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Crown Prince meets ex-speakers

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By B Izzak
KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met on Monday former National Assembly speakers Marzouq Al-Ghanem and Ahmad Al-Saadoun as part of consultations ahead of naming the next prime minister. HH the Crown Prince will also meet current and former prime ministers to complete the consultations before asking current Prime Minister HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah to form the new government or name a new premier.
Under Kuwaiti law, the Cabinet should resign immediately after the announcement of the results of parliamentary polls. The new government must be ready before the new Assembly is scheduled to hold its inaugural session on June 20. Ghanem told reporters late Sunday that he will convey to HH the Crown Prince during the meeting a proposal he announced during his election campaign about a new procedure before naming the prime minister.
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NEWS IN BRIEF

Saudi announces investment deals
RIYADH: Saudi Arabia announced on Sunday billions of dollars in investment deals between China and the Arab world, on the first day of the China-Arab business conference in Riyadh. The event "marked its first day with the signing of \$10 billion in investment agreements", the statement said — the vast majority of which are for projects in Saudi Arabia or by Saudi firms and government entities. — AFP (See Page 8)



Pak gets first Russian crude
KARACHI: The first shipment of Russian oil to energy-starved and dollar-strapped Pakistan was due to be unloaded at Karachi port on Monday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said. State Minister for Petroleum Musadik Malik previously said shipments will be paid for in currencies of "friendly countries". — AFP (See Page 10)

First COVID vaccine claim filed
HAMBURG: Vaccine-maker BioNTech faced Monday its first legal claim in its home country of Germany over adverse effects allegedly suffered by some users of its COVID vaccines, more than two years after one of the world's fastest and most extensive inoculation campaigns. In her claim, the plaintiff reported suffering effects including "pain in the upper body, swelling of the extremities, exhaustion, fatigue and sleeping disorders" after receiving the vaccine, the court said. She is seeking €150,000 (\$162,000) in damages. — AFP (See Page 6)

Berlusconi dies at 86; Amir sends condolences

ROME: Silvio Berlusconi, the former prime minister who reshaped Italy's political and cultural landscape while fending off multiple legal and sex scandals, died Monday aged 86. The billionaire media mogul had been suffering from a rare type of blood cancer. Mourners laid flowers and notes outside Villa

San Martino, Berlusconi's home near Milan, with one reading simply "we will miss you".
HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable of condolences to Italian President Sergio Mattarella over the death of Berlusconi. HH the Amir recounted in the cable Berlusconi's service to Italy in numerous posts he had held, expressing his deepest sorrow to the family of the former prime minister and the people of Italy. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah also sent cables of condolences to Mattarella.
Continued on Page 6



KOTC eyes energy efficiency with two solar plants

KUWAIT: State-run Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) said on Monday that work is underway to build two new solar power plants as part of na-

tional plans aiming to attain energy efficiency. The construction of the two solar plants is part of the state's goals to invest in and adopt renewable energy sources, said KOTC Acting Chief Executive Sheikh Khaled Al-Sabah during a ceremony to launch the project, underlining the "environment-friendly" nature of the endeavor.
The project is in line with a national energy transformation strategy that seeks to reach net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2050, added the official, citing a number of

measures KOTC has taken to cut carbon emissions. The new power plants are an "innovative and unprecedented" approach towards building a "vibrant" energy infrastructure, according to KOTC's renewable energy projects supervisor Saad Al-Qahtani. He said the project also allows the private sector the chance to contribute towards state endeavors. Upon completion, the pair of solar plants will be a major step forward in providing adequate power supply sources in Kuwait, he added. — KUNA

Wedding bus crash kills 10 in Australia

GRETA, Australia: A bus carrying wedding guests overturned and killed 10 people in an "unimaginable" nighttime crash as it travelled through a wine-growing area north of Sydney, police said Monday, announcing a string of charges against the driver. The white Linq Buslines coach was ferrying 35 passengers from a wedding at a local winery when it flipped onto its left side late on Sunday, coming to rest on the pavement alongside roadside barriers at the entrance to a major roundabout.
It was Australia's deadliest road accident in 16 years. Police said they had charged a 58-year-old man with 10 offences relating to dangerous
Continued on Page 6



CESSNOCK, Australia: This frame grab taken from video on June 12, 2023 shows the site of a bus crash where 10 people from a wedding party were killed. — AFP

Iran says indirect talks continuing with US via Oman

TEHRAN: Iran on Monday said it has continued indirect negotiations with the United States through the Sultanate of Oman over its nuclear deal and a possible prisoner swap. Iran's nuclear program has long been the subject of scrutiny from Western powers, resulting in sanc-

tions that have crippled the country's economy. A 2015 deal granted Tehran much-needed sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program before it was torpedoed by the United States' unilateral pullout in 2018.
In recent days, the two capitals have denied media reports that they were close to reaching an interim deal to replace the 2015 accord. "We welcome the efforts of Omani officials and we exchanged messages with the other party through this mediator" over the lifting of US sanctions, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said Monday. "We have never stopped the diplomatic processes," he added during his weekly press conference, emphasizing that the talks "were not secret".
Diplomatic ties between Tehran and Washington soured in 1980 following the 1979 Islamic revolution led by Iran's first supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Efforts to revive the 2015 nuclear deal have so far failed to yield results. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Sun-

day reiterated the denial of moves towards acquiring a nuclear weapon. He also said deals could be reached, provided they do not change "the existing infrastructure of the nuclear industry".
Iran and its arch-enemy the United States have also been involved in Oman-mediated talks over a possible prisoner swap. Kanani on Monday said a prisoner exchange could be agreed "in the near future", provided that Washington exhibits "the same level of seriousness" as Tehran.
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Local

Arab, Pacific countries keen on deeper cooperation: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister

Second ministerial meeting discussed security, energy, economic ties



RIYADH: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen among other representatives from the Pacific and Arab countries during the second ministerial meeting. — KUNA photos



Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with Kuwaiti delegates.

RIYADH: The Arab League countries and the nation islands of the Pacific are keen on bolstering ties on all levels and are interested in resolving various challenges, said Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday.

This came during Sheikh Salem's speech to the second ministerial meeting for the Arab League countries and small developing Pacific nations held in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

The meeting's agenda focused on developing ties with numerous domains in addition to finding solutions to matters hindering collaboration between the two blocs. Regional and international happenings were also highlighted during the session.

The meeting is presided over by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, Palau Foreign Minister and the Pacific group's coordinator Gustav Aitaro with the participation of Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit and ministers of both blocs of member nations.

During his speech at the meeting, Sheikh Salem affirmed his country's eagerness to explore new ways to expand cooperation between Arab countries and their Pacific Island nations to achieve security and development for all.

He commended the previous meeting held in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in 2010, saying it laid the foundation stone to which this meeting was standing on. Reflecting Kuwait's stance on important regional issues pertaining to the Middle East, Sheikh Salem expressed his country's unwavering stance on the issue of Palestine, indicating that the world must find ways to prevent the Zionist aggressors from continuing their assault on the Palestinian people who are eager to establish an independent state



Arab and Pacific foreign ministers pose for a photo at the meeting.

with east Jerusalem as the capital.

He also displayed Kuwait's interest in resolving international crises whether in the Ukraine or the South China Sea. On the issue of nuclear proliferation, Sheikh Salem stressed that it was important to spread awareness on the issue to keep the world free of weapons of mass destruction.

As for the relations between the Arab and Pacific regions, Sheikh Salem urged both blocs to boost numbers of commercial exchange via taking decisions during current and future meetings.

Talks bringing together foreign ministers from Arab and Pacific Island countries drew to a close on Monday. They aimed to bolster bilateral rela-

tions across numerous fields ranging from trade and investment to security and energy. Greater bilateral cooperation would enable countries to address global challenges as a "collective unit," said Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, pinpointing food security and climate change

as among those challenges. Egypt-based Arab League chief Dr. Ahmed Abul-Gheit highlighted the common "aspirations and interests" of the two regions despite the lack of geographic proximity, citing efforts to find "common ground" on a vast array of matters. — KUNA

Australian envoy visits Dasman Diabetes Institute

KUWAIT: The Australian Charge d'Affaires to Kuwait, Amanda McGregor, paid a field visit to Dasman Diabetes Institute, which was established by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. McGregor was met by Director General of Dasman Diabetes Institute Dr Qais Saleh Al-Duwairi, and Tarek Abdullah Al-Eryan, Director of Public Relations and Media at the institute. She visited the institute to get to know closely the important institutions in Kuwait and strengthen scientific cooperation. During her visit to the institute, many scientific and research topics and issues of common interest between the two sides were discussed.

Dr Al-Duwairi briefed McGregor about the institute's scientific progress, its importance, and its role in the service of scientific research in Kuwait, discussing ways to enhance joint research and scientific cooperation. In turn, McGregor praised the institute's impressive developments and achievements.

Bader recommends people who are going to spend their entire summer in Kuwait to go to one of Kuwait's many malls with family and friends and try out new cafes and restaurants and shopping at stores they have never been to before. When asked about activities he believes he and people of his age group like to do, Bader expressed an interest in group sports like football and group activities like going to the cinema with friends and family.

Also, he believes that many people of his age group share his hobby of trying new and trending cafes in Kuwait. Bader said it would be good if there were more fun events and activities for him and people of his age. He added that if anyone feels bored in Kuwait, they should probably do something like book a few nights at a hotel or a chalet for a change of scenery or book a dinner reservation at an experience-oriented restaurant they have never been to before.

Summer in Kuwait could be one of your most memorable periods if it is spent with the right people. This is what Renad Al-Habishi, an 18-year-old Kuwaiti girl who just graduated from high school, believes. Renad said she usually spends her summer vacation doing hobbies she normally does not have time to do during the academic year. In addition, she likes to go to the beach, chalets, malls and cafes. She said that for her, and most people her age, concerts, art exhibitions and museums are highly enjoyable experiences.

Renad added that markets and second-hand shopping is an extremely popular activity in her age group. It is something she and her friends enjoyed



RIYADH: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah (left) meets with his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan. — KUNA

Kuwait, Saudi FMs discuss bilateral ties

RIYADH: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday met with his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan on the sidelines of the second

ministerial meeting for the Arab League countries and small developing Pacific nations held in the Saudi capital Riyadh. During the meeting, both sides discussed the strong bilateral ties between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, ways to enhance those ties and common efforts to strengthen international cooperation in the upcoming events, prioritizing the support for Saudi Arabia in Expo 2030 in Riyadh. — KUNA



KUWAIT: (From left) Australian Charge d'Affaires to Kuwait, Amanda McGregor, Director General of Dasman Diabetes Institute Dr Qais Saleh Al-Duwairi and Director of Public Relations and Media Tarek Abdullah Al-Eryan.

How some youth find ways to spend fun summers in Kuwait

By Munirah Al-Fayez

KUWAIT: It is highly likely that many people in Kuwait have heard the refrain that "there is nothing to do in Kuwait", especially in the summertime, when children, teenagers and young adults are out of school and other educational institutions. As summer starts, parents who are not planning on going abroad to spend their summer vacation are having some worries about what activities to do during the long hot days. Kuwait Times spoke to three young adults who have spent multiple summers in Kuwait to ask them about how they usually spend their summers and if they believe Kuwait is as boring as it is made out to be.

According to Bader Al-Fayez, a 20-year-old Kuwaiti man, spending the entire summer in Kuwait is not boring. He likes to spend this stress-free time with friends and family. Bader also enjoys practicing one of his favorite hobbies, which is trying out different kinds of coffees and discovering new cafes in Kuwait. He enjoys rating them on their quality of coffee, pastries, interior design and seating and price over quality ratio.



doing for a long time when they are abroad and she would love to see it done properly in Kuwait. She recommends people who feel bored in Kuwait to explore the country more and try things they have not tried before to get a new perspective.

Dalal Al-Nusif, a 23-year-old Kuwaiti woman who just graduated from university, said Kuwait is not boring if people use their time wisely. Dalal says that there are many summer camps and summer training courses in Kuwait during the summer for different age groups and all kinds of activities. She added she tends to enjoy her summer at the beach, summer camp, malls and arcades. In addition to these places, she recommends people go to water parks, skating rinks, cinema, museums, aquar-

iums, scientific centers, bowling alleys, shopping and restaurants and cafes.

Dalal advised people to try new things and discover new places through social media. She added people need to be prepared and organized by making a schedule that includes the things they enjoy the most.

In conclusion, it seems many young adults do not believe that Kuwait is a boring country during the summer. Contrary to popular belief, many have managed to find a way to enjoy their summers in Kuwait. Many young adults seem to enjoy trying out new things and discovering places they have never been to before. They also like spending time on the beach or at malls, especially with friends and family.

CEOs in Kuwait optimistic despite risk of recession

Leaders spending more on new technology: KPMG report

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: KPMG Kuwait held a press conference on Monday to launch the Kuwait CEO Outlook report for the year 2022-2023 titled 'Turning the Tide', in the presence of Managing Partner at KPMG Kuwait Rasheed Al-Qenae and members of the senior management team. The KPMG Kuwait CEO Outlook report indicates seven in 10 CEOs discount the possibility of a globally anticipated recession in the country. It also shows CEOs are not only confident in terms of Kuwait's growth prospects, but also feel more resilient with regards to the global economy compared to 2021.

The report shows that when CEOs in Kuwait are looking past recent economic slowdowns, they look optimistically towards achieving structural growth during the next three years (2022-2025). The KPMG Kuwait CEO Outlook 2022-23 report focuses on four primary themes — economic outlook, technology, talent and ESG (environment, social and governance), while it highlights a great discrepancy between some global trends and current trends in Kuwait.

Qenae said the past recent years have brought significant problems and pressures, where companies had to be flexible in dealing with challenges and steadfast in the path to continue with the same approach due to the continuous waves of



Managing Partner at KPMG Kuwait
Rasheed Al-Qenae.
— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

crises and the state of instability that the world witnessed. "This year's report is not just a set of numbers, but an expression of the strength and courage of CEOs in exploring opportunities despite the state of uncertainty, which was evident in the results," he pointed out.

Qenae stressed digital transformation has become an essential step for companies to follow up rapid global development in new technologies and performance. He pointed out cybersecurity during the pandemic developed greatly in Kuwait due to the rise in investments, which is still of great interest to the financial and telecommunications sectors.



KUWAIT: Stakeholders attend a press conference to launch the 2022-2023 Kuwait CEO Outlook report.

Qenae mentioned that due to the great interest for cybersecurity in Kuwait, the country is considering taking steps towards building a big cybersecurity unit.

The report included surveys and interviews of CEOs of five Kuwaiti companies — Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer at KIB Raed Jawad Bukhamseen, Chief Executive Officer at STC Maziad Al-Harbi, Chief Executive Officer at Markaz Ali H Khalil, Group Chief Financial Officer at Fouad Alghanim Group S

N Ramachandran and Vice Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer at United Real Estate Co Mazen Hawwa.

The results indicated that more than 70 percent of CEOs polled believe the Kuwaiti economy is unlikely to face a recession in the near future. However, they do not diminish the fact that a potential event would in fact affect earnings and slow down the post-pandemic recovery process. The results also highlighted that CEOs are putting more capital towards

acquiring new technology to stay competent. The report points out that despite economic uncertainties, CEOs are still hopeful for M&A driven growth.

On the other hand, the report underlined that when it comes to ESG, the biggest downside of failing to meet stakeholders' expectations is higher cost of and/or difficulty in raising finance. Although sustainability is yet to pick up speed in Kuwait, the burden falls on major industries to drive the change.

Palestinian envoy lauds successful product festival

KUWAIT: The Palestinian products festival concluded Saturday after a five-day run. The event was organized by the Palestinian Embassy in co-operation with women's cultural social society at its premises under the patronage of Ambassador Rami Tahboub and was held from June 6 until June 10. The Ambassador lauded the success of the festival, thanking Kuwaiti citizens for visiting the exhibition and their confidence in the Palestinian products. He thanked Kuwait and its ministries of concern for facilities given to the embassy, wishing Kuwait continued security and prosperity.

He prayed for the safety of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He also thanked the ambassadors and embassies' employees who attended the opening ceremony and shopped at the exhibition.



Rami Tahboub



Kuwait Municipality launches app to report violations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality launched the e-Baladia smartphone application to allow users to report violations more easily. After registering through the app via Kuwait Mobile ID app authentication, people can take pictures of the violation and send them through the app while specifying the type of the complaint. After that, Municipality workers can follow up with the complaint and proceed to remove the violation, the Municipality explained,

noting that users should receive a response within 72 hours after filing the complaint. The app allows field teams to reach the location through GPS, said the Municipality. It's also equipped with a feature which allows Municipality workers to identify the source of the complaint via Google Maps.

The app was launched to encourage active social participation by filing complaints and reporting violations to authorities, said Tariq Al-Mudaini, Director of the Information Systems Department at Kuwait Municipality. He indicated that Municipality departments handle all complaints seriously and takes all efforts to address the violations reported. Furthermore, Mudaini noted that the app will soon be integrated with the Sahel app to make reporting violations even easier.

Kuwait-UNHCR alliance key to alleviate refugee crisis

KUWAIT: The refugee tragedy will find a fair solution only if the international community cooperates and shares responsibility so that generations are not lost to the crisis, Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry said Monday.

Chamber President Mohammad Al-Saqer said partnership between the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and Kuwait private sector is strategic to alleviate the suffering of the displaced through providing job opportunities, education, health care and freedom of movement.

The remarks came during a discussion panel hosted by the Chamber in cooperation with commission under the theme (so a generation is not lost).

Saqer said he considered the commission's choice of the Chamber of Commerce to host the discussion panel a reflection of its appreciation of Kuwait's distinguished role, be it government or people, in organizing conferences and international humanitarian campaigns to contribute to financing the commission's activities at the international level in addition to the Arab and regional ones.

Saqer spoke about the difference between the refugee and the displaced, as he considered all those who were forced to be outside their country due to justified fear for their lives or oppression due to creed or religion, social affiliation or political stand is a refugee. He said the term "displaced" is used to refer to those whose fear of natural catastrophes



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti business representatives and UNHCR delegates are seen during the panel discussion held on Monday. — KUNA

forces them to leave their area of residence to another inside his country.

As the world marks "World Refugees Day" on June 20, Saqer pointed out there are 90 million refugees and displaced people by as of the end of 2021. More than half, 54 million, are displaced and more than 32 million are refugees, of which six million are Palestinian. He said half of the refugees are aged below 18 years old and more than 75 percent live in countries neighboring to their country of origin. Three-quarters of refugees, he said, come from six countries only. Between the end of 2021 and the start of this year, the number of refugees and displaced people has jumped by 14 million, raising the total number to 104 million.

The increase is the largest annual increase in recorded history. Worldwide developments indicate

the number will be on the rise for many years to come, with Arabs making up a large portion. He attributed the large number of Arab refugees to several factors, including "oppression" and what the Palestinian people are exposed to in the form of harsh treatment and violence, which put the Middle East region "on top of volcano craters" for the past 75 years, he said.

Meanwhile the regional official for private sector contributions to the commission Nader Al-Naqeeb said there are 182 million refugees and displaced people around the world who are registered with the commission. He expressed sorrow that there are generations who are born into this world and leave it as refugees. He said Kuwait contributed through the private sector in rescuing 500,000, out of one million, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. — KUNA

First flexible eye valve operation performed in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Ophthalmology consultant Dr Yousuf Al-Ruwaisan said he carried out the first operation to implant the flexible valve (Preserflo) in Kuwait

on a 60-year-old patient suffering from glaucoma. He said this is one of the most modern techniques in treating glaucoma and is done by implanting a microscopic pipe that helps control the internal eye pressure and is done under local anesthetic.

He said the (Preserflo) operation has been done in America, Europe, UAE and Saudi Arabia but this is the first time it's done in Kuwait. The (Preserflo) makes eye pressure operations easier and faster, whereas the operations were difficult in the past because they required a water passage.

The flexible valve can now create a channel in the eye easily, allowing surgeons to also implant the valve accurately without any suturing. The technique leads to the stabilization of eye pressure within 24 hours and patients wouldn't need to use eye pressure drops later, except for very rare conditions.

He said "Preserflo" is not suitable for all types of glaucoma, but it is good for around 70 percent of cases. Alternatives are available for the remaining 30 percent of patients.

In my view

No parties... no democracy



Dr Khalid Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

We kept hearing just before the Assembly elections many promises, and we hope these promises materialize. Elections are over, and 50 members of the new parliament were elected — the parliament which makes up Kuwait's incomplete democracy. There were those who were not lucky in the elections, yet they got part of voters' confidence, and for this they have an important role — they must make a start to complete part of the incomplete democracy. They should start by forming the first semi-official party and through it follow MPs and support them in their stands that serve the nation, and confront them over exploitation and corruption.

All those who did not win must continue their political activities; they must benefit from the incomplete confidence they received and work as one team for the sake of Kuwait. Their slogans and the values they demanded were not conditional on success. The holder of values does not have their values dependent on entering Abdullah Al-Salem Hall, as Kuwait is more spacious than that building. In fact, being away will constitute a true start to completing the democracy, which I hope everybody supports.

Kuwait's constitution did not criminalize parties; rather observers of the constitution confirm that it indicated the forming of parties. Those who are against parties and stir fear against it are political groups of various hues. Those against parties are tribal and sectarian groups who consider parties as an end of their control and monopoly; these and others want the status quo to remain as is. Heads of sects control their followers, and they are always there — they do not change or get replaced.

But the legal party system is similar to NGOs — it has a statute, internal rules and every Kuwaiti no matter their creed or sect can join it according to its declared goals. There is legal justice in the party system and an end to the era of secret and mysterious leaderships.

Maybe the Turkish experience that ended a short while ago, and many Kuwaitis followed it, can be an eyeopener for us to get closer to their system. Candidates who received part of the people's confidence must communicate, and maybe they will succeed in forming an influential gathering as the first party that has the confidence of part of the society in free and clean elections.

News in Brief

Expat dies following
two car accidents

KUWAIT: A Syrian expat died Monday after being involved in two successive car accidents. The expat was reportedly first run over in Khaldiya by a vehicle driven by a citizen. In an attempt to rescue the expat, the citizen who ran him over picked him up in his vehicle and headed to Amiri Hospital. But while on the way the citizen was involved in an accident, a vehicle driven by a Yemeni in Salhiya area, leading to the citizen's car flipping over. When police and paramedics arrived, they found the Syrian had died while the citizen and the Yemeni were injured. The body was recovered as investigations continue.

Severed cable causing
Internet disruption repaired

KUWAIT: The Communications Public Authority succeeded in repairing a severed cable that connects the Kuwait's cables networks in Kuwait with the global cables network, according to sources. Roadworks on Cairo Road had caused the cable cut which resulted in notable slower Internet speeds across Kuwait since Sunday evening, the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) said in a statement published by Kuwait's state media agency KUNA. Communications companies were affected to different degrees by the damaged cable, sources said, but Internet speed has reportedly returned to normal following the repairs.

Media prosecuted over
interviews with students

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Information referred a number of e-media channels to the Public Prosecution for posting on social media video interviews with students before and after taking their final exams. The news services violated a ministry order issued on May 23, 2023 to ban such interviews in accordance with the child protection laws in Kuwait. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A woman feeds a group of cats in the parking lot of a shopping mall in Kuwait City. In the absence of a government-funded shelter, volunteers and animal rights activists have taken it upon themselves to care for Kuwait's large street cat population. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

PAAET, Arab Planning Institute sign
deal to develop educational process

Agreement to help with institutional restructuring, economic reforms

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) and the Arab Planning Institute signed Monday a memorandum of understanding to develop the educational and training process in the authority. The agreement is meant to help with the restructuring of the authority and its programs and designing a national system for professional qualifications, said Director General of PAAET Dr Hassan Al-Fajjam in a statement to Kuwait's state media agency KUNA.

He added that the agreement fulfills the requirements for socioeconomic and human resources development in the country in line with the New Kuwait Vision 2035.

The memorandum marks one of several collaborations between the two institutions. The Arab Planning Institute had previously developed a strategy for the authority's inclusion in the labor market, including guidelines for human resource management and ways to prepare its Kuwaiti graduates and enhance their

productivity and efficiency.

The new agreement, said Fajjam, will also help the authority find ways to stay up to date with e-learning and adopt innovative educational systems to keep pace with international prestigious academic institutions. The authority is also looking towards improving the educational process to match the requirements of the modern age. Director of the Arab Planning Institute, Dr. Bader Malallah, said the deal comes to enhance cooperation between the two sides through the activities and services provided by the institute to the PAAET.

The memorandum of understanding, said Malallah, is not limited to technical and advisory support, but includes training, institutional support, exchange of expertise, publishing support and program delivery. The cooperation is specifically focused on strategic planning and economic and financial reform, in order to provide an integrated vision for the authority. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Officials from the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) and the Arab Planning Institute shake hands following the signing of the agreement. — KUNA

Kuwaiti publications,
authors shine at
Moroccan book fair

RABAT: Dar Suad Al-Sabah for Culture and Innovation received Minister of Solidarity, Social Inclusion and Family in Morocco Awatif Hayyar during his participation in the 28th edition of the International Publication and Book Fair in Morocco.

The minister lauded the efforts of Dr Suad Al-Sabah in promoting Arab culture as a well-known Arab writer and looks forward for her visit to Morocco.

The minister toured the pavilion and saw the Dar Suad Al-Sabah publications, in addition to various works of Dr Suad Al-Sabah in the fields of poetry, history and economy.

Visitors to the Kuwait Pavilion at the fair praised the role played by the National Council for Culture Arts and Letters (NCCAL) in supporting culture in the Arab region for the past 50 years, according to Kuwait's state media agency KUNA. A number of visitors to the Kuwait pavilion at the exhibition said they noted the importance of NCCAL's publications, which have been published for about half a century and contributed to the formation of literary consciousness among many Arab intellectuals.

Mohammed Darwish, who was responsible for the pavilion, confirmed to KUNA that NCCAL publications are widely known among visitors to the fair.

He stressed the role of Kuwaiti participation in Arab exhibitions in highlighting the culture and literary and scientific contributions of Kuwait and its position as one of the centers of enlightenment and openness in the Arab world.

The Moroccan book fair, which opened in early



RABAT: Minister of Solidarity, Social Inclusion and Family in Morocco Awatif Hayyar (left) examines publications by Dar Suad Al-Sabah for Culture and Innovation. — KUNA



Visitors to the Kuwait pavilion browse a selection of publications on display during the Morocco book fair.

June, concluded its activities on Sunday, with the participation of 737 publishers from 51 countries, including Kuwait.

KFAS concludes project
to develop digital
education platform

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) has stressed its backing to the efforts aiming to enhance innovation, technology and science to evolve digital transformation in the educational sector.

KFAS made the statement Sunday while concluding the digital educational platform project, which seeks to find global models for high-quality educational platforms with successful experience to help

public sector teachers utilize digital platforms and test the educational environment and its needs.

The project comes in line with directives of board of directors of the KFAS led by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with the aim to direct students about how to learn and explore science concepts, and do activities amid an attractive environment, the statement said.

It referred to meetings held with Singapore's Ministry of Education and technology development companies to develop a national educational platform and identify partners of cooperation as well as set standards for science and mathematics development, in accordance with the goals of education and localization of national education content. — KUNA



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Xi signals support for Honduras after diplomatic switch

Woman wakes up inside coffin at her own wake

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Pakistan orders mass evacuations to move citizens ahead of cyclone landfall

Authorities struggle to persuade families to leave



SUJAWAL: Children look at the camera as they wait to be evacuated to government relief camps before the due onset of cyclone, in Sujawal district, Sindh province on June 12, 2023. — AFP

SHAH BANDAR: Pakistan authorities on Monday began an evacuation effort to move 80,000 citizens out of the path of an approaching cyclone, which is expected to bring winds of up to 120 kilometres per hour. The cyclone is making its way across the Arabian Sea towards the coastlines of Pakistan and India, forecast to make landfall later this week.

Swathes of coastal communities in southern Sindh province are set to suffer storm surges up to 3.5 metres (12 feet), which could inundate low-lying settlements, as well as up to 30 centimetres of rain. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said an emergency has been declared and the army drafted in to help relocate "more

than 80,000 people" at risk.

"We will not request people but demand them to evacuate," Shah told reporters, adding that the order was being issued through social media, mosques and radio stations. A spokesman for Shah said around 2,000 people have already been evacuated to "safe places" from the area of Shah Bandar, a fishing town nestled among mangrove deltas 45 kilometres (28 miles) west of India's Gujarat state.

However, in the nearby village of Gul Muhammad Uplano, authorities struggled to persuade families to leave. "We will become helpless in the government camps, that is why we are better off at our own place," said 46-year-old Gul Hasan.

The Pakistan Meteorological Department has warned that traditional mud and straw homes which house the poorest in Pakistan will be vulnerable to disintegration in high winds.

But in the settlement of Haji Ibrahim, a cluster of such structures, fisherman Abu Bakar said concerns over losing their livelihoods prevail. "Our boat, goats and camels are our assets," the 20-year-old said. "We cannot compromise on their safety." "But if the danger becomes imminent, we will be forced to leave to save our lives," he conceded.

'Adverse effects of climate change'
Provincial lawmaker Muhammad Ali

Malkani told AFP a decision had been made to evacuate the population living up to eight kilometres inland. Karachi — a port city home to around 20 million — is also due to be deluged by dust and thunder storms with winds whipping up to 80 kilometres per hour.

Billboards will be removed and 70 vulnerable buildings evacuated in the city, while construction will be stopped over the entire affected area. India's Meteorological Department said Monday the storm will hit western Gujarat state around noon on Thursday, with winds gusting up to 150 kilometres per hour causing "total destruction of thatched houses".

Heavy rains and strong winds late Satur-

day killed 27 people in northwest Pakistan, including eight children, officials said. "Undoubtedly, these are the adverse effects of climate change," Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Twitter Sunday. Last summer, Pakistan was hit by massive monsoon rains which put a third of the country under water, damaged two million homes and killed more than 1,700 people. Pakistan, the world's fifth most populous country with 220 million inhabitants, is responsible for only 0.8 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

But the nation ranks highly among those vulnerable to extreme weather events, which scientists say are becoming more frequent and more severe owing to climate change. — AFP

NATO begins unprecedented air drills

BERLIN: NATO began its largest ever air force deployment exercise in Europe on Monday, in a display of unity toward partners and potential threats such as Russia. The German-led "Air Defender 23" will include some 250 military aircraft from 25 NATO and partner countries including Japan and Sweden, which is bidding to join the alliance. It will run until June 23.

Up to 10,000 service members are to participate in the drills intended to boost interoperability and preparedness to protect against drones and cruise missiles in the case of an attack within NATO territory. "The significant message we're sending is that we can defend ourselves," Lieutenant General Ingo Gerhartz of the German Luftwaffe told public television.

"Air Defender" was conceived in 2018 in part as a response to the Russian annexation of Crimea from Ukraine four years before, though Gerhartz insisted it was "not targeted at anyone". He said the exercise would not "send any flights, for example, in the direction of Kaliningrad," the Russian enclave bordering alliance member states Poland and Lithuania.

"We are a defensive alliance and that is how this exercise is planned," he said. The first flights began in the late morning at the Wunstorf, Jagel and Lechfeld air bases, a Luftwaffe spokesman confirmed to AFP. Hundreds of demonstrators had gathered at Wunstorf in northern Germany on Saturday against the drills, under the banner "Practice peace — not war". Protesters called for a "diplomatic solution" to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and an immediate ceasefire.

US Ambassador to Germany Amy Gutmann said the exercise would show "beyond a shadow of a doubt the agility and the swiftness of our allied force" and was intended to send a message to countries including Russia. "I would be pretty surprised if any world leader was not taking note of what this shows in terms of the spirit of this alliance, which means the strength of this alliance, and that includes Mr Putin," she told reporters, referring to the Russian president.

"By synchronizing together, we multiply our



BERLIN: (Left to right) Director of the US Air National Guard Michael Loh, US Ambassador to Germany Amy Gutmann and inspector of German airforce Ingo Gerhartz pose for a picture during a press conference in Berlin. — AFP

force." Russia's war on Ukraine has galvanized the Western military alliance set up almost 75 years ago to face off against the Soviet Union. Finland and Sweden, which long kept an official veneer of neutrality to avoid conflict with Moscow, both sought membership in NATO after Russia's February 2022 invasion. Under NATO's Article Five, an attack on one member is considered an attack on all.

'Great power competition'

The exercise includes operational and tactical-level training, primarily in Germany, but also in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Latvia, with a total of around 2,000 flights. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will visit pilots based at the Jagel airfield in northern Germany on Friday. General Michael Loh, director of the US Air National Guard, said NATO's duties were at an "inflection point". "A great deal has changed on the strategic landscape throughout the world, especially here in Europe," he said.

The exercise will focus on "supplementing the permanent United States presence in Europe" as well as providing training "on a larger scale than what was usually accomplished on the continent", Loh added. He said many of the alliance pilots were working together for the first time.

"It's about fostering the old relationships that we have but also building new ones with this younger generation of airmen," he said. "And so this is about now establishing what it means to go against a great power in a great power competition." —AFP

Bodies and burial as Sudan fighting resumes after truce

KHARTOUM: Mourners gathered to bury the dead and bodies lay in a Khartoum hospital Sunday as deadly shelling and gunfire resumed after the end of a 24-hour ceasefire in Sudan. Fighting has raged in the northeast African country since mid-April, when army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, turned on each other.

The latest in a series of ceasefire agreements enabled civilians trapped in the capital Khartoum to venture outside and stock up on food and other essential supplies. But on Sunday they gathered on a sandy plot of land in the south of Sudan's capital to bury victims of an artillery strike.

Witness told AFP that only 10 minutes after the truce ended at 6:00 am (0400 GMT) on Sunday, the city was rocked again by shelling and clashes. Men in Khartoum's Azhari neighborhood carried a woman, her body lying on a green cot and covered with a light-colored cloth, toward her final resting place, a hole dug out of the soil on bumpy ground across from some houses.

Her own home had been shelled, leaving her among more than 1,800 killed during eight weeks of war, according to figures from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. One relative, who did not give his name, condemned the "unacceptable" act and said: "We pray for an end to this war."

A pro-democracy neighborhood group had reported that fighting in Khartoum's south sent "shells landing in citizens' homes". On beds at a hospital in the area, two bodies lay under colored cloths. Heavy artillery fire was heard across greater Khartoum. Residents also reported air strikes and anti-aircraft fire.

'Return of terror'

The one-day lull was "like a dream" that evaporated, said Nasreddin Ahmed, a resident of south Khartoum awakened by the renewed fighting. Asmaa al-Rih, who lives in the capital's northern suburbs, lamented the "return of terror" with "rockets and



OMDOURMAN: A man undergoes blood pressure check at a makeshift emergency room set-up by Sudanese volunteers in Omdurman, the capital's twin city, amid ongoing fighting between the forces of two rival generals. — AFP

shells shaking the walls of houses" once again.

Clouds of smoke were also seen billowing for a fifth successive day from the Al-Shajara oil and gas facility near the Yarmouk military plant in Khartoum. Multiple truces have been agreed and broken, including after the United States imposed sanctions on both rival generals after a previous attempt collapsed at the end of May.

Sudan's military elites as well as Daglo amassed considerable wealth during the rule of longtime strongman Omar al-Bashir, whose government was subjected to decades of international sanctions before his overthrow in 2019.

The 24-hour ceasefire that ended on Sunday had been announced by US and Saudi mediators who warned that if it failed they may break off mediation efforts. The two warring sides had "agreed to allow the unimpeded movement and delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout the country", the Saudi foreign ministry said on Saturday.

The mediators said in a joint statement they "share the frustration of the Sudanese people about the uneven implementation of previous ceasefires".

A record 25 million people — more than half the population — are in need of aid and protection, according to the UN.

Fighting has gripped Khartoum and the western region of Darfur, uprooting nearly two million people, including 476,000 who have sought refuge in neighboring countries, the United Nations says. — AFP

International

First COVID vaccine side-effect claims land in German courts

Clients were 'all healthy' before suffering from symptoms following their jabs

HAMBURG: Vaccine-maker BioNTech faced Monday its first legal claim in its home country of Germany over adverse effects allegedly suffered by some users of its COVID vaccines, more than two years after one of the world's fastest and most extensive inoculation campaigns.

In the face of the deadly pandemic that emerged in early 2020, which prompted border closures and lockdowns that trapped millions of people in their homes, the arrival of COVID vaccines had been widely hailed as a life-saver.

But the jabs, which had been developed at breakneck speed and granted early approval for usage, are now the focus of legal procedures in several countries including France and Britain where plaintiffs argue that the vaccines harmed their health.

In Germany, a court in Hamburg was prepared to hear a case from Monday against BioNTech, which, together with US giant Pfizer, produced the first mRNA vaccine Comirnaty. The hearing was delayed however after the claimant's lawyers put in a last-minute challenge of the judge's impartiality, and asking instead for a panel of judges to rule on the case.

In her claim, the plaintiff reported suf-

fering effects including "pain in the upper body, swelling of the extremities, exhaustion, fatigue and sleeping disorders" after receiving the vaccine, the court said. She is seeking 150,000 euros (\$162,000) in damages and recognition that the "defendant is bound to provide material damages", the court added.

Her lawyer Thomas Ulbrich, who is also representing another 250 people in similar cases, said his clients were "all healthy" before suffering from symptoms, allegedly following their jabs. He believes that the medical files he has on hand offer a link between the vaccines and the symptoms experienced by his clients.

'Rocky and long road'

BioNTech's mRNA vaccine, a scientific breakthrough, had been granted conditional marketing authorization as early as December 21, 2020, by the EU regulatory authority EMA. Similar authorization for Moderna, another mRNA vaccine maker, swiftly followed.

With fears of catching the disease running high, the vaccines were pre-ordered by governments even during their development phases, and deployment swiftly followed once regulatory authorities gave their approval.

But the new generation of inoculations also sparked a wave of vaccine sceptics questioning the safety of the jabs. Out of 192 million jabs given in Germany, the country's medicines regulator, the Paul Ehrlich Institute, said 338,857 suspected cases of side effects were reported, including 54,879 severe reactions. Among the worst cases, "the symptoms are very different, they vary from stroke to thrombosis to cardiac diseases", said another German lawyer, Joachim Caesar-Preller, who represents 140 clients making similar claims. He is seeking up to one million euros in damages per case — plus interest — but concedes that a "rocky and long road" lies ahead in the legal battles.

'Not an isolated case'

A key point for the courts is whether the side effects of the medication, when used correctly, surpass "a justifiable level according to the findings of medical science". In other words, the effects have to be sufficiently serious to be taken into account, said Anatol Dutta, a professor at Munich University.

A claimant identified only as Kathrin K., 45, believes her symptoms are severe enough. She said she lost a lot of weight after taking the vaccine and had to un-



BERLIN: File picture of a patient receiving an injection of the Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine by Biontech-Pfizer at a vaccination centre in Berlin's Humboldt Forum museum on January 18, 2022. — AFP

dergo several intestinal operations. "I hate it when people tell me that I'm an isolated case," she said. "I'm not."

To address the question of causality, the courts would likely have to obtain expert advice. Besides the legal avenue, claimants can also turn to the state for compensation for the loss of income. More than 8,000 such applications had

been made as of April, and so far about five percent have been successful, according to German media.

BioNTech told AFP that the number of liability claims made to the company is very small when compared to the number of doses it has delivered worldwide, and that each claim had to be examined individually. — AFP

Scottish ex-leader claims innocence after arrest

GLASGOW: Scotland's former leader Nicola Sturgeon insisted on Sunday that she had done nothing wrong after police arrested her as part of an investigation into the finances of the country's ruling party. Detectives quizzed the former leader for around seven hours as part of the "Operation Branchform" investigation into the finances of the Scottish National Party (SNP), Scotland's dominant political force.

She was later released pending further investigation, said Police Scotland. "To find myself in the situation I did today when I am certain I have committed no offence is both a shock and deeply distressing," Sturgeon wrote in a statement issued

on Twitter after her release. "I would never do anything to harm either the SNP or the country," she added. Given the ongoing investigation, there was a limit to what she could say, she said. But she insisted: "Innocence is not just a presumption I am entitled to in law. I know beyond doubt that I am in fact innocent of any wrongdoing."

A statement earlier Sunday from Police Scotland said: "A 52-year-old woman who was arrested earlier today as a suspect in connection with the ongoing investigation into the funding and finances of the Scottish National Party, has been released without charge." Her arrest is the third in the probe that has sent shockwaves through Scotland's politics. The brewing scandal has plunged the SNP into deep crisis and damaged its dream for an independent Scotland.

Labor's shadow Scottish secretary Ian Murray reacted to the latest news by saying: "For too long, a culture of secrecy and cover-up has been allowed to fester at the heart of the SNP." Meanwhile, Scottish Lib Dem leader Alex Cole-Hamilton said: "It's



Nicola Sturgeon

fair to say that today's events will have huge ramifications both for the SNP and the future of Scottish politics." Sturgeon's husband Peter Murrell, the former chief executive of the SNP, was arrested in April as part of the probe. At the time, police raided the Glasgow home shared by the couple, erecting a crime-scene tent in the front garden, and SNP headquarters in Edinburgh. — AFP

Woman wakes up inside coffin at her own wake

QUITO: An elderly Ecuadorian woman who woke up inside a coffin at her own wake is being treated at the same state hospital that declared her dead two days earlier, her son said on Sunday. A video posted on Twitter shows Bella Montoya, 76, in her open coffin breathing heavily while two men assist her.

Her son, Gilbert Balberán, said "she was hitting the box" with her left hand after the five-hour wake. Balberán had to arrange for the donation of a coffin for the impoverished family after the Martin Icaza public hospital, in the coastal town of Babahoyo, declared Montoya dead on Friday. "They even gave us a death certificate," he said in a video broadcast by local media. — AFP

Crown Prince meets ex-speakers...

Continued from Page 1

At the campaign held on June 4, Ghanem said that all those who desire to lead the government from the ruling family must be interviewed and the selection should be based on the result of the interview. After embracing parliamentary democracy in 1962, members of the Al-Sabah ruling family have been appointed to head governments.

Speaking to reporters after a reception he held to thank his supporters after his election to the Assembly, Ghanem said the strong mandate he received at the ballots was a powerful response against his critics. He said the next prime minister should read the outcome of the elections carefully, not only in respect to who won and who lost, but also the number of votes MPs received and who received more votes, so as to form a government that meets the aspirations of the people.

Berlusconi dies at 86; Amir sends...

Continued from Page 1

The government has declared a national day of mourning for Wednesday, when Berlusconi will have a state funeral in Milan's gothic Duomo Cathedral. It will be led by Milan Archbishop Mario Delpini and will start at 3:00 pm (1300 GMT). Berlusconi had suffered ill health for years, from heart surgery in 2016 to a 2020 hospitalization for COVID-19. Despite being re-elected to the Senate last year, he was rarely seen in public.

But he remained the official head of his right-wing Forza Italia party, a junior — and occasionally troublesome — partner in Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's coalition government. "Berlusconi was above all a fighter," Meloni said in a video message posted on Twitter. "He was a man who was not afraid to defend his convictions, and it was precisely that courage and determination which made him one of the most influential men in Italy's history," she said.

As Berlusconi's body was moved from the hospital to Villa San Martino, and flags were lowered

Asked if he plans to run for Assembly speaker, Ghanem said he is prepared to serve the Kuwaiti people as a speaker or as a member of parliament. Ghanem served as a speaker between 2013 and 2022, when the Assembly was dissolved. He said that he did not attend the informal meeting held by new MPs on Sunday because he was not invited, adding that he will not attend any meeting unless he is properly invited. Ghanem said he will announce a clear program, adding that he is optimistic about the future and will exert all efforts to help achieve stability for the people, who are frustrated from disputes.

Meanwhile, MP Osama Al-Shaheen said the 47 MPs who held an informal meeting on Sunday agreed that the top priority for the new Assembly is to amend the law that governs the constitutional court. He said the aim of the amendment is to "safeguard the will of the nation", a reference to the election of the Assembly, after the constitutional court annulled the Assembly on three occasions since 2012. He said those verdicts had created political chaos in the country and there is consensus that the law should be amended.

to half mast on all public buildings, tributes flowed from in from international leaders. Russian President Vladimir Putin — whom Berlusconi controversially defended following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine — said his death was an "irreparable loss" and he hailed him as a "true friend". Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban tweeted: "Gone is the great fighter".

Berlusconi led Italy three times between 1994 and 2011, for a total of nine years, wooing voters with a promise of economic success, only to be forced out as a debt crisis gripped his country. But his influence extended well beyond politics, thanks to his extensive TV, newspaper and sporting interests, while his playboy antics kept him in the headlines even in his final years. European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen tweeted that she was "saddened" by the death of Berlusconi, while Pope Francis hailed his "energetic temperament".

Italian ex-prime minister Matteo Renzi said that Berlusconi had "made history", even if he was controversial. "Many loved him, many hated him: Everyone today must recognize that his impact on political but also economic, sporting and television life was unprecedented," he said. Berlusconi had been admitted to a Milan hospital on Friday for what aides said were pre-planned tests related to leukemia. — AFP

In the last few weeks, Iran has released six European citizens and recovered an Iranian diplomat, Assadollah Assadi, who was convicted of terrorism and imprisoned in Belgium. Kanani also denied that Iran had provided Russia with equipment to "build a drone factory". White House national security spokesman John Kirby on Friday warned that Russia was receiving materials from Iran to build a drone factory on its territory. "We deny any accusations regarding the export of arms to Russia for use in the war against Ukraine," Kanani said. — AFP

Can you trust your ears? AI voice scams rattle US

WASHINGTON: The voice on the phone seemed frighteningly real — an American mother heard her daughter sobbing before a man took over and demanded a ransom. But the girl was an AI clone and the abduction was fake. The biggest peril of Artificial Intelligence, experts say, is its ability to demolish the boundaries between reality and fiction, handing cybercriminals a cheap and effective technology to propagate disinformation.

In a new breed of scams that has rattled US authorities, fraudsters are using strikingly convincing AI voice cloning tools — widely available online — to steal from people by impersonating family members. "Help me, mom, please help me," Jennifer DeStefano, an Arizona-based mother, heard a voice saying on the other end of the line.

DeStefano was "100 percent" convinced it was her 15-year-old daughter in deep distress while away on a skiing trip. "It was never a question of who is this? It was completely her voice... it was the way she would have cried," DeStefano told a local television station in April. "I never doubted for one second it was her."

The scammer who took over the call, which came from a number unfamiliar to DeStefano, demanded up to \$1 million. The AI-powered ruse was over within minutes when DeStefano established contact with her daughter. But the terrifying case, now under police in-



LOS ANGELES: This illustrative image created on June 9, 2023 shows a person using a smartphone to record a voice message. — AFP

vestigation, underscored the potential for cybercriminals to misuse AI clones.

"AI voice cloning, now almost indistinguishable from human speech, allows threat actors like scammers to extract information and funds from victims more effectively," Wasim Khaled, chief executive of Blackbird.AI, told AFP. A simple internet search yields a wide array of apps, many available for free, to create AI voices with a small sample — sometimes only a few seconds — of a person's real voice that can be easily stolen from content posted online.

"With a small audio sample, an AI voice clone can be used to leave voicemails and voice texts. It can even be used as a live voice changer on phone calls," Khaled said. "Scammers can employ different accents, genders, or even mimic the speech patterns of loved ones. [The technology] allows for the creation of convincing deep fakes." — AFP

Wedding bus crash kills 10 in ...

Continued from Page 1

or negligent driving "occasioning death" and denied him bail ahead of a court hearing at nearby Cessnock on Tuesday. A dozen emergency workers wearing high visibility yellow vests were at the scene soon after the accident on a foggy night near the town of Greta, helping to ferry more than 20 people to hospital.

Among those still in hospital, one patient was in a "critical" condition and 20 others were "stable", police said. After a daylong effort, bodies were still being recovered from the scene. Wedding photos shared on social media showed smiling guests from the party gathered on the lawn of a local winery in celebration, just hours before the accident — the deadliest on official records since 2007.

Acting Assistant Commissioner Tracy Chapman described a "frantic scene" in the aftermath of the crash. Emergency responders "were able to smash the front windshield of the bus in order to pull some people, or assist some people out of the bus", she said. "Those that were able to, walked themselves." No children were believed to be involved, she added. The passengers were presumably heading to their

accommodation after the festivities, Chapman said. No other vehicles appeared to have been involved in the crash, she said. Police declined to discuss the possible cause of the crash.

"For a joyous day like that in a beautiful place to end with such terrible loss of life and injury is so cruel and sad, and so unfair," Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said in Canberra. "People hire a bus for weddings in order to keep their guests safe, and that just adds to the unimaginable nature of this tragedy." Albanese sent his wishes for the recovery of those in hospital, and thanks to the emergency workers. "I want to give our thanks to the first responders, those who arrived at this terrible scene. I cannot imagine what they were confronted with, what they had to deal with," he said.

The area is being examined by specialist forensic police and a Crash Investigation Unit. The Hunter Valley region is replete with vineyards, kangaroos and native bushland, making it a popular spot for tourists and group outings. New South Wales Premier Chris Minns sent his "deepest condolences" to the families and loved ones of those killed and injured. Wedding guests had come together to experience a "day of joy" and had instead been met with "undeniable despair", he told reporters. "The next few days and the next few weeks may be worse than the initial shock as it fully comes to the realization of what this community has gone through." — AFP

Iran says indirect talks continuing...

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At least three Iranian-Americans are being held in Iran, including businessman Siamak Namazi, arrested in October 2015 and sentenced to 10 years in prison for espionage.

International

Nuclear arms spending, arsenals swell as global tensions grow

China increased its stockpile from 350 to 410 warheads

GENEVA: The world's nuclear powers, and China in particular, increased investment in their arsenals for a third consecutive year in 2022 amid swelling geopolitical tensions, two reports showed Monday.

The world's nine nuclear-armed states jointly spent \$82.9 billion on their arsenals last year, with the United States accounting for more than half of that, according to a new report from the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) meanwhile released a report showing that the total number of nuclear warheads held by Britain, China, France, India, the Zionist entity, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia and the United States was down to 12,512 at the outset of this year, from 12,710 at the start of 2022. While some of that included older warheads scheduled to be dismantled, SIPRI said that 9,576 were in "military stockpiles for potential use" - 86 more than a year earlier. "We are approaching, or maybe have already reached, the end of a long period of the number of nuclear weapons worldwide declining," SIPRI director Dan Smith told AFP.

'Beginning to tick up'

Pointing to the stockpile of usable nuclear warheads, Smith said that "those numbers are beginning to tick up", while adding that they remain far below the more than 70,000 seen during the 1980s.

The bulk of the increase was in China, which increased its stockpile from 350 to 410 warheads. India, Pakistan and North Korea also upped their stockpiles and Russia's grew to a smaller extent, from 4,477 to 4,489, while the remaining nuclear powers maintained the size of their arsenals.

Russia and the United States together have almost 90 percent of all nuclear weapons.

"The big picture is we've had over 30 years of the number of nuclear warheads coming down, and we see that process coming to an end now," Smith said.

\$157,664 every minute

The higher spending reported by ICAN appeared to back that up. ICAN, which was awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, found that spending on nuclear weapons had risen three percent from 2021, marking the third consecutive annual increase.

The \$82.9 billion spent amounted to \$157,664 for every minute of 2022, it said in its report entitled "Wasted: 2022 Global Nuclear Weapons Spending".

Washington spent \$43.7 billion, which was slightly less than a year earlier but was still far ahead of all other countries, the report showed.

China was next in line with \$11.7 billion spent, followed by Russia at \$9.6 billion - both marking an increase of around six percent from 2021. India meanwhile showed the most drastic spending jump, dishing out \$2.7 billion - 21.8 percent more than a year earlier - while Britain raised its spending level by 11 percent to \$6.8 billion.

The report also highlighted how arms companies involved in the production of nuclear weapons received new contracts worth just under \$16 billion last year, and in turn spent \$113 million lobbying governments in the United States and France alone. Globally, nuclear-armed countries have contracts with companies to produce nuclear weapons worth at least \$278.6 billion, continuing in some cases through to 2040, it said.



BEIJING: File photo shows China's DF-41 nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missiles during a military parade at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. - AFP

Setbacks

Researchers at SIPRI also noted that diplomatic efforts on nuclear arms control and disarmament had suffered setbacks following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February last year.

Russia has for instance suspended participation in New START, a Cold War-era treaty that limits warheads and allows verification by both sides.

At the same time, Smith said the increase in stockpiles could not be explained by the war in Ukraine, as it takes a longer time to develop new warheads and the bulk of the increase was among countries not directly affected. China has also invested heavily in all parts of its military as its economy and influence have grown. "What we're seeing is China stepping up as a world power," Smith said. - AFP

Death toll in Vietnam shootings climbs to nine

HANOI: The death toll following gun attacks on two police headquarters in Vietnam's Central Highlands has risen to nine, including four officers, authorities said Monday. Twenty-six people have been arrested in connection with the rare shootings that occurred in the early hours of Sunday in Cu Kien district of Dak Lak province, according to the website of the ministry of public security (MPS).

"In the early morning of June 11, 2023, a group of people riding motorbikes used guns and other dangerous weapons to attack and vandalize the headquarters of the people's committee and the offices of police in the two communes of Ea Tieu and Ea Ktur," the site said.

Four police officers, two local officials and three civilians died, the site added, while two police officers were seriously injured. Police were searching for more suspects. An earlier report by the MPS said two people being held hostage by the attackers were freed, while another person being held managed to free himself.

The Central Highlands, home to a number of ethnic minorities, is considered a sensitive area for Vietnam's authoritarian government and has long been a hotbed of discontent over issues that include land rights. Some tribes in the area - collectively known as Montagnards - sided with the US-backed south during Vietnam's decades-long war. Some are calling for more autonomy, while others abroad advocate independence for the region.

Several state media outlets withdrew their reports about the incident on Sunday, before republishing them hours later. Gun violence is extremely uncommon in Vietnam, where it is illegal for citizens to own firearms and the black market for weapons is limited. Four people were shot dead at an illegal cockfighting betting ring on the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh city in January 2020. In another rare shooting in 2016, two senior officials in northern Yen Bai province were killed by a colleague at their office before the gunman shot himself. - AFP

Vietnam octogenarian fighting for Agent Orange victims

HANOI: As a young woman, Tran To Nga was a war correspondent, a prisoner and an activist. Now, at 81, she is waging a court battle against US chemical firms to win justice for the Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange. Nga is the first and only civilian to bring a lawsuit against the 14 multinational chemical firms, including Dow Chemical and Monsanto, that produced and sold the toxic herbicide sprayed over Vietnam by US forces during the war. According to the World Health Organization, some batches of Agent Orange were contaminated with a dioxin - a highly toxic environmental pollutant - that is being investigated for its link to certain types of cancer and to diabetes.

In May 2021, a French court threw Nga's case out. But she refuses to give up. "I will not stop. I will be on the side of the victims until my last breath," Nga, visiting Hanoi from her home in Paris, told AFP.

"This will be my last fight, and the most difficult of all," said Nga, herself a victim of Agent Orange who spent nine months behind bars, imprisoned by the South Vietnamese regime for her suspected connections to high-ranking communist leaders. The activist gave birth to her youngest daughter in prison, before being freed when the communists defeated US-backed South Vietnam on April 30, 1975.

'I blamed myself'

Like many other first-generation victims, Nga was at first unaware she had been exposed. In her mid-



BEIJING: Honduran President Xiomara Castro (right) and China's President Xi Jinping (left) inspect Chinese honor guards during a welcome ceremony outside the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on June 12, 2023. - AFP

Xi signals support for Honduras after diplomatic switch

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged economic and social backing for Honduras on Monday, state media reported, in his first remarks on the Central American country since it cut ties with Taiwan and recognized Beijing instead.

Beijing considers self-ruled Taiwan to be part of its territory and has vowed to seize the island one day. It does not permit countries to recognize both Beijing and Taipei, and has used economic inducements in recent years to lure away Taiwan's allies. Xi's remarks during a meeting with Honduran Pres-

ident Xiomara Castro in Beijing came after Tegucigalpa officially opened an embassy in the Chinese capital.

The switch of allegiances marked "a historic decision and demonstrated your firm political will", Xi told Castro, according to state broadcaster CCTV. "China will unwaveringly develop friendly China-Honduras relations and firmly support the economic and social development of Honduras," Xi was quoted as saying.

He said China would seek to develop ties "from a strategic height and long-term perspective, turning the beautiful vision of cooperation between the two countries into concrete results". Castro is expected to sign a host of agreements during her visit. In March, Honduras cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favor of Beijing, reducing the number of countries that diplomatically recognize Taipei to just 13. China opened an embassy in Tegucigalpa last week. - AFP



Tran To Nga

20s, she was stationed at a Viet Cong military base near Saigon - now known as Ho Chi Minh City - as a trainee journalist working for Hanoi's Liberation News Agency. Coming out of an underground shelter one day, Nga was "covered with a wet powder from a US aircraft".

"I took a shower only when I was told that it was herbicide all over my body. But then forgot all about it," she said. Between early 1962 and 1971, US warplanes dropped about 19 million gallons (68 million litres) of Agent Orange - so-called because it was stored in drums with orange bands - to defoliate jungles and destroy Viet Cong crops. At that time, no one knew they had been exposed to a substance that many believe destroyed not only their lives, but also their children's and grandchildren's.

A year after the exposure, in 1968, Nga gave birth to her first baby, a girl born with a congenital heart defect who survived for just 17 months. "For so long, I blamed myself for being a bad mother, giving birth to a sick baby and not being able to save her," Nga told AFP. Nga only suspected her child was a victim of Agent Orange decades later

when she encountered veterans and their disabled children in a similar situation. Vietnam's Association of Victims of Agent Orange says 4.8 million people were directly exposed, and more than three million have developed health problems.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs has said it assumes - although there is no official scientifically proven link - that some cancers, diabetes and birth defects are associated with Agent Orange exposure.

It has also recognized a link among veterans' children to spina bifida - a spine defect in a developing fetus. Nga herself is suffering from effects including type 2 diabetes and cancer. "I think of Agent Orange as the ancestor for all sorts of other substances that have destroyed the environment," Nga said.

No settlement

At a state-sponsored facility caring for Agent Orange victims in the suburbs of Hanoi, Nga watched a computer lesson given by Vuong Thi Quyen.

Quyen, 34, was born with a deformed spine after her soldier father was exposed during the war.

"I am so happy to meet Nga, my idol. She has done so much for victims of Agent Orange like ourselves," Quyen told AFP. After the war Nga, a trained chemist, spent many years as a head teacher at a school in Ho Chi Minh City before assuming a role as a go-between for donors in France and Agent Orange victims in Vietnam. "I have no hatred towards the American government or people. It's only those that caused devastation and pain that should pay for what they did," Nga said. At the trial in France, the multinationals argued that they could not be held responsible for the way the US military used their product, with the court ruling they had been "acting on the orders of" the United States, and were therefore immune from prosecution. - AFP

Dogs die as S Africa snake antivenom shortage bites

JOHANNESBURG: Zarza, a much-loved Staffordshire terrier, ended up at a South African animal hospital with a bite from a Mozambique spitting cobra on her snout. The snake's powerful venom can stop the breathing muscles from working, but normally the bites are treatable with an antidote.

The problem, say South African veterinarians, is that they currently have virtually no vials of the antiserum left. "We've been out of antivenom for quite some months now," said Dean de Kock, a vet at the Valley Farm Animal Hospital in Pretoria, where Zarza was treated but eventually died. Vets and snake experts say the shortage started getting serious towards the end of last year - though the authorities are denying there is a problem. "Snakebite antivenom is available in the country," the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS), a government body in charge of antidote production, told AFP. Experts in the field disagree.

A 'countrywide shortage'

In April, a group of snakebite treatment specialists pleaded with the health minister over what they described as "a major health risk". While the supply problems may be easing in some quarters, vets say they are still struggling. Hospitals treating humans get priority when any new doses come available, said Johan Marais, a herpetologist - specialist in reptiles and amphibians - who heads the African Snakebite Institute. "At the moment, if you're a veterinarian, you cannot get antivenom," said Marais, 65. Speaking from his headquarters in Pretoria, he casually handled a black mamba during his conversation with AFP. He said he receives up to a dozen calls a day from desperate animal doctors and dog owners looking for antidotes.

"If your dog gets a serious snakebite today, there's a likelihood it's going to die," Marais said. Alan Kloock, of the South African Veterinary Association, confirmed Marais's remarks, describing a "countrywide shortage" with vets unable to get their hands on the antiserum they needed.

Horse blood, spitting cobras

South Africa is home to about 160 species of snakes, many of them poisonous. South African Vaccine Producers - a NHLS subsidiary and the only antivenom maker in the country - produces two antidotes. One can treat bites from 10 snakes including the cape cobra, the puff adder and the green mamba, while another is for relatively rare boomslang bites. Making the antiserums is a laborious process, said Mike Perry of African Reptiles and Venom, a venom-extraction firm in Centurion, outside Johannesburg, that houses around 900 snakes in small glass cages. He said his team forces the hissing reptiles to spit out their poison by forcing them to bite a glass jar. Small quantities of the toxins are then injected into horses, which over time develop immunity. Their plasma is then harvested and processed to make the serum. - AFP



JOHANNESBURG: Mike Perry, owner of African Reptiles & Venom, handles a puff adder before extracting venom from the snake near Diepsloot, Johannesburg. South African vets say they currently have virtually no vials of the antiserum left. - AFP

Business

TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2023

Boursa holds workshop for Investor Relations' strategic communications

Workshop held in collaboration with MEIRA and its Kuwait Chapter

KUWAIT: As part of its constant efforts to develop the rapidly evolving investor relations (IR) field, Boursa Kuwait collaborated with the Middle East Investor Relations Association (MEIRA) and its Kuwait Chapter to organize an interactive Investor Relations (IR) workshop entitled "Strategic Communications: Challenges and Opportunities for Listed Companies" on Wednesday, June 7, 2023.

The event, which was held at Al Kharafi Auditorium in the Boursa Kuwait building, aimed to increase transparency – considered the backbone of the IR industry – in communications with current and prospective investors, locally and around the world. The workshop considered key trends and put these into the context of the local market by inviting the participation of expert guest speakers from Kuwait, the region and the UK, and was made up of a discussion featuring keynote speakers and a workshop providing practical takeaways for IR professionals. The event also gave IR experts and practitioners the opportunity to network and discuss the latest developments and trends in the field.

Keynote speakers

The plenary discussion was moderated by Mohammad A Abdal, Chief Communications Officer, Zain and MEIRA Kuwait Chapter Head and featured Andy Parnis, Managing Director, Teneo and Mohammad Al Abdulkader, Senior Vice President at MENA Equities, Markaz. During the workshop, Al Abdulkader shared an overview of the performance and structure of the equity market. He elaborated on the importance of the interaction between investors and companies, and the vital role that the investor relations departments play at listed companies.

The IR workshop was moderated by John Gollifer, General Manager of the Middle East Investor Relations Association (MEIRA) and included speakers like the aforementioned Parnis, and Paolo



Casamassima, Head of Global Market Intelligence at Orient Capital, a firm specializing in international capital markets intelligence, who discussed the role of strategic communications as an imperative for managing stakeholder relations in any market conditions.

They also considered the local and regional market context before drilling down to the role of IR in addressing the investment community. The supporting IR workshop resulted in practical takeaways for the IR audience. Speaking at the workshop, Andy Parnis said, "This was an important discussion at a time of continued market uncertainty and volatility.

It is always a pleasure to support market initiatives and it is something that Teneo does throughout the region in partnership with other market experts, including MEIRA. I would like to thank Boursa Kuwait for hosting this event, and look forward to more collaborative market initiatives." John Gollifer added, "MEIRA only thrives with the support of our active membership and expert partners. It is always thrilling to work with Boursa Kuwait, who continue to set a fine example by leading through example every day in IR across their market."

Collaboration with Boursa Kuwait

The collaboration between Boursa



Kuwait and MEIRA is part of Boursa Kuwait's Corporate Sustainability strategy and is an example of its endeavors to raise financial literacy and capital market awareness among current and prospective investors. The company has launched several initiatives to empower and equip businesses and investors with the ability to capture market opportunities as well as transform the Kuwaiti capital market into a robust capital market ecosystem and Kuwait into an attractive investment destination.

The initiative also forms part of the company's efforts to create a lasting meaningful impact on the communities where it operates and is in line with Goal 4 – Quality Education – and Goal 17 – Partnership for the Goals – of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Fahad Al-Bisher, Director of Investor Relations at Boursa Kuwait commented on the changing landscape of investor relations in the region, saying, "Over the past 10 years, the Middle East has seen significant movements in capital

markets, accompanied by changes in the structure of stakeholder engagements. One of the most important changes is in Investor Relations.

It is becoming increasingly crucial to have a clear well planned and effective investor relations program – one that can help deliver and communicate the value of the company and build a strong shareholder base. I would like to thank the Middle East Investor Relations Association for their long-standing partnership with the exchange and look forward to more collaborations in the future."

Boursa Kuwait's Corporate Sustainability strategy stipulates ensuring initiatives apply and fall in line with the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR), industry best practice standards and investor expectations, creating strong and sustainable partnerships that ultimately achieve success and allow Boursa Kuwait to leverage the capabilities and strengths of other companies or organizations that have experience in different fields, and integrating sustain-

ability efforts with the company culture, in order to achieve longevity and an ongoing impact that is carried on and instilled in the day-to-day operations of the stock exchange.

Boursa Kuwait has launched many initiatives in partnership with local and international organizations, focusing on support for nongovernmental organizations and charity programs, financial literacy and capital market awareness, the empowerment of women, and environmental protection.

Since its inception, Boursa Kuwait has implemented many steps in accordance with international practices and standards to enhance the position of the exchange locally, regionally and internationally as well as transform Kuwait into a regional and global investment destination, focusing on creating an attractive issuer base and broadening its investor base, increasing the depth and breadth of its products, as well as upgrading its infrastructure and business environment to international standards.

UBS completes takeover of former rival Credit Suisse

ZURICH: UBS announced Monday it had finalized the takeover of its former rival Credit Suisse, clearing the way for the Herculean task of integrating two of the world's most important banks. The mega-merger of the biggest banks in Switzerland will be closely watched by clients, employees, politicians and regulators. "UBS has completed the acquisition of Credit Suisse today, crossing an important milestone," the bank said in a statement. "Credit Suisse Group AG has been merged into UBS Group AG and the combined entity will operate as a consolidated banking group."

UBS, Switzerland's leading bank, was forced into the marriage on March 19 to prevent its closest domestic rival from going under — with potentially catastrophic consequences for the global financial system. "I'm pleased that we've successfully closed this crucial transaction in less than three months, bringing together two global systemically important banks for the first time," said UBS chairman Colm

Kelleher. "We are now one Swiss global firm and, together, we are stronger... Our top priority remains the same: to serve our clients with excellence."

No other option

The merger will be complex both technically and politically, resulting in a megabank bigger than anything Switzerland has seen before — a size that has political leaders worried. Thousands of jobs could be lost due to overlapping operations. To Thomas Jordan, chairman of Switzerland's central bank, there was no other solution. "Of course, it's a pity there is only one (big bank) left. But I am sure that if the takeover by UBS hadn't succeeded, there would have been an international financial crisis," the Swiss National Bank chief told the Sonntagszeitung weekly newspaper.

UBS chief executive Sergio Ermotti said Monday that "instead of competing, we'll now unite as we embark on the next chapter of our joint journey. Together, we'll present our clients an enhanced global offering, broader geographic reach and access to even greater expertise." But he warned Friday that the coming months are likely to be "bumpy", saying the operation would require "waves" of difficult decisions, particularly regarding employment. At the end of 2022, the two giants had around 120,000 employees worldwide, including 37,000 in Switzerland.

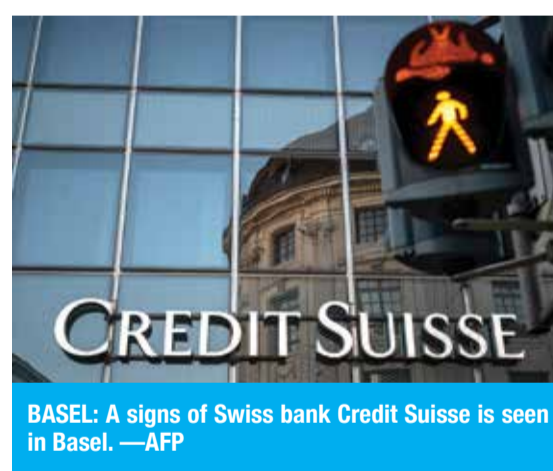
financial crisis as he ran Switzerland's biggest bank from 2011 to 2020. His rise has also been like a Hollywood tale having gone from local apprentice to the two-time boss of a top global bank. Having steered the ship once before at UBS, can Ermotti do it again?

Bumpy flight

Ermotti has warned the coming months will be "bumpy" for the new megabank, whose sheer size has raised concerns in Switzerland in the event that it runs into trouble one day. At the Swiss Economic Forum conference in Interlaken on Friday, he was asked if he saw himself as a kind of Superman figure, a clean-up man responsible for restoring order, or the new coach of a football team.

He chose the latter option, saying the task was to "make something good out of a not ideal situation". Ermotti will have to merge two institutions which were both among the 30 banks around the world deemed of global importance to the banking system – in short, too big to fail. Following the collapse of three banks in the United States, Credit Suisse's share price plummeted on March 15 as investor confidence evaporated.

On March 19, the Swiss government, the central



BASEL: A sign of Swiss bank Credit Suisse is seen in Basel. —AFP

For the time being, the two banks will continue to operate separately under the UBS umbrella. But UBS has already created a new board of directors for certain Credit Suisse operations, headed by current UBS vice-chairman Lukas Gachwiler. UBS has spent the time since March 19 working out a plan of action for absorbing Credit Suisse. UBS probably already has an idea of what it wants to keep, close or sell, but had been "limited in what they could do" until the merger was sealed, Andreas Venditti, an analyst at Swiss investment manager Vontobel, told AFP. — AFP



Sergio Ermotti

bank and the financial regulators strongarmed UBS into buying Credit Suisse for \$3.25 billion to prevent it from collapsing – and potentially triggering a global banking meltdown. UBS chairman Colm Kelleher turned once more to Ermotti, thinking him the "better pilot" to navigate the bank's completely altered flight path than its Dutch CEO Ralph Hamers. Hamers swiftly vacated the hotseat and Ermotti returned to the helm on April 5. — AFP

Saudi announces investment deals at Arab-China summit

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia announced on Sunday billions of dollars in investment deals between China and the Arab world, on the first day of the China-Arab business conference in Riyadh. The meeting comes amid growing commercial and diplomatic ties between Beijing and Middle Eastern countries, including a recent landmark Chinese-brokered rapprochement between powerhouses Iran and Saudi Arabia that has shifted regional relations.

The oil-rich kingdom is hosting the conference, now in its 10th edition, for the first time. Over two days, it brings together more than 3,500 government and business officials from China and Arab countries, the Saudi investment ministry said in a statement. The event "marked its first day with the signing of \$10 billion in investment agreements", the statement said — the vast majority of which are for projects in Saudi Arabia or by Saudi firms and government entities.

This figure includes a \$5.6-billion memorandum of understanding between the Saudi investment ministry and Human Horizons, a Chinese maker of electric and self-driving cars. More than half of the total sum is in the memorandum of understanding, as well as a separate "cooperation agreement" and a "framework agreement" involving other companies, according to the statement. It detailed agreements in various fields, including technology, agriculture, renewable energy, real estate, natural resources and tourism.

At the launch of the conference, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan highlighted the potential in increased trade and economic ties between China and Arab countries. "(This) meeting is an opportunity... to build a shared future towards a new, beneficial era for our peoples," he said. According to the Saudi statement, a \$533-million deal was concluded between AMR ALuwlaa Company and Zhonghuan International Group (Hong Kong) for the establishment of an iron factory in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi ASK Group and the China National Geological & Mining Corp inked a \$500-million cooperation agreement on copper mining in the kingdom, the statement added. Chinese President Xi Jinping in December visited Saudi Arabia—the world's largest crude exporter — prompting criticism from Riyadh's longtime ally the United States. Asked about the US criticism, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said: "I actually ignore it." — AFP

Ermotti: Clooney of Swiss banking tasked with mega-merger

ZURICH: Sergio Ermotti returned as chief executive of UBS to mastermind the merger with Credit Suisse – an onerous task which begins in earnest on Monday after the takeover was finalized. "Today we welcome our new colleagues from Credit Suisse to UBS," he said, vowing: "We'll create a bank that our clients, employees, investors and Switzerland can be proud of." Ermotti has to smooth out the controversial shotgun marriage of two of the world's most important banks.

Nicknamed the "George Clooney of Paradeplatz", after the Hollywood star and the Zurich square at the heart of Switzerland's banking industry, the silver-haired 63-year-old is known for always being immaculately dressed. The Swiss banker has a reputation that lives up to such star billing, having turned around the fortunes of UBS after the 2008 global

Britain inflation sparks fears, worsens cost-of-living crisis

High inflation rattles UK home loan market

LONDON: Britain's retail lenders are withdrawing fixed home-loan products, as elevated inflation sparks fears of more Bank of England interest rate hikes and worsens the cost-of-living crisis. UK banks mostly offer mortgages with a fixed interest rate for a set period — typically two to five years — but after expiry this becomes variable or a new rate is fixed in line with prevailing market conditions. However, recent inflation data sparked speculation that the central bank will ramp up its key interest rate even higher to contain stubbornly high inflation. That could further squeeze living standards and spell more gloom for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative government before a general election expected next year.

Mortgages pulled

"Mortgages are being pulled, and then coming back to the market at a higher rate," said Sarah Coles, head of personal finance at stockbroker Hargreaves Lansdown. HSBC joined the fray on Thursday, suspending certain home loans as it also sought to cope with significant new demand but stressed there was no change for existing customers. Nationwide, one of the country's biggest home loan providers, was among a growing number of banks lifting product rates. The total number of available mortgage products has meanwhile fallen by about five percent in just under one month, according to data provider Moneyfacts. "This has been going on ever since the news emerged a couple of weeks ago that core inflation had risen," Coles told AFP.

The BoE last month lifted its key interest rate to 4.50 percent, its 12th increase in a row. Retail lenders tend to match the central bank's increases to borrow-

ing costs, sparking higher loan repayments, weighing on house prices and denting economic activity. Although UK inflation slowed to a 13-month low in April, it remains elevated at 8.7 percent as soaring food bills offset weaker energy costs — and is still more than four times the BoE's 2.0-percent target.

And core inflation, which strips out volatile energy and food, accelerated to 6.8 percent or the highest since 1992. That cemented expectations of another BoE rate hike, with some investors predicting it could reach 5.5 percent by year-end. The data also sent the UK government's long-term borrowing costs — used as a reference for mortgage products — jumping. The yield on the 10-year UK government bond briefly rose not far from levels hit in October following unfunded tax cuts that sank the short-lived administration of Sunak's predecessor Liz Truss.

Average two-year fixed mortgage rates had hovered close to two percent in recent years, but rose sharply during the Truss premiership and before the BoE began lifting rates in December 2021. And they gained about 0.5 percentage points over the last month to approach an average fix of six percent according to Moneyfacts. That means that many Britons reaching the end of their current fixed home loans are forced to accept higher rates with far bigger monthly repayments.

Financial problems

Hargreaves Lansdown estimates 16 percent of Britons are already struggling to meet monthly mortgage repayments. "Anyone whose deal comes to an end this year is set to see their monthly payments increase by an average of £192, but almost two-thirds of people



LONDON: A woman buys fruit at a market stall in London. British inflation surged to a new high on soaring food prices, adding to a cost-of-living crisis. — AFP

said this would cause them financial problems," said Coles. Many Britons "may need to extend (the term of) their mortgage for it to remain affordable, which will keep monthly payments lower, but will mean paying more interest over the long run".

Coles added that "in extreme circumstances" some may need to consider "selling up and downsizing" and warned this would hit the property market. Consum-

ers' incomes will take a big hit as they struggle to re-finance, according to AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould. The BoE is meanwhile attempting to bring down inflation in the long run. "Higher mortgage rates mean higher interest costs and higher interest costs mean lower disposable income," he told AFP. "The choice is between higher interest rates or inflation — or possibly both," Mould cautioned. — AFP

Divided Fed expected to rally around US interest rate pause

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve is widely expected to pause its campaign of interest rate increases on Wednesday to give policymakers more time to assess the economic impact of existing hikes and recent banking stresses. But members of the rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) remain divided going into the meeting on June 13-14, with a minority still pushing for an 11th straight hike to fight inflation, which remains stubbornly above the Fed's long-term target of two percent.

The Fed has raised its benchmark lending rate by five percentage points since March last year, lifting it to between 5.00 to 5.25 percent. "I think there is enough support within the community for that pause," EY senior economist Lydia Boussour told AFP. "But at the same time, the compromise will be that the FOMC will be keen on carrying on retaining that optionality, and really keeping the door open to further tightening," she said.

Corralling the cats

Senior officials including Fed chair Jerome Powell have indicated they may vote to hold the benchmark lending rate at the next meeting of the Fed's powerful rate-setting committee, while leaving the door open to an additional rate hike in July if necessary. "Skipping a rate hike at a coming meeting would allow the Committee to see more data before making decisions about the extent of additional policy firming," Fed governor Philip Jefferson said late last month. The data points to a mixed economic picture,

with slowing growth, a tight labor market, and inflation still well above the Fed's two percent target. Jefferson, who was recently nominated for the vacant number two spot at the Fed, added that "a decision to hold our policy rate constant at a coming meeting should not be interpreted to mean that we have reached the peak rate for this cycle."

But those pushing for a further hike, like Fed governor Christopher Waller, have indicated support for a more aggressive stance on inflation. "I do not support stopping rate hikes unless we get clear evi-

dence that inflation is moving down towards our two percent objective," Waller said last month, adding: "whether we should hike or skip at the June meeting will depend on how the data come in" before the next decision. The division among members of the FOMC over the best path forward has led some traders on a journey, from predicting a pause to expecting a hike — and back again.

Futures traders who as recently as late May were predicting another hike, now see a more-than 70 percent chance that the Fed will vote to hold rates on Wednesday. And many analysts now also see a pause as the most likely scenario on Wednesday. "Chairman Powell is expected to corral the cats and get the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) to skip a rate hike in June, while leaving the door open to hike in July," KPMG Economics chief economist Diane Swonk wrote in a recent note to clients.

While most major banks now predict a pause, there are still some notable outliers who expect the Fed to hike rates by another quarter percentage point. "We are maintaining our call for a 25bp rate hike next week — though admittedly it is a close call," Citi economists wrote in a recent investor note. If Powell does succeed in winning over a majority of FOMC members for a June pause, analysts expect the Fed to signal through its interest-rate announcement and updated summary of economic projections (SEP) that it expects another rate hike to complete the cycle.

"Among the key innovations for this meeting, we expect the statement will be hawkishly adjusted to note the potential for further tightening at 'coming meetings,'" Deutsche Bank economists wrote in a note to clients. The SEP will likely show that "appropriate policy may require an additional hike to achieve a 'sufficiently restrictive' stance," they added. This, analysts say, would help the Fed leave the door open for an additional rate hike if needed, possibly as early as July. — AFP



FRANKFURT: Photo shows the exterior view of European Central Bank (ECB) prior to a press conference on the euro-zone's monetary policy, in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

No pause in sight as ECB eyes next hike

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank will almost certainly deliver another interest rate hike on Thursday, pressing ahead with its fight against inflation even as the euro-zone slides into a recession. Analysts predict that ECB policymakers will copy May's move and again raise borrowing costs by 25 basis points, taking the closely watched deposit rate to 3.50 percent. It would be the Frankfurt institution's eighth-consecutive hike since last July, when it kicked off an unprecedented campaign of monetary tightening after Russia's war in Ukraine sent food and energy costs surging.

Euro-zone inflation slowed to 6.1 percent year-on-year in May after hitting a peak of 10.6 percent last October, suggesting the ECB's efforts were having an impact. But with the bank's two-percent inflation target still out of reach, policymakers have stressed it was too early to take the foot off the gas, hinting at rate hikes even beyond June. ECB President Christine Lagarde said earlier this month rates were getting "closer to our cruising altitude", but "we need to continue climbing". The picture is different in the United States where the Federal Reserve is expected to pause its rate-hiking cycle on Wednesday after 10 consecutive increases, as it takes stock of how its tightening is feeding through to the real economy.

Surprise recession

Like central banks around the world, the ECB has to walk a fine line between raising borrowing costs to dampen demand and tame inflation, without triggering a deep economic downturn. Revised data last week showed that the 20-nation euro-zone unexpectedly shrank by 0.1 percent for two straight quarters at the end of 2022 and the start of 2023, meeting the technical definition of a recession. While still mild, the surprise winter recession adds to fears that the region did not cope as well as thought with the fallout from Russia's war, and casts doubt on more optimistic predictions for 2023. "The euro-zone economy has turned out to be less resilient than anticipated a few weeks ago," said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski. But he said the disappointing data were unlikely to deter the ECB as it remains laser-focused on bringing down inflation. Capital Economics economist Jack Allen-Reynolds said he expected the ECB to "hint" at a further 25 basis-point rise in July and emphasize that rates will stay high "for a long time".

Much will depend on the ECB's latest economic forecasts, set to be unveiled on Thursday. Observers expected little change from the previous projections, which saw inflation only returning to target in 2025, at 2.1 percent. Although rapidly falling energy prices and fading supply chain bottlenecks have helped ease inflation in recent months, prices for services remain high in part because of strong demand in tourism. ECB officials have also expressed concern about wages becoming an important driver of inflation, as workers use record-low euro-zone unemployment to boost their demands for salary increases in order to compensate for higher living costs. — AFP

Markets rise as traders move cautiously

HONG KONG: Most markets rose Monday but investors traded cautiously as they awaited key US inflation data and the Federal Reserve's interest rate decision later this week. Stocks globally have enjoyed a broadly strong run-up this month on hopes the US central bank will decide against an eleventh successive hike at the end of the meeting on Wednesday. Positive readings on jobs in the past few weeks — indicating the economy remained healthy but gave the Fed room to stand pat in June — have added to the broadly upbeat mood.

However, with the policy board split on the best way forward for fighting still-too-high inflation, there



WUHAN: An engineer checks a laser cutting machine, to be sold to automotive manufacturers for the production of new energy vehicles, at a facility in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province on June 12, 2023. — AFP



HUNTINGTON: People look through donated clothes during a weekly Saturday River City Street Ministry food distribution in Huntington, West Virginia. Huntington, also known as River City locally, has struggled with a declining manufacturing base and a surge in opioid addiction over recent years. — AFP

remains a certain amount of uncertainty on trading floors. The decision comes a day after the release of consumer price inflation data, which could play a major role in officials' thinking. For now, the forecast is for the Fed to hold this month but announce another hike in July. "With inflation still well over double the target rate for all central banks can the US Federal Reserve really afford the luxury of a pause, or are they right to be careful given the deflation coming out of China," said CMC Markets' Michael Hewson. "Growth is already slowing in China post COVID, and in Europe, Germany and the EU are already in a technical recession, while the UK probably isn't too far behind." Policy announcements from the central banks of Japan, China and the euro-zone are also due this week, after Canada and Australia unveiled small increases last week.

Meanwhile, concern about China's sluggish recovery and signs of further weakness in Europe continued to weigh on sentiment. After a positive but light lead from Wall Street — with the S&P 500 extending its bull market run — Asian traders battled to build on last week's advances. Tokyo, Hong Kong, Mumbai, Singapore, Jakarta and Taipei rose but Shanghai, Seoul, Bangkok and Wellington dipped. London, Paris and Frankfurt rose in the morning.

Solita Marcelli, of UBS Global Wealth Management, warned against thinking the latest gains for equities could be the beginning of a rally. "While many investors believe that passing this milestone puts markets in bull territory, it remains possible that we are seeing a bear market rally — a period of strong gains that occurs in the middle of a bear market," she said. "Until markets reach a new all-time high, it's impossible to know whether the bear market trough — the ultimate low of the market cycle — is behind us." And Mike Riddell, of Allianz Global Investors, said that while the US economy appeared to still be holding up, there was a possibility of a "nasty recession" before the year's end owing to numerous rate hikes. "Our base case is for a moderate-to-deep recession — and potentially crises — as the unprecedented pace of global policy tightening seen over the last year starts to really bite." — AFP

HSBC relaunches SVB UK as 'innovation' division

LONDON: Asia-focused bank giant HSBC on Monday relaunched the recently-acquired UK arm of collapsed US lender Silicon Valley Bank as part of a major push into technology and life sciences. It rebranded SVB UK as HSBC Innovation Banking, the London-listed lender said in a statement, three months after it bought the unit in a rescue deal for £1 (\$1.2). The division, headed by former SVB UK boss Erin Platts, will include HSBC's newly-formed innovation teams in Hong Kong, the Zionist entity and the United States, it added.

The announcement came at the start of London Tech Week, an industry showpiece for the British capital's vibrant technology scene. The new division is a "globally-connected, specialized banking proposition" that will support "innovation businesses and their investors", the lender said. HSBC in March bought SVB UK under a deal brokered by the UK government and the Bank of England. The rescue came after parent group SVB collapsed, sparking panic in Britain over the division's key UK-based customers.

Monday's rebrand comes with "the UK's world-leading technology and life sciences sectors... central to growing the UK economy and boosting global exports", said HSBC chief executive Noel Quinn said Monday. California-based SVB failed after an attempt to raise new money proved unsuccessful, triggering mass withdrawals by customers. Its demise is the third-largest retail bank failure in US history. Fellow California lender First Republic Bank took the dubious second spot last month. — AFP

Business

Iraq record budget hands Baghdad greater control over Kurdish oil

Parliament approves \$153 billion a year budget plan

BAGHDAD: Oil-rich Iraq's parliament on Monday approved a record \$153 billion a year budget plan that boosts spending on infrastructure and public sector jobs in the war-scarred nation. The three-year financial plan also hands the federal government in Baghdad greater control over lucrative oil exports from the northern autonomous Kurdistan region. After months of wrangling and several late-night sessions, lawmakers agreed on a 198.9 trillion dinar (\$153 billion) budget for this fiscal year, and the same amount in 2024 and 2025, subject to future amendments.

With annual revenues projected to reach \$103.4 billion, based on an oil price of \$70 per barrel, the fiscal plan bloats Iraq's budget deficit to over \$49.5 billion, more than double the figure in 2021. Energy sales account for about 90 percent of income for Iraq, a country still struggling to emerge from decades of war and insurgency and plagued by rampant corruption. Lawmakers approved the bill after months of wrangling over its components in a country long accustomed to budget delays.

Much of the new spending pays for wages in Iraq's huge public sector. Economist Ahmed Tabaqchali estimated a wave of recruitment would create 600,000 more public sector jobs, with wages and pensions accounting for more than \$58 billion a year. Tabaqchali, a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics' Middle East Centre, warned that this could be unsustainable. "The vulnerability for Iraq is, should oil prices decline, that would mean

that you would have to cut spending, and since you can't cut fixed expenditures, you'll have to cut on investment," he told AFP.

Kurdish oil wealth

Much debate focused on the Kurdish regional government, which had for years earned billions by exporting oil via Turkey without the Iraqi federal government's approval. Those operations ceased in March after international arbitrators recognized Baghdad's exclusive right to manage the exports. Baghdad and the Kurdish regional government agreed in April to grant the federal government greater control over Kurdish crude exports. Under the budget, 400,000 barrels per day will be shipped from Kurdistan to Baghdad, with revenues going to a central bank account overseen by Baghdad. Meanwhile 12.7 percent of Iraq's public spending will go to Kurdistan.

The budget also sets aside \$37.9 billion for infrastructure investment, labeled a priority by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani in a country where basic services have long been sorely lacking. Most spending is financed through energy exports, but experts have warned Iraq it must wean itself off its overdependence on oil. The International Monetary Fund said last month that "a significantly tighter fiscal policy is needed to strengthen resilience and reduce the government's dependence on oil revenues while safeguarding critical social spending needs". — AFP



KARBALA: This handout photo shows a view of installations at the Karbala oil refinery in the eponymous governorate. — AFP



LAGOS: A general view of Dangote Petroleum Refinery Petrochemicals in Lagos. — AFP

Nigeria's president urges patience after subsidy upheaval

LAGOS: Nigeria's new president Bola Tinubu on Monday urged Nigerians to accept more sacrifice in return for later investments after his government ended a long-standing fuel subsidy in a measure that has spiked petrol, transport and food prices. Elected in February in a highly contested vote, Tinubu in his first day in office last month called for an end to the fuel subsidy that costs the government billions of dollars to keep consumer prices of petrol artificially low.

Nigeria is one of Africa's biggest oil producers but has little refining capacity. For decades, it has swapped crude for gasoline that it then subsidizes, causing a huge drain on revenue, foreign exchange and contributing to growing debt. Tinubu's decision has seen petrol prices triple, triggering a spike in transport costs as well as a knock-on impact on food prices and electricity for the many Nigerians who use petrol-run generators for power.

In a national broadcast for Nigeria's Democracy Day, Tinubu said the end of the subsidies was a painful necessity for the country's economic well-being. "Painfully, I have asked you, my compatriots, to sacrifice a little more for the survival of our country. For your trust and belief in us, I assure you that your sacrifice shall not be in vain," he said. "The government I lead will repay you through massive investment in transportation infrastructure, education, regular power supply, healthcare and other public utilities."

Although the country is Africa's largest economy, Nigerians already face inflation of around 20 percent, intermittent fuel shortages and a fragile national power supply that forces people to rely on generators for light or sometimes go hours without power if they cannot afford one. Experts say the removal of subsidies was long needed, but critics say the government has not done enough to put in place measures to counter the inflationary impact.

Soon after the end of subsidies, petrol prices rose from 190 naira per litre to about 540 naira (\$1.20) per litre. Last week, Tinubu's government also fired the central bank chief who was later arrested by the DSS domestic security and intelligence service as part of an investigation into his role. Central Bank of Nigeria director Godwin Emeziele had been under fire for carrying out former president Muhammadu Buhari's cash swap policy that had caused an acute shortage of physical naira cash earlier this year. — AFP

African business leaders chafe at obstacles to trade

ABIDJAN: More than four years ago, African countries gave the ceremonial push to a deal to scrap internal trade barriers - a historic scheme that would create a continent-wide single market worth trillions of dollars. But African business leaders say cross-border trade remains entangled in customs duties, administrative hurdles and varying national regulations. Costs and delays are hampering African corporations fighting to compete with low-cost rivals, they say.

"Each country has its own laws - it's very

Small shops boom as Cuban private sector takes hold

HAVANA: Like mushrooms after the rain, small stores are springing up all over Havana, many run from homes or garages as the private sector finally gains a foothold in communist Cuba. Small businesses, only authorized in 2021, are mounting a challenge to companies run by the one-party state which are emptier every day as Cuba battles a shortage of foreign currency and sky-high inflation amidst its worst economic crisis in 30 years. From garages, porches or small rented shops, Cubans sell anything from beers and sweets, meat, dairy and groceries that are becoming increasingly difficult to find elsewhere.

"If you need something you can't find (in the state-run stores), they have it! They have the things you need," client Maria Leonor, 73, told AFP as she emerged from one of the new private outlets. After six decades of exclusively state-owned commerce, in August 2021 the government approved a law approving small and medium enterprises. The sea change came as Cuba reeled from the after-effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which flattened its critical tourism industry, and the tightening of US sanctions.

Yogurt on the menu

At the neighborhood store "El Bodegon 21," a colorful array of products are arranged prettily on wooden shelves — a stark contrast to the monotony of indistinguishable cans and empty refrigerators in grey-hued state shops. For customers like Leonor, these new stores offer a chance to find products, like yogurt, missing from the official market.

An added benefit: Cubans can buy at the private stores with the local peso while government stores require payment in foreign currency, which is hard to come by. But the downside, prices are "quite high," said Leonor. A kilogram of milk powder sells in a small private store for about 2,000 pesos (some \$16) - just less than half the average monthly salary. Before, it was only available on the black market, long absent from government shops or the "bodegas," outlets where Cubans have access to a limited selection of subsidized products through ration books.

In May 2022, US President Joe Biden had pledged

Pakistan gets first Russia crude under discount deal

KARACHI: The first shipment of Russian oil to energy-starved and dollar-strapped Pakistan was due to be unloaded at Karachi port on Monday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said. Since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine last year, economic sanctions have seen a significant cut in its oil and gas exports to the European Union and United States. However,

complex," Jeremy Awori, head of Ecobank, a bank that operates in 30 countries, said at a business conference in Abidjan this week. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was signed in 2019 by 54 out of the African Union (AU)'s 55 states, who together accounted for GDP last year of \$3 trillion.

It formally began operations on January 1, 2021 with the goal of achieving 90 percent cuts in tariffs within five to 10 years. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) says this would unlock a real increase of 10 percent in per-capita GDP and a 50-percent rise in intra-African commerce. To give one example of the potential gains, an AU study in 2014 found that sending a vehicle from Japan to Ivory Coast was three times cheaper than sending the same vehicle from Ivory Coast to Ethiopia.

But AfCFTA faces an uphill task. Its secretary-general, South African trade expert

Pakistan, in the midst of an economic downturn worsening a long-running energy shortage, in May confirmed it had struck a deal with Moscow to buy petroleum products.

State Minister for Petroleum Musadik Malik previously said shipments will be paid for in currencies of "friendly countries", with Pakistan's US dollar reserves dangerously low and Russia pivoting away from the greenback. "This is the first ever Russian oil cargo to Pakistan and the beginning of a new relationship between Pakistan and Russian Federation," Sharif said on Twitter late Sunday. Sharif, who is preparing for general elections later this year, said the

first shipment of "discounted crude oil cargo" arrived in the southern city of Karachi on Sunday and was set to be unloaded on Monday.

Local media reported the cargo of 100,000 metric tons of oil left Russia a month ago and was split across two smaller ships in Oman before sailing to Karachi. Pakistan — the world's fifth most populous country — is currently on the brink of default with runaway inflation, the rupee tumbling and shrinking dollar reserves hobbling imports. Meanwhile, negotiations to unlock the next tranche of a \$6.5 billion loan package agreed with the International Monetary



HAVANA: A woman shops at the private business 'Bodegon 21' in Havana. SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), approved only in 2021 in Cuba, are flourishing, displacing the sordid state-owned businesses that are becoming emptier by the day. — AFP

to "increase support for independent Cuban entrepreneurs" and help the private sector grow. A year later, last month, hundreds of Cuban tradespeople sent the American leader a letter urging him to follow through on this promise. They asked him for non-immigrant visas to permit them to travel and acquire supplies, to allow access to payment platforms like PayPal, the right to set up US bank accounts, and the reopening of US tourist travel to Cuba.

Mission: Generate wealth

Omar Bouso, 27, is among those trying to make a living under the new rules that have given rise to some 7,800 private SMEs in almost two years. He lost his work in a restaurant that closed during the pandemic, then opened a Hawaiian fast-food restaurant with two friends, which they run from a private home. "We found a niche in the market to do something different," he told AFP.

Entrepreneurs like Bouso get their goods from private import companies that did not exist until recently. According to a recent UN report, about 22 percent of

Cuban small enterprises are in construction, 19 percent in gastronomy and tourist accommodation, 12 percent in industrial food production and under three percent in trade. Inflation, which the government estimates will reach 39 percent in 2023 but analysts say will surpass 100 percent, hits the public and private sectors alike. Economy Minister Alejandro Gil recently sought to clear the government of blame for high prices. In a parliamentary session, he pointed the finger at the private sector, saying: "We are not expecting anyone to work at a loss, but it is not possible to make a fivefold profit so fast."

Gil also defended state-owned companies, which he said "are not making a profit and pay minimum salaries so as not to increase prices to the population." The state sector continues to carry the economy and employ almost two-thirds of workers, according to a regional UN commission. Oniel Diaz, founder of private business consultancy Auge, said many of Cuba's problems can be addressed with responsible regulation, but stressed that the very purpose of small business will always be to "generate wealth." — AFP

Fund have been stalled for months.

Islamabad imports 84 per cent of its petroleum products and has historically relied on friendly Gulf states for shipments. Coal imports from Afghanistan have also likely doubled under the Taliban government, according to a 2022 report by research group XCEPT. The energy sector has suffered shortages for years due to mismanagement, a lack of storage facilities and a poor economy. The World Bank last week said this year's outlook for Russia's economy had improved, with stronger-than-expected energy exports to countries such as India and China offsetting sanctions. — AFP



ABIDJAN: Benedict Oramah, president and chairman of Afreximban, and Wamkele Mene, Secretary General of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) attend a panel discussion at the 2023 Africa CEO Forum in Abidjan. — AFP

Lifestyle



The landmark Seoul City Hall is illuminated in purple to celebrate the 10th debut anniversary of K-pop megastars BTS in Seoul on June 12, 2023.



A customer takes photographs of a poster showing K-pop megastars BTS inside a cafe in Seoul.



A woman looks at an in-progress mural of K-pop megastars BTS.

South Korea celebrates 10 years of K-pop megastars BTS

Fans of K-pop megastars BTS flocked to hotspots around Seoul on Monday to mark the supergroup's 10-year anniversary, with South Korea unveiling a special commemorative stamp series to celebrate. The group's fans — known collectively as ARMY — gathered outside the offices of its agency HYBE to take selfies and record TikTok videos in front of a huge mural of the stars being painted on a wall.

Korea Post unveiled a special edition series of stamps in BTS's honor set to go on sale at post offices Tuesday — the official anniversary of the septet's debut — having already sold out almost instantly online. "Obviously BTS are global superstars, but we didn't expect the stamps to be sold out on the day of the online release," a Korea Post official told AFP. After debuting on June 13, 2013, the group went on to become the first all-South Korean act to dominate the US and UK charts, raking in billions of dollars and building a global fandom in the process.

"Many ARMY BTS fans have asked for the release of BTS stamps, and we also wanted to issue stamps for these global artists for their 10th anniversary," Kim Mi-hwa, Korea Post stamp designer, told AFP. The band — currently on a hiatus, with two members performing their mandatory South Korean military service — released a new digital single



A model shows a BTS 10th anniversary postage stamp during its unveiling event at Seoul Central Post Office in Seoul on June 12, 2023. - AFP photos

last week to celebrate the anniversary. The single, "Take Two", is purportedly a nod to the band's second chapter after a decade as musicians.

Fans from around the world travelled to South Korea to celebrate the anniversary, with the Seoul city government running a special program for the visitors. "It's thrilling to be here. It's thrilling to be surrounded by other ARMY," scientist Anne Micic, 55, a BTS fan from Australia, told AFP. "I think that's the other thing, that as an ARMY when you meet other ARMY it's almost like you have another family, which is really awesome."

'BTS saved my life'

A special map released by the city government for fans visiting from abroad features 13 locations across the South Korean capital. It includes agency HYBE's office in Yongsan and the historic Gyeongbok Palace, where BTS filmed a special edition of the Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon. Fans said it was worth travelling so far to honor their favorite band.

BTS "really saved my life", Claudia Agustin, 23, a fan from Indonesia who works in accounting, told AFP in Seoul, adding that their lyrics had spoken to her during difficult periods of her life. She



The landmark Namsan Seoul Tower is illuminated in purple to celebrate the 10th debut anniversary of BTS in Seoul.

said she was "really, really proud" of the group's 10-year anniversary. "I know how they've been struggling from back in their debut days and then they really make it big. Now everyone really knows them," she added.

Starting Monday, important tourist spots across Seoul, including the Namsan Seoul Tower and Dongdaemun Design Plaza, will be lit up in purple — ARMY's color — in celebration of the anniversary. BTS members who are not doing their military service yet have been busy with their solo careers — with Jimin releasing his six-track solo album "Face" in March. It is likely part of a care-

fully planned strategy, experts said.

"The most significant part of BTS' 10th anniversary is that they're still here and together as BTS," Jeff Benjamin, Billboard's K-pop columnist, told AFP. "Every male K-pop group will need to pause or transition due to South Korea's mandatory military service but not every group is adequately prepared as BTS has with preplanned music and content that holds significant meaning. "Even the new song itself 'Take Two' speaks specifically to this new chapter of BTS with their fans," Benjamin added. — AFP



British playwright Tom Stoppard poses with the award for Best Play "Leopoldstadt."



Victoria Clark poses with the award for best performance by an actress in a leading role in a musical for "Kimberly Akimbo".



Sean Hayes poses with the award for best performance by an actor in a leading role in a play for "Good Night, Oscar".



Patrick Marber poses with the award for best direction of a play for "Leopoldstadt".



Brandon Uranowitz poses with the award for best performance by an actor in a featured role in a play for "Leopoldstadt".



Miriam Silverman, winner of the award for best performance by an actress in a featured role in a play for "The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window," poses in the press room.



US actor Utkarsh Ambudkar arrives for the 76th Tony Awards.

'Leopoldstadt', 'Kimberly Akimbo' top Tony Awards

Tom Stoppard's play "Leopoldstadt," a look at how one family confronts loss, and intimate tragicomic musical "Kimberly Akimbo" earned the top prizes Sunday at the Tony Awards, the highest honors in American theater. Inclusion and identity were key themes on a night at which history was made — J Harrison Ghee in "Some Like It Hot" and Alex Newell in "Shucked" became the first openly nonbinary actors to win trophies for their work on Broadway.

Winners, performers and presenters alike at the United Palace theater in Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood also offered their full support to striking writers in Hollywood. The 85-year-old Stoppard, who won his fifth Tony for best play with "Leopoldstadt," a work inspired in part by his own family history, called out artificial intelligence, saying he was "teeming with emotions a chat box wouldn't begin to understand."

In the 55 years since his first Tony for best play for "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," Stoppard said, "I have witnessed the theater writer getting progressively devalued in the food chain. It's just something I thought I'd mention." The play won four awards overall, including best director and best featured actor. "Kimberly Akimbo" — about a high school student suffering from a genetic disorder that causes her to age prematurely—won five Tonys including best musical and best lead actress for Victoria Clark.

Ghee and Newell gave emotional speeches, with Ghee telling the audience: "For every trans, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming human who ever was told... you couldn't be seen, this is for you." Britain's Jodie Comer, known to TV fans as the assassin Villanelle on "Killing Eve," won for best actress in a play for her searing one-woman show "Prima Facie," about a lawyer who defends men accused of sexual assault, until she herself is attacked. Sean Hayes, who starred on TV's "Will and Grace," won for best actor in a play for "Good Night, Oscar."

Industry woes

The Tonys almost didn't happen, as a strike by the Writers Guild of America, which began in early May, called into question how to produce the live nationally televised event. Eventually, the union said it would not picket the ceremony, after Tonys organizers made some concessions about the show's format — the show was unscripted, a fact made clear by host Ariana DeBose, who opened the show by looking at blank pages.

"Our siblings over at the WGA are currently on strike in pursuit of

a fair deal," she said after an elaborate opening dance number. "I'm live and unscripted... buckle up." Staging the Tonys gala was seen as key for Broadway productions. The event serves as an annual showcase for American theater — and a live ad to encourage tourists to buy tickets. Broadway took a serious hit during the COVID-19 lockdown, which shuttered theaters and left travelers skittish about returning to crowded venues.

But the Broadway League, the industry's national trade association, released data last month indicating that theatergoers were coming back to Manhattan. During the 2022-23 season, the first full one since the pandemic, 88.4 percent of seats were filled — "comparable to pre-pandemic levels," the league said in a statement. Total attendance was at more than 12.2 million. But the season was not without its victims, including some of the shows up for awards on Sunday. In addition, "Phantom of the Opera," the longest-running show in Broadway history, closed in April after 35 years, in part because it struggled to rebound from Broadway's 18-month closure. — AFP



Cartoon character Tony the Tiger arrives for the 76th Tony Awards at the United Palace in New York City on June 11, 2023. — AFP photos

Last artisanal fishermen of Copacabana seek revival



Fishermen pull nets out of the water into their boat near the shore of Copacabana Beach.



Fishermen work near the shore of Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro on May 23, 2023. — AFP photos

Each day at dawn, Manoel Reboucas launches his small motorboat into the sea off Copacabana, a reminder of the century-old fishing collective established here long before it became Rio de Janeiro's most famous beach. But these days Reboucas and his colleagues are struggling to keep their livelihood afloat in the face of industrial fishing and a waning interest from young people. After sailing a few kilometers and scanning the horizon, Reboucas turns off the engine and begins to collect the net that he has placed the day before, where several croakers and anchovies have been trapped.

"The shoals have decreased a lot, they are no longer coming like before," laments Reboucas, 63, president of the Z13 Copacabana fishermen's collective, founded in 1923. Unsustainable fishing practices from both artisanal fishers and commercial trawlers, combined with difficulty attracting young people, is threatening the profession, says Reboucas — though not for his son Manasi, 34. Even when the fishing is poor, "the feeling of being here is renewing," he says.

On the boat, the noise of Rio is but a distant murmur, as the surrounding hills paint a panoramic postcard. But Manoel and Manasi are not there to appreciate the dazzling sight. "We have to quickly bring the fish to land for the customers, who buy it for lunch," explains Manoel.

The story of a neighborhood

Back on the beach, they unload a box containing several kilos of fresh fish, which they will sell at the Z13 headquarters, where some 50 fishermen work. Mauricio Thompson, a rowing instructor who works on the beach, is a regular cus-



Fishermen prepare to set sail at the shore of Copacabana Beach.

tom. "We know that they leave early and come back with something fresh, good. You are already sure of the quality," Thompson said. The fishermen's tuna, tilapia, octopus, and mussels are also sold on their website, which boasts of supplying "the best restaurants" in the city. The fishermen of Z13, numbering about 500 in total, have long worked the 36 km of coastline along the iconic Rio neighborhood, founded more than 130 years ago. "When Copacabana was created, the fishermen were already here," says Reboucas.

Young apprentices

In addition to the presence of large industrial fishing boats, artisanal fishing is also hemmed in

by waste from the city and oil exploration in the region, says sociologist Lara Mattos, from the NGO Nucleo Canoas. Together with the fishermen's collective, the group is coordinating a training course for new, young fishermen, a project that is part of a compensation agreement signed between the prosecutor's office of Rio de Janeiro and the US oil company Chevron (whose share was later acquired by Brazil's PRIO oil company) after a spill of more than 3,000 barrels of crude oil in an offshore field off the coast of Rio state, in 2011 and 2012.

The objective is to keep alive a trade that contributes to — rather than harms — environmental preservation. The fishermen's knowledge

"takes into account the cycles of marine life, the maintenance of biodiversity and the guarantee of resources for the next generations," explains Mattos. The first 20 students in the project will graduate this month.

Among them is 19-year-old Izabely Albuquerque, who expertly sews a fishing net, never letting it get tangled in her long, sculpted fingernails. "If it's unstitched, the fish escapes," she explains. Gilmar Ferreira, 39, seeks to make official a job that he has always done informally. "My father is a fisherman and we've been fishing since we were kids, my brother and I. We had the opportunity to take a course to get a fisherman's license and we're doing it," he says. — AFP



A fisherman's catch is displayed for sale.

Pirarucu: Amazon's giant air-breathing fish in poachers' sights

A fish larger than a man, tasty as well as beautiful, the freshwater pirarucu is a favorite with poachers in a lawless part of the Amazon jungle where Brazil, Peru and Colombia meet. Prized for its skin as much as its flesh, the pirarucu has long been a staple for Indigenous people who hunt the air-breathing fish in lakes in the Javari Valley. But it has also become a much sought-after protein on the menus of gastronomic and fusion restaurants in Rio, Bogota and Lima — its rising popularity pushing up prices and raising the stakes for Amazon dwellers.

The growing appetite for pirarucu is blamed for the deaths last year of Indigenous rights defender Bruno Pereira and British journalist Dom Phillips at the hands of fish poachers who hacked up the pair's bodies and hid the remains in the jungle. In Brazil's Amazonas province, pirarucu harvesting is strictly regulated. In the Javari Valley which holds the country's second-largest protected Indigenous reserve — home to seven tribes including the Kanamari — only residents may hunt it. Yet, "they are stealing from us!" said Joao Filho Kanamari, an Amazon resident who takes his last name from his tribe which comes into regular conflict with intruders in pursuit of the prized fish.

For the Kanamari, the story of the pirarucu is that of "a tree leaf that fell into the water and became a giant fish," tribal chief Mauro da Silva Kanamari told AFP. "Arapaima gigas" by its scientific name, the pirarucu is one of the largest freshwater fish on the planet. It is a weird-looking creature with a pink, tapered tail, awkwardly-flattened head and globular eyes reminiscent of a prehistoric monster. An omnivore, the pirarucu can grow up to three meters long and weigh over

200 kg. Caught with nets and harpoons, the giant fish is relatively easy to spot and kill as it needs to surface to breathe about every 20 minutes. Known lovingly to locals as "the cow of the Amazon", presumably for its ability to feed many at a time, the pirarucu is also versatile: Its skin is used for exotic leather products — shoes, bags or wallets. Pirarucu scales, reputedly resistant to piranha teeth, are sold to tourists as key chains. Subject to overfishing in the Brazilian Amazon, the pirarucu all but disappeared in the 1990s until the government introduced fishing restrictions.

'Fished like crazy'

In 2017, a project was started in the Javari Valley with the help of an Indigenous NGO called CTI to ensure the community will be able to continue harvesting pirarucu for a long time to come. Sustainably. The project is managed by the Kanamari themselves, who have voluntarily limited their own catches of pirarucu and agreed not to sell any for five years. "The idea is that the natives can feed themselves, provide for their needs, all while protecting their territory," said CTI spokesman Thiago Arruda.

The project also involves patrols to spot and report poachers — a risky endeavor that can bring the tribespeople in contact with illegal fishermen, often armed. "The project is very important for us," said Bushe Matis, coordinator of the Union of Indigenous Peoples of the Javari Valley (Univaja). "Before people fished like crazy. From now on we will take care of the lakes and fishing



Workers cut pirarucus at RDS.



Bushe Matis, coordinator of Univaja, talks with Thiago Arruda Mairum, from the CTI, in Atalia do Norte, Brazil, on May 15, 2023.

areas, so that we will always have fish in the future."

A stocktake will occur within weeks, and if fish numbers have recovered sufficiently, the Kanamari will be able to start selling again. But there are obstacles ahead: The community still has to set up a cold chain to get the fish safely to clients from all the way inside the bowels of the jungle, and decide

how to split the proceeds. Some fear the opening to sales could expose the Indigenous jungle dwellers to a whole new kind of risk. According to one project promoter, who asked not to be named, there is a danger of local politicians or businessmen "not necessarily well-intentioned and probably involved in illegal fishing networks" working their way into the system. — AFP



A fisherman carries a pirarucu (Arapaima gigas) at the Mamiraua Sustainable Development Reserve (RDS) in Fonte Boa, Amazonas state, Brazil, on Nov 5, 2022. — AFP photos

Lifestyle

Crash landing on us! Swiss village reels from Netflix fame



Tourists take photographs on the famous pier of a South Korean Netflix series in the village of Iseltwald at the shore of Lake Brienz, in the Swiss Alps, on June 2, 2023.



A tourist pays with his mobile to enter the famous pier.



The village of Iseltwald at the shore of Lake Brienz.



"It's a dream come true," said Filipina tourist Isabel Palijon, staring in wonder at a wooden pier framed by the turquoise waters of a Swiss lake and the towering Alps behind. And she is not alone. Ever since the hugely popular South Korean series "Crash Landing on You" aired a romantic scene shot on this very spot, the picturesque village of Iseltwald has been overrun by Asian tourists.

The Netflix hit tells the unlikely story of a South Korean billionaire heiress who accidentally paraglides into the peninsula's demilitarized zone, crashing landing onto a chivalrous army officer serving North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Several flashbacks in the show take place in Switzerland, including a riveting romantic scene on Iseltwald's wooden pier, where the male lead plays a beautiful piano melody that echoes across the water as the girl he will later fall in love with arrives by ferry from Interlaken.

'Romantic'

"I wish someday someone would do that for me," said Jiah Hni Gwee, a 35-year-old from Malaysia, looking longingly at the spot on the pier where the piano stood. "It would be amazing and romantic." She was among dozens of tourists milling around the lakeside on a sunny day last week, as a large steamboat bearing a giant Swiss flag pulled up to the nearby dock, teeming with visitors.

The breathtaking scenery and the romantic setting have made the pier a must-see for so-called "CLOY" fans who make it to Europe. The 16-part series started airing just as Covid-19 began and it became a must-watch in much of Asia during pandemic lockdowns.

A South Korean culture ministry survey found that CLOY was the second-most popular K-drama show among foreign viewers in 2021 after "Squid Game".

'Overwhelming'

But its success has caused an unexpected headache for Iseltwald, especially since last year when travel restrictions were lifted across much of Asia. "The numbers have exploded," local tourism office manager Titia Weiland told AFP. She said it was difficult to calculate how many CLOY tourists had come but estimated that "for every local person living here, it's been 1,000 visitors". She stressed that "almost everybody in Iseltwald — population 400 — is happy to have many tourists," but acknowledged "it has been quite overwhelming".

Last summer, up to 20 coaches began arriving each day, clogging traffic and sometimes blocking access to the village. And locals complain that CLOY fans typically rush to the pier for a picture before moving on, often leaving a mess but little money. In a bid to deal with the in-

flux, the municipality last month announced only pre-booked coaches that pay for reserved parking spots will be let in. And it installed a turnstile at the pier, which tourists can pass for a "selfie fee" of five Swiss francs (\$5.50).

'Paradise on Earth'

Sonja Hornung, the manager of the Strand Hotel that overlooks the pier, said the measures had made a difference and her restaurant gives customers a turnstile token. "Last year, it was terrible, (but) it has gotten much better," she said, hailing the slot system that has dramatically reduced the number of coaches.

Some tourists, however, were a bit dismayed by the turnstile — and the price. "Oh, five francs!" Florita Lichtensteiger, a 64-year-old Filipina living in Switzerland, exclaimed as she showed up with several visiting relatives. She grudgingly paid for them to go through, but did not follow, saying she had been here at least 10 times before. "All my guests want to see this place."



Tourists walk past a sign of Iseltwald.

"It's not worth it," said Nayeon Park, a 21-year-old from South Korea. Weiland insisted that the payment was needed for the upkeep of the pier, which had seen

the number of people walking on it skyrocket. "It has to be safe." Iseltwald "is like paradise on Earth," she said. "We want to really try to keep it that way." — AFP

QR code menus spark love-hate row in Rio, and beyond

Leafing through the leather-bound menu at a classic Rio de Janeiro restaurant, the tile-floored, wood-paneled Armazem Sao Thiago, 28-year-old Paula Cardoso says something that amounts to heresy in this establishment: "I prefer QR code menus." Founded in 1919 and owned by the same family for three generations, Armazem Sao Thiago is a place that frowns on QR codes, those new-fangled hieroglyphs that surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, letting contact-wary diners access digital menus on their cell phones.

The bar and restaurant takes pride in its menu, which waiters in impeccably pressed white shirts deferentially hand customers. "It's the introduction to the house," says Carlos Fionda, 59, a manager at the restaurant — affectionately nicknamed "Bar do Gomes" — in the picturesque hillside neighborhood of Santa Teresa. "That's how the client's experience starts. You chat with them, help them make the best choice... Not a cold, impersonal thing."

Fionda is not alone in defending the good old-fashioned menu — a subject that stirs passions worldwide. Rio state adopted a law last week requiring restaurants and bars to offer physical menus for clients who lack smartphones, have technological troubles or simply want to ignore their devices and enjoy a meal with family and friends. Several other states are considering similar measures.

And the QR code kerfuffle goes far beyond Brazil. A comparable bill is in the works in Miami, Florida. Colombia adopted a similar measure last year. Lawmakers in Mendoza province, in Argentine wine country, are meanwhile pushing the other way, with a bill that would require a digital menu option. It's a touchy topic in a world suddenly dominated by digital dining.

With pandemic-era fears of surface-borne contagion now a receding memory, many diners voice frustration at the lingering omnipresence of digital menus and their drawbacks — the agony of navigating on a tiny screen, the connection problems, the dead phone battery threat, the lack of human contact. "QR code menus are the death of civilization," a Washington Post columnist opined last year. "F*** QR codes. I just want to hold a menu again," railed an article in Vice magazine. "Can we finally say QR code menus are a gigantic pile of s***?" Brazilian influencer Felipe Neto asked in a Twitter post that went viral in May.

'Here to stay'

But hold the hostility, please, say the digital menu's defenders. They are "much more practical," says Cardoso, the trendy young marketing manager who found herself going vintage at Armazem Sao Thiago. "You can access it on your phone, there are more pictures of the food. You can explore the menu better. (Traditional) menus get old."



Carlos Fionda, 59, manager of Armazem Sao Thiago, shows their physical menu at the Lapa neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro on May 24, 2023. — AFP photos



A worker shows a digital menu at Casa Nossa restaurant in the Lapa neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro.



A waiter serves meals to clients at Cafe do Alto restaurant in the Lapa neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro.



A waiter and clients look at physical and digital menus at Cafe do Alto restaurant.

Many restaurateurs love the technology — and quietly hope clients will learn to love it, too, saying it facilitates innovation, seasonality and freshness.

"I just added Japanese food to my menu. If I had 50 physical menus, I'd have to change 50 copies. With digital, you can change it in a few minutes, with zero environmental impact," says Andre Delfino, 50, manager of elegant Santa Teresa restaurant Casa Nossa. The technology "is here to stay," he predicts. At Cafe do Alto, in a historic build-

ing near Santa Teresa's iconic tramline, co-owner Francisco Dantas calls himself a traditionalist who prefers an intimate, tech-free dining experience.

But he loves his QR code menu when it comes to his constantly evolving selection of beverages. "It's super fluid. I can change it on my phone any time. Just go in, control C, control V, add the new ones," says Dantas, 43. The Brazilian Association of Bars and Restaurants wants the government to leave the decision to owners. "It's a matter for the

market," says spokesman Jose Eduardo Camargo. "Both systems have their advantages and fans."

The association found in a recent survey that 38 percent of Brazilian restaurants have adopted digital menus; another 25 percent plan to. That accelerating ubiquity is what worries Rio state lawmaker Rodrigo Amorim, who introduced the new law. "We're probably heading for a world of all-digital menus. But the change should be respectful and inclusive," he says. — AFP

Sports

Taylor wins Canadian Open to end 69-year Canada drought

First home-nation player since 1954 to win Open

TORONTO: Nick Taylor sank a stunning 72-foot eagle putt on Sunday's fourth playoff hole to defeat England's Tommy Fleetwood and become the first home-nation player since 1954 to win the Canadian Open. Taylor ended the 69-year drought for Canadians at their championship after a tension-packed extra session with a dramatic putt on the par-5 18th hole at Oakdale for his third career US PGA Tour title. "I'm speechless," Taylor said. "This is for all the guys that are here. This is for my family at home. I'm speechless. This is the most incredible feeling ever."

Taylor was in tears as spectators raced out of the grandstands and onto the green to celebrate the victory after he had fired a six-under par 66 to match Fleetwood on 17-under 271 for 72 holes. "This was incredible," Taylor said. "This is an unbelievable moment. It was such a special day. This was amazing." Spectators cheered him all around the course, giving him the energy to outlast Fleetwood. "Every hole they were egging you on," he said. "Then in the playoff when the rain was coming down, it gives you the energy to keep going, keep focused. This is for all of them."

After each man birdied the 18th to open the playoff, parred it on the second extra hole and parred the par-3 ninth, the playoff returned to 18 for the emo-

tion-packed finish. World number 23 Fleetwood found a fairway bunker and blasted out short of the green while 69th-ranked Taylor was on the green but 72 feet from the hole. Fleetwood dropped his approach 12 feet from the hole and Taylor then rolled in the longest putt of his PGA career to become the first Canadian to be a Canadian Open champion since Pat Fletcher in 1954.

"I had a similar line in the second playoff hole," Taylor said. "I knew it was going to be slow with how much rain we've had. I wanted to get as close as I can because Tommy, I thought he's going to make it. For that to go in, it was unbelievable." Fleetwood, a six-time European Tour winner, settled for his fifth PGA runner-up finish. No Englishman has won the Canadian Open since 1981. "Nice moment for Nick and the fans here," Fleetwood said. "It's great to be a part of that. I had my chances, really. It wasn't to be this time. But congratulations to him."

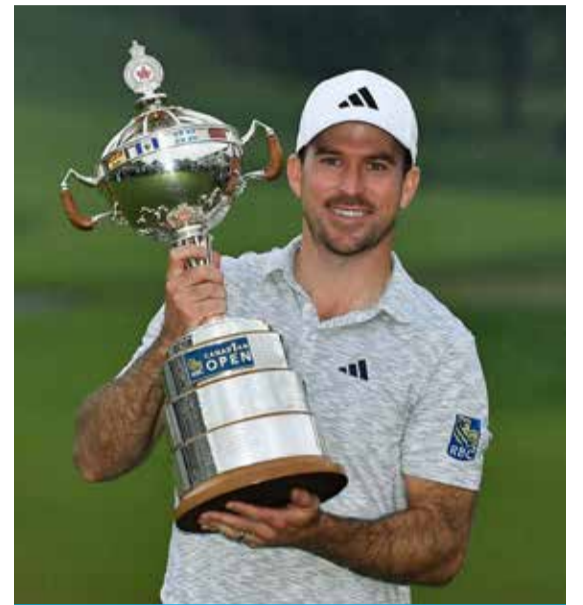
'Can't dwell on it'

Fleetwood will try to pick himself up for next week's US Open at Los Angeles Country Club. "I had my chances and didn't take them," Fleetwood said. "I just have to keep practicing, keep playing." "Have to

take the positives from it and start practicing tomorrow. I got a major next week. So can't dwell on it too much." Taylor, who set a course record of 63 on Saturday, had his right foot in a bunker when he punched from greenside sloped rough to five feet on the first playoff hole at 18. But he watched Fleetwood make a tense 20-foot birdie putt and then sank his putt to extend the playoff.

Rain began as they played 18 again, Fleetwood sending his second shot into the right grandstand but recovering to have an 11-foot birdie putt to win only to miss and stretch the drama. At the par-3 ninth, Taylor landed 14 feet from the hole on the right fringe while Fleetwood was 13 feet away on the green. Taylor's putt came up short and he tapped in. Fleetwood missed left and tapped in and back they went to 18.

England's Tyrrell Hatton birdied the last four holes to shoot 64 and share third on 272 with countryman Aaron Rai, who shot 67, and 54-hole leader Pan Cheng-tsung of Taiwan. Erik Cole, who birdied the last four holes to match Taylor's course record 63, shared sixth on 274 with fellow American Mark Hubbard. England's Justin Rose, the 2013 US Open champion, was eighth on 275. Two-time defending champion Rory McIlroy shot 72 to share ninth on 276. — AFP



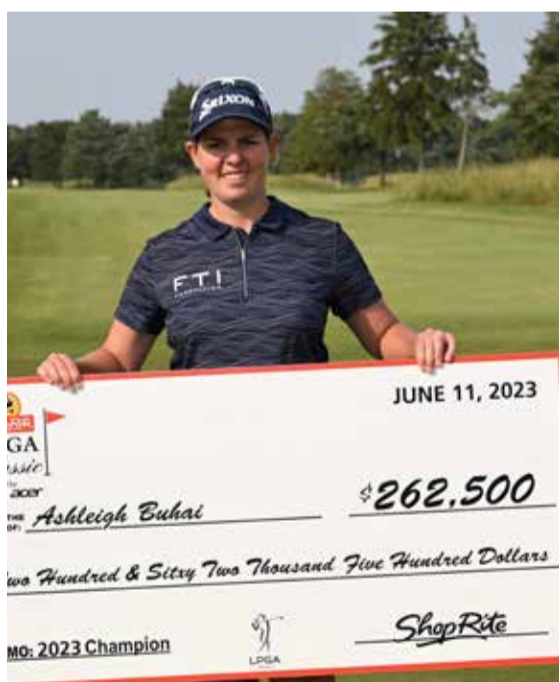
TORONTO: Nick Taylor of Canada holds the trophy after winning the RBC Canadian Open at Oakdale Golf & Country Club on June 11, 2023. — AFP

Buhai captures ShopRite title

NEW YORK: South Africa's Ashleigh Buhai, the reigning Women's British Open champion, fired her second consecutive six-under par 65 on Sunday to win the ShopRite LPGA Classic by one stroke. The 34-year-old from Johannesburg, who began the day three off the pace, finished 72 holes on 14-under 199 at Seaview in Galloway, New Jersey, to edge South Korea's Kim Hyo-joo. Kim needed an eagle at the par-5 18th to force a playoff but her pitch stopped inches from the hole to leave her in second place.

"At no point did I think it was mine until it was really confirmed," Buhai said. "I did really well to stay mentally in it, stuck to my processes. I didn't get ahead of myself and think of the outcome at all. I just trusted the one thing I was trying to do in my golf swing and hopefully that could take care of it." While it was Buhai's first LPGA triumph on US soil, it was her fourth worldwide victory in the past 10 months, including March's South African Women's Open, last December's Women's Australian Open and her major breakthrough last August at Muirfield in Scotland.

"It's definitely the best golf I've ever played in my career," Buhai said. "Experience only comes from experience and I put myself in that position four times in the last eight months. Every time you get a little more comfortable." China's Liu Yan was third on 202 with Sweden's Daniela Holmqvist and Denmark's Nanna Koerstz Madsen sharing fourth on 203. Holmqvist began the day with a one-stroke lead over Kim but struggled with three bogeys and three birdies on the front nine. That opened the door for Buhai, who birdied four of the first five holes to leap into the lead.



NEW JERSEY: Ashleigh Buhai of South Africa poses for a photo with a cheque after winning the ShopRite LPGA Classic presented by Acer at Seaview Bay Course. — AFP

'Hallelujah' putt

After sinking a 10-foot birdie putt on the first hole, Buhai dropped her approaches inches from the hole to set up tap-in birdies at the second and fourth holes, then made a long putt from just off the fifth green. "I got off to such a good start and that putt on five was a 'Hallelujah' and I was like, 'Those things need to happen for you to win,'" Buhai said.

Buhai sank another short birdie putt at the eighth after another great approach and reached the turn with a two-stroke advantage. But Buhai stumbled with a bogey at the par-3 11th and Kim, who answered a bogey at the second with birdies at three and four, began the back nine with a birdie to pull level for the lead at 12-under. Buhai answered with a birdie at the 13th and Kim made a three-putt bogey at 12 to restore the South African's two-shot edge.

Kim birdied the par-3 17th to pull within one of Buhai, but the South African pitched to three feet at the par-5 18th and tapped in for birdie and a two-stroke lead. Kim came up short of the green and when her tension-packed pitch stopped inches left of the hole, Buhai had the triumph. Many of the LPGA's top players will tee off again in New Jersey in two weeks at the next women's major, the Women's PGA Championship at Baltusrol. — AFP



LE MANS: (From left) Head of Ferrari Attivita Sportive GT Antonello Coletta, Ferrari N.51 499P Hypercar drivers Italian Alessandro Pier Guidi, Italian Antonio Giovinazzi, and British James Calado celebrate on the podium after winning the endurance race 24 hours of Le Mans on June 11, 2023. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the race. — AFP

Ferrari triumph at Le Mans on return after 50 years

LE MANS: Ferrari made a triumphant return to the 24 Hours of Le Mans after a 50-year absence on Sunday. The celebrated Italian constructor won the centenary edition to foil Toyota's hunt for a sixth successive win in motorsport's fabled endurance classic. Alessandro Pier Guidi was at the wheel of Ferrari's No.51 car to take the chequered flag of a race first run in 1923 in front of a sell-out 300,000 crowd at the Bugatti circuit. Italian Pier Guidi shared driving duties with his compatriot and former Formula One driver Antonio Giovinazzi and Briton James Calado.

"We're back at Le Mans after 50 years and we've won, we can be proud," said Giovinazzi. "We first set eyes on this car less than a year ago, and now that we find ourselves here is something fantastic," he added. Toyota's No 8 car, victorious 12 months ago, came in second with Cadillac in third and fourth. With less than two hours to go after the leaders had played cat and mouse overnight Toyota's Ryo Hirakawa was within striking distance of the red rival only for the Japanese driver to make a hash of braking at a bend to hit a barrier.

A costly mistake that involved a lengthy pit stop assured Ferrari of their tenth win in the premier Hypercar class but first in 58 years. "It's a great achievement after so long - this will go down in history," said Calado. For Toyota there was disappointment mixed with pride at playing their part in a memorable battle. "We gave it our all," said New Zealand's Brendon Hartley, who shared the Toyota wheel with Hirakawa

and Swiss Sebastien Buemi. Hartley's heart went out to Hirakawa. "An accident could happen to any of us, full support to Ryo," he said.

'Under pressure'

Hartley, a three-time Le Mans winner, added: "The last few stints I did were the best I've done. We had to put them (Ferrari) under pressure - we threw everything at them." The 62 cars across all classes were sent on their way 24 hours earlier by NBA legend LeBron James. Toyota had won the last five editions but new regulations to the premier Hypercar class attracted several new and old constructors to throw their hats into the Le Mans ring. And it was one of the Japanese marque's new rivals Ferrari, that secured pole position in qualifying on Friday.

Buemi's Toyota battled in the night in the top category with Giovinazzi in the Ferrari. If Buemi was often in the lead, Giovinazzi hung on and overtook the Toyota shortly after dawn thanks to faster refueling, with Cadillac remaining in touch. Rain showers had made part of the Sarthe circuit slippery, upsetting the strategy of many teams. Three podium hopefuls had to give in during the night including the Toyota No 7 of Kamui Kobayashi, victorious in 2021, who pulled out after a collision.

For the past five years, both Toyotas have always finished the race. The second Ferrari then lost half an hour in the pits due to damage to eventually finish in fifth. In all there were 16 Hypercars vying for the win in the Le Mans centenary compared to only five last year - but despite Ferrari on pole Toyota had remained favorites to notch up their sixth successive win after cleaning up in the first three rounds of the world endurance championship. In the end they had to settle for second, but only after pushing Ferrari to the absolute limit after over 4,500 kilometers of hard driving. — AFP

Three things we learned from the WTC cricket final

LONDON: Australia became the first men's side to have won every major global cricket trophy after a 209-run rout of India in the World Test Championship final at The Oval. Victory was a timely boost for Pat Cummins' men just five days before the start of the first Test against arch rivals England at Edgbaston, with Australia bidding for their first away Ashes series success in 22 years. AFP Sport looks at three things we learned from a dominant Australia display in south London.

Boland looks built for England

England know all about Scott Boland after he marked his Test debut aged 32 with a stunning six-wicket second innings haul in an Ashes clinching-win for Australia on his Melbourne home ground two years ago. But the seamer may be an even tougher prospect in English conditions. Test pitches in England usually offer some assistance for seamers

such as Boland, with the Dukes ball offering more movement off the surface for longer than the Kookaburra used in red-ball cricket in Australia.

Boland's ability to make deliveries nip off a good length was evident throughout a WTC final, where he sparked India's last-day collapse by dismissing Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja in the same over. "He was just our best bowler all game," said Australia captain Pat Cummins of Boland. "He didn't go for many runs and to get two big wickets in an over is just reward for how well he bowled."

Opens a worry for Australia

If England is a good place for bowlers like Boland, it is also a difficult place for opening batsmen to score runs given the movement on offer to the pacemen. Australia's David Warner and Usman Khawaja found runs hard to come by at The Oval and it is now 12 Test innings in England since Australia enjoyed an opening stand of 20 or more. But with both Steve Smith and Travis Head making first innings hundreds against India, the lack of contributions from their first-wicket pair did not hurt Australia in the final.

Still, it is asking a lot of their team-mates to keep bailing out Warner and Khawaja in a five-match Ashes campaign. Left-hander Warner, with just one century in his last 34 Test innings, recently unveiled

Bagnaia wins Italian MotoGP, stretches championship lead

MUGELLO: Francesco Bagnaia won the Italian MotoGP to extend his lead in the world championship and complete a perfect weekend at his Ducati team's home track in Tuscany. Sunday's race win followed the world champion's sprint success 24 hours earlier after nailing pole for both with a record lap time in qualifying. His third win of the year after Portugal and Spain put further distance between him and Marco Bezzecchi, his closest rival in the standings who had to settle for eighth. Jorge Martin took second with Johann Zarco completing the all-Ducati podium for the sixth round of the season at Mugello.

Bagnaia delighted his home fans by celebrating at a hastily erected picnic table, covered with a Ducati red tablecloth, in front of the stands. Jack Miller got the run on Bagnaia off the grid but the world champion was back in front by turn two, the Italian showing he meant business after crashing last time out at Le Mans. Martin emerged from the chasing pack to track Bagnaia, half a second splitting the pair. Bezzecchi was struggling for pace on the Ducati of Valentino Rossi's VR46 team. With 18 laps to go Marc Marquez crashed out.

The six-time world champion waved his arms in frustration at his fallen Honda as his wait for his first points in a race this term continued. With Bagnaia setting sail for home, Miguel Oliveira joined Marquez in crashing out. Alex Marquez following suit with nine laps left. Up front Bagnaia stretched his advantage over Martin to well over one second to take the chequered flag at his Ducati team's local track in the picture-postcard Tuscan hills. The MotoGP circuit moves on to Germany next weekend and then Assen the following week before taking a summer break. — AFP



MUGELLO: Winner Ducati Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia holds up a trophy as he celebrates on the podium after the Italian MotoGP race at Mugello Circuit in Mugello. — AFP

a plan to bow out of red-ball duty for Australia in his hometown of Sydney next year. But the decision may be made for the 36-year-old by Australia's selectors if he cannot improve on his form during a drawn 2019 Ashes in England where he averaged under 10.

Lack of preparation costs India?

Pretty much all of India's side at The Oval, with the exception of veteran batsman Cheteshwar Pujara, who had been playing for English county side Sussex, came into this match following stints in the lucrative Twenty20 Indian Premier League. And while Ajinkya Rahane was able to translate his IPL form into significant scores in the final, several fellow top-order India batsmen struggled.

Whether it would have helped India, who have now lost both WTC finals after going down to New Zealand in the inaugural 2021 showpiece, to have played some red-ball warm-up games is open to debate. India captain Rohit Sharma, speaking after Sunday's heavy defeat, suggested the WTC ought to be decided in a three-games series, while there have also been calls for the introduction of semi-finals. But quite how these would be fitted into an already-packed international calendar is another issue. "A three-match series would be nice but it's about finding a window," said Rohit. — AFP

Sports

Charismatic, controversial: Djokovic remains the undisputed king of tennis

Serb's victory takes him past rival Nadal at top list

PARIS: Novak Djokovic, who won a record-equalling 23rd Grand Slam title on Sunday, is driven on through controversy by his determination to be the greatest ever. The Serb's victory over Casper Ruud in the French Open final took him past great rival Rafael Nadal at the top of the list of all-time men's major champions. For 36-year-old Djokovic, it matters to be the best, and he has a strong sense of his historical place in tennis now that he has become the first man to win all four Slams at least three times.

He also keeps ploughing on through the highs and lows because it is "a great school of life". "I would like to send a message to every young person out there. I was a seven-year-old dreaming that I could win Wimbledon and be world no.1 one day," he said Sunday. "I am beyond grateful but I feel I had the power to create my own destiny. I believe it and feel it with every cell in my body. Be in the present moment, forget about the past. If you want a better future, you create it."

While Nadal and now-retired Roger Federer are widely admired, Djokovic continues to divide as well as unite. His staggering achievements on the court have often been overshadowed by blunders and missteps off it. The latest was in the first week of the

French Open when he wrote "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia" on a court-side TV camera lens as ethnic tensions were again rising in the Balkans.

On court, he was booed for fist-pumping as semi-final rival Carlos Alcaraz wilted with cramping. "I don't mind. It's not the first; probably not the last. I'll just keep winning," said Djokovic. His most controversial moment was his refusal to be vaccinated against COVID, which culminated with Djokovic last year being deported from Melbourne on the eve of the 2022 Australian Open. His uncompromising stance on the vaccine also saw him barred from the United States and unable to play in the US Open.

Even before that, the Serb was seemingly doomed never to be held in the same esteem as Federer or Nadal, the undisputed people's champions. There are those who see something too calculating in the Djokovic make-up - an intense, brooding presence prone to affectation. His infamous default from the US Open in 2020 for petulantly swiping at a ball that hit a female line judge gave a glimpse of his fiery character. And some of his personal stances have drawn criticism - one claim that raised eyebrows was his belief that it was possible to alter

the composition of water and food through positive thinking.

Ticking clock

However, the career achievements and resolve of a player who was the first to smash through the \$150 million prize-money barrier cannot be doubted. Djokovic, who left Belgrade when he was 12 to train in Munich and escape NATO's bombardment of his home city, captured the first of his 23 majors at the Australian Open in 2008. It was three years before he added his second. He dropped gluten from his diet, his lithe physique allowing him to chase down lost causes, transforming him into the rubber man of tennis with a rock-steady defense.

In 2011 he enjoyed a spectacular year, winning three of four Slams and becoming world number one for the first time. In total, he has 10 Australian Opens, seven Wimbledons, three US Open titles and now three French Opens. And time appears to be on his side in the quest to be considered the greatest of all time. Federer is retired now while Nadal, 37, is sitting out the rest of the season due to a hip injury which might well see him permanently sidelined. Djokovic shows few signs of losing his physical edge - 11 of his 23 Grand Slams have come after he turned 30. — AFP



PARIS: This combination photo shows Serbia's Novak Djokovic posing with his 23 men's singles Grand Slam titles after his victories. — AFP

AU's Football Team crowned champions

KUWAIT: For the second year in a row, the Australian University (AU) Futsal team won the University Athletic Association of Kuwait (UAAK) Futsal Tournament. The tournament brought together 10 teams from various universities in Kuwait to compete against each other. Over the course of the tournament, the AU team participated in a total of 12 games.

During the tournament, the AU team won seven of the nine regular tournament games, following their outstanding performance, the AU team beat the KCST team 8-0 in the quarterfinal game and then beat the AUK team 3-3 with 5-4 penalty shots in the semifinal game, after which they qualified for the final match. The final match was held between AU and AUM at the AUM Sports Hall Center.

The game went into overtime with a score of 1-1, and then AU team managed to score two goals during the second extra time period for a final score of 3-1 to become the back-to-back champions of the UAAK Futsal Tournament. Following the final game, the Student Life department chose student Saleh Al Kanderi as the Man of the Match for scoring two critical goals in the final match, and they also chose student Abdulwahab Hassan as the Play-



er of the Season for scoring 9 goals and 10 assists during the tournament.

Commenting on the achievement, Hussain Al Haddad, Manager of Student Affairs at AU, said: "We would like to start by congratulating the Champions of the UAAK 2023 Tournament. The Futsal team's

win was brought by the team's collective hard work, dedication, and resilience. All the hours of training done by the team and Coach Abdullah Khaledi were demonstrated in their performance every game. A great win for the Futsal team and a great win for the Australian University."

Nuggets must defy human nature to close out series

DENVER: Denver Nuggets head coach Michael Malone knows the mind can play tricks on players when it comes to crunch time in the NBA Finals, so he's trying out some mental games himself. His team needs one more win against the Miami Heat to secure their first NBA championship title, after Friday's victory in South Florida gave them a 3-1 lead in the series.

Back on home court Monday, the odds favor the Nuggets who in the last two

games have had the measure of Miami in every department of the game. The home crowd will turn up expecting a celebration and the pundits will talk of Denver needing to simply wrap-up the series but Malone knows that kind of mood spells danger.

"My biggest concern going into any close-out game is human nature and fighting against that," he told reporters. "You're up 3-1. Most teams, when you're up 3-1, they come up for air. They relax and they just kind of take it for granted that, 'oh, we're going to win this,'" he said. "The neat thing for us is that going back to the (COVID) bubble, we've been down 3-1. We've come back and won. We know anything is possible," he said. Three years ago the Nuggets pulled off the relatively rare series comeback twice in the same post-season.

They overturned the Utah Jazz's 3-1 lead in the Western Conference first round and then did the same against the Los Angeles Clippers in the semi-finals. So Malone has told his team to put themselves in Miami's shoes and play like a team who have to win to survive in the series. "That's why my message to our team (on Sunday) was our approach has to be we are down 3-1. They are desperate; we have to be more desperate. They are hungry; we have to be hungrier," he said.

"There is no celebrating after game four. We have another game that we have to win, and the close-out game is always the hardest game ever," he said. There have only been eleven other cases in the NBA of a team winning from a 3-1 deficit and only once has it occurred in the finals - in 2016 when the Cleveland Cavaliers fought back

against the Golden State Warriors. At the same time, while demanding that hunger, Malone has been reminding his team that they must stick with the approach that has taken them to their first ever finals.

"Stay in the moment and once that jump ball goes up tomorrow night, our players, every possession, every moment of that game can't be (thinking) 'We have to win this game.'" "We have to stay true to ourselves, trust what's gotten us to this point," he said. "After game four in Miami, everybody was yelling, 'Just one more win.' Hey, let's just win the first quarter tomorrow night. Take it in small bites. And if you do that possession by possession, quarter by quarter, hopefully when 48 minutes are over, you've done what you needed to do." — AFP

Kuwait Rhythmic Gymnastics team shine in Egypt

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Girls Rhythmic Gymnastics team added three new medals during the Pharaohs 4th International Gymnastics Championship that concluded in Egypt yesterday. The medals were won in the Juniors Category by players Raya Al-Qassar, who won the gold medal in the hoop, Nabeela Al-Kharafi won the silver medal in the ball routine and the bronze in the freestyle. Raya Al-Qassar was placed fourth in the ball routine, while Amina Al-Kandari grabbed the fourth position in the hoop event. 106 players participated in the event.

President of Kuwait and Arab Gymnastics Federation Fahad Al-Soula congratulated the players and their families for their achievements. Al-Soula thanked the Public Authority for Sport, Kuwait Olympic Committee for their support and Chairwoman of the Women's Sport Committee, Fatima Hayat, who was keen on having the Kuwait team participate in this event.



Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733

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

Change of Name

I, Kalamarla Subbaiah @ Sunkara Mahmoud C/o. Sunkara Ramachandra, residing at D.No: 3-40-2-7, Vasavi Nagar, Kadiri Town & Mandalam, Sree Satya Sai (Dist.) A.P., India. My name is calling as Kalamarla Subbaiah and Sunkara Mahmoud (Indian Passport bearing No: M2310696) both names are belongs to me and both names are one and same and there is no other person above said name's. Hence I am making this declaration for clarification of my name. Vide affidavit, dated 03/04/2023 before advocate T. Baba John, Notary, Sri Satya Sai District. This is for kind information of all concerned. **(#3803) 13/06/2023**

I, KADHAR SAMATHU, holder of Passport No. L5941243, do hereby change my name to ABDUL SAMED (as given name) KADHAR SAHIB (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name ABDUL SAMED KADHAR SAHIB and I

also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(#3804) 12/06/2023**

I, SHABBIR, holder of Passport No. Z4825725, do hereby change my name to SHABBIR (as given name) HITA (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name SHABBIR HITA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(#3803) 12/06/2023**

I, ZARINA ABBAS ALI, holder of Passport No. S5547730, do hereby change my name to ZARINA (as given name) HITA (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name ZARINA HITA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(#3803) 12/06/2023**

I, ABBAS ALI, holder of Passport No. P7118093, do hereby change my

name to ABBAS ALI (as given name) HITA (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name ABBAS ALI HITA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(#3803) 12/06/2023**

I, SABIRA BANU, holder of Passport No. Z6929011, do hereby change my name to SABIRA (as given name) HITA (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name SABIRA HITA and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **(#3803) 12/06/2023**

I, Ajjj, holder of Indian Passport No. Z3828425, having permanent address: Aziz Arif, S/o Saifuddin Arif, 107, Ward No. 18, Saket Residency, Barwani, M.P. - 451551, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Aziz (given name) and Arif (surname). **(#3802) 09/06/2023**

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Ahly conquer Africa again

Abdelmonem the hero as Al Ahly extend record



CASABLANCA: Ahly's Egyptian midfielder Hussein El-Shahat (center) celebrates with the trophy after winning the CAF Champions League final football match between Morocco's Wydad AC and Egypt's Al-Ahly on June 11, 2023. — AFP

JOHANNESBURG: Defender Mohamed Abdelmonem equalized on the night as Al Ahly of Egypt drew 1-1 at Wydad Casablanca of Morocco on Sunday to win the CAF Champions League for a record-extending 11th time. His goal cancelled the lead Yahia Attiyat Allah gave the defending champions and earned the Cairo club a 3-2 aggregate victory after building a 2-1 first-leg lead seven days ago.

Defeat for Wydad ended a run of two final victories over Ahly, and they paid the penalty for concentrating on defending their fragile second-leg lead instead of seeking further goals. Unlike Europe, away goals count double in African club competitions when sides finish level on aggregate and Wydad would have retained the trophy had they won 1-0.

Ahly pocketed a record four million dollars for winning and Marcel Koller became the first Swiss coach to win the premier African club competition.

It was the third Champions League triumph in four seasons for Ahly after victories over fellow Egyptians Zamalek in 2020 and Kaizer Chiefs of South Africa the following year. Wydad made two changes to the side that began the first leg in Cairo last weekend with attackers Mohamed Ounajem and Saïfeddine Bouhra replacing Reda Jaadi and Zouhair el Moutaraji.

Veteran Ounajem was part of the Wydad team to beat Ahly in the 2017 final while Bouhra scored last Sunday after coming on as a late substitute. Ahly made one change with fit-again first choice goalkeeper Mohamed el Shenawy returning in place of Ahmed Shobeir. The second leg was the 13th time the African club giants had met in the Champions League with Ahly holding a 5-3 lead and four matches drawn. Among the capacity crowd in the 65,000-seat Stade Mohammed V was Patrice Motsepe, a South African billionaire and president of

the Confederation of African Football (CAF).

Special occasion

For referee Bamlak Tessema Weyesa from Ethiopia it was a special occasion - his last match before retiring at the age of 42 after 14 years handling international fixtures. As the first half got under way, an unfortunate feature of African football reared its ugly head again with green lasers pointed at visiting players to try and distract them. Moroccan Ayoub El Amloud had the first clearcut chance just past the 10-minute mark, but after a dazzling dribble into the area, his tame, inaccurate shot posed no threat.

The Ahly strike force of Mahmoud Kahraba, South African Percy Tau and Hussein el Shahat had scored 15 Champions League goals before the second leg, but were unable to trouble Wydad early on. Wydad broke the deadlock when an Attiyat Allah

free-kick close to the touchline floated into the goalmouth, eluded El Shenawy, and landed in the far corner of the net. Ahly made no headway before half-time as they tried to equalize and their frustrations led to yellow cards for Kahraba and El Shahat, while Bouhra was cautioned for time wasting.

Nobody was more relieved when a 51-minute opening half finished than the referee, who was battling to keep control of some bad-tempered Moroccans and Egyptians. Midway through the second half smoke from flares restricted visibility leading to play being temporarily halted. A set piece gave Wydad the lead and another one - a corner from Ali Maaloul - set up Abdelmonem to equalize with a glancing header into the far corner that stunned the crowd. Ahly had plenty of second-half possession, but did not seriously threaten Wydad goalkeeper Youssef el Motie before leveling. — AFP

City's victory defines new era in football

ISTANBUL: Pep Guardiola laughed when it was put to him that Manchester City could go on to chase down Real Madrid's record tally of European Cups after their victory over Inter Milan in Saturday's Champions League final. "Be careful Real Madrid! If you sleep a little bit we will catch you," he joked in the wake of City's first triumph in Europe's elite club competition, which also saw them complete a treble after they won the Premier League and FA Cup. A Rodri strike gave City a 1-0 win at the Ataturk Olympic Stadium as they became European champions for the first time after several near misses in recent years.

The Abu Dhabi-owned club have a long way to go to catch Real's record haul of 14 victories, and it would be some achievement if they ever get there. Yet it is tempting to look at Saturday's success in Turkey and wonder if it might definitively mark the start of a new era in European football. Real, the great aristocrats of the sport, have resisted the rise of City and Paris Saint-Germain, teams backed by Gulf riches, to win the Champions League five times in the last decade.

The Spaniards were blown away by City in this season's last four, though, and Guardiola's side - beaten by Chelsea in the 2021 final - may take some stopping now they have claimed their first title. "The good thing is that we want more," match-winner Rodri said. "This project is to want more, more ambition." City are just the second English side to win the treble, following Manchester United in 1999. It is an era-defining triumph for a club whose rise has been remarkable, as well as a potentially era-shaping moment. City were in England's third tier the year their cross-town rivals completed their treble.

United were reigning European champions while City had finished ninth in the previous season's Premier League when they were bought in 2008 by the Abu Dhabi United Group, backed by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. City had not won the English title in 40 years at that point.



ISTANBUL: Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola poses for a picture with the European Cup trophy after winning the UEFA Champions League final football match between Inter Milan and Manchester City. — AFP

They have just claimed a seventh Premier League in 12 seasons and have won three FA Cups and six League Cups since the takeover. Now they have a first Champions League. "Today's title is the result of a deliberate strategy developed 15 years ago," Sheikh Mansour, who is vice-president of the United Arab Emirates, said in a statement. He attended Saturday's final, reportedly just the second match he has been to in that time, in which City have gone from also-rans to superpower.

Guardiola's brilliance has been key, but he acknowledges none of what City have achieved would be possible without the 2008 takeover. "Listen, one of the main reasons why this club became what we are is because people from Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mansour, took over the club," said the Catalan. "Without that we wouldn't be here. That is the most important thing." City had the biggest revenues of any football club last year according to analysts Deloitte, of 731 million euros (\$786m).

That same ranking a decade ago had them seventh, and their rise has posed problems for football, with City being fined 60 million euros in 2014 for breaching UEFA's Financial Fair Play regulations. The club were banned for

two years from UEFA competitions in February 2020 for "serious financial fair-play breaches", although the sanction was later overturned.

In February this year they were charged with 115 alleged rule breaches by the Premier League, concerning the period from 2009 to 2018. However, that case may not be resolved any time soon, and City appear poised to keep dominating, at least if they can keep Guardiola. "I don't want after one Champions League to disappear, so we have to work harder next season and be there," he said. It is not just City.

Qatar-owned PSG have come close before, losing the 2020 final to Bayern Munich. They will surely eventually get there in Europe, perhaps next season with Kylian Mbappe spearheading their project. Next season's Champions League will also feature Saudi-owned Newcastle United. Meanwhile, Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani has been locked in a bidding war for Manchester United. Many fans of the Old Trafford club, England's first European Cup winners in 1968, may feel that enormous investment from the Middle East is the only way they can now hope to catch City. — AFP

Verona thump Spezia in relegation play-off



Cyril Ngonge

MILAN: Belgian Cyril Ngonge scored twice and Davide Faraoni was sent off as Verona beat Spezia 3-1 in the Serie A relegation play-off on Sunday. Attacker Ngonge's double came in a 12-minute spell during the first half before Faraoni, who had opened the scoring, was sent off with more than 20 minutes to play as the 1985 champions stayed in the top-flight.

Wales midfielder Ethan Ampadu, on loan from Chelsea, had equalized for Spezia but it failed to stop his outfit from returning to Serie B after two seasons in the first division. Spezia, who finished the season in 17th, and Verona, a spot lower, were only separated by goal difference at the end of the season, meaning a play-off was needed to decide who would be sent down to the second tier. Midfielder Faraoni gave Verona the best start possible, opening the scoring on five minutes before Ampadu's response on the quarter of an hour mark.

Ngonge's first goal came after 26 minutes and his second after 38 minutes, giving his side a cushion going into the break. After the interval, Faraoni almost became the villain for his side with 22 minutes remaining after handling the ball in his box. He was sent for an early shower but thankfully for the 31-year-old and Verona, M'Bala Nzola had his penalty saved. The spot kick miss failed to dampen Spezia's dim hopes but Ampadu's injury-time effort, which skimmed the post, was as close as they got to maintaining their spot in the Serie A. — AFP