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# CALL OF DUTY



KUWAIT: Voters cast their ballots during parliamentary elections on June 6, 2023.



A child, holding her father's citizenship certificate, gestures as he arrives to vote. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis cast their ballots on Tuesday for the third time since December 2020 to elect a 50-member parliament they hope will be able to put an end to almost two decades of political turmoil and regain stability. Ballots closed at 8.00 pm after remaining open for 12 hours and counting of votes began immediately in most election centers. Unofficial estimates put the turnout at a moderate 60 percent, slightly below last year's turnout of around 63.5 percent.

The voting process went smoothly without any incident and no medical cases were reported. As many as 207 candidates, representing a spectrum of affiliations, contested the polls, the lowest number of candidates for at least the past two decades. Candidates passionately urged citizens to come and cast their ballots to increase the turnout percentage, which was relatively low in the morning and noon, mainly because of the scorching heat of the summer.

Initial results were expected to come out after midnight on Tuesday, but full and final results were not expected to be announced before noon on Wednesday. Since 2003, only the parliament elected in 2016 completed its full four-year term, while the others were either dissolved by HH the Amir or annulled by the constitutional court on nine occasions. This election is the seventh since 2012. Governments were changed at a much faster pace.

The repeated dissolutions reflected continued political disputes between MPs and the government and sometimes between MPs themselves. A number of voters expressed frustration and called for stability to advance the country. "We need to feel stability in this country. We are frustrated that every three to four months a parliament is dissolved or a government resigns," said a voter in the first constituency. Another voter warned that disputes could destroy the country. "We need honest members who should help advance the country. The people are exhausted and need stability," said the voter.

SEE PAGES 2 & 3



Get the latest election updates on [KuwaitTimes.com](http://KuwaitTimes.com) and our digital media channels on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and TikTok



# Citizens brave the heat to shape Kuwait's future

## Dwindling turnout in the afternoon surprised voters, officials



KUWAIT: Kuwaitis arrive at a polling station to vote during parliamentary elections in Kuwait City on June 6, 2023. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A voter shows a stamp on her citizenship certificate after casting her vote on Tuesday.

By Nebal Snan

**KUWAIT:** Many polling stations were relatively quiet on Tuesday afternoon, halfway through election day. Just a few hours ago, Kuwaitis queued in long lines to cast their vote in the third parliamentary election in two and a half years, eliminating fears of a low voter turnout which many attributed to voter fatigue.

But a little after 5 pm, traffic drastically died down at the Kaifan polling station, surprising voters and campaign coordinators alike. The reason for the dwindling turnout is not clear, but it's difficult not to consider the role that high temperatures could be playing. Weather conditions on Tuesday were the hottest yet this month, with temperatures reaching 44 degrees Celsius.

Many people may have opted to stay home and away from the scorching heat, especially that Election Day was designated an official holiday. But the few voters who came to fulfil their national duty thought otherwise.

"It makes me sad to see that people use the heat as an excuse not to vote. Everyone should take advantage of this opportunity," said a voter who asked not to be named. "The (right to vote) was hard for us to get. There are people in other countries who wish they (could vote) ... This is the role we play in shaping the future of Kuwait. (People) shouldn't give it up."

A voter, who also asked not to be named said she had voted under harsher weather conditions in previous years. "We've had elections in July, August. So, there's no issue at all," she said. "All polling stations are air conditioned. We also drive to the polling stations in air-conditioned cars. We're used to this weather."

She added that having the day off helps people choose the best time to head to the polls while avoiding the hottest time of the day. "Some people choose to come in the early morning when it's relatively cool, while others come after sunset," she said.

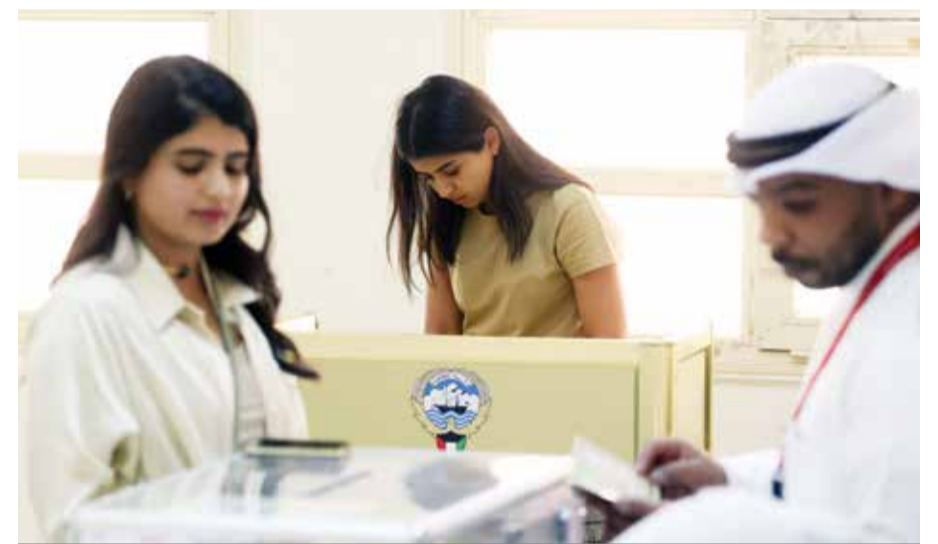
Although observations on Tuesday suggest the weather could be affecting

voter turnout, research is divided on the debate — Oxford University scientists have found no correlation between voter turnout and the weather. In fact, their research suggests people are more likely to vote if the election race is close. On the other hand, research carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in the Republic of Ireland found that poor weather, specifically rain, could stop people from going to vote.

A campaign coordinator who preferred to remain anonymous said the weather could discourage some people from coming, but "it's not the main factor". "We're expecting more people to come after Maghreb prayers," she hoped.

She said more could be done to help voters at some polling stations brave the heat. The parking lot in some schools designated for voting is far away from the building, she said, making it challenging for people to get to the ballot boxes in the sweltering heat. "Not everyone can walk long distances in the heat," she said.

The elderly and people with disabili-



Kuwaiti women cast their votes during parliamentary elections in Kuwait City on June 6, 2023.

ties are allowed to be dropped off or park their vehicles closer to the entrance, Kuwait Times found. "Whether (polling stations are) close or far, I would come to vote either way. Nothing would stop me from voting," said one determined voter.

## Foreign delegation observes 2023 Election Day

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** As Kuwaitis voted in the National Assembly election on Tuesday, members of a foreign media delegation that arrived in Kuwait to witness the electoral process shared their opinions with Kuwait Times. Omani political writer and analyst Dr Ahmed bin Salem Batmira said this political event comes under the slogan "correcting the path is everyone's responsibility", indicating that Kuwait needs parliamentary reforms to help the country move forward.

Batmira hoped that what happened in the previous parliamentary elections held in September would not be repeated, pointing out that Kuwait needs a patriotic stand from its people. "We notice today an increase in the presence of strong voters, and a small number of candidates compared to previous periods, but nevertheless, candidates represent an elite group from all aspects of Kuwaiti society. This is a race that is expected to witness a change of faces to translate the hopes of Kuwaitis in seeing a strong, productive and practical parliament in 2023 that works with the government that will be formed later as one team, and turning ideas and proposals into tangible reality," he said.

Saudi Editor-in-Chief of Al-Khaleej newspaper Abdullah Khoja Bakkah said the delegation began their tour by visiting the first constituency and the third constituency, where they shared beautiful moments with the voters. He explained the voter has responsibility towards their country when voting in the elections. Bakkah witnessed the smoothness of the system and quick response to voters by the committees as soon as they arrived to input their information and confirm their citizenship.

"The process was smooth and comfortable, giving us a very good experience in terms of feeling the electoral atmosphere," Bakkah said. He expressed his love for Kuwait and wished it best of luck in the parliamentary elections this year. He mentioned this is not the first election he has covered, adding every time he attends Kuwaiti elections, he finds progress. He also pointed out that the Kuwaiti media provides help and cooperation to all the journalists and media people present to cover the event.

Moreover, Bakkah said that when he sat with some Kuwaiti voters and talked to them, they told him that the vision has now become clearer and better than before. This has led to an increase in the interest of Kuwaiti citizens because they



B Josie Susilo H



Ahmed bin Salem Batmira



Abdullah Khoja Bakkah



Clemens Chay

want the best for their country, which will result in boosting citizens' benefits as well.

Dr Clemens Chay from the Middle East Institute and National University of Singapore, who covers Kuwait and Gulf politics, said regarding the elections, the primary motivation is to have a parliament that is able to have a powerful relationship with the executive branch, which is the Cabinet. He explained the ongoing crisis in Kuwait is due to the inability to resolve the tension between the two branches.

Chay sees a sense of fatigue in terms of the number of elections, as Tuesday marked the third in around two and a half years. He expressed his hope that turnout is relatively high compared to previous elections, because the fact that Kuwait has democratic structures is a testament to political and personal freedoms guaranteed by the constitution. This is important for both the country and the citizens, Chay said.

B Josie Susilo H, Deputy Editor of Indonesia's Kompas Gramedia, commended this democratic step. "I think it is very good to build democracy in Kuwait through this mission, which makes it a good step to move forward," he said. He also highlighted the necessity for Kuwaitis to take action towards their civil responsibility. "I think it is important for Kuwaitis to use their right to vote, because through this step they can (be involved) in building their nation and the future of Kuwait. It is a civil responsibility of each Kuwaiti citizen."

## Interior minister follows up on voting process

**KUWAIT:** First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah took on Tuesday an inspection tour of polling stations involved in the



KUWAIT: Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah interacts with voters at the Saad Al-Abdullah High School for boys in Jahra governorate. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## KRCS, security personnel support polling stations

**KUWAIT:** Volunteers of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) are heavily involved in facilitating the voting process of the 2023 National Assembly elections. While assisting the elderly and the disabled, the KRCS volunteers went beyond the call of duty to serve their nation during its democratic celebration.

KRCS recruited 150 volunteers to support the



KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) volunteers help an elderly woman get to the polling station. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

state's various entities in organizing the election. The volunteers were tasked with providing first aid medical assistance during the election in coordination with the Ministry of Health in addition to assisting senior voters in their journey to cast their vote.

The security authorities, represented by the Ministry of Interior and the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), are putting in great efforts in organizing the 2023 National Assembly elections. The involved authorities are providing services and facilitating the voting process, so voters can perform their national duty. The KFF teams are present at 36 polling stations in the five constituencies, which were allocated vehicles and teams for rapid intervention in case of an emergency. — KUNA



A police officer helps a voter cast her ballot.



Local

# Voters confront political deadlock with mix of hope, frustration

‘Being optimistic is our duty toward Kuwait’



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti men cast their votes during parliamentary elections in Kuwait City on June 6, 2023. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A Kuwaiti man checks voting lists at a polling station during parliamentary elections in Kuwait City on June 6, 2023.



Kuwaiti men cast their votes during parliamentary elections in Kuwait City on June 6, 2023.

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis voted for the third time since Dec 2020 on Tuesday, but the focus this time is not only on whether the National Assembly will achieve the expected reforms, but if the parliament would complete its full term. Kuwait Times visited a number of electoral districts to gauge the general mood of citizens toward the polls and asked them about their expectations from the next Assembly.

A general feeling of frustration and absence of high hopes was noticeable among many citizens, who hoped the next Assembly would not be dissolved and would instead complete its term. Other voters believed there is awareness to choose better representatives. A female voter, who preferred to remain anonymous, said people are trying to be optimistic and positive, but the current situation hinders them from hoping for key reforms, based on previous experiences with the Assembly.

“Political conflicts among candidates and previ-

ous representatives turned out to be more personal than adopting better goals, which is taking care of our country. Meanwhile, we as citizens are trying not to lose hope. We came to vote wondering if there would be any change,” she added.

Noora, a citizen, said despite there being good people among candidates who are trying and willing to achieve reforms, the general situation is facing big challenges that make achievements unachievable. She pointed out that people are voting because they still have hope in candidates who are willing to develop the country, but she also thinks there is a big chance that the Assembly will be dissolved again. “The conflicts are already obvious in front of everyone. You can visit any social media platform and understand the situation, which is not bright,” she commented.

**Awareness**

Another citizen told Kuwait Times that people are being overdramatic towards the elections. She

said one can find internal conflicts all around the world and this is normal. She believes losing hope will not only affect the country, but also the future of the next generation, “so being optimistic is our duty toward Kuwait”. “We are living in a time of awareness, where many people have learned from previous mistakes. I have personally witnessed many people not merely voting for their relatives or friends, but choosing candidates more wisely, because they saw the results of selecting the wrong representatives,” she pointed out.

Regarding her hopes from the coming Assembly, she said the most important things are health and education, considering them as the most essential pillars to develop a country. “Calls to raise salaries or control prices are legitimate rights of people, but the previous Assembly didn’t have enough time to tackle these issues. So I think that we should give another chance to representatives who didn’t get enough time last time to prove their good intentions,” she added.



A Kuwaiti woman casts her vote during parliamentary elections in Kuwait City on June 6, 2023.



(From left) Khaled Al-Falah, Bader Al-Kharafi and Loay Al-Kharafi are seen at a polling station on Tuesday.



KUWAIT: Bader Al-Kharafi casts his vote during the parliamentary elections on Tuesday, June 6, 2023. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Men line up to cast their votes at the polling station in Kuwait City on June 6, 2023.



A man casts his ballot at a polling station on Tuesday.



A citizen holds her citizenship certificate against a mural showing Kuwait’s emblem and the photos of Kuwaiti rulers at a polling station Tuesday.

## Kuwaiti voters cast their ballots for a better future

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: The feelings of love and concern were evident among Kuwaitis who turned out to vote on Tuesday. This was expressed in performing their national duty by casting their votes, even though the circumstances may have been difficult for some due to the extreme heat and overcrowding. Despite repeating this process multiple times within a short period, the voters did not abandon their country, out of love and fear for its present and future.

Some expressed their frustration at the negligence of some other Kuwaitis who did not vote, highlighting their insistence that every citizen should carry out their duty selflessly and without prioritizing their comfort at the expense of the country’s benefit. Others were aware of the magnitude and importance of this responsibility, while some tried to give an opportunity to new faces in the hope that Kuwait will rise again and regain its glory by keeping up with other countries that have witnessed remarkable development.



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti women cast their votes during parliamentary elections in Kuwait City on June 6, 2023. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Kuwait Times spoke to voters from the third constituency on their views about the electoral process.

**Mona:** In these elections, I decided to use the right that is granted to me by my country to give a chance to new faces, especially the youth, in the hope of seeing a new and strong Kuwait that keeps up with the progress witnessed by other Gulf countries.

**Dana:** The responsibility of voting remains a significant one that cannot be underestimated, and we must be aware that when we elect someone, we

decide our destiny in the long run. So, we must vote for those who are competent from the patriotic perspective, supporting the homeland regardless of any ethnic, sectarian or other affiliations. People should be conscious and not submit to pressure from family or friends and not flatter others at the expense of the nation.

**Esra’a:** Although I initially intended to abstain from participating and voting due to the boredom and frustration I felt because of the dissolution of the parliament, I realized I must participate by choosing a candidate who may play a role in taking

Kuwait to a better future and spread real hope instead of false hope in the hearts of the people.

**Noor:** If there is a Kuwaiti person who is able to vote and does not do so, I say that he or she is an irresponsible person who lacks patriotism, because on a day like this, Kuwait calls for Kuwaitis, and our duty towards Kuwait is to play our role in the elections. Kuwait has strengthened and supported its people and given them a lot of privileges that other nations do not give to their people, so why this negligence, especially since it does not require much effort.



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## NEWS IN BRIEF

## Final exam results to be released ahead of schedule

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Education Ministry said it finalized the end of year exams' results for the primary and intermediate stages, as well as 10th and 11th grades and is posting them on the ministry's website. Ministry spokesman Ahmad Al-Wuhaida said on Tuesday that schools worked long hours correcting exams, calculating grades and reviewing the results. He added that the ministry has completed the approval of results of most schools and posted it on its website before their scheduled release. Results will be available on the ministry's website link (<https://results.moe.edu.kw>). — KUNA

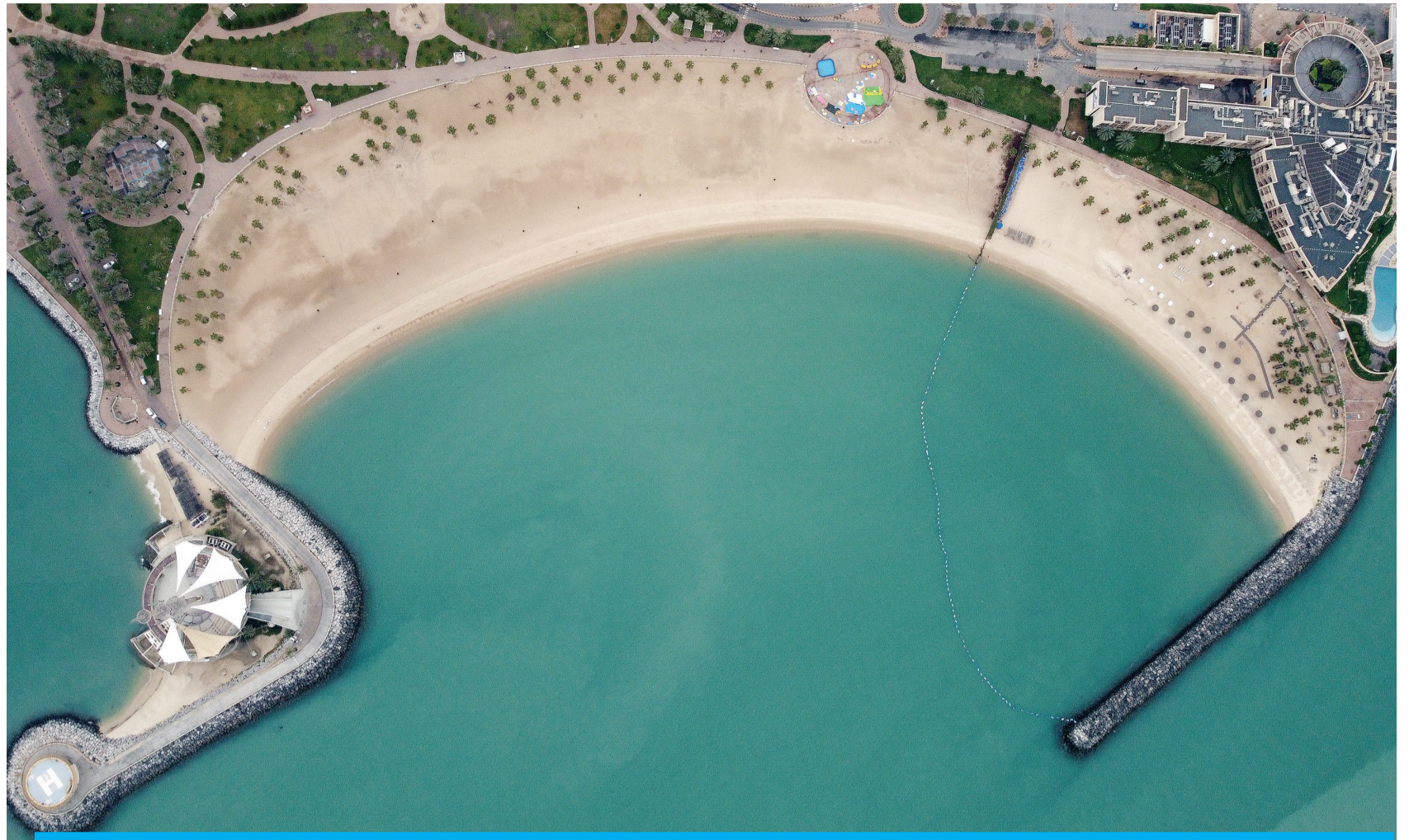


## Vehicles in Andalus home catch fire

**KUWAIT:** A fire broke out in a number of vehicles in front of a house in Andalus area, said the Department of Public Relations at the Kuwait Fire Force. Firefighting teams were dispatched from the Sulaibikhat and Ardiya fire stations to the site of the fire. The fire was extinguished and no injuries were reported.



## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** This aerial photo shows the Marina Hotel and Marina Crescent beach overlooking the Arabian Gulf in Salmiya. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Ensuring social protection for all is Kuwait's priority: Social affairs minister

### Country to work on enhancing children protection laws, support elderly

**CAIRO:** Minister of Social Affairs and Community Development Mai Al-Baghli affirmed that Kuwait follows international measures to ensure social protection for all society categories. The remarks came during Baghli's speech, while chairing Kuwait's delegation in the 2nd Ministerial Conference on Social Development of member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), under the theme (social justice and security), held in Cairo on Tuesday, under the patronage of Egyptian President Abdelattah Al-Sisi. The minister said that the event pays great attention to preserving social life and family security in the Islamic world.

Social globalization has a big impact on family values, said Baghli, adding that Kuwait is continuously seeking to protect the Arab and Islamic identity when it comes to family values. Baghli, who is also Minister of State for Women and Children's Affairs, noted that Kuwait always works on spreading awareness on marriage, finding solutions for youth refraining from marriage. The country also aims to provide an easier life for children, the elderly and people with special needs. This includes enhancing children's protection laws

and providing them with proper education, as well as providing job opportunities and training for disabled people, said the minister.

Kuwait's participation is fruitful and important, she said, adding, it aims to review the efforts made in the file related to the conference. The decisions issued by the first session of the conference, chaired by Turkey, were reviewed, especially those regarding the preservation of the values of marriage and family institutions, child-rearing in the Islamic world and preserving the well-being of the elderly and people with disabilities, she added. Baghli expressed hope that the conference would come out with the most important recommendations that serve the targeted group, thanking Egypt for its hospitality.

Undersecretary at the Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Mutairi said in statement Monday that "Kuwait has presented many suggestions on elderly and special needs care, including "setting a unified apparatus linking Islamic nations to data sources."

Mutairi said it was paramount to issue studies and revisions to better help conserve the Arab and Islamic identities and address the challenges related to technological development, in addition to



**KUWAIT:** Minister Mai Al-Baghli is seen with elderly citizens at the social care complex in this file photo. — KUNA

placing a plan for the educational sector's curriculum, and preparing programs to ensure well-being and stable living for the communities in need. The delegation participating in the conference included Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulaziz Sari. — KUNA



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## Kuwait eyes deeper cooperation with Italy

**KUWAIT:** Assistant Foreign Minister for Europe Affairs Ambassador Sadeq Marafi Tuesday commended deep relations between Kuwait and Italy, stressing both sides' willingness to promote them. The Kuwaiti official made the remark while attending a ceremony organized by the Italian Embassy in Kuwait to mark its national day. He added that both sides have various cooperative relations, pointing out opportunities for furthering them to new horizons. He also lauded bilateral economic cooperation, particularly oil and small and medium-sized industries, along with traditional trade exchange fields, speaking highly of Italy's high quality exports. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Assistant Foreign Minister for Europe Affairs Ambassador Sadeq Marafi (right) is seen with Italian Ambassador to Kuwait Carlo Balducci during the ceremony. — KUNA

## Lulu Hypermarket raises awareness on World Environment Day

**KUWAIT:** Lulu Hypermarket, a leading retail chain in Kuwait, took a proactive step towards safeguarding the environment through a comprehensive awareness program on the occasion of World Environment Day, marked on June 5, 2023. Under the tagline "Act today, safeguard tomorrow," Lulu Hypermarket emphasized the urgent need to address plastic pollution and promote the importance of reducing plastic consumption.

As part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, Lulu Hypermarket recognized the significance of World Environment Day as a global platform to raise awareness and encourage positive environmental practices. The day was marked with a series of activities and engagements across all Lulu outlets in Kuwait.

The highlight of the campaign was the launch of the hashtag #beatplasticpollution, which served as a rallying call for individuals and communities to come together and combat the adverse effects of plastic waste on our planet. Lulu Hypermarket believes that through collective action, society can make a lasting impact on the environment, ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

Throughout the day, Lulu Hypermarket engaged its customers through various interactive initiatives, aiming to foster a sense of responsibility towards reducing plastic consumption. Informational sessions were conducted, providing valuable insights on the detrimental effects of plastic pollution and the simple yet effective ways to minimize its usage.

In addition, Lulu Hypermarket organized awareness campaigns within its stores, showcasing alternative eco-friendly products. Through these efforts, Lulu Hypermarket aimed to educate and empower individuals to make conscious choices



Act today, safeguard tomorrow  
Our planet is a gift we can't lose - let's preserve it!

#BeatPlasticPollution  
JUNE 05-2023

that contribute to a greener and cleaner environment. Lulu top management expressed his gratitude to all customers and participants who actively engaged in the World Environment Day awareness program. "Preserving our planet is a collective responsibility, and Lulu Hypermarket is committed to being at the forefront of sustainability initiatives. By reducing plastic consumption, we can significantly minimize our environmental footprint and ensure a healthier future for our planet and future generations," said Lulu top management.

Lulu Hypermarket's initiative on World Environment Day reflects its long-standing commitment to environmental stewardship. By raising awareness and advocating for the reduction of plastic pollution, Lulu Hypermarket sets a positive example for the retail industry and inspires individuals to make a difference in their daily lives.





Australian mother thanks 'science' for murder pardon

## Iran unveils hypersonic missile hailing deterrent boost

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# Major Ukraine dam 'partially destroyed'

## Big population centres being flooded, over 22,000 people at risk

**KYIV:** The partial destruction Tuesday of a major Russian-held dam in southern Ukraine unleashed a torrent of water that sent people fleeing flooding on the war's front line. Moscow and Kyiv traded blame for ripping a gaping hole in the Kakhovka dam as expectations built over the start of Ukraine's long-awaited offensive.

People in the neighboring city of Kherson were heading for higher ground as the water levels rose in the Dnipro River, which was held back by the dam and hydro powerplant. "There is shooting, now there is flooding," said Lyudmyla, who had loaded a washing machine onto a cart that was attached to an old Soviet car.

Vladimir Leontyev, the Russian-installed mayor of the town of Nova Kakhovka where the dam is located, said residents of "around 300 homes" had been evacuated. On the Russian-occupied side of the Kherson region, officials said there was "no threat" of major population centres being flooded, but said that more than 22,000 people were at risk. The Kakhovka dam and its hydro powerplant were seized by Russia in the first hours of the war.

### War crime

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky convened a meeting of his National Security Council over what he called a "terrorist attack". Western powers also blamed Russia for the damage to the Kakhovka dam, with EU chief Charles Michel calling it a "war crime."

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said the dam breach was "outrageous" and "puts thousands of civilians at risk and causes severe environmental damage." Russia however said the dam was partially destroyed by "multiple strikes" coming from Ukrainian forces. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the destruction was the result of a "deliberate sabotage by the Ukrainian side."

The Soviet-era dam sits on the Dnipro river, which provides cooling water for the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. The flooding fuelled already existing fears for the safety of the Zaporizhzhia plant, under Russian control.

The plant is some 150 kilometres (about 90 miles) away from the damaged dam. Moscow and Kyiv offered conflicting versions on the safety of the facility. The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said its experts "are closely monitoring the situation" but that there was "no immediate nuclear safety risk at plant." The Russian-installed director of the plant, Yuri Chernichuk, echoed the UN agency and said that "at the moment,



**KHERSON:** Local residents look at a partially flooded area of Kherson on June 6, 2023, following damage sustained at Kakhovka HPP dam. — AFP

there is no security threat to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant." "The water level in the cooling pond has not changed," he said, adding that the "situation was controlled by personnel." Chernichuk said the water cooling system was not in direct contact with the outside environment and could be refilled from several alternative sources. Ukraine — which in 1986 suffered the devastating Chernobyl nuclear disaster — sounded the alarm.

### 'Slow down' Ukraine

"The world once again finds itself on the brink of a nuclear disaster, because the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant lost its source of cooling. And this danger is now growing rapidly," Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhaylo Podolyak said. "The Ukrainian nuclear operator, Energoatom, said the water level of the Kakhovka reservoir was "rapidly decreasing, which is an additional threat to the temporarily occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant."

It said it was "monitoring the situation" and that currently the cooling plant's pond water level is "sufficient for

the power plant's needs." News of the damage came amid increasing speculations over Ukraine's long-expected counter-offensive. Ukraine has for days called for silence ahead of its counteroffensive and said there would be no announcement about when it would start. On Monday, Zelensky praised his troops for advances claimed near the devastated city of Bakhmut, while Russia said it had repelled a large-scale attack. Ukraine said that Russia's goal was to "create obstacles" for Kyiv's long-awaited counteroffensive to retake territory from Moscow's forces. Kyiv already accused Moscow of mining the dam as combat raged nearby in October, during the last major offensive by Ukrainian forces seeking to regain lost territory, which Russia denies.

Built in Soviet times in the 1950s, the Kakhovka dam has strategic value as it pumps water into the North Crimean Canal, which starts in southern Ukraine and crosses the entire Crimean peninsula. This means that any problem with the dam could cause water supply problems for Crimea, which has been under Russian control since 2014. — AFP

## Pope in hospital for medical tests

**ROME:** Pope Francis visited a Rome hospital for a medical check-up on Tuesday, the Vatican said, just over two months after he was hospitalized with bronchitis. "This morning Pope Francis went to the Gemelli Polyclinic to undergo some clinical tests and returned to the Vatican before noon," Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said in a statement.

Francis, 86, was forced to take a day off at the end of last month with a fever, which the Vatican secretary of state blamed on tiredness. The pope does not have public audiences scheduled on Tuesdays. His general audience at the Vatican was confirmed for Wednesday, according to his official schedule.

The Vatican also released the schedule for Francis' next trip abroad, which will see him attend World Youth Day in Lisbon from August 2-6. The examination had been pre-planned, the Repubblica newspaper said, citing a Vatican source. It added that the pontiff was undergoing specialized scans.

When Francis was hospitalized at the end of March, the Vatican initially said in a one-line statement that he had gone into the Gemelli for health checks that were previously scheduled. It later emerged that he had been rushed in after suffering breathing difficulties. — AFP



Pope Francis blesses a toddler during an audience to pilgrims. — AFP

## Flood-hit Pakistanis still waiting on promised rebuild

**DADU:** Noor Bibi lost her mother, her daughter and the roof over her head in the catastrophic floods that drowned Pakistan last summer. One year later she remains homeless, living with the remnants of her family in spartan tents marking where the village of Sohbat Khosa was gutted by the deluge in southern Sindh province.

Noor, a farm worker approaching her 60s, prays for "someone with righteous thoughts that will help us build some good houses in an elevated place." "If it flooded again, we would not bear such big losses," she told AFP. But government pledges to rebuild flood-ravaged swathes of Pakistan so they are resilient to future extreme weather have largely failed to materialize.

The monsoon deluges of last summer submerged a third of the country, killing 1,700 people and displacing eight million more. Climate change is making those seasonal rains heavier and more unpredictable, scientists say, raising the urgency of flood-proofing the country. A failure to do so will be most acutely felt by the poor, who tend to live in the most vulnerable areas.

### Absence of authorities

Here in Dadu district, which was heavily flooded, no rehabilitation is visible. Rare pieces of public infrastructure remain in disrepair and housing reconstruction is left to locals or NGOs. In January, Islamabad announced a "Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework" valued at \$16.3 billion, but it remains confined to paper. International donors have also pledged \$9 billion, but most of the cash will come in the form of loans.

Villagers' crops were swept away in the floods, depriving them of livelihoods that might have allowed them to pave their own way to recovery. With pooled funds, the residents of Sohbat Khosa only raised enough for a toilet and water tank. Their best hope is the Alkhidmat Foundation, a Pakistani NGO, which plans to build around 30 new homes. "The government seems to not exist here, and if anything is done by the government, that is only corruption," said Ali Muhammad, a coordinator for Alkhidmat in Dadu. Pakistan is currently mired in dual political and economic crises that have brought all public initiatives to a standstill. But decades of entrenched corruption and mismanagement are also to blame.

"Building back better is expensive, and the amount of damage is colossal," Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari told AFP. He said he "can't speak to what the federal government has done", but in Sindh province, controlled by his party, "we've started a couple of initiatives". "One is the financing of the reconstruction of houses, through NGOs and charity organizations," he said. However, Alkhidmat, like two other NGOs interviewed by AFP, has not received any public money and relies entirely on private funds.

### 'Where else could we go?'

Thanks to Alkhidmat's efforts, a few dozen homes have been built in the district, but it's nowhere near the two million damaged or destroyed in the floods. The village of Bari Baital, submerged until November, is expected to eventually host 80 houses built by the foundation — far too few for its thousands of inhabitants. To resist future rains they are raised on brick pillars, and built with reinforced roofs and water-resistant cement. "People are completely



**DADU:** In this photograph taken on May 9, 2023, flood-affected victims rebuild their house in Dadu district of Pakistan. The government's pledge to rebuild the swathes of Pakistan ravaged by floods so they are resilient to future extreme weather has largely failed to materialize. — AFP

unaware of climate change," said village teacher Imtiaz Ali Chandio. All they know is that their village has been a "passage for floods for centuries", he said. But moving is not an option, meaning the scenario will likely soon be repeated. "Where else could we go?" asked Abdulrahim Brohi, who already weathered catastrophic floods in 2010. "Everything of ours is here." "Somewhere else people won't accept us," added Brohi, who estimates his age to be between 50 and 60. "We don't have resources to rebuild our houses here, so how can we afford land somewhere else?"

### Repeating mistakes

Prized by tourists for its scenic mountain vistas, the Swat Valley in northwest Pakistan was also hit hard by last year's floods. Hundreds of hotels, restaurants, businesses and homes perched on the banks of the Swat river were swept away as ferocious waters were funnelled down the ravine. To prevent a repeat of the disaster, authorities have "imposed a complete ban on the construction of any sort of building on the river", said Irfanullah Khan Wazir, Swat's deputy commissioner. Nonetheless, in Bahrain, a small resort town once half underwater, the government's writ is so weak that builders are riding roughshod over the ban. A number of shops, restaurants and hotels have been renovated or rebuilt just metres from the coursing water. Even the mosque has been rebuilt on the same spot where it was heavily damaged.

"People are doing illegal construction on weekend nights, but [authorities] are not paying any heed — their silence is baffling," said hotel manager Zafar Ali.

His own property is under construction 20 metres (65 feet) from the river, in a zone he says is authorized. It is now protected by a flood wall twice the height of the previous one. Economic considerations also prevented them from relocating away from their waterfront vantage. "Tourists want to be able to open their windows and see the river outside," Ali said. "Those built further away struggle to cover their expenses." Locals in Swat also condemned the inaction of authorities. The main road following the river has been reopened, but whole sections of tarmac remain torn away. Compensation schemes have been limited to certain people who lost their homes. They are granted 400,000 rupees (\$1,400), nowhere near enough to rebuild. Muhammad Ishaq, a tailor in Bahrain, built his house near the river for easy access to the water. He watched as his home was swallowed by the floods, and has since been forced to move in with his father further up the mountainside. Life there is harsher, he told AFP, but even if he manages to rebuild, he knows he "will have to stay away from the river". — AFP

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## International

# Iran unveils hypersonic missile hailing deterrent boost

## Capable of travelling at hypersonic speeds of up to 15 times the speed of sound

TEHRAN: Iran's Revolutionary Guards unveiled an intermediate range ballistic missile Tuesday capable of travelling at hypersonic speeds of up to 15 times the speed of sound, state television reported. President Ebrahim Raisi hailed the new missile's hypersonic capability, saying it would boost Iran's "power of deterrence" and "bring peace and stability to the countries of the region".

The official IRNA news agency published photographs of the ceremony in a closed area it did not identify. Several top military commanders were present, including Guards chief General Hossein Salami. "The range of the Fattah missile is 1,400 kilometres (870 miles) and its speed before hitting its target" is between 13 and 15 times the speed of sound, IRNA said.

Like slower ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles can be equipped with nuclear warheads and Iran's announcement it was producing one in November prompted International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi to express concern.

But Grossi added he did not see the new missile "having any influence" on negotiations with Iran over its nuclear activities. Talks between Tehran and major powers on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal that was left in tatters when Washington unilaterally

abandoned it in 2018 and imposed renewed sanctions are currently stalled.

Iran has since suspended its implementation of the strict limits it agreed to on its nuclear activities and restricted IAEA monitoring in a policy it is only slowly reversing. Unlike conventional ballistic missiles, hypersonic ones fly on a trajectory low in the atmosphere, enabling them to reach their targets more quickly and with less chance of being intercepted by modern air defences.

When the programme was announced last year, Guards aerospace chief General Amirali Hajizadeh said the system was developed to "counter air defence shields", adding that he believed it would take decades before a system capable of intercepting it is developed.

Iran's arch foe the Zionist entity, which is widely believed to have its own undeclared nuclear arsenal, has multiple air defence shields for countering subsonic and supersonic missiles. North Korea's test of a hypersonic missile last year sparked concerns about the race to acquire the technology, which is currently led by Russia, followed by China and the United States. Since March last year, Russia's Kinzhal hypersonic missile has been used multiple times in its war against Ukraine. — AFP



TEHRAN: This handout photo provided by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) official website Sepah News on June 6, 2023 shows the unveiling ceremony of the new 'Fattah' hypersonic missile in Tehran. — AFP

## Egypt, Zionist entity pledge cooperation after border bloodshed

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to boost cooperation Tuesday after an Egyptian policeman shot dead three Zionist soldiers before being killed, officials said.

Sisi received a telephone call from Netanyahu about Saturday's deadly violence on the normally calm border, the spokesman for the Egyptian president said. During the conversation, the two leaders stressed "the importance of coordination between the two countries to clarify the circumstances", he said.

Egypt has said the policeman crossed into Zionist entity while chasing drug smugglers, leading to exchanges of fire with Zionist soldiers. On Saturday, Netanyahu called the Egyptian shooter a "terrorist"

although he has since mostly spoken of the shootings as an "incident".

Sisi offered Netanyahu his "deep condolences", the Zionist entity prime minister's office said. "The two leaders expressed their commitment to further strengthening peace and security cooperation, which is an essential value for both countries," it added.

Zionist entity's border with Egypt has been largely quiet since Egypt became the first Arab country to make peace with Zionist entity following the Camp David accords of 1978. In recent years, there have been exchanges of fire between smugglers and Zionist soldiers stationed along the border.

Questions have been raised about why the Egyptian assailant — reported by Egyptian media to have been a 22-year-old conscript — crossed into Israel and opened fire.

Speaking at the opening of a cabinet meeting on Sunday, Netanyahu said his government had sent a "clear message" to Egypt: "We expect that the joint investigation will be exhaustive and thorough." On Tuesday, his office said he had "thanked the Egyptian president for... his commitment to an exhaustive and joint investigation of the incident". — AFP



MITZPE RAMON: Zionist soldiers are pictured outside the Mount Harif military base near the city of Mitzpe Ramon in Zionist's southern Negev desert, adjacent to the border with Egypt. — AFP

## Iran debates new penalties for veil violations

TEHRAN: An Iranian draft law that would set new penalties for women not wearing a headscarf in public has sparked heated debate within the Islamic republic's leadership as more women flout the country's strict dress code. Since the aftermath of the Islamic revolution of 1979, women have been required to cover their hair and neck in public places, with offenders facing fines or prison terms of up to two months.

But a growing number are defying the law and appearing bareheaded in the streets. The trend accelerated during the nationwide protests sparked by the September death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurdish woman arrested for allegedly violating the law.

The protests rocked Iran, provoking a crackdown by authorities that claimed the lives of hundreds of people, including dozens of security personnel, and saw thousands more arrested. Iran's conservatives, who dominate the country's parliament and leadership, have passionately defended the dress code and believe relaxing rules would begin a process leading to profound shifts in "social norms".

But with many Iranians demanding change, in May the judiciary and the government proposed a "Support for the Culture of Hijab and Chastity" bill, to "protect society" and "strengthen family life". The text proposes increased fines for "any person removing their veil in public places or on the internet" but withdraws the threat of a prison sentence.

"This bill reduces the removal of the hijab from a felony to a misdemeanor, similar to a traffic violation but with heavier fines," sociologist Abbas Abdi told AFP. After Amini's death and the subsequent protests, society "no longer accepts that we imprison a woman because she does not wear the veil", he said.

Since the protests, authorities have imposed a series of measures to enforce Iran's strict dress code, including the closure of businesses whose staff do not conform with the rules and installing cameras in public places to track down offenders. In recent days, at least three officials have been sacked or arrested for failing to prevent unveiled women from entering historic sites.

### 'Not dissuasive enough'

Under the proposed law, the text of which has been published in government-affiliated media, offenders will first receive a warning text message from the police. A second breach will incur fines of between five million and 60 million rials (around \$10 to \$120), a large sum for many Iranians. The law would also provide for other penalties, including the confiscation of a woman's vehicle for up to 10 days. Defending the bill, judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei stressed the need to avoid polarizing society, saying he understood the "concerns of believers" supportive of the dress code.

As the bill awaits examination by lawmakers, it faces accusations of not being tough enough from ultra-conservatives, an influential bloc in the current parliament. Relaxing punishments for violations will see "the expansion of a repugnant phenomenon" by "removing legal barriers" for women not wearing a veil, the ultra-conservative newspaper Kayhan said.

Those supporting the law "do not know that the enemy" seeks to "destroy the family as an institution and ultimately, to attack the foundations of the Islamic system" by removing headscarves, the newspaper said.

Social networks and foreign media, particularly television channels broadcasting in Persian, are calling for "social disobedience", according to some ultra-conservatives. Within Iran's leadership "there is no consensus on the hijab", as some favor repression, while others "believe that other means must be tried", the sociologist Abdi said.

"The bill satisfies neither the supporters of compulsory hijab nor, of course, the supporters of the freedom to cover up or not." A similar situation developed in the 1990s with a law prohibiting the use of satellite dishes, he said. "It was only implemented for a while before it was dropped." — AFP

## Palestinian toddler killed by Zionist forces buried

NABI SALEH: Hundreds of Palestinians gathered Tuesday for the funeral of a three-year-old boy who died after being shot by Zionist forces in the occupied West Bank last week. Mohammed al-Tamimi died in a Zionist hospital Monday, after Zionist soldiers shot him and his father on Thursday night in the village of Nabi Saleh, near the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Tamimi's mother, Marwa, wept as she embraced her son for the final time, his body wrapped in the traditional black and white Palestinian keffiyeh scarf. Zionist soldiers stood within sight of the funeral reception, blocking a main entrance into the village of Nabi Saleh near where last week's shooting took place.

Marwa al-Tamimi, 32, told AFP that soldiers had fired on her husband Haitham, who was also wounded, while he was in the car with their three-year-old son. She said he had gone out to move his car because he feared it would be damaged by nearby Zionist soldiers.

"My husband started the car and my son was next to him, and the shots were fired at him when he turned on the car's lights", "They (Zionist soldiers) fired at them for a while, and they could not get out of the car... so I hid inside (the house)," she added.

Her son was transferred to the Sheba hospital in Zionist entity, where he "died... despite extensive efforts of the medical team," a statement released by the hospital on Monday said. The Zionist army said on Monday that soldiers had "responded with live fire" following a shooting attack on the nearby settlement



NABI SALEH: The mother (C) of Mohammed Haitham al-Tamimi, a three-year-old Palestinian boy shot by Zionist forces in the occupied West Bank a week prior and who died of his wounds the previous day, carries his body during the funeral in the village of Nabi Saleh in the central part of the occupied West Bank on June 6, 2023. — AFP

of Neveh Tzuf. The army said that two Palestinians were wounded adding that it "regrets harm to civilians" and said an investigation was under way. Marwa al-Tamimi said she had no faith in the Zionist army's investigation.

"I want an international trial. Enough is enough. Every time we hear of a child who is martyred, a whole family is martyred," she said. Senior Palestinian official Hussein al-Sheikh on Monday night expressed his anger in a tweet.

"He (Tamimi) died by the bullets of Zionist occupa-

tion soldiers !!! What will the occupation authorities say about him? Are they going to call him a terrorist?? Is he endangering the lives of their soldiers??" Al-Tamimi is the youngest person killed in the conflict this year. Since the start of the year, at least 156 Palestinians, 21 Zionists, a Ukrainian and an Italian have been killed in violence linked to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources. The figures include combatants as well as civilians and, on the Zionist side, three members of the Arab minority. — AFP

## Lula leads tributes on anniversary of Amazon double murder

BRASILIA: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva urged the world Monday to ensure British journalist Dom Phillips and Brazilian Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira did not die in vain, at commemorations marking one year since their murder in the Amazon rainforest.

In a case that caused global outcry, Phillips and Pereira were killed on June 5, 2022 on a reporting trip to the edge of the Javari Valley, a far-flung Indigenous reservation in northwestern Brazil that experts say has been invaded by drug traffickers, illegal gold miners and poachers. "I want to pay tribute to Dom Phillips and Bruno Pereira, and all those who lost their lives defending the environment," Lula said at an event in Brasilia that opened with a resounding salvo of applause in memory of the two men.

"The best way to honor them is to make sure their struggle wasn't in vain," he said, announcing new initiatives to fight illegal deforestation in the Amazon, which surged under his far-right predecessor,

Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022). In that spirit, Lula later unveiled an update of an initiative he launched in 2004 during his first term as president, only for it to be scrapped by Bolsonaro, under whom deforestation shot up by 75 percent compared to the previous decade.

Iconic Indigenous chief Raoni Metuktire also attended the event, wearing his traditional lip plate and feather headdress, along with the victims' widows and Pereira's daughter, who got hugs from First Lady Rosangela da Silva, Environment Minister Marina Silva and Indigenous Affairs Minister Sonia Guajajara.

Police say illegal fishermen with suspected ties to a drug-trafficking ring have confessed to shooting Phillips and Pereira, hacking their bodies to pieces and hiding them in the jungle, where the remains were found after a 10-day search.

In the latest development, police charged an alleged drug-trafficking boss, Rubens "Colombia" Villar, with masterminding the murders. Brazilian TV network Globo reported Sunday. They also brought charges against an alleged henchman for Villar, local fisherman Janio Freitas de Souza, it said. Three other fishermen are currently on trial for the murders.

One year on, the case has become a symbol of the combustible mix of violence, greed, lawlessness and poverty fueling the destruction of the world's big-



RIO DE JANEIRO: Alessandra Sampaio (C), widow of British journalist Dom Phillips, participates in a demonstration in tribute to Phillips and Brazilian indigenous expert Bruno Pereira, murdered while on a reporting mission in the Amazon rainforest one year ago, at the Copacabana neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on June 5, 2023. — AFP

gest rainforest — and the dangers faced by journalists, experts, Indigenous groups and others trying to draw attention to the Amazon's plight. — AFP



International

# Australian mother thanks 'science' for children murder pardon

'I'm extremely humbled for being pardoned and released from prison'

**SYDNEY:** An Australian mother convicted of killing her children claimed a "victory for science" on Tuesday after an unexpected research breakthrough helped win her freedom after 20 years in prison.

Kathleen Folbigg was jailed in 2003 after she was convicted of killing her four infant children, who died separately without explanation between 1989 and 1999. She was found guilty despite a lack of forensic evidence linking her to the deaths and steadfastly maintained her innocence during her 20-year incarceration.

Scientific breakthroughs in recent years have uncovered genetic mutations that helped explain why some of the children died, paving the way for Folbigg to be released from prison on Monday. "I'm extremely humbled and extremely grateful for being pardoned and released from prison," Folbigg said in her first public statement since being released.

"Today is a victory for science and especially truth." The 55-year-old also said in a short video message she would grieve for her children "for-

ever", and "missed them and loved them terribly".

Folbigg was pardoned by New South Wales Governor Margaret Beazley after a long-running inquiry concluded there was "reasonable doubt" she had killed her children.

Although she has won her freedom, Folbigg must now go through a separate legal process to have her convictions officially overturned. Folbigg's lawyer Rhance Rego said Australia's court system had "failed her at every step", and it had taken authorities far too long to reopen the case.

**'Bamboozled'**

"If Australia really wants to make some good from a tragic story, they'll seriously consider reviewing the system of post-conviction review," she told reporters. "Instead of trying to understand why her children died, potentially through an inquest... we threw her in jail, locked her up, called her Australia's worst female serial killer." Rego said Folbigg's legal team would fight to clear her name and make sure "right is done by her".

The Australian Academy of Science, which played a crucial role in the Folbigg inquiry, described the convictions as "Australia's greatest miscarriage of justice". "What this case has absolutely shown is there's an absence of a mechanism for the justice system to consider new information, particularly scientific information," chief executive Anna-Maria Arabia told national broadcaster ABC.

Folbigg was released on Monday 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. Long-time friend Tracy Chapman said Folbigg was slowly getting her head around the wonders of modern technology, such as smartphones and on-demand television.

"She slept for the first time in a real bed, had a cup of tea in a real crockery cup, real spoons to stir with," Chapman told reporters. "That sounds basic to you all, but she's grateful. 'The phones have bamboozled her a bit. Even the television she was going, 'Oh my god, it's got so many capabilities.' — AFP



**SYDNEY:** This screen grab released courtesy of Kathleen Folbigg on June 6, 2023 to the media shows Folbigg, who was jailed in 2003 after she was convicted of killing her four infant children, after being pardoned near Grafton in the north of New South Wales state. — AFP

## Taleban provincial governor killed in suicide attack

**FAIZABAD:** The acting governor of an Afghan province was killed by a suicide bomber Tuesday, officials said, months after the region's police chief was killed in a similar attack claimed by the Islamic State group. Security has improved dramatically since the Taleban stormed back to power in August 2021, ousting the US-backed government and ending their two-decade insurgency, but IS remains a threat. The bomber drove a car filled with explosives into the vehicle carrying Nisar Ahmad Ahmadi — the deputy governor of northern Badakhshan before stepping up as acting governor last month — in the provincial capital Faizabad.

"The target of this attack was the vehicle carrying Nisar Ahmad Ahmadi," said Muazuddin Ahmadi, the head of culture and information in the province. The driver was also killed and six others wounded in the attack, which has so far not been claimed by anyone.

The head of the province's police force was killed in a suicide blast claimed by IS in December last year. A bomb attack also killed the head of the min-



**FAIZABAD:** A member of Taleban stands guard near the site of a suicide attack in Faizabad district of Badakhshan province on June 6, 2023. — AFP

ing department in April last year. The Taleban and IS share an austere Sunni Islamist ideology but the latter group is fighting to establish a global caliphate instead of the Taleban's more inward-looking aim of ruling an independent Afghanistan.

IS has killed and wounded hundreds of people in attacks since the Taleban government returned to power, some targeting foreigners, in a bid to undermine the Taleban government. — AFP

## Bangladesh promises no forced return of Rohingya refugees

**DHAKA:** Bangladesh has promised that no Rohingya refugee will be returned to Myanmar against their will in a controversial proposed repatriation process, a top United Nations official has said. "Refugees who wish to return should have access to clear, factual information to be able to make free and informed decisions," Kelly T. Clements, the UN deputy high commissioner for refugees, said in a statement late Monday after a four-day visit to Bangladesh.

"Under no condition should refugees be forced or coerced to return, which the government assured us would not happen," added Clements, who met both government officials and refugees. Bangladesh is home to around a million Rohingya, most of whom fled a 2017 military crackdown in neighboring Myanmar that is now subject to a UN genocide investigation.

The Rohingya are widely viewed in Myanmar as interlopers from Bangladesh, despite roots in the country stretching back centuries, and are stateless after Myanmar ceased recognizing their citizenship in 2015.

Bangladesh and Myanmar have agreed to a pilot repatriation of 1,176 refugees, despite concerns raised by refugees and rights groups such as Human Rights Watch, who last month warned it poses "grave risks".

Bangladesh has repeatedly said any repatriation would be voluntary. However, several Rohingya earmarked for the return programme told AFP they had been threatened to join. One Rohingya man, who asked for anonymity, said refugee camp leaders had called him every day. "They said: 'If you don't go, you can't stay here, we will beat you.'"

Another Rohingya refugee, also speaking on the understanding his name would not be used, said he had been told to leave — but would do so only if Myanmar gave him back his land. "They said: 'You have to go, you can't stay here,'" he said. "But why should we go if we don't get our land back? If they (Myanmar) give us citizenship, we will return. If they give us our land, we will go." — AFP

## China, Russia conduct air patrol over Sea of Japan

**BEIJING:** China and Russia conducted joint air force patrols over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea on Tuesday, as South Korea said it had deployed fighter jets in response to warplanes near its airspace. Beijing and Moscow "staged the sixth joint aerial patrol in accordance with an annual military cooperation plan between China and Russia", the Chinese defence ministry said in a statement.

The statement gave no further details of the manoeuvres, which took place over waters bordering Japan, the Korean peninsula and Taiwan. South Korea said four Russian and four Chinese military aircraft had entered its air defence identification zone (ADIZ) around lunchtime on Tuesday, prompting it to scramble fighter planes.

An ADIZ is an area wider than a country's airspace in which it tries to control aircraft for security reasons, but the concept is not defined in any international treaty. The South Korean military "identified the Chinese and Russian jets before their entry into the air identification zone", Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said.

"We deployed air force fighters to conduct tactical steps in preparation in case of an emer-

gency," it added. The eight foreign jets did not violate Seoul's airspace, the JCS said. The incident comes after the defence ministers of South Korea, Japan and the United States on Saturday agreed to set up real-time data sharing on North Korean missile launches by the end of the year. South Korea has supported Western sanctions on Russia over the war in Ukraine and has sent humanitarian aid to Kyiv. But it is bound by its own regulations prohibiting the supply of lethal aid to countries in conflict.

China says it is a neutral party in the Ukraine war. It has been criticized by Western countries for refusing to condemn Moscow and for its close strategic partnership with Russia. In February, Beijing released a paper calling for a "political settlement" to the conflict, which Western countries warned could enable Russia to hold much of the territory it has seized in Ukraine.

During a March summit in Moscow, Chinese leader Xi Jinping invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to visit Beijing and the two leaders declared that ties were "entering a new era". Analysts say China holds the upper hand in the relationship with Russia, and that its sway is growing as Moscow's international isolation deepens.

Beijing and Moscow were Cold War allies with a tempestuous relationship but in recent years have drawn closer, especially in the economic and military realms. Both countries have touted what they call a "no-limits" partnership and played up what they frame as a close friendship between presidents Xi and Putin. — AFP

## Major aid group's women staff resume work in Afghanistan

**KABUL:** A leading international NGO's Afghan women staff have resumed their work in some provinces, months after the Taleban government banned them from working. Several aid groups suspended operations in protest at the order that was announced at the end of December, and later extended to include Afghan women working for the United Nations.

"I am glad to confirm that we have been able to resume most of our humanitarian operations in Kandahar as well as a number of other regions in Afghanistan," Jan Egeland, Secretary-General of the independent Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) said Monday.

"All our work is for women & men, girls & boys alike, & with equal participation of our female & male humanitarian colleagues," he said in a tweet. It comes after Egeland travelled to Kandahar — the Taleban government's traditional stronghold — last month where he announced that officials had said they would consider a "temporary agreement" to allow women to return to work.

"This arrangement ensures the delivery of

much-needed assistance while the authorities finalize national guidelines to facilitate women's participation in humanitarian efforts," Christian Jepsen, a spokesperson for the NRC, said Tuesday.

The UN has previously also reported that the Taleban is working on guidelines that will provide more clarity. The Taleban authorities have not commented. Government officials claim the ban was imposed because women were not observing rules on wearing the hijab, an allegation denied by aid workers.

The Taleban government is not officially recognized by any country or world body, and only a handful of nations have a presence in Afghanistan. UNAMA, the UN's mission in Afghanistan, said in a statement last month that the ban "seriously undermines our work" and that lifting restrictions was essential.

"We must remain focused on our objective to support the people of Afghanistan. We cannot disengage despite the challenges," the statement said. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned that funding for aid operations "remains at worryingly low levels and the ban is exacerbating this trend".

Since the ban, UNAMA has asked all of its Afghan staff — men and women — to work from home, but other agencies in the country "have had different ways of handling the situation", he noted. Since ousting the foreign-backed government in 2021, Taleban authorities have imposed an austere version of sharia law that the UN has labelled "gender-based apartheid". — AFP

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<p>1.725 1.350</p>	<p>1.395 1.095</p>	<p>1.695 1.295</p>
<p>0.295 0.150</p>	<p>2.320 1.590</p>	<p>3.190</p>
<p>3.990</p>	<p>3.690 2.990</p>	<p>3.490 2.990</p>
<p>4.350</p>	<p>1.950 1.190</p>	<p>4.470 2.150</p>
<p>1.980 1.250</p>	<p>2.440 1.890</p>	<p>24.500 15.900</p>
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## Business

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 2023

## Apple unveils Vision Pro

First mixed reality headset costs a hefty \$3,499



CUPERTINO: Apple's new Vision Pro virtual reality headset is displayed during Apple's Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) at the Apple Park campus in Cupertino, California, on June 5, 2023. Apple on Monday unveiled its first-ever virtual reality headset challenging Facebook-owner Meta in a market that has yet to tempt users beyond videogamers and tech geeks. — AFP

CUPERTINO: Apple on Monday unveiled its first mixed reality headset, challenging Facebook-owner Meta in a market that has yet to tempt users beyond videogamers and tech geeks. The release was the most significant product launch by the iPhone maker since it unveiled the Apple Watch in 2015. The Vision Pro, which was generally well received on Monday, will cost a hefty \$3,499 and be available early next year in the United States only, the company said.

"There are certain products that shift the way we look at technology and the role it plays in our lives," said Apple CEO Tim Cook as he unveiled the sleek VR device that resembled ski goggles. "We believe Apple Vision Pro is a revolutionary product with the performance, immersion and capability that only Apple can deliver," he added. The headgear, which Apple referred to as a spatial computer, was introduced at the close of an Apple event in Cupertino, California in which the company announced a long list of product updates.

The product has been in development at Apple for years, and will focus on gaming, streaming video and conferencing. Company executives insisted that the Vision Pro offers an unchallenged experience, making the hard sell on tech that has yet to win the hearts of the greater public. Unlike its rivals, the Vision Pro delivers mixed reality technology that "clearly situates the user in their environment," said Insider Intelligence principal analyst Yory Wurmser. "Whereas Meta Quest and other devices are virtual reality-first, Vision Pro keeps the user in the present and emphasizes the mixed reality features — unless they choose otherwise," he added. Vision Pro allows wearers to twist a watch-like "crown" to go from having interactive imagery augment one's sur-

roundings to being fully immersed in a rich 3-D experience that feels like being in a video or on a sports playing field, a hands-on demonstration showed. Apple went to great lengths to preserve its signature design minimalism, at least to the extent that it could, given the technology squeezed into the Vision Pro.

The device has a glass front, an aluminum frame, five sensors, 12 cameras, a display for each eye, and a computer that is cooled with a fan. Smaller than a scuba diving mask, Vision Pro will run mainly by being plugged into a power source in a clear effort to preserve a sleek design. A cord-attached battery pack, which would slide into your pocket, would work for no more than two hours. Vision Pro optics are tuned to each wearer's eyes, freeing them from eyeglasses during use and also providing optical identification to verify user identity, the demonstration showed.

## 'Blown away'

Tech companies have struggled to sell virtual reality headsets to a wider audience that is uncomfortable with wearing a mask. In an effort to overcome that resistance, internal cameras on Apple's version will project the user's eyes on an external screen. "As a non VR believer, I was actually blown away by how seamless the experience is," said tech analyst Carolina Milanesi of Creative Strategies. While wearing Vision Pro one can see who is nearby, and even look them in the eyes and have a conversation. Disney partnered with Apple for the launch and the Mickey Mouse company teased content from Marvel, Star Wars and live sports that would be available on the device and provide an immersive experience. Apple said that over 100 video games would be available from the day of release.



CUPERTINO: Apple's new Vision Pro virtual reality headset is displayed during Apple's Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) at the Apple Park campus in Cupertino. — AFP

## Collision course

The release puts Apple on a collision course with Meta, which had taken a head start on doubling down on virtual worlds. Just days before Apple's event, Meta ramped up its line of much cheaper Quest virtual reality headgear. A new-generation Quest 3 will be available later this year at a starting price of \$500. Meta's experience with the so-called metaverse has been humbling despite it being a leader in the emergent sector and many questioned whether Apple would in the end jump in. Less than two years after changing its name to Meta to reflect a metaverse priority, the Facebook giant has fired tens of thousands of staff and promised to get back to its social media basics. — AFP

## Musk says China detailed plans to regulate AI

WASHINGTON: Top Chinese officials told Elon Musk about plans to launch new regulations on artificial intelligence on his recent trip to the Asian giant, the tech billionaire said Monday, in his first comments on the two-day visit. The Twitter owner and Tesla CEO — one of the world's richest men — held meetings with senior officials in Beijing and employees in Shanghai last week. "Something that is worth noting is that on my recent trip to China, with the senior leadership there, we had, I think, some very productive discussions on artificial intelligence risks, and the need for some oversight or regulation," Musk said. "And my understanding from those conversations is that China will be initiating AI regulation in China."

Musk, whose extensive interests in China have long raised eyebrows in Washington, spoke about the exchange in a livestreamed Twitter discussion with Democratic presidential hopeful and vaccine conspiracy theorist Robert Kennedy Jr, the nephew of John F Kennedy. Musk did not tweet while in China and Tesla has not released readouts of Musk's meeting with officials. But official Chinese channels said he lavished praise on the country, including for its "vitality and promise," and expressed "full confidence in the China market." A flurry of Chinese companies have been rushing to develop AI services that can mimic human speech since San Francisco-based



BEIJING: Photo shows the private jet of Tesla Chief Executive Officer Elon Musk departing from Beijing Capital International Airport. — AFP

OpenAI launched ChatGPT in November.

But rapid advancements have stoked global alarm over the technology's potential for disinformation and misuse. Musk didn't elaborate on his discussions in China but was likely referring to a sweeping draft law requiring new AI products to undergo a security assessment before release and a process ensuring that they reflect "core socialist values." The "Administrative Measures for Generative Artificial Intelligence Services" edict bans content promoting "terrorist or extremist propaganda," "ethnic hatred" or "other content that may disrupt economic and social order."

Under Beijing's highly centralized political system, the measures are almost certain to become law. Musk has caused controversy by suggesting the self-ruled island of Taiwan should become part of China — a stance that was welcomed by Chinese officials but which deeply angered Taipei. The 51-year-old South African native described his meetings in China as "very promising." "I pointed out that if there is a digital super intelligence that is overwhelmingly powerful, developed in China, it is actually a risk to the sovereignty of the Chinese government," he said. "And I think they took that concern to heart." — AFP

## US fines Microsoft \$20 million over violations

WASHINGTON: Microsoft will pay \$20 million to settle government charges that it collected personal information from children without their parents' consent, officials said Monday. The Federal Trade Commission alleged that from 2015 to 2020 Microsoft collected personal data from children under age 13 who signed up to its Xbox gaming system without their parents' permission and retained this information. To open an account, users had to provide their first and last names, an email address, and date of birth.

The FTC said Microsoft violated a law called the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, or COPPA. "Our proposed order makes it easier for parents to protect their children's privacy on Xbox, and limits what information Microsoft can collect and retain about kids," said Samuel Levine, head of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. "This action should also make it abundantly clear that kids' avatars, biometric data, and health information are not exempt from COPPA," Levine added. The decision still needs the approval of a federal court before it can be implemented.

The FTC said Microsoft will be required to take several steps to bolster privacy protections for child users of its Xbox system. Under the COPPA law, online services and websites aimed at kids under 13 must notify parents about the personal information they collect and obtain verifiable parental consent before collecting and using any personal information collected from children. A spokesperson for Microsoft told AFP that Xbox was "committed to complying with the (FTC's) order" and would develop a new identity and age validation process to deliver age-appropriate experiences. — AFP



MARYLAND: A Microsoft logo adorns a building in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Microsoft will pay \$20 million to settle government charges that it collected personal information from children without their parents' consent, officials said June 5, 2023. — AFP



## Business

# Strawberry boycott leaves Spanish farmers in a jam

## German-led campaign over environmental concerns enrages farmers

MADRID: A German-led campaign to boycott Spanish strawberries over environmental concerns has enraged farmers and Spain's right wing, forcing a German parliamentary delegation to suspend its work Monday. The issue touches on increasingly-scarce water resources in the strawberry-growing heartlands of southern Spain where a regional government plan to legalize illegal berry farms has angered environmentalists and worried Brussels.

Spearheaded by German consumer group Campact, the campaign urges top German supermarkets like Lidl and Edeka not to stock strawberries grown in Huelva, a province in the southern Andalusia region which is Spain's biggest exporter of red fruits. So far, its online petition has garnered more than 163,000 signatures. This is "a harsh and unjustified attack on our agricultural sector" said the ASAJA farmers union, denouncing the boycott as an "attack on thousands of producers and their families who work hard all year round".

"This campaign is insidious and harmful to the entire strawberry and berry industry and its workers," said Interfresa, an association representing the Spanish strawberry industry. "It shares false information and accuses the sector of serious misconduct and committing illegal actions." Campact's campaign singles out a draft law introduced by the region's right-wing government to legalize illegal berry farms near Donana National Park, one of Europe's largest and fauna-rich wetlands.

If the bill passes, environmental groups say it could legitimize 1,500 hectares (3,700 acres) of crops, most of which are irrigated by illegal wells, which could jeopardize the future of this UNESCO-listed nature reserve that is currently threatened by desertification. "If the Andalusian regional government has its way, even more water will now be used for strawberry cultivation," the campaign says, warning such a move would "destroy this fragile ecosystem" and urging consumers to stop buying "drought strawberries".

### 'Intolerable interference'

The campaign drew an angry response from the right-wing opposition Popular Party (PP) which runs the region, which said the bill sought to update a 2014 law that regularized 9,000 hectares of illegal crops but left out several hundred farmers. Strawberries from Huelva are facing "unfair attacks driven by ideological reasons", said the region's agriculture minister, accusing the left-wing central government of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez of backing the German campaign.

On Monday, the controversy escalated with the arrival of a cross-party delegation of nine German lawmakers to discuss the implications of the on-going drought in Spain and of the "illegal water extraction" in the Donana region. This visit by German lawmakers who are "seeking to inspect our farmers' produce, notably of Spanish straw-

berries, is totally unacceptable," said Santiago Abascal, head of the far-right Vox which supports the legislation. "It is interference that no decent government should tolerate."

### Climate change denial

Sanchez, who is resolutely opposed to regularizing the illegal farms, has constantly accused the PP and Vox of climate change denial and warned the Andalusian government about possible European sanctions if it pushes ahead. With tensions high, the German delegation on Monday morning said it was suspending the visit, which had been due to end on Friday, in light of "the considerable political significance" that such topics had assumed "in recent days in light of the upcoming Spanish election". The trip's purpose had been "to exchange expertise and gather information" on climate change and its consequences, with the delegation expressing hope to "continue this exchange in the future".

Interfresa figures show Huelva produces an annual 300,000 tons of strawberries, accounting for more than 90 percent of Spain's strawberry production, with the industry generating 100,000 direct jobs. Germany is Spain's main export market for strawberries, with annual sales of an estimated 186 million euros (\$200 million). In early 2022, some 20 European supermarkets, among them Lidl, Aldi and Sainsbury's, called on the Andalusian government to shelve the controversial berry bill. — AFP



AURIOL: Stephanie Singh, forestry engineer in charge of forestry and energy transition at the Regional Natural Park (PNR) of the Sainte-Baume in the Var, collects fruit from arbores or strawberry trees in Auriol, southern France. — AFP

## Disinformation soils Kenya's GMO debate

NAIROBI: A Kenyan government decision to allow imports of genetically modified maize to help combat its food crisis has sparked disinformation, with leading politicians spreading unsubstantiated claims about the health risks of the crops. In October last year, the East African nation lifted a decade-long ban on the cultivation and importation of GM crops, partly in response to the worst drought to ravage the Horn of Africa region in 40 years which has left millions hungry.

A Nairobi high court later blocked the decision, pending a ruling on a lawsuit brought by a farmers' lobby group which argues that the government move was unlawful. But the lifting of the ban has triggered a wave of disinformation off- and online. This included veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga falsely claiming that GM crops caused mutations in humans and President William Ruto making misleading assertions about their use in other countries.

"Both sides of the debate, those who are pro (genetically modified organisms) and those who are against GMOs, have been to some extent propagating that kind of misinformation," Anne Maina, national coordinator at the Biodiversity and Biosafety Association of Kenya, told AFP. A 2023 study by the Alliance for Science, a project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, warned that Kenyans were "subjected to the world's worst misinformation" on GM crops. According to the research, false or misleading claims "primarily originated in the form of quotes from prominent Kenyan politicians", which were then repeated in media reports.



NAIROBI: Rider Ezra Kipkemboi tries out an electric motorcycle, during the launch of Africa's first electric service station for the electric motorcycles, the Roam hub in Nairobi. — AFP

### 'Not supported by evidence'

Odinga has alleged that eating food made from GM crops would cause men to grow breasts and women to develop testicles. A video of his remarks at a public address on May 7 went viral on Facebook, with one post garnering more than 17,000 views. Experts say there is no scientific proof of GM crops causing sex changes in humans. "Claims of gender mutation are not supported by scientific evidence," the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) said in an email to AFP.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says GM foods available on the market have passed safety assessments and are unlikely to be harmful. About a decade ago, Odinga backed GMOs while serving as prime minister. However, he now says his stance was based on "limited information" and has since come to believe GM crops cause human mutations. This puts him at odds with Kenyan President Wil-

liam Ruto, a GMO supporter who also faces opposition from other politicians.

### Politicized issue

Ekuru Aukot, who ran in Kenya's 2017 presidential election race, told his 350,000 Twitter followers last year that lifting the ban was akin to "feeding people poison in the pretext of saving their lives". Meanwhile, 2022 presidential candidate George Wajackoyah asserted that Mexico banned GM crops after cases of men developing breasts and women growing beards. There is no evidence to back up this claim. In 2020, Mexico ordered the elimination of GM corn by next year, with its leader saying his country would "not accept transgenic corn for human consumption".

But the government rowed back in February following pressure from the US - its main trading partner and the leading producer of GM crops - announcing it would allow GM corn for animal feed and industrial food production. In Kenya, Ruto also contributed to the spread of disinformation when he misleadingly said in a TV interview in January that South Africa and the United States were "100 percent GMO". South Africa has so far approved the cultivation of only three GM crops while US supermarkets sell organic produce alongside GM products clearly labeled as such.

Many countries allow the import but not the cultivation of GM crops. In Kenya, the GMO debate is "based on people and not fact", according to Joel Ochieng, the lead agricultural biotechnology researcher at the University of Nairobi. "We have politicians in Kenya whose main business is to fight each other. Because the current president has said it is safe, the game (of the opposition) is normally to oppose," he told AFP. Ochieng added that the main safety concern was not linked to the development of GM crops but glyphosate, a herbicide commonly used in tandem with them and which poses potential risks. — AFP



Satellite dishes are seen on the balconies of a residential building in Dortmund, western Germany, on April 18, 2023. According to German media reports, rent prices in Germany are increasing noticeably at the beginning of the year. — AFP

## Cost of living weighs on European voters year before polls

BRUSSELS: Cost of living woes are focusing European voters' minds one year before they go to the polls to choose a new EU parliament, a new official survey Tuesday showed. Half the 26,000 respondents questioned across all 27 EU countries for the Eurobarometer survey "see their own standard of living in decline and expect it to decrease even further," according to the results. Some 65 percent were unsatisfied with what their national governments were doing to tackle the crisis, and 57 percent were not happy with what the EU was doing.

"All that weighs indeed heavily on people," acknowledged Philipp Schulmeister, campaign director in the European Parliament, as he presented the Eurobarometer findings. "Citizens see very quickly how much they have left in their purse at the end of the month," he said. But he stressed there was "optimism" in the data "that the European Union will be able to deliver". "This is not the story of everything is well and good, this is a story of expectation and also of learned trust," he said. Other public opinion topics that could sway the European elections include attitudes towards EU support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, migration, and the shift to a greener future. The elections will take place June 6-9, 2024. European Parliament spokesman Jaume Duch Guillot said the survey didn't have any indication that European voters' trust in EU institutions had been rocked by a graft scandal.

Also, "I haven't seen any national or otherwise surveys that would have shown a significant and lasting impact of the situation on the image of the European Union or the European Parliament as such," he said. Several lawmakers and parliamentary aides were arrested in a Belgian probe into suspected bribery of MEPs. Both countries deny any wrongdoing. On Ukraine, 76 percent of the respondents to the survey — which was conducted in March — said they were satisfied with the action the European Union has taken to support Ukraine. On the issue of migration and asylum, only 43 percent of those surveyed approved of what the EU was doing, while on the green transition it was 47 percent. The survey found strong support among Europeans for democracy, rule of law and foreign policy. On the cost of living crisis, being felt globally on the back of rising inflation but especially acutely in Europe because of an initial energy crunch stemming from Russia's invasion, there was dissatisfaction across the bloc. — AFP



NEW YORK: People walk past the New York Stock Exchange during afternoon trading in New York City. — AFP

## Oil prices sink after Saudi-driven rally

LONDON: Oil prices sank Tuesday as dealers mulled the weak demand outlook after having rallied the previous day on output cuts from key crude producer Saudi Arabia. Europe's Brent oil contract and US counterpart WTI crude fell more than two percent, one day after bouncing on news that Riyadh slashed daily output by one million barrels for July in a bid to prop up prices. The announcement came at a weekend meeting of the 23-nation OPEC+ oil producers' alliance, which also agreed to continue its current production cuts until the end of next year.

### Saudi glow fades

"Oil prices are under pressure... as the glow from Saudi's supply cut fades and the reality of the sluggish demand backdrop sets in," noted Victoria Scholarr, head of investment at trading firm Interactive Investor. Asian and European stock markets mostly fell as investors also digested a surprise interest rate increase from the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA). That sparked talk that global central banks were not yet done hiking to combat stubbornly-high inflation. The RBA lifted its main rate by 25 basis points to 4.1 per-

cent, which was the highest level since May 2012. In reaction the Australian dollar jumped more than one percent against the greenback, which traded mixed against the euro and yen.

"The RBA's surprise decision... (was) a warning that the major central banks are not done tightening yet," SwissQuote analyst Ipek Ozkardeska told AFP. "That, combined to the overbought conditions in stock markets, weighs on sentiment. We will likely step into a period of profit taking after such a breather and unexpected rally." The tepid equities performance came after a global advance stumbled Monday, with a below-par read on US services sector activity hinting at weakness in a key area of the economy. "After a brief rally since the end of last week, markets have taken a moment to catch their breath," noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould. Traders have been broadly upbeat after a "Goldilocks" jobs report Friday that was neither too good nor too bad suggested the economy was not facing an immediate risk of a recession and could still give the Federal Reserve room to hold monetary policy next week. There is a growing hope that the central bank will decide against a hike but flag a resumption in July as officials try to bring inflation down while limiting damage to the economy and the troubled banking sector. Bitcoin held steady Tuesday at \$25,785, one day after sliding after US regulators charged cryptocurrency giant Binance with securities law violations. — AFP

## Fall in factory orders adds to German woes

FRANKFURT: German industrial orders unexpectedly fell again in April following a sharp drop the month before, official data showed Tuesday, adding to concerns about the health of Europe's biggest economy. New orders, closely watched as a foretaste of future industrial activity, declined 0.4 percent in April compared with the previous month, federal statistics agency Destatis said. The drop surprised analysts surveyed by FactSet who had predicted a four-percent increase.

It comes after orders plummeted 10.9-percent in March, the biggest fall since April 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic forced widespread lockdowns. The disappointing April figure was mainly down to a drop in large orders, the economy ministry said in a statement. Excluding them, new orders actually increased by 1.4 percent. But the ministry acknowledged that German industry lacked momentum at the beginning of the second quarter. "Germany's export-oriented economy is suffering particularly from the still weak global economy and the decline in orders from the euro area," it said.

The slowdown was especially noticeable in machinery and equipment manufacturing where orders were down six percent month-on-month, while "miscellaneous vehicle construction" including ships, trains and aircraft saw a 34-percent plunge. The motor vehicle and electrical equipment sectors on the other hand registered increases in new orders in April. After weathering the initial fallout from Russia's war in Ukraine and the resulting surge in energy prices better than feared, the picture for the German economy has darkened in recent months. Two consecutive quarters of economic contraction at the end of 2022 and the start of 2023 have plunged Germany into recession, as inflation and higher interest rates weighed on demand. A relatively high order backlog may continue to support German industry "for a few months", Commerzbank economists said in a note. — AFP



# Russia fly-around source of tension for airline industry

## Russia overflights a potential risk for US airlines

**ISTANBUL:** With travel between Asia and Europe booming the closure of Russian airspace is hobbling Western airlines while proving a boon for those from non-aligned nations not subject to Moscow's wrath. For airlines on Russia's airspace blacklist, avoiding the country which straddles 11 time zones in Europe and Asia is an expensive proposition. Travelling around Russia implies larger distances and longer flight times. A Paris-Beijing flight path over Russia is some 8,400 kilometers while skirting Russia to the south is 9,800 kilometers, according to data from the Flightradar24 website. That translates into two hours of additional flight time.

Between added expenditure on fuel and staff, "this costs much more," Air France-KLM's chief executive Benjamin Smith told AFP. "It's a big issue for us," he added. And it is an even bigger issue for Finnair as it has based its long-haul strategy on serving as an air bridge between Europe and Asia crossing Russian airspace. "If you're Finnair, you had a large number of widebodies that were purchased in anticipation to serve a market, origin and destination pairs between Asia, Europe and North America," said Vik Krishnan, a partner at the McKinsey consultancy. "Your calculus is quite different than if you're Lufthansa or Air France-KLM or British Airways," Krishnan added.

### 'Competitive disadvantage'

The airspace restrictions are reciprocal, meaning that flights between Moscow and Havana have to skirt Norway to the north to avoid EU and NATO member countries which have banned Russian airlines following the invasion of Ukraine. But these flights are insignificant compared to the 10 million

Chinese tourists which visited Europe in 2019 before the coronavirus pandemic.

When Russia closed its airspace to airlines from nations it judged hostile at the end of February 2022, there wasn't much of an impact. The continuation of pandemic restrictions in China meant air travel between Asia and the rest of the world was just a tenth of 2019 levels. But with China having reopened, the situation has changed. In April, passenger travel on these routes tripled from the same time in 2022, according to industry organization the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which is holding its annual general meeting in Istanbul this week.

The issue found itself at the centre of talks between Beijing and Paris on increasing flights, a request of the French tourism industry, but which risks weakening Air France. "We want that airlines which have the right to fly to France or the Netherlands respect the same regulations as us," said Smith, who warned Air France-KLM risked getting "squeezed out" on these routes. The same complaint could be heard from US airlines, whose trade association Airlines for America warned that "some foreign carriers being able to fly over Russian airspace puts US carriers at a direct competitive disadvantage".

### IATA on the sidelines

"It's a big issue for us," said United Airlines chief executive Scott Kirby, who noted that the closure of Russian airspace means they were no longer able to serve one of five destinations they had in India. On the other hand, Russia overflights are also a potential risk for US airlines if a problem forces them to land. "What's going to happen if an airline lands in Russia with some prominent US citizens on board?" he



**TBILISI:** A passenger plane of Azimuth Airline conducts the first direct flight from Moscow, arriving in Tbilisi. Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin lifted a flight ban with Georgia, against which Russia fought a brief war in 2008. —AFP

asked. "That is a potential crisis in the making."

That is an issue that helps counter the added cost and time of skirting Russian airspace, according to Lufthansa chief Carsten Spohr. There are clients who don't want to be flying over Russia, he noted. Other than Chinese airlines, those from the Gulf said Emirates and Qatar Airways continue to enjoy Russian overflight rights, as do those from Egypt and India, as well as Turkey which has hiked flights to the country in the wake of the Ukraine invasion.

IATA, which has member airlines that are blacklisted and those that continue to fly over Russia, is staying on the sidelines. "We would like to have Russian airspace open to everybody," said IATA's director general, Willie Walsh, who previously ran International Airlines Group which contains British Airways. "We would prefer to see everybody be in a position to be able to compete equally, but that is a political decision that can only be addressed once peace returns," he added. —AFP

## TSMC: Industry could have 'stabilizing' effect

**HSINCHU:** Taiwanese semiconductor giant TSMC said Tuesday its production of ever-smaller microchips will remain on the island, hopeful that the critical industry will have a "stabilizing effect on global geopolitical conflicts". Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company - whose clients include Apple and Intel - controls more than half the world's output of silicon wafers, used in everything from smartphones to cars and missiles. Recent years have seen it navigating geopolitical tussles between the United States and China, with the countries facing off over a range of issues including technology, trade, and Taiwan - the primary manufacturing base of the world's semiconductors.

Alarm has spiked in recent months over the future of the semiconductor industry - the lifeblood of the global economy - if Taiwan were to be invaded by China, which considers the self-ruled island its own territory. "I can assure everyone that for the three-nanometer, two-nanometer (chips), we will manufacture here in Taiwan," said TSMC CEO CC Wei on Tuesday during a shareholder meeting in the northern city of Hsinchu.

TSMC's three-nanometre and two-nanometre chips are expected to be among the world's most advanced technologies - to be used in high-performing devices as the global market pivots towards products deploying artificial intelligence, like ChatGPT. Wei also said that an even smaller product - the 1.4-nanometre chip - will be manufactured "almost entirely in Taiwan". China has ramped up military and political pressures on Taiwan, strongly protesting against any diplomatic engagement with the island.

In April, Beijing conducted three days of military exercises simulating a blockade of the island in response to US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy meeting Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen in California. On Tuesday, TSMC sought to project an image of calm. "I think Taiwan's semiconductor industry plays a stabilizing role amid global geopolitical tensions. Whether it's China or the United States... they all hope that TSMC is around," said executive chairman Mark Liu. "I hope Taiwan's semiconductor industry can do well to have a stabilizing effect on global geopolitical conflict."

The US-China trade conflict combined with the impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war and climate change have led to lowered expectations for the semiconductor market, said Liu, though TSMC's performance in the second half of the year "will be better than the first half". —AFP

## Australia lifts key interest rate, flags further rises

**SYDNEY:** Australia's central bank hiked interest rates to an 11-year high Tuesday and warned that further rises may be on the horizon to get surging prices under control. The Reserve Bank of Australia lifted the key rate 25 basis points to 4.1 percent, its highest level since May 2012, with governor Philip Lowe saying inflation had "passed its peak" but was still stubbornly high. Most analysts surveyed by Bloomberg had forecast officials to stand pat, while the announcement saw the local dollar jump more than one percent against the US dollar.

However, stocks sank around one percent in Sydney. "This further increase in interest rates is to provide greater confidence that inflation will return to target within a reasonable timeframe," he said in a statement. "High inflation makes life difficult for people and damages the functioning of the economy." Government figures released last week showed prices surged 6.8 percent in April, up from 6.3 percent the month before, outstripping previous forecasts that suggested a drop. "Recent data indicate that the upside risks to the inflation outlook have increased and the board has responded to this," Lowe said.

The latest rate hike heaps further pressure on mortgage holders who are, on average, already



**ADELAIDE:** A sign advertises a new apartment development in Adelaide, as Australia's central bank hiked interest rates to an 11-year high on Tuesday. —AFP

forking out hundreds of dollars more each month to meet their repayments. Lowe acknowledged that many Australian households were feeling a "painful squeeze on their finances". "Some further tightening of monetary policy may be required to ensure that inflation returns to target in a reasonable timeframe, but that will depend upon how the economy and inflation evolve."

Tuesday's decision comes after the independent

Fair Work Commission lifted the national minimum wage 5.75 percent, which will kick in from July 1. Like other countries fighting inflation, Australia faces a delicate balancing act to bring prices down without stifling economic growth and sparking a recession. Central banks around the world continue to tighten monetary policy in the face of runaway food and energy prices, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. —AFP

## South Africa skirts recession with surprise growth

**JOHANNESBURG:** South Africa's economy grew slightly in the first three months of the year, shooing away fears of recession hanging over Africa's most industrialized country, official data showed Tuesday. The gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 0.4 percent between January and March after shrinking by 1.1 percent in the final three months of 2022, the national statistics agency said. The growth came despite crippling power cuts that continue to hit economic activity — and beat many analysts' expectations.

"The manufacturing and finance industries were the major drivers of growth on the supply side of the economy," StatsSA said in a statement. "The demand side was lifted by exports, with smaller positive contributions for household, government, and investment spending." Economists at South African bank FNB said last week they expected a "mild recession", while others predicted growth to stagnate at around zero percent.

South Africa has been battered by record blackouts over the past year, as problems at beleaguered power utility Eskom have mounted. The outages are



**JOHANNESBURG:** The University of Johannesburg's electric bus driven by Calvin Sithole is seen on Empire Road as it makes its way to the University's Auckland Park campus in Johannesburg. The university has purchased two electric buses as part of the university's contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals program. —AFP

costing more than \$50-million in lost output each day, according to estimates by the energy minister. GDP has been swinging like a pendulum. It recorded a 0.8 percent contraction in the second quarter of 2022, followed by a 1.8 percent expansion in the following quarter — before diving back in the last three months of the year, according to revised data.

High inflation and a weakening currency have

compounded the lacklustre performance. Inflation dropped to the lowest level in almost a year in April, slowing to 6.8 percent from 7.1 percent in March. But in May the central bank still raised its main interest rate by 0.5 percentage points to 8.25 percent — a 14-year high. It forecast GDP would grow by 0.3 percent in 2023, followed by 1.0 percent and 1.1 percent increases in 2024 and 2025 respectively. —AFP

## Divers fish deadly 'ghost nets' from Santorini's depths

**SANTORINI:** Off the spectacular Greek tourist island of Santorini, divers drag dead "ghost nets" from the depths of the Aegean Sea which have claimed the lives of thousands of fish. "These abandoned nets are like fish traps," said diver Mika Panagiotopoulou, one of a group of volunteers who have been descending up to 45 meters to fish out discarded nets, tyres and plastic bags from the crystalline blue waters.

"For half a century the build-up of these abandoned nets has swept up thousands of fish and caused incalculable damage to the flora and fauna of our seas," said Santorini's mayor Antonis Sigalas, as the rubbish was gathered up at the little port of Vlychada before being recycled. "For World Environment Day we want to highlight the dangers of abandoned fishing nets for our seas," said George Sarelakos, co-founder of Aegean Rebreath, the Greek NGO behind the clean-up.

"Discarded fishing nets account for about a tenth of the world's marine pollution and it's a real challenge because up to now it has been invisible - because most people have no idea of what is hidden in the depths," he added. Over the last five

years, Aegean Rebreath's 300 volunteer divers have removed more than 28 tons of nets and hundreds of thousands of plastic bags - one of the greatest scourges of the aquatic world - from Greek waters.

Despite a tax being levied on plastic bags in Greece since 2018, shops still hand them out with abandon. However, Sarelakos said there has been some progress. "There has been a change of mentality among fisherman and now they are handing (nets) over to be recycled." Veteran fisherman Kyriakos Prekas, 71, said there was a growing awareness that "the riches of the sea were being exhausted". "It is hard for a fisherman to survive so they put down more and more nets, which leads to fewer fish. It's a vicious circle," he said. —AFP



**FIRA:** A couple walks in a street overlooking the Santorini Caldera, in Fira on the island of Santorini. —AFP



Lifestyle



Carved Quranic verses



Sculpture of Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



A carved kettle



A carved lion



A sculptural work



Bilal's precise sculptural works. — KUNA photos

## Egyptian sculptor carves eye-catching objects on pencil tips

Ibrahim Bilal, a young Egyptian artist, amazingly succeeds in making use of his creative skills and expressive energy in creating highly accurate sculptural works on pencil tips. Despite fragile materials and small sizes of pencils used in sculpture, Bilal can carve artifacts, pharaonic statues, leaders,

prominent historical figures, Quranic verses and mosques, as well as models of cars and animals. Bilal's wonderful artistic works attracted the attention and admiration of thousands of social media users. — KUNA



Ibrahim Bilal, a young Egyptian sculptor.

## Deezer to detect AI-generated music clones

Music streaming app Deezer said Tuesday it was launching a tool to detect and tag songs with AI-generated vocal clones in a bid to protect the revenues of the real artists. Artificial Intelligence tools have recently allowed people to recreate the sound of famous artist vocals, from The Beatles to Oasis.

"Heart on a Sleeve", a track featuring AI-generated copycats of Drake and The Weeknd, racked up millions of hits on TikTok and other platforms. Music companies fear this could eat into future earnings since there is currently no way to copyright the sound of someone's voice.

But Deezer said it plans to identify AI-generated music, focusing initially on those which recreate the voices of existing artists. The French company said it aimed to create a system to tag these tunes in the app, which can alert artists, labels and users to this "fraudulent activity".

"Our goal is to weed out illegal and fraudulent content, increase transparency, and develop a new remuneration system where professional artists are rewarded for creating valuable con-

tent," said Deezer CEO Jeronimo Folgueira in a statement. He said more than 100,000 new tracks are uploaded to Deezer's site daily, making it increasingly important to distinguish between human- and machine-generated music. "AI can be used to create new incredible content and I believe there are massive benefits of using generative AI," he added. "But we need to ensure it's done in a responsible way." — AFP



Drake and The Weeknd

## Prince Harry tells UK court of lifelong 'press invasion'

Prince Harry on Tuesday said he had suffered lifelong "press invasion" and accused some media of having blood on their hands, as he became the first royal in more than 100 years to give evidence in court. Harry, 38, said he had been the victim of relentless and distressing media intrusion "most of my life up until this day" and attacked negative portrayals of him as the "spare to the heir".

"How much more blood will stain their typing fingers before someone can put a stop to this madness," the younger son of King Charles III added in a witness statement. "You're then either the 'playboy prince', the 'failure', the 'dropout' or, in my case, the 'thicko', the 'cheat', the 'underage drinker', the 'irresponsible drug taker', the list goes on.

"As a teenager and in my early 20s, I ended up feeling as though I was playing up to a lot of the headlines and stereotypes that they wanted to pin on me... It was a downward spiral," he said, calling the reporting "utterly vile". Harry is accusing Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN) Ltd — publisher of The Mirror, Sunday Mirror and the Sunday People tabloids — of illegal information gathering, including phone hacking.

During cross-examination by MGN's lawyer Andrew Green, Harry admitted that he had no recollection of reading the majority of the articles he had complained about. But he called them "incredibly invasive" and taken as a whole they had made him acutely paranoid and ruined his relationships.

### 'Industrial scale'

The case is Harry's latest legal battle with the press since he stepped down from frontline royal duties in early 2020 and relocated to California with his American wife Meghan. The prince earned a rebuke from the judge on Monday for not turning up for the opening statement in his case as he had been attending his young daughter's second birthday on Sunday.

Dressed in a dark suit and tie, the Duke of Sussex, as he is formally known, began giving evidence shortly after 0930 GMT after swearing an oath on the Bible. On Monday, Harry's lawyer David Sherborne said that he was targeted by illegal information gathering even as a young schoolboy and his phone would have been hacked on "multiple occasions".

"No aspect of the young prince's life was safe" from press intrusion, he sub-

mitted. The case against MGN centres on claims that its tabloids broke the law to obtain stories about Harry and other claimants, including two TV soap opera actors and the ex-wife of a comedian.

At the start of the trial on May 10, MGN apologized and admitted to "some evidence" of unlawful information gathering, including for a story about Harry. But it denied voicemail interception and also argued that some claims had been brought too late. Sherborne submitted that "industrial scale" illegal activities were happening at MGN and had been approved by senior executives.

### Government 'in bed' with press

Harry, who is fifth in line to the throne, has had a turbulent relationship with the press and holds the media responsible for the death of his mother Princess Diana, who died in a Paris car crash in 1997 while being pursued by paparazzi. In television interviews and his explosive memoir "Spare", released in January, Harry 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.

Although the royal family are normally scrupulous about staying out of politics, Harry on Tuesday also launched a tirade against the government. "On a national level, at the moment, our country is judged globally by the state of our press and our government, both of which I believe are at rock bottom," he said in his witness statement.

"Democracy fails when your press fails to scrutinize and hold the government accountable, and instead choose to get into bed with them so they can ensure the status quo." The prince has vowed to spearhead efforts to enforce change on Britain's tabloid behavior and accused the police and government of being "scared" to hold the press accountable. The last time a royal gave evidence in court was in the 1890s when the future king Edward VII took the stand in a slander trial. — AFP



Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, arrives to the Royal Courts of Justice, Britain's High Court, in central London. — AFP

## 'Shattered': Singapore to end 180 years of horse racing

Singapore's horse racing community spoke of its anger and heartbreak Tuesday with the city-state's only racecourse set to close, signaling the end of the sport there after more than 180 years. The final race will be the 100th Grand Singapore Gold Cup in October next year, the Singapore Turf Club (STC) said, after which the land will be returned to the government for housing. The club was founded in 1842 by a Scottish merchant and other horse-racing enthusiasts. The current racecourse at Kranji was opened in 2000, replacing the old Bukit Timah track.

"We are saddened by the decision of the government to close the club," STC's chairman Niam Chiang Meng said in a press release. "At the same time, we understand the land needs of Singapore, including housing and other potential uses such as leisure and recreation," he added.

The STC acknowledged that attendances at the racecourse had been declining over the past decade, but many of those within the close-knit industry were taken aback by Monday's announcement. Jockey Jerlyn Seow said she felt "nauseous" when she heard the news.

"I felt I was living my dream but now it's shattered," the 29-year-old said, ac-



In this file photo horses are paraded before the debut of the China Equine Cultural Festival Singapore Cup at Kranji racecourse in Singapore.

cording to Singapore-based Channel NewsAsia.

"Why does the government want to close this historic industry when there isn't much recreation or entertainment in Singapore?" "It's a mistake." Racehorse owners and trainers will be offered support for horse maintenance and exportation, the STC said. There are about 700 racehorses at the club, according to local media.

The land will be returned to the government in 2027 and the 120-hectare (300 acres) site will be used for housing, including public housing. "Singa-

pore is a city-state with limited land," the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of Finance said in a joint statement. "The government continually reviews its land use plans to meet today's needs while ensuring there is sufficient land for future generations."

### Left reeling

Singapore staged its first race in 1843 at the Farrer Park Racecourse but the sport outgrew the venue and racing moved to Bukit Timah. According to the STC, it opened in 1933 to a 5,000-strong crowd. In 1972 there was an estimated crowd of more than 26,000 for the Queen Elizabeth II Cup, held in honor of the visiting monarch, who was a big racing fan. She visited the club on two occasions.

Prize money reached the millions in the 2000s, with the Sg\$3 million (now \$2.2 million) Singapore Airlines International Cup and the Singapore Airlines KrisFlyer International Sprint. Both were discontinued in 2015. Attendances also gradually dropped off. Indraneel Rajah, a government second minister, said that race-day attendances fell from 11,000 in 2010 to 6,000 in 2019.

By the end of the pandemic, the number had fallen to 2,600, she wrote in a Facebook post. "This is not unique to Singapore. The global horse racing scene is changing as new trends come about," she added. But that was of little comfort to a racing community that was left reeling.

"The stakeholders and the whole industry were not consulted," Eric Koh of Team Cheval told The Straits Times. Punters and racing fans also reacted with disappointment. "What a shame! 180 years of tradition just gone like that? Was it really a difficult decision? What has been done to conserve it?" one wrote on STC's Facebook post announcing the closure. — AFP



In this file photo Jockeys compete in the China Equine Cultural Festival Singapore Cup horse race at Kranji racecourse in Singapore. — AFP photos



## Lifestyle



Beekeeper Jay Weiss holds a tray of festooning bees, pulled out of a hive box, during the process of making of honey in his backyard in Pasadena, California. — AFP photos



A sample of different kinds of honey from Los Angeles beekeepers are seen in Pasadena.



## California's honey bees await the famous sunshine

California's very wet winter gifted the state a spectacular superbloom — an explosion of flowers that delighted hikers and should have been great news for bees. But beekeepers say lingering low temperatures and gray skies in the Golden State are keeping the insects indoors — and if it doesn't get sunny soon, the bumper honey harvest they were hoping for might not materialize. "The bees don't like to fly when it's cold and damp," explains Jay Weiss, a backyard beekeeper in Pasadena, as he lifts the lid off a hive to reveal thousands of insects.

Of course, "cold and damp" is relative. But with temperatures in the Los Angeles area topping out around 20 Celsius (68 Fahrenheit) most days right now, and the area's famously blue skies hidden by a blanket of cloud, it all adds to the impression that the weather is just not being very Californian this year.

ers in Southern California are not used to really bad weather," he told AFP.

### May gray, June gloom

When the rain stopped in April, hillsides exploded into a riot of oranges, yellows, purples and whites; a carpet of color that could be seen from space. The abundance should have been manna from heaven for the bees — a vast superstore of nectar and pollen that would fatten hives and give honey-makers their sweet reward.

But May was gray and June has begun with gloom. National Weather Service meteorologist Joe Sirard says an exceptionally wet winter with rain that lasted longer than usual gave way to the cloudy skies that are common at this time of year, without the burst of sunshine seen in previous years to separate them. "We're in the climatologically cloudiest two months in Southern



A queen bee, with the red dot, is seen in a clip with nurse bees during the production of honey.

He'll also make soaps, lip balms and various ointments from the wax, all smelling deliciously of the bees' sweet confection. "The super bloom can double our production of honey this year," said Weiss. That's as long as the insects are given their Goldilocks moment — not too hot and not too cold. "Once we're into July, the temperatures could get really hot and so they're not going to be producing honey anymore," said Weiss. "So I would say we got about six weeks for this to happen. "But when they start making honey, it's unbelievable how fast things happen." — AFP



A bee feeds on both pollen and nectar from a scarlet powder-puff wildflower at Eaton Canyon.



A bee hovers near scarlet powder-puff wildflowers at Eaton Canyon in Pasadena, California.

While a few overcast weeks in May and June are not unusual, the weather has never really cheered up from the deluge that walloped the state over the winter.

A series of atmospheric rivers — high altitude ribbons of moisture — chugged into the western United States, dropping trillions of gallons of water on a landscape that had been baked dry by years of punishing drought. Reservoirs that had been perilously low drank their fill, and rivers burst their banks. The downpour was great news for water managers and for homeowners fed up with brown lawns and hosepipe restrictions. But honeybees really struggled, unable to take wing in all that rain. "I had healthy strong hives, but next thing you know two months later, the bees starved to death inside the hive," said Weiss. "I lost five hives over the winter. "Beekeep-

California, which keeps temperatures on the cool side," he told AFP. The phenomenon is caused by cool ocean water that keeps air temperatures low around the coast — the so-called marine layer. "Typically, the marine layer clouds will come in at night, and usually scatter out in the morning, into the afternoon," though they can stay all day.

The next week or so looks set for more of the same, but July and August — the bulk of the meteorological summer — can be expected to be sunny, he said. That'll be good news for the bees, who will finally be able to get out and about amongst all those flowers. If the sun does come through, Weiss, a former professional magician who drifted into beekeeping 20 years ago, will be hoping to harvest as much as 100 pounds (45 kilograms) of honey from each of his hives.



Festooning bees are seen among trays on a hive box during the production of honey.



Bees festoon on a hive box during the process of making honey, in the backyard of beekeeper Jay Weiss.



Beekeeper Jay Weiss stores bees in hive boxes during the process of making of honey in his backyard.



Brazilian singer Astrud Gilberto performs on stage during a Jazz Festival on July 16, 1982, at The Hague. - AFP

## 'Girl from Ipanema' singer Astrud Gilberto dies at 83

Astrud Gilberto, the Brazilian singer whose soft, beguiling voice made "The Girl from Ipanema" a worldwide sensation in the 1960s and provided a huge boost to the budding bossa nova genre, has died at age 83, her family said. "I come bearing the sad news that my grandmother became a star today and is next to my grandfather Joao Gilberto," Sofia Gilberto wrote on social media early Tuesday.

The singer was born in Salvador, capital of Brazil's northeastern state of Bahia, in 1940 and was married to Joao Gilberto, a pioneer of the bossa nova genre who died in 2019. Astrud Gilberto recorded 19 albums in her career, but she had little professional music experience

when she turned "The Girl from Ipanema" - the song by Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes - into a global smash singing the English verses alongside American saxophonist Stan Getz. The version made Gilberto the first Brazilian to be nominated for a Grammy - which she won, for song of the year, in 1965.

### 'Queen of bossa nova'

The silky-smooth song changed Gilberto's life, turning it upside down both personally and professionally. As she told the story, she owed her popularity to an off-the-cuff suggestion by Joao Gilberto while they were recording it in New York to try singing in English. "That song is going to make you famous,"

Getz told her in the studio. It was apparently not just her music that wowed the saxophonist - and vice versa.

She ended up leaving her husband for Getz and moving to the United States. But that turbulent period in her life produced some of the best-loved recordings of all time, including the live album of the three friends' concert at New York's Carnegie Hall in October 1964.

Aged just 24, Gilberto suffered from stage fright, which she overcame by taking theater classes at the Stella Adler acting academy. The pretty young brunette wowed audiences with her satin voice, which she took on tour with Getz. She earned the nickname "The Queen of Bossa Nova," bringing the

syncopated, relaxed Brazilian musical style to the world. She remained in the US after separating from Getz, continuing her career with hits such as "Fly Me to the Moon" (1972) and "Far Away" (1977), and turning to songwriting with the albums "Astrud Gilberto Now" and "That Girl From Ipanema."

After a career touring the world, she retired from the stage in 2001. She was inducted into the International Latin Music Hall of Fame the following year. In 2008, she was awarded a Latin Grammy for lifetime achievement. - AFP



# Healthy snowpack heralds bumper season for US rafters



A healthy Rocky Mountain snowpack looks set to offer a bumper season for thrill-seeking white water rafters on Colorado's rivers. Operators plying waterways fed by the US mountain range say a decent winter and a slow snowmelt should offer months of fun for those intent on hurtling over bubbling rapids.

Each rapid plunges the front of the raft into the spume, spraying occupants with water cold enough to remind them it was snow just a few hours earlier. For those brave enough — or unlucky enough — to take a plunge, even a wetsuit isn't enough to guard against the bone-chilling cold. "This is a very good year for water, we have no concerns there," said Mark Hammer, who runs The Adventure Company in Buena Vista. "It shouldn't be exceedingly high, and should provide us with a really long season."

**Wet winter**  
Years of below-average snowfall across the US West have left river systems depleted, as a long-term aridification trend is exacerbated by human-caused planet warming. Some of the main riverine arteries that criss-cross the country have been badly hit, with the once-mighty Colorado River dwindling. The situation became so bad last year that Lake Mead, an enormous reservoir formed by the Hoover Dam, dropped to just a quarter of its capacity, threatening "deadpool" — where the river downstream dries up, and hydro-electric generation grinds to a halt.

But a wet winter that left a thick blanket of snow over the Rocky Mountains, has — for now at least



People raft down the Arkansas River in Buena Vista, Colorado.

— breathed new life into the rivers. Scientists who measure the snowpack—a vital store of water for a huge swathe of the country — say to the west of the continental divide, it's looking very healthy.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is "seeing some really huge numbers" for snowmelt "forecasted to flow into reservoirs throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin" this summer, according to the organization's Paul Miller.

The eastern side of the divide did not see quite as much snow, but it was still abundant. That's good news for rafters on the Arkansas River, which rises near Leadville, Colorado, and meanders 1,500 miles (2,400 kilometers) across the Great Plains, before it joins the Mississippi River.

Hammer, whose company guides up to 8,000 people down the river every year, says while this season is set to be a good one on the waterway, there are no guarantees for the future.

A changing climate, over-use by



People raft down the Arkansas River in Buena Vista, Colorado.

burgeoning population centers and voracious agriculture are all stressing these lifebloods. "I would love to see people taking a more serious look at the overall water that's available," he told AFP. "I don't hear a lot of great solutions. And I know it's a tough problem to solve, and it's probably going to take decades to manage our water better. However, I don't think we have much of a choice." — AFP



People carry their raft into the river for a white water rafting expedition in the Arkansas River in Buena Vista, Colorado. — AFP photos

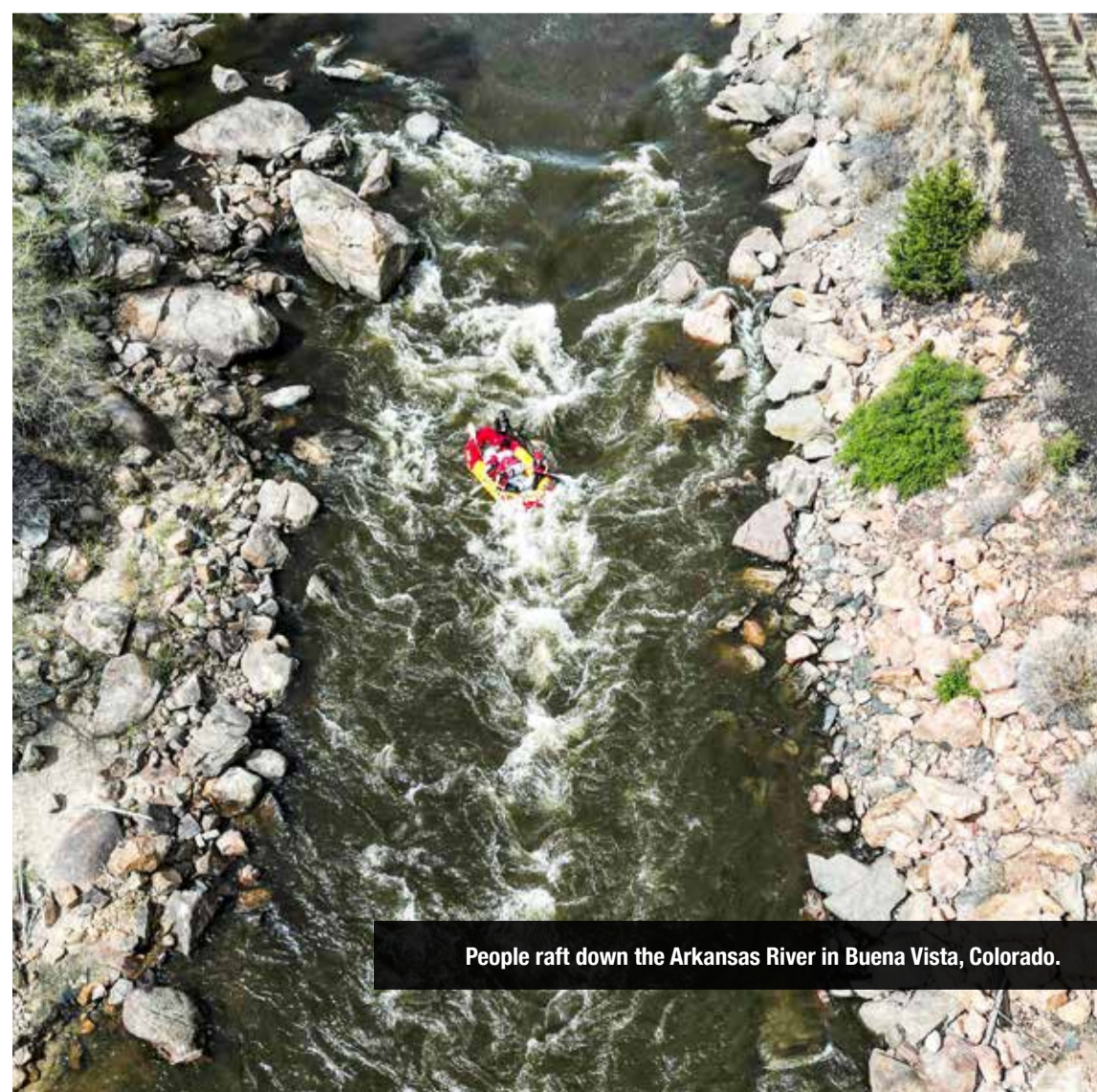
"This river has doubled in size... since three days ago," said Corey Coker, who has been leading rafting expeditions on the Arkansas River in Colorado for well over a decade. "I believe today we're just under 1,000 cubic feet per second," he told AFP in mid-May. One cubic foot is about 7.5 US gallons, or 28 liters.

That means if you drew a line across the river, there would be 7,500 gallons of water going past at any given moment. "It doesn't look too bad here," he said as he pushed the raft into a wide, slow-flowing section of the river. "But when you're down in the rapids, that water level makes a big difference to how scary things look."

Indeed, as the water narrows along a path carved out millennia ago, things really start to quicken. What was once gently flowing and rather harmless-looking water takes on an angry foam-filled churn in the majestic Browns Canyon. Coker shouts instructions to rafters to paddle backwards or forwards as they try to steer their inflatable vessel around



People from "The Adventure Company" raft down the Arkansas River in Buena Vista, Colorado.



People raft down the Arkansas River in Buena Vista, Colorado.



People carry their raft into the river for a white water rafting expedition in the Arkansas River in Buena Vista, Colorado.



People raft down the Arkansas River in Buena Vista, Colorado.



People carry their raft into the river for a white water rafting expedition in the Arkansas River in Buena Vista, Colorado.



## Sports

# Knights thrash Panthers in Stanley Cup, lead 2-0

## Panthers goaltender yanked from the game

LOS ANGELES: The Vegas Golden Knights thrashed the Florida Panthers 7-2 to take a 2-0 lead in the National Hockey League's Stanley Cup final series on Monday. The Knights, who romped to a 5-2 victory in game one on Saturday, once again overpowered Florida on a miserable night for the Panthers at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas. Panthers goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky was yanked from the game in the second period after conceding four goals from 13 shots in just 27 minutes as the Knights ran riot.

Florida defenseman Radko Gudas also left the game with an undisclosed injury after a bone-jarring hit by Knights forward Ivan Barbashev. Jonathan Marchessault fired Vegas into the early lead on a power play to make it 1-0 with 12min 55sec left in the first period. Alex Martinez then doubled the Vegas lead at the end of the first, making it 2-0 with a snap shot after an assist from Barbashev.

The Vegas onslaught continued in the second period, with Nicolas Roy lashing home through

a crowd of defenders to put the Knights 3-0 up. Brett Howden tucked away the fourth with a superb finish from close range with 7:10 remaining in the third. That prompted the removal of shell-shocked goalie Bobrovsky, and the Panthers at least managed to ride out the remainder of the period without conceding again. Anton Lundell raised faint hopes of an improbable comeback after scoring for Florida just 14 seconds into the final period to make it 4-1.

But once again the Knights response was emphatic, with Marchessault grabbing his second for a 5-1 lead after deft work down the left flank from Jack Eichel. Michael Amadio piled on the pain for Florida to make it 6-1, coolly finishing after a clever reverse pass from William Karlsson. Matthew Tkachuk grabbed a late consolation for the Panthers but it was only a temporary reprieve, with Howden sweeping home to complete the scoring with just over two minutes left on the clock. The best-of-seven series now heads to Florida, with game three taking place on Thursday. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: Sergei Bobrovsky #72 of the Florida Panthers makes a save against Mark Stone #61 of the Vegas Golden Knights as Aaron Ekblad #5 and Aleksander Barkov #16 of the Panthers defend in the first period of Game Two of the 2023 NHL Stanley Cup Final at T-Mobile Arena on June 05, 2023. — AFP

## World Test final takes centre stage amid T20 boom

LONDON: The World Test Championship final between Australia and India at the Oval starts Wednesday against a backdrop of fears for the long format given the growth of Twenty20 franchise leagues. Not that there's anything new about cricket-lovers worrying about the future of their sport. Indeed it was following an 1882 Test at the Oval, after Australia had inflicted England's first defeat on home soil, that the Sporting Times published a mock obituary of English cricket that referenced its cremation, with "the Ashes taken to Australia".

The Ashes has since become a shorthand for Anglo-Australian Test cricket, with a five-match series in England starting next week - just days after the scheduled finish of the WTC final. One current concern is that the riches on offer to leading players from T20 tournament such as the Indian Premier League, and the vastly shorter time it takes to earn the money than by playing five-day Test cricket, makes the traditional format of the game much less attractive to leading modern-day players.

The International Cricket Council's response was to devise the WTC, a two-year cycle of games culminating in a final, in order to give Test cricket greater context. This week's match marks the culmination of the second edition, with New Zealand having defeated India in the inaugural 2021 final at Southampton. Australia and India are two of cricket's major on and off-field powers, together with England, and the 'Big Three' play the majority of five-match Test series. The proximity of the first Ashes Test at Edgbaston starting on June 16 has led to the WTC final being labeled a "warm-up" game for Australia.

### 'Big week'

But Australia star batsman Steve Smith, whose side just missed out on the inaugural final, after losing their last home series India, is adamant it is a match his side want to win just as much as a 50-over or T20 World Cup final. "We're all just looking forward to this (match against India)," Smith told reporters at the Oval on Monday. "It's two years in the making, of getting to the final of the World Test Championship, it's a big week for us and India, so we'll get through this then we'll focus after that. "Every game you play for your country is important."

And India coach Rahul Dravid said: "It's something you aspire to, to be in the top two teams so you get an opportunity to play this game." The former India batsman added the fact New Zealand had won the first final after qualifying via the ICC's weighted points system, was proof of how teams whose cricket economics mean they are often restricted to two-Test series, could still be competitive at Test level.

"If you play less you still have the opportunity to make it to the final, as New Zealand showed last time," said Dravid. "Actually playing less gives you an opportunity to protect your resources." When India, now cricket's financial powerhouse, won the 1983 one-day World Cup final, it transformed the format's status in the sport's most populous nation and with it the economy of the global game.

It was a similar story in 2007 when Indian officials' skepticism about T20 cricket evaporated after India's dramatic victory over arch-rivals Pakistan in the 2007 World Twenty20 final in South Africa. Dravid, however, was skeptical over whether a victory for India, set to be roared on by thousands of passionate fans at the Oval, the south London headquarters of county side Surrey, would have a similar effect. "Test cricket faces unique challenges, which are not necessarily going to change as a result of one game," he said. — AFP

## 'Embarrassing, feral, disrespectful': French Open fans under fire

PARIS: Branded "embarrassing", "disrespectful" and even "feral", French Open fans are under fire for the kind of boisterous behavior usually associated with the diehard ultras of nearby football giants Paris Saint-Germain. Basking in temperatures which have nudged 30 degrees most days and with beer-sellers roving conveniently throughout the grounds, notoriously impatient locals have made their voices heard.

On the first day at Roland Garros, Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk was booed for refusing to shake hands with Belarusian opponent Aryna Sabalenka in protest over the ongoing war in her country. "I want to see people react to it in 10 years when the war is over. I think they will not feel really nice about what they did," said Kostyuk, a vociferous and articulate critic of the ongoing presence of Russian and Belarusian players on tour.

"People should be honestly embarrassed," Sabalenka initially thought the boos from the showpiece Court Philippe Chatrier were targeted at her and performed an exaggerated bow in response. On Court Suzanne Lenglen, America's Taylor Fritz knocked out Arthur Rinderknech, the last remaining French player in the singles tournament after 27 had already fallen. It was only day five and only the second round.

## India captain coy over Ashwin role in WTC final

LONDON: India captain Rohit Sharma was tight-lipped on whether star spinner Ravichandran Ashwin would feature in the World Test Championship final starting on Wednesday. Rohit's men will bid to be crowned Test world champions for the first time when they face Australia at the Oval. The last time India played a Test at the London ground, in 2021, they left out Ashwin despite the star off-spinner's excellent record - 474 wickets at 23.93 in 92 matches.

Instead they opted to play spin-bowling all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja alongside four seamers in a match in which India beat England by 157 runs. Both bowlers are in India's 15-man squad for the WTC final. "In terms of the combination, better we wait until tomorrow (Wednesday) - that's a common answer, I think," Rohit said with a smile during a pre-match press conference at the Oval on Tuesday.

Early season surfaces in England

generally do not give spinners much help and Rohit said the Oval pitch and the overhead conditions looked as though they would assist seam bowlers. "When we played the last Test match here at the Oval, it looked very similar to this and then as the game went on, it got better and better and slower and slower, then the reverse-swing came into play on the fifth day," he said. "We are going to consider all those factors." Wednesday's match is only the second WTC final - India lost the inaugural showpiece match by eight wickets to New Zealand in Southampton in 2021.

Rohit said his men were determined to learn from their mistakes on that occasion. "The last time we played (in the final) we made a few mistakes, which we've already spoken about in this group," said the 36-year-old. "It's a good challenge to have and we know exactly what went wrong for us in the last Championship final, so hopefully we won't repeat those kinds of things." Australia, who will remain in England for a five-match Ashes campaign, boast an impressive pace attack led by captain Pat Cummins.

But India have won their past four

## Caught up in politics, Sabalenka only wants to talk tennis

PARIS: Aryna Sabalenka would like to just speak about tennis, but as the war in Ukraine goes on and she struggles to distance herself from links to Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, she has decided to stop talking at the French Open. Sabalenka, in the Roland Garros quarter-finals for the first time, has skipped the press conference after her past two matches, and there is nothing to suggest that will change after she plays Ukraine's Elina Svitolina in a politically-charged duel on Tuesday.

Sabalenka's reason for opting out of her media duties is that she "did not feel safe" after she fended off a series of tough questions over her stance on the war as well as her links to the government in Belarus.

The world number two did not comment on reports she supports Lukashenko and refused to "flatly condemn" Russia's invasion of Ukraine when asked by a reporter after her second-round win last week. Belarus is a key military ally of Russia in the conflict. "She left two press conferences very affected," said tournament director Amelie Mauresmo, who is allowing Sabalenka to skip her obligatory media commitments for now.

### 'President supports sport'

Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk was booed by the crowd after refusing to shake Sabalenka's hand in the first

### 'Very involved'

It was all too much for a proud tennis nation on the 40th anniversary of being able to hail their last home men's champion in Yannick Noah and 23 years since Mary Pierce claimed the women's title. Fritz had been irritated by the partisan night-time crowd's desperate attempts to push Rinderknech over the line. At one stage, fans even sang the French national anthem. When he wrapped up victory, 25-year-old Fritz placed his finger to his lips to shush his tormentors before theatrically blowing kisses.

The jeers continued as he attempted to carry out the traditional on-court TV interview. "The crowd was just so great that I had to let it fire me up. They cheered so well for me, I wanted to make sure I won. Thanks guys," the American said sarcastically. Former champion Mats Wilander believes the crowd's behavior, which pushes the limits of fairplay, can be counter-productive.

"I don't think they necessarily mean to boo players, but they're very engaged and enthusiastic this year," the Swede told Eurosport. "I think they're a bit more involved here than if you play a Brit at Wimbledon or an American at the US Open, or an Aussie in Australia." Australian doubles player Arina Rodionova asked on Twitter: "Is it me or French crowd is especially feral this year? Normally there is at least a little bit of logic behind the booing... this year they just woke up and chose violence!"

Alcohol appears more easily accessible this year at Roland Garros. As well as the mobile vendors selling glasses of beer for 10 euros (\$10.70), the tournament has for the first time installed a beer station.

Novak Djokovic, who divides opinion at Roland Garros as well as pretty much every other tennis venue, was the target when he took a medical timeout in his grueling third round win over Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. The 36-year-old Djokovic gave spectators a sarcastic round of applause and a thumbs-up. In the third set, he launched a ball skywards in frustration which again brought boos.

### 'Love to boo'

Two-time champion Djokovic mocked fans by mimicking their boos and nodding his head in weary acceptance. "I think the majority of the people come to enjoy tennis or support one or the other player. But there are people who love to boo every single thing you do," said Djokovic. "That's something that I find disrespectful and I frankly don't understand that. When somebody is disrespectful he or she deserves to have an answer to that." Daria Kasatkina was booed on Sunday following her loss to Elina Svitolina. In common with all Ukrainian players, Svitolina does not shake hands with Russian or Belarusian opponents.

Instead, Kasatkina, a rare Russian voice to have criticized the war, gave Svitolina a friendly thumbs-up, a gesture sportingly acknowledged by Svitolina. "Leaving Paris with a very bitter feeling," tweeted Kasatkina. "I was booed for just being respectful on my opponent's position not to shake hands." However, not all players have fallen out with the home support. "Obviously there's a limit but they're not afraid to express themselves. I think this makes the atmosphere a lot of fun for me," said 2022 runner-up Coco Gauff. — AFP



Rohit Sharma

Test series against Australia, including a 2-1 success on home soil earlier this year. "We've played the opposition a fair bit in the last two or three months so we know what they are capable of... the next five days will be quite challenging for us," said Rohit. It is now a decade since India last won a major International Cricket Council tournament, the 50-over World Cup in 2013. "That is what you play for," said Rohit. "It will be nice to win some titles, some extraordinary series. "Having said that, I genuinely feel we don't want to put too much pressure on ourselves by over-thinking this kind of stuff." — AFP



Spectators watch as Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka serves to Ukraine's Elina Svitolina during their women's singles quarter final match on day ten of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament at the Court Philippe-Chatrier in Paris on June 6, 2023. — AFP

round. Kostyuk, who has refused to shake the hands of Russian and Belarusian players since the invasion of her country, said she had no respect for Sabalenka for not individually denouncing the role of Belarus in the war. Beyond her nationality, Sabalenka is paying for her association with Lukashenko in the past. In 2018, she requested a one-to-one meeting with Lukashenko, according to Belarusian state news agency Belta.

The following year, in an interview with the country's largest independent news site Tut.by - since shuttered following a brutal crackdown after historic demonstrations against Lukashenko - she spoke glowingly over the Belarusian leader. "Obviously it's good to be born in a country where the president supports sport like no one else and is ready to help in

difficult times. It's priceless," she said, going so far as to consider Lukashenko like a "member of my team".

On December 31, 2020, after a year marked by the crushing of pro-democracy demonstrations in Belarus, Sabalenka toasted in the new year with Lukashenko in Minsk. Lukashenko praised Sabalenka when she won the Australian Open in January. There is a question over the public relations boost provided by such a high-profile sportswoman performing so well internationally. "I'm pretty sure it doesn't help," Sabalenka replied when asked in April in Stuttgart if Lukashenko's comments made her unpopular. "I don't know what to say because he can comment on my matches, he can comment on whatever he wants," she added. — AFP



Sports

# Spurs' new manager driven by humble roots, dad's memories

## Tottenham appoint Postecoglou as new manager

SYDNEY: Ange Postecoglou has come from humble roots and arriving in Australia by boat as a little boy to take one of the Premier League's biggest jobs. The 57-year-old Australian was named Tottenham Hotspur manager on Tuesday, having won five trophies in two seasons at Celtic including the Scottish treble this year. Athens-born Postecoglou may represent a disappointment to Spurs fans demanding a "bigger name", but he knows what success is, having lifted league titles in three different countries.

Championship glory first came with South Melbourne and Brisbane Roar in Australia, then Japan's Yokohama F. Marinos, before defying sceptics to excel in Scotland. The no-nonsense Postecoglou also had a successful four years as Australia coach that in-

cluded winning the 2015 Asian Cup. Former Everton star Tim Cahill played for the Socceroos under Postecoglou and said his "leadership and beliefs are infectious". "The most important part was the belief he instilled in us to play a style of football that could test any team we came up against," said Cahill.

### Memories of dad

Postecoglou was born in the Greek capital Athens before the family emigrated to Australia by boat in 1970 when he was five, settling in Melbourne. His parents wanted to give their son a better life than the one they had. "There was a never-ending struggle there to establish ourselves," he told Sky Sports last year. "He (dad) was working day and night, my mum was working, we were at school, we

were saving money to buy a house. We shared a house with another family for a number of years." Postecoglou told The Scotsman newspaper his hard-working father had been hugely influential both in his life and football philosophy.

"The only time I ever got to see any joy in my dad was when we went to the football on a Sunday. So that did make an impression on me because I made a quick connection that football is something that makes him happy," he said. It was this bond that has driven Postecoglou to produce teams playing the type of attractive and attacking football that his dad enjoyed watching. "He's not with us now, he passed away a couple of years ago, but he's in my head," he said. "I know that and every time my team plays, I'll sometimes have an ugly 1-0

win and I know what he's saying. 'Don't celebrate because that was crap.'"

### Japan legacy

As a player Postecoglou was a defender for South Melbourne in the then National Soccer League between 1984 and 1993, winning two championship titles, the latter as captain. He won four caps for Australia before a knee injury prematurely ended his playing career. South Melbourne gave him his first coaching break in 1996, which he grabbed with both hands to win back-to-back league titles.

As his stature grew, he took over as coach of the Australian U20 team before a year in Greece with Panachaiki, ahead of a return home with Brisbane Roar. After leading Roar to the A-League title and

being named coach of the year, he was poached by Melbourne Victory, then the Socceroos in 2013. In 2018 he took over at Yokohama F Marinos in the J-League, where he finished 12th in his first season, and in the next campaign they claimed the title for the first time in 15 years.

Yokohama fans loved the team's swash-buckling attacking style and Postecoglou's commitment and passion. "People who watch Marinos now know what to expect in terms of our football, know that we won't change our approach, that we believe in something as a football club," he said before leaving for Celtic in 2021. "I think that was the most important thing for me." Postecoglou was determined to leave a legacy in Yokohama and his successor, compatriot Kevin Muscat, went on to win the J-League in 2022. — AFP

## Otaibi thanks Prime Minister, honors shooters



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, PAS Director General Yousuf Al-Baidan, President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Duajj Al-Otaibi, Information Minister Abdelrahman Al-Mutairi and President of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad take a group photo with other officials.

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations, Eng Duajj Khalaf Al-Otaibi, thanked HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad

Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his support as he honored those who were able to record remarkable success in Olympic and international. He said such support contributes largely to removing obstacles and raising the athletes' morale. Al-Otaibi lauded the role of the technical and ad-

ministrative departments and the high technical level of shooters with high hopes to qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympics. He thanked the information and culture minister, the state minister for youth affairs, and the public authority for sport for their continued support.



## Kuwait team set to participate in Special Olympics

KUWAIT: Director of Kuwait National Special Olympics Rihab Buresli said the Kuwait National Team is ready to participate in the 16th World Summer Special Olympics Games in Berlin - from June 12th until the 26th. Buresli said during a press conference at the Public Authority for Sport that the goal of the games (in which more than 7,000 athletes from 170 countries compete) is to integrate the disabled with their healthy peers in hopes of promoting the inclusion aspect and participation in various daily activities.

She said the participating athletes went through several programs, most notably medical check-ups, to make sure

they were fit to compete. She added that a special training program for each game was prepared, and it included training camps in and outside Kuwait for all games in order to prepare the teams and be ready. Buresli said the participation of Kuwait in the Special Olympics is the second after the games that were held in Abu Dhabi in 2019, during which they had outstanding results.

Meanwhile, PAS Deputy Director General for Competitive Sport Sector Bashar Abdallah said the authority is keen on removing obstacles that disabled sport faces, and this is at the instructions of the political leadership in the country. He said that the support and encouragement of the authority for the Kuwait Special Olympics is keen on removing obstacles that the disabled sport faces, and this is at the instructions of the political leadership in the country.

He said that the support and encouragement of the authority for the Kuwait Special Olympics to participate in the world games is within the strategy of the information and culture minister, state minister for youth affairs Abdelrahman Al-Mutairi. Abdallah pointed to the positive effect of

various sports in breaking the fear barrier in this group of athletes, explaining its importance in developing skills and improving them to represent the country abroad.

Chairwoman of Special Olympics Hanas Al-Zawawi said the intensive preparations by Kuwait's team of mentally disabled people lasted 4 months of training in order to sharpen their skills and have the best achievements during the games. She said Kuwait's team was formed in cooperation with schools, establishments, clubs, and concerned health clubs that are concerned with their affairs after passing contests and various training courses, adding that those efforts resulted in a team ready health-wise and sports-wise to participate. She said there will be 60 persons participating in the games, 23 of mental disability, 3 healthy persons in addition to 33 persons who include the administrative and technical delegation along with a media team from information ministry and KUNA and a medical team from the health ministry. Official spokeswoman for MENA region Mariam Theyab, who is disabled, appreciated the participation of her colleagues in a world games event that have many sports. — KUNA

## Football's future? City eye CL win for state-backed club

PARIS: Saturday's Champions League (CL) final between Manchester City and Inter Milan in Istanbul could mark a definitive turning point in European football. Victory for City would be the first for a state-backed outfit in Europe's elite club competition, after more than a decade of trying. The club that has just won a fifth Premier League title in six seasons has been transformed since the 2008 takeover by the Abu Dhabi United Group,

backed by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

They reached their first Champions League final in 2021, losing 1-0 to Chelsea. Beaten by Real Madrid in the semi-finals last year, City exacted revenge on the great aristocrats of European football in this season's semi-finals. Having added the FA Cup to their Premier League title, they are eyeing a treble in Istanbul, something City boss Pep Guardiola has called a "once in a lifetime" opportunity.

Meanwhile, the rest of Europe must wonder if the sport is headed for a period of City dominance. They topped this year's Deloitte Football Money League - a reference in measuring the financial might of European clubs - with revenue last season of 731 million euros (\$783m). That same ranking a decade ago had City seventh, and their rise has posed problems for the sport, with City being fined 60 million euros in 2014 for breach-

ing UEFA's Financial Fair Play regulations.

The club were banned for two years from UEFA competitions in February 2020 for "serious financial fair play breaches", but the sanction was later overturned by the Court of Arbitration for Sport. In February this year they were charged with 115 alleged rule breaches by the Premier League, relating to the period from 2009 to 2018. That case may not be resolved any time soon.

### Old elite left behind?

Yet if simply spending vast sums were all that mattered, Paris Saint-Germain would have won the Champions League already. PSG were bought by Qatar Sports Investments, a subsidiary of Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, in 2011. In 2017 they signed Neymar and Kylian Mbappe for the two biggest fees in football history, and

in 2020 they reached the Champions League final but lost to Bayern Munich. A year later they lured Lionel Messi after the Argentinian had to leave cash-strapped Barcelona. While City put their money into attracting Guardiola and building the perfect environment for him to thrive, PSG threw cash at signing superstars. That approach has not delivered the Champions League, but the sense is that they will eventually get there, and keeping Mbappe improves their chances.

PSG are the fifth-richest club in the world according to Deloitte's ranking. Qatari wealth has helped decimate Barcelona, who spent beyond their means trying to replace Neymar, creating debts that ultimately led to them losing Messi. PSG have also managed to keep Mbappe despite interest from Madrid, who are now set to rebuild as Karim Benzema departs. — AFP

## PGA Tour and LIV Golf merge to end golf's 'civil war'

MIAMI: The PGA Tour and DP World Tour announced on Tuesday that they have merged their commercial operations with the Saudi-backed LIV Golf and ended all litigation, bringing to a close the sport's two-year rift. The US-based PGA Tour said they had "signed an agreement that combines PIF's (Saudi Public Investment Fund's) golf-related commercial businesses and rights (including LIV Golf) with the commercial businesses and rights of the PGA TOUR and DP World Tour into a new, collectively owned, for-profit entity".

LIV Golf was launched in October 2021 and lured top PGA Tour talent with record \$25 million purses and money guarantees. The competition is currently in its second season. The PGA Tour responded to the emergence of a rival tour by banning LIV players while the DP World Tour has handed out heavy fines to its players.

The rift had led to a series of lawsuits and caused acrimony between players. "After two years of disruption and distraction, this is a historic day for the game we all know and love," said PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan. "This transformational partnership recognizes the immeasurable strength of the PGA Tour's history, legacy and pro-competitive model and combines with it the DP World Tour and LIV - including the team golf concept - to create an organization that will benefit golf's players, commercial and charitable partners and fans," he added.

The name of the new merged entity and the precise structure of the tours has yet to be announced but the PGA Tour said that the parties had agreed to "establish a fair and objective process for any players who desire to re-apply for membership with the PGA Tour or the DP World Tour following the completion of the 2023 season". While both the PGA Tour and the DP World Tour issued statements, there was no separate statement from LIV but the PGA Tour included comments from PIF governor Yasir Al-Rumayyan.

"Today is a very exciting day for this special game and the people it touches around the world," said Al-Rumayyan. "We are proud to partner with the PGA TOUR to leverage PIF's unparalleled success and track record of unlocking value and bringing innovation and global best practices to business and sectors worldwide. "There is no question that the LIV model has been positively transformative for golf. We believe there are opportunities for the game to evolve while also maintaining its storied history and tradition. This partnership represents the best opportunity to extend and increase the impact of golf for all," he said. — AFP

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

#### Hospitals

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

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

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
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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
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

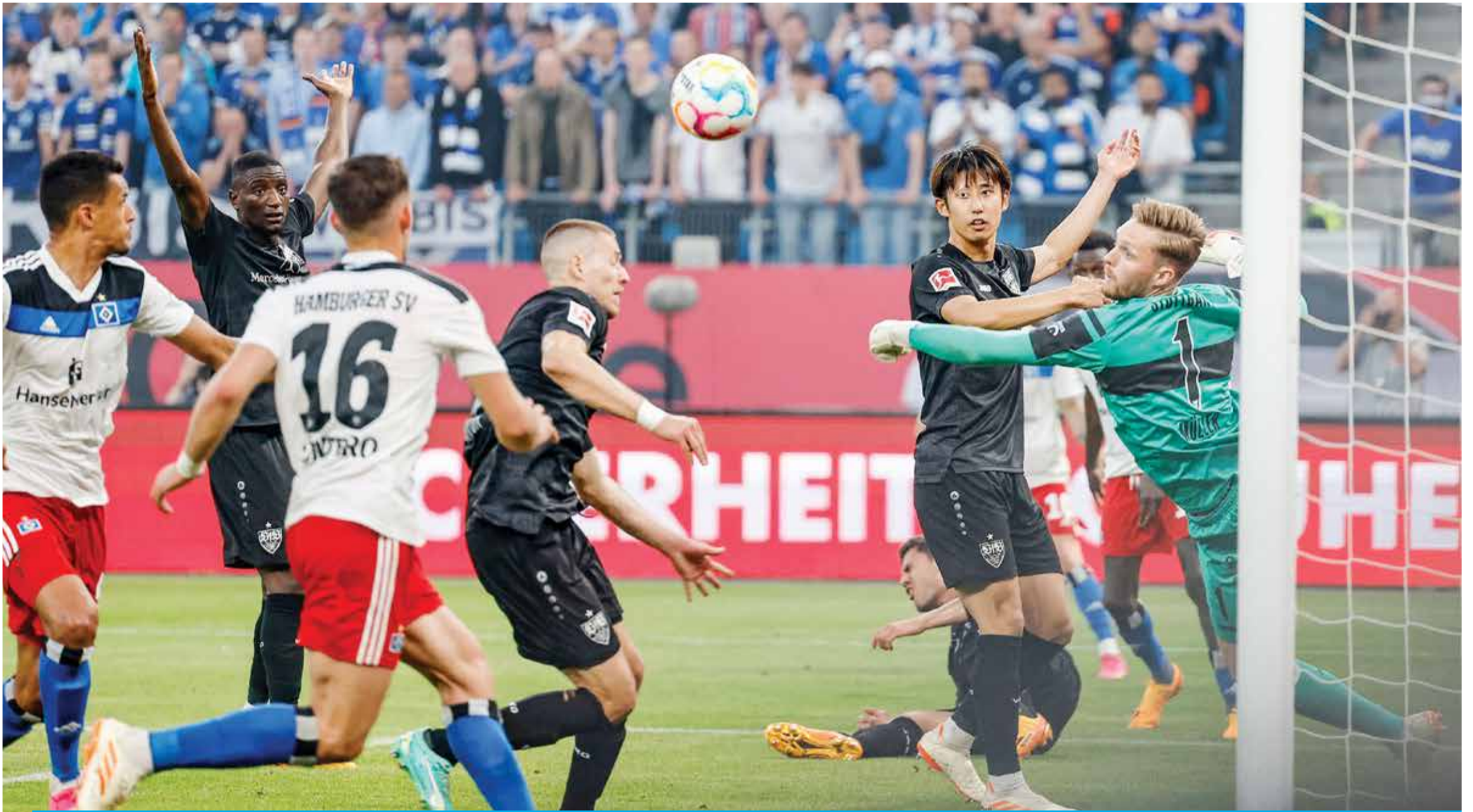
### Change of Name

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**



## Stuttgart secure Bundesliga status

### Stuttgart overpower Hamburg in relegation playoff



HAMBURG: Stuttgart's German goalkeeper Florian Mueller (right) eyes the ball during the German Bundesliga relegation second-leg football match Hamburg SV v VfB Stuttgart in Hamburg on June 5, 2023. — AFP

**BERLIN:** Stuttgart secured their Bundesliga status with a 3-1 victory at Hamburg (6-1 aggregate) in Monday's relegation playoff return leg, ensuring another season in the second division for the fallen giants. Two second-half goals from French midfielder Enzo Millot and an injury time strike from DR Congo's Silas overturned a 1-0 halftime deficit, ensuring the 16th-placed Stuttgart remain in the top division next season.

The loss means Hamburg, who once celebrated the longest run in the top division with a clock marking every second the former Champions League winners had not been relegated, will now play a sixth season in the Bundesliga 2. Stuttgart manager Sebastian Hoeness, who has lost just one of 10 league matches since taking over in early April, lauded his team's "ability to handle pressure". "Compliments to the team" Hoeness said of securing first division football next season "it sure didn't look like that eight or nine weeks ago."

His Hamburg counterpart Tim Walter, who coached Stuttgart for six months in 2019 before being sacked, lamented how close but how far his side was. "We played a great season, 20 wins, but we were missing just one point. "We're building something unbelievable here, I'm incredibly proud of my team, unfortunately the first division side were a little bit better." Thrashed 3-0 in Thursday's first leg,

Hamburg gave their suffering supporters hope early. A stunning long-range strike from Sonny Kittel just seven minutes in gave the home side the lead in front of an electric 57,000-strong home crowd. Hamburg built and pushed in the hope of a second and breathed a sigh of relief after 16 minutes when a superb Serhou Guirassy backheeled goal was chalked off for offside. Stuttgart struck early after half-time, the unmarked Millot firing in from close range. Millot scored another midway through the second stanza, pouncing on a huge goalkeeping error from Daniel Heuer Fernandes, who miscued a punt on the edge of his box, allowing the Frenchman to tap in. Hamburg pushed to turn the tie but

Stuttgart scored again deep into injury time, attacker Silas adding a third to seal his side's place in next year's top division.

Hamburg, with six league titles and a European Cup victory 40 years ago, will play second division football for another season. Under German football's playoff system, the 16th-placed team in the top division faces the third-placed team in the second division. Since their relegation, Hamburg have finished fourth three times and third twice, losing last year's relegation playoff against Hertha Berlin. Since the playoff system was re-instituted in the 2008-09 season, the second division team has won the playoff only on three of 15 occasions. — AFP

## West Ham eye history in Europa Conference League final

**LONDON:** West Ham defender Thilo Kehrer has urged his team to make history by winning their first major trophy for 43 years when they face Fiorentina in the Europa Conference League final on Wednesday. The Hammers haven't lifted a significant piece of silverware since Trevor Brooking's header clinched a shock win against Arsenal in the 1980 FA Cup final. In their first major European final since 1976, when they lost to Anderlecht in the Cup Winners' Cup, West Ham are on the brink of finally ending their trophy drought.

West Ham's most recent final was a painful penalty shoot-out defeat against a Liverpool side inspired by Steven Gerrard's masterclass in the 2006 FA Cup. But David Moyes' men arrive in Prague as firm favorites to win the Europa Conference League against a Fiorentina team that finished eighth in Serie A. Although West Ham came a disappointing 14th in the Premier League this term, but they will never get a better chance to win the fifth major trophy in their history.

Although West Ham dub themselves "The Academy" in a proud reference to their record of developing stars including Bobby Moore, Geoff Hurst, Rio Ferdinand and Frank Lampard, the club have rarely parlayed those talents into success. Their sole triumph in Europe came in the 1965 Cup Winners' Cup when Moore and Hurst were among the side that beat 1860 Munich in the final. That was the club's golden era as Moore, Hurst and Martin Peters, another homegrown West Ham product, played key roles in England's World Cup final victory against West Germany a year later.

Kehrer knows Moyes' team have a chance to make their own history against Fiorentina. "I said at the beginning of the season without knowing how it would go, bringing a title to West Ham is a big goal," the German said. "Making history is being in the final. Now our focus and vision is completing the goal. "You can feel the excitement of everybody around the club. For us players it's great to be in



West Ham United's German defender Thilo Kehrer

that place. "We have the squad and quality to do it, so we're very confident."

Last season, West Ham lost to eventual winners Eintracht Frankfurt in the Europa League semi-finals. They have made amends by reaching the final of a competition much-maligned in some quarters, but never again among West Ham supporters. While West Ham are expected to bring home the silverware, there is extra pressure on them amid speculation about Moyes' future. Reports have circulated this week that Moyes could be sacked if they don't win the final after a troubled domestic campaign featuring poor performances from several of his expensive new signings.

"To be in a cup final is special, certainly for West Ham because it's been a while since we've been there," Moyes said. "The only focus I've got is to win the game. I'm not thinking any further ahead than that." Declan Rice has been one of the few West Ham players to shine and the England midfielder — linked with Arsenal, Manchester City and Bayern Munich — could be playing his last game after Moyes admitted he is likely to leave in the close-season.

Adding to the tension around West Ham is the potential for trouble on the streets of Prague. Despite having a ticket allocation of only 6,000, around 20,000 West Ham fans are expected to make the trip to the Czech capital. There will be a huge police presence after ugly clashes between fans before and after West Ham's semi-final second leg win at AZ Alkmaar. But Kehrer is confident the fans will provide an uplifting presence as West Ham set their sights on a historic night. "We feel the support of every one of our fans. We are taking that energy with us to Prague," he said. — AFP

## Saudi Al-Ittihad, Benzema ink deal

**RIYADH:** Real Madrid's Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema has signed for Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad for three years starting next season, a source in the Jeddah-based club told AFP on Tuesday. The announcement comes days after Real Madrid announced that the 35-year-old was leaving the club after 14 seasons, the day after coach Carlo Ancelotti had said there was "no doubt" Benzema's future lay in the Spanish capital. "Benzema has signed a contract for his transfer to Al-Ittihad for a three-year period starting next season," the Saudi club source said.

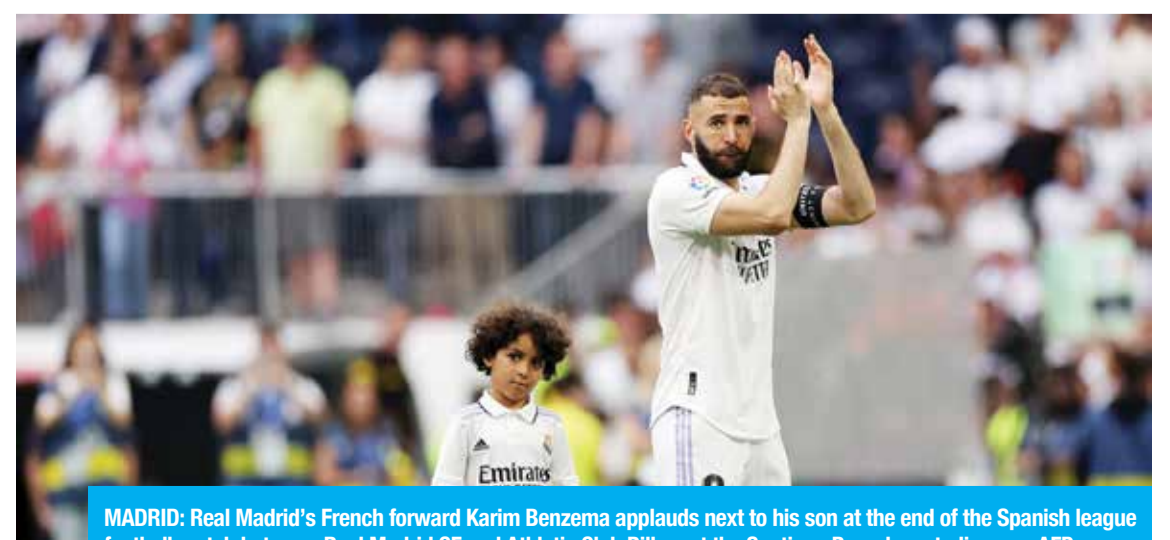
If the move is confirmed, Benzema will join his former Real Madrid teammate Cristiano Ronaldo in the Gulf kingdom after the five-time world player of the year moved to Al Nassr from Manchester United following last year's World Cup. Lionel Messi, who is leaving Paris Saint-Germain after two seasons, has also been linked with a move to Saudi Arabia.

Senior officials from another Saudi Arabian club, Al Hilal, have flown to France to try and seal a deal for Messi after the 35-year-old Argentinian played his last game for PSG at the weekend, two sources with knowledge of the matter told AFP on Sunday.

The Saudi delegation plans to meet Messi's father and agent, Jorge, with the aiming of completing the signing as soon as possible. Benzema joined Madrid in 2009 from Ligue 1 side Lyon. He made 648 appearances for Madrid and is second on Real's all-time goalscoring list with 354 - only Ronaldo has more. He has lifted five Champions League, four La Liga titles and three Copas del Rey with Madrid.

But after a stellar 2021-22 season when he led Real to Champions League glory and was rewarded with the Ballon d'Or, he was troubled by injuries in the just-completed season and had to miss France's World Cup campaign in Qatar last year with a thigh problem. Saudi Arabia has drawn up a list of "more than 10" players who have won either the Champions League or the World Cup that it wants to lure to its league, a source close to the negotiations has told AFP.

The list includes Real Madrid and Croatia midfielder Luka Modric, Tottenham goalkeeper Hugo Lloris and his France teammate N'Golo Kante. All are at the tail-end of their careers. The world's biggest oil producer has ambitions to host the World Cup in 2030 or 2034 and is betting on sport to help revamp its austere image, which has earned accusations from rights groups that it is "sportswashing". Real are holding a ceremony on Tuesday to say goodbye to Benzema. — AFP



MADRID: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema applauds next to his son at the end of the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Athletic Club Bilbao at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. — AFP