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Jordanian crown prince and Saudi architect tie the knot

Kuwaiti official, US First Lady, Prince and Princess of Wales attend royal wedding



AMMAN: Jordan's Crown Prince Hussein and his wife Rajwa Al Seif wave as they leave the Zahran Palace in Amman on June 1, 2023 following their royal wedding ceremony. The ceremony was held in the mid-century Zahran Palace — the site of other key royal weddings including that of King Abdullah II to Queen Rania as well as that of his father, the late King Hussein bin Talal. — AFP

AMMAN: Jordan's Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah married Saudi architect Rajwa Al Seif on Thursday in a ceremony attended by royals from across the globe. The ceremony was held in the mid-century Zahran Palace in the capital Amman — the site of other key royal weddings including that of King Abdullah II to Queen Rania as well as that of his father, the late King Hussein bin Talal.

The king's eldest son and Al Seif, both aged 28, tied the knot at a ceremony attended by their families and 140 guests, including US First Lady Jill Biden and the Prince and Princess of Wales. Other notables included the Netherlands' King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima, as well as Belgium's King Philippe and Crown Princess Elisabeth and Danish Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary.

The highly anticipated nuptials were met by celebrations across Jordan, with thousands gathering to witness the procession in Amman in streets decorated with pictures of the couple and banners. A royal red motorcade, reserved for special occasions, crossed the capital to celebrate the bride and groom. King Abdullah II, aged 61 and on the throne since 1999, has long groomed his eldest son to succeed him, bringing him along to important visits and meetings, former information minister Samih Maaytah previously told AFP.

Prince Hussein became heir to the throne in 2009 after his father removed the title from his half brother

Hamzah in 2004. Hamzah would later be placed under house arrest after being accused of attempting a royal coup in 2021 that sent shock waves through the royal establishment. In April 2022, Hamzah renounced his royal title, saying his own values no longer aligned with those of "our institutions".

Jordan enjoys relative stability compared to its Middle East neighbors but has seen protests in recent years. The Jordanian king has wide-ranging political powers in the country of 11 million people, a parliamentary monarchy, and also acts as supreme leader of the armed forces. Hussein followed in his father's footsteps by attending Britain's Sandhurst Military College and then studied history at Washington's Georgetown University. His bride was born and raised in conservative Saudi Arabia but is also Western educated, having studied architecture at Syracuse University in New York.

Meanwhile, a senior Kuwaiti official on Thursday attended wedding of the Jordanian Crown Prince Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, accompanied by his spouse, attended the wedding in his capacity as the Representative of both His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah is the head of His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan. King Abdullah II and Queen Rania received the well wishers. — Agencies

Kuwait candidates call for united fight against corruption

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Candidates contesting the June 6 parliamentary polls yesterday called for a united fight against corruption, while highlighting the need to improve the standard of living of citizens and the need to contain rising inflation and creating jobs. "We are encountering an imminent danger which is threatening our future," said candidate Mohammad Al-Fajji, a leader of Kuwaiti resistance during the Iraqi 1990-91 invasion.

"We are witnessing political chaos, thefts and corruption has spread to most corners of the state. This has become very dangerous. The issue has become a question of survival," Fajji, who is contesting polls for the first time, told an election rally. Former MP Abdullah Fahhad spoke of an impending battle against corruption. "The next fight is a battle to uproot the corruption system and all are aware it is a difficult confrontation. Kuwait will never rise without confronting the forces of corruption," said Fahhad, adding that corruption forces are well organized and will not give up easily. Candidate Khaled Al-Hajeri strongly lashed out at the government for ignoring the basic economic rights of citizens.

The candidate warned voters that if this continues "your children will not get jobs and things may get even worse". He urged citizens to turn in large numbers at the ballots to elect their best representatives to safeguard their national interests. Candidate Ahmad Al-Oteibi said that prices are ever rising and salaries

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Saudi Arabia growing cinema soft power

CANNES: Accompanying Naomi Campbell on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival last week was one of cinema's most powerful men - and he represents a country where cinemas were banned until five years ago. Mohammed Al Turki, 36, heads Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Film Foundation, his name splashed all over posters and movie credits at the world's biggest cinema gathering on the French Riviera.

The foundation, formed two years ago, holds its own annual festival and has already financed 168 movies, including eight in the official selection at Cannes this year. Among them was festival opener "Jeanne du Barry" about a French prostitute falling in love with King Lou-

is XV, played by Johnny Depp. Others seemed equally at odds with traditional Saudi values - female-focused films such as "Four Daughters" about the religious radicalization of girls, or "Goodbye Julia" about a woman and her overbearing conservative husband. "We have learned to respect other cultures," Emad Iskandar, director of the Red Sea Film Foundation, told AFP.

He said the foundation focuses on Arab and African filmmakers, though the precise definition seems flexible: the French director of "Jeanne du Barry", Maïwenn, qualified thanks to her Algerian father. "As long as we have the resources, we want to serve the region, but also take the opportunity to learn more," Iskandar added. Al Turki's foundation also sponsored a gala for women, attended by Catherine Deneuve, Katie Holmes and supermodel Campbell. "MO!! Proud of all your doing @redseafilm creating history of many 1st's and Changing the narrative," Campbell wrote of Al Turki on her Instagram. — AFP (See Page 11)



CAP D'ANTIBES: Saudi Arabian film producer Mohammed Al Turki arrives to attend the annual amfAR Cinema Against AIDS Cannes Gala on the sidelines of the 76th Cannes Film Festival. — AFP

Sudan gripped by bloody warfare

KHARTOUM: Shelling and aerial bombardments killed 18 civilians at a Khartoum market as fighting showed no signs of abating Thursday and the US warned it could act against Sudan's rival leaders. For more than six weeks, Khartoum and other parts of the country have been gripped by bloody warfare between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. Fighting continued Thursday, with witnesses reporting "heavy artillery" in the capital's north.

The army on Wednesday blasted RSF bases in Khartoum after pulling out of the talks in the Saudi city of Jeddah, accusing its rival of violating a ceasefire that was meant to allow aid deliveries. "Eighteen civilians were killed and 106 wounded" by army artillery fire and aerial bombardments Wednesday on a market in southern Khartoum, a committee of human rights lawyers said.

The toll was confirmed by a neighborhood group that organizes aid, which said the situation was "catastrophic" and appealed for help from doctors and for blood donations. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

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KHARTOUM: Bullet holes riddle the wall of a building at the Souk Sitta (Market Six) in the south of Khartoum on June 1, 2023. — AFP

Tehran 'increasing nuclear stockpile'

VIENNA: Iran has significantly increased its stockpile of enriched uranium in recent months, continuing its nuclear escalation, a confidential report by the UN nuclear watchdog on Wednesday seen by AFP said. The agency, however, noted progress in its cooperation with Iran in a separate report saying it has

decided to close the file on nuclear material at an undeclared site, an issue which has long exacerbated relations between the two parties.

The two confidential reports come days before the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is due to meet to review progress in addressing the watchdog's remaining concerns. The nuclear watchdog said in its quarterly report that Iran's estimated stockpile of enriched uranium had reached more than 23 times the limit set out in the landmark 2015 accord between Teh-

ran and world powers. As of 13 May, Iran's total enriched uranium stockpile was estimated at 4,744.5 kilograms (10,459 pounds). The limit in the 2015 deal was 202.8 kilograms. The report also said that Iran is continuing its enrichment of uranium to levels higher than the 3.67 percent limit in the deal.

Efforts to revive the Iran nuclear deal - which was left in tatters by the unilateral withdrawal of the United States in 2018 - have stalled since last summer. The stockpile of uranium enriched up to 20 percent

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Cryptocurrency adoption: Opportunities and challenges

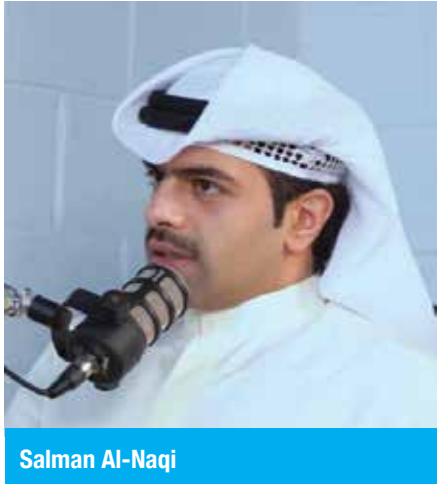
Investors should thoroughly explore market before investing: Kuwaiti economist

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Using cryptocurrencies or digital currencies is a relatively new phenomenon that has been gaining popularity among investors and users around the globe. Cryptocurrency is a type of currency that utilizes cryptography, which is a method of encoding information to secure it to facilitate financial transactions. This currency is decentralized and operates independently of banks and governments, which enables it to offer users more privacy and flexibility.

However, cryptocurrency's unstable nature presents a significant risk for investors, with fluctuating prices and frequent market corrections. This occurs because the currency is relatively new, and demand is not yet steady or predictable. Prices can drop as fast as they rise, which creates a risk for investors who may not be well prepared. Thus, cryptocurrency is undoubtedly an enticing option, but caution remains crucial when investing in this type of currency.

Investors should thoroughly explore the market and make informed decisions before investing in any cryptocurrency. Educating oneself about the technology behind cryptocurrency and understanding its risks and benefits is essential in making informed investment decisions. For a thorough and more accurate ex-



Salman Al-Naqi

amination of cryptocurrencies, Kuwait Times interviewed Kuwaiti economist Salman Al-Naqi.

Risks associated with cryptocurrencies

Naqi told Kuwait Times inflationary pressures after the massive financial stimulus packages during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the attractiveness of cryptocurrencies as alternative assets to hedge against inflation. However, the riskiness of cryptocurrencies was exposed when prices dropped remarkably, as there are significant fundamentals that drive cryptocurrencies' risk.

The current sharp decline in cryptocurrency prices is attributed to several macroeconomic factors, mainly the hawkish stance and tightening monetary policies of the US Federal Reserve and its peers among other global central banks. Furthermore, cryptocurrencies are highly sensitive assets. The recent collapse of some cryptocurrency exchange platforms has widened the associated risk of cryptocurrencies.

Cryptocurrency adoption

Naqi explained the global adoption of cryptocurrencies has been moving slowly since 2019 due to the uncertainty of funds flows and the anonymity of users. Most central banks around the globe consider this type of currency as unregulated financial property, and some of them have introduced regulations to impose taxes on these properties. Therefore, the vast majority of countries and payment gateways do not accept payments through cryptocurrencies. Nevertheless, the decentralized functions of cryptocurrencies threaten the monetary tools of central banks and compete with the services of financial firms.

Future of cryptocurrency

Moreover, Naqi shared with Kuwait Times his thoughts about the future of cryptocurrency. He said although it's



difficult to determine or predict future prices and adoption of cryptocurrencies, this type of currency sheds light on features that have been considered and exploited by financial authorities. The decentralized infrastructure provided by blockchain and distributed ledger technology introduces new developments in the context of fintech, such as digitizing trade finance instruments, increasing efficiency in funds transfer to be faster, and

expanding financial inclusion.

Various countries have shown interest in introducing their own Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), which has cryptographic functional features and is pegged to the national currency. The infrastructure of cryptocurrencies can be applied to financial services to solve legacy issues such as double spending, money laundering, fraud and inefficient due diligence processes.

India-Kuwait hold first UN/multilateral consultations

KUWAIT: UN/multilateral consultations between India and Kuwait were held in Kuwait City on June 1, 2023. Abdulaziz Saud Mohammad Al-Jarallah, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for International Organizations, led the Kuwait side, while the Indian delegation was led by Prakash Gupta, Joint Secretary UN-Political Division, along with Dr Adarsh Swaika, Ambassador of India to Kuwait. Being the first such consultations on multilateral issues between the two sides, the meeting provided an important platform to further deepen the cooperation in the United Nations and other international organizations. Both sides had a fruitful exchange of views on areas of mutual interest at multilateral fora, including cooperation in the framework of NAM and the G-77.



KUWAIT: Indian and Kuwaiti officials are seen during their first UN/Multilateral Consultations Thursday.

Kuwait NGOs to monitor National Assembly elections

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have always been playing a significant role in serving the society, addressing its problems and monitoring political events and public activities, including election observation.

The Kuwaiti cabinet has recently asked several NGOs to partake in monitoring the country's forthcoming parliamentary elections due on June 6 out of its commitment to ensure fair and transparent elections.

Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA) Chairman Adnan Al-Rashed said the decision of the Council of Ministers to ask the association to monitor the elections is an appreciated move in favor of the Kuwaiti society and local journalism in particular.

In a statement to KUNA, he said the association has been one of the most effective tools in monitoring the parliamentary elections since the mid-1960s. The cabinet's praiseworthy move reflects the state's confidence in Kuwaiti national organizations and their role.

The role of the KJA, he said, is to submit reports of any observations it makes regarding the



Adnan Al-Rashed

Mohammad Al-Otaibi

electoral process to the concerned authorities. He added that the KJA, throughout its previous participation in monitoring parliamentary elections, has always found all concerned government entities, be it the ministries or the judicial authorities, to be cooperative.

Rashed also spoke highly of the government's decision to increase the number of NGOs participating in the observation of the National Assembly (parliament) as clear evidence of the significant national role of civil society organizations.

Chairman of Kuwait's National Nazaha Society Mohammad Al-Otaibi told KUNA that NGOs' involvement in monitoring the forthcoming vote is of paramount significance at both local and international levels. This unquestionably shows further transparency and fairness and highlights Kuwait as a "state of institutions and

law", he said, adding that the decision is mainly aimed at keeping a close eye on potential electoral flaws.

He called on all eligible voters to head to the polling stations next week, given that the international community will be following the democratic race.

Also speaking to KUNA, Chairman of Kuwait Transparency Society Majid Al-Mutairi said the ultimate goal of NGOs' election observation is not only to ensure clean and fair elections, but also to assess the democratic situation and improve Kuwait's ranking in relevant international indicators. He added that his agency would conduct various reports about all the stages of the electoral process, including ballot centers, candidates' discourse and electoral atmospheres in general.

Chairman of the Kuwaiti Parliament Performance Follow-up Society Nasser Al-Shelemi said his body's role in observing the voting due on June 6 reflects the government's belief in the significance and role of national civil society organizations. The cabinet's recent decision would definitely lead to the actual application of the principles of genuine partnership, and integrity and transparency criteria to the democratic process. Minister of Social Affairs and Women and Children's Affairs Mai Al-Baghli said on Monday that the cabinet had decided to allow national NGOs to monitor the forthcoming electoral race. — KUNA

Resolving central prison issues necessary: NDHR

KUWAIT: The Chairman of the Complaints and Grievances Committee at the National Diwan for Human Rights (NDHR), Dr Abdelreha Asiri, said it is necessary to deal with some issues related to the correctional facilities and the central prison administration, which have been difficult to resolve over the years despite the negative effects on the prison administration and inmates.

Dr Asiri said, "We welcomed the news of the first Deputy Premier, Interior Minister, and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah forming an investigating committee in regards to prisons. The NDHR and the complaints committee will make periodic visits to central prison and submit reports and recommendations in regards to the conditions of prison and prisoners, as well as prison guards, doctors and civilians.

Asiri said the committee reports used to emphasize the importance of solving the overcrowding problem by quickly expanding the prison and having the public prosecution be more flexible in enforcing the electronic bracelet system to reduce the numbers as per the conditions. He also called for providing material and moral incentives for people to work at correctional facilities and giving them professional training to handle prisoners.

NDHR, said Asiri, monitors the human rights situation in the state of Kuwait and always seeks to extend a helping hand to all state institutions where required in order to improve Kuwait's record in various fields.

This statement was provided by the National Diwan for Human Rights (NDHR)



Lebanon looks to Kuwait for consumer protection guidance

BEIRUT: Dr Rola Dashti, ESCWA's executive secretary, has affirmed that Kuwait ranks among advanced states in the realm of consumers' protection. Dr Dashti, who was speaking after meeting a delegation of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Industry and Commerce, said Kuwait plays an eminent role in the issue of protecting the consumers, noting that Lebanon could learn from the Kuwaiti experience at this level.

At the Lebanese level, Beirut needs to learn how to apply ministerial decisions and activate the laws to stem upward trends of the commodities' prices. Dr Dashti said indicating that ESCWA, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, has been transferring success-

ful experience of other countries in this respect to Beirut for shoring up the local economy.

Kuwaiti assistant undersecretary for legal affairs, companies and commercial permits, Dr Mohammad Al-Jalal, told KUNA the Kuwaiti delegation's visit to Beirut was intended to help the country cope with inflation and examine the Kuwaiti experience in this respect.

The Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce had a distinguished experience during peak of the coronavirus crisis, closely observing commodities' prices in the local markets. The delegation briefed ESCWA's officials about Kuwait's successful actions to keep commodities' prices at reasonable levels.

Lebanon is aspiring to take lessons from Kuwait's successful experience in the consumer protection sector, the country's minister of economy and commerce said. Amin Salam was speaking after a meeting on Thursday with a delegation from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Industry and Commerce, chaired by the assistant undersecretary Dr Mohammad Al-Jalal, currently visiting Lebanon in response to an invitation from the Lebanese min-

istry and ESCWA, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia.

In remarks to KUNA, Salam said his department is working with ESCWA to re-regulate its administrative system, adding that the talks with the Kuwaiti delegation aimed at examining the Kuwaiti authorities' protection of the consumers. Kuwait has had a successful experience in protecting the consumer, thus Lebanon can benefit from it as a start of tackling its economic crisis, he said, affirming the dire need for checking commodities' high prices.

Al-Jalal affirmed in remarks to KUNA significance of the cooperation between the two ministries, noting that legislations in Kuwait are quite effective in keeping commodities' prices at reasonable levels. The meeting was attended by the Kuwaiti embassy first secretary, Yassin Al-Majed. It also involved the director of Kuwait's technical apparatus for overseeing commodities' prices Faisal Al-Ansari, the public relations director Khaled Al-Abdulhadi and the secretariat head of the ministry's undersecretary office, Tami Al-Graifah. — KUNA

Municipality to 'work seriously' on solving 'bachelor phenomenon'

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality is working seriously to protect Kuwait's social identity as it tries to solve the 'bachelor phenomenon' in the private and model residential areas, said Acting Director General of Kuwait Municipality Saud Al-Dabbous Thursday.

The remarks came following a meeting of the bachelors' committee, chaired by Dabbous, with the participation of government bodies. He said that the recommendations of the committee focused on maintaining the infrastructure and services, including the sewage system and electrical grid, so as to protect lives and public property.

He said that the penalties stated in the environmental law and its implementation will be activated and may reach up to KD 50,000 for violators according to Environment Protection Law 42/2014 and its amendments.

8,514 Kuwaiti students studying in UK signify deep-rooted ties

Kuwait, UK discuss bolstering ties, Ukraine conference

KUWAIT: UK Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis said that the number of Kuwaiti students sent to study in Britain is evidence of the deep-rooted cultural ties between both sides that have passed through generations. Speaking to KUNA on Thursday, Lewis said that the number of Kuwaiti students in the UK during the academic year 2022-23 was 7,014 students on scholarships and 1,500 self-funding students. The quality of studying in the UK is excellent compared to other countries due to them being prestigious and old universities, she explained. Among the privileges appreciated by Kuwaiti students in the UK are the multiple options that are permanently available to various airlines, as Kuwait Airways alone has 14 weekly flights to

Heathrow Airport, she added. She urged students to visit the UK Visa Application Center in Kuwait directly in the event of any inquiries, noting that the electronic travel permit scheduled to be implemented next February will not be applied to students who intend to study in British universities. With regard to the developments of the airport crisis in the UK and its impact on tourists in general and Kuwaitis in particular, she indicated that there is no expected strike at present, and there will be no complications for tourists, as flights will proceed as normal.

On Wednesday, Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs James Cleverly discussed via phone,

Wednesday, ways to enhance the deep historic relations on all possible domains. In a statement by the Foreign Minister, Cleverly expressed the United Kingdom's gratitude towards Kuwait's efforts to evacuate British citizens from Sudan, affirming that this gesture reflected strength of relations and strategic partnership between Kuwait and the UK. The two officials also delved into preparations for the 70th anniversary of the Kuwait Investment Office in London, established in 1953. Recent regional and international developments in Syria, Sudan, and elsewhere were discussed, in addition to the preparations for the upcoming Ukraine reconstruction conference to be hosted by the UK on June 21-22, the statement concluded. — KUNA



KUWAIT: UK Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis says the excellent quality of education in the UK is attributed to its prestigious universities. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Waleed Al-Khashti welcomes NUKS USA officials.

Zain renews partnership with NUKS USA

KUWAIT: Zain announces the renewal of its strategic partnership with the National Union of Kuwaiti Students in the United States of America (NUKS USA), continuing to support the union's long list of programs and social activities in both Kuwait and the US. The announcement comes to reinforce Zain's position as the top supporter of the biggest gathering of Kuwaiti students abroad.

Waleed Al-Khashti, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer, welcomed NUKS USA officials at the company's headquarters in Shuwaikh during an official visit to discuss future collaboration opportunities and preparations for the new academic year. The union's team also outlined their upcoming plan for special programs and activities to be held in and outside of Kuwait to serve new and current students, as well as fresh graduates.

For the past 20 years, Zain continued to be the top supporter of NUKS USA by participating in a plethora

of community programs, including the annual conference in the US, the annual orientation session in Kuwait, the local NUKS USA office to guide new students, academic sessions, cultural seminars, sports competitions, entertainment programs, workshops, and others. These programs and more witness wide positive reaction and participation from students every year.

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

NUKS USA serves nearly 14,000 Kuwaiti students studying in the United States. The union aims, through its events and programs, to connect Kuwaiti students with each other on one level, and with their nation and the local community on another.

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

communication and ways to employ them to serve society, states, and the world. Kuwait University was able to make remarkable progress in seven sustainable development goals in the Times classification of the impact of international universities in sustainable development, the statement added. This year Kuwait University maintained its performance in four goals and ranked 601-800 out of 1,591 universities and higher education institutions.

The university affirmed its commitment to promoting sustainable development and goals set by the UN, as it realizes the importance of education, scientific research and community participation in achieving positive change and contributing to achieving these global goals. It expressed its thanks to all those responsible for preparing the required data and providing it to the Times Foundation and to all the university's affiliates and members of the academic and administrative body for their efforts that contributed to achieving this progress. The university said it's looking forward to achieving more progress in the future. The Times Higher Education is one of the most important and prestigious international classifications in the field of higher education which helps the world's universities achieve excellence. — KUNA

Kuwait University makes progress in international ranking

KUWAIT: Kuwait University announced Thursday that it achieved a significant improvement in the indicators of the Times Higher Education ranking in its latest edition for the year 2023.

In a press release, the university said that it achieved this improvement through the continuous and tireless pursuit to reach the highest levels of academic and research quality. This indicator is one of the most prestigious international rankings in the field of higher education, as it evaluates the impact of universities and educational institutions on society and the surrounding environment, the statement added. It takes into consideration the 17 goals of the UN sustainable development plan. Kuwait University is the only institution in Kuwait on the list.

Indicators of the Times Higher Education are calculated through balanced comparisons of three areas, including scientific research, knowledge, and



KUWAIT: Kuwait University is the only institution in the country on the Times Higher Education ranking. — KUNA

Long-time customer talks about Volvo collection

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Fadhel A Al-Baghli is an old customer of Volvo company. He has had Volvo cars since the 80s and currently owns four vehicles made by the company. Kuwait Time and Kuwait News interviewed Baghli to get his thoughts on Volvo cars and why he's always chosen this brand.

Kuwait Times: How long have you been driving Volvo cars?

Baghli: I have been a Volvo customer since the 80s. In the year 1980, I bought my Volvo GLE 240, and in the 90s I bought Volvo GLE 940, continuing up to this day where I own a Volvo XC90, Volvo XC70, Volvo XC40 and S60.

Kuwait Times: What made you decide to purchase four Volvo cars?

Baghli: My work involves transportation. I work in the transportation of individuals, goods and materials, so I know what kind of cars provide the best service for the driver on the road.

Volvo cars have all the specifications needed by the driver on the road. By "the road", I don't just mean the street, but there are two important factors: The street which is exposed to natural elements, as well as the people who drive cars on the street.

Volvo cars provide customers with many features, such as protection from natural elements that humans are exposed to on the road, in addition to the



Fadhel Al-Baghli

individuals who drive on the road. These two factors are the most important factors that prompted me to purchase a Volvo car because it is a secure means of transportation for passengers as it can deal with such conditions.

Kuwait Times: Tell us about your experience with BNK Automotive.

Baghli: BNK chose a beautiful, high-quality and highly efficient car and succeeded in marketing it to customers. We are seeing more Volvo cars on the roads these days more than ever. I have noticed this not only in Kuwait, but also in Egypt, Dubai, Bahrain, Europe, America and even in China. As for Kuwait, BNK has succeeded in promoting the name of this brand in the right way. BNK has succeeded due to several factors, including offering reasonable prices that are not exaggerated compared to the type and quality of the car, as well as friendly maintenance service that meets customers' requirements. I was very satisfied with everything when dealing with BNK Automotive.



Fadhel Al-Baghli poses for a photo with his cars.



This photo shows the four Volvo vehicles currently owned by Fadhel Al-Baghli. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait's humanitarian contributions garner UN admiration

GENEVA: Kuwait's contributions towards humanitarian causes have received large-scale applause from top United Nations (UN) officials, the country's permanent representative to the UN Nasser Al-Hain said on Wednesday. The UN appreciates Kuwait's response to humanitarian crises, which include the plight of refugees across large parts of the globe, the Kuwaiti diplomat was told during talks with UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. Kuwait's "sage" approach in dealing with these crises makes it one of the UN's most indispensable partners, added the UN refugee chief. — KUNA



GENEVA: Kuwaiti permanent representative to the UN Ambassador Nasser Al-Hain and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi (left). — KUNA

NEWS IN BRIEF

PACI warns of fake callers
requesting personal data

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Civil Information on Thursday urged people to avoid answering phone calls made by anonymous persons pretending to be PACI personnel and requesting personal data. PACI does not request such data by phone, it said in a statement. — KUNA

Police arrest Kuwait airport
escapee: Interior ministry

KUWAIT: Criminal Investigation Department personnel arrested a fugitive who entered Kuwait illegally after escaping from security at Kuwait International Airport, the Interior Ministry announced Thursday. The ministry said on Wednesday that it launched an investigation into the incident in which a person of African nationality who's banned from entering Kuwait had managed to escape from police at the airport.

More private sector
pharmacies closed

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health has shut down and withdrawn the licenses of 21 pharmacies. This brings the total number of pharmacies shut down over the past couple of weeks to 61. The pharmacies were found in violation of law 28 for the year 1996 and its 2016 amendments. The law regulates the conditions by which a pharmacy would receive a license and stipulates that it's illegal for any pharmacy to operate without a license under the conditions set by the law.

Women empowerment
exhibition opens

KUWAIT: Social Affairs, Women and Childhood Affairs Minister Mai Al-Baghli launched an exhibition called "Dakakeen", organized by the family care directorate (Botique 33) in Salam area. The exhibition, Minister Al-Baghli said, aims at economic empowerment of the Kuwaiti women in the social aid system. The exhibit will continue until July 10 with participation from 40 Kuwaiti families.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This photo shows a pylon on the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway. The pylon is inspired by the traditional Kuwaiti sailboat and stands at approximately 151 meters, which is about 30 meters higher than the prominent Kuwait Towers. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Government agencies facilitate paperwork, job hunting for people with disabilities

74 people graduate from PADA's employment program



KUWAIT: Participants and officials pose for a photo at the final meeting for PADA's employment program. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Acting Social Affairs Undersecretary Abdelaziz Al-Mutairi issued a circular Thursday to designate employees to handle applications and process government paperwork submitted by disabled people.

According to the circular, the decision is meant to remove obstacles to process their transactions as soon as possible. Paperwork will be received at the office of the undersecretary to ensure it gets processed quickly, the circular said.

Government agencies have given special attention to services directed at disabled people this week.

On Wednesday, Director General of the Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA) Dr Bibi Al-Omairi confirmed that training people with disabilities and their qualification for the labor market are a real investment in society with the entry of various job paths. This came in Dr Al-Omairi's statement to KUNA on the sidelines of the fourth edition of the "partners to employ" program, organized by PADA in cooperation and strategic partnership with the Human Develop Institute.

This includes training that ensures people with disabilities get their full rights and know their duties. PADA and its partners in the non-for-profit, banking and industrial sectors, she said, are aware of what the labor market needs and consequently provides skill training as needed, she said.

74 to enter job market

Omairi said the authority aims to increase the employment rates for people with disabilities over the next few years in the governmental and private sectors, explaining that it seeks more cooperation with other entities with the aim of providing disabled people with more job opportunities.

In a similar statement to KUNA, Director General of the Human Develop Institute Awatif Al-Salman said the "partners to employ" program was launched years ago with the aim of measuring the integration of disabled people in the private sector.

The fourth batch of the program includes 74 graduates, 42 of which are candidates for working in the private sector and 32 in the government sector. The graduates were trained in skills for jobs in customer service, office management and information systems. She added that there are 15 job opportunities for the graduates offered in cooperation with 22 entities. Deputy Director General for National Employment Affairs at the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) Najat Al-Yousef confirmed to KUNA PAM's keenness to cooperate with all entities providing job opportunities.

The fifth edition of the program aimed at employing people with disabilities will be launched through PADA's official website Thursday. Applications will remain open until the end of July. — Agencies

DDI holds seminar on cardiometabolic disease



Researchers and healthcare professionals listen to a lecture by Professor Mark Daniel.

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI), established by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, held recently a specialized scientific seminar titled "Towards an Ecological Perspective on Cardiometabolic Disease: From Clinic to Population, and Back," in collaboration with visiting Professor Mark Daniel, a consultant epidemiologist. Professor Daniel earned his doctorate in Health Care and Epidemiology at the University of British Columbia, Canada and complet-



KUWAIT: Professor Mark Daniel (second left) is seen with Dasman Diabetes Institute officials.

ed an MRC Postdoctoral Fellowship in Epidemiology & Preventive Medicine at Monash University in Australia. Professor Daniel joined DDI this year assisting the Research Sector in epidemiological analyses of diabetes and related risk factors using large database and data linkage from the Kuwait National Population Health and the DDI's Geohealth Laboratory to better understand environmental factors shaping diabetes in Kuwait.

This scientific seminar was held at the institute and attended by many scientists, researchers and healthcare professionals.



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Famed Australian soldier loses war crimes case

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NATO debates 'security' for Ukraine

Joining NATO means Ukraine would be covered by alliance's Article 5 collective defence clause



OSLO: (L to R) Turkey's Permanent Representative to NATO Zeki Levant Gumrukcu, Britain's Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs James Cleverly, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Sweden's Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom attend an informal meeting of NATO Foreign Affairs Ministers at The Oslo City Hall in Oslo. — AFP

OSLO: NATO foreign ministers meeting in Oslo Thursday debated providing security guarantees to Ukraine after its war with Russia ends, as the alliance looks to narrow divisions over Kyiv's push to join the bloc. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February last year has galvanized the Western military alliance set up almost 75 years ago to face off against the Soviet Union.

But with just over five weeks to a summit of NATO leaders in Lithuania's capital Vilnius there are splits on key issues. Chief among them is Kyiv's push to join NATO, an organization that requires consensus to make decisions.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, backed by NATO countries in eastern Europe, is calling for a "clear message" at the July summit that Kyiv will join once the war with Russia ends.

But diplomats from NATO countries say its dominant military power, the United States, is reluctant to go further than a 2008 vow that Ukraine would one day become a member.

Joining NATO would mean Ukraine would be covered by the alliance's Article 5 collective defence clause that obliges all allies to help defend it if attacked. One option being weighed is major powers offering Ukraine bilateral security assurances in the years before it becomes a full NATO member.

"We need to ensure that history doesn't repeat itself, that this pattern of Russian aggression against Ukraine really stops," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told the meeting in Oslo. "Therefore we need to have in place frameworks to provide guarantees for Ukrainian security after the end of the war."

French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday backed "tangible and credible security guarantees" for Ukraine. But there are major questions over how any commitments to Kyiv would work. "We must give strong defence guarantees to Ukraine," said Estonia's Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna.

"This is a clear message to (President Vladimir) Putin and to Russia. They know and understand only the clear language." On a practical level, Stoltenberg is pushing for a decade-long programme worth 500 million euros (\$530 million) per year to help Ukraine's military switch to Western standards.

That would be on top of the tens of billions of dollars in arms that allies have already sent. "The most urgent and important task now is to ensure that Ukraine prevails," Stoltenberg said.

New NATO head?

Another hot potato for the Vilnius gathering is a new pledge to boost NATO's current target for each member to spend at least two percent of gross domestic product on defence. Only seven members hit that figure last year, and the allies agree on the need to make the two-percent goal "a floor, not a ceiling".

But Eastern European members, which have already boosted defence spending beyond that, are disappointed by the lack of ambition shown by some allies. On the other side, members such as Canada and Luxembourg are reticent to make any greater ambition too concrete.

One issue also being discussed by ministers on the sidelines of the meeting is finding a successor to Stoltenberg as NATO secretary general. The former Norwegian premier has held the post since 2014. Last year,

following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, his tenure was extended to September this year.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has emerged as a possible frontrunner and is heading to Washington next week for a meeting with US President Joe Biden. She has bolstered her case by promising to triple Denmark's defence budget over the next decade.

But newer NATO members from the eastern part of Europe complain it is time one of their politicians gets the job, arguing it should not be dominated by just one region. Other names being mentioned are Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, Romania's President Klaus Iohannis, and British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace.

Diplomats say that if no clear choice emerges then Stoltenberg — who says he won't put himself forward — may be asked to stay on still longer, into next year. — AFP

Firefighters in Canada battle rare blazes

OTTAWA: Firefighters on Wednesday faced a grueling uphill battle against wildfires in Canada's Nova Scotia province, including one threatening suburbs of Halifax. Federal help was coming, officials said, along with firefighters from the United States.

"We're in a crisis in the province and we want and we need and we will take all the support we can get," Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston told a news conference. "These fires are unprecedented." Already, additional kit have been shipped in from Ontario, and a dozen water bombers from neighboring regions and the Coast Guard joined efforts to douse the flames and assist with evacuations.

Houston said he has also asked for the military to help out. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called the wildfires "heartbreaking," and vowed unlimited support. As of Wednesday, 14 wildfires were burning in Nova Scotia, including three out of control. They've so far destroyed or damaged more than 200 homes and other structures including a wooden bridge, but no injuries have been reported.

One couple described to public broadcaster CBC having lost both their home and their child-care business. "That's my life," a tearful Terri Kottwitz said. Others said they saw trees on fire in their backyard as they fled with just a moment's notice.

Evacuee Janis Churchill-Moher told CBC that she didn't know if her home in the picturesque rural south of the province was still standing. "Our neighbors have working farms and they just had to pack up their kids, pack up as

many animals as fast as they could and run," she said. More than 2,000 residents of the area were ordered to evacuate earlier in the week as fires swept through the area. "It's a devastating situation for everybody," she said.

'Frustrated and frightened'
Smoke from the wildfires blew down the Atlantic coast, prompting air quality alerts for the US state of New Jersey and parts of Pennsylvania, including the Philadelphia area. David Meldrum of the Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency, pointing to record-high temperatures forecast this week, warned of "a prolonged operation" to bring under control a large fire northwest of the port city that has displaced more than 16,000 residents.

"People are understandably tired, frustrated and frightened," said Halifax Mayor Mike Savage, adding that "some have no home to return to." Houston announced a ban on all activities in Nova Scotia forests, including hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, the use of off-road vehicles and logging.

"For God's sake, stop burning."

Stop flicking cigarette butts out of the car window. Just stop it. Our resources are stretched incredibly thin right now fighting existing fires," he pleaded after several illegal burns were reported by conservation officers.

Government data shows a decline in the number of wildfires in Canada since the 1980s, likely due to improved fire prevention. But the past decade also saw more disastrous wildfires scorching a lot more land and displacing many more people - problems set to worsen with climate change.

In recent years western Canada has been hit repeatedly by extreme weather, including floods and mudslides, forest fires that destroyed an entire town, and record-high summer temperatures that killed more than 500 people in 2021.

On Tuesday, 800 residents of Fort Chipewyan in northern Alberta had to be airlifted to safety as fires beared down on the remote hamlet. Earlier this month, wildfires in Alberta burned nearly one million hectares of forests and grasslands, and at one point displaced 30,000 people. — AFP



TANTALLON: Image courtesy of the Nova Scotia Government in Canada, firefighters with Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency work to put out fires in the Tantallon area of Nova Scotia. — AFP



MANILA: Japanese coast guard Captain Toru Imai (left), commanding officer of Japanese ship Akitsushima, Philippine coast guard Captain Antonio Sontillanos (centre), commanding officer of Philippine ship Melchora Aquino, and Captain Brian Krautler (R), commanding officer of US coast guard ship Stratton, link arms during the arrival ceremony at the international port in Manila. — AFP

Philippines, US, Japan coastguards hold joint drills

MANILA: The Philippines, United States and Japan kicked off their first ever joint coastguard drills on Thursday, as the nations seek to strengthen their maritime cooperation to counter China's growing assertiveness. The week-long exercises will be held near the mouth of Manila Bay in the hotly disputed South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost entirely.

Four Philippine Coast Guard ships will be joined by a US Coast Guard cutter and a Japanese Coast Guard cruiser for manoeuvres focused on law enforcement, and search and rescue. "As a maritime nation, Japan has a stake to uphold and protect a rules-based maritime order," said Kenichi Matsuda, deputy chief of mission for Tokyo's embassy in

Manila, at the arrival ceremony for the Japanese and US vessels.

The United States has been seeking to strengthen security alliances across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond as part of efforts to deter Chinese aggression over Taiwan and the South China Sea. Manila and Washington recently agreed to restart joint maritime patrols in the contested waterway, and also struck a deal to give US troops access to another four military bases in the Philippines.

Tokyo and Manila are in preliminary discussions over a key defence pact that would allow them to deploy troops on each other's territory for training and other operations. It was the United States and Japan's proposal to hold the trilateral exercise, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Armando Balilo said this week.

The United States and Japan are key suppliers of vessels used by the Philippine coastguard and navy to patrol waters off the archipelago nation. Beijing claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, ignoring an international court ruling that its assertion has no legal basis. — AFP

International

Brazil ex-leader gets nearly 9 years in jail for corruption

Money laundering was carried out through more than 40 deposits in accounts in Collor's name

BRASILIA: Brazil's Supreme Court sentenced former president Fernando Collor de Mello to eight years and 10 months in prison for corruption on Wednesday, part of the fallout from the country's sweeping Car Wash graft investigation.

The high court had convicted Collor of taking 20 million reais (\$4 million) in bribes as a senator from 2010 to 2014 in exchange for arranging contracts for a construction company with a subsidiary of state-run oil company Petrobras.

Collor, 73, who led Brazil from 1990 to 1992, was already a tarnished figure in Brazilian politics: The country's first democratically elected president after the 1964-1985 military dictatorship, he resigned from that office to avoid impeachment, also over corruption allegations.

Earlier this month, Supreme Court's justices had found him guilty of corruption and money laundering in the Petrobras case in an eight-to-two ruling. The lead judge on the case, Edson Fachin, had recom-

ended a sentence of 33 years. The facts in the trial are "extremely serious" and "portray the nefarious misuse of public functions for personal and patrimonial promotion," Fachin said on Wednesday.

In his vote, Fachin said "the then-senator used his political-partisan influence to promote appointments to the board of directors" of Petrobras subsidiary Distribuidora "and create facilities for the establishment of contracts," according to the court's official website.

The money laundering was carried out through more than 40 deposits in accounts in Collor's name, and in 65 accounts of companies owned by him. His defense denies the accusations.

Fall from grace

Collor's political star shone bright during his triumph in the 1989 elections at just 40 years old, against Brazil's current president, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. With a nonconformist, jovial image, Col-

lor was elected as a social and political reformer who promised to crack down on absenteeism by high-salaried public officials.

A former national karate champion, he capitalized on his image as a successful athlete. But within two years in power, thousands were taking to the streets to demand his departure, and Congress opened impeachment proceedings following allegations of corruption.

The Car Wash investigation had also led to a bribery conviction against Lula, preventing him from standing in the 2018 election and sending him to jail for a year and a half. But Lula's conviction was later thrown out, paving the way for the leftist leader to run in and win last year's presidential contest.

The taskforce behind the wide-ranging investigation, which looked into cases of bribery between Petrobras and Brazil's political elite, was started in 2014, and officially disbanded in 2021. — AFP



BRASILIA: File photo shows Brazilian senator and former president (1990-1992), Fernando Collor de Mello, speaking during the impeachment vote against Brazil's suspended President Dilma Rousseff, at the Senate in Brasilia, on August 31, 2016. — AFP

Iran executions in May highest since 2015

PARIS: Iran has executed over 300 people this year, with the rate in May during the current surge in hangings the highest monthly figure in the country since 2015, a rights group said on Thursday. Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) said at least 307 people have been executed in 2023, a rise of over 75 percent compared to the same period last year.

At least 142 people were executed in May, the highest monthly figure since 2015, meaning an average of over four people were hanged every day last month in the Islamic Republic, it added. Campaigners accuse Iran of stepping up executions to strike fear into the population as the leadership moves to quell the protest movement that erupted in September.

Seven men have been hanged in cases related to the protests but activists say executions have surged in less high profile cases, particularly over drug and murder convictions, with ethnic minorities disproportionately targeted.

"The purpose of the Islamic Republic's intensification of arbitrary executions is to spread societal fear to prevent protests and prolong its rule," said IHR director Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam. "If the international community doesn't show a stronger reaction to the current wave of executions, hundreds more will fall victim to their killing machine in the coming months."

It said 59 percent of those hanged this year — 180 people — were executed for drug-related charges. Over 20 percent of those executed in May — 30 people — were from the largely Sunni Baluch minority concentrated in the southeast of the country, it added.

The protests sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini, who had been arrested for allegedly flouting Iran's dress rules for women, have abated somewhat in the last months but still continue sporadically. — AFP

Turkish support in Germany for Erdogan fuels debate

FRANKFURT: Strong backing for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan among Turks in Germany in last weekend's historic election has sparked renewed soul-searching about whether Berlin's attempts to integrate the minority are failing. There were scenes of jubilation in some German cities after Erdogan extended his two-decade rule in Sunday's runoff vote, with cars decked out with flags driving through the streets and honking.

Germany — home to the world's biggest Turkish community overseas — had about 1.5 million registered voters in the polls, and Erdogan received some 67 percent of votes cast. That is far above the 52 percent share of the vote Turkey's longest-serving leader garnered at home, where he had to overcome strong competition from secular challenger Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

That so many voters in a liberal European democracy opted for a ruler frequently accused of pursuing increasingly authoritarian policies sparked fresh debate over Berlin's integration policies. Most of those celebrating Erdogan's victory in Germany "were born here, went to school here, enjoy freedom and prosperity, but consider the 'West' the realm of evil," read a commentary piece in conservative daily the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

"It is a truism that is now being echoed from left to right — something is going wrong with integration in Germany." The results fed into a political row on a plan by the coalition government, led by the left-leaning SPD, to ease the path to gaining German citizenship and make it easier to become a dual citizen, which is almost impossible under current rules.

"After this Turkish election, the (coalition) should finally have understood: 'turbo-naturalization' and dual citizenship for all are the wrong way," Andrea Lindholz, a lawmaker from the right-wing CSU party told the Bild tabloid.

But Islam expert Ahmad Mansour argued the result should not stop the rules on dual citizenship being changed — as most of those who voted only held Turkish citizenship and were banned from having two passports.

'Emotional approach'

Erdogan's success in Germany was helped in large part by well-organized, and well-funded overseas organizations, said Gokay Sofuoglu, chairman of the Turkish Community in Germany, which advo-



ISTANBUL: Supporters of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan celebrate Erdogan's victory in Istanbul. Recep Tayyip Erdogan has cemented his status as the most important figure in modern Turkish history, after victory in the May presidential runoff. — AFP

cate for greater rights for those of Turkish origin. "Of course, they can mobilize a lot of people," he told AFP. Erdogan was presented as a strong, successful leader in a way that would appeal to Turks in Germany, many of whom are descended from so-called "guest workers" who arrived under an economic programme in the 1960s and '70s, and hailed from rural, conservative communities.

While many Turks in modern-day Germany have high levels of education, good jobs and decent incomes, critics say some can still feel disillusioned by relatively low levels of participation in politics and civil society.

In contrast to Erdogan's "emotional approach" to the Turkish community in Europe's most populous country, Germany appeared to have little to offer, said Eren Guvercin, a Turkish journalist living in the country. Those who are not seeking to develop "counter-offers" to build up "emotional access" to Turks in Germany, "should not be surprised that Erdogan fills this gap," he added.

'Conservative attitudes'

As Germany sought to get back on its feet after

World War II, hundreds of thousands of Turks came over to work in industries ranging from construction to car-making. Times were often tough for the newcomers, many of whom earned lower salaries than Germans and lived in low-quality housing. But many stayed and brought family members over, and are now an integral party of society.

Germany is home to about three million people of Turkish origin, although many hold only German citizenship, due to the current ban on dual nationalities. Despite the worries triggered by the weekend election results, some argue that the backing for Erdogan in Germany should not ring alarm bells.

Many of the best integrated Turks have in fact taken on German nationality over the years, which excluded them from the vote, observers note. The result also fits with a trend of strong support for the leader among Turks in other parts of Europe where, as in Germany, migrant communities originally came from rural communities, Yunus Ulu-soy, from the Centre for Turkish Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen, told AFP. — AFP

Kuwait candidates call for united fight...

Continued from Page 1

remain unchanged, so what should the people do? Candidate Osama Al-Zaid it is strange that "we are a wealthy country and still young graduates or-

ganize sit-ins to demand jobs. This is unacceptable". He added that the standard of living is not good and some Kuwaitis are suffering. Former MP Faisal Al-Kundari said the challenge facing Kuwaitis to preserve their rights is huge. Candidate Meteb Al-Enezi said this election is exceptional as it could take us back to square one, adding that there are some who are attempting to control the next Assembly and forces of corruption are working to discourage voters from going to the ballots.

army barracks" and has not vacated "despite the truce". Despite repeated pledges from both sides, fighting has flared this week both in greater Khartoum and in the western region of Darfur. "The army is ready to fight until victory," Burhan declared during a visit to troops in Khartoum. The RSF said they would "exercise their right to defend themselves", and accused the army of violating the truce.

Since fighting erupted on April 15, more than 1,800 people have been killed, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. The UN says 1.2 million people have been internally displaced and more than 425,000 have fled abroad. World Food Program chief Cindy McCain condemned Thursday "the looting of WFP food and assets happening right now in El Obeid", 350 kilometers southwest of Khartoum.

Medics and humanitarian agencies have reported repeated looting since the start of the conflict, which has killed 18 aid workers. "Food for 4.4 million people is at stake," McCain wrote on Twitter. More than half the population - 25 million people - are now in need of aid and protection, the UN says. Entire districts of Khartoum no longer have running water, electricity is only available for a few hours a week, and three quarters of hospitals in combat zones are not functioning. Hundreds have been killed in Darfur, on Sudan's western border with Chad, the United Nations said.

The UNHCR said Thursday more than 100,000 Sudanese refugees had fled to Chad since April, and called for emergency financial support. Darfur has never recovered from the years-long war that began in 2003 when a rebel uprising led strongman Omar Al-Bashir to unleash the Janjaweed militia, from which the RSF are descended. Experts say Burhan is facing increasing pressure from his own Islamist supporters and remnants of the Bashir regime, with whom he had built a symbiotic relationship in order to gain power. — AFP

BRICS ministers urge global 'rebalancing'

CAPE TOWN: Top diplomats from BRICS countries called for a "rebalancing" of the global order during talks in South Africa on Thursday, as the bloc seeks a larger voice in the international arena. Foreign ministers from the five-nation grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa met in Cape Town for a two-day conference overshadowed by the fallout from the war in Ukraine.

"Our gathering must send out a strong message that the world is multipolar, that it is rebalancing and that old ways cannot address new situations," India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said during opening remarks. "We are a symbol of change and must act accordingly." Russia's invasion of Ukraine has largely isolated Moscow on the international stage, pushing it to seek closer ties with China and others, including South Africa.

Pretoria, which says it wants to stay neutral over

the war but is accused by critics of tilting towards the Kremlin, has long advocated for BRICS to act as a counterbalance to a western dominated international order. "Our vision of BRICS is for our partnership to provide global leadership in a world fractured by competition, geopolitical tension, inequality, and deteriorating global security," South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor told the meeting. "Our discussions today will therefore focus on opportunities... strengthening and transforming global governance systems".

The talks precede a heads of state summit in August, which is proving problematic for host South Africa, due to the possible attendance of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Putin is the target of an International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant over accusations that Russia unlawfully deported Ukrainian children. A member of the ICC, Pretoria would be expected to make the arrest if Putin sets foot in the country. On Thursday, Pandor reiterated that Putin, like all other leaders, has been invited, adding the government was looking at its "legal options". — AFP

Tehran 'increasing nuclear stockpile'...

Continued from Page 1

is now believed to be 470.9 kilograms - up 36.2 kg since the last report in February - while the amount enriched up to 60 percent stands at 114.1 kilograms, an increase of 26.6 kg. Enrichment levels of around 90 percent are required for use in a nuclear weapon.

Meanwhile, the IAEA has been able to reinstall some monitoring equipment set up under the 2015 nuclear deal - but which was later removed by Iran - the reports said. "Iran has allowed the agency to install monitoring equipment at two declared enrichment facilities," it said. Some additional surveillance cameras were also installed at workshops in Esfahan where "centrifuge rotor tubes and bellows are manufactured".

However, the agency said it awaits Iran's engagement to address "the completion of the installation of surveillance and monitoring equipment, access to

data recordings and the gaps in the recordings." On the detection of uranium particles enriched to near bomb-grade at the Fordo plant, the IAEA said it has "no further questions on the matter" for now.

"The Agency assessed that the information provided (by Iran) was not inconsistent with Iran's explanation for the origin of these particles," the report said. In a second confidential report, the IAEA said it has decided to close the file relating to the presence of nuclear material at one undeclared site after receiving a "possible explanation" from Iran. The watchdog "has no additional questions... and the matter is no longer outstanding at this stage", the report said of the site at Marivan in Abadeh county.

The IAEA had reported the discovery of traces of radioactive material at three sites not declared by Iran, in a blow to efforts to restore the 2015 deal. The Marivan site in the southern province of Fars is the first to be addressed under a work plan agreed by Iran and the IAEA in March. The other two sites are Varamin and Turqzabad. Iran has always denied any ambition to develop a nuclear weapons capability, insisting its activities are entirely peaceful. — AFP

Sudan gripped by bloody warfare...

Continued from Page 1

warned that the United States could take action against rival Sudanese leaders after the collapse of a US- and Saudi-brokered truce. Washington is "looking at steps that we can take to make clear our views on any leaders for taking Sudan in the wrong direction," Blinken told reporters at NATO talks in Oslo.

Earlier, a US State Department spokesperson said there had been "serious violations of the ceasefire by both sides" and warned it would only be ready to mediate between the warring parties when they get "serious". In both north and south Khartoum on Wednesday, troops loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan attacked key bases of the RSF led by commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, residents told AFP.

One witness said there was "heavy artillery fire from army camps" in the city's north. Another reported "artillery blasts on the RSF camp in Al-Salha" in southern Khartoum — the largest paramilitary base and arsenal in the capital. The attacks came two days after US and Saudi mediators said the two sides had agreed to extend by five days the initial week-long humanitarian truce. Mediators admitted the truce had been "imperfectly observed", but said the extension would "permit further humanitarian efforts". The army walked out "because the rebels have never implemented a single one of the provisions of a short-term ceasefire which required their withdrawal from hospitals and residential buildings", a Sudanese government official said.

The health ministry published a list Thursday of 34 health facilities that "the rebel militia continues to use as

International

Famed Australian soldier loses war crimes defamation case

Defendants hail verdict as a major victory for media freedom in Australia

SYDNEY: One of Australia's most decorated soldiers lost a landmark defamation case Thursday after a bruising trial filled with accusations of murder, domestic violence, witness intimidation and war crimes. Ben Roberts-Smith, a former member of Australia's elite Special Air Service Regiment, sued three newspapers for 2018 reports that alleged he was involved in the murders of unarmed prisoners in Afghanistan.

Roberts-Smith denied the allegations and launched a multi-million-dollar defamation case in response. But after two years of proceedings, Justice Anthony Beskano ruled that the papers had proven the bulk of their allegations to be "substantially true" and dismissed the case against them.

The defendants hailed the verdict as a major victory for media freedom in Australia, where defamation laws are often used to muzzle the press. But journalist Nick McKenzie said it was also a victory for servicemen who testified against their former comrade and for Afghan victims.

"It's a day of justice for those brave men of the SAS who stood up and told the truth about who Ben Roberts-Smith is — a war criminal, a bully and a liar. "Australia should be proud of those men in the SAS, they are the majority in the SAS." "Today is a day of some small justice for the Afghan victims of Ben Roberts-Smith," he added.

Before the trial, Perth-born Roberts-Smith had been Australia's most famous and distinguished living soldier. He won the Victoria Cross — Australia's highest military honor — for "conspicuous gallantry" in Afghanistan while on the hunt for a senior Taliban commander. He met Queen Elizabeth II and his image hung in the hallowed halls of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. But after painstaking report-

ing, The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Canberra Times alleged that lauded public persona masked a pattern of criminal and immoral behavior.

The papers reported Roberts-Smith had kicked an unarmed Afghan civilian off a cliff and ordered subordinates to shoot him. He was also said to have taken part in the machine-gunning of a man with a prosthetic leg, later bringing the leg back to Australia and using it as a drinking vessel with comrades.

The towering veteran was also accused of domestic violence against a woman in a Canberra hotel — an allegation the justice said had not been proven. The case was one of Australia's longest-running defamation trials and local media has estimated the legal costs to be about US\$16 million, making it also one of the costliest.

Lawyers for the media defendants indicated they would now be seeking "indemnity costs against the applicant". Roberts-Smith's defence was partially bankrolled by the boss of Seven West Media, a rival to the three newspapers. Roberts-Smith was photographed holidaying in Bali ahead of the ruling and did not attend court.

Long war

Australia deployed 39,000 troops to Afghanistan over two decades as part of US and NATO-led operations against the Taliban and other militant groups. As veterans returned home, their actions have come into sharp legal focus. A 2020 military investigation found special forces personnel "unlawfully killed" 39 Afghan civilians and prisoners, revealing allegations of summary executions, body count competitions and torture by Australian forces.

It was a watershed moment for Australia, which is



SYDNEY: Journalists Chris Masters and Nick McKenzie (L) leave the Federal Court of Australia in Sydney on June 1, 2023. Ben Roberts-Smith, one of Australia's most decorated soldiers, lost a landmark defamation case against major newspapers on June 1 after a bruising trial that saw accusations of murder, domestic violence, witness intimidation and war crimes. — AFP

more secretive than many democracies and whose government has silenced whistleblowers and prosecuted journalists involved in bringing wrongdoing to light. Under growing pressure, the government appointed a special investigator to probe whether current and former soldiers should face criminal charges. That process has already resulted in one man in his 40s being charged with "one count of War

Crime — Murder", the first serving or former Australian Defence Force member to face such charges.

Local media has reported that Roberts-Smith is one of those still being investigated by the Office of the Special Investigator. The United States, Australia's top ally, had warned that a failure to prosecute human rights abuses could result in a bar on military aid to and cooperation with accused units. — AFP

'Unfortunate' that Chinese counterpart declined talks: US

TOKYO: Beijing's decision to decline a meeting between US and Chinese defence chiefs is "unfortunate", particularly given recent "provocative" Chinese behavior, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Thursday.

Washington had invited China's Minister of National Defence Li Shangfu to hold talks with Austin on the sidelines of a defence summit in Singapore this week. But Beijing opted against the meet, though it declined to officially confirm the snub, with a spokeswoman saying only "the US knows clearly why there are currently difficulties in military communication".

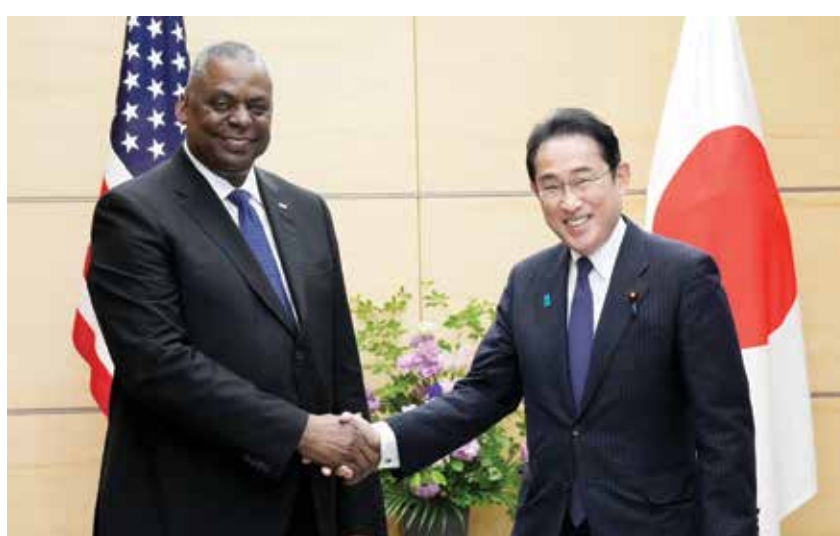
Speaking in Tokyo on a brief trip before his arrival in Singapore, Austin called Beijing's decision "unfortunate." "You've heard me talk a number of times about the importance of countries with large, with significant capa-

bilities, being able to talk to each other so you can you can manage crises and prevent things from spiraling out of control unnecessarily," Austin said.

He said recent "provocative intercepts of our aircraft and also our allies' aircraft" by China were "very concerning". "We would hope that they would alter their actions, but since they haven't yet, I'm concerned about at some point having an incident that could very, very quickly spiral out of control," he added.

The US military said Tuesday that a Chinese fighter pilot had performed an "unnecessarily aggressive maneuver" near an American surveillance aircraft operating over the South China Sea last week. Video footage released by the US military shows a Chinese fighter plane crossing in front of the American aircraft, which could be seen shaking from the resulting turbulence.

But China's military said on Wednesday that the US jet "broke into" a military training area. It accused Washington of "provocation" and said the dispatch of ships and planes to "conduct close surveillance on China seriously harms China's



TOKYO: US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin (left) and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida shake hands prior to their meeting at the prime minister's office in Tokyo on June 1, 2023. — AFP

national sovereignty and security". Austin and other US officials have been working to shore up alliances and partnerships in Asia to counter increasingly assertive moves by Beijing, but there have also been tentative signs the two sides were working

to patch their relationship. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi in Vienna this month, and President Joe Biden has said ties between Washington and Beijing should thaw "very shortly." — AFP

India minister demands return of guns

NEW DELHI: India's interior minister on Thursday demanded people in a restive northeastern state surrender guns following deadly inter-ethnic fighting during which rival forces raided police stations and seized assault rifles.

Home Minister Amit Shah, speaking to reporters on a visit to Manipur's state capital Imphal, warned of "stringent charges" for those who failed to hand in their weapons before a major police sweep begins on Friday.

Shah, a key aide of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, arrived in Manipur earlier this week to tackle the unrest and also announced a probe into the causes of the violence. Clashes erupted in May between the majority Meitei, who are mostly Hindus and live in and around Imphal, and the mainly Christian Kuki in the surrounding hills.

At least 70 people were killed and tens of thousands have fled. Thousands of troops have been deployed to restore order. The state's chief minister N. Biren Singh on Thursday also called for people to "surrender the arms and ammunition" they had "snatched from armed police". Security sources also confirmed to AFP that guns had been seized.

Last month, local media quoted Singh as saying that battles had involved rival groups using M16 and



NEW DELHI: Activists of the All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM) hold placards during a protest amid ongoing ethnic violence in India's northeastern Manipur state, in New Delhi. — AFP

AK-47 assault rifles. The far-flung states of northeast India — sandwiched between Bangladesh, China and Myanmar — have long been a tinderbox of tensions between different ethnic groups. The initial spark was Kuki anger at the prospect of the Meitei being giv-

en guaranteed quotas of government jobs and other perks in a form of affirmative action. This also stoked long-held fears among the Kuki that the Meitei might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for them and other tribal groups. — AFP

call to all parties to de-escalate tensions and to use established regional, continental, international mechanisms to resolve any disputes in the implementation of peace in eastern DRC," said a statement.

Dozens of armed groups plague the mineral-rich eastern DR Congo, a legacy of regional wars that raged in the 1990s and 2000s. One group, the M23, has seized swathes of territory in an uprising that has displaced over a million people since late 2021, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The EAC force has taken over some areas previously occupied by the M23 but has so far failed to thwart the insurgency. Kinshasa wants the force to have an "offensive" mandate to push back M23 fighters, and many residents have expressed disappointment that M23 continues to operate with impunity.

Earlier this month, southern African nations agreed to deploy their own troops to eastern DR Congo to restore peace and security. The DR Congo has repeatedly accused its neighbor Rwanda, an EAC member, of backing the rebels, a charge Kigali denies. The United States and several other Western countries, as well as independent UN experts, have also concluded that Rwanda is backing the rebels. — AFP

E African leaders extend troop in east DR Congo

NAIROBI: East Africa's leaders have agreed to extend until September the mandate of a regional military force deployed to quell violence in the strife-torn east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The seven-nation East African Community (EAC) began the deployment last November with Kenyan soldiers arriving in the volatile region, followed this year by Burundian, Ugandan and South Sudanese contingents.

Its future had been in question, with DR Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi this month accusing troops of "cohabitation" with rebels and hinting the regional force could leave by the end of June.

But at a summit in Burundi on Wednesday, the EAC agreed to keep their troops on the ground until September 8 to consolidate "gains" made. "The summit reiterated its

NZ police charge man with murders after hostel fire

WELLINGTON: New Zealand police said Thursday they had levelled five murder charges against a man suspected of igniting a deadly hostel fire in Wellington last month. The 48-year-old, already remanded in custody on two counts of arson, now also faces five murder charges, police said.

The blaze engulfed the four-storey, 92-room Loafers Lodge hostel a fortnight ago in Wellington's city centre, killing five men whom police have named. Inspector Dion Bennett, acting Wellington district commander, said the victims' families have been informed.

"Our thoughts are with them and we are continuing to ensure they are supported through this process," he added. The suspect, who cannot be named under an

interim court suppression order, appeared in court on May 19 after being charged with starting a sofa fire inside the hostel and, a few hours later, setting the building itself alight. He did not make a formal plea. Due to extensive fire damage inside the hostel, police said it took two weeks to examine the building. A dawn "karakia" — a Maori ceremony — will take place at the hostel on Friday morning for police staff involved in that operation, Bennett said.

The scale of the fire shocked the country, with Prime Minister Chris Hipkins describing it at the time as an "absolute tragedy" while promising a thorough investigation. Some survivors crawled through smoke in the dark of night to escape the fire, while others were rescued from the rooftop by firefighters.

Loafers Lodge advertised itself as a "convenient and affordable" accommodation, with laundry, kitchen facilities and a lock on each floor. It was used as a cheap home by a mix of long- and short-term residents, including some on lower incomes or those staying temporarily in New Zealand. — AFP

Senegal braces as opposition leader's rape verdict looms

DAKAR: The Senegalese capital Dakar braced for potential clashes on Thursday as a court prepared to issue a verdict in the trial of fire-brand opposition leader Ousmane Sonko on rape charges. The two-year case has deeply polarized the West African country with a reputation for tolerance and stability, igniting accusations of political meddling in the judiciary and sparking violent confrontations between Sonko's supporters and the security forces.

Sonko, the 48-year-old leader of the PASTEF-Patriots party, has leapt to national prominence on the back of attacks against President Macky Sall. Throwing down the gauntlet, he declared Tuesday that he was being "illegally held" after security forces swooped on his motorcade at the weekend, urging the public to take to the streets.

"Everyone should rise up as one," he said on social media. "Power should remain with the people." When Sonko was arrested on the charges in 2021, several days of clashes left at least 12 people dead.

Several more have died in sporadic violence this year, including a fatality that occurred at the weekend when police detained Sonko ahead of Thursday's hearing. Sall promised to stand firm in the face of potential violence while calling for a "national dialogue" to ease the tensions.

At the heart of the trial are allegations by 23-year-old beauty salon worker Adjil Sarr, who accuses Sonko of raping her and making death threats. Sonko denies any wrongdoing, saying that he went to the salon for a massage for chronic back pain and that the case against him is politically motivated.

Conviction for rape in Senegal carries a jail term of 10 to 20 years, a sentence that would bar Sonko from running in next year's presidential election. Sonko surged to national prominence in the 2019, when he came third in the presidential elections after a feisty campaign against Sall and a perceived corrupt elite.

The aftermath of a guilty verdict against Sonko remains unclear. It is not known whether Sonko would be arrested immediately if convicted, or whether he would be able to mobilize crowds to protest such a verdict.

The "dialogue" announced by Sall has driven a wedge into the opposition front, with Sonko saying he would boycott such a meeting while Khalifa Sall, another opposition candidate, has said he will attend. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, JUNE 2, 2023

US House votes to avert debt default

Biden hails 314-117 vote as a 'critical step' to protect economic recovery



WASHINGTON: US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) speaks during a news conference following Senate Republican policy luncheons at the US Capitol in Washington. Congressional leaders were racing to secure backing for a cross-party deal to raise the US debt limit and avert a first-ever default as they faced a growing backlash from conservatives ahead of a crucial Wednesday evening vote. — AFP

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers voted Wednesday to raise the national borrowing limit as a crucial first step to averting a catastrophic default, green-lighting a pact struck between Washington's warring parties after weeks of brinkmanship and fraught backroom deal-making. Hammered out between Democratic President Joe Biden and the Republicans in the House of Representatives, the measure suspends the debt ceiling through 2024, slightly cutting government spending next year.

"Passing the Fiscal Responsibility Act is a crucial first step for putting America back on track," said Speaker Kevin McCarthy, the top Republican in Congress. "It does what is responsible for our children, what is possible in divided government, and what is required by our principles and promises."

Biden hailed the 314-117 vote as a "critical step" to protecting the country's post-pandemic economic recovery that had been achieved through "bipartisan compromise." The drama capped a tense few days on Capitol Hill, with the Treasury expecting to run out of the money as soon as Monday.

The Republican majority in the House needed help from dozens of Democrats to fend off a right-wing rebellion — 71 conservatives voted no

— and advance the deal to the Senate, which is expected to follow suit by the end of the week. McCarthy's lieutenants had spent the final hours frantically whipping votes, as senior Democrats vowed that their members would put the nation's finances above the temptation to give the opposition a bloody nose.

"The consequences of slipping past the deadline would reverberate across the world and take years to recover from," Chuck Schumer, the leader of the Democratic-led Senate, warned ahead of the lower chamber's vote. "Remember, a default would almost certainly trigger another recession, send costs soaring, kill millions of jobs — hardworking people thrown out of work through no fault of their own."

Leadership challenge?

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that the proposed spending limits for 2024 and 2025 would trim nearly \$1.5 trillion from projected federal budget deficits over the next decade. The total debt is more than \$31 trillion. The vote was the result of weeks of on-off talks between the McCarthy and Biden teams, with Democrats accusing Republicans of holding the economy "hostage" by

insisting on spending cuts to accompany the hike in the borrowing cap. Fiscal hawks on the right of Congress have accused the White House of pushing unsustainable spending programs and say negotiating the future budget must be a condition of hiking the limit, which covers debts already incurred.

The high drama seen in recent debt ceiling and budget fights was absent however as House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries had been open that his members would provide enough votes to ensure the bill was never in danger.

But it was a high wire act for McCarthy, whose job would have been on the line had the majority of his members rejected the pact, only to see it pushed through anyway. Securing 149 Republican votes — roughly two-thirds of his caucus — allows McCarthy to project strength in his bid to face down criticism from the Republican right, which has accused him of capitulating to the White House by not demanding steeper cuts. Some hardliners have openly mused about using a new power granted by McCarthy as part of his pitch for the speakership in January to call for snap vote to oust him.

'Cartoon villain'

House Democratic Whip Katherine

Clark described the vote as a "ransom" the Republicans had exacted by offering Americans "devastating cuts or we lose eight million jobs overnight." "It's hard to take in because it is so cartoon villain-like. But unlike a cartoon, the American people won't snap back up when you drop that economic anvil on their head," she said.

The bill will need 60 votes in the 100-member Senate, and party bosses urged their members to cooperate on a swift rubber stamp vote that they are hoping to hold as early as Thursday evening. Defense hawks have voiced concerns over a \$886 billion cap on defense spending, the amount Biden requested.

Meanwhile senators Jeff Merkley and Bernie Sanders — a Democrat and an independent who votes with the party — released separate statements saying they could not "in good conscience" back a bill cutting key federal programs while increasing military spending and demanding no extra tax dollars from billionaires.

Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell, who largely deferred to McCarthy in the negotiations, will be expected to provide at least a dozen votes, with most of the 51-member Democratic majority locked in. — AFP

Brazil economy posts stronger growth in Q1

BRASILIA: Brazil's economy grew a stronger-than-expected 1.9 percent in the first quarter, according to official figures released Thursday, welcome news for leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva as he looks to jump-start growth. The expansion, led by strong growth of 21.6 percent in the key agricultural sector, marked a rebound for Latin America's biggest economy, which contracted by a revised 0.1 percent in the fourth quarter of 2022 — the last under far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro.

The result was better than expected, beating an average forecast of 1.3 percent Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth by analysts polled by business daily Valor.

The services sector expanded by 0.6 percent in the first three months of the year, while the industrial sector contracted by 0.1 percent, said the national statistics institute, IBGE.

But the agricultural sector in the world's top beef and soybean exporter drove growth, posting its strongest expansion since 1996.

"Climate-related problems had a negative impact on the agricultural sector last year, but this year we have a forecast for a record soybean harvest," said IBGE analyst Rebeca Palis.

Lula, who previously led the country through a commodities-driven boom from 2003 to 2010, took office again in January vowing to restore strong growth, fight resurgent poverty and "make Brazil happy again." The 77-year-old ex-metalworker got another piece of economic good news Wednesday: the fall of the unemployment rate to 8.5 percent for February-April, an eight-year low for the period.

But Lula faces the huge challenge of negotiating with a Congress dominated by conservative lawmakers, many opposed to his plans for expanded social and environmental protection programs. He has also locked horns with the central bank, which he accuses of putting the brakes on economic growth by holding the benchmark interest rate too high — currently 13.75 percent. The bank's monetary policy committee says inflation — currently at 4.18 percent annually — remains "resilient."

Some analysts cautioned the figures did not necessarily herald a new boom for the South American giant. Although it was the strongest quarter for the Brazilian economy in 15 years, barring the recoveries from the COVID-19 pandemic and the global financial crisis, "the details of the data don't make for such positive reading," said William Jackson, chief emerging markets economist at consulting firm Capital Economics.

"The drivers of growth were very narrow," he wrote in a note, pointing to the weak expansion in the services sector and the contraction in the industrial sector, as well as meager growth of 0.2 percent in consumer spending. — AFP

Eurozone inflation dips but ECB to remain hawkish

BRUSSELS: Sliding energy prices helped lower eurozone inflation more than expected in May but underlying pressures suggest the European Central Bank will still be inclined to raise interest rates, officials and analysts said Thursday. Headline inflation for the 20 EU countries using the euro dipped to 6.1 percent in May, according to Eurostat data. That was a drop from the 7.0 percent figure for April that had reversed five months of declines, and below analysts' consensus forecast of 6.3 percent.

But inflation remains well above the 2.0 percent target set by the European Central Bank, which indicated another round of monetary tightening in two weeks' time. "Inflation is too high and it is set to remain so for too long," ECB chief Christine Lagarde told a banking congress in Germany.

She suggested that a smaller rate increase was to come, following ECB hikes since July that have pushed up the official borrowing rate an unprecedented 3.75 percentage points. "We are approaching our cruising altitude," Lagarde said.

Core inflation, which strips out volatile energy, food, alcohol and tobacco prices, is the key signal for the ECB. In May, that figure came in at 5.3 percent, lower than the 5.6 percent recorded in April. "The persistent nature of core inflation means that the ECB is expected to extend their unprecedented tightening cycle with another 0.25 basis points rise

in two weeks, despite signs of slower growth and the potential for increased pressure on the financial system," said Richard Flax of the investment advisory firm Moneyfarm.

Households squeezed

Eurostat said energy inflation in the eurozone dipped into negative territory in May, falling by 1.7 percent. That reflected a glut on the natural gas market as Europe, now less dependent on Russian fossil fuels since supply cuts over the war in Ukraine, heads into summer.

Inflation in services also slowed slightly, to 5.0 percent, but higher prices for food and alcohol, while slowing a bit, were the main prop for headline inflation and a problem for European household budgets.

That component rose 12.5 percent in May, compared with 13.5 percent in April. It was also largely responsible for the surprise 7.0 percent reading in April that reversed five months of declines. Back in October, the eurozone was struggling with overall inflation of 10.6 percent as it confronted the fallout from Russia's war in Ukraine and supply bottlenecks related to the post-COVID recovery.

While inflation has since eased, slowing economic growth and higher loan costs were starting to bite. Germany, the European Union's economic powerhouse that is now in recession, saw its inflation rate drop to 6.3 percent in May from 7.6 percent in April.

France, the bloc's second-biggest economy, saw inflation dip to 6.0 percent in May from 6.9 percent the previous month. "I'm aware of the risks that weigh on our growth and the French economy," French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire said Wednesday, in response to signs of tepid growth and cutbacks by consumers.



ECB chief Christine Lagarde

The ECB rate increases have flowed through into mortgages, making home loans more expensive and harder to secure for would-be buyers in Europe, weakening some real estate markets. The ECB said in a report this week that demand for mortgages fell sharply in the first quarter of 2023, leading to a "correction" that risked becoming "disorderly" if recession fears widened.

"The tightening monetary policy is testing the resilience of households and businesses" in the eurozone, Moneyfarm's Flax said. "Looking ahead, both headline and core inflation will keep falling," said Jack Allen-Reynolds, a eurozone economist for analysis firm Capital Economics. "But the labor market still looks very tight... As a result, we suspect that the core inflation rate will come down only slowly and it will be a long time before it hits 2 percent." Like other analysts, he predicted the ECB would raise interest rates by 25 basis points on June 15 "and probably once more at the July meeting". — AFP

Pacific ire at Australia's backing for fossil fuels

'We need money in the renewable energy sector'

WELLINGTON: Pacific Islands expressed dismay on Thursday at Australia's subsidies for fossil fuels, flagging climate concerns as a point of friction between the neighboring nations. Two Pacific ministers appeared in a joint livestream to condemn Australia's long and continuing enthusiasm for coal and gas projects.

Vanuatu's Climate Change Minister Ralph Regenvanu welcomed Australia's pledge last year to transition towards renewable energy but said it must stop funding climate-damaging projects. "We are very disappointed to see that Australia continues to subsidize fossil fuel projects," Regenvanu told The Australia Institute, a Canberra-based think tank. "We need money in the renewable energy sector. That's where the future of our economies and our societies lies — not in the fossil fuel industry." Regenvanu questioned why Canberra continues to pump "billions of dollars into the fossil fuel industry, which we in the Pacific have agreed, including Australia, is the greatest threat to our security".

Vanuatu is a small archipelago and, like many Pacific Island nations, is threatened by rising sea levels. Speaking alongside Regenvanu, Tuvalu's Finance Minister Seve Paeniu said Pacific nations are currently weighing a commitment to make the region fossil-free.

"The idea is to stop any further expansion of fossil fuel" and to eliminate consumption of coal, oil and natural gases, Paeniu said. "It's a matter of our security and our survival." Tuvalu, midway between Hawaii and Australia, is one of the smallest nations in the world, made up of less than 26 square kilometres (10 square

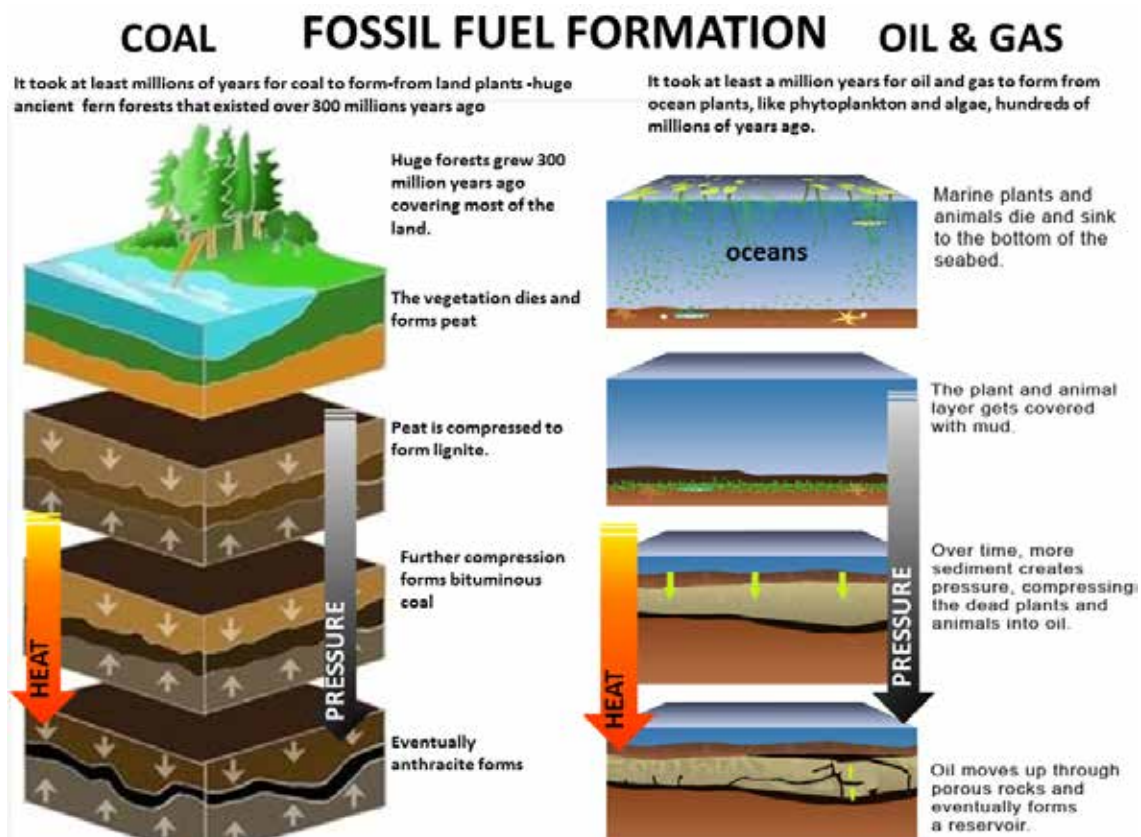
miles) and shrinking fast. "Our land is constantly being eaten away," Paeniu said. "And we know that fossil fuel is the cause of climate change."

'One step forwards'

Australia has pledged that 82 percent of its electricity will come from renewable sources by 2030. The current figure is around 30 percent. But it is one of the world's largest coal and gas exporters and a series of governments have resisted pressure to scale back the industries. The centre-left Labor government approved a new coal mine last month, sparking anger from environmental groups. Australia and its allies, including the United States, are currently locked in a battle with China for influence across the Pacific.

Australia's relationship with fossil fuels is a constant irritant. Regenvanu described Australia as Vanuatu's greatest trade partner but said there are tensions in the relationship over climate change. He accused Australia of "not recognizing the main security threat to the Pacific". Vanuatu is still under a state of emergency after being battered this year by an "unprecedented event of two Category Four cyclones within a few days", Regenvanu said.

He estimates fixing the damage will cost more than 40 percent of Vanuatu's gross domestic product, which the International Monetary Fund puts at around US\$1 billion. "It's like you take one step forwards and two backwards in terms of economic development," Regenvanu said. "We're not seeing the emissions reduction that we need to see happen." — AFP



BTS employees accused of insider trading

SEOUL: Three employees at HYBE, the agency behind K-pop megastars BTS, have been accused of insider trading by South Korea's financial watchdog over share sales before the group's bombshell "hiatus" announcement. In a YouTube video posted on June 14 last year, BTS' band members told fans they were taking a break from the supergroup to focus on their solo careers, citing exhaustion and the pressures of their stratospheric success.


The company's share price fell nearly 25 percent when the market opened the day after the announcement, wiping nearly 2 trillion won (\$1.5 billion) off its value. Three HYBE employees, whose identities have been withheld, had prior knowledge of the announcement and sold their shares before it was made public, pocketing hundreds of millions of won illegally, the Financial Supervisory Service said in a statement Wednesday.

"We referred the three officials, one of whom is a team leader, to the prosecution with the opinion that they should be indicted," the watchdog said. The watchdog also criticized HYBE for making the market-moving announcement in a YouTube video rather than an official statement or regulatory filing, which they said had "aggravated investors' confusion". — AFP

IMF calls for carbon pricing to aid energy transition

WASHINGTON: Carbon pricing will be needed to help finance the global transition to renewable energy, the International Monetary Fund's second-most senior official said Wednesday, warning against escalating the use of "green" subsidies. "I think we really need to, you know, put carbon pricing squarely on the table, despite all the political issues surrounding it," the IMF's First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath said at a conference in Washington.

"We cannot think of the subsidies as a complete substitute for carbon taxes," she said, adding that current discussions on the energy transition "seem to focus on subsidies and not on prices." "But fiscally, it makes a huge difference if you deal with the carbon pricing versus subsidies," she said. The practice increases revenues which can then be used to help households and businesses deal with the energy transition, and also reduce debt, she noted. Carbon pricing is also "very effective in channeling investment where it needs to go, and providing the right kinds of incentives for buyers to switch from one type of energy to another," Gopinath said. Carbon pricing is equivalent to buying a "pollution permit" to cover CO2 emissions. The European Union, in particular, has just expanded its carbon market, which is already the most ambitious such program in the world and currently covers around 40 percent of the continent's emissions. — AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 1 JUNE 2023

(965) 22 675 140
Al-Safat Tower, Hawalli, Beirut St.
alsafatinvest.com
research@alsafatinvest.com
alsafatinvestment
al-safat-investment-company

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance											Valuation Multiples *			
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	924	917	940	917	23	33,988,410	-6	-0.65%	-10.68%	916	940	14.4	1.85	3.6%	1.04
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	257	254	262	252	10	60,866,787	-3	-1.17%	-15.06%	253	261	13.4	1.22	3.7%	1.31
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	168	160	170	160	10	25,384,127	-9	-5.33%	-10.69%	160	167	20.1	0.55	2.2%	1.18
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	186	187	189	185	4	8,914,679	2	1.08%	-10.34%	184	191	17.4	0.70	4.0%	1.30
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	711	710	725	707	18	61,553,776	1	0.14%	-5.10%	704	715	20.9	1.80	1.9%	1.16
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	597	600	607	596	11	29,358,502	4	0.67%	-20.30%	579	620	43.8	2.68	0.9%	1.21
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	115	124	125	115	10	10,043,968	9	7.83%	-18.42%	119	125	-	0.58	4.1%	1.81
204	National Investments	Financial Services	192	197	200	186	14	19,239,757	9	4.79%	-16.88%	195	244	-	0.79	14.7%	1.92
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	118	121	124	118	6	21,387,699	4	3.42%	8.04%	116	122	21.7	0.73	0.0%	0.95
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	103	105	109	102	7	17,784,749	2	1.94%	-6.87%	101	106	10.3	0.78	3.7%	1.13
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	149	144	150	144	6	13,254,139	-4	-2.70%	8.27%	140	146	10.1	1.09	5.1%	1.65
252	Al Intiaz Investment	Financial Services	61.0	60.6	61.3	58.8	2.5	6,265,729	0.2	0.33%	-19.09%	60.1	62	-	0.38	14.9%	1.25
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	106	108	109	105	4	12,662,746	2	1.89%	3.00%	106	109	10.4	0.78	2.7%	1.08
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	740	736	755	732	23	2,794,255	6	0.82%	-8.00%	734	755	15.6	1.70	1.8%	1.04
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	95.2	97.5	97.5	94	3.5	17,584,198	3	3.17%	1.54%	97.1	99	15.9	0.60	3.0%	0.57
501	National Industries	Financial Services	190	196	197	186	11	13,577,031	6	2.90%	-5.16%	190	202	-	0.89	2.5%	1.55
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,141	1,147	1,160	1,137	23	368,794	-28	-2.38%	-5.60%	1,090	1,149	12.5	1.07	5.2%	1.04
506	HEISCO	Industrials	610	610	615	598	17	670,404	-1	-0.16%	-0.49%	590	611	21.2	1.54	3.3%	1.02
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	800	805	808	791	17	1,890,461	4	0.50%	0.63%	790	813	12.0	1.54	7.5%	0.97
603	Agility	Industrials	608	607	621	607	14	19,346,157	2	0.33%	-15.69%	598	618	22.0	0.86	0.0%	1.55
605	Zain	Telecommunications	508	515	521	505	16	37,952,548	9	1.78%	-8.53%	512	528	11.1	1.75	6.7%	0.72
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,350	3,406	3,455	3,335	120	534,035	50	1.49%	1.60%	3,400	3,461	9.5	3.05	11.0%	0.63
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	193	192	193	187	6	1,492,683	1	0.52%	-5.42%	188	195	-	0.82	0.0%	1.16
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,826	1,851	1,900	1,802	98	899,124	17	0.93%	-2.58%	1,820	1,880	22.5	15.26	4.2%	1.41
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	80.3	80.3	83.5	80.2	3.3	69,011,617	0.0	0.00%	5.66%	79.0	81.1	9.7	0.96	5.9%	1.34
821	Warba Bank	Banking	207	209	212	206	6	27,232,331	5	2.45%	-8.40%	207	215	31.7	1.16	1.4%	1.13
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	439	433	445	425	20	3,033,933	-6	-1.37%	10.18%	432	453	-	1.24	2.8%	0.41
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	372	372	380	367	13	4,326,494	2	0.54%	0.54%	371	380	34.7	1.48	4.0%	0.71
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	182	181	184	180	4	2,425,998	-1	-0.55%	-3.72%	181	185	15.1	1.85	9.2%	0.44
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,792	1,790	1,820	1,760	60	2,199,098	-2	-0.11%	-12.77%	1,785	1,820	21.4	6.93	4.7%	0.97
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	930	958	960	930	30	2,023,868	18	1.91%	19.01%	929	960	12.0	3.68	6.1%	0.32

* As of end of week closing

Business

Chinese fans welcome 'Comrade Musk'

'For Musk, there are no countries on this planet, only markets... to hawk your wares'

BEIJING: Lavish meals, gushing praise and memes about "Comrade Musk" — China showered the Tesla CEO with admiration during his whistle-stop tour of the country this week. The mercurial magnate is a controversial figure in the West but widely admired in China, where Tesla's electric vehicles have become a staple of middle-class urban life.

His visit was welcomed by Zhu Qi, a Tesla owner from the central city of Changsha who said she "worships" Musk for his "great personal charm and constant excellence in his field". "China is still not super open... so for people like him to come and share some of their knowledge with us, I think it's something meaningful that our country and leaders can learn from," the 33-year-old university lecturer told AFP.

"Due to our exam-focused education system, I think it's hard for China to produce someone like Musk, who has gained world-leading status based on his personal interests." Chinese social media was abuzz with news of Musk's sojourn, with related hashtags on the Twitter-like Weibo platform racking up billions of views.

Musk arrived in Beijing on Tuesday, holding meetings with top ministers

and praising China's "vitality and potential". He then stopped off in Shanghai — home to a vast Tesla manufacturing base — before his private jet left the city on Thursday.

Photos of a reported 16-course dinner menu laid out for Musk's arrival — featuring seafood, New Zealand lamb and traditional Beijing-style noodles — quickly went viral. And many users were keen to show their appreciation for a man known affectionately as "Brother Horse" after the first character in Musk's Chinese name.

"For Musk, there are no countries on this planet, only markets... to hawk your wares," wrote one user. "This is exactly the kind of borderless capitalism he predicted." Some took the opportunity to poke fun at the United States at a time of strained ties between the world's two largest economies.

"Our officials and media are going hard on this visit," quipped one Weibo user. "He's apparently the only American welcome in China." "Biden must be wondering why China refuses his invitations to meet with top US officials, but rolls out the red carpet for Musk," said another.

A typically tongue-in-cheek meme circulating on the platform this week depicted a statesmanlike "Comrade



BEIJING: Tesla CEO Elon Musk (left) shakes hands with China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang during a meeting in Beijing. Elon Musk met Foreign Minister Qin Gang in Beijing, the ministry said, as the Tesla CEO embarks on his first trip to China in more than three years. —AFP

Musk" standing behind a podium flanked by Chinese flags as besuited officials applauded in the background.

But not everyone was taken in by Musk mania. Several users noted an after-midnight post by a Tesla vice president showing photos of Musk posing with hundreds of beaming workers in Shanghai.

In recent years a growing number of Chinese tech workers have criticized the industry's long hours and high-stress company culture. "It feels a little outdated to make so many people stay into the middle of the night just to take some photos," one user said. "So you're all working overtime tonight, huh?" wrote another. —AFP

HK launches retail friendly rules for crypto exchanges

HONG KONG: Hong Kong rolled out new rules on Thursday allowing licensed cryptocurrency exchanges to service retail customers, bucking the global trend of tightening rules after last year's market crash. The Chinese finance hub is racing regulators around the world to lay down ground rules for crypto after high-profile failures like trading platform FTX, which led the United States to crack down on a sector worth more than \$1 trillion.

China has had a strict crypto ban since 2021, but in Hong Kong — which operates on a separate legal framework — trading has been allowed though unregulated, meaning individual investors resort to unlicensed platforms.

The regulatory regime launched Thursday means that after a one-year transition period, all crypto exchanges in Hong Kong must be licensed, and will be able to take on retail clients. "The sector fundamentally is going to stay despite all the risks... These activities have to be allowed in a regulated way," the city's financial services and treasury chief Christopher Hui told AFP.

Hong Kong's securities regulator said Thursday afternoon that it had "already received a handful of applications" and that the market is "generally supportive" of the regime. The new rules emphasize investor protection measures, like requiring

exchanges to vet their clients and limit their risk exposure, as well as restricting trade to "large-cap" tokens such as bitcoin.

Regional rival Singapore is heading in the opposite direction as it plans to curb retail participation in crypto. Crypto exchange OKX — founded in China but now based in the Seychelles — told AFP it was "committed to the Hong Kong market" and will apply for a licence.

"Hong Kong is making concrete strides and is building confidence among industry players," said Lennix Lai, OKX's global chief commercial officer. Regulators said they hope to move quickly to issue the first licences.

But some crypto firms have had trouble accessing traditional banking services or hiring corporate specialists that have been made mandatory, according to Etelka Bogardi, partner at Norton Rose Fulbright. Hong Kong's market appeal may also be dimmed as platforms are banned from offering stablecoins, crypto derivatives and staking products — meaning retail investors are largely limited to spot trading.

'Financial bandwagons'

A prominent activist investor in Hong Kong said Thursday the new policy lends credibility to a risky sector and endorses speculation. "Hong Kong has a history of jumping onto financial bandwagons just as the wheels are falling off," David Webb, a former investment banker, told AFP.

The government may say the new crypto regime is similar to that of traditional finance, but Webb said the "analogy breaks down" as most crypto — unlike stocks or futures on companies and commodities — have no intrinsic value.

Following the shipment suspension and "as a result of the economic outlook, Nintendo of Europe has decided to wind down operations of its Russian subsidiary", it said. "Payment information tied to Nintendo accounts, such as credit card or PayPal account details, has been deleted for security reasons."

Nintendo's eShop was already "under maintenance" in Russia because its payment provider had stopped ruble transactions. A growing number of multinationals have fully or partially halted business in Russia since the Ukraine war began.

Some have cited disruption to business, while others have directly linked the move to outrage over President Vladimir Putin's decision to send troops into Ukraine in February last year. Nintendo's rival Sony suspended software and hardware shipments to Russia and operations of the PlayStation Store there in March 2022. —AFP

ment programs, said Wednesday that certification of the 737-7 was taking longer than expected.

"The amount of documentation that we're producing on these airplanes relative to what we've had to produce in the past is considerably much larger," said Flemming, adding that the company still hopes to receive final approval for the jet by the end of the year. The company also expects to be cleared to undertake certification flights on the 737-10 "within this year," Flemming said. Calhoun cited the pandemic-era supply chain constraints in explaining the company's waiting approach to advancing new jet designs, noting that key suppliers have struggled with staffing shortages.



Boeing Dream Lifter Aircraft

Nintendo ends online sales of games in Russia

TOKYO: Nintendo has said it will no longer sell games in Russia through its online store as the Japanese giant winds down operations in the increasingly isolated country.

The changes, which were announced and came into effect on Wednesday, follow Nintendo's suspension of product shipments to Russia in March 2022 after the invasion of Ukraine. Russian customers can still re-download previously purchased content but no new payments can be made or new accounts created, a Nintendo statement said.

Boeing's priority is current certifications before new jet

CHARLESTON: Boeing will focus on successfully completing plane certifications, shoring up its supply chain and improving technologies in development before launching a new plane model, said Chief Executive Dave Calhoun.

"You have to be patient, you have to get your ducks lined up," Calhoun said at a briefing at Boeing's Charleston, South Carolina factory organized Tuesday and Wednesday ahead of the Paris Air Show in late June.

The aviation giant's top technology efforts under development include greater use of composite materials and autonomous systems. "There's a lot of homework going on, a lot of regular testing, so that if we decide to include it, it's mature enough to do so," he said.

Boeing currently has three commercial aircraft at various stages of the certification process. These include the shortest version of its best-selling 737 MAX, the 737-7, as well as the longest in the 737-10. The third jet moving through the US regulatory process is the long-distance 777X.

"It's an enormous amount of work at scale to move through all of those certifications," Calhoun said. Mike Flemming, who heads Boeing's develop-

Australia 'hopeful' China will lift barley tariffs

SYDNEY: Australia's efforts to remove sky-high tariffs on its barley exports to China are "going in the right direction", the government said Thursday, as once-icy relations show further signs of a thaw. Australia has this year resumed exports of coal and timber, which were among a slew of commodities hit by Chinese import bans and restrictions as diplomatic relations soured in recent years.

"Barley is the next cab off the rank," Trade Minister Don Farrell told reporters. Beijing's review of its 80.5 percent anti-dumping levy on the crop "is complete or close to be completed", said the minister following a "good meeting" with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Wentao, in Detroit last week.

"The messages I got back from our officials in China was that things are going in the right direction," Farrell added. "So, I would be hopeful that when that decision is finally made that it will be a positive decision, and we can get Australian barley back into China."

Pending the Chinese decision, Australia has suspended a World Trade Organization challenge over the barley tariff, which has effectively blocked the commodity since it was imposed in May 2020. Barley exports to China were worth about Aus\$916 million (\$596 million) in the 2018-19 season.

Farrell said he is also keen to get quality Australian wine back into China by removing anti-dumping measures imposed since November 2020, adding that he had seen growers "leaving grapes to wilt on the vine rather than suffer the uncertainty of the global market".

China imposed various trade restrictions following Australia's legislation against overseas influence operations, its barring of Huawei from 5G contracts and its call for an independent investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Relations appear to have warmed since Australia's centre-left Labor government adopted a less confrontational approach to China since coming to power a year ago. —AFP



Different kinds of cryptocurrency is seen in this file photo.

"There's no reason why (the government) should encourage people to bet on someone else paying more for something that has no fundamental value," Webb said. Last year, the city said HK\$1.7 billion (\$217 million) was lost to crypto-related scams, which police attributed to criminals taking advantage of the public's lack of sector knowledge.

The new rules ask exchanges to conduct a "holistic assessment" of a client's understanding of digital currencies before taking them on, but give no specifics. One company licensed under Hong Kong's previous regime tells its prospective clients to take a screenshot showing they have finished watching 13 instructional videos in a free online course.

But they "DO NOT need to complete any programme assignments or take any tests", it wrote on its website. —AFP



Nintendo gaming console

"Many of those suppliers make one part; and they're the only supplier that makes that part. And when they fall down and can't respond to a rate increase, we suffer," Calhoun said. "We can't just get mad at them... We simply have to work with them."

Most recently, Boeing was forced to slow deliveries of new MAX jets because of problems with a part supplied by Spirit Aerosystems. Despite the issue, Calhoun said he has no interest in acquiring the company.

"Oh yes, we are disappointed with every next issue that occurs that limits our rates," he said. "But I believe the path forward is still a constructive path where engineers work with engineers." —AFP

Taiwan, US to sign trade deal: Taipei

TAIPEI: The United States and Taiwan will sign a trade deal on Thursday, Taipei said, in a move likely to stoke tensions between Beijing and Washington over the island. The Office of Trade Negotiations in Taipei announced that the first batch of agreements under "The US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade" will be inked in Washington at 10 am local time (1400 GMT), without providing details.

Washington has remained a key ally and arms supplier to Taiwan despite switching diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979. It is also the island's second-largest trade partner. But Beijing detests any hint of diplomatic relations between Taiwan and other governments as it considers the self-ruled island its own territory.

"The deal that will be signed tonight is not only very historic but also signals a new beginning," cabinet spokesman Alan Lin told reporters in Taipei. "Relevant tasks are yet to be completed... Taiwan will continue to move towards a comprehensive FTA with the United States to ensure Taiwan's economic security."

The new initiative looks to boost trade by streamlining customs checks, improving regulatory procedures, and establishing anticorruption measures between the United States and the island.

Taiwan's government has described the deal as "the most comprehensive" trade agreement signed with Washington since 1979. Beijing has in recent years stepped up threats and rhetoric against Taiwan, increasing military drills in the seas around the island and working to cut off its official ties with countries around the world.

The issue prompts rare bipartisan agreement in the United States, with politicians including Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and his Democratic predecessor Nancy Pelosi both meeting publicly with Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing-wen.

Washington unveiled plans for the trade negotiations last August in a show of support as Beijing was staging huge military drills in response to then-speaker Pelosi's visit to Taipei. China lashes out at any diplomatic action that appears to treat Taiwan as a sovereign nation, and has reacted with growing anger to visits by Western politicians.

In April, Beijing conducted three days of military exercises simulating a blockade of the island in response to McCarthy and Tsai meeting in California. —AFP

Lifestyle



Saudi Arabian film producer Mohammed Al Turki arrives to attend the annual amfAR Cinema Against AIDS Cannes Gala at the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Cap d'Antibes, southern France, on the sidelines of the 76th Cannes Film Festival. - AFP photos



British model Naomi Campbell (right) and Saudi Arabian film producer Mohammed Al Turki arrive for the screening of the film "Firebrand" during the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes.



French actress and director Maiwenn (left) poses with US actor Johnny Depp during a photocall for the film "Jeanne Du Barry" during the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.

Saudi Arabia's growing cinema soft power

Accompanying Naomi Campbell on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival last week was one of cinema's most powerful men — and he represents a country where cinemas were banned until five years ago. Mohammed Al Turki, 36, heads Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Film Foundation, his name splashed all over posters and movie credits at the world's biggest cinema gathering on the French Riviera. The foundation, formed two years ago, holds its own annual festival and has already financed 168 movies, including eight in the official selection at Cannes this year.

Among them was festival opener "Jeanne du Barry" about a French prostitute falling in love with King Louis XV, played by Johnny Depp. Others seemed equally at odds with traditional Saudi values — female-focused films such as "Four Daughters" about the religious radicalization of Tunisian girls, or "Goodbye Julia" about a Sudanese woman and her overbearing conservative husband.

"We have learned to respect other cultures," Emad Iskandar, director of the Red Sea Film Foundation, told AFP. He said the foundation focuses on Arab and African filmmakers, though the precise definition seems flexible: the French director of "Jeanne du Barry", Maiwenn, qualified thanks to her Algerian father. "As long as we have the resources, we want to serve the region, but also take the opportunity to learn more," Iskandar added. Al Turki's foundation also sponsored a gala for women, attended by Catherine Deneuve, Katie Holmes and supermodel Campbell. "MO!! Proud of all your doing @redseafilm creating history of many 1st's and Changing the

narrative," Campbell wrote of Al Turki on her Instagram.

Whitewashing?

Saudi largesse for the arts has boomed under the kingdom's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, with billions pouring into previously taboo areas such as music, fashion and sports. Human Rights Watch says this is designed to "whitewash its dismal rights record" and that, despite recent reforms, Saudi Arabia continues to repress civil society, execute dissidents, discriminate against women and bury the investigation into the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

But most Saudis back the reforms, and its officials say it is absurd to expect the kingdom to turn into a liberal paradise overnight. Accusations of whitewashing "sadden us more than anything else," said Iskander.

"Come to visit and get to know Saudi Arabia and then talk about us. The West has arrived where it is after years of wars and debates. We are a 90-year-old state — be patient." In any case, the relentless PR campaign is working. The Saudi presence at Cannes felt less controversial than that of Depp, still widely branded as toxic since his court battle with ex-wife Amber Heard. Cannes director Thierry Fremaux celebrated the kingdom's interest in "producing films and allowing artists to emerge." "Saudi Arabia is evolving," he told Variety.

'More and more present'

All over Cannes were adverts calling on producers and directors to shoot in Saudi Arabia, while its pavilion showed off the work of its own young directors. "Every year Saudi Arabia asks for a big-



(From left) Tunisian actress Hend Sabri, Tunisian actress Ichraq Matar, Tunisian actress Nour Karoui, Tunisian actress Tayssir Chikhaoui, Tunisian director Kaouther Ben Hania, actress Eya Chikahoui, Tunisian actress Olfa Hamrouni and Tunisian actor Majd Mastoura pose during a photocall for the film "Les Filles D'Oufa" (Four Daughters) at the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes.

ger pavilion, more facilities, to be more and more present," said Guillaume Esmiol, head of the Cannes Film Market that runs alongside the festival. Saudi Arabia is not the only country in the region investing massively in cinema: rival Qatar financed 13 films at Cannes this year, including three in the main competition.

Some have little or no connection to the Middle East. "We have a lot of French productions," Fatma Hassan Alremaihi, Doha Film Institute CEO, told AFP. "We don't want to be insular, we want our filmmakers to be open to other regions and other filmmakers and work with them." She had no qualms that such investments were aimed at

spreading Qatar's soft power. "Who doesn't do that? The US does that with their Hollywood films... At least we are doing what we believe in, and we are not losing our identity at the same time." — AFP

Street sellers struggle as Hanoi sweats through heatwave

Covered from head to toe to keep herself cool, Vu Thi Phuong pushes a trolley of coffee, lime juice and ice around Hanoi in the burning sun. Thousands of street vendors, mostly women, in Vietnam's capital have had no choice but to work through a series of heatwaves that have struck the north of the country in recent weeks. Scientists say global warming is exacerbating adverse weather, and Vietnam is just one of many countries across South and Southeast Asia to have suffered record temperatures in recent weeks.

"Sometimes I just want to faint in the middle of the street. If the weather forecaster says it's 38 degrees Celsius, the temperature in the road feels even higher," Phuong said, sweat dripping off her nose. In early May, Vietnam reported its highest-ever temperature, 44.1 degrees Celsius (111.38 degrees Fahrenheit), prompting a warning from health officials to avoid the heat as much as possible.

As the temperature hit 38 degrees Celsius on Thursday, Hanoi's old quarter — usually buzzing with motorbikes,



Street vendor Nguyen Thi Vinh sells mangosteens in Hanoi.

tourists and noodle sellers — was calm. But for those like Phuong, whose livelihood is earned on the street, the advice is impossible to follow. "I rest for about five minutes, then I have to continue," Phuong said. "It's not easy pushing this trolley in the heat but I keep trying my best." At a nearby corner, fruit seller Nguyen Thi Vinh, 60, complained of reduced profits.

"I don't sell much during hot days

like this because people don't go out," she said. A day earlier Vinh's income was down by a third, not helped by a lack of refreshing options to offer her customers. "I would have sold more if I'd had some oranges," Vinh said from behind two baskets of custard apples and mangosteens. Another vendor had opted to sell watermelon, but trade was still slow as she stood by her cart, a conical hat and two tiny fans around

her neck keeping the worst of the heat at bay.

Heat island

According to a 2021 environment ministry report, life in Hanoi has been seriously impacted by the urban heat island effect, a common environmental problem in which the air temperature in metropolitan areas is significantly higher than in suburban ones. Overpopulation, increasing construction work and a high number of vehicles are partly to blame, the report said.

The intense heat also impacts the flower sellers who navigate Hanoi's small alleys on bicycles, with buckets of roses, daisies or lotuses secured to the back. "It's not easy to keep the flowers fresh on an extremely hot day," Tran Thi Hoa told AFP, explaining that she switches to lilies, which can survive relatively well when the temperature is high. "Hot or cold, life has always been a struggle. But I am not in a position to give up," said Hoa while dousing her flowers with water from a small bottle. — AFP



Street vendor Vu Thi Phuong prepares a coffee for sale in Hanoi.



A street vendor pushes her bicycle carrying fruits in Hanoi.



Street vendor Vu Thi Phuong (left) pushes her trolley to sell coffee and soft drinks in Hanoi.



A street vendor carries mangoes in Hanoi. - AFP photos



Street vendor Vu Thi Phuong pushes a trolley to sell coffee and soft drinks in Hanoi.

Lifestyle



A built-up area of Ha Long Bay in northeast Vietnam.



Workers picking up trash from Ha Long Bay in northeast Vietnam.



A worker picking up trash from Ha Long Bay in northeast Vietnam. - AFP photos



Garbage being picked up in Ha Long Bay in northeast Vietnam.

Squinting in the bright light of a hot summer morning, Vu Thi Think perches on the edge of her small wooden boat and plucks a polystyrene block from the calm waters of Vietnam's Ha Long Bay. It's not yet 9 am, but a mound of styrofoam buoys, plastic bottles and beer cans sit behind her. They are the most visible sign of the human impacts that have degraded the UNESCO World Heritage Site, famed for its brilliant turquoise waters dotted with towering rainforest-topped limestone islands. "I feel very tired because I collect trash on the bay all day without much rest," said Think, 50, who has been working for close to a decade as a trash picker.



A worker on a boat after picking up foam buoys floating in Ha Long Bay in northeast Vietnam.



Workers picking up trash in Ha Long Bay in northeast Vietnam.

"I have to make five to seven trips on the boat every day to collect it all." Since the beginning of March, 10,000 cubic meters of rubbish — enough to fill four Olympic swimming pools — have been collected from the water, according to the Ha Long Bay management board. The trash problem has been particularly acute over the past two months, as a scheme to replace styrofoam buoys at fish farms with more sustainable alternatives backfired and fishermen chucked their redundant polystyrene into the sea.

Authorities ordered 20 barges, eight boats and a team of dozens of people to launch a clean-up, state media said. Do Tien Thanh, a conservationist at the Ha Long Bay Management Department, said the buoys were a short-term issue but admitted: "Ha Long Bay... is under pressure".

Vietnam battles plastic blight in idyllic Ha Long Bay



Human waste

More than seven million visitors came to visit the spectacular limestone karsts of Ha Long Bay, on Vietnam's northeastern coast, in 2022. Authorities hope that number will jump to eight and a half million this year. But the site's popularity, and the subsequent rapid growth of Ha Long City — which is now home to a cable car, amusement park, luxury hotels and thousands of new homes — have severely damaged its ecosystem.

Conservationists estimate there were originally around 234 types of coral in the bay — now the number is around half. There have been signs of recovery in the past decade, with coral coverage slowly increasing again and dolphins — pushed out of the bay a decade ago — coming back in small numbers, as a ban on fishing in the core parts of the heritage site expanded their food source.

But the waste, both plastic and human, is still a huge concern. "There are so many big residential areas near Ha Long Bay," said conservationist Thanh. "The domestic waste from these areas, if not dealt with properly, greatly impacts the ecological system, which includes the coral reefs. "Ha Long City

can now handle just over 40 percent of its wastewater." Single-use plastic is now banned on tourist boats, and the Ha Long Bay management board says general plastic use on board is down 90 percent from its peak. But trash generated onshore still lines parts of the beach, with a team of rubbish collectors not able to block the eyesore from tourists.

'Plastic pollution crisis'

Pham Van Tu, a local resident and freelance tour guide, said he had received a lot of complaints from visitors. "They read in the media that Ha Long Bay is beautiful, but when they saw a lot of floating trash, they didn't want to swim or go canoeing and they hesitated to tell their friends and family to visit," he said. Rapid economic growth, urbanization

and changing lifestyles in communist Vietnam have led to a "plastic pollution crisis", according to the World Bank.

A report in 2022 estimated 3.1 million tons of plastic waste are generated every year, with at least 10 percent leaking into the waterways, making Vietnam one of the top five plastic polluters of the world's oceans. The volume of leakage could more than double by 2030, the World Bank warns. Larissa Helfer, 21, who travelled to Vietnam from her home in Germany, said Ha Long Bay was beautiful but the trash problem would be one of her strongest memories of the trip.

"Normally you (might say) 'Look at the view! Look at the fishing villages!' she told AFP. But here "you have to talk about the trash, (you say) 'oh god... look at the plastic bottles and things in the sea.' And it makes you sad." Think, the trash collector, grew up in Ha Long and remembers a very different bay. "It didn't look so terrible," she said. "Of course, a lot of work makes me tired and irritated," she admitted. "But we must do our work." — AFP



Workers on a boat picking up foam buoys in Ha Long Bay in northeast Vietnam.

Once hostile, NASA holds first public meeting on UFOs

The truth is out there — but we're going to need to look harder. Scientists at NASA's first ever public meeting on "unidentified anomalous phenomena" — more commonly called UFOs — called Wednesday for a more rigorous scientific approach to clarify the origin of hundreds of mysterious sightings. The space agency announced last year it was analyzing observations in the sky that can't be identified as aerial or natural phenomena — a subject that has long fascinated the public but was shunned by mainstream science.

An independent team of 16 scientists are due to report their findings in a report by the end of July, with Wednesday's working meeting a forum for its final deliberations. "The current existing data and eyewitness reports alone are insufficient to provide conclusive evidence," astrophysicist David Spergel, chair of the study, said in livestreamed remarks.



Workers freshen up the paint on the NASA logo at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida. — AFP

"One of the lessons we've drawn is the need for more high quality data and data that is, measured with well calibrated instruments, multiple observations, and there's a need for high quality data curation," he added. There have been more than 800 events collected over 27 years, of which two to five percent of them are thought to be possibly anomalous, said science journalist Nadia Drake, part of the study. These are defined as "anything that is not readily understandable by the operator or the sensor," or "something that is doing something weird."

Metallic orb

In a presentation, Sean Kirkpatrick, director of Pentagon's All-Domain Anomaly Resolution office, showed a new video of two distant dots moving back and forth on a screen, as recorded by a P3 military aircraft in the western United States, which became three dots. The P3 was unable to intercept the dots, and the pilot reported the

event. But later analysis revealed the objects were very far away and likely commercial aircraft on a major flight corridor.

"This is the kind of thing that can spoof and/or provide misperception of both very highly trained pilots, as well as sensors," said Kirkpatrick. "When they're not sure, they're reporting it now, and that's what they're supposed to be doing." One example of a still unexplained phenomenon was a flying metallic orb spotted by an MQ-9 drone at an undisclosed location in the Middle East, added Kirkpatrick, replaying a video first shown to Congress last month.

"This is a typical example of a thing we see most of. We see these all over the world, and we see this making very interesting apparent maneuvers." While NASA probes and rovers scour the solar system for the fossils of ancient microbes, and its astronomers look for signs of intelligent civilizations on distant planets, this is the first time

NASA is investigating unexplained phenomena in Earth's skies.

The agency's posture in the past was to "debunk" such sightings — reinforcing the stigma over the hunt for alien life. Several of the study's scientists have been subjected to online harassment as a result of their participation in the panel, revealed Dan Evans, who is coordinating the research.

"It's critical to understand any form of harassment towards our panelists only serves to detract from the scientific process, which requires an environment of respect and openness," he added. NASA's work, which relies on unclassified material, is separate from a Pentagon investigation, though the two are coordinating on matters of how to apply scientific tools and methods. "To date, in the refereed scientific literature, there is no conclusive evidence suggesting an extraterrestrial origin for UAV," summarized Drake. — AFP

Lifestyle

Baby boys more chatty than girls, according to large study

Baby boys babble more than girls, according to a scientific paper out Wednesday that upends a common belief that females hold a language advantage over males early on in life. The findings, published in *iScience* after the largest ever study on the subject, came as a surprise even to the paper's authors. They say it might be the result of an important sex difference that emerged during our species' evolution.

A team led by D. Kimbrough Oller of the University of Memphis, Tennessee used an algorithm to trawl through a data set of more than 450,000 hours of non-stop audio from 5,899 infants, recorded using an iPod sized device over two years. "This is the biggest sample for any study ever conducted on language development, as far as we know," Oller said in a statement.

While young babies don't talk, they



produce pre-speech vocalizations — squeals, growls, raspberries, and later word-like sounds such as "ba" and "ga" — collectively called "protophones" that eventually give way to real words

and sentences. The idea that girls acquire language faster than boys has long held sway in scientific circles, and with it the assumption that baby girls vocalize more than baby boys. However,

the results showed that boys made 10 percent more utterances in the first year of life, before the girls caught up and made seven percent more sounds by the second year.

Evolutionary theory

The differences occurred despite the fact that adult care-givers spoke more to girls than to boys across both years. One theory for the finding was that male infants were more vocal because they were more active in general. But the data did not support this, since higher male vocalizations gave way to females around the 16 month mark, but higher physical activity did not.

Instead, the team suggests their findings might fit an evolutionary theory which holds that infants make sounds in order to signal their wellbeing to their caregivers, who in turn invest more energy and attention in them. Boys have

higher mortality rates than girls in their first year of life, according to a broad body of research, and so it may follow that more vocal baby boys in the distant past were more likely to survive and pass on their genes.

But by the second year of life, death rates have dropped dramatically for both sexes, and "the pressure on special fitness signaling is lower for both boys and girls," said Oller. Next, Oller plans more research on how caregivers respond to baby talk. "We anticipate that caregivers will show discernible reactions of interest and of being charmed by the speech-like sounds, indicators that fitness-signaling by the baby elicits real feelings of fondness and willingness to invest in the well-being of infants," he said. — AFP

Freddie Mercury's draft lyrics for Queen hits unveiled

A trove of Freddie Mercury's previously unseen handwritten draft lyrics for some of Queen's biggest hits goes on show Thursday in New York, ahead of their sale in London later this year. The manuscripts include working drafts for "Bohemian Rhapsody" — which Mercury initially planned to call "Mongolian Rhapsody" — "Don't Stop Me Now" and "Somebody to Love".

"In scope, quality and exceptional provenance, the collection of lyrics together afford an unprecedented glimpse into the creative mind of one of the 20th-century's most influential songwriters," said Sotheby's, which is staging the auctions in September. More than 1,500 items from Mercury's private collection, including costumes and unique objects as well as the draft lyrics, will feature in the eventual auctions in London and online.

Left largely untouched at his former west London home in the three



Freddie Mercury of Queen, portrait for Japanese music magazine 'Music Life', Tokyo, Japan, 1985.

decades since his death, they will be sold at live events in the British capital on September 6-8 and online August 4-September 11. The vast array of items — being auctioned by Mary Austin, one of the icon's closest friends who has cared for them at his former home Garden Lodge — are expected to fetch at least £6 million (\$7.5 million).

A highlight of the trove unveiled Thursday is 15 pages of lyrics and melodies that led to "Bohemian Rhapsody", one of Queen's most globally beloved and streamed songs and the third best-selling UK single ever. Written in black and blue ink and pencil, on stationery from the now-defunct British Midland Airways, they reveal Mercury originally planned to call it "Mongolian Rhapsody".

'Mongolian Rhapsody'

The songwriter, who died in 1991, had at some point crossed out the word "Mongolian" and replaced it with "Bohemian". The 15 pages are expected to fetch up to £1.2 million at the auction. Other draft lyrics going on display include nine pages of lyrics for arguably Queen's greatest anthem, "We Are The Champions", 19 pages behind 1976 hit "Somebody to Love" and seven leaves for "Don't Stop Me Now". Meanwhile a red notebook from the early 1970s,

before Queen were signed as a band and believed to be Mercury's earliest known containing lyrics, will also be on show in New York until June 8.

"Freddie Mercury's spectacular performances and songs are rightly remembered and celebrated around the world," said Gabriel Heaton, Sotheby's books and manuscripts specialist. "However, thanks to the emergence of this extraordinary group of early handwritten lyrics we can now also fully appreciate the absolute skill as a lyricist which complemented his consummate showmanship." Heaton added it cemented "his standing as one of the greatest songwriters of his generation — and beyond". The collection of draft lyrics and other items will be in Los Angeles June 14-18 and Hong Kong June 26-30 before arriving in London August 4 for a month-long exhibition ahead of the auctions. — AFP



US actor Danny Masterson is arraigned on rape charges at Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

'That '70s Show' actor Masterson found guilty of rape

US actor and Scientologist Danny Masterson on Wednesday was found guilty of raping two women at his home in the Hollywood Hills. The star of television's "That '70s Show" and "The Ranch" was convicted of two counts of forcible rape between 2001 and 2003, while jurors at a Los Angeles courthouse said they were deadlocked on a third rape charge. It was the second rape trial for Masterson, after previous proceedings were declared a mistrial last November when a different jury was unable to reach a unanimous decision.

Masterson was taken into custody following the verdict and is awaiting sentencing. He could face 30 years to life in prison. The actor, now 47, rose to fame with the 1998 launch of retro sitcom "That '70s Show," where he played the character of Steven Hyde alongside fellow stars Mila Kunis and Ashton Kutcher.

He co-starred again with Kutcher on Netflix's "The Ranch," but was fired in 2017 and written off the show after Los Angeles police confirmed they were investigating multiple rape allegations against the actor. Prosecutors at the time dropped two further sexual assault cases against Masterson over lack of evidence and the statute of limitations passing.

During closing arguments earlier this month, prosecutors said Masterson "drugged and raped each one of these victims" and called on the jury to hold him "accountable for what he has done." The three alleged victims were also members of the Church of Scientology at the time, and Masterson met them through the secretive group. Two of them said church officials had discouraged them from contacting law enforcement.

Masterson's lawyers in his closing argument questioned why the court had heard "so much about Scientology," and the defense has suggested that bias against the Church could have been a motivating factor. In a statement, the Church of Scientology said the "prosecution's introduction of religion into this trial was an unprecedented violation of the First Amendment and affects the due process rights of every American. The Church was not a party to this case and religion did not belong in this proceeding." It denied harassing the accusers and said it has no policy of "prohibiting or discouraging members from reporting criminal conduct." The jury deliberated for around seven days. No verdict was reached on the third rape charge, which involved Masterson's former girlfriend. — AFP



British musician Noel Gallagher presents the British album of the year award during the BRIT Awards 2017 ceremony and live show in London. - AFP

Noel Gallagher: 'England becoming a difficult place to be'

Ex-Oasis star Noel Gallagher has never been one to mince words, and his new album "Council Skies", released Friday, sees him in a reflective mood on what he sees as the miserable state of Britain. "The government needs to get its s*** together," the 56-year-old told AFP during a trip to Paris. "England is becoming a very, very difficult place to be. It's tough times for people." Gallagher wrote the songs for his new album during the COVID-19 lockdowns — a period that he said was good for his creative process but triggered his deepest frustrations with the world.

"The people who dealt with it best were artists, since they could create something, so in that sense good came out of it," he said. "But I hated all the masks and all that. I think the whole thing was a gross over-reaction by governments around the world, brought on by the neurosis of people on the internet." Gallagher could not help but smile at his view of the dark absurdity of recent history. "Since then, well, the world has not recovered and probably never will. And we just wait for the next one," he said with a chuckle.

'Fans that suffer'

British society is reeling from the combined impact of the pandemic and years of political chaos. Brexit has also made it more complicated and expensive for the country's artists to tour the European continent. "Instead of spending two weeks in France, I'll be doing 10 days in the whole of Europe, just doing capital cities — it's the fans that suffer," Gallagher said. But aside from the grumbles about the state of Britain, the songwriter is in a buoyant mood thanks to the new album, his first in six years, and an imminent international tour of Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds.

He is particularly enthusiastic about the new song "Easy Now". "I imagined the audience and the reaction when I was writing it. It's reminiscent of what I wrote in the 90s, and as good as what I wrote in the 90s I think. "I knew it straight away, you could just feel it." There is also an unlikely all-star moment on the record with the song "Pretty Boy", which features Johnny Marr of The Smiths and is remixed by The Cure's Robert Smith.

"I don't know Robert Smith at all, but I got his email... I thought: he's not going to like Oasis or me," Gallagher said. "But I sent it anyway and it turns out he fucking loves it. I was like, wow." Marr, however, is an old friend going back to the days when Oasis was an unsigned band trying to get attention around Manchester. "Johnny was the first person outside the guys in the band who showed any interest in us at all. No one in Manchester cares," Gallagher said. He's a great guy."

'Cursed' guitar

For Gallagher, coming to France is always a reminder of "the catastrophic night" when Oasis broke up live on stage at the Rock en Seine festival in 2009, following a furious fight between Noel and his brother Liam, the band's other frontman. The guitar that was collateral damage during that fight was recently auctioned in Paris for 385,000 euros (\$411,000).

"I bought that guitar in Paris, in Pigalle somewhere — I never liked it, it was horrible. If one guitar had to be sacrificed..." Gallagher said. "The guy bought it off me smashed to bits and I never thought he'd put it back together, but he did, so good luck to him," he said. "It's a s*** guitar, I never wrote a single song on it. It was cursed." — AFP

It is written: Why France holds to analyzing handwriting

Caroline de la Tournelle says her ability to decipher handwriting has influenced whether hundreds of people got jobs, helped police track death threats and even saved a child that was being abused. Graphology remains a controversial topic, and has fallen out of favor in recent years — even in France, where it was widely used in the 20th century to gain psychological insights into individuals, especially for job applications. But in the right hands, practitioners and their clients say it can be a useful tool. "When I look at a piece of writing, I have to enter into it, it takes time. Some are warm, welcoming; others are harsher, more reserved," said Paris-based de la Tournelle, who has more than a decade in the profession.

"Pressure is always the first thing I look at," she said, running her fingers softly over an example. "How hard they pressed, how the writing moves, how it is organized... it all has meaning." Not long ago, it was common in France for job applicants to undergo handwriting evaluations. Though largely replaced by psychometric tests, some firms have recently returned to graphology. "I tried other things, but they were no good. Graphology finds the main characteristics of a person — not everything but a lot," said Marc Foujols, manager of a Paris real estate firm.

'Impressive'

Christophe Dherbecourt, who has 25 years in human resources at a communications firm in the French capital, said it allows him to ask candidates "the right questions". Twice his firm rejected an applicant when handwriting analysis by de la Tournelle supported suspicions that they would be difficult employees.

"Of course, you can have graphologists who say any old rubbish, but she captures people well," Dherbecourt said. "It's impressive what you can pull out. I had it done when I was hired here — they showed me the results and I felt it was 80 percent right." Studies have debunked claims by leading exponents of graphology in the past, and it has attracted fraudsters and charlatans over the years. But Tracey Trussell, of the British Institute of Graphologists, said "don't diss it until you've tried it." "It's like a plumber — it's only as good as the person doing it," she said. "People say it's not a science, but year one of our training is all about measuring and assessing on a scientific basis."

'Crazy stories'

"Our writing comes from the heart, from our cardiac movement, through the nervous system and to the end of our fingers and through the pen," said de la Tournelle. "We are full of nuance, but three things never change" — how emotional and energetic we are, and how much we rely on outside stimuli to act. Other aspects of the profession are beyond dispute, and of use to the police. De la Tournelle began her career in the small town of Brive in southwest France and worked with local cops to match handwriting samples. She helped find the culprits behind death threats, messages written with lipstick on mirrors, marker pens on office walls and even scratched into a car door. "Crazy stories of greed, revenge, hate. Life can be like that in a small village," she said.

She also interprets drawings, including for children, and this gave rise to her most shocking case, when a woman brought in her three-year-old granddaughter. "Everything bad was in there — very angled, everything purple, everything bunched on the right..." said de la Tournelle. She conferred with her graphology teacher and they brought in a court-appointed psychologist who found the child was being abused by her mother. The psychologist now comes to her for other family cases. — AFP



Sports

'Is what I stand for,' Djokovic insists as Kosovo row rages

'Kosovo is the heart of Serbia. Stop the violence'

PARIS: Novak Djokovic defiantly insisted on Wednesday "it's something I stand for" regarding the controversy over his explosive comments about Kosovo earlier this week at the French Open. On Monday, the 22-time Grand Slam champion wrote "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia. Stop the violence" on a TV camera after his first match at Roland Garros.

"I would say it again, but I don't need to because you have my quotes," he said after making the third round on Wednesday with a straight sets win over Marton Fucsovics. "I'm aware that a lot of people would disagree, but it is what it is. It's something that I stand for. So that's all." Djokovic had defended his message in comments to Serb media, saying that Kosovo is Serbia's "cradle, our stronghold".

The International Tennis Federation (ITF), the governing body of the sport, said they had received a request from the Kosovo Tennis Federation demanding Djokovic be sanctioned over his actions. However, they pointed out that such statements do not contravene regulations. "Rules for player conduct at a Grand Slam event are governed by the Grand Slam rulebook, administered by the relevant organizer and regulator. There is no provision in this that prohibits political statements," an ITF spokesman told AFP.

Djokovic was criticized for his comments about recent clashes in Kosovo by French sports minister Amelie Oudea-Castera who said he "shouldn't get involved". Oudea-Castera told broadcaster France

2 that Djokovic's message was "not appropriate, clearly". "It was a message that is very activist, that is very political." The Kosovo Olympic Committee (KOC) accused Djokovic of "stirring up" political tensions, a spokesman told AFP.

Djokovic "breached the fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter regarding political neutrality and involved yet another political statement in sports", the KOC wrote in a letter sent to the IOC on Tuesday. KOC head Ismet Krasniqi sought that the IOC initiates disciplinary proceedings against Djokovic, said the letter posted on its Facebook. Such "behavior cannot be tolerated as it sets a dangerous precedent that sports can be used as a platform for political messages, agendas and propaganda", the letter quoted Krasniqi as saying.

Ukrainian player Elina Svitolina said Djokovic should be free to "say his opinion". Svitolina, who has repeatedly spoken out over tennis' response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, believes players should be able to talk publicly about political issues. "We are living in the free world, so why not say your opinion on something?," said Svitolina. "I feel like if you stand for something, you think that this is the way, you should say. I mean, if you are with a friend sitting, talking, you're going to say your opinion, he is going to say his opinion. So why not?"

Thirty peacekeepers from a NATO-led force in Kosovo were injured in clashes with ethnic Serb demonstrators on Monday during protests about the installation of ethnic Albanian mayors in north-



PARIS: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning against Hungary's Marton Fucsovics at the end of their men's singles match on day four of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament on May 31, 2023. — AFP

ern Kosovo. Kosovo, mostly populated by Muslim ethnic Albanians, broke away from the then-Yugoslavia in the late 1990s and declared indepen-

dence in 2008, in a move that has never been accepted by neighboring Christian-majority Serbia or its ally Russia. — AFP

Alonso eyes first win in decade at Barcelona

BARCELONA: Fernando Alonso returns to the scene of the last of his 32 Formula One victories this weekend hoping that a bumper crowd and an unexpected slice of luck will help deliver his 33rd. Ten years after he won his home Spanish Grand Prix for Ferrari in 2013, the now 41-year-old is reveling in a run of form that has seen him claim five podiums in this year's opening six races. That sequence included his vibrant surge to second place behind Red Bull's defending double world champion and series leader Max Verstappen in last Sunday's Monaco Grand Prix.

It was a result that boosted the already strong box office appeal of the two-time champion Aston Martin driver for this weekend's contest at the Circuit de Catalunya where a record crowd of more than 100,000 is expected on Sunday. And Alonso, enjoying his renewed lease of popularity, did nothing to play down his hopes, even if he laced them with some realism. "I think Barcelona is going to be a celebration," he said after the Monaco race, in which his bid to end Red Bull's domination this year was undone by a strategic error that saw him waste a pit-stop.

"We need to keep our feet on the ground, so I don't want to create too many expectations and extra pressure for the team. There are going to be some weekends in the year when we will be down in seventh of eighth and we have to accept that — like there are some others when we fight for a podium." He added that he was not satisfied with second place, his best position of the season. "It's one step higher than the other podiums, but we're still aiming to go better and it can happen if we have some luck or if Max and the others have a DNF."

'Monaco disaster'

Alonso knows, however, that he may well not finish as the fastest Spanish, or Hispanic, man this weekend as both Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and Red Bull's Sergio Perez have reason to wish for success. Fellow-Spaniard Sainz has yet to taste victory on home soil and cut a frustrated figure last Sunday when he finished eighth for Ferrari while Perez admitted his weekend had been a personal disaster. He crashed in qualifying, started from the back of the grid and was classified 16th, leaving him 39 points adrift of Verstappen in a title race in which Alonso is a close third, only 12 points behind.

The race will be also something of a happy return for Verstappen, who claimed his maiden F1 triumph with Red Bull in Spain, in 2016, but Perez knows he has to rediscover the consistency and speed that brought him two wins earlier this year. "Monaco was a disaster for me," he said. "Everything that could have gone wrong went wrong so this weekend is all about starting again and making sure we get back to the high standards we have set all season."

Aston Martin, Ferrari and Mercedes will all be seeking to keep pace with Verstappen, who gained his 39th career Red Bull win on Sunday, passing the total of four-time champion Sebastian Vettel. The 25-year-old Dutchman will remain the man to beat on what is likely to be a quicker track than that used in 2022, thanks to the removal of a final sector chicane. This will favor Red Bull for whom Verstappen won last year. Another triumph, his 40th, is in prospect on Sunday. — AFP

Rybakina racks up 30th win of 2023

PARIS: World number four Elena Rybakina racked up her 30th win of the year on Thursday to reach the French Open last 32. The Wimbledon champion defeated Czech teenager Linda Noskova 6-3, 6-3 and will face Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo for a place in the last 16. Kazakh fourth seed Rybakina, who could be the new world number one by the end of Roland Garros, converted three of the 10 break points she carved out and fired 30 winners past 18-year-old Noskova. Only Australian Open champion and world number two Aryna Sabalenka has more wins on tour this year than Rybakina. The Belarusian player, another contender for the world top ranking, has 31.

Swiatek eyes last 32

Meanwhile, Iga Swiatek continues her bid to become the first woman in 16 years to win back-to-back French Opens as Alexander Zverev returned to the court where 12 months ago his dreams of a maiden Grand Slam crown ended in agony. World number one Swiatek celebrated her 22nd birthday on Wednesday and is expected to comfortably ease past Claire Liu of the United States to make the last 32.

Liu, ranked 102 in the world, managed to win just one game when she faced the Pole at Indian Wells this year. Victory in Paris this year would give

Heat-Nuggets furor in past, Butler says

DENVER: Jimmy Butler said there was no lingering bad blood between the Miami Heat and Denver Nuggets on Wednesday as the two teams prepared to face off in the NBA Finals. Miami and Denver met in a fiery regular season clash in the 2021-2022 season, when Nuggets star Nikola Jokic poleaxed then Miami player Markieff Morris from behind. That sparked a melee involving players from both sides. A furious Butler challenged Denver's players to settle their differences in the tunnel after the game.

Jokic and Morris were both ejected while Jokic was later suspended for one game following the incident at Denver's Ball Arena. Butler moved to draw a line under the controversy on Wednesday when talking to reporters on the eve of Miami's clash with Denver in game one of the finals. "There's a lot of stuff about

Young footballer dies after brawl in Germany

BERLIN: A 15-year-old footballer from Berlin died Wednesday after he was seriously injured in a fight with players from a French team at an international youth tournament, police said. The teenager "died in hospital as a result of his severe brain injuries" after being hit on the head in the altercation in Frankfurt on Sunday, local police said in a statement. A 16-year-old player from the French team was arrested following the fight and was still being held in custody, police said.

The brawl occurred following the final whistle in a game between the victim's side JFC Berlin and a team from French second-division club Metz. Investigators were still looking at the

whole situation that people don't understand, and I'll let that stay back there," Butler said. "I don't think it has too much to do with anything, this thing in the past. It's high-level competition."

Butler was at pains to clarify however that his angry on-court tirade during that 2021 game was not directed at Jokic. "I will say I wasn't talking to Jokic," said Butler. "That wasn't my beef. Make sure you write that. The individual who I was talking to definitely knew who I was talking to." Butler meanwhile said Miami would need to take an all-hands-on-deck approach to containing Jokic, Denver's two-time NBA MVP who is averaging 29.9 points, 13.3 rebounds and 10.3 assists during this postseason.

Asked what would be the key to slowing down Jokic, Butler replied: "Guarding him as a team with all five guys. He does everything so well, and we're going to have to be in the gaps, we're going to have to gang rebound. We can't have defensive lapses. We're just going to have to get after it. I think at the end of the day, he's a major key ... and we're going to have to lock in." Butler has been the talismanic driving force of Miami's remarkable playoff run this year,

"detailed sequence of events" that led to the player's injuries, they said. The victim was seemingly hit "on the head or neck" before he "fell to the floor and had to be resuscitated", police said in a separate statement Tuesday. The victim, already declared brain dead on Tuesday, was kept on life support so his organs could be donated, a spokeswoman for the Frankfurt prosecutor's office said.

Metz released a statement on Wednesday evening. "Following the tragedy that occurred this weekend in Frankfurt, FC Metz has learned through the media of the death of the young opposing player today," it said. "The whole of FC Metz is deeply shocked by this tragedy and sends its most sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of the young player." The statement added that the club "would once again like to remind everyone that FC Metz Performance Program, as well as all the players and parents present, are of course at the disposal of the German authorities to help with the investigation". — AFP



PARIS: Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina plays a forehand return to Czech Republic's Linda Noskova during their women's singles match on day five of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament on June 1, 2023. — AFP

up after world number two Daniil Medvedev was knocked out in the first round by Brazil's Thiago Seyboth Wild. Fourth seed Casper Ruud and runner-up to Nadal last year, who was Medvedev's scheduled semi-final opponent, takes on Italian qualifier Giulio Zeppieri, ranked 129. Wimbledon champion and women's fourth seed Elena Rybakina, who could take Swiatek's world number one ranking at Roland Garros, faces a Czech teenager for the second time. Having defeated Brenda Fruhvirtova, Rome champion Rybakina will face Linda Noskova. — AFP



DENVER: Jimmy Butler #22 of the Miami Heat shoots during practice in preparation for Game One of the NBA Finals against the Denver Broncos at Ball Arena on May 31, 2023. — AFP

which saw them reach the finals despite being the lowly-ranked eighth seeds.

The 33-year-old forward said Miami's players had always believed in their ability to mount a deep postseason run based on the quality of the roster displayed in practice. "We do it every single day, and we know what we're capable of," Butler said. "The outside individuals don't get the opportunity to see that, and I wish that y'all did because then you would see that the guys that we have on this team, on this roster, can really play some high-level basketball. We're going to stay confident because, we're in the grind every single day. Guys have been out of the lineup all year long, guys step up, fill in, and do their job. We're never going to be surprised." — AFP



KUWAIT: President of the International Olympic Committee Dr Thomas Bach received President of Federation International de Natation (International Swimming Federation) Captain Hussein Al-Musallam. The two sides discussed several sports issues including the Paris 2024 Olympics and cooperation with FINA and the development of water sports.

Sports

Leon stun Los Angeles FC, take Champions League final lead

Liga-MX side's hopes of winning continental title jolted

LEON: Mexican side Leon defeated Los Angeles FC 2-1 to take a slender advantage after the first leg of the CONCACAF Champions League final on Wednesday. First-half goals from Colombian international William Tesillo and Ecuador forward Angel Mena looked to have secured Leon a comfortable victory at the Estadio Leon. But the Liga-MX side's hopes of winning the continental title for the first time were jolted after Los Angeles forward Denis Bouanga scored in the sixth minute of second-half stoppage time.

Los Angeles coach Steve Cherundolo admitted his team had been lucky to escape with just defeat by a one-goal margin and vowed an improved performance in Sunday's second leg in California. "Obviously it's a bit of a lifeline," Cherundolo said of Bouanga's late strike. "That goal does give us a chance. But that goal alone won't help us win the final. The performances as individuals and as a group needs to be much, much better."

"The scoreline is extremely lucky for us. But we're experienced enough and smart enough to bounce back. I'm 100 percent positive that our performance on Sunday will be much improved." Los Angeles went into the first leg with high hopes of emulating Seattle, who last year became only the second MLS team to be

head down and going about it in a really good way." Nashville are second in the East on 28 points, while Philadelphia Union, 1-0 winners over Charlotte on Wednesday, remain in third spot.

back into the game in the 36th minute but a promising counter-attack broke down when Jose Cifuentes misdirected his pass into the penalty area behind advancing team-mate Kwadwo Opoku.

Leon's hopes were then given a huge boost in stoppage time at the end of the first half when defender Jaime Barreiro's header from a corner was adjudged to have just grazed LAF's fullback Ryan Hollingshead's forearm. Referee Walter Lopez initially gave a corner, but after a review by VAR the Guatemalan official pointed to the spot to roars of delight from the home crowd. Mena stepped up to hammer home the

spot-kick to leave Leon 2-0 up at half-time.

Los Angeles rallied briefly early in the second half, but again failed to seriously test Leon goalkeeper Rodolfo Cota. Instead it was Leon who looked the likelier to score, with only LAF's goalkeeper John McCarthy keeping the tie alive with a string of fine saves, including one remarkable 58th minute block to deny Mena from close range. Leon looked to have killed the tie off in the closing stages but had a goal disallowed. Instead Los Angeles finally conjured a breakthrough in the dying seconds when Bouanga prodded home Mateusz Bogusz's cross. — AFP

Cincinnati go eight points clear; Seattle stumble in MLS

LOS ANGELES: FC Cincinnati surged eight points clear at the top of Major League Soccer's Eastern Conference standings on Wednesday as Western Conference leaders Seattle slumped to defeat. Cincinnati maintained their blistering start to the season with a 3-1 victory over New York City FC at Yankee Stadium. Luciano Acosta fired Cincinnati into the lead with a curling shot from the edge of the area in the 38th minute before Alvaro Barreal doubled the visitors' lead with a sublime curling free-kick in the 59th minute.

Braian Cufre gave New York hope with a 64th-minute header that made it 2-1, but Cincinnati restored their two-goal advantage with a Brandon Vazquez penalty six minutes later. "Really pleased with this win, a very tough place to play," Cincinnati coach Pat Noonan said after the win in New York. "Historically we haven't done so well here, but I'm very happy with how the guys played tonight. The guys are in a good way right now."

Cincinnati now have 36 points — the most any team has ever accumulated through 15 matches in the history of Major League Soccer. "Credit to the players for just focusing on whatever's in front of them," Noonan said. "They just keep putting their



Luciano Acosta of FC Cincinnati

head down and going about it in a really good way." Nashville are second in the East on 28 points, while Philadelphia Union, 1-0 winners over Charlotte on Wednesday, remain in third spot.

In the Western Conference, Seattle missed the chance to stretch their lead at the top after slumping to a 1-0 home defeat to the San Jose Earthquakes. Jeremy Ebobisse scored the winner for San Jose,

who move into fifth place in the table on 22 points, four points adrift of Seattle on 26. St Louis are just one point behind Seattle with 25 points but have played three games fewer than the Sounders. Los Angeles FC, who were in action in the CONCACAF Champions League final on Wednesday, are also one point behind the leaders but have four games in hand over Seattle. — AFP

Barcelona, Wolfsburg face off in Champions League final

BARCELONA: Barcelona face Wolfsburg in the Champions League final on Saturday, aiming to assert themselves early as the decade's dominant force in women's football, as Lyon did in the 2010s. The Catalan giants have both immense quality and huge support, but securing a second triumph in Eindhoven is essential to keep writing history, and prove a worthy adversary for the French side on a longer timeline.

Lyon are the reigning champions after beating Barcelona 3-1 in Turin last year, and have won six of the last seven editions, with a record eight triumphs in total. "There was women's football before Barcelona, and it was played here for years," Lyon forward Ada Hegerberg remarked last season, as Barca racked up two world-record attendances at Camp Nou en route to the final. The Norwegian forward also pointed out her side have never lost to Barcelona, so even if they conquer Wolfsburg, that issue remains.

Some Barcelona players, however, already think believe their time has begun. "I consider myself within the successful era (already), because reaching three consecutive finals is not something we would have seen in the past," veteran defender Marta Torrejon told reporters this week. "With one Champions League in the bag, as I put it, let's see what happens this Saturday."

Explosive young forward Claudia Pina, who could play a big part for Barcelona in the coming decade, agreed, saying winning the second Champions League would be further progress. "I hope we



Barcelona's Spanish forward Claudia Pina

keep winning, I hope we win this final, but I think already, today, we're one of the best teams in Europe and the world," said Pina. "We are showing it, by reaching the finals we're reaching, and now we have to win them and, well, take a step forward." Barcelona have dominated within Spain, winning the last four consecutive league titles, wiping away opponents without breaking a sweat.

In May they suffered their first league defeat in almost two years — during that run they won 62 consecutive league games. After Lyon beat Barcelona 4-1 in Budapest in the 2019 final, the already improving Catalans kicked up a further gear. They beat Chelsea in the 2021 final in Gothenburg to earn their maiden Champions League trophy. This season, shorn of injured two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas

until recently, the Catalans lost only one game in Europe, a group phase match at Bayern Munich.

During Lyon's era of success, Barcelona watched carefully, investing in facilities and bringing through young players primed to play for the first team, including key midfielder Aitana Bonmati. They have supplemented that with star signings, including Keira Walsh from Manchester City for a world-record women's transfer fee last summer, of 400,000 euros (\$427,000). "It's one of the main reasons why I came, and just the ambition of the club in general," Walsh told reporters. "If you look at how many finals they have been in in recent years it is incredible. To be in another one now shows how much the club values women's football and where they are trying to take it." — AFP

Man United aim to rewrite history with FA Cup glory

LONDON: Twelve years ago, Manchester City triggered a seismic shift in English football by beating treble-chasing Manchester United at Wembley. Now City's own treble bid will come under threat from resurgent United in Saturday's FA Cup final. With the Premier League wrapped up for a third successive season, City are two victories away from becoming only the second English club — after United in 1999 — to win the English title, the Champions League and the FA Cup in the same campaign.

City's current success and United's status as hopeful challengers would have been unimaginable when they last met in the FA Cup at Wembley in the 2011 semi-finals. Just a few weeks after that showdown at the national stadium, United would clinch the Premier League title for the fourth time in five years, while also reaching the Champions League final.

In stark contrast to United's golden era under boss Alex Ferguson, City were still scarred by decades of disfunction and they headed to Wembley in the midst of a trophy drought that had become a source of embarrassment. Such was United's superiority over their neighbors that fans cheekily displayed a banner in the Stretford End at Old Trafford which showed how many years it was since City last won a trophy.

To the intense frustration of the blue side of Manchester, the number on the banner was 35 by 2011. Yet by the time they left Wembley on a grey April afternoon, City had delivered a statement of intent that would soon render that mocking banner redundant. The first Manchester derby to be played at Wembley was an appropriate setting for a defining moment in English football. Since City were taken over by Sheikh Mansour's Abu Dhabi-based group in 2008, their vast spending on new players had become the talk of the Premier League.

Ferguson had dismissively waved away talk of City posing a threat to United when he dubbed their rivals "noisy neighbors" in 2009. But City were gradually improving under boss Roberto Mancini and the FA Cup semi-final served as their coming of age. After United missed several chances, Yaya Toure, one of City's expensive recruits, scored the only goal of a fiercely-contested clash seven minutes after half-time. The defeatism that had plagued City for so long was removed in one fell swoop.

Joleon Lescott was part of the defense that kept United at bay and the centre-back recalls the match as game-changer for both clubs. "That FA Cup semi-final was a real shift in belief as a club, for us as players and the fans, but also for United," Lescott said. "They realized we were a real threat. That was a real turning point. It really propelled us."

City would go on to win the FA Cup final against Stoke, banishing the trophy taunts from United and setting the stage for the start of a blue dynasty in Manchester. Mancini's men thrashed United 6-1 at Old Trafford the following season and won the title at their rivals' expense thanks to Sergio Agüero's unforgettable late goal against QPR on the final day. "We weren't just the noisy neighbors anymore, we were very loud!" Nigel De Jong, a member of that title-winning team, 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
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000

Physiotherapy Hospital

24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913

Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
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Mirqab	22456536
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Job Summary

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- ◆ Restore Database and application server whenever required
- ◆ Allocate system storage and planning future storage requirements for the database
- ◆ Monitor and optimize the performance of the database

Qualifications

- ◆ At least 2-4 years experience in performing Core-DBA Apps DBA activities
- ◆ Experience in Oracle 9i/10g/11g/12c

Requirements

- 1- Transferable Residency
- 2- Having Kuwaiti Driver license
- 3- Experience 2 to 4 Years in the same field

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Sevilla in seventh heaven

Sevilla overwhelm Roma 4-1 on penalties



BUDAPEST: Sevilla's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the UEFA Europa League final football match between Sevilla FC and AS Roma in Budapest, Hungary on May 31, 2023. — AFP

BUDAPEST: Sevilla found their Europa League magic formula on Wednesday, beating Roma 4-1 on penalties in Budapest to make it a perfect seven out of seven in finals in the competition. The game finished 1-1 following extra-time after Paulo Dybala's opener was earlier cancelled out by an own goal from Roma defender Gianluca Mancini. A bad-tempered but gripping match went to a shootout at a raucous Puskas Arena, with Sevilla goalkeeper Yassine Bounou proving the hero with two saves.

Gonzalo Montiel, who scored the winning penalty in the 2022 World Cup final, netted the decisive spot-kick after Mancini and Roger Ibanez had failed to convert for Roma. The win is a remarkable achievement for 62-year-old Jose Luis Mendilibar, who only took over at Sevilla in March and is now celebrating his first major trophy. "We are going to enjoy this because it has cost a lot and right now I don't know if I will renew or not and I don't care," said the Spaniard, who is not certain to be at the club next season.

The veteran coach was brought in to save the club from relegation and has led them to safety as well as European glory. "When I arrived I told the players that they were very good but that they were not mentally in the right place and that was my job," he said. "They have shown me in the end that they are very good." Defeat spells heartbreak for Roma boss Jose Mourinho, who has lost a European final for the first time after five successes.

The fans created a crackling atmosphere before kick-off but the early stages of the game did not match the color in the stands.

Dybala strike

Dybala repaid Mourinho's gamble on his fitness in the 35th minute when he latched onto Mancini's through ball from the centre circle, coolly slotting his shot past Bounou. Sevilla, finally finding some fluency, came agonizingly close to levelling deep into the seven minutes of added-on time when Ivan Rakitic drilled a fierce left-footed strike from distance that cannoned back off an upright. Mendilibar brought on forwards Suso and Erik Lamela for Oliver Torres and Bryan Gil at the break and the Spanish side began the second period on the front foot.

They were level after 10 minutes when Mancini bundled a Jesus Navas cross from the right into his own net from close range. Roma seemed certain to re-take the lead against the run of play midway through the second half but the Sevilla defenders somehow scrambled the ball away after several stabs at goal from close range. Dybala, starting a match for the first time since mid-April, was withdrawn, with midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum coming on to replace him.

Sevilla thought they had a penalty with 15 minutes to go after referee Anthony Taylor ruled that Ibanez had brought down Lucas Ocampos but the

decision was overturned by VAR. Roma squandered a glorious chance to go back in front when substitute Andrea Belotti failed to keep his shot on target with only the goalkeeper to beat. Extra-time was largely uneventful as tempers flared between the two benches but Roma defender Chris Smalling almost snatched the win when he hit the woodwork with a looping header from a corner in the dying seconds.

There were 13 yellow cards awarded, the most ever in a UEFA Europa League game. The first three spot-kicks were converted but when man-of-the-match Bounou saved penalties from Mancini and pushed Ibanez's effort onto the post, the Spanish side had a 3-1 lead and appeared certain winners. But there was more drama to come. Montiel's effort was saved by Rui Patricio but the kick was ordered re-taken after an encroachment by the goalkeeper and this time the Argentine made no mistake.

Sevilla, 11th in La Liga with one match to play will play in the Champions League next season. But Roma's campaign could end with a whimper after the highs of winning the inaugural Europa Conference League last year. The Italian team are sixth in Serie A with one game remaining and there are major doubts over whether Mourinho, 60, will still be manager next season. "We felt pressure against a team that has more talent than us," said the Portuguese. "We lost a game but not dignity. I've never gone home prouder than today, even when I won." — AFP

No swag, but Ronaldo puts swagger in Saudi



Nassr's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo

RIYADH: Cristiano Ronaldo's first season in Saudi Arabia ended with a whimper, but with hundreds of millions in wages and unprecedented attention on Saudi football he may not be the last megastar to grace the oil-rich kingdom. The fireworks and euphoria that greeted Ronaldo's gala unveiling in January were in sharp contrast to the close of Al Nassr's season, when the Portuguese sat out a 3-0 win against Al Fateh late on Wednesday.

Despite signing the five-time Ballon d'Or-winner in a two-and-a-half-year deal said to total 400 million euros (\$428 million), Al Nassr finished second in the Saudi Pro League without any silverware, although they qualified for the Asian Champions League as a consolation. Ronaldo scored 14 goals including five penalties but it was a "disappointing season" for the Riyadh club, said Moqbel Al-Zabni, editor-in-chief of the Saudi capital's Al Riyadhiah newspaper.

"They needed at least one championship." Fan frustrations aside, however, the 38-year-old remains a marketing coup for Saudi football and the wider country, which is attempting to reinvent itself as a magnet for tourism and foreign investment. According to a source close to the negotiations, the major oil exporter is also about to land a "huge" deal for Ronaldo's ex-La Liga sparring partner Lionel Messi, the World Cup-winning Argentine icon. Reports have linked a string of other big names to the Saudi Pro League thanks to the riches of the Public Investment Fund, the sovereign wealth vehicle behind LIV Golf and the purchase of Premier League club Newcastle United, as well as Ronaldo's signing. Saudi Arabia is also considering bidding for the World Cup, following in the footsteps of its neighbor Qatar, and has already explored joining forces with Egypt and Greece to present a tri-continental option.

Saudi Arabia's lavish spending on sport is often criticized as "sportswashing" - an attempt to shift the focus from its record on human rights. The conservative monarchy executed 81 people in a single day last year, outlawed homosexuality and triggered international condemnation when journalist Jamal Khashoggi was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018. Ronaldo has said little in public since arriving in Riyadh with his model girlfriend Georgina Rodriguez - a highly bankable influencer with 49.5 million Instagram followers - and five children. After mistakenly calling the country "South Africa" when he was first welcomed at Al Nassr, last week he backed the Saudi Pro League to become one of the best in the world. "Step by step, I think this league will be a top-five league in the world," he said in a post-match interview. Although it quickly became clear that the veteran player could not win games single-handedly, Saudi football has never enjoyed such attention. — AFP

Kuwait SC crowned basketball champions

KUWAIT: Kuwait SC defeated Kazma 104-85 in the final of 2022-2023 season of the Kuwaiti Division I Basketball League on Wednesday, thus claiming the title of the championship for the 14th time. Throughout the game, hosted by Kuwait Basketball Association, Kuwait SC put Kazma on the defensive and was able to win their third showdown running. The champions maintained their advantage, ending the first half with a 53-38 lead, and then expanded their lead to 19 points at the end of the game. The result of the game put Kazma in the second place ahead of Qadsia who came third after beating Al-Jahra a couple of days ago. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait SC were crowned champion of basketball league 2022-2023. — KUNA photos

