

Crown Prince receives education minister, outstanding students

Students urged to select specialties that would contribute to Kuwait's progress



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives outstanding high school students. — KUNA photos

Foreign at home

By Ahmad Ali

Everyone's home may be different, but we all have in common the familiarity of being where we belong. In Kuwait, this concept can be difficult to understand for many. In a nation with people of all backgrounds, it can seem burdening, especially for those born here, to develop a sense of identity to their homeland while simultaneously fitting into the nation that hosts them. As a Kuwaiti national who has spent most of my life in Europe and growing up distant from my home, I've always found it difficult to grasp what it is to actually be Kuwaiti. In addition, having parents from separate roots and not speaking Arabic only widens this gap between me and my fellow citizens.

At the age of 11, for family reasons, I found myself moving to Europe, to a country that I had only visited once before and whose language I didn't know. Similar to many immigrants, I was obliged to adapt and integrate into a new society and a new way of life in a place that I would end up calling home for the years to follow. Living abroad for over 17 years can definitely grant exposure to other ways and cultures, and perhaps even develop a certain amount of attachment, but the feeling of belonging is lacking. Society will always lack a sense of familiarity, and people, regardless of their affiliations, will always look at you differently.

Yet at home, things aren't necessarily straight forward, either. Difficulties with speaking Arabic and being unfamiliar with certain notions sometimes can have a limiting effect on my interactions with others, whether it be the necessity of having a family member accompanying me for administrative procedures to help with communication, looking for employment, or having trouble understanding and staying informed about developments in Kuwait's political sphere. While abroad, it can even sometimes feel strange explaining how things function in Kuwait, as I often feel as if I am not the proper person to explain it.

Cultural issues can also create a gap in interactions, which can sometimes seem awkward. For instance, greetings in Arabic can be so elaborate, that I sometimes find myself overwhelmed not knowing how to respond. The diwaniya is a staple in Kuwaiti culture and society, a place where topics are discussed and connections are made. But it is also foreign to me, as attending the diwaniya is something that wouldn't occur to me and would also be very confusing due to the linguistic barriers.

Of course, for anyone arriving in a new country, the challenges of discovering a new culture and the necessity to adapt to it is evident, but less so is adapting to a place you already call home. Many aspects about our customs and social norms are unique and can be difficult to comprehend, and despite being a Kuwaiti national, I find myself doing the same, aided even by expats at times.

The difficulties of this situation make it hard to relate, notably to Kuwaiti nationals, since there is less in common with my fellow citizens, so there are social impacts. But there are professional restraints too, as many jobs in Kuwait and particularly those for Kuwaiti citizens or in the public sector require knowledge of Arabic, significantly limiting my options of employment.

In essence, these estranged feelings can be alienating, and can make me feel like a foreigner in my own country, where I need to familiarize myself with notions that most of my countrymen and even non-Kuwaitis have been familiar with all their lives. As a Kuwaiti, having this experience helps to create a sense of understanding, both in Kuwait and abroad, for people who live in a host country but call somewhere else home.

I find myself somewhat in between both worlds, as someone from Kuwait who has had to integrate in a different society that will always consider him as foreign, but at the same time as someone who doesn't feel recognized and who has trouble recognizing his own home, a feeling that perhaps many other people in Kuwait can testify to.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Minister of Education Dr Hamad Al-Adwani.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday welcomed Minister of Education Dr Hamad Al-Adwani, who introduced outstanding high school students for the 2022-2023 scholastic year. During an honoring ceremony, His Highness the Crown Prince advised the students to select specialties that would contribute to the country's progress, so as to keep pace with accelerated developments.

His Highness the Crown Prince also instructed

them to obey their parents, who made efforts that enabled their children to excel in their study. In addition, His Highness thanked the Ministry of Education, its staff and agencies for efforts made over the past scholastic year, mainly during the exams. In a speech, Minister Al-Adwani said the ministry had started implementing instructions of His Highness the Crown Prince on developing education through strategies with certain goals to achieve the country's vision.

This was shown in inaugurating Abdullah Al-Salem University with specialties consistent with the State's development goals, along with Kuwait University, Al-Adwani said. Afterwards, Nora Al-Hamly delivered a speech on behalf of the students. The ceremony was attended by His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan Director Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and senior officials. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Ministers hold a Cabinet session on Monday to ratify the government's (2023-2027) action plan. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah presides over Cabinet meeting.

Kuwait Cabinet ratifies 2023-2027 action plan

KUWAIT: The Cabinet on Monday ratified the government's (2023-2027) action plan. Titled (Correcting The Course: Product-Based Economy And Sustainable Wellbeing), the five-pronged plan breaks down into a number of programs and projects - reflecting the government's goals based on the state's developmental plan, noted Deputy Premier Essa Al-Kandari after the Cabinet's session.

This would contribute in accelerating pace of achievement, as well as further fruitful cooperation between the executive and legislative branches, pointed out Al-Kandari, also Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs. The plan is to then be

Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The Chairman of the Authority, Dr Fahad Al-Daihani, said: "The Authority received the mandate to follow up the Minister of Information and Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi to implement the directives and coordinate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in preparation for their distribution in the Kingdom of Sweden."

He stated that this initiative, which was preferred by HH the Prime Minister, aims to emphasize the tolerance of the Islamic religion, spread Islamic principles and values, and positive coexistence among all human beings in an atmosphere

of love, tolerance and peace. The Cabinet decided during its weekly meeting earlier in the day to print 100,000 copies of the Holy Quran in Swedish and distribute them in the Kingdom of Sweden in order to emphasize the tolerance of the true Islamic religion.

The Council confirmed in a statement after the meeting that based on the directives of His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister, the Council decided to assign the General Authority for the Care of Printing and Publishing the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet and their sciences to print 100,000 copies of the Holy Quran translated into Swedish. — KUNA

Kuwait to distribute 100,000 copies of Quran in Sweden

KUWAIT: The General Authority for the Care of Printing and Publishing the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) and their Sciences announced the printing of 100,000 copies of the Holy Quran translated into Swedish based on the directives of HH prime minister Sheikh Ahmad

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Local

'It is an art': Young Kuwaitis navigate world of podcasting

Podcasts outlet for youth to make new friends

By Munirah Al-Fayez

KUWAIT: Starting a podcast seems to be something that many young Kuwaitis are becoming more and more interested in. Podcasts are like radio shows, except they are usually not live, and they are usually focused on a certain topic or genre. Kuwait Times interviewed two young Kuwaiti podcasters to ask them about what inspired them to start a podcast and their experience in starting and maintaining a podcast.

Host of the podcast Ment Ebrouhek, Hanan Al-Salahi, shared that her podcast is built on feelings of pain and grief she went through. She explained that at times when she felt these feelings, she felt very alone, but listening to podcasts made her

feel less alone. This experience, says Hanan, is what inspired her to start the podcast, hence the name which translates to "you are not alone".

Hanan said having conversations with people she would have never had access to before is one of her favorite things about having a podcast. "Human connection is a value of mine and now I get to do it on an entirely different scale, so I am extremely grateful for that," she said. Diary of a CEO by Steven Bartlett is a podcast she enjoys listening to, which inspired her to start podcasting. She added she also enjoys listening to How to Fail by Elizabeth Day, Saturn Returns by Caggie Dunlop and The Happy Place by Fearne Cotton.

She concluded with a piece of advice for people who are considering starting a podcast. "Find

the right fit to work with. I am very lucky to have found my producer who covers almost all the technical stuff, but also helps me with ideas and suggestions for guests."

Nasser Al-Doseri, co-host of the 4th Ring Road podcast, explained that in his last year of university, he realized he wanted to become a content creator. He said at the time he had just started listening to podcasts, so he thought it would be a great opportunity to start one. Podcasting, says Nasser, gives him an outlet to express himself freely and talk about things he is passionate about, like mental health and how it affects our society. "I love that I met like-minded people and got to make new friends through the podcast. I also love having conversations. I think it is an art."

Doseri said his favorite podcast, the one that inspired him to start a podcast, is "The 85 South Show", an American comedy podcast that talks about and laughs at their own insecurities. "They always made me smile and giggle," he said. Nasser's advice to people who are considering starting a podcast is to "start the podcast and do not overthink it. Podcasts are meant to be unique and spontaneous. Do not compare yourself to other podcasts. Talk about things that you are passionate about; listeners can feel the passion and they will be more engaged. Always have fun doing it. If you are not in the mood, don't record an episode. It's ok. Finally, the podcast game is a marathon — you should stay consistent and keep putting out episodes for 2-3 years before you see any success."



KUWAIT: Eaman Al-Roudhan, Waleed Al-Sharian and Neda Al-Dehani are seen at the opening ceremony.



Eaman Al-Roudhan, Waleed Al-Sharian and Neda Al-Dehani are seen during the event.

Zain, SACGC launch Innovation Nation to empower youth

KUWAIT: Zain announced the kick-off of Innovation Nation, a unique experience that comes in partnership with Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) and in collaboration with the Avenues. The initiative runs daily till July 19 and offers a unique set of rich content, courses, and workshops with the aim of empowering children and youth's technical and digital skills in a fun, informative and innovative way.

The opening ceremony was attended by Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al Roudhan, Mabaneq CEO Waleed Khalid Al-Sharian and SACGC GM Neda Al-Dehani. The project is the first fruitful result of Zain and SACGC's recently signed strategic partnership to invest in the talents and skills of Kuwait's children and youth to contribute to the national economy by empowering tech and digital competencies, which are core requirements of today's careers.

Innovation Nation brings many daily courses for young people aged 7-14 years. Each course or workshop runs for two hours and is supervised and facilitated by experts and certified trainers from SACGC. The content is presented in an out-of-the-box way with fun, informative and innovative educational methods that appeal to young people.

The content offered by Innovation Nation mainly covers the essentials of a variety of technical and digital topics that are aligned with the requirements of modern markets and careers, including electronics, robotics, 3D printers, programming, artificial intelligence and more. The initiative offers a great opportunity for parents to positively fill their children's free time while they shop at the Avenues.

Zain recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with SACGC - a center of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences



From the 3D Printing workshop.

(KFAS) - to build a new strategic partnership that focuses on elevating the digital literacy of the youth, empower creativity and innovation, and enhance the local startup ecosystem in the community.

The MoU aims to foster a joint collaboration between the two partners to achieve a number of targets, including elevating digital literacy, develop digital competencies, support the local startups ecosystem, empower Kuwaiti inventors and innovators to excel, and more to serve the nation's developmental, economic, and social goals. The partnership targets young people of 7-35 years, and includes insightful programs, workshops, and more to share expertise and achieve these shared goals.

This particular activity is the first of many projects under Zain's all-new initiative, Innovation Nation, under which all of Zain's innovation and entrepreneurship programs will fall, especially within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) areas. The initiative mainly targets the youth, and centers around a number of pillars, including entrepreneurship, investment, startup acceleration, supporting inventors, fostering innovation and more.

On its part, Mabaneq reflects its social responsibility by launching and supporting a range of CSR



Innovation Nation runs daily at the Avenues until July 19.



From the Robotics workshop.

activities and projects in collaboration with many of its partners. The company believes that such initiatives aim at investing in the talents of young people and help create an innovative, digitally capable generation, ultimately benefiting the entire community.

Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity was established in 2010 as an initiative by His

Highness the Late Amir and former Chairman of the board of directors of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The center was founded to nurture Kuwaiti Human capital and resource with innovation, technical knowledge, and expertise to enhance the development and growth of Kuwait.

SACGC is dedicated to facilitating knowledge and investing in exceptional and high achieving individuals within the entrepreneurial and innovation fields. The center also aims to foster an environment that generates impact across the community that will, in turn, boost social, economic and cultural development.

The center boasts five dedicated scientific clubs each specializing in a different area: the programming club, the robotics club, the science and math club, the electronics club, and the design club. SACGC also offers support to young people and innovators who wish to execute their own projects under the supervision of the center's engineers and trainers, offering specially designed courses to support unique projects, and even manufacturing tools and services like digital engraving, laser cutting, 3D printing, and more.

Manpower, KRCS sign agreement to promote culture of human rights

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower signed an agreement to cooperate in the field of human rights with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society on Tuesday. The agreement aims to promote and develop the culture of human rights, consolidate human rights values, spread awareness of them and contribute to ensuring they are put to practice, which would create a strategic humanitarian partnership that serves all categories of human rights.

The two sides met following directives of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on the need to cooperate with civil society institutions to spread awareness and provide protection for workers. Acting Director General of the Public Authority of Manpower, Secretary General of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society Marzouq Al-Otaibi, Maha Al-Barjas and a number of members of the society's board of directors were in attendance.

Otaibi began the meeting by welcoming the members of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society and praising the pioneering humanitarian role of the Society and those in charge of it for their tireless efforts and contributions to achieve its noble mission and spread the culture of volunteer work. Barjas expressed her thanks and gratitude for the efforts made by the Public Authority of Manpower in supporting human rights and civil society, which reflects an honorable



KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower signed an agreement to cooperate in the field of human rights with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society on Tuesday. They also discussed a project with the Kuwait Society for Human Rights.

image of the State of Kuwait.

Also Tuesday, Otaibi received the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Society for Human Rights Khaled Al-Ajmi and a number of members of the board of directors of the society. Otaibi was briefed on the latest projects of the society, including the "Sahim" project to enhance the role of community leaders in monitoring and accountability to improve public services.

The project aims to build the capacity and skills of the government and community leaders and activists regarding the concepts of good governance and accountability and the use of mechanisms for monitoring and improving public services. The project also aims to improve government responses to the needs of citizens as well as build a community initiative that promotes good governance, integrity and transparency in society.

Wafra plant project on track for 2024 deadline: Official

KUWAIT: The CEO of the GCC Interconnection Authority Ahmed Al-Ibrahim announced on Tuesday that the construction of the Wafra plant project in the State of Kuwait are proceeding well according to schedule, expecting the project to be completed in December 2024.

"The completion rate of construction and civil works, which includes the construction of concrete bases for electrical towers, reached 15 percent, while the completion rate of construction of overhead lines carrying electric current reached 27 percent," Ibrahim said.

He stated that the existing cooperation between the authority and the Kuwait Fund for Development in the implementation of the Wafra station project is "very excellent".

"The authority seeks to build greater cooperation with the fund in the implementation of other vital and strategic projects for the benefit of Kuwait and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries," he said.

Ibrahim said representatives from the authority and the fund inspected the situation on the ground and listened to the reports and opinions of engineers, consultants and contractors, stressing that things are going well in terms of direct coordination with the joint operations teams and the timely arrival of needed materials.

The Linkage Authority and the Kuwait Fund "work as one team in the success of this project, which is a common goal," he said, expressing many thanks to the fund for its continuous support and follow-up of the project. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Representatives from the GCC Interconnection Authority and the Kuwait Fund for Development inspect the construction site of the Wafra plant. — KUNA



Charity builds Islamic center in Indonesia

KUWAIT: The Namaa' Charity Committee of the Islaah society inaugurated an Islamic center in Indonesia to contribute to spreading Islamic culture to all Muslims and to play an effective role in presenting a correct image of Islamic values, teachings and charitable and humanitarian work.

The center includes of a mosque with an area of 150 square meters, with a capacity for 300 worshippers, a toilet, acoustics and mattresses, in addition to a furnished center dedicated for teaching the Quran consisting of two classrooms with capacity for 40 students, said Khalid Al-Shemmari, director of the relief department in Namaa'.

The center aims to contribute to the dissemination of Islamic culture to all Muslims by carrying out many advocacy, educational and social activities.

He said Namaa' Charity is "keen to support and care for the keepers of the Book of Allah in the countries in which it operates, based on the emphasis of the texts of Islam on the virtue of learning, memorizing and reciting the Quran."

"Namaa' is focusing on building Islamic centers to allow millions of Indonesians to perform their daily prayers comfortably," he said.

With 'therapy speak' going mainstream, youth find better ways to communicate

Social media helps young people understand, talk about mental health

By Noor AlKhars

KUWAIT: The younger generation, also known as 'Gen Z', are taking matters into their own hands when it comes to openly talking about topics formerly labeled as taboo by the previous generation, specifically in the Arab world, in hopes to set boundaries and eliminate the lack of empathy when discussing topics related to mental health. In a post-apocalyptic world, people are now more in touch with their emotions than ever; consequently, it has become the norm for people to seek out professional help, which eventually opened the realm of 'therapy speak' on social media.

The phenomenon has established a new vocabulary for the masses. As more mental health vocabulary became mainstream, people found describing their emotions in more concrete terms, much easier than before. Furthermore, terms such as 'gaslighting' has sparked such controversy within the older generation, as terminology has shed the light on the problematic aspects older generations have been dabbling into when approaching their mental well-being and life in general.

The reason why having a word for everything has sparked such uproar amongst the older generation is because they are keen on the idea that suffering is simply a part of life and

labeling everything has made this generation prone to weakness. Nonetheless, having terms for every emotion has enhanced the mental well-being of teens and children immensely. Primarily, people are often scared of what they do not understand, and when it comes to the previous generations, those who have been through the most life-altering changes and lived through so much history, whether it be famine or cultural revolutions, it is truly astonishing how they were raised to never talk or fully process their emotions in a healthy manner.

As a result, those same people now find it hard to understand how young adolescents waste no time in verbally expressing how someone made them feel. Unquestionably, terminology helps one comprehend certain topics, which is why it should be considered an important factor these days, as it reduces ambiguity and increases transparency in conversations as well as discussions, allowing people to communicate more efficiently.

When asked about how certain terms or phrases has helped this generation to break certain generational cycles within their own families and how it positively affected the family dynamic within the household, 24-year-old Maryam states: "I have struggled with anxiety my entire life and it was significantly bad when I



was a kid. Growing up, there were no words in the Arabic language that could help set a visual of what it felt like. Therefore, my inability to describe my emotions has created a wedge between my relationship with my family as a lot of resentment was lingering due to the fact that I could not articulate my emotions clearly.

"However, with the rise of social media, that eventually allowed people to stop mirroring each other and start speaking their truths. Having a term for everything validated a lot of the dense emotions I was carrying within me. It helped truly encapsulate the depth of my emotions, which significantly improved my relationship with my mother,

as she now understands exactly how much of it I was feeling".

Another girl, Fatemah, seconds Maryam's statement by expressing how "being aware of mental health now in my early twenties is mostly impacted by learning the terminology. As a child, part of the torture was because I did not understand what was happening and most importantly why it was happening."

It is safe to say that as a generation we have come a long way in terms of feeling comfortable and safe with being vocal about our emotions and struggles; however, we still have a long way to go as some still find it hard to break this generational cycle.

Sports committee targets violators

KUWAIT: The committee for the removal of equestrian encroachments at the Public Authority for Sport will begin work next week to remove all types of infringements in Ahmadi, Farwaniya and Jahra after stable owners violated laws.

Khalifa Al-Tararwa, director of the follow-up and inspection department at the sports competitiveness sector at the Public Authority for Sport, and chairman of the committee, confirmed: "The Committee held its third meeting in the presence of representatives of the ministry of interior, the ministry of electricity and water, Kuwait Municipality and the Environment Public Authority in order to develop a mechanism that will be implemented during the operations to remove all kinds of infringements and violations that the committee monitored during its tours recently."

"The General Sports Authority, based on the directives of Youssef Al-Bidan, Director General of the Authority, and his deputy for the competitive sports sector, Bashar Abdullah, is keen to activate the role of equestrian clubs in practicing sports activities according to allocated lots," he added.



Higher Education ministry officials are seen at the event.

Higher Education prepares students for scholarships

KUWAIT: Under the patronage of Minister of Education Dr Hamad Al-Adwani, the Ministry of Higher Education held awareness lectures for students admitted to the annual scholarship plan for the year 2023/2024.

The lectures were held in the presence of Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education Lamia Al-Melhem.

They were held on Monday, July 10 and Tuesday, July 11, at the Kuwait University Conference Hall in Al-Shadadiya campus over three periods distributed according to the country the students will be studying in.

Undersecretary Al-Melhem thanked the minister and everyone who contributed to the success of the event. She added that she was happy to meet the distinguished students who got accepted into the scholarship program.

"Based on the implementation of the directives of the political leadership and the minister's keenness on investing in human capital and raising the efficiency of our human resources, work has been done to send our children today to universities with international rankings to benefit from modern disciplines," she added.

During the lectures, several ministry officials explained issues that students need to be aware of before going abroad to study. Some of the officials



KUWAIT: Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education Lamia Al-Melhem speaks at an event held to prepare scholarship students for their journey abroad. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

include Assistant Undersecretary for Missions and Equivalencies Affairs Wafaa Al-Sarraf, Observer of Foreign Missions Nusseibeh Al-Nisf, Head of the Department of Missions of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland Noura Al-Enezi, Head of the Department of Missions of the Arab Countries, Shuaa Al-Salem, Head of the Department of the United States of America and Canada Balqees Al-Bahar and Head of the Department of European countries, Australia and New Zealand Farah Al-Jadi.

The topics they talked about covered completing post-admission documents, the visa process, taking the IELTS and TOEFL, steps to withdraw from the annual scholarship plan, conditions for changing the specialization or mission headquarters, definition of financial guarantee and its objective, and the language year required for some students before beginning their studies.



Students accepted into the government's scholarship plan attend the lecture.



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BBC defends refusal to name top presenter at centre of scandal

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Erdogan agrees Sweden's NATO bid

Nordic nation to become 32nd member of US-led defence bloc



VILNIUS: (L to R) Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, US President Joe Biden, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Lithuania's President Gitanas Nausėda and NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoga attend the meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) during the NATO Summit in Vilnius on July 11, 2023. — AFP

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has performed one of his trademark policy U-turns on Sweden's accession to NATO that culminates a gradual pro-Western tilt of course since his May re-election. Erdogan ended more than a year of wrangling and struck a deal Monday that will allow the Nordic nation to become the 32nd member of the US-led defence bloc.

It followed a dramatic day during which Erdogan upped the stakes by suddenly demanding a clear path for Turkey's long-stalled accession to the European Union in return. The new ask secured him a private meeting with EU chief Charles Michel and a pledge from Sweden and NATO to "support efforts to reinvigorate Turkey's EU accession process".

The agreement allows NATO to stand more united at a two-day summit that started Tuesday in Vilnius with the aim of showing Western resolve in the face of Russia's war on Ukraine. But it also highlights a strategic shift in thinking that appears to have occurred in Ankara since

Erdogan nearly lost his two-decade grip on power in May elections.

The vote coincided with a dire economic crisis that Erdogan tried to buffer through deals with rich Gulf countries and -- to the West's growing alarm -- Russian President Vladimir Putin. Erdogan's refusal to budge on Sweden added to the growing perception that NATO member Turkey was turning into a Kremlin tool for sowing divisions in the West.

That image began to change after Erdogan turned to Wall Street-trained economists who want to improve relations with Western investors post-election. He then hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for more than two hours of talks Friday that created huge unease in Moscow.

The deal on Sweden followed a call with US President Joe Biden during which Erdogan raised both EU accession and Turkey's desire to acquire a large batch of F-16 fighter jets. "Ankara wants to improve its relations with Europe and the West," European Council of

Foreign Relations analyst Asli Aydintasbas remarked. "The recent policy balance had shifted too much towards Russia."

'Transactional style'

Erdogan has long tried to leverage Turkey's strategic location between Europe and Asia to play off Russian and Western interests for maximum gain. Few expect his westward turn to represent a fundamental or long-term shift.

"We tend to think of Erdogan as unpredictable. But that's not entirely true," said veteran Turkish analyst Salim Cevik. "Once you understand his transactional style, he is quite predictable." Many note that Erdogan's change in tactics followed a June mutiny by Wagner mercenaries group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin that created mayhem in Moscow and suddenly left Putin looking weak.

Erdogan ended his meeting with Zelensky by declaring support for Ukraine's NATO ambitions and approving a deal under which Kyiv could get more Turkish combat drones. But

Russia's most vocal anger came in response to five Ukrainian commanders that Zelensky brought back with him to Kyiv from Turkey.

The Avov regiment fighters became national heroes in Ukraine because of their last-stand defence of Mariupol -- now seized by Russia -- in the first months of war. They were supposed to stay in Turkey until the war was over under a deal arranged with Erdogan's help in September 2022.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday that Russia "expects to receive explanations from the Turkish side about what happened". "We will take this into account in our future agreements," Peskov added.

'Damaged goods'

Long-time Russia and Turkey watcher Timothy Ash partially links Erdogan's shift to the Wagner revolt. "The Azov and drone deals over the weekend around the Zelensky visit showed that Turkey thinks, post the Prigozhin mutiny, that Ukraine will win and Putin is dam-

aged goods and likely on his way out," Ash said.

But Turkey's membership of the European Union still looks like a distant prospect and Erdogan's balancing acts will likely continue for the final five years of his rule. Erdogan has scheduled a fund-raising trip to Saudi Arabia and two other petro-dollar rich Gulf nations days after the NATO summit.

And European powers such as France have longstanding reservations about accepting Muslim-majority Turkey into the bloc. The European Parliament voted to suspend negotiations with Ankara in 2019 because of what it viewed as Erdogan's backsliding on democratic values and human rights.

Turkey has been a formal candidate country since 2005. "Turkey needs Western investments, but I don't think they will come simply because the president has changed his rhetoric," Turkey's TEPAV policy institute analyst Nilgun Arisan Eralp said. "They would like to see an economy based on the rules of law." — AFP

Thousands mourn Srebrenica victims as tensions mount

SREBRENICA: The remains of 30 victims of the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia were laid to rest Tuesday, as thousands commemorated the atrocity's 28th anniversary against a backdrop of surging tension, with the landmark peace deal that ended the war under pressure.

Bosnian Serb forces captured the ill-fated eastern town--then a UN-protected enclave--on July 11, 1995 and in the following days summarily killed some 8,000 Muslim men and boys, in an act labelled as a genocide by two international courts.

The remains of most of the victims were later found in mass graves in eastern Bosnia, where the perpetrators moved them from original burial sites to cover up the crime. Many of the 30 victims buried on Tuesday were identified in previous years, but the families chose to wait until more of their remains were recovered.

"Now we know where his bones are... we know where we will go to pray," said former Srebrenica resident Nedžad Mehinovic, whose father Idriz's remains were among those buried on Tuesday. In the massacre, Mehinovic also lost his grandfather, uncles, nephews, and many other close relatives, he told AFP.

Showdown

The anniversary came as a political tug of war in recent weeks has seen some of the biggest cracks emerge in Bosnia since the end of the brutal 1992-1995 civil war with the signing of a US-brokered peace deal. A day ahead of the ceremony, the top international envoy to Bosnia Christian Schmidt--tasked with overseeing the civilian aspects of the Dayton accords that ended the war--pledged to "ensure that legal steps are taken against all those who deny the genocide".

The comment appeared to be a thinly disguised

Alarm over Sudan war crimes, calls to end fighting

GEDAREF: Human Rights Watch on Tuesday called on the International Criminal Court to investigate possible "war crimes" in Sudan's Darfur region where fighting has intensified despite calls for an end to the conflict.

The New York-based group charged that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied Arab militias "summarily executed" at least 28 members of the Massalit ethnic minority when they ransacked and torched much of the town of Misterei in May.

Efforts to broker an end to the violence have continued, and the east African regional bloc IGAD on Monday led a renewed push, calling on the warring parties to "sign an unconditional ceasefire".

The Sudanese army nonetheless boycotted the gathering in Addis Ababa, dampening hopes for an end to the nearly three-month-old conflict with the RSF.

Air strikes again shook the capital Khartoum, resi-



SREBRENICA: Bosnian Muslim women and survivors of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre bury the remains of their relatives on July 11, 2023. — AFP

dent said Tuesday as they sheltered from gunfire. Experts believe army leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, have opted for a war of attrition and are hoping to extract more concessions at the negotiating table.

US ambassador John Godfrey, who along with other diplomats was evacuated near the start of the conflict, warned that "a military 'victory' by either of the belligerents in the Sudan conflict would entail unacceptable human cost and damage to the country".

'Horrible deaths'

Godfrey called instead for "a negotiated exit from the crisis", which he said "does not -- and cannot -- mean returning to the status quo that existed before April 15". Before the conflict erupted that day, the two generals had jointly ruled the country following an October putsch that derailed Sudan's fragile transition to civilian rule.

Around 3,000 people have been killed in the violence, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. Godfrey further slammed "irresponsible" calls for continued fighting, pointing to the "horrible deaths by air strike of at least six people" in Khartoum North on Monday and of "at least 22 people on Friday in Omdurman". — AFP

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International

Trial opens over 2019 New Zealand volcano disaster

Parties found guilty could face fines of up to NZ\$1.5 million

WELLINGTON: A trial opened Tuesday over New Zealand's 2019 White Island volcanic eruption, a "massive explosion" that engulfed tourists and killed 22 people while leaving others with terrible burns.

Around 50 people, mostly tourists from Australia, were on White Island -- also known as Whakaari -- in December 2019 when a deadly column of burning ash and steam blasted from a volcanic vent.

The eruption off the coast of the country's North Island claimed 22 lives and left dozens more with horrific injuries, prompting a massive medical operation that saw victims treated in burns units across New Zealand and Australia.

"This volcano eruption involved a massive explosion," prosecution barrister Kristy McDonald told Auckland District Court. It resulted in a flow of "burning hot ash, scalding hot sea, poisonous volcanic ashes and rocks projected across the crater floor," she added.

"The pyroclastic current engulfed all those who were on the volcano with estimates of speeds of approximately 60 kilometres per hour." Six parties, including two tour companies and the island's owners Whakaari Management Limited, have been charged with breaching health and safety regulations in the lead-up to the disaster. They deny wrongdoing.

McDonald said the family owners of the island were making around NZ\$1 million (US\$620,000) a year before disaster struck. "They profited from every single tourist taken to Whakaari," she told the court.

'Active volcano'

But the island's management failed to make adequate risk assessments, provide personal protective equipment or ensure evacuation routes, she said.

"The end result was that tourists and workers went to the crater of an active volcano without being properly advised of the risks," McDonald added. Video footage played in court showed people trying to flee a massive, expanding cloud of volcanic ash, which quickly engulfed them.

In one clip, a guide spotted the billowing eruption and shouted at tourists to "move, quick" back to their boat. Some stumbled in their desperation to flee. The charges do not carry the threat of jail time, but parties found guilty could face fines of up to NZ\$1.5 million. The trial is expected to last several weeks.

Another six companies have already pleaded guilty to health and safety charges, including three helicopter tour operators that entered 11th-hour pleas on Friday. Among those to previously plead guilty were White Island Tours, which ferried 21 of those killed -- 19 tourists and two staff -- to the volcanic site by boat.

Volcanic Air Safaris, which flew in one tourist who died on the island, has also pleaded guilty. In May last year, a judge cleared New Zealand's emergency management agency of health and safety breaches. Since the eruption, no boat or aircraft tours have been allowed to land on the island. — AFP



WHAKATANE: People lay flowers on the waterfront near White Island Tours offices in Whakatane, in memory of those who lost their lives during the White Island volcano disaster. A trial opened over New Zealand's 2019 White Island volcano disaster that killed 22 people at a once-popular tourism spot. — AFP

Uncle investigated in missing Vatican teen case: Report

VATICAN CITY: Rome prosecutors investigating the disappearance of a teenager 40 years ago are looking afresh at the possible involvement of her uncle following information supplied by the Vatican, Italian media reported Tuesday.

Emanuela Orlandi, the 15-year-old daughter of a Vatican employee, was last seen leaving a music class in Rome on June 22, 1983. Decades of speculation followed over what happened to her, with suggestions that mobsters, the secret services or a Vatican conspiracy were to blame, theories which sparked a hit Netflix series.

The Vatican has been accused of obstructing investigation efforts over the decades, but eventually launched an inquiry into its most famous cold case in January. Rome prosecutors in May then opened their own fresh probe—the third so far. The Vatican recently passed its case files to Rome, saying they included "some lines of inquiry worthy of further investigation".

Those include a letter in which a priest told the Vatican's then secretary of state that Orlandi's older sister Natalina had revealed during confession that her uncle, Mario Meneguzzi, had sexually abused her, Italian television channel La 7 said Monday. Orlandi's brother Pietro, who has for years campaigned for the truth and believes the Vatican knows what happened to Emanuela, reacted angrily to the La 7 report.

"They cannot put it all on the family, I am furious,"

he told the news agency AdnKronos, saying the Vatican had "crossed the line" by implicating his uncle. Rome prosecutors are now reportedly looking again at Meneguzzi, who was only superficially investigated during the original probe.

Meneguzzi, who died several years ago, looked remarkably similar to an identikit drawing of a man spotted talking to Emanuela in the street after her music lesson, La 7 said. He also played a key role in the months following her disappearance, answering the calls of the purported kidnappers, the report said. Meneguzzi had ties to the secret service, and managed to get the family a lawyer paid for by the service, it said.

During the first, brief investigation into him, he was also warned by the service that he was being tailed by police, it said. Meneguzzi told investigators at the time that he was out of Rome on the day the teenager disappeared, in the village of Torano east of the capital, along with several relatives including Emanuela's father Ercole, according to the Open online newspaper.

But Ercole Orlandi told investigators on several occasions that he was not in Torano that day, but in Fiumicino, west of Rome, Open said. The Corriere della Sera's investigative reporter Fabrizio Peronaci said Tuesday he had also uncovered information that the kidnappers had insisted from the start that Meneguzzi be their point person for the ransom negotiations. The twists and turns of the case were documented in a 2022 TV series by Netflix, "Vatican Girl", though it did not look at Meneguzzi.

In the documentary, a friend claimed the teen confided the week before she disappeared to having been harassed in the Vatican gardens by a figure close to then Pope John Paul II. Another claim often repeated in the Italian media was that she was taken to force the release from prison of Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turk who attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II in 1981. — AFP

BBC defends refusal to name top presenter at centre of scandal

LONDON: BBC chief Tim Davie on Tuesday insisted on allowing a high-profile presenter accused of paying a teenager for sexually explicit images to remain anonymous, despite mounting calls for his identity to be revealed. The accusations fuelled a fifth straight day of fevered frontpage headlines in the British media, with the publicly funded BBC also leading its own news bulletins with the story.

There has been a frenzy of speculation about the presenter's identity on social media, with the Daily Mail even reporting that "one in six" Britons knew who it was, according to its own snap poll. But Davie said "processes and protocols" were in place when allegations were made and they had a duty of care towards all involved.

"We always take these matters seriously and seek to manage them with care," he told reporters. The corporation needed to handle them "with the upmost diligence", he added, refusing to comment on calls from some MPs to use parliamentary privilege to name the presenter in the House of Commons.

Parliamentary privilege allows legal immunity to lawmakers for statements made in the chamber. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, in Vilnius for a NATO leaders summit, described the allegations as "serious and concerning" but said it was a matter for the BBC.

Publishers 'war'

The claims first emerged in an article published

Friday in The Sun tabloid in which the alleged victim's family said the presenter had paid a total of £35,000 (\$45,000) for the pictures. The Sun, which backs the ruling Conservative party, said the exchanges between the presenter and the young person started three years ago when the teenager was 17.

The damaging headlines come after the broadcaster—whose brand is built on public trust—was rocked in recent years by scandals which saw some of their biggest names revealed as serial sex offenders. "The BBC has a shameful record for ignoring complaints about its 'talent'. Its actions now must be entirely above board," The Sun said in an editorial.

Media industry publication Press Gazette called the claim and counter-claim "a war between two of the UK's leading news publishers". "This episode can now only result with either News UK-owned The Sun or the BBC having their credibility severely diminished," it added.

The revelations have shone a light on Britain's complex and increasingly strict privacy laws, which have made the media increasingly wary about revealing a person's identity before they are formally under investigation or arrest. In 2018, the BBC itself was forced to pay substantial damages for breach of privacy to the singer Cliff Richard after it broadcast live footage of a 2014 police raid on his home.

Further adding to the stand-off are the slew of attacks on the BBC by members of the ruling Conservatives and their supporters since the divisive Brexit referendum in 2016. The critics have accused it of pro-EU bias, with others in the UK's predominantly Tory-supporting right-wing press accusing it of having a "woke" agenda, and criticising its funding model. Davie, the corporation's director general, briefed the media Tuesday on the BBC's latest annual report but inevitably faced a grilling about the furor. — AFP

Sri Lanka uproots 'last legume' tree to build highway

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan authorities on Tuesday cut down what had once been described as the world's only known wild specimen of a species of legume, part of ongoing construction of a four-lane expressway. Transport Minister Bandula Gunawardana told reporters in Colombo that the cabinet had approved the removal of the tree. The Sri Lanka Legume (*Crudia zeylanica*) — a flowering tree whose pods are not known to be eaten by humans — was first classified in 1868 and last found in 1911.

In 2012, it was declared extinct until the surprise discovery in 2019 of a lone tree near Colombo. But

the eight-meter tree was set to be felled in February 2021 to allow the construction of a motorway, sparking uproar from environmentalists and the country's influential Buddhist clergy, who had blessed the plant to give it sacred protection.

Gunawardana said a study showed that 40 other trees of the same family still existed, but he did not provide details on where they were located. "It is a crime to have held up the construction by propagating a myth that this was the only tree of its kind," Gunawardana said. He said bypassing the tree would have added another 15 billion Sri Lankan rupees (\$50 million) to the cost of the road construction.

Local residents said workers had uprooted the tree using heavy equipment and had taken it to an undisclosed location. "There were a few workers... they uprooted the tree after chopping off some of the branches," one resident told the Swarnavahini TV network. "Before we could react, the tree was removed." — AFP

of the government. The minister told the Saudi station on Sunday that the field is the exclusive right of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and Iran should first demarcate its maritime borders with Kuwait before making any claims. Kuwait has officially stated that the field, which contains some seven trillion cubic feet of natural gas, is owned entirely by Kuwait and is shared equally with Saudi Arabia based on an agreement signed more than two decades ago.

Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah said Durra is fully owned by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait only, adding that Kuwait is continuing talks with Iran. Sheikh Salem stressed that the foreign ministry issued a "very clear" statement on the issue of the Durra field, referring to its affirmation of Kuwait's clear position during its talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. He also said one of the government's priorities is to end the issue of marine border demarcation with Iran and Iraq, noting that during the past few months, three rounds were held with the Iraqi side and one round with the Iranian side, and that the government is serious and proceeding with meetings with the two sides.

MP Hasan Jowhar asked about the role of Kuwaiti diplomacy in the issue, adding that it is not logical that for 20 years, the country's maritime borders have not been demarcated. MP Adel Al-Damkhi said the Durra field is an important issue and Kuwait's unity with Saudi Arabia over the issue is a safety valve against ambitions from other sides, in a reference to Iran. He said the government should complete the demarcation of all Kuwaiti borders so as "to stop ambitions against our energy resources".

Biden thanks Erdogan for...

Continued from Page 1

its green light. Erdogan had demanded at the last minute that approval for Sweden in NATO would depend on Turkey being able to renew stalled membership talks with the European Union.

Another long-standing demand from Turkey for the purchase of modern US F-16 fighter jets seemed to get a boost in the wake of the decision on Sweden. Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, stressed Tuesday that the US president has "been clear and unequivocal for months that he's supported the transfer of F-16s," seeing this as in the interests of NATO. "He has placed no caveats or conditions on that in his public and private comments over the past few months. And he intends to move forward with

that transfer in consultation with Congress."

A US official told AFP that the White House is now "actively engaging" with Congress, where there has been significant opposition to allowing the sale. Sullivan said "we will work with the Congress on the appropriate timing for getting" the warplanes to Turkey. But he could not "speculate on the precise day it's going to happen."

Although NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson were heavily engaged in the negotiations with Erdogan, Sullivan stressed "significant recent" US involvement. As for the effort by Erdogan to link Turkey's EU aspirations with the Swedish-NATO question, Sullivan said Biden has "long" supported Turkey entering the European Union. However, that would take "discussions of the necessary reforms and steps relative to democratic resilience that every prospective applicant to the European Union goes through". "So, as far as we're concerned, these issues are not connected," he said. — AFP

Finmin quits over KIA snub...

Continued from Page 1

and investigate financial scandals and irregularities. Some MPs have accused Shaya of hiding sensitive information from the Assembly related to a state enterprise purchasing an information security system from a company in the Zionist entity, with whom Kuwait has no relations and is considered an enemy state.

Lawmakers also approved a motion asking the Assembly's foreign relations committee to follow up measures and steps taken by the government towards safeguarding national sovereignty and natural resources in the Durra offshore gas field, which is disputed by neighboring Iran. The approval came after some MPs criticized "weak" statements issued by government ministers after an Iranian official was quoted as saying the Islamic Republic was planning to develop the field unilaterally.

Former oil minister MP Bader Al-Mulla said statements made by Oil Minister Saad Al-Barrak in an interview on a Saudi television channel were "inadequate and shaky and could affect Kuwait's rights" in the field. He said the statements by the minister conceded possible Iranian rights in the field after the demarcation of maritime borders with Iran, adding that the foreign relations committee must examine the statements.

But Barrak insisted that his statements were "crystal clear" and they represent the policy and the viewpoint

Canadian lake ground-zero for...

Continued from Page 1

including another lake, coral reefs, ice cores and an ocean bay in Japan — as the Anthropocene's so-called golden spike.

"The sediment found at the bottom of the Crawford Lake provides an exquisite record of recent environmental change over the last millennia," said working group chair Simon Turner, a professor at University College London. "It is this ability to precisely record and store this information as a geological archive that can be matched to historical global environmental changes."

Those changes are currently on dramatic display: last week was the hottest globally on record. Out-of-control forest fires have been ravaging Canada for months, while the US and China are coping with unprecedented heat, flooding and drought at the same time. Humanity has burned so much fossil fuel that concentrations of planet-warming CO₂, meanwhile, have increased by half. Sea surface temperatures have hit new highs in recent weeks, and Antarctic sea ice last month was 17 percent below the previous record low for June.

Last month scientists reported that so much water has been pumped from underground reservoirs that

Earth's geographic North Pole has shifted — by nearly five centimeters per year. According to the rules of the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICU), which in 2009 mandated a team of geologists to assess evidence for the Anthropocene, there must be a synchronous "primary marker" for a proposed boundary that is detectable in the geological record almost anywhere on the planet.

For the Anthropocene, plutonium cast off by hydrogen bomb tests provides that "global fingerprint", explained Cundy. "The clearest marker for a single year — which gives an abrupt and effectively instantaneous snapshot — is plutonium, because there's so little of it naturally present." That means 1952 — when the United States first detonated a huge hydrogen bomb in the Marshall Islands as a test — could become the Anthropocene's boundary year, he said.

Smaller atom bomb explosions before that left mostly regional imprints. A sharp, hockey-stick increase across a dozen markers of humanity's growing impact — including population, water use, greenhouse gas emissions, and forest loss — bunched around the middle of the 20th century add up to what scientists call the Great Acceleration. The "epoch of humans" first proposed in 2002 by chemistry Nobel Paul Crutzen is widely accepted within science as a reality, but faces daunting hurdles for formal validation by the gatekeepers of Earth's official geological timeline of eon, eras, periods and epochs, such as the Jurassic and the Cretaceous. — AFP

International

Myanmar crisis tops agenda at divided ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting

Thailand talks to be discussed but members 'going to talk about Myanmar again'

JAKARTA: ASEAN foreign ministers gathered in Indonesia on Tuesday for talks dominated by the crisis in Myanmar, with the regional bloc divided over how or whether to reengage with the country's ruling junta. The two-day Association of Southeast Asian Nations meeting will be followed by talks later in the week with Beijing, Washington and other powers where top US diplomat Antony Blinken will seek to push back on China's assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Myanmar has been ravaged by deadly violence since a military coup deposed Aung San Suu Kyi's government more than two years ago, unleashing a bloody crackdown on dissent. ASEAN has long been decried as a toothless talking shop, and it remains split over diplomatic attempts to resolve the crisis.

Those fractures were laid bare in a draft joint communique seen by AFP, where a section on Myanmar was left blank. "The para is still being discussed... member countries are still taking time to propose their submission," a Southeast Asian diplomat told AFP. ASEAN members were making "extra efforts" before the meeting—a prelude to a leaders' summit in September—to unite the group around the Myanmar issue, the diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

The official was "not too optimistic" that would happen given that a "few members have different perspectives", they said. Myanmar remains an ASEAN member but has been barred from high-level meetings over the junta's failure to implement a five-point plan agreed two years ago to resolve the crisis.

'Clearer' plan

Thailand hosted the junta's foreign minister for controversial "informal talks" last month, deepening the divisions between ASEAN members. Cambodia sent a junior diplomat while ASEAN chair Indonesia and Malaysia snubbed the meeting. Philippine Foreign Minister Enrique Manalo told reporters on



JAKARTA: (L-R) Malaysian Foreign Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir, Philippines' Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo, Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, Thailand's Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai, Vietnam's Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, Laos' Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith, Brunei's Second Minister of Foreign Affairs Erywan Yusof, Cambodia's Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn, East Timor's Foreign Minister Bendito Freitas and ASEAN Secretary General Kao Kim Hourn pose for a family photo during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Jakarta. — AFP

the meeting's sidelines the Thailand talks would be discussed but members were "going to talk about Myanmar again". His Thai counterpart Don Pramudwinai told reporters Bangkok wants Myanmar to be represented again at future meetings.

"Yes, we'd like to see it—meaning all ASEAN members," he said, without specifying if he meant the junta. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi appeared to take aim at divisions within the bloc. "Our differences should not be an excuse for

us to abandon pressing human rights issues in our own region," she said in remarks opening a session.

The bloc's initiatives are limited by its charter principles of consensus and non-interference, but analysts say the meeting could push members to do more. "It is hoped there will be a clearer implementation plan on what ASEAN will do going forward," Lina Alexandra of Jakarta-based think tank the Centre for Strategic and International Studies told AFP.

an affidavit sent to the court on Monday, saying the change had brought "peace, progress and prosperity" to the restive territory.

But Kashmiri politician Omar Abdullah, whose National Conference party helped bring the case, said the government rationale for its decision was irrelevant. The court would have to weigh "the illegality & unconstitutionality of what was done," he said on Twitter. "Not whether the (government) has a strong enough political case." A bench agreed the case could continue and adjourned the case for oral arguments in August. India has for decades stationed more than half a million soldiers on its side of divided Kashmir, which is also claimed by Pakistan.

An armed rebellion against Indian rule has killed thousands in the Muslim-majority territory since 1989. Consolidating New Delhi's rule over its portion of the territory has long been a key plank of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

The imposition of direct rule in 2019 was accom-

panied by the preventative detention of thousands of people across Kashmir including almost all local political leaders. A months-long internet shutdown throttled communication in the territory as India bolstered its armed forces in the region in an effort to contain protests against the move.

Critics say that authorities have since curbed media freedoms and public protests in a drastic curtailment of civil liberties. The suspension of Kashmir's semi-autonomy also allowed Indians from elsewhere to buy land and claim government jobs in the territory, a policy denounced by critics as "settler colonialism".

Hundreds of new laws, replacing local ordinances, have since been promulgated by the region's New Delhi-appointed governor. The frequency of armed clashes between Indian soldiers and insurgents has dropped significantly in recent years as India works to fortify its rule over the territory. Last year, at least 223 combatants and 30 civilians died in the region, according to official records. — AFP

Trial opens for 50 Vietnam officials over rescue flight bribes

HANOI: More than 50 officials went on trial in Vietnam on Tuesday for alleged corruption over repatriation flights during the COVID-19 pandemic, a scandal that has seen several senior ministers fired.

The case is part of a major anti-corruption drive that led to President Nguyen Xuan Phuc's sudden resignation earlier this year—an unprecedented move in communist Vietnam, where political changes are normally carefully orchestrated.

Early Tuesday morning, state media ran photos of the defendants—all wearing masks—as they were led by uniformed police to the court building in central Hanoi where they underwent a security check. Among those on trial are Hanoi's former deputy mayor Chu Xuan Dung and ex-Vietnamese ambassador to Japan Vu Hong Nam, who had given the state more than \$75,000 each as "money to fix the consequences," said state news website VNExpress.

Earlier in the week, state-run newspaper Thanh Nien, said prosecutors would charge "21 officials and civil servants... for receiving almost seven million dollars from up to 100 businesses to solve administrative procedures for repatriation".

Thirty-three others will face various other charges, including "offering or intermediating bribes, fraudulence and power abuse", the report said. The total amount of bribery money involved reached \$9.5 million, according to Thanh Nien's report on Monday.



HANOI: Picture shows defendants (front row standing) in a courtroom for the repatriation flight trial in Hanoi. More than 50 officials went on trial in Vietnam on July 11 for alleged corruption over repatriation flights during the COVID-19 pandemic, a scandal that has seen several senior ministers fired. — AFP

Top India court to weigh legality of Kashmir direct rule

SRINAGAR: India's top court on Tuesday began considering a challenge to the 2019 imposition of direct rule in Kashmir, a snap decision accompanied by mass arrests and a months-long internet blackout. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government suspended a section of the constitution that guarantees limited autonomy to the disputed region, home to a long-running insurgency against Indian rule.

The Supreme Court in New Delhi will weigh whether the move was legal despite lacking the endorsement from parliament usually required for constitutional change. Modi's government defended the decision in

Twitter better for 'freedom of speech', says Taliban official

KABUL: Twitter owner Elon Musk's freewheeling approach to the platform's handling of censorship has won support from an unlikely quarter—Afghanistan's Taliban. Anas Haqqani, a senior Taliban leader without an official portfolio, said late Monday that Twitter had "two important advantages" over other social media platforms following the launch of Meta-owned rival Threads. "The first privilege is the freedom of speech. The second privilege is the public nature & credibility of Twitter," he tweeted. "Twitter doesn't have an intolerant policy like Meta. Other platforms cannot replace it."

The remarks drew an angry reaction from some users, who noted the Taliban government did not allow its own citizens the same rights. The Taliban had a low-key presence on social media until they stormed back to power in August 2021. Before that, many of their accounts—and those of sympathisers—were frequently blocked as fast as they were created. Now the government uses Twitter as a major vehicle for announcements, and most ministries and provincial departments have official accounts, although none appear to have paid for a blue tick since Twitter scrapped its verification system earlier this year.

Meta—owner of Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and now Threads—is still actively shutting down accounts associated with the Taliban. Social media observers say accounts with the name "Taliban", "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" or featuring the movement's distinctive flag rarely last long. Last year Facebook shuttered the pages of state-owned Radio Television Afghanistan and Bakhtar News Agency, saying at the time it was complying with laws in the United States listing the Taliban as a "terrorist organisation".

Under Musk, who bought Twitter last year, bans on tens of thousands of accounts—including former US president Donald Trump—were swiftly reversed. Many had been suspended for reasons such as denying US election results, spreading misinformation about COVID, peddling conspiracy theories or promoting extremist ideologies. Haqqani—son of famed anti-Russian mujahideen fighter turned Taliban Jalluddin Haqqani, and brother of interior minister Sirajuddin Haqqani—is one of the movement's youngest political leaders. With more than half a million followers on Twitter he frequently opines—often in English—on subjects ranging from cricket and poetry to local and global politics.—AFP

Qin absent

On Thursday, an ASEAN-plus-three ministerial meeting with Japan, South Korea and China will take place ahead of the ASEAN Regional Forum and an 18-nation East Asia Summit foreign ministers' meeting on Friday, which will also include Washington and Beijing.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is expected to attend the latter meeting, again putting him in the same room as US Secretary of State Blinken—after a brief March meeting—as Moscow's Ukraine invasion grinds on.

China will be represented by top diplomat Wang Yi instead of Foreign Minister Qin Gang, a Southeast Asia diplomat told AFP. Qin was unable to attend due to "health reasons", Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said in response to an AFP question at a daily briefing.

North Korea—which will participate in the ASEAN Regional Forum—has decided against sending Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui, Indonesian officials said. Washington and ASEAN will seek to "push back" on Beijing's actions in the dispute-rife South China Sea, top US diplomat for East Asia Daniel Kritenbrink told reporters Saturday.

China has made sweeping claims in the strategic waterway despite protests from several ASEAN members who argue for unimpeded freedom of navigation and that their own territorial claims be respected. The draft ASEAN joint communique called for self-restraint in the waterway and said there was "positive momentum" in talks over a code of conduct. The document also called on members to uphold a decades-old treaty preserving Southeast Asia as a "nuclear-free" region.

"We cannot be truly safe with nuclear weapons in our region," Indonesian FM Marsudi told ministers in her opening remarks. "With nuclear weapons we are only one miscalculation away from apocalypse and global catastrophe." — AFP

Thai caretaker PM announces retirement from politics

BANGKOK: Thailand's outgoing prime minister Prayut Chan-o-cha announced his retirement from politics Tuesday, but will remain as PM until the formation of a new government. A long-running fixture in Thai politics, the army chief seized power in a 2014 coup before cementing his control in highly controversial 2019 elections.

His decision comes just days before a key vote in the Thai parliament that could see the next prime minister elected, following a May election when voters emphatically rejected army-backed parties. "From now on, I quit politics by resigning as a member of the UTN party," he said in a statement posted on the United Thai Nation (UTN) party's official Facebook page.

The party—which Prayut joined only weeks before the elections—failed to gain traction with voters, coming in a distant fifth place behind opposition parties Move Forward and Pheu Thai. The opposition groups were galvanised by a wave of support across the country, as voters rejected a near-decade of army-backed rule and voted for reform. — AFP



BANGKOK: Thai prime minister Prayut Chan-o-cha speaks to the press after a cabinet meeting at Government House in Bangkok. — AFP

Six dead in Nepal tourist copter crash

KATHMANDU: All six people aboard a tourist helicopter in Nepal were killed when it crashed soon after take-off in the Everest region on Tuesday, aviation authorities said. The Manang Air flight was heading for the capital Kathmandu from near Lukla, the gateway for climbing expeditions to the world's highest peak, with five Mexican travellers and a Nepali pilot onboard.

The chopper lost contact eight minutes after taking off on Tuesday morning, the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) said in a statement. "Locals and police at the site report that all six bodies have been recovered," Pratap Babu Tiwari, general manager at the Tribhuvan International Airport, told AFP.

Two helicopters and teams on the ground had been deployed for search and rescue and could not land near the crash site because of the weather. "The bodies are being brought by ground transportation to the helicopters so they can be lifted to Kathmandu," Tiwari said. Lhakpa Sherpa, a local resident who joined search and rescue efforts, said the scene was "very scary".

"It looks like the helicopter first collided with a tree and then slammed on the floor. It has caused a small hole in the ground," he said. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "expressed grief" over the incident, his office said on Twitter.—AFP

WEDNESDAY, JULY 12, 2023

World job market on brink of 'AI revolution': OECD

AI will change jobs, create new ones and make others disappear



A robot working along side humans at a computer. The rapid development of AI has raised concerns that it could replace whole sectors of the workforce through automation.

PARIS: The world's wealthiest nations must urgently prepare for the impact of an imminent "AI revolution" that will change jobs, create new ones and make others disappear, the OECD said Tuesday.

The rapid development of artificial intelligence — with tools that can generate essays, create images and even pass medical exams — have raised concerns that it could replace whole sectors of the workforce through automation. In its 2023 Employment Outlook, the OECD said there was little evidence of significant negative effects on employment from AI "so far".

"While the adoption of AI still remains relatively low, rapid progress, falling costs and the increasing availability of workers with AI skills

indicate that OECD economies might be on the brink of an AI revolution," the report said. "While there are many potential benefits from AI, there are also significant risks that need to be urgently addressed," according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The international and influential organization has 38 member countries ranging from Australia to Britain, Canada, Germany, Japan, Mexico and the United States. The OECD said it was "vital" to gather better data on AI uptake and use in the workplace, "including which jobs will change, be created or disappear, and how skills needs are shifting".

AI use is generally concentrated in large firms

that are still experimenting with the new technology, and many appear reluctant to replace staff, said Stefano Scarpetta, OECD director for employment, labor and social affairs. "However, it is also clear that the potential for substitution remains significant, raising fears of decreasing wages and job losses," he wrote in an editorial.

AI has the potential to improve workplace safety by reducing "tedious or dangerous tasks" and lead to higher wages for workers whose skills complement the technology, the OECD report said. But it could also "leave workers with a higher-paced work environment" and reduce wages for those "who find themselves squeezed into a diminished

share of tasks due to automation". When taking AI into consideration, jobs at the highest risk of automation account for 27 percent of employment, according to the OECD.

"The use of AI also comes with serious ethical challenges around data protection and privacy, transparency and explainability, bias and discrimination, automatic decision making and accountability," Scarpetta said. "Urgent action is required to make sure AI is used responsibly and in a trustworthy way in the workplace," he said. "On the one hand, there is a need to enable workers and employers in reaping the benefits of AI while adapting to it, notably through training and social dialogue." — AFP

'Meta loses more': Zuckerberg takes Threads fight to EU

PARIS, France: US tech titan Mark Zuckerberg has plunged into a high-stakes game of brinkmanship with the European Union by withholding his new Threads app from users in Europe, but analysts say he will struggle to win the fight.

Threads, billed as the killer of Twitter, a platform that has tumbled into chaos under the leadership of mercurial tycoon Elon Musk, has added more than 100 million users in its first week in app stores.

But Zuckerberg's firm Meta said it could not be released in Europe because of "regulatory uncertainty" around the Digital Markets Act, an antitrust regulation that will not come into force until next year. "The reason they gave made me laugh," said Diego Naranjo, head of policy at campaign group European Digital Rights. "The regulation is not uncertain, it's very certain, it's just that Meta doesn't like it."

His theory is that Meta will give Threads to the rest of the world and Europeans will become so vexed at missing out that they will pressure the EU to water down the DMA.

Naranjo, for one, thinks the ploy will fail. But either way, the rest of the big tech platforms will be glued to their screens as this fight could shape the future regulatory landscape in Europe for all of them.

'Fatal' blow

Meta and the rest are already regularly in trouble

Cash-strapped Pakistan gets \$2bn deposit from Saudi Arabia

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's desperately low foreign exchange reserves were boosted on Tuesday with a \$2 billion deposit from Saudi Arabia, ahead of a key IMF meeting this month to approve a new deal. The economy has been stricken by a balance-of-payments crisis as it attempts to service crippling external debt, while months of political chaos have scared off foreign investment.

Inflation has rocketed, the rupee has reached a record low against the dollar, and the country is struggling to afford imports, causing a severe decline in industrial output.

"Saudi Arabia had announced in the recent past that it would deposit an additional \$2 billion in the account of the State Bank of Pakistan — that has been credited to the account of the State Bank," Pa-

akistan's finance minister Ishaq Dar said in a televised press conference. It brings state foreign reserves to a total of \$6.5 billion, an almost 50 percent increase compared to last week's account balance.

Faisal Shaji, a research analyst with Standard Capital Securities, told AFP that the deposit will stabilize Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves and will improve its credit rating in the international market. "This is also a big and positive development towards the IMF program. As a result, Pakistan's currency will be strengthened and it will have a better impact on the stock market."

After months of prolonged negotiations, the IMF last week announced a new standby deal worth \$3 billion for Pakistan after the government met the final conditions, including securing guarantees of further financial support from friendly nations. The standby deal will be considered for approval by the IMF's executive board by mid-July. Years of financial mismanagement have pushed Pakistan's economy to the limit, exacerbated by the COVID pandemic, a global energy crisis and record floods that submerged a third of the country last year. Pakistan's headline

with EU regulators over their data gathering and retention policies. They struggle to keep to the terms of Europe's mammoth five-year-old data privacy regulation (GDPR). When the DMA was announced, their reaction was muted as it seemed to be about business and competition, a simpler topic for them though not without pitfalls.

The DMA bans the biggest tech firms from favoring their own platforms, particularly problematic for the latest launch as Threads and Instagram accounts are linked. But the DMA's Article 5.2 contained a bombshell: the firms will be banned from transferring user data across platforms unless they get consent. Berin Szoka, president of the pro-business US think tank TechFreedom, said the DMA's rules would require Meta to ask for the consent of someone's Instagram contacts before their data could be transferred to Threads.

"In practice, this could prove fatal to Threads' rollout," he said, as the network effect would be dead on arrival. "I don't really see a good way out here for Meta." Naranjo has little sympathy for Meta, saying the European embargo was just a "political push" by the firm against the EU.

"We will see who loses more," he said. "My guess is that Meta will lose more from not having 450 million potential customers on their network."

'Question of time'

The European Consumer Group (BEUC) said the Threads issue showed the DMA doing exactly what it is supposed to do. "The DMA does not stand in the way of new products or innovation," said the group's competition specialist Vanessa Turner.

"It creates an environment for innovation from more competitors and at the same time protects con-

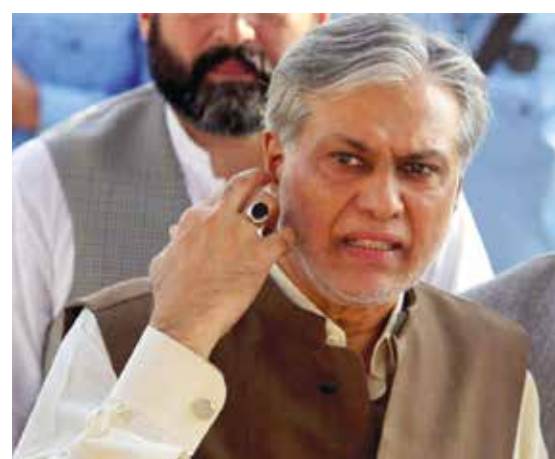


WASHINGTON: This photo illustration created in Washington, DC, on July 6, 2023, shows the logo for Threads, an Instagram app, next to its page on the App Store. — AFP

sumers." Meta has left the door open for a Threads launch in Europe and few expect it to maintain its embargo indefinitely.

European law expert Alexandre de Stree said big tech firms would probably be hammering out compliance issues with the EU over the coming months. "I think it's more a question of time to understand the scope of the legislation and have a dialogue with the commission," he said.

But Szoka suggested the EU might be about to get a dose of unintended consequences. "It would be particularly sad if DMA shields Twitter from competition," he said. Meta, he argued, had committed to making Threads compatible with its competitors, adding: "That's something Twitter has only talked about." — AFP



Pakistan Finance Minister Ishaq Dar

inflation eased for the first time in seven months in June, figures released last week showed, a bright spot for a beleaguered government that must call an election this year. — AFP

Oil prices rally on OPEC+ cuts, Wall St rises

LONDON: Oil prices edged higher on Tuesday, paring some of the losses from the previous session, driven by supply cuts from the world's biggest oil exporters and a weaker dollar, news agencies reported. Brent and West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crudes edged 0.4 percent and 0.5 percent, to \$78 and \$73.34 on the barrel, respectively.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies (OPEC+) enacted a number of cuts over the past year, the latest being Russia's and Saudi Arabia, which will extend through August. Oil prices slipped slightly Monday, as reported by Bloomberg, but has made some advances since, back to selling at over \$78 and \$73 per barrel of Brent and WTI.

Overall, both oil crudes have been range-bound since April, with marginal slides and surges in June, all above the \$70 and \$67 thresholds, as reported by the German data platform, Statista. Supply cuts by the world's biggest oil exporters Saudi Arabia and Russia set for August bolstered benchmark prices. While Russia will not cut production, it will lower its exports to replenish domestic fuel supplies for its ongoing war effort in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Wall Street stocks mostly rose early Tuesday amid signs of greater broadening in the equity market beyond technology.

Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare pointed to greater momentum for industrials and other "cyclical" sectors tied to economic growth "suggesting that there was a rotation of money within the stock market," he said in a note.

"That is what one typically sees in a bull market," O'Hare said. Energy and materials were two other sectors showing early gains, while technology was lower. Tech gains were at the heart of the stock market's buoyant first semester of 2023.

About 25 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 0.3 percent at 34,060.67. The broad-based S&P 500 added 0.1 percent at 4,415.35, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index dipped 0.1 percent to 15,017.45. Markets are looking ahead to Wednesday's consumer price index report, a critical data point for the upcoming US Federal Reserve decision. The yield on the 10-year US Treasury note, a proxy for interest rates, dipped below 4.0 percent. — AFP

Business

UK unemployment climbs as inflation weighs on economy

Britain seeks pensions boost for sluggish economy

LONDON: UK unemployment rose back to four percent in the three months to the end of May, official data showed Tuesday, as the economy struggles with stubbornly-high inflation. The unemployment rate increased from 3.8 percent in the three months to the end of April, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

The rate was back at four percent for the first time since the start of 2022. Analysts' consensus had been for unemployment to remain at 3.8 percent. Despite the rise, finance minister Jeremy Hunt said Britain's "jobs market is strong with unemployment low by historical standards".

The ONS added that pay excluding bonuses had risen at record levels. "Due to high inflation, however, the real value of weekly earnings is still falling, although now at its slowest rate since the end of 2021," noted Darren Morgan, director of economic statistics at the ONS. In a keynote speech late Monday, Hunt insisted there could "be no sustainable growth without eliminating the inflation that deters investment and erodes consumer confidence".

UK annual inflation has eased in recent months but remains close to nine percent. This is far above the Bank of England's two-percent target, triggering numerous interest-rate hikes from the central bank.

"UK inflation is already running far hotter than policymakers had hoped, and price pressures will struggle to abate any time soon so long as earnings continue to grow at the current scorching pace," said Matthew Ryan, head of market strategy at Ebury. The ONS revealed that average regular pay, not including bonuses, was 7.3-percent higher in the three months to May compared with the same period one year earlier. While BoE governor Andrew Bailey and Hunt call for pay restraint, thousands of public and private-sector workers continue to strike in a push for wages rises that keep up with inflation.

Meanwhile, British Finance Minister Jeremy Hunt on Monday unveiled plans to channel more of the nation's pension fund cash into UK companies and boost the inflation-battered economy. Hunt trumpeted a deal with major pension firms to put five percent of investments — or up to \$50 billion (\$64 billion) by 2030 — into high-growth businesses, in turn



LONDON: UK unemployment rose back to four percent in the three months to the end of May, official data showed Tuesday.

boosting economic activity and tax revenues that fund public services.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, whose Conservatives are trailing the main opposition Labour party before an election due next year, has vowed to slash inflation to ease a cost-of-living crisis.

The UK economy has been slammed by rising interest rates and stubbornly high inflation, which has eased in recent months but remains close to nine percent. "I want to... enable our financial services sector to increase returns for pensioners, improve outcomes for investors and unlock capital for our growth businesses," Hunt told an audience of finance leaders at London's Mansion House in the heart of its City financial district. Hunt added that the UK's

pension market was the largest in Europe and worth more than £2.5 trillion.

And he wants to make Britain "the most innovative and competitive" financial centre in the world.

The new measures will in particular seek to make the UK stock market more attractive than elsewhere 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 also laid out plans for an "entirely new kind of stock market" allowing private companies to access capital markets before they float. And he will look to "simplify our financial services rulebook" to ensure "growth-friendly regulation" without compromising the government's com-

mitment to stability. "British growth driven by British financial firepower, providing higher living standards and better-funded public services," concluded Hunt in Monday's speech.

"With cooperation between government, regulators and business closer than ever... we will deliver not just more competitive financial services but a more innovative economy." Britain had last year announced measures to stimulate growth in the financial sector, in particular relaxing certain curbs that were introduced after the 2008 global financial crisis. However, despite post-Brexit reforms, London lost its crown as the top European trading hub following Britain's departure from the EU in early 2021. — AFP



EU lawmakers back chip production plan

STRASBOURG, France: The European Parliament on Tuesday formally approved an EU plan to greatly boost its own supply of semiconductors, a strategic goal to reduce dependency on Asia. An overwhelming majority of lawmakers, 587 to 10, backed the EU Chips Act, which is meant to see European Union chip production quadruple by 2030 to account for 20 percent of global share.

Globalization and rise of Asian manufacturing has seen European activity in the sector dwindle in recent decades. The market is dominated by Taiwan, which makes 90 percent of the most advanced chips, South Korea and, increasingly, China.

The COVID pandemic in 2020 caused supply chains from Asia to seize up, dealing serious shortages to the European car industry in particular. Semiconductors are also vital for many other everyday items, ranging from smartphones to household appliances. They are also needed for data storage, which is in full expansion, and in green tech to reduce carbon output.

To reach its ambitious goal in chip production, the EU will have to mobilize more than 43 billion euros (\$47 billion) in public and private investments. The drive is part of a strategy of greater European self-sufficiency, championed by French President Emmanuel Macron, which has been galvanized by energy and food shocks caused by Russia's war in Ukraine.

The EU Chips Act calls for the EU to throw 3.3 billion euros at the goal from its budget, and for research and development to be reinforced. A monitoring system to detect budding supply shortfalls is meant to alert the European Commission early enough so it can act urgently to head them off, including by organizing pooled purchases on behalf of the bloc, like it did for COVID vaccines. — AFP

Bahrain 9th best country for expats to live and work

ABU DHABI: Bahrain has been ranked the 9th best destination for expatriates to live and work, based on the high quality of life it offers and job opportunities, according to a report by global network InterNations. The UAE has been ranked 11th in its survey. The UAE was ranked second globally in the Expat Essentials Index category, behind Bahrain, with 80 per cent of respondents in the Emirates saying it

Indonesia seizes Iran-flagged crude oil tanker

JAKARTA: Indonesian maritime authorities seized an Iranian-flagged tanker carrying more than 200,000 metric tons of light crude oil after a suspected illegal transfer at sea, they said Tuesday. Iran has been accused by the United States and its allies of using crowded shipping lanes in the Arabian Gulf and elsewhere to circumnavigate Western sanctions on its nuclear program. The MT Arman 114 under the Iranian flag was "suspected of carrying out illegal transshipment activities" in Indonesia's exclusive economic zone, the maritime security agency said in a statement.

The tanker was seized on Friday after authorities found it conducting a suspected transfer of crude oil to Cameroon-flagged ship MT S Tinos, the statement said. "The two ships were caught red-handed carrying out crude oil transshipment activities," it added.

The vessel was carrying a crew of 28 Syrian nationals and three other passengers, as well as 272,568 metric tons of light crude oil worth tens of millions of dollars. The agency did not directly link the transfer to the Iranian government or accuse Tehran of involvement. In May, the two countries signed a trade agree-

ment in Indonesia's capital Jakarta, where President Joko Widodo hosted his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi, as Tehran looked to boost its international trade ties. Indonesia's maritime authorities said the tanker refused to respond to communication from Indonesian authorities, had turned off its shipping information system, and did not fly its flag.

The listed owner of the vessel did not respond to a request for comment. When approached, the MT Arman 114 tried to escape before being chased into Malaysia's exclusive economic zone. Indonesian authorities carried out the seizure with the help of Malaysian authorities, who "deployed special maritime troops using helicopters," it said.

Tehran has increased actions against tankers in the Persian Gulf since the United States tightened sanctions on Iran's oil exports and other areas of its economy. The US military said last week it had blocked two attempts by the Iranian navy to seize commercial tankers in international waters off Oman, including one case in which the Iranians fired on the tanker. The tightened US sanctions, which aim to cut into Iran's export earnings, have led to the United States seizing Iranian-controlled tankers and shipments of crude to other countries. President Joe Biden took office hoping to return to a 2015 nuclear accord with Iran that had been scrapped by his predecessor Donald Trump. But EU-mediated talks collapsed and mass protests in Iran made Washington increasingly hesitant to strike a deal with the clerical state. — AFP



AT SEA, Indonesia: This handout photo taken on July 7, 2023 and released on July 11 shows an aerial view of the Iranian-flagged vessel MT Arman 114 (left) beside the Cameroon-flagged ship MT S Tinos. — AFP

is easy to obtain a visa when moving here. Mexico topped the global ranking, with Spain and Panama in second and third place, respectively, InterNations said in its annual Expat Insider 2023 report released on Tuesday. Malaysia and Taiwan were ranked fourth and fifth on the index. Rounding off the top 10 were Thailand, followed by Costa Rica, the Philippines, Bahrain and Portugal.

Some of the worst destinations for expatriates include Norway, South Korea, Germany, South Africa, Italy, Malta, New Zealand and Japan. InterNations polled 12,000 people in 53 nations and territories, asking questions based on five categories: quality of life, ease of settling in, working abroad, personal finance and an expatriate essentials index, which covers digital life, administration topics, housing and language.

"Expats enjoy the high quality of life and job opportunities in the UAE," said InterNations, which has more than 4.8 million members. "The UAE even makes it into the top five of three indices — expat essentials [second], working abroad [fourth], and quality of life [fourth]." Last September, a survey by health insurance company Cigna found that 4 per cent of expatriates around the world wanted to relocate to the UAE because of its progressive policy changes, recent visa reforms and economic rebound after COVID-19.

The UAE, the Arab world's second-largest economy, has introduced several economic, legal and social reforms in recent years to strengthen its business environment, boost foreign direct investment, attract skilled workers and provide incentives to companies to set up or expand their operations. — Agencies



AL-HASAHEISA, Sudan: Internally displaced Sudanese reside in the Hasahisa secondary school on July 10, 2023, transformed to house people fleeing violence in the war-torn country. — AFP

Sudan civil servants go hungry as war claims livelihoods

WAD MADANI, Sudan: Sudanese public school teacher Imad Mohammed had worked for 32 years when war broke out almost three months ago, tearing his country apart and his finances to shreds. "We only eat one meal a day now," he told AFP about his family of five.

"And we don't know how long this will go on," said the teacher from Al-Jazirah state, which has been spared the brutal fighting but has still suffered dire shortages. Like other civil servants, Mohammed has gone without a salary since the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces took up arms against each other.

When the first blasts shook Khartoum on April 15, banks there shuttered their doors, and branches nationwide have since struggled to provide services because they are cut off from headquarters in the capital. Since then, the only government salaries that have been paid are the army's.

Deprived of their pay and annual holiday bonuses for the festivals of Eid Al-Fitr in April and Eid Al-Adha in June, around one million desperate public sector workers have been forced to survive on their savings or on social aid networks.

"What teachers and their families are going through, in both the public and private sectors, is catastrophic," said Ammar Youssef, head of the Sudanese Teachers Committee.

The livelihood losses and descent into poverty have compounded the horrors of the war, which has already killed around 3,000 people and displaced three million. More than 1.5 million people have fled from Khartoum alone, using whatever money they had when the fighting started, to escape the air strikes, artillery fire and street fighting that have turned the capital into a war zone.

But some who were unlucky enough to have had little or no savings they could access, have been left stranded, unable to pay for expensive transport as fuel prices have surged 20-fold. "Not only are they struggling to feed their families even once a day, but they also can't afford to take their families to safety, away from the combat zones," Youssef told AFP. "State education alone employs over 300,000 people, who were already underpaid before the war," he said, adding that the education ministry has been unreachable since the war began. — AFP

Business

Britain's water crisis pollutes its decades of privatization legacy

UK water companies have debt of more than £60bn since privatization

LONDON: Britain's biggest water supplier staving off renationalization, trains derailed by strikes and consumers suffering huge energy bills — the nation's vital sectors are mired in chaos decades after their controversial privatization. Sold off in the 1980s and 90s under Conservative prime ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major, state-run utilities and British Rail were split into several companies, unleashing fresh investment but also huge executive bonuses, shareholder dividends and massive debts.

Thames Water on Monday announced a significant financial injection from shareholders that keeps Britain's biggest supplier of the commodity afloat. The company, reported to have been at risk of renationalization, said shareholders agreed to provide further funding worth £750 million (\$960 million).

However, it falls short of the £1 billion it sought on top of £500 million secured from shareholders in March. Thames Water on Monday also noted that it would need a further £2.5 billion of support between 2025 and 2030.

Vote loser?

The government of Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had said the crisis at Thames Water — the company has debts of £14 billion — is a matter for the company and shareholders despite

reports the state made contingency plans for temporary control. "Renationalization, in addition to being expensive, would be suicidal electorally" for the Tories, Professor Hugh Willmott of Bayes Business School told AFP.

Even the main opposition Labor party, strong favorites to win a general election expected next year, has abandoned plans to renationalize the water and energy sectors if elected, as the state coffers have become depleted in the cost-of-living crisis. Labor, however, has its sights set on returning the railways to full state control. Britain's "rail sector is easier as much of it is already effectively nationalized", noted Willmott.

The nation's rail tracks were not privatized, while the state has periodically enforced temporary renationalization of badly-run train operators. There have been calls also for renationalization of Royal Mail, crippled over the past year by postal workers striking over pay. Railway staff and state health workers have also carried out mass industrial action as inflation remains stubbornly high in Britain, eroding the value of wages.

The UK government in May took control of train operator TransPennine Express owing to persistent delays and cancellations of its services serving northern England and Scotland. A vital sector that has remained under state control during

its 75 years of existence is the cherished National Health Service, but which is facing a huge crisis.

The NHS, which relies on private sector investment as well as taxes and state borrowing to run, has also accumulated a huge debt and is operating out of numerous crumbling hospitals while patients are waiting record-long times to be treated. Sunak, the son of a former NHS doctor, recently unveiled a 15-year plan to recruit hundreds of thousands of health workers.

Water 'rip-off'

Whether the state rescues Thames Water remains to be seen after shareholders led by Canadian pension fund Ontario Municipal ploughed more cash into the indebted company — but less than required. "When privatized in 1989... the water industry was hailed as the jewel in the crown of the Thatcherite privatization program," noted independent analyst Howard Wheeldon.

"The rather sad reality is that in a world increasingly driven by individual greed, it could be argued that ... (the) water industry became the biggest rip-off story in the UK. "In the 34 years since privatization, water bills — both to households and industry — have soared," he added.

The country's water companies have reportedly accumulated combined debt



LONDON: A train arrives at King's Cross railway station in London on July 27, 2022. — AFP

totaling more than £60 billion since privatization. They have been under fire for years over releasing untreated wastewater into rivers and seas, blighting fragile ecosystems and leading to illnesses in people and closure of beaches. A UK court last week fined Thames Water £3.3 million for polluting rivers.

Water bills could surge 40 percent by 2030 to fund the works, according to estimates.

"Would nationalization — itself a long-drawn-out and costly process — produce any improvement over better regulation of the private sector?" questioned Professor Len Shackleton on behalf of free-market think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs. "Sure, costs would be reduced were no dividends paid. But government borrowing still has a cost... Yes, water is a mess. But don't suppose nationalization is a panacea." — AFP

Gulf Bank promotes financial literacy among staff's children

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to consolidate the principles of social sustainability and believing in the importance of work-life balance, Gulf Bank welcomed its employees' children on an ordinary working day, where plenty of educational and recreational activities were organized for them.

On this occasion, the Assistant General Manager of Human Resources at Gulf Bank Hanan Al-Khalifa said: "Allowing employees to accompany their children to work, aligns with our

commitment towards creating a positive work environment at Gulf Bank. This helps to promote work-life balance, and further highlights our eagerness to support our employees on a personal and professional level."

She added: "We were keen to organize a series of various activities, designed for different age groups, with the aim of teaching children about banking services and financial literacy. The activities included creative workshops, fun games and entertaining surprises to ensure an exceptional experience for both the children and parents alike." Al-Khalifa indicated that educational workshops were created with the aim of enriching the children's financial information, and to encourage the

spirit of teamwork. Additionally, the children were given a chance to visit Gulf Bank's Head Office to experience banking transactions both theoretically and practically.

She further stressed the importance of instilling financial literacy in the new generation and to teach them about the importance of savings, in order to enhance their knowledge of banking transactions and terminology; hence, why the bank facilitated fun and engaging activities to help the children learn this new information effortlessly.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in

recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

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



SINGAPORE: Temasek Chief Investment Officer Rohit Siphahimalani stated that the company would maintain a cautious investment stance this financial year.

Singapore state investor Temasek reports value drop

SINGAPORE: Singapore state investor Temasek said Tuesday its net portfolio value fell 5.2 percent in the last financial year due to volatility in global markets, and that it would be adopting a more cautious strategy. The company, whose global footprint extends well beyond the city-state, said its net holdings in the year ending in March were at Sg\$382 billion (\$287 billion), down from a record high Sg\$403 billion in the previous year.

Its one-year total shareholder return came in at negative 5.07 percent, weighed by higher interest rates resulting from tighter monetary policies to fight inflation. Its three-year total shareholder return, however, stood at 8.0 percent, while its 10-year return was at 6.0 percent and 20-year return at 9.0 percent. "We maintain a cautious investment stance and expect to invest at a moderated pace this financial year, given the challenging macroeconomic environment," said Temasek chief investment officer Rohit Siphahimalani.

Temasek is ranked among the world's top 10 investors, with stakes in companies like Singapore Airlines and the city-state's biggest lender DBS Group. The company is mainly anchored in Asia, which accounts for 63 percent of its holdings, mostly in Singapore and China.

Its portfolio ranges from transportation to financial services, telecommunications, real estate and life sciences. On Tuesday, Temasek also defended not taking tougher action against the team responsible for a failed investment in collapsed cryptocurrency exchange FTX.

Temasek said in May it had slashed compensation for the team and senior management responsible for investing in FTX, which together with its sister trading house Alameda Research went bankrupt in November. FTX's implosion dissolved a virtual trading business that at one point had been valued at \$32 billion, resulting in Temasek writing down its \$275 million investment and launching an internal review. While the review found no misconduct, the investment team and senior management "took collective accountability and had their compensation reduced", Temasek said at that time.

Temasek chief executive Dilhan Pillay said Tuesday the action taken by the firm was enough. "If we were to start to punish people beyond what we've done, who would want to be an investor?" he said.

"When you do invest, you take risks. You take calculated, calibrated risks, and as long as you've done the work required to make the investment, the committee approves it and it goes forward," he added. "FTX was, I would say, an aberration." — AFP

Foxconn pulls from \$19.4bn deal in India

TAIPEI: Taiwanese electronics giant Foxconn withdrew from a \$19.4 billion deal with India's Vedanta to make semiconductors in the South Asian nation owing to "challenging gaps", it announced Tuesday. The world's top iPhone assembler signed an agreement in September with Vedanta to set up a chip factory — which would also produce display screens for phones and tablets — in India's Gujarat state.

The plan was to boost New Delhi's self-reliance in the technology supply chain, given that semiconductors are an essential component of nearly all modern electronics — powering everything from coffee machines to electric cars. But Foxconn on Thursday said "both parties mutually agreed to part ways". "There was recognition on both sides that the project was not moving fast enough, there were challenging gaps we were not able to smoothly overcome, as well as external issues unrelated to the project," Hon Hai Technology Group — Foxconn's official name — said in a statement.

The deal would have seen Vedanta — one of India's biggest mining companies — take a 60 percent share in the joint venture, while Foxconn would have the minority stake. Both companies had also projected that the facilities would be operational by

Clean tech minerals market surges to \$320bn, says IEA

PARIS: The market for the minerals key to the clean energy transition soared to \$320 billion last year but faces challenges including volatile prices, supply chain snarls and geopolitical tensions, the International Energy Agency said Tuesday.

The market for minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel and copper doubled between 2017 and 2022, fuelled by the record deployment of clean technologies such as solar panels and electric car batteries, according to the IEA. "Rapid growth in demand is providing new opportunities for the industry," the Paris-based agency said in its first annual IEA Critical Minerals Market Review.

"But a combination of volatile price movements, supply chain bottlenecks and geopolitical concerns has created a potent mix of risks for secure and rapid energy transi-

tions," it added. The IEA, which advises developed nations on energy policies, said the "affordability and speed of energy transitions" will depend on the availability of critical mineral supplies.

Prices rose in 2021 and early 2022 as the COVID pandemic caused bottlenecks across supply chains and Russia's invasion of Ukraine wreaked havoc in commodity markets.

Most prices began to moderate in the latter half of 2022 and into 2023, but they remain well above historical averages, the IEA said. "As things stand, 2023 could be a crucial year for clean energy technology prices," the report said. "Whether and how quickly they resume a downward trajectory will depend on the speed of innovation and on the stability of mineral markets that witnessed significant volatility in 2022 after two years of pandemic-related supply chain disruptions followed by the onset of global geopolitical uncertainty." — AFP

German investor confidence slips in July

BERLIN: German investor confidence slipped in July, a key survey showed Tuesday, adding to fears of a deeper downturn in Europe's biggest economy. After a slight rebound in June, the ZEW institute's economic expectations index shed 6.2 points to reach minus 14.7 points.

The reading was worse than analysts had expected, with experts at financial data firm FactSet having penciled in minus 10 points. A negative reading means most investors are pessimistic.

ZEW president Achim Wambach said in a statement the survey was "shifting even more noticeably into negative territory". "The industrial sectors are likely to bear the brunt of the anticipated economic downturn, with profit expectations for these export-oriented industries experiencing a substantial decline once again," he said. Europe's top economy fell into a technical recession at the

start of the year, following two consecutive quarters of contraction.

Most analysts agree the gloomy trend is set to continue in the coming months, with leading economic institutes now expecting the German economy to shrink by 0.2 to 0.4 percent in 2023.

ZEW said inflation and interest rate hikes from the European Central Bank were hitting private spending hard, which was hurting industry. Despite a steep fall in energy prices, the manufacturing sector — particularly the important chemicals industry — is struggling to regain its strength from before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A batch of negative economic data in recent weeks has dented hopes of a strong rebound in Europe's industrial powerhouse.

Industrial production unexpectedly fell 0.2 percent in May, federal statistics agency Destatis said earlier this month, raising fears of a prolonged downturn.

Meanwhile, unemployment showed a surprise rise in June to 5.7 percent, seasonally adjusted figures from the BA federal labor agency showed. However, factory orders, which are closely watched as a foretaste of future industrial activity, rose significantly in May, according to official data. — AFP



2024. Foxconn will not make a loss because of the withdrawal as it "has not injected capital or fixed assets into the" joint venture, the statement said.

While Vedanta did not confirm the pullout, it reiterated that it is "fully committed to its semiconductor fab project", adding that there are other partners in line to set up India's first foundry.

"Vedanta has redoubled its efforts to fulfill (Prime Minister Narendra Modi's) vision for semiconductors and India remains pivotal in repositioning global semiconductor supply chains," its spokesperson said, adding that Ve-

danta now has a license for production-grade technology to create 40-nanometer chips. "We will shortly acquire a license for production-grade 28 nm as well."

The vast majority of the world's top chips are made in Taiwan — primarily by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company — and in South Korea by Samsung. To join the race for semiconductors, India in late 2021 approved a \$10 billion incentive scheme to kickstart its own domestic industry by agreeing to cover up to half of all project costs. — AFP

Lifestyle

What carbon footprint? American man flies 23 million miles

Tom Stuker has flown some 23 million miles in three decades, the same as 48 round trips to the moon, but the American says he is not concerned by his carbon footprint. Stuker, dubbed the world's most traveled air passenger, estimates he has spent the equivalent of three of his 69 years on planes and in airports. The businessman from New Jersey travels an average of 994,000 miles (1.6 million kilometers) a year, although in 2019 he clocked up 1.5 million miles. "I'll never do that again," he told AFP, admitting that even for him it was too much. Stuker owes his travel to a lifetime pass he bought from United Airlines for \$290,000 in 1990. "It was strictly a business decision," Stuker recalls.



This undated handout image provided by Tom Stuker shows Stuker posing for a photo in the cockpit of an airplane. — AFP

At the time, his auto industry consulting business was expanding, particularly in Australia, and he wanted to save money on travel. He later took up the option of a companion pass, bringing his total spent to \$510,000, for which he took out a loan. "It took about a half hour to explain everything to my banker, and he tried to talk me out of it several times," Stuker remembers. Then he was scared of flying, but not anymore.

The pass has likely saved him millions of dollars but United appear happy with his business — they've put his name on three of their planes. Stuker has flown an average of 22,000 miles a

week since acquiring his pass and visits Australia about 20 times a year. He has been featured in several US publications and has endured some abuse on social media, with users accusing him of contributing to global warming. "Recently a person posted a comment saying he hopes that myself and my entire family die from my carbon footprint," Stuker says.

100 million miles

The airline industry contributes up to three percent of global carbon dioxide

emissions, but experts say its impact on warming temperatures is worsened by its emission of other gases and condensation trails. Scientists say that the industry's contribution to further warming can be halted with a 2.5 percent annual decrease in traffic using current fuels or a transition to a 90 percent carbon-neutral fuel mix by 2050, an industry target.

"The problem isn't the passengers," insists Stuker. "The only way to solve the problem is with the airline industry itself, which is spending millions of dollars to reduce its overall emissions." Stuker has accumulated more than 100 million frequent flyer miles that he has been able to use on luxury hotels and restaurants, as well as generous gift cards for family and friends.

And his favorite thing about flying? The food. "Actually I got to start cutting down on all that food. During the pandemic, I lost 65 pounds," he says. Stuker says he has only ever missed one flight in his life and that was because he fell asleep in the airport lounge. So what is his top tip to ensure the smoothest possible travel? Catch the first flight of the day because it is usually cheaper, less busy, and not impacted by delays. "Get out of bed early!" Stuker says. — AFP



US singer Madonna speaks onstage during the 65th annual Grammy Awards at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles. — AFP

Madonna on 'road to recovery' after hospital stay

Madonna said she's on "the road to recovery" after a bacterial infection that required hospitalization, in the US pop icon's first statement since landing in the intensive care unit late last month. "My first thought when I woke up in the hospital was my children," the 64-year-old said in her social media post. "My second thought was that I did not want to disappoint anyone who bought tickets for my tour."

The illness required Madonna to postpone her nearly sold out, 84-date "Celebration" tour that was due to start July 15. Her manager, who first said the superstar was in the hospital, had said "a full recovery is expected." "My focus now is my health and getting stronger

and I assure you, I'll be back with you as soon as I can!" Madonna said Monday.

She said her current plan was to begin the European leg of her tour — due to start October 14 in London — as scheduled, and rebook the earlier stateside shows for later dates. Shortly after Madonna released her statement, touring giant LiveNation confirmed that North American dates scheduled prior to October 8 would be "unfortunately postponed." The company said a new calendar was forthcoming "as soon as possible." Stops in the United States are to include Detroit, Chicago, Miami and New York, the city where her storied rise to superstardom began. The Grammy-winning icon behind classics including "Like A Virgin" and "Material Girl" has asserted incalculable influence as one of music's top stars. In 2020 Madonna underwent hip replacement surgery following an injury sustained on her "Madame X" tour. — AFP

Red Hot Chili Peppers, Lauryn Hill to headline concert urging foreign aid

The Red Hot Chili Peppers and rapper-singer Lauryn Hill will headline this year's Global Citizen festival in New York on September 23, organizers announced Tuesday. Artists including Megan Thee Stallion, Conan Gray and Stray Kids will join them at the stage in Central Park for the event, which is aimed at drumming up support for preserving international aid to eradicate extreme poverty, in addition to a number of other causes.



The Global Citizen event, which has been staged since 2012 as world leaders gather in New York for the UN General Assembly, offers free tickets to supporters who pledge to take actions such as sending letters to their governments urging development aid.

"COP27, this year's G7, the World Bank Spring Meetings and the Paris climate finance summit all failed to deliver tangible results, or disruption of the world's unjust systems," said Global Citizen head Hugh Evans. "But complacency can't win," he continued, urging the world's richest nations to "meet the urgency of the hour." — AFP

Singer Lauryn Hill performs on the Pyramid Stage during the third day of the Glastonbury Festival of Music and Performing Arts on Worthy Farm near the village of Pilton in Somerset, South West England.



(From left) Anthony Kiedis, Chad Smith, Flea, and John Frusciante of the Red Hot Chili Peppers perform during Austin City Limits Music Festival at Zilker Park in Austin, Texas. — AFP photos

'Succession' and strikes: What to expect from Emmy nominations

Can any TV show topple "Succession" at the Emmys? Will Amazon's lavish "Lord of the Rings" prequel rule them all? And, with ongoing Hollywood strikes, will television's finest even be honored this year? Nominations for television's equivalent of the Oscars will be announced in a live-streamed ceremony Wednesday starting at 8:30 am Pacific time (1530 GMT), after which final-round voting begins for the 75th Emmy Awards, tentatively set for September 18. Here are five things to look out for:

Will protests strike the Emmys?

In normal years, TV pundits argue over which shows will be nominated — not whether the Emmys will even take place. But this year's ceremony is already jeopardized by a writers' strike, now in its 11th week. Nominations are to be announced on the same day that Hollywood actors will decide whether to walk off the job too, over pay and other conditions.

A Screen Actors Guild (SAG) shutdown would mean a boycott by stars — and therefore, a likely delay — of

the Emmys. "If there is a strike, that's going to really affect the Emmys going forward," said Deadline awards columnist Pete Hammond. "Because the TV Academy is going to have to decide, 'How long is this going to go on?' and 'What's our drop-dead date to move the show?'"

'Succession' to steamroll?

Emmy voters love "Succession." The HBO drama about the warring family behind a sinister media empire has already earned 48 nods, with 13 wins — including the best drama prize, twice. The series concluded this year with a critically adored final season, and voters are expected to shower nominations on its cast. Best actor in a drama, alone, could feature three "Succession" stars — Brian Cox, Jeremy Strong, and Kieran Culkin — among its six nominees.

"I would say with all the acting they have, they're looking at 20 nominations or more, easily," said Hammond. Much of the competition will come from within HBO, which also boasts popular dramas "The White Lotus," "The Last of

Us" and "House of the Dragon," a prequel to "Game of Thrones."

School, soccer and sandwiches

The comedy categories look like they will feature a more open and varied field. Feel-good soccer show "Ted Lasso" from Apple TV+ has thrashed its rivals in recent years, but its third — and possibly final — season was not well received. ABC's "Abbott Elementary" — a rare non-streaming show, set at a struggling Philadelphia school — won three out of seven Emmys in a breakthrough debut last year, and will now be seeking even higher grades.

And then there is "The Bear." Taking viewers inside the astonishingly stressful, frantic and occasionally violent kitchen of a run-down Chicago sandwich shop, it is not your typical comedy, but became a cultural phenomenon last summer.

Limited appeal

In recent years, the Emmys' "limited series" category — for shows that end after a single season — has been arguably the most competitive, stuffed with



File photo shows Welsh actress Mortyde Clark attends the premiere of Prime Video's "The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power" at Culver Studios in Los Angeles, California. — AFP photos

popular "Beef" offers a (slightly) lighter alternative — despite being premised on a road-rage encounter that spirals into a bitter feud.

Can lavish 'Rings' woo voters?

With an overall \$1 billion budget, Amazon's "Lord of the Rings" prequel "The Rings of Power" has been dubbed the most expensive television show ever made. While its first season earned weak reviews, even the toughest critics were impressed by the show's luxurious production values. So "Rings" should perform strongly across technical categories, from special effects to makeup.

But few fantasy genre productions — with the notable exception of "Game of Thrones," or the "Lord of the Rings" movies at the Oscars — have been big winners at awards shows. "I don't think you're going to see it in any major categories," said Hammond. Competition from "House of the Dragon" could also "burst its bubble," he said. — AFP



File photo shows actor Jeremy Strong arriving for the 74th Emmy Awards at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles, California.



File photo shows writers holding signs while picketing in front of Paramount Studios in Los Angeles, California as the strike by the Writers Guild of America enters its third week.



File photo shows fans attending "The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power" panel in Hall H of the Convention Center during Comic-Con International on July 22, 2022 in San Diego, California.

Lifestyle



Players fight for the ball during a football match on a field at the Teoca volcano crater.



A man prepares to play on a football field at the Teoca volcano crater in the town of Santa Cecilia Tepetlapa, on the outskirts of Mexico City.



The coach of amateur football team Liverpool gives instructions to his players on a field at the Teoca volcano crater in the town of Santa Cecilia Tepetlapa, on the outskirts of Mexico City.



People play football on a field at the Teoca volcano crater in the town of Santa Cecilia Tepetlapa, on the outskirts of Mexico City.



People play football on a field at the Teoca volcano crater in the town of Santa Cecilia Tepetlapa, on the outskirts of Mexico City.

Mexican volcano crater home to 'unique' football pitch

A volcano crater is not an obvious venue for a football match, but that's where a referee blows the whistle for kick-off each weekend on the outskirts of Mexico City. "It's a unique pitch," said 32-year-old player Adrian Garcia, a graphic designer by profession. "It's very nice to come here to distract yourself, to relax, with friends and family," he added. The inactive Teoca volcano rises around 2,700 meters (roughly 8,900 feet) above sea level in the district of Xochimilco, a green lung in the southeast of the sprawling megacity.

About 10 teams belonging to an amateur league play in its crater on weekends. The area was once a ceremonial center, but after falling into disuse, it was transformed into a football venue. "The pitch must be about 70 years old," said league representative Joel Becerril.

"They used to carry me up here when I was a child," he added. At dawn, a thick mist covers the football pitch, but it gradually clears as the sun rises. A single road reaches the summit, as well as an 18-kilometer (11-mile) hiking trail up the volcano's forested slopes. "It's fantastic," said 47-year-old goalkeeper Daniel Mancilla Pena. "It's very impressive to come all the way up here to the pitch and to have a very nice setting to play football," he added.

According to experts from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, there are more than 200 volcanoes, most of them inactive, in the south of



Mexico City and on the border with the neighboring state of Morelos. Mexico sits in the world's most seismically and volcanically active zone, known as the Ring of Fire, where the Pacific plate meets surrounding tectonic plates. One of the country's active volcanoes, Popocatepetl, located just 70 kilometers from the capital, rattled nerves in May when it spewed ash, gases and molten rock.—AFP

People play football on a field at the Teoca volcano crater in the town of Santa Cecilia Tepetlapa, on the outskirts of Mexico City.



'Like a mirror': Most reflective planet identified

A scorching hot world where metal clouds rain drops of titanium is the most reflective planet ever observed outside of our Solar System, astronomers said on Monday. This strange world, which is more than 260 light years from Earth, reflects 80 percent of the light from its host star, according to new observations from Europe's exoplanet-probing Cheops space telescope. That makes it the first exoplanet comparably shiny as Venus, which is the brightest object in our night sky other than the Moon. First discovered in 2020, the Neptune-sized planet called LTT9779b orbits its star in just 19 hours. Because it is so close, the side of the planet facing its star is a sizzling 2,000 degrees Celsius, which is considered far too hot for clouds to form. Yet LTT9779b seems to have them. "It was really a puzzle," said Vivien Parmentier, a researcher at France's Cote d'Azur Observatory and co-author of a new study in the journal *Astronomy and Astrophysics*.



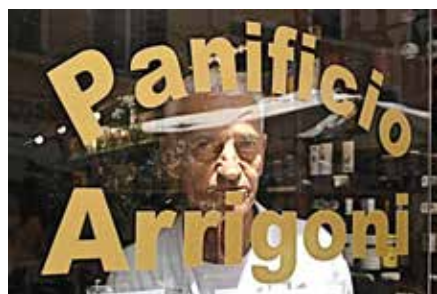
This handout image released by the European Space Agency (ESA) shows an artist impression of exoplanet LTT9779b orbiting its host star.—AFP

The researchers then "realized we should think about this cloud formation in the same way as condensation forming in a bathroom after a hot shower," he said in a statement. Like running hot water steams up a bathroom, a scorching stream of metal and silicate — the stuff of which glass is made — oversaturated LTT9779b's atmosphere until metallic clouds formed, he said.

The planet, which is around five times the size of Earth, is an outlier in other ways. The only exoplanets previously found that orbit their stars in less than 24 hours are either gas giants 10 times bigger than Earth — or rocky planets half its size.—AFP

Rome's historic bakery to the popes closes

The Arrigoni bakery has made bread for the popes for almost a century, from rosetta rolls to wholewheat loaves—but mass tourism has proved deadly and no prayers can save it now. "We turned the oven off on Tuesday," said Angelo Arrigoni, 79, whose father opened the little shop in 1930 during Pius XI's papacy, and who would hand-deliver bread to the papal household.



Angelo Arrigoni owner of the historic bakery that has supplied bread to the Pope looks through the window of his bakery, in the Borgo Pio district, adjacent to the Vatican, in Rome.—AFP photos

Each time a new head of the Catholic Church was elected, the "Panificio Arrigoni" on Borgo Pio, just a five-minute walk from St Peter's Square, would get ready to cater to the new pope's tastes. Polish Pope John Paul II, elected

in 1978, "said he wanted the bread his workers ate", Arrigoni said.

"The workers ate both the 'ciriola', that big, classic Roman loaf that hardly anyone makes anymore, and rosetta rolls," he told AFP. "So for his whole papacy, which lasted almost 27 years, we gave him five 'ciriola' and five rosetta rolls." When his successor Benedict XVI was elected, Arrigoni rang the papal household but was told by a nun that the new German pope would be sticking with the baker he frequented as a cardinal. "But I am that baker!" he told her, for Benedict had already been getting cheese and unleavened bread from him as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

'Piece of history'

Pope Francis has also been served by Arrigoni—but will now need to look elsewhere for his daily bread, after the baker found himself squeezed by a drop in loyal local customers and steep energy prices. "The district has changed," he said.

"All the houses that used to be full of people have become rentals for tourists," most of whom do not do a daily shop for basics, but prefer to eat out in the Eternal City's restaurants. News that the premises have been sold has saddened Arrigoni's remaining regular customers. Tourist



Nuns walk past the historic bakery that has supplied bread to the Pope, owned by Angelo Arrigoni.

guide Francesca Pantusa took her time eating her last sandwich, prepared with care by Arrigoni.

"In Borgo Pio, there are only tourist restaurants... whereas here you can find good products, at the right price and with Angelo who is incredible—kind, friendly... it makes me want to cry", she said. The bakery stood out on the street, particularly for the lack of tourist-friendly tables outside—a sore subject with Arrigoni, after he tried and failed to convince the council to give him permission.

Vatican reporter Iacopo Scaramuzzi slammed the council on Twitter, asking why a city "drunk with nostalgia was unable to preserve its heritage" and save "the popes' baker... a piece of Vatican history".—AFP



Angelo Arrigoni owner of the historic bakery prepares to cut a loaf of bread.



Angelo Arrigoni (right) owner of the historic bakery that has supplied bread to the Pope serves a customer, in the Borgo Pio district.



Angelo Arrigoni stands in the breadmaking laboratory of his bakery.

'Orange like the sun': Visitors flock to Iceland volcano



People watch flowing lava during a volcanic eruption near Litli Hrutur, south-west of Reykjavik in Iceland.

Despite warnings to stay away from Iceland's latest volcanic eruption near Reykjavik, a group of curious visitors told AFP they couldn't resist the lure of lava that is "orange like the sun". While volcanologists say the eruption remains "low intensity" for now, initial estimates indicate that its flow is significantly more powerful than the two previous eruptions in 2021 and 2022 on the Reykjanes peninsula. "When the wind is coming in this direction, it's not so hot... it's warm like a campfire," said Niall Lynch, a 23-year-old Irish guide AFP met in front of the fresh lava flows next to the small peak of Litli Hrutur.



This aerial photograph shows flowing lava during a volcanic eruption near Litli Hrutur, south-west of Reykjavik in Iceland.

in the last two years. The eruptive faults reached a total size of around 900 meters overnight, compared with 200 to 300 meters initially, according to the latest update from the Icelandic Meteorolo-

logical Office (IMO) Tuesday. "Dangerously high" levels of volcanic gases, particularly sulphur dioxide, will accumulate close to the eruption, warned the IMO, which advised tourists not to visit the area. Access to the site was closed on Monday evening.

During the six months of the March 2021 eruption, and the three weeks of the August 2022 eruption, hundreds of thousands of visitors came to admire the hypnotic spectacle of lava on the outskirts of Mount Fagradalsfjall and the Meradalir and Geldingadalir valleys.

Unlike explosive eruptions that spew out thousands of tons of dust, such as the famous Eyjafjallajokull eruption that paralyzed air traffic in Europe in 2010, so-called "effusive" eruptions have little impact, apart from lava flows and locally toxic gas spikes.

Big barbecue

The handful of visitors who managed to reach the site before it was closed describe it as the experience of a lifetime. From the nearest road, you have to traverse a challenging path, the last three winding kilometers of which are through moss and rocks embedded in the soil.

When the lava finally comes into view, with the tiny Litli Hrutur ("Little Ram" in Icelandic) mountain on the left, the feeling is "in-describable", said Jessica Poteet, a 41-year-old American.

"When you look in the centre of the lava flow, it's a lot brighter than I was expecting it to be," Lynch said. "I was thinking a lot more like the darker colours of blacks and browns, like the rock when it starts to solidify. But right in the centre it's pure orange like the sun. It's

But on the other side of the fissure, the gas released by the eruption makes the area "unbearably hot". "It's much too hot to stay there for any extended amount of time. I mean it's like 1,000 degrees Celsius (1,800 degrees Fahrenheit)," he added.

The uninhabited area 30 kilometers southwest of the capital had been dormant for eight centuries but has experienced a resurgence of volcanic activity

can living in Iceland. "When you cross the hill for the first time, especially when it's the first day, and you see the fountains of lava and you hear the crackling of the solidified rock, it's just unbelievable," she added. Gudmundur Hauksson, a 26-year-old Icelandic who was also among the first there, said "it's really nice... to come out and connect with the Earth and nature in this fashion."

The powerful smell of volcanic gases and flowing lava is reminiscent of "a big barbecue", according to some visitors. The air is also thick with the smoke of burning moss, which ignites under the molten liquid.

Volcanologist Thorvaldur Thordarson of the University of Iceland said "we have no idea" how long the natural spectacle will last. "It could last for a few days, it could last for a month, it could last for six months like the 2021 eruption or it could even last longer than that." — AFP



This aerial photo shows smoke billowing from flowing lava during a volcanic eruption at Litli Hrutur, south-west of Reykjavik in Iceland.



This aerial photograph shows smoke billowing from flowing lava during a volcanic eruption near Litli Hrutur, south-west of Reykjavik in Iceland. — AFP photos



University of Iceland's observers stand in front of smoke billowing from flowing lava during a volcanic eruption near Litli Hrutur, south-west of Reykjavik in Iceland.



This picture shows smoke billowing from flowing lava during a volcanic eruption at Litli Hrutur, south-west of Reykjavik in Iceland.



This picture shows a man taking a picture of flowing lava during a volcanic eruption at Litli Hrutur, south-west of Reykjavik in Iceland.



Sports

Australia, New Zealand revive 'football's Ashes'

Long-forgotten trophy rediscovered almost 70 years after lost

SYDNEY: Australia and New Zealand will play this year for the "Soccer Ashes", sporting officials said Tuesday, a long-forgotten trophy recently rediscovered almost 70 years after it was lost. The ornate wooden trophy houses a silver razor case carried during the treacherous Gallipoli landing of World War I, and has been dubbed the "greatest domestic treasure" in Australian football. Missing since a fixture in 1954, the trophy was rediscovered during a clean-out of a suburban Sydney garage earlier this year.

Reminiscent of the celebrated Ashes cricket urn, it contains the ashes of cigars smoked by the Australian and New Zealand captains after the rivals met

in 1923. It will be put on the line for the first time in 69 years when the Australian Socceroos square off against the New Zealand All Whites at London's Wembley Stadium in October.

"This is a truly historic trophy and it will be brilliant to see it played for this year, and in future years, for the first time since the 1950s," New Zealand Football boss Andrew Pragnell said. Football Australia chief executive James Johnson said the trophy was a "wonderful piece of sporting history" that highlighted the deep Anzac military connection between the countries. "When discussing the significance of the trophy and the story behind it, returning it to its rightful place as

the prize the Socceroos and All Whites play for was an easy decision."

The wooden trophy, or casket, was built from a mix of Australian maple wood and New Zealand honeysuckle, while the silver razor case was carried during the Gallipoli landing in 1915 by Private William Fisher - a football administrator. "This is quite possibly the greatest domestic treasure there is in the game," football historian Trevor Thompson said earlier this year. "It's packed with so much imagery about the unity of the two countries, and the razor case that had been to Gallipoli referenced the recent experience of fighting shoulder to shoulder during the First World War." — AFP



SYDNEY: This handout image released by the Football Australia shows the century-old Australia and New Zealand 'ANZAC Soccer Ashes' trophy, that was last sighted in 1954, in Sydney. — AFP

News in Brief

Kuwait fencers win medals

ALGIERS: Kuwaiti fencers on Monday grabbed two medals: one silver and one bronze, of the Epee competition in the Algeria-hosted Arab Games. Fencers Hussein Foudry won the silver medal in the Men's Epee contest and his compatriot Abdulaziz Al-Shatti got the bronze medal of the same competition. This takes Kuwait's medals tally up to eight medals: four silver and four bronze, since the start of the Arab Games on July 5th. — KUNA

Getafe must face Barca

BARCELONA: Getafe will face champions Barcelona without supporters at home in the first match of the new La Liga season after being punished for a pitch invasion in 2017. Spain's Supreme Court, the country's highest judicial body, overturned a decision from the National Court to annul the sanction, in a document seen by AFP on Tuesday. Getafe supporters invaded the pitch at the Madrid club's Coliseum Alfonso Perez stadium after beating Tenerife to earn promotion to La Liga six years ago, provoking opposition supporters and forcing the match officials to run to their dressing room. The visit of Barcelona is one of the most lucrative fixtures of the season for Getafe, but president Angel Torres said he was sad for the supporters. "If what they want is to punish our fans, we will have no choice but to accept it," Torres told AS on Monday. "I feel more sorry for our fans than for the club's finances." — AFP

Anti-harassment policy

MEXICO CITY: The Mexican Football Federation and Liga MX league announced on Monday the creation of a new set of guidelines to prevent and punish sexual harassment and other discrimination in football. "We are presenting a document that will be a roadmap when we talk about non-negotiable concepts on a day-to-day basis such as respect, tolerance and inclusion," said Mikel Arriola, president of Liga MX. The FMF and Liga MX urged the top division's 18 teams to adopt the protocol within six months. The code of conduct specifically prohibits sexual harassment and the harassment of women and people from the LGBTQ community, who are often targets of abuse. The new protocol identifies three different types of sexual and other harassment: physical, including unwanted kisses and touching; verbal, including offensive comments or jokes; and non-verbal, which concerns whistling, leering and inappropriate behavior on social media. — AFP

Brazil football brawl

SAO PAULO: A 23-year-old woman died Monday after a glass bottle severed her jugular vein in a brawl between fans of two Brazilian football clubs in Sao Paulo over the weekend, her family said. Gabriela Anelli's brother Felipe announced her death on Instagram, thanking well-wishers for their prayers since she was hospitalized Saturday after being hurt in a fight between supporters of her favorite club, Palmeiras, and visiting rivals Flamengo. The altercation took place outside the Allianz Parque stadium where the two teams were playing a match, according to police. Anelli was near a fan zone where Palmeiras supporters were eating and drinking when passing Flamengo supporters started hurling stones and glass bottles in their direction, said Cesar Saad, a police official who specializes in sports-related crimes. She was hit and her jugular vein was cut, he told the Canal do Benja YouTube channel, adding that the Flamengo supporter who threw the bottle was arrested and has admitted guilt. — AFP

Guerrero joins dad as MLB Home Run Derby winner

LOS ANGELES: Toronto Blue Jays first baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr edged Tampa Bay's Randy Arozarena to win Monday's Major League Baseball Home Run Derby, blasting a final-round record 25 homers. The 24-year-old slugger, whose father Vladimir Guerrero Sr. won the 2007 Derby title, captured the \$1 million top prize by beating Arozarena 25-23 in the final. "My family are the ones who pushed me to do this and this is for them," Guerrero Jr. said. "I'm just very happy to be in this moment right now."

The \$2.5 million slugger showdown came on the eve of the 93rd MLB All-Star Game in Seattle between elite talent from the American League and National League. "What a performance! Proud of you son," Guerrero Sr. tweeted moments after the triumph was secured. Due to seedings, Guerrero Jr. batted last in the semi-finals and first in the final, giving him only minimal rest to try and smash balls over the outfield wall with the title at stake.

But Guerrero Jr. blasted 25 homers, two more than the old final-round mark set by Pete Alonso in 2019 when he edged Guerrero Jr 23-22. Arozarena, who hadn't swung on the field in 45 minutes, came to the plate and missed on his first six swings but hit nine homers in the first minute and had 21 with 30 seconds remaining. But the 28-year-old outfielder managed two more to give Guerrero Jr the trophy. "I felt good," Guerrero Jr said. "I thought the pressure was on him and if he did it, he did it. But I was able to come through."

Guerrero Jr. beat 22-year-old Seattle outfielder Julio Rodriguez, last year's runner-up, by 21-20, in an



SEATTLE: Vladimir Guerrero Jr #27 of the Toronto Blue Jays poses for photos with teammates Bo Bichette, Jordan Romano, and Manager John Schneider after winning the T-Mobile Home Run Derby at T-Mobile Park on July 10, 2023. — AFP

all-Dominican semi-final. Arozarena defeated top seed Luis Robert Jr of the Chicago White Sox 35-22 in a semi-final duel of Cuban outfielders. Rodriguez set the overall one-round record for homers in eliminating two-time champion Pete Alonso of the New York Mets 41-21 in a first-round rematch of last year's semi-final, where "J-Rod" ousted the two-time defending champion.

Rodriguez smashed the first three pitches he saw for homers, and did the same with 14 of the first 20 on

the way to breaking the record of 40 set by Guerrero Jr. in the second round in 2019. "That's a nice number," Rodriguez said of his record total. Guerrero Jr awaited him in the semis after defeating third-seeded Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder Mookie Betts 26-11. In the other first-round matchups, Robert eliminated Baltimore catcher Adley Rutschman 28-27 and Arozarena beat Texas outfielder Adolis Garcia 24-17 in a duel of Cuban pals. Last year's winner, San Diego's Juan Soto, did not compete. — AFP

Kuwait Special Olympics team praised

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Head of the Disabled Friends team, Dr Essa Al-Jassim, lauded the achievements of Kuwait Special Olympics at the World Games Berlin 2023 as achievements that surpassed expectations. Tomooh Sports Club provides the best services and opportunities for the mentally challenged, especially in the sports field, by forming a distinguished base of athletes. These athletes have succeeded in presenting an honorable image for Ku-

waiti disabled sports locally, regionally, and internationally.

Dr Essa Al-Jassim addressed a meeting during a visit to Tomooh Club along with the Head of Young Fighters Academy, Dr Talya Al-Khalil (from Iraq), and the Deputy Director of Educational Inclusion at Al-Najat Charity Schools, Dr Fatima Abdellatif Al-Dhafiri. National Director of Kuwait Special Olympics Rihab Buresli congratulated Dr Essa Al-Jassim for taking over as head of the Disabled Friends team and lauded his contributions in support of disabled issues. She also welcomed Dr Talya Al-Khalil to Kuwait and presented the club's programs and activities to develop disabled sports, support their athletic, psychological, and health abilities, include them in society, and qualify them to effectively participate in the country's development.



Dr Essa Al-Jassim, on his part, lauded Tomooh Club's efforts in saving much time and establishing a new stage of integrated care in athletics, social, and health for children who

are mentally challenged and called for support to enable the club to continue their successful march. The meeting was also attended by the executive director of Tomooh Sports Club.

Wembanyama has 27 points, 12 rebounds in loss

LAS VEGAS: Victor Wembanyama, the NBA's top draft pick, showed improvement in his second game with San Antonio, scoring 27 points in an 85-80 NBA Summer League loss to Portland. The 19-year-old French center, who stands 7-foot-4 (2.24m), has been hyped as the NBA's best prospect since LeBron James 20 years ago, but had received a wake-up call in his first game against NBA talent.

This time, though, Wembanyama grabbed a game-high 12 rebounds, blocked three shots and made a steal in just under 27 minutes on the court. "It's just me getting comfortable with myself and my body," he said. "Before today I had two practices and one game. I was just getting going. "It's normal to get better every game. I had so much stuff

going on with the draft and the game, so it makes sense." Wembanyama sank 9-of-14 shots from the floor, 2-of-4 from 3-point range, and 7-of-12 from the free throw line.

"He was a tough matchup for us," said Portland guard Michael Devoe, who scored a game-high 29 points. "We just wanted to be physical with him and try to make him make tough shots over us. He did a great job but I think defensively we did a great job too." In his debut on Friday, Wembanyama struggled with nine points, eight rebounds, five blocked shots and three assists in just over 27 minutes as the Spurs beat Charlotte 76-68. He made only 2-of-13 shots from the floor and just 1-of-6 from 3-point range.

"In the past month I don't think basketball was 50% of my schedule," Wembanyama said. "I can't stand it. I know it's a special moment in my life but I'm glad it's over. "I just want to hoop, work out, lift, because this is my life. It just makes me better for the future." Against the Trail Blazers, Wembanyama looked more comfortable with the Spurs offensive schemes, something he said was a problem in his first game, and was able to make dunks and grab attacking rebounds. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: Portland Trail Blazers' Ibou Badji (left) fails to block a point by San Antonio Spurs' Victor Wembanyama during the NBA Summer League game between the San Antonio Spurs and Portland Trail Blazers, at the Thomas and Mack Center in Las Vegas. — AFP

India aiming to pile on the 21-year Test misery for Windies

ROSEAU: India attempt to extend West Indies' 21 years of misery when they meet in the lush tropical setting of Windsor Park Stadium in Dominica on Wednesday in the first match of a two-Test series. Rocked by the failure of the two-time winners to qualify for the World Cup in India in October-November this year, the Caribbean cricket community is unlikely to find solace in the shape of Kraig

Brathwaite's Test side. The West Indies last won a Test match against India back in 2002. This brief series, which ends in Trinidad the following week in what will be the 100th Test between the two teams, marks the start of the next two-year World Test Championship cycle leading to the final in 2025.

Beaten by New Zealand in the inaugural final in 2021 and then outplayed by Australia in the 2023 decider just four weeks ago, Rohit Sharma's team is likely to show no more than three changes from the side that lost the new Test cricket showpiece by 209 runs at The Oval. With veteran batsman Cheteshwar Pujara dropped and pacer Mohammed Shami

rested, there are now opportunities for either of the uncapped Yashviji Jaiswal or Ruturaj Gaikwad to make the number three spot their own while it will be a toss-up between Jaydev Unadkat and Navdeep Saini to fill the breach in the fast bowling department.

Spinning all-rounder Ravichandran Ashwin, unlucky to have been omitted from last month's duel with Australia, should have the chance to add to his already impressive record against the West Indies. In 11 Tests against these opponents he has taken 60 wickets and compiled four of his five Test centuries in averaging just over 50 with the bat. India will also look for runs from recalled

Ajinkya Rahane, the vice-captain who made 89 and 46 in the loss to Australia after a two-year absence.

"I'm still young and there's a lot of cricket left in me," the 35-year-old told cricinfo.com. "In the last year or so, I've worked a lot on my fitness. There were a few points in my batting that I've worked on. I'm enjoying my cricket a lot." As consolation as they may be by the West Indies' failure to advance to the World Cup, fans in Dominica are anticipating that one of their own, 24-year-old Alick Athanaze, will make his Test debut in the series opener in the middle-order in place of fellow left-hander Kyle Mayers.

While Mayers has been ruled out of

contention due to niggling injuries, two other players who were part of the West Indies' abysmal World Cup qualifying campaign in Zimbabwe - all-rounder Jason Holder and fast bowler Alzarri Joseph - are expected to shoulder much of the responsibility to quell the threat of a formidable India batting line-up. Senior pacer Kemar Roach will still lead the attack though, while the decision on whether or not to go with two specialist spinners in Jomel Warrican and the recalled Rakheem Cornwall or opt for the raw pace but questionable fitness of Shannon Gabriel will be determined by the appearance of the pitch on Wednesday morning. — AFP

Sports

Revolt, missing stars hurt Spain's World Cup title bid

Protesting players omitted for friendlies

BARCELONA: Spain should be among the favorites for the Women's World Cup but without several key players because of a dispute they are taking the hard path. La Roja will still be a threat in Australia and New Zealand this month, but they are undoubtedly weaker for the absences of stars protesting against the Spanish football federation (RFEF) and coach Jorge Vilda. Patri Guijarro, who struck twice for Barcelona as they won the Champions League, and club team-mates Mapi Leon and Sandra Panos are big misses, even as two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas returns after injury.

Three players who were part of a 15-strong protesting group have been selected—Aitana Bonmati, Mariona Caldentey and Ona Batlle, all at Barcelona too. They stepped down from their position, ostensibly satisfied that sufficient improvements were being made in the areas the players demanded. Discontent between players on the one side, and the RFEF and Vilda on the other, had been brewing for some time.

Issues they were concerned about included the atmosphere around the camp, Vilda being too strict, the team's lack of success under the coach since his reign started in 2015, and disputes over travel

arrangements and staff numbers. In September 2022 the situation exploded - 15 of the squad emailed the RFEF to say they did not want to be considered for selection citing their "emotional state". "This is a farce, on the world stage," said Vilda at the time. "It's hurting women's football."

'Practically resolved'

The RFEF backed the coach and he omitted the protesting players for friendlies against Sweden and the United States in October, which Spain drew and won respectively. Victory over world champions the United States strengthened Vilda's position as lesser lights and younger players showed their quality.

Two further friendly wins, including a 7-0 trouncing of Argentina, cemented Spain's conviction they had made the right decision to back the coach. Spain have lost just one game in 11 matches since the protest began, recording nine victories. Vilda named a provisional squad for the World Cup in early June with Bonmati, Caldentey and Batlle returning. The other 12 players either stayed firm in their stance or not selected despite making themselves available again.

The coach maintained his loyalty to many of the players he had turned to in

the interim. "We've always been looking to solve this conflict and it's practically resolved," said Vilda. "We're focused on the players who are committed." The star midfielder Putellas, who had backed the complaints but did not join the boycott because of a long-term knee injury, was included in the squad. The coach confirmed his final list for the tournament on June 30.

'We are not rebels'

The RFEF has improved the players' travel arrangements, extra fitness staff and physios are available, and the players are less tightly monitored during call-ups. However, some did not think the RFEF went far enough. "It makes me sad as I deserve (to go) and I contributed to getting the team there," said Mapi Leon in May, reiterating why she was continuing her protest.

"It's not a decision that you take lightly and it's not easy. My decision is clear. Mapi Leon has a way of living and she has values to stick to. "I can't go back, there has to be changes." Spanish reports suggested Barcelona's Putellas acted as a mediator between the returning players and the RFEF, and although she is not the team's captain,



Spain's midfielder Patri Guijarro

she is their footballing leader.

Putellas did not like the tag of "rebels" some gave the 15 boycotting players. "We are not rebels," she said in March. "It's exhausting having to constantly call for improvements to perform better." With the double Ballon d'Or winner back

in the team, Spain believe a first World Cup triumph is possible, even if they are missing other stars and bitterness lingers. "We are sixth in the world rankings," said Vilda. "Spain has never had such a complete side with such good chances, we want the World Cup to start." —AFP

Fukushima-born Endo ready to run free for Japan at World Cup

TOKYO: Jun Endo wasn't allowed to play football outside after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster because of radiation fears, so she honed her dribbling skills in a cramped indoor hall instead. Japan's Women's World Cup win that year inspired her to keep going and now the forward is carrying her country's hopes into this month's tournament in Australia and New Zealand. "I couldn't play football because of the effects of the disaster, but just when I was thinking of quitting, Japan won the World Cup," the 23-year-old told AFP. "I watched that and I strongly felt that I wanted to be standing in that position one day too."

Endo grew up about 100 kilometers from Fukushima's Daiichi nuclear plant and was 10 years old when the deadly tsunami overwhelmed its cooling systems, triggering a meltdown. About 165,000 people fled their homes in the area, either voluntarily or under evacuation orders, in the worst nuclear catastrophe since Chernobyl. Endo's family lived outside the evacuation zone and stayed put, but radiation regulations at her school meant outdoor play was strictly limited for months after the disaster. Endo had to

share the same small indoor hall with the other kids but she says it had "a good impact" on her control of a football. "I liked dribbling before then but I began to like it even more during that time," she said. "My technique developed a lot and in terms of what came out of it, it was really good."

Endo says it was difficult to deal with the loss of freedom and she thought about giving up football. Rare visits to other parts of Japan to play games brought relief but also pain - she and her team-mates faced discrimination from opposing players who treated them like they were radioactive. "People would say nasty things to us when we were away on football tours," she said. "Then there were people who didn't want to eat or buy things that were grown in Fukushima and had the name Fukushima on them."

'Turning point'

A moment of respite came when Japan upset the odds to win the Women's World Cup in Germany that summer, beating the United States in the final to become national heroes. Endo recalls getting up in the middle of the night to watch the match with her parents and three siblings, describing it as "a turning point" in her life. "I had felt the fun going out of football, so to see players doing what I wanted to do - winning the World Cup - it had a really positive impact on me," she said.

"It gave me strength." Endo now plays her club



HARRISON: Jun Endo of Angel City FC warms up before the game. — AFP

football for Angel City FC in the United States, having left Japan's domestic league at the end of 2021. She has become a key figure for her country, after appearing in three of Japan's four games at the 2019 World Cup as the squad's youngest player. Japan have fallen behind the world's leading sides since winning the World Cup and did not progress past the last 16 in France four years ago. They have been drawn in Group C alongside Spain, Zambia and Costa Rica for this year's tournament. — AFP

Things learned from British GP

SILVERSTONE: Max Verstappen is strolling towards a third drivers' world title with metronomic consistency, but there is no driver, or team, emerging as a serious rival to his and Red Bull's current domination of Formula One. After a record-equalling 11th consecutive win, the last six from the 25-year-old Dutchman, Red Bull could move a win clear of McLaren's 1988 record if they succeed again in Hungary later this month - with, or without, Sergio Perez in the second car. AFP Sport looks at three things we learned from an intriguing, if not dramatic, weekend at Silverstone:

Perez must recover

After his fifth consecutive failure to reach Q3, Perez's seat at Red Bull is under threat as the champions bid for back-to-back team titles. Verstappen dropped several hints over the weekend that a change might be afoot, suggesting he is presently doing all the serious work himself and praising the talent of Ricciardo. The Australian is midway

through a 'year out' of racing, knows the team well as a former driver and is keen to return next year. For Perez, inconveniently, he is on good terms with the Dutchman.

Speaking before his 43rd career win on Sunday, Verstappen stingingly remarked: "Obviously, we are also fighting for the constructors' championship, but I think I'm going to have to do that on my own at the moment..." Asked about Ricciardo he said: "Daniel is doing a good job in the simulator, which doesn't surprise me because he hasn't lost his talent. I think he's comfortable with us." After Sunday's race, he pointed out that, for now, Red Bull are seemingly unchallenged thus allowing Perez to retain his place in the team and the title race.

Lando Norris's second for McLaren ahead of Mercedes seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton represented another different runner-up driver and team in an ever-changing scenario that has seen Ferrari, Aston Martin and Mercedes regarded as the leading challengers. "It's very confusing to me because every single race weekend, it's someone else," said Verstappen after his eighth win this year. "I think it's because it's so close behind that if you get your car in a little bit of a better win-



SILVERSTONE: Winner Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen holding the trophy reacts as second placed McLaren's British driver Lando Norris sprays at him during the podium ceremony for the Formula One British Grand Prix at the Silverstone motor racing circuit. —AFP

now, it works on one particular track. "So, for me, I don't know what's going to happen in Hungary to be honest, who is going to be quick or second-quickest, but the stable factor so far is that every single weekend, it seems like we are

on top, which of course is the most important..." Verstappen became the fifth driver to win six straight races, joining Alberto Ascari, Michael Schumacher, Sebastian Vettel and Nico Rosberg in an exclusive hall of fame. — AFP

USA ex-Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar stabbed in prison

MIAMI: Larry Nassar, the former USA Gymnastics team doctor convicted of sexually assaulting hundreds of athletes, was in stable condition Monday after being stabbed multiple times by another inmate, a prison union official said. Nassar, 59, was attacked on Sunday afternoon at the federal USP Coleman II prison in Sumterville, Florida, where he is serving his sentence, Joe Rojas, the president of the local correctional officers union, told AFP.

The disgraced physician was stabbed twice in the neck, six times in the chest and twice in the back, Rojas said. "He's in stable condition last I heard," Rojas said. Nassar pleaded guilty in late 2017 and early 2018 to sexually assaulting athletes while working as a sports medicine doctor at USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University and was sentenced to up to 175 years in prison. Hundreds of women - including Olympic gold medalists Simone Biles, Aly Raisman and McKayla Maroney - have accused Nassar of sexually abusing them during his career of more than two decades.

The Bureau of Prisons (BoP) declined to confirm for "privacy" reasons that Nassar had been attacked but in response to a query about him said "an inmate" had been assaulted at 2:35 pm on Sunday at the Coleman prison and taken to a local hospital. "Responding staff immediately initiated life-saving measures," the BoP said in a statement. "Staff requested emergency medical services and life-saving efforts continued." "The Federal Bureau of Investigation was notified," the BoP said, and an "internal investigation is ongoing."

Nassar's victims reached a \$380 million settlement with USA Gymnastics in 2021, one of the largest ever recorded for victims of sex abuse. USA Gymnastics filed for bankruptcy in 2018 after a tidal wave of allegations against Nassar swamped the organization. Michigan State University reached a \$500 million settlement with hundreds of Nassar's victims in 2018. The prison where Nassar is serving his sentence is a high security facility and currently houses 1,214 male offenders, according to the BoP. Rojas, the prison union official, said the penitentiary is currently experiencing a "severe staffing crisis." —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000

Physiotherapy Hospital 24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507

Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name

I, **Kalamarala Subbaiah**, holder of Indian Passport No. M2310696, having permanent address 3-40-2-7, Vasavi Nagar, Kadiri, Sri Sathya Sai, Pin - 515591, Andhra Pradesh, India residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name: **Mahmoud** and surname: **Sunkara. (C#3826) 12/07/2023**

I, **Safdar Faruq Ahmed**, holder of Indian Passport No. W778014, having permanent address at PO Aarshi Shriwardhan Dist-Raigad, Maharash-

tra, India, Pin code 402110, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name: **Safdar Faruq Ahmed** and surname: **Khamkar.**

Thiru L. Mukilarasan (Hindu), Son of Thiru B. Lingesan, born on 1st July 1987 (District of Birth: Chennai), residing at No. 7, New No. 10, R O B, 7th Street, Halls Garden, Royapettah, Chennai- 600014, has converted to Islam with the name of **L. Abdul Rahman** on 5th May, 2023. **L. Mukilarasan. (C#3827) 11/07/2023**

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Svitolina, Vondrousova book semis

Rune cruises into Wimbledon quarters, 'not afraid' to face Alcaraz



WIMBLEDON: Czech Republic's Marketa Vondrousova (right) shakes hands with US player Jessica Pegula after winning their women's singles quarter-finals tennis match on the ninth day of the 2023 Wimbledon Championships on July 11, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Ukraine's Elina Svitolina stunned world number one Iga Swiatek to reach the Wimbledon semi-finals on Tuesday, just three months after returning from maternity leave. The world number 76 came through 7-5, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 despite being a break down in both of the first two sets against the reigning US Open and French Open champion. Svitolina, also a semi-finalist in 2019, will take on Marketa Vondrousova of the Czech Republic for a place in Saturday's championship match.

Also, unseeded Marketa Vondrousova beat fourth seed Jessica Pegula in a topsy-turvy match to reach the Wimbledon semi-finals on Tuesday. The Czech player, ranked 42 in the world, clawed her way back from 4-1 down in the deciding set to win 6-4, 2-6, 6-4. Pegula was quickly out of the blocks, breaking the former French Open finalist at her first opportunity but that proved a false dawn as she lost three service games in the first set, landing just 41 percent of her first serves.

The American, 29, found more rhythm on her serve in the second set and cut her error count, surging into a 4-1 lead and sealing the set with her second

break. Pegula was in total charge when she broke again in the fourth game of the decider to lead 3-1 before the match was suspended for the roof to be closed due to rain at the All England Club. She held serve when play resumed to take a 4-1 lead but the 24-year-old Czech, who had never previously never been beyond the second round at Wimbledon, dug deep to pull level. Pegula faced a real struggle on her serve in the following game and sprayed a forehand long to hand Vondrousova a vital break and she took full advantage.

Meanwhile, Holger Rune became the first Danish man in 65 years to reach the Wimbledon quarter-finals and insisted he is "not afraid" to face anybody, even world number one and close friend Carlos Alcaraz. World number six Rune came back from a set and a break down to defeat Grigor Dimitrov 3-6, 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/4), 6-3. He will next take Alcaraz in the last eight after the top defeated 2021 runner-up

Matteo Berrettini in his fourth-round clash.

"I am not afraid, I am excited," said Rune, who was supported on Court One by Denmark's Crown Prince Frederik. Rune is just seven days older than Alcaraz and they have been friends since their junior days. When they were 12, they even played doubles and reached the semi-finals of a boys event. "I think he's the same, just so much better now. I think back then he was Carlos, now he's still Carlos," said Rune. "He's the same, just improved a lot and very quickly." Rune hopes one day they can play doubles again even if they may get in each other's way.

"When a singles player plays doubles, they want to cover the court by themselves. We both try and did that a little bit, which is fun. "Again, it was good, because he's amazing." As professionals on the ATP Tour, they have met just twice. Alcaraz came out on top at the 2021 NextGen Finals before the Dane gained revenge at the Paris Masters last year when his rival retired from their quarter-final with an injury. "I remember I first saw Holger when we were 12," said US Open champion Alcaraz. "So I'm really excited about this match."

Rune, already a two-time quarter-finalist at the French Open, had been just two points from defeat in the previous round before seeing off Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in five sets. On Monday, Dimitrov, the 24th-ranked Bulgarian who made the semi-finals in 2014, pocketed the first set after carving out a key break in the eighth game. The veteran was a break ahead early in the second set, which 20-year-old Rune retrieved in the eighth game.

He leveled the match in the tiebreak. After securing the third set, also on a tiebreak, Rune broke for 4-2 in the fourth courtesy of back-to-back double faults by Dimitrov. Rune wrapped up the match, becoming the first Dane since Kurt Nielsen in 1958 to make the quarter-finals when Dimitrov pushed a weary backhand wide. "Grigor is an amazing player, he pushed me to the limit," said Rune after a performance in which he fired 11 aces and 46 winners in total. "It was a crazy match, tough and long. But I always fight to the end. "I kept telling myself that Wimbledon is only once a year and that I have to fight to have any chance of winning." — AFP

Sabalenka wants shield from 'hate'

LONDON: Women's tennis chiefs on Monday pleaded with spectators to show "understanding and respect" when Ukraine players refuse to shake hands with Russian and Belarusian opponents in protest at the ongoing war in their country. The WTA, which runs the women's game, became the first governing body to acknowledge demands that they publically explain the reasons for the stance. Earlier on Monday, Aryna Sabalenka backed Elina Svitolina's call for officials to respond to help shield players from "so much hate".

Victoria Azarenka, from Belarus, was booed off court following her defeat by Ukraine's Svitolina at Wimbledon on Sunday. As has become common, Svitolina did not shake hands with Azarenka in protest over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Belarus is a key military ally of Moscow. Azarenka, who held her hand up in the direction of Svitolina, seemingly in a gesture of respect, left the court to a chorus of boos from some sections of the crowd. The two-time Australian Open champion said her treatment "wasn't fair".

"I thought it was a great tennis match," she added.



WIMBLEDON: Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova serves the ball to Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka during their women's singles tennis match on the eighth day of the 2023 Wimbledon Championships. — AFP

"If people are going to be focusing only on handshakes or the crowd, quite drunk crowd, booing in the end, that's a shame." Svitolina and her fellow Ukraine players all refused to shake hands with Russians and Belarusians at the recent French Open. She called on the sport's governing bodies to explain the position of Ukraine players. "I don't know if it's maybe not clear for people, some people not really knowing what is happening," she said. "So I think this is the right (thing) to do."

Belarusian second seed Sabalenka, who beat Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova on Monday to reach the quarter-finals, backed Svitolina's call. "As Elina said, I think someone has to come out on social media with the announcement that there is not going to be a handshake so players will not leave the court with so much hate," she said. "It would be good for the crowd to actually know what's going on. There is a reason behind no handshake."

Hours later the WTA, describing the war as "rep-rensible", said they respected the position of the Ukrainian players as it is a "personal decision". "We have some of the best fans in the world and are grateful for their passion and dedication, and we thank them for their understanding and respect for the athletes," they said in a statement. Men's third seed Daniil Med-

vedev said it was a "pity" that Azarenka was booed. The Russian added: "I think the people didn't know the story behind it, and that's why it happened."

Personal decision

All England Club chief executive Sally Bolton said Wimbledon had no plans to issue a statement. "Historically in tennis the decision on how a player reacts at the end of a match is entirely a personal decision for them and I think we don't really want to start mandating what happens," she said. "I think we have an incredibly knowledgeable audience at Wimbledon and I think in most part they would understand what was happening." She admitted it is impossible to control the crowd, calling for the sporting action to be centre stage.

There are four players in the quarter-finals at Wimbledon who are representing Russia or Belarus, a year after athletes from the two nations were banned by the All England Club. Bolton was asked how tournament organizers would feel about handing the trophy to a player from one of the two nations. "When we made the decision earlier this year to admit Russians and Belarusians we thought really carefully about all of those things and having made the decision to admit them, we are comfortable about how that plays out," she said. — AFP

Morocco 'the star' attraction at draw

JOHANNESBURG: Shock 2022 World Cup semi-finalists Morocco and 53 other African nations will discover on Wednesday who they must overcome to qualify for the next edition in Canada, Mexico and the USA. A seeded draw in Abidjan will divide the 54 hopefuls into nine groups of six with all the first-placed teams securing places at the 2026 finals. The best four runners-up then go into play-offs and the winners join five other teams in an inter-confederation tournament with two World Cup places up for grabs.

Were an African team to fill one of those slots, the continent will have a record 10 representatives at the 2026 finals, up from five in Qatar last year. Morocco, the first semi-finalists from Africa, Cameroon, Senegal and Tunisia featured at the 2022 tournament and are among the nine first seeds for the draw. But the fifth African participants, Ghana, miss out and, along with eight other teams including South Africa and the

Democratic Republic of Congo, have to settle for being second seeds.

Seeding for the Abidjan draw is based on the June FIFA world rankings and four-time World Cup qualifiers Ghana lie 11th. Mali were the big winners in the rankings, climbing two places to eighth in Africa after a 2-0 victory over Congo Brazzaville in an Africa Cup of Nations qualifier. Winning gave the Malians top-seed status and relegated Burkina Faso, 3-1 losers to Cape Verde in another Cup of Nations match, to second seeds.

Avoid giants

The advantage of being among the nine top seeds is avoiding the giants of African football like Morocco and Senegal, last-16 losers to England in Qatar. Lacking injured star Sadio Mane, Senegal did not match pre-tournament expectations, losing to the Netherlands in a group game and being outplayed by England. But the disappointing showing by the Cup of Nations title-holders was forgotten as Morocco made history.

They topped a group including 2018 runners-up Croatia and star-stacked Bel-

gium, then ousted Spain and Portugal before offering brave resistance before falling to France in the semi-finals. Morocco made history despite a late change of coaches with Bosnian Vahid Halilhodzic axed and Walid Regragui taking over having led Wydad Casablanca to the CAF Champions League title. After Morocco finished fourth in Qatar, France-born Regragui predicted Africa would end the European-South American monopoly of the World Cup "in 15 to 20 years".

While all 54 CAF member nations have officially entered the draw, Zimbabwe have been suspended by FIFA since February 2022 due to government interference in football. Unless the ban is lifted before the first two matchdays this November, the southern Africa country cannot take part. When the 2023 Cup of Nations qualifying draw was made, Zimbabwe were included in the hope that talks would lead to the suspension falling away, but this did not happen and they were barred. Zimbabwe were banned from 2018 World Cup qualifying after failing to pay a former national coach, Brazilian Jose Claudinei Georgini. — AFP



DOHA: Morocco's defender #20 Achraf Dari (center) celebrates scoring his team's first goal with his teammates in this file photo, during the Qatar 2022 World Cup third place play-off football match between Croatia and Morocco at Khalifa International Stadium. — AFP