

Polestar 2  
Why wait  
to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



**NOTICE**

Happy Islamic New Year to all our readers! Kuwait Times will not publish its print edition on July 20 and 21, 2023. Readers can stay informed with breaking news and information via KuwaitTimes.com and our digital media channels on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn and Threads.



Happy New Hijri Year



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday received the Honorary Chairperson of Kuwaiti Disabled Sports Club Sheikha Abdullah Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah, chairman of Kuwaiti Tomooh Sports Club Jassem Mohammad Al-Nouri, and the club's founder and head of Kuwait National Special Olympics Rihab Buresli as well as its members. His Highness the Crown Prince also welcomed female and male athletes who won a number of gold, silver and bronze medals at the Special Olympics World Games hosted by Germany. — KUNA (See Page 16)

## Government urged to amend Kuwait population structure

Lawmakers reject taxes, raising charges, debt

By B Izzak

### Kuwait inflation up

KUWAIT: The consumer prices on an annual basis grew by 3.83 percent last June, according to the Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau (KCSB). In a statement to KUNA on Tuesday, the bureau said that the inflation rate in Kuwait rose 0.54 percent last June, on a monthly basis, due to the increase of prices of all main groups that influence the movement of key indices, particularly food, education and clothing.

Record number of the first group (food and beverages) last June went up by 6.25 percent, compared to the same month in 2022, while the price index of the second group (cigarettes and tobacco) slightly rose by 0.37 percent on an annual basis. The consumer price index (CPI) for the clothing group rose 6.76 percent, and the (housing services) rose by 3.23 percent, while the inflation rate in furnishings increased by 2.36 percent.

KCSB noted that the health index rose 2.34 percent while rates of transport moved up by 3.56 percent compared to the same month in 2022. Communication rose by 1.58 percent on an annual basis, culture and entertainment went up by 3.16 percent while education rose by 0.40 percent. Restaurants and hotels climbed on a yearly basis last May by 3.07 percent, services and miscellaneous goods by 4.25 percent.

The statement indicated that the inflation of CPI in June, excluding food and beverages, increased by 2.24 percent on an annual basis. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measurement that examines prices on a monthly or annual basis. Generally, it constitutes a basic index for growth and economic recession, where decision makers examine to take decisions at the economic level and work out financial and monetary policies. — KUNA

KUWAIT: A lawmaker on Tuesday called on the government to deport 1.8 million expats, some 55 percent of all foreigners in the country, in a bid to amend the population structure currently tilting heavily in favor of expats. "Stray (foreign) laborers have entered private homes ... and the government is silent toward amending the population structure," MP Fares Al-Oteibi said during a special debate on the government's four-year

program. "We must deport 1.8 million of these laborers," the lawmaker called. Based on official figures, the number of expats remained almost unchanged at 3.3 million, about 69 percent of Kuwait's total population of 4.8 million. The government has repeatedly pledged to take measures to cut the number of expats in Kuwait but the number has not dropped, but at the same time stopped to grow as it did in the past years.

The government has been adopting a stricter policy towards issuing new visas for expats, restricting

the issuance of dependent visas or visit visas. The issuance of work visas has also been rationalized. MP Abdullah Fahhad also criticized the government for not including concrete policies for amending the population structure to increase the percentage of citizens in the population mix. In its program, the government said it plans to review the residency law governing the stay of expats in Kuwait, but provided no details on the planned measures.

Continued on Page 6

### Japan's PM rounds out energy-focused Gulf tour

DOHA: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited gas-rich Qatar on Tuesday to wrap up a Gulf tour centered on energy security and cooperation with Tokyo's main suppliers. He was making the first visit to Doha by a Japanese premier in 10 years. Kishida arrived in Qatar from the United Arab Emirates after starting his tour in Saudi Arabia where he met the de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

During his tour, Kishida and Gulf leaders discussed "how to deal with energy challenges" in the face of unstable supply due to Russia's Ukraine invasion, the prime minister told a Doha press conference. Japan relies almost entirely on imports for its crude oil, with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar accounting for the bulk of its supplies. But as the oil-producing Gulf states move towards cleaner energy sources, Japan said it is hoping to offer its greener and renewable energy technologies to assist their decarbonisation efforts.

"By combining respective strengths of Gulf states and Japan, oil producers in the Middle East will be transformed to global green energy hubs, exporting decarbonised energy and critical minerals," Kishida

Continued on Page 6



DOHA: Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani receives Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Doha on July 18, 2023. — AFP

### Saudi and Turkey seal drone deal

RIYADH: A Turkish firm will provide drones to Saudi Arabia, Riyadh said Tuesday following a visit by Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that aims to attract foreign investment. Several contracts, including the drone deal with the privately-owned Baykar, were signed during a meeting between Erdogan and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the Red Sea port of Jeddah on Monday, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said. Haluk Bayraktar, CEO of the drone manufacturer which is co-run by one of Erdogan's sons-in-laws, in a tweet called the deal "the biggest defense and aviation export contract in the history of the Turkish Republic".

The value of the deal has not been made public. Erdogan, who in May elections won another five-year term, was in Saudi Arabia to kick off a Gulf tour seeking to drum up support for Turkey's faltering



JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman welcomes Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) in Jeddah on July 17, 2023. — AFP

economy. The Turkish leader is expected in neighboring Qatar later on Tuesday. After attending a Saudi-Turkish business forum in Jeddah on Monday, Erdogan and Prince Mohammed discussed "prospects for joint cooperation" in their meeting, SPA reported.

Continued on Page 6

### US deploying warship, warplanes to Middle East

WASHINGTON: The United States is deploying a destroyer as well as F-35 and F-16 warplanes to the Middle East to deter Iran from seizing ships in the Gulf, the Pentagon said Monday. The move came after the Iranian Navy tried to seize two merchant vessels in the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman earlier this month, in one incident opening fire at one of the merchant vessels.

"In light of this continued threat and in coordination with our partners and allies, the (Defense) Department is increasing our presence and ability to monitor the Strait and surrounding waters," Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said, calling

Continued on Page 6



# Work program embraces added-value implementable projects: Prime Minister

## Lawmakers' suggestions to be taken into consideration: Ministers

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said Tuesday the government's work program includes plans for added-value implementable projects with specific timetables. Addressing a parliament session on the government's program, the prime minister said the plan is considered a document of cooperation between both legislative and executive authorities and establishes joint constructive work rules based on putting the supreme national interest first, wiping out obstacles and addressing challenges.

It is also a document of partnership with the private sector and civil society organizations, which have a central role to play in achieving progress and development as part of Kuwait's future vision aiming at serving the interest of generations to come, he stressed. He added that the government had presented its work plan in line with Article 98 of the constitution and the principle of constructive cooperation between both legislative and executive authorities, which is essential to serving public interest and carrying out the aspired achievements.

His Highness the Prime Minister cited the plan including major economic and development projects aiming at ensuring economic diversification, improving development performance and addressing economic and financial challenges. Improving living conditions and answering social needs for citizens, mainly housing, education, health and entertainment, have been taken into account in the government's work program, he pointed out. The prime minister commended fruitful cooperation between the legislative and executive authorities in the enactment of a law that allows companies to establish new residential cities or areas, the amendment of the health insurance law to include more citizens.



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah addresses lawmakers and officials at the National Assembly on Tuesday. — KUNA photos



Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Essa Al-Kanderi speaks at the session.



Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr Saad Al-Barrak is seen during his speech.

### Comments welcome

Suggestions pitched by Kuwaiti lawmakers over the government's newly-announced work plan will be taken into "consideration," Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Essa Al-Kanderi said on Tuesday.

The government, he said, will respond "in accordance with constitutional procedures". He echoed the words of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Sabah, in which he said that the government and parliament are bound by a "partnership" to serve the nation's best interests.

Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Acting Minister of Finance Dr Saad Al-Barrak affirmed that the government will take note of the observations of MPs. He added that the government's work program is practical and based on a clear vision and was created in a record time. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Cabinet affirmed its commitment to cooperate with the National Assembly during its meeting on Monday. — KUNA photos

## Cabinet approves GCC road system, talks Boubyan port

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet on Monday reaffirmed its commitment to "commendable" cooperation between the executive and legislative branches. Deputy Premier and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Essa Al-Kanderi, underlined after the Cabinet meeting the government's keenness to sustain cooperation with parliament.

### Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port

The Cabinet was briefed at the beginning of its meeting on the recommendation of the Ministerial Committee for Economic Affairs on the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port, also known as Boubyan Port, project. The Cabinet decided to assign the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, supervisor of the Silk City Development Authority (Subiya) and Boubyan Island, to follow up the progress of the executive and construction works related to the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project. The ministry

will coordinate with the General Investment Authority in addition to relevant authorities to take appropriate measures towards determining the best ways to operate Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port.

The port, with its 24 harbors, will serve as a major route for regional shipping and transit services. It's designed to link the sea to the mainland through a network of highways and railways. The project has been in discussion since at least 2007.

### GCC unified road system

Cabinet approved the recommendation of the Ministerial Committee for Legal Affairs on a draft law to issue the unified system of international road transport among the countries of the GCC. The Council of Ministers decided to submit it to HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in preparation for its referral to the National Assembly.

### Al-Shadadiya university city

The Cabinet was also informed of the recommendation of the Ministerial Committee on Education, Health and Youth regarding the report submitted by the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development on the follow-up of the construction program for the Sabah Al-Salem University City project in



A 3D illustration of part of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer port project is seen in this 2010 file photo.

Al-Shadadiya for the months (January, February, and March 2023).

The Cabinet praised the efforts made by Ku-

wait University to move forward in completing the Sabah Al-Salem University City project in Al-Shadadiya to the fullest. — KUNA

## For some people, money doesn't buy happiness

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The pursuit of happiness lies at the core of human endeavors, and most of the time, it is associated with money that can provide a sense of security. However, according to multiple studies, people who value time over money tend to be happier. In a study published in the journal Social Psychological and Personality Science, around 64 percent of 4,000 people said more money will make them happier. However, the study found that people who said they would rather have more time than money were generally happier compared to those who preferred money.

Kuwait Times spoke with several people to learn more about their ways of pursuing happiness. Mosab Athamneh revealed to Kuwait Times that he will always choose time over money. As a family guy, he affirmed that positive relationships and social connections with family and friends can bring immense joy and satisfaction. He added money can consume one's health and quality time with beloved ones. "Well-being is more important and significantly contributes to overall happiness."

As for Jessica Della, money is a tool to buy



happiness. "Money makes you happy, not only by buying materialistic things, but also shows you are pursuing personal growth and being successful in achieving your goals. It can bring a sense of fulfillment," she said. Rahma Hassan sees an act of kindness as the best way to reach the highest stage of happiness. "Helping others and engaging in acts of kindness can bring joy and happiness, whether through volunteering, supporting charitable causes or simply extending a helping hand to someone in need," she explained.

Talal Al-Fadhli said for him, work is equal to happiness, saying that people can balance their life and find health and wealth. "Achieving happiness requires striking a balance between job

obligations and leisure and personal time. The ability to manage one's time properly, pursue interests and partake in enjoyable activities outside of work can all greatly improve wellbeing," he said. He indicated that although money may not be the only factor in determining happiness, it does play a role in providing chances for experiences that can enhance happiness and meet fundamental requirements.

On the other hand, a study by Yale University and University of Cambridge said money can buy happiness when spending fits our personality. Matching spending with personality was more important for individuals' happiness than the effect of individuals' total income or their total spending.

## Central Bank affirms cryptocurrency ban

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has stressed on all companies the absolute prohibition of using virtual assets (cryptocurrency) as a tool or means of payment or recognizing them as a decentralized currency. The directives come within the scope of strengthening efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

In this regard, the regulatory authorities in Kuwait, led by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Insurance Regulatory Unit, have moved to circulate to all entities subject to their supervision regarding the required procedures and transactions related to virtual assets in accordance with the findings of the study prepared by the National Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing Committee on the required compliance in the field of implementing Recommendation 15 of the International Requirements issued by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

The Central Bank of Kuwait stressed on local banks and finance and exchange companies to refrain from conducting transactions under which virtual currencies are used as a tool or means of payment within the scope of this ban or dealing with them as a means of investment and refraining from providing this type of services to any of their customers. The bank also affirmed the absolute prohibition of all asset mining activities or virtual currencies.

## Local

# Examining men's complaints about rising dowry in Kuwait

## Societal expectations pressure families to raise dowry: Young woman

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** In Kuwait, the topic of dowry, also known as 'mahr,' has become a subject of heated discussions and complaints among men. Dowry, a longstanding tradition in many cultures, refers to the financial gift given to a bride by her husband at the time of marriage. While it holds value in celebrating the union of two individuals, there has been a growing concern about the escalating dowry amounts demanded in recent years.

To explore the complaints made by men regarding the excessive amounts of dowries and to consider the underlying factors contributing to pushing women towards asking for such amounts, Kuwait Times interviewed two young men and a woman. Ali Ibrahim, a newlywed young man and a father-to-be, shared with Kuwait Times his thoughts regarding excessive dowries.

"In my opinion, a high dowry decreases the blessings of marriage and increases its difficulties. On the other hand, the bride's family believes it increases the value of the bride. Others consider it as trading the girl for a large sum of money, which is considered - forbidden. In my opinion as a father, I believe it is important to know the qualities and financial capabilities of the potential husband before determining the dowry, based on mutual agreement."

Ibrahim perceives the increased amount of dowry as a financial burden. "Excessive dowry demands may have negative effects on both the man and the woman. It reduces the chances of marriage and discourages men from getting married. This can lead to unofficial marriages, such as kidnapping the girl from her family's home or civil marriages," he added.

On his part, Mohammad Al-Ansari said that the dowry is an essential component of the marriage contract in communities where Shariah Law is practiced. Within this context, the bride has the power to determine the mahr at her discretion - whether in monetary or other terms. Regardless of one's financial situation, Islam promotes justice and moderation and encourages sensible and affordable mahr.

The basis for a happy and respectful marriage is



laid by this practice, which encourages respect, understanding, and open communication between the couple and their family. Al-Ansari also highlighted how cultural and societal expectations influence the size of a woman's dowry in Kuwait. He said that Kuwait is a collective society with various communities. Some of these communities are status-driven, ultimately influencing the dowry.

It is completely saddening to see families nowadays treat their own children like assets to be bought. It is disheartening how dowry is viewed, where the more money you offer, the higher the social status. He explained that marriage should, by no means, be about who has the capability of spending the most money. It is supposed to be a special connection between two people who want to build a family, experience love, feel safe and valued, and find a place where they can call home.

Al-Ansari supported his stance with an example of a beautiful marriage that shows exactly what he means - the marriage of Ali and Fatima (two main figures in Islam). Fatima's dowry was no more than a mere shield, mind you, even as the daughter of the prophet (peace be upon him), it was not fancy or expensive. Their marriage gave birth to the purest people to ever: Ali and Fatima's bloodline.

Ali's love for Fatima and their love for each other were extraordinary. They were each other's everything, and their bond was a shining example of what a marriage should be based on—pure love, loyalty,

and a shared journey through life. Not how large one's pocket may be. He also spoke about the potential consequences of a large dowry for women and their families, saying that large sums for dowries are problematic because they - not only prevent the probability of two souls connecting on a spiritual and physical level, but they can also lead both parties to succumb to whims and desires that Allah forbids.

Al-Ansari also expressed that setting a minimum for dowries is an insult to low-class income earners, as they may be applicable to people who cannot afford such payments, thereby preventing them from pursuing their dreams.

However, Lama, a young lady in her mid-twenties, told Kuwait Times that one of the key factors influencing the increase is the pressure and societal expectations. In Kuwait, marriage is highly valued, and weddings are significant events celebrated by the entire community, especially among women. Consequently, families often feel compelled to adhere to traditional norms and offer substantial dowries to maintain their social status.

Many men feel some women are focusing on material gains rather than the love and commitment shared between partners while others feel they are being financially exploited. The real reason (most times) is to adhere to societal expectations, especially in a collective community where people affect each other's choices.

## Dealing with both ends of the spectrum: Student and Teacher

By Noor AlKhasr

**W**hen you're in college, it almost seems impossible to picture life outside of it. The newness of it all never gets old; nothing is ever predictable, and the world really does feel like your oyster. However, what many adults fail to tell us is that eventually, we're going to have to face the music. The curtains will drop, you'll submit your final assignment, hand in your student ID, and be well on your way to the next phase of your life: The Job Hunt phase.

Now, most of us enter adulthood with great ambitions on how we'll start our own ventures or at least put our degree to good use; however, if someone were to tell me that most adults settle for jobs that drain them with little to no satisfaction solely for the money and the lack of jobs, I would have laughed in their faces, knowing that I've never settled for anything I didn't deserve in life.

So, imagine the sheer disappointment I felt when I settled for a job I had no interest in or was not emotionally qualified for, but had to accept it simply because it was considered the best option. Don't get me wrong; being a teacher is the most fulfilling job for those who go into the profession willingly. It takes someone who is immensely strong, extremely patient, caring, and incontestably devoted to have what it takes to deal with the tribulations of being a teacher.

The reality of my life consisted of a lot of disassociation; it felt like I had completely given up on my life; however, it did not strike me as something that was concerning or alarming, as most adults of my age were all going through the same thing, and I thought this was completely normal. However, the remaining question kept me up at night: Was this life after college?

You start out being so full of life, eager and curious to learn with a powerful sense of ambition and determination, and then you become at drained 20-something - dealing with identity crisis issues, and surely enough, that fire in your belly starts to dissolve as you step into adulthood. I graduated in the spring of January, and months later, I was employed in May of the same year.

People went from calling me by my name to now calling me "Ms". Nothing ever prepares you for the horrors of dealing with teenagers or the painfully limiting curriculum that leaves no room for creativity. Eventually, teaching becomes a step-by-step monotone method, leaving both the teacher and student begging for the lesson to be over.

While I did find the humor of having to deal with teenagers that reminded me of my mischievous teenage self, my respect for my teachers who had to put up with so much grew immensely. The upsides to teaching could be the one or two students who actually listen and appreciate the time you spent rephrasing and repeating each point to enhance their learning experience, but other than that, being a teacher is truly not for the weak.

Additionally, given the short period in which I reluctantly transitioned from student to teacher, I was having a difficult time adjusting to the whole personality change everyone in the workforce expects of you. As most of my co-workers were in their mid-40s and over, being a teacher that was friendly, energetic, and vivacious was not within the job requirements of being a high school teacher, or at least not in the public sector. So, eventually, you learn to mirror those around you, and after doing that for eight months straight, your personality as well as your light start to burn out.

I remember someone once telling me that once you start being an adult, all you ever do is settle because that's just real life, and in real life, you learn to accept what's given to you because you don't want to seem too greedy. "You learn to be happy in the shoes you're wearing," they said, and while that may be true when measured against most things in life, I will simply not accept a life I do not deserve.

So, if you're reading this whether you've just graduated high school and someone tells you to pick the major that's going to make you the most money despite your having zero interest in it, or if you're someone who's miserable in their job and everyone around you tells you to stay because there's no better option, or if you're someone who's dying to pave your own path by starting your own business and people keep telling you it's too big of a risk, let me just tell you this: I may be 23 with little to no experience in life, but I am certain that we miss out on 100% of the opportunities we do not take. Nothing ever measures up to the sensation of being emotionally satisfied. We were put on this earth for different purposes, and there's room for everyone.



**KUWAIT:** United States Charge d'Affaires in Kuwait James Holtsnider and Zain Kuwait Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Musaibeh with NUKS USA officials.

## Zain sponsors NUKS USA orientation

**KUWAIT:** As part of its extended strategic partnership with the National Union of Kuwaiti Students in the United States of America (NUKS USA), Zain recently sponsored the union's annual orientation session at Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC). The session welcomed high school graduates and came under the patronage of the Minister of Education.

The session was attended by the representative of the event's patron, the Acting Assistant Undersecretary of Scholarships and Equivalency Affairs at the Ministry of Higher Education, Wafaa Al-Sarraf, HE United States Charge d'Affaires in Kuwait James Holtsnider, and Zain Kuwait Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Musaibeh. The event welcomed over 700 students accepted in this year's scholarships plan, along with students who are NUKS USA members.

Zain's support to this annual session comes under the umbrella of its broader strategic partnership with NUKS USA for over 20 years. Through this cooperation, the company continues to support the union's long list of programs and social activities in both Kuwait and the US, reinforcing Zain's



**Hamad Al-Musaibeh addressing the students.**

position as the top supporter of the biggest gathering of Kuwaiti students abroad.

This year's annual orientation session featured many programs that served the needs of new students who were recently accepted in the Ministry of Higher Education's scholarships program. NUKS USA members from across US states who are studying various majors were present to interact with the new students and answer their inquiries. The event also featured a special panel discussion: My Experience in the US, about the unique experience of going to college in the United States.

Zain recently welcomed NUKS USA officials at the company's headquarters in Shuwaikh during an official visit to discuss future collaboration opportunities and preparations for the new academic year.

The union's team outlined their upcoming plan for special programs and activities to be held in and outside of Kuwait to serve new and current students, including the annual orientation session.

For over 20 years, Zain continued to be the top supporter of NUKS USA by participating in a plethora of community programs, including the annual conference in the US, the annual orientation session in Kuwait, the local NUKS USA office to guide new students, academic sessions, cultural seminars, sports competitions, entertainment programs, workshops, and others. These programs and more witness wide positive reaction and participation from students every year.

Zain's support to NUKS USA comes in line with its pledge as a leading national company to provide bright and enthusiastic young Kuwaitis with a great social experience, as well as listen to their ideas and experiences while they pursue their education abroad.

NUKS USA serves thousands of Kuwaiti students studying in the United States every year. The union aims, through its events and programs, to connect Kuwaiti students with each other on one level, and with their nation and the local community on another.

The union was publicized in the US and was granted the recognition of the United States government. The achievement is considered a proud milestone for Kuwait's youth and is a direct result of the great relations between the State of Kuwait and United States. Such a recognition is a clear reflection of the strategic relations between the two nations.



**NEW YORK:** Officials pose for a group photo during the High-Level Political Forum in New York. — KUNA

in cooperation with the United Nations within the framework of the National Cooperation Program agreement. In a statement, Mahdi explained to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the projects cover capacity building and strengthening institutional capacities in many government agencies, efforts to train public sector employees, and coordination that

took place with all sectors in the country.

He noted that the cooperation between Kuwait and the United Nations and its affiliated organizations has resulted in many positive results at the level of preparing reports, strategies, and frameworks, in addition to workshops and training courses to build capacity in newly established institutions. — KUNA

## Official reviews Kuwait Vision 2035, UN partnership

**NEW YORK:** The Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Dr Khalid Mahdi, reviewed on Monday the "Kuwait Vision 2035" and the partnership between Kuwait and United Nations organizations. This was stated at an event organized by Kuwait entitled "Kuwait Vision 2035" on the sidelines of the High-Level Political Forum in New York and moderated by the permanent representative of Kuwait to the United Nations, Ambassador Tariq Al-Bannai, in the presence of UNDP director Walid Al-Dardairi, ambassadors, and heads of delegations from the Gulf countries.

During the event, Mahdi also spoke about the National Program Project and the positive outputs and results of 17 projects implemented by Kuwait

## News in Brief

22 people arrested  
for drug possession

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior has caught 22 people of different nationalities found in possession of about 16.5 kilograms of various drugs, 2,400 psychoactive pills and varying amounts of money in separate cases. "These efforts come as a continuation of the Interior Ministry's work in confronting drug traffickers and smugglers as well as protecting the youth of the country from the dangers of this devastating scourge," The General Department of Relations and Security Media at the Ministry of Interior said in a statement. Of the 22 people seized, four are of Arab nationality, two of foreign nationality, three of Asian nationality, seven are citizens and six are illegal residents, the ministry said. The ministry added that the defendants admitted that they acquired the drugs with the intention of trafficking and abuse. The perpetrators were referred to the authorities for further legal action. "Security efforts are continuing to arrest anyone who tries to bring and trade in narcotic substances and protect society and preserve it from these dangerous scourges," the interior said, stressing the need for concerted efforts to eliminate drug traffickers and promoters. "The drug combatting team can keep pace with modern and innovative criminal methods of smuggling and promoting drugs. They will remain a force in the face of anyone who seeks to compromise the security of the homeland or the safety of citizens and residents," the ministry added. The ministry called on everyone to cooperate with security men and report any negative phenomena through the ministry's emergency phone at 112 or the hotline of the General Administration for Drug Control at 1884141.

Fire in vegetable warehouse  
extinguished with no injuries

KUWAIT: A fire was controlled in a vegetable warehouse in the Sulaibiya agricultural area, announced the Department of Public Relations and Media of the Kuwait Fire Force on Tuesday. The fire broke out on Tuesday afternoon, according to a report received by the Central Operations Department on Tuesday afternoon. The Central Operations Department directed fire brigades from Tahrir and Sulaibikhat stations to the site of the fire. The fire was extinguished without any significant injuries, said the fire force.

# Doctor urges caution as temperatures hit new highs

## Gastrointestinal diseases most prevalent during hot weather

KUWAIT: Head of the internal medicine department at the Amiri Hospital, Dr Osan Al-Muhaini, warned of the danger of exposure to sunlight for long periods of time, especially with the high temperatures the country is currently witnessing. The heat, he said, may cause gastrointestinal issues, heat stress and sunstroke if one is not careful.

In a statement to the Kuwaiti news agency (KUNA) on Tuesday, Dr Al-Muhaini called for the need to avoid sunlight and wear protective headwear, specifically in the period from 11 am to 3 pm. He said that with rising temperatures, some types of viruses and microbes are active that cause diseases and unpleasant health symptoms, stressing that most diseases associated with summertime are not dangerous if handled properly.

He added that among the most prominent of these diseases are microbes that infect the digestive system and cause vomiting and diarrhea, pointing out that they are treated by intestinal disinfectants, antibiotics and drugs that reduce fever.

He urged people to drink a lot of water and fluids if the symptoms are accompanied by vomiting or diarrhea. He explained that with the high temperature and the strength of the sun rays in the summer period, the incidence of intestinal inflammation increases, which causes dehydration, stressing that drinking fluids is very



Dr Osan Al-Muhaini

important to avoid complications.

Eating vegetables, which compensates the body for the lack of salts and minerals and reduces the occurrence of dehydration, as well as wearing protective headwear when spending time outdoors at peak hours, are very important, said Dr Al-Muhaini.

Air conditioners, he said, are a double-edged sword because the transition from the hot outdoors to the cool indoors could put people at risk.

Heat stress is also a common disease during the summer and is often contracted by those who work in professions during which they are exposed to the sun for long periods. Its symptoms include a high fever, impaired consciousness, as well as faint-



KUWAIT: A man stands under running water to ward off the heat in this file photo.

ing, vomiting, abdominal pain and other symptoms.

He pointed out that heat stress can lead to greater health problems if it is not dealt with quickly by moving the injured away from the sun and giving them fever-reducing medicine and having them drink fluids as much as possible if there's no vomiting. In case of vomiting, fluids can be administered through solutions.

Prolonged exposure to sunlight may cause a person to get heat stroke, which is much more dangerous than

heat stress because it directly affects the center of consciousness in the brain. In that case, a person loses consciousness quickly and if not dealt with quickly may lead to serious complications.

He emphasized the importance of frequent bathing during the summer to reduce sweating and dehydration. In addition, he called for maintaining the cleanliness of surfaces continuously, washing hands before eating, staying away from direct sunlight, and wearing light cotton clothes. — KUNA

## With safety measures, exposure to sunlight beneficial for health

By Munirah Al-Fayez

KUWAIT: As temperatures reach more than 50 degrees Celsius in Kuwait, people might find it challenging to go about their daily lives. However, there are perks to living in such a sunny country, Dr Shaikha Al-Mutawa told Kuwait Times.

Exposure to the sun is extremely beneficial in increasing vitamin D in a person's body, according to Dr Mutawa.

"A person should be exposed to the sun for 20 minutes daily, while they are wearing short sleeves, so they are sure that their body is fully able to absorb the sunlight," she said.

Dr Mutawa explained that doing this will increase vitamin D, which will lower a person's risk of bone fractures and osteoporosis. The best time to be ex-

posed to the sun, says Dr Mutawa, is in the afternoon before the sunset. With all the benefits of the sun, Dr Mutawa says that we still need to put on sunscreen, drink water, and not get immediate exposure to the sun at noon.

Research has found that that being exposed to the sun also affects our cognitive functions. A study done by researchers in the US and published in 2009, suggests that "among participants with depression, low exposure to sunlight was associated with a significantly higher predicted probability of cognitive impairment." The study also explained that the lack of natural sunlight might lead to "altered serotonin levels, neurodegeneration, depression, cognitive deficits, and ultimately dementia." In addition, the study has also found that there is a relationship between sunlight and serotonin, melatonin and cerebral hemodynamic.

SAD, a mental condition that causes depression during the winter and is less severe during the spring or summer, is associated with the shorter daylight hours during the winter. Many people with this condition, according to researchers, use light therapy, to improve their wellbeing, but it appeared that light therapy also improves their brain functions.

Exposure to sunlight also has a positive effect on a person's mental health and general wellbeing, according to a study done by researchers in Japan and published in 2022, which studied the effect of sunlight exposure on people during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. "Exposure to sunlight, spending leisure time in green spaces, and physical activity each had a positive impact on people's mental health, including depression, anxiety, and stress states," the paper reads.



## KFAS honors Kuwaiti high school grads

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences honored outstanding Kuwaiti High School graduates in appreciation of their efforts during their school years, and as a motivation for them to continue in order to move the development

process in Kuwait forward.

KFAS Director General Dr Aameena Farhan said the annual celebration by the foundation is at the directions of HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Foundation's Board, to support Kuwait Youth who are the pillars of the country's renaissance and development and to encourage them to make outstanding scientific achievements in all fields.

She said the foundation believes that scientifically outstanding Kuwaiti youth will be able to achieve "our country's major ambitions". — KUNA



### Scan & Subscribe KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

### Kuwait Times

Established 1961  
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf

Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220



'Hanging tough': Ukraine fights new Russian advance

## Sri Lankan leader seeks to disarm India, China fears

Page 7

Page 6

# US calls for urgent action on climate

## Kerry says climate change requires 'new definition' of China-US cooperation

BEIJING: Global warming poses a threat to all humankind and requires a new kind of cooperation between China and the United States, US climate envoy John Kerry told Chinese officials on Tuesday. Kerry has called for "urgent action" by Beijing and Washington to tackle the threat of climate change as the world's two largest polluters revive stalled diplomacy on reducing planet-warming emissions.

Speaking at Beijing's Great Hall of the People with China's top diplomat Wang Yi, Kerry underlined the need for "global leadership" on the issue. His visit to China came as the Northern Hemisphere endured record-setting summer heat waves, which scientists have said are being exacerbated by climate change. "Climate, as you know, is a global issue, not a bilateral issue. It's a threat to all of humankind," Kerry told Wang.

"This is a matter of global leadership," he stressed, adding that the world "really hopes for that and needs it". "Our hope is now that this can be the beginning of a new definition of cooperation and of capacity to resolve the differences between us," he added, noting that "we both know there are real differences".

"But we also know from experience that if we work at it, we can find the path ahead and ways that resolve these challenges," Wang, in response, underlined the need "for a healthy, stable, and sustainable Sino-US relationship".

"Cooperation on climate change is advancing under the overall climate of China and the United States, so we need the joint support of the people of China and the United States," Wang told Kerry, who

he described as an "old friend". Climate talks between the two biggest greenhouse gas emitters came to a halt last year after Nancy Pelosi, then speaker of the US House of Representatives, enraged Beijing by visiting self-ruled Taiwan, which China considers to be part of its territory. Kerry, a former secretary of state, has enjoyed comparatively cordial and consistent relations with China despite Washington and Beijing locking horns over Taiwan and other issues.

Kerry also met Tuesday with Chinese premier Li Qiang, who told the US envoy climate change posed a "daunting challenge". "It is incumbent on China, the United States and indeed all countries in the world to strengthen coordination, build consensus and speed up actions," Li said.

Kerry met his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua in Beijing on Monday, with the two men speaking for around four hours, state broadcaster CCTV said. Both countries "must take urgent action on a number of fronts, especially the challenges of coal and methane pollution", Kerry wrote in a tweet after the talks. Beijing said after the talks that "climate change is a common challenge faced by all mankind".

Kerry's trip follows two other high-profile visits by US officials — Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen — that were aimed at stabilizing US-China ties. China on Monday said the mercury hit 52.2 degrees Celsius (126 degrees Fahrenheit) in the northwest of the country over the weekend, setting a record for mid-July. — AFP



BEIJING: US Climate Envoy John Kerry (left) shakes hands with China's Premier Li Qiang before a meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on July 18, 2023. — AFP

## Egypt jails rights researcher Patrick Zaki for 3 years



Egyptian researcher Patrick Zaki arrives at a courthouse in Egypt's northern Nile delta city of Mansoura for a trial hearing on June 21, 2022. — AFP

CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Tuesday sentenced rights researcher Patrick Zaki to three years' prison for "spreading false news", a rights activist said, even as the government conducts a dialogue aiming to give the opposition a voice.

Human rights defender Hossam Bahgat, who runs the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights where Zaki worked, said no appeal is possible against the conviction over an article he wrote about religious freedom. Zaki previously spent 22 months in pre-trial detention until December 2021, and was again taken into custody Tuesday after the court ruling in Mansoura, 130 kilometers (80 miles) north of Cairo.

His 2020 article recounted his experiences of discrimination as a member of the country's Coptic Christian minority, who number around 10-15 percent of Egypt's 105 million people. The drawn-out case has triggered international condemnation, particularly in Italy where he was studying at Bologna University. He was arrested in 2020, while returning to visit family, under charges of "spreading false news", "harming national security" and "incitement to overthrow the state", among others.

### 'Scandalous'

Amnesty International, in a statement released Tuesday in Italian, called the ruling "a scandalous verdict". Rights defenders have said Zaki was beaten and tortured with electricity during his detention.

Thousands in Italy signed petitions calling for Zaki's release, and the country's senate voted in 2021 to grant him Italian citizenship. Relations between Cairo and Rome had previously been strained by the 2016 killing of Italian PhD candidate Giulio Regeni in Egypt in 2016, which sparked alarm over academic freedom in the country.

Egypt ranks in the lowest group of the Academic Freedom Index, with researchers frequently detained and harassed for their work. Cairo has come under frequent criticism for its human rights record, with tens of thousands of political prisoners — including journalists, lawyers, trade unionists and artists — behind bars, according to rights groups. — AFP

## Trump says he expects to be indicted in Capitol riot probe

WASHINGTON: Former US president Donald Trump said Tuesday he has received a letter from prosecutors suggesting he is likely to be criminally indicted over the January 6 riot at the US Capitol. "Deranged Jack Smith, the prosecutor with Joe Biden's DOJ, sent a letter... stating that I am a TARGET of the January 6 Grand Jury investigation," Trump said in a post on his Truth Social platform.

The former president, the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, said he received the letter on Sunday and was given "a very short four days" to report to a grand jury, "which almost always means an Arrest and Indictment."

"This witch hunt is all about election interference

and a complete and total political weaponization of law enforcement," Trump said. "It is a very sad and dark period for our Nation!"

The 77-year-old Trump is already facing charges brought by Smith, the special counsel, for mishandling top secret government documents after leaving the White House. According to the indictment, Trump kept the files — which included classified records from the Pentagon, CIA and National Security Agency — unsecured at his Mar-a-Lago home in Florida.

The judge presiding over the documents case is to hold a hearing later Tuesday to discuss a date for the trial to begin. Prosecutors have asked for a December start while Trump's defense attorneys have asked for it to begin after the November 2024 presidential election.

Smith has also been investigating Trump's efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, as well as the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol by his supporters seeking to block congressional certification of Biden's victory. Georgia prosecutors are also investigating whether Trump illegally attempted to overturn the



WEST PALM BEACH, US: This combination of pictures shows, Special Counsel Jack Smith (left) and former US President Donald Trump. — AFP

2020 presidential election outcome in the southern state.

In his Truth Social post, Trump argued that he has "the right to protest an Election that I am fully convinced was Rigged and Stolen" and said he was being targeted because of the upcoming election. — AFP

## 14,000 evacuated during Pakistan's monsoon rains

LAHORE: More than 14,000 people and their cattle were evacuated from villages in eastern Pakistan, authorities said Tuesday, following the arrival of monsoon rains across South Asia. The summer monsoon brings South Asia 70-80 percent of its annual rainfall between June and September and is vital for

the livelihoods of millions of farmers in a region of around two billion people.

But it also brings landslides and floods, and scientists have said climate change is making seasonal rains heavier and more unpredictable.

Rising water levels inundated at least 15 riverside villages and submerged large swathes of agricultural land, destroying crops such as corn, in Kasur district, close to the city of Lahore in Pakistan's most populous province of Punjab. "We had been warned that there could be a flood. But it all happened very suddenly," villager Ashfaq Bhatti told AFP.

"My family all made it out in time, but we have lost our livelihood. All our crops are now sitting under-

water." The provincial disaster management agency said people were being evacuated to 11 relief sites. It said the floods were worsened by India's decision to release more water into downstream areas in Pakistan after torrential monsoon rains that killed more than 90 people. "We want to go home and start fixing the damage. But they keep telling us that more rains are coming," Muhammad Farooq, another villager who had been evacuated, told AFP.

At least 50 people have died in weather-related incidents across Pakistan since the end of June. Pakistan is struggling to recover from the devastating floods that inundated nearly one-third of the country in 2022, affecting more than 33 million people. — AFP

## Colombia landslide kills at least eight

BOGOTA, Colombia: Rescue teams with drones searched for survivors Tuesday after a landslide triggered by heavy rains left at least eight people dead and some 20 missing in central Colombia, authorities said. Several homes were destroyed and a major trade artery blocked by mud after torrential rains hit the Quetame municipality in Colombia's Cundinamarca department late Monday.

The dead included two children, civil defense director Jorge Diaz told Noticias Caracol TV. Quetame mayor Camilo Parrado said some households "lost two, three, even four family members."

Mud was piled a meter high, up to two meters in some places, he told El Dorado Radio, making for a "very complex" search and rescue operation. "Relief agencies with drones are resuming the search," said the mayor. Firefighters have evacuated dozens of survivors, six of whom were taken to hospital.

The Cundinamarca fire department put the estimated number of missing people at 20. According to Diaz, the landslide buried part of a road linking Bogota to the southeast of the country, one of the country's main



PUENTE QUETAME, Colombia: General view of the Naranjal Toll on the Bogota-Villavicencio highway after a landslide near the town of Puente Quetame, Cundinamarca department, Colombia, on July 18, 2023. — AFP

freight routes. It happened near a toll post some 60 kilometers (37 miles) from the capital. "We also have 20 houses totally destroyed," said Diaz. "There is talk of between 11 and 20 people missing." Footage broadcast on Caracol showed large stones and mud obstructing the road between Bogota and Villavicencio.

Several vehicles are seen trapped in mud. On Twitter,

President Gustavo Petro offered his "heartfelt condolences" to the families of victims. The rainy season in Colombia starts in June and usually lasts until November. Last year, seasonal flooding left some 300 dead overall, including 34 people who died when the bus they were travelling on was buried in an avalanche in the west of the country. — AFP

## Zionists recognize Moroccan sovereignty

RABAT, Morocco: Zionist entity has decided to "recognize Morocco's sovereignty" over the disputed Western Sahara region, the royal office in Rabat announced Monday, citing a letter from the Zionist prime minister. According to the letter, Benjamin Netanyahu informed Morocco's King Mohammed VI of the Zionist entity's decision to recognize Morocco's sovereignty "over the mineral-rich desert region, the

royal office said in a statement. Netanyahu said in the letter that Zionist entity is examining the "opening of a consulate in the town of Dakhla", located in the Moroccan part of Western Sahara — a move long demanded by Rabat. Zionists confirmed the contents of the statement from Morocco when contacted by AFP.

Zionist entity's Foreign Minister Eli Cohen said Netanyahu's announcement would "strengthen the relations between the states and peoples, as well as the continued cooperation to enhance peace and regional stability". The Western Sahara dispute dates back to 1975, when colonial ruler Spain withdrew from the territory, sparking a 15-year war between Morocco and the Polisario Front movement seeking independence in the territory. Rabat controls nearly 80 percent of Western Sahara and sees the entire region, home to abundant phosphates and fisheries, as

its sovereign territory.

Rabat advocates for limited autonomy for the vast desert territory while the Algeria-backed Polisario seeks independence and has called for a UN-supervised referendum on self-determination, but it has never taken place. Since late 2020, the Polisario says it has been in "a war of legitimate defense" and has declared the entire Western Sahara, including its land, sea and airspace, a "war zone".

Amir Ohana, the speaker of the Zionist parliament, paid an official visit to Rabat in early June and said that his country "should move toward" recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Ohana said "serious discussions" between the countries over the issue were underway and that Netanyahu "will be announcing his decisions in the near future". — AFP

## International

# 'Hanging tough': Ukraine fights Russian advance

## 'So what if the Russians are advancing, they all have a death wish'

**LYMAN FRONT, Ukraine:** The towers of smoke rising over the verdant valley betray positions the Russians are pounding in their new thrust into eastern Ukraine. It instills far less fear in soldier Admin than a similar push into the Ukrainian town of Lyman just over a year ago.

"The last month has been like one long day for us," the 23-year-old said at a secret location near the site of Russia's main advance of the past few weeks of war. "In terms of morale, we are hanging tough. We just want victory to come as soon as possible." Ukraine's ability to make an elusive breakthrough in its summer offensive partially rests on the spirits of soldiers such as Admin.

Russia assumed a new assault along a northeastern stretch of the crescent-shaped frontline a few weeks after Ukraine began its own attacks further south in early June. Moscow claimed last week to have advanced 1.5 kilometers (0.9 miles) closer to Lyman—a rail hub Ukraine reclaimed in October. The Russians seem intent to force the Ukrainians to abandon their advance on captured cities such as Bakhmut and redeploy troops to defend the Lyman front.

Soldier Admin—a call name befitting his pudgy frame and background as an IT consultant—feels momentum is still on Ukraine's side. "Any war ends in negotiations, but how can you negotiate with... I won't use the name we use for them here," he said.

"So many good young people are either wounded or no longer with us. They shell civilians, so how can you talk to them? I think they should just be destroyed."

### 'Come and die'

For Viktoria Tamosevska, Russia's push to grab Lyman and other destroyed villages further north is filling her with hope. The 53-year-old former postal worker was selling cucumbers and parsley at a Lyman intersection where a Russian strike killed eight people two weekends ago. She fondly remembers the day the Russians first entered Lyman in the fourth month of war. "We were wait-

ing for them as if they were God," she recalled in a trembling voice. "And if they enter again, they will not harm us. But the Ukrainians, they do bad things." The Russians took Lyman after weeks of brutal battles that turned surrounding forests into rows of stumps and stalks. Many villagers who refused to flee the fighting were older Russian speakers who had no qualms about being ruled by Moscow. This meant that far from everyone welcomed back the Ukrainian troops with open arms.

These tensions forced fellow vegetable vendor Volodymyr Seravatskiy to extol the virtues of Ukraine's armed forces in hushed tones. "So what if the Russians are advancing. They all have a death wish. They will come here and die," he said after casting a furtive glance Tamosevska's way. "If we had the same weapons last year as we do now, they would have never come here in the first place," the 69-year-old former power plant worker said.

### 'Little frightened kids'

Ukraine's new stock of bigger and better Western weapons is doing little to shift the shape of the front. But it has brightened the mood of villagers who support Ukrainian soldiers and are absorbing the brunt of the new Russian assault.

Factory worker Valentyna Omelchenko's little cottage in the village of Zakitne rests well within striking distance of Russian forces about 10 kilometers to the north. She watched a missile fly over her house a few days ago and kill a man in his late 30s. Omelchenko smiles serenely and admits to sometimes feeling almost sorry for the Russian troops. "They have no idea why they are fighting. You look at the ones we have captured, and they are just little frightened kids," the 53-year-old said. Yulia Polyakova sounded equally untroubled as she tended her three surviving cows on the northern edge of Lyman. "We hope they won't reach us," the 63-year-old said of the Russians.



**LYMAN, Ukraine:** A woman buy products from a street vendor in front of a heavily damaged building in the town of Lyman, Donetsk region, on July 17, 2023, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

"But we have already conquered our worst fears. Maybe it's because we have simply grown used to it, but I don't know, it just feels okay now."

These glimmers of hope were badly missing when the Russians were mowing down entire cities while making their biggest advances in these parts of Ukraine one year ago. Ukraine's forces themselves sound quietly confident but near exhaustion point. Captain Rys darted his tired eyes from soldier to sol-

dier while trying to find the right words to capture the mood of his brigade.

He wobbled slightly and ran his hand over his shaved head. "We are mentally drained after 17 months of war," the captain finally said. "My memory is shot. I called my wife last night and she asked me about something we discussed the day before. I had no idea what she was talking about." He paused to take another look at his troops. "I think we are like that," Rys said. — AFP

## US national crosses into N Korea, likely detained

**SEOUL:** A United States national entered North Korea during a tour of the heavily fortified border and is believed to have been detained, the United Nations Command said Tuesday. "A US national on a JSA orientation tour crossed, without authorization, the Military Demarcation Line into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)," the UN Command said, referring to the Joint Security Area and the border between the Koreas.

"We believe he is currently in DPRK custody and are working with our KPA counterparts to resolve this incident," it said, referring to the North's Korean People's Army. North and South Korea remain technically at war since the 1950-1953 Korean War ended with an armistice, rather than a peace treaty, with a Demilitarized Zone running along the border. Soldiers from both sides face off at the JSA north of Seoul, which is overseen by the United Nations Command. It is also a popular tourist destination and hundreds of visitors tour the area on the South Korean side every day.

Former US president Donald Trump met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at the Panmunjom Truce Village in 2019 and even stood on North Korean soil by stepping across the demarcation line there.

"Panmunjom is the most likely site this American chose to cross into North Korea because it's the only

location one could attempt such a move out of the whole JSA tour," Choi Gi-il, a professor of military studies at Sangji University, told AFP. South Korea's SBS television station reported that the person who crossed the border was a US soldier. South Korea's defense ministry declined to comment when contacted by AFP.

An eyewitness who said they were on the same tour told CBS News the group had visited one of the buildings at the site when "this man gives out a loud 'ha ha ha' and just runs in between some buildings". "I thought it was a bad joke at first but, when he didn't come back, I realized it wasn't a joke and then everybody reacted and things got crazy," they said.

North Korea sealed its borders at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and has yet to reopen. Its security presence on its side of the border at the JSA has also been scaled back significantly.

When AFP toured the JSA earlier this year, no North Korean guards were visible in the area. Even so, under armistice protocols, South Korean or US personnel could not run across the border to retrieve the US national. Retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel Steve Tharp, who worked in the JSA area, told Seoul-based specialist site NK News he had no idea how the North Koreans would react to the incident because there was "so little data out there" about events such as this. "This is the first contact since COVID... We don't know what they're thinking," he told NK News.

The incident comes as relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points, with diplomacy stalled and Kim calling for increased weapons development, including tactical nuclear weapons. Seoul and Washington have ramped up defense cooperation in response, staging joint military exercises with ad-



**PANMUNJOM, Republic of Korea:** North Korean soldiers (center) take photos towards a South Korean soldier (left) and a US soldier (right) standing before the military demarcation line (lower center) separating North and South Korea within the Joint Security Area (JSA) at Panmunjom in this July 27, 2014 file photo. — AFP

vanced stealth jets and US strategic assets. The allies held the first Nuclear Consultative Group meeting in Seoul on Tuesday and announced an American nuclear submarine was making a port visit to Busan for the first time since 1981. The move is likely to trigger a strong

response from North Korea, which balks at having US nuclear assets deployed around the Korean peninsula. Kim Yo Jong, the North Korean leader's powerful sister, said Monday such actions would only "make the DPRK go farther away" from possible talks. — AFP

## Government urged to amend...

**Continued from Page 1**

During the debate, lawmakers strongly rejected government plans to impose taxes, review the charges on public services, in addition to a public debt legislation. "We will not accept a program headlined by raising charges, imposing taxes and a public debt law. It is clear the government's policy has not changed," MP Hamdan Al-Azemi said. MP Marzouk Al-Ghanem said the program "is simply a number of wishes, dreams and hopes ... but it lacks the mechanisms of implementation".

He called on the prime minister to explain the program to the people. He added that the govern-

ment should submit legislation directly on issues like national identity and citizenship and resolving the problem of stateless people or Bedouins. MPs Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf and Hamad Al-Olayan criticized the program for lacking plans for political reforms. MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf said improving the standard of living of citizens is not a priority in the program.

At the end of the debate, MPs approved recommendations - calling on the government to transfer Kuwait into a hub for Islamic finance, providing the Assembly with reports on the progress of the program every three months and explaining the program online to the people. In its program, the government said it plans to implement 107 projects costing billions of dinars, including opening the new Kuwait Airport terminal, repairing thousands of kilometers of roads, operating the long-delayed Mubarak Al-Kabir Containers Harbor in addition to many other projects.

did not renew contracts that expired in 2021 for gas supply of 5.5 million tons per year, Bloomberg said. Since Russia's Ukraine invasion Japan has faced "potential LNG disruption," said Takafumi Yanagisawa, a researcher with Japan's Institute of Energy Economics.

"Japan needs to secure more LNG from Qatar," he told AFP, arguing that a deal would provide Tokyo with "stable and reliable LNG supply". China has inked some of the industry's longest-running contracts with Qatar. Last month, Doha announced a 27-year deal to supply four million tons annually to the China National Petroleum Corporation. It matches the terms of a November deal with China's Sinopec as the longest ever seen in the industry.

China, Japan, South Korea and other Asian countries are the main market for Qatari gas, which has been increasingly sought by European countries too since Russia's invasion of Ukraine early last year. By expanding activities at North Field, which has the world's biggest natural gas reserves and extends under the Gulf into Iranian territory, Qatar expects to raise its LNG production by at least 60 percent, taking it to 126 million tons a year by 2027. — AFP

## Heatwaves hit globe

**ROME:** Europe braced for record-smashing heat Tuesday as withering heatwaves across the globe showed no signs of easing and Greece battled wildfires that forced people to flee their homes. Across vast swathes of the planet, from California to China, authorities have warned of the health dangers of the extreme heat, urging people to drink water and shelter from the burning sun.

In a stark reminder of the effects of global warming, the UN's World Meteorological Agency (WMO) said the world should prepare for increasingly intense heat. "These events will continue to grow in intensity, and the world needs to prepare for more in-

tense heatwaves," John Nairn, a senior extreme heat advisor at the WMO told reporters in Geneva. The peak in Europe was due to hit in the Italian islands of Sardinia and Sicily, where temperatures could surpass the continent-wide record of 48.8 degrees Celsius (119.8 degrees Fahrenheit) recorded in Sicily in August 2021.

In Rome, where temperatures were expected to reach 42C, two priests ambled lethargically with their collars open outside the Pantheon as local merchants filled up water buckets at public fountains. "We can't stop because of the heat," said waiter Mauro Natale, 45, who said staff was allowed to wear short-sleeved shirts instead of their usual suits. Tourists still needed to eat, but "instead of a carbonara or an amatriciana (pasta), they just want to eat salad." — AFP

## US deploying warship, warplanes...

**Continued from Page 1**

on Tehran to "immediately cease these destabilizing actions that threaten the free flow of commerce through this strategic waterway."

On Friday, a senior defense official said the United States was flying A-10 Warthog warplanes over the Gulf, armed "with the kinds of munitions that would be useful to go against fast boats and moving targets." As Iranian "fast attack boats, fast attack craft have increased as a maritime threat, we've tried a number of

different ways to tackle them. And the A-10 has proven capable of that," the official added. Washington said its forces blocked two attempts by the Iran to seize commercial tankers in international waters off Oman on July 5, while Tehran took control of a commercial ship the following day.

In April and early May, Iran seized two tankers within a week in regional waters, and Tehran was also accused of launching a drone attack against an Israeli-owned tanker in November 2022. There has been a series of such incidents since 2018, when then US president Donald Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal and reimposed crippling sanctions on the Islamic republic, sending tensions soaring. Talks aimed at reviving the accord remain stalled, but have recently resumed with Oman as an intermediary. — AFP

## Saudi and Turkey seal drone...

**Continued from Page 1**

The two leaders signed cooperation agreements in the fields of energy, direct investment, defense and media, the report said. It added that Saudi officials also signed "two contracts with the Turkish company Baykar". Drones developed by Baykar have been used in Azerbaijan, Libya and Ukraine. Saudi Arabia "will acquire drones with the aim of enhancing the readiness of the kingdom's armed forces and bolstering its defense and manufacturing capabilities", Defense Minister

Prince Khalid bin Salman said on Tuesday.

He did not specify the type of drone the kingdom is looking to procure. An Arab diplomat in Riyadh, requesting anonymity as he was not authorized to speak to the press, said it was Baykar's TB2 model. Last month, Kuwait said it struck a \$367-million agreement to procure TB2 drones. This week's visit is Erdogan's second to Saudi Arabia since a recent rapprochement between Ankara and Riyadh, whose ties were strained by the 2018 murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's Istanbul consulate. Erdogan's current Gulf trip comes as Turkey battles a currency collapse and soaring inflation that has battered its economy. In March, Saudi Arabia deposited \$5 billion in Turkey's central bank. — AFP

## Japan's PM rounds out energy-focused...

**Continued from Page 1**

told reporters. "Cooperation will be enhanced in respect to the production of hydrogen, ammonium," and decarbonisation technology, said the prime minister, the first from Japan to make a Gulf tour since Shinzo Abe in 2020.

### 'Energy security'

Earlier on Tuesday, Kishida and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani discussed "developments related to energy security and supplies," the Qatari leader said in a statement. The Doha visit comes with Japanese companies negotiating new long-term LNG supply contracts with Qatar, according to Bloomberg.

It said Japan's LNG importers have not signed a contract with Qatar since 2014, and that Qatari LNG deliveries to Tokyo dropped by more than 60 percent last year. Japan's top LNG importer, Jera,

## International

# Sri Lankan leader seeks to disarm India's China fears

## Wickremesinghe to arrive in New Delhi on Thursday

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's president arrives in India on Thursday for his first visit to the regional powerhouse, with concerns mounting in New Delhi over China's increasing influence in the strategically placed but financially bankrupt island.

New Sri Lankan leaders usually travel to India within a few weeks of taking office, but Ranil Wickremesinghe's trip comes exactly a year after he became president following the toppling of his predecessor at the height of an unprecedented economic crisis. As Sri Lanka drifted towards chaos with daily street protests over shortages of food, fuel and medicines, India poured nearly \$4 billion in aid to restore supplies and stabilize the island.

The loans and credit lines were granted despite Sri Lanka defaulting on its \$46 billion foreign debt and losing access to international financial markets. "Without India's help Sri Lanka could have degenerated into anarchy," said political commentator Victor Ivan. "The president will not only have to show gratitude, but reassure that we will not do anything to hurt them," he added. "At the same time, Sri Lanka can't drop China because they are also a very important economic partner."

China is Sri Lanka's biggest bilateral creditor and a Chinese firm acquired a 99-year lease on the southern port of Hambantota after Colombo was unable to repay a huge loan from Beijing to build it.

A \$1.4 billion land reclamation project next to Colombo port—the biggest-ever foreign investment in Sri Lanka—has raised Indian fears that Beijing could use it as a listening post. Initially some of it was to have been Chinese sovereign territory. Sri Lanka lies halfway along the main international shipping route between Europe and East Asia, with Colombo and Hambantota the only deep sea ports between Dubai and Singapore. New Delhi sees the region as its backyard, and officials have been alarmed by Beijing's activities. As part of its Belt and Road Initiative, China has also struck other infrastructure deals with countries around the Indian Ocean, including the Maldives, Bangladesh and Djibouti, where it has a military base.

### Spy ship

New Delhi raised concerns when a Chinese research vessel, Yuan Wang 5, sought permission to dock at Hambantota in August. The port call by what India describes as a spy ship went ahead. Sri Lanka responded by asking China not to carry out any "scientific research" while in Sri Lankan waters. Lo-



COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe (second left) arrives for the opening session of the parliament in Colombo on February 8, 2023. — AFP

cal political columnist Kusal Perera called the Yuan Wang 5 spat an "aberration". "One such incident will not decide the fate of the entire relationship with India," he said, adding that Indian businesses were also seeking to expand their presence in the island. Wickremesinghe sought to address India's fears during a visit to France last month, dismissing speculation about Chinese military bases in Sri Lanka.

"No, we have no military agreements with China," he told the France24 TV network. "There won't be any military agreements. I don't think China enters into one. "We are a neutral country, but we also emphasize on the fact that we cannot allow Sri Lanka to be used as a base for any threats against India," he added. Wickremesinghe will be the fourth Sri Lankan president to be hosted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He was elected by parliament to serve the remaining two-and-a-half years in the term of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who stepped down following protests over mismanagement of the economy.

But the Indian establishment has often viewed six-time prime minister Wickremesinghe's pro-Western United National Party with suspicion. "Debt restructuring will be on the agenda along with connectivity," said a senior diplomatic source, adding New Delhi would be keen to speed up infrastructure projects hit by bureaucratic delays.

### Debt deals

Sri Lanka requires agreement from all its creditors, including India and China, on debt restructuring. Colombo has proposed haircuts of up to 30 percent and a repayment freeze extending to nine years. The second tranche of some \$330 million out of a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout is due in September—subject to Colombo securing a deal with its lenders. Wickremesinghe said last month that he was "very confident" China would be on board and Colombo would be able to unlock the remainder of the IMF bailout. In October, he is due to travel to China for the first time as president. — AFP

## Weakened Typhoon Talim hits Vietnam after crossing China

HANOI: Typhoon Talim reached Vietnam Tuesday after passing through China less forcefully than feared, with no deaths reported in either country despite nearly 260,000 people relocating before the storm hit.

Talim first made landfall in southern China late Monday evening, battering the coast of Guangdong province with maximum winds of 136.8 kilometers (85 miles) per hour. By Tuesday it had weakened to a tropical storm as it slowly made its way across the Vietnamese island of Bach Long Vi before moving towards the neighboring Chinese region of Guangxi.

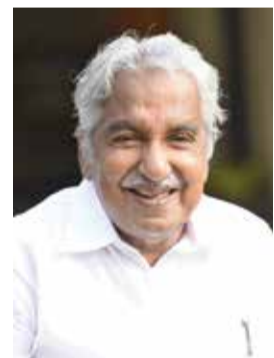
The storm passed by Bach Long Vi, an outlying island east of the capital Hanoi, "with maximum winds of about 60 kilometers per hour" the national weather bureau said Tuesday. Authorities revoked an evacuation order in the northern port city of Hai Phong, a day after 30,000 people were relocated from there and the province of Quang Ninh. "People's activities have returned to normal in the city," state newspaper Thanh Nien reported.

But Vietnam's second-biggest airport in Hanoi closed on Tuesday, disrupting hundreds of flights according to local media reports. Authorities warned that heavy rains, flooding and landslides could still pose a risk in northern provinces after the storm passed.

China's state news agency Xinhua said Tuesday that nearly 230,000 people were evacuated from their homes in Guangdong ahead of the expected landfall. Forecasters said strong winds and heavy rains would lash Guangxi until Wednesday, issuing a warning for possible landslides, while authorities closed schools and suspended dozens of train services. Nine people were injured in Hong Kong during the brief typhoon period, according to the financial hub's Hospital Authority, while around 112 people sought refuge in temporary shelters. — AFP

## Former Kerala CM Chandy dies at 79

BENGALURU: Marking the end of an era in India's Congress Party as well as politics in the state of Kerala, Oommen Chandy, 79, died early on Tuesday morning after a long battle with cancer. In a reflection of the popularity of one of Kerala's most beloved political leaders, condolence messages poured in from across party lines, including from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Oommen Chandy

A key aspect of this popularity was Chandy's accessibility, being that rare leader who did not build barriers around him and believed in being among the people. He also chose to remain in state politics despite close links with the Congress national leadership almost all through his career in politics.

The end came at a hospital in Bengaluru. Chandy's body was flown to Thiruvananthapuram, and kept in state at his residence, followed by the secretariat and Congress office, for people to pay their respects.

On Wednesday, the body will be taken to Kot-

tayam by road, and the funeral will take place on Thursday noon at Chandy's native place Puthuppally, Kottayam. The Kerala government has announced Tuesday as a public holiday along with two days of mourning as a mark of respect to the departed leader. Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the death of former Kerala CM via a tweet on Tuesday. Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi also paid his tribute to Chandy via on Twitter.

Chandy's demise has led to a downpour of wishes from leaders across the political spectrum. Senior Congress leaders like Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi and Shashi Tharoor have shared their condolences while Congress general secretary KC Venugopal visited the Chinmaya Mission Hospital in Bengaluru where the former Chief Minister died on Tuesday morning.

Chandy was famous for his humility and leading a simple life, despite being a two-time chief minister and a legislator for over 50 years. An incident that got talked about a lot in Kerala took place in 2016 when passengers in a bus from Kollam to Thiruvananthapuram found Oommen Chandy travelling with them. This was a few months after he relinquished office as chief minister. The same year a photo of Chandy lying down on the lower berth of a sleeper class compartment in a Thiruvananthapuram-Kottayam train went viral. A long-term crowd puller for the Congress party, Chandy was the Kerala chief minister from 2004 to 2006 and 2011 to 2016, the leader of the opposition from 2006 to 2011, and served as a minister in governments led by K Karunakaran and A K Antony, handling the portfolios of Labour, Finance and Home. — Agencies

was tested for toxic material—have shut down online speculation that it could be linked to the 2014 disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370.

"At this early stage it appears the object did not originate from a commercial aircraft," police said in a statement. The Australian Space Agency said it was investigating whether the canister may be part of a "foreign space launch vehicle that has washed up on shore". "As the origin of the object is unknown, the community should avoid handling or attempting to move the object," the agency said in a statement. A charred chunk of debris from one of Elon Musk's SpaceX missions was discovered jutting out of a paddock by an Australian sheep farmer last year. "It was kind of exciting and weird all in the same way," astrophysicist Brad Tucker told AFP at the time, after inspecting the SpaceX debris. — AFP

## Australia says mystery beach object could be part of space vehicle

SYDNEY: A bulky barnacle-encrusted cylinder has baffled authorities since washing up on an Australian beach, with the country's space agency suggesting Tuesday it could be debris from a foreign rocket launch. The object, which measures some two metres (six feet) high with cables dangling from the top, was recently spotted near remote Jurien Bay, a coastal region two hours' drive north of state capital Perth. Police—who cordoned off the canister while it



A large canister washed up on a beach at Green Head, 250 kilometres north of Perth.

## Rising water from Yamuna reaches Taj Mahal's walls

AGRA: Rising water from the Yamuna river has reached the walls of the Taj Mahal for the first time in 45 years and flooded an adjacent garden after monsoon rains in northern India swelled rivers across the region. The 17th century mausoleum in Agra, built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, is counted as one of the Seven New Wonders of the World and is built on the southern banks of the Yamuna river. Due to incessant rain in northern India, the river rose above what is marked as the "low-flood level" of 150.8 meters on Monday, according to media reports from New Delhi.



AGRA, India: Rising water from the Yamuna river has reached the walls of the Taj Mahal. — AFP

## ICC resumes probe into Philippines' brutal drug war

THE HAGUE: International Criminal Court judges on Tuesday gave its chief prosecutor the go-ahead to renew a probe into Manila's brutal anti-drug campaign, slapping down an appeal by the Philippines against the move.

Former president Rodrigo Duterte, who initiated the drug war, pulled the Philippines out of the ICC in 2019, a year after the Hague-based tribunal began a preliminary probe into the crackdown which has killed thousands.

The ICC launched a formal inquiry in September 2021, only to suspend it two months later after Manila said it was re-examining several hundred cases of drug operations that led to deaths at the hands of police, hitmen and vigilantes. ICC chief prosecutor Karim Khan later asked to reopen the inquiry in June 2022 and pre-trial judges at the court gave the green light in late January, a decision which Manila appealed shortly afterwards.

Judges at a public hearing at the court's headquarters on Tuesday "confirmed by majority... a

decision granting authorization to the ICC Prosecutor to resume the investigations in relation to the situation in the Philippines." A five-judge bench dismissed Manila's objection that the court had no jurisdiction because the Philippines pulled out of the ICC in 2019, some three years before the inquiry was resumed. "The Appeals Chamber by majority... finds that the Philippines sets out the alleged errors in a manner that renders unclear both the precise nature of its challenge as well as the legal basis pursuant to which the challenge is made," presiding judge Marc Perrin de Brichambaut said.

Bryony Lau, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said Tuesday the ruling marked "the next step toward justice" for victims and their families. But Philippines Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla, on the eve of the judgment, warned against foreign interference in the Philippines' criminal justice system. "We are not a colony, we are not a territory of another country", he told reporters. Remulla insisted the ICC was "not welcome in the Philippines" and the government would not enforce any arrest warrants issued by the court. At least 6,181 people have been killed in more than 200,000 anti-drug operations carried out, according to the latest official data released by the Philippines. ICC prosecutors estimate the death toll at between 12,000 and 30,000. — AFP

## Business

WEDNESDAY, JULY 19, 2023

# Divided G20 split over Ukraine and slow progress on debt

## Two-day summit ends without agreement on joint statement

**GANDHINAGAR, India:** G20 finance chiefs ended talks in India Tuesday with disagreement over Russia's war in Ukraine, limited progress on debt restructuring and warnings that divisions between rich and poor nations risked deepening poverty. Many countries are still recovering from the coronavirus pandemic and drastic commodity price surges triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while climate change is affecting some of the poorest countries least able to cope.

The Group of 20 major economies failed to agree on a joint statement "because we still don't have a common language on the Russia-Ukraine war", but progress had been made on key issues, Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told reporters after the two-day summit of finance ministers and central bank governors in Gandhinagar.

The conflict in Ukraine created a devastating global economic impact sending food prices soaring, with diplomatic loyalties torn between Russia and the West.

"Most members strongly condemned the war in Ukraine and stressed that it is causing immense human suffering and exacerbating existing fragilities in the global economy," a G20 outcome document read. The war was "constraining growth, increasing inflation, disrupting supply chains, heightening energy and food insecurity, and elevating financial stability risks", it added.

### 'Impact poorer nations'

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Sunday insisted redoubling support for war-stricken Ukraine was the "single best" way to aid the global economy, saying she would "push back" on criticism there was a trade-off between aid to Kyiv and developing nations. As talks took place, Russia refused to extend a deal on Monday allowing critical Ukrainian grain exports through the Black Sea, sparking outrage from the United Nations, which has warned millions of the world's poorest would "pay the price".

German central bank chief Joachim Nagel told AFP it had been "really strange" to have been "discussing how to help the vulnerable countries" as Moscow withdrew from the grain deal.

It will "likely to have an impact on food prices, which will more heavily impact poorer nations", South African Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana



**GANDHINAGAR:** US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (center) arrives to attend the G20 Finance Ministers, Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) and Finance & Central Bank Deputies (FCBD) meetings, at the Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar on July 18, 2023. —AFP

said. Any discussion on Ukraine is awkward for India, which has not condemned Russia's invasion but is also part of the Quad grouping alongside Australia, the United States and Japan.

### 'Paying the price'

International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva said that "the world today is more shock-prone and fragile, with climate change, pandemics, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine all causing wide-

spread turmoil". The United States has said efforts to reform multilateral lenders such as the World Bank and other regional institutions could unlock \$200 billion over the next decade.

### Debt distress

G20 finance ministers also discussed multilateral development banks' reform, tax, cryptocurrency regulations and climate change adaptation finance. Debt restructuring deals for low-income nations were also

a key focus. China, the world's second-largest economy and a major lender to several stressed, low-income countries in Asia and Africa, has so far resisted any one-size-fits-all debt restructuring formula. China's finance ministry said multilateral creditors should handle debt "in accordance with the principle of common action and fair burden", and that the G20 should "objectively analyze the causes of debt problems of vulnerable countries". Several G20 countries suggested Beijing was reluctant on a deal. —AFP

## WB chief: Rich-poor split could tighten 'grip of poverty'

**GANDHINAGAR, India:** The new head of the World Bank said Tuesday that growing divides between rich and poor nations risked deepening poverty in the developing world, at a meeting of G20 finance ministers in India.

The G20 talks come after Russia on Monday refused to extend a deal allowing critical Ukrainian grain exports through the Black Sea, sparking outrage from the United Nations, which has warned millions of the world's poorest would "pay the price". South African Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana warned it was "likely to have an impact on food prices, which will more heavily impact poorer nations".

World Bank president Ajay Banga said he feared a lack of progress was in danger of splitting the global economy. "The thing that keeps me up at night is a mistrust that is quietly pulling the Global North and South apart at a time when we need to be uniting," Banga told the two-day meeting of

finance ministers and central bank chiefs in Gandhinagar, Gujarat state.

"The Global South's frustration is understandable. In many ways they are paying the price for our prosperity," said Indian-born Banga, a naturalized American citizen who took up the bank post last month after being nominated by US President Joe Biden. "When they should be ascendant, they're concerned promised resources will be diverted to Ukraine's reconstruction, they feel energy rules aren't applied evenly, constraining ambition, and they're worried the grip of poverty will pull down another generation."

Banga told AFP that developing nations had the highest percentage of young people, but that was only an opportunity if they can access education and find employment.

"If they don't... that is not a demographic dividend, that is a challenge to countries", he said.

The World Bank said it is working to increase its financial capability—including by raising hybrid capital from shareholders—to spur growth and jobs, but said the future economy could not rely on expansion at the cost of the environment. "The simple truth is: We cannot endure another period of emission-intensive growth," Banga said.

The United States says efforts to reform multi-



**GANDHINAGAR, India:** World Bank chief Ajay Banga speaks during the G20 Finance Ministers, Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) and Finance & Central Bank Deputies (FCBD) meetings, at the Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar. — AFP

lateral lenders such as the World Bank and other regional institutions could unlock \$200 billion over the next decade.

"The Chinese have put a lot of investment into developing nations and... therefore are likely to lose more, and so the resistance could be a function of that", South Africa's Godongwana said. —AFP

## Russia warns of Black Sea risks after grain deal exit

**KYIV:** Russia on Tuesday issued a veiled warning over the future of grain exports via the Black Sea, after Moscow refused to extend a key agreement allowing safe passage for cargo ships from Ukrainian ports. The caution came hours after Ukraine said a Russian strike overnight had damaged facilities at the southern port of Odesa, one of the main transit hubs for grain under the pact signed with the UN and Turkey.

"Without appropriate security guarantees, certain risks arise here (in the Black Sea)," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. Were a new arrangement to allow for exports "formalized without Russia, then these risks should be taken into account", he said. But Peskov put Moscow's position in starker terms when he said Ukraine was using the Black Sea export corridor "for combat purposes". Russia later told Turkey that the coordination centre overseeing the deal

would be disbanded in the wake of Moscow's exit.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan the decision to quit the deal also meant Russia would lift "safe navigation guarantees" for cargo ships in the Black Sea.

### Retaliation strike

Moscow said its strike on Odesa came in retaliation for a Ukrainian attack one day earlier on the Crimea bridge, a key transit artery linking Russia's mainland to the peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014. The bridge was targeted using seabornedrones by Kyiv's navy and SBU security service, a source told AFP. Russian forces struck back against "facilities where terrorist acts against Russia had been prepared using unmanned boats", the defence ministry said in a statement.

Kyiv's military earlier said it had



**NOVOSOFIIVKA, Ukraine:** A combine harvests wheat on a field near Novosofiivka village, Mykolaiv region on July 4, 2023. — AFP

"destroyed" six Kalibr missiles and 21 Iran-built attack drones targeted at the Odesa region, but that port facilities were damaged in an assault overnight.

"Unfortunately, the debris of the downed missiles and the blast wave from the downing damaged the port infrastructure facilities and several private homes," Ukraine's military

southern command said in a statement. Across the country, Ukraine's air force said it had destroyed 31 of the 36 drones launched by Russia overnight. The Odesa region is home to the maritime terminals central to the export deal between Moscow and Kyiv that has enabled the shipment of more than 32 million tonnes of Ukrainian grain over the past year. —AFP

## Indian tycoon Adani slams Hindenburg report

**NEW DELHI:** Indian tycoon Gautam Adani on Tuesday denounced fraud accusations against his group by a US investment firm as a "deliberate attempt" to damage its image, at the first annual general meeting since the scandal.

US short-seller investment company Hindenburg Research accused the Adani Group in January of using offshore tax havens to manipulate stock prices. Before the allegations Adani was listed by Forbes as Asia's richest man, but shares in his group firms plummeted in the wake of the report, sending him tumbling down the rankings, with his fortune at one point dropping by more than \$100 billion.

The shares have since recovered some of their losses, but the group's flagship subsidiary Adani Enterprises remains around 30 percent below its price level before the report.

Addressing shareholders at the Adani Enterprises annual general meeting, Adani called the document a "combination of targeted misinformation and discredited allegations". "This report was a deliberate and malicious attempt aimed at damaging our reputation and generating profits through a short-term drive-down of our stock prices," the media-shy billionaire said.

He was confident of the group's governance and disclosure standards after a panel set up by India's top court found no "regulatory failure", he added. Short-sellers seek to profit by offloading shares in the hope that their prices will fall and they can buy them back cheaper, and Hindenburg's report accused the conglomerate of artificially inflating its market value using related-party transactions conducted through tax havens.

Soon after the report, the group abruptly cancelled a stock sale and refunded investors. But Adani said Tuesday: "It is worth noting that even during this crisis, not only did we raise several billions from international investors but also that no credit agency in India or abroad cut any of our ratings." The group's income grew 85 percent in the last financial year, the tycoon added. —AFP



**Gautam Adani**



Business

# stc's net profit increases by 6.7% to hit KD 16.1m

## Revenue up by 13.5% to reach KD 174.6 million

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc), a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers and enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its financial results for the six months period ended 30 June, 2023, highlighting the most significant achievements, financial and operational performance in addition to the social initiatives made by the company during the first six months of 2023.



stc's CEO, Eng Maziad Alharbi

ny aims to sustain its market share by improving its services and enhancing the customer experience through relying on its solid infrastructure."

Commenting on stc's financial position as of June 30, 2023, Dr Abdulrahman said: "stc's total assets reached KD 425.4 million by the end of June 2023, while total shareholders' equity increased by 2.4% reaching KD 227.6m by the end of June 2023 compared to KD 222.3 million during the same period in



stc's Chairman, Dr Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman

Commenting on the announcements of these results, Dr Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman, stc's Chairman, stated: "stc achieved a notable financial and operational growth during the first six months of 2023 through its commitment to provide the most innovative, customer-centric and up-to-date solutions in addition to its relentless pursuit of excellence by providing a package of integrated offers and digital services to its individual and enterprise customers.

Driven by the continuous demand for the digital and ICT services, stc has been keen to meet the needs of its customers by providing high quality advanced services and transformative technologies in light of the intense competition witnessed by the ICT sector in Kuwait. With the support of its corporate strategy and its strategic expansion over the past years, stc has strengthened its position as a leading Telecom and ICT company through its technical and digital capabilities in addition to its human capital experience to keep pace with the rapid changes in the telecommunications sector, especially in the enterprise sector, as the compa-

2022. Whereby, stc has a strong solvency position amongst its peers in the Middle East.

Regarding stc's CSR framework, Dr Mahmoud Abdulrahman indicated: "In Q2 2023, the Company has strengthened its presence within the local community through several campaigns and initiatives in collaboration with various charitable organizations, as well as institutions in the government and private sectors respectively.

stc's CSR program has focused in Q2 2023 on a series of community driven activities and youth initiatives under the "Weyak" umbrella - season 2 - that supports Kuwaiti SMEs and start-ups as well as other Kuwait-based innovative concepts, that reinforces our efforts to support the youth, entrepreneurs, and innovators to pursue their creative visions. In addition to "Weyak", stc has enabled its "upgrade" educational initiative, which serves as a platform dedicated to stc's contributions towards the education sector. This initiative aligns with the Company's efforts in highlighting its continued commitment to supporting the education sector in Kuwait.

These initiatives align under the core values of

our diversified CSR program, with a primary focus across our main pillars: education, health, sports, environment, entrepreneurship and youth empowerment. In line with the Company's integrated CSR program, stc will continue to activate sustainable development partnerships with the public and private sectors and strengthening the relationships with local communities in addition to increasing community awareness and promoting a culture of the concept of social responsibility."

Commenting on stc's major milestones during the first half of 2023, Eng Maziad Alharbi, stc's CEO stated: "We are pleased to announce stc's results for the first half of 2023, which proves the Company's continuous dedication in offering extraordinary services and driving the digital transformation process across the region. stc's strong results in both the individual and enterprise sector, which was attained through its ICT and business solutions specialized subsidiaries, contributed in enhancing the Company's financial and operational performance.

Therefore, stc was able to sustain its competitive position in the telecom and ICT sector in Kuwait. Driven by its focus on innovation, network expansion, and delivering value added services to its customers, stc has ensured updating its future digital transformation strategy, in order to keep pace with the latest developments in the sector.

This would aid the Company to deliver various high-quality services by seizing all the available opportunities that would support the main pillars of its corporate strategy which focuses on leading the ICT sector in Kuwait. Whereby, the Company's vision revolves around its growth trajectory by investing in emerging technologies focused on creating digital solutions including 5G services, IoT, Cloud services, and artificial intelligence. These investments will enable stc to expand its presence in both the individual and enterprise sectors, whilst building a solid customer base and increasing its market share."

Commenting on the announcement of company's financial results for the six months period ended June 30, 2023, Eng Maziad Alharbi said: "stc managed to generate good financial results leveraging its internal capabilities to meet the anticipation of the Company's shareholders. Whereby, stc's total revenue reached KD 174.6m in the first six months of 2023 with growth rate of 13.5% compared to KD 153.8m during the same period in 2022.

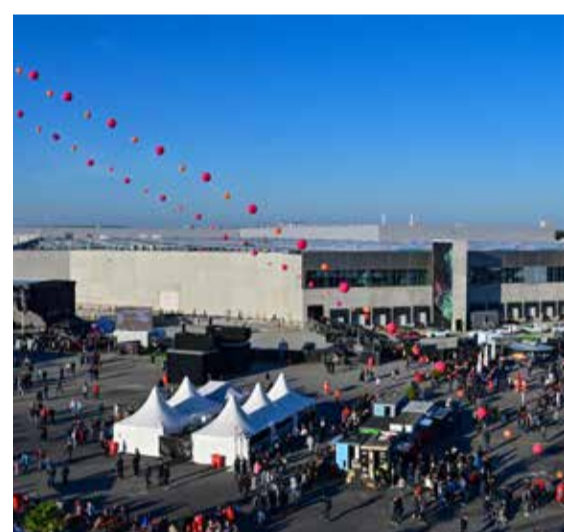
This increase is attributed to stc's services and

The financial results for six months period ended 30 June 2023	
Revenues	KD 174.6m
EBITDA	KD 42.1m
Net Profit	KD 16.1m
Earnings per share	16 fils per share
Assets	KD 425.4m
Shareholders' equity	KD 227.6m
Book value per share	228 fils per share
Customer base	2.5m customers

smart packages designed to cater the demands of most segments of our individual customers. Not to mention stc's emphasis on the providing digital services to the enterprise segment and delivering integrated technical solutions to companies from all sectors in addition to driving its operations into new areas of sustainable growth through a series of innovative initiatives aimed at improving its operational efficiency, delivering the best services and products that meet its customers' needs, as well as supporting the company's advanced infrastructure with the best and widest 5G coverage".

Alharbi added: "These outcomes resulted in a growth of EBITDA by 4.7% to reach KD 42.1 million in the first half of 2023 compared to KD 40.2 million in the same period of 2022. As a result, the company's net profit during the six months period ended 30 June, 2023 reached KD 16.1 million with a growth of 6.7% compared to KD 15.0 million during the same period in 2022. stc's customer base reached approx. 2.5 million customers at the end of June 2023".

Alharbi noted: "stc is committed to constantly update its financial and operational plans to improve the Company's capabilities and implement the most efficient cost optimization processes. Furthermore, by remaining abreast of the latest development in the telecommunications sector, stc is keen to offer a comprehensive range of services including voice and digital solutions as well as data services. This would empower stc to enhance profitability and achieving the desired financial and operational outcomes, crucial for maintaining a good cash flow position."



GRUNHEIDE, Germany: A photo taken on October 9, 2021 from a ferris wheel shows visitors attending the opening of the new 'Gigafactory' of US carmaker Tesla in Grunheide, east of the Germany. - AFP

## Tesla seeks to double capacity at German plant

**FRANKFURT:** Tesla confirmed plans on Tuesday to drastically expand its factory near Berlin, with the goal of doubling production capacity at its only European plant to a million electric vehicles per year.

The US company said it had filed an application for the expansion of the Grunheide site with the regional environment ministry of Brandenburg state. The plans will be available for public consultation from Wednesday and citizens will have two months to register any objections, the ministry said.

In a statement, Tesla said it wants to double "production capacity to 1,000,000 vehicles" annually. It also plans to ramp up battery storage production capacity at the Grunheide gigafactory from 50 gigawatt hours annually to "100 gigawatt hours". As well as enlarging the existing facilities, the proposals would require the construction of a new production hall. The number of employees could rise from around 10,000 currently "to possibly 22,500", Tesla said.

The Elon Musk-owned company did not give a timeline for the project. The plant is currently churning out around 5,000 electric cars a week — amounting to 260,000 a year. If Tesla's plans are approved, the Grunheide factory would become Germany's largest car factory, according to the Handelsblatt financial daily, behind Volkswagen's Wolfsburg site with a production capacity of 800,000 vehicles per year.

The Grunheide factory opened last year after an arduous two-year approval and construction process dogged by administrative and legal obstacles, including complaints from residents worried about the site's environmental impact. The factory's water usage in particular has been a key concern among locals. In an apparent bid to ease those worries, Tesla said the "contractually agreed quantities of fresh water will be sufficient" for the larger factory as well. —AFP

## Wirecard fugitive breaks silence with court statement

**MUNICH:** Former Wirecard executive Jan Marsalek, one of Europe's most wanted fugitives, has released a statement through his lawyer commenting on the ongoing trial into the fraud scandal that brought down the company, a German court said Tuesday. A district court in Munich has received a letter from Marsalek's lawyer, a court spokesman told AFP, confirming a report in the weekly Wirtschaftswoche. The spokesman declined to comment on the contents of the letter. It was the first sign of life from Marsalek, a shadowy figure with ties to foreign intelligence services, who evaded arrest in 2020 by staging a daring escape from Vienna by private jet.

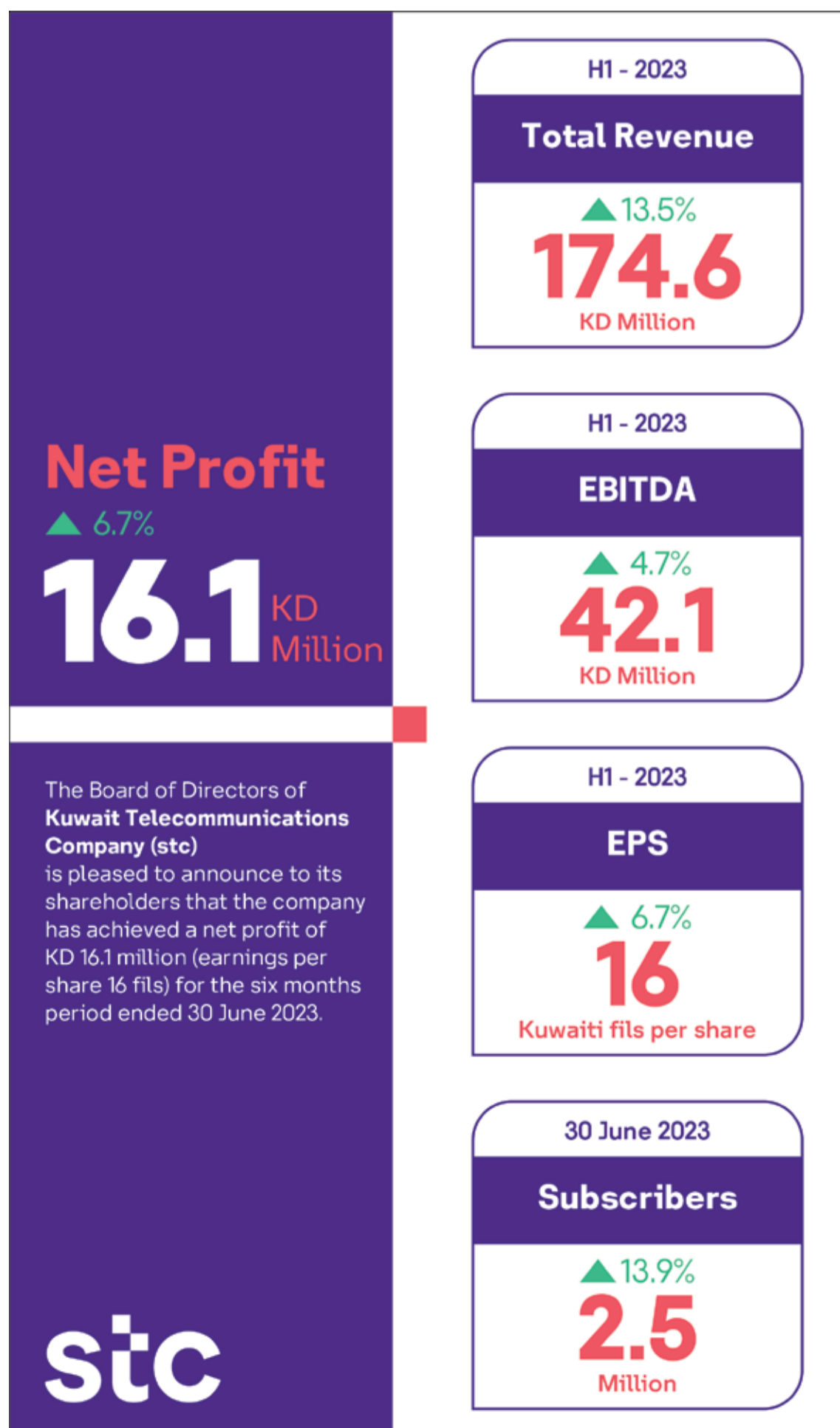
He was last reported to have been seen in Russia. Wirecard, a once celebrated payments company, imploded in June 2020 after it was forced to admit that 1.9 billion euros (\$2.1 billion) in cash, meant to be sitting in trustee accounts in Asia, did not actually exist. The firm's Austrian-born ex-CEO Markus Braun has been in the dock since December alongside Wirecard's ex-accounting boss Stephan von Erffa and Oliver Bellenhaus, the former head of Wirecard's Dubai subsidiary.

Prosecutors allege that the trio invented revenue streams with third-party companies to inflate Wirecard's accounts and make the loss-making company appear profitable. Marsalek's lawyer Frank Eckstein, contacted by AFP, also offered little detail on what was in Marsalek's letter to the court. "We spoke of various facets and various people" linked to the Wirecard case, he said. — AFP

## DR Congo signs \$1.9bn mining deal with UAE

**KINSHASA, DR Congo:** The United Arab Emirates signed a \$1.9-billion deal with a state mining company in DR Congo to develop at least four mines in the African country's turbulent east, the Congolese presidency said Monday. Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi's office stated on Monday evening that an Emirati government delegation had signed a partnership worth \$1.9 billion with Societe Aurifere du Kivu et du Maniema (Sakima) in the capital Kinshasa.

The deal would see the "construction of more than 4 industrial mines" in the provinces of South Kivu and Maniema, according to the statement. Congolese parastatal Sakima has mining concessions containing tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold in the volatile east of the country. The statement gave no other details about the deal, including the type of minerals that would be extracted. Government spokesmen were not immediately available for comment. —AFP



## Business

# Al-Fulaij: Our solid balance-sheet increases optimism for sustaining strong performance

## NBK-Kuwait CEO Salah Al-Fulaij in an interview with CNBC Arabia

- Maintaining exceptional credit quality and liquidity ratios contributed to growth of profitability
- Our income streams are geographically and sectorally diversified to ensure sustainable profitability
- We have a strong and diversified funding structure that maximizes benefit from interest rate hikes

**KUWAIT:** Salah Al-Fulaij, the CEO of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) - Kuwait, said that the record financial results reported by the bank during the first half of 2023 are a continuation of the solid performance during the past year, as NBK succeeded in achieving exceptional performance thanks to the improvement in the Group's income from core business activities.

In an interview with CNBC Arabia, Al-Fulaij stated: "the growth in net profit is mainly driven by the increase in net operating income, which boosted by 18.8 percent in the first half of 2023, reaching KD 565.9 million, combined with substantial growth in net interest income and net fees and commissions."

Al-Fulaij indicated that higher interest rates and the bank's solid balance-sheet contributed to the increase in margins, expecting this trend to continue moving forward.

"Our endeavors to strengthen our balance-sheet, both locally and internationally, across different business sectors, including corporate, retail and Islamic finance, have enabled us to maintain our leadership in the markets where we operate," he added.

"We succeeded in maintaining exceptional levels of credit quality and comfortable liquidity ratios, which paved the way for an increase in earnings per share. We also proceeded with our strategy to maximize returns for shareholders, in line with our long-term goals, as return on average assets and return on average equity recorded 1.53 percent and 15.2 percent, respectively," he continued.

Al-Fulaij expected strong performance to continue during the second half of the year, despite some headwinds, with continued benefitting from a robust and diverse balance sheet and the group's ability to seize opportunities in the different markets where it operates.

### Resilience and diversification

As far as the operating environment in Kuwait is concerned, Al-Fulaij said that it has recently received some support after the election of a new parliament, expressing his hope that this would lead to a stable political scene in Kuwait. Al-Fulaij stressed that any stability would reflect on the operational environment gaining further momentum during the second half of the year, and that cooperation between the executive and legislative branches is crucial to driving financial and economic reforms and stimulating the private sector.

Speaking on the impact of changes in the operat-

ing environment on operating income, Al-Fulaij said that more than a third of the balance-sheet comes from outside Kuwait, which makes future growth and income streams geographically well-distributed, thus ensuring sustainable profitability. We also operate across diversified business sectors, which is one of the buffers protecting the Group's growth and profitability.

"We will continue to strengthen our business activities and profitability across all markets and business sectors, while being well-prepared to seize growth opportunities resulting from the expected recovery of the non-oil sector activity in Kuwait," he emphasized.

"NBK will continue its historical precautionary approach, as the Group will continue to follow a conservative policy in managing its credit exposures, taking into account the extended impact of a number of factors, including the impact on the operating environment as a result of the geopolitical developments, the crisis faced by European and American banks, as well as the uncertainty of the global economic outlook, with a possible downturn in global economy," he mentioned.

### Improving margins

On a question about NBK's vision of interest rates, Al-Fulaij said that interest rate raising cycle is nearing its end, noting that higher interest rates are generally viewed as a positive factor, considering the strong and diversified funding structure of the Group's deposits.

"Around 40 percent of our non-bank deposits are CASA deposits, which are low-cost deposits that are not sensitive to interest rates, which is favorable for us when the interest rate is raised. Also, around a third of the loan portfolio is retail loans with fixed rates that are not re-priced, whereas the remainder is floating rate loans which are re-priced within a short period of time."

"As we grow and strengthen our loan portfolio, we book new loans at higher interest rates, allowing average return on assets to improve regularly. This reflected positively on margins, which grew by 34 bps year-on-year to 2.52 percent in 1H 2023," he added.

### Growth markets

Al-Fulaij went on to talk about NBK's geographical footprint in regional markets saying: "NBK is operating in 13 countries across 4 continents. At the present time, we are focusing on strengthening our presence in the key growth markets, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Saudi Arabia is one of the key growth markets

Corporate earnings so far, have held up well this year despite the headwinds, lifting sentiments. Looking ahead, several key metrics, including economic growth and inflation, have shown encouraging signs as of late. Additionally, a sustained easing in inflation may also prompt the Fed to moderate its previously hawkish stance. However, the tight US labor market, especially with regards to wage growth, may lead the Fed to avoid any early interest rate cuts. Other risks include energy market volatility and a further escalation in the geopolitical risk between the US and the likes of China and Russia, which could lead to renewed inflationary pressures. Last but not least, continued weakness in the world's second largest economy, China could hinder global economic growth and weigh on EM equity market performance.

Inversely, a faster rollout of policy support in China to boost its flagging economy would be positive for markets.

### GCC markets

GCC equity markets were mostly positive in 2Q despite lower oil prices, influenced by the rally in global markets, positive economic outlooks, and expectations that interest rates are close to their peak. The MSCI GCC index rose 3.3 percent q/q led by major rallies in Dubai and Saudi Arabia with gains of 11.3 percent and 8.1 percent q/q, respectively. These markets continue to receive foreign investor interest thanks to a booming IPO market which saw 48 listings and \$23 billion in capital raised in the GCC, with 34 IPOs from Saudi Arabia linked to its private sector reform and investment plans. The strong gains contrast with more modest rises in Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, and Qatar.

Kuwait's All-Share index ended the quarter with a marginal decline on a partial recovery in banking stocks which helped pare losses earlier in the quarter on rate-hike concerns and the potential impact on earnings. Market capitalization recovered to KD 45.7 billion as of end-June from an 8-month low of KD 43.7 billion in May, while turnover by value eased to a monthly average of KD 798 million, reflecting lower trading activity and prices. Looking forward, the market may benefit from improving global and regional sentiment, with positive performance so far in July. Still, elevated valuations (PE 16x versus 12x for GCC), lagging reform progress, peer market relative strength and the absence of any catalyst pose downside risks.

As for the rest of the GCC, international market developments, including oil prices, economic growth, and Fed policy continue to hold the key. Generally improved fiscal positions thanks to large hydrocarbon windfalls in 2022, and still favorable though moderating growth outlooks in 2023 should be supportive of investor sentiment. However, oil market volatility, although limited by preemptive OPEC policy, and adverse geopolitics such as an escalation of the Iran-GCC conflict over the Al-Durra offshore gas field remain as main downside risks.

- We aim to expand in our regional markets, based on the digital bank model
- In KSA, we focus on growing our wealth management business and financing the project boom
- We have a long-term strategy in Egypt, and our operations there are going well, with plans for further expansion



Salah Al-Fulaij during the interview with CNBC Arabia

that the Group is focusing on as we are expanding our business in all sectors there, in view of the continued improvement of the operating environment and the various emerging opportunities that are in line with our strategic objectives."

"We are laser-focused on expanding our recently launched global wealth management platform and benefiting from the NBK brand in growing assets under management there, as the Group's AUM in Saudi Arabia have exceeded \$1 billion since its inception, thanks to our highly professional wealth management and private banking team there," he continued.

"We are greatly benefitting from the tremendous developments taking place in the Saudi market in light of Saudi Vision 2030, as we provide financing to projects that are witnessing a boom across all sectors. We also benefit from the influx of investments into the Kingdom from most of the main regional markets in which we operate," he elaborated.

Speaking on the Group's vulnerability to economic changes in Egypt, Al-Fulaij explained that the Egyptian economy is going through a difficult year, like other emerging markets, which suffered

successive external shocks over the past period. However, he expressed his hope for improvement in these conditions going forward, in light of the current economic reforms, and the potential resulting influx of foreign investments, and the normalization of inflation, starting next year.

"EGP devaluation against the USD has adversely affected NBK-Egypt's dollar-denominated profits in our consolidated balance sheet, but its contribution to the Group's profits is marginal, in view of the geographical diversity of our income sources, and that the Egyptian market represents only a small percentage - less than 5 percent - of our total assets," he highlighted.

Al-Fulaij mentioned that NBK has a long-term strategy towards the Egyptian market. "Domestically, the bank's operations are performing very well, it is reporting decent profits, and has a very healthy balance sheet as well." "We have plans for further expansion in Egypt, especially in the retail sector, in which we see growth opportunities given the large population and increasing financial inclusion, based on increasing our investments in digital banking," he concluded.

## NBK GLOBAL MARKETS REPORT

### Equity markets positive amid Fed rate hike skip

**KUWAIT:** Global equity markets were broadly positive in 2Q23 as inflation, monetary tightening, and recession fears eased and as economic data showed signs of improvement. Fears of systemic risks in the banking system following the collapse of several banks have diminished since earlier in second quarter. The Federal Reserve's June decision to pause its rate hike cycle, with more than 500 bps of cumulative rate hikes since early 2022, was a relief to traders weary of 13-year-high interest rates and their potential impact on markets as well as on the US economy. GCC equities, with some exceptions, also fared well despite lower oil prices, influenced by positive developments in global markets and improving investor sentiment.

With that said, uncertainty regarding future Fed policy and economic growth remains a key downside risk, with the potential to stall the rally which endured in July. Though some of these risks seem to have eased as of late, a slow economic recovery in China has posed fresh worries.

### US markets outperform on AI-driven tech rally

The steady easing in inflation, which reached a two-year low of 4 percent in the US in May (and 3 percent in June), the possibility that interest rates may have peaked after the Fed's June pause, and a sizeable upwards revision to the final Q1 US GDP growth (1.3 percent to 2 percent), alleviated recession fears. This lent support to most global markets in 2Q23, extending the gains of the previous quarter.

Bullish sentiment was especially apparent in US markets which outperformed their global peers by a large margin. US equities were also boosted by an AI-driven rally in tech stocks, as investors flocked to buy stocks related to the AI supply chain, fueled by optimism and speculation regarding the growth of the sector, propelling the S&P500 and Dow Jones +8.3 percent and +3.4 percent q/q, respectively. The MSCI All-Country World Index (ACWI) also gained a solid 6 percent q/q. Meanwhile, European markets saw relatively modest gains, with the Euro Stoxx 50 up 1.9 percent q/q, likely weighed down by a still hawkish European Central Bank which signaled the possibility of two additional rate hikes this year. Turning to emerging markets, the MSCI EM was little changed, up a muted 0.7 percent q/q, severely weighed down by losses in China (Shanghai Shenzhen CSI 300: -5.1 percent q/q) with a much slower than expected economic recovery taking a heavy toll on sentiment.



MANILA, Philippines: This handout photo taken and received by the Philippines' Presidential Photographers Association (PPA) on July 18, 2023 shows Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (center) signing the Maharlika sovereign wealth fund into law at the Malacanang Palace in Manila. —AFP

### Marcos signs \$9bn wealth fund into law

**MANILA:** Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos on Tuesday signed into law a bill creating a \$9 billion sovereign wealth fund aimed at boosting economic growth and infrastructure spending, but critics warned it will be prone to misuse. Marcos had pushed Congress for swift approval of the bill, which was filed by his son and cousin late last year.

During a signing ceremony at the presidential palace, Marcos said the fund would "leverage a small fraction" of the government's money without adding to the country's debt burden. "We will leverage on a small fraction of the considerable but underutilized investable funds of government and stimulate the economy without the disadvantage of having additional fiscal and debt burden," Marcos said, less than a week before he is due to deliver his second State of the Nation address.

But a small group of protesters rallied near the palace in opposition to the law, claiming the fund was a "deception" and would put public money "in danger". The 500-billion-peso "Maharlika Investment Fund"

will draw most of its funds from the national government, including the central bank, gaming revenue and two state-owned banks. Private banks and companies will also be allowed to invest. The original proposal was for a \$4.9 billion fund that would be partly bankrolled by state-run pensions for government and private-sector workers, sparking public fears that retirement savings could be put at risk.

The final version of the bill approved by Congress in May said pension funds would not have to contribute. The fund will be allowed to make a wide range of investments, including in corporate bonds, equities, joint ventures and infrastructure projects.

Marcos said Tuesday the fund would help the government achieve its economic growth targets and reduce reliance on foreign borrowings to pay for new roads and bridges. He insisted the fund would be transparent and only top finance professionals would be hired to manage it. "I assure you that the resources entrusted to the fund are taken care of with utmost prudence and integrity," Marcos said. Conventional sovereign wealth funds are seeded by windfall government profits from natural resources such as oil or minerals. The word "maharlika" is widely associated with Marcos Jr's late dictator father and namesake, who presided over widespread human rights abuses and corruption during his two decades in power. He was ousted in 1986. — AFP

### India's Vistara to integrate staff with Air India

**MUMBAI:** The merger between India's airlines Air India and Vistara are on track, with regulatory approvals expected to be obtained by April 2024, said Vistara CEO Vinod Kannan on Monday.

Kannan said, however, that the airline is "on track to receive regulatory approvals from Competition Commission of India (CCI), National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), among others, according to lo-

cal media reports. It is a new challenge for formerly government-owned Air India, which Tata Group took over last year. The Indian airline has ambitious plans to modernize its fleet, operational systems and revenue management, he said.

In a bid to streamline businesses, Tata in November said it was merging its two full-service carriers Air India and Vistara to create a bigger airline that will take on local rivals such as IndiGo and other international carriers that dominate outbound traffic from India.

Vistara is a joint venture between Tata and Singapore Airlines. In November 2022, Singapore Airlines Ltd (SIA) said it would emerge as a 25.1 per cent owner of Air India as part of a deal that would merge its Vistara full-service airline joint venture with Tata Sons into India's national carrier. — Agencies

Lifestyle



Fishermen check a net for fish in a shallow water body in the East Calcutta Wetlands area in Kolkata.



A vendor sorts his stock of vegetables at a wholesale vegetable market.



Fishermen prepare to catch fish in the East Calcutta Wetlands area in Kolkata. — AFP photos

# THE 'KIDNEYS OF KOLKATA': INDIAN WETLANDS UNDER THREAT

**W**etlands just outside India's Kolkata have for generations provided tons of food daily and thousands of jobs as they filter sewage through fish ponds — but rapid urbanization is threatening the ecosystem. Conservationists warn that pollution and strong-arm land grabs are putting a lifeline for the megacity's 14 million residents at risk. "We are destroying the environment," said Tapan Kumar Mondal, who has spent his life farming fish in the ingenious system of canals and ponds stretching across about 125 square kilometers (48 square miles).



People through a wholesale vegetable market in the East Calcutta Wetlands area in Kolkata.



Fishermen cast a net in a shallow water body in the East Calcutta Wetlands area in Kolkata.



A fisherman releases fish in a larger water body for further growth in the East Calcutta Wetlands area in Kolkata.

But Dhruva Das Gupta, from the environmental group SCOPE, said that short-sighted building development was encroaching on the wetlands. "The wetlands are shrinking," said the researcher, who is trying to finance a study of what is left of the waters.

### 'Ecologically-subsidized city'

Every day, 910 million litres of nutrient-rich sewage flow into the wetland, feeding a network of about 250 hyacinth-covered ponds. "Sunlight and the sewage create a massive plankton boom," said K. Balamurugan, chief environment officer for West Bengal state, explaining that the microorganisms in the shallow fish ponds feed rapidly growing carp and tilapia. Once the fish have had their fill, the water runoff irrigates surrounding rice paddies and the remaining organic waste fertilizes vegetable fields.

"The sewage of the city is being naturally treated by the wetlands,"

Balamurugan said, giving them the nickname the "kidneys of Kolkata". The community-developed system was created by "the world's foremost connoisseurs of wastewater wise use and conservation", according to its UN Ramsar listing, which also warns it is under "intense encroachment stress of urban expansion".

The late ecologist Dhrubajyoti Ghosh, who played a key role in the 2002 Ramsar submission, called Kolkata an "ecologically-subsidized city". The wetlands system processes about 60 percent of Kolkata's sewage free of charge, saving the city over \$64 million a year, according to a 2017 University of Calcutta study.

Farms in the wetlands provide about 150 tons of vegetables daily, 10,500 tons of fish annually and employ tens of thousands of people, the Ramsar listing estimates. For Kolkata, on the vast delta where the Ganges River meets the Indian Ocean, the wetlands also

provide flood defenses for a city facing rising sea levels due to climate change. "This city never faced any flooding issue," Balamurugan added. "These wetlands are acting as a natural sponge, taking the excess rainwater." Das Gupta said the biodiversity hotspot also "plays a very important role in stabilizing the climate", calling the wetlands "the lifeline of Kolkata". "The wetlands have to stay, because of the cooling that they achieve by their very presence," she said.

### 'Land is being snatched'

But the Ramsar listing notes that industrial effluent is tainting natural systems, threatening food production. Fish farmer Sujit Mondal, 41, said that compared to last year "production has reduced" because of "murky water". About 95 percent of the wetlands are in private hands. As land prices surge, environment officials say they have pleaded with people not to fill in the fish ponds to create new building space.

"We asked them not to convert the wetlands, not to trade these wetlands to buildings, not to get them filled," Balamurugan said. But residents say village councils are being bribed by land-hungry developers. "They are often accused by residents of giving informal permission in return for money to real estate developers to build, while they look the other way," said Das Gupta.

"This leads to huge loss of productive space, and destroys the ecosystem services offered by these wetlands," she added. "The land is being snatched from people," said Sujit Mondal, the fish farmer. Gangs even net the ponds at night to steal the fish, leaving farmers with little option but to close and sell. "They pressurize fishermen to give up their livelihoods," said Das Gupta. "Then they take control of the land." — AFP



A sea lion is washed up on the sand at Santa Monica Beach in Santa Monica, California. — AFP photos

## Marine animal poisonings overwhelm California volunteers



Ventura County stranding coordinator for the Channel Islands Marine and Wildlife Institute, Denise Christ, points to a wound on a rescued sea lion.



A sea lion drinks water at the Channel Islands Marine and Wildlife Institute (CIMWI).



Sea lions in recovery look out of their enclosure at the Channel Islands Marine and Wildlife Institute (CIMWI).

**D**enise Christ regularly comes across injured wildlife in her work rescuing beached or stranded marine mammals along the California coast. But she's been shocked by the hundreds of sea lions and dolphins found on the shore in recent weeks, dead or dying from neurotoxin poisoning. "Heartbreaking, to say the least," said Christ, the Ventura County stranding coordinator for the Channel Islands Marine and Wildlife Institute (CIMWI). The animals were sickened by domoic acid, a neurotoxin produced by algae that are a food source for fish, which are then eaten by sea lions and dolphins.

Algal blooms are not unusual this time of year, but this summer's crisis follows another one less than a year ago, alarming and overwhelming the CIMWI team based about 120 miles (190 kilometers) north of Los Angeles. "We had a pretty intense bloom last summer but this year is way worse than we've ever seen in the 35 years I've been practicing marine mammal medicine," said Sam Dover, the executive director and cofounder of CIMWI. Added Ken Hughes, Christ's colleague in neighboring Santa Barbara County: "We had over 300 sea lions up on the beach. And over 150 dolphins that also were affected by it. It was just so sad."



Ken Hughes (left), stranding coordinator for Santa Barbara, and volunteer Joe Kolda control a rescued sea lion for treatment at the Channel Islands Marine and Wildlife Institute.

### 'New reality' of climate change

There is no official explanation for the outbreak, but experts have several theories. Algal blooms are fed by agricultural runoff, and this year California experienced heavier than normal rainfall. "So there's a lot more runoff from the whole state, not just from the local regions," Dover said. Others from the institute said warming oceans due to climate change were spurring algae growth. "I believe it is the new reality and things are changing. The ocean's changing," Christ said.

When sea lions consume the toxin, they suffer neurological effects that include disorientation, foaming at the mouth, head bobbing and seizures. "They basically don't know they're a sea lion. They don't know where they're at or what they're doing," Hughes explained. The animals will head for the shore, where they wander erratically, attracting the attention of beachgoers.

Dover said last year's domoic acid outbreak took place in mid-August, but this year his group started getting calls

reporting stricken animals in late May. "We started getting one animal a day. So we knew it was coming," he said. "And then on June 8, literally the floodgates opened and animals just started showing up everywhere," Dover said. "This is definitely the worst we've ever seen." CIMWI rescued about 300 animals last year — this year they were getting more than 300 calls each day.

### More than 100 dead dolphins

Another unusual feature of this year's outbreak is dolphins getting sick and dying from the toxin, with Dover counting more than 110 of the mammals dead in recent weeks. There is no cure for domoic acid poisoning, so the only way to treat the animals is with fluids, food, anti-seizure medicine and patience, the experts said. Younger animals have a better chance of survival because they eat less fish than adults, and therefore consume less of the toxin.

"Those are the ones we're putting most of our efforts towards now and we're having some pretty good success in flushing out the toxin from their system," Dover said, as volunteers hose down spacious enclosures where the rescued sea lions eat fish, float in pools and nap. — AFP

## Lifestyle



In the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, on the small Magdalen Islands, foot paths are caving in, cliffs are receding and the sand dunes are disappearing, leaving homes vulnerable to the lashing waves. The archipelago, part of Quebec province in eastern Canada, is in a race against time — and the elements — to survive global warming. Residents are feeling the effects of climate change on a daily basis. “The Magdalen Islands are in the front row when it comes to the changes taking place. We are miniscule faced with the immensity of it all,” says Mayka Thibodeau from CERMIM, a research center focused on sustainable development.



Coastal erosion in the Magdalen Islands.

The changes seem to be coming fast and furious, leaving the roughly 13,000 residents reeling, as they realize their island home will need to adapt quickly and radically in the decades to come if it is to survive. The islands' picturesque shores have already been eroded, receding by an average of half a meter (1.6 feet) a year, according to a study by the University of Quebec at Rimouski (UQAR).

It's a figure that concerns Diane Saint-Jean and her partner — they live on the coast and worry the next big storm could sweep their home into the water. “We were rather naive, we were sure there would be a solution. But nature proved us wrong,” says Saint-Jean, her voice shaky as she stares at the nearby cliffs, which are slowly disappearing. The two women live in La Martinique, a slim band of territory that links the archipelago's two main islands.

They have spent thousands of dollars to reinforce the cliff at the foot of their yard, but in September 2022, Hurricane Fiona struck with brute force, quickly washing away the giant rocks meant to protect their property. “We woke up one morning and realized we'd thrown away our money. But what can we do?” rues Saint-Jean, a retired nurse.

#### Costly emergency work

Erosion is a bit of a sensitive topic for most residents on the Magdalen Islands, which were first populated in the 18th century and are located more than five hours by boat from continental Canada. Everyone here remembers spots that are now gone — especially houses that had to be moved because of the risk of flooding. The situation is a headache for local authorities, who must invest millions of dollars for emergency work.



## Canada's Magdalen Islands have 'front row' seat to climate change

In Cap-aux-Meules, in the center of town, part of the pedestrian walkway collapsed in 2018, leaving the hospital, a retirement home and a cemetery in the direct path of dangerous waves. Last year, local authorities built a huge gravel beach, using 143,000 tons of stones along an 800-meter (half-mile)

#### Vanishing ice

In recent years, extreme weather events have become more frequent and more devastating as a result of climate change. The Magdalen Islands are notably losing one of their most important defenses in winter: ice. It has always served as a sort of shield, but

by replanting them with beachgrass, which helps keep the sand in place as its roots create a natural net.

Many times, the dunes are the shoreline's only defense against the waves. The islands are in danger of being lost to rising waters, a fate shared by other low-lying areas around the

laboratory in the global battle against climate change. For Marianne Papillon, a doctor and public health advisor, the time to act is now.

Papillon has taken up a relatively new job — tackling climate change-related issues. “We must do something collectively. Individual action won't



Diane Saint-Jean poses in front of her house which is close to coastal erosion problems in the Magdalen Islands of Quebec, Canada.

stretch to raise the shoreline. It was not the first time the tactic had been used.

“Solutions exist but they are extremely expensive and these projects have to be maintained. So each time we intervene, it's a tax burden for the future,” explains Jasmine Solomon, who monitors erosion for the local government. “We likely won't be able to protect everything. There are spots that are going to need to change, that's for sure.”

without it the coasts are completely exposed when rough storms hit.

With each cycle of freezing and thawing, the red sandstone cliffs crumble more easily. “One storm can erase a dune, a cliff, or even open up a breach” in the coastline, says Marie-Eve Giroux, the director of local environmental organization Attention Fragiles. In addition to raising awareness about ecological issues in local schools, her group works on dune restoration, especially

world. They are also gradually sinking. “We must look at all realistic scenarios and not bury our heads in the sand,” says Thibodeau. “We don't just want to endure what is to come. We want to be part of the solution.”

She explains the many projects undertaken by CERMIM to restore the beaches including the use of mollusk shells to make concrete. The idea is to turn the islands into a sort of living

make sense if everyone is not on board,” she explains. “Faced with the storms we are seeing, people must make the mental link with climate change. They must feel more involved, and personally invested, without becoming too stressed about it all.” — AFP



This aerial view shows coastal erosion in the Magdalen Islands.

## Lifestyle

## 'Let's go party!' Barbie readies to paint world pink

The world is about to be hit by a pink tsunami as "Barbie" — Hollywood's ironic new take on the doll feminists once loved to hate — opens with a vast marketing campaign. Not even an actors' and writers' strike has been able to put brakes on the juggernaut, with the first images of stars Margot Robbie as Barbie, and Ryan Gosling as her square-jawed boyfriend Ken, sending social media into a frenzy of fuchsia.

in plastic" days with the other Barbies in their bubblegum Californian world, she has her heroine kick off her high heels to put on a pair of sensible Birkenstock sandals to leave Barbie Land behind and plunge into the real world.

With Ryan Gosling camping it up as a breezily sexist Ken barechested under a fur coat, the two go AWOL, to the horror of toymaker Mattel. "If you hate Barbie, this movie is for you," the trailer proclaims. "The movie is packing so much

surgeon.

Gerwig, 39, said her approach to tackling Barbie was "by not denying that she's full of controversy. "In some ways Barbie has been ahead of culture, in some ways she has been behind it," she told AFP. "But she has definitely been a topic of conversation for 64 years."

Chinese-born Simu Liu, who plays one of the many Kens in the movie, said he admired how Gerwig "doesn't shy away from some of the criticisms of Barbie, some of the very valid criticisms of body image and of diversity... but still wraps it in an era of optimism and hope." Issa Rae, of "Awkward Black Girl" fame, who plays one of the Barbies, said despite all the "negative associations", for her Barbie went back to core memories of her childhood.

#### Girl power makeover

"I think about telling stories with Barbies, making Barbies kiss and thinking about all the different questions I had about life, posing that onto Barbie," she told AFP. "So people are very protective of her in that way." Gerwig — who wrote her first hits about New York life with her partner, "Marriage Story" director Noah Baumbach — is next to take on another childhood cultural colossus by adapting the "Chronicles of Narnia" for Netflix.

While Barbie's makers Mattel seemed happy to be cast as cartoon baddies in the trailer for the film, they are counting on the blockbuster giving their lodestar toy some "girl power" cred as she challenges the patriarchy. But behind Barbie's Dayglo optimism, the turnover of Mattel's dolls division fell by nine percent last year.

And the old sexist stereotypes have not been easy to airbrush away. Uniformly blonde and white for decades, Barbie has been going through a huge makeover since 2016 with 175 different models reflecting different colors and body types — "curvy, tall and petite" — as well as dolls with physical disabilities. — AFP

in," Robbie told AFP on the pink carpet of the London premiere.

#### 'Full of controversy'

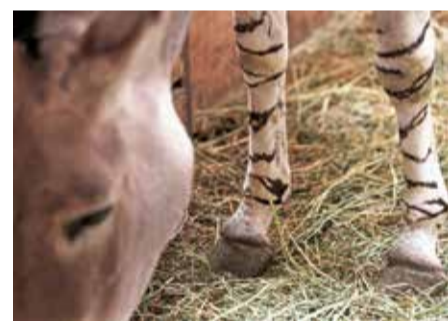
"There is so much joy, it's hilarious, it's very clever and it has a lot to say," said the Australian actress, who is also one of the film's producers. "It's a crazy ride and a visual spectacle. I cannot think of another movie that is like it." While critics say Barbie has brainwashed generations of young girls with an unattainable ideal of beauty and thinness, others see her as a figure of female emancipation through figures like Astronaut Barbie and Barbie the



Australian actress Margot Robbie poses on the pink carpet upon arrival for the European premiere of "Barbie" in central London. - AFP

With the movie hitting big screens across Europe from Wednesday, and North America from Friday, expectation is building at how director and indie film darling Greta Gerwig has tackled the most flagrant of corporate product-placement vehicles. Many were surprised that the acclaimed feminist maker of "Little Women", "Lady Bird" and "Frances Ha" would be tempted to take on a doll whose body is said to be so unrealistic she would not be able to walk if she were a real woman.

But already in the trailer, it is clear Gerwig's take on Barbie is nothing if not tongue in cheek. After a few perfect "life



## Rare Somali wild donkey born in Chile zoo

A rare Somali wild donkey has been born in a zoo in Chile, the fourth specimen of the critically endangered species to be born in the South American country, the zoo owner said. The foal, named Julieta, was born in a private zoo on June 19, said Ignacio Idalsoaga, a veterinarian and founder of the zoo. With white, striped legs similar to those of a zebra, the Somali wild donkey is critically endangered in its native East Africa.

There are less than 200 left in the wild, and a similar number in captivity. Seven of the latter are in South America, all at the Buin Zoo in Santiago, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Hunting and crossbreeding with the common domestic donkey have reduced the populations of this animal to the point of placing it at a critical level of extinction, the last category on the IUCN register before extinction.

"In non-traditional medicine, their bones are used for soup that is said to improve rheumatism, tuberculosis, despite the fact that it has not been scientifically proven," said Idalsoaga, the zoo founder. Females can only have young approximately every two years, and the donkey can live for about 30 years and weigh about 250 kilos (550 lbs). — AFP



A Somali wild donkey foal and its mother born in captivity are exhibited to the public as part of a conservation project for this endangered species at the Buin Zoo, on the southern outskirts of Santiago. - AFP photos

## Cheers and sneers as Bulgaria unveils EU's highest flagpole

As soaring mast in the mountains of southern Bulgaria has made the EU's poorest country the home of the bloc's highest flagpole, filling some with pride and drawing scorn from others. Nationalism and populism are on the rise in the Balkan nation, where many remain strongly Russophile despite Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The immense 1,110-square-metre flag, meant to symbolize Bulgaria's territory of 111,000 square kilometers, was hoisted up the record-breaking 111-metre (364-foot) pole last week in a forest meadow in the Rhodope mountains. With it Bulgaria takes the flagpole crown



People take part in the rising of a huge Bulgarian flag during preparations ahead of the inauguration of an 111 m / 364 ft flagpole at Rozhen meadows near the city of Smolyan. - AFP photos

from Finland — which has a 100-metre one — though it does not nearly touch the heights of some outside Europe which are almost twice as high.

"This won't make Bulgarians richer but it will raise people's spirits," said Simeon Karakolev, 45, the organizer of an historic annual folk festival at Rozhen, whose foundation is behind the project.

Karakolev raised 500,000 euros (\$560,000) in donations for the pole in a campaign embraced by Bulgaria's pro-Russian President Rumen Radev. Local media said that a number of public companies were approached on Radev's behalf to donate money for the mast on the mountain meadow where the festival is held.

#### Marred by controversy

The campaign was widely mocked on the social media with one meme depicting the president swinging on the pole going viral, while many said a country wracked with high emigration and a crumbling health system had more urgent concerns than collecting funds for a massive flag mast. Political scientist



US rapper Travis Scott

## Egypt union bans US rapper Travis Scott's pyramid concert

The Egyptian musicians' syndicate announced Tuesday it would not allow a planned concert at the Giza pyramids by US rapper Travis Scott, in a rare move citing offence to "traditions". International music stars often perform at the feet of Egypt's famed pyramids near the capital Cairo. The powerful musicians' union rarely opposes such events, but in recent years has spearheaded a fight against musical genres deemed improper in Egypt, with rap a frequent target.

Egypt has also increasingly opposed what it views as a "rewriting" of its history, finding fault with African-American movements that claim cultural affiliation to the ancient pharaohs. The musicians' syndicate, which oversees all matters relating to live or recorded music in the Arab world's most populous nation, said in a statement on Tuesday that Scott's concert would "go against our traditions".

The union said it does not intervene in any musical performances so long as they "do not undermine the ancestral customs and traditions of the Egyptian people". After examining social media content and "the artist's positions, the syndicate found images and documented information on the strange rituals he practices, which go against our traditions," the statement said. It however does not specify which "rituals" the union attributes to the hip-hop heavyweight, who is currently on a world tour. — AFP

## Taylor Swift sets women's record for most number one albums

Taylor Swift now has more number one albums than any other female artist in history following the recent release of "Speak Now (Taylor's Version)," Billboard said Monday. The record debuted at the top of the Billboard charts, becoming the pop queen's 12th number one album and surpassing Barbra Streisand for the most among women. For male performers, Jay-Z and the Beatles both have over a dozen number one albums, though Billboard notes it has changed its album ranking system over the decades to include anthologies.



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift performs onstage on the first night of her "Eras Tour" at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. - AFP

Swift, 33, has also become the first living artist in nearly 60 years to have four albums in the top 10 at the same time, the organization added. They include "Midnights," "Lover" and "Folklore." Billboard said Swift had also become the first living artist to have 11 albums in the top 200 simultaneously.

Swift's record-breaking feats come as she performs many of her best hits on the fan-frenzied "Eras" tour. The 106-date stadium concert series kicked off in March and is within striking distance of becoming the first billion-dollar tour. "Speak Now" was originally released in 2010. Swift has vowed to re-record her first six albums so she can control their rights — a process she was contractually allowed to begin in November 2020. — AFP



People watch the rising of a large Bulgarian flag during preparations ahead of the inauguration of an 111 m / 364 ft flagpole.

Ognyan Minchev lamented how patriotism had been hijacked by "leaders who measure national pride by the height of a flag mast... quasi-nationalists dominated by Russian propaganda."

A recent Open Society Foundation study found Bulgaria was among the EU countries most susceptible to Russian propaganda and disinformation. The concrete poured for the flagpole's foundations on the pristine mountain meadows, and alleged irregularities with its permits, also sparked calls from environmentalists to ban it. A petition against it collected thousands of signatures. Karakolev said this was "undeserved hate" and thanked authorities for not "backing down to pressure as checks showed everything is perfectly legal."

Radev slammed "dishonourable attempts to denigrate and break this initiative" as he and Karakolev inaugurated the structure with shouts of "Long live Bulgaria!" Several thousand people

of all ages, many in national costumes, gathered for the ceremony ahead of the three-day annual festival, taking the chance to touch the gigantic flag before it went up. "Yes, some people don't like it... (but) there are flags in every country. They are one of the symbols of a nation," said reserve army colonel Dimitar Mitev, 69, adding that he hoped this initiative would boost patriotism.

Others were less positive. "I felt unwell when I saw this rod sticking out of the ground in the middle of the meadows and the surrounding forests. This is human interference in nature," business consultant Sofia Botusharova, 38, from the nearby town of Chepelare told AFP. Still, thousands of phone screens lit up the night as the cheering crowd waited for the flag to be hoisted. But when the big moment came there was disappointment as the lack of a breeze left it hanging listlessly from the pole. — AFP



People watch the rising of a large Bulgarian flag during preparations ahead of the inauguration of an 111 m / 364 ft flagpole at Rozhen meadows near the city of Smolyan.

## Sports

# England put their faith in ageing attack for must-win Ashes clash

## Ollie Robinson out, over back spasm

**LONDON:** James Anderson returns on his Old Trafford home ground to lead an ageing England attack in a must-win fourth Ashes Test. It is the only change for Ben Stokes's men, 2-1 down with two to play. England have dropped Ollie Robinson, who suffered a back spasm as the hosts won the third Test by three wickets at Headingley. Anderson is reinstated just a fortnight short of his 41st birthday for the match starting Wednesday.

Anderson's 688 wickets are the most by any pacesman in Test history. Only spinners Muttiah Muralitharan and Shane Warne are ahead of the Lancashire swing bowler. But Anderson managed just three wickets as England fell 2-0 behind. He is now, however, set to be the cornerstone of the oldest pace attack in an Ashes match since the Australia line-up of 1928. That was the last time either side deployed four seamers aged 33 or above, with Stuart Broad (37), Chris Woakes (34) and express quick Mark Wood (33) joining Anderson in England's seam-bowling quartet.

England's seasoned campaigners also include all-rounder Moeen Ali. "I was always told that old was gold," the 36-year-old Moeen said Monday. "But it's not just old, it's Jimmy, it's Broady, Woakesy, Woody - they're really good bowlers. 'Myself...you never know what you're going to get, but with those guys, you definitely know how good they are.'" Only a few weeks ago, Moeen was retired from Test cricket but an injury to frontline spinner Jack Leach led to his recall.

With Ollie Pope sidelined by a dislocated shoulder, Moeen finds himself in the key position of number three, with star batsman Joe Root preferring number four. Emerging talent Harry Brook made a decisive 75 at number five at Headingley. Moeen only managed five



England's captain Ben Stokes

at first-wicket down in the second innings at Headingley but England are keeping him there after resisting calls for either captain Stokes, or wicketkeeper Jonny Bairstow, who has struggled with both bat and gloves this series, to move up the order.

### 'Faith and destiny'

It is nearly seven years since Moeen - who has batted in every position from one to nine in his 66-Test career - scored the last of his five centuries at

this level. "If I'm playing well and I get in I have made Test hundreds before and it's not like I can't do it," said Moeen, who added: "But things happen for a reason...I'm a big one on faith and destiny."

Australia have yet to name their XI as Pat Cummins bids to lead the world Test champions to their first Ashes series win in England since 2001. Veteran opener David Warner twice fell cheaply at Headingley to Broad, who has dismissed the Australian opener 17 times in Test cricket. Warner and middle order mainstays, Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith, have just one hundred and one fifty between them in 18 innings. At Headingley, Mitchell Marsh marked his first Test since 2019 with a fine hundred after replacing the injured, but now fit, Cameron Green.

Australia must decide if both all-rounders can play in the team. Josh Hazlewood is set to return after fellow pacesman Scott Boland went wicketless at Headingley. England have won 13 of their last 16 Tests at Old Trafford, losing just once. But that defeat was against Australia four years ago. Not since Ian Botham hit a celebrated hundred in 1981 have they enjoyed an Ashes win at the Manchester ground. The 2019 series serves as a warning to England.

The euphoria of a victory at Headingley was followed by a loss at Old Trafford as Hazlewood took six wickets in the match. "I'm hugely excited, I've got fond memories of the last time here in 2019 so it's good to be back," Hazlewood said. "Obviously I sat the last game out, but I feel better for it. It was probably the right call. Now I can sit back and look at the big picture. I was desperate to play, but now it makes sense. 'Hopefully, after that little break, I'll come out firing again.'" — AFP

## Wimbledon highlights: Rain, records, royals

**LONDON:** Wimbledon saw Carlos Alcaraz dethrone Novak Djokovic, Marketa Vondrousova take a surprise women's title while there was also rain, records and royals. AFP Sport looks at 10 highlights from this year's Grand Slam tournament which wrapped up on Sunday:

### Dry hard! Djokovic mops up

Heavy rain brought havoc to the schedule on the second day with just an hour's play possible on the outside courts, which meant 69 of the planned 77 matches were unable to be completed. Novak Djokovic helped dry Wimbledon's Centre Court with his towel on the first day, appealing to fans to "blow" on the court during a lengthy delay.

### 'Just Stop Oil' stops play

Climate activists interrupted matches on the third day, scattering orange confetti and jigsaw pieces on Court 18. Two men and a woman, all wearing T-shirts with "Just Stop Oil" printed on them, were arrested on suspicion of aggravated trespass and criminal damage. One fan shouted "Get off the court" as spectators booed and jeered.

### 38-point tiebreaker

Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko reached the fourth round after triumphing in the longest-ever tie-break in a Grand Slam women's singles match. The deciding breaker stretched to a record 38 points as the 34-year-old defeated Ana Bogdan of Romania 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (20/18) to make the last 16. Tsurenko took victory on a seventh match point after saving five match points herself in a three-hour 40-minute epic on Court 14.

### Murray faces the end

Andy Murray admitted he didn't know if he will be back at Wimbledon next year after a heart-breaking second round loss to world number five Stefanos Tsitsipas. Two-time champion Murray went down 7-6 (7/3), 6-7 (2/7), 4-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 after a grueling four-hour 40-minute match-up. The defeat meant 36-year-old Murray has not made the second week of a Grand Slam since reaching the quarter-finals at Wimbledon in 2017. "I don't know," said Murray when asked if he would be back at the All England Club next year.

### Down and out

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina insisted he had no regrets after his decision to serve underarm when just two points from a place in the last 16 spectacularly backfired. The Spaniard opted for the unorthodox tactic at 8/8 in the fifth set tiebreaker against sixth seed Holger Rune before losing in five sets. "It was just another serve. I don't regret anything," said Davidovich Fokina who also squandered two match points.

### Azarenka and 'unfair' boos

Victoria Azarenka blasted the Wimbledon crowd as "unfair" and "drunk" after she was booed off Centre Court following her defeat to Elina Svitolina in a politically charged clash. Ukraine's Svitolina came through in three sets and opted not shake hands with Belarusian Azarenka in protest over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Belarus is a key military ally of Moscow. "It wasn't fair. It is what it is. What can I do?" said Azarenka.

### Eubanks' feeling in defeat

Having described grass as the "stupidest" surface, big-serving Chris Eubanks left Wimbledon as a shock quarter-finalist and record-breaker. As well as being the only man to hit over 100 aces at the tournament, he unleashed 321 winners, beating Andre Agassi's record of 317 from 1992.

### Djokovic hit by hindrance call

Novak Djokovic endured a double mini-set-back in his straight sets win over Jannik Sinner when he was docked a point for hindrance for a loud grunt which accompanied a down-the-line winner. In the same game, the Serb was handed a code violation for taking too long between points. "The hindrance could have changed the course of the match. I felt nervous after that call, but I managed to re-group," Djokovic said.

### Hugs welcome

Ons Jabeur was so disconsolate after her shock Wimbledon final defeat to Marketa Vondrousova that she told Kate, the Princess of Wales, that "hugs are always welcome". In a moving moment on Centre Court, the wife of the heir to the British throne, gave the tearful Tunisian a warm embrace as she handed her the runners-up trophy. "She didn't know if she wants to give me a hug or not. I told her hugs are always welcome from me. That was a very nice moment and she's always nice to me."

### Changing of the guard

Carlos Alcaraz defeated seven-time champion Novak Djokovic to claim his first Wimbledon title, shattering the Serb's dream of a record-equaling 24th Grand Slam crown. World number one Alcaraz recovered from dropping the first set and saving a set point in the second to win 1-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-1, 3-6, 6-4 after four hours and 42 minutes on Centre Court. — AFP

## Motorbikes falls: Tour de France talking points

**SAINT-GERVAIS:** Mass falls, wayward motorbikes, mountainside hordes and the unrelenting duel for supremacy between Jonas Vingegaard and Tadej Pogacar all marked the Tour de France's second week. With Pogacar trailing Vingegaard by just 10 seconds, AFP Sport takes a look at the main talking points after a pulsating week of action in the world's greatest bike race.

### The dangers of cycling

Although he crashed out of the Tour de France in such agonising fashion last week, British sprinter Mark Cavendish waited several days before making his first public comments about his broken collarbone and broken dreams, saying his fall on stage eight was "part of the beauty and brutality of cycling". With the death of Gino Maeder during June's Tour de Suisse fresh in the memories of professional cyclists, Saturday's stage 14 as the Tour de France climbed and descended a string of Alps, had more than a few riders taking a deep breath.

On the day, rain, which made even flat roads treacherous, was the main culprit, as five riders said goodbye to the Tour with broken bones or concussion. Young gun Carlos Rodriguez won the stage with a flying downhill finale. "My BMX past gave me the win today. My descending skills are one of my strong points," said the 22-year-old. On Sunday, a spectator stepped into the road and took out half the peloton. Those caught up were all able to remount, albeit shaken.



**SAINT-GERVAIS:** UAE Team Emirates' Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar wearing the best young rider's white jersey (left), Jumbo-Visma's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey (center) and INEOS - Grenadiers' Spanish rider Carlos Rodriguez Cano cycle in the final ascent of Saint-Gervais-les-Bains. — AFP

Race leader Jonas Vingegaard was asked about the risks of high-speed downhill finishes. "It's as dangerous as you make it. If you go too hard it's dangerous, if you don't, it's not," he said. The final word goes to Maeder's teammate Pello Bilbao. "I was afraid of course on some of the downhill sections," Bilbao said after winning the hot and hilly stage 10. "But Gino's death has changed me, not just in cycling but in all aspects of my life." "In the end I realized you cannot live in fear. This realization has changed the way I live."

### Six seconds

Pogacar's late attack on Vingegaard in the mountains on stage 14 was foiled by a motorbike carrying a photographer that failed to match the acceleration and blocked a path already narrowed by hordes of fans at absolute fever-pitch. At stake were six seconds, three more for one rider, three less for the other. Pogacar was the loser but refused to criticize. "It is what it is," he said. "The guy couldn't move because of the fans." Vingegaard said he did not know if the motorbike had changed anything. "Talking about what might have been is useless," he said. The photographer offered a full apology. "I cannot defend the indefensible, I should have moved forward." —AFP



**PERTH:** Japhet Tanganga (center) of Tottenham Hotspur kicks the ball during an exhibition football match against West Ham at Optus Stadium in Perth on July 18, 2023. — AFP photos

## West Ham spoil Postecoglou's Spurs debut

**PERTH:** West Ham spoiled Ange Postecoglou's much-anticipated Tottenham coaching debut Tuesday with a pulsating 3-2 pre-season friendly victory in Perth. West Ham thwarted Spurs' late rally in a free-wheeling contest between the London rivals in front of 46,266 fans at Optus Stadium. The departure of captain Declan Rice to Arsenal has barely affected West Ham, who won their third straight pre-season game after Gianluca Scamacca broke the deadlock in the 78th minute.

They exploited a new-look Tottenham, who showcased glimpses of the high-octane style expected under Postecoglou but were creaky in defense. Tottenham had a remarkable 30 shots to four but rued a slew of missed opportunities. Harry Kane took Tottenham's captaincy reins amid uncertainty over his future, having been courted aggressively by Bayern Munich.

He had an early close-range shot sensationally blocked by goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski but was relatively subdued before being substituted at half-time. Marquee signings Guglielmo Vicario, James

Maddison and Manor Solomon started in their Tottenham debuts. Former Empoli goalkeeper Vicario is seen as a replacement for captain Hugo Lloris, who has skipped the tour as he seeks opportunities elsewhere. Vicario was unable to curtail a couple of well-executed set pieces from West Ham before being substituted at half-time.

Much like Postecoglou's previous teams, Tottenham started in swashbuckling style with several early shots on goal denied by Fabianski. West Ham drew first blood against the run of play when striker Danny Ings finished off a superb Jarrod Bowen cross with a header past Vicario. Tottenham's defense was again exposed by an efficient West Ham as 18-year-old Divin Mubama headed another slick set piece into the net. Spurs continued to press only to be denied by Fabianski, who had been outstanding in West Ham's 6-2 win over Perth Glory on Saturday.

Postecoglou rang the changes at half-time, flipping his team entirely, and it did the trick as Tottenham dictated in inclement conditions. They were rewarded when Giovanni Lo Celso scored from close range before debutant Destiny Udogie leveled in the 71st minute with a brilliant header. But Scamacca scored against the run of play to deny Postecoglou a fairy-tale start. Tottenham's Asia-Pacific tour continues against Leicester City in Thailand on July 23 before travelling to Singapore to play Lion City Sailors. West Ham return home to play Dagenham and Redbridge on July 22. — AFP



Manager of Tottenham Hotspur Ange Postecoglou

Sports

# Commonwealth Games in limbo

## Australian state pulls out as 2026 host

MELBOURNE: The Australian state of Victoria pulled out of hosting the 2026 Commonwealth Games on Tuesday citing major cost blow-outs, leaving organizers "hugely disappointed" and scrambling to keep the multi-sport event alive. State Premier Daniel Andrews said the initial estimate of Aus\$2 billion (US\$1.36 billion) needed to hold the Games would more likely be around Aus\$7 billion, which he called "well and truly too much".

"I've made a lot of difficult calls, a lot of very difficult decisions in this job. This is not one of them. Frankly, \$7 billion for a sporting event, we are not doing that," he said at a news conference in Melbourne. "I will not take money out of hospitals and schools to host an event that is three times the cost estimated and budgeted for last year. The Games will not proceed in Victoria in 2026. We have informed Commonwealth Games authorities of our decision to seek to terminate the contract."

The decision to pull the pin throws a question

mark over not just the 2026 event but the concept as a whole, analysts said, with fewer countries showing interest in recent times to take on a spectacle seen as losing its relevance. The last Games in 2022 were held in Birmingham, but only after the English city stepped in late on to replace Durban in South Africa, which was stripped of hosting rights after a series of missed deadlines and financial problems. The Commonwealth Games Federation insisted it remained "committed to finding a solution for the Games in 2026".

The event typically attracts more than 4,000 athletes from the 54 nations of the Commonwealth, almost all of which are former territories of the British Empire. The 2026 version — featuring 20 sports and 26 disciplines — was due to be held across five regional hubs, including Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Gippsland and Shepparton, with each having its own athletes' village. Andrews said his team had looked at cutting the number of hubs or even moving the

Games to the Victoria state capital Melbourne but "none of those options stack up".

### 'Gross exaggeration'

He refused to say how much it was costing to terminate the agreement but insisted talks with the Commonwealth Games Federation were amicable. However, the London-based Federation blasted the move as "hugely disappointing". "We are disappointed that we were only given eight hours' notice and that no consideration was given to discussing the situation to jointly find solutions prior to this decision being reached by the government," it said in a statement. Victoria was only awarded the contract 14 months ago as the exclusive bidder, with the Federation claiming the state had since decided to include more sports, added an additional regional hub, and changed plans for venues.

These additional costs were "often against the advice of the Commonwealth Games Federation

and Commonwealth Games Australia", it said, adding that it had received assurances that "sufficient funding was available to deliver the Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games". Commonwealth Games Australia president Ben Houston was equally scathing, claiming the new cost estimates were a "gross exaggeration".

But Tom Heenan, a lecturer in sport and Australian studies at Monash University, said it showed that hosting mega-events like the Commonwealth Games was not worth it. "This venture was flawed from the start," he said. "Situating the Games in regional centers highlighted their declining global importance." The Victorian state opposition called Andrews' decision a "massive humiliation" and "hugely damaging to Victoria's reputation", suggesting it would hurt the state's chances of being awarded big-ticket sporting events in the future. The Australian city of Brisbane in the state of Queensland will host the 2032 Summer Olympics. — AFP

## Domestic violence case dropped against Giggs

LONDON: Former Manchester United player Ryan Giggs will not face a retrial over domestic violence claims after prosecutors on Tuesday withdrew the charges due to the "unwillingness" of his ex-girlfriend to give evidence. Giggs, 49, was due to go on trial for a second time on July 31 after a month-long trial last year ended without the jury reaching a verdict. But prosecuting lawyer Peter Wright told Manchester Crown Court in north west England that there was no realistic chance of conviction.

Giggs' ex-girlfriend Kate Greville had "indicated an unwillingness" to give evidence and that the first trial had "taken its toll" on her and her sister Emma, he explained. "That being the case, we formally offer no evidence on counts one, two and three. This is not a decision taken lightly," said Wright. He added that there had been "protracted" efforts to find out why she was unwilling to testify and that it was inappropriate to compel her to give evidence.

Judge Hilary Manley replied: "I formally enter not guilty verdicts in respect of those counts." Chris Daw, representing Giggs, said the former footballer was "deeply relieved the prosecution has finally come to an end after almost three years in which he's been fighting throughout to clear his name. He has always been innocent of these charges, there's been very, very many lies told about him in court. He's now been found not guilty of all the charges and going forward would like to rebuild his life and career as an innocent man."

### Teenage prodigy

Giggs, a former Wales international, had denied the allegations of controlling and coercive behav-



MANCHESTER: Former Manchester United star and Wales manager Ryan Giggs leaves the Manchester Minshull Street Crown Court at the end of his trial for assaulting his ex-girlfriend. Domestic violence case was dropped against Giggs on July 18, 2023. — AFP

ior against former girlfriend Greville as well as assaulting her and her younger sister. Prosecutors had alleged that the ex-star headbutted Greville in the face as she tried to end their relationship, and had subjected her to a "litany of abuse, both physical and psychological".

The three counts could have led to a five-year jail term, but Giggs has now been cleared of all charges. Former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson was among those to give evidence in the trial last August, which also saw Giggs take the stand and admit to being unfaithful in all his past romantic relationships but deny ever being violent. He re-

signed as the Wales manager last June, after being on leave since his arrest.

Giggs exploded onto the scene as a teenager in the mid-1990s. He ended his career at Old Trafford as the most decorated player in English football history. As a player, he made a club record 963 appearances over 23 years for Manchester United, winning 13 Premier League titles and two Champions League trophies. He began his coaching career at Old Trafford, taking temporary charge at the end of the 2013-14 season after David Moyes was sacked. Giggs then worked as an assistant to Louis van Gaal for two years. — AFP

## Leeds confirm takeover by 49ers' owners

LONDON: Leeds United announced Tuesday that the English Football League had approved the club's takeover by the owners of NFL franchise San Francisco 49ers in the latest example of a US-based group taking a controlling stake in an English team. Last month, Leeds chairman Andrea Radrizzani said he had agreed a deal to sell his controlling stake in the recently relegated Premier League club to co-owners 49ers Enterprises, which has been a minority shareholder in Leeds since 2018. Former Norwich boss Daniel Farke was appointed manager at Elland Road on a four-year deal earlier this month, with Leeds bidding to make an immediate return to the Premier League following relegation in May.

Chairman Paraag Marathe said in a Leeds statement issued Tuesday: "This is an important moment for Leeds United and we are already hard at work. This transition is a necessary reset to chart a new course for the club. We have already appointed a highly-respected first-team manager with a track record of success, and we are confident Leeds will field a competitive squad to contend for promotion next season."

Rudy Cline-Thomas, founder of venture capital firm MASTRY, who is joining the board as co-owner and vice-chairman, said: "With my family hailing from Leeds, it's an honor to be able to uplift this incredible community. This is more than just an opportunity, it's a personal mission." 49ers Enterprises increased its stake in Leeds to 44 percent in 2021 with the option of buying Radrizzani's remaining 56 percent before January 2024.

That agreement, which had valued Leeds at around £400 million (\$500 million), was contingent on the club, a giant of English football in the late 1960s and early 1970s under manager Don Revie, remaining in the Premier League. Leeds' relegation forced both parties back into negotiations with the deal now reportedly worth a valuation of just £170 million. Italian businessman Radrizzani bought Leeds in 2017 and helped lead the club back to the Premier League for the first time in 16 years, with the appointment of Marcelo Bielsa as manager proving a masterstroke.

However, after just three years back in the top flight, Leeds will be in the second-tier Championship next season after finishing 19th in the Premier League. The 49ers takeover of Leeds means they have become the latest American group to have a controlling stake in an English football team, with top-flight Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool, Chelsea, Fulham, Aston Villa and Bournemouth all owned by US-based businessmen or consortia.

Meanwhile, Hollywood actors Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney own Welsh club Wrexham, recently promoted to League Two, the fourth-tier of the English professional game. Paraag Marathe, previously vice-chairman, will take over as chairman, chief executive Angus Kinnear will remain in his current position and Rudy Cline-Thomas, founder and managing partner of venture capital firm MASTRY, will join the board as co-owner and vice-chairman. — AFP

## Norway's Hegerberg eager to make up for lost time at WCup

LYON: The prolific Ada Hegerberg wants to cap her return from the international wilderness by firing Norway back among the elite at the Women's World Cup starting this week.

The former Ballon d'Or winner stepped away from the international scene in 2017 citing concerns over the inequality of treatment given to women's teams by the Norwegian football federation. The striker's self-imposed exile lasted five years and meant she missed the 2019 World Cup, where Norway reached the quarter-finals, before she returned in time for Euro 2022.

That was a forgettable tournament however - Hegerberg failed to score as Norway lost 8-0 to hosts England on the way to a group-stage exit. Now the 28-year-old, the all-time top scorer in the Women's Champions League, is determined to make up for lost time when Norway kick the World Cup off against co-hosts New Zealand on Thursday. "There is always work to be done with the national team but it feels good to be with them again," she told AFP ahead of the tournament from Lyon, where she plays for the French champions and record eight-time Champions League winners. "It gives me more of a chance to make a contribution to women's football, on and off the field."

### Injury nightmare

Aside from her international exile, Hegerberg - who helped her country reach the last 16 at the 2015 World Cup - has also spent much of the last few years out injured. She suffered a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament in her right knee in January 2020

and in September that year underwent surgery on a stress fracture to her left tibia.

She did not return to action until October 2021, then missed a large chunk of the season just finished due to injury too. "I finished the season well with Lyon. I was getting better as it went along," she said, after helping her club retain the French title. "There was quite an intense period because I came back during the run-in to the end of the season when we had some really important matches," she added. "It was a tiring season because I needed to put a lot of work in to get back to my best. I am proud. I never doubted I would."

### 'Caught napping'

And so what of Norway's chances in New Zealand and Australia? They will be expected to progress out of a Group A which also includes Switzerland and the Philippines, and will hope to get to the last eight at least. Hegerberg is cautious. "I don't think we can say we are one of the favorites," she said of a team also featuring the likes of Chelsea's Maren Mjelde and Guro Reiten, and the Barcelona pair of Ingrid Syrstad Engen and Caroline Graham Hansen. "We have lots of quality and desire. We need to be ambitious but also realistic - our most recent results have not been very good, so we want to give off a better image of Norway." They were powerhouses of the women's international game a generation ago, reaching the first Women's World Cup final in 1991 and winning the trophy four years later.

Twice European champions, they also won Olympic gold in 2000. "We have quite a history, having won the World Cup and been Olympic champions, but things have become a bit harder in the last few years," said Hegerberg. "We got caught napping. That doesn't mean we can't achieve anything anymore because we have some quality players, but we need to get them all playing together to get the best out of the team. "It's really interesting, I can't wait." — AFP



Norway's striker Ada Hegerberg

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

#### Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010

Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
---------------	----------

Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
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, **Zulfikar** holder of Indian Passport No. Z4063102 having permanent address Boharwadi, Nai Abadi, Bhinder, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 313603, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as **Zulfikar** (given name) and **Boheda** (surname). **(C#3833) 17/07/2023**

## Crown Prince receives paralympic athletes and senior sports officials

Amir's Representative to attend GCC, Central Asian states meeting



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



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday received the Honorary Chairperson of Kuwaiti Disabled Sports Club Sheikhha Abdullah Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah, chairman of Kuwaiti Tomooh Sports Club Jassem Mohammad Al-Nouri, and the club's founder and head of Kuwait National Special Olympics Rihab Buresli as well as its members.

His Highness the Crown Prince also welcomed female and male athletes who won a number of gold, silver and bronze medals at the Special Olympics World Games

hosted by Germany. In a speech during the reception, His Highness the Crown Prince expressed his pleasure to convey greetings and congratulations of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to the attendees. His Highness the Crown Prince congratulated the athletes who managed to bag a number of medals for their homeland during the games in Germany.

In addition, His Highness the Crown Prince thanked all officials who took part in preparing the athletes to represent Kuwait in this international sports event and gain advanced positions. His Highness the Crown

Prince said "our sons and daughters are our real wealth and investing in them is our goal". His Highness the Crown Prince directed all concerned bodies of the State to pay attention to the distinguished nationals mainly those special needs, wishing further success and progress to the dear homeland under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir.

Meanwhile, Sheikhha Sheikhha said Kuwait has paid attention to human beings before caring for buildings and streets, referring to achievements made by the athletes over the time for the country's interest. On her part, Bu-

resli said these accomplishments have been made amid tough conditions, calling for inserting this segment in the country's development plans and activities.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Amir's Representative His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation will head to Saudi Arabia on Wednesday. The Representative of His Highness the Amir will head the Kuwaiti delegation in the GCC 18th consultative meeting and the meeting between the GCC states and C5 Central Asian countries held in Jeddah. — KUNA

## Injuries overshadow Women's World Cup

**AUCKLAND:** Numerous top players will miss the Women's World Cup because of serious knee injuries, provoking soul-searching and calls for more research into what is behind the scourge. Alexia Putellas has recovered from rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee but a host of other leading names will be absent when the tournament in Australia and New Zealand starts on Thursday. Spain's Putellas, the Women's Ballon d'Or and The Best FIFA Women's Player winner, missed last year's European Championship in England and spent more than nine months out.

The attacking midfielder returned in April, just in time for the World Cup, but is one of the lucky ones. Holders the United States are diminished by the loss of Mallory Swanson to a torn patella tendon in her left knee, while midfielder Catarina Macario did not overcome a torn ACL in time. European champions England are without star striker Beth Mead and defender Leah Williamson, their captain, as both recover from ruptured ACLs.

Vivianne Miedema, the prolific Netherlands striker, and the star French duo of Delphine Cascarino and Marie-Antoinette Katoto also suffered World Cup heartache because of serious knee injuries. Christen Press is another who misses out and is set for a fourth operation on an ACL injury she suffered just over a year ago. "Having gone through an ACL tear and recovery (myself), that in itself is hard enough," her United States team-mate Andi Sullivan said on Tuesday. "I'm crushed for her." Janine Beckie, the

ex-Manchester City player from Olympic champions Canada, is another major absentee after she tore her ACL. Speaking to global players' union FIFPro, the 29-year-old Putellas said the sheer number of knee problems, especially ACL injuries, in women's football was down to "many things". "It is only relatively recent that women's players have started to become professionals and there has hardly been time to carry out these types of studies and learn a little more about the body of women's footballers," she said. Women players have not just suddenly become vulnerable to knee injuries that can rule them out for many months and even put their careers in jeopardy.

"The fact that females are at seriously higher risk than guys playing football has been recognized for a long time," Gordon Mackay, a Scottish knee surgeon, told AFP. "It is multi-factorial, but there are lots of things that contribute to the risk factors," he said, citing the need to train on the right surfaces and have footwear geared specifically for women. Mackay put the incidence of ACL injuries in women players at "four times at least, maybe six times" that of men and says pelvic shape is a contributing factor.

Hormonal changes related to the menstrual cycle have been mentioned, too, as potentially increasing the risk. "It is very hard to address the fact there is biomechanically a bit of a gender difference," Mackay said. One recent study by researchers in England suggested that kits and balls, as well as boots, needed to be better-tailored towards women to optimize on-pitch safety. Sportswear giant Adidas, one of the main kit providers for teams at the World Cup, said it takes the issue "incredibly seriously". "We have a long-standing legacy in designing products by, with and for women athletes," it said when contacted by AFP. — AFP

## Players to watch at Women's W Cup

**SYDNEY:** The top women's footballers on the planet will be in action when the World Cup kicks off on Thursday in Australia and New Zealand. AFP Sport picks out five players to watch:

### Alexia Putellas (Spain)

The 29-year-old attacking midfielder is considered by many to be the best women's footballer in the world. Winner of the Women's Ballon d'Or in each of the last two years, in February she retained her crown as The Best FIFA's Women's Player for 2022, despite missing the second half of the year with a serious knee injury. Barcelona star Putellas is the first woman to reach 100 caps for Spain and they badly missed her creativity and goals at the 2022 European Championship, where they lost to eventual champions England in the quarter-finals. Putellas was among the Spanish players demanding change within the national side, but did not join in with 15 players who last year asked not to be called up, amid differences with coach Jorge Vilda and the Spanish football federation.

### Sam Kerr (Australia)

If the co-hosts are to go far at the World Cup they will need Chelsea forward Kerr firing on all cylinders. The 29-year-old Australia skipper made her international debut aged just 15 and has played over 120 times for her country, averaging a goal every other game. She scored five times at the 2019 World Cup. Her numbers are just as impressive at Chelsea, hitting 29 goals in 38 appearances this season. Kerr is such a big name at home that she was Australia's flag-bearer

at the coronation of King Charles. She needs little introduction as the most instantly recognizable player in women's football. The attacker has played 199 times for the United States, scoring 63 goals and making 73 assists. She has won the World Cup twice. Now Rapinoe plays in the United States for OL Reign. She is set for retirement at the end of this season and is something of a fading force at 38, but she remains the face of women's football for the casual fan. Off the field, the openly gay Rapinoe is outspoken on a number of issues that go beyond sport, including advocating for LGBTQ rights.

### Keira Walsh (England)

England's hopes of winning the World Cup for the first time have taken a hit with the injury loss of several key players, putting even more onus on midfielder Walsh. Barcelona snapped her up from Manchester City for a reported 400,000 pounds (\$508,000) last September, a world record for a woman footballer. With her passing, reading of the game and ability to win the ball back, Walsh was instrumental in Sarina Wiegman's England winning the Euro on home soil in 2022. She was named player of the match when England defeated Germany 2-1 in the final at Wembley in extra time.

The Norwegian was the first winner of the Women's Ballon d'Or, in 2018, and is a prolific striker with leading French side Lyon. Her Norway career has been stop-start, however. She withdrew from the international scene in 2017, citing concerns over the inequality of treatment given to men's and women's teams by the Norwegian federation. She only returned last year. The 28-year-old forward has also been dogged by injuries. But when on form and firing she is one of the best players in the world, and averages more than a goal a game for her club. She is the all-time top scorer in the UEFA Women's Champions League with 59 goals. — AFP