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ANGER SEETHES IN FRANCE

Grandmother of slain teen urges calm as mayor's home attacked

PARIS: The grandmother of the French teenager whose fatal shooting by police has sparked several nights of unrest issued a plea for calm Sunday as the home of the mayor of a Paris suburb was attacked with a burning car in a new flaring of violence. The government of President Emmanuel Macron has been battling five nights of violent protests since 17-year-old Nahel M was shot dead in the Paris suburb of Nanterre on Tuesday by an officer during a traffic check.

The killing of Nahel M, who was of Algerian origin, has revived longstanding accusations of institutional racism within the French police, which rights groups say single out minorities during controls. Seeking to quell what has become one of the biggest challenges to Macron since he took office in 2017, the interior ministry has for the last two nights deployed 45,000 police and gendarmes nationwide, as well as helicopters and armored vehicles.

The interior ministry said 719 people were arrested overnight, around half the figure from the previous night but with intense clashes still reported in several places, including the southern city of Marseille, but calmer elsewhere. "Stop and do not riot," Nahel's grandmother, Nadia, told BFM television in a telephone interview, saying that the rioters were only using his death as a

"pretext." "I tell the people who are rioting this: Do not smash windows, attack schools or buses. Stop! It's the mums who are taking the bus, it's the mums who walk outside," she said.

Politicians condemned the attack on the home of Vincent Jeanbrun, the right-wing mayor of L'Hay-les-Roses outside Paris, in which assailants rammed a burning car into his home with the aim of setting it on fire, prosecutors said. Jeanbrun's wife and children, aged 5 and 7, were at home while the mayor himself was at the town hall to deal with the riots. The wife was "badly injured" sustaining a broken leg, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors have opened an attempted murder investigation. "Last night the horror and disgrace reached a new level," the mayor said in a statement. "The situation was much calmer" overall, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne told reporters as she visited L'Hay-les-Roses. "But an act of the kind we saw this morning here is particularly shocking. We will let no violence get by" unpunished, she said, urging that the perpetrators be sanctioned with the "utmost severity".

Some 7,000 police were deployed in Paris and its suburbs alone, including along the Champs Elysees avenue in the capital, a tourist

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PARIS: Demonstrators run as French police officers use tear gas on July 2, 2023, five days after a 17-year-old man was killed by police in Nanterre, a western suburb of Paris. — AFP

Twitter restricts number of posts users can read

NEW YORK: Elon Musk announced Saturday that Twitter would temporarily restrict how many tweets users could read per day, in a move meant to tamp down on the use of the site's data by artificial intelligence companies. The platform is limiting verified accounts to reading 10,000 tweets a day. Non-verified users — the free accounts that make up the majority of users — are limited to reading 1,000 tweets per day. New unverified accounts would be limited to 500 tweets.

The decision was made "to address extreme levels of data scraping" and "system manipulation" by third-party platforms, Musk said in a tweet Saturday afternoon, as some users quickly hit their limits. "Goodbye Twitter" was a trending topic in the United States following Musk's announcement. Twitter's billionaire owner did not give a timeline for how long the measures would be in place.

The day before, Musk had announced that it would no longer be possible to read tweets on the site without an account. Much of the data scraping was coming from firms using it to build their AI models, Musk said, to the point that it was causing traffic issues with the site. To create AI that can respond in a human-like capacity, many companies feed the programs examples of real-life conversations from social media sites.

"Several hundred organizations (maybe more) were scraping Twitter data extremely aggressively, to the point where it was affecting the real user experience," Musk said.

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Kuwait launches central college admission portal

KUWAIT: Kuwait has launched the first stage of a central college admission portal in a bid to revamp online services and overhaul information and educational infrastructure, the education minister announced. The move is part of an integrated program of applications that would contribute to applying a digital registration system involving a central admission portal for higher education institutions, Dr Hamad Al-Adwani said in a press statement.

Kuwait University, internal and external scholarships and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) will be included in the portal, allowing pre-university students to make online applications for higher education facilities, he said. The central admission portal comes in the context of the government's endeavor to draw upon advanced technology and achieve digital transformation, thus reflecting the state's development vision, he added.

"The automated system regulates procedures



Hamad Al-Adwani

for submitting applications for seats while ensuring there is no overlap and conflict between applications," Adwani said. It also verifies that the conditions of admission approved by each entity are met and enables those accepted to complete all their registration procedures at the educational institution in which they were accepted.

"Seats are distributed accurately and quickly through electronic linkage and coordination between higher education institutions and the concerned authorities, namely the ministries of education and interior and the Public Authority for Civil Information, in addition to the Civil Service Commission, Public Authority of Manpower and the Public Institution for Social Security," he added. Adwani said the central admission portal will be launched

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Space telescope targets universe's dark mysteries

KENNEDY SPACE CENTER: Europe's Euclid space telescope blasted off Saturday, kicking off a first-ever mission to shed light on two of the universe's greatest mysteries: Dark energy and dark matter. "I can tell you, I'm so thrilled, I'm so excited to see this mission up in space," European Space Agency (ESA) Director General Josef Aschbacher said after the launch. The telescope successfully took off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, at 11:12 am local time (1512 GMT) on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket. Shortly after, once separated from the rocket, it emitted its first signal, as scheduled.

The ESA was forced to turn to billionaire Elon Musk's firm to launch the mission after Russia pulled its Soyuz rockets in response to sanctions over the war in Ukraine. "The launch was perfect," said Carole Mundell, ESA's

Europe's space telescope Euclid

The spacecraft will be sent to explore the evolution of the dark matter and dark energy in the Universe, joining the James Webb telescope in orbit around the second Lagrangian Point, or L2

A Lagrangian point is a point where the gravitational forces of two bodies or more (eg. Sun and a planet) are in equilibrium

L2 point is ideal for observing space as it

- allows a satellite to maintain a stable distance and use solar energy
- provides a clear view of space
- avoids orbiting Earth and passing through its shadow but is close enough for good communications

Not to scale

Sources: ESA, Nasa, Emmanuel Trelat, Theory of control, Lagrange points and space exploration, Image CNRS, 2010

AFP

science director. "Now begins that journey." After a month-long trip through space, Euclid will join the James Webb telescope at a stable hovering spot around 1.5 million kilometers (more than 930,000 miles) from Earth called the second Lagrange Point.

From there, Euclid will chart the

largest-ever map of the universe, encompassing up to two billion galaxies across more than a third of the sky. By capturing light that has taken 10 billion years to reach Earth's vicinity, the map will also offer a new view of the 13.8-billion-year-old universe's history.

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Hamas publicly displays arms for first time

GAZA CITY: The armed wing of Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas has put its weapons on public display for the first time, drawing hundreds of Palestinians including children brandishing rocket launchers for selfies. Dressed in black balaclavas and tactical camouflage suits, members of the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades mingled with young men and women at the exhibition in Gaza City's Unknown Soldier's Square.

"Resistance is an image and a memory. Take souvenir photos with many of Al-Qassam's weapons," the group said in an invitation on social media and posters in mosques. The event was the first at which Hamas has allowed the public to take photos of weapons. It follows the latest surge in worsening violence, which cost 16 Palestinian lives in the occupied West Bank over six days in late June.

In May, militant groups in Gaza and the Zionist entity traded cross-border fire for five days, killing 34 Palestinians, among them six commanders of the Islamic Jihad, fighters from other Palestinian armed groups and civilians including children. Among the Hamas weapons on display in Gaza City on Friday were a range of locally manufactured missiles, "Shihab" drones, rocket-propelled grenade launchers and Russian-made "Kornet" missiles.

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Local

Differently-abled people face challenges finding safe, accessible entertainment

More accommodations needed to make Kuwait truly inclusive

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Many Kuwaiti residents complain about a lack of entertainment places in Kuwait and their feeling of boredom, especially during summer. As for people with disabilities, the situation seems even worse. Despite the scarcity of entertainment places, those with special needs face even more limitations in activities and places for entertainment. As we progress towards a more inclusive society, it is important that every individual, regardless of their different physical and mental abilities, is given access to the same opportunities and experiences as those without any different abilities.

Yet, when it comes to entertainment, we often forget about the limited options available for this category of people. Differently-abled people face various obstacles in finding entertainment that is safe, accessible and enjoyable. The inability to participate in activities due to a lack of infrastructure and accommodation facilities is a significant barrier that limits these people from experiencing entertainment in the same way as others.

Ritaj, a mother of a differently-abled son, shared with Kuwait Times her struggles over a lack of options available for her son to have fun. "For most of the handicapped population, entertainment is often restricted to passive activities such as watching television, reading books or playing video games. These activities can provide some level of entertainment, but it remains limited. My son wishes to experience a wider, but safe scope of entertainment, such as wa-

ter parks and other activities that allow him to have multiple options that would prevent him from being bored and lonely," she said.

Just like any other person who needs to try and experience new things, differently-abled people have the right to experience the same joy and unique perspectives that come from various forms of entertainment. "In Kuwait, there are some places that have undertaken to facilitate entertainment for handicapped people, such as cinemas, shopping malls and other public sites that have been remodeled to provide access to people with disabilities. But it is still necessary to expand and upgrade such places, especially in the entertainment sector, to make entertainment more inclusive for handicapped individuals. Especially since there are not many activities in Kuwait even for the normal people, let alone the handicapped community," Ritaj said.

By making efforts to improve accessibility and availability of entertainment options for differently-abled people, they will be provided with an equal opportunity to experience the joy that comes from different forms of entertainment, as entertainment is an important aspect of life that provides an opportunity for individuals to relax and enjoy themselves after a long day at work or school. Therefore, lack of entertainment activities for people with disabilities may lead to social isolation and lack of participation in community life. This can have a harmful impact on people's mental health and contribute to feelings of dehumanization and exclusion from society.

Moreover, Ritaj pointed out the necessity of rais-



ing further awareness about differently-abled people's rights. "There is a need for greater awareness among business owners on the handicapped community and their rights. There should be more investment in infrastructure and facilities that cater to

different disabilities," she said. By promoting inclusivity, educating society and supporting investments that benefit people with different abilities, we can create a more accessible and equitable entertainment industry in Kuwait.

Kuwait renews call for 'more transparent' UN Security Council

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait renewed its support for a more transparent, efficient and accountable UN Security Council, stressing its full support for efforts that achieve aspirations towards the full implementation of the Council's resolutions as the body responsible for maintaining peace and security around the world.

This was relayed during councilor Abdulaziz Amash's speech to the UN General Assembly when discussing the Security Council report. Amash took note of the long-suspended issues on the council's agenda, namely the 75-year-old Palestinian issue, saying that this is a call to seriously examine the causes of continuous regression of the situation.



Abdulaziz Amash

The notable restriction on the council's work in light of what the world is undergoing from accelerating challenges and unprecedented threats should drive member states to enhance the council's work mechanism, and augment intergovernmental negotiations aiming to reform the council, the Kuwaiti official said.

The state of Kuwait, he expounded, had joined and supported a number of reformative initiatives, including signing the Code of Conduct which calls upon all UNSC members to not use the Veto to stop any credible draft resolution intended to prevent or halt crimes against humanity, apartheid or war crimes.

On the intergovernmental negotiations, Amash commented that the session underwent tangible positive developments, including launching a website which contains documents presented during the session, as well as TV broadcasting of said intergovernmental negotiations. Amash stated that active change is achieved through true desire and cooperation, and voiced hope for more flexibility and innovation in raising the council's efficiency and transparency. — KUNA

Co-op high school summer job program has KD 15,000 budget

KUWAIT: The Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies announced that each cooperative society will be accepting between 75 to 150 students in the newly approved paid part-time work program.

The Ministry of Social Affairs had approved a proposal last month to allow tenth and eleventh grade high school students to work part-time at cooperative societies during July and August.

Jobs will be open only for co-op shareholders' children and grandchildren, he said, adding that around 10,000 students are eligible to apply. Students can enroll to work for four hours a day at the cooperative societies in their areas of residence.

Each student would receive a financial reward that varies between KD 100 and KD 200.

The union announced Sunday that the program's budget is KD 15,000, meaning that each cooperative society can hire 150 students with a reward of KD 100 or 75 students with a reward of KD 200.

Participants in the program will be distributed to different departments within the cooperative society and will be provided with training and practical experience in the field. They will learn skills such as how to organize, arrange and divide goods, maintain their cleanliness and track the expiry dates of goods.

The program requires each participant to go to work daily and adhere to their specified hours while performing their tasks. Anyone who withdraws from the program will be deprived of the financial reward, said the union in a statement.



VIENNA: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with OPEC Secretary-General Haitham Al-Ghais on Friday. — KUNA photos

Foreign Minister discusses oil, science on tour

VIENNA: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, now on a visit to the Republic of Austria, met on Friday with OPEC Secretary-General Haitham Al-Ghais to discuss cooperation between Kuwait and the organization. They reviewed the latest regional and inter-



Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen with Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Mariano Grossi and other officials.

national geopolitical developments and their impacts on the global oil market as well as the challenges related to climate change. Sheikh Salem highlighted the significance of the OPEC members, keeping constant coordination of their energy policies to ensure stable supplies to the global market. Ghais briefed the Kuwaiti minister on the organization's efforts to maintain the balance of the oil market and the stability of the energy industry.

Scientific cooperation

In another development, Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met with Director-General of the International

Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Mariano Grossi in Vienna on Friday. The meeting reviewed the close relationship between the State of Kuwait and the UN nuclear watchdog and the ways to enhance cooperation in areas of hi-tech experience exchanges and the peaceful applications of the nuclear energy.

Both sides discussed the IAEA's efforts to promote economic development by means of renewable energy as well as to ensure the safety of nuclear facilities. They also discussed the latest developments in the Iranian nuclear dossier, the Agency's efforts to protect the nuclear facilities of Ukraine and ensure sound implementation of the nuclear safeguards worldwide. — KUNA

Environment authority continue campaigns to protect local beaches

KUWAIT: Environment Public Authority inspectors are carrying out campaigns against violations at beaches around Kuwait and on the country's islands. The crackdowns, carried out in cooperation with environmental police since the middle of June, are meant to spread awareness among the public on the importance of keeping local beaches clean.

EPA Acting Director General Samira Al-Kandari warned in a statement that the fine for littering reaches up to KD 500, while the fine for harming or killing wildlife animals may reach up to KD 5,000. "(EPA inspectors) are raising awareness on the importance of preserving the environment, as well as the punishments included in the Environment Protection Law for actions that harm the environment," she said in a statement.

Inspectors have issued citations for 15 environmental violations for campaigns carried out Saturday at the capital, Hawally and Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorate, Kandari said, noting that the violations were for littering and use of prohibited fishing tools.

"The campaigns will continue to educate the public on preserving the environment, raising environmental awareness and promoting the environment protection culture with the goal of achieving the state's plan for sustainable development," Kandari pointed out. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Environment Public Authority inspectors carry out an inspection campaign at one of the beaches. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Environment Public Authority inspectors carry out an inspection campaign at one of the beaches. — KUNA photos

Childhood cancer has 80% recovery rate if detected early: Doctor

KUWAIT: The National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN) Chairman Dr Khalid Al-Saleh urged mothers to check their children for early symptoms of cancer, noting that the recovery rate

could reach over 80 percent in cases of early detection. The statement came as CAN representatives, along with Kuwait Social Association and Kuwait Society for Preventing Cancer and Smoking, visited cancer patients at Kuwait Cancer Control Center (KCCC) and National Bank of Kuwait Children Hospital in the presence of CAN representatives Dr Suad Al-Hawal, Dr Adel Al-Fahad and Dr Bader Al-Mishal.

Saleh congratulated workers in the health sector and patients on Eid Al-Adha and lauded their

role in society. He lauded the mothers who are the closest to the children and have the responsibility to check the primary symptoms in cancer cases. He called for changing children's lifestyles to ensure they stay away from cancer risk factors.

He said there are around 160 new pediatric cancer cases every year, the most common of which is leukemia, which makes up 40 percent of total cases, followed by brain cancer. Team leader Dr Al-Hawal said the visit on the second day of Eid was successful, with volunteers distributing gifts and flowers.

Zain celebrates Kuwait's top students at annual event

Company honors students in 4 categories



KUWAIT: Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan addresses the students.



Eaman Al-Roudhan and Dr Ghanim Al-Suleimani are seen with students.



KUWAIT: Zain recognized Kuwait's top high school students at its headquarters in Shuwaikh during the company's annual event that welcomed them and their families to celebrate their exceptional achievements. The ceremony was attended by Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan and the Ministry of Education's Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Development and Activities, Dr Ghanim Al-Suleimani.

At the end of every academic year, and as soon as the official results are unveiled by the Ministry of Education, Zain holds a special ceremony to recognize Kuwait's top performers who excel in their high school journey. This year, Zain honored top graduates in four categories: top graduates nationwide (sciences and humanities), top Kuwaiti graduates (sciences and humanities), top graduates of Religious Education, as well as top graduates of Special Education (sciences and humanities).

Addressing the students and their families, Roudhan said: "I'm happy to welcome you all to Zain's Wonderful World. Seeing you today with big smiles upon your faces and your parents' faces is a source of joy for us all at Zain and the entire nation." Roudhan congratulated the graduates by saying: "I applaud you for your exceptional achievements, and I'm sure that all of Kuwait is proud of you. Today we gather to celebrate and honor you for excelling in your studies, and we extend our congratulations to your esteemed families too."

"We not only extend congratulations to you and your parents, but to all of Kuwait for bringing forth such an exceptional group of brilliant young people. The number of top graduates this academic year, from studies of both sciences and humanities, is enough proof of the advancement of self-learning tools and modern scientific research, helped by the rapid growth of advanced technologies," Roudhan added.



Eaman Al-Roudhan and Dr Ghanim Al-Suleimani are seen with the honored students.

"Sources of information, references, notes, journals, and more are now easily and abundantly accessible online more than ever. I believe that this requires the redesign of the educational process, and the way students are evaluated across academic levels, so that they are built on the ability to self-learn and conduct scientific research in place of traditional methods. This is especially true with the rapid spread of emerging technologies like AI," Roudhan pointed out.

Roudhan went on to say: "We as parents, MOE

and government officials, private sector representatives, and the entire Kuwaiti community trust in our capabilities and skills in leading the future of our nation, Arab World, and the Islamic World." "We hope that our recognition today will drive your passion to achieve the best for this nation, because nations are built upon the dedication of their youth. And it is the duty of each and every one of us to give back the best we can to this nation that gave us so much," Roudhan added.

The CEO noted: "These words are for all our dear

students, even those who will leave to their motherlands to start college. You all are the children of this nation, and Kuwait will continue to embrace its youth, and the youth of the entire Arab World," Roudhan affirmed the importance of the next phase: "Now, the most important stage of your academic life lies ahead. You'll notice how colleges and universities will compete for your attention, and whether you choose to go with a local or international school, always remember to pick the studies that centers around your passion in life."

She further advised the students: "I advise you to try and stay away from traditional majors whose graduates cannot be accommodated by the market. It is also crucial to choose the courses and electives that strengthen your life skills, such as history, time management, and change management. The world today is going through massive strategic changes that will affect the way people learn."

Roudhan concluded by saying: "Last but not least, I'd like to share a word of gratitude and congratulations to all parents with us here. Your children (who are Kuwait's children) would not have reached this level of excellence without your care and support. I wish you all the best with even more achievements in their personal and professional lives."

As a leading national company, Zain firmly believes in the importance of contributing to the progress of the education sector and looks to empower and prepare the youth for the important roles they will play in the future of the country. Zain is fully committed to supporting young people in their development through a wide variety of community activities and programs, including award programs, educational programs, and career development initiatives. The company's solid social strategy is what drives it to continue being committed to support all sectors.



Medical, education majors most popular at Kuwait University

KUWAIT: Kuwait University set up a kiosk at the Avenues Mall as part of an awareness campaign launched Sunday under the patronage and in the presence of the Acting Director of Kuwait University Dr Fahad Al-Rashidi, to introduce students to the admission and registration requirements for the academic year 2023-2024.

"Every high school graduate with a final result of 70 percent or more in science and 78 percent or more in the arts stream is able to apply at Kuwait

University," Rashidi said in a statement. Acting Dean of Admission and Registration Dr Roaa Al-Jarallah, pointed out that although students have different interests, a few popular majors stand out.

"There is a strong desire for medical specialties in general, whether the Faculty of Medicine, dentistry or pharmacy. Demand for them is very large due to limited seats, so the competition is most intense in these colleges. There is also demand for the College of Education, whether in scientific or literary disciplines," she said.

She added that the answers the university is providing to students who come to the booth at the Avenues are based on the Civil Service Commission's study of the labor market and based on the study of the planning department at Kuwait University in the private and public sectors.

The university is also working on helping students

According to the scheduled flights, the total number of flights dedicated to the return of pilgrims from Saudi Arabia amounts to about 40 flights taking pilgrims from both Jeddah and Madinah. The DGCA has worked out an integrated plan to facilitate procedures for the returning devotees.

It confirmed its preparations to receive the returning pilgrims in cooperation with the concerned government agencies, headed by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Awqaf, the General Administration of Customs and airlines, as well as ground service providers.

No serious violations recorded

The Director of the Hajj Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Sattam Al-Muzayin, confirmed that this year's hajj season was distinguished by all standards in terms of voyage, delivery and entry of pilgrims, praising the efforts of the Saudi authorities in providing everything needed by pilgrims and all Kuwaiti government agencies participating in the hajj mission.



Strategic alternative payroll system still under deliberation

KUWAIT: A government project to overhaul the public sector's payroll system remains under deliberation and still needs to be completed in order to serve the interests of the state and national economy, Finance Minister Manaf Al-Hajeri said on Saturday, noting that rumors currently circulated on social media regarding public sector salaries are "inaccurate" and "unrealistic."

The project known as the strategic alternative payroll system was initially proposed for the purpose of achieving equality among public sector employees and turn state departments into productivity, the minister said. The system seeks to achieve equality in payment and a new performance assessment system based on the employees' actual productivity. Without the evaluation system, the project will not achieve its target of encouraging productivity among public sector employees, said the minister.

Furthermore, the government wants to make sure that the project would not result in national manpower refusing work in the private sector "which is already struggling today because of lack of interest from a large number of young people due to its long working hours and focus on productivity in staff assessment," he said.

Efforts to implement the strategic payroll alternative system must not hinder the state's financial sustainability and government's ability to launch major projects, he further noted.



Manaf Al-Hajeri

Kuwaiti pilgrims return from Saudi Arabia on 40 flights

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti pilgrims started on Saturday returning home after concluding the rituals at the sacred places in Saudi Arabia. The first flight bringing the pilgrims back home touched down at Kuwait International Airport at 9:35 am on Saturday. A Saudi airways plane arrived at terminal T-1 with 330 pilgrims on board, said Mansour Al-Hashemi, the director of operations at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), in a statement to KUNA. A total of 25 flights for the returning pilgrims are scheduled for Sunday. They are set to fly back 8,135 pilgrims, Al-Hashemi added.

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KUWAIT: Pilgrims arrive at Kuwait International Airport after performing hajj. — KUNA

Al-Muzayin said: "Coordination was made with the security authorities to enter the roof of Mount Arafat for the first time, which caused great comfort for pilgrims, as 3 hours were allocated for them to enter from 9 am to 12

noon." Al-Muzayin also pointed out that simple observations were recorded and resolved with some campaigns that were remedied immediately, and no serious violations were recorded this year. — Agencies

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News in Brief

46 violators of residence law
caught in Assima, Farwaniya

KUWAIT: Officials with the General Directorate of Residency Affairs Investigations have arrested 46 people who have been found in violation of Residence and Labor Law in Farwaniya and Al-Assima governorates, the Ministry of Interior announced Sunday. The violators were caught for a variety of reasons, including not having proof of valid residency, absconding, having an expired residency permit or entry visa and begging. The ministry said in a statement that they have been referred to the concerned authorities for further legal action.

Two men die after
colliding with tree

KUWAIT: An Egyptian man driving a four-wheel drive vehicle has died, along with his companion in the passenger seat, after their vehicle collided with a tree on the fourth ring road opposite Andalus area. Ambulance, police patrols and investigators moved to the scene of the accident, and the body of the driver of the vehicle was removed upon the detective's order, while the passenger was taken to the hospital but died while receiving treatment.

Violations issued against
138 labor recruitment offices

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has affirmed that it is working seriously to diversify its domestic labor recruitment markets, in coordination with the concerned authorities at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to arrange and facilitate procedures for signing memorandums of understanding with countries wishing to send domestic workers to Kuwait. "There are 428 labor recruitment offices and companies that have a license from the authority, a good number of them, around 138, have had violations recorded against them during the past year," said a spokesperson with the authority. They added that the authority is intensifying its supervisory role by increasing the frequency of inspections carried out by inspectors of the Domestic Workers Inspection department. The authority said it will be creating an awareness campaign to educate employers and recruitment-office administrators about their rights.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A boy touches the horns of a ram before it is slaughtered early on the first day of the Muslim feast of Eid Al-Adha on June 28, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

How some vegan Muslims celebrate Eid Al-Adha

Abstaining from animal products doesn't stop some from taking part in slaughter rituals

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: For many, Eid Al-Adha represents a special occasion to get together with family and relatives around feasts and barbecue parties with dishes in which meat is the main ingredient, after the ritual slaughter of sheep, goats or cows. However, vegans, who abstain from consuming animal products, try to approach Eid Al-Adha differently.

For Muhammad Rassem, the days of Eid Al-Adha are the toughest among all days of the year, but he chooses to focus on the religious and cultural aspects while abstaining from consuming meat. "I celebrate Eid and pray while enjoying the religious and traditional parts, but to avoid the slaughter ritual, I sometimes try to spend Eid in a chalet away from the hustle and bustle of the city

until the days of Eid are over," he said.

On the other hand, Abdullah Wael told Kuwait Times the rituals associated with Eid Al-Adha do not bother him. "I understand that this is a religious ritual, and I have never had any problems with my family or my surroundings," he noted. During the days of Eid, he prefers not to attend the rituals of sacrifice and wakes up late. Later, he visits his family to congratulate them on Eid and spends some time with them, then returns home without sharing any food.

Some vegans celebrate Eid by preparing plant-based meals. "Sharing vegan meals can help vegans to be involved in the community rather than being hated by everyone. It makes it easy for me to enjoy the Eid atmosphere while avoiding animal products," Rima Abu Qaoud said. Qaoud used the occasion of Eid al-Adha to promote compassion

towards animals, but still participated in all the rituals, including attending the slaughtering of sheep, pointing out this occasion has religious and historical symbolism for Muslims. "My being a vegetarian and not eating meat does not contradict in any way with Eid," she said.

Mohamed Chibani said the past two years were among the best due to the strict precautionary measures imposed because of COVID on everyone, which prevented the slaughter of animals. "The number of people eating meat has increased recently in the Middle East, which has environmental repercussions due to greenhouse gas emissions, usually by food industries and livestock farms, resulting in climate changes that we suffer from. It was one of the reasons that drove me to become a vegan," he explained.



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GAZA: Volunteers prepare slaughtered animals for distribution to Palestinian families in need. — KUNA photos

Kuwaiti charities assist Palestinians, Egyptians on Eid

GAZA/CAIRO: Palestine's Al-Wea'am Charitable Society handed out tens of sacrifice animals, funded by several Kuwaiti charities, to thousands of Palestinian families. Speaking to KUNA in a statement, head of the society Mohammad Abu Marie said the project received financial support from charities, including the International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO), the International Mercy Association, Namaa Charitable Society and the Global Charity Association for Development (Tanmia) in Kuwait.

Tens of sacrifice animals provided by Kuwaiti philanthropists were slaughtered to be given to thousands of needy Palestinian families in the Gaza Strip, he added. Kuwait and its national institutions are among the first countries which respond rapidly to relief calls launched by Gaza's institutions in light of the soaring prices of sacrifice, he noted. Abu Marie thanked Kuwait, His Highness the Amir, the government and Kuwaitis for this support.

Kuwait has also funded sacrifice animals in Cairo, according to KUNA. The Kuwait Office for Charitable Projects in Cairo, part of the Kuwaiti Zakat House, announced the distribution of sacrificial meat in some Egyptian governorates on the occasion of Eid al-Adha.

Director of the office Sarah Al-Mutairi said it distributed 10 tons of sacrificial meat through charities

accredited by the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity and registered with the office. The charities are also recognized by the humanitarian work system at the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry.

"Sacrificial meat is distributed to the most vulnerable groups and the neediest families in 18 different areas of the governorates of lower and upper Egypt," said Mutairi, stressing that the continuation of such charitable activities contributes to the consolidation of the relationship between the two countries and their peoples.

The Kuwait Office for Charitable Projects in Cairo distributed the sacrifice meat as part of the "Adhahi Project", which is one of the most important social service projects that achieve social solidarity in Egypt for 36 consecutive years. — KUNA



CAIRO: A man receives a donation bag from an official with the Kuwait Office for Charitable Projects in Cairo as part of their "Adhahi Project".



HK leader warns of 'resistance' on handover 'versary

Mike Pence, Liz Truss back exiled Iran opposition group

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WAD RAWAH: Citizens ride the Nile Ferry, also known as al-Bantoun, as it resumes operations following a prolonged interruption in the city of Wad Rawah. — AFP

Fighting shakes Khartoum as displaced battle disease

Injured are unable to reach hospitals and bodies lie rotting in the streets

Kenya in shock as road crash toll hits 52



LONDIANI: This video grab taken from an AFPTV video shows the wreckage of a vehicle on the scene after an accident on the highway between the towns of Kericho and Nakuru. — AFP

NAIROBI: The death toll from a horrific road crash in western Kenya rose to 52 on Saturday, officials said, as rescuers worked to clear the wreckage from one of the deadliest traffic accidents in the country in recent years.

A truck carrying a shipping container veered out of control and ploughed into multiple other vehicles and people thronging a busy roadside junction on Friday evening, plunging the nation into shock and mourning.

Erick Mutai, governor of Kericho county where the accident occurred, gave an updated death toll of 52 and said it included 31 men, 18 women and two children. Transport Minister Kipchumba Murkomen said during a visit to the crash site at Londiani junction that new safety measures would be introduced after what he described as a "terrible" and "painful" tragedy.

"Investigations have been launched to establish the cause of this accident but we urge drivers to be cautious and follow the rules," he told reporters. In a later statement, he also gave a death toll of 52 and said 32 people had been injured, adding that the truck involved was registered in Rwanda.

Kenyan station Citizen TV reported that the vehicle's driver had died, but this could not be immediately confirmed independently. The trailer rammed into private cars, minibuses, boda bodas (motorcycle taxis) and market stalls on the side of a busy highway between the lakeside town of Nakuru and Kericho, an area known for its lush tea plantations.

Footage late Friday showed the mangled wreckage of multiple vehicles as rescuers worked in the dark under pouring rain and ambulance sirens wailed. On Saturday, large crowds of onlookers were at the scene, where the overturned container was stuck in a ditch, debris was strewn across a wide area, including car seats, piles of fruit, a damaged axle and a lone black boot. "The accident happened in a flash, many of them had no time to escape," said one witness, Joel Rotich. "There was a lot of confusion because people were screaming all over and everyone was running after the accident."

Kenyan leaders including President William Ruto expressed their condolences, along with African Union Commission chief Moussa Faki Mahamat. "My prayers and thoughts go to the families affected by the Londiani road tragedy, with wishes for a full recovery to the injured," Faki tweeted. — AFP

KHARTOUM: Fierce fighting between the forces of rival generals shook the Sudanese capital Khartoum on Sunday as disease and malnutrition threatened the rising number of displaced. A Khartoum resident said he was shaken from sleep by "violent fighting in which various weapons were used". Another said he was awakened by warplanes.

Battles since mid-April between forces loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have killed nearly 3,000 people. Another 2.2 million have been forced from their homes inside the country while almost 645,000 have fled across borders for safety, according to the International Organization for Migration.

"The situation is grave," the medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said in a statement detailing the hardships of displaced Sudanese stuck in nine camps in White Nile State which borders South Sudan.

In addition to the capital, the worst fighting has been in the western region of Darfur where residents, as well as the United Nations, United States and others, say civilians have been targeted and killed for their ethnicity by the RSF and allied Arab militias.

The death toll is believed to be much higher than recorded, as the World Health Organization says

about two-thirds of health facilities are "out of service" in combat-affected areas. Many injured are unable to reach hospitals and bodies lie rotting in the streets of Khartoum and Darfur.

A record 25 million people in Sudan need humanitarian aid and protection, the UN says. "Hundreds of thousands of people, most of them women and children" pack those camps that stretch out from the south of Khartoum all the way to the border with South Sudan, MSF said.

"There are suspected cases of measles, and malnutrition among children has become a vital health emergency. "From June 6 to 7 we treated 223 children with suspected measles, 72 were hospitalized and 13 have died," MSF said. The war has smashed the country's already fragile infrastructure, leaving residents short of water and electricity in the oppressive heat. Numerous ceasefires, including some negotiated by the United States and Saudi Arabia, have failed to hold. Fighting continued during the just-ended Eid Al-Adha holiday for which the warring sides announced separate unilateral truces.

The worsening situation in Darfur is a bleak reminder of the region's painful history. In 2003, former strongman Omar Al-Bashir armed and unleashed the

RSF's predecessor, the Janjaweed militia, against Darfur's non-Arab ethnic minorities in violence that killed more than 300,000 and displaced 2.5 million.

The International Criminal Court charged Bashir and others with genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. A UN official has warned of possible new "crimes against humanity" from the current fighting in Darfur. Dozens of women have been sexually abused in Darfur and elsewhere, a government unit monitoring such offences has said. In Nyala, capital of South Darfur, at least 25 "conflict-related sexual assaults" were recorded, in addition to 21 in El Geneina, capital of West Darfur, and 42 in Khartoum. Most survivors in Khartoum, and "all in Nyala and Geneina" identified perpetrators as RSF fighters, the unit said.

In early June, Darfur governor and ex-rebel leader Mini Minawi, who is now close to the army, declared Darfur a "disaster zone". Aid organizations are repeating their appeals to the warring sides to open up secure corridors to allow them to reach the injured and those displaced by the fighting.

These appeals have taken on increased urgency with the start of the rainy season in Sudan, usually accompanied by floods that bring water-borne disease. — AFP

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International

Bosnia envoy cancels Serb laws defying peace deal

British, US embassies issued statements supporting Schmidt's move

SARAJEVO: Bosnia's international peace overseer Christian Schmidt on Saturday cancelled controversial rulings by the country's Serb parliament that defy a peace deal that ended the country's civil war. "The recent decisions taken by the Assembly of Republika Srpska represent a direct violation of the constitutional order of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and also of the Dayton peace agreement," Schmidt told journalists in Sarajevo.

The role of Schmidt as the International High Representative is to ensure compliance with the Dayton peace accord. On Tuesday, lawmakers in Bosnia's Serb parliament voted to suspend rulings made by the Constitutional Court, further inflaming ethnic tensions in the deeply divided country.

It was the latest in a series of inflammatory political moves engineered by Bosnia's Serb leader Milorad Dodik, who has long campaigned for secession from central institutions. On June 21, the Serb parliament

also adopted a law designed to bypass decisions taken by Schmidt. Schmidt, a German politician, used his special powers under the Dayton agreement to cancel the Serb entity's two recent decisions, which had provoked strong reactions particularly from Bosnian Muslim leaders.

Some of those leaders viewed them as a direct threat to peace in Bosnia. The Serb entity's initiatives have also been criticised by Washington, Paris and Berlin. On Saturday, the British and US embassies in Sarajevo both issued statements supporting Schmidt's move. "The United States supports the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and multi-ethnic character of Bosnia and Herzegovina and will continue to hold individuals engaged in anti-Dayton behaviour responsible for their actions," said the US embassy in Sarajevo.

"The action taken by Republika Srpska authorities is a clear and blatant attempt to challenge the framework and stability of

this country," said a statement from the UK ambassador to Sarajevo, Julian Reilly.

Dodik -- who remains a Kremlin ally -- has held enormous sway over Bosnia's Serb entity for years and has repeatedly stoked ethnic tensions. Even before Saturday's ruling was announced, Dodik declared that no decision of the International High Representative would be respected. "We are not prepared to bow our heads. The RS will not accept any decision by the false High Representative", declared Dodik. Bosnia has had a dysfunctional administrative system created by the 1995 Dayton peace agreement that succeeded in ending the Balkan conflict.

Under the peace agreement, Bosnia has been divided into two bodies -- a Muslim-Croat federation and a Serb entity, known as Republika Srpska. The two are connected by a weak central government. Three foreign judges serve on Bosnia's Constitutional Court along with two Croats, two Muslims and two Serbs. — AFP



SARAJEVO: Christian Schmidt, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, speaks during a news conference held by the Office of the High Representative (OHR) as he announces his decision to intervene into criminal laws and Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. — AFP

Mike Pence, Liz Truss back exiled Iran oppn group

PARIS: Former US vice president Mike Pence and British ex-prime minister Liz Truss on Saturday gave their backing to an exiled Iran opposition movement, slamming Western "appeasement" of Iran's clerical authorities. They addressed a meeting outside Paris of the People's Mujahedin (MEK) group outlawed by Tehran, as thousands of supporters of the group staged a rally in the centre of the French capital that had initially been banned by the police.

The MEK and its political wing the National

Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) are far from having universal support among the Iranian diaspora but are backed by several high-profile former US and European officials.

Pence, vice president under Donald Trump who is now seeking to challenge his former boss for the Republican nomination, told a conference in Auvers-sur-Oise outside Paris that the "Iranian regime has never been weaker than it is today" in the wake of the protest movement that erupted in September.

"This is not just another protest but the beginning of a revolution for freedom," he said, adding: "One of the biggest lies the ruling regime has sold to the world is that there is no alternative." "No oppressive regime can last forever," said Pence who addressed the meeting in person and last year met the MEK's leader Maryam Rajavi at its headquarters in Albania.

"We are seeing a rising threat from authoritari-

an regimes across the world," said Truss, Britain's shortest term prime minister, pointing to the China of Xi Jinping and Russia of Vladimir Putin. "These regimes have been emboldened as the free world has not done enough. I will never give up hope for a free and democratic Iran."

"Democracy is under threat around the world. Now is the time to turn our backs on accommodation and appeasement," she said. Trump's former secretary of state Mike Pompeo, another prominent supporter of the group, also warned by video link against making any new deal with Tehran on its nuclear drive saying it would be a "calamity for the Iranian people and the world".

Other prominent MEK supporters present included former Canadian premier Stephen Harper and ex-Belgian prime minister and prominent MEP Guy Verhofstadt. "Appeasement towards the mullahs' re-

gime may lead to more bloodshed among our people," Rajavi told the meeting, while adding it would "be futile in protecting" supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei "from his inevitable downfall." Paris police had angered the group last week by saying their rally had been banned because of the risk of tensions with other Iranian factions and the danger of an attack.

But the Paris administrative court overturned the ban, which the MEK had said was an example of Western "appeasement" towards Iran. Thousands gathered in Place Vauban in the centre of Paris for the rally, with supporters coming from all corners of Europe.

"We don't want the mullahs' regime or the shah's regime. The Iranians don't want to go backwards. We are moving towards democracy," said supporter Massoumeh Raouf, who said she was a former political prisoner in Iran. — AFP

Zionist entity's air strikes hit targets in Syria

DAMASCUS: Zionist entity carried out air strikes in Syria near the government-held city of Homs, Syrian state media reported on Sunday, and the Zionist army later said it struck an anti-aircraft battery after rocket fire.

A war monitor said the Homs-area strikes killed a member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. During

more than a decade of war in Syria, Zionist entity has launched hundreds of air raids on Syrian territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters as well as Syrian army positions.

"The Zionist enemy carried out air strikes coming from the northeast of Beirut, targeting some points in the vicinity of the city of Homs," which is about 20 kilometres (12 miles) from Lebanon, Syrian state-run news agency SANA said, quoting a military source.

SANA reported that Syrian air defences intercepted some missiles, and that there had been some "material" losses. In a brief statement early Sunday that did not mention the air strikes, Zionist's army said a Syrian anti-aircraft rocket "appears to have exploded in the air over Zionist territory".

Several hours later the military said it had targeted

"an anti-aircraft battery in Syria, as a response to the launch of an anti-aircraft rocket from Syria into Zionist territory". It added that Zionist entity's jets had also "struck additional targets in the area", and that no injuries were reported from the Syrian missile.

Zionist media showed pictures purportedly from a piece of the missile about 1.5 metres (yards) in length which landed in Rahat. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said the strikes targeted "Hezbollah sites and ammunition depots" on the north-eastern outskirts of Homs, killing one member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and wounding four others. Iran has long backed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government in the country's years-long civil war, but says it has no troops in Syria, only IRGC military advisers. Zionist strikes in Syria killed

two Revolutionary Guards in late March.

Along with Hezbollah, Assad is backed by Russian forces and has clawed back much of the ground lost early in Syria's conflict which erupted in 2011 when the regime brutally repressed pro-democracy protests. Zionist's latest strikes also targeted an air defence base in Qadmus, in Tartus province northwest of Homs, said the Observatory, which has a wide network of sources inside Syria. Zionist entity rarely comments on the strikes it carries out on Syria, but it has repeatedly said it will not allow its arch foe Iran to expand its footprint there.

On June 14, Zionist carried out air strikes near Damascus wounding a soldier, according to SANA. The Observatory, based in Britain, said at the time that the strikes had targeted arms depots belonging to pro-Iran fighters. — AFP

Anger seethes in France...

Continued from Page 1

hotspot, following calls on social media to take the rioting to the heart of the city. The massive police presence helped keep the violence in check, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said. "A calmer night thanks to the resolute action of the security forces," he tweeted early Sunday.

But Paris police chief Laurent Nunez cautioned on BFM television that "No one is declaring victory". In Marseille, which has seen intense clashes and looting, police dispersed groups of youths Saturday evening at Canebiere, the main avenue running through the center of the city, AFP journalists said. The protests present a fresh crisis for Macron, who had been hoping to press on with the pledges of his second term after seeing off months of protests that erupted in January over raising the retirement age.

He postponed a state visit to Germany scheduled to begin Sunday, in a sign of the gravity of the situation in France. "We are of course looking at (the

riots) with concern, and I very much hope, and I am certainly convinced, that the French president will find ways to ensure that this situation improves quickly," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told broadcaster ARD. Macron was to head a crisis meeting Sunday with members of his government, according to the Elysee. In a bid to limit the violence, buses and trams in France have stopped running after 9:00 pm and the sale of large fireworks and inflammable liquids has been banned. Marseille has stopped all urban transport from 6:00 pm.

Macron has urged parents to take responsibility for underage rioters, one-third of whom were "young or very young". Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti said Saturday that 30 percent of those arrested were minors, while Darmanin said the average age of those arrested was just 17. The unrest has raised concerns abroad, with France hosting the Rugby World Cup in the autumn and the Paris Olympic Games in the summer of 2024. Culture and entertainment have been disrupted, with singer Mylene Farmer calling off stadium concerts and French fashion house Celine cancelling its Paris menswear show. A 38-year-old policeman has been charged with voluntary homicide over Nahel's death and has been remanded in custody. — AFP

mass of visible and dark matter along the way, a phenomenon known as weak gravitational lensing. "By subtracting the visible matter, we can calculate the presence of the dark matter which is in between," Racca told AFP.

While this may not reveal the true nature of dark matter, scientists hope it will throw up new clues that will help track it down in the future. As for dark energy, French astrophysicist David Elbaz compared the expansion of the universe to blowing up a balloon with lines drawn on it. By "seeing how fast it inflates," scientists hope to measure the breath — or dark energy — making it expand.

A major difference between Euclid and other space telescopes is its wide field of view, which takes in an area equivalent to two full moons. Project scientist Rene Laureijs said that this wider view means Euclid will be able to "surf the sky and find exotic objects," like black holes, that the Webb telescope can then investigate in greater detail. Beyond dark energy and matter, Euclid's map of the universe is expected to be a "gold mine for the whole field of astronomy," said Yannick Mellier, head of the Euclid consortium.

Scientists hope Euclid's data will help them learn more about the evolution of galaxies, black holes and more. "We are trying to determine something that escapes us enormously: dark matter, dark energy," Marc Sauvage, a member of the Euclid consortium, told AFP. The first images are expected once scientific operations start in October, with major data releases planned for 2025, 2027 and 2030.

The €1.4 billion (\$1.5 billion) mission is intended to run until 2029, but could last a little longer if all goes well. Over the next few years, NASA also plans to launch the Nancy Grace Roman space telescope, its own project to study dark matter and dark energy. The two missions will complement each other, said Sauvage. — AFP

Twitter restricts number of posts...

Continued from Page 1

"Almost every company doing AI, from startups to some of the biggest corporations on Earth, was scraping vast amounts of data," he said. "It is rather galling to have to bring large numbers of servers online on an emergency basis just to facilitate some AI

Kuwait launches central college...

Continued from Page 1

in its first stage this year, and in subsequent stages will gradually complete the entire infrastructure, pointing out this has become an imperative necessity.

Secretary-General of the Council of Public Universities Dr Adel Al-Mane said: "Based on the directives of Minister Al-Adwani, work has begun to implement the first phase of the central admission portal between Kuwait University and

Hamas publicly displays arms...

Continued from Page 1

Exhibitions are also scheduled to take place on Saturday in the north and center of the Gaza Strip, where people are normally forbidden to approach and photograph military sites. At the entrance to the Gaza City exhibition a banner welcomed visitors, some of whom had come with their families and children, an AFP correspondent said. Dozens of uniformed Al-Qassam Brigades members were on hand.

A young boy in fatigues and wearing a green Brigades headband smiled for the cameras as a man propped a rocket launcher on his shoulder. Another held the controls of an anti-aircraft gun as young men posed in front of a display of rockets on stands. "I came with my family to take photos with the weapons and reinforce the spirit of resistance in our children," said Gaza resident Abu Mohammed Abu Shakian.

The exhibition is "encouraging and means that the liberation of our land is near", added Shahadeh Dalou, who also came with his children. Bassam Darwish, 58, said people wanted to show their support for the Al-Qassam Brigades. "Everyone is happy and proud of the Al-Qassam exhibition. We are here because we're proud of the resistance," he said. Around

startup's outrageous valuation."

Twitter is not the only social media giant to have to wrangle with the rapid acceleration of the AI sector. In mid-June, Reddit raised prices on third-party developers that were using its data and sweeping up conversations posted on its forums. It proved a controversial move, as many regular users also accessed the site via third-party platforms, and marked a shift from previous arrangements where social media data had generally been provided for free or a small charge. — AFP

Abdullah Al Salem University, where graduates of high school and its equivalents can submit applications for admission to these two universities from July 15 until 26 through the unified electronic portal of the two universities."

Mane explained that the method of selecting majors by applicants to the two universities will appear to each student according to their average score and according to the results of preadmission tests, if any, and the extent to which the applicant meets the conditions. The applicant is allowed to select all the specializations available to them, whether at Kuwait University or Abdullah Al Salem University, in the order chosen by the student. — KUNA

Space telescope targets universe's...

Continued from Page 1

"We will unravel the mysteries of the Dark Universe," Mundell said. Scientists hope to use information gathered by Euclid to address what project manager Giuseppe Racca calls a "cosmic embarrassment": that 95 percent of the universe remains unknown to humanity. Around 70 percent is thought to be made of dark energy, the name given to the unknown force that is causing the universe to expand at an accelerated rate. And 25 percent is dark matter, thought to bind the universe together and make up around 80 percent of its mass.

"Ever since we could see stars we've wondered, is the universe infinite? What is it made out of? How does it work?" NASA Euclid project scientist Michael Seiffert told AFP. "It's just absolutely amazing that we can take data and actually start to make even a little bit of progress on some of these questions."

Euclid consortium member Guadalupe Canas told a press conference ahead of the launch that the space telescope was a "dark detective" which can reveal more about both elements. Euclid, which is 4.7 m tall and 3.5 m wide, will use two scientific instruments to map the sky. Its visible light camera will let it measure the shape of galaxies, while its near-infrared spectrometer and photometer will allow it to measure how far away they are.

So how will Euclid try to spot things that cannot be seen? By searching for their absence. The light coming from billions of light years away is slightly distorted by the



GAZA: A Palestinian boy poses for a souvenir picture with an RPG launcher during an exhibition by the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, in Gaza City on June 30, 2023. — AFP

2.3 million Palestinians live in the impoverished Gaza Strip which has been under a crippling Zionist-led blockade since Hamas seized power in 2007. The Zionist entity and Palestinian militant groups in Gaza have fought several wars since. — AFP

International

HK leader warns of 'resistance' on handover anniversary

Hong Kong is still being targeted by countries that oppose China's rise

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's leader said the city must guard against "destructive forces engaging in soft resistance" as it marked the 26th anniversary of its handover from British to Chinese rule on Saturday. Britain ceded the long-time colony to China in 1997 under a 50-year governance model known as "one country, two systems", which guaranteed key freedoms and a measure of autonomy.

These rights — such as the freedom of assembly — set Hong Kong apart from the mainland, and July 1 was once a day of demonstrations for the city's outspoken civil society. But following huge and sometimes violent pro-democracy protests in 2019, China imposed a sweeping national security law that — when combined with legal changes putting "patriots" in charge — effectively stamped out most forms of dissent from Hong Kong life. On Saturday, ex-security chief turned leader John Lee said Hong Kong was "largely stable" now, but was still being targeted by countries that oppose China's rise. "There are also destructive forces engaging in soft resistance hidden within Hong Kong," Lee said during a speech at an event marking the anniversary. "Therefore, we must remain alert and take the initiative ourselves to protect national security." He also said the finance hub — whose economy was pummeled by pandemic-related border closures that left it internationally isolated — was on the "fast lane to resuming normality".

"Over the past year, the government has led Hong Kong out from the shadow of the pandemic, cultivating confidence and hope amid a difficult experience," Lee said, adding that he expected GDP to grow "around 3.5 to 5.5 percent" in 2023.

Responsible for spearheading Hong Kong's security response to the 2019 protests, Lee was sworn in as the city's leader on July 1 last year after running for the post unopposed and with Beijing's backing. Hong Kong stuck with China's zero-COVID strategy for nearly three years, even as other economies were reopening, with strict pandemic curbs hurting businesses and sparking a talent exodus.

Still, health experts said the city saw some of the world's highest coronavirus death rates — mostly due to low vaccination, especially among the jab-hesitant elderly — when the super-contagious Omicron variant breached its defences in late 2021.

Activists warned

The quiet streets of Hong Kong on Saturday were a far cry from previous years, when hundreds of thousands of residents would take part in a march to air their political and social grievances. Police said they received no applications for public processions on Saturday. Local media reported that more than 6,000 police officers were deployed around the city to ensure order. Five activists told AFP that they were "reminded" by authorities



HONG KONG: People attend a carnival at Victoria Park to celebrate the 26th anniversary of the city's handover from Britain to China, in Hong Kong. — AFP

not to stage any protests on July 1 or in the lead-up to the anniversary.

The conversations took place in police stations and were brief, said two of the activists, who requested anonymity due to fear of reprisals. An elderly man who held up a placard in the Causeway Bay shopping district calling for the release of political prisoners was quickly surrounded by police and escorted away on Saturday afternoon.

"I would feel uncomfortable if I hadn't come out (to protest)," he told reporters.

Since the national security law took effect, scores of opposition figures have been jailed, disqualified from office or have moved abroad. Critics, including many Western powers, say Beijing has effectively discarded its promise to maintain Hong Kong's autonomy. But both mainland and Hong Kong officials have defended the security law and legal changes as necessary to restore order and insist that civil liberties remain intact. Local officials, meanwhile, have

tried to project a celebratory mood for the anniversary by offering restaurant discounts, museum ticket giveaways and free public transport. A visitor from mainland China who gave her surname as Liang said she felt Hong Kong was on the upswing, adding that the city retained its appeal as a shopping and cultural hub. "It's very packed everywhere and people feel festive," said Liang, who was in the queue at a contemporary art museum. —AFP

UN chief calls on world to make Haiti 'top priority'

PORT-AU-PRINCE: On a visit to spotlight violence and chaos in Haiti, the UN secretary-general on Saturday called for a robust international effort to help the country's beleaguered police in fighting rampant criminal gangs. For months, Antonio Guterres has raised the alarm bell about the situation in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, which has been wracked by spiralling violence, a worsening public health situation and political instability.

But he traveled to Port-au-Prince — his first visit to Haiti as head of the United Nations — to make his point on the ground. "We must put Haiti on the international political map, and make the tragedy of the Haitian people the international community's top priority," Guterres told a press conference. "I met Haitians, and I felt the exhaustion of a population that has been facing a cascade of crises and unbearable living conditions for too long," he said. "This is not the time to forget about Haiti," Guterres said after meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Henry, and other political and civil society leaders.

Guterres urged the UN Security Council, which is due to discuss the Haiti situation later this month, "to authorize the immediate deployment of a robust international security force." In October, he relayed Henry's request for a non-UN force to support the overwhelmed national po-



PORT-AU-PRINCE: Jean Victor Gueues, Haiti's Minister of Foreign Affairs, looks on as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks during a press conference in Port-au-Prince. — AFP

lice force. But the call has gone unheeded. A few countries have indicated their willingness to participate, but none has volunteered to lead an operation in a country where multiple past foreign interventions have become mired.

"I call on those states that have the capacity to provide a robust security force to stop hesitating and be ready to follow a Security Council decision," Guterres said. "Every day counts. If we don't act now, instability and violence will have a lasting impact on generations of Haitians."

'Widespread sexual violence'

UN officials in recent months have offered increasingly grim assessments of the impact of gang shootings, kidnappings and rapes on the Haitian population. "Port-au-Prince is surrounded by armed gangs

blocking the main roads leading to the northern and southern departments, controlling access to water, food and health care," Guterres said Saturday.

He condemned "in the strongest possible terms the widespread sexual violence used by armed gangs as a weapon to instill fear." Earlier in the week, UNICEF executive director Catherine Russell said after a trip to Port-au-Prince that the world was "failing the Haitian people."

She recounted the horrific story of an 11-year-old girl who was kidnapped by five men — and raped by three of them. "She was eight months pregnant when we spoke and gave birth just a few days later," Russell said, recalling that armed gangs control more than 60 percent of the capital and large swathes of the countryside.

Almost half the population, or 5.2 million people, are in need of humanitarian assistance, including almost three million children. No elections have been held since 2016, and Henry, appointed prime minister just days before the assassination of president Jovenel Moise in July 2021, faces questions about his legitimacy.

Guterres said he had "frank exchanges" with Henry and others about the "need for a political agreement to put an end to the crisis," without offering specifics. He called on civic leaders to "overcome their personal interests and make concessions in order to facilitate the emergence of a common vision and a viable and credible electoral path." After Haiti, Guterres travels to Trinidad and Tobago for a Caribbean Community (Caricom) summit, where issues surrounding Haiti will be discussed. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also will attend the summit. — AFP

25 dead after bus catches fire in India

MUMBAI: At least 25 people were killed and eight others injured in western India when a bus crashed and caught fire on an expressway early Saturday. The bus was travelling to the city of Pune when it hit a pole and overturned after midnight, causing its diesel tank to catch fire, senior police officer Baburao Mahamuni told AFP. "There were about 30 to 35 people in the bus. Twenty-five people have died and eight others are injured," he said. The injured have been admitted to a hospital near the site of the crash in Maharashtra state, about 400 kilometres (250 miles) east of India's financial capital Mumbai.

The driver and conductor of the bus were taken into custody for questioning, state rural development minister Girish Mahajan told reporters. "The driver is saying the tire of the bus burst, after which it hit a pole. But it seems he had dozed off. We will have to see what actually happened," he said.

Mahajan added that the bodies had been charred beyond recognition and forensic teams were on their way to help in identification. One of the survivors of the accident said he got out of the burning vehicle via a window. "The passenger seated next to me and I managed to escape by breaking the rear window," he told the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency.

"But not everyone could do it." A witness to the crash told PTI he unsuccessfully tried to help rescue passengers stuck inside the burning bus. "We saw people getting burnt alive," he said. "The fire was so intense that we could not do anything."

Dangerous roads

Police said they had launched an inquiry into the crash. "The priority at this moment is to identify the bodies and hand them over to their family members," local media quoted police superintendent Sunil Kadasane as saying. Images published in local media showed the bus engulfed in flames and later the charred remains of the vehicle overturned on the highway. Three children were among the dead, a police officer told reporters. "Deeply saddened by the devastating bus mishap in Buldhana," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Twitter. "My thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who lost their lives. May the injured recover soon."

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said he felt "deep grief" over the accident and pledged compensation of 500,000 rupees (\$6,100) to the families of those killed. Accidents are common on India's vast network of roads, which are poorly maintained and notoriously dangerous. The country accounts for 11 percent of the global road death toll despite having just one percent of the world's vehicles, according to a World Bank report released in 2021. The same report estimated 150,000 car crash fatalities in India annually, or one every four minutes. It added that road crashes cost the Indian economy around \$75 billion each year, with medical expenses and loss of income pushing many accident survivors into poverty. — AFP



DILI: East Timor's new Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao (left) takes an oath during his inauguration at the presidential palace in Dili. — AFP

E Timor's Gusmao returns to power

DILI: East Timor's first democratically elected head of state, Xanana Gusmao, returned to power on Saturday, eight years after he resigned as prime minister of Southeast Asia's youngest democracy. The 77-year-old independence icon was credited with unifying the country during his first two stints in office, after the bloody guerilla fight against Indonesian occupation. Gusmao's party, the opposition National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT), won May's election in a landslide, defeating the incumbent coalition led by resistance movement turned political party Fretilin.

Gusmao was chosen as premier again after CNRT allied with the Democratic Party to gain a majority in parliament. The son of teachers of Portuguese-Timorese descent, Gusmao grew up in what was then a Portuguese colony. He joined the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East

Timor (Fretilin) in 1975, fighting for independence first from Portugal and then Indonesia. Born Jose Alexandre Gusmao, he adopted the code name Xanana, reportedly in connection with a popular doo-wop song. He quickly rose through the ranks of the resistance and became leader of Fretilin's military wing, Falintil, in 1981, spending much of his life in the jungle with fellow fighters.

When he was captured by Indonesian forces in 1992, he continued to lead the struggle from jail in Jakarta. During his time in prison, he met his second wife through a correspondence. Australian aid worker Kirsty Sword was initially teaching Gusmao English via letters, but she snuck into the prison to meet him face to face.

Gusmao earned the moniker "poet warrior" during this stint behind bars when he was known to paint and write poetry. "He was a great resistance leader, he's great at unifying people," Damien Kingsbury, an emeritus professor at Melbourne's Deakin University, told AFP. "He obtained for CNRT at the last election the best result ever, he's a formidable political personality." — AFP

Pakistan Taleban kill 4 police in Balochistan attack

QUETTA: Four security officers were killed in a shootout in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province on Sunday, officials said, in an attack claimed by the Pakistan Taleban. About a dozen gunmen attacked policemen and paramilitary Frontier Constabulary officers at a highway checkpoint in Zhob district, prompting a two-hour gunbattle.

"Four of the security officials, including three policemen and one Frontier Corps officer, were killed in the attack. One of the suspected attackers has also been killed but not yet identified," Zhob's commissioner, Saeed Umrani, told AFP. Three others were wounded, officials said. The Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP) later claimed the attack in a statement, identifying the attacker shot dead by police. The TTP is separate from Afghanistan's Taleban but shares a similar ideology. Attacks, mostly targeting security forces, have been on the rise again since the Afghan Taleban seized control in Kabul in 2021 and a shaky months-long ceasefire between the TTP and Islamabad ended in November last year.

The assaults have been regular in regions abutting Afghanistan and Islamabad alleges some are being planned on Afghan soil. Four policemen in Kuchlak, Balochistan, were killed in April in a gunbattle with militants identified by police as being from the Pakistan Taleban. In January, a suicide bomber linked to the TTP blew himself up in a mosque inside a police compound in the northwestern city of Peshawar, killing more than 80 officers. — AFP



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Business

MONDAY, JULY 3, 2023

Germany's jobless rate inches up in June as recession bites

Falling energy prices push eurozone inflation down

FRANKFURT: Unemployment unexpectedly rose in Germany in June, official data showed Friday, in the latest sign of weakness in Europe's biggest economy.

The joblessness rate inched up to 5.7 percent after staying stable at 5.6 percent since March, seasonally adjusted figures from the BA federal labor agency showed. Analysts surveyed by FactSet had expected the rate to remain unchanged. Germany was "feeling the effects of the more difficult economic conditions on the labor market," said BA chief Andrea Nahles in a statement.

In absolute terms, less representative of underlying trends but more closely followed in public debate, the number of people out of work climbed by around 11,000 month-on-month, to 2.55 million.

Even without taking into account the arrival of job-seeking Ukrainian refugees, Germany's unemployment rate would have risen this month, the agency added. Germany fell into a technical recession at the start of the year, following two consecutive quarters of contraction, as inflation fuelled by surging energy costs and higher interest rates took their toll.

Consumers have continued to rein in their spending in recent months, while demand for corporate and household lending has plunged as the European Central Bank's rate hikes make borrowing more expensive. Leading economic institutes now expect the German economy to shrink by 0.2 to 0.4 percent in 2023.

As a result of the gloomier outlook in Europe's industrial powerhouse, "many employers are looking a little less desperately for skilled workers", said KfW chief economist Fritz Koehler-Geib.

Should job security become a growing concern for workers, it could take some of the pressure off wage demands, said ING bank economist Carsten

Brzeski. ECB officials have repeatedly expressed concern about higher wages driving inflation, as workers in many countries push for pay hikes to compensate for the increased cost of living. "A slight weakening of the labor market... could help dampen wage pressures," Brzeski told AFP.

Meanwhile, eurozone inflation eased further in June as energy costs slid but those of food and drinks remained elevated as underlying price pressures persist, official data showed Friday. Since consumer prices remain above the European Central Bank's two-percent target, and core inflation rebounded slightly, analysts expect no let-up in interest rate hikes. Inflation soared worldwide after Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to spiraling energy and food costs. In response, the ECB raised rates at their fastest pace over the past year to cool inflation.

Consumer prices rose by 5.5 percent in June, down from 6.1 percent in May, according to the European Union's Eurostat agency. The drop was slightly better than a forecast of 5.6 percent given by analysts surveyed by Bloomberg, and much lower than the peak of 10.6 percent in October. But core inflation—which excludes volatile energy, food, alcohol and tobacco prices—remains stubbornly high. It rose to 5.4 percent in June from 5.3 percent in May.

That figure is the key signal for the ECB, whose chief, Christine Lagarde, pledged this week yet another rate hike in July. "There is nothing in this release that would deter the ECB from raising interest rates by another 25bp (basis points) at the meeting in July," said Jack Allen-Reynolds, deputy chief eurozone economist at Capital Economics.

He added that "there is good chance of another hike" in September. "The ECB thinks it is more costly to do too little in terms of hikes than to do too much,

Lucid is listed on Nasdaq, and PIF's 61 percent stake is valued at \$8 billion.

In addition, the SWF announced in November 2022 the launch of Saudi Arabia's first electric vehicle brand, Ceer, in a joint venture with and based Hon Hai Precision Industry Company (Foxconn). The first Ceer models are scheduled to roll off the production line in 2025, and the brand is projected to contribute \$8 billion to Saudi GDP by 2034, creating 30,000 jobs.

In 2022, the Crown Prince, Prime Minister, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of PIF, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, launched Ceer, the first Saudi brand to manufacture e-vehicles in the Kingdom, in line with the Fund's strategy. It focuses on launching and boosting promising sectors to diversify the sources of the Saudi economy, following Vision 2030, and in line with the Kingdom's goals in reducing carbon emissions and preserving the environment.

Additionally, PIF is mandated to develop 70 percent of Saudi Arabia's renewable energy capacity by 2030, and an example of the significant progress that is being made towards this is the investment of over \$6 billion by PIF and its partners in five solar power projects, with a cumulative capacity of approximately 8 gigawatts. These investments will support Saudi Arabia's target of a 50 percent renewable energy mix by 2030. The Head of Strategy Development and

on the regulation before it is approved and the bloc wants to strike a deal by the end of the year.

The rules stipulate that AI-generated content must be declared as such and bans some AI including real-time facial recognition systems. "In our assessment, the draft legislation would jeopardize Europe's competitiveness and technological sovereignty without effectively tackling the challenges we are and will be facing," executives from France's Airbus, Peugeot and Renault, Germany's Siemens, and Facebook parent firm Meta said in the open letter to EU institutions.

They warned under the draft law, generative AI "would be heavily regulated" and that such regulation could lead "highly innovative companies" to move their activities abroad and investors withdrawing their capital from the development in Europe. "The result would be a critical productivity gap between the two sides of the Atlantic," they added.

One of the MEPs who spearheaded the legislation through parliament, Dragos Tudorache, said he was "convinced" the executives had "not carefully read the text", adding the "concrete suggestions" made in

Airlines cancelled 750 flights.

In a statement issued by the airline, Kirby said that taking a private jet was a wrong decision because it was insensitive to the customers who were waiting to go back home. "I sincerely apologize to our customers and our team members who have been working around the clock for several days — often through severe weather — to take care of our customers," Kirby added. He further promised to better demonstrate his respect for the dedication of the airline's team members and the loyalty of its customers.

According to media reports, United Airlines cancelled nearly 3,000 flights this week, with the largest number at its Newark Liberty International Airport hub in New Jersey, which was hit by thunderstorms. Scott Kirby blamed the disruptions at the Newark



PARIS: President of the European Central Bank Christine Lagarde arrives for an official dinner at the Elysee Palace, on the sidelines of the New Global Financial Pact Summit, in Paris in this June 22, 2023 file photo. —AFP

which means that we expect the ECB to continue hiking in July and September," agreed Bert Colijn, senior eurozone economist at ING.

Food, alcohol and tobacco prices rose by 11.7 percent in June compared with 12.5 percent in May, according to Eurostat. The agency said energy inflation in the eurozone dipped further into negative territory in May, falling by 5.6 percent in June after

recording a drop of 1.8 percent in May.

Inflation data this week offered a mixed picture, but also allowed some to make predictions that high consumer prices had not become so entrenched in Europe. But Lagarde this week warned inflation was proving "persistent". "This persistence is caused by the fact that inflation is working its way through the economy in phases," she said. — AFP

Saudi PIF ranks first among 100 wealth funds in Middle East

RIYADH: The Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) ranked seventh globally and first in the Middle East among 100 sovereign wealth funds according to Global SWFs Governance, Sustainability and Resilience (GSR) rating. The 44-page report by the international organization discussed the Fund's sustainability in a special section, "Champions in Sustainability: The Public Investment Fund."

In November 2022, the PIF became the first SWF in the Middle East and one of the first globally to announce aims to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. "But this was nothing really new, as PIF had been working on sustainable initiatives since 2017."

The report pointed out that two examples can illustrate the efforts of the Fund on future sustainability trends. The first one is electric vehicles (EV), one of the main targets for decarbonization and economic diversification. PIF invested over \$1 billion in Lucid Motors, and the company last year announced it is building a factory in the Kingdom.

Major firms warn EU over AI regulation risks

BRUSSELS: More than 150 leading companies warned the EU's plans to regulate artificial intelligence risk harming Europe's competitiveness and do not go far enough to tackle challenges, in a letter seen by AFP. There have been growing calls for regulation after an array of examples like OpenAI's chatbot ChatGPT passing medical and bar exams that have demonstrated AI's dizzying advances but also the possible risks. The European Parliament earlier this month backed a draft law that will be the basis for the world's first comprehensive rules for AI.

It includes specific provisions for generative AI systems, such as ChatGPT and Dall-E, capable of producing text, images and other media. The parliament and the EU's 27 member states will negotiate

United CEO says sorry for leaving NY amid flight woes

WASHINGTON: United Airlines Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Scott Kirby apologized for hopping on a private plane to get out of New York while thousands of the airline's passengers were stranded as it cancelled several flights. According to a report by the news agency Associated Press on Saturday (July 1), Kirby took the private flight from Teterboro, New Jersey, to Denver on Wednesday, when United



Innovation at PIF, Chad Richard, said the report reinforces the Fund's status as one of the world's leading impactful and responsible investors, with world-class governance and sustainable practices.

PIF has led the way in supporting the clean energy transition globally. He pointed out that the Fund organized the largest voluntary carbon credit auctions, with 3.6 million credits sold to several local and international entities and companies. Richard added that the Fund is the first sovereign wealth fund to issue green bonds, including the first-ever century green bonds, with a combined value of \$8.5 billion, and the first Fund in the region to commit to targeting net zero by 2050. — Agencies



the letter had already been included in the text. "It is a pity that the aggressive and misleading lobby of a few is capturing other serious companies in the net," Tudorache said. He said the complaint "undermines the undeniable lead that Europe has taken in this file on the global stage". — AFP

airport on a shortage of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air traffic controllers. In a note to employees, the CEO said that the FAA "frankly failed us" by reducing the rate at which planes could arrive and depart the airport.

Kirby said that the cancelled flights left United planes and crews out of position, hobbling the airline when bad weather hit on Sunday. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg tweeted that airlines recovered from the storm except for United Airlines. Buttigieg shared a bar graph that compared United's cancellation rate with the rest of the industry.

According to FlightAware, the percentage of cancelled flights (of United Airlines) fell from 26 percent on Wednesday to 18 percent Thursday and eight percent through Friday evening. — Agencies

IMF and Pakistan reach \$3bn deal

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan could get temporary relief for its ballooning foreign debt with a new deal worth \$3 billion, the IMF has announced in Washington. The economy has been stricken by a balance-of-payments crisis as it attempts to service crippling external debt, while months of political chaos have scared off foreign investment.

Inflation has rocketed, the rupee has reached a record low against the dollar, and the country is struggling to afford imports, causing a severe decline in industrial output. "I am pleased to announce that the IMF team has reached a staff-level agreement with the Pakistani authorities on a nine-month stand-by arrangement in the amount of SDR 2,250 million (about \$3 billion)," IMF official Nathan Porter said in a statement. The deal will need to be approved by the IMF's executive board and will be considered by mid-July, Porter said. The figure represents 111 percent of Pakistan's IMF quota.

Pakistan's negotiations with the IMF for the last tranche of a \$6.5 billion bailout package, agreed in 2019, stalled last November, with the government making last-minute changes to the national budget to try and meet the deal's requirements.

That package expires on Friday, and the new agreement builds on the IMF's efforts under the previous deal, Porter said. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif welcomed the deal but said it was not a silver bullet. "This is not a moment of pride, but a moment to think over the reality. Do nations survive on loans? Let us pray that this is the last time that we have secured a loan from IMF and that we should not go to the IMF again," he told media after the deal was signed in Lahore.

Sharif described his meetings with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva in Paris last week as a "turning point" in a series of recent discussions with the world body. Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dar celebrated by tweeting "AlhamdoLillah!", meaning "praise be to God". He later told media "the (deal's) delay was caused mainly because of a gap in external financing assurances".

Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center, criticised Pakistan's slow progress on meeting IMF requirements for a deal. "Islamabad waited until the very final hour to take the (politically risky) fiscal policy steps that the IMF had been hoping to see for months," he tweeted.

Years of financial mismanagement have pushed Pakistan's economy to the limit, exacerbated by the Covid pandemic, a global energy crisis since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and record floods that submerged a third of the country in 2022. The grim data gave the government little room to introduce vote-attracting budget measures ahead of an election due in October.

The IMF had told Pakistan it needed to secure more external financing, scrap a swathe of populist subsidies, and allow the rupee to float freely against the dollar, before unlocking more funds. Mohammed Sohail, chief of Topline Securities, told AFP the IMF loan would restore some investor confidence. "This new program is far better than our expectations. There were a lot of uncertainties on what will happen after June 2023 as there will be new government coming to power," he said. — AFP

Business

NBK MONEY MARKETS REPORT

US inflation edges lower to 3.8%

Labor market remains tight amid expectations of further rate hike

KUWAIT: Inflation in the United States, as measured by the Fed's preferred gauge the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index fell on an annual basis to 3.8 percent from 4.3 percent previously in April. Moreover, annual Core PCE inflation edged lower to 4.6 percent versus 4.7 percent previously, which represents a monthly core print of 0.3 percent as opposed to last month's 0.4 percent reading. The headline figure is the lowest inflation reading seen since April 2021, over two years ago following a decline in energy and food prices. Meanwhile, despite the decline in core readings, it remains historically elevated and the slower pace of deceleration compared to headline figures indicate that stickiness in inflation remains entrenched in the economy.

First quarter GDP

US gross domestic product was revised upward to a 2 percent annualized rate for the first quarter, notably up from the second estimate of 1.3 percent. The figure was also above expectations of a 1.4 percent rate. The department's final estimate of first-quarter GDP reflected an upward revision to exports, consumer spending, state and local government spending, and investment from housing businesses. The figure reveals that the economy is in much better shape than previously believed, thanks to resilient US consumers, despite economists saying momentum has slowed in recent months.

Unemployment claims

The number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits fell to a one-month low of 239K. New jobless claims declined by 26K from a revised 265K the week prior. The data indicates the US labor market remains robust, and calms fears of a recession, which usually accompanies a rise in unemployment.

As annual inflation runs well above the Federal Reserve's 2 percent target and the labor market remains tight, most central bank policymakers expect they will need to raise interest rates twice more by year-end. Fed Chair Jerome Powell said on Thursday. He noted that banking stresses which emerged in March "may well lead" to more tightening in credit conditions than would be expected from rate hikes alone. He also made note of still too-high inflation, and the "long way to go" before inflation can be returned to the Fed's 2 percent goal.

Following 10 straight rate hikes since March 2022, the Fed's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee earlier this month opted to leave its policy rate unchanged at the 5 percent-5.25 percent range. "We made this decision in light of the distance we have come in tightening policy, the uncertain lags in monetary policy, and the potential headwinds from credit tightening," Powell said. At the same time, he said, "a strong majority of Committee participants expect that it will be appropriate to raise interest rates two or more times by the end of the year." The Fed will hold four more policy meetings this year, with the next one on July 25-26. Markets are pricing in an 81 percent probability of a 25 bps hike.

Consumer confidence

US consumer confidence jumped in June alongside a strong labor market, which continues to buoy the US economy. The Conference Board reported last week that its consumer confidence index rose to 109.7 in June from 102.5 in May, marking the highest the reading has been since January of 2022 and much higher than forecasted. Meanwhile, the board's expectations index (a measure of consumers' six-month outlook for income, business and labor conditions) climbed to 79.3 this month from 71.5 in May. Usually, a reading

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	Forward
EUR	1.0895	1.0833	1.0976	1.0910	1.0850	1.0980	1.0963
GBP	1.2707	1.2589	1.2759	1.2704	1.2686	1.2804	1.2709
JPY	143.55	142.93	145.07	143.55	141.90	143.98	142.30
CHF	0.8973	0.8910	0.9017	0.8953	0.8924	0.9006	0.8872

under 80 signals a recession in the coming year. The Conference Board noted that reading has come in below 80 every month but one since February of 2022.

May's inflation rate slows

Canada's annual inflation came in at 3.4 percent in May, marking the slowest pace in two years and weakening the case for another interest rate hike next month by the Bank of Canada. On a monthly basis, the consumer price index was up 0.4 percent, slightly lower than the 0.5 percent expected. Energy prices slid 12.4 percent in May compared to a year earlier, when supply uncertainty stemmed from the war in Ukraine led to a surge in energy prices. Contributing largely to the fall in energy prices was an 18.3 percent drop in gasoline prices and the first year-over-year decline in natural gas prices since August 2020.

The annual rate is broadly in line with the Bank of Canada's expectation for inflation to cool to around 3 percent by mid-year. The central bank hiked its overnight rate to a 22-year high of 4.75 percent earlier in June following a series of surprisingly strong data, such as an unexpected uptick in April inflation. Money markets are now pricing in a 52 percent

probability of a 25 bps hike this month, down from 64 percent prior to the release of the inflation figure. For the rest of the year, the BoC is expected to keep interest rates on hold. The Canadian dollar weakened as the USD/CAD pair gained 0.42 percent last week, ending at 1.3236.

Australia inflation high

Inflation slowed to a 13-month low in May, largely driven by a sharp pullback in fuel prices. The consumer price index rose by 5.6 percent in May, down from an annual pace of 6.8 percent in April but still well above the Reserve Bank's 2-3 percent target. Although electricity and some staple food prices rose by double-digit figures over the year, petrol prices have fallen compared with the same month in 2022. The Reserve Bank of Australia has delivered 12 increases so far in just 13 months, marking the most aggressive pace of monetary policy tightening since 1989. The RBA is not expecting inflation to fall back to 3 percent until June 2025. Markets are pricing in just a 25 percent probability of a 25 bps hike at the next meeting.

Kuwaiti dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30705.

Americans decry 'unjust' student debt

WASHINGTON: If the US Supreme Court had not overruled President Joe Biden's program to cancel billions of dollars in student debt, Satra D Taylor, who borrowed \$40,000 to complete her studies, could have seen that amount reduced by half.

Now the 27-year-old—who used the loan to study at the University of Michigan, supplementing a scholarship and other financial aid—is back on the hook for the whole sum.

"We created this unjust, inequitable, expensive, higher education system and so we need to redress it," she told AFP, standing before the high court.

Biden's forgiveness program was meant to lift more than \$400 billion in student debt weighing down the lives of millions of lower and middle-income Americans. Certain borrowers would have been eligible to receive \$20,000 in cancellations, while the vast majority were eligible for \$10,000.

But the court overruled the program Friday, stating that given the large sum, the president had overstepped his powers.

"Any American who wants to pursue higher education should be able to do so," Taylor said.

"We have students now who have not acquired the generational wealth to pay for their cost of college, it needs to be debt-free," added Taylor, who works for youth advocacy group Young Invincibles.

Taylor said she was not surprised given the Supreme Court's conservative majority, which on Thursday banned the use of affirmative action in university admission policies. Taylor, who is African American,



WASHINGTON: Supporters of student debt forgiveness demonstrate outside the US Supreme Court on June 30, 2023, in Washington, DC. — AFP

said the loan forgiveness decision was a setback for Black and Latino students who "would have disproportionately benefitted from this relief." "This is absolutely not only a social justice issue, but also a racial equity issue."

'Future generations'

Mina Schultz, 37, who borrowed approximately \$65,000 for her studies, emphasized the impact student debt has on the entire economy. When the pandemic hit and student loan repayments were frozen, it was "a blessing," she told AFP from outside the Supreme Court. People were "able to contribute more to the economy" by spending money elsewhere, whether on food as prices surged due to inflation or on things like rent, the George Wash-

ington University graduate said. Schultz would have benefited from \$10,000 in debt cancellation, which "would have been really helpful." That sort of money "is a huge deal to a lot of people," said Schultz, who will be forking over some \$340 per month when payments resume in several months.

Enjoying a seemingly debt-free life during the repayment pause, she was able to move out of her studio apartment and into a one-bedroom unit. Nearby, Shanna Hayes, 34, could not contain her emotion as she spoke before several cameras: Her debt, originally \$130,000, now exceeds \$150,000 due to compounding interest that has accrued over the past 11 years. "I ask you to remember that the student debt crisis impacts our grandparents, parents... children and future generations," she told the reporters. — AFP

Polluting shipping to face climate reckoning

LONDON: The hefty carbon footprint of global shipping networks that crisscross our oceans and keep the world's economy afloat will come under scrutiny next week, as countries wrestle over measures to slash planet-heating pollution.

Nations are under pressure to agree ambitious emission reduction targets and consider a tax on pollution by the sector at a key meeting of the International Maritime Organization. Currently shipping belches out roughly the same level of greenhouse gases as aviation.

The IMO Marine Environment Protection Commission (MEPC) meeting, held in London from Monday to Friday, is likely to pit climate-vulnerable nations—particularly Pacific islands—and some richer countries against big exporters such as China. "The climate crisis is an existential threat to Pacific small island developing states, and many other countries, but can be seen as less urgent by countries with superior resources," Michael Prehn, the IMO delegate for the Solomon Islands, told AFP. "This is why the Pacific has been consistently pressing for the highest possible ambition in climate regulation."

Net-zero

Shipping, which is responsible for around two percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, is judged to be off course in the fight against climate change. Efforts to decarbonize so far centre around a 2018 IMO decision that instructed shipping firms to reduce CO2 emissions by 50 percent by 2050, from 2008 levels.

But that target is considered insufficient given the level of global emissions and compared to other industries, including aviation, which is aiming for net zero by the same mid-century deadline.

Nations in support of more ambitious cuts want

the IMO to align its goals with the Paris Agreement's global warming limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times. Some 45 countries—including the European Union, the United States, Britain, Fiji, the Marshall Islands and Norway—support a net zero target for the sector by 2050.

Most also support an intermediate target for 2030. But emerging market exporters, particularly Brazil and China, have strongly resisted a change, according to observers at talks that started in late June ahead of the decision-making MEPC meeting.

A briefing note circulated by China, seen by AFP, framed the proposals as "unrealistic" and an effort by developed countries to boost their economic competitiveness by increasing shipping costs.

A 'no-brainer'

Ships transport 90 percent of the world's goods, and the sector emits around a billion tons of greenhouse gases every year, the equivalent of Germany or Japan. Nicolas Entrup, director of international relations at marine protection organization OceanCare, said a goal of absolute zero greenhouse gas emissions from shipping by mid-century, with interim targets, would be "the necessary step forward for humankind." "It should be a no-brainer to bring the IMO targets in line with those of the Paris Agreement," he said. "We simply can't afford any other less ambitious path."

One immediate way to reduce emissions would be to simply slow boats down so they burn less fuel, he

added. Among the proposals coming from different countries, the EU wants net zero by 2050, with emissions reduced 29 percent by 2030 and 83 percent by 2040. Countries such as the United States, Canada, and climate vulnerable Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands, want to go even further, with a 96-percent cut by 2040.

Observers say that while some countries are on the fence, the United Arab Emirates—which will this year host the UN COP28 climate conference—has swung in support of the goal of net zero by 2050. That has raised hopes of an agreement on the issue.

Global levy

But a potential deal on another flagship proposal—to introduce a global levy on shipping emissions—is going to be a harder sell. French President Emmanuel Macron threw his support behind the idea at a recent climate finance summit in Paris, but said it would need backing from China, the United States and other European nations to work.

A source following the preliminary IMO negotiations said support had swelled to 70 countries but that major exporters including Brazil, China and Australia were against it. Brazil has argued it would harm food security and penalize developing countries. There is also disagreement about where any revenues would be spent. There are debates over whether it should be used solely to decarbonize the sector, or whether some of the money should go to help countries cope with climate impacts. —AFP



Labor dispute shuts down Canada's west coast ports

MONTREAL: Workers at Canada's busiest port in Vancouver and at harbors up and down the nation's west coast stopped work Saturday in a labor dispute that is likely to disrupt global freight transport. After months of failed talks, more than 7,000 terminal cargo loaders and 49 waterfront employers in 30 ports went on strike. Port automation, the rising cost of living and outsourcing are key issues behind the collective action led by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

Union leadership "has not taken this decision lightly, but for the future of our workforce we had to take this step," Rob Ashton, president of the union's Canadian branch, said in a statement. He remained positive, however, about reaching a "collective agreement for the rights of (the) Working Class!" The union's last contract expired on March 31.

For its part, the BC Maritime Employers Association said it has "made repeated efforts to be flexible and find compromise on key priorities" without success. "We appreciate the assistance of federal mediators in supporting the parties and we remain open to any solutions that bring about a balanced agreement," said the trade group, which represents ship and port owners and terminal operators.

On Friday, the association had indicated that a possible strike would not affect cruise ships docking in Vancouver, Prince Rupert and on Vancouver Island. Members of the BC Maritime Employers Association transport goods across Canada and to the United States, including automobiles, coal, grain and containers. A strike would have repercussions in US and other markets that receive goods through Canada.

The Port of Vancouver alone handles some CAN\$305 billion worth of goods annually, and contributes CAN\$11.9 billion to the nation's annual output. All the west coast ports combined handled 16 percent of Canada's total traded goods in the year 2020, the port companies said. — AFP

Inflation eases sharply in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's inflation eased to 12 percent in June, official data showed Saturday, the lowest figures since the island nation careened into an unprecedented economic crisis last year. Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign debt in April 2022 and the public endured months of food, fuel and medicine shortages.

The crisis has eased since, with the government securing a \$2.9 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund in March. June inflation was the lowest since the 9.9 percent figure recorded in November 2021. It is down from 25.2 percent in May and a peak of 69.8 percent in September.

"Inflation is expected to reach single-digit levels by early third quarter 2023," the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said. This week, the government unveiled a debt restructuring plan which offers a 30 percent haircut for international sovereign bondholders, who account for more than a quarter of Sri Lanka's outstanding foreign obligations.

The IMF said last month that Sri Lanka's economy showed "tentative signs of improvement" but warned Colombo still needed to pursue painful reforms.

Last year's economic crisis sparked months of civil unrest which eventually toppled then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa. His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe has doubled taxes, removed generous subsidies on energy and sharply raised prices to shore up state revenue. — AFP

As prices soar, Japan returns to human waste fertilizer

'It's cheap, recycled, and has centuries of tradition'

MIURA, Japan: It's cheap, recycled, and has centuries of tradition: "shimogoe" or "fertilizer from a person's bottom" is finding new favor in Japan as Ukraine's war hikes the price of chemical alternatives. As in several parts of the world, the use of "night soil" to fertilize crops was once common in Japan.

However, the advent of sewage systems and treatment facilities, as well as chemical fertilizers, saw it fall out of fashion. About a decade ago, Japanese treatment facilities wondered if they could revive interest to avoid sewage sludge disposal—a costly and potentially environmentally damaging process.

But enthusiasm was limited until Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent the cost of chemical fertilizers soaring. That has been a bonanza for a facility in northern Japan's Tome, where sales of shimogoe were up 160 percent year-on-year by March 2023.

For the first time since the city began producing the fertilizer in 2010, it has sold out. The demand is easy to explain, said facility vice president Toshiaki Kato. "Our fertilizer is popular because it is cheap, and it is helping farmers cut soaring costs," he told AFP. "It is also good for the environment." Made of a combination of treated sewage sludge from septic tanks and human waste from cesspits, the fertilizer goes for 160 yen (\$1.10) per 15 kilos.

That's about a tenth of the price of products made from imported raw materials. In southwestern Japan's Saga too, officials report sales are up two to three times. And dozens of tour groups from municipalities elsewhere in the country have visited, eager to replicate their program.

Historic origins

Shimogoe was a key fertilizer in Japan's pre-modern Edo era, said Arata Kobayashi, a fertilizer specialist who has written journal articles on the subject. In the early 18th century, the one million residents of

Tokyo—then called Edo—"produced" an estimated 500,000 tons of fertilizer a year.

It was big business, involving gatherers, transporters and farmers, "and all of them benefited from the recycling system," Kobayashi said. They "didn't create a recycling system on purpose... it was the result of everyone pursuing profit." Japan's government has encouraged the revival, citing environmental benefits, and concerns about food security since Russia's invasion.

The ministry of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries hopes to double animal manure and human waste use by 2030, with a goal of them accounting for 40 percent of all fertilizer use in Japan.

In Miura outside Tokyo, vacuum trucks carrying human waste arrive one after another at a treatment facility. Water is removed and then bacteria ferment the remaining solids in huge tanks.

Methane produced during the process is burned to supply the facility's hot water and electricity, and the final product is a soil-like powder that can be spread on fields. "We produce 500 tons of fertilizer annually," said Kenichi Ryose, facility manager at Miura Biomass Centre.

"This fertilizer is particularly good for leaf vegetables, like cabbage," he added. Ryose said "harmful materials like heavy metals are removed from processed sewage sludge before arriving" at the plant.

In the United States, there have been recent concerns about the levels of so-called forever chemicals (PFAS) in fertilizer made from sewage. An environment ministry official said similar concerns had not been reported in Japan, but noted there are no current guidelines for PFAS levels in soil.

"We're in the process of developing a scientifically reliable way to measure PFAS and studying how to regulate it," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.



YOKOSUKA, Japan: This picture taken on June 13, 2023 shows Nobuyoshi Fujiwara, an owner of lettuce farm, smelling human faeces-made fertilizer at his farm in Yokosuka city of Kanagawa prefecture. — AFP

'Dirty mud'

The sun is shining as the trucks arrive, and despite the facility's odor-absorbing machines, a distinct aroma fills the air. The smell has proved something of a problem, admitted Nobuyoshi Fujiwara, 41, who runs a lettuce farm in Yokosuka, north of Miura.

He started using shimogoe last year, "because I wanted to cut costs, and for the social good" of recycling waste. But "we can't use it in fields near houses, because there are complaints about the smell." "Also, you have to spread four or five times the volume that

you use with regular chemical fertilizers," he explained. That's the case for any type of manure, but can be a turn-off for some farmers because it is more work. He concedes that the fertilizer faces something of a branding issue.

"The Chinese characters that are used for sludge—'dirty mud'—are not great," he said. "Even though we produce safe food, I imagine that for those who don't know much about it, the impressions people have of fertilizer made from human faeces might not be good." — AFP

Gulf Bank ties up with Coursera to train its employees

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous effort to provide high-level training opportunities, Gulf Bank is equipping all its employees with extensive training and learning possibilities, through Coursera, one of the world's largest online learning platforms — enabling them to have access to courses and certificates from prestigious educational institutions and universities.

Over the past decade, Coursera has become one of the most popular learning platforms around the world, providing thousands of online training and development courses that are available from anywhere and at any time. The platform provides training for various disciplines — ranging from professional and specialized courses to MBA and Certified Public Accountant certificates.

Furthermore, the platform also offers a range of features, including interactive videos, tests and assessments, that help employees acquire, and retain, information more effectively in multiple languages. Employees can also track their progress and performance feedback.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, Salma Al-Hajjaj, commented saying: "The new



Salma Al-Hajjaj

service stems from Gulf Bank's commitment to continuously develop the professional skills of its employees." She added: "Our employees are the basis of our success and the secret of our excellence; hence, we are keen to invest in their professional and career development by providing them with excellent training and educational opportunities."

She continued: "We will continue to develop our employees, keep them up-to-date with the latest technological developments, and provide the necessary support for talented individuals to develop themselves in order to acquire leadership positions." Al-Hajjaj concluded her statement saying: "We are proud that Gulf Bank is one of the leading banks that invests generously in human capital to enhance the competencies of its employees, as they are the main focus to achieve our strategic objectives. And we will continue to provide them with the latest expertise and skills required to keep pace with the major developments that the banking industry is undergoing."

Coursera's General Manager for the Middle East and Africa, Kais Zribi, said: "Aligned with the ambitious objectives of the Kuwait Vision 2035 'New Kuwait,' it is crucial for companies in the country to



develop high-performing teams capable of adapting to the latest economic changes. We are excited to partner with Gulf Bank on its talent transformation journey and elevate its capability-building efforts to a new level by offering a range of opportunities to its talent pool through Coursera. Together, we will empower Gulf Bank's workforce to thrive in the new economy as they contribute to the company's long-term growth and success."

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.



NAIROBI: A worker fills the tank of a vehicle at a petrol station as Kenya's government announced a new increase in fuel prices in Nairobi. — AFP

Kenya hikes fuel prices despite court order

NAIROBI: Kenya announced Friday a hike in fuel prices in defiance of a court order blocking implementation of a raft of new taxes.

The cost of petrol, diesel and kerosene went up from Saturday, the Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority said in a statement, a move that will have a ripple effect in a country hamstrung by a severe cost of living crisis. EPRA said the price of petrol would jump to more than 195 shillings (\$1.4) a liter to take into account the doubling of VAT on fuel products to 16 percent.

The announcement came despite the High Court of Kenya earlier suspending hotly contested new legislation that provides for new or increased taxes on certain salaries, a range of basic goods and services including fuel, food and mobile money transfers as well as a controversial housing levy.

President William Ruto had on Monday signed into law the finance bill which is expected to generate more than \$2.1 billion and is aimed at shoring up the government's depleted coffers and repair the heavily-indebted economy. But the high court in Nairobi on Friday suspended the implementation of the legislation pending a hearing next Wednesday on a case filed by a senator challenging its constitutional legality. Veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga—who has staged a series of demonstrations this year over Kenya's economic woes—has asked his supporters to boycott the taxes, rallying them to carpool or walk whenever possible.

Despite the added burden on Kenyans already facing deep economic hardship, Ruto, his deputy and other public officials are set to receive hefty pay rises, according to a government document seen by AFP Friday. They are due to get a 14 percent salary hike over a two-year period. Kenya's Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC) said in a proposal, which will raise Ruto's gross monthly salary to 1,546,875 shillings (\$11,000).

Members of parliament will earn a basic salary of 769,201 shillings (\$5,400) topped up with hefty extras such as a \$54,000 bonus to buy a car and \$2,600 a month to maintain the vehicle.

Kenya's minimum monthly wage is 15,120 shillings (\$107). The salary increases will go into effect on Saturday, but could be overturned pending a public discussion. No date has been set for the discussion, but Kenyans have protested online, accusing politicians of seeking office for personal gain at the expense of the poor. Ruto himself weighed in on the issue on Friday, urging the SRC to reconsider the increases for top government officials. "We need to make sure that the gap between the person paid the least and the person paid the most is not too big," he said. Ruto came to power last year on a promise to revive the economy and put money in the pockets of impoverished Kenyans. — AFP

China factory activity shrinks for third month

BEIJING: Activity in China's factory sector contracted for a third straight month in June, official data showed on Friday, signaling a patchy recovery in the world's number two economy as global demand and raw material prices slumped.

The reading comes as the government faces calls to unveil fresh measures to kickstart growth, which has slowed in the second quarter as the post-COVID lockdown rally rebound runs out of steam.

The official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) — a key measure of factory output — came in at 49.0, below the 50-point mark that separates expansion and contraction, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

It was above the 48.8 figure recorded in May and in line with forecasts by economists polled by Bloomberg. Contracting factory activity has been offset by expansion in services in recent months, but tepid demand has led to slower growth in June. The official non-manufacturing PMI, which measures business sentiment in the services and construction sectors, fell to 53.2 in June from 54.5 in May.

Economic growth has slowed sharply in April-June after lifting strict COVID rules at the end of last



FUYANG: Employees work on an assembly line producing speakers at a factory in Fuyang in China's eastern Anhui province on June 30, 2023. — AFP

year, while the yuan is at a seven-month low against the dollar as exports drop and weak domestic demand has kept inflation near zero.

Authorities are coming under increasing pressure to step in with stimulus but other than a few small interest rate cuts and pledges of action there has been little of substance out of Beijing. The cabinet on Friday said it would "take effective measures to enhance the momentum of development, optimize

the economic structure, and promote the sustained recovery of the economy... in a timely manner". But Zhiwei Zhang, president and chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said: "It is not clear if the weak economic data would push the government to launch aggressive stimulus measures soon." The government has set a modest economic growth target of about five percent for 2023, which Premier Li Qiang this week said he believed would be achieved. — AFP

IMF spokeswoman Julie Kozack in a statement confirmed: "The Argentine authorities continue to remain current on their financial obligations to the Fund." Government spokeswoman Gabriela Cerruti told reporters Thursday the payment would be made "partly with Special Drawing Rights of the Treasury and partly with yuan, without using Central Bank reserves." Argentina reached a deal with the IMF last year to restructure a loan of \$44 billion—the legacy of a record loan contracted in 2018 under former president Mauricio Macri.

Argentina is the target of the largest IMF assistance program as it grapples with year-on-year inflation exceeding 100 percent, a severe shortage of foreign exchange and a poverty level of about 40 percent.

Argentina makes IMF loan repayment partly with yuan

BUENOS AIRES: Short on dollars, Argentina on Friday made a \$2.7 billion loan repayment to the International Monetary Fund partly using Chinese yuan, the economy ministry said. To avoid dipping into its limited foreign currency reserves, the country also used so-called Special Drawing Rights—an asset created by the IMF to supplement countries' official reserves—for part of the payment due.



This photo shows Moroccan artist Asmaa Hamzaoui, a female member of a traditional Gnaoua band, performing during the 24th edition of the Gnaoua World Music Festival in Essaouira. — AFP photos

MOROCCAN WOMEN SHAKE UP WORLD OF GNAOUA MUSIC

Young Moroccan women are bringing new and inclusive energy to the centuries-old art of Gnaoua, a spiritual musical repertoire traditionally reserved for men. Also known as "tagnaouite", it gained worldwide recognition after it was listed by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage in 2019. "Why shouldn't women be part of this dynamic?" asked Asma Hamzaoui at the Gnaoua World Music Festival in Essaouira, a southern coastal city steeped in the musical tradition.

The 26-year-old Casablanca native is one of the first women to perform Gnaoua, which blends African rhythms with spiritual chants and poetry. Her father, a Gnaoua master, initiated her into the artform at a young age. "I've accompanied him to his evening gatherings since I was seven years old," recounted the young woman, who in 2012 formed the group "Bnat Timbouktou", or The Girls of Timbuktu.

"I gradually learned to play the guembri, a three-stringed lute made of camel skin. My father made sure that I learned as much as possible before I flew solo." The all-female ensemble wowed the festival-goers—with Hamzaoui on vocals and the guembri, and four musicians on qraqeb steel castanets. They played alongside the

Amazones d'Afrique, another all-female group, from Mali.

'Feeds the spirit'

"It's exceptional to have women playing Gnaoua music, which shouldn't be reserved for men," said Hamzaoui.



hir, a member of the audience. "They bring fresh air into this music." Inspired by Bnat Timbouktou's success, rising star Hind Ennaira developed her passion for tagnaouite in her hometown of Essaouira.

Its fortified citadel on the Atlantic coast is a breeding ground for the mystical musical tradition, in which religious hymns invoke ancestors and spirits.

Originally practised by enslaved people and dating back to at least to the 16th century, Gnaoua has gone from being practiced largely in private gatherings, where therapeutic rituals accompanied the music, to public events such as concerts and festivals.

"The city of Essaouira is the cradle of tagnaouite," said Ennaira, who was taught to play the guembri by friends. "It is beautiful heritage that feeds the spirit. It is important for young people to value it." Ennaira put her own touch on the tradition by bringing in a guitarist and drummer to accompany the traditional ensemble. "At first, there were some differences because they were not used to working with a woman," she said. "But after some challenging exercises, they adapted to me and we became complementary."

'Jimi Hendrix' style

Yusra Mansour—the front woman of the band Bab L'bluz ("The Blues Gate"), which fuses Gnaoua, rock and blues—also encountered challenges entering the music scene. "There were two constraints for me: first, the fact that this field is usually reserved for men, but also how we interpret traditional music," the musician told AFP. "It is not very accepted or even tolerated



by some of the stricter individuals.

"We replaced the bass with the guembri and the guitar with the awisha (a small guembri) and created a kind of 'power trio' in the style of Jimi Hendrix with reimagined traditional instruments," explained Mansour. The 32-year-old vocalist passionately defends women's freedoms, saying that

"as a woman, I have not had an easy life". "There was a lack of women in this field. When I see Asma Hamzaoui or Hind Ennaira, they are magnificent," she said. "It is not easy to evolve in a predominantly male universe, but we see changes emerging." — AFP



This photo shows female members of traditional Gnaoua bands performing during the 24th edition of the Gnaoua World Music Festival in Essaouira.



This photo shows members of the audience applauding and cheering the performers during the 24th edition of the Gnaoua World Music Festival in Essaouira.



Pokemon Go firm Niantic slashes staff

The maker of mobile game Pokemon Go has said it will slash 230 jobs, almost one-third of its staff, in another blow to the tech industry. Niantic boss John Hanke said in an email to staff posted online late on Thursday that the San Francisco-based firm needed to cut costs because of a post-pandemic slump in business. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their jobs in the tech sector over the past year, with firms often blaming over-hiring during the pandemic.



Gaming firms from Electronic Arts to Ubisoft have all announced cuts to staff despite continuing to make profits. Niantic has been struggling to match the success of Pokemon Go, where players are guided by their mobile phones to real-world locations to collect magical creatures.

The game has been downloaded more than one billion times and has brought roughly \$1 billion in revenues each year since its release in 2016, according to analysis firm Sensor Tower. But Niantic has shelved several other projects recently and Hanke announced on Thursday that its latest effort, basketball game "NBA All-World", would be discontinued just months after being released.

"Post COVID, our revenue returned to pre-COVID levels and new projects in games and platform have not delivered revenues commensurate with those investments," Hanke wrote. According to previous statements by Hanke, the firm had roughly 700 staff, making Thursday's cuts almost one-third of their remaining workers. He said its studio in Los Angeles would close down, adding that the firm's priority was now to focus on Pokemon Go. — AFP

Prince Harry has finally vacated UK home

Prince Harry and his wife Meghan have finally vacated their home on the royal family's Windsor estate, west of London, Buckingham Palace confirmed on Thursday. The property, known as Frogmore Cottage, was a wedding present to the couple from Harry's grandmother, the late Queen Elizabeth II, in 2018. But they were reportedly asked to remove any remaining possessions days after Harry, King Charles III's younger son, launched a scathing attack on his family in his controversial memoir "Spare" in January.

"We can confirm that the Duke and Duchess of Sussex have vacated Frogmore Cottage," senior palace official Michael Stevens said as an annual report on royal finances was published Thursday. "We will not be going into any detail on those arrangements here," said Stevens, who is the monarch's treasurer as Keeper of the Privy Purse.

He added that the couple who now live in California had paid £2.4 million (\$3 million) to cover rent and the cost of refurbishing the cottage, which belongs to the monarch's Crown Estate. The loss of the property leaves the couple without a UK base. Harry and Meghan,

an American former TV actress, sensationally quit royal family duties in early 2020 and moved from Britain to the United States. Since leaving they have repeatedly criticized the royal family.

Stevens did not comment on speculation that the King's disgraced brother Prince Andrew might move to the cottage from his current palatial residence, Royal Lodge, nearby. "Any future occu-

pancy will be determined and communicated in next year's report," Stevens added. Charles, who has long favored a slimmed-down monarchy, has been undertaking an overhaul of family finances since his mother's death. Andrew, however, has reportedly resisted any attempts to move him from his 30-room home. — AFP



File photo shows Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, leave at the end of the National Service of Thanksgiving for The Queen's reign at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. — AFP

Lifestyle



Iran's snooker player Amir Sarkhosh competes during the ACBS Asian 6 Reds Snooker Championship in Tehran.--AFP photos



A man plays snooker at a club in Tehran.

IRAN SNOOKER PASSION GROWS AS FANS TAKE CUE FROM 'PERSIAN PRINCE'



A passion for snooker has swept Iran in recent years, a trend fans attribute largely to the country's first internationally renowned star Hossein Vafaei, known as the "Persian Prince". Ever more enthusiasts in the Islamic republic have taken to the cue sport played on a billiards table, and Tehran last week hosted an Asian regional tournament. "In the past, Iran did not have much of a place in the Asian and world championships in billiards and snooker," said referee Mohammad Afghil Morshedi, 34, of Iran's Bowling, Billiard and Boules Federation.

But in recent years, said Morshedi, the sport—invented by British officers in colonial-era India—"has gained many enthusiasts... and now we are among the top three teams in Asia in winning titles and medals". Much of this is due to one man, he said: "Mr Vafaei is the brand of this sport in Iran. "Whenever the name of Iran is brought up in snooker, his name will come up too. He's the flag-bearer of this sport in Iran."

Vafaei, 28, is Iran's first professional snooker player, and the first to win a



world ranking title, in 2022 in the English city of Leicester. "I'm happy to make history for my country, that was a very good moment for me and snooker," he said at the time.

Vafaei, who hails from Abadan in the southwestern province of Khuzestan bordering Iraq, said Iran has "very little snooker history", speaking last week with state news agency IRNA. He lamented that so far he had received little official support in his home country, complaining that "no one has done anything for me and I have not



received any money or reward". On the subject of still lacking Iranian sponsors, Vafaei said that "it is not only about me, as most of our athletes have the same problem". Nonetheless, he has received huge gratitude from Iran's snooker and billiards enthusiasts, including at the tournament that brought teams from the Gulf, South Asia and as far as Malaysia and Hong Kong.

"Reaching the position that Vafaei has attained is the ultimate goal of almost all Iranian snooker players," said Shirin Zarrin, 38, an employee at the



Iran billiards federation. "He has been very impactful," she said. "If you ask any Iranian snooker player, they will cite Vafaei as their role model." She voiced hope that Iranian women, too, would gain more prominence in the sport in future in the conservative Shiite Muslim country. "If women can have more access to billiards clubs, more presence in this sport and the chance to practice better, they can progress significantly," she said.—AFP

US rapper Travis Scott won't face criminal charges over concert crush

US rapper Travis Scott will not face criminal charges over the death of 10 people killed in a crush during a Texas concert in 2021, a Houston grand jury decided. Some 50,000 people had packed into Houston's NRG Park for Scott's Astroworld music festival when the crowd started pushing toward the stage as he was performing, triggering chaos.

Lacking air and space, some fainted and were trampled by the crowd. Among those who were killed in the November 2021 havoc was a nine-year-old, and hundreds more concertgoers were injured. Faced with cries for help, organizers waited dozens of minutes before stopping the music and evacuating the area.

"It is tragic that 10 innocent people were killed while trying to enjoy an evening of music and entertainment," Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg



US rapper Travis Scott.

said. "... but a tragedy isn't always a crime, and not every death is a homicide." "No criminal charges will be filed in the incident," a statement by Ogg's office read.

Multiple lawsuits have been filed against Astroworld festival organizers, who accusers say failed to ensure the safety of concertgoers. In addition to Scott, promoters, concert site managers and several companies associated with the festival have been targeted in the suits. Thursday's ruling concerns only criminal proceedings, meaning civil lawsuits can still proceed.—AFP

Taylor Swift, The Weeknd invited to join Oscars panel

Music megastars Taylor Swift and The Weeknd are among showbiz people invited to join the organization that votes on who gets Oscars, the body said. Other invitees include Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, who directed "Everything Everywhere All at Once," which won seven Oscars this year including the prize for best picture. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences said its new crop of members of Tinseltown's most elite club numbers 398 people. That is about half the figure of recent years as the academy scaled back after working to double the number of women and non-white members, following calls to boycott the glitzy Oscars and an angry social media backlash under the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite due to a lack of diversity. The Academy now has more than 10,000 members.

Of the 2023 class, the academy said 40 percent identify as women, 34 percent belong to underrepresented ethnic and racial communities, and 52 percent are from 50 countries and territories outside the United States. Swift's song "Carolina"



US singer Taylor Swift poses in the press room after winning six awards at the 50th Annual American Music Awards at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles, California.--AFP photos

features in the movie "Where the Crawdads Sing" while The Weeknd's tune "Nothing is Lost (You Give Me Strength)" is heard in "Avatar: Way of Water." The artist's real name is Abel Makkonen Tesfaye. Seen as the apex body of the Hollywood film industry, the Academy issues a single round of invitations annually. Only Academy members can vote for Oscar winners. Next year's Oscars are set to take place on March 10.—AFP



Canadian singer Abel Makkonen Tesfaye aka The Weeknd performs at the 11th Alive Festival in Deiras, near Lisbon.

Oscar-winning actor Alan Arkin dies at 89

Alan Arkin, the Oscar-winning "Little Miss Sunshine" and "Argo" actor known for his wry wit and improvisation skills, has died at the age of 89, according to his sons. Adam, Matthew and Anthony—who all followed their father into the entertainment industry—said he was "a uniquely talented force of nature, both as an artist and a man." "A loving husband, father, grand and great grandfather, he was adored and will be deeply missed," they said in a statement Friday, without citing a cause of death.

Born in Brooklyn on March 26, 1934 to Russian-German Jewish immigrant parents, Arkin began taking acting classes from a young age. His family relocated to Los Angeles in the 1950s, and Arkin won scholarships to various Los Angeles drama colleges before dropping out to form a folk music band, The Tarriers, in 1955. The group had a hit with 1956's "The Banana Boat Song," and he continued to pursue a music career as well as acting for the next decade.

He was a member of Chicago's storied Second City improvisational troupe, and appeared on the big screen for the first time with The Tarriers in 1957's "Calypso Heat Wave." He made his Broadway debut in "From the Second City," which led to a role in acclaimed comedy "Enter Laughing," for which he won a Tony Award.



US actor Alan Arkin poses at his Hollywood Walk of Fame Star ceremony in Hollywood on June 7, 2019. --AFP

'Indelible mark'

In a rare feat, Arkin earned a best actor Oscar nomination for his first feature acting role, playing the Soviet sailor Rozanov, who is mistaken for a spy, in the 1966 comedy "The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming." That was followed by appearances in 1967's "Wait Until Dark" opposite Audrey Hepburn, and 1968's "The Heart is a Lonely Hunter," for which he received a second Oscar nomination, for playing a deaf-mute.

Many critics believe Arkin's best performance came in 1970's "Catch 22," the film adaptation of Joseph Heller's best-selling tragicomic war novel. Arkin appeared regularly on stage, television and the big screen from the 1970s to the 1990s, with notable roles in "Edward Scissorhands" (1990), "Glengarry Glen Ross" (1992) and "Grosse Pointe Blank" (1997).

He took it on himself to create his "Little Miss Sunshine" character's backstory, deciding that Grandpa Hoover should be a washed-up former saxophonist with a penchant for strip clubs and drugs. It would win him his only Oscar. "I love completely disreputable characters who spout philosophy," Arkin said. "He's completely out there, wide open and nuts."

He earned another Oscar nomination for 2013's best picture winner "Argo," in which he played a curmudgeonly Hollywood producer who brought comic relief to the tense Iran hostage thriller. He later starred in the acclaimed Netflix series "The Kominsky Method," which premiered in 2018. He played the agent and friend to an aging acting coach, portrayed by Michael Douglas.

On Friday, Douglas called Arkin "a wonderful actor whose intelligence, sense of comedy and consummate professionalism over the past 70 years has left an indelible mark on our industry." Arkin credited his early days as an improv performer with teaching him many lessons—but one of the key ones, he said, was failure.

"The audience came in knowing a lot of what they saw was going to fail, and it was okay," he told the Los Angeles Times in 2008. "Now if you fail, it's a moral issue, bad for the numbers crunchers." "But one of the things I learned from improvising is that all of life is an improvisation, whether you like it or not. "Some of the greatest scientific discoveries of the 20th century came out of people dropping things." Along with his three sons, Arkin is survived by his wife Suzanne as well as four grandchildren and a great-grandchild.—AFP

UK court told Kevin Spacey was a 'sexual bully'

Oscar-winning Hollywood actor Kevin Spacey was described as a "sexual bully", as prosecutors opened their case against him in London for a string of alleged assaults. "Kevin Spacey Fowler is an actor; many of you will already know that," lawyer Christine Agnew told a jury at Southwark Crown Court, using the star's full name. "He is an extremely famous actor who has won a number of awards. He is also, the prosecution allege, a man who sexually assaults other men."

Agnew said Spacey, a two-time Academy Award winner for "American Beauty" and "The Usual Suspects", did not respect personal boundaries or space. He was "a man who it would seem delights in making others feel powerless and uncomfortable, a sexual bully", the lawyer alleged in her opening speech.

"His preferred method of assault is, it appears, to grab aggressively other men in the crotch. On one occasion things went further than that." Spacey, 63, denies three counts of indecent assault, seven counts of sexual assault, and one count of causing a person to engage in sexual activity without consent.



US actor Kevin Spacey leaves Southwark Crown Court in London.--AFP

'Damned lies'

The prosecutor alleged that Spacey, star of the political television drama "House of Cards", had "abused the power and influence that his reputation and fame afforded him". Some of the alleged offences involved "inappropriate and unwelcome" touching, as well as groping, she said.

Another alleged Spacey had assaulted him while he was asleep, it was claimed. Agnew questioned how four men, who were all apparently unknown to one another, would make similar allegations. "Have they decided to manufacture allegations against the defendant in order to benefit financially?" Agnew asked. She told the jury Spacey would suggest that.

But she said the prosecution case was that the actor used his "popularity and prominence, his illustriousness and influence... taking what and who he wanted, when he wanted". Spacey's lawyer Patrick Gibbs said his client—a US citizen—had come back to the UK to answer the allegations against him and recount "what actually happened".—AFP

Lifestyle



A spectacled caiman (Caiman crocodilus) called "La Nina Princesa" ("The Princess Girl"), dressed as a bride.



Victor Hugo Sosa, Mayor of San Pedro Huamelula, kisses a spectacled caiman (Caiman crocodilus) called "La Nina Princesa" ("The Princess Girl") before marrying her in San Pedro Huamelula, Oaxaca state, Mexico. — AFP photos



Victor Hugo Sosa, Mayor of San Pedro Huamelula, marries a spectacled caiman (Caiman crocodilus) called "La Nina Princesa" ("The Princess Girl").

Mexican mayor weds a reptile and couldn't be happier!

As onlookers clapped and danced, a mayor of a small southern Mexico town entered into holy matrimony with a female reptile in a traditional rite to bring good fortune to his people. Victor Hugo Sosa, mayor of San Pedro Huamelula, a town of Indigenous Chontal people in the Tehuantepec isthmus of Mexico, took as his betrothed a reptile named Alicia Adriana, re-enacting an ancestral ritual.



The reptile is a caiman, an alligator-like marsh dweller endemic to Mexico and Central America. Sosa swore to be true to what local lore calls "the princess girl." "I accept responsibility because we love each other. That is what is important. You can't have a

marriage without love... I yield to marriage with the princess girl," Sosa said during the ritual.

Marriage between a man and a female caiman has happened here for 230 years to commemorate the day when two Indigenous groups came to peace—with a marriage. Tradition has it that frictions were overcome when a Chontal king, embodied these days by the mayor, wedded a princess girl of the Huave Indigenous group, represented by the female alligator. The Huave live along coastal Oaxaca state, not far from this inland town.

The wedding allows the sides to "link with what is the emblem of Mother Earth, asking the all-powerful for rain, the germination of the seed, all those things that are peace and harmony for the Chontal man," explains Jaime Zarate, chronicler of San Pedro Huamelula.

Before the wedding ceremony, the reptile is taken house to house so that inhabitants can take her in their arms and dance. The alligator wears a green skirt, a colorful hand-embroidered tunic and a headdress of ribbons and sequins. The creature's snout is bound shut to avoid any pre-marital mishaps. Later, she is put in a white bride's costume and taken to town hall for the blessed event.



Villagers walk a spectacled caiman (Caiman crocodilus) called "La Nina Princesa" ("The Princess Girl"), dressed as a bride, before being married to the Mayor in San Pedro Huamelula.

As part of the ritual, Joel Vasquez, a local fisherman, tosses his net and intones the town's hopes that the marriage may bring "good fishing, so that there is prosperity, equilibrium and ways to live in peace." After the wedding, the mayor dances with his bride to the sounds of traditional music.

"We are happy because we celebrate the union of two cultures. People are content," Sosa told AFP. As the dance winds down, the king plants a kiss on the snout of the "princess girl." — AFP



Villagers bless a spectacled caiman (Caiman crocodilus) called "La Nina Princesa" ("The Princess Girl"), dressed as a bride, before being married to the Mayor in San Pedro Huamelula.



Villagers walk a spectacled caiman (Caiman crocodilus) called "La Nina Princesa" ("The Princess Girl"), dressed as a bride, before being married to the Mayor in San Pedro Huamelula.



File photo shows a general view of an empty beach on the Philippine island of Boracay.—AFP

Philippine tourism video used images from other countries

Philippine tourism officials were left red-faced after the creators of a video promoting the archipelago nation as a holiday destination said on Sunday they had used stock shots from other countries. Advertising agency DDB Philippines apologised for the "highly inappropriate" images, which included rice terraces in Indonesia and sand dunes in Brazil. The agency was behind the video for the government's \$900,000 "Love The Philippines" tourism campaign launched on June 27. The tourism ministry announced late Saturday that it was investigating allegations that DDB's video included "non-original shots". The video was later removed from its Facebook page. Popular Philippine blogger Sass Rogando Sasot had posted on Facebook that several images in the campaign video were from other countries. Analysis by AFP's Fact Check team confirmed that the video showed places in Brazil, Indonesia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates. DDB apologized on Sunday for using "foreign stock footage", describing it as an "unfortunate oversight on our agency's part". "Proper screening and approval processes should have been strictly followed," DDB said in a statement. "The use of foreign stock footage in a campaign promoting the Philippines is highly inappropriate, and contradictory to the DOT's (Department of Tourism) objectives." The video was produced at its own expense, DDB said.

Tourists want 'authentic interactions'

The tourism ministry said in its statement it had "repeatedly sought confirmation from DDB on the originality and ownership of all materials contained in the AVPs (audio-visual presentations) and key visuals presented to the Department". "In ALL these occasions, DDB repeatedly assured the DOT that the originality and ownership of all materials are in order," the ministry said. Some of the images used in the promotional video can be found on the websites of stock footage providers.

For example, footage of rice terraces is on Pond5, which identified the location as Ubud on the Indonesian tourist island of Bali. Videvo has the same aerial shot of sand dunes as the one used in the Philippine ad but says the location was Cumbuco in northeastern Brazil. Other footage shows a fisherman casting a net while wearing a hat that is not typically worn in the Philippines and a person driving a buggy over sand dunes in the United Arab Emirates.

A spokeswoman for the tourism ministry did not respond to AFP's requests for comment on Sunday. Tourism minister Christina Frasco told local media last week the new branding campaign cost 49 million pesos (nearly \$900,000). Frasco said the ministry conducted a global survey which found that, in the post-pandemic era, tourists wanted "authentic interactions with communities".

The new slogan replaced "It's More Fun in the Philippines". Tourism is a key industry in the Philippines, which boasts pristine dive spots and white sand beaches, but arrivals lag those of its neighbors due to poor infrastructure and high costs. There were 2.7 million inbound tourists to the Philippines last year, down 68 percent from pre-pandemic levels in 2019, according to United Nations' World Tourism Organization data. — AFP

Orchestra-conducting robot wows audience in South Korean capital

A South Korean-made robot made its debut as an orchestra conductor before a sell-out crowd in Seoul on Friday, wowing the audience with a flawless performance in place of a human maestro. Named "EveR 6", the five-foot-ten-inch-tall (1.8m) robot guided more than 60 musicians of the National Orchestra of Korea who were playing traditional Korean instruments. The robot successfully guided the compositions, both independently and in collaboration with a human maestro who was standing next to it for about half an hour, entertaining the more than 950 audience members who had packed the National Theater of Korea.

The robot was showered with applause when it first appeared from below the stage on a lift and turned to face the audience, bowing in greeting. Throughout the performance, the robot's blue eyes stared unblinkingly at the musicians, only nodding its head in time to the music. The rookie performed well on its stage debut, audience members said. "I came here worried whether this robot could pull this off without a glitch," Kim Ji-min, a 19-year-old college student majoring in music, told AFP.

"But I found it to be in great harmony with the musicians... It felt like a whole new world for me." While there have been musical performances led by robotic conductors in the past, including



This handout picture shows the South Korean-made robot called "EveR 6" conducting musicians of the National Orchestra of Korea during a practice session at the national theatre in Seoul.

a 2017 concert led by the robot YuMi in Italy, this was the first time South Koreans were able to witness a robotic conductor on stage. EveR 6, developed by the state-run Korea Institute of Industrial Technology, was programmed to replicate the movements of a human conductor through motion capture technology.

The machine is not capable of listening or improvising in real-time, however. EveR 6's developers are currently working on enabling the robot to make

gestures that are not pre-programmed, said Lee Dong-wook, the robot's engineer. Improvising and communicating with musicians in real-time is the next big step, said Song Joo-ho, a music columnist who came to see the performance. "It needs to improvise in real-time when musicians make a mistake or things go wrong." — AFP



This handout picture provided by the National Theater of Korea shows the South Korean-made robot called "EveR 6" conducting musicians of the National Orchestra of Korea during a concert at the national theatre in Seoul. — AFP photos



This handout picture shows the South Korean-made robot called "EveR 6" conducting musicians of the National Orchestra of Korea during a practice session at the national theatre in Seoul.

Sports

China win first women's Asia Cup basketball title in over a decade

Five-time defending champions Japan stunned

SYDNEY: Giant centre Han Xu sank 26 points as China stunned five-time defending champions Japan 73-71 Sunday to win their first women's Asia Cup basketball title in more than a decade. New York Liberty's Han also made 10 rebounds and two assists at Sydney Olympic Park, while fellow superstar Li Meng poured in 17 points to hand world number two China its 12th crown and first since 2011. The victory snapped Japan's dominance in the tournament dating back to Bangkok in 2013 and ended the Tokyo Olympic silver medalist's dream of making it six in a row.

No nation other than Japan, China or South Africa has won the Asia Cup since its inception in 1965. Hosts Australia took bronze for the third consecutive tournament after crushing New Zealand 81-59. "It feels unreal. We didn't expect we could be champions before the tournament started," said China coach Zheng Wei. "At our training camp before the tournament we had some problems like injuries and not every player joining us at the start of the camp. But our team has got better and better. 'I'm very proud them.'"

Weina Jin scored an early bucket for China but Japan quickly found their stride in an intense first quarter that ended level-pegging at 17-17. With tournament MVP Han, who towers 6 feet 10 inches (2.08 meters), leading the way, China went on a 7-0



SYDNEY: China players celebrate victory with the winners' trophy after the end of the Women's Asia Cup basketball final match between Japan and China in Sydney on July 2, 2023. — AFP

run in the second stanza to pull clear, but again a relentless Japan came roaring back. With lightning-fast transition and aggressive defense, Japan went 18-2 to reach half-time 35-26 in front.

China lifted the tempo in the third stanza and edged a point clear, but Japan weathered the storm to take a 51-48 lead into the home stretch. But in

a nail-biting finish, the Chinese held their nerve to triumph in a game that went to the wire. "We tried hard, all the players did well," said Japan coach Toru Onzuka. "We can learn from this (Chinese) team, they are a great team." All four semi-finalists in the eight-team competition secured a place at the 2024 Paris Olympic qualifying tournament. — AFP

Fowler grabs PGA lead at storm-hit Detroit

WASHINGTON: Rickie Fowler, trying to snap a four-year victory drought, birdied six of the last eight holes for a one-stroke lead after Saturday's third round of the PGA Tour Rocket Mortgage Classic. The 34-year-old American, who last won at the 2019 Phoenix Open, sizzled down the back nine to fire an eight-under par 64 and stand on 20-under 196 after 54 holes at Detroit Golf Club. "Just felt good," Fowler said. "Swing felt nice. I wanted to keep giving myself as many looks as I could. Good swings and made some putts."

Canadian Adam Hadwin matched the course record with a bogey-free 63 to finish one back of Fowler on 197 with countryman Taylor Pendrith third on 198 after taking his first bogeys of the week at the par-3 15th and 18. England's Aaron Rai and American Peter Kuest, a Monday qualifier, shared fourth on 199. Afternoon storms halted play for an hour and 42 minutes and a stormy forecast prompted officials to move Sunday tee times to early morning in threesomes off first and 10th tees.



DETROIT: A detail shot of Rickie Fowler of the United States on the practice putting green during the final round of the Rocket Mortgage Classic at Detroit Golf Club on July 02, 2023 in Detroit. — AFP

"I'm just hoping we can finish," Fowler said. Fowler, a five-time PGA winner whose titles include the 2017 Players Championship, has struggled for the past three seasons but revived his form this year with nine top-20 finishes in his past 10 events. He's confident a triumph is not far off. "Whether it happens tomorrow or not, it's going to happen here soon," Fowler said. "I'm not pressing that I need to go get it done tomorrow or it means absolutely nothing."

"I've been playing a lot of really good golf and been putting myself in good positions. This definitely won't be the last, but yeah, it will be fun tomorrow." Fowler sank a 20-foot birdie putt at the second and birdied all four par-5 holes - the fourth, seventh, 14th and 17th. After taking his lone bogey at 10 when he landed his tee shot behind a tree in the far left rough, Fowler birdied the 13th with a 12-foot putt, the 14th on a tap-in and the par-3 15th from just outside four feet.

Fowler tapped in for birdie at 15 to match Hadwin for the lead and then dropped his approach just inside three feet at 18 and tapped in for the lead. Hadwin went four-under over the last five holes with a 17-foot eagle putt at 14, a 12-foot birdie putt at 15 and a tap-in birdie at 17. "This is the round I needed to give myself a chance tomorrow," Hadwin said. "Guys are going low. I've got to keep making birdies, keep hitting fairways, staying out of my own way and keep making decisions quickly."

Hadwin, whose only PGA victory came at the 2017 Valspar Championship, fired a 59 at LaQuinta Country Club in the 2017 PGA CareerBuilder Challenge and pondered another 59 on Saturday. "It kind of passed through my mind. I did quick match after eagle-birdie on 14-15," he said. "I just didn't think there were enough holes coming in." World number 127 Pendrith, chasing his first PGA title, was last year's Detroit runner-up. His only top-10 finish this season was a share of seventh at Pebble Beach. — AFP

Duckett gives England hope in 2nd Ashes Test

LONDON: Mitchell Starc sparked an England collapse at Lord's on Saturday before Ben Duckett was given a controversial reprieve as the hosts maintained their bid for a remarkable win in the second Ashes Test. England were 114-4 at stumps on the fourth day, still needing a further 257 runs to reach a target of 371. If achieved, that would be England's second-highest run-chase to win a Test behind their 378 against India at Edgbaston last year.

Left-handed opener Duckett, who made 98 in the first innings, was 50 not out and captain Ben Stokes unbeaten on 29, with England looking to level the five-match series at 1-1. Starc, recalled following Australia's thrilling two-wicket win in last week's first Test at Edgbaston, reduced England to 13-2. And they were in dire straits at 45-4 when Australia captain Pat Cummins struck twice in an over.

Duckett then appeared to fall for exactly 50 when he miscued Cameron Green to fine leg, where a sliding Starc held a fine catch only for the ball to touch the turf. Third umpire Marais Erasmus, to Australia's visible despair, disallowed the dismissal because Starc had grounded the ball before he was in control of his body and so had not completed a fair catch. "I have no idea on the rules, we've seen different ones in this game and different decisions have been given," England batting coach Marcus Trescothick told the BBC.

'Finely balanced'

At the close, England could still think of a win that would be almost as improbable as their one-wicket victory over Australia at Headingley in 2019, when Stokes hit a stunning unbeaten hundred as they chased down a target of 359. "It's finely balanced," added Trescothick. "We didn't want to lose the wickets at the top order but we faced some beautiful balls, it's not out of the question yet." Starc had Zak Crawley 'strangled' down the legside, wicketkeeper Alex Carey holding a fine diving catch.

But there was no denying the left-arm fast bowler's skill when he cleaned up Ollie Pope with a 90 mph inswinger that started outside off and smashed into middle stump. And Starc would have had Duckett lbw for five but for a review that fell narrowly in the opener's favor. But Cummins had Joe Root fending to David Warner at first slip for 18 as the England star became the latest batsman this match to fall to the short ball. Three balls later Cummins, looking to become the first Australia captain in 22 years to win an Ashes series in England, bowled Harry Brook with a superb delivery that straightened off the seam to hit the top of off stump.

World Test champions Australia ripped through

England's top-order despite being without Nathan Lyon. The off-spinner, appearing in his 100th consecutive Test, was not on the field having surprisingly limped out to bat at No 11 despite suffering a severe calf injury while fielding on Thursday. Yet for all the 35-year-old's bravery, Lyon was struggling to run. And with runners no longer allowed in Tests, Starc repeatedly refused singles to a deep-set field in order to protect Lyon.

The courageous Lyon's defiant four off 13 balls ended when he holed out off Stuart Broad, the veteran paceman taking 4-65 as Australia were dismissed for 279 in their second innings. Lyon departed to a pat on the back from Stokes, who bowled 12 overs straight through, and a standing ovation from the crowd. His gutsy effort was also a testament to Australia's regard for England's run-chasing ability. In the past year, Stokes's men have achieved three of England's highest fourth-innings run chases.

The most any side have made to win in the fourth innings of a Test at Lord's, however, is West Indies' 344-1 in 1984. Australia resumed on Saturday morning on 130-2 but then lost three wickets for 10 runs in slumping to 197-5 as a trio of batsmen were bounced out. Usman Khawaja, who made 141 and 65 at Edgbaston, started the slump when out for 77 after spooning a Broad bouncer straight to fine leg. Steve Smith, fresh from a hundred in Australia's first-innings 416, then hooked a Josh Tongue bouncer straight to deep backward square. — AFP



LONDON: England's Ben Duckett plays a shot on day five of the second Ashes cricket Test match between England and Australia at Lord's cricket ground in London on July 2, 2023. — AFP

News in Brief

Horn hangs up gloves

SYDNEY: Australia's Jeff Horn, best known for his stunning upset of Filipino great Manny Pacquiao to win the WBO welterweight world title, officially retired Sunday citing memory issues. The former schoolteacher beat Pacquiao in a unanimous 12-round points decision in Brisbane in 2017, seen as one of the greatest moments in Australian sport. Pacquiao pulled out of a planned rematch later that year, with Horn going on to win three more fights while losing to Australian Michael Zerafa and American Terence Crawford. His last bout was a defeat at the hands of current interim WBO super welterweight champion Tim Tszyu nearly three years ago, but he had never officially retired. Horn, 35, told the Brisbane Courier-Mail newspaper he had been offered a big-money deal for a comeback bout with Zerafa but turned it down. — AFP

Blue Jackets hire Babcock

NEW YORK: Mike Babcock, who guided the Detroit Red Wings to a Stanley Cup title 15 years ago, was named on Saturday as the new coach of the Columbus Blue Jackets. The 60-year-old Canadian spent 17 seasons as an NHL coach, leading the Anaheim Ducks to the Stanley Cup final in 2003 in his first season behind the bench. Babcock compiled 700 wins, 12th-most in NHL history, in 1,301 games over two years with Anaheim, 10 with Detroit and just over four seasons with Toronto before being fired in November 2019 after a start of 9-10 with four overtime losses. He spent the past two seasons as a volunteer coach at the University of Saskatchewan before resigning last August. Babcock signed a two-year contract to replace Brad Larsen, who was fired April 15 after winning only 25 games last season, finishing 31st among 32 clubs and missing the playoffs for the third consecutive year. — AFP

Fabregas hangs up boots

MADRID: Former Arsenal, Barcelona and Chelsea midfielder Cesc Fabregas announced his retirement from football at the age of 36 on Saturday, revealing his plans to immediately go into coaching. Fabregas won the 2010 World Cup and two European Championships with Spain, two Premier League titles with Chelsea and La Liga with Barcelona. "It is with great sadness that the time has come for me to hang up my playing boots," Fabregas wrote on social media. "It has been a journey that I'll never forget," he added. "From my first days at Barca, Arsenal, Barca again, Chelsea, Monaco and Como, I will treasure them all. 'I lived experiences that I never thought in a million years I would even come close to.' Fabregas set up Andres Iniesta to score the winning goal against the Netherlands in the 2010 World Cup final in Johannesburg. — AFP

Keys lifts Eastbourne title

EASTBOURNE: Madison Keys claimed the Eastbourne International for the second time on Saturday after holding off a fightback by Daria Kasatkina to win 6-2, 7-6 (15/13). The American appeared to be cruising towards her third grass court title as she raced through the first set and led 4-1 in the second. Kasatkina was battling the blustery conditions and a series of net cords that went in Keys' favor but found her stride to take five of the next six games. However, the Russian, who will enter the world's top 10 next week, was broken when serving to take the second set. Instead a marathon tie-break ensued as Kasatkina again battled back from 5-2 down to have four set points. Keys' booming forehands though dug the world number 25 out of trouble and she eventually took the title on her fifth match point. "It feels like home," said Keys of backing up her first ever WTA title at Eastbourne in 2014. — AFP

Thai football boss resigns

BANGKOK: Thailand's football association president announced his resignation on Saturday, following political pressure over brawling between the kingdom's national team and Indonesia during the men's final at the Southeast Asian Games. Indonesia defeated Thailand 5-2 in extra time in the May final that saw players and coaches on both sides clash on two occasions with four red cards issued. Thailand's football association later apologized and handed out lengthy bans to two players, two officials and a coach. In a statement on Facebook, football association boss Somyot Poompanmonng said Thai deputy prime minister Prawit Wongsuwan, who heads the country's national Olympic committee, had ordered him to stand down as president at a meeting on Friday. "As President of the Football Association of Thailand... I am ready to follow the order of General Prawit," Somyot said in the Saturday statement, adding he would notify the ASEAN Football Federation (AFF), the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), and the international governing body FIFA. — AFP



Damian Lillard

Lillard wants trade, prefers Miami deal

NEW YORK: Portland Trail Blazers star Damian Lillard has requested a trade and the seven-time NBA All-Star guard prefers a deal to the Miami Heat, according to multiple reports on Saturday. Lillard, who turns 33 on July 15, is due \$204 million over the next four years. He has spent all 11 of his NBA campaigns with Portland but has gone past the second round only once in eight trips to the playoffs. Lillard's request was reported by ESPN and The Athletic with the Miami Herald also reporting Lillard wants only the Heat, being a close friend of Heat star Bam Adebayo and having respect for playmaker Jimmy Butler. Butler and Adebayo were keys in the Heat making a run from the play-in games to the NBA Finals last month, where Miami lost to the Denver Nuggets.

Lillard averaged a career-high 32.2 points and 7.3 assists and matched a career-best by shooting 46.3% over 58 games last season. He would be the largest point scorer in NBA history to swap teams for the next campaign, ESPN reported. "We want Dame here but he notified us today he wants out and he'd prefer to play someplace else," Trail Blazers general manager Joe Cronin said. "What has not changed for us is that we're committed to winning, and we are going to do what's best for the team in pursuit of that goal."

Portland finished 33-49 and missed the playoffs for the second season in a row. The Trail Blazers are expected to want young talent and draft picks in exchange from any team interested in Lillard. Those with salary cap room to make the deal include the Heat, Philadelphia 76ers, Los Angeles Clippers and Brooklyn Nets. Players on the Heat who could be moved in exchange likely include guards Kyle Lowry and Tyler Herro and forward Duncan Robinson.

ESPN reported Lillard has a "deep respect" for the San Antonio Spurs, who just landed French teen star big man Victor Wembanyama. But the Spurs finished 22-60 last season and missed the playoffs for a fourth consecutive campaign. Lillard played under Spurs coach Gregg Popovich on the US Tokyo Olympic gold medal squad. — AFP

Sports

Pagenaud escapes serious injury in IndyCar rollover

IndyCar driver describes 'hell of a ride'

LOS ANGELES: IndyCar driver Simon Pagenaud of France described a "hell of a ride" after walking away from a frightening rollover wreck during practice at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course in Lexington. "I'm talking, so it's all good," the 49-year-old former IndyCar champion said after his Meyer Shank Racing car went off the track minutes into pre-qualifying practice on Saturday, hit a gravel trap and rolled more than half a dozen times. Pagenaud was able to climb from the car and walk away, but after being checked and released from the on-site medical center he was still being monitored for concussion. "I feel fine, but you've got to be careful with the brain," he said.

Pagenaud, who could be seen drawing his hands protectively into the cockpit as the car careened out of control, rolling more than half a dozen times. As safety personnel went to assist him, Pagenaud told the team via radio he was all right and after exiting he sat for a moment to collect himself, waving to fans as he walked to the safety vehicle. "It was a hell of a

ride, that's for sure," Pagenaud said. "We had something go wrong and I couldn't slow down."

"I tried to make the corner anyways. I know that gravel is deadly. Michael Andretti has done it, so I guess I joined another legend, so that's cool." The crash recalled one by Andretti 25 years ago when he rolled through a gravel trap at Mid-Ohio. "I was just trying to bail out," Pagenaud said. "It's downhill, which is nuts. The car took off, I hit the gravel and it just rolled. 'I'm just glad I didn't go over the tire wall,'" said the 2019 Indianapolis 500 winner. "So glad that we have the aeroscreen," he added of the protective polycarbonate and titanium windscreens on IndyCar race cars.

IndyCar issued a brief statement on the crash. "Following this morning's incident at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course, the driver of the No. 60, Simon Pagenaud, was evaluated and released by the IndyCar medical team. As per IndyCar protocol, Pagenaud has not been cleared to return to racing today. "He will be re-evaluated (Sunday) morning."

under NBA rules, which also outlaw the signing of new deals until Thursday, leaving only media reports to provide the first clues at moves by NBA clubs for next season. Reigning NBA champion Denver are reportedly losing Bruce Brown to Indiana, which agreed to a two-year deal worth \$45 million with the 26-year-old guard, who scored a career-best 11.5 points a game for the Nuggets in their championship run, playing a career-high 28.5 minutes a game.

Portland, still wondering about the eventual fate of star Damian Lillard, will keep forward Jerami Grant on a five-year deal worth \$160 million, ESPN and The Athletic said. Kyle Kuzma agreed to re-sign with Washington for \$102 million over four years, guard Coby White agreed a three-year deal for \$40 million to stay in Chicago and guard Caris LeVert is staying with Cleveland on a two-year deal worth \$32 million, ESPN and The Athletic reported.

Harden's fate unknown

The Milwaukee Bucks, the 2021 NBA champions, agreed to a deal with forward Khris Middleton on a \$102 million deal over three years that should help them keep Greek star big man Giannis Antetokounmpo, who could become a free agent in 2025. Still uncertain was the fate of center Brook Lopez, who completed his Bucks contract last season.

The Bucks had last season's best record in the NBA but lost to Miami in the first round of the playoffs. A potential savior for Lopez likely was taken off the board when the Los Angeles Lakers agreed to a deal with guard Gabe Vincent. The Athletic reported. Japanese forward Yuta Watanabe has agreed to a deal with the Phoenix Suns, where he will reunite with former Brooklyn teammate Kevin Durant, The

Berihu Aregawi, 22, became the fifth fastest runner ever over the 5,000m when he soared to a win in 12:40.45, another meet record - and also a personal best and the world's fastest time this season.

With temperatures hovering around 17 degrees Celsius (64F), Aregawi, who was fourth in the 10,000m at the Tokyo Olympics, launched into an impressive solo assault that saw Uganda's world record holder Joshua Cheptegei finish second (12:41.61). "I am delighted to be here and to win against Joshua," beamed Aregawi. Cheptegei added: "My goal is to get back to the form I was before, getting faster race by race and tonight is the proof of that. "I still have a lot to improve on, a lot to work on, but if I believe in myself, I will reach my objectives."

Bol, Ta Lou victorious

Dutchwoman Femke Bol continued her winning ways in the 400m hurdles, clocking a dominant 52.76sec for a new meet record. Ivorian Marie-Josée Ta Lou sprinted to the win in the women's 100m in 10.88sec, shorn of her principal Jamaican rivals and the sole runner to dip below the 11-sec mark. "I was happy with my race, but not really with my time," she said. "I will have to work as usual with my coach. The conditions weren't ideal, it was cold for me. But I'm happy, at least I ran under the 11 seconds barrier."

Kenya's Commonwealth champion Mary Moraa claimed victory in the women's 800m in 1:57.43, with in-form Briton Keely Hodgkinson almost a second

behind in second. "I wasn't very happy about this race. I was in great shape, but I guess today was not my day. Mary was better," Hodgkinson conceded. World U20 100m champion Letsile Tebogo of Botswana, the fastest this year with a 19.87 lifetime best, won the men's 200m in ease in 20.01sec into a 1.4m/s headwind. Olympic champion Andre de Grasse, making a comeback from injury, finished sixth in 20.57sec. "It felt great tonight," said Tebogo. "You have to trust the process and then everything will fall into place just as it's supposed to be." — AFP

It's easy to blame the track, but I think also looking at how wet it was and these kind of things, there are definitely things that we have to look at for the future. "What can we do to protect the drivers better? I think today it was unnecessary really." Van 't Hoff, 18, was the second junior driver killed at the Spa-circuit in four years.

Frenchman Anthoine Hubert was killed in a similar Formula Two crash at Raicidillon, a part of the track that follows the infamous Eau Rouge corner and close to the Kemmel straight. Aston Martin driver Lance Stroll said he wanted to see the circuit layout changed. "It's a tragic day," he said. "We lost a driver today so I want everyone to think about that. My thoughts are with him. "It breaks my heart. I think Eau Rouge at Spa needs looking into because we've lost two drivers there in four or five years. It's really dangerous. We say so every year and it's not fair. It has to change."

According to Dutch daily La Deriere Heure/Les Sports, Van 't Hoff's car hit a barrier at over 200kmh and the following driver was unable to avoid crashing into his stricken car. In the aftermath of a wet-dry race at Spielberg, where Verstappen triumphed after surviving a first corner skirmish with Red Bull teammate Perez, there was much debate about racing in very wet conditions with little or no clear visibility. "He pushed me off," shouted an angry Verstappen. "It could have been a really big shunt. We need to have a chat about that."

Irving stays in Dallas, Green with Warriors in NBA free agency

NEW YORK: Kyrie Irving agreed to a three-year deal to stay with Dallas and Draymond Green came to terms on a four-year deal to stay with Golden State according to multiple reports as NBA free agency dealmaking began Friday. Eight-time All-Star guard Irving, who won a title with Cleveland in 2016 but was dogged by off-court controversy in Brooklyn, was traded to Dallas last February and agreed to stay with the Mavericks for \$126 million, with a player option for the final season. The Athletic and ESPN reported.

Irving missed more than 50 games with the Nets because of not being vaccinated for COVID and eight more for refusing to apologize for promoting an anti-Semitic film on social media. He averaged 27 points in 20 games with Dallas but the Mavs missed the NBA playoffs. The Warriors kept forward Green on a four-year deal worth \$100 million, according to ESPN and The Athletic.

Green opted out of his contract but the Warriors said they wanted him back, with his \$22.3 million next year saving Golden State salary tax money. Just before the free agency negotiating period began, the NBA announced the salary cap for the 2023-24 season would be \$136.021 million per club with minimum payroll at \$122.418 million and the salary tax starting at \$165.294 million.

Free agency talks were not permitted until Friday

Ingebrigtsen and Aregawi shine at Diamond League

LAUSANNE: Norwegian Jakob Ingebrigtsen stormed to an impressive victory in the men's 1500m over Ethiopian challenger Lamecha Girma at the Lausanne Diamond League meet on Friday. Ingebrigtsen clocked 3min 28.72sec for a new meet record at the Stade de la Pontaise in unseasonably chilly conditions at the sixth of the season's 14 meets in track and field's elite circuit.

Girma had set a new world record in the 3,000m steeplechase in Paris earlier this month, on the same night that Ingebrigtsen broke the rarely-run 2 miles record. But the Norwegian made no mistake in Lausanne with a masterful display, Girma having to content himself with second place in an Ethiopian record of 3:29.51. "I have had to make some adjustments with my strategy, I have been putting in extra miles in the last couple of weeks," said Ingebrigtsen.

"It's all to get myself in the best shape possible for the worlds" in Budapest in August, said the Norwegian, who was left bitterly disappointed in Eugene last year after being outsprung by Briton Jack Wightman for world 1500m gold. Girma's teammate

Verstappen cautious to blame Spa circuit for fatal crash

SPIELBERG BEI KNITTELFELD: Max Verstappen was cautious to blame the Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Belgium for a fatal crash that claimed the life of a fellow-Dutchman on Saturday. The defending double world champion won a rain-hit wet-and-dry sprint race ahead of Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez before he commented on the tragedy at the Belgian circuit, one of his favorites.

Verstappen said he felt "incredibly sad" to learn of the death of teenager Dilano Van 't Hoff in rain-swept conditions on the Kemmel Straight in an accident during a Formula Regional European Championship race. "I didn't know him personally," he explained. "He was a Dutch racing driver, an up-and-coming driver who had the same dreams as we all had when we were at that age, wanting to get into Formula One or whatever. "It's incredibly sad for the whole family and all involved. The team MP Motorsport - I know quite a lot of people in there."

He added that lessons should be learned from the crash, but cautioned against blaming the circuit layout. "We have to look into these kind of situations,



Simon Pagenaud

Pagenaud said he was "ready," but didn't argue with the need to comply with the series' concussion evaluation protocol. "We will see what they say," he said. "But very unfortunate day for us. But I got some TV time, I guess." — AFP



Kyrie Irving

Athletic reported.

Philadelphia All-Star guard James Harden has opted into his \$35.6 million contract for next season with the 76ers but ESPN and The Athletic report it was done so the team can work on a trade deal. Harden, the 2018 NBA Most Valuable Player and a three-time scoring champion who turns 34 in August, could wind up on his fourth team in as many seasons after being traded from Houston to Brooklyn in 2021 and being dealt from the Nets to the 76ers in 2022. — AFP



LAUSANNE: Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen poses after winning the Men's 1500m event during the IAAF Diamond League 'Athletissima' athletics meeting in Lausanne. — AFP

behind in second. "I wasn't very happy about this race. I was in great shape, but I guess today was not my day. Mary was better," Hodgkinson conceded. World U20 100m champion Letsile Tebogo of Botswana, the fastest this year with a 19.87 lifetime best, won the men's 200m in ease in 20.01sec into a 1.4m/s headwind. Olympic champion Andre de Grasse, making a comeback from injury, finished sixth in 20.57sec. "It felt great tonight," said Tebogo. "You have to trust the process and then everything will fall into place just as it's supposed to be." — AFP



SPIELBERG BEI KNITTELFELD: Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez (left) and Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen take the lead at the start of the sprint at the Red Bull race track in Spielberg, Austria on July 1, 2023. — AFP

Perez said he had not seen Verstappen due to the poor visibility and the pair had settled their differences. "It was a hairy moment," said Verstappen later. Team boss Christian Horner said the pair had to avoid similar incidents in future and needed to ensure

Cincinnati's home run over; Miami end losing streak

MIAMI: FC Cincinnati's 100 percent home record in Major League Soccer ended on Saturday when they were held to a 2-2 draw at home to the New England Revolution. Eastern Conference leaders Cincinnati had gone into the game on the back of ten straight home wins but had to fight for a point against Bruce Arena's side.

The home side got off to a positive start with Senegalese forward Dominique Badji providing a clinical finish in the 11th minute from a tight angle after a penetrating low cross from Japanese winger Yuyu Kubo. It was to be an eventful night for Badji who, four minutes after his goal, put the ball into his own net when a shot from Gustavo Bou was parried out by Roman Celentano and flew in off the leg of the unfortunate Badji.

The impressive Bou then put New England, third in the East, into a 24th-minute 2-1 lead when Cincy defender Raymon Gaddis failed to deal with a cross, missing his header and the Argentine forward made no mistake. Bou then struck the post with a wickedly struck free-kick as New England looked to extend their lead. But Badji leveled the contest ten minutes after the break, collecting a pass from Luciano Acosta in the box and burying the ball in the bottom corner.

Spanish midfielder Carles Gil thought he had claimed a late winner for New England but his effort was ruled out for offside and the points remained shared. Another streak ended when Inter Miami's seven-match losing run was halted by a 1-1 draw at home to Austin. Newly appointed coach Gerardo Martino, watching from the stands while he awaits his papers, saw his former charge from Atlanta United, Venezuelan striker Josef Martinez put Miami — Lionel Messi's future team — ahead in the 47th minute.

Austin's defending was poor as they allowed Argentine teenager Benjamin Cremaschi space to cross and then failed to attend to Martinez who had time to control and convert in the box. But the lead lasted just four minutes before Nick Lima levelled with a side-foot finish meaning Miami remain last in the Eastern Conference, ten points off the final playoff spot with 15 games to go. Defending champions Los Angeles FC fell to their fifth defeat of the campaign with a 2-0 reverse at FC Dallas.

Tanzanian Bernard Kamungo opened the scoring for the Texas team before a brilliant last-minute strike from 20 yards by Sam Junqua condemned LAFC to back-to-back defeats. St Louis City moved three points clear of Los Angeles at the top of the Western Conference table with a 2-0 win at home to the Colorado Rapids. Costa Rican Randall Leal struck a brace for Nashville in their 2-0 win over Wayne Rooney's DC United. New York City ended their 11-game winless streak with a magnificent volley from Argentine Matias Pellegrini earning a 1-0 win at Montreal.

Los Angeles Galaxy were held to a 2-2 draw in the 'California Clasico' at the San Jose Earthquakes in front of 42,823 fans at a game moved to Stanford Stadium. A fine Preston Judd finish put the Galaxy 2-1 up in the 47th minute but San Jose grabbed an equalizer nine minutes from the end through Cristian Espinoza. The Columbus Crew beat the New York Red Bulls 2-1 thanks to a 62nd-minute volley from Ghanaian Yaw Yeboah, while Uruguayan Facundo Torres scored twice for Orlando City in their 3-1 win over the Chicago Fire. — AFP

they gave each other space. "The rules are very fair, race hard, but give each other space." Verstappen's win ahead of Perez in a Red Bull one-two earned him eight points to extend his title race lead to 70 points ahead of Sunday's Austrian Grand Prix. — AFP

Yates wins Tour de France opener

Adam Yates of Team UAE outsprints his twin brother



VITORIA: UAE Team Emirates' British rider Adam Yates (3rd left) wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey cycles with the pack of riders during the 2nd stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race 208.9 km between Vitoria-Gasteiz and San Sebastian, in northern Spain, on July 2, 2023. — AFP

BILBAO: Adam Yates of Team UAE won the opening stage of the Tour de France in Bilbao on Saturday outsprinting his twin brother Simon Yates of Jayco. The British twins had broken free at the top of the final climb and it soon became clear there was little will from those behind to chase over the final couple of kilometers. Two-time Tour winner Tadej Pogacar, also of UAE came, in third, 12 seconds adrift at the end of 182km circuit starting and ending in the Basque city.

Pogacar raised his arms in triumph crossing the line, after seeing his newly-recruited teammate take the win. "It was as if I had won the stage myself or in fact even better. It's a dream to see the team developing like this," said Pogacar, the 2021 and 2022 champion. Yates took both the first yellow jersey for the overall lead, and the first green jersey for sprint points. It was not the first 1-2 for cycling brothers as Andy Schleck beat his brother

Frank on stage 18 of the 2011 Tour de France.

"Our parents are here too," Adam said after the stage. "I haven't seen them yet, they're somewhere along the coast in a campervan." The younger by a few minutes, Adam led an elite clique up the Sondika hill through a narrow passage formed by enthusiastic flag-waving fans before allowing Simon to do the work most of the way to the line. "He understood. I'm sure he'll get his chance to be a pain in the ass along the road somewhere," said the winner. "He asked me this morning what our plans were but I couldn't tell him."

Simon Yates, long considered the better of the identical twins, is second in the overall standings, at eight seconds, but appeared deflated after the finale. "I've a fantastic relationship with my brother. I'm really happy for him," he said. "I'll stick it to him in a couple of days." After the bonuses, Slovenian Pogacar is third overall at 18 sec. Defending champion

Jonas Vingegaard is another four seconds off the pace after tailing the Slovenian all the way to the line, as he did when he wore down his rival last year.

"The Tour de France won't be decided on four seconds," Vingegaard said at the finish line. There seemed to be little love lost as Pogacar asked Vingegaard without success to help break away on the final hill. They did manage to create a good time gap however. The 2019 champion Egan Bernal, French former runner-up Romain Bardet, local hero Pello Bilbao and Australian hope Ben O'Connor all lost around 20 seconds to Pogacar and Vingegaard.

Eclipse Tour yellow

Saturday's race began under grey skies outside Athletic Bilbao's San Mames stadium before the riders were cheered round the countryside circuit by enthusiastic crowds. Ecuadorian Richard Carapaz of EF team and Spaniard Enric Mas of the Movistar Team

had hopes of contending for the final podium in Paris, instead both were forced out after being involved in the same crash towards the end of the stage. Carapaz, the 2019 Giro d'Italia winner, finished the stage despite a bloodied left knee which was later confirmed to have "a small fracture" while Mas withdrew immediately after breaking his right shoulder.

The streets along the route were decked out with the Basque white, green and red flags as the Tour de France yellow was for once eclipsed. Dane Vingegaard of Jumbo Visma led the peloton past the landmark Guggenheim museum before a breakaway formed as the peloton swept into pine and fir forests on the rolling green hills that mark this Atlantic coast region. American rider Neilson Powless took the polka dot jersey for best climber after winning the race to the top of the penultimate hill. Stage two is another hilly run through the Basque region from Vitoria to San Sebastian. — AFP

Kuwait book SAFF final



NEW DELHI: Kuwait defeated Bangladesh 1-0 on Saturday in the semifinal of the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship being held in the Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bangalore city in south India. Abdullah Ammar scored the only goal of the match in second minute of

the extra-time, helping Kuwait reach the final. In earlier group matches, Kuwait defeated Nepal 3-1 and Pakistan 4-0, and drew with India 1-1 to lead Group A. In the final, Kuwait will take on either India or Lebanon who are locking horn later today in the same stadium. — KUNA



Djokovic eyes 8th Wimbledon title, 24th Slam crown

LONDON: Novak Djokovic has Roger Federer's record of eight Wimbledon titles as well as a 24th major in his sights as he closes in on a first calendar Grand Slam in 54 years. Fresh from breaking out of a tie with Rafael Nadal for 23 Slams at the French Open, the 36-year-old Djokovic will comfortably be the overwhelming favorite at the All England Club when he starts his title defense on Monday.

With a 10th Australian Open and third Roland Garros already wrapped up this season, an eighth Wimbledon triumph would leave Djokovic needing just the US Open in September to emulate Rod Laver's sweep of all four majors in 1969. "He takes your legs, then he takes your soul, then he digs your grave and you have a funeral and you're dead. Bye-bye. Thank you for coming," said coach Goran

Ivanisevic when asked to caption the Serb's Grand Slam mindset.

Djokovic has won the title on his last four visits to Wimbledon and has not lost on Centre Court since the 2013 final. "When I enter Centre Court, it just awakens something in me and I'm able to perform at a very high level," said Djokovic who opens his campaign on Monday against 67th-ranked clay-court lover Pedro Cachin. "Grass courts are the rarest surface we have in the sport, which is contrary to what you had maybe 40, 50, 60 years ago where you played three out of four slams were played on grass.

"It does take time - more than any other surface - to really get used to it. But I think in the past 10 years of my career, I've adapted very quickly. I think the results here are a testament to that." Djokovic's 86 match wins at Wimbledon are only bettered by the now retired Federer and are more than the rest of the current top 20 put together. Of those players, only two—Cameron Norrie and Hubert Hurkacz—have made the semi-finals of Wimbledon. Among his top five rivals, not one has got beyond the last 16. Two-time cham-

pion Nadal is sitting out the rest of the year through injury.

A 24th major for Djokovic would take him level with Margaret Court for the most Grand Slam titles won by one player. World number one Carlos Alcaraz will be Djokovic's biggest threat, especially as the young Spaniard now has a maiden grass-court title in his collection after his win at Queen's last weekend. However, Alcaraz conceded key ground by admitting that the stress and tension of facing Djokovic in the semi-final at the French Open caused cramping that sparked his defeat.

Ivanisevic described Djokovic as "unbelievable". "He's still moving like a cat on the court. He's there. Like a Ninja, he's everywhere. He's going to find some kind of motivation to win 24, maybe 25, who knows where is the end." Not surprisingly, Alcaraz has attempted to shift all the focus onto Djokovic. "I saw that Djokovic has never lost a match on Centre Court since 2013 when he lost against Andy Murray—so it's 10 years. It's crazy," said Alcaraz who made the last 16 in 2022. "But I hope to have the crowd behind me to change that stat." — AFP

Ledecky wins US 1,500m free title

LOS ANGELES: Katie Ledecky closed out the US swimming championships on a high note Saturday, winning the 1,500m freestyle in an impressive 15min 29.64sec to book a fourth individual event at the World Championships in Fukuoka, Japan. Ledecky, who set the world record of 15:20.48 in the same Indianapolis Natatorium pool in 2018, posted the sixth-fastest time ever and now owns the top 15. After checking the scoreboard, the seven-time Olympic gold medalist pounded the water in delight, having cleared the taste of a dissatisfying time in her 400m free win on Friday.

"It's amazing what a morning off can do," Ledecky beamed. I just wanted to finish on a good note. "I really don't like ending a meet with a bad swim so I just really wanted to have a great swim tonight. "I think that's the first time I've

been under 15:30 since the pandemic, so I'm really happy with that," she added. Katie Grimes, winner of the 400m individual medley, booked another World Championships event with a distant runner-up finish in 15:58.34. Ledecky, who also owns 19 world titles, bookended her meet with two strong performances in her longest events, starting with the 800m free on Tuesday.

In between she settled for second in the 200m free behind teenager Claire Weinstein and won the 400m free in a, for her, pedestrian 4:00.45 - leaving her work to do to challenge world record-holder Summer McIntosh of Canada and Australian Olympic gold medalist Ariarne Titmus in Fukuoka next month. The 26-year-old, now training in Florida with coach Anthony Nesty, appears up for that challenge and more. "There's a lot more to come," she said.

Kate Douglass claimed her second title of the meet with an impressive 200m individual medley win in 2:07.09 -- second-fastest in the world this year behind McIntosh's 2:06.89. Alex Walsh was second in 2:07.89. Carson Foster,



INDIANAPOLIS: Katie Ledecky competes in the Women's 1500m Freestyle final on day five of the Phillips 66 National Championships at Indiana University Natatorium. — AFP

silver medalist at last year's World Championships in Budapest, won the men's 200m medley in 1:56.19. Shaine Casas, who the eighth and last qualifier for the final, grabbed second in 1:57.47 to earn a World Championships berth. — AFP