

Polestar 2
Why wait
to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



6 Lebanon lawmakers fail to elect president during 12th attempt



8 Afghan farmers despair as locusts plague precious crops



13 Syrians turn plastic waste into rugs to make a living



16 Knights thrash Panthers to win NHL Stanley Cup



Xi reiterates Palestine should become 'full member' of UN

Chinese leader hails establishment of 'China-Palestine strategic' ties

Amir heads to Italy on private visit



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah leaves Kuwait on June 14, 2023, heading to Italy on a private visit. HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and senior state officials saw HH the Amir off at the airport. — KUNA

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping reiterated to Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday his call for a state of Palestine to become a "full member" of the United Nations, state media reported. Xi expressed Beijing's position during a summit with Arab countries in Saudi Arabia in December, although the latest call comes as the Asian powerhouse works to strengthen its role as mediator in the Middle East.

Xi met Abbas during the December trip and pledged to "work for an early, just and durable solution to the Palestinian issue". Beijing has since positioned itself as a mediator in the Middle East, brokering the restoration in March of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia — rivals in a region where the United States has for decades been the main powerbroker. "China supports Palestine in becoming a full member State of the United Nations," Xi said during a meeting with Abbas in Beijing, according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV. "The fundamental way out of the Palestinian issue lies in the establishment of an independent Palestinian State," he said.

Abbas will be in the Chinese capital until Friday, his fifth official visit to the world's second-largest economy. Xi told Abbas at a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People that China was "ready to strengthen coordination and cooperation with the Palestinian side". "Today, we will jointly announce



BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping shakes hands with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas during a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People on June 14, 2023. — AFP

the establishment of a China-Palestine strategic partnership, which will be an important milestone in the history of bilateral relations," Xi said.

Abbas arrived in Beijing on Monday to hold talks with top Chinese leaders including Xi and Premier Li Qiang. The two sides are using the opportunity to discuss ways to advance relations and resolve longstanding challenges to the Palestinian-Zionist relationship.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Egypt executes man over femicide

CAIRO: Egypt on Wednesday executed a man sentenced to death for the murder of a fellow student who rejected his advances, in the culmination of a case that sparked outrage. Prison authorities "carried out the death sentence issued against Mohamed Adel", who was found guilty last year of the "premeditated murder" of fellow student Nayera Ashraf, after he confessed to the crime in court. — AFP



COLOMBO: A military medical officer measures a kidney stone removed from a retired soldier. — AFP

Largest kidney stone removed

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan military doctors have removed what is now recorded as the world's largest kidney stone from a 62-year-old retired soldier, the army said Wednesday. The stone removed from ex-sergeant Canistus Coonge on June 1 weighed 801 gm and measured 13.37 cm long, the army said. Officials announced the finding on Wednesday after Guinness World Records recognized it. — AFP

78 migrants dead as boat sinks off Greece

ATHENS: At least 78 migrants died after their fishing boat sank off the Peloponnese, Greece's coastguard said Wednesday, as fears mounted that the death toll could rise to hundreds. Some 100 people were rescued after the boat capsized in international waters in the Ionian Sea in an operation complicated by strong winds, the coastguard

said. A migration ministry source told AFP that according to the coastguard there could have been "hundreds" of people on the fishing boat. "We fear there will be a very large number of missing persons," the official said.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) acknowledged fears of a large number of missing people, noting in a tweet: "We fear more lives were lost. Initial reports suggest up to 400 people were onboard." Other Greek officials said survivors had claimed up to 750 people may have been crammed on the fishing boat. Greece's head of state, President

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KALAMATA, Greece: Survivors arrive at the port of Kalamata after a boat carrying dozens of migrants sank in international waters in the Ionian Sea on June 14, 2023. — AFP

All eyes on PM over formation of new Cabinet

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MPs on Wednesday called on Prime Minister-designate HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah to form a strong Cabinet of capable statesmen who should be able to meet the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people. Sheikh Ahmad was reappointed by

HH the Amir late Tuesday to form the new Cabinet following the June 6 elections. The next Cabinet is Sheikh Ahmad's fifth government in less than a year and is expected to receive strong support from the new Assembly. "We are at a crossroads," said MP Falah Al-Hajeri on his Twitter account. "Either we have a state of institutions, justice and achievement — which we will support, or more crises and disruption — which we will not allow," Hajeri said.

New MP Bader Al-Enezi said the people are looking for a government full of qualified ministers capable of achieving the demands of Kuwaiti citizens. MP Majed Al-Mutairi said at this crucial period, the people are expecting cooperation between MPs and the next government to set laws that will

improve the standard of living of citizens.

MP Abdullah Fahhad said the next Cabinet should be formed of statesmen, should concentrate on fighting corruption and achieve the demands of Kuwaiti people. By doing so, it will guarantee cooperation with the Assembly. A joint statement signed by 49 lawmakers on Tuesday called on the next Cabinet to fulfil the urgent demands of Kuwaiti citizens to ensure cooperation with the Assembly.

Over the past two decades, Kuwait has been rocked by a series of political disputes between MPs and governments that stalled development in the oil-rich country. People are hopeful that the new Assembly could turn a new page in Kuwait's history and put the country back on the right track.

Trump denies mishandling US secrets

MIAMI: Donald Trump pleaded not guilty Tuesday to dozens of criminal counts of mishandling some of the US government's most sensitive secrets and scheming to prevent their return, in a historic first court appearance as a federal defendant. The former president — and the favorite to fight next year's election for the Republicans — gave himself up to US Marshals in Miami for a hearing that set up the unprecedented scenario of a White House race liti-

gated from the courtroom as well as at the ballot box.

On the eve of his 77th birthday, Trump appeared before a magistrate judge to be formally presented with 37 counts under seven charges brought by a special counsel probe that opened after an FBI raid of his Florida mansion 10 months ago. But he dismissed his prosecution as politically-motivated in a speech to supporters framing the indictment as an effort to interfere in the 2024 election. "Today we witnessed the most evil and heinous abuse of power in the history of our country. Very sad thing to watch," Trump said after returning to his summer residence in New Jersey.

The hearing — just weeks after Trump denied state level financial fraud charges in a separate case in Manhattan — came with the former reality TV

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BEDMINSTER, New Jersey: Former US President Donald Trump delivers remarks at Trump National Golf Club Bedminster on June 13, 2023. — AFP



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Local

'Little Manila': A destination for lovers of Filipino culture

Filipino expats find home away from home in Barayeh Salem



KUWAIT: Filipino expatriates and lovers of Filipino culture enjoy a taste of the Philippines at Barayeh Salem. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Kuwait enjoys cultural diversity among its population, as is considered a good destination for expats searching for better career opportunities for a stable financial life. These expats also create their own communities that help them feel comfortable away from home.

The old Salmiya souq or "Barayeh Salem" has turned into a distinguished place for the Filipino community, who have turned this street into one full of Filipino food and people and a totally different atmosphere, so much that this area is called "Little Manila".

People of other nationalities also go there to experience Manila's markets without buying a ticket to the Philippines, according to a Kuwaiti enjoying his time there. The citizen, who preferred to remain anonymous, told Kuwait Times he has visited the Philippines several times. After he started coming to this market, he felt he was in one of the small markets in the Philippines. "It is very beautiful to see an example of coexistence between communities, as Kuwait is built on a fusion of different cultures," he said.

Kuwait Times explored the market and asked Filipinos how it helps them adapt to the different culture they live in. A Filipina who came to Kuwait almost two years ago said despite the good hospitality she has experienced from Kuwaitis and other nationals, this place helped her to meet people from her own

community. "This area makes us feel we are in our home country, with the presence of Filipino restaurants, original products at affordable prices and multiple events that alleviate the burden of being away from our families," she said.

Another Filipina said being a part of a different culture is a big challenge for any person who lives outside their country. "Kuwait made it easier for us by facilitating a convenient environment for us through this place," she said. "Every weekend you can see this place becomes a small version of Philippine cities, where everyone gathers to feel the atmosphere of our country," she added.

A Filipino restaurant owner told Kuwait Times that in addition to the great vibes that people feel in this place, it also provides many Filipinos a good opportunity to invest in a unique business in the Kuwaiti market. "This community helped me to grow my business, because most of my clients know what I provide and the type of food. It is boosting our culture among not only those who are familiar with it, but also attracts new customers who would like to try out our food, such as Kuwaitis and Arabs," he said.

A Jordanian visiting the place spoke about the huge transformation that has occurred in this area. "I have been in Kuwait for more than 30 years, and I used to come to this market back when it was one of the famous places for shopping and spending time with the family," he said. He added that seeing this



transformation made him realize how Kuwait is becoming more open to other communities. He stressed Kuwait should keep encouraging this diversity in

communities that benefits it at all levels, while providing new entertainment locations and attracting tourists to experience cultural diversity in Kuwait.

Conference tackles implications of using artificial wombs

KUWAIT: President of the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences (IOMS) Dr Mohammad Al-Jarallah affirmed that the organization presented the world with recommendations and latest medical developments in the modern age that provided a great service for mankind. This came during his speech at the 14th international conference entitled 'Artificial wombs, discovering opportunities and medical, moral and legal challenges', held on Wednesday under the patronage of Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi.

Dr Jarallah said that among these provisions are children born from in-vitro fertilization, gonadal transplantation, euthanasia, cloning and human genome that occurs outside Muslim countries without considering the specifics of Muslim ethics.

He pointed out that the organization took the

lead in carrying out this task in 1981 by holding many conferences and seminars that resulted in issuing 35 ethical medical jurisprudence documents that met the needs of doctors and jurists in the Islamic world to find out the provisions of medical emergencies and innovations. He added that the conference aims to explore the opportunities and challenges that accompany the artificial womb technology to ensure the establishment of health, legal and ethical measurements from an Islamic perspective. The conference hosted a group of Islamic scholars from 15 countries.

Regional Director of Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Ahmad Al-Mandhari said through a video call that this technology provides the opportunity to perform fetal surgeries without endangering mothers.

"This technology will launch a new era for humanity in which infertile couples can fulfill their dreams of building a family and reduce the risks of pregnancy," he said. "According to WHO report in 2023, 17.5 of adults suffer from infertility, or one out of six people worldwide. This indicates the urgent need to increase access to fertility care to ensure



President of the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences (IOMS) Dr Mohammad Al-Jarallah speaks at the conference. — KUNA

the health of individuals," he added.

"In the Middle East, 10.7 percent of people suffer from infertility for life. This technology in accordance with the Islamic laws will open new horizons, and would be possible and acceptable culturally, religiously, morally and socially," he noted. — KUNA

Over 85,000 blood bags collected in 2022: MoH

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health collected more than 85,000 blood units and 7,500 platelet units through blood donations last year, Blood Transfusion Department Director Dr Reem Al-Radhwan said on Wednesday. In a statement marking World Blood Donor Day, Dr Radhwan noted that 56 percent of donors last year were Kuwaitis and 44 percent were expatriates.

The Ministry of Health is hosting an annual celebration to mark the World Blood Donor Day under the patronage of Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi and with the attendance of a World Health Organization (WHO) representative, Dr Radhwan said in a press statement. The celebration is held to honor donors, organizations and corporate social responsibility institutions for their efforts in organizing blood donation campaigns, she added. She further noted that Kuwait participates every year on June 14 in WHO's activities marking World Blood Donor Day, which is held this year under the slogan "Give blood, give plasma, share life, share often."

This year's celebration focuses on patients requiring life-long transfusion support and underlines the role every single person can play, by giving the valuable gift of blood or plasma. It also highlights the importance of giving blood or plasma regularly to create a safe and sustainable supply of blood and blood products that can be always available, all over the world, so that all patients in need can receive timely treatment. — KUNA



Dr Reem Al-Radhwan

Kuwait, Qatar merge traffic systems; fines collected electronically

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Qatar have linked the traffic system between both countries to register traffic violations and collect fines electronically, the Interior Ministry announced. This comes following a similar step with the UAE in February 2023 and in line with efforts to achieve security and traffic integration between Kuwait and GCC states, the ministry said in a statement late Tuesday. "A delegation from Kuwait's traffic violations' integration team went on a business trip to Qatar on Tuesday during which the integration system was launched," the Interior Ministry said in the statement. Head of the Technical Division at the Interior Ministry's Traffic General Department Brigadier General Khaled Al-Adwani said that the system allows collecting traffic fines in both countries starting from violations committed on May 30, 2023 and onwards. — KUNA



DOHA: Kuwaiti and Qatari delegates meet to launch the integrated traffic system. — KUNA

Kuwait reiterates support for Moroccan self-rule in Sahara

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait renewed its support for the Moroccan initiative for self-rule in the Sahara, reiterating the need to respect Moroccan sovereignty and any solution agreed upon by all parties involved in the process. This reaffirmation came during a speech by acting Charge d'Affaires of the Kuwaiti mission to the UN headquarters in New York Faisal Al-Enezi to a special

committee session on the Sahara. Enezi said that the GCC countries were united on the issue of the Moroccan Sahara, reflecting hopes that the issue would be resolved soon to solidify security and stability in the region. He reiterated Kuwait's support of the UN and its efforts that led to the round table meetings on the issue in December of 2018 and in March of 2019. The Kuwaiti official welcomed the participation of Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, and the Polisario Front in the previous meetings in accordance with UNSC resolutions related to this specific issue. He commended the efforts of the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary General for the Sahara Staffan de Mistura on the issue, which led to the relaunch of the peace process. — KUNA



NEW YORK: Acting Charge d'Affaires of the Kuwaiti mission to the UN headquarters Faisal Al-Enezi speaks at the meeting. — KUNA

KTV Sports obtains rights to Argentine's Football League

KUWAIT: Kuwait Television (KTV) obtained on Wednesday the rights of exclusively airing Argentine's Football Leagues in the Middle East with 180 matches live stream on KTV Sport. In a statement to KUNA, Acting KTV Director Hamad Al-Daihani said that getting the rights of streaming the matches is a huge achievement to the channel as this league is important to football enthusiasts. Daihani added that a plan is set to cover the tournaments in football analysis studios and regular reports as well as marketing plans with local media agencies. — KUNA

Local

Innovators, educators inspire fresh graduates at Future Makers Forum

Forum held at Kuwait University prepares youth for job market demands

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Kuwait University is hosting the Future Makers Forum under the patronage of Acting President Prof Fahad Al-Rashidi from June 13 to 15, 2023 at the conference center at Kuwait University in Shadadiya. The forum, sponsored by Zain, NBK and Gulf Bank, is a first-of-its-kind, in line with Kuwait's 2035 vision and strategy of Kuwait University. Fresh graduates are the forum's main target, especially those who graduated from Kuwait University, to prepare them for their professional lives by holding discussions on how to serve the community and the state amid the remarkable and speedy development happening in the current era.

Unique workshops for training students on skills that they did not learn in their curriculums at schools and universities are also included, besides providing an opportunity for recent graduates to hold discussions with members of the public and private sectors and representatives of the United Nations. Rashidi told media representatives that just looking at the events held by Kuwait University for fresh graduates indicates the extent of excellence and creativity accomplished by the team that created the Future Makers Forum, announcing joyful news that will be revealed on Friday, June 24, 2023, without further elaboration.

Acting Dean of Admissions and Registration Dr Rawaa Al-Jarallah said this is a pioneering step initiated at Kuwait University, and the goal is to take the graduates by the hand from the first step after receiving their degrees. A corner has been provided for graduates to receive their degree at the exhibition, in which job opportunities are available, where they may find a suitable job for their capabilities. Instead of following the traditional method of employment, graduates today have the opportunity to search for talent and creativity through workshops, so that they are not limited to the field of their study, but rather the horizons are wide for them, she said.

Kuwait Times also interviewed Anwar Al-Ibrahim, Assistant Professor at the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University. Ibrahim said she was part of the team that built Kuwait University in Shadadiya. "It makes me very proud of the team that had an imprint on this project, and to see youth doing this whole program for their fellows assures me that the energy that we invested in this place was worthwhile," she said. She added she studied for five years at Kuwait University before moving abroad for her master's and PhD. She then joined the team that built Kuwait University in its new location in 2013 and finalized the project in 2019.

Dr Asaad Hafiz, Representative of the World Health Organization in Kuwait, told Kuwait Times: "This event is about the future of Kuwait, which plays a very important role. The United Nations is very keen to work with Kuwait University to em-



Anwar Al-Ibrahim



Badriya Al-Salem



Ali Al-Subaie



Jassim Al-Mutawa



KUWAIT: Dr Fahad Al-Rashidi (left) and Dr Rawaa Al-Jarallah browse booths at the Future Makers Forum held on Sunday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Dr Assad Hafeez



Fajer Al-Refai



Nourah Al-Shuaibi



Reem Al-Baghli

power the youth to address any challenges that Kuwait may encounter in the future. We see a great role for Kuwaiti youth, not only at the national level, but also at a global level."

Dr Reem Al-Baghli, faculty member of Kuwait University, started the event by directing her speech to the graduates. She told them the motive behind holding this event is love for Kuwait, its people, and oneself, as there is no real love for something without working on improving it. Therefore, she encouraged the graduates to look into the needs of the country and focus on fulfilling those needs to develop and further improve Kuwait in all ways possible.

Dr. Nourah Al-Shuaibi, a faculty member at Kuwait University, spoke about the necessity of uplifting the society, mentioning that one of the most important ways to achieve this is through awareness of opportunities. She also said this generation is different from other generations, as they are living in the midst of crises that previous generations only read about, whether they are civil wars, wars between countries, pandemics or other crises such as energy, food, climate and others.

However, Shuaibi pointed out that graduates can benefit from these crises to create employment opportunities, as a graduate must understand the needs of society and the world through these crises and work towards sustainable development of the community. Therefore, young people need to realize how to secure their future, she added.

Jassim Al-Mutawa, founder and manager of

Advanced Kuwaiti Group, an entrepreneurial initiative for technological solutions (Meta platform, Shlonik application and Sahel application), spoke about achieving dreams. He said one of the goals he worked on was to bring change to the public sector by providing services to citizens through technology, instead of having them come to certain places to get their documents processed and work done.

Mutawa mentioned an example of the applications he created — "Sahel", which means "easy" in English. "The applications' name is inspired from its task, which is facilitating people's lives," he said. He also encouraged young people by telling them that they have opportunities and that they can reach their full potential, adding he is looking forward to further develop Sahel because of the capabilities of young people to serve humanity.

Lawyer Fajer Al-Refai also directed her speech to youngsters and spoke about failure. She explained that failure is not an end to one's passion, but rather it is just an attempt that was not successful, which pushes us to hunt another opportunity or try again. Dr Ali Al-Subaie, Assistant Professor at Kuwait University, said having a university degree is only a step, while education is a long journey. Subaie further ex-

plained that a student's GPA is one of the indicators of an individual's capabilities, but it is not the only indicator. He spoke about growth and decline and encouraged the use of skills and not to focus on only one's success, even if the average of one's GPA is high. He also highlighted that it is difficult to know the future, but we can prepare for it. However, we must be prepared to learn and gain experience to be well prepared.

Badriya Al-Salem, a fresh graduate from Kuwait University, spoke about the trip that inspired her educational journey on stars, the skies and astronomy. She said her journey in astronomy was not limited to learning astronomy, as it forced her to learn English, driving a manual car, desert survival, poetry and other matters related to astronomy and the desert. This led to her leaving a mark in her architectural projects during her years of studying architectural engineering, which opened up new opportunities for her outside Kuwait. Although she was a little late to start, it gave her a strong push, as her work became recognized even outside Kuwait. Salem concluded by urging graduates not to confine themselves to one field, but explore and research multiple fields and continue learning in various domains.

Zain sponsors KU's Future Makers Forum

KUWAIT: Zain sponsored the Future Makers Forum, an inspiring and transformative initiative held by Kuwait University's (KU) Deanship of Admission and Registration at Sabah Al Salem University City. The event aimed at empowering fresh graduates by providing them with knowledge and competencies to help them launch their career journey.

The forum's opening ceremony was attended by Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan, Director of the Civil Service Commission Dr Issam Al-Rubaiyan, Chairwoman of Abdullah Al-Salem University Dr Moudhi Al-Humoud, Acting President of Kuwait University Dr Fahad Al-Dubais Al-Rashidi, Acting Dean of Admission and Registration Dr Rawaa Al-Jarallah and many executives and officials from the local public and private sectors who represented organizations that joined the forum's career fair.

Zain's support to this distinguished event came in line with its Human Resources strategy, through which it contributes to the local job market by exchanging expertise with other employers and offering adequate career opportunities to the new generation of national talents. The company is keen on offering job seekers with career opportunities that best suit their skills, competencies, and passions to increase national talent representation in the Kuwaiti private sector, especially within STEM and digital areas.

The Future Makers Forum is a leading and first-of-its-kind event organized by the Deanship of Admission and Registration in line with the New Kuwait 2035 Vision and Kuwait University's strategy. The forum aimed at empowering Kuwait's academic outcomes and helping graduates prepare for their upcoming career journeys by offering them the most essential skills required by today's job market. The event featured over 20 local entities, spanning the most vital industries.

The forum offered many programs and workshops that opened new horizons for graduates, covering crucial sets of personal and professional skills like creating CVs, excelling in interviews, AI in today's careers, and more. Students and graduates also got to engage in open talks with employers in several panel discussions.



Eaman Al-Roudhan (center left) poses for a photo with Zain's HR team.



KUWAIT: Eaman Al-Roudhan, Moudhi Al-Humoud, Issam Al-Rubaiyan and Fahad Al-Dubais Al-Rashidi are seen during the forum.

Zain joined the forum's career fair, where it introduced students and graduates to its leading experience in the telecom sector, as well as its internal policy and wonderful workplace environment. The company also presented the available job vacancies, provided a detailed explanation of the nature of work at various departments and divisions and answered questions and inquiries from visitors.

Zain is always eager to participate in career fairs under the umbrella of its Human Resources strategy, which closely focuses

on supporting the education sector hand in hand with various universities, colleges, and educational institutions in Kuwait from both the public and private sectors, with the aim of providing graduates with career opportunities in the private sector.

Zain is committed to playing an active role in the investment in the human capital of Kuwait. The company seeks to provide young and eager Kuwaitis with job opportunities that allow them to apply their practical skills, achieve their potential, and fully develop their capabilities.

Al-Safat Investment takes part in Future Makers Forum

KUWAIT: Al-Safat Investment Company participated in the career exhibition held on the sidelines of the Future Makers Forum organized by the Deanship of Admission and Registration at Kuwait University – Sabah Al Salem University City. This forum was held to shed light on the bright minds of young and talented national cadres in Kuwait, in addition to encouraging and pushing university students to identify their practical inclinations and find suitable work according to passion and ambition.

Safat Investment is keen to participate in such forums and exhibitions to be in constant contact with young people, and to provide them with the opportunity to get to know the investment sector and its diverse fields in accordance with a systematic plan through which the company aspires to recruit the best promising youth cadres.

This participation also comes from Safat's belief in the importance of sup-

porting young people and providing them with job opportunities, especially in a vital and important sector such as the investment sector, and in implementation of its social responsibility policy. Stemming from the company management's belief in the great role that young people play in building the future, Safat is working hard to participate in all events that support young people and their career aspirations to introduce them to job opportunities in the company.

This forum included open speeches by some of the University's faculty members and a group of students who shared their stories and life experiences. Acting University Professor Fahad Al-Dubais Al-Rashidi kicked off the career opportunities exhibition, which gave the opportunity for students to familiarize themselves with a group of private sector companies as well as participating government entities that provide job opportunities for students as soon as they graduate.



KUWAIT: Al-Safat Investment Company employees participate in the career exhibition at the forum.



Al-Safat Investment employee speaks with a student at the company's booth.

News in Brief

Labor support suspended
for conscription absentees

KUWAIT: Public Authority of Manpower (PAM), in coordination with the Defense Ministry, will suspend payments of social and children allowance for those who work in the private sector and are absent during the "national service time (Conscription)". Payment of labor support continues only for those who fulfil their time in the national service without absence, said PAM in a statement.

Power cut off in Shaab,
Jabriya, Salwa buildings

KUWAIT: Hawally Municipality Rapid Intervention Emergency team disconnected power from three violating buildings in Shaab, Jabriya and Salwa areas in cooperation with the judicially authorized team in the Ministry of Electricity and Water and police support. The team also issued three citations against the real estate illegally used as bachelors' residence. Three citations were also issued for using flimsy materials to divide rooms into smaller units, contrary to the building's blueprints, and for carrying out construction work without a permit. A warning for encroachment on state property was also issued. The team's visit to the area was promoted by complaints from citizens about bachelors living in several buildings.

Schools to update teachers' data
for fingerprint system

KUWAIT: Education Ministry Assistant Under-secretary for Public Education Usama Al-Sultan has asked schools to input teachers' data in the new fingerprint system currently being set up in schools across the country, sources said. The system, which is expected to come into effect next September, will be used to track teachers' reporting to work and leaving times. Sultan said updating teachers' data is necessary for the system to properly achieve its purpose. The education ministry said it will install and operate nearly 2,800 fingerprint systems for over 900 schools across Kuwait. Over 90,000 employees will get their fingerprints taken once the system is fully installed ahead of the coming academic year.

Kuwait, Saudi Arabia sign deal
to develop teachers' skills

Training courses to be provided to 100 Kuwaiti teachers



KUWAIT: Director General of Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity Neda Al-Dihani (right) signs the agreement with Aanab's CEO Dr Muneera Jamjoum.



Neda Al-Dihani and Muneera Jamjoum exchange copies of the agreement.
— KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity signed an agreement with Saudi Arabia's Aanab forum to launch a program on professional development for teachers in Kuwait, in cooperation with Harvard University's Graduate School of Education.

The program will provide training courses in Arabic, said the center's director general Neda Al-Dihani in a press conference on Wednesday. Harvard's professional education department serves over 16,000 education specialists around the world and helps prepare leaders in the field of education, he noted.

The Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and

Creativity was launched in 2010 to discover and sponsor talented and creative Kuwaitis and help inventors to develop their ideas and register their innovations. Aanab is a licensed digital educational platform that provides specialized training courses and professional qualifications for teachers and educators, provided by educational institutions in addition to distinguished academics and teachers, according to Aanab's website.

Cooperating with Aanab is a great opportunity to develop teachers' skills in Kuwait, using the best and most up-to-date standards, which will also have a positive impact on students, said Dihani. The collaboration will also contribute to achieving the common

goal of enhancing the culture of creativity and modern technology in Kuwaiti society and the development of the educational system.

Aanab's CEO Dr Muneera Jamjoum said her organization believes that teachers have a huge effect on improving the performance of students. She said the agreement includes two programs, one is titled "flexible thinking" and the second is "levels of aid". The two programs will provide training to 100 Kuwaiti teachers. The two sides will announce the requirements needed to join the programs at a later date. They will also study the outcome of the programs and their impact on teachers' skills once the programs have concluded. — KUNA

Kuwait, Japan potential
partners in development
assistance: Envoy

KUWAIT: On Monday, June 12, Ambassador of Japan to the State of Kuwait Yasunari Morino hosted an event of a special lecture featuring Prof. Hiroshi Kato, Vice-President of the International University of Japan and the former Senior Vice-President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), who has more than 40 years' experience of being engaged in the field of development assistance at JICA.

The event took place in collaboration between the embassy and JICA, with distinguished guests from Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), African embassies and international organizations based in Kuwait, with the aim of illuminating the future potentials of Japan-Kuwait cooperation for the world prosperity through the lecture by Professor Kato, which is titled "International Development Cooperation between Africa and Japan."

The event followed the lecture meeting hosted by KFAED on June 11.

In the beginning, Ambassador Morino gave opening remarks, in which he emphasized that development assistance toward Africa constitutes a major



priority of Japan's diplomacy, pointing out that Japan has consistently been organizing the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) every three years since 1993. Noting the presence of a representative from KFAED on the floor, Morino expressed his expectations on the potential for cooperation between Japan and Kuwait for the development in Africa and all over the world.

Following that, Professor Kato delivered a special lecture in which he explained the history and characteristics of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA), especially pointing out three central ideas behind the Japanese development assistance: supporting the self-help efforts to achieve eco-

nommic growth, respecting the role of the recipient governments, and avoiding any negative impacts of development projects. The professor introduced successful cases of Japanese aid in Southeast Asian countries, emphasizing that the same approach is now applied in Africa with a lot of success. He also expressed his expectations that more and more African countries choose Japan as a trustworthy partner of development cooperation.

The Q&A session witnessed a lively discussion between Professor Kato and the audience, for example, about the difference of development assistance approaches between Japan and other donor countries or organizations.



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Turkish ambassador
receives diplomats,
praises diwanias

KUWAIT: Ambassador Tuba Nur Sonmez held a special diwanias on June 13, opening her residence's doors to members of diplomatic corps and

friends in Kuwait. Ambassador Sonmez briefed guests about the embassy's activities, and developments in Turkey, including the re-election of Recep Erdogan as President of Turkey and vision of 'Century of Turkey'.

Guests enjoyed traditional Turkish foods. Ambassador Sonmez said "Diwanias" is her favorite Kuwaiti tradition, which she describes as an excellent venue for social interaction and an opportunity to develop stronger bonds with the community.





100,000 evacuated as cyclone threatens India and Pakistan



MILAN: Italian former Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi daughter Marina Berlusconi (L), partner of Silvio Berlusconi Marta Fascina, son Luigi Berlusconi and daughter Barbara Berlusconi (R) pay their respect at the end of Italy's former Prime Minister and media mogul Silvio Berlusconi funeral outside the Duomo cathedral in Milan. - AFP

Italy bids farewell to Berlusconi

Longest-serving premier in Italy's post-war history

MILAN: Devotees of former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi bid him farewell in Milan on Wednesday at a state funeral for the controversial billionaire, which closes a 30-year chapter in the country's history. The coffin of the media mogul, adorned with white and red roses, was driven through the city from his villa in Arcore to the city's Gothic Duomo, with mourners clapping and waving along the route.

It was then carried into the cathedral, escorted by a guard of honour, as his family walked behind.

Thousands of the tycoon's supporters -- including a delegation from his Monza football club -- watched on giant screens set up in the square, as Archbishop Mario Delpini led the ceremony for Berlusconi, who died Monday aged 86. "When a man is a politician, then he tries to win. There are those who exalt him and those who cannot stand him," Delpini said in his homily. "When a man is a protagonist, then he is always on stage. He has those who applaud him and those who detest him," he said. "But in this moment of farewell and prayer, what can we say about Silvio Berlusconi? He was a man: A desire for life, a desire for love, a desire for joy," he added.

Berlusconi, adored and loathed by Italians in equal measure, had been ill for several years, though he remained the official head of his right-wing Forza Italia party, a member of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's coalition government.

'Huge void'

Lucia Diele, 30, a Berlusconi fan from Puglia in Italy's south, described the man who entered politics

in 1994 and went on to be prime minister three times as "the greatest politician in the history of Italy". "He leaves a huge void that will be impossible to fill. Giorgia Meloni is a great prime minister, but no one will take Silvio's place," she said outside the cathedral.

Fellow supporter Luigi Vecchione, 48, said Berlusconi was "my first and last political love. It's a very sad day for Italy". Italian President Sergio Mattarella, Meloni and fellow coalition partner Matteo Salvini, head of the far-right League, were at the funeral, while the European Union was represented by its economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban was also present, along with Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and Iraqi President Abdel Latif Rashid. The longest-serving premier in Italy's post-war history, and re-elected to the Senate last year, Berlusconi was dogged by multiple legal and sex scandals and famed for his controversial gaffes on the international stage. He counted President Vladimir Putin among his friends -- but the Russian leader is subject to an international arrest warrant and could not travel to Italy.

Amateur photographer Gianfranco Diletta, 65, said he had come to "immortalise this mass phenomenon". "I never voted for Berlusconi, who embodied for Italy the modern populism of the 1990s... and was a friend of Putin's to the end, a strategic error which put Italy's national security in danger," he said.

Berlusconi is survived by his 33-year-old girlfriend, Marta Fascina, with whom he held a fake wedding last year and who was at his bedside as

he succumbed to a rare type of blood cancer. She was joined in the front pews by one of Berlusconi's two ex-wives, and his five children, some of whom helped run his empire, recently estimated to be worth around \$7 billion.

'Extreme'

Flags were lowered to half-mast on all public buildings from Monday in tribute to a leader whose influence extended well beyond politics, thanks to his extensive TV, newspaper and sporting interests.

Parliament was suspended for three days and the government declared a national day of mourning for Wednesday -- the first time for an ex-prime minister. The decision was criticised by Berlusconi's detractors, who accused him of cronyism, corruption and pushing through laws to protect his own interests.

Senator Andrea Crisanti said he was "strongly against" such national honours for "someone who had no respect for the state", pointing to Berlusconi's definitive conviction for tax fraud in 2013. Rosy Bindi, former head of the Antimafia Commission, said it was "inopportune" for "a person as divisive as Berlusconi", and the Repubblica daily said the "institutional shutdown" was "extreme" and compared it to Britain's protocol for Queen Elizabeth II's death. Berlusconi built a pharaoh-inspired marble mausoleum at his villa in Arcore, near Milan, to house his family and friends when they die. His family planned to cremate his remains and place his ashes in the mausoleum, Italian media reported. - AFP



WASHINGTON: This combination of pictures created shows (L) China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang and (R) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. - AFP

Blinken to seek to 'responsibly manage' ties on China trip

WASHINGTON: Secretary of State Antony Blinken will urge open communication to "responsibly manage" high tensions with China when he pays a rare visit to Beijing this weekend, US officials said. The State Department confirmed that Blinken will travel this weekend to Beijing on the first trip by a top US diplomat in nearly five years, rescheduling a visit that was scrapped in February as the United States detected what it said was a Chinese spy balloon.

Ahead of the trip, Blinken spoke by telephone to Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang and said he would "raise areas of concern as well as areas of potential cooperation." State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Blinken had stressed "the importance of maintaining open lines of communication to responsibly manage the US-PRC relationship to avoid miscalculation and conflict".

Relations between the world's two largest economies have tanked in recent years over Taiwan, trade and human rights, among a litany of other issues. A Beijing readout of the call struck a more confrontational tone, reporting that Qin had warned that relations between the two countries had faced "new difficulties and challenges" since the beginning of the year.

"It's clear who is responsible," Qin said, according to the Chinese foreign ministry. "China has always viewed and managed China-US relations in accordance with the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation put forward by President Xi Jinping," he added.

Another chance for dialogue

Presidents Joe Biden and Xi met in Bali in November and agreed to try to prevent tensions from soaring out of control, including by sending Blinken to Beijing. But Blinken abruptly cancelled a trip scheduled in early February after the United States said it detected—and later shot down—a Chinese surveillance balloon flying over the US mainland.

The two sides have more recently looked again to keep tensions in check, including with an extensive, closed-door meeting between Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, and senior Chinese diplomat Wang Yi in Vienna last month.

Biden has sought limited areas for cooperation with China, such as climate change, in contrast with the more fully adversarial position adopted at the end of the administration of his predecessor Donald Trump.—AFP

Deadly Russian missile strikes hit Ukraine

KYIV: Deadly Russian missile strikes hit southern and eastern Ukraine on Wednesday as the Western-backed country's air defences fought back against Moscow's intensified attacks. Russia fired four Kalibr missiles on the southern port city of Odesa from a warship in the Black Sea, Ukraine's air force said, with air defences shooting down three of them. One of the missiles hit a food warehouse, killing three employees and wounding seven. Oleg Kiper, the head of the region's military administration, said on Telegram. "There may be people under the rubble," he added.

Six other people were wounded after a business centre, shops and a residential complex in central Odesa were damaged "as a result of air combat and the blast wave", he said. A historic city on the Black Sea, Odesa was once a favourite holiday destination for many Ukrainians and Russians.

It has been repeatedly bombed since Russia invaded in February last year. In January, the United Nations cultural agency UNESCO designated the city's historic centre as a World Heritage in Danger site.

In the eastern cities of Kramatorsk and Kostiantynivka, Russian missile strikes overnight killed three people and destroyed dozens of private houses, regional authorities said. Kyiv also reported that Russian shelling of a van in northeastern Ukraine, near the border with Russia, had left six people dead a day earlier.

Ukrainian prosecutors said the Soviet-era van was hit near the village of Seredyna-Buda, on the border with Russia in the northeastern region of Sumy. Four of the victims were foresters, they said. Moscow has intensified its nightly attacks on major Ukrainian cities in recent weeks while Kyiv has launched a long-awaited counter-offensive to reclaim territory occupied by Russian forces. Ukraine said Wednesday that in the last three days Kyiv has retaken around three square



LVIV: People donate blood for the military on World Blood Donor Day as part of the charity event "Become a blood donor - Confess your love for Ukrainian army", at a shopping mall in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv. - AFP

kilometres (about one square mile) of territory and advanced in some areas as deep as 1.4 kilometres, while fighting continued near recaptured villages.

The latest strikes came as the death toll from Tuesday's missile strikes on Kryvyi Rig—the hometown of President Volodymyr Zelensky—rose to 12. Authorities in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, which includes Kryvyi Rig, also reported a fresh Russian drone attack overnight. "All three 'Shaheds' were shot down in the sky over the region," regional governor Sergiy Lysak said on Telegram, referring to the Iranian attack drones used by Russia. While Kyiv says it is making gains after launching its counter-offensive, Putin on Tuesday claimed his forces were inflicting "catastrophic" losses on Ukrainian troops.

IAEA chief to visit plant

Putin conceded during a Kremlin meeting with war bloggers that Russian forces were suffering from diminishing stockpiles of some military equipment, pointing in particular to attack drones and missiles. Kyiv quickly fired back, insisting that Ukraine's push,

bolstered with Western weapons and training, had "certain gains, implementing our plans, moving forward". According to military analysts, Ukraine has not yet committed the bulk of its forces in its counter-offensive, and is currently still testing the front with probing attacks to determine weak points.

In recent days, Kyiv has claimed to have re-captured several villages in the eastern and southern regions. "Ukrainian forces continued counter-offensive operations in at least three directions and made further limited territorial gains on June 13," the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said.

UN nuclear chief Rafael Grossi was expected at the Moscow-occupied Zaporizhzhia atomic power plant on Wednesday, but Russian news agencies reported the visit had been delayed by a day. "The mission is being postponed by a day," state news agency TASS quoted a nuclear official as saying, without giving a reason. Moscow-installed officials in Zaporizhzhia also said Grossi would now visit the plant on Thursday. Kyiv and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) did not confirm the delay.—AFP

International

Lebanon lawmakers fail to elect new president in 12th attempt

Lebanon has already been without a head of state for more than seven months

BEIRUT: Lebanese lawmakers on Wednesday failed for a 12th time to elect a new president, as bitter divisions between the Iran-backed Hezbollah and its opponents risk miring the country in a protracted power vacuum.

Crisis-hit Lebanon has already been without a head of state for more than seven months, and the previous attempt to elect a president was held on January 19. The vote for the presidency, reserved for a Maronite Christian under Lebanon's delicate sectarian power-sharing system, pitted the Hezbollah-backed Sleiman Frangieh against financial official Jihad Azour, who has mainly been endorsed by Christian and independent legislators.

But neither had enough support to get the required two-thirds majority, with Azour garnering 59 votes and Frangieh 51. All 128 lawmakers showed up for the election, but many left the chamber after placing their ballots in the box and quorum was lost before a second round of voting — where the winner only requires 65 ballots — was able to go ahead.

"Enough passing the buck... for prolonging the vacuum," parliament speaker Nabih Berri said in a statement after the session. "Only consensus and dialogue" will speed up the election of a president, he added, without immediately scheduling a new ballot.

Analysts said the vote risked further entrenching a political stalemate, dimming hopes of saving the economy after more than three years of meltdown. "At this stage, the most likely scenario is a prolonged vacuum," analyst Karim Bitar said.

The international community has urged politicians to elect a consensus presidential candidate who can help the country enact reforms required to unlock billions of dollars in loans from abroad. On top of lacking a president, Lebanon has been governed by a caretaker cabinet with limited powers for

more than a year.

By convention, the premiership is reserved for a Sunni Muslim and the post of parliament speaker goes to a Shiite Muslim. In past sessions, Hezbollah and its allies repeatedly posted spoiled ballots to disrupt the vote, then left so quorum was lost and a second round could not take place.

They adopted a similar tactic in the last presidential vote, a move that left Lebanon without a president for more than two years, until Michel Aoun's 2016 win. Samy Gemayel, head of the Christian Kataeb party, called Wednesday's support for Azour an "uprising" against "diktats and threats", in reference to accusations Hezbollah is seeking to impose its preferred candidate.

The Shiite movement has described Azour as the "defiance and confrontation candidate", and pro-Hezbollah daily Al-Akhabar's front page on Wednesday featured just one word: Vacuum. Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah said that "the country cannot be led by... confrontation". "Dialogue is essential for electing a president," he told AFP, calling for "understanding".

"Third-man solution"?

Frangieh, a former lawmaker and minister who is a friend of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, hails from a storied dynasty, like many of Lebanon's prominent political figures. On Sunday, he promised to be "the president of all Lebanese" despite his polarizing alliances. Azour was finance minister from 2005 to 2008 and has stepped aside from his role as the director of the Middle East and Central Asia department at the International Monetary Fund in view of the presidential contest.

On Monday as he announced his bid for the post, he said he wanted to "contribute to a solution" not a



BEIRUT: Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri (centre) heads the 12th parliamentary session to elect a new president in the capital Beirut's downtown district amid bitter divisions between the powerful Iran-backed Hezbollah and its opponents. — AFP

crisis, adding that he was "not defying anyone". The analyst Bitar said Wednesday's vote, like the previous 11 attempts, was likely "a way for political forces to gauge their respective electoral weight" and see how many votes they could get.

A stalemate could pave the way for protracted negotiations "that would ultimately reach a third-

man solution", he told AFP before the ballot. The United States and France on Tuesday renewed calls for Lebanese lawmakers to cooperate and elect a new president. French foreign ministry spokeswoman Anne-Claire Legendre had urged MPs to "take this date seriously" and "not to waste another opportunity". — AFP

Erdogan dampens hopes of Sweden joining NATO

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday rebuffed growing international pressure on Ankara to ratify Sweden's NATO membership bid before the Western defence alliance meets in July. Western officials had hoped Erdogan would soften his position on the diplomatically charged issue after he secured a hard-fought re-election last month.

But Erdogan signalled no major shift in comments that were released by his office while Turkish and Swedish officials held last-minute negotiations in Ankara. "Sweden has expectations. It doesn't mean that we will comply with them," Erdogan was quoted as saying.

"In order for us to meet these expectations, first of all, Sweden must do its part." Sweden and its Nordic neighbor Finland ended decades of military non-alignment and applied to join the US-led defence bloc in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Turkey and fellow NATO member Hungary ratified Finland's membership this year. But both countries' parliaments have yet to approve Sweden's entry. Unanimous backing is needed for new countries to secure the guarantees afforded by the world's most powerful defence alliance.

US President Joe Biden pressed Erdogan about Sweden during a call he placed a day after the Turkish leader extended his two-decade rule until 2028. Ankara hopes to win US congressional approval of a major defence package that could substantially modernize Turkey's ageing fleet of fighter jets.

Biden directly linked the F-16 fighters' sale with the Swedish bid for the first time. Erdogan "still wants to work on something on the F-16s. I told him we wanted



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

a deal with Sweden, so let's get that done", Biden told reporters after the call.

And NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg personally discussed the bid with Erdogan in Istanbul earlier this month ahead of an alliance summit in Lithuania in July. Erdogan noted that Stoltenberg's visit coincided with a protest held in Stockholm by Kurdish supporters of a group recognized as a terrorist organization by Ankara.

Turkey is pushing Sweden to ban and crack down on such rallies. "There are rights given to (Sweden's) law enforcement under the constitution. Use those rights. If you don't deal with it, we cannot (say yes) at the summit in Vilnius," Erdogan said.

Sweden has already taken a series of measures aimed at appeasing Turkey's concerns. It has agreed to extradite a self-proclaimed supporter of the Kurdish militants who was convicted in Sweden of drug trafficking.

It has also toughened up its anti-terrorism laws. Turkey "was able to raise some concerns that it had. Finland and Sweden have both addressed those concerns and, in our judgment, addressed them appropriately and effectively", US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said this week. "And that's what we're looking to see take place over the coming weeks." — AFP

Teacher hurt in Bosnia shooting, child arrested

SARAJEVO: A child was arrested Wednesday after allegedly shooting a teacher at an elementary school in the northeastern Bosnian city of Lukavac, officials and the family of the victim said.

The incident comes a month after back-to-back shootings rocked neighboring Serbia, including a rampage at an elementary school in Belgrade where a 13-year-old gunned down 10 people - including nine fellow classmates.

"The child, who is not yet 14, is under police supervision in the premises of the Lukavac Police Department, while firearms and other discarded items are secured until the investigation begins," the interior ministry of Tuzla canton said.

Officials described the suspect as a former student who had recently moved to another school. "The child was transferred to another school from the start of the second semester as a result of a disciplinary measure," Ahmed Omerovic, education minister for Tuzla, told reporters.

"Today was the end of classes in all schools in the territory of Tuzla canton," he added. The wounded victim is an English teacher and assistant principal identified as Ismet Osmanovic, his father told local broadcaster N1.

According to the hospital in the nearby city of Tuzla, the victim in the shooting had sustained "gunshot wounds to the neck".

"The patient was intubated and he is being operated on," the University Clinic Centre of Tuzla said in

a statement, according to local media. "The operation is still ongoing. Doctors told me he was stable," Osmanovic's father said.

The shootings in Serbia widely reverberated throughout the Balkans, with makeshift shrines and memorial services held in cities across the former Yugoslavia, including Bosnia.

During the war in Bosnia in the 1990s, an untold number of weapons were trafficked into the country due to an arms embargo. Following the war's end in 1995, officials repeatedly called for Bosnians to hand over their weapons during a years-long amnesty period, as security forces raided homes believed to harbor weapons. Despite the efforts, a large number of guns are scattered throughout Bosnia. According to the Small Arms Survey research group, approximately 31 out of every 100 citizens owns a gun in the Balkan nation. — AFP



LUKAVAC: Bosnian police secure the area after a shooting at an elementary school in the northeastern Bosnian city of Lukavac on June 14, 2023. — AFP

Xi reiterates Palestine should...

Continued from Page 1

Beijing has sought to boost its ties in the Middle East, challenging US influence — efforts that have sparked unease in Washington.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin called long-time Palestinian leader Abbas an "old and good friend of the Chinese people" during

a regular media briefing last week. Finding a lasting solution to Zionist-Palestinian tensions may prove elusive, as peace negotiations between the two sides have been stalled since 2014.

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang told his Zionist and Palestinian counterparts in April that his country was willing to aid peace negotiations, Xinhua reported. And Qin told Palestinian foreign minister Riyad Al-Maliki that Beijing supports the resumption of talks as soon as possible, according to the state news agency. In both calls Qin emphasized China's push for peace talks on the basis of implementing a "two-state solution". — AFP

Frontex agency had spotted the boat on Tuesday afternoon, but the passengers had "refused any help". It added that none on board were wearing life jackets, and did not immediately disclose their nationalities.

Authorities said it appeared the migrants had departed from Libya and were heading for Italy. The migration ministry said it had sent extra staff to Kalamata, including translators, and that the survivors would be transferred to a migrant camp near Athens. The sinking "brings to the fore once again, in the most tragic way, the need to dismantle the international smuggling rings that put the lives of migrants in danger," the ministry said in a statement.

Also Wednesday, a sailing boat in distress carrying about 80 migrants off Crete was rescued by a coast-guard patrol and towed to port, Greece's port police said. Along with Italy and Spain, Greece has been one of the main landing points for tens of thousands of people seeking to reach Europe from Africa and the Middle East. Greece is also facing an increase of crossing attempts from Turkey on southern routes near the Cyclades islands and toward the Peloponnese peninsula, hoping to avoid patrols in the northern Aegean Sea.

Rescue operations are common, but last month the Greek government came under international pressure over video footage reportedly showing the forceful expulsion of migrants who were set adrift at sea. Greece and other EU member states on the southern and southeastern rim of the bloc say they are being unfairly tasked with managing arrivals of undocumented migrants. — AFP

Trump denies mishandling...

Continued from Page 1

star's mounting legal woes threatening to derail his bid to return to the Oval Office. The US government — which has never before prosecuted a former president — accuses Trump of violating the Espionage Act and other laws when he removed classified documents upon leaving office in 2021 and failed to give them up to the National Archives.

Authorities say he conspired to thwart investigators and knowingly shared national security secrets with people who did not have the requisite clearance. After the hearing Trump jetted from Miami back to his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, where he blamed President Joe Biden for his prosecution.

"A corrupt sitting president had his top political opponent arrested on fake and fabricated charges — of which he and numerous other presidents would be guilty — right in the middle of a presidential election, in which he's losing very badly," said Trump, speaking from the front of the clubhouse, at a podium flanked by American flags. He was cheered by several hundred supporters, including 100 members of a conservative organization of Vietnamese Americans who had donned matching red dresses and chanted: "We love Trump."

Trump enjoys strong backing from Republican voters, 81 percent of whom believe the charges against him are politically-driven, according to a new Ipsos poll. Antonio Ruffa, 30, who had come to Bedminster to support the tycoon, called Trump's indictment "a travesty" while 57-year-old Vincent Larusso said the prosecution was designed to prevent Trump from running for reelection. "This is not democracy and people can see this from a hundred miles away," Larusso told AFP.

The government has recovered more than 300 documents with classified markings from Trump since officials discovered his correspondence with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was missing, US

media reported. The records were the work of top national security and law enforcement agencies such as the CIA and NSA, according to prosecutors, and some concerned the military and nuclear capabilities of the United States and foreign countries, and "plans for possible retaliation in response to a foreign attack".

The 49-page indictment, dismissed by Trump as "ridiculous", includes photographs of boxes of records stacked at Mar-a-Lago, his Palm Beach residence, in a ballroom and in a bathroom and shower. One image showed that by Dec 2021, some of the boxes that had been moved to a storage room fell, with their contents spilling across the floor.

Trump dismissed his attorneys' attempts to comply with a subpoena for the return of the records, according to the indictment, which quoted him asking a lawyer: "What happens if we just don't respond at all or don't play ball with them?" The runaway front-runner in the 2024 Republican primary — Trump leads second-placed Ron DeSantis by more than 30 points — has been impeached twice over allegations of misconduct in office and was recently found liable for sexual abuse.

He faces indictment or ongoing scrutiny in four criminal probes — in Washington, Florida, Georgia and New York — and could find himself on trial in multiple cases as he campaigns to return to the White House. The pugnacious billionaire has repeatedly complained that the investigations against him amount to a baseless "witch hunt" — and has vowed to stay in the race regardless of the outcome of the documents case.

He said Monday he would appoint a special prosecutor on his return to office to investigate Biden, who is not facing any credible accusations of criminality. Republican leaders in Congress and Trump's rivals for the party's presidential nomination have largely glossed over the gravity of the allegations against him, instead attacking the Justice Department. Fewer than one percent of US federal defendants go to trial and win acquittal, according to the Pew Research Center. The vast majority — around 90 percent — plead guilty. — AFP

78 migrants dead as boat...

Continued from Page 1

Katerina Sakellaropoulou, immediately travelled to the port of Kalamata to confer with senior officials on the rescue and accommodation response.

Greece is currently under an interim government until June 25 elections. The leaders of the two main parties, former conservative prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and leftist rival Alexis Tsipras, suspended campaign speeches scheduled for Wednesday. The worst migrant tragedy in Greece was in June 2016 when at least 320 people were listed as dead or missing, according to AFP records going back to 1993.

The IOM until Wednesday had listed 48 migrants missing in the eastern Mediterranean so far this year, compared to 378 a year earlier. Along with navy vessels, Wednesday's rescue operation included an army plane and helicopter as well as six other boats that were in the area. "Since very early Wednesday, an extensive rescue operation is underway off Pylos, after a fishing boat capsized with a large number of migrants onboard," the coastguard said.

Greek media reported that 26 people have been taken to the port's hospital, among them four in a more serious condition who had to be airlifted by helicopter. The coastguard said a surveillance plane with Europe's

International

100,000 evacuated as cyclone threatens India and Pakistan

Biparjoy expected to make landfall as a 'very severe cyclonic storm'

MANDVI: More than 100,000 people have been evacuated from the path of a fierce cyclone heading towards India and Pakistan, with forecasters warning Wednesday it could devastate homes and tear down power lines.

Biparjoy, meaning "disaster" in Bengali, is making its way across the Arabian Sea and is expected to make landfall as a "very severe cyclonic storm" on Thursday evening, government weather monitors said. Powerful winds, storm surges and lashing rains were forecast to hammer a 325-kilometre (200-mile) stretch of coast between Mandvi in India's Gujarat state and Karachi in Pakistan.

India's Meteorological Department predicted the storm will hit near the Indian port of Jakhau late Thursday, warning of "total destruction" of traditional mud and straw thatched homes. At sea, winds were already gusting at speeds up to 180 kilometres per hour (112 miles per hour), forecasters said.

By the time it makes landfall wind speeds are predicted to reach 125-135 kilometres per hour, with gusts up to 150 kilometres per hour. "Over 47,000 people have been evacuated from coastal and low-lying areas to shelter," said C.C. Patel, an official in charge of relief operations in Gujarat.

More were expected to be moved inland throughout Wednesday. India's meteorologists warned of the potential for "widespread damage", including destruction of crops, "bending or uprooting of power and communication poles" and disruption of railways and roads.

In the beach town of Mandvi, streets were mostly empty Wednesday with just a few hungry stray

dogs roaming abandoned beach shacks, next to large, rolling waves under strong gusts and grey skies. The Gujarat state government released photos showing lines of residents clutching small bags of belongings and boarding buses inland away from areas predicted to be worst hit.

'High to phenomenal'

Pakistan's climate change minister Sherry Rehman said Wednesday that 62,000 people had been evacuated from the country's southeastern coastline, with 75 relief camps set up at schools and colleges.

She said fishermen had been warned to stay off the water and small aircraft were grounded, while urban flooding was possible in the megacity of Karachi, home to around 20 million people. "We are following a policy of caution rather than wait and see," she told reporters in Islamabad. "Our first priority is saving lives." The Pakistan Meteorological Department forecast gusts up to 140 kilometres per hour in the southeastern province of Sindh, accompanied by a storm surge reaching 3.5 metres (11.5 feet).

Fishing has also been suspended along the Gujarat coast with conditions expected to escalate from "rough to very rough" on Wednesday to "high to phenomenal". "There could be flooding in some low-lying areas and we are prepared to handle that," Mohsen Shahedi, a senior official from India's National Disaster Response Force, told reporters.

Five people have already been killed in India including two children who were crushed when a wall collapsed, while a woman was hit by a falling tree



MUMBAI: High tides crashes into stalls at the seafront, in Mumbai on June 14, 2023. More than 40,000 people have been evacuated across India and Pakistan as a cyclone approaches their coast, officials said. — AFP

when riding a motorbike. Cyclones — the equivalent of hurricanes in the North Atlantic or typhoons in the Northwest Pacific — are a regular and deadly menace on the coast of the northern Indian Ocean,

where tens of millions of people live. Scientists have warned that storms are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer with climate change. — AFP

Nine killed in fresh ethnic clashes in India

IMPHAL: At least nine people were shot dead in the remote northeast Indian state of Manipur, officials said Wednesday — the latest incident in weeks of violence sparked by long-standing ethnic tensions. Manipur saw days of deadly clashes in May, prompted by a dispute over access to government jobs and other perks.

More than 100 have died in the resulting unrest, during which mobs raided police stations and stole

weapons, while tens of thousands of others fled their homes to seek safety. Unidentified gunmen stormed Kamenlok village on the outskirts of state capital Imphal late Tuesday and shot indiscriminately at houses using "sophisticated weapons", Manipur government information officer Heisnam Balakrishna told AFP.

"Nine persons including a woman was killed during the firing," he added. Ten others were injured in the attack and were taken to a hospital in Imphal for treatment. Another nine people were injured in a separate attack on Monday in the same village, according to police.

Tensions in the state came to a head last month between the majority Meitei, who are mostly Hindus and live in and around Imphal, and the mainly Christian Kuki tribe in the surrounding hills. The Kuki community had protested Meitei demands for reserved public job quo-

tas and college admissions as a form of affirmative action.

This also stoked long-held fears among the Kuki that the Meitei might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for them and other tribal groups. Manipur is part of India's remote northeast, a region linked to the rest of the country by a narrow land corridor.

The area is home to dozens of tribal groups and small ethnic guerrilla armies whose demands range from greater autonomy to secession from India. A curfew remains in force and internet shut in most of Manipur, where tens of thousands of soldiers were sent to control the violence last month.

The situation in the state remains volatile despite a visit this month by India's home minister Amit Shah, who demanded the return of assault rifles seized from police stations when the violence began. — AFP

Beijing acting 'counter' to our interests: Berlin

BERLIN: Germany on Wednesday called China a "partner, competitor and systemic rival" in the release of its first national security strategy, accusing Beijing of repeatedly acting against the European giant's interests in a bid to reshape the global order. The document prepared by Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition slammed China for putting regional stability and international security "under increasing pressure" and for disregarding human rights.

"China is trying in various ways to remold the existing rules-based international order, is asserting a regionally dominant position with ever more vigor, acting time and again counter to our interests and values," the strategy paper said. At the same time, it acknowledged that the Asian giant "remains a partner without whom many global challenges and crises cannot be resolved."

"That is why we must grasp the options and opportunities for cooperation in these fields in particular," the paper said. Publication of the much-awaited strategy blueprint came just days before Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang was due to visit Berlin.

Asked what message the document

sent to Beijing, Scholz told a press conference "the point is that China will continue to grow economically and that China's integration into world trade and world economic relations should not be impaired. "But at the same time the security issues that arise for us must be taken into account," he said, adding that Germany "doesn't want decoupling, we want de-risking".

'Most significant threat'

Drawn up under the lead of the foreign ministry, the strategy document covers defence pledges such as the NATO two percent spending vow to supply chain security to cyberattacks. It cites Russia as "for now the most significant threat to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area", blasting Moscow's invasion of its neighbor Ukraine.

Russia's war on Ukraine has deeply shaken Germany, forcing it to rip up long-held pacifist policies to instead drastically re-arm its army.

The conflict has also prompted Berlin to accelerate plans to reduce its reliance on China, after the coronavirus pandemic also acted as a wake-up call on the risks of depending on the Asian giant for health essentials like surgical gowns, masks or medication.

Over the last months, Germany has thus been busy diversifying its imports or bringing production of key components such as semiconductor chips to its soil. But Germany's export giants have expressed concerns over the shift away from China, fearful of



BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (right) speaks during a press conference with German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (centre) and German Finance Minister Christian Lindner on June 14, 2023 to present the German government's national security strategy for the country. — AFP

alienating the huge market.

In a clear warning to German companies, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock underlined that Berlin would not be able to bailout huge industrial groups with deep ties with China should a crisis erupt with Beijing.

She added that in discussions with German companies she and Scholz had underscored that lessons had to be drawn from Russia's war on Ukraine. At the same time, she underlined the importance of boosting cooperation with Beijing on areas on which both sides can agree.

One key area would be on the climate, on which the Asian giant's cooperation would be crucial if the world is to succeed in limiting warming to 1.5 Celsius. "We obviously see the world in a completely different way. But in recognizing that the climate crisis is the greatest security threat... we have overlap with China," Baerbock said.

"You can't say that you want to save the world's climate but don't want to talk to China. That has to be resolved, that's what we are facing up to and we can cooperate even more in the areas where we can work together." — AFP

China navy training ship visits Philippines

MANILA: A Chinese navy training vessel berthed in the Philippines on Wednesday for a rare port visit as the two countries contest reefs and waters in the South China Sea. Dragon dances and a brass band greeted the 165-metre (542-foot) Qi Jiguang in Manila to mark its final stop on a Southeast Asian tour through Vietnam, Thailand and Brunei.

"It's a goodwill visit," Chinese ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian told reporters, without offering details. Commissioned in 2017, the ship "conveys the concept of mutual trust concerning China's peaceful development", read a leaflet distributed by its crew to visitors.

Beijing claims most of the strategic South China Sea including waters close to Philippine shores, ignoring a 2016 international tribunal ruling that voided its claims. Chinese coastguard or navy vessels routinely block or

shadow Philippine ships carrying out supply missions to islands in the disputed sea that host Philippine garrisons, Manila says.

In February, Manila accused a Chinese ship of shining a military-grade laser at a Philippine coastguard boat escorting a supply vessel to the Spratly Islands. The Qi Jiguang, which is larger than any Philippine warship or coastguard vessel, is the first Chinese navy ship to visit the Philippines since Ferdinand Marcos won the presidency last year.

Marcos has vowed that Manila "will not lose an inch" of territory as unease grows in the region over Chinese maritime activities. He said last week that ties between the Philippines and China were "evolving" but denied he was shifting away from Beijing.

"As to the differences between China and the Philippines, certainly they exist, but it is not something that will define our relationship," Marcos added. His more assertive approach contrasts with that of his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte, who attempted to woo the Asian power to secure infrastructure deals and other investments.



MANILA: Chinese Navy Rear Admiral Su Yinsheng (right) and Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian (left) greet Chinese nationals after the arrival of the Chinese naval training ship "Qi Jiguang" in Manila. — AFP

The Duterte government welcomed several Chinese navy warships to the Philippines during his term as president from 2016 to 2022. He personally set foot on board three Chinese vessels including a destroyer and a frigate that docked in his hometown of Davao City in 2017.

In 2019 three more Chinese navy vessels, including two missile frigates, were welcomed to Manila by the Philippines' then defence secretary. The Qi Jiguang is in Manila until Saturday and will be open to the public for two hours each day, the Chinese embassy said. — AFP



TOKYO: Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) chief of staff Yasunori Morishita bows to apologize at a press conference at the Ministry of Defense in Tokyo, after a shooting incident occurred earlier in the day with SDF soldiers at a training range. — AFP

Two killed at Japan army training range

TOKYO: A new military recruit shot and killed two fellow soldiers and wounded a third at a training range in central Japan on Wednesday, the military said, with the 18-year-old suspect detained at the scene. "During a live-bullet exercise as part of new personnel training, one Self-Defense Forces candidate fired at three personnel," the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) said in a statement, confirming two deaths. The shooter was an 18-year-old SDF candidate who joined the military in April, GSDF chief of staff Yasunori Morishita told reporters, adding he was detained on the spot by other soldiers. "This kind of incident is absolutely unforgivable for an organization tasked with handling weapons, and I take it very seriously," Morishita said.

He said the three victims had been tasked with training new recruits, including the attacker, at the range in the city of Gifu, without further elaborating on their relations. Earlier in the day a local police spokesman said the suspect, whose identity was being withheld, had been charged with attempted murder. The cadet "fired a rifle at the victim with the intent to kill", the spokesman said. National broadcaster NHK reported that one fatality was a 52-year-old supervisor, while the other, and the injured soldier, were both aged 25.

The suspect was quoted by NHK as telling investigators that he had "aimed at" the supervisor, but shot the younger victim first because he was standing in his way. Aerial footage broadcast by the station showed military and civilians gathered around an emergency vehicle and police blocking nearby roads. Some appeared to be investigators, wearing covers over their shoes and hair. A local resident told NHK he saw several emergency vehicles rushing to the area at around 9:30 am (0030 GMT) but had not heard anything before that. Morishita said that, as far as he was aware, the last gun-related injuries or fatalities caused by GSDF personnel happened in 1984 at a camp in Yamaguchi.

Recent incidents

The training range is administered by the region's Camp Moriama and is a covered facility of more than 65,000 square metres. Gun possession is tightly controlled in Japan, where violent crime is rare. But several high-profile incidents have rattled the country over the last year. In July 2022, former prime minister Shinzo Abe was shot dead on the campaign trail by a man who allegedly targeted him over his links to the Unification Church.

The accused assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, was due to make his first appearance in court this week, but the session was cancelled after a package sent to the facility set off a metal detector. It was later found to contain no explosives, but rather a petition signed by thousands calling for a lenient sentence for Yamagami. He has garnered sympathy from some quarters over the effect his mother's devotion to the Unification Church had on his family and childhood. In April, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida escaped unharmed after a man threw an explosive device towards him at a campaign event. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 2023

Canadian Prairies farmers try to adapt to a warming world

Farmers trying to adapt to new era in agriculture

DAVIDSON: Following repeated droughts, Canadian farmers are trying to adapt to a new era in agriculture marked by a warming world - including by trapping snow in their fields, planting heat-resistant crops and seeding earlier in the season. But it's unclear, they are the first to admit, if their slogging will bear fruit. Squatting in the middle of a canola field in Alberta, on the western edge of Canada's vast Prairies region, Ian Chitwood surveys the shoots sprouting between long furrows of black soil.

His battle with the heat has been starting earlier every year. By planting his crops earlier in the season, in May, Chitwood aims to "move up the flowering window," during which the plants are most vulnerable, in order to protect them from the heat in June. But what his crops really need in the wake of a devastating drought in 2021, he acknowledges, is mild weather and humid soil.

That drought was a "once in 100 years event," says Curtis Rempel of the Canola Council of Canada. That year, the west of the country sweltered under record high summer temperatures, with the mercury reaching 49.6 degrees Celsius (121.3 Fahrenheit). "It sure had an impact on yields," reducing them by 50 percent, according to Rempel. Such hits have had significant impacts on international markets, as Canada exports 90 percent of its canola harvest - used mostly for cooking oil and biodiesel fuel.

Water management

Most canola crops are grown without requiring irrigation in the Prairies, the nation's agricultural heartland spanning nearly 1.8 million square kilometers (695,000 square miles). But the region is sensitive to droughts, whose frequency and severity have been steadily increasing. In this region, explains Phillip Harder, a hydrology researcher at the University of Saskatchewan, in Saskatoon, "crop production relies on water that accumulates throughout the year." In other words, snow that accumulates over winter and



AIRDRIE: Farmer Ian Chitwood walks at his farm near Airdrie, Alberta, Canada. Planting earlier, saving snow, using seeds that are more resistant to heat. Canadian farmers are fumbling for solutions to recurrent droughts, aware of their limited room for maneuver. - AFP

soaks into the ground during the spring thaw. But howling winds over fields that stretch as far as the eye can see have been blowing away much of that snow of late. Some farmers have turned to a century-old solution of planting trees in and around their fields to trap the snow. "In the wintertime when the snow blows it catches in the trees, and then it slowly soaks into the ground," explains Stuart Dougan, a 69-year-old farmer with a weather-beaten face.

In the spring and summer, the trees provide further shelter from the wind "so it's not taking the moisture from the crops," he adds. Trees may pose new challenges, however, as modern agricultural equipment is

much bulkier than in the 1930s when one could more easily plow around a tree trunk, points out Harder. Alternatively, he recommends when harvesting crops to cut the plants higher on the stem, leaving longer "stubble" sticking out of the ground to "increase snow retention."

Turning to science

"We've always looked to keep as much stubble in place to catch the snow and reduce evaporation rates," says Saskatchewan farmer Rob Stone. He, like many Canadian farmers, stopped plowing his fields in the 1990s for this very purpose. He's now experi-

menting with new genetically modified seeds that he says hold hope for the future of canola. Four small flags in the middle of his fields mark a test crop.

"As we find ones that are more tolerant (to heat), we will crossbreed them to make a new (plant) population," explains Greg Gingera, a genetics researcher. Also in the works, adds Rempel, are several companies looking to develop "biologicals or bacteria or fungi that you add to the soil or spray on top of the plant to confer stress tolerance." But it will be seven to eight years before a product is likely ready to be commercialized and widely available, he says. In the meantime, farmers will have to make do. - AFP



KANDALI: Farmers walk amidst a locusts swarm near a wheat field at Kandali area in Sholgara district, Balkh province. Hundreds of thousands of locusts have descended on crops in northern Afghanistan, under the helpless gaze of farmers and their families already stalked by famine. - AFP

Locusts plague precious crops in Afghanistan

KANDALI: Hundreds of thousands of locusts have descended on crops in northern Afghanistan, under the helpless gaze of farmers and their families already stalked by famine. In the village of Kandali in northern Balkh, one of eight affected provinces in the country's breadbasket, a staggering swarm of grey insects has amassed on a fallow wheat field.

After feasting on the harvest they laid eggs to hatch anew next spring, continuing a cycle of destruction in a nation where nine in 10 families already struggle to afford food, according to the UN. "They eat everything that is green: wheat, peas, sesame," Baz Mohammad, the representative of Kandali village, told AFP. Desperate farmers used nets to sweep up the plague of Moroccan Locusts - one of the world's most voracious pests - before burying them in trenches, but their numbers are still multiplying.

"We walk with hungry stomachs to kill the locusts. If we don't kill them, our agriculture will be ruined," Mohammad said. This year's outbreak could destroy 1.2 million tons of wheat, a quarter of the annual harvest, at a loss of up to \$480 million, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Afghanistan is facing its third consecutive year of drought, with farmers in Kandali reporting no rains since March, which could have helped wash away the bugs.

"Harvest forecasts this year are the best we have seen for the last three years," FAO Afghanistan representative Richard Trenchard said last month. "But

this outbreak threatens to destroy all these recent gains and dramatically worsen the food insecurity situation later this year and into next year." The agency said conditions were "perfect" for locusts with "overgrazing, drought and very limited control measures". The last two major infestations, which took place 20 and 40 years ago, cost the country an estimated eight percent and 25 percent of production, respectively.

Worse to come

The head of locust control at the provincial agricultural ministry, Sifatullah Azizi, said 7,000 hectares (17,000 acres) of land has been treated chemically and manually, but it is not enough. "We have acted within our means. To eradicate them you need a budget, to hire workers, pay for fuel, products," he told AFP.

Afghanistan's economy, already battered by decades of war, has been mired in crisis after billions of dollars in international aid were cut following the Taliban government's takeover in August 2021. Economic output has collapsed and nearly 85 percent of the country lives in poverty, according to the latest report from the United Nations Development Program. "Afghanistan used to have a very strong locust control system in place. But this has been heavily eroded in the last two years," Trenchard said.

If left untreated, the population of Moroccan locusts could increase 100-fold next year, the FAO has warned. Farmer Abdul Raqib Kazimi, who provides for sixteen family members, said 60 to 70 percent of his land has been destroyed, including fodder for cattle. "We need to feed ourselves. If there is no wheat, there is no flour," the 38-year-old said. "I am very worried as these locusts are laying eggs in this area so next year again it will be out of my control and out of the control of my villagers." - AFP

Drought-parched Uruguay hunts for underground water

MONTEVIDEO: Drought-parched Uruguay is thirsty, and in one of the main leafy parks of its capital a new sight is appearing: heavy equipment drilling in an emergency quest for more water. For the past 10 days, the noisy machinery has added to the urban soundscape. "You always have to have a Plan B," said Valeria Arballo, a geologist supervising the hunt for underground water. AFP caught up with her in Battle Park, a 150-acre (60 hectare) green "lung" in the capital that is the site of Estadio Centenario, the historic palace of football that was the main stadium for the 1930 World Cup.

Now, noisy heavy equipment seeks to tap underground fresh water known to be there, eventually to supply local hospitals and schools. "The drilling is being done in the city of Montevideo due to the water crisis," says Arballo, project director of the Underground Water Division of OSE, the state potable water enterprise.

Two new wells - one 138-foot deep (42 meters) and the other 300 feet (90 meters) - are already producing water, which is treated before human consumption. Others may soon be drilled. Montevideo, a city of 1.8 million, has traditionally relied on surface water. But the past three years of drought have been the worst in seven decades of record keeping, so OSE decided to tap its underground supply.



MONTEVIDEO: Workers of the state-owned water company Obras Sanitarias del Estado (OSE) drill boreholes to extract water, in a park of Montevideo. The water deficit situation in the metropolitan area of Montevideo, Uruguay's most populous, remains 'very critical', estimating that freshwater reserves for the capital and surrounding areas will run out shortly if it does not rain. - AFP

'You can't drink it'

As the drilling gets underway, tanker trucks carrying fresh water from a plant east of Montevideo arrive at Battle Park, where it is then transferred to smaller trucks and moved on to health clinics and other institutions in need. The main source for Montevideo's fresh water is the Paso Severino reservoir, 50 miles (85 kilometers) north of the capital. But it is now at historic lows.

On June 7, the reservoir contained 4.4 million cubic meters of water, a tiny fraction of its 67 million cubic meter capacity, according to official figures. Montevideo consumes an average of 550,000 cubic meters daily. To forestall running dry, OSE now mixes brackish water taken from sites near the River Plate with the Paso Severino water - to the displeasure of consumers. "It is very salty and sometimes is really cloudy. You can't drink it," said Marcelino Fernandez, 43, an employee at a shopping center.

Bottled water bonanza

This week, health authorities prolonged until July 20 emergency authorization permitting higher levels of sodium and chlorides in water. They also allowed the temporary increase of trihalomethanes (THMs), chemical compounds that form when water is disinfected with chlorine and which are harmful if consumed over decades. "It is absolutely certain that an increase in THMs for 45 days will not harm health," Karina Rando, the nation's health minister, told the media. A 6.25-liter bottle of purified water costs about \$3.40 in Montevideo, and sales have soared. Year-on-year sales climbed 224 percent in May, according to a private study published this week. And no rain is imminent at least through June 19, forecasters say. Arballo says rain would be "a relief" but the drilling for underground water supplies will go on. - AFP

Business

NBK Economic Update

Global outlook improves but uncertainties remain

KUWAIT: The growth outlook for most advanced economies has improved in the last few months, with chances of recession narrowing, as consumer spending has exhibited strong resilience in spite of high-interest rates and elevated inflation. Fallout from the recent banking crisis has dissipated, with no major deterioration seen in credit conditions following bank failures.

The US debt-ceiling impasse has also been resolved with no significant repercussions except minor government spending cuts in future and some uncertainty over the impact of large 'catch up' government debt issuance. Consumer price inflation has receded sharply from record highs in key developed markets, though core inflation has proven stubborn, underpinning continued tight monetary policies. China's post-COVID economic recovery has been disappointingly uneven, influencing external balances for many countries and arguably oil prices, too.

US economic outlook

Recent US economic indicators have been mixed but not yet consistent with an impending recession. Additionally, the fallout from the banking crisis has seemingly stabilized with no material alterations in liquidity conditions in the country since March. The government also resolved the weeks-long debt deal impasse with opposition lawmakers in the usual and frustratingly "last-minute" manner that helped avert a catastrophic default by suspending the federal debt ceiling and capping non-defense discretionary spending.

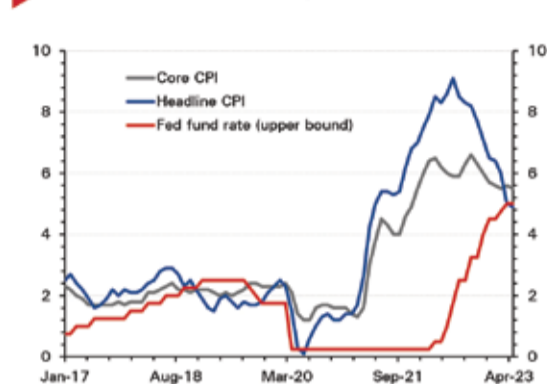
Meanwhile, consumer pricing pressures continue to subside, but with still-tight labor market. The Fed's job now appears more complicated, considering the Treasury's upcoming large post-debt deal bond issuance that should further squeeze liquidity. Economic growth during 1Q23 was revised upwards to 1.3% q/q (annualized) from 1.1% earlier, on upgrades to private fixed investments and personal consumption, though still slowed from 2.6% in 4Q22.

Meanwhile, retail sales, industrial production and personal spending in April all improved from the previous month, while growth in durable goods orders, although slowing m/m, came in sharply better than expected. The housing market, which saw steep softening in the last few quarters, seems to have stabilized, with rising new home sales, building permits and housing starts, while residential property prices rose in March for the second consecutive month by 1.5% m/m after seven straight months of decline.

However, ISM PMI and University of Michigan consumer confidence indices have ebbed in recent months, underscoring an unclear economic outlook. Employment data have largely been solid, with payrolls and new job openings increasing more than forecast, and slowing but still-decent wage growth. Still, the unemployment rate ticked up in May to a seven-month high of 3.7% from 3.4% earlier, while weekly jobless claims data are trending tentatively higher.

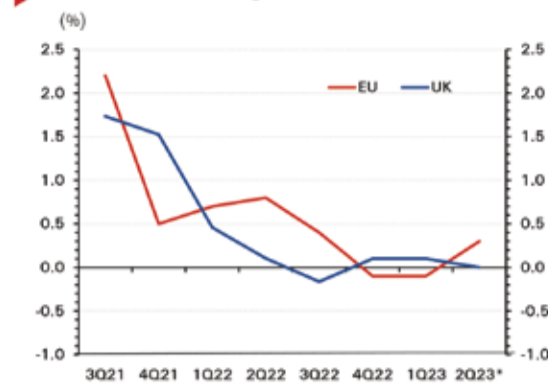
Meanwhile, price pressures continue to soften, with CPI inflation in May moderating to a two-year low of 4% y/y and the core rate easing to 5.3% y/y. Energy prices fell but growth in shelter prices accelerated and used car prices jumped on a monthly basis, implying an uneven outlook. A mixed bag of data makes the Fed's job even trickier. The bank could opt for a pause in rate hikes in its upcoming

Chart 1: US inflation and policy interest rates



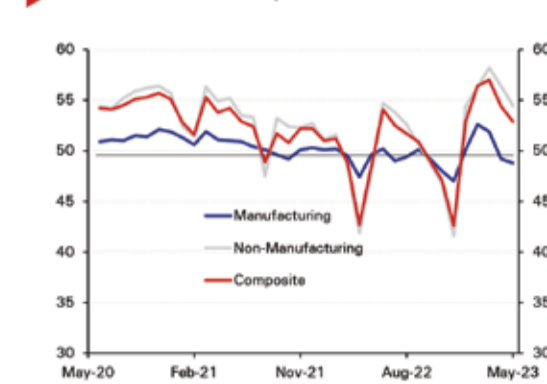
Source: Haver; Note: Upper bound of Fed Funds target rate

Chart 2: Eurozone GDP growth



Source: Haver Note: * forecasts from the ECB and the BoE for Eurozone and UK, respectively

Chart 3: China PMI surveys



Source: Haver

meeting, after raising the policy rate by 25 bps to a range of 5.0-5.25% in May – its 10th hike of the current cycle. That said, any such move may prove temporary if the labor market remains hot and/or inflation decelerates only slowly, while rate cuts could also be delayed.

The Euro-zone officially slipped into recession last quarter as revised data show GDP fell by 0.1% q/q each in 4Q22 and 1Q23. A mild winter helped escape a deeper downturn, though. There is some optimism over the outlook however, with the European Commission nudging up its forecast for 2023 growth to 1.1% from 0.9% in February.

GDP is expected to rebound in Q2 as the services sector leads the recovery, evident in the latest PMI readings. The composite PMI remained in expansion mode but moderated to 52.8 in May from 54.1 in April, mainly driven by services (55.1), while manufacturing contracted even further (44.8). Headline inflation has been subsiding, while core inflation has also started to ease, suggesting the ECB may not have to raise rates aggressively over this summer.

A weakening in the German economy has been driving the slowdown in manufacturing over the past period as the country fell into recession, with output shrinking 0.3% q/q during Q1, marking the second consecutive quarter of negative growth. France, on the other hand, expanded by 0.2% on a positive contribution from net trade and a lower negative contribution from domestic demand. Italy also grew by 0.5%, mainly driven by strong growth in services (especially tourism).

As for the UK, even though it has been posting positive economic growth, it continues to lag major economies within and outside Europe. The outlook will continue to be supported by government investment and spending, including energy bill support measures. CPI inflation moved down to 8.7% y/y for April from 10% in January, but the core rate worryingly rose to 6.8% versus 5.8% in January. A tight job market is supporting higher wage growth, which in turn is pushing companies to raise prices – one of the explanations for sticky core prices. The Bank of England is expected to continue raising policy rates (currently 4.5%) through the summer, and rates could peak around 5.5% by year-end.

Tourism lifts Japan

Japan's prospects have wavered amid robust domestic consumption and improving tourism, while manufacturing has been sluggish as external demand, especially from China, remains fragile. GDP in 1Q23 surprised on the upside, with annualized

growth of 2.7% q/q versus 1.9% expected. Higher private consumption (due somewhat to tourism activities) and a surge in capital expenditure drove the outperformance despite shrinking external demand.

The number of foreign tourists climbed to 2mn (+7% m/m) in April – a post-pandemic high, but still a third below the pre-COVID level. The PMI services survey has been continuously rising since the beginning of this year, indicating solid local demand and sharply recovering inbound tourism activities. The manufacturing surveys also show some improvement, having moved above the no-change zone in May, a first in seven months.

Meanwhile, inflation (all items excluding fresh food) reversed course in April and increased to 3.4% from 3.1% in March. The better-than-expected economic growth in Q1 and inflation exceeding the Bank of Japan's (BoJ) 2% target have fueled speculation of a pivot in monetary policy (towards tighter policy) happening sooner than anticipated.

However, wage growth – another critical gauge tracked by the BoJ that can help sustain higher inflation – has been broadly decelerating in 2023. Moreover, with falling real wages, the outlook on private consumption is moderating, which could provide additional reasons for the BoJ to maintain its ultra-loose policies. It seems unlikely that the BoJ will make a shift in its upcoming meeting later this week.

China's economy

China's economy started 2023 on a solid note, with GDP growing by 4.5% y/y in 1Q23, composite PMI readings soaring to record levels by March, and services activities and retail sales rebounding. However, since then, the post-COVID recovery has started losing steam, with shrinking manufacturing activities and lackluster consumption. The official manufacturing PMI sank to its lowest level in four months in May (48.8) amid a frail global outlook.

Compounding the matter was softer domestic demand, which saw imports shrink by 4.5% y/y in May and CPI inflation ease to 0.2% y/y, with PPI remaining in deflation since October 2022. Amid weaker global demand, exports also fell 7.5% y/y in May. Youth unemployment rates soared to record levels (20.4%) in April, three months before its seasonal peak in July, in which 11.6 million new graduates are expected to enter the labor market, boding ill for employment trends.

The softening economy has reversed capital flows, and the yuan has given back some reopening-related gains against the dollar. Meanwhile, hopes of a rebound in the real estate sector remain

shaky as developers' investment declined despite a pickup in residential property sales. Additional worries stem from local governments' ballooned financial liabilities, which have come under heightened stress on poor fiscal revenues following a downturn in the property market, foretelling widespread defaults.

The government is apparently working on rolling out additional measures to revive the property sector, including lowering payment requirements and reducing mortgage rates. The People's Bank of China had cut the reserve requirement ratio for big banks in March by 25bps, though as signs of easing economic activity intensified thereafter, the bank also reduced rates on short-term loans this week, a usual precursor to lowering the key policy rate in its upcoming meeting.

India's GDP growth

India's GDP growth accelerated more than forecast in the final quarter of FY22/23 (fiscal ending March) to 6.1% from 4.5% in Q3. A rebound in government spending and robust growth in private investment led to a sharp rise in output. For FY22/23 overall, GDP grew by 7.2%, higher than the previously estimated 7%. The government has retained its forecast of around 6.5% growth for the current fiscal year, with risks being "evenly balanced" now. Recent indicators point towards an uneven momentum, though. The latest PMI surveys have been solid (near their record-highs), underpinning continued strong business activity.

In contrast, growth in indirect tax collections has slowed, while private consumption has been muted. Moreover, the adverse impact of delayed and possibly below-optimal monsoon rains may be felt later this year, resulting in curtailed agricultural output and softer demand in the rural belt. On the brighter side, a general election next year should propel government spending higher on populist measures in the coming months, somewhat offsetting the weaker private consumption.

Consumer price inflation has been moderating, with price growth slowing to a 25-month low of 4.3% in May from 4.7% in April, as food inflation softened to 2.9% from 3.8%. However, food inflation may reverse course if grain output takes a big hit in case of a below-normal monsoon season this year. That said, the Reserve Bank of India has maintained a pause (repo rate at 6.5%) in its last two policy meetings, signaling continuation of tight monetary conditions, despite modestly lowering its inflation outlook for this year to 5.1%.

NBK receives two awards

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has been recognized by Global Finance with two awards, with Group Digital Office being awarded as the "Best Financial Innovation Lab in Kuwait for 2023" and the banks' innovative solutions being awarded the "Top Innovations in Finance for 2023" at the magazine's prestigious annual event, The Innovators. This acknowledgment is determined based on feedback from a distinguished panel of experts, analysts, consultants, and global corporate executives.

The awards highlight the leading players and emerging trends in banking innovation and have become one of the premier awards in the field. This year marks the third year in a row of claiming the "Best Financial Innovation Lab in Kuwait for 2023" award, demonstrating its pioneering role as the first Kuwaiti bank to champion innovation, both domestically and regionally.

NBK's commitment to digital is a central tenet and adopts a holistic approach, from expanding their product line-up to guaranteeing the best user experience for customers. Thus, NBK established Group Digital Office (GDO), as an internal digital transformation agency and innovation lab. GDO supports and fosters digital change in close collaboration with business units and other stakeholders. This is achieved through accelerating digital initiatives, consolidating talent, and bringing new ideas through FinTech partnerships.

The unit accomplishes this by combining the Digital Products & Services Team, the Design Center, and the Innovation Team into one cohesive team, by utilizing agile workflow, design thinking, and global research mechanisms, NBK facilitates



Mohammed Al-Othman, CEO of Consumer & Digital Banking Group, with the Group Digital Office (GDO) team.



the acceleration of the comprehensive digital roadmap. NBK continues to engage with numerous startups and FinTech companies worldwide, enabling the bank to source new innovations to deliver to customers, expanding NBK's digital offering. Moreover, the constant analysis and circulation of global trends is a key responsibility of GDO, informing the organization about upcoming innovations and facilitating knowledge transfer.

On the other hand, NBK received "Top Innovations in Finance for 2023" award for its novel digital solutions, Digital Investment Engagement, and the New NBK Mobile Banking Application which was recently launched this year to provide customers a us-

er-friendly, personalized, and more convenient banking experience. As the NBK Mobile Application is the most essential tool for customers and their most intimate connection with NBK day-to-day, the new application was created to put NBK customers at the central part of the innovation process.

Customer feedback was taken into account across all journeys, meaning several experiences throughout the app required changes. Employing Design Thinking allowed NBK to empathize with the end user's experiences, and using Agile Methodology enabled the growth of the project week-by-week. With customers at the heart, we are excited to build upon this founda-

tion with many new features to come.

Global Finance's Innovators Awards honor innovative institutions — exceptional labs, banks and FinTech from seven global regions (Africa, Asia Pacific, Central & Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America and Western Europe). This annual awards program recognizes entities that regularly identify new paths and design new tools in finance. Global Finance, founded in 1987, is one of the most reputable magazines specializing in finance and economics. It has a circulation of 50,000 readers in 193 countries, including senior corporate and financial officers responsible for making investment and strategic decisions at multinational companies and financial institutions.

The magazine conducts various surveys annually about innovation and profitability for banks and financial institutions all over the world, based on which it selects top performers on the regional and international levels. For more information about Global Finance World's Best Financial Innovation Labs Award for 2023 and "Top Innovations in Finance for 2023", you can visit their website: <https://www.gfmag.com/media/press-releases/global-finance-names-worlds-best-financial-innovation-labs>

UK economy returns to modest growth

LONDON: The UK economy returned to modest growth in April on strong consumer spending, official data showed Wednesday, stoking hopes it will avoid recession despite high inflation and rising interest rates. Gross domestic product increased by 0.2 percent in April following a fall of 0.3 percent in March, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. Activity was boosted by consumer expenditure on shopping and hospitality, while the reading was in line with market expectations.

"GDP bounced back after a weak March," said ONS director of economic statistics Darren Morgan. "Bars and pubs had a comparatively strong April, while car sales rebounded and education partially recovered from the effect of the previous month's strikes." The British economy was 0.3 percent larger than its pre-pandemic level. Finance minister Jeremy Hunt welcomed the upbeat data but cautioned over the outlook. "We are growing the economy," Hunt said in response. "But high growth needs low inflation," he added.

UK annual inflation slowed to a 13-month low in April, but remains elevated at 8.7 percent as soaring food prices offset weaker energy costs. Official data for May is due next week. The Bank of England last month lifted its key interest rate to 4.50 percent, its 12th increase in a row, and is widely expected to hike again next week in a bid to tame stubbornly high consumer prices. "Persistent inflation and higher interest rates continue to constrain the UK economy, yet April marked a welcome return to growth," said Jack Sirett, partner at global financial services firm Ebury. "The likelihood of recession continues to fade," he added. — AFP

Business

IMF and World Bank 'key counterweights to China'

Yellen seeks congressional support for US to lend more money

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday that international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank "reflect American values" and serve as key counterweights to "unsustainable lending from others like China." Speaking before the House Financial Services Committee, she sought congressional support for the United States to lend more money to such organizations, going towards helping developing countries.

"Our leadership at these institutions is one of the core ways of engaging with emerging markets and developing countries," Yellen told lawmakers. Assistance from international financial institutions comes "with strong requirements for governance, accountability, and debt sustainability," she said. "It serves as an

important counterweight to nontransparent, unsustainable lending from others like China," she added. Yellen's comments come at a time of heightened tensions between the world's two biggest economies, and both are also jostling for influence in the developing world.

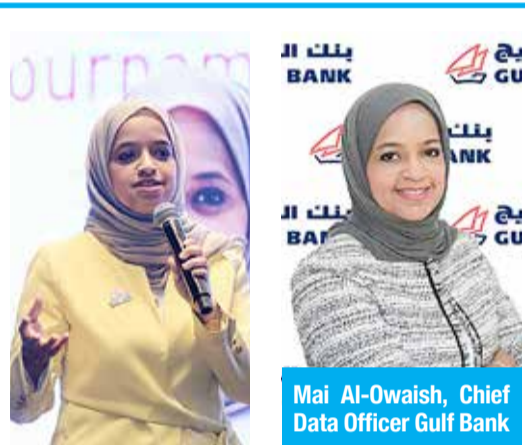
For now, Yellen said US authorities sought permission to continue participating in the International Monetary Fund's "New Arrangements to Borrow," a backstop to the fund's resources, and also seeks permission to lend up to \$21 billion to two IMF funds. Yellen also said she did not think China should qualify for the World Bank's loans, and that Washington would not vote in favor of the bank lending to China. Asked about Yellen's comments that international financial institutions reflect American values, a Chinese

foreign ministry spokesman said: "The IMF is not the IMF of the United States, nor is the World Bank for that matter."

US authorities have also worked to convince other countries to cease such funding. On security issues, Yellen said: "We are looking at potential restrictions on outbound investment, that could pertain to private equity firms that invest in Chinese firms with connections to their military." "We are worried about potential national security risks," she said. But she stressed it is not in America's interest to stifle the Chinese people's economic progress. "I think we gain in trying to gain from trade and investment that is as open as possible, and it would be disastrous for us to attempt to decouple from China. De-risk, yes. Decouple? Absolutely not," she said. — AFP



WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen testifies before the House Financial Services Committee at the Rayburn House Office Building on June 13, 2023 in Washington, DC. — AFP



Mai Al-Owaish, Chief Data Officer Gulf Bank

Gulf Bank celebrates 70 new data ambassadors

KUWAIT: As part of the bank's successful digital transformation journey, and its keenness to develop and enhance the skills of its employees, Gulf Bank has concluded the second edition of its Data Ambassadors program – the first of its kind data and analytics program in Kuwait. The program aims to up skill, and empower, employees to use advanced data science, which was developed by Kuwaitis within the bank, and approved by world-famous data expert, Dr Thomas Redman.

On this occasion, Gulf Bank's Chief Data Officer (CDO), Mai Al-Owaish, said, "We are pleased with the 70 Gulf Bank employees who graduated from the second Data Ambassadors program, increasing the total number of graduates from the first and second edition to 210. We are very proud of the various talents within the bank." She added: "The Data Ambassadors Program is part of Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, which aims to consolidate Gulf Bank's leading position as the Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The program also falls in line with the national development plan, Kuwait Vision 2035, which considers the development of human talent as one of its main pillars."

Al-Owaish also indicated that Gulf Bank is keen to empower its human talent across various disciplines, in light of the pivotal role that data plays in various sectors and fields. The program aims to help employees benefit from data – providing them with the tools and knowledge to extract ideas and information efficiently, whilst maintaining data integrity and quality.

She added: "At Gulf Bank, we firmly believe that our employees are the foundation of our success, and the secret behind our excellence. That is why we invest in them, train them and provide them with new skills to keep pace with the requirements of the job market, and the continuous changes witnessed by the banking industry."

She continued stating: "We are working to invest in integrated technological solutions to facilitate digital transformation within the bank and beyond, by spreading data culture. Gulf Bank is proud to have demonstrated a dynamic response to the digital requirements that the banking industry is witnessing both locally and globally." Al-Owaish concluded: "We are proud to develop our in-house talents in various digital disciplines such as data science and cybersecurity, and we are excited to reap the many benefits that result from encouraging our employees to build their critical thinking abilities and learn how to use, and manage, data science."

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

Al Muzaini Exchange Company opens its 130th branch in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The number one money exchange company in Kuwait, Al Muzaini Exchange Company, opened its 130th branch in Kuwait in Fahaeel on June 13, 2023. This opening was extremely significant and the rapid expansion reflects the company's endeavor to always be near its customers. It also reinforces the company's commitment to providing the highest quality of financial services such as money transfers, foreign currency exchange and bill payments with convenience, comfort and safety and at the most competitive prices, seven days a week.

General Manager of Al Muzaini Exchange Company Hugh Fernandes, and the company's department managers and various senior personnel, inaugurated the new branch in Fahaeel. Fernandes stated: "We take great pride in strengthening our leading position in the local market and always place focus in ensuring that we provide the best financial services' experience to our customers in order to meet all their money transfer needs. We



always want to stay true to our mission; to always be near to our customers and to add to their convenience and the opening of our 130th branch is another step in that direction."

The company always strives to make its financial services accessible to all. In addition to its strong network of branches, Al Muzaini application pro-

vides simple and safe financial solutions and is packed with plenty of valuable features such as: Availability in all digital platforms, new customer registration, the ability to add a new beneficiary and benefits from the Western Union service and Visa Direct services that makes it possible for you to transfer anywhere, anytime.

Injazzat redefines commercial excellence with Catamaran Tower

KUWAIT: Injazzat Real Estate Development proudly unveils its latest commercial project, Catamaran Tower, in Kuwait City. The Catamaran Tower enjoys a distinctive location that greatly facilitates and ensures seamless and easy access for business owners, investors, and visitors. Catamaran promises to deliver a distinctive and exceptional business experience, positioning occupants in a class of their own among other businesses in the city. This prestigious project reflects the company's commitment to maintaining a pioneering path, catering to the evolving needs of businesses and individuals seeking bespoke spaces.

Catamaran Tower represents a strategic investment and development opportunity for Injazzat Real Estate Development and its stakeholders. Catamaran Tower's distinctive architecture was thoughtfully developed by Dar Al Jazera Consultants and the main con-

tractor of the construction agreement has been recently awarded to Sadeem Al-Kuwait for General Trading and Contracting Company.

The slogan of Catamaran Tower, "In a Class of Your Own," encapsulates the essence of this exceptional commercial project. The Tower is situated on Omar Bin Al Khattab Street, featuring a total of 44 floors, including six floors dedicated to parking, providing utmost convenience for tenants and visitors in and out of the offices within the Tower.

Catamaran's architectural design exemplifies elegance and modernity, seamlessly blending with the urban landscape of Kuwait City. The striking facade and meticulously designed interior spaces create an inviting and inspiring atmosphere for employees, clients, and visitors. Catamaran provides a diverse range of commercial spaces to suit businesses of all sizes, including the desired privacy of services for each space.

Injazzat Real Estate continues to demonstrate its dedication to delivering innovative and high-quality real estate solutions that meet the evolving needs of businesses and investors with full commitment to the trust and development standards desired and needed.



Ubisoft sets sights on VR, AI shakeups in future of gaming

LOS ANGELES: French videogame titan Ubisoft is eyeing artificial intelligence and virtual reality as the next big things in gaming, its chief executive said, especially ahead of the release of Apple's new mixed reality headset. Ubisoft has long been known to take chances on new gaming innovations – the company launched an early partnership with Nintendo on its 2006 sensation the Wii console. Now, ahead of next year's release of Apple's Vision Pro headset, Ubisoft chief executive Yves Guillemot is ready to make another bet on the future of gaming – that virtual reality is around the corner.

After a decade that saw the revolutionary rise of free-to-play smartphone games and titles streamed directly from the internet cloud, Guillemot thinks VR is likely to be the next major industry disruptor. "VR is eventually going to happen," he told AFP Monday at a company showcase event in Los Angeles. "Apple investing massively in the field is fantastic for all of us," he added. With Vision Pro, Apple joins Facebook's Meta, which had been the driving force behind VR video games, in lobbying studios to adapt versions of hit titles for its virtual reality Quest device. "Apple's commitment and investment will take that industry

to a new level," said Guillemot, and Ubisoft "for sure" envisions developing games for the Vision Pro one day. "It's going to come," Guillemot said, as soon as enough of the \$3,500 headsets are in users' hands.

Expanding horizons

Designing games for new platforms "doesn't always work out perfectly," warned consumer behavior analysis firm Circana's executive director of videogames Mat Piscatella. "But, by supporting new market entrants, Ubisoft is usually well-positioned should that new product or service type succeed, and placing many bets seems to have generally worked out pretty well for the company over the years," the analyst said.

And in an era of consolidation in the game industry, Piscatella praised Ubisoft's diversification strategy as the company broadens its entertainment offerings. CEO Guillemot said Ubisoft would continue to expand into film and TV streaming content. Ubisoft is behind the AppleTV hit "Mythic Quest," a comedy series set – naturally – in a video game studio. And on Monday, the company announced that its animated series "Captain Laserhawk: A Blood Dragon Remix" will debut on Netflix later this year.

The series is set in "a dystopian, cyberpunk version of 1992" and features versions of characters from Ubisoft games. "The goal here is to make sure that our brands can reach more players all over the world," Guillemot told AFP. "Being on Netflix or Amazon Prime or other networks can make those brands better known and let everyone in the



LOS ANGELES: People attend the Ubisoft Forward livestream event in Los Angeles, California. The event features a look at upcoming Ubisoft games. — AFP

world participate in our creations." At the Los Angeles event Monday, Ubisoft also announced a free-to-play version of its blockbuster "Assassin's Creed" franchise, along with a virtual reality version of the game compatible with Meta's Quest gear. In addition, Ubisoft teased a video game spun off the blockbuster "Avatar" movies as well as a "Star Wars Outlaws" title made with LucasFilm.

AI games

Also on deck to shake up the world of video games is artificial intelligence, said Guillemot. He said he sees generative AI as a "fantastic opportunity," especially given how eagerly users have taken to the technology since the Microsoft-backed

ChatGPT bot was released late last year. "It's like inventing the mouse for the personal computer, it changed everything," Guillemot said. "Games are going to be more intelligent; as creators of games, we have to see how close we can get to what exists in real life." For example, a game might use generative AI to tap into computing power stored in the cloud, giving every character in its universe a spontaneous life of its own – players could encounter these personalities the same way they might meet a stranger on the street in the real world. "Video games (are) a \$200 billion industry today because we've always surprised gamers with new things," Guillemot said. "Gen AI and VR and cloud will make the industry even more attractive and fun." — AFP

'Joys of life': Hong Kong food traditions endure in city of flux



This photo taken on May 3, 2023 shows Lui Ming, the 93-year-old owner of Ming Shan Steel Bamboo Receptacles, making one of his bamboo steamers at his factory in Hong Kong. — AFP photos



Seafood dries in the sun in the Sai Ying Pun district.

Bent over a low bench in his cluttered Hong Kong workshop, dark-framed glasses perched on his nose, Lui Ming deftly assembles a bamboo steamer, a utensil essential to Cantonese cooking. It's a craft the 93-year-old has been perfecting for seven decades, and steamers like his are an indispensable part of yum cha, the Cantonese brunch involving tea and dim sum — perhaps the most prized culinary ritual in the city.

The circular bamboo baskets are ferried in small trolleys around yum cha restaurants, filled with bite-sized dumplings and other delicacies. "My only hobbies are yum cha and Cantonese opera," Lui tells AFP while twisting thin strips of bamboo to build the single most important dim sum-making tool. "Those are the joys of my life."

Hong Kong is equally acclaimed for its fine dining restaurants and its street-side eateries, and the enduring use of handwoven steamers in both is part of a set of unique food traditions that have shaped its culinary landscape for generations. As in many modern metropolises, the flow of commerce in the finance hub brings constant change, but Hong Kong's cuisine remains wedded to a network of traditions that residents view as staunch markers of local identity.

"Bamboo steamers absorb moisture and there won't be condensation (on the lid)," Lui explains, adding that metal or plastic versions would never pass as part of an authentic yum cha experience in Hong Kong. But he does add steel around the bamboo rim to make his steamers more durable and improve insulation, an innovation he says he pio-



A bamboo steamer of Yum Cha, Cantonese brunch involving tea and dim sum.

neered. "For steaming buns, there is no substitute."

Hong Kong institutions

Liu's shop is located on Shanghai Street, a historic stretch of road in Hong Kong's Kowloon district that is a treasure trove of kitchenware and utensils. One block north is Chan Chi Kee cutlery — a family-run Hong Kong institution more than 100 years old. Retired craftsman Chan, who is part of the clan that runs the shop and now in his 80s, spends much of his time there. He started forging cleavers when he was around 15 years old as part of the already-established family business.

"I was given a piece of metal and shaped it into a knife," he says, giving only his surname. "It was on the mountainside in the squatter huts... But eventual-



This picture taken on May 4, 2023 shows a worker sharpening a knife at a shop in the Sham Shui Po district.

ly there was not enough space — they built housing there." Today, Chinese chefs from around the world visit Chan Chi Kee's storefront on Shanghai Street to buy handcrafted cleavers and woks. "At least 80 percent of Chinese restaurants in Hong Kong use our knives," Chan tells AFP.

But rising property prices and the city's shift away from manufacturing has pushed the bulk of production for the knives, woks and steamers to Guangzhou, China — though a small select stock is still "Made in Hong Kong". Increased wages have also contributed to soaring costs, says Wong Yan-wai, a dried seafood trader for over three decades. "Most dried seafood is not processed in Hong Kong because of the high cost," Wong, 53, tells AFP. The fresh seafood is caught across the world and dried

on-site — in South Africa, Japan, Brazil and Australia — before being shipped to Wong's shop on Des Voeux Road.

More colloquially known as "Dried Seafood Street", it and its neighboring side streets are home to nearly 200 vendors hawking dried scallops, bird's nest, abalone, sea cucumber and more. Pulling out a dried fish bladder from an ornate gold box, Wong says it is priced at 168,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$21,500) due to its age and size. "For businesses that do well, they can make 800 million to a billion Hong Kong dollars a year in revenue."

'Modernize Cantonese food'

Ten minutes away, ArChan Chan deftly flips dried shrimp in a carbon steel Chan Chi Kee wok to make her version of the classic Cantonese dish known as stir-fry king. The 37-year-old chef at Ho Lee Fook, located in the glitzy Central district, is one of the city's most celebrated women chefs and among a handful of young innovators redefining Cantonese food. "One of the biggest challenges I have is how to modernize Cantonese food," ArChan says.

The answer lies in sourcing quality ingredients while making small tweaks to dishes' flavor profiles, such as adding fermented aged garlic soy to a classic razor clam dish. In her sleek kitchen, ArChan lifts the lid of a bamboo steamer to unveil three glistening vegetable dumplings, ready to be served. "There is such a big wealth of knowledge," she tells AFP. "I want to be able to learn and absorb as much as possible and just to pass it on." — AFP



A chef prepares roasted duck at a restaurant.



This photo taken on May 17, 2023 shows chef ArChan Chan speaking in the kitchen of the Ho Lee Fook restaurant in Hong Kong.



Venezuela's 'daily bread,' humble arepa conquers the world

From the streets of Caracas to trendy eateries in New York, Paris and Tokyo, the arepa, a humble cornmeal flatbread, is riding a wave of Venezuelan emigration and feeding a craving for exotic and gluten-free food. Prepared in just minutes by forming a ball from pre-cooked corn flour and water, it's flattened and then grilled. The arepa can be whatever you want: filled with anything from cheese and meat to beans or seafood, even greens.

A favorite in Venezuela is the "reina pepiada" — a mix of chicken, mayonnaise and avocado. The "viuda" or widow, comes without a filling — the ideal accompaniment for a soup but also the only option for many among Venezuela's poor. The arepa "is the daily bread of the Venezuelan. He eats it every day, every night," said Patrick Ribas, who translated into French the book "Arepologo" dedicated to the maize delicacy. "You can put anything you want in it. It's a dish. You can also eat it on its own when you don't have much money. This is unfortunately the case for many Venezuelans," he told AFP.

According to "Arepologo" author Ricardo Estrada Cuevas, the arepa "is a food that has no social class". "It is eaten by everyone, from the simplest and most humble people to (someone who is) a manager," he told AFP. "It is a food that everyone eats, in the same way, with the same fillings, with the same characteristics. Where there is a Venezuelan, there are arepas."

Amid a political and economic crisis that has seen their country's GDP shrink by 80 percent between 2013

and 2022, more than seven million Venezuelans — almost a quarter of the population — have emigrated in recent years. And they've taken their cuisine with them. Marlyn Quiroga, 47, was a lawyer in Venezuela but left five years ago for New York.

She did odd jobs until 2021, when she started an arepa catering business. This despite saying she "did not know how to cook an egg" before then. "I went door-to-door in Queens: to beauty salons, offices, clinics. I gave away free samples" to promote the business, Quiroga told AFP. Success came quickly, said the boss of "Arepa LaNewYorkquina", explaining that more and more people in the City That Never Sleeps now prefer gluten-free arepas to bread.

And on the other side of the Atlantic, "It's a change from the ubiquitous hamburger," said Jean-Francois Lamaison, a 63-year-old digital designer and diner at the Venezuelan restaurant "Ajidulce" in Paris. Ajidulce boss Luis Fernando Machado, a former petroleum engineer who moved to the French capital in 2011, told AFP he started with a food truck but now employs 10 people. His restaurant has an open kitchen so customers can see their meals being prepared. "Parisians love to discover exotic food," he said. "It is a bit like taking a trip to the Caribbean." It also helps to be listed on a register of gluten-free restaurants in the City of Light. "There are a lot of tourists who come" for that reason, said Machado. — AFP



Cook Alfredo Lopez prepares arepas in the kitchen of the 'Arepa Lady' restaurant in the Queens borough of New York City on Jan 27, 2022.



Venezuelan Raul Marquez and his wife Miho Marquez pose for a picture inside their food truck where they prepare arepas, during a farmers' market event in Ichikawa, Chiba prefecture, a suburb east of Tokyo, on May 27, 2023.



A chef prepares arepas in the kitchen of the Arepa Lady restaurant in the Queens borough of New York City.



A woman cooks on a griddle the traditional Venezuelan food known as arepas (stuffed cornmeal tortillas) at a food truck parked on a street in the popular neighborhood of Santa Rosalia, located in the historic center of Caracas on May 31, 2023. — AFP photos

Albania's communist pyramid at last has a point

It was built as a bizarre memorial to Albania's paranoid communist dictator who cut the country off from the rest of the world. Now a brutalist pyramid in the heart of Tirana hopes to become a beacon of the Balkan country's transformation. The behemoth fit for a pharaoh was designed by Enver Hoxha's daughter as a museum to his memory just a few years after his death in 1985.

Inside the grey pyramid sat a huge gleaming statue of the "Great Teacher", who ruled the hermetically sealed country for four decades. Now it is being turned into a hub to boost the country's embryonic tech sector.

"What used to serve to glorify an individual has been completely overturned, it's becoming a place designed to educate people, not dedicated to one person but to thousands," said Martin Mata, co-president of the Albanian-American Development Foundation (AADF), one of the project's major stakeholders. The 15-million-euro project co-financed by the AADF and Albanian authorities will house an education center to train youngsters in all things digital in an after-school program that aims to attract 4,000 students a week.

'Money well spent'

Later this year Tirana's teenagers will be able to take classes in 3D modelling, computer programming and digital design on state-of-the-art equipment in the old communist relic. The building has had several lives since the fall of communism and become a marker of the fast-changing nation, serving as a nightclub, NATO offices and a television studio.



Tourists climb the stairs to the top of the Pyramid of Tirana.



This aerial photograph shows the Pyramid of Tirana on May 24, 2023. — AFP photos

But its newest iteration may prove to be its most important, its backers hope, with Albania losing thousands of young people every year who leave to find work abroad. "It's money well spent," Mata said. "If 10 years from now we see that 200,000 kids have participated — and if 30 percent of those kids chose a career path because of what they learned... then mission accomplished."

The pyramid's once-dilapidated interior has been reimaged by Dutch and Albanian architects, with massive windows channeling natural light over colorful office blocks. "Our ambition was to open it up to the public, to make it the people's pyramid both inside and out," said architect Gent Agolli.

'A mirror'

The digital education program known as Tumo — which has been piloted in cities such as Paris, Yerevan, Beirut and Berlin — already welcomes around a thousand young people a week to a complex at the national stadium in Tirana. "All the knowledge



Teens attend an educational class at the Tumo Center near the Arena Kombetare stadium on May 24, 2023 in Tirana.

acquired here will be useful to them now, but above all in the future, whatever profession they pursue," Tumo Tirana director Shqipe Berisha, 41, told AFP.



In September, the teenagers, mentors and professional trainers will pick up sticks and transfer their operations to the pyramid.

The 12,000-sq-m structure will also house an array of businesses and cafes. The rents will be used

to subsidize Tumo Tirana, making the courses as accessible as possible to Albanian students. For Berisha, the pyramid has long served as a symbol of Albania's turbulent transformation. "To me the pyramid is like a mirror of what Albania has been like over the years," she said. For "our parents (it was used to) try to explain the regime. In my time we used to slide down the pyramid's [exterior], after that it was in bits and pieces just as the country was in bits and pieces. Now it is open. It reflects the openness of the country."

Tumo student Amina Xhembulla, 15, has taken an interest in graphic design since enrolling, with pupils encouraged to create a portfolio showing off their work for universities or potential employers in the future. "It's helpful, not stressful," Xhembulla said as she scrolled through projects she had worked on recently. "You can use technology we can't use at school." Asked for her opinion on the pyramid's dark past, the teenager shrugged. "I don't know much about history." — AFP

Hit by Russian war, UNESCO-listed Czech spas seek restart

UNESCO-listed Czech spa towns are hunting for new clients following a dramatic decrease in their foreign clientele due to the COVID outbreak and Russia's war on Ukraine. While the anti-pandemic measures shuttered spa facilities temporarily, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and subsequent sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union slashed the number of big-spending Russian clients virtually to zero.

The western Czech spa towns of Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně saw a glimmer of hope when UNESCO placed them on its World Heritage List, alongside eight other towns in western Europe, in 2021. They were still reeling from the pandemic that had crimped tourism across the globe a year earlier. But their joy was short-lived, as Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 and the Czech Republic, an EU member of 10.8 million, joined the sanctions.

"Our spas lost 80 percent of their clients from one day to the next," said Andrea Pfeffer Ferklova, the mayor of Karlovy Vary, which became a hit among Russian investors and tourists following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 2019, Czech spas registered 880,000 visitors. The number then fell to just over 500,000 in 2020 and 2021 before rising again to 840,000 last year.

But foreign client numbers fell from nearly 400,000 to fewer than 300,000

between 2019 and 2022, and the share of Russians tumbled from 61,000 to just a few thousand. "The average Czech tourist spends around 700 koruna (\$32) a day. Russian-speaking clients spend over 3,500 koruna a day," said Jan Hergert, director of the state agency Czech Tourism. "So the total numbers are not so different, but financially it's a slump." Clients from western neighbor Germany, the most frequent foreign guests at Czech spas, making up around one-quarter of the total, spend around 2,000 koruna a day, Hergert added.

'Pamper local clients'

Russian tourists also tended to stay for several weeks, while Czechs prefer weekend sojourns. "We can see a tendency to switch from spa treatment stays to wellness and short-term stays. We're living in fast times," Pfeffer Ferklova said. Spas are also grappling with a lack of staff, who are difficult to recruit with Czech unemployment hovering down around 3.5 percent for the past two years. Another problem is inflation, which is only slowly decreasing from a record-high 18 percent in September last year, making Czechs reconsider their spending.

Eduard Blaha, head of the Czech Healing Spa Association, said it was a mistake to focus on Russian clients. "We need to pamper local clients and offer them all options from treatment to tourism and wellness," he said. Czech Tourism is planning to woo clients from the Middle East and from former Soviet



A woman walks past a Russian shop on March 29, 2022 in Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic. — AFP

Union countries such as Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan. "We need to make up for the drop in Russian guest numbers, because it's obvious that they are not coming back," Hergert said.

Local spas could also treat patients suffering from the effects of COVID-19 from European countries with no spas, said Martin Plachy, deputy head of the Czech Healing Spa Association. The

western Czech spas are also planning joint promotion with other UNESCO-listed spa towns from Austria, Belgium, Britain, France, Germany and Italy. "We would like to use UNESCO for a joint campaign for instance in the United States," Hergert said.

Pfeffer Ferklova said the UNESCO-listed towns were cooperating on marketing and presentation, adding

that the western European spa towns were hit by the Russian war too. "I was in Baden-Baden (in Germany) last week, and they have exactly the same problem with the outflow of clients as Karlovy Vary," she said. — AFP

Syrians turn plastic waste into rugs to make a living



In this picture taken on June 1, 2023, a worker washes plastic gathered from dump sites after being crushed into small pieces to be used for recycling, at a scrapyard near the village of Ram Hamdan in Idlib province. — AFP photos



In this picture taken on June 1, 2023, a child works at a factory making mats and rugs from recycled plastic in Sarmada in Syria's northwestern Idlib province.



In this picture taken on June 3, 2023, people surround rubbish trucks as they unload at a dump site, to collect plastic items to sell for recycling, near the village of Hazreh in Syria's northwestern Idlib province.



A worker uses a machine to cut plastic junk gathered from dump sites.



A man works at a factory making mats and rugs from recycled plastic.

At a rubbish dump in northwest Syria, Mohammed Behlal rummages for plastic to be sold to recyclers and transformed into floor rugs and other items in the impoverished rebel enclave. In rebel-held Syria, recycling is rarely an environmental impulse but rather a grim lifeline for needy residents looking for work or items they otherwise could not afford. Braving the stench, insects and risk of disease, 39-year-old Behlal hacks through the rubbish pile with a scythe and his bare hands.

He and two of his six children earn a living sifting through the refuse in Idlib province's village of Hazreh, earning \$7 to \$10 a week each. "It's tiring... but what can we do, we have to put up with this hard labor," said Behlal, who was displaced from neighboring Aleppo province during Syria's civil war. "Thank God, at least we have work with the trash," he added.

Behlal was shot in the leg during fighting and has had trouble finding employment. Hunched over to collect pieces of plastic or metal, he throws everything into a bag to sell to a nearby scrap facility. Syria's conflict has killed more than 500,000 people, and around half of the country's pre-war population has been forced from their homes since fighting broke out in 2011.

More than four million people, most of them dependent on aid, live in areas controlled by jihadists and Turkish-backed groups in Syria's north and northwest. In a large scrapyard next to agricultural fields, workers sort plastic junk loosely into piles according to color. They then cut it up and crush it into small pieces that are washed and melted into plastic pellets.

Plastic thread

Farhan Sleiman, 29, is among those who handle the material brought in from the landfill. "We buy plastic from roaming trash-picker trucks and children," said Sleiman, originally from Homs province. He expressed fear of the risk of contracting "cholera or chronic illnesses" from working with the rubbish.

Elsewhere in northern Idlib province, workers at a factory making mats and rugs churn out brightly colored plastic thread while large weaving



In this picture taken on June 3, 2023, Mohammed Behlal, 39, sifts through rubbish looking for plastic items to sell.



In this aerial view taken on June 3, 2023, a child smiles as she sifts through the rubbish with a scythe, looking for plastic items to sell for recycling, at a dump site near the village of Hazreh in



A young boy works at a scrapyard.



This aerial view taken on June 1, 2023 shows a worker standing inside a scrapyard where plastic junk gathered from dump sites is sorted for recycling, near the village of Ram Hamdan in Idlib province.

machines click and clack. Factory owner Khaled Rashu, 34, says rug-making is a family tradition. "We have more than 30 employees" at the factory, he boasted as a significant feat in a region where many are jobless.

Large mats featuring geometric designs, some made with striking red or purple plastic thread, emerge from the weaving machines and are stacked into piles. Shop owner Mohammed Al-Qassem, 30, is among those selling the mats, which he says are a hit in an area where many people are displaced and live in basic tents or makeshift dwellings. The mats made from recycled plastic cost between \$5 and \$15, while traditional Persian-style rugs are around \$100. "In summer, demand for plastic mats increases" because they retain less heat, Qassem said from his shop in Maaret Masrin, a town in Idlib province. But "they can also be used in winter and are less costly", he added. — AFP



In this picture taken on June 7, 2023, people sit on a carpet made of recycled plastic, inside a tent at a camp for displaced people in Syria's rebel-held town of Al-Dana in Idlib province.

Sports



Ben Stokes



Brendon McCullum

England 'Bazball' revolution faces ultimate test in Ashes

Have they gotten a Plan B? Doubt persists

LONDON: Can England regain the Ashes playing their ultra-aggressive "Bazball" brand of cricket or will they come unstuck against battle-hardened Australia? The answer will come over the coming weeks, starting with the first Test of a hotly anticipated five-match series at Edgbaston on Friday. England have forced the rest of the world to sit up and take notice, with 11 wins in 13 Tests since captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum joined forces last year.

But doubts persist as to whether their policy of all-out attack can work against arch-rivals Australia, who only last week hammered India by 209 runs at The Oval to win the World Test Championship final. Steve Waugh, the last Australia captain to win an Ashes series in England, back in 2001, is not alone in questioning whether Stokes's side have an alternative plan. "Have they got a Plan B?" Waugh said to the Australian media. "They have shown they are good enough to carry this style of cricket off but the ultimate test will be against a world-class bowling attack, which Australia has got."

England had won just one out of 17 Tests be-

fore newly appointed English cricket chief Rob Key brought McCullum and Stokes together to oversee a dynamic revamp of their long-format game dubbed "Bazball", in reference to the nickname of former New Zealand captain McCullum. And all-rounder Stokes is adamant he has no intention of altering his approach. "Nothing is going to change because we've had unbelievable success with it," the 32-year-old told the BBC. "If we were to change anything from the last 12 months because we find ourselves in an Ashes series then anything from the last 12 months will have been completely pointless."

Strike rate

England have scored at an eye-watering 4.85 runs an over in the past year. And England great James Anderson, Test cricket's most successful pacesman, said that had benefits for the bowlers as well. "The (bowling) run-rate is irrelevant to Ben in particular," explained Anderson. "He's like 'I don't care how many runs you go for, I want 20 wickets as quickly as possible'."

You're constantly thinking, as a bowler then, about 'How am I taking my next wicket?'" Of more immediate concern to England fans than Stokes's philosophy is his fitness. Stokes, a lively seamer, opted against bowling himself in England's recent 10-wicket win over Ireland after struggling with a knee injury. He has since declared himself fit to bowl and with Anderson and fellow pacesman Ollie Robinson suffering niggling injuries, the hosts will hope he can make good on those words.

England will be without Jack Leach for the whole Ashes after the left-arm spinner was ruled out with a back problem. Moeen Ali has been recalled in his absence and the off-spinner's two-year Test retirement could end at his Edgbaston home ground, even though he averages an expensive 64.65 in Ashes cricket. Ashes-holders Australia, by contrast, have a proven world-class off-spinner in Nathan Lyon, who is closing in on 500 Test wickets.

Captain Pat Cummins is in the fortunate position of deciding if either Mitchell Starc or Josh Hazlewood joins him in a fast-bowling attack likely to in-

clude Scott Boland. Boland's fine WTC final display - he took five wickets in the match - left him with 33 wickets in eight Tests at a miserly average of 14.57. Second-ranked Australia drew the last Ashes series in England in 2019 2-2 and demolished the old enemy 4-0 on home turf in 2021/22. But they have not won a series in England for 22 years, with many of their batsmen, the outstanding Steve Smith excepted, struggling to adapt to English conditions.

Australia have now gone 12 Test innings in England since enjoying a first-wicket stand of 20 or more, while under-pressure opener David Warner, 36, has now managed just one century in his past 34 Test innings against all opponents. His battle with his nemesis, pacesman Stuart Broad, will be just one of a number of fascinating subplots, with Tests at Lord's, Headingley, Old Trafford and The Oval to follow the curtain-raiser in Birmingham. "An Ashes (in England) is bloody hard to win. It's been 20-odd years so it's not going to be easy," said the 30-year-old Cummins. "If we win, that is legacy-defining stuff." — AFP



Nepal's cricketer Sandeep Lamichhane

Lamichhane spearheads Nepal's WCup dreams

KATHMANDU: Sandeep Lamichhane is set to play a key role in Nepal's bid to seal a place at the one-day World Cup for the first time despite the former skipper being on bail for an alleged rape. Nepal face hosts Zimbabwe on Sunday in Harare at the start of a qualifying tournament pitting 10 teams fighting it out for two prized spots at the World Cup in India in October. Sri Lanka, the West Indies, Ireland and the hosts are among the favorites but Nepal - who only gained one-day international status in 2018 - hope to spring a surprise.

Central to their chances is 22-year-old spin bowler Lamichhane, once the poster boy for the rise of cricket in Nepal. "Lamichhane is a crucial player for our team," said Britant Khanal, general manager of the Cricket Association of Nepal. "He has performed very well in the last few matches despite a case against him in court." Lamichhane is accused of raping a 17-year-old girl in a Kathmandu hotel room in August last year. He denies all wrongdoing.

He was suspended as national captain and arrested, but was freed on bail in January and Nepal then lifted his ban on playing. Under his bail conditions, Lamichhane is able to travel abroad. In the capital Kathmandu there is excitement about the qualifiers, with many fans on social media backing the inclusion of Lamichhane - and only a small number against it. Nepal go into the qualifying tournament with momentum. They won 11 of their last 12 matches to take third spot in World Cup League 2 and reach the tournament in Zimbabwe.

Top-order batsman Aasif Sheikh told the International Cricket Council that there was confidence within the squad. "We believe that if we play our best cricket on that day, we are going to win," he said. Khanal was more measured, calling Nepal's hopes of reaching the World Cup "a long shot", before adding: "But we are confident that our team's performance will be outstanding." Part of Nepal's success has come from playing in front of packed houses at their home Tribhuvan University Cricket Ground - something they will not be able to rely on in Zimbabwe.

"Our team shows extraordinary performance when they are playing in the home ground, but when in a foreign stadium, the performance has not remained satisfactory," Khanal said. "Another weakness is our overreliance on two or three players - including Sandeep Lamichhane - which should not have been the case." After meeting Zimbabwe in Harare, Nepal will play the United States, the West Indies and the Netherlands as they try and make their World Cup dreams come true. On Tuesday they suffered a three-wicket defeat to fellow World Cup hopefuls the UAE in a warm-up match in Harare. — AFP

Rahm, Koepka seek to keep Open focus amid merger turmoil

LOS ANGELES: Jon Rahm says the merger of the PGA Tour and LIV Golf's Saudi backers has left golfers in limbo, but Brooks Koepka isn't daunted by a little "chaos" at this week's US Open. The winners of the first two majors of the year — Rahm claimed his second major title at the Masters in April and Koepka bagged his fifth at the PGA Championship last month — were among the many blindsided by the shock announcement last week that the PGA Tour and DP World Tour would join forces with the Saudi Public Investment Fund.

The deal is being billed as one that will end the bitter rift that erupted when the breakaway LIV Golf league launched in October 2021. But the merger has already drawn scrutiny from US lawmakers, and with nothing official and few details released of how the rapprochement will unfold, players arriving at Los Angeles Country Club for the 123rd US Open almost uniformly said they were just trying to shut out the politics and focus on the task at hand. "It's tough when it's the week before a major," said Rahm, who said the sudden revelation felt like a "betrayal" by US PGA Tour officials.

"I want to have faith that this is the best thing for all of us, but it's clear that that's not the consensus," Rahm said. "I think the general feeling is that a lot of people feel a bit of betrayal from management." Rahm said he understood the need to keep negotiations quiet, but with so little information available about what the future golf landscape will look like "we're all in a bit of a state of limbo because we don't know what's going on and how much is finalized and how much they can talk about, either."

While another layer of uncertainty is the last thing Rahm wants to see at a US Open, Koepka said his ability to shut out distractions is one of his main advantages at a major championship. "I enjoy the chaos," Koepka said. "The more chaotic things get the easier it gets for me. Everything starts to slow down and I am able to focus on whatever I need to focus on while everybody else is dealing with distractions, worried about other things."

Rahm and Koepka are among the favorites this week, along with world number one Scottie Scheffler, third-ranked Rory McIlroy and reigning British Open champion Cameron Smith. England's Matt Fitzpatrick defends the title he won last year at Brookline and like many in the field is unfamiliar with the par-70 Los Angeles Country Club North Course

PGA Tour chief stepping back

LOS ANGELES: Under-fire PGA Tour chief Jay Monahan is stepping away from day-to-day operations of the tour as he recovers from an undisclosed medical situation, a statement said Tuesday. Monahan has faced stinging criticism in the wake of the PGA Tour's shock merger with the Saudi backers of LIV Golf last week, with multiple players calling for him to resign.

A brief joint statement from Monahan and the PGA Tour policy board on Tuesday said Monahan would step back from his duties for an unspecified period as he recovers. "Jay Monahan informed the PGA TOUR Policy board that he is recuperating



LOS ANGELES: Jon Rahm of Spain plays a shot during a practice round prior to the 123rd US Open Championship at The Los Angeles Country Club on June 13, 2023. — AFP photos



LOS ANGELES: Brooks Koepka of the United States plays a shot during a practice round prior to the 123rd US Open Championship at The Los Angeles Country Club on June 13, 2023.

— which last hosted a PGA Tour event when it held the Los Angeles Open in 1940.

All the ingredients

Koepka's PGA Tour triumph at Oak Hill made him the first LIV golfer to win a major title, and signaled his return to top form in the wake of 2021 right knee surgery that he once feared would derail his career. Now he's eager to challenge for a third US Open title, to go with those he won in 2017 and 2018, and the tougher the US Golf Association makes it, the better he'll like it. "I just feel like I can outlast everybody when it comes to having to par things to death," Koepka said.

Rahm, who competed at LA Country Club as a star collegiate golfer, said it can provide just such a test, even though at first glance it doesn't resemble

the usual US Open challenge. "It is a US Open. Fairways and greens, hopefully two-putt and move on," Rahm said of what will be required. "I think it's deceptively wide. Those fairways look bigger than they play." "It makes you think," added Rahm, whose win at Augusta National was one of his four PGA Tour victories so far this year. "It's got everything. It's got all the ingredients to be a great week."

Scheffler, who played the course in the Walker Cup amateur matches in 2017, agreed. "I think this course is a really good mix of holes," Scheffler said. "The fairways maybe average a little bit wider than they usually are, but when you get fairways that are very firm, any sort of curve you put on the ball makes it play so much smaller. "With how firm I think we're going to get this golf course, it's going to be a really good test for all parts of the game." — AFP

from a medical situation," the statement said. "The board fully supports Jay and appreciates everyone respecting his privacy."

The statement said PGA Tour chief operating officer Ron Price and Tyler Dennis, executive vice president of the tour would lead "day-to-day operations" in Monahan's absence. "We will provide further updates as appropriate," the statement added. Monahan was the target of fury by PGA Tour players last week after news broke of the bombshell agreement that will see the tour and DP World Tour join forces with the Saudi backers of the LIV golf circuit.

Monahan - who had railed against LIV since its inception while simultaneously lobbying star tour players to resist huge paydays to join the circuit - was accused of hypocrisy after the volte face. Speaking in a media conference call following announcement of the merger, Monahan said he understood the criticism directed his way. — AFP



Jay Monahan

Sports

Hometown Homa dreams of major breakthrough as US Open returns

US Open returning to Los Angeles after 75-year hiatus

LOS ANGELES: California kid Max Homa dreamed of contending for a major in his hometown, and now that the US Open is returning to Los Angeles after a 75-year hiatus he could get his chance. Homa actually holds the course record on the Los Angeles Country Club's North Course, where he carded a 61 in the first round on the way to victory in the prestigious collegiate Pacific-12 conference championship in 2013.

The par-70 layout at the exclusive club, which last hosted a PGA Tour event in 1940, promises to offer an even tougher challenge this week, but Homa says the biggest obstacle to the major breakthrough he seeks is his own mindset. "You just look at how I played every other major, trying way too hard," said Homa, a six-time winner on the PGA Tour whose best major finish is a tie for 13th at last year's PGA Championship. In five prior US Opens his best finish is a tie for 47th at Brookline last year.

However, he said his excitement at the prospect of playing a US Open in his hometown has, paradoxically, helped him temper that tendency. "In an odd way, it's almost worked its way out positively because I've been thinking about this event for, like, a year, about how I can't try too hard, can't try too hard," he said. It's a lesson he let himself forget at last month's PGA Championship, where he finished tied for 55th. But that has only reinforced the

need to relax just a little. "Fortunately I'm coming off a PGA Championship that I tried too hard at, and it's right on the tip of my brain not to do that this week," Homa said.

Homa is certainly no stranger to success in Southern California. He won the Genesis Invitational at nearby Riviera in 2021 and claimed one of his two titles this year down the road at Torrey Pines. The world number seven is excited to play in front of family, friends and fans who know not only where he went to college but even where he went to high school. He's been careful to organize his week so he's to be distracted by requests for tickets and so forth so he can focus on his preparations, but not to the point that he gets in his own way.

"When you're trying too hard you care too much about where the ball goes," Homa said. "You're going to hit fairways, you're going to miss fairways. You're going to hit greens, you're going to miss greens. You're going to hit putts that go in and some that miss. I think it just comes down to stacking those up over the course of a week and seeing where that takes you. "I've done a very poor job of that in a lot of big golf tournaments, but especially the majors. I've done a good job of that in some other events, so I'm just trying to find whatever is in those moments where it's been great and take that to a championship like this." — AFP



ROCHESTER, New York: Max Homa of the United States plays his shot from the seventh tee during the first round of the 2023 PGA Championship at Oak Hill Country Club on May 18, 2023 in Rochester, New York. — AFP

Steijn replaces Heitinga as Ajax new boss

AMSTERDAM: Sparta Rotterdam coach Maurice Steijn was named Ajax's new boss by the Dutch club on Wednesday, taking over from the departed ex-Netherlands defender John Heitinga. Heitinga's contract was not renewed at the end of last season as Ajax failed to qualify for the Champions League after finishing third in the Dutch top-tier. The former Everton centre-back's departure came days after former Manchester United goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar announced he was resigning as chief executive.

Ajax's fortunes have flagged

since the departure of Erik ten Hag for United in April 2022. Steijn, 49, had been in charge at Sparta since 2022 after spells with Den Haag, VVV-Venlo, NAC Breda as well as Al-Wahda in the United Arab Emirates. "With all the clubs he worked for, the results exceeded the expectations," Ajax's director of football Sven Mislintat said in a club statement. "So, he has shown multiple times with his teams that he is a real overperformer."

He is ready for a step up, I'm sure of that," he added. Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman said he was surprised about Ajax's decision. "I think it's interesting, not strange, but interesting," Koeman told Dutch broadcaster NOS. "If you followed the news a bit, I would not have spoken about Maurice Steijn but a foreign coach. "I think it's good that it's a Dutch coach," he added. — AFP



Maurice Steijn

Najmul's ton guides Bangladesh to 362-5 against Afghanistan

DHAKA: Najmul Hossain struck his third Test century as Bangladesh dominated a hapless Afghanistan to score 362-5 on the first day of the one-off Test in Dhaka on Wednesday. Najmul made 146 off 175 balls and set up an imposing total in his 212-run second-wicket partnership with Mahmudul Hasan, who hit 76 to make his third Test fifty. Mushfiqur Rahim was not out on 41 alongside Mehidy Hasan Miraz on 43 when bad light forced stumps with 11 overs left.

Afghanistan, who are without talismanic all-rounder Rashid Khan, were on the back foot for most of the day after electing to bowl first on a rare green-top wicket at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium. Debutant medium pacer Nijat Masood was the most successful Afghan bowler with 2-67, removing Zakir Hasan for one on his very first Test delivery in the second over.

The sharp catch from wicket-keeper Afsar Zazai had to be confirmed by the television umpire after an initial decision of not out. But Najmul and Mahmudul immediately forged a strong partnership to take control of the proceedings and deny the visitors further momentum, despite pitch conditions working against them. "I am happy," Najmul

said. "It was not that easy to bat on... I only tried to execute my plan." Najmul hit back-to-back fours off Yamin Ahmadzai in the first over he came to bat and brought up his fifty off 58 balls with a boundary off leg-spinner Zahir.

Occasional spinner Rahmat Shah broke their partnership when Mahmudul attempted a cut shot only to edge a catch to Ibrahim Zadran at slip. Mahmudul hit nine boundaries in his sedate 137-ball innings. Afghanistan enjoyed a brief spell of success in the post-tea session when Nijat dismissed Mominul Haque, caught behind down the leg side, for 15. Najmul fell soon after, heaving a catch to Nasir Jamal at deep midwicket off left-arm spinner Amir Hamza in his attempt for his

third six in the innings. The 24-year-old left-hander smashed 23 fours in his fizzing innings.

Stand-in captain Liton Das followed him quickly, poking Zahir to Ibrahim at slip after making nine runs. But Mushfiqur and Mehidy halted further collapse and slowly reestablished Bangladesh's authority with their unbroken 72-run sixth wicket stand. "I don't think we bowled as well as we should have. I think there's a bit in the wicket," said Afghanistan bowling coach Jonathan Trott. "We need to do better tomorrow. It was a good lesson for the guys." Afghanistan won the only other Test between the two teams when they beat the home side by 224 runs at Chittagong in 2019. — AFP

Australia dominate rankings

LONDON: Australia will head into the Ashes series with their batters occupying the top three spots in the men's Test rankings. In the latest

weekly update from the International Cricket Council published on Wednesday, Marnus Labuschagne retains top spot with team-mates Steve Smith and Travis Head just below him.

The last time batsmen from the same side occupied the top three places was in 1984, when West Indies players Gordon Greenidge, Clive Lloyd and Larry Gomes filled the slots. Smith

scored a century in Australia's World Test Championship final win over India last week, while Head rises from sixth after scoring 163 in the same game at The Oval. Joe Root is the highest England batter at sixth in the list. Australia spinner Nathan Lyon has moved up to sixth in the bowling rankings after taking five wickets in the match against India. — AFP

News in Brief

Chelsea ex-player dies

LONDON: Former Chelsea player and manager John Hollins has died aged 76, the club announced on Wednesday. Hollins made his debut in 1963 and went on to make 592 appearances for the London side over two spells at Stamford Bridge, scoring 64 goals. He won the FA Cup, European Cup Winners' Cup and League Cup during his first period at the club, which ended in 1975. "He was a hero to the fans of this club, and very much that to me," said Chelsea board member Daniel Finkelstein. "He was at the heart of one of Chelsea's greatest teams and, as well as contributing to its trophy success, he expressed its spirit." Hollins, fifth on the all-time Chelsea appearances list, also played for QPR and Arsenal before returning to Stamford Bridge in 1983 for a final stint as a player. He played once for England, in 1967. He was Chelsea boss from 1985 to 1988 and later had coaching stints at Swansea, Rochdale and Stockport. — AFP

FFR names new chief

PARIS: The French Rugby Federation (FFR) announced it had appointed Florian Grill as its new president on Wednesday less than three months out from hosting the Rugby World Cup. Grill is also the head of the Greater Paris rugby committee and takes over from Alexandre Martinez, who had been in temporary charge after Bernard Laporte's resignation. Former France head coach Laporte stood down in January after being handed a two-year suspended prison sentence for corruption. Grill, 57, won 58.14% of the votes to beat Patrick Buisson, who had been in charge of amateur rugby under Laporte's presidency. He takes over a federation split, with Laporte continuing to have support in the FFR. After France's record win over England in March, Les Bleus head coach Fabien Galthie paid tribute to Laporte, a former sports minister. "We have work to do," Grill said. — AFP

Rugby Cup changes format

PARIS: The Champions Cup will change its format next season for the third time in five campaigns, the tournament's organizer European Professional Club Rugby (EPCR) announced on Wednesday. After three terms with two pools of 12 teams, which replaced the long-standing format of five groups of four in 2020, there will be a stage with four groups of six teams. Clubs from the United Rugby Championship, the French Top 14 and the English Premiership will also participate in the second-tier Challenge Cup alongside two invitational teams. "There will be no matches between clubs from the same league, so for the purposes of creating the fixtures, each club will play four matches against four different clubs who are not from the same league either home or away during the pool stage," EPCR said in a statement. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics

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Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
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Change of Name

I, (Ahmedi), holder of Indian Passport No. N7017922, having permanent address (State: Rajasthan, Country: India, Pin Code: 314025) residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Ahmedi (given name) and Husami (surname). **(#3807) 15-06-2023**

I, Fathima Muneeb, holder of Indian Passport No. V1965265, having permanent address 23-2-519/1, Hyderabad, Telangana, India, Pin code- 500002 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Fathima (given name) and Ayub (surname). **(#3806) 14-06-2023**

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. **(#3805) 13/06/2023**

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Embassy of India
Kuwait

TENDER No.- KUV/ADMN/872/01/2015

DATED- JUNE 15, 2023

TENDER NOTICE FOR REPLACEMENT OF FLOOR TILES

Embassy of India, Kuwait invites bids from interested companies for replacement of floor tiles in the chancery area of the Embassy.

Prospective / Interested companies are advised to inspect the area and present their offers in a sealed cover marked "Offer for replacement of floor tiles in the Embassy- to be opened by addressee only" and addressed to the "Head of Chancery, Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave, Arabian Gulf Street, Safat 13015, Kuwait." The bid must be submitted at the Embassy on or before 5th July, 2023.

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



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

Golden Knights win NHL Stanley Cup

Stone hits hat-trick as Golden Knights thrash Panthers 9-3



LAS VEGAS: The Vegas Golden Knights pose with the Stanley Cup after their 9-3 victory over the Florida Panthers in Game Five of the 2023 NHL Stanley Cup Final at T-Mobile Arena on June 13, 2023. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Mark Stone grabbed a brilliant hat-trick as the Vegas Golden Knights thrashed the Florida Panthers 9-3 on Tuesday to clinch the NHL Stanley Cup for the first time in the franchise's six-year history. The Knights, who had taken a commanding 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven series with a battling victory in Florida on Saturday, dominated throughout at Las Vegas' T-Mobile Arena to seal an emphatic victory over the Eastern Conference champions.

Florida were always struggling to keep a rampant Vegas at bay as the Knights became the fastest expansion team to win ice hockey's greatest prize, clinching the title in their sixth season. The previous record had been held by the Philadelphia Flyers, who won the title in their seventh season in the 1973-74 campaign. Vegas captain Stone's hat-trick was the

first by a player in a Stanley Cup-clinching game since Babe Dye achieved the feat for Toronto in 1922.

"I can't describe the feelings in my stomach right now, it's everything you would imagine," a jubilant Stone said after the victory. "The grind of an 82-game season, four playoff rounds — you grind, and you grind and you grind and at the end of the day, you're the last team standing. It's incredible. "I don't know what else to say — everyone on the team in those four walls, it's amazing."

Knights star Jonathan Marchessault was named Stanley Cup Most Valuable Player. The Panthers — also chasing a first Stanley Cup title — had been dealt a blow before game five started with confirmation that star player Matthew Tkachuk was ruled out with an undisclosed injury. After a

cagey opening, Vegas skipper Stone opened the scoring in the first period with a superb goal that came with the Knights shorthanded due to a Florida powerplay. Stone feinted cleverly to wrongfoot the Florida defense before lifting his shot past Panthers goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky.

Nicolas Hague made it 2-0 to Vegas soon afterwards, bundling home from close range after the puck squirted loose from beneath Bobrovsky during a furious goalmouth scramble. Aaron Ekblad raised hopes of a Florida recovery with a goal early in the second period to make it 2-1, but Vegas roared back with four unanswered goals in the same period to launch raucous celebrations amongst the home fans. Alex Martinez made it 3-1 after latching onto Jack Eichel's feed and slamming the puck into the top

corner before Reilly Smith extended the Vegas lead after scooping home a clever between-the-legs pass from Brett Howden.

Stone then smashed in his second of the game, his long-range effort going through Bobrovsky's legs to make it 5-1. With seconds remaining in the second period, Michael Amadio somehow bundled the puck in from close range to leave Vegas 6-1 up heading into the final period. Ivan Barbashev drove in a seventh goal early in the third period as the rout continued, before Florida hit back with back-to-back strikes from Sam Reinhart and Sam Bennett that made it 7-3. Yet it was only a fleeting interruption to the Vegas scoring, with Stone smashing a long-range effort into an empty net before Nicolas Roy made it 9-3. — AFP

Angry Kyrgios pleads for patience following straight-sets defeat

STUTTGART: Nick Kyrgios got upset over a lack of white towels and later pleaded for patience following a straight-sets defeat in Stuttgart to Wu Yibing on his return to tennis. The 25th-ranked Australian, who finished runner-up 11 months ago at Wimbledon to Novak Djokovic, lost 7-5, 6-3 to lower-ranked grass-court debutant Wu on Tuesday. Kyrgios, playing for the first time since undergoing knee surgery in January, tweeted afterwards: "Be patient with me my fans please. It's a process to get back to where I was."

"I know it's hard for you to see me perform like today, but I need more time and hopefully can get back to where I was." Kyrgios's mood turned sour in the first set, with complaints about the color of the towels, the bounce of the grass court and a shortage of sideline water. But it was the colored sponsor towels on court that got the famously fiery Australian steaming. "It took me three games to get

white towels," the 28-year-old said after his first-round loss to China's Wu, who is ranked 64th and won the Dallas title in February.

"They soak up the sweat better. I'm the same at every tourney. They all have white ones in the locker room. "I'm not asking to move mountains. White towels actually take the sweat off my body - we are professional athletes." Kyrgios, whose previous tour-level match was last October in Tokyo, added: "I have to get used to playing in front of the crowd again. Feeling the moments like break points - all that stuff is new to me again. "I made it through the match with no major pain. I've got a lot more work to do, but I'm taking some positive signs from it."

The loss still featured 15 aces from the big-serving Kyrgios, with the 23-year-old Wu hoping to improve his own serve as he gets more used to grass. "I'm very happy to have played Nick in the first round, he's one of the best players on grass," said the Chinese player, who faces Marton Fucsovics of Hungary next. "The key for me was to stay cool, stay patient and find a way. "He has a better serve than me, but I was more patient. I will work to improve my serve." Kyrgios is due to compete next week on grass in Halle, Germany, where he lost last year in the semi-finals. — AFP



ROSMALLEN: US Venus Williams attempts to return the ball to Switzerland's Celine Naef during their women's singles match on day two of the Libema Open tennis tournament in Rosmalen on June 13, 2023. — AFP

On comeback, Venus fades against Naef

'S-HERTOGENBOSCH: Venus Williams, playing her first match since early January, went down 3-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 to Celine Naef in the first round in 'S-Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands on Tuesday. With sister Serena, who retired last year, in the crowd, Venus Williams, who turns 43 on Saturday, started strongly, but she faded as Naef, a 17-year-old Swiss ranked 202 in the world, took her first tour victory in two hours, 18 minutes.

"I cannot believe I had the chance to play against Venus," said Naef, who was born on June 25, 2005, as Williams was on her way to her third Wimbledon title. "She's an amazing player and really a role model for anyone." Williams, ranked 696, was a wild card entry and was competing in the Netherlands for the first time in her career. It was her first singles match on grass since Wimbledon in 2021. She last played on any surface in Auckland in January where she lost

her second match to Zhu Lin of China, sustaining a hamstring injury that forced her to withdraw from the Australian Open.

On Tuesday, Williams broke in the eighth game on her way to taking the first set. She then broke in the fifth game of the second. But Naef broke back and won the tie-break before running away from the match, her first in the main draw at a WTA tournament. "For me, it was the biggest stage I ever played," she said on court at the finish. "It was incredible and amazing to play in front of such a big crowd. I was very nervous, maybe you could see, but I tried to keep going and try my best."

In the next round, the Swiss will face eighth seed Katy McNally who eased past fellow American Katie Volynets 6-2, 6-1 in 65 minutes. Fourth seed Ekaterina Alexandrova started her title defense with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Evgeniya Rodina. No 6 seed Bianca Andreescu beat Turkish qualifier Zeynep Sonmez, who was also making her WTA main-draw debut, 6-4, 6-4. Veronika Kudremetova is top seed in a field that also includes Victoria Azarenka. — AFP



Australia's Nick Kyrgios