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Why wait
to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



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Govt sends election commission draft law to National Assembly

Proposals to limit MPs to two terms, KD 1,000 minimum pension

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The government on Sunday sent to the National Assembly a draft law calling to amend the election law to establish an election high commission and allow convicted political prisoners to run in polls. The draft legislation, one of a host of laws agreed in principle between the government and MPs, is expected to be debated by the Assembly later this week.

It calls to establish the election commission consisting of seven senior judges and attached to the ministry of justice. It will supervise and conduct elections, replacing the election committee of the

interior ministry. Among the key amendments to the election law is a clause allowing political prisoners convicted of offending HH the Amir to run in future parliamentary elections, erasing a ban for life under the current law. This is expected to open the way for the return of former veteran opposition MPs and others to contest the elections.

In their campaigns for the June 6 elections, MPs considered this draft law as one of the most important political reform legislations. Head of the Assembly's interior and defense committee MP Khaled Al-Otaibi called on panel members to attend an urgent meeting on Monday to review the bill and approve it to be

ready for an Assembly debate on Thursday.

In a related development, MP Dawood Marafie on Sunday submitted an amendment to the election law to limit the duration of a term of any lawmaker to just two terms, or a maximum of eight years in a bid to give chance to new blood. The draft law also calls for restricting candidacy among "original" Kuwaitis, whose ancestors have been in Kuwait before 1920.

Meanwhile, the Assembly's financial and economic affairs committee on Sunday approved a draft law raising the minimum pension for retired Kuwaitis to KD 1,000 monthly, the head of the panel said. MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri said the committee also approved

a second draft law raising the amount of a non-profit loan to pensioners from seven times of the pension to 21 times of the monthly pay.

Also, MP Adel Al-Damkhi, head of a parliamentary committee probing alleged financial violations in the Eurofighter warplanes deal worth over \$8 billion, said on Sunday that a former defense minister refused to attend a meeting for a second time. He said the committee is looking to take legal action as per the law if the minister does not attend the committee meetings again, adding that former and current defense ministers and top ministry officials have attended the committee meetings.

Heat shows gap between rich and poor in US



PHOENIX: Rosalia Licea and neighbor Wendy Salinas pose near the remains of a mobile home recently destroyed in a fire during a record heat wave on July 20, 2023. — AFP

PHOENIX: Melanie Floyd took her kids to the zoo in Phoenix in the morning, when temperatures in the heat wave roasting the city and much of the US southwest were still bearable. Standing before a turtle exhibit, she downplayed this extreme weather event in a world grappling with climate change. "As long as we have AC and as long as everyone is making smart choices," this stay-at-home mother aged 32 told AFP, "staying hydrated, going in the shade, staying cool, not overexerting themselves, I think it's tolerable."

At her home it is, indeed, nice and cool. She keeps the air conditioning between 23 and 26 degrees Celsius so she can look after her kids, aged two and six, comfortably as they play with coloring books and crafts. Outside, day after day for more than three weeks, the temperature in Phoenix is surpassing a hard-to-fathom 43C. The heatwave affecting much of the southwest and southern United States — including the record temperatures in Phoenix — is igniting debate on how fast global warming is moving.

For Floyd, this particular weather event is no big deal. "You have to fluctuate as the weather fluctuates, so you have to be flexible with it," Floyd said. In this desert city many people that spoke to AFP expressed similar views about the rising frequency of brutally dangerous heat as global warming caused by human activity grinds on: One must learn to live with it.

For many of them life is a series of mad dashes from offices to restaurants to

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Locals, tourists flee wildfire on Greek island

ATHENS: Locals and tourists fled hotspots on the Greek island of Rhodes on Sunday, as firefighters, backed by water jets and helicopters, battled a blaze that sparked the country's largest-ever fire evacuation. Wind gusts of up to 49 km per hour were complicating efforts to bring the flames under control. The island of Rhodes is one of Greece's most popular tourist destinations, particularly with British, German and French tourists — many of whom were being rapidly moved out of the path of the flames.

As Greece has been battered by an extended spell of extreme heat, flames have burned for nearly a week on the island. Temperatures, which reached 45 degrees Celsius in central Greece on Sunday, were expected to dip on Monday before the mercury rises again for another four-day heatwave. "This is the biggest fire evacuation ever in Greece," Konstantia Dimoglidou, Greek police spokeswoman told AFP. "We had to evacuate an area of 30,000 people."

Police said that authorities had transported some 16,000 people across land, with 3,000 evacuated by sea, and others fleeing by road or under their own transport after being told to leave the area. German travel giant Tui said it was suspending all of its inbound passenger flights to Rhodes until Tuesday but would fly in empty planes to help evacuate tourists.

Spokesperson Linda Jonczyk told AFP that Tui had some 40,000 tourists in Rhodes, of which 7,800 are affected by the fires. The low-cost British carrier Jet2 also said it had cancelled "all flights and holidays" to the island. One German tourist told the Bild daily that they were "saved from the fire at the last moment" after returning from the beach on Saturday to a deserted hotel.

"We had embers flying around our heads and no help was in sight," said 23-year-old Paul from Bielefeld. "I had the feeling of being on my own, it was so hot and the smoke was already so thick we couldn't have survived another ten minutes." He said buses then arrived to evacuate the tourists, but some were so panicked they were trying to find boats to escape on from the beach.

Authorities have warned that the battle to contain the flames — raging in the middle of peak tourism season — will take several days. More than 260 fire

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KIOTARI, Greece: Tourists are evacuated from hotels during a wildfire on the Greek island of Rhodes on July 22, 2023. — AFP

Musk hints Twitter bird branding could be replaced

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter owner Elon Musk hinted late Saturday night that he may ditch the social media network's blue cartoon bird branding — and soon — for an edgier logo based on an "everything app" he has long alluded to called only X. "Soon we shall bid adieu to the twitter brand and, gradually, all the birds," he tweeted around midnight, implying an end to the imagery from where the very word "tweet" stems.

"Like this but X," the billionaire SpaceX boss said, above a picture of the Twitter bird over a black and white marbled background. "To embody the imperfections in us all that make us unique," he replied to the post. Twitter, founded in 2006 and whose name is a play on the sound of birds chattering, has used avian branding since its early days, when the company bought a stock symbol of a light blue bird for \$15, according to the design website Creative Bloq.

The 52-year-old Tesla founder has previously said that his rocky takeover of Twitter last year was "an accelerator to creating X, the everything app," a reference to the X.com company he founded in 1999, a later version

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WASHINGTON: In this photo illustration, a phone screen displays a photo of Elon Musk with the Twitter logo in the background. — AFP

'Barbie' trounces 'Oppenheimer' in 'historic' weekend

LOS ANGELES: With legions of pink-clad moviegoers swarming theaters, Warner Bros' "Barbie" conquered North American box offices in its debut weekend, raking in \$155 million, Sunday estimates showed — nearly double the cash of its second-place competitor. The other half of the much-anticipated "Barbenheimer" cinematic weekend — which saw Universal's much darker biopic "Oppenheimer"

released the same day and spurred hundreds of thousands to organize their own double features — brought in its own whopping \$80.5 million, according to figures from Exhibitor Relations.

"This is a record-shattering opening" for "Barbie," wrote David A Gross, of Franchise Entertainment Research. "No comedic film of any kind has opened higher than \$85.9 (million) over a 3-day weekend." "Oppenheimer," meanwhile, saw a "superb opening", Gross noted. According to industry estimates, some 200,000 people were thought to have purchased tickets to both films. Millions more were likely to catch both films on separate days.

The coincidental same-day release of the two starkly different but highly anticipated

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SAN DIEGO: An attendee points at her Barbenheimer shirt during the San Diego Comic-Con International on July 20, 2023. — AFP



Difference between a heart attack and a cardiac arrest

Cardiologist explains symptoms, risk factors of both conditions

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: In the scope of medical emergencies, some events strike extra fear into our hearts, the most precious muscle in our body, such as a sudden stoppage of this vital organ. Many people have heard chilling stories of a person clutching their chest and gasping for breath, fighting to keep themselves alive.

This panic and confusion push us to dig deeper into cardiac crises. Kuwait Times delved into the differences between two commonly misinterpreted terms — heart attack and cardiac arrest — by interviewing Pediatric Cardiologist and Electrophysiologist Dr Mohammad Ebrahim at the Chest Diseases Hospital, who is also an Assistant Professor at Kuwait University. Decoding these silent killers can empower us to make informed decisions and save our lives.

Kuwait Times: What is the main difference between a heart attack and a cardiac arrest?

Dr Mohammad Ebrahim: A heart attack is an issue with the arteries feeding the heart muscle (pumping problem), while a cardiac arrest is an issue with the electrical system of the heart that may lead to sudden cardiac death.

KT: What are the common signs and symptoms of both a heart attack and a cardiac arrest?

Dr Ebrahim: The common symptoms and signs of a heart attack are chest pain and shortness of breath. Patients often have specific risk factors such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, high cholesterol, smoking, etc. Whereas a sudden cardiac arrest causes sudden loss of consciousness, followed by irregular or no breathing, seizure and color change.

KT: Are there specific tests that need to be done to diagnose a heart attack compared to a cardiac arrest?

Dr Ebrahim: Regarding heart attacks, one needs an electrocardiogram, echocardiogram, stress test, nuclear test, CT angiography and cardiac catheterization. However, for sudden cardiac arrest survivors, they need to undergo similar tests, in addition to cardiac MRI and genetic testing.

KT: What are the common causes of a heart attack and a cardiac arrest?

Dr Ebrahim: Heart attacks happen due to coronary artery disease (a disease in the vessels that feed the heart muscle), where a plaque formation causes narrowing of the vessel lumen. On the other hand, cardiac arrest may be related to coronary



Dr Mohammad Ebrahim

artery disease if beyond 40 years of age. However, if the patient is young then they need to be evaluated by an inherited arrhythmia expert to rule out/in genetic cardiac disease that may predispose the patient to cardiac arrest. Often there is family history of other members with cardiac disease in the young individuals.

KT: Do treatment methods and medical care differ for a heart attack and a cardiac arrest?

Dr Ebrahim: Absolutely, if there is an established coronary artery disease, then cardiac catheterization and/or cardiac



surgery might be required to open up the narrowed vessels and restore normal blood flow into the heart muscles. While for sudden cardiac arrest survivors, depending on the specific cause, medica-

tions plus heart denervation surgery (removal of the nerves onto the heart), while insertion of a pacemaker or implantable cardiac defibrillator may be required in more extreme cases.

Arab forum calls for helping youth find employment

BEIRUT: The Arab Youth Forum for Economic and Social Empowerment recommended on Saturday to support and encourage entrepreneurship and opportunities in Arab markets, develop economies and mitigate the migration of young people to other regions of the world.

At the end of its work in Beirut, the Forum recommended submitting its recommendations to

the League of Arab States, the most prominent of which is improving education systems and developing comprehensive policies that support youth employment.

The forum stressed the need for partnership between governments, donor countries, employers, and workers in order to improve the level of employment in Arab countries.

"It is important to provide appropriate work environments and policies that support the participation of people with special needs as well as their inclusion in various practical sectors," the forum added.

Their statement called for creating opportunities for Arab youth by "identifying the most important skills required, how to exploit them for the appropriate job and establishing a platform that brings

together universities as well as students in the labor market." The forum concluded its recommendations on the importance of providing voluntary community opportunities to hone the personal skills of young people to prove their abilities and facilitate their access to the decision-making process.

The Lebanese Ministry of Youth and Sports along with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) organized over three days the work of the Arab Forum. Forty-six young men and women representing the 16 Arab countries, including Kuwait, which was represented by the (Public Authority for Youth) headed by Jassim Al-Baghli, the Chairman of the International Relations Committee in the Kuwaiti Youth Council, Abdul Rahman Al-Saeidi, and member of the Youth Council, Hessa Al-Nuwaif. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Acting Undersecretary Lamia Al-Melhem speaks at an event held by the higher education ministry for scholarship students on July 11, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Registration for vacancy scholarship plan opens

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Higher Education announced the opening of applications for the vacancy plan for foreign scholarships from high school graduates (unified system) or its equivalent in its science and art streams who obtained secondary school certificates in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 through the ministry's website.

Anyone looking to register in human medicine and dentistry in foreign countries must submit their IELTS test result with a minimum score of 6.5. Acting Undersecretary Lamia Al-Melhem said.

A score of at least 6 in all sections of the test is required, or its equivalent in the TOEFL test. Medical specialties in the Arab countries are in accordance with the conditions announced in the vacancy plan, she added.

Melhem said that in the event that those accepted in the scholarship plan for the next academic year or the plan of direct dispatch of medical specialties or excellence missions wish to apply to the vacancy plan, they must withdraw from that mission so that they can register. If they are not accepted in the vacancy plan, the seat from which they were withdrawn will not be returned.

Melhem stressed that the student is not entitled to register in the vacancy plan if he is registered in any of the other higher education institutions such as Kuwait University, Abdullah Al-Salem University, the scholarship plan outside Kuwait or the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. The Ministry has the right to cancel registration in case of violation of this condition.

Students must review the specializations included in the plan and their scientific description and university admission requirements for each specialization. The screening will be according to the lowest percentage that has been accepted for each specialty in the annual scholarship plan, except for the specialties of human medicine and dentistry, she clarified.

She stressed that all male and female students applying for the vacancy plan must review the registration conditions, as the student's registration is considered canceled if the required documents specified on the ministry's website are not entered or completed before the end of the specified date for registration. Applications are open from July 23 until July 25. — KUNA

MoH assigns 3 officials to acting leadership roles

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued three ministerial decisions appointing ministry officials to fill vacant positions within the health ministry. The decisions are effective July 23, 2023.

Dr Al-Munther Al-Hasawi was appointed acting assistant undersecretary for public health affairs in addition to his duties as head of the AIDS office and his position as an internist and infectious diseases consultant.

Dr Ahmad Assad was appointed acting assistant undersecretary for dental affairs in addition to his job as head of Jahra Specialized dental center.

The minister also appointed Dr Nadia Ahmad Jumaa, in addition to her position as head of the General Medical Council, as acting assistant undersecretary for health care affairs. Health care affairs include primary health care, special needs affairs, the department of prevention and control



Dr Ahmad Assad

of chronic non-communicable diseases, school health affairs and the elderly health service department.

Last April, Awadhi, who was also health minister in the previous government, appointed at least six other people to fill vacant leadership positions in the ministry as "acting" officials. By definition, an acting official is only there to fill the position for a temporary period of time until a proper replacement is found for an exiting or retiring official.

The phenomenon of hiring acting officials has been rampant in ministries



Dr Al-Munther Al-Hasawi

over the past few years, with nearly 2,000 leadership positions vacant across several ministries in late 2022.

According to local media, the reasons for the failure to fill supervisory positions are many, such as the multiple dissolutions of Parliament and government resignations, during which appointments of employees to new roles are suspended. The repeated handovers of ministries to new top officials means that these officials are continuously focused on attending to urgent matters, which don't include searching for candidates to perma-



Dr Nadia Ahmad Jumaa

nently fill vacant positions. It can also be attributed to a failure in retaining employees who are qualified enough to fill the shoes of their predecessors.

Critics say that work in multiple government agencies has been hindered due to these vacancies. The current situation leaves officials serving in multiple positions, which requires their attention to more than one file. A recent report by a local newspaper says that without permanently filling leadership positions, it would be difficult to hold officials accountable in case of mismanagement or shortcomings.

Municipalities intensify inspection campaigns

KUWAIT: The Jahra Governorate Municipality announced that it removed 80 abandoned vehicles during the month of July alone.

The public relations department at the Kuwait Municipality published the achievements of Jahra Governorate Municipality branch during July, which included citations, abandoned vehicles removal and general cleanliness. The report includes the municipality's efforts in dealing with anything blocking the roads and distorting order.

Director of Cleanliness and Road occupancy department in Jahra Mohammad Al-Jabaa said inspectors made several field tours in all areas of the governorate resulting in the removal of 80 abandoned vehicles and 30 violating food trucks, in addition to issuing 90 cleanliness citations. The department asked citizens and residents to call (139) or contact them through their website in case of any complaint related to the municipality's work.

Other municipalities have been cracking down on violations in recent weeks. The Farwaniya Governorate Municipality carried out field tours across the area, with one in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, according to media reports. Without specifying numbers, the municipality said that it removed abandoned vehicles, issued citations and arrested roaming salesmen.

Earlier this month, the Public Hygiene and Road Works Department at the Ahmadi Governorate Municipality issued 165 public hygiene violations during field tours. Officials also towed 103 aban-



KUWAIT: Municipality workers remove an abandoned vehicle in Jahra.

doned cars, boats, mobile convenience stores and scrap containers. They placed 189 stickers on cars and boats in preparation for their removal after the end of the specified period.

Tightening supervision

The intensified campaigns come as the government is looking for ways to enhance the municipality's supervisory role. On July 9, State Minister for Municipality Affairs, State Minister for Communications Affairs Fahad Al-Shula issued a ministerial decision to form a committee chaired by Municipality Director General and seven members who are Deputy Directors General to present a detailed study and proposals to activate the su-

perisory role of the municipality to achieve the maximum degree of field supervision over the municipality activities to ensure compliance with law and limit violations.

The committee will review all legislations, rules and decisions related to municipality activities in the field of cleanliness work and supervisory over construction, and violations of safety rules and encroachments on State property to check its efficiency in achieving the required field supervision. The committee will also review the current mechanism, from both administrative and legal perspectives, of field supervision over these activities to see the effectiveness of the procedures, and the short comings if they are present and propose solutions for them.

Experts call for better financial education to help economy grow

Allowing expats to invest, setting minimum wage to improve situation: Expert

By Munirah Al-Fayez

KUWAIT: As the stress of a coming recession rises, more and more Kuwaitis and people from neighboring countries are looking for ways to save and invest. Countries are trying to go through the recession unscathed. Kuwait Times interviewed Saudi and Kuwaiti consultants to ask them what they believe will be the best course of action to take when planning to save and invest and improve a country's economy.

Ranim Machhadi, a Saudi investment and marketing consultant, explained that it is well known internationally that countries in the Arabian Gulf are very consumerist, especially when it comes to food, clothes and other daily use items. According to Machhadi, for Gulf residents to be able to save more money, they should first pay back all their debts and stop buying things they do not need, like clothes and décor items. They should stop buying things they do not have the money for, like for example a car, by taking out a loan to buy them.

The economy of Gulf countries is very good, she added. "Not a lot needs to be changed. Gulf countries are always growing and improving. In general, for any country's economy to grow, there needs to be support from the country itself. There need to be job opportunities and companies for people to work at, and people in that country need to be ready to work and grow," Machhadi said, saying she strongly believes there needs to be good education, new studies, international growth of local companies and strong tourism in a country for its economy to prosper.

For an average resident in the GCC countries to invest, Machhadi explained, the best way is to first gain knowledge and educate themselves on the world of investing. Also, always invest based on knowledge, because, counter to popular belief, "there is no luck



Abdulaziz Al-Darweesh



Ranim Machhadi

in this field. You need to know what you are doing."

For a person to become a better saver and investor in the long run, Machhadi said they need a daily routine. "Waking up early helps me be more productive. It has also been proven that exercising makes you smarter, more focused and more disciplined. Discipline, which is doing things even when they are difficult or when you do not feel like it, is the number one trait for success. Discipline makes you achieve a lot and it makes you more productive in the long run," she said.

Abdulaziz Al-Darweesh, a Kuwaiti business consultant who also has a business-oriented podcast about financing, business and studies, said a society becomes consumerist if they have disposable income. Darweesh explains that in Kuwait, people are used to living in their parents' house, even when they start working, and there is no financial awareness. Therefore, Kuwaitis feel they would rather use their money for entertainment, because they probably do not have the knowledge of business or investment.

Darweesh states that an average Kuwaiti needs to educate himself. He explains how a person



should have a monthly budget, make a savings account and invest some of the money that is left. His belief is that Kuwaitis should not spend as much money on restaurants, since "according to studies, 82 percent of Kuwaiti youth eat at a restaurant twice a week". Also, Darweesh said the government and private companies should lower their spending to reduce inflation, which will result in Kuwaitis having a stronger income.

For the Kuwaiti economy to grow, according to Darweesh, we need to change the 'tamalluk' law which does not allow non-Kuwaitis to own property

or invest in Kuwait. Also, there needs to be a minimum wage in Kuwait, he said. "Having a minimum wage would make it less expensive to recruit Kuwaitis compared to non-Kuwaitis, and of course, the Kuwaitization rule needs to be abolished," he added.

Darweesh said he believes lack of education and awareness are the biggest problems in the Kuwaiti community and the root cause of every problem in Kuwait. Education, he explains, is what lowers the number of problems in a country. "If the quality of education improves in Kuwait, every problem would be solved."



BAGHDAD: Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid is seen with Kuwait's Ambassador Tareq Al-Faraj on Sunday. — KUNA

Foreign Minister to visit Iraq next week

BAGHDAD: Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid on Sunday discussed with Kuwait's Ambassador Tareq Al-Faraj the upcoming visit of Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Both sides stressed the importance of coordination, dialogue, and exchanging of visits between the two countries to enhance bilateral relations and resolve outstanding issues, noted an Iraqi Presidency statement. It quoted Ambassador Al-Faraj as saying that Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah's upcoming visit will be by the end of July. On July 9, Faraj discussed with Iraqi counterpart Fuad Husain a host of issues including the visit. — KUNA

MP group proposes law to cap expat communities at 10%

KUWAIT: A parliamentary group is seeking to revive a proposal submitted in the last National Assembly aimed at addressing the demographics imbalance in the country.

The group members said they will appeal to the government to put it into action and not be complacent, especially since the Supreme Committee for Addressing Demographics headed by Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah announced that reducing the number of expatriates in the country and getting rid of excess marginal labor, has become a top priority for the Kuwaiti government.

The parliamentary group in question, which includes among its members former Oil Minister Badr Al-Mulla, assured the government that its proposal, if approved, would correct the demographic structure, and "the imbalances of the current composition", which the group said is one of the most glaring problems that the country has suffered from in recent years.

The effects of this problem, the group said, have emerged clearly and dangerously at the time of the spread of COVID-19, "as it turned out that there is a lot of marginalized labor."

The group pointed out that the proposal suggests a law that "determines the maximum percentage of other nationalities in relation to the number of citizens and prohibits the recruitment of any person from large expat communities in Kuwait, especially those with population densities exceeding that of Kuwaiti citizens."

According to the law, the number of people from almost each expat community should not exceed 10 percent of the number of Kuwaitis.

"The demographics do not stop at the limits of the weight of the number of citizens in relation to the number of foreigners, but rather show an imbalance in the weight of those nationalities in number relative to Kuwaitis, to the extent that some nationalities approached the number of citizens, which carries with it a security risk," they added.

The group added: "the proposal comes due to the legislator's fear that some public officials will approve exceptions to exceed these stipulated percentages."

The group said it's also keen on criminalizing going over the percentages suggested in the draft law.

ister General Ali Mahmud Abbas and General Intelligence Director, Major General Husam Louka. Jordan's delegation was led by the chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, Major General Yousef Huneiti, and General Intelligence director, Major General Ahmed Husni, the Jordanian ministry said. The talks "went over the issue of the parties that organize, run and carry out smuggling operations across borders to Jordan, as well as necessary measures to... confront this escalating danger to the entire region", the ministry said.

Jordanian security forces have tightened border controls in recent years and occasionally announce thwarted drugs and weapons smuggling attempts from Syria. There has been increasing regional engagement with Assad's government since its readmission to the Arab League in May, ending more than a decade of isolation since civil war erupted in Syria in 2011. — AFP

Job seekers doubt effectiveness of interview questions

By Noor Abdulaziz

KUWAIT: Job interviews are inevitable when it comes to employing the candidate most suitable for the job and is a vital factor of the hiring process. The interview enables these professionals to determine whether the applicant's experience and skills as well as personality meet the requirements.

"When looking for suitable candidates, we often look for someone who exudes enthusiasm, communication skills, suitability and is capable of upholding a certain level of small talk, as having a suitable personality is a vital characteristic as well," a general manager of a bank revealed. However, many candidates feel interviews are pointless, as they do not gauge the skills that will be important for the job.

"I once applied for a PR job where one of the employers asked me what my approach would be to describing a database to a 10-year-old child," 28-year-old Basel said while laughing, "and he was dead serious too." Many argue that a lot of these interviews share a common factor, which is asking the most infamous question of all time: Where do you see yourself in five years?

"I was asked that very exact question," 24-year-old Mahaa recalled. "As if anyone navigates the world with such certainty. And if you do not give them an interesting answer, they will most likely perceive you negatively. How does this have anything to do with the job I'm applying for? It seems employers think



that these questions are the gateway to a candidate's soul," she added.

Moreover, candidates believe some interviewers disregard some of the candidates' potential as possible employees by asking questions that do not do justice to their skillfulness. Mahaa's friend Salma said most of the job interviews she's attended felt "fake". "They ask questions that simply do not prove that you're capable for the job and you're mostly focused on saying the right thing regardless of it being true," she said.

Another candidate, 42-year-old Hassan, adds to the discussion by reminiscing about his earlier years dealing with the job interview process. "I remember they sat me down and very sternly asked me what my favorite football team was and why. When I asked how was this relevant to the job I was applying for, I was told later that it was to test my communication skills. While this might have been reasonable, asking me questions regarding my area of expertise would have been more useful for them," he said. "Job interviews should mainly be for screening people's cognitive skills regarding the job they have applied for," he argued.



30 people to go to prison for traffic violations

KUWAIT: The General Department Public Relations and Security Media at the Ministry of Interior stated that the Traffic Court issued prison sentences against 30 people between March and May of this year.

The ministry issued other sentences ranging from fines, withdrawal of their driver's license for

a month, in addition to other violations stipulated in the Penal Code, after they were caught for reckless driving as well as negligence in driving and endangering the lives of others. The Traffic Violations Investigation Department referred them to the Traffic Court.

It is part of the efforts of the traffic and operations sector to arrest outlaws and violators of the traffic law and refer them to the traffic court, in order to take legal measures against them.

The department stressed the continuation of security and traffic campaigns throughout the country to arrest violators of the traffic law and rules, as well as to deter anyone who does not comply with the laws and regulations stipulated in the traffic law.

News in Brief

Court sends 'Quran therapist'
to prison for sexual assault

KUWAIT: The Criminal Court sentenced a "Quran therapist" of Egyptian nationality to five years in prison for assaulting three underage Egyptian girls. The man will also be deported after the execution of the sentence. The incident occurred when the father of the three girls visited the defendant in his residence in the Mahboula area to perform Ruqyah on his daughters to rid them of envy. Ruqyah is the recitation of specific Quranic verses or saheeh hadith which are known for seeking refuge in Allah. The verses, which don't need to be read by a sheikh or therapist, are said to be a source of healing, specifically from ailments and sickness, for protection from the evil eye and exorcism of Jinns, or from sihr (meaning black magic or witchcraft). The girls came out crying and informed their father that the therapist did immoral things and harassed them. The father of the girls filed a report to the Ministry of Interior. After investigations the case was referred to the prosecution and then the court, which made its advanced ruling.

Police arrests 11 men
at massage centers

KUWAIT: The General Directorate of Criminal Investigation, represented by the Department of Public Morals Protection, arrested five men of Asian nationality on charges of practicing immoral acts at a massage center in Salmiya area in exchange for sums of money. They were referred to the competent authorities to take all necessary legal measures against them, according to the public relations and media department at the interior ministry. The arrest comes after a similar incident last week where six men of Asian nationality were arrested in another massage center on similar charges. This totals to about 11 arrests of a similar nature within the week. The public relations department stressed increased security deployment and intensification of control in all locations to maintain maximum security and safety in the country. The General Department of Relations and Security Media called on citizens and residents not to hesitate to report any negative phenomena or violations of the law by calling the emergency phone 112, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A screen shows the time and temperature, which neared 50 degrees Celsius in the afternoon, in Kuwait City on July 23, 2023. Temperatures are expected to soar to new heights next week, according to Al-Ujairi Scientific Center. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Official visit, charity projects symbolize
Palestine's position in Kuwaitis' hearts

'Positions of the State of Kuwait are the pride of every Arab'



A monument in remembrance of Kuwaiti martyrs in Rummanah Village in Jenin Province.



RAMALLAH: Charge d'Affaires of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Jordan Mubarak Al-Hajri honored by officials of Jenin Province. — KUNA photos

RAMALLAH: The Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation (KAPF), in collaboration with the Kuwait Relief Society, distributed 2,400 food baskets to needy people and medical devices to patients in the West Bank city of Nablus. Charge d'Affaires of the Kuwait Embassy in Jordan Mubarak Al-Hajri told KUNA on Saturday that the distribution of the aid aims to support the resilience of the Palestinian people. He pointed out that more Kuwait aid campaigns would follow.

Kuwaiti charitable activities cover all the West Bank governorates including the occupied Jerusalem as well as Gaza Strip, he said.

"Kuwaiti people and leadership view the Palestinian people as one with our people and we believe they are worthy of our assistance," he said. Head of the Solidarity Charitable Association, Alaa Maqbool, said: "More than 2,400 food parcels were distributed to the families of orphans and the needy registered with the association."

Maqbool added that this project worth \$115,000 came under difficult economic conditions that Palestine, and Nablus in particular, suffer from due to the repeated occupation siege. The distributed medical devices included wheelchairs, portable oxygen concentrator machines, ventilators, hospital beds and prosthetics.

"The aid warmed the hearts of the beneficiaries and brought happiness to the souls of every Palestinian. These donations will have a good impact in alleviating the suffering of our people," said Maqbool.

Maqbool pointed out that the association, which was founded in 1956, had also received grants provided by the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development in the State of Kuwait. "The association provides monthly financial guarantees to the orphans of the governorate registered with it, in addition to helping humanitarian cases suffering from difficult economic and health conditions," he said.

Maqbool expressed his hope that Kuwaiti support for the association, which cares for about 2,000 families with 5,000 orphans, will continue, praising the official and popular Kuwaiti support at various levels for Palestine and its just cause, stressing that "the positions of the State of Kuwait are the pride of every Arab."

Sign of deep relations

The Kuwaiti diplomat and several other embassy officials began their visit to Palestine last week, where they met President Mahmoud Abbas and other senior officials. Abbas briefed the Kuwaiti officials on the latest situation in the Palestinian territories and the Zionist occupation force's practices.

"Palestine has been present and well-seated in the minds and hearts of the Kuwaiti people, as well as in our curricula, newspapers and discussions," he told KUNA last week.

Hajri said the visit came amidst tough circum-

stances experienced by the Palestinian people, especially in Jenin Province, where people have been under recurrent attacks by Zionist occupation forces. He added that the tour mainly aimed at delivering a message of Kuwait's unwavering and persistent support to the defenseless Palestinian people.

Speaking highly of the visit as a sign of deep relations between Kuwait and Palestine, the diplomat quoted the Palestinian leader as underscoring Kuwait's central and significant backing to the Palestinian cause. The Kuwaiti diplomats also met with Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Hussein Al-Sheikh and Prime Minister's Advisor for Arab and Islamic Funds Nasser Qattami, who appreciated Kuwait's relentless solidarity with the Palestinian people and their just issue.

Commemorating Kuwaiti sacrifices

A monument in remembrance of Kuwaiti martyrs, who were killed while defending Palestine against Zionist occupation forces, had been erected in Rummanah Village in Jenin Province. A medical center, named after Kuwaiti martyr Sheikh Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, is also to be launched soon in Rummanah Village in Jenin Province. Rummanah Council Chief Hasan Subeihat told KUNA that the center was named after Sheikh Fahad Al-Sabah in remembrance of his struggle and participation in battles against Zionist occupation forces in the north of Palestine.

He said the center's area is 1,500 square meters, and it is an initiative of the residents of the village. He lauded sacrifices of martyr Sheikh Fahad Al-Sabah for the sake of Palestine. Meanwhile, head of Wafaa Capacity Building and Microfinance Mohasen Atawneh told KUNA that the Kuwaiti delegation's visit was briefed closely to the Kuwaiti-supported projects carried out in Palestine, within the framework of improving the situation of the needy. Kuwait stands side by side with brothers everywhere and in Palestine in particular, he said, adding that President Abbas and officials he met stressed the Kuwait's pivotal role in backing Palestine's cause. Furthermore, Hajri stressed that the visit came during the difficult circumstances Palestinian people are facing, especially in Jenin, which is subject to repeated attacks by the Zionist occupation. He noted that he carried a message to the Palestinian people that "you are not alone and the State of Kuwait stands by you".

The delegation also met with Palestinian Authority General Intelligence Services chief Majed Faraj who described the visit as important. He said in a statement that the visit came to boost the historical ties between the two countries and discuss means of promoting cooperation and enhancing relations between the two sides. Kuwaitis have great positions in the hearts of Palestinians, he said, referring to continued coordination and consultation between the two countries. — KUNA



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Indian women seek reprisals over 'heinous' abuse video

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KHARTOUM: Smoke billows in the distance around the Khartoum Bahri district amid ongoing fighting. — AFP

Hunger stalks war-hit Khartoum

Rockets, shells kill 20 Sudanese civilians

WAD MADANI, Sudan: In a war-devastated district of Sudan's capital, Abbas Mohammed Babiker says he and his family have only been able to eat once a day. Now even that is in doubt, but on Sunday a citizens' support group issued an urgent appeal for donations to help people like him.

"We only have enough for two more days," Babiker said from Khartoum North, where residents said at least one person, a local musician, has already died from hunger. Since April 15, battles between Sudan's army led by Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), headed by Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, have killed more than 3,900 people, according to the latest toll from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

More than 2.6 million people have been internally displaced, mostly from Khartoum, the International Organization for Migration said. Thousands who remain in the capital, particularly in Khartoum North, are trapped at home without water since the local water station was damaged at the start of the war.

Residents say there is only intermittent electricity and food has nearly run out. Across the country, about one-third of the population already faced hun-

ger even before the war began, said the UN's World Food Programme. Despite the security challenges, the agency says it has reached more than 1.4 million people with emergency food aid as needs intensify.

"With the fighting, there is no market anymore and anyway we have no money," said another resident of Khartoum North, Essam Abbas. To help them, the local "resistance committee", a pro-democracy neighborhood group, issued its emergency appeal.

"We have to support each other, give food and money and distribute to those around us," the committee wrote on Facebook. In adjacent Omdurman, Khartoum's other battle-scarred sister city, locally known violinist Khaled Senhoury "died from hunger" last week, his friends wrote on Facebook.

In his own online posts, Senhoury had said he was unable to leave home because of the fighting and had tried to hang on with the supplies that he had. It wasn't enough.

Meanwhile, at least 20 Sudanese civilians have been killed by rocket fire on residential areas of one of Darfur's main cities and by shelling near hospitals in North Kordofan state, lawyers and medics said Saturday. The doctors' union said that since Friday

morning shells had struck near four hospitals in the North Kordofan state capital El-Obeid, killing four civilians and wounding 45.

In the South Darfur state capital Nyala, the local lawyers' union said that rocket fire had killed 16 civilians. The Darfur region, already ravaged by brutal conflict in the early 2000s, has seen some of the worst of the violence since fighting erupted in mid-April between Sudanese rival generals vying for power.

"During an exchange of rocket fire between the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), 16 civilians were killed on Friday, according to a preliminary toll," the lawyers' union said. And at least one man was killed by a sniper, it added.

In the West Darfur capital of El Geneina, near Chad, snipers have reportedly been targeting residents from rooftops since fighting began, and tens of thousands have fled across the border. The war, which broke out in the capital Khartoum on April 15 and spread to Darfur later that month, has left at least 3,000 dead across Sudan, according to a conservative estimate.

It pits army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan against his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, com-

mander of the paramilitary RSF. Fighting in Darfur, an RSF stronghold, has recently concentrated around Nyala, after brutal clashes in El Geneina where the United Nations had reported atrocities. Battles have also continued in and around Khartoum. Residents reported on Saturday the first army air strikes on villages in the Al-Jazirah state, just south of the capital. The fertile land between the White Nile and Blue Nile rivers now hosts several hundred thousands of the estimated 3.3 million people the war has displaced. If fighting expands into Al-Jazirah, they may be forced to flee again.

The humanitarian workers who support them would have to move as well, but fear the many bureaucratic challenges in relocating their operations.

Analysts say both warring sides would like to see the battlefield expand. "The RSF has held the upper hand in Khartoum since the early days of the war, but that advantage is only growing more apparent," the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank said. The army on July 15 launched a major offensive in North Khartoum, flattening entire suburban neighborhoods with air raids, "but it failed spectacularly," the ICG said. — AFP

Sri Lanka on alert as activists mark anti-Tamil riots

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka tightened security on Sunday as activists lit oil lamps in the capital Colombo commemorating the hundreds killed in 1983 anti-Tamil riots that fuelled a deadly civil war. "Let's not forget the slaughter of Tamils," read a banner carried by members of North-South Solidarity, a group of rights defenders from the country's majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil communities.

Several dozen activists lit coconut oil lamps and candles outside Colombo's main cemetery, where the inter-communal violence started 40 years ago.

The then-government attempted a mass burial at the cemetery for 13 Sinhalese soldiers killed in a

Tamil rebel land mine attack on July 23, 1983. Relatives demanded individual funerals for the soldiers and clashed with police, before turning their attacks on Tamils and Tamil-owned shops in the area.

What began as a spontaneous backlash against Tamils degenerated into state-led deadly violence that lasted six days. Official estimates place the riot death toll between 400 to 600, but Tamil groups say the actual number is in the thousands.

There have been no prosecutions, even though some members of the then-government were seen leading the Sinhalese mobs. At Sunday's commemoration, authorities deployed a heavily armed troops that outnumbered demonstrators, while an AFP journalist saw police kicking and stomping on oil lamps placed along the pavement just outside the cemetery.

Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe has cracked down on dissent since he came to power last year. His United National Party was in power when the 1983 riots broke out.

The then-president Junius Jayewardene, Wickrem-



COLOMBO: Sri Lankan rights activists scuffle with police during a protest outside the main cemetery in Colombo on July 23, 2023. — AFP

esinghe's uncle, is widely accused of not doing anything to prevent the violence. A Tamil insurgency demanding a separate state for their ethnic minority developed into a full blown civil war that eventually claimed the lives of at least 100,000 people, before the rebel leadership was defeated in May 2009. — AFP

Netanyahu fitted with pacemaker

JERUSALEM: Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was "doing great" Sunday following surgery to fit a pacemaker, as his hard-right government's controversial judicial overhaul plan neared a key vote in parliament. Tens of thousands of protesters have again taken to the streets against Netanyahu's proposal to curb the powers of judges, which critics fear will undermine Zionist entitly's democracy, while lawmakers started discussing a major plank of the package.

A vote is expected in the Knesset on Monday on a bill that would limit Supreme Court judges' ability to strike down government decisions they deem "unreasonable". As the crisis looked set to come to a head, Ne-

tanyahu's office announced overnight that the 73-year-old would undergo surgery to fit a pacemaker, days after he had been hospitalized for a reported spell of dizziness.

Netanyahu's government, which includes far-right and ultra-Orthodox Jewish allies, argues that the proposed reforms will prevent overreach by unelected judges and ensure a better balance of power.

Opponents accuse Netanyahu, who has been fighting corruption charges in court, of a conflict of interest and some protesters have labeled him the "crime minister". "We have to keep up the pressure, we have to safeguard our democracy," said one demonstrator. Amir Goldstein, who had spent the night in a protest camp outside parliament.

Scheduled trips Netanyahu had been due to make to Turkey and Cyprus this week have been postponed because of his medical condition, but no new dates had yet been fixed, said his office, where Deputy Prime Minister Yariv Levin temporarily assumed the premier's duties. — AFP

Four policemen shot dead in Iran's southeast

TEHRAN: Four Iranian policemen were killed on Sunday after attackers fired on a patrol in the restive southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan near the border with Pakistan, state media reported. "Three policemen were martyred in a terrorist attack on a police patrol unit," state news agency IRNA reported.

A fourth died later after succumbing to his wounds, state television reported.

The circumstances of the attack were not immediately clear. Unrest in the impoverished Sistan-Baluchistan province has involved drugs-smuggling gangs, rebels from the Baluchi minority and Sunni Muslim extremist groups.

On July 8, two policemen and four assailants were killed in a grenade and gun battle in the province during an attack later claimed by the jihadist Jaish Al-Adl group. In May, five Iranian border guards died in clashes with an armed group in Saravan southeast of Zahedan, the provincial capital of Sistan-Baluchistan.

State media reported at the time that the attack was carried out by "a terrorist group that was seeking to infiltrate the country" but whose members "fled the scene after suffering injuries". In late May, IRNA quoted a police official, Qassem Rezaee, as saying "Taliban forces" had shot at an Iranian police station in Sistan-Baluchistan, a drought-parched region which also borders Afghanistan. The two countries have been arguing over water rights.

Zahedan was also the scene of protests that flared last September, with dozens of deaths, over the alleged rape of a teenage girl by a police officer. — AFP

Iraq offers to mediate end to Yemen war

BAGHDAD: Iraq has offered to mediate between warring parties in Yemen in an effort to end the country's years-long war, Iraq's top diplomat said at a press conference on Sunday.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein put forward the proposal during a visit from his Yemeni counterpart. Iran-backed Houthi rebels seized the capital Sanaa in 2014, before a Saudi-led military coalition intervened the following year on the side of the country's internationally recognized government. Hundreds of thousands of people have died in the fighting or from indirect causes such as lack of food in what the United Nations has called one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

A six-month truce brokered by the United Nations expired in October last year, but fighting has largely remained on hold. "Currently, there is an unofficial truce. In practice, there is some form of ceasefire... We hope this situation leads to dialogue between all Yemeni parties," Hussein emphasized during a press conference with Yemeni Foreign Minister Ahmed bin Mubarak. "Iraq is ready to help in this matter. We have good relations with all parties. We can use our influence for stability and security in Yemen, and we can act on a regional level," he stated.

Baghdad has consistently tried to highlight its role as a regional mediator, and hosted several rounds of relatively low-level talks between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia from April 2021.

In March, Riyadh and Tehran announced a resumption of diplomatic relations in a surprise deal brokered by Beijing. The reconciliation raised hopes for peace in Yemen. "Unfortunately, for now, we have not seen any direct impact of this agreement on the situation in Yemen," the Yemeni minister said in his speech. "But we remain hopeful," he added. "We believe the time has come to put an end to this war in Yemen." In April Riyadh's ambassador to Yemen, Mohammed Al-Jaber, travelled to Sanaa as part of a plan to "stabilize" the truce. — AFP

International

Russia strikes Odesa cathedral

Putin claims Ukraine's counteroffensive 'failed'

KYIV, Ukraine: Russia's latest strike on Odesa on Sunday killed two people and severely damaged a historic Orthodox cathedral, drawing a vow of retaliation from Ukraine's leader. The 18th century Transfiguration Cathedral, the biggest Orthodox church in Odesa, lies within the UNESCO-protected historic city centre.

The strike on the port city, which Russia has pounded since quitting the Black Sea grain deal last week, came just hours before Russian President Vladimir Putin met his Belarus counterpart for talks. Putin claimed Kyiv's counteroffensive had "failed" as he met his closest ally, Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko, in Saint Petersburg — the first time since Minsk helped end a revolt by Russian Wagner fighters. On the Black Sea in Odesa, locals looked in disbelief as the Transfiguration Cathedral — originally built in 1794 under imperial Russian rule — was badly damaged.

Clergymen rescued icons from rubble inside the badly damaged shrine, which was demolished under Stalin in 1936 and rebuilt in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ukraine said it had been "destroyed twice: by Stalin and Putin."

It said the cathedral strike was a "war crime." President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed retaliation: "They will definitely feel this," he said. Images showed smashed mosaics on the cathedral floor as workers cleared the rubble. The outside of the building appeared intact.

"There was a direct hit to the cathedral, it completely damaged three altars," Father Myroslav, the assistant rector of the cathedral said. He said icons were pulled out from under the rubble and that the shrine is "very badly damaged inside", with "only the bell tower intact."

Clergymen said a security guard and a priest readying for a morning liturgy were inside during the attack but both survived. Russia blamed the cathedral damage on Ukrainian air defence. Moscow said it had hit all its intended targets in the Odesa strike, claiming the sites were being used to prepare "terrorist acts" against Russia.

But on the ground, locals said Russia had hit ordinary residential areas.

'Just simple beauty salons'

"We have ordinary residential buildings here, where people live," a woman who owns a beauty salon nearby, Tetiana, told AFP. "There are no military facilities here. Just simple beauty salons, a marine agency, a groomer. Nothing military here at all." Anzhelika Domanska said she ran with her neighbors when she saw the cathedral burning.

The strike came a year after a missile had hit her house in nearby Mykolaiv. "It is not a pleasant anniversary," she said. Russia launched a wave of attacks on the Black Sea port this week, after exiting a deal allowing the safe passage of cargo ships between Moscow, Kyiv, Istanbul and the UN.

Ukraine has vowed to find a way to continue exports from the ports and said Sunday repeated Russian strikes on Odesa this week were an attempt to "prevent and neutralize international efforts to restore the functioning of the "grain corridor."

Putin meets Lukashenko

As Odesa cleared rubble from the Russian strikes, Putin hosted his ally Lukashenko in his native city of Saint Petersburg, claiming that the Ukrainian counteroffensive to take back land captured by Russia had failed. "There is no counteroffensive," Lukashenko said at the meeting, before being interrupted by Putin:

"There is one, but it has failed." The Belarus strongman now hosts Wagner fighters on his territory, after brokering a deal that convinced its leader Yevgeny Prigozhin to end a march on Moscow and exile himself to Belarus.

Kronstadt walk

"They are asking to go West, ask me for permission... to go on a trip to Warsaw, to Rzeszow," Lukashenko said, referring to Wagner fighters, to Putin,



ODESA, Ukraine: This photograph taken on July 23, 2023, shows the destructed Transfiguration Cathedral as a result of a missile strike in Odesa, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

who smiled. "But of course, I am keeping them in central Belarus, like we agreed". "We are controlling what is happening (with Wagner)," he said, thanking Putin for vowing to defend Belarus should it be attacked.

The comments came two days after Putin said western Poland was a "gift" from Stalin at the end of World War II, when victorious allies decided on the contours of post-war Europe. Warsaw had summoned the Russian ambassador over the remarks. After their talks, Putin and Lukashenko greeted crowds in the naval town and base of Kronstadt on

Kotlin Island in a rare walkabout.

Russia's Kommersant newspaper posted a video of Putin and Lukashenko posing for photographs with people, with bodyguards standing nearby. Asked about quarantine rules which the Russian leader has been keeping up strictly since the pandemic, Putin replied: "People are more important than quarantine." Several days after Wagner had ended its mutiny last month, Putin met with adoring crowds in Dagestan in an apparent show of popularity. — AFP

Spain votes in snap election with right favored to win

MADRID: Spain went to the polls Sunday in an early general election in which the conservative Popular Party (PP) was tipped to beat Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's Socialists but likely to need the far-right to govern.

Final opinion polls allowed under Spanish law published on Monday suggest the PP was on track to win the most seats in the 350-seat parliament but fall short of a working parliamentary majority. That could force the PP to form a coalition with Vox, giving a far-right party a share of power at the national level for the first time since the end of the decades-long dictatorship of General Francisco Franco in 1975.

Anti-immigration and anti-feminist Vox is part of a Europe-wide trend of far-right parties gaining support at the ballot box. The far-right governs alone in Hungary and in coalition with the centre-right in Italy and Finland. Polling stations opened at 9 am (0700 GMT) and are set to close

at 8 pm (1800 GMT), with near-final results expected several hours later.

Brauli Munoz, a 53-year-old teacher, said he was hoping the election would result in another coalition government between the Socialists and the far-left. "I think it is the best option in terms of training for the future of our students," he told AFP after voting in Barcelona.

Sanchez, in office since 2018, appealed for a "historic turnout" to produce a "strong government" after he cast his ballot in Madrid with his wife. The election is "important not just for us, but also for the world and for Europe," he added. With the election being held at the height of summer with many Spaniards on holiday, a record 2.47 million registered voters have cast an absentee ballot, according to Spain's postal service.

'Dark time warp'

Sanchez warned during an ill-tempered TV debate with PP leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo that PP-Vox coalition government would "take us into a dark time warp that will leave us who knows where."

In its electoral program, Vox pledges to overturn laws on gender violence, LGBTQ rights, abortion and euthanasia as well as outlaw separatist parties and defend traditions such as bullfighting. Sanchez called the snap polls after his Socialist party and its far-

left junior coalition partners suffered a drubbing in May local and regional elections.

Under his watch the economy has outperformed most of its European Union peers, growing by 5.5 percent last year, and inflation has dropped below the European Central Bank's 2.0 percent target this year, a rarity in Europe. He has also introduced popular measures such as a sharp rise in the minimum wage, higher pensions and free commuter rail travel to help households cope with the cost of living crises.

But his minority coalition government's reliance on the votes of Catalan and Basque separatist parties to pass legislation has hurt his standing. Many voters are especially angered by his occasional deals with EH Bildu, the heir of the political arm of the disbanded armed separatist group ETA which is blamed for over 850 deaths in its decades-long campaign of bombings and shootings for an independent Basque homeland.

'New era'

Feijoo, who sells himself as a stable and safe pair of hands, has accused Sanchez of allowing "terrorists" to condition Spain's future with his reliance on Bildu. He has vowed to undo many of Sanchez's laws, including one which allows anyone 16 and over to change their gender on their ID card on the basis of a simple statement. "Spain can start



MADRID, Spain: The leader and candidate of conservative Partido Popular (People's Party) Alberto Nunez Feijoo casts his ballot during Spain's general election, in Madrid, on July 23, 2023. — AFP

a new era," Feijoo told reporters after casting his ballot.

Another major blow to Sanchez's popularity was a botched law on sexual consent approved last year which led to roughly 100 convicted offenders to be released from jail because of the way it redefines offences. If the PP and Vox fall short of a working majority,

that would give the Socialists a chance to form another government because they have more options to create alliances with smaller parties.

Federico Santi, senior analyst for Europe at Eurasia Group, said left-wing parties "still have more than a fighting chance at retaining a majority in parliament." — AFP

Locals, tourists flee wildfire on...

Continued from Page 1

fighters, backed by 18 aircraft, were battling the fire on Sunday, with Croatia, France, Slovakia and Turkey having contributed equipment and personnel, officials said. Last year Rhodes, which has a population of over 100,000, welcomed some 2.5 million tourist arrivals.

The fires reached the village of Laerma during the night, engulfing houses and a church, while many hotels were damaged by flames that had reached to the coast. Authorities evacuated 11 villages overnight as a precaution. On Sunday the blaze was burning along three active fronts — including on the southeast coast of the island where firefighters tried to prevent the blaze from crossing a creek.

Tourists and some locals spent the night in gyms, schools and hotel conference centers on the island. The Greek foreign ministry and embassies in Greece were setting up a station at the Rhodes airport to help tourists that have lost travel documents in the scramble to evacuate. TV footage broadcast by ERT Saturday

showed a solo woman carrying her luggage through the smoke, looking disorientated. Firefighters were heard shouting at her: "Madam, your life! Come here! Leave everything behind."

A large part of the island was without electricity as the public power utility PPC shut down the local plant in the south for safety reasons. "This is a special fire here because the heart of Rhodes and its environment is affected," Efthymios Lekkas, a professor specializing in natural disasters told ERTTV on Sunday, warning of a severe impact to the island's tourist industry. "I just did a drive from Lindos to Gennadi," he said. "All the big hotels have closed. I don't think they will be able to operate this year because the surrounding area in each unit has been completely destroyed, and the environment is not inspiring for a holiday."

The Greek presidency said it was cancelling a national holiday planned for Monday "in view of the extraordinary conditions prevailing in the country due to the fires". A separate wildfire broke out on Greece's second-largest island, Evia, according to the fire services, although it was not near any homes. Evia, situated off central Greece's eastern coast, was devastated last year by some of the worst wildfires in the country's history. — AFP

she said. "It was the priority, more than buying groceries or paying my rent." Even with the new motor in the old AC unit, one of the air conduits is broken so the cold does not reach her living room. That is something else she will have to pay to have fixed.

Licea tried but failed to qualify for aid offered by the city or some utility companies for people to upgrade their air conditioning units. A study in 2022 by Arizona State University found that while mobile homes make up five percent of all housing in Maricopa County, which includes Phoenix and its suburbs, they account for 30 percent of indoor heat-related deaths in the city. "It is easy to say 'we can adapt' when you have access to everything," Licea said. "It is different for us."

A fire broke out some days ago at her mobile home park, where the residences are hooked up directly to electrical pylons through shoddy connections. One mobile home was destroyed. The fire is believed to have started because of an electrical overload, with washing machines, dryers, fridges and full-blast air conditioning all operating at once. After 19 years in Arizona, Licea lives in fear of an electrical short circuit. So she mainly prepares salads for meals and tries to avoid turning on the lights to keep her electricity consumption, and the temperature, as low as possible. "If I could move to a state that is not so hot I would do it," Licea said. — AFP

Heat shows gap between rich...

Continued from Page 1

shops, all with air conditioning cranked up good and frosty. In the city center and well-to-do suburbs, people do not think twice about leaving their car running while they get out to do an errand, so as to keep it cool for when they come back. But in less wealthy areas, heat like this is another thing altogether.

"If the temperatures go on like this, many people will not be able to cope," said Rosalia Licea, 37, who is raising five kids on her own. She lives in a mobile home park where most of the trailers are from the 1950s. Early in this heat wave her air conditioning broke down. For two days the temperature inside their mobile home hit 36C. The whole family had to take refuge in the room of the eldest child, which had a window AC unit. One of the smaller kids started having headaches.

Licea, who hails from Mexico, works several low-paying jobs to make ends meet. She does not have the \$2,000 it would cost to buy a new AC system. So she came up with a makeshift solution: spend \$800 to fix the broken one. "I had no choice, what with my kids,"

Musk hints Twitter bird branding...

Continued from Page 1

of which went on to become PayPal. Such an app could still function as a social media platform, and also include messaging and mobile payments. Musk has already named Twitter's parent company the X Corporation.

"If a good enough X logo is posted tonight, we'll make (it) go live worldwide tomorrow," he said. Musk went on to make several other X-related comments, saying a new emblem should be "of course, Art Deco" style and that under the site's new identity a post would be called "an X". Twitter is thought to

have around 200 million daily active users but it has suffered repeated technical failures since the tycoon bought the so-called bird app for \$44 billion in 2022 and sacked much of its staff.

Since then, many users and advertisers alike have soured on the social media site thanks to charges introduced for previously free services, changes to content moderation and the return of previously banned right-wing accounts. Musk said earlier this month that Twitter has lost roughly half of its advertising revenue since he took control in October.

Facebook parent Meta earlier this month launched its own text-based platform, called Threads, which has up to 150 million users according to some estimates. But the amount of time users spend on the rival app has plummeted in the weeks since its launch, however, according to data from market analysis firm Sensor Tower. — AFP

'Barbie' trounces 'Oppenheimer' in...

Continued from Page 1

films — one following an iconic doll ready to paint the world pink and the other about the scientist who helped invent the atomic bomb — created a pop-culture phenomenon that transcended the individual marketing for either film. "This was a phenomenal experience for people who love movies on the big screen," president and CEO of the National Association of Theatre Owners Michael O'Leary said in a statement Sunday. "It was a truly historic weekend."

The "Barbenheimer" films together left a massive gulf between the weekend's top two box office spots

and the number three slot, occupied by "Sound of Freedom". The controversial action thriller from Santa Fe Films and Angel Studios, which critics say plays into QAnon conspiracy theories, brought in \$20.14 million. Fourth and fifth place saw the sort of franchise sequels that have come to dominate box office recently.

Paramount's "Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One", the latest in the long-running series starring Tom Cruise, brought in \$19.5 million. "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny," from Disney, brought in \$6.7 million. This "Indy" episode, likely the last, again stars Harrison Ford as a whip-cracking archeologist. Rounding out the top 10 were: "Insidious: The Red Door" (\$6.5 million); "Elemental" (\$5.8 million); "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse" (\$2.8 million); "Transformers: Rise of the Beasts" (\$1.12 million) and "No Hard Feelings" (\$1.07 million). — AFP



This combination of pictures shows Irish actor Cillian Murphy as he poses during the premiere of the movie "Oppenheimer" in Paris on July 11, 2023, and Australian actress Margot Robbie as she poses for a photo during a pink carpet event to promote her new film "Barbie" in Seoul. — AFP

International

Indian women seek reprisals over 'heinous' abuse video

Some Meitei women show anger over the horrible incident

PECHI AWANG LEIKAI, India: Gender trumped tribe for a group of furious Indian mothers who torched the homes of two men from their own community who were accused of abusing women in a video that sparked outrage. At least 120 people have been killed during months of ethnic conflict between the predominantly Hindu Meitei majority and the mainly Christian Kuki in India's troubled northeastern state of Manipur.

The women from the Meitei community decided to show their anger after the humiliating video surfaced on Wednesday, which reportedly shows two Kuki women being forced to strip naked and then jeered at and harassed by Meitei men in May. Police arrested four suspects on Thursday but, on the same day, a powerful group of Meitei women known as the "Meira Paibis", or the Mothers of Manipur, set out to burn the homes of two of the accused.

"We condemn the violence against the women and that is why we want capital punishment," Sumati, who gave only her first name, told AFP.

"That is why we destroyed his house," India is generally traditionalist, conservative and patriarchal but the Meitei have a history of women's activism, with women having a more prominent role in society than elsewhere. Tens of thousands of people have fled to government-run camps since the violence erupted in May but the video clip has shone a spotlight on the conflict.

'Shamed India'

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said after the video clip emerged that the incident had "shamed India". Manipur's state government is led by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party and has said it is investigating the "heinous" incident. "Both communities are condemning this event," said Suchitra

Rajkumari, 42, a local activist. "At least in one point they are agreeing."

The Meira Paibis smashed down the walls of the homes of two of the accused before stuffing bales of hay inside and setting them on fire. Thangjam Lata Devi, the mother of one of the accused, was told she had given birth to a "spoilt" son. Her home was also torched.

"If they decide to exile you, then that's it," she said. The Meira Paibis said the homes were burned to send a message. "We condemn what happened to the women," said Sumati, who helped set fire to one of the houses. "The accused and their family will not be able to live in their village. That is why we destroyed the house."

The Kuki oppose Meitei demands for reserved public job quotas and college admissions as a form of affirmative action, stoking fears that they might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for tribal groups. Human Rights Watch alleges the policies "promote Hindu majoritarianism".

Vigilante justice

But just as Meira Paibis vigilantes administer their form of justice, they have also protected their men. Some 500 women blocked roads to stop about 100 armed police arresting another suspect linked to the video on Saturday, jeering at security forces in a three-hour standoff. "Kill us! Take us all!" the women screamed, brandishing burning torches. Their faces were smeared in toothpaste, which they say helps protect against tear gas.

This time, they alleged the men the police wanted to arrest were not responsible and the officers left empty-handed. The group has blocked roads to bar security forces multiple times during the unrest, accusing the army of being biased towards the Kuki.



THOUBAL, India: In this photo taken on July 22, 2023, police detain alleged suspects of the viral sexual assault video in Pechi Awang Leikai village of the Thoubal district of north eastern state of Manipur. — AFP

"We have a legacy of protecting our people and that gives us inner strength," said Meira Paibis member Matouleibi Chanu.

The Meira Paibis launched dusk-till-dawn patrols after the violence erupted, hammering on electricity poles to raise the alarm. The army said in June they were forced to release 12 Meitei militia members after troops were surrounded by a 1,500-strong "mob" of women.

"We will do everything to protect our people,"

said 60-year-old Chongtham Thopi Devi, another Meira Paibis member. Police said in a statement on Saturday that six arrests had been made in connection with the video and they were conducting "raids" for other suspects. "We can't use the same force as we do in dispersing men," a senior police officer said, asking not to be identified because he was not authorized to speak to reporters. "We often find men hiding behind these women in protests and marches... the women lead always." — AFP

Cambodia's ruling party says on course for 'landslide'

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia's ruling party declared on Sunday that it was on course for a "landslide" victory in an election where all meaningful opposition to long-time ruler Hun Sen was eliminated before polling day. The 70-year-old former Khmer Rouge cadre has ruled since 1985 and faced no real contest in the vote, with opposition parties banned, challengers forced to flee and freedom of expression stifled.

His Cambodian People's Party (CPP) is expected to retain all 125 seats in the lower house, prolonging his grip on power and paving the way for him to hand the reins to his son in a dynastic succession some critics have compared to North Korean politics. The only serious opposition party was disqualified on a technicality in the run-up to the polls, and it will be a surprise if any of the 17 other small, poorly funded parties win seats. "We are winning a landslide," CPP spokesman Sok Eysan told AFP around two hours after polls closed, with counting under way. Official results are expected within hours.

More than 9.7 million people were registered to vote in Cambodia's seventh election since the United Nations first sponsored polls in 1993, after years of

conflict—including the era of the genocidal Khmer Rouge—left the country devastated. Over the last 30 years, whatever hopes the international community might have had for a vibrant multi-party democracy in Cambodia have been flattened by the juggernaut of Hun Sen's rule. The veteran PM has begun to look to the future, saying he will hand over to his son, four-star general Hun Manet—possibly even in the coming weeks.

"We have exercised our civil right and responsibility and right... of citizens to vote to choose the party we love to lead the country," the 45-year-old scion told reporters after casting his ballot.

Many wonder whether Hun Manet, educated in the United States and Britain, might bring change to the country—though Hun Sen has made it clear that he intends to keep pulling strings even after his son takes over. Asked by AFP what he planned to do for Cambodia when he became prime minister, Hun Manet replied: "I have no comment on that."

Rights groups have condemned the election. On the eve of voting, a 17-strong coalition—including the Asian Network for Free Elections and the International Federation for Human Rights—said the election was of "profound concern". Voter turnout recorded at 3.16 pm (0816 GMT) was 78 percent, with 7,601,326 votes cast, according to the National Election Committee.

The only real challenge to the CPP had come from the Candlelight Party (CP). But Cambodia's electoral body refused to register the party in May, rendering it ineligible to compete. The decision came after the



PHNOM PENH: Hun Manet, commander of the Royal Cambodian Army and eldest son of Prime Minister Hun Sen, shows his finger after he casts his vote at a polling station in Phnom Penh on July 23, 2023. — AFP

CP performed better than expected at last year's local elections, winning 22 percent of the popular vote. Internationally, Hun Sen has played off tensions between the United States and China, racking up huge sums in Chinese investment that came with no demands for democratic reforms. Speaking before the vote, the CP told AFP that the registration decision meant there was no way the election could be either free or fair. "Everyone knows who will win," said Rong Chhun, the party's vice-president. — AFP

Afghanistan flash floods toll jumps to 26; 40 missing

KABUL: The death toll from overnight flash floods caused by torrential rain in central Afghanistan has risen to 26, with more than 40 people missing, officials said Sunday. Shafiqullah Rahimi, spokesman for the state ministry for disaster management, said a total of 31 people had been killed nationwide in floods since Friday and extensive damage had been caused to property and farmland.

Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said urgent aid was being rushed to the main disaster zone in the Jalrez district of Maidan Wardak province. Although Afghanistan lies on the western edge of the Asian monsoon footprint, flash floods happen regularly during the wet season as heavy rain courses down dry riverbeds.

Rahimi told a news conference that 604 houses had been fully or partially damaged and hundreds of acres of agricultural land and orchards destroyed in Jalrez



GHAZNI, Afghanistan: Afghan children carry their belongings following flash floods in the Khair Abad area in Ghazni province on July 23, 2023. — AFP

since Friday. Nationwide, "in the last four months, 214 people were killed in natural disaster-related incidents", Rahimi said. "With great sadness we have received the

news that 12 of our compatriots have been martyred and 40 others are missing," he said in a statement. "Some financial losses have also been incurred." — AFP

India landslide toll jumps to 27, 50 missing

NEW DELHI: The death toll from a massive landslide in India's Maharashtra state jumped to 27 on Sunday, with at least 50 people still missing as rescue teams struggle in lashing rain, officials said. The landslide was triggered by monsoon rains on Thursday, smashing into a village in Raigad district, a hilly and forested site about 100 kilometers (62 miles) from Mumbai.

Emergency teams have been digging for bodies under the mounds of earth and rubble. "We've so far counted 27 bodies, and about 50 to 60 people are still missing, but there are multiple challenges for rescue work at the site," Raigad official Yogesh Mhase told AFP on Sunday.

Mhase said the remote hamlet was

about five kilometers from the nearest road. "No heavy equipment can reach this site, we only have small machines and most work has to be done manually," he added.

"Non-stop heavy rains in the region are also making the entire operation much more challenging". The top district official said he was not optimistic about finding survivors on the fourth day of the ongoing rescue. Local media reports said that several families were entirely wiped out, while other survivors were the only ones left alive among their relatives.

India has been battered by rains since the start of the monsoon season in June, and flooding and landslides have killed scores of people. Monsoon rains are vital to replenishing rivers and groundwater, but the deluge also causes widespread destruction every year. Experts say climate change is increasing the number of extreme weather events around the world, with damming, deforestation and development projects in India exacerbating the human toll. — AFP



NDRF personnel search for victims at the site of a landslide at Irshalwadi village of Raigad district in Maharashtra state. — AFP

News in Brief

Peru police clash with protesters

LIMA: Protesters and police clashed over the weekend during renewed demonstrations against Peru's interim President Dina Boluarte in the capital Lima, where demonstrators are demanding she step down and hold elections. Boluarte came to power in December after former leftist president Pedro Castillo was ousted and arrested, triggering accusations of power grabbing and setting off months of nationwide demonstrations. The ensuing crackdown by security forces left almost 50 people dead, according to an estimate by Human Rights Watch, which accused the authorities of extrajudicial and arbitrary killings. — AFP

3 hurt in Japan train knife attack

TOKYO: Three people were hurt in a knife attack on a train in western Japan on Sunday, with police saying they had arrested a man for allegedly carrying out the stabbings. The victims—a train conductor in his 20s and two male passengers aged in their 20s and 70s—were taken to hospital with non-life threatening injuries, Tetsuya Sakagami from a nearby fire department told AFP. The 37-year-old male suspect was armed with three knives when he was arrested at Rinku Town station in the Osaka region, local police told AFP. He was arrested for attempted murder and has already admitted to carrying out the attack on Sunday morning, police said, adding they were still investigating the motive. — AFP

11 killed in Mexico arson attack on bar

MEXICO CITY: A man who was thrown out of a bar in Mexico for improper behavior toward women went back and set fire to it, killing 11 people, authorities said Saturday. The arson attack happened overnight Friday into Saturday in the town of San Luis Rio Colorado, in the northern state of Sonora, which borders the United States. The fire killed seven men and four women and wounded six others, the state prosecutor's office in Sonora said. The attacker was expelled from the bar "for treating women disrespectfully," and then returned and threw a flaming object into it, presumably a Molotov cocktail, the prosecutor's office said. — AFP

Flooding in eastern Canada

MONTREAL: Four people in Canada, including two children, were reported missing Saturday in flooding triggered by torrential rains in Nova Scotia, police said. The children were in a car that was submerged, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said. The three other people in the car managed to escape. In a separate incident in the eastern province, a youth and a man were reported missing under similar circumstances, the police agency said. Heavy rains falling since Friday in Nova Scotia have cut off roads and flooded homes. — AFP

Yemen arrests suspect in UN staff killing

DUBAI: Authorities in Yemen have arrested a suspect in the killing of a World Food Programme staffer in Ta'ez province, a security official told AFP on Saturday. Moayad Hameidi, the head of the UN agency's office in Ta'ez, was killed in a shooting Friday in the nearby city of Turbah, the Rome-based WFP has confirmed. "The perpetrator of the criminal assassination of the United Nations employee in the city of Turbah in Ta'ez (province)... has been in the city of Ta'ez since 2017, after fleeing Aden due to security operations against Al-Qaeda operatives," the security official said late Friday. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, JULY 24, 2023

Zain wins two 'Best Corporate Governance in Kuwait' awards

Prestigious honors from World Finance and Arab Federation of Capital Markets

• Bader Al-Kharafi: We are committed to the highest levels of governance, providing all stakeholders with an accurate picture of Zain at any point

• Zain has placed ESG standards at the forefront of its activities, believing in the nurturing of positive relationships with all shareholders, analysts and regulatory authorities

KUWAIT/LONDON/MUSCAT: Zain, a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications operating in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced winning the World Finance 'Best Corporate Governance Award 2023 for Kuwait', for the third consecutive year. Zain was also deemed to win the 'Best Corporate Governance of a listed company in Kuwait' in 2023 at the Arab Federation of Capital Markets (AFCM) Annual Conference held in Muscat recently.

London-based World Finance is a reputable print and online magazine providing comprehensive coverage and analysis of the financial industry, international business and the global economy. The AFCM was established in 1978 to be the guiding body for Arab stock exchanges, under the recommendation of the Arab Central Banks Conference.

Zain's Investor Relations and Corporate Governance Framework is a cornerstone of the company's regional appeal, and has attracted ongoing praise and admiration as its exemplary operation provides stakeholders including shareholders, industry analysts, and regulatory authorities with the greatest confidence on the company's state of being. As a leading entity listed on the Premier Market, Zain is in regular communication with the country's Capital Markets Authority (CMA), abiding fully to market regulations issued by all financial regulatory bodies in Kuwait including the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the CMA, and Boursa Kuwait.



Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO said, "Zain has established a culture to exceed expectations across all its areas of operation; and maintaining a positive, transparent relationship with market stakeholders is fundamental to our ongoing success. We are committed to adhering to the highest levels of governance, providing all our stakeholders an accurate picture of Zain at any point, and interact with



in a straightforward and productive manner."

Al-Kharafi continued, "The publication of detailed regulatory disclosures, Corporate Governance framework, operational and financial results reporting, as well as sustainability and thought leadership reports annually, all point to our efforts to provide quality, informative and actionable facts about the company and its '4Sight' transformational and prof-

itable growth strategy." Zain believes good governance plays a significant role in providing long-term sustainable value to stakeholders. Accordingly, the organization has an impressive track-record in providing all stakeholders with accurate and transparent access to company information, beyond the minimum disclosure requirements.

Zain's Corporate Governance framework helps the company to mitigate risks and facilitates an effective Board oversight over the company's executive management by monitoring the implementation of policies when running daily operations. Corporate Governance promotes strong internal controls to improve integrity of financials and establishes a culture of compliance. This governance structure has helped Zain to win the confidence of the market and attract global investors.

Zain's Investor Relations, Sustainability, and Corporate Governance departments are committed to raising awareness on issues related to the environment, social, and governance (ESG) matters in response to global trends and best practices. Accordingly, Zain has developed new policies and is working to increase transparency in addition to focusing on social responsibility. Such policies and procedures are flexible, and take into account both short- and long-term challenges and risks.

Zain has placed sustainable growth at the forefront of its activities, believing in the nurturing of positive relationships among all stakeholders.

Twitter challenger Threads struggles for traction

SAN FRANCISCO: After a wildly successful first few days, Threads popularity has waned in the weeks since Meta launched its challenge to Twitter, which lives on despite its problems. The average amount of time people spend on Threads daily has plummeted more than 75 percent since the platform made a rock star debut on July 6, according to data from Sensor Tower, a market analysis firm.

Threads was quickly billed as a potential death knell for Twitter, a platform that has tumbled into chaos under the leadership of mercurial tycoon Elon Musk.

The launch saw sign-ups of more than 100 million users in less than five days, smashing the record of AI tool ChatGPT for fastest-growing consumer app and creating relief and excitement amongst early adopters fleeing Twitter. "I actually closed down my Twitter account after starting Threads," said Brooklyn resident Lauren Brose, head of marketing at a tech start-up.

"I used to love Twitter. After Elon Musk took over Twitter, I found that the entire environment just changed completely." But weeks later, Threads has

since seen a "material decline in new sign-ups," Sensor Tower said. Twitter continues to dominate its space as a platform for online comment and news, and Musk "would have to completely destroy it" to drive away its audience for good, according to Silicon Valley investor and analyst Jeremiah Owyang.

"Will Threads kill Twitter? Absolutely not. It's just not equivalent," he said. Threads went live on Apple and Android app stores in 100 countries at its launch, though it is not available in Europe because parent company Meta is unsure how to navigate the European Union's data privacy legislation.

Twitter is thought to have around 200 million regular users but it has suffered repeated technical failures since Tesla tycoon Musk bought the platform last year and sacked much of its staff. Musk, also the boss of SpaceX, has alienated users by introducing charges for previously free services and allowing banned right-wing accounts back on the platform. There is little doubt that Threads had a major leg up compared to other wannabe Twitter alternatives. Several rivals have emerged but most are niche platforms without the capacity to grow at the necessary scale to dethrone Twitter. But Meta was able to easily prompt Instagram users to start Threads accounts, tapping into a base of at least a billion users at the image-focused social network.

Not about news?

Threads has a lot to prove, and features to add, to become a formidable Twitter alternative, according to Insider Intelligence analyst Jasmine Enberg. It needs to foster creators to engage users, and to find its own identity separate from Instagram and Twitter, Enberg said.

"Given that Twitter is in a state of disarray, the brilliant move that they did was using the existing social graph from Instagram for rapid and seamless adoption," Owyang said of Threads. The downside is that's not the user base "that you want to have chats with or to do microblogging," he added.

Instagram users typically engage with the service for images or videos, not commentary or controversy, Owyang noted. "It is a very different crowd on Instagram," Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanese said of a comparison to Threads. Twitter is known as a forum for news and politics, topics that Threads has no interest in spotlighting, according to a recent post by Threads and Instagram boss Adam Mosseri. Meanwhile, Twitter is seen as an established home for posts by journalists, celebrities, athletes, politicians and others. Another roadblock to Threads growth is that Meta is holding it back from the European Union, Milanese said. "You are missing a big chunk of the market," she said of Threads being absent from the EU.



Twitter 'diaspora'?

While people frustrated with Musk-owned Twitter are seeking alternatives, no single competitor has established itself as the ideal option. Twitter quitters have become a "diaspora" of sorts, spread across Mastodon, Bluesky, Threads and other platforms in search of a new social media home, Owyang reasoned. "Many people have left Twitter, and that will continue," Owyang said.

"But the issue is where are they going?"

There's no one centralized place to go." The Threads app has been downloaded more than 184 million times globally since its launch, according to Data.ai Intelligence. "But, the app hasn't proved to be materially different from Twitter in terms of features/functionality," said Sensor Tower senior insights analyst Abe Yousef.

"What should dissuade people from remaining on Twitter, assuming they're comfortable with Twitter's content policies?" Yousef added. — AFP

US Fed likely to hike rates to 22-year high

WASHINGTON: After pausing in June, the US Federal Reserve is widely expected to hike interest rates again on Wednesday, adopting its most restrictive monetary stance for 22 years despite recent signs of slowing inflation. After 10 consecutive hikes in just over a year, the Fed halted its aggressive campaign of monetary tightening last month to give policymakers more time to assess the health of the US economy, and the impact of recent banking stresses on lending conditions.

In the weeks since, positive upgrades to economic growth and cooler inflation data have reinforced the likelihood that the Fed's rate-setting committee will vote for a quarter percentage-point hike on July 25-26. This would raise the federal funds rate to a range between 5.25 and 5.5 percent—its highest level since 2001.

"If I had to bet, I would bet they would raise the Fed funds rate 25 basis points at the next meeting," Joseph Gagnon, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), told AFP.

"The cooling of the economy is only happening slowly," Bank of America's chief US economist Michael Gapen wrote in a recent investor note. "We

think most committee members believe further re-balancing of supply and demand is needed to ensure disinflation will continue," he added, explaining why he expects another hike on Wednesday.

Futures traders now assign a probability of more than 99 percent that the Fed will hike its base rate by 25 basis points at its next meeting, according to CME Group. While a July rate hike is now widely expected, questions remain about how much further the Fed will need to go this year to bring inflation back down to its long-term target of two percent.

Recession risk fades

Since the Fed's decision to pause in June, its favored measure of inflation has slowed to less than four percent year-on-year, while unemployment has remained close to record lows.

Economic growth has also been revised upward significantly for the first quarter on the back of stronger-than-expected consumer spending. The positive economic news has raised the chances of a so-called soft landing, in which the Fed succeeds in bringing down inflation by raising interest rates while avoiding a recession and a surge in unemployment.

"We see the line between mild recession and soft landing as increasingly fine and view the probabilities of the latter outcome undeniably on the rise," Deutsche Bank economists wrote in a recent note to clients. Goldman Sachs recently cut its probability of the US economy entering a recession in the next 12 months to 20 percent from 25 percent, although it remains slightly above average postwar levels.



Federal Reserve Building, Washington DC, USA.

"Recent data have reinforced our confidence that bringing inflation down to an acceptable level will not require a recession," the bank's chief economist Jan Hatzius wrote in a note to investors.

Hiking in September?

At its June meeting, Fed officials indicated that they expect two additional quarter percentage-point hikes will be needed this year to tackle inflation. With the

first interest rate hike widely expected on Wednesday, analysts have turned their attention to what the Fed does next. Some economists predict another rate hike as soon as the Fed's next rate meeting in September, while others think it could hold rates steady once more. "My feeling is that, although they're going to move slowly, 25 basis points a meeting or even every other meeting, I don't think they're going to stop," said Joseph Gagnon from PIIE. — AFP

Business

Al-Bahar: NBK maintained its solid performance, delivering record profits

NBK Deputy Group CEO speaks on the sidelines of analyst conference for 1H 2023

Shaikha Al-Bahar

- We remain committed to establishing a strong network for our clients in key focus markets and growing our business in our main operating geographies
- We continued to focus on creating long-term added value for our shareholders
- We plan to continue investing in technology and digital platforms, expanding its rollout across the Group

KUWAIT: Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group CEO of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) said that the outstanding bottom line growth for the first half of 2023 was mainly driven by higher core banking income, as the bank continued to deliver very strong profitability trends, both for the quarter and year-to-date figures. On the sidelines of the Analyst Conference for the results of 1H 2023, Al-Bahar added, "We continued to deliver very strong trends operationally, with our revenue growth surpassing the increase in our operating expenses and hence delivering very solid growth in our pre-provision income to reach KD 359.2 million, growing by 23.1 percent year on year. NBK's strong operating performance has resulted in the Bank reporting the highest quarterly profit to date."

"Our focus remains on creating shareholders value as evident in the constant and fundamental improvement in our profitability ratios with return on average assets of 1.53 percent and return on average equity of 15.2 percent," she noted.

Strategic pillars

Al-Bahar mentioned, "NBK continued to deliver on its key strategic pillars focusing on diversification and defending our market share. We continued to be competitive in the local market and the bank of choice whether for retail & high net worth clients, domestic and foreign corporates or institutions."

"Internationally, we remained focused on establishing a network for our clients in key priority markets; working on growing the business in the Egyptian, UAE and Saudi markets while consolidating a leading position as a regional player in the area of wealth management," she added.

Investment in technology

"The Bank looks forward to continue

building and investing in technology and digital platforms. This will help us operate more efficiently and grow in key areas and markets, in order to achieve all stakeholders' aspirations. The Bank is putting significant emphasis on innovation as a key driver for future growth," Al-Bahar said.

On another front, Al-Bahar mentioned that NBK continues to integrate critical ESG issues into its business, culture and operations, creating meaningful change, and driving continuous improvement to ESG policies and disclosures to secure a more sustainable future.

"The Bank focuses on four key pillars that shapes its updated sustainability strategy: Responsible Banking, Capitalizing on our capabilities, investing in our communities and Governance for Resilience. We view our ongoing sustainability journey as integral to improving business performance and increasing our positive impact in the world," she indicated. "We have just released our 2022 sustainability report, which focuses on these four pillars of our ESG strategy. Additionally and for the first, the report has received third party assurance on aligning with global GHG protocol as well for aligning with GRI reporting principles," she added.

On the expectations for economic rebound in 2024, and if NBK may benefit from any key growth drivers more than peers, Al-Bahar said, "The government submitted the 4-year plan to the Parliament, and the plan includes 5 main pillars namely ensuring public finance stability, economic development, job creation, welfare sustainability and productive government."

"This will create opportunities for banks to get involved in the mega projects, by financing projects and NBK has the experience, as we have a specialized group dealing with all models of projects like PPP, BOT and so on. So, definitely we will benefit a lot from



Shaikha Al-Bahar

such ambitious plan from the government," she noted.

"Creating jobs, this means we will see more and more of Kuwaitis in the work market so this will create opportunities for our consumer business and hopefully when they will approve the mortgage law will create opportunities as well," she added.

Stable operating environment

On his part, Sujit Ronghe, Group CFO commented: "The results for the first half reflect a solid operating performance by the Group and demonstrate the continued growth in our businesses."

"The benefit of increased benchmark interest rates, a strong operating performance combined with a healthy balance sheet, comfortable liquidity levels and a strong capital base were features of NBK's 1H23 results," he pointed out. "The higher interest rate regime and an overall stable operating environment in Kuwait have benefitted the Bank during 1H23. Inflationary conditions in USA and some other advanced economies have started to wane and with that, the risk

Sujit Ronghe

- Our profits reflect the Group's solid operating performance and demonstrates the continued growth in our businesses
- Our healthy balance sheet, comfortable liquidity levels and strong capital base clearly featured in our performance



of a possible recession. We are cautiously optimistic that the overall operating environment will remain stable during upcoming quarters," he elaborated.

Ronghe mentioned that the Group reported a loan growth of 2.7 percent during 1H23. "Given the current local, political and the general macroeconomic situation, we are expecting the overall loan growth for 2023 to be in mid-single digit range. An improvement in overall operating environment will be a positive to loan growth."

"1H23 NIM has improved to 2.52 percent benefiting from higher interest rates and stronger volumes compared to the last year," he said. "The general expectation is that US benchmark interest rates will probably increase by 25bps, before beginning to plateau. That said the extent and timing of changes to local interest rates remains uncertain. We should also expect increasing

competition and the funding cost to remain high, despite Group's healthy overall funding mix. Our guidance is for an expansion in NIM compared to 2022 and we expect the full year 2023 NIM to remain broadly similar to 1H23, with a potential for a small upside," he explained.

"Our operations in Egypt continued to deliver very strong bottom line performance and asset growth in the local context. In the first quarter, Egypt has delivered a profit growth of 87 percent and 36 percent YoY growth in assets," Ronghe said. "Our Egyptian loan book has been stable over the years and we have not witnessed specific signs of deterioration in credit quality. NPL ratio remains low and comparable to levels similar to the last couple of years. As such, from an Egyptian operational view, we do not have specific concerns with respect to credit quality at this stage," he noted.

Global stocks mixed after tech drubbing

NEW YORK: Global stock markets wavered on Friday, a day after shares in major US tech firms took a beating and as investors brace for a week of interest rate decisions. Following a mixed day on European and Asian bourses, Wall Street finished the week on a muted note.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average eked out a tiny gain to climb for the 10th straight session for the first time since 2017. But the Nasdaq again declined, albeit with a much smaller loss than Thursday's rout.

"There wasn't any concerted selling interest, but there wasn't a lot of buying interest either as market participants looked ahead to a busy earnings reporting schedule next week," said Briefing.com, noting the coming reports from Google parent Alphabet, Microsoft and Meta Platforms, which owns Facebook. With this week's focus on earnings, the market's response to results has been a "reflection of what's been priced in" to individual stocks, said Art Hogan of B. Riley Financial.

Both Tesla and Netflix were "priced for perfection" and stumbled after earnings that fell short, said Hogan, pointing to Johnson & Johnson as a company that surged following results, in part due to a much lower valuation.

Besides earnings, next week's calendar includes a Federal Reserve policy meeting. While the Fed is widely expected to hike interest rates, Hogan said the market could be "disrupted" if the US central bank is more hawkish than expected. He noted that investors do not expect the Fed to raise rates again in September. The European Central Bank and Bank of Japan are also holding monetary policy meetings next week.

On currency markets, the yen rallied briefly against the dollar after data showed Japanese inflation picked up speed in June, which some saw as putting further pressure on the Bank of Japan to tighten policy. However, the yen later slid more than one percent as observers suggested the figures were unlikely to shift monetary policymakers from their ultra-loose stance.

The central bank is expected to stand pat at its meeting next week, after governor Kazuo Ueda's recent dovish comments. — AFP

Oil markets will face 'serious problems': IEF

PANAJI, India: Oil prices are set to rise in the second half of the year as supply struggles to meet demand, according to the Secretary General of the International Energy Forum. Oil demand bounced back to pre-COVID levels quickly, "but supply is having a tougher time in catching up," said Joseph McMonigle, secretary general of the International Energy Forum, adding that the only factor moderating prices right now is the fear of a looming recession.

"So, for the second half of this year, we're going to have serious problems with supply keeping up, and as a result, you're going to see prices respond to that," McMonigle told CNBC on the sidelines of a meeting of energy ministers from the group of the 20 leading industrial economies (G20) in Goa, India, on Saturday.

McMonigle attributes the push in oil prices to increasing demand from China — the world's largest importer of crude oil — and India. "India and China combined will make up 2 million barrels a day of demand pick-up in the second half of this year," the Secretary General said.

Asked if oil prices could once again spike to \$100 a barrel, he noted that prices are already at \$80 per barrel and could potentially go higher from here. "We're going to see much more steep decreases in inventory, which will be a signal to the market that demand is definitely picking up. So you're going to

see prices respond to that," McMonigle said. However, McMonigle is confident that the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies — collectively known as OPEC+ — will take action and increase supply, if the world eventually succumbs to a "big supply-demand imbalance."

"They're being very careful on demand. They want to see evidence that demand is picking up, and will be responsive to changes in the market." Brent crude futures with September expiry last settled at \$81.07 per barrel on the Friday close, while West Texas Intermediate crude with September delivery ended the trading day at \$76.83.

McMonigle also spoke about the liquefied natural gas market, crediting the stability in Europe's energy market to a warmer-than-expected winter in 2022. "The weather was probably the luckiest thing to have happened," he said, but warned that "it's not just this winter, [but] the next couple of winters" that could be rocky. Global policymakers cannot turn complacent just because LNG prices have fallen, and more investment in renewable energy is needed to ensure the lights continue to stay on, he said.

Once "whispered" about, energy security has now become the main focus of summits such as the G20, McMonigle signaled. "We definitely have to keep pursuing the energy transition, and all options have to be on the table," he highlighted, adding that prices and volatility in the energy markets has to be closely watched. "I'm worried that if the public starts to connect high prices and volatility in energy markets to climate policies or the energy transition, we're going to lose public support," he said.

"We're going to be asking the public to do a lot of difficult and challenging things in order to enable the energy transition. We need to keep them on board." He said the oil prices were already at



PANAJI: Joseph McMonigle speaks on the sidelines of a meeting of energy ministers from the group of the 20 leading industrial economies (G20) in Goa, India, on Saturday.

\$80 per barrel and could potentially go higher from there, when asked whether these could touch the \$100 mark yet again.

"We're going to see much more steep decreases in inventory, which will be a signal to the market that demand is definitely picking up. So you're going to see prices respond to that," McMonigle said. However, McMonigle expressed the hope that the OPEC and OPEC+ nations would again increase production if the world eventually succumbed to a "big supply-demand imbalance."

About the liquefied natural gas (LNG), he said policymakers could not turn complacent just because the LNG prices had fallen, calling for more investment in renewable energy. When it comes to energy security, McMonigle wants to keep all options having to be on the table. But he expressed the fear of losing support if the public started to connect high prices and volatility in energy markets to climate policies or the energy transition. — Agencies

Within sight of NY City, a despoiled river comes back to life

EAST RUTHERFORD, US: He is not a lawyer, finance guy or a politician, but activist Bill Sheehan has moved mountains to clean up the Hackensack River in New Jersey just outside Manhattan, which for decades has been a dumping ground for industrial chemicals.

Even still, the former taxi driver says, there is still so much to do to protect the waterway. "The North Jersey area here, just across from New York, is like the cradle of the Industrial Revolution," says Sheehan, sporting his signature cap. "For over 200 years, people were doing everything they could to lay waste to this river."

Once the 74-year-old Sheehan bought a boat, he witnessed the dire situation in the Hackensack River, along which he played as a child. "It didn't take me long to realize that the river that flows through my hometown... needed a full-time advocate," he says of the Hackensack, which is wedged into a densely populated urban area.

In 1997, he founded Hackensack Riverkeeper, an organization devoted

to preserving the watershed and raising awareness about the importance of conservation efforts. So far, Sheehan—a one-time professional drummer with a full mustache and an earring—has managed to block property developers and companies from doing further damage, after 60 percent of the swamps were drained for construction.

After a litany of negotiations and legal maneuvering, he also saw to it that a nature preserve was created covering about 8,400 acres (3,400 hectares) — without spending a dime. From a treatment plant upstream to a hotel down south, Captain Sheehan—as he is often called—has put a stop to the illegal dumping of wastewater, thanks to court rulings and coverage on local television news.

He launched a lawsuit that led to industrial conglomerate Honeywell being found liable for the cleanup of a site in Jersey City along the river that was contaminated with chromium residue, at a cost of several hundred million dollars. "This nonsense that's been going on here for so long had to stop," says Sheehan, as his



SECAUCUS, United States: Activist and Captain Bill Sheehan speaks as he drives his boat along the Hackensack River in Secaucus, New Jersey. — AFP

boat heads up the river, the wind whipping. Marc Yaggi, the CEO of Waterkeeper Alliance, an umbrella group for more than 300 associations in 47 countries, said Sheehan is "a mentor, friend, and hero to me and countless clean water advocates around the world." With numerous industrial sites shut down, swampland now protected and wastewater dump-

ing halted, nature has already partially taken its course in the watershed. Several bird species have returned, including the great blue heron, snowy egrets and ospreys. "The river has gotten a lot cleaner, and we have to thank Captain Bill for that," says Michael Gonnelli, the mayor of Secaucus, which is located along the river. — AFP

Trailers, a growing trend in California's housing crisis

7 million Americans spent over 50% of their income on housing in 2021

PLAYA DEL REY, US: Tamara Hernandez moved into a recreational vehicle when her rent shot up. Beau Beard did it because he lost everything after going to prison.

Stories like theirs abound in California where RVs and trailers, once a symbol of carefree living by the ocean, increasingly reflect a less glamorous slice of life in the Golden State: a housing crisis and the growing number of people without a roof over their head.

A third of all the homeless people in America live in wealthy California, which if it were a country would boast the world's fifth-largest economy. In Los Angeles County alone more than 75,000 people are homeless, Los Angeles Housing Services Authority statistics say.

And while figures are difficult to pin down, those same statistics show that more and more of them are living in recreational vehicles, trailers, vans or cars that have formed makeshift camps in Los Angeles and nearby towns. "That's all I can afford," Beard said as he points to his recreational vehicle, parked on a narrow street near the busy, touristy beach in the town of Venice.

Beard moved to California seeking a fresh start after he got out of prison nearly eight years ago. But things did not work out as he had hoped. The average rent in Los Angeles was \$2,950 a month in June.

And the problem of surging housing costs is not confined to California. In 2021, more than seven million Americans in the United States spent more than 50 percent of their income on housing — an increase of 25 percent since 2007, according to a study by the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

On top of that, says Beard, "there's no jobs." At his age — 57 — people are reluctant to hire, he said.

When his girlfriend got pregnant in 2020 Beard bought the RV to house his family. But city officials

took the baby away shortly after its birth on grounds that an infant cannot live in such meager lodgings. "It's been the worst experience of my life," he says. Not only did the vehicle cost him his daughter, it has also left him in a grey area when it comes to any chance of subsidized housing, he continues. "They say that we're not homeless. But we are homeless," he explains. "So as far as giving out housing and stuff like that, we're last on the list."

'No parking'

His RV is in a line of vehicles parked on a thoroughfare called Jefferson Boulevard, which runs along the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve. Many of the vehicles, parked next to "No Parking" signs, have been here so long that they feature art installations, little gardens, tables and chairs, and stoves for cooking.

Some people have dogs, and the residents are a mix of people born in the US, Europe and Latin America. They have a sense of community, with rules of behavior, and look after one another.

But life here is very hard. "It takes, like, 10 steps to do one thing," said Hernandez, a makeup artist who moved out of her apartment in Venice when, over the space of just a decade, the rent rose from \$450 to \$3,000.

To bathe, for instance, it takes her an hour to heat up enough water. Then there is the stress of living with the feeling that people look down on you, or worse. "I don't know why they hate us. Like, it's ridiculous. Like, we are good people," said Hernandez.

'The only way'

Another resident of the encampment is a man named Steven who did not want to give his last name. He works in a supermarket and parked on Jefferson



LOS ANGELES: A woman walks past belongings that surround recreational vehicles that house residents living beside the Ballona Wetlands, a nature and wildlife area, along Jefferson Boulevard in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Boulevard two years ago to live with his wife. They bought the small van they live in for \$6,000, because their two salaries were not enough to rent a place in a decent neighborhood.

Still, he said it is better than living in areas with gang and drug problems. Steven said that in order to pay rent of \$2,000 or \$3,000 a month in an average middle class neighborhood and cover basic expenses he would need to work not two jobs but three. "This is the only way I think we would be able to

survive after the inflation happened, because jobs, wages, haven't gone up," he said.

Like in other US cities, homelessness has risen in Los Angeles as people struggled with high costs for housing and other needs while inflation bit deep — prices across the country rose by 6.5 percent in 2022. But there is a glaring contrast here in the hub of the world's entertainment industry: lovely mansions up in the Hollywood hills while homeless people sleep on streets such as the Walk of Fame. — AFP

UK retail sales rise as inflation cools in June

LONDON: British retail sales climbed more than expected in June, official data showed Friday, offering respite for the government after heavy defeats overnight in votes centered largely on its economic record.

Sales by volume grew 0.7 percent in June compared with growth of 0.1 percent in May, helped by warmer weather and some competitive pricing as inflation cools, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. Analysts' consensus forecast had been for a rise of 0.2 percent last month.

The data comes after Britain's ruling Conservatives on Friday held the former seat of ex-prime minister Boris Johnson but saw hefty majorities in two other seats blown away as scandals and a cost-of-living crisis took their toll. Rishi Sunak had been expected to become the first prime minister to lose three parliamentary seats on one day, but was spared that humiliation thanks to a narrow victory in the west London seat of Uxbridge and South Ruislip.

However, heavy defeats in the other two contests leave Sunak increasingly vulnerable ahead of next year's likely general election. Separate official data Friday showed the government borrowed less than expected in June but continued to pay huge repayments on its debt owing to high interest rates.

The borrowing data brought "some cheer for the government on a day when it has lost two by-elections", noted Ruth Gregory, deputy chief UK economist at Capital Economics research group. — AFP

Nations aim to ink deep sea mining rules by 2025

UNITED NATIONS: The International Seabed Authority's member nations on Friday agreed on a two-year roadmap for the adoption of deep sea mining regulations, despite conservationists' calls for a moratorium on mineral extraction they say would avert marine threats. The ISA, an intergovernmental body tasked with protecting the seabed, and its member states have spent the last decade trying to hash out a mining code for the possible exploitation of nickel, cobalt and copper in deep seabed areas that fall outside of national jurisdictions. But an agreement has so far been elusive.

In Friday's decision, the ISA Council, which had been negotiating in Jamaica for the past two weeks, said it "intends to continue the elaboration" of regulations "with a view to their adoption at the 30th session of the Authority" in 2025. "This is an indicative target," rather than a deadline, said council chairman Juan Jose Gonzalez Mijares. Since July 9, after the expiration of a deadline triggered by the small Pacific state of Nauru in 2021, the ISA is obligated to consider — though not necessarily grant — licenses for potentially environmentally devastating mining operations if governments request them.

That would go beyond the status quo, which has so far only seen the body grant exploration permits, as the deep sea mining sector itches to take off in earnest. "We are no longer in a 'what if' scenario, but rather 'what now'," Nauru's ambassador to the ISA Margo Dejeve said during the session, adding that her government planned to soon apply for a mining contract. But ocean campaigners remain worried about a possible green light for industrial exploitation of the high seas, with the ISA yet to have agreed on a process for reviewing license applications. — AFP

NBK MONEY MARKETS REPORT

US labor market continues to show signs of tightness

KUWAIT: Starting off with forex, the US dollar index ended the week strengthening against its counterparts by rising up to 101.071, after reaching a weekly low of 99.589. Naturally, the US dollar strengthened against the euro, closing the week at the 1.1123 mark, after reaching a seventeen-month high of 1.1275. Similarly, the US dollar gained against the British pound, forcing the GBP to end the week at 1.2855. The Australian dollar was also a victim of the marauding US dollar, as the AUD/USD pair dropped significantly on Friday, ending the week at the 0.6727 figure. Meanwhile, the USD/JPY soared all the way up to 141.79 on Friday, after reaching a weekly low of 137.69.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York saw general business conditions drop from 6.6 last month, all the way to 1.1. Although that was a significant drop, that is still quite positive, especially when putting into account that economists were projecting the latest reading to come in at -3.5, and the mere fact that any reading above 0 still indicates growth. Measures of prices paid and received by manufacturers in the state of New York also dropped significantly to levels not witnessed since mid-2020, indicating the inflation is in fact cooling.

Retail sales

The latest monthly retail sales reading shows that there was a 0.2 percent rise in June, lower than the expected 0.5 percent increase that would have matched the previous month's reading. This was the third consecutive month of growth in US retailers spending in a showing of great resilience from American consumers. Meanwhile, department stores spending decreased by 2.4 percent, while furniture sales gained

Kalyan Jewellers announces 'Shop & Win Audi Q3' campaign

KUWAIT: Kalyan Jewellers, one of the most trusted and leading jewelry brands, recently announced the launch of its 'Shop & Win Audi Q3' campaign. Through this exciting campaign offer, the brand's patrons stand a chance to win an Audi Q3 car on their jewelry purchases from Kalyan Jewellers. The winners of the campaign will be chosen through a raffle.

As part of this, customers will receive raffle coupons based on their jewelry purchases from Kalyan Jewellers. Customers are entitled to receive 1 raffle coupon on purchase of gold jewelry worth KD 50, whereas on purchase of uncut, precious stone and diamond jewelry worth KD 50, the jewelry brand will be giving away two raffle coupons to patrons. By participating, customers not only enrich their jewelry collection but also increase their chances of winning the Audi Q3 car. The offer is valid till 27th August, 2023.

Speaking about the offer, Ramesh Kalyanaraman, Executive Director – Kalyan Jewellers said, "At Kalyan Jewellers, our endeavor has been to enable our customers to extract best value from their purchase while providing a great shopping experience. We have been consistently taking major strides towards offering a holistic shopping experience to patrons. As an extension to this thought, we are delighted to announce the 'Shop & Win Audi Q3' campaign, offering patrons with an opportunity of a lifetime. We believe patrons will continue to shower their love and support for brand Kalyan Jewellers

1.4 percent. Despite high inflation and interest rates, it seems that US consumers are not slowing down when it comes to spending, giving the Fed a strong hit in its fight against inflation.

Unemployment claims

The latest reading to come in shows that the labor market remains tight, justifying the Fed's efforts to increase interest rates even more. The number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits dropped to 228K from 237K previously, and lower than the expected 239K figure, reaching its lowest level in two months. Meanwhile, housing and manufacturing continue to struggle, as existing home sales dropped to 4.16 million units annually, a low not seen since January. While the amount of new residential buildings that began construction is 1.43 million, a little below the expected 1.48 million new residents, and way below the 1.56 million figure from the previous month.

Annual inflation in Canada fell to the target range for the first time in over two years, with the print coming in at 2.8 percent versus a forecast of 3.0 percent and previous rate of 3.4 percent. On a monthly basis, this represents an increase of 0.1 percent as opposed to the forecasted figure of 0.3 percent. The last time annual inflation readings came in below 3 percent was in March 2021. Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland described reaching the target range as a "significant moment" that "should provide a lot of relief to Canadians." Despite this, core inflation remains sticky, falling between the range of 3.5 percent - 4.0 percent. The three month annualized core reading is 3.6 percent. Markets are pricing in an 80 percent chance of a pause for the upcoming Bank of Canada monetary policy meeting.

UK inflation slows

United Kingdom's annual inflation slowed to 7.9 percent from 8.7 percent previously, lower than the market expectation of 8.2 percent. On a monthly basis, this represents an increase of 0.1 percent as opposed to the forecasted figure of 0.4 percent. Core inflation dropped to 6.9 percent from 7.1 percent previously. The readings come as a welcome sign amid the UK still having one of the highest inflation rates

compared to other developed economies. Following the print, the market shifted its expectation from a 50 bps to a 25 bps rate hike by the Bank of England. Furthermore, the Sterling dropped against the US dollar, last trading at 1.2855.

Asia-Pacific

Amid a series of disappointing economic data coming out of China following their recovery from zero COVID lockdowns, quarterly GDP further added to worries about a possible economic slowdown. The second quarter GDP print of 6.3 percent came in well below the expected figure of 7.1 percent. This represents a growth of 0.8 percent q/q versus 2.2 percent previously. Furthermore, unemployment among the youth set a new high, coming in at 21.3 percent for people aged 16 24. Despite this, industrial production came in way better than expected rising by 4.4 percent versus a 2.7 percent forecast. The Chinese government rolled out several stimulus measures following a lackluster zero COVID recovery represented by a struggling real estate sector, and depressed exports. National Bureau of Statistics spokesperson Fu Linghui stated that he expected real estate investments to remain low in the second half of the year, and that youth unemployment will continue to rise up until August. Although, the spokesperson voiced his confidence that China can still meet their yearly target of 5 percent growth despite the headwinds ahead.

Australia employment

The latest employment change came in at 32.6K, more than double the expected increase of 15.4K, beating expectations for the second consecutive month. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate came in at 3.5 percent, bettering the forecast 3.6 percent figure. Soon-to-be RBA governor Michelle Bullock claimed that the unemployment rate will need to escalate to around 4.5 percent in order to have any sort of impact on inflation, adding to the probability of further interest rate hikes by the Reserve Bank of Australia.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30600.



and make this initiative a huge success."

Kalyan Jewellers is committed to providing exceptional experiences and fostering a sense of delight for its valued patrons. Customers can avail the exciting range of offers along with benefits of Kalyan's 4-Level Assurance Certification on their jewelry purchases, ensuring a seamless service-backed shopping experience. The jewelry retailed at Kalyan Jewellers go through multiple purity tests and patrons will also receive the Kalyan Jewellers 4-Level Assurance Certificate, which guarantees Purity, Free Lifetime Maintenance of ornaments, Detailed Product Information and Transparent Exchange and Buy-back policies. The certification is part of the brand's commitment towards offering the very best to its loyalists.

Kalyan Jewellers offers popular house brands such as, Muhurat – Wedding Jewellery Line, Mudhra – handcrafted antique jewelry, Nimah – temple Jewel-

ry, Glo – dancing diamonds, Ziah – Solitaire like diamond jewelry, Anokhi – uncut diamonds, Hera – daily wear diamonds, Rang – precious stones jewelry, and the recently launched Lila – colored stones and diamond jewelry.



This picture shows a view of the wind-catcher ("badir" in Persian) of Dowlat Abad Garden, the world's tallest standing at 33.8 metres, in Iran's central city of Yazd.

Iran's ancient 'wind catchers'

BEAT THE HEAT NATURALLY

Tall, chimney-like towers rise from centuries-old adobe houses in Iran's desert city of Yazd, drawing in a pleasant breeze for residents of one of the hottest cities on earth. The wind catchers, called badjirs in Persian, are just one of the engineering marvels inhabitants have developed in this ancient city in central Iran – where temperatures reach well over 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in the summer.

of the Middle East. "The badjirs played a key role in the city's prosperity," said Shakeri about the desert city that was a caravan stop on the ancient Silk Road. "Thanks to them, people lived at ease," he added, describing how the wind catchers pull fresh air into buildings and allow hot air to ventilate out through large vertical slots. Majid Oloumi, the head of Dowlatabad garden, home to a towering 33-metre (100 foot) wind catcher – one of the tallest in the world – described the cooling method as "totally clean because it uses neither electricity nor polluting materials". UNESCO listed Yazd as a World Heritage Site in 2017, describing the city as a "living testimony to intelligent use of limited available resources in the desert for survival".

Similarly, ventilation inspired by "termite mounds, an approach similar to that of badjirs" were built atop Eastgate Centre, a shopping mall and office complex in Harare, Zimbabwe. However, Yazd's unique architectural traditions have largely been abandoned at their birthplace. "Unfortunately, our ancestral heritage has been forgotten," especially since the emergence of air conditioners, said Oloumi. Yazd's old town is a labyrinth of narrow streets and roofed alleyways. Its centuries-old edifices made of clay, mud-brick and adobe all provide insulation against the torrid heat. But the old houses stand in sharp contrast to modern cement buildings and multi-lane roads. "Today, house architecture imitates that in

water system. "They constitute a source of water supply and make it possible to cool the dwellings and to preserve food at an ideal temperature." Iran is estimated to have around 33,000 operational qanats today, a significant drop from the 50,000 in use in the mid-20th century. UNESCO says the decline in qanats is driven in part by the drying up of underground water sources due to overconsumption.



People visit the Qanat (underground aqueduct) of Zarch hanging at the site in Iran's central city of Yazd.—AFP photos



A couple sit for drinks by a wind-catcher ("badir" in Persian) at a rooftop cafe in Iran's central city of Yazd.



This picture shows a view of wind-catchers ("badir" in Persian) in Iran's central city of Yazd.

'Simplicity'

The bioclimatic architecture which provides thermal comfort for the people of Yazd has attracted interest elsewhere on a heating planet. "Badjirs demonstrate that simplicity can be an essential attribute to sustainability," said Paris-based architect Roland Dehghan Kamaraji, who has studied Iran's wind catchers. "It goes against the common misconception that sustainable solutions need to be complex or high-tech."

At a sustainable urban community called Masdar city in the United Arab Emirates, buildings have been "designed to make use of the natural ventilation for cooling, like badjirs," he said.

other countries, and cement-based construction does not correspond to the climate of Yazd," he added. Kamaraji says bioclimatic architecture has waned due to economic constraints and modern construction methods that "largely favour the use of energy and fossil fuel intensive materials".

Old but effective

Another sustainable architectural feature of Yazd is its system of underground aqueducts called qanats, which transport water from underground wells, aquifers or the mountains. "These underground aqueducts have great utility," said Zohreh Montazer, an expert on the



This picture shows a view of the Qanat (underground aqueduct) of Zarch hanging at the site in Iran's central city of Yazd.



This picture shows a view of wind-catchers ("badir" in Persian) in Iran's central city of Yazd.

Iranian authorities have in recent years sought to rehabilitate the qanat of Zarch – considered the longest and oldest, dating to some 3,000 years ago. The water network – which stretches over 70 kilometres across Yazd, and runs at a depth of around 30 metres – stands as a reminder for Yazd's residents of the challenges ahead. "The day when fossil fuels run out," said Montazer, "we will have to return to these methods."—AFP



This picture shows a view of wind-catchers ("badir" in Persian) in Iran's central city of Yazd.



This picture shows a view of a hallway at the Safavid-era (1501-1736) Bagh Gandom Ab-Anbar (cistern) in Iran's central city of Yazd.



People visit the Safavid-era (1501-1736) Bagh Gandom Ab-Anbar (cistern) in Iran's central city of Yazd.



A man points at a map of the Qanat (underground aqueduct) of Zarch hanging at the site in Iran's central city of Yazd.



A guide leads tourists at the Dowlat Abad Garden in Iran's central city of Yazd.

Tony Bennett, last of classic American crooners, dies at 96

Tony Bennett, the last in a generation of classic American crooners whose ceaselessly cheery spirit bridged generations to make him a hit-maker across seven decades, died Friday in New York. He was 96.

Raised in an era when big bands defined US pop music, Bennett achieved an improbable second act when he started winning over young audiences in the 1990s -- not by reinventing himself but by demonstrating his sheer joy in belting out the standards.

At age 88, Bennett in 2014 became the oldest person ever to reach number one on the US album chart through a collection of duets with Lady Gaga, who became his friend and touring companion as younger stars rushed to work with the singing great.

Bennett, who revealed in 2016 that he had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, died in his hometown, his publicist Sylvia Weiner announced, without revealing a cause.

He was "still singing the other day at his piano," said a message on his official Twitter account.

Tributes quickly poured in from the music, political and acting worlds. "Without doubt the classiest singer, man and performer you will ever see. He's irreplaceable. I loved and adored him," Elton John wrote on Instagram.



Winner of Best Pop Collaboration with Vocals and Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album, Tony Bennett poses with his trophies at the 49th Grammy Awards in Los Angeles 11 February 2007.

"For more than 70 years, Tony Bennett didn't just sing the classics -- he himself was an American classic," President Joe Biden said in a statement, offering his and his wife Jill Biden's condolences to loved ones and fans of the "timeless artist" who brought "joy." Likened since the start of his career to Frank Sinatra, Bennett first tried to distance himself but eventually followed much of the same path as earlier crooners -- singing in nightclubs, on television and for movies.

His attempts to act ended quickly though. His gift proved to be his stage presence. With a welcoming smile and dapper suit, he sang with gusto and a smooth vibrato in a strong, clearly enunciated voice.

Starting with his recording of the film song "Because of You" in 1951, Bennett sang dozens of hits including "Rags to Riches," "Stranger in Paradise" and, what became his signature tune, "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," which landed him two of his 19 Grammy Awards.

But the British Invasion led by The Beatles initially took a toll on the singer, whose music suddenly sounded quaint and antiquated. He nearly died of a cocaine overdose in 1979 before sobering up and reviving his career.

"When rap came along, or disco, whatever the new fashion was at the moment, I didn't try to find something that would fit whatever the style was of the whole music scene," Bennett told the British culture magazine Clash. "I just stayed myself and sang sincerely and tried to just stay honest with myself... and luckily it just paid off."

Singing as hardscrabble youth

Tony Bennett -- his stage name came after advice from showbiz A-lister Bob Hope -- was born Anthony Dominick Benedetto in the Astoria neighborhood of New York's Queens borough. His father was a struggling



A pedestrian stops to take a picture of a Tony Bennett statue at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, California.



Nominee for Best Pop Collaboration with Vocals and Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album Tony Bennett attends the 49th Grammy Awards in Los Angeles 11 February 2007.

grocer who immigrated from southern Italy.

Bennett showed early promise as an entertainer, singing at age nine next to legendary New York mayor Fiorello LaGuardia during a ceremony.

But his father's death at age 10, as the United States was still struggling to exit the Great Depression, led him to leave school and earn money through jobs including singing at Italian restaurants

and caricature painting, which remained a lifelong side career.

Bennett served in France and Germany during World War II. But he was demoted after cursing at an officer from the South who objected to Bennett dining with an African American friend in the then racially segregated army.

As punishment, Bennett spent his tour of duty digging out bodies. But after the Allied victory, Bennett found an unexpected break into music as he waited with fellow troops in Wiesbaden, Germany to return home. With the city's opera house still intact, a US Army band performed a weekly show to be broadcast on military radio across Germany. Taken on as the band's librarian, Bennett quickly impressed with his voice and was made one of four vocalists.

"I could sing whatever I wanted, and there was no one around to tell me any different," Bennett later wrote in his autobiography, "The Good Life." When he returned to the United States, he took formal singing lessons through the GI Bill, which covered educational expenses for returning troops.

His experiences made Bennett a lifelong liberal and pacifist. He became enraged in the 1950s when he played in Miami with jazz pioneer Duke Ellington, who was not allowed to attend a press party due to segregation at the hotel. — AFP



Singers Lady Gaga and Tony Bennett hold their Grammys for Best Traditional Pop Vocals for their album "Cheek to Cheek" in the press room during the 57th annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles, California on February 8, 2015.

Netflix's first African animation in trailblazing debut

Netflix's first original African animated series premiered on Thursday in a debut its creator said she hoped would pave the way for more productions from the continent.

Set in a futuristic version of Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, "Supa Team 4" tells the story of four teen girls who turn undercover superheroes after being recruited by a retired secret agent to save the world.

"I'm excited that the world finally gets to see the fantastic show that the incredibly talented super team, from Africa and beyond, have put together," Zambian writer Malenga Mulendema told AFP in a statement.

"We hope 'Supa Team 4'... will lead to further investment and collaboration so we can continue to grow the industry." Mulendema created the series after pitching it at a pan-African talent search by animation studio Triggerfish, where she became one of the winners in 2015. When the show was first announced in 2019, Mulendema said she set the story in her home country to "illustrate that anyone from anywhere can be a superhero".

"(Animation) series shaped our childhoods and to know young Zambians get to see what they've never seen on TV before is Amazing!!" Zambian singer Sampa the Great,



who worked on the theme song, wrote on Instagram this month.

Netflix has bet on diversifying its production outside the United States in recent years, scoring big with series including Spanish smash "Mon-

ey Heist" and South Korean dystopian drama "Squid Game". In April, the firm said it planned to expand operations in Africa and give "more African storytellers an amplified voice on the global stage". —AFP

'Barbenheimer' frenzy hits North American cinemas

Dolls in neon pink dreamhouses, scientists at Los Alamos, or both?

"Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" hit North American movie theaters on Friday, in what is expected to be among Hollywood's biggest weekends of the year -- inspiring a frenzy for the diametrically opposed films.

But as fans of the iconic toy and history buffs interested in the father of the atomic bomb flocked to cinemas, actors and writers remained on strike, casting a pall over the outlook for the film industry.

For now, both movies are off to strong starts with the cotton candy-hued "Barbie" bringing in \$22.3 million from previews and "Oppenheimer" \$10.5 million, said Daniel Loria, editorial director at Boxoffice Pro.

For the weekend, "Barbie" could take in \$150 million, according to estimates, exceeding December's opening of "Avatar: The Way of Water."

"The expectations are just so big that we're trying to figure out not if it's going to be a success, but how big of a success it's going to be," Loria said. Millions of moviegoers are set to see both films through Sunday, with more than 200,000 planning to catch both in the same day, according to the National Association of Theatre Owners.

Excitement over the parallel opening -- a phenomenon dubbed "Barbenheimer" -- has sparked



This combination of file pictures shows Australian actress Margot Robbie as she poses on the pink carpet during the European premiere of "Barbie" in central London; and (from left to right) US actor Matt Damon, British Actor Emily Blunt, Irish actor Cillian Murphy, and British Actor Florence Pugh as they pose on the red carpet during the UK premiere of "Oppenheimer" in central London on July 13, 2023.—AFP photos

memes featuring frantic transitions between viewing both movies and moviegoers showing up at theaters in outrageous outfits.

'Funny juxtaposition'

The online buzz surrounding same-day viewings drew salesman Eric Adams, 27, to the cinema in New York on Friday. "I just wanted to be in on it and the theater was full at 10:30 in the morning, so that was pretty crazy," he told AFP. He added that he had trouble finding tickets to "Barbie" and settled for a late screening.

Another moviegoer, 23-year-old actor Dara Weinstein, added: "Because it's such a funny juxtaposition that those two movies are coming out on the same day, it definitely created a lot of buzz around them." Viewers finally have "a weekend of choice," said Loria of the parallel opening, which adds to hits like the latest installment of the "Mission Impossible" franchise and "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny."

For a multiplex model to work for theater owners, such diversity in films is needed, he said.

Colorado-based Emma McNealy, 35, said she would typically have waited to stream "Oppenheimer" at home, given its three-hour runtime and serious subject matter. But chatter online about people planning to see both on the same day intrigued the account manager. On "Barbie," she said: "I think a lot of women like that a Barbie is getting more layers in this telling; it's not just candy-coated fluff."

The excitement around recent movie releases has also seen celebrities promote each others' films. Although director Christopher McQuarrie's "Mission: Impossible -- Dead Reckoning Part One" opened around a week before "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer," actor Tom Cruise earlier tweeted about looking forward to both films. —AFP



This combination of file pictures shows Irish actor Cillian Murphy as he poses during the premiere of the movie "Oppenheimer" at the Grand Rex cinema in Paris; and Australian actress Margot Robbie as she poses for a photo during a pink carpet event to promote her new film "Barbie" in Seoul.

Kuwait selected to join famous Bahraini TV show 'Beban'

In addition to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, and the United Arab Emirates, doors are now open for Kuwaiti entrepreneurs to join the entrepreneurship-themed reality television show "Beban" produced by Bahrain-based Hope Ventures, the investment arm of Hope Fund, in its third season through a fruitful collaboration with Kuwaiti social entrepreneur, Riham Al-Ayyar, Founder and CEO of Marketing Firm Philosophy.

Beban is centered around promising entrepreneurs as they pitch their existing businesses for equity investment and business development opportunities before a panel of regional investors of the private sector who can strategically accelerate the growth and expansion of these businesses to international markets.

Furthermore, Beban entrepreneurs will also benefit from the intensive training bootcamp they will undergo as part of the Beban journey to develop their businesses in various aspects like expansion planning, financial modeling, and pitching in front of a panel of regional investors on a televised show.

Commenting on the occasion, Riham Al-Ayyar said: "Beban opening its doors to Kuwaiti entrepreneurs and potential investors will bring exponential exposure and lucrative opportunities to the entrepreneurial scene in the country. Excited to be supporting Beban's journey in mobilizing its resources and fostering its financial patronization from Kuwait. Maximizing Kuwait's position in this valuable show will definitely make a significant impact on the country's entrepreneurial market and will highlight the great potential and talents we have as a nation. It is a pleasure to be part of this meaningful show."

On her part, Fajer Al-Pachachi, General Manager at Hope Ventures, said: "The Kuwaiti market is rich in the caliber of its entrepreneurs, which makes our expansion all the more exciting. We created Beban to function as a borderless investment platform that facilitates co-investment opportunities alongside the private sector, which possesses the knowledge and networks needed for businesses to strategically accelerate their growth. We look forward to welcoming Kuwaiti applicants and expanding Beban's presence in the region to Kuwait besides Riham Al-Ayyar."



Riham Al-Ayyar



Fajer Al-Pachachi

Lifestyle

VOICE ACTORS WARN COMIC-CON OVER RAMPANT AI THREAT



Barbie cosplayers pose outside the convention center during San Diego Comic-Con International in San Diego, California.



A cosplayer poses during San Diego Comic-Con International in San Diego, California.

"Pandora's Box is open" when it comes to artificial intelligence, voice actors behind some of the world's most popular animations and video games warned at this week's Comic-Con event.

North America's largest pop culture gathering is taking place during a major Hollywood strike, partly driven by actors and writers' concerns about the encroachment of AI into art.

Voice actors are on the frontlines of the debate, with technology now readily available allowing users to clone somebody's voice and have it read new dialogue — often without their permission or payment.

Tim Friedlander, founder of the National Association of Voice Actors, shared a recent example of a voice actor who had worked for a company for three years, but abruptly lost their work.

"They said 'we have three years of your voice — we're just going to create an AI synthetic voice out what we already have,'" Friedlander told press ahead of Saturday's panel.

The danger does not just come from studios. The last few years have seen a sharp rise in fans using AI "deepfake mods" to clone famous voices and have them read new material, often pornographic in nature.

"I have children. There are things I don't want my voice to say and have my children hear and question



Groot sits on an attendee's shoulder during San Diego Comic-Con International.

if that is something that I have actually said," said Cissy Jones, of animated TV series "The Owl House."

Zeke Alton, whose voice recently appeared in video game "The Calisto Protocol," said voice actors were not trying to ban AI altogether.

"Let's be clear — Pandora's box is open," he said. "If you're going to replicate me or any other performer, we should consent to that, and then we should be compensated for the use of what makes us money."

'Digital replica'

Artificial intelligence is a key sticking point in stalled talks between Hollywood studios and the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA), which this month joined writers on strike.

Actors have accused studios of

falling to take seriously concerns that would leave them "vulnerable to having most of their work replaced by digital replicas."

The studios said Friday they had offered to establish informed consent and fair compensation when a "digital replica" is made of a performer or their voice, and that the union did not respond.

Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, chief negotiator for SAG-AFTRA, told journalists at Comic-Con that studios want to "bury" AI consent clauses "in some sentence in the middle of a 12-page contract."

Voice actors are "at the forefront" of the AI debate, he warned, with changes "happening more quickly with voice acting than it is in any other field."

For instance, studios are explor-



(From left to right) US actors Tim Friedlander, Ashly Burch, Zeke Alton, SAG-AFTRA's Chief Negotiator Duncan Crabtree-Ireland and US actress Cissy Jones attend the "AI in Entertainment: The Performer's Perspective" press junket during San Diego Comic-Con International.

ing AI to dub dialogue into foreign languages, which would strip voice actors around the world of valuable work for their local markets.

Another concern is that studios could use "synthesized" voices that merge multiple human voices, and not pay any of the original actors.

'Not protected'

Despite the furor, not all voice acting work is currently affected by the strike, as some is negotiated under separate union contracts.

Voicing characters in animation, announcing trailers or adding dialogue for background actors in film or television scenes — a very

common practice known as "looping" or ADR (Automated Dialogue Replacement) — is banned.

But voiceover for video games comes under a separate union contract for "interactive" media, for which talks are still ongoing, and therefore can still be performed without breaking the strike.

Still, Alton warned, "what happens in this strike is going to impact not only the acting profession, but every profession." "An actor is an actor. So if we are not protected at the end of this strike in this contract, we're not protected in any contract." — AFP



A cosplayer dressed as a Mandalorian poses during San Diego Comic-Con International.



Cosplayer Jordan Riley dressed as Hawkeye poses outside the convention center during San Diego Comic-Con International.



Evil clown cosplayers pose during San Diego Comic-Con International in San Diego, California.

Indian stars bring superhero show to Comic-Con

With strikes keeping Hollywood actors away from Comic-Con, megastars of Indian cinema stole the spotlight with the splashy launch of an ambitious new sci-fi that merges Hindu mythology with "Star Wars." "Kalki 2898 AD" — set for a 2024 release — became the first-ever Indian movie given a coveted slot at the San Diego pop culture gathering's famous Hall H auditorium, where countless Marvel superhero films have been revealed.

In contrast with other toned-down events at this year's strike-hit Comic-Con, Thursday's presentation featured a phalanx of futuristic soldiers, performers pounding giant drums, and dancers dressed in white saris. Prabhas and Kamal Haasan — giants of southern Indian cinema — were joined via video link by Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan, and greeted with hysterical roars from an audience largely comprised of attendees from the South Asian diaspora.

"Here you guys have superheroes — you love your superheroes so much. If Superman can fly into space, we have Hanuman who can eat the sun," said director Nag Ashwin. "I'm very interested for the world to meet India." Afterward, Ashwin told AFP that he hopes the film can "do something similar" to hit movies like the Spider-Man and Iron Man franchises, but offer a more international story than US-focused superhero films. "It's always New York that gets attacked" in Hollywood films, he joked. "Let's bring that whole thing here... let's get people from around the world to India. So it's global in that sense."

While plot details are under wraps, Pra-



(From left to right) Rana Daggubati, Kamal Haasan and Prabhas speak onstage at "Project K: Inside India's History-Making Sci-Fi Epic" panel during 2023 Comic-Con International: San Diego at San Diego Convention Center in San Diego, California. — AFP

bhas said his character was inspired by the ancient Sanskrit epic the Mahabharata. A trailer showed a war-torn future world in which people are violently oppressed by mysterious forces, with Prabhas seemingly playing a warrior leading some form of resistance. Ashwin said he was heavily influenced by "Star Wars," jokingly calling the film's masked soldiers the "Indian version of Stormtroopers."

Tollywood

The arrival of "Kalki 2898 AD" at Comic-Con comes hot on the heels of the breakout success of last year's "RRR," which won an Oscar for best song. Both movies hail from southern India's Telugu-language film industry, aka Tollywood. With a reported \$75 million budget, "Kalki 2898 AD" supplants "RRR" as the most expensive Indian film ever made. "The

idea of this film started before the 'RRR' Oscar campaign," said Ashwin. But the international success of last year's hit "must have made life a lot easier for us," he said. "Kalki 2898 AD" also brings in stars more associated with the famous, Mumbai-based Bollywood industry, such as Bachchan and Deepika Padukone.

"As we figured out and saw what the story was becoming, it slowly became necessary for us to have these guys," said Ashwin. "Because the world we're trying to build is of that scale. And to make it believable, you needed people of that scale." Padukone, known to Western audiences for starring alongside Vin Diesel: Return of Xander Cage, did not attend Comic-Con as she is a member of the striking Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA). "I think it is a just battle. And I wish them well," Haasan told AFP of the strike. — AFP

Hollywood strike forces Venice fest to switch opening film

The Venice Film Festival has switched its opening selection, after the movie that had been slated to open pulled out because of the ongoing Hollywood strike, organizers said.

Edoardo De Angelis' "Comandante" will now open the 80th Venice International Film Festival, in place of Luca Guadagnino's "Challengers," the festival said in a statement late on Friday.

"Challengers" featuring US star Zendaya, "will not participate at the Festival following a decision made by the production," owing to ongoing industrial action in Hollywood, it said.

"Comandante" will have its world premiere on Wednesday, August 30 in the Sala Grande of the Palazzo del Cinema on the island of Lido di Venezia during the opening ceremony. The change comes two weeks after actors joined a writers' strike, triggering the first

industry-wide walkout for 63 years, effectively shutting down Hollywood.

The SAG-AFTRA (the Screen Actors Guild) went on strike after negotiations to reach a new deal with production studios ended without an agreement.

The union's demands have focused on dwindling pay in the streaming era, as well as the threat to the industry posed by artificial intelligence.

Based on a true story, "Comandante" depicts the rescue of 26 shipwrecked Belgians during World War II by a submarine skipper played by Pierfrancesco Favino. De Angelis, 44, was behind 2016 film "Indivisibili" and the TV drama series "The Lying Life of Adults."

The Venice festival will end on September 9 with the screening of "La sociedad de la nieve" ("Society of the Snow") by Spanish director Juan Antonio Bayona, the organizers said. — AFP



Sports

Marchand smashes Phelps' record as Titmus tops rivals

Australia break women's 4x100 freestyle relay world record

FUKUOKA: France's Leon Marchand smashed Michael Phelps's last remaining world record on Sunday while Australia's Ariarne Titmus blew her 400m freestyle rivals out of the water at swimming's world championships. Marchand clocked 4min, 02.50sec to win the 400m individual medley, taking more than a second off Phelps's record. The 21-year-old is set to be one of the faces of next year's Paris Olympics and he warned that "the best is yet to come".

"It was insane," Marchand said. "That was one of the most painful things I did. That was amazing to do it here. The time is crazy." Phelps's world record was one of three to fall on a dramatic opening night in the southern Japanese city of Fukuoka. Titmus reclaimed her world record in the women's 400m freestyle, while Australia's women's 4x100m freestyle team also improved the mark they set two years ago.

Phelps's benchmark of 4:03.84 had stood since the 2008 Beijing Olympics and was the longest-held world record in swimming. Carson Palmer, who finished second behind Marchand in a time of 4:06.56, said it was "pretty cool" to watch the Frenchman break it. "Obviously the goal is always to win and Leon is a great competitor," said Foster. "Be-

ing the closest person to history was pretty cool, getting a front-row seat to that." Japan's Daiya Seto finished third in a time of 4:09.41.

'Really excited'

Titmus earlier dominated in one of the most hotly anticipated races of the championships, the women's 400m freestyle. It pitted Olympic champion Titmus against world record-holder Summer McIntosh and defending world champion Katie Ledecky. Titmus made short work of her rivals, coming home in 3 min, 55.38 sec to win the title and take back the world record that McIntosh had wrested from her in March. Ledecky finished the race second in 3:58.73 but McIntosh could only place fourth, with New Zealand's Erika Fairweather taking third in 3:59.59.

Titmus said she "honestly did not think about getting the world record back". "I just wanted to come here and swim the way that I felt I was capable of swimming," she said. "It was obviously enough to get the record back." It was also the first time that Titmus, Ledecky and McIntosh had gone head-to-head since Titmus won at the Tokyo Olympics two years ago. "I was really excited for this race coming in tonight," Titmus said.

"Me and Katie and Summer always put up a great fight and I'm glad that we could put on a show."

On a successful night for Australia, Sam Short won the men's 400m freestyle, pipping Tunisia's Olympic champion Ahmed Hafnaoui. The 19-year-old was on pace to break the world record at the 300m mark but came home in 3 minutes, 40.68 seconds, missing the record by 0.61 sec. "With 100 to go, I was just going for the win because Ahmed is the Olympic champion so this was going to go down to the wire," Short said. "I just put my head down at the end and I don't know how I beat his long arms to the wall but I did it."

Hafnaoui finished second on 3:40.70, while Germany's Lukas Martens was third on 3:42.20. Defending champion Elijah Winnington of Australia finished seventh. In the women's 4x100m freestyle relay, the Australians came home in a world record time of 3min, 27.96sec to take gold ahead of the United States on 3:31.93 and China on 3:32.40.

The Australian team of Mollie O'Callaghan, Shayna Jack, Meg Harris and Emma McKeon beat the record of 3:29.69, also set by Australia at the Tokyo Olympics two years ago. "It's really excit-



FUKUOKA, Japan: Gold medalist France's Leon Marchand celebrates with former US swimmer Michael Phelps during the medal ceremony for the men's 400m medley swimming event during the World Aquatics Championships on July 23, 2023. — AFP

ing to start the night off with a world record in the relay," said O'Callaghan. "I'm very pleased and I'm proud of these girls."

Australia's men's 4x100m freestyle team also claimed gold, with Italy taking silver and the United States bronze. — AFP

As Paris Olympics loom, hotel industry has reservations

PARIS: While accommodating potential Olympic visitors is one topic to fret about 12 months ahead of the Paris Games, there are also concerns that the sports showpiece could exacerbate existing issues for one of the world's most popular tourist destinations. The Ile de France region, which includes historic suburbs such as Seine-Saint-Denis, home of the main Olympic sites, and Versailles, is neck-and-neck with London as the most visited city in Europe.

The question is whether the Games will be a boon for the hotel sector, for visitors and for the locals. Hotel professionals point to the risk of a "bad buzz" if the Games fail, yet they also warn that, following the example of previous hosts, the Olympics are certain to drive up prices for years to come. "With the expected peak in visitor numbers, it's clear that the Paris hotel network, which is much larger than that of Rio or Athens, will be saturated," Vangelis Panayotis, president of specialist consultancy MKG Consulting, told AFP.

"At the Rio Olympics in 2016, Airbnb helped to increase accommodation capacity. And at the Athens Olympics in 2004, large cruise liners were put in the port to cover accommodation needs," he said. Yet with the tourist industry growing, Paris is well supplied with hotel rooms.

'100% rise'

In terms of "hotel density, Paris and its region are superior to New York and very well positioned compared to London", said Vincent Bollaert, Director of France for property specialists Knight Frank. "We have a very high level of tourism: 45 million tourists staying here every year, and an extra 15 to 20 million are expected for the Olympic Games," said.

Panayotis adds an element of doubt. "Some of the capital's usual clientele are not likely to come, they are not interested in being in the rush of the Olympic Games," he said. "In London in 2012, there was no visitor boom, but those who came for the Games were prepared to pay much more: Prices rose by 100% and more, and they remained higher in subsequent years."

The Ile de France hotel network is growing, said Bollaert. It has some 2,100 establishments with 124,000 rooms and "has attracted 1.3 billion euros in investment, an increase of 35 percent compared to 2019, before the pandemic", he said. "In the run-up to the Olympic Games, around 150 new establishments, or 5,000 additional rooms, will be added to the total." There is also the concern that those who come do not enjoy their visit.

'Promotional window'

"It could even be extremely negative if what emerges from the Games is negative communication about the destination," said Didier Arino, managing director of the Protourisme consultancy. "But it can also produce a good image" in the long term, if everything goes well, providing an "exceptional promotional window". The positive contribution, said Arino, will come more from "the transformation, the urban developments, the creation of infrastructures that will be used afterwards, than from the Olympic Games' tourism function alone".

Hoteliers are planning to make the most of it. Some started early, renting rooms to agencies and partners rather than to private individuals. By May this year, Edgar Suites, which has some 500 boutique hotels, mainly in Paris, had rented 60% of its properties for the Olympic period. Co-founder Gregoire Benoit told AFP that "12 to 18 months before the Games is the most interesting period: federations, the Olympic Committee, sponsors, athletes' families, etc. are looking for accommodation". — AFP

Riots add to Paris Olympics worries a year from start

PARIS: As riots raged around France earlier this month, infrastructure for next year's Paris Olympics risked becoming engulfed in the violence, adding a fresh worry for organizers who face a head-spinning list of security challenges one year before the Games start. Surveillance was increased around the under-construction Olympic athletes' village, media center and swimming complex which are in the deprived Seine-Saint-Denis area of northeast Paris, one of the hotspots of the rioting.

In the end, a building which will house a training pool suffered minor damage to its facade when an adjacent bus depot went up in flames and an attempted arson attack on the media center was thwarted by two alert security guards. "We were very close to having a major problem," Nicolas Ferrand, head of the Solideo organization in charge of Olympics construction work, said afterwards.

The chaotic street scenes were an unwelcome reminder of last year's Champions League final in Paris, which was held at the national stadium in Seine-Saint-Denis that will host the athletics events at the Olympics. Gangs of youths preyed on football fans attending the 2022 climax to the European football season, many of whom were assaulted and robbed as they made their way out of the stadium. International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach this

week sought to reassure people planning to travel to Paris. "We are very confident that the Games can and will happen in a peaceful environment," he told reporters.

Opening ceremony fears

The need to manage street crime around the Olympic venues is a challenge French security forces are familiar with, former national police chief Frederic Pechenard told AFP. "Delinquency, potentially riots, or strikes are worries for organizers, but generally secondary ones," he explained. "If I was in charge of security, which very fortunately I'm not, it's a terror attack that would worry me the most."

The biggest headache is securing what promises to be the most ambitious opening ceremony in Olympic history. Rather than the usual procession in the athletics stadium, around a hundred boats carrying sporting delegations are set to sail through the middle of the City of Light on the river Seine. Up to half a million people will have tickets to witness the open-air extravaganza that will see the flotilla travel along a six-km route overlooked by thousands of buildings.

Pechenard, who became a politician for the opposition Republicans party after serving as national police chief from 2007-2012, said security services were naturally worried. "Everyone knows that it won't be easy to secure," he explained. "The biggest risk is someone acting on their own who decides to cause an incident." Large terror plots involving multiple people are seen as easier to detect and disrupt by intelligence services, which have prevented 39 attacks in France in the last five years, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said in December last year.



CRETEIL, France: A private protection and security guard candidate takes part in an exercise to validate her course in the offices of the company Securtyer on March 9, 2023. — AFP

Pechenard said "100 percent safety" was impossible at any large public event and overall he remained "optimistic" because of the strong team in charge of security from the interior ministry to the organizing committee. "There will be unprecedented security arrangements in place," chief Paris 2024 organizer Tony Estanguet, a three-time Olympic gold medal list in canoeing, told reporters on Tuesday. "I think it will be the safest place on the planet, where you can be in total security." — AFP

Many rivers to cross as Paris readies Seine for Olympics star role

PARIS: France's plan to have the gigantic 2024 Olympics opening ceremony on the river Seine is filling many Parisians with giddy anticipation, while some officials feel mostly dread over the logistical challenges. But whatever the obstacles may be, Paris is determined to make its iconic river a star, if not the star, of next year's Summer Games.

Ever since French President Emmanuel Macron ordered organizers to create the most memorable start to any Olympics in history, officials have been working overtime to make it happen. Representatives from government, police, the national organizing committee and Paris city hall know that so many things can go wrong up until the last minute before 8.24 pm (1824 GMT) on July 26, 2024, when 10,000 athletes on around 100 boats are to float down the river, marking the start to the biggest event in France for decades.

'Just crazy'

The itinerary of six kilometers between the Austerlitz and Iena bridges takes them past some of the French capital's most famous landmarks, Notre-Dame, the Louvre, the Musee d'Orsay, the Grand Palais and, of course, the Eiffel Tower. "The potential is just crazy," gushed Tony Estanguet, the head of the Paris 2024 organizing committee, after a first prac-

Rain threatens England's bid to level Ashes

MANCHESTER: England's bid to force a series-leveling win in the fourth Ashes Test against Australia was left hanging by a thread as rain continued to keep the players off the field on Sunday's final day at Old Trafford. A heavy overnight downpour left the outfield sodden and meant play was unable to start as scheduled at 11:00 am (1000 GMT) in Manchester. But with hardy spectators still sheltering beneath umbrellas, ground staff began removing the covers at



PARIS: Peniche boats sail past the Eiffel Tower on the River Seine on July 17, 2023 during a parade to test "maneuvers", "distances", "duration" and "video capture" of the future opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics in 2024. — AFP

tice run. It will be the first time in Olympic history that the opening ceremony takes place outside the main athletics stadium.

A crowd of an estimated 500,000 will be watching from the riverbanks, joining countless celebrities and world leaders. The security challenge alone is enough to give officials sleepless nights, and some, including the former Paris police chief, tried to get Macron to change his mind, in vain. France's leader wants an "unforgettable" Olympics start, outdoing even London, where the quirky 2012 opening cere-

mony directed by "Trainspotting" film director Danny Boyle wowed spectators.

"People will remember this," said Marc Guillaume, the prefect of the Paris region. "The whole world will watch the boats floating on the Seine," he added. "In contrast to a bunker-like stadium, we will be able to show Paris in its entirety, its history, its heritage, everything that makes us proud," he said. While the Seine will make its biggest splash during the opening ceremony, it will continue to play a prominent role for the rest of the Olympics. — AFP

Stokes' men must win at Old Trafford to square the series at 2-2 and force a decider in next week's fifth and final Test at the Oval in London. But a draw would be enough for Australia, as the holders, to be assured of retaining the Ashes. Old Trafford is notorious for weather delays — the northwest ground has had 24 complete days rained off in Test cricket, plus an additional two entire Tests abandoned. England restricted world Test champions Australia to 317 in their first innings of this match before racing to 592 all out, thanks largely to opener Zak Crawley's breathtaking 189 and an unbeaten 99 from Jonny Bairstow. Fast bowler Mark Wood then ripped through Australia's top order on Friday with three wickets. But Australia kept England at bay on Saturday during a stand of 103 between Labuschagne and Mitchell Marsh (31 not out). — AFP

Sports

A happy Messi is good news for Miami - and Argentina

MLS team have made it easy for superstar to settle in

FORT LAUDERDALE: Lionel Messi provided the perfect finish to start his career with Inter Miami with a brilliant winning goal on Friday but what may be most significant from his debut was how totally happy he looks again. So much of the focus since Messi said he was moving to Miami from Paris Saint-Germain has been on what the move will mean for Major League Soccer and for the business of soccer in the USA.

Somewhat lost in the hype around the move has been what it all means for the 36-year-old Argentine star himself. Messi went from the ultimate high of winning the World Cup in December to looking miserable in Paris, where he was booed by PSG's fans in his final game. Since arriving in South Florida though, Messi has had a smile on his face again and his comments, always in Spanish, have been peppered with the word "contento". He looks happy, sounds happy and everyone around him is smiling.

"We knew it was important for us to start this tournament with a win. Luckily we were able to do it at the end and I'm very happy," he said after his 94th minute winner, with a trademark curling free-kick, in the 2-1 victory over Mexico's Cruz Azul in the Leagues Cup. "I'm very happy to be here, with the team and my

family. We're very happy with this choice. I want to thank the people once again. I hope we continue this way and that they keep joining us all year because for us this is very important," he added.

Messi is a superstar but he has always appeared a somewhat reluctant celebrity. Unlike David Beckham, the biggest name to move to MLS before Messi and now co-owner of the Argentine's new club, or his contemporary Cristiano Ronaldo, the seven-times Ballon d'Or winner has never been fully at ease with his fame. Playing at a 20,000-capacity temporary stadium an hour's drive north of downtown Miami, on the surface is a huge comedown for a player who spent 17 years playing at Barcelona's Camp Nou in front of crowd's four times that size.

Adoring fans

But Messi appears to be enjoying the intimacy of the venue, where he is surrounded by adoring Spanish-speaking fans, thousands of them Argentine, many in his national team shirt. Football romantics would have loved to see Messi end his career back in Argentina, but in Miami he gets all the familiarity of home, while still able to enjoy a degree of privacy, security and — not insignificantly — a reported \$60 million a year salary.

Miami's 18-year-old midfielder Benjamin Cremaschi, born in the city to Argentine parents, was given a hug and kiss from Messi when the number ten replaced him in the 54th minute. Cremaschi said the mood in the dressing room, after the win for a team in last place in MLS without a win in 11 league games, was transformed. "It was pure joy, honestly. It was pure joy from everyone, from him, from us, to the owners, to the staff. And we're just so happy that we could win again," he said.

Miami have made it easy for him to settle in — he is surrounded by Spanish speaking teammates, Argentine coaches, including his former boss at Barcelona and Argentina, Gerardo 'Tata' Martino and club staff who share his language and culture. At training this week he has laughed and joked with the players during the warm-ups and when he entered the field on Friday, skipper DeAndre Yedlin handed him the captain's armband.

One of the smartest moves from Miami was bringing in the 35-year-old Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets to reunite with his former Barcelona teammate. It was instantly evident on Friday that the near telepathic understanding between the two has survived their two



FORT LAUDERDALE, Florida: Argentina's Lionel Messi arrives before his debut with Inter Miami CF in their League Cup match against Liga MX club Cruz Azul at DRV PNK Stadium on July 21, 2023. — AFP

years apart. Miami were transformed when the pair were sent in and if that level of impact can be maintained, they may have plenty more to smile about in the months ahead.

With the Copa America being held in the USA next year, Messi has plenty to look forward to with Argentina as well

as his club, whose next game is at home to Atlanta on Tuesday. He has indicated that his triumph in Qatar was his last World Cup but there will be plenty in his homeland now wondering that if he stays fit and happy perhaps he might be tempted to try to win the ultimate prize one more time. — AFP

Fernandes, Sancho give United friendly win over Arsenal

NEW YORK: Bruno Fernandes and Jadon Sancho were on target as Manchester United beat Arsenal 2-0 in a friendly front of 82,262 fans at MetLife Stadium on Saturday. The New York and New Jersey fans of the two Premier League clubs saw a lively first half with both goals, but the game lost its way in the second half with mass substitutions from both teams. United's new Cameroonian goalkeeper Andre Onana, signed from Inter Milan on Thursday in a \$44 million deal, did not feature despite flying out to join the team's tour in the United States.

Back-up Tom Heaton started in goal with Fernandes wearing the captain's armband after replacing defender Harry Maguire in that role. Brazilian winger Antony had the first chance for United when he was found in space in the middle of the box but he scuffed his shot which rolled harmlessly wide. Arsenal began their tour of the USA with a 5-0 win over the MLS All Stars on Wednesday and went close to an opener through Gabriel Martinelli, but Heaton produced a fine double save to deny the Brazilian.

United took the lead on the half hour mark, with Fernandes cutting in from the right and unleashing a low left-foot drive which deceived Arsenal keeper Aaron Ramsdale. Seven minutes later, Sancho doubled the lead when Arsenal defender Gabriel mis-kicked on the half-way line and the England forward burst away before blasting confidently home. With United still searching for a central striker in the transfer market, Sancho played in a central role, rather than his usual position on the wing, and handled the switch well.

With both Erik Ten Hag and Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta making full use of their squads after the break



EAST RUTHERFORD, New Jersey: Kieran Tierney of Arsenal makes a slide tackle on Scott McTominay of Manchester United as United's Facundo Pellistri chases the ball during a pre-season friendly match at MetLife Stadium on July 22, 2023. — AFP

there was an inevitable loss of intensity and United's lead was never in danger. There was an encouraging display from 18-year-old Kobbie Mainoo in the center of United's midfield and Fernandes was full of praise for the academy product. "Honestly, Kobbie is a great player, he shows great resilience. Everyone can see it. He's good on the ball, strong, he can defend and attack. He's still pretty young but we see a bright future for him. Hopefully he will get more minutes," said the Portuguese.

There was an unusual situation at the end of the game with both teams having agreed to take part in a penalty shoot-out regardless of the result. Although

there was nothing at stake in the shootout, which United won 5-3, both managers had agreed to take the chance to test their players' mettle from the spot as a useful experience. On Wednesday, United are in action again against Real Madrid in Houston while the Gunners are scheduled to face Barcelona in Los Angeles.

However Barca's friendly against Juventus, due to be played later on Saturday, was cancelled after an outbreak of viral gastroenteritis among the Spanish team. "A significant part of the blaugrana squad has a viral gastroenteritis," Barcelona said in a statement. Spanish media reported that at least a dozen players had fallen ill. — AFP

Haaland scores twice as Man City hit five in Tokyo

TOKYO: Erling Haaland scored a brace as Manchester City roared back from two goals down to beat J-League champions Yokohama F-Marininos 5-3 on Sunday in their first match of a pre-season tour of Japan. John Stones, Julian Alvarez and Rodri were also on target for Pep Guardiola's side in their first outing since completing a historic treble by winning the Champions League final last month.

Only four of the players who started that game were in the initial City XI against Marininos in Tokyo, and after 27 minutes they found themselves a goal down. Anderson Lopes latched onto the rebound after Stefan Ortega saved his initial shot, converting crisply into the bottom corner. Right-back Ken Matsubara made it 2-0

only 10 minutes later, expertly steering home with his first touch after fellow full-back Katsuya Nagato had crossed into his path from the left wing.

Stones pulled one back for City in the 40th minute, coolly slotting home from just inside the area after Alvarez's lay-off. Two minutes later City were level as Marininos goalkeeper Jun Ichimori surrendered possession cheaply under pressure from Calvin Phillips and Alvarez was on hand to stroke home. Haaland, one of 10 outfield changes made by Guardiola at half-time, didn't take long to put City ahead.

The Norwegian — who scored 52 goals in his debut season at City — fired home from an acute angle after receiving possession from fellow substitute Phil Foden in the 52nd minute. Rodri, whose goal sealed the Champions League title in Istanbul, added a fourth 20 minutes later. Kenta Inoue struck a late consolation for Marininos with four minutes to play, before Haaland tapped home his second in the second minute of stoppage time. City will next play Bayern Munich on Wednesday in Tokyo. They then travel to Seoul to take on Atletico Madrid. — AFP



TOKYO: Manchester City's forward Erling Haaland fights for the ball with Yokohama's defender Takumi Kamijima during the J-League World Challenge 2023 match at the National Stadium on July 23, 2023. — AFP

Once 'humiliated', South Korea's Park savors World Cup

SEOUL: Park Eun-seon was "humiliated" a decade ago by unfounded claims about her sex but has put the episode behind her to reach a third Women's World Cup. And now the 36-year-old South Korean forward — who played her first World Cup 20 years ago — has one more ambition in what will be her farewell to the tournament. "I've never scored a goal at the World Cup and I'm training hard with the aim of scoring a goal," Park told AFP in the lead-up to the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. "As I always say, I'm really working hard now thinking this is my last World Cup."



Park Eun-seon

South Korea begin their World Cup campaign on Tuesday against Colombia in Sydney. Park's long career has been marked by exceptional highs but also real lows. Considered a child prodigy, she joined South Korea's squad when she was a teenager and played in the 2003 World Cup. By the time she was 19 she had scored 11 goals for her country. There was domestic success too. In 2013 she was top scorer in the league with 19 goals, leading her team Seoul City Hall to second place.

But her goals prompted six rival coaches to threaten a league boycott and demand a gender test. The claim was shut down when South Korea's Human Rights Commission intervened, saying that the coaches' actions amounted to sexual harassment. "What happened is in the past and I don't remember much of it now," Park says, having described it at the time as "humiliating". She said in 2013 that she had undergone several eligibility tests in the past. "I scored a lot (in 2013) because I was given a lot of chances as my teammates were exceptionally good at the time," she says now of the scrutiny. "There are coaches who have apologized since, and time has passed. I'm doing well now."

There have been other ups and downs. Park failed to score in either the 2003 or 2015 World Cups, then was out of the national squad for seven years. She thought her international career was over. That was until Colin Bell became South Korea's coach in 2019 and the Englishman made the surprise decision to recall her. He calls Park "a game-changer".

Park was one of South Korea's best-known women footballers before the emergence of today's biggest stars such as Ji So-yun. But her career was first derailed by accusations she had leaptfrogged to the professional league — she joined her team after high school — rather than playing for a university team, as was standard practice. Park then took a two-year break from football in 2010 when her father died, but eventually returned to the game partly to honor his dreams for her career. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
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Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764

Change of Name

I, **Naseemuddin**, holder of Passport No. T8985703, permanent address Bechuva, Katkunya, Sirsiya, Shrawasti, Pin: 271840, Uttar Pradesh, India, do hereby change my name to Mohammad Naseem (as given name as surname). I will henceforth be known in the name Mohammad Naseem and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#3834) 24/07/2023

I, **Dharmendra Kumar Rai** S/o Wakil Rai R/o Sunita Sadan House No-19C, Chanakyapuri colony Khorabar urf Soba Bazar, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh-273010, have changed my name to Dharmendra Singh S/o Wakil Singh for all future purposes. (Given name) Dharmendra (Surname) Singh. Passport No. P7113638 (C#3835) 24/07/2023

Jamaica defy fancied France

Sweden, Netherlands win World Cup openers



WELLINGTON: South Africa's goalkeeper Kaylin Swart jumps to save the ball during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup Group G football match against Sweden at Wellington Stadium, also known as Sky Stadium, on July 23, 2023. — AFP

SYDNEY: Perennial underachievers France were held 0-0 by Jamaica to make a frustrating start to their Women's World Cup campaign on Sunday, but Sweden and the Netherlands both won by slender margins. France have never lifted the World Cup despite the strength of their women's domestic league and were defied by a battling Jamaica in the Sydney rain in front of nearly 40,000.

Herve Renard's France, one of the pre-World Cup favorites along with holders the United States and England, hit the woodwork late on and had more possession and chances, but Jamaica refused to fold. The Jamaicans only made their Women's World Cup debut in the previous edition in 2019 and lost all three games, so this point was a precious first in the competition for them. "I would say it's the number one result we have had so far, men or women — I would put it there," coach Lorne Donaldson declared.

The only sour note was the dismissal in injury time of star striker Khadija Shaw for a second yellow card. She will miss their second game of the tournament

against Panama as a result. The Jamaicans, ranked 43 in the world to France's five, celebrated wildly at the final whistle and defender Deneisha Blackwood was paraded in the air. "You're playing a team like France who are just fantastic. I mean, just looking at the rankings, you would say that result on this stage has to be number one," Donaldson said. Brazil play Panama in the same group on Monday.

Nervy Swedes

In the first match of day four of the tournament in Australia and New Zealand, Sweden were given a scare by South Africa before winning 2-1. The third-ranked Swedes fought back from a goal down and conjured up the winner in the 90th minute through Arsenal defender Amanda Ilestedt, much to the relief of their fans in miserably wet conditions in Wellington.

A goal early in the second half by Hildah Magaia — in which she suffered a match-ending injury — had given South Africa hope of an upset in front of 18,317 spectators. But that was soon cancelled out by Barcelona star

Fridolina Rollo before Ilestedt's late intervention, heading home from close range for a hard-fought victory. Italy face Argentina on Monday, also in Group G.

Sweden coach Peter Gerhardsson said "nerves and tension" were behind a shaky start to their World Cup campaign. "It's OK to be nervous but you need to have the courage to still make that pass," Gerhardsson said. The Dutch, losers 2-0 to the United States in the final four years ago, had less trouble against debutants Portugal in the New Zealand city of Dunedin. Defender Stefanie van der Graagt scored with a powerful header on 13 minutes with what turned out to be the winner.

The Netherlands now face the United States on Thursday in a rematch of their final, with Group E supremacy at stake. Sunday's match in Dunedin, played in front of a crowd of nearly 12,000, saw the Dutch have more of the ball but Portugal threatening on the break. Portugal's first shot of the game finally arrived in the last 10 minutes but the Dutch were ultimately fairly comfortable winners.

Evacuated

Two-times former champions Germany enter the fray on Monday when they face World Cup debutants Morocco. Germany are another of the favorites to win the tournament but their coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg warned that women's football has never been more competitive. "All the games are tight, women's football teams have come ever closer," the former international player said on the eve of her team's opening match. "All the countries coming here are not only proud to be at the World Cup but they absolutely have the quality to play here and to pose problems."

Co-hosts New Zealand return to action on Tuesday to begin the second round of group matches. The New Zealand team had to be evacuated on Saturday after a fire at their hotel in Auckland. Defender CJ Bott called it "not ideal" and "not a situation anyone wants to be in". "We went down the fire exits," she said. "One was a bit smoky but the majority of us got down the other exit." — AFP

Kuwaiti referee 'honored' over Wimbledon debut

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti referee Mohammad Al-Shatti on Sunday said he was "honored" to have represented his home nation as he made his officiating debut during the final contest of tennis' showpiece Wimbledon event last week. Shatti, who was among the group of referees to have taken charge of the final contest of the biggest spectacle in the sport of tennis, in which Spain's Carlos Alcaraz dethroned seven-time champion Novak Djokovic, told KUNA via telephone that he was thrilled to have taken part in an event of such magnitude.

The Kuwaiti referee's maiden appearance on the global stage preceded his time in charge of regional tennis events at home and other Gulf Arab countries including Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, citing these experiences as a "gateway" that catapulted him into the limelight. He added referees are under constant scrutiny when taking part in such significant events, pointing out that such assessment is crucial in dictating whether or not they are competent enough to handle such pressure. Shatti's debut at Wimbledon 2023 was the culmination point of a storied career as a tennis referee, he underlined, attributing that achievement to the overwhelming support he was given at home. — KUNA



Kuwait karatekas win silver, bronze

KUALA LUMPUR: The Kuwaiti karate team won two silver and one bronze medals at the end of the Asian Karate Championship held in Malaysia, bringing the total medals bagged by the national team in the tournament to four, two of which are silver and two bronze. Vice President of the Kuwait Karate Federation Ahmed Al-Dhafiri said in a statement to KUNA that the team achieved on the last day of the championship second



place in collective kata, where the team was represented by Mohammed Al-Mousawi, Salman Al-Mousawi and Mohammed Hussein.

Dhafiri added the team achieved third place in the collective kumite competition. The team was represented by Abdullah Shaaban, Omar Al-Qenaie, Youssef Hajia, Fahd Al-Ajmi, Sultan Al-Mutairi, Ahmed Al-Mesfer and Mohammed Al-Majadi. He pointed out the Asian Karate Federation presented the award for the best referee for the West Asian region to Kuwaiti international referee Ahmed Bastaki, part of honoring five referees at the Asian level, expressing his happiness with the good performance of the Kuwaiti team in the competitions of this Asian championship. — KUNA

Kuwait's Thafeeri tops Baja Aragon rally T3 category

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti rally racer Meshari Al-Thafeeri came first in the overall ranking of the T3 category in the fourth round of the Baja Aragon rally, which concluded on Saturday in Spain. In a phone call with KUNA Sunday, Thafeeri said despite his sixth place in the fourth round, which started on July 20 and lasted for two days, he was able to grab the lead in the T3 category in the championship, collecting 77 points.

Through his participation in this race and by achieving sixth place, he gained 15 points, which placed him first, with four rounds remaining for the championship in Poland, Portugal, Dubai and Jordan, he explained. The 874-km rally saw participation of 92 competitors in various categories, representing 26 countries. — KUNA

