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Finmin's resignation accepted

Barrak to temporarily take over portfolio • MPs debate Amiri address

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber A-Sabah issued a decree accepting the resignation of finance minister Manaf Al-Hajeri on Wednesday. Another decree was issued to appoint Deputy Prime Minister, Oil Minister and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Saad Al-Barrak as acting finance minister.

Hajeri had submitted his resignation to the

prime minister on Tuesday, less than a month after the formation of the new cabinet. Hajeri, who also briefly served in the previous government as finance minister, is a veteran Kuwaiti investment and financial expert. Local media reported that Hajeri, the chairman of a local financial and investment think-tank, resigned in protest against taking Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) away from him and giving it to Barrak.

KIA, Kuwait's sovereign wealth fund which man-

ages more than \$700 billion, mostly in international markets, has always been under the finance ministry. But the government created the portfolio for investments and moved KIA under its umbrella.

Meanwhile, lawmakers on Wednesday began debating the Amiri address delivered on the Assembly's inaugural day last month, warning against attempts to undermine national unity and urged a lasting solution for stateless people. MP Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf called for changing the Kuwaiti political system to

a full parliamentary system based on political parties, asking how can the government create jobs for 50,000 Kuwaiti graduates in the coming few years.

MP Hasan Jowhar called on the prime minister to concentrate on reforms as his top priority, adding that MPs are prepared to cooperate with him to achieve those reforms. He said Kuwait needs a vision and a team that believes in restoring Kuwait's leadership.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Iran summons Russian envoy

TEHRAN: Iran on Wednesday summoned the Russian ambassador in Tehran to protest a recent statement by Gulf countries and Moscow on three islands controlled by Iran but claimed by the UAE. On Monday, foreign ministers from the Gulf Cooperation Council and Russia held talks and called for "a peaceful solution" to the issue of the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands and Abu Musa. On Wednesday, Iran's foreign ministry said it summoned Russia's ambassador Alexey Dedov and voiced the Islamic republic's "objections on the content of the statement". — AFP

France to pay bonus for repairs

PARIS: From October, France will pay a bonus to encourage people to have their clothes and shoes repaired rather than throwing them away, the government said. The move aims to cut down on the 700,000 tons of clothes thrown away by French people each year, two-thirds of which ends up in landfills. Under the scheme, customers will be able to claim €7 (\$7.7) for mending a heel and €10-25 for clothing repairs from a €154 million fund set up to cover 2023-2028. In France, 3.3 billion pieces of clothing, shoes and household linen were put on the market in 2022, according to eco-organization Refashion. — AFP

UAE to cut more emissions

DUBAI: The UAE promised Tuesday to do more to help keep global warming below the 1.5 degrees tipping point after falling short in its latest plan to slash emissions. The oil-rich Gulf monarchy, which will host this year's COP28 UN climate talks, last week unveiled plans to cut domestic emissions by 19 percent of 2019 levels by 2030. Under these plans, the UAE would contribute to keeping warming to "just below" 2.0 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. — AFP (See Page 8)

Bali to impose \$10 tourist tax

JAKARTA: The Indonesian resort haven of Bali will impose a 150,000 rupiah (\$10) tax on tourists entering the island from next year to preserve its culture, officials said Wednesday. "The payment of a fee for foreign tourists applies only one time during their visit to Bali," Governor I Wayan Koster told local lawmakers. The fee will have to be paid electronically and will apply to foreign tourists entering Bali from abroad or from other parts of Indonesia, he said. — AFP (See Page 12)

Experts agree on responsible role of digital media

KUWAIT: There have been divergent views over the pros and cons of the digitalization of the Kuwaiti media sector in recent years, involving the quality of digital media platforms and their news credibility, let alone the role of social media. The Kuwaiti media sector has introduced digital technology in an inescapable step that aims at revamping production and publication and providing media content in a speedier and more effective mode.

Kuwait News Chief Abdullah Boftain opined that

both digital and conventional media entities are playing a complementary role in digital media transformation. "In the process of our digital transformation at Kuwait Times newspaper and Kuwait News media establishment, we combined heritage with modernity, traditional content with new content, as well as Arabic and English languages, twinning between Kuwait News electronic newspaper and Kuwait Times English newspaper," said Boftain, who is also the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Kuwait Times.

"Our role is to study changes and absorb the



Abdullah Boftain

daily updates that occur in our field, create original content, interact with content creators and deal with the challenges facing print journalism and traditional media that is going through the most difficult period in Kuwait and rest of the world," he said.

"Front-page headlines and how news is worded or conveyed are no longer the only factors determining whether media affects public opinion and decision makers. A variety of content, including news reports, exclusives, advertisements, podcasts, infographics and interviews all contribute to forming and influencing public opinion. At Kuwait News and Kuwait Times, credibility and accuracy in conveying the news precede speed and scoops. Social responsibility is more important than the number of views or creating fake interactions, which is adopted by some media," Boftain added. — KUNA (See Page 3)

Abbas vows to rebuild Jenin camp after raid

JENIN: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas vowed to rebuild the Jenin refugee camp during a rare and brief visit Wednesday, a week after a deadly Zionist raid destroyed much of the camp in the occupied West Bank. Abbas, 87, hailed the Jenin camp as an "icon of struggle" during his first trip to the area in more than a decade, a period during which armed groups have gained popular support at the expense of his Palestinian Authority. The two-day Zionist raid last week was the largest such op-

eration in years, involving hundreds of troops, drone strikes and armored bulldozers. It killed 12 Palestinians including children and fighters from a local armed group the Jenin Brigades. One Zionist soldier was also killed during the operation. Popular discontent with the PA, which cooperates with the Zionist entity on security, has been simmering in Jenin, and crowds last week heckled several visiting top officials of Abbas' Fatah party, including deputy chairman Mahmoud Aloul.

On Wednesday, Abbas expressed determination to back Jenin's reconstruction and security, describing the camp as an "icon of steadfastness and struggle" in a short address to cheering supporters. "We have come to say that we are one authority, one state, one law,"

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JENIN: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas arrives to lay a wreath of flowers on the graves of Palestinians killed in recent Zionist military raids on the Jenin camp on July 12, 2023. — AFP

NASA celebrates Webb anniversary with close-up pic

WASHINGTON: Jets of red gas bursting into the cosmos, and a glowing cave of dust: NASA marked a year of discovery by the James Webb Space Telescope Wednesday with a spectacular new image of Sun-like stars being born. The picture is of the Rho Ophiuchi cloud complex, the nearest stellar nursery to Earth, whose proximity at 390 light-years allows for a crisp close-up by the most powerful orbital observatory ever built.

"In just one year, the James Webb Space Telescope has transformed humanity's view of the cosmos, peering into dust clouds and seeing light from faraway corners of the universe for the very first time," said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson. "Every new image is a new discovery, empowering scientists around the globe to ask and answer questions they once could never dream of."

Webb's image shows around 50 young stars, of similar mass to our Sun or smaller. Some have the signature shadows of circumstellar disks — a sign that planets may eventually form around them. Huge jets of hydrogen appear horizontally in the upper third of the image, and vertically on the right. "These occur when a star first bursts through its



This NASA handout image captured by the James Webb telescope and obtained on July 12, 2023 shows a small star-forming region in the Rho Ophiuchi cloud complex, the closest star-forming region to Earth. — AFP

natal envelope of cosmic dust, shooting out a pair of opposing jets into space like a newborn first stretching her arms out into the world," the US space agency said in a statement. "At the bottom of the image, you can see a young star that's energetic enough that it's blowing a bubble in the cloud of dust and gas from which it was born," Christine Chen, an astronomer at the Space Telescope Science Institute, which operates Webb, told AFP.

Continued on Page 6

Huw Edwards BBC presenter at center of explicit pics row

LONDON: Veteran news anchor Huw Edwards was on Wednesday revealed by his wife as the BBC presenter accused of paying for explicit images. Vicky Flind said in a statement that her husband was "suffering from serious mental health issues" and was now "receiving in-patient hospital care where he will stay for the foreseeable future". At the same time, Metropolitan Police issued a statement saying that there was "no information to indicate that a criminal offence has been committed".



Huw Edwards

The furor has been frontpage news and the lead story on radio and television news bulletins for six successive days, with frenzied speculation on social media about the star's identity until the confirmation. It comes after the BBC — 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.

Continued on Page 6



Crown Prince receives letter to attend Gulf summit in Jeddah

KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Wednesday a letter addressed to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, King of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to participate in the 18th consultative meeting with the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as well as to attend the GCC summit with the Central Asian countries scheduled to be held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on July 19, 2023.

The two invitations were delivered by the Ambassador of the Custodian

of the Two Holy Mosques to the state of Kuwait, Prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled Al-Saud. The meeting was attended by the Head of the Court of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Ahmed Abdullah Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, HH the Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan and Director of the Office of HH the Amir of Kuwait, Ambassador Ahmed Fahd Al-Fahad, Director of the Office of HH the Crown Prince, Lieutenant General Jamal Mohammed Al-Diab, and Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs at the Office of HH the Crown Prince, Mazen Issa Al-Issa. — KUNA



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled Al-Saud at Bayan Palace on Wednesday.

UNHRC approves resolution condemning religious hatred

Kuwait urges HRC to act against advocates of hate speech

GENEVA: United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) approved Wednesday a resolution condemning and rejecting religious hatred. The approval came after recent incident of holy Quran desecration in Sweden. The resolution was approved by 28 member states including India, China and Latin American countries whereas it was opposed by several western countries including the United States, Germany, Belgium and Britain, while also seven countries abstained.

This resolution underscores the necessity of accountability as it urges countries to adopt laws and policies countering acts of religious hatred acts, acts that incite discrimination or violence, and stipulates prohibiting or prosecuting such acts and taking immediate measures to ensure accountability. It also urges UN human rights chief and other related parties to make their stance against religious hatred widely known, and put forth recommendations to address this phenomenon. The resolution requires the UN human rights high commissioner to present a report on the various incentives and root causes of

such behavior as well as the toll of religious hatred on human rights, highlighting the loopholes in laws and policies that allow for such practices. An interactive discussion panel on experts' level to examine cause and effect of desecrating religious sanctities, is also specified in the resolution.

Earlier, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Geneva Nasser Abdullah Al-Hayen called for firm response to the advocates of hate speech to deter extremists from offending more than two billion Muslims around the globe. All state parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) must honor their obligations set forth in Article 19 and Article 20 of the Covenant, he stressed in a speech to the urgent debate by the UN Human Rights Council on Tuesday. The debate, part of the 53rd session of the HRC, was themed "the alarming rise in premeditated and public acts of religious hatred as manifested by recurrent desecration of the holy Quran in some European and other countries."

Ambassador Al-Hayen noted that the freedom of speech needs to be bound by sense of responsibility and respect for the rights of others. On behalf of Kuwait, he called on the 47 members of the HRC to approve a draft resolution, tabled by the Islamic group of states, to send a clear message that the HRC rejects all destabilizing acts of extremist groups. In doing so, the Council would be better able to deny the extremists the chance to pose threats to the international peace and security, he said. "The desecration of the holy Quran is a gross violation of human rights," Ambassador Al-Hayen stressed, reiterating Kuwait's call for the HRC member countries to do more to promote awareness about mutual respect and coexistence among people with different cultures.

The state of Kuwait reminds of the relevant statements of regional and international groups denouncing the growing threats of Islamophobia and the recurrent desecration of Muslims' sanctities, he added. — KUNA



GENEVA: Kuwait Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Geneva Nasser Abdullah Al-Hayen addresses the UN Human Rights Council on Tuesday. — KUNA

July 15: Remembering the heroes of the 'Century of Turkey'

By Tuba Nur Sonmez
Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait

July 15, 2023 marks the seventh anniversary of the coup attempt in Turkey. It was an attempt by FETO (Fetullahist Terrorist Organization) to invade our country, without any doubt. It was one of the darkest nights in the history of our republic, perhaps the darkest.

What happened?

Fetullah Gulen, ringleader of a clandestine, criminal and terrorist organization, is the mastermind behind what happened on the night of July 15, 2016. Putschists, who were loyal only to him, made a vile betrayal with the invasion attempt. His disciples within the armed forces did not hesitate to use deadly military force against innocent civilians, killing 251 and wounding thousands.

They tried to assassinate the President of Turkey, attacked the Prime Minister's vehicle, air-bombarded the Parliament, and massacred protesting citizens on streets. They did these heinous actions to our nation while carrying sacred uniforms of Turkish army, using military vehicles, aircraft, helicopters and all other lethal equipment, which belonged to the nation herself.

My country had never seen such monstrous acts on this scale before. However, our democracy-loving strong nation ended the evil ambitions of the putschists, and put them at bay at that night. Millions of people, together with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, hit the streets with firm resistance against the military infiltrators. They helped our loyal security forces, and altogether led the coup attempt failed, eventually.

Traitors attempted to usurp country's rule and law, but they could not estimate people's strong perseverance and heroism. People from different political opinions came together, put aside their differences, and protected their democratic republic, of which they are proud citizens. FETO's long standing will to dominate the whole country was defeated by people's will to protect democracy.

The crimes committed on the night of July 15th were just the tip of an iceberg. If the coup had succeeded, Turkey would be very different today. There would be no democracy, and fundamental rights and freedoms would be frozen indefinitely.

What is FETO?

At that point, it is important to underline that all started under the guise of a "charitable education effort" back in the early 1970s. Fetullah Gulen and his followers disguised themselves as a benign education movement, when they started the campaign of establishing schools in Turkey and later around the world. They created illusions in people's mind, showing themselves as pious



Tuba Nur Sonmez

and benevolent people. They picked thousands of people on and turned innocent pupils into hardliner conscripts who serve Gulen's dark dreams.

Graduates of these schools, who were brainwashed at young ages, were able to infiltrate the most critical institutions of the state by stealing exam questions. They created a massive network among themselves in order to accomplish corrupted aims. FETO strengthened its economic and political influence by misusing the state's resources and authority for the vile interests of the organization.

Due to complexity and gravity of this betrayal, the fight against FETO in and outside Turkey has constituted one of the main priorities of our state. The perpetrators of the coup attempt have been brought to justice on the basis of the rule of law. FETO's organizational structure within governmental institutions has been revealed; administrative and judicial procedures have been started against its members and "parallel state structure" has been brought down. FETO's attempts to spread across all areas of the economy via its shell entities, particularly in the education, media and banking sectors, have been thwarted.

Every dark night has a bright dawn

The July 15 coup attempt was the edge of the cliff for the future of our country. As the saying goes, every dark night has a bright dawn. With our epic resistance against the putschists, we have shown to all friends and enemies that Turkey can never be captured or brought to its knees. Thanks to the measures taken in the wake of the coup attempt, Turkey could consolidate its political stability, minimize its dependency in terms of foreign policy, and strengthen its regional standing.

The thwarting of the coup attempt marked a turning point in the history of democracy. It will be a source of hope and inspiration for the peoples of the world, all the nations, to stick tight to the will of nations against such enemies of democracy. For this reason, July 15 is commemorated as the "Day of Democracy and National Unity", a day to keep collective memory alive.

With these feelings, we remember with gratitude our martyrs and veterans, who defended democracy with their lives. They are the heroes of the "Century of Turkey".

May Allah Almighty (swt) grant those who sacrificed their lives heroically Jannah.

Strategic payroll alternative draft ready in 2 days

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Essa Al-Kandari confirmed that the draft strategic payroll alternative will be included in the government's work program for the 17th legislative term (2023-2027), which will reach the National Assembly in the next two days. "The strategic payroll alternative was presented in the government's previous work program last November, with a timetable of one to two years for its completion," Kandari said.

Responding to a parliamentarian's inquiry about the minister responsible for the development of the

northern economic zone and the Silk City, he said: "Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Dr Saad Al-Barrak is the minister responsible for this."

At the end of the session, National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun announced the opening of the item on the membership of deputies in the Arab Parliament, namely MPs Mohammad Al-Huwailah, Khaled Al-Otaibi, Ahmed Lari and Hamdan Al-Azmi, as the council agreed to renew their membership. Saadoun adjourned the supplementary session of the National Assembly, provided that a special session will be held on Thursday at 9 am.

The National Assembly had moved at the beginning of its session on Wednesday to discuss the Amiri speech, which opened the first session of the 17th legislative term. It is noteworthy that the Council of Ministers adopted in its weekly meeting on Monday the government's work program for the 17th legislative term (2023-2027) and decided to refer it to the National Assembly. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti members of parliament attend a session at the National Assembly in Kuwait City on July 12. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KFF reviews safety measures after Jleeb fire

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force held a coordination meeting on Wednesday at its headquarters to review repeated violations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh that contravene fire safety regulations. The meeting was headed by KFF Chief Lt Gen Khaled Rakkhan Al-Mekrad in the presence of representatives of the concerned government agencies.

During the meeting, violations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh that threaten the security of the residents were discussed and solutions were suggested that could prevent such recurrences of fire incidents in this area. The meeting agreed that all the concerned parties will work towards this. The meeting was held under the directive of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. At the end of the meeting, Mekrad expressed his sincere thanks and gratitude to all government agencies that participated in the meeting.



KUWAIT: KFF Lieutenant General Khaled Rakkhan Al-Mekrad presides over the coordination meeting.

Local

Experts agree on responsible, influential role of digital media

Public, private sectors complement one another in digitalization: Abdullah Boftain



KUWAIT: Kuwait Times and Kuwait News employees are seen at the media organizations' studio. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: There have been divergent views over the pros and cons of the digitalization of the Kuwaiti media sector in recent years, involving the quality of digital media platforms and their news credibility, let alone the role of social media. The Kuwaiti media sector has introduced digital technology in an inescapable step that aims at revamping production and publication and providing media content in a speedier and more effective mode.

Kuwait News Chief Abdullah Boftain opined that both digital and conventional media entities are playing a complementary role in digital media transformation. "In the process of our digital transformation at Kuwait Times newspaper and Kuwait News media establishment, we combined heritage with modernity, traditional content with new content, as well as Arabic and English languages, twinning between Kuwait News electronic newspaper and Kuwait Times English newspaper," said Boftain, who is also the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Kuwait Times, the first English daily in Kuwait and the Gulf region. Kuwait News, on the other hand, is considered among the first news providers to be launched in Kuwait through short messages (SMS) and was the first to become a licensed e-paper by the Ministry of Information in 2006.

"Our role in the private sector is to study changes and absorb the daily updates that occur in our field, stay up to date on the latest trends in content creation, interact with content creators and deal with the challenges facing print journalism and traditional media which is going through the most difficult period in Kuwait and the rest of the world," he said.

Boftain added that digital transformation is a reality for the most prestigious newspapers and international media establishments. While some of them succeeded in gradual transformation and reaching a new generation of readers and followers, he said, others are suffering from unsuccessful repeated attempts.

"The role of the government sector (in the process of digital transformation) is to interact with the private sector experience and provide continuous support by embracing new content creators and facilitating joint projects between the public and private sectors, given that the state has the financial resources that enable it to support the sustainability of the private sector," he said.

Quality of media content

Media content is no longer limited to what gets published on platforms or in print, said Boftain, as content creators, whether individuals or establishments, are publishing content of all kinds and have become true competitors for traditional and prestigious establishments.

"Amid this surge of content, we find material that is sublime. But at the same time, we also find creators publishing material that is not related to professional journalism in any way, with their sole focus being on content which generates views regardless of ethical considerations, getting a scoop even if it threatened credibility and sensationalism away from social responsibility," he said.

"Most news platforms are satisfied with recycling existing news items, publishing ready-made pieces and relying on news agencies and official sources without at-

tempting to create original content."

Boftain also touched on the role of social media in disseminating news and influencing the public.

"Front-page headlines and how news is worded or conveyed are no longer the only factors determining whether media affects public opinion and decision makers," he said.

In fact, Boftain said, a variety of content, including news reports, exclusives, advertisements, podcasts, infographics and interviews, all contribute to forming and influencing public opinion.

"However, if the public has a high level of awareness, they can differentiate between bad and good content. Although bad content, such as scandals or that which relies on bullying some segments of the population based on their looks, dialects and ideologies, may gain a huge number of views but it is, without a doubt, at odds with well-respected media and its societal message."

Social responsibility over clicks

Boftain said credibility and accuracy in conveying the news precedes focus on getting the scoop at Kuwait News and Kuwait Times.

"Social responsibility is more important than the number of views or creating fake interaction as adopted by some media. It is our duty to verify the news and its sources, and make sure it meets the profession's ethical standards before publication," he said.

The dominance of advertising and commercial content over investigative



Abdullah Boftain



Naser Al-Otaibi

journalistic content is one of the most notable challenges facing journalism in the digital transformation process, according to Boftain. "We need to revive true journalism work and qualify a new generation of professional journalists who work in the field, content creators and journalistic investigators. The digital transformation must not make us forget the ethics of journalistic work and that journalism is a mission," he said.

The pros of digital transformation, he added, are the existence of comprehensive journalists who can independently create content and the influx of young content

creators with various messages and styles. "By creating a good work environment, ensuring journalistic freedom and providing training programs, media organizations may succeed in digital transformation without affecting the true essence and mission of journalism."

Difficult to keep track

Dr Ahmad Al-Kandari, professor of media and public relations at Kuwait University, said digital transformation has enabled everyone to gain easy access to media platforms in order to communicate with followers.

Speaking to KUNA, he listed the advantages of media digitalization as primarily helping governmental institutions to have their own media platforms to directly communicate with people and steer public opinion. But the Kuwaiti professor admitted that with this swiftly developing media revolution, it has become very difficult for people in general and media specialists and academics in particular to keep abreast of this transformation.

"It has become inevitable to read and always follow up on new research (in media digitalization) with a view to developing learning in the media space," he said. Concerning the role of social media in society, the Kuwaiti academic stressed that social media platforms, including ones with specific agendas and purposes, are now playing a big role in influencing people and that's why rules and controls should be set for the virtual space.

Al-Jarida Deputy Managing Editor Naser Al-Otaibi said media digitalization would lead to the "birth of new Kuwaiti media", in both public and private sectors, and would combine between both old and new mass media.

Digital media platforms play a supportive role for paper media and reflect media institutions' orientations, he said, believing that social media has an undeniable role to play in reporting and influencing audiences and even decision-makers.

But he cast doubts about the credibility of news content found on social media in general, sounding the alarm that this could negatively affect public opinion in any society.



Kuwait Times employees work at their desks at the Kuwait Times and Kuwait News offices on Sahafa Street.

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Kuwait Airways supports small businesses

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways (KAC) organized a campaign to support small and medium enterprise owners in cooperation with Kuwait Fund to sponsor and develop small and medium projects. KAC's Deputy Director of Corporate Communications, Public Relations and Marketing Ishaq Al-Hajiri said "KAC is pleased to support and encourage owners of small and medium business through granting them entry to participate in the company's various projects in addition to giving them the opportunity to present ideas and innovations to reach the best quality levels".

He said KAC's cooperation with the National Fund for sponsoring and developing small and medium business is within the company's interest to strengthen relations with the public and private sectors and to move the wheels of the economy in the country through creating a suitable working environment that contributes to achieving the sought after goals.

Hajiri said: "We appreciate the role of the National Fund in providing all means to serve the initiators owners of small and medium size projects to remove all obstacles facing them to support the economy of our country". Media Officer at the National Fund Mohammad Al-Saleh said the fund is pleased to activate the cooperation and partnership principle with KAC to support initiators and give them the opportunity to launch their innovations and ideas at KAC facilities.

He said there were more than 200 companies registered during the first day of various activities such as food, clothes, factories, health and others to participate in the national carrier's projects. Saleh said the National Fund, KAC cooperation comes within the strengthening of partnership relations between various state sectors to contribute to the support of the national economy which is considered among the economic development requirements and necessary in transforming into a financial center.

Photo of the day



ISLAMABAD: Kuwait Hostel Islamabad stands tall in the heart of the federal capital as a sign of brotherly relationship between Pakistan and Kuwait. The scenic hostel neighboring the famous Shah Faisal Mosque, accommodates the male students of one of the top universities of Islamabad. It was completed through Kuwaiti donations. — KUNA photos

Malls: Kuwait's unconventional public spaces

By Ahmad Ali

KUWAIT: There is no questioning the fact that one of the most renowned features in Kuwait, and the Gulf as a whole, are its malls and how big and numerous they are. They are a popular destination for people living in Kuwait, whether to go shopping with friends or dine with their families. "It's a great place to meet friends to hang out with to do something chill," said Youssef Majdalani, a Lebanese raised in Kuwait and currently studying in the UK. "During the week, I'd go almost anytime," he added.

In fact, visiting shopping malls is such a popular activity that it could be argued they are Kuwait's equivalent to public spaces found abroad. Public

spaces, as the name suggests, are areas that are accessible to the general public, such as roads, squares or parks. They are free to access for all and are areas where interactions take place, whether social or commercial. Around the world, public spaces are generally open and outdoor areas that provide public amenities as well as utilities that contribute to their accessibility, functionality and attractiveness.

In Kuwait however, there are factors that restrict the accessibility of outdoor spaces. The weather, notably the exceptional summer heat, limits the desire to take part in outdoor activities. The infrastructure too provides limited possibilities of gaining access to certain areas due to a lack of utilities such as pedestrian paths, bike lanes or parking, especially in neighborhoods further from downtown districts.

When questioned about his take on the state of outdoor spaces in Kuwait, Faisal Al-Refai, a Kuwaiti, said there are not many outdoor activities to engage in. Concurring with Majdalani, he believes that with a couple of exceptions such as Shaheed Park, there's a lack of general maintenance that would make outdoor spaces pleasant. Raghad Al-Hindi, a Kuwaiti law student, believes developing outdoor public spaces would be beneficial for all parties involved.

Malls offer an alternative to the classic outdoor public space. Despite being privately owned, as a concept they provide all the utilities of outdoor spaces confined in a large and climate-controlled environment. They offer commercial services but also offer entertainment and leisure. Kuwaitis will often go to malls not only for shopping, but also to gather and engage in social experiences with friends and family.

Despite being enclosed, malls provide an alternative to the classic outdoor spaces, allowing the same accessibility and usage in a large indoor space. Malls such as The Avenues even go as far as to imitate outdoor public spaces, with indoor treelined streets and paths that copy road networks, buildings resembling downtown areas, a glass ceiling providing natural lighting and various indoor areas that imitate both in aesthetics and in name outdoor spaces such as the Souk, the Forum or the Plaza.

This functionality of malls in the Gulf contrasts with the notion of malls abroad, such as in the US, where they are generally smaller, enclosed and serve a more commercial purpose, since there are other public spaces available that can fulfil more social needs. For example, when asked about where he would conduct social activities in the UK, where he studies, Majdalani said: "I'd usually go to nice restaurants outside and relax, walk somewhere nice and also do fun activities like karting or escape rooms." Whereas in Kuwait, Refai says he usually goes to malls three or four times a week to hang out with friends or visit restaurants.

There is no doubt about how large the role of malls in Kuwait is when it comes to social activities, providing most of the same activities as outdoor public spaces in a more maintained and comfortable environment, removing factors like the weather. It does remain to be seen however if development projects related to improving the quality of outdoor life and spaces will be more encouraged, since malls already take up most of the same roles and are becoming more and more numerous throughout the country.



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Officials are seen on the sidelines of the meeting to announce Qurtuba becoming a health city. — KUNA

Qurtuba joins WHO health city network

KUWAIT: Hawally Governor and Acting Capital Governor Ali Al-Asfar declared Wednesday Qurtuba's joining the regional network of the integrated health cities affiliated to the World Health Organization (WHO) initiative.

This came in a speech Asfar delivered during a ceremony held on this occasion in the presence of the head of the health cities office Dr Amal Al-Yahya and the coordinating committee's members of Qurtuba in Hawally's headquarters.

Asfar lauded the joining of the city, which is the tenth in the Capital, and the sixteenth across Kuwait,

hoping that it would continue to meet international standards to be approved as a health city. He affirmed full backing to and interest in the integrated health cities' project and removing all obstacles that government agencies might face. Asfar commended the key role of the health centers in offering distinguished services to alleviate burdens on hospitals.

Meanwhile, Yahya stressed keenness on expanding the project across the country, noting that this expansion shows the desire of areas to implement the WHO standards in this field.

Dr Nawal Al-Hamad, general coordinator of the committee, said this initiative aimed at boosting and developing society health through effective participation of residents. She added that proposals had been discussed, referring to communication with the concerned bodies in the area in this matter. — KUNA



ASEAN urges political solution in Myanmar

Iran president in Kenya, Uganda to deepen ties

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North Korea fires ballistic missile

Pyongyang threatens to down US spy planes

SEOUL: North Korea has fired a long-range ballistic missile, the South Korean military said Wednesday, days after Pyongyang threatened to down US spy planes that violated its airspace. Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points ever, with diplomacy stalled and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un calling for increased weapons development, including tactical nukes.

In response, Seoul and Washington have ramped up security cooperation, vowing that Pyongyang would face a nuclear response and the "end" of its current government were it to ever use its nuclear weapons against the allies. South Korea's military said it had detected the launch of a long-range ballistic missile fired from the Pyongyang area around 10 am. "The ballistic missile was fired on a lofted trajectory and flew 1,000 km (620 miles) before splashing down in the East Sea," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

A lofted trajectory involves firing a missile up and not out, a method Pyongyang has previously said it employs in some weapons tests to avoid flying over neighboring countries. The launch "is a grave provocation that damages the peace and security of the Korean peninsula" and violates UN sanctions on Pyongyang, the JCS said, calling on North Korea to stop such actions. Pyongyang last fired one of its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles in April—the purportedly solid-fuelled Hwasong-18—and in February launched a Hwasong-15, which flew a similar 989 km.

The flight time of around 70 minutes is also similar to some of North Korea's previous ICBM launches, experts said. "Given what we have at this point,

it's about 90 percent certain that it was an ICBM launch," Choi Gi-il, a professor of military studies at Sangji University, told AFP. He added that it could also have been North Korea attempting to re-test its satellite launch technology to prepare for another attempt to put a spy satellite into orbit, after a May launch failed.

'Provocative' US actions

Wednesday's launch came after North Korea on Monday accused a US spy plane of violating its airspace and condemned Washington's plans to deploy a nuclear missile submarine near the Korean peninsula. A spokesperson for the North Korean Ministry of National Defense said the United States had "intensified espionage activities beyond the wartime level", citing "provocative" spy plane flights over eight straight days this month.

"There is no guarantee that such shocking accident as downing of the US Air Force strategic reconnaissance plane will not happen in the East Sea of Korea," the spokesperson added. Kim's powerful sister Kim Yo Jong said that a US spy aircraft had violated the country's eastern airspace twice on Monday morning, according to a separate statement.

Kim Yo Jong said North Korea would not respond directly to US reconnaissance activities outside of the country's exclusive economic zone, but warned it would take "decisive action" if its maritime military demarcation line was crossed. The United States said in April that one of its nuclear-armed ballistic submarines would visit a South Korean port for the first time in decades, without specifying an exact date. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has ramped up defense cooperation with Washington



SEOUL: People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on July 12, 2023. — AFP

in response, staging joint military exercises with advanced stealth jets and long-range heavy bombers.

Yoon is set to attend a NATO summit in Lithuania this week, seeking stronger cooperation with the alliance's members over North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats. "Kim Yo Jong's bellicose statement against US surveillance aircraft is part of

a North Korean pattern of inflating external threats to rally domestic support and justify weapons tests," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "Pyongyang also times its shows of force to disrupt what it perceives as diplomatic coordination against it, in this case, South Korea and Japan's leaders meeting during the NATO summit." — AFP



VILNIUS: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida delivers a speech during an event with G7 leaders to announce a Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine during the NATO Summit in Vilnius on July 12, 2023. — AFP

Ukraine's NATO hopes for a clear timeline dashed

VILNIUS: NATO leaders on Tuesday dashed Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky's hopes for a clear timeline to join the alliance, saying they would offer an invite to become a member only when "conditions are met". At a summit in Vilnius of the 31 NATO nations, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg insisted the alliance had never used "stronger language" to back Ukraine in its bitter fight to defeat the Russian invasion. NATO leaders pledged that "Ukraine's future is in NATO" and shortened the eventual process Kyiv would have to go through to enter the alliance. "We will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the alliance when allies agree and conditions are met," a statement said.

But the failure to go much beyond a 2008 vow on future membership appeared a bitter blow to Zelensky, who was in Vilnius to address an admiring crowd of Lithuanian supporters in a packed city square ahead of his meetings with the NATO leaders. "It seems there is no readiness neither to invite Ukraine

to NATO nor to make it a member of the alliance," he declared on Twitter, after getting advance notice of the cautious language in the summit statement.

'Uncertainty is weakness'

"This means that a window of opportunity is being left to bargain Ukraine's membership in NATO in negotiations with Russia. And for Russia, this means motivation to continue its terror," he said, dubbing it "absurd" that no timeframe was set for an invitation. "Uncertainty is weakness. And I will openly discuss this at the summit," he said, vowing that - far from exposing NATO members to conflict with Russia - Ukraine's membership would make the alliance stronger and safer. As Zelensky was speaking, Moscow upped the pressure on the NATO leaders meeting in Vilnius, claiming that its forces had made 1.5 kilometers of progress (more than a mile) across a two kilometre wide section of the eastern front.

If confirmed, this would bring them closer to the rail hub of Lyman, a town in the Donbas region of the east of the country. It was captured by Russian forces last year only to be liberated by Ukraine in its October 2022 counteroffensive. Mindful of Zelensky's disappointment over his hopes for a membership timetable, Western officials stressed that there would be a broader package of support proposals designed to give Ukraine a military edge over the invader.

Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that the G7 group of major industrialized economies would issue a declaration on long-term support to kick in once "peace is obtained". This is expected to be announced on Wednesday after the NATO summit ends. In the nearer term, Berlin pledged another 700 million euros (\$771 million) in military assistance to Kyiv.

The new aid includes two Patriot missile system launchers, another 40 Marder infantry fighting vehicles and 25 Leopard 1 tanks. President Emmanuel Macron also said France was joining Britain in supplying long-range SCALP or Storm Shadow cruise missiles to allow Ukraine to strike Russian targets deep behind the frontline. And Denmark and the Netherlands said an 11-nation coalition will start training Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 fighter jets next month, with a new training centre to be set up in Romania.

While eastern European nations had pushed for an explicit timetable to allow Kyiv to join, the US and Germany are reluctant to go beyond an earlier vow that it will become a member one day. Biden, who will meet Zelensky on Wednesday, has said there is no agreement to offer Kyiv membership while the war with Russia rages, as this could drag NATO directly into the conflict. The biggest war in Europe since World War II has propelled NATO into the most sweeping overhaul of its defenses since the end of the Cold War. — AFP

Bodies of migrants found in the desert

TUNIS: The bodies of two migrants have been found in a desert region near Tunisia's border with Algeria, a judicial official and a witness said on Tuesday. Hundreds of migrants from sub-Saharan countries have fled or been forced out of Tunisia's port city of Sfax after racial tensions flared following the July 3 killing of a Tunisian man in an altercation between locals and migrants. Many have been left to fend for themselves in harsh conditions in remote desert areas near Tunisia's borders with Algeria and with Libya.

Around 10 days ago one body was found in the Hazoua desert, near Algeria's border, and another was discovered on Monday night, Nizar Skander, a spokesman for the court in the southeastern Tozeur district, told AFP. "Both bodies are of men, and rescuers have recovered the one found yesterday," a witness, who declined to be identified for security reasons, added. The witness, a local merchant, told AFP that in one week two convoys were seen transporting migrants to the desert, with nearly 100 left in the vicinity of Hazoua. "Many of these migrants are trying to reach oases in the area where residents give them food and water," the witness said.

Skander said the authorities have launched a "dubious death" investigation to determine the exact cause of the two fatalities. Youssouf Bilayer, 25, of Ivory Coast, told AFP on Tuesday that he was arrested on July 4 in Sfax where he had worked for four years as a welder and was taken to the Gafsa area near the border with Algeria. "We were in six buses and they left us in the forest—they made us get out by beating us," he said. His group of six people was now moving northwards.

'Suffering a lot'

"We want out of here and to be taken to Tunis or Sfax," he said, adding that they were 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of Kasserine. "We are suffering a lot. We were able to find a little water in the forest, but we've got nothing to eat. The police won't let people give us food, all we can do is charge our phones a little," Bilayer said. He said that when they try to continue their journey the police turn them back towards the forest and the border with Algeria. "This has already happened five times," he said. The crackdown on migrants in Sfax—a departure point for many hoping to reach Europe—erupted after the funeral of the 41-year-old Tunisian man who had been stabbed to death.

Aid and rights groups have called for the stranded migrants to be helped as a matter of urgency. According to Human Rights Watch, many migrants near the border with Algeria "risk their lives" if they are not provided with immediate assistance. The watchdog estimates that there are between 150 and 200 migrants in that region. Several days ago HRW carried a report quoting witnesses as saying that "several" migrants had died near the Algerian border.

Mamadou, a migrant from Guinea who gave only his first name, spoke to AFP on Monday by phone from the Algerian side of the border. "Please help us. If you can send the Red Cross here, help us, otherwise we will die. There is nothing here. There's no food, there's no water," he said. He could not be reached again by phone on Tuesday. Tunisia has seen a rise in racially motivated attacks after President Kais Saied in February accused "hordes" of undocumented migrants of bringing violence to the country, and alleging a "criminal plot" to change its demographic make-up. — AFP

Palestinian family evicted from east Jerusalem home

JERUSALEM: Police evicted a Palestinian family from their home in annexed east Jerusalem Tuesday to make way for Jewish settlers after a long legal battle, officials and an AFP correspondent said. Since 1978, the Sub Laban family had fought in the Zionist courts against their eviction from their home in the Muslim Quarter of the walled Old City. But early on Tuesday, police arrived to remove the family from their home following a court order. "They do not have the right to expel me from my house," Nora Abu Laban, 68, told AFP. "They are thieves and they steal everything from us, they stole the house, the lands, the youth."

Zionist and Palestinian activists jostled with police in the aftermath of the eviction. One held a placard that read "A family was evicted today" as Jewish settlers looked on, video footage filmed by AFP showed. In May, the Sub Laban family had been served with an eviction notice and told to vacate the building by June 11. The "family was forcibly evicted from their

home by Zionist police," Ajith Sunghay, head of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for Palestinians, said in a statement.

He said 12 Zionist activists protesting against the eviction, seven women and five men, were arrested. "Concerted efforts to evict Palestinians from their homes in occupied east Jerusalem may amount to forcible transfer," Sunghay said. "Forcible transfer is a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions and a war crime." The European Union expressed "regret" over the decision. It urged the "Zionist government to respect international law and let these families live where they have been living for decades".

Hazem Qasem, a spokesperson for Hamas, the Islamist group which controls the coastal Gaza Strip enclave, described the eviction as a "crime" and part of the "Zionist war on the Arab identity of Jerusalem". The Jewish settlers are part of an organization called Atara Leyoshna. The Zionist plaintiffs claimed that Jews lived in the building before the division of the holy city into Zionist and Jordanian sectors following the proclamation of the Jewish state in 1948. They invoke a Zionist law from the 1970s that allows Jews to reclaim property owned by Jews before 1948, even if they are not related.

According to anti-settlement watchdog Ir Amim, some 150 Palestinian families in Jerusalem's Old City and nearby neighborhoods are currently threatened



JERUSALEM: Nora Sub Laban (center) and her sons Raafat (left) and Ahmad react following their eviction from their home in the Muslim Quarter in Jerusalem's old city to make way for Jewish settlers. — AFP

with eviction because of "discriminatory laws and state collusion with settler organizations". The group says such evictions are part of "a strategy to cement hegemony of the Old City basin, the most religiously and politically sensitive part of Jerusalem and a core issue of the conflict". Zionists captured Jerusalem's Old City in the 1967 Six-Day War, before annexing it in a move regarded as illegal by the UN. — AFP

International

Iran president in Kenya, Uganda to deepen ties

Africa emerges as a diplomatic battleground

KAMPALA: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi visited Kenya and Uganda on Wednesday on a mission to strengthen ties as he embarked on the first trip by an Iranian leader to Africa in 11 years. The visit comes as the Islamic Republic tries to shore up diplomatic support to ease its international isolation, with Raisi due to travel to Zimbabwe on Thursday. Raisi met Kenyan President William Ruto early Wednesday, describing his visit to the East African powerhouse as "a turning point in the development of relations" between the two countries.

He then flew to the Ugandan city of Entebbe, where he was welcomed with a gun salute and military parade before heading into talks with President Yoweri Museveni, public broadcaster UBC showed. He is due to meet with his Zimbabwean counterpart Emmerson Mnangagwa on Thursday.

Africa has emerged as a diplomatic battleground in recent months, with Russia and the West vying for support over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, which has had a devastating impact on the continent, sending food prices soaring. Western powers have also sought to deepen trade ties with the continent, along with India and China, which has been on an infrastructure spending spree in Africa. Raisi said his talks with Ruto reflected "the determination and resolve of both countries for expansion of economic and trade cooperation, political cooperation, cultural cooperation."

Ruto described Iran as "a critical strategic partner" and said the two sides had signed five memoranda of understanding covering information technology, investment, fisheries and other areas. "These



ENTEBBE: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (left) and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni shake hands during his state visit to Uganda at the State House in Entebbe, Uganda, on July 12, 2023. — AFP photos

memoranda will enhance and further deepen our bilateral relations for sustainable growth and development," he said. Ruto told reporters that Raisi had also shared plans for Iran to set up a plant in the port city of Mombasa "to manufacture an indigenous Iranian vehicle that has now been given the Kiswahili name, 'Kifarū', meaning rhino."

'Common political views'

Iran's official IRNA news agency said Raisi's delegation includes the foreign minister as well as senior

businesspeople. Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani earlier expressed optimism that the trip could help bolster economic and trade ties with African nations. He also said on Monday that Tehran and the African continent share "common political views", without elaborating further.

Iran has stepped up its diplomacy in recent months to reduce its isolation and offset the impact of crippling sanctions reimposed since the 2018 withdrawal of the United States from a painstakingly negotiated nuclear deal. On Saturday, Raisi welcomed Algerian Foreign

Minister Ahmed Attaf in a bid to boost ties with Algeria.

Last week, Iran became a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes Russia, China and India. In March, Tehran agreed to restore ties with regional rival Saudi Arabia under a China-mediated deal. It has since been looking to re-establish relations with other countries in the region including Egypt and Morocco. In June, Raisi undertook a Latin American tour that included Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba before a trip to Indonesia. — AFP



NAIROBI: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (left) shakes hands with Kenyan President William Ruto after a press conference at the State House in Nairobi on July 12, 2023.

Kenya protesters defy ban; Police fire tear gas

NAIROBI: Kenyan officers on Wednesday fired tear gas on protesters who defied a police ban to join a demonstration against tax hikes called by opposition leader Raila Odinga. Shops were shut and security was tight in the capital Nairobi, where police deployed tear gas against stone-throwing demonstrators in the slum of Mathare. Tear gas was also used to disperse crowds in the port city of Mombasa.

The clashes followed rallies in several cities last week that turned deadly. Six people were killed according to the interior ministry, and rights campaigners accused police of being heavy-handed. On the eve of

Wednesday's protests, the country's police chief warned opposition supporters from holding "illegal demonstrations", saying that organizers had not provided the authorities with any "notifications" about their planned rallies this week.

"In this regard, no such demonstrations/gatherings/protests will be allowed to-morrow... All lawful means will be used to disperse such demonstrations," Inspector General of Police Japhet Koome said in a statement. Police in Nairobi on Friday fired tear gas, targeting Odinga's convoy. AFP reporters reported. They took similar steps against demonstrations in the cities of Mombasa and Kisumu.

On Saturday campaigners said police used tear gas on civil society representatives demanding the release of dozens of people arrested during the protests. The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights has called for "a thorough investigation into all reported incidents of police brutality",

adding to the chorus of condemnation from rights groups including Amnesty International against "arbitrary arrests".

Odinga's Azimio alliance has vowed to stage protests every week against the policies of President William Ruto's government. "Our activities are protected by the Constitution which guarantees right to protest, picket, assemble and present petitions," Odinga's spokesman Dennis Onyango told AFP.

Odinga, who lost the August 2022 election to Ruto, claims that the poll was "stolen" and has held a string of anti-government rallies this year. But as soaring food prices pile pressure on households, many Kenyans said they could not afford the disruption caused by the protests and had little hope of seeing improvements to their economic situation. "I used to look forward to the protests, I felt it was the only way our voices were being heard but nothing is changing," housekeeper Ruth Nyakundi told AFP on the eve of the demonstrations. — AFP



NAIROBI: Kenyan opposition supporters react and throw stones towards Kenya police officers surrounded by tear gas during demonstrations in Nairobi, Kenya on July 12, 2023. — AFP

Explosives attack kills three police officers in Mexico

GUADALAJARA: Three police officers were killed and 10 other people wounded Tuesday in an "unprecedented" explosives attack in the Mexican state of Jalisco, the state governor said. Police officers and staff from the state prosecutor's office "suffered a cowardly attack with explosive devices, which preliminarily caused the death of

three colleagues from the municipal police and the Prosecutor's Office, as well as 10 people injured," Governor Enrique Alfaro said on Twitter.

"This is an unprecedented event that shows what these organized crime groups are capable of," the governor said. "This attack also represents a challenge against the Mexican state as a whole." The western state is the base of operations of the Jalisco New Generation cartel, one of Mexico's most powerful drug trafficking groups that has a presence in a large part of the country and is embroiled in disputes with other drug syndicates. Alfaro said Jalisco's security cabinet was "in permanent session" to investigate the attack, which has not been attributed to a specific criminal organization.

Authorities learned of the incident shortly after 8:00 pm Tuesday (0200 GMT Wednesday), with reports indicating a vehicle on fire with five people inside in Tlajomulco de Zuniga, a suburb of the city of Guadalajara, police sources said. Forensic investigators were on the scene, as well as several ambulances to transport the injured to hospital. According to reports by local network Televisa, the explosion occurred near a vehicle in which the security officials were traveling.

Authorities were investigating whether a grenade or homemade mine was used, police said. The Jalisco New Generation cartel has used the latter device in the western state of Michoacan. Authorities also reported a drone attack on a house in the Michoacan town of Apatzingan this month that wounded one

person. While car-bomb attacks are rare in Mexico, a car bomb killed a National Guard member and wounded others in June in Guanajuato, another state hit hard by cartel-linked violence.

Also on Tuesday, 13 security personnel who had been taken captive the day before by protesters in the southern state of Guerrero were released after negotiations with authorities. Officials said the protesters were infiltrated by a criminal group. Guerrero has endured years of violence linked to turf wars between drug cartels. Mexico has recorded more than 340,000 murders and some 100,000 disappearances since the launch of a controversial military anti-drug offensive in 2006, most attributed to criminal organizations. — AFP

Finmin's resignation accepted...

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MP Hamdan Al-Azemi said "crises in the country are fabricated and problems are too many", adding that Kuwait's democracy is incomplete and the government has the upper hand in accepting or rejecting legislation.

MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf warned that certain people are attempting to undermine national unity by

discriminating between citizens based on the category of their citizenship. He warned that he will hold the Cabinet accountable if they discriminate between Kuwaitis in appointments based on the degree of their citizenship.

MP Falah Al-Hajeri urged for a speedy and lasting solution for the plight of stateless people, locally known as bedoons, adding they have sacrificed their lives for the country and authorities should not make their life difficult. MP Dawood Marafie said that authorities should employ bedoons rather than recruit foreigners. The Assembly meets again on Thursday.

ity. "There will be one authority and one security force. Anyone who seeks to undermine its unity and security will face the consequences... Any hand that reaches out to harm the people and their stability shall be cut off," he said. Prior to Abbas' arrival, a group of children were chanting "Katiba, Katiba, Katiba" at the camp in support of local armed group the Jenin Brigades.

Alaa Washahi, 27, speaking after Abbas's departure, defended the militants in the camp. "The Jenin Brigades are our pride and honor... their presence is part of our existence," said the camp resident. "The truth is we have suffered from the negligence of (Palestinian) officials. This is what the president must see with his own eyes."

The Jenin camp was established in 1953 to house some of those among the 760,000 Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes in 1948 when the Zionist entity was created, an event Palestinians call the "Nakba" or "catastrophe". Over time, the camp's original tents have been replaced with concrete buildings, and it now resembles an urban neighborhood. The camp, which houses about 18,000 people, was also a hotbed of activity during the second "intifada" or uprising of the early 2000s.

Over the past 18 months, the security situation in the camp has deteriorated with repeated Zionist raids, and the Palestinian Authority has little real presence there. Abbas last visited Jenin in 2012 but did not tour the camp at the time. While the PA remains somewhat present in the city, it has largely abandoned the camp to groups such as the Jenin Brigades, which the Zionist entity alleges is backed by Iran. — AFP

NASA celebrates Webb anniversary...

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It does so through a combination of its light and a stellar wind linked to it, she added. Interstellar space is filled with gas and dust, which in turn serves as the raw material for new stars and planets.

"Webb's image of Rho Ophiuchi allows us to witness a very brief period in the stellar life cycle with new clarity. Our own Sun experienced a phase like this, long ago, and now we have the technology to see the beginning of another star's story," said Webb project scientist Klaus Pontoppidan. Webb was launched in December 2021 from French Guiana, on a 1.5 million kilometer voyage to a region called the second Lagrange point.

Its first full color picture was revealed by President Joe Biden on July 11, 2022: the clearest view yet of the early universe, going back 13 billion years. The next wave included "mountains" and "valleys"

of a star-forming region, dubbed the Cosmic Cliffs, in the Carina Nebula; and a grouping of five galaxies bound in a celestial dance, called Stephan's Quintet.

Webb boasts a primary mirror measuring more than 6.5m that is made up of 18 hexagonal, gold-coated segments, as well as a five-layer sunshield the size of a tennis court. Unlike its predecessor Hubble, it operates primarily in the infrared spectrum, allowing it to look back nearer towards the start of time, and to better penetrate dust clouds where stars and planetary systems are being formed today.

Key discoveries include some of the earliest galaxies formed a few hundred million years after the Big Bang, identifying at unprecedented resolution the atmospheric compositions of planets outside our solar system, and, in our own neck of the woods, stunning new views of the planet Jupiter. Webb has enough fuel for a 20-year mission, promising a new era of astronomy. It will soon be joined in orbit by Europe's Euclid space telescope, which launched on July 1 on a mission to shed light on two of the universe's greatest mysteries: Dark energy and dark matter. — AFP

for his mental well-being and to protect our children". "Once well enough to do so, he intends to respond to the stories that have been published," she added, saying that he only learned of the allegations on Thursday.

Further claims have since been made against the presenter, as three more people came forward with complaints over the last two days. The BBC itself reported on Tuesday that another person in their 20s had come forward to say they received threatening messages from the presenter while The Sun reported that he also broke COVID lockdown rules to meet another young person he met on a dating site.

The alleged pandemic breach has a particular resonance in the UK as the BBC was at the time reporting on the country's third lockdown and how it was being enforced. COVID rule-breaking in Downing Street also led to the long-running "Partygate" scandal that contributed to the downfall of former prime minister Boris Johnson. A fourth person also told The Sun the star sent messages containing love hearts and kisses on Instagram when they were aged 17. — AFP

Abbas vows to rebuild Jenin...

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Abbas said, warning against anyone who "tampers with the unity and security of our people". He vowed to oversee the reconstruction of the camp and the wider city to restore it "to what it was, or even better".

As he concluded his visit, Abbas laid a wreath on the graves of Palestinians who lost their lives in recent Zionist raids. A number of Arab countries have announced aid for the camp after last week's offensive. Ahead of Abbas' arrival, hundreds of soldiers from the presidential guard patrolled the streets of the camp, an AFP journalist said, and snipers were positioned on rooftops. His visit "is a strong and important message... that he stands with the Palestinian people in their resistance to the occupation," Atta Abu Rumaila, Fatah's secretary-general in the camp, told AFP.

The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War and its forces regularly launch raids on Palestinian cities. Abbas travelled by helicopter from Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority, for the visit which lasted barely an hour. The Palestinian president was flanked by potential successors, including Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh and Hussein Al-Sheikh, secretary-general of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Abbas used his speech to issue a veiled threat at armed groups "undermining" Palestinian secu-

Huw Edwards BBC presenter at...

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Edwards, 61, is one of the most recognizable faces on UK television, and was the man entrusted with telling the world that Queen Elizabeth II had died. The BBC has been under the spotlight since allegations emerged last week in The Sun newspaper from the parents of a young adult, who said that the presenter had paid for explicit images of their child. The young adult, however, called the claims "rubbish".

The tabloid newspaper did not name the presenter, but accused the BBC of failing to properly investigate the claims, sparking another crisis at the national broadcaster. Edwards's wife said she was revealing his identity "after what have been five extremely difficult days for our family" and was doing so "primarily out of concern

International

Cambodia tiny opposition fights for democracy in one-sided vote

Candlelight Party barred over registration technicalities

PHNOM PENH: In white tuk-tuks kitted out with megaphones and banners, supporters of a tiny Cambodian opposition party wind down a dusty Phnom Penh street, rallying votes ahead of the country's one-sided election. It will be a herculean task for the little-known Grassroots Democratic Party to win any seats in Cambodia's 125-member National Assembly at the July 23 election - widely dismissed as a sham. But party president Yeng Virak insists his team is fighting the good fight. "We have a mission to restore democracy," he told AFP.

At the last national poll in 2018, Prime Minister Hun Sen's ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) made a clean sweep, winning every parliamentary seat after a court outlawed the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). This time around, the Candlelight Party - the CPP's only credible rival - was barred from running over registration technicalities. "The future for the Cambodian opposition is dim," said Sebastian Strangio, author of "Hun Sen's Cambodia". For the 17 remaining parties contesting the poll, it's difficult to compete against the deep pockets and long-entrenched power of Hun Sen's ruling party.

The prime minister has led Cambodia for nearly four decades, and critics accuse him of winding back democratic freedoms and using the court system to thwart political opponents. Across the capital over the past week, CPP campaigning has featured musicians playing atop trucks and a rally with tens of thousands of supporters decked out in freebie T-shirts and hats bearing the party's logo. The Grassroots Democratic Party's campaign, in contrast, is decidedly modest - banners on motorbikes, social media posts and old-fashioned leaflets. "We just want to try our best to reach out to the people," Yeng Virak said.

But since last year, the GDP has lost several senior party leaders to the CPP, including its former prime ministerial candidate, who took a government job. The co-option of opposition politicians and activists has been a steady drumbeat over the years, with dozens making the leap to the ruling party in recent weeks alone. Exiled opposition figurehead Sam Rainsy said it would be convenient for Hun Sen's government if a couple of minor parties won seats - creating the appearance of democratic challengers. But "if this happens, no one will be deceived that this is anything but a fig leaf and that Cambodia will still be effectively a one-party state," he told AFP.

Banned

Prominent trade unionist Rong Chhun, 54, who has served two stints in jail over his political activism, was a star recruit to the Candlelight Party in February before it was sidelined. He was gearing up for the fight of his life - pitting himself against Hun Sen, who has frequently threatened his opponents with jail and violence. "Am I afraid of him? He is a Cambodian citizen, I am also a Cambodian citizen, so there is no reason that I have to be afraid of a Cambodian citizen," he told AFP. But watching the campaign from the bench, Rong Chhun said it was wise to keep a low profile after eight party colleagues were recently attacked. "When I walk around in Phnom Penh, I have to be very cautious. Things could use metal bars, sticks or stones to throw at us." The Candlelight Party is unable to advocate a voter boycott because Cambodia's parliament recently passed legislation making it a criminal offence.

Political dynasty

More than 30 years after a landmark peace agreement ended decades of bloody violence stemming from the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia's democracy is languishing, experts say. "Cambodia is still incapable of creating a social and political situation conducive to holding free and fair elections. The polls held in such a situation would mean very little at all," said political analyst Lao Mong Hay.



PHNOM PENH: Members of Cambodia's Grassroots Democratic Party (GDP) travel to distribute their political campaign message during the general election campaign in Phnom Penh. — AFP

Kem Sokha, leader of the now defunct opposition CNRP, was sentenced to 27 years of house arrest on treason charges in March and scores of others were convicted in a mass trial on charges including incitement and conspiracy. Having led Cambodia for 38 years, Hun Sen has repeatedly declared that his eldest son Hun Manet will succeed him when he retires. "It makes... Cambodia look more like North

Korea than a genuine democracy," said Phil Robertson, Human Rights Watch's deputy Asia director.

'Boxing alone'

But the ruling party remains unapologetic about Hun Sen's heavy-handed tactics and denies it conspired to exclude the main opposition. "We don't care about any negative criticism against our leadership. As the saying goes: 'Dogs keep barking, but people keep walking,'" CPP spokesman Sok Eysan told AFP. Back on the hustings, some voters were unimpressed by the limited choices. "I won't go to vote," a disgruntled tuk-tuk driver told AFP. "Hun Sen is boxing alone in the ring." — AFP



PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron (left) and his wife Brigitte Macron greet Nigerian President Bola Tinubu upon arrival for an official dinner at the Elysee Palace in this photo. — AFP

Nigeria's new leader pushes regional role and domestic reform

LAGOS: Just a month in power, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has already received foreign entrepreneurs and investors at his villa, telling them Nigeria is open for business after a flurry of surprise economic reforms. The former Lagos governor added a diplomatic step this week, becoming chairman of the West Africa bloc ECOWAS, with a call for more democracy and cooperation in the region wracked by coups and jihadists.

Tinubu, 71, has made a swift start, defying critics fearful of his health and appearing determined to propel Africa's most populous nation back into the regional spotlight. "Nigeria, we are back," he said, accepting the rotating presidency of 15-member Economic Community of West Africa States in Guinea-Bissau. His financial overhaul—floating the naira currency and ending a fuel subsidy—and the push to promote Nigeria's global role broke from former president Muhammadu Buhari's more low-key approach. Supporters see the man known as the "Godfather of Lagos" for his political acumen bringing his experience to the regional stage.

"Everybody is looking up to Nigeria, especially in Africa and the ECOWAS region and President Tinubu is ready to take up the gauntlet," Dele Alake, a government spokesman, said. But while business chiefs from Bank of America to Shell and Western partners lined up to praise Tinubu for his swift reforms, the Nigerian leader still must tackle vast domestic financial difficulties. Elected in February in a highly contested vote, Tinubu last month acknowledged his early policies caused short-term pain for Nigerians with higher fuel, transport and food costs.

Huge security challenges

And while he pushes Nigeria's role as a regional heavyweight in West Africa, at home his own country struggles with huge security challenges. "It is interesting to see Tinubu's international focus, the key risk is being seen as a paper tiger," said Cheta Nwanze, partner at SBM Intelligence, a Nigerian risk advisory.

"Only Nigeria is in the position to corral the region, but it will be difficult for Nigeria to do that when the homefront is still a mess." The continent's biggest economy and a top oil producer, Nigeria has always been a regional player, sending troops on peacekeeping missions and offering leadership in multilateral African organizations. Under Tinubu's predecessor, former army commander Buhari, Nigeria dislodged jihadists from the northeastern areas they once controlled, helped by troops from neighboring Chad. But critics say eight years of his unorthodox economics deterred investors while massive theft of oil undermined the petroleum sector. Nicknamed "Baba Go-Slow" by critics, Buhari also mostly kept a lower profile on the global stage. — AFP

Bangladeshi protesters demand PM resignation

DHAKA: Tens of thousands of Bangladeshi opposition supporters defied monsoon rains to join a huge protest in the capital Dhaka on Wednesday to demand the prime minister's resignation ahead of next year's elections. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) says its members have been subject to a renewed crackdown and has accused the ruling Awami League of planning to rig the polls, due by January.

It is demanding that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina step down and allow the appointment of a caretaker government to ensure the vote is conducted fairly. "This government is anti-Bangladesh. This government is anti-democracy," Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the BNP's secretary-general, told a crowd massed outside the party's headquarters. Alamgir said around 1,000

BNP supporters had been detained in the past month as part of a renewed nationwide crackdown against the opposition. Amanullah Aman, a charismatic former student leader who played a key role in the ouster of a previous military junta in 1990, told the rally that the opposition "won't go back home without restoring democracy". Around 50,000 people attended the rally, which dispersed without incident, a senior officer in the Dhaka Metropolitan Police told AFP on condition of anonymity. Western governments have expressed concern over the political climate in Bangladesh, where Hasina's party dominates the legislature and runs it virtually as a rubber stamp.

Her security forces are accused of detaining tens of thousands of opposition activists, killing hundreds in extrajudicial encounters and disappearing hundreds of leaders and supporters. The elite Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) security force and seven of its senior officers were sanctioned by Washington in 2021 in response to those alleged rights abuses. Washington has called for a free and fair election and two senior State Department representatives are meeting with local officials in Dhaka this week. — AFP



DHAKA: Supporters of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), country's main opposition party protest, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka on July 12, 2023. — AFP

Paraguay's Pena vows to be 'on the side' of Taiwan

TAIPEI: Paraguay's incoming president Santiago Pena said Wednesday the country would stand by Taiwan's side for the duration of his five-year term, reaffirming it as Taipei's lone diplomatic ally in South America. Asuncion is one of the few remaining capitals in the wider Latin American region to still recognize Taiwan after Beijing, which claims the island as its territory, spent decades convincing Taipei's allies to switch sides.

Pena's trip to Taipei comes about five weeks before he will be inaugurated, and he said the timing was "not a coincidence". "I come to... reaffirm my commitment, our commitment as Paraguayans to be on the side of the people of Taiwan for the next five years," he said in a speech at Taiwan's Presidential Office.

Pena also praised President Tsai Ing-wen for "knowing that principles and values are not negotiable" and said his administration would work with Taiwan on future investments to ensure "a mutual economic benefit for both nations". The former finance minister had vowed on the campaign trail to continue recognizing Taiwan. His win in May soothed Taipei's fear that Paraguay would ditch ties with it in favor of Beijing, an increasingly common phenomenon as Chi-

na raises the pressure on Taiwan. Panama, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Honduras have all switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in recent years.

Beijing does not permit its own diplomatic allies to also recognize Taipei, which only has formal alliances with 13 countries around the world. Pena said he studied in Taiwan in 1999 and that he was bringing "the love and affection of all the Paraguayan people". He also extended an invitation to Tsai to visit Paraguay after she leaves office next year. Tsai, having served two terms, is constitutionally barred from running for office again. Vice President William Lai, who also met Pena on Wednesday, is the candidate for the ruling Democratic Progressive Party in January's election.

Tsai has been in office since 2016 and her two terms have been marked by a sharp deterioration in relations with an increasingly assertive China. Beijing has refused to engage with her because she does not accept that the island is a part of China. China has also ramped up its military presence around Taiwan, with its warplanes making near-daily incursions into Taipei's air defense zone and sending its vessels into waters around the island. Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense announced Wednesday that the Chinese military had conducted "long-range joint air and naval exercises" around in waters to the southeast. "This morning, July 12, from 7 am to noon, 30 military aircraft were detected, including fighter jets, bombers, early-warning aircraft, ship-based helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles," the ministry said. — AFP

ASEAN urges political solution in Myanmar

JAKARTA: ASEAN chair Indonesia on Wednesday urged a political solution to the Myanmar crisis at regional talks where Thailand's envoy announced he met the country's deposed democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi last week. Myanmar has been ravaged by deadly violence since a military coup ousted Suu Kyi's government more than two years ago, unleashing a bloody crackdown on dissent.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations has long been decried as a toothless talking shop, and it remains split over diplomatic attempts to resolve the crisis as it tries to form a united position on the junta-run country. "Only a political solution will lead to a durable peace," Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told ASEAN counterparts in her opening remarks on the second day of talks in Jakarta.

The meeting was dealt a surprise when Thailand's foreign minister disclosed he met with Myanmar's ousted democracy leader Suu Kyi on his own on Sunday in the country's capital Naypyidaw and said she was in "good health". In the meeting Suu Kyi - who has only been seen once since she was detained after the coup in early 2021 - "encouraged dialogue", Don Pramudwinai told reporters on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting.

The Philippines' foreign minister said Don briefed ASEAN ministers on his meeting with Suu Kyi, but he reiterated any independent effort to restart the peace process should be in line with a five-point ASEAN plan agreed two years ago with Myanmar's junta. "We feel any initiative should be consistent with the five-point consensus. He (Don) just reported on that," Enrique Manalo told reporters. Indonesia's top diplomat repeated the bloc's position that a resumption of dialogue between Myanmar's warring parties and a negotiated political pact would be the only way to bring an end to more than two years of turmoil.

"We are still very much concerned to see the continuing and increasing violence in Myanmar. We strongly urge all stakeholders to denounce violence as this is paramount to build trust," Marsudi said. ASEAN efforts to kick-start the five-point plan that calls for an end to violence and renewed peace talks have been fruitless, as Myanmar's junta ignores international criticism and refuses to engage with its opponents. The bloc's initiatives are limited by its charter principles of consensus and non-interference.

Ministers were still hammering out a joint position on Myanmar on the second day of talks but a communique would be issued by the end of the meeting on Wednesday, a Southeast Asian diplomat told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. In an early draft of the joint communique seen by AFP, the Myanmar section was left blank. ASEAN has tried to show a united front at its official high-level meetings from which Myanmar is barred, but Thailand last month hosted the junta's foreign minister for controversial "informal talks" that further split the bloc. — AFP



BANGKOK: A protester holds an image of detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi during a demonstration outside the Embassy of Myanmar in Bangkok. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, JULY 13, 2023

'Not there yet': COP host UAE vows to cut more emissions

Gulf country to cut domestic emissions by 19% of 2019 levels by 2030

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates promised Tuesday to do more to help keep global warming below the 1.5 degrees tipping point after falling short in its latest plan to slash emissions. The oil-rich Gulf monarchy, which will host this year's COP28 UN climate talks, last week unveiled plans to cut domestic emissions by 19 percent of 2019 levels by 2030.

Under these plans, the UAE would contribute to keeping warming to "just below" 2.0 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the UAE's climate change minister said—slightly outside the goals set out in the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement. "We're striving towards the best that we can do with what we have now. I think it will be 1.5 -- we're not there yet," Mariam Almheiri told a media briefing about the UAE plans.

"We are not losing hope here. We're continuing our efforts on this because just from our experience of seeing what we've done in this improvement, I

just feel there's a lot more in there that we can do," she added. At COP21 in the French capital, countries pledged to try to keep warming "well below" 2.0C and to pursue "all measures" not to exceed the key 1.5C threshold.

The fossil fuels that powered the industrial revolution and global prosperity have already warmed the planet 1.2C, unleashing extreme weather and human upheaval. Last week was the hottest recorded worldwide, the United Nations' World Meteorological Organization said on Monday, after days of scorching temperatures across the planet. To cut domestic pollution, the UAE plans to triple renewable energy production and slash emissions in everything from industry to transport, including a new focus on electric cars.

Currently in the UAE, one of the world's biggest per-capita polluters, gas-guzzling SUVs abound and air conditioning is ubiquitous against the intense desert heat—which is rising fast because of glob-

al warming. According to some studies, parts of the Gulf region could become uninhabitable by the end of the century if warming is left unchecked.

Almheiri said the UAE was pursuing the "pro-climate, pro-growth" approach championed by COP28 president Sultan Al-Jaber, CEO of state oil giant ADNOC, who believes global warming is an economic opportunity. She said the UAE hopes to unveil details of its plan to reach domestic carbon "net zero" by 2050 in the coming months, before COP28 starts in Dubai in late November. "Believe me, we had hard discussions," Almheiri said, describing weeks of government brainstorming over the net zero goal. "This year we're hosting COP28, we want to walk the talk," she added.

The domestic targets do not include planet-warming emissions from oil exported by the UAE, which is currently producing about three million barrels per day according to OPEC. — AFP



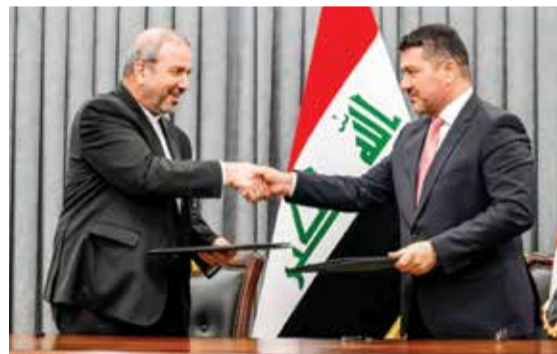
The UAE is pursuing a 'pro-climate, pro-growth' approach championed by COP28 president Sultan Al-Jaber, CEO of state oil giant ADNOC.

Iraq to pay for Iranian gas imports with oil

BAGHDAD: Iraq will start paying for its Iranian gas imports with oil, to circumvent the complicated mechanism agreed with Washington in order not to contravene US sanctions, the prime minister said Tuesday.

Iranian gas is crucial for Iraq's electricity generation, but US sanctions on Iranian oil and gas impose restrictions on how Baghdad can pay for the imports. Iraq cannot directly hand over cash to Iran, but payments must be held in a bank account and be used by Tehran to fund imports of food and medicines. The payment system has left Iraq in heavy arrears and prompted Iran to respond by periodically switching off the taps.

Ravaged by decades of conflict and international sanctions, oil-rich Iraq relies on Iranian gas imports for a third of its energy needs. It is also beset by rampant corruption, and suffers from dilapidated infrastructure. Ten days ago Iran halved its supply of gas to Iraq because of unpaid bills of more than \$12 billion, deposited in an Iraqi bank account but which Tehran cannot use, Prime Minister Mohamed Shia Al-Sudani said in a televised address Tuesday. His office said in a statement that Baghdad and Tehran had signed an agreement Tuesday after several days of talks for "the import of Iranian gas to fuel Iraqi power plants, in exchange for Iraqi crude oil". "The agreement aims to address the gas supply crisis for power



BAGHDAD: A handout picture released by Iraq's Prime Minister's Media Office shows the PM chief of staff Ihsan Al-Awadi (right) and Iran's ambassador to Baghdad Mohammad Kazem al-Sadeq shaking hands as they exchange signed bilateral agreements during a ceremony in Baghdad on July 11, 2023. —AFP

plants, while tackling payment issues and complications arising from US sanctions," the statement said.

Recent gas supply stoppages have only worsened the frequent power outages much of Iraq sees during the hot summer months, when temperatures regularly reach 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit). In his televised address, Sudani said: "As the American side did not give the necessary permission for the transfer of funds... the supply of Iranian gas was stopped. "Because of the transfer mechanism and its complexity, we were unable to obtain authorization to transfer these outstanding payments so our Iranian neighbor could continue to supply us" with gas, he said. — AFP

CMA: On the path to turn Kuwait into a regional hub

KUWAIT: Kuwait has been taking steady steps to achieve its strategic objective of turning the country into a regional financial and commercial hub. The Gulf state has set up supervisory and regulatory authorities to back up a domestic market capable of attracting investments locally and from abroad. Capital Markets Authority's establishment in 2010 was on the basis that the financial sector was one of the key fundamentals of the national economy, that it would play a vital role in investing funds, enriching savings, offering credit tools, diversifying income resources and creating jobs for nationals.

The CMA, since its establishment according to Law 7/2020, adopted by the National Assembly in February 2020, has taken charge of organizing and overseeing securities, ensuring transparency, justice and competence, obliging companies listed on Boursa Kuwait to adhere to governance and protecting traders from unjust and irregular practices. CMA's five-member board of commissioners is largely credited for promoting Kuwait to the emerging market status, as declared by the FTSE Russel index in September 2017, S&O in December 2018 and MSCI in June 2019.

The promotion has contributed to luring foreign traders including those with huge assets and some \$5 billion into the local stock market, particularly



between 2018 and 2020. It also impacted positively the daily trade volume that reached KD 62 million (\$187.8 million) in 2020, compared to KD 18 million (\$54.5 million) in 2018. Currently, the CMA is a member of the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO) and seeks expertise and consultation from various international agencies and institutions, namely the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, the European Commission, the Financial Stability Board (FSB), Internal Audit and the World Bank (WB).

Dr Ahmad Al-Melhem, CMA Board Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, said in an interview with KUNA that the Authority would present various financial services, in the foreseeable future, namely a digital platform for stock and sukuk listing and trading, funds, financial derivatives and re-purchase transactions. In addition to the above mentioned services, the CMA has already set up profiting realty funds, and launched margin trading, short selling, lending and borrowing.

Al-Melhem adds that the Authority has recently launched its third strategy (2023-2024) and (2026-2027) to stay abreast of forecast requirements, local and international trends. Moreover, the Authority that has been upgrading its strategies since 2020 is seeking to draw up a national inclusive financial strategy. — AFP

Why American communities are suing Big Oil

WASHINGTON: Attorney Jeffrey B Simon helped families affected by the opioid crisis obtain settlements worth more than \$2.7 billion against leading pharmaceutical companies. Now, he's part of a legal team taking on Big Oil over the 2021 Pacific Northwest Heat Dome disaster—and says the era of fossil fuel companies evading responsibility for their role in the climate crisis is ending.

"We contend that they put out an enormous amount of disinformation so that their business activities and their wealth creation would not be interrupted," the Texan told AFP in an interview, after filing a \$52 billion case on behalf of Oregon's Multnomah County.

"The defendants' old saw—that this science is uncertain and unproven—will fail," added the trial lawyer at Simon Greenstone Panatier PC. These defendants include the world's biggest energy interests: ExxonMobil, Shell and Chevron to name a few, but also the American Petroleum Institute, and the consultancy firm McKinsey & Company.

Multnomah County, which encompasses the state's biggest city Portland, is seeking the sum for past and future damages, as well as for a fund to "climatize" its infrastructure in preparation for a future of frequent and intense heat waves, drought and wildfires.

Its suit, filed in late June, alleges it suffered 69 deaths, extensive property damage, and significant expenditure of taxpayer money as a result of the 2021 heat wave, which saw it sizzle in temperatures up to 116F (46.7C). A peer-reviewed analysis by the World Weather Attribution group said the phenomenon would have been "virtually impossible" without human-caused climate change.

Explosion of cases

The case is the latest in a wave of litigation that began around 2017 in the United States, the world's biggest economy, responsible for the greatest share of accumulated global carbon emissions. More than 40 cities, counties, and states across the US are suing fossil fuel interests over climate change impacts



PORTLAND, US: Portland residents fill a cooling center with a capacity of about 300 people at the Oregon Convention Center June 27, 2021 in Portland, Oregon. —AFP

as well as campaigns of disinformation spanning decades, according to the Center for Climate Integrity, which tracks such cases.

"We're at a really important moment," Delta Merner, lead for the Science Hub for Climate Litigation at the Union of Concerned Scientists, told AFP. The oil and gas industry has been fighting for years to keep these cases out of state courts, where she argues they belong because the harms of global warming differ from place to place.

Florida experiences more intense hurricanes, for example, while California has worsening wildfires.

Industry, on the other hand, has sought to characterize the cases as attempts to regulate emissions and policy, making them a federal matter. These efforts at federalization received blows in April and May when the Supreme Court declined to hear appeals by oil companies against appearing in state courts, meaning the cases can now start to be heard on their merits.

These cases are distinct from a trial that concluded in Montana, where a group of young people say the western state violated their state constitutional rights to a clean and healthy environment.

They are not seeking damages, but rather a judgment declaring as unconstitutional regulations that allow state agencies to ignore climate impacts when making permitting decisions for fossil fuel development. That trial is now awaiting a verdict.

Beyond the jurisdictional debate, the fossil fuel industry and its advocates contend that their products are lawful and have helped grow the economy and raise standards of living. Chevron's legal counsel Theodore J Boutros told AFP: "The federal Constitution bars these novel, baseless claims that target one industry and group of companies engaged in lawful activity that provides tremendous benefits to society."

Simon argued there's nothing novel about their legal arguments. "In opioid litigation, we never contended that there was no appropriate medical use for prescription opioids—it's oversupply," which he says is the same case for fossil fuel use. Multnomah County's suit alleges the defendant companies' own internal documents showed they knew of the environmental harms of their products more than 50 years ago, but engaged in deception campaigns that prevented communities from making the best choices. — AFP

Broadcom wins EU approval for VMware takeover

BRUSSELS: The European Commission approved US chipmaker Broadcom's planned \$61-billion takeover of cloud computing firm VMware on Wednesday after the company offered remedies to ease competition concerns. The massive deal raised fears that it would stifle competition following its announcement in May 2022, prompting probes by antitrust watchdogs in the European Union and Britain.

The European Commission said its in-depth investigation found that the transaction, as originally proposed, "would harm competition in the worldwide market for the supply" of Fibre Channel Host-Bus Adapters (FC HBAs).

Part of the worries was that rivals would not be able to build components compatible with those made by VMware. As a remedy, Broadcom offered interoperability commitments to ensure that VMware software would work with that made by rival Marvell and other potential competitors, the EU's executive arm said.

The company also guaranteed access to the source code for all of its current and future FC HBA drivers through an irrevocable open source license.

The commission concluded that "the proposed acquisition, as modified by the commitments, would no longer raise competition concerns".

Britain's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) decided in March to deepen its probe into the mega-merger. Broadcom is seeking to expand into the software market to boost its server business and has already acquired two complementary firms, CA Technology and Symantec.

VMware, a leader in cloud computing and virtualisation technology, was spun out of Dell Technologies in 2021. — AFP

Business

NBK maintains leadership position in attracting top Kuwaiti talent

Bank upholds highest Kuwaitization rates

- Al-Ablani: Our strategic objective is to attract top talents and align with Kuwait Vision 2035 'New Kuwait' by fostering increased employment opportunities for Kuwaiti citizens
- NBK takes pride in maintaining the highest rates of Kuwaiti employee retention within the banking sector

- NBK takes pride in its leading position as a major supporter of young national talents, actively fostering their skills and preparing them for the job market
- We are dedicated to fostering sustainability and advancing Kuwaitization in the banking sector



Emad Al-Ablani receiving two awards for the Best Implementation of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives and the Best Initiative for Women in Business from MEED Magazine.



The presentation of the award for the highest employer in the career fair organized by the American University of the Middle East.



KUWAIT: Throughout the first half of 2023, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) remained committed in its role as the primary sponsor of national workforce, offering favorable employment prospects for Kuwaiti graduates. Furthermore, the Bank remained dedicated to attracting exceptional young Kuwaiti talents and actively strengthening sustainability initiatives, while placing even greater emphasis on Kuwaitization within the banking sector.

NBK is dedicated to upholding the highest Kuwaitization rates, in accordance with the regulations set by the Central Bank of Kuwait. To achieve this goal, the bank is actively developing initiatives that specifically target the attraction and nurturing of local talents. The Kuwaitization strategy further reinforces NBK's commitment to expanding efforts in attracting and retaining national talent in a sustainable manner. Commenting on NBK's successful strategies, Emad Al-Ablani, Head of Group Human Resources at NBK said, "throughout the first six months of the year, we maintained our relentless efforts in attracting exceptional talents and skills. We take pride in being the largest private sector institution in Kuwait, with a remarkable 75.7 percent national workforce representation by the end of the first half of 2023. Furthermore, we continue to uphold the highest retention rates among Kuwaiti employ-

ees, reaffirming our commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment."

"It is worth noting that approximately 83.6 percent of the total appointments in H1 2023 comprised Kuwaiti citizens, highlighting our commitment to national employment. Additionally, the proportion of Kuwaiti nationals holding managerial positions increased to 62.6 percent of the total number of managers by end of H1 2023, showcasing the continuous growth of local talents in our workforce, including those who graduated in 2022," Al-Ablani added. "These figures emphasize our unwavering and profound conviction in our historical role and our CSR commitment to recruit and attract national talents while fostering their skill development. By doing so, we aim to empower them to become the leaders of the future. This message and these values have been consistently preserved throughout our long-standing commitment," Al-Ablani confirmed.

He further highlighted that the recruitment strategy of the Human Resources Group is focused on attracting top talents, aligning with the objectives of "New Kuwait Vision 2035", and actively working towards increasing the employment of Kuwaiti citizens within the banking sector, thereby supporting the national economy. "NBK has gained widespread recognition as a leading institution in attract-

ing employees, thanks to its reputation for prioritizing equal opportunities and fostering workplace diversity. Through comprehensive programs focused on training and developing employees' capabilities and skills, the bank provides a solid foundation for building successful careers and preparing its people for future leadership roles within the organization. As a result, NBK has emerged as the preferred employer among Kuwaiti fresh graduates in the private sector," Al-Ablani said. In its efforts to attract and recruit professional talents, NBK actively seeks to establish strong partnerships with both local and international universities. By leveraging the latest applications and considering local recruitment campaigns, the bank aims to enhance opportunities for attracting employees. Furthermore, NBK has forged strategic relationships with numerous academic institutions to provide its people with professional development opportunities, ensuring their continuous growth and advancement.

In a recent achievement, NBK was honored with the prestigious top recruiter award for its remarkable contributions in job creation and Kuwaitization within the GCC. This esteemed recognition was presented by the Committee of GCC Ministers of Social Affairs and Social Development. During a career fair organized by AUM, the bank distinguished itself among all partici-

pating organizations for its exceptional efforts in recruitment and Kuwaitization. This accomplishment serves as a testament to NBK's unwavering commitment to promoting national employment and advancing the goals of the GCC nations in these critical areas. In addition, NBK's endeavors were recognized by the international magazine "MEED," honoring NBK Academy as the "Best Youth Programme Initiative" for two consecutive years. Furthermore, NBK won "Best Implementation of Diversity & Inclusion Initiatives" award, and NBK Rise was selected as "Best Initiative for Women in Business."

Every year, NBK actively sponsors numerous job fairs for Kuwaiti youth, aiming to provide them with valuable information about job opportunities that align with their interests and aspirations. This consistent effort underscores NBK's ongoing commitment to supporting young national talents and equipping them with the necessary qualifications to enter the job market and secure suitable employment that matches their skills and ambitions.

Beyond its focus on employment, NBK continues to extend support to Kuwaiti youth through its sponsorship of the "TAMAKAN" program. This program, which was recently named the "Best Project in the Private Sector" by the GCC Committee of Ministers of Social Affairs, highlights the bank's commit-



Leadership award in the field of Kuwaitization.

ment to empowering and uplifting young individuals. Additionally, the bank actively promotes financial literacy and awareness among students in public and private schools through the "Bankee" program. These initiatives showcase the bank's dedication to fostering the growth and development of Kuwaiti youth across various domains.

Musk's antics give Zuckerberg PR makeover

WASHINGTON: After years of bad press and scandal, Mark Zuckerberg is seeing his reputation spruced up in the fickle world of tech, largely thanks to the increasingly unpredictable behavior of Elon Musk. Always bubbling just beneath the surface, the on-again, off-again rivalry between Musk and Facebook creator Zuckerberg has boiled over with the launch of Twitter-clone Threads.

Meta's new app has provoked the Tesla titan to sue Zuckerberg as well as unfurl a spate of potty-mouthed trolling on Twitter. "It's definitely unique to see two people, who obviously are just uncouthly wealthy, be in this kind of grudge match," said Andrew Selepak, assistant media professor at the University of Florida. "But it does seem a little bit one-sided" with Musk clearly engaging in "childish behavior," he added.

Any blow-by-blow account requires wading into the often arcane back-and-forth that takes place on social media. One altercation began on Threads when the official account of fast-food chain Wendy's made a friendly jibe at Musk's expense, which Zuck-

berg tagged with a laughing emoji. This quickly met the wrath of the mercurial Tesla boss: "Zuck is a Cuck." Musk wrote on Twitter, using a slur embraced by the far-right to slander Zuckerberg as a shill for the establishment. Musk then proposed "a literal dick measuring contest."

'Learning is failing'

Zuckerberg has ignored the provocations, but hasn't always stayed above the fray. Two weeks ago, before the release of Threads, he offered, maybe as a joke, to meet Musk for a bare-knuckled cage fight.

And in the hours after Threads was released, he went to Twitter for the first time in more than a decade to post a popular meme of Spider-Man pointing at another Spider-Man—a tacit acknowledgment that, yes, he had copied Twitter. Zuckerberg, who is 39, now cultivates a calmer image as big tech's muscle-toned wise man who practices martial arts and cares for his young daughters, all while delivering huge profits. "Part of learning is failing," Zuckerberg recently told the Lex Fridman podcast.

"The moment that you decide that you're going to be too embarrassed to try something new, then you're not going to learn anything anymore," he added. Fading are the memories of the Cambridge Analytica scandal and Zuckerberg being hauled in front of US lawmakers to defend his company's ac-



BRUSSELS: Founder and CEO of US online social media and social networking service Facebook Mark Zuckerberg reacts upon his arrival for a meeting with European Commission vice-president in charge for Values and Transparency, in Brussels.—AFP

tions during the 2016 US election. Even last year's failure to make something out of virtual reality, with billions of dollars written off and thousands of staff fired, has faded from the headlines.

But the Musk antics have helped more than anything to rehabilitate the Facebook founder. "These attacks by Musk have done nothing but help Zuckerberg's image," said tech industry analyst Rob Enderle.—AFP

After spring crisis, US banks face subdued profits

NEW YORK: The upcoming deluge of US bank earnings is expected to show more pressure on deposits, an uptick in reserves for bad loans and much talk about potential new regulations. While there is always the potential for a shock disclosure, banking industry experts are generally anticipating a picture of subdued profitability, rather than a repeat of the crisis that pummeled the industry this spring. "You're going to see some challenges on the earnings picture," said Chris Wolfe, a managing director at Fitch Ratings, who expects banks to set aside greater reserves as households savings erode.

"There's still a recessionary element that's playing into forecasts even if that's getting pushed out a little further," Wolfe said. The second-quarter reporting season kicks off Friday with reports from three banking giants: JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup and Wells Fargo, which will be followed early next week by Bank of America and Goldman Sachs. Reports from these behemoths offer a reading on the US consumer because of these banks' extensive credit card operations and lending tied to home and car loans. The focus then shifts to regional players such as Cleveland-based KeyCorp, Dallas-based Comerica, Los Angeles-based PacWest Bancorp and Alabama's Regions Financial.

These midsized banks suffered a plunge on Wall Street in the spring amid fears that the crisis that felled Silicon Valley Bank, First Republic and Signature Bank would drag down other lenders.

Paying for deposits

The largest banks are projected to vary in terms of profitability compared with last year, with analysts still seeing a tepid merger and acquisition market as crimping investment banking revenues. But the outlook is generally worse for the midsized players, which face intense pressure to retain deposits in the shifting US monetary policy landscape. The Federal Reserve has lifted interest rates 10 straight times since early 2022 in a bid to counter inflation that has scrambled the picture after a lengthy stretch of very low interest rates.—AFP

Microsoft-Activision deal back on track after US court win

WASHINGTON: A US federal judge on Tuesday resurrected Microsoft's \$69 billion buyout of video gaming giant Activision Blizzard by refusing to allow a temporary suspension of the long delayed deal. The US Federal Trade Commission, the Washington-based antitrust enforcer, requested that the blockbuster transaction be halted pending an investigation on competition concerns.

But Judge Jacqueline Scott Corley said "the FTC has not shown a likelihood it will prevail on its claim," clearing the way for the deal to go through in the United States.

The decision handed a major victory to Microsoft and allowed it to close its purchase of Activision, the maker of "Call of Duty" and "Candy Crush," as planned on July 18. Xbox-owner Microsoft launched a bid for Activision Blizzard eighteen months ago, seeking to establish the world's third biggest gaming firm by

revenue after China's Tencent and Japan's PlayStation maker Sony.

While the European Union has greenlit the deal, Microsoft still needs to overcome a veto from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in Britain. "We're grateful to the court in San Francisco for this quick and thorough decision and hope other jurisdictions will continue working towards a timely resolution," said Microsoft President Brad Smith. "As we've demonstrated consistently throughout this process, we are committed to working creatively and collaboratively to address regulatory concerns," he added.

At the heart of concerns for regulators was the prospect that Microsoft would deny rivals access to wildly popular games, most notably the blockbuster "Call of Duty," and make them available only on Xbox consoles. Another worry, especially for the UK regulator, was the fate of cloud gaming, a market



WASHINGTON: The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) building is seen in Washington, DC. A US federal judge on July 11, 2023, refused to allow the temporary suspension of Microsoft completing its \$69 billion buyout of gaming giant Activision Blizzard, a court filing showed.—AFP

that remains largely underdeveloped but would be of great interest to Microsoft, a cloud computing leader along with Amazon's AWS.—AFP

Business

IMF: Bahrain's economy on strong footing, expanded by 4.9% in 2022

Economic growth spurred by 6.2% surge in non-oil GDP

MANAMA: Bahrain's economy is on a strong footing as it grew at its fastest pace in a decade since 2022, driven by continued fiscal reforms and improved finances amid higher oil prices, the International Monetary Fund said. The kingdom's economy, which expanded by 4.9 percent in 2022, spurred by a 6.2 percent surge in non-oil gross domestic product, is projected to moderate to 2.7 percent in 2023, the IMF said in a statement at the conclusion of Article IV consultations with Bahrain.

Non-oil GDP this year is expected to moderate to 3.3 percent, reflecting "fiscal consolidation, higher interest rates, and a base effect from 2022 strong growth." The overall economic growth is projected to stabilize at about 2.7 percent over the medium term. However, "significant uncertainty clouds the forecast, including from oil price volatility, international financial turmoil and ongoing tightening, and a slowdown in global growth," the Washington-based fund said. Bahrain, the smallest economy in the six-member GCC economic bloc, has bounced back strongly from the pandemic-induced slowdown, driven by robust growth in its non-hydrocarbon economy. The non-oil sector's contribution to real GDP reached an all-time high at 83.1 percent last year. Higher oil prices following Russia's military assault on Ukraine also supported its economy.

In May, S&P Global Ratings affirmed Bahrain's credit rating and maintained the kingdom's positive outlook on reform momentum and continued financial sector stability. The rating agency affirmed Bahrain's

long and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings at B+/B, which indicates the country will be able to meet its financial commitments.

With the economic recovery well under way, the state budget deficit declined significantly, narrowing to 1.2 percent of GDP in 2022, from 6.4 percent in 2021. Bahrain's overall fiscal deficit declined from 11 percent to 6.1 percent of GDP. Government debt also declined to 117.6 percent of GDP in 2022 from 127.1 percent of GDP in 2021, underpinning the improving financial stability of the kingdom, the IMF said. IMF directors welcomed the authorities' "continued commitment to implementing reforms under the Fiscal Balance Programme, including the progress so far to enhance non-hydrocarbon revenue mobilization and the continued spending restraint".

To strengthen its economy, Bahrain unveiled a major economic reform plan in 2021 that seeks to invest about \$30 billion in strategic projects to drive post-coronavirus growth, boost employment for citizens and attract foreign direct investment. As per the multi-year plan, the government adopted cost rationalization measures and aims to create more than 20,000 jobs for citizens annually and train 10,000 people through its Tamkeen program.

The IMF encouraged the authorities to continue improving labor market flexibility and empowering women, as well as leveraging opportunities from regional integration. The fund also said that the exchange rate



Clouds hover over an aerial view of newly constructed areas in Manama, Bahrain.

peg "continues to serve Bahrain well as a monetary anchor". Fiscal consolidation and structural reforms will support the kingdom's external position, while its monetary policy should continue to follow the US Fed-

eral Reserve. Bahrain's banking system is healthy with ample buffers and has so far withstood the phasing out of Covid measures and tightening financial conditions, the IMF said.

Gulf Bank announces its 20th millionaire on July 13

KUWAIT: As part of its keenness to reward its customers, and to encourage a culture of saving in society, Gulf Bank will be announcing the 20th millionaire in the semi-annual Al-Danah millionaire draw today (July 13, 2023). The draw will be held at the Avenues Mall in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Ernst & Young, which will also be broadcasted live across Gulf Bank's various communication channels.

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with periodic draws that award account holders with valuable prizes and multiple benefits. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers 10 lucky winners an opportunity to win KD 1,000 on monthly basis, in addition to two quarterly draw prizes of KD 100,000 each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million, and a grand draw prize of KD 2 million.

In celebration of the Al-Danah account's 25th anniversary, Gulf Bank has recently announced an increase in the annual grand prize value of the Al-Danah account — increasing the value from KD 1.5 million, to KD 2 million — making it the world's largest cash prize linked to a bank account.

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank cus-

tomers can open an Al-Danah account at any given time, and in order to increase their chances of winning, account holders must either maintain the minimum deposit amount of KD 200 or increase their Al-Danah savings. Hence, the higher the balance in an account, the more chances of winning. Additionally, opening an Al-Danah account is now easier than ever — with customers having the option to open an account through Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

The Al-Danah millionaire account is one of the oldest and most prestigious savings accounts in Kuwait and was designed to encourage a culture of savings in society, and reward customers for their commitment to saving on a regular basis. Therefore, Gulf Bank encourages everyone to open an Al-Danah millionaire account to start saving and to enjoy the multitude of benefits the account has to offer. Amongst the many advantages enjoyed by Al-Danah millionaire account, is that it is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty, by providing loyalty chances. The loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year. This means that all chances gained by existing Al-Danah clients in 2022 (from January 1 to December 31, 2022), have been transferred and added into 2023 Al-Danah draws (terms and conditions apply).

The Al-Danah account provides a multitude of valuable services to its customers, including access to an exclusive Al-Danah ATM card, that is ideal for depositing money into their accounts,



any time. Account holders can also calculate their chances of winning the monthly, quarterly, and annual draws using the Al-Danah calculator, which is available on Gulf Bank's Online website and Mobile Application.

Customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches or transfer directly through Gulf Bank's Online or Mobile Banking services. They can also direct their queries via WhatsApp on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number. Moreover, customers can visit the dedicated Al-Danah account website to learn more about the account and its winners.



Angola and DRC eye iconic rail revamp to quench minerals thirst

LUBUMBASHI, DR Congo: Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo are pinning hopes for economic revival on the revamp of an iconic African railway connecting mineral-rich inland areas to the Atlantic Ocean.

Earlier this month, Luanda and Kinshasa granted a group of investors a 30-year concession to operate the line linking Angola's seaport of Lobito to Kolwezi, a southern city in the heart of the DRC's copperbelt. Partially funded by the United States, the \$555-million project is expected to boost mineral export and intra-African trade and cements Angola's diplomatic pivot to the West, analysts said. "Unlocking the Lobito corridor with American funding... is a historical watershed," said Alex Vines at British think-tank Chatham House. Currently stretching about 1,700 kilometers (1,050 miles), the railway was completed around 100 years ago by British investors interested in getting copper out of Africa.

The Angolan section of the line was closed during the height of the country's 1975-2002 civil war and remained in disuse afterwards due to damage. Rebuilt by a Chinese company, it reopened in 2015 but traffic has struggled to take off. Only about one train every two weeks currently runs over it, according to Vecturis, a Belgian railway operator, part of the consortium awarded the railway concession.

Cobalt, copper, derailments

The Congolese stretch dates back to colonial times and is poorly maintained, said Marcel Lungange, head of infrastructure at the DRC's national railway company, SNCC. "We have an average of three derailments a day due to the dilapidated state of the tracks, with our locomotives running at two-kilometers-per-hour in many places," he said.

Mining firms prefer to transport metals via truck to other often congested ports in Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa—but such journeys are expensive and take weeks to complete. With the International Energy Agency expecting global demand for critical metals to quadruple by 2040 as countries race to tackle climate change, new export routes are badly needed, said Louis Watum, who heads the DRC's Chamber of Mines, a trade group.

DR Congo is respectively the world's and Africa's biggest producer of cobalt and copper. Both minerals are used to build solar panels, wind farms and electric vehicles. "We already have huge queues of lorries" at border posts, Watum said. The consortium, which includes global commodity trader Trafigura and Portuguese construction firm Mota-Engil, hopes the revamped railway will slash transit times from the DRC to Lobito to under 36 hours. It wants to have at least six trains a day crossing in and out of the country within five years. To that end it plans to pour \$455 million on upgrades in Angola, including buying more than 1,500 new wagons and locomotives, reinforcing bridges and welding rails.

Another \$100 million is earmarked for the DRC, with the concession agreement also envisaging extending the tracks to neighboring Zambia.

About half the money is expected to be financed by the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), a government agency. The commitment comes at a time of heightened competition between Washington and Beijing over access to critical minerals.

It puts some flesh on the bones of US President Joe Biden's pledge to go "all in" on Africa and bolster trade with the continent, said Vines. It also reflects a shift in Angola's diplomacy. — AFP

Gripes in Grimsby over Brexit fishing failure

GRIMSBY, UK: Grimsby, perched on the southern side of the River Humber, near Kingston-upon-Hull in northern England, was built on the fishing industry.

Some 70 percent of people in the town voted for Brexit, hoping that the UK's departure from the European Union would boost its flagging fortunes. But seven years on from the landmark referendum, those who banked on a turnaround are disappointed, while those who feared it are not taking it lying down.

At 7:00 am, the auction at Grimsby's wholesale fish market in the heart of the town's vast docks is in full swing. "We have mackerel. 1.5 (pounds) a kilo? 1.7? 1.8? 1.9?" shouts the auctioneer.

For an island nation, fishing is surprisingly small fry, accounting for just 0.03 percent of the British economy. But it still stirs passions. Then-prime minister Boris Johnson visited the wholesale fish market on the 2019 general election campaign trail, in which he vowed repeatedly to "Get Brexit Done" as divorce negotiations continued three years after the referendum. Johnson had also said that leaving the EU would bring a "massive boost" to the local fishing

industry. Indeed many of the current traders gathered under the market's strip lighting voted "Leave", hoping it would end European quotas and competition.

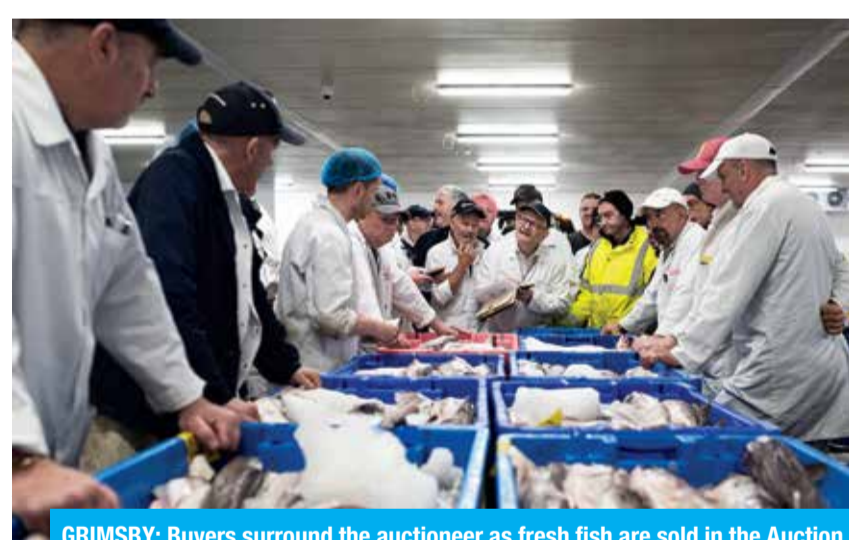
But Patrick Salmon, owner of a craft smokehouse, said that hasn't happened.

"The French and the Spanish come to the UK, fish our fish, and then they take it home, process it and sell it back to us," he told AFP. "That's bonkers. We should have control of our own waters and you lot (Europeans) should be thrown out. However, that will possibly never happen."

Salmon's small business is not unduly affected by Brexit for now, as he gets his fish from Scotland and Iceland. One day he said he would like to export to France, Belgium and other EU countries, even if it means much more paperwork than before.

Vanishing fleet

Fish market manager Martyn Boyers is another "Leave" voter. He said the UK was so far not doing a very good job of being self-sufficient. In the mid-20th century, Grimsby was one of the world's leading fishing ports, until the fleets of trawlers be-



GRIMSBY: Buyers surround the auctioneer as fresh fish are sold in the Auction Hall of Grimsby Fish Market in Grimsby, northern England, on July 10, 2023. Grimsby Fish Market holds a daily fish auction which is recognized as one of the most important fish markets in Europe. — AFP

thousand people are employed in the sector in a town with high unemployment.

Boyers said Brexit has not had a huge effect on the fish market but some fish processing contracts have been lost. Iceland has bypassed the UK, and now sends direct to the European mainland, he said.

Bitter

Brexit, which promised Britain's fishing industry freedom, has left a bitter taste in the mouth of traders like Nathan Goldley, who voted "Remain". "Brexit has made it harder to import fish from Europe,"

N Zealand holds rates, says inflation to fall further

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's central bank left its key interest rate unchanged Wednesday and said it expected inflation to ease further in coming months. The decision to keep the official cash rate at 5.5 percent comes after government figures in June showed the economy had tipped into

recession. The Reserve Bank of New Zealand said interest rates were "constraining spending and inflation pressure as anticipated and required".

The freeze will come as a relief to the country's mortgage holders, who have seen their monthly repayments rise rapidly over the past year. Rates would need to "remain at a restrictive level for the foreseeable future" to return inflation to the 1-3 percent target, the bank added.

Central banks around the world have been forced to ramp up interest rates for more than a year as they try to control inflation, which surged as economies reopened from COVID lockdowns

and in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The move gave stocks a tiny boost, with the benchmark NZX50 index edging up in the minutes after the announcement, while even the local dollar staged a very small recovery against the US dollar. Policymakers raise rates to make borrowing more expensive, reducing the buying power and demand of consumers and businesses, which usually pushes prices down.

Recent government figures showed inflation sitting at 6.7 percent on-year in January-March, with second-quarter figures due out next week, having hit a peak of 7.3 percent last year. — AFP

Lifestyle



Photographers take photo of "Nessie", a mounted skeleton of a lower Jurassic Plesiosaur *Cryptoclidus* (approximately 190 million years old) during Sotheby's Natural History auction preview in New York. — AFP photos

Two mounted dinosaur skeletons—one a fierce flying reptile of the kind seen in the "Jurassic Park" movies and the other evocative of the Loch Ness monster—will be auctioned off this month in New York, Sotheby's said Tuesday. The latter, called Nessie after the legendary elusive beast plying the depths of a Scottish lake, is estimated to draw between \$600,000 and \$800,000, Sotheby's said.



The mounted skeleton of "Horus", a late Cretaceous Pteranodon *Longiceps* (approximately 83 million years old) is on display.

A kind of dinosaur called a plesiosaur, it was last auctioned in Paris in 2010 and at the time had come from a private museum in Germany. The remains, which are nearly 11 feet (3.4 meters) long, were found in a quarry in England in 1990. The skeleton is about 75 percent complete and in exceptional condition, said Cassandra Hotton, Sotheby's head of Science and Popular Culture.

With its small head, long neck and flippers, the plesiosaur lived in the Lower Jurassic period about 190 million years ago. "The history of the Plesiosaur is also intertwined with the elusive Loch Ness monster of Scottish folklore, as many have drawn morphological comparisons between the Plesiosaur and the infamous 'Nessie,' whose sightings stretch back to the sixth century," Sotheby's said in a news release.

This one will be auctioned on July 26 at a Sotheby's event focused on natu-



Dinosaur bones evoking Loch Ness monster to be auctioned: Sotheby's

ral history. Also on offer will be a flying reptile called a pteranodon, with a wing span of about 20 feet (six meters) and estimated at \$4 million to \$6 million. Named Horus after an Egyptian god, this particular specimen was found in the US state of Kansas.



The mounted skeleton of "Horus", a late Cretaceous Pteranodon *Longiceps* (approximately 83 million years old) is on display.



The mounted skeleton of "Nessie", a lower Jurassic Plesiosaur *Cryptoclidus* (approximately 190 million years old) is on display.

bones remain essentially unrestored, meaning that artificial filler was not used to replace missing bone sections," the auction house said. It noted that this kind of creature made frequent appearances in the "Jurassic Park" film franchise. Fossils from prehistoric animals are now big draws at auctions. The record in terms of money was a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* skeleton that sold for \$31.8 million in 2020. —AFP



Engineers work on the components at a Godrej Aerospace manufacturing plant, which manufacture various parts for the Vikas and cryogenic engines for the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) space missions, in Mumbai. — AFP photos

India shoots for the moon with latest rocket launch

India on Friday launches its latest attempt at an unmanned moon landing, the next frontier of a burgeoning, cut-price aerospace program rapidly closing in on the milestones set by global superpowers. If successful, the mission would make the world's most populous nation only the fourth country after Russia, the United States and China to achieve a controlled landing on the lunar surface.

The latest iteration of the Chandrayaan ("Mooncraft") program comes four years after an earlier attempt ended in failure, with ground crew losing contact moments before landing. This time around, there is optimism that the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) will succeed, as it sets its sights on a future manned lunar mission.

"We're sure this one will be successful and will bring pride and recognition to everybody who has worked for it," Anil G. Verma of Godrej & Boyce, ISRO's principal engine and components supplier, told AFP. The 14-day mission comes with a price tag of \$74.6 million, according to media reports, and aims to successfully land a rover to explore the lunar surface.

A huge crowd is expected to attend the launch, scheduled for 2:35 pm local time (0905 GMT) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre north of Chennai. "I am very happy and hopeful," K. Sivan, the ISRO chief during India's last lunar landing attempt, told AFP.

Expanding space program
India's space program has grown considerably in size and momentum since it first sent a probe to orbit the moon in 2008. In 2014, it became the first Asian nation to put a satellite into orbit around Mars, and three years later, the ISRO launched 104 satellites in a single mission.

The ISRO's Gaganyaan ("Skycraft") program is slated to launch a three-day manned mission into Earth's orbit by next year. India is also working to boost its two percent share of the global commercial space market by sending private payloads into orbit for a fraction of the cost of competitors. Experts say India can keep costs low by copying and



An engineer walks past a component at a Godrej Aerospace manufacturing plant, which manufacture various parts for the Vikas and cryogenic engines for the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) space missions.

adapting existing space technology, and thanks to an abundance of highly skilled engineers who earn a fraction of their foreign counterparts' wages.

'Best is yet to come'

Chandrayaan-2, its previous attempt at a lunar landing in 2019, cost \$140 million—nearly twice Friday's launch, but a much smaller price tag than similar ventures by other countries. The mission, which coincided with the 50th anniversary year of Neil Armstrong's first-ever moonwalk, ended in disappointment when the lander went silent just 2.1 kilo-

Engineers work on a component at a Godrej Aerospace manufacturing plant, which manufacture various parts for the Vikas and cryogenic engines for the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) space missions.

meters (1.3 miles) from touchdown.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, present at mission control in Bangalore, consoled glum scientists and clasped the ISRO chief in a lengthy hug, saying India was still "proud" of their efforts. "In our glorious history of thousands of years, we have faced moments that may have slowed us, but they have never crushed our spirit," he said at the time. "We have bounced back again," he added. "When it comes to our space program, the best is yet to come." —AFP

Italian artist Pistoletto's 'Venus of the Rags' destroyed in fire

One of Italian contemporary artist Michelangelo Pistoletto's most famous works, "Venus of the Rags", has been burnt to cinders in a suspected arson attack in Naples, authorities said Wednesday. The installation, in which a statue of the Roman goddess of love, beauty and fertility stands next to a vast pile of coloured, discarded clothes, was destroyed where it stood on display near the town hall in the southern Italian city.

Naples Mayor Gaetano Manfredi said the fire in the early hours of Wednesday was "an act of great violence which leaves us speechless", and promised the installation would be rebuilt. Pistoletto was "embittered and hurt" by the "vandalism", Manfredi said, but keen that the fire be "interpreted by us as a (chance for a) fresh start".

There are several versions of the "Venus of the Rags", which was first created in 1967 and juxtaposes an iconic figure of classical culture and beauty with the detritus of contemporary society. Pistoletto, 90, is a central figure in Italy's Arte Povera movement, and his works have been shown across the world, including in London, New York and Paris. —AFP



Lifestyle

South Korea welcomes birth of first giant panda twins

A South Korean zoo has announced the birth of two giant panda twins — the first to be born in the country — triggering an outpouring of excitement online. The female twins were born at the Everland theme park near the capital Seoul on Friday, the zoo revealed in a video posted on its YouTube channel.

The video, uploaded Tuesday,

shows the mother, Ai Bao, in labor, rolling around her cage before giving birth to two tiny panda cubs. The first twin weighed 180 grams and the second 140 grams, the zoo said. "Both the mother and the twin pandas are in good health," a representative from the zoo said in a statement. "Ai Bao is taking good care of her cubs, putting her experience with Fu Bao to use."

Fu Bao, born in July 2020, is the twins' older sister and the first giant panda born in South Korea through natural breeding. The YouTube video of the twins' birth has garnered 640,000 views since it was uploaded, with viewers gushing about the arrival of the cubs.

"Welcome to the world, sweet babies! Congrats to the Bao family and

thanks to the grandpas and all the staff taking care of them," wrote one viewer. Another commented: "Tears keep on running from my eyes because I'm so proud of Ai Bao! Well done, Ai Bao!" Ai Bao and Le Bao, the father, arrived in South Korea in 2016 as a state gift from Chinese President Xi Jinping.

China has long deployed "panda diplomacy", gifting the animals to various

countries, often to further its foreign policy aims. Beijing only loans pandas to foreign zoos, which must usually return any offspring within a few years of their birth to join the country's breeding program. — AFP



These handout photos show giant panda mother Ai Bao and her newly born female twin pandas at Everland Amusement and Animal Park in Yongin. — AFP photos



This combination of handout photos shows the newly born female twin pandas at Everland Amusement and Animal Park in Yongin.

Britney Spears memoir set for October 24 release

Britney Spears will publish a highly anticipated memoir this fall, some two years after a court freed her from a strict conservatorship many deemed abusive and exploitative. The magnetic pop star's book "The Woman In Me" is set for publication on October 24, after Gallery Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, acquired it. Spears lived nearly 14 years under a controversial legal arrangement that barred her from managing her own life and finances, a period in which she was largely governed by her father, Jamie.

A Los Angeles judge in November 2021 dissolved the conservatorship. In one chilling accusation the singer said under the arrangement she was prevented her from having a contraceptive IUD removed despite her desire for more children. The 41-year-old has described being forced to work and tour, and said her phone was tapped. Spears rocketed to fame in her teens on hits like "...Baby One More Time," becoming one of the world's reigning pop stars at the turn of the millennium.

But she suffered a highly publicized

2007 breakdown, which included attacking a paparazzo's car at a gas station. The conservatorship began in 2008. It didn't formally end until November 2021, after the pop phenom's father Jamie Spears was removed from his position in charge of her finances and estate at a hearing in September. "I just want my life back," she told the court in 2021.



US singer Britney Spears

Since gaining her freedom, Spears has married her boyfriend Sam Asghari and collaborated on a song with Elton John. Her forthcoming memoir is "a brave and astonishingly moving story about freedom, fame, motherhood, survival, faith, and hope," her publisher said in a statement. "Written with remarkable candor and humor, Spears's groundbreaking book illuminates the enduring power of music and love — and the importance of a woman telling her own story, on her own terms, at last." — AFP

Bali to impose \$10 tourist e-tax from 2024 to preserve culture

The Indonesian resort haven of Bali will impose a 150,000 rupiah (\$10) tax on tourists entering the island from next year to preserve its culture, officials said Wednesday. Tourist-dependent Bali attracts millions of foreign visitors annually and the beach-dotted island is trying to capitalize on its popularity to boost its coffers and protect its tropical allure.

"The payment of a fee for foreign tourists applies only one time during their visit to Bali," Governor I Wayan Koster told local lawmakers. The fee will have to be paid electronically and will apply to foreign tourists entering Bali from abroad or from other parts of Indonesia, he said.

The levy will not apply to domestic Indonesian tourists. More than two million tourists visited the island last year, according to official figures, as Bali rebounded from the Covid-19 pandemic after imposing a zero-tolerance policy on rule-breakers. When asked if the new tax would deter vis-

itors, Koster said authorities did not believe numbers would dip. "It's not a problem. We will use it for the environment, culture and we will build better quality infrastructure so traveling to Bali will be more comfortable and safe," he told reporters.

The palm-fringed hotspot has vowed a crackdown on misbehaving tourists after a spate of incidents that have included acts of disrespect to the predominantly Hindu island's culture. Bali immigration deported a Danish woman last month after she was filmed flashing to the public while riding a motorbike.

A Russian woman was also booted out of the island in April for posting a nude photo of herself in front of a sacred tree. In June, the local government published a guide for tourists who wish to visit Bali after being pressed to do so by the island's immigration office. — AFP



A marine iguana (*Amblyrhynchus cristatus*) is seen in Tortuga Bay at Santa Cruz Island, part of the Galapagos archipelago in Ecuador. — AFP photos



A marine iguana (*Amblyrhynchus cristatus*) is seen in Tortuga Bay at Santa Cruz Island, part of the Galapagos archipelago in Ecuador.

El Nino spells trouble for vulnerable Galapagos iguana

Unusually warm for this time of year, the waters of the Pacific signal hard times for the reptilian inhabitants of Ecuador's iconic Galapagos Islands. The balmy temperature is the first symptom of a new cycle of the El Nino weather phenomenon that periodically pronounces a sentence of starvation on the archipelago's marine iguanas. Experts fear this El Nino could be one of the most intense in decades. On the white sands of Santa Cruz island, a species called *Amblyrhynchus cristatus* can live for as long as 60 years, uniquely adapted among extant iguanas for ocean diving around the islands synonymous with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

With its sharp claws and crest of back spines, the reptile resembles a prehistoric creature. It may look tough, but it is highly susceptible to temperature fluctuations in the Pacific that affect its main food source — algae — for which it digs among rocks under water or in the shallows. Marine iguana populations "undergo extreme fluctuations by cyclic, but unpredictably recurring, famine (El Nino) and feast (La Nina) events," according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which lists the species as vulnerable. Last month, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced "El Nino conditions are present and are expected to gradually strengthen" as the year progresses.

El Nino events are marked by warmer-than-average sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern Pacific near the equator, and occur every two to seven years and last about nine to 12 months. "We should be getting cold water now, at the end of June, July, August, but we still have very warm water," Danny Rueda, director of the Galapagos National Park, told AFP.

He cited two previous particularly harsh El Nino events: One in 1982 and another in 1997 that bleached corals and wreaked havoc on the islands' animal life — also tortoises, penguins, cormorants and sea lions. And "according to the forecasts, this could be (an) El Nino matching those in magnitude," said Rueda.

Cannot swim far
According to World Meteorological

Organization (WMO) secretary general Petteri Taalas, "the newly arrived El Nino will turn up the heat and bring with it more extreme weather" to Latin America and the Caribbean. In a statement issued to accompany a report on climate change effects in the region, he cautioned that "early warnings... will be vital to protect lives and livelihoods."

The WMO says climate change is likely increasing the impacts of El Nino events "in terms of more intense heat and heavier precipitation." Galapagos species are able to survive cyclical changes in the local climate. But if variations occur too often or are too extreme, species can struggle to recover a balance between births and deaths.

El Nino-induced food shortages can mean starvation for marine iguanas — whose body length has been recorded during previous events to shrink by as much as five centimeters (1.9 inches). Male iguanas can grow up to about 1.3 meters (4.2 feet) long, females about half that. "Predictions that climate change may increase the severity and frequency of El Nino events... suggest that some (marine iguana) subpopulations could be removed entirely," says



An iguana is seen in Tortuga Bay at Santa Cruz Island, part of the Galapagos archipelago in Ecuador.

the IUCN. According to Rueda, there are about 450,000 iguanas on the islands. Their numbers, say the IUCN, can drop by 90 percent after a strong El Nino event.

'No preventive measures'

Marine iguanas can dive up to 12 meters deep and stay under water for



A marine iguana (*Amblyrhynchus cristatus*) is seen in Tortuga Bay at Santa Cruz Island, part of the Galapagos archipelago in Ecuador.

Lifestyle



Satire and poetry: Milan Kundera took on life's absurdity

Milan Kundera, the author of "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" whose dark, provocative novels delved into the enigma of the human condition, has died, a spokeswoman for the Milan Kundera Library in his native city of Brno said on Wednesday. He was 94. "Unfortunately I can confirm that Mr Milan Kundera passed away yesterday (Tuesday) after a prolonged illness," she told AFP. Kundera died at his apartment in Paris, France, his adoptive country where he had lived since his emigration from Communist-ruled Czechoslovakia in 1975.

"Not only Czech literature, but world literature as well has lost one of the greatest contemporary writers, and one of the most translated writers too," Tomas Kubicek, director of the Kundera library, told the public Czech TV. Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said Kundera was able to "appeal to whole generations of readers across all continents" with his work.



File photo shows Czech-born writer Milan Kundera (center) attends the 20th anniversary party of the French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy's review "La regle du jeu" (The rules of the game) in Paris on November 30, 2010.

Kundera was frequently touted as a favourite to win the Nobel Prize for literature, but he never claimed the coveted honor. Through his characteristic satire and poetic prose, Kundera had sought to express all that is compelling and absurd about life, drawing on his own experiences of being stripped of his Czech nationality for dissent. Life, he said in his work of criticism "Art of the Novel" (1986), "is a trap we've always known: we are born without having asked to be, locked in a body we never chose, and destined to die."

Young rebel

Kundera was born on April 1, 1929, in the town of Brno, in what was then Czechoslovakia. His father was a famous pianist. He studied in Prague, where he joined the Communist Party, translated the French poet Apollinaire and wrote poetry of his own. He also taught at a film school where his students included the future Oscar-winning director Milos Forman.

Although he professed faithfulness to Communism, the independent spirit of Kundera's writing soon got him into trouble. He was expelled from the party in 1950, re-joined in 1956 and was expelled a second time in 1970 after the Prague Spring reform movement—in which he was seen as playing a role—was crushed.

Locked out

Kundera's first novel "The Joke", a work of dark humor about the one-party state published in 1967, led to a ban on his writing in Czechoslovakia while also making him famous in his homeland. In 1975, he and his wife Vera went into exile in France, where he worked for four years as an assistant professor at the University of Rennes. They were stripped of their Czech nationality in 1979. In his adopted home, where he became a citizen in 1981, his reputation and success grew as translations of his novels appeared, such as "Life is Elsewhere" (1973) set in Czechoslovakia about a poet entrapped by the Communist regime.

"The Book of Laughter and Forgetting" (1979) playfully explored through seven interlinked narratives the nature of forgetting in politics, history and daily life. The novel was "brilliant and original," said the Times reviewer, John Updike. By far his most famous work, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" was published in 1984 and turned into a film starring Juliette Binoche and Daniel Day-Lewis in 1987. The novel is a morality tale about freedom and passion, on both an individual and collective level, set against the Prague Spring and its aftermath in exile.

Kundera was an author "fascinated by sex, and prone to sudden, if graceful, skips into autobiography, abstract rumination, and recent Czech history," said the Times reviewer, John Updike. By far his most famous work, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" was published in 1984 and turned into a film starring Juliette Binoche and Daniel Day-Lewis in 1987. The novel is a morality tale about freedom and passion, on both an individual and collective level, set against the Prague Spring and its aftermath in exile.

No going back?

Kundera's critics say he turned his back on fellow Czechs and dissidents following his exile in France and for his decision to ban the translation of his French books into Czech. In 2008, a Czech magazine accused him of being a police informer under Communist rule, which he denied as "pure lies". In 2013, Kundera published his first novel after a 13-year hiatus. "The Festival of Insignificance", about five friends in Paris, received mixed reviews, with The Atlantic noting its "near-impenetrable irony" and The Guardian deeming it a "stinker". What Kundera "has to tell us seems to have less relevance", said the New York Times. —AFP

Milan Kundera

Key dates

- **April 1, 1929:** Born in the town of Brno in Soviet-era Czechoslovakia, today the Czech Republic. His parents are musicians.
- **1948:** Joins the Communist Party which seizes power the same year. He will be expelled two years later but readmitted in 1956.
- **1953:** Release of his first collection of poems, "Man: A Wide Garden".
- **1967:** Publication of his first novel, "The Joke", a satirical look at totalitarianism. The following year he plays a role in the short-lived Prague Spring reform movement.
- **1970:** Removed from his job as a teacher at the Prague Film Academy and his books are banned and withdrawn from bookshops and libraries. He is also banned from publication and expelled from the Communist Party.
- **1975:** Goes into exile in France, becoming a French citizen in 1981.
- **1979:** "The Book of Laughter and Forgetting", which portrays life under the communist Czech regime, is published. Kundera is stripped of his Czech nationality.
- **1984:** Release of "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" set against the Prague Spring. His biggest success, it is made into a film in 1987, starring Daniel Day-Lewis.
- **1990:** Release of his last novel written in Czech, "Nesmrtelnost" (Immortality), afterwards switching to French.
- **2008:** Accused of being an informer for the communist police in 1950, which he denies as "pure lies".
- **2019:** Regains Czech citizenship. —AFP

Milan Kundera: Five key works

'The Joke' (1967)

In his first novel Kundera wrote of his problems with the authorities, weaving a story full of dark humor that was published during the ideological detente before the Prague Spring. It both sealed his fate with the authorities, who would later strip him of his citizenship, and made him famous within Czechoslovakia.

'Life is Elsewhere' (1969)

Internationally praised but unpublished in the Czech Republic until 2016, Kundera's second novel tells the story of a young poet who fails to break free from his adoring mother and dies an absurd death. Humorously exploring the hopes and fantasies of youth through his protagonist, who seeks his freedom through art and revolution, Kundera saw parallels with his own evolution from poetry to the existential novel.

'Farewell Waltz' (1972)

Considered by some critics as Kundera's lightest and most playful major novel, this sexual farce with political overtones, set in a spa town, follows jazz musician Kilma, who pays dearly after a one-night-stand.

'The Unbearable Lightness of Being' (1984)

Kundera's most famous novel "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" is a morality tale about freedom and passion, on both an individual and collective level, set against the Prague Spring and its aftermath in exile. It was turned into a movie starring Juliette Binoche and Daniel Day-Lewis, and earned Kundera a worldwide following.

'Slowness' (1995)

After discovering with horror the liberties taken by the French translation of "The Joke", Kundera devotes much of his time to revising his translated works. "Slowness", the first in a cycle of four novels all short and very dark and written directly in French, causes a stir in literary circles as it praises slowness over what Kundera charges as the West's obsession with speed. It raises Kundera's status worldwide while also bringing him his first seriously bad reviews. —AFP



File photo shows Czech writer Milan Kundera walks by a cafe in the centre of Paris in 1975.--AFP photos



File photo shows Czech writer Milan Kundera poses in a garden in Prague on October 14, 1973.



Portrait taken on October 14, 1973 shows Czech-born French writer Milan Kundera in Prague.



File photo shows Czech writer Milan Kundera poses with his wife in Prague on October 14, 1973.

Jury declares Aretha Franklin will found in couch valid

A handwritten document found in Aretha Franklin's couch cushion is a valid will determining the late Queen of Soul's wishes, a Michigan jury found Tuesday, according to the local Detroit Free Press newspaper. A famously private person, when Franklin died five years ago at 76 years old she left no formal will—but hand-scratched documents discovered later in her Detroit home fueled a dispute among her four sons for years.



US singer Aretha Franklin poses on the red carpet before the 38th Annual Kennedy Center Honors in Washington, DC.--AFP

The difficult to read papers appear to distribute assets including real estate, jewelry, furs, stereo equipment and music royalties to her family members. One, dated to 2010, was discov-

ered in a locked cabinet. Another, dated four years later, was found under the cushions. Two of her sons, Edward and Kecalf Franklin, favored the 2014 paper. Another, Ted White Jr, says the 2010 document in the cabinet is more legitimate.

Both wills appeared to show an even split of royalties among those three sons. The New York Times said that Clarence Franklin, the singer's first-born child, has a mental illness and lives under a court-appointed guardian, and that his brothers have agreed to support him.

The six-person jury's decision works in particular favor of Kecalf Franklin and his children, who are now set to inherit the singer's primary residence, a mansion in an affluent Detroit suburb. They also stand to inherit her cars. Of significant focus in the trial was on a signature on the 2014 document, which said "A. Franklin" and included a smiley face in the first initial, which Kecalf Franklin testified was "characteristic" of his mother's writing.

The jury rendered its decision after deliberating for approximately an hour to close the swift two-day trial. For years Franklin's estate managers have been settling debts and paying back taxes, while also generating royalties off music and intellectual property. Franklin's death in Detroit closed the curtain on a glittering six-decade career that spanned gospel, R&B, jazz, blues and even classical music. She died of pancreatic cancer on August 16, 2018. —AFP

Philippines allows Barbie film but wants 'child-like' map lines blurred

Philippine censors said Wednesday they have allowed the Barbie film to be shown in cinemas, after asking its Hollywood distributor to blur lines on a brightly-colored world map drawing allegedly showing China's claims to the disputed South China Sea. The fantasy comedy film about the famous doll, directed by Greta Gerwig and starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling, is set to open in the Southeast Asian nation on July 19.

After reviewing the film twice and consulting foreign affairs officials and legal experts, the government's Movie and Television Review and Classification Board said it would allow it to be screened. The censors began examining "Barbie" last week after Vietnam reportedly banned the film over scenes featuring a map showing the so-called nine-dash line, which China uses to justify its maritime claims.

Beijing claims almost the entire South China Sea, despite rival claims from other Southeast Asian countries including the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam. But after "meticulous" scrutiny of the film, Philippine censors were convinced that the "cartoonish map" did not depict the nine-dash line.

"Instead, the map portrayed the route of the make-believe journey of Barbie from Barbie Land to the 'real world,' as an integral part of the story," the censor-

ship board said in a statement. "Rest assured that the Board has exhausted all possible resources in arriving at this decision as we have not hesitated in the past to sanction filmmakers/ producers/ distributors for exhibiting the fictitious 'nine-dash line' in their materials."

In a separate letter to Philippine Senator Francis Tolentino, who had criticized the film for "violating Filipino fisherfolks' rights", the censors said they had asked Hollywood studio Warner Bros to "blur"



Australian actress Margot Robbie and Canadian actor Ryan Gosling arrive for the world premiere of "Barbie" at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.--AFP

the controversial lines on the map. Dashed lines drawn in a "child-like manner" appeared in several locations on the map around land masses identified as Europe, North America, South America, Africa and Asia, the censors said.

But it found only eight dashes around the landmass labeled "Asia". "Moreover, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia are not visible on the map," the board said in the letter dated July 11 and shared with reporters. "This is in stark contrast to the maps found in the banned films 'Abominable (2019)' and 'Uncharted (2022),' it said.

The Department of Foreign Affairs said it appreciated the opportunity to watch "Barbie" to "ascertain if the depiction of the imaginary world map is inimical to the national interest". Warner Bros did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

But a Warner Bros spokesperson was quoted by Variety as saying the map was a "child-like crayon drawing" and "not intended to make any type of statement". The Philippines' approval of "Barbie" coincided with the seventh anniversary of an international ruling that China's historical claims to the South China Sea have no legal basis. —AFP

Sports

Wickets pitched for the start of inaugural season of MLC

Major League Cricket aims for US breakthrough

News in Brief

FIFA lifts Zimbabwe's ban

HARARE: Zimbabwe on Tuesday welcomed the lifting of FIFA's ban on the country's football association which has rekindled their hopes of qualifying for the 2026 World Cup. FIFA barred Zimbabwe from participating in international football in February 2022 over government interference in the running of the sport. FIFA lifted the ban on Monday, only two days before the draw for the African qualifiers for the next World Cup in Canada, Mexico and the USA. Sports Minister Kirsty Coventry described the end of the 18-month suspension as "exciting" and "incredible" at a press conference in Harare. "Our athletes deserve that chance to get back there to live their dream. And they're going to do that," Coventry said. Last year's ban followed a decision by the African country's Sports and Recreation Commission to suspend the board of the Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) citing various charges including graft, fraud and sexual abuse of female referees. — AFP

Golf merger under spotlight

WASHINGTON: US and Saudi officials discussed proposals to completely transform professional golf as they negotiated the biggest merger in the sport's history, a trove of documents released on Tuesday showed. Among the items on the table in the talks between the PGA Tour and Saudi Arabia's LIV Golf were the firing of two-time British Open champion Greg Norman as LIV boss and a new "World Golf Series" that would climax in the kingdom. The communications, released by the US Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations at the start of a hearing into the controversial tie-up, gave the most detailed picture yet of how the deal might look. Saudi's Public Investment Fund (PIF) - which finances LIV Golf - did not ultimately agree to the PGA Tour's request to fire Norman but the push for his ouster underscored the radical nature of the negotiations. The proposed merger has prompted antitrust concerns. — AFP

Kanu named Enyimba chairman

ABUJA: Former Arsenal and Nigeria forward Nwankwo Kanu has been appointed chairman of Nigerian league champions Enyimba, a local government official said. The appointment was announced by the newly elected Governor Alex Otti of the southeastern state of Abia. Kanu has taken over from Felix Anyansi-Agwu, who headed "The People's Elephant" for 24 years during which the club won two CAF Champions League winners' medals. Kanu's former Super Eagles teammate Finidi George coached state government-owned Enyimba to a record ninth league title last term and a place in next season's CAF Champions League. John Sam Obuh, who has recently been involved with the Roma Academy in Abuja, has also been named as the chairman of another Nigeria Premier League side, Abia Warriors. — AFP

Barcelona seal Roque deal

BARCELONA: Barcelona have agreed a deal to sign young striker Vitor Roque from Brazilian side Athletico Paranaense, the Spanish champions said Wednesday. The 18-year-old forward will join Barca from the start of the 2024-25 season on a deal until the summer of 2031. "The release clause is fixed at 500 million euros (\$551 million)," said Barcelona in a statement. Spanish reports suggest the Catalans will pay 30 million euros for the Brazil striker with another 31 million euros in potential add-ons. Barcelona have brought in Ilkay Gundogan and Inigo Martinez on free transfers this summer, with the Catalan giants still suffering from financial difficulties. They are currently able to spend only 50 percent of any savings or new income because of La Liga financial restrictions on clubs exceeding their spending limit, as determined by the Spanish league. Roque, one of the hottest prospects in Brazilian football, has scored six goals in his last six games. — AFP

Bangladesh beat Afghanistan

BANGLADESH: Liton Das top-scored with 53 not out as Bangladesh defeated Afghanistan by seven wickets to avoid a series whitewash in Tuesday's third and final one-day international in Chittagong. The hosts raced to 129-3 in 23.3 overs after Shoriful Islam's career best 4-21 helped them bowl out Afghanistan for 126 in 45.2 overs. Tail-ender Azmatullah Omarzai offered some late resistance for Afghanistan to top-score with 56, his maiden ODI fifty. Left-arm seamer Fazalhaq Farooqi gave Afghanistan a glimmer of hope, bowling out Naim Sheikh for a duck and Najmul Hossain for 11. Liton and Shakib Al Hasan put on 61 runs for the third wicket to steady the innings and bring Bangladesh back into control. Shakib fell to Mohammad Nabi after making a run-a-ball 39, but Liton, who struck three fours and two sixes in his 60-ball innings, took Bangladesh home. — AFP

MIAMI: The most ambitious attempt yet to establish professional cricket in the United States gets under way as wickets were pitched for the start of the inaugural season of Major League Cricket. With backing from four franchises in the Indian Premier League, including the league's most successful teams the Mumbai Indians and the Chennai Super Kings, MLC has plenty of money and expertise behind it, unlike prior attempts to crack the American market.

As well as financial muscle and television deals, MLC has also been sanctioned by USA Cricket and the International Cricket Council - rubber stamps that have been absent from short-lived private ventures in the past. Like the IPL, the league will play the shortest and most explosive version of cricket, Twenty20, and has recruited some experienced international players. England opening batsman Jason Roy, Australian batsman Aaron Finch, South African pace bowler Kagiso Rabada and West Indies spinner Sunil Narine are among the foreign players drafted by the six teams.

While cricket has long been played at a recreational level in the USA - the first-ever international game being between the USA and Canada at New York in 1844 - there remains a shortage of facilities for the sport in a country where baseball is beloved. A former baseball park in North Texas, Grand Prairie Stadium, has been transformed into a cricket-specific venue and will be the site of the opener when the Texas Super Kings face the Los Angeles Knight Riders. Other games will be played in Morrisville, North Carolina, before the playoffs and final return to Texas.

While organizers expect good levels of support from fans with family backgrounds in cricket-loving countries, they aim to gradually win over the broader American public. "The goal is to grow the game of cricket and expose the sport in the USA," tournament director Justin Geale, told AFP. "We've got some of the best players in the world that can actually represent the product, do it justice. So it's going to be a good quality game of cricket that gives us the

best chance to show existing fans and new fans the game. "We've got as far as anyone ever has. So after all the false starts, I think it's finally here."

'An exciting project'

Part of the groundwork that MLC did was been the creation of Minor League Cricket, a 26-team competition which began in 2021 to spark domestic player development. The teams will feature a maximum of six foreign players and a minimum of five domestic players and Geale says developing a talent pool for the USA national team is a big part of the mission. "Building talent here domestically is one of our big pillars for sustainability," he said. It will be a challenge for coaches and captains to manage teams with experienced international players alongside emerging domestic players but South African Robin Peterson, head coach of the Mumbai Indians-backed MI New York team, says it will work.

"In my experience, I found that the local boys tend to learn quite a bit playing alongside these superstars," he told

AFP. "I've seen it firsthand in the SA20 and even if you look at the growth and trajectory of the Indian cricket since the inception of the IPL, it has just been amazing the amount of talent that they're producing. "I see the league here playing a similar role for USA cricket." As well as the involvement of IPL teams, Australia's Cricket Victoria has a high-performance partnership with the San Francisco Unicorns and Cricket New South Wales has a similar role with the Washington Freedom.

The league has broadcast deals with streaming service Willow TV, whose owners are also investors in MLC, and also with Viacom18 in India. Peterson is optimistic that T20, much more than longer forms of the game, has the ingredients to win eyeballs in the American market. "It's becoming more entertainment," he said. "It speaks to the American sporting psyche where the players are a lot more physical, fitter, stronger, hit the ball further. "It's an exciting project. I think it's about time people start taking cricket seriously in America." — AFP

Diaz homer gives NL 3-2 win in MLB All-Star Game

LOS ANGELES: Elias Diaz smacked a two-run home run to give the National League a 3-2 victory over the American League in Tuesday's 93rd Major League Baseball All-Star Game at Seattle. The eighth-inning blast by the 32-year-old Venezuelan catcher for the Colorado Rockies gave the NL stars their first victory since 2012, ending a nine-game win drought. "It means a lot to me," Diaz said through a translator. "So proud. It's a dream come true what I've accomplished. To be in the All-Star Game for me, it's amazing."

The AL stars still leads the all-time rivalry 47-44 with two drawn. Diaz won the All-Star Most Valuable Player award. "A lot of emotions," Diaz said. "I never thought I would have this moment in my career but to be able to contribute to the win and be the MVP, that's something really special." The AL grabbed a 2-1 lead in the bottom of the sixth inning off NL pitcher Alexis Diaz of Cincinnati. Kansas City's Salvador Perez, just inserted to replace Shohei Ohtani as designated hitter, smacked a one-out single to right field, took third base on a ground-rule double by Oakland's Brent Rooker and scored on a sacrifice fly to right field by Toronto's Bo Bichette.

Arizona's Lourdes Gurriel Jr. appeared to pull the NL level with a homer down the left-field line off Toronto's Jordan Romano in the top of the seventh inning, but it was overturned and ruled a foul ball on video review, keeping the AL ahead. The NL delivered the deciding runs in the eighth, the rally starting when AL pitcher Felix Bautista of Baltimore walked Philadelphia's Nick Castellanos. Diaz, in his first All-Star at bat, then smashed his go-ahead homer to



SEATTLE: Elias Diaz #35 of the Colorado Rockies celebrates with teammates after hitting a home run in the eighth inning during the 93rd MLB All-Star Game presented by Mastercard at T-Mobile Park on July 11, 2023 in Seattle. — AFP

left field off Dominican right-hander Bautista. AL sluggers couldn't score an equalizer in the last two innings as their win streak was shattered.

Philadelphia pitcher Craig Kimbrel issued two-out walks to Houston's Kyle Tucker and Seattle's Julio Rodriguez in the ninth to produce late drama, but then struck out Cleveland's Jose Ramirez to end the game. "It has been a while since the

National League has gotten a win, so it feels pretty good," Kimbrel said. Tampa Bay first baseman Yandy Diaz smashed a solo homer to left field off Pittsburgh's Mitch Keller with one out in the second inning to give the AL a 1-0 lead. Diaz, a 31-year-old slugger whose wife is due to give birth to a baby on Wednesday, defected from Cuba 10 years ago to follow a dream of playing in the major leagues. — AFP

Springboks braced for 'ultimate test' in NZ

AUCKLAND: South Africa loose forward Kwagga Smith said Wednesday he expects an "epic" Rugby Championship clash against New Zealand this weekend in what he called "the ultimate test". Both sides go into Saturday's game at Auckland's Mount Smart Stadium on the back of big wins in the opening round. The Springboks thrashed Australia 43-12 in Pretoria last Saturday, the same day the All Blacks brushed Argentina aside 41-12 in Mendoza. The winner in Auckland will put one hand on the trophy—and fire a warning of intent for the World Cup.

The Rugby Championship has been reduced to three rounds because of the World Cup, which kicks off in September and will see South Africa defend their crown. "I think it's going

to be an epic match, both teams had a good performance last weekend," Smith told reporters. "It's going to be a tough game." The flanker expects a tight contest decided by "discipline and who is using their opportunities the most". The Springboks have not lost in New Zealand since being routed 57-0 in Auckland in 2017.

They beat the All Blacks 36-34 in 2018, before the sides drew 16-16 in 2019. Both those games were held in Wellington. There is plenty of respect for the hosts from the Springboks camp. "They are a good team, I wouldn't say they have a lot of weaknesses, if any," added Smith, who will start at blind-side flanker for Springboks captain Siya Kolisi, currently sidelined by injury. "I think playing against the All Blacks is the ultimate



PRETORIA: South Africa's Springboks scrumhalf Herschel Jantjies passes the ball during their team's training session at Loftus Versfeld Stadium in Pretoria ahead of the Rugby Championship in July, 2023. — AFP

test at the moment. "The history and rivalry behind it is really big. That makes it such an iconic game."

Eden Park is unavailable as it prepares to host the opening match of

the FIFA Women's World Cup, so the game will be at the home of the New Zealand Warriors rugby league team. "It's a new place to play," Smith said of Mount Smart. — AFP

Bilbao wins a hot and hilly stage 10

ISSOIRE: Pello Bilbao won a hot and hilly stage 10 of the Tour de France on Tuesday, becoming the first Spaniard in five years to win a stage on the world's biggest bike race. The main contenders for the overall title crossed the line together nearly three minutes after Bilbao. You have to go back to 2018 and Omar Fraile's win for the last victory by a Spanish rider. Bilbao dedicated the victory to Gino Maeder, his Bahrain Victorious team-mate who died last month after a crash on the Tour of Switzerland. "I had to do it for Gino," said Bilbao.

Maeder, a 26-year-old Swiss rider, plunged into a ravine while competing in his home race in June, and succumbed to his injuries a day later. "He was such a great guy and we are trying to honor his legacy with charity work - this is our project to remember him, and not just by sports," said Bilbao. He was delighted with his first Tour stage win. "It's an incredible feeling, I have waited years for this," he said. "It would have been a dream to win at home because we started in Bilbao. "I was lucky this stage came after a rest

day, but the day off meant I was fully hydrated." The Spaniard led a chase to track down Latvia's Kristis Neilands, who looked set to make it two stages in a row for Israel-Premier Tech before he was finally caught by a six-man pursuit.

Sizzling conditions

On a baking 167km run from the volcano-themed Vulcania amusement park billed as one of the Tour's most beautiful stages, the peloton laboured over five hills to the village of Issoire in Auvergne. The pack splintered due to the intense conditions in exposed terrain on the semi-deserted hillsides along the Puy de Dome tectonic fault line. Defending champion Jonas Vingegaard retained his 17-second lead in the overall standings but second-placed Tadej Pogacar forced the Dane to chase him early in the stage. Vingegaard said he was happy for the Bahrain team. "I feel for them today and for the family of Gino. I'm happy to see they are doing well, I guess they are doing it for Gino," he said. — AFP

Pogacar himself looked relieved the stage was over. "The team did a great job keeping me cool," said the Slovenian, who unlike Vingegaard, dislikes extreme heat. "After that the rest day seems like a long time ago," Pogacar said. American Neilson Pow-



ISSOIRE: Bahrain - Victorious' Spanish rider Pello Bilbao cycles to the finish line ahead of Intermarche - Circus - Wanty's German rider Georg Zimmermann (center) to win the 10th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 167.5 km between Vulcania and Issoire, in the Massif Central highlands in central France. — AFP

less also held on to the polka dot jersey for the most climb points and will likely do so again Wednesday. "We need that day off. I didn't do anything, and you should have seen how much water was being taken on today," said Powless. — AFP

Sports

More than just football: Haiti WCup debut against all odds

Culmination of a long and arduous journey against adversity

MIAMI: When Haiti play England in Brisbane on their Women's World Cup debut this month it will mark the culmination of a long and arduous journey against adversity. While many teams in women's football fight for recognition and resources, the Haitians have had to overcome the additional challenges that have afflicted the Caribbean nation. Haiti is the Western Hemisphere's poorest country and for years been mired in a vicious cycle of chronic political, humanitarian, economic and health crises.

Add in brutal gang violence, and the United Nations' top human rights official earlier this year described Haiti's multiple problems as a "living nightmare". Against such a backdrop, the team were forced to hold their training camps and home games in neighboring Dominican Republic. And yet, amidst all this, Haiti beat Chile in a playoff in New Zealand in February to qualify for the World Cup for the first time.

"We just put our head down and worked and tried not to worry about all the outside factors," midfielder Milan Pierre-Jerome told the Miami Herald. "Yes it's been more difficult for us compared to teams in other countries, but knowing that no matter the circumstances, no matter what challenges we face, we still have 11 players on the field, one soccer ball and we all play with cleats. That's what held us together." Haiti are in Group D at the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand alongside China, Denmark and European champions England. They face England in their opener on July 22.

'Special Dumornay'

The nucleus of the team emerged in 2018, when Haiti qualified for the Under-20 Women's World Cup, their first global FIFA tournament of any kind. Nine of that youth team were part of the squad which beat Chile, including midfielder Danielle Etienne, who is well aware of the positive impact that the team has had on her country. "It just shows how far we've come as a nation and as a team. It means so much to us. This is a breath of fresh air to brighten the country," she said. "It's more than just football - it's making strides in football, but also helping lift our country during such a hard time," she added.

The squad that secured qualification included seven players under the age of 20, including the fulcrum of the team, Melchie Dumornay. The 19-year-old attacking midfielder scored both goals in the win against Chile and is a rising star of women's football. After impressing with Reims in the past two seasons, she signed for Lyon, the 16-times French champions and record eight-times Champions League winners. Haiti are ranked 53rd in the world and will not be expected to get out of the group, but they are not ready to settle for just being at the World Cup.

"We're not the same Haiti we used to be years ago, where teams were not fearing us. Now we're stepping on the field and people are giving us more respect because they see how far we've come," said Etienne. "We were able to make history one time and make history again, and I just hope that we con-



SEOUL: Haiti's Nerilia Mondesir (left) celebrates scoring her team's first goal during the women's international friendly football match between South Korea and Haiti in Seoul. — AFP

tinue to do that and become genuine World Cup competitors," she added. If Haiti are to provide an upset it is likely to be Dumornay who provides the

spark. "Melchie is the star," said centre-half Jennyfer Limage. "You can't compare Melchie with any other player. She's special". — AFP

Messi in Florida ahead of Inter Miami's move

FORT LAUDERDALE: Argentine star Lionel Messi landed in Florida on Tuesday ahead of putting the final touches on his move to US Major League Soccer club Inter Miami. Argentine television footage showed Messi, with members of his family, walking off a private jet at a small, executive airport adjacent to Inter Miami's stadium in Fort Lauderdale. The World Cup winner is expected to put pen to paper on a two and a half year deal, reported to be worth \$60 million a year, before being presented to fans at a stadium event on Sunday.

"We are happy with the decision we made. Prepared and eager to face the new challenge, the new change," Messi said in an interview with Argentine TV show, Llave a la eternidad, released on Tuesday. "My mentality and my head are not going to change and I am going to try, wherever I have to be, to give my best for myself and my new club and continue to perform at the highest level," he added.

Messi is the biggest name to ever move to MLS and the greatest player to head to the United States since Brazilian great Pele signed for the New York Cosmos in 1975. MLS hope that Messi will massively increase the profile of the league and boost subscriptions to their streaming broadcast deal with



FLORIDA: Fans of Argentina's Lionel Messi wait for his arrival at the DRV PNK Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida on July 11, 2023, ahead of his debut in the Major League Soccer (MLS) with Inter Miami. — AFP

Apple TV. Ticket prices for games likely to involve Messi have already sky-rocketed.

Fans had begun to gather at the club's DRV PNK stadium early in the morning ahead of his expected arrival. One of the supporters, Julio Iglesias, 42 said he founded the 'Messias 305' fan group when he learned

the Argentine star was coming to Miami. He didn't previously watch MLS games but said he now won't miss any Miami matches. "For us, Messi coming means everything, wherever he goes there is always incredible happiness," he said, while standing by a banner declaring "We are waiting for you Messias". — AFP

Bullish De Laurentiis keen to keep hold of Napoli stars

NAPLES: Napoli owner Aurelio De Laurentiis insists that there is no need to sell star players Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia as the Italian champions begin preparations for their Serie A title defense. Nigeria striker Osimhen has been the subject of summer transfer talk after smashing in 31 goals in Napoli's first Scudetto-winning season in over three decades. In an interview with AFP De Laurentiis, 74, said that he has received no offers for Osimhen, a player the film mogul has reportedly priced at 150 million euros (\$165 million).

Last month he said Osimhen had already come to a verbal agreement to extend his current contract by two years until 2027, while Kvaratskhelia is reportedly set to more than double his annual salary of 1.2 million euros in a bid to stave off attention from Eu-

rope's richer clubs. At Monday's launch of Napoli's new kit he told reporters Osimhen would be wearing it the coming season unless "a more than indecent offer came in". "First of all Osimhen has two years left on his contract and Kvaratskhelia has four years. So you can keep talking about contract renewals and satisfying their agents' ravenous hunger, but in reality it's down to Napoli to decide what to do," De Laurentiis told AFP.

"I could decide to push forward, play on for two years and then let Osimhen go for nothing. It depends, but at that point I would have to find someone else at centre-forward, you can understand my point of view, right? "But I believe that in the end it's to everyone's benefit to find fair, serious modifications that don't involve unrealistic demands." De Laurentiis' bullish attitude towards his players' status flies in the face of the image of Italian clubs being easy meat for Premier League and state-backed clubs.

Champions League semi-finalists AC Milan and Inter Milan have both lost key players to Saudi Arabian money this summer. Lazio owner Claudio Lotito on Monday said that Serbia midfielder Sergej Mil-



NAPLES: Napoli President Aurelio De Laurentiis (left) and France's Rudi Garcia speak during a press conference where the French coach was unveiled as the new coach of Italian Champions Napoli, in Naples. — AFP

inkovic-Savic would also be on his way to the Gulf. However he is aware that a barrier has been erected by state money and the whopping broadcast rights revenues generated by the Premier League, above which Napoli simply cannot reach. — AFP

England must defy injuries and dip in form to win WCup

MANCHESTER: Injuries to key players and a dip in form have left England coach Sarina Wiegman with plenty to ponder if the European champions are to win the Women's World Cup for the first time. Barring a massive shock when the tournament begins on July 20, England should cruise through a group featuring China, Denmark and debutants Haiti. But their path through the knockout stages is loaded with danger, with co-hosts Australia or Olympic champions Canada likely opponents in the last 16.

Preparations have not been ideal, a year on from England winning the Euros at a packed Wembley for their first major trophy in women's football. In April, England were held 1-1 by Brazil before winning the first-ever women's Finalissima - a clash between the champions of Europe and South America - on penalties. Their 30-game unbeaten run was then ended by the Australians and Wiegman's team failed to break down Portugal in a 0-0 draw in their only warm-up friendly earlier this month. The Lionesses' World Cup build-up has also been overshadowed by an ongoing row over bonuses for the players. Then there are injuries which have ruled out captain Leah Williamson, Euro 2022 Golden Boot winner Beth Mead and Chelsea forward Fran Kirby.

England still have a squad that is the envy of most other teams, but the experience of Ellen White and Jill Scott is also missing from the side that conquered Europe after they retired. Wiegman, who took her native Netherlands to the World Cup final four years ago before losing to the United States, is publicly unconcerned. "I think the team has changed so there's another team dynamic now," Wiegman said after the Portugal stalemate. "We have other people in and different qualities. It's a new situation."

Many of the Lionesses such as Barcelona's Lucy Bronze and striker Alessia Russo are now household names in their homeland, their faces splashed across advertising campaigns and magazine covers in the build-up to the World Cup. But the new-look England are yet to click and Wiegman has some big decisions to make if they are to live up to their billing as one of the World Cup favorites. Russo starred as White's understudy last summer, scoring four goals as a substitute. But she was outscored by Aston Villa's Rachel Daly and Tottenham's Bethany England in the Women's Super League last season and was dropped for Daly against Portugal. In midfield, Wiegman is yet to commit to using the mercurial talent of Lauren James - sister of Chelsea's Reece James - as either a winger or a number 10. And at the back, Millie Bright has taken the captain's armband from Williamson, but has also not played since March due to knee surgery. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
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Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name

I, **Abu Waquase**, (Given Name) holding Indian Passport No. T1936751 issued at Kuwait on 31/12/2018 hereby announce to change my name as **Abu Waquase** (Given Name) and **Siddique** (surname) for all purposes. (C#3828) 13/07/2023

I, **Santosh**, holder of Indian Passport No. L3857518, do hereby change my name to **Santosh** (as given Name) and **Panchal** (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name **Santosh Panchal** and I also undertake to carry out this name change

in all my documents. (C#3829) 13/07/2023

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 Aarthi

Shriwardhan Dist-Raigad, Maharashtra, 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

Jabeur avenges painful defeat, beats Rybakina

Djokovic powers into 12th Wimbledon semis



WIMBLEDON: Tunisia's Ons Jabeur returns the ball to Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina during their women's singles quarterfinals match at The All England Lawn Tennis Club on July 12, 2023. — AFP

LONDON: Ons Jabeur avenged her painful defeat in last year's Wimbledon final on Wednesday to set up a last-four clash against Aryna Sabalenka as Carlos Alcaraz eyed the semis for the first time. In a repeat of the 2022 title match, Tunisian sixth seed Jabeur came from behind to beat defending champion Elena Rybakina 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-1 in their quarter-final on Centre Court. Both players broke twice in the first set before the Kazakh third seed took the tie-break.

The second set went with serve until the 10th game, when Rybakina cracked and Jabeur levelled the match. The force was with Jabeur in the decider as she opened up a 3-0 lead and saved two break points to move 4-1 ahead. Jabeur powered a backhand down the line to break once again and held her serve to seal the win, letting out a roar of delight. "I'm

very happy with the performance - a lot of emotion out there, especially playing someone that serves really well," she said. "It's frustrating to return but I'm glad I did everything, shouted, got angry, then got calm and focused and hopefully I can manage my emotions like this for the next two matches."

Sabalenka powered into a second Wimbledon semi-final with a 6-2, 6-4 win over Madison Keys of the United States. A double break secured the first set and Sabalenka, who was defeated by Karolina Pliskova in the last four in 2021, dug herself out of a deep hole at 4-2, 40-0 down in the second set. The world number two from Belarus was banned from the 2022 tournament following the invasion of Ukraine along with all Russian and Belarusian players. Belarus is a key ally of Moscow. "It was an amazing battle and I'm so happy to be back in the semi-final. I just

hope to do better than last time," said Sabalenka. "When I was a little girl I dreamed of winning Wimbledon," she added. "It's something special here."

Meanwhile, Novak Djokovic reached a 12th Wimbledon semi-final and record-equaling 46th at the Grand Slams on Tuesday as Elina Svitolina stunned world number one Iga Swiatek, delivering an emotional boost for her war-torn Ukraine homeland. Djokovic, chasing an eighth title at the All England Club and 24th career major, defeated Andrey Rublev 4-6, 6-1, 6-4, 6-3 and will face Italy's Jannik Sinner for a place in the final.

The Serb has now reached as many semi-finals at the Slams as the retired Roger Federer. The 36-year-old, playing in his 400th Grand Slam match, insisted he was enjoying being the man to beat. "I love it. Any player wants to be in the posi-

tion where all the other players want to beat you," he said after preserving his record of not losing on Centre Court since 2013. "The pressure never goes away every time I come on court. They want to get a scalp and the win - but it ain't happening!"

After dropping the first set, a fired-up Djokovic only allowed Rublev six points in the first five games of the second set. The champion then needed five set points to claim the third while saving three break points in the same game. Rublev's spirit drained away and Djokovic claimed victory with his 42nd winner of the tie. The Russian world number seven has now lost all eight quarter-finals he has played at the majors. "I had these little chances but I didn't make them. He made them. That's why he's Novak, one of the greatest players in history," he said. — AFP

Rain on the radar as Wimbledon keeps eye on weather

LONDON: Tucked away at the heart of Wimbledon sits an unassuming office that is one of the most critical cogs in the entire machine — the weather room. The meteorologists stationed there have a huge responsibility at a tournament where weather is such a major factor and are able to plot incoming danger with astonishing accuracy. On their say-so the grass courts are covered or left uncovered — even though the team is occasionally caught out by the famously unpredictable British weather.

This year's tournament was badly disrupted by rain in the first week, causing a scheduling headache for officials and forcing some players to stop mid-match while the roof was closed on Centre Court and Court No 1. Fans were treated at one stage to the unusual sight of defending champion Novak Djokovic mopping up moisture with a towel.

The pressure is on the weather team at Wimbledon — a collaboration between Britain's Met Office and Meteo France — to get the correct information to the club to prevent delays. "The Met Office leads the story from an hour out for the rest of the week," said senior operational meteorologist Abby Smith. "So we're leading those planning decisions about whether to close the roof and then tracking showers as they form downwind and then looking at how fast they are moving. "When they get to about an hour out from current time we hand over to Meteo France, who've got an amazing high-resolution radar."

Fellow meteorologist Paul Abeille of Meteo France said the radar equipment gives an astonishingly accurate picture of rain clouds coming, tracking them from 60 kilometers away. "We know exactly where the rain cells (rain clouds) are," he said. The modeling is so accurate that the team can even pinpoint where showers will first hit on the Wimbledon site in leafy southwest



WIMBLEDON: Members of the public sit in the stands of court 2 as they wait for the start of the men's singles tennis match during the 2023 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon. — AFP

London. The radar equipment is also used at other events including the French Open and the British Grand Prix. The ultimate decision of whether to stop play is made by tournament officials, relying on the data they are given. "In 20 seconds they can put the cover on the court but when you uncover the court it takes maybe five minutes because you have to remove the water, then the players have to warm up again so it takes 25 minutes to restart the game," he said. "That's why they ask us not to lose a single minute." Abeille admits that despite the cutting-edge technology, the weather experts are sometimes caught out — and it happened on Sunday.

"I was expecting no rain and we got 10-minute showers," he said, though he admits working somewhere with changeable weather is "more fun". Officials might choose not to stop play if there is just a sprinkle of rain while at other times they take preventative ac-

tion, even though it is not yet wet. "If it's light enough then it won't have damaged play so it's making that decision," said Smith. "We want to maximize play as much as possible, that's why we're here. If it's not going to be dangerous and it's just going to be very light then you'll be able to see that on the radar."

The Met Office is part of an elaborate and quirky communication set-up at the All England Club, keeping court-covering teams up to date. High up on the ivy-covered outside walls of Centre Court is a small electronic board using a signal system, keeping groundstaff and umpires updated on the latest conditions. Wimbledon referee Gerry Armstrong makes the final decision based on communication with the on-site meteorological team. "I get a lot of job satisfaction because you can see the impact of what you're doing and obviously it's a lovely place to be, with a great atmosphere," said Smith. — AFP

NBA expands coach challenges, adopts flopping penalty

NEW YORK: NBA team owners approved rule changes on Tuesday creating an in-game flopping penalty and expanded coach's video replay challenge starting next season, the league announced. The NBA's Competition Committee — which includes players, coaches, referees, club owners, team executives and representatives from the National Basketball Players Association — unanimously recommended both changes to the full board of team owners.

The new flopping rule, adopted on a one-season trial basis, says that when a game official calls a player for a flop — a motion deliberately trying to entice a referee foul call on another player — an offending player will be issued a technical foul and the opposing team will be awarded one free throw attempt.

A player will not be ejected from a game based on flopping violations. Referees will not be required to stop play to call a flopping violation, allowing teams with an offensive opportunity to keep going until the game's next natural stoppage. Referees can call both a foul and a flopping violation on the same play. While flopping violations are not reviewable under a coach's challenge, they can be called during a referee's replay review triggered by a coach's challenge or a referee-initiated replay review of certain types of called fouls.

The NBA will continue to look at flopping after games, with fines modified to match technical fouls, starting at \$2,000 and increasing for repeat offenders. The coach's challenge change gives teams a second challenge if their first challenge is successful. Teams must continue to use a timeout to trigger a challenge. They would not be able to challenge without a timeout available. Teams can continue to keep the timeout after a first challenge if successful but will not retain the timeout used for a second challenge whether or not it is successful. — AFP