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Kuwait keen on bolstering culture of peace worldwide

Kuwait backs UN efforts to curb climate change



Fahad Hajji

NEW YORK: Kuwait is keen on bolstering the culture of peace worldwide to avoid more tragedy, hatred and violence, said a diplomat on Thursday. In a statement to the UNGA session on the culture of peace, first secretary at the Kuwaiti mission at the UN headquarters in New York Fahad Hajji affirmed that boosting peace globally requires intensive efforts by the world community.

He reflected support towards the UN General Secretariat's recommendations on bolstering efforts in promoting peace and dialogue amongst religions and cultures around the world. Hatred and racism have been festering around the world and people must stand against such notions to ensure

peace, security and coexistence, Hajji reiterated.

All sectors of society must be involved to bolster peace and understanding, Hajji noted, pointing out that peace is an important part of the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He indicated that sustainable development cannot flourish or be achieved without the presence of peace, driving the point further by saying that the culture of peace must be built on solid foundations of understanding, tolerance and dialogue.

Meanwhile, Kuwait reaffirmed support to UN-led efforts to address the climate crisis which has "a clear and direct adverse impact on international peace and security". In his address to the UN Security Council Open Debate on Climate and Security, Counsellor

Faisal Al-Enezi, Kuwait's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, highlighted the link between regional stability and climate.

Detailing numerous infrastructure projects implemented by the Kuwaiti government, Enezi said "the processes of oil extraction in Kuwait are the lowest-carbon emitting processes in the world." He reiterated Kuwait's commitment to ensuring carbon neutrality in the energy sector by 2050 and in all sectors by 2060. To deal with political and security challenges in the Middle East and water scarcity in the Arab region, he urged scaling up cooperation with countries of the region and support from the international community to address these challenges. — KUNA (See Page 3)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hammad challenges poll results

KUWAIT: Former MP Saadoun Hammad, who lost his seat in the June 6 parliamentary polls, filed on Thursday a petition to the constitutional court challenging the results of the elections in his constituency. Saadoun came in 11th position, trailing the candidate in 10th place by just 23 votes. Saadoun received 3,610 votes, while new MP Jarrah Al-Fouzan got 3,633 votes. According to the petition, Saadoun should have been elected in the 10th position, surpassing Fouzan by a total of 410 votes, based on figures announced by the ministry of information on state-run Kuwait TV.

Saudi FM to visit Tehran

TEHRAN: Saudi Arabia's foreign minister is expected to visit Tehran on Saturday, Iranian media reported, as the two Middle East powerhouses move to cement their recent landmark rapprochement after a seven-year rupture. "The foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, Faisal bin Farhan, will travel to Tehran on Saturday, June 17, to meet with officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Tasnim news agency said on Thursday. Iran's government spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi added that Prince Farhan's visit would see him "take measures to open the embassy" of Saudi Arabia in Tehran. — AFP

World breaks temperature record

PARIS: Average global temperatures at the start of June were the warmest the European Union's climate monitoring unit has ever recorded for the period, trouncing previous records by a "substantial margin", it said on Thursday. The news comes as the El Nino climate phenomenon has officially arrived, raising fears of extreme weather and more temperature records. "The world has just experienced its warmest early June on record, following a month of May that was less than 0.1 degrees Celsius cooler than the warmest May on record," said Samantha Burgess, deputy director of the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S). — AFP

Gales lash India and Pakistan as Biparjoy hits

BHUJ, India: Howling gales and crashing waves pounded the coastline of India and Pakistan on Thursday as Cyclone Biparjoy made landfall, with more than 175,000 people fleeing the storm's predicted path. Indian forecasters have warned that Biparjoy, whose name means "disaster" in Bengali, was likely to devastate homes and tear down power lines as it barrels through the western state of Gujarat.

The storm hit the coastline with winds of 125 km per hour and gusts of up to 140 km/h at 6:30 pm (1330 GMT), the Indian Meteorological Department said in a bulletin. Coastal areas would continue to feel the full force of the storm through to midnight, state IMD director Manorama Mohanty told AFP. The United States' Joint Typhoon Warning Center forecast the storm would continue overnight into Pakistan's Sindh province, home to the port megacity of Karachi.

Jayantha Bhai, a 35-year-old shopkeeper in the Gujarat beach town of Mandvi, told AFP before the

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SUJAWAL, Pakistan: Cyclone-affected people wade through water as Cyclone Biparjoy rises sea levels in a coastal area in Sindh province on June 15, 2023. — AFP

Phosphorus discovered on Saturn moon

WASHINGTON: The long hunt for extraterrestrials just got a big boost. Scientists have discovered that phosphorus, a key building block of life, lies in the ocean beneath the icy surface of Saturn's moon Enceladus. The finding was based on a review of data collected by NASA's Cassini probe, and was published Wednesday in the prestigious journal Nature. Cassini started exploring Saturn and its rings and moons in 2004, before burning up

in the gas giant's atmosphere when its mission ended in 2017.

"This is a stunning discovery for astrobiology," said Christopher Glein of the Southwest Research Institute, one of the paper's co-authors, adding: "We have found abundant phosphorus in plume ice samples spraying out of the subsurface ocean." Geysers on Enceladus' south pole spew icy particles through cracks on the surface out into space, feeding Saturn's E ring — the faint ring outside the brighter main rings.

Scientists previously found other minerals and organic compounds in the ejected ice grains, but not phosphorus, which is an essential building block for DNA and RNA, and is also found in the bones and teeth of people, animals, and even ocean plankton.

Simply put, life as we know it would not be possible without phosphorus. While geochemical modeling had previously found it was likely phosphorus would also be present, and this prediction was published in an earlier paper, it is one thing to forecast something and another to confirm, said Glein.

"It's the first time this essential element has been discovered in an ocean beyond Earth," added first author Frank Postberg, a planetary scientist at Freie Universitat Berlin, in a NASA statement. To make the new discovery, authors combed through data collected by Cassini's Cosmic Dust Analyzer instrument, and confirmed the findings by carrying out laboratory experiments to show that Enceladus' ocean

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A mosaic of high-resolution images show Saturn's moon Enceladus, with long fissures at the moon's south pole that allow water from the subsurface ocean to escape into space. — AFP

Police charge India wrestling chief with sexual harassment

NEW DELHI: Indian police on Thursday charged the country's wrestling federation president with sexual harassment and stalking, following months of protests by the sport's top figures demanding his arrest. Brij Bhushan Singh, who is also a lawmaker

for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has been accused by Olympic medalists and other Indian wrestling champions of groping women athletes and demanding sexual favors.

Some of India's top athletes supported a week-long sit-in in the capital New Delhi, where they called for the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president to be arrested. Delhi Police said in a statement that "after completion of investigation" they charged Singh with sexual harassment and stalking under the Indian Penal Code. Public prosecutor Atul Shrivastava confirmed the charges had been filed.

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Brij Bhushan Singh



Kuwaiti envoy assures hajj preparations in full force

Kuwaiti consulate, embassy set up committees to serve pilgrims 24/7

KUWAIT: Preparations are now complete to welcome the 8,000 Kuwaiti pilgrims going to hajj this year, said Kuwaiti Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in a statement to Kuwait's state media agency KUNA.

The embassy and consulate in Jeddah gives the utmost care to providing pilgrims with all the amenities they need during their hajj trip, he added.

The Kuwaiti Consul General of the OIC in Jeddah Mohammad Al-Mutairi said the consulate has set up committees working round the clock to provide services to pilgrims.

Kuwaiti pilgrims in Saudi Arabia should not hesitate in contacting the embassy or consulate in Jeddah for emergencies, mentioned Sheikh Sabah Nasser. The consulate has also set-up an office in Makkah and another at the King Abdulaziz International Airport to help pilgrims facing any difficulties as they perform hajj, in addition to the consulates' services regularly offered.

Preparations are also underway at the Kuwait International Airport to facilitate all travel procedures for Kuwait's 8,000 pilgrims, Acting Director of the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation Imad Al-Jalawi told media this week. He said 4,000 pilgrims will fly to Saudi Arabia on flights operated by Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways, while the other half will fly on Saudi budget airline Adeal. The first flight carrying pilgrims will take off on June 21, he said.

Teams from the information, health and awqaf

ministries have already arrived in Saudi Arabia. Delegates from the Interior Ministry, the Red Crescent and the Food Authority will arrive next week.

Bedoon pilgrims

Illegal residents (bedoon) will get the chance to perform hajj this year. Saudi authorities had agreed to allow 1,000 bedoon pilgrims from Kuwait, the Awqaf ministry announced earlier this week.

Registration opened Monday and closed Wednesday for bedoon prospective pilgrims to submit their documents as required. About 4,400 bedoons who sent in their applications for hajj meet the conditions for registration, Supervisor of hajj and Umra Affairs committee Mohammad Al-Saeedi said Wednesday.

The hajj and Umra committee has already begun sorting through the applications, according to sources. Priority will be given to those who have not performed hajj before. Applications will also be processed according to age, with elderly applicants and their companions selected over those who are younger.

The agreement to allow bedoons to perform hajj followed talks between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, first announced in March. The negotiations were based on instructions from His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Navaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to launch efforts to help bedoons perform hajj this year.

Saudi Arabia said it expects an "exceptional" and "safe" hajj pilgrimage this year, accord-



MAKKAH: Saudi Arabia is expecting 8,000 Kuwaiti pilgrims this hajj season. Photo used for illustrative purposes only. — KUNA

ing to media agencies.

"All preparations bode well. We are optimistic about this hajj season," Sheikh Abdulrahman

Al-Sudais, head of the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques, told the state-run Al-Ekhhbariya television channel.



Social media detoxing worth the challenge: Student

By Munirah Al-Fayez

KUWAIT: Many people believe that deleting all your social media apps will cure a lot of your ills — from anxiety and depression to back pain and vision problems. Some say it is better to delete all of it for the rest of your life, while others say it is better to do a social media detox and come back to it with the ability to manage their use more easily. Kuwait Times interviewed Monera Al-Rabeah, a university student who did a social media detox, to learn about her experience.

Monera said in June 2021, she decided to embark on the journey of deleting all her social media apps. She said she was inspired to do it for a specific period to detoxify after watching videos of people who went through a similar experience. Monera added she noticed she was wasting a lot of time without being aware of the time passing by.

After deleting her social media apps, Monera said she felt less anxious and had more time to try out new things and focus on her to-do lists and hobbies. The best thing about a social media detox, according to Monera, is how much it improves a person's sleeping pattern. She said in the past she would stay up all night on her phone, moving from one app to another, which would result in her sleeping late, due to wasting her time doing something that did not benefit her.

However, Monera said after deleting her social media apps, she did not like the fact that she was not able to communicate with her friends and family as often, especially those who do not live with her at home or those who live abroad. According to her, in order to successfully detox, people should not delete social media apps all of a sudden. She said a few days or even weeks before the detox, people should try to limit themselves from social media, so they would be able to keep up with the detox. This could be either through setting a specific amount of time for the use of social media or limiting yourself to use the apps at a specific time of day.

Monera said she recommends people do a social media detox and is considering repeating it, because she says that it is worth the effort. But she added if she ever does a social media detox again, she would do it for a smaller amount of time but more frequently, so she would never reach a point of addiction again. She recommends people who use social media apps for four hours or more to do a social media detox, especially children, adolescents and young adults.

To whoever is thinking of doing a social media detox, Monera has some advice. "Do not hesitate to experience a social media free life. People should know that it is difficult for us to completely distance ourselves from the digital world, because it has become part of our lifestyle. However, after taking some time off, you will realize how much time you have wasted unknowingly, how much time you have, and things to do better than surfing the Internet," she said.

Monera added a social media detox will make you happier, and you will have a lot of time to focus on yourself and your hobbies which will make you grow as a person.

UNHCR, KU hold contest for designing refugees' shelters

KUWAIT: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has wrapped up a competition in architectural designs of shelters for Bangladeshi refugees engaging young Kuwaiti architects and freshly graduated engineers. The competition was held in coordination with the Kuwait University College of Architecture, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the Arab Consulting Engineering Office. Nisreen Rbaiaan, the UNHCR representative in Kuwait, said in a statement that the holding of the competition, capped with awards' distribution to winners, coincided with the forthcoming World Refugee Day (June 20), indicating that the UNHCR report, regularly issued on this occasion, revealed that number of compulsory refugees worldwide exceeded 110 million.

MoCI inspectors visit co-op to check prices

KUWAIT: Commerce and industry ministry inspectors visited a cooperative society in the Capital governorate to ensure availability of goods and compare prices. Head of the technical department to supervise products and set their prices at the commerce and industry ministry Faisal Al-Ansari said the inspection resulted in inspectors making sure goods are available without any price hikes. Ansari said the ministry monitors 39 consumer staples such as rice, oils, dairy and frozen chicken.



CSC employees protest 'unfair' sector merger

KUWAIT: Several employees of the employment affairs supervision sector of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) staged a sit-in in front of the commission's building in protest of merging their sector with the legal affairs.

The move would demote the sector to just a directorate, which is "an outright violation of this sector's independence", they said. Employees said the government's 2022 work program included the merger of the employment affairs sector to the financial auditor's department, which contradicts the union with legal affairs.

The Council of Ministers had decided on the employment affairs-financial auditor merger to enact more administrative supervision over state entities. The government's program said the joining would happen within one year from the date of the proposal.



KUWAIT: Winners of the competition held by UNHCR, Kuwait University, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the Arab Consulting Engineering Office are seen in this photo. — KUNA

Rbaiaan said the competition was held for engaging the youth for innovating solutions for mounting and complex challenges facing stakeholders seeking to secure housing for people who had to flee their homes. Walid Al-Bahr, KFAED acting director general, affirmed support for the young Kuwaitis, praising the distinctive partnership bonding the fund with the UNHCR, indicating at joint efforts for overhauling refugee camps' infrastruc-

tures and backing up host communities. Bahr has added that the fund participation in the contest has come in line with its belief that the Kuwait youngsters are the basis for sustainable development. For her part, Dr. Sheikha Al-Mubarak, the acting dean of the KU Architecture faculty, said the college participation in the activities was intended to boost engagement in architecture and merge the sector with humanitarian tasks. — KUNA



Fire Force contains warehouse blaze

KUWAIT: Firefighters have contained a fire that erupted at warehouses in the Ardiya industrial zone Thursday, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) announced. The KFF said in a statement that the central operations department was notified about the fire in the industrial region, thus squads from six fire stations were immediately dispatched to the scene, where they had to deal with flames raging at warehouses packed with food, consumer goods and electronic products. The firefighters battled and contained the blazes that raged within a 5,000-square-meter plot, the KFF said.

The operation to douse the flames was followed up by the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. He remained in contact with the KFF Chief Lieutenant General Khaled Al-Mekrad who conveyed the minister's admiration to all personnel involved in dealing with the incident. Policemen and medics had rushed to the scene shortly after the fire broke out. No injuries were reported. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Firefighters extinguish a fire erupting across a 5,000-square-meter plot in Ardiya industrial zone. — KUNA

The Council of Ministers had also lauded the role of employment affairs supervisors in limiting and correcting financial and administrative violations, subsequently safeguarding public money.

Protesting employees said the merger with legal affairs is against the Council of Ministers' plans and the government's work program, adding that sector employees were able to discover many violations estimated at millions of dinars. But there are those who secretly want to destroy this vital sector for unknown reasons, they said, asking the Premier and MPs to quickly interfere to stop the futility.

Employees said Head of CSC Essam Al-Rubaian did not respond to their demands and is insisting on his opinion that contradicts plans of the Council of Ministers. "This decision is unfair for more than 200 employees of this sector," said the protestors.

In a statement, CSC said the merger was based on a "thorough" and "detailed" examination of the workflow in the concerned sectors. The move, the commission said, is part of continuous revisions of its organizational structure.

Employment affairs supervision employees will maintain their privileges and will continue to perform



KUWAIT: Employees of the employment affairs supervision sector of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) stage a sit-in in front of the commission's building on Thursday, June 15, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

their work independently despite the merger, the statement added.

The commission said it's currently looking into expanding the privileges awarded to employment affairs supervisors and will make an announcement in that regard as soon as possible.

Local

Nazaha Society calls for using technology, hiring more females in voting process

Society among those tasked with monitoring 2023 election

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: More women should be working at polling stations to help verify the identities of female voters, the Kuwait Society of National Integrity (Al-Nazaha Society) recommends.

The society unveiled its final report and recommendations on the 2023 National Assembly elections in a press conference held Thursday.

The Council of Ministers had tasked Al-Nazaha Society to monitor the parliamentary elections, Chairman Mohammed Al-Otaibi said, emphasizing the belief held by the high leadership of the country in the role played by civil society institutions such as Al-Nazaha Society in the monitoring process.

Al-Nazaha Society began working on this mission following the call for elections, formulated an action plan, formed field, media and legal teams and had monitored the registration of candidates at the interior ministry's election headquarters during the 10-day candidate registration period, as well as the disbarment and withdrawal of some candidates through legal teams that had detected the registration processes.

Other recommendations included providing a procedural list for the election law that regulates the voting and counting process, which allows delegates to view the ballot paper, the use of modern technology in the voting and counting process and the establishment of a higher election commission.

Young people voted early

The society continued to monitor the media campaigns and electoral programs that witnessed lower participation than the previous election due to the small number of candidates.

Despite the fact that these elections came less than a year after the 2022 National Assembly elections, the readiness of the ministry of interior in terms of preparation and organization made the process easier for voters, taking into account the elderly and people with special needs in accessing electoral stations to cast their votes. Al-Nazaha Society also monitored the counting process by committees, the method of dealing with delegates and the speed of vote counting.

Otaibi said there was a predominance of young voters in the early hours of election day, which reflects awareness among the youth and their belief in the democratic process and their national role in the election process.

The society also noted the participation of a number of female judges in the election



Mohammed Al-Otaibi



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

process, which encourages involving women and enabling them to participate.

Otaibi thanked HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, who is keen to facilitate all the necessary means

for Al-Nazaha Society to carry out its role, which has positive domestic and international implications in front of the international community that also monitors the election process in Kuwait.

Oil extraction in Kuwait produces lowest carbon emissions globally: Official

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait reaffirmed support to the UN-led efforts to address the climate crisis which "a clear and direct adverse impact on international peace and security".

In his address to the UN Security Council Open Debate on Climate and Security, Counsellor Faisal Al-Enezi, Kuwait's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, highlighted the linkage between regional stability and climate.

"Since the beginning of the 1970s, the world has witnessed more than 11,000 climate crises, mostly in countries that are underdeveloped economically or infrastructure-wise. This has claimed the lives of millions, injured tens of millions and displaced countless," he recalled. Detailing numerous infrastructure projects implemented by the Kuwaiti government, Enezi said, "The processes of oil extraction in Kuwait are the lowest-carbon emitting processes in the world."

He reiterated Kuwait's commitment to en-

surging carbon neutrality in the energy sector by 2050 and in all sectors by 2060. Dealing with the political and security challenges in the Middle East and the water scarcity in the Arab region, he urged scaling up cooperation and the countries of the region and support from the international community to address these challenges.

Helping countries adapt

Noting the direct and indirect impact of climate change on small island developing States, he said that their economic development slows down and they sustain major development losses.

"Climate events have impeded the development of countries around the world, including unprecedented cyclones in South-East Asia and South-East Africa. "In recent history, Europe has experienced destructive floods and drought has affected the livelihood of people in the Horn of Africa," Enezi pointed out.

Stressing the need to ensure adaptation to help countries in need alleviate the impact of climate change, he spotlighted regional initiatives, especially the Middle East Green Initiative launched by Saudi Arabia.

He cited a recent report by the UN Environ-

ment Program (UNEP) as saying that 13 out of the world's 19 countries most-vulnerable to water insecurity are located in the Arab region. Since 2018, the Climate Security Mechanism - a joint initiative between the UNEP and the UN Development Program (UNDP), has provided multidisciplinary support to member states, regional organizations and UN entities to better understand the linkages between climate, peace and security. — KUNA

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BEIRUT: Lebanese and Kuwaiti delegates sign an agreement on June 15, 2023 in which Kuwait Red Crescent Society will renovate Al-Makased hospital's maternity ward. — KUNA

New Spider-Man movie banned in Kuwait, region

KUWAIT: Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse will not be released in UAE, Saudi Arabia and across the Middle East, according to a report by Esquire Middle East.

The movie, a sequel to Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, was supposed to release in cinemas in the Middle East during the Eid Al-Adha holidays but reports now indicate that it will no longer have a theatrical run in the region.

In Kuwait, the movie was pulled from the Cinescape schedule. And while it remains listed on the local VOX Cinemas schedule, the Esquire Middle East report indicates that Vox Cinemas have already received word that the movie will not be releasing

in UAE and Saudi Arabia, which means that the movie will likely be pulled from VOX Kuwait's schedule soon. Cinescape, Kuwait's national cinema company, could not be reached for comment. On the reason behind the decision, Esquire Middle East quotes sources who said the movie did not pass censorship requirements. This news follows days of speculation that the movie won't be released in regional theaters because of an LGBTQ+ flag that appears briefly in one of the scenes.

Saudi Cinema had reported on Tuesday that the movie will not hit screens in the Kingdom. "Out of our keenness on the safety of the content shown in cinemas, and our responsibility towards the viewers, we would like to point out that we will not permit or license any movie that contradicts the content controls in force in the media system... and its implementing regulations, unless the production companies commit to implementing the required amendments," it said in a statement on social media.



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Faisal Al-Enezi speaks at the UN Security Council meeting. — KUNA

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KRCS to renovate Lebanese hospital

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) on Thursday inked an agreement with Al-Makased association to renovate the society's hospital maternity ward — with funding from the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. The accord was inked at a ceremony held at the hospital by the KRCS Secretary General, Maha Al-Barjas, and the hospital's deputy director general Dr Mohammad Hamandi.

It was attended by the society's president Faisal Sinno and the KRCS delegate to Lebanon, Dr Musaed Al-Enezi.

Barjas said in a statement to KUNA that the support came as part of the Kuwaiti aid for the Lebanese hospitals and repairing damage inflicted in the August 2020 port explosion. The KRCS will oversee renovation and equipping the maternity ward with generous financial allocations from the fund. Dr Sinno said Al-Makased Hospital was under pressure, particularly in the maternity ward, due to its location close to the Palestinian refugee camp, Sabra, mounting numbers of Syrian refugee patients in addition to Lebanese in need of treatment. — KUNA

In my view

Politics and mobiles

Yousuf Awad Al-Azmi

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"All that we see in the nation in the form of corruption, confusion, chaos and deterioration arose from the individuals' lack of a sense of duty". — Ahmad Ameen

The mobile phone is almost the most important object you carry with you everywhere. The minute you wake up, before you go to bed, while eating, even while being in a roundabout in the midst of traffic congestion, it's no problem to look at a WhatsApp message! It is a tool that has become the most important on the list of daily requirements!

A few days ago, I decided due to the bad condition of my mobile phone, as it reached a point that repair won't do any good to it, to buy a new one after six years of using the old one. Of course, the idea was to buy a mobile of the same brand as the old one, as it was good to use and deserved its high price at the time of purchase. I remembered a proverb that says, "the expensive is cheap". It means that a well-made item lasts longer and its cost is worth it, and the opposite is correct of course.

I read and hear a lot about being loyal to a product out of confidence in it due to its quality, and it seems I am this type of person, as change is difficult. Change only for the sake of change is very difficult, as I am a supporter of the rule: "Someone you know is better than one you do not."

As the above rule was mentioned, it applies to the winning members of the new parliament, as change was not strongly tangible, rather most faces of the previous Assembly returned. Change was minimal in the world of elections, as it did not exceed 24 percent. So a large number of voters who exercised their right to vote proved the saying "your old friend is your best", and there was no need for a new experience. It seems that change is not wanted in its absolute-ness, rather new circumstances, varying events and their movements may explain why the situation is at a status quo.

The truth is that I do not know what the link is between changing a mobile, which is a product that is sold and purchased, and the people's reluctance to change and voting to keep the status quo, that is voting again for the same MP. Here we may have a misplaced comparison, but it is possible — a comparison between a product that is purchased and sold, and a member of parliament who is supposed to be up to the task and not a commodity sold and purchased! "Only Allah knows the intention!"



KUWAIT: African ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions pose for a group photo. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Africa Day celebrated in Kuwait, landmark initiatives underlined

Kuwait has historical and strategic relationship with Africa: FM



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah cuts the cake with one of the African ambassadors during the ceremony.



By Chidi Emmanuel

KUWAIT: Africans in Kuwait on Wednesday joined the rest of the continent in marking Africa Day. The celebrations, which commemorated the 60th anniversary of the creation of the Organization of African Unity, the predecessor of the African Union (AU), drew African diplomats in Kuwait, top Kuwaiti officials, expatriates and Kuwaitis. The event, organized by African envoys in Kuwait, featured lots of cultural displays, with each African nation showcasing its cultural heritage in its respective booth.

In his address during the event, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah affirmed Kuwait's keenness to continue strengthening cooperation and coordination with African countries, especially in light of the "ambi-

tious and pioneering" Agenda 2063 to transform the continent into a global power.

"Kuwait has a historical and strategic relationship with Africa that precedes our own independence. Kuwait is presently hosting 34 accredited African diplomatic missions, making Africa the largest group in the country. The African Union promotes regional and international peace, security and stability and has proven effective in its efforts to mediate various global conflicts and crises," Sheikh Salem said, adding that Kuwait is proud to hold the status of Permanent Observer at the African Union.

In terms of infrastructural development and investments, the Kuwaiti minister said Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has heavily invested in critical infrastructure and developmental projects across the continent since its inception in 1961. "Kuwait will con-

tinue to strengthen its cooperation with African nations in light of the ambitious and groundbreaking Agenda 2063, Africa's blueprint and masterplan for transforming the continent into the global powerhouse of the future," Sheikh Salem noted.

In his remarks, Senegalese Ambassador to Kuwait Ibrahim Al Khalil Seck said Africa Day is an important occasion for the celebration of African culture as well as the continent's growing resilience. "Today, we celebrate our African heritage and diversity as we showcase African investment potential. Africa Day is a reminder of our struggle to achieve political and economic independence," the ambassador said. He called on African expats to be good ambassadors of Africa.

On this year's anniversary, African diplomats highlighted some of the organization's notable achievements and landmark initiatives, which are aimed at stimulating economic growth, enhancing Africa's global competitiveness, lifting millions out of poverty and accelerating sustainable development throughout the continent.

Africa Day also featured a food fair, bonanzas, gift offers and cultural dances. "Today, we celebrate our past, present and future, embracing our rich cultural heritage, unity and diversity. As the continent continues to navigate its path toward development, Africa Day serves as a reminder of the remarkable progress made and the challenges that lie ahead. Let us celebrate Africa's achievements and work together to build a prosperous and inclusive future for all Africans," Ruth Nwanede, a teacher, told Kuwait Times.

The AU's anniversary commemorates the historic gathering in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1963, where 32 heads of independent African states and leaders from African liberation movements charted a path toward Africa's complete independence from imperialism, colonialism and apartheid. Africa Day, commemorat-



ed annually on May 25, is a momentous occasion that celebrates the unity, resilience and achievements of the African continent. This day holds great significance as it symbolizes the journey toward liberation, self-determination and the collective pursuit of progress.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the signature of its founding charter. AU chose "Acceleration of AfCFTA Implementation" as its theme for 2023. The AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area) is an ambitious trade pact aimed at creating a single market for goods and services for almost 1.3 billion people across Africa and deepening the economic integration of the continent. When fully implemented, the AfCFTA will be the world's largest free trade area, with a combined gross domestic product of around \$3.4 trillion. Fifty-four of the continent's 55 countries are signatories to its founding agreement.

The AfCFTA is projected not only to lead to job creation, poverty alleviation, improved welfare, and sustainable development but also to ensure inclusivity for women and youth, the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and the overall industrialization of the continent, guided by Agenda 2063.



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Africans in Kuwait on Wednesday joined the rest of the continent in marking Africa Day. African diplomats in Kuwait, top Kuwaiti officials, expatriates and Kuwaitis attended the event which featured lots of cultural displays.



Magnitude 6.2
quake strikes
Philippines

Australian senator suspended after sexual assault claim by colleague

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Sudan's conflict enters third month

'In our worst expectations, we didn't see this war dragging on for this long'



WAD MADANI: Sudanese wait for a gas truck to arrive to exchange their empty canisters, in Wad Madani, the capital of Sudan's al-Jazirah state. With fighting in Khartoum showing no signs of abating, small business owners are struggling to stay afloat. — AFP

KHARTOUM: Sudan's devastating war raged into a third month on Thursday, as a governor's killing marked a new escalation in the western region of Darfur. Since April 15, the regular army headed by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commanded by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo have been locked in combat that has destroyed entire neighborhoods of the capital Khartoum.

The fighting quickly spread to the provinces, particularly Darfur, and has killed at least 1,800 people, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project's latest figures from last month. Burhan accused the RSF of killing the governor of West Darfur state, Khamis Abdullah Abakar, in a "treacherous attack" on Wednesday.

Abakar was captured and later killed after he made remarks critical of the paramilitaries in a telephone interview with a Saudi TV channel. The Darfur Lawyers Association condemned his "assassination" as an act of "barbarism, brutality and cruelty".

Nationwide, Sudan's war has driven around 2.2 million people from their homes, according to the International Organization for Migration. Of these,

more than 528,000 have sought refuge in neighboring countries, said the UN agency. "In our worst expectations, we didn't see this war dragging on for this long," said Mohamad al-Hassan Othman who has fled his home in Khartoum. Everything in "our life has changed," he told AFP. "We don't know whether we'll be back home or need to start a new life."

'Completely devastated'

"We have nothing left," said one Khartoum resident, Ahmed Taha. "The entire country has been completely devastated. Everywhere you look, you'll see where bombs have fallen and bullets have struck. Every inch of Sudan is a disaster area."

US and Saudi mediation efforts are at a standstill after the collapse of multiple ceasefires in the face of flagrant violations by both sides. A record 25 million people — more than half the population — are in need of aid, according to the UN, which says it has received only a fraction of needed funding.

Saudi Arabia has announced an international pledging conference for next week. Many of the displaced have lost loved ones as well as "all their belongings and livelihoods", said Anja Wolz of aid

group Doctors Without Borders.

The group, which runs mobile clinics for the displaced in Madani, 200 kilometres (120 miles) south-east of Khartoum, noted a "worrying increase" in people escaping the capital. Despite dangers and obstacles, latest UN figures say aid has now reached 1.8 million people, still only a fraction of those in need.

"We have been suffering and suffering and suffering the scourge of this war for two months," said another Khartoum resident, Soha Abdulrahman. The conflict's other main battleground, Darfur, was already scarred by a two-decade war that left hundreds of thousands dead and more than two million displaced.

No 'red lines'

The army on Wednesday said the "kidnapping and assassinating" of West Darfur governor Abakar was part of the RSF's "barbaric crimes". Sudan analyst Kholood Khair said the "heinous assassination" was meant "to silence his highlighting of genocide... in Darfur". Khair, founder of Khartoum-based think tank Confluence Advisory, said in a tweet it was unclear "what the red lines are anymore", urging inter-

national condemnation "as well as action to protect the people of Darfur and elsewhere".

Homes and markets have been burnt to the ground, hospitals and aid facilities looted and more than 149,000 people sent fleeing into neighboring Chad. The Umma Party, one of Sudan's main civilian groups, said El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur state, had been turned into a "disaster zone", and urged international organizations to provide help.

The Darfur Lawyers Association described "massacres and ethnic cleansing" in El Geneina carried out by "cross-border militias supported by the RSF" which "serve agendas that have nothing to do with the interests of Darfur or Sudan".

Daglo's RSF have their origins in the Janjaweed militias which former strongman Omar al-Bashir unleashed on ethnic minorities in the region in 2003, drawing charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. An army official said Wednesday that the paramilitaries had begun using drones, which an RSF source said they had obtained "from commandeered army centres". Both sources spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak to the media. — AFP

Boris Johnson lied to MPs over COVID parties

LONDON: Boris Johnson deliberately lied to MPs about lockdown-breaking parties during the COVID pandemic that would have seen him face a 90-day suspension had he not quit as a lawmaker, a parliament committee ruled Thursday.

The Privileges Committee, which probes breaches of House of Commons rules, concluded that Johnson was guilty of "repeated contempts (of parliament) and... seeking to undermine the parliamentary process". "The contempt was all the more serious because it was committed by the prime minister, the most senior member of the government," they stated in a damning 106-page report. "There is no precedent for a prime minister having been found to have deliberately misled the House."

"He misled the House on an issue of the greatest

importance to the House and to the public, and did so repeatedly." The seven-member committee, which has a majority of MPs from Johnson's own Conservative party, has powers to recommend sanctions on rule-breakers that have to be voted on by MPs. But Johnson, 58, avoided having to face his peers — and the humiliation of potentially having to run for re-election in his constituency — by resigning as an MP just days before the report was released.

Unrepentant

In his resignation statement last Friday, Johnson — who quit as prime minister last July due to "Partygate" and a string of other scandals — claimed he was the victim of a stitch-up by his political opponents in a "kangaroo court".

He was unrepentant again on Thursday, calling the report "deranged" and the 14-month inquiry into his statements to parliament a "charade". He insisted his attendance at the Downing Street parties in question was "lawful, and required" by his job. "This is a dreadful day for MPs and for democracy," Johnson said in an angry 1,700-word statement. "This decision means that no MP is free from vendetta, or

expulsion on trumped-up charges by a tiny minority who want to see him or her gone from the Commons."

"I do not have the slightest contempt for Parliament, or for the important work that should be done by the Privileges Committee. "But for the Privileges Committee to use its prerogatives in this anti-democratic way, to bring about what is intended to be the final knife-thrust in a protracted political assassination — that is beneath contempt." "It is for the people of this country to decide who sits in Parliament, not Harriet Harman," the veteran opposition Labor MP who chaired the inquiry.

"Partygate" saw Johnson and dozens of government officials fined by police for breaking the social distancing laws the government set to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Months of newspaper revelations about boozy gatherings, including on the eve of the socially distanced funeral of Queen Elizabeth II's husband, Philip, caused widespread public outrage. It contributed to a ministerial rebellion that forced him to resign last July, though he still hinted at a political comeback. The committee's long-awaited report was even more critical than expected, particularly in relation to the sanction it would have recommended. — AFP

EU pledges 560m euros for Syrians fleeing war

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Thursday pledged 560 million euros (\$600 million) to help countries neighboring Syria cope with the costs of hosting Syrians displaced by the years of conflict in their country.

"Unfortunately, over the last year there has been little progress, very little progress, towards a resolution of the Syria conflict," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said as he announced the pledge at an international donors' conference in Brussels. He emphasized that the aid was for Syrians, not the Damascus government led by President Bashar al-Assad. Since 2011, more than 500,000 people have been killed in Syria after Assad's brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters plunged the country into a complex war that drew in foreign powers and jihadists.

The UN says more than 12 million Syrians were displaced by the conflict, most of them inside Syria, and with 5.4 million living as refugees in neighboring countries. Despite UN efforts, "the conditions are not in place for the European Union to change its policy on Syria", which would require "genuine political reforms" in the country, Borrell said. The EU will maintain its sanctions on Assad's regime and not support the return of Syrians to that country unless they are "voluntary", safe and monitored by international groups, he said. Assad, who stayed in power thanks to support from allies Iran and Russia, has become less of an international pariah by being welcomed back last month into the Arab League.

"This conference comes at the right time, especially after Syria returns to its seat in the Arab League," Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said as he arrived for the Brussels conference. He acknowledged there would be "sharp discussions" on Syria's re-joining the League, "but we have an opinion and we will express our opinions".

Borrell, speaking after a sideline meeting with Hussein, said: "The European Union policy on Syria has not changed — we will not re-establish full diplomatic relations with the Assad regime or start working on reconstruction until a genuine and comprehensive political transition is firmly on the way, which is not the case." He added that, "we have to remain committed to the justice and accountability for the crimes committed during more than a decade of conflict". — AFP

Greece seek survivors in boat sinking

KALAMATA: Greece on Thursday pursued a grim search for survivors a day after a fishing boat overloaded with migrants capsized and sank in the Ionian Sea, with the number of victims feared to reach into the hundreds.

As relatives in the migrants' home countries frantically sought details of their loved ones, the coastguard said 78 bodies had been recovered so far. "This could be the worst maritime tragedy in Greece in recent years," Stella Nanou of the UNHCR refugee agency told state broadcaster ERT.

"It's really horrific," UNHCR staffer Erasmia Roumana told AFP at the port of Kalamata, adding that the survivors were "in a very bad psychological situation". "Many are under shock, they are so overwhelmed," she said. "Many of them worry about the people they travelled with, families or friends. They want to call their families and tell them that they arrived." A coastguard spokeswoman told AFP that two patrol boats, a helicopter and six other ships in the area were searching the waters west of the Peloponnese peninsula, one of the deepest parts of the Mediterranean.

Greece has declared three days of mourning over the tragedy and a senior prosecutor has been as-



KALAMATA: Survivors of a shipwreck sit inside a warehouse at the port in Kalamata town, on June 15, 2023, after a boat carrying migrants sank in international waters in the Ionian Sea. — AFP

signed to investigate. "One young man started to cry and said, I need my mother... This voice is inside my ears. And will always be inside," Red Cross nurse Ekaterini Tsata told AFP. Around 30 people were hospitalized with pneumonia, dehydration and exhaustion but are not in immediate danger, officials said.

So far 104 people have been rescued but there are fears that hundreds more are missing, based on testimony from the survivors and the fact that no

women and children were among them so far. A survivor told hospital doctors in Kalamata that he had seen a hundred children in the boat's hold, ERT said.

"The fishing boat was 25-30 metres long. Its deck was full of people, and we assume the interior was just as full," coastguard spokesman Nikolaos Alexiou told ERT. Government spokesman Ilias Siakantaris on Wednesday said there were unconfirmed reports that up to 750 people were on the boat. — AFP

International

Australian senator suspended after sexual assault claim by colleague

Parliament, 'is not a safe place for women'

SYDNEY: An Australian lawmaker was suspended by his party Thursday after a fellow senator accused him of sexual assault in Parliament House and declared it was "not a safe place" for women to work. Senator David Van, of the opposition Liberal Party, strenuously denied the claims, describing them as "scandalous".

But Liberal Party leader Peter Dutton suspended Van, stating that "further allegations" had been raised against him. Later Thursday, a former Liberal Party senator accused Van of "squeezing my bottom twice" in 2020, telling local media the incident occurred at an office party. In a tearful Senate address earlier, independent senator Lidia Thorpe said she had been subjected to "sexual comments", cornered in a stairwell, "inappropriately touched" and "propositioned" by "powerful men".

Parliament, she said, "is not a safe place for women". Thorpe's allegations have rekindled accusations that Australia's crucible of democracy is also a bastion of sexism and misogyny. Thorpe on Wednesday had initially accused Van of "sexually assaulting" her, before being forced to withdraw the remark under threat of parliamentary sanction.

But on Thursday, Thorpe restated the core of her allegations against Van. In an address to

the Senate, Thorpe acknowledged that "sexual assault" meant different things to different people, and went on to describe her experiences in the corridors of power. "What I experienced was being followed, aggressively propositioned and inappropriately touched," she said. In 2021, Van was forced to move his parliamentary office away from Thorpe's after an unspecified complaint, both senators have acknowledged.

Thorpe told fellow lawmakers she "was afraid to walk out of the office door. I would open the door slightly and check the coast was clear before stepping out." "It was to the degree that I had to be accompanied by someone whenever I walked inside this building," she added.

"I know there are others that have experienced similar things and have not come forward in the interests of their careers." While the allegations were protected from Australia's severe defamation laws by parliamentary privilege, Thorpe said that Van had engaged lawyers in the matter.

Van responded in parliament, describing the allegations as "scandalous" and "concocted" before calling for an investigation. Van accused Thorpe of "bringing the Senate into disrepute" and "cowering under the

umbrella of parliamentary privilege".

Later Thursday, former senator Amanda Stoker, from Van's party, came forward to accuse him of "squeezing my bottom twice" at a party. In a statement to local media, she said the incident occurred at an "informal social gathering in a parliamentary office" in 2020. Van's removal from the Liberal Party's parliamentary caucus does not mean he is kicked out of parliament. He will remain effectively as an independent.

Widespread sexual harassment

Since 2021, Australian politics has been roiled by high-profile allegations of assault and harassment inside parliament. Former political aide Brittany Higgins alleged that a fellow conservative staffer raped her on a couch in a cabinet minister's parliamentary office following a night of heavy drinking in March 2019.

Five separate investigations followed, collectively delivering a scathing indictment on the frequently sexist nature of Australian politics. One government-backed inquiry found that sexual harassment and bullying were widespread in parliament, affecting both lawmakers and staff. One in three peo-



CANBERRA: This screen grab taken from video released by the Parliament of Australia on June 15, 2023 shows independent senator Lidia Thorpe addressing the Senate in Canberra. — AFP

ple working in parliament at the time said they "have experienced some form of sexual harassment while working there". That included 63 percent of the country's female parliamentarians. The Higgins case

sparked national protests and a high-profile court case that ended in a mistrial. It was not retried because prosecutors feared the strain it would put on Higgins's mental health. — AFP

Lebanon's Syrian refugees lose hope for return

SAADNAYEL: Syrian refugees languishing in camps in eastern Lebanon's Bekaa Valley for years say their hopes for the future are evaporating as their host country loses patience and international support dwindles. Ibrahim al-Korbaw is only 48, but the hardships of war and poverty have aged the white-bearded man beyond his years. In front of his tent in Saadnayel, he and his children are hard at work under the midday sun, separating and peeling fragrant cloves of garlic.

Korbaw fled Syria's Raqa almost a decade ago after the Islamic State group took over, turning the city into its de facto Syria capital. He and five of six children — all under 12 — now earn just around \$20 a week between them peeling garlic, a meagre supplement to United Nations aid that he said barely covers the necessities.

Aid groups have warned that crucial support for Syrians at home and abroad has dwindled, as the international community meets in Brussels this week for a pledging conference. One of the boys recently begged Korbaw to stop working because his hands were bruised, "but I told him 'keep going... we must put bread on the table'", Korbaw told AFP.

Lebanese authorities say the country hosts around two million Syrians, while more than 800,000 are registered with the UN — the highest number of refugees per capita in the world.

'No home'

But amid a crushing economic crisis that has pushed most of Lebanon into poverty, anti-Syrian sentiment has soared, the government has called for

refugees to leave and security forces have deported dozens to Syria this year alone.

Korbaw says he cannot go back to his destroyed house in Raqa, and that he fears arrest and deportation — especially after Lebanese authorities began a crackdown on Syrians in April. "I would rather die in front of my children" in Lebanon, he said, crouched over the garlic, beads of sweat trickling down his face.

"At least they would know for sure that I'm dead," he added, alluding to the tens of thousands whose fates are unknown in Syria. Other refugees living in agricultural lands in eastern Lebanon told AFP that no matter how dire their situation, they could not return to Syria because their homes were gone, they feared forced conscription and regime reprisals, or had no means to support their family there.

Korbaw's sister Souad, 34, said she lost all hope of living a normal life after fleeing the horrors of IS jihadists only to lose her 12-year-old son in Lebanon while he was at work.

He died in a tractor accident harvesting potatoes this year, after he and his five siblings were forced to drop out of school to help put food on the table.

"I feel like all the doors are shut for us... like I will never again live a decent life," she said from her shelter. "I feel like I will live out the rest of my life in this tent, voiceless."

'Watching my children die'

When her husband managed to return to Syria to bury their son, he found the family house looted and destroyed by shelling. "In Syria, we have no home, no security, no livelihood," she said.

Since 2011, more than 500,000 people have been killed in Syria after the government's brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters plunged the country into a complex war that drew in foreign powers and jihadists. Madaniya al-Khalaf, 35, told AFP she can no longer afford diapers for her six-month-old baby, and uses a plastic bag and cloth instead after losing meagre UN aid due to budget cuts.



SAADNAYEL: In this picture taken on June 13, 2023, Syrian women and children stand near tents at a refugee camp in Saadnayel in eastern Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. Lebanese authorities say the country hosts around two million Syrians, while more than 800,000 are registered with the United Nations. — AFP

The mother of four said she has had to beg for money from camp dwellers and have her young children rummage through garbage for plastic and metal to sell to make ends meet. In a nearby camp, Ghofran al-Jassem, 30, originally from northwest Syria's Idlib region, said her four children had "no future" in Lebanon and were not attending school because the family could not afford the bus fares.

Her two boys were born with a heart condition, but she said they had to skip medical tests and borrow money for treatments after she was

"cut off from UN aid since November" due to funding shortages. Her husband is only employed in low-paid seasonal work. Her eldest son, who is seven, could die unless he undergoes a costly heart transplant, she said. "I'm watching my children die right in front of me," Jassem told AFP, breaking into tears. "If I stay, I may lose them," she said. "But if I return to Syria I will lose both my children and my husband — because there is no health care... and my husband will be forcibly conscripted." — AFP

Gales lash India and Pakistan as...

Continued from Page 1

storm hit on Thursday that he was afraid for his family's safety. "This is the first time I've experienced a cyclone," said Bhai, a father of three boys aged between eight and 15, who planned to wait out the cyclone in his small concrete home behind the shop. "This is nature, we can't fight with it," he said, as driving rain lashed his home.

Low-lying roads started to flood on Thursday afternoon after hours of rain. Gusting winds earlier blew sheets of water, that reduced visibility with a dull grey mist. Almost all stores were closed, and shoppers had crowded the few that remained open to buy last-minute food and water supplies. India's meteorologists warned of the potential for "widespread damage", including the destruction of crops, "bending or uprooting of power and communication poles" and disruption of railways and roads.

The Gujarat state government said 94,000 people had relocated from coastal and low-lying areas to shelter. Pakistan's climate change minister Sherry Rehman said around 82,000 people had been moved from southeastern coastal areas. "Our worst fears are that it will come in the evening or later tonight," said Jaffer Ali in the largely abandoned fishing town of Zero Point — so-called because of its proximity to the Indian border.

The shanty settlement of hundreds of thatched homes was populated mainly by stray cats and wild dogs, with at least a hundred idle fishing boats teth-

ered to a long pier running out to the ocean. "We are afraid of what is coming," Ali, 20, told AFP. On Wednesday, Rehman said the coming storm was "a cyclone the likes of which Pakistan has never experienced". Many of the areas affected are the same inundated in last year's catastrophic monsoon floods, which put a third of Pakistan under water, damaging two million homes and killing more than 1,700 people. "These are all results of climate change," Rehman told reporters.

Storm surges were expected to reach four meters, with flooding possible in Karachi — home to about 20 million people — and commercial flights about to be grounded. About 200 people huddled together in a single-storey health center in Kutch district, a short distance from India's Jakhau port, late on Wednesday. Many were worried about their farm animals, which they had left behind. Dhal Jetheben Ladhaji, 40, a pharmacist at the health center, said 10 men had stayed behind to look after hundreds of cattle crucial to their village's livelihood. "We are terrified, we don't know what will happen next," Ladhaji said.

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. Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate researcher at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, said cyclones derive their energy from warm waters, and that surface temperatures in the Arabian Sea were 1.2 to 1.4 degrees Celsius warmer than four decades ago. — AFP

body, Pluto. While planets like Earth that have surface oceans need to reside within a narrow window of distance from their host star to maintain the right temperatures for life, the discovery of worlds with subsurface oceans expands the number of habitable bodies that might exist.

"With this finding, the ocean of Enceladus is now known to satisfy what is generally considered to be the strictest requirement for life," said Glein. "The next step is clear — we need to go back to Enceladus to see if the habitable ocean is actually inhabited." — AFP

Zionist army kills Palestinian in West Bank raid

NABLUS: Zionist forces shot dead a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank Thursday, Palestinian officials said. The Palestinian health ministry said in a statement that Khalil Yahya Anis, 20, was "killed by live occupation (Zionist) bullets in the head in Nablus". An official at Nablus' Al Najah hospital told AFP that two others were injured in the overnight clashes which erupted when Zionist forces entered the city in the northern West Bank to demolish the home of an alleged attacker.

An AFP journalist saw a group of young men surveying the damage to the apartment after dawn on Thursday. Twisted metal and piles of rubble littered the floor and a gaping hole was left in a wall. A security source in Nablus told AFP that Anis was a resident of the city's Al-Ain refugee camp and belonged to Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement. His body was carried from the hospital, shrouded in a Palestinian flag, as his funeral began, an AFP correspondent said.



NABLUS: The mother of Palestinian Khalil Yahya Anis, 20, mourns over his body during his funeral in the Al-Ain refugee camp on June 15, 2023. — AFP

Palestinian presidency spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said on Thursday the Zionist entity was "dragging the region into escalation and a spiral of violence". Witnesses told AFP that the army had demolished the flat of Osama Taweel, a prominent member of the Lions' Den militant group. Taweel was arrested by the Zionist in February after allegedly shooting dead Zionist soldier Ido Burch at a West Bank settlement in November. — AFP

Police charge India wrestling chief...

Continued from Page 1

Vinod Tomar, a Singh acolyte who served as WFI assistant secretary, faced the same charges as well as criminal intimidation and abetment.

Singh, 66, is serving his sixth term as a lawmaker from the northern state of Uttar Pradesh and has headed the wrestling federation for over a decade. He has been accused of inappropriately groping and propositioning seven wrestlers on several occasions. He has denied the allegations and claims to be the victim of a "conspiracy" to force him out of parliament. The most serious charge carries a potential prison sentence of up to five years. Police said one of the accusations against him — lodged by a minor — had been withdrawn.

Singh was bunkered down at home in a leafy New Delhi neighborhood on Thursday afternoon with a large police contingent placing barricades around his compound and restricting traffic into the area. There was no indication of whether he would be taken into police custody. The wres-

tlers at the center of the protest could not immediately be reached for comment.

Demonstrations by India's top wrestlers, including two-time world champion medalist Vinesh Phogat and Olympic bronze medalist Sakshi Malik, attracted a groundswell of public sympathy. They grew in size from a few dozen to crowds sometimes of thousands. Olympic gold medalists, including javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra and rifle shooter Abhinav Bindra, lent support to their fellow athletes.

In May, the protesters attempted to march to India's new parliament just as it was being inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but were dragged away and detained by police. At one point, Malik and Phogat had threatened to throw their international medals into the Ganges River unless police took action. Authorities opened an investigation into the accusations against Singh after being asked by the Supreme Court to account for the slow pace of progress.

The wrestlers decided to pause the sit-in after the government promised to investigate the sexual harassment claims, giving itself a Thursday deadline to respond to the protesters' demands. It also promised to stage new elections for the WFI and prohibit Singh or members of his family from contesting. — AFP

Phosphorus discovered on...

Continued from Page 1

has phosphorus bound inside different water-soluble forms. Over the past 25 years, planetary scientists have discovered that worlds with oceans beneath a surface layer of ice are common in our solar system. These include Jupiter's moon Europa, Saturn's largest moon Titan, but even the more distant

International

Australia blocks new Russian embassy near parliament

Intelligence officials warned it posed a spying risk and security threat

SYDNEY: Australia blocked Russia from building a new embassy in the shadow of Parliament House Thursday after intelligence officials warned it posed a spying risk and security threat. Russia holds the lease for a parcel of land about 400 metres (0.25 miles) from Australia's parliamentary precinct in Canberra and has been laying the foundations for a new embassy building. But, after failing to block the development in the courts, the Australian government passed new laws on Thursday that were specifically drafted to halt construction. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the laws were rapidly pulled together following a meeting of Australia's National Security Committee.

"The government has received very clear security advice as to the risk posed by a new Russian presence so close to Parliament House," he told reporters. "We are acting quickly to ensure the lease site does not become a formal diplomatic presence."

A Russian diplomat told AFP that "the embassy is seeking legal advice" in the wake of the announcement. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov blasted the decision on Thursday. "To our regret, Australia diligently continues to follow the path created by the authors of the Russophobic hysteria, which is now active

in the countries of the collective West," he said. The new laws, passed with bipartisan support, do not stop Russia from having a diplomatic footprint in Australia — only from building so close to parliament. The legislation also acknowledges that Russia may be eligible for financial compensation.

Capable, aggressive and unconstrained

Counterintelligence expert and former FBI agent Dennis Desmond said it was reasonable to suspect Russia would use the proposed embassy site as a base to spy on Australian politicians. "The decision to place an embassy in a location obviously has very specific intent behind it," he told AFP. "There's a variety of techniques and tactics they will use." Desmond said this could include signals intelligence and tailing Australian officials. Former UK diplomat Alex Bristow, from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said it was likely the government had received an "emphatic" warning from intelligence agencies.

"Given the proximity, it could be a form of electronic surveillance operating out of the embassy," he said. "Russia has some of the largest, most capable, most aggressive and least constrained intelligence services

in the world," he said. "And they're given leeway that we would never give a Western intelligence service." Albanese said he expected some blowback from Russia. "We don't expect Russia is in a position to talk about international law, given their rejection of it so consistently and so brazenly with their invasion of Ukraine," he said.

Agreement terminated

Russia acquired the lease to the scruffy paddock in 2008 through an agreement with the National Capital Authority, a federal government agency, and was granted building approval in 2011. It planned to move there from its current site, a hulking brick building in an unfashionable part of the city overlooking a funeral parlour, a pub and a petrol station. Construction has progressed at a glacial pace and the site remains strewn with detritus and building materials. Although the government was initially comfortable with the plans, it has been scrambling to tear them up as relations have soured in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A previous attempt to cancel the lease was thrown out by the federal court last month, prompting the pivot towards national security legislation. — AFP



CANBERRA: The Australian flag is seen on the Parliament House building behind an under construction structure on the grounds of a proposed new Russian embassy in Canberra. Australia blocked Russia from building a new embassy in the shadow of Parliament House. — AFP



COP28 must deliver for the most vulnerable: Al Jaber

BONN: COP28 President-Delegate, Dr Sultan Al Jaber, met with heads of delegations and key negotiating groups including those from the Least Developed Countries (LDC) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) at the Bonn UN Climate Change Conference, being held in the run up to COP28, emphasizing the need to engage and listen to all voices in the climate change discussion - especially those of the Global South.

The conference, taking place in Bonn, 5-15 June, is hosting discussions on more than 50 agenda items. In framing the meetings in Bonn, Dr Sultan said "we will reach out to engage every community, seek to include the active participation of the under-represented, including young people and indigenous peoples. And we will give the space and enabling environment to discuss, debate and align on every mandate across every climate pillar."

During his meeting with the delegates from the G77 + China Group, Dr Al Jaber said, the G77 members have a special contribution to make by helping shape ambitious negotiated outcomes, a transformative action agenda and a just and equitable energy transition that leaves no one behind. For this, climate finance is critical, with Dr Al Jaber emphasizing his commitment to reform global financial institutions, to unlock more concessional finance, to attract much more private capital. He underscored that COP28 will be the first-time a G77 Summit is hosted at a COP.

Dr Al Jaber also engaged with the Arab Group and various delegates from SIDS and highlighted the importance of driving tangible changes to deliver real climate action that leaves no one behind. Adaptation, he said, is a critical focus for the region — securing resources for countries to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change, including those associated with food and health.

"Everyone is affected and the most vulnerable communities who have done the least to cause climate change, are the most affected. Arab countries only contribute 5% of global emissions yet are among the hardest hit by climate impacts. Temperatures rising across Middle East and North Africa region almost twice as quickly as rest of world", added Dr Al Jaber.

Building on these comments, Razan Al Mubarak, UN Climate Change High-Level Champion highlighted her longstanding commitments to nature and biodiversity and the critical role they will play in delivering a successful outcome. She also emphasized the importance for inclusion to cut across every aspect of the COP process especially those most vulnerable to ensure that every voice is heard and that every stakeholder feels empowered to participate in the shared commitment to combating climate change.

Delegates from member states of the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) met with Dr Al Jaber. He pointed out that Africa is rich in clean energy resources — including wind, solar, hydropower and geothermal — providing the African continent with huge potential for

low-carbon growth and sustainable development. But this will only be feasible if finance, technology, and capacity building is made available through investment that flows at scale, making a just transition a reality.

"It is critical that we build on the successes of COP27 to focus on the needs of the most vulnerable communities and make transformational progress across mitigation, adaptation, finance and loss and damage," he said. "The phase down of fossil fuels is inevitable. The speed at which this happens depends on how quickly we can phase up zero carbon alternatives, while ensuring energy security, accessibility, and affordability."

Dr Al Jaber also listened to the priorities of the Indigenous Peoples, the role they can play in the COP process, and assured them that their voices and those from marginalized communities are being heard. He noted that Indigenous Peoples represent just 5 percent of the global population but protect 80 percent of the world's biodiversity. The role of Indigenous Peoples as custodians of nature will be recognized by an "Indigenous Peoples Pavilion" at COP28.

During his remarks at the Constituency Roundtable, the President-Designate said: "We will prioritize an inclusive approach to guide the highest level of ambition in our response to the Global Stocktake, ensuring a just and balanced energy transition and providing space for discussion, dialogue and consensus on the role of fossil fuels", adding "We are committed to ensuring all groups, all stakeholders, are fully engaged. We need a COP of action, a COP of solidarity, and a COP of unity", added Dr Al Jaber.

In his remarks to the Heads of Delegation of all Negotiating Groups and Parties under the UNFCCC, Dr Al Jaber said: "The COP28 Presidency recognizes the views of many in this room that the Global Stocktake, and by extension COP28, must be a turning point. We must respond to the Stocktake with a pragmatic and effective way forward to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement."

He further added: "Many of you have devoted your entire careers to this cause. You know what is at stake. Many of us remember that moment in Paris when the world chose to take a different path to a better, sustainable zero carbon future. We know we aren't moving fast enough, but we also know that we have the power to make the difference, if we act in solidarity."

Young people will be at the forefront of addressing the climate challenge, Dr. Al Jaber told the youth delegation, which is why COP28 will be putting a special focus on empowering youth. He introduced COP28's Youth Climate Champion, Shamma Al Mazrui, who stressed the importance of including youth in all conversations around climate change. Al Mazrui also headlined the first ever Youth Stocktake event: an assessment of the challenges for youth inclusion in UNFCCC processes and a roadmap for the future. The COP28 Presidency also met with SB Chairs Ambassador Nabil Munir and Harry Vroelofs and various other delegation heads attending a reception at the Bundeskunsthalle museum.

"At COP28, we are going to be laser-focused on concrete and ambitious solutions that will allow us to bridge the gaps by 2030. And we will include all stakeholders to drive an inclusive plan of action that gets us moving in the right direction. We need to shift from incremental steps to transformational progress that delivers for everyone, everywhere. And that work begins right here in Bonn."

North Korea fires ballistic missile: S Korean military

SEOUL: North Korea fired a ballistic missile, South Korea's military said Thursday, the latest in a string of banned weapons tests carried out by Pyongyang so far this year. "North Korea fired an unidentified ballistic missile into the East Sea," Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

Japan also confirmed the launch, with Tokyo's defence ministry saying Pyongyang had "launched a possible ballistic missile" and the country's coast-guard calling on vessels to be vigilant and not approach any fallen objects at sea. Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points in years, with diplomacy stalled and Kim Jong Un declaring his country an "irreversible" nuclear power, as well as calling for ramped-up weapons production, including tactical nukes. North Korea has conducted multiple sanctions-busting launches this year, including test-firing its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles, and last month attempting to put a military spy satellite into orbit.

In response, the hawkish administration of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has bolstered defence cooperation with the United States, staging regular large-scale joint military drills, including live-fire "annihilation" exercises which are currently

Magnitude 6.2 quake strikes Philippines

MANILA: A magnitude 6.2 earthquake struck the Philippines on Thursday, the US Geological Survey said, but there were no immediate reports of damage. The earthquake struck at a depth of 112 kilometres (77 miles) at around 10:00 am (0200 GMT) in waters off Calatagan town, about three hours' drive from the capital Manila.

Calatagan police chief Emil Mendoza said he and his staff rushed outside following the tremor, which was also felt over the country's heavily populated heartland, including Manila. "It was a bit strong. We had to run outside," Mendoza told AFP.

While there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage, disaster authorities had been deployed to assess the earthquake's impact, Mendoza said. Calatagan disaster officer Ronald Torres said the quake lasted between 30 seconds and a minute. The state seismological agency warned of aftershocks but ruled out tsunami waves due to the tremor's depth. The earthquake sent people rushing out of buildings in the capital. Runways and taxiways at Ninoy Aquino International Airport were temporarily closed to inspect for any damage to the pavement, according to the country's transportation department.

Operation of the capital's metro system was also halted while tracks were checked for possible damage. Images on social media verified by AFP showed a crane truck at a Manila port as it swayed from the force of the tremor.

Diego Mariano, information officer at the civil defence office, said authorities were still assessing the impact of the quake. "As of now, no major damage or casualties as of reporting time. Assessment still ongoing," Mariano told reporters in a message.

Quakes are a daily occurrence in the Philippines, which sits along the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic as well as volcanic activity that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

In October 2013, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake struck Bohol Island in the central Philippines, triggering landslides and killing more than 200 people. Old churches in the birthplace of Catholicism in the Philippines were badly damaged. Nearly 400,000 were displaced and tens of thousands of houses were damaged due to the quake.

In 1990, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake in the northern Philippines created a ground rupture that stretched over a hundred kilometres, causing severe damage and killing more than 1,200 people. — AFP

ongoing. Such exercises infuriate Pyongyang, which regards them as rehearsals for invasion. The ongoing drills were "targeting the DPRK by massively mobilizing various types of offensive weapons and equipment", a spokesperson for the North's Ministry of National Defence said in a statement Thursday, referring to the country by its official name. "Our response to this is inevitable," they added in the statement, which was carried by the official Korean Central News Agency. "Our armed forces will fully counter any form of demonstrative moves and provocation of the enemies."

Lawsuit

On Wednesday, South Korea filed a lawsuit seeking damages from North Korea for the 2020 demolition of a liaison office. The office was established in 2018 with funding from Seoul at an industrial zone near the border in North Korean territory, as South Korea's then president Moon Jae-in pressed for a diplomatic breakthrough with Pyongyang.

But after that process collapsed and relations deteriorated, North Korea demolished the building in June 2020. Seoul said it was seeking 44.7 billion won (\$35 million) in damages, with the country's Unification Ministry describing the demolition as "clearly an illegal act". North Korea is likely to ignore any ruling by the court, but there is precedent in South Korea and the United States of damages being awarded against its government. "Given the timing, the launch seems like the North's expression of discontent or protest at Seoul's legal action seeking compensation on the North's demolition of the Kaesong office," Choi Gil-il, professor of military studies at Sangji University, told. — AFP



SINGAPORE: Singapore Police Force (SPF) officers patrol with a police robot at Changi Airport in Singapore on June 15, 2023. — AFP

Singapore to put more police robots on the streets

SINGAPORE: Singapore will "progressively deploy" more patrol robots across the city-state, police said Thursday, after more than five years of small-scale trials. Robots were deployed at Changi Airport's Terminal 4 starting in April "to augment frontline police officers in conducting premises patrol", the Singapore Police Force (SPF) said. More deployments are expected across the city of 5.6 million people, whose small population and low birth rate mean it has to make use of technology to overcome a lack of manpower.

"The SPF plans to progressively deploy more patrol robots to augment police's operations across Singapore," the SPF said in a statement, without giving a timeline. The robots are equipped with cameras, sensors, speakers, a display panel, blinkers and a siren. An extendable mast with a 360-degree camera gives an on-the-ground view to officers in a situation room, and a two-way channel allows them to talk directly with the public. "The patrol robot is the latest addition to SPF's technological arsenal, capable of autonomous patrol and providing the police with an enhanced situational picture to enable better decision and sense-making," the police said.

Using its blinkers, siren and speakers, the robot can "enforce a cordon or warn bystanders during an incident prior to the arrival" of human police, according to the statement. — AFP



Business

FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2023

Rise of the cute robots

Friendly machines are now everywhere, serving as companions



PARIS: A humanoid robot displays a screen at the United Robotics Group stand at the Vivatech technology startups and innovation fair in Paris. — AFP photos

PARIS: The red eye that refuses to be extinguished, the metal body that cannot be crushed — for many of us the word “robot” conjures one image: the Terminator. But robots are now everywhere, serving as companions in care homes or vacuum cleaners in our homes, and manufacturers are keener than ever to design friendly machines. “At first we noticed the kids could be a bit afraid,” said Do Hwan Kim of his firm Neubility’s tiny delivery robot.

To get around the problem, the firm added big doughy eyes that can indicate, making it look like the world’s friendliest futuristic wheelie bin. Dozens of the machines now trundle around campsites, university campuses and golf courses across South Korea. “Campsites even use it on their posters,” Kim told AFP at the VivaTech trade fair in Paris, underlining its transformation from potential threat to family friend. And VivaTech played host to plenty of other robots designed with cuteness in mind — ones with cartoon animal personas, others that looked like children’s toys from the 1980s. The aesthetic stands in stark contrast to the creepy dog-bots and anonymous drones that have become standard.

‘Escaped’ from cartoon

As robots have become more common, a whole

field of academia has grown up studying the interaction between machines and humans. Kerstin Dautenhahn of Waterloo University in Canada, one of the most noted researchers in the area, said she had seen a huge shift in the way manufacturers looked at design: from an all-consuming concern with function to an acute awareness of appearance. “What you find in many, many fields... is that people pay a lot of attention to how the robot moves, how it looks, how it can interact with them,” she said.

This holds true for robots sharing production lines with human workers just as much as those designed to care for older and disabled people. “Even with those robots where the main function for example is to transport objects from A to B, people still need to pay a lot of attention to how the robot moves, how it can express its intentions,” she said. A French firm called Enchanted Tools has fully committed to the friendly aesthetic.

Their robots have names, genders, cartoon-style personas and even a back story. “These two characters have escaped from a cartoon to come into our everyday lives to help us manage our social spaces,” said the firm’s boss Jerome Monceaux. He envisages the brightly colored machines with cat-like features will help in hospitals, hotels, restaurants and

anywhere with objects that need moving. These cute robots take their design cues from a family of social companion robots, which are big business in Japan.

Stairway hell

Dautenhahn says there is plenty of evidence that people in Japan and South Korea hold more positive views about robots than people in the West. “In Japan, if you say ‘I want to build a robot that helps older people in a care home to be happier’, they just think it’s a great idea,” she said. In European countries, the initial response is often negative, fuelled by dystopian science fiction.

“We have to do a lot of convincing,” she added. Small pilot schemes in the United States have seen robots get bullied or even assaulted, though social-media videos have also shown people helping robots navigate pedestrian crossings. Handling these cultural difficulties is a challenge, says Dautenhahn. But there are plenty of other difficulties. Robots are expensive to design and manufacture, and so they don’t come cheap to buy.

Enchanted Tools reckons its robots will retail at 35,000 euros (\$38,000) while Neubility said it aimed to manufacture its bot for \$5,000. Then there is the issue of finding a market. Do Hwan Kim said



PARIS: A photo shows an autonomous robot delivery service by South Korean company Neubility at their booth during the Vivatech technology startups and innovation fair.

Neubility was aiming to corner grocery deliveries and has a pilot scheme with the 7-Eleven chain in South Korea. But its robot faces a common hurdle for machines: it cannot climb stairs. Kim hopes market forces will give a helping hand. “At the moment, the delivery cost is so much cheaper with the robot that people are happy to come down the stairs to get their groceries,” he said. — AFP

Lithium boom comes to Brazil’s ‘misery valley’

ARACUAI: In a cloud of gray dust, a heavy-duty excavator loads a truck with stone blocks containing lithium, the “white gold” of the clean-energy revolution, which some hope will transform this parched, impoverished region of Brazil. Sun-scorched and drought-prone, the Jequitinhonha valley, in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais, is one of the poorest places in the country.

But the region, nicknamed “misery valley,” is on the cusp of a boom: it is home to around 85 percent of the lithium reserves in Brazil, the world’s fifth-biggest producer of the metal, an essential ingredient in electric vehicle batteries. Authorities in the region are eager to tap the potential of the silvery-white metal. Last month they threw a fanfare-filled event at the Nasdaq stock exchange’s headquarters in New York, where they launched an initiative to attract investment to what they are calling “Lithium Valley.”

Not everyone is thrilled at the idea, however.

Some residents in the region of around one million people complain about the environmental impact of lithium mining, others that local communities are not being included. “This is the Jequitinhonha valley... They want to call it ‘Lithium Valley.’ But let’s not put mining interests before our people’s identity,” says Aline Gomes Vilas, 45, a local activist in the town of Aracuai.

‘Green lithium’

Ana Cabral-Gardner, chief executive of Canadian mining firm Sigma Lithium, is keen to respond to such criticism. Her company, which started mining in the valley in April, is among the first to tap its lithium reserves. Its goal is to produce more than 600,000 vehicle batteries’ worth of the metal in its first year, eventually scaling up to three times that amount.

Sigma calls itself a “green lithium” miner, and emphasizes its social and environmental credentials. Lithium mining is notoriously water-intensive, a problem given that the metal is typically found in water-poor regions. Cabral-Gardner, who is Brazilian, says her company reuses 90 percent of its



ARACUAI: Aerial view of the Grota do Cirilo lithium project, owned by Canadian company Sigma Lithium, located 20 km north east of Aracuai, Minas Gerais state, Brazil. — AFP

water supplies, protects the local stream and uses no chemicals in the mining process. “Our entire operation is built around finding a balance between sustainability and mining,” she tells AFP. “I’ve been called the ‘hippie CEO.’”

In Aracuai, which sits near Sigma’s mine, Gomes Vilas says it is already having a negative impact, including damage to people’s homes from explosions used in the mining process. “This was a peaceful rural area. Now there’s a constant racket. There are already houses with cracks in the walls from the explosions,” she says. “The whole house shakes every time there’s an explosion,” adds Luiz Gonzaga, a 71-year-old farm worker who lives next to the mine. “They’re digging pretty far from me for now, and the dust is already bothering us. Imagine what it will be like when they start digging closer.” — AFP

TikTok to spend billions in SE Asia

JAKARTA: TikTok’s chief executive said Thursday the company would pour billions of dollars into Southeast Asia in the coming years, as a report showed its nascent venture into online shopping is paying off. The popular video-sharing app’s e-commerce affiliate has gained a substantial market share in the region just a year after its launch. “We’re going to invest billions of dollars in Indonesia and Southeast Asia over the next few years,” Shou Zi Chew told a forum in Indonesian capital Jakarta. “From a humble team of about 100 people, we now have nearly 8,000 employees in Southeast Asia.”

Chew said 125 million Indonesians comprised the majority of the app’s 325 million Southeast Asian users every month and more than two million sell their wares on TikTok Shop in Indonesia, the region’s biggest economy and most populous nation. Users sell a range of tech, fashion, homemade products and other goods on the platform.

Chew’s comments came as Singapore-based consultancy Momentum Works released a report Thursday detailing how TikTok Shop capitalized on legions of users to expand its business in 2022 after testing the waters in Indonesia a year earlier. While it lagged older rivals Shopee and Lazada, TikTok Shop posted the fastest growth rate, expanding its gross merchandise value (GMV) — the total value of goods sold, including cancelled, returned and refunded orders — sevenfold to \$4.4 billion last year from just \$600,000 in 2021.

“You can think of it as TikTok already having a captive audience coming onboard for entertainment trying different means to convert them and their attention into purchase and GMV,” Weihan Chen, head of insights at Momentum Works, told AFP. From Indonesia, TikTok Shop “aggressively expanded into five additional Southeast Asian markets, many of which boasted large populations of TikTok users” and invested to improve its e-commerce capabilities, Chen added. TikTok is owned by Chinese technology giant ByteDance.

‘Game changer’

Overall, the GMV of the region’s nine top e-com-

merce platforms was valued at almost \$100 billion in 2022, up 14 percent on-year, led by Singapore-based Shopee and Lazada, a subsidiary of China’s Alibaba Group. Shopee, a unit of Singapore’s Sea Ltd, accounted for \$47.9 billion of that, a 13 percent increase, the report said. Lazada was at a distant second with \$20.1 billion, down from \$21 billion in 2021. Indonesia remains Southeast Asia’s largest e-commerce market, accounting for 52 percent of the region’s total GMV.

The return of offline shopping after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted led to a moderation in e-commerce sales, but it is expected to continue growing, the report said. It noted that the region may benefit from Chinese brands and manufacturing firms expanding into other countries as they reduce reliance on the US market and escape rising competition at home. “That might be a real game changer for Southeast Asia’s e-commerce landscape, which has for a long time suffered from a lack of variety of goods,” it said. — AFP



JAKARTA: TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew delivers his opening speech during the TikTok Southeast Asia Impact Forum 2023 in Jakarta on June 15, 2023. — AFP

Business

ECB hikes rate to 22-year high

Inflation still 'too high' amid darkening economic outlook

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank on Thursday said euro-zone inflation was still too elevated as it hiked interest rates for an eighth consecutive time to a two-decade high, despite a darkening economic outlook. The ECB increased rates by another 25 basis points, taking the closely-watched deposit rate to 3.50 percent - its highest level since 2001. "Inflation has been coming down but is projected to remain too high for too long," the ECB said in a statement.

Policymakers were "determined to ensure" a return to the bank's two-percent target, and will keep rates at sufficiently restrictive levels "for as long as necessary", it added. The quarter-point hike was widely penciled in by analysts. They were instead hoping president Christine Lagarde would use her 1245 GMT Frankfurt press conference to shed light on whether the ECB's unprecedented campaign of monetary policy tightening was nearing the summit. In the United States, the Federal Reserve on Wednesday held off from raising interest rates again after 10 straight increases.

But the Fed indicated more hikes were likely before the end of the year as inflation remains double

the bank's target rate. In the euro region, the ECB has hiked borrowing costs at the fastest rate ever to tame inflation after Russia's war in Ukraine sent food and energy prices soaring, raising rates by 3.75 percentage points since last July. Euro-zone inflation slowed to 6.1 percent in May year-on-year, down from a peak of 10.6 percent in October, mainly thanks to rapidly falling energy costs.

The ECB said its inflation-fighting efforts were "gradually having an impact across the economy", with loan demand slowing sharply in the euro-zone as higher borrowing costs take their toll on households and firms. But inflation remains three times above target and core inflation - which strips out volatile food and energy prices - eased only slightly to 5.3 percent, after 5.6 percent in April. Lagarde said earlier this month there was "no clear evidence" yet that core inflation had peaked. The ECB reiterated on Thursday that it will "follow a data-dependent approach" as it charts the way forward.

'Last optimists'

Like all central banks, the ECB has to walk a fine

line in raising interest rates sufficiently to dampen demand and contain inflation, without provoking a sharp economic slowdown in the process. But the euro-zone economy has proved less resilient than initially thought. Revised data last week showed that the economy in the 20-nation currency union shrank by 0.1 percent for two straight quarters at the end of 2022 and the start of 2023, meeting the technical definition of a recession.

While still mild, the surprise winter slump has cast doubt on more optimistic economic forecasts for 2023. In updated forecasts on Thursday, the ECB said it now saw the euro-zone economy growing by 0.9 percent in 2023, down from 1.0 percent previously. The ECB also slightly raised its inflation outlook, predicting it will reach 5.4 percent in 2023, 3.0 percent in 2024 and 2.2 percent in 2025 - a 0.1 percentage point increase from the March predictions for each year.

"It looks as if the ECB remains one of the last growth optimists standing, expecting euro-zone growth to return to potential before year-end," said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski. "This keeps the door for further rate hikes wide open." While the

recent weak economic data and gradually slowing inflation may boost the case of the "doves" among ECB policymakers against further tightening, most observers expect at least one more rate hike to follow.

ECB "hawks" may point to strong wage growth in the euro-zone and persistently high core inflation to warn against taking the foot off the gas too early, analysts said. Policymakers including Lagarde have also expressed concern about corporate profits worsening inflation, suggesting some companies were raising prices even as their costs have come down - a practice sometimes dubbed "greedflation".

Berenberg economist Holger Schmieding predicted "a heated summer debate" between the hawks and the doves, but said "a final rate hike" of another 25 basis points at the next meeting in July seemed likely. The ECB on Thursday also gave an update on efforts to shrink its massive balance sheet, built up over years of hoovering up government and corporate debt. The bank confirmed that it will from July stop reinvesting the proceeds from maturing bonds issued under a pre-pandemic stimulus scheme. — AFP

UIC, BWL discuss latest trends in AI for investments

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Bright World Labs (BWL), in cooperation with Union of Investment Companies (UIC), held a workshop for UIC group team members on Thursday titled "AI for Investments", in the presence of UIC Secretary General Fadwa Darweesh and BWL President Dr Scott Pezanowski. The workshop, which discussed the best ways to benefit from using artificial intelligence in the investment sector, also explained the great potentials AI provides to boost accuracy and efficiency in collecting the required data to choose the best real estate.

Dr Pezanowski told Kuwait Times about the importance of this technology. "AI has a lot of potential in investment, whether in portfolio optimization, stock market prediction and real estate property evaluation, in addition to the great tools that helps to know more about people's feedback, about stocks for example, or to analyze large amount of data to make better decisions about our money," he said. He pointed out AI prevents people from being biased and helps them make

a fact-based decision about investing their money and collecting data, adding sometimes people need to risk their money to make more money.

Regarding concerns about the replacement of human employees with AI, Pezanowski said AI is not going to take people's jobs, but "somebody who knows about AI is going to take their job". He quoted from an expert, explaining that it is very important for employees and companies to start using AI, else they would be left behind.

Darweesh said in her speech that investment companies are increasingly utilizing AI techniques and technologies to enhance their decision-making process and improve portfolio performance. She said AI has shown a key advantage in the investment field, which is the ability to analyze vast amounts of data quickly and accurately, in addition to shifting between large volumes of financial data, news articles, social media posts and other sources to identify patterns and trends that may impact investment decisions.

She added AI can help investment companies to enhance decision making, improve risk management and optimize portfolios, which can help the companies gain a competitive edge in the market and deliver better outcomes for their clients. Despite Darweesh stressing on the importance of human expertise in investment decisions which cannot be replaced by AI, she told Kuwait Times that in some careers, AI can help compa-



Dr Scott Pezanowski speaks to the audience.

nies a lot to save time and overhaul the old ways in collecting data and evaluating risks and profits. In addition, it can reduce the company's expenses.

Darweesh pointed out that AI will result in complete shift in careers globally, as new careers will emerge in place of jobs that have lost their relevance. The workshop also discussed the importance of AI in the investment sector, where speakers viewed examples of AI in finance and investing, different types of machine learning with examples, consulting and training in finance and investing and incorporating AI in personal businesses.



Dr Scott Pezanowski and Fadwa Darweesh are seen during the workshop.



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WEEK ENDED ON 15 JUNE 2023

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	929	937	942	929	13	27,806,416	5	0.54%	-8.73%	916	940	14.7	1.88	3.6%	1.04
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	259	264	267	253	14	70,672,512	4	1.54%	-11.72%	261	270	13.7	1.25	3.6%	1.33
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	164	172	174	163	11	25,295,659	9	5.52%	-3.99%	167	173	20.8	0.57	2.2%	1.18
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	192	197	198	192	6	4,996,451	6	3.14%	-5.55%	191	202	18.1	0.73	3.9%	1.30
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	728	740	740	728	12	57,615,208	14	1.93%	-1.09%	715	744	21.7	1.87	1.9%	1.16
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	617	633	643	617	26	28,730,546	16	2.59%	-15.92%	618	642	46.6	2.85	0.9%	1.22
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	121	125	125	121	4	4,662,137	5	4.17%	-17.76%	119	125	-	0.58	4.1%	1.79
204	National Investments	Financial Services	196	205	207	195	12	17,996,028	9	4.59%	-13.50%	195	206	-	0.82	14.1%	1.94
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	122	130	131	122	9	34,530,684	8	6.56%	16.07%	126	132	23.0	0.78	0.0%	0.95
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	107	110	111	106	5	40,544,454	3	2.80%	-2.43%	106	110	10.5	0.79	3.6%	1.14
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	144	149	151	143	8	49,780,083	5	3.47%	12.03%	146	151	9.9	1.08	5.2%	1.65
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	61.3	62.9	63.6	59.8	3.8	17,435,676	1.8	2.95%	-16.02%	62.0	63.4	-	0.38	14.9%	1.24
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	109	117	119	109	10	109,375,097	8	7.34%	11.58%	115	119	11.0	0.83	2.5%	1.08
413	Mabaneeh	Real Estate	758	843	843	757	86	8,593,573	88	11.66%	5.38%	825	856	17.5	1.91	1.6%	1.05
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	99	102	103	98.4	4.6	18,442,790	3	3.03%	6.23%	99	104	16.4	0.62	2.9%	0.57
501	National Industries	Financial Services	200	203	207	197	10	15,729,645	3	1.50%	-1.77%	200	206	-	0.92	2.4%	1.55
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,125	1,140	1,143	1,120	23	316,807	15	1.33%	-6.17%	1,090	1,149	12.4	1.06	5.3%	1.03
506	HEISCO	Industrials	621	646	650	621	29	985,926	6	0.94%	5.38%	638	651	22.4	1.62	3.1%	1.02
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	801	807	810	795	15	2,221,084	12	1.51%	0.88%	790	813	12.0	1.54	7.5%	0.98
603	Agility	Industrials	615	638	648	610	38	31,292,416	26	4.25%	-11.39%	634	656	23.1	0.90	0.0%	1.53
605	Zain	Telecommunications	511	520	522	510	12	26,677,772	9	1.76%	-7.64%	512	528	11.0	1.74	6.8%	0.69
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,481	3,500	3,500	3,389	111	616,743	46	1.33%	4.40%	3,499	3,560	9.5	3.07	10.9%	0.62
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	198	204	206	196	10	2,948,256	6	3.03%	0.49%	198	206	-	0.88	0.0%	1.16
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,900	1,855	1,900	1,855	45	614,057	-37	-1.96%	-2.37%	1,820	1,910	22.5	15.24	4.2%	1.40
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	80.0	87.0	91.5	79.9	11.6	188,148,855	6.9	8.61%	14.47%	86.3	90	10.6	1.05	5.4%	1.36
821	Warba Bank	Banking	210	216	216	208	8	17,539,215	7	3.35%	-5.33%	212	218	31.3	1.15	1.4%	1.15
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	442	480	495	442	53	5,221,123	34	7.62%	22.14%	453	490	-	1.37	2.6%	0.41
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	398	420	420	398	22	8,267,123	20	5.00%	13.51%	410	420	38.3	1.63	3.7%	0.72
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	181	187	187	180	7	5,289,875	6	3.31%	-0.53%	185	189	15.2	1.86	9.2%	0.44
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,790	1,804	1,805	1,772	33	1,032,820	23	1.29%	-12.09%	1,785	1,820	20.9	6.75	4.8%	0.97
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	975	1,020	1,069	975	94	2,352,786	30	3.03%	26.71%	1,010	1,035	13.0	3.98	5.6%	0.32

* As of end of week closing

Business

China's central bank cuts interest rate, pumps billions into markets

China youth unemployment rises to record 20.8%

News in Brief

German economy to shrink

FRANKFURT: The German economy will contract in 2023, two leading economic institutes said Thursday, revising down earlier forecasts after persistently high inflation contributed to a weaker-than-expected start to the year. Europe's largest economy is expected to shrink by 0.2 percent this year, the Berlin-based DIW institute said, after previously predicting modest growth. Germany's IHW Kiel economic institute now sees a contraction of 0.3 percent, down from a previous forecast of 0.5 percent growth. The downgrades come after Germany fell into a mild recession in the final months of 2022 and the start of 2023, as inflation and higher interest rates curbed consumer demand. Strong wage growth and gradually slowing inflation are expected to drive a recovery in the later half of the year, both institutes said, but not enough to offset the winter surprise. "Prices that are no longer rising quite as strongly, increasing real incomes, a robust labor market and higher consumer spending are likely to be the key to economic recovery in the course of the year," said the DIW's Timm Boenke. — AFP

Swedish inflation dips

STOCKHOLM: Swedish inflation dipped under 10 percent in May, official statistics showed Wednesday, but was still higher than expected with some analysts suggesting superstar Beyonce had tipped the scales. Consumer prices rose by 9.7 percent in May year-on-year, down from 10.5 percent in April, the first time inflation came in under 10 percent in over six months. "Continued decrease in electricity and food prices contributed to the lower inflation rate in May," Mikael Nordin, statistician at Statistics Sweden, said in a statement. At the same time, costs of certain goods and services rose, "for instance hotel and restaurant visits, recreational services, and clothing," the agency said. According to Michael Grahn, chief economist for Sweden at Danske Bank, a visit by Beyonce to Stockholm could explain the unexpected rise. "Beyonce's start of her world tour in Sweden seems to have colored May inflation, how much is uncertain," Grahn said in a post to social media. — AFP

Kenya govt unveils budget

NAIROBI: Kenyan President William Ruto's government presented its maiden budget to parliament on Thursday but was met with a walkout by protesting opposition MPs. The 3.6-trillion shilling (\$25.7 billion) financial plan for 2023/24 is the first since Ruto took the helm of the East African powerhouse in September last year following a bitterly contested election race. But there has been widespread public anger over plans for a raft of tax hikes including on food and fuel expected to generate an extra \$2.1 billion in revenue. And just as Treasury Minister Njuguna Ndung'u began reading the budget, lawmakers allied with opposition leader Raila Odinga's coalition walked out of the chamber to cheers and jeers. Although Ruto pledged on the campaign trail to help poor Kenyans known as "hustlers," he has been accused of introducing policies that have actually made their lives harder. — AFP

Polish banks face lawsuits

WARSAW: Polish banks faced a new wave of lawsuits after the European Union's top court sided with borrowers holding foreign-currency mortgages in a key ruling on Thursday. Around 700,000 Polish households took out mortgages in Swiss francs more than a decade ago, attracted by low interest rates. They were hit hard when the zloty depreciated sharply against the franc, nearly doubling the costs of their loans. But some of the contracts were later found out to have contained the so-called abusive clauses, misleading provisions that the borrowers invoked in domestic courts as grounds to deem such deals null and void. Now, the EU tribunal said the banks are not allowed to seek compensation from clients or charge for the cost of capital if a loan agreement contained "unfair terms" and was declared invalid in court. "It can neither be accepted that the bank derive economic advantages from its unlawful conduct, nor that it be compensated for the disadvantages caused by such conduct," the court said in a statement. — AFP

N Zealand tips into recession

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's economy has fallen into a recession, according to official data released Thursday, with a damaging cyclone fuelling a widespread downturn just months before a national election. Stats NZ signaled the economy had contracted 0.1 percent in the first quarter, after a fall of 0.7 percent at the end of 2022. Four months before the country goes to the polls, finance minister Grant Robertson admitted that entering recession was "not a surprise". "We know 2023 is a challenging year as global growth slows, inflation has stayed higher for longer and the impacts of North Island weather events continue to disrupt households and businesses," he added. January flooding in Auckland and destruction caused by Cyclone Gabrielle in February both weighed on the economy. The government estimates it will cost up to NZ\$15 million (US\$9 million) to clean up the damage caused by the extreme weather. — AFP

BEIJING: China's central bank cut a key interest rate and pumped billions into financial markets Thursday, as fresh data showed the world's second-largest economy was flagging. The moves are the most significant by leaders to try to invigorate growth after indicators in recent months showed a hoped-for strong recovery following years of Covid lockdown-induced slowing was quickly running out of steam.

China's efforts contrast with those in the United States and other Western countries, which have been forced into a series of interest rate hikes while reducing money supply to tame inflation. Officials lowered the medium-term lending facility (MLF) rate - the interest for one-year loans to financial institutions - 10 basis points to 2.65 percent, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. The PBOC also said it was offering 237 billion yuan (\$33 billion) of funds to banks through the medium-term lending facility, "to maintain reasonable and sufficient liquidity in the banking system".

The announcement comes two days after unveiling a surprise cut in a short-term interest rate this week, which analysts said reflected growing concern about the state of the economy among Chinese policymakers. The MLF rate guides the benchmark lending rate for households, businesses and mortgages, which is set to be announced next week. A lower MLF rate reduces commercial banks' financing costs, in turn encouraging them to lend more and potentially boosting domestic consumption.

A number of lackluster economic indicators in recent weeks have signaled the country's post-COVID recovery is running out of steam. Inflation rose only 0.2 percent on-year in

May, while factory activity contracted for the second consecutive month. In another sign of weakness Thursday, figures showed youth unemployment rose to a record 20.8 percent in May. Meanwhile, industrial production growth slowed to 3.5 percent as factories gradually returned to full capacity, while retail sales, the main indicator of household consumption, rose 12.7 percent 18.4 percent April.

Weakening momentum

Retail sales are currently "the only functioning engine of Chinese growth", Rob Carnell, Asia-Pacific head researcher at ING, said in a note. Thursday's data "equates to a seasonally adjusted decrease in month-on-month sales and shows that the re-opening momentum is falling", Carnell said. Exports also sank in May for the first time since February, breaking a two-month growth streak. Beijing has kept interest rates low compared with other major economies, but the near-zero inflation highlights challenges faced by policymakers in trying to stimulate growth.

Top economist and government adviser Liu Yuanchun this month called for regulators to cut borrowing costs further to ease the financing burden of small and medium-sized private businesses.

Reports have in recent days said Beijing is lining up a series of measures targeting areas of the economy, particularly the real estate sector, which makes up a huge portion of gross domestic product.

China's six largest state-owned commercial banks cut interest rates for savers on Thursday to boost spending, according to announcements on their websites, after being asked by the central bank.

The Chinese economy is also



SHANGHAI: Ships sail along the Huangpu River as buildings (back) are seen in Pudong district in Shanghai on June 15, 2023. — AFP

weighed down by a debt-laden property sector and a global economic slowdown. "All the data points so far sent consistent signals that the economic momentum is weakening," Zhiwei Zhang, president of Pinpoint Asset Management, said in a note on Thursday.

"We expect Beijing to ramp up transfers to local governments via an increase in the quota for special local government bonds, more lending quota for policy banks, and some direct funding from the PBOC," Ting Lu, Chief China Economist at Nomura, said in a note earlier this week.

Youth unemployment

Meanwhile, China on Thursday reported a series of weak economic indicators, with youth unemployment hitting a record high for the second consecutive month as the economy's post-COVID growth spurt fades. The

unemployment rate for Chinese between the ages of 16 and 24 rose to 20.8 percent, up from what was already a record 20.4 percent in April, the National Bureau of Statistics said. Overall urban unemployment remained at 5.2 percent, the NBS said in a statement.

Meanwhile, industrial production rose 3.5 percent in May, down from 5.6 percent a month earlier, as factories gradually returned to full capacity. Retail sales, the main indicator of household consumption, rose by 12.7 percent on-year compared with 18.4 percent a month earlier. Weak domestic demand, despite near-zero inflation, is holding back China's post-COVID recovery. "All the data points so far sent consistent signals that the economic momentum is weakening," Zhiwei Zhang, president of Pinpoint Asset Management, said in a note on Thursday. — AFP

Siemens to build new high-tech factories in Asia

BERLIN: German industrial giant Siemens said Thursday it would build a new high-tech factory in Singapore and expand another in China as part of a two-billion-euro (\$2.1 billion) investment plan to build up its manufacturing capacity. Siemens said it would invest around 200 million euros in the Singapore factory that would focus on industrial automation, and "set a new standard for connectivity". Aimed at serving the Southeast Asian markets, the new installation is expected to create over 400 jobs.

Business daily Handelsblatt reported that Siemens had originally planned to set up the factory in China but finally turned to Singapore to reduce its reliance on the Asian giant. Nevertheless, China is far from left out in the latest investment plans. Siemens said

it would expand its digital factory in Chengdu, China, investing 140 million euros and bring 400 new posts. A new digital R&D centre will also be set up in Shenzhen. "Many of Siemens' Chinese customers are early adopters of new technologies especially in digitalization and high-tech manufacturing," it said in a statement.

"This is why Siemens also announced the investment in a new digital R&D Innovation Center in Shenzhen to speed up development of motion control systems with digitalization and power," it added. Details on further investments in Europe and the United States across the globe are expected to follow, said Siemens. The group's announcement came a day after the German government published its first National Security Strategy that took aim at China for acting against Berlin's interests and values.

During the press conference presenting the blueprint, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock revealed that in talks with German companies, she had warned that lessons had to be learnt from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Berlin could not bail out huge industrial groups with deep ties with China should a



CUXHAVEN: A general view shows a hall with wind turbines at the Siemens Gamesa factory in Cuxhaven, northwestern Germany. — AFP

crisis erupt with Beijing, she added. Instead, German companies are encouraged to diversify their supply chains and markets. Particularly in sensitive areas like artificial intelligence or digitalization, the West has repeatedly warned of the risks of commercial espionage from China. — AFP

Stocks wobble as ECB raises rates, lowers forecast

LONDON: Stock markets wavered Thursday as the European Central Bank raised interest rates to a 22-year high, a day after the Federal Reserve signaled it would resume raising borrowing costs after a pause. The euro shot higher after the ECB delivered the widely expected quarter-point rate increase and warned of persistent inflation and slower growth. "More interesting is the Bank's new forecasts and guidance, the overall message from which is that policymakers' work is not done," said Jack Allen-Reynolds, deputy chief euro-zone economist at Capital Economics. The ECB raised its inflation forecasts and warned that consumer price increases will remain "too high for too long".

Inflation in the bloc slowed to 6.1 percent in May year-on-year, but remains more than three times the ECB's two-percent target. Euro-zone stocks fell further after the announcement by the ECB, which trimmed its growth forecast for the bloc which recent data showed fell into recession over the winter. A day earlier, the Fed paused its rate-hiking cycle, but it signaled more rate hikes are to come. Central banks hike rates in efforts to dampen inflation, but this also hurts economic activity, ramps up loan repayments and weighs on investor sentiment.

'Hawkish'

"Central banks remain... hawkish" owing to stubbornly-high inflation, OANDA analyst Craig Erlam told AFP. "The Fed paused but forecast two more rate hikes, while the ECB will likely push back against the idea of a pause at this point after hiking today." ECB chief Christine Lagarde did just that at her traditional post-rate meeting press conference, saying the central bank was "not done" with its battle to bring down inflation. "Unless there is a material change to our base-



LOS ANGELES: A nozzle pumps gasoline into a vehicle at a gas station in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

line, we will continue to hike at our next meeting (in July). So we're not thinking about pausing," Lagarde told journalists after bringing rates up to their highest level since 2001. Fed policymakers opted Wednesday to freeze borrowing costs, having implemented 10 straight hikes since early 2022. However, they signaled more increases were likely later in the year as inflation was still double the bank's target rate and the jobs market remained tight.

The move to hold rates at 5.0-5.25 percent came a day after figures showed prices rose 4.0 percent last month on an annual comparison, the slowest pace since March 2021. The reading added to hopes the Fed could guide the economy to a soft landing and eased worries the United States could tip into recession. A slew of economic data released early Thursday mostly confirmed that narrative, but Wall Street stocks mostly dipped at the open of trading, after having finished mixed on Wednesday following the Fed's rate decision.

Investors also digested news that China's central bank had cut a key interest rate in a bid to boost activity in the struggling Asian powerhouse economy. Elsewhere Thursday, Europe's reference gas price hit a two-month high on falling supplies from major producer Norway, which has suffered pipe leaks and maintenance shutdowns. Norway has become Europe's biggest gas supplier in the wake of Russia's war on neighboring Ukraine. — AFP

Scandal-hit hedge fund Odey says to be broken up

LONDON: Odey Asset Management will be dismantled and transfer its activities to other firms, the high-profile British hedge fund said Thursday, after its founder was accused of sexual assault against eight women. Crispin Odey, a vocal Brexit supporter and Conservative party donor, quit the group at the weekend. He denies the allegations. "Acting in the best interest of our investors and our staff has continued to be our primary concern over the past few days," the firm said in a statement. The company said it was "in advanced discussions for rehousing funds and transferring certain fund management activities and individuals to other asset managers".

The allegations against Crispin Odey had emerged in the Financial Times newspaper one week ago. A further five women alleged they had been abused or harassed by Odey, the FT said. Odey, 64, well known for making huge sums from betting heavily against the British pound and UK government bonds in recent years, has described the allegations as "rubbish". The FT probe focused on incidents said to have occurred between 1998 and 2021. It cited 13 women who have worked for Odey Asset Management or had social or professional dealings with its founder, the business daily said.

'Deeply troubling'

A cross-party panel of British lawmakers on Wednesday called upon UK regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority, to answer questions surrounding its supervision of Odey Asset Management and Crispin Odey. "Culture in financial services, and the experiences of women in the industry, are ongoing concerns of the Treasury Committee," its chair Harriet Baldwin said in a statement. "Journalists at the Financial Times have shone a light on deeply troubling allegations of conduct regarding the actions of a powerful individual. "We look forward to receiving a response from the financial regulator on these important issues," added Baldwin, an MP for the ruling Conservative party. — AFP



This photograph taken on June 13, 2023 shows "Fox with Bird" 2016-2023 by US artist Jeff Koons, displayed at the gallery Pace during the Art Basel fair for modern and contemporary art, in Basel. - AFP photos



A visitor takes a picture of "Jam Proximus Ardet, the last video", 2021 by Algerian-French contemporary artist Adel Abdessemed, displayed at the Unlimited section of Art Basel.



An installation by British artist, composer and performer Martin Creed at Art Basel.

Climate change, migration, artificial intelligence, perspectives on Africa and combating nationalism take center-stage this year at Art Basel, the world's top contemporary art fair. The giant annual event in the Swiss border city of Basel, which aims to reflect current trends in the contemporary world, begins with private viewings for wealthy collectors before opening its doors to the public from Thursday to Sunday.



US artist Mika Tajima poses at the Unlimited section of Art Basel.

In the monumental works section, a video by the French-Algerian artist Adel Abdessemed shows an approaching burning boat, intended as an allegory of the tragedy awaiting many migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Close by, Ghanaian artist Serge Attukwei Clottey illustrates the water shortage crisis through a huge installation entitled "Sea Never Dries".

The giant tapestry is made up of fragments of the yellow cooking oil containers found throughout Ghana, which are then reused to collect water. "Artists are the thermometer of what's happening in the world," said Giovanni Carmine, one of the Art Basel curators, told AFP. The monumental works offer "a mirror on the interests of artists and of the art market", he added.



Canadian visual artist Sin Wai Kin, nominated for the Turner Prize 2022, poses at the Soft Opening art gallery's booth during Art Basel.



Visitors walk past "Topa" a 2005 neon installation by US artist Jason Rhoades.

AI, Africa and climate crisis star at Art Basel fair

'Apocalyptic' atmosphere

The fair tackles topical issues such as the rapid growth of artificial intelligence. An ephemeral work by Croatian artist Tomo Savic-Gecan uses an algorithm that analyses articles relating to Art Basel's art market report. It uses it to affect the locations, durations and intensity of selected lights. US artist Adam Pendleton questions racism in the United States with a video centered on the statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee in Virginia's capital Richmond, which came under the spotlight in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The artist, who hails from Richmond, documents the transformations the statue went through — being covered in graffiti, sprayed with paint, then finally pulled down to be transferred to the city's Black History Museum — symbolizing the changes in US society. Some 76 monumental works fill the section devoted to pieces intended for purchase by museums or major art collections. Carmine acknowledged that



"Dining in Chaos" 2023 by Kenyan painter and sculptor Kaloki Nyamai.

"the atmosphere is a bit apocalyptic" — but with "a touch of hope", he added.

Long underrepresented, African artists are playing an increasing role. There is a triptych by Kenya's Kaloki Nyamai, and "The African Library" installation by the Nigerian-British artist Yinka Shonibare. This work is filled with books covered with fabrics bearing the names of Africans who helped shape the continent's identity.

'Stupid idea'

The fair takes over the city for an entire week. Works by renowned artists are dotted throughout Basel, including one by Britain's Martin Creed, who won the country's prestigious Turner Prize for contemporary art in 2001. Creed has planted a flagpole in front of the historic city hall with a flag simply reading "air". "A flag that says 'air', to me, is kind of a stupid idea. So I thought I would try it," he told AFP. "Putting a flag in the earth to say that you own it is a form of nationalism. It's stupid. I think nationalism is stupid. I think flags

are stupid. Nobody owns anything. It's completely delusional." He is amused by those who use his flagpole as simply something to lock their bicycles to.

More than 4,000 artists from 36 countries are represented in 284 galleries, often by their most expensive works. If recession fears are cooling the art market, the Basel galleries still manage to seal big sales. The Pace Gallery, one of many galleries presenting and selling work at the fair, has unveiled a new series of sculptures by the US artist Jeff Koons, representing a stainless steel fox inspired by 18th-century European porcelain. "People are very excited about the fox," said Marc Glimcher, chief executive of the Pace Gallery, which has already sold two versions for \$3 million each, including one which is finished but has yet to be painted. — AFP



Visitors look at "Bearla Fene", 2023 by US conceptual artist Alex Da Corte.



A woman takes a picture of "Onion gum" 1983 by US artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (left) next to "Untitled" 1982 by US artist Keith Haring at the Van de Weghe fine art gallery during Art Basel.



Visitors walk past pictures by US photographer Richard Avedon at "the Ten Exhibition Prints from In the American West, photographed 1979-1984" booth at Art Basel.



A visitor watches "Esfera Amarilla" 1984, painted metal and nylon thread, by late Venezuelan artist Jesus Rafael Soto.



A visitor watches "Dismantled Wasteland (Proposal for a Landscape)" 2023 by Mexican mixed-media conceptual artist Jorge Mendez Blake.

Lifestyle



Local historian Giorgos Tsampanakis poses with his sister Maria in the family house inherited by his sister in the village of Olympos on the island of Karpathos.



Tavern owner, Anna Lentakis, 67, (left) clears her land from weeds in the farming hamlet of Avlona near Olympos.



Rigopoula Pavlidis and her husband Giannis work in their workshop on a narrow alley of the remote village of Olympos on the island of Karpathos on May 5, 2023.

The loneliness of one of Albania's last sworn virgins

For decades, Gjystina Grishaj chopped wood, drove tractors and tended livestock as the man of the house in a remote valley in northern Albania, only to find herself alone after years of sacrifice supporting her family. Grishaj is among the last of Albania's so-called "sworn virgins" — an ancient, gender-bending tradition that saw her renounce sex, married life and parenthood in exchange for the right to live and work as a man in the deeply patriarchal society.

The choice — made over 30 years ago — was simple. With her father sick and eldest brother dead, she embraced the "burreneshe" identity — as it is known in Albania — which allowed her to provide for her family. But now at 58, Grishaj is alone after her relatives, like hundreds of thousands of other Albanians, emigrated in search of a better life — leaving her behind in their family home.

"After all the sacrifices I've made for my family, it's the loneliness that weighs on me," Grishaj told AFP. "There have always been a lot of us living in this big house, which is now plunged into silence. I'm overwhelmed with grief."

'I would hide'

Grishaj came of age during the hard years of communist rule and the chaotic aftermath that followed Albania's entry into the global economy. To add to their woes, Grishaj's family struggled to make ends meet living in an isolated valley along Albania's craggy, northern frontier — where winters are harsh and traditions run deep. With six mouths to feed, her sister married off, eldest brother dead, and her father stricken with disease, Grishaj decided to make the ultimate sacrifice.

"I decided to work like a man to help with my siblings' education and my father's medicine," said Grisha. Her mother, however, pushed back "insisting a lot that I get married," she added. But "when people came to ask for my hand in marriage, I would hide." Over the years, Grishaj hardened up physically as she

"Here it is women who command!" declared Rigopoula Pavlidis, as she sang the virtues of her remote village on the island of Karpathos, one of Greece's rare matriarchal societies. Sitting at a desk across the room painting religious icons, her husband Giannis nodded silently. "My husband can't do anything without me, not even his tax return," Pavlidis laughed as she embroidered a traditional dress inside her workshop.

In contrast to most of patriarchal Greece, the women of Olympos play a commanding role in village life. Isolated from the rest of the Dodecanese island, the spectacular hillside village has safeguarded this centuries-old tradition, which has survived the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century and Italian rule in the 20th. Until the 1980s, there was no asphalt road to Olympos.

Among the traditions that survive is a Byzantine-era inheritance system that gives a mother's property to the eldest daughter, said local historian Giorgos Tsampanakis. Rigopoula, the seamstress, is one of the beneficiaries of the tradition. She inherited 700 olive trees from her mother. "The families did not have enough property to divide among all the children... and if we had left the inheritance to the men, they would have squandered it," she said.

Greek women traditionally moved into their new husband's home upon marriage. In Olympos, the opposite takes place. And women's prominence is also reflected in their names. "The eldest daughter took the first name of the maternal grandmother, unlike the rest of Greece, where it was that of the paternal grandmother," said Tsampanakis. "Many women still call themselves by their mother's surname and not their husband's," he added.

The role of women in Olympos was further strengthened in the 1950s when the village men began to emigrate for work — mainly to the United States and European countries — leaving their wives and daughters behind to manage families and farms on their own.



This photograph taken on May 6, 2023, shows a sculpture dedicated to women of Olympos, overlooking the remote village on the island of Karpathos. - AFP photos

Women rule on Greek island of Karpathos

'We had no choice'

"We had no choice but to work in the absence of the men. It was our only way of surviving," recalled 67-year-old Anna Lentakis as she picked artichokes in the hamlet of Avlona near Olympos. A few years ago, Lentakis ran the Olympos tavern. This has now passed into the hands of her eldest daughter Marina. "I don't know if we were early feminists... but I like to say that the man is the head of the family, and the woman the neck," said Marina, who is in her 40s. Marina's daughter Anna is only 13 years old, but she knows that one day she will take up the torch. "It's my grandmother's legacy and I'll be proud to take care of it!" she said.

But the "feminist" inheritance system only benefits the eldest children,

said Alain Chabloz of the Geographical Society of Geneva, who has studied the subject. "The youngest sons were forced into exile, and the youngest daughters had to stay on the island at the service of the elders. A kind of social caste was created," he said. Giorgia Fourtina, the youngest of her family and unmarried, helps her older sister in the restaurant and in the fields. Fourtina does not feel that Olympos society is particularly progressive: "It's a small society where a woman alone in a cafe is frowned upon," she said.

Women "are the ones who maintain the traditions," said Yannis Hatzivasilis, a local sculptor, who has crafted an iconic statue of an Olympos woman gazing at the sea, waiting for her husband to return. The older women

of Olympos traditionally wear embroidered costumes consisting of flowered aprons, a headscarf and leather boots. Treasured heirlooms that are part of a girl's dowry, these costumes can cost up to 1,000 euros (\$1,077) and require hours of work.

Irini Chatzipapa, a 50-year-old baker, is the youngest Olympos woman to still wear it every day. "I taught my daughter to embroider, but except for the holidays, she does not wear it as it's not adapted to modern life," she said. Chatzipapa's 70-year-old mother chimes in: "Our costume is becoming just folklore for the holidays... Our world is disappearing." — AFP



Baker Irini Chatzipapa carries freshly baked rusks at her furnace workshop at the village of Diafani on the island of Karpathos on May 6, 2023.



Foula Chatzipapa, 61, holds freshly baked bread in Olympos.

helped the family scratch out a living doing manual labor. "I became the mainstay," she said.

But life as a burreneshe came with its advantages. Being a sworn virgin enabled her to escape arranged marriages without disgracing her family. She wore her hair short and pants long and was able to drink brandy in the cafes with the men and have a say in major decisions in the home. In the village, where barely 20 people live year-round, she became affectionately known by her nickname Duni.

Her choice to forsake womanhood for a life of hard labor has earned her "respect" in the eyes of the community, said Paulin Nilaj, the owner of a nearby guest house in Lepushe. "She has adopted the habits of men to have a special status," he adds. "I've always known her like that, so if one day she got married, that's when I'd be surprised."



Gjystina Grishaj, a "burrenesha" (sworn virgin), chops wood at her home in the mountain village of Lepushe, 200 km from Tirana, on May 25, 2023. - AFP

'Pillar of the family'

The role is a familiar one for Albania's sworn virgins. "It was a very appreciated and honored choice," anthropologist Aferdita Onuzi told AFP. "These women who decided to be the pillar of the family, to rub shoulders with men in the hardest tasks, enjoyed the respect of all, such a choice is considered the supreme sacrifice."

There is no official figure regarding the number of burrenesha remaining in the Balkan nation of 2.8 million. Most experts suspect there are no more than a handful left as Albania embraces modernity. "Maybe with me the chapter will be closed, no one will become a burrenesha

anymore. Because today life is different, there's no such pressure. Those who want to work can do so anywhere," said Grishaj.

In any case, experts agree that the choice has little to do with sexual identity. "Sexual relations were not even a subject," insisted Elsa Ballauri, a rights activist and curator of a museum in Tirana dedicated to the history of Albanian women. The phenomenon is "the result of social circumstances that force someone to impose themselves in a society of men," Ballauri added.

Grishaj shuns any notion that her decision was linked to sexuality, saying "not even God should hear such talk". And despite the fixation for some in the West with gender-appropriate pronouns, Grishaj said "she doesn't care" about her grammatical place in the world. "It doesn't matter, it's my life," she shrugged. And that life has been made



all the more difficult now that her family has moved abroad. After a lifetime of embracing jobs outside of the home, Grishaj has been forced to learn the domestic chores she long shirked, like cooking and cleaning.

Despite a lifetime of hard labor, Grishaj said she has been left with little. To support herself, she makes herbal remedies concocted from wildflowers and roots foraged in the mountains along with fruit brandy that she sells to tourists. Even still, Grishaj refuses to ask her siblings or 12 nephews and nieces for help. "It's difficult for them too," Grishaj said. "They are Albanian immigrants." - AFP

Egypt clinic helps women scarred by genital mutilation

Intissar was only 10 years old when she was forced to undergo genital mutilation, but 30 years later, one clinic is offering help for some of the millions of Egyptian women affected by the still-rampant practice. Intissar, a journalist who like other women cited here spoke under a pseudonym to protect her identity, recalls having spent 30 years "completely deprived of pleasure, without any connection to my body".

Her story closely resembles that of millions of Egyptian women and girls who have gone through female genital mutilation (FGM) at a young age, despite state-sponsored efforts seeking to curtail the practice. But for three years, one clinic has sought to change the reality of many of these women. In 2020, surgeons Reham Awwad and Amr Seifeldin became the first to offer clitoral reconstruction surgery in Egypt through their clinic, Restore FGM. Surgery is "the last resort", Awwad told AFP in her Cairo clinic.

A common first step in the clinic's treatment is psychosexual counselling coupled with plasma injections, which Awwad said "can reduce the need for surgery by 50 percent". The plasma injections allow for the regeneration of damaged tissue without subjecting women to new, invasive procedures. Nourhan, also using a pseudonym, described chronic pain and a severed sense of pleasure in the two decades since she underwent genital mutilation at 11.

Now in her 30s, the suffering has given way to "completely new sensations", Nourhan told AFP eight months after going under the knife again for reconstruction surgery. But more than the physical effects, Nourhan said she finally felt "in charge of my body again".

Holiday peak

Intissar recounted the day that her grandmother took her — with the consent of her parents, a doctor and a principal — to perform the harmful practice. When she cried, her grandmother "would tell me this was for my own good, that I was better this way", she told AFP. Under the grandmother's care, she spent her sum-

mer vacation recovering. Now aged 40, the prospect of undergoing reconstructive surgery offers her renewed hope.

Lobna Darwish, gender officer at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, urged "prevention campaigns in schools right before the holidays", citing seasonal peaks of FGM during those periods to allow time for recovery after the procedure. In Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country with a largely conservative society, 86 percent of ever-married women aged 15 to 49 have undergone FGM, according to the latest official figures from 2021.

Most commonly, they are subjected to the partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, which according to the World Health Organization can cause pain, bleeding, infections, painful sexual intercourse and complications during childbirth. The practice — misguidedly meant to reduce libido and preserve women's chastity — has been illegal in Egypt since 2008, and is regularly condemned by both Muslim and Christian religious authorities. Yet it remains widespread, not only in Egypt but in multiple other African countries and beyond, often cutting across social classes.

Egypt marks its national day for the elimination of FGM on June 14, and every year, government-sponsored TV advertisements list its dangers. While experts say the awareness campaigns have largely scared off parents from what they were told was a dangerous procedure performed by suspect midwives in rural backrooms, a rebranding has kept FGM alive. Parents began opting for what seemed like a safer option, with official figures now showing three-quarters of procedures in Egypt are done by doctors.

Intissar, who has studied the practice, said it was being promoted for its "aesthetic" value. When Nourhan and her then eight-year-old sister were recovering, she recalled how the women in their family praised not just the religious and moral virtues of FGM, but how "it was better and cleaner". — AFP

Lifestyle

SNAKES AS THERAPY ANIMALS: REPTILES HELP HEAL IN BRAZIL

A yellow-and-brown boa constrictor wraps itself around David de Oliveira Gomes' neck like a scarf, but the 15-year-old Brazilian with autism is fascinated, not afraid. For him, this is therapy. "His name is Gold. He's cold. He eats mice," Gomes tells his therapist at a treatment center in Sao Paulo, gently holding the large snake as it slithers around him. That is exactly the kind of sentence his therapist, Andrea Ribeiro, is trying to elicit.

She specializes in treating people with disabilities, autism or anxiety, using an unusual method: Reptile therapy, which she says helps patients relax and improve their communication, motor skills and other abilities. "He's working on speech and memory formation," the 51-year-old language-speech therapist says of Gomes, sitting at a table with him and the large snake.

Ribeiro has pioneered this method over the past decade at the treatment center, which features an open-air space where patients interact with lizards, turtles and a "jacare" — a kind of alligator native to Latin America that is common in Brazil, including in the Amazon rainforest. The treatment is not scientifically proven. But "it's been medically demonstrated that when people come in contact with animals, it releases neurotransmitters such as serotonin and beta-endorphins that give a sense of pleasure and well-being," says Ribeiro. "That makes (patients)



Gabriel Pinheiro attends a therapy session with reptiles.

feel good and want to learn." The reptiles "enable us to achieve better, faster results," she told AFP.

Step aside, dogs

Ribeiro used to use dogs in her treatment sessions. But she found their constant attempts to play and interact made some patients uneasy, especially those with autism. So she turned to reptiles. It's a class of animals that makes many people squirm. But people with autism tend to approach them "without preju-

dice", she says: The animals spark their curiosity without making them uncomfortable. The reptiles, for their part, "are indifferent", she says. "They don't seek attention the way some mammals do."

Ten-year-old Gabriel Pinheiro is petting a small alligator, trying to imitate Ribeiro's syllables by opening his mouth wide three times: "Ja-ca-re." "It's wet," he says, his eyes fixated on the creature from behind his glasses. The alligator's scales are "hard," its belly "soft," he says, as the therapist helps him work

on opposites. He and Ribeiro then sing a song about the jacare to practice auditory memory skills. Pinheiro's mother, Cristina, credits four years of this therapy with helping improve his listening, communication and motor skills. "He's always happy when we come," she says.

Reptilian massage

Another patient, 34-year-old Paulo Palacio Santos, suffered severe brain damage in an accident that left him paralyzed and speechless. Ribeiro wraps his face with a thick snake, whose weight and cold temperature help reactivate Santos's swallowing reflex, she says. She then uses a smaller boa constrictor to work the muscles around his mouth. The handling of these species is regulated by Brazil's environmental authority, IBAMA.

Ribeiro works side-by-side with biologist Beatriz Araujo, whose job is to monitor the animals' stress levels and ensure patients remain safe. There has never been an accident in 10 years of treatment, the center says. The reptiles, which are raised on site, are accustomed to human contact. No poisonous snakes are used. "I'm always here, just in case (an animal) reacts unexpectedly," says Araujo. "The dangers are the same as for close contact with any animal." — AFP



Paulo Henrique Palacio Santos attends a therapy session with reptiles at the Walking Equotherapy Clinic in Sao Paulo on May 30, 2023. - AFP photos



David de Oliveira Gomes attends a therapy session with reptiles.



Oscar-winning actress turned MP Jackson dies at 87

British actress Glenda Jackson, the two-time Oscar-winning actress who went on to become an MP, died on Thursday at the age of 87, her agent said. Lionel Lerner said Jackson "died peacefully at her home in Blackheath London this morning after a brief illness with her family at her side." "She recently completed filming 'The Great Escaper' in which she co-starred with Michael Caine," he added.

The film tells the true story of a World War II veteran who escaped his care home to attend a commemoration of the D-Day landings in France. Jackson won the Best Actress Oscar in 1970 for her leading performance in Ken Russell's film adaptation of author D H Lawrence's novel "Women in Love". She won it again in 1973 for her role in "A Touch of Class", in which she played a woman falling in love with the man with whom she is having an affair.

Despite her status as a formidable actress, she frequently showed her lighter side with appearances on popular British comedy series the "Morecambe and Wise Show". Jackson was elected as a Labor MP for her local London constituency of Hampstead and Highgate in 1992, and served as a transport minister in Tony Blair's government between 1997 and 1999. Alastair Campbell, Blair's influential press chief in government, called her "one of the finest actresses of our lifetime". "I sometimes felt she found the transition to politics harder than she expected. But a great life well lived," he tweeted.

'Formidable'

Tulip Siddiq, the current Labor MP serving Jackson's former constituency, called her a "formidable politician" and a "very supportive mentor". "Devastated to hear that my predecessor Glenda Jackson has died," she tweeted. Labor's foreign affairs spokesman, David Lammy, called her "a principled campaigner for the arts and social justice and always down to earth, fearless, outspoken and Labor to her core".

Jackson also advised Labor's Ken Livingstone when he was London mayor on housing policy and campaigned against homelessness in the capital from 2000 to 2004. Jackson was born on May 9, 1936, in Birkenhead, a small port town near Liverpool, northwest England, to a bricklayer and a cleaning lady. At 16 she went to work in a chemist's shop, doing amateur dramatics in her spare time. When she was 18 she won a scholarship to the prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London. — AFP

South Africa clinic hopes to save penguins' future

A small fish is dangled under the beak of an emaciated penguin at a South African clinic, to whet the bird's appetite. The sickly animal is among dozens undergoing treatment in the coastal town of Gqeberha, where a dedicated rehabilitation center is on a mission to bring African penguins back from the brink of extinction. "We are trying to reverse some of the human damage caused to these birds over the years," says Caitlin van der Merwe, a seabird ranger at the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB).



Seabird rangers prepare to feed penguins at SANCCOB.

Threatened by climate change and human activity, the endangered species, which waddles awkwardly on land but turns into a fast-swimming torpedo in the water, has suffered a drastic decline in numbers. Around 50,000 mating pairs — penguins are monogamous — inhabited the shore-

lines of South Africa and Namibia three decades ago. Today the number has dropped to 10,000 pairs.

That's a jaw-dropping 80 percent population decrease, which zoologists say is even more worrying given that a healthy penguin population is considered indicative of a healthy marine ecosystem. "The species declining, that means there's a big issue in the marine environment," says Carl Havemann, who heads the penguin clinic.

Climate threat

The center is currently teeming with feathered patients. Over the past two weeks, about 40 baby penguins have been transferred here from Bird Island, an islet home to one of Africa's largest penguin colonies about 60 km off Gqeberha, formerly known as Port Elizabeth. Heavy rains have battered the island, washing away nests and chicks. The little black and white birds traditionally dug their nests into a thick layer of guano — a mixture of droppings and remains that accumulate over time.

But the organic substance has been plundered for use as natural fertilizer, and the penguins now have to make do with branches or in cracks in the rocks, which make for a less sturdy home. And for the first three months of their lives the birds are covered only by grey plumage that offers little protection from water and cold. The rains caused many to drown or die of hypothermia. "With climate change, weather events are becoming more and more extreme and these obviously impact the natural colonies," Havemann says.

Footbath

Some survivors are being treated in the seabird rehabilitation center's intensive care unit, where staff are busy disinfecting, stitching and bandaging wounds. Footbaths, sardines and med-



A penguin swims at the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) centre in Gqeberha on June 6, 2023. - AFP photos

icines are also part of the treatment. In total, around 100 birds, both young and adult, are cared for in the clinic. The goal is to return them to the wild in the shortest time possible, limiting interaction with humans to what is strictly necessary.

The penguins huddle together, their shoulders raised as if they are perennially cold. Some are kept hydrated through a small tube inserted in their gullets. Desperate ones are euthanized. For those who are fit enough, rehab continues in the pool. "If they don't swim, they don't drink," says van der Merwe, as she whispers soothing words to a small penguin furiously waving its wings while she holds it between her thighs. It is suffering from borreli-

osis, an infectious disease caused by bacteria, and needs antibiotics.

Besides extreme weather events, African penguins are also threatened by diseases, overfishing and pollution. Gqeberha is home to a major port and huge cargo ships refuel offshore. Spills in the recent past have seen frantic attempts to rescue and clean up oil-tainted penguins. At current rates of decline, African penguins could become extinct within a decade, according to the Environment Ministry. "The ocean has such a complexity. If we take bits here and there, the whole system will collapse," van der Merwe says. — AFP



Britain's King Charles III (second right) poses for pictures with Sue Leyden, daughter of expedition leader Lord Hunt (left), Peter Hillary, son of Sir Edmund Hillary (second left) and Jamling Norgay, son of Sherpa guide Tenzing Norgay (right), during an audience at Buckingham Palace in London on June 14, 2023 to mark the 70th anniversary of the ascent of Mount Everest. - AFP

Royal reception for sons of first Everest summiteers

King Charles III on Wednesday received the sons of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa to mark the 70th anniversary of the first confirmed ascent of Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain. The New Zealander and his Nepalese guide reached the summit of the 8,849-m peak on May 29, 1953 as part of a British expedition led by John Hunt, paving the way for thousands of others to make the daring attempt to reach the "Roof of the World".

Charles received Peter Hillary and Jamling Norgay, the sons of the two mountaineers who themselves have successfully scaled Everest, as well as Hunt's daughter Sue Leyden, Buckingham Palace said. In a message read out at a Royal Geographical Society celebratory event earlier this week, Charles hailed the historic climb as "one of the greatest examples of endurance, combined with careful planning and collaboration".

He said his mother, the late Queen Elizabeth II, had received news of the

expedition's success on the eve of her coronation in 1953. "It has not escaped my notice that there is a wonderful symmetry in the coinciding of the 70th anniversary of that achievement with my own coronation," he added.

Known for his keen interest in the environment, Charles also noted the challenges posed by climate change, "which endangers fragile ecosystems, including the Himalayan range. "I dearly hope we can take inspiration from the Everest Expedition of 1953 in order to work together in a similar fashion to safeguard our beautiful world for future generations," he added.

In the past seven decades, more than 6,000 climbers have climbed Everest, according to the Himalayan Database. It remains dangerous, with more than 300 losing their lives in the same period, including 12 this year. Five others are missing, putting 2023 on course to be a record deadly year. — AFP

Sports

O'Callaghan stuns Titmus with year's fastest 200m freestyle

Mollie O'Callaghan books world championship slot

MELBOURNE: Mollie O'Callaghan upset Olympic gold medalist Ariarne Titmus with the fastest 200m freestyle of the year Thursday to book a world championship slot from a stacked field at the Australian trials. Reigning 100m world champion O'Callaghan produced a sizzling final 50m to touch in 1:53.83 ahead of Titmus (1:54.14), who easily won the 400 free on the opening night of the meet in Melbourne on Tuesday. Both qualified for the world championships in Japan next month and will be hot favorites alongside American great Katie Ledecky and Canadian teenager Summer McIntosh, who previously held the year's quickest time.

"I'm absolutely amazed by that race," said 19-year-old O'Callaghan after a career-best swim over the distance. "I was so nervous and just hoping for a personal best and try and get top two. I'm just so happy, overjoyed. It's exciting for the worlds and let's see what I can do." Such was the quality of the field that all the top six — including Lani Pallister, Maddie Wilson, Kiah Melverton and Brianna Throssell — went under the automatic qualifying time.

They will be in contention for spots on Australia's formidable world-record holding 4x200m relay team. Surprisingly, Shayna Jack, who had swum

a 1.55 this year, missed the final while backstroke queen Kaylee McKeown was a no-show after her sizzling 100m back performance — the third fastest in history — on Wednesday.

Australia's most successful Olympian, Emma McKeon, also opted out, forgoing a 200m relay place to focus on the sprint butterfly and freestyle events. She instead suited up for the 50 fly but in another upset was squeezed into third behind Alex Perkins (25.92) and Lily Price (25.97).

McKeon won the 100m butterfly earlier this week to book her seat to Japan. Prodigious young talent Sam Short, 19, put himself in gold medal contention by swimming the world's fastest 800m freestyle this year, by nearly two seconds, hitting the wall in 7:40.39.

Elijah Winnington came second to also qualify. "That hurt a lot, but I got it and very stoked," said Short. "I held off Elijah in the 400 so I had a lot of confidence. I knew if I was with him at 400 that would give me the best shot."

Matt Temple was the top seed and fastest qualifier in the men's 200 fly, but pulled out of the final. That opened the door to Bowen Gough to touch first in 1:56.01, but outside the qualifying time. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Mollie O'Callaghan of Australia swims to victory in the women's 200m freestyle swimming final at the 2023 Australian World Championship Trials in Melbourne on June 15, 2023. — AFP

Packed schedule set to test Ashes pace attacks

LONDON: Both England and Australia will need several fast-bowling options for a busy Ashes schedule due to ageing attacks and recent injury scares. England have named veterans James Anderson and Stuart Broad in their XI for the opening Test which gets under way at Edgbaston on Friday. Australia, who recently won their World Test Championship final against India at The Oval, are on a punishing program of six Tests in eight weeks. England earlier this month warmed up for the five-game Ashes with a 10-wicket win against Ireland in a one-off Test at Lord's.

The hosts boast the two most successful quicks in Test history, but it appears unlikely the pair will both play every match. Anderson, who will turn 41 during the fifth and final Test, has been the spearhead of the attack for nearly two decades and has formed a potent new-ball combination with Broad, but the Ashes schedule can be particularly tough on fast bowlers. Modern fitness methods allied to long experience as Test specialists have helped Broad and Anderson keep bowling at an age when most of their predecessors had long retired.

Broad's 37th birthday is next week, between the first two Tests. But with

the threat of injuries — express quick Jofra Archer is out of the series with an elbow problem and the rapid Mark Wood's career has been blighted by injuries — Anderson knows England are unlikely to field the same pace attack in every Test. "I think playing all five is a little bit optimistic, and not just for myself," said Anderson, who said featuring in three of the games is more realistic.

England will be desperate to avoid a repeat of the 2019 Ashes opener at Edgbaston, where Anderson broke down with a calf injury after bowling just four overs in a match the hosts lost by 251 runs. Both Anderson and fast-medium seamer Ollie Robinson were rested from the Ireland match to ensure they were fit for Edgbaston following niggling injuries. Australia, unusually, are being captained by a fast bowler in Pat Cummins, with the 30-year-old confidently predicting: "I'll be aiming to play all six (Tests)."

'Fresh, ready to go'

History is threatening to repeat itself for Josh Hazlewood, who missed the start of the 2019 Ashes in Birmingham following an injury lay-off before featuring later in the series. Four years ago, Australia opted for the slightly slower but remorselessly accurate seamer in Peter Siddle. It could be a similar story this week, with Scott Boland competing against Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc, whose left-arm angle is a real point of difference, for a place in Australia's attack. The 34-year-old Boland has taken 33 wickets in just eight Tests at the staggeringly low average of 14.57.



LONDON: This combination of file pictures shows England's Stuart Broad (left) and Australia's David Warner in London. England face Australia in the first Test of the five-match Ashes series starting at Edgbaston on June 16, 2023. — AFP

And those figures may mean even the world-class Hazlewood, with 222 wickets from 59 Tests, has to bide his time, with injuries restricting the 32-year-old in recent years. "No doubt you still want to play every game and it's hard to sit on the sidelines and watch," Hazlewood, who missed the WTC final, told the Guardian. "But potentially if you bowl back-

to-back Tests and you bowl 50 overs and you've got some of Boland, Starc or myself on the bench, fresh, ready to go ready for the next Test... the guys are more open to it." Australia could also call upon Michael Neser, who has been starring for Welsh club Glamorgan in the County Championship, as a potential replacement quick later in the series. — AFP



MONTMELO: Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen reacts waving after crossing the finish line in first place during the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix race at the Circuit de Catalunya. — AFP

Verstappen set to maintain winning run, stretch lead

MONTREAL: Refreshed by a Mediterranean break since winning in Spain, defending world champion Max Verstappen will be seeking to continue his dominant run and stretch his title-race lead in this weekend's Canadian Grand Prix. The Red Bull driver, who won in Montreal last year, has reeled off successive victories in Miami, Monte Carlo and Barcelona to move 53 points clear of nearest rival and team-mate Sergio Perez in the drivers' championship.

He has also led every lap since lap 48 in Florida, a total of 154, the longest unbroken run since 2012 when four-time champion Sebastian Vettel was equally supreme for the Milton Keynes-based team. Another win, in Sunday's 70-lap contest on the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve, a high-speed semi-street track on the Ile Notre-Dame in the St Lawrence river, would be the team's 100th in Formula One — and 24th in 27 outings.

Only four other teams have scored a century of Grands Prix wins — Ferrari, McLaren, Mercedes and Williams — and few individuals have relished such a coincidence of invincibility for man and machine. Two-time champion Alberto Ascari of Italy led a record 305 laps between the 1952 Belgian Grand Prix and the Dutch event in 1953, a streak that three-time champion Ayrton Senna in 1988, with 264 consecutive laps in front, tried to match. Briton Nigel Mansell, champion in 1987, and Vettel, are the only other drivers to have passed 200 laps as leader.

"This track is unique," said the 25-year-old Verstappen. "You get to ride some old-school kerbs and the scenery is quite cool too. The car set-up has to be a balance between straight-line and running well over the kerbs well." Perez, recently regarded as the 'king of street tracks' before his qualifying accident in Monaco, said he has been working back at the team factory on rekindling the form that brought him early two early-season wins. "As a team, we have worked well and know what we have to do to get the car into a window where I perform best," he said. "In moments like this, it's more important than ever to work as a team."

Stroll wants two podium spots

After their disappointing form in Spain, Ferrari and Aston Martin will also hope for a recovery with the British team's Canadian owner Lawrence Stroll keen to see both his son Lance and two-time champion Fernando Alonso, 41, on the podium at his home event. Having won all seven races this year, Red Bull will be clear favorites, but resurgent Spaniard Alonso has claimed five top-three finishes already this year and is highly motivated to continue his successes.

For Stroll senior, the sight of a Canadian driver on the Montreal podium for the first time since Jacques Villeneuve in 1996 is a special dream and, after beating Alonso in Spain, his son may have a chance to realize it. "That's our plan," said Stroll senior. "Hopefully, two cars on the podium." After a revival in Spain, where they enjoyed a double podium finish, Mercedes will hope their upgraded car can challenge again, but team chief Toto Wolff warned against unrealistic expectations.

"That result was a reward for everyone's efforts to bring out update package to the track and we're pleased with how it worked," he said. "We have a new base-line to build from, but we must manage expectations. "The circuit suited our car and we should expect our direct competitors to be stronger. The Red Bull is large and that will take a lot of work to bridge, but we're up for the challenge." He added that the long straights and slow corners of Montreal's barrier-lined track would not suit the revived 'Silver Arrows' as Barcelona did. "Whatever the result," he added. "We are learning about our car." — AFP

Ambassador receives Kuwait's delegation

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ambassador to Germany, Najeeb Abdulrahman Al-Bader, received Kuwait's delegation that is participating in the Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023, which will start on June 17th and run until June 25th. Ambassador Al-Bader welcomed the 60-member delegation, confirming the embassy staff's care to assist and present the necessary services for the delegation during competitions.

He lauded HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for their efforts in preparing the national team and for their paternal care. National Director of Kuwait Special Olympics Rihab Buresli thanked Ambassador Al-Bader and embassy staff that accompanied the delegation. He said Kuwait Special Olympics athletes will do their best to give an honorable impression about Kuwait sports during the competition.

Focus turns to US Open challenge amid global golf turmoil

LOS ANGELES: The 123rd US Open teed off on Thursday at Los Angeles Country Club with global golf gripped by suspense worthy of a Hollywood script. LACC's par-70 North Course, a jewel that club members have largely preferred to keep to themselves, is hosting the US Open for the first time, 75 years after the championship was last held in Los Angeles at Riviera Country Club. The course's coming out party has been overshadowed by last week's stunning announcement that the PGA Tour and DP World Tour would join forces with the Saudi backers of LIV Golf, the upstart circuit whose launch roiled the global game.

The world's top players arrived in Los Angeles still reeling from the news and with details yet to be revealed wondering what it

meant for their professional futures. Masters champion Jon Rahm spoke of a feeling of "betrayal" by PGA Tour officials and a sense of being in limbo. "There's definitely a lot of curious players," said LIV golfer Cameron Smith, the reigning British Open champion from Australia. "Once the balls go in the air, the athletes take the narrative back." US Golf association chief executive Mike Whan confidently predicted.

A field of 156 is led by world number one Scottie Scheffler, second-ranked Rahm and last month's PGA Championship winner Brooks Koepka. They'll be getting to grips with a course whose wide fairways look deceptively welcoming for a US Open, but which will require creativity in navigating the scrubby barrancas and patchy bermuda rough on the undulating layout. Blind shots are not uncommon, while the five par-threes will offer anything from a near 300-yard tee shot at the 11th to one of around 80 yards at the 15th.

The multiple teeing options add just one more layer of uncertainty on a course that few in the field have played competitively.

"I feel like the front nine is a bit easier than the back," said Scheffler, who was on the US team that beat Britain and Ireland at Los Angeles Country Club in the 2018 Walker Cup amateur matches. "There's definitely some opportunity on the front ... 13 through 18, there's really not much to say. There's just a lot of long, hard, difficult holes." Scheffler, the 2022 Masters champion, has been widely tipped to lift a second major title this week, despite his struggles on the greens in his most recent PGA Tour starts.

Rahm, the 2021 US Open winner whose Masters triumph in April was one of his four wins this year, also has competitive experience at LACC, where he played in the prestigious 2013 Pacific-12 collegiate championship. American Max Homa, a six-time PGA Tour winner who has underachieved in the majors, set the course record of 61 in winning that PAC-12 title, but Rahm said anyone expecting to see that score this week will be disappointed. "That's not happening right now," Rahm said. "You'll see a lot of birdies, and I think you also

see some high numbers come out of nowhere.

Gnarly oasis

Hemmed in by the magnificent homes of Beverly Hills — including the Playboy Mansion — the course is "this natural, gnarly oasis, rural oasis in this urban metropolis — the entertainment capital of the world," said John Bodenhamer, the USGA's chief championships officer. Koepka isn't concerned about his lack of familiarity with the course. "The American isn't short on confidence after winning his fifth major at the PGA Championship — where he became the first LIV golfer to win a major. "I'm pretty sure I know what it takes to compete in majors," said Koepka, who could add a third US Open title to those he won in 2017 and 2018.

Koepka will tee off at 1:54 pm (2054 GMT) Thursday alongside 2011 US Open champion Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland and 2021 Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama of Japan. Scheffler goes off at 8:13 am alongside Homa and two-time major winner Collin Morikawa. — AFP



Sports

FIFA agrees deal to broadcast Women's WCup in 34 nations

FIFA strikes a deal with European Broadcasting Union

LAUSANNE: FIFA on Wednesday announced it had struck a deal with the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) to televise the 2023 Women's World Cup, avoiding a controversial blackout in the 'Big Five' European nations. The deal follows a standoff between the governing body of world football and broadcasters in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom over the rights for the competition in Australia and New Zealand in July and August.

"FIFA is delighted to widen the deal with the European Broadcasting Union for the transmission of the upcoming FIFA Women's World Cup to include the five major markets within their existing networks, namely France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom, as well as Ukraine, thus ensuring maximum exposure for the tournament," said FIFA president Gianni Infantino on the football body's website.

No financial details of the deal were announced. Infantino had been critical of broadcasters in the 'Big Five' European countries for offering substantially less than the amount paid to show the men's World Cup. One stumbling block

in Europe was the time difference, which means that games will often be played in what is the early morning on the continent, but Infantino said that was no excuse.

Last October, FIFA and EBU struck a deal for 28 countries. Wednesday's expanded 34-nation list omitted the names of several European nations competing at the World Cup: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Portugal. The deal with the EBU involved networks that broadcast free-to-air rather than subscription channels. FIFA listed ARD and ZDF in Germany, BBC and ITV in the UK, France Televisions, RAI in Italy and RTVE in Spain. In France M6, which is not part of the EBU, was also announced as a broadcaster.

'Most exciting and fastest growing'
"The FIFA Women's World Cup is one of sport's most exciting and fastest growing events and we are committed to working hand-in-hand with FIFA to ensure the women's game is enjoyed by as many people as possible across the continent," said EBU director general Noel Curran. The Women's World Cup

will be staged in Australia and New Zealand from July 20 to August 20 and will be the first to feature 32 teams. It will also see overall prize money for participating teams increased to \$150 million, up sharply from \$50 million in 2019 and a huge rise on the \$15 million in 2015. The figure still pales in comparison to the \$440 million prize money at the 32-team 2022 men's World Cup.

"We have a good product, the very best of women's sport," FIFA secretary general Fatma Samoura told AFP last month. "Everyone is talking about equality. We would like these words to be transformed into actions. The simplest action is to value the World Cup at a fair price. That is all we are asking for." ARD director Axel Balkausky had previously said his network offered a fair bid for the rights and told Germany's FAZ newspaper broadcasters "would not allow themselves to be blackmailed".

On Wednesday, German FA boss Bernd Neuendorf declared in a statement that he was "delighted" to be "avoiding a blackout" and have a deal that would be "of enormous importance for the further development of women's football in Ger-



GENEVA: FIFA President Gianni Infantino holds an official ball of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in Geneva. — AFP

many". German women's coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg thanked "everyone involved for reaching an agreement". "Now we can go into the preparation phase with even more momentum and positive ener-

gy." In May, Germany captain Alexandra Popp accused administrators of "empty words" in the ongoing dispute, saying a World Cup blackout would be "so bad for women's football". — AFP



CLAIREFONTAINE-EN-YVELINES: France's forward Kylian Mbappe kicks the ball during a training session in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines on June 14, 2023, as part of the French national team's preparations for the upcoming UEFA Euro 2024 football tournament qualifying matches. — AFP

What to look out for in Euro 2024 qualifying

PARIS: The season in Europe is not finished yet, with a double-header of matchdays in qualifying for Euro 2024 set to take place over the next week. AFP Sport picks out some of the main storylines with a year to go until the tournament in Germany:

Will Mbappe be distracted?

Talk of Kylian Mbappe's possible departure from Paris Saint-Germain has resurfaced in recent days and dominated headlines in France after the striker told his club he would not extend his contract beyond next year. France coach Didier Deschamps will hope Mbappe can remain focused for another few days as last year's World Cup runners-up go to Portugal to play Gibraltar and then host Greece in Group B.

"It has created a buzz and is on the front page of the papers, but we can't control that," said France's Liverpool defender Ibrahima Konate on Wednesday. "He has not changed with us. He is just the same, as joyful as ever and teasing people. I have not seen a change in his behavior." Mbappe was named as France's new captain before they began Euro qualifying with wins over the Netherlands and Ireland. With the Dutch currently focused on the Nations League finals, France can all but wrap up qualification by claiming back-to-back victories.

England to maintain maximum points?

England enjoyed a superb start in Group C as they won 2-1 in Italy in March and then defeated Ukraine. They will now be expected to keep up their perfect record and pull away from Italy, who are at the Nations League finals. England are away to Malta, a team ranked fourth-last in Europe, on Friday.

They follow that by hosting North Macedonia at Old Trafford. Midfield star Jude Bellingham, who has just completed a move from Borussia Dortmund to Real Madrid, is injured but Southgate could give a debut to Crystal Palace winger Eberechi Eze. "It's been a journey getting back to the standard and putting in the performances but it's been a good one," said Eze, who withdrew two years ago from England's provisional Euro 2020 squad with an Achilles injury but is coming off a fine season with Palace.

200th cap for Ronaldo?

Cristiano Ronaldo is in Portugal's squad for their Group J games against Bosnia and Herzegovina and Iceland. The 38-year-old links up with Roberto Martinez's squad after scoring 14 goals in 16 games in the Saudi league following his move to Al Nassr in January. "It is always a special feeling to return home," he posted on Instagram this week. Ronaldo silenced those who doubted Martinez's wisdom in calling him up by scoring a brace in each of Portugal's qualifiers in March, albeit against Liechtenstein and Luxembourg. These two fixtures promise to be harder, but Ronaldo will hope to add to his international record of 122 goals for his country. He also holds the men's international appearance record of 198 and can bring up a double-century if he plays in both fixtures.

Can Scotland tame Haaland?

Erling Haaland missed Norway's opening qualifiers in March due to injury and his side struggled in his absence, losing 3-0 in Spain and drawing 1-1 in Georgia. That means Stale Solbakken's side will be desperate to have the 22-year-old back for Saturday's meeting with Scotland, who have maximum points after two games in Group A. Norway will have to hope that Haaland, who scored 52 goals this season for Manchester City, has recovered from the wild celebrations which followed Pep Guardiola's side winning the Champions League last weekend. "I'm wary you're all going to go down the route of Haaland, Haaland, Haaland," Scotland head coach Steve Clarke said recently. "There are lots of other players we have to deal with as well." — AFP

Injury-hit Crusaders set for bruising encounter

WELLINGTON: An injury-hit Canterbury Crusaders missing All Blacks forwards Sam Whitelock and Ethan Blackadder are anticipating a bruising encounter when they host the Auckland Blues in the Super Rugby Pacific semi-finals on Friday. The Crusaders, who are chasing a seventh straight Super Rugby title, have already beaten the Blues home and away during the regular season. This time they will have to do it without veteran lock Whitelock, who is sidelined for a second week by an Achilles tendon injury.

Loose forward Blackadder hurt his quad in last weekend's quarter-final hammering of the Fijian Drua. It came just minutes into his return after months out with a calf injury. Crusaders captain Scott Barrett says the hosts will cope without the pair of All Blacks. "Sam was missing last week too and Ethan was only there for four minutes, so we are used to changes as a team. We are ready to go," Barrett told reporters Thursday.

The Christchurch-based outfit has been hit hard by

injury all season with 12 players currently unavailable. But the Crusaders have made a habit of beating the Blues, who they also saw off 21-7 in last season's final at Auckland's Eden Park. "Physical and intense" is how Barrett describes recent showdowns with the Blues. "They will be looking to come down here, upset us and get a ticket for the final." Barrett expects the visitors to "show up with physicality, possibly niggles and a bit of chat, so we've got to be prepared for that".

A key battle will be at outside half between Crusaders playmaker Richie Mo'unga and Blues star Beauden Barrett, brother of the opposition skipper. Mo'unga and Barrett go head-to-head in the battle for New Zealand's Number 10 shirt. Both are expected to be included on Sunday when All Blacks head coach Ian Foster names his squad for the Rugby Championship.

Blues coach Leon MacDonald says his side are relishing another chance to break the Crusaders' stranglehold on the Super Rugby crown. "The challenge of going down there and potentially breaking that unbeaten playoff record is a big carrot and great motivation for us," MacDonald told reporters. The Blues are boosted by the return of All Black Caleb Clarke from injury on the left wing. "We're confident. We've been building nicely and there's a bit of continuity with our squad," MacDonald added. — AFP

Bayern to repay 245,000 euros for breaking rules

BERLIN: Bayern Munich have been forced to repay over 200,000 euros (\$216,560) for failing to meet minimum wage requirements over a five-year period, Bavarian customs authorities announced on Thursday. The club must also pay approximately 45,000 euros (\$48,700) in unpaid social security contributions. The investigation found Bayern underpaid employees from 2016 to 2021. The Munich customs office issued a statement on Thursday saying Bayern had employed workers, mostly in the club's youth training centre, on limited hours contracts, but "the

actual level of employment was far higher." "The club did not pay the minimum wage at the youth training centre it operates" the office said in a statement. In a press release on Thursday, Bayern apologized for the incident, saying "it was never FC Bayern Munich's intention to withhold employees from their legitimate wages." Bayern said it has cooperated fully with the investigation and has taken steps to ensure similar incidents cannot happen again. "The club has cooperated with the process and the procedure is now closed" Munich customs spokesman Thomas Meister told German news service SID, an AFP subsidiary. With annual turnover in excess of 650 million euros (\$700 million), Bayern is the largest sports club in Germany and the third highest-earning football club in the world, after Real Madrid and Barcelona. Bayern Munich's men's team won their 11th straight Bundesliga title in 2022-23, alongside their female counterparts, who have won two of the past three Frauen Bundesliga titles. — AFP

S African Premiership: Maritzburg demoted as Spurs promoted

JOHANNESBURG: Cape Town Spurs were promoted to the South African Premiership on Wednesday after drawing 0-0 away to demoted Maritzburg United in the final play-off. Spurs topped the table with 10 points thanks to three solitary-goal victories before defying a second-half onslaught from a Maritzburg team backed by a capacity 12,000 crowd. Maritzburg needed a win to retain their Premiership status, but could not unlock a Spurs side that defended in depth

as tiredness set in. "Our warrior spirit saw us through," said tearful Spurs coach Shaun Bartlett, a member of the South Africa squad that won the 1996 Africa Cup of Nations in Johannesburg. "The legs of our older players were close to collapsing, but they were determined to see us into the top flight and dug deep."

Clive Barker, coach of the only South African team to lift the Cup of Nations, died last Saturday aged 78 and Spurs and Maritzburg honored him before the kick-off by observing a minute of silence. Premiership clubs get a 5.5 million rand (\$300,000/275,000 euros) pre-season allowance, a monthly 2.5 million rand grant and play in competitions with first prizes totaling 30 million rand. Second division sides receive 1.5 million rand each before the season kicks off, 750,000 rand a month and the league winners pocket 300,000 rand. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134

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

Change of Name

I, (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 Husami: 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

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Croatia book Nations League final

Petkovic, Modric fire Croatia over Netherlands 4-2



ROTTERDAM: Croatia's midfielder Mario Pasalic kicks Netherlands' defender Nathan Ake as he attempts to hit the ball during the UEFA Nations League semi final football match between The Netherlands and Croatia on June 14, 2023. — AFP

ROTTERDAM: Bruno Petkovic and Luka Modric struck in extra time to fire Croatia into the Nations League final with a 4-2 victory over hosts the Netherlands on Wednesday. Zlatko Dalic's side, who reached the World Cup semi-finals last year, moved a step closer to earning their first ever trophy and demonstrated once again they are extra-time specialists. Andrej Kramaric and Mario Pasalic netted in the second half after Donyell Malen sent the Dutch ahead, but Noa Lang snatched a 96th-minute equalizer to force an additional half hour.

However Petkovic got away from Frenkie de Jong and drilled home from outside the box to decisively put Croatia ahead eight minutes into extra time, and Modric wrapped up the win with a penalty. The Nations League represents one of the last chances for Croatia's elder statesmen, including Real Madrid midfielder Modric, to taste international triumph. "It's a victory for the Croatian people, we beat the Netherlands in front of their fans, Croatia has one more medal - it's impossible, unreal, but she deserves it," Croatia

coach Dalic told his country's Nova TV.

"Nothing upset the team, they know what they are playing for, above all, Croatia. You endure everything for Croatia. "This is one of our biggest victories, to win 4-2 on their ground, we were losing, we conceded in the 96th minute. "Surely this is a victory which will go down in history." Croatia have only suffered one defeat in their last 16 matches, to World Cup winners Argentina, and quashed the Netherlands' bid to win their first competition since the 1988 European Championship.

Ronald Koeman's side finished as runners-up in the inaugural Nations League against hosts Portugal in 2019, while France triumphed in 2021. "We fought like lions, but unfortunately it was just not good enough today," Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk told Dutch broadcaster NOS. "It's very disappointing. We knew it would be difficult, but we actually did quite well. "We conceded two penalties, we have to be better there, it's hard to look for words now."

Koeman selected Malen on the right of the attack, with exciting youngster Xavi Simons making his fourth

appearance for the Netherlands on the left. Both were involved in the opening goal, along with Liverpool forward Cody Gakpo, as the Oranje burst into life after half-an-hour. The match started sluggishly in the evening heat, both sets of players tired after a long season with the World Cup wedged in the middle. After a tidy team move Feyenoord's Mats Wieffer, playing in his club's stadium De Kuip, fed Malen, who slotted past Dominik Livakovic - Croatia's World Cup hero on their run to third in Qatar.

Bouncing back

Croatia came out stronger in the second half, with Kramaric cutting inside from the left and firing wide of the far post. Soon they were level, when 37-year-old Modric, earning his 165th Croatia cap, cleverly robbed Gakpo on the edge of the area, with the forward pulling him back to concede a penalty. Kramaric stroked his spot kick down the middle as Justin Bijlow dived to his right to delight Croatia's travelling contingent.

Further celebrations were in order when Luka

Ivanusec crossed for Atalanta midfielder Pasalic to stab home from close range after 73 minutes. Dutch defender Nathan Ake, who featured in Manchester City's Champions League final win just five days ago, came close with an acrobatic effort before Lang pounced on a loose ball to level. Croatia, who have beaten Brazil, Japan, England, Russia and Denmark in matches which have gone to extra-time at the last two World Cups, were nonplussed.

The Netherlands could not maintain parity for long, with Petkovic beating Bijlow at his near post. Lang fired into the side netting when he might have equalized and Netherlands paid the price when Tyrell Malacia fouled Petkovic in the area and Modric converted the penalty to seal the win. Croatia, who finished third in the 1998 and 2022 World Cups and runner-up to France in 2018, have their sights firmly set on their first silverware. "We have bronze and silver, let's go for gold so that we can finish this story," said Dalic. Spain and Italy face off in Enschede on Thursday in the other semi-final. — AFP

City to open Premier League title defense at Kompany's Burnley

LONDON: Manchester City will kick off their bid for a record fourth straight Premier League title away to Burnley, managed by their former captain Vincent Kompany. The fixture list released on Thursday confirmed the Treble winners will visit Turf Moor on August 11 to raise the curtain on the 2023/24 campaign. It will be the second time Kompany, who won the title on four occasions as City skipper, will have faced his old side as a manager, with City winning 6-0 at the Etihad in the FA Cup quarter-finals in March. Pep Guardiola's side, who won the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup in 2022/23, are seeking to become the first English team to win four successive top-flight titles.

They have dominated the Premier League in recent years, winning the title in five of the past six seasons. Premier League debutants Luton will play their first top-flight fixture since 1992 away to Roberto De Zerbi's Brighton the following day. The other promoted side, Sheffield United, kick off with a home game against Crystal Palace. The most eye-catching fixture of the opening weekend will be at Stamford Bridge, where Mauricio Pochettino begins life as Chelsea manager against Liverpool, with both sides looking to bounce back after disappointing campaigns.

Arsenal, who finished second in the Premier League, open at home to Nottingham Forest, while fellow Champions League qualifiers Newcastle host Aston Villa and Manchester United begin against Wolves at Old Trafford. Ange Postecoglou's first game in charge of Tottenham will be away to Brent-



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola (left) greets Burnley's Belgian manager Vincent Kompany at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. — AFP

ford. Bournemouth host Europa Conference League winners West Ham, and Everton, looking to avoid a third straight relegation scrap, begin at home to Fulham.

City, who finished five points clear of Arsenal last season, travel to the Gunners' Emirates Stadium in early October. Old Trafford will host the first Manchester derby since City matched United's Treble-winning feat of 1999 at the end of that month, with the champions meeting Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool in late November. The schedule, returning to normal after the 2022/23 season was interrupted by the World Cup in Qatar, includes a mid-season break, which will take place in mid-January, with the 10 fixtures split across two weekends. The campaign finishes on May 19, 2024. — AFP

Salah creates goal; Egypt secure Cup of Nations place

JOHANNESBURG: Liverpool star Mohamed Salah set up the equalizer for Egypt in a 2-1 win over Guinea on Wednesday that secured a place at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations finals. Serhou Guirassy put Guinea ahead on 26 minutes in the central Moroccan city of Marrakech and substitute Mahmoud Trezeguet leveled three minutes before half-time off a Salah pass. Former Aston Villa forward Trezeguet turned creator after 79 minutes with a cross that Mostafa Mohamed slammed past goalkeeper Ibrahima Kone in the Group D matchday five showdown.

An eventful night for Turkey-based Trezeguet ended with an added-time yellow card after he refused to be stretchered from the pitch following an injury, preferring to limp off. Salah displayed some exquisite touches as Egypt joined hosts the Ivory Coast, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia at the African showpiece from January 13. Among the eight countries already assured of places at the 24-team tournament, only Burkina Faso have not lifted a trophy that symbolizes African national team supremacy.

It was a third straight group victory of the record seven-time Cup of Nations winners after a stunning 2-0 loss to Ethiopia on matchday two last June that cost coach Ehab Galal his job. Defeat for Guinea leaves the second qualifying place from the group between them and Malawi, who play Ethiopia on Tuesday and the Guineans in the final round during September. If Malawi win both matches they will finish level with Guinea on nine points and head-to-head records will determine who finishes runners-up.

Gambia, who exceeded expectations as debutants by reaching the quarter-finals at the last Cup of Nations before losing to hosts Cameroon, edged South Sudan 3-2



Egypt's forward Mohamed Salah

in a Group G thriller. South Sudan, who have never qualified, equalized twice before Denmark-based Gambian Hamza Barry scored the winning goal six minutes into added time. Rehan Angier conceded an own goal after only four minutes in the Egyptian city of Ismailia — a temporary home for the Sudanese because they do not have an international-standard stadium.

Valentino Yuel levelled midway through the opening half in 31 Celsius (86 Fahrenheit) heat and there were no further goals before half-time. Ablie Jallow put Gambia ahead a second time halfway through the second half and in added time, Peter Chol equalized before Barry became the hero of Gambia by firing a rebound into the net. Guinea-Bissau struggled to overcome minnows Sao Tome e Principe 1-0 through a 55th-minute Zinho Gano goal, but the three points lifted them above Nigeria to first place in Group A.

Sao Tome are another country lacking an international-standard stadium and conceded home advantage with the match staged in Bissau. After conceding 10 goals to Nigeria and five to Guinea-Bissau in earlier qualifiers, Sao Tome did better than expected in a match that produced 20 goal attempts, but only three on target. Nigeria play Sierra Leone on Sunday and a draw for the Super Eagles will suffice to clinch qualification for them and Guinea-Bissau. — AFP