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Assembly panel discusses election commission law

MP wants Kuwaitis living abroad to vote in parliamentary polls

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly Interior and Defense committee on Monday began discussing a government-sponsored draft law calling to establish the High Election Commission for the first time in Kuwait to supervise parliamentary elections. The heads of the Interior panel and the legal and legislative committee MPs Khaled Al-Oteibi and Muhannad Al-Sayer, respectively, announced after the meeting

that they will ask the National Assembly on Tuesday to form a joint committee to discuss the draft law.

This will allow them to complete the bill and send it to the National Assembly for a possible debate on Thursday. MP Jenan Bushehri said after attending the meeting that she raised a number of issues during the discussion including demanding to allow Kuwaitis living abroad to vote in parliamentary polls. She said that she also called for including clauses to control spending during the elections and to specify

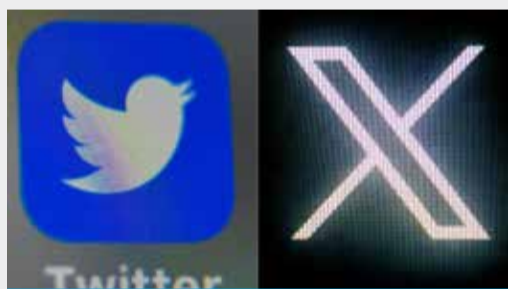
sources of financing, in addition to regulating opinion polls ahead of the elections.

Bushehri said she objected to a clause in the government draft law requiring women to abide by Islamic Sharia regulations during voting, adding that she demanded to know the specifics about those regulations. The government draft law stipulates that the Election Commission will consist of seven senior judges, adding that the commission will be under the Ministry of Justice. The Progress-

sive Movement meanwhile, said the draft law has ignored the problems of the one-vote system and that under the bill, the commission will not be independent because it will be attached to the Ministry of Justice.

In another development, five MPs on Monday submitted a draft law calling to include Kuwaiti women who are 50 years and unmarried in the housing welfare system so they are entitled to a house and a housing loan like men.

Musk rebrands Twitter, replaces bird logo with X



This combination of pictures shows the old and the new logo of the US social networking website Twitter. Twitter launched its new logo on July 24, 2023, replacing the blue bird with a white X on a black background as the Elon Musk-owned company moves toward rebranding as X. — AFP

SAN FRANCISCO: Elon Musk killed off the Twitter logo on Monday, replacing the world-recognized blue bird with a white X as the tycoon accelerates his efforts to transform the floundering social media giant. Musk and the company's new chief executive Linda Yaccarino announced the rebranding Sunday, scrapping one of technology's most iconic brands in the latest shock move since the tycoon took over Twitter nine months ago.

Musk's connection to the letter X goes back nearly 24 years when he founded X.com that later was renamed PayPal despite his objections. His space company is called SpaceX and the parent company of Twitter was changed to X earlier this year. He described the logo as "minimalist art deco," and updated his Twitter bio to "X.com," which now redirects to twitter.com. The Tesla CEO also tweeted that under the site's new identity, a post would be called "an X."

Musk has said his takeover of the social media giant was "an accelerant to creating X, the everything app" - an app inspired by China's WeChat that functions as a social media platform and also messaging and payments. "You basically live on WeChat in China because it's so usable and helpful to daily life, and I think if we can achieve that, or even get close to that at Twitter, it would be an immense success," he told a company town hall meeting in June last year.

The new logo was projected onto the facade of Twitter's San Francisco headquarters on Sunday night. "Powered by AI, X will connect us in ways we're just beginning to imagine."

Continued on Page 6

Kuwait FM and EC chief discuss Schengen visas

ROME: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Salem Abdullah Jaber Al-Sabah, discussed with the President of the European Council (EC), Charles Michel, the facilities that would be provided to Kuwaiti citizens who are applying for Schengen visas. The meeting was held on the sidelines of the International Conference on Development and Migration, which kicked off earlier in Rome. They also touched on the solid historical friendship and close strategic partnership linking Kuwait with the European Union Member States and

the steps taken to achieve the desired progress in cooperation in various vital and important domains.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs led a delegation to the International Conference on Development and Migration, which was called for by the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. The conference, which kicked off earlier in the Italian capital, Rome, was also attended by Tunisian President Qais Saeed. Participants in the conference highlighted joint international efforts to confront the illegal immigration crisis and scrutinized various views and solutions in cooperation with the countries of the region, including addressing the root cause of this crisis and limiting its effects on all political, economic, and security aspects. — KUNA (See Page 3)



ROME: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Salem Abdullah Jaber Al-Sabah, meets with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. — KUNA

Iraqi forces seize nearly one million captagon pills

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces on Monday announced the seizure of nearly a million captagon pills in the possession of a "foreign trafficker", as the country grapples with the ballooning drug trade. Authorities in Iraq - a key conduit for the amphetamine-type drug - regularly announce such operations in which large hauls of captagon are seized, often coming from Syria with which it shares 600-kilometre (370 miles) porous border.

National security forces in Baghdad arrested "a foreign narcotics trafficker" and seized large quantities of the drug hidden in a truck that he was "planning to drive

to a northern province", according to a statement. The statement did not specify the suspect's nationality. On July 16, the interior ministry reported the discovery of a rare captagon manufacturing lab in the country's south. It was the first such announcement of its kind in a country where drug consumption had spiraled in recent years but where production remains virtually nonexistent.

Days earlier, the authorities had announced the dismantling of an "international drug trafficking network" and the arrest of three of its members. They seized during the operation two million captagon pills in the southern province of Muthanna on the border with Saudi Arabia. Governments in the region have recently upped efforts to crack down on trafficking after oil-rich Gulf states - the key target markets for captagon - expressed their displeasure over the trade. — AFP

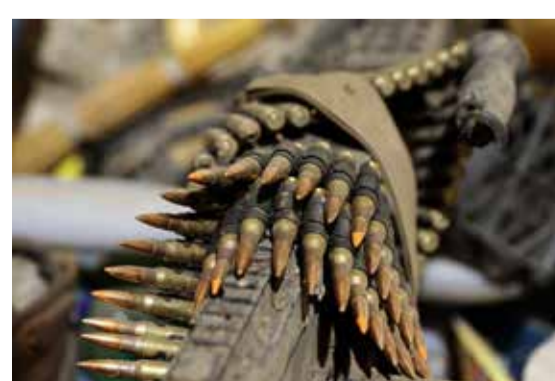


BAGHDAD: Iraq's Interior Ministry spokesman General Saad Maan inspecting bags of captagon pills in this photo, after a site for captagon production was found. — AFP

Russia increases arms production

MOSCOW: Russia said Monday it had dramatically increased production of ammunition and military equipment, as its offensive in Ukraine enters its eighteenth month. Russia expected to quickly overpower Ukraine's military when it launched full-scale hostilities last February but instead has faced down a grinding conflict and sanctions that have hindered its ability to refill inventories. "Since the beginning of this year, many types of weapons and military equipments are being produced in quantities far above last year," Russian Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov said.

"In terms of munitions, we are reaching a level where deliveries in a month exceed last year's total orders," Manturov said. Limited stockpiles of ammunition have been a challenge for both sides in the Ukraine conflict, where the frontline is



BAKHMUT: This photograph shows a view of a machine gun and ammunition cartridges in Bakhmut, in the Donetsk region. — AFP

dominated by long-range artillery duels. Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu said in May that his forces were dependent on the "timely replenishment" of ammo and hardware inventories, and urged a boost in production. — AFP

Raging wildfires, heatwave kill 15 in Algeria

ALGIERS: Wildfires raging across Algeria during a blistering heatwave have killed at least 15 people and forced mass evacuations, the government said on Monday. As temperatures hit 48 degrees Celsius (118 Fahrenheit) in parts of the North African country, it recorded 97 blazes across 16 provinces, fanned by strong winds, said the interior ministry. The fires injured 26 people and raged through residential areas, it said, adding that most had been put out.

Some 1,500 people were evacuated from the Bejaia, Bouira and Jijel provinces east of the capital Algiers, according to the ministry. The three provinces in Algeria's Mediterranean coastal region have seen the worst of the fires.

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Kuwait on track to become entertainment destination

Ambitious goals, one-of-a-kind projects sign of commitment to improving sectors



Al-Mikshat



Green Island Season

In my view

Legally Blonde



Fadia Al-Refai

Local@kuwaittimes.com

As a semi-blonde senior law student supported by many of my professors to talk about important legal matters in a student's young abstract point of view, I finally feel like I can have my Elle Woods moment.

My dear reader, before you run away expecting tough legal jargon, I assure you that this topic concerns everyone, whether you are a member of the legal profession or just someone looking out for the greater good of our country.

As a legal amateur who has somewhat seen the legal scene in Kuwait whether that of law firms or different courts (criminal, corporate, administrative) it is more than fair to say that today the courts are being overloaded with so many cases, (of importance and of not) to which arises a question of how much more can the legal system take before collapsing? In plain English, the input is much larger than the output. This is not an opinion, it's a fact. There are more than 65,000 cases that have been in the court of cassation for almost ten years without a ruling, as I quote professor of private law Ahmed Aljarallah in a seminar which he gave on the July 3 in the Kuwait Commercial Arbitration Centre.

Now, this delay could, theoretically, be for many reasons whether because of the limited number of judges — despite having many allegeable youthful Kuwaiti candidates — or because of many loopholes in our procedural laws. But in my humble point of view, it has been brought to my attention through the intensive course I am taking at the Kuwait Commercial Arbitration Centre, one of the reasons is because in Kuwait we are not educated about alternative ways of dispute resolutions and run the judicial path as soon as a dispute occurs.

Now, with that said, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) is a specialization of its own, but what is important to know is that it is a way of resolving the issue where the two sides of this dispute entrust qualified arbitrators to try to resolve it without having to go to court. Whether this is done through arbitration, which is quite frankly the last mean of ADR, or mediation, or conciliation, it is no magic potion that when 65,000 different cases are divided upon three or four different groups, the judicial system will have the chance to catch a breath!

In England today, 90 percent of disputes are being solved through ADR (quoting the same seminar) as ADR has become a key part of the western legal culture, whether in the US or the UK. What this tells us is that this means of dispute resolution is not only as effective as litigation and not only does an arbitrator or mediator have the characteristics of a judge — experience, neutrality, objectivity, and confidentiality — but it is a faster and more efficient way of doing so. What supports this argument is that by Kuwaiti law originally trials are public and by exception confidential, where in ADR the trial, the ruling and all that comes with it is 100 percent confidential! Not only that, but according to article 181 of the Kuwaiti civil procedural law, all in all the process of arbitration has to end by six months. Most importantly, while the job of a judge is strictly given to those with law degrees, arbitrators could be anyone who the parties decide is qualified, so that an engineer can look at the contractual engineering disputes, and a doctor can look at a medical dispute etc.

In conclusion, personally I hold nothing but respect and praise for my country's legal system, and because of that it is my duty to try to make sure it does not collapse by trying to lift some off the burden of its shoulders.

By Ghadeer Ghloom and KUNA

KUWAIT: Under the visionary leadership and ambitious goals set forth by its 2035 vision, Kuwait is making significant strides towards improving various sectors. One key area that has witnessed remarkable attention is the entertainment and tourism sector. Due to the crucial role that the entertainment sector plays in driving economic growth and enriching society, Kuwait has made it a priority to invest in its development.

As Kuwait Times delves into the exciting developments taking place, it becomes evident that Kuwait is on track to realize its vision and establish itself as an entertainment destination. This is evident through several entities that are focusing their attention on projects which are expected to take this sector to the next level. For instance, the Council of Ministers has emphasized on the need for relevant government entities to overcome all obstacles that may hinder the establishment of Kuwait Entertainment City, one of Kuwait's most significant amusement parks expected to cost KD 200 million to attract tourists as part of an economic diversification strategy. The government has also emphasized the importance of the development of Failaka Island, going as far as including the project in its work plan. It's also called on implementing the two projects as quickly as possible.

Last year, the Touristic Enterprises Company launched seasonal entertainment projects in winter 2022, such as Winter Wonderland and Green Island. The company's projects do not stop here, as more is coming for both seasonal and permanent entertainment projects. In winter 2023, the Touristic Enterprises Company will be working on the South Subahiya Park project, the Water Front Project and the Balajat project, all of which have been officially announced by the company's official accounts on social media platforms.

Furthermore, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters' (NCCAL) strategy for 2023- 2028 aims to preserve Kuwaiti heritage and history in line with Kuwait Vision 2035. The strategy includes maintenance and restoration of historical sites, such as 'Sheikh Khazal's Diwan', Al-Mubarakiya School, and Mishref Castle. NCCAL has plans to revamp some museums and theaters and reopen public li-



Kuwait University to tackle Sabah Al-Salem traffic

KUWAIT: Kuwait University is forming a technical committee to study the organization of traffic and propose solutions to improve the traffic situation in Sabah Al-Salem University City, the university said in a press release. The decision comes in effort to enhance traffic safety, maintain the safety of the university's affiliates, and maintain a safe environment for all.

The committee will be examining the entrances and exits of the campus, the parking situation, and proposed measures to tackle existing issues, including traffic signals, intersections, traffic lines, speed bumps, passenger drop-off areas, etc. The university said it will coordinate with the competent authorities in Kuwait to implement the necessary solutions.



KUWAIT: People visit Winter Wonderland Kuwait on its opening day in December. – Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

braries after maintenance and restoration work.

Kuwait Municipality is among those government entities involved in setting and achieving the country's entertainment goals. The municipality has recently approved a KD55 million to develop Al-Mubarakiya area and address the existing drawbacks to find possible solutions. The project aims to utilize all areas in Al-Mubarakiya and the nearby municipality park as it has experienced a period of stagnation due to a lack of visitors. According to the plan, unused spaces will be utilized to add modern components and features to the area, including a hotel, mosque, museum, and several commercial buildings.

The municipality is also supporting Kuwait Vision 2035 through the implementation of several projects that support the country's development plan, creating a new environment of tourism, entertainment and sports projects in attractive locations, such as the coastal areas around the country. These areas will in-

clude sports stadiums, entertainment facilities, green spaces, as well as a sandy beach area and spaces for walking and cycling.

The Ministry of Public Works has also made its contributions to Kuwait's vision for 2035 in the sector of Tourism and Entertainment. The ministry launched 'Al-Mikshat' during winter 2022, a first-of-its-kind project which revisits the kashta tradition but with a modern twist. It attracted thousands of visitors and was considered a unique entertainment and cultural project for the entire family.

Over the past few months, Kuwait's entertainment landscape has witnessed a remarkable upswing. While progress has undeniably been made, Kuwait's progression towards realizing its 2035 Vision for the entertainment sector is not yet complete, as some challenges still need to be addressed. Yet, Kuwait's commitment to driving growth in this sector ensures that these goals will be realized in the coming years.

Information ministry launches studio as part of media plan

KUWAIT: Kuwait's newest radio news studio is now live, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Dr Nasser Muheisen announced on Monday. The studio is considered one of the most advanced radio studios due to its state-of-the-art technologies and radio broadcasting equipment, he said. "This step will develop the studio's work mechanism by linking it to the servers of the TV news studio to facilitate the exchange of information between the radio and television studios," he said in a statement to KUNA.

"The studio has been linked to the Arab news editorial hall so that news bulletins are sent directly to the broadcast studio through a digital network, which saves effort and time and ensures the safety of broadcasting news bulletins on time." He stated that under the directives of the Minister of Information,

Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, the ministry is working on a comprehensive strategy and action plan to develop the media work system at the technical level and develop the capabilities of ministry employees.

The strategy includes several infrastructure projects according to the latest required specifications, including studios for television and radio news in line with developments in the media industry, he added. "This comes in view of the great importance of the process of disseminating news in Kuwait and abroad for viewers and listeners, in addition to broadcasting events at the local and international levels for viewers of Kuwait TV."

He pointed out that a news monitoring project has been implemented to follow up on everything related to international, political, economic, and other events and turning it into a main source of news, especially when it comes to Kuwaiti affairs. — KUNA



Dr Nasser Muheisen

Education Ministry announces 2023/24 school schedule

KUWAIT: The Education Ministry announced Monday the schedule for the 2023/2024 school year at public and Arabic private schools. According to the schedule, first grade students start school on Sept 17, 2023, followed by the remaining stages on Sept 18, 2023 and finally kindergarteners on Sept 20, 2023. The spring break will be on Jan 11, 2024 - Feb 4, 2024 for kindergarten and elementary school students, and on Jan 21 - Feb 1, 2024 for middle school and high school students. The final day for kindergarten and elementary students is June 6, 2024, while the final exams for middle school students take place on May 15 - 23, 2024. The final exams for 10th and 11th grade students take place on May 15 - 27, 2024, while the finals for 12th grade students are scheduled between May 29, 2024 and June 10, 2024.



Local

Online scams evolving

Tips to help identify potential scam websites

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Online scams are evolving. Many people are complaining of many fraudulent sites as scammers are now disguising themselves and their activities by using government websites and promoting them on the search engines. With a fake government website, Leena and her husband lost KD 6,700 to scammers. Leena was trying to file a complaint with the Kuwaiti Competition Protection Agency (CPA) regarding an issue that happened to her, but she never knew the website she found was not the real one. Her data was compromised.

Later, she received a call from a man discussing her issue and the process of solving it. "Everything seemed legit, but eventually he hacked into my husband's bank account and stole KD 6,700. The money was transferred on the spot, and he wanted to access my husband's other additional savings, but he could not. At one moment, we were al-

most going to lose all of our money and go bankrupt," Leena told the Kuwait Times.

There were two sponsored ads under fake Nazaha, she said. "When we went on CPA's Instagram, it only had random posts. It turned out that so many people had been scammed because of this, and they did not create a proper campaign about it! More awareness campaigns should be organized by the government, and there should be more strict procedures regarding that, even with banks and the Ministry of Interior," she added.

Fake government websites are not the only way scammers use to trap their victims; they also target people with online advertisements for famous restaurants with tempting offers. "I saw a great offer posted on Facebook. It was a good deal, and I ordered the items," Magi Hamed said. "After a while, they took KD 350 from my bank account. I contacted my bank, but the only way to get my money back is to trace the scammer's IP address, which is a long process and will probably cost more," she said sadly.

Mohammad Al-Jasem, a lawyer and Interpol-accredited expert in international law enforcement cooperation, told Kuwait Times that if the money transfer was within Kuwait, the victim could file a case against the scammer using the username, and the Department of Cybercrime in Kuwait could trace him or her via the IP address. The department contacts website owners to collect data on the scammer. It tracks the internet line and reveals the data of the wanted person, but if the money is transferred outside the country, once the IP address is determined, correspondence is carried out.

On the other hand, experts revealed some tips to help identify potential scam websites, saying that scammers often use domain names that resemble well-known brands or websites to deceive users. Web users are advised to check the website's URL carefully for any misspellings, extra characters, or odd domain extensions.

Also, legitimate websites use HTTPS



to encrypt data transmission, especially during sensitive activities like payment processing or account login. Experts urged people to look for a padlock icon in the address bar to ensure a secure

connection. In addition, some legitimate website layouts may appear unprofessional with low-quality images, while others contain numerous pop-up ads and have poor written content.



KUWAIT: Cabinet ministers are seen during their meeting on Monday July 24, 2023. — KUNA

Cabinet passes election draft law to Assembly

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet on Monday agreed to pass a draft law over the formation of a national electoral commission to parliament, pending its approval by lawmakers. The draft law, scheduled to be discussed during the forthcoming session of parliament, will be in addition to other matters due to be addressed when Kuwaiti lawmakers convene for a parliament session on Tuesday.

In the backdrop of a recent summit between Gulf Arab states and Central Asian countries held in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea city of Jeddah, the Cabinet praised the outcome of the talks as instrumental in boosting bilateral relations, hailing the gathering as a step towards bringing common aspirations to fruition. The summit focused on strengthening the existing partnerships between the GCC and Central Asian countries and enhancing security and stability considering the challenges surrounding the Arab Gulf region.

The Cabinet also gave the thumbs up to suggestions pitched by a ministerial committee tasked with handling economic affairs over the final accounts and budgets for independent state bodies for the fiscal year 2022/2023, referring the matter to His Highness the Crown Prince, for approval.

The Cabinet discussed National Assembly affairs, where it reviewed the course of the special



session of the assembly held last Tuesday and dedicated to discussing the government's work program for the seventeenth legislative term (2023-2027).

In this regard, the Cabinet stressed the importance of continued cooperation and coordination between the executive and legislative authorities to study the recommendations made by some members of the assembly during the discussion of the program, noting that the government's relationship with parliament is a partnership to serve the country and the citizen.

In implementation of what was agreed upon by the Governmental Parliamentary Coordination Committee, the government referred yesterday to parliament a draft law on National Assembly elections and the establishment of a national body for the High Electoral Commission in preparation for discussion and approval in the current session of the NA.

National Assembly agenda

The Cabinet reviewed the schedule of the parliamentary session and discussed matters surrounding it. The National Assembly agenda for Tuesday and

Wednesday includes a discussion of the strategic alternative system and the government's policy towards it. Parliamentarians will also talk about price monitoring and how to control artificial hikes.

They will also tackle appointments in vacant leadership positions, with a focus on the government's standards when making appointments. Another item on the agenda is pertaining requests to form temporary committees, including one to discuss problems facing southern areas including Sabah Al-Ahmad City, Residential Wafra, Ali Sabah Al-Salem area, and Residential Khairan. A request to form a committee regarding Cyber and Artificial Intelligence Security has also been submitted for discussion.

The agenda includes an item on the financial status of Housing Care Authority Projects at the end of fiscal year 2019-2020. Parliamentarians will also examine a letter from the Head of Public Authority for Corruption Control in the regards to the authority's semiannual report for 2020-2021, which details its activities related to corruption prevention and control and recommendations to tackle any obstacles it's come across. — KUNA

KNPC announces first shipment of 95 octane fuel to Europe markets

KUWAIT: The Kuwait National Petroleum Company announced that it exported the first shipment of 95 octane motor fuel and low-sulfur to European markets. In a statement to KUNA Monday, the Deputy CEO of Fuel Supply Operations and official spokesman for KNPC Ghanim Al-Otaibi said that the volume of the shipment that was exported from Mina Al-Ahmedi amounted to 35,000 tons, and it was loaded on board the oil tanker Pacific Sarah.

The export of this shipment was carried out in cooperation and coordination with Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's international marketing sector after the company was able to meet the entire local market's need for this product. Al-Otaibi added. The company has been able, since operating the clean fuel project in March 2022, to achieve profitable additional financial returns from selling its products that conform to international standards approved in the European and American markets, he pointed out.

Selling products that conform to international standards enhances the company's profitability and contributes to supporting the national economy, especially with the growing global demand for environmentally friendly oil products, he stated. — KUNA

Central Prison yard catches fire

KUWAIT: A limited fire broke out in a number of trees and plants in the outer yard of the Central Prison No. 2 on Monday afternoon. The fire, which caused the emission of thick smoke, was controlled by firefighters. The fire happened as, members of the Human Rights Committee of the National Assembly inspected Central Prison No 1.

Kuwait wants more secured, stable world

ROME: Representative of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah led a delegation to the International Conference on Development and Migration, which was called for by the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. The Conference, which kicked off earlier in the Italian capital Rome, was also participated by Tunisian President Qais Saeed.

Participants in the conference highlighted joint international efforts to confront the illegal immigration crisis, and scrutinized various views and solutions in cooperation with the countries of the region, including addressing the root cause of this crisis, and limiting its effects on all political, economic and security aspects. They also discussed the most effective ways to reduce the flow of migrants, supporting legal paths in this context, enhancing cooperation to confront human trafficking, and smuggling of migrants.

In addition to creating a sustainable social and economic development environment in the countries of origin and preventing more waves of irregular migration across the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Africa. Participants expressed solidarity, partnership, respect for the national sovereignty of states, shared responsibility towards full compliance with international law, including international human rights law, and work towards finding a long-term structural solution for the sustainable management of migration flows, which were emphasized during the conference.

Sheikh Salem delivered a speech during the conference, expressing thanks to the Italian government for the invitation, and praising its efforts in tackling the issue of migrants in this international conference. The minister also hailed efforts exerted by the Tunisian leadership in this conference and its cooperation with Italy, stressing on the importance of deliberating the issue of migration in this conference, including all of its aspects and consequences, since the issue have multiple humanitarian parts to it.

Sheikh Salem noted that this gathering comes in line with of Kuwait's wish to work in a global scale for a more secured and stable world, pointing out to international cooperation and countries who are affected by unorganized migration whether from their country of origin or crossing over countries, which represent a critical step that needs to be addressed politically, economically, and in terms of security as well.

"Accordingly, Kuwait sees the importance of addressing the root causes of this humanitarian issue," Sheikh Salem said. He added, the political vacuum along with the turmoil, as well as the economic stagnation and the escalation of unemployment rates and the severe poverty in some countries constitute a fertile ground for increase in the phenomenon of unregulated migration and human trafficking, which requires united efforts to support countries of origin to face the economic difficulties they face.



Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

The minister added that he would like to assert on Kuwait role in tackling such issue through its institutions on the economic, development, and investment fronts, and in particular the role of the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development in achieving the development efforts of many countries by financing their development projects and implementing their development programs. Sheikh Salem said Kuwait Fund for Economic Development represents one of the pillars of Kuwait in its relations with the countries of the world.

Since 1961, the Fund has contributed to creating job opportunities, strengthening infrastructure and striving to achieve sustainable development for many developing countries around the world, he noted. The Fund's activities covered 105 countries and its contributions amounted to soft loans and grants of more than 22 billion dollars, he said. The minister added Kuwait contributed over the past years amounting to about 50 million dollars to support the humanitarian efforts of the International Organization for Migration.

"Those efforts made by the State of Kuwait ultimately lead towards achieving a common goal that we all seek, which is to create an economic and social environment in order to achieve growth and prosperity for the countries that suffer from this problem," Sheikh Salem said. The minister also said that they "believe that convening this conference is a necessity at this stage and a first step that we bless and support, to be followed by subsequent steps to discuss the best method for implementing the recommendations that will be issued from this conference, through transparent and tight mechanisms to reach the desired goal.

The minister also commended the United Arab Emirates for hosting the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in its twenty-eighth edition (COP 28), and expressed appreciation for exerted efforts of Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the President of UAE in this conference. — KUNA

In my view

Al-Durrah field and the state's wisdom



Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

The land border disputes between Kuwait and its neighbors are issues with broad dimensions. These disputes sometimes become the subject of tensions and stir negative feelings between brotherly people — something the British imperialism created intentionally when they contributed to drawing the borders.

Today, we see that the dispute has expanded into the marine borders, particularly with our neighbor Iran. The newest escalation is over Al-Durrah field which exists in Kuwait's territorial waters and whose natural resources are shared between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Border issues are solved by international treaties and are managed by Kuwait's government through the foreign ministry. The government can reach understandings and do whatever is necessary, as well as use the help of national experts and others to guarantee Kuwait's right in its natural wealth.

We in Kuwait follow a strategy that focuses on reducing tension in any issue between us and our neighbor Iran. In fact, we have a Kuwait-Iran friendship society, and each side works on maintaining peaceful relations.

But this time, it will be difficult to let this dispute go peacefully, because it relates to a major treasure hidden underwater and there is no room for compromise when it comes to it. Observers can easily notice some writers presenting pre-emptive writings in which they attempt to intervene and calm the heated atmosphere and achieve balance between Kuwait's and Iran's interests.

Iran succeeded in promoting the wrong image to find a foothold in Al-Durrah field. Despite the attempts of some educated individuals to explain the truth of the matter and show how making demands for something you have no share in is not the right way, there are those who are trying to mediate, give concessions and bring arguments without evidence and spread it among people. This effort may have bad repercussions, not to mention that it is also against the country's interest.

These attempts have created continued apprehension amongst the people of the nation and threatened to expand racism and sectarianism among a small population who cannot bear any more divisions. Kuwait suffered previously from the Abdally cell. This suffering was because of a few who committed a crime, and they were sentenced in court. The suffering was because of those who attempted to politicize the court ruling and belittle it with the claim of reducing tension.

Today, Al-Durrah field will bring back the polarizations. Some people began to write columns as a prelude to side with Iran, and most of what is written is just taking sides that will soon be followed by manufacturing evidence. Such writings usually are not replied to because they are written with goals that are far away from justice, and therefore replying to them would not serve Kuwait. I believe that we should stop presenting topics such as Al-Durrah field. We should stop talking about it and leave the entire issue to officials and experts, as no matter the result is, it will be much less harmful than instigating conflicts and promoting lack of confidences which some individuals are seeking.

Kuwait, our homeland, is for all, and those who feel they are targeted or treated unfairly must know that there are many like them who share the same feeling. This is always the nature of things in every place and time. There is always good and evil, as the situation has nothing to do with man's origin or religion.

It is unjust for the country to go behind foreign goals under any slogan or theme. Also, the use of ill intended people to create harmful divisions will make the country pay the price out of its security and stability. Believe in your homeland and make Kuwait the top priority. Period.

Kuwait partakes in meeting to facilitate OIC charitable efforts

KUWAIT: The fifth consultative meeting between the Islamic Committee of the international Crescent and the National Societies of the Red Crescent and the Red Cross of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries under the slogan "permanent interdependence for a lasting impact" with Kuwaiti participation began in the Saudi city of Jeddah on Sunday.



Anwar Al-Hasawi

The head of the Kuwaiti delegation at the meeting, Deputy Chairman of the board of Directors of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society Anwar Al-Hasawi, stressed in a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) the importance of permanent consultation between the Islamic Committee of the international Crescent and the National Societies of the Crescent and the Red Cross in the OIC countries to reach the countries affected by natural disasters, wars or conflicts and provide a helping hand to those in need.

Hasawi said that the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society is keen to participate in these meetings, which aim to serve people wherever they are, regardless of their gender, religion, or ethnicity, in accordance with the Seven Principles of the Geneva Conventions.

He said that the association has a great role in the humanitarian field, through which aid and assistance has been provided to more than 100 countries in the world since the establishment of the association in 1966, pointing to Kuwait's status as the first humanitarian center and its classification as a center for humanitarian action by the United Nations.

The meeting, which comes under the auspices of the Emir of the Makkah Region, Prince Khalid bin Faisal, and in the presence of representatives of national associations from 56 countries, aims to unite efforts and facilitate joint humanitarian work. The agenda of the first day of the meeting discussed the digital transformation in humanitarian work with the participation of several countries who shared their experiences with digital transformation. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: People walk through a mist dispenser as they enter Mubarakiya market amid soaring temperatures in Kuwait City on July 23, 2023.

— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait gets international praise for supporting Rohingya refugees

Two-year project provided medical care to hundreds of thousands of patients

KUWAIT: Head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) regional mission in the GCC, Mamadou Sow praised Kuwait's efforts through the Kuwait Red Crescent Society in supporting the ICRC's work in providing aid to the displaced Rohingya people in Bangladesh.

Sow said in a statement to the Kuwaiti news agency (KUNA) on Monday that Kuwait's global humanitarian roles are appreciated by all international organizations involved in humanitarian and relief work, especially the ICRC. He expressed his gratitude for this strategic partnership and Kuwait's support for the ICRC's humanitarian operations in Bangladesh.

Sow highlighted Kuwait's efforts during 2021 and 2022 when the ICRC emergency department at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital provided free emergency health services to 227,065 patients from local communities and displaced people from Rakhine state as part of a cooperation agreement with the Kuwaiti Red Crescent.

Thanks to this agreement, the ICRC, together with

its partners in the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, contributed to growing the skills of healthcare professionals at the previously underutilized and under-resourced emergency department, he said.

He added that the capacity of emergency services has been expanded to include patients with heart disease, children, pregnant women as well as those with breathing difficulties and other emergency situations.

Sow stated that during the entire project period between 2019 and 2022, the emergency department gave 377,000 patients free consultations in partnership with Bangladeshi authorities.

He explained that with support of the Kuwait Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the emergency department is now equipped, providing emergency care to between 350 and 450 patients a day and has become a national model providing comprehensive medical care under one roof for both Bangladeshi and displaced people.

Sow added that on January 26, 2022, the regional mission in Kuwait signed a grant agreement with the Kuwaiti Red Crescent worth \$1 million to support

humanitarian aid in Bangladesh with assistance from the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development to help improve the situation of displaced people from Rakhine state in Bangladesh.

He stated that the contributions to ICRC operations in the areas of health, water, housing, and economic security have been used to improve the daily living conditions of displaced communities in the Cox's Bazar area.

Thanks to these contributions and changes made by the Sadar Hospital Support Project in Cox's Bazar, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of Bangladesh has declared its emergency department to be a model department and awarded the hospital the title of the second-best District Hospital in Bangladesh, he said.

Sow thanked Kuwait for its support for the work of the regional mission of the Red Cross in GCC, praising the continuous support provided by the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society and its great contributions to alleviate the suffering of displaced people around the world. — KUNA



Ali Al-Asfar speaks at the event.



KUWAIT: The Governor of Hawally and Acting Governor of Asimah Ali Al-Asfar is seen with the top 2023 high school graduates at a ceremony the governorate held to celebrate their achievements.

Hawally governor honors top high school graduates

KUWAIT: The Governor of Hawally and Acting Governor of Asimah Ali Al-Asfar held a ceremony to honor the outstanding male and female high school graduates who went to Hawally governorate schools and got top scores in the 2023 final exams.

The ceremony was held at the Governorate General Office, and in the presence of the Director of Activities in the Hawally Educational Zone, Dr Majid Al-Ali, in addition to the students' parents.

"The excellent scores were a result of the students' diligence. The success is in great part attributed to their parents, as they watched over their comfort and followed up their academic achievement throughout the year," Asfar said, expressing his appreciation to the outstanding students and their parents.

He added that holding such an event comes from the belief in the governorate's role in celebrating students for their efforts and honoring their parents for their support. It also aims to achieve the principle of community partnership and revive and strengthen the sincere national spirit of the homeland in the hearts of our students.

He concluded by wishing them to continue the journey of success and excellence in their university studies and in their working lives as they serve Kuwait.



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KIOTARI, Greece: A deer runs with smoke in the background during a fire between the villages of Kiotari and Gennadi, on the Greek island of Rhodes on July 24, 2023. — AFP

Greece 'at war' with wildfires

Over 2,400 visitors and locals evacuated from Corfu island

RHODES, Greece: Authorities evacuated nearly 2,500 people from the Greek island of Corfu on Monday as the heat-battered nation was "at war" with several wildfires. Tens of thousands of people have already fled blazes on the island of Rhodes, with many frightened tourists scrambling to get home on evacuation flights.

About 2,400 visitors and locals were evacuated from the Ionian tourist island of Corfu from Sunday into Monday, a fire service spokesman said, adding that the departures were a precaution. "We are at war and are exclusively geared towards the fire front," Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis told parliament, warning that the nation faced "another three difficult days ahead" before high temperatures are forecast to ease.

Greece has been sweltering under a lengthy spell of extreme heat that has exacerbated wildfire risk and left visitors stranded in peak tourist season. Kelly Squirrel, a transport administrator from the United Kingdom, said police had ordered people from her hotel on Rhodes to evacuate.

"We had to keep walking," she told AFP at the international airport. "So we walked for about six hours in the heat." Rhodes, which counted 2.5 million visitor arrivals in

2022, is one of Greece's leading holiday destinations.

Greek television broadcast images of long lines of people, some in beachwear, lugging suitcases along the island's roads on Saturday, when the evacuations were ordered.

Some 30,000 people fled the flames on Rhodes at the weekend, the country's largest-ever wildfire evacuation. Police said 16,000 people had been transported on land and evacuated 3,000 by sea. Others had to flee by road or used their own transport after being told to leave the area.

"We are exhausted and traumatized," said Daniel-Cladin Schmidt, a 42-year-old German tourist waiting to be evacuated with his wife and nine-year-old son. "There were thousands of people, the buses couldn't pass, we had to walk for more than two hours," he told AFP at Rhodes airport. "We couldn't breathe, we just covered our faces and moved forward."

Holiday-makers and some locals spent the night in gyms, schools and hotel conference centers on the island. In the departures hall of the international airport, AFP saw groups of tourists sleeping on the floor, surrounded by luggage. "We had to lend a woman some of my wife's clothes because she had nothing to wear," Kevin Sales, an engineer from England,

told AFP. "It was terrible." Several travel companies have halted their inbound tourist flights to Rhodes, and have been helping to ferry foreigners home. "We ran 10 kilometers (six miles) with all our luggage to escape the flames", while the temperature was 42 degrees Celsius (108 degrees Fahrenheit), said German tourist Lena Schwarz, after arriving at Hannover airport overnight Sunday into Monday.

The 38-year-old told AFP their journey leaving Rhodes was "hell on Earth". Oxana Neb, 50, also arriving at Hannover, said the evacuation had been "very bad". "We stayed in the hotel until the end and fire came from all sides," she said. She joined other guests running to the beach, eventually abandoning her suitcases on the way, she said.

Crews have been battling the flames in parts of Greece for about a week, and firefighters were from dawn on Monday using aircraft to try to douse the flames on Rhodes. According to the authorities, many regions were under extreme risk of forest fires on Monday, but no towns were directly threatened by flames, the fire service told AFP. Like every summer, Greece is plagued by forest fires, often deadly, ravaging tens of thousands of hectares of forest and vegetation. — AFP

UK Islamist preacher remanded

LONDON: British Islamist preacher Anjem Choudary was remanded in custody by a UK magistrate on Monday, after London's Metropolitan police charged him with three terrorism offences. Choudary, 56, faces charges of belonging to a proscribed organization, addressing meetings to encourage support for a proscribed organization and directing a terrorist organization, the force said.

A 28-year-old Canadian, Khaled Hussein, was also ordered held in custody after he was charged with membership of a proscribed organization. Both appeared separately at Westminster Magistrates Court in London, which heard that the charges relate to "an extreme form of Islam".

"The charges relate to the proscribed organization Al-Muhajiroun, also known as the Islamic Thinkers Society," prosecutor Nick Price said. "Criminal proceedings against Mr Choudary and Mr Hussein are now active and they each have the right to a fair trial," he added.

Chief magistrate Paul Goldspring ordered the pair remanded in custody and set their next appearance, at the central criminal courthouse known as the Old Bailey, on August 4. Choudary, from east London, wore a black jacket and glasses, and spoke only to confirm his name, date of birth and address during Monday's 30-minute court hearing. The high-profile preacher was not asked to enter any pleas to the three charges. A lawyer for Hussein, who is from Edmonton in the Canadian province Alberta, said he would not be entering a plea. The defendant spoke—in a Canadian accent—only to confirm his name, date of birth and address.

He is alleged to have been in "close contact" with Choudary online to provide "a platform" for the group's views for around two years, the court heard. Counter-terror officers investigating alleged membership of the proscribed organization arrested both men last Monday, the Metropolitan police has said. Officers detained Choudary in east London and held Hussein at Heathrow Airport after he arrived on a flight. — AFP

Ukraine claims drone attack in Moscow

MOSCOW: Ukraine on Monday claimed a drone attack in central Moscow, the latest in a series of attacks revealing Russian vulnerabilities, while Kyiv said Russian forces again hit grain facilities near Odesa.

Police wearing masks cordoned off streets near the defense ministry in Moscow where one of the drones crashed, while the second shredded floor-to-ceiling glass walls of an office building in a southern district. A Ukrainian defense source told AFP the attack—one day after Kyiv vowed to "retaliate" for a Russian missile strike in the UNESCO-protected city of Odesa—was a "special operation" carried out by Ukraine's military intelligence.

AFP reporters at the scene of the strike near the ministry on Komsomolsky Prospekt saw a two-storey building whose sloping, metal sheeted roof had been torn up by the impact of the drone's crash.

"I wasn't asleep. It was 3:39am. The house really shook," Vladimir, who lives nearby told AFP. "It is scandalous that a Ukrainian drone almost flew into the defense ministry," the 70-year-old who declined to give his last name said while taking pictures at the scene.

In Crimea, the peninsula annexed by Russia in 2014, Moscow-installed governor Sergei Aksyonov said an ammunition depot had been hit and a private house damaged in a separate drone attack. Villages near the depot were being evacuated, he added.

Crimea—a regular Ukrainian target since Russia's large-scale offensive launched last year—has come under more intensive attacks in recent weeks. Kyiv has repeatedly said it plans to take back Crimea.

Russia's defense ministry said 14 Ukrainian drones that targeted Crimea overnight were "suppressed" by electronic air defenses and three others



MOSCOW: Municipal workers remove a shattered glass window at the scene of a reported drone attack on Komsomolsky Prospekt in Moscow on July 24, 2023. — AFP

were shot down. Meanwhile in southern Ukraine's Odesa region, officials reported a four-hour Russian drone attack on port infrastructure on the Danube River.

"A grain hangar was destroyed and tanks for storing other types of cargo were damaged," Ukraine's southern mil-

itary command said on Telegram. The Danube delta region, which spans across Romania and Ukraine, is being used as an export route for Ukrainian grain. Russia last week pulled out of a key deal which had allowed the safe export of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea. — AFP

Hong Kong questions more families of wanted activists

HONG KONG: Hong Kong national security police on Monday took in family members of businessman-turned-activist Elmer Yuen for questioning, one of the eight fugitives with bounties on their heads for allegedly breaching national security. The city announced this month that eight pro-democracy activists, all of whom now live overseas, are wanted for national security crimes, and offered rewards of

HK\$1 million (\$128,000) for each of them.

Since then, police have targeted at least seven family members of three of those wanted—lawmakers Nathan Law and Dennis Kwok, as well as unionist Mung Siu-tat—taking them in for questioning before releasing them. On Monday, the relatives of 74-year-old Elmer Yuen were also taken in. The US-based businessman became a vocal activist for foreign sanctions against Hong Kong and Chinese officials during the city's huge, and sometimes violent, democracy movement in 2019.

His daughter-in-law Eunice Yung, a pro-Beijing legislator in Hong Kong who has publicly severed ties with Yuen, told reporters that national security police arrived at her home early Monday with a search warrant. They took her and her husband, Der-

ek—Yuen's son—to two separate police stations for hours of questioning.

"For questions (they asked that) I do not know—such as some inside stories, his current whereabouts, his residential address and phone number—I plainly said I don't know," Yung said, reiterating her support for the investigation.

"I believe the police are determined to look for strong evidence from family members of the eight fugitives and to locate the eight people," she told reporters. Yung openly severed her ties with Elmer Yuen in 2022 by making declarations disavowing him in newspapers. She has also staunchly supported the enactment of Beijing's sweeping national security law, imposed on Hong Kong in 2020 to quell the democracy protests that kicked off the year before. — AFP

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International

Inconclusive election prompts political uncertainty in Spain

Sanchez, rival begin talks to head off a fresh vote

MADRID: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and his right-wing rival begin negotiations Monday to try to head off a fresh vote after an inconclusive snap election resulted in a hung parliament. Defying polls that for months had written him off as defeated, the Socialist premier managed to curb the gains of the right-wing opposition. With all the votes counted, Alberto Nunez Feijoo's Popular Party (PP) and far-right Vox—its potential ally—won a total 169 seats, short of the 176 needed for a governing majority.

Sanchez's Socialists and radical left Sumar ally secured 153 seats for the left bloc. "Both the right and the left have a very tenuous, and hazardous, path to a majority, and neither is very likely to succeed," said Federico Santi, analyst at political risk consultancy Eurasia Group. The front pages of newspapers on Monday highlighted the political gridlock now facing Spain. "The government is up in the air," top-selling daily newspaper El Pais headlines on its front page.

'A challenge'

Addressing a crowd of euphoric activists shouting "No pasaran!"—the famous anti-fascist slogan of Spain's 1936-1939 civil war meaning "They shall not pass!"—Sanchez was jubilant. "The backwards-looking bloc that wanted to roll back all the progress we made over the past four years has failed," said Sanchez who focused his campaign on the danger of a PP-Vox

government. With their 153 lawmakers, the Socialists and Sumar will need the support of several regional formations such as the left-wing Catalan separatist ERC party or the pro-independence Basque party EH Bildu, seen as the heir of the now-defunct armed separatist group ETA.

But they will also have to negotiate the abstention of the hardline Catalan separatist party JxCat which has demanded a referendum on independence for Catalonia - a likely red line for Sanchez.

"If it depends on JxCat, it is a challenge because it has shown itself to be more opposed to Sanchez than it was in the past," said Antonio Barroso, an analyst at political consultancy Teneo. If everything came together, Sanchez could assemble 172 lawmakers behind him, which is more than Feijoo, and would be enough to secure a second parliamentary investiture vote which only requires a simple majority.

Otherwise, Spain—which held four general elections between 2015 and 2019 -- could find itself once again in deadlock and forced to call a new vote.

'Didn't expect it'

Feijoo, who narrowly won the election on paper, has insisted he has the right to form a government.

"As the candidate of the most-voted party, I believe it's my duty... to try and govern our country," he told supporters after results came in. "It is with great determination that I will take on the task of



MADRID: The leader and candidate of conservative Partido Popular (People's Party) Alberto Nunez Feijoo gestures as he addresses supporters from a balcony of the PP headquarters in Madrid after Spain's general election on July 23, 2023. — AFP

opening dialogue to form a government," he said, urging the Socialists not "block" his efforts.

Without an absolute majority, Feijoo would seek to form a minority government but for that he would need the Socialists to abstain during any investiture vote in parliament—which they have no intention of doing. The results were a bitter blow for PP supporter Carmen Rodriguez de la Cruz.

"I didn't expect it at all, I can't believe we're going to be stuck with Sanchez and that blond and the (Catalan and Basque) independent parties," she said in a reference to Yolanda Diaz, head of Sumar.

Sanchez, 51, called the snap polls in late May after his Socialist party and its far-left junior coalition partners suffered a drubbing in local and regional elections in which the right surged. He focused his campaign on warning

about the danger of a PP-Vox government in order to mobilize the electorate in a strategy that appears to have paid off, with turnout reaching almost 70 percent, some 3.5 percentage points higher than in 2019. The vote has been closely watched from abroad over the possibility, which now seems unlikely, of a government in which the far right held its first share of power since the Franco dictatorship ended in 1975. — AFP

Macron calls for return to authority after French riots

NOUMEA, France: President Emmanuel Macron said Monday that France needed a return to authority "at every level" in response to recent riots sparked by the police shooting of a teenager. The killing of Nahel M, 17, during a traffic stop last month prompted protests, riots and looting, with many accusing the government of allowing a culture of institutional racism in the police force to fester.

Condemning "the burning of schools, city halls, gyms and libraries" and "the violence of looting", Macron said: "The lesson I draw from this is order, order, order."

Speaking on French television during a trip to New Caledonia, Macron added that "order must prevail. There is no freedom without order," he said. "Our country needs a return to authority at every level, starting with the family," he said. "We must invest massively in our youth to provide them with a framework," Macron said.

The president also reiterated his previous criticism of the role of social networks during the riots and looting, saying "public digital order" was needed "to stop excesses".

He said many young people used social media to organize meetups and riots, and even "to enter into competition with each other" during the riots. Of the



NOUMEA, France: France's President Emmanuel Macron (left) presents the insignia of Commander of the Legion of Honor to Marie-Claude Tjibaou, widow of the assassinated Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou, during a ceremony in Noumea on July 24, 2023. —AFP

around 1,300 people being prosecuted for their alleged role in the riots, nearly half are under 18. The most intense urban violence since 2005 sparked a debate about law and order, immigration, racism and police brutality.

Following a reshuffle of his cabinet, Macron warned last week that the riots had highlighted "a risk of fragmentation, of deep division, of the nation". There is a "need for authority and respect", he told Friday's cabinet meeting, and asked the new government "to draw the lessons from what happened, and provide sound answers". New Caledonia is the first stop of Macron's Pacific trip which also includes Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea and during which he is expected to lay out a "French alternative" for a region marked by China-US tensions, his office said last week. —AFP

some victims were shot by troops. Lagos state government and the armed forces always denied troops opened fire with live rounds at Lagos city's Lekki Tollgate, the epicenter of the protests, but an independent panel ruled there was a "massacre" of unarmed protesters there.

Rights group Amnesty says at least 10 people were shot dead by security forces on October 20, 2020 at the tollgate, and more were killed in rioting and violence that broke out elsewhere in Lagos city and state. In a statement late Sunday, the Lagos State health ministry said 103 victims whose bodies have been held in Lagos morgues for three years and were still not claimed by family will soon given a mass burial.

It said bodies were picked up in a dozen areas around Lagos state, but it denied any were col-

lected at Lekki, after a copy of the burial plan was leaked by local media.

"There was also a jailbreak at Ikoyi Prison. The 103 casualties mentioned in the document were from these incidents and NOT from Lekki Toll gate," it said.

The health ministry statement was the first time the government has admitted that such a large number of people died following the riots. "For the avoidance of doubt, no body was retrieved from the Lekki Toll Gate incident," it said.

The repeated denial of any deaths at the Lekki toll gate sparked criticism online and from those who took part in the protests. "The report of the panel was empathetic there was a massacre at Lekki," Dele Farotimi, one of the lawyers for victims told Arise TV. "The facts are not in dispute."

"corporate seppuku," the Japanese ritual suicide for samurais. This is "usually committed by new management in pursuit of cost-savings due to a lack of understanding about the core business or disregard for the customer experience," she added.

Since Musk bought Twitter for \$44 billion last October, the platform's advertising business has collapsed as marketers soured on Musk's management style and mass firings at the company that gutted content moderation. Musk last week said Twitter has lost roughly half of its advertising revenue since he took the reins. In response, the billionaire SpaceX boss has moved toward building a subscriber base in a search for new revenue. Twitter is thought to have around 200 million daily active users, but it has suffered repeated technical failures since Musk sacked much of its staff.

Many users and advertisers alike have responded adversely to the social media site's new charges for previously free services, its changes to content moderation, and the return of previously banned right-wing accounts. Facebook parent Meta also launched its text-based platform this month, 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, according to data from market analysis firm Sensor Tower. — AFP

UN stages food summit as more people go hungry

ROME: A three-day United Nations summit opened in Rome on Monday aimed at tackling a "broken" global food system where millions are starving, billions are obese and the planet is suffering. The food systems summit comes amid growing food insecurity around the world, with UN agencies warning of an increasing number of people suffering from chronic hunger. "In a world of plenty, it is outrageous that people continue to suffer and die from hunger," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said at the opening of the meeting.

"Global food systems are broken—and billions of people are paying the price." More than 780 million people go hungry around the globe, even as nearly one-third of the world's food is wasted or lost, he said.

And while 462 million people are underweight, two billion are overweight or obese, he added.

The summit brings together representatives from the UN's three food agencies headquartered in Rome—the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) -- alongside heads of states, government representatives and delegates.

The #EndSARS protests erupted initially against police abuses, with the rallying name referencing the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which was later disbanded.

The demonstrations spiraled into a broader protest to demand better governance and rights in Africa's most populous country and largest economy. Demonstrators said people were shot dead when security forces opened fire on peaceful protesters at the Lekki. But the army said only blank rounds were used to break up a crowd that was defying a curfew.

An investigative panel set up by Lagos state government concluded that the armed forces shot and killed unarmed protesters in what could be considered a "massacre", according to a leaked copy of the report. — AFP

A major blaze raged in a Tunisian pine forest near the border with Algeria.

A border crossing had to close temporarily, according to Tunisian officials who confirmed 470 hectares of forest had been burned. In some other North African countries such as Morocco and Libya, temperatures were relatively normal compared to annual averages. Algeria's state energy firm Sonelgaz on Sunday reported a peak in electricity consumption at 18,697 megawatts.

In August 2022, massive blazes killed 37 in Algeria's northeastern El Tarf province. It was preceded by the deadliest summer in decades, with 90 people killed in such fires in 2021, particularly the Kabylie region. In a bid to avoid a repeat of previous years' death tolls, the authorities had announced a series of measures in the months leading up to peak summer heat. Tebboune in April announced the acquisition of six medium-sized water-bombing aircraft.

This was followed by the interior ministry similarly announcing the imminent acquisition of one such aircraft and the leasing of six others the following month. And in May, authorities said they were preparing for wildfires by constructing landing strips for helicopters and fire-fighting drones. Scientists rank the Mediterranean region as a climate-change "hot spot", with the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warning of more heatwaves, crop failures, droughts, rising seas and influxes of invasive species. — AFP

Fires regularly rage through forests and fields in Algeria in summer, and this year have been exacerbated by a heatwave that has seen several Mediterranean countries break temperature records. In neighboring Tunisia, temperatures on Monday neared 50 degrees Celsius. Tunisia's state energy supplies STEG announced planned half-hour to one-hour power cuts in a bid to preserve the network's performance. Last week,

Lagos plans mass burial for victims of 2020 protests

LAGOS: Lagos state government has announced plans for a mass burial of more than 100 people killed during Nigeria's 2020 anti-police brutality rallies, sparking renewed criticism over a crack-down on protesters.

The youth-led #EndSARS protests were the largest anti-government demonstrations in Nigeria's modern history, but ended in repression by security forces and bitter disputes over whether

Musk rebrands Twitter, replaces...

Continued from Page 1

Yaccarino tweeted earlier. Yaccarino, a former advertising sales executive at NBCUniversal who Musk hired last month to be Twitter's CEO, said the social media platform was on the cusp of broadening its scope. "X is the future state of unlimited interactivity — centered in audio, video, messaging, payments/banking — creating a global marketplace for ideas, goods, services, and opportunities."

The logo change was greeted with criticism as well as nostalgia for an image that had become a symbol for the social media age. Martin Grasser, one of the original designers of the blue bird logo, wrote on social media that the emblem was intended to be "simple, balanced, and legible at very small sizes." Twitter founder Jack Dorsey, who signed off on the design in 2012, replied to Grasser with an emoji of a goat, meaning "greatest of all time."

Brand suicide?

Esther Crawford, a former head of product at Twitter, said the change amounted to a form of

International

Philippines' Marcos says drug war has 'a new face'

Activists insist people are still being killed illegally

MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos said Monday the nation's anti-narcotics campaign has "taken on a new face" with a focus on rehabilitation and education, but activists insist people are still being killed illegally.

Thousands of people have been killed in the drug war started by former president Rodrigo Duterte in 2016, sparking condemnation and an international probe into alleged human rights abuses. The deadly crackdown has continued under Marcos, the son and namesake of the country's former dictator, even as he pushed for a greater emphasis on prevention and treatment.

More than 350 drug-related killings have been recorded since Marcos took office in June 2022, according to figures compiled by Dahas, a University of the Philippines-backed research project that keeps a count of such killings. "The campaign against illegal drugs continues but it has taken on a new face," Marcos said in his second State of the Nation address to lawmakers, diplomats and judges.

"It is now geared towards community-based treatment, rehabilitation, education and reintegration to curb drug dependence amongst our affected citizenry," he said.

Marcos said the government would also "relentlessly continue our fight against drug syndicates" and crackdown on "unscrupulous law enforcers" involved in the drug trade. "I will be accepting their resignations," he said to cheers and applause.

Nearly a thousand top-ranking police were asked to resign in January as the government sought to clear the corruption-tainted force of officers involved in illegal drugs.

It is not clear how many resignations have been

accepted so far. Human rights activists expressed outrage at Marcos's speech, which came days after his declaration that the Philippines would no longer deal with the International Criminal Court after The Hague-based tribunal rejected Manila's appeal to stop a drug war investigation.

"The supposed new face of his anti-narcotics campaign is merely a rehash of tired old PR lines that mean literally nothing in the context of the continuing EJKs (extra-judicial killings) in his drug war, and his disinterest and even contempt for justice for the victims during the past administration," said Cristina Palabay of human rights alliance Karapatan.

'Passing grade'

Several thousand protesters marched peacefully along a major avenue in the capital Manila hours before Marcos's speech to demand higher pay, more jobs and protection of human rights. Riot police did not intervene as the marchers later set fire to a large two-faced effigy of Marcos, who they accused of pursuing the deadly narcotics crackdown while at the same time mouthing calls for national unity.

Marcos also used his 71-minute speech to highlight his government's efforts in the past year to boost agricultural productivity, improve education and build infrastructure. He also sought to drum up congressional support for his legislative agenda, including reforming the military and uniformed personnel pension system to make it more sustainable, and granting amnesties to insurgents who surrender. Many observers had set a low bar for judging Marcos' performance after Duterte's turbulent years, when the brutal drug war tarnished the country's image, diplomatic relations with the



QUEZON CITY, Philippines: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. delivers his speech during the State of the Nation Address (SONA) at the House of Representatives in Quezon City on July 24, 2023. — AFP

West were strained and economic growth tanked during the Covid-19 pandemic.

For some, he has exceeded expectations. "He was pleasantly surprising in many ways, especially for those who feared that the Philippines would go over

the cliff," said political analyst Richard Heydarian, who gave Marcos' first year a "passing grade". Heydarian said Marcos' greatest achievement so far was writing off \$1.04 billion in land-related debt owed by more than half a million farmers. — AFP

220 churches, 17 temples torched in Manipur violence

IMPHAL, India: Charred walls, collapsed tin roofs and smashed windows in a burned Kuki community church illustrate how deadly ethnic violence has led to brutal sectarian attacks in India's troubled Manipur state. At least 120 people have been killed since May in armed clashes between the predominantly Hindu Meitei majority and the mainly Christian Kuki in the northeastern state.

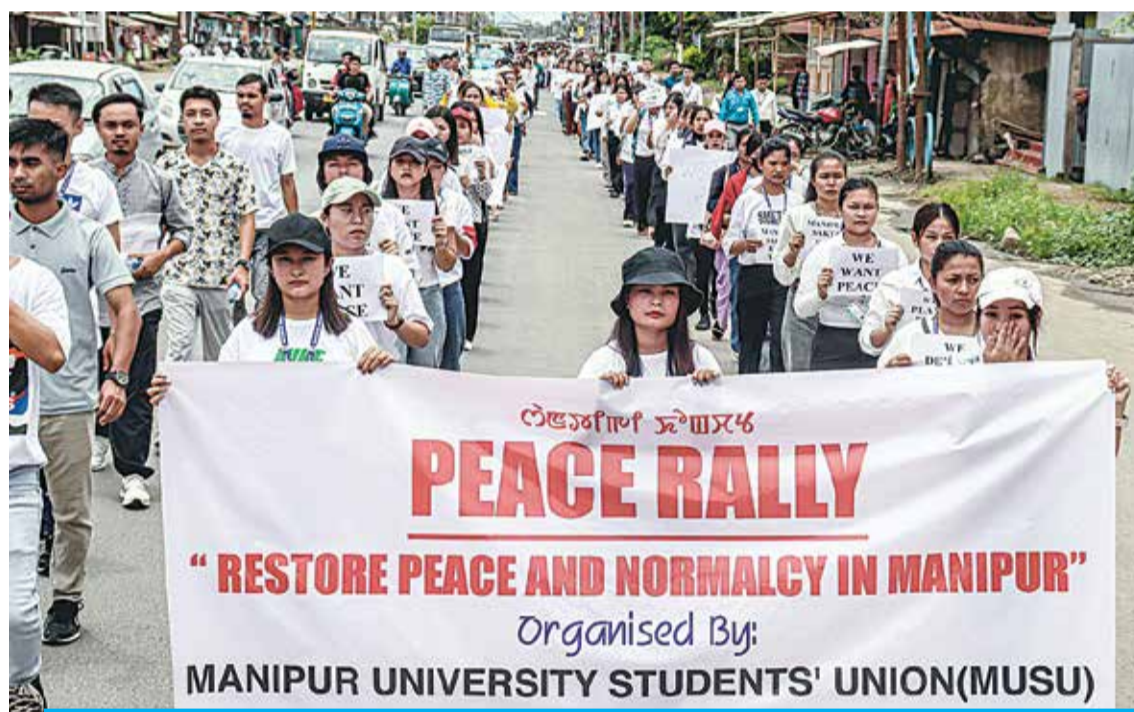
The ruins of the Kuki church in Imphal are just one among the more than 220 churches and 17 Hindu temples destroyed in the months of vigilante violence, according to a report by India Today news magazine. Across the street from the burned church, Baptist priest Zuan Kamang Damai led a service on Sunday with a congregation just a third of its usual size of about 800 after many of his Kuki parishioners fled.

"After this violence erupted, they moved to different places to save their lives," he said. "They want to come back, they want to resettle, they want to live with my family," Damai said. "This is what they responded to me, and I comfort them. God is there." Damai is himself a Naga, another major tribal group in the area who have largely been spared in the cycle of revenge attacks. But many of his regular worshippers are staying away, fearful of the possibility of violence.

"We have to respect each religion — regardless of Christians, regardless of Hindu, Muslim, whatever," the 55-year-old said. While there was "conflict here and there", he said, "we have to avoid attacking the temples".

Land, rights and power

The cause of conflict is a complex mix of land, rights and power. The Kuki oppose Meitei demands for reserved public job quotas and college admis-



IMPHAL, India: Members of the Manipur University Students' Union (MUSU) protest over sexual violence against women and for peace in the ongoing ethnic violence in India's north-eastern state of Manipur, in Imphal on July 24, 2023. — AFP

sions as a form of affirmative action, fearing that they might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for tribal groups. India's Interior Minister Amit Shah has promised a "thorough, in-depth and impartial investigation" into the violence and has said the government "stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the people of Manipur".

But the Human Rights Watch group says that state authorities, led by Shah's Bharatiya Janata Party, have rolled out "politically motivated, divisive policies that promote Hindu majoritarianism".

Many say religious divisions are adding to the trouble. While the majority Meitei people are largely Hindu, a small number are Christian and some say they too have been attacked. B, a Meitei Christian

who did not wish to be identified beyond an initial, described how he watched in horror as his church was burnt to the ground by a mob.

"The large-scale attack on churches across communities makes it evident that it has a religious angle to it," he said. But others point out that while churches used by the Kuki community have been attacked, those of the Naga people have not.

Eva, a Christian with roots in both the Meitei and Naga communities who also asked for her real name not to be used, said the conflict is not just about land rights or government jobs. "Meitei churches were vandalized and burnt," she said. "If it is just a Kuki and Meitei issue, then why were the Meitei churches attacked? The evidence is very clear cut." — AFP

14 die in boat capsized off Senegal capital

DAKAR, Senegal: At least 14 people who appeared to be migrants were killed when their wooden boat capsized off the Senegalese capital Dakar, a local official told AFP on Monday. Police and rescue workers were still looking for more bodies after the pirogue overturned overnight Sunday to Monday.

"The navy told the vessel to draw alongside and they fled," district deputy mayor Samba Kandji said. "I was told 14 (dead) but two more bodies have been found. We assume it's 16," he said.

A wooden boat, which several witnesses on the beach said had been carrying the victims, could be seen floating near the shore. An AFP journalist saw fire department workers recover a body and place it on a tarpaulin on the beach. Dozens of onlookers on the beach

watched the drama unfold. One of them, 23-year-old Amndy Moustapha Sene, said he dreams of becoming a professional footballer and playing in Europe.

"I dreamed of going to Europe because there is no future here. I was ready to board a pirogue, but now I've decided to emigrate legally when the opportunity arises," he said, noting the boats were too risky. Activity has increased in recent weeks along the Atlantic sea route from northwest Africa used by migrants to try to reach Europe via Spain's Canary Islands. At least 14 people died in mid-July when a pirogue capsized off Senegal's Saint-Louis, near the border with Mauritania. Morocco's navy said it had rescued nearly 900 irregular migrants in a one-week period this month. Most



DAKAR, Senegal: Senegalese rescue personnel carry a body on the beach of Ouakam, in Dakar on July 24, 2023 after a boat capsized off the coast of Dakar. — AFP

were from sub-Saharan Africa. NGOs regularly report fatal shipwrecks in Moroccan, Spanish and international waters, with unofficial estimates putting the death toll in the

dozens, if not hundreds. During a cabinet meeting on Thursday, Senegalese President Macky Sall, "paid tribute to the memory of those who died in recent accidents at sea." — AFP

Taiwan air raid drills simulate response to China missile attacks

TAIPEI: Taiwan held air raid drills simulating its response to Chinese missile attacks in several cities on Monday, the same day the island's military

kicked off its annual war games. Self-ruled Taiwan holds frequent defense drills in the face of increasing military and political pressures from China, which regards the island as its territory.

Preparation efforts also extend to its civilian population, with authorities stepping up drills in cities, citing lessons learned from Russia's invasion of Ukraine where the street-to-street warfare appears to be part of the defense strategy playbook.

"Because of the ongoing Ukraine-Russian war, the importance of the drill is for our resi-

dents to know how to evacuate," said Tsai Ying-fong, who organized Monday's evacuation in Taipei's Neihu district.

Residents in seven counties across northern Taiwan were subjected to emergency scenarios as part of Taiwan's "Wan An" air defense exercises, which translates to "everlasting peace". As the sirens sounded in Neihu to signal an incoming missile attack, volunteers guided residents to nearby underground evacuation shelters, where they crouched to the ground and covered their eyes and ears. — AFP

News in Brief

BBC newsreader Alagiah dies

LONDON: George Alagiah, the BBC newsreader recognizable to millions worldwide who reported on many of the most important global events in recent decades, died on Monday aged 67, his agent said. "I am so terribly sorry to inform you that George Alagiah died peacefully today, surrounded by his family and loved ones," Mary Greenham said in a statement. He was first diagnosed with cancer in 2014, and the disease returned in 2018. "George fought until the bitter end but sadly that battle ended earlier today," said Greenham. — AFP



George Alagiah

Kevin Spacey sex assault case

LONDON: The jury in the sexual assault trial of Kevin Spacey began weighing on Monday the Hollywood actor's fate in the closely followed case. The two-time Oscar winner denies the counts, including indecent assault, which concern four men and are alleged to have occurred between 2001 and 2013. At the opening of the trial in London last month, the prosecution claimed Spacey was a "sexual bully" who revealed in making others feel uncomfortable, including by aggressively grabbing men's crotches. The court has heard from the four alleged victims, who cannot be named for legal reasons. — AFP

Cameroon building crash toll 33

YAOUNDÉ, Cameroon: At least 33 people died and 21 others were injured when a building collapsed in Cameroon's business hub Douala, a senior fire officer and the regional governor told AFP on Monday. The four-storey block of flats collapsed onto another residential building in the north of the city overnight Saturday to Sunday. Firefighters put the death toll at 16 on Sunday. Rescuers were trying to clear the rubble and find survivors throughout Sunday and into Monday, according to a local resident said. — AFP

Ghana minister resigns

ACCRA, Ghana: A Ghanaian minister resigned over the weekend after a probe into how her houseworkers allegedly stole more than \$1 million in cash from her home last year. Sanitation Minister Cecilia Abena Dapaah denied any crimes, but the case drew criticism from Ghana's opposition who questioned why a minister would have such large amounts of cash in her house. In her statement on Saturday, Dapaah handed in her resignation to not be a "hindrance" to government, but rejected reports of such large amounts of cash at the family home. — AFP

Russia jails Navalny ally

MOSCOW: An aide to jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been imprisoned for nine years on "extremism" charges, Navalny's organization said Monday, the latest case sidelining critics of President Vladimir Putin. Moscow banned Navalny's organizations in 2021 as part of a crackdown that intensified after Russia launched large-scale military hostilities in Ukraine in February 2022. Mounting pressure on critics of Putin and Russia's role in the conflict has forced many Navalny allies into exile. Others have been jailed. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2023

KFH reports record net profit of KD 333.4m in H1 2023 up 141.4%

EPS for H1 2023 reached 22.03 fils, an increase of 73.3%

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq said that KFH has, by the grace of Allah, reported record net profit for its shareholders of KD 333.4 million (\$1.086 billion) for the first half of 2023, an increase of 141.4 percent compared to the same period last year. KFH showed its highest-ever quarterly profit in history and the biggest in the Kuwaiti banking sector.

Earnings per share for the first half of 2023 reached 22.03 fils; an increase of 73.3 percent compared to the same period last year. Net financing income for H1 23 reached KD 458.5 million; an increase of 43.2 percent compared to the same period last year.

Net operating income for H123 reached KD 489.1 million; an increase of 58.6 percent compared to the same period last year. Financing receivables as of the end of H123 reached KD 19.1 billion, an increase of KD 268 million or 1.4 percent compared to the end of last year.

Total assets as of the end of H123 reached KD 37.02 billion, an increase of KD 51.0 million or 0.1 percent compared to the end of last year. Also, shareholders' equity as of the end of H123 reached KD 5.2 billion. Depositors' accounts as of the end of H123 reached KD 22.9 billion, an increase of KD 459 million or 2.0 percent compared to the end of last year.

In addition, the capital adequacy ratio reached 16.45 percent which is above the minimum limit required by regulators. This ratio confirms the solid financial position of KFH. The Board of Directors approved distribution of an interim cash dividend of 10 percent to the shareholders.



Hamad Al-Marzouq



Abdulwahab Al-Rushood

Record profits

Al-Marzouq said that the record profits KFH achieved cement its standing and positively contribute to raising the performance of the Kuwaiti banking sector. He pointed out that the outstanding profitability ratios confirm the benefits and significance of the acquisition deal and reflect the efficient operational performance, the flexible business model of KFH and the disciplined execution of KFH's strategy. The distinct ratios also reflect the continuous momentum in all KFH's business areas and the contribution of operations at the Group level.

Al-Marzouq said that KFH showed positive growth in all key financial indicators and maintained good ratios in terms of ROAA, ROAE, improving asset quality ratios as well as the coverage ratio of provisions for non-performing debt, cost to income ratio and other financial indicators. He added that KFH tops the Kuwaiti banks in terms of assets and market capitalization.

It also ranked first among the listed companies on Bursa Kuwait in terms of market capitalization exceeding KD 11 billion. This means that KFH is the largest player in the private sector in Kuwait.

Financial technology

Al-Marzouq said that KFH sustained excellence in developing innovative products and services as well as financial and investment solutions, and in adopting FinTech and AI tools to enhance operations, customer experience, leadership, and market share. He noted that KFH succeeded in expanding customers base, achieving growth in operating income, which reflected positively on the H123 financial results.

ESG adoption

Al-Marzouq emphasized increasing investment in green finance, expanding ESG-linked investments, contributing effectively to building low-carbon economy for a sustain-

able future. He indicated that KFH won Best Islamic Bank for ESG-global category 2023 award from Euromoney and Kuwait's Best Bank for Sustainable Finance in 2023 from Global Finance. KFH received these awards in recognition of its spectacular efforts in adopting ESG principles in all its banking and business activities, the annual growth of sustainability products and green finance, becoming the first Bank in Kuwait to receive the Global Sustainability Assessment System GSAS – Gold Level Certificate in addition to the fruitful partnership with UNDP.

CSR leader

Al-Marzouq emphasized the pioneering role KFH maintains in CSR by supporting added-value initiatives, including health, sport, education, environment, women empowerment, supporting youth and students and people with special needs, as well as enhancing financial literacy, among others. He indicated that the societal role KFH plays is essential and influential as it keeps executing strategic initiatives inside and outside Kuwait in collaboration with stakeholders, such as signing design and supervision contract for Al-Mubarakiya reconstruction project with Gulf Consult Co. It is worth mentioning that KFH contributed around KD 8 million to this project.

Remarkable growth

KFH Acting Group Chief Executive Officer Abdulwahab Iesa Al-Rushood explained that the remarkable growth KFH achieved compared to the same period last year enhances its local and global standing, supports

its financial strength and creditworthiness and its ability to assist companies and lead mega financing deals. He noted that KFH has solid credit ratings, high liquidity ratios and strong capital base that support business growth and development plans in Kuwait and countries where KFH Group operates including Bahrain, Turkey, UK, Germany, Egypt, Malaysia, and others.

Digital leadership

"KFH has made great strides in its digital transformation strategy where customers carried out more than 135 million e-banking transactions through KFHonline on mobile and website in H123, with a growth rate of about 40 percent compared to the same period last year. This noticeable growth confirms KFH's leadership in offering innovative digital financial solutions that boost customers' experience and give KFH a competitive advantage," Al-Rushood said.

High competencies

Al-Rushood said that KFH is proud of its young national banking talents and competencies and the continuous efforts in training and localizing workers and attracting talents among graduates in partnership with public and private universities.

He added that the record financial results of H123 reflect the efforts exerted by KFH's staff, the trust of shareholders and customers, and the efficient strategic directions of Board of Directors. He also praised the role of the regulatory authorities and all partners and stakeholders which reinforces KFH's leadership locally and globally.

Highest in Kuwait banking sector

Praise be to Allah

Financial Results for the First Half of 2023

333.4 Million

141.4%

بيت التمويل الكويتي
Kuwait Finance House



Record Profits

Financial Results for the First Half of 2023

	30/06/2023	30/06/2022	%		30/06/2023	31/12/2022	%
Net Profit for Shareholders "KD Million"	333.4	138.1	141.4	Total Assets "KD Million"	37,021	36,969	0.1
Earnings per Share "Fils"	22.03	12.71	73.3	Financing Receivables "KD Million"	19,108	18,840	1.4
Net Financing Income "KD Million"	458.5	320.2	43.2	Depositors' Accounts "KD Million"	22,942	22,483	2.0
Net Operating Income "KD Million"	489.1	308.3	58.6	Shareholders' Equity "KD Million"	5,235	5,358	(2.3)

The Board of Directors approved distribution of an interim cash dividend of 10% to the Shareholders.

Ford launches 'hands-free' driving on UK motorways

'BlueCruise' self-drive option available on 'blue zones' motorways

LONDON: In a scene Ford hopes to see across Europe "soon", the first hands-free car model allowed on the UK's fastest roads zoomed down a motorway before slowing down as the back of a truck appeared.

Travelling at 60 miles per hour (100 kilometers per hour), the small SUV remained within its lane as an AFP journalist took a ride in the driver's seat along the M11 motorway north of London.

Ford activated the "BlueCruise" self-drive option on its electric flagship, the Mustang Mach-E, in the UK in April. After debuting in the United States in 2021, the option is now available on 6,000 kilometers (3,700 miles) of UK "blue zones" motorways — equipped with four lanes and central dividers — from Dover to Scotland. While the driver's hands are free, the car ensures that there is no fiddling with phones — and that eyes are fixed on the road — thanks to several cameras and infrared sensors. The on-board computer offers to take over driving duties when it enters the motorway, but when it detects that the driver has looked away for 10 seconds, a voice says:

"Look at the road. Resume control". If the warning is not heeded, the car will slam on the brakes and sound warnings. Some 500 early adopters have joined the trial in Britain, paying £17.99 (21 euros) per month. In North America, the option is also available on the F-150 pickup truck and the Expedition SUV.

Ford claims that 200,000 drivers use it, with no accidents. Competitor General Motors also offers hands-free driving, as does Mercedes on the German autobahn, but only in traffic jams with a maximum speed of 60 kmh imposed.

'Lighten the load'

Tesla boss Elon Musk has long predicted that fully autonomous driving (Level 4) is just around the corner. Ford, for its part, is betting on immediate applications of the technology but last year ended a research partnership on autonomous driving with startup Argo AI.

"We're optimistic about a future for L4 ADAS, but profitable, fully autonomous vehicles at scale are a long way off and we won't necessarily have to cre-



BlueCruise will use an infrared camera to ensure drivers are paying attention to the road.

ate that technology ourselves," Ford CEO Jim Farley said late last year. "But things have changed, and there's a huge opportunity right now for Ford to give time — the most valuable commodity in modern life

— back to millions of customers while they're in their vehicles," he added. The US brand was the first in the UK to benefit from an exemption allowing hands-free driving, said Douwe Cunningham, in charge of safety certification at Ford's European operation.

He is currently in discussions with the British authorities about the next step — enabling the car to change lanes to overtake when the indicator is activated. But the hands-free option doesn't mean the driver will be able to type on their phone or read a book. "It's evolution, not revolution," admitted Cunningham. He believes that improved cruise control is the next step towards Level 3 autonomous driving, which will allow the computer to take over the driving in the majority of situations.

Tariq Willis, marketing expert for the American brand, told AFP that BlueCruise gives drivers "an opportunity to take a little bit of the load off them, especially in traffic", letting the car "do the hard work". BlueCruise should be available "soon" in Germany, then in France, said Cunningham. — AFP



Newly-graduated Gulf Bank employees.

Gulf Bank employees graduate from KGDP program

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to develop human talents, Gulf Bank announced the graduation of a number of its employees from the Kuwait Graduates Development Program (KGDP) — organized by the Institute of Banking Studies in cooperation with the Central Bank of Kuwait — of which began back in March 2022 and ended in May 2023. The KGDP program is a bridge between the academic stage and the job market, of which combines both theoretical and practical training, including working in highly professional institutes. This is meant to enrich the participants' experience and prepare them to work efficiently.

Over the course of a year, participants in the program acquired plenty of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary when working in the banking sector; in addition to providing them with the opportunity to discover the banking sector and acquire academic and professional skills.

Throughout the training period, participants were able to test their capabilities, develop their skills, and discover local and international banks — by experiencing and building their skills through a rotation program at Gulf Bank and through an international field training to Oman, in collaboration with the National Bank of Oman.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources

Salma Al-Hajjaj said: "We continuously strive to engage, empower and develop employees, as we consider them to be a key pillar to achieve excellence in both customer service and society as a whole." Al-Hajjaj indicated that the bank is keen to cooperate and partner with international and local institutions to provide quality training programs that contribute to the development of the bank's human talents — believing in the importance of training and development to help increase the efficiency and skills of employees.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



Salma Al-Hajjaj

Sam Altman, Alex Blania and Max Novendstern, is now live," read a statement on Worldcoin's website.

Worldcoin provides users with a private digital identity — a "World ID" — after they register in person, where an "Orb" imaging device scans their eye's unique iris pattern to verify they are "a real and unique person," Worldcoin said. The founders said verified private digital identities will be crucial to distinguish humans from AI online. The company also launched Monday its Worldcoin token, a cryptocurrency now transactable on the blockchain in certain locations, to millions "who participated in the beta," the statement said.

Worldcoin aims to create the "world's largest identity and financial public network," according to its website. "If successful, we believe Worldcoin could drastically increase economic opportunity, scale a reliable solution for distinguishing humans from AI online while preserving privacy, enable global democratic processes, and eventually show a potential path to AI-funded (universal basic income)," Altman and Blania said in a letter posted to Twitter.

The company spent three years developing the project, and 2 million people signed up for a World ID during its beta testing. Worldcoin is rolling out 1,500 Orbs in locations across the globe, which will enable millions more to register, according to its website.

"Like any really ambitious project, maybe it works out and maybe it doesn't, but trying stuff like this is how progress happens," Altman tweeted. Blania, too, was cautiously optimistic. "This is the beginning of a long journey. Especially early on, things will not be perfect. But we hope that with fast iteration, Worldcoin can become an empowering technology layer for every human," he tweeted. — AFP



SAN FRANCISCO: OpenAI chief executive Sam Altman, along with two co-founders, launched Monday the Worldcoin crypto project.

Deep ocean targeted for mining is rich in unknown life

PARIS: A vast area at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean earmarked for controversial deep sea mineral mining is home to thousands of species unknown to science and more complex than previously understood, according to several new studies.

Miners are eyeing an abyssal plain stretching between Hawaii and Mexico, known as the Clarion-Clipperton Zone (CCZ), for the rock-like "nodules" scattered across the seafloor that contain minerals used in clean energy technologies like electric car batteries.

The lightless ocean deep was once considered a virtual underwater desert, but as mining interest has grown scientists have scoured the region exploring its biodiversity, with much of the data over the last decade coming from commercially-funded expeditions. And the more they look the more they have found, from a giant sea cucumber dubbed the "gummy squirrel" and a shrimp with a set of elongated bristly legs, to the many different tiny worms, crustaceans and mollusks living in the mud.

That has intensified concerns about controversial proposals to mine the deep sea, with the International Seabed Authority on Friday agreeing a two-year roadmap for the adoption of deep sea mining regulations, despite conservationists' calls for a moratorium.

Abyssal plains over three kilometers underwater cover more than half of the planet, but we still know surprisingly little about them. They are the "last frontier", said marine biologist Erik Simon-Lledo, who led research published Monday in the journal Nature Ecology and Evolution that mapped the distribution of animals in the CCZ and found a more complex set of communities than previously thought. "Every time we do a new dive we see something new," said Simon-Lledo, of Britain's National Oceanography Centre.

Campaigners say this biodiversity is the true treasure of the deep sea and warn that mining would pose a major threat by churning up huge plumes of previously-undisturbed sediment.

The nodules themselves are also a unique habitat for specialized creatures. "With the science as it is at the present day, there is no circumstance under which we would support mining of the seabed," said Sophie Benbow of the NGO Fauna and Flora.

'Mind-bogglingly vast'

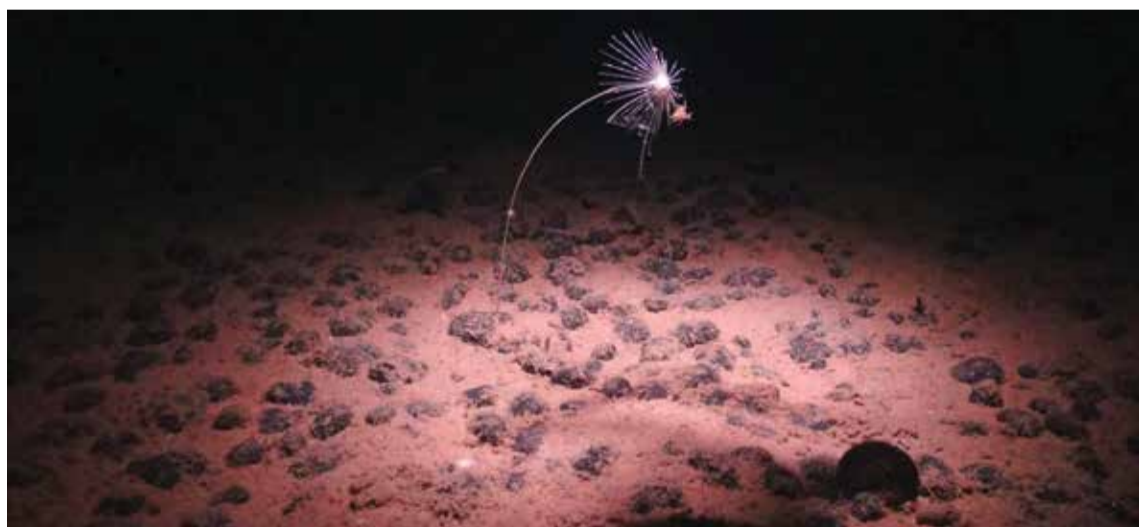
The Clarion-Clipperton zone has both its age and its size to thank for the unique animals discovered there, scientists say. The region is "mind-bogglingly vast", said Adrian Glover, of Britain's Natural History Museum, a co-author both on the study with Simon-Lledo and on the first full stocktake of species in the region published in Current Biology in May.

That study found that more than 90 percent of species recorded in the CCZ — some 5,000 species — are new to science. The region, which was considered to be essentially barren before an increase in exploration in the 1970s, is now thought to have a slightly higher diversity than the Indian Ocean, said Glover. He said sediment sampling devices from the region might only capture 20 specimens each time — compared to maybe 20,000 in a similar sample in the Antarctic — but that in the CCZ you have to go much further to find the same creature twice. Scientists are now also able to use autonomous underwater vehicles to survey the seabed. These are what helped Simon-Lledo and his colleagues find that corals and brittlestars are common in shallower eastern CCZ regions, but virtually absent in deeper areas, where you see more sea cucumbers, glass sponges and soft-bodied anemones. He said any future mining regulations would have to take into account that the spread of animals across the area is "more complex than we thought".

'Serious harm'

The nodules likely started as a shard of hard surface — a shark tooth or a fish ear bone — that settled on the seabed and slowly grew by attracting minerals that naturally occur in the water at extremely low concentrations, Glover said. Each one is likely millions of years in the making. The area is also "food poor", meaning fewer dead organisms drift down to the depths to eventually become part of the seafloor mud. Glover said parts of the CCZ add just a centimeter of sediment per thousand years. Unlike the North Sea, formed from the last ice age that ended 20,000 years ago, the CCZ is ancient.

"The abyssal plain of the Pacific Ocean has been like that for tens of millions of years — a cold dark abyssal plain with low sedimentation rates and life there," Glover said. Because of this, the environment impacted by any mining would be unlikely to recover in human timescales. "You are basically writing that ecosystem off for probably centuries, maybe thousands of years, because the rate of recovery is so slow," said Michael Norton, Environment Programme Director, the European Academies' Science Advisory Council. — AFP



AT SEA, Undefined: A handout image made available by the National Oceanography Centre on July 24, 2023 shows a soft-bodied anemone found in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone (CCZ). — AFP

British court spares Shell in climate case

LONDON: A British court dismissed a lawsuit that accused Shell's leadership of mismanaging climate risks to the oil giant on Monday, but the activist investor group that brought it plans to appeal. Corporations have faced a growing number of climate-related lawsuits in recent years as they come under pressure to step up efforts to curb global warming.

Shell was already ordered by a Dutch court in 2021 to slash its greenhouse gas emissions by 45 percent by the end of the decade after it was sued by environmental groups. This time, ClientEarth, an environmental law NGO and a minor Shell shareholder, filed in February a lawsuit in the High Court of England and Wales against Shell bosses "for failing to manage the material and foreseeable risks posed to the company by climate change".

But the judges dismissed the case, once in May and now following a hearing earlier in July.

ClientEarth said it was disappointed by the dismissal and plans to appeal. A Shell spokesperson

said the dismissal was "the right outcome — the court has reaffirmed its decision that this claim is fundamentally flawed". The company said ClientEarth's "claim entirely ignores how directors of a business as large and complex as Shell must balance a range of competing considerations". At its annual shareholders meeting in May, Shell's management received majority backing even though there were disruptions and doubts expressed about its climate transition.

Shell later announced a change of plans: instead of gradually reducing oil output it would hold it steady until 2030. "The Board's strategy to manage the risks of the energy transition was fundamentally flawed as it was," said ClientEarth senior lawyer Paul Benson.

"Now the Board seems to be dropping even any pretense that it will take meaningful action," he added in a statement. ClientEarth says Shell's flawed climate strategy is inconsistent with the Paris Agreement and jeopardizes the company's future commercial success, and thus constitutes a breach of its legal duties under English company law. "The Board's refusal to take decisive action to prepare the company for the fast-advancing energy transition puts Shell's future commercial viability at risk," said Benson. — AFP

Business

Chinese economy facing new difficulties, warn top leaders

Dismal economic data ramps up calls for support measures

BEIJING: China's top leaders said the economy was facing "new difficulties and challenges" in a meeting of the 24-person politburo on Monday. The country's highest-ranking officials gather annually at the end of July to review the economic situation before their traditional summer break in August.

This year, they met as the post-COVID recovery in the world's second-largest economy was running out of steam, due in large part to sluggish consumer spending. "The meeting pointed out that the current economic operation is facing new difficulties and challenges, mainly due to insufficient domestic demand, operational difficulties for some enterprises, high risks and hidden dangers in key areas, and a complex and severe external environment," a readout of the meeting on state broadcaster CCTV said.

The politburo agreed on Monday that China must "implement precise and effective macroeconomic regulation, strengthen countercyclical regulation and policy reserves", according to CCTV.

The meeting, headed by President Xi Jinping, also called for efforts to expand

domestic consumption and "adjust and optimize real estate policies in a timely manner", CCTV said.

Dismal data

A run of dismal economic data over recent months has ramped up calls for officials to unveil support measures. China this month said its economy grew 6.3 percent in the second quarter, much weaker than the 7.1 percent predicted in an AFP survey of analysts. The disappointing result came in spite of the very low base of comparison with last year, when the country was hit by a series of COVID lockdowns in major cities. In quarter-on-quarter terms — considered a more realistic basis for comparison — growth came in at 0.8 percent, well down from the 2.2 percent seen in January-March, the first full period after the removal of zero-COVID restrictions. Youth unemployment jumped to a record 21.3 percent in June, up from 20.8 percent in May. And the property sector remains in turmoil, with major developers failing to complete housing projects, triggering protests and mort-

gage boycotts from homebuyers.

While the People's Bank of China last month cut interest rates and authorities pledged to help the troubled property sector, there has been very little concrete action out of Beijing.

"The key to watch from the meeting is not specific policy measures, but the policy tone set by top leaders," Macquarie economist Larry Hu wrote in a note. "The government mentioned 'strengthening countercyclical policies' but the tone related to fiscal and monetary policies seems not significantly different from before," said Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management.

Zhang said the call to support the property sector appeared to show that the government has "recognized the importance of policy change in this sector to stabilize the economy".

"We don't expect policymakers to unleash a bazooka-like stimulus package," Hu of Macquarie said. "More likely, they would continue to roll out stimulus measures in a piecemeal way." China on Friday unveiled a number of measures to encourage the purchase of automobiles,



SHANGHAI: People visit the Bilibili World 2023, an exhibition of animation, comic and game (ACG) held by Chinese video sharing website Bilibili in Shanghai. China's top leaders said the economy was facing "new difficulties and challenges" in a meeting of the 24-person Politburo on Monday. — AFP

while other measures have also been announced to promote artificial intelligence and electronics consumption. Beijing is aiming for about five percent growth this

year, one of the lowest targets set by the Asian giant in decades, and one that Premier Li Qiang has warned will not be easy to achieve. — AFP



Philips sales jump, rebounds from respirator recall

THE HAGUE: Dutch medical tech firm Philips posted a nine percent jump in second-quarter sales and a return to profit on Monday as it bounces back from a global recall of sleep respirators. The Amsterdam-based company said sales rose to 4.5 billion euros (\$4.9 billion).

It reported a net profit of 74 million euros following a loss of 20 million euros over the same period last year. "I am pleased with our improved operational performance across all segments and geographies in the quarter," Philips chief executive Roy Jakobs said. The medical device maker in 2021 announced a major recall of its DreamStation machines for sleep apnea, a disorder in which breathing stops and starts during sleep.

Users were said to be at risk of inhaling or swallowing pieces of toxic soundproofing foam that could cause irritation or headaches. Philips also mentioned a "potential" cancer risk in the long term.

But it announced in May that independent tests showed the sleep respirators at the centre of the massive recall were "unlikely" to harm patients. The replacement of suspected faulty devices has now been almost completed, with "the vast majority" of the sleep devices back with patients and home care providers. Jakobs said. "We are fully focused on the remediation of the affected ventilators," he said. The recall hit the 132-year-old company hard and by January it announced it was slashing 10,000 jobs out of a total workforce of just under 80,000 employees around the globe.

To date Philips has cut 6,600 jobs out of the planned total set for 2025, the company said. Philips has faced a US Department of Justice probe over the respirator issue and was negotiating with US authorities over a financial settlement. It is also a defendant in several class action lawsuits in the United States and other litigation elsewhere. While "uncertainties remain", Philips said it expected sales to grow in the mid-single-digits for the rest of the year. — AFP

ECB set to hike again with inflation stubbornly high

FRANKFURT: Another interest rate hike appears a near certainty when ECB policymakers meet Thursday as inflation remains high, but the central bank faces increasing discontent among countries scared high interest rates will hurt growth.

The Frankfurt-based institution has lifted borrowing costs at the fastest rate ever to combat red-hot inflation after Russia's war in Ukraine sent food and energy prices soaring.

At its last meeting in June, ECB President Christine Lagarde said it was "very likely" that the bank would raise rates again at its next meeting. "Virtually everyone is anticipating a 0.25 percentage point increase," the head of the influential German central bank, Joachim Nagel, told the RND media group last week.

But future increases are in doubt as inflation slowly eases and the eurozone economy looks weaker.

Consumer prices rose at a 5.5-percent pace in June — still well above the ECB's two-percent target but down from its double-digit peak towards the end of last year. Collectively, the eurozone fell into recession around the turn of the year, shrinking in two straight quarters.

Core inflation

The outlook for the economy is not much rosier. At its last meeting in June, the ECB lowered its forecast for eurozone growth this year to 0.9 from 1.0 percent. The eurozone economy will "strengthen in the course of the year" as inflation eases, it said. With a new hike almost a given, the July meeting is an opportunity to weigh the "advisability of extending the tightening", said Eric Dor, a director at the IESEG business school.

The Federal Reserve, which started its hiking cycle before the ECB, hit pause on new increases at its last meeting in June as US inflation fell more than expected, but could hike again at its meeting this week. Meanwhile, falling inflation in the eurozone was "mainly due to the reduction in the annual growth of energy prices", which are little influenced by monetary policy, Dor said. "Excluding energy,

the reduction in annual price growth is still very limited," he said.

Core inflation — a closely watched measure that excludes volatile energy, food, alcohol and tobacco prices — in fact rose to 5.4 percent in the eurozone in June from 5.3 percent in May. The persistence of inflation was "caused by the fact that inflation is working its way through the economy in phases", Lagarde said at the end of June. ECB officials are now concerned about the impact of rising wages as workers demand higher salaries to cover rising costs.

'Difficult situation'

Concerns over stubborn inflation will ultimately convince the bank to keep hiking beyond Thursday's meeting, according to Ulrike Kastens, European economist at DWS. "Neither the labor market nor the underlying price trend will weaken significantly," Kastens said, predicting another rise in September. But some members of the governing council have raised the prospect of stopping hikes.

"We might have one further move... but I'm not sure that we're going to go further than that," the head of the Greek central bank, Yannis Stournaras,

NBK introduces new features on Mobile Banking App

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to enrich the services provided under NBK Mobile Banking App, aiming to help customers rely on mobile phones for all their transactions. In this context, the bank announces introducing a number of new services and features on the app, mainly including updating personal information digitally without having the need to visit the branch, generating NBK Quick Pay using QR Code, paying Quick Pay links instantly through the app, and viewing card's details and PIN using NBK Mobile Banking App.

The new updates of NBK Mobile Banking app include other services like using Quick Pay service to make in-app payments when receiving a Quick Pay link from an NBK Customer payee.

Updating personal information

NBK now allows customers to update Personal information using Mobile Banking App digitally at any time. Whether inside or outside Kuwait, customers can now update their Personal Information simply by logging into NBK Mobile Banking App, tapping on "Update My Personal Information" under "profile", filling out the digital form, and submitting the request in minutes.

Generating NBK Quick Pay through QR code

The new updates allow using Quick Pay service on NBK Mobile Banking App by scanning QR code. The service is available in simple and easy steps anytime and anywhere, which will make link-generation process for NBK Quick Pay even quicker and easier. If the payer is an NBK customer, he can proceed

with a payment by simply scanning the Quick Pay QR Code that was generated by the payee and make the payment using the new service in a fast, smooth, and secure way.

In-app Quick Pay payments

NBK customers can now Pay NBK Quick Pay link instantly through NBK Mobile Banking App, which will give them the option to choose which account to Pay the link with in one tap, without having the need to enter the card credential to proceed the payment. This new feature fulfills the daily needs of today's customers when using NBK Mobile Banking App to make Quick Pay payments in a fast and convenient manner. Commenting on these new updates, Mohammed Al-Dakheel, head of Mobile Banking, Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "NBK continues to add new innovative digital solutions to make daily banking more convenient. In this, we focus on enhancing NBK Mobile Banking App, seeking to offer our customers new and innovative methods to make their banking transactions, anytime, anywhere, for delivering the best banking experience."

"As we are approaching the travel season, we seek to enable our customers to make all their transactions anytime, anywhere. In this context, enabling the service of updating personal information using NBK Mobile Banking App reflects our understanding of customers' needs and endeavors to meet them," he added. "NBK will continue introducing innovative digital services to help serve the needs of customers via NBK Mobile Banking App, in an effort to enrich their banking experience and offer them more luxury and peace of mind," he noted.



Mohammed Al-Dakheel



It is worth mentioning that NBK launched the new experience of NBK Mobile Banking App, including comprehensive enhancements to enrich customers' experience and better meet their banking needs in an easier way. With Mobile Banking App being NBK Customers' personal banking companion, the new experience promises to strengthen the connection even further with upgraded features such as quick-action buttons to reach essential services easily, reordering favorite accounts and products on the dashboard, faster "NBK Quick Pay" service, a new Rewards Center, and much more.

The NBK Mobile Banking App is available for download on the App Store, Google Play Store, as well as Huawei App gallery.

Stellantis, Samsung to build second battery plant in US

PARIS: US-European automaker Stellantis, whose brands include Fiat, Jeep and Peugeot, and a Samsung subsidiary plan to build a second electric car battery factory in the United States, the companies said Monday. The location of the facility has yet to be announced but Stellantis and South Korea's Samsung SDI said it would start production in 2027, with an initial annual output capacity of 34 gigawatt hours (GWh).

It would be able to produce hundreds of thou-

sands of vehicles made by Stellantis.

Stellantis, whose US brands include Chrysler, Dodge, Ram and Jeep, plans to have electric vehicles account for 50 percent of its sales in the United States by 2030. "This new facility will contribute to reaching our aggressive target to offer at least 25 new battery electric vehicles for the North American market by the end of the decade," Stellantis chief executive Carlos Tavares said in a statement.

The company is seeking to secure around 400 GWh of battery capacity to achieve its sales target.

Stellantis and Samsung SDI are already building a gigafactory in Kokomo, Indiana — an investment of between \$2.5 billion and \$3.1 billion — with production slated to begin in 2025 and a 33-GWh capacity.

Samsung SDI, which specializes in the production of electric car batteries, announced in April a joint venture with General Motors to build a \$3 billion factory in the United States. The company,



part of the sprawling Samsung group, already has EV battery plants in Vietnam, China, Hungary and elsewhere. — AFP



said last week. Steep interest rate rises have also provoked an angry backlash from political leaders in southern eurozone countries, where debt levels are higher and growth has been weaker. "The ECB's simplistic recipe of raising interest rates does not appear to many to be the right way forward," Italy's far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni

said at the end of June. — AFP
Meloni pinned the blame on the Ukraine conflict and worried over the impact of rising rates on the economy. More hikes "could create a more difficult situation for growth at the European level", Portuguese Finance Minister Fernando Medina concurred. — AFP

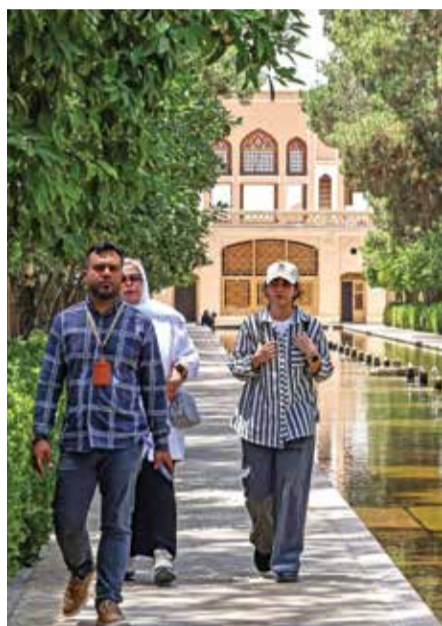
Lifestyle



This undated photo released by the website of Iran's Aras UNESCO Global Geopark shows a general view of the Aras river in northern Iran close to the border with Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan exclave.



This undated photo released by the website of Iran's Aras UNESCO Global Geopark shows a general view of rapids along the Aras river in northern Iran.



A guide leads tourists at the Dowlat Abad Garden 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.

Hoping to attract tourists, Iran looks to neighbors

Iran, largely shunned by western tourists, is making a push to attract visitors from wealthy Gulf Arab states and other nearby countries to boost its sanctions-hit economy. The Islamic republic is also drawing more visitors from Russia and China to its ancient sites that date back to the Persian empire and the fabled Silk Road, industry figures say. Iran's Beijing-brokered diplomatic thaw this year with Saudi Arabia paved the way for direct flights, and Tehran is also seeking closer ties with other countries from Egypt to Morocco.

The slow but steady change is noticeable at major tourist sights where more visitors can now be heard speaking not English, French or German, but Arabic, Chinese and Russian. "In the past, we were receiving many tourists from Europe but now those numbers have seen a sharp decline," said one Tehran travel agency owner, 46-year-old Hamid Shateri.

Europeans are "afraid of visiting Iran", he said, after years of tensions over the country's contested nuclear program and after Western government warnings against travelling there. "These days, mostly Chinese and Russian people visit Iran's historical sites and spectacular scenery and Arab tourists, especially from Iraq, come to attend religious ceremonies."

Years of isolation

Iran has long attracted foreign visitors with its ancient splendors including the cities of Shiraz, Isfahan and Mashhad and its 2,500-year-old Persepolis complex. It has deserts and snow-capped mountains as well as Gulf and Caspian Sea coastlines, and prides itself on its cuisine and tradition of hospitality. A steady stream of mainly European visitors long kept coming despite the strict dress code for women and bans on alcohol and nightlife after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

As the largest Shiite Muslim power, Iran also hosts a steady stream of religious pilgrims, many from neighboring

Iraq, to its ancient shrine cities of Mashhad and Qom. There were high hopes for a lucrative boost to tourism after Iran and major powers struck a landmark deal in 2015 to restrict its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief. But those hopes were dashed three years later when the then US president Donald Trump unilaterally pulled out of the agreement.

Bad news has spiraled since, including the COVID pandemic that hit Iran early and hard. Last year, mass protests rocked the country, sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini after her arrest for allegedly flouting the dress rules, before authorities put down the women-led "riots", which they blamed on hostile forces abroad.

Iran has also jailed several Europeans, prompting multiple Western countries to advise their citizens against all travel there, many citing the risk of "arbitrary detention". Last year Iran attracted 4.1 million foreigners — less than half the figure for 2019 and accounting for just 0.4 percent of tourist trips worldwide, says the UN World Tourism Organization. Tehran has now launched a push to rebuild tourism, including by drawing people from the

United Arab Emirates and Qatar to the Gulf islands of Kish and Qeshm, which boast beaches, luxury hotels and cheap shopping.

Renewed push

Iran has also sought to attract more visitors from neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan, despite recent tensions between Baku and Tehran.

"Setting up tourism exhibitions in other countries, advertising through their media and hosting international events are among the programs to promote tourism," said Majid Kiani, the CEO of northwest Iran's Aras Free Zone. UNESCO last month added the region's colorful Aras rock formations to its Global Geoparks network.

The area around the geological park, also hailed for its diverse ecosystem, hosted "more than 1.2 million tourists" during this year's Nowruz new year season, Kiani said. Armenians are now visiting the 9th-century monastery of Saint Stepanos, a UNESCO World Heritage site with vivid murals of biblical scenes and ornate facades. "Many Armenian tourists come to visit the historic church," said local archbishop Krikor Chiftjian, prelate of the Diocese



Tourists walk at the Dowlat Abad Garden in Iran's central city of Yazd.

of the Iranian provinces of East and West Azerbaijan.

Tourism analyst Babak Babali said there was much potential, given that in the 2010s Azerbaijanis routinely visited the region for healthcare, creating "a sizeable medical tourism industry". More broadly, some observers see signs of easing tensions, pointing to Iran's recent release of several European prisoners, although others remain in detention.

Babali said that, while "these steps signal Tehran's intention to deescalate tensions, it will take a while before this gets reflected in the number of tourists from Europe". Shateri, the Tehran tour guide, also said Iran has some way to go before western visitors return in great numbers. "Iran needs to improve its international relations and show the world that it has a peace-seeking nature if it wants to attract more tourists," he said. — AFP



Women pose for a group photo with wind catchers ("badir" in Persian) dotting the skyline behind, on a rooftop in Iran's central city of Yazd.

Turkey's Antioch rises from the ruins, stone by stone

The old priest painted a warning on the cracked walls of his shack: "Twelve children were born here! Don't touch this house." Vahit Baklaci, 82, returns every day to the house where he was born in the heart of old Antakya, which has been turned upside down since an earthquake on February 6 devastated southern Turkey and Syria, killing at least 55,000 people. But ancient Antioch, a stone's throw from Syria, is not just any old town, insisted the old priest.

"Antakya has existed for thousands of years. Look — two mosques dating back to the beginnings of Islam, both destroyed. And there, two 2,000-year-old churches from the time of Jesus... also destroyed. That's why we have to be careful with these places." Before the disaster, the Turkish Ministry of Culture had listed 719 buildings of historic importance. When the diggers went into action, first to find the bodies and then to clear away the rubble, it posted notices to protect those still standing: "Do not touch without authorization."

A representative of the ministry, standing in the dust in a fluorescent waistcoat and hard hat, makes sure those notices are obeyed: "If (a building) is too damaged, we can't do anything.

But when we can, we take it down stone by stone," she said on condition of anonymity. The stones that are saved are sorted, classified and numbered for future restoration. Six teams like hers patrol the old town. "We had about 50 at the beginning", she said.

'A work of art'

Talking about the future in this city in ruins, where you walk over collapsed roofs, step over bell towers and around toppled minarets, is a leap of faith. Architect Gokhan Ergin picked up one of the orange roof tiles strewn across the ground. It was made in Marseille in southern France which from the Ottomans and later the French imported tiles in huge quantities. Antioch was part of the French mandate of Syria before being handed to Turkey just before World War II.

"We're standing in the city's first residential areas. These beautiful houses were charming hotels and restaurants," said Ergin, who has restored many of them and knows all about their mysteries, from the doors painted blue to deter scorpions to the curry plants sculpted above the entrance arches.

"It's like when you find a work of art, you make an inventory of it to protect it in a museum. We have to do the same thing here: these buildings are just as important. It's not just earth and stone," said the 40-year-old. "This is living history." Ergin said the older buildings withstood the successive tremors of February much better because the planks and wood inserted between the mud brick structures helped absorb the shock. Those houses that have been damaged were because of the collapse of their neighbors, who have been poor-

ly restored, he insists. His, he proudly pointed out, still have their windows and glazing almost intact.

'Plastic restoration'

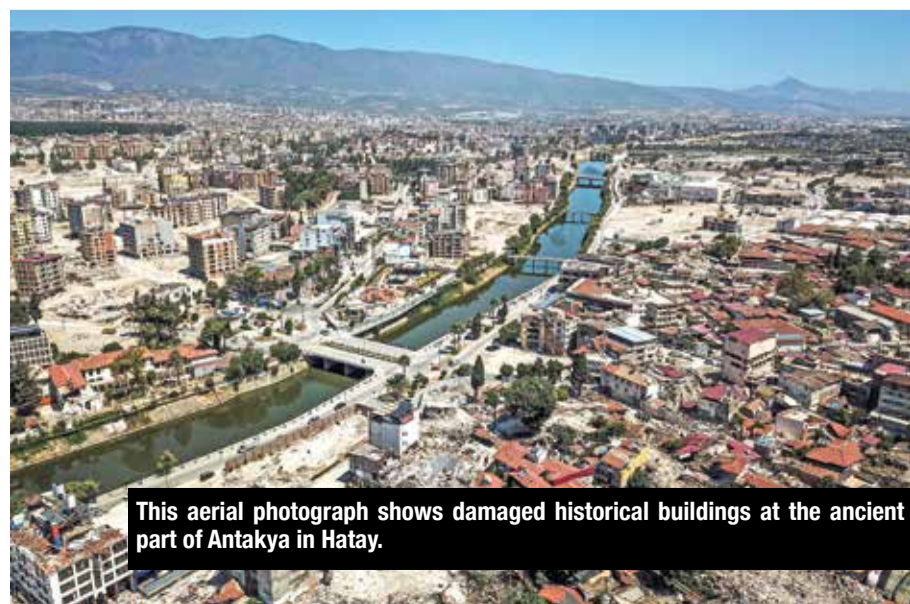
On Kurtulus Avenue, Antakya's main thoroughfare, formerly Herod Street and home to the synagogue and the region's oldest mosque, Habib-i Nejjar, built on the site of an ancient pagan temple transformed into a church in early Christian times, a team from Istanbul Technical University is carrying out its own surveys. For Umut Almac, professor of architecture in the restoration department, at least 800 more buildings in the city deserve protection. "That's the problem of the region, there are so many buildings that should be registered," he said.

In front of a former luxury hotel, with its crumbling breezeblock walls, he complained about the "plastic restorations" carried out 10 or 20 years ago to attract tourists. "They concentrated on the facade, without respecting the internal structures of the building." When the quake hit on February 6, tens of thousands of buildings in southern Turkey collapsed in a matter of seconds.

Almac wants the reconstruction to be quicker, while others, including Ergin and the elderly priest Vahit, denounce the brutality of using diggers in the old town. "But I don't think we can move the stone blocks any other way," said the academic. — AFP



Gokhan Ergin, architect specialist on ancient buildings walks next to a damaged historical buildings as he inspects them, five months after a 7.8-magnitude jolt and its aftershocks wiped out swathes of Turkey's mountainous southeast at the ancient part of Antakya.



This aerial photograph shows damaged historical buildings at the ancient part of Antakya in Hatay.



This aerial photograph shows damaged historical buildings at the ancient part of Antakya in Hatay. - AFP photos

Lifestyle

Greatest rock'n'roll showman **Mick Jagger** turns 80

Mick Jagger

Mick Jagger once sang "what a drag it is getting old" but the most senior swinger in town shows little sign of slowing down as he turns 80 on Wednesday. The Rolling Stones frontman is still strutting and gyrating in front of packed-out arenas, most recently touring Europe to mark the band's 60th anniversary. The icon of 60s counterculture underwent a heart valve replacement in 2019, but his regime of running, kick-boxing, cycling and yoga has maintained his svelte figure and longevity as an energetic showman.

The band completed its 14-date "Sixty" tour last year, although had to cancel one date when Jagger caught COVID. It was the first time the band had performed without drummer Charlie Watts, who died in 2021. The remaining members plan to release a new album in tribute to their late drummer later this year, the first LP of original material since "A Bigger

Bang" in 2005. It will reportedly feature Beatles legend Paul McCartney and former Stones bassist Bill Wyman, 86, more than 30 years after his departure from the band. Beyond the Stones, Jagger teamed up with Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl in 2021 to record "Eazy Sleazy", a song about life during the pandemic.

With songs like "Jumpin' Jack Flash", "Gimme Shelter", "Sympathy for the Devil" and "Not Fade Away", Jagger's band helped detonate the cultural and social explosion of the 1960s. The charismatic frontman built a reputation for pushing boundaries, taking full advantage of the era's sexual revolution and recreational drug use.

Establishment figure

Michael Philip Jagger was born on July 26, 1943, to middle-class parents in Dartford, south of London. He start-

ed jamming with childhood friend Keith Richards in 1960 after they discovered a mutual love of the blues, and have enjoyed a productive, if love-hate, relationship ever since. Jagger dropped out of the London School of Economics in the pursuit of fame and in 1965 the band had their first smash hit with "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction".

A string of massive hits across five decades followed, including "Brown Sugar", "Honky Tonk Women" and "Paint It Black". The band became as famous for their off-stage antics as those on it. Jagger and Richards were found guilty of drug offences in 1967, while founding member Brian Jones paid the ultimate price for the rock and roll lifestyle, drowning in his swimming pool in 1969.

"I wasn't understanding enough about his drug addiction," Jagger said in 1995. "Things like LSD were all new.

No one knew the harm. People thought cocaine was good for you." Despite the drug-fuelled indulgences and controversies, Jagger has always kept a careful eye on the commercial side of things and has amassed a £310 million (\$400 million) fortune, according to the Sunday Times Rich List 2021.

For all his image as a subversive figure, Jagger has in later life become a pillar of the establishment. He became "Sir Mick" in 2002 after being knighted by Queen Elizabeth II and is frequently spotted at Lord's, watching the England cricket team. The rocker became a father for the eighth time in 2016 when American dancer Melanie Hamrick, his current partner, gave birth to a son. He already had seven children from four previous relationships. — AFP

Alphorn fest brings sound of music to Swiss mountains

High up in the Swiss Alps, a hundred alphorn players assembled on a windswept pasture Sunday to make the mountains ring in gentle harmonies at the 22nd International Alphorn Festival. The players formed a wide semi-circle at Tracouet above the ski resort of Haute Nendaz in southern Switzerland for the country's annual alphorn competition, which celebrates the musical instrument in its native landscape.

Several hundred spectators made the cable car trip or trekked up the mountainside to sit amongst the wildflowers at 2,200 meters above sea level and hear the country's top players en masse. The alphorn is a straight wooden instrument around 3.4 meters long with a cup-shaped mouthpiece. It was first documented in the 16th century and was reputedly used for communication in the mountains, with the clear sound echoing through the valleys.

"It's easy to play it but it's difficult to play it well," explained participant Marcel Henchoz, 85. A team of giant cowbell ringers paraded onto the pasture to start Sunday's festivities. Many of the alphorn players dressed in traditional costume, wearing hats adorned with badges, while flag twirlers performed to the music.

Soft, velvety sound

The cool mountain breeze blew the sound of horns and the smell of grilled cheese down the slopes. "The sound is

round, it's soft, it's velvety when there are a lot of horns. The music envelops us," said participant Françoise Dillon, 66, from Bulle, next to the cheese village of Gruyeres in western Switzerland. "There are more and more young people and women and girls who play folk music. It was very masculine 50 years ago," she added.

Fabien Crausaz, musical director of the Swiss Alphorn Academy, said the instrument was historically used to warn of dangers such as wolves or call for help



Approximately one hundred Alphorn players perform together on the final day of the 22th International Alphorn Festival on the mountain pasture of Tracouet. — AFP

if an animal was injured. "You have to vibrate your lips; the alphorn amplifies that," he said, explaining how to master the necessary skills. "Technically you need the right attack, the notes have to be clean; physically you have to support the note with the diaphragm. And then you actually have to say something."

'Play it with feeling'

In the competition, the players, identified by a number, are judged by a four-person jury screened off inside a tent so they do not know who is playing. "The jury works a lot on the inter-

pretation, the musicality, the accuracy, the rhythm," festival founder Antoine Devenes told AFP. "When it's groups, it's how they play together, the balance of sounds."

Besides Swiss competitors, nine French, two German, six American and one Canadian player took part. The youngest participant was 11, while a third of the players were women. Around 100 horn players entered the first round of competition on Saturday, with the adjudged best 10 called back to compete

for the title on Sunday.

The grand final was won once again by Adolf Zobrist, 58, from Brienz in central Switzerland. He claimed the title in 2016, 2019 and 2021. "It's my hobby and it's my passion. I've been playing since I was 12. My father passed it on to me," he told AFP. "It's a special, natural instrument and it's important to play it with feeling. For me it's really important that you are one: the instrument and yourself. "It's the sound of the mountains." — AFP

Iran bans film festival over poster of actress without hijab

Iranian authorities have banned a film festival that put out a publicity poster featuring an actress who was not wearing a hijab headscarf, state media reported. The ban comes after the Iranian Short Film Association (ISFA) released a poster for its upcoming Short Film Festival featuring Iranian actress Susan Taslimi in the 1982 film "The Death of Yazdgerd". "The culture minister has personally issued an order to ban the 13th edition of the ISFA Film Festival, after using a photo of a woman without a hijab on its poster in violation of the law," state news agency IRNA reported late Saturday.

The festival had been scheduled to be held in September. Wearing a hijab, covering the head and the neck, has been compulsory for women in Iran since 1983, shortly after the 1979 Islamic revolution.

However, Iranian women have increasingly flouted the strict dress code since mass protests began last September calling for an end to compulsory hijab. The months-long protests were triggered by the death of 22-year-old Iranian Kurd Mahsa Amini, who had been arrested by the morality police for allegedly breaching the strict Islamic dress code.

Earlier this month, police said patrols have been relaunched to catch the increasing number of women ignoring the law. The judiciary's Mizan Online website said late Saturday that legal measures were being taken against



Digikala, a major e-commerce company, over images of female employees not wearing the head covering.

On Wednesday, a Tehran court handed prominent actress Afsaneh Bayegan a suspended two-year prison sentence for failing to wear the hijab at a public event. It also ordered Bayegan to make weekly visits to a psychological centre "to treat the mental disorder of having an anti-family personality" and to submit a health certificate after her treatment, Fars news agency reported. — AFP



A portrait of late British-French singer and actress Jane Birkin is displayed next to her coffin at the end of the funeral ceremony in the Saint-Roch church in Paris. — AFP photos

Galaxy of French stars pay final farewell to Jane Birkin

Stars of the French screen on Monday turned out to bid a final farewell to the British-born actor and singer Jane Birkin who died earlier this month after charming France for decades with her style and panache. The coffin of Birkin was carried into the Saint-Roch church in Paris by her daughters Charlotte Gainsbourg and Lou Doillon, both also celebrated singers and actors, while a crowd of onlookers also gathered outside.

Those present inside the church in-

cluded French screen legends such as Catherine Deneuve, Chiara Mastroianni and Isabelle Huppert as well as fellow British actor Charlotte Rampling, who has also won a major following in France and starred in French-language movies. They were joined by French first lady Brigitte Macron and Culture Minister Rima Abdul Malak.

Birkin was catapulted to fame through her turbulent relationship with legendary singer-songwriter Serge Gainsbourg and her heavily accented French, which

became one of her signatures in her adopted home. With her flared jeans, mini dresses and distinctive fringe, Birkin was the ultimate "It girl" in the 1970s.

The flowers covering the square in front of the church were evidence of the affection with which Birkin was held in France, her adopted country even if she never turned away from her British and especially London roots. The family had made clear that access to the inside of the church was only allowed for close family and friends but a giant screen was

set up outside to allow the wider public to follow.

Her voice choking with emotion, Charlotte Gainsbourg paid tribute to her mother as she addressed the congregation saying: "Now I am an orphan". Her father Serge Gainsbourg died in 1991. "I see already the emptiness that she has left behind, she is my mum, our mum," she added.

Doillon said: "Mum, thank you for all these adventures, thank you for not being ordinary, reasonable or docile". Many

of the hundreds gathered outside had tears in their eyes. Marie-Pierre Frapart, 63, said she had "come to pay tribute to our little Englishwoman". Birkin, who had been suffering from health problems in recent years that had forced her to cancel concerts, was found dead at her Paris home on July 16, aged 76. French President Emmanuel Macron called Birkin "a complete artist" who "sang the most beautiful words in our language". — AFP

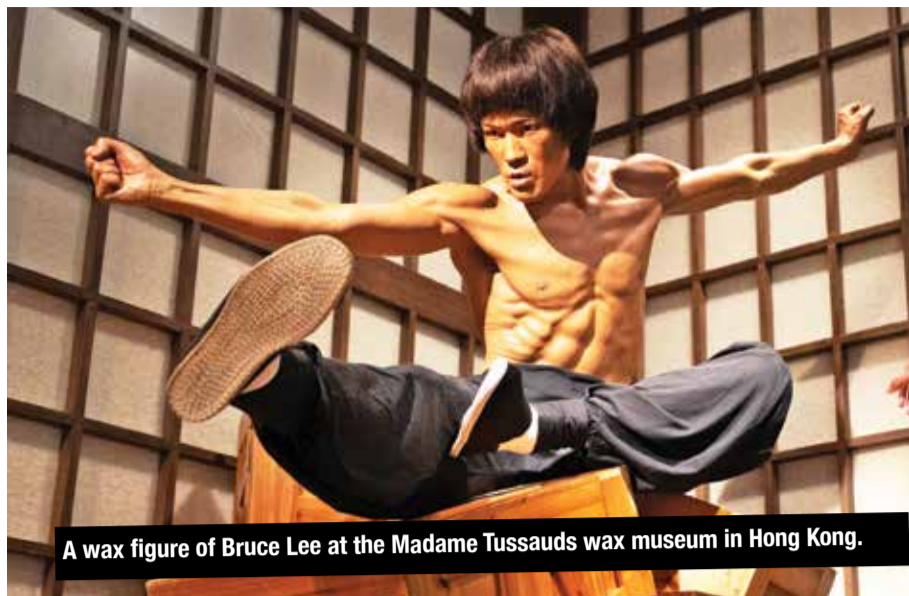


Jane Birkin's daughters French-British actress Lou Doillon (second left), Charlotte Gainsbourg (right) and Charlotte Gainsbourg's son Ben Attal (second right) react as they walk behind the coffin of late British-French singer and actress Jane Birkin at the end of the funeral ceremony in the Saint-Roch church in Paris.



Fans gather to watch the funeral ceremony for late British-French singer and actress Jane Birkin near the Saint-Roch church in Paris.

Lifestyle



A wax figure of Bruce Lee at the Madame Tussauds wax museum in Hong Kong.



Visitors take pictures with a statue of Bruce Lee outside the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in Hong Kong, ahead of the 50th anniversary of the martial arts star's death.--AFP photos



Visitors walk past a poster for the Bruce Lee exhibition at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong businessman W. Wong still remembers the day in 1972 when he first heard neighborhood kids rave about a figure who seemed larger than life: Bruce Lee. Lee, a consummate martial artist whose films spawned a kung fu craze around the world, was one of the first Asian men to achieve Hollywood superstardom before his death at 32. His influence can still be felt in Hong Kong, where he spent his childhood and final years, as fans this week hold exhibitions and martial arts workshops to mark the 50th anniversary of Lee's death.



This photo shows W. Wong, chairman of the Bruce Lee Club, posing for a photo next to a bust of Bruce Lee at an art exhibition in Hong Kong.

"Every child needs some kind of role model, and I chose Bruce Lee," said Wong, 54, who has led the city's largest fan club devoted to the star for nearly three decades. "I had hoped my life would resemble the Bruce Lee I saw: handsome, strong, with great martial arts skills and a heroic image." At a studio for Wing Chun—a style of martial arts Lee practiced before inventing his own Jeet Kune Do method—the martial arts master is revered as something akin to a patron saint.

Studio owner Cheng Chi-ping, 69, told AFP his cohort began their train-



Martial arts superstar Bruce Lee's legacy endures 50 years on

the 'god of martial arts', we could only be talking about Bruce Lee. There is no one else," he said.

Smashing barriers

Born in San Francisco in 1940, Lee was raised in Hong Kong and had an early brush with fame as a child actor, supported by his father, who was a famous Cantonese opera singer. At 18,

role in the martial arts film "The Big Boss", which made him a household name in Asia after its 1971 release. The next year saw two more box office hits—"Fist of Fury" and "The Way of the Dragon"—cementing Lee's persona as a relentless, lightning-fast fighter.

Lee had completed filming his fourth star vehicle, "Enter the Dragon", and was halfway through his fifth when he

"I would call Bruce Lee a paragon of Sinophone soft power success with Hong Kong characteristics," he told AFP. In Hollywood, Lee represented a rebuke to racist stereotypes, showing that Asian men were more than just servants and villains.

The scenes where he bares his torso and flexes his muscles—what Magnan-Park called the "kung fu strip-

serving his legacy in Hong Kong was no easy task, fan club chairman Wong told AFP. Government support was intermittent at best, he said. Fans in 2004 successfully petitioned to set up a bronze statue of Lee on Hong Kong's famed waterfront, but a campaign to revitalize his former mansion could not save it from demolition in 2019.

At a government-run museum exhibit commemorating Lee's life, a woman surnamed Yip told AFP she wanted to share "a symbol of the old Hong Kong" with her two children. Wong, who had organized a smaller exhibit in Sham Shui Po district, acknowledged a decline of interest among young people but said Lee's philosophy always has the potential to become relevant again.

He pointed to how protesters in Hong Kong's 2019 democracy movement cited the martial artist's mantra—"Be water, my friend"—as a reminder to adopt flexible tactics of resistance. That discussion has largely tapered off after authorities cracked down on dissent, but Wong remembers the public at the time wondering why young protesters were so taken by Lee. "As long as everyone still remembers (Lee), once your interest is piqued, you will have a chance to rediscover him," he said.—AFP



A man taking a photo of portraits of Bruce Lee at an art exhibition in Hong Kong.



Bruce Lee's yellow jumpsuit is pictured on display at the Bruce Lee exhibition at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in Hong Kong.

ing under the shadow of Lee's cultural influence but "we could never match his speed, strength or physique". Lee's appeal had not diminished for the next generation, said Mic Leung, 45, who trained at the same studio and, as a teenager, sought out Lee's movies on old videotapes. "When we talk about

he continued his studies in the United States and over the next decade taught martial arts and scored minor parts in Hollywood, before landing the role of Kato in the television series "The Green Hornet".

But it was not until Lee returned to Hong Kong that he landed his first lead

died on July 20, 1973 from swelling of the brain, attributed to an adverse reaction to painkillers. Film scholar Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park, who taught Lee's movies at the University of Hong Kong, said Lee expressed a kind of Chinese identity that transcended national borders.

tease"—were essential because they show how ripped bodies can belong to Asian heroes as well. "He made Asian men sexy, and that is something I don't think we talk about enough," he said.

Preserving legacy

Despite Lee's enduring fame, pre-



Portrait and illustration artist Tsui Shing On poses in front of his drawing of Bruce Lee at the Fringe Club in Central area of Hong Kong.



A visitor take pictures with a statue of Bruce Lee on the Tsim Tsui waterfront promenade in Hong Kong.



A TV displaying Bruce Lee is pictured at a restaurant in Hong Kong.



This photo shows artist Shannon Ma speaking next to his portraits of Bruce Lee at an art exhibition in Hong Kong.



A woman walks past a mural of Bruce Lee (right) in Hong Kong.



Photo shows portraits of martial arts icon Bruce Lee at an art exhibition in Hong Kong.

Sports



FUKUOKA: Kuwait's Saud Alshamroukh reacts after competing in a heat of the men's 200m freestyle swimming event during the World Aquatics Championships in Fukuoka on July 24, 2023. — AFP



FUKUOKA: (Left to right) Silver medalists Italy's Nicolò Martinenghi, Netherlands' Arno Kamminga, USA's Nic Fink and gold medalist China's Qin Haiyang pose during the medals ceremony for the men's 100m breaststroke swimming event during the World Aquatics Championships on July 24, 2023. — AFP

China takes centre stage at swimming championships

Zhang wins women's 100m butterfly world title

FUKUOKA: China got their campaign up and running at swimming's world championships on Monday, claiming two gold medals to banish the memory of a forgettable showing at last year's competition. China won only one individual gold in the pool last year in Budapest but they doubled that tally in the evening's first two races in the southern Japanese city of Fukuoka. Qin Haiyang got things started with victory in the men's 100m breaststroke, taking advantage of dominant Olympic champion Adam Peaty's absence from the competition.

Zhang Yufei followed that up with gold in the women's 100m butterfly, beating Olympic champion Maggie MacNeil into second place in a field chock-full of talent. "Last year the whole team didn't

perform very well, and we worked hard and tried to be ready for these championships," Zhang said. "We learned from last year. It was an opportunity for us. "Hopefully we can get more gold medals in the next six days," she added.

Qin came home in 57.69sec to finish ahead of Italy's Nicolò Martinenghi, American Nic Fink and Arno Kamminga of the Netherlands, who all tied for second on 58.72. Britain's Peaty, the world record-holder and twice Olympic champion in the event, skipped the competition to focus on his mental health. Qin set his sights on winning more gold in the 50m and 200m breaststroke. "Tonight went the way I thought it would," the 24-year-old said. "This is just the start for me because I still have the 50 and the 200 to

come." Zhang, the silver medalist at the Tokyo Olympics, finished in 56.12sec, ahead of MacNeil on 56.45 and American Torri Huske on 56.61. Australia's Emma McKeon was fourth in a star-studded line-up, and Zhang said her opponents "gave me a lot of strength". "I hope in the future, especially next year at the Paris Olympics, we can race together to make the 100m butterfly the best race," she said.

Douglass wins

China did not have things their own way in the Fukuoka pool, with Kate Douglass claiming the United States' first gold of the championships in the women's 200m individual medley. Douglass reeled in teammate Alex Walsh over the last 100m to finish in a time of

2min, 07.17sec. Walsh was second on 2:07.97, ahead of China's Yu Yiting on 2:08.74. "I'm really happy with that race," Douglass said. "I really just wanted to get a gold for Team USA tonight and I'm so happy I did that." Italy's Thomas Ceccon claimed the other gold medal of the night in the men's 50m butterfly. Ceccon, the defending champion in the 100m backstroke, came home in a time of 22.68sec to finish ahead of Portugal's Diogo de Matos Ribeiro on 22.80 and France's Maxime Grousset on 22.82. He went into the butterfly final just 20 minutes after winning his 100m backstroke semi-final. "It's really hard for me mentally and physically but today I did it," Ceccon said. "I was not preparing for this 50m final, just for the 100m backstroke semi-final, and I just tried to pull through." — AFP

Newgarden wins again in Iowa for IndyCar sweep

LOS ANGELES: Josef Newgarden delivered another dominant performance at Iowa Speedway on Sunday, completing a sweep of the IndyCar double-header on the short oval where he has now won six times. The Penske driver's victory was his fifth straight on an oval circuit, a run dating back to last season and including the Indianapolis 500 in May. Newgarden passed two cars in the same corner to seize the lead on the 31st lap and dominated from there. He finished .7050sec ahead of Penske teammate and reigning IndyCar champion Will Power of Australia after a three-lap sprint to the finish because of a late caution.

On that restart, Power passed Felix Rosenqvist for second, Rosenqvist going wide and losing spots to Alex Palou and Scott McLaughlin. Series leader Palou of Spain was third for Chip Ganassi while Rosenqvist came back to take fourth ahead of New Zealand's McLaughlin. The greatest late-race drama came after Sting Ray Robb lost his right rear wheel, with Newgarden among a string of drivers to narrowly avoid hitting it.

As on Saturday, only five drivers were on the lead lap when the race ended on the .894-mile circuit. Newgarden, who'd been irked Saturday by late traffic, was all smiles after posting his second win in as many days. "I'm happy now," said Newgarden, who averaged 159.4 mph (256.53 Km/h). "It's great to have a double-header, but you just feel incomplete until you get through today. "To be able to come back and do it again, make our car a little better ... it's a fantastic effort from everyone."

Newgarden joined four-time Indianapolis 500 winners A.J. Foyt and Al Unser as the only drivers to win five straight oval races in the IndyCar series. Despite his history of success at Iowa, Newgarden said he felt the pressure this weekend, especially after a disappointing qualifying. "We knew we had a great car and the pressure was there because we wanted to execute on it and make sure it was a great weekend," he said. With the victory Newgarden closed the gap on Palou atop the standings, but with 477 points the Spaniard still leads him by 80 with five races remaining. — AFP

Harman cruises to British Open glory

HOYLAKE: American Brian Harman won the British Open by six shots on Sunday, finishing 13 under par to claim his first major title at a rainswept Hoylake. Masters champion Jon Rahm tied for second alongside Austria's Sepp Straka, Australian Jason Day and South Korean Tom Kim. But no one could get close to Harman as the world number 26 refused to buckle under the pressure of closing out his first tournament win since 2017.

"I've always had a self-belief that I could do something like this. It's just when it takes so much time it's hard not to let your mind falter, like maybe I'm not winning again," said Harman. "To come out and put a performance like that together, like start to finish, (I) just had a lot of control. I don't know why this week, but I'm very thankful that it was this week."

Harman held a five-shot lead overnight, a margin no player had squandered at a major since Frenchman Jean van de Velde, who collapsed at the last hole of the 1999 British Open. The 36-year-old's temperament was tested early on the soaking Royal Liverpool course on the English west coast. Harman bogeyed the second after a wayward approach failed to find the green and was then punished for a wild tee shot at the par-five fifth with another dropped shot.

His lead was briefly cut to three shots, but back-to-back birdies at the sixth and seventh settled his nerves and stretched his lead as the chasing pack failed to make a move. "Just with the weather and the scenario, you're going to hit bad shots," added Harman. "I knew that the way I responded to that would determine whether I'd be sitting here or not." His sublime putting was the key to his success all week and he nailed a huge 40-foot birdie putt at 14 before another birdie at the par-five 15th set the seal on a remarkably composed performance.

Rahm, McIlroy fall short

Rahm shot a course-record 63 on Saturday to get back in the hunt for his third major. The Spaniard needed similar heroics to ramp up the pressure on the leader, but could only manage a one-under round of 70 thanks to a birdie at the last to climb into a share of second. Straka's two-under-par final round was enough to secure his best-ever finish at a major and boost his hopes of representing Europe at the Ryder Cup later this year. Kim's joint-second was also a career-best at a major, while Day, the 2015 PGA Championship winner, continued his return to form after years of struggle with a back injury. Rory McIlroy finished in a tie for sixth on six under par alongside Argentine Emiliano Grillo.

Ledecky gets back to work after epic 400m showdown

FUKUOKA: Katie Ledecky got back to work with the fastest time in the world championships 1,500m freestyle heats on Monday, the morning after coming second to Ariarne Titmus in an epic showdown. Ledecky, of the United States, could not match Titmus as the Australian won gold in the 400m freestyle and reclaimed her world record on Sunday night in Fukuoka, leaving her celebrated rivals trailing in her wake. Ledecky is aiming to add to her record collection of 19 world titles in Japan, and she was straight back in action in the 1,500 heats, coming home in a time of 15min, 41.22sec.

"I just wanted to have a good swim and take care of business this morning," said Ledecky, whose name stands beside the 15 fastest 1,500 times ever. The women's 400 freestyle was one of the most hotly



HOYLAKE: US golfer Brian Harman poses with the Claret Jug, the trophy for the Champion golfer of the year after winning the 151st British Open Golf Championship at Royal Liverpool Golf Course in Hoylake, north west England on July 23, 2023. — AFP

McIlroy's wait to win a fifth major will now extend into at least a 10th year. Not for the first time this week, the Northern Irishman made a blistering start with three birdies in his opening five holes to move into a share of second at the time. But four pars to the turn slowed his momentum before a bogey at the 10th ended his hopes of a miraculous victory at the scene of his only British Open triumph in 2014. McIlroy has now finished in the top 10 at seven of the past eight majors.

"If it weren't for one guy I'd be right there," said McIlroy. "Still another really solid performance and still a lot of golf to play this year." Veteran Henrik Stenson's tie for 13th was the best of a poor showing from the group of players now plying their trade on the Saudi-backed LIV golf circuit at three under. Further back, world number 561 Alex Fitzpatrick upstaged older brother and 2022 US Open champion Matt. Playing in his first major championship, Alex Fitzpatrick finished at two under for a share of 17th, four shots better than Matt, who came in at two over par for the championship. — AFP

anticipated races of the world championships on the competition's opening night. It pitted Olympic champion Titmus against Canada's world record-holder Summer McIntosh and defending world champion Ledecky. It was the first time the three had gone head-to-head since Titmus won at the Tokyo Olympics two years ago. Titmus led from start to finish and came home in 3min, 55.38sec to win the title and take back the world record that McIntosh had wrested from her in March this year.

Ledecky said she was "pretty happy with my swim so I'm just keeping the positive momentum going into the rest of the week". "I was just excited to get the 1,500 started today," she said. She also said that she was "not concerned at all" that the United States had failed to win any golds on the competition's opening day. "I think our best days are ahead of us," she said. "We had a really good morning today, we have a great final session on tap tonight so I think there's going to be a lot of gold, silver and bronze to come."

Popovici gets started

Italy's Simona Quadarella swam second-fastest in the 1,500 heats with a time of 15:55.05, while Aus-

NBA's Anderson obtains Chinese citizenship

BEIJING: NBA player Kyle Anderson has become a Chinese citizen, Beijing's basketball association said Monday, paving the way for the Timberwolves forward to represent the Asian giant at next month's FIBA Basketball World Cup. China has naturalized a series of foreign-born athletes in recent years in a bid to strengthen its frequently underperforming national teams. Anderson, who was born in New York and reportedly has a Chinese great-grandfather, said this year he would consider switching allegiance to Beijing.

"With the promotion and support of all parties, Li Kai'er obtained Chinese nationality this morning," the China Basketball Association (CBA) said on its Weibo social media account, using Anderson's Chinese name. "We thank all parties for their support and help. Li's family for their support, and the fans and media for their long-term attention to the Chinese men's basketball team," the CBA added. The governing body posted a photo of a beaming Anderson standing with its chairman, former NBA star Yao Ming. It did not mention whether Anderson had renounced his American passport, typically a requirement in China, which does not recognize dual nationality.

Anderson currently plays for the Minnesota Timberwolves, who lost in the first round of last season's playoffs to eventual champions the Denver Nuggets. China is currently ranked 27th in the world by basketball's global governing body FIBA. Beijing has made overtures in recent years to foreign athletes with connections to the country through ancestry or long-term residence. — AFP



MINNEAPOLIS: Kyle Anderson #5 of the Minnesota Timberwolves lies on the court after being hit in Minneapolis, Minnesota. — AFP



FUKUOKA: USA's Katie Ledecky competes in a heat of the women's 1500m freestyle swimming event during the World Aquatics Championships in Fukuoka on July 24, 2023. — AFP

tralia's Lani Pallister got third on 15:58.11. Romanian star David Popovici got his campaign underway in the men's 200m freestyle. Popovici, the defending champion in both the 100 and 200 freestyle, swam the third-fastest time in the morning heats, coming home in 1min, 45.86sec.

American Luke Hobson had the fastest time on 1:45.69, followed by Britain's Matthew Richards on 1:45.82. American Regan Smith and Australia's Kaylee McKeown limbered up for what promises to be an epic battle in the women's 100m backstroke by qualifying first and second from the heats. Smith, the reigning champion, was quickest in a time of 58.47sec, ahead of McKeown on 58.90 and American Katharine Berkoff on 59.04. In the women's 100m breaststroke, Lithuania's Ruta Meilutyte was the fastest qualifier with a time of 1min, 04.67sec. Meilutyte, the 2012 Olympic champion, was followed by Ireland's Mona McSharry on 1:05.55 and South Africa's Tatjana Schoenmaker on 1:05.56. In the men's 100m backstroke, China's Xu Jiayu qualified with the fastest time in 52.87sec. Xu, the world champion in 2017 and 2019, finished ahead of Hungary's Hubert Kos on 53.12 and Poland's Ksawery Masiuk on 53.15. — AFP

Sports

Silva 'fully committed' to Fulham after Saudi offer

Fulham manager turns down lucrative deal

NEW YORK: Fulham manager Marco Silva said Sunday he was "fully committed" to the club after turning down a lucrative offer from Saudi Arabian side Al-Ahli. Reports in Britain said the Portuguese manager had been offered a two-year deal worth £40 million (\$51 million) as Saudi's Pro League continues its lucrative recruitment drive. However speaking ahead of Fulham's pre-season friendly with Brentford in Philadelphia on Sunday, Silva confirmed he was staying with the west London Premier League club.

"My commitment to this club has been 100 percent since the first day I signed and it will continue this way," Silva told NBC Sports. "It was a decision that I made. I spoke with the people in the club and like I was before last season, and two seasons ago, I'm fully committed to the club and will continue this way. "Offers are part of the business...it's up to us to think, always respecting the club that you are working for. It's what I have done always in my career and I will keep doing."

Silva, 46, joined Fulham in 2021, leading them to promotion to the Premier League from the Championship in his first season before guiding them to 10th in the top-flight last term. Al-Ahli have signed Riyad Mahrez from Manchester City, Liverpool's Roberto Firmino and Edouard Mendy from Chelsea in recent months. The signings are part of a broader hiring spree by the Pro League, which is backed by the country's sovereign wealth fund.

Cristiano Ronaldo signed for Saudi club Al Nassr earlier this year while other stars heading to the Pro League include Karim Benzema and French World Cup winner N'Golo Kante. Silva meanwhile was left satisfied on Sunday after watching Fulham complete a 3-2 win over Brentford in their pre-season game, part of the Premier League Summer Series. Goals from Harry Wilson, Bobby Decordova-Reid and Carlos Vinicius secured victory with Yoane Wissa and Kristoffer Ajer scoring for Brentford.

Al Hilal-Mbappe deal

In another development, Paris Saint-Germain have given Saudi club Al Hilal permission to speak to Kylian Mbappe after tabling a world record 300-million-euro (\$333 million) bid, a source close to the negotiations told AFP on Monday. The Riyadh-based club has made a formal offer by letter, the source said, but such a transfer could only be made with the agreement of Mbappe who has never expressed an interest in moving to the fast-growing Saudi league. "The club has given permission to Al Hilal to speak with Mbappe. That's the request of the letter and that's been granted," the source said.

Mbappe has one year left on his contract with PSG, who want him to leave now rather than for nothing next summer. But Mbappe, 24, is refusing to sign a new contract and the French champions believe he has already struck a deal to move to Real Madrid next year. The source said Real Madrid were among a group of clubs which had also expressed



Fulham's Portuguese head coach Marco Silva

an interest in Mbappe. "In the group so far that have expressed their interest there are Manchester United, Inter Milan, Barcelona, Tottenham and obviously the Saudi club and Real Madrid," the source said. — AFP

Olympics: Paris airports under intense pressure

PARIS: Paris' airports face a double challenge during the Olympics next year - already under huge pressure, they will also be the first impression that many foreign visitors get of the Games. France's main international airport, Charles de Gaulle (CDG), and the smaller Orly will be two crucial gateways to the Olympics, which open in around a year on July 26, 2024. The Parisian airports' authority ADP believes it can cope with the increased traffic in July and August next year in what is already one of the world's most visited cities. What is keeping managers awake at night is the exceptional nature of tens of thousands of the arrivals - and their outsized baggage.

Some 85,000 competitors, coaches and officials will be accredited for the Olympics and the Paralympics, excluding spectators, said Renaud Duplay, the deputy director of CDG. "In terms of numbers, it's a drop in the

ocean" compared to the approximately 340,000 people who pass through CDG and Orly on peak summer days, he said. On the other hand, the Olympic arrivals have expectations that are "different from those for which our infrastructure is designed".

The canoeists, for example, will bring kayaks, there will be crates and crates of bicycles and unwieldy poles for pole vaulters. "There will be a volume of oversized luggage that is just not the one we usually have," Jerome Harnois, the top state official in charge of Paris' airports, said. Lost or misplaced equipment could mean competitors missing out on Olympic glory, and trigger a storm of negative publicity for the organizers and France as a whole.

Access to the centre of Paris is also a concern. The upcoming extension of the Metro's line 14, which will link Orly to the centre of the capital and several key Olympic venues in Seine-Saint-Denis to the north of Paris, should help alleviate some pressure. On the other hand, a long-planned fast rail link between CDG and Paris will not be ready, leaving the often-derided RER B suburban train line as the alternative.

Coach and bus traffic between the two airports will be strongly regulated "to avoid chaos", Duplay said. A question mark also hovers over what passenger numbers can be expected in the summer of 2024, when the post-

COVID recovery in tourism will still be being felt. Past Olympics though have shown that visitor numbers actually decline during the Games because tourists postpone their visits. During the London Olympics in 2012, for example, traffic only increased by six or seven percent compared to normal, Harnois said.

Each team delegation arriving on a regular flight will benefit from a personalized welcome, with around one thousand volunteers chosen for the task. "We will pick them up at the exit of the plane and we will accompany them to the bus," Harnois, the state official, said. Competitors will follow priority routes in the terminals, and will also be able to collect their official accreditations there.

Queues for passport control should be significantly eased by the installation of new automated gates, which have recently been opened to more nationalities, as well as by increased staff numbers. The authorities have also promised a crackdown on pickpockets and unofficial clandestine taxis. In order to spread the load, other airports in the Paris region will be involved. Le Bourget, to the north of Paris, will handle the arrival of up to 120 heads of state, for example. Once the Olympic flame is extinguished on August 11, 2024, the airports face another test as competitors and spectators head out of the country. — AFP

Newcastle and Villa draw 3-3 in friendly

NEW YORK: Callum Wilson scored a second-half equalizer as Newcastle recovered from a two-goal deficit to secure a 3-3 draw with Aston Villa in their Premier League pre-season friendly in Philadelphia on Sunday. Newcastle, the surprise package of the Premier League last season after securing a top-four finish and a ticket to the Champions League, were rocked early on after Villa took the lead after just seven minutes through Ollie Watkins. Villa midfielder Emi Buendia split the Newcastle defence with a fine run before passing to Watkins who controlled deftly to fire home a low finish.

Buendia doubled the Villa lead four minutes later with a rasping finish to beat Newcastle goalkeeper Martin Dubravka and make it 2-0. Newcastle however hit back on 28 minutes when

a long ball by Jacob Miller caught the Villa defense napping, allowing Elliot Anderson to control before tucking away a low shot. The Magpies, who will play Villa in their opening Premier League fixture on August 12, leveled on the stroke of half-time, with Swedish international Alexander Isak burying a rebound from close range.

Newcastle manager Eddie Howe and Villa counterpart Unai Emery made a flurry of substitutions at half-time but it was the impressive Buendia who struck next. Another surging run by the Argentine launched a Villa counter-attack which ended with teenager Omari Kellyman firing a shot off the foot of the post. Buendia was alert to the rebound and tapped in from close range to make it 3-2. Once again though, Newcastle were able to



PHILADELPHIA: Jed Steer #12 of Aston Villa and Javi Manquillo #19 of Newcastle United battle for the ball in the second half during a Premier League Summer Series match between Aston Villa and Newcastle United on July 23, 2023. — AFP

take advantage of Villa's high defensive line. A superb pass over the top from Jamal Lascelles found Anthony

Gordon, whose shot was parried but only as far as Wilson, who stroked home for 3-3. — AFP

China's Zheng Qinwen wins maiden WTA title

PALERMO: China's Zheng Qinwen captured her first WTA title on Sunday with a three-sets victory over Jasmine Paolini of Italy in the Palermo clay-court final. The 20-year-old Zheng, ranked at 26 in the world, came

through 6-4, 1-6, 6-1 against her 52nd-ranked opponent, registering her 20th match win of the year. It was Zheng's second career final after finishing runner-up in Tokyo last year. She becomes the 11th Chinese woman to win a WTA singles title and second in 2023 after Zhu Lin triumphed at Hua Hin in Thailand in February.

"I won my first WTA match here and also my first WTA title, but you probably don't know that I won my first ITF championship in Italy," said Zheng, whose

three-hour semi-final win over Mayar Sherif of Egypt only ended in the early hours of Sunday. "This is really special for me. This is my first WTA 250 championship. I will remember that." The 27-year-old Paolini was playing her fourth three-set match of the week, having already knocked out top seed Daria Kasatkina in the quarter-finals. The effort took its toll as Zheng stretched to a 5-1 lead in the decider before claiming victory on a third match point. — AFP



TRUCKEE: Akshay Bhatia of the United States poses with the trophy after putting in to win on the 18th green during the final round of the Barracuda Championship at Tahoe Mountain Club on July 23, 2023. — AFP

Bhatia stuns Rodgers for first PGA Tour win

LOS ANGELES: American Akshay Bhatia birdied the 72nd hole to force a playoff then edged Patrick Rodgers with a par at the first playoff hole to claim his first US PGA Tour title at the Barracuda Championship. Bhatia, 21, shook off two early bogeys and a double-bogey at the fifth hole, making six birdies the rest of the way to score nine points under the Modified Stableford scoring system that awards points for birdies and eagles and deducts them for bogeys and worse.

That took him to 40 points, pulling him level with overnight leader Rodgers who couldn't get his own birdie putt at the 72nd hole to fall for the win. Rodgers had stretched his lead with three birdies in the first eight holes. But he had two bogeys and just one birdie coming in, finishing with six points as Bhatia surged into contention. Rodgers, a 31-year-old seeking a first tour title, got a terrible break when they returned for the playoff to 18, where his solid tee shot landed in a sandy divot.

His shot out was in deep rough short of the green as Bhatia blasted a superb drive down the fairway, then gave himself a birdie chance. He ended up tapping in for a par that was enough for the win after Rodgers's bogey. "I can't even talk," said Bhatia, whose runner-up finish at the Puerto Rico Open had given him temporary tour status. The win gives him full tour member status and he's now qualified for the season-ending FedEx Cup playoffs. Bhatia admitted that he "felt uncomfortable" in the early going at Tahoe Mountain Country Club in Truckee, California.

"I made a really bad double, I hit some really bad shots," the Californian said. "Then I just kind of made some really nice putts on eight and nine and then started hitting some really good shots coming in." It was an agonizing end to the week for Rodgers, who now has four runner-up finishes on tour without a win. France's Julien Guerrier roared into a share of third place with 10 birdies that gave him a final-round score of 20 points for a total of 37. He was tied with Sweden's Jens Dantorp who had an eagle and six birdies and two bogeys to score pile up 15 points. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics

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

Change of Name

I, **Shahabuddin Ahmad Ansari**, holder of Indian Passport No. M9885941 having permanent address UP, Pin code 274409 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (Given name) Shahid and (surname) Ansari. **(C#3837) 25/07/2023**

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**

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Embassy of India
Kuwait

NOTICE INVITING TENDER/ REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Closed bids are invited from competent and experienced market research agencies:

A Comprehensive Market Research on
Manufacturing Sector in Kuwait and Opportunities
therein for collaboration between India and Kuwait.

Interested agencies may contact the Commerce Wing of the Embassy at Email: com1.kuwait@mea.gov.in or Tel: 00965 22571193 (8:00 AM to 4:30 PM) for further details.

Last Date for Submission of Bids:
1st August 2023 - 04.00 PM Kuwait Time

Germany thrash Morocco 6-0

Brazil put on the style; Borges hits a hat-trick



MELBOURNE: Morocco's goalkeeper #01 Khadija Er-Rmichi (left) tries to save the ball during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup Group H football match between Germany and Morocco on July 24, 2023. — AFP

ADELAIDE: Ary Borges was the star of the show at the Women's World Cup on Monday, hitting a hat-trick for an impressive Brazil, while Germany also won big to begin their campaign. Italy were also victors but needed an 87th-minute header from substitute Cristiana Girelli to squeeze past Argentina 1-0. Brazil have featured at all eight previous Women's World Cups - and never won it. Far tougher challenges lie ahead - they face France next - but their 4-0 thumping of debutants Panama was the perfect start for Swedish coach Pia Sundhage's side.

The stylish victory was all about 23-year-old attacking midfielder Borges. As well as her hat-trick she also set up the other - her backheel to tee up Bia Zaneratto at Hindmarsh Stadium in Adelaide capping off a sweeping team move and the best goal of the competition so far. Some of the Panama players and fans were in tears during their national anthem, underlining what it means to them to be at the World Cup for the first time. But this was a debut they will

probably want to forget as Brazil put on an exhibition of flowing, attacking football. As a result Brazil top Group F after Jamaica surprisingly held France 0-0 on Sunday.

Popp double

Earlier, Alexandra Popp scored twice as Germany thrashed Morocco 6-0 for the biggest win of the tournament so far. The lower-ranked teams at the first 32-team Women's World Cup have generally held their own, indicating a closing of the gap in women's international football. But two-time champions Germany blew away Morocco, the first Arab team at a Women's World Cup. The Germans are among the favorites once again, along with holders the United States, England, Spain and France, and they showed why with a clinical performance in front of a near sell-out crowd of more than 27,000 in Melbourne.

In their 32-year-old skipper Popp they have one of the best goal-scorers around and she took full ad-

vantage of some poor Morocco defending with simple close-range finishes. Klara Buehl made it three straight after half-time to end the match as any kind of contest, before two own goals and a late sixth from Lea Schueller. "Today we came up against a team that was superior. It was David and Goliath," said Morocco's French coach Reynald Pedros. Colombia face South Korea on Tuesday also in Group H, in the final match of the first round of group games.

Super sub

Argentina had never won a game at the Women's World Cup after appearing at three previous finals - and the wait goes on after going down to Italy in a fiery clash that yielded six yellow cards. Juventus veteran Girelli was Italy's savior, coming on as a substitute in the 83rd minute and scoring the winner with a superb header just four minutes later in front of nearly 31,000 fans in Auckland.

"I am really happy for me and my teammates

because we deserved the victory," said Girelli, who scored a hat-trick against Jamaica at the 2019 World Cup. "To win in that way, even though we had to suffer, is important," added the 33-year-old, surely now a contender to start the next match against Sweden even if she had no complaints about being an impact substitute. "If all the games are like this then there is no problem," she said. "Honestly, obviously every player wants to play 90 minutes, but I will settle for every game being like that. The main thing was the victory."

Argentina coach German Portanova felt the result at Eden Park was harsh on his side. "It was a very even match," he said. "At times we controlled it and they did not have many opportunities. "The result was somewhat unfair. A draw would have been the right score." Also on Tuesday, co-hosts New Zealand return to action when they face debutants the Philippines in Wellington. In the third match of the day, Switzerland play former champions Norway. — AFP

What rankings? Gap in women's football closing, Jamaica say

SYDNEY: The gap in international women's football is closing, Tottenham Hotspur goalkeeper Rebecca Spencer says, after her Jamaica side held France to a goalless draw at the World Cup. At only their second World Cup and having lost all three previous games in 2019, the Reggae Girlz pulled off the surprise of the tournament so far by holding the fifth-ranked French 0-0 in Sydney on Sunday. It came on the back of debutants Haiti only narrowly losing 1-0 to European champions England, while world number three Sweden needed a 90th-minute winner to squeeze past South Africa.

Even the United States, long the sport's dominant force, were made to work hard by Vietnam for a 3-0 win to open their bid for a third consecutive title. In contrast, the Americans smashed Thailand 13-0 in their opening match four years ago. So far only Zambia have been well beaten at this tournament, losing 5-0 to Japan. "As you've seen from the other group games, results are getting closer," Spencer, who was key to helping Jamaica hold a France side ranked 38 places above them, told reporters.

"The gap between nations is narrowing and that's exactly what this sport needs to produce great tournaments. Look at the England-Haiti game. There was nothing between them." Team-mate Chantelle Swaby added: "The gaps are closing, that much is certain. As the final whistle went, I heard my sister (Allyson Swaby) say, 'The world rankings? What rankings?!'" France and Paris Saint-Germain forward Kadidiatou Diani agreed, telling reporters: "There are no small teams."

FIFA has expanded the tournament, being



SYDNEY: Jamaica's defender #14 Deneisha Blackwood (right) fights for the ball with France's forward #09 Eugenie Le Sommer (left) during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup Group F football match between France and Jamaica in Sydney. — AFP

co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand, to 32 teams from 24 in France four years ago, allowing supposedly weaker sides greater opportunity to qualify. It also potentially opened the door to some one-sided matches, but instead Jamaica and Haiti, at least, grabbed their chance to show they can hold their own. The Jamaica squad in Australia is drawn largely from European and North American-based players now, and they have been helped in recent years financially by the efforts of Bob Marley's daughter Cedella.

Drew Spence, who was born in London and played a couple of times for England before switching allegiance to Jamaica, said the team always believed they could spring a surprise. "I think a lot of people didn't even think we were going to make it to the World Cup because we had a tough group in the CONCACAF qualifiers, and now we have another tough group here," the Tottenham midfielder said. "We don't mind people writing us off though, it just motivates us." — AFP

Vingegaard wins 2nd successive Tour de France

PARIS: Jonas Vingegaard won his second successive Tour de France on Sunday after Jordi Meeus claimed the final stage honors on the Champs-Elysees in Paris. Denmark's Vingegaard of the Jumbo-Visma team crossed the finish line after the 21-day race 7min 29sec ahead of Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar, the champion in 2020 and 2021. Pogacar's UAE teammate Adam Yates of Great Britain rounded out the top three podium.

Vingegaard's winning margin was the largest since 2014 when Italian Vincenzo Nibali took the fabled champion's yellow jersey by 7min 39sec. "I enjoyed fighting for this win with 'Pogi' and Yates, but now I'm just looking forward to having a nice dinner here in Paris with my family," said the champion. "It was a long, hard race and one day ran into another but there's a feeling of being proud and happy. "Winning for the second time is amazing with all the Danish people here. I hope to come back to take a third win, at least try it."

Despite finishing runner-up, Pogacar was happy to focus on the positives. "Considering everything it's been a great Tour, I have to be happy with that," Pogacar said after picking up his best young rider jersey for the fourth time. "We have two guys on the podium, and I won two stages and the white jersey. I love cycling," he said. The final stage was won by outsider Meeus of the Bora team, with Jasper Philipsen denied a fifth stage win on this Tour right at the line in a photo finish. "What a wonderful finish, it's been such a high level Tour," said the surprise stage winner.

The world's greatest bike race provided tense drama with spectacular backdrops as Vingegaard and Pogacar remained separated by seconds until the Dane edged ahead with a sensational individual time trial last Tuesday. The following day, on a 28km climb to the ski resort



PARIS: Jumbo-Visma's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard celebrates lifting his bike on the podium with the overall leader's yellow jersey after winning the 21st and final stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race. — AFP

of Courchevel, Pogacar cracked, shouting "I'm gone, I'm dead" before Vingegaard killed off the race with a sensational final climb. The event had been billed as a showdown between the defending champion Vingegaard and Pogacar, who has won the Tour twice and now come second twice.

Tour director Christian Prudhomme used boxing terms to describe the struggle. "They went 15 rounds and then there was a punch in the gut, a knee on the floor and a knock out punch," he said Sunday. All time great Eddy Merckx told AFP the pair had delivered a thrilling show. "Pogacar is a more complete rider, but in the high mountains at least, Vingegaard remains the stronger," he said.

"I don't know what happened to me. I took on too much this year and after two weeks I started to look as white as this shirt," said runner-up Pogacar, pointing to his best under-25 rider's white jersey. Pogacar started well enough, taking minor advantages in the Basque hills until Vingegaard attacked on the first mountain stage in the Pyrenees to take the overall leader's yellow jersey. And while Pogacar clawed back a few seconds here and there, the defending champion never relinquished the lead all the way to Paris. — AFP