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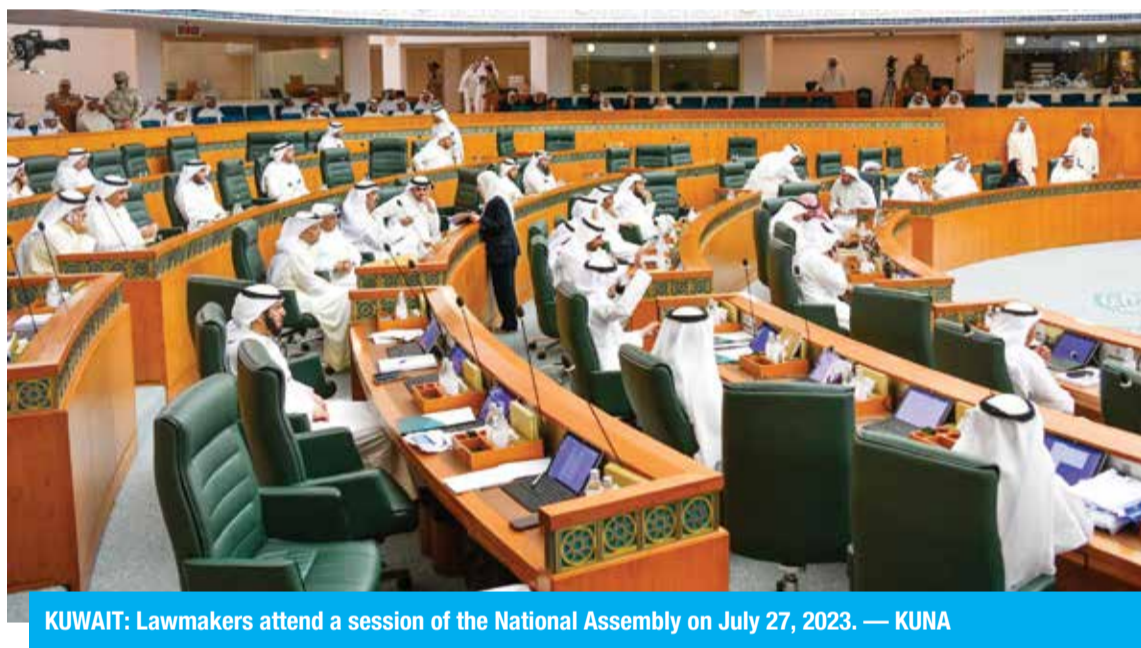


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Nod to election commission

Lawmakers agree on return of former political prisoners



KUWAIT: Lawmakers attend a session of the National Assembly on July 27, 2023. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly on Thursday overwhelmingly voted to pass in the first reading a law to establish a high election commission and allow the return of former political prisoners after their exclusion from political life. Fifty-six MPs voted for the legislation, while MP Jenan Bushehri opposed the law because it imposes some restrictions on female voters.

Under the law, the election commission will replace the interior ministry in organizing and supervising parliamentary elections, but it will still remain attached to the ministry of justice. Some MPs demanded the commission to be independent from the government. The commission will be presided by seven senior judges who will supervise and organize parliamentary polls including the voting process, counting of votes and announcing the results.

One of the most important amendments in the law is abolishing a clause that barred for life political prisoners convicted of offending the Almighty, prophets and HH the Amir. Under the new legislation, former political prisoners convicted of offending HH the Amir

will now be allowed to run for public office. The Assembly will need to pass the law in a second reading in the next session after the Assembly panel introduces amendments to the law demanded by MPs.

Head of the interior and defense committee that reviewed the government-sponsored legislation, MP Khaled Al-Otaibi, announced that with this law, the period of political executions has ended. MP Fahad Al-Azemi called to amend the law to allow servicemen in the armed forces and the police force to vote like members of the National Guard, who have the right to vote.

MP Marzouq Al-Ghanem said the law will promote more transparency in the election process. But he warned that some sections who have no faith in democracy will try to exploit the law to secure the election of some members to defend their interests. He also called for adding some clauses to stop people from exploiting the Assembly to serve their selfish interests and political ambitions. MP Abdullah Al-Mudhaf said political reforms are the most important and the Assembly must be reformed in order for political reforms to be successful, adding the Assembly should also approve the multiparty law.

Kuwait hangs five, including mosque bombing convict

KUWAIT: Kuwait put to death five people on Thursday, including a man convicted of involvement in a 2015 Islamic State group suicide bombing that killed 26 people, the public prosecution said. The multiple executions in the state are the first since seven people were put to death in November last year, ending a five-year moratorium.

In a statement, the public prosecution said it oversaw the "implementation of the death sentence in Kuwait's Central Prison" against five people, most of them convicted of murder. They included Abdulrahman Sabah Saud — the main convict in the 2015 bombing that struck a Shiite mosque in the capital during Friday prayers. It was the bloodiest attack in Kuwait's history.

Saud, a bedoon, was convicted of driving the bomber to the mosque and bringing the explosives belt he used from near the Saudi border. At his initial trial, Saud pleaded guilty to most charges but, in the appeals and supreme courts, he denied them all. The other men executed on Thursday included a Kuwaiti, an Egyptian and a bedoon, all of whom had been convicted of murder. A Sri Lankan was put to death on drug charges. The public prosecution said all five were executed by hanging.

Kuwait had initially charged 29 defendants, including seven women, with helping the Saudi mosque bomber. In 2016, it upheld jail terms of between two and 15 years for eight people, including four women, and acquitted more than a dozen others. Those convicted included alleged IS leader in Kuwait, Fahad Farraj Muhareb, whose death sentence was commuted to 15 years in prison.

Although Kuwait has executed dozens of people since it introduced the death penalty in the mid-1960s, the punishment is relatively rare. Most of those condemned have been convicted of murder or drug trafficking. In April 2013, Kuwaiti authorities hanged three men convicted of murder. Two months later, two Egyptians, convicted of kidnap and murder, were executed. In 2017, the state carried out a mass execution of seven prisoners, including a ruling family member. — AFP

'Global boiling': July set to be hottest ever

PARIS: UN and EU monitors said Thursday that July is set to be the hottest month in recorded history and likely "unprecedented" for thousands of years, warning that this was a taste of the world's climate future. Searing heat intensified by global warming has baked parts of Europe, Asia and North America this month, combining with wildfires that have scorched across Canada and parts of southern Europe. "The era of global warming has ended; the era of global boiling has arrived," UN chief Antonio Guterres told reporters in New York.

Kuwait Meteorology Department said on Thursday the weather is fore-

cast to be very hot during the week-end and relatively humid in coastal regions. Yasser Al-Bloushi, the Head of the Marine Forecast division at KMD, told KUNA the country remains gripped with the Indian seasonal depression, coupled with very hot winds, northwesterly winds and light to moderate southeasterly winds, with sporadic dust. Heat on Thursday was forecast at 47-49C maximum, dropping to 30-33C at night. On Friday, the temperature is expected to range between 46C and 48C maximum, falling at night to 32-35C. Bloushi added on Saturday, temperatures will hit the 47-49C level during daytime and 32-33C at night. With the first three weeks of July already registering global average temperatures above any comparative period, the World Meteorological Organization and Europe's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said it is "extremely

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KUWAIT: People walk through a mist dispenser as they enter Souq Mubarakiya amid soaring temperatures. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Duo set record for summit of 14 'super peaks'

ISLAMABAD: A Norwegian woman and her Nepali guide set the record Thursday for the fastest summit of all 14 of the world's 8,000-m mountains, their team said in a statement. Kristin Harila and Tenjin "Lama" Sherpa completed the feat in three months and a day after summiting Pakistan's K2, the last peak on their quest. "Kristin said it was a very hard climb because of the amount of snow. She is grateful and extremely happy to share the record with Lama," Rigmor

Berthier, from her press team, told AFP.

The record reflects "their unwavering determination, teamwork, and sheer tenacity throughout this monumental endeavor", a statement from her team said. "Harila and Lama's collaboration has showcased the essence of mountaineering unity, transcending borders and cultures to achieve greatness together."

The pair surpassed Nepal-born British adventurer Nirmal Purja's record of six months and six days, set in 2019. Both records were achieved with the help of oxygen and helicopters, which has drawn some criticism from the climbing community. Pakistan is home to five of the world's 14 "super peaks", and climbing them all is considered the ultimate achievement of any mountaineer. Besides being far more technically difficult to climb than

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Handout photo taken on May 18, 2023 shows Norwegian climber Kristin Harila and Nepali guide Tenjin Sherpa at Kanchenjunga, the third-highest mountain in the world. — AFP

Remembrances pour in for Sinead O'Connor

DUBLIN: Tributes streamed in Thursday from political leaders to pop stars for singer Sinead O'Connor, who was remembered for her powerful voice and willingness to court controversy. The Irish star was pronounced dead Wednesday at a home in London after officers responded to reports of an "unresponsive woman", police said Thursday. The force said it was not treating the 56-year-old's death as suspicious, but an autopsy has been ordered.

Political leaders and musicians like Bryan Adams and Cat Stevens have been honoring O'Connor, who shot to fame in the 1990s, and is best known for her cover of Prince's "Nothing Compares 2 U". Ireland's President Michael Higgins said the country had lost "one of our greatest and most gifted composers, songwriters and performers of recent decades". Prime Minister Leo Varadkar added her music "was loved around the world and her talent was unmatched and beyond compare".

Born in County Dublin, the Grammy-winner made 10 albums in her career, from "I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got" to 2014's "I'm Not Bossy, I'm the Boss". In recent years O'Connor had melded her outspoken political views with spiritualism and was ordained as a priest amid controversy in 1999. She later converted to Islam, changing her name to Shuhada' Sadaqat in 2018. — AFP (See Page 12)



LORIENT, France: Irish pop singer Sinead O'Connor performs during the 37th International Celtic Festival on Aug 5, 2007. — AFP



In my view

Road traffic accidents in Kuwait: The breakdown

By Dr Ahmad Al-Dehani

Road traffic accidents (RTAs) have had a detrimental impact on numerous aspects of our lives. From the loss of loved ones over the years, close calls with death, to the financial burdens incurred due to these incidents, the toll is palpable. Road traffic is undeniably a widespread and relatable issue faced by the people of Kuwait on a daily basis. The problem is exacerbated by the ever-increasing number of vehicles, heavy reliance on automobiles as the primary mode of transportation, and an inadequate infrastructure in place.

This combination of factors has created a crisis situation that is currently ongoing and projected to deteriorate further. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), RTAs represent a significant global public health challenge, claiming the lives of 1.30 million people annually. Shockingly, RTAs are the leading cause of death among individuals aged 5-29 years. With thousands of injuries and fatalities occurring each year, road traffic accidents stand as a critical concern due to their alarming mortality and morbidity statistics.

Hence, it is crucial to delve deeper into the global health crisis and gain a comprehensive understanding. Road traffic accidents, being a preventable issue, can be addressed by identifying and modifying several key factors. These factors encompass human behavior, infrastructure, and vehicle-related aspects. The actions and choices of individuals significantly contribute to the occurrence of RTAs. Reckless driving, speeding, and distracted driving (such as mobile phone use) are among the top behaviors leading to these accidents.

To combat the RTA crisis, implementing stringent traffic control measures and improving infrastructure are imperative steps. Insufficient lighting, poorly designed roads, inadequate signage, and a lack of infrastructure for pedestrians all heighten the risk of RTAs. Enhancing road safety necessitates proper maintenance and routine vehicle inspections. Vehicles themselves can be contributing factors to the RTA crisis, with faulty brakes, tire blowouts, and malfunctioning light systems potentially playing a significant role.

From a medical perspective, several factors can contribute to road traffic accidents. These factors include fatigue and sleep disorders, medical conditions, alcohol consumption, and drug use. Alcohol and drug consumption impair judgment, coordination, and reaction times, significantly increasing the likelihood of accidents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). To address this medical aspect, it is crucial to enforce strict regulations against driving under the influence, conduct public awareness campaigns, and establish substance abuse treatment programs.

Driver fatigue and untreated sleep disorders also pose significant risks on the road. Conditions such as sleep deprivation and obstructive sleep apnea compromise driver alertness and reaction times, thus contributing to accidents (Chen et al. 2020). To mitigate these risks, promoting sufficient rest, educating drivers about the importance of sleep, and advocating for regular screening and treatment of sleep disorders are necessary measures. Several medical conditions can increase the chances of road traffic accidents. Conditions such as epilepsy and cardiovascular diseases that lead to sudden loss of consciousness or impaired cognitive function can pose significant risks while driving (Lam et al. 2021).

To effectively address this medical aspect, it is crucial to promote regular medical check-ups, provide appropriate treatment and education, and conduct driver fitness assessments. Unfortunately, a study conducted in Kuwait between 2003 and 2009 revealed that the highest percentage of accidental medico-legal deaths (64.6 percent) were a result of RTAs (Patterns of accidental deaths in Kuwait: a retrospective descriptive study from 2003-2009).

In order to address the ongoing crisis of road traffic accidents, the World Health Organization (WHO) has set a goal to reduce the number of deaths and injuries caused by RTAs by 50 percent by the year 2030 (WHO, 2022). Several strategies can be employed to tackle this issue, including legislation and enforcement, infrastructure development, public awareness, and education.

Implementing and enforcing strict traffic laws and regulations is crucial, particularly targeting speeding, reckless driving, distracted driving, and driving under the influence (WHO, 2020). By imposing increased fines, penalties, and license suspensions, these measures can act as deterrents to risky behavior. Furthermore, investing in well-designed road infrastructure with proper signage, adequate lighting, and pedestrian-friendly facilities is essential (European Commission, 2020). Additionally, implementing traffic calming measures such as speed bumps and roundabouts can contribute to improving safety.

Promoting awareness campaigns focused on safe driving practices, the dangers of impaired driving, and the significance of regular vehicle maintenance are important components of addressing the RTA crisis. By educating the public on these issues, individuals can make informed decisions and take necessary precautions to reduce the risk of accidents. Collaborating with educational institutions, community organizations, and the media can play a key role in spreading this important information.

Road traffic accidents represent a major public health concern worldwide, with factors like human behavior, inadequate infrastructure, and vehicle-related issues playing significant roles in their occurrence. Medical factors such as alcohol and substance abuse, fatigue, sleep disorders, and chronic medical conditions also contribute to these accidents. To tackle this issue, it is essential to implement comprehensive solutions that encompass legislation and enforcement, infrastructure development, and public awareness campaigns. Collaboration among medical professionals, policymakers, and the community is vital in promoting road safety and ultimately saving lives.

NOTE: Dr Ahmad Al-Dehani is an Assistant Registrar at Al-Amiri Hospital in Kuwait.

Kuwaiti fishermen address challenges facing the union

Union demands an increase in fishery subsidies

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Fishermen Union held a press conference on Thursday to address challenges facing the union that causes the absence of local products in the market. Head of Union Zaher Al-Suwayyan stressed local products are not a priority for some officials, demanding an increase in fishery subsidies, which have not risen for 30 years.

"There is only an interest in increasing and doubling subsidies for other sectors. What has been happening for years is unfair, and makes fishermen burdened with debt and feeling threatened all the time," he said. Suwayyan said the union appeals to officials to resolve the problems of the fishing sector and support local products, adding many fishermen who have fishing licenses want to leave the profession due to the heavy burden on their shoulders.

He stressed the importance of meeting the demands of fishermen and working to remove all challenges, the first of which is restoring the amount of subsidized diesel and gasoline to what it was before an "ill-conceived" decision by the subsidy committee to reduce it to half in May. "Our fuel ended in three weeks and there are still ships that have not been refueled with diesel, especially with the start of the shrimping season in regional waters on August 1."

Suwayyan addressed the issue of the shortage of workers and the failure to open entry visas, despite repeated claims and official letters sent by the union



KUWAIT: The head of the Kuwaiti Fishermen Union Zaher Al-Suwayyan (center) speaks at the press conference.

to concerned authorities, stressing a dearth of labor has led to the idling of some fishing boats. Suwayyan called for maintaining prices and promoting local products, noting the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources must allow mullet fishing in Kuwait Bay according to a set of controls and conditions, pointing out decision 2017/787 that specified the areas to fish are devoid of mullets, as

they are seasonal fish and migrate when the winter period begins.

Suwayyan pointed to the difficulty faced by fishermen to exit Kuwait waters, calling on officials to stand with fishermen and not place more obstacles, adding fishing is a heritage profession that has been associated with the history of Kuwait since its inception, and must be preserved from extinction.

Kuwait, Britain share strong historic ties

KUWAIT: Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs James Cleverly affirmed that the Kuwaiti-British relations are historic and strong, hoping to further develop them in the future. In an interview with KUNA on Thursday, on the sidelines of his visit to the country, Cleverly noted that the two countries share 125 years of relations, adding that the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the opening of the Kuwait Investment Office in London is an example of the strong partnership between Kuwait and the UK.

Meanwhile, Cleverly expressed joy over his meeting with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, where they discussed bilateral ties on all levels. He added that he had also discussed topics of mutual concern with ministers. The UK is committed to defending and protecting Kuwait's security and stability, said the

minister, noting his country's role in standing side by side with Kuwait during the Iraqi Invasion.

The UK's relations with Kuwait are not only limited to the military and economic fields, but also include health, technology and education, he said. He said the UK is looking forward to cooperate with Kuwait to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East region, to encourage countries to turn to dialogue instead of political conflicts. Moreover, the British official noted that his country also aims to enhance cooperation with the GCC states, through signing a free trade zone agreement.

As for the Palestinian cause, Cleverly said that Kuwait has been continuously supporting Palestine and its people, adding that Kuwait and the UK share the same view on the "two-state" solution, to achieve peace in the region. Meanwhile, he spoke of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, saying it is similar to what happened to Kuwait in 1990, affirming that the UK is against any violation of the international law. Yesterday, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met with Cleverly.

The UK minister also separately met with First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh



Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs James Cleverly

Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment and Acting Minister of Finance Dr Saad Al-Barrak and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Cleverly had visited Qatar on Tuesday before heading to Kuwait and is set to conclude his Middle East tour in Jordan. — KUNA

Kuwait strengthening food security system

ROME: Kuwait's chief delegate to the UN Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment (UNFSS+2) shared the successes, made by her country in strengthening the food security system, with attendees at the gathering on Wednesday. Reem Al-Fleij, Director-General of the Public Au-

thority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN), said Kuwait was able to tackle numerous complicated challenges in ensuring food security through launching an umbrella organization for coordinating the efforts of competent agencies.

She was speaking to a plenary session on "Empowering National Convenors towards 2025 - systems leaders for transformative action," at the end of the summit. The State of Kuwait was able to ensure the safety and quality of foods, particularly when it comes to children and school students, as

per the parameters set by the first UNFSS in 2021, Al-Fleij affirmed.

The three-day UNFSS+2, hosted by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome, brought together over 2,000 participants from 180 countries, including FAO Director-General QU Dongyu and more than 20 heads of state and government and 125 ministers, to explore challenges and opportunities to transform agrifood systems. Led by Al-Fleij, Kuwait's delegation included the country's Permanent Delegate to FAO Eng. Youssef Jheil. — KUNA



Captagon pills seized, three suspects nabbed

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced on Thursday the thwarting of the smuggling of about one million Captagon pills that three suspects of Arab nationality tried to smuggle into the country through the port of Shuwaikh. The banned substances were hidden in a container carrying cement building materials in a secret and innovative way.

The General Directorate of Security Relations and Media at the ministry confirmed in a press release that the security

operatives, in cooperation with the General Directorate of Customs and in joint coordination with the General Directorate of Drug Control in Kuwait and Qatar, were able to thwart the smuggling operation. The statement explained that the suspects have been referred to the competent authorities in order to take all necessary legal measures against them.

The officials thanked the Qatari security authorities for the fruitful cooperation with regard to the security of the two countries, especially with regard to the scourge of drugs, stressing the keenness of the first deputy prime minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to intensify security and field follow-up efforts to repel all operations against narcotic substances. — KUNA



Social networks increasingly affecting consumer behaviors

Social media changing and transforming lives



By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Recently, a well-known coffeehouse in Kuwait launched a new menu item for summer, creating a social media advertising campaign about it, specifically on TikTok, one of the most popular platforms in Kuwait. This advertising campaign succeeded to the point that the coffeshop set aside the item's ingredients to cover demand for a month, but they ran out in only four days at all of their branches, a manager told Kuwait Times.

This proves the power of social media in affecting people's behaviors, including purchasing decisions, changing their daily routine or lifestyle, or even getting a new perspective of their lives. Kuwait Times asked people about their point of view of the power

of social media on their lives, and what are the things social media made them change, for better or worse.

Lubna Hayek, 35, said she used to read books whenever she had the time, but after a while, she noticed herself spending more time taking pictures of what she was reading and creating videos about her books to show off. "I realized that when I was searching for book reviews on Instagram, the platform's algorithm subconsciously urged me to focus on creating videos and taking pictures like other users," she said. She believes the algorithm started to show twisted results, stressing she stopped once she realized this.

Abdullah Mousa, 24, said the social media effect depends on people's self-control and not the opposite, pointing out that despite the power of social me-



dia platforms on people's decisions, people have to be aware of not only its effect on them, but also on directing people's minds toward issues and causes that they don't accept, such as choosing one's identity that is popular now, especially amongst the new generation. He added social media has helped people improve their lives and pushed them to adopt new lifestyles due to what they see on other people's accounts.

Meanwhile, respondents told Kuwait Times how social media helped them take decisions they never took before, as the diversity of global experiences that exists on social media played an important role. Zainab Saedi, 43, who suffered from obesity almost her entire life, said she had tried several traditional means that people in her area use to lose weight. After social media started to play an

essential role in people's lives, she started to follow foreign accounts that spoke about losing weight, where she learned new techniques and finally succeeded in losing almost 30 kilos.

A recent report by a business incubator said the impact of social media platforms is evident through the fact that more than 59 percent of the world's population uses social media. This means social media is changing lives and transforming how people interact with their family, friends, community and businesses. The report also showed there are approximately 4.74 billion active social media users globally, with about 59.3 percent of the world's population using at least one social media platform. Also, the influencer marketing sector is expected to grow to \$17.4 billion in 2023.

Kuwait University Council approves IELTS equivalence

KUWAIT: The Council of Kuwait University approved at its meeting on Thursday the proposal of the assistant Vice-Rector for Scientific Affairs for evaluation and measurement on the equivalence of IELTS with academic aptitude test scores in English. The acting director of Kuwait University, Dr Fayez Al-Dhafiri, said in a press release that the board discussed a number of items on the agenda at the meeting. Al-Dhafiri, who chaired the meeting, stressed the need to adhere to university systems and regulations that would ensure the safety of the educational process and achieve the desired goals, the results of

which were to achieve progress in the QS rankings and Times Higher Education (THE) classifications.

He congratulated the university family on the progress achieved. The university is ranked by the QS ranking as 851-900 out of a total of 2,963 international universities, which reflects its commitment to achieving its vision and strategy in enhancing quality, innovation, sustainability, and distinguished presence. He noted its progress in the Times Higher Education ranking and its entry into the top 201-250 universities in Asia after being in the top 250-300. He explained that this progress came as a result of the concerted efforts of the university family over the years and their keenness to develop a good educational system.

He stated that during the meeting, the security and safety regulation was represented after receiving the comments of some deans of colleges and deaneries, indicating that the council also approved the renewal of the assignment of Dr Yacoub Al-Shammari, assis-

tant professor at the Department of French language and culture at the Faculty of Arts, to work as the head of the Cultural Office at the embassy of Kuwait in Paris for a year from the first of August next year.

He reported that the Council also approved the proposal of the Faculty of Medicine on the transfer rule for Kuwait University students registered at the Medical Sciences Center in college (Dentistry and Pharmacy) for the academic year 2023-2024 and the opinion of the Scientific Affairs Committee on this matter. The Council also approved the report submitted by the Coordinating Committee to consider the proposal of the Faculty of Life Sciences to change the name of the Department of Environmental Technology Management to become the Department of Environmental Sciences. He added that the council approved the appointment of academic staff members, as it was approved to promote 21 academic staff members to the degree of Professor and associate professor from various colleges. — KUNA

The kafala system

By Noor Abdulaziz

The sponsorship system, also known as the 'kafala' system, has been around since the 1950s. It was initially created to control migration into Arab countries. The kafala system usually defines the relationship between foreign workers and their local sponsors, making them their employers. Under this system, states typically give these employers enough funding permits to bring in said workers, which then binds them to their employers and allows them to be easily exploited.

Across the countries, domestic workers have reported grim instances where employers have been withholding their pay, forcing them to work overtime with little-to-no breaks, failing to provide them proper living conditions, and sometimes having to endure verbal as well as physical abuse.

In the last few years, Kuwait introduced a new contract that would protect and honor their basic human rights. The official contract reads workers should not work for more than 12 hours, followed by 5 hours of rest, granting them a day off once a week along with a paid annual vacation. The contract also obliges the employer to provide suitable housing with adequate means of living, along with food and clothing, in addition to access to healthcare.

However, according to some domestic workers, some employers disregard this contract by not fulfilling its requirements. Having worked as a domestic worker for 15 years, Mayaa shares: "I'm lucky to now work for a boss that grants me my rights without having to fight for them. My previous boss would sometimes send me to bed with no dinner, her excuse being that there were no leftovers. A lot of times she would make me wake up around 6 am and continue working for 15 hours straight with no breaks. I was not allowed to go to my room or use my phone to talk to my children and family during my shift. I couldn't save myself at the time because the system permitted employers to confiscate passports and phones as well."

When asked if we can interview her employer, her boss gladly accepted. "It is truly disgusting how some local employers feel entitled to treat their workers like slaves. Kuwait is a country of justice and humanity. If someone were to know about them not following the contract, they would be in a lot of trouble. I personally know someone who refuses to bring in a domestic worker from the Philippines because their country allowed them 'too many rights'. This shows the fact that there is a hierarchy within the nationalities of domestic workers as well," she said.

"This essentially means she does not want to deal with the consequences of her exploiting a person. She wanted someone she can verbally, mentally and maybe even physically abuse with no repercussions," she added. When asked about her thoughts on the current kafala system, she said: "I'm so happy this new contract protects them from those merciless people. However, I would urge the authorities to abolish the kafala system entirely to allow migrant workers substantial freedom. It's bad enough they must leave their families and travel across the world to provide for them." This highlights the fact that there needs to be an effective change in hopes of gradually eradicating the kafala system.

Minister lauds Kuwait security operatives



KUWAIT: The First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, reaffirmed on Thursday the support of Kuwait's leadership for security operatives. This came from the press release from the General Directorate of Security Relations and Media at the Ministry of Interior. Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled attended the graduation

ceremony of the 12th course for university non-commissioned officers. The event was held at the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy of Security Sciences.

Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His

Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to the graduates. The Minister of Interior praised the efforts of the graduates and their determination to achieve education after passing all the security academic courses. He urged them to apply the law to everyone and protect lives and properties. — KUNA

Arabs deplore storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque

CAIRO: The Arab League on Thursday deplored the storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque by Zionist National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, and Negev, Galilee and National Resilience Minister Yitzhak Wasserlauf as well as far-right settlers. The storming of the mosque happened in the presence of tightened police forces, the League said in a news statement. The repeated attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque by some officials of the Zionist government and settlers 'provoke' the feelings of Muslims across the world, and violates all international laws and charters, it added.

This came within the framework of systematized

policy aimed to change the status quo legal and historical position of Al-Aqsa and impose its temporal and spatial division, it pointed out. The League warned against the repercussions of this grave storming and held fully Zionist authorities accountable for these aggressions, which have impacts on peace and stability in the region, it elaborated.

The storming came in the context of growing aggressions on Palestinian people, and their properties and sanctities, it said, referring to the recent killing of four Palestinian people. The bloc called on international community to intervene 'immediately and urgently' to halt this continued aggression and provide international protection to Palestinians. In addition, the League called on holding the perpetrators accountable for these crimes, according to the statement.

The Arab League delivered a copy of its written pleading letter to the International Criminal Court (ICC), within the framework of giving a legal opin-

ion about the Zionist occupation of the Palestinian territories, and its impacts, and legal repercussions. The ICC looks into this topic in implementation of a UN General Assembly resolution, the League said in a statement, noting that it took it upon itself to prepare written pleadings based on high-level legal experts and a direct follow-up of Secretary General Ahmad Aboul-Gheit.

The pleading included the sufferings of Palestinian people, and settlement, its occupation of Palestinian territories as well as discrimination, apartheid, and systematized violations of international law and relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, it indicated. Struggle legally for this issue is important to consolidate Palestinians' rights and hold legally and morally Zionists accountable for this, it said. A number of Arab and friendly countries will submit written pleadings in support of Palestine to refute the Zionist claims, according to the statement. — KUNA

News in Brief

Kuwait leaders console UAE

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has sent a cable of condolences to Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, on demise of Sheikh Saeed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the Representative of Abu Dhabi Ruler. His Highness the Amir expressed deep sorrow on Sheikh Saeed's death, praying for his soul and his family so they may endure patiently the somber event. Also, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a similar cable of condolences to Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates. His Highness the Crown Prince expressed deep sorrow on Sheikh Saeed's death, praying for his soul and his family so they may endure patiently the somber event. — KUNA

Kuwait's efforts appreciated

KUWAIT: Kuwait's prominent humanitarian efforts are highly appreciated and recognized around the world, said Tunisian Ambassador to Kuwait Al-Hashimi Ajeeli. In a statement to KUNA after his meeting with Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Dr Hilal Al-Sayer on Wednesday, Ajeeli hailed the strong and historic Kuwait-Tunisia relations, hoping for further cooperation in the humanitarian field. He applauded KRCS' role in easing the suffering of people affected by natural disasters and war around the world. On his part, Dr Al-Sayer affirmed that the society will continue exerting efforts to aid those in need. He also appreciated the efforts of Ambassador Ajeeli in strengthening ties between the two sides, adding that KRCS is coordinating with its Tunisian counterpart to develop their humanitarian work. — KUNA

Gulf-Sino strategic partnership

KUWAIT: Secretary-General of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi has stressed the significance of promoting strategic partnership between the GCC and China. Al-Budaiwi made the remark while meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chen Weiqing, the GCC Secretariat General said in a press release. During the meeting, they looked into a mechanism to follow up on the implementation of the statement adopted during the GCC-China summit held in the kingdom on December 9, 2022, which aimed at propping up existing strategic partnership between both sides. They also tackled joint negotiations about a bilateral free trade agreement, the latest regional and international developments and issues of mutual concern, according to the release. — KUNA

Kuwait-China relations 'based on cooperation and mutual respect'

PLA a 'resolute force for maintaining world peace and development'



KUWAIT: China Embassy in Kuwait marks the 96th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah affirmed keenness on strengthening the "deep and distinguished" relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in all fields. "The friendly relations with the PRC are based on cooperation and mutual respect," he said while attending a celebration, held on Wednesday by China Embassy in Kuwait to mark the 96th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Sheikh Ahmad Fahad congratulated the political leadership of China on this occasion, praising the technological advancement and expertise of the PLA. He noted that the Kuwait and the PRC share the desire to promote the bilateral ties in all areas, notably the defense domain. He thanked Ambassador Zhang Jianwei on the invitation to attend the celebration, noting that his response to the invitation reflected the keenness of the political leadership of Kuwait on opening new horizons for cooperation.

Chinese Defense Attache Xue Chuanlai welcomed and addressed the guests: "PLA was founded by the Communist Party of China (CPC) on August 1, 1927. Under the leadership of CPC, the past 96 years have been an extraordinary and glorious journey for the PLA, witnessing its remarkable contribution to China's independence, liberation, national sovereignty and socialism with Chinese characteristics, as well as regional stability and world peace.

"China's armed forces are a reforming and innovative army. Over the past 96 years, it has evolved from a single-service army into a powerful army with five branches. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, under the strong leadership of President Xi Jinping and the Central Military Commission (CMC), China's armed forces has carried out the most extensive and profound national defense and military reforms since 1949.

"This reform has reshaped the leadership and command system of the people's military, the modern military structure, the policies and institu-



Chinese Defense Attache Xue Chuanlai



— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

tions, injecting fresh life into the people's military. Now the people's armed forces have taken solid strides along the path of building a powerful military with Chinese characteristics. A new stage has been initiated in strengthening and revitalizing the armed forces.

"China's armed forces is a responsible and peace-loving army. China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development and adhere to a defense policy that is in nature defensive. China's national defense modernization does not target or pose a threat to any other country. A strong military of China is a staunch force for world peace, stability and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

"However, peaceful development isn't a one-way road or a matter of wishful thinking; it is the common responsibility of all countries in the world, and only when all countries follow the path of peaceful development can we live in peace with each other. To this end, President Xi Jinping has proposed the global security initiative, advocating a new type of security path of dialogue rather than confrontation, partnership rather than alliance, and win-win cooperation rather than zero-sum game, which contributes China's wisdom in addressing the current complex international security challenges.

"China's Armed Forces is a fearless and invincible army. Over the past 96 years, it has achieved one victory after another, effectively safeguarding national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity. Peace has not come easy and must continue to be safeguarded. The world is now in the midst of eventful years far from peace, with diversified instabilities and security threats lingering on. China is confronted with increasingly complicated external obstacles and challenges that may undermine its stable development.

"Confronting the profound changes in our national security environment, China is firm in the resolve to uphold its sovereignty, security and

development interests, and will never yield to any external pressure. China's armed forces is keenly aware of the utmost importance and urgency to safeguard national security, remains as vigilant and ready as a strained bow for potential combat, keeps the confidence and ability to deal with security threats and challenges in all directions and fields, enabling us to effectively shape our military posture, manage crises, and deter and win wars.

"Kuwait, the pearl of the Gulf, is the first Gulf Arab country to establish diplomatic relations with China, tracing back to 1971. In 2018, bilateral relations embraced a new chapter with the establishment of the China-Kuwait strategic partnership. Since then, under the guidance of the heads of two states, the two sides have seen booming cooperation in various fields, enjoying a promising and bright future.

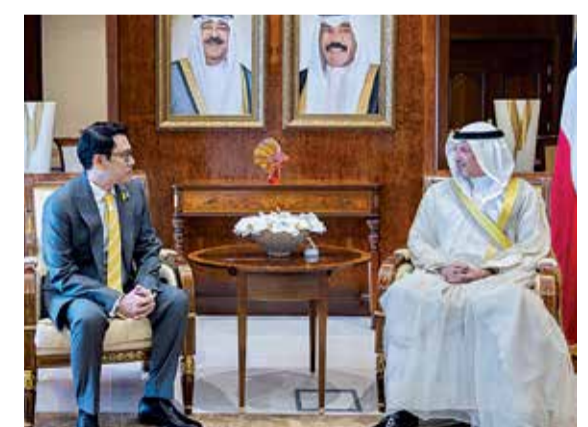
"As the defense attaché of the China Embassy in the State of Kuwait, I would like to work with my Kuwaiti counterparts to jointly draw a new blueprint between the two militaries. I'd like to witness the important consensus reached by the heads of two states can be actively implemented, and more pragmatic achievements can be realized between us.

"I'd like to take the opportunity to offer some suggestions for the militaries' cooperation. The two militaries should further strengthen high-level exchanges, so as to enhance mutual trust and better lead the bilateral relationship. The two sides should send more officers to each other's military academies, so as to further expand military education cooperation.

"The two sides should further expand cooperation in military industry and trade, jointly accelerate national defense and military construction, so as to enhance the ability to safeguard national security. The two sides should further strengthen international and regional security cooperation, advocate concerted settlement of regional disputes through diplomatic channels and dialogue, and work together to safeguard world peace, contribute to global development, and uphold international order."

Foreign Minister receives credentials of Thailand ambassador

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday received the credentials of Thailand's Ambassador in Kuwait Ekapol Poolpipat. This came during the meeting held at the Foreign Ministry, with Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah - wishing the new ambassador best of luck and closer relations between both friendly countries. — KUNA



Arabs attracted 1,617 foreign projects worth \$200 billion

KUWAIT: The Arab Corporation for Investment and Export Credit Guarantee (Daman) said on Thursday that foreign direct investment projects coming to the region during the year 2022 increased by 74 percent to 1,617 projects, with 358 percent investment cost worth \$200 billion. In a press statement, DAMAN said that these projects were concentrated in Egypt with a 53 percent share of the investment cost, and the UAE with a 57 percent share.

The cumulative value in the region over the past 20 years reached \$15.5 trillion through more than 16,000 projects and secured more than two million job opportunity. The institution's monitoring of 155 indicators issued by 30 international bodies revealed changes in the ranking of Arab countries globally in four main groups of indicators (political, economic, organizational, and production factors)

related to the investment climate in the region's countries during the year 2022, the statement quoted the Director General of Daman, Abdullah Al-Sabeeh, as saying.

Al-Sabeeh explained that the outcome of changes in the status of Arab countries in international indicators reflected positively on the number of direct foreign projects coming to the region and their investment costs, with expectations of continued strong performance in 2023. The number of foreign projects coming to the region increased by 28 percent, and the cost by 70 percent, to reach \$74 billion during the first third of 2023 compared to the same period of 2022, especially if the political and economic conditions in the region improve. (Daman), a joint Arab body owned by Arab countries in addition to four Arab financial institutions, was established in 1974. It is headquartered in Kuwait. — KUNA



Abdullah Al-Sabeeh



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Kim shows off new N Korean drones, ICBMs to Russia defense minister Page 7

'We are dying': Migrants' plea from Libya-Tunisia border

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Niger military chief backs coup leaders, but president defiant

World and regional leaders condemn 'attempted coup d'etat'



NIAMEY, Niger: A general view of billowing smoke as supporters of the Nigerien defense and security forces attack the headquarters of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), the party of overthrown President Mohamed Bazoum, in Niamey on July 27, 2023. — AFP

NIAMEY, Niger: Niger's armed forces chief on Thursday declared his support for troops who said they had overthrown the government, despite a defiant stand by the country's elected president and an outcry from the world community.

The latest target of a coup in the deeply troubled Sahel, President Mohamed Bazoum was confined at his residence on Wednesday by members of his presidential guard.

Hours later, their leaders, calling themselves the Defense and Security Forces (FDS), declared they had "decided to put an end to the regime," and all institutions were being suspended, the borders closed and a night-time curfew imposed. Armed forces chief General Abdou Sidikou Issa on Thursday swung his weight behind the putschists.

"The military command... has decided to subscribe to the declaration made by the Defense and Security Forces... in order to avoid a deadly confrontation between the various forces," he said in a statement. Earlier, Bazoum defiantly stood his ground as

condemnation of the putsch swelled from African and international organizations and allies France and the United States.

"The hard-won (democratic) gains will be safeguarded," Bazoum said on Twitter, which is being rebranded as X. "All Nigeriens who love democracy and freedom would want this."

Foreign Minister Hassoumi Massoudou said Niger's "legal and legitimate power" was the one exercised by its elected president. There had been a "coup bid" but "the whole of the army was not involved," he told France24 television. "We ask all the fractious soldiers to return to their ranks," he said.

"Everything can be achieved through dialogue but the institutions of the republic must function."

Pro-coup demonstrations

Several hundred people in Niamey and the town of Dosso took part in shows of support for the coup leaders, AFP journalists saw. In scenes redolent of what happened in Mali following a coup there in 2020, some held Russian flags and chanted

anti-French and pro-Russian slogans.

"France was unable to take care of our problems—we need to take our destiny in hand," said their leader, who gave his name as Issouf and said he worked in a garage.

Youths from the gathering in Niamey travelled several kilometers (miles) to the headquarters of Bazoum's PNDS party and attacked it, setting fire to some cars. The president of neighboring Benin, Patrice Talon, was expected in the capital for mediation efforts, the head of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) said.

Coup-prone

The landlocked state is one of the poorest and most unstable countries in the world, experiencing four coups since gaining independence from France in 1960, as well as numerous other attempts—including two previously against Bazoum. The 63-year-old is one of a dwindling group of elected presidents and pro-Western leaders in the Sahel, where since 2020 a rampaging jihadist insurgency has triggered coups in Mali and Burkina Faso. Their juntas have forced out French troops

and in the case of Mali, the ruling military have woven a close alliance with Russia.

Disgruntled members of the Presidential Guard sealed off access to Bazoum's residence and offices on Wednesday morning, and after talks broke down "refused to release the president", a presidential source said. The coup leaders -- 10 men in military uniform -- appeared on television overnight.

Their leader, an officer named Colonel-Major Amadou Abdramane, announced they were taking power following "the continued deterioration of the security situation, poor economic and social governance."

Condemnation

The parties in Niger's ruling coalition denounced "a suicidal and anti-republican madness" and condemnation poured in from regional and global leaders. ECOWAS and the African Union each blasted an "attempted coup d'etat" while UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres attacked "the unconstitutional change in government."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he had spoken to Bazoum to offer support

from Washington, which deploys about 1,100 troops in Niger. France, a key ally which has 1,500 soldiers in Niger, called for "the restoration of the integrity of Nigerien democratic institutions."

Russia—isolated internationally since invading Ukraine in February 2022 -- joined nations appealing for Bazoum's release. All disputes should be resolved "through peaceful and constructive dialogue," it said.

Bazoum took office after elections two years ago, in Niger's first-ever peaceful transition since independence. He had been interior minister and right-hand man to former president Mahamadou Issoufou, who voluntarily stepped down after two terms.

But an attempted coup took place just days before Bazoum's inauguration, according to a security source at the time. A second bid to oust Bazoum occurred last March "while the president... was in Turkey", according to a Niger official, who said an arrest was made.

The nation of 22 million is two-thirds desert and frequently ranks at the bottom of the UN's Human Development Index, a benchmark of prosperity. — AFP

Algeria counts costs after deadly wildfires

BEJAIA, Algeria: Algerians in the fire-ravaged northeast were Thursday counting the cost of the blazes that killed 34 people, destroyed homes and reduced vast forest areas to scorched wastelands. The wildfires raged for days, mainly through the mountain forests of the Kabylia region on the Mediterranean coast, fanned by winds during blistering summer heat.

"Many people are traumatized. Our aim is to provide moral support and psychological care," said a member of a psychiatrist support unit sent to the disaster area.

Water and electricity remained cut off in wide areas but aid supplies were arriving. "We need help, all the help we can get," said a man at an aid supply point in Bejaia, 250 kilometers (150 miles) from Al-

geria. "We need clothes, mattresses, things like that." In the small village of Ait Oussalah, 16 people were killed as they tried to flee the flames, witnesses said, pointing out that they made up 10 percent of the village population.

Tahar Chibane, 35, from the town of Ait Oussalah, lost several family members and almost all of his farmlands. "We've lost 99 percent of our land, and suffered great human losses," he said at a funeral ceremony in nearby Souk el-Dejemaa. "We're still standing on our feet, because of God's protection."

Djudi Zenoud, also burying a loved one, said: "How can you remain sane when so many members of your family are lost at once?" Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has sent his condolences to the families of those killed, among them 10 soldiers trapped by flames in Bejaia province.

At the height of the disaster, more than 100 fires burned across 17 provinces, said Interior Minister Brahim Merad, the fires forcing the evacuation of more than 1,500 people.

More than 8,000 civil defense personnel were mobilized, along with 500 fire trucks and multiple chartered aircraft. Merad said local authorities have been instructed to assess the damage

he said. "The boat sank in front of us while on its way home to the island," said Binangonan resident Frederic Sison, who had been standing at the Kalinawan port when the incident happened.

Rescuers were scouring the lake for the six people still missing hours after the accident, Cirados said. Video footage of the rescue shared by the coast guard showed a man standing on the hull of the boat that was lying on its side, shouting "There are so many people here", as small outrigger boats circled trying to help.

Another clip showed two rescuers leaning from the side of a boat to pluck a person who appeared to be unconscious from the calm waters. Mobile phone footage taken by Sison and shared with AFP showed anxious people standing on the shore watching the boats take part in the frantic rescue effort.

In the video, a young boatman said he saved four people including a disabled person and a girl.

A woman could be seen doing chest compressions on one of several victims laid out on the concrete pier, as men lifted more motionless people out of small boats. Boats, including wooden outriggers and passenger ferries that provide transport between islands, had been ordered to shore in



MELLOULA, Tunisia: A woman salvages produce from the remains of a burnt building in the aftermath of a forest fire near the town of Melloula in northwestern Tunisia close to the border with Algeria on July 26, 2023. — AFP

and losses, and to "identify the victims in order to compensate them as soon as possible". Northern and eastern Algeria battle forest fires every summer, but they have been exacerbated by this year's Mediterranean heatwave. — AFP



BINANGONAN, Philippines: This handout photo taken from a screen grab from a video footage shows local government rescue workers retrieving a body of a victim of a boat capsizing from the lake near Binangonan town. — AFP

Luzon and central islands earlier in the week due to gale warnings as the typhoon intensified the southwest monsoon. The Philippines, an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands, has a poor maritime safety record, with scores dying in mishaps at sea each year, usually aboard wooden-hulled outriggers used for fishing or to move people from one small island to another. — AFP

23 dead, 6 missing as boat capsizes in Philippine lake

MANILA: A small passenger boat capsized in a lake near the Philippine capital on Thursday, killing 23 people on board and leaving six missing, rescuers said.

The accident happened in the early afternoon at Laguna lake, near Manila, hours after Typhoon Doksuri had swept out of the northern Philippines. The wooden outrigger "encountered strong winds prompting all passengers to panic and (go) to the port (left) side," a coast guard statement said.

"The boat had clearance to sail. There was no more storm in the area," coast guard spokesman Rear Admiral Armando Balilo told reporters. The passenger boat was making its regular run from the municipality of Binangonan to the island of Talim in the middle of the lake, municipality rescue official Kenneth Cirados told AFP. Rescuers retrieved 23 bodies from the water and there were 40 survivors,

Russians keep the free press flame alive in the Arctic

KIRKENES, Norway: Exiled to a place far above the Arctic Circle, a group of Russian journalists are working with Norwegians to break through the strict state controls that have gripped the media in their homeland. At the Barents Observer, an online newspaper that has become a leading provider of news from the Far North over the past two decades, the two local journalists are now in the minority.

Based in the town of Kirkenes, close to the Russian border, the news outlet opened its doors to reporters who have fled Russia after a clampdown on the press followed the invasion of Ukraine.

Wearing a Mickey Mouse T-shirt and a Michael Jackson-tattoo on his arm, Denis Zagore explains he left the Russian city of Murmansk in September. "When the war started, in my podcasts for Barents Observer, I said dictator Putin, I said, not SMO (special military operation) or something like that," the 47-year-old journalist tells AFP. "I started to understand it could be unsafe if I continued to do it in Murmansk," which lies 220 kilometers (137 miles) over the border. "If you (want to) say Putin is a dictator and war is war, it's more safe here," he says.

The Barents Observer now has three Russian reporters and a Russian trainee, and has started publishing more articles in Russian than English. "We were already blocked in Russia and have been in tremendous trouble with the Russian censorship agency. So we said OK, they want to make more trouble for journalists, then we can make more trouble for them," editor Thomas Nilsen says. — AFP



KIRKENES, Norway: Russian protestor Anton Kalinin poses next to the car he decorated with the lettering 'Stop War' and 'Stop Putin' and parked it near the Russian consulate building in Kirkenes, Norway on July 4, 2023. — AFP

International

'We are dying': Migrants' plea from Libya-Tunisia border

Almost 800 migrants drowned off Tunisia in 6 months: National Guard

RAS JEDIR, Libya/TUNIS: African migrants pleaded to be saved from a desert zone between Libya and Tunisia on late Wednesday weeks after Tunisian authorities allegedly dumped dozens of them there with nothing. "We are dying. We are dying by the minute," a Nigerian who wanted to be identified only by his first name, George, told AFP.

"Please, I'm begging you. Take us from here now," said George, 43. "Come and rescue us from this place." On Tuesday Libya's interior ministry said the bodies of five African migrants had been found near Tunisia's border. The group of about 140 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are the latest to be taken to Tunisia's borderlands with Libya or Algeria, according to border guards, migrants and NGO workers who reported previous cases. "We don't know where we are living here. We've been suffering with no food and no water," George said at the migrants' makeshift camp among barbed wire 30 meters (33 yards) from a Libyan border post on the seashore at Ras Jedir.

He said he had been working as a barber for 18 months in the Tunisian coastal city of Sfax, where his wife and baby remained after he was forced out. "The Tunisian police, they aim their weapons... and say we are terrorists," George said. The Libyans tell the migrants not to go further into their territory, leaving them "stuck in the middle," George said, as a heatwave grips the Mediterranean.

Through the Red Crescent the Libyans have, however, brought them some food and water, which they share among themselves. Another migrant, Fatima, 36, from Niger, said Tunisian soldiers "took everything from us", including their mobile phones, and left them there. She also declined to give a last name.

Some held up torn pieces of cardboard with hand-written messages. One asked the International

Organization for Migration to "help please". "We are humans," another said.

Racial tensions

In early July, hundreds of migrants from sub-Saharan African countries were driven out of the Tunisian port city of Sfax as racial tensions flared following the death of a Tunisian man in a clash between locals and migrants. At its closest point, near Sfax, Tunisia is only about 130 kilometers from the Italian island of Lampedusa. The North African country is a gateway for migrants and asylum-seekers attempting perilous sea voyages in hopes of a better life in Europe.

Mubarak Adam Mohamad, 24, said he had fled the war in Sudan for Libya before reaching Tunisia.

"I was arrested by the police in Sfax and brought here by force," he told AFP, appealing for "regional and international organizations" to rescue them. Medecins du Monde, an aid group, called on Tunisian authorities to facilitate humanitarian access. "These people find themselves in a situation of great vulnerability," the group said in a statement.

Human Rights Watch said up to 1,200 black Africans were "expelled or forcibly transferred by Tunisian security forces" to the country's desert border regions with Libya and Algeria this month.

In mid-July the Tunisian Red Crescent said it had provided shelter to at least 630 migrants who had been taken after July 3 to Ras Jedir, north of Al-Assah. Around the same time, Libyan border guards also said they rescued dozens of migrants left in the desert by Tunisian authorities without water and food. An AFP team at the time saw migrants who were visibly exhausted and dehydrated, sitting or lying on the sand and using shrubs to try and shield themselves from the heat that topped 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit). The group were in an unin-



RAS JEDIR, Libya: A migrant mother from Africa, stranded on the seashore at the Libyan-Tunisian border in Ras Jedir, cries holding her son on July 26, 2023. — AFP

habited area close to Al-Assah.

Almost 800 irregular migrants drowned off Tunisia in the first half of this year as they tried to reach Europe by boat, a National Guard spokesman told AFP Thursday. "789 bodies of migrants were recovered from the sea, including 102 Tunisians, the others for-

eigners and unidentified people," said Houcem Eddine Jebabli, adding that more than 34,000 were rescued.

The North African country has become a major gateway for irregular migrants and asylum-seekers attempting the perilous sea voyage in often rickety boats in the hope of a better life in Europe. — AFP

Greece races to tackle wildfires as winds set to resume

VOLOS, Greece: Greek fire crews on Thursday scrambled to douse deadly wildfires raging for two weeks around the country before strong winds forecast for the day rekindle blazes. Hundreds of firefighters backed by European Union reinforcements were struggling to contain the flames on the islands of Rhodes, Corfu and Evia, in addition to a new front that erupted Wednesday in central Greece. "These are difficult and very sad days," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said.

Mitsotakis said Greece was "mourning four fellow citizens, the two aircraft pilots... and two who could not distance themselves from the inferno in time." Five bodies have been recovered from fire-stricken areas this week, but a police source told AFP that a cattle farmer found burned on the island of Evia on Tuesday had disappeared before the fire and was not listed among the casualties. Around the Mediterranean, fires this week also flared in Croatia and Italy, and flames killed 34 in Algeria in extreme heat that has left landscapes tinder dry.

Officials have said more than 600 wildfires have broken out around Greece since July 13. The vast majority were tackled before they could pose a threat, the government said. The



VOLOS, Greece: Firefighters rest after tackling wildfires, near the industrial zone of the central Greek city of Volos on July 27, 2023. — AFP

civil protection ministry has warned of an extreme danger of fire in over a dozen Greek regions on Thursday.

A forest fire broke out Wednesday in mountainous terrain in Haskovo, near the Greek-Bulgarian border, and was still out of control. Early Thursday, another fire broke out near homes in the leafy Athens suburb of Kifissia but was swiftly extinguished.

Tens of thousands of residents and tourists at the height of the busy travel season have been evacuated, including 20,000 people on Rhodes, where officials declared a state of emergency this week. A dangerous fire broke out Wednesday near the industrial zone of the central

city of Volos, leaving two dead. An elderly disabled woman was found dead inside her burned camper van in a coastal area near Volos and a cattle farmer was killed while trying to rescue his livestock. On Tuesday, two pilots died when their water-bombing plane crashed while battling a blaze in Evia. The industrial zone was closed Thursday as a precaution. Six communities and villages around the city of nearly 140,000 people were evacuated early in the morning, with more placed on standby.

Temperatures are expected to drop Thursday after a prolonged heatwave but near-gale winds are expected to complicate efforts to douse the fires. — AFP

Taiwan fends off mock Chinese assault on beach

NEW TAIPEI CITY: Taiwanese troops on Thursday thwarted a mock Chinese beach landing, the latest exercise in the island's week-long annual military drills simulating attacks by Beijing, China, which regards self-ruled democratic Taiwan as its territory, has intensified its saber-rattling in recent years, orchestrating near-daily incursions of warplanes and naval vessels around the island.

Taiwan's five-day "Han Kuang" (Han Glory) wargames this year have included drills in varying settings — including Taipei's main train station and its biggest international airport — and on different terrains.

Thursday's anti-invasion drill took place on Bali beach — an important strategic position near the capital Taipei and a prime location for an amphibious landing, said Shih Shun-wen, political warfare director at the Taiwanese army's Third Theatre of Operations. "We know very well what the current cross-strait situation is and what the military threats are against us," Shih told reporters. "We

want to convey this — we will do our utmost in protecting our country."

Amphibious assault vehicles — marked red to signify they were Chinese for the purposes of the wargames — rolled steadily through the sand as crimson-helmeted soldiers raced alongside in the mock invasion. But they were impeded by Taiwanese tanks and troops, who navigated their way around tall grasses and past colored smoke plumes.

"In the future, the threats and challenges we face will become more and more complicated," said Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, who watched Thursday's drill dressed in army fatigues.

She was also wearing a face mask after being diagnosed with COVID this week — though only with mild symptoms. Without mentioning China, she said that Taiwan needed to "envision the situation of hybrid threats in advance to formulate relevant plans and enhance the drills."

"With everyone's concerted efforts, we fully demonstrated our combat intention to prevent the enemy from establishing a beachhead, and successfully completed this joint anti-landing combat mission," she said. Since Tsai — who does not accept that Taiwan is a part of China — came to power in 2016, Beijing has stepped up military and political pressure on the island. — AFP

'Global boiling': July set to be...

Continued from Page 1
likely" that July 2023 will be the hottest month on records going back to the 1940s. Carlo Buontempo, Director of CES, said the temperatures in the period had been "remarkable", with an anomaly so large that scientists are confident the record has been shattered even before the month ends.

Beyond these official records, he said proxy data for the climate going back further — like tree rings, or ice cores — suggests the temperatures seen in the period could be "unprecedented in our history in the last few thousand years". Possibly even longer "on the order of 100,000 years" he said. About 1.2 degrees Celsius of global warming since the late 1800s, driven by the burning of fossil fuels, has made heatwaves hotter, longer and more frequent, as well as intensifying other weather extremes like storms and floods.

The WMO has said the eight years to 2022 were the warmest on record, despite the cooling effects of the

La Nina weather pattern. That has now given way to the warming El Nino, although this is not expected to strengthen until later in the year. "The extreme weather which has affected many millions of people in July is unfortunately the harsh reality of climate change and a foretaste of the future," said World Meteorological Organization's Secretary-General Petteri Taalas.

The WMO predicts it is more likely than not that global temperatures will temporarily rise 1.5C above the pre-industrial benchmark for at least one of the next five years. They stress, however, that this would not mark a permanent breach of the 1.5C limit set out in the Paris Agreement, which refers to long-term warming. Buontempo said there had never been a month where so many days had exceeded 1.5C.

Temperature records have tumbled across the northern hemisphere this month, with many regions sweltering through weeks of unrelenting heat. With large swathes of the United States baking under a record-breaking heatwave, President Joe Biden held a White House conference with mayors of cities like Phoenix, Arizona — currently enduring a brutal 27-day streak of days above 43 degrees Celsius — to discuss the impact of the extreme temperatures. — AFP

Chinese side. "My goal was to do it in less than six months," she told AFP in the interview. "So when we didn't get a permit last year I decided to do it all over again this year."

Harila is a native of Vadso, on the Barents Sea in Norway's northernmost reaches, where the highest point is just 633 m. She did not take to climbing from an early age, dedicating herself to football, handball and cross-country skiing. It was only in 2015 when she won a trip to Kilimanjaro in Tanzania from her employers — a chain of furniture shops — that she discovered her passion.

Lama, who has been a guide since the age of 16, was Kristin's companion throughout her record-breaking journey. "Lama's invaluable expertise and profound connection with the mountains have been integral to their success in navigating treacherous terrains and facing harsh weather conditions," the team statement said.

Previous record holder Purja, who has a series of titles under his belt including the first winter ascent of K2 in 2021, is currently attempting the fastest ascent of the super peaks without supplemental oxygen. Twenty-one-year-old Pakistani mountaineer Shehroze Kashif also hopes this year to become the youngest person to tackle them all. — AFP

Syria fishermen despair at water loss, river pollution

TABQA DAM, Syria: Around war-torn Syria's biggest freshwater dam reservoir, fishermen say their catch is now a fraction of what it used to be as environmental pressures have decimated aquatic life. Ismail Hilal, 50, sat on the hull of his rowboat—now lodged firmly on the shores of Lake Assad — as gentle waves washed in, talking about the way of life he has lost. After 37 years as a fisherman, he has retired his nets, declaring defeat as fish stocks have declined, water levels have dropped and pollution has worsened in the Euphrates and the dam reservoir it feeds.

"I have spent my whole life on the water, since childhood," said Hilal, a father of seven. "But I was forced to stop this year. I couldn't live on fishing anymore." Syria has endured more than a decade of civil war, and the nearby town of Raqqa was the center of the Islamic State group's brutal "caliphate" until their ouster in 2017.

The battered country, where half a million died in the conflict, has also suffered the impacts of climate change, from searing summer heat to prolonged drought. The flow of the Euphrates — one of the region's mighty streams,

where the world's earliest civilizations flourished — has been further impacted by upstream dams in Turkey.

Other fishermen AFP spoke to also blamed the river's low water levels, lack of rainfall, worsening pollution and overfishing for the sharp decline in fish stocks. Fishermen now "barely take in five percent" of their catch from former times. Hilal said. He now works in a restaurant in Tabqa, on the eastern edge of the lake, toiling in front of a flaming hot oven and preparing and grilling fish instead of catching them.

The Euphrates runs for almost 2,800 km through Turkey, Syria and Iraq, where it empties into the sea. From the Turkish border, it flows southeast across Syria, irrigating its breadbasket region and filling the reservoirs of three hydroelectric dams that provide drinking water and electricity for millions. Lake Assad is the biggest reservoir, stretching across 600 sq km.

But its water level has dropped by four meters since last year, says Dutch peace-building group PAX, which blames a "downward spiral of drought and water shortages". The lack of water and the pollution are "driving further biodiversity loss along the lakes and rivers" in Syria's north and east, said the group's Wim Zwijnenburg. Raqqa province received only 208 mm per month of rainfall last year, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. An AFP team visiting Lake Assad saw vast plumes of algae — an indicator of pollution, according to experts, that sucks oxygen from the water and kills aquatic life. — AFP



JAABAR, Syria: Ismail Hilal, 50, who retired after 37 years as a fisherman, sits on a boat on the banks of Lake Assad near his village in Raqqa governorate on July 9, 2023. — AFP

Duo set record for summit of...

Continued from Page 1
Everest, K2 — Earth's second-highest mountain — has notoriously fickle weather and has only been scaled by 425 people since 1954, including around 20 women. More than 40 people have summited the world's top 14 peaks, but only a few of them women. Last year, despite her proven climbing prowess, 37-year-old Harila struggled to secure sponsors, forcing her to sell her apartment to fund her quest. "I think to do this project if I was a man would be much easier," she told AFP in an interview in May. "It is just different to be a woman in the world, not just with the sponsorships."

This year, though, Harila is backed by several firms — including a watch company and backpack manufacturer — for her new attempt. In her race to the record, Harila had to repeat the summit of 12 mountains, including K2, after delays in securing visas from China to climb Shishapangma — wholly in Tibet — and Cho Oyu, normally climbed from the

International

Kim shows off new N Korean drones, ICBMs to Russia defense minister

Shoigu and a high-ranking Chinese delegation in Pyongyang

SEOUL: Walking past huge intercontinental ballistic missiles and previously unseen military drones, Kim Jong Un gave Russia's defense minister a tour of North Korea's newest and most advanced weaponry on Thursday, state media reported.

After Washington earlier this year accused Pyongyang of supplying Moscow with weapons for its war in Ukraine, photographs in state media showed Kim walking Moscow's Sergei Shoigu through a vast defense exhibition showcasing the North's nuclear missiles and what Seoul-based specialist site NK News said were new unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

Shoigu and a high-ranking Chinese delegation are in Pyongyang as Kim's first-known foreign guests since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the country marks the 70th anniversary of the Korean War armistice, which ended open hostilities and is celebrated as Victory Day.

Kim and Shoigu visited the "Weapons and Equipment Exhibition 2023", the official Korean Central News Agency said, showing photos that featured North Korea's largest intercontinental ballistic missiles, the Hwasong-17, and the Hwasong-18

solid-fuel ICBM. Russia, an historic ally of North Korea, is one of a handful of nations with which Pyongyang maintains friendly relations. Kim and Shoigu had earlier discussed "matters of mutual concern in the field of national defense and security and on the regional and international security environment," KCNA said.

The North Korean leader has been steadfast in his support for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, including, Washington says, supplying rockets and missiles—a charge Pyongyang has denied. During the visit, Kim told Shoigu "about the weapons and equipment which were invented and produced" under North Korea's national defense plan and "repeatedly expressed belief that the Russian army and people would achieve big successes", KCNA added.

Shoigu's visit is noteworthy given that Russian defense ministers have not regularly visited Pyongyang since before the collapse of the USSR, experts told AFP. "Russia may need the potential of North Korean military industry in the realm of conventional weapons, while North Korea may be interested in missile technology transfers from Russia," Vladimir Tikhon-

ov, professor of Korean studies at the University of Oslo, told AFP. Despite the high-profile coverage of Shoigu's visit, North Korea is likely to be "very careful" about providing Moscow with weapons for its war in Ukraine, Park Won-gon, professor at Ewha University, told AFP. "If it is confirmed publicly, European countries would also turn adversarial," Park said, adding that North Korea would prefer not to face additional sanctions. "So it will be careful, but it's possible that Russia will seek more help in secret." First foreigners satellite imagery indicates North Korea has been preparing for a large-scale military parade for Thursday's anniversary.

The inclusion of foreign guests at this year's celebrations is a post-pandemic first and hints at new flexibility towards enforcing border controls. Seoul's military said US and South Korean "intelligence authorities are closely monitoring." Pyongyang's parade prep, adding they were also tracking the country's "weapons development trends". "We are currently analyzing the weapons systems unveiled by North Korea, and for now we have nothing more to say," a spokesperson for the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

North Korea has imposed a rigid COVID-19 blockade since early 2020, preventing even its own nationals from entering the country. Beijing is North Korea's most important ally and economic benefactor, their relationship forged in the bloodshed of the Korean War in the 1950s.

Kim Jong Un also met a Chinese delegation led by politburo member Li Hongzhong and told him "the Korean people will never forget the fact that the brave soldiers of the Chinese People's Volunteers shed blood to bring about the war victory," KCNA said.

"The meetings show that Kim is more interested in political theatre than he is concerned about Covid," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University, told AFP. Park, also at Ewha University, said it was unlikely the visits would lead to a reopening of the North's borders, noting the country's "broken" medical system and that its people had not been vaccinated.

North Korea only resumed some trade with China last year and allowed new Beijing envoy Wang Yajun to take up his position this year. He is the first known senior diplomat to cross into North Korea since the border closure in January 2020. — AFP



PYONGYANG: This picture shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (center), with Chinese Communist Party politburo member Li Hongzhong (Center right) and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu (Center, left), attending the grand celebration performance celebrating the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Fatherland Liberation War at the Ryugyong Chung Ju-yung Gymnasium in Pyongyang. — AFP photos



PYONGYANG: This picture shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (front right) visiting the weaponry exhibition house with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu (front left) and members of the military delegation in Pyongyang.

Sri Lanka massacres that fuelled civil war haunt 40 years later

COLOMBO: Forty years ago, mobs in Sri Lanka burned 13 people alive, part of a week-long pogrom that turbocharged simmering ethnic unrest into all-out civil war. Known in Sri Lanka as "Black July", the brutal violence triggered a 26-year conflict that killed about 100,000 people and set development back by decades, ending only after the Tamil rebels fighting for autonomy were massacred in 2009.



COLOMBO: In this photograph taken on July 21, 2023, Human Rights lawyer Nimalka Fernando speaks during an interview in Colombo. — AFP

The 1983 anti-Tamil mob attacks escalated on July 29, when Mohan Panneer Selvam was just eight years old. A rampaging gang torched his home in the tea-growing central town of Hawa Eliya, burning 13 people inside, including his parents, relatives and their staff. "My grandmother started to escape, they shot her and threw her body into the house," Panneer Selvam said, breaking down while recalling the events narrated to him by his older sister. He and his younger brother were away at boarding school when the riots broke out, returning as orphans to the ruins of their burned home two months later. His sister—then a child of 10 -- was the sole survivor only because their mother "threw her out of the kitchen window," he said.

She was wounded and found "two or three days later" by police and sent to a camp for Tamils made homeless by the violence. "My sister

saw the burnt bodies—they put the bodies in a municipal tractor (trailer)," he told AFP. "They dumped them somewhere."

'Pogrom'

Ethnic tensions between the mainly Buddhist Sinhalese majority and the largely Hindu and Christian Tamil minority had long simmered, and worsened after ex-colonial ruler Britain quit in 1948. The conflict erupted in July 1983, when a landmine ambush laid by Tamil rebels killed 13 Sinhalese soldiers, in the Tamil heartland of Jaffna. The government flew the bodies to Colombo for a mass burial, but relatives demanded individual funerals and rioted.

The backlash degenerated into a week of violence targeting Tamils, with the worst of the violence on July 29, dubbed "Black Friday", when Panneer Selvam's family was killed. According to the government, about 400 to 600 people died over the course of the massacres—mostly Tamils. But minority groups say the true toll could be in the thousands. "The events that happened... changed the course of history," said Tamil legislator MA Sumanthiran.

"We don't regard what happened in 1983 as a riot, because it was planned violence unleashed on the Tamil people in this country. It was a pogrom." Some claim the army was actively involved or provided tacit support to the attacks in revenge for the loss of their 13 comrades, and several then-government officials were seen leading mobs. No one has been prosecuted. But some Sinhalese did protect Tamil neighbors. Human Rights lawyer Nimalka Fernando, who is Sinhalese, sheltered Tamil and Muslim neighbors. "Over 40 years, it has been a journey to grapple with waves of internally displaced people, waves of refugees in my own country," she said.

Sumanthiran said autonomy was the "political standard of the Tamil people", noting they had always voted for a federal system—and had even demanded a separate state during elections in 1977. "To quell that, to subdue that, violence was practiced," he said. "So '83 was the height of that kind of strategy by the government". Sumanthiran says about 1.3 million Tamils fled the country after the riots, many north to neighboring India—motivating their increasing interest in the conflict. New Delhi pressed Colombo to seek peace by granting autonomy to the Tamils, and the Sinhalese leaders' policy "boomeranged" back in their faces, he added. "While everything was on fire, the Indian government intervened," Sumanthiran said. — AFP

and to allay local fears that Papua New Guinea is being dragged into a US-China battle for influence in the region. Perched between Taiwan and US ally Australia, Papua New Guinea is the largest and most populous state in Melanesia—an area that was pivotal in deciding the outcome of World War II in the Pacific. Austin stressed that the coastguard deployment would help Papua New Guinea stop the plundering of its thinly protected maritime resources, stopping activities like illegal fishing and trafficking. According to a landmark US-Papua New Guinea security pact signed earlier this year, the United States will be able to develop and operate out of facilities across the country.

With Papua New Guinea's agreement, the US military can station troops and vessels at six key ports and airports, including Lombrum Naval Base on Manus Island and facilities in the capital Port Moresby.

Washington would have "unimpeded access" to the sites to "pre-position equipment, supplies and materiel" and have "exclusive use" of some zones where development and "construction activities" could be carried out, according to the text.

Entire pod of 97 pilot whales dies in Australia beaching

SYDNEY: Nearly 100 pilot whales have died after beaching in Western Australia, wildlife officials said Thursday, following desperate rescue attempts.

The pod of 97 long-finned pilot whales gathered in shallow water off Cheynes Beach, about 400 kilometers (250 miles) southeast of Perth, on Tuesday, with scores stranding themselves on the sand.

By the next morning, 51 of the cetaceans had died. Some 250 volunteers joined 100 wildlife experts in a vain struggle to save the rest of the pod throughout the day Wednesday.

Dozens of people in wetsuits stayed in the water, a few on kayaks or surfboards, trying to coax the tightly packed group of remaining pilot whales into deeper waters, and then out to sea. "Volunteers and everyone attempted to get them back out into the deeper water, and then they re-beached themselves," a spokeswoman for the Parks and Wildlife Service told AFP. "From that point, the vets assessed them and it was determined on welfare grounds that they needed to be euthanised." Incident controller Peter Hartley thanked rescuers for their "enormous efforts" to save the whales in cold waters. — AFP



SYDNEY: A handout photograph taken and released on July 26, 2023 shows volunteers helping pilot whales, with more than 50 whales dying after stranding themselves on Cheynes Beach in Western Australia. — AFP

Lombrum has in the past been used as a garrison for British, German, Japanese, Australian and US troops. During World War II, it was one of the largest US bases in the Pacific, with 200 ships at anchor, including six battleships and 20 aircraft carriers that were used to retake the Philippines from Japan.

But Austin tried to allay concerns that the pact would erode the South Pacific nation's fiercely guarded independence. Papua New Guinea only escaped decades of direct rule from Britain and Australia in 1975. "I just want to be clear that we're not seeking permanent basing in PNG," Austin told his hosts. "This is an opportunity to expand upon a long-standing relationship."

Prime Minister James Marape also made the case for the pact, saying it would help modernize Papua New Guinea's infrastructure and strengthen its security. "They have never tampered with our sovereignty and our autonomy and our independence," he said.

"It is not them coming in. We invited them in... to build up our defense to protect our own borders, including stopping the theft of fish from our seas. 'We're doing this for the betterment of our country.' — AFP

News in Brief

New Zealand welcomed to AUKUS

WELLINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday that New Zealand would be welcome to engage in the AUKUS alliance, a landmark pact aimed at counterbalancing China's rise in the Pacific. "The door's very much open for New Zealand and other partners to engage as they see appropriate going forward," Blinken said as he visited Wellington, a trip aimed at shoring-up Washington's alliances in the contested Pacific region. AUKUS is a pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States that includes ambitious plans to supply Canberra with nuclear-powered submarines. — AFP

Six killed in copter crash in Siberia

MOSCOW: A helicopter crash Thursday in the southern Siberian region of Altai killed at least six people, the local branch of the Russian emergency situations ministry said. The ministry said that a "private Mi-8 helicopter hit electrical wires" while landing in the village of Tyungur and caught fire. It added that according to preliminary information, "13 people were on board, six of them died". Russian news agencies reported that seven others were injured. — AFP

Philippine typhoon toll rises to 6

MANILA: The death toll from a typhoon in the northern Philippines has risen to six, official figures showed on Thursday, as the storm swept towards southeastern China. Typhoon Doksuri battered the main island of Luzon on Wednesday, toppling trees, knocking out power and forcing the evacuation of thousands of people from coastal communities. Strong winds and heavy rain pummeled the lightly populated Babuyan islands and northern provinces, triggering flooding and landslides. — AFP

El Salvador approves mass trials

SAN SALVADOR: Tens of thousands of alleged gang members arrested during El Salvador's state of emergency may be tried in groups, according to a measure passed by the legislature Wednesday. In place since March 2022, El Salvador's state of emergency has led to some 72,000 arrests and prompted warnings by humanitarian groups and the United Nations that President Nayib Bukele's "war" on gang violence may be leading to rights abuses. — AFP

Trudeau reshuffles cabinet

MONTREAL: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced a major cabinet overhaul on Wednesday with the stated goal of strengthening his economic team ahead of upcoming legislative elections. Weakened in the polls, the man who has led a minority Liberal government since 2021 changed more than two-thirds of his political inner circle, with seven new recruits joining the cabinet and around 20 ministers reassigned to new roles. The shake-up comes as Trudeau renews his focus on the economy as a way to counter inflation and tackle the country's housing crisis. — AFP

US to deploy coastguard ship to PNG

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea: US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Thursday announced the deployment of a US Coastguard ship to Papua New Guinea, as Washington seeks to boost its military footprint in the region amid fierce competition for influence with China.

"A US Coastguard cutter will be here in August," Austin said as he became the first Pentagon boss to visit Papua New Guinea. The move capitalizes on a recently signed defense pact between the two countries that offers the United States greater military access to a strategically important part of the South Pacific.

Washington is keen to show that regional partners can benefit from increased US security cooperation

Business

FRIDAY, JULY 28, 2023

CBK raises discount rate by 25 basis points to 4.25%

Other GCC central banks also increase rates tracking US Fed move

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) on Wednesday raised the discount rate by 0.25 percent from 4.0 percent to 4.25 percent effective July 27, 2023. The decision is part of the CBK's efforts to maintain monetary and financial stability, enhance the economic growth of the various economic sectors, particularly the non-oil sectors, contain local inflationary pressures and maintain the competitiveness and attractiveness of the national currency as a lucrative store of domestic savings, Governor and Chairman of the CBK Board of Directors Basel Al-Haroon, said in a press statement.

It is also based on the bank's continuous monitoring of the economic, monetary and banking developments, he added. This decision is informed by a thorough analysis of the latest economic, monetary, and banking data and information, including growth and inflation levels that trended upwards in June after stabilizing in the previous period, indicators of local liquidity, developments in deposits and bank credit, interest rates on both the Kuwaiti dinar and on main foreign currencies, thus supporting the attractiveness of the Kuwaiti dinar, he noted.

The governor concluded that CBK shall continue its monitoring of the local and international economic, monetary, and banking developments, and direct the various monetary policy tools to provide an environment conducive to sustainable economic growth.

Meanwhile, other central banks in the GCC also

have increased their key interest rates after the US Federal Reserve (Fed) delivered its 11th rate hike, reinforcing its fight against high inflation.

GCC central banks normally change their interest rates in tune with the Fed as Gulf countries' currencies barring Kuwait, — the UAE dirham, Qatari riyal, Saudi riyal, Omani rial and Bahraini dinar — are pegged to the dollar.

The Central Bank of the UAE raised the base rate on its overnight deposit facility by 25 basis points (bps) to 5.40 per cent, from 5.15 per cent, effective Thursday. "This decision was taken following the Fed's announcement on July 26th to increase the interest on reserve balances (IORB) by 25 bps," the UAE central bank said in a statement.

The UAE central bank maintained the rate applicable to borrowing short-term liquidity from the central through all standing credit facilities at 50 basis points above the base rate.

Saudi Central Bank (SAMA) raised the rate of repurchase agreement (repo) by 25 bps to 6 per cent and the rate of reverse repurchase agreement (reverse repo) by 25 bps to 5.50 percent while the Central Bank of Bahrain hiked the one-week deposit rate to 6.25 per cent and the overnight deposit rate to 6 percent. Similarly, Qatar Central Bank's Monetary Policy Committee increased the deposit interest rate by 25 bps to 5.75 per cent, the lending interest rate to 6.25 percent and the repo rate to 6 percent. — KUNA and Agencies



KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) on Wednesday raised the discount rate by 0.25 percent from 4.0 percent to 4.25 percent effective July 27, 2023.

NIC's Zajil Fund achieves returns of 12.76% in H1

KUWAIT: In a press statement, the National Investments Company (NIC) has announced recording a remarkable performance for its investment funds, another achievement that reflects its informed strategy and experienced and knowledgeable funds management team; this also mirrors the track record in managing local and regional portfolios and investment funds.

Mohammed Al-Hamad, Assistant Vice President — Asset Management at NIC, stated that Zajil Services and Telecommunications Fund, which was established in 2004, aims to achieve capital growth and the highest returns possible, at calculated risk, by investing the fund's capital in wisely selected shares within the sector of services and telecommunications in the Arab financial markets that are compatible with the provisions of the Islamic Sharia.

Al-Hamad also highlighted the remarkable performance recorded by Zajil Fund and the returns of 12.76 percent it has achieved during the first half of 2023, which has outperformed all equity funds established in Kuwait. "These returns are achieved thanks to the Fund's focus on defense sectors such as health and telecommunications, which have achieved an exceptional rise this year; it also represented an exceptional hedge for clients from the current economic factors, which are global inflation, oil price fluctuations, high bond yields and fixed income investment instruments, which are harmful elements on the performance of stock markets in general



Mohammed Al-Hamad

and the share of key sectors within GCC such as banks, energy, and petrochemicals.

This performance reflects the company's keenness to diversify investment opportunities to achieve the best returns for its customers despite economic challenges, market fluctuations, and concerns related to global and local political and economic conditions, the most important of which are global political tensions and conflicts and the frail expectations about global economic growth", clarified Al-Hamad.

Concluding his statement, Al-Hamad pointed to the excellent performance achieved by the National Investments Company equity funds during the first half of 2023, which follow an active strategic approach in terms of achieving optimal returns over a long time by reducing the risks involved in the stock markets and achieving the best possible returns for customer.

have become increasingly cautious and selective," said EY-Parthenon chief economist Gregory Daco. Consumer spending continued to grow by 1.6 percent in the second quarter, slowing from the first quarter, but Daco noted that momentum is moderating on still-high prices and tighter credit conditions. For now, "real wage growth is turning positive" and helping consumption as inflation cools, he added.

Residential investment declined for a ninth consecutive quarter according to the latest gross domestic product report, although business investment grew 7.7 percent.

Daco said there are encouraging signs "executives are still driving growth despite lingering recession concerns." The surge in structures investment "continues to reflect the strong impetus" from government spending related to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act, he added.

'Positive trajectory'

Some analysts think the United States could see a mild recession in the second half of the year. But this likelihood appears to be diminishing on encouraging data with a strong labor market, low unemployment and households still spending — while inflation eases. On Wednesday, Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell told reporters that his staff are no longer forecasting a recession although they still see a "noticeable slowdown in growth starting later this year."

This came after the Fed raised the benchmark lending rate for an 11th time since March 2022,

ECB opens door to pause in rate hiking campaign

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank lifted a key interest rate to its highest level since early 2001 on Thursday as it fights stubborn inflation but opened the door to pausing its aggressive hiking cycle.

The Frankfurt-based institution increased its main rates a quarter percentage point, taking its benchmark deposit rate 3.75 percent — its highest level since May 2001 and equal to its previous record high. Borrowing costs have risen at their fastest pace ever in the bank's year-long hiking cycle to fight inflation.

In all, key rates have risen by 4.25 percentage points since the ECB made its first move in July last year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent prices for energy and food soaring. While inflation has come down from its double-digit peak at the end of last year, the price gauge was still expected to remain "too high for too long", ECB president Christine Lagarde said at a press conference.

Consumer prices in the eurozone rose at 5.5-percent pace in June — but still well above the ECB's two-percent target. But Lagarde said the ECB would keep an "open mind" when it came to future rate decisions — a marked departure from her past hawkish tone, which analysts said opened the door for a potential pause at the central bank's next meeting in September.

'Data dependent'

The ECB was "moving to a stage where we are going to be data dependent", Lagarde said, pointing to new projections to be released alongside the bank's next meeting in September. "On the basis of that



FRANKFURT: President of the European Central Bank (ECB) Christine Lagarde gestures as she addresses a press conference following the meeting of the governing council of the ECB in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on July 27, 2023. — AFP

we will determine whether we hike or whether we pause," Lagarde said. Commenting after Lagarde's remarks, Jens-Oliver Niklasch from LBBW bank said: "Another rate hike is not off the table, but a little less likely today than yesterday."

The ECB decision came a day after the US Federal Reserve resumed its own hiking cycle with a quarter-point raise, following a decision to pause in June. The US central bank signalled it could raise rates again if inflation proved stubborn. For its part, the ECB stressed that "underlying inflation remains high overall". 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.

At the same time, there were factors that could drive inflation higher. Russia's exit from a landmark deal for the export of grain from Ukraine could push up food prices and posed an "upside risk" to inflation, Lagarde warned. — AFP

US economy picks up steam despite slowdown fears

WASHINGTON: The US economy defied expectations of a slowdown as growth accelerated in the second quarter, according to government data released Thursday, supported by business investment and resilient consumer spending.

GDP growth in the world's biggest economy hit an annual rate of 2.4 percent for the April-June period, said the Commerce Department, despite analyst predictions of a cooldown from two percent growth in the first three months this year. Although economists have been warning of a potential downturn as the US central bank raised interest rates rapidly to tamp down demand and lower inflation, the economy has proven stronger than expected. In the first quarter, GDP growth was revised sharply higher from initial estimates of 1.1 percent, boosted by consumption in the face of elevated interest rates.

On Thursday, the rise in GDP also "reflected increases in consumer spending, nonresidential fixed investment, state and local government spending" and other areas, said the Commerce Department.

Cautious consumers

"Consumers are still willing to spend, but they



US GDP growth hit 2.4 percent in the second quarter, despite expectations it would slow from two percent in the first quarter.

bringing it to the highest level in 22 years. "Growth is outpacing expectations even as the monetary policy stance has become restrictive," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics. "A strong household sector that continues to benefit from positive job growth and rising real incomes should keep growth on a positive trajectory this year," she added.

But Daco said the economy "continues to face significant headwinds from persistently elevated

prices and costs, tightening credit conditions and rising interest rates." Other risks include student loan repayments and weak global growth. Steady growth in consumer spending for the second quarter was a clear reflection of ongoing strength in the job market, said Mike Fratantoni, chief economist of the Mortgage Bankers Association.

"However, the sharp drop in exports shows that this growth in the context of a weak global economy is creating a headwind," he said. — AFP

G20 environment chiefs ready fresh bid for climate deals

Al-Jaber calls for tripling global renewable energy capacity by 2030

CHENNAI: G20 environment ministers in India readied a fresh bid on Thursday to strike deals tackling climate change, days after heavy criticism for failing to agree on cutting fossil fuel use.

Environment chiefs from the Group of 20 major economies—constituting more than 80 percent of both global GDP and CO2 emissions—are focusing on critical topics including climate change adaptation finance, biodiversity and principles for ocean-based economic activities.

Those agreed by environment ministers during their one-day conference on Friday will be signed off by leaders during a summit in New Delhi in September. Global temperatures are hitting record highs, triggering floods, storms and heatwaves, climate experts say.

"The livelihoods of people are being destroyed," EU Commissioner for the Environment Virginijus Sinkevicius told AFP late Wednesday, pointing to the "growing evidence on the ground of devastating climate impact", including in raging wildfires in Greece and Sicily. Sinkevicius, who is attending the meeting in Chennai, said he wanted reforms to build the "resilience" of people but warned leaders must base decisions on scientific evidence.

"We live in an era of social media where you can be a scientist working for 20 years on climate change and

where you can be just a populist, you know, fishing for votes," he said. "And your opinions on social media will weigh very much the same."

Dismay

Campaigners across the world were dismayed after G20 energy ministers failed at a July 22 meeting in Goa in India to agree on a roadmap to cut fossil fuel use. It was seen as a blow to mitigation efforts and a win for some major oil producers, such as Russia and Saudi Arabia, who have resisted a quick transition away from dirty fuels and were blamed by critics for a lack of progress at the crucial meeting.

It came despite G7 leaders agreeing in Hiroshima in May to "accelerate the phase-out of unabated fossil fuels". Among those at the Chennai meeting is Sultan Al-Jaber, president of the upcoming COP28 climate summit who also heads the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

He has been heavily criticized for an apparent conflict of interests because burning fossil fuels is the main driver of global warming. "The world needs its leaders to unite, act and deliver; and that must start with the G20," Al-Jaber and UN Climate Change chief Simon Stiell said in a joint statement on Thursday.

"Those at the frontline of climate change need our support now, not in five years' time," they said, also calling for a tripling of global renewable energy capacity by 2030. Progress has so far been slow, with the G20 polarized by Russia's war in Ukraine and sharp divisions on key issues between the West and developing countries.

Many have tired of the rounds of conference talks and apparent lack of progress that followed the 2015 Paris Agreement to limit global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times. "Negotiations are not going fast, I'm not going to hide that," Sinkevicius said. "We are already so many years after the Paris Agreement, it's time to implement it."

'A pivotal moment'

The G7 economies will also have to contend with a key demand of many developing countries, including India, for more finance to offset the impact of global warming on sectors such as agriculture and energy. A report prepared for India's G20 presidency estimated the global cost of the energy transition at \$4 trillion a year and emphasized the importance of low-cost financing for developing countries. Some have pushed back against bracketing developing nations with coun-



CHENNAI, India: A man walks through the venue of G20 environment and climate sustainability working group meeting in Chennai on July 27, 2023. — AFP

tries such as India and China, both among the world's top five largest economies.

"When we talk about developing countries, we should not be referring to the situation in the 1990s," Sinkevicius said. "We definitely need to help the most vulnerable ones, who are already heavily affected." India's environment and climate change

minister Bhupender Yadav said Thursday the world was facing "critical challenges". "We find ourselves at a pivotal moment—a moment that holds potential to ignite action and introduce sustainable solutions that will safeguard the well-being of our planet and future generations," Yadav said in Chennai. — AFP

Putin promises free grain at Africa summit

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday offered free grain to six poor African countries as he launched a summit with leaders from the continent days after withdrawing from the Ukraine grain export deal.

The two-day summit in Putin's native Saint Petersburg is being scrutinized as a test of his support in Africa, where he retains support despite international isolation sparked by his military intervention in Ukraine last year.

Russia last week refused to extend a deal under which Ukrainian grain exports passed through the Black Sea to reach global markets, including Africa, easing pressure on food prices. In a keynote address at the summit, Putin promised to send grain to six African countries.

"In the coming months we will be able to ensure free supplies of 25,000 to 50,000 tons of grain to Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Mali, Somalia, Central African Republic and Eritrea," Putin said.

Over a year, the grain deal allowed around 33 million tons of grain to leave Ukrainian ports, helping to stabilize global food prices and avert shortages. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken pressed African leaders attending the summit to demand answers about the grain disruptions that have propelled poorer nations towards crisis.

"They know exactly who's to blame for this current situation," Blinken said of the leaders. "My expectation would be that Russia will hear this clearly

from our African partners," he said Thursday during a visit to New Zealand. Seventeen African leaders including South African President Cyril Ramaphosa are expected at the Russia-Africa summit taking place on Thursday and Friday.

The Kremlin has accused Western countries of trying to prevent African states from participating in the summit. The summit is the second of its kind after an inaugural one held in 2019 in Sochi, southern Russia.

'Find common ground'

On Friday, Putin is set to discuss Ukraine during a working lunch with a group of African heads of state, according to the Kremlin. The situation in Niger, where President Mohamed Bazoum has been detained by soldiers following a coup bid, is "actively" discussed on the sidelines of the summit, the Kremlin spokesman said.

"It will likely be discussed in some way during the central events of the summit that will take place tomorrow. And today too," Dmitry Peskov added. The summit will be an opportunity to exchange views on key issues, according to Vsevolod Sviridov of the Centre for African Studies at HSE University.

Since the coronavirus pandemic and the launch of the military offensive in Ukraine, "the framework in which Russia and Africa interact has seriously changed", Sviridov told AFP.

"It is necessary to find common ground, to explain to each other positions on topical issues, for example, the grain deal," he added. Putin has already held talks Wednesday with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, praising their joint energy projects.

Representatives of African states continued to arrive in the former imperial capital ahead of the summit, including delegations from Mozambique and Libya, Russian state news agency TASS said Thurs-



TRIPOLI, Libya: People shop at a bakery in Libya's capital Tripoli on July 22, 2023. Russia issued a veiled warning over the future of grain exports via the Black Sea after refusing to extend a key agreement allowing safe passage for cargo ships from Ukrainian ports. — AFP

day. Since the start of the Ukraine offensive, Russia has sought to strengthen diplomatic and security ties with Africa.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has been on two tours of the continent so far this year, trying to win over leaders to Moscow's side by emphasizing Russia's stand against Western "imperialism".

Russia's Wagner mercenary group has been a major player in the security sphere in Africa but its failed mutiny against Russia's military leadership last month has cast doubt on the future of the group's operations on the continent. The summit in Saint Petersburg comes a month ahead of a summit of leaders of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) due to take place in Johannesburg. South Africa has said that Putin, who is the subject of an international arrest warrant for his actions in Ukraine, will not be attending in person. — AFP

Turkish central bank doubles inflation forecast

ISTANBUL: Turkey's central bank more than doubled its year-end inflation forecast to 58 percent on Thursday as its new Wall Street-trained governor vowed to keep raising interest rates after years of controversial policies. Former Goldman Sachs and First Republic Bank executive Hafize Gaye Erkan announced the revised projections in her first press conference since her appointment last month.

The forecast, up from 22.3 percent prior to Erkan taking the post, follows years of doubts from independent economists about the official rate. Since Erkan took her post, the central bank has increased interest rates twice as it pivots away from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's unorthodox policy of cutting borrowing costs to fight inflation. She indicated on Thursday that more hikes were coming. "We will gradually strengthen the monetary tightening as needed until a significant improvement in inflation is achieved," Erkan told journalists.

She said inflation would be on an upward trend "temporarily" due to the exchange rate and fiscal measures. Erkan

added that the bank's main goal was price stability and she hoped that inflation would be on a downward trend with the start of monetary tightening.

The bank nearly doubled its rate last month from 8.5 percent to 15 percent but its following hike was smaller, raising it 17.5 percent. While markets have been clamoring for rate increases, the moves disappointed as analysts said they were not ambitious enough. The Turkish currency has lost a quarter of its value against the dollar since the end of May. On Thursday morning the lira stood at 26.7 against dollar. Erkan is the first woman to hold the job.

Her resume includes diplomas from Princeton and Harvard, a top job at Wall Street titan Goldman Sachs and the role of co-CEO of California-based First Republic Bank. Erdogan also named former Merrill Lynch economist Mehmet Simsek as finance minister. Both have promoted conventional policies that include interest rate hikes to combat inflation—the opposite of the approach long backed by Erdogan, who has a history of sacking the bank's governors.



ANKARA, Turkey: Turkish Central Bank Governor Hafize Gaye Erkan addresses a presentation and answers questions during an information meeting organized to introduce the Inflation Report 2023 in Ankara, on July 27, 2023. — AFP

Erkan assured that after 2025, the period of stability would begin. "We will continue to use all our tools with determination until inflation reduces to single digits," she said. BlueBay Asset Management economist Timothy Ash said on Twitter (which is being rebranded as X) that Erkan came across well in her press conference as she was "not sugar

coating the problems with inflation".

Even as inflation soared to 85.5 percent in October, Erdogan continued to declare rate increase as an enemy. But he said after winning a hard-fought election in May that he will approve his new economic team's recipe to get Turkey out of its current troubles, even if he still did not back higher rates. — AFP

Fed lifts rates to highest since 2001 to curb inflation

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve raised its benchmark lending rate on Wednesday to the highest level since 2001 to tackle above-target inflation, and signaled it could hike again later this year amid improving economic prospects. "Policy has not been restrictive enough for long enough to have its full desired effects," Fed Chair Jerome Powell told reporters after the decision to lift interest rates by a quarter percentage-point was announced. "So we intend, again, to keep policy restrictive until we're confident that inflation is coming down sustainably toward our two

percent target—and we're prepared to further tighten if that is appropriate," he added. The increase, after a brief pause in June, brings the Fed's key lending rate to a range between 5.25 percent and 5.5 percent. In a statement, the US central bank said it will "continue to assess additional information and its implications for monetary policy," looking at a range of data points "in determining the extent of additional policy firming." This indicates that officials see the possibility of more monetary tightening ahead. "We're going to be going meeting by meeting," Powell said.

'Long way to go'

At the previous meeting of the rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) in June, the median forecast was for two additional rate hikes this year. The latest quarter percentage-point rise, which was in line with analysts' expectations, is the Fed's 11th since it began an aggressive campaign of monetary tightening in March 2022 in response to rising

prices. Although inflation has continued to fall since the decision in June to pause rate hikes, it remains above target—suggesting more policy action may be needed. "Inflation has moderated somewhat since the middle of last year," Powell said on Wednesday, adding that the "process of getting inflation back down to two percent has a long way to go."

Meanwhile, unemployment has remained close to historic lows and economic growth for the first quarter was revised up sharply on resilient consumer spending data. "The Fed will stand its ground and hold rates high well into 2024, barring a more pronounced slowdown in the economy and rise in unemployment," KPMG US's chief economist Diane Swonk wrote in a note published shortly after the Fed decision on Wednesday. "The goal is to defeat, not just cool, inflation," she said, adding that KPMG expects another rate hike in November, "given the time needed to assess how rapidly the economy is actually cooling and the risk of noise due to strikes." — AFP

Why Musk's 'X' will struggle to become a Chinese-style app

PARIS: Elon Musk is rebranding his Twitter platform as "X" and wants to create a super-app where users will do all their finances as well as their socializing.

His inspiration is China's WeChat, which dominates the Chinese internet with chat, payments, games and a host of other functions in its walled garden. Musk has hinted that this kind of "everything app" is his goal for the X platform but experts reckon he will struggle.

What is WeChat?

The app was launched by China's big tech behemoth Tencent in 2011 to replace an earlier desktop chat program called QQ. It is used by almost everyone in China and weaves together messaging, voice and video calling, social media, mobile payment, games, news, online booking and other services. It passed the one-billion-account mark in 2018, with most of its users based in mainland China.

Is it anything like Twitter/X?

No. Twitter, or X, is much smaller and more limited in its functions. China has its own Twitter equivalent, called Sina Weibo. "Sina Weibo is also one of the largest social networks in China, but it serves a very different function than WeChat," said Kendra Schaefer, head of tech policy research at analysis firm Trivium China. "It is not as critical to daily life, people don't pay using that platform. They use it primarily just for browsing threads."

How did WeChat get so dominant?

Back in the 2000s, before the age of the smartphone, China's internet sector was a place of fevered experimentation with very little regulation. Kai von Carnap from Merics, a German think-tank specializing in China, said the internet sector "had an absolute Wild West free market economy".

"Absolutely no labor protections or data protections or competition regulations," the analyst said.

Tencent was among those experimenting and succeeding where thousands of others failed. Crucially Tencent was able to bolt a payments system onto QQ that it ultimately carried on building for WeChat—an innovation observers say is vital for a super-app. Musk has talked repeatedly about adding payments functions to Twitter and even suggested it could "become half of the global financial system".

Is Musk likely to succeed?

Tencent operated in a very different climate when it was forging its early success. Many millions were without bank accounts in China and bank cards were rare, but the people were quick to adopt mobile phones. "And then those phones quickly became their wallet," Schaefer said.

There are not so many "unbanked" in the United States today and credit cards are accepted everywhere—leading Schaefer and others to wonder why anyone would need to use Musk's app to pay for something. Regulators in Europe and the United States appear to be getting less tolerant of tech companies with ambitions across sectors. Regulatory concerns ultimately torpedoed a cryptocurrency project from Facebook. — AFP



PARIS: This picture shows the new Twitter logo rebranded as X, reflected in smartphone screens, in Paris on July 24, 2023. — AFP

Oil, gas majors post sliding profits on weaker prices

Fears of falling demand send crude prices crashing as global economy slows

LONDON: Shell joined other energy majors Thursday in posting sliding profits after oil and gas prices weakened from peaks reached in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Energy prices had soared a year ago following the key producer's invasion, sending global inflation to the highest levels in decades and providing record profits for oil and gas companies.

Gas and oil prices have since pulled back but remain at elevated levels, prolonging a cost-of-living crisis. British giant Shell on Thursday said its profit after tax came in at \$3.13 billion in the second quarter, down 80 percent compared with the April-June period a year earlier. "Shell delivered strong operational performance and cash flows in the second quarter, despite a lower commodity price environment," chief executive Wael Sawan said in an earnings statement.

Despite the drop in profits, caused also by lower gas sales, Shell said it would return \$3 billion to shareholders.

Sector-wide falls

Elsewhere Thursday, French group TotalEnergies said its net profit dropped

28 percent to \$4.1 billion in the second quarter from a year earlier. "In a favorable but softening oil and gas environment TotalEnergies once again delivered this quarter robust results, strong cash flow, and attractive shareholder distribution," chief executive Patrick Pouyanne said in an earnings statement. Spain's Repsol also posted a sharp drop in net profits on Thursday, a day after similar results reported by Norwegian state-owned energy company Equinor.

"The impact of the sharp falls in oil and gas prices was laid bare... and with BP results next week this is likely to be a familiar theme," noted Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK. Gas prices had soared last year after Russia cut gas shipments to Europe while oil markets were also rocked by supply concerns. But natural gas prices fell sharply as European countries found new suppliers, built up reserves and experienced a mild winter.

Oil prices have also tumbled, partly on fears of falling demand as the global economy slows, with major consumer China's post-COVID recovery stumbling. Profits remain large, however, as

oil and gas firms pivot toward cleaner energy and away from fossil fuels. Repsol's net profit slumped 44 percent in the first half on falling energy prices but also owing to investments in low-carbon projects, it said.

Greenpeace protest

Campaigners, however, accuse fossil-fuel producers of "greenwashing", or marketing operations as climate-friendly. Outside Shell's London headquarters on Thursday, Greenpeace protested against the company's big profits, "while devastating wildfires linked to climate change are causing devastation" across the globe. A British court this week dismissed a lawsuit that accused Shell's leadership of mismanaging climate risks to the oil giant.

ClientEarth, an environmental law NGO and a minor Shell shareholder, plans to appeal the ruling handed down by the High Court of England and Wales. 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. — AFP



LONDON: Greenpeace activists load into a van a spoof advertising billboard featuring the image of a Greek firefighter battling a wildfire near Athens last week with the slogan "Our profit, your loss" following a protest outside Shell's headquarters in London on July 27, 2023 ahead of the announcement of the energy company's half-year results. — AFP



NBK warns against phishing e-mails, offers protection tips

KUWAIT: In line with its active role in increasing awareness and promoting financial literacy and inclusion among all segments of society, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to support the "Let's Be Aware" banking awareness campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with local banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA). In this context, NBK launched a campaign for warning against phishing e-mails, which are sent from suspicious domains impersonating and bearing the logo of legitimate organization like banks, telecom or other big companies to trick the user into believing they are genuine.

Therefore, the bank advises customers to follow important tips when dealing with e-mails, including always making sure that the e-mail sender is from a legitimate organization, as well as checking the grammar and spelling in the e-mail, as many phishing e-mails are poorly written, and making sure to disregard those e-mails to avoid being a victim of fraud.

With the increasing fraud attempts using various schemes, NBK is keen to protect its customers and increase their awareness of how to avoid frauds by following the tips provided on all its digital channels including cautious dealing with links and not saving any confidential information such as: debit/credit card number or PIN on the mobile phone, as well as not to write down the PIN on the card or share it with any person, and the same also applies to the "OTP". The bank also advised customers to log out of the mobile banking app or website immediately after the transaction is completed.

NBK intensifies awareness campaigns by publishing educational materials and awareness content including video clips and text communications, as well as awareness tips on all its social media platforms and other digital channels, as well as reposting of CBK's communications. This aims to increase awareness among all segments of society and familiarize them with the various fraud schemes, and the precautions to avoid falling victim to these attempts.

The bank also reaffirms that it will never ask customers for personal information via e-mail, SMS or phone calls, warning them of responding to such messages representing fraud attempts to obtain their banking information to steal their money or data. NBK harnesses its huge capabilities in communicating with customers as well as all its digital channels, which are the most popular among all Kuwaiti banks, to support CBK's endeavors to protect customers and the economy.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives aiming to increase financial and banking awareness among different segments of society. As a leading financial institution in Kuwait, NBK frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as various training courses for its employees to enhance their experience in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime.

KFH underlines customers' rights and regulations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues efforts to support "Diraya" financial and banking awareness campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association for the second year in a row. The campaign aims to shed light on customers' rights, rules and regulations of dealing with banks, information safety and security against intrusion, combating fraud transactions in addition to other warnings and regulations. This campaign comes as part of the bank obligation to keep the customers informed about their rights and duties towards banking and financial transactions and their cyber security.

The campaign discusses finance types, banking cards, awareness of customers with special needs, tips on cyber security and protection of bank accounts. Also, it provides the mechanism to lodge complaints, protect customers rights and identify the banking sector duties and its role in enhancing and developing national economy. KFH's contribution in the campaign comprises the dispatch of various messages on different topics related to the main components of the campaign. These messages are sent to all types of customers to suite the culture and nature of each tier. Also, messages are sent on

continuous basis to employees who are considered as the second main component in the awareness triangle (customers – employees – public) who are either potential or targeted customers, thus aiming to achieve the targets of the campaign. The main targets of the campaign comprise awareness, identification of and warning against any possible risks of failing to follow safety and security instructions upon using modern technology means. Regulations include refraining from extending any information about accounts and personal transactions to any unknown parties or reply to messages from unknown sources as this would be a violation to data privacy and banking protection regulations.

KFH is keen on spreading financial education, saving and investment knowledge and customer's awareness of the bank's products and services. KFH appreciates the efforts extended by the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association in organizing the Be Aware "Diraya" campaign to spread awareness in society regarding banking and financial transactions and e-banking services. Technology has opened vast business opportunities. However, several risks and challenges were also detected considering the several attempts, most of which failed, to hack customers accounts and cause system damage. Accordingly, this situation has called for a comprehensive awareness plan and enhancement of the cyber security systems, anti-money laundering systems and prevention of other legally incriminated and suspicious activities.

KFH's messages highlight the clear and defined policies placed by the Central Bank of Kuwait to

supervise the lending and finance operations at banks. These policies provide that the customer shall be provided with the loan details, value and No. of instalments, settlement dates, instalment/net salary ratio and default penalties. The customer is given at least 2 days grace period to review the contract fully before signing. Once signed, a draft copy of the contract shall be given to the customer including type of loan, payment term, instalment value and profit. There are two types of loans offered to customers, consumer loan and residential loan.

According to CBK's instructions, the bank is required to provide financial advice and all information concerning the finance contract and explain all details related to the finance transaction including rate of return/finance amount, No. of instalments to be paid by customer and components of each instalment before signing the contract with the customer. Customer shall be given two days period to review the contract and read the terms and conditions carefully and be aware of his rights and obligations before signing the contract.

بيت التمويل الكويتي
Kuwait Finance House

لذكن
علي
دراية
LET'S BE AWARE



Chip shortage takes shine off Volkswagen's Q3

FRANKFURT: Volkswagen's underlying profits tumbled in the third quarter as a global chip shortage left the German auto giant unable to meet demand for its vehicles, it said on Thursday.

In the third quarter the company "lost some 600,000 vehicles that could not be delivered to customers compared to the second quarter", chief executive Herbert Diess said in a conference call. "The global semiconductor bottlenecks particularly impacted on the business performance of the Volkswagen Group in the third quarter," the carmaker said in a statement, forcing it to pause production at some of its plants due to missing components.

The shortage of semiconductors, a key component in both conventional and electric vehicles, had "intensified throughout the industry", Volkswagen complained. Operating profit before special items, VW's preferred yardstick for underlying earnings, fell 12 percent to 2.8 billion euros (\$3.2 billion) in the period from July to September. By contrast, bottom-line net profit rose by 5.6 percent to 2.9 billion euros. A year earlier, earnings had been hit by the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

Vehicle deliveries were down 24 percent in the third quarter, while demand in key market China "could also not be met", VW said.

Through the worst?

The industry was "through the worst" of the chip crisis, CEO Diess said, predicting the situation would improve in the fourth quarter, even if "constraints" would continue into 2022. Building capacity to meet higher demand for the group's vehicles would "take time", Diess said, noting that the number of semiconductors per car was increasing by seven percent a year.

Bottlenecks led to operating losses in the group's mass-market brands, including its VW range, despite "full order books", it said. The flagship brand was 180 million euros in the red, said chief financial officer Arno Antlitz, and Skoda and Seat also chalked up losses. The disappointing results showed that Germany's biggest carmaker "must now systematically drive forward the improvement in productivity in the volume sector," Diess said.

"We are determined to maintain our strong position against established and new competitors," said the CEO, who has clashed with unions over the reorganization of VW's flagship plant in Wolfsburg, Germany. Following the difficult quarter, VW downgraded its forecast for deliveries in 2021, putting them "in line" with 2020 when business was hurt by the pandemic. Revenues were, however, still on target to be "considerably higher" than in 2020, thanks to a shift towards sales of premium vehicles. Continuing on from a strong first half of the year, operating profit jumped to 14.2 billion euros in the first nine months from 2.4 billion euros a year earlier. And Diess said he was "optimistic that 2022 will be a much better year than 2021". — AFP

News in Brief

Pakistan granted \$2.4bn China loan

KARACHI: China has granted Pakistan a two-year rollover on a \$2.4 billion loan, Islamabad said Thursday, giving the debt-saddled nation breathing space in its balance-of-payments crisis. Soaring inflation, shrinking dollar reserves and crippling foreign debt led Pakistan to the brink of default before a pivotal \$3 billion IMF bailout was granted earlier this month. Securing supplemental backing from friendly nations was a key condition for the global lender granting further support to Pakistan. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said China's EXIM Bank had rolled over for two years principal amounts on twin debts of \$1.2 billion that had been due in the fiscal years 2023/24 and 2024/25. — AFP

TotalEnergies profit sinks

PARIS: French group TotalEnergies on Thursday reported a drop in net profit in the second quarter as oil and gas prices have fallen from the highs they reached following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Net profit reached \$4.1 billion between April and June, down 28 percent from the same period last year, the company said. "In a favorable but softening oil and gas environment TotalEnergies once again delivered this quarter robust results, strong cash flow, and attractive shareholder distribution," chief executive Patrick Pouyanne said in an earnings statement. British oil major Shell and Spain's Repsol also posted drops in profits on Thursday, a day after similar results reported by Norwegian state-owned energy company Equinor. — AFP

German consumer mood improves

BERLIN: German consumer confidence rose heading into August, a key survey showed Thursday, as once red-hot inflation looked to be on the way back down. Pollster GfK said its forward-looking survey of around 2,000 people rose to minus 24.4 points in August from minus 25.2 points in July. The mood among consumers hit a low of minus 42.8 points in October, as prices soared and consumers worried about the cost of heating their homes over the coming winter. Since then, the index climbed steadily until July, when it suffered a small drop. The August rebound meant there were good chances the "consumer climate will be able to resume its recovery course", said GfK expert Rolf Buerkl. The improvement was carried by rising income expectations, Buerkl said. — AFP



A specialty coffee shop employee operates a coffee roasting machine.



A specialty coffee shop employee serves filtered coffee at the shop in Sanaa.



A specialty coffee shop employee holds a cup of freshly-brewed coffee.



Yemen specialty coffee 'wave' sweeps war-hit capital



Tucked amid shell-pocked buildings and roadside tributes to fallen fighters, a less obvious byproduct of war-time is spreading across Yemen's capital: specialty coffee houses serving steaming cups of top-rated pour-over. The Arabian Peninsula's most impoverished country, locked in an eight-year conflict between Iran-backed Houthi rebels and forces supporting the internationally recognized government, has deep ties to coffee.

Legend has it that Sufi mystics on Yemen's western coast were the first people to brew coffee beans back in the 15th century. Yet Yemeni entrepreneurs have until recently focused on exporting their best product to wealthy overseas markets.



have inspired them to turn inward, giving rise to a cafe scene that today brings flashes of Brooklyn and Paris to Sanaa's war-scarred streets.

"People started to feel like Yemeni coffee was costing a lot and they lost interest in buying it," said Rashed Ahmed Shagea of Durar Coffee, recalling how the export market soured as fighting broke out in 2015. In response, he opened a cozy shop in central Sanaa where customers can sample beans from all over the country, surrounded by Yemeni art and Yemeni-made wood furniture. "We had to think of another way to support our farmers," Shagea said. "Everybody said it's impossible to work in Yemen, that people had no purchasing power... But we insisted."

'A magical drink'

In southern Sanaa's Hadda neighborhood, Hussein Ahmed made a similar gamble in 2018, opening his Mocha Hunters cafe on a street dotted with million-dollar villas. It was the culmination of

a long personal journey with coffee that began when he and his Japanese wife founded a cafe in Tokyo more than a decade ago.

After the marriage ended, Ahmed also turned his attention to exporting, but wartime hurdles and a travel ban against Yemenis introduced by former US president Donald Trump spurred him to consider opportunities in his home country. In the cafe's early days, Ahmed could sometimes count on one hand the number of customers who dropped by.

Now the patio is full most afternoons, with Yemenis and foreigners drawn to the simple menu: 750 Yemeni rials (around \$1.50) for pour-over drip and qishr, a traditional drink made from coffee husks, and 1,000 Yemeni rials (around \$2) for cold brew. "It's like a wave," Ahmed said, adding this was only natural for a country of coffee "pioneers" who transformed it "from seeds to a magical drink". The specialty offerings are a far cry from the commercial-grade coffee, often loaded with milk and sugar, that many Yemenis are used to con-

suming, Ahmed said. "This movement, it reintroduces what is good taste," he said, with a touch of the haughtiness required of any self-respecting trendsetter. "We tell customers, 'Your taste or preference doesn't matter for us. We drink what we think is good.'"

of travel, they become more emotional about their land. So they buy local products," he said. "It's a global movement, specialty coffee, but in Yemen it's more emotional."

Back home, meanwhile, entrepreneurs are bullish on local con-



Coffee shop employees serve filtered coffee.

'Angels singing' in a cup

Both Durar and Mocha Hunters still depend heavily on their export business, which became easier after a truce was announced in April last year. Yemeni coffee is world-renowned: James Freeman, founder of Blue Bottle Coffee, once said of Alkhanjali's Port of Mokha product that "this is what angels singing tastes like".

Sales abroad have been boosted further by Yemeni diaspora communities wracked with nostalgia for their homeland but reluctant to return because of the fighting, Ahmed said. "I think our expats, our people who live abroad, because of the hardness

sumption, especially if a durable ceasefire were to take hold and improve the economy. More than two-thirds of the population currently depend on aid to survive. "This place will grow in the future to become the largest coffee centre in the Middle East," predicted Ghaleb Yahya Alharazi, manager of Haraz, a coffee house that opened last year and can accommodate 1,000 people. "We have a goal, which is a journey back to the glory, culture and authenticity of Yemeni coffee." — AFP



A specialty coffee shop employee serves filtered coffee.

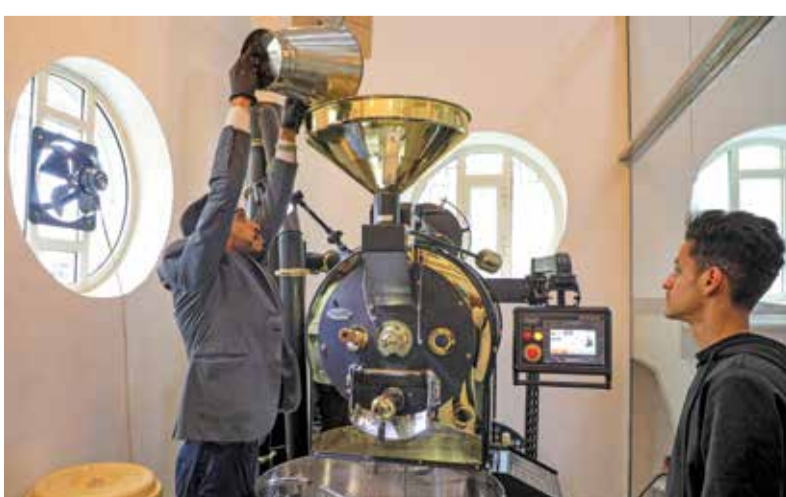


A woman sips coffee at a specialty coffee shop in Yemen's Houthi-held capital Sanaa. - AFP photos

The most famous among them is Mokhtar Al-Khanjali, whose death-defying bid to ship a container full of specialty beans during the war's early stages was chronicled in Dave Eggers' 2018 best-selling book "The Monk of Mokha". For other Yemenis, however, blocked ports and related restrictions imposed during the war



A man pours coffee grains to be weighed in a bucket on a scale, at a specialty coffee shop.



A specialty coffee shop employee pours coffee grains into a roasting machine.



A specialty coffee shop employee packages

Lifestyle



Vibrating wristbands are part of haptic suits created for the deaf by Music: Not Impossible, during an outdoor concert at Lincoln Center.



Concertgoers get fitted for haptic suits created for the deaf by Music: Not Impossible, during an outdoor concert at Lincoln Center in New York City.—AFP photos



A concertgoer wears a vibrating ankle bracelet, part of a haptic suit.



A concertgoer wears a vibrating wristband, part of a haptic suit, created for the deaf by Music: Not Impossible, during an outdoor concert.

Vibrating vests translate music for deaf concertgoers

The violins reverberate in the ribcage, while cello and bass are felt a little further down, with horns in the shoulders and, more often than not, soloists in the wrists. That's one way audio expert Patrick Hanlon programs haptic suits, designed to enable concertgoers who are deaf or hard of hearing to experience orchestral music, as initiatives to improve inclusivity at live music performances break new ground.

At a recent classical concert at Manhattan's Lincoln Center, audience members had the chance to try on the wireless vests, featuring 24 points of vibration translating the music onstage.

"It engages the body," Hanlon told AFP prior to the show, giving attendees a "3D-surround experience through vibrations." Hanlon is a co-founder of Music: Not Impossible, an arm of Not Impossible Labs, which employs tech to try to alleviate social barriers, including those around disability.

Previous methods that deaf and hard of hearing individuals would use to enjoy live music included literally putting their hands on speakers, or holding a balloon to feel vibrations in their fingertips. The aim of the vests -- along with bands at the wrists or ankles -- is to allow for a full-body experience, creating sensations that render the feelings music can



Haptic suits created for the deaf by Music: Not Impossible are readied during an outdoor concert at Lincoln Center.

evolve. "Nobody expects it to be so engaging," Hanlon said of the vests. "And when you see it in people's eyes, it's magical." Jay Zimmerman, a composer whose ability to hear was damaged due to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, says the vests are an example of new technology offering more flexibility and dynamism than had been available previously.

"My hope is down the road, is that we will be able to let deaf kids have experiences with real vibrations and real mate-

rials up close, so they start building this library of auditory memory -- even if it's not auditory through their ears, it's just different sensations," he told AFP.

"I think if we can put it all together, there's real opportunities for us."

'Immersion'

Lincoln Center, the prestigious arts complex on New York's Upper West Side, began working with Music: Not Impossible in 2021, both for orchestra shows and for their popular outdoor si-

lent disco series. Its most recent collaboration had 75 vests on offer during its outdoor concert as part of Korean Arts Week, which featured renditions of Korean folk music as well as Mozart's Concerto No. 2. Liza Fiol-Matta was among the attendees, and though she is not hard of hearing, she was excited to test the tech.

"Music is my major love, and the idea that there can be an experiential sense of the music for anybody" is exciting, she said. "But also for the deaf and hearing impaired -- that's perfect."

"I love the idea of immersion, the whole immersive experience... music happens at so many different levels."

Flavia Naslausky, the business head for Music: Not Impossible, described how during early testing, Mandy Harvey -- a singer who lost her hearing after an illness -- was able to match the sound of the music after feeling the vibration that translated it. "That's when we knew that we were right on, because if somebody that wasn't hearing, from that vibration could match that note -- we were on the right direction," Naslausky said.

Music: Not Impossible's vests are not genre-limited. Hanlon explained audio leads like him can adjust the vibration points to fit a show's vibe, from rock to disco. The vests have been used at Gre-



Concertgoers wear haptic suits created for the deaf by Music: Not Impossible, during an outdoor concert at Lincoln Center.

ta Van Fleet and Lady Gaga concerts.

Zimmerman is excited about the technology's potential -- but there's still a far way to go. "Ultimately, the big goal for me is that I will be able to feel a soft violin and it will be so gorgeous to my body and my mind that I would cry," he said. "And I could feel that exact same note come through a trombone blast and it will be so hilarious I'm going to laugh." "That is the big dream."—AFP



Concertgoers wear haptic suits created for the deaf by Music: Not Impossible, during an outdoor concert at Lincoln Center.



Technicians control haptic suits created for the deaf by Music: Not Impossible, during an outdoor concert at Lincoln Center.



Concertgoers wear haptic suits created for the deaf by Music: Not Impossible, during an outdoor concert at Lincoln Center.

Mattel reports profit dip despite 'Barbie' blockbuster glow

American toy maker Mattel on Wednesday reported a drop in profits compared to last year, due to lower sales including a decline in Barbie products in the second quarter. Profits fell 59 percent compared to this time last year, to \$27.2 million, on a 12 percent fall in revenues to \$1.1 billion. The first quarter had seen a net loss of \$106 million, and analysts had expected a loss of \$11 million this quarter.

Business was negatively hit by retailers trimming inventory levels and "some overall industry softness," said Chief Financial Officer Anthony DiSilvestro. "At this point, we believe the retail inventory correction is mostly behind us, and we look forward to meeting consumer demand for our product as we enter the second half of the year and all-important holiday season," DiSilvestro said.

Mattel's toy categories were mixed, with "Hot Wheels" and the overall vehicles category scoring increased gross

billings compared with last year, while Fisher Price and the action figures/building sets/games categories fell. Barbie had a six percent drop in worldwide gross billings to \$282.7 million.

A coming 'Barbie' bump?

The star-studded "Barbie" film was released after the end of the second quarter, and the iconic doll is expected to be a cash-cow for Mattel in the coming period. The movie, from director Greta Gerwig and starring Margot Robbie, raked in a stunning \$155 million in its opening weekend in North America. Mattel Chief Executive Ynon Kreiz said that the toymaker had entered into 165 product partnerships tied to the film.

"We launched a wide range of 'Barbie' movie-related toys and products," Kreiz said. "Releases to date have sold out across major distribution channels and we will be expanding the range in the second half." "The Barbie movie is a showcase for the cultural resonance of our IP (intellectual property), our ability to attract and collaborate with top creative talent and the capabilities of our franchise management organization," Kreiz added. "This also speaks to the potential of Mattel Films and the significant progress of our strategy to capture the full value of our IP." Shares of Mattel edged up 0.1 percent, to \$21.34, in after-hours trading.—AFP



'Iconoclast': Remembrances pour in for Sinead O'Connor

Tributes streamed in Thursday from political leaders to pop stars for singer Sinead O'Connor, who was remembered for her powerful voice and her willingness to court controversy. The Irish star was pronounced dead Wednesday at a residence in the British capital after officers responded to reports of an "unresponsive woman", London's Metropolitan Police confirmed Thursday. The force—which did not name O'Connor, in line with UK policing protocols—said it was not treating the 56-year-old's death as suspicious. A coroner will eventually rule on the cause of death.

Political leaders and musicians like Bryan Adams and Cat Stevens have been honoring O'Connor since news of her passing emerged late Wednesday. She shot to worldwide fame in the 1990s, best known for her cover of Prince's "Nothing Compares 2 U".

Ireland's President Michael Higgins said the country had lost "one of our greatest and most gifted composers, songwriters and performers of recent decades". He praised O'Connor's "fearless commitment to the important issues which she brought to public attention, no matter how uncomfortable those truths may have been".

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said O'Connor's "music was loved around the world and her talent was unmatched and beyond compare". Born in County Dublin, the Grammy-winner made 10 albums in her career, from "I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got" to 2014's "I'm not Bossy, I'm the Boss".

Outspoken

British pop singer Alison Moyet said O'Connor had a voice that "cracked

stone." "As beautiful as any girl around & never traded on that card. I Loved that about her. Iconoclast," she added. Instantly recognizable with her trademark shaved head, O'Connor courted controversy throughout her decades-spanning career, speaking out frequently against the Catholic Church.



Irish pop singer Sinead O'Connor performs during the 37th International Celtic Festival in Lorient, western France on August 5, 2007.—AFP

Starting out busking on the streets of the Irish capital and performing in pubs, she recorded her first album "The Lion and the Cobra"—a punk cult classic released in 1987 -- in London. The artist said she had been abused by her mother as a child and in 1992 protested the abuse of children by the Catholic Church, tearing up a picture of Pope John Paul II while performing on US television program "Saturday Night Live".

In recent years O'Connor had melded her outspoken political views with spiritualism and was ordained as a priest amid controversy in 1999. She later converted to Islam, changing her name to Shuhada' Sadaqat in 2018. Singer Cat Stevens, who also converted to Islam, said "she was a tender soul", while writer Bonnie Greer de-

scribed her voice as "Ireland right down to the ground".

'Cultural impact'

The array of people paying condolences ranged from American rapper and actor Ice T to Irish mixed martial arts superstar Conor McGregor. "The world has lost an artist with the voice of an Angel," the fighter posted on Twitter, which is being rebranded as "X". Canadian singer Bryan Adams wrote on the platform: "RIP Sinead O'Connor, I loved working with you making photos, doing gigs in Ireland together and chats."

Newspapers in Ireland and neighboring Britain splashed tributes to the singer-songwriter on their front pages Thursday. "Nothing compared to you, Sinead", the Irish Daily Mirror headlined, while the Irish Examiner called her "a child of Ireland... our beloved friend". Colm O'Gorman, executive director of Amnesty International Ireland, praised her wider impact on society.

"It is hard to think of an artist who has had the social and cultural impact of Sinead," he said. "What a loss." O'Connor had also spoken publicly about her mental health struggles, telling Oprah Winfrey in 2007 that she struggled with thoughts of suicide and had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

More recently she had shunned the limelight, in particular following the death of her son Shane from suicide last year at the age of 17. O'Connor is survived by three children and had reportedly been dividing her time between Ireland and Britain prior to her death.—AFP

Lifestyle



Palestinian Khader Salameh, the librarian of the Khalidi library, shows a gilded copy of the Quran, Islam's holy book dating back to the 16 century, at their premises in the old city of Jerusalem.

Dane back home after 'visiting every nation in the world'

A Danish man who claimed to be the first to visit every country in the world in a single trip without flying landed home Wednesday after 10 years away. Torbjorn Pedersen stepped off a Maersk container ship in the Danish port city of Aarhus, after visiting his 203rd country and final country—the Maldives—in late May. "I've been dreaming about coming back home and having it over with and done. So that's today. At the same time, I'm anxious about the future," Pedersen told AFP, describing the return as bittersweet.

"A lot of things are up in the air and in the unknown, mixed emotions," he said while listing concerns about restarting his career and trying to adjust to everyday life. Known as "Thor," he has travelled by train, bus, boat or even on foot on the voyage he set off on October 10, 2013.

The 44-year-old—who previously had a career within the shipping sector—is the first to make the feat. Leaving Micronesia in January 2020, he continued to Hong Kong, where he found himself stuck for two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the borders were open again, he set off for the island country of Palau, then continuing the countries of Oceania and the Pacific islands.



Took longer than expected
"Three have been to every country twice. Two have been to every country without returning home in between. And now, one has done it completely without flying. What can I say? Good luck to the second," he wrote on his blog. Keen to meet new people, the former UN peacekeeper never hired a car, preferring to instead to travel on public transport. Despite the geographical distance, Thor and his partner have managed to keep their relationship alive. During the decade of travel, she travelled to visit him 27 times. On the 10th occasion, he got down on one knee and asked for her hand in marriage—but unfortunately the pandemic forced them to get married online. His wife Le Gjerum said she found his stubbornness in completing the task admirable but added she was looking forward to having a "daily life together."

The inspiration for the trip came from an article his father emailed him. He was first apprehensive but didn't want the regret of not doing it, he however conceded that he originally thought the trip would be completed in less than half the time.

"I thought it would take a maximum of four years in total, maybe three and a half if I went a little fast." Thor, who documented his journey on social media and in a blog, was also an ambassador for the Red Cross. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, Britain's Graham Hughes was the first person to circumnavigate the globe without a plane, but his journey was interspersed with two returns home, which Thor did not do.—AFP



Library restores Palestinian history one manuscript at a time

A library in Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem offers a rare glimpse into Palestinian history with its treasure trove of manuscripts dating back hundreds of years before the creation of Zionist entity. At the Khalidi Library in the walled Old City, Rami Salameh expertly inspects a damaged manuscript as part of the effort to restore and digitize historical Palestinian documents.

"The manuscripts range from jurisprudence to astronomy, the Prophet's (Muhammad (PBUH)) biography and the Quran," says the Italian-trained restorer as he carefully maneuvers a dry brush over a fragile text on Arabic grammar. From his small workshop, he lets out a sigh of relief, concluding that it won't be necessary to treat the 200-year-old document for discoloration as a result of oxidation.

Working alone, Salameh has already restored 1,200 pages from over a dozen manuscripts belonging to private Palestinian libraries over the past two and a half years. The items date back as far as 300 years, to the Ottoman period. The majority of the manuscripts come from the Khalidi Li-



This picture released on May 13, 1938 shows a portrait of then-Mayor of Jerusalem Mustapha bey Khalidi.—AFP photos

Glimpse into history
Located in the Old City near one of the entrances to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, the library was founded by Palestinian judge Raghieb Al-Khalidi in 1900. From its main building, which overlooks the Western Wall—the holiest site where Jews can pray—warring sultans reportedly played a role in liberating Jerusalem from the Crusaders in the 12th and 13th centuries. The

manuscripts that talk about the cultural and social status of the people of Jerusalem, and this is an indication of the presence of Palestinians here for centuries," says librarian Khader Salameh, the restorer's father who manages the collection.

"The contents of the library negate the Zionist claim that this country was empty," he added, referring to the common refrain that the land was unpopulated prior to the creation of Zionist entity in 1948 and the expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians.

used to preserve cultural heritage in Jerusalem through their restoration and digitization, with support from local and international organizations. "We capture the documents with very high precision without exposing the paper to light, as the manuscripts are very delicate, and we want to preserve them for as long as possible," says Shaimaa Al-Budeiri, a digital archive officer.

Surrounded by hundreds of books and equipment in her office, she brushes pages clean before placing them flat to photograph and upload the images



A picture shows the Khalidi library logo in the old city of Jerusalem.



Palestinian Khader Salameh, the librarian of the Khalidi library, shows an ancient book, that had been restored by them, at their premises in the old city of Jerusalem.

Palestinian families and institutions in east Jerusalem have frequently been evicted to make way for Zionist settlements since Zionists captured and annexed the area, including the Old City, in the 1967 Six-Day War—moves regarded as illegal by the UN and the international community. Part of the library was seized by Zionist settlers to build a Jewish religious school, the librarian lamented.

The library's administration waged a long legal battle to fight the settlement, but did not succeed in preventing the seizure of part of it. Khader Salameh said the outcome could have been much worse, and the entire property taken by settlers, had it not been for the support they received. He noted that intellectuals from the Zionist entity supported the library administration and testified in court in their favor.

'Delicate' manuscripts
Ever since, the library has contin-

onto her computer. To date, Budeiri has photographed around 2.5 million pages of manuscripts, newspapers, rare books and other documents from the four private libraries in Jerusalem.

She says digitization is the way forward, as it allows researchers remote access to the library's archive. They hope to secure more funding for the restoration work to buy costly supplies and equipment, including acid-free storage boxes. They also want to update the workshop to safeguard against the humidity that threatens their work with the delicate manuscripts. Budeiri says it is her love for books that drives her passion for her work. "If I see someone holding a book in a violent way, I feel like the book is in pain," she notes. "The book gives to you, it doesn't take away from you."—AFP



Shaimaa Al-Budeiri, a digital archive officer at the Khalidi library, speaks during an interview at her office in the library in the old city of Jerusalem.

brary itself, the largest private collection of Arabic and Islamic manuscripts in the Palestinian territories. Also on its shelves are Persian, German and French books, including an impressive collection of titles by French writer Victor Hugo.

collection contains books, correspondence, Ottoman decrees and newspapers, including documents from the influential Khalidi family.

They offer a rich view of past life in the holy city, with the oldest book dating back to the 10th century. "We have



Palestinian Khader Salameh, the librarian of the Khalidi library, shows a wall displaying the history of the library at their premises in the old city of Jerusalem.



Palestinians walk past the Khalidi library in the old city of Jerusalem.



Torbjorn (Thor) Pedersen stands on the dock at the Port of Aarhus in Aarhus, Denmark and smiles as he stepped off a large Maersk container ship, after visiting his 203rd country and final country - the Maldives - in late May 2023. — AFP photos

Sports

Ukraine fencer disqualified after refusing to shake Russian hand

Kharlan lands first blow for Ukrainian athletes

MILAN: Ukraine's Olha Kharlan was disqualified for not shaking the hand of her beaten Russian opponent Anna Smirnova at the Fencing World Championships on Thursday. Four-time sabre world champion Kharlan had told AFP a fortnight ago she would not shake hands with a Russian if she fought one. She had earlier become the first athlete officially representing Ukraine to face a Russian or Belarusian opponent since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

The 32-year-old had been given the green light only at 0600GMT on Thursday morning, coming hours after the Ukraine sports ministry late Wednesday changed its previous policy of barring athletes from facing Russians or Belarusians competing as neutrals. The new policy says Ukrainians cannot face athletes who "represent the Russian Federation and Belarus". Smirnova was competing as a neutral. Ukrainian tennis players have been playing Russians and Belarusians since the invasion, but as individuals not representing their country. They too have avoided shaking hands with their opponents. "They are right not to shake hands, I cannot imagine a scenario where I would," Kharlan told AFP. "We have different fronts, we also have sport which is about the fight and the struggle."

First to compete with Russian

Meanwhile, Fencer Olha Kharlan became the first athlete representing Ukraine to compete against a Russian or Belarusian since Russia's invasion last year when she beat Anna Smirnova on Thursday at the world championships. The Ukrainian sports ministry late Wednesday changed its previous policy from barring athletes from facing Russians or Belarusians competing as neutrals. The new policy says Ukrainians are barred from facing those athletes who "represent the Russian Federation and Belarus". Smirnova was competing as a neutral.

The change of tack by the Ukrainian sports ministry dramatically reduces the chances of a boycott of the Paris Olympics next year. The statement read

they would not send national teams "to participate in international sports competitions, in which athletes representing the Russian Federation and/or the Republic of Belarus participate under their national flags, and/or use their own national symbols, and/or express their affiliation with the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus by their public actions or statements."

This relaxation of the policy permits Ukrainian athletes to get on and earn invaluable qualifying points for the Games. This opportunity was denied to Igor Reizlin, who withdrew from his fencing bout against a Russian on Wednesday, and Kharlan only got the green light to fence at 0600GMT Thursday a member of the Ukrainian delegation told AFP.

Four-time world sabre champion Kharlan outclassed Smirnova and fulfilling the promise she made to AFP in an interview a fortnight ago refused to either acknowledge her Russian opponent or shake her hand at the end of the contest. The 32-year-old - who hopes to add the elusive Olympic individual gold next year to complete the full set of titles - was cheered on by around 20 members of the Ukrainian delegation chanting 'Slava Ukraini' ('Glory to Ukraine').

'Different fronts'

Smirnova furious at the snub and her loss stood her ground and was still sitting on her chair 10 minutes after the bout. Kharlan was livid with the IOC and the International Fencing Federation (FIE) for permitting Russians and Belarusians to compete again, albeit as neutral athletes. Belarus is seen as Russia's ally in the Ukraine invasion. "How are Ukrainian athletes meant to feel when the IOC should be on our side and delivering justice but in fact they are doing things totally against us?" she told AFP in an interview earlier this month.

Kharlan had, though, expressed her doubts about Ukraine's policy of barring their athletes from events where Russians and Belarusians were competing. Ukraine's judokas had been pulled out of the world championships earlier this year due to Rus-



MILAN: Ukraine's Olga Kharlan (left) and Russia's Anna Smirnova, registered as an Individual Neutral Athlete (AIN), compete during the Sabre Women's Senior Individual qualifiers, as part of the FIE Fencing World Championships at the Fair Allianz MI.CO (Milano Convegno) in Milan, on July 27, 2023. — AFP

sians and Belarusians being present. "It is important to our nation we do not remain on the couch," she told AFP. "I am really proud of our tennis players and imagining myself in their place, playing or fencing against the people whose country is bombing and killing our compatriots."

"It must be very hard but you know you have to do it as a way of fighting, you are the fighter in your own way." Ukrainian tennis players have been playing Russians and Belarusians since the invasion in February, 2022, but as individuals not representing their country. They too have avoided shaking hands with their opponents. "They are right not to shake

hands, I cannot imagine a scenario where I would," said Kharlan. "We have different fronts, we also have sport which is about the fight and the struggle."

The IOC are yet to make a final decision over whether Russians and Belarusians will be able to compete in Paris which still leaves open the potential for a change of mind by the Ukrainians over a boycott. "We have not yet taken a decision regarding the Olympics," Vadym Gutzeit, Ukrainian Sports Minister and a former fencer himself, told Le Monde newspaper on Tuesday. "We await the final decision to see if (the Russians and Belarusians) will be given the green light to compete or not." — AFP

Spurs owner Lewis pleads 'not guilty'

NEW YORK: The British billionaire owner of Premier League side Tottenham, Joe Lewis, pleaded not guilty to insider trading charges Wednesday in a US federal court. The 86-year-old Bahamas-based Lewis earlier traveled to the United States where he surrendered to authorities in New York. Lewis is accused of furnishing employees and lovers with inside information for years in a "brazen" scheme between 2013 and 2021 that raked in millions of dollars.

The Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Damian Williams, announced on Tuesday that Lewis had been indicted along with two co-conspirators. Lewis, the principal owner of the Tavistock Group private investment firm, denied all 19 counts in the Manhattan federal court and was released on bail, the prosecutor's office confirmed to AFP.

Lewis' attorney, David Zornow, said the US government had made "an egregious error in judgment" in charging his client. "Mr Lewis has come to the US voluntarily to answer these ill-conceived charges, and we will defend him vigorously in court," he said in a statement emailed to AFP. The prosecutors allege that for years Lewis "abused his access to corporate board rooms and repeatedly provided inside information to his romantic partners, his personal assistants, his private pilots and his friends."

"Those folks then traded on that inside information and made millions of dollars in the stock market, because thanks to Lewis those bets were a sure thing," Williams said. The attorney alleges that Lewis passed on the inside information as a way of compensating employees or giving gifts to friends, describing the scheme as "classic corporate corruption." Lewis has been charged with 16 counts of securities fraud, the most serious of which carry a maximum sentence of 25 years in prison, and three conspiracy counts, which carry a maximum sentence of five years.

'False filings'

His two alleged co-conspirators, Patrick O'Connor, 66, and Bryan Waugh, 64, are two pilots employed by Lewis to fly his private aircraft. The prosecution says the pair made millions of dollars on the stock market thanks to the alleged illegal tips provided by Lewis. Stock tips provided by Lewis included confidential information about upcoming favorable test results for biochemical companies, according to prosecutors.

The 29-page indictment alleges that in 2019 Lewis lent his two associates \$500,000 each so that they could buy Mirati Therapeutics stock before the public release of the clinical results. O'Connor allegedly texted a friend to buy the stock, telling them that he thought "the Boss has inside info." Lewis is also accused of conspiring with others to hide his share ownership in Mirati through false filings and misleading statements.

Lewis is reported to be one of Britain's richest men with a fortune that Forbes puts at \$6 billion, building his reputation as a currency speculator in the 1980s and early 1990s. His holding company ENIC bought a controlling interest in Tottenham Hotspur Football Club in 2001 from then-owner Alan Sugar, another prominent British tycoon, for \$22 million. — AFP

Verstappen targets eighth win in a row

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS: Max Verstappen will seek to extend his and Red Bull's current sequence of record-breaking invincibility at this weekend's Belgian Grand Prix ahead of spectacular Dutch homecoming next month. After winning seven straight races and nine out of 11 this year, the Belgian-born defending double world champion, and runaway leader of this year's title race, could make it eight on Sunday and then a record-equaling nine at Zandvoort next month.

Two more successive wins would take him level with former Red Bull driver and four-time champion Sebastian Vettel's 2013 run of nine and extend his team's record sequence to 13 and then 14. Only five drivers have won seven races consecutively - Alberto Ascari, Michael Schumacher, Vettel, Nico Rosberg and now Verstappen - and the 25-year-old Dutchman's current form makes it seem inevitable that he will go on winning. Having won the last two Belgian races, he will be seeking a hat-trick as the majestic, fast and dangerous Spa-Francorchamps circuit, set in the Belgian Ardennes, hosts an F1 sprint race weekend for the first time.

"Spa is my favorite track, of course," said Ver-

Rising Corpez aims for second major at Evian Championship

EVIAN: What a difference a year makes. Twelve months ago, Allisen Corpez was a newcomer to the professional ranks and missed the cut at the Evian Championship. Now the American enters the fourth major of the women's season as the reigning US Women's Open Champion and relishing the prospect of a game with former US President, Barack Obama. Corpez became the newest women's major title-holder at Pebble Beach earlier this month and her first professional victory has been a life-changing experience.

"I've had time off since winning and it's been great to just let it all sink in," said the 25-year-old, who turned pro in 2021. "There have already been a lot of changes, and I'm just taking it day by day. But they're good changes." Corpez, now ranked six in the world, comes from Hawaii and went to the same school as Obama and Michelle Wie, who finished second at Evi-

Wallabies roll dice for a crunch clash

MELBOURNE: Under-pressure Wallabies coach Eddie Jones rolled the dice Thursday with a new-look "young, vibrant" side to face the All Blacks in Melbourne, while powerhouse New Zealand opted for stability in making just one injury-enforced change. Australia head into the Melbourne Cricket Ground game on Saturday, in front of an expected 80,000 fans, after consecutive Rugby Championship defeats to South Africa and Argentina.

Should the All Blacks win they will retain not only the Rugby Championship title, but also the trans-Tasman Bledisloe Cup, which Australia has not got its hands on since 2002. Former England boss Jones is without a win since taking over from Dave Rennie, and again shuffled the deck as he continues his search for his best side to field at the September-October World Cup in France. The biggest surprise among seven changes to the run-



BUDAPEST: Red Bull Racing Dutch driver Max Verstappen crosses the finish line to win the Formula One Hungarian Grand Prix at the Hungaroring race track in Mogyorod near Budapest. — AFP

stappen, echoing the thoughts of most drivers who love the sweeping fast corners of the longest circuit in use on the F1 calendar. "So, I'm looking forward to racing there and seeing the fans - it should be a fun weekend. It's our final push before the summer break." Early weather forecasts have warned of a wet weekend ahead, but that does not worry Verstappen. "That'll make it a bit more interesting and chaotic," he said, oozing the kind of confidence created by driving a car that has

turned him into a winning machine.

Not even the best efforts of his team-mate Sergio Perez have slowed Verstappen as he extended his lead in the drivers' championship to 110 following last Sunday's victory in Hungary, where Perez was third behind McLaren's Lando Norris. After a slump in form, notably in qualifying, Perez recovered at the Hungaroring and will hope to continue his good run at sprint race weekends with the revived McLaren team and Mercedes expected to be closest in pursuit. — AFP

an as a 14-year-old amateur in 2005. "I've had congratulations from both," she said. "Barack says he is looking forward to having a round with me."

American Nelly Korda, the world No 2, is aiming to continue her bounce back from injury. Last year, she suffered from a blood clot in her arm and this season has been blighted by back trouble. But she won the individual title at the Team Series event in London this month and arrived in France after a trip to see her Czech grandparents in Prague. "We go every year around this time and it's great fun," she said. "It was a good confidence boost to get the win in London and I'm looking forward to Evian. It's such a lovely place."

The new sensation in the women's game is 20-year-old American, Rose Zhang. She racked up a record 141 weeks as the world no.1 amateur and made more history by winning on her LPGA professional debut at the Mizuho Americas Open. She turned pro on May 26 and won on June 4. "The first time I played golf outside the US was as a 14-year-old at the Evian Junior Cup so this place has special memories," she said. "It has been an incredible start to my professional career. I certainly couldn't have imagined it. Everything has been happening so quickly." — AFP



Allisen Corpez of United States

Moroccan club president held in ticket scam

RABAT: The president of a Moroccan football club was taken into custody on Wednesday in connection with a ticket scandal involving the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, a judicial source told AFP. Mohamed Hidaoui, the president of Olympique Club de Safi, a first division team, is accused of "attempted fraud and selling tickets at too high a price", according to the source. Hidaoui, a member of parliament for the National Rally of Independents (RNI), the party of prime minister Aziz Akhannouch, was remanded in custody by a public prosecutor in Casablanca.

A radio sports journalist is being prosecuted for the same offences, but has been released, the judicial source added. The case caused quite a stir when - at the height of the Atlas Lions' epic journey in Qatar - many fans who had travelled to Doha found themselves deprived of free tickets promised by the Moroccan Football Federation. The tickets were sold on the black market at four or five times their face value, according to accounts gathered at the time by AFP. — AFP

Sports

Trossard at the double as Gunners down Barcelona

Arsenal beat Barca 5-3 in pre-season friendly

INGLEWOOD: Leandro Trossard bagged a second-half brace as Arsenal twice came from behind to defeat Spanish champions Barcelona 5-3 in a pre-season friendly in Los Angeles on Wednesday. Belgian international Trossard netted in the 55th and 78th minutes as the English Premier League runners-up completed an emphatic victory at the SoFi Stadium in Inglewood. The start of an entertaining encounter at the home of the NFL's Los Angeles Rams was delayed by 30 minutes after Arsenal's team bus was held up in traffic en route to the stadium.

When the game finally kicked off, Barcelona began the brighter, with Moroccan forward Abde Ezzalzouli producing a scintillating run down the left flank to set up the Catalans' opener. Ezzalzouli's cross was met by Raphinha, whose first-time shot was saved by Arsenal goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale, but only as far as Robert Lewandowski, who rammed in the finish in the seventh minute. Arsenal however were swift to respond, with England international Bukayo Saka grabbing an equalizer in the 13th minute after

a defensive lapse by Barcelona centre-half Andreas Christensen.

Saka missed the chance to fire Arsenal into the lead from the penalty spot on 22 minutes, the winger screwing his shot wide of the post after Ronald Araujo had handled in the area. Barca however regained the lead just after the half-hour mark, with Raphinha's long-range free-kick deflecting off Martin Odegaard in the Arsenal wall to deceive Ramsdale. Odegaard made amends just before half-time however, flicking on to Arsenal's new signing Kai Havertz, for the forward to jab in the finish from close range.

Arsenal dominated for long periods of the second half, with Saka missing a golden chance to put the Gunners ahead early in the second half, shooting over from five yards out with the goal begging. Arsenal's pressure finally told though with Trossard scoring in the 55th and 78th minutes to make it 4-2. Ferran Torres scored a late consolation for Barcelona in the 88th minute to give the Catalans a glimmer of hope, but Fabio Vieira made certain of victory with a long-range strike a minute before full-time. — AFP



INGLEWOOD: Oriol Romeu #18 of Barcelona clears the corner kick against William Saliba #2 Arsenal during the first half of a pre-season friendly match between Arsenal and Barcelona at SoFi Stadium on July 26, 2023. — AFP

Kuwait fall in Group A with India, Qatar

KUALA LUMPUR: The joint draw for AFC FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifiers and Asia Cup 2027 was held on Thursday at headquarters of the Asian Soccer federation in the Malaysian capital, where Kuwait came in Group A along with Qatar and India. The draw distributed 36 teams to nine groups, each comprising four teams, set to compete between November 2023 and June 2024.

The Kuwaiti team will play its first match against India on November 16. The first and second will qualify for the Asia Cup 2027 due in Saudi Arabia and finals of the World Cup 2026, scheduled in Canada, Mexico and the US. The 2026 edition of the World Cup will be an expanded 48-team affair hence forty-five AFC affiliated nations will have the chance to qualify for the tournament.

The qualification process will be played over five rounds while the first two will also double up as the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers. The 45 AFC (Asian Football Confederation) teams will be segregated into four pots and will be drawn into nine groups of four teams each. The 18 teams from pot 4 will compete in the first-round qualifiers in October, where they will face off in a two-legged tie to

PRELIMINARY ROUND 2				
GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D	GROUP E
A1 QATAR	B1 JAPAN	C1 KOREA REPUBLIC	D1 OMAN	E1 IR IRAN
A2 INDIA	B2 SYRIA	C2 CHINA PR	D2 KYRGYZ REPUBLIC	E2 UZBEKISTAN
A3 KUWAIT	B3 DPR KOREA	C3 THAILAND	D3 MALAYSIA	E3 TURKMENISTAN
A4 AFGHANISTAN/ MONGOLIA	B4 MYANMAR/ MACAU	C4 SINGAPORE/ GUAM	D4 CHINESE TAIPEI/ TIMOR-LESTE	E4 HONG KONG, CHINA/ BHUTAN
GROUP F	GROUP G	GROUP H	GROUP I	
F1 IRAQ	G1 SAUDI ARABIA	H1 UAE	I1 AUSTRALIA	
F2 VIETNAM	G2 JORDAN	H2 SAUDI ARABIA	I2 PALESTINE	
F3 PHILIPPINES	G3 TAJIKISTAN	H3 YEMEN/ SRI LANKA	I3 LEBANON	
F4 INDONESIA/ BRUNEI DS	G4 CAMBODIA/ PAKISTAN	H4 NEPAL/ LAOS	I4 MALDIVES/ BANGLADESH	

qualify for the second round.

These are the groups: Group A: Qatar, India, Kuwait, Afghanistan/Mongolia; Group B: Japan, Syria, DPR Korea, Myanmar/Macau; Group C: Korea Republic, China PR, Thailand, Singapore/Guam; Group D: Oman, Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia, Chinese Taipei/Timor-Leste; Group E: IR Iran,

Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Hong Kong/China v Bhutan; Group F: Iraq, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia v Brunei Darussalam; Group G: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Tajikistan, Cambodia/Pakistan; Group H: UAE, Bahrain, Yemen/Sri Lanka, Nepal/Laos; Group I: Australia, Palestine, Lebanon, Maldives v Bangladesh. — KUNA

On and off pitch, Messi an instant hit in Miami

FORT LAUDERDALE: Lionel Messi's impact for Inter Miami has been clear to see, with three goals and an assist in 120 minutes on the field, but his team-mates say his influence behind the scenes may be just as vital. The seven-times Ballon d'Or winner and recently crowned World Cup-winning Argentine captain, faced a number of potential pitfalls when he joined the last-placed club in Major League Soccer.

Having spent his entire career alongside world-class players at Barcelona, Messi left behind star team-mates such as Brazilian Neymar and Frenchman Kylian Mbappe at Paris Saint-Germain and walked into a locker-room full of mostly unrecognizable faces. Earning millions more than his team-mates, enjoying a lifestyle and football resume they could only dream of it was by no means sure that he would bond with the rest of the squad. Adding to the sudden change inside the team, Messi joined the club this month along with another former Barcelona star and World Cup winner, Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets.

But speak to anyone connected with Inter Miami and they quickly tell you how the pair have parked their egos and gone out of their way to fit in with their new team-mates. "To be honest, I think that boils down to their character," says American full-back DeAndre Yedlin. "They've come in and they haven't boasted or been like, oh, we're the big guys here or anything like that. They've tried to meld right into the group," said the defender, who gave up his captain's armband to Messi.

There has been no special treatment at the training ground for the pair, says Yedlin, even though they know that their every wish would surely be agreed to. "They eat the same things we eat and train the same way we train and use the same trainers that we use. There's nothing different. "So we really feel like they're a part of the group, one of us. And I think that helps us," added



Inter Miami's Argentine forward Lionel Messi

Yedlin, who played in England's Premier League with Newcastle United.

Leaving the stadium after Tuesday's 4-0 win over Atlanta, their second straight win with their new team-mates, Yedlin was sporting new headphones, in the team's pink and black colours, which he said Messi had gifted to the entire team. If there had been any concerns about an 'us and them' divide forming at the club, Yedlin says they have vanished since the pair arrived in South Florida. "Nobody really knew what to expect. But, they've been an incredibly pleasant surprise to work with and to learn from and to play with," he said.

The transformation of Miami, in two games, from a struggling side lacking confidence into a team playing with swagger and some style, isn't just down to Messi and Busquets' technical ability. The duo are clearly committed to helping the rest of the team improve. Messi has responded to any mistakes by his team-mates with suggestions and support rather than the frustrated gestures that some star players in MLS have displayed.

Dream come true

Nineteen-year-old full-back Noah Allen, who grew up just down the road from Inter's DRV PNK Stadium in Pembroke Pines, says Messi is a joy to

play with. "He really makes us all enjoy the game and he gives us extra space. So we also have more time on the ball and we have to make better decisions," he said. "We're playing with the best in the world, so we have to sharpen up as well. And he's really helping us with that," he said.

No one has benefited more from Messi's arrival than Finnish winger Robert Taylor, who has matched the Argentine with three goals in the last two games and has also reciprocated with an assist for his team-mate. "It's a dream come true to play with him," said Taylor, who struggled to get a starting place before Martino took over. Busquets draws less attention than Messi but he pulls the strings in midfield and says the pair's experience of playing under Martino in the past is helping them to guide their new team-mates in the change of style.

Knowledge transfer is clearly taking place - frequently during games. Busquets can be seen talking to team-mates and pointing out passing options that may have been missed. "I know Tata, his philosophy, what he wants and on a tactical level I think I can help all the players a lot, not just the young ones," said the Spaniard. "We are trying to improve and yes, we have that communication, so that it can be seen in the matches," he said. — AFP

World Cup mums balance parenting with ambitions

SYDNEY: Jamaican Women's World Cup player Cheyna Matthews tears up when she recalls one of her three little boys saying: "Why are you always gone so long?" But some players at the tournament in Australia and New Zealand have found a solution to suffering similar anxieties about being apart from their young children for weeks - they have brought them with them.

Midfielder Melanie Leupolz has her infant son and a nanny for the tournament, which will last one month if her Germany side fulfill expectations back home by reaching the final in Sydney on August 20. Throw in preparations in the build-up and it can be a long trip. Leupolz left the youngest member of the Germany squad with his nanny for two days at the team base north of Sydney while the team flew to Melbourne, where they opened their campaign with a 6-0 thrashing of Morocco.

"It's quite a challenge. It's draining and takes up a lot of energy," the 29-year-old Chelsea player said in an interview with broadcaster DAZN, reflecting on balancing her playing career with parenting. "I wanted to show women: Hey, you can do both. That's what drove me." In an interview broadcast this week by football's governing body FIFA, Matthews and her Jamaican team-mate Konya Plummer are seen laughing as they look at videos of their children. But there are tears, too, because they are apart. "The reason I really push to play soccer is that I want my kid to know I am strong," says Plummer, who has a baby boy.

Smiling no matter what

Several World Cup players have found the best thing is to bring their children with them. Among them are the United States striker Alex Morgan and Amel Majri of France. The 34-year-old Morgan, a two-times World Cup winner, had a daughter, Charlie, three years ago. The little girl will also be with a nanny and even though Morgan hopes to see her daughter "almost every day", she said that team rules are strict, plus there is all the flying about for matches in different cities. Asked if it was tough balancing her World Cup with being a mum, Morgan said: "It is hard because every day I miss her so much. "But when she is here I know I am playing two roles - as a mum and soccer player, so it is give and take. "It is the life of a professional athlete with families," she added.

The midfielder Majri said having small children about the team camp can help bring levity when tensions are high or heads are down. "A child is only joy and good humor within any group," the 30-year-old told AFP just ahead of the World Cup about having her one-year-old daughter Maryam with the squad. "Sometimes we are not satisfied with training and we are a little tired, and so when I find my daughter, it gives me a huge energy boost." Germany forward Laura Freigang agrees that having children around can be a welcome distraction from the pressures of World Cup football. "It's just funny when you're eating and a serious announcement is made, but then a toddler comes babbling along," she said. Leupolz also knows that, unlike fans who can be unforgiving in defeat, she will always have a friendly face to return to, no matter what the score. "Sure, it's super exhausting, but when you come home and get a smile, you know what you're doing it all for," she said. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

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

Clinics

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

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, **Qutbuddin**, holder of Indian Passport No. L4533621 having permanent address 25, Durga Colony, Neemuch Kheda, Udaipur, Pin - 313001, Rajasthan, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Qutbuddin and (surname) Rajnagar. **(C#892) 26/07/2023**

Nigeria stun Australia 3-2 in biggest shock of World Cup

Portugal defeat Vietnam 2-0, US fail to hit top gear



BRISBANE: Nigeria's goalkeeper #16 Chiamaka Nnadozie (left) makes a save during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup Group B football match between Australia and Nigeria at Brisbane Stadium on July 27, 2023. — AFP

BRISBANE: Nigeria stunned co-hosts Australia 3-2 on Thursday in the biggest shock of the Women's World Cup so far, while the United States failed to hit top gear in a stalemate with the Netherlands. Australia's damaging defeat, having surrendered a 1-0 lead, leaves their last-16 hopes in real danger with one round of games to play in Group B. Randy Waldrum's Nigeria and Canada are both on four points from two games and in pole position to make the knockout rounds.

Australia are a point behind and now must beat Olympic champions Canada on Monday otherwise they will be out of their home World Cup. It had all started so well for the co-hosts in front of an expectant crowd of nearly 50,000 in Brisbane who were there to see the Australians seal a place in the knockout stage. A concussion to Mary Fowler in training and the continuing absence of captain and talismanic striker Sam Kerr because of a calf injury left Australia badly short of attacking options.

But Emily van Emond came into the side and she

fully justified the decision of coach Tony Gustavsson by scoring the opener in the first minute of first-half injury time, rolling the ball smartly into the net. She made a beeline for Kerr on the sidelines by way of celebration. But the lead lasted just five minutes because, in the sixth minute of added time, Uchenna Kanu popped up unmarked at the far post to prod the ball home and silence the vast majority of the crowd.

Defender Osinachi Ohaile then pounced from close range with 25 minutes left to nod in from almost right on the goal line. Things got worse for the Matildas seven minutes later when they made a mess of a routine ball over the top and Barcelona's Asisat Oshoala kept her head to score from a tight angle. Alanna Kennedy made it 3-2 in the 10th minute of injury time but Nigeria held on for a famous win.

US yet to click

The United States beat the Netherlands four years ago to retain the World Cup and are now pursuing a third title in a row, something that has never been done before. But they were far from their best

in an entertaining 1-1 draw with the Dutch in front of a crowd of 27,312 in Wellington. Their bid for a place in the last 16 also goes down to their final group game, against debutants Portugal. The Netherlands took the lead in the 17th minute with a superb strike from midfielder Jill Roord.

Vlatko Andonovski's side grew into the game and the Americans struck back just after the hour with a header from skipper Lindsey Horan, moments after she had clashed with her Lyon teammate Danielle van de Donk. The Americans might have won it after that but the biggest match of the group stages ended in stalemate and neither side is yet assured of a berth in the knockout phase. The United States face Portugal on Tuesday, the same day the Netherlands play Vietnam.

US coach Andonovski described Horan's response to the altercation with Van de Donk as a turning point. "It's a really good example of the leader that she is. She gets fouled, kicked, hurt and obviously it's a very difficult moment," Andonovski said. "And instead of crying about it, she just goes and makes a statement." Portugal defeated Vietnam 2-0 in the other match in

Group E on Thursday. First-half goals by Telma Encarnacao and Kika Nazareth ended Vietnam's hopes of going any further and left the Portuguese eyeing up a huge upset when they face the holders.

'Mortal sin'

England are the headline act on Friday when they play Denmark in Sydney. Denmark coach Lars Sondergaard told his players that it would be "a mortal sin" not to relish playing the European champions. England's Lionesses failed to sparkle in beating debutants Haiti 1-0 thanks to a penalty but they are still among the favorites to win the World Cup. With the majority of the Sydney crowd also likely to be behind Sarina Wiegman's side, Sondergaard acknowledged that his team were clear underdogs against "superpower" England. But he said on the eve of the match: "There's a World Cup every four years, you don't get many of these opportunities in your career. "It would be a mortal sin not to enjoy it." Also on Friday, Argentina play South Africa and China face Haiti. — AFP

Australia breaks women's 4x200m freestyle record

FUKUOKA: Australia broke the women's 4x200m freestyle world record at swimming's world championships on Thursday, coming home in 7min, 37.50sec. The United States were second on 7:41.38, while China were third on 7:44.40. The team of Ariarne Titmus, Mollie O'Callaghan, Shayna Jack and Briana Throssell beat the record of 7:39.29 that Australia set at last year's Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

Titmus, who won the 400m freestyle individual title in a world record on the competition's opening night, said "pushing each other in training every day" was the key to their success. "We train together every day, and to come here and break a world record together is really special for us," she said. Australia's 4x100m freestyle relay team set a new world record earlier in the competition. O'Callaghan also broke the world record in the individual 200m freestyle. Australia's Kyle Chalmers and Kaylee McKeown won individual titles on Thursday.

Meanwhile, France's Leon Marchand won the

men's 200m individual medley on Thursday for his third gold medal of swimming's world championships. Marchand won in a time of 1min, 54.82sec, ahead of British pair Duncan Scott on 1:55.95 and Tom Dean on 1:56.07. "I feel amazing," Marchand said. "It's been very big for me. I'm very happy with the time and with the win today." The result gave Marchand an individual medley gold double, having won the 400m event in stunning fashion on the opening night.

He came home in 4min, 02.50sec to break American great Michael Phelps's 400 IM world record, which had stood since the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Marchand followed that up by winning the 200m butterfly on Wednesday night. "I'm very proud of it," he said. "I worked very hard for it, so I'm just enjoying it right now." He decided to drop the 200m breaststroke from his program in Fukuoka. Marchand, who is set to be one of the faces of next year's Paris Olympics, also won both the 200m and 400m IM at last year's world championships in Budapest.

In another development, Australia's Kaylee McKeown won the women's 50m backstroke title at swimming's world championships on Thursday. McKeown, who also won the 100m backstroke in Fukuoka, finished in 27.08sec to beat American Regan Smith on 27.11 and Britain's Lauren Cox on 27.20. "Fifty meters is fifty meters, there's not really much in it at all," said McKeown. She also beat Smith to win the 100 gold in Fukuoka. — AFP

Mbappe 'refuses to talk' to Al Hilal over \$333 million move

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain striker Kylian Mbappe has refused to meet officials from Al Hilal, dealing a potentially fatal blow to the Saudis' ambitious hopes of completing a world record 300-million-euro (\$333 million) swoop. The French star has refused "any discussion with the representatives of the Al Hilal club, present in Paris this Wednesday," reported L'Equipe sports daily. According to the report, a delegation from the Saudi club came to Paris to finalize the transfer of Brazilian Malcom from Zenit Saint Petersburg.

They also wanted to present their project to Mbappe while in the French capital. "This approach will not succeed," added L'Equipe because the entourage of the 24-year-old player "refused any discussions with the representatives of the Saudi club". "The captain of Les Bleus has never considered this option," the report

added. Riyadh-based Al Hilal had been given permission by PSG to open talks with Mbappe despite him never having expressed an interest in moving to the fast-growing Saudi league. Mbappe has one year left on his contract with PSG, who want him to leave now rather than for nothing next summer.

But he 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. It is widely thought that Real hoped to pick up Mbappe for free next year, attracting him with a colossal signing fee because they would not have to pay PSG anything for his services. The standoff between Mbappe and the French club reached a new peak last weekend when they dropped him from their squad to tour Japan and South Korea.

There have been suggestions that Mbappe would not be selected for an entire year if he fails to find a solution with PSG. Mbappe, the club's all-time top scorer with 212 goals in 260 appearances, remains the second most expensive player in history behind his PSG teammate Neymar. — AFP

