

Polestar 2
Why wait
to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



3 KOC: Kuwait to spend KD 13bn on oil projects



5 Fear, grief after 41 killed in brutal Uganda school attack



13 Repentant ranchers rescuing Colombian Amazon wildlife



16 Portugal win in Euro qualifying, Scotland stun Haaland's Norway



SIX NEW FACES IN CABINET



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah - Prime Minister



Sheikh Talal Al-Sabah, 1st Dep PM, Interior



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah, Dep PM, Defense



Essa Al-Kandari, Dep PM, Cabinet, Assembly



Dr Saad Al-Barrak, Dep PM, Oil, Economy



Fahad Al-Shula, Municipality, Comms



Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Information, Awqaf



Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, Health



Dr Amani Bugammaz, Public Works



Dr Hamad Al-Adwani, Education



Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, Foreign



Mohammad Al-Aiban, Commerce, Youth



Manaf Al-Hajeri, Finance

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: An Amiri decree was issued on Sunday announcing the new Cabinet, which includes six new faces with new defense, oil and electricity and water ministers. Saad Al-Barrak, the former chief executive officer of Zain Telecom, was appointed as minister of oil and minister of state for economic affairs and investment. He enters the Cabinet for the first time.

Jassem Al-Ostad was appointed as minister of electricity and water, also for the first time in the government. The new

Cabinet, headed by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, brings back to Kuwaiti politics Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, who was minister between 2001 and 2011. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad was appointed deputy premier and minister of defense, occupying the post for the first time as he had been minister of oil and energy for most of his tenure in the cabinet.

The prime minister and nine ministers were retained from the previous Cabinet in their old posts, including Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah and

Minister of Finance Manaf Al-Hajeri, in addition to the ministers of health, information, education, commerce and industry and public works all kept their posts. Other newcomers include Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah as minister of social affairs, Faleh Al-Ruqubah as minister of justice and Fahad Al-Shula as minister of state for municipal affairs.

The previous Cabinet resigned last week following the election results in accordance with Kuwaiti law. The Cabinet is expected to be sworn in by HH the Crown Prince on Monday before attending the inaugural session of the National Assembly the following day.



Dr Jassem Al-Ostad, Electricity & Water



Faleh Al-Ruqubah, Justice, Housing



Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah, Social Affairs, Family

Iraq unveils 2,800-yr-old stone tablet



BAGHDAD: Iraqi Culture Minister Ahmed Fakak Al-Badrani presents a 2,800-year-old stone tablet during a press conference on June 18, 2023. — AFP

BAGHDAD: Iraq unveiled on Sunday a 2,800-year-old stone tablet returned by Italy, as the war-ravaged country works to recover from abroad antiquities looted from its territory. The tablet — whose text is written in cuneiform, the Babylonian alphabet — bears the insignia of Shalmaneser III, the Assyrian king who ruled the region of Nimrod, in present-day

Continued on Page 6

Kuwait marks 62nd Independence Day

KUWAIT: June 19, 1961 is a pivotal day in the history of Kuwait, as it marked the end of the British protection treaty and the emergence of a modern state. On this day, Kuwait, a newly-independent sovereign state, took its first steps in the journey of development. The late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah signed the declaration of independence with the British Chief Political Resident in the Arabian Gulf Sir George Middleton.

After signing the declaration of independence, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem addressed a memorable speech to the Kuwaiti people, in which he said: "My dear people... my brothers and children. This is the

most precious day of our beloved homeland. On this day, when we move from one stage to another stage of history, we turn a page from the past with all that it carries and what it entails to open a new page represented in this agreement, under which Kuwait obtained its full independence and full sovereignty."

Three years after the declaration, a decree was signed on May 18, 1964 merging national day with the day on which Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem assumed office, on Feb 25. Celebrations have been held on that day since 1965. Since assuming office in 1950, Sheikh Abdullah took carefully measured steps, paving the way for independence and achieving stability. The 15-year reign of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, who was dubbed "Father of Independence" and "Father of Constitution" was peppered with achievements.

Continued on Page 6



KUWAIT: Late Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem signs the declaration of independence with British Chief Political Resident in the Arabian Gulf Sir George Middleton. — KUNA

First plane leaves Sanaa for Saudi amid Amman talks

SANAA: The first commercial flight from Yemen's rebel-held capital to Saudi Arabia since 2016 took off carrying hajj pilgrims on Saturday, in the latest sign of easing tensions after years of war. A Yemenia Airways plane carrying 277 travelers departed at around 8 pm (1700 GMT), an official told AFP, seven years after Sanaa's international airport was blockaded by the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

"Hopefully, the blockade will end and the airport will remain open. We are very happy and relieved, and I cannot describe the feeling," said Mohammad Askar, one of the travelers.

The Jeddah-bound flight is the first to Saudi Arabia since Sanaa's airport was closed by the coalition blockade in August 2016, more than a year into the Saudi-led military campaign to dislodge the Houthis. Air traffic was largely halted by the blockade, but there have been exemptions for aid flights that are a lifeline for the population.

Hundreds of thousands of people have died in the fighting in Yemen or from indirect causes such as lack of food or water, in what the United Nations calls one of the world's most humanitarian crises. But despite coalition bombing raids and ground clashes, the Houthis, who seized control of Sanaa in 2014, ousting the internationally recognized government, rule over large swathes of the country.

Two more flights will depart on Monday and Tuesday, officials said. Continued on Page 6



SANAA: Yemeni hajj pilgrims wait at Sanaa International Airport to board a flight to Jeddah on June 17, 2023. — AFP



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Local

Reforms, stronger enforcement needed to battle human trafficking: US report

Kuwait maintained its position on US government's 'Tier 2 Watch List'

KUWAIT: Kuwait is required to continue strengthening enforcement of the domestic workers' law to ensure their rights are protected, the US State Department said in its latest annual report on human trafficking.

"The United States is committed to combating human trafficking, because it represents an attack on human rights and freedoms," Blinken told media at the report's launching event. "It violates the universal right of every person to have autonomy. Today, more than 27 million people around the world are denied that right."

The report includes detailed information on how countries across the world, including Kuwait, are dealing with the issue of human trafficking.

Some of the steps the Kuwaiti government must take to protect domestic workers' rights, says the report, include increasing access for domestic workers to file a grievance with authorities, intensifying inspections of registered and fraudulent recruitment agencies and improving screening of domestic worker complaints to identify potential labor trafficking cases.

Still on the watchlist

Kuwait remained on 'Tier 2 Watch List' in the '2023 Trafficking in Persons Report' for the second consecutive year.

Being on the 'Tier 2 Watch List' means that Kuwait government "does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking," but is making "significant efforts" to achieve that goal.

The report attributes Kuwait's position to several factors, including a failure to implement procedures to identify trafficking and the continuous detention, prosecution and deportation of potential trafficking victims without screening for trafficking indicators.

"The government shelter did not regularly accept workers who had criminal charges filed against them, including for 'absconding,' which may have left some unidentified trafficking victims without care," reads the report.

It adds that the government "did not take any new

steps to reform its visa sponsorship system, which continued to render migrant workers highly vulnerable to exploitation, specifically trafficking."

However, the report acknowledged that Kuwait is assisting more vulnerable migrant workers at the government shelter, launching an online platform for domestic workers to file grievances rather than submitting a complaint in person and continuing to hold fraudulent recruitment agencies civilly accountable.

Protection services needed

The report prioritizes a list of recommendations to tackle human trafficking in Kuwait, such as ensuring unhindered access to the government shelter for all potential victims, including those who self-refer, regardless of criminal charges, and do not require a complaint on file with authorities to be granted access at the shelter.

It also urged increasing the number of investigations and prosecutions of employers who illegally confiscate migrant workers' passports and strengthen penalties for passport confiscation in accordance with Kuwait's labor law to deter potential future perpetrators.

Furthermore, the report recommends introducing reforms to the visa sponsorship-based employment system to allow "all workers at any time to change employers and leave the country without requiring employer approval." It also calls for protection services specifically for male victims, including accommodations, and specifying procedures for their access to care.

Charging for visa renewals

One of the most common ways to lure visa trafficking victims is charging workers for issuing or renewing visas — an illegal practice carried out by some employers in Kuwait. This practice often leaves workers stuck in the vortex of paying exuberant annual fees to renew their visas while struggling to save from their meager wages.

To combat this problem, the US State Department recommends that the Kuwaiti govern-



ment follows through on Article 10 of Law No 6 of 2010 (Kuwait labor law) and issue a resolution which sets procedures for recruitment fees in private-sector labor law. Such a move would ensure workers are not subjected to fees related to their recruitment and would lead to the establishment of penalties for non-compliant agencies and employers who subject workers to such fees.

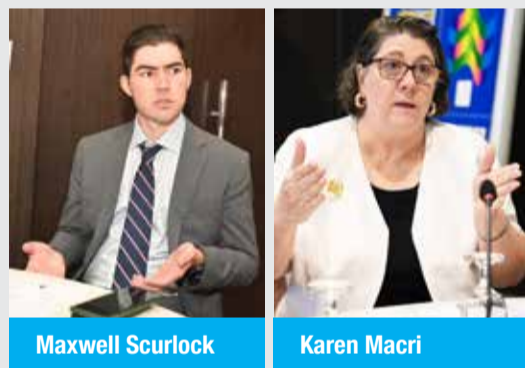
More stringent law enforcement

The report further recommends that the government continues to increase law enforcement efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, including Kuwaiti citizens and allegedly complicit officials, under the 2013 anti-trafficking law rather than other criminal laws, when applicable.

It calls on the government to proactively screen for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, including those in government and embas-

sy shelters and those arrested for immigration violations or prostitution offenses, or those who flee abusive employers and face countercharges. These measures, says the report, would ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

In addition, the US report says that the government needs to strengthen efforts to prosecute allegations of forced labor crimes criminally instead of administratively, and refer cases with trafficking indicators, such as complaints of non-payment of wages, passport confiscation, and restriction of movement, for investigation as potential trafficking crimes. The report urged the government to exert more efforts in raising awareness on existing protections for migrant workers and penalties for traffickers, particularly among vulnerable populations, including domestic workers, as well as employers, company owners and recruitment agencies.



Maxwell Scurlock

Karen Macri

US-DTRA holds biosafety security, surveillance workshop

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: In the presence of a number of officials from the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), which is affiliated to the US Department of Defense, a training workshop on biosafety security and surveillance was held on Sunday with the participation of three Kuwaiti government authorities — Ministry of Health, Environment Public Authority and Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources. The workshop will continue until June 22. International Project Manager at the Biological Threat Reduction Program at DTRA Maxwell Scurlock said in a press statement that this workshop is a proactive step for any threat the world can face, "because we do not know where the next threat will come from, whether it is from nature or manmade. So it's important to hold these workshops," he said. "By having a network of allies around the world, not only in Kuwait but also in GCC countries and elsewhere, we can work together to confront any threat of this kind," he added.

Scurlock said it is very important for participants in this workshop to get to know each other to measure things in the same way and bring points of view and concepts closer. "The third part of the workshop, which will be held next year, will be a forum of Gulf Cooperation Council countries. This means all Gulf countries can come together and start sharing information, and this will make us very strong together."

Economic Attaché at the US Embassy Karen Macri said this workshop includes sectors concerned with human health, animal health and the environment in Kuwait, where they are working to increase coordination between ministries to prevent the spread of diseases and epidemics. She added the US is working with Kuwait to enhance cooperation and increase coordination within this system across various sectors. She pointed out the workshop aims to discuss concepts of combating viral diseases, in addition to maintaining good health, which contributes to achieving a healthy economic position in the world.

Economic relations with Kuwait

Macri said economic cooperation between Kuwait and the United States is in its best shape and distinguished, noting Kuwait is an important strategic partner for the US. She said many American companies are operating in Kuwait and contributing to the development process, praising at the same time the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority's approval to establish Google Cloud Services Company to operate directly in the Kuwaiti market without the need for a local agent. Macri explained this confirms the government's encouragement of foreign investments, support to the private sector and promotion of direct investment.

Arab world should celebrate fathers, too

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: On June 18, several countries celebrated Father's Day, which honors fathers and recognizes their sacrifices for the sake of their children. Despite the great effort by fathers in the Arab world, Father's Day does not receive as much attention as Mother's Day. The impact fathers have on their children is often underappreciated. The majority of psychological research on parenting has been focused on mothers.

Speaking to Kuwait Times, counseling psychologist Borehan Hassan revealed fathers are a valuable factor in their children's life, adding that according to recent studies, children who have an involved father are more likely to be emotionally stable and self-assured to explore their surroundings, and when they get older, they will have better social ties. "According to numerous studies, active and supportive fathering is linked to teenagers' improved language abil-

ities, intellectual functioning and academic accomplishment," she noted.

Hassan explained the phenomenon of not celebrating Father's Day in the Middle East is related to the nature of the relationship between children and their mothers. "Children in Arab countries spend more time with their mothers than their fathers. That is why mothers are recognized despite a father's effort to provide a decent life for his children and take care of the financial aspects," she said.

She pointed out Father's Day should also be celebrated, which will impart justice in the family. This is in honor of his efforts in managing the family and providing a decent life for them. She called on children to take care of their parents, especially the elderly, who need special care and great attention because they suffered to provide a decent life for them.

Fathers' Day is not merely a day of celebration for men, Fadi Salameh, a new father, told Kuwait Times. He said this holiday is not completely accepted in our society, but seeing appreciation from your children means the world. "Recognizing how much effort we make to make their life easy and great is a great gift for us. More people must embrace the idea of the influence fathers have on their families, especially



in their children's lives," he noted.

Ali Hemdan noted that Fathers' Day is not celebrated in Kuwait because it cannot be commercialized like Mother's Day. "Fathers are practical — they will not accept flowers and gifts from their children; they only want appreciation. But on Mother's Day, you can see how shops and stores promote everything, which allows it to spread faster," he said.

The idea of Father's Day was by

an American girl Sonora Smart Dodd, who founded it in 1910, inspired by the incredible example of her twice-widowed yet devoted father. Her father single-handedly raised his six children after the death of his wife in 1898, so Sonora submitted a petition recommending devoting a day to celebrate fathers. The city of Spokane celebrated its first Father's Day on June 19, 1910, and this custom later spread throughout the world.

Alghanim Industries, Kuwait Codes foster female tech talent

KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries, one of the largest privately-owned companies in the region (Kutayba Alghanim Group), proudly participated in a special women-in-tech event as part of its ongoing partnership of CODED Academy's "Kuwait Codes" program. The event, held as part of a short series of special workshops focused on encouraging female high school students to develop their tech skills, aimed to highlight the range of opportunities available to women in the tech field.

As a strategic sponsor of the "Kuwait Codes" initiative, Alghanim Industries actively supported the event, which focused exclusively on empowering women in tech. The event took place at the Sabah Al-Ahmed Center for Creativity and Giftedness in Ahmadi and aimed to emphasize the importance of coding skills and the diverse opportunities available to women in the tech industry.

Reem Ahmed Al-Hunaidi, Sr. Manager – Digital Transformation at Alghanim Industries' automotive sector, delivered an inspiring address during the event, sharing her experiences and highlighting the significance of a well-rounded skill set in building a successful career in the tech field.

Reflecting on the participation, Hunaidi stated, "I am immensely proud to witness the growing interest of young girls in Kuwait in the field of coding from such a young age. By empowering them through initiatives like 'Kuwait Codes,' we are not only opening doors to exciting possibilities but also fostering a more inclusive and diverse tech industry. Women in the region have a crucial role to play in shaping the future of technology, and their diverse perspectives and contributions are invaluable.



I strongly believe that by providing young girls with the skills and confidence to pursue their passion for coding, we are creating a brighter future for them and for the entire industry."

In addition to its participation in the women in tech event, Alghanim Industries proudly continues its sponsorship of the "Kuwait Codes" initiative for the second consecutive year. This coding program, developed by CODED Academy in collaboration with esteemed private sector entities including Alghanim Industries, aims to provide comprehensive programming education to high school students in Kuwait, training them in Python, app development and game development. The initiative seeks to foster their interest in technology and equip them with

essential skills for a wide range of future careers. Over the course of three cohorts in 2022, Kuwait Codes successfully impacted more than 900 students, with 393 students graduating from the program. The objective this year has been to enhance this impact, specifically reaching a greater proportion of high school girls.

Alghanim Industries recognizes the importance of fostering an inclusive and diverse tech industry, driven by the talented youth of Kuwait. Through its continued support of "Kuwait Codes" and similar initiatives, the company aims to contribute to the development of a brighter future for the nation, where young individuals, especially women, can thrive and lead in the ever-evolving field of technology.

Local

Kuwait's oil production capacity to reach 3 million bpd in 2025

KOC to spend KD 13bn on oil projects by 2028



CEO of Kuwait Oil Company Ahmad Al-Aidan



KUWAIT: People listen to keynote speeches at Kuwait Oil Company's big data galaxy conference on Sunday, June 18, 2023. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwait's oil production capacity, above 2.8 million barrels per day (bpd) now, will reach 3 million in 2025, the CEO of Kuwait Oil Company Ahmad Al-Aidan said on Sunday.

Aidan added in a statement to journalists on the sidelines of the KOC's big data galaxy conference and exhibition that the company intends to spend about KD 13 billion, nearly \$2.42 billion, on oil-related projects during the next five years.

Aidan reiterated Kuwait's commitment to the cuts decided by OPEC and OPEC+ in early June. OPEC+ had announced on June 4 its second round of production cuts since April, opting to reduce its crude oil production by 1.4 million barrels per day during 2024. The members have also extended their implementation of a

voluntary reduction until the end of 2024, instead of increasing production at the end of 2023 as previously announced.

Aidan underlined national commitments towards an output target of four million bpd by the year 2035.

An emphasis on technology

KOC's big data conference is one of many initiatives the company has been taking to highlight the role technology could play in Kuwait's oil industry.

The conference included a series of seminars and workshops on the latest trends, challenges and opportunities related to big data and artificial intelligence. The goal is to draw a roadmap for a future in which big data will enable the exploration and production

sector to prosper in a rapidly changing world, according to Kuwait's state media agency KUNA.

In his opening speech, Aidan said innovation and sustainability are two main pillars in the development of KOC's business. He noted that the world is at a juncture where technology and data are converging, which "opens up unprecedented opportunities".

"The development witnessed by the oil and gas industry will lead to a new era of innovation, sustainability and growth," he said, calling for taking advantage of big data and digital technologies to reshape the way hydrocarbon resources are explored and extracted.

Despite its importance, digital transformation is one of the biggest challenges

for leaders, as it requires the need to build the capabilities of employees to combine specialized technical skills and the ability to use and integrate software. Ali Al-Janabi, an executive with Shell, told the audience.

But these challenges could be overcome, Weatherford Kuwait director Ashutosh Panchal said in his speech. "Automation in the energy sector is no longer just an option, but a necessity that continues to play a growing role in achieving operational efficiency and productivity," he added.

The use of artificial intelligence, for example, helps keeping pace with digital development and directly contributed to reducing operational costs and increasing productivity, said Janabi. — Agencies



Zain and Central Blood Bank teams are seen in this photo.



Zain employee donates blood during the company's annual blood drive.

Zain organizes blood drive to help save lives

KUWAIT: Zain recently held its annual blood drive campaign in celebration of World Blood Donor Day, the globally celebrated initiative held on June 14 of every year. The step came in continuation of the company's strategic partnership with the Central Blood Bank of Kuwait and witnessed wide participation from Zain employees who where keen on contributing by donating to help save lives and add to the nation's strategic blood reserve.

Zain regularly organizes this initiative in line with its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy to support the health sector, where the company actively partners with major health organizations in the country, including the Central Blood Bank and Ministry of Health. The campaign encourages Zain employees to donate blood and save the lives of those who are in most need of blood transfusion and also aims at raising awareness of the health benefits donors gain by participating.

As always, Zain's blood drive campaign was positively received by employees who were eager to donate, and the entire process was operated by the Central Blood Bank's medical staff. Zain strives to contribute to the community through its numerous corporate social responsibility initiatives and is pleased with the success this particular activity has achieved.

The company is keen on organizing internal blood



KUWAIT: Zain employees donate blood to help save lives.

drives to encourage employees to donate blood and save lives, further reinforcing the company's productive role in social and health activities. Such campaigns contribute to saving people that are in urgent need of blood, especially people with rare blood types.

World Blood Donor Day is celebrated around the globe on June 14 of every year. The initiative was organized for the first time in 2004 by four core international organizations: the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Federation of Red

Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Federation of Blood Donor Organizations (IFBDO), and the International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT).

The annual campaign aims to raise awareness of the need for blood and blood products, as well as the importance of having a strategic and sustainable blood reserve. The initiative also highlights the vital role donors play by thanking them for their voluntary, life-saving contributions.

Minimally invasive method used to repair hernia for first time

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital held a surgery workshop to repair complicated hernias by surgical endoscope using the LIRA technique (Laparoscopic Intracorporeal Rectus Aponeuroplasty). Senior specialist in General Surgery at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital Dr Omar Al-Shareef said the recent technique has many benefits most important of which is being away from the traditional surgical scalpel, adding that it reduces stay time in hospital and reduces the need to use pain killers, in addition to the fact that this modern technique does

not need placing drainage tubes following the operation. Dr Suleiman Al-Mazydi, Head of Surgery Department at Jaber Hospital and Director of Kuwait Surgery Board Program said Jaber Hospital seeks to present the most modern techniques to carry out surgical procedures for patients with the help of international expertise, especially in the advanced cases.

He said Kuwait ranks first at the international level in obesity, and second in diabetes prevalence, which increases the possibility of hernia occurrence in the abdominal wall and negatively affects the spread of incision healing when the hernia repair is done with the traditional surgical mesh.

He said the most modern mesh was used for the first time in Kuwait (Hybrid Mesh), designed to repair the surgical hernia, and reconstruct the abdominal wall for patients who suffer from advanced stages of hernia. These meshes are distinguished by their unique structure which is made of two internal and external layers with the PTFE material in the middle making the mesh stronger and reducing the occurrence of adhesions.



In my view

Let's coexist, Kuwait



Nejouad Al-Yagout

Local@kuwaittimes.com

It is always uplifting to hear locals promote peace. The latest invitation, as mentioned in a Kuwait Times article titled "Kuwait keen on bolstering culture of peace worldwide" (dated 16/06/23), comes from the First Secretary of the Kuwait mission to the UN Fahad Hajji, who "affirmed that boosting peace globally requires intensive efforts by the world community". Hajji wisely stated that "hatred and racism have been festering around the world and people must stand against such notions to ensure peace, security and coexistence..."

Without acknowledging this rise in hatred and racism, we cannot create a community in which coexistence reigns. We can never resolve issues regarding discrimination without admitting that something is amiss. And, as Hajji prompts us to take a stand against notions of hatred and notion, we are doomed to failure if we fail to do so. There are many ways to take a stand: Through art, writing, music and even through speeches and discussions. We need to galvanize one another to respect every member of our community regardless of faith, gender, nationality, social and/or financial status.

We can adopt Gandhi's principle of satyagraha, in which we resist in a non-violent manner against any edicts that encourage us to undermine the dignity of fellow human beings. If parliament members continue to rant against expatriates and minorities, it is our solemn duty to resist and open our hearts to everyone who lives here.

In Kuwait, these last few years have proven to be a nightmare for expatriates and minorities. Kuwait is a country that prides itself on spiritual values, but lately we seem to be festering hatred and racism in our community. Whenever anyone defends an expatriate, we are the first to say: "Look at other countries; they always put their citizens first." But we are not other countries. And we should be inspired by countries which are civic, which promote peace and understanding, and which embrace diversity.

And even while being inspired by peaceful nations, why can't we also be a source of inspiration for other countries? Why can't Kuwait be known as a nation in which egalitarian principles are implemented? Change, after all, begins at home. We cannot advance as a society when we resent a foreigner who reaches a higher status than us at work. Our nationality should not make us feel entitled to a position that was destined for someone else, who left their country to live a better life, and who finally found a way to support their family, only to face backlash. To enhance our infrastructure and improve our education, we must put people in place who can transform our society for the better, Kuwaiti or not.

Many Kuwaitis are worthy of their positions, but many expats are as well. We should give positions to members of society based on their merit, and for the sake of a better Kuwait, an inclusive Kuwait, not a Kuwaiti Kuwait. We live in an era of globalization, but we seem to be resisting integration in every way. The tourism industry, as well, is faltering because we are afraid of imbibing the lifestyles of so-called others, even in a country in which citizens constantly travel abroad to attend concerts and visit art museums. If we can be tourists overseas, why are we depriving our country of tourists like us? We say it's to protect our values, but exclusivity and discrimination are certainly not values. A culture of coexistence cannot thrive in a country whose borders are closed in an airtight fashion, or a country that denies family members the right to visit their loved ones who work here.

And how much longer will we fail to understand that Kuwaitis hail from many backgrounds? And yet still, foreigners who have served our country are deprived of citizenship. How many stateless people have served in our military and police force only to continue to be denied a Kuwaiti passport? What kind of community are we when we continue to consider honor killings merely a misdemeanor? How can we progress when we deprive local women who marry foreigners the chance of passing citizenship to their spouses and children even when male members of the society are allowed to do so? Why can't we allow people to practice their faith openly? What happened to us? And why are we ignoring the fact that our country needs a revival, a renaissance, a reformation.

Hajji's culture of peace is a noble proposal and his bold assertion that hatred and racism is on the rise reminds us that we cannot change our community when we do not admit that there are many barriers to coexistence in our community. Xenophobia, misogyny and prejudice are dominating our headlines, but we seem to be defensive when faced with the truth.

We must rise from this cult of separation and unite our society. We need more locals in positions of power that invite citizens to raise our frequency. And we need expatriates to feel at home here. After all, home is where the heart is, and many expats consider this country as their home. What a pity that we deny them the pleasure of feeling at home. What a pity. Let's wake up, Kuwait. Let's coexist, Kuwait.

News in Brief

CSC to suspend
controversial merger

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) said in a statement Sunday it is postponing any amendments to the commission's organizational structure pending further discussions. The decision comes a few days after a group of CSC employees staged a sit-in protesting the merger of their department with another within the commission, consequently demoting it into a directorate. The employees called the decision "unfair" and "an outright violation of this sector's independence". While the commission had earlier said in a statement that the merger was decided on following a "thorough" study of the workflow within the two departments, they seem to have had a change of heart only a few days later. According to the instructions of Chairman of the Civil Service Council, any changes to the current organizational structure will not take place until all employees in various sectors are consulted.

Official sentenced to
life for embezzlement

KUWAIT: The cassation court has upgraded the sentence handed to the main suspect in one of the largest corruption cases in the history of Kuwait, dubbed "Interior Hospitality" case, sources said Sunday. The suspect has now been sentenced to life in prison, although the appeals court had earlier sentenced him to 15 years in jail, according to sources. The "Interior Hospitality" case came to the public's attention in early 2016, when an inventory count revealed high-ranking officers had embezzled money from the interior ministry and faked a large number of receipts for fuel, food, hotel reservations, roses and gifts to cover it up. The suspects, including businessmen, officers and well-known personalities, were referred to prosecution in September 2018. The Criminal Court later charged 24 defendants with fraud, gross negligence, misappropriation of public money and money laundering.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: People walk at The Avenues, Kuwait's biggest shopping mall, on June 16, 2023 in Kuwait City. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwaiti diplomat calls for deeper ties between Gulf states, Germany

Kuwait discusses security issues at Gulf-German Forum

BERLIN: The fifth session of the Gulf-German Forum is to start in Berlin on Sunday, mainly to discuss the strategic dialogue, regional and international security, and issues of mutual concerns. In a statement to (KUNA), Kuwait Ambassador to Germany Najeeb Al-Bader said that Kuwait is participating in the forum, which concludes on June 20, with a number of specialists in the field of security and defense policies, led by former Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

Kuwait's participation comes in response to an invitation from the Fed-

eral Academy for Security Policies, Arab-German Friendship Association, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, with the participation of the German Foreign Ministry, Bader noted. This is the fifth Gulf-German Forum on security and cooperation. Kuwait had also participated with other Gulf states in the fourth forum held last year also in Berlin. The forum focused on the future of German-Gulf relations in the context of the "Zeitenwende", or turning point, in Europe sparked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jas-

sim Al-Budaiwi and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Saudi King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies Prince Turki Al-Faisal, will participate in the forum, along with a group of specialists, parliamentarians, researchers, think-tanks and policy-makers. Ambassador Al-Bader stated that such dialogues contribute to developing the strategic partnership and deepening the bridges of cooperation between the Gulf and German sides, calling at the same time for developing cooperation between the Gulf states and Germany in various fields and at all levels. — Agencies



Kuwait Ambassador to Germany Najeeb Al-Bader



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NBK sponsors KALD's student award ceremony

KUWAIT: Pursuing its support of the students with learning difficulties and ADHD, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has sponsored Kuwait Association for Learning Differences (KALD's) Persevering Student Award for school year 2022/2023.

The award's goals include encouraging students to show tenacity and commitment by honoring outstanding students, promoting the culture of excellence and developing positive attitudes towards teaching and learning among them.

The mechanism for this year's award included nominating four students by each school for middle, high school, and grade four and five from elementary school, who should be officially registered in a government, private or special education school in Kuwait and only students with specific learning difficulties or ADHD are eligible for nomination.

NBK is a key sponsor of the various events organized by KALD, in line with its sustainability strategy, which incorporates education as a major factor. This reflects the bank's belief that these events help provide valuable opportunities for young people to show their capabilities and talents and develop their social skills.

NBK's ongoing strategic partnership with KALD over the past years goes in line with the bank's so-



Founder and CEO of KALD Amal Al-Sayer (right) is seen with Manal Al Mattar, Head of Group Corporate Communications at NBK.

cial responsibility mission of supporting the different segments of society, particularly children with learning difficulties, with the aim of providing them with psychological support and motivating them to express their talents and potentials.

It is worth mentioning that NBK shows unwavering commitment to supporting humanitarian organizations and childcare societies, in addition to participation in various social welfare programs in cooperation with various entities, reflecting its leading CSR role. NBK stands out among all private sector institutions as a keen sponsor of meaningful social initiatives across many sectors including healthcare and childcare, as well as social, environmental, sports and educational development in Kuwait.



KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait has sponsored Kuwait Association for Learning Differences (KALD's) Persevering Student Award for school year 2022/2023.



Blinken opens rare Beijing visit in bid to lower temperature

Executed women haunt, inspire Iranian Bahais 40 years on

Page 6

Page 7

South Africa's Ramaphosa tells Putin Ukraine 'war must be settled'

Delegation put forward set of principles that Kremlin deemed 'very difficult to implement'



STREL'NA: Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) attending a meeting with delegations of African leaders at the Constantine (Konstantinovsky) Palace in Strel'na. —AFP

MOSCOW: South Africa's president, in Russia as part of a delegation pushing for peace between Kyiv and Moscow, told his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Saturday that the fighting had to stop. His delegation put forward a set of principles that the Kremlin deemed "very difficult to implement", a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky ruled out talks with Moscow.

The delegation brought the voice of a continent that has badly suffered from repercussions of the Ukraine conflict, particularly with rising grain prices. "This war must be settled... through negotiations and through diplomatic means," South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa said after talks in the suburbs of Saint Petersburg.

Russian authorities have effectively banned the word "war" to describe their military operation in Ukraine. Ramaphosa added that his delegation, which has leaders and senior officials from seven African countries, "would like this war to be ended".

Ramaphosa listed 10 principles, which included de-escalation, the recognition of countries' sovereignty, security guarantees for all countries, unimpeded grain exports through the Black Sea and sending prisoners of war and children back to their countries of origin. The mission included the presidents of South Africa, Senegal, Comoros and Zambia, as well as top officials from Uganda, Egypt and Congo-Brazzaville.

'Difficult to implement'

"Any initiative is very difficult to implement," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quoted as saying by the state-run agency RIA Novosti. "But President Putin has shown interest in considering it," Peskov said after the leaders held a meeting behind closed doors.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the plan was "not formulated on paper". Putin had praised the delegation's "balanced" approach and said he was "open to a constructive dialogue with all those who want to implement peace based on the principles of justice and respect for the parties' legitimate interests".

Moscow has in the past repeated that any negotiations would need to take into account "new territorial realities". Zelensky, speaking on Friday after Ramaphosa called for de-escalation following their talks in Kyiv, repeated his position that Ukraine must recover territories lost to Russia to achieve peace.

When an air raid siren sounded in Kyiv shortly after the delegation's arrival earlier on Friday, forcing it to take shelter, Zelensky said it showed that Putin either did not control his army or was "irrational".

Focus on the battlefield

African countries have been divided over their response to the fighting. While some have sided with Ukraine, others have remained neutral or gravitated

towards Moscow. Efforts to secure peace appear increasingly perilous, analysts told AFP, with both Kyiv and Moscow convinced they can win on the battlefield.

Ukraine launched a long-awaited counteroffensive earlier this month. Russian officials — including Putin — have insisted the counteroffensive is failing despite Kyiv claiming some gains. Kyiv said Friday evening that its units were having "tactical success" in nearly all areas where they were fighting in the south. The Russian army, meanwhile, said it had repelled all assaults from Ukraine.

'Negative impact' on Africa

If analysts doubted the African mission could secure a concrete peace, there had been hope it would achieve some concessions. Securing the future viability of a deal allowing grain from Ukraine to reach the global market would be one potential goal of the delegation.

"This war is having a negative impact on the African continent and indeed on many other countries around the world," Ramaphosa said ahead of formal talks with the Russian president. Putin said "the crisis on the global food market is by no means a consequence" of the Ukraine conflict.

Russia accuses the West of blocking its exports of fertilizers and threatens to pull out of a deal — due to expire on July 17 — that has allowed vital Ukrainian grain exports to resume through the Black Sea. "We

do not believe that shipments of Ukrainian grain supplies can solve the problems of poverty and hunger," Putin said during the meeting.

Zelensky had asked the African leaders to "please, let them release our political prisoners. I think this will be an important result of your mission." Referring to prisoners of war, Putin said on Saturday: "We are ready to continue this process."

In Ukraine, Russian and Ukrainian officials in the area devastated by flooding from the destruction of a Russian-held dam announced revised death tolls Saturday. The toll in Russian-held areas had risen to 29, officials there said. Kyiv said the number killed in its territory had risen to 16, with 31 still missing, and warned that the threat of air strikes "remains high across Ukraine".

"The enemy continues to focus its main efforts on the Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and Maryinka axes and heavy battles continue," the defence ministry said in a statement. In Washington, US President Joe Biden warned that the United States would not make special arrangements for Ukraine to join the NATO military alliance. "They've got to meet the same standards," he told reporters. "So we're not going to make it easy." Next week, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will call on investors and businesses at a two-day summit in London to match Ukraine's "bravery on the battlefield" with support to get the country back on its feet. — AFP

Anxious wait for news after 41 dead in Uganda attack

MPONDWE: Distraught families gathered at a mortuary in western Uganda on Sunday for any news of their loved ones after a militant attack left dozens of students dead and others missing. Officials say at least 41 people, mostly students, were massacred at a secondary school near the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo late Friday by militants linked to the Islamic State group.

Victims were hacked, shot and burned to death in a brutal attack at Lhubirha Secondary School in Mpondwe that has shocked Uganda and drawn condemnation from around the globe. The army and police have blamed the Allied Democratic Front (ADF), a militia based in DR Congo, who fled back to the border with six abductees in captivity after the attack.

The military said it was pursuing the attackers and would recover those kidnapped. Many of the victims were burned beyond recognition when the attackers set a locked dormitory ablaze, frustrating efforts to identify the dead and account for the missing. At a mortuary in Bwera, a town near where the attack occurred, families wailed as the bodies of their loved ones were put into coffins and taken away for burial.

But for many others, there was no news of missing relatives. Many of those killed in the fire were transferred to the city of Fort Portal where DNA testing can be conducted. It is the deadliest militant attack in Uganda since 2010, when 76 people were killed in twin bombings in Kampala by the Somalia-based group Al-Shabaab.

'They will pay'

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called it "an appalling act" while the United States, a close ally of Uganda, and the African Union also sent their condolences and condemned the bloodshed.



MPONDWE: A boy is confronted at the scene of an attack in Mpondwe, Uganda at the Mpondwe Lhubirha Secondary School. The death toll from an attack on a school in western Uganda by militants linked to the Islamic State group has risen to 41. — AFP

Seventeen male students were burned in their dormitory while 20 female students were hacked to death, said Uganda's first lady and education minister, Janet Museveni.

A security guard and three members of the public were also killed, officials said. The army would track down "these evil people and they will pay for what they have done", Museveni said on Saturday. But questions have been raised about how the attackers managed to evade detection in a border region with a heavily military presence.

Major General Dick Olum told AFP that intelligence suggested the presence of the ADF in the area at least two days before the attack, and an investigation would be needed to establish what went wrong. Uganda and DR Congo launched a joint offensive in 2021 to drive the ADF out of their Congolese strongholds, but the measures have failed to blunt the group's violence. In June 1998, 80 students were burnt to death in their dormitories in an ADF attack on Uganda's Kichwamba Technical Institute near the DR Congo border. More than 100 students were abducted. — AFP

Europeans scramble on air defence after years of complacency

PARIS: The intensity of the drone and missile war in Ukraine has laid bare gaps in European states' air defences that experts say will be difficult, time-consuming and costly to plug. Anti-air systems will likely have a starring role at the Paris Air Show starting on Monday, predicts Richard Aboulafia, managing director of AeroDynamic Advisory.

"You're going to see a lot of talk about production capacity for missiles. The market for missiles is easily the fastest growing segment of the industry and yet the manufacturers simply can't keep up," Aboulafia told AFP.

Western countries had enjoyed total mastery of the skies since the end of the Cold War and largely dropped the powerful defences once designed to protect NATO forces from Soviet aircraft. France got rid of eight of its nine anti-aircraft artillery regi-

ments, MPs flagged up in a recent report.

But NATO countries have been turning to air defence again in recent years as more states have acquired cruise missiles, short-range ballistic missiles and drones, said Mark Cancian, a retired US marine colonel who is a senior adviser at the US-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

"They started it, but basically didn't get too far," Cancian told AFP. "In another five years, I think there'll be a lot more out there, but that doesn't help Ukraine right now," he added. With anti-air systems and the missiles they fire lacking, the West is struggling to respond to Ukraine's pleas for supply — whether for short- or long-range defences.

Berlin plans to spend five billion euros on anti-air from a 100-billion-euro (\$110 billion) fund for rebuilding its armed forces in the coming years, with the same amount budgeted in Paris for the period to 2030.

On the industry side, European missile maker MBDA has in recent months signed contracts worth two billion euros with France and Italy to supply 700 Aster missiles, used especially in the SAMPT system. And Poland will spend 2.2 billion euros on 44 launchers and hundreds of CAMM missiles. — AFP



JAGEL: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (R) delivers a speech next to German general Ingo Gerhartz in front of a Eurofighter at the military air base in Jagel, southern Germany, during the Air Defender Exercise 2023. — AFP

International

Swiss vote on net-zero climate law

Nearly all of Switzerland's major parties support the bill, except the SVP

GENEVA: The Swiss, feeling the impact of global warming on their rapidly melting glaciers, were voting on Sunday on a new climate bill aimed at steering the country towards carbon neutrality by 2050. Recent opinion polls indicate strong support for the proposed law, which would require Switzerland to slash its dependence on imported oil and gas, scaling up the development and use of greener and more homegrown alternatives.

But the backing slipped in the most recent survey by pollster gfs.bern, albeit remaining at 63 percent in favor, amid an anxiety-infused campaign around electricity shortages and economic ruin driven by the populist right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP). Polling stations opened in most places at 10:00 am (0800 GMT) and were set to close at noon.

But most ballots are typically cast in advance for popular votes held under Switzerland's direct democratic system, and initial results were expected by mid-afternoon. Supporters say the proposed "Federal Act on Climate Protection Targets, Innovation and Strengthening Energy Security" is needed to ensure energy security. They say it will also help address the ravages of climate change, highlighted by the dramatic melting of glaciers in the Swiss Alps, which lost a third of their ice volume between 2001 and 2022.

Climate-friendly alternatives

Switzerland imports around three quarters of its energy, with all the oil and natural gas consumed coming from abroad. Climate activists had initially wanted to push for a total ban on all oil and gas consumption in Switzerland by 2050.

But the government balked at the so-called Gla-

acier Initiative, drawing up a counter-proposal that scrapped the idea of a ban but included other elements. The text promises financial support of two billion Swiss francs (\$2.2 billion) over a decade to promote the replacement of gas or oil heating systems with climate-friendly alternatives, as well as aid to push businesses towards green innovation.

Nearly all of Switzerland's major parties support the bill, except the SVP — the country's largest party — which triggered the referendum against what it dismisses as the "electricity-wasting law". The SVP says the bill's goal of achieving climate neutrality in just over a quarter-century would effectively mean a fossil fuel ban, which it claims would threaten energy access and send household electricity bills soaring.

SVP leader Marco Chiesa last month criticized the "utopian" vision behind the bill, maintaining it would drive up energy costs by 400 billion Swiss francs while having basically "no impact" on the global climate. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said in April the melting of the Alpine glaciers would have an economic impact in both the short term — such as natural disasters and a loss of tourism revenue — and in the longer term, as they supply rivers and hydroelectric power plants.

Corporate tax hike

In 2021, the SVP successfully lobbied against a law that would have curbed greenhouse gas emissions. But observers say it will be harder for it to convince people of its message this time. There is a growing push for Switzerland to reduce its reliance on foreign energy sources since Russia's invasion of Ukraine threw into doubt Swiss access to much of the foreign energy it uses.

That road has been marked by the sacrifices of those who chose to stand for their principles even over their lives," said Simin Fahandeh, the Bahai International Community (BIC) representative to the United Nations in Geneva.

'Asked to recant'

The women had been arrested in October and November 1982, tortured, denied the right to a lawyer and had been offered the opportunity to save their lives by converting to Islam, according to the BIC. They refused to sign the statements that were prepared for them and were taken on June 18, 1983 from their prison to Chowgan Square in Shiraz where they were hanged one by one in front of each other.

Two days earlier, six Bahai men were executed in the same square, some of them relatives of the 10 women. In all, more than 200 Bahais were executed in the frenzy of hangings that followed the revolution, according to the BIC.

"There is tremendous pride in the faith and selfless courage of the 10 women and their strength in the face of extreme physical and psychological pressure," Anthony Vance, director of the US Bahai Office of Public Affairs, told AFP.

Soosan Sabet, the second cousin of one of the women executed, Akhtar Sabet, who was hanged aged just 25, said she had "good memories" of her

damage, and let out a sigh of relief. "There is no indication of damage in the village, with the rock mass having stopped just in front of the village," they said in a statement. A meter-high wall of mud and rock came to a halt just in front of the village school.

Some 1.5-1.9 million cubic meters of rock came loose, according to Stefan Schneider, a geologist who heads the early warning service in Graubunden canton. He told journalists Friday that the rocks had felled trees as if they were matches, and had destroyed a small cabin in a field above the village. But there was no longer a major risk that a major rockslide could destroy the village, he said.

After the rockslide, authorities lifted the highest alert level around midday Friday, making it once again possible to reach villages neighboring Brienz by train or road. But Brienz's own inhabitants, who have been in temporary accommodation, will need

to be flown following independence. At that time, Kuwait accomplished 43 laws and legislations, including the nationality law, monetary law, passports law and the organization of government departments. New departments were established to cope with the development of the nation, like public works, health, publication, knowledge, municipality, post and telephone, electricity and water, social affairs, awqaf, radio and television.

Over the past 62 years, Kuwait has become reputed for its humanitarian contributions and its levelheaded foreign policy. Today, under the leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait remains on a steady path of preventative diplomacy, crises mediation and efforts contributing to resolving outstanding regional and international issues. — KUNA

Red Cross (ICRC), said Jessica Moussan, ICRC's media adviser for the Middle East. They are meeting "together with... parties to the conflict in Yemen to address issues pertaining to negotiations on a future release operation", she told AFP.

On Friday, the UN envoy's office said the Amman talks were a follow-up to an agreement struck by the two sides in Stockholm five years ago. The deal called for the "release all prisoners, detainees, missing persons, arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared persons, and those under house arrest", held in connection with Yemen's nearly decade-long conflict, "without any exceptions or conditions". Moussan said the ICRC was engaged with both sides to secure a prisoner swap in line with a deal agreed in Switzerland in March.

Fighting in Yemen sharply declined after a UN-brokered truce came into effect in April last year, and full-scale hostilities did not resume even when the ceasefire lapsed in October. Among the terms of the truce was a resumption in international flights from Sanaa. The first commercial flight in six years took off for Jordan's capital Amman in May last year. Peace efforts have accelerated since March when Saudi Arabia, seeking to calm the region as it tries to revamp its oil-reliant economy and attract investment, announced a surprise rapprochement with its powerful rival Iran, seven years after they broke off ties. — AFP



LAUSANNE: A photograph taken in Lausanne on June 18, 2023 shows an electoral poster reading in French "Invest in our future, Yes, Climate Law June 18". — AFP

Also on the ballot on Sunday will be a referendum on whether to hike the tax rate for large businesses. The government wants to amend the constitution so Switzerland can join an international agreement, led by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to introduce a global minimum tax rate of 15 percent for multinational corporations.

The latest opinion poll indicated that 73 percent of Swiss voters backed the plan, which would impose

relative, a "pure, kind, friendly and sociable person" who worked as a nurse.

"Even in prison, she started serving the elderly and sick people. She would prepare their breakfast, provide medical treatment and wash their clothes," Sabet told AFP. "During the interrogation, she was asked repeatedly to recant her faith and convert to Islam in order to be released from prison." Akhtar Sabet refused and was hanged.

Ruhi Jahanpour, who was initially held with the women, freed, evaded re-arrest and escaped abroad, described the women as "really ordinary individuals who loved their families, loved continuing their education and loved to live their lives".

When she received news of their execution "it was a terrible shock for me. It was devastating. I knew the girls so well." But she was not surprised by their decision not to renounce their faith. "When they were confronted with this choice... they were willing to give up their lives. Their life was their faith and their faith was their life."

'Severe repression'

Commemorating the anniversary is particularly important for the Bahais at a time when they say those remaining in Iran are facing a new wave of repression. The Bahai faith is not recognized by the Iranian authorities, unlike other minority faiths

the new rate on all Swiss-based companies with a turnover above 750 million euros. Until now, many of Switzerland's 26 cantons have imposed some of the lowest corporate tax rates in the world, in what they often said was needed to attract businesses in the face of high wages and location costs. The Swiss government estimates that revenues from the supplementary tax would amount to between 1.0 and 2.5 billion Swiss francs in the first year alone. — AFP

including Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, even though the community remains the biggest non-Muslim minority in the country.

The Bahai faith is a relatively modern monotheistic religion with spiritual roots dating back to the early 19th century in Iran, promoting the unity of all people and equality. Iran brands Bahais "heretics" and often accuses them of being agents of arch-foe Zionist entity, as their world headquarters are in the Zionist port city of Haifa.

But the community rubbishes such suggestions, saying Haifa emerged as a centre of the faith well before the state of Zionist entity was established in 1948. Bahais in Iran complain of official discrimination in their daily lives, making it a struggle to open businesses and even bury their dead, and they are also systematically denied access to higher education in Iran.

Persecution also intensified last summer with arrests and raids, according to Vance. Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi, former members of a long disbanded, informal leadership group of the Bahais of Iran, who had previously each served 10-year sentences from 2008 to 2018, were re-arrested and sentenced to another 10 years in prison. "The repression today is severe and comprehensive, as it invades almost all aspects of daily life for Bahais," said Vance. — AFP

Executed women haunt, inspire Iranian Bahais 40 years on

PARIS: One by one, the 10 women, mostly aged under 30, went defiantly to their deaths by hanging in a city square in Shiraz in southern Iran. The youngest was only 17 years old. They had been charged with crimes including espionage but, for supporters around the world, they were simply being hanged because they were Bahais, and refused to renounce their faith even under pain of death.

On Sunday, Iranian Bahais marked 40 years since the June 18, 1983 executions of the 10 Bahai women in Shiraz, seen as one of the most egregious abuses committed against the non-Muslim minority that has been persecuted ever since the Islamic revolution of 1979.

Their deaths continue to horrify Bahais but also inspire the community as it still struggles against discrimination in daily life in Iran. Bahais hope all Iranian women can draw strength from them after a wave of women-led protests shook the clerical leadership late last year.

"The arduous path to gender equality in Iran has been walked by countless women over the decades.

Massive rockslide just misses village

BRIENZ, Switzerland: A Swiss village came within a hair's breadth of being wiped off the map when a mountain towering above it collapsed overnight, officials said Friday. The massive rockslide missed Brienz in the east of the country, "by a hair", they said. The rockslide had been expected. The village was emptied of its 84 inhabitants on May 12 after the authorities said the Insel peak had become unstable.

A large part of the Insel finally collapsed before midnight Thursday, sending more than 1.5 million tons of rock crashing down in the darkness. Early Friday morning, the local authorities inspected the

to wait a bit longer before returning home. "The village's security is not guaranteed," Andreas Huwiler, the Graubunden cantonal geologist, told reporters. "We have to monitor the movement of the collapsed rock mass in the coming days. It could still shift, for instance in the case of rain," he said. But, he added, there is a "very, very big chance" that all the inhabitants will be able to return home.

"This is one of the best days since the evacuation of the villagers," said Daniel Albertin, mayor of the Albula municipality that includes Brienz. While the inhabitants were spared, the slide forced the Tour de Suisse cycling race to shorten Friday's leg of the race, which had been due to run below the village. The stage was in the end declared void after news that Swiss rider Gino Maeder had died from the injuries he sustained when he plunged into a ravine a day earlier. — AFP



BRIENZ: This picture taken on June 16, 2023 shows a view of Brienz in eastern Switzerland after a massive landslide spared the village. — AFP

Kuwait marks 62nd Independence...

Continued from Page 1

Kuwait became a member of the Arab League on July 20, 1961. Sheikh Abdullah signed a decree on Aug 26, 1961 to hold elections of the Constituent Assembly, mandated with writing the constitution. The 183-article comprehensive constitution was completed in nine months, and laid the foundations for a sturdy democratic regime, putting the Kuwaiti people on a path of progress and prosperity.

On Sept 7, 1961, an Amiri decree was signed specifying the shape and colors of the Kuwaiti flag, the very first flag

First plane leaves Sanaa for Saudi.

Continued from Page 1

The Houthi's Works Minister Ghaleb Mutlaq said about 200 flights would be needed to accommodate the 24,000 people that he said wanted to travel. "We consider what is happening today as a good gesture, so that airports, especially Sanaa airport, will be opened to Yemeni travelers," Najeb Al-Aji, the Houthi's minister of guidance, hajj and umrah, told journalists.

Thousands of pilgrims in Houthi-held areas travel by bus to Saudi Arabia, or to government-controlled Aden — an arduous 12-hour journey, due to checkpoints — where they can fly to the neighboring country. "We can no longer bear the burdens and hardships of travelling to Aden," said Akram Mohamed Murshid, one of the pilgrims boarding the plane.

Meanwhile, Yemen's government and Houthi rebels are locked in talks in Jordan to set the ground for a possible prisoner exchange, a Red Cross official told AFP on Sunday. The negotiations since Friday in the Jordanian capital Amman are overseen by the office of the UN special envoy to Yemen and the International Committee of the

72-hour truce between Sudan generals begins

KHARTOUM: A 72-hour ceasefire between Sudan's warring generals took effect on Sunday to allow for the delivery of desperately needed aid to the country, on the eve of a humanitarian conference. The army, led by Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, has since April 15 been battling paramilitary forces commanded by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, after the two fell out in a bitter power struggle. Multiple truces have been agreed and broken in the war that has claimed the lives of more than 2,000 and driven over two million from their homes, including

at least 528,000 who fled abroad.

The latest ceasefire came into force at 6:00 am (0400 GMT), with the mediators saying the two sides had agreed to refrain from attacks and allow freedom of movement and the delivery of aid. "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United States of America announce the agreement of representatives of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on a ceasefire throughout Sudan for a period of 72 hours," the Saudi foreign ministry said.

Witnesses in Khartoum said the situation was "calm". "We want a full ceasefire," Sami Omar, who lives in Khartoum's twin city of Omdurman, told AFP. "A truce is not sufficient for us to return to our lives. They may stop fighting, but the RSF will not leave the homes (they occupy)." The United Nations will on Monday host an international donors' conference for Sudan in Geneva. — AFP

Iraq unveils 2,800-yr-old...

Continued from Page 1

northern Iraq, from 858 to 823 BC. The circumstances surrounding the tablet's arrival in Italy remain unclear, but the Italian authorities handed it over to Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid during a visit to Bologna over the past week.

"I would like to thank the Italian officials for their efforts and cooperation in bringing back this piece," Rashid said during a ceremony Sunday at a Baghdad presidential palace to hand the artefact over to the national museum. The tablet had arrived in the 1980s in Italy, where it was seized by police, said Laith Majid Hussein, director of Baghdad's council of antiquities and heritage. Iraqi Culture Minister Ahmed Fakak Al-Badrani said the circumstances behind its discovery were unclear. "Perhaps (it was found) during archaeo-

logical excavations or during work on the Mosul dam," Iraq's biggest built in the 1980s, he said.

He underlined the importance of the piece, "whose cuneiform text is complete". Modern Iraq's territory is the cradle of the Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations, to which humanity owes

writing and the first cities. The country's antiquities have been the target of looting that increased in the chaos following the US-led invasion of 2003. "We will continue to work to recover all the archaeological pieces of Iraqi history from abroad," said the Iraqi president. "We want to make the national Iraq Museum one of the best museums in the world, and we will work to do so." In May, New York prosecutor Alvin Bragg announced the return of two ancient sculptures to Iraq: A limestone Mesopotamian elephant and an alabaster Sumerian bull from the old city of Uruk. The figurines, stolen during the Gulf War, were smuggled into New York in the late 1990s, according to the prosecutor's office. The bull was part of the private collection of Shelby White, a billionaire philanthropist and Met trustee. — AFP

International

Blinken opens rare Beijing visit in bid to lower temperature

US, China are at odds over a slew of issues including trade, technology and Taiwan

BEIJING: Secretary of State Antony Blinken began talks in China on Sunday on the highest-level trip by a US official in nearly five years as the two powers looked to notch down the temperature in an escalating rivalry. Both sides have voiced guarded hope of improving communication and preventing conflict, with the world's two largest economies at odds on an array of issues from trade to technology and regional security. Blinken and his aides opened the two-day visit by meeting Foreign Minister Qin Gang at an ornately decorated state villa in Beijing's ancient Diaoyutai gardens, where the Chinese hosts will later throw a banquet dinner. Qin and Blinken walked along a red carpet and shook hands next to a pair of national flags standing in front of a painting of craggy mountains and wispy clouds.

Blinken earlier said he would seek to avoid "miscalculations" and to "responsibly manage" relations with the country identified by US policymakers across party lines as the greatest challenge to Washington's global primacy. He was originally scheduled to visit in February but abruptly scrapped his plans as the United States protested — and later shot down — what it said was a Chinese spy balloon flying over its soil. US President Joe Biden played down the balloon episode as Blinken was heading to China, saying: "I don't think the leadership knew where it was and knew what was in it and knew what was going on."

"I think it was more embarrassing than it was intentional," Biden told reporters Saturday. Biden said he hoped to again meet President Xi Jinping after their lengthy and strikingly cordial meeting in November on the sidelines of a Group of 20 summit in Bali, where they agreed on Blinken's visit.

"I'm hoping that, over the next several months, I'll be meeting with Xi again and talking about legitimate differences we have but also how there's areas we can

get along," Biden said. The two leaders are likely to attend the next G20 summit, in September in New Delhi, and Xi is invited to travel to San Francisco in November when the United States hosts the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

Array of disputes

The United States and China are at odds over a slew of issues including trade, technology and Taiwan. Beijing has not ruled out seizing Taiwan by force and has conducted military drills twice since August near the self-governing democracy, in response to the actions of top US lawmakers. Ahead of Blinken's visit, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said the United States needed to "respect China's core concerns" and "give up the illusion of dealing with China from a position of strength".

Beijing has been especially irritated by Biden's restrictions on the export of high-end semiconductors to China, with the United States both fearing their military application and eager to prevent the communist state from dominating next-generation technologies.

In a rising domestic priority for the United States, an aide said Blinken is expected to press China to curb precursor chemicals sent to Latin America to produce fentanyl, the powerful painkiller behind an addiction pandemic that kills tens of thousands of Americans a year. Washington has also lashed China over human rights, with Blinken's visit the first by a cabinet member since the United States formally accused Beijing of genocide against the mostly Muslim Uyghur minority.

Keeping allies close

As part of the Biden administration's focus on keeping allies close, Blinken spoke by telephone with his counterparts from both Japan and South Korea during his 20-hour trans-Pacific journey. Biden's na-



BEIJING: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) walks with China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang (right) ahead of a meeting at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. — AFP

tional security advisor, Jake Sullivan, travelled to Tokyo for separate three-way meetings involving Japan and both South Korea and the Philippines.

In recent months the United States has reached deals on troop deployments in southern Japan and the northern Philippines, both strategically close to Taiwan. Blinken before departure also met in Washington with his counterpart from ally Singapore, who voiced hope that the United States would stay as a power but also find ways to coexist with a rising China.

Blinken's "trip is essential, but not sufficient", Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said. "There are fundamental differences in outlook, in values. And it takes time for mutual respect and strategic trust to be built in." Blinken is the first top US diplomat to visit Beijing since a stop in 2018 by his predecessor Mike

Pompeo, who later championed no-holds-barred confrontation with China in the final years of Donald Trump's presidency.

The Biden administration has gone further than Trump in some areas, notably semiconductors, but has remained open to cooperation in limited areas such as climate. Experts say China sees more predictability with Biden than with Trump, who is running for president again next year.

Danny Russel, the top diplomat on East Asia during Barack Obama's second term, doubted Blinken's brief trip would resolve fundamental differences. "But his visit may well restart badly needed face-to-face dialogue and send a signal that both countries are moving from angry rhetoric at the press podium to sober discussions behind closed doors." — AFP

Mali junta holds vote on new constitution

BAMAKO: Malians went to the polls on Sunday to pass judgement on the governing junta's constitution, which has fuelled speculation that the country's strongman ruler will seek election. The west African nation has been under military rule since an August 2020 coup, which came after a decade of instability marked by jihadist insurgencies and political and economic crisis. Some 8.4 million citizens are eligible to vote "yes" or "no" on the draft constitution in the first electoral test for leader Colonel Assimi Goita, 40, who has vowed to lead the country back to civilian rule in 2024 elections.

Voting began at 0800 GMT and results are expected within 72 hours. But election turnout is typically low in the country of 21 million, where many have grown weary of chronic instability, while others face the direct danger of jihadist attacks in central and northern regions. Security is an ever-present concern and there is always the risk of an attack. For this reason the vote will not be held in some parts of the country, including in Kidal, the ex-rebels' stronghold in the north. The junta will be judged on turnout as a measure of its ability to restore stability, as well as an indicator of people's enthusiasm for the junta's agenda.

Chronic instability

The junta has advertised the new constitution as the answer to Mali's inability to tackle its multiple crises. Mali's recent woes began in 2012, when separatist insurgents in the north — long seen as marginalized by



BAMAKO: A man holds up a sign that reads "vote no in the referendum" during a march against the new constitution organized by the Association of Imams, in Bamako. — AFP

the southern government — aligned with Al-Qaeda-linked Islamists to seize vast swathes of territory.

Former colonial power France stepped in and helped push back the Islamists, but attacks have continued, and Bamako has since broken its alliance with Paris in favor of Russia and its Wagner mercenaries. Disputed parliamentary elections in March 2020, and mass protests against a government unable to reign in the insurgency, corruption and economic crisis, ended in a coup.

Goita initially appointed an interim president, but kicked him out in a second coup in 2021 and stepped into the top job himself. Now doubts are swirling over his commitment to step down next year. Mali's ruling junta called on Friday for the immediate departure of

the country's UN peacekeeping mission, a central and controversial actor in a security crisis that has claimed the lives of nearly 200 peacekeepers in the last decade. The African nation's military rulers had increasingly imposed operational restrictions on the peacekeepers, ultimately accusing the mission on Friday of not only being a "failure", but even becoming "part of the problem".

A stronger presidency

The new constitution will strengthen the role of the president, who will have the right to hire and fire the prime minister and cabinet members. The government will answer to the president, and not parliament as the current 1992 document states. It will also give amnesty to those behind prior coups, reform the regulation of public finances, and force MPs and senators to declare their wealth in a bid to clamp down on corruption. "Those who contest these provisions think that Goita will be a candidate in the elections" in 2024, said Bamako University sociologist Brema Ely Dicko. A politician, speaking on condition of anonymity, said some in the military were hoping a new constitution would "reset the clock" — erasing a previous commitment that Goita would not take part in the election.

Goita, a former special forces commander who saw action during the 2012 rebellion, stays out of the limelight, and is known to be publicity shy. "Opinion in Bamako is favorable to the president," said Dicko. "Through his political and verbal silence he has become a sort of icon, and is very popular," said political scientist Abdoul Sogodogo. Observers say a vote for "yes" is almost certain. "Maliens say that presidents from democratic regimes did not necessarily shine. Corruption has reached a certain level. People want to see something else," Dicko explained. However, the reform has drawn vocal opposition, from former rebels and imams as well as political opponents. — AFP

Pakistan arrests 10 trafficking suspects after Greek tragedy

MUZAFFARABAD: Pakistan authorities arrested 10 alleged human traffickers days after dozens of migrants drowned off the coast of Greece, officials said on Sunday. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also ordered an immediate crackdown on agents engaged in people smuggling, saying they would be "severely punished". Every year, thousands of young Pakistanis embark on perilous journeys attempting to enter Europe illegally in search of a better life. There were likely dozens of Pakistanis among those aboard the rusty trawler that sank off Greece's Peloponnese peninsula on Wednesday, killing at least 78 people with hundreds more missing.

Officials said nine people had been detained in Pakistan-administered Kashmir — home to a majority of the victims — and one in Gujrat, a city that has long served as a springboard for migrants. "They are presently under investigation for their involvement in facilitating the entire process," said Chaudhary Shaukat, a local official from Pakistan-administered Kashmir. In a joint statement, the International Organization for Migration and UN Refugee Agency said between 400 to 750 people were believed to be aboard the ferry. On Saturday, Pakistan's ministry of foreign affairs said 12 nationals had survived, but they had no information on how many were aboard the boat. An immigration official told AFP on condition of anonymity that the figure could surpass 200. "The Prime Minister has given a firm directive to intensify efforts in combating individuals involved in the heinous crime of human trafficking," his office said in a statement. A combination of political turmoil and an economy on the brink of collapse drives tens of thousands of Pakistanis to leave the country — legally and illegally. Young men, primarily from eastern Punjab and northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, often use a route through Iran, Libya, Turkey and Greece to unlawfully enter Europe. — AFP



MINNEAPOLIS: Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta addresses the findings of a Justice Department investigation into the Minneapolis Police Department during a press conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. — AFP

Racism routine in police force that killed George Floyd

MINNEAPOLIS: Police in the city where patrol officers murdered African American George Floyd routinely resort to violent and racist practices, the US Justice Department said Friday in findings of a review three years after his death. The report detailed multiple cases of police in Minneapolis, Minnesota shooting unarmed and unthreatening people, before and after Floyd's May 25, 2020 death.

The Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) "uses excessive force, including unjustified deadly force" and "unlawfully discriminates against Black and Native American people when enforcing the law," the department concluded. The cases in the report included the killing of a woman who had called 911 to report a possible sexual assault, and a man already

in custody who was stabbing himself. The report also cited frequent cases of police using excessive force, often with fatal consequences. Floyd died after white police officer Derek Chauvin held his knee to the 46-year-old's neck for nearly 10 minutes while three other officers looked on.

He had been detained on suspicion of trying to pass off a counterfeit \$20 bill. His death set off nationwide protests over police abuse and discrimination against African Americans, raising the pressure on police departments around the country.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland announced that Minneapolis had agreed to accept a program of tough oversight from the Justice Department that will impose reforms.

He said the study showed a pattern of Minneapolis police violating locals' constitutional rights, and that Floyd's death brought this to broader attention. It "has had an irrevocable impact on the Minneapolis community and our country and around the world," Garland told a news conference. "This loss is still felt deeply by those who loved and knew him and by many who did not," he added. — AFP

News in Brief

Cyclone leaves 11 dead

RIO DE JANEIRO: At least 11 people were killed and 20 were missing after a cyclone tore through southern Brazil, local authorities said Saturday. "According to the state branch of Protection and Civil Defense, 11 people died from the effects of the cyclone," the government of Rio Grande do Sul state, which borders Argentina and Uruguay, said in a statement. "Eighteen people are still missing in Caraa and two in Tres Forquilhas," it said. A total of 2,330 people were left with damaged houses and 602 were evacuated from areas at risk due to the passage of the cyclone between Thursday and Friday. Rio Grande do Sul governor Eduardo Leite visited the worst-affected areas by helicopter on Saturday together with government and rescue officials. — AFP

129 migrants packed in truck

MEXICO CITY: Mexican authorities found 129 migrants packed into the back of a cargo truck, the National Institute of Migration said on Saturday. The "migrants from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and India" were discovered on Friday night in the eastern state of Veracruz, it said in a statement. Mexico is in the middle of a heat wave that has killed at least eight people. The truck full of migrants was found in the town of Sayula de Aleman, where temperatures are forecast to hit 44 degrees Celsius (111 degrees Fahrenheit) on Sunday, according to the National Meteorological Service. The migration institute said 51 migrants from Guatemala were returned to that country. Another 19 unaccompanied minors from Guatemala and Honduras were transferred to a special shelter and the rest were transferred to a migration station. — AFP

Two dead in Nepal floods

KATHMANDU: Two people were killed and 28 are missing in major flooding and landslides caused by monsoon rains in eastern Nepal, authorities said Sunday. A worker at a hydropower project under construction on the Hewa River in Sankhuwasabha district was found dead, while 17 other staff were missing on Saturday evening, according to a local official. In neighboring Taplejung district another person died and three members of the same family were untraceable after houses were swept away in a landslide. "Two bodies have been recovered, but 28 people are missing," said Rishi Ram Kandel, a spokesperson for Nepali police. — AFP

Indonesia orders 13 radars

PARIS: Indonesia has ordered 13 long-range military radars from Thales to boost airspace surveillance efforts across its immense archipelago, the French manufacturer and state-owned Indonesian defence firm PT Len Industri said Sunday. The Ground Master 400 Alpha (GM400A) radars will allow the Indonesian military to "benefit from a single air picture integrating the detection of all types of threats, from jets and missiles to hovering helicopters and unmanned air vehicles", the companies said in a joint statement. The amount of the contract, which spans several years, has not been disclosed. Each radar costs several tens of millions of dollars. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, JUNE 19, 2023

Massive lawsuit against largest crypto exchange

Binance to repatriate US customer funds as legal woes mount

WASHINGTON: Binance has agreed to repatriate its US customers' assets pending a massive lawsuit against the world's largest crypto exchange, the US Securities and Exchange Commission said, adding that it will secure the funds. Binance and its boss Changpeng Zhao have "agreed to repatriate to the United States assets held for the benefit of customers of the Binance.US crypto trading platform," the SEC said in its statement. The regulator did not specify how many of Binance's US customers are affected, nor the value represented by these funds.

Earlier this month the SEC charged the crypto giant with securities law violations that it said amounted to "an extensive web of deception" and "calculated evasion of the law." Binance is alleged to have permitted US residents to trade, even though the platform is not registered in the United States as a securities exchange. The case also alleges the firm misused customer funds. The SEC says it wants to keep US customer funds safe, adding that the court order also prohibits Binance and Zhao "from spending corporate assets other than in the ordinary course of business."

"Given that Zhao and Binance have control of the platforms' customers' assets and have been able to commingle customer assets or divert customer assets as they please, as we have alleged, these prohibitions are essential to protecting investor assets,"

said Gurbir Grewal, director of the SEC's enforcement division, in the statement. "Further, we ensured that US customers will be able to withdraw their assets from the platform while we work to resolve the alleged underlying misconduct and hold Zhao and the Binance entities accountable for their alleged securities law violations," he said.

A Binance spokesperson told AFP that user "funds have been and always will be safe and secure on all Binance-affiliated platforms." "Although we maintain that the SEC's request for emergency relief was entirely unwarranted, we are pleased that the disagreement over this request was resolved on mutually acceptable terms," the spokesperson said via email. The platform, created in Shanghai in 2017, has cornered much of the crypto-trading market, turning its globe-trotting founder Zhao into a billionaire.

But it has long been accused of facilitating money laundering, setting up complex structures to avoid regulation, and busting sanctions — claims it denies. After the SEC announced the charges, Binance said earlier this month that it was halting US dollar deposits and encouraged clients to withdraw their dollars. The case comes on the heels of charges in March against Binance by another US regulator, the Commodities Futures and Exchange Commission, and as the company faces a legal probe in France on allegations of illegal trading and money laundering. — AFP



MIAMI: The logo of Binance US is seen at its stand in the exhibition hall during the Bitcoin 2022 Conference at Miami Beach Convention Center. — AFP



LE BOURGET: This photograph taken on June 18, 2023 shows the cabin of the Boeing 777X during the International Paris Air Show at the Paris-Le Bourget Airport. — AFP

Boeing expecting number of planes in air to double

PARIS: Boeing expects the number of commercial planes in service around the world to double in the next 20 years, according to estimates published on Sunday, anticipating a slightly larger increase than competitor Airbus. The American aircraft manufacturer estimates 48,575 planes will be in service in 2042, compared with 24,500 last year. This will require producing, across all manufacturers combined, 42,595 planes - half to replace existing aircraft, and the other half to account for growth. North America will take 23 percent of these new planes, the Asia-Pacific region 22 percent, Eurasia 21 percent and China alone 20 percent.

The projections, published on the eve of the opening of the Bourget air show near Paris, are in line with

ones Boeing made last year, when it forecast a world fleet of 47,080 aircraft in 2041. On Wednesday, rival manufacturer Airbus said it anticipated a need for 40,850 new passenger and cargo planes by 2042, bringing the world fleet to a total of 46,560 aircraft. After the shock to air travel demand brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, the industry is now "shifting from a recovery mindset back to the fundamentals that drive air travel", said Darren Hulst, head of commercial marketing at Boeing.

Hulst pointed to the link between the propensity to travel and world GDP, which he expected to grow substantially over the next two decades, bringing another 500 million people into the middle class and making them potential air passengers. Boeing also expects low-cost carriers to more than double in size over the next 20 years - substantial growth, but slower than the past 20 years, when their combined fleet grew sixfold. Demand for cargo planes should also remain strong, with Boeing predicting air cargo traffic growth to outstrip overall growth in global trade. — AFP

Al Muzaini announces winners of 'Transfer and Win' promotion

KUWAIT: Al Muzaini Exchange, the leading exchange company in Kuwait, celebrated the end of its latest three months-long promotional campaign in The Avenues Mall, Kuwait on Friday the 16th of June 2023, attended by General Manager Hugh Fernandes and Al Muzaini Management. In the event, which was hosted by Hasan Anwar, Al Muzaini was thrilled to announce the winners of the online "Transfer and Win" Grand Promotion.

The winners received various Cash prizes of up to \$130,000 and the final Mega prize being a BMW X3 2023 which was awarded to Ayathulla Saleem Saleem Shaik. Additionally, Al Muzaini awarded cash prizes to the attending audience through various interactive contests and activities. Hugh Fernandes, General Manager of Al Muzaini Exchange said: "Today we are delighted to introduce our latest event that brings Al Muzaini close to our customers in The



Avenues Mall. We continually invest in our product to ensure a leading excellence of remittances and we know that customers expect fantastic service when it comes to money transfers and foreign exchanges. Our commitment and number one priority is to always deliver a great customer experience. I would also like to congratulate all the winners and thank them for their trust'.

Angola police disperse fuel hike protests

LUANDA: Angolan police clashed with protesters and arrested dozens of people as thousands took to the streets in Luanda and other cities on Saturday to demonstrate against a hike in fuel prices. More than 70 people were arrested in the western city of Benguela over acts of vandalism, a provincial police spokesman told local media. Police did not immediately respond to enquiries about potential arrests or injuries in other cities.

In Luanda, a heavy police presence patrolled the streets from the morning, before firing teargas to disperse a crowd that had gathered in the east of the capital. The demonstrations were the latest in a wave triggered by the African country's decision to cut subsidies for petrol, as the economy suffers from a slide in oil prices.

Organized by civil society groups, Saturday's rallies were endorsed by opposition parties, which in a joint statement on Friday said the subsidy cut was rushed and did not consider Angolans' living standards. The opposition also decried authorities'

heavy-handed response to the protests, saying 11 people have so far been killed. At least five died earlier this month, in the central city of Huambo, as police opened fire on a demonstration of taxi and motorbike drivers that authorities said had turned violent. Angola is one of the largest oil exporters in Sub-Saharan Africa, alongside Nigeria, but has little refining capacity.

The decision to cut subsidies aimed at curbing government spending, but resulted in sharp fuel price hikes. "Removing subsidies allows the government to save some cash," said independent analyst Marisa Lourenco. "Of course, it's also coming at a bad time for the population, amid high inflation that is eroding the value of the local currency." The kwana started to weaken sharply in May, as oil prices ebbed and analysts say the central bank stopped propping it up. Over the past month, the currency has plunged more than 25 percent against the dollar.

Under President Joao Lourenco, who was re-elected for a second term last year, the nation has moved to lure foreign investors and diversify its oil-dependent economy. But reforms are yet to translate into better living standards for many of the country's 33 million people. Unemployment and poverty remain high. Earlier this month, Lourenco sacked influential Economic Coordination Minister Manuel Nunes Junior and replaced him with Angola's central bank governor Jose Massano. — AFP



LUANDA: Supporters of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) march in Luanda during a demonstration against the increase of the fuel price in Angola. — AFP

US adds Switzerland to currency monitoring list, eyeing China

WASHINGTON: None of the United States' major trading partners has been designated as manipulating its currency — including China — the Treasury Department said, although Switzerland was added to a "monitoring list." China also warrants close observation, the Treasury added in a biannual report to Congress, over its failure to publish information on foreign exchange interventions and a "broader lack of transparency around key features of its exchange rate mechanism."

The report looks at countries with big trade surpluses that actively intervene in foreign exchange markets to gain trade advantages. "Most foreign exchange intervention by US trading partners last year was in the form of selling dollars, actions that served to strengthen their currencies," said Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in a statement. She added that although the global economy has been more resilient

than many expected, Russia's war on Ukraine weighs on the outlook and has increased energy and food insecurity.

In the latest report, seven economies are on the Treasury's monitoring list of key trading partners that merit close attention to their currency practices and policies. These are China, South Korea, Germany, Malaysia, Singapore, Switzerland and Taiwan. Switzerland was declared a currency manipulator in December 2020 and became the subject of "enhanced" discussions, although it was removed from the monitoring list last year. A Treasury official noted that there remain concerns with its current account balance, adding that both sides continue to discuss ways to address this.

China's trade imbalance with the United States was another factor keeping it on the list, the official added. But Japan was removed in the latest report. Beijing has long faced scrutiny, with Washington frequently accusing the government of keeping the exchange rate artificially low via its massive stockpile of US dollars, undermining US manufacturers and workers. The criteria considered by the Treasury are a large trade surplus with the United States, a significant current account surplus and evidence of "persistent, one-sided intervention" in foreign exchange markets. — AFP

Business

Berlusconi business empire faces succession question

Fortune estimated to be worth around \$7 billion

MILAN: With Silvio Berlusconi gone, the spotlight turns to a potential succession drama as his heirs inherit the controlling stake of the late Italian mogul's vast business empire. Fininvest, the Berlusconi family trust, controls a myriad of companies in sectors ranging from television to film to publishing and football. The Berlusconi fortune was recently estimated to be worth around \$7 billion. Since his death on Monday, speculation has swirled about the future of Italy's third largest fortune - from the possibility that its companies could be broken up to whether his children and his girlfriend might fight for the spoils.

The family patriarch held onto his 61-percent stake of the group until the end. How it will be divided up among his children is unknown as the contents of his will have not been made public. The idea of a breakup seems appealing to investors as shares of Berlusconi's TV group, Mediaset, surged by 13 percent on such speculation on Tuesday.

Fininvest, however, sought to quash all speculation, issuing a statement saying that its business

activities "will continue in a line of absolute continuity in every respect". The group faces a key test at the end of June when it holds its first shareholder meeting without "Il Cavaliere" (The Knight). In a headline, the newspaper La Repubblica said: "Now the battle between his children for the 61 percent stake in the Cavaliere's safe".

He had two children, Marina and Pier Silvio, with his first wife, Carla Dall'Oglio. They each hold 7.65-percent stakes in Fininvest. Berlusconi had three other children - Luigi, Eleonora and Barbara - with his second wife, Veronica Lario. They have a combined stake of 21.42 percent. La Repubblica noted that if Berlusconi's 61-percent share were divided equally among his offspring, the three children from his second marriage would end up with a majority stake of 58 percent.

His two older children, however, hold major positions in the family business. First in line of succession is Berlusconi's daughter Marina, 56, who has headed Fininvest since 2005 as well as the Mondadori publishing house since 2003. Nicknamed the Tsarina or the Iron Princess, Marina is

reputed to be the business mastermind of the Berlusconi clan and has been involved in the family business from a young age. "She appears fragile but has a wrought iron character," Berlusconi liked to say about his eldest daughter, who has ranked among the most powerful women in the world by Forbes.

Planned transition

Despite the speculation about a potential feud, analysts say Berlusconi had planned his succession well. "Marina Berlusconi took over from her father, gradually acquiring freedom to act and independence which allowed her to become a focal point for the group," said Andrea Colli, a professor of business history at Bocconi University in Milan.

"His empire will survive without Silvio Berlusconi because he planned ahead of time for the transition between generations," Colli said. The professor noted that Berlusconi had not been directly involved in the management of the group since entering politics in the 1990s. Giuseppe Di Taranto, an emeritus professor of economic his-

tory at Luiss University in Rome, said "there is no risk of the Berlusconi empire weakening". "On the contrary, it will emerge strengthened because his children have proved themselves to be very good managers," he said.

'Very united'

Pier Silvio Berlusconi, 54, took the reins of Mediaset in 2015 after starting his career at the group's advertising unit, Publitalia '80. Berlusconi's other business include Mediolanum bank, the Medusa Film production company and the Serie A football club Monza, along with assets such as villas and yachts. "Marina will probably head the group and will control the majority with Pier Silvio," Di Taranto said. "I don't think there will be family feuds. They're very united," he said. Berlusconi is also survived by his 33-year-old girlfriend, Marta Fascina, a former model and lawmaker in his Forza Italia political party. Could she be a source of discord? "No," said Colli. After some tensions with Berlusconi's children, "they found a modus vivendi" - a way to live together. — AFP

Gulf Bank offers women seven exclusive benefits

KUWAIT: As part of its keenness to reward its customers, and women in particular, Gulf Bank announced exclusive benefits and packages for Female Kuwaiti Salary Account customers, when transferring their salary to Gulf Bank. The benefits that women get when transferring their salary to Gulf Bank include: (1) In cooperation with Zain, offers an exclusive offer that includes iPhone 14 pro, free calls, free internet for two years, media subscriptions, and a gold number as a salary transfer gift. (2) In cooperation with many car dealerships, women get an exclusive offer that includes an additional discount when buying a new car.

(3) In cooperation with Rove, provides a ride for customers with a car loan, to receive their new car at the dealership. (4) In cooperation with

Nazek, provides a special customized office desk gift for new Kuwaiti salary account customers. (5) Women get to enjoy a two-year annual fee waiver for Rose Gold credit cards. (6) Women receive two complimentary local concierge services when issuing a Rose Gold credit card. (7) The bank offers investment opportunities for women with a WISE account, with a minimum investment amount of \$5,000.

Additionally, new Kuwaiti women employees working in government, semi-government, or the oil sector, benefit from this offer when transferring their salary to Gulf Bank, provided that the minimum salary amount is KD 500. Furthermore, Gulf Bank's salary account customers enjoy many other benefits, such as: Automatic enrollment in the best and fastest rewards program in Kuwait, discounts at leading car dealerships, a personal loan of up to KD 25,000 with a repayment period of 5 years, housing loans up to KD 70,000 with a repayment period of 15 years, as well as a free credit card and safety deposit box for one year.


Gulf Bank has recently launched the 'Get Cash in A Flash' offer, which enables new customers, or those transferring their salaries to the Kuwaiti

Salary Account, to receive a cash gift of up to KD1,200, in addition to a grace period of one year for those obtaining a loan. This means that customers who transfer their salary to Gulf Bank, and apply for a loan, have a period of 12-months to payback the first installment, following the date of obtaining it.

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

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





شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 15 JUNE 2023

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	33,430	7,778.58	2.3%	3.8%	-4.2%	825,731,817	226,955,436	36,350	16.6	1.2	79.0%
Main Market	8,896	5,448.47	1.4%	0.1%	-2.7%	452,575,861	44,768,409	19,173	14.8	0.7	21.0%
All Share	42,326	7,003.72	2.1%	3.0%	-4.0%	1,278,307,678	271,723,845	55,523	15.5	0.8	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Banking	25,256	1,697.50	1.4%	2.8%	-5.4%	252,913,375	119,133,255	14,361	19.1	1.2	59.67%
Basic Materials	546	967.08	3.6%	5.3%	11.8%	2,724,406	2,027,647	884	8.5	1.5	1.29%
Consumer Discretionary	1,054	1,572.79	1.7%	2.1%	5.8%	42,142,815	5,626,229	2,792	14.2	0.9	2.49%
Consumer Staples	171	562.32	7.1%	11.8%	17.2%	5,339,954	2,450,371	639	NM	1.0	0.40%
Energy	209	999.45	-0.3%	1.0%	-12.2%	2,608,426	246,740	225	9.0	0.8	0.49%
Financial Services	4,329	1,224.59	3.7%	3.4%	-2.6%	590,139,625	62,676,518	16,839	21.3	0.8	10.23%
Health Care	224	452.77	1.0%	-1.3%	-2.0%	37,218	17,583.75	14	9.9	0.9	0.53%
Industrials	3,475	1,001.02	3.0%	3.5%	-7.2%	65,417,733	31,427,277	6,993	16.5	0.9	8.21%
Insurance	880	2,137.45	1.4%	0.1%	37.8%	1,943,750	223,658	297	11.1	0.8	2.08%
Real Estate	2,578	1,201.99	6.9%	7.8%	-0.6%	281,367,687	32,256,062	9,402	14.2	0.6	6.09%
Technology	9	646.75	3.4%	-6.3%	-7.1%	15,250	1,266	8	NM	0.8	0.02%
Telecommunications	3,389	1,108.91	1.7%	1.1%	-6.1%	28,367,564	14,666,946	2,751	11.1	1.4	8.01%
Utilities	206	492.11	3.3%	1.6%	-0.5%	5,289,875	970,292	318	15.3	1.9	0.49%

Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
ALOLA	57	44.30%	18,896,733	944,229	727
ALKOUT	822	20.88%	1,105	863	7
THURAYA	129	18.35%	4,501	50	3
MANAZEL	23.5	17.50%	13,712,385	295,566	427
KUWAITRE	366	16.19%	2,611	907	7

Top Losers

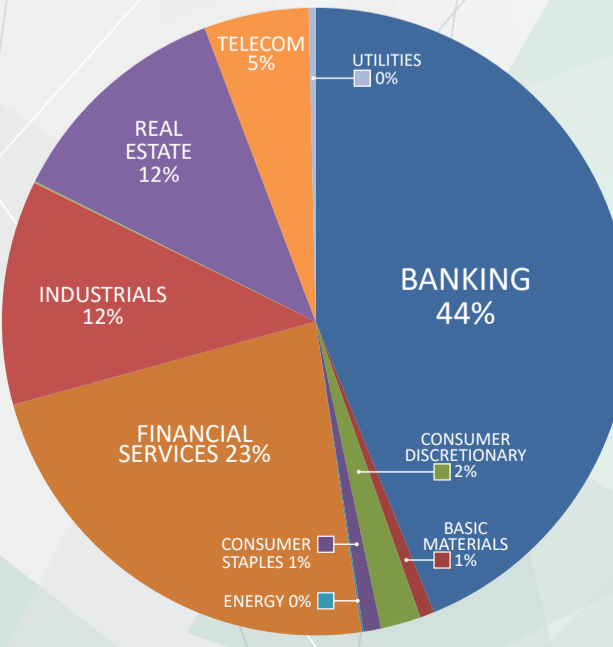
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
GFC	59	-14.49%	65,718	4,148	50
TAHSSILAT	18.3	-10.73%	88,004	1,617	15
ABK	235	-8.20%	18,226,814	4,388,862	1,112
DALQAN	160	-8.05%	847,713	136,253	163
FUTUREKID	93	-5.10%	516,452	48,042	62


Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
GFH	87	8.61%	188,148,855	16,325,128	3,896
KRE	117	7.34%	109,375,097	12,484,587	2,038
GBK	264	1.54%	70,672,512	18,264,269	1,537
KFH	740	1.93%	57,615,208	42,350,582	4,311
AAYAN	149	3.47%	49,780,083	7,281,904	820

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	740	1.93%	57,615,208	42,350,582	4,311
NBK	937	0.54%	27,806,416	26,021,487	2,378
AGLTY	638	4.25%	31,292,416	19,590,815	3,088
GBK	264	1.54%	70,672,512	18,264,269	1,537
BOUBYAN	633	2.59%	28,730,546	18,207,437	2,621





Market Summary:

- Premier market volume increased 49% while value dropped 10%. Main Market volume and value increased by 59% and 10%, respectively.
- The Premier index is moving on an upward trend overcoming critical resistance levels. The Main index is moving upwards but this is yet to be confirmed.
- Technically, the All Share index closed at 7003, with support levels at 7000, 6981, and 6959, while resistance at 7041. The Premier index closed at 7778, with support levels at 7764, 7727, and 7701, while resistance at 7784. The Main index closed at 5448, with support levels at 5447, 5424, and 5393, while resistance at 5467.

Business

Benin feeling the pinch as Nigeria ends fuel subsidies

Prices of black market fuel over the border double



COTONOU: Moto taxi drivers queue at a fuel station in Cotonou. For decades, Nigeria's cheap gasoline has been transported illegally by road to its neighbors, primarily Benin, where it is then resold on the black market by a multitude of informal sellers. — AFP photos

COTONOU: Sitting on top of a yellow jerrycan of fuel, Jeannine waits for customers on a sidewalk in Benin's economic capital Cotonou, but business is slow. The motorbikes and cars she normally supplies are no longer stopping to stock up on her cheap gasoline, which is smuggled in from neighboring Nigeria. Since Nigeria's new president Bola Ahmed Tinubu abruptly ended his country's long-standing subsidy on petrol two weeks ago, prices of black market fuel over the border in Benin have also doubled.

"Since this morning, barely five people have stopped," said Jeannine. "Everyone prefers to go to the petrol station now." Two weeks ago, a liter of "Kpayo", the smuggled gasoline sold on the side of Beninese roads, doubled from 350 to 700 CFA francs (0.5 to 1 euro). That is now higher than the petrol in service stations at the market price of around 650 CFA a litre.

In Nigeria, fuel prices have also tripled since Tinubu ended the subsidies, with food, transport and power prices feeling the knock-on effect. Ending the subsidy was the first measure taken by Tinubu, who sees the subsidies as unsustainable financial waste costing the state billions of dollars a year, and allowing mas-

sive smuggling of subsidized gasoline to neighboring countries. "Why should we (...) feed the smugglers and be the Santa Claus of neighboring countries," Tinubu said last week, justifying the decision, which has been unpopular in Nigeria.

For decades, Nigeria's low-cost gasoline has been transported illegally by road to its neighbors, primarily Benin, where it is resold on the black market by a multitude of informal sellers. "You know, this fuel helps feed thousands of people in Benin," said Jeannine, a 48-year-old widow with five children, who says she does not have savings "to start a new business". The scale of the trafficking is such that the price of taxi fares has almost doubled in Cotonou. In Cameroon, another neighbor of Nigeria, several motorcycle taxi unions have gone on strike in protest.

'Pray to God'

Victorien Assogba Kossi, wearing a yellow shirt like all the zemidjans (motorbike taxis) of Cotonou, wonders "what is wrong with Nigeria...?" "Is it because the border is closed?" asks the driver who has never heard of Nigerian subsidies. "We're going to pray to God that it



COTONOU: Fuel containers are seen on the side of a road in Cotonou.

goes down," said the 46-year-old man, who says he was forced to cut corn rations for his children when business slowed. A few kilometers away, Nicolas Evedjere is happy enough. The gas station manager has never sold as much as in recent days. "We had to close this morning, because we had nothing left to sell, our clients have multiplied by ten," he said smiling while adding he is sad "to see brothers suffer".

Suppliers had not anticipated such an explosion in demand, he said. In front of gas stations that still have fuel to sell, long queues are now visible at peak times. This is good news for the Beninese State, which hopes to increase its tax revenue, as informal sellers do not pay tax. "In recent years, the Beninese government has encouraged the development of service stations in the country to reduce the importance of contraband gasoline on the market," Beninese government spokesman Wilfried Houngbedji told AFP. "If we hadn't done this, we would currently be facing serious shortages," he said.

Border closure

The subsidy episode has once again illustrated Benin's steep dependence on its Nigerian neighbor,

a West African giant with 215 million inhabitants, the continent's largest economy and one of Africa's top oil producers. Nigeria's border with Benin was closed off overnight in 2019 by former Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, a shutdown which lasted 18 months and asphyxiated the Beninese economy. Whether coincidence or not, Beninese President Patrice Talon recently dismissed his foreign affairs minister, replacing him with Shegun Bakari, a Beninese entrepreneur who is of the same Yoruba ethnicity as Tinubu, and who observers say is "close" to his inner circle.

At the Benin border post of Seme-Krake, on the Atlantic coast, the usual hustle of currency traders, sellers, transporters and small traders involved in gasoline trafficking may have slowed, but another activity persists. Rice imports are officially banned in Nigeria, which is trying to encourage local production. But on the Nigerian side, past the customs checkpoints, a multitude of cars, their trunks filled with bags of rice arriving from the port of Cotonou in Benin, are unloaded in plain sight and passed into new vehicles for transport into Nigeria. — AFP

NBK Market Report

US inflation eases but still sizzles

KUWAIT: US headline inflation fell to a lower than expected 4.0% year-on-year in May from 4.9% in April, largely due to lower energy costs and slowing food inflation. While the headline rate was the lowest since March 2021, core inflation rose 5.3% year-on-year, only a modest improvement from April's 5.5% reading. Services inflation (excluding energy) remains elevated at 6.6% year-on-year, driven by higher housing and transportation costs. US wholesale inflation also fell more than forecast, due to cheaper gasoline.

PPI rose 1.1% year-on-year, the smallest gain since 2020, underscoring a continued easing in supply-side inflation. Excluding food and energy components, core PPI rose 2.8% from a year ago. PPI has slowed considerably since the middle of last year amid normalizing supply chains, shifting consumer spending preferences towards services, and a broader cooling in costs of key commodities.

As widely expected, the Federal Reserve left interest rates unchanged at their June meeting after ten consecutive rate hikes over the past 15 months. The Federal Funds Rate was kept at 5-5.25% unanimously, but officials signaled more hikes are on the cards with some hawkish projections for the economy. The updated economic forecasts struck a hawkish tone.

For Q4 this year, GDP has been revised up from 0.4% year-on-year to 1%, unemployment has been revised down from 4.5% to 4.1%, and the core Personal Consumption Expenditure (PCE) deflator has been revised up from 3.6% to 3.9%. The March dot plot indicates rates had probably peaked, but the June forecasts show that two further rate rises are expected before they reverse course in 2024 with 100bp of rate cuts. Officials offered a median forecast of 5.6% in their so-called dot plot for the end of 2023, compared to the 5.1% median released in the March. Mixed economic data and the Fed's dovish move weighed on the greenback, giving peers room to run. The US Dollar Index closed the week just below 103.

UK: Ticket to tighter times

Britain's labor market tightened unexpectedly in April, as wages shot up and unemployment fell, in another sign that the Bank of England (BoE) has not yet done enough to bring down stubbornly high inflation. The unemployment rate dropped to 3.8% in the three months through April, defying forecasts for an increase to 4%. The number of people employed surpassed pre-pandemic levels for the first time, rising to a record 33.1 million during the quarter.

British companies are scrambling to find the staff they need, bidding up pay and bringing down the unemployment rate.

Average earnings increases excluding bonuses rose to the highest ever outside the pandemic, hitting 6.5% year-on-year in the three months through April. Nevertheless, pay is still rising more slowly than inflation, eating into the spending power of consumers and delivering the tightest cost-of-living squeeze in generations.

Economic activity bounced back in April as strong growth in the retail and creative industries sectors offset a slowdown in construction and manufacturing. Gross domestic product rose 0.2% after a 0.3% decline in March. The figures left the economy 0.3% bigger than before the coronavirus hit in 2020. However, according to the data, the GDP rebound in April reflects a reversal of the squeeze in the service sector from poor weather in March rather than a meaningful improvement in the underlying growth trajectory.

There were signs of households cutting back on spending in the GDP figures. Higher interest rates and the cost of living have started to bear down on the private housing sector, which was the main cause of a sharp fall in construction. Consumer-facing industries grew monthly, but were still 8.7% below their pre-pandemic levels. Manufacturing fell 0.3% in April, with pharmaceuticals and computers dragging down the figures. In the service sector, four days of junior doctor strikes caused a 0.9% fall in health and social work activities.

The semi-positive start to the second quarter reduces the risk of recession for now. However, bets that the BoE will keep raising interest rates through the summer are adding to the prospect of a downturn later in the year. In the labor market, the figures are a major surprise because the BoE and economists had been expecting the labor market to loosen under the pressure of 12 consecutive interest rate increases. The latest batch of data supports bets the BoE will raise rates again at their meeting this month to 4.75%. The cable gained ground against the dollar, closing the week past the 1.26 range it was in to 1.2821.

Europe interest rate rises

Germany's ZEW survey showed an improvement in investor expectations in June. The expectations index rose to -8.5 from -10.7 in May, above the median forecast. However, sentiment around current conditions worsened with manufacturing still firmly in contraction territory. Euro-zone industrial production underwhelmed in April, rising 1% month-on-month after a 3.8% decline in March. The underlying data was not optimistic, leaving a good chance of negative overall production growth in the second quarter.

The large countries experienced poor output developments in April. German

production was flat, France posted a small 0.8% increase, but Italy, Spain and the Netherlands experienced contractions. Industrial dynamics provide a mixed picture at best for the sector. New orders, domestic demand, along with global demand have all been weak for some time now. Besides that, the catch-up effects from supply chain disruptions have been fading. Lower energy prices should work favorably from a production perspective, but overall this is not yet resulting in stronger activity so far.

Higher borrowing costs are a further headwind to recovery after the economy entered a technical recession in Q1 2023 and digested the tide of rate hikes from the European Central Bank (ECB). The ECB lifted rates by another 25bps at their June meeting and signaled that their hiking campaign is not over yet. The deposit rate was lifted to 3.5%, the highest level in 22 years. Officials also confirmed that they'll halt reinvestments under their €3.2 trillion (\$3.5 trillion) Asset Purchase Program from next month — another tightening move that was flagged at May's policy meeting.

The decisions were underpinned by fresh quarterly projections suggesting inflation will moderate more slowly than previously envisaged, to 2.2% in 2025. The single currency edged higher after the ECB's meeting, climbing past 1.08 to close the week at 1.0937.

Stuttering economic growth

China's central bank ramped up its monetary stimulus to help spur the economy amid signs of a weakening property market, a slump in business investment and record joblessness among young people. In an unexpected move, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) cut its short-term policy interest rate, the seven-day reverse repurchase rate, by 10bps to 1.9%. The reduction in that rate was the first since August 2022.

Additionally, the PBOC lowered the rate on its medium-term lending facility (MLF), or one-year loans, by 10bps to 2.65% and provided 237 billion yuan (\$33 billion) of medium-term loans, more than the 200 billion yuan maturing later this month. The cut to the one-year MLF rate was largely expected after the seven-day reverse repurchase rate was reduced by the same magnitude a few days earlier. The two rates are usually adjusted together.

The latest batch of official data showed the economy's recovery lost further momentum in May. Consumer spending is moderating after surging early this year when China dropped pandemic restrictions. Growth in industrial output slowed to 3.5% year-on-year in May from 5.6% in April and retail sales grew 12.7% year-on-year in May, below expectations. Fixed asset investment by private businesses con-

Rates - 18th June, 2023

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.0946	1.0919	1.0972	1.0937	1.0800	1.1000	1.0984
GBP	1.2783	1.2769	1.2852	1.2821	1.2600	1.2900	1.2830
JPY	140.30	139.83	141.91	141.82	139.00	143.00	139.82
CHF	0.8916	0.8900	0.8949	0.8937	0.8800	0.9200	0.8851

tracted in the first five months of the year. The unemployment rate remained relatively elevated at 5.2% in May, while the jobless rate for young people between the ages of 16 and 24 rose slightly to 20.8%, a new record high since data became available in 2018. The housing market remains a major drag on growth.

Property investment contracted 7.2% in the first five months of the year from the same period in 2022, worse than expected. Construction of new homes plunged more than 22% annually in the period. Home prices rose just 0.1% month-on-month in May, down from 0.3% in April. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said the foundation of the economy's recovery "is not yet solid," and focus needs to be on repairing and expanding demand.

The PBOC timed its easing just as the Federal Reserve paused its rate hiking cycle for the first time in 15 months. The widening gap between US and Chinese rates fueled capital outflows and put pressure on yuan, which is down more than 3% against the dollar this year. The offshore yuan closed the week at 7.1251.

Japan: The dove doves on

Producer prices in Japan slowed for a fifth consecutive month, rising 5.1% year-on-year in May after a revised 5.9% increase in April. The rise came as prices of electricity, fuel, nonferrous metals and chemical goods fell, data showed, a sign cost-push pressure that has driven up consumer inflation may be subsiding. On the other hand, prices of beverage and food goods rose 7.9% in May from a year earlier and those of electric equipment were up 5.5%, the data showed, a sign cost pressures for sectors close to households such as retailers and restaurants were showing little signs of abating.

Core machinery orders, a highly volatile data series regarded as a leading indicator of capital spending in the coming six to nine months, rose 5.5% in April from the previous month, the first increase in three months and above the median forecast for a 3.0% gain. While orders from manufacturers were down 3.0%, an 11.0% growth

in service-sector demand drove up the headline figure. On a year-on-year basis, the figure fell 5.9%, versus a forecast for a decline of 8.0%.

The Bank of Japan (BoJ) maintained its ultra-easy monetary policy on Friday despite stronger-than-expected inflation and signs of wage growth. It kept the short-term interest rate at -0.10% and set a 0% cap on the 10-year yield under its yield curve control (YCC) policy. It signaled it will remain a dovish outlier and focus on supporting a fragile economic recovery.

The BoJ also reiterated its view that inflation will slow this year and pledged to sustain stimulus. "We expect trend inflation to heighten as economic activity strengthens and the labor market tightens. But there's very high uncertainty on next year's wage negotiations and the sustainability of wage growth," BoJ Governor Kazuo Ueda told a briefing. The yen fell broadly following the BoJ's announcement, closing the week at 141.82.

Labor market still sizzling

The Australian labor market figures made an extraordinarily strong report in May, blowing past expectations. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) showed net employment rose by 75,900 in May from April, higher than market forecasts for a rise of 15,000 jobs. The jobless rate edged back to near 50-year lows at 3.6%, when analysts had expected a steady 3.7%. The participation rate climbed to a record high of 66.9% from 66.7%, thanks to a greater share of women entering the labor force. Full-time employment rebounded 61,700 from April when it fell by a revised 28,600.

The broad strength of the report adds pressure on the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) has more work to do to tame inflation, even after tightening by 400 basis points to an 11-year high of 4.1% and a surprise rise earlier this month. The robustness of the labor market over 2023 to date is undeniable and suggests some ongoing momentum in the economy. The Aussie made a notable gain rising from the 0.6700 region to close the week at 0.6879.

Denmark vies to stay gastronomy star in post-Noma era



A waiter serves the food at the Alchemist restaurant.

With off-the-wall dishes like butterfly wings or simple local products, restaurants in Denmark, the recent darling of the culinary world, are outdoing each other to emulate Noma, a soon-shuttering three-starred eatery. Tucked away at the far end of an industrial zone in an old shipyard, Alchemist is turning food into gold, offering its fortunate-enough visitors — the single set menu costs 4,900 kroner (\$707) — a “holistic experience” consisting of 50 “impressions”.

“The ambition is to change the world through gastronomy and try to make a very immersive experience (by) bringing different artistic fields into the culinary world,” says Alchemist’s 32-year-old chef, Rasmus Munk. And that experience is drawing crowds. Around 10,000 people are usually on the waiting list at Alchemist, which serves 52 people a day. Behind a heavy bronze door, diners are plunged into an almost mystical ambience, including music and light effects and a contemporary dance performance.



A representative of Danish Seaweed demonstrates seaweed from Odsherred fjord at Anneberg Cultural Park.

pollution, followed by anxiety-inducing news reports. For one dish, caviar is placed in the pupil of a fake eyeball made from dried cod broth. Here, titillating diners’ minds is almost more important than teasing their tastebuds. “My favorite part is when people begin to debate and create some interaction with the food and experiences,” says Munk, whose establishment has two Michelin stars.

Noma, ranked the best restaurant in the world several times, announced in January that it would close for good at the end of 2024 to reinvent itself as a food laboratory. But Denmark has a long line of restaurants that continue to attract foodie tourists. On Monday, five new eateries were awarded their first Michelin stars.

Stars in an old asylum

A hundred kilometers west of Copenhagen, diners can have a completely different gastronomic experience at Mota. Located in a former psychiatric hospital, the restaurant is quiet, simple and bucolic, and gives pride of place to local products. But despite the tranquil feel, Mota, recently

opened by another star of Danish cuisine Claus Henriksen, is “a place where you’re allowed to do a lot of crazy things”.

Surrounded by an abundant flora and fauna offering up mushrooms, asparagus, algae and hake, Henriksen picks what he can from his nearby surroundings to compose his menus. “Twenty years ago we did a lot of classic French, Italian cooking... We forgot our own products,” says the 42-year-old chef. Even the beverage menu features local bottles, which are gaining renown amid Europe’s warming climate.

The focus on local Nordic flavors and ethical cuisine — a movement started by Noma founder Rene Redzepi — has enabled restaurateurs to reinvent Scandinavian cooking, and reap the financial benefits. Almost 40 percent of recent tourists to Copenhagen said they visited for the cuisine. Henriksen said he spent two “wonderful” years working in Redzepi’s kitchen. “There was a creativity. It was also a place where you could find your different ways of being, there (was) an



People enjoy the atmosphere as they visit the Alchemist restaurant in Copenhagen.

important way of looking at products,” he recalled.

Putting Denmark on the culinary map, Noma also attracted young chefs from around the world to the small windswept country. Long gone are Denmark’s days of boiled potatoes, chops and gravy. In their place is a plethora

of refined dishes topped with Nordic berries and edible flowers. “I could watch it developing, getting more people more and more interested,” says Louise Bannon, an Irish former chief pastry chef at Noma and now a baker in vogue in Denmark. “People have travelled all over the world to go and work there (and) to go eat there,” she notes.

During her years at Noma, she developed a hankering for bread baking. After months spent travelling and training to hone her skills, she returned to Denmark and now makes her bread solely with flour milled locally, including her own. She says her customers, many of whom own vacation homes at the tip of a wild peninsula, are connoisseurs who can tell the difference. “People here really appreciate the quality. If you’re using fresh flour they know... they can taste it and they will pay for the quality.” — AFP



Rene Redzepi, chef and co-owner of the world class Danish restaurant Noma, is pictured on May 31, 2021 in Copenhagen.

A first room is reserved for the bite-size amuse-bouches. Guests then head into “the dome” for the rest of the meal, enjoyed under a cupola screening colorful scenes of ocean life ravaged by plastic



A chef prepares asparagus with wild herbs at the kitchen of the Mota restaurant in Anneberg Cultural Park.



A man looks at a creation called “Burnout Chicken” as he visits the Alchemist restaurant.



An artist performs at the Alchemist restaurant in Copenhagen on May 25, 2023.



Louise Bannon, owner of Tir Bakery, works on bread and pastries at Anneberg Cultural Park in the town of Nykobing Sjaelland, Denmark, on May 24, 2023.



Soren Wiuff, asparagus farmer, inspects his field outside the village of Gislinge, Denmark, on May 24, 2023.



Chefs prepare fried oysters in the kitchen of Mota.

Lifestyle



(From left) Britain's Prince George of Wales, Princess Catherine of Wales, Prince Louis of Wales, Prince William, Prince of Wales, Princess Charlotte of Wales, King Charles III, Queen Camilla, Prince Edward, Duke of Edinburgh and Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh, wave from the balcony of Buckingham Palace after attending the King's Birthday Parade, 'Trooping the Color', in London on June 17, 2023. - AFP photos



Britain's King Charles III salutes as members of the Blues and Royals return outside Buckingham Palace after the King's Birthday Parade, 'Trooping the Color'.

DYING MARTIN AMIS ACCEPTED KNIGHTHOOD FROM KING CHARLES

King Charles III announced his first birthday honors list on Friday, awarding a knighthood to British writer Martin Amis, who died from cancer last month. The honors – announced at New Year and to mark the sovereign's official birthday in June – award the famous and ordinary members of the public for excellence.

Amis, the author of "Money", "London Fields" and "Time's Arrow" accepted the honor before his death aged 73 at his home in Florida. Recipients are told confidentially in advance until the list is published. Sources told AFP the royals' turmoil following the death of Princess Diana – also became "sirs". Amis' friend and fellow novelist Ian McEwan and US-based Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour were made companions of honor, joining a select group – never numbering more than 65 – recognized for major contributions in their field.

British-Nigerian poet and novelist Ben Okri and director Stephen Frears – whose film "The Queen" recounted the royals' turmoil following the death of Princess Diana – also became "sirs". Amis' friend and fellow novelist Ian McEwan and US-based Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour were made companions of honor, joining a select group – never numbering more than 65 – recognized for major contributions in their field. Amis' novelist father Kingsley was also knighted and was sometimes scathing about the royals. However, he described Charles in 2011 as "charming... and very knowledgeable", although "he has an extraordinary laugh".

Volunteers honored

Many of the more than 1,100 people recognized are volunteers, in line



Members of the public cheer as they watch the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, the Red Arrows.

with Charles' decision to put charitable works at the center of his coronation celebrations. Hundreds of volunteers were invited to his crowning at Westminster Abbey on May 6 and two days later a national day of volunteering was held on a special public holiday.

The king's first list puts a "renewed focus" on those making a "profoundly positive impact" on society, said the government's Cabinet Office department which oversees the awards. Among the recipients is Alice Good, 55, from Northumberland in northeast England, who set up Sunflower Sisters to help Ukrainian families fleeing the

Russian invasion after seeing an on-line plea from a woman with a young daughter. "It was just that image and thinking, 'Oh my god that could be me... there must be something I can do'," she told AFP.

#BoysCanDance

The group offers a hand of friendship to the women, helping them to navigate sponsors, visas and finding independent accommodation as well as sending aid to the war-torn country. Good said that after coming up with the idea she was joined by many others who now help her to run the



Britain's King Charles III rides back to Buckingham Palace.

constantly evolving project. "We've got so many women still trying to come out of Ukraine," she said, adding that they were now grappling with a lack of sponsors.

The youngest person to be honored is performing arts student Junior Froot, 18, from Merseyside in northwest England. Froot started the Twitter hashtag #BoysCanDance and became an anti-bullying advocate after he was targeted at primary school for his love of dance. Dancing since the age of three, he said he "just always had a groove".

But after being subjected to taunts

and even physical abuse he resolved to prove the bullies wrong and has gone on to raise hundreds of thousands of pounds for charity and supported other boy dancers facing the same struggles he encountered. "I just felt really isolated in myself, I felt I couldn't turn to anybody but I didn't want to let anyone stop me because it was my dream," he said. Also honored in the list are many of those who helped to organize the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II after her death last September. — AFP

Flamingos and Dalmatian pelicans laze in the azure waters of a shallow lagoon near Albania's Adriatic coast. But this avian paradise's days may be numbered, ecologists warn, with a new airport being built close by to cash in on the Balkan nation's tourism boom. Its construction near Vloa has triggered protests from environmentalists, who say it is being built inside a protected area and poses a serious risk to a variety of birds.

"This project goes against the laws of nature," said Zydjon Vorspi of the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania group. "Building such vast infrastructure in an area known worldwide for its exceptional biodiversity means blocking the birds' paths and creating major problems for local, as well as international, populations."

The lagoon is fed by the Vjosa, billed as Europe's last major "wild river", which was given national park status with much fanfare by the Albanian government in March after a campaign supported by Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio. Millions of birds pass through the Narta lagoon and the nearby Karavasta estuary to the north every year, providing critical grounds for migratory species travelling between northern Europe and the African continent.

The airport will likely have a direct impact on the habitat, ecologists say, with jets disrupting migratory flyways and nesting areas that could irreparably damage the fragile ecosystem. "We can already see that some species are worried," Niko Dumani,



This aerial picture shows the construction site of the Vloa Airport near Narta lagoon.

a biodiversity specialist, told AFP. But the Albanian government denies the airport is infringing on protected areas and said the project will be a much-needed boost to tourism. "The airport will be built anyway," declared Prime Minister Edi Rama. "It will be an added value and in no way a threat to the ecosystem".

'A better life'

A two-and-a-half-hour drive south of Tirana, the Narta lagoon and its marshy surroundings are home to more than 200 bird species, including 33 on Albania's red list of endangered flora and fauna. It is the final destination of the Vjosa – one of Europe's last undammed rivers – before it empties

into the Adriatic through a labyrinth of waterways and marshes that are ideal for birds.

But just five kilometers north as the crow flies, construction teams are laying the groundwork for the €104 million (\$112 million) airport that aims to handle two million passengers a year by 2025. Locals are largely supportive of

the airport, which they hope will bring jobs and development to an impoverished region.

"I think it's a good investment for the future of our children, for a better life here," Tokli Hysa, 70, told AFP. His village has been emptied by waves of migration, with only a single shop left that sells everything from sugar to bags of cement. Authorities say the airport will encourage tourism and create 1,500 jobs directly in a country where one in five under 30 are out of work and the average monthly wage is €560.

Disfigured coast

But environmentalists fear mass tourism will set off a tidal wave of construction. Activists point to the disfigured swaths of coastline in Vloa and Durres that have been overrun with resorts and apartment blocks with little oversight. The rapid urbanization in the area – along with overfishing and climate change – has already played a part in the dramatic decline in migratory bird populations.

Last year researchers reported that the number of waterbirds in Albania's Divjaka-Karavasta wetlands were down by a quarter. For Ornelo Bazaj, the owner of an agency focused on ecotourism, the airport could undermine the tracts of pristine coastline that are attracting tourists to the area in the first place. "In the short term, it will have beneficial effects," Bazaj said. "But in the long term, it will destroy the environment and in turn tourism." - AFP



Environmentalist Zydjon Vorspi observes birds at the Narta lagoon.



This aerial picture taken on May 23, 2023, shows a flock of greater flamingo (Phoenicopterus roseus) at the Narta lagoon some 10 km north of the city of Vloa. - AFP photos



Environmentalist expert Niko Dumani stands next to the fence of the Vloa Airport construction site.



This photograph shows a Eurasian stone-curlew (Burhinus oedicnemus) at the Narta lagoon.

Lifestyle



Repentant ranchers rescuing Colombian wildlife

A wounded crested porcupine (*Hystrix cristata*) is seen at the reserve.

Two newborn pumas and a convalescing porcupine share a room in the home of the Zapata family, which has renounced livestock farming to focus on stewardship of the Colombian Amazon and its animals uprooted by deforestation. Just over a decade ago, the Zapatas decided to change their ways, and instead of cutting back trees for pasture, plant new ones.

They sold their cows and let the jungle claim back most of their land in San Jose de Guaviare in southern Colombia. Today, the family of three work to rehabilitate animals affected in a variety of cruel ways by humanity's encroachment on nature. They sacrificed part of their home and backyard, where for the moment they house 60 creatures, ranging from monkeys, birds and armadillos to a spotted wild cat known as an ocelot.

"This farm was dedicated to cattle raising: 56 hectares of which only about 12 (hectares) were... forest," said Dora Sanchez, who runs the ranch-turned-reserve with husband Hector Zapata, 57, and daughter Samantha, 23. "Little by little, my family understood that (conservation) is a good thing," the 48-year-old told AFP on the former ranch now called the Nupana reserve. "We must preserve and protect the forest, because it is the source of life... We are one hundred percent convinced that it is the jungle" that is the future, she added.

'Positive effect'

Like many others in this rural department of Guaviare, the Zapatas were attracted by the dream of making a new

life in a "land without men for men without land." When Sanchez and Zapata moved there in 1997, most of the locals were raising cattle or planting coca – the raw ingredient of cocaine, of which Colombia is the world's main producer. Both cattle and cocaine are jungle

conditions and the soil began to improve."

Today, the reserve has 40 hectares of jungle, said Sanchez, and tourists visit its eco trail. Some "adopt" an animal and make monthly contributions for its upkeep. Baby animals are cared for in the family house. Roaming free

of the animals at the reserve had been confiscated from people who kept them as pets or tried to sell them. Others were found injured or abandoned in the ever-shrinking Amazon.

The Zapatas keep the wild animals separately in cages, giving them medicine and food to get them back on their feet and hopefully back to the wild. "There are many challenges, because each animal has its own characteristics and behavior," said Hector Zapata, adding they had learnt a lot through practical experience. "Taking care of them, guiding them step by step to a... release, I think is one of the most difficult challenges we have."

Learn to hunt

Samantha bottle feeds the baby pumas with mixed emotions. "They are very beautiful and we would normally never have been able to see them so close, but it is sad because (people) killed their mother," she said. The cubs were rescued by the CDA environmental agency and brought to the ranch after a citizen reported them abandoned in the jungle, their eyes closed and with their umbilical cords still attached.

Locals told the CDA some farmers had been killing wild cats in the area to protect their sheep. "At the age of four, five months we will begin to give them meat... and live prey so that they can learn to hunt and can develop naturally," said Samantha Zapata. Hopefully, "they will not be condemned to living in a cage." — AFP



Samantha Zapata, animal caretaker, feeds parrots with her parents Dora Sanchez and Hector Zapata at La Nupana natural reserve, as part of its rehabilitation process in Agua Bonita, San Jose del Guaviare, Colombia, on June 2, 2023. - AFP photos

killers and Guaviare lost some 25,000 hectares of forest just in 2021, according to authorities. The family raised cattle for 15 years before deciding this was no longer for them. By 2012, the last cows left the farm. "I began to do some experiments, to set up agroforestry systems and we began to see the positive effect," said Sanchez, an agroforestry engineer by training. "The forest began to change, the fauna began to return. We improved the water con-

on the property, a small grey fox and a capuchin monkey that lost a leg chase each other around playfully – among the animals too domesticated or weak to return to the wild.

Other, more potentially dangerous creatures, must live out their days in enclosures "because they do not have the necessary skills, they cannot survive, they do not recognize that a predator can attack them," said Samantha Zapata, an agronomy student. Some



A crab-eating fox (*Cerdocyon thous*) and brown capuchin (*Sapajus apella*) play at La Nupana natural reserve.



Two woolly monkey (*Lagothrix lagotricha*) cubs are seen at the reserve.



An owl is seen at La Nupana natural reserve.



Samantha Zapata carries two armadillo cubs.



Dora Sanchez touches an ocelot at the reserve.

Overfishing is driving coral reef sharks towards extinction, according to a global study that signals far greater peril to the marine predators than previously thought. That matters to humans because the species act as managers of their marine ecosystems, maintaining delicately balanced food webs on which hundreds of millions of people rely.



A nurse shark (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*) is seen at the Hol Chan Marine Reserve coral reef on the outskirts of San Pedro village, in Ambergris Cay, Belize, on June 7, 2018. — AFP photos

The research, published in the journal Science, is the result of the Global FinPrint project, which collected more than 22,000 hours of video footage from reefs across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Australasia and the Americas. A team of more than 100 scientists found that five of the most common coral reef shark species – grey reef, nurse, Caribbean reef, blacktip reef and whitetip reef – declined by 70 to 60 percent.

The depletion data was derived from a computer model that estimated what shark numbers would have looked like without human pressures. Sharks were entirely absent in 14 percent of reefs where they had been previously documented. Lead author Colin Simpfendorfer of the James Cook University and the



Overfishing pushes reef sharks toward extinction

University of Tasmania told AFP that prior to the study, coral reef sharks – unlike their bigger cousins that dwell in deep oceans – were not thought to be doing badly. "But when you sat down and looked at the overall results, it was quite stunning," he said.

Ripple effects

The findings should help update the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red list, with more species qualifying for "endangered" status, an important step towards conservation action. Simpfendorfer added that the

overwhelming factor in the decline was overfishing, both targeting sharks for their fins and meat, and unintentionally killing them as bycatch.

In terms of impacts, the loss of sharks causes ripple effects down the food chain. The prey they eat increases in number, but the next level down decreases, and so on – creating unpredictable disruptions that risk human food security. Reef sharks also keep herbivores in check, said Simpfendorfer. When herbivores become more common, they eat more algae, which trap carbon for use in photosynthesis. "Car-

bon sequestration on coral reefs without sharks is much lower than it is on reefs with sharks," he said, meaning there is an impact on global warming.

'Hope spots'

Funding for the project came from the Paul G Allen Family Foundation, which was responsible for the Great Elephant Census, a pan-African aerial survey of Earth's largest land animals. In the shark study, scientists used baited remote underwater video stations (BRUVS) – cameras with a small amount of oily fish hung placed on arm – to draw

out and observe sharks in deployments that lasted an hour.

In total, they surveyed 391 coral reefs in 67 nations and territories using 22,756 cameras – generating three-years-worth of raw video. Reefs with healthier populations tended to be in high-income countries with stronger regulations and greater levels of democratic participation, while lower-income countries generally had worse outcomes.



A grey reef shark swims in an aquarium at the National Center of the Sea, Nausicaa, on Feb 16, 2019 in Boulogne-sur-Mer, northern France.

But the team also uncovered certain "hope spots" in developing countries, such as Sipadan Island in Malaysia and Lighthouse Reef in Belize. "In and around them, things are fairly depleted – but in those areas where you have strong MPAs (marine protected areas) and really good ways to enforce them, you have robust shark populations," co-author Michael Heithaus of Florida International University told AFP.

This, he said, offered hope that heavily depleted areas can be repopulated so long as a source population is intact and careful management programs are followed. — AFP

Sports

McEvoy, Jack send championship warning in lightning fast 50 free

Jack upstages Olympic champion McKeon

MELBOURNE: A resurgent Cameron McEvoy swam the two fastest 50m freestyles of the year Sunday to emphatically make Australia's world championship team as Shayna Jack upstaged Olympic champion Emma McKeon to take out the women's race. McEvoy, a four-time world championship silver medalist, powered to victory at the Australian trials in Melbourne in 21.41 seconds after scorching through his heat in 21.27.

His heat time would have won gold at the last world championships and silver at the Tokyo Olympics behind American great Caeleb Dressel. Both times surpassed British reigning world champion Ben Proud's 21.71 as the quickest of 2023 and were the 29-year-old's best in seven years.

"I opened the week with my first PB (personal best) in seven years in the fly, I got two today in the free. I'm in a great spot and great to be back," said McEvoy. Seven-time Tokyo Olympic medalist McKeon was upset by Mollie O'Callaghan in a sizzling women's 100m freestyle on Saturday, and was again beaten in the 50 with Jack hitting the wall in 24.22, second only to dominant Swede Sarah Sjoestrom this year.

McKeon came second in 24.26 to also make the grade for the world championships in Japan next month, with O'Callaghan, who also won the 200m freestyle, coming fourth. "I was happy with how I executed it, I just wanted to come here today and have some fun," said Jack. "We have some of the fastest freestylers in the world here and it's a tough competition, so I'm just trying to take away all the positives and go away with some learning lessons."

No one met the automatic qualifying time of 51.28 in the men's 100m butterfly - a disappointment for Matt Temple (51.35) and Kyle Chalmers (51.61), who touched first and second. But teenager Jenna Forrester won the women's 400m medley in 4:34.89 to make the plane in a race missing Kaylee McKeown, who is focusing on the 200 medley and backstroke events. Brendon Smith also qualified with a 4:10.64 swim in the men's version. Lani Pallister, who had already qualified in both the 400m and 800m free, added the 1500m to her world championship program with a 15:56.31. Second-placed Moesha Johnson (16:03.02) also made the grade. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Cameron McEvoy of Australia competes in the men's 50m freestyle swimming event during the 2023 Australian World Championship Trials in Melbourne. — AFP

Khawaja savors Ashes hundred; Broad blasts 'soulless' pitch

BIRMINGHAM: Usman Khawaja said the taunts of the Edgbaston crowd spurred him on to an "emotional" maiden Test hundred in England as he led Australia's fightback in the Ashes opener on Saturday. Australia were reeling at 67-3 after Stuart Broad struck twice in two balls to remove David Warner and Marnus Labuschagne, the world's top-ranked Test batsman, before England captain Ben Stokes captured the prize wicket of Steve Smith.

Yet they recovered to 311-5 at stumps on the second day, 82 runs behind England's first-innings 393-8 declared, with left-handed opener Khawaja 126 not out. Broad later blasted the pitch as "soulless". Khawaja's more than six-and-a-half hour stay may have lacked the dynamism of some of England's 'Bazball' batting, but there was no denying the value of an innings that still featured 14 fours and two sixes. The 36-year-old's seventh hundred in 18 Tests since he was recalled last year also ended a decade-long wait to reach three figures at this level on English soil.

Prior to this innings, Khawaja's top score in a Test in England was 54, with his corresponding average a lowly 19.60. "When I'm getting sprayed (barracked) by the crowd as I'm walking out there today and as I'm going to nets being told that I can't score runs in England...I guess it was just a bit more emotional than normal," he said. Khawaja, who attended Saturday's post-play press conference with his daughter Aisha, said having his family around him helped ease the pressures surrounding what is set to be his last tour of England.

Verstappen on pole at Canadian Grand Prix

MONTREAL: Max Verstappen drove with extreme poise and skill on Saturday as he claimed pole position for Red Bull ahead of Haas driver Nico Hulkenberg in a rainswept qualifying session at the Canadian Grand Prix. The defending double world champion and series leader outpaced the German driver by 1.244 seconds in a very wet top-ten shootout to secure his 25th career pole. It also completed a hat-trick for the Dutchman after poles in Monaco and Spain. It will be the third front row starting position for Hulkenberg and the first for the American-owned Haas team.

Two-time champion Fernando Alonso was third-fastest for Aston Martin and will share the second row of the grid with seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes. George Russell was fifth in the second Mercedes ahead of Esteban Ocon of Alpine, Lando Norris of McLaren, Carlos Sainz of Ferrari and Oscar Piastri in the second McLaren. Sainz, however, was dropped three places on the grid by race stewards after the session for impeding Alpine's Pierre Gasly in qualifying, tumbling the Spaniard from eighth to 11th.

Alex Albon was 10th for Williams in the original results while both Red Bull's Sergio Perez and Ferrari's Charles Leclerc failed to proceed from Q2 for the second consecutive event. "We made changes after a tricky day yesterday, said Verstappen. "And it was completely wet but the car felt improved to drive. In these conditions, you have to stay on top of everything as it is super-slippery and but we made all the right calls and I am very happy to be on pole here. "I'm from Holland so I like driving in the wet."

Hulkenberg said: "It was a wild and crazy session in changing conditions with the walls so close in the wet - we were changing tyres and the team did a great job." Alonso admitted it had been a difficult session in which to choose the right tyres at the right time. "But we have P3 and we will take that," he said. "The fans here are amazing and the city embraces the Grand Prix so I hope they all enjoyed it. If we push, we have a chance tomorrow."



BIRMINGHAM: Australia's Usman Khawaja (center) reacts after he is bowled by England's Ollie Robinson (left) on day three of the first Ashes cricket Test match between England and Australia at Edgbaston in Birmingham on June 18, 2023. — AFP

"Thought my career was over"

"These young ones keep me young and make me realize that there's a lot to life and a lot of good stuff after I stop playing cricket," he explained. "So for me, it's just about enjoying it. My wife has been awesome to me, she's been my rock throughout my career. "That perspective makes it a lot easier for me to go out there and just enjoy it as much as I can, whether I get a duck or a hundred." He added: "Every Test match is a bonus for me because we thought my career was over. In my head, it's the last (Ashes) tour I'll be on, unless I pull a Jimmy Anderson and come back when I'm 41."

Khawaja was bowled by Broad on 112 only for re-

plays to reveal the veteran seamer had over-stepped for one of his six no-balls in the innings. Broad said the intensity of the occasion allied to a "soulless" pitch, contributed to a "frustrating day". "I'm not really a big no-ball bowler," he told the BBC. "I have probably bowled more today than in a Test match day before. There's no excuse. "But it is the first innings of an Ashes Test match, you have some big emotions there so you are trying to gain energy from the surface and maybe pushing a little bit too hard." He added: "It is certainly one of the slowest pitches I can remember bowling on in England...Hopefully it is not a trend for the whole series." — AFP



LOS ANGELES: Rickie Fowler of the United States putts on the 18th green during the third round of the 123rd US Open Championship on June 17, 2023. — AFP

Fowler, Clark lead McIlroy by 1 after Open third round

LOS ANGELES: Rickie Fowler and Wyndham Clark shared a one-shot lead over four-time major winner Rory McIlroy on Saturday after a two-shot swing at 18 left them tied atop the leaderboard at the US Open. Overnight leader Fowler led playing partner Clark by two as they stood on the 18th tee at Los Angeles Country Club. Clark had just dropped a shot at the 17th, but fired his approach at the flag at 18 and made a six-foot birdie putt. Fowler, who had gone 12 holes without a bogey as a string of rivals faltered on the treacherous back nine, saw his 42-foot birdie putt skim the edge - but his par putt from inside four feet coming back lipped out.

"You could see from the first putt, there's a lot of slope there," Fowler said. "I'm not sure why it didn't move. It should have. I hit a good putt, so really can't go back on it. "It would be nice for that one to go in. Really doesn't matter, having the lead, being one back, two back. You're going to have to play good golf tomorrow." Fowler signed for an even par 70 while Clark posted a one-under 69 that left them one in front of Northern Ireland star McIlroy, who carded a 69 for 201 to remain in position to claim a fifth career major and his first since 2014. World number one Scottie Scheffler was alone in fourth on 203. — AFP

Yang seizes lead with back-to-back birdie finish

GRAND RAPIDS: South Korea's Amy Yang closed with back-to-back birdies to grab a one-stroke lead after Saturday's third round of the LPGA Meijer Classic. Yang fired her third consecutive five-under par 67 to stand on 15-under 201 after 54 holes at Blythefield Country Club in Belmont, Michigan. The 33-year-old Orlando resident made seven birdies against two back-nine bogeys to take the top spot in search of her first victory on US soil. "All day, all week, my ball striking has been really good so I was giving myself good chances out there," Yang said. "I was a little bit off with putting speed. During the round I made a couple of mistakes, but I tried to stay patient and keep trying throughout the round."

Japan's Ayaka Furue, who began the day with a one-stroke edge, shared second on 202 with China's Lin Xiyu, seeking her first LPGA title, and South African Ashleigh Buhai, the reigning Women's British Open champion who won last week's LPGA ShopRite Classic. Buhai and Lin shot 66. Yang, 33, is a three-time European Tour winner and four-time LPGA champion, her first coming in South Korea in 2013 and the other three coming in Thailand in 2015, 2017 and 2019. — AFP



MONTREAL: Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen races during the qualifying session for the 2023 Canada Formula One Grand Prix at Circuit Gilles-Villeneuve in Montreal on June 17, 2023. — AFP

row." After his crash in final practice, Sainz was relieved to learn his Ferrari was repaired in time for qualifying.

As in 2022, the qualifying session began in cold and damp conditions with an air temperature of 16 degrees and the track at only 18, insufficient to generate optimum tyre temperatures for most teams, notably Mercedes. The two Williams of Albon and American rookie Logan Sargeant led the way into Q1 as Zhou Guanyu pulled up in his spluttering Alfa Romeo, prompting a red flag. Zhou made it back to the pits and after repairs was in the queue when the session re-started after six minutes as rain was reported arriving at Turn Two.

This turned it into a race against the weather in which Verstappen and Alonso swapped quickest laps and others, including Hamilton, Leclerc and Perez, took to escape roads. In a final flurry, Verstappen was quickest ahead of Alonso as he went Alpha Tauri's Yuki Tsunoda, Alpine's Gasly, Nyck de Vries in the second Alpha Tauri, Sargeant and Zhou. Albon boldly took the gamble on slicks for Q2, with rain forecast to arrive after six minutes. Ferrari more cautiously

asked Leclerc to stay on intermediates for an early "banker" lap.

More rain

Verstappen and the rest then switched to slicks as Albon went top - and the rain arrived. Unperturbed, Albon trimmed his time to 1:18.725 while Mercedes unhappily remained on intermediates before Hamilton was finally switched to slicks. As Hamilton squeezed into 10th, both Leclerc and Perez faced a second consecutive elimination from Q2, their teams having failed with their strategy. It was the first time Williams had topped a qualifying segment since Felipe Massa in Belgium in 2016. Leclerc and Perez joined Stroll, Haas's Kevin Magnussen and Bottas in missing the top-ten Q3 shootout as the rain intensified and Verstappen led the way on intermediates. The session was red-flagged after five minutes when Piastri crashed his McLaren at the exit of Turn Six, smacking the wall and damaging the rear end. This left Verstappen leading the way ahead of Hulkenberg, in his Haas, and Alonso's Aston Martin with Hamilton and Russell fourth and fifth for Mercedes - and the track awash after more heavy rain. — AFP

Sports

Tszyu demolishes Ocampo, retains interim super welterweight title

Australian power puncher sets up Charlo showdown

GOLD COAST: Australian power puncher Tim Tszyu scored a stunning first-round knockout over Mexico's Carlos Ocampo to retain his interim WBO super welterweight title Sunday and set up a shot at undisputed champion Jermell Charlo. The 28-year-old, son of renowned former world champion Kostya Tszyu, came out with all guns blazing at Australia's Gold Coast despite needing surgery just weeks ago after a nasty dog bite.

He landed some huge right-handers, and a blistering left hook, to twice put Ocampo on the canvas, with the fight over in just 72 seconds. Tszyu connected with 14 punches, while the shell-shocked Mexican failed to land a single one. "I think it was a statement made. America is the land I want to conquer, the land I'm going to next, the big one is coming," said Tszyu, who earned the interim belt with a savage ninth-round stoppage of American Tony Harrison at Sydney in March.

"I've got the interim belt, but I'm not satisfied. I want all four. I want the name Charlo on my resume." The victory kept Tszyu's unbeaten record intact as he moved to 23-0 (17 KOs) to position himself as the mandatory challenger for the unified titles. American

Charlo (35-1-1, 19 KOs) hasn't fought since knocking out Brian Castano in a May 2022 rematch following a disputed draw in their first meeting.

He and Tszyu had been poised to fight in Las Vegas in January but the American's defense of all four major sanctioning body world crowns was postponed after he broke his left hand. The pair have been ordered to face off for the WBA, WBC, WBO and IBF super-welterweight belts later this year. "I've copped a lot of adversity coming into this fight and it was just about pushing through. I didn't think it would be that early, this guy is a warrior," Tszyu said.

Tszyu came into the fight despite undergoing emergency surgery for a gaping wound on his right arm just three weeks ago that needed 26 stitches. But he showed no lingering issues with his movement or punching power to send Charlo a message. On the undercard, rising Australian prospect Sam Goodman beat American Ra'eese Aleem on a split decision in an IBF super-bantamweight world title elimination match. It put him in line for a clash with Filipino Marlon Tapales - the WBA/IBF champion - with scores of 117-111 and 116-112 in his favor and the third judge giving it to Aleem 122-116. — AFP



Australian boxer Tim Tszyu

Prograis retains world light welterweight title

WASHINGTON: Hometown hero Regis Prograis retained his World Boxing Council light-welterweight crown on Saturday with a split-decision victory over Puerto Rico's Danielito Zorrilla at New Orleans. Prograis won by judges' scores of 118-109 and 117-110 while the third judge saw Zorrilla winning 114-113. "I was confident I would get the decision," Prograis said. "It was a tough win but I felt like I deserved the win."

Prograis, who managed the only official knockdown in the third round of a fight filled with push-downs and slips, improved to 29-1 while elusive Zorrilla fell to 17-2. "I got the drop early and I kept pressing the action but he ran around the whole time," Prograis said. "I definitely have to go back to the gym and work on some things but he ran, he definitely tried to survive." Prograis, 34, suffered his only loss in a 2019 title unification showdown with Scotsman Josh Taylor, but the southpaw has won his five fights since then, including an 11th-round knockout of American Jose Zepeda last November for the vacant WBC title at 140 pounds.

Despite his brief tenure, Prograis is the division's longest-reigning champion among major belt holders. Late in the first round, Zorrilla sent Prograis sprawling with a right but the champion grabbed Zorrilla and pushed him to the ground, prompting referee Ray Corona to declare no knockdowns, instead both being ruled pushes. "That was a good punch, that right hand he caught me with," Prograis said. "It looks like a knockdown but when I did it, it didn't feel like it. I never was hurt."

Prograis hit Zorrilla in the nose with a hard left hand just under a minute into the third round that sent the challenger to the canvas and midway into the round landed a flurry of punches on the Puerto Rican fighter while trapping him in a corner. "He was stronger than I thought. He caught me with some punches," Prograis said. "But he just ran around. It was hard to get to him. He felt the power when I did drop him and he started running even more."



Regis Prograis

Fighters traded punches from a distance for most of the middle rounds, each cautiously testing his rival's resolve without taking major risks in a tactical bout. Prograis went to the canvas on a slip in the 10th round when the left feet of both fighters tangled. Zorrilla, 29, and Prograis began exchanging inside punches with urgency in the 11th round, sensing the fight remained up for grabs. Prograis fell forward seconds into the 12th round but Corona ruled a push to the back of his head put him onto the canvas. He rose and they exchanged a few punches to the final bell. — AFP

Chiefs set for Super Rugby final against Crusaders

WELLINGTON: Waikato Chiefs coach Clayton McMillan concedes the Canterbury Crusaders are in "phenomenal" form but believes his side has good reason to take confidence into the Super Rugby Pacific final. Next Saturday's all-New Zealand decider in Hamilton will pit the top-qualifying Chiefs against a Crusaders side who have bulldozed past their opponents in the knockout phase to set up a shot at a seventh successive title.

While the Chiefs have ground out tense playoff wins over two Australian opponents - the Queensland Reds and ACT Brumbies - the second-ranked Crusaders have crushed both the Fijian Drua and Auckland Blues in Christchurch. The Crusaders barely missed their eight injured All Blacks in a 52-15 mauling of the Blues on Friday. "They were phenomenal. They really lifted a gear and made an outstanding Blues team look pretty ordinary," McMillan said.

"Even the most feverish Chiefs supporter had to sit back and applaud that performance because it was pretty unreal - they've certainly enhanced their game over the last six to eight weeks. "The Crusaders have been the benchmark but if somebody's going to knock them off, I want it to be us." In the Chiefs' favor is a long history of home advantage being a major factor in Super Rugby playoff games.

They are also at close to full strength while the Crusaders have been without a host of their best players all season, although the visitors are confident veteran All Blacks lock Sam Whitelock can shake off a leg injury and play the final. Seeking their first title in a decade, the Chiefs have lost just once this year. They accounted for the Crusaders twice during the regular season - 31-10 in round one in Christchurch and 34-24 in Hamilton seven weeks ago - to finish 11 points clear in the standings.

It took a late Brodie Retallick try to see off the

stubborn Brumbies on Saturday but the tight nature of the 19-6 win - and a nine-point defeat of the Reds a week earlier - did not bother McMillan. "It's irrelevant how big the scoreline is, if it goes down to the line next week then I think the last couple of weeks have been good preparation and will give us confidence," he said. "We enter every game wanting to entertain and score lots of tries but history tells us semi-finals and finals, they go down to the wire." It will be the last game in charge for uber-successful Crusaders coach Scott Robertson, who will take the All Blacks' reins in 2024.

Crusaders fly-half Richie Mo'unga has been pivotal in their triumphant run of titles since 2017 and said emotion will be taken out of the equation when the 13-time champions head north. "Rugby is pretty brutal, it doesn't favor fairy tale endings," the All Blacks playmaker told Sky Sports after the Blues were dispatched. "It was crucial that we did a job, to be cold-blooded by any means necessary and execute. "It's what we pride ourselves on as Crusaders. Finals footy, we enjoy it, and we want to walk towards all these challenges." — AFP



HAMILTON: Reds' Tate McDermott fights for the ball during the Super Rugby quarterfinal match between the Waikato Chiefs and Queensland Reds at FMG Stadium in this file photo. — AFP

Cane named captain in All Blacks squad

WELLINGTON: Sam Cane has retained the captaincy in the All Blacks squad announced on Sunday for the Rugby Championship, which features five uncapped players. New Zealand head coach Ian Foster said he had "total belief" that veteran flanker Cane was the right man to lead the side, after naming a 36-man squad that sent a clear message about his thinking for the Rugby World Cup.

There had been question marks over Cane's leadership after the All Blacks slumped to defeat in four of their first six Tests last year, including a home series loss to Ireland and a first-ever defeat on home soil against Argentina. A run of better results at the end of the season, when Cane was injured, left critics suggesting Sam Whitelock would be a better World Cup captain. However, a fully fit Cane earned praise from Foster with his imposing form for the Waikato Chiefs, who have reached the Super Rugby Pacific final as top qualifiers.

"Sam has proven himself as a great leader of our team despite having had a disrupted couple of seasons leading into this one," Foster said. "We have total belief that he is the right man to lead us. It's fantastic to see him back playing with a smile on his face." Foster has been guided by form in naming a squad whose first Test is against Argentina in Mendoza on July 9. He has included 10 players each from the Chiefs and Canterbury Crusaders, who will meet in next week's Super Rugby final.

The five uncapped players are Chiefs winger

Emoni Narawa, Crusaders midfield back Dallas McLeod, Wellington Hurricanes scrum-half Cameron Roigard, Chiefs flanker Samipeni Finau and Crusaders prop Tamaiti Williams. Uncapped Chiefs outside back Shaun Stevenson will assemble initially with the squad and serve as injury cover for Mark Telea. A 10-strong group of players were listed as unavailable due to injury, including influential Crusaders trio David Havili, Ethan Blackadder and Joe Moody.

Among the more notable omissions are established All Blacks Jack Goodhue, Brad Weber, Akira Ioane and Asafo Aumua, who have been named in an All Blacks XV squad to play two matches in Japan in July. "We are very excited about the group we have selected," Foster said. "There's a nice blend of existing players but also some new players we feel have earned their opportunity to be named. "The Rugby Championship is a vital piece in our preparation for the World Cup later in the year. It's a key opportunity to get our game ready so we can enter the global tournament with confidence."

All Blacks squad

Backs: Will Jordan, Mark Telea, Emoni Narawa, Caleb Clarke, Leicester Fainga'anuku, Dallas McLeod, Rieko Ioane, Braydon Ennor, Anton Leinert-Brown, Jordie Barrett, Richie Mo'unga, Beauden Barrett, Damian McKenzie, Aaron Smith, Finlay Christie, Cameron Roigard. - Forwards: Ardie Savea, Sam Cane (captain), Dalton Papali'i, Luke Jacobson, Samipeni Finau, Shannon Frizell, Scott Barrett, Sam Whitelock, Brodie Retallick, Tupu Vaa'i, Josh Lord, Tyrel Lomax, Nepo Laulala, Fletcher Newell, Tamaiti Williams, Ethan de Groot, Ofa Tu'ungafasi, Codie Taylor, Samisoni Taukei'aho, Dane Coles. — AFP



SAINT-DENIS: Toulouse's New Zealand prop Charlie Faumuina (centre left) and Toulouse's French scrum-half Antoine Dupont (centre right) celebrate holding the Bouclier de Brennus (Brennus Shield) trophy after winning the French Top 14 rugby union final match between Stade Toulousain Rugby (Toulouse) and Stade Rochelais (La Rochelle) at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis. — AFP

Toulouse's Rugby World Cup stars 'liberated'

PARIS: After Toulouse's star-studded side beat La Rochelle to claim a 22nd French Top 14 title, the club's host of internationals were ready to shift their sights to the Rugby World Cup. France fly-half Roman Ntamack scored a late solo match-winner after Argentina centre Santiago Chocobares also crossed while England back-rower Jack Willis stood out in the 29-26 victory in Paris on Saturday. Up to 20 of Toulouse's matchday squad could feature in the tournament, which starts on September 8 as Les Bleus host three-time winners New Zealand.

Ntamack and club-mate and half-back partner Antoine Dupont are among those expected to be in France's preliminary squad, named on Wednesday. France's first training camp is set for the Mediterranean coast on July 2-14 before four pre-tournament Tests in August with Fabien Galthie's men among the favorites for the Webb Ellis trophy. "For now we'll enjoy this, we've won the right to do that for some days," Ntamack told reporters after the victory. "We'll do it together, to decompress after the season before thinking about France because it will come quickly. "We'll focus on France from the first day in Monaco," he added.

'Satisfied'

Flanker Francois Cros is also set to be involved for France after an impressive season with his club. "We will take time to savor then we'll move onto the World Cup," Cros told reporters. "Winning the Top 14 gives us a confidence boost and for the players who are lucky to be part of the preparation of the World Cup we will be liberated and satisfied by the season with the club," he added. His back-row partner Willis joined Toulouse, five-time Champions Cup winners, mid-way through the campaign after English club Wasps entered administration.

Willis was given a nine out of 10 rating by newspaper L'Equipe for his performance at the Stade de France. He is expected to be involved with Steve Borthwick's England after helping lift the 131-year-old French title, the Bouclier de Brennus. "Jack's had an incredible season," Cros said. "I really think he wanted to taste his first Brennus," he added. Toulouse's midfield pair of the Argentina's Chocobares and Tonga's Pita Ahki are in line to play at the World Cup too.

Chocobares is one of two Argentina three-quarters in the Toulouse squad, alongside Juan Cruz Mallia, who can cover across the backline. "The Argentinians with us, we love them. They're really great guys. They're always in a good mood in the changing room," France full-back Thomas Ramos said. "In the game, defensively, one of his strong points, he was exceptional and was solid against a great player in Jonathan Danty alongside Pita Ahki, who was very good too. "They're big competitors and when you play for Toulouse we love great competitors," he added. — AFP

Portugal pound Bosnia 3-0

Scotland stun Haaland's Norway



LISBON: Portugal's forward Diogo Jota (left) fights for the ball with Bosnia-Herzegovina's defender Sinisa Sanicanin during the UEFA Euro 2024 group J qualification football match between Portugal and Bosnia-Herzegovina at the Luz stadium on June 17, 2023. — AFP

PARIS: Bruno Fernandes scored twice as Portugal won in Euro 2024 qualifying on Saturday after Scotland produced a stunning late comeback to beat Erling Haaland's Norway in Oslo. Portugal defeated Bosnia and Herzegovina 3-0 in Lisbon to make it three wins out of three in Group J, with Manchester City star Bernardo Silva opening the scoring a minute before half-time. Fernandes headed in the second from a Ruben Neves cross in the 77th minute and scored his second, and Portugal's third, in added time. Cristiano Ronaldo wore the captain's armband and played all 90 minutes as the 38-year-old men's international appearance record-holder won his 199th cap.

However, the forward now playing for Al Nassr in Saudi Arabia did not manage to add to his record 122 international goals - he found the net with a header midway through the first half only to be denied by an offside flag. Portugal, who visit Iceland on Tuesday, are top of Group J with nine points out of a possible nine having scored 13 goals and conceded none.

They are two points clear of Slovakia, who beat Iceland 2-1 in Reykjavik with Tomas Suslov unwittingly scoring the winner 20 minutes from time after an Alfred Finnbogason penalty for the hosts cancelled out Juraj Kucka's opener.

Luxembourg beat Liechtenstein 2-0 in the same six-team group, from which the top two sides qualify for the finals in Germany. Scotland have three wins out of three in Group A after following a famous victory over Spain in March by coming from behind late on to beat Norway 2-1 on Saturday. It looked as if Norway would get their first win of the campaign after Erling Haaland was fouled in the box on the hour mark by Ryan Porteous and converted the resulting penalty.

It was Haaland's 22 goal in 24 games for Norway, and he was taken off six minutes from time by coach Stale Solbakken with the job seemingly done. But then Scotland equalized in the 87th minute when Leo Ostigard failed to deal with a John McGinn pass, allowing Lyndon Dykes to stab home. And Scotland

were not finished as they snatched the winner with a minute left, McGinn and Dykes combining to set up Norwich City's Kenny McLean to slot in, leaving Norway with just one point from three outings.

Lukaku rescues Belgium

Scotland, who went 23 years without appearing at any major tournament before going to Euro 2020, are now in a fantastic position on top of Group A, five points clear of Georgia and six ahead of Nations League finalists Spain. They have played a game more than both of those sides, however, and welcome Georgia to Glasgow on Tuesday. "Sometimes when it's your moment you just have to ride the wave. The boys believe in themselves and kept going," said Scotland boss Steve Clarke. Georgia, coached by ex-France international Willy Sagnol, won 2-1 in Cyprus with Zuriko Davitashvili scoring the decisive goal late on. That was after Georges Mikautadze's opener was cancelled out by a penalty from Ioannis Pittas for Cyprus.

Belgium were held to a 1-1 draw by Austria in Brussels, with captain Romelu Lukaku turning and firing in from the edge of the box just after the hour mark for the hosts. They had been trailing after Orel Mangala deflected a shot past goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and into his own net. "After the first goal we saw the heads go down, which is something we need to learn from because this team is young," said Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco. "But in the end, I honestly saw good things as well."

Eden Hazard, the former Belgium captain who quit international football after the World Cup, attended the match and did a lap of honor around the stadium at half-time. Belgium are three points behind group leaders Austria but have a game in hand. They are back in action on Tuesday in Estonia, who drew 1-1 with Azerbaijan on Saturday. In other action, the Czech Republic cemented their position at the top of Group E after a 3-0 win in the Faroe Islands in which Vaclav Cerny scored twice. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: Fans gather for a victory parade and rally for the Vegas Golden Knights outside T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

Knights celebrate NHL crown with night parade

LAS VEGAS: Vegas Golden Knights players showed off the Stanley Cup and celebrated their NHL title Saturday with about 100,000 supporters in an evening parade along the famed Vegas Strip. The expansion club captured the trophy after only six seasons with a 9-3 home triumph over Florida on Tuesday to claim the best-of-seven championship series four games to one.

With temperatures at 96 degrees Fahrenheit (35.5 Celsius), floats and flatbeds and open-topped buses made the trek past the famed casinos as supporters cheered from along the city streets, police making a crowd estimate of 100,000 people along Las Vegas Boulevard. The Golden Knights' Twitter page was predicting the "Party of the Century" with the theme of the

parade being the team's motto — "Vegas UKnighted." Players were among those tossing Knights championship T-shirts, towels and flags into the cheering crowd as the team's dance team and drum line, used before games to excite fans, led the procession along the street. Knights center Nicolas Roy screamed as he hoisted the Cup over his head while supporters along the streets roared with delight. "Incredible," Roy said after passing the trophy off to teammate Ivan Barbashev. "That's the best feeling in the world. That will never get old. I can do that as long as I live."

Players poured drinks into the bowl of the trophy and tipped it over above the crowd, allowing Knights fans to partake in a players' tradition of drinking from the Cup. It was the second Cup title for Barbashev, a 27-year-old Russian center who also won an NHL crown in 2019 with St. Louis. "This is going to stay for a lifetime. I'm really proud of where I'm at right now. It's super amazing," Barbashev said. "I'm just really happy. You have a chance to party with the guys. It has got to be the best time of my life." "To lift the Cup here is something that will stay with me for the rest of my life." — AFP

Nashville beat St Louis as Vela gives LAFC win

LAS VEGAS: Hany Mukhtar struck a hat trick as Nashville beat St Louis City 3-1 in Major League Soccer on Saturday while Carlos Vela struck a 90th-minute winner as Los Angeles FC won at Sporting Kansas City. German Mukhtar opened the scoring in the 11th minute, drilling home a low shot from inside the box, but four minutes before the interval Nicholas Gioacchini leveled for the visitors, bundling home after a corner. The game turned decisively in the 68th minute when Kyle Hiebert brought down Jacob Sheffelfburg in the box and was sent off with a second yellow card.

Mukhtar converted the penalty to restore Nashville's lead and then wrapped up the win with a first-time shot from the edge of the box. The 28-year-old Mukhtar is

now top scorer in MLS with 13 goals in 18 appearances and with the win, Nashville close the gap on Eastern Conference leaders FC Cincinnati to five points, having played one game more. The third match without a win leaves Western Conference leaders St Louis now level on points with reigning champions LAFC.

The Californians had Mexican veteran Vela to thank as they snapped a three-match losing streak with a controversial victory at Kansas City. An Alan Pulido penalty had given Sporting the advantage at the break but three minutes after the interval, Honduran Denil Maldonado, who had given away the spot-kick, made amends with an angled header. In the final minute, Vela was found with a ball over the top and showed all his experience with a calm finish into the bottom corner.

Kansas City thought they had leveled in stoppage time through a header from substitute Roger Espinoza but to the fury of the home team the goal was ruled out after a VAR review spotted a foul in the build-up. After last week's wonder goal from inside his own half from the Crew's Lucas Zelarayan, Real Salt Lake's Pablo Ruiz provided a carbon copy with an audacious goal from over 50 yards out at DC United. — AFP

Goalkeeper howler sinks Morocco as Zambia run riot

JOHANNESBURG: A blunder by Morocco goalkeeper Munir El Kajoui led to a 2-1 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying defeat in South Africa on Saturday - their first loss since reaching the 2022 World Cup semi-finals. Zambia completed a joyful day for southern Africa by hammering the Ivory Coast 3-0 in Ndola to secure a place in the finals for the first time since 2015. South Africa and World Cup history-makers Morocco had qualified ahead of a lively Group K clash in Johannesburg that drew a 50,000 crowd despite near-freezing conditions.

El Kajoui, standing in for rested Yassine Bounou, allowed a Percy Tau cross slip from his grasp into the net af-

ter only five minutes and Zakhele Lepasa added a second on 48 minutes. Hakim Ziyech halved the deficit on the hour, but an equalizer eluded Morocco, who last December became the first African and Arab team to reach the World Cup semi-finals. After finishing fourth in Qatar, the Atlas Lions beat Brazil and drew with Peru and Cape Verde in friendly matches. The visit to Johannesburg marked a return to competitive action. "We could have scored four or five goals against Morocco, who are currently the best team in Africa, and it is a great confidence booster to beat them," said South Africa coach Hugo Broos.

"Having played in front of small crowds lately, it was wonderful to have so many people backing us, and I believe they left the stadium feeling very proud to be South Africans." Morocco coach Walid Regragui, mastermind behind successes over Belgium, Spain and Portugal before a semi-final loss to France in Qatar, said he was "not unhappy with the result". "Call me crazy if you wish for saying that, but you sometimes learn more from a loss than a win. My players were tired after a grueling season of domestic and World Cup matches." — AFP