

Polestar 2
Why wait
to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



3 Language of inclusiveness: Election candidates urged to speak to all



7 US and India agree defense industry cooperation plan



11 Here Comes the AI: Fans hail 'new' Beatles music



16 Zain holds excellence awards ceremony for best performers



Kuwaitis head to vote again

207 candidates in fray • 793,646 citizens eligible to vote • 1,157 judges to supervise polls

NEWS IN BRIEF

Palestinian 3-year-old dies

RAMALLAH: A three-year-old Palestinian boy shot by Zionist forces in the occupied West Bank last week died of his wounds on Monday. The Zionist Sheba hospital, where he was being treated since he was shot on Thursday, said the child "died... despite extensive efforts of the medical team". In a statement, the Palestinian health ministry said it was informed of the "death of the child Mohammed Haitham Al-Tamimi, 3, from the village of Nabi Saleh". — AFP

Ashi joins French couture federation

PARIS: Saudi fashion designer Mohammed Ashi announced Monday he had joined France's haute couture federation, becoming the first couturier from the Gulf region to join the prestigious roster. His eponymous label Ashi Studio will have its first show as part of the official line-up of Paris Fashion Week's haute couture shows on July 6. "This appointment is the highlight of my career," Ashi said in a statement. — AFP



Mohammed Ashi

Qatar minister heads UN conf

GENEVA: Qatar's labor minister was on Monday appointed without a vote to head the International Labor Organization's annual decision-making conference. Asian and Pacific nations, which according to a regional rotation had dibs this year on selecting the president of the two-week International Labor Conference, had proposed Ali Bin Samikh Al-Marri. After his appointment, Marri pointed out to the conference that his country had introduced a minimum wage and improved conditions for domestic workers. — AFP

Oil market rallies on cut

LONDON: Oil rallied Monday after key producer Saudi Arabia slashed output by a million barrels in a bid to prop up prices, while fellow OPEC+ members agreed to continue current cuts to 2024. International benchmark Brent oil and US counterpart WTI crude won more than two percent. Asian and European stocks mainly climbed with energy majors boosted by higher crude futures, which boosts profit and revenues. — AFP (See Page 8)

Air travel to soar in 2023

ISTANBUL: Airlines will return to profit and fly a near-record 4.35 billion passengers this year, but the sector's post-pandemic recovery remains fragile, an industry group said on Monday. The industry is forecast to post net profits totaling \$9.8 billion in 2023, or double previous estimates, boosted by the end of China's COVID restrictions, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA). — AFP (See Page 8)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti voters head to the polls on Tuesday for the third time since December 2020 to elect a new parliament they hope will put an end to almost two decades of non-stop political disputes, which have stalled development despite huge revenues from oil. The elections, the seventh in just the last 11 years, were called after HH the Amir dissolved the National Assembly elected in 2020 for the second time after the constitutional court reinstated it following its first dissolution.

The Assembly was dissolved for the first time in August last year due to disputes between MPs and the government. Snap polls were then held in September 2022, in which the opposition scored a resounding victory. However, the constitutional court nullified the election on March 19 after finding that the decree

which dissolved the Assembly breached the constitution. It also reinstated the 2020 Assembly.

Since 2003, the Kuwaiti parliament has completed its four-year full term only once, between 2016 and 2020. During the same period, it was dissolved or annulled by the constitutional court on seven occasions. The Cabinet, which is always led by a senior member of the ruling family, was changed more frequently.

Some 793,646 citizens are eligible to vote. They include 406,895 females or 51.3 percent of the electorate, and 386,751 men (48.7 percent). As many as 207 candidates, including 13 women, are contesting the 50-seat National Assembly. The number of candidates is much lower than the 305 hopefuls who took part in the previous elections in September last year.

They include 55 former MPs from previous assemblies and as many as 46 members of the

scrapped 2022 Assembly. The ballots open at 8.00 am and close 12 hours later. Voting will take place at some 118 centers spread across the six governorates. Initial results are not expected before midnight on Tuesday. Some 1,157 judges will supervise the elections, which will be monitored by local civil societies. Hundreds of police have been deployed to watch the voting process.

Kuwait is divided into five electoral constituencies, with each electing 10 MPs. Campaigning this time has primarily focused on trying to convince voters to vote, as people feel increasingly frustrated with the turn of events and frequent voting. There were fewer rallies compared to previous polls and many candidates did not even set up their election headquarters. Campaigning only gained some steam in the last few days, when candidates started attacking each other and criticizing the government.

Iranian embassy set to reopen in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH: Iran is set to reopen its embassy in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday following a seven-year closure, Tehran and a diplomatic source said, sealing a Chinese-brokered rapprochement deal announced in March. Saudi Arabia severed relations with Iran in 2016 after its embassy in Tehran and consulate in the northwestern city of Mashhad were attacked during pro-

tests over Riyadh's execution of Shiite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr.

Iran's diplomatic mission, which was expelled by Saudi authorities, will return under the leadership of Alireza Enayati, who previously served as Iran's ambassador to Kuwait. Tehran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani announced the reopening in a statement Monday, confirming earlier comments by a diplomatic source in Riyadh.

Iran's embassy in Riyadh, its consulate in Jeddah and its representative office to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) "will be officially reopened on Tuesday and

Continued on Page 6



CAPE TOWN: Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian greets his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan on June 2, 2023. — AFP

Treatment found to reduce progression of rare blood cancer

WASHINGTON: A treatment that involves genetically modifying the body's own immune cells has been found to cut the risk of disease progression by 74 percent in people with a rare type of blood cancer, results showed Monday. Ciltacabtagene autoleucel — also known by its trade name Carvykti — was tested in a clinical trial involving 419 patients with multiple myeloma, whose disease was not re-

sponsive to the current frontline drug lenalidomide, a chemotherapy medicine.

"Lenalidomide has become a foundation of care for people with myeloma, but as its use has expanded, so has the number of patients whose disease will no longer respond to the treatment," said oncologist Oreofe Odejide at the American Society of Clinical Oncology's annual meeting where results were presented. Ciltacabtagene autoleucel "delivers remarkably effective outcomes compared to patients' current options" and "can be used safely earlier in the treatment phase," added Odejide, an expert who was not part of the research.

Multiple myeloma affects a type of white blood cells called plasma cells, and can cause cascading harms to the bones, kidneys, and immune health. It affects sev-

en people out of 100,000 every year, according to the Cleveland Clinic, with 100,000 people impacted in the United States. There is currently no cure, though progression can be stopped for a long time.

Risk increases with age, with men more likely to be affected than women, and Black people at higher risk than other races. Not everyone requires immediate treatment and the disease may be monitored if it is slow growing. In the new clinical trial, half the patients were randomly assigned ciltacabtagene autoleucel, while the other half received a cocktail of drugs that represents the current standard of care, including chemotherapy and steroids.

"After a median follow-up of 16 months, the researchers found that ciltacabtagene autoleucel

Continued on Page 6

WHO eyes global certificate inspired by EU COVID pass

GENEVA: The World Health Organization will use the European Union's digital COVID pass as a basis for a global health certification system, according to a new partnership deal agreed Monday. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides signed what they described as a "landmark" agreement in Geneva. "The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the value of digital health solutions in facilitating access to health services," Tedros said at the signing ceremony.

He said the EU's COVID certificate would now be transformed into "a global public good", as a first step in the creation of a global digital health certification network. The network will expand to include things like digitized international routine vaccination cards, he said. It will be aimed to help protect people from health threats, including possible future pandemics, and facilitate global mobility, the WHO and the EU said in a statement.

This "will be an important part of our efforts to strengthen health systems and to support our mem-



PARIS: This file photo taken on July 20, 2021 shows the EU digital COVID certificate. — AFP

ber states to prepare better for the next epidemic or pandemic," Tedros said. "The network could also play a crucial role in cross-border humanitarian situations by ensuring people have access to their health records and credentials as they move across borders due to conflict, the climate crisis and other emergencies."

The EU COVID certificate, made available on paper or digitally, has been used by travelers moving around inside the bloc to show their COVID vaccination or test status. The most widely-used COVID certification system in the world is based on open-source technologies and standards, and allowed

Continued on Page 6

US ex-VP Pence jumps into 2024 White House race

WASHINGTON: Republican former vice president Mike Pence launched Monday his hotly-anticipated challenge to one-time boss Donald Trump for the party's 2024 White House nomination, setting up the unusual scenario of two running mates becoming rivals. Pence, a 63-year-old evangelical Christian, filed his nomination papers with the Federal Election Commission ahead of an official declaration to be made by video Wednesday in the early voting state of Iowa — joining an already crowded primary field.

He spent his 2017-21 tenure as vice president honing his reputation as a loyal deputy who brought the religious right into the tent and

Continued on Page 6



Mike Pence



Local

Cabinet discusses youth projects, supporting small business owners

Cultural cafes project to blend modernity, tradition



KUWAIT: Architectural renderings of the cultural cafe project presented by Minister of Social Affairs Mai Al-Baghli on Monday.

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti cabinet focused during its weekly meeting, Monday, on a number of topics pertaining to projects connected with youth development, the workforce and boosting cultural activities. During the meeting, Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi briefed the meeting on projects aimed at cultivating the youths' talents.

The minister presented updates on the establishment of a complex supporting entrepreneurs and

businessmen in Kuwait. He also touched on a project aimed at providing job opportunities to youth during the summer. The third project will harness the artistic talents of Kuwaiti youth by commissioning them to paint murals across the country with the purpose of beautifying public places.

Employment for fresh grads

Deputy Prime Minister Khaled Al-Fadhel and several top officials at the Civil Service Commission

of commercial and even strategic stocks," he said.

Behbehani noted that OPEC+ reduction was expected, as increase of production from outside of the group led to imbalance in the oil market, which was exploited by stockbrokers that led to sharp fluctuations in prices. "Saudi Arabia's decision to reduce its production by an additional one million barrels per day next July is in the interest of global markets and supports its stability," Behbehani added.

Oil analyst Ahmad Karam said that oil prices are still fluctuating at low prices at around \$70 per barrel despite the latest voluntary oil production cut from OPEC+ countries. He said the low prices directly affect oil-producing countries that rely on oil income. The voluntary oil reduction has not helped so far, as oil prices have stabilized at their current level. He added that yesterday's decision to extend production cuts until the end of 2024 supports the stability of oil prices at the required levels. He said oil prices will remain the same at the present time, until the effect of the additional voluntary reduction by Saudi Arabia begins next month, expecting an increase in oil prices in the coming months of July and August, especially with the travel season and summer. He explained that current price levels are a result of fears and low economic factors, pointing out that there are expectations of a decrease in economic growth rates for industrial countries, especially China, United States and EU countries.

Kuwait lauds OPEC decision

Al-Hajri, also Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, headed Kuwait's delegation to the 186th OPEC ministerial meeting held Saturday and the 35th OPEC and non-OPEC producing countries held in Vienna earlier in the day. Kuwait is committed to the cutting decisions, in ad-



Minister Mai Al-Baghli (second left) is seen with officials during a field trip.

(CSC) informed cabinet of a scheme to immediately employ excelling new university graduates. The scheme, said Fadhel, who is also Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, involves allowing employees to take leave for studying at approved universities in accordance with rules and regulations of their places of employment.

Redeveloping heritage cafes

Minister of Social Affairs Mai Al-Baghli dis-

cussed a cultural cafe project. The project, for which Baghli presented the initial architectural renderings Monday, will blend modernism and tradition, which is in line with the 2035 Kuwait development vision. Boosting cultural appreciation, supporting small business ventures as well as encouraging creativity amongst the youth are some of the goals behind the initiative, said Baghli, who is also Minister of Women and Childhood Affairs. — KUNA

OPEC+ decision aims to stabilize market: Analysts

KUWAIT: The decision of the OPEC+ group on reducing oil output by two million barrels per day until the end of 2024 aims to enhance the stability and balance of oil markets, said two Kuwaiti oil analysts on Monday.

Kuwait announced Sunday that it will continue its voluntary oil output reduction by 128,000 bpd until the end of 2024. This voluntary cut comes as a precautionary measure taken in coordination with the countries partaking in the OPEC+ deal on the decrease announced last April. Kuwait's Minister of Oil Manaf Al-Hajri, added in a statement issued by the Ministry of Oil. In separate statements for KUNA, analysts said that this decision shows OPEC+ group's commitment towards the cooperation deal signed on December 10, 2016, and its keenness on stabilizing the oil markets.

Kuwaiti oil expert Dr Abdulsamie Behbehani said that this OPEC+ decision is expected for two main reasons. The first being the increase in production from outside the OPEC+ countries, which amounted to about 1.9 million barrels per day. The increase came mostly from the United States, Canada, Brazil and Guinea due to the increase in exploration and production.

The second reason is the increase in commercial stocks in some consuming countries by 60 percent, as a result of the previous winter, as it was not as harsh as expected, which reduced the consumption

and balance of markets and thanked Saudi Arabia for its initiative on a voluntary cut of one million bpd in July. He further lauded the positive atmospheres which prevailed during meetings that reflected the one-team spirit. There is a consensus on reaching mechanisms of reviewing production figures of all member states to be a base of calculating the output level in 2025, he said. He stated that this ensures transparency, stability and sustainability of the markets. — KUNA



VIENNA: Officials are seen during the 35th meeting for OPEC and non-OPEC producing countries on Saturday. — KUNA

dition to its voluntary reduction by 128,000 bpd, to produce 2,548,000 bpd as of June. Al-Hajri said. The deal on cutting output was extended to the end of 2024 as a precautionary measure taken in coordination with the countries participating in the OPEC+ agreement, which had previously announced in April 2023 on voluntary cuts, that includes Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iraq and Oman.

The minister emphasized Kuwait's support for the OPEC+ efforts, which aimed at enhancing sta-

bility and balance of markets and thanked Saudi Arabia for its initiative on a voluntary cut of one million bpd in July. He further lauded the positive atmospheres which prevailed during meetings that reflected the one-team spirit. There is a consensus on reaching mechanisms of reviewing production figures of all member states to be a base of calculating the output level in 2025, he said. He stated that this ensures transparency, stability and sustainability of the markets. — KUNA



NBK organizes GRI standards training program

KUWAIT: In conjunction with its ongoing commitment to advancing sustainability as a foundational pillar of its operations and corporate culture, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) organized a comprehensive two-day Sustainability training program for its employees across various functions. The core objective of the training was to empower its people with the requisite knowledge and skills to better understand the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards and the fundamentals of sustainability reporting in line with NBK's ESG Strategy. This initiative was carried out in collaboration with DCarbon, the GRI certified training partner in the MENA region, demonstrating NBK's steadfast dedication to building a sustainable economy.

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) sustainability reporting framework is the most trusted and widely used sustainability framework globally. GRI Standards are used universally to measure and report economic, environmental, and social performance. Thousands of companies and organizations of different sizes and industries apply GRI's guide-

lines as an integral part of their core strategies to scale up their positive impact and value.

Throughout the training program, Dr Ehab Shalaby, Chairman at DCarbon, provided a comprehensive overview encompassing the purpose and structure of the GRI Standards. Through a series of interactive sessions, presentations, and case studies, participants gained a comprehensive understanding of the standards' core principles, reporting requirements, and guidelines, addressing different types of organizations.

Throughout the program, participants acquired a profound comprehension of how international sustainability practices and reporting frameworks, like the upcoming sustainability standards of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), align with NBK's long-term ESG objectives and ambitions. Participants also developed the skills to identify and evaluate ESG-related impacts on the Bank's various key stakeholders. NBK views stakeholder engagement as an important priority across its business practices for defining the Bank's material ESG topics and guiding its ESG strategy and reporting.

NBK continues to integrate ESG and sustainability practices into its business strategies to further strengthen risk management, decision-making and long-term value creation. Through comprehensively designed training programs, the Bank strives to empower its employees' dedication and commitment to embedding sus-



tainability through every facet of its operations.

NBK continues to lead in its unwavering commitment to strengthening sustainability throughout its operations and corporate culture. This ongoing progress has been achieved through a range of initiatives, more recently its commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2060 and reducing operational emissions by 25 percent by 2025. NBK recognizes its responsibility in mobilizing capital to solve specific environmental and social challenges, thereby advancing societal transition to a more sustainable and equitable low carbon economy. To that extent, the Bank developed and launched its Sustainable Financing Framework and furthered its commitment to environmental transparency by disclosing its environmental impact through CDP. Building on the strong foundations it established, NBK intends

to continue with taking the necessary steps to drive equitable and sustainable socio-economic growth.

Key highlights of NBK's ESG achievements in its efforts to strengthen the foundation of sustainability:

- Committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2060.
- Established interim goals to reduce gross operational emissions by 25 percent by 2025.
- Launched the NBK Sustainable Financing Framework.
- Transformed its ESG Strategy to higher levels of ESG integration across the Group's operations and activities.
- Joined the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC).
- Achieved significant progress in women's participation in the workforce, as well as Board gender diversity.
- Disclosed its environmental impact through CDP for both the Climate Change and Forests Categories across the Financial Services Sector.

Local

Advocacy needed to include differently abled people in political discourse

Interpretation, accessibility can greatly break down barriers

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: During the election period, people with hearing difficulties struggle with understanding some speeches, which hinders them from taking action as part of society, especially since this mainly depends on listening to political speeches and discussions. Therefore, it is essential that differently-abled people have the same rights as everyone else and deserve equal opportunities to participate in societal activities.

To advocate for the protection and equal treatment of differently-abled individuals and shed light on the necessity of their inclusion in society's activities, Kuwait Times interviewed speech-language pathologist Maraheb Al-Qallaf and certified practicing speech pathologist (CPSP) Khadeejah Buabbas, who is also a founder of Let's Speech Center for people with special needs.

Kuwait Times: How does having an interpreter for differently-abled people during a speech benefit both the individuals with impairments and the speaker?

Maraheb Al-Qallaf: Having an interpreter during an event promotes a sense of inclusion, diversity and equity by ensuring that everyone has equal access to the information being shared regardless of their abilities. The presence of an interpreter removes any communication barriers by providing a sense of belonging and fostering a greater level of engagement between the individuals and the speaker.

For example, we know there is a fixed time for national news every day; therefore, individuals who can hear can listen to the language spoken by the news anchor, while hearing-impaired individuals can see the interpreter on the lower corner of the screen or simply read the news anchor's lips. An interpreter promotes effective communication between communication partners with different speaking and hearing abilities.

Let's imagine that a hearing individual hosts a big event which includes the presence of differently-abled individuals. An interpreter can provide the speaker with real-time feedback on the comprehension and engagement of the audience, allowing for adjustments and improvements when necessary. This enables effective understanding and comprehension, ensuring that the message is accurately delivered, which enhances the overall learning experience.

Therefore, individuals with disabilities feel valued and empowered. It shows respect for their communication needs and culture, and ensures their voices are heard and that their opinions matter. Such a big event embraces the diverse needs of the audience and shows their willingness to accommodate those needs. This enhances the speaker's reputation and credibility, as it shows sensitivity and understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.

Khadeejah Buabbas: It is crucial to promote the access and accommodation requirements for people with communication disabilities, as it is one of their basic human rights. There are many conditions that affect differently-abled people's participation in social activities — some of them include hearing, visual and cognitive impairments, developmental language disabilities, acquired language disabilities due to neurological conditions or trauma that can affect the person's full participation in social activities due to having underlying communication difficulties. Thus includes the inability or difficulty to understand and/or use language.

KT: In what ways can including interpretation during a speech help to break down communication barriers and promote understanding



Khadeejah Buabbas



Maraheb Al-Qallaf

and empathy for individuals with different forms of communication?

Qallaf: Interpretation ensures that individuals with different abilities and different forms of communication like sign language users effectively access and engage with the content of the speech. Interpreters are skilled professionals who specialize in facilitating effective communication between speakers and individuals with different communication abilities. Interpreters can accurately convey the message with their expertise, taking into consideration linguistic and cultural differences.

This visual element provided by the interpreter improves understanding and facilitates a deeper connection with the speaker's message. Non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language that accompany the interpretation contribute to showing emotions, empathy and connection. Interpretation increases awareness, encourages acceptance, deepens understanding of diversity and breaks down stereotypes, because it broadens perspectives, especially for those who have never been exposed to any other methods of communication, such as sign language.

Buabbas: Speech pathologists play an important role in helping people with communication difficulties and give them access to take an active part in society, which thereby improves their quality of life. All sectors must interpret their messages for people with difficulties, whether social, political, educational, economic, etc. Speech pathologists target the language skills required to understand the way every sector functions by using printed versions of the sample ballot or the speakers' speech summaries.

There are other strategies and technologies that can be used to enhance the quality of life of people with various disabilities, for example, by using text-to-speech technology or devices that provides text-to-speech output with adjustable speech rate, magnified visual displays, touchscreen input and paddle-switch input. Also, allowing a personal support worker to accompany the person with disability is helpful in some cases.

Kuwait Times: How can individuals without hearing and speaking impairments better understand and support the inclusion of sign language or any other means of communicating and interpretation in a speech or event?

Qallaf: Educating ourselves by learning about the history of the deaf community, their cultural significance and the importance of sign language. This is the first step towards supporting inclusion and acceptance of the deaf community, along with advocating for inclusion by learning basic signs to facilitate communication with individuals who rely on sign language as the main communication mode. People with hearing impairment know how to lipread; therefore, they are making an effort to

ies to protect them from harmful content and interactions. The service is available via two dedicated apps, one for parents and another for children, and both apps fully support English and Arabic interfaces. The apps are available on all popular operating systems for smartphones, tablets, and computers.

The service's top features include a precise and real-time child locator on the map, device use controls, application controls, online content filtering, calls and SMS monitoring, battery level tracker, screen time management, safe search in YouTube, and much more. Parents can easily control all these tools and more as they see fit.

Parental control apps and solutions have become increasingly necessary in today's digital age due to the growing prevalence of internet connected devices and online platforms that expose children to potential risks such as cyberbullying, online predators, and explicit content. The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to increased remote learning and screen time, making parental control apps even more important for maintaining healthy technology habits and safeguarding children from online risks.

As parents cannot always be physically present to supervise their children's internet use, parental control apps provide an important layer of protection and guidance to help children navigate the digital world safely and responsibly. For this, Zain was keen on partnering with Kaspersky,

catastrophes related to these issues affect the lives of citizens and expats directly, which calls for attention by National Assembly candidates and their election platforms.

Dr Uqab said the National Assembly has a major role in protecting environmental rights of society members through legislations that protect such rights. Also, the environment protection law of 2014, which was amended in 2015, must be activated to guarantee environmental rights of citizens by not affecting the quality of air, water and land.

She said the Civil Service Commission must move quickly by pro-

viding job titles that match academic qualifications and specialties, such as environmental engineering, which is not on the CSC's job lists. Uqab said elected MPs who will occupy the green seats in Abdullah Al-Salem Hall must think deeply about issues related to the environment and should move the wheels of the development of environmental work in Kuwait, with priority for environmental achievement.

She asked voters to elect those who have a high sense of responsibility towards Kuwait to guarantee the integration of the proposed rules and recommendations.



integrate in our verbal community, and they do their best to verbalize words.

Now, it is our turn to spend similar efforts to promote a better and harmonious society. Learning a few commonly used signs can greatly help to break down barriers and show willingness to engage and connect. This will not only strengthen communication, but will also demonstrate our commitment and respect. When attending or organizing a speech or event, we need to cater to the accessibility of all differently-abled people. We tend to see only accessibility measurements made for physically disabled individuals; however, having seen many places in Western cultures, especially in opera houses and big stages, special accommodations are always considered for people with poor vision, the blind, those with hearing aids or the deaf.

Different abilities mean diversity, and diversity should be accepted, because I believe every one of us is an active citizen in society and every one of us have different potentials that contribute to a better society. By actively supporting and advocating for these measures, we contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive environment that develops a deeper appreciation for the challenges faced by individuals with different communication abilities.

We need to be patient, attentive and open-minded when communicating with differently-abled individuals, and engage in meaningful conversations with individuals with disabilities by asking them about their experiences, challenges and suggestions for better inclusion. Their insights and perspectives are greatly valued in shaping a better accepting community.

Buabbas: Some basic tips and etiquettes on interacting with people with differently-abled people: Face people when talking to them and have their attention; try to reduce the distractions if you are unable to provide a quiet environment during the speech; respond, rephrase and repeat the sentences; ask for repetition politely if you do not understand; do not make assumptions about what they are trying to communicate; ask if they need help before providing it; be sensitive about physical contact; think before you speak, and always speak directly to the person and not their companion or interpreter; speak clearly and use simple language; give them more time to respond, process or read; and do not tease or laugh at people with disabilities.



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In my view

Arabization is inevitable



Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh

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Among the hilarious ironies is that an Arab student who studies medicine or other sciences at Italian universities studies it in the Italian language, and the one who studies in Korea studies in their language too. The Palestinian Arab who studies in the usurped state — the Zionist entity — studies in Hebrew, but the Arab who wants to study in his Arab countries studies medicine and science in English or French! It is truly a sad irony.

Science and numbers have proved that teaching science in the mother language enables the human being to understand his subject in a more innovative manner, which makes the researcher or doctor able to be creative in their field. This language of science and numbers has much evidence, be it through statistical studies or studies related to the science of brain functions or educational studies, so observers do not find it strange for keenness by countries' leaders to teach their students in their language. The reason is that these leaders know that there is no way for their people to share the development and technology in the world without making their language the first tool to deliver science to their children.

When the Zionist entity was established, the person in charge of education asked Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion about the language Jews will be taught in. Ben-Gurion looked at him in anger and the official understood it, so teaching of medicine and science in the Zionist entity is in Hebrew. The Zionists brought the language out of the grave. It was a weak language, so they taught their children in it. The Zionist entity's doctors publish more research papers than what Arab doctors publish, despite the large number of Arab children.

Using an alternative language in teaching science and medicine is something we encourage and call for. The material for a student of science and medicine must be in their language, so they can comprehend the material completely and become excellent in it. The unified medical dictionary committee was formed in 1966, and scientists completed the unification of the medical language dictionary and published it for the first time in 1973.

The Arab Center for Authorship and Translation of Health Science was established in 1980 by the Council of Arab Ministers of Health, located in Kuwait. This center, which was first chaired by the late Dr Abdulrahman Al-Awadhi, and currently led by Dr Marzouq Al-Ghunaim, has a full register of workshops, lectures and meetings that has enough evidence for every fair person about the necessity of teaching medicine and science in the mother tongue.

Arabization is inevitable, and if our leaders wish for us to actively contribute to human civilization, they must support the Arabization process quickly. All countries of the world who speak a language teach in their language, publish their research in their language and there are specialized entities that translate and deliver information to doctors in their language.

I went for training in Tokyo for many months and there was only one Japanese doctor who spoke English; the rest of scientists, doctors and technicians spoke in Japanese, and no one claimed that Japan is lagging in medicine; rather I saw Western delegations come with translators to learn techniques and science from them. We will not become like them unless we respect our language and culture, as science is like air — it is the right of everyone.

There are enemies of the Arabic language among us with many motives. Some of them hate Arabs, others hate the language of the religion, some are living among us but their hearts are somewhere else; all of them fight the Arabic language and attempt to despise it and doubt its abilities, as they forge information and make up rumors in order to keep the Arab nation hostage to other cultures, and keep our nation away from participating in the global civilization. Those, no matter how they try, will not stop the expansion of this language, in which the Holy Quran was revealed, which is the language of intellect and science. This is a fact known to fair people only, who have clean hearts.

Zain offers online parental control tools to protect children

KUWAIT: Zain recently celebrated International Children's Day by announcing a new partnership with Kaspersky® Safe Kids to offer 3 months FREE when subscribing to the service from the Zain app. Kaspersky® Safe Kids brings the latest parental control tools to protect children online via a bundle of unique features that allow parents to monitor and control their kids' online usage on their smart devices to shield them from harmful and inappropriate content.

This step stems from Zain's tireless efforts to bring a safe and secure online experience for everyone, especially children, who continuously face the danger of being exposed to harmful and inappropriate content online. With this service, parents can enjoy peace of mind by having the ability to easily monitor and control their children's digital experience at any time and place.

Kaspersky® Safe Kids offers three main safeguards: monitoring and regulating children's online activities, limiting screen time, and setting boundar-

KEPS calls on MPs to protect environment

KUWAIT: Head of Kuwait Environment Protector Society (KEPS) Dr Wijdan Al-Uqab said caring for current issues such as the environment, climate change, alternative energy, water scarcity and sustainable development goals "is not a luxury or a particular interest of environmental specialists". Crises and natural

catastrophes related to these issues affect the lives of citizens and expats directly, which calls for attention by National Assembly candidates and their election platforms.

Dr Uqab said the National Assembly has a major role in protecting environmental rights of society members through legislations that protect such rights. Also, the environment protection law of 2014, which was amended in 2015, must be activated to guarantee environmental rights of citizens by not affecting the quality of air, water and land.

She said the Civil Service Commission must move quickly by pro-



Dr Wijdan Al-Uqab

NEWS IN BRIEF

Man dies in car crash

KUWAIT: A man driving a four-wheel-drive vehicle died after crashing his car into a tree on the Jahra highway Monday morning. The man was killed after getting trapped in the vehicle as a result of the crash. A fire brigade from the Tahrir center was dispatched to the site of the collision, said the Public Relations and Media Department at the Fire force. The body was retrieved from the vehicle and handed over to authorities.

KRCS urges Arab cooperation

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society Hilal Al-Sayer stressed the importance of further Arab cooperation in the field of humanitarian work. He also called for coordination between various Arab and international organizations. The remarks came in a phone call with KUNA on the sidelines of the meeting of 47th session of the Arab Red Cross and Red Crescent Organization on Monday in the Qatari capital of Doha. The meeting, Sayer said, discussed developments in countries experiencing humanitarian crises and stressed the need to work on providing urgent assistance and relief for them through humanitarian partners. — KUNA

Power cut off in bachelor dwellings

KUWAIT: Power will be disconnected from bachelor dwellings in Khaitan, Kuwait Municipality said Monday. The move is in response to an order from the Director General of Kuwait Municipality Saud Al-Dabbous to the committees tasked with eliminating the 'bachelors' housing' phenomenon in private and model residential areas. The municipality said last week that it's intensifying its crackdown on bachelors living in family residential areas. People whose power will be cut off didn't comply with earlier warnings ordering them to evacuate their homes, the municipality said.

Optimize your wellbeing: Exploring the benefits and drawbacks of popular diets

A healthy diet is about moderation, variety: Nutritionist



By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Diets have become increasingly popular in recent years, with many individuals turning to various types of meal plans and restrictions in an effort to achieve their health goals. A well-balanced diet consisting of the right proportion of carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, minerals and fats is necessary for good nutrition. Proper nutrition provides energy to the body, supports the immune system and helps repair damaged cells. It also helps in the prevention of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart diseases and cancer.

Consuming a healthy diet can also promote mental health by improving mood, cognitive function and reducing stress. However, the decision to follow a diet is not one to be taken lightly, as there are both benefits and drawbacks to consider. While following a diet can result in weight loss, improved digestion and increased energy, it may also lead to restrictive eating habits and nutritional deficiencies. US Licensed Clinical Nutritionist Noor S Al-Askar shared with Kuwait Times her opinions on three of the most popular diet examples that may help one make a more informed choice about whether or not to adopt a particular meal plan.

Askar says a healthy diet isn't about horrible-tast-

ing "specific" food; on the contrary it is about moderation and variety and nourishing your body from within. Generally, good nutrition means eating the correct types of food (variety) in the right amounts (moderation) at the right time of day (timing) to optimize your overall health and wellbeing during the days, months and years of your life. Askar also added her thoughts on a few examples of diets that may boost one's mental and physical health.

The Vegetarian Diet

According to Askar, the vegetarian diet is a diet that excludes meat, poultry and fish. It is rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains and nuts. This diet is linked to several health benefits, such as reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity and some types of cancer. Vegetarian diets are also high in fiber, vitamins and minerals, which are essential for good health. However, vegetarians may have difficulty getting enough protein, vitamin B12, iron and zinc, which are mostly found in animal products. Additionally, some vegetarian diets may be high in simple carbohydrates, added sugars and processed foods, which can have adverse health effects.

The Paleo Diet

Askar shed light on the paleo diet, saying it is a diet that is based on the eating habits of our ancestors during the Paleolithic era. This diet emphasizes whole foods such as meat, fish, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, and excludes processed foods, grains and dairy. Paleo has been linked to several health benefits, such as weight loss, improved blood sugar control and reduced inflammation. However, the paleo diet may be deficient in some essential nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D and fiber, which are mostly found in dairy and grains. Additionally, the paleo diet may

be high in saturated fat, which can increase the risk of heart disease if not followed correctly.

The Keto Diet

Askar said the keto diet is a high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet that aims to put the body into a state of ketosis, where it burns fat for energy instead of carbohydrates. The keto diet has been linked to several health benefits, such as weight loss, improved blood sugar control and reduced inflammation. However, the keto diet may be deficient in some essential nutrients such as fiber, vitamin C and potassium, which are mostly found in fruits and vegetables. Additionally, the keto diet can have adverse health effects such as constipation, bad breath and nutrient deficiencies.

Kuwait Times also asked Askar about such diets' impact on the environment, which is a growing concern due to the continuing increase in the world's population, with rising demand for food consequently. According to Askar, the environmental impact of these diets varies. "The vegetarian diet is considered to have the lowest environmental impact, as it requires fewer resources such as land, water and energy to produce. On the other hand, the paleo and keto diets require more resources to produce, as they rely heavily on animal products," she said.

"As studies have shown, the production of animal products has been linked to greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation and water pollution. Therefore, adopting a vegetarian diet may have a more positive impact on the environment. There is a world of diets out there such as intermittent fasting, the Mediterranean diet, the anti-inflammatory diet and the anti-aging diet to name a few. Each of these diets has its own list of benefits for your health depending on which phase of life you're at, what your goals are and what you are looking to achieve," Askar explained.

Kuwait supports improving labor conditions

GENEVA/KUWAIT: Kuwait is committed to ensure stability and development in the labor market, Kuwaiti permanent representative to the United Nations said on Monday, hailing his country's ties with the International Labor Organization (ILO). Underlining Kuwait's support of efforts aiming to improve labor conditions in the wider Arab region, Nasser Al-Hayen told the International Labor Conference that many labor markets across the globe were yet to shake off the impact induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. On the agenda for the talks, the Kuwaiti diplomat cited pressing matters that will be discussed, running the gamut from worker safety to pay parity. The statement comes as tensions between Kuwait and the Philippines reached new heights in recent weeks over migrant worker rights. Kuwait suspended all types of work and entry visas for Filipinos in May after the country alleged-

ly violated a bilateral labor agreement with the state. In February, the Philippines halted the deployment of first-time workers, especially domestic helpers, to Kuwait following the gruesome murder of a 35-year-old Filipina maid by a Kuwaiti teenager.

Meanwhile, Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Kuwait Society for Human Rights to promote human values and spread awareness about them and contribute to guaranteeing their practice using all legal means that will limit human rights violations. Acting Director General of PAM Marzouq Al-Otaibi said the signing of the agreement with KSHR is an augmentation of partnership between state entities and non-government organizations.

Otaibi said the MoU seeks to promote the culture of human rights in society using all legally available means, organizing courses and training programs concerning the Kuwait labor law for the private sector and the domestic help law, and implementing ministerial and administrative decisions. He said the MoU is important in strengthening the principles of human rights in general and the rights of labor in particular, according to international agreements ratified by the government of Kuwait.

Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait participates in PADA career fair

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently announced its participation in the Public Authority for Disability Affairs' (PADA) fourth annual career fair. The event aimed to empower people with disabilities and provide them with opportunities to work in the banking sector, thereby promoting their integration into society.

Throughout the career fair, ABK employees engaged with job seekers, discussed available opportunities, and provided them with information about the Bank's recruitment process.

Afrah Al-Arbash, General Manager of Human Resources at ABK, highlighted the Bank's commitment to supporting the empowerment of people with disabilities. She stated: "At ABK, we believe in providing equal employment opportunities to all individuals, including those with disabilities. We are proud to participate in this

career fair organized by PADA, which aligns with our commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace."

The career fair offered a platform for people with disabilities to explore career opportunities, gain exposure to different companies and sectors, and interact with potential employers. The event aimed to raise awareness about their capabilities, dispel stereotypes and encourage society to recognize their skills and potential.

The Bank's participation in this career fair aligns with its commitment to promoting social and economic empowerment for people with disabilities. By providing equal employment opportunities, ABK aims to promote a more equitable and just society and contribute to building a diverse and inclusive Kuwait.

Arbash said: "We fully support PADA's mutual goal of supporting special needs individuals. Our participation in this event is a testament to our dedication pertaining to this cause and commitment to breaking societal barriers."

Since its establishment in 1967, ABK has progressed to become one of the leading Kuwaiti banks in the region that is today known for offering a simpler banking experience. The Bank offers personal, corporate, and private banking of which includes a wide array of products and services. ABK also provides a broad range of local, regional, and global investment solutions and services through its subsidiary, ABK Capital. Enjoying equal stability and strength, the bank also offers the convenience of banking across the region, servicing other markets in Egypt and the UAE.



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Trains resume service after deadly India crash

TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2023

Trial begins for French accused of burning girl alive

Page 6

Page 7

Russia says repelled Ukraine offensive

Ukrainian officials to hold talks with Pope Francis' peace envoy



BELGOROD: Residents evacuated from the Belgorod region's zones bordering Ukraine, including those from the town of Shebekino, are seen settled in a temporary shelter set up at the Belgorod Arena in the regional capital of Belgorod. — AFP

MOSCOW: Russia said Monday it had repelled "a large-scale offensive" by Ukrainian forces in the Moscow occupied Donetsk region as Kyiv was silent about plans to claw back lost territory. Ukrainian officials meanwhile were expected to hold talks with Pope Francis' peace envoy, Italian Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, who headed to Kiev Monday for two days of negotiations.

Ukraine says it has been preparing a major offensive after months of stalemate to recapture territory lost since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops in February last year. But officials have been tight-lipped about the details, saying there would be no formal announcement about the start of the operation.

On Sunday, Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov posted a cryptic tweet, citing lyrics from Depeche Mode's song, "Enjoy the Silence." "Words are very unnecessary," he tweeted. "They can only do harm."

Military experts expect Ukrainian forces

to test Russian defences for weaknesses before starting a full-blown offensive. Early Monday, Russia's defence ministry said that on Sunday "the enemy launched a large-scale offensive in five sectors of the front" in the south of the Donetsk region.

"A total of six mechanized and two tank battalions of the enemy were involved," it said in a Telegram post, adding that Ukrainian troops had hit "the most vulnerable, in their opinion, sector of the front". "The enemy did not achieve their tasks, they had no success."

The ministry posted what it said was a video of the battle, showing Ukrainian armored vehicles coming under heavy fire. Putin's top commander in Ukraine, Valery Gerasimov, "was at one of the advanced command posts," the ministry said.

A high-profile Russian war correspondent, Alexander Kots, said that "battles have been going on" in the area of Ugledar, in the south of the Donetsk region, and also further north in Soledar and Bakhmut, which were

occupied by Moscow's forces after months of fighting.

Kots said Ukrainian forces were "conducting offensive operations" in and around the frontline hotspot of Bakhmut which Russian mercenary group Wagner claimed last month had fallen to Moscow. He suggested that Kyiv had not yet "introduced the main forces into battle."

'The fight will be serious'

A Moscow-installed official also said that Ukrainian troops were on the offensive in the southern region of Zaporizhzhia, home to Europe's largest nuclear plant, which has been under control of Russia's forces since the start of Moscow's offensive.

"It looks like the die has been cast and the next couple of months will clear up a lot. The fight will be serious, because there is a lot at stake," Rogov added. Large parts of Donetsk have been held by pro-Moscow separatists since 2014. It is one of four east-

ern Ukrainian territories that Russia formally annexed in September last year, along with Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. Speaking to reporters in New Delhi, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said that Ukrainian authorities would make an announcement "at the right time". "We can talk about what we're seeing and we're seeing continued operations in and around the Bakhmut area," he added. "We're seeing an uptick in activity south of there."

Pope's envoy in Kyiv

The Vatican said that Italian Cardinal Matteo Zuppi headed to Kiev Monday as Pope Francis' peace envoy for talks with Ukrainian authorities on the war. Zuppi, the head of the Italian bishops' conference, "will pay a visit to Kyiv as Envoy of the Holy Father" from June 5 to 6, it said in a statement.

The Russian army claimed to have repelled a "sabotage group of Ukrainian terrorists" seeking to cross the border near the

village of Novaya Tavolzhanka, in the southern region of Belgorod. Belgorod's governor said Sunday that fighting took place near Novaya Tavolzh

"The enemy was hit by artillery. The enemy scattered and retreated," it said in a statement. It was the first time during the more than 15 months of conflict that a Russian official has admitted the capture of prisoners on Russian territory by pro-Ukraine forces.

Fighting around the village follows last month's dramatic armed incursion from Ukraine into the Belgorod region which forced Russia to use its artillery and air force on home soil. The border breach was claimed by anti-Kremlin Russian ultra-nationalists.

Ukraine has consistently not claimed responsibility for attacks on Russian soil, but presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said Sunday the situation in the border areas "should be viewed as the future of Russia". — AFP

Trump boosted by bloated 2024 race

WASHINGTON: With three denizens of the Republican establishment launching presidential campaigns this week, the race for the 2024 nomination has begun to resemble the sprawling 2016 field that proved a huge boon to unfancied outsider Donald Trump.

This time the 76-year-old tycoon is the runaway front-runner but the conventional wisdom remains the same: The larger the chasing pack, the more likely he is to win by dividing the anti-Trump vote. Former New Jersey governor Chris Christie, who was trounced by Trump in 2016, is expected to launch a fresh tilt at the White House on Tuesday, a day ahead of ex-vice president Mike Pence and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum.

Christie, who will announce in New Hampshire, presents a novel challenge as the only contender so far willing to land genuinely damaging blows on Trump as he makes his case for four years in the Oval Office.

The 60-year-old Newark native has already begun needling his former friend, arguing last month that the former reality TV star and real estate tycoon was "afraid" of debating serious opponents. Trump has indicated that he may skip at least one of the first two debates, expressing a reluctance to share the limelight with lower-polling rivals.

"If he really cares about the country — and I have deep questions about that — but if he really cares about the country, then he's going to get up there, and he shouldn't

be afraid," Christie told radio host Hugh Hewitt.

The former federal prosecutor came in sixth in New Hampshire seven years ago and eventually endorsed Trump, serving as a key advisor before the pair had a high-profile falling out.

'Ton of coverage'

Christie has since assailed Trump on all manner of issues, highlighting the escalating criminal probes targeting the embattled billionaire, trashing his false claims of election fraud and dubbing him "Putin's puppet" over his isolationist stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Trump revealed that he relishes the chaos of a crowded field when he welcomed his first serious opponent, former South Carolina governor Nikki Haley, to the race in February, telling Fox News: "The more the merrier."

But John Ellis, a former head of the network's Election Night Decision Desk, told AFP Christie's candidacy could put Trump on the back foot. "Because he will attack Trump relentlessly, Christie's campaign will get a ton of coverage in the mainstream press, which may help him do well in New Hampshire," said Ellis, founder of the News Items current affairs newsletter.

"Favorable press coverage catapulted John McCain's presidential campaign in New Hampshire in 2000. Christie is making the same bet. Regardless, having someone hammering you every day is never helpful to the frontrunner."

By midweek there will be 10 major candidates in the Republican primary and another four also-rans, but Trump has a 30-plus point lead over his closest rival, Ron DeSantis, the Florida governor. Pence, Trump's unwaveringly loyal vice president turned reluctant critic, is expected to launch his campaign on Wednesday, ahead of a CNN Town Hall in Iowa.

His launch, along with Christie's, complicates the



MANCHESTER: Supporters of former US President and 2024 Presidential hopeful Donald Trump gather and rally before a campaign event for Florida Governor and 2024 Presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis, at Manchester Community College in Manchester, New Hampshire. — AFP

race less for Trump than for DeSantis, who has been on a charm offensive in the first-in-the-nation voting states of Iowa and New Hampshire as he bids to remain competitive.

The governor's efforts to keep the emphasis on "charm" rather than "offensive" — softening the edges of reputation for aloofness — were undermined Thursday by a temper tantrum he had at a reporter in the lakeside town of Laconia. The hardline conservative is running to Trump's right in what political analysts have called a "last man standing" campaign that banks on the former president being taken out of contention by the escalating legal threats he faces. — AFP

Armed men kill at least 30 in Nigeria villages

KANO: Armed men killed 30 people in weekend raids on six villages in Nigeria's north, a region regularly hit by criminal violence and clashes between communities, local police have said. Attackers on motorcycles "killed eight people in Raka, seven in Bilingawa, six in Jaba, four in Dabagi, three in Raka Dutse and two in Tsalewa villages," Ahmad Rufai, Sokoto police spokesman said in a statement received Monday.

However, residents from two of the affected villages said 36 people were killed in the attacks which they said were reprisals for their refusal to pay protection money to the bandits. "They (bandits) were enraged by our refusal to negotiate with them and pay them protection money as other villages have done. That was why they attacked our villages," said Musa, a subsistence farmer.

'Killed by the bandits'

Kasimu Musa, a resident of Raka Dutse, told AFP the communities "buried 36 people yesterday (Sunday) who were killed by the bandits". Mansur Abdullahi from nearby Gandaba village gave the same toll.

Bandits who terrorize the district launch attacks from their hideouts in nearby Tsaua and Kuyan Bana forests which stretch into neighboring Niger. Abdullahi said. "The governments of Nigeria and Niger need to work together to fight these bandits who have established hideouts in the two forests", Abdullahi said.

Communal violence is just one security challenge facing recently sworn in President Bola Tinubu who won a February presidential ballot marred by opposition accusations of vote rigging. The area has for several years been wracked by deadly conflict between herders and farmers over grazing and water rights. The conflict has spiralled into broader criminality with gangs of so-called bandits, comprising mostly herders, carrying out deadly raids on villages to steal livestock, kidnap for ransom and burn homes after looting them.

There has been an increase in tit-for-tat killings between the bandits and vigilante groups set by local communities in recent times, prompting the state authorities to attempt peace negotiations. Authorities and security analysts have expressed concern over alliances between the so-called bandits, who are motivated by financial gains, and jihadists waging a 14-year-old insurgency in the northeast. — AFP

More than 500 evacuated after Ecuador floods

ESMERALDAS: More than 500 people were evacuated from their homes in northern Ecuador on Sunday following flooding caused by heavy rains. President Guillermo Lasso said. No one had been reported dead or missing, he said.

Dozens of residents climbed onto the roofs or balconies of their homes to protect themselves from the rising waters, according to images released by the Ministry of Defense. Rain had fallen for 12 hours without interruption, causing six rivers to overflow, Lasso said. "The priority is to save their lives,

let's protect them! We have already rescued 500 people and the work continues," he wrote on Twitter.

Authorities evacuated around 500 people by boat and another 30 by helicopter, the Risk Management Secretariat said. Around 11,750 people were affected by the floods and 16 lost their homes in the province of Esmeraldas, which borders Colombia.

Classes were suspended in several towns where schools were damaged. Five health centers were also affected. Between January and May, 36 people have been killed and more than 99,000 affected across Ecuador.

In March, a landslide caused by heavy rains in the Andean town of Alausi buried dozens of houses, killing around 60 people. Rescuers are still working to recover the bodies of 13 people who went missing in that disaster. — AFP



ESMERALDAS: People waded through a flooded street in Esmeraldas, Ecuador, on June 4, 2023. More than 500 people were evacuated on Sunday from the coastal province of Esmeraldas, in northern Ecuador and bordering Colombia, due to flooding caused by heavy rains. — AFP

International

Britain to house more asylum seekers on accommodation barges

Sunak announces new sites at former Royal Air Force bases to accommodate hundreds

LONDON: Britain has ordered two more accommodation barges to house asylum-seekers, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced on Monday. Sunak has pledged to stop crossings of the Channel from northern Europe made in small boats, after record numbers of people arrived last year. But huge backlogs in the processing of applications have put the government under pressure, particularly over housing people while their claims are dealt with.

On a visit to the Channel port of Dover, Sunak announced new sites at former Royal Air Force bases to accommodate "hundreds" in the coming months. "Nearly 3,000" will be housed there by the end of the year, he added, arguing it would ease pressure on costly hotels where many migrants have been staying.

"To reduce pressures on local communities, we will also house people on ships," he told a news conference. "The first will arrive in Portland next week and we've secured another two today that will accommodate another 1,000."

Supporters of the UK's bid to leave the European Union made "taking back control" of the country's borders a key plank of their Brexit campaign. With the UK now out of the EU, immigration remains a live political issue, particularly as a general election approaches next year.

Last month, Sunak said legal immigration levels were also "too high" and announced restrictions on family visas for international students.

Sunak, who visited the operations room tracking small boat crossings, claimed the asylum system was being "overwhelmed" by exploitative criminal gangs. Asylum applications, however, are still well below those in European countries such as France and Germany.

Sunak, pushing proposed new laws currently in parliament to criminalize asylum-seekers arriving via the Channel, claimed the crackdown was working. A total of 7,610 people have been detected in small boats so far this year, according to government figures.

"Crossings are down 20 percent compared to

last year," Sunak said, adding: "Illegal migrants entering the rest of Europe have risen by 30 percent." Just over 33,000 people were waiting more than six months for an initial decision on asylum by the end of December 2021, out of a total of 82,000 applications.

By the same time last year, that figure had ballooned to nearly 89,000 out of just over 132,000 applications, according to the Oxford Migration Observatory. But Sunak said the backlog had now been cut by over 17,000.

With the UK no longer part of the EU's migrants policy, the government has been forging returns programmes with individual countries on mainland Europe. A new multi-million-euro partnership with France has also been signed to prevent small boat crossings in the first place.

But a controversial deal to deport failed asylum-seekers to Rwanda, denounced by human rights groups, is stuck in the courts. — AFP



DOVER: Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak speaks during a press conference at Western Jet Foil in Dover, on June 5, 2023. — AFP

Trial begins for French accused of burning girl alive

BEAUVAIS: A man went on trial in France on Monday facing accusations of stabbing and then burning alive a 15-year-old girl in 2019 who was likely pregnant by him at the time.

The killing of the secondary school pupil, named only as Shaina, amplified concerns in France over the numbers of young women murdered by their partners and also their vulnerability to bullying on social networks. The man, who was aged 17 at the time, is accused of luring Shaina to a shed in the town of Creil north of Paris to kill her and burn her body.

As he has always done, "he disputes the charges and screams his innocence," his lawyer Adel Fares said ahead of the hearing, adding he will seek an acquittal. Thin with his long hair tied in a bun, the accused gave his identity in a calm and youthful-sounding voice at the opening of the hearing where restrictions prevent the media from identifying him.

"The family and I are determined that the truth emerges. This truth is linked to the guilt of the accused," said the lawyer of Shaina's family, Negar

Haeri. Police found the almost entirely charred body of the teenager in October 2019 after receiving a tip-off.

The post-mortem forensic examination revealed "multiple wounds" inflicted by a knife but also that Shaina was still breathing at the start of the fire.

The day before, she had gone out after a family dinner. In her handbag relatives had found a positive pregnancy test.

According to various examinations, the teenager, who had undergone an abortion a few months earlier, was most likely starting a new pregnancy.

She attributed paternity to the accused, with whom she had had a relationship, according to the investigation.

As well as the shocking nature of the killing, the case has made waves in France as two years earlier Shaina was the victim of sexual assault, for which four other young people were sentenced Thursday on appeal to suspended sentences ranging from six months to two years in prison.

Humiliating images of her assault were shared on the messaging app Snapchat with the aim, according to the lawyer, of showing Shaina as a person "who they can sleep with but also get rid of".

According to the family's lawyer, Haeri, her death was "the end point of a long period of suffering".

The number of so-called femicides increased by 20 percent in France in 2021 compared to the previous year, with 122 women killed by their partner or ex-partner, according to the government. — AFP



BEAUVAIS: Relatives and friends hold a banner reading "Shaina Hansye, 15, cowardly murder" prior to the trial of the alleged murderer of Shaina, accused of murdering and burning alive the 15-year-old girl in 2019, at the Juvenile Assize Court of Beauvais, northern France. — AFP

Australian pardoned after 20 years for killing her children

SYDNEY: An Australian mother jailed for killing her four young children was pardoned and released on Monday after 20 years behind bars, ending what authorities called a "terrible ordeal". Kathleen Folbigg was dubbed "Australia's worst female serial killer" after she was convicted in 2003 of murdering three of her children and the manslaughter of a fourth.

Prosecutors argued she suffocated the children, who died between the ages of nine weeks and three

years, but Folbigg has steadfastly maintained each death was due to natural causes. In 2021, dozens of scientists from Australia and abroad signed a petition calling for Folbigg's release, saying new forensic evidence suggested the unexplained deaths were linked to rare genetic mutations or congenital abnormalities.

New South Wales Attorney-General Michael Daley said Folbigg had been pardoned following an inquiry, launched in May 2022, that established "reasonable doubt" surrounding the convictions. "This has been a terrible ordeal for everyone concerned, and I hope that our actions today put some closure on this 20-year matter," he told reporters.

Folbigg, 55, was released on Monday morning from a prison in Grafton, in the north of New South Wales state, where she had been serving a sentence

of at least 25 years. "We've received confirmation that Ms Folbigg has walked free this morning and that she is in the sunlight, she's now free from prison," said supporter Sue Higginson, a Greens politician. "It is a massive relief for all of those who have stood by Ms Folbigg."

In the absence of firm forensic evidence, prosecutors had argued that it was extremely unlikely four children would suddenly die without explanation. But retired judge Tom Bathurst, who led the inquiry, said subsequent investigations uncovered medical conditions that could account for three of the deaths.

The four children died between 1989 and 1999. Bathurst said Sarah and Laura Folbigg possessed a rare genetic mutation, while Patrick Folbigg may have had an "underlying neurogenic condition". Given these factors, Bathurst found the death of Caleb

Folbigg was also no longer suspicious.

He said he was unable to accept that "Folbigg was anything but a caring mother for her children". Folbigg's friend Peter Yates said he was "absolutely delighted". "What we're particularly pleased about is that he's given Kathleen a full pardon," he told national broadcaster ABC.

"That means that she's free to live her life as a normal citizen and that makes a big difference to her." While the pardon lifts Folbigg's prison sentence, Yates noted she would need to apply separately through the court system to have the convictions overturned, a process that could take "two or three years".

The Australian Academy of Science, which helped to spark the inquiry, said it was "relieved" to see justice for Folbigg. — AFP

Iranian embassy set to reopen...

Continued from Page 1

Wednesday", Kanani said. The diplomatic source had earlier told AFP that the opening "will take place Tuesday at 6:00 pm local time (1500 GMT) with the presence of the newly appointed Iranian ambassador" to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has yet to confirm when it will reopen its embassy in Tehran or its pick for ambassador. Iranian media had named Enayati as the Islamic

republic's Saudi envoy last month. He had previously served as assistant to the foreign minister and director general of Gulf affairs at the foreign ministry, according to Iranian reports. After years of discord, the two Middle East heavyweights signed a surprise reconciliation agreement in China on March 10.

Since then, Saudi Arabia has restored ties with Tehran ally Syria and ramped up a push for peace in Yemen, where it has for years led a military coalition against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels. Iran and Saudi Arabia had backed opposing sides in conflict zones across the Middle East for years before mending fences. — AFP

Treatment found to reduce progression...

Continued from Page 1

reduced the risk of disease progression by 74 percent, compared with the standard-of-care treatments," a press statement said. Ciltacabtagene autoleucel is a type of chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy, a newer form of treatment. CAR-T-cell therapy involves removing the patient's disease-fighting T cells, and genetically engineering them in a lab so they have specific proteins known as receptors that, once returned to the body, will seek out and destroy cancer cells.

Nearly all the patients in both groups experienced severe to life-threatening adverse events, including infections and low blood cell counts. Three-quarters of patients on ciltacabtagene autoleucel developed Cytokine release syndrome, in which the immune system is sent into overdrive. It can affect multiple organs and cause death. Around five percent of patients on ciltacabtagene autoleucel developed immune effector cell-associated neurotoxicity syndrome (ICANS), which affects a person's nervous system. Next, the researchers will continue to follow the study participants to determine long-term effects and impacts on quality of life. The clinical trial was funded by Janssen Research & Development and Legend Biotech USA. — AFP

US ex-VP Pence jumps into 2024...

Continued from Page 1

who was willing to defend the president against any accusation. But he became a pariah in Trumpworld after rejecting the Republican leader's demands that he overturn the 2020 election in his role as president of the Senate.

Berated constantly by Trump after Joe Biden's victory — and even heckled at a conservative conference with chants of "traitor!" — Pence continued to praise the tycoon in public. That eventually changed as Trump's torrent of false claims of election fraud led to a mob chanting for Pence to be hanged at the US Capitol. Since the riot, Pence has called out Trump for endangering his fam-

ily and has emphasized his differences with the former president on issues ranging from the handling of Russian leader Vladimir Putin to abortion rights.

Pence has spent much of the last two years touring early-nominating states such as Iowa, South Carolina and New Hampshire to reinforce his political vision as a "Christian, conservative, Republican — in that order". His entry doesn't much change the dynamics of the race, which is divided into three lanes — runaway leader Donald Trump, Trump's closest rival Ron DeSantis, and everyone else.

Pence is framing himself as a traditional Republican, concerned with fiscal responsibility and family values, who can deliver Trump's policies on the economy, immigration and much else without the drama. Marking a contrast with Trump, Pence hasn't ruled out welfare cuts and has allied himself strongly with Ukraine. He is an abortion hardliner who has opposed same-sex marriage. — AFP

UN body faults US, other states over Guantanamo torture

GENEVA: The United States and seven other countries are responsible for torture and illegal detention of a Saudi prisoner awaiting a death penalty trial at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, a UN watchdog has ruled. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention also hinted that the systematic use of Guantanamo to hold suspects rounded up in Washington's "war on terror" after the September 11, 2001 attacks, might in some cases amount to crimes against humanity.

The working group's five independent experts ruled in a case brought by Abd al-Rahim Al-Nashiri, a Saudi national of Yemeni descent suspected of being the mastermind behind the October 2000 suicide bombing of the USS Cole missile destroyer that left 17 sailors dead. In the case submitted to the working group last June, lawyers maintained that after Nashiri was captured in Dubai in 2002, he spent four years shuttled between various CIA black sites — in Afghanistan, Lithuania, Morocco, Poland, Romania and Thailand, — being tortured and abused. He arrived at Guantanamo Bay in 2006, where he remains detained. He was only charged in 2008, and his military commission death penalty case still remains in pre-trial proceedings.

In an opinion adopted late last year, but only discreetly made public on Friday, the UN working group determined that all eight countries were "jointly responsible for the torture and cruel, inhu-

man and degrading treatment of Mr Al-Nashiri". "The submissions that Mr Al-Nashiri was tortured stand unrefuted," it said, also finding that all eight countries were responsible for his "arrest, rendition and arbitrary detention".

Nashiri's lawyer Sylvain Savolainen described the decision as "immensely powerful and important". The working group, made up of five independent experts, whose opinions are not binding but carry reputational weight, called on the countries to "take the steps necessary to remedy the situation of Mr Al-Nashiri without delay". Taking into account all the circumstances of the case, they said "the appropriate remedy would be to release Mr Al-Nashiri immediately", and provide him compensation and reparations. And they called for "a full and independent investigation of the circumstances surrounding the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Mr Al-Nashiri, including an independent inquiry into his allegations of torture".

The experts took particular issue with the situation at Guantanamo, currently holding 31 detainees, down from a peak of nearly 800. They noted among other things that the medical care given there "has been and remains grossly deficient". "The Working Group is obliged to remind the government of the United States that all persons deprived of their liberty must be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person," they said.

The experts stressed that while they were addressing Nashiri's case in particular, "the conclusions reached here also apply to other detainees in similar situations to Guantanamo Bay". And they cautioned that "under certain circumstances, widespread or systematic imprisonment or other severe deprivation of liberty, in violation of international law, may constitute crimes against humanity". — AFP

WHO eyes global certificate inspired...

Continued from Page 1

for the connection of non-EU countries with certificates issued according to the EU specifications.

The certificate "showed our citizens the light at the end of the tunnel and protected at the same time public health amid the uncertainty of the pandemic", Kyriakides said at the signing ceremony. "And this EU

success story quickly became a global standard," she said, pointing out that nearly 80 countries had already adopted the EU COVID certificate framework.

Tedros stressed that the new certificate system would be "based on the principles of equity, innovation, transparency and data protection and privacy". WHO will not have access to any underlying personal data, which would continue to be the exclusive domain of governments. "Privacy is key," Tedros said. "We will only maintain a directory of the public keys that can be used to verify the authenticity of a member state's digital health records." — AFP

International

Passenger trains resume service 51 hours after deadly India crash

Death toll could rise with medical centres overwhelmed by number of casualties

BALASORE: Passenger and freight trains were running again on Monday at the site of India's deadliest train disaster in decades, which officials said was caused by failures linked to signal systems. Trains rumbled past the debris of smashed carriages from Friday night's crash near Balasore in the eastern state of Odisha, where at least 275 people were killed and hundreds injured.

Officials had initially reported 288 deaths, but the Odisha state government has since revised the toll to 275 after some bodies were mistakenly counted twice. Of the 1,175 injured, 382 were still being treated in hospital, authorities said on Sunday.

However, many fear the death toll could still rise with medical centres overwhelmed by the number of casualties, many in serious condition. Green netting was erected on either side of the tracks, shielding the crumpled carriages pushed down the embankment from the view of travelling passengers.

Railways minister Ashwini Vaishnav

was seen folding his hands in prayer as he saw the first train cross the site of the disaster late Sunday. The railways ministry said the first train, a goods train loaded with coal, started 51 hours after the crash. It was not immediately clear if all the tracks had been fully repaired, with trains on Monday using only lines on one side.

Crowded hospitals

There was confusion about the exact sequence of events on Friday, but reports cited railway officials saying a signaling error had sent the Coromandal Express running south from Kolkata to Chennai onto a side track.

It slammed into a freight train and the wreckage derailed an express running north from India's tech hub Bengaluru to Kolkata. Vaishnav said on Sunday the crash happened due to the "change that occurred during electronic interlocking", referring to a technical term for a complex signal system designed to stop trains colliding by arranging their movement on the tracks.

"Whoever did it, and how it happened, will be found out after proper investigation," he said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the crash site and injured passengers in hospital on Saturday and said "no one responsible" would be spared.

Of those injured, the most critical patients had been moved to bigger hospitals in cities further away from the crash site. However, many crash survivors were still being looked after at the main government hospital in Balasore. Gura Palai, 24, a daily laborer from Jharkhand state, suffered serious injuries to his leg and shoulder. His family was overjoyed he had survived — but worried for the future.

"He has to undergo an operation on his leg, and the doctors say that the recovery will take some time," said his uncle, who did not give his name, standing next to his bed in a cramped orthopedic ward alongside Palai's wife and child.

"He is the only earning member of his young family. How will they survive?" In a separate incident, in the Bargarh dis-



BALASORE: Railway attendants look out from the carriages of a long-distance train as it runs on the newly restored track at the accident site of a recent three-train collision near Balasore. — AFP

trict of Odisha, a goods train operated by a private cement factory partially derailed inside the factory premises on

Monday. Indian Railways issued a statement saying it was "in no way connected" with the train. — AFP

US, India agree defence industry cooperation plan

NEW DELHI: The United States and India agreed a roadmap for military industrial cooperation Monday, as New Delhi seeks to reduce its reliance on key arms supplier Russia in the face of tensions with China. "We established an ambitious new roadmap for defence industrial cooperation, which will fast track high priority co-development and co-production projects," US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said as he wrapped up an overnight visit to New Delhi.

Moscow and New Delhi have been allies for decades, with Russia by far India's biggest arms supplier. Now India — which has not condemned Russia for its invasion of Ukraine — is looking to diversify, both by broadening its sources of imports and ramping up domestic production.

Western countries, including the United States and France, are negotiating multi-billion-dollar contracts, and diplomats say India is putting a high priority on technology transfer as part of any deal. The agreement will fast-track technology cooperation and co-production in areas including air combat and land mobility systems, the "undersea domain", and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, the US Defense Department said.

The initiative "aims to change the paradigm for cooperation between US and Indian defense sectors", it said, and "could provide India access to cutting-edge technologies and support India's defense modernization plans".

India displaced China as the world's most populous country earlier this year, and relations be-



NEW DELHI: US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin (C) prepares to shake hands with India's Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan as Defence Minister Rajnath Singh (2L) watches before Lloyd's ceremonial reception at the Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi on June 5, 2023. — AFP

tween the Asian giants have been strained since a deadly high-altitude border clash in June 2020. At the same time, Washington and Beijing are engaged in fierce competition on diplomatic, military, technological and economic fronts.

But India is walking a diplomatic tightrope: uniquely, it is a member of both the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which includes both Russia and China, and the Quad, set up with the United States, Japan, and Australia to counter Beijing's growing assertiveness.

As well as arms, India also imports oil from Russia, increasing its purchases since the Ukraine war began. Austin, speaking to reporters after meeting his counterpart Rajnath Singh, said boosting partnerships with India came against a backdrop of "bullying and coercion" from China,

as well as Russian "aggression against Ukraine".

India's defence ministry said discussions had a "particular focus on identifying ways to strengthen industrial cooperation" with Washington, including the "co-development of new technologies and co-production of existing and new systems".

Austin's visit comes ahead of a trip by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington in June. Austin visited India as part of a tour of Asia that previously took him to Japan and Singapore, part of a push to help counter China and an increasingly bellicose North Korea.

The United States is "committed to collaborating closely with India in support of our shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific", Austin said, but added they were "absolutely not trying to establish a NATO" equivalent in the region. — AFP

Indonesia volcano draws thousands for ritual sacrifice

PROBOLINGGO: Thousands of Hindu worshippers scaled an active Indonesian volcano on Monday to toss livestock, food and other offerings into its smoking crater in a centuries-old religious ceremony. Swarming the thin rim around the basin of Mount Bromo, devotees heaved goats, chickens and vegetables slung across their backs up to the dusty peak as part of the Yadnya Kasada festival.

Every year Tengger tribe members from surrounding highlands gather at the top of the volcano — famed for its stunning sunrise views — in hope of pleasing their gods and bringing luck to the Tenggerese, an Indigenous group in eastern Java.

Slamet, a 40-year-old farmer who like many Indonesians goes by only one name, brought a baby cow as an offering. "We have a lot of cows back home and this one can be considered excess, so we are bringing it here... to return it back to God," he told AFP.

"This is also an act of gratitude to God for giving us prosperity... We return it back to God so we can come back here next year." The calf had a lucky escape as it was handed to a villager after Slamet's prayers instead of being sacrificed to the volcanic cauldron.

Some villagers who do not belong to the Tengger tribe took to the crater's steep slopes equipped with nets in an attempt to intercept offerings thrown into the abyss and avoid them going to waste. Farmer Joko Priyanto brought some of his own produce in the form of cabbages and carrots to lob down into the smoky void. "I hope I will receive a reward from the almighty God," the 36-year-old said.

'Better income'

Monday's ritual was the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic that authorities had allowed tourists to the site after the festival was limited to worshippers last year. The event has its roots in 15th-century folklore from the Majapahit kingdom, a Javanese Hindu-Buddhist empire that stretched across Southeast Asia.

Legend has it that Princess Roro Anteng and her husband, unable to



PROBOLINGGO: Members of the Tengger sub-ethnic group carries a goat for offering on the active Mount Bromo volcano as part of the Yadnya Kasada festival in Probolinggo, East Java province on June 5, 2023. — AFP

bear children after years of marriage, begged the gods for help. Their prayers were answered when they were promised 25 children, as long as they agreed to sacrifice their youngest child by throwing him into Mount Bromo.

Their son is said to have willingly jumped into the volcano to guarantee the prosperity of the Tengger people. For shopkeeper Rohim,

who travelled from a nearby Javan city on Monday to launch potatoes, leeks and cash into the lava, it was a chance to pray for good luck. He said his fortunes had improved following previous visits. "Business has been better than before, hence my coming here," the 32-year-old said. "I'm hoping my business can improve so next year I can come back." — AFP

HK court quashes journalist's conviction

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's top court on Monday quashed the conviction of a journalist in relation to her investigation into an attack on democracy supporters by government loyalists in 2019. It was a rare victory for the press industry in a city where two major independent news outlets have been forced to shut down since Beijing imposed a national security law in 2020.

"Happy — I could not think of another word that can describe my mood right now," veteran journalist Bao Choy said outside the Court of Final Appeal after the judgement was handed down. "I think this kind of happiness belongs to everyone in society."

Choy was found guilty in 2021 and fined 6,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$765) for "making a false statement" when accessing car ownership records on a public registry during her investigation into the attack, carried out by a gang of men armed with clubs and sticks.

The online form to access the information provided only three purposes for applicants — "for legal proceedings", "for sales and purchase of vehicles", and "other traffic and transport related matters". Choy chose the last one — which the original trial

court and a lower appeal court said did not cover her journalistic purpose.

But on Monday, a five-judge bench at the apex court decided unanimously to overturn the conviction, ruling "there is no reason... that bona fide journalism should be excluded" in the definition of the third choice.

"One might read 'other traffic and transport related matters'... in a broader way to include the serious investigative journalism undertaken here by the appellant," the judges said in their ruling. They added that the choice to read it broadly is due to the "constitutionally protected freedom of speech and of the press".

Choy said the court's verdict emphasized the importance of these freedoms. "I think that's the biggest significance of today's ruling," she said. Choy's searches

were made for a documentary she produced in 2020 for Hong Kong's public broadcaster RTHK.

It investigated the police's failure to respond quickly enough to the July 2019 attack, a watershed moment in the huge and often violent pro-democracy protests that year, which dealt a blow to public trust in the force.

The award-winning documentary said police failed to respond to the build-up of stick-wielding men ferried into Yuen Long district by specific vehicles on the evening of the attack. Using the car ownership records Choy accessed, the programme uncovered new details about the alleged attackers — some of whom have links to politically influential pro-Beijing rural committees. — AFP

US, China join naval drills in Indonesia despite rifts

JAKARTA: The United States and China have sent warships to the multinational naval drills that began in Indonesia on Monday, despite the rifts between the two powers. Washington and Beijing are engaged in fierce competition on diplomatic, military, technological and economic fronts.

The US military has stepped up its Asia-Pacific operations to counter an increasingly assertive China, which has recently staged several rounds of war drills around Taiwan. But both dispatched warships to the 2023 Multilateral Naval Exercise (MNEK) hosted by Indonesia in its eastern waters off Sulawesi island from Monday to Thursday.

The US Navy has sent a littoral combat ship to the exercise, a US embassy spokesperson in Jakarta told AFP on Sunday. The drills will allow the United States to "join together with like-minded nations, our allies and our partners to work on solving common challenges" such as humanitarian and disaster response, the spokesperson said.

The Chinese defence ministry said last week that it would send a destroyer and a frigate at the invitation of the Indonesian navy. Australia and Russia were also expected to send warships, according to an Indonesian military list seen by AFP.

Officials said there would be 17 foreign vessels involved in the drills, which will focus on non-military operations with key allies. "MNEK is a non-war training which prioritizes maritime cooperation in the region," Indonesian navy spokesperson I Made Wira Hady said in a statement.

Washington and Beijing have clashed this year over a number of Asia-Pacific issues including Taiwan, a self-ruled, US-backed island that China considers its territory. They have also been involved in a diplomatic tussle over Pacific island nations.

Tensions skyrocketed when an alleged Chinese spy balloon traversed the United States before it was shot down. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin at a defence summit in Singapore last week that the two nations needed to renew dialogue to avoid "misunderstandings" that could lead to conflict. Beijing had declined an invitation for its defence chief to meet Austin on the sidelines of that summit. — AFP



MAKASSAR: Indonesia's Navy air planes Bonanza perform during the opening of the 4th Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo (MNEK) 2023 in Makassar, South Sulawesi on June 5, 2023. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2023



AUSTIN: Southwest Airlines planes are seen at the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS) in Austin, Texas.— AFP



BOGOTA: Passengers use BIOMIG, the new biometric migration system, at El Dorado International Airport in Bogota. Colombian Migration launched a new biometric migration system for foreigners. — AFP photos

Air travel to soar near record: Industry group

Airlines will fly near-record 4.35 billion passengers

ISTANBUL: Airlines will return to profit and fly a near-record 4.35 billion passengers this year, but the sector's post-pandemic recovery remains fragile, an industry group said on Monday. The industry is forecast to post net profits totaling \$9.8 billion in 2023, or double previous estimates, boosted by the end of China's COVID restrictions, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The association added that its 2022 losses were half as bad as previously estimated at \$3.6 billion.

"Airline financial performance in 2023 is beating expectations," IATA director general Willie Walsh said in a statement during the association's annual general meeting in Istanbul.

"Stronger profitability is supported by several positive developments. China lifted COVID-19 restrictions earlier in the year than anticipated," Walsh said.

While jet fuel prices remain high, they have moderated over the first half of the year, he added. Inflation

surged worldwide as Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 sent energy costs soaring, but oil and natural gas prices have fallen since then. "On the cost side, there is some relief," Walsh said. "Economic uncertainties have not dampened the desire to travel, even as ticket prices absorbed elevated fuel costs," he added.

Profits equal to \$2.25 per passenger

Airlines transported a record 4.54 billion people in 2019 before Covid brought travel to a standstill. The industry lost \$137 billion when countries imposed lockdowns and closed borders in 2020. The sector lost another \$42 billion in 2021 and was still in the red last year as China, a major market, continued to enforce COVID restrictions that were finally lifted in December.

The IATA said total revenues are expected to grow to \$803 billion this year, up almost 10 percent from 2022. While the industry as a whole will turn a profit,

Walsh noted that it would amount to just \$2.25 per passenger - a net-profit margin of 1.2 percent. The IATA, which represents around 300 airlines accounting for 83 percent of global air passenger traffic, said net profit will rise to \$11.5 billion for North American air carriers, \$5.1 billion for Europeans and \$2 billion for those from the Middle East. But Asian, Latin American and African airlines will remain in the red.

Airlines will face a total fuel bill of \$215 billion this year, or \$98.5 per barrel, according to the IATA. This is down from the average cost of \$135.6 in 2022. Fuel will account for 28 percent of the costs that airlines face this year, compared to 24 percent in 2019. "After deep Covid-19 losses, even a net profit margin of 1.2 percent is something to celebrate," Walsh said. "But with airlines just making \$2.25 per passenger on average, repairing damaged balance sheets and providing investors with sustainable returns on their capital will continue to be a challenge for many airlines," he added.

War risks

The IATA said industry profitability is "fragile" and could be affected by several factors, including interest rate hike by central bank fighting inflation. "The risk of recession remains. Should recession lead to job losses, the industry's outlook could shift negatively," it said. While the war in Ukraine is not having a "major impact" on profitability of most airlines, an escalation would likely hurt global aviation, it said. "Already broader geopolitical tensions are weighing upon international trade and any escalation of such tensions represents a downside risk to the industry outlook," the IATA said. Supply chain issues, which have plagued global trade since the pandemic, are still being felt. "Airlines have been directly impacted by aircraft parts supply chain ruptures which aircraft and engine manufacturers have failed to sort out," the IATA said. "This is negatively impacting the delivery of new aircraft and the ability of airlines to maintain and deploy existing fleets." — AFP



VIENNA: Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al-Saud (right) arrives for the 35th OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) and non-OPEC ministerial meeting in Vienna, Austria. Opec+ ministers meet to try to find a solution to the slump in oil prices, with the possibility of a further production cut on the horizon, against a backdrop of tensions between Moscow and Riyadh. — AFP

Oil market rallies as Saudi slashes output

LONDON: Oil rallied Monday after key producer Saudi Arabia slashed output by a million barrels in a bid to prop up prices, while fellow OPEC+ members agreed to continue current cuts to 2024. International benchmark Brent oil and US counterpart WTI crude won more than two percent in earlier morning deals. Asian and European stocks mainly climbed with energy majors boosted by higher crude futures, which boosts profit and revenues. Sentiment also remains buoyant after the United States clinched a breakthrough deal late last week to lift its debt ceiling and avert a disastrous default. Equities won extra support as Friday's US jobs report lifted hopes the US Federal Reserve will refrain from hiking interest rates next week.

OPEC+ 'creates splash'

"The outcome of the much-anticipated OPEC+ meeting has created a splash in the oil market, if not a wave," said KCM Trade analyst Tim Waterer. "Saudi Arabia has backed up their words with actions by going it alone and extending their supply cuts." The 23-nation OPEC+ alliance, which includes Russia, agreed Sunday to continue current output cuts until the end of next year. But influential player Saudi Arabia also announced its own new cutback taking July production to nine million barrels per day.

Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told reporters that he "will do whatever is necessary to bring stability to this market". OPEC+ nations are grappling with falling prices on concerns oil demand will weaken as major economies struggle to cool elevated inflation. Oil has plummeted about 10 percent since April, when several OPEC+ members agreed to cut production voluntarily by more than one million bpd in an attempt to stem losses. "Saudi will continue doing the heavy lifting of production cuts, hoping that its efforts will reverse the falling price trend," noted Swissquote Bank analyst Ipek Ozkardeskaya.

'Goldilocks' jobs report

Wall Street surged Friday after data showed the US economy added 339,000 jobs in May, far more than expected, indicating the labour market remained strong. The report also revealed wage gains moderated slightly.

Analysts said the "Goldilocks" reading—neither too good nor too bad—suggested the world's biggest economy was not facing an immediate risk of a recession and could still give the Fed room to hold policy steady. The Fed has lifted rates 10 times since early last year to try and tame rampant inflation fuelled largely by energy costs. In Asia, Hong Kong stocks extended Friday's surge, while Tokyo piled on more than two percent to hit a three-decade peak. Europe stocks ran out of steam as the morning progressed, although London was lifted by oil giants BP and Shell.— AFP

Spotify to cut 200 staff working with podcasts

STOCKHOLM: Swedish music streaming giant Spotify said Monday it will cut some 200 positions, equalling two percent of its workforce, as it slims down its internal podcast operations. The Sweden-based company said it had recently "embarked on the next phase of our podcast strategy," and was moving to a "tailored approach optimized for each show and creator."

"Doing so requires adapting; over the past few months, our senior leadership team has worked closely with HR to determine the optimal organization for this next chapter," Spotify said in a statement. "As a result, we have made the difficult but necessary decision to make a strategic realignment of our group and reduce our global podcast vertical

and other functions by approximately 200 people," it added, noting it represented about two percent of Spotify's global workforce.

The streaming giant, which is listed on the New York stock exchange, announced in April it had passed 500 million monthly active users with 210 million paying subscribers. The company also posted a first quarter operating loss of 156 million euros (\$167 million), compared to an operating loss of six million euros a year earlier. The widened loss was, according to the company, attributed to a higher headcount compared to a year earlier and changes in social charges.

In January, following similar moves by other tech industry giants, the streaming giant announced it was cutting around 600 jobs. The platform has only occasionally posted a quarterly profit since its launch and has regularly posted annual losses, despite strong subscriber growth and having had a head start on its rivals such as Apple Music and Amazon Music. Spotify has also invested more than one billion euros into podcasting in recent years, but analysts say the company has yet to prove the investment is bearing fruit.— AFP



ANKARA: Turkey's newly appointed Foreign Affairs Minister Hakan Fidan (center) delivers a speech, flanked by his predecessor Mevlut Cavusoglu (center left), during a handover ceremony in Ankara on June 5, 2023. The Turkish president unveiled a new cabinet lineup after winning a historic runoff election to serve a third term in office. — AFP

Turkish inflation dips under 40% for first time in 16 months

ISTANBUL: Turkey's annual inflation rate dropped below 40 percent in May for the first time in 16 months, pushed down by a temporary offer of free gas to households, official data showed on Monday. Consumer prices rose by 39.6 percent on an annual basis and were almost stable, at 0.04 percent, com-

pared to the previous month, according to the country's statistics agency.

However, these official figures—the first since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was re-elected on May 28 - are challenged by independent economists from Turkey's Inflation Research Group (ENAG). The latter say annual inflation stands at between 105 and 109 percent, depending on whether or not the free gas offer is taken into account. Erdogan, who is starting a third term in office, has said tackling inflation is a top priority. It exceeded 85 percent in autumn 2022 before starting to slow in November. While prices continue to rise every month, they are doing so less rapidly than during the previous year.— AFP

Car sales in Germany rise as supply chain problems ease

German exports bounced back, official data show

FRANKFURT: New car sales in Germany rose strongly again in May as supply chain problems eased, official figures showed Monday, but analysts warned the weakening economy may weigh on the sector. A total of 246,966 new cars were registered in Europe's top economy last month, up 19.2 percent on a year earlier, according to the KBA federal transport authority. This followed a rise of 12.6 percent in April and a 16.6 percent improvement in March. "The new car market continues to improve, the upswing is robust," said EY analyst Peter Fuss. Sales of all-electric vehicles rose by 46.6 percent. But demand for plug-in hybrids fell by 40.5 percent, the latest sign that motorists are turning their backs on the models.

As a semiconductor shortage that had impacted production continues to ease, manufacturers will be able to ramp up production further to meet demand, said Fuss. While the upward trend would likely continue for the time being, a weak economic picture coupled with high inflation could lead to a slowdown, he said. Germany's economy fell into recession around the turn of the year as consumer prices surged and after the European Central Bank implemented a series of interest rate hikes. Fuss also noted that sales were still well below the levels seen before the coronavirus pandemic.

Exports rebound

Meanwhile, German exports bounced back in April after falling a month earlier, official data showed Monday, but analysts said it was too soon to see a recovery in Europe's recession-hit largest economy. Germany exported goods worth 130.4 billion euros (\$139 billion) in April, data published by federal statistics agency Destatis said, a 1.2-percent increase on the previous month. In March, demand for "made in Germany" goods plunged by six percent. The bounce-back was driven by a 4.7-percent jump in exports to the United States, which was once again Germany's biggest export destination. Exports to key market China saw a 10.1-percent increase, while those to European Union countries rose by more than four percent.

Imports fell 1.7 percent in April to 112 billion euros, leading a trade surplus of 18.4 billion euros for the month. The rise in exports after March's sharp decline brought some relief, analysts said, after Europe's export powerhouse slid into a recession at the turn of the year as inflation and higher interest rates curbed demand. But the April rebound in exports is "too little to make us happy", said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski. "Trade is no longer the strong resilient growth driver of the German economy it used to be," he said.



SINDELFINGEN: Factory 56 is seen at the plant of German car maker Mercedes-Benz in Sindelfingen, southern Germany. — AFP

An expected slowdown in the US economy, ongoing supply chain frictions and China increasingly being able to produce its own goods would all "leave clear marks on German exports", Brzeski warned. The German economy shrank by 0.3 percent in the first three

months of 2023 following a 0.5-percent contraction in the final quarter of last year, according to figures released by Destatis at the end of last month. The German government expects the economy to grow by 0.4 percent over the whole of 2023. — AFP

Bangladesh shuts its power plant as heatwave hits

DHAKA: Cash-strapped Bangladesh shut its biggest power plant Monday because it was unable to afford the coal to fuel it, as a sweltering heatwave creates surging electricity demand. The 1,320-megawatt government-run Payra Power Plant in southern Bangladesh had already slashed production last month due to fuel shortages, but it was forced to go a step further on Monday, manager Shah Abdul Mawla told AFP.

"Due to the coal shortage, the plant came to a complete shutdown at 12.15 pm today," Mawla said, adding that he hoped production could be restored within three weeks when coal shipments arrived. Bangladesh is struggling against a depreciating currency, with foreign exchange reserves slumping from \$46 billion in January last year to \$30 billion at the end of April this year. The official inflation rate is around 9.9 percent, but independent economists say the real figure is substantially higher.

The country has faced nationwide blackouts of up to five hours a day in recent weeks as a heatwave sweeps across the country, creating surging demand for power. Bangladesh recorded a temperature of 41.1 degrees Celsius (106 degrees Fahrenheit) on Monday, with the government closing primary schools until Thursday in a bid to combat the heat. Power Grid Company of Bangladesh spokesperson ABM Badruddoza Khan said the country had experienced a "2,500 MW shortage of electricity in the national grid", compared to 2,200 MW a day earlier, with daily demand around 16,000 MW.

Minister for Power Nasrul Hamid said he hoped to normalize the situation within 10 to 15 days. "We can't provide coal, gas and fuel sufficiently," he told reporters, blaming "economic factors" including securing letters of credit. The Bangladeshi taka depreciated about 25 percent against the US dollar last year, driving up the cost of fuel imports and power utilities. Last February, the International Monetary Fund signed off on a \$4.7 billion support package for Bangladesh. — AFP



DHAKA: A worker welds a structure at a steel workshop in Dhaka. — AFP

France announces massive state aid to chips factory

PARIS: France is ploughing 2.9 billion euros (\$3.1 billion) of public money into a factory to make microchips, officials said on Monday, heating up a global race for the lucrative market. Europe and the United States have both passed so-called Chips Acts to boost investment in the sector as fears grow that China could gain a stranglehold on global supply. Chips, also known as semiconductors, are vital for every electronic device, from smartphones to electric cars, and control of supply chains has become a major priority for the world's biggest trading blocs.

France's economy ministry said the state aid was the biggest subsidy it had offered since 2017. The



KARACHI: An artisan makes a bamboo chair at his roadside shop in Karachi. — AFP

Stocks rise on 'Goldilocks' US jobs report

HONG KONG: Markets built on a global rally Monday after a mixed US jobs report lifted hopes the Federal Reserve will skip an interest rate hike this month, while oil extended gains after Saudi Arabia slashed output. The figures combined with news that Washington had finally passed a debt ceiling deal to avert a catastrophic default, while a report that China is looking at fresh support for its property sector also boosted sentiment.

Wall Street surged Friday after data showed the US economy added 339,000 jobs last month, far more than expected, indicating the labor market remained strong despite more than a year of Fed rate increases. However, the report also revealed wage gains moderated slightly, putting less pressure on inflation. Analysts said the "Goldilocks" reading - neither too good nor too bad - suggested the economy was not facing an immediate risk of a recession and could still give the Fed room to hold policy steady.

Asian traders welcomed the news, with Hong Kong extending Friday's four percent surge, while Tokyo piled on more than two percent and Sydney added one percent. Shanghai was helped by a Bloomberg News report that China was looking at measures to help its beleaguered property sector, which accounts for a huge portion of its economy.

Singapore, Mumbai, Seoul, Taipei, Manila and Jakarta also rose. London, Paris and Frankfurt all climbed at the open.

Saudi output cut

The latest advances across equities have come as investors bet the Fed will not tighten monetary policy at its meeting next week, though expectations

are it will do so in July. The central bank has lifted rates 10 times since early last year. "A combination of a US debt ceiling resolution alongside a mixed US jobs report, still favoring a June Fed pause, and news that China may be considering further support to its beleaguered property sector boosted risk sentiment," said National Australia Bank's Rodrigo Catril. The renewed confidence also saw the so-called VIX "fear gauge" drop below 15 points to pre-COVID levels.

Mark Hackett, at Nationwide, said: "Investors have spent much of the past three years obsessed by the Fed, inflation, and payrolls, though volatility around those reports has settled, reflecting a less emotional market. "This is bullish, as less reactivity is a sign of a healthy market." However, Michael Hewson at CMC Markets added: "With the latest US inflation numbers due out the day before next week's Fed meeting, US policymakers will have a challenging job to spin the idea of holding rates while at the same time keeping the option open for a July rate move."

Meanwhile, there is a worry that with the borrowing limit standoff off the way, the Treasury will launch a sale of around \$1 trillion of debt to restock its coffers, sucking up cash from banks and sapping liquidity. Oil prices jumped more than one percent, adding to Friday's more than two percent advance, after Saudi Arabia slashed output by a million barrels per day for July, which it said was "extendable". Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told reporters after an hours-long meeting of OPEC and other key producers that he "will do whatever is necessary to bring stability to this market".

The crude market has come under pressure in recent months on concerns that a year of rate hikes by central banks would spark recessions and hit demand, while China's post-zero-Covid rally has run out of steam. SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes said the "moderately bullish meeting... partly offsets some bearish downside risks to most price forecasts, including supply beats in Russia, Iran, and Venezuela and downside risks to China demand". — AFP

funding would go towards a 7.5-billion-euro project announced last year to be run by European multinational STMicroelectronics and US company GlobalFoundries. The European Chips Act has loosened the rules on state aid that usually forbid such generous outlays, as it aims to unlock 43 billion euros of investment and for the bloc to produce 20 percent of the world's chips by 2030.

Europe currently accounts for less than 10 percent of the global total, with most of the world's chips being made in Taiwan. The French ministry said the project, in the Alpine town of Crolles near Grenoble in southeastern France, would boost European production capacity by almost six percent by 2028.

The battle to secure supplies of semiconductors was supercharged during the pandemic when lockdowns and other measures caused a supply crunch and brought industries across the world to a grinding halt. The US Chips Act is one of several laws aimed at funneling hundreds of billions of dollars to US firms at the expense of foreign competitors. — AFP



ORMOY: In this file photo, an employee works at the manufacturing of electronic chips in the X-Fab semiconductors factory, in Ormoy, near Paris. — AFP

Turkish Airlines eyes record plane order in 2 months

ISTANBUL: The chairman of Turkish Airlines said Monday that the company will make a final decision on plans for a record-breaking order of 600 aircraft in two months. The airline is in talks with US aircraft maker Boeing and its European rival Airbus to purchase 400 single-aisle planes along with 200 jumbo jets, said chairman Ahmet Bolat.

Turkey's recent presidential election delayed the decision, Bolat said on the sidelines of the annual general meeting of the International Air Transport Association in Istanbul. "We were very close to make a deal with one of the manufacturers ... but we're going to wait for two months to announce our final decision," he said.

He declined to give details about the number of planes that might be ordered from each manufacturer. Bola had previously been quoted as saying that a decision could be made at the IATA conference. The mega-order would increase the airline's fleet to 800 planes within 10 years. It currently has 435 aircraft. Turkish Airlines has ambitious growth plans, notably in Africa and Asia, with Istanbul's new airport serving as its main hub. If the purchases involves firm orders, it would be the biggest in the history of civil aviation, beating the 470-plane order by Air India in February. — AFP

Journalists strike at America's largest newspaper group

NEW YORK: Hundreds of journalists at America's largest newspaper publisher went on strike across the United States on Monday, accusing management of destroying local newsrooms. The walkouts, set to last one or two days, involved Gannett employees from around two dozen newsrooms, the NewsGuild-CWA union said in a statement. The strike affected publications in more than half a dozen states, including California, Texas, Florida, New Jersey and New York, the union added. Gannett owns more than 200 daily newspapers across the country, including USA Today, the Palm Beach Post and the Arizona Republic.

It was bought in November 2019 for around \$1.2 billion by New Media Investment Group, also known as GateHouse Media. Since the merger, newsrooms "have been hollowed out, local news coverage has dwindled, and Gannett share prices have fallen nearly 70 percent," said NewsGuild-CWA. The union blamed CEO Mike Reed for "mismanagement" that has "demoralized newsrooms and made it impossible for reporters to have the resources to produce quality journalism." Gannett has cut nearly 20 percent of its journalism jobs in the last year, instituted unpaid furloughs, and suspended company contributions to retirement plans, the union said. — AFP

Business

Fossil fuelled: UN climate talks begin amid criticisms

World struggling to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius

PARIS: The future of fossil fuels - the leading source of planet-heating emissions - faced scrutiny at UN climate negotiations on Monday with an under-fire Emirati oil chief poised to step into the driver's seat. As the world struggles to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, pressure is on the UAE to arrive in Germany with ambitious plans for its presidency of Dubai's December COP28 climate summit.

The choice of Sultan Al-Jaber - head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, or ADNOC - to head COP28 has triggered calls from campaigners and lawmakers for him to step aside. Al-Jaber favors the rapid development of renewable energy. But he has also focused on tackling carbon emissions - with controversial technologies to capture CO₂ - rather than reducing the use of fossil fuels, insisting they will have a key role in the energy transition.

"The presidency needs to quickly show where its ambition lies: ramping up the renewables is part of it but recognizing that won't be enough for this COP," said Laurence Tubiana, head of the European Climate Foundation. She added it was critical to "recognize that the fossil era is ending". On Sunday, the United Arab Emirates' Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, responsible for overseeing the preparations for COP28, met with US special presidential envoy for climate John Kerry, in a meeting attended by Al-Jaber.

The three reviewed UAE-US initiatives including "The UAE-US Partnership for Accelerating Clean Energy (PACE), which will catalyze \$100 billion in financing," a statement said. Last year's UN climate summit in Egypt reached a landmark deal to help vulnerable countries cope with climate-enhanced disasters, but failed to toughen up commitments to tackle emissions, despite backing from more than 80 countries. The Bonn meeting will strive to close the gap on a past-due promise of \$100 billion per year to help poorer countries make their economies greener and prepare for future climate shocks.

Observers will also look for signs of how nearly 200 nations represented will respond to the first-ever "Global Stocktake", due in September, of progress made in reducing carbon emissions. The assessment will echo a UN report warning that the world may cross the 1.5C warming threshold within a decade. The report also said existing fossil fuel infrastructure could tip global temperatures over the edge if its carbon pollution is allowed to escape into the atmosphere. Meanwhile, emissions - which must drop nearly 50 percent by 2030 to keep the Paris climate treaty goals within reach - continue to rise.



STOCKHOLM: Members of the 'Scientist Rebellion' organization demonstrate outside the Finance Ministry of Sweden, in central Stockholm, to warn against the effects of global warming and urge the government to stop supporting fossil energies. — AFP

Existential threat

The 2015 Paris deal calls on countries to limit global warming "well below" two degrees Celsius, or preferably 1.5C, a safer limit that would still have severe implications for millions. It does not say how the world will meet that challenge. Among the most vocal advocates of slashing fossil fuel use are small island nations that could be wiped off the map within decades by rising sea levels. "Fossil fuels are certainly the main culprit in this climate change fight," Samuella Laloni, special envoy of the government of Tuvalu, told AFP in Paris. "What is at stake for Tuvalu is the entire country." Tuvalu last year joined South Pacific neighbor Vanuatu in backing a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Recent years have seen a crescendo of temperature records and climate-driven disasters worldwide, mostly in poorer regions least responsible for the problem. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has provoked a surge in gas investments, even if renewables are also booming. In May the G7 group of wealthy nations committed to "accelerate the phase-out of unabated fossil fuels", but defended investment in the gas sector as a "temporary response" to the energy crisis. "Unabated" means without the technology to capture

CO₂ emissions before they reach the atmosphere.

Decarbonizing

One issue with broad support across nations is the IEA call to triple new renewable capacity by 2030. The intergovernmental body projects that clean energy investment - including renewables and nuclear - will hit a record \$1.7 trillion in 2023. Fossil fuel investment is still predicted to exceed \$1 trillion. IEA chief Fatih Birol has lambasted the oil and gas industry - with a record net income of \$4 trillion last year - for its lacklustre renewables investment despite the "unprecedented cash windfall". The COP28 presidency has pushed back on criticism of Al-Jaber, citing his work in the renewables sector.

But he heads to Bonn just weeks after more than a hundred members of the United States Congress and the European Parliament issued an extraordinary demand for him to be removed from his post. Oil producer the UAE might stop using its oil but does not plan to stop pumping it for the international market, said Karim Elgendy, associate fellow at Chatham House. He told a briefing it might be "inclined to keep saying things like the world will need oil simply because it needs to maintain that customer". — AFP

In Ecuador biosphere, battle lines form over mining plans

NANEGALITO: The Choco Andino Biosphere Reserve near Ecuador's capital Quito is a UN-designated biodiversity hotspot - and the center of an increasingly heated debate over mining. Mining companies want to exploit sites within the sprawling reserve, home to species like the spectacled bear. At least 12 mining concessions are in exploratory stages, although no mine has yet opened. People who live within the reserve and environmentalists are pushing for a referendum to halt all mining.

Last year, the Constitutional Court gave a green light to hold a referendum in the Quito Metropolitan District (DMQ) on whether they want to prohibit all mining - including small-scale "wildcat" projects. The date for the referendum remains up in the air. Mining "has such great impact, and extractive activity is not compatible" with the almost 20,000 inhabitants of six towns in the reserve and inside the DMQ boundaries. Inty Arcos, a biologist and coordinator of the Choco Andino community, tells AFP. He lives in one of the private reserves that are within the biosphere and that are dedicated especially to bird watching. Other residents are farmers, ranchers and producers of organic unrefined cane sugar.



NANEGALITO: Biologist Inty Arcos, coordinator of the Commonwealth Council of the Andean Choco, speaks with AFP during a visit to the Intillacta Reserve, in the cloud forest near Nanegalito, in the Metropolitan District of Quito, Ecuador. — AFP

"It is just incongruous that you (could) go to see ... hummingbirds and Andean cock-of-the-rocks while somebody next to you is blowing up dynamite, and moving large trucks and tractors around," Arcos tells a group of journalists tromping through the bushes. The Choco Andino Biosphere Reserve - at 1,100 square miles bigger than metropolitan Paris - extends from humid lowland forests to Andean mountain forests. It hosts 270 mammal species, hundreds of endemic plant species, and 600 bird species, including the iconic cock-of-the-rock, whose striking red-and-black plumage makes it emblematic of the region.

Despite its UN designation as a priceless natural jewel, the biosphere does not enjoy status as a broadly protected area under domestic law, instead comprising a patchwork of protected forests, private nature reserves and areas of sustainable development. There is plenty of disagreement among locals about the biosphere, environmentalists acknowledge. According to the Chamber of Mining, when one of the concessions in the area was suspended, it left some 60 families without work.

Unprotected

In the Choco Andino, just 90 minutes from downtown Quito, hummingbirds hover so close that visitors can hear the thrum of their wings. Given its jaw-dropping biological diversity, UNESCO enshrined Choco Andino as a biosphere reserve in 2018, a distinction it shares with the Galapagos Islands. For years, "Quito without Mining" activists fought against development and rallied more than 200,000 signatures for a popular referendum. Yet Ecuadorian law only bans mining or mineral-extraction activities within the national system of protected areas - not those receiving global distinctions. "The Constitution clearly establishes that the subsoil resources belong to the central state... which has to manage the resources," Maria Eulalia Silva, executive president of the Chamber of Mining, tells AFP.

She stresses that even a local referendum cannot decide how those resources will be handled when they belong to the nation as a whole. Ecuador began to promote mining in 2019 as an alternative to the faltering oil industry, long a pillar of the economy. Silva says that while Ecuador's Constitutional Court has the last word, "we just cannot be so blind, be so arrogant, as to fritter away the kind of opportunity" mining offers.

At the same time, with its enormous trees - some with leaves the size of an adult - the Choco Andino forest is important in the fight against climate change, its defenders say. "They are extremely important forests because they retain carbon and fix it in their growth," says Arcos. The trees also help clean up nearby Quito, a metropolis with three million inhabitants. "The last clean rivers that remain are those of the Choco Andino and they help to dissolve the pollution that is dumped in (elsewhere)," Arcos says. After a decade of effort, another grassroots group, the "Yasunidos" collective, got the Constitutional Court to approve a different referendum - one on leaving crude oil underground in an important block within the Amazon basin area's Yasuni National Park. That referendum will be held on August 20, coinciding with nationwide elections after the dissolution of Congress last month. — AFP

NBK Economic Update

Kuwait consumer spending 'strong'

KUWAIT: The underlying drivers of consumer activity in Kuwait remain solid, including sustained job gains, government measures, and favorable demographics, with spending registering another firm rise in 1Q23. Nevertheless, growth has eased from previous quarters, as the effects of previous government stimulus and the post-pandemic demand rebound fade.

Overall consumer spending is likely to continue to benefit from the government's intention to maintain an expansionary fiscal stance, supported by high oil revenues. That said, in the near term, spending growth could moderate further amid the volatile and overall weaker global macroeconomic environment and tighter monetary policy, which could weigh on consumer sentiment.

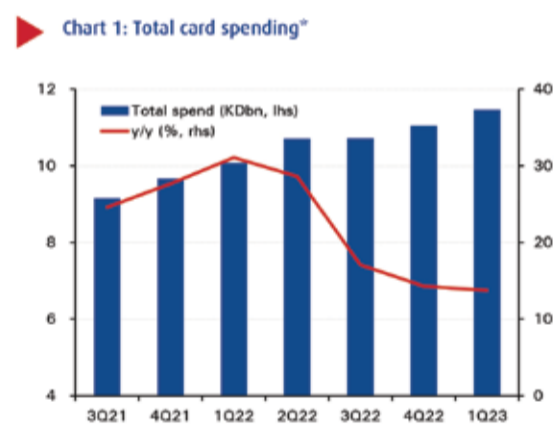
Spending robust

Consumer spending, measured by total credit and debit card transactions (including ATM cash withdrawals), grew by 14% y/y in 1Q23, the same rate as the previous quarter and by 3.8% q/q. While growth has slowed from its peak of more than 30% early last year, it remains solid compared to pre-2019 levels, where growth averaged 7% y/y during 2014-19.

The initial trend of particularly strong overseas spending in the wake of the lifting of pandemic restrictions has now settled at more 'normal' levels. Card transactions outside of Kuwait did jump 20% y/y in 1Q23 (compared to a 7% rise in 4Q22), a quarter marked by a strong uptick in National Day overseas travel; although overseas spending still represents less than 6% of total consumer spending. As for local spending, growth further softened to 13% y/y.

Household credits

Household lending (excluding loans for the purchase of securities) has been providing solid support to consumer spending. The rate of increase in household credit has weakened in recent quarters, however, to 7% y/y at the end of 1Q23 (from 14% y/y in 1Q22),



Source: Central Bank of Kuwait; *POS, payment gateway and ATM withdrawals

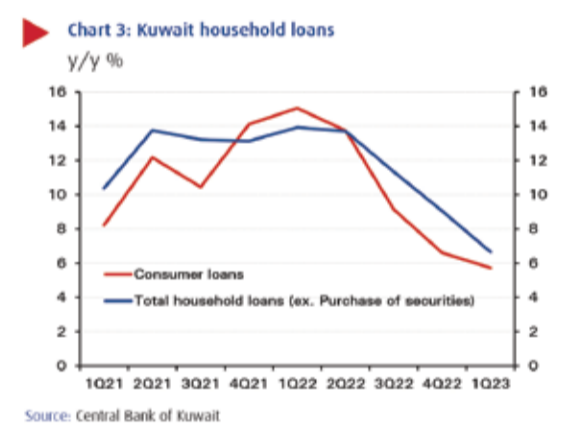
amid tighter monetary conditions. Lending growth in the 'consumer loans' sub-segment - which strips out housing loans and may be most closely related to the purchase of consumer durables - had slowed to 5.7% at the end of Q1 from a peak of 15.1% early last year.

Employment recovering

Population and labor markets both recorded a sharp recovery in 2022, following the return of some expats after their COVID-linked departures. The boost to private consumption from an expansion in the labor force and population growth, while undoubtedly positive, may not be so pronounced, given that most of the recent additions to the expat population and jobs are concentrated in labor-intensive and possibly lower-end jobs. Sustained job gains among Kuwaitis continue to be a solid driver of consumption growth, though.

According to data from the Kuwait Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), the total population of Kuwait reached 4.74mn in 2022, increasing by 8% y/y. The number of non-Kuwaitis rose by 11.1% y/y, outpacing the increase in Kuwaitis (+1.9%). Overall employment grew by 8.1% during the last six months of 2022, predominantly driven by the return of some expatriate jobs following the resumption of economic activity post-COVID.

Still, expat employment levels across many sectors are some way below their peak in 2019, suggesting a full recovery is yet to happen. Meanwhile, employment



Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

among Kuwaiti nationals inched up by 1.4% in the six months to December 2022 to 455K on mainly public sector job gains.

Average wages of Kuwaiti public sector workers rose by 1.8% y/y in 4Q22, the fastest growth rate in over two years, according to Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau and Labor Market Information System data. Broadly, increasing employment and growing wages (based on the data for the public sector) should support consumer spending in the country.

Consumer sentiment ebbing

As measured by ARA Research and Consultancy's Consumer Confidence Index, consumer sentiment has also been trending lower. Growing worries about the global economic outlook and moderating oil prices have contributed to the recently softer readings of the broad consumer sentiment index. The index for durable goods (consumer discretionary category) has been more volatile but is also broadly softening. The overall moderating trend in consumer confidence outlines some easing in growth in consumer activity.

Inflation elevated

Inflation in Kuwait in April stood at 3.7% y/y, unchanged from March but up from 3.2% at the end of 2022. Consumer prices have seen some renewed upward pressures this year across several key categories including food & beverages, clothing and housing services. Ramadan-related seasonality could explain some of this increase. Nevertheless, the overall inflation trend we see for the remainder of the year is one of moderation on easing consumer activity.

Fiscal stimulus

We also expect fiscal policy to provide ongoing support for the consumer sector going forward. The election of a new parliament in June could be followed by the approval of the draft budget for FY23/24 proposed earlier this year. The draft outlined a 12% y/y increase in budgeted public expenditures, driven by a 13% rise in salaries and a 34% rise in subsidies. A part of this spending, however, consists of accrual payments to ministries for previous years' outlays so the positive impact on demand this year may be somewhat less. The government also aims to hire around 20K additional Kuwaiti employees in the public sector this fiscal year, which should support rising consumer demand.

Table 1: Employment in Kuwait (period-end)

| | Employment ('000) | | | % y/y | | |
|---------|-------------------|-------------|-------|---------|-------------|-------|
| | Kuwaiti | Non-Kuwaiti | Total | Kuwaiti | Non-Kuwaiti | Total |
| 2018 | 399 | 2,393 | 2,793 | 3.7 | 4.3 | 4.2 |
| 2019 | 409 | 2,522 | 2,931 | 2.4 | 5.4 | 5.0 |
| 2020 | 418 | 2,391 | 2,809 | 2.1 | (5.2) | (4.2) |
| Jun-21* | 423 | 2,338 | 2,761 | 1.3 | (2.2) | (1.7) |
| Jun-22 | 449 | 2,167 | 2,616 | 6.1 | (7.3) | (5.2) |
| Dec-22* | 455 | 2,374 | 2,829 | 1.4 | 9.5 | 8.1 |

Source: PACI Note * % change is for six months due to data unavailability

Lifestyle

Putting the K in hip-hop: South Korea's Jay Park

K-pop idol. Used tyre salesman. Hip-hop mogul. The course of true success has never run smoothly, but Korean-American entertainer Jay Park has had an unusually bumpy ride to stardom. The 36-year-old is now one of South Korea's most recognizable entertainers: he's founded two of the country's largest hip-hop labels, released a string of hits, has his own soju liquor brand and was the first Asian-American to sign with Jay-Z's Roc Nation.

But this success was hard fought, he told AFP in an exclusive interview, with his first shot at fame — debuting as the leader of a K-pop band — imploding in a scandal that led him to flee Seoul for his native Seattle. "I faced a lot of backlash," Park told AFP, adding he was once "kind of blacklisted from the industry".

The problem started with a few throwaway comments posted online by Park — then in his late teens — criticizing the intense idol training regime, the K-pop industry and South Korea itself. A Korean media frenzy ensued, with the fallout forcing Park to quit 2PM, a seven-member boy band under major label JYP Entertainment.

He moved back to Seattle and worked at a used tyre shop, but he kept his musical dreams alive, eventually posting a cover of "Nothin' on You" — a B.O.B and Bruno Mars song — on his YouTube channel. "I just wanted to show my fans



In this photo Korean-American entertainer Jay Park reacts during an interview in Seoul. - AFP photos

that I'm doing well, and also I wanted to show people what type of music I'm into, what type of artist I am. So I just put up a cover and it just kind of blew up," he said. Racking up more than two million views in a day, the song catapulted him back into the music industry and marked "a new start" for Park.

It also allowed him to recalibrate his musical style and shift from pop to rap — a move that would eventually help transform South Korea's nascent hip-hop scene. It was not a calculated decision

or grand plan, he said, but an attempt to move past restrictive labels. "If I say I'm a rapper, then I can only rap. But I like to rap, I like to dance, I like to sing," he said, adding that he would be "always grateful to the hip-hop culture" for helping him relaunch his career.

Struggle for survival

Park's story is unusual: it is rare for a K-pop failure to go on to have a successful musical career after leaving one of the big agencies around which

the industry is structured. "It didn't happen overnight. Obviously it took a lot of work," Park told AFP of his musical comeback. Hundreds of thousands of aspiring K-pop stars go through the grueling idol training system, notorious for high stress and long hours, analysts say.

Only 60 percent of trainees make it to "debut", industry figures show, and almost all of those that do are signed to big agencies like BTS's HYBE, or its major rival SM Entertainment. Without that backing, "the chances for survival are really low", said music critic Kim Do-heon. "There are so many groups that disband," he said.

After Park quit 2PM, he was left to navigate the industry on his own, and has spoken of his struggles with, for example, finding musicians willing to be featured on his first solo album. But even when the industry odds are stacked against you, Park said, it is still possible to succeed with the right mindset. "There is a limit to what agencies can do for you, and it seems that grit and determination are what can fill in," he said.

Change the industry

Now Park is trying to change the industry — or his small segment of it — for the better. He has already founded two of South Korea's most prominent hip-hop labels. And now his career has



In this photo Korean-American entertainer Jay Park reacts during an interview in Seoul.

come full circle with his establishment of a third label aimed at producing a boy band. But he's doing it his way: rather than the exacting training and obsessive levels of control pioneered by the major agencies, Park says he believes real relationships and "freestyling together" are the key to success.

His new trainees will have Park as a mentor — something he says he longed for when he started in the industry at 18. "I'm not bitter over anything. I don't hate anybody. I don't dislike anybody. I don't have time for that. I don't have time for thinking about stuff in the past," he said. "I can't change the past, so what I can change is the future, so that's what I work on." — AFP

Here Comes the AI: Fans rejoice in 'new' Beatles music

When the Beatles broke up more than 50 years ago, devastated fans were left yearning for more. Now, artificial intelligence is offering just that. From "re-uniting" the Fab Four on songs from their solo careers, to re-imagining surviving superstar Paul McCartney's later works with his voice restored to its youthful peak, the new creations show off how far this technology has come — and raise a host of ethical and legal questions. "I'm sobbing! This is so beautiful!!!!" wrote a listener in a typical YouTube comment for a fan-created AI cover of McCartney's 2013 single, "New," which features de-aged vocals and a bridge part "sung" by his great songwriting partner and friend, the late John Lennon.

Equally impressive is a version of "Grow Old With Me," one of the last songs penned by Lennon, which was posthumously released after his 1980 murder and recently remade by an AI creator who goes by "Dae Lims." With enhanced audio quality, an orchestral arrangement and harmonized backing vocals that evoke the Liverpoolian rockers' heyday, the song's most stirring moment comes when McCartney croons over a soaring melody with poignant lyrics about aging.

"When I hear this, I lose it. I start crying," said music YouTuber Steve Onotera, who goes by "SamuraiGuitarist" and has a million followers, in a recent video discussing the new works' unforeseen sentimental resonance. After the most influential band in history parted ways acrimoniously, fans were deprived of a final "happy ending," he said. "So when we do get that reunion artificially yet convincingly created by AI, well, it's surprisingly emotional."

AI here, there and everywhere

Like an earlier track called "Heart on a Sleeve" which featured AI-generated vocals of Drake and The Weeknd and racked up millions of hits on TikTok and other platforms, these covers use scraping technology that analyzes and captures the nuances of a particular voice. The creators would have probably then sung the parts themselves and then applied the cloned voice, in a manner similar to placing a filter on a photograph.

While the results can be astonishing, getting there isn't simple and requires skilled human operators combining new AI tools with extensive knowledge of traditional music processing software, Zohaib Ahmed, the CEO of Resemble

AI, a Toronto-based voice cloning company, told AFP. "I think we're still seeing a very small percentage of the population that can even access these tools," he said. They need to "jump through hoops, read documentation, have the right computer, and then put it all together."

Ahmed's company is one of several offering a platform that can make the technology more accessible to clients in the entertainment sector — and counts a recent Netflix documentary series "narrated" by late art icon Andy Warhol using its technology as an early success. For Patricia Alessandrini, a composer and assistant professor at Stanford's Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics, the recent spate of AI tracks represent a coming-of-age for a technology that has been advancing exponentially — yet largely out of public view over the past decade.

"This is a great example of what AI does very well, which is anything that's resemblance: to train it on something existing," she told AFP. But, she added, it flounders when it comes to new ideas. "There's really no expectation that it's going to replace the rich history of humans originating art and culture."

Litigation coming

For the music industry, the ramifications are enormous. As the technology progresses, software that will easily allow people to transform their vocals into one of their favorite singers is likely not far away. "If they're getting paid for their vocal license, hey, everyone's happy," said Onotera. "But what if they're long since passed away? Is it up to their estate?" AI is already proving a helter-skelter impact on the copyright world.

In the case of "Heart on a Sleeve," Universal Music Group was quick to assert copyright claims and have the track pulled down from streaming services, but that hasn't stopped it popping back up on small accounts. Marc Ostrow, a New York-based music copyright lawyer, told AFP AI-generated music is a "gray area."

Copyright can be asserted both by songwriters whose material is used, as well as the holders of the master recordings. On the other hand AI creators can argue it falls under "fair use" citing a 2015 court ruling that said Google was permitted to archive the world's books, because it wasn't competing with sellers and was displaying only snippets. — AFP



Fans surround Beatles Paul McCartney (center) and George Harrison (second right) upon their arrival at Orly airport on June 20, 1965, before their concert at the Palais des Sports the same evening. - AFP



The fish market of Keratsini, west of Athens, is abuzz in the early morning, with trawlers disgorging crates of sardines and anchovies as trucks await nearby to be loaded. But on his family's fishing boat, Lefteris Arapakis sorts out a different sort of haul — bottles, boots, plastic pipes and fishing nets, all dragged from the bed of the Aegean Sea. "We are swimming in plastic," said Arapakis, whose family has fished for five generations.

By 2050 "there will be more plastic than fish" in the sea, he warned, quoting recent reports. That morning's plastic catch "weighs about 100 kilos (220 pounds)," said the 29-year-old economist and co-founder of Enaleia, an NGO that encourages fishermen to collect marine litter caught in their nets. Since its creation in 2018, it has worked with more than 1,200 fishermen in Greece to raise awareness over the degradation of the maritime environment. The seabed litter does not come only from Greece but from all over the Mediterranean, moving with the sea currents.

Active in 42 ports throughout Greece, Enaleia provides fishermen with large bags for marine waste that they can deposit in dumpsters once back at port. For every kilo of plastic they deliver, they receive a small "symbolic" sum. The money is enough for a drink, said Arapakis, who was in Paris this week for global talks on limiting plastic pollution.

UN plastic talks

Representatives of 175 nations are meeting at the UNESCO headquarters with the aim of making progress towards reaching an agreement by next year covering the entire plastics life cycle. Since October, fishing crews affiliated with Enaleia have dragged out 20 tons of plastic and old fishing equipment each month. Nearly 600 tons have been collected over the last five years, the NGO said.

The collected plastic is transported to a recycling plant in the industrial area of Megara near Keratsini, to be turned into pellets to make new products such as socks, swimwear or furniture. A sixth is fishing nets, according to Emalia. Next in line are high and low-density plastics (12.5 percent and 8 percent respectively). But nearly half of the total, 44 percent, is non-recyclable plastic.

Recycling marine waste is a "challenge" because the plastic is degraded by its exposure underwater, said Hana Pertot, sales manager of the Skyplast recycling plant in Megara. Enaleia began as a fishing school created by Arapakis after he lost his job in 2016 during the Greek financial crisis.

It was originally created to help his father recruit personnel for his trawler. The organization is now also active in Italy, and this year began partnerships in Spain, Egypt and Kenya. Arapakis said he embarked on the Mediterranean Cleanup project after a trip to Greece's Cyclades islands, where he saw fishermen throwing the waste gathered by their nets back into the sea.

Mokharam, the team leader on Arapakis' family's boat, the Panagiota II. There are also practical benefits for fishing boats.

"In the past, the anchor often snagged on waste of all kinds, especially nets, and the engine would go out," said Nikolaos Mentis, who works out of the island of Salamina opposite Keratsini, and has been an Enaleia contributor



Enaleia NGO's divers and volunteers collect ghost nets under the water during a clean-up operation near the coast of the island of Salamina.

'Part of the solution'

In 2020, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) awarded Arapakis its "Young Champion of the Year in Europe" prize. He is convinced that there has been a "mentality change" among Greece's fishermen. Previously "we caught large quantities of plastic but we only kept the fish. All waste was thrown into the sea," said Mokhtar

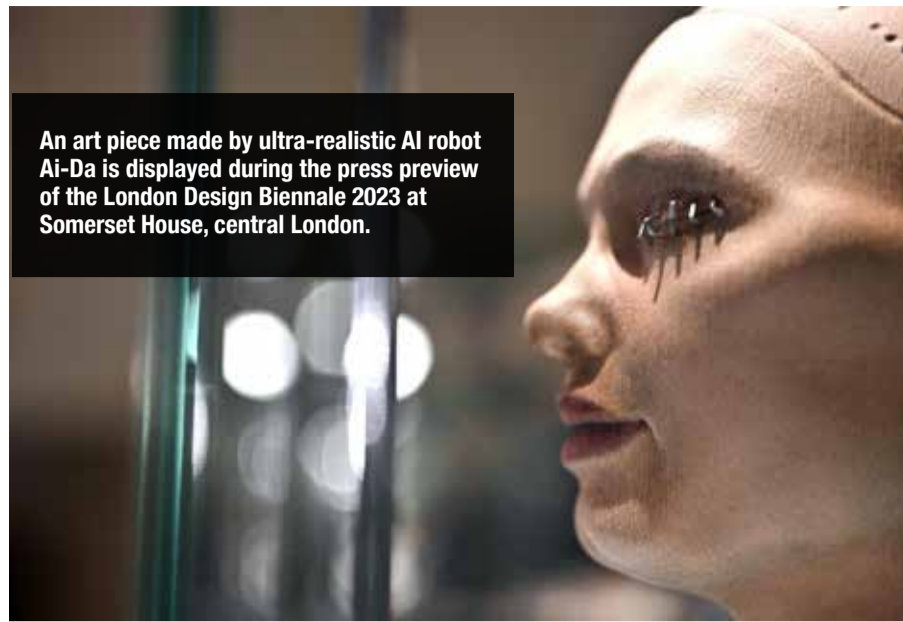
for the past five years. "Fishermen are mobilizing, (it's) a kind of democracy. Climate change mainly affects people on low incomes," he said. "Fishermen were part of the problem before. Now they are part of the solution — which means that any citizen or politician can contribute." — AFP



This picture shows marine litter at a Recycle Factory in the city of Megara near Athens, on May 26, 2023. — AFP



Ultra-realistic AI robot Ai-Da poses in front of a painting she made during the press preview of the London Design Biennale 2023 at Somerset House, central London.



An art piece made by ultra-realistic AI robot Ai-Da is displayed during the press preview of the London Design Biennale 2023 at Somerset House, central London.



A visitor looks at the Dubai installation during the press preview of the London Design Biennale 2023 at Somerset House, central London.

London Design Biennale explores design-led collaboration

The fourth edition of the London Design Biennale opened in the British capital on Thursday, bringing together exhibitors from around the globe, invited to explore new forms of collaboration through design. "What you're seeing is how to make the world a better place through the lens of design," director Victoria Broackes told AFP at the opening of the international exhibition. "There's often a belief that design is sort of like, you know, nice to have but not absolutely necessary. And I think what this exhibition shows is that design and designers' thinking is something absolutely at the core of producing objects that address challenges," Broackes added. Projects from over

40 participants will be on display at Somerset House until June 25, showcasing various design techniques and exploring subjects ranging from the environment to artificial intelligence.

In the Chilean pavilion, the "Borrowed Matter" installation of bio-textile sheets suspended from the ceiling looks at ways of using wood cellulose — a renewable and biodegradable material — to create natural fibres and reduce the impact of logging on rainforests. Some of the textile works are also sensory and emit the sounds of birds and running water, reminiscent of rainforests, when touched by visitors.

At a different display, scientists and designers of the "Automorph Network" collective have collaborated on an

installation that focuses on self-shaping matter, materials that "are no longer passive recipients of design, but active participants in their shaping process". The Biennale also featured works by a robot artist, at a time when artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly present in everyday life.

Robot artist

On display are mugs, plates and other household objects that were designed by Ai-Da, an ultra-realistic AI robot, using artistic algorithms and then printed using a 3D printer. "I do not have thoughts and feelings like humans do," Ai-Da said, answering questions from AFP. "But the objects mean a lot to me if they succeed in their aim, which is helping the viewer question the role of new technologies

in our lives," the humanoid robot, sporting a bobbed haircut, added.

Ai-Da's creator Aidan Meller said "algorithms are able to be creative... And so in their very nature, they are showing and exploring new ideas". But he also warned that it is important to treat this technology with "responsibility". "We want to save the world, we want the benefit. There are negatives, so we need to think about that, slowing it down to think about that," he added. Attention was also brought to the war in Ukraine, where fighting is ongoing more than a year since Russia invaded its pro-Western neighbor.

On display at the Polish pavilion are windows donated from the UK that will be Ukraine-bound after the exhibition. The installa-

tion is inspired by a project of the Poland-based BRDA Foundation, which works on sustainable and accessible housing.

The group has been collecting windows from across Poland and sending them to Ukraine to help rebuild homes destroyed by war. "Windows are the first thing to disappear when there's an air raid," the project's curator Zofia Jaworowska said. "And this is a chance to talk about material re-use, its potential in architecture, how it can be an answer to crisis situations," she added. — AFP



Visitors look at Malta installation during the press preview of the London Design Biennale 2023 at Somerset House, central London. — AFP photos

Hit Vermeer show ends in Amsterdam

Amsterdam's famous Rijksmuseum drew the curtain Sunday on its "most successful" exhibition featuring paintings of Dutch master Johannes Vermeer, saying hundreds of thousands of art lovers flocked to the capital for the blockbuster show. Long queues formed daily outside the Rijksmuseum since the exhibition opened on February 10, boasting the largest collection of works by the 17th-century artist ever gathered under a single roof. "Despite having carefully limited numbers to give visitors the best experience possible, the Rijksmuseum's Vermeer exhibition finished as the most successful exhibition in its history," the museum said. Some 650,000 visitors from 113 nations came to wonder at

Vermeer classics such as "Girl with the Pearl Earring" and "The Milkmaid", which were among the 28 masterpieces on display.

The exhibition borrowed from galleries and private collections around the world — from the United States to Japan. Other highlights included three works from the Frick Collection in New York, the newly restored "Girl Reading a Letter at the Window" from Dresden, and "Woman Holding a Balance" from Washington's National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition also cast new light on Vermeer's techniques used in "The Milkmaid" in which researchers discovered a hidden jug holder and basket, later painted over by the enigmatic artist. For those who missed the chance of wondering at more than two dozen Vermeers at once, a small consolation remained: six Vermeers will remain in place at the museum from June 7. "The Girl in the Red Hat" and "Young Woman at the Virginal" will hang in the museum's gallery of honor with four Rijksmuseum Vermeers until October 10. — AFP



Photographers take pictures next to the painting 'The Milkmaid' by Johannes Vermeer, during a visit by France's President Emmanuel Macron and Netherlands' Prime Minister Mark Rutte to the exhibition of the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. — AFP

Tree-mendous ride: Wooden Citroen 2CV sells for 210,000 euros

A Citroen 2CV made of wood, thought to be the only one of its kind, has sold for 210,000 euros (\$225,000) at auction in France, setting a new price record for the iconic vehicle. The car, in full working order and registered in France, beat expectations when it went under the hammer in the central town of Tours on Sunday.

The body of the 2CV was hand-crafted out of wood with the same famous curves as the post-war French classic. It was snapped up by Paris-based collector Jean-Paul Favand, who owns a museum of vintage fairground attractions. "I'm having difficulty talking after this bet," Favand told AFP by telephone afterwards.

The auction house had issued a guide price of 150,000-200,000 euros, saying it was "much more than a car — it's a work of art". Auctioneer Aymeric Rouillac declared the sale a record as he brought down the hammer. The previous high for a 2CV was set in 2016, when an extremely rare 1961 2CV Sahara in almost mint condition was sold for 172,800 euros by Paris-based auction house Artcurial. Carpenter Michel Robillard crafted the wooden 2CV's wings out of walnut and its chassis from pear and apple tree wood. He used a single block of cherry wood for the bonnet, shaped with just chisels and sandpaper.

'Crazy project'

Robillard told AFP he spent five years and approximately 5,000 hours creating the car, beginning in 2011. "It's like my daughter," he said as he polished the vehicle before the auction. "I had three

boys and this was my little daughter." The 2CV — which stands for "deux chevaux", meaning "two horsepower" — was launched in 1948 as Citroen's answer to the Volkswagen Beetle.

Robillard's model is equipped with an original engine from Citroen's later 3CV model, giving it the extra power needed to propel the naturally heavier wooden structure. He said he had another "crazy project" in mind for the next few years. He intends to make a wooden version of an-

other French classic — the Citroen DS, which in 2025 will celebrate 70 years of existence. A woodworker since the age of 14, Robillard began making miniature wooden replicas of the world's famous automobiles in the 1990s. He has won several prizes for his intricate work, including for a Harley Davidson motorcycle and its sidcar, which took more than 500 hours to complete. — AFP



Lifestyle

Spell it out: Paris' Champs-Elysees hosts mass 'dictation'

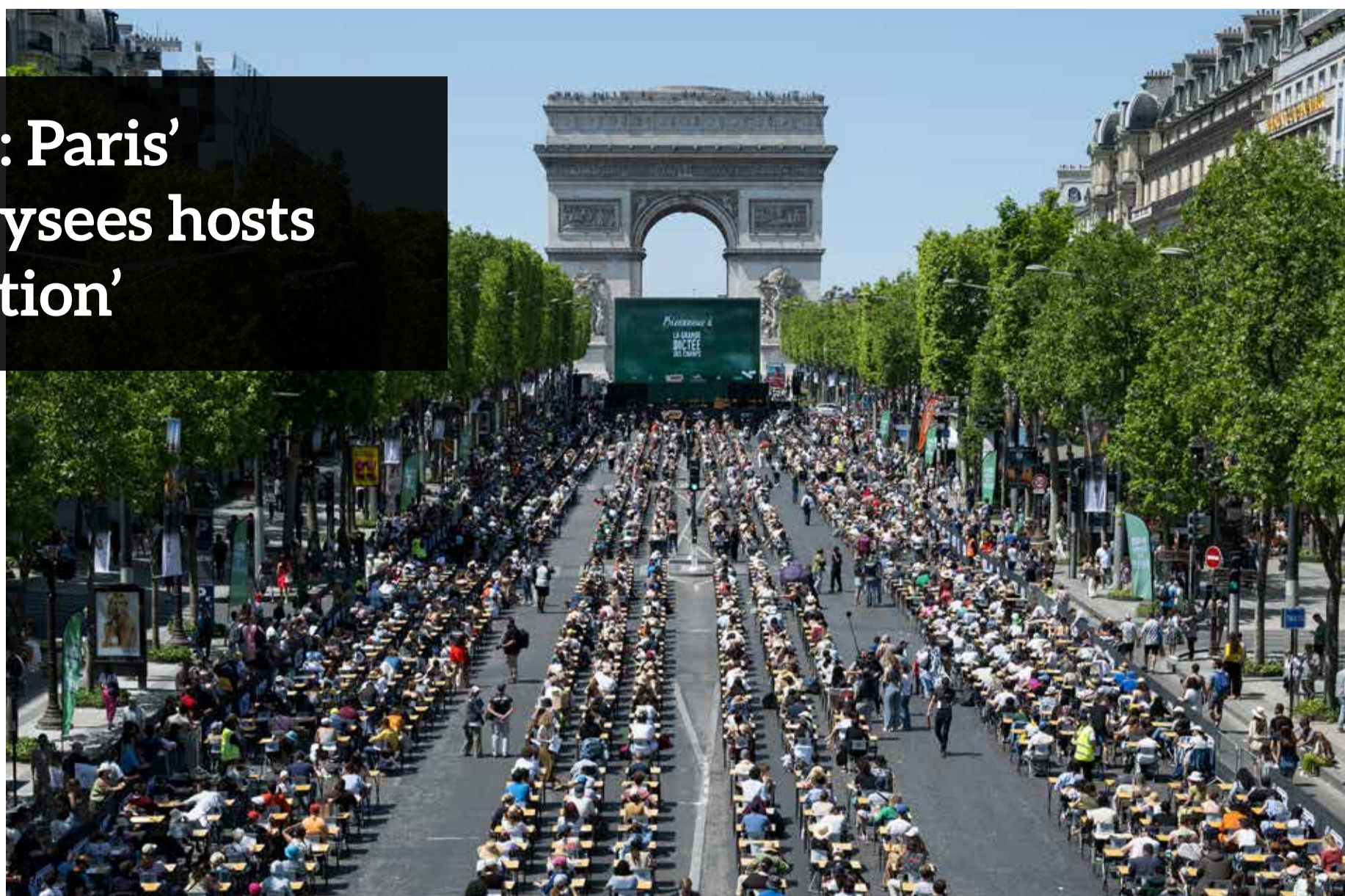
Not to be outdone by US-style spelling bee extravaganzas, Paris' most famous street the Champs-Elysees was transformed into an open-air mass "dictation" spellathon Sunday, pitting thousands of France's brainiest bookworms



A participant takes part in the attempt to beat the record of the "World's Biggest Dictation" on the prestigious Champs-Elysees Avenue.

against one another. Revealing a very French love affair with words, over 50,000 applied to participate in the event, a world first, in which hopefuls attempt to participate faithfully and without error transcribe a text read to them. Over 5,000 applicants aged 10-90 were chosen to participate in three sessions led by novelist Rachid Santaki.

With 1,779 desks laid out on Paris' most famous boulevard in each session, organizers had sought to break the world record for a dictation spelling competition. In the first round, an excerpt of La Mule du Pape by renowned French writer Alphonse Daudet was read by journalist Augustin Trapenard, of Libraries Without Borders. Silence fell when the first session started, but for 10-year-old Samson, the dictation was "too fast". He gave up.



This photograph shows the prestigious Champs-Elysees Avenue, transformed into a giant classroom hosting participants, as they attempt to beat the record of the "World's Biggest Dictation" in Paris. - AFP photos

In his final year of primary school, top student Antoine attended with his father and, despite being a star pupil, he had struggled to fill his page. "It was impossible! The dictation was for adults," he said. His father Adrien Blind, 42, was equally relieved when the session wrapped, saying he "was in a state of stress and worry". But 65-year-old retiree Touria Zerhouni was more upbeat. "I only made two mistakes! I expected it to be much harder," she said.

The competition went beyond the French classics, with a sport themed round read by rugby player Pierre Rabadan, and another with a contem-

porary flavor read by writer and journalist Katherine Pancol. Marc-Antoine Jamet, president of the Champs-Elysees Committee which hosted the dictation during, said the event went beyond spelling. "Dictation helps us to live together. It's unifying," he said. — AFP

Members of the public take photographs of participants attempting to beat the record of the "World's Biggest Dictation".



(From left) Portuguese-US filmmaker Joaquim Dos Santos, US filmmakers Kemp Powers and Justin K. Thompson arrive for the world premiere of "Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse" at the Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Latest Spider-Man spins silver screen gold

"Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse," Sony's newest chapter in the webslinger series, soared to North American box office domination in its weekend debut, Sunday estimates showed, cementing the resilience of one of Hollywood's biggest superhero juggernauts. The animated offering featuring the voices of Shameik Moore, Hailee Steinfeld and Issa Rae netted a cool \$120 million domestically for the Friday-through-Sunday period, and another \$88 million internationally, according to industry watcher Exhibitor Relations.

"This is an exceptionally good opening for an animation follow-up sequel," said analyst David A. Gross, adding the sequel has an "entirely fresh" look and is an example of "inspired commercial filmmaking." The film picks up the story of half-Black, half-Latino Miles Morales, using an eye-popping blend of decades-old 2D comic book drawing techniques with the latest computer-generated visual effects.

Spidey dethroned Disney's live-action version of "The Little Mermaid," which raked in a similar amount in its debut the previous weekend and fol-

lowed up with \$40.6 million. The remake of the 1989 animated tale of an underwater princess who gives up her voice in pursuit of true love on land stars pop singer Halle Bailey, Jonah Hauer-King as Prince Eric, and Melissa McCarthy as the villainous Ursula.

"The Boogeyman" debuted in third with \$12.3 million. The 20th Century Studios horror/mystery feature is the latest in a long line of films adapted from a Stephen King book, and one of its producers shepherded the hit show "Stranger Things" onto the small screen. Slipping one spot to fourth was Disney's "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3" which added \$10 million to its cumulative worldwide total of some \$780 million. Universal's action film "Fast X," part of the "Fast & Furious" franchise, held fifth spot, earning \$9.2 million. Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "The Super Mario Bros Movie" (\$3.3 million)
- "About My Father" (\$2.1 million)
- "The Machine" (\$1.7 million)
- "You Hurt My Feelings" (\$770,000)
- "Kandahar" (\$765,000)—AFP



Prince Harry to make history with UK court testimony

Prince Harry will become the first senior British royal to give evidence in court for more than a century when he testifies this week against a tabloid newspaper publisher. Harry, 38, is expected to take the witness stand at London's High Court in a trial considering unlawful information-gathering claims against Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN). King Charles III's younger son and other high-profile figures allege that the publisher engaged in illegal activities, including phone hacking, at its titles and are seeking damages.

The case is one of several that Harry has brought against British newspaper groups since stepping down from royal duties in early 2020 and relocating to the United States. The MGN trial, which is expected to last up to seven weeks, kicked off last month, days after Charles's May 6 coronation which Harry attended. The California-based prince also made a surprise appearance at the High Court in March for a privacy claim he and others have launched against Associated Newspapers (ANL), publisher of the Daily Mail.

Harry, the Duke of Sussex, made written submissions in that case but did not give in-person evidence, sitting near the back of the court during several days of proceedings. His appearance on the stand, expected Tuesday, is said to be the first time a senior royal has given evidence in court since Edward VII, who took the stand in an 1890 slander trial before becoming monarch.

Harry battles

Harry, who is fifth in line to the throne, has had a difficult relationship with the media, especially since he and his American wife Meghan left Britain. As well as filing multiple lawsuits, the couple has repeatedly lashed out over alleged privacy invasions by photographers in particular. Just weeks ago, they claimed to have been involved in a "near catastrophic car chase" with paparazzi in New York, an incident police and other officials played down. Harry's mother, Princess Diana, was killed in a 1997 Paris car crash as she was being pursued by photographers. He has also challenged the UK government in court over his security arrangements when he is back from the United States.

But on May 23, he lost his bid for a legal review of a decision refusing him permission to pay for specialist UK police protection himself. In television interviews and his explosive memoir "Spare" — released in January — Harry



Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex leaves after attending the coronations of Britain's King Charles III and Britain's Camilla, Queen Consort, at Westminster Abbey in central London.

hit out at other royals, accusing them of colluding with the press. In court filings unveiled in April, Harry claimed the royal family as an institution had struck a "secret agreement" with one UK publisher that had prevented him from suing, to avoid a royal entering the witness box. He also alleged the monarchy wanted to prevent the opening of a "Pandora's Box" of negative coverage that could tarnish the royal brand.

Tapping claims

The MGN case centers on claims its tabloids conducted unlawful information-gathering, including voicemail tapping, to obtain stories about Harry and other high-profile figures. The other claimants are two television soap opera actors and the ex-wife of a comedian.

At the outset of the trial on May 10, MGN apologized and admitted to "some evidence" of unlawful information-gathering and assured that "such conduct will never be repeated". But it denied voicemail interception and argued that some claims had been brought too late. The claimants' lawyer David Sherborne submitted that "industrial scale" illegal activities were happening at MGN and had been approved by senior executives.



Barrister David Sherborne, representing Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex reacts as he arrives past members of the media at the Royal Courts of Justice, Britain's High Court, in central London. - AFP photos

Harry's unofficial biographer Omid Scobie — who co-authored a best-selling 2020 book about Harry and Meghan — claimed in a submission that he was shown how to hack voicemails while on work experience at MGN title The Sunday People. Scobie also said that while on work experience at its sister paper The Mirror he overheard the then-editor Piers Morgan being told that information for a story about Australian pop star Kylie Minogue had come from voicemail. Morgan, editor of the tabloid between 1995 and 2004, has denied any involvement in phone hacking. — AFP

Sports

Maia clinches epic; Swiatek eyes French Open last eight

Jabeur powers into quarter-finals for the first time

PARIS: Iga Swiatek targets a place in the French Open quarter-finals as Beatriz Haddad Maia won the third longest ever women's match at Roland Garros to become the first Brazilian female in the last eight of a Slam since 1968. Swiatek, bidding to become the first woman since Justine Henin in 2007 to win back-to-back titles in Paris, has made the fourth round with ease. Four of the six sets the 22-year-old has played have been 'baggels' where an opponent fails to win a single game. Hapless Wang Xinyu was double-baggled by the Pole in the last 32, going down to defeat in just 51 minutes.

Swiatek tackles Lesia Tsurenko and will again be overwhelming favorite having easily defeated the 34-year-old Ukrainian in their two previous meetings, including the first round at Roland Garros last year for the loss of just two games. But Tsurenko hasn't dropped a set so far and has made the last 16 by knocking out two former Slam champions in Barbora Krejčíková and Bianca Andreescu. Haddad Maia battled from a set and 3-0 down to defeat Sara Sorribes Tormo in a three-hour 51-minute epic. The 27-year-old Brazilian left-hander came through 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 7-5 against her 132nd-ranked Spanish opponent on Court Suzanne Lenglen.

The match was just 16 minutes short of the record four hours and seven minutes it took Virginie Buisson to beat

French compatriot Noelle van Lottum in the first round in 1995. Haddad Maia is the first Brazilian woman in a Slam quarter-final since seven-time major winner Maria Bueno in 1968. She will face world number seven Ons Jabeur of Tunisia for a place in the semi-finals. Haddad Maia, ranked 14, claimed victory on a fourth match point after squandering three in the ninth game of the decider.

The Brazilian, who saved a match point in her previous round against Ekaterina Alexandrova, is no stranger to energy-sapping duels. In Rome last month, she dropped a three-hour 41-minute quarter-final to Anhelina Kalinina. Jabeur powered into the quarter-finals for the first time with a 6-3, 6-1 rout of Bernarda Pera, breaking the American's serve eight times. Jabeur, a Wimbledon and US Open runner-up last year, has now reached at least the quarter-finals of all four Slams. "It was the only Grand Slam missing, I'm very happy with the performance," said Jabeur.

Should 66th-ranked Tsurenko pull off a shock victory over Swiatek, she will join compatriot Elina Svitolina in the quarter-finals. That would mark the first time that two Ukrainian women have reached the last eight of the same Slam. The war in Ukraine has been a constant issue at the tournament ever since world number two Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus defeated

Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk on the opening weekend.

Kostyuk was booed for refusing to shake the hand of Sabalenka in protest over the war in which Belarus is a close ally of Russia.

Sabalenka has refused to carry out media commitments, claiming she does not "feel safe" having faced a barrage of questions over her stance on the war and her links to Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. On Tuesday, Sabalenka will face Svitolina for a place in the semi-finals. Svitolina has already said she will maintain the position of all Ukraine players in refusing to shake hands with Russian and Belarusian opponents. She exchanged a cordial thumbs up with Daria Kasatkina after beating the Russian in Sunday's fourth round.

'Being respectful'

However, Kasatkina said Monday she had been stunned by being jeered by the crowd, insisting she was "just being respectful on my opponent's position not to shake hands". "Leaving Paris with a very bitter feeling," she added. A win for Swiatek on Monday would give her a potential last-eight clash with Coco Gauff, the American teenager she defeated in the 2022 final. Gauff, the sixth seed, was taking on Anna Karolina Schmiedlova, the 100th-ranked Slovakian who is in the



PARIS: Tunisia's Ons Jabeur plays a backhand return to US Bernarda Pera during their women's singles match on day nine of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament on June 5, 2023. — AFP

second week of a Slam for the first time. Fourth-ranked Casper Ruud, the runner-up to Rafael Nadal a year ago, beat in-form Nicolas Jarry of Chile 7-6 (7/3), 7-5, 7-5 to seal a quarter-final spot.

Ruud avenged last month's defeat by Jarry in Geneva and could face world number six Holger Rune in a repeat of their bad-tempered quarter-final last year. Rune takes on Francisco Cerundolo

of Argentina who is in the fourth round of a Slam for the first time. Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka faces Tomas Martin Etcheverry of Argentina. Nishioka, seeded 27, is in the fourth round of a Grand Slam for a second successive major after his breakthrough performance in Australia. Alexander Zverev, a two-time semi-finalist, faces Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov in the night session. — AFP

Tambwe sends Bordeaux-Begles into Top 14 semis

PARIS: Congolese winger Madosh Tambwe scored twice as Bordeaux-Begles beat Lyon 32-25 on Sunday to seal a place in next weekend's French Top 14 semi-finals in a game played without a television match official (TMO). Tambwe took his tally for the campaign to nine tries after joining from the Bulls in Pretoria this season. The 26-year-old crossed twice in the second half to help Bordeaux-Begles book a tie with Champions Cup holders La Rochelle in San Sebastian next Saturday.

"Madosh is a great player, he arrived and shined quickly before a tough first winter in France where he discovered the harshness of the Top 14 in winter," back-rower Mahamadou Diaby told reporters. "Tonight he came along at the right time." In the other semi-final, record 21-time champions Toulouse will play Racing 92 on Friday after they beat Stade Français 33-15 in a Parisian derby. Before kick-off in balmy conditions in Lyon, host broadcaster Canal+ said there would be no TMO during the match because of a technical issue linked to the TV truck.

The first controversy due to the problem came after six minutes as Matthieu Jalibert crossed for Bordeaux-Begles and referee Ludovic Cayre awarded the try despite television footage showing a knock-on from the fly-half. The home side responded to lead 17-8 at the break as France winger Ethan Dumortier and Fiji centre Josua Tuisova responded to Jalibert's early effort. With half an hour to play there was just two points between the sides as Jalibert converted Diaby's try to make it 17-15. Diaby's touchline effort was whistled by the home fans as the flanker seemed to lose control of the ball. — AFP

Palou extends lead at wild Detroit GP

WASHINGTON: Spaniard Alex Palou survived a wild race on the Detroit streets on Sunday to win IndyCar's Detroit Grand Prix and extend his lead at the top of the championship. The sixth career victory for 2021 champion Palou of Chip Ganassi Racing was a masterful display as he managed to keep the lead despite two late restarts. It was the first time the race had been held on the city's streets in 32 years and Palou — coming off a fourth-place finish from pole in the Indianapolis 500 — had been among those who had criticized the tight and bumpy course after Saturday's qualifying, describing it as a "go-kart track".

A total of eight of the 27 drivers failed to finish the race including Pato O'Ward and Romain Grosjean who both hit walls. The caution flag was out as early as the second lap of the race after Callum Hogg went into the back of Kyle Kirkwood on the first turn. Palou, who started on pole, won by 1.18 in his Honda over Australian Will Power of Team Penske Chevrolet with Sweden's Felix Rosenqvist in third place. "I'm so super proud of the job we did," said Palou. "It was tricky at the end, those tires couldn't really get into temperature, but super proud".

Palou now leads in the standings by 51 points from teammate Marcus Ericsson but said it was premature to start sensing a repeat of his 2021 title. "No, not yet. It's too early. I mean, I wish we could say that, but we'll keep focused on next few races. There's a few that I really love coming up now. So we'll keep on pushing," he said. Team owner Ganassi said that Palou had handled the difficult conditions on the nine-turn, 1.7 mile street circuit perfectly.

"The guy, he just took to this place when we got here. I know he was complaining about the track yesterday but I think it's his new favorite track today," he said. There were seven cautions through the race and on the final restart, Palou got off to the better start while Power regained second place. There was some tight jousting between Arrow McLaren team-mates Rosenqvist and Alexander Rossi, who finished fifth. A clearly unhappy Rossi said he would discuss Rosenqvist's approach "internally". — AFP

Heat hand Nuggets first home defeat

DENVER: The Miami Heat handed the Denver Nuggets their first home defeat of the playoffs Sunday, surging in the fourth quarter for a 111-108 victory that leveled the NBA Finals at one game apiece. Gabe Vincent scored 23 points and Jimmy Butler and Bam Adebayo scored 21 points apiece for Miami, who withstood a 41-point performance from Nuggets star Nikola Jokic to get the split in Denver and breathe new life into the championship campaign. In a game of swinging shifts of momentum, the Heat had the last word, rallying from a 15-point first-half deficit and out-scoring the Nuggets 36-25 in the final period as they silenced the crowd of 19,537 at Ball Arena.

Adebayo sealed it with a pair of free-throws with 48.3 seconds remaining. "We know we've got to do it on the defensive end," Adebayo said of Miami's fourth-quarter focus. "That's the biggest thing for us. We got to do it on that end because we know we can score, all five guys we believe in. So the biggest thing for us was getting stops." Denver had a last chance to tie it, but Jamal Murray missed a three-pointer. "It was a good look, just didn't go down," said Murray, who scored 18 points and handed out 10 assists.

Miami, who came through two play-in games and are trying to become the first eighth-seeded team to win the title, host game three of the best-of-seven series on Wednesday. "We gutted out one on their home court, so time to go back to the 305," Adebayo said referencing the Miami area code. Miami, who were dominated in a game one defeat, vowed to step it up and they started strong, leading by 11 with less than five minutes to play in the first quarter. The Nuggets battled back and were up by 15 in the second quarter on the way to a 57-51 halftime lead.

But Nuggets coach Michael Malone excoriated his team's lack of effort. "This is NBA Finals, we are talking about effort; that's a huge concern of mine," Malone said. "Tonight, the starting lineup to start the game, it was 10-2 Miami. Start of the third quarter, they scored 11 points in two minutes and 10 seconds. "We had guys out there that were just, whether feeling sorry for themselves for not making shots or



DENVER: Bam Adebayo #13 of the Miami Heat dunks during the fourth quarter against the Denver Nuggets in Game Two of the 2023 NBA Finals at Ball Arena on June 04, 2023. — AFP

thinking they can just turn it on or off, this is not the preseason, this is not the regular season. "This is the NBA Finals. That to me is really, really perplexing, disappointing."

Certainly Denver's second-quarter turnaround owed plenty to their bench, which out-scored Miami's reserves 25-5 in the first half. But it was two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic who asserted himself in the third, scoring 18 points in the period. Jokic would finish with 11 rebounds but handed out just four assists and coughed up five turnovers as Miami's adjustments limited his effectiveness as a facilitator. "We had a lot of miscommunication and misunderstanding," Jokic said. "You just need to know where to be or what to do or what's the coverage or whatever."

Moments of truth

Miami tied it up at 66-66 midway through the third

quarter on Vincent's three-pointer with 10:10 to play and never trailing again. After a disappointing shooting display in game one, the Heat connected on 17 of 35 from beyond the arc on Sunday.

Max Strus, who didn't score a basket in game one, led all scorers in the first half with 14 points. They connected on 11 of their 16 attempts in the fourth quarter, including five of nine from three-point range. "During the fourth quarter, our guys love to compete," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "They love to put themselves out there in those moments of truth. "Fortunately we were able to make a lot of big defensive plays down the stretch, and then we got a lot of contributions, which you're going to need against a team like this." — AFP

Hovland wins PGA Memorial

WASHINGTON: Norway's Viktor Hovland parred the first extra hole to defeat American Denny McCarthy in a playoff on Sunday to win the Memorial tournament for his fourth US PGA Tour title. The 25-year-old from Oslo, a runner-up in last month's PGA Championship, had not won on tour since the 2021 World Wide Technology Championship in Mexico. Seventh-ranked Hovland, Sunday's only player to birdie the 17th hole, and McCarthy, whose lone bogey came at 18, each fired a two-under par 70 to finish 72 holes on seven-under 281 at Muirfield Village in Dublin, Ohio.

In the playoff at the par-4 18th hole, McCarthy found the right rough and pitched into the fairway while Hovland reached the green in two. McCarthy missed a par putt from just inside 12 feet and Hovland sank a par putt from just inside seven feet for the trophy. "I've been playing well. I've just been trying to stay within myself and play my own game. Maybe before I would have fired at some pins I shouldn't have fired at. "I just played smart, played my game and came up clutch this time."

Hovland contended late at the Masters before settling for a share of seventh and shared third at The Play-

ers Championship in March as well as his PGA runner-up effort, making the Memorial triumph that much sweeter. "Feels even better after a few close calls the past few months," he said. "It's fun to win one of these without ball-striking it to death. Now I can rely on some other strengths as well."

It was a gut-wrenching loss for McCarthy, who settled for his best PGA Tour result. He led down the final holes with clutch par putts only to bogey 18 in regulation and the playoff after missing the fairway off the tee. "I battled really hard," McCarthy said. "Heartbroken right now, but a lot of positives to take from this week. My putter kept me in it when I was a little shaky. Hit a lot of good golf shots this week."

On a day when the average score soared above 75, top-ranked Scottie Scheffler — who made the cut on the number and began Sunday five strokes adrift — fired a 67 to finish third in 282, one shot out of the playoff. South Korea's Kim Si-woo, a 54-hole co-leader, was fourth after closing on 73 with Americans Jordan Spieth and Andrew Putnam on 284 and American Andrew Schenk on 285 with 54-hole co-leader Rory McIlroy, who stumbled to a 75.

'I putted awesome'

Hovland made three birdies and three bogeys in the first 12 holes to stay within reach, then sank a birdie putt from just outside four feet at the par-5 15th and made a 27-foot birdie



DUBLIN, OHIO: Viktor Hovland of Norway poses with the trophy after winning the Memorial Tournament presented by Workday in a playoff over Denny McCarthy of the United States (not pictured) at Muirfield Village Golf Club on June 04, 2023 in Dublin, Ohio. — AFP

putt at the par-4 17th to pull one back of McCarthy. Hovland found greenside rough at 18 but saved par from inside six feet and reached a playoff when McCarthy found left rough and missed a 23-foot par putt on his 72nd hole. "I didn't feel like I hit it my best the whole week," Hovland said. "I just played really smart, really conservatively. I really relied on my short game and I putted awesome this week." McCarthy, ranked 55th, had a best prior finish of third at the 2021 Honda Classic.

World number 38 Kim, seeking his fifth PGA Tour victory, found water off

the 14th tee and made double bogey to fall back. Scheffler, last year's Masters champion and this year's Players Championship winner, made six birdies in the first 16 holes but found a greenside bunker at 17 and made his lone bogey to miss the playoff. Four-time major winner McIlroy, who won at Dubai in January, had seven bogeys — three in a row from 12-14 — against four birdies. Reigning Masters champion Jon Rahm, the world number two from Spain, holed out from the fairway to eagle the par-4 ninth from 159 yards. He shot 74 to share 16th on 288. — AFP

Sports

Legendary Benzema strikes on Madrid farewell; Champions Barcelona beaten

Real Valladolid relegated after a 0-0 draw with Getafe

BARCELONA: Real Madrid's departing great Karim Benzema struck from the penalty spot to earn his side a 1-1 draw against Athletic Bilbao on Sunday in La Liga as he said goodbye to fans at the Santiago Bernabeu. Elsewhere, Real Valladolid were relegated after a 0-0 draw with Getafe, while five other sides near the bottom were able to breathe a sigh of relief after a gripping conclusion to the season. Champions Barcelona were beaten 2-1 at Celta Vigo, with Gabi Veiga's brace ensuring the Galician side will remain in the top flight next season.

Benzema, whom Madrid confirmed would leave this summer earlier in the day, departing after 14 years at the club, rolled his penalty down the middle to level the game, before being substituted to great applause. The draw ensured Real Madrid would finish above city rivals Atletico Madrid in second place, after Diego Simeone's side tied 2-2 at Villarreal on the final day. "I spoke with him this morning and he told me he was going. He's taken the decision and I told him I respect it completely," said Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti.

Ancelotti said Benzema's choice came by surprise, after the Italian himself said Saturday he expected the forward to

stay. "I have coached one of the best in the world, not a forward, a complete footballer," continued the coach. "A very friendly, humble, serious person. We can't be happy he is going, but we have to respect his decision. What he has done at this club is legendary and unforgettable."

Athletic were the stronger team and only a stunning Thibaut Courtois penalty save to deny Mikel Vesga kept his team level at the break. Oihan Sancet struck early in the second half to give the visitors the lead but Benzema netted from the spot after a soft penalty was given for a foul on Eder Militao. It was the 35-year-old's 354th goal of a sparkling career in the Spanish capital after his 2009 move from Lyon. Benzema, who has won five Champions League titles and La Liga on four occasions, seems to be set to play in Saudi Arabia, where former team-mate Cristiano Ronaldo has moved.

Vinicius Junior made his first appearance for Real Madrid since he was racially abused by Valencia fans, causing worldwide anger and support for him. Madrid's season was a disappointing one - they won the Copa del Rey but were beaten heavily by Manchester City in the Champions League semi-finals and finish 10 points be-

hind their most bitter rivals, champions Barcelona. Xavi Hernandez's side were beaten at Balaidos, with Veiga slotting home in the first half and then adding a second from an attempted cross which flew in. Ansu Fati pulled a goal back for the champions but they could not find a leveler.

Falling short

Valladolid could not find a way through against Getafe and were relegated. "There's little explanation, the team tried, we tried to make it hard for Getafe but we didn't do it," said Valladolid goalkeeper Jordi Masip. "It's a huge shame for all the team, all the fans, all the city, I can't say much more. We needed to score, there was no other way." Their final hope would have been a late Espanyol winner against Almeria, but the Andalusians held on for a 3-3 draw to survive by a point in 17th place. Valencia were another team who started the day in danger but they earned a 1-1 draw at Real Betis, who said their own goodbye to captain Joaquin Sanchez.

The 41-year-old is retiring and made his 622nd appearance in the top flight, equaling the all-time record first set by goalkeeper Andoni Zubizarreta. "It's a special day, a beautiful day, when I'm with



MADRID: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema is tossed in the air by teammates at the end of the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Athletic Club Bilbao at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

my people, my family, the club that gave me everyone," an emotional Joaquin told Movistar, kissing the Benito Villamarin pitch when he was substituted. "I am who I am thanks to Real Betis." Osasuna beat Girona 2-1 to climb above Athletic and

snatch seventh place - qualification to next season's UEFA Europa Conference League. Ante Budimir hit a brace for the Copa del Rey runners-up, who were able to celebrate their fine season with supporters at El Sadar. — AFP

Late Wydad goal dents Ahly hopes of CAF glory

JOHANNESBURG: Al Ahly hopes of a record-extending 11th CAF Champions League title hang in the balance after conceding a late goal in a 2-1 final, first-leg win over Wydad Casablanca on Sunday. The Egyptians will face the Moroccans again, in Casablanca next Sunday, desperate to avoid a third final loss to their rivals in seven seasons. Ahly built a two-goal lead after 59 minutes through goals from South African Percy Tau and Mahmoud Kahraba before a capacity 50,000 crowd at the Cairo International Stadium.

But the final took a dramatic turn when defending champions Wydad snatched a precious away goal four minutes from the end of regular time through substitute Saïfeddine Bouhra. Ahly were no longer in control, and if Wydad can score once and not concede in the return match, they will retain the title and be crowned African champions a fourth time. The home side pushed forward from the kick-off and Tau and Kahraba came close to scoring before the Libyan referee awarded Ahly a penalty for hand ball on 30 minutes.

Pleas from Wydad followed and the match official

changed his decision after viewing the pitch-side VAR monitor and realizing the ball hit the head of Bouly Sambou and not his hand. Such was the dominance of the Egyptian outfit that their third-choice goalkeeper, Mostafa Shobeir, did not touch the ball until gathering a harmless free-kick on 35 minutes. Shobeir, a son of legendary Ahly goalkeeper Ahmed Shobeir, made his Champions League debut after injuries ruled out first choice Mohamed el Shenawy and reserve Ali Lotfy.

Brave block

The stand-in goalkeeper bravely blocked a shot from Ayman el Hassouni with his body soon after and then Tau put Ahly ahead four minutes into first half added time. Hussein El Shahat held off the challenges of two defenders on the goal line before crossing and unmarked Tau nodded past goalkeeper Youssef el Motie at the far post. It was the fifth goal of the Champions League campaign for the South African, who starred in the semi-final triumph over four-time title-holders Esperance of Tunisia.

Mohamed Hany, deputizing as captain for El Shenawy, and El Shahat combined to set up Kahraba for the second goal after 59 minutes. A brilliant long, cross-field pass from Hany found El Shahat, who pushed the ball across the goalmouth for Kahraba to fire into the net from close range. Sensing the title was slipping from their grasp, Wydad responded positively and Yahia Attiyat Allah struck the woodwork with a low shot midway through the second half. El Motie saved superbly from Kahraba after great



CAIRO: Ahly's players leap to stop the ball in a free kick during the first-leg final football match of the CAF Champions League, between Egypt's Al-Ahly and Morocco's Wydad AC, at Cairo International Stadium on June 4, 2023. — AFP

work by Tau as the Cairo Red Devils sought the three-goal advantage that would have virtually guaranteed them overall victory. Zouhair El Moutaraji, whose wonder goal led to Wydad beating Ahly in the 2022 final, made little impact this time and was replaced by Bouhra on 82 minutes. It proved a masterstroke by recently hired Belgian coach Sven Vandebroek as the substitute slammed a loose ball into the net after Ahly failed to clear a cross. — AFP

Napoli celebrate title as Ibrahimovic retires

NAPLES: Napoli fans watched their heroes finally lift the Serie A trophy on Sunday as coach Luciano Spalletti walked away from Naples, while Zlatan Ibrahimovic announced his retirement from football. A 2-0 win over relegated Sampdoria was little more than a hors-d'oeuvre before the real reason fans jammed into the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona — to see their team lift the trophy for the first time in 33 long years.

Victor Osimhen opened the scoring from the penalty spot midway through the second half, the 26th league strike of a stunning season which made him Serie A's all-time top African scorer. Giovanni Simeone then made sure the hosts would finish the season on 90 points in the 85th minute with a stunning long-range strike before celebrating by holding up a Napoli shirt worn by icon and compatriot Maradona.

"I don't know, the president has to decide that," Osimhen told DAZN when asked whether he might leave in a big-money summer move. "I love the people of Napoli, they have shown me so much love. For me, I don't mind, the president decides and I will just go with the flow." Spalletti will be on gardening leave for a year while still under contract with Napoli, and he will return to his Tuscan vineyard the oldest ever coach to win the Scudetto at 64.

"True to myself"

Napoli's title triumph was the crowning glory of Spalletti's long and eventful coaching career which has brought plenty of plaudits but few trophies. "I need to be true to myself, leaving was a decision I made, that I came to. Even when I'm at home it'll be like I was in the stands watching and cheering for them," said Spalletti.

Fans will be hoping that whoever takes Spalletti's place will be able to utilize the hugely talented squad assembled by outgoing sporting director Cristiano Giuntoli, as some like Osimhen are targets for richer clubs north of the Alps. "I would tell them to trust these boys because they have a human and playing quality that means you can allow them to keep the ball rolling," said Spalletti.

Fabio Quagliarella openly blubbed as he was honored by his fellow Napoli supporters in his final match in Italy's top flight. The 40-year-old, who has scored 182 Serie A goals, was given a plaque by supporters who also unfurled a banner in the stands which said "you will never be forgotten by your people", and was given a rousing applause when he was substituted late on. Napoli fans considered the Samp captain an enemy when he left for hated rivals Juventus after just one season in 2010, unaware until years later that a bizarre stalking plot had forced his departure. — AFP

Leon win CONCACAF Champions League

LOS ANGELES: Mexican side Leon won the CONCACAF Champions League for the first time on Sunday, defeating Los Angeles FC 1-0 to seal a 3-1 aggregate victory over the Major League Soccer champions. Lucas Di Yorio's first-half goal proved decisive, Los Angeles goalkeeper John McCarthy failing to grasp the Argentine forward's scuffed shot for the game's only goal in the 20th minute. The win ended Leon's long wait to taste success in the CONCACAF region's premier club competition after finishing runners-up in the 1993 tournament in its old format.

Leon's Argentine coach Nicolas Larcamon paid tribute to the way his team absorbed an early period of pressure from Los Angeles before closing out the win. "We managed to get around that first quarter of an hour and then we dominated clearly," Larcamon said. "Los Angeles are a very good team. The result today is testimony to how well we played over both games." The win means Leon will qualify for this year's FIFA Club World Cup as well as the expanded 32-team edition of the event planned for 2025. But it was another agonizing near-miss for LAFC, who were also bidding to win the tournament for the first time, three years after losing in the 2020 final to Mexican side Tigres.

"We got beat by a very good team," Los Angeles coach Steve Cherundolo said. "They deserved to win over 180 minutes. We're disappointed and it hurts, as it should. "We now know where we need to get to win this competition and we'll do everything in our power to come back stronger next year." Roared on by their vociferous home support in a crowd of 22,413, Los Angeles should have taken the lead after just 10 minutes



LOS ANGELES: Club Leon celebrates with the championship trophy after defeating LAFC 1-0 in the CONCACAF Champions League final leg 2 of 2 match between Los Angeles Football Club and Club Leon at the BMO Stadium in Los Angeles, June 4, 2023. — AFP

only for defender Aaron Long to head wide from Carlos Vela's free kick with the goal at his mercy.

Instead it was Leon who took the lead on 20 minutes with their first serious foray into Los Angeles territory. Right back Ivan Moreno surged into space down the right and crossed for Di Yorio, who hooked his shot untidily at LAFC keeper McCarthy. McCarthy flapped at the effort and could only look on in disbelief as the ball spilled into the net to put Leon 3-1 up on aggregate. Los Angeles upped the tempo but as in their 2-1 first-leg defeat, were let

down by a lack of precision close to goal.

Denis Bouanga shot high and wide from long range in the 27th minute before seeing a deflected free-kick saved by Leon goalkeeper Rodolfo Cota shortly afterwards. Kellyn Acosta had LAFC's only other chance of note in the first half, dragging a shot from outside the area wide of the post. Los Angeles coach Cherundolo reverted from 3-5-2 to his team's more familiar 4-3-3 formation after halftime, but the change had little impact as Leon kept the home side at arm's length in a scrappy second half. — 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 |
| Khaldiya | 24848075 |
| Kaifan | 24849807 |
| Shamiya | 24848913 |
| Shuwaikh | 24814507 |

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

Change of Name

I, Kuntumala Jagon, S/o Kuntumala Chinna Rangadu (old name), R/of D.No. 1/7 Lingampalli Village, Sidhout Mandal, YSR District, A.P., Indian Passport No. L4107874, hereby changed my name as Kuntumala Jagan S/o Kuntumala Chinna Rangadu (New Name). (#3550) 06/06/2023

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Saudi eyes 'world-class players'

Messi, Modric, Lloris among 'more than 10' Saudi targets

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia is hoping to lure a swathe of world-famous footballers including Luka Modric and Hugo Lloris, a source close to the negotiations has told AFP, after snagging Cristiano Ronaldo and launching bids for Lionel Messi and Karim Benzema. "More than 10" seasoned players including N'Golo Kante and Roberto Firmino have been approached, the source said, by the oil-rich kingdom which has ambitions of hosting the World Cup and is betting on sport to help revamp its austere image.

According to Saudi sources and state media this weekend, delegations flew to Paris and Madrid to secure the signatures of Messi and Benzema after their

final games for Paris Saint-Germain and Real Madrid. But the Saudis are also "in contact with more than 10 players, many of them won the World Cup or the Champions League, to join the Saudi league next season", said the source close to the talks, on condition of anonymity. In addition to Messi, "the list includes Benzema, (Sergio) Ramos, (Angel) Di Maria, Modric, Hugo Lloris, (Jordi) Alba and (Sergio) Busquets".

"Beside receiving they will play in a very the source said, add-aimed to "seal most the new season starts on a wishlist would have unthinkable before the Saudis pulled off the

quite lucrative offers competitive league," ing that the Saudis of the deals" before August 11. Such seemed

near the closest to signing, they said. Modric, Real Madrid's influential midfielder, and Ramos, who is leaving Paris Saint-Germain, would join Ronaldo at Al Nassr, while Kante would play at Saudi champions Al Ittihad, the sources added.

The Saudi Pro League, which next season is expanding to 18 teams allowed to field eight foreign players each, is also set for a structural revamp with plans to privatize the clubs from September. The clubs, currently public property under the supervision of the sports ministry, will be sold to private companies or businesspeople as part of plans to more than double the league's value to eight billion riyals (\$2.13 billion) by 2030. "The Saudi Pro League... will be supported in its ambition to be amongst the top 10 leagues in the world," the official Saudi Press Agency said on Monday. "Elevate the Saudi clubs"

A Saudi government official also confirmed to AFP that the authorities are holding negotiations with "world-class players". "The objective is to establish a very strong and competitive league and elevate the Saudi clubs' levels," the official said. The world's biggest oil exporter has already thrown hundreds of millions at sports deals including Ronaldo's signing, Formula One and the divisive LIV Golf tour. Saudi Arabia, whose neighbor Qatar hosted the World Cup last year, has explored bidding for the competition including a possible tri-continental hosting with Egypt and Greece.

Under the "Vision 2030" project of its 37-year-old de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia is trying to diversify its oil-dependent economy by attracting tourists and investment. "We want people to visit Saudi Arabia to watch football stars," the source close to the Messi negotiations told AFP last month. While not well known internationally, the Saudi league enjoys a strong following in a country where more than half of the 32 million population - 51 percent - is under 30. — AFP



Argentine forward Lionel Messi



Croatian midfielder Luka Modric



French forward Karim Benzema

Zain honors winners at excellence awards ceremony



Waleed Al-Khashti

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Zain Telecommunications Company held the excellence awards ceremony for the best performers during the Zain Football League this season at the St Regis Hotel. Zain's Chief Cooperative Communications and Relations Officer, Waleed Al-Khashti, conveyed the greetings of Zain's Deputy Chairman of the Board and CEO, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, and thanked the Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Football Association (KFA) for his attendance and support.

He said, "We at Zain and in cooperation with our strategic partner KFA are honored to host you in the excellence awards ceremony in the Zain Football Premier League for the 2022-2023 season - Zain's first season during which we learned a lot. The title of this ceremony is 'excellence', and we were keen (from the first day) to have it outstanding and distinguished. We had many excellent moments in one season and



Group photo of officials and award winners.

hoped for bigger success in the coming seasons."

Al-Khashti thanked KFA board members, administrators, and coordinators. He also thanked the local teams that competed in the name of Zain and contributed to having the season come out in this outstanding fashion. He congratulated Kuwait Sports Club for winning the league for the second consecutive time and becoming the most success-

ful club with 18 titles in its history. He said, "We are here today to honor the winners of the excellence awards, which we promised at the start of the season. The winners are Mohammad Dahham - Best player of the season (KD 10,000); Taha Yassen - Zain League most goals scorer (KD 5,000); Shibeeb Al-Khaldi - Local most goals scorer (KD 5,000); Abdelrahman Kameel - Best goal keeper

(KD 5,000); Firas Al-Khateeb - Best coach award (KD 3,000); Hussein Ashkanani - Best promising player of the season. Al-Khashti thanked members of the technical committee who contributed to setting the standards to select the winners in coordination with KFA. They include: Saad Al-Houti Wael Suleiman (committee chairman), Usama Hussein and Mohammad Bunayan.