaiian authorities said they were opening a probe into the handling of the fire as a congresswoman from the state's Big Island acknowledged that officials had underestimated the dangers.

In the historic resort city of Lahaina on the island of Maui, resident Anthony Garcia said the fire had gutted the apartment he was renting and destroyed all his belongings and memories. "It took everything, everything! It's heartbreaking," the 80-year-old California native, who has lived in Lahaina for three decades, told AFP. "It's a lot to take in."

The town of 12,000, once the proud home of the Hawaiian royal family, has been reduced to ruins, its lively hotels and restaurants turned to ashes. A majestic banyan tree that has been the center of the community for 150 years has been scarred by the flames, but still stands upright, its branches denuded of green and its sooty trunk transformed into an awkward skeleton.

Hawaii's Attorney General Anne Lopez said her office would examine "critical decision-making and standing policies leading up to, during and after the wildfires on Maui and Hawaii islands this week". Late Friday, Maui County officials revised the death toll to 80 and Governor Josh Green warned that the number of fatalities was sure to rise further. Over 1,400 people were in emergency evacuation shelters.

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Young Kuwaiti sailors embark on pearl diving trip

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Under the sponsorship of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, 60 young Kuwaiti divers set sail for the 32nd annual pearl diving trip on traditional dhow off the coast of Khairan. Kuwait Sea Sports Club (KSSC) organized a "dasha" ceremony on Saturday with the participation of the young sailors.

Head of the Kuwait Heritage Committee at KSSC Ali Al-Qabandi said: "The six-day trip is important, as it is one of the most prominent national activities aiming to revive Kuwaiti marine heritage. This trip is in memory of our fathers and grandfathers, when pearl diving was the livelihood of the people of Kuwait in the past." He indicated this trip is the first to be held in the name of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf after it was suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic for three years.

The organizing committee said the divers will return on Thursday. Pearl-diving trips were previously held annually under the patronage of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to keep maritime traditions alive. (See Page 2)



KUWAIT: People wave to Kuwaiti youths as they set sail aboard traditional dhows for a pearl diving expedition on Aug 12, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwaiti MPs, activists drive reform push

KUWAIT: Inside Kuwait's National Assembly, 41-year-old lawmaker Dawood Marafie is a fresh face, determined to live up to the hopes of a younger generation exhausted by perpetual political turmoil in the state. He is among 12 newcomers to the legislature, most of them young reformists, following the election in June — the seventh in just over a decade. The new faces do not coordinate action or work as a cohesive bloc, but most share the goal of pushing for policy improvements, particularly on issues related to youth.

"I was pushed to enter the political arena" by the protracted tug-of-war between parliament and Cabinet that has left the country in a state of perpetual stagnation, said Marafie. Before joining parliament, "I didn't have a political affiliation," said Marafie, who worked in the corporate world for years before switching to politics. "What matters is competence," he told AFP from his office, surrounded by assistants dressed in white dishdashas and matching ghutra headdresses.

Kuwait is home to the most active and powerful parliament in the Gulf. But repeated standoffs be-



Dawood Marafie, Shaikha Albahaweed, Haifa Al-Mousa

tween elected lawmakers and Cabinet ministers have stymied development efforts and scared off investors. While its neighbors the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have managed to grow their economies, Kuwait has lagged far behind, forcing some like Marafie to seek to chart a new path forward.

Following a succession of resigning governments and dissolved parliaments, Kuwait's current Cabinet is its fifth in a year. The latest Cabinet, formed in mid-June, promised "positive cooperation" with the National Assembly. The political deadlock has delayed necessary reforms and blocked development projects, leaving infrastructure and education in disrepair and much of the population disgruntled.

Even with the old guard still at the helm, Marafie said he is driving a youth-focused agenda that pri-

oritizes the environment, housing, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises. He believes that technological development and training is key to meet the "needs of the future", in a country where half of the estimated population of four million is under the age 35. Marafie is "confident" in his plans. But he cautioned that reforms require a "parliamentary consensus" — a tall order in a 50-member Assembly that includes several Islamists and only one woman.

For Shaikha Albahaweed, an independent journalist, a more radical approach is needed. "The whole political system needs to be amended," she told AFP, echoing a desire for change that is widely held by younger Kuwaitis who have grown disenchanted with the political establishment.

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Local



Deputy Director-General of Public Authority for Sport (PAS), Bashar Al-Salem delivers the flag of Kuwait to the young diver. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Family members of a Kuwaiti youth wave as traditional dhows prepare to sail for a pearl diving expedition from the shore of Kuwait City on August 12, 2023. Pearl-diving trips are held annually in summer under the patronage of Kuwait's Amir, in order to keep alive an ancestral heritage of pearl diving and trading, prior to the discovery of oil.

Young Kuwaiti divers sail for 32nd annual pearl diving trip

'Dasha' ceremony kicks off six-day trip

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Under the sponsorship of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, young Kuwaiti divers set sail for the 32nd annual pearl diving trip on traditional dhows off the coast of Khairan. Kuwait Sea Sports Club (KSSC) organized a "dasha" ceremony on Saturday with the participation of about 60 youths.

Head of the Kuwait Heritage Committee at KSSC Ali Al-Qabandi said: "The six-day trip is important, as it is one of the most prominent national activities aiming to revive Kuwaiti marine heritage. This trip is in memory of our fathers and grandfathers, when pearl diving was the livelihood of the people of Kuwait in the past."

He indicated this trip is the first to be held in the name of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf after it was suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. "We stopped for three years because of COVID-19, but we returned today for an exceptional trip with Kuwaiti youth onboard two dhows off Khairan, which will take about seven hours. They will start diving from Sunday," Qabandi said.

"Usually, the number of participants used to be more than 250, but this year there are only 60 partic-

ipants, in addition to administrators and supervisors. We hope participation will be more next year," he said, praising Kuwaiti youth willing to go on this heritage trip despite its harshness and the hot weather.

Deputy Director General of the Public Authority for Sport (PAS) Bashar Abdullah Al-Salem said the authority is keen to support such historical and heritage events, adding Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Muhammad Al-Aiban will be present at the Al Qafal (arrival of the divers with sea treasures) ceremony.

"I am happy with the participation of Kuwaiti youth at the young ages of 13-14, which shows the importance of this event in the lives of young people and their inheritance of old habits despite the speedy pace of life and development of technology," Salem noted. He affirmed the role of PAS is to support sporting and important events, adding such events that have a great role in spreading awareness of our history and giving a purpose to an important segment of the society in Kuwait.

Badr Dhiab, a participant, said the experience would stimulate him to remember the forefathers and the difficulties they had gone through in the past times. His peer, Rashed Al-Fegaan, said he was elated to organize the festival after a three-year hi-

atus due to the coronavirus. He expressed pride of participating in the activity under sponsorship of His Highness the Amir. The six-day voyage features the two dhows, donated by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The latest edition comes after a three-year hiatus due to ramifications of the COVID-19.

The organizing committee said the divers will return on Thursday. Pearl-diving trips were previously held annually under the patronage of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to keep traditions alive. At core of the activity is revival of the ancestors' hard work and adventures for many of the voyages on the man-made ships in the past aimed at pearling—that was a main source for living for many Kuwaitis.

The club started organizing the annual activity in 1986, when the Ministry of Information furnished the participants with five dhows before the late Amir granted two others in 1987 out of his keenness on encouraging the young citizens get involved in such activities that bring to life the national heritage. The late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad had also donated other ships to the club, enabling it hold the diving ceremony steadily on yearly basis, keeping memories of the old generations engraved in the conscience of the youth.



Divers raise the flag of Kuwait.

Kuwait marks International Youth Day

KUWAIT: Kuwait on Saturday marked the International Youth Day, designated by the UN in 1999, having earned an eye-catching stake in boosting the youth potentials and supporting their enterprises. The renewed occasion is celebrated worldwide under the motto, "Green Skills for Youth: Towards a Sustainable World," for disseminating an education for acknowledging the youngsters' role in attaining a more sustainable globe. Kuwait, along with other states and stakeholders, is shedding light on the youth initiatives, innovations and pioneering solutions to various issues. The Gulf country has dedicated special concern for empowering the junior citizens as a force for stimulating development. Kuwait has, indeed, coupled words with action at the level of youth empowerment, establishing during era of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah a ministry for running their affairs.

Moreover, the government has worked out a task plan to invest in this segment, establishing three sports complexes, regulating handicrafts for the youth, encouraging them to work in the private sector and involve in sports. In this path, it built a complex for creative industries for launching and incubating start-ups. The state had established the Public Authority for Youth to intensify the efforts for caring for the young nationals and sharpening their skills for securing a better future for the country. The authority provides them with facilities to create, excel and sharpen their skills.

The youth authority set up a series of programs, launching Kuwait award for distinctiveness and creativity, establishing the youth creativity program, the Kuwait youth council for sake of incubating them and guiding them to invest in time. Moreover, it seeks to find jobs for the junior citizens, encourage them to work in the private sector in coordination with companies and public welfare societies. Furthermore, the youth authority organizes educational, cultural, scientific activities and facilitates the Kuwaitis' participation in local, Arab and international conferences.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Saturday that the youth play a leading role in the quest to attain a sustainable world and urged nations to take into consideration their basic role in decision-making processes. Shifting to an environmentally sustainable world has become an issue of profound significance; not only for responding to the international climatic crisis but also for attaining goals of sustainable development, he said.

Such transfer warrants boosting "green skills" among citizens particularly the youth, Guterres said, alluding in particular to the need to enhance their knowledge, capacities, values and required stands to live in a sustainable and effective community. Theme of the latest edition of the global youth day, he said, underscores necessity to enable the young people acquire skills and apply them in the growing green economy. The humankind depends on the youth energy everywhere, in addition to their thoughts and unlimited contributions, he affirmed. — KUNA



Head of the Sea Sports Club Major General Fahad Al-Fahad announces the kickoff of the diving trip.



The participants



The ceremony attendees



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti youths prepare to sail aboard traditional dhows for a pearl diving expedition, from the shore of Kuwait City on August 12, 2023.

Kuwait ranks 27th in youth empowerment

KUWAIT: Kuwait has made significant leaps in the realm of youth empowerment ranking 27th in the Global Youth Development Index, Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Aiban has said. It dedicates special concern for this segment of the Kuwaiti society, carving out all possible avenues for the youngsters to contribute to Kuwait's development, said Al-Aiban, also Minister of Commerce and Industry, marking the International Youth Day, falling on August 12th yearly.

Upon guidelines by the political leadership, the

State puts all available resources at the disposal of attaining the youth aspirations and enabling them to be active at the social, economic, sports, cultural, scientific and artistic levels, he added. The UN-designated International Youth Day is celebrated this year with the theme, "Green Skills for Youth: Towards a Sustainable World," the Kuwaiti minister said, noting necessity of enhancing the youth skills for establishing a green economy and attaining a sustainable world.

He expressed confidence that the juniors, particularly in Kuwait, are able to lead their communities toward a sustainable world that is friendly to the environment, also noting in this respect that the Kuwaiti juniors have already left an eye-catching mark in the voluntary field works. Nevertheless, Minister Al-Aiban affirmed necessity of pooling all efforts to aid the youth and pave the way for them to play a vital role for successful access to a more sustainable globe, equipping them with

the skills to cope with the green economy in light of the global climatic crisis.

In line with this approach, the Kuwaiti Authority for Youth has worked out special programs for these citizens to help them attain objectives of the sustainable development, enable them to compete in the work market for sake of achieving objectives of Neo Kuwait Vision 2035. He congratulated the young Kuwaitis on this global occasion, re-affirming their key role in Kuwait's development. — KUNA



Mohammad Al-Aiban

Local

Cabinet sets rules for exceptional salaries

Committee in Jordan to seal contracts with teachers

KUWAIT: The Cabinet has prepared the rules of providing exceptional salaries for leadership roles according to item 80 of law 61/1976 of the social security law. The exceptional salary will be granted to workers whose services were terminated either by retirement, resignation or nonrenewal of leadership positions, to be added to their pensions as follows: Rank of minister - KD 3,000; excellent rank - KD 2,000; undersecretary - KD 1,500;

assistant undersecretary - KD 1,000. The decision stipulates that at least four years must be spent in the leadership position and the evaluation must not be less than competent. The employee will also not be paid more than the last monthly salary they were receiving. The Cabinet asked the Civil Service Commission and social security institute to take the necessary steps to pay the exceptional salaries according

to the rules of the decision. The Cabinet also asked the economic affairs committee to prepare the rules for exceptional salaries for the following groups: Ministers, military officers, fatwa and legislation department members; Municipality lawyers (special cadre) and all other employees.

In another development, the foreign contracting committee of the Education Ministry left for Jordan to sign

contracts with teachers in various specialties public education schools are in need of. The committee will remain there for a week, during which interviews will be conducted for teachers for English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and geology. Contracts will be signed only with female teachers for physics and mathematics.

Following the completion of the committee's work in Jordan, a com-

mittee will be sent to Palestine later. No contracts will be signed with expat teachers from outside those two countries. The ministry resorted to foreign contracting after all local applicants completed their procedures, with their numbers not enough. Concerned departments at the education ministry accepted all teachers who meet the conditions among Kuwaitis, children of Kuwaiti women and bedoons.

Cooperative Union empowers students

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti high school students have opted not to waste the summer free time choosing to work in cooperative stores. They have been hired according to a program organized by the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies, aiming to empower the students with some work experience and enhance their confidence in themselves. The Kuwaiti juniors work for four hours a day in 30 stores. The project is carried out in coordination with the ministry of social affairs, upon guidelines from the government. — KUNA



A female student examines bookstore at the cooperative store.



High school students participating in the summer activity. — KUNA photos



A High school student partakes in summer training at cooperative stores.

Commerce minister issues decisions on supplies

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry, State Minister for Youth Affairs Mohammed Al-Aiban, has issued several ministerial decisions in regards to supplies and maintenance of the commodity reserves and warehouse areas. Among the aims of

the decisions are to prepare a plan and an automated system to monitor the strategic reserves, follow up on the implementation of the warehousing projects of Kuwait Mills Company and Kuwait Supply Company, remove obstacles, and ease the process for government companies.

The first item of the decision '118/2023' calls for reforming the permanent committee to select and list the supply items in the ration card. The second item '119/2023' calls for a committee in regards to providing strategic warehousing areas to build stores.

The committee will be responsible for: (1) following up on the implementation of warehousing areas for Kuwait Mills Company and Kuwait Sup-

ply Company and removing obstacles. (2) Prepare a guide of procedures to carry out the duties of organizing and supervising the strategic warehousing areas and available lands for storage. (3) Prepare a plan and automated system to monitor the strategic reserves and link them with the above-mentioned companies. (4) Coordinate with Kuwait Municipality and all concerned entities to allocate lands to build multi-story buildings for the sale and distribution of subsidized items. (5) Follow up and ease procedures for establishing government companies for strategic warehouses. (6) Study the new supply center project and propose the best proposals to carry out the project.

KRCS initiative aims to instill altruism in youngsters

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Red Crescent Society (KRCS) wrapped up an initiative that allowed some 100 children the chance to embrace virtues such as altruism and philanthropy, its deputy chief Anwar Al-Hasawi said. These endeavors, such as a recently-concluded children's club, give participants an opportunity to "familiarize" themselves with basic humanitarian principles, besides serving as an incentive for them to volunteer towards such causes, he underlined.

He went on to highlight the significance of such activities that KRCS routinely organizes, with the aim of boosting "social awareness" among youngsters, saying these endeavors leave an indelible mark not only on the participants themselves but society as a whole.

In another development, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) is coordinating with authorities in Egypt to deliver tons of urgent medical and food supplies to Sudan. KRCS coordinator Khaled Al-Mutairi told KUNA that the Kuwaiti Embassy in Cairo would coordinate with the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) to deliver urgent relief aid material to Sudan. He affirmed that relief shipment would be handed to the Sudanese Red Crescent (SRC) and the Health Ministry for distribution. — KUNA

Maintain healthy lifestyle, experts urge the elderly

KUWAIT: The social development department at the Patients Helping Fund organized its first health forum for the elderly on Aug 9, 2023, during which speakers gave advice on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle at an older age. Chairman of Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking & Cancer Dr Khalid Al-Saleh said out of the social responsibility principle among various government and private entities, the society participated in the exhibition that was held on the sidelines of the forum, during which gifts and pamphlets were distributed to encourage the elderly to care for their well being and support those wishing to stop smoking, to prevent many cancers.

Dr Saleh said the National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN) participated by distributing material of interest including leaflets on most cancers that affect men, such as prostate cancer, the incidence of which rises from the age of 50. Booklets on breast cancer were also distributed, which affects women over 40 years of age. He said CAN concentrates on the elderly with a campaign themed "Reward your parents with health", aimed at providing psychological support for the elderly and protecting them against diseases.



KUWAIT: Social Development Department at the Patients Helping Fund organized its first health forum for the elderly on August 9, 2023.

Man accused of stealing subsidized food items

KUWAIT: Officials from the Kuwait Ministry of Interior arrested an Asian expat who is being accused of stealing state-subsidized foods (estimated at about five tons) and smuggling them out of the country.

The Department of Security Relations and Media said in a press release that the General Directorate of Criminal Investigations has been able to arrest the resident who sells these food items in the market after repacking them in bags - bearing different brands.

The accused person is being investigated to find out who his accomplices are and who is facilitating his illegal activities. Security officials expressed thanks to the officials in the criminal department for their sincere efforts in arresting violators and outlaws. — KUNA

Kuwait crude drops, world oil demand hits record

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil dropped \$1.13 to \$90.16 per barrel on Friday compared with \$91.29 pb on Thursday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said on Saturday. Meanwhile, the Brent crude forward transactions edged up by 41 cents to \$86.81 pb and the West Texas Intermediate followed suit, gaining 37 cents to settle at \$83.19 pb. Meanwhile, the International Energy Agency said it had revised upwards its forecast for global oil demand growth in 2023 as demand is "scaling record highs".

World oil demand already hit a record 103 million barrels per day in June and August and "could see yet another peak", the Paris-based IEA said in its monthly report. "For 2023 as a whole, global oil demand is set to expand by 2.2 million barrels per day to 102.2 million barrels per day," it said. China accounted for 70 percent of growth, the IEA said,

adding that demand in the Asian giant was "also stronger than expected, reaching fresh highs despite persistent concerns over the health of the economy".

"World oil demand is scaling record highs, boosted by strong summer air travel, increased oil use in power generation and surging Chinese petrochemical activity," the IEA said. The forecasted expansion in global demand in 2023 would mark its "highest ever annual level", according to the agency, which in February had already forecast an annual record for the year of 101.9 million barrels per day.

The increasing demand for oil comes amid tensions on world markets after significant output cuts by several members of the OPEC+ alliance - made up of 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) headed by Saudi Arabia and their 10 allies led by Russia - to prop up prices. As a result, global oil supply plunged by 910,000 barrels per day in July, to 100.9 mbd, the IEA said in its report. A sharp reduction in production by Saudi Arabia last month saw output from the 23-nation OPEC+ alliance fall 1.2 million barrels per day, to 50.7 mbd "a near two-year low". Volumes by non-OPEC+ members rose to 50.2 mbd, the report added. — Agencies

Kuwaitis warned over anonymous calls, messages

WASHINGTON: The embassy of Kuwait to the United States of America has called on Kuwaiti citizens to exercise caution in dealing with phone calls and e-mails made by unidentified individuals claiming to be represented by the consular section, during which they demand to pay money to the US department of higher education to register students at universities or certify certificates and other educational matters.

The embassy said in a statement that "it never communicates with citizens either by phone or e-mails to request money from them in any way". It warned citizens not to deal with these calls and emails and not to respond to them and not to pay any payments or sharing with them any official information or papers such as photos of their passports, photos of their civil cards, academic certificates, any personal proofs or other documents. She also called on citizens to contact the embassy (consular affairs) in case they receive such communications. — KUNA



News in Brief

August 24 ushers in moderate weather

KUWAIT: High heat in Kuwait is expected to taper off as of August 24 with onset of Shail star season that would proceed for 52 days and end on October 14, Al-Ojairi Scientific Center announced on Saturday. The center said in a statement to KUNA that the temperature would substantially drop with rise of Shail star, adding that it would remain well below the threshold, 50 degrees. Hot air will dissipate giving way for moderately cool blows, amid incoming humidity and scattered and recurring drizzles. Shail star will be seen from Kuwait as of September 4. — KUNA



HAWAII: Destroyed buildings and homes are pictured in the aftermath of a wildfire in Lahaina, western Maui, Hawaii. — AFP

Embassy cautions Kuwaitis in Hawaii

WASHINGTON: Kuwait Embassy in Washington has called on Kuwaitis living on Hawaii and Maui islands to be vigilant for their safety amid the blazing wildfires. The Kuwaiti nationals are well advised to keep away from the dangerous areas and abide by the instructions of the local authorities, the embassy warned in a statement. The Embassy advised its nationals to contact its consulates in Los Angeles or New York, if need be at any time around the clock, via the following phone numbers. The Embassy's phone number is 0012022620758. The number of Consulate General in Los Angeles is 0013102793644 while, the Consulate General in New York is 0019172426688. Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah has sent a cable of condolences to US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin over the victims of Hawaii State wildfires that resulted in multiple deaths and injuries. Sheikh Ahmad Fahad wished those wounded - a speedy recovery. — KUNA

Kuwait security personnel abort bid to smuggle drugs

Smuggler conceals drugs in a vehicle

KUWAIT: Security personnel have aborted a bid to smuggle 250,000 amphetamine captagon pills by land into Kuwait, the Ministry of Interior announced on Friday. The smuggler concealed the drugs in his vehicle and attempted to smuggle them into the country by land, but his attempt ended in failure when personnel of the directorate general department for combating drugs uncovered the concealed narcotics, the MoI said in a statement.

The smuggler and the confiscated drugs have been referred to the relevant authorities for legal action, the MoI statement said. The MoI called on all people to cooperate with the security authorities and report about any such illegal action by calling the phone number 112 and the directorate at 1884141.

Few weeks ago, the Ministry of Interior thwarted of the smuggling of about one million Captagon pills that three suspects of Arab nationality tried to smuggle into the country through the port of Shuwaikh. The banned substances were hidden in a container carrying cement building materials in a secret and innovative way.

The General Directorate of Security Relations



and Media at the ministry confirmed in a press release that the security operatives, in cooperation with the General Directorate of Customs and

in joint coordination with the General Directorate of Drug Control in Kuwait and Qatar, were able to thwart the smuggling operation. — KUNA

Kuwait's envoy submits credentials in Slovenia

VIENNA: Kuwait's Ambassador in Austria and its Permanent Representative at International Organizations in Vienna Talal Al-Fassam has presented his credentials as non-resident ambassador to Slovenian President Nataša Pirc Musar. Speaking to KUNA following a ceremony

held in Ljubljana on Friday, the ambassador said he conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Slovenian president.

He added that the leader had asked him to convey her greetings to His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince. He said his country looks forward to promoting and developing relations with Slovenia in various fields, and to keeping sharing views about issues and matters that concern both friendly countries. — KUNA



Kuwait's Ambassador to Austria submits credentials as non-resident envoy to Slovenia.



LuLu Hypermarket holds Indian Independence Day promotion

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retailer in the region, held a week-long 'Independence Day' promotion to celebrate Indian Independence Day which falls on 15 August. The promotion, which runs from 9 to 15 August was inaugurated at the Al-Rai outlet of the hypermarket on 10 August by Indian Ambassador Adarsh Swaika, along with top management of LuLu Kuwait, and representatives of main sponsors of the event.

The inauguration featured a lively traditional music band, as well as colorful cultural performances by students of Indian schools in the country that highlighted the vibrancy and diversity of Indian culture. A special live painting exhibition held on the occasion displayed the amazing creativity and artistic talent of Indian artists in Kuwait. Ambassador Swaika handed mementos to the artists for their brilliant efforts in showcasing Indian art.

The week-long promotion provides shoppers with amazing discounts and offers on a wide range of Indian branded products, including groceries, fresh and frozen meat, fruits, and vegetables, as well as on non-food items, health and beauty products. Large cutouts and images of historic Indian monuments and landmarks, in addition to displays around the theme of 'Future India' lined the foyer of the hypermarket to mark the event's patriotic spirit. The creative displays also paid homage to India's rich and ancient heritage, as well as its modern achievements. A standout attraction that uniquely captured India's space exploration achievements was an innovative model of Indian spacecraft 'Chandrayaan 3', which is aiming for a soft landing on the moon next week.

A special Indian food fest competition that focused on local culinary talents and showcased the



vast diversity of Indian cuisine, was also organized as part of the Indian Independence Day promotion. Adding to the excitement of the promotion was the opportunity for visitors to click 'selfies' in front of a traditional Indian 'three-wheeled autorickshaw' that was specifically imported for the occasion.

Visitors were also treated to a delightful experience with free sampling counters that allowed them to savor the authentic flavors of exotic Indian dishes. Additionally, customers who purchased goods worth KD10 or more during the promotion period were presented with vouchers for KD2.5 that could be redeemed on buying Indian garments from the clothing and garment section.

The Indian Independence Day promotion allowed the main sponsors of the event — Eastern, Kitchen-Treasures, Nirapara, and KLF Concoad — to demonstrate the specific qualities of their various products. The event also was an affirmation of LuLu Hypermarket's continued commitment to providing customers the best of products from around the world at highly competitive prices.



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Little-known senator named Pakistan caretaker PM until coming election

Russia launches first moon mission in nearly 50 years

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LAHAINA: Davilynn Severson and Hano Ganer look for belongings through the ashes of their family's home in the aftermath of a wildfire in Lahaina, western Maui, Hawaii on August 11, 2023. — AFP

'It's gone': Stunned residents find nothing but ashes in Hawaii town

Hundreds of years of history, family homes erased by wildfire

LAHAINA: When Anthony La Puente made it back to the place he had called home for the last 16 years, there was almost nothing left. His house, like most in Lahaina, had been razed by the wildfire that swept through this slice of Hawaiian paradise. "The only thing I can say is that it hurts. It takes a toll on you emotionally," the 44-year-old said.

"It sucks not being able to find the things you grew up with, or the things you remember." La Puente was one of dozens of people who were allowed back into what used to be Lahaina on Friday. The 12,000-strong town, which has stood on the island of Maui for hundreds of years, was once the proud home of the Hawaiian royal family. Thousands of tourists visit every year to soak up the atmosphere, to wander along the scenic harbor front, and to idle under a majestic banyan tree reputed to be the oldest in the United States.

An AFP team that walked through the town on Friday found the blackened corpses of cats, birds and other animals caught in flames that also killed at least 67 people. Electricity cables dangled uselessly from stricken poles, and small pockets of fire continued to burn. Spray-painted Xs marked the skeletal vehicles that lay in the street — a sign to firefighters they have been checked for victims.

All through the town, there were piles of still-warm ashes where family homes once stood. Using the metal frame of a chair as a makeshift shovel, La Puente sifted through what was once his kitchen, uncovering a Starbucks tumbler. But the boxes of photographs and the mementoes from his 16 years in the house were gone — including the treasured items of his late father.

"I had packed up my dad's belongings" hoping to sort through them at some point, he said. But that will never happen. "Now it's gone." Elsewhere there was shocked

elation as neighbors hugged. "You made it!" cried Chyna Cho, as she embraced Amber Langdon amid the ruins. "I was trying to find you." For Keith Todd there was the unspeakable relief of finding his home still standing, his solar panels still pumping electricity to his kitchen. "I just couldn't believe it," Todd told AFP.

"I'm so grateful, but at the same time it's so devastating," he said, looking around at the unrecognizable piles that were once his neighbors' homes. Todd was resolved to stay at his house, fearful of the looters that people say have been targeting empty properties. "I will stay here, now that I know my house and my things are here. I will sleep here just in case someone tries to come in," he said.

Banyan tree

Here and there in the warscape were pockets of improbable hope. The Maria Lanakila Catholic

Church was seemingly unscathed, looming over the ashes of Waive'e Street, a small fire burning in front of it like some kind of perverse Eternal Flame. The stone walls of the historic Hale Pa'ahao prison still stood, but the wooden building that was used to punish unruly sailors was no more — 170 years of history wiped out.

Blocks away, Front Street, where restaurants had jostled with clothing stores for a view of the ocean, was all but gone. Boats that had been moored in the harbor days earlier were blackened, melted or sunk. Among the ruins, the huge banyan tree still stood upright, its branches denuded of green and its sooty trunk transformed into an awkward skeleton. The tree has dominated Lahaina for 150 years, watching over an island that was an independent monarchy, then a US territory, and finally a full US state. But the city it once guarded is now gone. — AFP

India proposes overhaul of British era criminal laws

NEW DELHI: India's government unveiled new punishments for mob lynchings and crimes against women on Friday in a proposal for the country's biggest criminal justice overhaul since the British colonial era. India's Penal Code and other statutes governing the police and courts were introduced in the 19th century, while the country was governed by the British crown.

Sweeping changes to the laws would remove archaic references to the British monarchy and other "signs of our slavery", home minister Amit Shah told parliament Friday. "These laws were made to strengthen the colonial rule, to protect colonial rulers, and the intention was to punish and not give justice," he told lawmakers while introducing bills for the reforms.

"We are going to change this and the spirit of these new laws will be to protect the constitutional rights of our citizens." New provisions in the laws would impose the death penalty on perpetrators of mob lynchings and minimum sentences of 20 years for gang rape. The bills also introduce community service provisions for petty crimes to ease the chronic backlog of criminal cases in Indian courts, which have millions of pending cases. Fixed timelines would be imposed for trials and criminal investigations in a country where both can drag on for years without result.

The bills have been referred to a parliamentary committee for further deliberation but could be passed before the current legislature dissolves ahead of general elections next May. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist government has sought to remove lingering symbols of colonial rule from India's history books, urban landscape and political institutions.

It has renovated the capital New Delhi's parliamentary precinct, originally designed by the British, to replace old colonial-era structures. Last year Modi inaugurated a statue of Subhas Chandra Bose, an independence hero venerated for taking up arms against the British, but controversial for his collaboration with Nazi Germany's war machine. The unveiling ceremony took place just hours before Britain announced the death of Queen Elizabeth II, and the statue itself replaces one of Britain's King George V torn down nearly half a century ago. — AFP

Australian journalist detained in China 'misses the sun'

SYDNEY: Jailed Australian journalist Cheng Lei yearns for her children and the country's "psychedelic sunsets", she said in a rare public letter marking three years since her mysterious arrest in China.

Cheng describes her bleak prison conditions in a candid note dictated to Australian officials from her cell, casting new light on a long-running point of friction between Canberra and Beijing.

"I miss the sun," reads the message, described as a "love letter" to Australia. "In my cell, the sunlight shines through the window but I can stand in it for only 10 hours a year." The former anchor for Chinese state broadcaster CGTN was arrested in 2020, and has been formally charged with "supplying state secrets overseas" — though no further details have been supplied.

Her message was shared with Australian news outlets and on the social media platform X by Cheng's partner, Nick Coyle, on Thursday evening. Cheng was detained at a time of rising tensions between China and Australia, with some questioning whether political ma-

neuvering played a part in her arrest.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called on Saturday for China to release Cheng, saying he was worried about her condition after three years behind bars. "Cheng Lei is an Australian citizen. She is someone who does not deserve this treatment," he told reporters during a visit to Queensland.

Albanese said Australia had pressed for Cheng's release at the "highest levels" and would continue to do so "whenever Australia meets with China". "It is important that her human rights as an Australian citizen be respected," the prime minister said. Albanese has been invited to visit China though no date has been set. The Australian leader told journalists on Friday that Cheng's release would not be made a condition for his trip to go ahead, saying such visits "should not be transactional".

Her case is often compared with that of Chinese-born Australian writer Yang Jun, who has been detained in China since 2019 on vaguely defined espionage charges. Although the relationship between Canberra and Beijing has warmed in recent months — with China dismantling a series of hefty trade tariffs — Cheng's imprisonment remains a point of stress in the relationship. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said the entire country wanted to see Cheng "reunited with her children".

"Australia has consistently advocated for Ms Cheng, and asked that basic standards of justice, procedural fair-

ness and humane treatment to be met in accordance with international norms," she said in a statement on Friday. "We will continue to support Ms Cheng and her family and to advocate for Ms Cheng's interests and wellbeing." Last year, Coyle said he had serious concerns about a "range of health issues" Cheng faced behind bars.

'Miss my children'

In the poignant message, the mother of two said she had not seen a tree in three years and spoke of her longing for Australia's bushwalks, beaches and "psychedelic sunsets". She said her bedding in jail was only taken out to air once a year. "It is the Chinese in me that has probably gone beyond the legal limits of sentimentality," writes Cheng, who describes herself as Chinese-Australian. "Most of all I miss my children," she ends the letter.

Cheng has been detained since August 2020, but was only formally arrested in February 2021. She was tried last March behind closed doors, with even Australia's ambassador to China blocked from entering the court to observe proceedings. The court deferred the verdict and Cheng's sentence, which could extend to life in prison. "She has missed her daughter going to high school. Her parents aren't getting any younger and Lei is their only child. So time is getting more and more precious," the Sydney Morning Herald quoted Coyle as saying on Thursday. — AFP

US-Iran prisoner deal heralds thaw in relations

WASHINGTON: Two and a half years into Joe Biden's presidency, and after exhaustive diplomacy with Iran's clerical leadership, his administration has reached a first deal — to free five detained Americans. The delicate agreement heralds an easing of tensions between the longtime adversaries, and experts and diplomats believe it could bring further, quiet efforts to address concerns including Iran's nuclear work.

Few people, however, expect major agreements anytime soon, with the clock ticking to the 2024 US presiden-

tial election. "I think both sides have an interest in using this initial agreement as the gateway to get back to dialogue, but not necessarily to a deal," said Ali Vaez, the Iran project director at the International Crisis Group, which promotes conflict resolution.

European-led talks collapsed last year on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal, which constrained Iran's contested program in return for promises of sanctions relief but was trashed by former president Donald Trump. Biden himself, in a caught-on-camera encounter at a campaign stop late last year, said the nuclear deal was "dead" in all but name, at a time when the Islamic republic was putting down massive protests led by women.

A source familiar with the negotiations said the prisoner agreement was separate from the nuclear issue. But he also said diplomacy has been effective in lowering the temperature with Iran, pointing to the truce that has held

unofficially for more than a year in war-ravaged Yemen, where Houthi rebels are backed by Iran.

Attacks by Iranian-linked Shiite militias against US troops have also appeared to subside in Iraq, noted a diplomat from a US ally. "The tensions are still very much there but the two governments are communicating, and that makes a difference," the diplomat said. US and Iranian officials reopened diplomacy in May in indirect meetings arranged by Oman, with some talks exploring measures to cap Iran's nuclear program that stop short of fully restoring the nuclear deal, according to diplomats. "I think the de-escalatory context already exists," said Vaez, who helped outside efforts to bridge gaps to reach the 2015 accord. But he doubted the Biden administration has the appetite on a new nuclear deal with the election season opening. "Any substantive deal with Iran requires significant sanctions relief that will be extremely politically controversial in the US," he said. — AFP

International

Russia launches first moon mission in nearly 50 years

Landing to take place on lunar south pole for first time in history

MOSCOW: Russia launched its first probe to the Moon in almost 50 years on Friday, a mission designed to give fresh impetus to its long-struggling space sector, which has been also hit by sanctions since the conflict in Ukraine. The launch of the Luna-25 probe is Moscow's first lunar mission since 1976, when the USSR was a pioneer in the conquest of space.

The rocket with the Luna-25 probe lifted off at 02:10 am Moscow time (23:10 GMT Thursday) from the Vostochny Cosmodrome, according to live images broadcast by the Russian space agency Roscosmos. Roscosmos expects the probe to enter a "100-kilometre-high lunar orbit" on August 16 and land on the Moon north of the Boguslawsky crater on August 21, the agency said in a statement. "For the first time in history, the landing will take place on the lunar south pole. Until now, everyone has been landing in the equatorial zone," senior Roscosmos official Alexander Blokhin said in a recent interview.

'Ambition of our ancestors'

The spacecraft, which will remain on the Moon for a year, will be tasked with "taking (samples) and analyzing the soil" as well as "conducting long-term scientific research", the Russian space agency said. The launch is the first mission in Russia's new lunar program, which gets underway at a time when Roscosmos is being deprived of its partnerships with the West amid the conflict with Ukraine. Instead, Russia is turning to China.

According to Russian space expert Vitali Iegorov, the mission is the first time that post-Soviet Russia has attempted to place a device on a celestial body. "The biggest question will be: can it land?" he told AFP, stressing that this mission is "of great importance" for Russia. President Vladimir Putin has pledged to continue Russia's space program despite sanctions, pointing to the USSR's sending of the first man into space in 1961 at a time of escalating East-West tensions.

"We are guided by the ambition of our ancestors to move forward, despite difficulties and external attempts to prevent us from doing so," Putin said at the Vostochny Cosmodrome last year. But the mission is "risky", Roscosmos' own chief Yuri Borisov has admitted. "The chance of success of these missions is estimated at around 70 percent," he told Putin at a meeting in June.

Following the launch, the rocket's boosters fell as expected 28 kilometres from the village of Shkhtinsky in the far-eastern region of Khabarovsk, regional governor Mikhail Degtiariov said on Telegram. Residents of the village had been evacuated in advance of the launch and Degtiariov said they had since been able to return. The mission is important for the Russian space sector, which has suffered from funding problems, corruption scandals and increasing competition from the United States and China, as well as from private initiatives such as billionaire Elon Musk's SpaceX. — AFP



In this handout picture taken and released by the Russian Space Agency Roscosmos on August 11, 2023, a Soyuz 2.1b rocket with the Luna-25 lander blasts off from the launch pad at the Vostochny cosmodrome, some 180 km north of Blagoveschensk, in the Amur region.

Environmental racism should be tackled in South Africa: UN

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa should increase its effort to tackle the "environmental racism" that has plagued the country since the apartheid regime, a United Nations expert said Friday. Marcos Orellana, the UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, also expressed shock that children had died because of poor controls on pesti-

cides and called for better regulation.

Landfill sites and polluting industries in South Africa are often positioned in poor and migrant communities, Orellana noted in a statement. Unemployment, hazardous synthetic chemicals and structural inequality were also among the reasons that make it difficult to overcome "the legacy of environmental racism", he added.

The country has "a landscape scarred by abandoned mines and tailing dumps and acid mine drainage", he added -- placed there during the apartheid era. "The legacy of pervasive air, water and chemical pollution disproportionately impacts marginalized and poor communities," said Orellana, who on Friday concluded a 12-day visit to southern African nation.

And despite the new constitution's commitment to human rights, apartheid-era laws were still hampering progress. "There are laws predating 1994 that continue to result in harms and human rights infringements, such as the laws governing hazardous waste from 1973 and pesticides from 1947," he noted.

He was "appalled" to learn that many children had died as a result of consuming or handling hazardous pesticides meant for agricultural use -- but sold illegally to combat pest infestations. He called for accountability, warning that this could "begin to erode" the country's confidence in democracy if not remedied.

Mining, one of South Africa's largest industries,

has left a legacy of thousands of waste dumps. "The hope for pollution prevention and remediation upon mine closures is lost in the poor enforcement of legislation," Orellana said in his statement. Coal mines, in particular, have a severely negative impact on the air pollution in these communities, because of mercury emissions, ashes and dust. Coal is a bedrock of South Africa's economy, employing almost 100,000 people and accounting for 80 percent of electricity production.

The country's environmental ministry welcomed the report, acknowledging that "rapid urbanization, industrialization and immigration, combined with fiscal challenges" had hampered efforts to tackle environmental challenges. — AFP

Saudi names non-resident...

Continued from Page 1

including an independent Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. Saudi Arabia does not recognize the Zionist entity and did not join the 2020 US-brokered Abraham Accords that saw the Zionist entity establish ties with two of the kingdom's neighbors, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. But during US President Joe Biden's tour of the Middle East last year, the Saudi civil aviation authority announced that it was lifting overflight restrictions on "all carriers", paving the way for Zionist planes to use Saudi airspace.

The kingdom denied at the time that the move was "a precursor to any further steps" towards normalization. Riyadh has repeatedly said it would stick to the

decades-old Arab League position of not establishing official ties with the Zionist entity until the conflict with the Palestinians is resolved. Yet in recent months Riyadh and Washington have held talks on Saudi conditions for progress on normalization, including security guarantees and assistance with a civilian nuclear program with uranium enrichment capacity, according to people briefed on the meetings.

Hesham Alghannam, a Saudi analyst at the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences in Riyadh, told AFP last week that Saudi Arabia needs to know whether the Zionists are "actively working towards making tangible progress on resolving the Palestinian-Zionist conflict". Saturday's move "gives insight into how diplomatic relations might be between Saudi Arabia and (the Zionist entity): A Saudi ambassador to Palestine with a file for (the Zionist entity)", said Aziz Alghashiani, a Saudi analyst and expert on Saudi-Zionist relations. "The immediate signal is to treat Saudi demands for (Zionist) concessions seriously." — Agencies

inist". "But because the system is broken, we cannot get people to represent us," she added. "We are running around in circles."

The last election saw only one out of 15 female candidates voted into office, according to Haifa Al-Mousa, a member of the Kuwait Women's Cultural and Social Society, an organization established in 1963. There is "a war against women in Kuwait, unfortunately, led by fanatical currents," she told AFP, criticizing the country's "male-dominated society" for pushing women to the sidelines. But even with the odds stacked against them, Mousa believes women should still push back. "We have to trust in ourselves and say that in the end, our rights will prevail." — AFP

of elation when they tearfully reconnected with neighbors they feared might not have gotten out alive. "You made it!" cried Chyna Cho, as she embraced Amber Langdon amid the ruins. "I was trying to find you."

For some of the luckiest, there was joy — albeit tempered by the scale of the tragedy that counts among the worst natural disasters to hit the state of Hawaii. "I just couldn't believe it," Keith Todd told AFP after finding his home intact. "I'm so grateful, but at the same time it's so devastating." Todd, 64, discovered his house and his neighbor's house untouched, and his solar panels providing electricity to the fridge, which was still dispensing ice on demand.

Fears of looting were also on residents' minds, and county authorities said anyone accessing Lahaina would have to prove they lived or were staying at a hotel there, and that a curfew would be in place between 10 pm and 6 am. Some of those who made it back to Lahaina wandered in stunned silence trying to take in the enormity of the destruction. Anthony La Puente, 44, said the shock of finding his home burned to nothing was profound. "It sucks not being able to find the things you grew up with, or the things you remember," he told AFP of the house he had lived in for 16 years. — AFP

Musk-Zuck cage fight to take place in Italy

WASHINGTON: Elon Musk said Friday that his much-hyped cage fight with Mark Zuckerberg would take place in Italy, as authorities there confirmed talks about hosting a "great charity event". While any showdown between the two tech titans has yet to be officially confirmed, Musk said on his X social media platform — formerly known as Twitter — that arrangements were advancing.

"I spoke to the PM of Italy and Minister of Culture," Musk wrote, referring to Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. "They have agreed on an epic location." Meta chief Zuckerberg responded on his Threads social network, posting a photo of himself shirtless and pinning down an opponent in his "backyard octagon". A martial arts enthusiast who has taken part in jiu-jitsu competitions, Zuckerberg said, "I love this sport and I've been ready to fight since the day Elon challenged me. If he ever agrees on an actual date, you'll hear it from me. Until then, please assume anything he says has not been agreed on."

Italian Culture Minister Gennaro Sangiuliano confirmed speaking to Musk about "how to organize a great charity event evoking history" but said any match "will not be held in Rome". Musk apparently hopes the fight would take place in the ancient Colosseum, a UNESCO World Heritage site, posting about the idea in late June. In a statement, Sangiuliano said any event with Musk would raise "a huge sum, many millions of euros, (that) will be donated to two important Italian pediatric hospitals". "It will also be an opportunity to promote our history and our archaeological, artistic and cultural heritage on a global scale," he said.

COVID cases up 80% as new subvariant rises

PARIS: The number of new COVID-19 cases reported worldwide rose by 80 percent in the last month, the World Health Organization said on Friday, days after designating a new "variant of interest". The WHO declared in May that COVID is no longer a global health emergency, but has warned that the virus will continue to circulate and mutate, causing occasional spikes in infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

In its weekly update, the UN agency said that nations reported nearly 1.5 million new cases from July 10 to Aug 6, an 80 percent increase compared to the previous 28 days. However, the number of deaths fell by 57 percent to 2,500.



This combination of photographs shows Mark Zuckerberg (left) and Elon Musk. — AFP

Musk meanwhile said "everything done will pay respect to the past and present of Italy" and that proceeds will "go to veterans". He said the cage match would be managed by foundations run by himself and Zuckerberg and not by UFC, the Las Vegas-based mixed martial arts promoter. UFC boss Dana White, still seeking participation in the event, told Mike Tyson's podcast this week that he believed the fight would generate \$1 billion in revenue.

Zuckerberg said in his Threads post that he would want to work with a professional organization such as the UFC to create a line-up that spotlights elite athletes in the sport. The two tech tycoons, who have occasionally jostled from afar, became direct competitors after Zuckerberg's Meta launched its Twitter-like Threads platform in early July.

In a slightly frivolous aside, Musk later Friday posted a phrase in Latin that translates as "it is delightful to play the fool occasionally". Musk did not mention a date for the proposed fight, but said he may need to undergo "minor surgery" to resolve a "problem with my right shoulder blade rubbing against my ribs". — AFP

Kuwaiti MPs, activists drive...

Continued from Page 1

"There must be deputies representing us who are able to change the system," Albahaweed told AFP on the sidelines of a symposium on women.

Only with major systemic changes can the Gulf state achieve "better representation not only of women but also" members of different social classes, said the 34-year-old, wearing a necklace that reads "fem-

Pain, anger as Hawaii fire death...

Continued from Page 1

"We underestimated the lethality, the quickness of fire," Hawaii Congresswoman Jill Tokuda told CNN on Saturday morning. Maui suffered numerous power outages during the crisis, preventing many residents from receiving emergency alerts on their cellphones — something, Tokuda said, officials should have prepared for. "We have got to make sure that we do better," she added. The fires follow other extreme weather events in North America this summer, with record-breaking wildfires still burning across Canada and a major heat wave baking the US southwest.

Europe and parts of Asia have also endured soaring temperatures, with major fires and floods wreaking havoc. Scientists have said global warming caused by carbon emissions is contributing to the extreme weather. For some of those who made it back into Lahaina, there was a momentary sense

The WHO warned that the reported number of cases and deaths do not reflect the true numbers, in part because countries carry out far less testing and monitoring than during earlier stages of the pandemic.

Many of the new cases came in the Western Pacific region, which saw infections jump by 137 percent, the WHO said. Several countries in the Northern Hemisphere, including the United States, United Kingdom, France and Japan have seen a summer uptick in cases in recent weeks. Experts have suggested that summer gatherings and travel, declining immunity and a new subvariant may have all played a role in the increase.

On Wednesday, the WHO designated the Omicron subvariant EG.5 as a "variant of interest" following a steady rise in its prevalence. More than 17 percent of all reported cases were EG.5 in mid-July, up from 7.6 percent a month before, according to the WHO. EG.5, which has been unofficially nicknamed "Eris" online, is considered to be a descendant of the XBB lineage of the virus. — AFP

International

Little-known senator named Pakistan caretaker PM until coming election

Election date up in the air as commission redraws constituency boundaries

ISLAMABAD: A little-known senator from Pakistan's least-populous province was named caretaker prime minister Saturday to see the country through to an election due in months. Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, from Balochistan province, takes on a country that has been wracked by political and economic instability for months, with Imran Khan, the country's most popular politician in jail.



Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar

Kakar was confirmed by President Arif Alvi as the choice of the outgoing coalition government, led by Shehbaz Sharif, and opposition leader Raja Riaz Ahmad. "We first agreed that whoever should be prime minister, he should be from a smaller province so smaller provinces' grievances should be addressed," Riaz said.

Kakar, 52, will lead Pakistan through to general and provincial elections due by November, but which some officials have already said will be delayed until next year. Political analyst Hasan Askari Rizvi told AFP that Kakar "has a limited political career and not much weight in Pakistani politics", but that could work in his favor.

"This can be an advantage because he has no strong affiliation with the major political parties," he said. "But the disadvantage is that being a lightweight politician he may find it difficult to cope with the problems he's going to face without the active support of the military establishment."

Khan in jail

The country has been in political turmoil since former international cricket star Imran Khan was dismissed as premier by a no-confidence vote in April 2022, culminating in him being jailed last weekend for three years for graft. He has been disqualified from standing for office for five years but is appealing against his sentence and conviction.

Authorities have cracked down hard against Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in recent months, crushing his grassroots power by rounding up thousands of his supporters and officials. Analyst Ayesha Siddiqi, noting Kakar had done courses at the National Defence University — formerly the military's war college — said he would be close to the establishment. "It seems that the establishment has struck, and they have found somebody who will be watching over their interests rather than that of politicians," she said.



KARACHI: People through a market where vendors sell Pakistan's national flags in Karachi on August 11, 2023, ahead of the country's 76th Independence Day. — AFP

Question mark over election date

Parliament was officially dissolved on Wednesday with elections due within 90 days according to the constitution. But there has been speculation for months that they would be delayed as the establishment grapples to stabilize a country facing overlapping security, economic and political crises.

Data from the latest census carried was finally published last weekend and the outgoing government said the election commission needs time to redraw constituency boundaries. Asked this week on television if a vote would take place this year, interior minister Rana Sanaullah replied: "An absolutely straightforward answer — No."

The election commission has yet to comment. Last month parliament rushed through legislation that gives the caretaker government more power to negotiate with global bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, another clue it may be around for a while. Some analysts think the delay

could give time for the main coalition partners — the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) — to figure out how to address the challenge of Khan's PTI.

"But in reality, delaying the election could simply anger the public more and galvanize an opposition that has already suffered through months of crackdowns," said Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center. The United States said this week it was watching with concern the prospect of election violence.

Behind any election in Pakistan lurks the military, which has staged at least three successful coups since the country was forged from the partition of India in 1947. Khan enjoyed genuine widespread support when he came to power in 2018, but analysts say it was only with the blessing of the country's powerful generals — with who he reportedly fell out within the months before his ousting. — AFP

Columbian gang behind Ecuador assassination

QUITO: Two years after a Colombian squad allegedly shot dead the president of Haiti, authorities in Ecuador have accused a group of Colombians of being behind the assassination of a top presidential candidate, pointing to the export of a culture of political hitjobs. Colombia has a long history of politicians being assassinated by opponents, drug traffickers, or paramilitaries, and even its president, Gustavo Petro, campaigned before his election from behind a wall of bulletproof shields.

After the shock assassination of Ecuador journalist and anti-corruption crusader Fernando Villavicencio on Wednesday, authorities released pictures of six Colombian suspects, one of them splattered with blood. A seventh suspect was killed in a shootout at the scene of the crime. The country's main newspaper, El Universo, reported Villavicencio was assassinated "hitman-style and with three shots to the head."

Police said the suspects were arrested in a series of raids in which they also found a rifle, a machine gun, grenades and ammunition. In a message of support to Ecuador, Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro drew a direct link to the murder of Haitian president Jovenel Moise in his home in July 2021 by a group of 17 Colombian mercenaries.

"A gang of Colombian hitmen, mercenaries, went to Haiti to assassinate a president," he said during an official event. "These criminal gangs of hitmen are unfortunately taking this Colombian model of political assassinations outside

of its borders." Jorge Mantilla, a Colombian investigator into organized crime, said that the arrests showed the "specialization among Colombian criminals in the use of violence" after six decades of armed conflict between the state and guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug gangs. He said the two assassinations "show the capacity that these violence professionals have of connecting with transnational crime networks."

Cross-border ties

Villavicencio said last week he had received several threats from Los Choneros, one of Ecuador's most powerful criminal groups which the Insight Crime thinktank said became the armed wing of a Colombian drug cartel. It also has ties to Mexico's Sinaloa cartel. Late Friday Villavicencio was buried in Quito during a private ceremony after hundreds of people paid tribute at an exhibition center, where his coffin was draped with the flag and a symbolic presidential sash with the words "My power is in the constitution."

While there has been no clear claim of responsibility, the murder has highlighted the once-peaceful nation's decline into a violent hotbed of drug trafficking and organized crime. Wedged between the major cocaine producers Colombia and Peru, Ecuador — seen as having laxer controls — has in recent years attracted foreign drug cartels that have linked up with local gangs to move drugs through the country to the United States and Europe.



Tamia (R, foreground) and Amanda Villavicencio, daughters of slain Ecuadorian presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio, stand by their father's coffin during an act organized by the Movimiento Construye party and friends at the Quito Exhibition Center in Quito, on August 11, 2023. — AFP

Mantilla explains that Ecuador's drug gangs "acquired their power from working with Colombian organizations and later became independent" and grew stronger. On Thursday, Ecuador's Interior Minister Juan Zapata referred to the detainees simply as "foreigners," saying they were "members of a criminal group" that assassinated Villavicencio in an "attempt to sabotage" snap presidential elections due on August 20. Colombian media said the suspects had criminal records in their home country, including for arms manufacturing and trafficking, drug trafficking, murder, or domestic violence.

Colombia partly 'responsible'

After the Haiti assassination, a US in-

vestigation revealed that two men at the head of a Miami security firm had devised a plan to kidnap Moise and replace him with a Haitian-American citizen. In March this year, dual Haitian-Chilean citizen Rodolphe Jaar pled guilty in the United States to housing the Colombian commando team and giving them weapons.

That same month Colombia's president Petro said his country was partly responsible for Moise's assassination. "Colombia has a co-responsibility... it was Colombian mercenaries who went to kill the president of Haiti, unleashing a crisis even worse than the one they were already going through," he said. Petro has not commented on the Ecuador assassination. — AFP

Zuma released after spending an hour in prison

PRETORIA: South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma reported back to prison on Friday only to be swiftly released, in a government move lashed by the opposition as a "monumental insult" to the public. In the latest twist arising from a sentence for contempt of court, Zuma was ordered to report back to jail, arriving at 6:00 am (4:00 GMT) at a detention facility in the eastern town of Estcourt, the prison service said.

There, he was "admitted into the system" — only to be let go in just over an hour, under a "remission process" to ease overcrowding in prison, according to the national commissioner of correctional services, Makgothi Thobakgale. "Upon admission into the system he was subjected to administrative processes ... He was then released," Thobakgale told a press conference in Pretoria.

Zuma, 81, was sentenced to 15 months in June 2021 after refusing to testify before a panel probing financial corruption and cronyism under his presidency. He started serving his term in July 2021, sparking protests that descended into riots and looting that left more than 350 dead in the worst violence to hit South Africa since the advent of democracy.

But after just two months he was freed on medical parole for an undisclosed condition. In November last year an appeals court found the release was illegally granted and ordered Zuma back to the Estcourt Correctional Centre in KwaZulu-Natal province. South Africa's prison service, which had granted Zuma's conditional release, appealed the decision, but the bid was dismissed by the Constitutional Court last month.

Release

Thobakgale said the ex-president had been ordered to return to jail on Friday in compliance with the ruling. But Zuma immediately benefited from a remission of non-violent offenders approved by President Cyril Ramaphosa, Justice Minister Ronald Lamola said.

Mzwanele Manyi, a spokesman for Zuma's foundation said the ex-president was "at home" and consulting with his legal team. The decision was met with outrage by some opposition parties and scepticism from the press, with Thobakgale and Lamola facing a barrage of questions over the timing of the remission process, which began on Friday.

Lamola said the "exercise of exploring special remission" started in April, and more than 24,000 inmates, about two-thirds of them currently under correctional supervision and parole, will be released under the process. The move "will alleviate overcrowding" which "poses a direct threat to inmate health, security, and

management, and it could lead to a surge in gangsterism," the minister said.

'Insult'

The Democratic Alliance (DA), South Africa's leading opposition party, said it would seek legal action, adding Zuma's release was a "monumental insult to each and every South African." "This decision has nothing to do (with) overcrowding, and everything to do with preventing Zuma from facing accountability for his actions," said Glynnis Breytenbach, the DA's shadow justice minister.

"The precedent has been clearly set. If you are a senior ANC member, you will never be held accountable for your crimes". Zuma is a senior member of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), in power since the end of white-minority rule in 1994.

He served as president from 2009 to 2018 before being forced out over graft allegations. But as one of the dwindling generations of ANC anti-apartheid fighters, he remains deeply popular with many grassroots members. The party is in the doldrums as it seeks to continue its reign in government as elections loom next year.

Polls suggest the ANC could see its vote drop below 50 percent, battered by discontent at corruption, power cuts and entrenched unemployment. Besides his 2021 contempt-of-court conviction, Zuma is facing separate charges of corruption in an arms procurement scandal dating to the late 1990s, when he was vice president. — AFP

Reviving the bread basket strategy

By Magdi A. Mofadal, Ambassador of Sudan to Austria

Sudan's humanitarian partners have recently rung the alarms about the situation of food insecurity in the country, particularly in Darfur, due to the conflict that started on April 15, 2023. The war erupted when farmers were preparing for the rainy season, in which about 95 percent of the cultivated land across the country is tilled.

It interrupted the urgently needed finance, obstructed transportation, impacted trade, and diverted the attention away from production. This further complicated a very fragile humanitarian situation in the country. The humanitarian situation in the region is also posing several challenges. The UN humanitarian agencies warned in June 2023 that climate change, armed conflicts, high food prices and post-COVID-19 economic fall-out have caused record food insecurity in the Horn of Africa, with an estimated 60 million urgently in need of help.

The gravity of the current humanitarian situation, in Sudan and the region, requires the search for sustainable solutions that will address not only the current crisis but will build a solid ground for the future. This can only be achieved through reviving the 1970s bread-basket strategy, which aimed at transforming Sudan into a leading agricultural producer in Africa and the Arab World. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), based on a World Food Conference in 1974, considered Sudan, with Australia and Canada, the future breadbasket of the globe. The East African country was projected to be one of the largest agricultural powerhouses globally.

This was based on several factors. An arable land of 170 million acres, out of which only 40 million acres are currently used (less than its quarter). Most of these vast fertile lands have the potential for irrigation, from the river Nile and its tributaries, seasonal streams, and vast aquifers. In addition to adequate rainfall, different climates, 110 million heads of livestock (cattle, goats, sheep, and camels). Its diverse climates enable Sudan to produce vast array of crop varieties including cereal grains (wheat, millet, and sorghum), groundnuts, sugarcane, beans, vegetables, and fruits (mangoes, lemons, oranges, and grapefruits). The Nile and the Red Sea provide Sudan with huge potential in the fishing industry.

Political instability, long and devastating internal conflicts, strains in the country's relations with some actors in the international community, mismanagement of resources, and lack of vision are among the major factors that deprived the country from achieving its bread-basket strategy.

A lot of water has passed under the bridge of this strategy in the last 50 years. The secession of South Sudan with its huge resources of water, lands, and forests; climate change; drought and desertification; population growth; migration to urban areas; the prevalence of the culture of seeking quick income; and the neglect of the agricultural sector. Despite all these factors and the unprecedented looting, destruction, sabotage, and razing of economic institutions in the current war in Sudan, there are several local, regional, and international factors that encourage investment in agriculture and agribusiness and pave the way for reviving the bread-basket strategy. These will be outlined in the following points.

Most of the infrastructure and facilities of the agricultural sector has been spared the devastation by the current conflict. The sector outside Khartoum, Darfur and North Kordofan states can be swiftly and easily revitalized. This will contribute to achieving food security, create jobs, and provide goods and services to the manufacturing, trade, and transport sectors. This in turn will reflect positively on economic growth, reducing the deficits in the trade and the balance of payments, reducing inflation and stabilizing the exchange rate.

Fortunately, each one of the 18 states of Sudan has a comparative advantage in one or more of the subsectors of the agricultural sector: crop production, animal husbandry, forests, and water resources. Therefore, revitalizing the agricultural sector will contribute to achieving balanced regional development, sustaining peace, and enhancing national unity, as regional disparities are among the main factors behind internal conflicts in the country.

Most of the areas in the peripheries of the country have been connected by paved roads to the center and the main port. There are also roads to Eritrea, Ethiopia, Egypt, and South Sudan. This in turn will ease access to markets within and without the country, and access to inputs, raw materials, and capital goods. The advancement in scientific research and technology provides huge opportunities to increase productivity, introduce new varieties, enhance efficiency in water consumption and introduce new techniques to rehabilitate the natural pastures. Solar energy provides opportunities for access to off-grid electricity in remote areas. The internet and mobile technologies open new avenues for access to agricultural extension services, training, know-how transfer and instant update on prices of agricultural products.

The disruption of supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic prompted enhanced regional supply chains. This is an opportunity for Sudan to increase its production targeting regional markets. In 2022, the food imports gap in the Arab World was estimated to be \$42 billion. In response to this challenge, the Arab banks and financial institutions devoted \$10 billion for investments in food security in the first phase. With its huge potential, it can have a large share in these projects.

Population growth is a crucial factor that must be taken into consideration. Africa and the Arab World are two of the fastest growing regions in the world in population growth. Africa's population is projected to increase from the current 1.4 billion to 2.5 billion in 2050 and to 4.2 billion in 2100. Planning for how to feed these ever-growing numbers must start immediately.

The road to new strategy

Considering positive factors that have been just enumerated, it can be said that reviving the breadbasket strategy becomes a necessity, not an option. It is the key to addressing current and future food security challenges in Sudan and the region. It should be the backbone of the Sudan recovery plan.

However, the journey to this noble goal is going to be arduous and extremely challenging. Several political, economic, financial, social, and bureaucratic obstacles are expected in the way. This necessitates a smart partnership with Sudan in her march towards reviving the breadbasket strategy.

The main pillars of this partnership include, providing innovative finance, enhancing the capacities of the relevant universities and national research institutions, technology and know-how transfer, rehabilitating the infrastructure, enhancing market access to Sudanese products, value addition to agricultural products, addressing the acute shortage in electricity, addressing challenges related to land ownership; enhancing infrastructure connectivity internally and with the region, enhancing the capacity of the state to effectively coordinate among the different institutions at local, state, regions and national levels, enhancing access to micro-finance for small scale producers, disseminating lessons learned from previous experiences, sharing of best practices from around the world and other relevant fields.

Therefore, it can be said that reviving the breadbasket strategy provides a golden opportunity to address the current food insecurity crisis in Sudan and the region. It also contributes to achieving the SDGs, sustaining peace, enhancing national unity, fostering regional cooperation, and integration. The first step in realizing this crucial strategy is to make it the heart of the post-conflict recovery plan. The preparations for this plan should start immediately, as a crucial pillar in peace-making efforts, and should be connected to the humanitarian response plan.

Business

SUNDAY, AUGUST 13, 2023

Preliminary audit report slams Lebanon central bank, governor

Report says financial position of BdL 'deteriorated rapidly' between 2015, 2020

BEIRUT: A preliminary forensic audit of Lebanon's central bank by professional services firm Alvarez & Marsal (A&M) has painted a damning picture of the institution under long-serving former governor Riad Salameh. Since late 2019, Lebanon has been mired in an economic crisis that the World Bank has dubbed one of the worst in modern times, but officials have largely failed to take action to stem the collapse or implement reforms demanded by creditors. An audit of the central bank has been among the top demands of creditors as Lebanon seeks bailout funds. The financial position of the central bank (BdL) "deteriorated rapidly" between 2015 and 2020, according to a leaked copy of the preliminary report which was seen by AFP on Friday.

"However, this deterioration was not reported in BdL's balance sheet presented in its annual financial statements, which were prepared using unconventional accounting policies," it said. Those policies allowed the central bank "to overstate assets, equity and profits while understating liabilities", it added. Former governor Salameh, who left his post at the end of last month, is widely viewed as a key culprit in the country's dramatic economic crash.

On Thursday, Britain, Canada and the United States announced sweeping sanctions against the 73-year-old, who is also wanted in Europe for alleged financial crimes. Salameh has denied all charges against him. In 2015, he launched so-called financial engineering measures aimed at increasing central bank reserves, in measures that some have compared to a Ponzi scheme. The preliminary audit report said the central bank's "accounting policy in respect of financial engineering was exceptional in the extent of personal, unscrutinised discretion given to the governor to determine accounting estimates", it said, calling the measures "costly".

'Misconduct'

It recommended "immediate action" to "introduce further governance, oversight and scrutiny measures to mitigate any further risk arising from BdL's misconduct". It also recommended implementing "strong internal controls across BdL's risk taking departments".

Salameh is the subject of judicial investigations at home and abroad into allegations including embezzlement. In May, judicial authorities in France



BEIRUT: Lebanon's Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh speaks to a reporter during an interview with AFP at his office in Beirut. — AFP

and Munich in Germany issued arrest warrants for Salameh over accusations including money laundering and fraud. Lebanon does not extradite its nationals. European investigators have been probing the central bank's ties to Forry Associates Ltd, a British Virgin Islands-registered company that listed Salameh's brother Raja as its beneficiary.

The US Treasury said on Thursday that Forry was a "shell company" used "to divert approximately \$330 million from transactions involving the BdL". "Salameh and Raja then moved these funds to bank accounts in their own names or the names of other shell companies," the statement said.

A&M's preliminary audit report said "there is evidence of the payment of illegitimate commissions during the period totaling \$111 million". "This appears to be a continuation of the commission scheme under investigation by Lebanese and international prosecuting authorities," the report said.

"We have identified no records to confirm that a service was actually performed to justify the commission payments," it added. A&M had agreed to complete its work in 12 weeks, the preliminary report said, but "the review was in fact completed 49 weeks after mobilization due to the frequent delays in receipt of data". It cited "many challenges in conducting the forensic audit, including that we have not been allowed access on site at BdL, nor have we been permitted to conduct interviews with BdL staff or leadership". — AFP

US to invest \$1.2bn In facilities to pull carbon from air



WASHINGTON: US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm testifies before a Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources about the 2023 budget for the Department of Energy, in Washington, DC. — AFP

WASHINGTON: The US government said Friday it will spend up to \$1.2 billion for two pioneering facilities to vacuum carbon out of the air, a historic gamble on a still developing technology to combat global warming that is criticized by some experts.

The two projects—in Texas and Louisiana—each aim to eliminate one million tons of carbon dioxide per year, equivalent in total to the annual emissions of 445,000 gas-powered cars.

It is "the world's largest investment in engineered carbon removal in history," the Energy Department said in a statement. "Cutting back on our carbon emissions alone won't reverse the growing impacts of climate change," Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in the statement. "We also need to remove the CO2 that we've already put in the atmosphere."

Direct Air Capture (DAC) techniques—also known as Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR)—focus on that CO2 emitted into the air, which is helping to fuel climate change and extreme weather.

Each of the projects will remove 250 times more CO2 from the air than the largest carbon capture site currently in operation, the Energy Department said. The UN's International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) considers capturing carbon dioxide directly from the atmosphere one of the methods necessary to combat global warming. But the sector is still marginal—there are just 27 existing carbon capture sites commissioned worldwide, according to the International Energy Agency, though at least 130 projects are under development.

And some experts worry that use of the technology will be a pretext for continuing to emit greenhouse gases, rather than switching more quickly to clean energies. Direct capture "requires a lot of electricity for extracting CO2 from the air and compressing it for pipes," Stanford University professor Mark Jacobson told AFP. "Even in the best case, where the electricity is renewable, that renewable electricity is then prevented from replacing a fossil electricity source on the grid, such as coal or gas."

That means such technology is nothing more than a "gimmick," he said, adding: "It will only delay our solution to the climate problem."

Storing CO2 underground

US non-profit Battelle is the prime contractor on the Louisiana project, which will inject captured CO2 for storage deep underground. It will partner with another American company, Heirloom, and the Swiss firm Climeworks, already a sector leader that operates a plant in Iceland with an annual capacity to capture 4,000 tons of CO2 from the air. — AFP

FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried jailed after bail revoked

NEW YORK: A US federal judge on Friday ordered FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried back to prison less than two months before his trial on fraud charges, revoking the disgraced cryptocurrency tycoon's bail over alleged attempts to tamper with witnesses. Bankman-Fried, 31, has pleaded not guilty to charges of wire fraud and conspiracy to commit money laundering, as well as election finance violations, in connection with the spectacular collapse of his crypto firm last year.

FTX and its sister trading house Alameda Research went bankrupt in November, dissolving a virtual trading business that at one point had been valued by the market at \$32 billion.

US District Judge Lewis Kaplan justified the revocation of bail by citing "probable cause... that the defendant has committed the federal crime of attempted witness tampering," the ruling said.

"There is no condition or combination of conditions of release that will assure that the defendant will not pose a danger to other persons or the safety of the community," the order said. Prosecutors had argued to Kaplan that Bankman-Fried's activities

IEA raises world oil demand forecast in 2023 to all-time high

PARIS: The International Energy Agency said Friday it had revised upwards its forecast for global oil demand growth in 2023 as demand is "scaling record highs". World oil demand already hit a record 103 million barrels per day in June and August and "could see yet another peak", the Paris-based IEA said in its monthly report.

"For 2023 as a whole, global oil demand is set to expand by 2.2 million barrels per day to 102.2 million barrels per day," it said. China accounted for 70 percent of growth, the IEA said, adding that demand in the Asian giant was "also stronger than expected, reaching fresh highs despite persistent concerns over the health of the economy". "World oil demand is scaling record highs, boosted by strong summer air travel, increased oil use in power generation and surging Chinese petrochemical activity," the IEA said.

The forecasted expansion in global demand in 2023 would mark its "highest ever annual level", according to the agency, which in February had already forecast an annual record for the year of 101.9 million barrels per day. The increasing demand for oil comes amid tensions on world markets after significant output cuts by several members of the OPEC+ alliance—made up of 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) headed by Saudi Arabia and their 10 allies led by Russia—to prop up prices.

As a result, global oil supply plunged by 910,000 barrels per day in July, to 100.9 mbd, the IEA said in its report. A sharp reduction in production by Saudi Arabia last month saw output from the 23-nation OPEC+ alliance fall 1.2 million barrels per day, to 50.7 mbd "a near two-year low". Volumes by non-OPEC+ members rose to 50.2 mbd, the report added.

Price increase on horizon?

In April, several OPEC+ members decided to slash production voluntarily by more than one mil-

lion bpd—a surprise move that briefly buttressed prices but failed to bring about lasting recovery.

Oil producers are grappling with falling prices and high market volatility, reflecting continued fallout from the Russian invasion of Ukraine and China's faltering economic recovery. Saudi Arabia also announced last week that it was extending its voluntary oil production cut of one million barrels per day for another month to include September. Moscow has pledged, too, to cut production by 500,000 bpd in August, and a further cut of 300,000 bpd for September.

"Market balances are set to tighten further into

as a source for The New York Times amounted to witness intimidation, citing an article containing the private writings of former Alameda CEO Caroline Ellison, his former girlfriend. Ellison is a cooperating witness in the government's case.

Prosecutors accused Bankman-Fried—who had more than 100 phone calls with one of the Times reporters—of "intending to portray a key cooperator testifying against him in a poor and inculpatory light," according to a July 28 letter filed by the Department of Justice.

Bankman-Fried "crossed a line toward improperly influencing those prospective jurors and intimidating a witness and sending a message to other prospective witnesses," it said.

"Witness tampering is not constitutionally protected speech." In response, attorneys for Bankman-Fried said the government's position flouted the First Amendment and that returning the defendant to jail would mar his ability to mount a defense. Bankman-Fried, who also is facing charges that he authorized bribes of at least \$40 million to Chinese officials in a bid to unfreeze trading accounts controlled by Alameda, is due to go on trial in early October.

Fall from grace

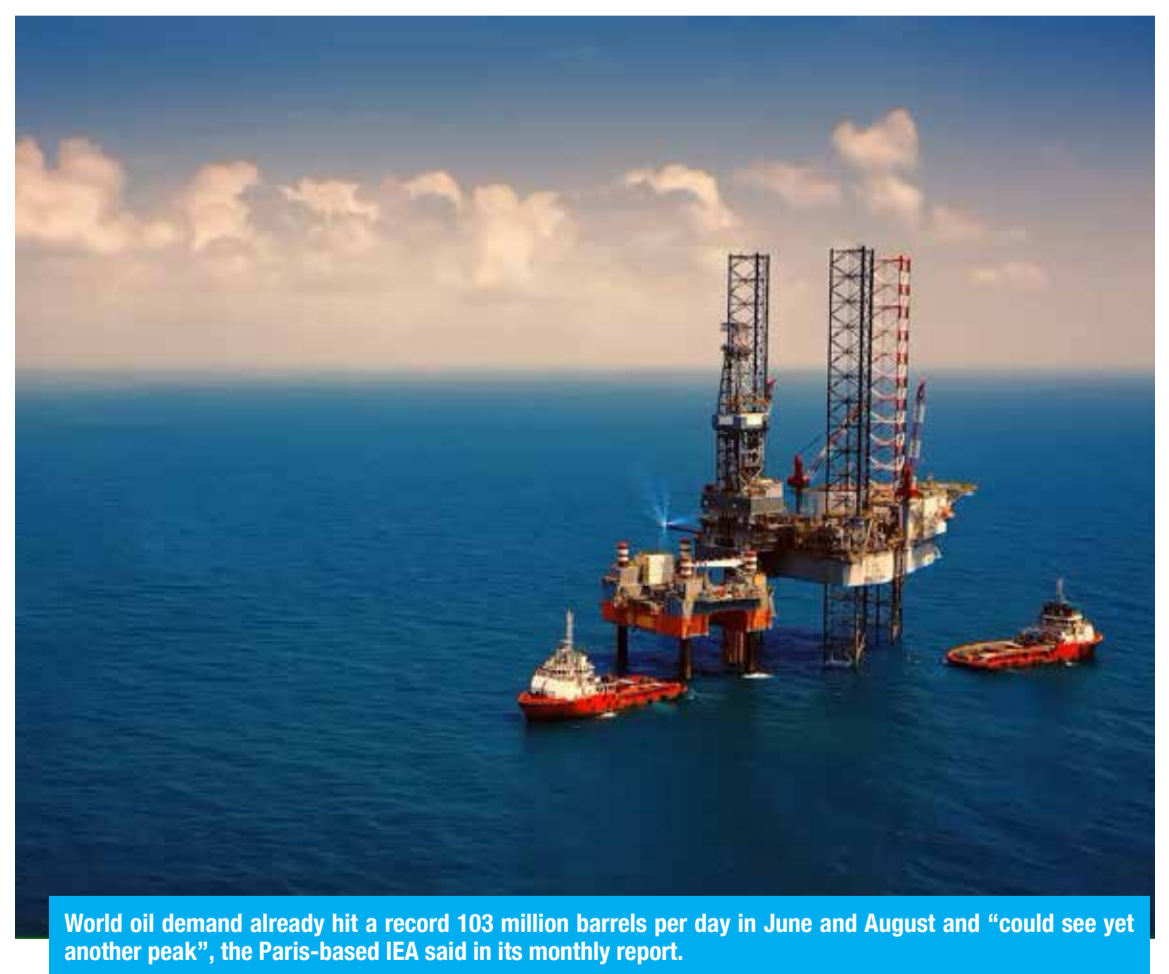
Prosecutors allege Bankman-Fried—who had been released on \$250 million bail and confined to his parents' California home before Friday's ruling—cheated investors and misused funds that belonged to FTX and Alameda Research clients. The former



NEW YORK: Former FTX chief executive Sam Bankman-Fried (center) arrives to enter a plea before US District Judge Lewis Kaplan in the Manhattan federal court in New York, on January 3, 2023. — AFP

FTX chief had appeared on the covers of finance and tech magazines, with Fortune likening him to Warren Buffett, and drew in huge investments from prominent fund managers and venture capitalists. But it all imploded dramatically in when a media report said Alameda's balance sheet was heavily built on a token created by FTX with no independent value—and exposed Bankman-Fried's companies as being dangerously interlinked.

Bankman-Fried was arrested at his apartment in the Bahamas on December 12 at the request of federal prosecutors in New York. A Bahamas permanent resident, he spent nine days in prison, weighing his choices before deciding not to fight extradition to the United States. — AFP



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"Market balances are set to tighten further into

the autumn as Saudi Arabia and Russia extend supply cuts at least through September," the IEA said.

If the bloc's current targets are maintained, oil inventories could fall in the second half of the year "with a risk of driving prices still higher". Looking ahead to 2024 as the world races to combat climate change and reduce the use of fossil fuels, the IEA said it anticipated demand growth to slow.

"With the post-pandemic rebound running out of steam, and as lacklustre economic conditions, tighter efficiency standards and new electric vehicles weigh on use, growth is forecast to slow to 1 mbd in 2024," it said. —AFP

Business

Yellen sees 'resilience' in US economy even as it cools

US wholesale prices rise in July on jump in services costs

WASHINGTON: US economic growth and wage gains should "serve as a source of resilience" moving forward even if the economy continues to cool, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in remarks released Friday.

"I still believe that there is a path to continue reducing inflation while maintaining a healthy labor market," she said, in excerpts of a speech to be delivered in Nevada next week.

"While there are risks, the evidence we've seen so far suggests that we are on such a path," Yellen added. The world's biggest economy has defied expectations of a slowdown, picking up pace in the second quarter of the year, supported by business investment and consumer spending. Its labor market has remained robust as well. The strength comes despite policymakers' efforts to ease demand and rein in inflation, fueling hope that the central bank's aggressive campaign of interest rate hikes will lower price increases without triggering a major recession.

Yellen noted in prepared remarks that annual inflation is now nearly six percentage points below its 9.1 percent peak in June 2022, while the economy continues to expand. Real average hourly earnings have increased over the past year as well, reversing some wage inequality that has accumulated in recent decades, she added. "I expect the important gains that we've made over the past two and a half years to serve as a source of resilience in the weeks and

months to come, even if we see further cooling in our economy," Yellen said.

In July, consumer inflation inched up for the first time in around a year, keeping pressure on the central bank as officials mull further interest rate hikes. But the inflation figure remains moderate compared with last year's numbers.

Meanwhile, US wholesale prices picked up in July on a surge in services costs, according to government data released Friday, although the overall inflation figure remains muted. The bigger-than-expected rise in the July producer price index (PPI) indicates that services prices are still buoyant, even as increases in the cost of goods are tepid.

Wholesale prices rose by 0.3 percent from June to July, after a flat reading in the month before, according to Friday's Labor Department data. "PPI inflation surprised to the upside in July," High Frequency Economics' chief US economist Rubeela Farooqi wrote in a note to clients.

But headline producer prices are well below two percent, she said, adding that annual changes in measures of underlying inflation are also moving towards target. Economists surveyed by MarketWatch had expected a slightly lower headline figure of 0.2 percent.

Services prices rose by 0.5 percent from June to July, the largest monthly increase since August 2022, fueled by a jump in trade services as well as in transportation and warehousing services. Meanwhile,



NEW YORK: Food carts operate outside City Hall in New York City. US wholesale prices rose by 0.3 percent from June to July, after a flat reading in the month before, according to US Labor Department data released on August 11, 2023. — AFP

goods prices ticked up 0.1 percent from a month earlier, much of it attributable to a rise in the cost of food. The Federal Reserve is weighing the prospect of another rate hike in September to reduce inflation. While producer prices have come down rapidly

since last year, progress has been slower in consumer inflation. Many analysts and traders currently expect the Fed to hold rates steady at its next decision, as the effect of existing hikes filter through into the broader economy. — AFP

Bank tax shatters investor confidence in Italian govt

MILAN: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government watered down its surprise windfall tax on banks this week after a brutal market reaction, but the damage to investor confidence was done. "The most damaging impact... will not be the hit to the earnings of Italian banks but the higher risk premium that investors will demand to compensate them for the risk of future government intervention," noted Johann Scholtz, analyst at Morningstar.

Meloni's hard-right government announced out of the blue on Monday night that it would levy a 40-percent tax on banks' "surplus profits" generated by interest rate hikes, due to last one year.

Shares in Italian banks plunged the next day on the Milan exchange, losing 9.5 billion euros (\$10.5 billion) in capitalization—a figure well in excess of the money Rome had hoped to raise from the tax.

That evening, the government announced the levy would be capped at 0.1 percent of the total assets of a bank, causing them to recover some of their lost ground in trading on Wednesday and Thursday.

But ratings agency Moody's said on Thursday that the one-off tax would "lower profits systemwide and significantly reduce the benefit of increased interest rates to the sector". Parliament must still approve the decree law but if implemented in its current form, the levy would represent "about 15 percent" of Italian banks' net income in 2022, it said.

'Haphazard manner'

It was Meloni's first showdown with the markets since she took office in October, after her far-right Brothers of Italy party came top in September's general election. Initial alarm at the potential for radical

change in the eurozone's third-largest economy gave way to relief as Meloni mostly followed the path set by her predecessor, former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi.

One of Draghi's ministers, Giancarlo Giorgetti of the far-right League party, stayed on as Meloni's economy minister. He reassured banks in June that a windfall tax was not on the cards—but was absent on Monday when the measure was unveiled by League leader Matteo Salvini.

"An economy minister who does not show up for a press conference in such an occasion gives a very bad image of the country," noted Francesco Giavazzi, a former economic advisor to Draghi.

"The haphazard manner of the announcement, where the government changed the terms of the tax at least three times in one day, will do little to restore investor confidence," added Scholtz.

'Populist target'

While Meloni left the announcement of the tax to Salvini, her deputy prime minister, she defended it in a video posted on social media on Wednesday. She criticized the "unfair margins" of the banks, and said the money raised would help "fund measures of support for households and businesses" struggling with record inflation. Italian banks, like their European counterparts, saw their net interest income soar in the wake of the European Central Bank's rise in interest rates.

According to the Italian media, Meloni agreed with Salvini to introduce the measure to help appease their right-wing electorate. The government—which also includes the Forza Italia party of late former premier Silvio Berlusconi—has been criticized for cutting an anti-poverty mechanism and blocking opposition calls for a minimum wage. "Banks are an easy populist target and their bashing can only attract political support," said Lorenzo Codogno, former chief economist at the Italian Treasury.

But he warned that "a Soviet-style tax" such as this week's levy "risks producing permanent damage to the attractiveness of Italy's economy". — AFP



The Porta Nuova business district seen from the terrace of Duomo Cathedral in Milan.

Power crisis cost Vietnam \$1.4bn: WB

HANOI: A severe power shortage in Vietnam caused by an intensely hot spell and unprecedented drought in May and June cost the country \$1.4 billion, according to the World Bank.

Northern Vietnam suffered rolling blackouts and sudden power outages, with operations at a large number of factories badly impacted. Some businesses were given very little notice or had no warning at all. Vietnam is a crucial part of the supply chain for some of the world's most important companies, and

many of them—including Samsung and Apple supplier Foxconn—have factories in the north, not far from Hanoi.

The World Bank said with an estimated peak demand supply deficit of 1.8GW, businesses in the north reported losses of up to 10 percent of revenue, citing a small industry survey as part of its August economic updates.

"The preliminary estimate of economic costs for the May-June power outages is about US\$1.4 billion (or 0.3 percent of GDP)," the World Bank said in its Taking Stock report released Thursday. Vietnam struggled with a series of heatwaves beginning early May when the mercury reached a record high, while rivers and reservoirs at hydroelectric power plants

UBS no longer taking state aid for Credit Suisse takeover

ZURICH: Swiss banking giant UBS voluntarily put an end Friday to the state and central bank support that smoothed its takeover of stricken Credit Suisse, saying they were no longer necessary. UBS agreed to buy its rival in a 3-billion-franc (\$3.5 billion) fire sale hastily arranged over a March weekend by Swiss authorities afraid that a weakened Credit Suisse would go bankrupt.

UBS was granted up to 9 billion francs for protection against any losses incurred selling certain Credit Suisse assets, along with 100 billion Swiss francs in liquidity assistance provided by the Swiss National Bank (SNB). These loans ensured that both banks had sufficient liquidity to carry out the takeover. They also assured protection for UBS against the risk of extreme losses, the bank said in a statement Friday, as it had "very limited" time to study Credit Suisse's assets during takeover negotiations.

UBS has now concluded that the government support is no longer needed and asked for a "voluntary termination" of the agreements as of Friday. UBS will pay 40 million francs in compensation for the measures. The bank also announced that Credit Suisse had fully repaid the additional liquidity support loans granted by the central bank. The measures taken by the central bank, state and financial regulators FINMA "were necessary due to the acute crisis of confidence at Credit Suisse," the SNB said in a statement Friday. The liquidity assistance amounted to 168 billion francs, the SNB said, emphasising that it "has been repaid in full".

Too big to fail

Both UBS and Credit Suisse are among 30 international banks deemed too big to fail due to their importance in the global banking architecture. But the collapse of three US regional lenders in March left Credit Suisse looking like the weakest link in the chain and its share price plunged more than 30 percent on March 15.

The Swiss government feared Credit Suisse would have quickly defaulted and triggered a global banking crisis that would also have shredded Switzerland's reputation for sound banking.

"With the acquisition of Credit Suisse by UBS, a solution was found to secure financial stability and protect the Swiss economy in this exceptional situation," the SNB said. Analyst Andreas Venditti of Vontobel Asset Management applauded the news of UBS ending its agreements, saying it would "calm the political debate around the potential 'danger'" the new megabank could pose for Switzerland.

The size of UBS following the merger, bigger than anything the country has seen before, has some politicians worried, fearing it could not be rescued if it too got into trouble. Vontobel said there is still a long way to go but added that "management is executing its plan at full steam." He said he hopes to see more details of those plans with the release of UBS's second quarter results, which have been postponed to the end of August due to the complexity of the merger. —AFP

dried up. The country relies on hydropower for almost half its energy needs, while demand for electricity in the southeast Asian nation is increasing by more than eight percent per year on average.

The government is targeting a two percent reduction in energy consumption per year until 2025, suggesting the power issue may persist.

It has also made an ambitious pledge to shift away from coal-fired power by 2050 as part of efforts to counter climate change. "Prompt action is needed to mitigate future risks to energy security and economic losses," the bank urged authorities in the report.

Scientists warn weather extremes have intensified because of global warming. The situation this year improved in early July following heavy rain. — AFP



LONDON: Britain's gross domestic product grew 0.2 percent in the April to June period after output expanded 0.1 percent in the first quarter.

UK economy grows in Q2

LONDON: Britain's economy expanded slightly over the second quarter thanks to strong output in June and despite inflation remaining high, official data showed Friday. Gross domestic product grew 0.2 percent in the April to June period after output expanded 0.1 percent in the first quarter, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

"Across the quarter as a whole, GDP grew a little with widespread growth across manufacturing, aided by falling raw material prices," said Darren Morgan, director of economic statistics at the ONS.

The economy grew by a stronger-than-expected 0.5 percent in June, sending the pound higher against the dollar in early London trading.

Government boost

The data was a boost also for the Conservative government, forecast to lose power in a general election due next year as Britain struggles with a cost-of-living crisis. "The actions we're taking to fight inflation are starting to take effect, which means we're laying the strong foundations needed to grow the economy," finance minister Jeremy Hunt said in reaction to the GDP figures.

"If we stick to our plan to help people into work and boost business investment, the IMF has said over the longer-term we will grow faster than Germany, France and Italy," he added. The growth update came one day after British household goods company Wilko collapsed owing to big debts, putting about 12,500 jobs at risk as high inflation and interest rates hurt consumers and businesses.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made it a government priority to get UK annual inflation down to five percent by the end of 2023, around half the rate it was at the start of the year. This will largely be down to outside factors, however, notably the independent Bank of England (BoE) raising interest rates and price growth slowing for food and energy. UK annual inflation currently stands at 7.9 percent, the highest among G7 nations. Despite Friday's bright data, economists said the UK remained at risk of recession this year, especially as the growth numbers could see the BoE keep on raising interest rates. June's output rise "was mostly due to the return to the normal number of working days" in the month after a public holiday in May for the coronation of King Charles III, noted Ruth Gregory, deputy chief UK economist at Capital Economics.

"We still think that with most of the drag from higher interest rates still to come, GDP will fall in the third quarter and a mild recession will begin," she added. Output in June was lifted especially by strong manufacturing and construction growth, the ONS added, amid dry and warm weather that month that preceded the rain in July and at the start of August. — AFP

Business

Over half of young Arabs in Levant, N Africa, pin hopes on emigrating

Arab Youth Survey finds exodus primarily for jobs, better life

BEIRUT: More than half of young Arabs in north Africa and the Levant say they are actively trying to emigrate or considering leaving their home countries in search of better jobs abroad, a research shows.

The latest Arab Youth Survey by global communications agency Asda'a BCW, released on Thursday, found that 53 percent of people aged 18-24 in Levantine countries — Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and the Palestinian territories — and 48 percent of those in north Africa wanted to move abroad to find work. The figure drops to 27 percent in the oil and gas exporting countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, where living standards are higher than in the rest of the region, the Financial Times reported quoting the survey.

Canada tops the list of preferred destinations, with 34 percent of those surveyed choosing the country. The US followed at 30 percent, Germany and the UK were picked by 20 percent each and France by 17 percent. "The desire to emigrate corresponds with the bleak economic outlook in many Arab nations," said Asda'a BCW, which has conducted the survey annually for the past 15 years. In the survey, 72 percent of young Levantines and almost two-thirds of young North Africans said their national economy was

going in the "wrong direction".

About two-thirds of respondents in both North Africa and the Levant said their governments did not have the right policies to address their most important concerns. Youths are the largest demographic group in the Arab world, with one in five people aged 15-24, according to UN figures. Youth unemployment at an average of 26 percent is the highest in the world, the World Bank says.

In Tunisia — where youth unemployment rose to 40.2 percent in the first quarter of 2023, according to official figures — many young people said they wanted to leave the country. Hakim Hadidin, a 19-year-old in the final year of school, said, "Is there anyone who doesn't want to leave? This country has never had a future, not since I was born." Fellow student Malika Atwani said she wanted to move to France. "My family is fine with it because they want me to have a future."

Lebanon has seen an exodus of young people, many of whom have sought jobs and education abroad since its financial meltdown began in 2019. The currency has lost more than 98 percent of its value against the dollar since then, impoverishing 80 percent of the population and eradicating much of the middle class.

The World Bank estimated remittance flows to Lebanon at \$6.4 billion in 2022, making it the third



BEIRUT: Lebanese youths protest in front of the Ministry of Education in this file photo. — AFP

highest globally in terms of its contribution to the country's GDP, at 36 percent. "Youth emigration is a huge drain on the economy of the Arab world, which

must be stopped if the region is to benefit from the youth dividend," said Sunil John, BCW's president for the Middle East and north Africa. — AFP

Gulf Bank educates customers about safe investments

KUWAIT: As part of its social responsibility to promote financial literacy across various segments of society, Gulf Bank is introducing its customers to the appropriate savings and investment channels, through its social media platforms, website and various media outlets.

For the third consecutive year, Gulf Bank is continuing to support and actively participate in the Diraya "Let's Be Aware" campaign, which is initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association. Diraya is an awareness campaign that aims to spread financial literacy in society, raise awareness of the role of the banking sector, and promote the various services that banks offer to their customers.

Elaborating on the process of saving and investing, Gulf Bank's Corporate Communications Officer, Abdul Mohsen Al-Nassar, explained that saving is about reserving a sum of money for later use, while investing is allocating an amount of money, and placing it in a product or service for the purpose of obtaining profits. Al-Nassar further indicated that Kuwaiti banks provide customers with various safe investment products and services, that can help them manage their investments and increase their returns. Some of the investment products and services include:

Deposits and investment funds

A deposit is a sum of money installed by the customer in an account with a bank wherein the bank keeps the deposit and invests it to achieve returns on the deposit amount over a certain period of time. The customer has the right to recover the initial deposit amount after the period specified in the deposit contract. Investment Fund on the other hand, is a common investment tool that allows clients' finances to be invested in order to achieve profits. The fund is managed by a manager specialized in this role (for a set fee). The investment fields of these funds vary, and may include stocks, bonds, commodities, money markets, and others. (The investment funds of banks are subject to the supervision and licensing of the Capital Markets Authority).

Investment savings accounts

A savings account is an account in which the customer deposits the amounts they wish to save at a bank, with the bank investing the amount and depositing its returns into the same account after a specific period of time. The difference between an investment savings account and a deposit, is that clients can typically withdraw and deposit into the account at any given time. Furthermore, Al-Nassar pointed that Gulf Bank's WISE Investments is a digital investment platform that provides many investment advantages in global markets safely, easily, transparently, and at relatively low cost. WISE Investments enables investors to achieve their investment and saving goals through a service which customizes investment portfolios for clients based on their financial goals and allows clients to access their investments anywhere, and anytime, assisting investors in attaining their financial goals and growing their wealth.

Moreover, Al-Nassar mentioned that Gulf Bank also provides customers with the option of opening and depositing into an Al-Danah account, the most rewarding savings account in Kuwait since 1998. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million and a grand draw prize of KD 2 million. Additionally, he noted that last chance and date to deposit and participate in the annual grand draw is September 30, 2023.

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.



Abdul Mohsen Al-Nassar

How El Nino could impact health, food and the economy

PARIS: The El Nino weather phenomenon is just warming up, according to scientists, potentially paving the way for higher temperatures and extreme weather events in a year that has already seen plenty of both.

The first El Nino in years began last month, according to the World Meteorological Organization. The naturally occurring warming of temperatures in the Pacific Ocean typically lasts between nine to 12 months, and is expected to become stronger towards the end of the year.

Scientists have warned the impacts of El Nino—combined with human-induced global warming—will likely stretch beyond the weather.

Disease

Vector-borne diseases, such as malaria and dengue, have been shown to expand their range as temperatures rise. Scientists warned that El Nino, coming in addition to already dire global warming, could make the situation worse. "We can see from previous El Ninos that we get increases and outbreaks of a wide range of vector-borne and other infectious diseases around the tropics, in the area that we know is most affected by El Nino," Madeleine Thomson, head of climate impacts at the Wellcome Trust charity, told journalists on Thursday. The rise stems from two effects of El Nino: unusual rainfall that increases breeding sites for transmitters such as mos-

quitoes, and higher temperatures that speed up transmission rates of various infectious diseases.

An El Nino in 1998 was linked to a major malaria epidemic in the Kenyan Highlands.

Health

It is difficult to calculate exactly how much El Nino contributes to extreme weather events such as wildfires. But heatwaves themselves pose a significant danger to health.

"It's sometimes named the silent killer because you don't necessarily see it as a threat," said Gregory Wellenius, head of a climate and health centre at Boston University. "But heatwaves in fact kill more people than any other type of severe weather events." More than 61,000 people are estimated to have died due to the heat in Europe alone last summer—when there was no El Nino. And July 2023 has now been confirmed as the hottest month in recorded history.

Food security

"In an El Nino year, there are countries where the chances of having a bad harvest increase, for example in South and Southeast Asia," said Walter Baethgen of the International Research Institute for Climate and Society. Last month India, the largest rice exporter in the world, restricted its exports due to crop damage from irregular monsoon rains.



According to the researchers, such actions have the potential for dire consequences for countries dependent on the exports, such as Syria and Indonesia, that could face a "triple challenge" during El Nino. "The rice harvest in those countries may be lower than normal, the rice trade may be more difficult or less accessible in the international market and because of that, the price of rice will be high," said Baethgen. "This combination of factors pretty rapidly affects the food insecurity problems," he added.

Economic growth

The Panama Canal is central to global trade routes, but last week the passageway announced that low rainfall—which meteorologists said was exacerbated by El Nino—forced operators to restrict traffic, resulting in an expected \$200 million drop in

earnings. The sidelined ships are just one example of how El Nino can hurt the global economy.

A study published in the journal Science in May estimated that past El Ninos cost the global economy more than \$4 trillion in the years that followed them. Impacts from both El Nino and global warming were "projected to cause \$84 trillion in 21st-century economic losses", it said.

However researchers at Oxford Economics have argued against these projections, calling El Nino a "new risk, but not a gamechanger". The costs may remain unclear, but the scientists hope the predictability of El Nino will improve preparedness for the challenges ahead posed by a warming world.

"Preparation is much more effective than emergency responses," Wellenius said. — AFP

Malaysia suspends live cattle, buffalo imports from Australia

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia has temporarily suspended live cattle and buffalo imports from Australia, officials said Friday, after neighboring Indonesia said cattle infected with lumpy skin disease (LSD) had arrived from the country.

LSD is an infectious viral disease that causes a reduction in milk production, temporary or permanent sterility, and sometimes death of cattle but poses no risk to humans.

Singapore cuts growth outlook on weak demand

SINGAPORE: Singapore on Friday cut its economic growth forecast for this year owing to weak demand from key export markets including China and the United States. The Southeast Asian nation's performance is often seen as a barometer of the global environment because of its reliance on international trade.

Data showing forecast-beating second-quarter growth helped the city-state escape a recession, but analysts have warned that it faced headwinds in the back-end of the year.

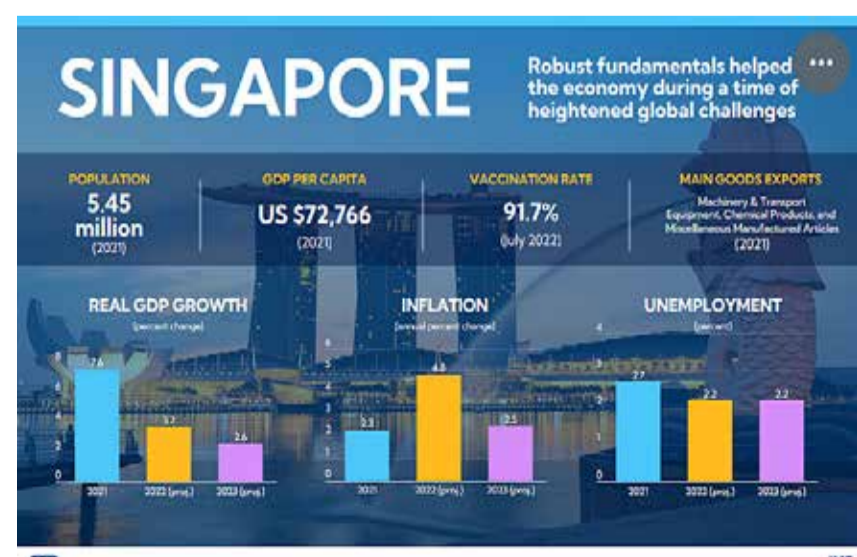
The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) on Friday said it had narrowed its economic growth forecast this year to 0.5-1.5 percent from a previous estimate of 0.5-2.5 percent. "Overall, MTI's assessment is that Singapore's external demand outlook for the rest

of the year remains weak," the ministry said in a statement. "The global electronics downturn is also likely to be protracted, with a gradual recovery expected towards the end of the year at the earliest."

Despite the reopening of China—the world's second-biggest economy—and other positive global trends, downside risks to the world economy remained, the ministry said.

It cited persistently high inflation that could crimp global spending and potential supply disruptions caused by "escalations in the war in Ukraine and geopolitical tensions among major global powers". Among its major export markets, the US economy is "projected to slow more significantly in the remaining quarters of the year as elevated interest rates and a cooling labor market weigh on personal consumption growth", the ministry said.

Economic growth in the eurozone and China are also forecast to be sluggish for the rest of the year, it added. As a small and open economy, Singapore is usually among the first to experience the impact of external de-



velopments before the effects ripple to the rest of the world. Official data released Friday showed its economy expanded 0.1 percent on-quarter in the three months to June, slightly softer than the 0.3 percent growth reported in advance estimates last month.

But the figures defied projec-

tions for a contraction and helped Singapore avoid a recession after the economy shrunk 0.4 percent on-quarter in January-March. Year-on-year, the economy grew 0.5 percent in the second quarter, extending the 0.4 percent expansion in the previous three months. — AFP

Lifestyle



Scouts attend the "K-pop Super Live" concert.—AFP Photos



Performers take part in the finale of the "K-pop Super Live" concert.



The Boyz perform during the "K-pop Super Live" concert.



NewJeans



NCT Dream

Tens of thousands of scouts danced, sang and waved glow sticks at a massive K-pop festival in Seoul on Friday, as South Korea sought to salvage a problem-plagued jamboree with "the power of Korean culture". The quadrennial world jamboree gathered 43,000 scouts in North Jeolla province, but an unprecedented heatwave prompted mass illnesses, US and UK contingents left early amid reports of dire campsite conditions, and a tropical storm finally forced a full evacuation this week.

The scouts were dispersed across the country and sent on government-sponsored cultural tours, but the "K-pop Superlive" concert – featuring major acts including NewJeans and The Boyz – reunited all the jamboree participants for a grand finale. Tens of thousands of scouts in colorful uniforms and neckties, some wearing face paint and waving flags, filled Seoul's World Cup Stadium Friday.

"The last few days have not been easy," said Ahmad Alhendawi, secretary-general of the World Organization of the Scout Movement, at the official closing ceremony ahead of the concert, adding to loud cheers that they had finally "reunited our jamboree". Prime Minister Han Duck-soo told the scouts that he hoped "the cultural experiences you had in various parts of Korea... will remain as beautiful memories for you".

K-pop groups including HolyBang, The Boyz, ATBO and The New Six –



K-pop to the rescue? S Korea all-in for scout jamboree closing concert

the latter wearing scout-themed costumes – then performed to rapturous applause from the mostly teenage scouts. The scouts, many wearing colorful raincoats, could be seen singing along, dancing and enthusiastically waving glow sticks. Some used their smartphones to capture the faces of the K-pop stars, with many celebrating wildly when the cameras zoomed in on their faces, projecting them on the

screen. Traffic control in Sangam-dong, the district where the stadium is located in Seoul, began hours before the concert, resulting in serious congestion in the area. More than 1,000 buses carried scouts to the venue. Seoul's culture ministry said all scouts were given photo cards of BTS as a gift, provided for free by the septet's agency, HYBE. The photo cards were said to have a

total retail value of 800 million won (\$600,000), according to local media.

'Totalitarian idea'

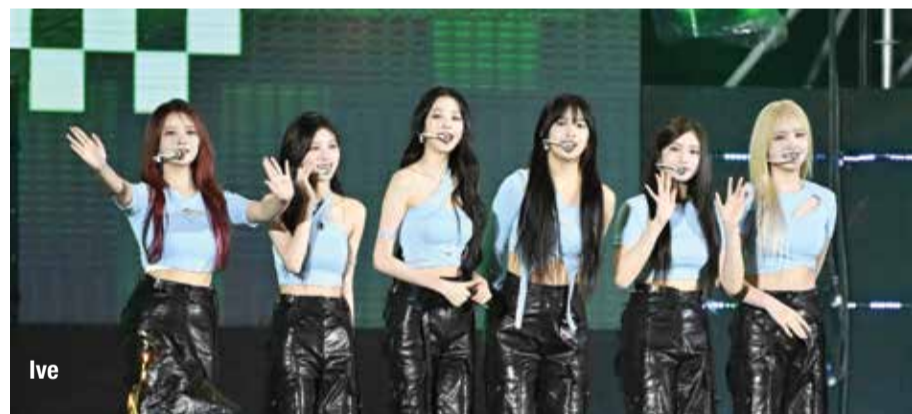
But even as the government throws millions of dollars in emergency funding into fixing an event that has been a public relations disaster, criticism – from K-pop fans to public sector employees – is mounting over Seoul's approach. A popular TV music program,

set to feature some acts now performing at the jamboree, was abruptly cancelled for undisclosed reasons.

And lawmaker Sung Il-jong faced backlash from K-pop fans after saying the army should let megastars BTS – on hiatus while two members serve their mandatory military terms – reunite and perform. K-pop columnist Isak Choi said on the social media platform X that the plan betrayed "a terrible totalitarian idea that the state owns K-pop".

The Yonhap News Agency reported that around 1,000 employees at public institutions – such as the Korea Development Bank and the Korea Electric Power Corporation – had been "mobilized" to help out with the concert. "Although the words used are 'request for cooperation', it's almost at the level of forced conscription during wartime," the Korean Financial Industry Union said in an angry response.

The venue is also proving controversial, as its wildly expensive "hybrid grass", ideal for sporting events, will be damaged by the concert stage. "Idol fans are shedding tears as their favorites are being pulled out at the last minute. Football fans are also shedding tears as the expensive grass in the stadium is getting destroyed," one disgruntled person wrote on X in Korean. "Who exactly benefits from this Jamboree concert?" - AFP



Ive



Holy Bang



Mamamoo



Pokemon fan Jeffrey Ng visits the dedicated trade area.

Catch 'em all: Pokemon hooks kids, parents and investors

Dressed up and ready for battle, around 10,000 Pokemona fans have descended on Yokohama in Japan this weekend, looking for fun and also collector's item cards potentially worth serious money. Since the launch of Pokemon cards in 1996 following the hit computer game of the same name – meaning "pocket monsters" – an astounding 53 billion cards have been printed.

Almost 30 years on, the card game remains hugely popular as contestants take each other on with cards representing the monsters and their different attributes. The Pokemon World Championships, being held this weekend in Japan for the first time ever, will see the world's best players of the video and the card game battle it out for cash prizes at an event attended by thousands.

"I have been playing since I was a kid," Ajay Sridhar, 33, who travelled halfway around the world from New York to attend with his cards, told AFP as he explained why he was hooked. "It's just the competition, it's the community... A lot of my oldest friends I've met through Pokemon," he said. "It's kind of like chess, where if you didn't play chess and you were watching a high-level chess match, you wouldn't know what was going on," said Gilbert McLaughlin, 27, from Scotland. "But once you get to a certain skill level, there is a lot of depth and complexity to it."

Catch 'em all Ranging from Pikachu the mouse to



Competitors take part in the trading card game at the 2023 Pokemon World Championships.

Jigglypuff the balloon to the jackal-headed Lucario, there are now more than 1,000 different Pokemon characters, with new "generations" released every few years. While they have always been swapped and collected, the cards' value has exploded in recent years, not just among fans of the game but also among investors with little or no past interest. Factors determining value include the cards' rareness, the character (Mew, Mewtwo, Pikachu and Charizard tend to be more valuable) and the artist, who is indicated on the card.

Websites have sprung up dedicated to helping people understand the dizzying array of different cards and their myriad markings, complete with charts showing their value over time. The most expensive ever sold was in 2021 when US YouTuber Logan Paul paid – in a Dubai hotel room to a "mystery" seller – \$5.28 million for a supposedly unique, mint-condition "PSA Grade 10 Pikachu". The following year, Logan, 28, hung the card – inside a protective plastic case attached to a gold chain – around his neck at a WWE wrestling event in Texas.

Fisticuffs Hiroshi Goto is an expert in Pokemon

cards who has written a book with advice on how to make money from them. He said that when he ran a shop selling the cards in the 2000s, his customers were mostly "schoolkids with their dads taking part in tournaments together". But since the 20th anniversary in 2016, "the perception of cards evolved into being not just toys for children but also items appreciated by adults, collector's items with a tangible value".

Demand is such that the Pokemon Company has had to increase production. In Japan and the United States there have been instances of physical fights, including one outside a shop in the Japanese city of Osaka in July that went viral on social media. There have been cases of shops selling Pokemon cards being broken into in normally low-crime Japan in recent months.

The gold-rush has also sparked a boom in fake cards. Paul, for instance, paid \$3.75 million in 2021 for a "sealed & authenticated" box of first-edition booster packs that turned out to contain "G I Joe" cards instead, according to one of his videos.

Bargains On the sidelines in Yokohama, col-



Competitors take part in the trading card game.



A woman visit a shop selling Pokemon merchandise during the 2023 Pokemon World Championships.—AFP photos

lectors were busy swapping and selling their cards, including Jeffrey Ng, happy after buying 10 cards for \$1,700. He now hopes to sell them for a profit. "Conventions like this one are a good place to meet other collectors," he told AFP. All cards are painstakingly conceived and designed in the same place, the Tokyo offices of Creatures Inc, which along with Nintendo and Game Freak own the Pokemon Company.

Creatures executive Atsushi Nagashima said while the firm was "very happy" about the success of the cards, "that doesn't change how we do our job". Creatures employs 18 testers who spend their working days playing Pokemon to make sure that the new cards fit harmoniously with the vast number of existing ones. "(But) we never hire people from competitions," said Kohei Kobayashi, another manager at Creatures. "We want to leave the good players where they are, there where they shine." — AFP



People watch the Pikachu parade, which is a part of the 2023 Pokemon World Championships, at Grand Mall Park in Yokohama.



Rio's iconic Copacabana Palace celebrates 100 years of glamour



A hotel worker shows the signature of the late founder of the Disney company, Walt Disney (1901–1966), in the Golden Book of the Belmond Copacabana Palace Hotel.

General view of the Belmond Copacabana Palace Hotel at the Copacabana beach, south zone of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, taken on Aug 4, 2023. - AFP photos

With its gleaming white facade looming over Rio de Janeiro's iconic beachfront, the Copacabana Palace is celebrating 100 years of welcoming stars, presidents, and royalty. "The Copacabana Palace is more than a hotel, it's an institution," director general Ulisses Marreiros told AFP. The epitome of luxury and old-world glamour, the hotel was inaugurated on August 13, 1923, with a performance by Moulin Rouge singer-dancer Mistinguett, the most famous French entertainer of her time.

The guestbook – specially opened for AFP – is a veritable relic that is carefully kept in a briefcase. White gloves are needed to peruse its pages, full of illustrious signatures, such as that of late Brazilian football great Pele.

President shot by mistress

Designed by French architect Joseph Gire, the Copacabana Palace was inspired by some of the most emblematic hotels of the Riviera, like the Carlton in Cannes or the Negresco in Nice. At the

years until it was bought by the Orient-Express group in 1989 and then in 2018 by LVMH – the world's leading luxury group. The entrepreneur lured artists like Edith Piaf, Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra to sing in the mythical Golden Room.

When Rio was still the capital of Brazil – before it was moved to Brasilia in 1960, the hotel was also frequented by the cream of local politics. This included a stay by President Washington Luis, who in 1928 was shot by his mistress in one of the hotel suites, requiring discreet evacuation to hospital. The presidency later said he had suffered an attack of appendicitis.

'Very Brazilian charm'

In another anecdote recounted by historians, screenwriter Orson Welles once tossed a typewriter out of a window overlooking a swimming pool, in a moment of frustration with writer's block. It was in the same pool that Janis Joplin went skinny-dipping in 1970, which saw her ejected from the hotel. "It is a place of political and artistic meetings, which has welcomed celebrities from around the world, but with a very Brazilian charm and glamour," said historian Thiago Gomide.

Monaco's Prince Albert II is one of those who fell under the hotel's spell. "Every time he comes here he gives me a warm hug," said Antonio Francisco dos Santos, who has worked at Copacabana Palace for 28 years. "He likes to go for an early swim before enjoying tropical fruits, especially mango or acai, at his favorite table by the pool, which I reserve for him as soon as he arrives," said the assistant manager of the Pergu-

la restaurant.

The pool has just been revamped, with pale green-and-white parasols and deckchairs covered with matching cushions, with tropical motifs. The facade has also been repainted to return to its original pearly white. "We wanted to get as close as possible to the appearance

of 1923, while using cutting-edge technology for a lighting system that enhances the beauty of the building at night," explained Marreiros, the manager, who seeks to "honor the past while inspiring the future". - AFP



View of the swimming pool area of the Belmond Copacabana Palace Hotel.

Since then, dozens of celebrities, heads of state, and royalty, have graced its sumptuous suites and a balcony with a breathtaking view of Copacabana. A gallery of portraits of famous visitors, redesigned for the centenary, includes images of Josephine Baker, Bob Marley, Freddie Mercury, Madonna, Walt Disney, Brigitte Bardot, Robert De Niro, and Queen Elizabeth II.

time, the hotel was practically the only building on an almost deserted Copacabana beach, now lined with prime real estate. The inauguration was supposed to take place in 1922, for the centenary of Brazil's independence, but numerous technical issues delayed works.

This did not dampen the enthusiasm of the hotel's founder Octavio Guinle, whose family ran it for more than 60



A man gets information using a QR code at the Hall of Fame of the Belmond Copacabana Palace Hotel.



Signatures of late Brazilian football star Pele and late Brazilian musician Tom Jobim in the Golden Book.



Signature of Britain's King Charles III in the Golden Book.



Stunts Master Class students attend a training session at the Tempest Academy.

Rise of the machines: AI spells danger for Hollywood stunt workers

Hollywood's striking actors fear that artificial intelligence is coming for their jobs – but for many stunt performers, that dystopian danger is already a reality. From "Game of Thrones" to the latest Marvel superhero movies, cost-slashing studios have long used computer-generated background figures to reduce the number of actors needed for battle scenes.

Now, the rise of AI means cheaper and more powerful techniques are being explored to create highly elaborate action sequences such as car chases and shootouts – without those pesky (and expensive) humans. Stunt work, a time-honored Hollywood tradition that has spanned from silent epics through to Tom Cruise's latest "Mission Impossible", is at risk of rapidly shrinking.

"The technology is exponentially getting faster and better," said Freddy Boucigues, stunt coordinator for movies like "Free Guy" and "Terminator: Dark Fate". "It's really a scary time right now." Studios are already requiring stunt and background performers to take part in high-tech 3D "body scans" on set, often without explaining how or when the images will be used.

Advancements in AI mean these likenesses could be used to create detailed, eerily realistic "digital replicas", which can perform any action or speak any dialogue its creators wish. Boucigues fears producers could use these virtual avatars to replace "nondescript" stunt performers – such as those playing pedestrians leaping out of the way of a car chase.

"There could be a world where they said, 'No, we don't want to bring these 10 guys in... we'll just add them in later via effects and AI. Now those guys are out of the job.'"

But according to director Neill Blomkamp, whose new film "Gran Turismo" hits theaters Aug 25, even that scenario only scratches the surface. The role AI will soon play in generating images from scratch is "hard to compute", he told AFP. "Gran Turismo" primarily uses stunt performers driving real cars on actual racetracks, with some computer-generated effects added on top for one particularly complex and dangerous scene.

But Blomkamp predicts that, in as soon as six or 12 months, AI will reach a point where it can generate photo-realistic footage like high-speed crashes based on a director's instructions alone. At that point, "you take all of your CG (computer graphics) and VFX (visual effects) computers and throw them out the window, and you get rid of stunts, and you get rid of cameras, and you don't go to the racetrack," he told AFP. "It's that different."

The human element

The lack of guarantees over the future use of AI is one of the major factors at stake in the ongoing strike by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) and Hollywood's writers, who have been on the picket lines 100 days. SAG-AFTRA last month warned that studios intend to create realistic digital replicas of performers, to use "for the rest of eternity, in any project they want" – all for the payment of one day's work.

The studios dispute this, and say they have offered rules including informed consent and compensation. But as well as the potential implications for thousands of lost jobs, Boucigues warns that no matter how good the technology has become, "the audience can still tell" when the wool is being pulled over their

eyes by computer-generated VFX.

Even if AI can perfectly replicate a battle, explosion or crash, it cannot supplant the human element that is vital to any successful action film, he said, pointing to Cruise's recent "Top Gun" and "Mission Impossible" sequels. "He uses real stunt people, and he does real stunts, and you can see it on the screen. For me, I feel like it subconsciously affects the viewer," said Boucigues.

For stunt workers like Boucigues, the best outcome now is to blend the use of human performers with VFX and AI to pull off sequences that would be too dangerous with old-fashioned techniques alone. "I don't think this job will ever just cease to be," said Boucigues, of stunt work. "It just definitely is going to get smaller and more precise."

But even that is a sobering reality for stunt performers who are currently



2nd Unit Director and Stunt Coordinator Freddy Boucigues poses for AFP during a Stunts Master Class students training session at the Tempest Academy in Chatsworth, California on Aug 10, 2023. — AFP photos

Current AI technology still gives "slightly unpredictable results," agreed Blomkamp, who began his career in VFX, and directed Oscar-nominated "District 9." "But it's coming... It's going to fundamentally change society, let alone Hollywood. The world is going to be different."

standing on picket lines outside Hollywood studios. "Every stunt guy is the alpha male type, and everybody wants to say, 'Oh, we're good,'" said Boucigues. "But I personally have spoken to a lot of people that are freaked out and nervous." — AFP

Lifestyle



This aerial photograph taken on July 27, 2023 shows a diver searching for archaeological material in Lake Ohrid in southeastern Albania. — AFP photos



Divers prepare to leave to continue their research in Lake Ohrid near the shoreline of Lin village.



Swiss archaeologist Albert Hafner identifies objects discovered in the waters of Lake Ohrid.



Albanian archaeologist Ilir Gjepali identifies objects.



Albanian archaeologist Adrian Anastasi researches on his laptop objects discovered in the waters of Lake Ohrid.



Archaeologists uncover Europe's oldest stilt village

Beneath the turquoise waters of Lake Ohrid, the "Pearl of the Balkans", scientists have uncovered what may be one of Europe's earliest sedentary communities, and are trying to solve the mystery of why it sheltered behind a fortress of defensive spikes. A stretch of the Albanian shore of the lake once hosted a settlement of stilt houses some 8,000 years ago, archaeologists believe, making it the oldest lakeside village in Europe discovered to date.

Radiocarbon dating from the site puts it at between 6000 and 5800 BC. "It is several hundred years older than previously known lake-dwelling sites in the Mediterranean and Alpine regions," said Albert Hafner, a professor of archaeology from Switzerland's University of Bern. "To our knowledge, it is the oldest in Europe," he told AFP. The most ancient other such villages were discovered in the Italian Alps and date to around 5000 BC, said the expert in European Neolithic lake dwellings.

Hafner and his team of Swiss and Albanian archaeologists have spent the past four years carrying out excavations at Lin on the Albanian side of Lake Ohrid, which straddles the mountainous border of North Macedonia and Albania. The settlement is believed to have been home to between 200 and 500, with houses built on stilts above the lake's surface or in areas regularly flooded by rising waters.

Fortress of spikes

And it is slowly revealing some astonishing secrets. During a recent dive, archaeologists uncovered evidence suggesting the settlement was fortified with thousands of spiked planks used as defensive barricades. "To protect themselves in this way, they had to cut down a forest," said Hafner.

treasure trove for research".

Lake Ohrid is one of the oldest lakes in the world and has been around for more than a million years. Assisted by professional divers, archaeologists have been picking through the bottom of the lake often uncovering fossilized fragments of wood and prized pieces of oak.



Divers search for archaeological material in Lake Ohrid.

precise, like a calendar," said Hafner. "In order to understand the structure of this prehistoric site without damaging it, we are conducting very meticulous research, moving very slowly and very carefully," added Anastasi, who heads the team of Albanian researchers.

The lush vegetation at the site makes the work painstakingly slow at times. "Building their village on stilts was a complex task, very complicated, very difficult, and it's important to understand why these people made this choice," said Anastasi.

For the time being, scientists say it is possible to assume that the village relied on agriculture and domesticated livestock for food. "We found various seeds, plants and the bones of wild and domesticated animals," said Ilir Gjepali, an Albanian archaeology professor working at the site.

But it will take another two decades for site to be fully explored and studied and for final conclusions to be drawn. According to Anastasi, each excavation trip yields valuable information, enabling the team to piece together a picture of life along Lake Ohrid's shores thousands of years ago — from the architecture of the dwellings to the structure of their community. "These are key prehistoric sites that are of interest not only to the region but to the whole of southwest Europe," said Hafner. — AFP

But why did the villagers need to build such extensive fortifications to defend themselves? Archaeologists are still searching for an answer to the elusive question. Researchers estimate that roughly 100,000 spikes were driven into the bottom of the lake off Lin, with Hafner calling the discovery "a real

'Like a Swiss watch'

Analysis of the tree rings helps the team reconstruct the daily life of the area's inhabitants — providing "valuable insights into the climatic and environmental conditions" from the period, said Albanian archaeologist Adrian Anastasi. "Oak is like a Swiss watch, very

Arm wrestling grips India with glitzy dreams

Athletes flex muscled biceps before going hand-to-hand in a newly televised arm-wrestling league seeking to take the sporting spotlight in otherwise cricket-mad India with a glitzy Bollywood-style makeover. Contestants fight under bright studio lights with a cheering audience as opponents push down the other person's arm in the Pro Panja League (PPL) at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi Stadium.

The Indian Arm Wrestling Federation launched in 1977, but the sport, known as "panja" in India, has been given new lease of life by league owners and Bollywood acting couple Parvin Dabas and Preeti Jhangiani. "Our athletes are literally sons and daughters of our soil. Somebody is a government servant, a gym trainer, somebody is a mechanic," Dabas told AFP. "They come from all walks of life and come from small-town India, and that's what we love about it, that's what the audience is getting attracted by."

Arm wrestler Shaikh Tawheed worked as a stone mason, motorbike



Bollywood actor Suniel Shetty (left) with Pro Panja League founders Parvin Dabas (right) and Preeti Jhangiani attend a promotional event of the ongoing Pro Panja League, a professional arm wrestling tournament, in Mumbai on Aug 7, 2023. - AFP photos

mechanic and gym cleaner before finding PPL fame in the 90 kilogram category. A charming smile on his well-sculpted body adds to the 23-year-old Tawheed's appeal as he defeats opponents in a quick strike — and then celebrates by blowing kisses to his fans. "It's a dream living in fancy hotels, having good food, and some money," Tawheed told AFP, adding he had earned around 75,000 rupees (\$900) during the competition period so far, a 10-fold jump on his previous earnings. "I couldn't have asked for more".

'Power in their hands'

The six teams have to include men, women and people with disabilities — including athletes who use wheelchairs

with impressive upper-body strength — with the winning team getting two million rupees (\$24,000). Launched in 2020 with some exhibition matches and tournaments, this is the first league season to be shown live on Sony Sports Network in India and Willow TV in the United States between July 28 and August 13. The top four teams will play in the semifinals and the winners will clash in the final on Sunday.

Sylvester Stallone's 1987 film "Over the Top" made arm wrestling popular around the globe but the ancient sport in India remains rooted in Hindu mythology and is widely popular — making Tawheed a local star. Tawheed has moved from a one-room rented house in his home city of Aurangabad in Maharashtra state,

and bought his own home.

"The fame I got from arm wrestling helped me in my career as a gym trainer which in turn got me the cash," he said. "Pro Panja has changed arm wrestling," he said. "We travel in flights in contrast to moving in unreserved train coaches for tournaments." League owners are confident of the growing popularity of arm wrestling after the success of Indian sports leagues including the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL), which has made stars out of humble villagers.

Among the athletes is also 38-year-old mother Farheen Dehalvi, who went from participating in local competitions in the state of Madhya Pradesh to taking down her opponents in a bright-colored team jersey in front of a large TV audience. Decades of cleaning, cooking and household chores left Dehalvi with powerful arms — and she has put them to good use. "Girls who stay at home including housewives are more powerful because they work and have power in their hands," said Dehalvi, a part-time teacher and mother to a 17-year-old son.

Olympic dreams

Dehalvi, who competes in the 65+ kilogram women's category, won her opening match by defeating a 19-year-old, winning on points over several wrestles. "I went to see an arm-wrestling match in my district and people urged me play the sport as they thought I am powerful," Dehalvi told AFP.

"In our region daughters-in-law are



not allowed to step out of their homes, but my husband backed me to display my power in the sport. And here I am." Her success has inspired others, she said. Two gyms have opened in her village after her league entry and girls have started working out. "It was tough juggling between household duties and pursuing the sport, but I kept my hopes high," Dehalvi said. "People watch me on TV back home and it has inspired them to go to the gyms and I tell them to come to Pro Panja".

Future PPL seasons could witness a player auction, like the hugely successful Indian Premier League (IPL) T20 cricket tournament, which has spawned the growth of other sports leagues. The PPL, like IPL, boasts of foreign coaches for all six teams — mostly from Kazakhstan, where arm wrestling is widely popular. "There are lot of people in India, there are lot of people in Kazakhstan," seven-time world champion and PPL coach Yerkin Alimzhanov told AFP. "From both sides we can try to get the game to the Olympics". - AFP



Farheen Dehalvi of Baroda Badshahs competes against Kashmiri Kashyap of Ludhiana Lions.



Coach of Ludhiana Lions Yerkin Alimzhanov reacts after winning a match.



Players practice inside a gymnasium in Noida.



In this photograph taken on Aug 2, 2023, Harman Mann of Baroda Badshahs (right) competes against Tawheed Shaikh of Ludhiana Lions during the Pro Panja League 2023 in New Delhi.

Sports

Firmino hits hat-trick on Saudi Pro League debut

Fox to broadcast Saudi League and Ronaldo in USA

JEDDAH: Brazilian forward and former Liverpool star Roberto Firmino hit a hat-trick on his Saudi Pro League debut on Friday as Al-Ahli defeated Al-Hazem 3-1. The 31-year-old skipper found the net in the sixth, 10th and 72nd minutes for the promoted team who also fielded fellow new signings Riyad Mahrez, Allain Saint-Maximin, Frank Kessie and goalkeeper Edouard Mendy.

Firmino left Liverpool in the summer after eight seasons at Anfield, during which time he scored 111 goals in 362 appearances and won the Premier League, Champions League and Club World Cup. Al-Ahli are considered to be one of the title favorites along with Al-Nassr, Al-Hilal and defending champions Al-Ittihad. Backed by the nation's sovereign wealth fund, the Saudi Pro League has lured big names from the major European leagues with the promise of huge salaries. Karim Benzema and N'Golo Kante have also made the move to the Gulf state since Cristiano Ronaldo's switch to Al-Nassr in January started the trend. Former Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard has also taken over as coach at Al-Ettifaq.

In another development, Fox Sports have secured the rights to broadcast the Saudi Pro League, including games featuring Cristiano Ronaldo, in the United States, the network announced on Friday. Fox will

launch the deal with broadcasts of two games on Monday featuring Ronaldo and former Real Madrid forward Karim Benzema. An industry source told AFP that Fox's deal was for 100 matches this season and for both English and Spanish language rights.

The matches will feature on Fox Sports 2 and Fox Deportes as well as Fox Soccer Plus. The arrival of Ronaldo in the Gulf kingdom has been followed by a series of big money acquisitions and the league will now reach fans across the United States with the Fox deal. With Lionel Messi's move to Inter Miami in Major League Soccer, part of a boom in interest in the sport, Fox will be hoping that they can attract interest from Ronaldo's significant personal following. Saudi clubs have used their huge budgets to attract global stars, with French striker Benzema, England midfielder Jordan Henderson and Senegalese striker Sadio Mane among those who have moved to the league. Last month, Saudi club Al-Hilal made a 300-million-euro (\$328 million) bid for Kylian Mbappe, though the Paris Saint-Germain striker reportedly refused to meet with officials from the club. Messi's games with Inter Miami are broadcast on Apple TV but Fox have the rights to broadcast an average of 34 regular season games and eight play-off matches across their four-year deal. — AFP



Roberto Firmino

Glover seizes lead with 64 at St Jude Championship

WASHINGTON: Lucas Glover, the 2009 US Open champion, fired a six-under-par 64 to grab a one-stroke lead after Friday's second round of the St Jude Championship, the FedEx Cup playoff opener. The 43-year-old American made four birdies and an eagle in a bogey-free round to stand on 10-under 130 after 36 holes at TPC Southwind in Memphis, Tennessee. Three-time major winner Jordan Spieth, who led after an opening 63, was second on 131 with a pack on 132 including fellow American Taylor Moore, South Koreans Tom Kim and Im Sung-jae, Argentina's Emiliano Grillo and England's Tommy Fleetwood.

Glover won last week's US PGA Tour Wyndham Championship to seize a spot in the 70-player post-season, with 50 advancing to next week's BMW Championship and only 30 qualifying for the Tour Championship in two weeks at Atlanta. "It's just kind of a carryover from the last few weeks," Glover said. "Just trying not to overcomplicate things, make good, positive swings and stay aggressive. "Playing well and executing pretty much what I'm seeing. Don't over think it and no need to change anything, just keep riding it."

Glover, who snapped a two-year win drought

Alcaraz knocked out as Medvedev ousted in Toronto

TORONTO: Frustrated world number one Carlos Alcaraz was knocked out of the ATP Toronto Masters 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 on Friday as American Tommy Paul ended the Spaniard's 14-match winning streak. Top-seeded Alcaraz was unable to escape the poor form that has plagued him all week as he prepares for a US Open title defense starting in just over two weeks. The 20-year-old muttered to himself and chastised his play during a match lasting more than two and a quarter hours. "I realize I didn't play well in all of these matches," Alcaraz said. "All I can do now is practice to be better."

"I have some weeks before the US Open. But now I will be focused (from Monday) on Cincinnati. It's a Masters 1000. It's a big tournament as well. "I take a lot of lessons from this tournament." Paul, ranked 14th, repeated his defeat of the Spaniard a year ago in the Montreal second round and now faces a semi-final against sixth seed Jannik Sinner, who defeated French showman Gael Monfils 6-4, 4-6, 6-3. "It's never easy to play Gael," Sinner said. "I just tried to stick to my game plan. "I'm having my best season, I'm happy to be in the semis. I hope to raise my level tomorrow."

Paul, meanwhile, was trying to figure out how he got past Alcaraz. "I don't know if I think I have the recipe, but I played a really good match today," Paul said after notching another Canadian win over the Spaniard. "I went after my shots. You can't start any points on your heels against him, he'll take advantage of it so you've really got to go after your shots early in the rally. "Luckily I was feeling really good, playing first-strike tennis." Alcaraz struggled early for the second straight match after barely escaping a third-round encounter

third set," said Swiatek, who claimed her fourth career Grand Slam title at the French Open this year. Swiatek, whose Thursday win over Karolina Muchova took nine hours to complete thanks to two lengthy rain delays, said her energy level was still high. "For sure tomorrow is going to be a little bit tougher since we have not a lot of time to recover, but physically I've been really well prepared," she said.

Fourth-seeded Pegula reached the semi-finals for a third straight year with a 6-2, 5-7, 7-5 victory over her sixth-seeded doubles partner Coco Gauff, whose nine double faults ultimately proved too much to overcome. "It's always tough to play your doubles partner," said Pegula, whose victory marked the end of a four-match skid against top-10 players. "We know each other's games so well, so we kind of know what we're going to do to each other, know what our goal is."

"It's just kind of trying to execute it at the right times and as best as possible. So I think I was just able

at Greensboro last Sunday, had been in the top six in three of his four PGA starts last month before his breakthrough. "I'm old enough to know it can change the other way in a hurry, too, so ride the wave and just don't overthink it, keep going, and play until it runs out and then figure it out after that," he said. Glover, who began on the back nine, made a 31-foot birdie putt at the par-4 13th and, after driving the green in two at the par-5 16th, sank an eagle putt from just beyond 32 feet.

He sank a 20-foot birdie putt at the par-4 third and holed out from the fringe at just over 27 feet on the par-3 fourth. At six, he dropped he approach three feet from the hole and tapped in for birdie. "Pleased with how I played," Glover said. "It has been a good few months with the long putter. "Confidence is high and I'm liking what I'm seeing." Spieth, the world number 12 who has yet to win this year, had six birdies and four bogeys in shooting 68. The back-nine starter grabbed second with a 19-foot birdie putt at the seventh hole and a four-footer at the eighth.

"It's funny, I felt like I had better control of my swing today than yesterday," Spieth said. "I got stuck with a couple numbers where I maybe played the wrong shot, wrong decision, and didn't play patiently early. Then I made a couple bad swings as well." Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy fired a 66 to stand on 133 in a pack that included world number one Scottie Scheffler, who birdied three of the last four holes to shoot 66. They played alongside reigning Masters champion Jon Rahm, the season playoff points leader from Spain who holed out from a bunker to par 18 and shoot 67 to finish on 140. — AFP

with Hubert Hurkacz. The reigning Wimbledon and US Open champion had 27 winners and 30 unforced errors while Paul's numbers were 19 and 29. After losing serve three times in the opening set, Alcaraz recovered enough to take the second. But the Spaniard was well off his game, floating a volley wide to trail 4-2 in the final set. Paul took quick advantage, advancing on his second match point from an Alcaraz return wide "I knew he would be there in the third set," Paul said, adding: "It helps to have beaten an opponent before. That attitude is important." — AFP



TORONTO: Carlos Alcaraz of Spain serves against Tommy Paul of the United States during Day Five of the National Bank Open, part of the Hologic ATP Tour, at Sobey's Stadium on August 11, 2023. — AFP

to do it a little bit better today." Thursday's rain meant Liudmila Samsonova had to win twice on Friday to book her semi-final clash with third-seeded Elena Rybakina. Samsonova upset Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka, the second seed, 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 6-3 in a third-round match postponed from Thursday, then returned to beat 12th-seeded Swiss Belinda Bencic 6-4, 6-4 in the quarters. Bencic had started her day with a 6-7 (3-7), 6-3, 6-1 win over seventh-seeded Czech Petra Kvitova. "A really long day, I don't really have the words right now, but I was happy of how I managed my energy today," Samsonova said. "I was feeling great on the court." The jam-packed schedule meant Kazakhstan's Rybakina and Daria Kasatkina didn't take the court until 11:30 pm. It would take former Wimbledon champion Rybakina three hours and 27 minutes, and five match points, to prevail 5-7, 7-5, 7-6 (10/8). She saved a match point herself before finishing it off shortly before 3:00 am. — AFP



FLORIDA: Inter Miami's Argentine forward #10 Lionel Messi and Harper Beckham look on ahead of the Concacaf Leagues Cup quarterfinal football match between Inter Miami and Charlotte on August 11, 2023. — AFP

Messi records 8 goals in 5 games; LAFC stunned

FORT LAUDERDALE: Lionel Messi made it eight goals in five games for Inter Miami as they eased into the semi-finals of the Leagues Cup with a 4-0 win over Charlotte FC on Friday. But Major League Soccer champions Los Angeles FC crashed out of the competition after giving up a two goal lead and losing 3-2 at home to Mexico's Monterrey. Miami will travel north to face the Philadelphia Union for Tuesday's semi-final after they beat Mexican team Queretaro 2-1.

Monterrey, the only Mexican team left in the tournament, will be away to Nashville who crushed Minnesota. Messi slotted in Miami's fourth goal, at DRV PNK stadium, in the 86th minute of what was a relatively routine victory for Gerardo Martino's team. Watched by Argentina national team coach Lionel Scaloni, Messi had one of his quietest games in Miami's pink jersey but was still able to find the target for his legions of fans and help secure a fifth straight win since his arrival.

Miami took the lead in the 12th minute through a Josef Martinez penalty and doubled their advantage in the 32nd minute through in-form Robert Taylor, who clipped home a low cross from DeAndre Yedlin. Charlotte, who had been largely content to frustrate Messi and Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets in the opening 45 minutes, showed more adventure after the break and substitute Patrick Agyemang should have pulled a goal back but his close-range header bounced over the bar.

Immediately following that let-off, Miami made sure of victory with Diego Gomez playing a low cross towards Messi in the middle only for Charlotte defender Adilson Malanda's attempted interception ended up in his own goal. Malanda's ill-fated slide had denied the home crowd their expected Messi goal celebration, but that was to arrive three minutes from the end of time. With the North Carolina side tiring, Ecuador striker Leonardo Campana had time, inside the box, to calmly look up and slip the ball across to Messi for the simplest of conversions.

After Sunday's helter-skelter game in Dallas ended 4-4, with Miami progressing after penalties, Martino was pleased to see his team keep control of the contest. "We kept control of the ball for longer spells and I think there was only one clear chance from the opponent. Other than that I think we didn't suffer defensively," said the former Barcelona and Argentina coach. — AFP

Swiatek overpowers determined Collins

MONTREAL: World number one Iga Swiatek outlasted a determined Danielle Collins 6-3, 4-6, 6-2 on Friday to book a semi-final clash with Jessica Pegula at the WTA Montreal Open. Swiatek looked on the way to a quick win when she rode two breaks of serve to a 5-1 lead in the opening set. But Collins, the first qualifier to reach the quarter-finals of the event since 2019, overcame an early break in the second and broke Swiatek for a second time in the 10th game to force the third set. From there, however, Swiatek was in control. She broke Collins for a second time for a 5-2 lead and claimed the victory on her third match point with a sizzling forehand winner. "I really wanted to play powerful and I'm pretty happy that I managed to even increase the power in the

News in Brief

Valencia beat Sevilla

MADRID: Valencia defeated Europa League champions Sevilla 2-1 on Friday on the opening night of the new Spanish Liga season. Valencia, who only survived relegation by two points in the last campaign, took the lead on the hour mark thanks to a header from Guinea international defender Mouctar Diakhaby after good work by Portuguese teammate Andre Almeida. Sevilla leveled nine minutes later when Moroccan striker Youssef En-Nesyri headed in at the far post from a cross by Suso. However, Valencia stunned the home side in the 88th minute when Javi Guerra hit the winner after Hugo Duro had set-up the opportunity. Sevilla played the last 10 minutes of the match with 10 men after Frenchman Loic Bade was red-carded for shirt pulling. Earlier Friday, Rayo Vallecano came away from Almeria, who survived last season by just one point, 2-0. Both goals came from the penalty spot with Isaac Palazon and Randy Nteka on target in the first half. — AFP



SEVILLE: Valencia's Spanish defender #14 Jose Gaya vies with Sevilla's Spanish midfielder #07 Suso during the Spanish Liga football match between Sevilla FC and Valencia CF on August 11, 2023. — AFP

PSG, Dembele seal deal

PARIS: France international Ousmane Dembele has signed a five-year deal with Paris Saint-Germain from Barcelona, the Ligue 1 champions announced on Saturday. The 26-year-old Dembele, who was part of France's 2018 World Cup-winning squad, joined Barcelona in 2017 from Borussia Dortmund and had extended his contract last year until 2024. PSG took advantage of the player's 50 million euros (\$54 million) release clause to sign the former Rennes forward. "I'm very happy to join Paris Saint-Germain and can't wait to play in my new colors," Dembele said in a PSG statement. "I hope to continue to grow here and make all who love the club proud." — AFP

Lille rescue point at Nice

PARIS: Nice and Lille battled out a 1-1 draw on Friday as the wraps came off the new-look Ligue 1 season on Friday. Gaetan Laborde earned a minor footnote in the history of the French spotlight by scoring the first goal of the 2023/24 campaign. The Nice forward's 19th minute close range effort put the Ineos-owned south coast club in control and en route to give their new coach Francesco Farioli the perfect start to his tenure. Farioli is the club's third coach this year after Didier Digard who took over from Lucien Favre in January. But his perfect start was spoiled when Bafode Diakite struck in the fourth minute of injury time to grab the visitors a share of the points. — AFP

McLaughlin out of worlds

WASHINGTON: Reigning world and Olympic 400-meter hurdles champion Sydney McLaughlin said Friday a knee injury will keep her from competing in the World Athletics Championships that open next week in Budapest. The 24-year-old American, who set the 400 hurdles world record of 50.68 seconds last year at the World Championships in Eugene, said in a social media posting she has a "minor knee issue" and cannot race. "I am sad to share that I must withdraw this year's World Championships meet in Budapest," she posted. "After consulting with my doctors and coaches, I need to take care of a minor knee issue so that I can be fully healthy for next year's Paris Olympics." — AFP

Sports

Bayern sign England captain Kane on four-year contract

Kane ends record-breaking career with Tottenham

MUNICH: England captain Harry Kane ended his record-breaking career with Tottenham on Saturday signing a four-year deal with Bayern Munich until 2027. Kane said he "felt it was time to leave" the Premier League club he had spent two decades with as he chases trophies with the Bundesliga giants. "I felt like it was the time to leave. I didn't want to go into the season with a lot of unresolved future talk," Kane posted on social media.

"Obviously a lot of emotions going through me right now; sad to be leaving the club I've spent nearly 20 years of my life at, from 11-year-old boy to a 30-year-old man now. "There's been so many great moments and special memories, memories that I will cherish forever." After protracted negotiations between Bayern and Spurs' chairman Daniel Levy a deal was finally struck on Thursday.

Kane flew to Munich on Friday evening to complete the traditional medical where he was greeted by a multitude of Bayern fans before putting pen to paper on his new contract. Six-time European champions Bayern were in desperate need of a striker after struggling to replace Robert Lewandowski who left for Barcelona last season. The reported fee for Kane is a Bundesliga record 100 million euros (\$110 million, £86 million) plus

10 million euros in bonuses.

Kane, who was out of contract next summer, leaves Tottenham having scored 280 goals in 435 games to become the club's all-time leading goalscorer, but without a trophy. "I'm very happy to be a part of FC Bayern now," Kane said in a club statement. "Bayern is one of the biggest clubs in the world, and I've always said that I want to compete and prove myself at the highest level during my career. This club is defined by its winning mentality—it feels very good to be here."

Kane is also England's all-time top goalscorer with 58 international goals. He finished top scorer at the 2018 World Cup where England reached the semi-finals. At the 2022 tournament in Qatar, they were defeated by France in the quarter-finals, Kane first scoring and then missing a penalty with England 2-1 down and six minutes left on the clock. Kane also featured in his country's run to the European Championship final in 2021 where they lost to Italy in a penalty shoot-out.

'Fresh challenge'

Silverware is all but guaranteed at Bayern, who have won 11 straight Bundesliga titles. The club won the Bundesliga in each of Lewandowski's eight seasons in Munich, with the Pole averaging 30

goals per season. In 2022-23, not one Bayern player hit the 15 league goal mark. Kane has scored more than 20 league goals in all but three of the past nine Premier League seasons, winning the Golden Boot on three occasions.

Despite finishing second in last season's Premier League scoring charts behind Erling Haaland (36), Kane netted 30 league goals in 2022-23, equaling his best mark. Bayern were eliminated by eventual winners Manchester City in the quarter-finals of the Champions League last season and only won the Bundesliga title on goal difference thanks to a final-day capitulation from Borussia Dortmund.

Kane had been linked with a move away from his boyhood club two years ago but Manchester City failed in their pursuit. Spurs chairman Levy said the club had "reluctantly agreed to the transfer". "We sought over a long period of time to engage Harry and his representatives in several forms of contract extension, both short and long term," Levy said. "Harry was clear, however, that he wanted a fresh challenge and would not be signing a new contract this summer. We have reluctantly, therefore, agreed to his transfer."

"We have seen a product of our academy system become one of the best play-



English striker Harry Kane

ers to ever pull on a Spurs shirt and become one of world football's elite strikers. It has been a truly remarkable journey." Kane could start the next chapter in his career later on Saturday, with the German Super Cup scheduled for the Allianz

Arena against RB Leipzig. "I hope to play part of it," Kane told Bayern's website. "I spoke briefly to the coach, but I will meet him this (Saturday) morning with the team and I will try to fit in as soon as possible." — AFP

De Bruyne injury clouds City's 3-0 win at Burnley

BURNLEY: Manchester City could be without Kevin De Bruyne for a number of weeks after he suffered the recurrence of a hamstring injury as the defending champions opened the Premier League season with a 3-0 win at Burnley on Friday. Erling Haaland scored twice before Rodri completed the scoring to give City a perfect start to their quest to become the first side to win four consecutive English top-flight titles. But the night was soured for Pep Guardiola's men by the sight of De Bruyne limping off midway through the first-half. The Belgian had suffered a hamstring tear in City's Champions League final victory over Inter Milan two months ago.

"He was injured again unfortunately," said Guardiola. "Same place and position as the Champions League and he will be out for a while. "It depends on the magnitude but will be a few weeks out. He has to free (his) mind and relax because he came back from that position (previous injuries) and he will be back now." Burnley's 2022/23 season finished over a month before City's European Cup final win in Istanbul. Guardiola has bemoaned

his side's short pre-season compared to their rivals, but they were quick out of the blocks.

"We are still not in our best (physical) form but we have to try to not drop many points in that period," added Guardiola. "It's a question of mentality and we were fortunate to break the game early. "A lot of teams are going to suffer here, so that is why I am so pleased." Haaland fired City to the treble last season by scoring 52 times in his first year at the club. The 23-year-old took just over three minutes of the new campaign to open his tally once more when he swept home Rodri's header across goal after a well-worked corner between De Bruyne, Bernardo Silva and Phil Foden.

Burnley boss Vincent Kompany has a statue outside City's Etihad Stadium in honor of his decorated playing career with the English champions. Kompany returned the Claret's back to the Premier League at the first time of asking and transformed Burnley's playing style in the process during his first season in charge. Despite the scoreline, the home side were far from



Manchester City's Belgian midfielder Kevin De Bruyne

outclassed but paid for the lack of a clinical finisher like Haaland.

Luca Koleosho and Zeki Amdouni missed good chances to equalise, while Amdouni also had a penalty appeal turned down. "There were a lot of periods of the game where we did ourselves proud," said Kompany. However, they were hit with a sucker punch when Julian Alvarez laid off Kyle Walker's cross into the path of Haaland to produce an unstoppable effort in off the underside of the bar nine minutes before half-time.

With the wind taken from Burnley's sails, City took a stranglehold of the game after the break without ever having to hit top gear. Rodri was the unlikely hero with the only goal in Istanbul two months ago and he started the new season as he finished the last by smashing home from close range after a goalmouth scramble. Burnley's miserable night was rounded off in stoppage time when Anass Zaroury was shown a straight red card for a wild challenge on Walker. — AFP

Today's Matches

English Premier League	
Brentford v Tottenham Hotspur	16:00
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium	
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
Chelsea v Liverpool	
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium	18:30
beIN Sports HD 1 English	
beIN Sports HD 3	
Spanish League	
Celta de Vigo v Osasuna	18:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
beIN Sports Fr 4 HD max	
Villarreal v Real Betis	
beIN Sports HD 1	20:30
beIN Sports Fr 4 HD max	
Getafe v Barcelona	
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Stade brestois 29 v Lens	14:00
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Clermont Foot 63 v Monaco	
beIN Sports HD 2	16:00
beIN Sports HD 4	
Nantes v Toulouse	
beIN Sports HD 4	16:00
HSC Montpellier v Le Havre	
beIN Sports Max 2 HD	16:00
Stade Rennais v Metz	
beIN Sports HD 2	18:05
beIN Sports HD 4 TR	
Strasbourg v Olympique Lyonnais	
beIN Sports HD 2	21:45
beIN Sports HD 2 English	
beIN Sports HD 4 TR	

'Good chemistry' takes Sweden into familiar territory at WCup

AUCKLAND: They don't attract the same level of attention as many of their rivals, but Sweden might be starting to quietly believe this is their year after reaching yet another semi-final at the Women's World Cup. The pre-tournament talk was about the United States and a third straight title, England adding the World Cup to their European crown and Australia going for glory on home soil. But Sweden are ranked third in the world for a reason and are now gearing up for a third World Cup semi-final in four editions after beating Japan 2-1 on Friday.

After losing to the Netherlands in the last four in 2019, and to Japan at the same stage in 2011, Sweden face Spain on Tuesday hoping to secure a first final appearance since 2003, when they were edged out by Germany. It is not just the World Cup though. Peter Gerhardsson's team were also beaten semi-finalists at last year's Euro. In fact, they have reached at least the semi-finals eight times in their last 10 appearances at the European Championship, without winning the title. They have also been silver medalists at the last two Olympics. Sweden might have fallen short all too often when it comes to the crunch, but all that past experience could serve them well against a Spain team appearing

at this stage of the World Cup for the first time. "We have been in this situation before, playing semi-finals. It's huge. We just have a really good team," said veteran forward Sofia Jakobsson. The 33-year-old is one of the most seasoned campaigners in Gerhardsson's squad, having been part of the team at the 2011 World Cup. She has seen many players come and go, and only four of the team that started against Japan also lined up in the 2019 semi-final.

'Trust each other'

Jakobsson puts Sweden's consistency down to the players getting on with each other, something which may appear simplistic but is helpful at a major tournament when teams spend weeks together in hotels far from home. "We push each other in training, we have really good fun outside the field and I just think we really have a good chemistry in the group," she said. "Obviously it helps when you win games as well." Sweden were one of just three teams to win all three group games, along with Japan and England. They overcame the USA on penalties before ending Japan's run, winning 2-1 at Eden Park thanks to defender Amanda Ilested's fourth goal at the tournament and Filipa Angelodal's penalty. The triumph sparked wild celebrations in the dressing room that were captured on video and relayed on social media. "The chemistry in the team is crucial for us. We really enjoy being together and I think if you are happy off the pitch it shows on the pitch," said captain Kosovare Asllani. "If you trust each other off the pitch, you trust each other on the pitch. You need to work on these things and we do it daily. "That is a big strength we have on the team. We just really like each other." — AFP



AUCKLAND: Team Sweden head coach Peter Gerhardsson gives instructions to players during a training session in Auckland. — AFP

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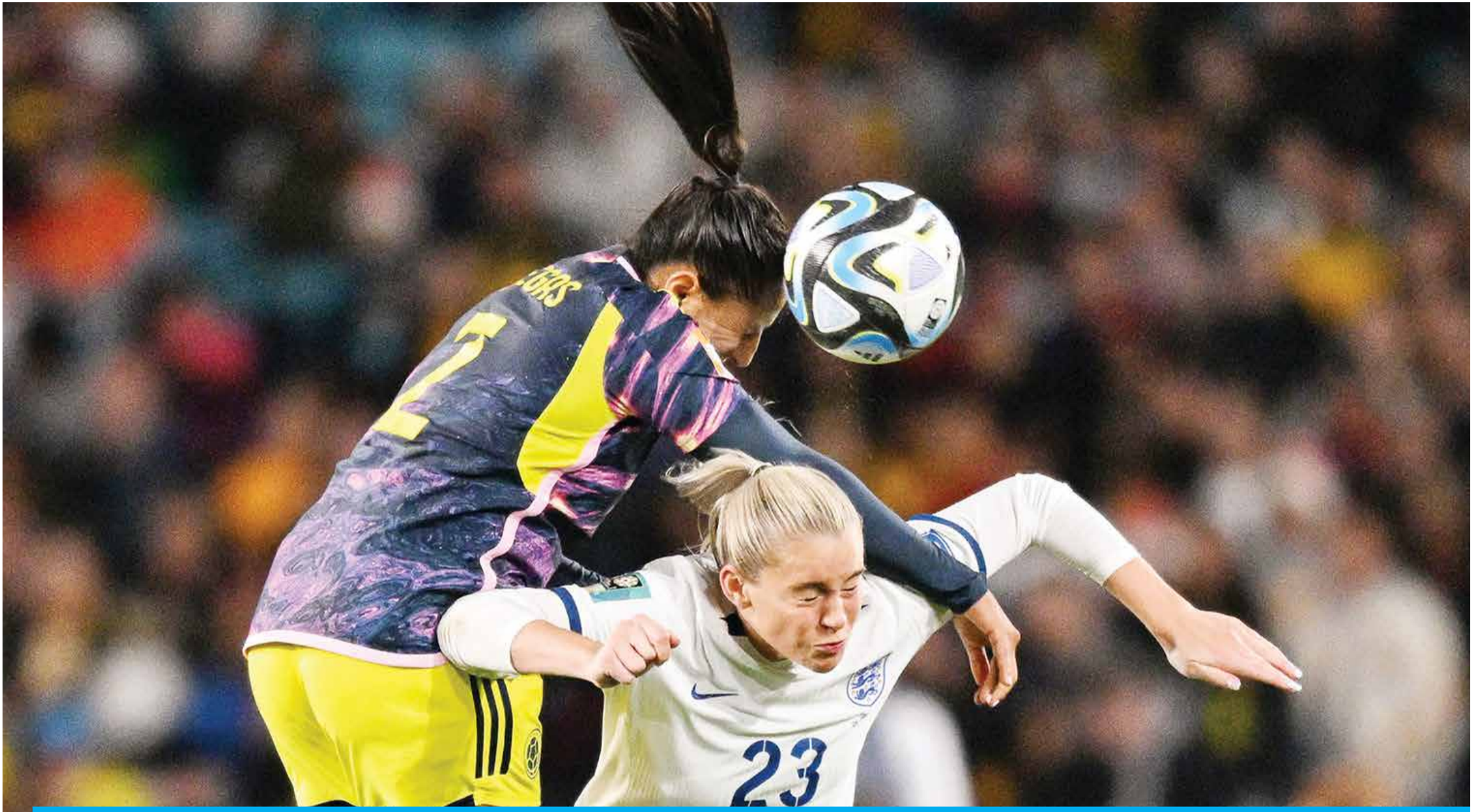
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England and Australia set up WCup semi-final blockbuster

Australia outsmart France in penalty thriller



SYDNEY: Colombia's midfielder #02 Manuela Vanegas and England's forward #23 Alessia Russo fight for the ball during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup quarter-final football match between Colombia and England on August 12, 2023. — AFP

SYDNEY: England battled past a physical Colombia 2-1 and Australia survived a thrilling penalty shootout against France on Saturday to set up a blockbuster Women's World Cup semi-final. Sarina Wiegman's European champions fought back from going down to a stunning Leicy Santos goal for a deserved win in front of a pro-Colombian crowd of 75,000 in Sydney. England will be back at Stadium Australia on Wednesday and will face an even more hostile reception against the co-hosts. In the other quarter-final of the day, Australia beat France 7-6 in a nerve-shredding penalty shootout to reach the last four for the first time in their history.

Colombia, playing in their first quarter-final, took the lead against the run of play through a wonderful dipping effort from the edge of the box by Santos on 44 minutes. But England struck back deep in first-half stoppage time when Lauren Hemp pounced on a goalkeeping error by a fumbling Catalina Perez, before Alessia Russo sealed the quarter-final in the Lionesses' favor with a cool second-half finish. Co-

lombia have a reputation for being physical and they dished out some roughhouse treatment. Wiegman praised her players for keeping their cool while still remaining aggressive. "We stay calm, we can see the goal, you don't see panic," said Wiegman, who took her native Netherlands to the 2019 final, where they lost 2-0 to the United States. "We have had lots of challenges and we have got through. "It shows the resilience of the team... they got through really well, they got up and got the win over the line." The 25th-ranked Colombia were among the many surprises at the World Cup, their stunning 2-1 win over Germany a highlight of the group phase.

They have also been one of the best-supported teams at the tournament and their fans dominated at Stadium Australia, their yellow shirts vastly outnumbering England supporters. Their coach Nelson Abadia called the tournament "a turning point" for women's football in Colombia. "We are not satisfied but we have peace of mind because we know

we had a very good performance throughout the World Cup," he said. "We proved how Colombia has progressed and evolved."

Penalty drama

Australia emerged from a heart-stopping penalty shootout in Brisbane after 120 minutes of goalless stalemate against France. It all came down in the shootout to Australia's Cortnee Vine, and she coolly converted the winning kick to send the home crowd into raptures. It ended a remarkable shootout that saw both teams take 10 penalties. Australia coach Tony Gustavsson said it was the most emotionally draining night of his career. "I've won medals, but I said to the team before this game that it's not about the medals around your neck," he added.

"It's about the heart beating on the back of it. And the heart beating tonight in this team and in this country, unbelievable. I'm so freaking proud about this team." In front of a sell-out crowd of more than

50,000, Sam Kerr came off the bench in the second half and the talismanic striker duly converted her penalty in the shootout. Australia goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold had missed a chance to win the game in the shootout when her kick hit the post, but she saved twice from Kenza Dali after the VAR spotted she had both feet off her line the first time.

Vicki Becho missed France's 10th penalty, and it was left to Vine to beat France's substitute goalkeeper Solene Durand, who had been sent on especially for the shootout. "You have to be proud of the girls tonight. They played an exceptional match," French coach Herve Renard said. In the other semi-final, Sweden will face Spain on Tuesday. Spain beat the Netherlands 2-1 in extra time and Sweden defeated the 2011 champions Japan by the same scoreline on Friday, meaning there will be a new name on the World Cup trophy this year. Outgoing holders the United States and former champions Norway and Germany are all already out. — AFP

Spain defy turbulence to make WCup semis

SYDNEY: Spain were plunged into turmoil when 15 players refused to feature under coach Jorge Vilda, but less than a year later they are in the Women's World Cup semi-finals for the first time. It is a remarkable turnaround for Vilda and a squad that is not even at full strength in Australia and New Zealand because of the very public disagreement. Moreover, there were hints even coming into the World Cup that all was not well in the Spain camp. Perhaps they are still not.

But Vilda's side stuck together to defeat the 2019 runners-up the Netherlands 2-1 in extra time and will face Sweden in the last four on Tuesday. Even on the eve of Friday's game against the Dutch in Wellington there was no escaping the turmoil which had threatened to torpedo Spain's World Cup in the past year. "The team is united," Vilda said, asked by a Dutch journalist to comment. "We have a group that competes and they are all fighting for the same objective, and they are very motivated."

Discontent between players on the one side and the Spanish football federation (RFEF) and Vilda on the other had been brewing for some time. In September 2022 the situation exploded - 15 of the squad emailed the RFEF to say they did not want to be considered for selection, citing their "emotional state". They were unhappy with numerous things: the atmosphere around the camp, Vilda being too strict and the team's lack of success under the coach since his reign started in 2015.

The players also objected to travel arrangements and organization behind the scenes, but the bulk of their complaints were aimed at the 42-year-old Vilda. The RFEF backed the coach however and he omitted the protesting players for friendlies against Sweden and the United States, which Spain drew and won respectively. Indeed, including at this World Cup, Spain have lost just

twice in 17 matches since the mutiny broke out, validating the RFEF's stance and strengthening Vilda's position.

When Vilda named his squad for the World Cup, three of the 15 protesting players were selected - Aitana Bonmati, Mariona Caldentey and Ona Batlle, all at Barcelona. They had stepped down from their position, ostensibly satisfied that sufficient improvements had been made in the areas the players demanded. But the absence of another Barcelona trio in Patri Guijarro—who struck twice as they won the Champions League - Mapi Leon and Sandra Panos were all expected to hurt Spain. In the build-up to the World Cup, Vilda said that the conflict was "practically resolved". But refusing to return, Mapi Leon said: "I can't go back, there has to be changes."

It is testament to Spain's depth of talent that at this World Cup they have shrugged off the loss of some top players, and a 4-0 defeat in the group stage to Japan, to reach the last four. Even more so because two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas has barely made any impression at the tournament as she struggles to recover form and fitness following a serious knee injury.

The likes of Jennifer Hermoso, Alba Redondo and Bonmati have all excelled, while teenager Salma Paralluelo showcased her talent with her classy winner against the Netherlands after coming off the bench. Vilda has made full use of his 23-player squad, ensuring there is fierce competition for places while also keeping players fresh as they get towards the business end of the tournament. Ahead of their quarter-final with the Netherlands, a second Dutch journalist attempted to poke Vilda and captain Ivana Andres into a reaction.

The reporter put it to Andres that a strength of the Netherlands team was that the players liked their coach Andries Jonker and asked if she had the same fondness for Vilda. Andres and Vilda had a brief chat away from the microphone - probably to ensure she had understood the translation of the question correctly - and smiled. "We have an excellent relationship with Jorge, we have total confidence in him," she answered. — AFP

Arsenal hold off Forest; Brighton thrash Luton

LONDON: Arsenal began their Premier League title challenge by beating Nottingham Forest 2-1 on Saturday as Brighton shrugged off the absence of Moises Caicedo to thrash newcomers Luton 4-1. After finishing second to Manchester City last season, Arsenal have splashed over £200 million (\$254 million) on new signings to try and claim their first title for 20 years.

Declan Rice, Kai Havertz and Jurrien Timber all made their debuts at the Emirates and Arsenal should have had a far more convincing scoreline to show for their performance. Eddie Nketiah opened the scoring after some sublime skill by Gabriel Martinelli opened up the Forest defense. Bukayo Saka then curled into the top corner from outside the area, but the Gunners were guilty of not killing the game off. Forest had barely threatened until the introduction of Anthony Elanga and Taiwo Awoniyi.

Former Manchester United winger Elanga marked his debut with a fine run and cross for Awoniyi to score in his fifth consecutive Premier League game eight minutes from time. "We were super dominant," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta. "There's no question that we deserved to win the game. "We have to be more ruthless and more critical of ourselves to be more pushy and kill the games." Victory ensured Arsenal did not lose any early ground on City, who began the defense of their title with a 3-0 win at Burnley on Friday.

Brighton ensured there was no fairytale for Luton on their return to the top flight for the first time in 31 years despite the distraction of Caicedo's looming departure. The Ecuadorian is set to become the most expensive player in Premier League history after a £110 million deal



LONDON: Nottingham Forest's Ivorian Coast defender #30 Willy Boly (left) vies with Arsenal's German midfielder #29 Kai Havertz during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Nottingham Forest on August 12, 2023. — AFP

was agreed with Liverpool. However, Caicedo reportedly still prefers a move to Chelsea, who have had a series of bids rejected by Brighton. The Seagulls have also lost Alexis Mac Allister to Liverpool from the side that finished sixth last season. But two of the other stars of the 2022/23 campaign combined to open the scoring as Solly March headed in Kaoru Mitoma's cross.

Joao Pedro opened his Brighton account from the penalty spot in the second-half before Carlton Morris reduced Luton's arrears from the spot at the other end. But late goals from Simon Adingra and Evan Ferguson gave a fairer reflection of Brighton's dominance to put Roberto De Zerbi's men top of the table. Everton's need for a striker was laid bare as the Toffees wasted numerous chances in losing 1-0 at home to Fulham. Bobby De Cordova-Reid scored the only goal at Goodison Park 17 minutes from time. — AFP