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## KUWAIT EYES REFORMS

Amir congratulates election winners, urges them to realize people's aspirations

Amir accepts Cabinet resignation • New Assembly to meet on June 20

### 1st Constituency winners



### 2nd Constituency winners



### 3rd Constituency winners



### 4th Constituency winners



### 5th Constituency winners



## Sheikh Jarrah named new deputy foreign minister

KUWAIT: Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah has been appointed as Kuwait's new Deputy Foreign Minister, succeeding Mansour Al-Otaibi to the post. Sheikh Jarrah most recently served as an ambassador at the Foreign Ministry Diwan since May 20, and was previously First Secretary at Kuwait's delegation to the United Nations.



Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis voted back an overwhelming majority of the 50 members of the court-nullified 2022 National Assembly, according to official results announced early Wednesday, hoping the new Assembly will cooperate with the government to take the country out of non-stop crises.

HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday cables to the winning candidates, congratulating them on earning the Kuwaiti people's trust. HH the Amir called on the winners of the 2023 elections to carry the responsibility of representing the people and diligently realize their aspiration for a better future for Kuwait. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also sent cables on Wednesday congratulating the candidates, wishing the future MPs luck in their upcoming endeavor to represent the people of Kuwait. HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent congratulatory cables to the winners.

The government of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf submitted its resignation as required by the constitution and HH the Amir accepted it, asking the Cabinet to continue as a caretaker government. Before its resignation, the government approved an Amiri decree calling on the new National Assembly to hold its inaugural session on June 20, as the Kuwaiti constitution requires the Assembly to meet within two weeks of announcing the results. HH the Amir is expected to ask HH Sheikh Ahmad to form a new Cabinet, or appoint a

new figure to lead the new government.

As many as 38 members of the scrapped Assembly were re-elected, three did not contest and nine lost their seats, in a massive popular mandate to the 2022 Assembly which was annulled by the constitutional court in March. Nationalists scored big and increased their numbers. Another major result was the election of former three-time Assembly speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, who stormed back in style, scoring first position in the second constituency.

Ghanem, who was speaker between 2013 and 2022, opted not to contest the Sept 2022 elections. "My priorities in the next Assembly are achieving reforms, development, stability and cooperation," Ghanem told jubilant supporters who carried him aloft amid loud slogans. The new National Assembly is now controlled in a massive way by those who are calling themselves "reformists", with around 40 seats in the 50-member house.

"With the will of the nation, we have come back stronger than before. We will continue with political reforms and improve the standard of living of citizens," MP Osama Al-Zaid said after he was declared a winner. "Now, the reformist majority is bigger than it was in 2022 ... the Kuwaiti people have elected the road to reforms," said MP Adel Al-Damkhi, advising the prime minister to select his Cabinet based on the outcome of the election.

Only 12 MPs were changed in the new Assembly compared to the 2022 house. The 12 MPs who replaced them include Ghanem and former MP Mohammed Hayef and 10 new faces, mostly in the second and fourth constituencies. The number of women members were

reduced to just one, Jenan Bushehri, from two in September, after Alia Al-Khaled lost. Bushehri said she expected the Assembly "to seek stability and move ahead on outstanding issues, whether political or economic".

The main losers include Saleh Ashour, Khalil Al-Saleh, Thamer Al-Suwait, Marzouq Al-Khalifa and Saifi Al-Saifi. They also included former MP Obaid Al-Wasmi, in addition to Faisal Al-Kandari. Main winners among newcomers include Dawood Marafie, Fahad Al-Masoud and Jarrah Al-Fouzan. They also include Bader Al-Shemmari, Meteb Al-Enezi, Bader Al-Enezi and Hamad Al-Alyan. Former three-time speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun won a seat, but came in second position in the third constituency.

"This election has demonstrated the ability of Kuwaiti voters to choose, and even punish those (politicians) deemed working against their interests or national interests," Kuwaiti political analyst Abdullah Al-Shayehi wrote on Twitter. Former minister and political analyst Saad Al-Ajmi said the election has seen the victory of an overwhelming majority of the so-called opposition.

Now, this opposition is no longer opposing the government and its head HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf, but has expressed readiness to cooperate with the next government to speed up reforms and projects. MP Hamdan Al-Azmi said the prime minister must read the outcome of the elections while forming his government. "The Kuwaiti people have issued its verdict and voted nationalist MPs to the Assembly," said MP Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf. "We hope they will be able to achieve the aspirations of the people" he said.





# Profiles of election winners



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti candidate and former parliament speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem celebrates with his supporters following the announcement of his victory in legislative elections in Kuwait City on June 7, 2023. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Candidate Jenan Bushehri celebrates with supporters following the announcement of her victory in the parliamentary elections.

## First constituency:

### 1- Abdullah Al-Mudhaf:

Born in 1983. Holds Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the College of Administrative Sciences at the Gulf University for Science and Technology in Kuwait. Worked in the banking and investment sectors. Member of the annulled 2022 Assembly.

### 2- Osama Al-Zaid:

Worked in the petrochemical sector. Member of the annulled 2022 Assembly.

### 3- Ahmad Lari:

Born in 1955. Holds Bachelor's degree in Statistics. Member of the Municipal Council (1993 - 1995 - 1999). Member of the National Assembly (2006 - 2008 - 2013 supplementary - annulled 2022).

### 4- Khaled Al-Ameera:

Holds a bachelor's degree in Security Sciences. Worked as an officer in the Ministry of Interior. Member of the 2022 annulled National Assembly.

### 5- Hassan Jowhar:

Born in 1960. PhD in Political Science. Professor of Political Science at Kuwait University. Member of the National Assembly (1996 - 1999 - 2003 - 2006 - 2008 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

### 6- Dawood Marafie:

Born in 1982. Master's in Business Administration. Pioneer in the business sector.

### 7- Essa Al-Kandari:

Born in 1963. Former minister. Diploma from the Commercial Institute, specializing in banking. Member of the National Assembly (2013 - 2016 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

### 8- Hamad Al-Medlej:

Born in 1984. Holds a Bachelor's degree in Military Sciences. Worked as an officer in the Ministry of Defense. Member of the Municipal Council (2010 - 2013) - Member of the 2022 annulled National Assembly.

### 9- Osama Al-Shaheen:

Masters in Law. Member of the National Assembly (annulled 2012 - 2016 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

### 10- Adel Al-Damkhi:

Born in 1965. PhD in Islamic Sharia. Member of the National Assembly (annulled 2012 - 2016 - annulled 2022).

## Second constituency:

### 1- Marzouq Al-Ghanem:

Born in 1968. Holds a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering. Member of the National Assembly (2006 - 2008 - 2009 - annulled 2012 - 2013 - 2016). Held the position of Speaker of the National Assembly (2013 - 2016 - 2020). Former Chairman of Kuwait Sports Club. Member of the Society of Engineers and the International Association of Mechanical Engineers.

### 2- Shuaib Shaaban:

Born in 1984. Holds a Bachelor's degree in Police Sciences from Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences. An officer in the Ministry of Interior. Member of the National Assembly (2022 annulled).

### 3- Abdullah Al-Anbaei:

Born in 1983. Bachelor's degree from Kuwait University. Worked in the private sector. Member of the National Assembly (2022 annulled).

### 4- Falah Al-Hajeri:

Director of the Attarjah Center for Memorizing the Holy Quran. Member of the National Assembly (annulled 2022).

### 5- Mohammad Al-Mutair:

Born in 1969. Holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. Member of the National Assembly (2003 - 2006 - 2008 - 2016 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

### 6- Abdulwahab Al-Essa:

Born in 1988. Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Kuwait University. Worked in media and commerce. Member of the Kuwait Journalists Association. Member of the National Assembly (annulled 2022).



Candidate Muhaf Al-Mudhaf greets his supporters as news of his victory in the parliamentary elections was announced.

### 7- Bader Al-Enezi:

Born in 1979. Holds a Bachelor's degree in Media from Kuwait University. An employee at the Public Authority for Communications. Chairman of the Board of Directors' Union (2009 - 2011).

### 8- Fahad Al-Masoud:

Born in 1961. Holds a Master's degree in Computer Engineering. Is a computer engineer at Kuwait Airways.

### 9- Hamad Al-Matar:

Born in 1970. Holds a PhD in Industrial Chemistry. Member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Member of the National Assembly (annulled 2012 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

### 10- Bader Al-Mulla:

Born in 1971. Holds a Doctorate in law. A lawyer and member of the teaching staff at the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences. Member of the National Assembly (2016 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

## Third constituency:

### 1- Muhaf Al-Mudhaf:

Born in 1971. Diploma in Mechanical Engineering. Member of the teaching staff at the Industrial Institute in the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. Member of the National Assembly (2020 - annulled 2022).



Candidate Abdullah Al-Mudhaf hugs one of his supporters as election results were announced early Wednesday morning.

### 2- Ahmad Al-Saadoun:

Born in 1934. Former Speaker of the National Assembly. Member of the National Assembly (1975 - 1981 - 1985 - 1992 - 1996 - 1999 - 2003 - 2006 - 2008 - 2009 - annulled 2012 and 2022) - Assistant Undersecretary for Telegraph and Telephone Affairs at the Ministry of Communications. President of Kuwait Football Association from 1968 to 1976.

### 3- Abdulkarim Al-Kandari:

Born in 1981. PhD in business and commercial law. Works as a lawyer and professor at the Faculty of Law at Kuwait University. Member of the National Assembly (2013 - 2016 - 2020 and annulled 2022).

### 4- Muhannad Al-Sayer:

Born in 1981. Masters in Private Law. Member of the National Assembly (2020 - annulled 2022).

### 5- Abdulaziz Al-Saqaabi:

Born in 1986. Bachelor of Architecture from the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University 2008. Master of Architecture from University of Cincinnati. Member of the National Assembly (2020 - annulled 2022).

### 6- Jenan Bushehri:

Born in 1973. Bachelor of Chemical Engineering from Kuwait University. Master of Chemical Engineering from Kuwait University. Member of the annulled 2022 National Assembly.

### 7- Hamad Al-Obaid:

Born in 1982. Holds a Bachelor's degree in Comparative Jurisprudence and Fundamentals of Jurisprudence from Kuwait University. Holds a Master's degree in Islamic economics from Cairo University. Member of the annulled 2022 National Assembly.

### 8- Fares Al-Otaibi:

Born in 1974. Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. General Controller in Kuwait Municipality. Member of the National Assembly (2013 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

### 9- Hamad Al-Alyan:

Born in 1982. Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Kuwait University. Worked in the banking sector.

### 10- Jarrah Al-Fouzan:

Born in 1989. Bachelor's law degree. General Manager of Cyber Systems.

## Fourth constituency:

### 1- Bader Al-Shemmari:

Born in 1973. Retired Major General from the Ministry of Interior. Former Director of Jahra Immigration.

### 2- Mubarak Al-Tasha:

Holds PhD in private law compared to Islamic law. Legal advisor of the Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf. Teacher of personal status law at Kuwait University. Teacher of civil law at the Commercial Institute. Member of the annulled 2022 National Assembly.

### 3- Meteb Al-Thaydi:

Born in 1968. Holds a Bachelor's degree in Educa-

tion. Former Vice President of the Educational Association at the College of Basic Education. Works as a teacher in the Ministry of Education.

### 4- Mohammad Al-Ruqaib:

Born in 1981. He holds a Bachelor's degree in accounting. Former executive in Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB). Former member of the Municipal Council.

### 5 - Mohammad Hayef:

Born in 1964. Holds a BA in Islamic Studies. Imam and preacher at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. Member of the National Assembly (2008 - 2009 - 2012 - 2016 - annulled 2022).

### 6- Mubarak Al-Hajraf:

Born in 1970. Holds a Master's degree in law and a diploma in private law. Member of the National Assembly (2016 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

### 7- Abdullah Fahhad:

Born in 1976. Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Kuwait University. Member of the Municipal Council (2009). Member of the National Assembly (2016 - annulled 2022).

### 8- Saad Khanfour:

Born in 1965. Holds a high school diploma. Worked in the Ministry of Interior. Member of the National Assembly (2008 - 2009 - annulled 2012 - 2013 - 2016 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

### 9 - Fayez Al-Jamhour:

Born in 1971. Holds a Bachelor's degree in Sharia. Former executive at the Ministry of Public Works. Businessman. Former MP in the 2020 National Assembly.

### 10- Shuaib Al-Muwaizri:

Born in 1959. Holds a diploma in police sciences. A former colonel in the Ministry of Interior. Former minister. Member of the National Assembly (2009 - annulled 2012 - 2016 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

## Fifth constituency:

### 1- Saud Al-Asfour:

Master's in Mechanical Engineering from the United States. Worked in the field of media and journalism. Member of the National Assembly (annulled 2022).

### 2- Hamdan Al-Azmi:

Born in 1968. Master's in Civil Law. Attorney and legal researcher at the Ministry of Interior. Member of the National Assembly (2013 - 2016 - 2020 and annulled 2022).

### 3- Khaled Al-Otaibi:

Born in 1966. Bachelor's degree in Police Sciences. Member of the National Assembly (2016 - 2020 - annulled 2022).

### 4- Hani Shams:

Born in 1970. Bachelor's degree in Commerce, majoring in accounting from Kuwait University. Member of Parliament (annulled 2022).

### 5- Marzouq Al-Hubaini:

Born in 1952. Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. Worked as Acting Director of Health Affairs in Kuwait Municipality. Member of the National Assembly (1996 - 1999 - 2003 - 2006 - 2008 - annulled 2022) and Member of the National Council of 1990.

### 6- Fahad Al-Azmi: Ex-military.

### 7- Abdulhadi Al-Ajmi:

Born in 1974. Holds a PhD in Islamic History. Professor of History and Civilization at the College of Arts at Kuwait University.

### 8- Mohammad Al-Mahan:

Holds a Diploma in IT from Cambridge, the United Kingdom. Bachelor's degree in Media from October 6 University, Egypt. Masters from Cairo University. Holds a PhD. Member of the National Assembly (annulled 2022).

### 9- Majid Al-Mutairi:

Born in 1972. Bachelors in Business Administration. Worked for the Kuwait Oil Company. Member of the National Assembly (2016 and annulled 2022).

### 10- Mohammad Al-Huwailah:

Born in 1971. PhD in Administration and Master's in Political Science. Member of the teaching staff at the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences and the Arab Open University. Member of the National Assembly (2008 - 2009 - 2013 - 2016 - 2020 and annulled 2022).



## Local

# Activist calls on officials, media to protect, raise awareness of animal rights

## Respect of animal rights reflects compassion and justice in society

By Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** Animal welfare is a crucial aspect of a just and compassionate society. It is our duty to ensure that animals are not subjected to any form of cruelty or exploitation. Animal rights refers to the belief that animals have inherent rights, just like humans do, and that those rights should be protected. An example of the main arguments for animal rights is that animals are capable of feeling pain and suffering, just like humans.

Therefore, it is our moral obligation to treat animals with compassion and not cause them unnecessary harm. This includes not only physical harm but also psychological harm, besides cruel actions such as poisoning stray animals, as it has become evident in Kuwait. Believing that just because they are not human does not mean that animals' lives are any less valuable.

Many organizations and individuals are working in Kuwait to raise awareness about this issue, such as Elika Mansouri, founder and volunteer of iCare Kuwait, a non-profit that rescues animals and calls for their rights. Kuwait Times spoke to Mansouri, who speaks for those who cannot do it for themselves.

### Key challenges

Treating animals ethically is an issue that requires our attention and action. Respect, kindness, and compassion should be core values; thus, people must ensure that animals are not subjected to any form of cruelty, exploitation or abuse, because taking animals' rights into consideration is not just about protecting animals — it is also a reflection of our values as a society. To reach this goal, Mansouri told Kuwait Times: "We need officials to create more strict laws against animal abuse in Kuwait and actually imple-



Elika Mansouri poses with a dog.

ment and reinforce them. We also need them to work closely with rescue groups and empower us to be the voice for the voiceless."

The media plays a major role in individuals' and communities' awareness to work together and promote greater understanding of animal rights issues in Kuwait. Mansouri suggested a few examples of ways to protect animal rights, focusing mainly on the media. "We need news channels and media platforms to constantly push for animal rights and expose the most recent incidents on their platform. The more the topic is talked, about the more serious concern it becomes when it comes to animal rights issues," she said.

Thus, the media has a vital role to play in raising awareness about animal rights. By highlighting animal rights, the media can help inspire widespread changes that are essential for animal welfare. Animal protection organizations will have more awareness, and consumers will make better choices, which will



**KUWAIT:** Elika Mansouri takes care of stray dogs on a beach. Mansouri is the founder and volunteer of iCare Kuwait, a non-profit that rescues animals and calls for their rights.

lead to better treatment of animals. Media platforms should continue to focus on spreading awareness about animal rights to initiate change and contribute to animal rights in Kuwait.

### Ethical alternatives

According to Mansouri, providing shelter and putting an end to poisoning stray animals are two examples of ethical treatment towards animals. "Once stray animals are treated humanely and eth-



Elika Mansouri plays with two dogs as others play in the grass behind her.

ically by officials, such as by spaying/neutering and vaccination, the community becomes more accepting and comfortable with regards to stray animals. The population control strategies are not clear and we have only seen poisoning in public. We have also seen unknown individuals taking puppies and dogs in traps to unknown destinations. There is no recognized public shelter for dogs in Kuwait, so the question remains: Where are they being taken to?" she asked.

## Kuwait cheapest city for expat workers in Gulf

By Ahmad Jabr

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait City is the cheapest for expatriate employees out of eight Gulf cities ranked in Mercer's Cost of Living City Ranking 2023. Kuwait City maintained its same ranking of 131 out of 227 cities on the list. Two of the most expensive cities in the Middle East are in the United Arab Emirates, namely Dubai (18) and Abu Dhabi (43), both of which have seen fairly significant increases in their rankings since last year. Saudi cities such as Riyadh (85) and Jeddah (101) have also jumped up the global list, by 18 and 10 spots respectively. Manama (98), Doha (126) and Muscat (130) round up the GCC cities on the list.

Hong Kong once again tops the ranking, followed by Singapore, which jumped up six positions since last year, pushing Zurich to the third spot. The least expensive locations in the ranking include Havana, which dropped 83 spots, due in part to strong currency devaluations mid last-year, and two cities in Pakistan — Karachi and Islamabad. Mercer's Cost of Living City Ranking measures the comparative cost of more than 200 items in each location, including housing, transportation, food, clothing, household goods and entertainment.

Hong Kong and Singapore are the only two Asian cities out of 10 of the most expensive cities for international assignees to live in in 2023, compared to four last year. The global top ten includes five Euro-



pean cities and four of those are in Switzerland, with the fifth being Copenhagen. Other most expensive cities in the region include London, Vienna, Amsterdam, Prague (up 27 spots in the global ranking since last year) and Helsinki.

New York City (number six in the global ranking) continues to be the most expensive city in North America, followed by Los Angeles (11) and San Francisco (14). All US cities in the ranking have gone up since last year, with the largest changes being for Detroit (+27 positions), Houston and Cleveland

(both +24 positions).

Mercer says that the key factors that have shaped the world's economy in 2022 will continue to exert an influence into 2023. "More than a year after the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine crisis and the emergence of more contagious COVID-19 variants, many economies are still absorbing the shocks produced by these events," it noted. High inflation and market fluctuations impact the cost of living across the world, "impacting our purchasing power and standard of living," it added.

## Kuwait elected to senior post for WTO regional commission

**THE DEAD SEA:** The Regional Commission for the Middle East of the UN World Trade Organization (WTO) on Wednesday elected the State of Kuwait Second Deputy of the commission chair. Kuwait also won membership in the "designation documents commission" at the organization for the first time since founding of the WTO in 1975. This came during the 49th meeting of the commission and the Medical and Wellness Tourism Conference, held with participation of a Kuwaiti delegation headed by the Assistant Undersecretary for Tourism at the Ministry of Information Saud Al-Khaldi, representatives of 13 Arab states

and international and Arab organizations.

In remarks to KUNA, Khaldi said electing Kuwait to serve in this ranking post signaled its high-esteem status within the WTO, noting that Kuwait's development strategy New Kuwait 2035 aims at boosting its status regionally and internationally in diverse sectors, including tourism. He indicated the national approach in the sector to promote Kuwait as a shopping and nutrition hub, noting that tourism is an axis in the government manifesto (2022-2026).

The 49th meeting of the WTO regional commission began earlier today, with attendance of the organization's secretary general, Zurab Pololikashvili, Jordan's Minister of Tourism Makram Al-Qaisi and Arab peers. Pololikashvili said the meeting was held to ponder plans for facing challenges in the tourism sector in the region. Meanwhile, Ahmad Issa, the head of the regional commission and Egypt's Tourism Minister, said the meeting bears special significance as it is being held following dire ramifications of the coronavirus crisis. — KUNA



Saud Al-Khaldi

## Kuwaiti, German officials discuss trade relations

**BERLIN:** Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), praised Wednesday, the Kuwaiti-German economic cooperation in addition to areas of economic cooperation between Germany and the Arab countries. This came during the 26th session of the Arab-German Economic Forum, organized by the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Berlin, with the participation of more than 300 decision makers, businessmen and representatives of Arab and German institutions and companies. In a statement to KUNA, Chamber Board Member Ahmed Al-Qudheibi said that the forum constitutes a pioneering platform in terms of developing trade relations between Germany, Kuwait and

other Arab countries, through the forum's discussion of economic cooperation areas between Germany and Arab countries.

Kuwait's delegation participated in workshops aimed at achieving economic growth between the two sides and shedding light on ways to develop economic relations between the Arab and German sides in the field of industrialization, planning and establishing smart cities, investing in capital, logistics, transportation, infrastructure and the importance of vocational training, Al-Qudheibi said.

President of the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Peter Ramsauer, praised in his speech the transformations and changes the Arab world is witnessing which have caused the prosperity of many Arab countries. The energy fields come at the top of the agenda of the Arab-German meetings, Ramsauer said, stressing "European energy supplies depend more than ever on the Arab countries."

Kuwait Ambassador to Germany Najeeb Al-Badr praised the Kuwaiti-German economic relations, stressing the existence of a successful economic



**BERLIN:** Kuwaiti officials who represented Kuwait at the 26th session of the Arab-German Economic Forum pose for a photo. — KUNA

partnership between the two countries, adding that during the forum, a number of issues related to ways to promote trade and industrial development and

to improve and increase cooperation and trade exchange between Arab countries and Germany were discussed. — KUNA

## GCC, Jordanian travelers can soon visit UK for £10 ETA

**KUWAIT:** Nationals from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Jordan will soon only be required to pay £10 to apply for an ETA, which will allow them to visit the UK multiple times over a two-year period, the UK government announced. This is compared to Gulf nationals currently paying £30 per visit to the UK under the current Electronic Visa Wavier (EVW) scheme and Jordanian nationals £100 for a visit visa. The scheme is set to launch for Qatari nationals in October 2023, and for the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council states and Jordan in February 2024 ahead of a worldwide expansion throughout 2024.

The move to the ETA scheme means that the visa requirement will be removed for nationals from GCC states and Jordan, bringing the requirements for them to visit the UK in line with other visitors, such as those from the US and Australia. The application process for an ETA will be simple and fast to complete, with the process being entirely digital via a mobile phone app. To apply, individuals will need to provide biographic and biometric details such as a digital photograph and answer a set of suitability questions.

Earlier this year, the UK government announced plans to introduce a new ETA scheme as part of a digitization of the UK border by 2025 to further enhance border security and the customer experience. An ETA is a digital permission to travel for those visiting or transiting through the UK who do not need a visa for short stays, or who do not currently hold another UK visa.

Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick said: "Visitors from the Gulf states and Jordan make a huge contribution to the UK's tourism industry and the new ETA scheme will make it easier and cheaper for them to travel to the UK. The cost of an ETA will be one of the best value in the world compared to similar international schemes. This small additional cost to visitors will enable us to bolster the security of the UK border and keep our communities safe."

Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia Lord Ahmad said: "I'm delighted that our partners across the Gulf and Jordan will be the first to benefit from the UK's new Electronic Travel Authorization scheme. This scheme is further proof of the strong partnership between the UK and countries across the region. By cutting costs and visa requirements, the ETA scheme will ensure visitors from the Gulf states and Jordan can enjoy travelling with ease to the UK, boosting business and tourism links between our countries."



# Humanitarian efforts paint positive picture of Kuwait

## KRCS staff receive awards on sidelines of 47th ARCO meeting



DOHA: Director of the Department of Youth, Volunteers and Legal Affairs at Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Musaid Al-Enezi (center right) receives the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq medal. — KUNA photos

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Six-day Eid holiday for public sector

**KUWAIT:** The Civil Service Commission announced on Wednesday that the Eid Al-Adha holiday in the public sector will start on Arafat Day on Tuesday, June 27, 2023 and end on Sunday, July 2, 2023 as work resumes on Monday, July 3, 2023.

#### 279 voters needed medical attention

**KUWAIT:** The health ministry said it dealt with 279 medical cases while voters were casting their votes for the National Assembly on Tuesday at 123 field clinics. It said that 12 cases were transferred to hospitals, while 267 cases suffering from hypoglycemia, drowsiness, hypertension and shortness of breath were treated at field clinics. Health Minister Ahmad Al-Awadhi thanked the technical and administrative medical teams for their role in securing the health and safety of voters. — KUNA

#### KD 55.8m collected in Ramadan

**KUWAIT:** Informed sources at social affairs ministry said the total amount from the 20th projects to collect donations during the month of Ramadan was KD 55.8 million. Ministry officials reviewed the reports of NGOs to ensure the data was accurate, then matched it with bank statements. A report of each entity was made about the observations resulting from the review. "Every entity that participated in the project submitted a report about the final amount of collections and expenses and the type of projects be they in Kuwait or abroad," sources said.

#### Person injured in Jleeb house blaze

**KUWAIT:** A person was injured as a result of a fire that broke out on Wednesday in a house in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh area. Firefighting teams from Al-Samoud and Al-Ardiya stations were dispatched to the site. Upon investigation, firefighters found that the fire was in a room on the first floor. The fire was extinguished and the injured person was taken by emergency medical technicians to the nearest hospital.

**DOHA:** Over the years, Kuwaiti humanitarian efforts painted a bright positive picture of the state to the outer world, stated Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) official, Khaled Al-Zaid. On the sidelines of Qatar Red Crescent Society celebration of world international humanitarian law day in capital city of Doha, Al-Zaid, head of the public relations and media department at KRCS told KUNA that Kuwaiti diplomacy, a source of soft power, sought to fortify humanitarian dimensions within its foreign policy. He indicated that the name of Kuwait became synonymous with humanitarian charitable work, adding that a work paper titled "Media and Humanitarian Diplomacy" was discussed highlighting Kuwait's role.

Zaid mentioned that Kuwait's efforts extended beyond the borders of Arab world to reach nations far and wide as it also joined numerous active and vital international organizations such as the World Food Program, World Health Organization, UNRWA and many others. KRCS caught on the importance of media in raising awareness regarding humanitarian situations early on, mentioned Al-Zaid while also taking note of the society's efforts in ensuring the sustainability of humanitarian work. He further commented saying that in this day and age, media and diplomacy became closely intertwined, as the instrument of media is quite influential on public opinion.

#### Medal recognizing humanitarian work

On the sidelines of the 47th session of the Arab Red Crescent and the Red Cross Organization

## Pakistani medics to arrive in July

**KUWAIT:** Informed sources said a new batch of Pakistani doctors, nurses and technicians will arrive in Kuwait by the end of next month, the 20th batch of medical cadres Kuwait has requested to work at its hospitals and medical centers.



DOHA: KRCS photographer Adnan Al-Nouh (center left) receives an award for second best picture on the sidelines of the 47th session of ARCO in the Qatari capital of Doha.

(ARCO) meeting in the Qatari capital of Doha, the Director of the Department of Youth, Volunteers and Legal Affairs at Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Musaid Al-Enezi was awarded the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq medal by the organizations in recognition of his efforts in voluntary and humanitarian work.

Zaid said Enezi was honored by the Arab Organization and Qatar's Minister of State for International Cooperation Lolwah Rashid Al-Khater. The honoring

reflects the appreciation of the great efforts of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society in humanitarian work.

He expressed his pride in Enezi's long career in humanitarian, charitable and voluntary work, expressing thanks and appreciation to the Arab Organization of the Red Crescent and the Red Cross for this honor. ARCO has also awarded the photographer of KRCS Adnan Al-Nouh for winning second place for best picture in the organization's photography award. — KUNA

The sources said documents of the medics are being gathered to issue their entry visas to Kuwait, as well as decide their place of work, as they will be sent to new areas and to hospitals that need more employees. They said another

batch of over 400 Pakistani doctors, nurses and technicians will arrive before the end of the year as they are requested by private hospitals, and official agreements to allow them in are obtained, adding the number of those is over 400. The sources said recruiting Pakistani medical cadres aims to diversify the workforce and is not limited to certain countries.

## NBK organizes course for special needs students

**KUWAIT:** As part of the ongoing drive to discharge its CSR towards all segments of society, especially the people with special needs, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced the successful completion of a training program for the special needs students of Dasman School, with the aim of encouraging them to receive training and engage in the banking business experience.

The program that ran for two weeks at the Domestic Branches Department, focused on familiarizing participants with work nature in branches, as well as the basics and mechanisms of the banking business. It also aimed to provide a comprehensive and supportive environment for students with special

needs, allowing them to acquire real-world knowledge, and develop essential skills to be more familiar with the future labor market.

The program witnessed active participation by students in the various activities and assignments, which were carefully designed to suit their abilities and interests. They also had the opportunity to gain practical experience in the Domestic Branches Department.

During the program, NBK staff worked closely with the students, providing them with guidance, and support throughout the training journey with the aim of deepening their understanding of the banking industry and building their confidence in the work environment.

Upon completion of the course, the participating students from Dasman School visited NBK to receive their certificates, in a ceremony attended by the executive management, who praised the students for showing enthusiasm, determination and achieving progress during the program.



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Philippine court denies bail for Duterte critic

## Four dead, dozens injured in Haiti earthquake

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# Blinken meets Gulf officials

Blinken's visit is aimed at boosting ties with longtime ally Saudi Arabia



JEDDAH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman meets US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on June 7, 2023. — AFP

**RIYADH:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Gulf Arab officials in Saudi Arabia Wednesday at a time of rapidly shifting alliances following the oil-rich kingdom's rapprochement with Iran. Blinken attended a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) ministerial meeting in the capital Riyadh that kicked off shortly after he met with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan.

The two countries "resolved to continue to work together to counter terrorism, to support efforts to bring about a lasting peace in Yemen, and to promote stability, security, de-escalation, and integration in the region," the US State Department said.

"The two sides pledged to continue their strong cooperation to end the fighting in Sudan," it added in a statement. The meetings came a day after

Blinken flew into Jeddah and held talks with Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman, in which he raised human rights issues.

Relations between Washington and Riyadh, decades-old allies, have been strained in recent times mainly over human rights and oil, after US pleas for help in bringing down skyrocketing prices last year were dismissed. The three-day visit is Blinken's first since the kingdom restored diplomatic ties with Iran, which the West considers a pariah over its contested nuclear activities and involvement in regional conflicts.

On Tuesday, the day Blinken arrived, Iran reopened its embassy in Riyadh after a seven-year closure, with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Alireza Bigdeli hailing a "new era" in ties. On the same day, Prince Mohammed hosted Venezuelan

President Nicolas Maduro, the head of a fellow oil power who has long sparred with Washington.

Last month, in a major shift, Syrian leader Bashar Al-Assad attended an Arab League summit in Jeddah, his first since Syria's membership was suspended at the start of its 12-year civil war. Washington criticized the decision to invite Assad.

### 'Open, candid discussion'

Wednesday's meeting at the GCC headquarters in Riyadh was attended by Qatar's prime minister among other top Gulf officials. On the agenda were key regional issues, including conflicts in Yemen, Sudan, Syria and the Palestinian territories, Qatar's foreign ministry spokesperson Majid al-Ansari said on Tuesday.

"The meeting undoubtedly constitutes an opportunity to draw a common posi-

tion here in the region in relation to the United States of America and to define the form of the American positive influence in the region through partnership with the GCC," he said.

Blinken's visit is aimed at boosting ties with longtime ally Saudi Arabia, which has begun forging closer relations with Washington's rivals. The visit will also focus on the joint battle against the Islamic State group and the Arab world's relations with Zionist entity.

Blinken had "an open, candid discussion" with the 37-year-old Prince Mohammed in Jeddah, a US official said on condition of anonymity. "The secretary raised human rights both generally and with regards to specific issues," the official said.

The meeting, which lasted about 100 minutes, touched on topics including Sau-

di Arabia's support for US evacuations from Sudan, the need for political dialogue in Yemen and the potential for the normalization of relations with Zionist entity.

The two men discussed "our shared priorities, including countering terrorism through the D-ISIS Coalition, achieving peace in Yemen, and deepening economic and scientific cooperation", Blinken said on social media.

Since announcing resumed relations with Iran in March, Saudi Arabia has restored ties with Tehran ally Syria and ramped up a push for peace in Yemen, where it has for years led a military coalition against the Iran-backed Huthi rebels.

Regional heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran have been at loggerheads for years, backing opposing sides in a number of conflicts around the volatile region. — AFP

## Thousands flee Ukraine dam flooding

**KHERSON:** Thousands were fleeing their homes Wednesday after the destruction of a frontline Russian-held dam flooded dozens of villages and parts of a nearby city in Ukraine, sparking fears of a humanitarian disaster.

Downstream from the breached Kakhovka dam, Ukrainian police and troops in Kherson city were bringing people out from inundated areas in inflatable boats, most clutching only a few documents and pets. Moscow and Ukraine have traded blame for the dam being ripped open early Tuesday, which unleashed a gush of water on the Dnipro River and forced hasty departures.

One woman, Nataliya Korzh, 68, had swum part of the way to escape from her house. She emerged from a rescue boat barefoot, her legs covered with scratches, her hands trembling from cold. "All my rooms are underwater. My fridge is floating, the freezer, everything. We're used to shooting, but a natural disaster is a real nightmare. I wasn't expecting that," she told AFP.

She had only managed to bring a few belongings and medicines with her and feared for her two dogs and cat, which she was unable to save. "To get to the room where the dogs were, I would have had to dive. I don't know what's happened to them." Central streets of Kherson were waist-deep in water and ground-floors of buildings underwater.

A spokesman for Ukraine's emer-

gency services, Oleksandr Khorunzhyi, said on television that "more than 1,450 people have been evacuated" and "currently there is no information about the dead or injured". Water levels in Kherson have risen by five metres (16 feet), he said. Amid the rescue operation, frequent shelling could be heard in the city, which was occupied by Russian forces for nine months in 2022.

A policeman, Sergiy, 38, was using a radio to coordinate the rescue boats. "Today we've already saved 30 people, 10 pets. There was one child. We will work until we've brought out all the people," he told AFP.

Washington warned there would be "likely many deaths" due to the breach of the Kakhovka dam, which is located on the frontline and provides cooling water for Europe's largest nuclear plant. Kyiv said the destruction of the dam - seized by Russia in the early hours of the war - was an attempt by Moscow to hamper its long-awaited offensive, which Ukraine's leader stressed would not be affected.

The United Nations warned that hundreds of thousands could be affected on both sides of the frontline. The head of the Kherson regional military administration, Oleksandr Prokudin, said 1,852 houses had been flooded by early Wednesday. "According to our forecasts, the water level will increase by one metre within the next 20 hours," he warned.

President Volodymyr Zelensky's adviser Daria Zarivna said that in the occupied territory "the Russians simply abandoned people" and in the town of Oleshky on the opposite bank from Kherson, "many spent the night on the roofs of houses". Moscow-installed officials on the Russian-occupied side of the river said on Tuesday that more than 1,200 people had been evac-



KHERSON: Ukrainian security forces transport local residents in a boat during an evacuation from a flooded area in Kherson on June 7, 2023, following the destruction of Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant dam. — AFP

uated, including 38 people rescued from roofs.

### 'Environmental bomb'

Zelensky also accused Russia of detonating an "environmental bomb of mass destruction", saying authorities expected up to 80 settlements with tens of thousands of residents to be flooded and urging the world to "react". "This crime carries enormous threats and will have dire consequences for people's lives and the environment," Zelensky said.

But the explosion would "not affect Ukraine's ability to de-occupy its own territories", he added. Last October, Zelensky accused Russia of planting mines at the dam, warning that its destruction would spur a new wave of refugees into Europe.

Kyiv said 150 tonnes of engine oil had spilled into the river, and the agricultural ministry said about 10 thousand hectares of farmland on the right bank of the river would be flooded and

"several times more" on the left bank.

China expressed "serious concern" over the dam destruction, while EU chief Charles Michel called it a "war crime" and NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg condemned it as "outrageous". Russia has said the dam was partially destroyed by "multiple strikes" from Ukrainian forces and urged the world to condemn Kyiv's "criminal acts".

The Soviet-era dam, built in the 1950s, sits on the Dnipro River, which provides cooling water for the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant some 150 kilometres (90 miles) away. Moscow and Kyiv offered conflicting assessments of the safety of the facility.

The Russian-installed director of the plant, Yuri Chernichuk, said water levels in the cooling pond had not changed and "at the moment, there is no security threat to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant". But Zelensky's aide Mykhaylo Podolyak said the nuclear plant had lost its source of cooling and the danger was "growing rapidly". — AFP

## Attacks by suspected jihadists in Burkina Faso kill 21

**OUAGADOUGOU:** Twenty-one people, most of them members of the security forces, have been killed in Burkina Faso in attacks by suspected jihadists, security sources said on Wednesday. Fourteen members of the VDP volunteer militia and four soldiers died on Monday in Sawenga in central-eastern Burkina, while five were wounded, a source said.

Another security source confirmed the toll, saying that the clash occurred during an operation to secure the area, and that "more than 50 terrorists were neutralized" in an airborne counter-attack. Separately, a police source said a policeman and two civilians were killed on Monday night in an attack on a police border post at Yendere, on the southwestern frontier with Ivory Coast. A trucker in the area confirmed the attack, adding that many local people had already fled into Ivory Coast because of jihadist incursions. Ivory Coast hosts around 18,000 Burkinabe refugees, more than double the tally for 2022, according to the UN's refugee agency.

One of the poorest and most troubled countries in the world, Burkina is struggling with a jihadist insurgency that swept in from neighboring Mali in 2015. Nearly a third of the country lies outside the government's control, according to official estimates.

More than 10,000 civilians, troops and police have died, according to an NGO count, while at least two million people have been displaced. Anger within the military at failures to roll back the insurgency sparked two coups last year, culminating in the ascent of a young army captain, Ibrahim Traore. The junta has ruled out any negotiations with the jihadists. It is staking much of its anti-jihadist strategy on the VDP — the Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland militia.

The force comprises civilian volunteers who are given two weeks' military training and then work alongside the army, typically carrying out surveillance, information-gathering or escort duties. Since its inception in December 2019, the VDP has suffered hundreds of casualties, especially in ambushes or roadside bombings. Despite the losses, the authorities launched a successful recruitment drive last year, encouraging 90,000 people to sign up, far exceeding the target of 50,000. — AFP

## Former Trump foe Christie launches presidential run

**WASHINGTON:** Republican former New Jersey governor Chris Christie jumped into the 2024 race for the White House on Tuesday, positioning himself as a political knife-fighter and the only candidate willing to take on front-runner Donald Trump. Christie, who filed his paperwork with the Federal Election Commission before an evening announcement in Manchester, New Hampshire, presents a novel challenge as the only Republican contender so far willing to land genuinely damaging blows on the former president.

The 60-year-old Newark native came sixth in New Hampshire seven years ago and eventually endorsed Trump,

serving as a key advisor before the pair fell out over the tycoon's refusal to accept his 2020 election defeat. At his announcement in New Hampshire Tuesday evening, Christie depicted Trump as self-obsessed and dishonest.

The former US president, Christie said "always finds someone else and something else to blame for whatever goes wrong, but finds every reason to take credit for anything that goes right." And Christie argued last month that the de facto Republican leader was "afraid" of debating serious opponents. Trump has indicated that he may skip at least one of the first two Republican primary debates, expressing a reluctance to share the limelight with lower-polling rivals. "If he really cares about the country — and I have deep questions about that — but if he really cares about the country, then he's going to get up there, and he shouldn't be afraid," Christie told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt.

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

John Ellis, a former head of the Fox News Election Night Decision Desk, told AFP that while a bigger field benefits Trump, Christie's candidacy could put the top-polling candidate on the back foot. "Because he will attack Trump relentlessly, Christie's campaign will get a ton of coverage in the mainstream press, which may help him do well in New Hampshire," said Ellis.

Christie's launch comes a day after former vice president Mike Pence filed the paperwork for his own White House bid, setting up an unusual scenario in which two former running mates becoming rivals.

The evangelical Christian plans an official campaign launch on Wednesday in the early voting state of Iowa — joining an already crowded field that includes Florida governor Ron DeSantis, Trump's closest competition.

Former governors Nikki Haley and Asa Hutchinson are also in the race, while North Dakota's chief executive Doug Burgum is due to announce on Wednesday. Polls show Trump as the overwhelming early frontrunner, regularly posting leads on DeSantis in excess of 30 points. None of the other candidates is achieving double figures. — AFP



GOFFSTOWN: Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie speaks during a New Hampshire Town Hall at Saint Anselm College in Goffstown, New Hampshire, on June 6, 2023. Christie announced his run for the presidency. — AFP



## International

# 'No woman feels safe': Sexual violence rampant in Sudan war

## Sudan's war has claimed at least 1,800 lives and displaced over 1.5 million people

CAIRO: Zeinab was fleeing war-torn Sudan's capital to seek safety when she found herself pinned to the ground, a rifle to her chest, as a paramilitary fighter raped her. "I was sure we were about to die," she told AFP, recounting how she, her younger sister and two other women, one with an infant daughter, were all sexually violated. Dozens of women have reported similar attacks — in their homes, by the roadside and in commandeered hotels — since the war erupted in mid-April between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

A month into the war, said Zeinab, the women were fleeing Khartoum when their minibus was stopped at an RSF checkpoint. Terrified, they were marched into a warehouse where a man "in civilian clothes who seemed to be their commander" ordered Zeinab to the ground, she said.

"I was pinned down by one man while the other raped me," she told AFP. "When he was done, they switched. They wanted to keep my sister with them. I begged them on my hands and knees to let her go." The women were eventually allowed to leave and escaped to Madani, 200 kilometres (120 miles) away, where they reported the attack to police and went to a hospital.

When Zeinab later recounted their ordeal, she had found refuge in another country. "We're not the first people this has happened to, or the last," she said. Sudan's war has claimed at least 1,800 lives and displaced over 1.5 million people.

The horrors of the conflict have been compounded by a wave of sexual violence, say survivors, medics and activists who spoke to AFP. Most have requested anonymity or, like Zeinab, used a pseudonym for fear of reprisals against them and others.

Both Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the RSF, led by Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, have accused their enemies of such attacks. And human rights lawyer Jehanne Henry said that indeed both sides have committed "notorious acts of sexual violence" in the past.

The governmental Combating Violence Against Women and Children Unit has documented 49 assaults in the first two weeks of the war. In all but six cases, survivors identified perpetrators "in RSF uniform", said unit chief Sulaima Ishaq al-Khalifa, adding that there are "new reports night and day". "There is not a single woman in Khartoum now who feels safe, not even in her own home."

### 'Tip of the iceberg'

The worst fighting has raged in Khartoum and the Darfur region, where former dictator Omar al-Bashir once unleashed the notorious Janjaweed militia from which the RSF emerged. In their scorched-earth campaign since 2003, they committed genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, including rape, according to the International Criminal Court. Now "mass rapes" are again being reported in Darfur, said Adjaratou Ndiaye, the UN Women representative in Sudan.

In one case, 12 women were stopped by gunmen in late April and ordered to join in looting a warehouse, said Amna, a local human rights defender. Once they were inside, they heard the doors lock.

"They were all raped," said Amna. "They had men with them, whom fighters in RSF uniforms forced to rape the women." Amna said she and other defenders have recorded more cases in Darfur, with the youngest victim aged 14.

"Women and girls are being abducted to a hotel the RSF has commandeered, where they're kept for two or three days, raped repeatedly." Documented cases, like wider casualty counts, are likely "the tip of the iceberg", said a Sudanese Women Rights Action (SUWRA) group researcher. Medics say many victims receive no care as hospitals have been ransacked or destroyed. Many cases have been reported by civil society groups known as resistance committees, which long campaigned for democracy. In one attack in May, reported by one group and corroborated by multiple sources, RSF fighters raped a 15-year-old girl on a northern Khartoum street.

In another case, a woman in her 30s in eastern Khartoum "was at home alone with her kids when she heard her downstairs neighbors screaming," said the SUWRA researcher. Three women there were gang-raped before the fighters made their way upstairs, the survivor told SUWRA. "Four armed men broke the door down, and then one of them locked himself in a room with her."

### 'Screaming for hours'

Most survivors say they were assaulted by fighters of the RSF, who are embedded in residential neighborhoods. Khalifa said the unit had also received news "of assaults by perpetrators in army uniform" but had "not yet been able to confirm" these. A resistance committee member said in



KHARTOUM: An army soldier talks to women on a street in Khartoum on June 6, 2023, as fighting continues in war-torn Sudan. Battles raged in Sudan's war-torn capital of Khartoum. — AFP

another attack last month three army soldiers stormed a northern Khartoum home, "beat the son and raped both mother and daughter".

"Their neighbors heard them screaming for hours." A lawyer who has long documented sexual assaults by security forces, said the scourge now impacts "every segment of Sudanese society". "We have seen the rape of young girls and old women, mothers with their children," she said, adding that to the perpetrators "it doesn't matter".

Amid dire shortages, health workers have struggled to provide HIV medication or emergency contraceptives. "The situation is catastrophic," said a member of the Central Committee of Sudanese Pharmacists. Activists and medics

are trying to document every attack. The aim, said the lawyer, is "to ensure there is no impunity". But the task is dangerous. "Every time you walk down the street, you could be stopped and accused of being an informant for either side," said one activist. After several colleagues were violently interrogated, Amna said that "they know what they're doing, and now the activists themselves are in danger."

Zeinab hopes the rapists will one day face justice, but voices resignation. "I shared my testimony to try and stop this happening to others, to tell them the road isn't safe," she said. "But even when I filed the police report, I knew nothing would come of it. They're never going to get the men who did this." — AFP

## Former VP Pence announces US presidential run

WASHINGTON: Mike Pence announced Wednesday his entry into the 2024 United States presidential election, as the former vice president goes up against his ex-boss Donald Trump for the Republican nomination.

The evangelical Christian is scheduled to appear at a campaign launch event the same day in the early-voting state of Iowa — joining an already crowded field that includes Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Trump's closest competition.

"Today, before God and my family, I'm announcing I'm running for president of the United States," he said in an online campaign video. Pence's announcement comes two days after papers filed with the US Federal Election Commission showed he had formally entered the race.

"I believe in the American people, and I have faith God is not done with America yet," the 64-year-old wrote in a tweet accompanying the video. "Together, we can bring this Country back, and the best days for the Greatest Nation on Earth are yet to come!"

Pence honed his reputation as an unstintingly loyal vice president who stuck with Trump throughout a scandal-plagued four years in the White House, and brought the religious right into the tent. But he became a pariah in Trumpworld after rejecting the Republican leader's demands that he overturn the 2020 election in his role as president of the Senate.

Berated constantly by Trump after Joe Biden's election victory — and even heckled at a conservative conference with chants of "traitor!" — Pence continued to praise the tycoon in public.

That changed after Trump's torrent of false claims of election fraud led to a mob chanting for Pence to be hanged at the US Capitol. Pence announced his presidential run a day after former New Jersey governor Chris Christie joined the contest.

Former governors Nikki Haley and Asa Hutchinson are also in the race, while North Dakota's chief executive Doug Burgum is also due to announce on Wednesday. Polls show Trump as the overwhelming early front runner, regularly posting leads on Wednesday in excess of 30 points. None of the other candidates is achieving double figures.

But the former president is facing multiple criminal investigations into his personal and professional conduct that have already yielded dozens of felony charges in New York. — AFP

## Four dead, dozens injured in Haiti earthquake

PORT-AU-PRINCE: An earthquake shook parts of western Haiti on Tuesday, killing at least four people and injuring three dozen others, authorities said, with more victims feared trapped under the rubble.

The magnitude 4.9 quake occurred just after 5:00 am (0900 GMT) around 5.5 miles (9 kilometers) off the coast of the isolated Grand'Anse department, some 185 miles west of Port-au-Prince, according to the US Geological Survey.

The Haitian Red Cross said emergency workers were looking for people who may still be trapped under the ruins. "Efforts continue to find survivors," the group said. The majority of victims lived in the poor neighborhood of Sainte Helene, in the town of Jeremie, where an AFP photographer saw a number of cracked houses. Three of the dead "are members of the same family and were killed when their house collapsed," Christine Monquele, head of Civil Protection in Grand'Anse, told AFP. "I don't know what to do," said Katiana Pierre, a 19-year-old who lost her husband and little sister in the quake.

### 'I lost everything'

At least 36 people were reported injured. "We were able to administer first aid to the victims," said Soitmil Lorreus, head of emergency services at the Saint-Antoine public hospital. Some patients were airlifted to the capital, and Lorreus said the hospital expected to receive more patients from the countryside.

One man, speaking from his hospital bed in a video shared by local news outlet JCOM Haiti, recalled how his neighbors and wife helped him save his two children. But his wife didn't make it out alive.

"At dawn, I heard a deafening noise," he said. "My wife, with a start, asked me to fetch the children from their room. With the help of neighbors, I was able to save the two children, but unfortunately my wife died."

"The house was completely destroyed. I lost every-

## Libya's rivals agree terms for long-delayed vote

BOUZNKA: Envoys of rival Libyan factions have agreed on the legal steps to hold much delayed presidential and legislative elections in the conflict-scarred nation, both sides said early Wednesday.

Election were due to be held in December 2021 but were never organized

as differences persisted on key issues including who should run in the polls. Libya has been torn by more than a decade of stop-start conflict since a 2011 revolt toppled strongman Muammar Gaddafi, with a myriad of militias forming opposing alliances backed by foreign powers.

The country remains split between a nominally interim government in Tripoli in the west, and another in the east backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar. After more than two weeks of talks in Morocco, representatives from both sides struck a deal but stopped short of inking any agreement so far in

a sign some differences may still need to be resolved.

No date has yet been named for when the vote may take place. "The members... have agreed the laws for presidential and legislative elections," Jalal Chouehdi, who represents the east-based parliament, told reporters in the southern Moroccan city of Bouznika.

"All that is left is for parliament to ratify" the texts of the accord, added Omar Boulifa, representative for the High State Council (HSC) aligned with the Tripoli-based administration. Morocco's Foreign Minister Nasser

other natural disaster which is the flooding and landslides we've seen in the past few days," Dujarric said.

He added that the World Food Program is prepared to distribute some 350,000 meals and other food assistance to those in need. But he said that relief efforts are hampered by insecurity and damage to roads, an apparent reference to the country's swirling gang violence. In 2010 a massive 7.0 quake killed more than 200,000 people in Haiti, turning the capital Port-au-Prince into ruins and making 1.5 million people homeless.

In August 2021 the southwest peninsula was ravaged by an even stronger, 7.2 magnitude quake that killed more than 2,200 people and destroyed 130,000 homes. — AFP



JEREMIE: People walk amongst damaged buildings in Jeremie, Haiti, after an earthquake hit western Haiti. An earthquake shook parts of western Haiti on Tuesday, killing at least four people and injuring more than two dozen others, civil protection authorities said. — AFP

## Genocide suspect Kabuga ruled unfit for trial

THE HAGUE: UN war crimes judges ruled Wednesday that ageing Rwandan genocide suspect Felicien Kabuga is unfit to stand trial but should still go through a stripped-down legal process.

Former tycoon Kabuga, who is 88 according to officials but claims to be 90, is accused of setting up a hate broadcaster that fuelled the 1994 slaughter of around 800,000 people.

Victims groups condemned the "dismaying" decision by the court in The Hague. Captured in Paris 2020 after two decades on the run, wheelchair-bound Kabuga went on trial last September but judges said medical experts had now found that he has "severe dementia".

The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals said in an order that "Kabuga is unfit to participate meaningfully in his trial and is very unlikely to regain fitness in the future."

Judges instead proposed an "alternative finding procedure that resembles a trial as closely as possible, but without the possibility of a conviction."

It was important to victims, survivors and the international community that the genocide crimes against Kabuga still be addressed in court, the justices added. One judge dissented.

### 'Genocide mastermind'

Prosecutors accuse Kabuga, once one of Rwanda's richest men, of being the driving force behind Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTL) which urged ethnic Hutus to kill Tutsis with machetes.

Kabuga has pleaded not guilty. The court first put the trial on hold in March over health concerns, having earlier dismissed bids by Kabuga's defence lawyers to have him declared unfit to stand trial.

Survivors of the genocide accused Kabuga's family and lawyers of using "delaying tactics".

"When Kabuga was arrested after evading justice for more than two decades, we were happy and thought that justice was finally going to be served," said Naphtali Ahishakiye, executive secretary of Ibuka, the genocide survivors group. — AFP



Felicien Kabuga



## International

# Philippine court denies bail for Duterte critic: Lawyer

## Detained for six years on charges she insists were fabricated to silence her

MANILA: Jailed Philippine human rights activist Leila de Lima was denied bail Wednesday on the remaining drug trafficking charge filed against her during former president Rodrigo Duterte's administration, her lawyer said. De Lima, one of the most outspoken local critics of Duterte and his deadly drug war, has been detained for more than six years on charges she insists were fabricated to silence her.

"Sad to inform you that the Court denied Sen. Leila's bail application," her lawyer Filibon Tacardon said in a message to journalists, adding he was "in shock" at the decision. The ruling followed another court's verdict on May 12 that acquitted the former senator and justice minister of a separate drug trafficking charge.

The 63-year-old is accused of taking money from inmates inside the country's largest prison in exchange for allowing them to sell drugs while justice minister from 2010 to 2015 under then-leader Benigno Aquino. She initially faced three charges. Two have been dismissed as the prosecution's case falls apart, with multiple witnesses dying or recanting their testimonies.

De Lima, a mother of two, faces life in prison if she is convicted on the remaining charge. In denying the bail application, Judge Romeo Buenaventura said the evidence against de Lima and her co-accused was "strong". He said "there is great probability that the crime charged has been committed", according to a copy of the ruling shared with reporters.

Human Rights Watch senior researcher Carlos Conde said the decision "flies in the face of her previous court acquittal in two cases, which clearly showed the political nature of her persecution".

### Health issues 'not life threatening'

Since President Ferdinand Marcos came into office last June there have been renewed calls from human rights groups, foreign diplomats and politicians for de Lima's release. While in jail she has suffered various health problems, including a pelvic organ prolapse that required surgery.

In October 2022, she was briefly taken hostage during an attempted breakout by three detained militants. But Judge Buenaventura said de Lima's age and health were "not compelling" grounds for bail.

"The accused herself admitted that though she is already a senior citizen and has several health issues, she is not suffering from any serious or life-threatening health condition," he said. Before her arrest on February 24, 2017, de Lima had spent a decade investigating "death squad" killings allegedly orchestrated by Duterte during his time as Davao City mayor and in the early days of his presidency.

She conducted the probes while serving as the nation's human rights commissioner, and then from 2010 to 2015 as justice minister in the Aquino administration that preceded Duterte's rule. After winning a Senate seat in the 2016 elections that also swept populist Duterte to power, de Lima became one of



MANILA: File picture shows former Philippine senator and human rights campaigner Leila de Lima waving as she arrives at the Muntinlupa Trial Court in Manila. — AFP

the few opposition voices.

Duterte then accused her of running a drug trafficking ring with criminals when she was justice secretary, forcing her from the Senate and into a jail cell. De Lima lost her bid for re-election in May 2022 after campaigning from behind bars. Duterte, who was constitutionally barred from seeking a second term as president, stepped down the following month.

Throughout the proceedings, de Lima has insisted the charges against her had been trumped up in retaliation for going after Duterte and his drug war that killed thousands of people. — AFP

### News in Brief

#### Turkey jails teen

ISTANBUL: Turkish authorities on Tuesday seized and jailed a 16-year-old youth for drawing a moustache on an election campaign poster showing re-elected President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, media reports said. Several media close to the opposition, including daily newspapers BirGun, Cumhuriyet and private TV station Halk TV, said the youth from the southeastern town of Mersin was accused of defacing the poster near his home with a pen, scribbling "a Hitler moustache and writing insulting comments." He was arrested after being identified by CCTV cameras, media reports said. Authorities interviewed him at his home where he reportedly "admitted drawing the moustache" while denying writing the accompanying comments. Taken before the public prosecutor he was found to have "insulted the president" and was jailed at a nearby youth facility, according to Halk TV. Erdogan extended his 20-year rule over Turkey after winning the May 28 second round of the presidential election to embark on a new five-year term. — AFP

#### CNN chief steps down

NEW YORK: Chris Licht, the embattled head of CNN, has stepped down from the news network "effective immediately," Warner Brothers Discovery announced Wednesday as it appointed an interim leadership team. After joining CNN last year, Licht came under fire for editorial decisions including a recent town hall meeting with former president Donald Trump that was dominated by cheering from supporters and jeering at CNN interviewer Kaitlan Collins. "I have great respect for Chris, personally and professionally," said David Zaslav, president and CEO of Warner Brothers Discovery. "The job of leading CNN was never going to be easy, especially at a time of huge disruption and transformation, and he has poured his heart and soul into it," Zaslav said. "While we know we have work to do as we look to identify a new leader, we have absolute confidence in the team we have in place and will continue to fight for CNN and its world class journalism." Licht had sharply criticized CNN's news coverage of Trump under former news chief Jeff Zucker in a recent Atlantic article, but the publication reported uncertainty among CNN journalists on Licht's preferred approach. — AFP

#### Indonesia to deport surfer

BANDA ACEH: An Australian surfer detained after launching a drunken assault in Indonesia's most conservative province will be deported, officials said Wednesday. Bodhi Mani Risby-Jones, 23, from Noosa in southern Queensland was facing five years in prison after attacking several people in April on the surf island of Simeulue. But the Australian tourist will return home after apologizing and paying compensation to a wounded victim, the head of the immigration office in Meulaboh city in West Aceh told AFP. "Bodhi Mani Risby-Jones is currently in our detention, awaiting to be returned to his home country," Fauzi, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, said. Ultra-conservative Aceh — a province granted special autonomous status — prohibits alcohol and is the only region in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country that imposes Islamic law. Officials said the tourist appeared naked from his local resort and started to hit passersby including a fisherman on a motorcycle, throwing him off and wounding him. That victim of the alleged attack agreed to forgive him, allowing the case to be dropped, Risby-Jones' lawyer told reporters. — AFP

#### Human trafficking ring busted

BERLIN: German police said they smashed a human trafficking network Wednesday accused of smuggling hundreds of people in "inhumane" conditions, with six suspects arrested in raids across Germany, Romania and Bulgaria. The suspects are believed to have trafficked more than 560 people into Germany, and more than 300 migrants to Romania, federal police said. The probe into the ring began after accounts were collected from Turkish and Syrian nationals in the border regions of Austria, Czech Republic and Poland. The migrants were believed to have been brought to Germany via the so-called Balkans route. They were allegedly forced to remain hidden among cargo in trucks "under inhumane conditions for several days" after being taken from Timisoara in Romania. Four of the suspects were arrested in Romania by authorities who were searching properties used to house the migrants. One suspect was picked up in Germany and another in Bulgaria. — AFP

## India's Coromandal Express is back on track after disaster

KOLKATA: One of the train services involved in a triple collision in India's deadliest railway disaster for decades resumed journeys on Wednesday, as officials revised the death toll up to 288. "The Coromandal Express is back on track," railway spokesman Aditya Kumar Chaudhary said, with a train departing Shalimar station near Kolkata on Wednesday afternoon on a 25-hour journey south to Chennai.

The train, which was full, chugged out of the station five minutes behind the scheduled time as scores of people looked on. The service was one of three trains involved in the crash near Balasore in the eastern state of Odisha on Friday. As usual, long and winding queues formed for the train's unreserved section. "Four friends who were travelling on the ill-fated train went missing after the accident on Friday," said Samaresh Mondal, 30, a migrant worker in the line.

"I am ready to accept my destiny. I am forced to go to Chennai to earn bread for me and my family," Pradeep Jena, Odisha's top civil servant, said late on Tuesday that the official death toll had risen to 288.

At least 1,175 people were injured, with many of them in critical condition and still being treated in hospital.

Jena said the revised toll came after deaths were tallied from both hospitals and mortuaries and noted that 83 bodies remain unidentified. Medical centres were overwhelmed by the number of casualties and there are fears the death toll could rise further.

### 'No alternative'

The Coromandal Express was diverted onto a loop line before it slammed into a stationary goods train. The



KOLKATA: Passengers queue along a platform to board the Chennai bound Coromandal Express at Shalimar station near Kolkata on June 7, 2023. — AFP

collision flipped the carriages of the Coromandal Express onto another track. The derailed compartments were then struck by the rear carriages of another train, the Howrah Superfast Express from India's tech hub Bengaluru, which was passing in the opposite direction. While trains began operating late Sunday past the crash site, Wednesday's journey is the first service of the Coromandal Express to resume the route.

"We are very much worried after Friday's devastating accident," said Pinki Bhuniya, 36, travelling with her husband and daughter. "We have no alternative but to travel in trains because air tickets are too expensive for us."

Ashwini Vaishnav, India's railway minister, has said the crash happened due to the "change that occurred during electronic interlocking", a technical term for a

complex signal system designed to stop trains colliding. A six-member team from India's Central Bureau of Investigation examined the crash site on Tuesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said "no one responsible" would be spared.

India has one of the world's largest rail networks and has seen several disasters over the years, the worst in 1981 when a train derailed while crossing a bridge in Bihar and plunged into a river below, killing 800 people.

The Balasore crash is India's third worst and the deadliest since 1995, when more than 300 people died as trains collided in Firozabad near Agra. "We have no faith in the railways' safety and security," Mondal added before boarding Wednesday's train. "We believe that only God can save us." — AFP

## Blinken eyes trip to China as tensions ease

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is likely to reschedule an aborted visit to China in the coming weeks, officials said Tuesday, as the two powers try again to put a cap on tensions.

Blinken had been set to travel to Chi-

na in February but canceled the trip after the United States detected and later shot down what it said was a Chinese espionage balloon over US soil. But both countries gave a positive assessment of a recent visit to Beijing by senior US officials, which included Daniel Kritenbrink, the top US diplomat for East Asia who also arranged Blinken's previously planned trip.

A US official said on condition of anonymity that Blinken was expected to reschedule his visit to China in the coming weeks but stressed that no date had been set. National Security

Council spokesman John Kirby said that the recent talks in Beijing touched on "the potential for future visits" and were "very useful."

"I think you'll see us speak to future visits here in the near future," he told reporters. State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said that Kritenbrink and senior White House official Sarah Beran had "candid and productive discussions" in China, but regarding Blinken's trip said only, "We look forward to rescheduling that visit when conditions allow."

"Our viewpoint is that there is no substitute for in-person meetings or en-

gagements, whether they be in Washington or Beijing, to carry forward our discussion," Patel told reporters. Tensions have soared in recent years between the world's two largest economies on a host of issues including trade and security, with the United States voicing concern that China is moving ahead on preparations to seize Taiwan, the self-governing democracy claimed by Beijing.

Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping agreed to work to avoid miscalculations when they held extensive talks in Bali in November, but tensions soon flared anew over the balloon. — AFP

## Bangladesh shuts schools, cuts power in longest heatwave in decades

DHAKA: Bangladesh has shut thousands of schools as it struggles through its lengthiest heatwave in half a century, with widespread power cuts only compounding locals' misery. Temperatures in the South Asian nation's capital of Dhaka have surged to around 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), with the poor bearing the brunt of the blazing sun.

"We have never seen such a prolonged heatwave since Bangladesh's independence in 1971," said Bazlur Rashid, a senior official at the Bangladesh Meteorological Department. Tens of thousands of primary schools were shut down by the government, and electricity production has been drastically cut, even as demand for air conditioners and fans has surged.

On Monday, the country was forced to suspend operations at its biggest power plant because the government was unable to afford the coal to fuel it. The Bangladeshi taka depreciated about 25 percent against the US dollar last year, driving up the cost of fuel imports and power utilities. Other plants have fallen well short of meeting demand, leading to hours-long blackouts.

### 'Falling sick'

Housewife Tania Akhter said that her youngest child was resting at home with classes cancelled, but her 12-year-old daughter was still going to school.

"Those classes should also be shut down because the students are suffering a lot in this heat — they are falling sick," Akhter said.

The heatwave began in April and ran into early May before easing, then resumed late last month, with forecasters predicting the mercury will remain high until the end of the week. "Every summer Bangladesh witnesses heatwaves, but this year's heatwave is unusual," Rashid told AFP. "In the past, heatwaves would only continue for a few days or a week, but this year it has continued for two weeks and more."

A study last month by the World Weather Attribution group found that climate change had made record-breaking deadly heatwaves in Bangladesh — as well as India, Laos and Thailand — at least 30 times more likely.

On June 3, the temperature in the northern Dinajpur district hit 41.3 degrees Celsius (106.3 degrees Fahrenheit), the highest recorded there since 1958. "The heatwave in the past would affect only some parts of the country," Rashid added. "This year it is very extensive and spread to almost all parts of the country."

Power cuts in some rural districts stretch for between six and 10 hours a day, officials from the state-run power company said.

### Incomes down

Manual laborers and street vendors say working in the heat is tough, and with those who are able staying out of the sun at home, incomes are down. "My income has significantly declined: I used to make 20-30 trips a day, but now it is down to 10-15," said 60-year-old motorized rickshaw driver



DHAKA: A girl riding on a motorbike uses a portable fan to cool off during a heatwave in Dhaka. — AFP

Abdul Mannan. "My body doesn't allow more than this in this heat." "It saps all your energy," said fellow driver Raisul Islam, 35, gulping a lime sherbet drink at a roadside stall in Dhaka. "It is tough to drive rickshaws in the scorching heat."

Rashid, of the Meteorological Department, said the heatwave would cool once monsoon rains land in mid-June, while the government has said power production will increase in two weeks once fuel imports arrive.

Fruit seller Mohammad Manik, 31, exhausted by the heat, said he was seeing fewer customers in the high temperatures, and was just waiting for the weather to change. "The situation is very bad in this heat — I spend my day here at work, and when I return home, there are power cuts," he said. "So I can't sleep well, staying awake for almost the whole night." — AFP



## Business

THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2023

## US steps up crypto crackdown

## US regulators sue Coinbase alleging its failure to register

**NEW YORK:** In their second major action against a big crypto player in two days, US regulators sued Coinbase on Tuesday, alleging its failure to register as a securities exchange venue exposed investors to risk. The Securities and Exchange Commission charged that the largest digital currency trading platform in the United States had made billions of dollars by "unlawfully facilitating the buying and selling of crypto asset securities."

Shares of Coinbase tumbled on news of the lawsuit, which comes on the heels of charges unveiled Monday against cryptocurrency exchange Binance and founder Changpeng Zhao for numerous alleged securities law violations. Coinbase slammed the SEC for turning the screws on a market that is still largely unregulated, a criticism that was levied by Binance the day before.

"The SEC's reliance on an enforcement-only approach in the absence of clear rules for the digital asset industry is hurting America's economic competitiveness and companies like Coinbase that have a demonstrated commitment to compliance," said Paul Grewal, general counsel of Coinbase. At a congressional hearing later Tuesday, Grewal called for "legislation that allows fair rules for

the road to be developed transparently" without litigation. But more than six months after the spectacular failure of crypto exchange giant FTX and its boss Sam Bankman-Fried, Washington is still grappling with how to tighten oversight of a market that has been likened to the "Wild West."

## Need for oversight

The largest crypto asset trading platform in the United States, Coinbase had 110 million users and \$80 billion in assets at the end of 2022. Filing a complaint in federal court, the SEC said Coinbase's failure to register as a securities exchange "has deprived investors of significant protections, including inspection by the SEC, record-keeping requirements, and safeguards against conflicts of interest, among others." The suit follows Monday's move against Binance and Zhao for operating what the SEC called "an extensive web of deception" and "calculated evasion of the law." On Tuesday, the SEC asked the federal court to freeze assets affiliated with Binance and Zhao.

SEC Chair Gary Gensler told CNBC the crackdown was needed to protect US financial markets, the world's biggest. "We punch above our weight class in the

capital markets in part because of robust oversight in the markets," said Gensler. Oversight "builds trust in the investing public, you become the destination of choice," Gensler said. "The crypto markets are undermining that trust."

But Gensler's approach to cryptocurrency has come under fire from House Republicans, in part over criticism that his agency has overstepped its domain. Under the US system, securities are regulated by the SEC, while commodities are overseen by the Commodities Futures Trading Commission (CFTC). Ahead of its hearing Tuesday, the Republican-led House Agriculture Committee, while declining to comment on the specifics of the Coinbase case, tweeted that "regulation by enforcement is not an appropriate way to govern a market, adequately protect customers, or promote innovation."

At Tuesday's hearing, CFTC Chair Rostin Behnam highlighted key problems at the center of recent failures of crypto entities, including undisclosed conflicts of interest and the comingling of funds among entities. "This is the reason we're here. There is confusion and uncertainty," he said. "Hopefully we can clear that up." These issues are at the heart of the US criminal case against Bankman-Fried,



**CULVER CITY:** Photo shows the Coinbase logo on a smartphone in Los Angeles. US securities regulators sued Coinbase, alleging that the cryptocurrency platform's failure to register as a securities exchange venue exposed investors to risk. — AFP

who is scheduled to be tried in October in New York.

James Angel, a Georgetown University professor specializing in financial markets and fintech, said the SEC's suits - while protective of investors - fall short of the comprehensive regulatory design needed for an evolving market. "This

Johnny-come-lately action is not the sign of a healthy regulatory apparatus, but it's sort of the best we can do at this time," said Angel, who sees little chance for congressional passage of legislation on digital oversight given the current political polarization. Coinbase shares fell 12.1 percent to \$51.61. — AFP

## Apple lays down the gauntlet to the metaverse

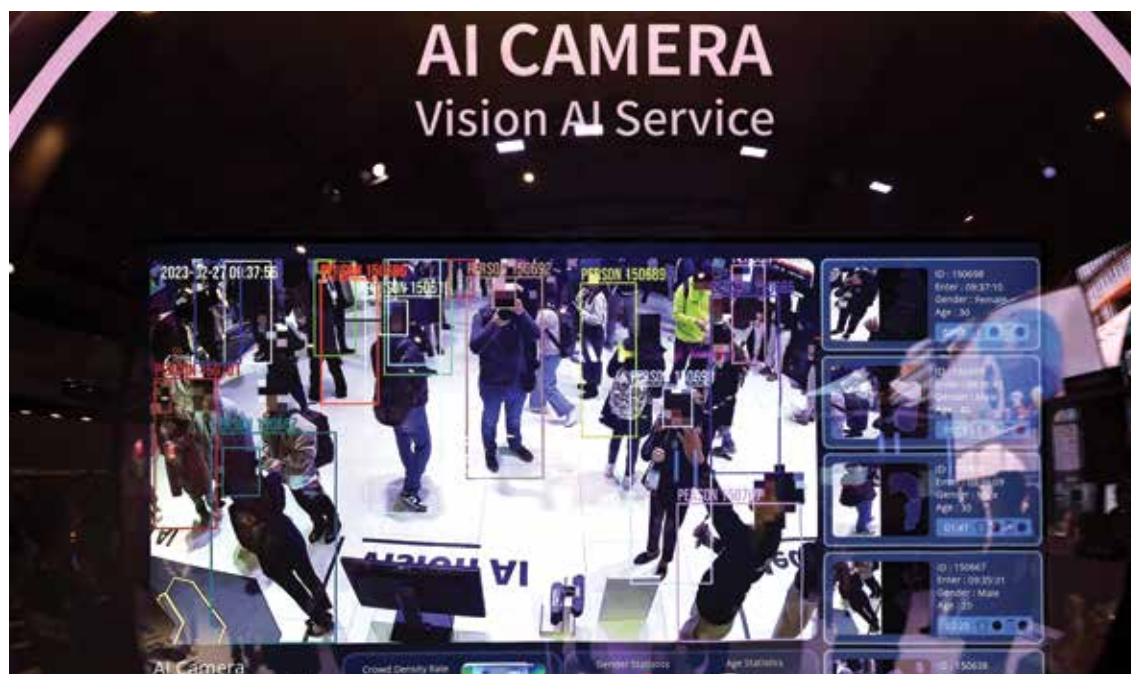
**PARIS:** Tech giant Apple has unveiled its first major product in more than seven years, a mixed-reality headset that might just deliver a terminal blow to the "metaverse". Silicon Valley rival Meta was so confident of it could create the metaverse - an idea of a 3D immersive internet - that it changed its name from Facebook in 2021 and began funneling billions into the project. But the idea has been hampered by fluffed launches, dodgy graphics, no clear path to profitability and a general feeling that few people know what it is.

Meta's Reality Labs, the division helming its metaverse effort, has lost \$4 billion so far and company chief Mark Zuckerberg has been increasingly talking up artificial intelligence rather than the metaverse. During his presentation on Monday, Apple boss Tim Cook introduced the Vision Pro, a sleek headset resembling ski goggles. It will allow the user to communicate, work, watch movies, listen to music - and even choose whether to be immersed or to keep an eye on the outside world.

Cook pointedly did not mention the metaverse once during the hour-long launch, with Apple promising instead the dawn of an era of "spatial computing". "Tim Cook has gone on record as saying that he doesn't like using the word, he doesn't think it has any real meaning," said James Whatley, chief strategy officer at Diva, a marketing agency. "The faster Meta can move away from that word, the better position they will be in combating Apple's encroachment into the space."

## 'A believable vision'

Meta can argue that its product still has advantages over Apple's newcomer. The first and most obvious is the price - Apple's Vision Pro weighs in at a whopping \$3,499, more than double the price of Meta's top-of-the-range Quest Pro headset. Tom Ffiske, who runs specialist newsletter the Immersive Wire, pointed out that Apple was clearly pushing a



**BARCELONA:** Picture shows facial recognition software on the Metaverse stand at the Mobile World Congress (MWC), the telecom industry's biggest annual gathering in Barcelona. - AFP

different strategy to Meta. "Apple is not seeking to build a wide XR (extended reality) ecosystem with a cheaper device, like Meta with the Quest line-up," he wrote. "The company instead seeks to monetize an already lucrative subsection of its audience with high-margin subscriptions and software."

And more broadly, he told AFP that Apple had such high levels of trust "that it legitimizes a product category". Martin Peers of technology website The Information reckoned Apple had just made Meta look like BlackBerry, the defunct Canadian smartphone maker. He wrote that Apple had "provided a believable vision of the long-term potential of augmented reality", a space it was well positioned to dominate at Meta's expense.

## 'Real-world experiences'

The smooth launch of Apple's headset, complete with an awestruck video declaring it to be "like magic", has laid down a clear marker. Users

were shown enjoying "cinematic" movie experiences, scrolling 3D photographs and videos, moving through webpages with just a hand gesture while joining FaceTime calls, and linking up to games consoles. "Apple has rightly, and in a very traditionally Apple way, rooted it in real-world experiences," said Whatley.

He contrasted that with Meta's vision of "making a 3D avatar of yourself with legs that that may or may not exist in a world where there's nothing to do". Yet analysts were still divided over whether such goggles will ever take off among the wider public. Google has tried and failed, largely ending its Google Glass experiment this year. Meta's Quest headset has failed to break out from specialist users and gamers. But both Ffiske and Whatley stressed that immersive technology is in its infancy and ultimately there will be enough room for two Silicon Valley giants. "The Apple announcement will lift all boats in the tide, including Meta," said Ffiske. — AFP

## Climate: Battle lines harden over how to slash CO2 emissions

**PARIS:** Banish fossil fuels, capture their emissions, pull CO2 from thin air - diplomats in Bonn for UN-led climate talks agree there's too much planet-warming carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, but remain at loggerheads on the best way to reduce it. At stake is nothing less than a liveable world: even if humanity caps global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius - a huge 'if' - hundreds of millions will still confront devastating heat, drought, flooding and sea level rise, recent studies have shown.

There are three ways to deal with the problem, intervening at different points in the CO2 "value chain" from source to tailpipe: stop burning fossil fuels, by far the main driver of warming; if you do burn them, stop carbon pollution from seeping into the air; and remove CO2 from the atmosphere once it's there. "All technologies, all levers available need to be used," Simon Stiell, the head of UN Climate, told AFP as the talks in Bonn opened. "But the science is very, very clear: the fastest and most effective way of getting us to where we need to is the phasing down and phasing out of all fossil fuels."

Politically, an informal "high ambition" coalition including the European Union (especially Germany) and scores of climate vulnerable developing countries are pushing - to cite the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) - to "radically reduce fossil fuels now" through policy, regulatory and economic levers. But major oil and gas exporters, the United States and some emerging economies are keen to shift the focus further downstream, saying the world can reduce carbon emissions without ditching the fossil fuels that generate them.

## Persistent failure

Their standard bearer is Sultan al-Jaber, head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and - controversially - president of the COP28 climate summit to be hosted at year's end by the United Arab Emirates. The persistent failure over decades to cut carbon emissions - currently 53 billion tons of CO2 or its equivalent per year - has forced once marginal technologies toward centre stage. These fall roughly into two categories that are often confused and conflated.

"Carbon capture" refers to syphoning off concentrated CO2 from the exhaust, or flue gas, of coal- and gas-fired power generation, as well as heavy industrial processes. Once isolated, the CO2 can be used to make products ("carbon capture and utilization" or CCU), or socked away underground in depleted oil and gas reservoirs ("carbon capture and storage" or CCS). A crucial point: Even when CCS stores all the CO2 captured, it does not decrease the amount in the atmosphere. But only prevent more from entering.

Carbon dioxide removal (CDR) techniques, however, do result in a net reduction in atmospheric CO2 and could, if scaled up, help lower Earth's surface temperature when we overshoots the Paris Agreement's 1.5C threshold, as seems likely. Worldwide, CDR captures two billion tons of CO2 each year, according to the inaugural State of Carbon Dioxide Report. More than 99.9 percent is extracted through "conventional" techniques such as restoring and expanding CO2-absorbing forests. Less than 0.1 percent is removed by "novel" means, and one in particular - direct air capture (DAC), an energy-intensive process that chemically extracts CO2 from the air - has attracted the most attention and investment. — AFP

## China's exports fall 7.5 percent

**BEIJING:** China's exports fell in May for the first time since February, state media reported Wednesday, breaking a two-month growth streak as a post-COVID rebound in the world's second-largest economy faded. Overseas shipments sank 7.5 percent on-year last month, a sharp drop from an increase of 8.5 percent in April, according to figures published by the official Xinhua news agency. Meanwhile, imports fell 4.5 percent in May, according to Xinhua. Forecasts in a survey by Bloomberg showed economists expected exports to drop 1.8 percent and imports to shrink 8.0 percent.

Rising global inflation, the threat of recession elsewhere and geopolitical tensions with the United States have weakened demand for Chinese products. China's exports grew in March and April, snapping a run of five straight declines, when production was disrupted by sweeping lockdowns and delays at ports when authorities enforced their strict zero-COVID policy. But that recovery has lost steam, with the economy weighed down by a debt-laden property sector, limp consumer confidence and a global economic slowdown. —AFP



**NINGBO:** This aerial photo shows shipping containers stacked at Zhoushan port in Ningbo, in China's eastern Zhejiang province. — AFP



# OECD slightly raises world GDP growth forecast to 2.7 percent

## Inflation eases; China drops COVID restrictions

PARIS: The OECD slightly raised its growth outlook for the world economy on Wednesday as inflation eases and China has dropped COVID restrictions, but it warned the recovery faces a "long road". The Paris-based organization forecast an economic expansion of 2.7 percent, up from 2.6 percent in its previous report in March, with upgrades for the United States, China and the euro-zone.

But it is still under the 3.3 percent growth recorded in 2022. "The global economy is turning a corner but faces a long road ahead to attain strong and sustainable growth," OECD chief economist Clare Lombardelli wrote in the OECD's Economic Outlook. "The recovery will be weak by past standards," Lombardelli wrote. The growth forecast for 2024 remains unchanged at 2.9 percent, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development said.

### 'Signs of stress'

A drop in energy prices, the untying of supply chain bottlenecks and China's sooner-than-expected reopening are contributing to the recovery, the OECD said. Among its 38 members - an eclectic group ranging from the United States to Germany, Mexico, Japan and New Zealand - inflation is expected to slow to 6.6 percent this year, after soaring to 9.4 percent in 2022. But core inflation, which strips out volatile energy and food prices, is higher than previously expected, according to the OECD.

The international organization said this may force central banks, which have already raised interest rates in efforts to tame consumer prices, to further hike borrowing costs. "Central banks need to main-

tain restrictive monetary policies until there are clear signs that underlying inflationary pressures are abating," Lombardelli said. James Pomeroy, an economist at HSBC bank, said: "The period we are going through is slow growth but that's what policy makers want to see because we are trying to rein in some of the inflationary pressures."

At a press conference, Lombardelli said central banks faced a "delicate balance". "Obviously they shouldn't tighten too much to the point that it would have a greater impact on growth than it is necessary," said the OECD's new chief economist, who took her post last month. The OECD warned that higher interest rates around the world are "increasingly being felt", notably in property and financial markets. "Signs of stress have started to appear in some financial market segments as investors reassess risks, and credit conditions are tightening," the report said.

The banking sector was rocked in March by the collapse of US regional lender SVB, whose demise was partly blamed on high rates bringing down the value of its bond portfolio. The crisis reverberated across the Atlantic, with the Swiss government forcing Swiss banking giant UBS to take over troubled rival Credit Suisse. "Should further financial market stress arise, central banks should deploy financial policy instruments to enhance liquidity and minimize contagion risks," Lombardelli wrote.

### Debt danger

The OECD also warned that almost all countries have budget deficits and higher debt levels than be-



RAWALPINDI: A laborer pulls a handcart loaded with plastic pipes at a market area in Rawalpindi on June 7, 2023. — AFP

fore the pandemic as they propped up their economies to withstand the shocks of Covid restrictions and Russia's war in Ukraine. "As the recovery takes hold, fiscal support should be scaled back and better targeted," Lombardelli said. As energy prices, which soared following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, fall further, government should withdraw schemes aimed at supporting consumers, the OECD said.

The OECD raised its 2023 growth forecasts for the United States, the world's biggest economy,

to 1.6 percent and China, the second biggest, to 5.4 percent - both an increase of 0.1 percentage points. The euro-zone also got a slight 0.1-point bump to 0.9 percent. Britain was upgraded out of recession territory, with growth now forecast at 0.3 percent instead of a contraction. The OECD, however, sharply lowered the outlook for Germany, with zero growth now expected for Europe's economy while Japan's GDP will grow 1.3 percent, a slight downgrade. — AFP



PARIS: A protestor holds a sign reading 'Macron's pensions, it's no!' during a demonstration in the 14th day of action after the government pushed a pensions reform through parliament without a vote, using the article 49.3 of the constitution. - AFP

## French pensions protests falter despite anger

PARIS: French protests against President Emmanuel Macron's pensions overhaul began to run out of steam with the lowest numbers yet taking to the streets in half a year of demonstrations and leaders questioning the future of the movement. Hundreds of thousands of people protested across France for the 14th day of demonstrations since January, with some cities seeing angry clashes, but numbers throughout the country were low down on the peak of the movement in March.

Macron signed the legislation into law in April, raising the pension age to 64 from 62 after the government used a controversial but legal mechanism to avoid a vote in parliament on the bill. The later retirement age, which seeks to bolster France's troubled long-term finances, was a banner pledge of Macron's second and final term in office.

The new head of the hard-left CGT union, Sophie Binet, said as the protest in Paris got underway: "After six months the unions are still united and the level of anger, frustration and motivation is high." "I hear people say sometimes that everything is over, but it's not true," Laurent Berger, the head of the more moderate CFDT union, however, acknowledged that the "match is coming to an end" and Tuesday's protest would be "clearly the last on pensions in this format".

"I'd love to tell you that we're capable of mobilizing another two million people next week. That's not true, because you can't lie to workers. Unfortunately this reform has been enacted," he said. Some 281,000 people protested nationwide, the interior ministry said, the lowest turnout since the start of the movement, with just 31,000 people protesting in Paris. The nationwide peak was on March 7, when the government counted 1.28 million. According to the CGT union, 300,000 people took to the streets in Paris, while it said 900,000 protested nationwide, also its lowest such estimate since the protests began.

### 'No Games'

The figurehead of the hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) party Jean-Luc Melançon insisted the "struggle will continue" while admitting it was not clear "under what form". Seeking to show the potential power of union

action, around 60 members of the CGT briefly occupied the offices of the organizing committee for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games in northern Paris, chanting there would be "no Games" if the law was not pulled.

Michel Moulbach, a building worker in the northeastern city of Lille, said the movement had allowed people to express anger "but you need to be realistic". With summer holidays on the horizon "it will be hard not to take a pause." Clashes were reported in the southeastern city of Lyon, a flashpoint in previous demonstrations, where projectiles were thrown at security forces, local authorities said.

Police meanwhile used tear gas in clashes with protesters in the western city of Nantes, another flashpoint, while clashes were also reported in Toulouse in the south and Rennes in the west. In contrast to March and April when rubbish piled up in the streets of Paris and most long-distance trains were cancelled, only limited disruption is expected on transport or public services. Around a third of flights were cancelled at Paris Orly airport.

### 'Increase in violence'

Parts of the pensions overhaul, including the key increase in the retirement age, were printed Sunday in France's official journal, meaning they are now law. Opponents are pinning their hopes on a motion put forward by the small Liot faction in parliament - broadly backed by the left - to repeal the law and reverse the increased retirement age.

Parliament speaker Yael Braun-Pivet, a member of Macron's party but officially neutral, was to rule on Thursday whether a vote could go ahead. Most observers expect her to declare the bid to be unconstitutional. Having faced down the biggest protests in a generation to push through the changes, Macron appears intent on moving on, having concluded that voters now view the changes as inevitable and support for the demonstrations is waning.

The president Tuesday refused to comment on the issue as he attended commemorations for the 79th anniversary of D-Day, saying that "this is a moment... to celebrate the unity of the nation". The president's personal ratings are also moving higher again, having plunged to near-record depths in March and April. "I will not go so far as to say that the page is turned, there is no clean slate," one minister told AFP, asking not to be named. "It's not forgotten but we're going to start looking forwards again." - AFP

## Pullback in exports widens US trade gap

WASHINGTON: The US trade deficit grew in April on a pullback in exports, bringing the gap to its widest since October 2022, according to government data released on Wednesday. Although the country's imports have been boosted by resilient consumer spending, analysts expect this trend to weaken as well going forward, while tighter lending conditions weigh on investments. The anticipation is that trade could bring negative growth to gross domestic product in the second quarter of the year.

In April, the overall trade deficit was \$74.6 billion, expanding slightly less than expected by \$14 billion, according to Commerce Department data. Exports fell by \$9.2 billion to \$249 billion in the month, while imports edged up by \$4.8 billion to \$323.6 billion. "Net foreign trade often is sidelined in discussions of headline GDP growth, but it has been a huge swing factor since COVID," said Pantheon Macroeconomics economist Ian Shepherdson and Kieran Clancy in a recent report. They added that weakening in foreign trade will



SAN FRANCISCO: A view of the Parc 55 by Hilton Hotel in San Francisco, California. — AFP

likely be "accompanied by a further drag from the inventory component, and a steep drop in investment in business equipment, making an outright drop in headline GDP more likely." The slide in exports came on the back of a decrease in value of goods shipments, such as crude oil and fuel oil, along with some consumer goods. Imports of goods picked up with support from auto vehicles and parts, as well as some industrial supplies and materials.

But imports are likely to weaken in the months ahead, according to economist Mat-

thew Martin of Oxford Economics, as consumer strength declines and "businesses investment feels the pinch of tighter lending conditions and higher interest rates." Rubella Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics, said in a note: "After rising to all-time highs, overall trade flows have slowed." "A weaker trend could persist owing to the effects of monetary policy tightening around the globe which is adding to economic uncertainty domestically and abroad," she added. The US goods deficit with China stood at \$24.2 billion in April. — AFP



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# 10 billion global population 'unsustainable': US envoy

## Food, energy needs and supplies stretched

OSLO: US special climate envoy John Kerry told AFP that the world's population will not be tenable in 2050, when it is projected to hit nearly 10 billion, but refrained from asking Americans to give up steaks. Since November, the global population has officially crossed eight billion, more than three times the figure in 1950. This has already stretched food and energy needs and supplies. UN projections say the figure will balloon to 9.7 billion in the middle of the century. "I don't think it's sustainable personally," he said in an interview on Tuesday. "We need to figure out how we're going to deal with the issue of sustainability and the numbers of people we're trying to take care of on the planet."

Global warming is exacerbating the problem. The landmark 2015 Paris Agreement calls for capping global warming at "well below" two degrees Celsius and 1.5C if possible. Producing food for eight billion mouths accounts for over a fourth of greenhouse gas emissions. Cattle rearing for human consumption, food waste and deforestation further contribute to warming, which in turn is responsible for droughts, flooding and extreme weather conditions.

"I've been to a number of African countries where they're very proud of their increased birth rate but the fact is, it's unsustainable for life today, let alone when you add the future numbers," Kerry said. "I'm not recommending the population go down," the 79-year-old added. "I think we have the life we have on the planet. And we have to respect life and we could do it in so many better ways than we're doing now." Experts say Africa is one of the regions worst affected by climate change, with devastating droughts and

flooding, although its citizens have had barely any impact on global warming compared to Western nations.

### Changing habits

Avoiding air travel, consuming less meat and improving insulation of homes are all changes that can help protect the environment. According to a report published by Norway's environment agency Friday, the country could reduce an equivalent of 4.5 million tons of carbon emissions between 2024-2030 if its population of 5.5 million followed nutrition guidance by health authorities.

That guidance would see the biggest meat eaters reduce their intake to under 500 grams of red meat per week. But Kerry wasn't about to make an appeal for people to give up their hamburgers. "I think that those choices are up to people on their own, what they want to do, how they want to do it," he said. "What I would recommend is that we change our practices of how we feed livestock and what we feed them and how we use farming," he said referring to new technologies in farming that reduce the negative impacts to the environment.

The former secretary of state under Barack Obama, who lost the 2004 presidential election to George W. Bush, rejected the notion of prescribed, top-down changes to everyday life as a solution to the world's challenges. "I don't think you have to ask for a sacrifice of lifestyle in order to accomplish what we need to do," Kerry said. "I think you can have a better lifestyle, and you can eat better food and we can feed more people if we stop wasting as much food as we waste." — AFP



MUMBAI: Pedestrians walk past a population clock board displayed outside the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) in Mumbai. — AFP

## Scandal-hit British business lobby wins survival vote

LONDON: Britain's main business lobby, the CBI, won a survival vote Tuesday as members backed a cultural reset under new leadership after allegations of sexual misconduct threw the group into crisis. A total 93 percent of voting members backed a resolution to put their confidence in the Confederation of British Industry to reform its "governance, culture, and purpose", a statement said.

Ahead of the vote, the CBI had warned that the result would determine the fate of the nearly 60-year-old institution which has seen prominent corporate members quit in the wake of the allegations. "After an incredibly tough period, I'm deeply grateful for the faith shown in us by our members," said new CBI director general Rain Newton-Smith following the vote held at an extraordinary general meeting in London and online.

"We've made real progress in implementing the top-to-bottom program of change promised by the board and, while there remains work to do, today's result represents an important milestone on that journey." The CBI has faced claims that more than a dozen women were sexually harassed at the organization and two others had been raped.

Police have launched an investigation following the allegations reported this year by The Guardian newspaper, triggering a shake-up at the organization and the extraordinary vote on its future. The allegations, described as "absolutely devastating" by Newton-Smith, caused an exodus of member companies - and the launch Monday of a rival body by the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC).

### 'We have listened'

"Let me be clear, we have listened, we have acted, and we will leave no stone unturned to be the best voice for business inside and out," Newton-Smith added following the result of the vote. The scandal comes as UK businesses look for leadership during a cost-of-living crisis, with the country's elevated inflation cooling more slowly than expected. Under Newton-Smith, the CBI has proposed the creation of a People & Culture Committee plus an external expert-led Culture Advisory Committee. And it has created the role of chief people officer. At the same time it is cutting jobs as the reduction in members slashes revenue. In a move seen as taking advantage of the crisis, the BCC has launched the rival Business Council.

Founding partners include British energy group BP and Heathrow airport. The BCC said it welcomed the result of Tuesday's vote, seeing itself as a peer rather than rival to the CBI. "Given the challenges facing the UK economy, it is vital for the business community to have a diverse range of voices representing their concerns and priorities into government," BCC director general Shevaun Haviland said in a statement.

Newton-Smith on Tuesday said a revamped CBI could still be a powerful driving force, with its depth of expertise and practical business insights over decades. "Even our competitor groups have admitted they can't match all that," she told delegates. On the eve of the vote, about one dozen firms - including engineering giant Siemens, Microsoft and oil firm Esso - signed a joint letter published in The Times newspaper backing the CBI reforms. The signatories said that while the "CBI has recognized its failings", they "will hold it to account on putting its plan into action".

The letter added that "as the UK faces strong economic headwinds and anaemic growth and with a general election expected before the end of next year, it is vital that there is a credible voice representing all sectors and sizes of UK business." — AFP

## 675 m worldwide without electricity

GENEVA: A full 675 million people worldwide still lack access to electricity, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, according to a report published Tuesday by several international organizations. Despite significant efforts and some progress, the world continues to face a dramatic energy access gap, according to the report by the International Energy Agency (IEA), the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Bank and the World Health Organization. The report cautioned that the world remained off track to ensure clean and affordable energy access for all by 2030 - one of the so-called Sustainable Development Goals set by all UN countries in 2015.

The world has seen "a recent slowdown in the global pace of electrification," World Bank vice president for infrastructure Guangzhe Chen said in a joint statement. While the number of people living without electricity has been cut in half in the past decade, from 1.1 billion in 2010, 675 million people were still doing without in 2021, the report said. Around 80 percent of them live in sub-Saharan Africa, where the electricity access deficit has remained basically unchanged since 2010, the report said.

It highlighted progress elsewhere though, in particular the increased rate of using renewables in the power sector, but warned this progress was "insufficient" to reach the UN-set targets. "While the clean energy



LEPHALALE: This general view shows Eskom's Medupi coal powered power station in Lephalale, on June 6, 2023. Medupi is the 4th largest coal powered power station in the world and has a nominal capacity of 4800MW. — AFP

transition is moving faster than many think, there is still a great deal of work needed to deliver sustainable, secure and affordable access to modern energy services for the billions of people who live without it," Fatih Birol, IEA executive director, said in the statement.

Citing IRENA data, the report also cautioned that public financial flows supporting clean energy in poorer countries had been decreasing even before the COVID pandemic hit. It also found that the current mounting debt levels and rising energy prices were worsening the outlook for meeting the target of ensuring universal access to clean cooking methods and electricity within the next seven years. Current pro-

jections show that without scaling up efforts further, the world is on track to see 1.9 billion people still living without access to clean cooking methods and 660 million without electricity access in 2030.

That would be bad news for global health. According to the WHO, 3.2 million people die each year from illness caused by the use of polluting fuels and technologies. "We must protect the next generation by acting now," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in the statement. "Clean cooking technologies in homes and reliable electricity in health-care facilities can play a crucial role in protecting the health of our most vulnerable populations." — AFP



NEW YORK: A dog from the Good Dog company walks on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange during afternoon trading as they prepare to ring the closing bell in New York City. — AFP

## Stocks mostly drop after weak Chinese economic data

LONDON: Stock markets mostly retreated Wednesday as data showed ongoing weakness in China's economy, offsetting hope that the Federal Reserve would skip an interest rate hike this month. The OECD grouping of leading industrialized nations slightly raised its growth outlook for the world economy as inflation eases and after China dropped COVID restrictions, but it warned the recovery faced a "long road".

A World Bank warning on the global economic outlook Tuesday gave some food for thought as it lowered its growth expectations for next year. Reports that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken would visit China provided optimism for a thawing of relations between the superpowers. In foreign exchange, the Turkish lira sank to a all-time low against the dollar, with the currency continuing to struggle after the re-election of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the end of May.

The greenback, which hit a peak at 23.17 lira, was

down against the euro, pound and yen. Traders are keeping tabs on China, with reports saying authorities have asked the country's biggest banks to lower their deposit rates to boost the economy as it struggles to recover from years of zero-COVID lockdowns.

Analysts said such a move could indicate the People's Bank of China was considering an interest rate cut as soon as this month. The need for fresh help was highlighted Wednesday by data showing Chinese exports tumbled more than seven percent in May, far more than expected and the first drop since February. The reading follows figures showing shrinking factory activity and showed the uphill task officials have in kickstarting the economy. While imports performed better than forecasts, there remain concerns over consumer activity.

Oil prices gained in more volatile trading for the commodity as traders weigh Saudi output cuts against potential slowing demand as the global economy continues to battle elevated inflation. Along with weak Chinese data, markets reacted also to news of subdued industrial production in Europe's biggest economy, Germany. The Chinese reading was "yet another disappointing data which will raise growth concerns and intensify expectations of more policy support", said Khoon Goh, at Australia and New Zealand Banking Group. — AFP

## Italy PM pressing for Tunisia's IMF bailout

TUNIS: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said on Tuesday Rome backed efforts to secure an IMF bailout for Tunisia and support to tackle its growing migrant problem. She was speaking after talks in Tunis with President Kais Saied whose country is going through a dire financial crisis, political tensions. Tunisia is also a departure point for migrants attempting perilous sea journeys to Europe. Last October, the debt-riddled North African country reached an agreement in principle with the International Monetary Fund for nearly \$2 billion, but discussions have since stalled.

The IMF has called for legislation to restructure more than 100 state-owned firms, which hold monopolies over many parts of the economy and in many cases are heavily indebted. But Saied on Tuesday again rejected what he calls the "diktats" of the IMF before a loan is granted, his office said, even as the country struggles under crippling inflation and debt estimated at around 80 percent of its gross domestic product. After nearly two hours of talks with Saied, Meloni reiterated that Italy has been pressing for a "pragmatic" approach to the IMF bailout through the European Union and G7.

Meloni also said she has been advocating through the EU for a "concrete approach to step up support for Tunisia in its fight against human trafficking and illegal migration". Tunisia's coastline is less than 150 kilometers from the Italian island of Lampedusa, and has long been a stepping stone for migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan African countries, seeking a better life in Europe. The flow of migrants from Tunisia intensified after Saied made a fiery speech on February 21 claiming that illegal immigration was a demographic threat to Tunisia.

Meloni said she discussed with Saied the idea of hosting a conference in Rome to thrash out the problems of illegal migration and ways to bolster development. The meeting, for which no date was revealed, could bring together representatives of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and Gulf countries "to hear their needs and elaborate projects to attract investments", she said. Meloni also called for "growth in democracy" and political stability in Tunisia, where tensions have run high since Saied launched a sweeping power grab in July 2021, rocking the democracy in the birthplace of the 2011 Arab Spring revolts. — AFP



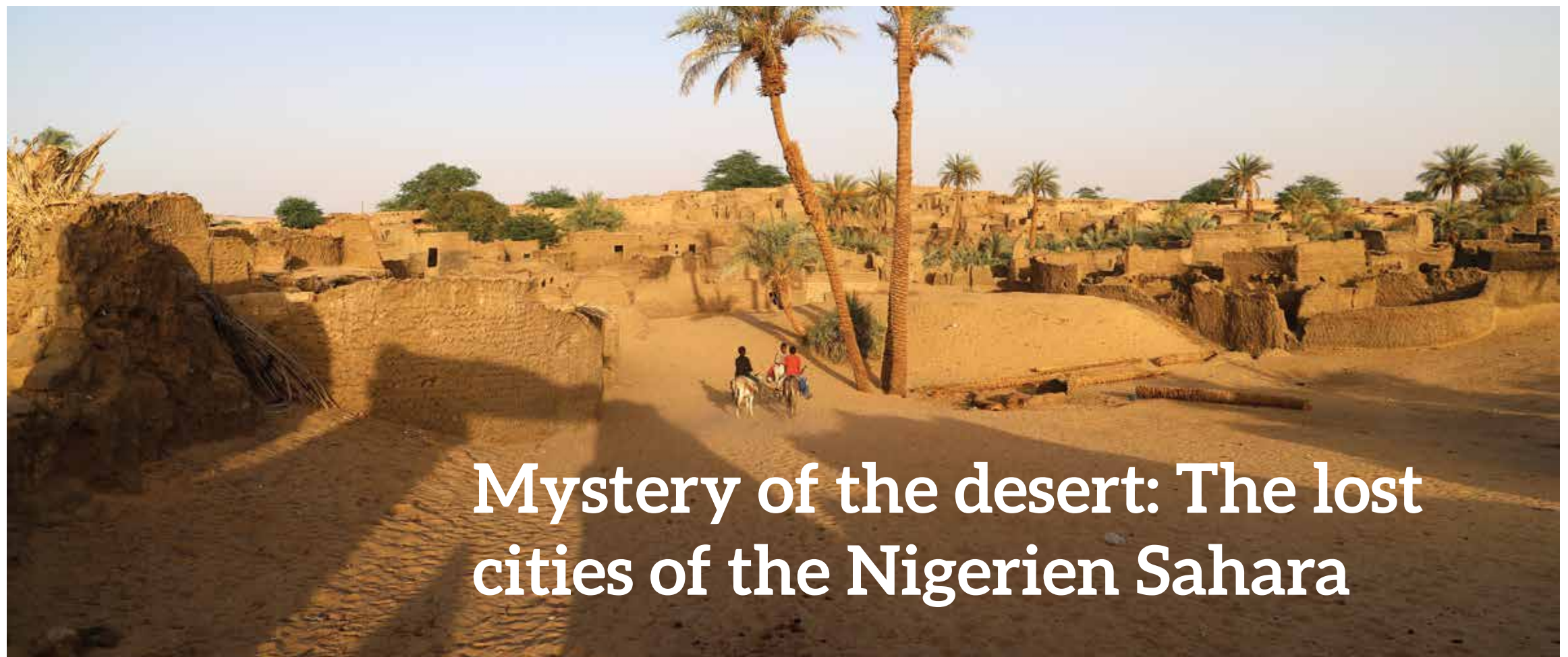
Lifestyle



A general view of the Djado fortress, in Djado.



An aerial view of the fortress of Djaba, a fortress that dates back more than 200 years, near Djado.



# Mystery of the desert: The lost cities of the Nigerien Sahara

A long trek across the desert of northeastern Niger brings the visitor to one of the most astonishing and rewarding sights in the Sahel: fortified villages of salt and clay perched on rocks with the Saharan sands laying siege below. Generations of travellers have stood before the “ksars” of Djado, wondering at their crenelated walls, watchtowers, secretive passages and wells, all of them testifying to a skilled but unknown hand.



A small family poses for a photograph at the house that they kept from their ancestors in the old town of Dirkou. - AFP photos

Who chose to build this outpost in a scorched and desolate region — and why they built it — are questions that have never been fully answered. And just as beguiling is why it was abandoned. No archaeological dig or scientific dating has ever been undertaken to explain the mysteries. Djado lies in the Kavar oasis region 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) from the capital Niamey, near Niger’s deeply troubled border with Libya.



An aerial view of the old town of Fachi.

Once a crossroads for caravans trading across the Sahara, Kavar today is a nexus for drug and arms trafficking. Its grim reputation deters all but the most determined traveler. “There have been no foreign tourists since 2002”, said Sidi Aba Laouel, the mayor of Chirfa, the commune where the Djado sites are located.

“When tourism was good, there was economic potential for the community.” A blessing of sorts occurred in 2014, when gold was discovered. It saw an influx of miners from across West Africa, bringing life and some economic respite, but also bandits who hole up in

the mountains. Few of the newcomers seem interested to visit the ksars.

### Devastating raids

The mayor is careful when speaking about local history, acknowledging the many gaps in knowledge. He refers to old photocopies in his cupboard of a work by Albert le Rouvreur, a colonial-era French military officer stationed in Chirfa, who tried without success to shed light on the origins of the site. The Sao, present in the region since antiquity, were the first known inhabitants in Kavar, and perhaps established the first fortifications.

But the timeline of their settlement is hazy. Some of the ksars still standing have palm roofs, suggesting they were built later. Between the 13th and the 15th centuries, the Kanuri people established themselves in the area.

Their oasis civilization was almost destroyed in the 18th and 19th centuries by successive waves of nomadic raiders — the Tuaregs, Arabs and finally the Toubou. The arrival of the first Europeans in the early 20th century spelt the beginning of the end of the ksars as a defense against invaders. The French military took the area

in 1923.

Today, the Kanuri and Toubou have widely intermingled but the region’s traditional leaders, called the “mai”, descend from the Kanuri lineage. They act as authorities of tradition, as well as being custodians of oral history. But even for these custodians, much remains a mystery. “Even our grandfathers didn’t know. We didn’t keep records,” said Kiari Kelaoui Abari Chegou, a Kanuri leader.

### Threatened relics

Three hundred kilometers to the south of Djado lies the Fachi oasis, famous for its fortress and old town, with the walls still almost intact. Some symbolic sites of the ancient city are still used for traditional ceremonies. A traditional authority of Fachi, Kiari Sidi Tchagam says the fortress is “at least two hundred years old”.

“According to our information, there was an Arab who had come from Turkey, it was he who gave people the idea of making the fort there,” he said, echoing theories of Turkish influence. While the ruins are a point of pride, descendants are worried the fragile salt buildings, threatened by rain, are not properly safeguarded. Since 2006, Djado has languished on a tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. “It’s really crucial it’s registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site,” said Tchagam. “We are reminded of ourselves in this fort, it’s a part of our culture, (it’s) our entire history.” — AFP



An aerial view of the place where all the decisions of the canton are taken by the canton chief and his men.



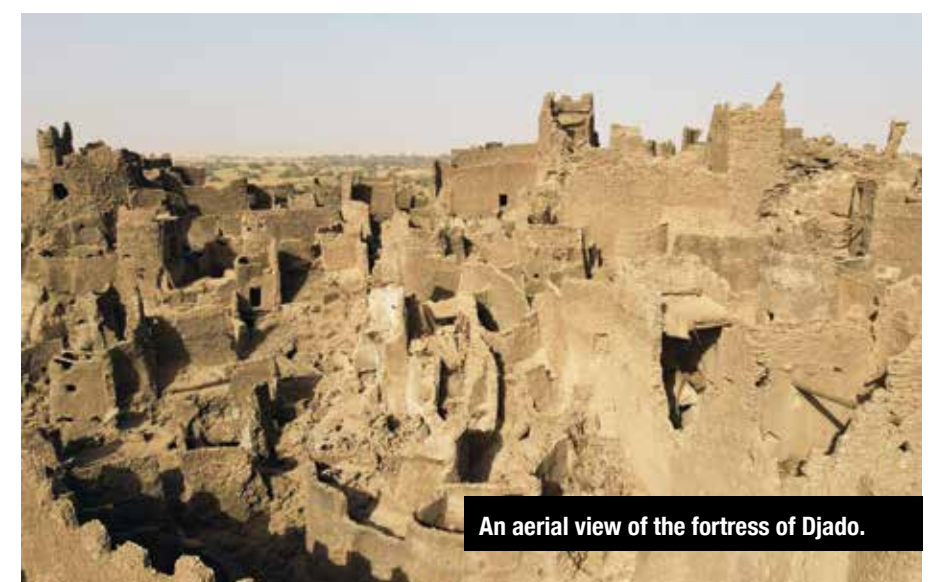
An aerial view of the granaries that were used by the population to store their food during the attacks in the old fortress of Fachi.



A general view of the old mosque in Dirkou.



A general view of the Djado fortress, in Djado.



An aerial view of the fortress of Djado.



## Lifestyle



This photo shows various dishes set out on a table at the Vegan Izakaya Masaka restaurant in the Shibuya area of Tokyo. - AFP photos

Even on a weekday, there's a queue at Tokyo's vegan Izakaya Masaka, including many tourists eager to try meat-free versions of Japanese classics like fried chicken and juicy dumplings. While millions of visitors have happily savored Japan's fish- and meat-heavy cuisine, options for vegetarians and vegans are harder

has held seminars for restaurateurs and dispatched experts to help eateries develop new menu items, introducing alternatives to staple ingredients such as dried fish flakes or pork-bone broth.

Ninna Fujimoto from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government told AFP that the city wants to help accommodate tourists by widening the diversity of food



This photo shows "gyoza", a kind of Japanese fried dumpling, being prepared in the kitchen at the Vegan Izakaya Masaka restaurant in the Shibuya area of Tokyo.



A dish of "karaage" with tartar sauce, made from deep fried soy meat.



## Beyond sushi: Japan expands veggie options to tempt tourists

to find. Now, Tokyo and other cities are on a mission to show the country's renowned gastronomy is not off-limits to those who don't eat meat.

Tina Bui, a 36-year-old vegan from San Francisco, said she was very excited to order the signature "karaage" soy fried chicken at Izakaya Masaka. She said plant-based options were limited in Japan compared to the United States, with just "enough for me to survive" a short trip. Tokyo's government

options, including vegetarian cuisine. The city publishes a specialist restaurant guide, offers subsidies to get businesses certified veggie-friendly, and has two vegetarian and vegan chefs among its "tourism ambassadors".

One of them is Katsumi Kusumoto of Saido, a restaurant that serves vegan versions of common dishes, such as grilled eel made from tofu and vegetables. "In Tokyo, there are lots of Michelin-starred restaurants, the most in the

recent years, are foreign tourists. It's "sad" so many people are excluded from Tokyo's fine dining scene, said Kusumoto, who posts on social media about vegan cooking and gives demonstrations in his volunteer ambassador role. Haruko Kawano, founder of the non-profit VegeProject Japan, is also helping Tokyo in its push for a more inclusive cuisine.

"A lot of restaurants think making vegan dishes is very, very difficult," she

said. "In Japan, there are few vegetarians or vegans, (so owners) don't know about them, or what they really want." Some worry they will need a separate kitchen, or to follow strict rules as for halal or kosher food, Kawano added. Others are reluctant to stop using core ingredients like dashi fish stock, often added to flavor otherwise vegetarian dishes.

"There are some very good dashi made without animal products," Kawano said. "If they try, and understand how good it is, they can maybe make very beautiful, delicious Japanese



A dish of spicy glass noodles on a table at the Vegan Izakaya Masaka restaurant in the Shibuya area of Tokyo.

destination near Tokyo.

At the workshop, expert Mari Fujii showed five people from Sweden, Venezuela, India and the United States how to make "kenchinjiru" vegetable soup and several side dishes. "Vegetarians come and participate, but also people who are interested in and want to know more about the philosophy and background of the food," said Fujii, 72, whose late husband was a Buddhist monk.

Being a vegetarian in Japan remains challenging, despite the efforts made in recent years. Ashley van Gool, PR



Photo shows "shojin" style cuisine specialist Mari Fujii preparing meals with participants during a one-day "shojin" style cooking intensive course.

food." VegeProject was involved in a recent trial to turn the town of Ikaho in the Gunma region into a model for attracting veggie tourists. Other cities making similar efforts include Sapporo, whose tourism promotion committee is publishing an online video series about vegetarian restaurants and cafes.

### Buddhist traditions

Data on vegetarians and vegans in Japan is sparse, with small-scale surveys finding just a small percentage of the population following such diets. But the concept is not new in the country, where Buddhist vegetarian cuisine, known as "shojin ryori", has been eaten for hundreds of years. These days it is served mainly at temples and specialist restaurants — and at a cooking class in Kamakura, a popular seaside day-trip

manager for Izakaya Masaka, thinks Tokyo can "definitely" become as culinarily diverse as New York, London and other global cities. "It's already been improving over the past years," she said, with regular restaurants starting to offer one or two veggie dishes.

Customer Laura Schwarzl from Austria paused her vegetarianism to eat meat and fish during her trip to Japan, saying the food is "very special". The 22-year-old also planned to visit Indonesia and other destinations, where she expected to find more choices. "As soon as I leave Japan, I'll be vegetarian again," she said. — AFP



A participant prepares meals during a one-day "shojin" style cooking intensive course.



A staff taking a dish to a customer at the Vegan Izakaya Masaka restaurant.



A participant prepares meals during a one-day "shojin" style cooking intensive course.



A picture shows plastic reproductions of dishes at the former El Bulli restaurant transformed into 'elBulli1846' Museum, in Roses, near Barcelona. - AFP photos



Plastic reproductions of dishes displayed at the former El Bulli restaurant transformed into 'elBulli1846' Museum, in Roses, near Barcelona.

## 'World's best restaurant' to reopen in Spain as museum

Spain's elBulli, repeatedly voted the world's best restaurant before it closed over a decade ago, is set to reopen as a museum dedicated to the culinary revolution it sparked. Nestled in an isolated cove on Spain's northeastern tip, the museum is dubbed "elBulli1846" — a reference to the 1,846 dishes ground-breaking chef Ferran Adria says were developed at the eatery. "It's not about coming here to eat, but to understand what happened in elBulli," the 61-year-old told AFP near the kitchen of the restaurant he ran for over two decades.

The museum will open on June 15, nearly 12 years after the restaurant served its final dish to the public. Visitors will be able to see hundreds of photos, notebooks, trophies and models made of plastic or wax that emulate some of the innovative dishes which were served at the eatery. Adria pioneered the culinary trend known as molecular gastronomy, which deconstructs ingredients and recombines them in unexpected ways.

The results are foods with surprising combinations and textures, such as fruit foams, gazpacho popsicles and caramelized quails. Under Adria's watch elBulli achieved the coveted Michelin three-star status and was rated the world's best restaurant a record five

times by British magazine The Restaurant. "What we did here was find the limits of what can be done in a gastronomic experience," Adria said. "What are the physical, mental and even spiritual limits that humans have. And that search paved paths for others."

### 'Passion for cuisine'

Some of the world's most famous chefs were trained by Adria at elBulli, including Denmark's Rene Redzepi of Noma and Italy's Massimo Bottura of Osteria Francescana. A foundation set up to maintain elBulli's legacy invested 11 million euros (\$11.8 million) in the museum. Plans to expand the building on the idyllic Cala Montjoi cove near the towns of Roses had to be adjusted after they ran into opposition from environmentalists.

Adria headed to the white-walled restaurant overlooking the Mediterranean in 1983 for a one month internship

on the recommendation of a friend. He was invited to join the restaurant's staff as a line cook the following year, and became its solo head chef in 1987. Adria bought the restaurant in 1990 with his business partner Juli Soler, who passed away in 2015.

"The most important thing that happened to me at elBulli is that I discovered for the first time passion for cuisine," he said. "At the table, when the staff ate together, we did not talk about football, or our weekends, we talked about cuisine."

### 'Right to close'

The restaurant opened usually just six months of the year to give Adria and his staff time to conceive new dishes. The meal consisted of a set menu comprising dozens of small dishes which cost around 325 euros, including a drink, when the restaurant closed in 2011. A team of 70 people prepared the



Spanish chef Ferran Adria poses next to sculptures he calls "Bullinanos" outside of the El Bulli restaurant, transformed into 'elBulli1846' Museum, during an interview with AFP, in Roses, near Barcelona.

meals for the 50 guests who managed to get a reservation. Adria said he accepted that his culinary innovations did not please everyone.

"In the end they are new things and it's a shock after the other, it is normal that it makes you reflect on what you like," he said. In the final years of the restaurant, demand for reservations was so high that Adria allocated seats mostly through a lottery. When Adria decided to close the restaurant, he justified the move saying it "had become a monster". "I was very certain that we were right to close. We had reached what we felt was a satisfactory experience at the maximum level," Adria told AFP. "And once we reached it we said 'why do we have to continue?'. The mission of elBulli was not this, it was finding the limits," he added. — AFP



Size templates made of modelling pate displayed at the former El Bulli restaurant transformed into 'elBulli1846' Museum, in Roses, near Barcelona.



Lifestyle



A woman making a traditional Papua New Guinean "Bilum" bag at a workshop in Port Moresby.



Supervisor Maureen Charlie working at a workshop producing traditional Papua New Guinean "Bilum" bags in Port Moresby.



A man posing with a traditional Papua New Guinean "Bilum" bag around his neck in Port Moresby.

# PAPUA NEW GUINEA WOMEN WEAVE THEIR WAY TO A LIVING

Inside a compound in Papua New Guinea's capital, Betty Nabi is putting six decades of expertise to work, weaving traditional bags that can last a lifetime. The boutique workshop in Port Moresby hosts a group of women who specialize in intricately lacing plant fibers together to make the roomy pouches known as bilums, a symbol of Indigenous pride. The word bilum means "womb" in the local Tok Pisin language, and the women are giving the functional handwoven bags new life — bringing them to an international audience in return for a steady wage in a country where about 40 percent live below the poverty line.



A woman making a traditional Papua New Guinean "Bilum" bag at a workshop in Port Moresby. - AFP photos



A woman holding woven ornaments at a workshop in Port Moresby, where traditional Papua New Guinean "Bilum" bags are made.



Traditional Papua New Guinean "Bilum" bags on display at a workshop in Port Moresby.



A woman making a traditional Papua New Guinean "Bilum" bag at a workshop in Port Moresby.

**'Makes us proud'**  
Demand is growing, with international customers in North America, Europe and neighboring Australia increasingly

looking for authentic bilums, says supervisor Maureen Charlie, 34. The bags have also drawn attention from the fashion world, with coverage of the patterned pouches and the techniques used to make them landing in top magazines such as Grazia, Harper's Bazaar and Vogue Australia.

Some are concerned the bag that serves as a pillar of Papua New Guinea culture is being misappropriated by Westerners for fashion and profit. But the weavers say they have little issue with its export. "It makes us proud, like, 'Oh yeah, there's something from PNG there,'" said Charlie. "It's special. It's part of who we are and it's part of our

culture. We are still doing it, and my children will be doing it."

Bilums are often given to friends and family, or used in welcome rituals, sometimes being laid on the floor in front of guests. But the women are capitalizing on their increasing popularity to stitch together a living for their families and other weavers. "In villages, women don't have any source of income. Sometimes they don't have time to come to the markets, or road access, so they just weave and store their bilums," said Charlie.

**'Anytime, forever'**

At the lower end of the market, women in Port Moresby take their wares to

worn by women like Charlie, but Papua New Guinean men are increasingly donning them as pouches around their neck.

"If a woman doesn't wear a bilum... they say you're not a woman," said Charlie. "When I carry a bilum, I feel like I'm a woman and I'm from Papua New Guinea." So weaving the bags handed down to them by their mothers and grandmothers is about more than money. "We can make bilum anytime, forever," said Betty Nabi. "We will not stop."

— AFP



A woman selling traditional Papua New Guinean "Bilum" bags at a craft market in Port Moresby.



Boutique workshop supervisor Maureen Charlie posing with traditional Papua New Guinean "Bilum" bags in Port Moresby.



A woman carrying items in her traditional Papua New Guinean "Bilum" bag in Port Moresby.

## Harry takes stand again in historic court battle with tabloids

Prince Harry was back on the stand for a second day of cross-examination in a London court on Wednesday, the first British royal in more than a century to give evidence on the witness stand. The younger son of King Charles III is testifying against a tabloid publisher for alleged illegal information-gathering, including phone hacking, alongside several other claimants. After around five hours of grueling questioning Tuesday, he returned to the High Court just before 0900 GMT to continue giving evidence against Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN).

The 38-year-old prince, again dressed in a dark suit and tie, claims the publisher of The Mirror, Sunday Mirror and the Sunday People used illegal practices to write dozens of stories about him. "I believe phone hacking was at an industrial scale across at least three of its papers and that is beyond doubt," Harry said under renewed cross-examination by MGN lawyer Andrew Green. He added if that was not accepted by the court, "I would feel some injustice".

On Tuesday, after swearing an oath on the Bible, the Duke of Sussex — as he is also known — took aim at the British press and, in a rarity for a royal, the government. He told the court that media intrusion had blighted his life, while also claiming the state of both the press and government were "at rock bottom". British royals have largely

steered clear of publicly commenting about the government of the day, given the monarch is head of state of a constitutional monarchy and supposed to be above politics.

But Harry, who has launched several lawsuits against tabloid media groups in recent years alongside barrages of attacks towards his family, defied the convention in the history-making court appearance. 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.

**Friends 'lost'**

In a lengthy witness statement released Tuesday, the prince claimed to be the victim of relentless and distressing media intrusion "most of my life up until this day," claiming some media had blood on their hands. At the May 10 start of the trial, MGN apologized



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

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 by Harry and the other claimants — two TV soap opera actors and the ex-wife of a comedian. Harry has faced questions about various aspects of the 33 tabloid stories being considered, covering everything from ex-girlfriends and rumors that army officer James Hewitt was his father to royal family relations.

The prince admitted that he had no recollection of reading the majority of the articles — many around two decades old — that he was complaining about. But he called them "incredibly invasive" and taken as a whole they had made him acutely paranoid and ruined his relationships. "Friendships were lost entirely unnecessarily," the prince noted. Harry — fifth in line to the throne — stepped down from royal duties in early 2020 and relocated to California with his American wife Meghan. He has long had a turbulent relationship with the press and holds the media responsible for the death of his mother, Princess Diana, in a 1997 Paris car crash 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. — AFP

## Louvre safeguarding Ukraine art treasures

The Louvre in Paris is hosting 16 works of art, including 1,500-year-old Byzantine icons, from a museum in Kyiv in order to protect them from the war, it said Wednesday. "Since the start of the war, like other museums, we have been concerned to see how we can support our Ukrainian colleagues. In the autumn, faced with the intensity of the conflict, we decided to carry out this rescue," Louvre president Laurence des Cars told AFP. "It's not much in a sea of sadness and desolation, but it's a symbol," she added.

She said the Louvre was particularly concerned by the risk of theft and illicit trafficking of artworks and relics if they had stayed in Ukraine. Among the works being safeguarded by the Louvre are five Byzantine icons from the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko Museum, Ukraine's national arts institution, which will be exhibited in Paris from June 14 to November 6. Four of the icons are from Saint

Catherine's Monastery in Egypt and date from the 6th and 7th centuries, and the fifth is from late 13th or early 14th century Constantinople. Eleven other works, "among the most emblematic and most fragile" from the Ukrainian collection, will be housed in the Louvre's reserves "until the situation improves," Des Cars said.

She welcomed a Ukrainian delegation, including the head of the Khanenko museum, in October when UN cultural body UNESCO declared 240 sites in their country had been damaged by the war. Earlier that month, a rocket landed near the Khanenko Museum, blowing out the windows. Most of its works have been moved into the museum's storage, but are at risk from temperature variations caused by power cuts. The operation to rescue the 16 selected works was supported by the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas. — AFP





## Sports

# Sri Lanka thrash Afghanistan to clinch 2-1 ODI series win

## Karunaratne and Nissanka half-centuries lift Sri Lanka

**HAMBANTOTA:** Half-centuries by Sri Lanka openers Dimuth Karunaratne and Pathum Nissanka made short work of Afghanistan in a nine-wicket drubbing that clinched a 2-1 ODI series win for the hosts Wednesday. Sri Lanka eased to 120 with 34 overs to spare in Hambantota, after a fast-bowling attack led by man-of-the-match Dushmantha Chameera had demolished the hapless Afghan top order.

It was just the boost Sri Lanka needed before heading off for a qualifying tournament in Zimbabwe, with two remaining slots up for grabs for the World Cup. Afghanistan are already through to the World Cup, to be held in India from October, but skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi was left to rue "a bad day for our batters". "We lost too many wickets and it put us under pressure," he told reporters. "I still feel it was a good call to bat first but we lost too many wickets earlier on and that took the momentum away from us."

Nissanka did not waste time when the chase began, racing to his seventh ODI half-century in 32 balls with eight fours and two sixes. He departed on 51 after being trapped leg before by Gulbadin Naib to end an 84-run stand for the opening wicket. Fellow opener Karunaratne, featuring in his first ODI

series in more than two years, made 56 not out to ensure that Sri Lanka reached the target without another wicket falling.

His 56 came off 45 balls with seven boundaries, making his eighth half-century in the format. Kusal Mendis was unbeaten on 11 as Sri Lanka reached the target in just 16 overs to end the game early. Afghanistan won the toss and elected to bat, but fast-bowling spearhead Chameera established Sri Lanka's dominance early with two fiery spells that left the tourists unable to post a decent partnership. Chameera, playing his first series after ankle surgery sidelined him for seven months, earned man-of-the-match honors with his 4-63.

"The wicket was slow today so we had to sort out our strategies. There was good backup for me from rest of the bowlers," he said. "It's important to keep things tight and when you do that, batsmen take risks, and there are more chances for you to pick up wickets." Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga polished off the Afghan tail with 3-7 while quick Lahiru Kumara claimed two wickets, as the tourists folded for 116 all out. Afghanistan won the first game comprehensively by six wickets, but Sri Lanka bounced back to take the second game by 132 runs. — AFP



**HAMBANTOTA:** Sri Lanka's players pose with the trophy after winning the third and final one-day international (ODI) cricket match against Afghanistan at the Mahinda Rajapaksa International Cricket Stadium in Hambantota on June 7, 2023. — AFP

## 'WTC final, Ashes can secure legacy' for Australia

**LONDON:** Australia captain Pat Cummins said on Tuesday the World Test Championship final against India and the subsequent Ashes tour of England will define his side's place in cricket history. Cummins' men face India in just the second WTC final at the Oval starting on Wednesday, the first of six Tests in eight weeks, including a five-match Ashes series. New Zealand beat India in the inaugural 2021 WTC final in Southampton, while it is 22 years since Australia last won an Ashes campaign in England.

"Whether we like it or not, these big series are where you look back at eras of cricket teams and judge their performances," Cummins told reporters at the Oval. "That's an exciting opportunity for us.... No doubt this will be the last Ashes away tour for a lot of the guys." The 30-year-old fast bowler added: "Missing the first one (WTC final), this second one feels like it is a bit more significant. It is the only trophy that Australian cricket hasn't won."

This week's match takes place against a backdrop of fears over the future of Test cricket during the growth of global franchise Twenty20 tournaments. But Cummins said he wished the final, the culmination of a two-year program, would strengthen the place of the WTC in cricket's congested international calendar. "I hope this week shows that it does work," said the skipper. "Every day is a sell-out. I just had a meeting where they said it will be the most-watched Test ever played. So hopefully this event is a real event that is here to stay."

The WTC final will be Australia's only match in England before next week's first Ashes Test at Edgbaston after officials ditched fixtures against county sides that have traditionally been a part of the tour program. Cummins, however, was adamant the final was a key game in itself and not merely a warm-up for the Ashes. "It's absolutely an event," he said. "It feels like it is the bookend of the past two years' campaign. We have played great cricket over that campaign, and after this Test match it means nothing. We start again, starting with a series that doesn't get much bigger than an Ashes away series. "It does feel like a final."

India have yet to name their team but Australia have confirmed that seamer Scott Boland will play. Josh Hazlewood has been ruled out of the final with a side injury and that left Boland and Michael Neser, a late call-up to the squad after impressing for Glamorgan in England's County Championship, competing for a place.

Australia, however, have stuck with Boland, who enjoyed a stunning international debut during the 2021/22 Ashes, with his return of 6-7 in Melbourne helping seal a series win. The 34-year-old has now taken 28 wickets in seven Tests at a remarkably low average of 13.42. "Someone like Scotty, it's just a really simple game plan - you hit your good areas and you stay there all day and hopefully the ball will do the work for you," said Cummins. — AFP

## Apple TV+ announces Messi documentary

**NEW YORK:** Streaming platform Apple TV+ on Tuesday announced a four-part documentary series on Argentina's World Cup-winning captain Lionel Messi. The service said the series would feature "exclusive behind-the-scenes access" to the football megastar, who scored seven goals as Argentina lifted the World Cup in Qatar in December.

"In his own words, Messi tells the definitive story of his incredible career with the Argentina national football team, providing an intimate and unprecedented look at his quest for a legacy-defining World Cup vic-

## West Indies wrap up ODI series win over UAE

**SHARJAH:** The West Indies produced a fine team display to secure a series victory over the United Arab Emirates with a 78-run win in the second one-day international on Tuesday. Openers Brandon King and Johnson Charles both plundered half-centuries as the tourists made 306 all out batting first. The bowlers then shared the wickets around as the UAE slipped to 95-5 before eventually finishing on 228-7 in their 50 overs.

The West Indies are preparing for the World Cup qualifying event in Zimbabwe which starts on June 18 and also features the UAE. The two-time world champions have never failed to reach the global showpiece, but only two of the 10 teams in the qualifier will reach the World Cup in India later this year. "The game was always about getting wickets and putting pressure on the opposition," said West Indies captain Shai Hope. "Unfortunately, didn't get wickets to see the game out earlier. But still happy with the win."

Charles got the Windies off to a flying start with a 47-ball 63, while King followed up his hundred in Sunday's first ODI with 64. After a mini-collapse, all-rounder Odean Smith clobbered 37 off 24 balls



**SHARJAH:** West Indies' Roston Chase delivers a ball to a UAE's batsman during the second one-day international (ODI) cricket match between the United Arab Emirates and West Indies at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium on June 6, 2023. — AFP

to drag the Caribbean side past 300 before they were bowled out with one ball remaining. Smith also took 1-27 in eight miserly overs, with spinners Kavem Hodge, Roston Chase and Yannic Carih

sharing five wickets between them. Teenager Ali Naseer again shone for the UAE, hitting 57 from 53 deliveries to back up his fifty on ODI debut at the weekend. — AFP

## PGA chief faces calls to resign after LIV merger

**LOS ANGELES:** PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan reportedly faced calls to resign at a heated players' meeting following the announcement of a shock merger with LIV Golf. Monahan was accused of hypocrisy after announcing that the US-based PGA Tour and Europe's DP World Tour had agreed a tie-up with the Saudi-backed rebel circuit in a bid to end golf's civil war. LIV Golf launched last year with eight events, luring top talent with record \$25-million purses and money guarantees.

Monahan, who has railed against LIV since its inception, attended a tense meeting with players on Tuesday ahead of the Canadian Open in Toronto. US media reported that furious players - who had been kept in the dark about the merger until the news broke - challenged Monahan over the bombshell announcement. In a media conference call later Tuesday, Monahan acknowledged that criticism directed at him was inevitable, saying he understood being branded a "hypocrite".

The Golf Channel reported that former three-time PGA Tour winner Johnson Wagner had access to an audio feed of the meeting, which he described as "contentious", saying "a lot of players are unhappy". "There were many moments where certain players were calling for new leadership of the PGA Tour and even got a couple of standing ovations," he told the channel. He added: "As we step away from this and see it unfold in the coming weeks I think we'll get more clarity but there was a lot of anger in that room from players, feeling like they can't trust what the leadership of the PGA says any more."

tory," Apple TV+ said in a statement. No broadcast date was given for the documentary, which will be produced by Smuggler Entertainment and was filmed in Paris, Qatar and Argentina.

The series will retrace Messi's international career, starting with his debut for Argentina in 2005 when he was sent off two minutes after coming on as a substitute and including defeat in the 2014 World Cup final. It will culminate with the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner's lifting of football's ultimate prize last year at his fifth World Cup. Messi, 35, left Paris Saint-Germain earlier this month following two seasons in which he scored 32 goals in 75 appearances and won two Ligue 1 titles. He has not announced which club side he will play for next, with reports and a source close to the negotiations suggesting he could soon sign a lucrative contract to play in Saudi Arabia. — AFP



**ST ALBANS:** Players practice on the driving range ahead of the forthcoming LIV Golf Invitational Series event at The Centurion Club in St Albans, north of London. The PGA Tour and DP World Tour announced that they have merged their commercial operations with the Saudi-backed LIV Golf and ended all litigation, bringing to a close the sport's bitter two-year rift. — AFP

Wagner said the future pathway for LIV players to return to the PGA Tour was unclear. And he said it was difficult to predict the shape of tournaments. LIV events are played over 54 holes rather than the traditional 72-hole format and use "shotgun" starts, with golfers starting at the same time on different holes. "I don't think he (Monahan) has the answers to that yet," he said. "I think we're in the infancy of this whole thing so there was no real discussion of what it's going to look like."

Monahan insisted that his staunch defense of the

tour over the past year had been in good faith, but that "circumstances do change." He defended the cloak-and-dagger nature of the merger talks with LIV that led to Tuesday's announcement. "Given the complexity of what we were dealing with, it's not uncommon that the circle of information is very tight," Monahan added. Rory McIlroy, one of the most vocal opponents of LIV among the PGA Tour's players, is playing at the Canadian Open this week and is due to speak to reporters later on Wednesday. — AFP



**BUENOS AIRES:** Photo shows a view of a mural painting depicting Argentine football star Lionel Messi at the Villa del Parque train station in Buenos Aires. — AFP



Sports

# Zain ends football season with spectacular Excellence Awards

Winners in six categories received total of KD 30,000 cash prizes from Zain



Al Shaheen and Al Khashti with the winners and members of the technical committee.



The moment Mohammed Daham was announced Best Player.



Local sports community at the event.

Winner	Club	Award
Mohammed Daham	Naser SC	Best Player (KD10,000)
Taha Yaseen Alkhunaisi	Kuwait SC	League Top Scorer (KD 5000)
Shibeeb Alkhalidi	Kazima SC	League Top Local Scorer (KD 5000)
Abdulrahman Kameel	Kuwait SC	Best Goalkeeper (KD 5000)
Firas Alkhateeb	Fahaheel SC	Best Coach (KD 3000)
Hussain Ashkanani	Arabi SC	Best Rising Star (KD 2000)

**KUWAIT:** Zain held a special Excellence Awards ceremony to recognize the top athletes in the recently concluded 2022-2023 football season of the Zain Premier League (Dawri Zain). During the event, the very best players were recognized on stage after being selected by the technical committee for their top performance, winning them the affection of fans and the wider local sports community. The special event was held at the St Regis Hotel, attended by Kuwait Football Association Chairman Abdullah Al Shaheen, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, and members of the local sports community and local and regional sports journalists.

During the ceremony, Zain and the KFA took to the stage to celebrate and award the top performers of the 2022-2023 season with the cash prizes announced at the season's kick-off last year. The recognition came after the technical committee officially announced the winners on-stage, after which they were presented with a total of KD 30,000 as cash prizes.

In addition to the above awards, Zain also presented a weekly Player of the Round Award of KD 500 that started with the ninth week. These prizes came to reflect Zain's keenness in recognizing those athletes who pursued excellence and elevated the league's performance. A special committee was formed in coordination with the

Kuwait Football Association to outline the standards and criteria on which the winners were selected. The committee is membered by former Kuwaiti international players Saad Al Houti (as the committee's head), Wael Sulaiman, Osama Hussain, and Mohammed Benyaan, who were all recognized on stage by Zain during the event for their efforts in selecting the winners throughout the season.

During the event, Zain also awarded the top three winners of the Zain Fantasy League for the 2022-2023 season. The online competition was kicked-off by Zain last year to bring local sports to the digital scene, and since featured the registration of near 5,000 players. The winners are:

first place winner Abdullah Almatrouk (KD 5,000), second place winner Mohammed Alqallaf (KD 3,500), and third place winner Thamer Al Hajeri (KD 1,500).

With this spectacular awards ceremony, Zain has successfully concluded the first season under its official sponsorship of the KFA's competitions for the 2022-2026 seasons, which includes the Kuwait Premier League (Dawri Zain), the Zain First Division League, HH the Amir's Cup, HH the Crown Prince's Cup, and the KFA Cup (Zain Cup). Zain's role centered around three main areas: supporting athletes with cash prizes, launching social events and interacting with fans at stadiums, and the first-ever Fantasy Football

League in Kuwaiti football's history. These contributions and more went in line with the KFA's vision to further enrich the local football scene, given that it is the most beloved sports among Kuwaitis.

Zain firmly believes that the private sector has a vital and active role in developing the local sports and youth sectors, and it makes this belief a reality by sponsoring and supporting some of the biggest sports programs in the nation. This partnership with Kuwait's top football competition comes to strengthen the leadership role Zain plays in the local sports scene and is perfectly in line with the company's sustainability and social responsibility strategy towards the sports and youth sectors.

## China's Liang and Li given lifetime snooker bans

**LONDON:** Chinese pair Liang Wenbo and Li Hang were given lifetime bans from snooker on Tuesday for match-fixing after a "heart-breaking" corruption scandal rocked the sport. In total, 10 Chinese players were handed bans of varying lengths by the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association (WPBSA) on Tuesday. Lu Ning, Zhao Xintong, Yan Bingtao, Chen Zifan, Zhang Jiansheng, Bai Langning, Zhao Jianbo and Chang Bingyu were the other players suspended.

Yan, the 2021 Masters champion, has been banned for five years until December 2027 after his initial seven and a half-year suspension was reduced following his early admissions and guilty plea. Former UK Championship winner Zhao Xintong will serve a 20-month suspension, reduced from two-and-a-half years after his early admissions and guilty plea, that ends in September 2024. The charges included manipulating games, approaching players to cheat, betting on snooker and fixing a match.

"It has been heart-breaking to see some young, talented players fall foul of the WPBSA conduct regulations through pressure exerted by two senior players (Liang and Li)," WPBSA chairman Jason Ferguson said. "This behavior has been recognized as wholly unacceptable by the imposition of two lifetime bans from participating in recognized snooker in any way." This outcome must be taken as a lesson to those who think they can avoid detection. If any player is involved in fixing a snooker

match, they will be caught and will face severe penalties." World number 72 Liang, who won the 2016 English Open, and world number 71 Li must also pay £43,000 (\$53,000) in costs. The International Betting Integrity Association became aware of wrongdoing in August 2022 and a detailed investigation was carried out by the WPBSA Integrity Unit and Sportradar. Liang was found to have "fixed or been a party to fix five snooker matches" between July 24 and September 28, 2022.

### Threats and a cover-up

The panel determined that the 36-year-old "solicited, induced, enticed, persuaded, encouraged or facilitated players to fix nine matches" between July 24 and December 13, 2022. Liang was accused of behaving "in conduct that was corrupt by threatening another player and making him delete his messages on his phone". He was also found to have threatened another player to seek to persuade him not to assist the WPBSA enquiry.

When aware of the WPBSA enquiry, Liang was also found to have covered up or attempted to cover up his involvement in match-fixing by deleting messages on his phone and by requesting other players deleted messages. Li has been found to be in breach of the regulations as he fixed or was a party to fix five snooker matches between July 24 and September 29, 2022. The WPBSA also found he "solicited, induced, enticed, persuaded, encouraged or facilitated" players to fix seven matches between July 24 and December 13, 2022. He was also found to have bet on snooker matches on or after September 1, 2022 when aware of the WPBSA enquiry, while covering up or attempting to cover up his involvement in match-fixing. Yan, ranked 23, admitted he fixed four matches he played in and also bet on snooker matches. The other players all accepted fixing matches except for world number 11 Zhao Xintong, who accepted he was a party to another player fixing two matches and that he had bet on snooker. — AFP

## Guardiola closes in on silencing critics

**MANCHESTER:** Manchester City are on the brink of a historic treble as Pep Guardiola targets Champions League vindication in Saturday's final against Inter Milan. Inter stand in the way of City matching the greatest ever achievement in English football by emulating Manchester United's class of 1998/99 in winning the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League in the same season. For Guardiola, meanwhile, a moment of personal validation awaits in Istanbul after his 12-year drought in the competition. The Catalan is widely regarded as the greatest coach of his generation with 11 league titles to his name in just 14 seasons in charge of Barcelona, Bayern Munich and City.

But since winning the Champions League in 2011 for the second time in his first three years at Barca, Guardiola has suffered a series of agonizing European exits. After losing a dramatic semi-final to Chelsea in his final year at the Camp Nou, Guardiola's three years at Bayern were marred by three more defeats in the last four. At City, it took five tries just to break the quarter-finals, but he again fell just short in the final to Chelsea two years ago. A miraculous late fightback from Real Madrid in last season's semi-final inflicted more heartbreak on City.

### 'Overthinking' no more

Guardiola's team selection in losing the 2021 final was just one of a number where he has stood accused of "overthinking" and getting in the way of a richly-talented squad. But his tactical nous has shone through to turn what had been a troublesome campaign until February into potentially the greatest

the club has ever enjoyed. Guardiola publicly questioned his players' hunger to keep on winning trophies in January, while it took time for the team to acclimatize to having Erling Haaland up front, even if the 52-goal Norwegian was prolific from the off. Many questioned the decision to jettison Joao Cancelo in the January transfer window, leaving City desperately short on natural full-backs.

But Guardiola had a plan as a switch to a back three, with centre-back John Stones pushed forward into the midfield role that Cancelo had occupied in previous seasons, sparked a devastating run of form. "I can't speak highly enough of him," said City winger Jack Grealish of his manager. "He's a bit weird the way he just knows everything. There are games I come into and think 'what's he going to come out with today' and he just comes out with different tactics every game. He's a pleasure to work with."

Yet stability has also been key to City's charge to Istanbul this weekend. Ten players have started all of the last five Champions League games as the likes of Riyad Mahrez, Phil Foden and Julian Alvarez have been consistently frozen out. After thrashing Bayern 4-1 on aggregate in the quarter-finals, City took revenge on Madrid by routing the defending champions 4-0 at a jubilant Etihad Stadium in the semi-final second leg. Guardiola has already made City the dominant force of English football with five league titles in the past six seasons.

However, he recognizes that Champions League success will bring a status that no number of domestic titles can provide. "So many clubs have destroyed projects and ideas because they weren't able to win this competition, and so many have become big clubs because they were able to win it," Guardiola told UEFA.com. "Even if I don't share this opinion, I understand that everything we have done through all these years, which has been a lot and very good, will make sense to others if we win this competition. — AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

### Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733

Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

## Change of Name

**I, Ahmed**, holder of Indian Passport No. M8390696, having permanent address Bohrwardi -313027, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Ahmed (given name) Semari (surname). **(#3801) 08/06/2023**

**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**



Embassy of India  
Kuwait

TENDER No.- KUW/ADM/872/04/2019

DATED- JUNE 8, 2023

### TENDER NOTICE FOR MAINTENANCE OF HVAC, PLUMBING & FIREFIGHTING SYSTEM

**Embassy of India, Kuwait invites bids from interested companies for operation and maintenance of HVAC, Plumbing, Firefighting system and cleaning of 29 Air Handling Units, 9 Fan Control Units and its connected ducts.**

Prospective / Interested companies are advised to inspect the area and present their offers in a sealed cover marked "Offer for Maintenance of HVAC, Plumbing & Firefighting system- to be opened by addressee only" and addressed to the "Head of Chancery, Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave, Arabian Gulf Street, Safat 13015, Kuwait." The bid must be submitted at the Embassy on or before June 28, 2023.

The detailed tender document along with its annexure may be downloaded from Central Procurement Portal <https://eprocure.gov.in/cppp/> and also the official website of the Embassy of India, Kuwait from <https://indembkwt.gov.in/tender-kuwait-in-india.php>. (please scan QR).



For any other clarification please contact Mr. S. James Jacob, Attache (Administration) on any working day (Sunday - Thursday) between 0800 hrs 1630 hrs on +96522513498 or email to: admnkuwait@mea.gov.in.



## Swiatek books semi-finals

Djokovic, Alcaraz to square off in blockbuster French Open



PARIS: Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates after winning against US Coco Gauff during their women's singles quarter final match on day eleven of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament on June 7, 2023. — AFP

PARIS: Defending champion Iga Swiatek will play Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia in the French Open semi-finals after the top seed defeated Coco Gauff 6-4, 6-2 on Wednesday in a rematch of last year's final. World number one Swiatek improved her record at Roland Garros to 26-2 after beating Gauff for the seventh time in as many meetings. The 22-year-old from Poland is chasing a third French Open crown and attempting to become the first woman to successfully defend the title in Paris since Justine Henin in 2007. After the pair exchanged breaks in the fourth and fifth games, Swiatek landed the key blow with another break as Gauff served to stay in the first set.

The American teenager, who won only four games in the 2022 final, made this a much closer contest but was left to rue three missed break point opportunities early in the second set. Swiatek's quality then shone through as she won the final four games to become the youngest woman since Martina Hingis to reach three or more semi-finals at Roland Garros. "It wasn't easy, the first set was really tight. Coco was really using the conditions, so I was happy to be able to work on it and win this match," said Swiatek, who has yet to drop a set at the tournament.

### Sabalenka condemns war

Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz will square off in a blockbuster French Open semi-final, while Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka condemned outright her country's role in the Ukraine war on Tuesday after reaching the last four at Roland Garros. Djokovic, chasing a third French Open crown and record 23rd men's Grand Slam singles title, recovered from dropping his first set of the tournament to defeat 11th seed Karen Khachanov 4-6, 7-6 (7/0), 6-2, 6-4.

The 36-year-old Serb is in his 12th Roland Garros semi-final - his 45th at the majors - and faces Alcaraz for a place in the final after the world number one thrashed 2021 runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas in straight sets. "That's the match that a lot of people want to see. It's definitely the biggest challenge for me so far in the tournament," said Djokovic, who lost his only meeting with Alcaraz in Madrid last year. "If you want to be the best, you have to beat the best. He's definitely a guy to beat here. I'm looking forward to that."



PARIS: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates his victory over Russia's Karen Khachanov during their men's singles quarter final match on June 6, 2023. — AFP

Djokovic fell behind for the first time this fortnight against Khachanov but dominated the second-set tie-break and then broke to begin the third set after a favorable bounce off the net. Djokovic hit 19 winners and just one unforced error in the third set, conceding a solitary point on his serve before breaking the Russian again for good measure. He briefly let slip a 4-2 lead in the fourth set but immediately broke back and secured a ninth win in 10 tries against Khachanov with an ace on match point.

Alcaraz once more showed why he is the favorite with a convincing 6-2, 6-1, 7-6 (7/5) victory over Greek fifth seed Tsitsipas in the night session, easily navigating his stiffest challenge to date. The 20-year-old Spaniard has won all five meetings with Tsitsipas and becomes the youngest Roland Garros semi-finalist since Djokovic in 2007. Tsitsipas started with a confident hold but Alcaraz soon grabbed control with two breaks to bag the opening set.

Alcaraz's mix of delicate drop shots and blistering groundstrokes were too much for an overmatched Tsitsipas, who tamely surrendered the second set with a double fault. The top seed broke early in the third set but failed to serve it out at 5-3 as Tsitsipas

and tried to keep my rhythm," said Haddad Maia. Jabeur, the runner-up at Wimbledon and the US Open in 2022, was playing in her first quarter-final at Roland Garros. The Tunisian hit 15 winners as she claimed an opening set which featured five breaks of serve in nine games. Haddad Maia had never got past the second round of a Grand Slam before this French Open. She had saved a match point in the third round against Ekaterina Alexandrova and then defeated Sara Sorribes Tormo in a three-hour 51-minute marathon, the third longest women's match ever played at the tournament.

She summoned all that fighting spirit in the second set against Jabeur, holding her nerve on a fourth set point. Haddad Maia then swept into a 3-0 lead in the decider, saved four break points to stretch to a 5-1 advantage and took the match after two and a half hours when Jabeur hit long. "I had a day off after my fourth round match. My amazing team worked hard on my body," said the Brazilian. "We work hard all year to be in these moments so I remembered this when we were in the middle of the second set." — AFP



PARIS: Spain's Carlos Alcaraz Garfia celebrates a point against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas during their men's singles quarter final match on June 6, 2023. — AFP

offered some belated resistance, saving five match points before ultimately going down in the tie-break. "I lost my focus a little bit at the end of the third set," said Alcaraz. "He started to play better and... I was in trouble. I am happy to recover from that problem and still focus and play a great level."

### Sabalenka speaks out

The war in Ukraine came into sharp focus again as Sabalenka ended Elina Svitolina's surprise run in the highest-profile match between two players whose countries are on opposing sides of the conflict. Sabalenka won a politically-charged encounter 6-4, 6-4 to extend her Grand Slam winning streak to 12 matches following her first major title at the Australian Open in January.

Svitolina was booed by the crowd on Court Philippe Chatrier after refusing to shake hands, a common practice now in the sport when a Ukrainian player meets a Russian or Belarusian opponent. After boycotting her past two press conferences, Sabalenka insisted she is not a supporter of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, a key military ally of Moscow.

"I'm not supporting the war, meaning I don't support Lukashenko right now," said the world number two, who has been urged by Ukrainian rivals to use her platform to individually stand up against the war. "I don't want my country to be involved in any conflict. I said it many times. You have my position. You have my answer," she said. "I don't want sport to be involved in politics, because I'm just a 25-year-old tennis player." Svitolina, playing her first Grand Slam since becoming a mother, has lost all four of her quarter-final appearances in Paris.

She accused Sabalenka of inflaming tensions between Ukrainian and Belarusian players by staring her down at the net. "I don't know why she was waiting, because my statements were clear enough about the handshake," said Svitolina. Sabalenka has now reached the last four at each of the Grand Slams and will face 43rd-ranked Karolina Muchova of the Czech Republic for a place in Saturday's final. The unseeded Muchova matched her best run at a major by knocking out 2021 finalist Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 7-5, 6-2 to reach the last four at Roland Garros for the first time. The 26-year-old also made the semi-finals of the Australian Open in 2021. — AFP

## Haddad Maia makes history for Brazil

PARIS: Beatriz Haddad Maia became the first Brazilian woman to reach a Grand Slam semi-final since 1968 on Wednesday when she came back from a set down to defeat Ons Jabeur at the French Open. World number 14 Haddad Maia came through 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 and will face either top-ranked defending champion Iga Swiatek or Coco Gauff for a place in Saturday's championship match.

The 27-year-old left-hander follows in the footsteps of seven-time major winner Maria Bueno who was the last Brazilian woman in the semi-finals of a major at the US Open 55 years ago. Bueno, who passed away in 2018, made the last four in Paris in 1966 before the advent of the Open era. "Ons is not easy to play against, you have to be patient but I believed in my body



PARIS: Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia serves to Tunisia's Ons Jabeur during their women's singles quarter final match on June 7, 2023. — AFP