

Polestar 2
Why wait
to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



3 Kuwait underlines strategic cooperation with UNHCR



7 Pak village mourns 24 feared dead in Greek migrant tragedy



11 Pharrell brings gospel party to Paris with fashion debut



16 Ronaldo hits late winner on 200th cap against Iceland



Iranian FM visits Kuwait on third leg of Gulf tour

Tehran ups diplomacy to ease isolation and project strength



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, received on Wednesday visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian during his official visit to Kuwait. During the meeting, both sides discussed the latest regional and international developments as well as the bilateral relations between Kuwait and Iran.

"The resolution of challenges with the collective participation of countries in the region is the best way to achieve the progress of nations and ensure security in the ... Gulf," Amir-Abdollahian tweeted after the meeting. Iran's top diplomat arrived in Kuwait from Muscat, where he held "constructive" talks with his Omani counterpart earlier on Wednesday, a day after Tehran held discussions in Doha on its nuclear program with Qatari and EU officials. Amir-Abdollahian is on a tour of the Gulf that will see the Iranian foreign minister also making a stop later in the United Arab Emirates.

On Wednesday, he met Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi, who said they discussed "continued consultations and cooperation" on issues

of bilateral concern. "There is great consensus in the visions of the two states on a series of issues... that will contribute to stability, security and peace," he said, quoted by the official Oman News Agency. Amir-Abdollahian, for his part, called the meeting "constructive" and praised the effective cooperation between the two sides, ONA said.

Iran said last week it had been engaged in indirect negotiations with the United States through Oman, with nuclear issues, US sanctions and detainees on the agenda. The following day, Iran's nuclear negotiator said he had met with diplomats from three European countries in Abu Dhabi to discuss a number of issues including the country's nuclear program.

A landmark deal reached in 2015 between Iran and world powers was designed to prevent Tehran from secretly developing a nuclear bomb, a goal the Islamic republic has always denied. The United States under then-president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the accord in 2018, before Iran began backing away from its own commitments, including by stepping up its enrichment of uranium. The administration of US President Joe Biden has

Continued on Page 6

MP threatens to remove Audit Bureau chief

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Hamad Al-Mudlej threatened on Wednesday that he will initiate a move that could end up dismissing Faisal Al-Shaye, the head of the state accounting watchdog, the Audit Bureau, over alleged violations. Mudlej wrote on Twitter "he will make a decisive stance through a letter to remove the State Audit Bureau chief in the next session" scheduled for July 4 and 5.

The lawmaker said the Audit Bureau is involved in "excesses and a cover-up of violations", but he did not provide any specific details. Shaye is a former MP who served as a lawmaker for several terms before being appointed to lead the Audit Bureau in 2019. The bureau reports to the National Assembly, which also appoints its chief.

Meanwhile, MP Bader Al-Mulla filed a petition at the constitutional court challenging the position he secured in the June 6 Assembly polls. Mulla, a former MP and ex-oil minister, was elected in the 10th and last place in the second constituency. He insisted that he should have come in the eighth position, alleging wrong calculations of votes. Also, five lawmakers submitted a draft law allowing the government to hold direct contracts with foreign companies, omitting the requirement of having a local agent, effectively canceling them.

Meanwhile, several Assembly committees on Wednesday elected their heads and rapporteurs. The budgets committee elected MP Adel Al-Damkhi as head and MP Osama Al-Zaid as its rapporteur. MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri was elected head of the financial and economic affairs committee and MP Abdulwahab Al-Essa as its rapporteur. The public funds protection committee elected MP Muhallal Al-Mudhaf as its head while Hamad Al-Alyan was elected as its rapporteur.

Zionist settlers attack village, kill Palestinian

TURMUS AYYA: A Palestinian man was killed Wednesday in an occupied West Bank village, as Zionists attacked residents and property in escalating violence. The reprisals came hours after Palestinians buried a girl killed in a Zionist raid. "A martyr arrived at the Palestine Medical Complex from Turmus Ayya after being shot in the chest," a Palestinian health ministry statement said.

Lafi Adeeab, Turmus Ayya mayor, told AFP that 35 houses were damaged, around 50 cars torched and farmland

set ablaze. "We in Turmus Ayya are targeted — after day after day — by the aggressive (settler) outposts that were established here," he told AFP. He and another resident put the number of Zionists involved in the attack between 200 and 300, while AFP journalists in the village saw scorched homes, buildings and wounded people being evacuated by ambulance.

"Settlers shot at us and when the police and the (Zionist) army arrived they shot at us with rubber bullets and fired tear gas," resident Awad Abu Samra told AFP. The Zionist military said security forces entered Turmus Ayya "to extinguish the fires, prevent clashes and to collect evidence" after "(Zionist) civilians burned vehicles and possessions belonging to Palestinians".

Continued on Page 6



JENIN: Palestinian schoolgirls mourn during the funeral of their classmate, 15-year-old Sadil Nagnaghya, in the occupied West Bank on June 21, 2023. — AFP

Rescuers 'target' noises in hunt for Titanic sub

BOSTON: Rescue workers raced to beat a rapidly closing oxygen window Wednesday as they hunt for a missing submersible near the wreck of the Titanic, after noises detected by sonar raised hopes the five people onboard are still alive. Extra ships, specialized salvage equipment and US Navy experts arrived in the vast search area in the North Atlantic, with the passengers of the small sub estimated to have less than 24 hours of oxygen left.

Rescuers, who have received help from around the world, were concentrating efforts on trying to figure out the source of "underwater noises" detected late Tuesday by a Canadian aircraft, US Coast Guard Rear Admiral John Mauger told CBS. "It's something, it's a target, it's a focus for us to look at," he said. "As long as there's an opportunity for survival, we will continue to work with this broad unified command to bring every resource to bear on the search," Mauger added.

All communication was lost with the 6.5-m tourist craft less than two hours into its descent Sunday to see the remains of the Titanic, which sits nearly four kilometers below the surface of the ocean. The submersible, named Titan, was carrying British billion-



This combination of pictures shows Titan submersible passengers (left to right, top to bottom) Hamish Harding, Stockton Rush, Paul-Henri Nargeolet, Suleman Dawood and Shahzada Dawood. — AFP

aire Hamish Harding and Pakistani tycoon Shahzada Dawood and his son Suleman, who also have British citizenship. OceanGate Expeditions charges \$250,000 for a seat on the sub.

Also on board is the company's CEO, Stockton Rush and a French submarine operator Paul-Henri Nargeolet, nicknamed "Mr Titanic" for his frequent dives at the site. Ships and planes are scouring around 20,000 sq km of surface water — larger than the US state of Connecticut — for the vessel, which was attempting to dive about 400 miles off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada.

Continued on Page 6

Saudi wages war on drugs

JEDDAH: After a spate of arrests and executions for drug offences, Ibrahim, a dealer in Saudi Arabia, is not taking any chances. "I don't deal with new clients or go to the clients myself," said the 37-year-old, using a pseudonym to protect his identity. "They have to take on the risk," he told AFP from the Red Sea city of Jeddah, weeks after several of his customers were arrested.

Ibrahim is on the frontlines of a war on drugs in Saudi Arabia, which has seen an influx of the addictive amphetamine Captagon flooding in from war-torn Syria and Lebanon. After becoming a major market, Saudi Arabia is hitting back, ending a moratorium on the death penalty for drug cases and launching a zealous crackdown. The result is at least 20 executions for drug offences since last year, according to an AFP tally, and a sharp rise in arrests.

At least two Saudi security officers have been killed in drug raids, including one last week, according to state media. "Several of my customers were recently arrested in a private compound," said Ibrahim, who mainly sells Captagon and hashish.

Continued on Page 6



9 780202 223841

Local

Kuwait calls for pressuring Zionist entity to work with human rights committee

Zionist forces, settler attacks in West Bank condemned

GENEVA: Kuwait called on the international community through the UN Human Rights Council to pressure the Zionist occupation forces to work with the committees of the council to enter Palestinian lands. This came in Kuwait's speech in the dialogue session organized by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Human Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Kuwait's diplomatic attache Fedha Al-Darweesh delivered the speech during the 53rd session of the UN Human Rights Council. She affirmed Kuwait's support to the statements issued by the groups that Kuwait belongs to, praising efforts of the International Commission in preparing this case despite restrictions and harassment by the Zionist entity. Darweesh stressed Kuwait's strong condemnation to the practices and violations on the Palestinian people and lands by Zionist occupation forces. The 53rd session of the UN Human Rights Council is set from June 19 to July 14, to discuss various human rights issues.

The State of Kuwait on Wednesday condemned the attack carried out by the Zionist occupation forces on the city of Jenin in the West Bank where several Palestinians had fallen as martyrs and others suffered injuries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a statement, expressed the State of Kuwait's utter rejection of the dangerous escalation and recurring

attacks that "constitute a continuation of the series of violations perpetrated by the occupation forces against the brotherly Palestinian people and flagrant breach of the international humanitarian law as well as relevant United Nations resolutions." It renewed the call upon the international community to shoulder the responsibility and act seriously and immediately to stop the continuing attacks, act to provide full civil and legal protection for the brotherly Palestinian people according to the UN charter and rules of the international law.

Palestinians killed

A senior Palestinian citizen had died on Tuesday nearly one month after being shot by the Zionist entity's forces during an incursion into the West Bank of town of Jenin. Nasser Sanan, 55, died of the bullet injury at hospital Tuesday evening, according to a statement from the Palestinian Ministry of Health. In a related development, Jewish settlers pelted stones at vehicles of the Palestinian residents on the main road between Ramallah and Nablus cities in the West Bank. They also set ablaze the stores and farmlands of Palestinians in Allaban Al-Sharqia village, eyewitnesses told KUNA.

On Wednesday, a group of Jewish settlers shot a Palestinian dead in their attack on the West Bank village of Turmus Ayya, local authorities reported.

food and energy security and cover the very high cost of climate transition and consequences of extreme climate events, it is necessary to scale up finance.

The global financial system inherited from Bretton Woods has reached its limits at a time when we are facing two major threats to the future of our planet. The first is insufficient support for development and for the protection of our global public goods due to a lack of resources. The second, which is even more crucial, is the risk of geopolitical fragmentation, at a time when we need effective multilateralism and enhanced cooperation more than ever.

A number of G7 and G20 countries, organizations and associations share this observation with France and wish to promote the same conviction: we have to act fast and join efforts to correct the imbalances and injustices generated by these divides. We are therefore now calling for a review of our software and for a shake-up of finance. We must together drive change in our global financial system to make it more responsive, just and inclusive, fight inequalities, finance the climate transition and biodiversity protection, and move closer to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This is the objective of the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact, which will be held on 22 and 23 June in Paris. This Summit intends to be inclusive, with every country, every opinion and every proposal being able to be expressed.

This Summit is part of a positive momentum. The launch of reform by the World Bank, the G20 Presidency of India and that of Brazil right after, the SDG mid-term review and commitments made at COP are all reasons for hope to build on this momentum. Tangible solutions have already been initiated: the Paris Club and the G20 launched an initiative for debt treatment, and France plays a pivotal role in implementing coordinated solutions under the Common Framework. We have pro-

posed and obtained the issuance of \$100 billion in IMF Special Drawing Rights for the most vulnerable countries. All countries in a position to do so must take part in this effort. Several multilateral development banks have begun to respond to the G20's requests and have implemented initial measures to optimize capital to increase their lending capacity.

But we must now go even further, following the example of the Bridgetown Initiative, a set of innovative solutions spearheaded by Barbados to address climate vulnerability affecting many middle-income developing countries.

We will promote a reform agenda for development banks and the IMF to provide more finance to countries in the most need as well as global challenges. It is an agenda that aims to improve existing instruments and capital and to promote innovative approaches and instruments to support the poorest and most vulnerable countries. It also aims to mobilize more private finance using risk-sharing and guarantee mechanisms to redirect financial flows towards these countries to support the local private sector and durable infrastructure. This requires stepping up the use of our instruments and public and private innovative and new financing mechanisms.

To be more effective, our international financial institutions should be able to do more than they are currently doing to work better together, while better mobilizing private savings. To be more inclusive, we must above all give a greater voice to the most vulnerable countries in international fora.

The Summit for a New Global Financing Pact highlights global finance challenges and the many leaders participating will give the impetus needed to carry out the transformations our system requires.

We do not have to choose between fighting poverty, tackling climate change and its impact and protecting biodiversity. A just transition is the only answer.

the history exam, directing her statement to the minister of education: "Are you testing our capabilities as students or teachers specializing in history? Did you see the level of the exam? We demand an official circular sent to all teachers and supervisors to go easy on our answers in this exam. Otherwise, you will see all students failing and repeating the exam in the second half."

Meanwhile, Alia stressed most students unanimously agreed the test was more difficult than the level of their abilities, even for the most diligent ones. "Reassure us that we will not be distracted mentally from the rest of the exams and be gentle with our aspirations and dreams," she called on the authorities. Noura Hadi asked students of the scientific section to celebrate their last day in silence because there are those around them who are in pain.

Ahmed Al-Hassan commented: "To those who set these questions — do you think it is an exam for master's students? I do not know why the history exam was like this. There is not one clear question. All the questions are difficult, and the student must read the question more than once to understand it."

Hajar Al-Tamimi addressed her message to those who set the questions. "Are you okay? Because I think this is a kind of revenge. From the shock of the history



GENEVA: Kuwait's diplomatic attache Fedha Al-Darweesh delivers a speech during the 53rd session of the UN Human Rights Council. — KUNA

"A martyr arrived at the Palestine Medical Complex from Turmus Ayya after being shot in the chest," the ministry said in a statement. Around 200 settlers set homes and properties on fire and wounded people who were being evacuated by ambulance, according to residents.

Earlier arson attacks by Jewish settlers resulted in 36 injuries among the Palestinians in Hawarah vil-

lage and damaged an ambulance, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. The attacks, systematically backed by the Zionist occupation forces, drew condemnation from the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign which called on the international community, particularly the United States, to step in and force the Zionist entity into halting the aggression on the Palestinian people. — KUNA

Building a more responsive, just financial system

By Claire Le Flécher
Ambassador of France to Kuwait

The post-war international financial architecture is no longer sufficiently adapted to deal with the growing inequalities, climate change, biodiversity erosion and public health challenges prevalent in the 21st century. The international community's responses are currently fragmented, partial and insufficient. Firstly, concessional resources provided by development institutions are not delivering their full potential in terms of impact, co-finance and alignment with needs. Secondly, the expansion of finance conditions and rise in debt are slowing investment in developing countries and do not provide them with means to address the challenges they are facing.

Yet, international solidarity has never been more critical amid a growing number of crises that are weakening the poorest and most vulnerable countries to an even greater extent. To help the most exposed countries exit the COVID crisis, deal with the consequences of Russian aggression in Ukraine on their



Claire Le Flécher

12th-graders left in tears after tough history final exam

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: As high school exams come to an end, hundreds of students in Kuwait are preparing for their graduation ceremonies mentally and psychologically to bid farewell to their books and stationery. But this was not the case for students graduating from the literary section, as the hashtag #history_exam topped Twitter.

Thousands of students complained on Wednesday about the difficulty of the history exam and its impact on their psyche and their academic grades. Alaa Al-Enezi said the exam was very difficult. "I intended to improve my score, but now this exam will be the reason for making my success harder. The questions of the exam were twisted, incapacitating and indirect," she charged.

Maryam Al-Hindi expressed her dissatisfaction with

Lack of entertainment, hot weather behind summer travel surge

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Summer season in Kuwait is a high season for traveling among citizens and residents, mostly due to the scorching heat and dearth of entertainment places, which are also overpriced. Although the government recently directed responsible authorities to accelerate major entertainment projects, they are not ready yet to attract people to spend the summer in Kuwait, one of the hottest places in the world.

Kuwait Times asked people about the main reasons that drive them to travel every year. Expat Eman Abdullah said she has lived in Kuwait her entire life and used to travel rarely. But in the last couple of years, she has visited several countries for tourism, mainly due to the extreme high temperature and foul weather in Kuwait in the last couple of years.

Eman pointed out that entertainment places have to be available for the new generation, as Kuwait used to have leading projects in this field, and she and her generation lived a full life during the previous era. "To be logical, opening new entertainment places for adults and children during the recent climatic changes affecting Kuwait might not be the best solution or choice for the country to im-

prove internal tourism, unless these projects are built in a way to adapt to climate change," she said.

Citizen Sabeha Jassem told Kuwait Times she and her grandchildren are suffering from the heat and expenses. "My grandchildren's bodies are adapting to this climate, which is very different than what we used to live with before. Also, because they are used to seeing joyful places in other countries, they feel there is nothing to do in Kuwait," she said. "If we don't travel, we are forced to take them to play areas inside malls in Kuwait, which are very expensive, as we pay for each child double the amount we spend on them abroad. This is also one of the main reasons why many people prefer to travel," Jassem stressed. "Climate change is an issue we cannot control, but we can control having better

entertaining projects for our children, or at least the government should limit the prices for play areas to be affordable for all segments of society," she added.

A recent report showed Kuwait is among the most affordable countries for expats and citizens to live in compared to other regional countries. An Indian father of two, who asked to remain anonymous, said traveling is a better choice for him than staying in Kuwait due to the increase in prices at entertainment places. "Climate change is not a big issue compared to price hikes, which many in Kuwait cannot afford, whether expats or even Kuwaitis," he said. He agreed that Kuwait is affordable for people with regards to basic needs, "but in the matter of entertainment places and other things, it is overpriced".

Kuwait participates in Paris global financing summit

PARIS: France is hosting the Summit for the New Global Financing Pact on Wednesday and Thursday, with Kuwait's participation. The Kuwaiti delegation is headed by Minister of Finance Manaf Al-Hajeri, as representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and it will also include Kuwaiti Ambassador to France Mohammed Al-Judaie. The two-day summit kicked off in Paris on Wednesday. French President Emmanuel Macron said on his official Twitter account on Wednesday that "we can make a significant difference for the planet and fight poverty." Macron had previously called for holding the summit, during the Climate Change Conference (COP 27) in Egypt, as a step to fight climate change, limit poverty and reduce debts. The summit, where about 50 world leaders, prime ministers and heads of international organizations and NGOs are participating, mainly discusses future reforms and create balanced financial partnership. The main participants in the event are UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, President of the European Council Charles Michel, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and President of the European Central Bank Christine Lagarde. — KUNA



NASEEM: A health care worker follows up on the condition of a Kuwaiti pilgrim at the hajj mission's medical clinic. — KUNA

Kuwaiti medical teams ready to serve pilgrims

NASEEM: The Ministry of Health announced that preparations are complete at the medical clinics at the headquarters of Kuwait's hajj mission in Naseem, Saudi Arabia.

The clinics, the ministry said, are now in operation to provide health care to pilgrims of Kuwaiti campaigns. The head of the medical services team at the Kuwaiti hajj mission, Dr Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, said in a press statement on Wednesday that the team includes doctors, health inspectors, emergency medical technicians, members of the nursing staff, pharmacists and administrators. He pointed out that it also includes the medical staff accompanying the Kuwaiti Hajj campaigns, who provide primary care services to the pilgrims of the campaign and transfer cases as required to the clinics of the Naseem medical services team.

Deputy Head of the team Mugheer Al-Shammari said the Kuwaiti medical teams are working in coordination with the Ministry of Health in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He called on Kuwaiti pilgrims and hajj campaigns to adhere to the implementation of health guidelines issued by the health authorities in the Kingdom to protect their health. — KUNA



KUWAIT: People line up at the departure area of Kuwait International Airport in this file photo. - KUNA

Local

Kuwait, UNHCR mark World Refugee Day

Event 'global alarm bell' to urge relief action



Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah speaks at the event marking World Refugee Day.



KUWAIT: (From left) Kelly Clements, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Sheikh Rima Al-Sabah pose for a photo at the event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) is seen with UNHCR team members.



US Deputy Chief of Mission in Kuwait James Holtsnider



Canadian Ambassador Aliya Mawani



British Ambassador Belinda Lewis



French Ambassador Claire Le Flecher



Ambassador of Malta George A Said-Zammit

By Ghadeer Ghloom and KUNA

KUWAIT: World Refugee Day was marked by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on Tuesday to affirm Kuwait's relationship with UNHCR and showcase Kuwait's part in providing humanitarian aid. The event was attended by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Deputy Commissioner Kelly Clements and UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Sheikh Rima Al-Sabah, in addition to ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions serving in Kuwait and senior state officials.

Sheikh Salem expressed his satisfaction and pride on the relationship between Kuwait and UNHCR under the leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He

emphasized Kuwait's efforts in devoting all available resources for establishing international peace and security, saying cooperation between Kuwait and UNHCR go back 30 years. He mentioned Kuwait has donated more than \$17 million in aid to UNHCR for Syria and Turkey to help deal with the repercussions of the earthquakes that struck recently, confirming Kuwait will always stand by the side of refugees.

Clements expressed her gratitude and admiration for Kuwait's concerns and dedication to address oppressed people's issues. She said the world is witnessing a remarkable increase in the number of refugees that has never happened before, due to conflict in different places around the world such as Ukraine and Sudan.

"At the UN refugee agency, we aim to aid and protect as many people in need as we possibly can. More than 90 percent of our team are operating in different locations, some of them remote and some

dangerous," she said. She highlighted the main reason behind celebrating this day, saying it is meant to urge the world to come together and take action over refugees, describing it as a "global alarm bell" that demands attention to the desperate situations families are facing. She praised Kuwait's generosity and dedication in supporting refugees.

Kuwait Times spoke to US Deputy Chief of Mission in Kuwait James Holtsnider on this matter. "When we talk about refugees, we talk about the work that UNHCR does, and the support that both the United States and Kuwait give to UNHCR. It is incredibly important now more than ever because we have the largest refugee challenge due to Russia's unjustified invasion of Ukraine, and we have similar problems around the world and in other countries such as Yemen, Syria and Somalia. So, it is great to see Kuwait stepping up, and it's great to see US leadership on this issue as well. The United States partners very

closely with UNHCR, but also with all our diplomatic partners to try and help people in need," he said.

British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis told Kuwait Times: "I am delighted to be at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' reception this evening to celebrate World Refugee Day. The head of UNHCR in Kuwait Nisreen Rubaian is very active and a very hard-working colleague. I am very proud to be able to support her work through UNHCR and other organizations that support refugees. With the recent 'Homes for Ukraine' initiative, the UK is showing again that there is a welcome, open and hospitable place for people who need somewhere safe to stay."

Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait Aliya Mawani told Kuwait Times: "Canada takes this day very seriously, as Canada has a very strong tradition of welcoming refugees. Historically, we have welcomed millions of people over the years and they have become part of the fabric of our so-

ciety. This is something that we are really proud of and we want to continue. We also recognize that welcoming people is the first step, as they need to be included; they need to have opportunities to build safe and secure lives. The theme of World Refugee Day this year is 'Hope Away from Home', because it is about how to give hope over the long term to refugees by including them."

Ambassador of France Claire Le Flecher said: "Kuwait is very engaged in humanitarian support, particularly, the minister of foreign affairs and his wife. They are very supportive of this cause, and as ambassador of France, I am very happy to be here, because France is also very supportive of refugees all over the world and very willing to join efforts to support them." Ambassador of Malta Prof Dr George A Said-Zammit said: "We have to take care of refugees not because of laws and agreements, but because they are human beings."



KUWAIT: Mohammed Nasser Al-Mutairi is seen with Mohammed Al-Sayer, Hamad Al-Musaibeeh and Zain and the Awqaf ministry's teams.

Zain offers free roaming for customers at hajj

KUWAIT: Zain announced a new collaboration with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to present its annual complimentary roaming promotion for the hajj season, offering its top roaming plan for free to all postpaid and prepaid customers who are registered in Kuwait's certified Hajj campaigns. With this initiative, the company keeps pilgrims in touch with their loved ones at no cost by enjoying internet and voice calls at hajj locations in Saudi Arabia.

Zain Kuwait's Roaming and Wholesale Department Manager Mohammed Al-Sayer and the company's Corporate Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Musaibeeh, recently visited the office of the Assistant Undersecretary of Media and External Relations at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Mohammed Nasser Al-Mutairi to discuss this collaboration. Zain presents this initiative every year to keep customers who travel to the Sacred House connected to each other and to their loved ones for free during hajj season.

Zain now offers free roaming internet and voice calls to all customers who are registered in Kuwait's official and certified Hajj campaigns when they subscribe to the postpaid or prepaid Roaming PLUS plan (originally at KD 13 weekly).



The plan includes 30 local minutes, 30 minutes to Kuwait, and 30 SMS messages per week, in addition to 3 GBs of daily internet (fair usage policy applies daily after exceeding 3 GB, after which speed is reduced until end of day). The limited time offer starts from June 22 and continues until July 5 and is only valid at hajj rituals locations.

Zain continuously offers services that are tailored to match its customers' expectations and needs during their travels and to keep them connected to their loved ones and businesses with more convenience and around the clock, especially during the most cherished occasions and seasons like hajj.

New project allows high school students to work in co-ops

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Social Affairs approved a proposal to allow tenth and eleventh grade high school students to work part-time at cooperative societies during July and August. Kuwait Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies' President Abdulwahab Al-Fares announced on Wednesday.

Jobs will be open only for co-op shareholders' children and grandchildren, he said, adding that around 10,000 students are eligible to apply. Students can enroll to work for four hours a day at the cooperative societies in their areas of residence, Fares explained, noting that each student would receive a financial reward that varies between KD 100 and KD 200.



Abdulwahab Al-Fares

appreciation for the support shown by the Social Affairs Ministry through presenting the necessary facilities, offering a quick response and easing the process of implementing this project.



KUWAIT: A cooperative society is seen in this illustrative file photo.

MoH announces first successful artificial heart pump implant

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health announced Wednesday the success of an artificial heart pump implant, the first of its kind in the country and second in the Arab world.

The surgery was for a patient in his sixties who also had a left ventricular assist device installed. The ministry explained in a statement that the patient was overcome with an acute heart attack and taken directly to the chest disease hospital. He was resuscitated for about 50 minutes and had to undergo necessary procedures of cardiac catheterization and installation of five stents in the arteries. The patient was then put on ECMO, an artificial life support device to help his lungs function properly, until his condition stabilized. The team at the Amiri hospital took



KUWAIT: A man in his sixties received Kuwait's first artificial heart pump implant after suffering from a heart attack. — KUNA

up the case later to follow up and ensure smooth recovery and improvement. The statement further added that the Minister, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, hailed the efforts of those involved in the situation for their professionalism. — KUNA

News in Brief

2,000 expats lose driving licenses issued against law

KUWAIT: The traffic department revoked more than 2,000 driving licenses that were either issued in violation of rules, or whose holders no longer meet issuing conditions. The traffic department had earlier carried a comprehensive review of expat's licenses and cancelled many of them either because the holders left Kuwait, or they lost the conditions the licenses were issued based on it due to the salary stipulation. The traffic department asked police to continue their campaigns in areas where expats are in large numbers such as Hawally, Salmiya, Mahboula, Khaitan and Jleeb. If the license was issued in violation of the laws, the holder will be referred to the nearest police station and detained.

Kuwaiti health office in Jordan shut down

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi gave orders Wednesday to close the Kuwaiti health office in Jordan starting from July 20. Health offices operate in Kuwait's embassies around the world to provide healthcare to Kuwaiti students and oversee the affairs of citizens sent for treatment abroad. Matters related to the health insurance that covers Kuwaiti students in Jordan will be shifted to the Kuwaiti cultural office in the kingdom, the health ministry explained.

Deadline to apply for scholarships extended

KUWAIT: The registration period for the annual scholarships plan for 2023/2024 high school graduates has been extended by two days until July 4, the Higher Education Ministry said Wednesday. All students wishing to apply for a scholarship should complete the documents required by the ministry before the deadline. — KUNA

Blaze at tire-recycling plant extinguished

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force said four fire centers put out a fire at a tires recycling plant on Salmiy Road and no injuries were reported. The fire covered 2,000 meters squared, adding that the quick arrival of firemen kept the blaze from spreading further. — KUNA



RABAT: Delegations from Arab countries, including Kuwait, attend a meeting of the Executive Office of the Council of Arab Ministers of Information Tuesday. — KUNA

Kuwait to become 2025 Arab media capital

Kuwaiti report, meteorologist bag awards ahead of Arab Information Ministers meeting

RABAT: The Executive Office of the Council of Arab Information Ministers adopted Tuesday a recommendation to approve the designation of Kuwait as the Arab media capital for the year 2025.

The office closed its seventeenth meeting Tuesday with the adoption of 17 recommendations submitted by the Standing Committee for Arab media, which concluded its work the day before. The Council of Arab Ministers of Information have met Wednesday to discuss the approved proposals.

The 53rd session of the Council of Arab Information Ministers has also awarded 'The Jahra Nature Reserve' reportage, directed by Mishal Al-Shammari, with the Arab Media Excellence Award for best television reportage in the environmental category.

The winning reportage highlights the importance of the Jahra Nature Reserve in safeguarding biodiversity in Kuwait. The reportage shows Kuwait's commitment to preserving the environment and achieving environmental sustainability. The or-

ganizers also honored several program presenters, editorial directors, media professionals, writers and experts, including Kuwaiti meteorologist Issa Ramadan for publications, articles and research in the fields of environment and climate.

Kuwait's delegation to the Arab meeting is headed by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Nasser Al-Muhaisen.

Arab Media Observatory approved

The recommendations approved by the executive office Tuesday confirmed the adoption of all resolutions of the previous Arab Information Ministers Council meeting, held in Cairo last September, especially those related to the Palestinian issue, including working to provide various forms of media support to Palestine and raising awareness of the historical, spiritual and legal status of occupied Jerusalem. The meeting also approved the establishment of the Arab Media Observatory in the Kingdom of Morocco, with a deadline of no later than

the first quarter of the year 2024 for the project to be complete.

The Executive Office stressed the importance of developing a unified strategy to deal with all international media companies and the formation of a high-level team of specialists to negotiate with these companies.

It also highlighted the importance of previous decisions related to the inclusion of media education in school curricula. The role of the Arab world in addressing the phenomenon of terrorism and the adoption of the Joint Arab Media Strategy to combat terrorism was also discussed. The office said it will be submitting the strategy to the Arab League Foreign Ministers Council to consider its presentation for ratification at the next Arab Summit.

The work of the Executive Office of the Council of Arab Ministers of Information began Tuesday with the participation of delegations from Arab countries, including the delegation of the State of Kuwait. — Agencies



KUWAIT: Kuwait Blood Bank officials are seen with Life Savers Global after receiving the award.

Life Savers Global recognized for blood donation services

KUWAIT: Life Savers Global is an organization based in Kuwait which runs blood donation camps with a mission to provide access to safe blood to the patients as well as increasing the resources of the Kuwait Blood Bank.

The organization's volunteers and team members have worked tirelessly in conjunction with doctors and the medical staff of the Central Blood Bank to provide a safe and efficient way to donate blood, plasma and bone-marrow from the donors.

Life Saver Global was thus awarded a memento for their services. The support of donors, volunteers, team members of Life Savers were crucial to the organization's success, the organization said in a statement. "We are humbled and motivated by this recognition and will strive to better the lives of our fellow brethren," they said.

Mexican envoy sends greetings for Eid Al-Adha

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Mexico Miguel Ángel Isidro has the honor to extend his sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince, His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Prime Minister, the government and people of

Kuwait, US embassy to cooperate in family protection field

KUWAIT: The Secretariate General of Supreme Council for Family is cooperating with the American



Hamza Ghadi, with Life Savers Global, receives the award on behalf of the organization.



the State of Kuwait on the occasion of the advent of "Eid Al-Adha" coupled with our best wishes for continued well-being and success and the friendly people of Kuwait further prosperity, progress and stability.

Ambassador Isidro added: "On this joyful occasion I would like to express our satisfaction with the existing friendly relations between our countries and peoples, and we emphasize that we are making efforts to further strengthen our joint work for the sake of our common interests."



Miguel Ángel Isidro

Embassy in training personnel to work at the protection centers of the council, said Secretary General Mariam Al-Azmi. The statement came following a meeting with representatives from the embassy, in the presence of foreign ministry officials.

Azmi said the meeting discussed the mechanism of work at the protection centers of the council in addition to services given to people staying at the centers and the judicial jurisdiction granted to workers according to family violence law.

Scan & Subscribe
KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf

Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220



Ex-Australia PM feared Macron would 'kill' sub deal

Sierra Leone battle to keep pregnant girls in schools

Kyiv allies vow to make Russia pay

'Every day of Russian aggression brings new ruins'



LONDON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken addresses the opening session on the first day of the Ukraine Recovery Conference in London on June 21, 2023. Leaders and representatives from more than 60 countries are in London for a two-day conference to secure funding to help Ukraine recover from the ravages of war. — AFP

LONDON: Western allies on Wednesday promised to make Russia pay for its invasion of Ukraine, as governments and private investors met to fund the country's reconstruction from the ravages of war. The World Bank has put an estimate of \$14 billion on Ukraine's immediate needs for repairing the damage caused by the bitter fighting.

But a recent study by the World Bank, the UN, the European Union and the Ukrainian government said the wider recovery of the economy would cost \$441 billion.

"Let's be clear: Russia is causing Ukraine's destruction," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told delegates at the London conference. "And Russia will eventually bear the cost of Ukraine's reconstruction," he added.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak voiced a similar message, promising to keep tough sanctions in place "until Russia pays up", and use seized assets to get Ukraine back on its feet. In the conflict overnight, Russia

said it had downed three Ukrainian drones in the Moscow region, while Ukraine said its air defence systems had shot down six Iranian-designed attack drones in the west.

The conference comes as President Volodymyr Zelensky oversees a military fight-back by his troops using Western-supplied heavy weaponry to regain territory lost to Russian forces since last year.

"Every day of Russian aggression brings new ruins, thousands and thousands of destroyed houses, devastated industries, burnt lives," Zelensky told the London delegates by videolink.

But he set out his stall for future investment in Ukraine, saying that despite the devastation, the country was ripe for development in sectors from technology and green agriculture to clean energy.

International help for Ukraine would send a strong message to the world for generations to come, he said.

"Also, the world is watching to see if we will restore normal life in such a way

that our transformation will land an ideological defeat on the aggressor. "We protect Ukraine, and thus we protect freedom. And when we build Ukraine, we'll build freedom."

Seized assets

Leaders and representatives from more than 60 countries are attending the International Ukraine Recovery Conference 2023 — the second to be held since the Russian invasion in February last year.

The first, in Lugano, Switzerland, in July last year saw Kyiv's allies commit to supporting Ukraine through what is expected to be an eye-wateringly expensive and decades-long recovery.

African countries, though, have voiced concern that by pumping aid to Ukraine, the West is backing off from its pledges to help the continent with development and fight climate change.

Sunak told delegates that Kyiv's allies would support Ukraine "on the battlefield and beyond" for as long as it

takes. He has announced UK backing for Ukraine to the tune of \$3 billion so it can unlock vital World Bank loans to help bolster its public services, including schools and hospitals. The guarantee will run over the next three years, he said. He also announced an extra £240 million (\$306 million) in development aid funding for humanitarian projects.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen recapped the EU executive's support package for Ukraine of 50 billion euros (\$55 billion) over the next four years.

The European Union would soon outline how it intends to use proceeds from seized Russian assets, she added, "because the perpetrator has to be held accountable".

Germany will provide 381 million euros in humanitarian assistance this year, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said. Blinken announced more than \$1.3 billion in additional US aid. "As Russia continues to destroy, we are here to help Ukraine rebuild - rebuild lives, rebuild its country, rebuild its future," he said.

Private sector

As well as government support from around the world, it is hoped more private-sector firms will help in the reconstruction effort. Delegates include captains of industry from major multinationals and corporations, many of whom have signed up to a new Ukraine Business Compact.

It encourages trade, investment and expertise-sharing to Ukraine on the back of promises from Zelensky to tackle corruption, improve financial and legal transparency, as well as market liberalization and competition.

Sunak said more than 400 companies from 38 countries, with a combined market capitalization of \$4.9 trillion, have already promised to back Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction.

A new London-based insurance scheme would help to underwrite risky investments in Ukraine, he said, "removing one of the biggest barriers and giving investors the confidence they need to act". — AFP

Sudan fighting resumes as ceasefire ends

KHARTOUM: Renewed artillery exchanges rocked greater Khartoum early Wednesday as Sudan's warring generals resumed fighting just minutes after the latest US and Saudi-brokered ceasefire expired. Already on Tuesday evening, an immense fire had engulfed the intelligence service's headquarters in the capital Khartoum with each side accusing the other of attacking it in violation of the 72-hour truce.

A source within the regular army, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, accused rival paramilitaries loyal to his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo of shelling the building. A source within the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces said an "army drone bombed the building where RSF fighters had gathered, sparking a fire and the partial destruction of the intelligence headquarters".

On Wednesday morning, residents of Omdurman, just across the Nile from Khartoum, reported heavy artillery exchanges within minutes of the ceasefire expiring at 6:00 am (0400 GMT). Army warplanes flew low over several adjacent districts, the residents said.

The ceasefire, which coincided with an international donors' conference in Geneva on Monday, brought a brief respite to the millions of civilians who have been trapped by the fighting in greater Khartoum but an exodus of refugees continued to pour of the war's other main battleground Darfur. Nationwide, more than 2,000 people have been killed since the power struggle between Burhan and Daglo erupted into fighting on April 15, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project said. More than 2.5 million people have fled their homes, of whom around 550,000 have sought refuge in neighboring countries, fled abroad, according to the International Organization for Migration.

Bodies on city streets

According to the US State Department, up to 1,100 people have been killed in the West Darfur state capital El Geneina alone. Bodies have remained on the streets of the city, where months of unrest have left shops either vacant or gutted by looters.

One lay covered on the asphalt, in front of an armored vehicle. A dead man was partially curled up outside a house. Several others appeared to be lying face down together on a dirt road. Residents have fled en masse, grabbing whatever they could to escape to the border with Chad. At least 150,000 people have fled Darfur into Chad since the start of fighting, according to the UN.



KHARTOUM: A woman rolls her suitcase as she walks through a dirt road in southern Khartoum amidst ongoing battles on June 21, 2023, as renewed artillery exchanges rocked the Sudanese capital again with the country's warring generals resuming fighting just minutes after the latest US and Saudi-brokered ceasefire expired. — AFP

Some described being shot at by fighters and subject to searches during the perilous journey. The United Nations has spoken of possible "crimes against humanity" in Darfur as the conflict has "taken an ethnic dimension" in a region still reeling from a 2003 rebellion among non-Arab minorities that prompted then-strongman Omar al-Bashir to recruit the Arab Janjaweed militia, whose actions led to charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Washington has said the RSF, which traces its origins to the Janjaweed, is "primarily" responsible for recent "atrocities" in Darfur, which is home to a quarter of Sudan's population. In an audio recording Tuesday, Daglo denounced what he called "a tribal conflict" in El Geneina, claiming to have ordered his men "not to intervene" and accusing the army of "creating sedition by distributing weapons" to civilians.

'Fleeing for their lives'

Monday's donors' conference raised close to \$1.5 billion in aid pledges for Sudan and neighboring countries, but organizers said that amounted to only half of the estimated needs. A record 25 million people - more than half Sudan's population - are in need of aid and protection, the United Nations says.

UN chief Antonio Guterres warned "the scale and speed of Sudan's descent into death and destruction is unprecedented." "Without strong international support, Sudan could quickly become a locus of lawlessness, radiating insecurity across the region," he said.

In an interview with AFP Tuesday, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi urged neighboring countries to keep their borders open to Sudanese refugees despite concerns the violence and lawlessness could spill over. — AFP

شارك برعايتك SHARE YOUR CARE

"شارك برعايتك Share your Care"

With your loved ones لأحبائك

بطاقات الهدايا للعافية ميدكس Medx Wellness Gift Cards

ORDER NOW اتصل الآن 1893333 medx.com.kw

Home Services Available | Ali Ghanim Al Dabbous St - 109 | Block - 08 Fahaheel | Kuwait

19 شارع علي غانم الدبوس | الفحيحيل | الكويت

SCAN FOR THE DETAILS OF GIFT CARDS

قم بمسح الكود للحصول على تفاصيل بطاقات الهدايا

International

Dozens hurt as protesters, police clash in Argentina

Police responded with rubber bullets and tear gas

BUENOS AIRES: Dozens of people were injured in northern Argentina on Tuesday as protesters clashed with police in Jujuy province over a proposed ban on certain forms of demonstration. For several hours, hundreds engaged the police in running battles in the streets of the provincial capital San Salvador de Jujuy, burning cars and throwing rocks, according to TV images.

Police responded with rubber bullets and tear gas. One channel showed a demonstrator lying in the street near a pool of blood, and local media reported dozens of injuries on both sides. An emergency services official told TN television that about "50 to 70 people received medical assistance" mainly for light injuries. At least one person was in a serious condition, the official said, after suffering a head injury.

An official in the provincial security ministry told AFP there had been at least 20 arrests. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights expressed concern at recent actions in response to protests in Jujuy and urged "the State to respect the right to freedom of expression."

"Local security forces reportedly used excessive force, tear gas, and

rubber bullets to dissolve non-violent roadblocks that respected the right of way on federal highways," the IACHR said in a statement. Tuesday's demonstration was called by groups representing Indigenous people and workers against a change to the provincial constitution that would prohibit protest-related road blockades and other "disturbance to the right to free movement of persons and the improper occupation of public buildings" in Jujuy.

The text had initially also sought to modify Indigenous land rights, but this was abandoned at the last minute after widespread protests. A version of the text was approved by the provincial parliament on Tuesday, but the exact wording has not been revealed.

Jujuy province, which borders Bolivia and Chile in Argentina's far northwest, is governed by conservative Gerardo Morales, a possible presidential candidate in the upcoming October elections. On his Twitter account, Morales blamed the policies of center-left President Alberto Fernandez and his deputy Cristina Kirchner for the "extreme violence" in Jujuy. Fernandez retorted the Jujuy reform was at odds with Argentina's national constitution and urged the provincial government to stop its "repression." — AFP



SAN SALVADOR DE JUJUY: Demonstrators clash with infantry police outside the Legislature of Jujuy, where Governor Gerardo Morales promotes a provincial constitutional reform, in San Salvador de Jujuy, Argentina. — AFP

S Leone battle to keep pregnant girls in schools

FREETOWN: Hawa used to relish competing with her cousin for top marks in school until, eight months ago, she fell pregnant. "We studied hard together," the slight 18-year-old told AFP. "I was one of the top girls in the class."

In Sierra Leone, where pregnant girls have been allowed in classrooms since a ban was lifted in 2020, the news should not have halted Hawa's education. However, like other progressive policies introduced under President Julius Maada Bio, keeping pregnant girls in school has been easier said than done.

Hawa was mercilessly taunted by other students, and her mother stopped sending her money for supplies and uniforms.

She ended up dropping out of school at six months pregnant, forced to watch her cousin advance alone. Bio, who is seeking a second term in office in Saturday's presidential election, made education and women's rights the main pillars of his presidency. He admitted to AFP in an interview that he at first resisted allowing pregnant teens to go to school.

"I was totally opposed to that a few years back, but I realized I was wrong," Bio said. "They are in their formative years, and if we punish them for the rest of their life, you have been unfair to them, and you have been unfair to society."

Teen pregnancy is widespread in Sierra Leone, and a lack of data makes it hard to measure how many girls are staying in school. In 2021, a year after the ban was overturned, the national school census identified 950 visibly pregnant girls in schools across the country. A 2019 government survey found that 21 percent of women and girls aged 15 to 19 were pregnant or had already given birth - indicating tens

of thousands may have dropped out. Nadia Rasheed, country representative for the United Nations' sexual and reproductive health agency (UNFPA), said keeping girls in school was "critical to breaking cycles of poverty and inequality in Sierra Leone."

Kadi, 18, a new mother, had hoped that education would be her ticket to a better life. She was raised by her grandmother and an older sister in Freetown's Cocker Bay slum, and both pushed her hard in her studies. Then her grandmother died in a car accident. Two years later, her older sister fell ill and died too.

Her boyfriend, a fisherman, began helping with her school expenses - they planned for her to study medicine and then they would marry. "I want to be a remarkable somebody in society," Kadi said.

But when she became pregnant at 17, she could not stand the bullying at school. She failed some of her exams and did not return the following academic year. She hopes to retake her exams next year, but is worried

she will have fallen too far behind. "Communities are not going to change just like that - schools are not going to change just like that - I don't think anyone should have expected overnight success," said Regina Mamidy Yillah, a researcher. "But that being said, the overturned ban... is really a gigantic step for equality."

Expectation meets reality

The challenge reflects those affecting several progressive policies introduced by Bio's government. On the one hand, they are hailed by Western NGOs and UN agencies that have been omnipresent in Sierra Leone since its 1991-2002 civil war.

But in reality, they collide with traditional values or have fallen short of expectations. Bio's government hands out free sanitary pads to students, and has invested more than 20 percent of the budget into education. But many are disappointed that what was branded as a "free" education policy has not translated into access for all.

Students must still pay for some textbooks, plus transportation, uniforms, shoes, socks and school supplies, which can be prohibitively expensive. Many teachers informally charge students for soap, toilet paper and cleaning supplies, and demand cash hand-outs on a daily or weekly basis under threat of flogging, according to families AFP met.

Plans to decriminalize abortion, lauded internationally when they were announced last July, have not progressed. In January, Bio signed a new gender equality law to boost the number of women in the public and private sectors.

While many had hoped for a 30-percent quota for woman MPs, the gender act only requires that a third of parliamentary candidates are women. The president, it states, may consider "the possibility" of appointing a 30-percent female cabinet. The Institute for Governance Reform, a survey group, forecasts that between 26 and 30 percent of MPs elected to the new parliament will be women. — AFP

Iranian FM visits Kuwait...

Continued from Page 1

sought to revive the deal, but the process has stalled in on-off talks since 2021. In recent weeks, the two sworn enemies have denied media reports that they were close to reaching an interim deal to replace the 2015 accord. In Doha on Tuesday, Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, held talks with the European Union's Iran nuclear talks coordinator Enrique Mora. "I had a serious and constructive meeting with Enrique Mora in Doha," he said on social media on Wednesday. "We discussed and exchanged opinions on a range of issues, including negotiations to lift sanctions." EU spokesperson Peter Stano confirmed the meeting, saying the bloc was "keeping diplomatic channels open, including through this meeting in Doha, to address all issues of concern with Iran". Amir-Abdollahian also discussed "developments in the nuclear agreement" with his Qatari counterpart, according to the official Qatar News Agency. Since the start of the year, Iran has intensified its diplomatic activity, engaging with friends and foes alike as it seeks to reduce its isolation, improve its economy and project strength. Iran's ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi has led the way, swinging through China, Syria and Venezuela, hosting Saudi Arabia's top diplomat, and reaching out to other long-time regional rivals such as Egypt.

Sanam Vakil, director of Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa program, said Iran was seeking to show it can overcome its adversaries. Iran is "looking to show that despite sanctions and domestic protests it continues to weather the storm by bolstering stronger international economic and foreign ties", she said. "These links... aim to increase economic connectivity and boost internal morale."

Zionist settlers attack village...

Continued from Page 1

Twelve people were wounded in Turmus Ayya, the Palestinian health ministry said.

In Jenin, girls in school uniform carried the body of their classmate killed in a Zionist army raid on the city on Monday. Sadil Nagnhaghya, 15, died from gunshot wounds suffered during the hours-long Zionist incursion, the Palestinian health ministry said on Wednesday. Six other Palestinians, including a 15-year-old boy and a militant, were killed in the raid.

A spokesman for the Palestinian militant group Hamas, Hazem Qassem, described Tuesday's attack against Zionists as a "response to the crimes of the (Zionist) occupation" in Jenin and elsewhere. A statement from the office of Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the government would fast-track settlement expansion at Eli in response to the attack. The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967. Exclud-

At stake are "agreements focused on easing tensions through the de-escalation of Iran's nuclear program and release of US prisoners" held in Iran, said Diako Hossseini, a Tehran-based foreign policy analyst. Iran hopes such agreements would allow it to revive an economy battered by sanctions, rampant inflation and record depreciation of the rial against the dollar. Any indication of a thaw in US-Iran relations would be viewed favorably by Arab countries, especially those of the Gulf, which are seeking to ease tensions fueled in recent years by the conflicts in Yemen and Syria. This desire was one of the main drivers of the China-brokered normalization of relations in March between Iran and Saudi Arabia after seven years of hostility.

Since then, Iran has sought to cement or restore ties with other Arab countries including Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. Tehran says its "policy of openness" has contributed to a de-escalation of tensions in the Middle East, even if the risk of an armed confrontation is still high with the Zionist entity, the Islamic republic's archenemy. "Only the enemies of Islam, led by the Zionist regime, are upset by the progress of cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia," Raisi said last week when he received the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan.

At the same time, a certain detente is emerging with European countries after months of simmering tensions since nationwide protests erupted in Iran over the September death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, after her arrest for an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women. In recent weeks, Iran has released six Europeans it was holding and has held nuclear talks with Britain, France and Germany, the three European signatories to the landmark 2015 agreement. But a bone of contention remains between Iran and Western countries that accuse Tehran of supplying drones to Moscow and helping it build a factory to manufacture them, which the Islamic republic denies. Iran is also courting China, which Raisi visited in February for the first such trip in 20 years. — Agencies

ing annexed east Jerusalem, the territory is now home to around 490,000 Zionists who live in settlements considered illegal under international law.

Anti-settlement organization Peace Now said Netanyahu's announcement was intended "to appease fervent and fanatic settlers", while Palestinians "are already suffering the consequences of such decisions, with their villages being subjected to attacks and burnings". The deadly shooting sparked reprisal attacks reported Tuesday in multiple Palestinian towns in the northern West Bank, including Huwara, Al-Lubban Al-Sharqiya and Beit Furik. Several dozen people were wounded, the Palestinian Red Crescent said.

The army said Wednesday that overnight its forces entered the Palestinian village of Orif which was home to the gunmen in the latest incident. Zionist forces arrested three "wanted people" in Orif and went to "map the homes" of the shooters, a precursor to their demolition, a statement said. The Zionist entity routinely demolishes the residences of Palestinians it blames for deadly attacks on Zionists. Human rights activists say the policy amounts to collective punishment, as it can render non-combatants, including children, homeless. — AFP

Saudi wages war on drugs...

Continued from Page 1

"This never used to happen before." Acts of violence committed by drug users prompted the crackdown, a security official told AFP. They include a recent case in which a drug addict killed his parents by dousing them with fuel and setting them on fire, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the press.

Across Jeddah, roadside billboards urge citizens to report any illicit drug activities to the authorities. While previous anti-drug campaigns targeted smuggled shipments, mainly from Syria and Lebanon, the latest initiative is zeroing in on dealers and users within the country. Apparently to provide a deterrent, a nearly three-year moratorium on executions for drug crimes was scrapped last year.

"In the last year to two years, we have seen an uptick in internal arrests and the use of the death penalty (in drug cases)," said Caroline Rose of the New Lines Institute think tank. The shift from border seizures to arrests of dealers is partly due to "a focus on security issues surrounding Captagon and a recognition of just how deep some of these networks go", Rose told AFP.

Rescuers 'target' noises in hunt...

Continued from Page 1

After the noises were detected, rescuers relocated two remotely operated vehicles (ROV) that search under the water and one surface vessel with sonar capability, Mauger said. The ROV searches had so far not yielded results, but are continuing, Mauger added, saying that data from the Canadian aircraft had been shared with US Navy experts.

The US Coast Guard said in a tweet that three more search vessels, including one with side scanning sonar capabilities, arrived in the area Wednesday morning. The Navy has sent a specialized winch system for lifting heavy objects from extreme depths, other equipment and personnel; and the Pentagon is deploying a third C-130 aircraft and three C-17s. A deep-sea underwater robot sent by France's oceanographic institute is expected to arrive in the area early Wednesday afternoon.

Rescuers estimate that passengers now have less a day of oxygen left, based on the sub's capacity to hold up to 96 hours of emergency air. The mission was expected to be the only manned trip to the Titanic this year due to bad weather, Harding wrote in an Instagram post before the journey. The 58-year-old has three Guinness world records to his name and became a space tourist through Amazon founder

The campaign is also aimed at keeping drugs out of the hands of Saudi youth, the drivers of an ambitious reform agenda to diversify the oil-dependent economy. Fifty-one percent of the 32.2 million population is under 30. "Saudi Arabia is carrying out a huge economic project...and the youth are the main pillar of this project," said Sulaiman Al-Oqaily, a Saudi political analyst.

Rampant drug use is taking its toll, with more than 200,000 addicts in Saudi Arabia, according to health ministry figures cited by domestic media. Growing numbers are seeking addiction treatment, mainly because they fear arrest, said Hamad Al-Sheehan of the Rushd Specialized Center in Riyadh. "After the recent campaign, the numbers have increased at the center," the director of treatment said from his office, where at least 10 young men were waiting to be seen. "We currently receive 1,000 people per month instead of only 100 previously."

He said that Captagon and other methamphetamine-type drugs are among the most abused in the kingdom. Most of his patients are between 17 and 21 years old and half are women, he said. If Sheehan's patients fear arrest, the crackdown is working, Oqaily said. "The message is if you don't fear for yourself, you should fear the government," he said. Last month, Interior Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Nayef warned drug dealers and smugglers that they will not escape. — AFP

Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin company a year ago.

Shahzada and Suleman Dawood hail from one of Pakistan's richest families, which runs Karachi-headquartered conglomerate Engro, with investments in energy, agriculture, petrochemicals and telecommunications. The Titanic hit an iceberg and sank in 1912 during its maiden voyage from England to New York with 2,224 passengers and crew on board. More than 1,500 people died. It was found in 1985 and remains a lure for nautical experts and underwater tourists. The pressure at that depth as measured in atmospheres is 400 times what it is at sea level.

Mike Reiss, an American television writer who visited the Titanic wreck on the same sub last year, told the BBC the experience was disorientating and that he had to sign a waiver that "mentions death three different times on page one". Alistair Greig, professor of marine engineering at University College London, has suggested two possible scenarios based on images of the Titan.

He said if it had an electrical or communications problem, it could have surfaced and remained floating, "waiting to be found" — bearing in mind the vessel can reportedly be unlocked from the outside only. "Another scenario is the pressure hull was compromised — a leak," he said in a statement. "Then the prognosis is not good." In 2018, OceanGate Expeditions' former director of marine operations David Lochridge alleged in a lawsuit that he had been fired after raising concerns about the company's "experimental and untested design" of the craft. — AFP

International

China's foreign ministry slams Biden for equating Xi to 'dictators'

Relevant remarks by US side are extremely ridiculous and irresponsible

BEIJING: China's foreign ministry on Wednesday slammed comments by US President Joe Biden equating Chinese leader Xi Jinping with "dictators" as an "open political provocation". Speaking at a fundraiser in California on Tuesday, Biden said Xi had been angered over an incident in February when a Chinese balloon - which Washington says was used for spying - flew over the United States before being shot down by American military jets.

His comments come just days after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken concluded a visit to Beijing aimed at re-establishing lines of communication in order to avoid conflict between the two global powers.

"The reason why Xi Jinping got very upset in terms of when I shot that balloon down with two box cars full of spy equipment is he didn't know it was there," Biden said. "I'm serious. That was the great embarrassment for dictators, when they didn't know what happened."

Beijing's foreign ministry termed Biden's comments as "ridiculous". "The relevant remarks by the US side are extremely ridiculous and irresponsible, they seriously violate basic facts, diplomatic protocol and China's political dignity," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a Wednesday briefing. "China is strongly dissatisfied with and firmly opposed to this," she added.

'Distortion of facts'

The multi-faceted rivalry between China and the United States turned into a full-blown diplomatic crisis with February's balloon incident. Beijing on Wednesday reiterated its protest against Washington's decision to shoot it down.

"The United States should have dealt with it calmly, rationally and professionally, but its distortion of facts, abuse of force, and escalation of hype have fully exposed its hegemonic and bullying nature," Mao said.

Russia also criticized Biden's comments, with the Kremlin on Wednesday saying the comment reflected Washington's "unpredictable" foreign policy. "This is a very contradictory manifestation of US foreign policy, which points to a significant element of unpredictability," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

'Going to take time'

Biden, who at 80 is running for re-election, on Tuesday told donors that "we're in a situation now where (Xi) wants to have a relationship again." Blinken "did a good job" on his Beijing trip, but "it's going to take time," Biden added.

The US president also brought up another prickly point regarding China: a recent summit in which leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the United States -



NUSA DUA: File photo shows US President Joe Biden (right) and China's President Xi Jinping (left) walk to shake hands as they meet on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Nusa Dua on the Indonesian resort island of Bali on November 14, 2022. - AFP

known as the Quad group - sought to boost peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific maritime region. The four countries are "working hand in glove in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean," Biden said. "What he (Xi) was really upset about was that I insisted that we unite the... so-called Quad," Biden said.

Tuesday was not the first time Biden has made sig-

nificant, even provocative, statements at fund-raising receptions - usually small-scale events at which cameras and recordings are forbidden but where journalists may listen to and transcribe the president's opening remarks. At one such event last October Biden spoke of the threat of nuclear "Armageddon" from Russia. - AFP

Ex-Australia PM feared Macron would 'kill' sub deal

PARIS: Former Australian leader Scott Morrison had plans to ditch a French submarine contract for fear a furious Paris would find a way to "kill" his new deal with the United States and United Kingdom, he reveals in an upcoming book seen by AFP.

The scandal, which saw Morrison work in secret with London and Washington to procure nuclear submarines before breaking the contract with Paris, highlighted the fragility of transatlantic trust, with ties still recovering from the 2021 revelation. "Our strategy was that if we are going to do this, we can't let it lead to the French knowing - in case that damages the French deal. So, we had to build Chinese walls - pardon the pun - around our discussions," said Morrison of the two years of subterfuge.

Morrison was interviewed extensively for a new chapter of the book "The Secret History of The Five Eyes" international spy network, by journalist Richard Kerbj, in which he reveals new details of how he duped Macron - while maintaining that not telling him was "not the same as lying to him".

Macron was the first foreign leader to congratulate Morrison upon his unexpected election victory in 2019, a sign of the importance of a \$36.5 billion deal, dubbed the "contract of the century" in which France's Naval Group would build 12 conventionally powered submarines for Australia.

However, concerned about production delays, and a growing security threat from China in the South China Sea, Morrison said he realized that "if there was ever a time to have a crack at getting nuclear-powered subs, it was either now or never".



BUENOS AIRES: File photo show France's President Emmanuel Macron (left) greets Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison during the G20 Leaders' Summit, in Buenos Aires. - AFP

'Bluffing'

And so in late 2019, he set about coming up with what he called a "Plan B" to form an alliance with London and Washington to supply Australia - a non-nuclear state - with nuclear-powered submarines. "Australian techies were flying back and forth to Washington," in 2020, said Morrison.

In one anecdote, he describes how an oblivious Macron approached him to discuss the submarine contract as he emerged from a secret meeting on the new deal with US President Joe Biden and former British prime minister Boris Johnson on the sidelines of a G7 meeting in June 2021.

At a dinner between the two at the Elysee Palace a few days later, Morrison said he was "pretty clear" about his concerns over the submarine deal. "Not telling him is not the same as lying to him," he told Kerbj. "I think Emmanuel thought I was... seeking

leverage on the contract. Maybe he thought I was bluffing," said Morrison in the updated book edition, which will be published on July 6 in Europe and July 11 in Australia and New Zealand. A key reason Morrison did not tell Macron about his plans to walk away from the deal was a deep insecurity that, despite a verbal commitment, the US and Britain would pull out of the deal to appease the French. He told London and Washington he would not give France time to "kill the arrangement that we have with you, and then we stand left there with nothing".

He admitted the politics back home "would have been quite catastrophic". Morrison said it was this potential outcome, and not the COVID-19 pandemic or devastating bushfires, which gave him the most anxiety during his term.

'Sleepless night'

On the eve of the trilateral AUKUS announcement, he sent a letter to Macron informing him they were terminating the submarine contract, but feared the French president still had time to undermine the new deal. "I would say it was the most sleepless night I had in my entire prime ministership," said Morrison, citing the "unpredictability" of the close relationship between Washington and Paris.

"I don't regret it for a minute," he said of his decision to break the contract and deceive Paris. At the time, Paris slammed the revelation as a "stab in the back", and withdrew its ambassador from Australia in protest. Relations remained on ice until the election of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, who has tried to patch up relations and in June 2022 announced the country would pay compensation of \$584 million for the termination of the contract.

On Monday, Australia announced it would buy up to five US nuclear-powered submarines, then build a new model with US and British technology, prompting Beijing to warn the AUKUS alliance was treading a "path of error and danger". - AFP

UN expert calls for new approach to Myanmar crisis

JAKARTA: The world must rethink its approach to solving the crisis in junta-ruled Myanmar because it was not working, a United Nations expert said Wednesday. Myanmar has been in turmoil since a February 2021 coup that ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, with more than 3,600 civilians killed in the military's crackdown on dissent, according to a monitoring group.

Efforts by the 10-member Association of South-east Nations (ASEAN) bloc, which includes Myanmar, to defuse the crisis have faltered and no progress has been made on a five-point peace plan agreed on two years ago.

Tom Andrews, a UN special rapporteur on the situation in Myanmar, called for a new course of action and leadership from its fellow ASEAN members. "I believe that the crisis in Myanmar has reached an important inflection point and that it is time the international community reassesses its approach to the crisis," he told a press conference in the Indonesian capital Jakarta.

He said the current action by the international community and regional bloc ASEAN was "simply not working" to end the crisis. "A change of course is imperative," he said. "This change will require vision and leadership, and I believe that Indonesia is positioned to provide that leadership."

ASEAN has become divided over the Myanmar issue, with Thailand defending talks with the junta after inviting its foreign minister Than Shwe to an informal meeting on Monday. Indonesia and Malaysia - among the junta's harshest critics within the regional bloc - snubbed the meeting.

Myanmar's generals have been barred from high-level ASEAN meetings and Bangkok drew criticism from Singapore over Monday's talks, which warned it was premature to engage the junta at such a high level. The United Nations says more than one million people have been displaced by violence since the coup. Fighting between the army and rebel groups in Myanmar has periodically sent thousands of people fleeing across the border into Thailand. ASEAN's last leaders' summit, held in May, ended without any significant progress. - AFP

Pakistan village mourns dead in Greek boat tragedy

BANDLI: Death hangs over the Pakistan village of Bandli like a shroud, as residents absorb news that as many as 24 young local men may be among hundreds feared drowned in last week's Greek migrant boat tragedy. The village, home to around 15,000, was in mourning as relatives offered up DNA samples to identify bodies among the 82 recovered from last Wednesday's shipwreck in the Ionian Sea. A procession of visitors came and went from the homes of families in distress, 95 kilometres (60 miles) south-east of Islamabad in Pakistan administered Kashmir.

Parents sat listlessly in the street and funeral prayers were not yet held, as the faintest hope still lingered. Shahnaz Bibi said she spoke to her son Inaam Shafaat, 20, by phone a day before the overcrowded and rusty trawler set sail from Libya into Mediterranean waters on the world's deadliest migrant route. "At night he told me that the weather was not clear. I told him not to go on the boat, but he wouldn't listen to me," said Bibi, in her 50s, having her DNA sampled at a local hospital. "He said, 'Mother I leave you in the protection of Allah. Pray for me,'" she told AFP, her voice hoarse from weeping as she dabbed tears away with her shawl.

Send another son

Authorities in Europe still have no clear idea how many people were aboard the boat when it sank - estimates range from 400 to over 700 - but likely hundreds came from Pakistan, largely from the most populous Punjab province and Pakistan administered Kashmir. An official from the country's Federal Investigation Agency told AFP more than 75 families have so far registered a missing relative believed to be on board. Sarfraz Khan Virk, a senior official from the FIA in Lahore, told reporters that following previous such disasters, many families have refused to speak to authorities.

"They said that we want to send a second son and we will suffer if you file a case," he said. "There are families who had sent one brother to Italy and after a failed attempt with the second brother, want to send the third one. So we have many issues and the people



BANDLI: Shahnaz Bibi (right), mother of Inham Shafaat, and Tasleem Bibi (left), mother of Akash Gulzar, weep for their sons after they went missing in an overloaded trawler that capsized and sank in the Ionian Sea, in Bandli village, in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. - AFP

are not cooperating with us." The country is in the grip of a staggering economic downturn with runaway inflation, industry and imports hobbled, and a tumbling rupee sapping families' abilities to pay their way. Pakistan administered Kashmir - where Bandli nestles among lush rolling hills - has historically been a springboard for migrants, increasingly driven to make desperate odysseys escaping hardship.

The eastern region hosts a thriving black market of human smugglers and Islamabad so far says 15 have been arrested for alleged links to the tragedy. "What happened to our brother shouldn't happen to anyone else. Human trafficking has been on the rise, it will not stop," said Waheed Wazir, 38, whose younger brother Imran, 32, is missing.

"The human trafficking agents who are arrested should not be released. They should be publicly punished so nobody dares to do such a thing in the future." The assistant commissioner of the local district Sardar Mushtaq Ahmad confirmed 24 people had been reported missing from the area.

Migrant journeys from Pakistan to Europe are perilous. Travellers often have only patchy communication with relatives and the illegal nature of the trip encourages them to lay low. With the majority of the passengers still reportedly lost at sea, the Bandli families cling to the precious final words they heard from their relatives. "My son had told me that they were boarding them on the boat. The weather was not good," said Tasleem Bibi, 48, already grieving her 20-year-old son Akash Gulzar. "His voice gradually sank and he could not speak further." - AFP

News in Brief

Train derailment kills two

TUNIS: Two people were killed and 34 injured when an overnight passenger train careered off the tracks and overturned in eastern Tunisia on Wednesday, the state-owned SNCFT rail company said. The accident occurred shortly after midnight (2300 GMT) when a train operating between Tunis and the southern city of Gabes derailed near Msaken, a town about 150 kilometres (95 miles) from the capital. The driver and a passenger were killed while 34 other passengers were injured, the SNCFT said. "An investigation has been opened to clarify the circumstances and causes of the accident and to determine who was responsible," it added. The accident comes 15 months after a collision between two trains in the south of the capital injured around 100 people. In December 2016, five people were killed and more than 50 injured in the same area when a train and a public bus collided. - AFP

AU starts reducing troops

MOGADISHU: The African Union's mission in Somalia said Wednesday it had begun reducing troop numbers in line with plans to eventually hand over security to the troubled country's national army. "The African Union Transition Mission in Somalia has started to drawdown in compliance with (UN Resolutions) which mandate ATMIS to drawdown 2,000 soldiers by the end of June 2023," it said in a statement. The move comes despite continued deadly attacks by Al-Shabaab in the face of a major offensive by pro-government forces backed by ATMIS against the jihadist group. Only last month, 54 Ugandan peacekeepers were killed when Al-Shabaab fighters stormed an AU base located southwest of the capital Mogadishu in one of the deadliest attacks since the offensive was launched last year. Al-Shabaab has been waging a bloody insurgency against the fragile government in Mogadishu for more than 15 years, carrying out attacks both in Somalia and neighboring countries. - AFP

Helicopter crashes in Croatia

ZAGREB: A military helicopter belonging to a foreign country crashed in central Croatia, the country's defence ministry said Wednesday, as one media reports suggested it was a Hungarian aircraft. Croatia's armed forces gave no details of casualties for the crash, which happened in a mountainous area near the central Adriatic town of Sibenik. They said only that the aircraft did not belong to its military. The military has mobilized a plane and helicopter to help survey the area where the helicopter went down. Regional broadcaster N1 reported that the helicopter belonged to the Hungarian military and had three people onboard. Croatia joined NATO in 2009 and frequently hosts military exercises with partner nations in the alliance. - AFP

Honduras death toll rises to 46

TEGUCIGALPA: The death toll from a fire and clashes between rival gangs at a women's prison in Honduras has risen to 46, the prosecutor's office said Wednesday, as the first bodies were handed over to mourning families. The violence occurred at a prison about 25 kilometers (15 miles) north of the capital Tegucigalpa on Tuesday. According to several accounts, members of a gang burst into an area housing rival group women, shot at them with heavy-caliber weapons, and set the place on fire. That part of the prison was "completely destroyed" in the blaze, Delma Ordenez, who represents inmates' relatives, told media. The CEFAS correctional facility in Tamara held about 900 inmates, she added. On Wednesday, the prosecutor's office upped the confirmed death toll from 41 to 46. It was still unclear if all the victims were inmates. A spokeswoman of the Forensic Medicine Directorate, Issa Alvarado, said 23 of the bodies had been identified and handed over to relatives. - AFP

Business

THURSDAY, JUNE 22, 2023

Crypto a 'flawed system': BIS

Central bank of central banks backs 'tokenization'

ZURICH: The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) said that decentralized cryptocurrencies are a "flawed system" and instead supported the development of a centralized alternative. The BIS, regarded as the central bank of central banks, backed "tokenization" or the conversion of money and other assets into digital tokens that can be traded on programmable platforms, saying it offers the promise of a "major leap" in the financial system.

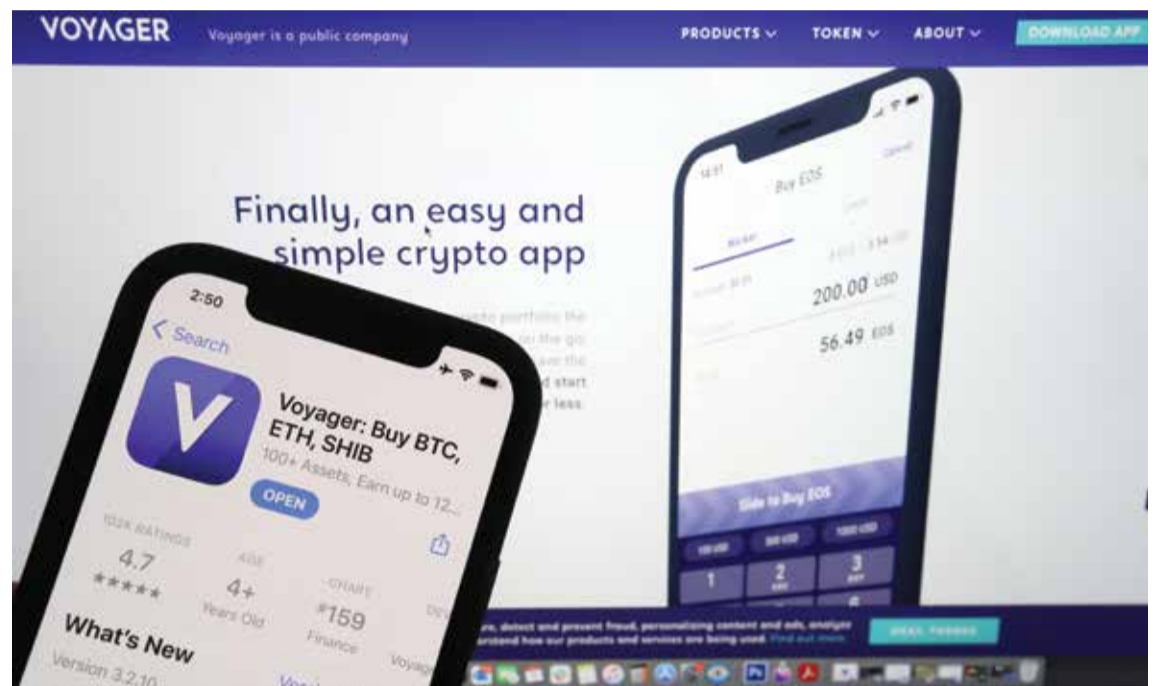
Central banks and regulators have mostly been sceptical if not downright hostile to cryptocurrencies, which were developed using digital blockchains, a technology that allowed for decentralized management of trading assets. Proponents of the technology lauded its decentralized structure and often anonymous transactions that took control out of the hands of government institutions like central banks. But central banks have begun to test the waters of the technology, with the BIS taking a leading role.

In an advance publication of its quarterly report, the BIS wholeheartedly embraced the underlying technology, but said its success in the financial sphere requires the trust imparted by it being backed by institutions like central banks. "Crypto and decentralized finance (DeFi) have offered a glimpse of tokenization's promise, but crypto is a flawed system that cannot take on the mantle of the

future of money," said the BIS. The cryptocurrency system "lacks the anchor of the trust in money provided by the central bank ... the implosion of the crypto universe in the past year shows that there is no substitute for the real thing," it added.

Quite aside from huge volatility of value, the crypto world has been hit repeatedly by scandal including the collapse of the FTX exchange platform last November which saw investors lose vast sums. Crashes of crypto platforms have regulators to harden their stance to protect consumers, with US authorities recently moving against two major exchanges recently for allegedly skirting securities laws. Although the BIS is pushing for a single registry of transactions what could ultimately emerge is a network of interconnected variants.

The report looks at several central bank studies, including Jura, brainchild of the Swiss national bank and the Bank of France to test cross-border operations using versions of digitized central bank issue currencies. The BIS called tokenization "the next logical step" in digital record keeping and asset transfer. "Tokenization could dramatically enhance the capabilities of the monetary and financial system by harnessing new ways for intermediaries to interact in serving end users, removing the traditional separation of messaging, reconciliation and settlement," it said. — AFP



SAN ANSELMO: In this photo illustration, the Voyager Digital app is visible on an iPhone screen in San Anselmo, California. — AFP



LE BOURGET: A cabin of an electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft developed by Brazilian company Eve Air mobility is displayed during the International Paris Air Show on June 20, 2023. — AFP

Flying taxis star at Paris Air Show

LE BOURGET: Barely making a buzz, a two-seat helicopter powered by an electric battery landed softly on the tarmac at the Paris Air Show after a 15-minute flight. Such futuristic "flying taxis" are among the star turns of this year's aerospace industry event as they move closer to the day when they can be used by the public. For the VoloCity made by German firm Volocopter, the next stop is the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, when it plans to ferry passengers across the French capital - more than a decade after its first test flight.

With a maximum airspeed of 110 kilometers per hour, the 18-rotor aircraft has room for a pilot and a passenger. "The good news is (that) it's very simple to fly. It has a very clever digital flight control system," said VoloCity pilot Paul Stone, who used to test fighter jets for Britain's Royal Navy. Experienced helicopter and airplane pilots will be trained to fly the VoloCity, he said.

"The irony is for helicopter pilots, they will have to unlearn many very clever skills and learn to fly an aircraft simply again, because it's much simpler to fly than, say, a helicopter," Stone said. Volocopter has been conducting test flights in the Paris region for more than a year as it preps for the Olympics. The company has been working on the project with Groupe ADP, which operates Paris airports, state-owned metro and bus operator RATP, and the Ile-de-France region government.

ADP chief executive Edward Arkwright said more than 20 flights spanning 200 kilometers have taken place. The air taxi will fly between Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport and nearby Paris-Le Bourget Airport as well as a heliport near Versailles and a "vertiport" installed on a barge in the Seine river in southeast Paris. Ile-de-France president Valerie Pécresse said the region will spend one million euros to build the barge. Volocopter is waiting for the greenlight from the European Union Aviation Safety Agency for permission to fly by spring 2024.

'Not easy market'

Volocopter has ploughed \$600 million into its air taxi - an expensive endeavour as it has yet to be made available to consumers. "It's a market not easy to enter, you have high investments," said Christian

Bauer, the company's chief financial officer. "It's a challenge but we're very close to the commercial phase," he said. The company has already received 300 pre-orders from private firms for its eVTOL (electric vertical take-off and landing) aircraft. In addition to selling aircraft, Volocopter will manage the routes with an app that will enable online reservations. Whether on not eVTOL aircraft become as easy to take as an Uber is an open question, but the aerospace industry is taking their potential impact seriously and for the first time they have their own dedicated space at the airshow.

Investment hasn't been lacking. A recent study by the Deloitte consultancy found the sector attracted 6 billion euros in investment in 2021, before falling to 2.7 billion in 2022 after the pandemic hit. "Four years ago it was still a very experimental sector. The market has consolidated a bit and today we have real prototypes and it is becoming a reality," said Jean-Louis Rassinoux, a senior partner at Deloitte responsible for the aerospace and defense sectors.

Orders are starting to flow in. On Monday, the French startup Ascendance Flight Technologies announced another 110 orders for its Atea eVTOL, taking the total to 505. The US firm Archer has 100 orders for its eVTOL by United Airlines worth more than a billion dollars which will be used as electric air taxis ferrying people from O'Hare International Airport and downtown Chicago. Its Midnight eVTOL, can carry four passengers in addition to a pilot.

"Midnight is a convenient product which can take you from the airport to city centre for a cost that is similar to a ride share in an Uber ... it can replace a ninety-minute commute by a five-minute commute," Archer's chief executive Adam Goldstein told AFP. An Uber ride from Charles de Gaulle airport in to central Paris typically costs around \$40. Electric motors help drastically reduce maintenance costs compared to regular helicopters, said Goldstein, who rejected the idea that air mobility should be reserved for the rich, a criticism often addressed at eVTOLs.

Less maintenance requirements not only reduces costs but allows for more flights per day, meaning the price for consumers is lower. The major aircraft manufacturers are making sure they don't miss out. Boeing has ploughed money into US startup Wisk Aero, which is presenting an pilotless eVTOL at the airshow. "If the autonomy doesn't work, we fail," said Wisk CEO Brian Yutko. "We don't have a plan B trying to figure out how to have an optional pilot. This venture is absolutely committed to certify the first autonomous aircraft." — AFP

Turkish arms makers' ambition on display at Paris Air Show

LE BOURGET: Turkish defense manufacturers are out in force at this week's Paris Air Show, the first in four years during which conflicts including Russia's invasion of Ukraine have spotlighted the country's now-coveted weapons. Most obvious is state-owned Turkish Aerospace (TAI), whose ample stand, fronted by a tarmac display of armed drones, helicopters and a recently-developed jet trainer, is just a few paces away from heavyweights like Airbus and Boeing at Le Bourget airport.

Dour-faced military delegations, including one group from Brazil, could be seen touring the aircraft while gawkers took pictures of the bomb- and missile-laden drones. As an arms exporter, Turkey "benefits from an image as a 'third way': politically less restrictive than Western systems, but more neutral than buying Russian, Chinese or Iranian while guaranteeing satisfactory quality," Leo Peria-Peigne, a researcher at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) wrote in a recent paper.

Among the country's most sought-after products are armed drones, driven in part by the TB-2 Bayraktar produced by privately-owned firm Baykar, which does not have a stand of its own at the airshow. The drone basked in the media spotlight last year for its role in the earliest stages of Ukraine's defence against the Russian invasion and has been bought by a dozen militaries according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies' Military Balance.

Like Baykar, TAI's unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) have in recent years been sold around the world including to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Algeria and Tunisia, according to data from arms trade watchdog SIPRI. For drones, "most of the interest nowadays comes from Africa," where countries want them to "fight terrorism", TAI drones chief Omer Yildiz tells AFP. Turkish UAVs had "proved to be very effective and efficient against terrorism," in Turkey's neighbor Syria, where Ankara's armed forces have engaged Kurdish fighters as well as the Islamic State group (IS), he adds.

Elsewhere in Africa, SIPRI data shows Niger and Chad have bought TAI's Hürkus-C turboprop trainer aircraft, which can also be used for ground attack missions. The firm is at pains to show off less belligerent uses of its UAVs, pointing out their use to reestablish mobile phone coverage in some areas following February's devastating earthquake. Their radars have also been used to spot Russian and

Ukrainian mines threatening commercial shipping in the Black Sea since Moscow's invasion of its neighbor last year.

'Aggressive subsidies'

TAI's Yildiz points to a scale model of the firm's latest iteration of its Anka drone, a jet-powered delta wing which bears a closer resemblance to an American stealth bomber than its gawky propeller-driven sister aircraft. With its larger payload and other enhanced capabilities, the drone is "aiming to take the air-to-ground missions of the F-16" American fighter jet, he says. Replacing Western technology with home-grown weaponry harks back to the origins of Turkey's domestic arms industry, which Ankara has pushed ever since the US' 1970s arms embargo over its invasion of northern Cyprus.

The sector's "increase in capability is ensured using a policy of very aggressive industrial subsidies, demanding high return on investment in the form of technology transfer, development of local production or partnerships with major Western industrial groups," IFRI's Peria-Peigne wrote. "From the 2000s, there has been an emphasis on aeronautical capabilities" and the Turkish armed forces' growing appetite for drones, he added.

That has only been stoked by the US' refusal to sell NATO ally Turkey F-35 fighter jets, after Ankara bought anti-aircraft systems from the bloc's antagonist Russia. At another Le Bourget stand, Rusen Komurcu, secretary-general of the Turkish Defense and Aerospace Industry Manufacturers' Association (SASAD), recites sectoral statistics by heart: 100,000 jobs and \$10 billion in revenues, of which \$4.4 billion in exports. Asked why the country's products are doing so well, he says simply that in Turkey "you find good material at a good price".

'More and more for export'

In a cosy room behind state-owned missile and rocket developer Roketsan's nearby stand bristling with mockups of guided explosives, marketing boss Mustafa Odabas agrees. "As we are developing new systems to meet the Turkish armed forces' needs, our sales are growing," he tells AFP. "We have the capability now" to supply "pinpoint accuracy missiles, cruise missiles, long-range missiles" that have drawn customers across the Middle East and especially the Gulf region, Odabas adds.

Sales of Baykar and TAI drones further afield have helped Roketsan win customers in Africa and even Europe, he says. In the complex global web of defense production, Roketsan is the sole manufacturer of some parts used in Raytheon's Patriot anti-air missiles recently delivered to Ukraine, just as TAI makes components for NATO allies' aircraft such as the Airbus A400M transporter. — AFP



LE BOURGET: Photo shows the Turkish drone (Unmanned aerial vehicle, UAV) TAI Anka displayed during the International Paris Air Show at the Paris-Le Bourget Airport. — AFP

Business

European businesses in China fighting post-COVID-19 blues

Regulatory headaches, politicized business climate hammer confidence

BEIJING: A faltering recovery, regulatory headaches and an increasingly politicized business climate are hammering European business confidence in China despite the country reopening its doors, according to a survey published on Wednesday. Two thirds of European companies operating in China say it has become more difficult to do business in the country, according to an annual survey of 570 companies by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China.

One in 10 are either planning to move their Asia headquarters out of the country or have already done so, said Jens Eskelund, president of the Chamber, with many choosing Singapore. "Eleven percent of our members have already shifted investments out of China," he added in a briefing to journalists. For nearly three years, the world's second-largest economy cut itself off with harsh lockdowns and travel restrictions intended to keep the COVID-19 pandemic at bay but which also disrupted factories and supply chains. Chinese authorities abruptly announced the end of zero-COVID policies last December, raising hopes of an economic recovery after a rapid, mas-

sive wave of infections. But six months on, the post-COVID economic rebound has faded and problems are mounting for foreign firms in China.

'Government interference'

Of the companies surveyed, 60 percent said China's increasingly politicized business environment was an issue. A vague anti-espionage law due to take effect in July, as well as the threat of war with Taiwan, which China considers a part of its territory, are among the top concerns. There is "more and more government interference in business" since the end of COVID curbs, the manager of a French industrial group operating in east China's Shandong province told AFP.

Officials often target foreign firms with stricter regulatory enforcement while giving Chinese companies more lenient treatment, he said. "Port charges are up 300 percent" from 2019, while local authorities have "signed favorable agreements with two Chinese groups that are setting up their factories next door," the manager said, asking to remain anonymous for fear of repercussions. His company would



BEIJING: European Chamber president Jens Eskelund (left) and Global Managing Director at Roland Berge Denis Depoux attend a press conference during the official launch of the European Business in China at the European Chamber's Beijing office on June 21, 2013. — AFP

keep their operations in China for now, as "the investment is too big". But the uncertainty of working in China "undermines the confidence of customers, investors, and the board of directors", he told AFP.

Tightening rules

The sudden about-turn on COVID also rattled the foreign business community. China has created the impression that it is a country where things are "ultimately uncontrollable, as it can decide to close down overnight", a Beijing-based executive at a European company told AFP, also requesting anonymity. Since the reopening, he has observed a "tightening of the rules" for foreign companies. "They asked us to put people from the Party in our company, but we refused," he said, referring to China's ruling Communist Party. More than half of the companies surveyed by the chamber of commerce said they did not expect any expansion of their activities in China this year. No new small and medium-sized enterprises from Europe have set up shop in the country since 2019, according to the chamber. But "despite the challenges, China is too big to be ignored", said Klaus Zenkel, the chamber's representative in southern China. "China is still the world's factory and will remain so," the Beijing-based executive told AFP. "The conditions for entering the Chinese market are becoming increasingly difficult." — AFP

Antitrust watchdog warns Google over car infotainment

FRANKFURT: Germany's antitrust watchdog on Wednesday criticized Google's in-car infotainment system, saying the bundling of services within it could give the US tech giant an unfair advantage over competitors. The Federal Cartel Office said it had warned Google's parent company Alphabet in a preliminary legal assessment that it "intends to prohibit" various "anti-competitive practices" linked to Google Automotive Services (GAS).

The GAS platform, licensed to vehicle manufacturers, comprises Google Maps, a version of the Google Play app store and the Google voice assistant. "In particular, we take a critical view of Google offering its services for infotainment systems as a bundle only, as this reduces its competitors' chances to sell their competing services as individual services," Andreas Mundt, head of the Federal Cartel Office, said in a statement. Google now has the opportunity to respond to the allegations, it added. The watchdog last year already opened an investigation into Google Maps, to determine whether restrictions on combining the platform with third-party map services were harming competition.

That probe is still ongoing. The Federal Cartel Office last year classed Alphabet as a company of "paramount significance for competition across markets", allowing for closer monitoring for possible abuse of its market position. Fellow tech behemoths Amazon, Apple and Meta have also been placed under increased scrutiny, made possible by new German legislation. The German Competition Act, which came into force in 2021, gives the Federal Cartel Office greater powers to clamp down on anti-competitive behavior by tech giants. — AFP



LONDON: Customers eat and drink outside bars in the Soho area of London. — AFP

High inflation hinders UK cost-of-living fight

LONDON: Britain's annual inflation rate unexpectedly remained at 8.7 percent in May, official data showed Wednesday, piling pressure on the Bank of England and government to act over a cost-of-living crisis. Markets had forecast a drop from April's level, while the BoE was already widely expected to raise interest rates again Thursday to combat an inflation rate which is the highest among G7 nations.

The latest data is a blow also for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who has made cutting inflation a priority for his Conservative government heading into a general election next year. Britain has endured months of strikes by workers demanding higher wages to help with the cost-of-living crisis. "We know how much high inflation hurts families and businesses across the country," finance minister Jeremy Hunt said following the latest consumer prices index data.

UK inflation had been expected to cool to 8.4 percent last month while core inflation, which strips out food and energy costs, unexpectedly jumped to 7.1 percent in May, said the Office for National Statistics. "Core inflation rose again, to its highest rate in over 30 years," noted Sarah Coles, head of personal finance at Hargreaves Lansdown. "Lower energy costs will eventually feed into prices across the

board, and we should see the pain at the supermarket subside a little in the coming months. "However, in an awful lot of cases this isn't going to bring prices down, they'll just get more expensive more slowly," she added.

Higher rates

Ipek Ozkardeskaya, senior analyst at Swissquote Bank, said the latest figures "warn that inflationary pressures in the UK are not under control and call for further rate hikes which will further squeeze the British households". The BoE has already lifted borrowing costs to a 15-year high at 4.5 percent in a bid to cool inflation. This is set to rise further Thursday following a regular policy meeting in what would be the central bank's 13th rate increase in a row. "We will not hesitate in our resolve to support the Bank of England as it seeks to squeeze inflation out of our economy," Hunt said.

The government wants to see inflation reduced to five percent by the end of the year, which would be around half the level at the start of 2023. "Despite a modest easing in food price inflation, headline inflation remains at high levels," noted Yael Selfin, chief economist at KPMG UK. "More worryingly for the Bank of England, strong core inflation suggests that firms may now be passing on the rising costs from higher wage bills to consumers." Despite easing to 18.4 percent in May, annual food price inflation remains close to an all-time high. At the same time, mortgage rates and rents are soaring, biting hard into disposable income for millions of Britons, as pay rises fail to keep pace with the annual inflation rate. — AFP

has expressed confidence about meeting its 2023 targets amid ongoing strong demand.

Lufthansa said the AirPlus sale was expected to "have a positive effect" on the group's operating profits and return on capital. The deal is expected to close in the first half of 2024. "By joining forces, SEB Kort and AirPlus will be well placed for the future corporate payments market, benefiting from complementary strengths, synergies and scale benefits," Johan Torgeby, president and CEO of SEB group, said in the same statement. — AFP



MUNICH: Airplanes of the German airline Lufthansa and other airlines are parked at a terminal at the Franz-Josef-Strauss airport in Munich, southern Germany. — AFP

Lufthansa to sell payments unit for 450 million euros

FRANKFURT: Lufthansa said Wednesday it would sell payments subsidiary AirPlus to Sweden's SEB Kort Bank for around 450 million euros (\$490 million), as part of the German group's efforts to refocus on its airline business. The sale of AirPlus, which provides corporate travel payment services, "is the next major step" in Lufthansa's strategy "to focus on its core business going forward," chief financial officer Remco Steenberg said in a statement.

It comes after Lufthansa in April announced the divestment of its LSG catering business, and last month agreed to buy a 41-percent stake in Italy's ITA Airways. "Selling two group companies and agreeing on a stake in ITA - all in less than three months - clearly shows our determination in executing this strategy," said Steenberg.

The Lufthansa group - one of Europe's biggest airlines - was brought to the brink of bankruptcy when the COVID-19 pandemic saw global air travel grind to a halt, and had to be bailed out by the German government in 2020. The group recovered swiftly once coronavirus curbs eased and demand for air travel bounced back. It returned to the black in 2022, posting a net profit of 791 million euros, and

Debt in the poorest countries: Problem in a nutshell

PARIS: The world's poorest countries are bearing the brunt of the world's debt crisis, at a time when they need more cash than ever to fight climate change. As top officials gather in Paris for the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact, AFP takes a look at the problem.

Countries with most debt

The poorest economies already had high debt levels before COVID-19 struck, forcing them to borrow more to shore up their economies during months-long lockdowns. Add in the war in Ukraine, which drove up global food and fuel prices, and the higher interest rates imposed by international banks to combat rising inflation, and they face a combustible mix. "It means that countries are much less able to refinance their debt or to borrow for infrastructure projects or climate change projects," Clemence Landers, a senior policy fellow at the Center for Global Development, told AFP.

The United Nations Development Program warned in March that 25 countries are spending more than a fifth of government revenues servicing external debt. Among the countries with the highest debt as a percentage of GDP in 2021, the report mentions Venezuela (240.5 percent), Sudan (181.9 percent), Eritrea (176.25 percent), Lebanon (150.6 percent), Cape Verde (142.3 percent), Suriname (125.7 percent) and the Maldives (124.8 percent).

How much do they owe?

Over the past decade the debt of developing countries has more than doubled to \$9 trillion in 2021, according to the World Bank's most recent international debt report.

Who are biggest lenders?

The Paris Club of major creditor governments was formed in 1956 to find ways for heavily-indebted countries to avoid being in default. Its 22 members, all advanced economies, include the US, Japan and most of western Europe. But in recent years China has overtaken the traditional creditor nations as the world's biggest lender. In Africa particularly it has emerged as a bailout force to rival Western institutions like the International Monetary Fund. India and Saudi Arabia are among the other new creditor nations. But most of the debt of the poorest countries is now in the hands of private banks, the World Bank reported in December.

Debt affecting climate crisis

High debt levels make it harder for developing countries to find the \$2 trillion- \$2.8 trillion (1.8 -2.6 trillion euros) they need to spend per year until 2030 to meet their commitments on climate change, according to the European Commission's expert group on sustainable finance. African countries are among the most exposed to the impacts of climate change, in the form of worsening droughts and floods, but are responsible for only around three percent of global CO2 emissions, former UN chief Ban Ki-moon said last year.

What can be done?

Efforts to address the issue have focused on global debt restructuring. In 2020, the G20 group of major economies, which includes China, agreed on a common framework to restructure the debt of poor countries buckling under the impact of COVID. The process was launched after Zambia defaulted on its foreign debt estimated at \$17.3 billion. But critics say the process has been too slow, with China particularly accused of dragging its feet. Zambia, which has been in negotiations about its debt for two years, hopes to finally secure a deal this week. — AFP

VW targets sales growth powered by US and China

FRANKFURT: German car giant Volkswagen said Wednesday it was targeting sales growth of five to seven percent annually until 2027, as the group bets heavily on electric cars and growth in China and the United States. "While most revenues are still generated in Europe, the growth engines of the future will be China and North America," CEO Oliver Blume told reporters in a call ahead of an investor meeting. "We want to grow our sales by in average five to seven percent per year until 2027," Blume said.

Last year, the 10-brand group - which includes Porsche, Audi and Skoda - reported revenues of nearly 280 billion euros (\$306 billion). VW is also aiming for a higher return on sales of between nine and 11 percent by 2030, compared with a profit margin of 8.1 percent in 2022. A wide-ranging cost-cutting plan as well as a new strategy handing the group's individual brands more autonomy are expected to help achieve the new goals. But a key focus will be on the electric transition, as the global battle for dominance in the EV market heats up. VW announced in March that it planned to invest more than 120 billion euros in electrification and digitization projects. In China, VW has already fallen behind local manufacturers of electric cars like BYD. — AFP

Business

IEA: Climate goals need clean energy surge in Global South

Speeding the transition from dirty to clean energy

PARIS: Financing for clean energy in developing and emerging economies excluding China must increase seven-fold within a decade if global warming is to be capped at tolerable levels, the International Energy Agency said Wednesday. To keep Paris climate temperature goals in play, annual investment for non-fossil fuel energy in these countries will need to jump from \$260 billion to nearly \$2 trillion, the intergovernmental agency said in a report. "Financing clean energy in the emerging and developing world is the fault line of reaching international climate goals," IEA executive director Fatih Birol told journalists in a briefing Tuesday.

The report comes on the eve of the two-day Summit for a New Global Financing Pact in Paris, which seeks to galvanize

support for revamping the mid-20th century architecture governing financial flows from rich to developing nations. Speeding the transition from dirty to clean energy, and helping the Global South cope with and prepare for devastating climate impacts are high on the summit agenda. Virtually all of the nearly 800 million people lacking electricity and the 2.4 billion without access to clean cooking fuels are in poor and emerging countries.

Under current policy trends, one third of the rise in energy use in these nations over the next decade will be met by burning fossil fuels, the main driver of global warming, the IEA warned. "Clean energy investments is increasing gradually — this is a good news," said Birol. "The bad news is that more than 90 percent of that

increase in clean energy since the Paris Agreement in 2015 comes from advanced economies and China." "Only 10 percent comes from the emerging and developing countries," he added. "We need to change this trend."

Solar is cheapest

With China included in the calculation, private and public money pouring into renewables and other forms of carbon neutral energy will need to more than triple from \$770 billion in 2022 to about \$2.5 trillion per year by the early 2030s. Investment must remain at those levels until mid-century to help keep Earth's average surface temperature "well below" two degrees Celsius, and 1.5C if possible, the Paris climate treaty's binding and aspira-

tional targets, respectively. The potential for rapidly ramping up renewable energy is there, according to the report. At least 40 percent of the global solar radiation reaching the planet lands on sub-Saharan Africa, and solar energy is now the cheapest source of electricity generation across almost the entire world.

And yet, nearly ten times more solar PV capacity was installed last year in China — some 100 GW — than across the entire African continent. Sunny sub-Saharan Africa generates less solar electricity than the Netherlands, Birol noted. According to the report, two-thirds of the finance for clean energy projects in emerging and developing economies excluding China will need to come from the private sector. Today's \$135 billion in

annual private financing for clean energy in these economies must rise to about a trillion a year within the next decade.

To meet both climate and sustainability goals, clean energy investment in emerging and developing economies should be concentrated in four areas, according to the IEA. Just over a third should go into low-emissions generation, mainly solar and wind. Another third is needed to improve efficiency in end-use sectors, such as cooling and electric transport. A quarter is required for electricity grids and storage capacity, while just under 10 percent goes to low-emission fuels and so-called carbon, capture and storage (CCS), which removes CO2 from the exhaust of gas or coal power plants and heavy industry. — AFP

Volvic on front line of France's new water fears

VOLVIC: The public fountains in Volvic, the home of one of the world's most famous mineral waters, have been turned off. Just down the road from the bottling factory at the foot of the old volcanic hills of central France, streams once powerful enough to drive flour mills are drying up and villages are under a hosepipe ban. Campaigners such as Sylvie de Larouziere, head of the water conservation group PREVA, point the finger at the Volvic plant. "It seems like it's always getting bigger," she complained.

A local aristocratic trout farmer is suing the company, owned by French multinational Danone, after a stream that fed his 17th-century fish ponds abruptly dried up. The Puy de Dome region is sometimes called the "water tower" of France, with heavy and reliable rainfall meaning farmers downstream used to slosh around in their fields because the soil was so wet. But those days are long gone. In early May with supplies "abnormally weak", authorities imposed a hosepipe ban and outlawed the filling of swimming pools in 31 nearby districts, hitting some 60,000 people.

Volvic's public fountains were switched off and villagers fear water cuts this summer. "It was a shock," said Maria-Louisa Borges, a retired cleaner who has lived in Volvic for 50 years. "We're just coming out of winter." The restrictions, affecting somewhere so famous for its abundant water, underline the worsening strains on supplies in France and the competing demands for an increasingly rare resource.

Two-thirds of the country's water tables are below normal, Environment Minister Christophe Bechu said last week as he voiced "very serious concerns". But it also raises questions about the future of France's enormous mineral water industry, already decry by environmentalists for the hundreds of billions of plastic bottles it produces annually. France is both the world's biggest exporter of bottled water and the home of its most famous brands from Volvic to Evian, Vittel to Perrier.

'Critical state'

For decades, experts have been warning about the risk to global fresh water supplies posed by climate change, population growth, and over-consumption. Problems have been gathering in France, though mostly beyond the public eye. But this winter, the country went a record 32 days without rainfall, from January 21 to February 21. Even villages in the foothills of the snow-topped Pyrenees mountains are having to be supplied by truck.



This file photo taken on May 5, 2021 shows a general view of the plant of the French mineral water company Volvic, in Volvic. The public fountains in Volvic, the home of one of the world's most famous mineral waters, have been turned off. — AFP

The dry winter followed punishing heat last summer with months of drought and high temperatures parching even the normally lush Alps and rendering mighty rivers like the Rhine unpassable for barges.

President Emmanuel Macron said it spelled "the end of abundance". "Climate change is adding to an already degraded situation, with long droughts, heatwaves but also winter droughts," former French environment minister and a Green MP, Delphine Batho, told AFP. "That's leading to a critical state for drinking water." In a sign of conflicts experts anticipate in future, activists opposed to farmers building rainwater-capture facilities in Batho's constituency in western France clashed violently with security forces in March. Two protesters were left in a coma.

Rain shortfall?

No blows are being traded in Volvic, but fears are growing. Similar tensions are playing out in the eastern Vosges region, where Nestle-owned Vittel is accused of over-exploiting the water table. Other disputes between water companies and locals have occurred as far afield as Mexico, California and Fiji. "Sending water to the other side of the world while we die of thirst here? It bothers me," said Jose da Silva, a 69-year-old who worked for 30 years at the Volvic plant. "They try to claim it's not the same source (as for the drinking water), but I'm not convinced," he told AFP.

The Volvic brand has been around since 1935, the water naturally filtered through a granite-lined volcanic basin in a process that takes five years, according to the company. Pumping has rocketed from around 200,000 liters a year in 1950 to 1.7 billion liters in 2020, according to its own figures. Yet Volvic is exempt from the latest water restrictions imposed on locals. The company,

however, has pledged to respect a five-percent reduction of its extraction limit of 2.8 billion litres. Given that it is currently withdrawing less than the limit, campaigners say the pledge makes no difference.

But the company insists it only uses 22 percent of the local water, with 50 percent taken by the public water system. "Undertaken downstream from the drinking water source, the activities of Volvic do not have an impact on the availability in the drinking water system of the area," it said in a statement. The local government prefect's office, which sets the annual quota for Volvic, also denied any link between the company and the water restrictions. It blamed a shortfall in rain, saying it was 24 percent below average in 2022. The water use restrictions were "preventative and aim to reduce consumption in order to avoid bigger supply tensions", it said.

Legal fight

But PREVA and another local group, Marsat, suspect the six deep wells used by Danone are drawing down the level of Volvic's aquifer. Trout farmer Edouard de Feligonde has spent four years suing the French state for 32 million euros (\$35 million) and taking Volvic to court to recover losses caused by his water source drying up.

He is confident an expert report ordered by a judge last year will validate his findings that show Danone is to blame. "At the moment, authorities are trying to make us believe that the water shortages are linked to the general problem of drought. It's false," he told AFP. He said many people are scared to speak out as Danone is by far the biggest local employer, with about 1,000 people on its payroll. "I'm not the only one affected, but I'm the only one to have the means to fight back," he said. — AFP

Stocks dip as Powell warns of rate hikes

LONDON: Stock markets fell Wednesday as investors fretted about stubbornly high inflation in Britain and warnings from US Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell that further interest rate hikes were likely. In written testimony before testifying in Congress later Wednesday, Powell said "nearly all" Fed policymakers agreed on the need to "raise interest rates somewhat further by the end of the year." The US central bank last week held rates steady after 10 straight increases, but signalled more hikes could come to bring prices under control.

Investors are equally eager to hear his take on the near global banking crisis in March triggered in the aftermath of the collapse of a number of regional lenders. Wall Street was lower in morning deals while London and euro-zone markets dipped after data showed UK inflation remained unchanged at 8.7 percent in May. Markets had expected consumer prices to cool but now fear the Bank of England could go for a bigger rate hike than previously thought at a meeting on Thursday to tame inflation.

"The impact of further monetary tightening on the British economy is likely to hinder economic activity and ultimately cause a contraction," said Ricardo Evangelista, senior analyst at ActivTrades. The anxiety in the United States and Europe follows disappointment across market floors this week with Beijing's moves to try and revive the Chinese economy. The People's Bank of China reduced its benchmark five-year rate by 10 basis points on Tuesday, less than the 15 points expected.

Uncertainty over the Chinese economy, which continues to show signs of weakness as the post-COVID rebound fades, also weighed on the yuan, which on Wednesday briefly fell past 7.2 per dollar for the first time since November. "Developments in China... continue to point to a slower-than-predicted post-pandemic recovery in the world's second-largest economy," added Evangelista. — AFP

June 30: Deadline to deposit, qualify for AlDanah prize

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced that the last chance to deposit and qualify for the AlDanah Millionaire prize of KD 100,000 is June 30, 2023 — noting that the winner will be announced on October 12, 2023, in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Ernst & Young. As part of its continuous efforts to reward customers for their savings, and to encourage a culture of saving in society, Gulf Bank will hold a semi-annual draw to announce the winner of the KD 1 million on July 13, 2023.

The AlDanah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's AlDanah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million, and a grand draw prize that has recently been increased from KD 1.5 million to KD 2 million. To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an AlDanah account at any time, and to increase their chances of winning, account holders must either maintain the minimum deposit amount of KD 200 or increase their AlDanah savings.

The higher the balance in an account, the more chances are accumulated over time. Opening an AlDanah account is also easier than ever, with customers being able to open their accounts online through Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking services. It is noteworthy that September 30, 2023, is the last chance to deposit and participate in the annual grand draw prize of KD 2 million, which will be held on January 18, 2024, in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Ernst & Young.

The AlDanah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank is the only bank in Kuwait that creates two millionaires annually. One of the many advantages of the AlDanah account, is being the only account in Kuwait that transfers the customers' chances of winning from the previous year to the next, as part of a program that rewards customers for their loyalty to Gulf Bank.

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.



NEW YORK: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (right) and SpaceX, Twitter and electric car maker Tesla CEO Elon Musk meet in New York. — AFP

Musk, Modi discuss investment in India

NEW DELHI: Twitter owner and Tesla CEO Elon Musk said Wednesday he discussed potential "significant investments" in India after meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the United States. Musk, one of the world's richest men, said that Modi was "pushing us to make significant investments in India, which is something that we intend to do, and are trying to figure out the right timing". New Delhi has rolled out the red carpet for top global investors and companies — including tech giants like Google and Apple — in the last few years.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, many companies have expanded their presence in India as a way to cut their supply-chain dependence on China and tap into the South Asian nation's huge domestic market. Modi, who saw the tech billionaire shortly after arriving from India on a state visit, said it had been "great meeting" Musk in New York. "We had multifaceted conversa-

tions on issues ranging from energy to spirituality," Modi tweeted on Wednesday, a day before he is due to be hosted by US President Joe Biden for a state dinner.

Musk said he was a "fan" of Modi. "I am actually incredibly excited about the future of India. India has more promise than any large country in the world," he added. Musk has faced questions from free speech activists over Twitter reportedly caving into the Indian government's demands for takedowns of critical posts. Critics accuse India's government of democratically backsliding, including by curtailing free speech and not doing enough to check attacks on journalists and minorities.

Last week, former Twitter chief executive Jack Dorsey said the platform he founded had come under sustained pressure from Indian officials during his tenure. Indian information technology minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar responded that Dorsey's claim was an "outright lie", while also accusing Twitter of repeated violations of local laws. Twitter said last year that India ranked fourth globally in the number of requests made by a government to remove content — behind Japan, Russia and Turkey. — AFP



Models present creations for the Louis Vuitton Menswear Spring-Summer 2024 show.



PHARRELL BRINGS GOSPEL PARTY TO PARIS WITH FASHION DEBUT

US Louis Vuitton fashion designer and singer Pharrell Williams (center) acknowledges the audience at the end of the Louis Vuitton Menswear Spring-Summer 2024 show as part of the Paris Fashion Week on the Pont Neuf, central Paris, on June 20, 2023.

Musician-turned-designer Pharrell Williams took over the oldest bridge in Paris, packed it with celebrities and turned it into a pumping gospel nightclub as he made his historic debut for Louis Vuitton on Tuesday. Rihanna, Beyonce, Jay-Z, LeBron James and Zendaya were among the many stars lined up along the Pont Neuf in central Paris, which had a golden carpet rolled along its entire length.

here," said Williams ahead of his debut as menswear director for Louis Vuitton. "It's not lost on me that a lot of people died, a lot of people lost their lives and suffered... to get us to these positions."

The show itself played it fairly safe, drawing on Louis Vuitton's familiar check patterns and leather work, adding in some pixelated patterns and some military-style camouflage. The classic bags came out in primary colors and a couple

of souped-up karts even made their way down the catwalk carrying piles of classic Vuitton luggage.

The soundtrack made its way from stately classical music to full-blown gospel disco. And there was a special treat for guests and people leaning out of windows along the Seine when Jay-Z gave

a concert on the bridge at the end of the night, with a cameo by Pharrell himself.

'Waking up'
Williams is the second successive black American to take over menswear for Louis Vuitton – a sign of how hip-hop culture has come to dominate global fashion. He spoke to AFP as the final preparations were being made for the show, which saw a whole stretch of the

historically, it's kind of made it easy when it comes to taste because we bring such a striking juxtaposition. "It's striking when you see LeBron James wearing something, when you hear Jay-Z's lyrics, when you see and hear Beyonce, the energy and voice."

Virgil's energy
Williams, 50, also spoke about his predecessor Virgil Abloh, a former Kanye West collaborator who breathed new life into Louis Vuitton with his hip-hop-infused style, but died tragically young from cancer in 2021. "I collaborated with him on a couple of things," said Williams. "Spiritually, his energy is very much still here."

Many labels have moved away from the big-name designers of the past like Jean Paul Gaultier and Karl Lagerfeld, preferring more discreet professionals. But Louis Vuitton, which made more than €20 billion (\$22 billion) in revenue last year, is going the other way, putting a full-blown celebrity in charge.

It follows its last show in January when a performance by Spanish pop superstar Rosalia was almost more of a focus than the clothes on the runway. It is "consistent with LVMH CEO Bernard Arnault's idea that Louis Vuitton does not sell handbags but sells culture", said bank HSBC in a briefing note. - AFP



French actor Omar Sy and his daughter Selly pose for a photocall.



Formula One's British driver Lewis Hamilton poses for a photocall.



British supermodel and singer Naomi Campbell poses for a photocall.



A model presents a creation for the Louis Vuitton Menswear Spring-Summer 2024 show.



Models present creations for the Louis Vuitton Menswear Spring-Summer 2024 show.



A guest holds a Louis Vuitton airplane-shaped handbag.

The multi-faceted artist told AFP before the show that he was conscious of the traumatic history behind the current dominance of black culture that has allowed him to take over at the world's most lucrative fashion label. "We wish that our culture and our people didn't have to suffer so hard in order to get us

of souped-up karts even made their way down the catwalk carrying piles of classic Vuitton luggage.

The soundtrack made its way from stately classical music to full-blown gospel disco. And there was a special treat for guests and people leaning out of windows along the Seine when Jay-Z gave

riverbank cordoned off.

"I think these corporations are waking up, slowly but surely, I think they're understanding that we have flavor and that we have something really interesting to offer," Williams said. "Historically and factually, it's been whitewashed (but) while that's been tough on us



Lights from rooftops illuminate the night sky as guests stand on the Pont Neuf during the Louis Vuitton Menswear Spring-Summer 2024 show.



Artist Shawn Corey Carter aka Jay-Z performs during a free show on the Pont Neuf after the Louis Vuitton Menswear Spring-Summer 2024 show.

Hot new fashion talent Akyol makes 'magic with little'



Turkish-born French designer Burc Akyol sews in his studio in Paris on June 19, 2023. — AFP

While the fashion world braced for the celeb juggernaut of Pharrell Williams' first show in Paris on Tuesday, a young designer was making his own modest splash with a debut below his own home. Burc Akyol might not yet have the means to shut down the oldest bridge in Paris like Williams was doing for his Louis Vuitton show, but for fashionistas in the know, he is just as exciting a proposition.

The 34-year-old's first show as part of the official Paris Fashion Week roster continued his unique blend of Eastern and Western styles that has already seduced the likes of Cate Blanchett and

Cardi B — both of whom have worn his daring dresses. "We're not Vuitton, but it doesn't matter, maybe we will be one day," Akyol told AFP as he put the final touches to the show.

For now, his Paris apartment doubles as his workshop, with a bedroom cluttered with designs. His show took place, as did his previous ones, in the courtyard of his building in the 8th district of Paris. "I find it important to bring my guests to my house, it's very home-spun," he said. "We manage to make magic out of very little," he added.

One of his flagship dresses is an "all black, very simple lace", he said as an

example. "We just inserted gold threads into it to be able to make it something special and give it a second life." Like many of his generation, he sees gender divisions in clothing as pointless and his collection is for both sexes. He chose to present during menswear week because it is currently getting more attention, and is better timed for sales. "Clothing has no gender," he said.

Austere and sexy, Akyol's outfits reflect his mixed identity. "I was born in France to Turkish parents. When I was outside my parents' apartment, I became French... and when I was home, I ate and lived like a Turk." The son of

a tailor, he grew up in public housing in Dreux, an hour outside Paris, with "many immigrants". "We had a desire for beauty," he said.

He learned to sew at home where the whole family "patched clothes on Saturday nights while watching TV". Though he grew his passion watching fashion shows on TV, he is happy things have moved online, which is more favorable to emerging talents. "We're no longer forced to depend on the big media," he said. — AFP

Lifestyle



The interior of the former Roman Catholic Cathedral of Saint Louis de Carthage (Acropolis) in Carthage.



A tourist poses for a photo with a statue fragment on the esplanade of the Carthage Museum in Carthage on June 20, 2023. — AFP photos



Tunisian architect Ghada Jellali gives a briefing about one of the renovation plans.



Tourists visit the esplanade of the Carthage Museum.



Renovation plans for the Acropolis and Carthage Museum are displayed.

Tunisia's Carthage museum gives preview of expanded renovation

A temporary exhibition will give visitors a sneak peak of Tunisia's expanded plans to renovate the shuttered national museum at the world heritage site in Carthage, Rome's ancient rival. The museum's rich collection comprises more than 100,000 pieces from the ancient city's Punic, Roman, and Byzantine eras to the 20th century. However, it has been closed since 2018

because of structural instability and the pieces will not be on display before the museum's official reopening scheduled for the end of 2026.

But until October, history lovers will be able to view a dozen of the museum's mosaics and immerse themselves in the renovation plans entrusted to German firm Bez+Kock Architekten. They are the winners of the "very first international

architecture competition ever organized in Tunisia", Ghada Jellali, an architect working on the museum's renovation, told AFP on Tuesday.

"At the onset of the project in 2019, it was only planned to renovate two rooms for 3.5 million euros (\$3.8 million), but an assessment showed that it was impossible without addressing the rest of the buildings," Jellali said. With European

Union support, the project budget has climbed to €12 million, along with other foreign funding dedicated to the development of tourism and crafts at the Acropolis of Byrsa, the ruins of an ancient citadel which the museum was built upon in the northern suburbs of Tunis.

Work on the site is expected to start in June 2025. Pauline Lecoite of Expertise France, a French public agency

coordinating the technical work, says the site will be "rid of buildings from the '90s devoid of historical interest and in an advanced state of disrepair". At the project's completion, the museum will have three times more exhibition space (2,200 sq m) than before. — AFP

Golden tip fixed atop Paris obelisk

Though few onlookers have ever noticed, the famed golden-topped obelisk at the center of Place de la Concorde in Paris has stood without a tip for nearly 200 years. Until Tuesday. In a ceremony attended by VIPs, a trainee craftworker showed no signs of vertigo as she placed a new gold-plated point atop the 3,000-year-old monument, which was gift to France from Egypt in 1830. The obelisk from the Luxor Temple "arrived in Paris without



Workers atop cherry-pickers give finishing touch-ups atop the newly restored Obelisk of Luxor shortly before a ceremony to install the golden tip at its peak on Place de la Concorde in central Paris on June 20, 2023. — AFP photos

ing the obelisk, a process which began last year, decided to correct the anomaly. The new tip is made from gold-plated steel and was crafted by a specialized metalworking company near Versailles — the Ateliers d'art Saint-Jacques and the Fonderie de Coubertin — under

the supervision of the culture ministry. Egypt gifted the 23-m obelisk to France in recognition of work by French Egyptologist Jean-Francois Champollion who deciphered hieroglyphs for the first time. — AFP



Standing atop a cherry-picker, Egypt's ambassador to France Alaa Youssef (left) and French Culture Minister Rima Abdul-Malak (second left) look on as Ateliers Saint-Jacques and Fonderie De Coubertin craftsperson apprentice Joanna Simon (second right) places the refurbished golden tip on top of the newly restored Obelisk of Luxor.



The golden tip adorning the top of the newly restored Obelisk of Luxor is seen shortly after its installation ceremony across the river from the Eiffel Tower (seen far rear).

its tip which had been eroded over centuries," French conservation expert Isabelle Morin-Loutrel explained to AFP.

"The hieroglyphs and bas-reliefs (sculptures) at Egyptian tombs show the obelisks as pointed. We don't know how long the Luxor Obelisk has been without a tip, but probably for a very long time," she added. Workers in charge of restor-

Tattoo artists ink masterpieces at Rembrandt house

Visitors to the museum of Rembrandt's house in Amsterdam will have the chance to get their own permanent work by the 17th century master this week. But they should expect to have more skin in the game than most art lovers, as the Schiffmacher and Veldhoen team of tattoo artists have set up their studio in the Dutch painter's former home for a week. They are offering visitors the chance to have their very own work by Rembrandt (1606-1669) inked on their skin, until Sunday, at what they call the "Poor Man's Rembrandt project".

"I think it's a fantastic opportunity to bring what was the lowbrow into the highbrow world — or the other way around!" Dutch tattoo artist Henk Schiffmacher said. The 71-year-old, known as "Hanky Panky", says he has tattooed rock royalty during his illustrious career, including band members from the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Pearl Jam, and Motorhead.

Lilian Ramcharan, the first to get her tattoo, smiles as he inks her shoulder blade with a famous drawing of a 17th century elephant, following one of Rembrandt's works. The Hansken elephant, now carried by Lilian, had travelled through the fairs and gardens of Europe and been painted by Rembrandt in Amsterdam. There are also windmills, self-portraits, characters from works and even the signature of the painter of the Night Watch. "I felt very honored... to be the first one and also by Henk himself," says Ramcharan, 36.

Around 90 people have made appointments for tattoos, which cost between 100 and 250 euros and the museum also offers walk-in time slots in the Rembrandthuis, where the artist and his students worked. "The end result is a work of art that you carry with you for life," according to the museum. "It's the peak of your career you could almost say," adds tattoo artist Tycho Veldhoen. — AFP



Dutch tattoo artist Henk Schiffmacher poses in front of some of Rembrandt's drawings at The Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam on June 19, 2023. — AFP photos



A tattoo artist inks a design on a customer during a session at The Rembrandt House Museum.



Tattoo designs resembling Rembrandt's drawings available for customers to choose from.



Istanbul's ancient shoreline gets ultramodern museum

This photograph taken on June 20, 2023 shows the exterior of the new building of the Istanbul Modern Art Museum looking towards the Galata tower, in Istanbul, on June 20, 2023. - AFP photos

Istanbul's museum of modern art moved Tuesday into a futuristic building overlooking the Bosphorus Strait designed by the Italian-born architect of London's Shard skyscraper and the Pompidou Centre in Paris. The

cruise ships that again clutter the busy strait. The museum's new three-storey reflective steel building, featuring a transparent ground floor made of reinforced glass, is connected to the new Galata Port — a sleek amalgam of restaurants, bars and retail stores overlooking a waterfront boardwalk.

Its design was inspired by the glittering waters and light reflections of the Bosphorus, architect Renzo Piano told reporters. "This museum building is like a creature of the sea that has jumped out from the waters of the Bosphorus," said Piano, whose other works include the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. "Every time you have water, it is great to make a building because water makes things beautiful," he said. "Istanbul

is a place of water. We have water everywhere."

Turkey's art scene, funded mostly by wealthy businessmen and philanthropists, flourished during an economic boom that accompanied the early years of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's rule. But Erdogan, who extended his two decades in power until 2028 in a general election last month, has come under fire for curtailing the freedom of expression, developing a troubled relationship with artists.

'It's forever'

Spanning 10,500 sq m, the museum offers a space for exhibitions, film screenings and a permanent collection of more than 280 works by Turkey's most important modern and contempo-



The new building of the Istanbul Modern Art Museum near the Bosphorus shoreline.

rary artists. It is currently featuring works by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, a photographer, screenwriter and actor whose "Winter Sleep" won the Palme d'Or in Cannes in 2014. The exhibition consists of 22 large portraits taken by Ceylan in his travels to places such as India, Georgia, China and Russia.

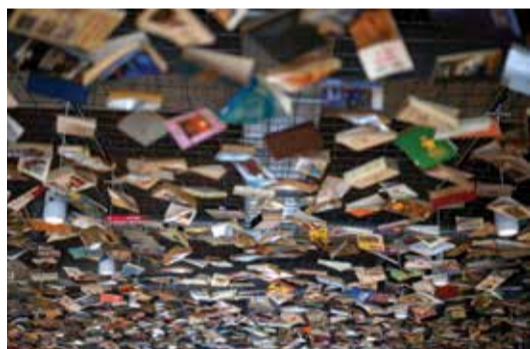
Piano approached his latest creation knowing the pressures of erecting a building that could reshape both the city and its artistic direction for future generations. "People must understand that it is a public art, making architecture, so it is different from many other sorts of art," Piano said. "It's forever," he added. "Especially when you make a building like a museum."

The building stands on a grid of steel-braced concrete columns that are meant to be resistant to major earthquakes. The city of 16 million people straddles an active fault line, suffering a catastrophic quake in 1999 that claimed more

than 17,000 lives. Piano said architecture was about making lasting structures. "Look at the building, it's solidly built, and the solidity is part of the semantic expression of the building: solid and flying." — AFP



Italian-born architect Renzo Piano poses for photographs before a press conference at Istanbul Modern Art Museum.



Books hang from the ceiling at the Istanbul Modern Art Museum.

museum's return to its old but re-invented location marks the latest attempt by Turkey's cultural capital to infuse its iconic waterfront — lined with graceful imperial palaces and mosques — with a more futuristic feel.

Established in 2004, the Istanbul Modern in 2018 moved out of a rustic building that once served as a customs warehouse. The city then launched a massive regeneration project that rebuilt a long stretch of the European side of the Bosphorus shoreline, making it more accessible to both Istanbulites and



Visitors sit in a gallery at the Istanbul Modern Art Museum.



A visitor looks at an artwork.



Visitors explore a gallery.



Sports

Cummins leads Australia to thrilling win in Ashes opener

England left to rue series of missed chances

BIRMINGHAM: Australia captain Pat Cummins led his side to a dramatic two-wicket win over England in the first Test at Edgbaston on Tuesday. The Ashes holders were 209-7, still 72 runs shy of a victory target of 281, when fast bowler Cummins came in to bat after first-innings century-maker Usman Khawaja fell for a painstaking 65. And after Alex Carey was out to leave Australia 227-8, the tourists still required another 54 more runs.

But Cummins and Nathan Lyon's unbroken stand of 55 saw Australia home in a match to rival the tension of England's two-run win in a celebrated 2005 Ashes clash at Edgbaston. Cummins, who finished on 44 not out, hit the winning boundary when he edged Ollie Robinson to third man where a diving Harry Brook knocked the ball over the rope.

Lyon, whose missed run out contributed to England's stunning one-wicket win at Headingley in the drawn 2019 Ashes series in England, was 16 not out. Victory left World Test champions Australia 1-0 up in the five-match series as they bid for a first Ashes campaign win in England in 22 years. Cummins had promised Australia would stick with their traditional game rather than get caught up in the hype surrounding England's aggressive 'Bazball' approach.

"One of the beauties of this series is the totally contrasting styles," Cummins said after the nail-biting win. "We both played to our strengths. You don't necessarily know which style is better but it makes for good entertainment." Australia's method was exemplified by player of the match Khawaja, with Cummins saying: "He showed composure in both innings, playing at his own pace, playing his own method and didn't get caught up in anything else." This was just England's third defeat in 14 Tests under captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum.

England miss chances

England were left to rue a series of missed chances throughout the match, none more so than when Lyon was dropped on just two by Stokes at square leg, after the skipper failed to hold a one-handed diving chance from a pull off Stuart Broad as he hit the turf. Stokes had made a surprising decision to declare before stumps on the first day at 393-8. But the unrepentant all-rounder told the BBC: "Scoring 390 and then being able to declare sends a message to Australia about how we want to take them on..."

"We've managed to stand up to Australia and being in control for most of it makes it hurt a little bit more that we've lost, but there are four more games left." After Tuesday's morning session was washed out by rain, Australia resumed on 107-3 with veteran seamer Broad having removed Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith, the world's two top-ranked Test batsmen, late on Monday's fourth day. But Khawaja was still there on 34 not out as the 36-year-old opener became only the second Australian, after Kim Hughes at Lord's in 1980, to bat on all five days of a Test.

After nightwatchman Scott Boland fell to Broad, spinner Moeen Ali, struggling with a finger injury, struck on his Birmingham home ground. Moeen's first ball of the day, a rank long hop, was pulled for four by Travis Head. But his fifth was a classic off-spinning delivery to the left-hander, taking the outside edge on its way to Joe Root at slip as a near capacity crowd erupted in celebration. Australia reached tea at 183-5, but were quickly reduced to 192-6 when Robinson had all-rounder Cameron Green (28) chopping on to end a stand of 49 with Khawaja.

Meanwhile Stokes, capable of swinging the old ball at a lively pace, brought himself on to bowl as the floodlights came on. Stokes struck when he had Kha-



BIRMINGHAM: Australia's Pat Cummins gets hit by a ball, thrown towards the stumps by England's captain Ben Stokes (unseen), as he ran to his crease on day five of the first Ashes cricket Test match between England and Australia at Edgbaston in Birmingham. — AFP

waja, who made 141 in Australia's first innings, chopping on to end a 197-ball stay. Part-time off-spinner Root dropped two tough and caught bowled chances offered by Carey and Cummins. But he made no

mistake with a third chance as he clung on to remove Carey for 20. Cummins, however, reignited Australia's pursuit by launching Root for two straight sixes before finishing the job himself. — AFP

Summer Karting Championship

KUWAIT: The Summer Karting Championship for boys and girls will be held on Saturday at Kuwait Karting Tracks at Kuwait Complex with the participation of 100 competitors. Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Karting Club Dr Hamid Busheri thanked the organizing committees for their efforts in creating suitable grounds for competitors to be able to perform. Busheri said the board is working according to a plan so that the championships can be of higher standards.



Hamid Busheri

No 2 Korda returns for Women's PGA after back injury

NEW YORK: World number two Nelly Korda returns from a lower back injury to compete in this week's Women's PGA Championship, trying to capture her second major title after missing four events. The 24-year-old American daughter of retired tennis star Petr Korda has had more than a month off since missing the cut in last month's LPGA Founders Cup. Before that, Korda had top-six finishes in six of seven LPGA events this year and had moved to world number one before being overtaken in May by South Korea's Ko Jin-young.

"It was nice to be at home," Korda said Tuesday. "Started practicing a week and a half ago when I was all cleared to go two weeks ago. Just been grinding away." Korda has played 27 practice holes at Baltusrol and plans nine more on Wednesday before she tees off on Thursday alongside top-ranked Ko and third-ranked Lydia Ko of New Zealand. "I'm very excited," Korda said. "It's going to be a pretty interesting test this week. It's an amazing golf course."

"Your game has to be good and on all cylinders."

Korda, the reigning Olympic champion, suffered a back injury at the 2020 Women's PGA and missed much of that season but won her first major title at the 2021 Women's PGA at Atlanta Athletic Club. Korda won three other LPGA titles and Olympic gold in Tokyo in 2021 but in March 2022 announced she was taking a break due to a blood clot in her left arm and missed three months. She later won her second Pelican Women's Championship, her most recent of eight LPGA victories.

"I feel like every single time I've taken a break, it has been for something else," Korda said. "Last year was the blood clot at the beginning of the year and this time it was just my lower back that I just wanted to make sure it didn't turn into something worse. It's nice to take a step back, get a break in a sense. It also makes you appreciate playing out here, traveling and getting to do what you love when it's taken away from you and you have to take a forced break."

Korda said she is pain-free but didn't want to take chances with the same area where she was hurt in 2020. "It didn't feel right," she said. "I just talked with my doctor and he recommended I just take a couple weeks off to just rest it before something else flares up from it. There's a lot of torque in the golf swing so I felt like I'm not the only golfer that kind of struggles with the low back. "Also



SPRINGFIELD: Nelly Korda plays her shot during a practice round prior to the KPMG Women's PGA Championship at Baltusrol Golf Club on June 19, 2023. — AFP

when you're traveling four weeks in a row, different beds, flying out right after your round, sometimes you just tweak it and you just need to take rest." The break has increased her appetite for golf and winning. "It just makes me appreciate it more," she said. "A little bit more hungry." — AFP

Zimbabwe smash Dutch in qualifier

HARARE: Sikandar Raza delivered an all-rounder's masterclass to help Zimbabwe to a convincing six-wicket win over the Netherlands in their Cricket World Cup Group A qualifier on Tuesday. After first bagging four Dutch wickets, Raza then hit an entertaining unbeaten 102 off just 54 balls - the fastest ever hundred in one-day internationals by a Zimbabwe player. The Netherlands had posted 315 for six wickets thanks to 88 from Vikramjit Singh, 83 from skipper Scott Edwards and 59 from Max O'Dowd.

Saqib Zulfiqar chipped in with a run-a-ball 34 not out to boost the total off their allotted 50 overs at the Harare Sports Club. Raza proved to be the pick of the bowlers, picking up four wickets for 55 runs off his 10 overs. Zimbabwe's run chase never seemed in doubt as Sean Williams hit a 58-ball 91 after openers Craig Ervine and Joylord Gumbie had contributed 50 and 40 runs respectively.

It was left to Raza to strike the winning runs, however, hoisting Logan van Beek over mid-off and into the stands for his eighth six in a spectacular display of power batting that had earlier seen him strike three consecutive sixes off Shariz Ahmad. "I just wanted to go out there," said the 37-year-old Pakistan-born all-rounder, who sealed victory with 55 balls remaining. "The platform was already set, I just wanted to stay humble and respect every ball but it was there, I went for it. "As long as we win the game, we are happy and we are happy for each other's performance."

Group A's other match saw Nepal, who lost their opener to Zimbabwe, beat the United States by six wickets. Karachi-born wicketkeeper Shayan Jahangir hit an unbeaten 100 to help the US team reach 207 all out off 49 overs after recovering from being 18 for four wickets. Sushant Modani chipped in with 42 and Gajanan Singh 26, but the next best score was 12 and seven batsmen failed to make double digits as Karan Khatri Chhetri and Gulsan Jha shared seven wickets between them.

Bhim Sharki hit an unbeaten 77 while Kushal Bhurtel and Dipendra Singh Airee pitched in with 39 runs apiece as Nepal sealed the victory with ease, ending on 211/4 with 42 balls remaining. It was a second defeat for the Americans after they went down to the West Indies in their opening game. The action continues Wednesday, with Ireland facing Scotland and Oman taking on the United Arab Emirates in Group B matches at Bulawayo. Only two of the 10 teams taking part in the three-week qualifier will make the World Cup to be played in India in October and November. — AFP

Alcaraz survives scare as Murray's winning streak ends

LONDON: Carlos Alcaraz survived a scare against lucky loser Arthur Rinderknech at Queen's Club on Tuesday as Andy Murray's winning streak on the grass was ended by Alex de Minaur. Alcaraz was playing only his seventh match on grass and his first outside of Wimbledon as he prepares for the third Grand Slam tournament of the season next month.

Rinderknech, ranked 83 in the world, only found out he was playing the Spaniard hours before the match after Frenchman Arthur Fils, Alcaraz's scheduled opponent, withdrew from the tournament. But the 27-year-old almost stunned world number two before Alcaraz edged through 4-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) in just over two-and-a-half hours. "It has been a really tough match, he has played four or five matches on the grass and this was my first one," said Alcaraz. "It was really difficult to adapt my game to the grass. For me it's tough to play here, but Queen's is a tournament I really wanted to play."

Alcaraz was playing his first match since losing to Novak Djokovic in the semi-finals at the French Open and is hoping to improve once he gets accustomed to the conditions. "I couldn't play tennis on grass at home but I practiced the movement on grass. I practiced here a little bit before the tournament and I felt really good, even though it was the first match. "I would say I'm going to be better in the next round." Alcaraz will face Czech Jiri Lehecka in the second round. Murray had been on a 10-game



LONDON: Spain's Carlos Alcaraz dives in an attempt to play a return against France's Arthur Rinderknech during their men's single tennis match on Day 4 of the Cinch ATP tennis Championships on June 20, 2023. — AFP

winning streak after winning Challenger Tour events at Surbiton and Nottingham. But the former world number one found the step up in quality to hard to handle as De Minaur eased to a 6-3, 6-1 victory.

Murray had been hoping to rise into the seeds for the Wimbledon draw, but that is now unlikely as he started the week ranked 38 in the world. "I was so excited to play Andy on Centre Court at Queen's. I'm super proud of how I played and it

couldn't have gone any better for me," said De Minaur. Second seed Holger Rune was also pushed by American Maxime Cressy before the Dane progressed 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/3) to secure his first ever grass court win on the ATP Tour. World number 10 Frances Tiafoe was more comfortable as he saw off Botić van de Zandschulp 6-2, 6-4 to continue his winning streak after lifting the title in Stuttgart last week. — AFP

German Open: Sabalenka wins opening match

BERLIN: Top seed Aryna Sabalenka won her opening match Tuesday at the German Open, a traditional Berlin warm-up tournament for Wimbledon. The world number two beat veteran Vera Zvonareva 6-3, 6-2 to make it through to the last 16 ahead of next month's Grand Slam at the All England Club. The Australian Open champion, who has lost just six matches this season, called her 38-year-old oppo-

nent, who played her first match at the Berlin tournament in 2003, a "legend".

"Probably one day I'll also be a legend here, losing to someone here and you'll remind me that I won my first match here when the girl was five years old," Sabalenka said on court after the match. Later on Tuesday, American teenager Coco Gauff defeated Czech Katerina Siniakova in straight sets 6-3, 6-4. The 19-year-old was dominant throughout in her first appearance on grass this year, one year after making it to the semi-finals in the German capital.

Defending champion Ons Jabeur lost her bid to defend her crown, going down to German qualifier Jule Niemeier 7-6 (7/4), 6-4. Ranked 120th in the world, Niemeier saved two points on serve in the ninth game of the opening set when she was down

5-3, before breaking serve in the opening game of the second set. Niemeier, 23, missed her first match point late in the set but made the most of her second to qualify for the last 16. Elena Rybakina won her opening match in straight sets as she warms up for her Wimbledon title defense in July.

The Kazakh world number three beat Polina Kudermetova 6-4, 6-2. After winning the first game, Rybakina had to wait three hours as a thunderstorm swept across the venue before play could resume. An Australian Open finalist in January, the 24-year-old was one of the favorites for the French Open but pulled out early due to illness. The WTA tournament in Berlin, taking place just two weeks before the start of Wimbledon, is a star-studded event, with nine of the world's top 10-ranked women participating. — AFP

Sports

Colombia's Diaz and Cuadrado deepen German coach's woes

Colombia overpower Germany 2-0

GELSENKIRCHEN: Second-half goals from Luis Diaz and Juan Cuadrado took Colombia to a 2-0 friendly win over Germany on Tuesday, deepening home coach Hansi Flick's woes a year out from Euro 2024. Liverpool forward Diaz leapt high to head in a looping Cuadrado cross before the Juventus wing-back scored a late penalty after Germany captain Joshua Kimmich handballed in the box a minute after coming off the bench.

It was Colombia's first win over Germany and means the four-time world champions have won just one of five games since their disastrous group-stage exit at the Qatar World Cup in December. Germany, who qualify for next year's Euro as hosts, lacked fluidity in Gelsenkirchen, ramping up the pressure on under-fire boss Flick, with the side not playing again until September. "I'm very disappointed for the fans," said Flick. "We wanted to try something but it went belly up."

Flick was bullish on his side's long-term chances, saying his side would "show a different willingness, a difference performance" in the next round of friendlies. "From September, we'll settle in and then the results will come." With isolated boos and whistles ringing out across his home-town stadium in Gelsenkirchen, local boy turned captain Ilkay Gundogan said he could "understand" the crowd's response. "We know it was not good and we know what needs to get better."

Asked if he was worried by the team's latest dis-

play, midfielder Leon Goretzka said: "I don't know if that's the right word." "It's dramatic, you have to say that clearly... We're missing things across all levels. All in all it was far too little." After making nine changes for the 1-0 loss to Poland in Warsaw on Friday, Flick again switched things up with five alterations in the starting XI. The coach handed the armband to Gundogan after the treble-winning Manchester City captain's recent successes, with Kimmich starting from the bench.

But Germany again looked disjointed and were lucky to avoid conceding a penalty midway through the first half when the home side were caught out by a lightning-fast Colombia counter. Centre-back Malick Thiaw, in just his second match for Germany, appeared to have brought down Diaz in the box but the referee ruled the AC Milan defender got a toe to the ball. Diaz got on the scoresheet however in the second half, heading in Cuadrado's ball after Emre Can was dispossessed in his own half.

Flick brought Kimmich on for Gundogan with 10 minutes remaining and the Bayern Munich midfielder gave away a penalty moments afterwards. Cuadrado stepped up to the spot to send Germany goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen the wrong way. While Flick has repeatedly defended his side's results on the basis of a desire to experiment before Euro 2024, his position may now be called into question. Germany play two home friendlies against Japan and World Cup runners-up France in September. — AFP



GELSENKIRCHEN: (Left to right) Germany's defender Malick Thiaw, Germany's midfielder Emre Can, Colombia's defender Yerry Mina, Colombia's forward Rafael Santos Borré and Germany's defender Marius Wolf vie for the ball during the international friendly football match between Germany and Colombia on June 20, 2023. — AFP

Senegal hammer Brazil in friendly

LISBON: Sadio Mane scored two goals as African champions Senegal came from behind to defeat Brazil 4-2 in an international friendly in Lisbon on Tuesday. Five-time World Cup winners Brazil are still without a coach after the departure of Tite last year, while Neymar remains sidelined by an ankle injury suffered in February. Lucas Paqueta headed the South Americans ahead from Vinicius Junior's cross 10 minutes in, but Senegal equalised through a thumping left-foot volley by Strasbourg forward Habib Diallo.

Marquinhos put Senegal ahead early in the second half when the Paris Saint-Germain defender inadvertently turned the ball into his own net. Mane, who missed the World Cup with injury and endured a tough first season at Bayern Munich, added a third minutes later with a superb curling shot into the top corner. Brazil halved the deficit when Marquinhos this time scored at the right end, looping a mishit effort over Senegal goalkeeper Mory Diaw. But Mane wrapped up Senegal's victory deep into stoppage time as he grabbed his second goal of the game from the penalty spot. — AFP



LISBON: Brazil's forward Ronielson Barbosa (center) heads the ball with Senegal's midfielder Nampalys Mendy (left) during the international friendly football match between Brazil and Senegal at the Jose Alvalade stadium on June 20, 2023. — AFP



KRAKOW: Kasra Mehdipournejad, flagbearer of the EOC Refugee Team poses as he arrives in Krakow, for the Opening Ceremony of the European Games Krakow-Malopolska 2023. — AFP

Iranian flies flag for refugees at European Game

PARIS: Kasra Mehdipournejad has seen neither his Iranian parents nor siblings for six years since they advised him to remain in Germany - on Wednesday the taekwondo specialist will make them proud as the flag bearer for the Refugee Team at the European Games. Mehdipournejad thinks it could be a dream debut for him as gold is not out of the question in the -80 kilogram title at the Games in Poland when the action begins on Thursday.

The 30-year-old's journey has not been the easiest - a trip to Germany in 2017 turned into something completely unexpected and led to him being separated from his close family. "It was meant to be just a trip but then something happened in Iran that was family related," he told AFP by phone shortly after being informed he would be carrying the flag for the Refugee Team at the Games that will take place in Krakow and 10 other towns until July 2.

"My family on my mother's side are against the Islamic regime and we made a decision after talking with my parents for me to stay in Germany at that point," Mehdipournejad added. "They said the most important thing was I be safe in Germany and can continue a normal life and my career." He says that initially his new life was a daunting challenge in a country he barely knew. "The first two years were really difficult. I had never been so far from my family," he said. "It was that difficult that I did not know whether I would stay in Germany forever. "However, after that spell I made some friends and joined in with the community and things became much better." — AFP

Africa Cup of Nations: Five talking points

JOHANNESBURG: Five-time champions Cameroon will be among 16 teams chasing nine finals places in the last round of 2023 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying during September. While only Egypt, with a record seven titles, have been more successful in the continental showpiece, Cameroon must win at home against Burundi to be certain of qualifying.

A draw would leave Cameroon, Burundi and Namibia level on points and goal difference in Group C and tie-breakers would come into play to decide which two countries go to the Ivory Coast. Cameroon had a bye this month as Kenya were disqualified by FIFA before the first matchday last June due to government interference in the sport. AFP highlights five talking points after the latest match-

day, with 22 qualifiers delivering 52 goals and the number of qualifiers rising from seven to 15.

Osimhen sparkles

Napoli star Victor Osimhen is the leading scorer in qualifying with seven goals, and there is the prospect of more to come from him when Nigeria host Sao Tome e Principe in the final round. The leading scorer in the Serie A season with 26 goals as Napoli ended a three-decade title drought netted four times in a 10-0 away triumph over Sao Tome last June. Sao Tome are ranked 184 in the world and have the worst defensive record in 2023 qualifying, conceding 20 goals.

'Homeless' struggle

Playing home matches on foreign soil was not a rewarding experience for the 11 countries that had to do so in matchday five due to sub-standard stadiums or civil war. Only Burundi, who do not have an international-quality venue and played in Tanzania, won. Ethiopia drew in Mozambique, and the other nine teams

were beaten. Explaining why stadiums are banned, senior Confederation of African Football official Lux September said "pitches, dressing rooms and spectator facilities are among areas looked at".

Guinea-Bissau transformed

Guinea-Bissau, for decades one of the weakest teams in the continent, have booked a fourth consecutive appearance at the biennial African football showcase. After an unsuccessful first spell in charge of the 'Wild Dogs', local Baciro Candé returned as head coach in 2016 and transformed a side lacking any stars into consistent qualifiers. The best known Guinea-Bissau footballer of the modern era is 20-year-old Barcelona forward Ansu Fati, but he chose to represent Spain after gaining citizenship.

Beasts' tall order

The Central African Republic could qualify for the first time despite a 2-1 loss to Angola after having goalkeeper Dominique Youfeigane

sent off midway through the second half. But the 'Wild Beasts' must win their final-round match in Ghana to reach the finals - a tall order given the star-laden 'Black Stars' boast a 100 percent home record in 2023 qualifying. Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Eswatini, Lesotho, Sao Tome, Seychelles, Somalia and South Sudan are the other nations that have never played at the Cup of Nations.

Perfect Algeria

Two-time champions Algeria are the only team boasting five victories heading into matchday six, and with a home match against Tanzania to come they are set to maintain a perfect record. The Desert Foxes are seeking a second title in three Cup of Nations after edging Senegal 1-0 in the 2019 final in Cairo, before bowing out after the first round in the following edition. Senegal have the second most impressive record with four wins and a draw and Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Zambia have all won four matches and lost one. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733

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

Change of Name

I, Ummehani Hatim, current name Saya holder of Indian Passport No. T3300581, having permanent address 501, B7, Bramha Majestic, Nibm Road, Kondhwa, Pune, Maharashtra, India 411048, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name **Ummehani Saifee** and surname **Malpurwala**. (#3813) 22-06-2023

I, Ebrahim Gulam Hussain Shikari (current name in Passport), holder of Indian Passport No. U0747346, having permanent address Moham-

mediya Colony, PO Galiakot, Durgapur, Rajasthan, India, Pin Code No. 314026. Residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name: **Ibrahim** and surname: **Shikari**. (#3812) 22-06-2023

I, Shahanas Riyas, holder of Indian Passport No. T5333279, having permanent address Kerala, India, PIN.670141, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name: **Shehnaz** and surname: **Azmin**. (#3811) 22-06-2023

I, Leena Castalino, holder of Passport No. M6714512, do hereby change my name to Leena (as given name) Castalino (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Leena Castalino and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#3810) 20-06-2023

I, Khojema, holder of Indian Passport No. V3753960, having permanent address Rajasthan, India - 314026, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Khojema (given name) and Gadi (surname). (#3809) 20-06-2023

Ronaldo marks 200th cap in style

Portugal beat Iceland 1-0 in Euro 2024 qualifying; Haaland lifts Norway



REYKJAVIK: Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo (left), Iceland's midfielder Arnor Traustason and Iceland's goalkeeper Runar Runarsson vie for the ball during the UEFA Euro 2024 group J qualification football match between Iceland and Portugal on June 20, 2023. — AFP

PARIS: Cristiano Ronaldo marked his 200th international appearance with the winner as Portugal beat Iceland 1-0 in Euro 2024 qualifying on Tuesday, while Erling Haaland netted twice for Norway. Elsewhere, Belgium brushed aside the Thibaut Courtois captaincy row by seeing off Estonia thanks to a Romelu Lukaku double in Tallinn and Moldova came from two goals down to stun Poland. Portugal appeared to be heading towards a drab goalless draw in Reykjavik until Willum Thor Wilumsson was sent off late on.

Ronaldo struggled for much of the match but repaid coach Roberto Martinez's faith by slotting home from Goncalo Inacio's knock-down in the 89th minute. "It was a nice script (for Ronaldo). There was incredible celebration, the first men's player ever in world football to get 200 international games," Martinez told uefa.com. The former Real Madrid and Manchester United star's record-extending 123rd international goal was initially ruled out for offside before being awarded by VAR. "For me it's an unbelievable achievement, it's amazing," said the 38-year-old Ronaldo. "And of course to score the winning goal, it's even more special."

Portugal remain two points clear of Slovakia at the top of Group J after a fourth straight win. Slovakia, who are Portugal's next opponents in September, won 1-0 away to Liechtenstein to stay unbeaten. Luxembourg gave their unlikely bid to reach a maiden major tournament a boost with a brilliant 2-0

away victory over Bosnia and Herzegovina to move third, just three points behind Slovakia. The top two from each group qualify automatically for next year's finals in Germany.

Captain Lukaku stars

Belgium goalkeeper Courtois had said he was "surprised" that coach Domenico Tedesco told a press conference he had refused to travel to Estonia after being overlooked for the stand-in captaincy last week. Tedesco had wanted to hand Lukaku the armband for Saturday's 1-1 draw with Austria and give Courtois the honor in Tallinn, with regular captain Kevin De Bruyne absent.

But with Courtois instead back home, Lukaku was named skipper again and responded by scoring two goals in a 3-0 success which helped Belgium stay second in Group F. Austria remained three points clear in first place, albeit having played a game more than Belgium, as Christoph Baumgartner scored twice in the last 10 minutes to clinch a 2-0 win over Sweden.

The Scandinavians are in danger of failing to reach a Euro tournament for the first time since 1996, sitting four points behind Belgium. Haaland's brace helped Norway bounce back from their dramatic defeat by Scotland at the weekend with a 3-1 victory against Cyprus. That kept their slim hopes of reaching a first major tournament since 2000 alive, although they only sit third in Group A and just one

point ahead of Spain having played two games more than the three-time champions.

Group leaders Scotland were not blown off course by a near two-hour interruption caused by heavy rain as they maintained their 100 percent record with a 2-0 win over Georgia. Callum McGregor scored in the sixth minute in farcical conditions before the game was suspended. A number of pitch inspections then took place amid reports that Georgia wanted the game postponed before it eventually restarted at 9:35 pm local time (19:35 GMT) and Scott McTominay secured the points.

Poland in trouble

Poland fell to fourth place in Group E after blowing a two-goal lead to lose 3-2 to Moldova in Chisinau. Moldova, who had won only one of their last 43 Euro and World Cup qualifying matches, appeared to have been safely dispatched by first-half goals from Arkadiusz Milik and Robert Lewandowski. But Ion Nicolaescu's double left Poland reeling and Vladyslav Baboglo, who plays his club football for Ukrainian team Oleksandriya, headed past Wojciech Szczesny to score a dramatic 85th-minute winner. Moldova, 171st in the FIFA rankings, are now third in the group standings, a point behind second-placed Albania who saw off the Faroe Islands 3-1. Hungary moved top of Group G by cruising past Lithuania 2-0, level on points with Serbia after their 1-1 draw with Bulgaria. — AFP

Euro 2024 qualifying tables

Euro 2024 qualifying tables after Tuesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Group A	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Scotland	4	4	0	0	9	12
Georgia	3	1	1	1	3	4
Norway	4	1	1	2	5	7
Spain	2	1	0	1	3	2
Cyprus	3	0	0	3	2	8

Group B	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
France	4	4	0	0	9	0
Greece	3	2	0	1	5	2
Ireland	3	1	0	2	4	3
Netherlands	2	1	0	1	3	4
Gibraltar	4	0	0	4	0	12

Group C	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
England	4	4	0	0	15	1
Ukraine	3	2	0	1	4	4
Italy	2	1	0	1	3	2
North Macedonia	3	1	0	2	4	11
Malta	4	0	0	4	1	9

Group D	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Turkey	4	3	0	1	7	5
Armenia	3	2	0	1	7	6
Croatia	2	1	1	0	3	1
Wales	4	1	1	2	4	7
Latvia	3	0	0	3	3	6

Group E	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Czech Republic	3	2	1	0	6	1
Albania	3	2	0	1	5	2
Moldova	4	1	2	1	4	5
Poland	3	1	0	2	4	6
Faroe Islands	3	0	1	2	2	7

Group F	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Austria	4	3	1	0	9	3
Belgium	3	2	1	0	7	1
Sweden	3	1	0	2	5	5
Estonia	3	0	1	2	2	6
Azerbaijan	3	0	1	2	2	10

Group G	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Hungary	3	2	1	0	5	0
Serbia	3	2	1	0	5	1
Montenegro	3	1	1	1	1	2
Bulgaria	4	0	2	2	2	6
Lithuania	3	0	1	2	1	5

Group H	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Finland	4	3	0	1	10	3
Kazakhstan	4	3	0	1	8	4
Denmark	4	2	1	1	7	5
Slovenia	4	2	1	1	5	4
Northern Ireland	4	1	0	3	2	3
San Marino	4	0	0	4	0	13

Group I	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Switzerland	4	3	1	0	12	3
Romania	4	2	2	0	6	3
Israel	4	2	1	1	5	6
Belarus	4	1	0	3	4	10
Kosovo	4	0	3	1	3	4
Andorra	4	0	1	3	3	7

Group J	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Portugal	4	4	0	0	14	0
Slovakia	4	3	1	0	5	1
Luxembourg	4	2	1	1	4	6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4	1	0	3	3	7
Iceland	4	1	0	3	8	6
Liechtenstein	4	0	0	4	0	14

NBA Draft top picks produce epic flops as well as legends

NEW YORK: French teen giant Victor Wembanyama, considered the greatest NBA prospect since LeBron James two decades ago, has some cautionary tales among players who became top picks in the NBA Draft. History has proven there are no sure things among those selected first overall, as the versatile 7ft 4in (2.24m) Wembanyama is expected to be on Thursday by the San Antonio Spurs. There have been epic flops selected ahead of eventual legends in the NBA Draft as well as superstars going first overall such as James did to Cleveland in 2003.

The Cavaliers also chose forward Anthony Bennett first overall in 2013 and he played for four teams in four seasons before exiting the NBA for stops in Turkey, Israel and Taiwan. The same year, Greek star Giannis Antetokounmpo went 15th in 2013 and became a two-time NBA Most Valuable Player who helped Milwaukee win the 2021 crown. Six-time NBA champion Michael Jordan went third overall to Chicago in 1984 after two-time NBA champion Hakeem Olajuwon went first to Houston and Portland selected center Sam Bowie, who was undone by leg and foot injuries over 10 NBA seasons before retiring in 1995.

Portland also saw 2007 top pick Greg Oden limited by chronic knee injuries, the center playing only 82 games for the Trail Blazers and 23 more in a brief comeback with Miami. The second pick in 2007 was Kevin Durant, a future 13-time All-Star forward, NBA MVP

and two-time champion. Wembanyama arrives as the past five NBA MVPs have come from beyond US borders, none of them top picks. Serbian center Nikola Jokic, a two-time MVP who led Denver to the title last week, went 41st in 2014, the same year Cameroon's Joel Embiid, the reigning MVP with Philadelphia, went third.

The 2014 top overall pick was Andrew Wiggins, who helped Golden State win last year's NBA title. He's one of five top picks since James to win a title, although three of them - Anthony Davis, Dwight Howard and Kyrie Irving - did so as a James teammate. The other was Australian Andrew Bogut, the 2005 top pick by Philadelphia who helped Golden State's 2015 title run. Only Irving, Cleveland's top pick in 2011, won a title with the club that drafted him. San Antonio, however, has a solid history with top draft picks, the Spurs taking big men David Robinson in 1987 and Tim Duncan in 1997 with their past two.

Duncan helped the Spurs win five titles from 1999 through 2014, the first two of them alongside Robinson and the last four as a teammate of French guard Tony Parker, taken 28th overall by San Antonio in 2001. The Spurs were 20-62 in the season before Duncan arrived. Duncan was NBA Rookie of the Year in 1998 and the NBA Finals MVP in 1999. San Antonio went 22-60 this season so Duncan's history might be a road map for Wembanyama. — AFP



Victor Wembanyama

French World Cup winner Kante joins Saudi Al Ittihad

RIYADH: France's World Cup-winning midfielder N'Golo Kante has joined Saudi Arabian champions Al Ittihad, the club said in a statement on Wednesday, joining up with compatriot Karim Benzema. "Kante is an Ittihad player now!" the club said on Twitter, while chairman Anmar al-Hailee tweeted: "Welcome to our new tiger Kante," a reference to the team's nickname. The 32-year-old becomes the latest in a line of European stars choosing to ply their trade in the desert kingdom, which is making big-money moves across elite sport.

A dynamic and industrious midfielder, Kante won the World Cup with France in 2018. His club career also glitters. He won the Champions League and World Club Cup with Chelsea, as well as back-to-back Premier League titles with Leicester City and Chelsea. Kante's contract with the London club was set to expire this month and they paid him a handsome tribute in bidding him farewell.

"N'Golo's impact and influence during his time at Chelsea cannot be overstated," said Chelsea's co-sporting directors Laurence Stewart and Paul Winstanley in a club statement. "His tireless performances in midfield contributed to several trophy wins and has guaranteed him a place in the club's history." He has signed a three-year deal with Al Ittihad, the Jeddah-based team said in a statement, though it gave no details of how much Kante will earn.



French midfielder N'Golo Kante

The Saudi club said: "Kante's addition to Al-Ittihad is considered one of the most high-profile and impactful signings in the club's history. "It is part of the club's efforts to establish itself as a top choice for world-class players in the Saudi Professional League." He will wear the number seven shirt, which he also donned at Chelsea. Current Ballon d'Or holder Benzema joined Al-Ittihad earlier this month, after 14 seasons with Real Madrid in which he won five Champions Leagues, four La Liga titles and three Copas del Rey.

In a video posted online by the club, Benzema, 35, said in a message to his fellow Frenchman: "One time I told you, you're the best player, box to box, in the world. Now I'm happy to play with you again, and of course in the best team in Saudi." Kante said he was "very excited to play for the Tigers". The kingdom's league had already signed up five-time Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo, who joined Al-Nassr in January. His fellow Portuguese international Ruben Neves, currently of Wolves, is reportedly set to join Al Hilal. — AFP