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to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



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Kuwait, Saudi to expedite oil projects in neutral zone

Plans to ensure 'safe and seamless' movement of workers and equipment



KUWAIT: Members of the Kuwaiti-Saudi joint permanent committee meet on July 9, 2023. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Saudi Arabia agreed during talks on Sunday to accelerate efforts aiming to complete joint oil projects in the neutral zone linking the two Gulf Arab neighbors, underlining that such endeavors are imperative to meet local energy demands. The Kuwaiti-Saudi joint permanent committee convened to monitor the progress on a number of vital oil projects, making sure to eliminate any "impediments" that could hinder their completion, Kuwaiti Oil Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Nimr Al-Sabah said in a statement.

These efforts include plans to draw up a "future vision" when dealing with operations at the sites of these projects, chiefly, plans to ensure the "safe and seamless" transportation of workers and equipment alike, according to the statement. The neutral zone spanning

more than 5,700 square kilometers is jointly managed to run its main oilfields — onshore Wafra and offshore Khafji.

Such plans are in line with a previous deal signed between the Gulf Arab neighbors in 2019, which backed all efforts aiming to expedite joint oil projects linking Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, added the statement, citing regular talks as a strategy to bring that goal to fruition. Since its inception in 1965, the Kuwaiti-Saudi joint permanent committee has acted as a monitoring body to examine the progress and development of common endeavors, particularly those carried out in zones linking the two countries.

Sheikh Nimr pointed out the agreement between the two sides includes updating the work mechanisms of the

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Demand for honey soars in Jordan



IRBID, Jordan: Mohammad Khatib, a 49-year-old bee enthusiast and French-language university professor, checks a bee frame at an apiary on June 20, 2023. — AFP

IRBID, Jordan: Jordan's key tourism industry may have been hammered by COVID, but the pandemic gave a boost to another sector, keeping its beekeepers busy as demand for honey has soared. The country's 4,000 apiarists have ramped up output of the sweet and sticky golden substance long praised for its anti-inflammatory and other health benefits. Even if there is no scientific consensus that honey helps fight COVID, many of those infected have used it to soothe symptoms such as sore throats. "The COVID period in particular had a great, positive impact on us," said beekeeper Mutasim Hamad, 48, who retired 12 years ago from the public security directorate and turned his hobby into his main job.

The kingdom of Jordan prides itself on its 19 different types of honey, including citrus, eucalyptus and maple varieties, depending on which plants the bees pollinate. "We have about 2,500 flowering plants," said Mohammad Rababaa, head of the Jordan Beekeeping Association. "This diversity distinguishes Jordanian honey and means that the therapeutic and nutritional value of this honey is expected to be better than other types." — AFP (See Page 13)

PM: New airport to modernize infrastructure

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah said on Sunday the new airport project (T2) is one of the national projects that aims to modernize the country's infrastructure to serve the New Kuwait 2035 vision. This came in a statement during his visit to the new passenger terminal at Kuwait International Airport. HH the Prime Minister was briefed with a visual presentation that included all information about the project and checked its facilities and timeline.

He expressed his pride and appreciation for the Kuwaiti youth participating in this project in cooperation with the company in charge. He also affirmed the government's interest and keenness to harness all capabilities and facilitate all necessities to complete the project.

HH the Prime Minister was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Essa Al-Kandari, Minister of Public Works Amani Bugamraz, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Jassem Al-Ostad and several senior officials. — KUNA



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah tours the new T2 airport project on July 9, 2023. — KUNA

Govt calls to delay election bill; 1MDB jail terms upheld

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The government on Sunday asked the National Assembly's interior and defense committee to delay its debate on draft laws calling to establish an independent high election commission to organize and oversee parliamentary polls. Member of the committee MP Khaled Al-Tammr said the government said it was preparing a comprehensive legis-

lation on the issue, and the Cabinet is scheduled to study the draft legislation on Monday.

It will be sent to the Assembly soon, so the issue can be completed by the panel and sent to the Assembly for full debate during July. A number of draft laws have been submitted by MPs calling to establish the election commission in order to make the polls more transparent and controlled by an independent body.

MP Hamad Al-Alyan said on Sunday he and a group of lawmakers have submitted a series of reform bills including amendments to the constitutional court and amendments to the election law to allow group lists in polls, in addition to establishing the election commission. Alyan said lawmakers also submitted a draft law introducing comprehensive changes to the Assembly's internal charter and another bill to regulate the judiciary. He said the group is working to in-

roduce other draft laws on reforming education and the economy and improving welfare for citizens.

The Assembly's health and labor committee approved a proposal to add Kuwaiti housewives to a network of health insurance for retired Kuwaitis called Afya, MP Majed Al-Mutairi said. Mutairi said the panel also proposed to reduce the age of beneficiary women from 50 to 45 years. Meanwhile, the appeals court on Sunday upheld a 10-year jail term on a senior member of the ruling family and his Kuwaiti partner over money laundering charges as part of the worldwide scandal of the so-called Malaysian Fund. The court also upheld a seven-year sentence on a Kuwaiti lawyer involved in the case involving the laundering of \$1 billion embezzled from 1Malaysian Development Bhd, the Southeast Asian country's sovereign wealth fund.

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UN warns Sudan faces 'full civil war' as air raid kills 22

WAD MADANI, Sudan: Conflict-torn Sudan is on the brink of a "full-scale civil war" that could destabilize the entire region, the United Nations warned Sunday, after an air strike on a residential area killed around two dozen civilians. The Ministry of Health reported "22 dead and a large number of wounded among the civilians" from what it described as an air strike Saturday on Khartoum's sister city Omdurman,

in the district of Dar al-Salam, which means "House of Peace" in Arabic.

After nearly three months of war between Sudan's rival generals, the air strike is the latest incident to provoke outrage. Around 3,000 people have been killed in the conflict, survivors have reported a wave of sexual violence and witnesses have spoken of ethnically targeted killings. There has been widespread looting, and the UN warned of possible crimes against humanity in the Darfur region.

A video posted by the health ministry on Facebook showed apparently dismembered bodies lying partly covered on the ground after the air strike. Several women were among the victims. The paramilitary Rapid Sup-

port Forces (RSF), fighting the regular army, claimed that the "air strikes" killed 31. Residents contacted by AFP also confirmed an air strike but on Sunday, the armed forces released a statement "clarifying that the air force did not deal with any hostile targets in Omdurman yesterday."

Since the war began, paramilitaries have established bases in residential areas, and they have been accused of forcing civilians from their homes. Witnesses reported more air strikes near the presidential palace in central Khartoum on Sunday, as well as machine gun clashes and artillery fire in the city's south.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Sunday condemned the

air strike in Omdurman, which he said "reportedly killed at least 22 people" and wounded dozens, his deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said in a statement. Guterres "remains deeply concerned that the ongoing war between the armed forces has pushed Sudan to the brink of a full-scale civil war, potentially destabilizing the entire region", Haq said.

Sudan, in northeast Africa, borders other impoverished countries which have a history of unrest. Nearly three million people have been uprooted by Sudan's fighting, among them almost 700,000 who have fled to neighboring countries, according to the International Organization for Migration.

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Local

Kuwaiti government sparing no effort in protecting society from drugs: Minister

Social affairs ministry holds first forum addressing addiction prevention



KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah is seen during the opening ceremony of the forum. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Minister of Social Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah tours the exhibition on the sidelines of the event.



An interior ministry officer explains a demonstration of a drug victim to officials.



Young people participate in a play which demonstrates the danger of drug abuse as part of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Family and Childhood Affairs forum "Towards a drug-free safe society" held Sunday.



Minister of Social Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah (second right) honors participants at the forum.



By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Coinciding with the International Day Against Drug Abuse, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Family and Childhood Affairs held the first social scientific forum under the slogan "Towards a drug-free safe society" at the National Library of Kuwait. In his opening remarks, Minister of Social Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah said: "Protecting youth from the danger of drugs is a religious, patriotic and moral duty. The Cabinet has spared no effort to harness all capabilities to combat drugs, both in terms of awareness and treatment."

He pointed out the role of the family is most important, where the more stable the family is, the more the youth become strong to stand against the temptation of drugs, affirming the ministry's keenness to continue its awareness role to combat drugs.

Director of the Juvenile Welfare Department Dr

Jassem Al-Kandari said: "With the development witnessed by the countries of the world, some have an agenda of a hidden war by using drugs to destroy and target the backbone of societies and their main axis, which is the youth. Youth are the core of the progress of countries."

"Drugs have invaded our country with one goal — to destroy society. It is no secret that the war that Kuwait is carrying out to combat drugs is to complete its path of giving. From this standpoint, Kuwait decided to fight against drugs through many steps and means," he added. Kandari revealed that Kuwait, with all its institutions, will not be able to stand against the danger of drugs unless the government and the people stand up and cooperate, saying all Kuwaiti people must declare war on the scourge of drugs that has invaded the society.

During its sessions, the forum discussed modern methods to combat drugs and addressed addiction prevention from the psychological aspect. Several

private and government agencies also participated in an exhibition on the sidelines of the forum, where participants were honored. At the end of the event, several recommendations were presented regarding best ways to combat drug use in Kuwait.

In a statement to KUNA, Sheikh Feras said that the social affairs ministry is keen on organizing lectures to raise awareness of the dangers of drugs and their harm, especially for "juvenile delinquents". The ministry would also like to hold training courses in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to urge young people to stay away from the deadly toxins.

Speaking to KUNA, Sheikh Feras called for concerted efforts of all state institutions to combat this phenomenon in cooperation with all government agencies, including the ministries of interior and justice regarding the security and legal aspect, the ministry of health regarding the treatment aspect and the information ministry regarding hold-



Dr Jassem Al-Kandari



Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah

ing awareness campaigns. He added that providing support to recovered youth will help others not fall victim to drugs.

Interior ministry maps out Ashoura security plan

KUWAIT: A meeting was held on Sunday between Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas and a number of husseiniya owners to discuss a security plan and launch preparations for the commemoration of Ashoura during the month of Muharram, which is expected to fall on July 29.

"On the instructions of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, all logistical support will be provided to visitors of husseiniyas by drawing up a security plan. The meeting was held with the participation of all security sectors — traffic, rescue, public security, criminal investigation and special forces," sources told Kuwait Times.

During the meeting, interior ministry officials listened to the owners of husseiniyas and what security needs they require from the ministry. "Owners will cooperate with the ministry to ensure the success of the plan by adhering to the law to safeguard the comfort, security and safety of husseiniya visitors," sources said.

Security posts will reportedly be set up in the vicinity of husseiniyas. Public security personnel, detectives and special forces will be deployed in front of each husseiniya, accompanied by rescue and traffic patrols to facilitate traffic.

"The interior ministry will leave the inspection process during entry to husseiniyas to volunteers, while security men will inspect the surroundings. Inspection devices will be placed at the gates to detect any contraband, taking care not to allow people to sit outside to protect them and ensure their safety. People will be warned to adhere to everything that would strengthen national unity," sources added.

Barjas will hold another meeting with security officers of the interior ministry to finalize and adopt the security plan, they said.



No price hikes at local co-ops: Union president

KUWAIT: Prices of commodities at local cooperative societies have not increased and will not be increased in the future, Abdulwahab Al-Fares, President of the Kuwait Union of Consumer Co-operative Societies, said in a statement on Sunday.

"We will support the middle and working class and maintain purchasing power in the country," he said in a statement.

"We are following instructions of the commerce and social affairs ministers regarding not raising prices. Any cooperative society that violates the ministerial decision will face legal action."

Fares refuted claims made on social media accusing cooperative societies of hiking prices, adding that they won't make such a move without the approval from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ministry of Social Affairs. A price hike will only be discussed when inflation rates are down according to Central Bank statistics, he said.

According to Fares, the union has refused price



hikes suggested for 45 products. It also refused to sell 245 new products because they cost more than the market's average. A committee has been

formed within the union to examine 315 requests to increase prices of 1,350 products which have been made since May 30.

Conference to discuss improving lives of persons with disabilities

KUWAIT: The General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development held a coordination meeting for a conference on improving the lives of persons with disabilities and their families (related to media, entertainment and health), to be held in its sixth edition in November. The conference is part of the New Kuwait 2035 vision and the framework of the joint agreement between the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the Global Training Portal.

Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Khaled Mahdi said: "The case for persons with disabilities is considered a deserved and important file within the policies of our development plan, because it touches everyone."

He stressed Kuwait's interest in all topics related to providing services to this category of people. Mahdi also emphasized the importance of the real integration of persons with disabilities at all levels as well as the public sector, private sector and other important sectors. "This inclusion is the



basis for improving the lives of persons with disabilities," he said.

The conference will focus on a set of axes, namely media, entertainment and health and will witness public debates, interactive scientific lectures, panel discussions and an exhibition accompanying the conference on themes related to it.

Mahdi added the conference has many objectives, including increasing media awareness to contribute to changing stereotypes towards persons with disabilities and ensuring easy access for persons with disabilities to all entertainment places equally with the rest of society.

"The conference also aims to promote the mental health of persons with disabilities by ensuring their access to health services without difficulties and contributing to achieving the goals of the pillars of the New Kuwait 2035 vision and some articles of the International Convention for Persons with Disabilities. Moreover, we will be developing an interactive partnership between government agencies, the private sector, civil society institutions and individuals to adopt useful strategies to ensure improving the lives of persons with disabilities within the New Kuwait 2035 vision," he explained. The conference is scheduled to be held from Nov 12 to 14.

Local

Sparking hope and maximizing youth potential amidst crises

Healthcare, agriculture fields offer new opportunities for innovation

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Amidst the global crises this era is facing, where challenges seem overwhelming and instability is concerning people, some sparks of hope emerge through the rise of opportunities. As the world goes through conflicts and crises in various spheres, from climate change and pandemics to social tensions and many other issues, a glimmer of hope has emerged for individuals in sectors such as agriculture, health and technology, which are presenting great opportunities for innovation, growth and positive change.

To further explore how global crises can pave the way for individuals to harness their potential and contribute to a brighter future for all, Kuwait Times interviewed Dalal Al-Baloul, teaching assistant and field practicum liaison of social work at the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Kuwait University, and Abdulrahman Al-Fraih, manager of the organic agriculture department at the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources.

Baloul shared a few examples with Kuwait Times, saying that social crises, like the conflicts experienced by societies, can open up opportunities for young people in society to highlight their role in community participation. We see in many societies the role of young people emerging in different fields during crises. For example, voluntary aid groups are formed when a country is hit by natural disasters. Young people also have a renewed and exceptional role in building bridges of peace by creating a language for effective and peaceful communication between different groups to resolve conflicts in society.

In addition, the youth in society are characterized by their ability to innovate and create positive change that contributes to the progress of communities. Baloul also said another example is health crises, such as pandemics, that are accompanied by an increase in attention to healthcare and the services that need to be provided. "Just like we saw in the recent pandemic, it provided an opportunity for young



Dalal Al-Baloul



people who were considered frontline workers to provide these services and assist in the field of public health and mental health in particular," she said.

The role of mental health service providers stood out in raising awareness among communities about the importance of paying attention to symptoms of mental and psychological disorders that people may experience as a result of the pandemic. Many virtual workshops and lectures were held, and awareness services through social media increased significantly, contributing to a noticeable increase in people's awareness of their mental and psychological health.

Fraih highlighted that despite the difficulties farmers face due to several factors that hinder their process, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) has allowed farmers to maintain their jobs in agriculture instead of feeling despair due to climate change and eroding soil fertility. According to Fraih, farmers, for instance, can innovate and produce more instead of losing hope due to crises, with the help of AI. He said the effects of climate change and desertification pose a potential food crisis, but farmers can address these challenges through various strategies.

AI is increasingly adopted in agriculture, aiding in planting, pest monitoring, data collection

and forecasting, thus enhancing farm productivity and preemptively mitigating environmental issues. Fraih said "regenerative farming" is another approach gaining popularity. It takes a holistic view to build farms from the ground up, improving biodiversity, soil properties and sustainable planning. Polyculture systems (e.g., agroforestry, companion planting) diversify income and create resilient production systems. Indoor growing systems such as hydroponics, aeroponics and aquaponics remove environmental constraints by employing artificial lighting, robots and AI to create fully automated plant factories that can lower resource usage while achieving high performance.

Fraih further emphasized that selecting the right seeds is vital, as breeders are developing cultivars with heat resilience, pest resistance and stronger plant-soil relationships. Ultimately, Fraih sees that farmers are realizing that despite the crises that might hinder the quality of farming and agriculture, AI is accelerating the breeding process, offering better genetics to help farmers adapt to future challenges. Hence, he said by combining these approaches, farmers are combating environmental conditions and degraded soils while ensuring long-term agricultural sustainability.

Ambassador aspiring to cement cultural bridges with US

WASHINGTON: The State of Kuwait Ambassador to the US Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah affirmed on Saturday her aspiration to bolster cultural bridges with America in various realms and involving Kuwaiti youth in this approach.

Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah expressed during the meeting confidence in the Kuwaiti youth capacity to make initiatives useful for the State of Kuwait and for cementing its relations with the US. She affirmed keenness on boosting cooperation between the State of Kuwait and the United States of America by means of employing potentials of the successful Kuwaiti youth, with emphasis on enhancing their understanding of the international relations and mechanisms of making public policies. The Kuwaiti ambassador indicated that bolstering the relations with US

would warrant empowerment of gifted Kuwaiti youth. The ambassador's remarks came during her meeting with Abdulaziz Al-Anjari, founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research Center, according to a statement by the US embassy in a statement provided to KUNA. — KUNA



Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah

In my view

Unlocking Kuwait's economic potential



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Kuwait is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, with a high GDP per capita and a large oil reserve. However, despite its wealth, Kuwait has one of the lowest rates of land use in the world, with only 8.8 percent of its total land area being utilized for human activities (World Bank, 2019). This is a missed opportunity for economic growth and diversification, especially given the country's dependence on oil exports, which are subject to market volatility and fluctuations.

Land is considered one of the most important sources of income for Kuwait, after oil. Failure to exploit it is indeed a great loss for the state. Therefore, it is crucial for the government to take action and develop its land in a sustainable and responsible way to unlock its economic potential. The underutilization of land in Kuwait is due to various factors, including a lack of urban planning, outdated regulations and a lack of investment in infrastructure. These factors have contributed to a housing crisis, with many people struggling to find affordable and suitable housing.

As a result, the government must prioritize the development of new housing options. Introducing new housing methods and partnering with real estate development companies can help control the high demand for housing and create new affordable housing options for residents. Building new cities is also a promising solution to the housing crisis, as it can create new housing options and attract investment from domestic and international sources.

The government must also prioritize sustainable development and introduce new urban policies that promote responsible land use. By developing its land in a sustainable and responsible way, Kuwait can create new sources of revenue, attract investment from both domestic and international sources and position itself as a leader in sustainable development. Sustainable development can also mitigate the effects of climate change and promote a more sustainable way of life for residents. By incorporating the latest technology and sustainability practices, the government can create new and innovative housing options that are both affordable and environmentally friendly.

Furthermore, sustainable development can create a more dynamic and diverse economy. To achieve sustainable development, the government must work with real estate development companies to address the housing crisis, create new affordable housing options and promote a more sustainable way of life for residents. The government must also introduce new regulations that promote responsible land use and incentives developers to incorporate sustainability practices in their projects and establish a framework for collaboration with the Public Authority of Housing Welfare (PAHW). Kuwaiti citizens with existing housing requests with the PAHW should be given the priority when it comes to affordable housing.

Furthermore, the government must invest in infrastructure to support sustainable development. This can include developing smart city infrastructure that utilizes the latest technology to improve energy efficiency, reduce waste and promote sustainable transportation methods. The government must also invest in renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, to reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels and promote sustainability. In addition to economic benefits, sustainable development can also promote social benefits, such as improved quality of life for residents. By incorporating green spaces, such as parks and gardens, the government can improve the mental and physical health of residents.

Furthermore, sustainable development can promote a sense of community and social cohesion by creating public spaces that encourage social interaction and cultural exchange. Kuwait has already taken some steps towards sustainable development, such as the establishment of the Kuwait Green Building Council in 2009, which promotes social awareness of sustainable building practices.

Additionally, Kuwait's 2035 vision, also known as New Kuwait, recognizes the importance of sustainable urban planning and development for achieving economic growth, promoting social well-being and protecting the environment. However, more action is needed to address the challenges facing Kuwait. The government must take a more proactive approach to sustainable development and prioritize the development of new cities, housing options, green spaces and infrastructure. By doing so, Kuwait can unlock its economic potential, create new sources of revenue and promote a more sustainable way of life for its residents.



KUWAIT: Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Musaibeeh and HS Store Founder and General Manager Fahad Al-Mithin are seen with this year's trainees.

Zain kicks off fourth internship program for youth, students

KUWAIT: Zain announced the kick-off of its fourth Summer Internship Program with HS Store. This year, the program features 40 university-level trainees engaging in a unique part-time experience to gain a wide range of invaluable soft skills and professional competencies with the aim of preparing them to confidently join the job market.

The Zain Innovation Campus (ZINC) hosted an orientation session where Zain and HS Store officials gathered with the new trainees to welcome them onboard, explain the nature of the program, and go through their tasks. The session was attended by Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Musaibeeh and HS Store Founder and General Manager Fahad Al-Mithin.

The first three editions of the Zain HS Store Summer Program were a huge success, attracting eager and dedicated students who were keen on making the most out of their summer vacation. Hundreds of young people gained invaluable insights, soft skills and professional competencies that added value to their CVs and helped accelerate their new career journeys. This year, the program is joined by 40 trainees who are all university students, giving them the opportunity to work for 5 weeks at several HS Store branches across Kuwait. The trainees are responsible for a number of key tasks related to communications, business, technical, and administrative skillsets.

This initiative provides students with a range of workplace skills, such as customer service and engagement, product sales and marketing, electronics maintenance and smartphone repairing, and more. The trainees work for 4



hours daily within a part-time schedule, and each participant receives a cash reward at the end of the program.

The Zain HS Store Summer Program comes under the umbrella of Zain's Future University Network (FUN), a youth-tailored social program for university-level students that bridges the gap between studying and a unique experience at the Zain workplace by recruiting youth as the brand's main ambassadors.

FUN is one of the largest sustainable projects that Zain has been developing over the years since its first edition in 2008. It offers students an invaluable opportunity to benefit from a real-world work experience to develop many skills and gain expertise on both professional and personal levels, including project management, public relations, social media management, customer engagement, and more.

Zain continues its long-term partnership with HS Store to offer this annual program under its wider community



strategy that largely focuses on shouldering the youth and education sectors. This strategy is made possible by leveraging on Zain's vast network of partners from the community's top youth-centered entities and organizations. The company dedicates more efforts and projects that invest in Kuwait's human capital, especially by focusing on developing the youth's business competencies to prepare them for their future careers. Zain strongly believes in strengthening the bond between the private sector and the local community, given that it is one of the sector's biggest players.

HS Store was established in 2011 with the aim of offering tech enthusiasts with a wide range of high-quality products with a hassle-free shopping experience. The store ensures the satisfaction of its customers in Kuwait and throughout the GCC by providing top-in-class devices and accessories and offering specialized maintenance and repair workshops for the most popular smart devices.

News in Brief

2 Sixth Ring Road
crashes kill 6 people

KUWAIT: Three people died and eight were injured in a car crash on Sunday. The accident happened when three vehicles collided on the Sixth Ring Road, Kuwait Fire Force said. Also on Sunday, three people died inside a minibus transporting workers following a traffic accident with a half lorry on Sixth Ring Road. Security personnel, paramedics and fire men were dispatched to the site of the accident. The General Directorate of Traffic examined a set of CCTV videos including traffic accidents involving delivery men on motorcycles. The videos show that the delivery men had violated traffic rules and failed to stop at the red light in some instances.

Case against teacher who
stabbed colleague dropped

KUWAIT: The Court of Appeal overturned the imprisonment of a teacher who stabbed his colleague with a knife after the plaintiff dropped the case. The criminal court had handed the man a 15-year jail sentence, but the appeal court on Sunday said it would not punish him. The events of the case date back to October 2022, when a dispute between two Kuwaiti teachers in one of the primary schools of the Jahra Educational Zone escalated into violence, leaving both with injuries. Colleagues who witnessed the incident intervened to break up the clash and urged them to reconcile. After resolving the argument, the defendant brought a knife and stabbed the plaintiff several times. He was immediately taken to the hospital in critical condition and admitted to the intensive care room.

Company faces money laundering
charges in suspicious car deals

KUWAIT: The Public Prosecution referred two citizens and a public trading company to the criminal court on charges of money laundering and fraud, it announced on Sunday. The case was filed after receiving 455 complaints from people who accused the suspects of falsely claiming to be able to import vehicles from abroad at prices lower than their actual value and within relatively short periods of time, the Public Prosecution explained.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A student waits for her class at Kuwait University's College of Life Sciences in Kuwait City on July 9, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Real estate transactions continue to plummet in first half of 2023

Residential, investment property prices soar in Hawally, Capital

KUWAIT: Prices of real estate transactions have been on a steady downward slope since the first half of 2022, as per Ministry of Justice data. The decline is accompanied by a price rate hike especially within Capital and Hawally governorates.

The first half of this current year marked a sharp 41 percent plunge in the number of transactions within the residential sector, which refers to housing owned and occupied by Kuwaitis, with 1,526 deals struck (total value of KD 736 million) compared to 2,592 in the same period last year (total value of KD 1.75 billion).

Despite this obvious decline in the number of deals, the average value of a single deal increased to KD 483,000 per deal from KD 414,000 in 2022, a 16.6 increase, this speaks to private residence price increases namely within Capital and Hawally while prices in other governorates remain intact.

The investments sector, which refers to real estate owned by Kuwaitis but turned into apartments for

rent, was also subject to decrease as 589 deals were registered in first half of 2023 compared to 687 deals in the first half of the previous year, marking a 14.2 percent decrease.

However, unlike the residential sector, average value of single transaction within investments sector declined by 9.8 percent from KD 854,000 per deal last year to KD 770,000 this year.

Data shows that the commercial sector plummeted by 74 percent from 111 deals in first half of 2022 to only 39 deals first half of this current year, whereas average value of single deal shot up from KD 3.513 million to more than KD 5 million.

Commenting on the real estate market, expert Mohammad Al-Sughair attributed decrease in transactions to the dwindling number of offers and new land plots, this very same reason contributes to the increase of prices. Chair of a real estate company Ahmad Al-Nabhan spoke of the increasing interest rate on Kuwaiti dinar saying this drove brokers in the private residents sector to revert to local bank trusts rather than invest in residential houses and flipping them to apartments for rent.

Nabhan also spoke about the investments sector in areas further away from the capital, within Al-Ahmedi and Farwaniya governorates, saying that de-



Ahmad Al-Nabhan



Mohammad Al-Sughair

crease in these areas could be linked to recent government decision relating to visas.

As for forecast for upcoming six months, Nabhan reported blurry vision with most investors and observes awaiting whether The American Federal Reserve continues to increase interest rate. Nabhan stated that the Kuwaiti market could rejuvenate if American interest rate seizes to increase in second quarter of 2024 prompting decrease in local interest rate, thus causing bank trusts to loner appeal to investors and driving them back to the more robust markets of real estate or the stock exchange. — KUNA



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LuLu Hypermarket kicks off 'Summer with LuLu' promotion

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retailer in the region, launched its annual 'Summer with LuLu' promotion on July 5 at its Fahaeel outlet. The promotion, which runs from July 5-11 at all LuLu Hypermarket outlets, was inaugurated by Ministry Official Talal Sadiq, along with the top management of LuLu Hypermarket and the event's sponsors.

Major highlights of the promotion include live mocktail preparation by mocktail specialists, cooling summer drinks and samplings of refreshing foods. Adding to the excitement of the 'Summer with LuLu' promotion is a colorful summer garments fashion show, a special music show and stalls set up by suppliers that exhibit a range of summer products, including a variety of cosmetics and eyewear collections for the hot summer months.

To make the week-long promotion equally attractive to kids, a special smoothie-making competition for children is being held to allow the young talents to show off their creativity in blending cooling smoothies.

Apart from the live entertainment and activi-



ties, the 'Summer with LuLu' promotion also offers amazing deals and discounts on a wide range of summer-related items, including coolers and air-conditioners. Enhancing the summer theme of the promotion are large displays and cutouts of summer-related activities and products.

Famous vloggers and influencers also participated at the inaugural event and helped promote the campaign. The promotion is being sponsored by KDD, Magnum, London Dairy, Igloo, Al-Safi and Starbucks.

The 'Summer with LuLu' promo is a great way to beat the heat and save money on summer essentials. With so many activities and discounts to enjoy and participate in, there is clearly something for everyone during the week-long promotion.



Sons' jailing turns Cuban mothers into activists

Polish leader visits Ukraine ahead of NATO summit

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US raid in Syria kills IS leader

Damascus revokes BBC accreditation over 'misleading reports'



BZAAH, Syria: Passersby and gunmen gather around a body at the site of a reported drone strike in Bzaah town near Al-Bab in Syria's Aleppo governorate on July 7, 2023. — AFP

BEIRUT: A US drone strike has killed an Islamic State group leader in Syria after Russian warplanes harassed MQ-9 drones over the war-torn country, the US Central Command said Sunday.

The strike on Friday resulted in the death of Osama Al-Muhajer, IS leader in eastern Syria, Centcom said in a statement. "We have made it clear that we remain committed to the defeat of ISIS throughout the region," Centcom chief General Michael Kurilla was quoted as saying, using another acronym for the IS jihadist group. "ISIS remains a threat, not only to the region but well beyond," he added.

According to Centcom, no civilians were killed in the operation but coalition forces are "assessing reports of a civilian injury". Friday's strike, Centcom said, "was conducted by the same MQ-9s (drones) that had... been harassed by Russian aircraft in an encounter that had lasted almost two hours".

US drones taking part in operations against IS in

Syria were harassed on Thursday, for the second time in 24 hours, by Russian military aircraft, a US commander said at the time. Air Force Lieutenant General Alexis Grynkeiwich said the planes "dropped flares in front of the drones and flew dangerously close, endangering the safety of all aircraft involved".

In another incident on Wednesday, three Russian jets dropped parachute flares in front of US drones, forcing them to take evasive action, Grynkeiwich said, calling on Moscow to "cease this reckless behavior". Russia is a key ally of the Syrian regime of President Bashar Al-Assad.

With the support of Moscow as well as Iran, Assad has clawed back much of the ground lost in the early stages of the Syrian conflict that erupted in 2011 when the government brutally repressed pro-democracy protests. The last pockets of armed opposition to the regime include large swathes of the northern rebel-held Idlib province. The United States has about

1,000 troops deployed in Syria as part of international efforts to combat IS jihadists, who were defeated in Syria in 2019 but still maintain hideouts in remote desert areas and conduct frequent attacks.

Meanwhile, Syria on Saturday announced it was cancelling the BBC's accreditation over what it called "misleading reports", a rare move against an international media outlet in the war-torn country. "Due to the broadcaster's failure to adhere to professional standards and its insistence on providing biased and misleading reports", the information ministry has decided to "cancel the accreditation" of the BBC's "correspondent and cameraman", it said in a statement. Accreditation of the BBC Radio correspondent in Syria was also revoked, the ministry added.

A spokesperson for the British broadcaster, without directly commenting on the Syrian move, said that "BBC News Arabic provides impartial independent journalism" and speaks "to people across the political

spectrum to establish the facts". "We will continue to provide impartial news and information to our audiences across the Arabic-speaking world," the spokesperson added in a statement. The information ministry said that since Syria's war broke out in 2011, the BBC has "from time to time provided subjective and fake information and reports about the reality" in the country.

The conflict has killed more than 500,000 people, displaced millions and devastated much of the country's infrastructure and industry. The BBC was warned "more than once" but "continued to broadcast its misleading reports based on statements... from terrorist entities and those hostile to Syria", the ministry added. Revoking the accreditation of international media representatives is rare for Damascus, where the few remaining foreign media outlets have locally based correspondents. Many foreign journalists quit the country as the war spiraled, pulling in foreign powers and global jihadists. — AFP

Heat wave in US turns Texas prisons into 'ovens'

HOUSTON: On the afternoon of July 4, as Americans were celebrating the country's independence with elaborate fireworks displays, a prisoner named Joseph Martire passed out in his cell in Texas, amid the excessive heat that has been swamping much of the southern United States in recent days.

In concrete, brick and metal penitentiaries, industrial fans churn warm vapor without really cooling the air. And with no air conditioning in most prisons, when outside temperatures exceed 40°C (104 Fahrenheit), it can feel even hotter inside the cells. Some prisoners sabotage the toilets in their cells to make the water overflow and wet the floor, which they then sleep on. Others wet their clothes to try to stay cool, according to convicts, ex-convicts and family members who spoke to AFP. In recent weeks, 35-year-old Martire had four heat-related health episodes at Estelle Prison in Huntsville, where he has served 16 years.

"I just passed out, the medical (staff) refused to see me and I don't know what to do," he told his family by phone. They called prison administrators to seek help. When inmates sense that someone has passed out in a nearby cell, they yell to attract a guard's attention, but staff shortages often mean delays, Martire said.

The stricken inmate is then taken to an adminis-



HUNTSVILLE, US: The Wynne Unit is pictured in Huntsville, Texas, on May 21, 2013. Prisoners, ex-convicts, and family members of prisoners are extremely concerned about the high temperatures being experienced inside several Texas prisons, which do not have air conditioning, as a heat wave hits the southern United States. — AFP

trative area of the jail that does have air conditioning for so-called "respite." Prisoners try to linger as long as possible. "I've already had too many issues with my health before from the heat," Martire said. Asked what the heat in the cells is like, Amite Dominick of the NGO Advocates for Texas Community Prisons replied: "The fastest way I can explain that is, go sit in your car on a triple-digit day. Bring a blow-dryer with you. Crack your window a little bit."

The Texas Tribune news site reported that at least nine people had died in state prisons in June from heart attacks or other possibly heat-related causes. But Amanda Hernandez, spokeswoman for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), which is in charge of prisons, said the last heat death occurred in 2012. In June, the department treated seven cases of people affected "beyond first aid," but there were no fatalities, she said. — AFP

Over 15 dead in monsoon floods in India

NEW DELHI: At least 15 people were killed in floods and landslides triggered by monsoon rains that battered northern India, with New Delhi receiving the most rainfall in decades, reports and officials said Sunday. Roads in several parts of the capital were submerged in knee-deep water as it was inundated with 153 millimeters of rain, the highest precipitation in a single day in July in 40 years.

With at least another day of heavy rain forecast, authorities have ordered schools shut in New Delhi on Monday. The Press Trust of India news agency reported Sunday that 15 people had been killed in the past 24 hours in six northern Indian states. Hill states were the worst affected, leaving six dead in Himachal Pradesh alone where landslides blocked about 700 roads, Omkar Sharma, a disaster management official told AFP.



Villagers use a boat to commute at a waterlogged area caused by floodwaters after a rise in water level of River Yamuna following monsoon rains at Badara Sanuti Village, near Allahabad in this file photo. — AFP

India's meteorological department has forecast more rain across large parts of northern India in coming days. Official data shows monsoon rains across the country in the first week of July have already produced about two percent more rainfall than normal. The summer

monsoon brings South Asia 70-80 percent of its annual rainfall, as well as death and destruction due to flooding and landslides. The rainfall is hard to forecast and varies considerably, but scientists say climate change is making the monsoon stronger and more erratic. — AFP

BBC suspends staff after explicit images claims

LONDON: The BBC said Sunday it suspended a male member of staff following allegations that one of its presenters paid a teenager thousands of pounds for sexually explicit photos. UK culture minister Lucy Frazer said earlier she had spoken about the "deeply concerning" allegations with BBC Director General Tim Davie, who assured her the BBC is "investigating swiftly and sensitively".

The Sun newspaper, which first reported the claims, cited the young person's mother as saying that an unnamed BBC presenter paid her child over £35,000 (\$45,000) for the images over a three-year period. It is also claimed that the presenter in question appeared on air for a month after the family of the young person—who was said to be 17 when the payments started—complained to the BBC in May.

In a statement on Sunday, the BBC confirmed that it "first became aware of a complaint in May". "New allegations were put to us on Thursday of a different nature and in addition to our own enquiries we have also been in touch with external authorities, in line with our protocols," it added.

The statement said that "a male member of staff has been suspended". "This is a complex and fast moving set of circumstances and the BBC is working as quickly as possible to establish the facts in order to properly inform appropriate next steps," the BBC added. The BBC said it takes "any allegations seriously" and has "robust internal processes in place to proactively deal with such allegations".

In an internal email sent to staff and quoted on the BBC website, Davie said he is "wholly condemning the unsubstantiated rumors being made on the internet about some of our presenting talent".

Since The Sun published the allegations, some BBC presenters have taken to social media to deny that they are the broadcaster in question. The British broadcaster, whose chairman resigned in April after an inquiry found he failed to disclose a loan to ex-prime minister Boris Johnson, has come under fire over its handling of the claim. Former home secretary and an MP from the ruling Conservative party, Priti Patel, has said the BBC's response was "derisive", adding: "They must provide the victim and his family a full and transparent investigation".

"The BBC, but also other broadcasters, do need to get a grip because we seem to lurch from one scandal to another and more needs to be done," opposition Labour party lawmaker Rachel Reeves told Sky News on Sunday. In May, British star TV host Phillip Schofield resigned from the ITV channel after admitting to an "unwise but not illegal" relationship with a younger colleague. — AFP

International

Polish leader visits Ukraine ahead of NATO summit

Biden headed for Vilnius, Kyiv hopes to get NATO nod

KYIV, Ukraine: Poland's president emphasized the need for unity with Ukraine on Sunday as he visited the country ahead of a NATO summit where Kyiv is hoping to get a clear signal that it could one day join the alliance. "We are stronger together," President Andrzej Duda said on social media, as he visited the western city of Lutsk with Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky.

Poland is one of Ukraine's biggest supporters within NATO and has said it wants "security guarantees" for the country from other NATO members. Zelensky returned from Turkey on Saturday after a regional tour to drum up support ahead of the summit with Western allies, who have pledged billions in military aid. Zelensky was accompanied by five top commanders from the Azov regiment who were supposed to have remained in Turkey until the end of the conflict under a prisoner exchange deal with Moscow. Their return to Ukraine angered the Kremlin, with spokesman Dmitry Peskov quoted by Russian news agencies on Saturday as saying that it was "a direct violation" of the agreement with Turkey.

One of the men, Denys Prokopenko, was quoted by Interfax Ukraine news agency as saying that he would return to the front. "That is why we have come back to Ukraine. It is our main aim," said Prokopenko, who along with the others had been living in Turkey since September.

Peskov said the return was linked to the "failure" of Ukraine's counteroffensive, and Ankara's desire to show "solidarity" ahead of the NATO summit in Lithuania. "Preparations for the NATO summit are underway and of course there has been a lot of pressure on Turkey," he said.

Biden headed to NATO summit

US President Joe Biden is expected in Vilnius on Monday along with other NATO leaders for talks

Tuesday and Wednesday. Zelensky has said he does not expect Ukraine to actually join NATO until after the war but he hopes the summit will give a "clear signal" on the intention to bring Ukraine into the alliance. The Ukrainian leader hailed Ukraine as "the country of the brave" in a video clip released on social media on Saturday, the 500th day of the war.

The video showed him visiting Snake Island in the Black Sea — a symbol of Ukraine's defiance against Russia. The island was captured by Russian forces shortly after the start of the invasion.

A radio exchange went viral in which Ukrainian soldiers told the crew of Russia's attacking warship demanding their surrender to go away, using a swearword. The Ukrainian soldiers were taken prisoner but later exchanged for Russian captives and the island was recaptured by Ukrainian forces in June last year.

Danger 'for many years'

Zelensky on Friday secured Turkey's backing for Ukraine's NATO aspirations after winning a US pledge for cluster munitions that could inflict significant damage to Russian forces. Washington's decision to supply Ukraine with cluster bombs — banned across a large part of the world — dramatically ups the stakes in the war. Biden admitted that it had been "a difficult decision", while humanitarian groups strongly condemned it.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, whose country still grapples with deadly war remnants, on Sunday urged Ukraine not to use cluster bombs. "It would be the greatest danger for Ukrainians for many years or up to a hundred years if cluster bombs are used in Russian-occupied areas in the territory of Ukraine," Hun Sen tweeted. He cited Cambodia's "painful experience" of US cluster munitions dropped in the early 1970s, a foreign legacy that has

would vote for Mirziyoyev, who is running against three largely unknown candidates.

"These are my first elections. I will be voting for Shavkat Mirziyoyev because I want there to be more opportunities for young people and places to study," said 18-year-old Milana Yuldasheva, a resident of Krasnogorsk, a former mining town about 50 kilometers (30 miles) from Tashkent.

Abduali Nurmatov, 64, said he hoped the president would solve "problems with gas and electricity" as the town suffered repeated cuts during the last winter. Around 20 million Uzbeks are eligible to vote in Central Asia's most populous country, a landlocked nation which also borders Afghanistan.

Mirziyoyev portrays himself as a reformer creating a "New Uzbekistan".

He has ended forced labor in Uzbekistan's cotton fields and released political prisoners jailed during Karimov's long rule.

NGOs say human rights are better than under Karimov but there is still much to improve, and the authorities have shown no sign of allowing a real opposition to emerge. "The victory of the incumbent president is obvious," Uzbek political expert Farkhod Talipov told AFP ahead of the vote.

"All the other candidates are completely unknown and unpopular. Their candidacies are just an artificial way of showing a political struggle that does not ex-

atives, La Jornada reported, citing local authorities.

At that time, Sanchez was at home and spoke to his wife by phone. Lopez also reportedly told investigators that she found the clothes her husband was wearing the last day she saw him in their home, and his wallet was complete except for his La Jornada correspondent's card.

The family also reported that "his computer, cell phone, a hard drive and his sandals are missing," the newspaper added. La Jornada, a leftist newspaper founded in 1985 in Mexico City, has already lost two of its most widely known correspondents: Miroslava Breach, killed in Chihuahua in March 2017, and Javier Valdez, who was also a contributor to AFP, murdered in Sinaloa in May of the same year. The Committee to Protect Journalists, a New York-based press freedom group, strongly condemned the killing of Sanchez and tweeted that it "calls on Mexican authorities to immediately and credibly investigate." A statement by journalists in Nayarit and other Mexican states urged local and federal authorities "to exhaust all lines of investigation" and to provide protection to the families of the victims.

These disappearances "are violent actions that disrupt public peace and show the danger that we all run at any time," it said.

Nayarit, on the Pacific coast, neighbors the states of Sinaloa to the northwest and Jalisco to the south, where the country's two largest drug trafficking cartels operate. Last May, Marco Aurelio Ramirez, a retired journalist and former official of the central Mexican state of Puebla, was shot and killed as he was leaving his home. Since 2000, more than 150 journalists have been murdered in Mexico, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF). — AFP

The \$1 billion was sent by the Malaysian convict using a Kuwaiti bank account of the senior royal, and then transferred to Swiss bank accounts. During the term of former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak, the country's sovereign wealth fund was systematically embezzled of a total of \$4.5 billion, with the convicted Malaysian businessman playing an instrumental role in the fraud.

The money was sent to several countries including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, China and others. The appeals court's ruling is not final as it can be appealed before the court of cassation, the highest in the country. The case attracted huge attention in Kuwait, especially in the National Assembly where MPs demanded an investigation into the major money laundering case.



LUTSK, Ukraine: In this handout photograph taken and released by the Ukrainian Presidential Press Service on July 9, 2023, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (left) speaks with Poland's President Andrzej Duda (right) during their meeting in Lutsk. — AFP

left tens of thousands maimed or killed.

Russia, which itself uses cluster munitions in Ukraine, said the decision was an "act of desperation" that would have "no effect" on the conflict. Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on Sunday urged NATO leaders instead to discuss the situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station in southern Ukraine.

Kyiv and Moscow have accused each other of

planning a provocation at the site, raising alarm over the risk of a disaster at Europe's largest nuclear plant. "The NATO summit should have focused on this topic. After all, the vast majority of Alliance members would be in the direct contamination zone," Zakharova said on social media. The plant is held by Russian forces, who accuse Ukraine of regularly shelling the site. Kyiv has accused Moscow of rigging up the site with explosives. — AFP

Uzbekistan holds vote to cement president's rule

TASHKENT: Uzbekistan was holding a presidential election on Sunday that is set to hand incumbent Shavkat Mirziyoyev a third term as head of the gas-rich Central Asian state. The 65-year-old Mirziyoyev has promised to open up his country, a tightly controlled former Soviet republic, to foreign investment and tourism. He served as prime minister under his hardline predecessor Islam Karimov before winning his first term in 2016 and getting re-elected in 2021.

A constitutional referendum this year paved the way for him to serve two more presidential terms and increased the mandate from five years to seven, meaning he could stay in power until 2037.

"I hope the next president will be Shavkat (Mirziyoyev). I am expecting him to increase the fight against corruption and to notice the ecological problems we have," said Nodira Khidoyatova, a 57-year-old company director, after casting her ballot. All the Uzbeks AFP spoke to ahead of the election said they

Mexican newspaper reporter found slain

MEXICO CITY: A regional correspondent for leading Mexican newspaper La Jornada was found slain on Saturday, shortly after he went missing in the western state of Nayarit, prosecutors said.

Luis Martin Sanchez Iniguez is one of three active or former journalists to have been abducted in the state in recent days, the prosecutors' office said in a statement, adding to Mexico's surging attacks on the press that are often linked to the country's powerful drug cartels. His body turned up in a village near the state capital Tepic "with signs of violence" and two cardboard messages pinned to his chest, the office added. The statement did not indicate the content of the scrawled cardboard messages left on Sanchez's body by his abductors, a common tactic used by organized crime in Mexico to sow terror.

On Friday, armed and hooded men also broke into the home of teacher Osiris Maldonado de la Paz, who had previously worked for digital media, in the town of Xalisco and he remains missing, prosecutors said.

A third missing journalist was later found alive. In all three cases, attacks were "related to their journalistic work," prosecutors said. Sanchez, 59, is the first active journalist to be killed in 2023 in Mexico, one of the most dangerous nations in the world for members of the news media.

Early indications suggest Sanchez was slain between 24 and 48 hours before his body was discovered in the village of El Ahuacate, prosecutors said.

His wife, Cecilia Lopez, told investigators she had been unaware of his whereabouts since Wednesday night, when she was in another town visiting rela-

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The court did not review a 10-year jail sentence on two foreign accomplices, a French businessman of Syrian descent and a Malaysian businessman and financier who is the main defendant in the scandal, because the initial sentences were issued in absentia and the convicts did not appeal. The appeals court also upheld ordering the convicts to collectively return \$1 billion and pay a fine of KD 145 million.



TASHKENT: People vote at home in Uzbekistan's presidential election in Tashkent on July 9, 2023. — AFP

ist." The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) said the campaign has been "low-key, mirroring lack of opposition to the incumbent". In July 2022, protests erupted over a plan to remove the right to self-determination from the region of Karakalpakstan.

The unrest and subsequent crackdown in the poor northwestern territory left at least 21 people dead. Mirziyoyev's re-election campaign has focused on the economy and education. He has said he aims to double gross domestic product to \$160 billion in the near future. — AFP

Zionist protesters mobilize ahead of judicial reform vote

TEL AVIV: Tens of thousands of Zionist protesters packed Tel Aviv and other cities on Saturday to demonstrate against proposed legal reforms they say could mean more authoritarian government. Demonstrators have kept up the pressure with weekly rallies against the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who returned to power in December at the head of a coalition with ultra-Orthodox Jewish and extreme-right allies.

Zionist media estimated turnout at Saturday's protest in Tel Aviv — the 27th since the reform agenda was unveiled in January — at 150,000, ahead of a vote Monday in parliament on a key provision of the proposed overhaul. Police do not give the number of demonstrators.

"We must act against what the Netanyahu government is doing to our country and to the Zionist dream," historian Yuval Noah Harari told

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joint permanent committee and developing means of communication between the two sides through the use of new technologies and holding

UN warns Sudan faces 'full civil war'...

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The UN and African blocs have warned of an "ethnic dimension" to the conflict in the western region of Darfur, where the United States, Norway and Britain have blamed the RSF and allied militia for most of the widespread violations. Concentrated in Darfur and the capital Khartoum, fighting has also been reported in Blue Nile state near Ethiopia, as well as in South Kordofan state. Overnight Saturday-Sunday residents in El-Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan and a commercial hub south of Khartoum, re-

Brazil building collapse toll rises to 14

RIO DE JANEIRO: Fourteen people have died in the partial collapse of an illegally occupied building in north-eastern Brazil, the authorities said Saturday, as they concluded a search for survivors. Earlier, a toll of 11 dead was announced, but firefighters searching through the debris later found the bodies of a woman and two children following the collapse Friday in Paulista, a city in the state of Pernambuco. The dead included men, women and children, aged five to 45, according to a statement Saturday from the Pernambuco civil defense services.

Three people — a 65-year-old woman and two adolescents — were rescued. The authorities provided no information on their condition. The three-storey structure, which was attached to a larger housing complex, had been closed in 2010 due to a risk of collapse but had been illegally occupied since then, the authorities said. In April, a building in similar condition collapsed in the city of Olinda, also in Pernambuco, leaving six people dead. Building collapses in Brazil generally happen in poorer neighborhoods where illegal construction is rampant. — AFP

the rally. "If the Netanyahu government does not stop, it will soon learn what happens when we get angry," he said.

Police used water cannon to disperse some 100 demonstrators who blocked a main highway in the coastal city, an AFP journalist said. The government argues the judicial reform, which would give politicians more power over the courts, is necessary to ensure a better balance of power.

After unsuccessful talks with the opposition following Netanyahu's late March announcement of a "pause" to allow for negotiations, the government is taking the offensive once again this week. Monday will see the first reading of a bill aimed at excluding the judiciary's right to rule on the "reasonableness" of government decisions. One of its potential effects would be on the appointment of ministers. Netanyahu in January was forced to dismiss cabinet member Aryeh Deri after intervention by the Supreme Court over a previous tax evasion conviction. Organizers have announced a day of protest for Tuesday. Amit Lev, 40, a tech executive, said: "If we don't stop what is happening now, there'll be no going back." He said the draft law to be introduced on Monday "is part of a series of laws, each of which allows the passage of the other". — AFP

meetings, which will contribute to accelerating the pace of work and achievements.

He said that this modernization will facilitate petroleum projects related to the neutral zone and ensure the facilitation of work related to joint operations and the safety of workers of operating companies, which include Aramco Gulf Operations Company, Saudi Arabian Chevron and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company, and their ability to face any emergency or exceptional circumstances. — KUNA

ported renewed fighting in their area. "There is an utter disregard for humanitarian and human rights law that is dangerous and disturbing," said Haq, expressing support for efforts by the African Union and East African bloc IGAD to end Sudan's crisis.

On Monday leaders of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan — IGAD members handling the Sudan file — are to meet in Addis Ababa. Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo have been invited but neither side has confirmed they will attend. Several Sudanese civilian figures are already there, however, "in order to accelerate peace efforts," said Khalid Omer Yousif, who was fired from the government in 2021 when Daglo and Burhan led a coup, before their falling out. Numerous ceasefires in the war have been announced and ignored. — AFP

Business

Sons' jailing turns Cuban mothers into activists

Women pin hopes on Diaz Canel-Pope Francis meeting

SAN JOSE: Two years ago, Marta Perdomo and Liset Fonseca were two unassuming Cuban women with little interest in politics and no social media footprint. That changed overnight when their sons were arrested in a mass round-up that followed the biggest anti-government protests in the history of the communist island. Today, they are fervent activists. "Liberty for Jorge and Nadir. Enough. They are innocent," screams a poster that adorns the home of Perdomo in San Jose de las Lajas, a city of some 80,000 people southeast of Havana.

Her life became filled with "pain and anguish" on July 16, 2021, the 60-year-old seamstress told AFP, when police came to take both her two sons: 40-year-old IT professor Jorge, and Nadir, an English teacher aged 39. Then, "when we started making complaints, the state security started calling us and the threats began," she said. Since the arrests, Perdomo says she needs tablets to sleep.

Also on July 16, police took Roberto Perez, the 40-year-old son of Fonseca, a fellow resident of San Jose de las Lajas. "Knowing that he innocent but in prison is an enormous sadness," the 62-year-old homemaker told AFP in tears.

The three men were among thousands of Cubans who spilled onto the streets of dozens of cities and towns on July 11 and 12, 2021 in a spontaneous outburst of frustration. Demonstrators chanted "Freedom!" and "We are hungry!" amid economic strife, medical and food shortages which have gotten no better in the two years since then. A crackdown by the security forces left one dead, dozens injured and more than 1,500 people detained, according to rights groups.

The biggest ask: Freedom

The government says 488 protesters have been sentenced, some for up to 25 years in jail for crimes including "sedition." Jorge Martin Perdomo is serving eight years for "assault, contempt and public disorder" and his brother

six years for similar crimes—all "fabricated" according to their mother.

Perez, who was among a group of protesters defacing a poster of Cuba's revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, was given a 10-year sentence. "They committed perhaps the biggest crime of all: asking for freedom" in Cuba, said Perdomo. Along with Fonseca, she has vowed to continue the fight for the protesters' freedom "whatever the cost."

In a country where political opposition is illegal and all newspapers and broadcasters are aligned to the one-party State, one of the few ways to do so is on social media. Learning the ropes of online activism was almost as difficult as dealing with the "pressure" and "threats" of the authorities, recounted Perdomo. "We started protesting without knowing what we were doing," she recalled. "I didn't know how to do a direct" internet broadcast and "my legs were shaking" when she did her first.

'More radical'

The women are naturally scared. Fonseca said five other women in the city have sons behind bars but remain quiet for "fear of losing their jobs." She herself was once warned during a prison visit that: "Unless you stay quiet, your son will pay the price."

But the pair is not giving up. "If I died or something happened to me, on my grave would be written: 'Freedom for Jorge and Nadir.' But I think I will not die yet. I think I will be alive to see them come back to this house," said Perdomo. During the interview with AFP at her kitchen table, Perdomo's phone rings and her face lights up. "My boys," she says, and indeed it is a call from Nadir.

"Everything is fine, Mom," he told his mother on speaker phone. "We are strong and... proud of everything we did." Minutes later, Jorge called too. "That day (of the protest) we had a more intuitive awareness" of what was going on in Cuba, he told AFP on his mother's phone. "But today our thinking has become more radical and we believe, obviously, in all the ideals of freedom," he said. Perdomo



SAN JOSE, Cuba: Marta Perdomo (right), mother of brothers Nadir Martin and Jorge Martin Perdomo, detained in the July 11th protests against the government, stand near a poster demanding the release of her sons, in San Jose de las Lajas, Mayabeque Province, Cubam on June 22, 2023. — AFP



mo and Fonseca form part of a group called "Cuba in Mourning" made up of the mothers and wives of participants in what have become known as the J11 protests. They wear only black.

With few if any signs of change afoot, the women are hopeful something might come from a meeting at the Vatican last month between President Miguel Diaz-Canel and Pope Francis—just months after a Church envoy called in Havana for the release of jailed protesters.

It is time, said Perdomo, "for this injustice to end." Dissident artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcan-

tara, also jailed ever since trying to join the protests two years ago, has begun a hunger strike to demand his release, his girlfriend—exiled in the United States—said on Facebook Friday.

Alcantara, 35, was sentenced last year to five years in prison for "offending the symbols of the Church that continues to proclaim God's merciful love to all people on earth," said the pope, following his weekly Sunday Angelus prayer from the window of the Apostolic Palace on Saint Peter's Square. The consistory will be the ninth for the creation of cardinals under Pope Francis, who is in the tenth year of his papacy. His choices are closely watched as cardinals under the age of 80 will participate in the vote to nominate the successor to Francis. — AFP

Murder of Sikh leader sparks dueling protests in Toronto

TORONTO: A few hundred members of Canada's Sikh community demonstrated outside the Indian consulate in Toronto on Saturday to protest the unsolved murder of one of their leaders last month in the Vancouver area.

They accused the Indian government of being responsible for the gunning down of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, president of a Sikh temple and campaigner for the creation of an independent Sikh state that supporters hope to call Khalistan.

"When an Indian agency and system commit a crime, they have to be held accountable," Kuljeet Singh, spokesperson for Sikhs for Justice, a US-based organization behind the rally, told AFP.

Nijjar, whom India had declared a wanted terrorist, was gunned down on June 18 in Surrey, a suburb of Vancouver that is home to one of the largest Sikh populations in Canada. Another protestor, Hakirt Singh, a lawyer, told AFP that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) "should investigate this

murder" as a political assassination.

"When there is vandalism against a member of Parliament you see tweets and reactions from politicians. Here it is an assassination of a Canadian citizen on Canadian soil. That is foreign interference," Nijjar advocated for the creation of an independent Sikh state to be carved out of parts of northern India and perhaps part of Pakistan. India accused Nijjar of carrying out terrorist attacks in India, a charge he denied.

The demonstrators, almost exclusively men, carried yellow flags with blue logos representing their separatist movement, and shouted "Khalistan! Khalistan!" Setting off from the Toronto suburbs, they arrived in front of the Indian consulate, where they were greeted by around 50 members of the diaspora in support of the Indian government. "They have a poster here calling to kill Indian diplomats. We are concerned because these groups have committed terrorist acts in the past and politicians are not taking actions," one of the counterdemonstrators, Vi-



TORONTO: Police arrest a Sikh protestor during a demonstration for the independence of Khalistan in front of the Indian Consulate in Toronto, Canada, on July 8, 2023. — AFP

jay Jain, an IT consultant, told AFP.

A line of 20 policemen intervened to separate the two groups, and one Sikh protestor was taken away after forcing down a barrier and running to the other side. Since the murder of the Sikh leader, tensions have risen between Canada and India. New Delhi regularly accuses Ottawa of laxity in its handling

of Sikh protesters in Canada.

"We have asked the Canadian government to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of our diplomats," Arindam Bagchi, spokesman for India's foreign minister, said on Thursday.

Canada is home to the largest number of Sikhs outside their home state of Punjab, India. — AFP

N Korea slams IAEA for Fukushima water approval

SEOUL: North Korea on Sunday slammed the United Nations' nuclear watchdog for approving Japan's plan to discharge treated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant. The International Atomic Energy Agency approved Tokyo's plan to release treated water from the tsunami-hit nuclear plant into the sea over the next few decades.

The plan has raised concerns in neighbouring countries, prompting China to ban some food imports and sparking protests in South Korea.

The release of the treated water will have a "fatal adverse impact on the human lives and security and ecological environment," an official from Pyongyang's environmental protection ministry said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central

News Agency. "What matters is the unreasonable behaviour of IAEA actively patronizing and facilitating Japan's projected discharge of nuclear-polluted water, which is unimaginable," the statement added.

Some 1.33 million cubic metres of groundwater, rainwater and water used for cooling have accumulated at the Fukushima nuclear plant, where several reactors went into meltdown after the 2011 tsunami overwhelmed cooling systems.

The plant operator treats the water to remove almost all radioactive elements except tritium, and plans to dilute it before discharging it into the ocean over several decades. The statement comes as IAEA head Rafael Grossi is wrapping up his three-day visit to Seoul with a meeting with opposition lawmakers, who have criticised the planned release.

On Saturday, Grossi met with South Korean foreign minister Park Jin to brief him on his agency's findings, Seoul's foreign ministry said in a statement. Park requested "active cooperation from the IAEA for safety verification and public reassurance," it added. Following that meeting, Grossi said the IAEA will remain at the Fukushima plant



SEOUL: South Korea's main opposition Democratic Party lawmakers and party members hold placards reading "We oppose the dumping of Fukushima contaminated water into the sea" in Seoul. — AFP

to ensure safety "every step of the way", tweeting: "What starts now is even more important than the work done so far - the continuous monitoring of the plan's implementation." —AFP

Sri Lanka seeks stolen artifacts on 'versary of president's ouster

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka offered an amnesty on Sunday for the return of historical treasures looted when protesters stormed the presidential palace a year ago, forcing then-leader Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee. Months of protests over Sri Lanka's worst economic crisis since gaining independence from Britain in 1948 culminated in thousands of people breaking into the palace on July 9, 2022.

"Various valuable artefacts and archaeological items went missing, including coats of arms associated with former governors and presidents of Sri Lanka," the office of Rajapaksa's successor Ranil

Wickremesinghe said in a statement, announcing a month-long amnesty to surrender the items.

The artefacts were stolen from the palace in the heart of the capital Colombo — a symbol of state authority for over 200 years—during its five-day occupation.

Officials released photos of five coats of arms, including one of Jorge de Albuquerque, the seventh Portuguese governor appointed in 1622 to administer the island. Other coats of arms belonged to governors during British colonial rule in the 19th and 20th centuries. — AFP



COLOMBO: University student activists take part in a demonstration in Maharagama, a suburb of Colombo on July 9, 2023, demanding the release of some of their colleagues in police custody and to mark the first year anniversary of the toppling of former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa. — AFP

News in Brief

Pope to appoint new cardinals

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis said on Sunday he would appoint 21 new cardinals from across the world at the end of September. "Their providence expresses the universality of the Church that continues to proclaim God's merciful love to all people on earth," said the pope, following his weekly Sunday Angelus prayer from the window of the Apostolic Palace on Saint Peter's Square. The consistory will be the ninth for the creation of cardinals under Pope Francis, who is in the tenth year of his papacy. His choices are closely watched as cardinals under the age of 80 will participate in the vote to nominate the successor to Francis. — AFP

France bans July 14 fireworks sales

PARIS: France has banned the sale, possession and transport of fireworks during the July 14 national holiday weekend, following riots sparked by the police killing a teenager, the government said Sunday. Fireworks were among the weapons of choice during the unrest that exploded in France after a police officer shot dead a 17-year-old during a traffic stop on June 27 near Paris, rekindling long pent-up frustrations and accusations of systemic racism among France's security forces. The ban does not extend to professionals or municipalities that are organising traditional fireworks for the Bastille Day celebrations, it added. — AFP

Greek PM kicks off second term

ATHENS: Greek government won a vote of confidence Saturday in parliament, kicking off its second four-year term, two weeks after Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' New Democracy party won the elections. Following a three-day debate on policy statements for a second term in power, the ruling party received a vote of confidence from 158 out of 300 deputies in a roll-call vote. New Democracy has 158 seats in parliament. The party, which won the June 25 election with 40.56 percent of the vote, compared to 17.83 percent for the left-wing Syriza and 11.84 percent for the socialist PASOK, vows to accelerate institutional and economic reforms. — AFP

Paraguay president-elect to visit Taiwan

TAIPEI: Paraguayan president-elect Santiago Pena will visit Taiwan this week, Taipei's foreign ministry announced Sunday, to cement the "friendship" between the self-ruled island and its last diplomatic ally in South America. Paraguay is one of the few remaining Latin American countries to still recognize Taiwan after Beijing — which claims the island as its territory — spent decades convincing Taipei's diplomatic allies to switch sides. The foreign ministry said Pena would arrive in Taipei for a five-day trip on Tuesday, and would meet with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen before taking office in August. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, JULY 10, 2023

Saudi, France to work together for advancing hydrogen production

'French-Saudi Task-Force' to push cooperation in renewable energy sector

RIYADH: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Republic of France adopted on Saturday a joint communique on joining forces to search for innovative solutions to produce hydrogen and promote renewable energy. The communique followed the meeting between Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman and French Minister for Energy Transition Agnes Pannier-Runacher in Riyadh, according to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

"Both countries acknowledge the importance of advancing the implementation of the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement in accordance with the principles, objectives and goals defined therein, including pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C," the communique reads.

They recognize that clean hydrogen is an essential fuel to reach the shared objective of promoting a sustainable economic development while mitigating the impact of climate change. Both countries agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of electricity, and exchange experiences in the field of electricity generation from renewable energy resources, grid interconnection projects, as well as encouraging the participation of private sectors in power sector projects includ-

ing generation, transmission, distribution, storage and network automation technologies. They have agreed to engage in joint efforts to enhance energy efficiency, and to enhance their cooperation in the field of nuclear energy in a peaceful and safe framework, the management of radioactive waste and the nuclear applications, and the development of human capabilities. Both countries agreed to cooperate on advancing climate technologies and solutions including carbon capture utilization and storage for hard-to-abate sectors such as cement, aviation, marine, and petrochemicals, among others.

The Kingdom aims to become the leading exporter of hydrogen and electricity produced from low emission resources globally, capitalizing on its ability to produce hydrogen and electricity produced from low emission resources at competitive cost. The Kingdom has the necessary resources of renewable energy, natural gas and carbon sinks, to export hydrogen in addition to its strategic location with proximity to major global demand centers.

The French strategy for the development of decarbonized hydrogen aims at having a significant contribution to the de-carbonization of industry and transport. France and Saudi Arabia have

placed hydrogen and electricity produced from low emission and renewable resources at the core of their respective energy transition. Both countries decided to join forces in the search for innovative solutions to produce hydrogen in the most effective and competitive way, and to develop its use in industry, mobility, power generation, buildings and other relevant applications.

To this end, France and Saudi Arabia agreed on a hydrogen cooperation and electricity produced from renewable resources roadmap focusing on three pillars: First, Technology development: Cooperation will advance hydrogen and electricity produced from renewable technology deployment from production, transportation and conversion at demand centers; Second, Business co-operation: the private sector has a critical role to play, Saudi - France cooperation welcomes joint efforts between Saudi and French companies to partner in the entire energy supply chain to unlock business and hydrogen trade; And third, Policies and regulation: the roadmap will further promote the development of the hydrogen industry through a mutual recognition of certification framework including emission life cycle assessment from all possible sources necessary for consis-



RIYADH: France's Energy Transition Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher gives an interview to AFP at the French ambassador's residence in Riyadh, on July 8, 2023. — AFP

istency in international trade. Both countries will work to enhance their cooperation in developing and sustaining supply chains for the energy sectors and to enable cooperation between companies to maximize the utilization of local resources in both countries, which contributes to

achieving flexibility and effectiveness of energy supplies.

The parties support the creation of a "French-Saudi Task-Force" aiming to deliver desired outcomes from cooperation in hydrogen and other domains, the joint communique added. —KUNA

Yellen: Visit helped put US-China ties on 'surer footing'

BEIJING: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Sunday that her talks with top Chinese officials have helped put ties on "surer footing", as she wrapped up a trip aimed at stabilizing freight relations between the two biggest economies. During her four-day trip—which came on the heels of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit—Yellen stressed the need for healthy economic competition and improved communication, and urged cooperation on the "existential threat" posed by climate change.

"We believe that the world is big enough for both of our countries to thrive," she told journalists at the US embassy in Beijing on Sunday. "Both nations have an obligation to responsibly manage this relationship: to find a way to live together and share in global prosperity," she added.

While it did not produce specific breakthroughs, Yellen's trip furthers a push by President Joe Biden's administration to steady ties with China. Beijing's official Xinhua news agency said Saturday that Yellen's meeting with Vice Premier He Lifeng yielded an agreement to "strengthen communication and cooperation on addressing global challenges".

Both sides also agreed to continue exchanges, the readout added.

Yellen said Sunday that while there are "significant disagreements" between the countries, her talks had been "direct, substantive, and productive". "My bilateral meetings—which totaled about 10 hours over two days—served as a step forward in our effort to put the US-China relationship on surer footing," she said. "I feel confident that we will have more frequent and regular communication."

Sources of tension

Topping the laundry list of disagreements are Washington's trade curbs, which it says are crucial to safeguard national security. On Sunday, Yellen said



BEIJING: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen speaks during a press conference at the Beijing American Center of the US Embassy in Beijing on July 9, 2023. —AFP

she had stressed that Washington's measures "are not used by us to gain economic advantage". "These actions are motivated by straightforward national security considerations," she said. And with the US mulling fresh curbs that could more strictly regulate American outbound investment to China, Yellen said any new moves would be implemented in "a transparent way".

She also said she had raised "serious concerns" over "unfair economic practices" by Beijing. She cited barriers to foreign firms entering the Chinese market as well as issues around the protection of intellectual property. "I also expressed my worries about a recent uptick in coercive actions against American firms," she said, referring to a recent national security crackdown against US firms in China. During a roundtable of experts on Saturday, Yellen also stressed the "critical" need for the two largest emitters of greenhouse gases to collaborate on climate financing. "The United States and China must work together to address this existential threat," she said.

Looking ahead, "any concrete key break-

throughs and major deliverables presumably will be reserved for the two top leaders to announce," said Yun Sun, director of the China program at the Washington-based Stimson Center. "The two sides have not had this level of communications and consultations for a number of years," she told AFP. Last month, Biden voiced confidence in meeting Chinese leader Xi Jinping soon. Lindsay Gorman, senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, added: "I think one underappreciated audience is really US allies and partners, both in the region and globally."

"The main goal for this trip is really a messaging goal," she told AFP. Among the aims are communicating how Washington considers its economic relationship with China, and dispelling the notion that it might embrace "pure zero-sum competition"—while signaling it targets a fairer playing field. Overall, China's response towards Yellen's visit appears "more enthusiastic" than Blinken's trip, as he is considered more hawkish, said Wu Xinbo, director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University. — AFP

Ribbing Republicans

The twist to Biden's message is that Republicans nearly all opposed his giant public spending plans—and now he's coming back to rib them. Mocking Republicans who tried to stop the bills yet seem more than happy to see the resulting investments reach their states, Biden said: "All those members of Congress who voted against it suddenly realize how great it is, and they're bragging about it. As my mother would say, 'God love them.'"

South Carolina hasn't voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1976 and just a week ago Trump held a large election campaign rally of his own in the state, proving that his grievance-laden message remains powerful. South Carolina Senator

using tax incentives from Biden's mammoth Inflation Reduction Act to juice some \$60 million in investments, including 600 new jobs in South Carolina.

And that's a blip in the bigger picture. "Since I took office, we have attracted a half a trillion dollars -- \$497 billion—in private investment in American manufacturing, both here and around the world. It's historic, and it's Bidenomics in action," Biden said.

UK to unveil new measures to help financial sector

LONDON: Finance minister Jeremy Hunt is on Monday due to announce new measures to support Britain's powerful financial sector, seeking to make the UK the "most innovative and competitive" financial centre in the world.

Hunt will set out "how Britain's financial services will support the drive for long-term sustainable growth across the country", the UK Treasury said ahead of his speech at London's Mansion House in the City of London financial district. "I want to lay out plans to enable our financial services sector to increase returns for pensioners, improve outcomes for investors and unlock capital for our growth businesses," Hunt is expected to tell an audience of CEOs and leaders from the sector.

The new measures will in particular seek to make the UK stock market more attractive to firms looking to take their businesses public. The number of companies conducting IPOs in London last year plunged to around 40 listings compared to more than 100 in 2021. Hunt, whose official title is chancellor of the exchequer, will lay out plans for an "entirely new kind of stock market" that will allow private companies to access capital markets without floating.

He is also expected to detail plans to simplify the rules for buying and selling shares. "These common-sense changes are grasping our newfound Brexit freedoms to simplify the rulebook—making it easier than ever for firms to research, raise funds, and float their business," Hunt said.

The UK government late last year announced a package of measures to stimulate growth in the financial sector, in particular relaxing certain curbs that were introduced after the 2008 financial crisis. But despite post-Brexit reforms, London has lost its crown as the top European trading hub following Britain's departure from the EU in early 2021. — AFP

Tim Scott, who is also seeking the Republican presidential nomination, scoffed on Twitter that "propaganda tours won't hide the damage Bidenomics has done to our economy. This President has delivered nothing but failure."

No Republican officials attended Biden's factory visit or even met with the president. And on his way into the facility, Biden's motorcade had to pass about a dozen Trump supporters, including a woman displaying a "Women for Trump" flag who yelled and made an obscene gesture at the passing vehicles.

The Biden team, though, believes it can eat right into Trump's base by emphasizing that the manufacturing bonanza is targeted primarily at the working and middle class. That would allow him to target the kinds of disaffected communities that turned away from Democrats to Trump's populism in 2016 and 2020. Even as polls don't yet show that he has made the case effectively, aides say the tide will turn as investments take root, giving Biden the opportunity to do more visits like Thursday's factory stop. "I think people are beginning to feel the results of this," a senior administration official said. "We need to tell the story." —AFP

Biden yanks pro-growth label from Republicans

COLUMBIA: Taking the stage at a South Carolina factory for his latest "Bidenomics" speech, Joe Biden gave the base of the apparently malfunctioning podium a light kick. The real kicking, he reserved for Republican critics of his economic plan.

Ahead of the 2024 election, Biden is seeking to turn the tables by stealing Republicans' traditional talking points on the economy, boasting that he is now the pro-growth president—with a multitude of newly opened manufacturing plants to prove his point.

He took that message Thursday to deep pro-Republican territory in Columbia, South Carolina, where he toured a factory churning out high-tech solar panel components. "Investment is working, and factories are being built, and jobs are being created...

in rural America, the heartland, all across America, in communities that have been left out and hollowed out," he said. Biden seeks to win over voters from the working and middle class in those "hollowed out" communities, but he has a lot of work to do. Polls do not show the message has got through.

In fact, majorities of Americans tell pollsters that they trust former President Donald Trump more on the economy than Biden. Biden suggested that he is more deserving of that trust, and he rattled off statistics to lay out what he gleefully calls "Bidenomics."

Unemployment has remained consistently under four percent for the longest period in half a century, painful inflation rates from the aftermath of the COVID pandemic are slowly but steadily receding, and job creation is booming.

Crucially, Biden told workers at the plant, where solar firm Enphase Energy is collaborating with manufacturer Flex Ltd, none of this is happening by accident. All the activity, he says, is fueled by historic government investment and incentive packages that he got passed—against expectations—through the nearly evenly split Congress earlier in his presidency.

For example, Enphase Energy and Flex Ltd are

Elon Musk threatens lawsuit as Twitter rival Threads takes off

Threads accused of 'unlawful misappropriation of Twitter's trade secrets'

WASHINGTON: Twitter threatened to sue Meta just hours after the Instagram parent company launched Threads, an app it hopes will beat out the struggling site owned by Elon Musk.

In a letter to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, published by online news outlet Semafor on Thursday, Musk lawyer Alex Spiro accused the company of "unlawful misappropriation of Twitter's trade secrets and other intellectual property." The letter accused Meta of hiring dozens of former Twitter employees who "had and continue to have access to Twitter's trade secrets and other highly confidential information."

Threads is the biggest challenger yet to Musk-owned Twitter, which has seen a series of potential competitors emerge but not yet replace one of the world's biggest social media platforms, despite its struggles. Zuckerberg's latest move against Musk further heightened the rivalry between the two multimillionaires who have even agreed to meet for hand to hand combat in a cage match.

Threads went live on Apple and Android app stores in 100 countries at 2300 GMT on Wednesday, and early feedback noted its close, but scaled back, resemblance to Twitter. Within a few hours, more than 30 million people had downloaded Threads, Zuckerberg said Thursday.

"Feels like the beginning of something special, but we've got a lot of work ahead to build the app," Zuckerberg wrote on his official Threads account. Accounts were already active for celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez, Shakira, Oprah Winfrey and Hugh Jackman, as well as media outlets including The Washington Post and The Economist.

Zuckerberg wrote: "It'll take some time, but I think there should be a public conversations app with 1 billion+ people on it." "Twitter has had the opportunity to do this but hasn't nailed it. Hopefully we will." Twitter has said it has more than 200 million daily users.

Musk meanwhile retweeted an image that said the Threads logo resembled a tapeworm. "Metaphorically too," he added. In another post referencing Twitter's potential legal action against Meta, Musk noted that "competition is fine, cheating is not." Meta spokesman Andy Stone said on Threads: "No one on the Threads engineering team is a former Twitter employee — that's just not a thing."

'Be kind'

Threads was introduced as a spin-off of Instagram, giving it a built-in audience of more than two billion users and sparing the new platform the challenge of starting from scratch. Instagram chief Adam Mosseri told users that Threads was intended to build "an open and friendly platform for conversations." "The best thing you can do if you want that too is be kind," he said. Zuckerberg is taking advantage of Musk's chaotic ownership of Twitter to push out the new product, which Meta hopes will become the go-to platform for celebrities, companies and politicians.

Analyst Jasmine Engberg from Insider Intelligence said Threads only needs one out of four Instagram monthly users "to make it as big as Twitter." "Twitter users are desperate for an alternative, and Musk has given Zuckerberg an opening," she added.

Under Musk, Twitter has seen content moderation reduced to a minimum with glitches and rash decisions scaring away celebrities and major advertisers. He also fired more than half of Twitter's staff, some of whom presumably went to other tech companies, including Meta.

EU 'many months' away

Meta has its legion of critics too, especially in the major market of Europe, which could slow the growth of Threads. The company has been criticized for its



WASHINGTON: This photo illustration shows an image of Elon Musk and Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg reflected in the opening page of Threads, an Instagram app. — AFP

handling of personal data, the essential ingredient for targeted ads that help it rake in billions of dollars in profits. Mosseri said he regretted that the launch was delayed in the European Union, but had Meta waited for regulatory clarity from Brussels, Threads would have been "many, many, many, months away."

According to a source close to the matter, Meta was wary of a new law called the Digital Markets Act

(DMA) that sets strict rules for the world's "gatekeeper" internet companies. One rule restricts platforms from moving user data between products, as would potentially be the case between Threads and Instagram. Globally, the Threads hashtag on Twitter has garnered three million tweets, with many users jokingly suggesting people will return to Musk's platform. Others expressed privacy concerns. — AFP

What we know about Threads, 'Twitter killer'

WASHINGTON: Threads, Mark Zuckerberg's Instagram-based challenge to dethrone Elon Musk's troubled Twitter, has already secured tens of millions of downloads, but it remains to be seen whether this Twitter rival will be a winning one.

What is it?

Threads is a text-based sidekick of Instagram, the image-heavy social network that Facebook bought more than a decade ago and became the world's most popular app for photo sharing. You can't be a Threads user without being signed up to Instagram and Zuck-

erberg said that he ultimately aims to reach one billion users, or about half Instagram's current base. The app is easily downloadable from Instagram, where users need just a few clicks to replicate their account on the new platform. This has propelled Threads to become the fastest downloaded app ever on Apple's app store. Once signed in, users have the same handle and inherit the same followers as they have on Instagram.

Verified accounts on Instagram are also verified on Threads, but be careful: you can only delete a Threads account by getting rid of your Instagram one, too.

Is it the same as Twitter?

If you don't like Twitter — and many people don't — you won't like Threads either, as the user interface is generally speaking very similar. Zuckerberg joked about this in a meme tweet on Musk's platform, his first in 12 years, that featured an unexpected encounter between two identical superheros.

Users are allowed 500 characters in each post, can

add a picture, five minutes of video and make replies, similar to the basic building blocks of Twitter. But at this stage Threads is missing some key ingredients like search, hashtags, and a following only feed, meaning what you see is generated by an algorithm — not who you follow. Instagram boss Adam Mosseri said his teams were "cranking away" to provide more features as quickly as possible.

Why not Europe?

The birth of Threads comes just as a series of landmark laws governing big tech are coming into force in the European Union, including the Digital Markets Act (DMA). The DMA will govern so-called internet gatekeepers such as Meta, and one of the rules bans giants from combining personal data across several products, as would be the case with Threads and Instagram. Mosseri said the problems with Europe were just too large and that any solution would be "months and months away." — AFP

Energy-short South Africa will survive winter: Minister

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa, which has experienced crippling electricity outages in recent months, will "survive" this winter season thanks to a huge improvement in generation, a cabinet minister said on Saturday. Electricity Minister Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, who had last month forecast "an incredibly difficult" southern hemisphere winter, on Saturday said power generation had been ramped up to achieve an average output of 60 percent, from 48 percent weeks ago.

The state utility Eskom imposes daily scheduled blackouts, called load-shedding, to safeguard the grid whenever demand outstrips supply.

These have in recent weeks drastically dropped from 12 to around two hours a day. "We are succeeding in maintaining those levels of efficiency," said the minister. He credited the change to Eskom mobilizing some of

the best generation experts and deploying them at the worst-performing power stations whose output is now "surpassing our expectations".

"We are more than confident that we should be able to survive the winter," he told journalists at a national executive committee meeting of the governing African National Congress, taking place at a hotel east of Johannesburg. "We will not experience the worst-case scenario that we had projected and we will continue to see the improvement," said the minister.

Peak winter demand, projected at 34,000 megawatts, has been down at 30,000 megawatts, he said.

Power cuts have forced many South Africans, who had become hardened to the rolling outages, to find alternative sources such as installing solar units at household level. "I'm very confident load-shedding will be behind us



South Africa's state utility Eskom imposes daily scheduled blackouts, called load-shedding, to safeguard the grid whenever demand outstrips supply. — AFP

very soon and we begin to work on creating an additional buffer reserve margin to allow the economy to grow at the desired level," said Ramokgopa.

In May, the central bank fore-

cast GDP will grow by just 0.3 percent this year and that the power cuts alone would cost the continent's most industrialized economy at least two percentage points of growth. — AFP

Underwater mining of high seas inches closer amid worries

UNITED NATIONS, US: Governments will soon likely be able to apply for deep sea mining contracts in international waters, a plunge into the unknown that is worrying conservationists as calls for a moratorium on such digging grow.

States have for ten years been negotiating a mining code to set rules for the possible exploitation of nickel, cobalt and copper in deep seabed areas that fall outside of national jurisdictions.

But agreement has so far been elusive, and on Sunday a clause is set to expire that allows governments to apply for contracts while negotiations continue. "I think it's a very real possibility that we see an application submitted this year," Emma Wilson of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition told AFP.

"So it's crucial for states to be bold and implement the necessary measures to protect our ocean," she said, adding that the International Seabed Authority (ISA) is entering "the most critical decision-making period in the history of its existence." The ISA was established under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. It is responsible

for protecting the seabed in the high seas as well as regulating activities related to coveted minerals. Presently, the Jamaica-based body only grants exploration permits for these areas, which the UN convention classifies as "the common heritage of mankind."

In the summer of 2021, the small Pacific island state of Nauru threw a spanner into the works of the decade-long negotiations for the mining code by triggering a clause demanding that agreement be reached within two years. With that timeframe now up, if Nauru were to apply for a contract for Nauru Ocean Resources (Nori), a subsidiary of Canadian firm The Metals Company, then ISA would have to consider the request — but may not necessarily give the green light.

The Nauru authorities have given assurances that they will not act immediately, but other companies sponsoring states' underwater mining ventures could take advantage of the opportunity, experts say.

"I'm not too concerned," Pradeep Singh, a laws of the sea expert at the Research Institute for Sustainability in



Governments are trying to agree on rules for deep sea mining in the high seas. — AFP

Potsdam, Germany, told AFP. "I think it would be a mistake to submit an application anytime soon, seeing that states are still negotiating and working towards completing the regulation.

"The indication is quite clear that states are very reluctant and hesitant to allow mining to commence without regulations," he added.

'Question of credibility'

In March, the 36 member states of the ISA Council, the decision-making body on contracts, noted that commercial exploitation "should not be carried out" until the mining code was in place.

But they were unable to agree on the process for examining a possible application, or on the precise interpretation of the clause triggered by Nauru. NGOs fearing that companies may exploit the legal vacuum hope that the Council will make a much clearer decision when it meets in Kingston from July 10 to 21. Meanwhile, Chile, France, Palau and Vanuatu have chosen to take the debate to the political level.

At their request, and for the first time, the assembly of ISA's 167 member states will discuss a "precautionary pause" in mining when it meets between July 24 and 28. — AFP

Gulf Bank announces 10 winners of Al-Danah monthly draw



KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing commitment to rewarding its customers and account holders, Gulf Bank has announced the 10 monthly winners of its Al-Danah account draw for the month of June 2023. The winners, who will be taking home prizes of KD 1,000 each, include:

- Maasoumah Taqi Reda Askhanani
- Khaled Mohammed Saleh Al-Fedaghi
- Abdul Jaleel Tabtabaei
- Waheedah Abbas Eissa Al-Dhafeeri
- Hani Ahmed Essa Al-Hadad
- Mohsen Faour Madhi
- Jassem Mohammed Hmoud Al-Marzouq
- Vikram Singh
- Aram Byuryundzhikyan
- Mohammed Abdullah Ali Al-Wazan

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 2 million.

Gulf Bank is the only bank in Kuwait that proudly creates two millionaires a year. Al-Danah customers stand to win the semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million, whose winner will be announced on July 13, 2023, and an upcoming grand draw prize of KD 2 million. The annual grand draw is currently scheduled to take place on January 18, 2024 in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Ernst & Young.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances and transfers your chances of winning from the previous year to the next year, as part of a program that rewards customers for their loyalty to Gulf Bank.

In order to increase one's chances of winning, customers must maintain a minimum of KD 200 in their accounts, or deposit continuously to increase their chances of winning. Al-Danah account holders are eligible to win Gulf Bank's upcoming monthly, quarterly, and annual Al-Danah draws. 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 a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

Business

Nomo Bank signs strategic partnership with Blueprint

Partnership to offer best property finance solutions for customers in Kuwait, region

KUWAIT: Nomo Bank, the digital sharia-compliant bank in the United Kingdom that is part of the Bank of London and the Middle East (BLME) of the Boubyan Bank Group, announced the signing of a strategic partnership with Blueprint Company to provide a set of integrated investment advisory services related to the real estate market in the United Kingdom to its clients in Kuwait and the region.

Abdullah Al-Tuwaijri, BLME's Board Member, stated: "Since the launch of Nomo Bank, our main goal has been to provide our customers with a new dimension of solutions, integrated services, and investment opportunities that are unique, competitive, and in line with the high quality service and flexibility provided by UK banks, and we managed to achieve that in a short period of time."

He explained that the importance of owning a property in the United Kingdom has been well known lately and is considered one of the most important pillars of successful property investment for investors, whether residential or rental. However, venturing into this type of investment requires the availability of flexible financing options and integrated investment solutions. This is where Nomo Bank

comes in to provide property investment solutions that are sharia-compliant.

He added that through our partnership with Blueprint, a leading real estate investment consultancy in the UK, we offer our clients investment opportunities based on realistic foundations after conducting studies and analysis of the real estate market and then obtaining the best advice to ensure the maximum benefits for the investor.

He explained that this step further enhances the series of digital banking services by Nomo Bank while working on providing value to more customers in Kuwait and the region, especially property finance with competitive advantages, giving them a unique banking experience that meets their expectations and needs while ensuring the highest levels of protection and security for their funds.

Al-Tuwaijri indicated that in the coming period, Nomo will witness several new strategic partnerships with distinguished partners with the aim of strengthening our unique series of services and providing digital solutions with a global financial outlook that contribute to the management of our customers' savings and investments with ease in the UK.

Investment advisory with multiple advantages

CEO of Blueprint, Eng Mishaal Al-Melhem, commented that Nomo Bank comes in light of the growing demand for real estate investment in the UK, especially since owning a residential or rental property was and still is a dream for many, adding that there is often a need to invest or have permanent or temporary residence for clients and investors from the Gulf countries, stressing that these consultations come to develop the right investment and financial path for Nomo clients.

He added that through this partnership, we offer Nomo Bank's clients in Kuwait and the region an integrated package to identify the most suitable real estate investment opportunities in the UK and provide professional advice tailored according to their needs in terms of search or purchase, in addition to tax advice, financing advice, legal advice, and everything related to interior design, furnishing, and renting the property.

In a related context, Al-Tuwaijri indicated that the property finance product provided by Nomo is fully sharia-compliant, a major step through which we succeeded in overcoming the challenges between how to combine the principles of sharia in Islamic



Abdullah Al-Tuwaijri



Eng Mishaal Al-Melhem

banking and digital innovation to strengthen real estate financing in the most attractive and important real estate markets in the world".

He added, "With Nomo Bank's digital real estate financing services, customers can now invest their wealth continuously with access to their accounts around the clock to suit their diverse lifestyles and provide more convenience and flexibility."



PARIS: Irish politician and President of the Eurogroup Paschal Donohoe poses during a photo session in Paris on July 7, 2023. — AFP

Eurogroup chief sees 'narrow' path to budget health

PARIS: After years of overshooting budget and debt targets, EU members need to rein in spending even as they reel under high inflation and rising interest rates, the powerful chief of the Eurogroup said Friday.

In an interview with AFP, Paschal Donohoe—who runs the monthly informal eurozone finance minister meetings known as Eurogroup—said members must find a balance between controlled spending and higher taxation to bring their financial position to a solid footing, or face the pain of ballooning borrowing costs. "We have a narrow and demanding path upon which we are trying to walk," said Donohoe, a former Irish finance minister and currently minister for public expenditure and reform.

Most EU members' budgets are wildly out of line with the bloc's public finance criteria which call for deficits to remain below three percent of GDP and public debt below 60 percent.

After years of heavy spending to offset the impact of the Covid pandemic and high energy and commodities prices after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, some countries are running deficits of up to eight percent and debt levels of well above 100 percent of GDP.

'Hard-wired'

The rules are currently suspended to give countries room to spend their way out of trouble without fear of European Commission fines, but Donohoe said there was no chance that they would be abolished, or even revised. "For lots of countries they're hard-wired into their laws," he said. "It would be very, very hard for many countries to move away from those figures." The Eurogroup has, however, discussed more flexibility which Donohoe said could take the form of generous deadlines for the return to fiscal orthodoxy.

"That decision regarding speed can be every bit as meaningful as what the figures themselves should be," he said. Donohoe said he was "confident enough" that finance ministers will reach agreement on such a timetable "later on in the year".

Governments needed to accept meanwhile that a long period of light debt servicing costs linked to a context of ultra-low interest rates was over. "We're going back to a more normal world of financial borrowing," Donohoe said. Any deviation from EU rules would in future not only spark warnings from the European Commission, but also bring financial costs as debt market operators demanded higher and higher returns for sovereign debt.

"It will be a combination of what the commission may say or do, and then a reaction by the market to statements and analysis from the commission," Donohoe said.

'A big effect'

No eurozone member has ever been fined for overshooting budget or debt targets, but Donohoe said "I believe that the statements and the warnings that the commission will give about a high level of borrowing of itself will be a sanction." He said that "if we even just slowed the pace of government expenditure growth ... it can have a big effect".

The eurozone entered into a technical recession in the first quarter. But Donohoe noted that the economic slowdown had not caused havoc in the jobs market as countries have maintained an "extraordinarily high" level of employment. "The most meaningful example of what economic growth can look like is whether you have a job," he said. — AFP

NBK MONEY MARKETS REPORT

US labor market remains tight

KUWAIT: The US dollar index dropped drastically on Friday, reaching a three-week low of 102.272, after reaching a weekly high of 103.572, prompting the EUR/USD currency pair to rise to a two-week high of 1.0967. Similarly, the GBP strengthened against the greenback, ending the week at 1.2836 and reaching a daily high of 1.2849, a figure not seen since April 25, 2022. The Japanese yen, as well, did not hesitate to follow suit by strengthening against the dollar, forcing the USD/JPY currency pair to a three-week low of 142.07.

Employment change

As the Fed contemplates its next moves in regards to interest rate hikes, significant data was released on Friday. The latest non-farm employment change increased by 209K this month, after last month's seven-month high reading of 306K. The latest reading came even lower than the expected 224K increase. The unemployment rate on the other hand expectedly came in at 3.6 percent, a slight slip from May's reading of 3.7 percent. On the other hand, wage gains remained firmly strong, with the latest average hourly earnings m/m beating expectations by increasing 0.4 percent. The labor market remains tight, even with job growth slowing more than expected, leading markets to believe that another interest rate hike in the Fed's next meeting is almost certain, especially with wages remaining too high for the Fed's 2 percent inflation target.

Fed meeting minutes

The Federal reserve meeting minutes for June revealed that "almost all" voting members at the FOMC opted for a June rate skip, with Fed officials feeling that "leaving the target range unchanged at this meeting would allow them more time to assess the economy's progress toward the committee's goals."

Moreover, all but two Fed officials believe that further tightening would be appropriate this year, while 12 of the 18 officials expect at least two more rate hikes before the end of the year.

Manufacturing output

Manufacturing output in the Euro zone fell to an eight-month low, settling at 43.4. According to the HCOB, "Eurozone manufacturing production contracted for the third month in a row in June, according to the PMI output index, with the rate of decline accelerating and pointing to a worsening of factory conditions. New orders also fell at a faster rate, which further increases the likelihood that industrial production, which contracted by 0.9 percent month-on-month in the first quarter according to Eurostat, will drop again in the second quarter." With countries like Germany, France and Italy experiencing a weakness in demand for new factory orders, it is natural for the eurozone as a whole to experience such low demand. The HCOB's final PMI for manufacturing dropped from 43.2 in May, to 40.6, marking a fifth consecutive monthly drop. Markets are pricing in a 25bps hike in the ECB's next meeting at the end of July.

Swiss inflation

The latest CPI m/m reading came in at 0.1 percent, from 0.3 percent previously, and exceeding the forecasted 0.2 percent reading. On a year-on-year level, Swiss inflation dipped to 1.7 percent in June, from its previous rate of 2.2 percent, and yet again below its respective expected reading of 1.8 percent. This marks the first month that inflation has returned to SNB's 0-2 percent target for price stability. The latest data, published by Procure, showed that PMI soared to 44.2 in June, from its previous reading of 43.2. As the latest reading still remains below 50, the manufacturing sector is still contracting. Markets were last seen pricing in a 60 percent probability of a 25bps rate hike to 2 percent.

Asia Pacific

In line with market expectations, the Reserve

Bank of Australia held its official cash rate to 4.10 percent, with the RBA highlighting that this decision is in line with the consensus that the bank's officials believe that they should wait for the impact of their previous hikes to be embedded into the economy before deciding on their next move. Nevertheless, the bank delivered a hawkish message by stating that "some further tightening of monetary policy may be required to ensure that inflation returns to target in a reasonable timeframe." The RBA understands the peak inflation has been passed, although it "is still too high and will remain so for some time."

OPEC+

On Monday, Saudi confirmed that they would extend their one million barrels per day (bpd) cut until at least August. The two powerhouses of the organization, Russia and Saudi Arabia, appeared to be on the same page in the latest OPEC meeting that took place on Wednesday in Vienna, with Russia following Saudi's lead by announcing that it would reduce oil exports to 500,000 bpd in August. Saudi Arabia's energy minister, Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al-Saud, hailed his Russian counterparts on their "meaningful decision" by stating that "in the last move this week, yes, we are all continuing with our voluntary cut, but again, part of what we have had done with our colleagues from Russia was also to mitigate the cynical side of spectators about what was going on with Saudi Arabia and Russia." The Saudi energy minister continues to refer to oil short sellers as critical contributors to lowering oil prices, as he did in the previous meeting, when he famously advised "them [oil short sellers] that they will be ouching, they did our in April." Prince Abdulaziz brushed off remarks that the Russian might not honor their oil exports pledge, by stating that "It was a voluntary cut that was not imposed on them ... including delivering, that they will do it from their exports, because it is more meaningful."

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30730.

Climate change challenges hydropower-reliant Austria

KAPRUN, Austria: High in the Austrian Alps, hundreds of construction workers toil in a huge underground project aimed at storing hydropower as climate change has reduced the country's water-dependent electricity production. Austria draws more than 60 percent of its electricity output from the renewable energy source, compared to a global average of 16 percent, with more than 3,100 dams spread across its rivers.

But the amount of electricity generated through hydropower in the European Union country is down—from some 45 terawatt hours (TWh) in 2020 to 42 TWh in 2021 -- as water levels are falling.

For the first time last year, Austria—which also still relies heavily on Russian gas—had to import electricity, ringing alarm bells. Inside the snow-capped mountain range, above the Austrian village of Kaprun in the Salzburg region, trucks thunder in and out of the vast subterranean construction site, which is dotted with statues of Saint Barbara, patron of miners and others plying dangerous trades. Excavation work for the Limberg 3 pumped storage power plant is wrapping up.

Excavation work for the Limberg 3 pumped storage power plant is wrapping up.

'Well prepared'

The plant is to be operational by 2025 to store power in order to cater to peaks in electricity consumption and mitigate a change in weather patterns, including increasingly capricious and irregular rainfall. "We want to be prepared well," said Klaus Hebenstreit, an executive of main electricity producer Verbund.

"The distribution (of water) over the year will change: we will have less water in summer (due to drought) and more in winter" due to snow melt, he added. Two years of drought have hit Austria, like the rest of Europe, according to Roman Neunteufel, a senior researcher at Vienna's University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences. "If there are several dry years in a row, then this becomes very noticeable... Water levels have never been lower since records began" some 100 years ago, he said.

Europe should brace for more deadly heatwaves driven by climate



KAPRUN, Austria: The Wasserfallboden dam near Kaprun, Austria, is seen on June 27, 2023. — AFP

change, said a report last month by the World Meteorological Organization and the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

The report noted the world's fastest-warming continent was some 2.3 degrees Celsius hotter last year than in pre-industrial times. In the Alps, glaciers saw a new record mass loss for a single year in 2022, caused by very low winter levels of snow, a hot summer as well as deposits of wind-blown Saharan dust.

Difficult diversification

Verbund, a semi-public company, continues to pour billions of euros into hydropower generation despite criticism from activists who say the dams and plants have a big impact on the environment. "Hydropower expansion must be ecologically and socially compatible.... The complete expansion of hydropower is not the solution to our energy problem. Instead, it is necessary to save energy," the World Wildlife Fund says on its site. — AFP

New Zealand signs 'ambitious' trade deal with EU

BRUSSELS: The European Union and New Zealand on Sunday signed a free trade agreement which Brussels says can lift exchanges between the two by 30 percent with a decade. The deal, agreed in June 2022 after four years of tough negotiations, is "ambitious", said Euro-

pean Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. "It is a very well balanced free trade agreement," she added. "New Zealand is a key partner for us in the Indo-Pacific region, and this free trade agreement will bring us even closer together," the EU chief said from Brussels. New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said it "will generate substantive new economic opportunities. It's of huge benefit to both partners," he said. The EU is New Zealand's third biggest trading partner importing wines, fruit and meat into the continent. Bilateral trade was just under nine billion euros (\$9.9 billion) last year.

According to Brussels, EU exports to the South Pacific nation could increase by 4.5 billion euros a

year. The bloc's investment in New Zealand could climb progressively by as much as 80 percent.

The deal includes a section on sustainable development, a first for an EU trade pact. "For the very first time in a trade deal, we have included commitments on the Paris climate agreement," which set a goal of limiting global warming to well below two degrees Celsius, noted von der Leyen. "With unprecedented social and climate commitments, it drives just and green growth while reinforcing Europe's economic security," she said. To go into force, the agreement has to win the backing of the European Parliament and be ratified in New Zealand, where the economy fell into recession this year. — AFP



Triplets Taylor (left), Kristin (center) and Morgan Seals, all seven-year old, celebrate their birthday with their parents (not in photo) by visiting the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie". — AFP photos



The DreamCamper is seen at the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie".



Pink macarons and empowerment: A day in the 'World of Barbie'



Barbie roll models (from left) tennis player Naomi Osaka, artist Frida Kahlo, mathematician Katherine Johnson, author Maya Angelou, nurse Florence Nightingale and civil rights activist Rosa Parks are displayed at the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie" at Santa Monica Place in Santa Monica, California.



The Dreamhouse in the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie" is seen.



Barbie Interstellar Rocket at the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie" is seen.



The Movie Theater at the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie" is seen.



The "You Can Be Anything TV Network" set is seen at the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie".



The DreamHouse living room at the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie" is seen.



The number plate of the DreamCamper is seen at the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie".



The DreamCloset in the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie" is seen.



Barbie roll models tennis player Naomi Osaka (left) and artist Frida Kahlo (right) are displayed at the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie".



A woman wearing a Barbie dress and purse walks outside the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie".



The interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie" is seen.

In the "World of Barbie," the news is always happy, the weather is always perfect, and the kitchen is always full of sweet pink macarons. A huge immersive attraction in Los Angeles—all bright colors and childhood whimsy, complete with Dreamhouse—has drawn tens of thousands of visitors, just as excitement builds for "Barbie," a major Hollywood film based on the legendary doll this summer.

"It's Barbie spirit, Barbie energy everywhere!" said Lucy Treadway, spokeswoman for Kilburn Live which, along with toy manufacturer Mattel, runs the 20,000-square-foot (1,850-square-meter) experience. Visitors—nearly all dressed in peak Barbiecore, with lots of pink and glitter—can explore a ball pit with a fuchsia slide, a beauty salon, beach chairs and palm trees, a recording studio, and even a spaceship.

In this surreal make-believe world, a morning news studio broadcasts bulletins about cute dog competitions, and a map shows perfect weather across the United States, with temperatures never rising above a balmy 81 degrees Fahrenheit (27 Celsius). The "World of Barbie" is not directly linked to the film—out in US theaters on July 21 -- but comes amid a blitz of Barbie-themed events, also including a Barbie-themed mansion listed on Airbnb in nearby Malibu.

Rhonda, Lois and Felice, all in their 50s and friends since childhood, travelled to Los Angeles to meet up for a girls' weekend at "World of Barbie." "We're girls again," said Lois, posing for photos with her friends in front of the pool slide.

Escapism

The two-story experience also contains a museum tracking Barbie's career since the first dolls—dressed up in heels and a black-and-white bathing suit—arrived in stores in 1959, and the iconic Dreamhouse. "The Barbie Dreamhouse is such a staple in so many people's lives," said Treadway. "If you've been playing with it since you're a child, (or) maybe your sibling played with



Diverse Barbie dolls are displayed at the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie" on June 28, 2023, at Santa Monica Place in Santa Monica, California.



The first Barbie Doll from 1959 is displayed at the interactive exhibition "The World of Barbie".

it... it still gives you that feeling of nostalgia."

Another popular spot is a room full of human-size doll boxes, which visitors can enter to pose as movie director Barbie, skater Barbie, explorer Barbie, mermaid Barbie and Hollywood star Barbie.

As well as providing Instagrammable moments, the interactive experience tries

to impart an empowering message. Each box comes with a caption at the bottom, saying "You can be anything you want." "Barbie has been an inspiration over so many decades, and to really show people that you can be whatever you want," said Treadway. "Love who you are, don't be afraid of who you are, you can be anything—she was at the forefront of teaching that, and it stood the test of time."

'Become Ken'

The message appears to have resonated with Emmanuel Fernandez. The 38-year-old was inspired to visit after watching the trailer for the upcoming movie, in which Ryan Gosling plays Ken alongside Margot Robbie as Barbie. "I wanted to become Ken," said Fernandez, who started working out, and bought himself a new outfit—a bright pink and turquoise print shirt and shorts. Standing in line to buy a pink cocktail at the exhibition, Fernandez said he was thrilled to have achieved his goal of becoming a real-life Ken, in this world of escapism. "I'm happy... everything is so cute here!" —AFP

Lifestyle



Bret Iwan, the actor who is the voice of Mickey Mouse, speaks during an interview with AFP on June 20, 2023 at the Disney Studio lot, in Burbank, California.—AFP

AI can't replace Mickey Mouse, says voice of Disney mascot

Aw, gee! The technology driving artificial intelligence sure is swell, but it could never capture the essence of Mickey Mouse, according to the man who voices Disney's mascot. As part of Disney's upcoming 100th anniversary celebration, AFP spoke with animators, archivists and Mickey voice actor Bret Iwan about the company's past and future, including the potential for AI—a topic currently roiling Hollywood. "Gosh, I would say, of course there's amazing technology being developed with AI, and it's so impressive," said Iwan.

"But I don't think anything can replace the heart of a character and more importantly, the heart of storytelling." Artificial intelligence, and the threat it poses to professions across the entertainment industry, has been a constant source of hand-wringing in Hollywood this summer.

AFP's visit to Disney's sprawling studio near Los Angeles came during the ongoing strike by writers, in part over fears that AI could replace them. The issue is also among demands being negotiated by Hollywood actors who are worried about AI cloning their voices and likenesses, and who could strike as soon as Thursday.

But for Iwan, character and storytelling are "unique to a performer, a writer, an animator, an artist, a creator." "I have to believe that that part is what's going to hold out, and keep real people doing the job for a while!" Iwan is one of just four people to have ever been Mickey's official voice.

Mickey's falsetto was first voiced by company founder Walt Disney himself, with 1928's "Steamboat Willie." Two other men each voiced the character for more than three decades. "I hope I get to do it as long as this holds out," said Iwan, pointing to his vocal cords.

'Replicating realism'

In animation—perhaps the art form most associated with Disney—the role of sophisticated computers is well-established. Computer-generated animation has long overtaken traditional hand-drawn artistry as the genre's dominant form. While humans are still designing and creating those films, the use of AI to generate the credits for the Disney+ show "Secret Invasion" recently triggered anger.

Eric Goldberg—the Disney animator who designed the Genie in "Aladdin," and a stalwart champion of hand-drawn animation—believes AI is unlikely to impact his work. "I think AI has less of a chance of affecting hand-drawn animation than it does computer animation, because AI is about replicating realism," he said.

"The characters that I do, the Genie's head can turn into a toaster! Which you can't do with an AI character!" "So hand-drawn gives us a little bit of an advantage that way." Goldberg recently finished training five new Disney hand-drawn apprentices, and believes there will always "be a core of us who want to see hand-drawn animation." "Because we have to use our imaginations so much to represent hand-drawn characters, because of the flexibility of what they can do, I don't think AI is going to be a problem to that side of medium," said Goldberg. "As long as there are people who still want to do it!"—AFP

BRAD PITT RESPECTS F1 AND THRILLS DRIVERS AT SILVERSTONE

Brad Pitt was full of praise and respect for Formula One and, in particular, the drivers on Sunday after spending the weekend in their company for filming at the British Grand Prix. The Hollywood film star told Sky Sports F1 that the paddock and sport as a whole had welcomed and embraced the yet unnamed Apple-supported F1 film project in which he is starring. "I'm having the time of my life," he said, having raced around the track himself.

"I'm a little giddy right now! It's great to be here. We're having such a laugh. It's the time of my life. "To be a part of it in this way? To tell our story? Everyone has been cool with us, the teams have opened their doors to us, the FIA have been really helpful, F1 and Stefano Domenicali. Everyone has been amazing." And he received a warm reception from the drivers when he and director Joseph Kosinski joined the drivers' briefing ahead of the race.

Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes, who is an executive producer for the film, said it was "probably the best drivers' briefing we've ever had." In the film, Pitt plays a veteran driver who joins an F1 team represented at Silverstone by a fictional 11th team on the grid, complete with a garage and pit-bay alongside Ferrari.

Using Formula Two cars converted by Mercedes, the 'film cars' took places on the grid for the race and ran in part of the formation lap before the start of the Grand Prix. They were driven by former drivers Craig Dolby and Luciano Bachetta. Mercedes George Russell said it had been a surreal experience to share space with Pitt.

"It's one of those you see a worldwide superstar for the first time—it's quite surreal. It's only when you get to be with those individuals whether it's Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt or Roger Federer that you recognize they're just normal human beings. "He was joking around and having a good time and just kind of one of the boys really. I'm so excited to see what the movie does." Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Alpine's Pierre Gasly were among the drivers thrilled by their chance to spend time with Pitt, but defending world champion Max Verstappen said he was less than impressed.

"I think they're going to use some shots of everybody, in terms of onboard cameras and stuff," he said. "I completely can't be bothered with this. "In the end, a film is always made to create a little bit of a show because, of course, it won't all be real, but I think it's all fine. I'm actually not that much into it."—AFP



US actor Brad Pitt, starring as a driver in an F1-inspired movie, is seen prior to the Formula One British Grand Prix at the Silverstone motor racing circuit in Silverstone, central England on July 9, 2023. — AFP photos



US actor Brad Pitt is seen prior to the Formula One British Grand Prix at the Silverstone motor racing circuit in Silverstone, central England.

Elton John hails fans at emotional final farewell show

Surrounded by emotional fans from around the globe, Elton John hailed them as his "lifeblood" as he gave his final farewell concert in Stockholm after more than 50 years of live performances. "You know how much I like to play live. It's been my lifeblood to play for you guys, and you've been absolutely magnificent," he told the delighted audience at the arena in the Swedish capital. Wearing a tailcoat accented with rhinestones and a red pair of his trademark large glasses, the 76-year-old pop superstar sat down at the piano shortly after 8:00 pm to cheers to open his farewell show with one of his most popular songs, "Bennie and the Jets."

He then continued with "Philadelphia Freedom" and "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues" to a rapt audience, many of whom were wearing sparkling blue or red glasses. Playing for more than two hours, John interspersed the songs with moments when he would get up and leave the piano to thank not only his fans but also his band and his crew, some of whom have been with him for more than 40 years.

"I want to pay tribute to these musicians... They're really incredible, they've been with me so long, some of them. And they are the best, I tell you, the best," he said. Shortly after a rendition of "Border Song" which he dedicated to Aretha Franklin, John's "I'm Still Stand-

ing" brought the 30,000 fans at the Tele2 Arena to their feet. Before he took his encore, John screened a message from Coldplay, who were playing in the western Swedish city of Gothenburg, in which singer Chris Martin thanked him for his career and commitment.

from Finland. "You almost start tearing up on his account. But then it feels great to be here," added Swedish teacher Conny Johansson, who bought tickets for the show four years ago. Excited fans were looking forward to an emotional end to the superstar's glittering live career even

tour. Describing herself as a "huge fan", she said it all began the first time she watched "The Lion King", the 1994 Walt Disney film which gave John one of his two Oscar music wins. Fifty-year-old Jeanie Kincer travelled from Kentucky in the United States for the show. "I wanted to be here for the end because I was too young to be here in the beginning," she said.

To mark the occasion, she was dressed in red shorts with braces and a red, yellow and brown T-shirt—almost the exact same outfit John wore for his first concert in Stockholm in 1971. Sweden's daily Expressen called the final show "an important chapter in the history of rock 'n' roll which is about to end".

The star has been winding down his decades-long live career with a global farewell tour. He played his last concerts in the United States in May and brought the curtain down on Britain's annual Glastonbury Festival last month. Saturday's farewell concert was the second consecutive evening the Stockholm stadium hosted the legendary British singer-songwriter for the last leg of his final tour, which began five years ago and was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and a hip operation in 2021. On his "Farewell Yellow Brick Road" tour, John will have given 330 concerts, crisscrossing Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada and Britain, before closing in Stockholm. Overall, the tour has seen him perform in front of 6.25 million fans.—AFP



British legendary singer Elton John performs on the Pyramid Stage on day 5 of the Glastonbury festival in the village of Pilton in Somerset, southwest England. — AFP

'Amazing show'

"It was amazing. I have no words right now because I haven't processed all the show, but it was amazing," said Anton Pohjonen, a 25-year-old bank worker

before the curtain went up.

"It's going to be very emotional tonight," said Kate Bugaj, 25, a Polish student who admitted she had delayed her Master's exams to follow her musical hero's

BULGARIAN-GERMAN FILM WINS TOP PRIZE AT CZECH FESTIVAL



Bulgarian actress Eli Skorcheva (left) poses with the Crystal Globe for Best Actress for her role in the film 'Blaga's Lessons' next to Bulgarian film director Stephan Komandarev (center) posing with the Grand Prix Crystal Globe for Best Film 'Blaga's Lessons' during the closing ceremony at the 57th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (KVIFF) in Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic.



Iranian-British film director Babak Jalali poses with the Crystal Globe for best director for the film 'Fremont'. — AFP photos



US actress Robin Gayle Wright poses on the red carpet as she arrives for the closing ceremony at the 57th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (KVIFF).



US actress Robin Gayle Wright poses with her KVIFF President's Award during the closing ceremony at the 57th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (KVIFF).



Norwegian actor Herbert Nordrum poses with the Crystal Globe for Best Actor for his role in the film 'The Hypnosis'.



South Korean director Yoo Ji-young (left) delivers her speech after having been awarded with the Special Jury Prize in the Proxima competition for the film 'Birth' during the closing ceremony.

"Blaga's Lessons", a Bulgarian-German film, on Saturday won the main Crystal Globe award at the Karlovy Vary film festival, one of Europe's top cultural events. The film by Bulgarian director Stephan Komandarev tells the story of a recently widowed elderly woman who has fallen prey to phone scammers.

Hollywood star Russell Crowe received the Crystal Globe for outstanding artistic contribution to world cinema earlier into the 57th edition of the festival in the western Czech spa city. The Australian actor known notably for "Gladiator", "L.A. Confidential" and "A Beautiful Mind" also performed with his band called Indoor Garden Party at the festival's opening concert.

US actress Robin Wright, famous for her role of Jenny in "Forrest Gump" and for the "House of Cards" series, received the Festival President's Award on Saturday. Swedish actress Alicia Vikander, star of "The Danish Girl" and "Ex Machina" also got the Festival President's Award earlier. Organizers sold over 123,000 tickets to film screenings at the festival that started on June 30, about 15,000 fewer than before the COVID pandemic.—AFP

Sweet success: Jordan's beekeepers busy as honey demand soars



A worker bee gathers pollen and nectar from flowers at an apiary in Irbid in northern Jordan.



Bees gather on cells in a frame at an apiary in Irbid in northern Jordan.



Mohammad Khatib checks on a bee frame at an apiary in Irbid in northern Jordan.



Mohammad Khatib uses a bee smoker on a bee frame at an apiary in Irbid in northern Jordan.



A beekeeper checks on a bee frame at an apiary in Irbid in northern Jordan.



Mohammad Khatib speaks during an interview at an apiary in Irbid in northern Jordan.

Jordan's key tourism industry may have been hammered by COVID, but the pandemic gave a boost to another sector, keeping its beekeepers busy as demand for honey has soared. The country's 4,000 apiarists have ramped up output of the sweet and sticky golden substance long praised for its anti-inflammatory and other health benefits. Even if there is no scientific consensus that honey helps fight COVID, many of those infected have used it to soothe symptoms such as sore throats.

"The COVID period in particular had a great, positive impact on us," said beekeeper Mutasim Hammad, 48, who retired 12 years ago from the public security directorate and turned his hobby into his main job. "There was good demand for honey, and people got to know it," added Hammad, dressed in a white protective suit while checking on his 80 bee hive boxes on a property in Irbid 90 kilometres (60 miles) north of Amman. "People have become more aware of the value of honey and are turning to the guaranteed locally produced honey," said Hammad, who sells about 400 kilograms (880 pounds) a year. The kingdom of Jordan prides itself on its 19 different types of honey, including citrus, eucalyptus and maple varieties, depending on which plants the bees pollinate.

"We have about 2,500 flowering plants," said Mohammad Rababaa, head of the Jordan Beekeeping Association. "This diversity distinguishes Jordanian honey and means that the therapeutic and nutritional value of this honey is expected to be better than other types."



Mutasim Hamed, a beekeeper and retired employee of the security department, speaks as he checks on bee hives at an apiary in Irbid in northern Jordan.—AFP photos

Rababaa said the slightly bitter maple honey variety, for example, boasts "very high phenolic compounds and antioxidants compared to other types, which indicates that it has a higher value".

Ecosystem service

Rababaa also said that, since the COVID pandemic, "demand for locally produced honey has clearly increased". He said the sector has

a much bigger workforce than Jordan's official count of about 1,400 beekeepers.

"The reality is that the number of beekeepers is more than 4,000," said the professor of Natural Resources and Environment at the Jordan University of Science and Technology. They produce about 700 to 800 tonnes annually, or about 70 percent of Jordan's annual domestic needs, he said. "We are very close to self-sufficiency," said Rababaa, adding that "imports must be stopped".

A fellow enthusiast, Mohammad Khatib, 49, also pointed to the pandemic and lockdown periods, saying it "helped me and gave me enough time to learn about bees and take good care of them". A French language professor at Al-Bayt University, he now works about 15 bee boxes in his garden, which he said earns him a nice side income. "People are looking for reliable honey" and some customers place their orders a year in advance, he said.

Jordanian honey sells for 15 to 30 dinars (\$21 to \$42) per kilogram, depending on the type.

Rababaa said the economic benefit "is not limited to honey as it also produces pollen, royal jelly, wax, propolis and bee venom, which is included in many therapeutic compounds".

Crucially, healthy populations of bees and other insects provide an almost immeasurable ecosystem service by pollinating plants.

While the beekeeping sector generates about \$28 million a year, Rababaa said, "the indirect value of crop pollination exceeds \$100 million". —AFP

K-POP MEGASTARS BTS RELEASE MEMOIR



BTS' Malaysian fans Aiudrey (left) and Aqilah (right) hold copies of the BTS memoir titled "Beyond the Story: 10-Year Record of BTS" at a bookstore in Seoul.



Copies of the BTS memoir titled "Beyond the Story: 10-Year Record of BTS" are seen on display at a bookstore in Seoul.



Customers stand in front of a poster for the BTS memoir titled "Beyond the Story: 10-Year Record of BTS" as they wait for the opening of a bookstore in Seoul.

K-pop megastars BTS released their hotly anticipated memoir in South Korea on Sunday, marking their 10th anniversary as a group. "Beyond the Story: 10-Year Record of BTS" is the septet's first official book, and contains a chronological summary of their musical career as well as hints at their future endeavors, according to their agency BIGHIT MUSIC. Crowds were kept away by heavy rain on Sunday morning, but some diehard fans braved the weather to gather in front of the Kyobo bookstore in Gwanghwamun, one of the biggest in Seoul.

Sri Lankan fan Lakshi told AFP that if her excitement were measured on a "one to 10 scale, then it is about a million". Aqilah, a fan from Malaysia, gushed: "I came here since 9 am and I finally got this book!" The book, which is also being released in the United States, shot to the top of the Amazon and Barnes and Noble bestseller lists in May on the strength of its pre-orders.

It was co-written by South Korean journalist Kang Myeong-seok and members of the band, according to its US publisher Flatiron Books. The release date of the memoir, July 9, is a nod to a significant date in the septet's history: it is the day the mega-

stars' loyal international fan base, known as ARMY, first came into being 10 years ago. "(BTS) Thank you for saving me when I needed it," said Audrey, another fan from Malaysia who scheduled a holiday in Seoul to coincide with the memoir's release.

"I wish I could say more, but I am going to cry now," she added. Over the course of its decade in the limelight, BTS has become a global cultural phenomenon, selling out stadiums and dominating charts around the world while raking in billions for South Korea's economy. The band is currently on a "hiatus", with members pursuing solo projects while two of the group complete South Korea's mandatory military service.

All able-bodied men in South Korea must serve at least 18 months in the military and, after a years-long debate about whether BTS deserved an exemption, Jin, the oldest member of the group, enlisted last year. His bandmate J-Hope started his mandatory service in April, South Korean media reported at the time. Before the hiatus, BTS bagged six No. 1 hits on the Hot 100 and all seven members of the boyband have reached the top songs chart with solo tracks, Billboard said. —AFP



A woman walks past a poster for the BTS memoir titled "Beyond the Story: 10-Year Record of BTS" in front of a bookstore in Seoul. — AFP photos

PALOMA PICASSO TAKES OVER LATE FATHER'S ESTATE

Paloma Ruiz-Picasso, the last of Pablo Picasso's four children, has been appointed administrator of the estate managing rights linked to the artist and his work, replacing her brother Claude, their lawyer has told AFP. A businesswoman, fashionista, and perfume, accessories and jewelry designer, Paloma Picasso, 74, is the daughter of Spanish painter and French artist Françoise Gilot, who died in June.

The lawyer, Jean-Jacques Neuer, said earlier this week that her arrival at the head of the world's most important artistic succession was "very important for the art world". The Picasso estate is owned by Claude and Paloma Picasso and the grandchildren of the painter—Marina Picasso, Bernard Ruiz-Picasso as well as Olivier, Diana and Richard Widmaier-Picasso.

The organization also holds a monopoly on the copyright and reproduction rights of Picasso's works, as well as trademark rights. It issues authentication certificates and fights forgeries, regularly taking legal action. Claude Ruiz-Picasso, 76, who had been the director since 1989, wanted to step aside in favour of his sister, the lawyer said. —AFP



Paloma Picasso attends the 2022 FIAF Trophée des Arts Gala at The Plaza Hotel in New York City.

Alcaraz survives Wimbledon Test as Rybakina cruises

Alcaraz will face big-serving Matteo Berrettini in the fourth round

LONDON: Carlos Alcaraz reached the last 16 at Wimbledon on Saturday after a tough battle against Nicolas Jarry as defending women's champion Elena Rybakina snuffed out the hopes of Britain's final hope Katie Boulter.

Rain returned to the All England Club, meaning play on Centre Court started under the roof and later forced an early end to the action on the outside courts. Top seed Alcaraz is seen as the biggest threat to Novak Djokovic, who is gunning for a record-equalling eighth men's title and 24th Grand Slam crown overall.

But the Spaniard, who won the grass-court Queen's tournament last month, was made to work hard for the win by his Chilean opponent, seeded 25th, before prevailing 6-3, 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 7-5. Alcaraz bounced back from losing his first set of the tournament to lead 2-1 but narrowly avoided going a double break down in the fourth set before rediscovering his mojo.

"I'm really happy with the level that I played to get through this really tough match," said the relieved 20-year-old. The US Open champion was playing his second match in two days after rain delays earlier in the week. Djokovic, by contrast, moved serenely into the last 16 late on Friday, beating Stan Wawrinka

in straight sets.

Alcaraz will face big-serving Matteo Berrettini in the fourth round after the 2021 runner-up beat Alexander Zverev 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5). Unseeded Berrettini feels he has a point to prove after missing last year's tournament due to a bout of COVID. "I love to play here," said the Italian. "Last year I missed it and I still didn't heal from that withdrawal. This tournament changed my career, my life and I'm really happy."

Rybakina crushes Boulter

Last year's surprise women's champion Rybakina made short work of wild card Boulter, who was the only British player left in the tournament, romping to a 6-1, 6-1 win in just 57 minutes. The Kazakh third seed had not previously hit her best form at Wimbledon but 89th-ranked Boulter had no answer to her opponent's superior power.

Rybakina fired seven aces in her 20 winners, breaking her opponent five times. Last year's beaten finalist Ons Jabeur also progressed, thanking the rain for the part it played in her victory, interrupting the deciding set.

The Tunisian sixth seed lost the first set but battled back to beat Bianca Andreescu 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 and set up a last-

16 clash with two-time champion Petra Kvitova. "I've got to thank the rain a little bit for letting me speak to my coach and have a bit of perspective about the match," she said. "I felt like I didn't play my best tennis."

Kvitova stayed on track for a third title by beating Serbian qualifier Natalija Stevanovic 6-3, 7-5 while Australian Open champion and second seed Aryna Sabalenka saw off Russia's Anna Blinkova. Men's third seed Daniil Medvedev lost the first set against close friend Marton Fucsovics but recovered to win in four sets. Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, who beat Andy Murray in a five-set thriller over two days in the second round, eased past Serbia's Laslo Djere in straight sets.

Underarm surprise

Holger Rune saved two match points to defeat Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, with the Spaniard left to regret deciding to serve underarm when he was just two points from winning. The Danish sixth seed came through 6-3, 4-6, 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (10/8) after Davidovich Fokina served underarm at 8/8 in the final-set tiebreaker.

Holger was quick to it, winning the point to go to match point, which he con-



LONDON: Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina tosses the ball to serve to Britain's Katie Boulter during their women's singles tennis match on the sixth day of the 2023 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London. — AFP

verted when the 31st seed netted a forehand. "I didn't expect the serve like that but I was fast to reach it," said Rune after the four-hour clash.

He will face either US 10th seed Fran-

ces Tiafoe or former semi-finalist Grigor Dimitrov in the next round. Bulgaria's Dimitrov had won the first two sets when the match was called off due to the weather and light conditions. — AFP

Jackson on course for Jamaican sprint double

KINGSTON: Shericka Jackson stayed on course to win a women's sprint double at the Jamaican athletics championships on Saturday, advancing to the 200m final by winning her heat in 22.88secs. A day after stunning National Stadium with a personal best and world-leading 10.65 seconds to win the 100m in the fifth-fastest time ever recorded, Jackson won her 200 heat (-1.4m/s) to reach Sunday's final.

Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce had the fastest time in the round when she won her semi-final race with an impressive 22.39 seconds (0.7m/s), after sitting out the 100m as she has a wild card for the World Championships at Budapest in August.

After failing to get past the first round of the 100m on Thursday, Yohan Blake secured his place in the men's 200 final by winning his semi-final heat in 20.35 seconds (0.6m/s). Defending champion Andrew Hudson is also through after winning his semi-final in 20.31 seconds while Rasheed Dwyer had the fastest time of the round when he ran 20.25 seconds (0.4m/s).

Two time World Championships runner-up Shanieka Ricketts, Wayne Pinnock, Traves Smikle and Danniell Thomas-Dodd all retained their respective titles to secure their places on the Jamaican team for worlds. Ricketts won her fifth consecutive women's triple jump national title with a wind-aided 14.79m (2.6m/s), beating Ackelia Smith on 14.26m (0.9m/s) with Imani Oliver third with a wind-aided 13.44m (2.1m/s).

Ricketts and Smith had achieved the qualifying mark of 14.52m for the World Championships prior to the national championships and could be joined in Hungary by Kimberly Williams, who is well placed in the World Ranking system. It was also the second event Smith had qualified in after she was second in the long jump on Thursday.

World Championships finalist Pinnock jumped 8.32m, just shy of his season-best 8.37m, while former World Championships gold medalist Tajay Gayle was second with a season-best 8.27m and Carey McLeod was third in 8.07m.

Smikle retained his men's discus title with a best mark of 66.12m, ahead of Roje Stona's 65.92m. Former Commonwealth Games champion Fedric Daces was third with 65.79m. Double national record holder Thomas-Dodd threw 19.08m to win the women's shot put with Lloydricia Cameron second on 16.37m.

Commonwealth champion Rasheed Broadbell and Olympic Games bronze medalist Megan Tapper are the leaders going into Sunday's final of the sprint hurdles. Broadbell ran a season-best 13.06 seconds (1.2m/s) to win his heat and was followed by Tyler Mason, who ran a personal best 13.12 (2.0m/s) to win his heat while Olympic champion Hansle Parchment won his heat in 13.29 (1.1m/s).

Tapper ran a personal best 12.44 seconds (0.6m/s) to win her semi-final, faster than her previous best of 12.51 set in Brussels last year. Former World Youth champion Yanique Thompson won her heat in 12.53 seconds (0.8m/s), beating the 12.69 second set ran in 2017, while Amoi Brown also had a personal best 12.61. Ackera Nugent is also into Sunday's final after running 12.80 seconds as well as former World Champion Danielle Williams in 12.61. — AFP

McLaughlin-Levrone dominates in 400m win, Richardson shines

EUGENE: Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone continued her push to make the 400m her own Saturday, blazing to victory at the US athletics championships in a world-leading 48.74sec. McLaughlin-Levrone, the reigning world champion and world record-holder in the 400m hurdles, has switched her focus to the flat race this season with an eye to eventually lowering the world record of 47.60sec set by Marita Koch of the former East Germany in 1985.

"The greats always push themselves, and I want to be one of them," McLaughlin-Levrone said of her decision to take on a new challenge in a season highlighted by the World Championships in Budapest in August. She took control of the race early and powered away to win easily over Britton Wilson, who was second in 49.79. Talitha Diggs was third in 49.93.

McLaughlin-Levrone's personal best time improved on the previous world-leading 48.98 set by Marileidy Paulino in on May 27 and gave McLaughlin two potential spots in Budapest, with a bye into the 400 hurdles as defending champion.

"I have no idea," McLaughlin said of what she'll race in Budapest. "Obviously make the team is the number one goal, then you go for the win, then you go for the time. So in that order that was my goal and I'm very happy with that time."

Athing Mu, the 800m world champion, also stepped out of her comfort zone and after a run-

ner-up finish to Nikki Hiltz in the 1,500m refused to rule out what would be a tough double in Budapest. Like McLaughlin-Levrone, she was cagey on her precise plans, backing off a bit from earlier saying she would "probably not" pursue a double. "I won't say that it's, like, not likely, but I also won't say that there's a guarantee that I'll do it," she said.

In a chaotic, physical race, Mu took the lead and looked as if she could hang on for a win, but Hiltz used a furious final kick to power past her and win in 4min 03.10sec. Mu was second in a personal best 4:03.44 and Cory McGee was third in 4:03.48 as Sinclair Johnson fell across the line and finished fourth.

"That was great!" Mu said, adding that coach Bobby Kersee had advised her to gear herself so she could push in the last 200 meters. "I kind of started that with 400 to go," she said. "By the time I got to the last hundred, I just wanted to give it all just like any other race and pull it all the way through."

Richardson's strong 200

Bryce Deadmon won the men's 400m, charging late to win in 44.22sec ahead of Vernon Norwood and Quincy Hall. The US challenge in the event in Budapest will also include defending champion Michael Norman, who didn't race the 400 this week. Former world champion Nia Ali won the 100m hurdles in 12.37sec, with former world record-holder Keni Harrison second in 12.42 and Masai Russell third in 12.46.

Chris Nilsen, silver medalist behind Armand Duplantis at last year's worlds, won the men's pole vault with a clearance of 5.91m, and Marquis Dendy won the men's long jump with a jump of 8.14m. Maggie Ewen continued her strong season in the women's shot put, winning with a throw of 19.92m as defend-



Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone

ing world champion Chase Ealey settled for fourth.

A day after her emotional 100m triumph, Sha'Carri Richardson led the 200m heats with a sizzling wind-aided 21.61sec. It was the fastest time in the world this year in all conditions, with the 21.91 of Julien Alfred in April the fastest with a legal wind. Men's 100m surprise winner Cravont Charleston opted out of the 200m. Collegiate standout Robert Gregory notched the fastest time of 20.00 as 100m world champion Fred Kerley, Erriyon Knighton Kenny Bednarek and Christian Coleman all eased through to the semi-finals. — AFP

Springboks must not get carried away after Australia rout

JOHANNESBURG: As 21 Springboks head for New Zealand on Sunday, assistant coach Mzwandile Stick will remind them "not to get carried away" by a 43-12 Rugby Championship rout of Australia this weekend. The players will join 13 others, who flew across 10 time zones last Tuesday to acclimatise early for a top-of-the-table clash with the All Blacks this Saturday. Stick, a candidate to replace Leinster-bound Jacques Nienaber as head coach after the 2023 Rugby World Cup in France, said finishing was an area needing improvement.

"There was a point in the game where we had a lot of entries into the Australian 22 and did not convert them into points," noted the former sevens star. "We also made a couple of line breaks and I think that is an area where we need to keep on improving. "When we play New Zealand and Argentina, we are not going to get 10 scoring opportunities—we are going to get only four or five and we need to convert them into points."

"I am happy at the manner in which we executed our game plan and, once again, if it was not for the way we defended early in the game, those opportunities would not have come later. "The most important thing for the Springboks is to keep improving as a team. It is a World Cup year and everyone is focusing on that tournament."

"We want to make sure we keep building and to have a start like this—even though there is a lot of room for improvement—is something we can build on. "We are really happy with the manner in which we won this game because Australia were very physical. Credit to our boys for the way they played throughout the 80 minutes."

Stick said the fact that South Africa adopted a ball-in-hand approach did not mark a tactical change for a team often criticised for being over reliant on kicking. "As I and the other coaches have said many times, if we create opportunities the guys have the freedom to exploit them."

Captain and No. 8 Duane Vermeulen, standing in for the injured Siya Kolisi, said the backing of the 50,000 crowd at Loftus Versfeld was a huge factor in the unexpectedly wide winning margin. — AFP



MENDOZA: Argentina's Emiliano Boffelli (C) is tackled by New Zealand's Tyrel Lomax during the Rugby Championship 2023 first round match between Argentina's Los Pumas and New Zealand's All Blacks at the Malvinas Argentinas stadium in Mendoza, Argentina. — AFP

NZ overwhelm Argentina with seven tries

MENDOZA: Captain Sam Cane hailed a "ruthless" performance by the All Blacks after they romped to a 41-12 win over Argentina in Mendoza on Saturday as New Zealand got their Rugby Championship campaign off to a flying start.

Two months before the Rugby World Cup kicks off in France, New Zealand capped a strong performance by scoring seven tries to Argentina's two, having led 31-0 at half-time. The All Blacks crossed for three tries in the first 12 minutes alone to silence a sold-out crowd at Estadio Malvinas and were rarely threatened by the error-prone Pumas.

Cane described New Zealand's electric first-half display as "outstanding". "I thought the key to that first 20 minutes was our discipline and how ruthless we were on attack," he told Sky Sport. "We were really clinical, able to get the ball to space and as a result I thought we nullified the effect of the crowd. "The Pumas came back in the second half, it was a little bit of an arm-wrestle but I'm really pleased

and proud of that result." New Zealand were unable to assert the same authority in the second half. All Blacks head coach Ian Foster said it left them with areas to work on ahead of next Saturday's match against South Africa in Auckland. "It's a bit of a wake-up call – the first half was great, the second half is probably more of what's to come," Foster said with one eye on the Springboks.

The match in Auckland will be an early Rugby Championship showdown after the Springboks had earlier crushed Australia 43-12 in Pretoria. Nevertheless, it was an impressive start to the year for the All Blacks, who endured a turbulent 2022 season when they suffered four defeats including a historic loss to Argentina in Christchurch.

The Pumas couldn't generate the same intensity, with their forwards often on the back foot. The hosts conceded a stream of a scrum penalties against the impressive New Zealand pack and lacked rhythm on their few attacking opportunities. Argentina captain Julian Montoya conceded his team were "shocked" to fall behind so quickly from the outset and would need to be vastly improved against the Wallabies in Sydney next week. "We didn't have intensity, we had nothing, we have to be critical of ourselves," Montoya said. "You can see when we are a team, we can be dangerous. We need to be way better." — AFP

Sports

England beat Australia in thriller to keep five-match Ashes series alive

Stokes has 'no hesitation' England can complete Ashes comeback

LEEDS: England beat Australia by three wickets in a nail-biting third Test at Headingley on Sunday to keep the five-match Ashes series alive. Harry Brook and Chris Woakes shared a crucial partnership of 59 that took England to the brink of victory before Brook fell for 75 to Mitchell Starc (5-78).

The recalled duo of Woakes (32 not out) and Mark Wood (16 not out) then saw England home with more than a day to spare to cut Australia's series lead to 2-1. The series continues with the fourth Test at Old Trafford starting on July 19, with Australia now having two games in which to seal their first Ashes campaign triumph in England in 22 years.

England are bidding to become just the second team to win a Test series from 2-0 down after the 1936/37 Australia side, inspired by batting great Don Bradman, that recovered from that deficit to win the Ashes 3-2. England captain Ben Stokes said he has no doubt his side can pull off a remarkable Ashes comeback after winning a dramatic third Test by three wickets on Sunday.

Chasing 251 to win at Headingley, England slumped to 171-6. Harry Brook's 75 put the hosts back in command before Chris Woakes (32 not out) and Mark Wood (16 not out) got Stokes' men over the line. Australia still lead the best-of-five series 2-1 and need just one more win to secure their first Ashes triumph in England for 22 years.

"Yep. No hesitation," said Stokes when asked if England can win the series. "Another down to the wire

game. It's nice to get over the line in this one and keep our hopes alive."

Stokes' 155 was not enough as England fell just short in a run chase in the controversial second Test at Lord's last week. But he and the selectors could afford themselves a pat on the back as the three changes they made to the side paid dividends.

Woakes and Wood starred with both bat and ball, while Moeen Ali took the key wickets of Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith in Australia's second innings.

"It's great when you make decisions like that and they have a big impact on the team," added Stokes. "We want people to come in and impact the game in their moment to put us in a commanding position and all three guys did that." The fourth Test of the series gets under way at Old Trafford in Manchester on July 19.

Brief scores

Australia 1st Innings 263 (M Marsh 118; M Wood 5-34, C Woakes 3-73)

England 1st Innings 237 (B Stokes 80; P Cummins 6-91)

Australia 2nd Innings 224 (T Head 77; S Broad 3-45, C Woakes 3-68)

England 2nd Innings 254-7 (H Brook 75; M Starc 5-78)

Result: England won by three wickets

Series: Australia lead five-match series 2-1. — AFP



LEEDS: England's Moeen Ali is bowled by Australia's Mitchell Starc on day four of the third Ashes cricket Test match between England and Australia at Headingley cricket ground in Leeds. — AFP

Mexico, Panama reach Gold Cup semis with hat trick for Diaz

MIAMI: Mexico and Panama booked their places in the last four of the CONCACAF Gold Cup with victories on Saturday in their quarter-final ties against Costa Rica and Qatar. Ismael Diaz blasted a hat trick in the space of nine second-half minutes as Panama marched on with a 4-0 win over Qatar.

Panama will face the winner of the quarter-final between the United States and Canada on Sunday in Cincinnati. Record eight-time Gold Cup champions Mexico reached the last four of the tournament for the ninth straight edition thanks to a 2-0 win over Costa Rica.

In the semi-finals, El Tri will take on the winner of Sunday's clash between Jamaica and Guatemala after a hard-earned victory over the Central Americans at the home of the Dallas Cowboys in Arlington, Texas. Ajax right-back Jorge Sanchez went close to a first-half opener for Mexico, driving into the box and firing a low shot at the near post that was well saved by Ticos keeper Kevin Chamorro. Mexico, beaten by the USA in the final two years ago, dominated for long stretches but were given a reminder of Costa Rica's threat when Anthony Contreras found space for a shot but his effort lacked power and was comfortably dealt with by veteran keeper Guillermo Ochoa.

It threatened to be a frustrating night for Jaime Lozano's side but they finally broke through in the



ARLINGTON: Qatar's defender Youssef Farahat (R) heads the ball during the Concacaf 2023 Gold Cup quarterfinal football match between Panama and Qatar at the AT&T Stadium, in Arlington. — AFP

52nd minute when Kendall Waston barged Henry Martin to the ground and Orbelin Pineda side-footed home the spot kick. Costa Rica struggled to penetrate the Mexican defense and had to resort to long-range attacks, the best of which saw an Aaron Suarez effort dip just over the bar.

At the other end, Luis Chavez went close to a second with a free-kick that flew narrowly over the bar and then Santiago Gimenez flashed a shot just wide. The victory was wrapped up for Mexico with three

minutes of regulation time remaining — Roberto Alvarado burst down the left and pulled the ball back, just behind Erick Sanchez, who scuffed the ball home.

Guest team Qatar had to shuffle their pack in Dallas with six players suspended due to an accumulation of yellow cards and Panama proved to be too strong for the Asian champions. The Canalmen took the lead in the 19th when Eric Davis whipped in a great cross from the left and Edgar Barcenas buried a header into the far corner. — AFP

Philippines meteoric rise to WCup is game-changer

MANILA: In a country obsessed with beauty pageants, basketball and boxing, the Philippines women's team hope to ignite interest in football when they make the nation's World Cup debut. Long minnows in the sport, the Philippines have never played at a FIFA World Cup, either the men's or women's.

All that will change on July 21 when the women's side under their Australian coach Alen Stajcic play Switzerland in Dunedin, New Zealand. Stajcic calls their journey from "almost ground zero" to the World Cup "miraculous". Half of his players do not belong to a professional club and some have been "running around the block on their own" for training, he said. "It's been a meteoric sort of rise for the team," the 49-year-old told AFP via Zoom. "The challenge for us is to somehow maintain and sustain that improvement, not be happy with where we got to."

Since Stajcic's appointment as coach in late 2021, the Philippines have jumped from 68 in the FIFA rankings and are now a best-ever 46th place. It began with the Women's Asian Cup in early 2022 when they made the semi-finals, losing to South Korea but securing a historic World Cup berth. They followed it up with bronze at the Southeast Asian Games last year, then won the regional AFF Women's Championship on home soil.

The Philippines are in Group A at the World Cup



TAGUIG: File photo shows Philippine women's football team member Hali Long during a practice session at a stadium in Taguig City, suburban Manila, ahead of the upcoming 2023 Women's World Cup tournament. — AFP

alongside co-hosts New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland. They will not be expected to get out of the group, but defender Hali Long said: "I would like to think we're going to go in there and do more than just participate. "We're going in there to compete with everything we have to show." The team hope getting the Philippines to their first World Cup can be a game-changer for football in the country. Long

took a knee during the national anthem in solidarity with NFL player Colin Kaepernick.

"I've been able to have such an incredible career, and this game has brought me all over the world and allowed me to meet so many amazing people," said Rapinoe. "I feel incredibly grateful to have played as long as I have, to be as successful as we've been, and to have been a part of a generation of players who undoubtedly left the game better than they found it." "To be able to play one last World Cup and one last NWSL season and go out on my own terms is incredibly special," she added. Last July she received the highest civilian honor in the United States when President Joe Biden awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Rapinoe was the first footballer to receive the award and one of just six female athletes or coaches. "Beyond the World Cup title to Olympic medals, Megan is a champion for essential American

US women's star Rapinoe to retire at end of season

MIAMI: United States women's team star Megan Rapinoe announced on social media on Saturday that she would be retiring from football at the end of this season. "It is with a deep sense of peace & gratitude that I have decided this will be my final season playing this beautiful game," the 38-year-old posted.

"I never could have imagined the ways in which soccer would shape and change my life forever," she added. The two-time World Cup winner, well known for her activism, is part of the USA squad for the up-

Former Spanish Ballon d'Or winner Luis Suarez dies

BARCELONA: Former Barcelona and Inter Milan midfielder Luis Suarez, the only male footballer born in Spain to win the Ballon d'Or, died at the age of 88 on Sunday. Nicknamed "The Architect" the Spaniard won the prestigious award in 1960 and later coached La Roja at the 1990 World Cup. "Luis Suarez Miramontes has died this Sunday in Milan at 88 years old," said Barcelona in a statement.

"He played for Barca between 1954 and 1961 before going to Inter Milan, where he is also a legend." Suarez was loved in Italy after becoming one of the league's most celebrated midfielders at Inter Milan under coach Helenio Herrera in the 1960s, whom he followed from Barcelona.

"Saying goodbye to Luisito leaves us with a deep melancholy — the nostalgia of his perfect and inimitable football, which inspired generations, is combined with the memory of a unique footballer and a great, great Inter player," wrote Inter in a statement.

Suarez, born in La Coruna in 1935, began his career at Deportivo La Coruna, before moving to Barcelona in 1954. He won two La Liga trophies with the Catalan giants, among other silverware and earning the Ballon d'Or. The only other player born in Spain to win the Ballon d'Or is Barcelona midfielder Alexia Putellas, who has won the women's trophy twice. Alfredo Di Stefano, who played for Argentina and later the Spanish national team, won it twice but was born in Buenos Aires. "Suarez was a stupendous player, among the best Spaniards ever in history, along with Xavi (Hernandez) and (Andres) Iniesta," said Di Stefano in one of his last interviews before his death in 2014.

'Elegance'

Barcelona lauded Suarez as one of the best players in the history of Spanish football. "He had it all as a player, superior technique, unbeatable ability with the ball at his feet, a privileged vision of the game and a great shot," said the Catalan club in a statement. "However, most of all, he stood out for the elegance of his game."

He scored 112 goals in 216 games for Barcelona in his seven years at the club, winning the Ballon d'Or while in Catalonia. However Suarez played down the importance of the accolade. "There have been many Spanish players who have deserved that award, but it depends a lot on the moment — you have to be lucky that another great contemporary player doesn't perform as well as you," Suarez told FIFA's website.

"There have been great players who have never lifted the trophy," Suarez moved to Inter Milan in 1961 for a then world record fee of 250 million lire (£142,000) and won two European Cups and three Serie A trophies as well as other silverware during the club's most glorious era.

He also lifted the European Championships trophy with Spain in 1964, making 32 appearances for the national team. Suarez retired in 1973 at Sampdoria, going on to coach both the Genoa side and Inter, as well as Como and Cagliari. "Goodbye Luisito," wrote Sampdoria on Twitter, posting a photo of the Spaniard in tribute. In 1988 he took over as coach of the Spanish national team, guiding them to the World Cup in Italy two years later, where they were beaten by Yugoslavia in the last 16. — AFP

truth that everyone is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect," Biden said at the award ceremony.

"She helped lead the change for perhaps the most important victory for anyone on our soccer team or any soccer team: equal pay for women." Rapinoe's views made her a polarizing figure in the deeply divided country, however, as former USA men's international now television pundit Alexis Lalas highlighted. "Megan Rapinoe has transcended the game of soccer and she's fearless and opinionated and interesting and she is a legend and she's a badass both on and off the field," Lalas said on Fox Sports. "Now I fundamentally disagree with a lot of her opinions and stances off the field but I'll fight to my last breath for her to have that freedom to express that which she has done incredibly well. "I've got a lot of respect for her even though at times I disagree with her," he added. — AFP

England beat Spain to win dramatic Under-21 Euro final

'We are a very good team and we believe that no one can score against us'



BATUMI: England's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the UEFA European Under-21 Championship final football match between England vs Spain at Batumi Arena in Batumi. — AFP

BATUMI: England won the under-21 European Championship for the first time since 1984 as Curtis Jones' goal beat Spain 1-0 in Saturday's final. In a dramatic finale in Batumi, Spain captain Abel Ruiz had a 99th-minute penalty saved by Manchester City goalkeeper James Trafford to preserve England's record of not conceding a goal all tournament.

"I told everyone this morning I was going to save a pen, and when it was a penalty I knew I was going to save it," said Trafford, who has been strongly linked with a £19 million (\$24 million) move to Premier League newcomers Burnley. "We are a very good team and we believe that no one can score against us and we showed it."

Lee Carsley's men won all six games in Georgia and Romania to continue a golden age for England's youth sides. The Three Lions are also reigning European champions at under-19 level and won the under-17 and under-20 World Cups back in 2017. There was a hint of fortune about the only goal as the ball struck Jones from Cole Palmer's free-kick in first-half stoppage time and looped into the far corner.

Spain did have the ball in net after the break when Ruiz headed home only to be denied by the offside flag. The Braga striker had an even better opportunity 20 minutes from time when he headed wide with the goal gaping. England could also have put the five-time winners away before an incredible ending as Arnau Tenas made fine saves to deny Jones and Noni Madueke a second.

But they needed Trafford to produce some heroics at the death. He parried Ruiz's spot-kick and a follow-up effort from Aimar Oroz to spark wild celebra-

tions among the England players and coaching staff. The drama did not end there as Morgan Gibbs-White and Antonio Blanco, who had already been substituted, were both shown red cards. Earlier, former Chelsea and Arsenal left-back Ashley Cole, who is part of the England coaching staff, had also been dismissed from the bench. But in front of the watching Gareth Southgate, England held on to go one better than the senior side managed in losing the Euro 2020 final two years ago. — AFP

NBA launches in-season tourney with final in Vegas

LAS VEGAS: The NBA launched its first-ever in-season tournament on Saturday, revealing the groups for the 30-team event culminating with the NBA Cup Final on December 9 in Las Vegas. NBA commissioner Adam Silver said the idea had been discussed for 15 years by league officials before settling upon a format styled after European football league Cup events.

"What a perfect opportunity for a global league like the NBA," Silver said. "It's a perfect fit for our game." Silver did sound a cautionary note in hopes NBA fans would be patient at the start of the new competition.

"It takes a little bit of time to establish a new tradition," Silver said. "All throughout sports we're seeing new innovations and now is the time for this in-season tournament. So here we go." Six groups of five teams each, three from the Eastern Conference and three from the Western Conference, were randomly drawn based on last season's records.

Each team will play two home and two road games in group play, facing each group rival once. Those games will be played on Tuesdays and Fridays in November starting November 3, regular-season contests counting as tournament play, except for US Election Day on November 7.

Three group winners and the next-best team overall from each conference will advance to the eight-team knockout quarter-finals round and games on December 4-5. Those winners will advance to the semi-finals in Vegas on December 7 with the championship match two nights later.

Each player on the NBA In-Season Tournament championship squad will receive \$500,000. "I'm excited," Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "I think it's going to add an element of excitement for the players and the coaches and the fans. I think it's a great idea."

The 67 games across both stages of the In-Season Tournament will count toward the regular-season standings except the final. All clubs will continue to play 82 regular-season games in the 2023-24 season.

In the Western Conference, Group A will consist of the Los Angeles Lakers, Memphis, Phoenix, Utah and Portland. Group B will feature reigning NBA champion Denver, New Orleans, the Los Angeles Clippers, Dallas and Houston while Group C includes Golden State, San Antonio, Oklahoma City, Minnesota, Sacramento.

"I think we're going to be really surprising," said San Antonio Spurs teen star and 2023 top draft pick Victor Wembanyama of France. In the Eastern Conference, Group A includes Philadelphia, Cleveland, Atlanta, Indiana and Detroit with Group B consisting of Milwaukee, New York, Miami, Washington and Charlotte. Group C will feature Orlando, Chicago, Boston, Brooklyn and Toronto. — AFP

Djokovic joins 100 club as Wimbledon hails new star Andreeva

LONDON: Novak Djokovic contests his 100th Wimbledon match on Sunday as he continues his quest for a record-equaling eighth title while the All England Club witnessed the birth of a new star in 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva.

Djokovic tackles Poland's Hubert Hurkacz on Centre Court, where he has not lost in 10 years. However, if he is to continue his bid for a third major of 2023, and match Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Slams, he needs to find a way of battering through the seemingly impregnable Hurkacz defence.

The Pole has not dropped serve at the tournament, saving all 11 break points he has faced and winning all 46 service games. "I don't see too many holes in his game," said Djokovic, who has a 5-0 record against the 18th-ranked Hurkacz, including at Wimbledon in 2019. Hurkacz made the semi-finals in 2021, having become the last man to defeat Roger Federer at Wimbledon in the quarter-finals. Twelve months ago, however, he crashed out in the first round.

In the women's draw, Andreeva's fairy-tale season continued as the 16-year-old Russian reached the fourth round, defeating 22nd-seeded compatriot Anastasia Potapova 6-2, 7-5. "Even if I wanted to show my emotions I couldn't because I was out of breath on every point," said Andreeva, who came through the qualifying tournament and is making her tournament debut.

The teenager had to battle hard in the second set, coming back from 1-4 down before squandering seven break points in the ninth game. But she held her nerve to break Potapova in the 11th game before securing victory when her opponent buried an overhead into the net. It was Potapova's 45th and final unforced error.



WIMBLEDON: Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns the ball to Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka during their men's singles tennis match on the fifth day of the 2023 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon. — AFP

Andreeva arrived at Wimbledon having made a run to the third round at the French Open, also out of qualifying. She will rise in the rankings from 102 to the top 65 at least after Wimbledon, her first grass-court event on the main tour.

After being banned from Wimbledon in 2022 over the war in Ukraine, seven players from Russia and Belarus have made it to the last 16 in men's and women's singles. Russian seventh seed Andrey Rublev kicks off the action on Centre Court, hoping to complete a full set of quarter-finals at all four Slams.

The 25-year-old faces Alexander Bublik, born in Russia but representing Kazakhstan. Another Russian, Roman Safiullin, has made the last 16 on his main draw debut. The world number 92, who had never previously got beyond the second round of a Slam, faces 2021 semi-finalist Denis Shapovalov.

Jannik Sinner, the eighth-ranked Italian, takes on unseeded Daniel Elahi Galan of Colombia, hoping to secure a second successive quarter-final. Women's world number one Iga Swiatek, the reigning US Open and French Open champion, has not dropped a set yet.

In her bid to reach the quarter-finals for the first time, she takes on Swiss 14th seed Belinda Bencic. In a last-16 clash tinged with political significance, Victoria Azarenka of Belarus takes on Ukraine's Elina Svitolina. At the French Open, Svitolina and all Ukraine players refused to shake hands with opponents from Russia and Belarus. — AFP