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Wagner troops 'turning back' as Putin vows to defeat rebels

Wagner chief vows to topple top brass • Kuwaitis in Russia urged to stay alert

Amir returns home from Italy



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah returns to Kuwait from a private visit to Italy on June 24, 2023. He was welcomed at the airport by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and senior officials. — KUNA

MOSCOW: The chief of mercenary group Wagner said in a surprise announcement on Saturday that his troops were turning back to avoid spilling blood. "We are turning our columns around and going back to field camps," Yevgeny Prigozhin announced after vowing to march on Moscow to topple the military leadership. He said he understood the importance of the moment and did not want to "spill Russian blood."

The mercenaries had advanced north towards Moscow after seizing a key military base Saturday, just as Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin vowed to defeat the revolt and head off the threat of civil war. The rapidly escalating events mark the most serious challenge yet to the Russian president's rule — and Russia's most serious security crisis since the strongman came to power in late 1999.

Putin's spokesman insisted the Russian leader was still at work in the Kremlin and had not fled Moscow, as regular forces launched a "counterterrorist operation" to halt the rebel advance in the Voronezh region, on the Wagner force's route to the capital. The governor of the Lipetsk region, whose capital is just 420 km south of Moscow, said Wagner's private military force was "moving across" the territory and urged civilians not to leave their homes.

Kuwait's embassy in Russia urged citizens there to exert caution and follow official authorities' instructions. Citizens in Russia are advised to call the emergency number 0079256311313 for inquiries or



Vladimir Putin



Yevgeny Prigozhin

in case of emergency, Kuwait's Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Saturday. In the capital, the mayor urged Muscovites to stay indoors and declared Monday a day off work. "The situation is difficult. I ask you to refrain from travelling around the city as much as possible," Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said in a statement, warning of possible road closures.

Ukrainian leaders, meanwhile, revealed in the outbreak of in-fighting among its Russian foes, with a deputy defense minister describing it as a "window of opportunity" for Kyiv's latest counteroffensive to rid its territory of Russian forces. Kyiv's top general, Valery Zaluzhny talked to US chairman of the joint chiefs General Mark Milley and told him that Ukraine's counteroffensive "was going according to plan".

The Russian foreign ministry retorted that it would achieve all the goals set for what it calls the "special military operation" would be achieved, and

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Aramco, Total ink contracts for \$11bn complex

DHAHRAN: Saudi Aramco and France's TotalEnergies on Saturday signed contracts to start building an \$11-billion petrochemicals facility in the Gulf kingdom, the two companies said. A signing ceremony for the engineering, procurement and construction contracts for the Amiral complex took place at Aramco's headquarters in Dhahran, in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. The move "marks the start of construction work on the joint petrochemical expansion", Aramco and TotalEnergies said in a joint statement.

Seven companies were awarded contracts for the construction of the project in Jubail, on Saudi Arabia's east coast. The facility is slated to begin operations in 2027. The project, first announced in 2018, represents an investment of around \$11 billion, of which \$4 billion will be funded through equity by Aramco and TotalEnergies. The complex will enable Saudi Arabia's SATORP refinery to convert internally produced off-gases and naphtha, as well as ethane and natural gasoline supplied by Aramco, into higher value chemicals.

It will have the capacity to produce 1.65 million tons per annum of ethylene and other industrial gases, Aramco said. "As part of Aramco's growth strategy, the project is anticipated to contribute to value-addition opportunities in the kingdom's downstream ecosystem," Aramco president Amin Nasser said at the signing ceremony. — AFP

Grade 12 results announced; KU climbs rankings

KUWAIT: Education Minister Dr Hamad Al-Adwani endorsed on Saturday the results of the high school exams for the 2022-2023 academic year of grade 12 students in the arts and science divisions. A total of 40,242 students, male and female, attended

Diabetes cases set to double to 1.3bn by 2050

PARIS: The number of people suffering from diabetes worldwide will more than double to 1.3 billion by 2050 driven by structural racism and gaping inequality between countries, new research predicted

US: No evidence COVID created in Chinese lab

WASHINGTON: The head of US intelligence said Friday that there was no evidence that the COVID-19 virus was created in the Chinese government's Wuhan research lab. In a declassified report, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said they had no information backing recent claims that three scientists at the lab were some of the very first infected with COVID-19 and may have created the virus themselves.

Drawing on intelligence collected by various member agencies of the US intelligence community (IC), the ODNI report said some scientists at the Wuhan lab had done genetic engineering of coro-

naviruses similar to COVID-19. But the US "has no information" indicating they had done such work on the specific COVID-9 virus, known as SARS-CoV-2, or on any "close progenitor, or a backbone virus that is closely related-enough to have been the source of the pandemic."

The report, made for Congress and carrying an unreleased classified annex, came three months after lawmakers demanded a fuller explanation of US intelligence's information on the origins of the pandemic which erupted at the end of 2019. Some lawmakers allege that the virus was created out of so-called gain-of-function genetic engineering research at Wuhan, and that Beijing had covered up evidence to show it was a man-made disease.

Reiterating a conclusion announced in March, the ODNI report said "almost all" of its constituent agencies, which include the NSA, the CIA and FBI, assess that COVID-19 was not genetically

also sent similar cables. Adwani also congratulated HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad on the success of the final exams and the promising results. He also congratulated the graduates, wishing they excel in higher education and realize their aspirations.

The institutions of higher education have drawn up a plan for enrolling the high school graduates according to the marks they obtained in the exams and the percentages set by Kuwait University (KU).

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Dr Hamad Al-Adwani

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WUHAN: Security personnel stand guard outside the Wuhan Institute of Virology in this Feb 3, 2021 file photo. — AFP



Local

Despite cost cuts, majority of pilgrims from Kuwait request lower prices: Poll

Several deals signed, in the works to facilitate hajj by awqaf ministry

KUWAIT: A poll conducted by Kuwait's Ministry of Awqaf has found that 70 percent of pilgrims would prefer paying less to perform hajj, an official with the ministry told KUNA.

The poll, which included a sample of 1,200 pilgrims, has also found that 94 percent of pilgrims were pleased with the ministry's hajj services.

Sattam Al-Muzain, Director of hajj and umra, told KUNA that the awqaf ministry substantially cut costs of the pilgrimage, which is set to begin on June 26, this year. According to an official price list published on the ministry's website, someone staying in a four-bed room, the cheapest option offered by hajj campaigns, would have to pay between KD 1,650 to 4,450 during the 2023 hajj season. Prices depend on the campaign and whether you're staying at a five-star hotel, furnished room, or a four-star hotel.

Kuwait Times reported last year that hajj prices were exuberant due to COVID-19 health restrictions and a tax hike imposed by Saudi authorities on hotels. In 2022, a triple room in a five-star hotel cost KD 3,750 for each pilgrim, compared to KD 2,000 to KD 2,400 before the pandemic, a travel agent told Kuwait Times.

Prices seem to have gone down to pre-pandemic



Ahmad Al-Otaibi



Mohammad Al-Mutairi



Sattam Al-Muzain

levels this year, with a triple room in a five-star hotel, with many options between KD 2,090 and KD 2,750 available.

Facilities for pilgrims

Mohammad Al-Mutairi, the assistant undersecretary for media and external affairs and the deputy head of the hajj expedition, told KUNA the ministry has dispatched teams to the holy lands to install equipment at the pilgrims' tents.

Agreements have been inked with several Saudi authorities to aid the 9,000 pilgrims coming from Kuwait — 8,000 Kuwaitis and 1,000 bedoons (illegal residents), he said.

The ministry has worked out contracts with a company to oversee pilgrims' camps, secure food and other necessities for them, Mutairi said. It also inked a deal with a specialized office to arrange fa-



MAKKAH: The annual pilgrimage, hajj, is set to begin on June 26.

ilities for the devotees at the airports and work out their travel documents. Another agreement has been worked out with a company in Madinah to host the pilgrims, organize their housing, follow up on their health issues and preserve their belongings.

Dr Ahmad Al-Otaibi, the director of the media di-

vision at the Ministry of Awqaf, said the pilgrims had been filled in about necessary health precautions and vaccinations. Kuwaiti Ministry of Health had declared terms for performing the hajj rituals, namely vaccination against coronavirus (COVID-19) and other disease, ten days ahead of travel.

Shatha Abueljebain: From art to a movement

By Munirah Al-Fayez

KUWAIT: When Shatha Abueljebain was younger, she did not think people knew how to produce digital art in Kuwait. The now 23-year-old self-taught artist would follow people from the Western world on social media to stay updated on her favorite form of art. But she discovered she was "100 percent wrong" — Abueljebain was "shocked" at the number of incredible artists in Kuwait.

She says she is very proud of the digital art community in Kuwait and the Arab world. Finding Arab artists who shared her interest, says Abueljebain, resulted in the 'Arab Artist Club', a community she co-founded for artists in the Arab world, where they can gather online to learn about art. The community is on Instagram at @arabartistclub.

Abueljebain, who goes by @spilledartsociety on Instagram, said she has always liked being part of a community, because she believes it helps her grow and learn, through teaching herself and others. The significance of a community is that it grows together, supports each other and helps each other out. According to Abueljebain, art, in all its forms, is very important in Kuwait, explaining it has been significant as "a way of processing and sending out messages and ideas to people". She says its impact stems from how it portrays the culture at the time it was produced.

"For example, after the discovery of oil in Kuwait, you can see the innovation and progression of art in Kuwait, and now with the progression of digital media, you can see the new age of progression in art. Art reflects who we are as a community — that is how significant art is," Abueljebain said, adding if there is a problem in the community, it is very often expressed through art.

Art for Palestine

Abueljebain said she usually does not use her art to represent a certain political issue; however, she did use art to stand up for Palestine, although she said it is more "Islamic" or "humanitarian" rather



KUWAIT: Shatha Abueljebain, a digital artist based in Kuwait, poses with the two art pieces she created to stand up for Palestine at Irada square in this contributed photo.

than political. She said the coverage she got with regards to her art about Palestine from people in Kuwait and outside too was "pretty huge". When she went to Irada Square, she was "shocked" after seeing her art "literally everywhere". She said children wore it on their t-shirts and people held it on their posters.

Abueljebain said MP Hamad Al-Matar even printed her artwork and put it in his National Assembly office, adding there is a picture of him holding her art in Irada Square. Although she does not use art to make political or societal statements, Abueljebain stressed how amazed she was at how art could be this impactful in sending a certain message, adding she could not believe it was possible. However, she says her Instagram account was shut down, and the platform was not allowing her to express her opinions freely through art. She said it was also intense having to deal with people who have different opinions.

When asked if she has any advice for new artists who are thinking about sharing their art, specifically on social media, Abueljebain said an artist should keep going and not get discouraged due to lack of engagement. Lack of engagement with a specific artwork, according to her, does not mean



This photo shows the art piece created by Shatha Abueljebain for Palestine. The Arabic text reads: "We shall not leave".



This photo shows the art piece created by Shatha Abueljebain for Palestine. The Arabic text says: "This is my fight".

it is bad. The important thing, she explained, is that you are satisfied and you see your progress through the years. "Keep reminding yourself — why you are sharing your work and why are you making it: Is it to gain followers?" Abueljebain said.

Abueljebain advises to always look out for your local community no matter what your field is, because it will have a huge impact on you and others. "You will get to support each other, learn from each other, grow together and feel like you belong to that community and are part of it," she said. "It will give you comfort and make you feel at home."

MoE adds varsities, refutes accusations of bias in scholarships

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Higher Education announced Saturday opening the door for students to apply for human medicine scholarships in the Turkish Koc University for the 2023/2024 academic year on apply.ku.edu.tr. Meanwhile, the ministry announced that it will soon open registration for human medicine scholarships in the Turkish Hacettepe University for the 2024/2025 academic year. Students can also apply for human medicine scholarships to study in the UK, Ireland, Australia, Malta, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and others, for the 2023/2024 academic year, the ministry noted.

The announcement comes following a recent decision to suspend scholarships for Kuwaiti students who want to study medicine, pharmacy and dentistry in Jordan and Egypt. The decision, which was met with backlash by parliamentarians, was defended as an effort to improve the level of Kuwaiti medical professionals.

Lamyaa Al-Melhem, an official with the ministry, said the number of seats available for students wishing to apply for a program in any of the medical fields has been on the rise, with 1,100 seats provided for applicants in the year 2023-2024.

This week, a parliamentarian criticized the government's medical scholarship program, saying it was not fair to students who graduate from public schools, specifically because private schools have a different grading system which facilitates meeting requirements for these programs. He further implied that the system gives an advantage to private school students, calling on the government to take the different grading methods into consideration when designing the scholarship program.

However, the Ministry of Higher Education later released statistics that show otherwise. According to the ministry, 75.4 percent of students accepted in scholarships are from public schools. Of that, 62 percent get into medical specialties. The ministry did not say how many students from public schools apply for scholarships as opposed to private school students. It's also not clear whether any existing discrepancy has been taken into account when calculating the provided percentages.

Health parliamentary committee to bring back 'housewives' law

KUWAIT: The Health, Social Affairs and Labor parliamentary committee said it was meeting soon to begin working on some of its priorities.

In a press statement, MP Majed Al-Mutairi said the committee will first discuss the "housewife law", which aims to add married Kuwaiti housewives to the "Afyah" health insurance system. The system provides free healthcare at the private sector for Kuwaiti retirees. The committee had approved amending Article 2 of Law No 114 of 2014 on health insurance to include housewives in December 2022.

The amendments will also guarantee benefits to widows aged 55 and older under the social assistance program and those 50 and older getting paid on behalf of their deceased husbands. The National Assembly passed the law in December 2022, but local media later reported that the health ministry referred the law back to the National Assembly in January 2023.

"The law is approved by both the parliament and the government. We will put it forward for discussion on the agenda for July," said Mutairi.

The committee — which is comprised of MP Bader Al-Enezi, MP Saad Al-Khanfour, MP Hani Shams and MP Fahad Al-Azemi, in addition to Mutairi — is also prioritizing improving health services in the southern health zone, he said. Both Mutairi and Azemi won in the fifth constituency, which is made up of areas located south of the country.

The plan is to dedicate Adan hospital to Kuwaitis only, he said, with expatriates getting transferred to the Dhaman hospital in southern Sabahiya. Mutairi added that the committee will discuss establishing a new hospital in Sabah Al-Ahmad.

Interior Minister promotes 604 fire force officers

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah approved the promotion of 604 officers and non-commissioned officers of Kuwait Fire Force, KFF said in a statement to KUNA on Saturday. The promotion is in line with Sheikh Talal's approach to grant all personnel their rights and back them, it said. It added that the minister urged the promoted officers to seek greater professional and practical development, hoping that the promotion would motivate them to excel in performing the tasks.

Rescue training

Earlier this week, the Kuwait Fire Force organized several training courses for their counterparts in Gulf and Arab countries, focused on marine rescue. The courses included one on free diving, which concluded last week and in which participants were taught safety measures. Officers from across the Arab world, as well as Kuwait's defense ministry and national guard, learned how to identify signs of oxygen deprivation, breathing techniques and the correct methods for carrying heavy weights under water.



GAZA: Palestinians receive Kuwaiti-funded coupons ahead of Eid Al-Adha. — KUNA

Kuwait funds coupons for Palestinians hit by Zionist attacks

GAZA: Zakah Daraj, a Palestinian charity, distributed on Saturday 210 coupons funded by Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization

to the Palestinians affected by the recent Zionist aggression on Gaza Strip. This move comes before Eid Al-Adha to alleviate sufferings of the families affected by the aggression, enhance their steadfastness, and help them obtain their basic needs, head of Zakah Abdulkader Abulnour said in a press statement. Abulnour thanked Kuwait, His Highness the Amir, the government and institutions for their support. — KUNA

Zain, SACGC to cooperate on elevating youth's digital literacy

Partnership to include workshops for supporting startup ecosystem, innovators



KUWAIT: Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan and SACGC GM Neda Al-Dehani sign a memorandum of understanding aimed at elevating digital literacy among youth and supporting the local startups ecosystem.



Eaman Al-Roudhan (center) and Neda Al-Dehani (fourth right) pose with Zain and SACGC officials.

KUWAIT: Zain signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC), a center of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). The MoU aims to build a new strategic partnership that focuses on elevating the digital literacy of the youth, empower creativity and innovation, and enhance the local startup ecosystem in the community.

The MoU was signed at the Zain Innovation Campus (ZINC) in the company's headquarters in Shuwaikh and was attended by Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan and SACGC GM Neda Al-Dehani. The partnership is a fruitful result of Zain and SACGC's joint vision to invest in the talents and skills of Kuwait's youth to contribute to the national economy

by empowering tech and digital competencies, which are highly required by today's markets.

The announcement aims to foster a joint collaboration between the two partners to achieve a number of targets, including elevating digital literacy, develop digital competencies, support the local startups ecosystem, empower Kuwaiti inventors and innovators to excel and more to serve the nation's developmental, economic and social goals. The partnership targets young people of 7-35 years and will include insightful programs, workshops and more to share expertise and achieve these shared goals.

This agreement is the first of many projects under Zain's all-new initiative, Innovation Nation, under which all of Zain's innovation and entrepreneur-

ship programs will fall, especially within science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas. The initiative mainly targets the youth and centers around a number of pillars, including entrepreneurship, investment, startup acceleration, supporting inventors, fostering innovation and more.

Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity was established in 2010 as an initiative by His Highness the Late Amir and former Chairman of the board of directors of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The center was founded to nurture Kuwaiti Human capital and resource with innovation, technical knowledge and expertise to enhance the development and growth of Kuwait.

SACGC is dedicated to facilitating knowledge

and investing in exceptional and high achieving individuals within the entrepreneurial and innovation fields. The center also aims to foster an environment that generates impact across the community that will, in turn, boost social, economic and cultural development.

The center boasts five dedicated scientific clubs each specializing in a different area: the programming club, the robotics club, the science and math club, the electronics club and the design club. SACGC also offers support to young people and innovators who wish to execute their own projects under the supervision of the center's engineers and trainers, offering specially designed courses to support unique projects, and even manufacturing tools and services like digital engraving, laser cutting, 3D printing and more.

Netizens divided on women footing bill at restaurants

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: A tweet went viral in Kuwait recently saying it is not acceptable for a man to allow his wife to pay for him at a restaurant, leading to a host of supporting and opposing reactions. The woman who tweeted it said she witnessed at a restaurant a woman opening her bag and paying the food bill of her husband and herself, commenting this is a shameless thing to do.

The tweet is in sync with the culture of many people in Gulf, Arab and some Asian countries, where such behavior is considered unacceptable. But with the development of societies and empowerment of women, some societal segments have normalized this issue as a partnership between a man and his wife, or

between men and women in general.

Many people, however, still see this as a negative trait. Tweets on this issue included comments like "shameful", "embarrassing behavior" and "at least even if she was inviting him to dinner, she should discreetly give her husband the credit card". Some netizens firmly agreed this is unacceptable behavior by the man, while others speculated the wife might be paying with her husband's card.

Some people also defended the man, saying if women want their full rights, they should be equal in everything, including paying the bills. Kuwaiti public figure Ahmad Hadi opened a conversation on Twitter by starting to wonder about the reason why people consider women paying for men as a lack of manhood. He said people should stop interfering in others' lives, as this matter is something between a husband and wife.

The comments represent not only the mindset of people, but also shed light on society changing and developing over the past years, with women becoming financial partners in the house. Many women, especially expats (due to the financial situation) share in a lot of household expenses, especially working



women, as inflation and rising prices affect the husband's financial status. Although this is a normal thing for a woman to do (if she wants to), many families still do not accept it, as they think men should be responsible for their families.

Despite the spread of feminist groups calling for women's rights in the country, the Kuwaiti society still maintains its conservative traditions.

Kuwait, UN ink counterterrorism agreement

NEW YORK: Kuwait Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Office to combat terrorism signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Friday aimed at enhancing cooperation in counterterrorism and exchanging experiences. "The memorandum will enhance cooperation, exchange of experiences, training of youth and those concerned with the country in combating terrorism and increase cooperation with the United Nations office to support international efforts in the field of combating terrorism," Minister of Foreign Af-

fairs Assistant for Development and International Cooperation Ambassador Hamad Al-Mashaan said in a statement to KUNA.

Mashaan noted that the UN Undersecretary-General for Counterterrorism, Vladimir Voronkov, praised Kuwait's role in the fight against terrorism, and that today's MoU was one of the most important memorandums of understanding signed in this regard. Mashaan added that a training program for Kuwaitis and the establishment of special workshops in the field of combating terrorism are included in the MoU. An invitation was extended to Voronkov to visit Kuwait.

Mashaan reaffirmed Kuwait's constant endeavor to strengthen international partnerships in the field of combating terrorism and that it has become a close partner of the international community, which clearly reflected its active role in regional and international arenas. — KUNA



NEW YORK: Assistant Foreign Minister for Development and International Cooperation Ambassador Hamad Al-Mashaan (left) shakes hands with UN Undersecretary-General for Counterterrorism, Vladimir Voronkov. — KUNA



Director of NCCAL's Foreign Cultural Relations and Antiquities and Museums Departments Mohammad bin Redha speaks at the meeting.

NCCAL attends meeting on protecting Arab culture, heritage

KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) stressed the importance of Kuwait's participation in the meeting of the Standing Committee for Arab Culture of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) which discussed ways to preserve her-



TUNIS: Arab delegates pose for a group photo at the meeting of the Standing Committee for Arab Culture of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO). — KUNA photos

itage and encourage investment in the field of culture.

The meeting, hosted by Tunisia last Tuesday and Wednesday, provided an opportunity to discuss issues regarding culture and heritage sectors. Director of NCCAL's Foreign Cultural Relations Dept, and Antiquities and Museums Dept Mohammad bin Redha said in a press release on Friday.

Bin Redha, a member of the Standing Committee for Arab Culture, added that the meeting discussed preparations for the 24th session of the next conference of ministers for cultural affairs in Arab countries, which will be held in Marrakesh, Morocco.

The meeting discussed follow-up on the im-

plementation of the decisions of the 23rd session, added bin Redha, noting that the meeting also discussed supporting the culture of Jerusalem and sponsoring Arab cultural institutions in Jerusalem. On the sidelines of the meeting, a ceremony was organized to honor the poets on the Arab Poetry Day 2023 and Iraqi poet Nazik Al-Malaika was chosen as a symbol of Arab culture for 2023. ALECSO is one of the most prominent organizations of joint Arab action, since its establishment, that continues to work on its mission in empowering intellectual unity in the Arab world through education, culture, science, and raising the cultural knowledge to keep pace with global civilization. — KUNA

Kuwait calls for stronger efforts to battle illegal trade

BRUSSELS: Director-general of the General Administration of Customs Abdullah Al-Sharhan, on Saturday called for exerting more efforts to face the transformations and challenges in the international trade environment.

This came in a speech delivered by Sharhan during his participation in the meetings of the council of the World Customs Organization, which concluded its work on Saturday at the headquarters of the organization in the Belgian capital Brussels.

Sharhan stressed the need to keep abreast of the accelerated new updates in technological systems and programs, electronic commerce and data digitization that the customs administrations.

He also urged exchanging intelligence information and participating in joint operations through the customs network to combat illegal practices "that negatively affects the security and facilitation of trade".

Sharhan highlighted the need to strengthen the capabilities of customs officials and identify new methods of smuggling. He pointed to Kuwait's membership in the audit and review committee, which is one of the main committees in the organization, explaining that the membership consists of two countries from each of the six regions and its tasks are to provide objective and independent advice and recommendations to the secretary-general, the policy committee and the council and works to review the annual plans and monitor the comprehensive implementation of the strategic plan to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

During the meetings, Sharhan reviewed the priorities of the General Administration of Customs in Kuwait, including the qualification of employees, providing all necessary means to build their capabilities, providing technical assistance to enable them to develop customs work, achieve security and facilitation in trade, providing opportunities for them to occupy positions in the organization, representation on committees and raising the professional level to achieve the goals set in the strategic plan.

During the regional meeting for the Middle East and North Africa, Sharhan stressed the importance of the agreement of the countries of the region on the mechanism of financing the translation of the work of the OIC committees in Arabic to ensure the empowerment and activation of the participation of customs administration officials in the Arab countries, pointing out that the terms of Reference Document for the appointment of technical attaches to the countries of the region was also adopted after the inclusion of Kuwait's observations.

The 141st and 142nd meeting of the Council of the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the 58th regional meeting for the Middle East and North Africa, which began its work on June 21, concluded Saturday, during which the reports of the WCO budget 2023/24 and its finance committee were adopted. The delegation of the State of Kuwait at the meetings was headed by Sharhan. — KUNA

News in Brief

Man drowns
in Abdali pool

KUWAIT: A man died from drowning at a pool in Abdali, according to local police. The victim was swimming with a group of friends when they found him motionless in the pool, according to their statements to police. His friends rushed him to the nearest medical facility, but he was already dead on arrival. Police and criminal investigation department personnel arrived at the scene shortly afterwards. The victim's friends were taken to the police station for questioning as investigations are ongoing in the case.

Six freed from
burning home

KUWAIT: Firefighters saved six people from their burning home in Salwa, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) said in a statement on Saturday. Firemen rushed to the scene in response to an emergency call reporting a fire in a house where six people were trapped behind flames and thick smoke in their second-floor apartment. They were able to evacuate the residents safely and then put out the flames, KFF explained. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire.



Photo of the day



KUWAIT: This aerial photo shows residential areas and the skyline of Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Multiculturalism: Key to overcoming cultural barriers and spreading peace

Befriending diverse people shatters harmful stereotypes: Expert

By Ghadeer Ghloom



Dr Fatemah Al-Mosawi



Lulwa Al-Masoud

KUWAIT: Living as an expatriate can be challenging for many people. From feeling like you don't belong to finding your way around a new place without having a support network, there are many barriers to overcome. For Lulwa Al-Masoud, a Kuwaiti citizen living abroad, embracing multiculturalism and diversity is necessary to conquering such challenges and fostering understanding between people from different cultures.

"I have lived in America for a long time, approximately eight years. As America is a country with a diversity of cultures, I never felt like an outsider, because the society is diverse and we are treated similar to Americans, even as an Arab Muslim wearing a hijab. Multiculturalism had a huge impact on me intellectually and emotionally, and it remains with me in the sense of responsibility I want to spread awareness about the difficult living conditions that expats may face in other countries, such as Kuwait. Multiculturalism has been instrumental in shaping my personality and expanding my horizons. I hope that one day more people will accept and embrace diversity and make everyone feel a sense of belonging," she said.

Multiculturalism is a term used to describe the diversity of different cultures that coexist in a society. It emphasizes the recognition, respect and celebration of cultural differences, which in turn, has a major impact on accepting diversity and reducing hostility. This mutual learning brings about a greater appreciation of diversity, leading to tolerance and acceptance towards people of different races, ethnicities and religions, rather than biased discrimination against those who come from different origins or follow a different belief.

Hence, it encourages inclusion that leads to greater

social cohesion, as individuals are more likely to identify with society as a whole rather than just their personal culture or ethnic group. To encourage learning and accepting differences and shed more light on the advantages of this concept to develop a peaceful society.

Masoud stressed on valuing diversity to create a cohesive and harmonious society, which also provides opportunities for people to celebrate their own cultural traditions and share them with others, as this can further strengthen social bonds and promote mutual respect.

Social entrepreneur and genetics and behavioral scientist Dr Fatemah Al-Mosawi shared her personal perspective with Kuwait Times. "Making friends with people from different backgrounds can change our stereotypical impressions of people. However, with the growing polarization on many topics and views, I feel there are ways in which some would be in a 'us vs them' mindset. Yet, in the face of global challenges, we can only tackle matters if humanity is a united 'we'. This means understanding individual needs not only in terms of culture, but also diverse ways of thinking and decision making. This will help us to respond better in situations with more wisdom than the survival mode reaction," she said.

According to Mosawi, it is important to build relationships with people from different backgrounds as a means to reduce stereotyping. However, she acknowledges that in today's polarized society, people may be more inclined to adopt a competitive mindset, but despite these challenges, working towards a united goal will require understanding individual differences. This, in turn, will allow for more insightful and informed responses to challenges, emphasizing the need for open-mindedness and empathy in a complex and ever-changing world.



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Medx launches Wellness Gift Card to encourage health

KUWAIT: Medx Medical Care, a leading healthcare provider in Kuwait, launched its latest Medx Wellness Gift Card, under the tagline 'Share Your Care' at a function held on 21 June at the Medx Auditorium in Fahaheel.

The new health gift card was inaugurated by Medx President and CEO Mohammed Ali V.P. in the presence of a large gathering of Kuwaiti dignitaries, leaders of different organizations and associations, as well as media personnel.

In his speech on the occasion, Ali stated that the

new Wellness Gift Card evolved from the idea that there is no better way to show your love and care for someone who is ill, than by providing them with the means to access the necessary treatment facilities. He then presented five Medx Wellness Gift Card to each of the leaders of the community organizations.

In addition to the wellness gift card, Medx also offers a number of other gift cards, including the Royal Laser Card, Medx Silver Card, Medx Golden Card, and Royal Health Package Card. These cards are available at a special office in Medx and can be used to purchase a variety of treatment services and packages.

The new Medx Wellness Gift Card is part of the initiative by Medx to encourage people to give the gift of health to their loved ones, and to raise awareness on the importance of preventive care, as well as make it more convenient for people to access these services.



With an eye toward China, Biden goes all-in for Modi

Dictator's daughter, ex-first lady vie to lead Guatemala

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World watches with concern as mutiny unfolds in Russia

British PM urged 'all parties to be responsible and to protect civilians'



ROSTOV-ON-DON: Members of Wagner group sit atop of a tank in a street in the city of Rostov-on-Don, on June 24, 2023. President Vladimir Putin said an armed mutiny by Wagner mercenaries was a "stab in the back" and that the group's chief Yevgeny Prigozhin had betrayed Russia, as he vowed to punish the dissidents. — AFP

PARIS: Countries around the world were on Saturday closely watching events unfolding in Russia, where a mutiny by the Wagner mercenary group posed the most serious challenge yet to President Vladimir Putin's long rule.

Here is what governments and analysts are saying about the extraordinary situation taking place in nuclear-armed Russia:

Ukraine

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the Wagner mutiny showed Russia was weak. "Russia's weakness is obvious. Full-scale weakness. And the longer Russia keeps its troops and mercenaries on our land, the more chaos, pain, and problems it will have for itself later," he said in a statement on social media. Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Malnar said it provided a "window of opportunity" for Kyiv on the battlefield.

The United States

US President Joe Biden was briefed on the situation in Russia and Washington and "will be consulting with allies and partners on these developments",

National Security Council spokesman Adam Hodge said.

Europe

European Union chief Charles Michel tweeted that the bloc was "closely monitoring the situation in Russia as it unfolds. In touch with European leaders and G7 partners." "This is clearly an internal Russian issue," he wrote, adding that "our support for Ukraine" remains "unwavering". The bloc's diplomatic chief Josep Borrell said the EU was in "permanent contact with our ambassador in Moscow and continuing our internal consultations with our member states."

NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu said only the alliance was "monitoring the situation". British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak urged "all parties to be responsible and to protect civilians." "We're in touch with our allies as the situation evolves. I'll be speaking to some of them later today and the most important thing is for all parties to behave responsibly," he told the BBC.

Meanwhile, Czech politicians used the mutiny as a moment to take a stab at Russian leadership. "I can see my sum-

mer holiday in Crimea is approaching," said Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky, referring to the territory annexed by Russia from Ukraine in 2014.

"So we finally know what the Russians mean by a Special Operation," said Czech Defence Minister Jana Cernochova. "After 16 months of the war in Ukraine, Russia is waging war on Russia. No surprise. It's a tradition over there. Failed wars end up with the Tsar being executed, with chaos and with a civil war supervised by snoopers. Congratulations," she said.

Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer, who has met Putin since the launch of the Ukraine war, warned of the nuclear risks of the instability in Russia. "The operations of the Russian Federations are always of the utmost importance, because the Russian Federation has a great potential for biological, chemical and nuclear weapons," he said.

In Berlin, "the government is closely following the events in Russia", a spokesman told AFP. The foreign ministry advised avoiding central Moscow and government and military buildings in the capital. In Paris, French President

Emmanuel Macron is also keeping a close eye, the Elysee said. "We remain focused on supporting Ukraine."

In Rome, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's office said the events "show how the aggression against Ukraine is causing instability also within Russia." In Sweden, Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom tweeted: "The government is closely following the situation in Russia. The situation is serious."

In Norway, Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt said Oslo was "closely following the dramatic situation in Russia and are in close contact with the embassy in Moscow." Belgian Defence Minister Ludivine Dedonder tweeted that the situation was "serious" and he was watching to see "what impact it has on the conflict."

G7

The EU's Borrell announced that foreign affairs ministers of the G7 nations held a call to "exchange views" on the situation Saturday. Borrell didn't provide details of the exchange in his tweet, which Berlin also confirmed, saying German Foreign Affairs Minister Annalena Baer-

bock "just discussed the situation" with her G7 counterparts.

Qatar

Qatar's foreign ministry said it was following "with great concern" and urged restraint. "The worsening situation in Russia and Ukraine will have negative repercussions on international peace and security, and on food and energy supplies, which were mainly affected by the Russian-Ukrainian crisis," the ministry said.

Analysts

The UK Ministry of Defence said in an intelligence update that "this represents the most significant challenge to the Russian state in recent times." "Over the coming hours, the loyalty of Russia's security forces, and especially the Russian National Guard, will be key to how the crisis plays out," it said in a tweet.

The US-based Institute for the Study of War said the armed rebellion was "unlikely to succeed" but that "an armed Wagner attack against the Russian military leadership in Rostov-on-Don would have significant impacts on Russia's war effort in Ukraine." — AFP

All five on Titanic sub dead after catastrophic implosion

BOSTON: All five people aboard a submersible that went missing near the wreck of the Titanic died — likely in an instant — when their vessel suffered what the US Coast Guard said Thursday was a "catastrophic implosion" in the ocean depths.

The somber announcement ended a multinational search-and-rescue operation that captivated the world since the tiny tourist craft disappeared in the North Atlantic four days ago. Rear Admiral John Mauger told reporters in Boston that analysis showed debris found on the seafloor, 1,600 feet (500 meters) from the bow of the Titanic, was consistent with an implosion of the sub's pressure chamber.

"On behalf of the United States Coast Guard and the entire unified command, I offer my deepest condolences to the families," Mauger said. On board were Brit-

ish explorer Hamish Harding, French submarine expert Paul-Henri Nargeolet, Pakistani-British tycoon Shahzad Dawood and his son Suleman, and Stockton Rush, CEO of the sub's operator OceanGate Expeditions.

OceanGate said its "hearts are with these five souls and every member of their families during this tragic time." "These men were true explorers who shared a distinct spirit of adventure, and a deep passion for exploring and protecting the world's oceans," it said in a statement. The Coast Guard announced earlier Thursday that an underwater robot had discovered a "debris field" in the search area.

Authorities said they later learned the pieces included the sub's tail cone and front and back ends of its pressure hull. Mauger said the Coast Guard could not be sure when or why the vessel imploded and declined to be drawn on whether remains of the men would be retrieved.

"This is an incredibly unforgiving environment down there on the seafloor," he said. The process of demobilizing personnel and vessels from the scene would soon begin, but unmanned robots would continue operations on the seabed for now, Mauger added. — AFP



BOSTON: US Rear Adm. John Mauger, the First Coast Guard District commander, speaks at a press conference at the US Coast Guard Base Boston in Boston. All five people aboard that went missing near the wreck of the Titanic died — likely in an instant — when their vessel suffered a "catastrophic loss" of pressure, Mauger said. — AFP

Air strikes, killings in Sudan as aid stalls

KHARTOUM: Artillery fire, air strikes and gun battles rocked Sudan's capital on Saturday, witnesses told AFP, as the UN urged a stop to "wanton killings" that have left decomposing bodies in Darfur. While fighting rages, relief efforts have stalled after more than two months of fighting between rival generals.

Houses in Khartoum shook from the fighting that continued unabated, residents said, with entire families shelter-

ing in place, running low on vital supplies in the baking summer heat. The United Nations says nearly 1.5 million people have fled the capital since violence erupted in mid-April, pitting the regular army against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Entire districts of Khartoum no longer have running water, and those who remain in the city have had no electricity at all since Thursday, several residents told AFP. The battle for power between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, has killed more than 2,000 people, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

The deadliest violence has raged in

Darfur, a vast western region on the border with Chad where the UN has warned of possible crimes against humanity and said the conflict has taken an "ethnic dimension".

In the South Darfur state capital Nyala, residents said they had been caught in the crossfire. They reported battles, shelling and artillery strikes. "Civilians were killed, and wounded are arriving at the hospital," a medic told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The UN on Saturday urged "immediate action" to stop killings of people fleeing El Geneina, the West Darfur state capital, by Arab militias aided by the paramilitaries. The Geneva-based UN rights office said witnesses had given "corroborating ac-

counts" of militias targeting men from the non-Arab Masalit people.

It said all but two of the 16 people it interviewed testified they had witnessed "summary executions" and the targeting of civilians on the road from El Geneina to the border between June 15 and 16. "All those interviewed also spoke of seeing dead bodies scattered along the road — and the stench of decomposition," the UN said.

Two-thirds of health facilities in the main battlegrounds remain out of service, according to the Sudanese doctors' union. The few hospitals still operating are extremely low on medical supplies and struggling to obtain fuel to power generators. — AFP

Around 40 missing in Italy migrant boat shipwreck

ROME: More than 40 people are missing after a migrant boat capsized off the Italian island of Lampedusa, the UN said. The shipwreck took place on Thursday and at least one newborn baby is among those missing, said UNHCR representative to Italy Chiara Cardoletti.

The vessel left from Sfax in Tunisia and was carrying 46 migrants from Cameroon, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast, Flavio Di Giacomo, a spokesman for the UN migration agency IOM, said Friday. The boat capsized in strong winds and high waves, he said. "Some survivors were taken to Lampedusa and others were brought back to Tunisia".

"Among those missing were seven women and a minor. The survivors are all adult men", he added. "We have noticed more arrivals of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa than Tunisians" via the Tunisian route since November, he said.

He explained this was due to people from sub-Saharan Africa fleeing discrimination in Tunisia. "It is unacceptable to continue counting the dead at the gates of Europe", Cardoletti wrote on Twitter, referring to deadly shipwrecks of migrant boats which have already occurred in Italy, Greece and Spain.

"A coordinated and shared rescue mechanism at sea between states is now also a matter of conscience." Di Giacomo also stressed the fragility of the badly welded boats, which sank at the first damage.

"We are therefore not aware of certain shipwrecks," he said, calling for "patrols of European ships to monitor the Tunisian route as well as the Libyan route, otherwise we will witness a disaster this summer." Located about 145 kilometres (90 miles) from the Tunisian coast, the southern Italian island of Lampedusa is one of the main entry points for migrants crossing the Mediterranean. — AFP

International

Greece eyes Mitsotakis win

Getting voters to return to polls is a gamble for former Harvard graduate

ATHENS: Sipping her four-euro (\$4.36) freddo in a suburban Athens cafe, Maria N. says she has no illusions about how Greece's national election on Sunday is going to turn out. "I'm not even sure I'm going to vote, the outcome is foregone," the doctor says.

With opinion polls giving him a lead of around 20 percentage points, conservative leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis is almost assured of winning a second straight four-year term. But he fears that voter apathy could end up costing him the absolute majority he seeks, which was the whole point of him calling fresh elections for the second time in a month.

Crediting him with bringing back stable economic growth to a country once notorious for its debt woes, voters gave Mitsotakis 40.79 percent of the vote on May 21. But his party fell five seats short of a parliamentary majority, which would have required the 55-year-old to govern in a coalition, something that he has refused.

Getting voters to return to the polls however is a gamble for the former Harvard graduate and McKinsey financial consultant. His key challenge is to keep the 9.8 million eligible Greek voters away from the beach this weekend.

'Not strong'

He has even gone as far as to warn of a third election in August, at the height of the busy tourism season, if he fails to clinch enough votes to form his own government. "I hope we don't have to meet again in early August," he told Skai TV on the last day of campaigning. "This is no joke," he added.

On May 21, Mitsotakis crushed the leftist Syriza

party of former prime minister Alexis Tsipras by over 20 points in a victory nobody expected to be as clear. A Pulse poll for Skai TV on Thursday suggested that 73 percent would vote for the same party they chose in May.

Tsipras is still remembered as the prime minister who nearly crashed Greece out of the euro. Having now lost four electoral contests to Mitsotakis, his future as head of Syriza is at stake. He warned this week against giving Mitsotakis a "blank cheque" that would enable him to carry out a "hidden agenda" of anti-social policies.

But cafe-owner Agueliki Giannopoulou, 45, is not convinced. Tsipras, he said, "says nothing of note. His message is not strong". For many Greeks however, high consumer prices remain a constant source of worry despite the headline growth figure touted by Mitsotakis.

In front of a sports betting shop, two retirees were discussing the high cost of living. "Prices are changing every day at the supermarkets," said Konstantinos Noumas, noting that cherries were being sold for 1.70 a kilogramme at cooperatives as supermarkets charged 6.0 euros a kilo.

His friend, Zissis Karagiorgos, 67, hoped that "the people, especially young people will stop being afraid of change". While normally more inclined to vote left, even young Greeks mainly voted conservative at the last vote.

Nikos Giorgiou, 24, who had turned up with her mother at Syntagma Square on Friday for Mitsotakis' final campaign rally said he "deserves an absolute majority". "Only Mitsotakis



ATHENS: A supporter of Conservative leader of New Democracy party Kyriakos Mitsotakis, takes a selfie in Athens. — AFP

can allow the country to stabilize economically and to offer a future for young people who had gone into exile during the economic crisis,"

he said. Student Giorgos Bistouras, 20, said he simply hoped that "salaries will improve and that promises will be kept". — AFP

Dictator's daughter, ex-first lady vie to lead Guatemala

GUATEMALA CITY: A dictator's daughter, a former first lady and a UN diplomat lead the pack of 22 candidates vying for the Guatemalan presidency in elections Sunday that will likely lead to a runoff in August. AFP takes a look at the frontrunners — all three of whom oppose the legalization of gay marriage and abortion in a staunchly Catholic country.

Sandra Torres

Torres, 67, placed second in Guatemala's last two elections, in 2019 and 2015. She is the ex-wife of deceased leftist former president Alvaro Colom, arrested for fraud in a case that never went to trial. Torres herself was detained in 2019 on charges of illicit campaign funding, but the case was dropped last year. From the same center-left National Unity of Hope party as Colom — the largest

in Congress — this is Torres's fourth shot at the presidency. She had first sought to run in 2011, divorcing Colom as he was still in office to bypass a constitutional disqualification for close relatives of presidents. Her candidacy was rejected nevertheless. In her latest campaign, Torres's focus has been on high levels of violent crime, a major voter concern.

She has praised the tactics of Nayib Bukele of neighboring El Salvador in his controversial "war" on gangs, with mass arrests earning him adoration from crime-weary citizens but sparking concerns over rights violations. She has promised help for the poor in the form of feeding and educational programs.

Torres, who hails from northern Guatemala, earned a degree in communication science and ran a textile business before entering politics. In 2002 she divorced her first husband, with whom she has four children, marrying Colom in 2003.

Torres is "a woman of leadership, character and determination," according to her campaign manager Adim Maldonado. Congressman Oscar Argueta, a former ally, told AFP Torres was "hard-working and tenacious" but quick to "discard" people once they are

no longer useful to her. Lawyer and diplomat Mulet, 72, is running his second presidential campaign. He came third in 2019. He is a fierce critic of the government of conservative Alejandro Giammattei, on whose watch anti-graft prosecutors and critical journalists have been detained or gone into exile, raising international concern.

"We are slowly sliding into an authoritarian model," Mulet told AFP this month. He represents the centrist Cabal party he founded in 2020. It has no seats in parliament. His platform includes proposals for a universal pension, free medicines, expanded access to the internet, and youth unemployment projects.

Mulet also wants to shrink government and fight corruption. Unlike Rios and Torres, he is critical of Bukele's approach to violent crime, a problem he said at a campaign rally Thursday he would tackle with a heightened security deployment "of at least 18 months."

Born in Guatemala City, Mulet worked as a journalist before embarking on a political career. In 1992, he was president of Guatemala's congress, then served as ambassador to the United States and the European Union. — AFP



GUATEMALA CITY: Guatemalan candidate for the National Union of Hope party and former First Lady (2008-2011), Sandra Torres, greets supporters during her closing campaign rally at La Terminal market in Guatemala City. — AFP

Wagner troops 'turning back' ...

Continued from Page 1

warned the West against trying to exploit the revolt for "Russo-phobic goals". Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, once a close Putin ally, said his troops had taken control of the military command center and airbase in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don, the nerve center of Russia's offensive in Ukraine, and vowed to topple Moscow's top military leaders.

"We got to Rostov. Without a single shot we captured the HQ building," he said, in an audio message on social media channels, claiming that local civilians had welcomed the operation. "Why does the country support us? Because we went on a march of justice," he said, claiming his men had not killed any soldiers despite having been hit with strikes from army "artillery and after that from helicopters".

Responding to the challenge in a televised address, Putin accused Prigozhin — whose private army provided shock troops for Moscow's offensive in Ukraine — of a "stab in the back" that posed a threat to Russia's very survival. "Any internal turmoil is a deadly threat to our statehood and to us as a nation. This is a blow to Russia and to our people," Putin said, demanding national unity.

"Extravagant ambitions and personal interests led to treason," Putin said, referring to Prigozhin, who built his powerbase as a catering contractor to the Kremlin and now runs a private military force. "All those who consciously stood on the path of betrayal, who prepared an armed rebellion, stood on the path of blackmail and terrorist methods, will suffer inevitable punishment, before the law and before our people," Putin vowed.

The FSB security service accused Prigozhin of attempting to launch a "civil conflict" and urged Wagner fighters to detain him. Another Putin ally, Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov, declared that he had dispatched his own units to help quash the Wagner rebellion. "Defense ministry and National Guard fighters of the Chechen Republic have already

left for the zones of tension," Kadyrov said on Telegram. "The rebellion must be put down, and if harsh measures are necessary, we are ready!"

Belarus also backed Moscow in the conflict. "Any provocation, any internal conflict in military or political circles, in the information field or in civil society is a gift to the collective West," the Belarusian foreign ministry said. Latvia announced that it was tightening security on its Russian border and would not admit refugees fleeing the chaos. Inside Ukraine, emergency services said that three people were killed and nearly a dozen injured in Kyiv after what authorities said was an overnight barrage of 40 Russian cruise missiles and at least two attack drones.

After Putin's speech accusing him of treason, Prigozhin launched a second broadside. "On treason of the motherland: The president is deeply wrong. We are patriots of our motherland," Prigozhin said. "Nobody plans to turn themselves in at the request of the president, the FSB or anyone else." Russia's headquarters in Rostov-on-Don is a key logistical base for its offensive in Ukraine.

Watching events unfold in Russia as his own forces conduct a slow-moving counteroffensive, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said the revolt showed Russia's was failing. "Russia's weakness is obvious. Full-scale weakness," he said. "And the longer Russia keeps its troops and mercenaries on our land, the more chaos, pain, and problems it will have for itself later. It is also obvious, that Ukraine is able to protect Europe from the spread of Russian evil and chaos."

Armed Wagner fighters deployed around administrative buildings in Rostov and tanks could be seen in the city center. As the insurrection force headed north through Voronezh and Lipetsk towards Moscow, the capital's mayor announced that "anti-terrorist" measures were being taken. Critical facilities were "under reinforced protection", TASS reported, citing a law enforcement source. While Prigozhin's outfit fought at the forefront of Russia's offensive in Ukraine, in recent months it has engaged in a bitter feud with Moscow's military leadership. He has repeatedly blamed Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Valery Gerasimov, chief of the general staff, for his fighters' deaths. — Agencies

category last year. The improvement reflects KU's constant care for issues of quality education and advancement of scientific research, according to a press release from the university. KU made concerted efforts to provide THE with the necessary data as part of experience sharing to ensure meeting the world's highest standards, KU noted, pledging to continue efforts to modernize the educational system.

The World University Rankings 2023 include 1,799 universities across 104 countries and regions, making it the largest and most diverse university rankings to date. The table is based on 13 carefully calibrated performance indicators that measure an institution's performance across four areas: Teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook. — KUNA

Like dogs, wolves recognize familiar human voices

WASHINGTON: Here, wolfie, wolfie, wolfie! Like dogs, wolves recognize and respond to the voices of familiar humans more than strangers, according to a study that has implications both for the story of canine domestication and our broader understanding of the natural world. Holly RootGutteridge of the University of Lincoln, a co-author of the paper that appeared in *Animal Cognition* this week, told AFP a longstanding theory held that dogs' ability to distinguish human voices was a consequence of generations of selective breeding.

"So we wanted to look at wolves, because obviously nobody has been selecting so that wolves can recognize human voices," she said. RootGutteridge and colleagues carried out experiments across five zoos and wildlife parks in Spain, involving a total of 24 gray wolves, both male and female, aged between one and 13. The team set up speakers and first played the animals the voice of a number of strangers that they would "habituate" to, in other words, get bored of, because they decided it was not salient to them.

US: No evidence COVID created...

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engineered and most believe as well it was not laboratory-adapted. But the ODNI report, as in March, did not dismiss the possibility that COVID-19 was being examined in the Wuhan lab at the time and may have leaked out through carelessness.

ODNI said the intelligence community remained divided on whether the pandemic arose from a natural occurrence of the virus — perhaps transferred from animals like bats — or from a lab leak. The report said the Wuhan lab had done pathogen research and vaccine development together with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) "for public health

needs". But the coronaviruses used in this research "were too distantly related to have led to the creation of SARS-CoV-2," the report said.

It firmly rejected allegations that COVID-19 was developed by the PLA as a bioweapon. The ODNI report responded to the allegation that three of the scientists at the Wuhan facility who were working on coronaviruses came down with COVID-19 around just ahead of the outbreak. It said US intelligence found that several Wuhan researchers did become "mildly" ill in the Fall of 2019.

Some of their symptoms were consistent with COVID-19; other symptoms not consistent, it said. It also said US intelligence did not know if those who became sick handled live viruses in their work. "The IC continues to assess that this information neither supports nor refutes either hypothesis of the pandemic's origins because the researchers' symptoms could have been caused by a number of diseases," it said. — AFP

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Grade 12 results announced; KU

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Abdullah Al-Salem University (AASU) and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), Adwani added. Meanwhile, the ministry of education said 80.78 percent of students of the arts division passed the exams, with the success percentages in the science stream and religious institute amounting to 81.62 and 89.62 percent respectively.

Meanwhile, Kuwait University said Saturday the Times Higher Education (THE) Asia University Rankings 2023 raised its rating to 201-250 from 250-300

Diabetes cases set to double to...

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with diabetes will live in low- and middle-income countries. But even in wealthy countries such as the United States, diabetes rates were almost 1.5 times higher among minorities such as black, Hispanic, Asian or Native Americans, a separate Lancet study said.

Study co-author Leonard Egede, of the Medical College of Wisconsin, blamed a "cascade

of widening diabetes inequity". "Racist policies such as residential segregation affect where people live, their access to sufficient and healthy food and healthcare services," he said in a statement.

Ong said "the challenge is that we don't really see one type of intervention that's going to fix everything". Instead, fighting diabetes will require long-term planning, investment and attention from countries around the globe, she said. In an editorial, the Lancet said that "the world has failed to understand the social nature of diabetes and underestimated the true scale and threat the disease poses". "Diabetes will be a defining disease of this century," it added. — AFP

International

With an eye toward China, Biden goes all-in for Modi

‘We’ve got partners, allies and we’ve got India on our side of the ledger’

WASHINGTON: Laser-focused on countering China, US President Joe Biden has embraced Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he has few other world leaders, casting aside any concerns about the Hindu nationalist's authoritarian streak.

Biden offered Modi the full pomp of a state visit with two dinners — one intimate and one gala — a meeting with top CEOs, and a long list of concrete takeaways including agreements on US engines for India's new home-grown fighter-jets and a major semiconductor factory.

Biden is “trying to tell the world that America is back. We’ve got partners and allies and we’ve got India on our side of the ledger,” said Aparna Pande, a South Asia expert at the Hudson Institute. Biden hopes to “send a message to China — you have your people and I have my people and India is among mine,” she said.

Tamanna Salikuddin, a former State Department official, called the joint statement for Modi's visit “remarkable” in its scope with the defense deliverables on par with what the United States would give a NATO or other treaty ally.

“The depth and breadth of what we’re committing to with India is really putting them in a totally different basket. And I think that is what Modi wanted,” said Salikuddin, now director of South Asia programs at the US Institute of Peace.

The Biden administration considers China the most serious long-term challenger to the United States, despite renewed efforts to manage tensions. Both Biden and Modi publicly played down the China factor but Modi made a clear allusion in his address to the US Congress where he backed a “free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific,” winning knowing applause from lawmakers. India, a fast-growing economy which has surpassed China as the world's

most populous country, has a long-running territorial dispute with China, which the Indian public widely sees negatively.

Sidestepping rights concerns

Modi enjoyed more obvious kinship with fellow right-wing populist Donald Trump, for whom the prime minister arranged a packed stadium rally in his home state of Gujarat, a scene hard to imagine with Biden, who is not known for exciting the masses.

But US presidents across party lines have been seeking a closer relationship with India since Bill Clinton in the late 1990s, seeing alignment between the world's largest democracies after Cold War estrangement. Modi, the most powerful Indian leader in decades, comes with particular baggage. Before he became prime minister in 2014, the United States refused to issue him a visa due to his alleged role in anti-Muslim riots as leader of Gujarat.

The US State Department in its latest religious freedom report spoke of vigilante violence against minorities after incitement from Modi's base. Indian authorities have also raided media offices and parliament expelled the opposition leader.

At least six lawmakers boycotted Modi's speech but Biden made clear that rights concerns would not impede ties with India and offered carefully chosen words about both countries facing challenges to democracy.

Modi, who has not held an open press conference at home in his nine years in power, was coaxed to take two questions as part of the state visit and denied discrimination against minorities. “There's an irony in that the Biden administration seeks to contrast democratic India with authoritarian China,” said Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center.



WASHINGTON: (L-R) US First Lady Jill Biden, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joe Biden wave from the Truman Balcony during a welcoming ceremony for Modi at the White House in Washington. — AFP

But Biden “doesn't appear to worry too much” about accusations he is ignoring democratic backsliding in India, Kugelman said. “The two leaders definitely got what they wanted: They brought the most prestige possible to a partnership they're keen to showcase,” he said.

Still nonaligned?

Ashley Tellis, a prominent India scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, offered a contrarian view in a recent essay in Foreign Affairs. He pointed to India's refusal to join the West in isolating Russia over Ukraine and doubted that India, hesitant at formal alliances, would provide any

meaningful support in a US conflict with China.

But paradoxically, even as Modi faces criticism on rights, his anti-elite pedigree has led him to reject some vestiges of the proud nonalignment of India's post-independence leaders and to work more closely with the United States.

Salikuddin said that Modi, with his enthusiastic domestic base, was not seeking personal “validation” in Washington on his record — but that he was seeking results, which he received aplenty. “He's going to go back and say — look, I have delivered. I have put India on the world stage and made India an indispensable partner in the Indo-Pacific,” she said. — AFP

Malian voters approve changes to constitution

BAMAKO: Malian voters overwhelmingly approved changes to the constitution in a referendum, marking a key step in the ruling junta's declared plans to restore civilian rule, provisional results showed Friday. The military has made the draft constitution a cornerstone for the rebuilding of Mali, which is facing the spread of jihadism and a deep, multi-faceted crisis.

Ninety-seven percent of the referendum votes were cast in favor of the changes, the electoral authority said. Voter turnout was put at 39.4 percent in the landlocked Sahel country, which is struggling with an 11-year-old jihadist insurgency.

Opponents of the plan believe the vote was designed to keep the colonels in power beyond the presidential election scheduled for February 2024, despite their initial commitment to hand over to civilians after the elections.

The new constitution will strengthen the role of the president, a change that has spurred expectations that junta leader Colonel Assimi Goita intends to vie for the job. The changes will also give pride of place to the armed forces and emphasize “sovereignty”, the ruling junta's mantra since it came to power in 2020. Voting was hampered in many towns in the centre and north of the country, either by fear of jihadist attacks or by political disagreements.

Stronger president

Mali has been under military rule since August 2020 when army officers angered over failures to roll back the jihadists forced out the country's elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. The country's strongman, Goita, is a special forces colonel.

He initially appointed a civilian as interim president but kicked him out in a second coup in 2021 and stepped into the top job himself. Under pressure from the West African regional bloc ECOWAS,



ADJAME: A Malian national living in Abidjan casts his ballot during voting for the referendum on the draft of the new Malian constitution in the district of Adjame, Ivory Coast. — AFP

Goita has vowed to restore a civilian government in March 2024 after implementing what the junta says are crucially needed institutional reforms. Under the constitutional changes, the president will “determine the policies of the Nation,” a role allotted to the government under the country's current constitution, which dates to 1992.

The head of state will have the right to hire and fire the prime minister and cabinet members, and the government will be answerable to him and not to parliament as is the case presently. Other clauses provide amnesty to those behind prior coups, reform oversight of public finances and force MPs and senators to declare their wealth in a bid to clamp down on corruption.

The 1992 constitution has often been criticized for creating a weak central state unable to combat security crises, develop infrastructure and meet other needs. But its proposed replacement has been attacked by critics as a tool for consolidating the junta's grip. The ruling authorities have defended the reforms as an essential for the overhaul of the Malian state, which they intend to carry out.

bour — which wants Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom with England, Wales and Northern Ireland — would gain 23 seats to bring their seat tally in Scotland up to 24.

The Scottish Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, also pro-union parties, would each take four seats. Patrick English, an associate director at YouGov, said the survey, conducted in April and May, suggested the recent bad news stories have hit SNP support.

“Not since 2010 have either the Scottish Nationalists failed to win more than 30 seats at a general election contest, or Labour surpassed seven (in Scotland),” he said. The SNP has been the dominant force in Scottish politics since elections for the devolved Scottish parliament in Edinburgh in 2007, when it won 47 out of 129 seats. — AFP



DUNDEE: Scotland's first minister and Scottish National Party (SNP) leader Humza Yousaf is applauded after delivering a speech during the Scottish National Party (SNP) independence conference in Dundee, Scotland. — AFP

General election concerns

YouGov forecast it could lose nearly half those seats — 21 — if there were a general election. La-

Russian paramilitaries

In the country's restive north, armed groups that had previously battled the government in Bamako but signed a fragile peace agreement with it in 2015, hampered Sunday's referendum. In places in their region where the vote did take place, ballot stuffing was widespread, they said.

Influential religious figures, including prominent imam Mahmoud Dicko, also complained that the new constitution retained a clause defining Mali as a secular state. The referendum coincided with a confrontation between Mali and the United Nations over the future of the UN's decade-long peacekeeping mission in Mali.

Two days before Sunday's vote, the junta called on the UN Security Council to pull out the 15,000-man MINUSMA force immediately, saying the mission had failed in its task of providing security. MINUSMA's mandate expires on June 30.

The ruling military has also fallen out with France, Mali's traditional ally, which withdrew its troops after the country wove close ties with the Kremlin and brought in Russian paramilitaries. — AFP

Sierra Leone votes amid economic crisis

FREETOWN: Sierra Leone voted Saturday in a fiercely contested general election, with President Julius Maada Bio seeking a second term amid a crippling economic crisis that sparked deadly riots last year. The deeply poor West African nation was battered by a brutal 1991-2002 civil war and the Ebola epidemic a decade later, and further pummeled economically by the Covid pandemic and the fallout from the war in Ukraine. Boubacar Conteh, 27, from Wellington in the east of Freetown, waited since four in the morning to cast his ballot. “I want my country to change - I need change,” he said. Twelve men and one woman are vying for the top job and incumbent Bio's main challenger is Samura Kamara of the All People's Congress (APC) party.

The two could face off for the second time in a row. Bio, 59, of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), narrowly beat Kamara, who is aged 72, in a runoff in 2018. Rising food prices are a key issue for many voters in the import-dependent nation of eight million people. Year-on-year inflation hit 43 percent in April, according to the latest official figures. Both Bio and Kamara told AFP they would prioritize boosting agricultural production.

Regional allegiances

Polling stations opened later than the scheduled time of 7:00 am in the capital Freetown, AFP journal-

Eight Chinese jets approach Taiwan waters

TAIPEI: Taiwan's defence ministry said Saturday that eight Chinese warplanes had crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait and come close to waters under Taipei's control. Taiwan lives under constant threat of invasion by China, which views the self-ruled island as part of its territory to be seized one day.

On Saturday, Taiwan's defence ministry said 19 Chinese warplanes including J-10 and J-16 fighters were detected around the island. Eight of them crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait and approached the island's contiguous zone, or the band of sea within 24 nautical miles (44 kilometres) of its coast, the ministry said in a statement.

“Additionally, five PLAN (Chinese navy) vessels conducted joint combat patrol,” it continued, adding that it was closely monitoring the situation and had deployed its patrol aircraft and vessels in response. Beijing has ramped up incursions into Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ) in recent years as relations between the two sides have plunged.

Taiwanese Defence Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng warned in March that Beijing could use a potential visit by US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy as an excuse to cross into Taiwan's contiguous zone and approach its territorial space, defined as being within 12 nautical miles of the coast.

McCarthy instead met Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen in California in April, prompting China to launch three days of military exercises around the island that included simulating targeted strikes and practising a blockade. On the final day of the drills, Taiwan detected 12 Chinese warships and 91 aircraft around the island, with 54 planes entering its southwestern and southeastern ADIZ. — AFP

ists said, including in the central Wilberforce Barracks area. They were due to close at 5:00 pm (1700 GMT). Some 3.4 million people are registered to vote, 52.4 percent of whom are under 35 years old, according to an electoral commission spokesman. Presidential candidates must secure 55 percent of valid votes for a first-round win.

Turnout has ranged between 76 and 87 percent over the past three elections. Voters will also elect members of parliament and local councils in a proportional representation system after a last-minute switch from a first-past-the-post system.

Under a recently passed gender act, one-third of all candidates must be women. A new 11.9 percent vote threshold will make it difficult for independents and minority parties to secure seats in parliament.

Many Sierra Leoneans vote based on regional allegiances. The majority of people in the south and east normally vote for the ruling SLPP while most people from the north and west normally vote for the opposition APC. Jobs and benefits are commonly perceived to flow to regions whose politicians are in power. Bio, a former coup leader in the 1990s, has championed education and women's rights in his first civilian term.

Kamara, a former foreign and finance minister, has lambasted the electoral commission for alleged bias in favor of the ruling party. He is facing a protracted trial over allegations that he misappropriated public funds as foreign minister, a case he says is politically motivated. A June 14 poll by Institute for Governance Reform (IGR), a partner of the pan-African survey group Afrobarometer, forecasts Bio will win 56 percent of the vote, with 43 percent for Kamara. Another poll, conducted by the newspaper Sierra Eye and two local data groups, forecasts 38 percent for the incumbent and 25 percent for his main challenger. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, JUNE 25, 2023

Big tech quietly rolling out services for disabled users

Apple, Google harnessing the sensors, cameras of smartphones



BARCELONA: Visitors try Honor Magic Vs foldable smartphones at the Mobile World Congress (MWC), the telecom industry's biggest annual gathering, in Barcelona. — AFP photos

PARIS: Buried beneath the hype of the artificial intelligence revolution, big tech is quietly rolling out services for disabled people that it hopes will push a greater transformation for customers. Apple and Google are leading the field, harnessing the sensors and cameras of their best-selling smartphones that allow users to edit, enhance and improve their photos and audio. Among the latest announcements, Apple unveiled its Live Speech feature in May that uses machine learning — the term Apple uses for AI — to re-create a user's voice.

The idea is to allow people who are at risk of losing the ability to speak to type messages and have them read out in their natural voices. Google, meanwhile, is testing an upgrade to its Lookout app, a program that describes images to blind people and those with impaired vision. The new version, Google says, will use AI to identify objects without the need for labeling.

Digital 'kerb cuts'

Both firms are keen to portray this as the norm. "We try and put a lot of time in, early and often," Sarah Herrlinger, who leads Apple's accessibility projects, told AFP during a recent tech event in Paris.

When asked about the process behind developing a product like the Vision Pro — a headset launched to great fanfare earlier this month — she said the idea was "to make sure that, when we are at the point of making an announcement like that, we can say we've been thoughtful about this".

Google's accessibility chief Eve Andersson makes a similar point, telling AFP hundreds of people worked full-time on accessibility at the company. "What's even more important is that we expect accessibility to be a core part of everybody's job who is creating products," she said. If there is discord between the firms' approaches, it is more in emphasis than practicalities.

While Herrlinger stresses the rigor of Apple's targeting, Andersson is keen to talk up the way that such features end up improving everyone's lives. She describes it as a digital "kerb cut", an idea named after the initiative to lower kerbs on pavements that was initially intended to help wheelchair users but also helped people with pushchairs, bicycles or those carrying anything awkward. Andersson cites digital kerb cuts such as autocorrect, autocomplete and voice recognition software. "A lot of this was originally developed as accessibility technology that

now it's just productivity-enhancing, for all of us," she said.

'Marketplace reality'

Google and Apple are among the most well-known brands on the planet and both describe how they develop accessibility features by gathering feedback from their vast numbers of users. They are also among the richest firms, so they can go into fine-grain detail in their product planning. Herrlinger said Apple had worked closely with Team Gleason, a charity formed by ex-American football player Steve Gleason who was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a rare, incurable and debilitating disease.

Apple worked with his foundation to make sure its products would work for those suffering from ALS. But Apple and Google are not the only ones developing accessibility tech — the widening availability of AI models has sparked huge creativity. Microsoft has developed SeeingAI, which describes photos for visually impaired people, and there are a host of startups in the field.

French firm Sonar Vision is developing technology to guide visually impaired people around cities, and Equally AI is harnessing the ChatGPT bot to improve



BANGKOK: Visitors check their smartphones as they sit under an installation at the Asiatic Riverfront along the Chao Phraya river in Bangkok.

the accessibility of websites. Manuel Pereira of the French Valentin Haüy association, which campaigns for greater accessibility, reckons AI has the potential to give blind and visually impaired people more autonomy.

But he had a warning for the companies in the field. "If we fall into an economic model that emphasizes profit-

ability, the door can close as quickly as it opened," he said. Google's Andersson makes the opposite point, saying the realization that one billion people live with disabilities has jolted companies into realizing what this could mean for their bottom line. "It's marketplace reality, not every company does it out of the goodness of their hearts," she said. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: Cranes stand on the horizon as cargo shipping containers are unloaded from ships at the Port of Los Angeles in Los Angeles. — AFP

Shipping emissions tax still stuck in port

PARIS: Efforts by France to build a consensus for a global carbon tax on the shipping industry failed to produce significant results at a summit in Paris on Friday. French President Emmanuel Macron put the item on the agenda of the two-day Summit for a New Global Financing Pact which brought together around 40 heads of state and government. The shipping industry transports around 90 percent of traded goods worldwide and accounts for around three percent of global carbon emissions.

The Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands have been pushing for a \$100-per-tonne tax on emissions which would raise approximately \$60-80 billion (55-73 billion euros) of tax receipts per year, according to the World Bank. At a closing press conference, Macron said that backing from China, the United States and other European nations was still needed in order to bring the idea to fruition. "We are in favor of taxing shipping, it's a sector that isn't taxed," he told report-

ers. "To make it work, you need a group of countries that follow us. If China, the United States and other key European countries which host major companies, if they don't follow then it won't have any effect."

He cited France's decision to put in place so-called "green taxes" on airline tickets and some financial transactions in the past, saying other countries had not followed suit, putting the country at a disadvantage. "We can't continue to do harm to ourselves on our own," he said. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told the same press conference that "it's something that the US will look at". "We are very focused on the need to raise substantial additional resources to address climate change, poverty reduction and other global challenges," she added.

A Treasury official had previously described the proposal as "in its very early days." The International Maritime Organization (IMO), a United Nations agency, is set to host a summit in two weeks' time where the carbon tax is expected to be discussed. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also lent only lukewarm support to the idea, which has been pushed by two Pacific nations, the Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands, over the last decade. — AFP

Dutch to shut biggest gas field after quakes

THE HAGUE: The Netherlands said it would end production at Europe's largest gas field on October 1 after years of earthquakes, despite global energy worries sparked by Russia's war in Ukraine. Wells at the massive Groningen field in the northern Netherlands will remain open for one more year in case of a cold winter but then be shut down forever, the government said. Residents near the huge site, which opened in 1965, have complained for more than two decades of being terrorized by quakes directly attributed to drilling operations.

"We are really turning off the tap," said Hans Vijlbrief, the Dutch minister for extractive industries. The decision was an "important moment after decades of gas extraction," he added. "The problems of Groningen residents have not yet been solved and unfortunately the earthquakes will continue for years to come, but the source of all misery will be closed from October."

The Netherlands first said five years ago that it would close the site by 2030 due to the increasingly severe quakes, which damaged homes and traumatized locals. Although gas extraction from the field has been almost cut to zero over the last few years, the Dutch government kept the site operational due to the global energy uncertainties prompted largely by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. But Prime Minister Mark Rutte's cabinet decided at a meeting on Friday to completely end production by October 1.

'Uncertain international situation'

The government said that "due to the uncertain international situation" it would be possible to draw gas from the Groningen site for one more year "in very exceptional situations." These would include "very severe cold" or a gas shortage. But the final 11 wells would then be "permanently closed" by

October 1, 2024, it said. Oil giants Shell Netherlands and ExxonMobil have equal stakes in NAM, the company responsible for drawing gas from the Groningen field since the early 1960s. A top Shell official said in March this year that the gas field "must be closed". So far Groningen's residents, who suffered severe damage to their homes and buildings from the slew of quakes, have received a trickle of compensation.

They have been caught in a bottleneck of bureaucratic bungling and red tape, said a report by a parliamentary commission of inquiry earlier this year. The Netherlands, which has around a third of its surface area lying below sea level is particularly vulnerable to climate change. It is also under pressure to cut its reliance on fossil fuels. An environmental group won a landmark case in 2019 in Dutch courts, ordering the government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 25 percent by the end of 2020. — AFP



GARRELSWEER: This picture shows a view of a gas extraction facility near Garrelsweerd, in the Northern Dutch province of Groningen. — AFP

Big ideas, small steps at climate finance summit

International financial system woefully inadequate

PARIS: A global climate summit has wrapped up with leaders agreeing that the international financial system was woefully inadequate in an era of global warming, after taking a number of small steps to helping debt-burdened developing nations. While host country France pitched the conference as a consensus-building exercise, leaders were under pressure to produce clear outcomes from the two-day meeting as economies stagger under growing debt after successive crises in recent years.

The summit comes amid warnings that the world's ability to curb global warming is reliant on a massive increase in clean energy investment in developing countries. French President Emmanuel Macron hailed a "complete consensus" to reform global financial institutions and make them "more efficient, fairer and better suited to the world of today".

Some 40 national leaders gathered in Paris, most from developing countries whose economies have been buffeted by a succession of crises in recent years, including COVID-19, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, soaring inflation and extreme weather events. The conference heard time and again that the nearly 80-year-old financial system — underpinned by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund — was no longer fit-for-purpose in facing 21st-century challenges. "With this mechanism, the rich are always rich and the poor are always poor," said Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Work together

While there was agreement on the broad outlines of the problem, there was less progress on steering the global financial juggernaut in a new direction, though there were several incremental initiatives and advancements on existing promises. "We only have this planet and unless you have a plan to live on Mars that I don't know about, then

we need to work together to make it better," Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley, who has led the drive for reform, told AFP.

Mottley, whose Caribbean island nation is threatened by rising sea levels and tropical storms, welcomed the acceptance by the World Bank and others of "natural disaster clauses" in debt. World Bank president Ajay Banga on Thursday said the lender would introduce a "pause" mechanism on debt repayments for countries hit by a crisis so they could "focus on what matters". One key announcement came from IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva, who said a pledge to shift \$100 billion of liquidity-boosting "special drawing rights" into a climate and poverty fund had been met.

Friederike Roder, Vice President of Global Advocacy at Global Citizen, said overall the progress made was "not sufficient", pointing out that the IMF target included a US pledge of \$21 billion that is stuck at Congress. But she said the meeting had managed to "totally change the conversation" on tough issues that have up to now been mostly kicked into the long grass. Observers have also hailed the strong leadership role of developing nations at the summit, including Barbados, Kenya and the V20 group of more than 50 climate vulnerable countries, which all came with a suite of ideas.

Roadmap

Avinash Persaud, the architect of the Barbados Bridgetown Initiative plan to reform the global financial system, said in the past solutions presented by richer nations had been marginal and like "childish toys". "We now have an adult roadmap," he told reporters. "We have not got anywhere near the key numbers. But we have a roadmap."

An official summary of the meeting prepared by France expressed hope that a pledge to deliv-



PARIS: (From left) Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley, Netherlands' Minister of Finance Sigrid Kaag, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Indonesia's Finance Minister Sri Mulyani look on during a meeting at the US embassy, on the sidelines of the New Global Financial Pact Summit, in Paris. — AFP

er \$100 billion a year in climate finance to poorer nations by 2020 would finally be fulfilled this year — although actual confirmation the money has been delivered will take months if not years. And Zambia, which defaulted on its debt after the COVID pandemic broke out, hailed a "significant step" after securing some financial relief as its main lender China and other creditors agreed to restructure \$6.3 billion in loans.

This week, the International Energy Agency said annual investment just for clean energy in

these countries will need to jump to nearly \$2 trillion within a decade. This is crucial to keep alive the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to "well below" two degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times, and below 1.5C if possible. The meeting summary called for work on a range of international taxes to finance the fight against climate change and poverty. The idea that gained the most traction was a levy on shipping emissions — ahead of a key meeting of the International Maritime Organization in July. — AFP

Economy returns to pre-pandemic levels in Spain

MADRID: Spain's economy returned to pre-pandemic levels during the first quarter as it grew more than previously estimated, official data showed Friday, boosting the government ahead of snap polls. Gross domestic product (GDP) expanded by 0.6 percent from January to March from the previous three months, national statistics institute INE said, upgrading the first quarter rate from a preliminary estimate of 0.5 percent.

"We have recovered the level of our pre-pandemic GDP," Economy Minister Madia Calvino said in a video message, adding growth had picked up in the first quarter because Spanish firms had improved their competitiveness. Spain was the European country hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, with its GDP falling by 10.8 percent in 2020 as Covid-19 travel restrictions hit its key tourism sector hard.

But a global rebound in tourism has allowed the Spanish economy to resist the slowdown sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine better than most of its neighbors. Spanish GDP in the first three months of 2023 grew 4.2 percent from a year earlier, up from its previous estimate of 3.8 percent. By comparison the euro area was in a technical recession



MADRID: Photo shows a view of a Mercadona supermarket in Madrid. With its aggressive cost-cutting measures and own brands, privately-owned Mercadona has become Spain's leading supermarket chain. — AFP

in the first two quarters of 2023. The statistics office said growth in the first quarter was fuelled by a 5.7 percent increase in exports in the first quarter, after falling 1.0 percent in the final quarter of 2022, and a 1.8 percent increase in business investment.

This offset a 1.3 percent fall in household consumption as rising prices led people to curb spending in the euro-zone's fourth-biggest economy. The

countries, who have done little to contribute to the fossil fuel emissions that drive up temperatures.

Parts of India saw temperatures above 44C (111F) in mid-April, with at least 11 deaths near Mumbai attributed to heat stroke on a single day. Since late 2020, countries in the Horn of Africa like Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia have been suffering the region's worst drought in 40 years. NGOs said that despite the aid poured into the region last year, an estimated 43,000 people died from the drought in Somalia alone in 2022. Placing the responsibility of on rich nations, Dufflo said, "We are imposing an enormous cost on the poorest countries by the way in which we decide to live today."

A pioneer in field experiments that won her the 2019 Nobel prize in economics with her husband Abhijit Banerjee and American economist Michael Kremer, Dufflo says the situation is ever-more urgent with extreme poverty on the rise since 2020 after having been halved since the 1990s. Pointing to widening inequality, she said rich countries spent 27 percent of their GDP on measures to support their populations during the pandemic, while poor countries spent just two percent and global solidarity was "almost at a zero level" when it came to international aid and vaccines.

The war in Ukraine and inflation driving up the cost

counting" by third-party retailers, it added. "These pressures were exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, as retail stores were closed for significant periods of time due to the restrictions introduced by governments and public health authorities across the globe." "In addition, outdoor event cancellations, changing consumer habits and general uncertainty during this period had a further negative impact on demand." Supply chain problems and stubbornly high inflation also squeezed margins, according to the document, which was dated June 14.

Hunter, based in the Scottish capital Edinburgh and formerly called the North British Rubber Company, went from making sturdy work boots to the footwear being a must-have fashion item. As well as Moss, who sported a pair at the 2005 Glastonbury festival, fans included the late Queen Elizabeth II and her son, King Charles III. Despite

Bank of Spain on Monday revised its economic growth forecast for 2023 from 1.6 percent to 2.3 percent as activity picked up more than expected at the start of the year, with energy costs easing and tourist visits on the rise. Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez is making Spain's good growth figures a central plank of his campaign to be re-elected in a general election on July 23. — AFP



Nobel Prize winner in economics, Esther Dufflo

of necessities has aggravated the situation. And commitments made at the United Nations climate summits (COP) have repeatedly fallen short, she said. Countries have never, for example, respected their pledges of \$100 billion each year toward a climate transition fund for poor countries and haven't found the funding to support a loss and damages scheme announced during the COP27 summit in Egypt. — AFP

being saddled with debts of some £100 million (\$127 million) and going into administration, its "wellies" will not disappear. The brand has been bought by the Authentic Brands Group (ABG), the US owner of Reebok and British clothing chain Ted Baker, among others.

According to the administrators, ABG paid £68 million for Hunter's intellectual property in a transaction that took place at the beginning of June. The majority of its 121 employees were transferred to the American group. "With a 160-plus-year heritage, the Hunter brand has evolved from a rubber boot to a lifestyle brand, offering an expansive footwear collection, outerwear, bags and accessories designed for outdoor performance in both rural and urban environments", ABG said in a statement. New styles and colors would help keep its position as the "welly of choice" among outdoor enthusiasts, celebrities and fashion trendsetters, it added. — AFP

Erkan: Wall Street ex-star overseeing Turkey's troubles

ANKARA: Hafize Gaye Erkan can be forgiven for approaching her new job with caution after moving from the bright lights of Wall Street to the treacherous terrain of Turkey's much-maligned central bank, a place where job security is scarce. Turkey's powerful leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has fired a handful of the 44-year-old Goldman Sachs alumna's predecessors for following the basic rules of economics and raising interest rates to fight inflation.

Erkan did just that after chairing her first policy meeting on Thursday, hiking the benchmark rate from 8.5 percent to 15 percent. It was a huge jump and the first rate rise in 27 months. It also fell short of the increase to 20 percent or higher demanded by the markets. The lira hit new lows against the dollar after losing 2.5 percent of its value.

But Erkan sounded unphased in a bank statement that promised to raise rates "as much as needed in a timely and gradual manner" until Turkey's cost-of-living crisis is brought under control. "This is a sign that the new governor is looking to tread carefully to avoid a clash with President Erdogan," said Hamish Kinnear, analyst at Verisk Maplecroft risk consultancy. "The last central bank governor to hike interest rates was fired by the president after less than five months in the post."

Stellar resume

Erdogan turned to Erkan during a government overhaul that followed a May general election in which he was nearly punished for overseeing Turkey's worst economic crisis of his 20-year rule. The first woman to lead Turkey's central bank, she brags a stellar resume that includes diplomas from Princeton and Harvard.

Born in Istanbul, she ranked 26th out of more than 1.3 million students who take Turkish university entrance exam every year. She was the valedictorian of her graduating class at Istanbul's prestigious Bogazici University, where she studied industrial engineering. After receiving scholarship offers from nine top US universities, Erkan chose Princeton, where she completed a two-year PhD program in operations research and financial engineering. She is also a graduate of Harvard Business School's advanced management program, and the Stanford Graduate School of Business Executive Program in Leadership.

After her studies, she joined Goldman Sachs in 2005, first as an associate and then managing director. She led a team and developed investment algorithms at the legendary firm. In 2014, she was hired by First Republic Bank, climbing to the top of the corporate ladder at California-based bank, where she became co-chief executive and was expected to take over from founder Jim Herbert until she unexpectedly resigned in December 2021. More than a year later, the lender plunged into crisis as it reported a loss of more than \$100 billion in deposits in the first quarter of 2023. — AFP



New president of the Turkey Central Bank Hafize Gaye Erkan

Welly boot maker Hunter whacked by weather

LONDON: Their popularity soared when the supermodel Kate Moss wore them in the mud at the Glastonbury music festival, which started on Wednesday in southwest England. But British manufacturer of the rubber wellingtons, Hunter Boot Ltd, went bust just before the celebrated event, only to be rescued by a US group. Administrators AlixPartners said in a document seen by AFP that the company faced "significant challenges" because of drought in the United States, its largest market.

That led to reduced demand and "significant dis-

Business

'Every drop counts': Spain's crops thrive on wastewater

Recycling wastewater sparks interest abroad

MURCIA: With rainfall increasingly scarce, irrigating crops can be a major challenge, but farmers in southeastern Spain have long relied on recycled wastewater in a model that is winning attention abroad. "Here the water is still dirty... but by the end, it will be crystal clear and bacteria-free," said Carlos Lardin, operations manager at Esamur, the public body overseeing wastewater management in the Murcia region. At his feet, brownish water bubbled in a de-silting tank, the first step before being sifted, filtered and then biologically treated to give it "a second life", explained the 45-year-old engineer.

Some 23 years ago, Murcia - an arid region with chronic water shortages that claims to be the EU's leading producer of fruit and vegetables - set itself a huge challenge of reusing wastewater to irrigate its crops. To that end, the region built a network of 100 treatment plants that process and disinfect water from the sewage system so it can be reused on the fields. This treatment, which involves sand filters and ultraviolet rays, ensures that the water "is not contaminated" and doesn't transfer bacteria "such as E.coli" to the fruit and vegetables, Lardin said.

'An important resource'

As a result, some 98 percent of the region's wastewater is reused today, compared with an average of nine percent across Spain and five percent across the EU, government figures show. It is an important contribution given that the central government has recently restricted Murcia's huge water transfers from the Tagus River, whose levels have been dropping

dangerously. According to Esamur, 15 percent of the region's irrigation needs are met by recycled wastewater. It's not enough to cover the need, but it's still important, said Feliciano Guillen, head of the Ceuti irrigation organization which allocates water resources among farmers in northeastern Murcia.

Farmer Jose Penalver, who owns 10 hectares of land in the hills above Campos del Rio, agreed. "Whatever (water) can be collected is good wherever it comes from as long as it's put to good use," said the 52-year-old apricot grower. In his fields, an automated drip-irrigation system lets him limit water use to what is strictly necessary, in this case, two hours per day. "Without this (recycled) water, everything here would dry up," he said. "Every drop counts."

'A precious resource'

To protect its agriculture from the threat of global warming, the Spanish government in May pledged to increase the national rate of wastewater usage, releasing 1.4 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) to build the necessary infrastructure. "Water is a precious resource which can also be recycled... it's worth the effort," said Ecology Minister Teresa Ribera earlier this month, flagging the importance of working with small towns and villages who "find it difficult to make such an investment". According to the Spanish Association for Desalination and Water Reuse (AEDyR), 27 percent of its 2,000 wastewater treatment plants can purify water to a level that can be used for agriculture. And that figure could easily be increased with greater investment.

Cheaper than desalinating seawater, recycling



LAS TORRES DE COTILLAS: Photo shows a view of a sewage recycling plant of EDAR company, recycling water for agriculture, in Torres de Cotillas near Murcia, southern Spain. — AFP

wastewater has sparked interest abroad, with France's President Emmanuel Macron saying in March he wanted to increase water reuse along the same lines as Spain. Evidence of this growing interest has been seen in Murcia, where in recent months, "many foreign

delegations have come to see our facilities", said Esamur's Lardin, pointing to visitors from as far afield as Argentina and Bolivia. "This water doesn't depend on the weather, and at very least, it guarantees a stable quantity of water for irrigation," he said. — AFP

Global stocks retreat as traders eye more rate hikes

NEW YORK: Global equity markets declined as traders from Wall Street to Frankfurt eyed additional interest rate hikes by central banks to combat elevated inflation amid mounting concerns about global growth. Oil prices fell on concerns high borrowing costs would weigh further on demand, while the dollar gained against major rivals on the prospect of more rate increases. All three major US indexes ended the day in the red, with analysts noting a sense that the market is due for a pullback after an earlier run. "Hawkish central banks talk" continues to weigh on markets, said Peter Cardillo of Spartan Capital.

There was mixed macroeconomic news this week, he said, but investors' focus remained on Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell and the Bank of England, which further tightened monetary policy. On the other side of the Atlantic, a keenly watched survey showed euro-zone economic activity worsened in June to a five-month low, hit hard by a fall in industrial production. The euro-zone entered a technical recession at the start of the year. Meanwhile, UK private-sector growth slowed to a three-month low in June as soaring interest rates and stubbornly high inflation fuelled by rising food prices worsens a cost-of-living crisis, data showed.

"The key theme in FX (foreign exchange) and across most financial markets this week has unambiguously been this: risk off," said City Index analyst Fawad Razaqada. "Weakness in data and very hawkish central banks have revived investor concerns over a hard landing," he added, referring to the fear that economies could face a severe downturn due to rising borrowing costs. Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Finalto, said "the mood is changing from inflation risk to growth risk."

Optimism that characterized the first half of June - fueled by hopes the Federal Reserve was close to ending its hiking cycle - has given way to concern that the US central bank is planning additional increases to bring down inflation. In Europe, the Bank of England lifted its key rate on Thursday by more than expected, while Switzerland and Norway also tightened. These hikes followed rate increases last week in the euro-zone, Australia and Canada. Turkey also hiked rates this week, sharply reversing course on its unorthodox monetary policy by almost doubling borrowing costs after cutting them for two years.

"Global recession concerns are back in the main thanks to a hawkish central bank policy that may have to inflict some economic pain to rein in core inflation," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management. "In that environment, the current level of risk-free yields makes investing in equities less attractive relative to bonds," he added. Amid the decline in stock prices in Asia, Europe and the United States on Friday, traders were also keeping an eye on Beijing after a hoped-for raft of stimulus measures for the Chinese economy failed to materialize.

While China's central bank has cut borrowing costs, there has been very little by way of policy detail from officials. On the corporate front, shares in Siemens Energy plummeted Friday after the company warned that technical problems at its wind turbine unit were worse than thought. In the US, Goldman Sachs shares fell 1.5 percent after a media report suggested it could face a large write down for a 2021 acquisition of fintech firm GreenSky. And shares of CarMax ended 10.2 percent higher after reporting better-than-expected results. — AFP



Weyay Bank partners with Mastercard

KUWAIT: Weyay Bank, Kuwait's first and rapidly growing digital bank, has joined forces with Mastercard, a global technology company in the payments industry. The strategic partnership aims to introduce pioneering digital banking services to empower Kuwait's youth by leveraging the expertise and technological innovations from both entities. The partnership marks a significant development for Kuwait's dynamic digital payments landscape.

The collaboration will enable Weyay Bank to provide its customers with access to Mastercard's global acceptance network and its suite of digital solutions, including contactless payments, mobile payments, and online transactions. A signing ceremony to mark the partnership was officiated by Salah Al-Fulaij, Chief Executive Officer of National Bank of Kuwait - Kuwait, and Mohamed Al-Othman, Chief Executive Officer, Consumer and Digital Banking Group. Senior representatives from both Weyay Bank and Mastercard were present to mark this significant partnership.

Mohamed Al-Othman, Chief Executive Officer of the Consumer and Digital Banking Group, expressed his enthusiasm regarding the partnership, highlighting the remarkable prospects it presents. He stated, "On this momentous occasion, we are thrilled to partner with Mastercard, as it enables us to deliver exceptional digital banking services that cater to the evolving needs of our customers. By harnessing Mastercard's extensive global network and

advanced payment solutions, we can provide our valued customers with both local and international payment services of the highest caliber."

Al-Othman emphasized the partnership's importance, highlighting it as a significant milestone in Kuwait's digital banking transformation. He underscored the joint commitment of both parties to drive innovation and deliver seamless digital banking experiences that successfully cater to the changing financial needs of customers. "Weyay Bank is dedicated to offering a comprehensive and exceptional banking experience specifically designed for its young customers. The bank achieves this vision by understanding their aspirations and tailoring its services to align with their unique personalities and lifestyles," Al-Othman added.

Khalid Elgibali, Division President, Middle East and North Africa, Mastercard said: "For more than 50 years, Mastercard has been connecting people to the limitless opportunities offered by the digital economy. We are delighted to join forces with Weyay Bank as we empower the next generation with state-of-the-art payment services to allow them to manage their finances safely and responsibly."

Since its establishment in 2022, Weyay Bank has remained committed to realizing NBK's vision by offering exceptional and personalized digital services to the tech-savvy young generation. With a deep understanding of the reliance Kuwaiti youth have on technology in their everyday lives, Weyay Bank provides a wide range of banking products and services tailored to their specific needs, including savings pots, digital stores, seamless transfers, budgeting and tracking tools, as well as the added convenience of Apple Pay integration. By providing these diverse offerings, Weyay Bank strives to meet the banking requirements of Kuwaiti youth while aligning with their digital-focused lifestyle.



Furthermore, since its launch, Weyay Bank has experienced significant demand from Generation Z, seeking to open new accounts. The bank's streamlined digital onboarding process allows individuals to open a bank account within minutes, without the requirement of any paperwork. Weyay Bank was honored with the prestigious "Outstanding Innovation in Mobile Banking" Award for 2022 in Global Finance's esteemed Innovators Awards. This recognition highlights Weyay Bank's exceptional accomplishments and groundbreaking advancements in the field of mobile banking and solidifies its position as a trailblazer in the industry.

British economy falters on cost-of-living crisis

LONDON: UK private-sector growth has slowed to a three-month low as soaring interest rates and stubbornly high inflation fuelled by rising food prices worsens a cost-of-living crisis, data showed Friday. It comes as the UK government announced help for homeowners after seeing mortgage costs surge in the wake of rising interest rates. Figures on Friday highlighted Britain's economic struggles, heaping more pressure on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

The closely-followed S&P Global/CIPS flash UK purchasing managers' index declined to 52.8 in June from 54 in May. A reading above 50 indicates growth. "June's flash PMI survey indicates that the UK economy has lost momentum again after a brief growth spurt in the spring and looks set to weaken further in the months ahead," Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence, said in a statement. "Most notably, consumer spending on services, which was a core growth driver in the spring, is now showing signs of faltering."

Williamson said this was "as the reality of higher interest rates, the increased cost-of-living and gloom about the outlook sets in and overrides the brief boost

to spending". Official data this week showed UK annual inflation at 8.7 percent in May, unchanged from April, causing the Bank of England (BoE) on Thursday to hike its key interest rate by a larger-than-expected amount. The half-point lift to a 15-year peak of five percent was the 13th increase in a row. Economists are predicting rates could hit six percent this year, which could see the UK follow the euro-zone into recession.

Retail slowdown

Separate data Friday showed UK retail sales growth slowed in May as soaring food prices hit shoppers hard. Total retail sales by volume rose 0.3 percent after climbing 0.5 percent in April, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. Food stores sales dropped 0.5 percent in May, with retailers indicating "that increased cost-of-living and food prices continued to affect sales volumes", the ONS added.

Shops were impacted also by "some anecdotal evidence of increased spending on takeaways and fast food" owing to an extra public holiday last month for the coronation of King Charles III. Overall sales climbed thanks to cheaper fuel and demand for summer clothing and outdoor goods, the ONS noted. Annual food price inflation was close to a record-high of 18.4 percent in May, official UK data showed this week.

Mortgage help

The UK housing market was also in sharp focus. Finance minister Jeremy Hunt on Friday agreed support measures with major UK mortgage lenders for struggling



LONDON: Shoppers, some wearing face coverings to combat the spread of the coronavirus, walk past stores in Camden in London, on January 7, 2022, as UK businesses and consumers face mounting fallout from surging inflation, including higher interest rates. — AFP

customers, including those in arrears. This included a 12-month minimum period before repossessing homes. Millions of Britons who have home loans are particularly affected by the BoE rate hikes, which tend to be mirrored by commercial lenders. On food, Sunak acknowledged that households' weekly shopping bills had "gone up far too much in the past few months". "We're looking at the supermarkets, making sure that they're behaving responsibly and fairly when it comes to pricing all those products, to make sure that we're easing the burdens," he added. — AFP



CAIRO MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART displays priceless treasures



The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo is one of the largest museums for Islamic art worldwide, preserving more than 100,000 relics including treasures from various nations. The preserved and displayed relics are from India, China, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant, Egypt, North Africa and

Andalusia. The items include written references for ancient medicine, engineering and space science, in addition to various glass and metal utensils and potteries. Also on display are gems, arms, wooden and ivory works, textiles and carpets. - KUNA



American visitor Caroline Kutek had just completed a tour of the Acropolis, Greece's most-visited archaeological site. As beautiful as the 2,500-year-old monument was, the huge crowds were just as memorable, she grumbled. "The wait and the amount of people that are here are definitely overwhelming," the 30-year-old customer services operator told AFP on a recent June morning, within sight of the hundreds of people queueing on the winding uphill path to the attraction, a common occurrence.

"Too many people for my liking," said Australian Jackie Zachary. "I did not expect this many people in June, I thought July would be peak and busier," the sales assistant said. At least 14,000 people visited the Acropolis in May, about 70 percent more than in 2022, according to the Greek state organization for the management of cultural resources (ODAP).

From April onwards, average daily visits were equivalent to those seen last August, the month considered the busiest of Greece's tourism season, says ODAP chairman Ilias Patsarouhas. Tourist numbers visiting Greece are ticking up to levels rivalling pre-pandemic times as the world witnesses a resurgence in demand for leisure travel. That has been compounded by the tourist season starting earlier than in previous years. Even with an online "fast pass", Kutek and her family still had to wait around 15 minutes to enter, she said. "The worst part of it was at the top when you are trying to funnel into one line, you lost your people," Kutek said.

After purchasing their ticket at the entrance, visitors must queue a second time before climbing the stairs of the Propylaea, the gateway of the sanctuary dedicated to the ancient Greek god-

'Overwhelming' Acropolis queues a challenge for visitors



Tourists visit the Acropolis archaeological site in Athens on June 21, 2023.

dess Athena. World Heritage Watch is a non-governmental organization that supports UNESCO in protecting and safeguarding sites of international importance. It says the Acropolis currently lacks visitor management plans required under the UN watchdog's World Heritage Convention, to which Greece is a signatory.

'Over-tourism'

WHW chair Stephan Doempke told AFP that the site had experienced "over-tourism" for many years and was

now at risk. "A site of global importance as the Acropolis... is not in good condition, and is at risk, if it lacks a management plan and an understanding of how to deal with tourists," he said. Sometimes the congestion at the Propylaea is so significant that the site's security guards have to interrupt the flow of visitors, says Patsarouhas.

Things can get particularly tight if there is a sudden influx of passengers from one of the many cruise ships that stop at the port of Piraeus this time of year. On such occasions, between two

and three thousand people may arrive, causing waits to increase to over an hour, says veteran guard Ioannis Mavrikopoulos, who has worked at the Acropolis for 30 years.

Mavrikopoulos adds that there is a chronic lack of archaeological site staff around the country, especially on Greek islands where conditions are "dramatic", he said. Two years ago, there was controversy after Greece's culture ministry approved restoration work at the Acropolis that included a new concrete walkway. The ministry

said the redesign improves wheelchair accessibility and reduces the risk of accidents. Doempke said the upgrades "appear to aim at increasing the number of tourists visiting the site" and are therefore "totally irresponsible".

Time slots

The ministry is now planning a time slot system to spread out visitors during the day, said Patsarouhas, adding that it would be gradually intro-



Tourists queue at Propylaea, the monument's ancient gate as they visit the Acropolis in Athens on June 14, 2023.

duced by the end of June. But the site guards say that introducing the new system in mid-season is a mistake that will make their jobs even harder. "Any changes should take place after the tourism season," said Mavrikopoulos. Greece is counting on tourism to boost its economy after its near-decade debt crisis. Officials hope to exceed the 31.3 million arrivals recorded in 2019, a record year for the country.



Tourists walk in front of the Parthenon Temple as they visit the Acropolis archaeological site in Athens on June 14, 2023.



Tourists take photos and selfies in front of the Parthenon Temple - AFP photos



Tourists visit the Acropolis archaeological site in Athens on June 14, 2023.

Lifestyle



Women participate in the annual renovation of the Q'eswachaka rope bridge.



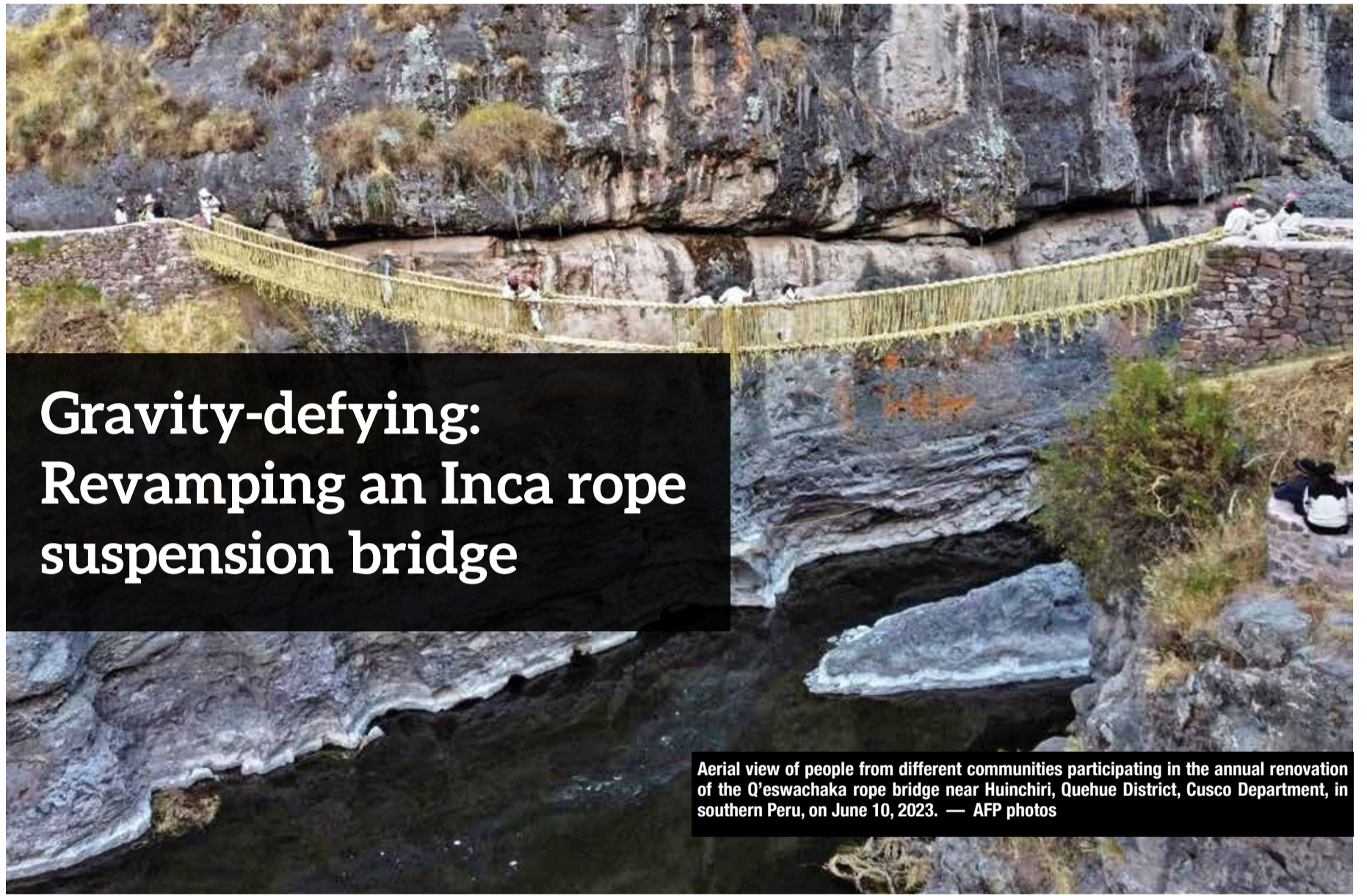
Dangling over a vertiginous gorge, the Apurimac River flowing around 10 stories below, Indigenous Peruvians show no fear as they repair a centuries-old Inca rope suspension bridge – the world's last. Every June, members of the Quechua Indigenous group come together to braid thick ropes made from a type of Andean straw, then brave the chasm without harnesses to replace worn parts of the Q'eswachaka bridge.



Shamans perform a ritual.

It is a ritual that connects communities to one another but also to their ancestors, according to Quechua belief. "It is a matter of pride for us to (renovate) this bridge," Braulio Huilca, a 34-year-old student told AFP of his role in the annual rite.

Inscribed on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage 10 years ago, the bridge has become a key tourist attraction and source of income in the Peruvian region of Cusco – also home to the Inca citadel of Machu Picchu. "If we abandon this, the tradition would be lost, and there would... be no income,"



Gravity-defying: Revamping an Inca rope suspension bridge

Aerial view of people from different communities participating in the annual renovation of the Q'eswachaka rope bridge near Huinchiri, Quechua District, Cusco Department, in southern Peru, on June 10, 2023. — AFP photos

said Felipe Hanampa Huamani, 40.

Jealous mermaids

The bridge, made of fibers obtained from q'oya, a straw-like plant, was first built about 600 years ago. Nearly 30 m long and 1.2 m wide, it hangs over a gorge around 28 meters deep. For several weeks every year, residents of four towns in the province of Canas gather and prepare straw for ropemaking. With sickles, women in multi-colored skirts cut the q'oya and gather it in bundles that are soaked in a well and then crushed with stone.

They then braid the ropes, sitting in groups on the side of a dusty road. Within hours, they have made thick ropes that men carry on their shoulders along winding paths and steep steps up to the bridge.

"If we don't renew it, (god) punishes us. We could have an accident or something could happen to us," said 54-year-old Emperatriz Arizapana Huayhua, a small-scale farmer in the region involved in rope production. Crucial in the initial phases of the operation, women are not allowed to take part in the final steps: According

to local beliefs, the mermaids of the river are jealous.

Animal sacrifice

To guarantee that "no accident happens during the reconstruction," a shaman sacrifices a lamb to the gods as part of the ritual. As men in "chullos" – colorful woolen caps with earmuffs – tear down the old structure, worn and blackened braids plummet into the Apurimac river. The hanging bridge has several thick ropes that serve as a platform, with two more for holding on on either side.

The replacement of the old ropes takes three days. Some of the workers chew coca leaves for energy. There is a narrow metal bridge next to the rope structure that communities also use for trade and transport. The work is finished when the two groups working from either side of the gorge meet in the middle. Cries of "Hayllay Q'eswachaka!" are heard in Quechua, signaling that the time has come for the celebratory festival. Next year, they will do it all over again. — AFP

'Tranq': The flesh-rotting drug adding to America's opioid crisis

Opioid addict Martin has seen the deadly fentanyl replace heroin as the most prevalent drug in New York. Now he's trying to avoid "tranq", a flesh-eating drug increasingly causing concern across America. "It makes holes in your body, your skin," said the 45-year-old, whose wounds on his legs and arms signify he may have unknowingly injected the animal sedative, officially named xylazine and commonly called the "zombie drug."

The tranquilizer, approved for veterinary use by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), has infiltrated the illegal drug market in the United States, with producers increasingly using it to augment fentanyl. Overdose deaths where tranq was detected have soared in recent years and in April the White House designated the drug an "emerging threat."

"It eats up your flesh, like a crocodile," Martin, who did not wish to give his surname, told AFP during a visit to St Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction,

a drug-support and syringe-exchange center in the Bronx. Xylazine is easily accessible on the Internet and almost always coupled with fentanyl, the synthetic opioid 50 times more potent than heroin.

Fentanyl pushed the number of fatal overdoses in the United States to nearly 110,000 in 2022, a record. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the estimated number of overdoses involving xylazine in the country rose from 260 in 2018 to 3,480 in 2021.

Amputation

While Philadelphia is the epicenter of tranq use, the drug is also gaining ground in New York. City authorities say traces of xylazine were found in 19 percent of fatal opioid overdoses, around 419 deaths, in 2021. "Fentanyl is a short-acting opioid so people have to use more frequently," to prevent withdrawal, explained Courtney McKnight, clinical assistant professor of



Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York, Bridget G Brennan, speaks during an interview in her office about fentanyl, in New York on May 28, 2019.

epidemiology at New York University's School of Global Public Health.

"The thinking is that xylazine has been added to the supply because it can extend the life of fentanyl. However, there are other side effects that come with it that are pretty significant," she added, citing anxiety. Health experts also suspect that xylazine causes abscesses and skin ulcers by tightening blood vessels. In some cases, it can lead to amputation.

Workers at St Ann's are seeing more skin wounds when they're on streets of the Bronx to provide treatment, equipment, clean syringes, fentanyl tests, food and, sometimes, just a few words of advice and comfort. "A lot of times people say that they show up like little bruises or black marks," said Jazmyna Fanini, a nurse at the center. But then "the tissue dies around that area". "I've been seeing them a lot more. They can get really bad sometimes, even down to the bone," she added.

The number of fatal overdoses in New York soared more than 80 percent between 2019 and 2021 to 2,668 deaths, largely due to fentanyl as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, which iso-

lated users and hampered relief efforts. African-American and Hispanic communities were the most impacted.

Both the city and drug-prevention associations are focusing on naloxone, a nasal spray antidote that reverses an opioid overdose. But xylazine is not an opioid, so naloxone does not reverse its effects. Law enforcement is hamstrung by the fact that the sedative is not legally classified as a "controlled substance". "Even if we found a big stash of it, you wouldn't be able to prosecute somebody for that," New York's special narcotics prosecutor, Bridget Brennan, told AFP. That means "we can't track it back to the source. We can't find out how it's being distributed in large amounts," she added.

'Safe supply'

At St Ann's, where each leaf of a paper tree stuck to the wall represents a loved one lost to drugs, the emergence of these new blends of drugs is considered the result of policies that criminalize drug users. "You're going to continue to find all of these different types of substances in the supply until we address the real issue, which is just not having a safe supply," said team leader Steven Hernandez. "The challenge is just simply that people are really being poisoned," he added.

The center is taking part in a city-wide program that encourages users to test their drugs before taking them. The initiative should enable health services to monitor developments in the illegal drug market in real time. Leonardo Dominguez Gomez, a field researcher with New York's health department, said it is still possible to avoid xylazine because it hasn't proliferated through the market. "How the city decides to do public health campaigns will impact that," he said. — AFP



Leonardo Dominguez Gomez, field researcher with the New York City Department of Health, tests the contents of a heroin sample at St Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction.



Heroin user Martin, 45, stands during an interview with AFP.



Registered nurse Jazmyna Fanini disposes a used needle found in a Bronx park in New York City on April 24, 2023.



A staff member holds an overdose prevention kit, including Narcan nasal sprays used to treat narcotic overdoses in an emergency situation.



Steven Hernandez, Chief of Staff, poses for a portrait at St Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction in New York City on April 24, 2023. - AFP photos

Lifestyle



Berlin TV Tower,
main tourist attraction
in the German capital

The Berlin TV Tower is one of the most prominent touristic icons in the German capital Berlin, situated close to Alexanderplatz square. Standing over 360 meters high, the tower is used for TV and radio broadcasting and has a revolving restaurant that allows visitors to have panoramic views of the city. Tourists can reach the tower easily, as it is located close to the train station and other means of transportations. — KUNA



James Cameron says Titanic sub warnings 'went unheeded'

“Titanic” director and renowned deep-sea explorer James Cameron said many warnings were ignored about the safety of the tourist submersible that imploded near the famous shipwreck, killing five people. Cameron said the sub had been the source of widespread concern in the close-knit ocean exploration community, and drew parallels to the 1912 ocean liner sinking in which around 1,500 people died. “I’m struck by the similarity of the Titanic disaster itself, where the captain was repeatedly warned about ice ahead of his ship, and yet he steamed at full speed into an ice field on a moonless night, and many people died as a result,” Cameron told ABC News. “And for a very similar tragedy, where warnings went unheeded, to take place at the same exact site, with all the diving that’s going on all around the world, I think it’s just astonishing. It’s really quite surreal.”



A decal on a piece of equipment which reads “Titan” is pictured near a trailer with the OceanGate logo at OceanGate Expedition’s headquarters in the Port of Everett Boat Yard in Everett, Washington, on June 22, 2023. — AFP

The US Coast Guard confirmed Thursday that the small sub, operated by OceanGate Expeditions, had suffered a “catastrophic implosion” in the ocean depths, ending a multinational search-and-rescue operation that captivated the world. Cameron - who in 2012 became the first person to make a solo dive to the very deepest part of the ocean, in a submersible he designed and built - said the risk of a sub imploding under pressure was always “first and foremost” in engineers’ minds.

“That’s the nightmare that we’ve all lived with” since entering the field of deep exploration, he said, pointing to the sector’s very strong safety record over recent decades. But “many people in the community were very concerned about this sub,” he said. “A number of the top players in the deep-submergence engineering community even wrote letters to the company, saying that what they were doing was too experimental to carry passengers, and that it needed to be certified.”

The Hollywood director added that he had personally known one of the lost submersible passengers, French ocean explorer Paul-Henri “PH” Nargeolet. “It’s a very small community. I’ve known PH for 25 years. For him to have died tragically in this way is almost impossible for me to process.” Cameron has visited the Titanic shipwreck many times in the course of - and since - directing his 1997 epic starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet, which won a joint-record 11 Oscars. — AFP



This handout photo released by the Colombian Air Force on June 9, 2023, shows members of the Military Forces of Colombia checking one of the four Indigenous children, who were found alive after being lost for 40 days in the Amazon rainforest following a plane crash, as they are transported from San Jose del Guaviare to Bogota. - AFP

Colombia says documentary to be made about kids rescued in Amazon

The Colombian government is working with British producer Simon Chinn to make a documentary about the four Indigenous children who survived 40 days alone in the Amazon after a plane crash that killed their mother, the country’s president said Friday. Gustavo Petro, who is attending a climate summit in Paris, said he had “a first meeting” with Chinn, a two-time Oscar winner for the documentaries “Man on Wire” (2008) and “Searching for Sugar Man” (2012). The four children - Lesly (13), Soleiny (9), Tien Noriel (5) and one-year-old Cristin - were the only survivors of a small plane crash in the Amazon on May 1. All

three adults on board, including their mother, died. It took nearly 200 military and Indigenous rescuers with search dogs 40 days to track down the children in difficult jungle conditions. On Thursday, Petro published a photo in which he appears with Chinn; a correspondent for Britain’s Channel 4 television, Guillermo Galdos; and the director of television for Colombian state broadcaster RTVC, Holman Morris. Petro said RTVC will partner with Lightbox, a production company founded by Chinn, to tell the story of “Operation Hope,” the name for the massive search operation. — AFP

Ukrainian couple takes Berlin with old-school film shop

When Russian bombs began raining down on her hometown of Kyiv, Katya Hridina-But was pregnant with her third child and living her dream of running a photo shop for enthusiasts. Fast forward a turbulent year and a half later and she and her husband Dima have settled in Berlin, their eldest daughter has become fluent in German and they are serving a growing niche of analogue photography buffs in Europe’s top economy. They say that at 24 hours, their Film Speed Lab (FSL) provides perhaps the quickest turnaround service in the country for hobbyists and professionals who have returned to traditional rolls of film.

Joining the burgeoning ranks of entrepreneurs among the more than one million Ukrainian refugees who have arrived in Germany since the war began, the couple said the shop had also allowed them to “build a community” in their new home. “Film’s not dead - demand is rising,” Hridina-But, 38, said, noting the irony that social media is driving interest in analogue photography. Ukrainians “have the same interests as people in the US or Germany so they all watch TikTok and shoot (with) film”, she said.

Hridina-But, who gave birth to her third daughter in the western city of Chernivtsi while fleeing Ukraine, calls herself the business brains behind the operation. Dima But, who as a father of three was exempt from compulsory military service in Ukraine and allowed to leave the country, brings the passion

for photography. But, 40, said he loves the “crazy emotion” of film because, instead of providing the instant gratification of digital, it requires some patience to reveal its beauty and power. He likes the parks and playgrounds of their family-friendly district of Prenzlauer Berg, the sunny, modern space he has to work in - half lab, half sitting room - and the shop’s “good neighbors”. “It’s people interested in what we do,” But said. “It’s very good people, it’s good vibes.”

German ‘peculiarity’

While the couple was able to rely on savings to start their business, they still had to grapple with the notorious red tape required to launch any German venture and get their children enrolled in school and daycare. “At first of course you’re saying, ‘Oh my God, I need to fill in this form and that form and send it to this place and that place,’” Hridina-But said. “It’s just the peculiarity of the country - you have to go through it and then everything works.”

They were nevertheless able to launch at remarkable speed last October, impressing even their German friends. “Usually it takes a lot more time but we just didn’t have a lot of time,” she said. They’re not quite in the black yet but FSL’s business has steadily grown, selling and developing color as well as black-and-white film and processing ECN-2 motion pictures. They’re now a team of five, mainly Ukrainians.

Ukrainian refugees are as a rule exempt from Germany’s complex sys-



Founders of the Film Speed Lab Katerina Hridina-But (left) and Dmytro But, pose in their shop in Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg district on June 7, 2023.



Co-founder of the Film Speed Lab Dmytro But looks at a negative strip through a loupe at his shop in Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg district on June 7, 2023.

tem to apply for asylum, allowing them to join the labor market immediately. Around 36,000 Ukrainians had found steady employment by January, according to German government data, with another 1,000 people self-employed. FSL attracts customers from across Germany and even a few refugees who used to frequent the family’s Kyiv shop Fotovramci, like 22-year-old Yana Isaienko.

‘Collect everything’

This year on February 24, the anniversary of the 2022 invasion, the shop put on an exhibition of its clients’ photography featuring dozens of pictures by Ukrainians aching for home. Isaienko, who now works at FSL and runs its prolific TikTok feed, said the powerful images help keep the war front-and-center in their German customers’ minds. She held up a favorite picture from Kyiv of an

improvised anti-tank obstacle known as a “Czech hedgehog”, with a single flower threaded into its metal.

Another showed a rosy-cheeked grandmother in her kitchen making the beloved dessert varenyki with cherries. In the wake of the invasion, “you start thinking about your family and about your history in another way - you want to collect everything”, said Isaienko. Ukrainian freelance photographer Stan Gomov, 27, dropping off some vacation snapshots, said that being at FSL felt like home. “It’s just the time to support each other generally because of the whole situation with the Russian war,” he said. “It’s just very nice when you can come somewhere and have the same service that you used back home.” — AFP



Founders of the Film Speed Lab Katerina Hridina-But (left) and Dmytro But, pose next to an automatic film processor in their shop in Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg district on June 7, 2023.



Employees prepare to process film rolls at the Film Speed Lab in Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg district on June 7, 2023.

Sports

Bradley joins McCarthy atop leaderboard at Championship

McIlroy climbs the leaderboard with impressive display

NEW YORK: Keegan Bradley birdied five straight holes in a seven-under-par 63 on Friday to join Denny McCarthy atop the leaderboard at the US PGA Tour Travelers Championship, where Rory McIlroy was among those in the mix. McCarthy, who led by two after a 10-under-par first-round 60, followed up with a five-under-par 65 at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut. Bradley blistered the back nine to join him on 15-under-par 125 - a 36-hole course record - rolling in five straight birdies from the 12th through the 16th.

Bradley had kick started his round with a 58-foot birdie putt at the third hole and drained a 10-footer at eight. He sank a 34-foot birdie at the 12th to launch his back-nine surge. "Felt like I could make every putt I looked at," Bradley said. "I was just reading them really good. When you're putting good everything feels easy and it's automatic."

McCarthy shook off a bogey at the second hole, where he missed the green, carding six birdies the rest of the way. That included a 43-foot birdie putt at the 10th and another from just inside 20 feet at 18. McCarthy said it was "nice" to post the 36-hole scoring record for the course, but he remained focused on claiming a first PGA Tour title. "Golf tournaments aren't 36 holes unfortunately, so I know there is still a lot of golf left," he said.

McCarthy and Bradley - who played through afternoon showers - were two strokes clear of Chez

Reavie, who carded a 63 for 127. Eric Cole shot a 65 for 129 while Zac Blair and Adam Scott were tied at 130 as the course again yielded a bevy of low scores. World number two Jon Rahm couldn't take advantage, firing a one-over 71 that left him at two-under, two shots outside the cutline that came at four-under par.

McIlroy was in a group on eight-under-par 132, climbing the leaderboard with an impressive display on the greens and despite a double-bogey disaster at his penultimate hole, the par-three eighth - the same hole he ace'd on Thursday. "Other than that, it was a really good round of golf," said McIlroy, whose tee shot was in the water. "It just got hit by a little bit of wind," McIlroy said. "Hit a pretty good shot. I just misjudged the wind a little bit and it came up short - the one place you couldn't miss today on that hole."

The Northern Ireland star, coming off a runner-up finish to Wyndham Clark at the US Open at Los Angeles Country Club on Sunday, had eight birdies at that point, setting the tone with a 19-foot birdie putt at the 11th. His five birdies in his first nine holes also included a 13-footer at the 14th and a 14-footer at 17. His three birdies coming in included a 25-footer at the third. While low scores abounded, world number one Scottie Scheffler couldn't join the birdie fest. He had two birdies and two bogeys in an even-par 70 that left him on seven-under 133. — AFP



CROMWELL: Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland plays his shot from the fifth tee during the second round of the Travelers Championship at TPC River Highlands on June 23, 2023. — AFP

News in Brief

CONCACAF suspends 4 players

LOS ANGELES: CONCACAF meted out suspensions to Weston McKennie and Sergino Dest of the United States and Mexico's Cesar Montes and Gerardo Arteaga on Friday in the wake of the stormy Champions League clash between the two nations. The United States triumphed 3-0 in the semifinal match that saw both sides finish with nine men. Montes was shown a red card for an ugly wild kick at Folarin Balogun and McKennie was dismissed for his role in the fracas which followed. Arteaga and Dest were sent off after another mass brawl. CONCACAF, football's governing body for North and Central America and the Caribbean, said on Friday that McKennie and Montes have been suspended a further three matches, in addition to their automatic one-match bans. — AFP

Busquets joins Inter Miami

MIAMI: Inter Miami announced on Friday they are signing former Spain and Barcelona midfielder Sergio Busquets to team-up with Lionel Messi at the Major League Soccer club. Messi said earlier this month he was moving to Miami and he will now be re-united with his former Barca team-mate Busquets. Inter Miami posted a tweet heralding the arrival of the player. "Si, Busi" read the twitter post, referring to Busquets' nickname. The tweet included quotes praising Busquets from several people in the game including former Spain coach Vicente del Bosque. Busquets said in May that he would leave Barcelona in the summer at the end of his contract. The 34-year-old made 143 appearances for Spain before announcing his retirement from the team in December. — AFP

Krejčíková, Ostapenko book semis

BIRMINGHAM: Top seed Barbora Krejčíková cruised into the semi-finals of the Birmingham WTA grass court tournament on Friday with a 6-3, 6-2 win over fellow Czech Linda Fruhvirtova. Second seed Jelena Ostapenko, by contrast, needed to battle back from a set and 4-0 down before prevailing over Polish qualifier Magdalena Frech 4-6, 7-5, 6-2. World number 12 Krejčíková never faced a break point as she reached her first grass court semi-final of her career. "I definitely feel great, it's nice to have three matches in your pocket," said Krejčíková. "Every single match you have to be aggressive on the grass. To play aggressive, to go for the shots, to serve well and return well and start dictating from the very first point. I think that's the key, and I think that I was doing that pretty well today." Krejčíková will face China's Zhu Lin in the last four after she beat Rebecca Marino 4-6, 6-3, 6-2. Ostapenko's fightback sets up a clash with fourth seed Anastasia Potapova on Saturday. The Russian outlasted British wild card Harriet Dart 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in Friday's last quarter-final. — AFP

Marseille name new coach

MARSEILLE: French giants Marseille on Friday unveiled Marcelino as their new coach to replace Igor Tudor who quit after just one season in charge. Former Athletic Bilbao coach Marcelino will take charge of training for the first time next month with a Champions League preliminary round tie to play on August 8/9. "The arrival of Marcelino is part of the desire to give continuity to the club's project," said Javier Ribalta, Marseille's director of football. "His experience will also be a considerable asset to strengthen the work undertaken last season." Marcelino had been out of work since leaving Bilbao in June 2022. He has also worked with Sevilla, Villarreal and Valencia where he won the Spanish Cup in 2019. — AFP

Maguire takes lead in Women's PGA Championship

NEW YORK: Ireland's Leona Maguire birdied three of her last four holes to take a one-stroke second-round lead in the Women's PGA Championship at rain-soaked Baltusrol. Maguire, who started the day three off the pace, shook off a slow start that saw her par her first five holes before a bogey at the 15th. She responded with a birdie at the 17th and grabbed another at the fourth before a bogey at the fifth. Then she cantered home with birdies at the sixth, seventh and ninth to card a three-under 68.

Her five-under total of 137 put her one clear of a group of three on 138: England's Mel Reid, Norway's Celine Borge and China's Lin Xiyu. Reid carded a 67, Borge signed for a 69 and Lin shot an even par 71. It was a further stroke back to Australia's Minjee Lee, who posted a 67, and overnight leader Lee-Anne Pace of South Africa, who posted a two-over 73. "Really happy with how I played today," Maguire said. "Weather was a little bit trickier today, espe-

cially on the back nine when that rain came in."

"Didn't really hole any putts on the front side, but nice to get those three birdies coming in," added Maguire, who said a solid hybrid into the ninth gave her a comfortable seven-footer uphill putt to finish. Maguire arrived in Springfield, New Jersey, riding the momentum of her second LPGA title at the Meijer Classic on Sunday. Chasing a first major, however, requires a different mindset, she said. "This is uncharted territory for me. Whatever happens this week, I'm sure I'll learn a lot, and just sort of taking it one day at a time," she said.

"I think this golf course demands that. I think you can't think more than one shot ahead, let alone a hole or a round ahead." Maguire's European Solheim Cup teammate Reid was delighted to hit 18 greens in regulation on what she called a "beast of a golf course." "The rough is really obviously thick," Reid said. "It's obviously a bit wet. I feel like that's OK for me because I'm one of the stronger players. I'm not really too scared about hitting it in the rough, so I feel like it's kind of freed my driver up."

Lin said she found the conditions even more challenging than Thursday's. She offset an opening bogey at the 10th with a birdie at 11 and followed a bogey at 15 with an eagle at the 18th. "I've been trying to stay patient," Lin said. "I didn't really get angry with any



SPRINGFIELD: Leona Maguire of Ireland hits from the 15th fairway during the second round of the KPMG Women's PGA Championship at Baltusrol Golf Club on June 23, 2023. — AFP

of the bogeys I made, but then 18th hole I finally hit the fairway, so I was like, there's a good chance, and I hit that really good three-wood in the rain, and then it went up to like maybe 12-footer. When I made the putt, I was pretty pumped." — AFP

Alcaraz powers into Queen's semi-finals

LONDON: Carlos Alcaraz remains in the hunt for his first grass court title after the world number two beat former champion Grigor Dimitrov 6-4, 6-4 to reach the semi-finals at Queen's Club on Friday. Alcaraz admitted earlier in the week to watching videos of Roger Federer and Andy Murray to learn how to move on the grass and appears to be finding his feet on the surface ahead of Wimbledon next month.

Since surviving a marathon first round encounter with French lucky loser Arthur Rinderknech, Alcaraz has not dropped a set to reach the last four in London. A break in the first game was enough to win the Spaniard the first set as Dimitrov missed three chances to break back in the sixth game. The Bulgarian, who won the Queen's title in 2014, got off to a flier in the second set as he led 3-0. Alcaraz battled back to lead 4-3, only to give the break back for 4-4.

However, the US Open champion was gifted the chance to serve for the match when an error-strewn game from Dimitrov threw away his serve to love. Alcaraz took full advantage to set up a semi-final clash with Sebastian Korda, who beat British number one Cameron Norrie 6-4, 7-6 (7/1). "Grigor is a really top player in every surface, but even more here on grass, he feels the ball very well," said Alcaraz. "I played very well since the beginning. The two matches before helped me a lot."

Medvedev crashes out of Halle Open

BERLIN: Top seed Daniil Medvedev has crashed out of the Halle Open, a traditional Wimbledon warm-up, beaten in straight sets by Roberto Bautista Agut on Friday. Medvedev lost 7-5, 7-6 (7-3) against the 35-year-old Spaniard. Eighth seed Bautista Agut now boasts a 5-2 career record against the 2021 US Open winner. "To beat Daniil on this court, you have to play really good" said Bautista Agut. "I didn't feel good (for) some months this year, but I kept working hard. I know tennis is sometimes very difficult, but today it showed that I have been working hard."

Medvedev, the former world number one, was runner-up on the Halle grass in 2022, losing to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in straight sets in the final. With a poor record on the surface Medvedev has never reached the quarter-finals at Wimbledon, missing last year's tournament due to a ban on Russian athletes over the war in Ukraine. In Friday's final match, third seed Andrey Rublev came from behind to defeat Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor, setting up a meeting with Bautista Agut. Rublev lost the



LONDON: Spain's Carlos Alcaraz returns to Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov during their men's quarter-final match at the Cinch ATP tennis Championships on June 23, 2023. — AFP

first set 3-6 but won the next two 6-3, 6-4, making it the second time he beat Griekspoor this season after another three-set win at the Qatar Open in Doha in February.

Olympic gold medalist Alexander Zverev also progressed into the semi-finals after defeating Chilean Nicolas Jarry. The 26-year-old German, who made it to the semi-finals of this year's French Open, defeated Jarry in straight sets 7-5, 6-3. "It's fantastic that I've been able to keep playing like I did in Paris, but there's still a few things to improve on" Zverev said. Zverev will play in the semis for the third time. The German previously made it to the final of the Halle tournament in 2016 and 2017, losing to 10-time winner Roger Federer on both occasions.

Zverev will meet Kazakh Alexander Bublik in the last four after Bublik advanced when Italian fourth seed Jannik Sinner withdrew hurt in the second set of their quarter final tie. Bublik won the first set 7-5 and was up 2-0 in the second when Sinner pulled out with a right leg injury. The Italian had taken a medical timeout at the end of the first set. He received treatment from a physiotherapist and played, and lost, two more games before pulling out. Sinner, the 21-year-old world number nine, now faces a race against time to be fit for Wimbledon which starts in early July. — AFP

again, it is legal. He can hit the ball where he wants to. "It just gave me fire in the belly to beat him even more. I'm super happy to manage to beat him in two sets." Rune faces Australia's Alex De Minaur in the last four after he beat Frenchman Adrian Mannarino 6-4, 4-6, 6-4. — AFP



HALLE WESTFALEN: Russia's Daniil Medvedev returns the ball to Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut (not pictured) during the men's singles quarter-final of the ATP 500 Halle Open tennis tournament in Halle, western Germany. — AFP

Sports

Crusaders win Super Rugby final, claim 7th straight title

Canterbury Crusaders overpower Waikato Chiefs 25-20

HAMILTON: The Canterbury Crusaders claimed a seventh straight title with a 25-20 win over the Waikato Chiefs in the Super Rugby Pacific final Saturday on coach Scott Robertson's swansong. The Chiefs led 20-15 early in the second half, but the Crusaders fought back with Codie Taylor grabbing a converted try before Richie Mo'unga slotted a late penalty.

This was Robertson's final match with the Crusaders before leaving to coach the All Blacks following the Rugby World Cup, which kicks off in September. Under his stewardship, the Christchurch-based franchise has won a perfect set of seven consecutive titles since 2017. "I'm just really proud," an emotional Robertson said of the victory. "We kept pushing them back on defense."

The match turned in the 72nd minute when Chiefs co-skipper and All Blacks captain Sam Cane was shown a yellow card. From the resulting penalty, Test veteran Taylor was driven across for his 42nd career try, setting the record for the most tries by a forward in Super Rugby. Roared on by their home crowd, the Chiefs' best chance of victory was a missed long-range penalty attempt from fly-half Damian McKenzie. Mo'unga rounded out the scoring with a penalty after the final hooter, sparking emotional scenes among a Crusaders side who were missing seven All Blacks through injury.

Taylor, who scored two tries on the night, said the

players were motivated to win for their departing personnel including Mo'unga and Sam Whitelock. "I'm lost for words, just so proud of the effort," Taylor told Sky Sport. "I can't get the fact out of my head that the boys are leaving and how much it means to them. It's special. All the boys leaving really stood up tonight. "Can't take anything from the Chiefs, they threw everything at us. We just managed to hang in there."

It was a heartbreaking result for the Chiefs, who appeared to have the firepower to end a decade-long title drought after dropping only one game in the regular season. Two long-serving Chiefs players — All Blacks Brodie Retallick and Brad Weber — were playing their last game before heading overseas. The Crusaders led 15-10 at half-time but the margin could have been greater after they dominated possession, helped by the Chiefs' ill discipline.

The home side were forced to play with 14 men for two 10-minute periods following yellow cards for All Blacks Anton Lienert-Brown and Luke Jacobson before Cane was also sin-binned. "We nearly got there," said Chiefs coach Clayton McMillan. "It felt like we created enough to win despite those three yellow cards — you can't fault the Crusaders." Weber also lamented the home side's lack of discipline. "It sucks, this crowd deserved to see us win tonight and jeez, if we had done it with 14 men for 30 minutes it would have been a hell of a story to tell," he said. "To come up just short... it's devastating." — AFP



HAMILTON: Crusaders' Scott Barrett (center) holds the winning trophy as he celebrates with the teammates after the Super Rugby Pacific final match between the Chiefs and Crusaders at FMG Stadium in Hamilton on June 24, 2023. — AFP

Rivals seek to profit from Chelsea's sale

MANCHESTER: Chelsea have embarked on a fire sale following their stunning spending spree, trimming their bloated squad in an effort to comply with financial regulations as they prepare for a new era under Mauricio Pochettino. In their first year under the ownership of an American consortium, Chelsea spent more on transfer fees than any club has ever done in a 12-month period, only to finish 12th in the Premier League — their lowest placing since 1994.

The arrival of RB Leipzig forward Christopher Nkunku this week has added to the outlay of more than £500 million (\$635 million). But most of Chelsea's business is focused on departures, with key players in the squad that won the Champions League just two years ago set to leave. France midfielder N'Golo Kante has already said his

goodbyes to join a wave of star footballers heading to Saudi Arabia, with other Chelsea players expected to follow him.

A potential influx of Saudi cash could prove vital to Chelsea's chances of complying with the Premier League's financial fair play (FFP) rules. Clubs are allowed a maximum loss of £105 million over a three-year period, with deductions allowed for spending on infrastructure, youth and women's football.

Chelsea looked set to be well over that limit, having posted £275 million worth of losses in the final two years of Roman Abramovich's reign, even before LA Dodgers co-owner Todd Boehly and private equity group Clearlake Capital took charge. Some of the club's new signings last season such as Enzo Fernandez and Mykhailo Mudryk were handed eight-year deals to minimize the impact of their transfer fees on the books. For FFP purposes, transfer fees are spread over the number of years of the contract. By contrast, sales can be registered in full as soon as they are completed and Chelsea are in a rush to get business done before the end of football's financial year on June 30.

Havertz, Kovacic on the move

A number of Chelsea's Premier League rivals are circling, keen to take advantage of cut-price deals. Croatia international Mateo Kovacic is on the verge of joining English champions Manchester City for an initial £25 million. England's Mason Mount is the subject of serious interest from Manchester United, with just 12 months left on his deal at Stamford Bridge.

Germany forward Kai Havertz is close to joining London rivals Arsenal for £65 million, while Marc Cucurella could reportedly join Newcastle for around half the £60 million he cost Chelsea to sign from Brighton year. Saudi interest in Edouard Mendy, Kalidou Koulibaly and Hakim Ziyech is making waves. All three found themselves out of favor last season and getting their wages off the books along with receiving a significant transfer fee would come as a blessing. Business links between the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) and Clearlake have resulted in accusations of a conflict of interest.

Former Manchester United captain Gary Neville has called for an embargo on transfers from Premier League clubs to Saudi to "ensure the integrity of the game isn't being damaged". However, the Premier League reportedly investigated any links between Chelsea's ownership group and the PIF at the time of last year's takeover and was apparently happy there was no conflict. The hard work in transforming Chelsea's fortunes on the field, though, still lies ahead for Pochettino on his return to English football.

The club's hierarchy are banking on the Argentine to develop the abundance of young talent at his disposal, much like he did as Tottenham boss between 2014 and 2019. But the competition at the top of the Premier League is even tougher now with PIF-backed Newcastle joining the traditional top six of City, United, Liverpool, Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham in the battle for Champions League places. And Chelsea's reckless splurge over the past year could end up strengthening their rivals should Havertz, Mount and Kovacic go on to shine at their new clubs. — AFP

5-wicket Hasaranga shines as Sri Lanka crush Oman

BULAWAYO: Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga took his second successive five-wicket haul as Sri Lanka crushed Oman by 10 wickets in the 2023 World Cup Qualifier on Friday, Sri Lanka now have two wins from two matches and are well-placed to reach the Super Six stage. Scotland are also on course for the next stage after they defeated the UAE by 111 runs in the day's other Group B fixture. Hasaranga took six wickets in the opening win over the UAE, and was at it again with five for 13 against Oman who were bowled out for just 98.

Sri Lanka needed just 15 overs to chase that total down, Dimuth Karunaratne (61 not out) leading them home. Lahiru Kumara (3-22) also starred with the ball for 1996 world champions Sri Lanka as Oman slipped to 20 for four. A 52-run stand between Jatinder Singh (21) and Ayaan Khan (41) hinted at a recovery before Hasaranga entered the fray. His triple wicket maiden ripped the heart out of the Omani middle order, leaving them in dire trouble at 72 for seven.

Hasaranga finally removed Ayaan before finishing off the innings by trapping Bilal Khan leg before. Sri Lanka showed their intent from the very first ball of the chase, Pathum Nissanka (39 not out) slashing Bilal for four over point. The pair never really looked troubled, bringing up

the 50 partnership in the seventh over with Karunaratne's fifth boundary of the innings.

"He's a champion. Whenever I throw him the ball, he delivers for me," Sri Lanka skipper Dasun Shanaka said of Hasaranga. "Very good to see him keeping getting five-wicket hauls and man of the match awards. I think the future is really bright and they support staff and management has done a good job to keep the environment calm." Sri Lanka have now won two in a row with matches against Ireland and Scotland to come. Oman can still reach the Super Six with a win over Scotland in their next game. Scotland backed up their thrilling one-wicket win over Ireland by beating the UAE by 111 runs, with a captain's knock from Richie Berrington.

His 127 with nine fours and three sixes fired them to 282 for eight before Chris Sole and Safyaan Sharif finished the job with the ball. Michael Leask with 41 also shone with the bat. "It was really important today after the win against Ireland to turn up and adapt to the conditions. Pleading that we put in such a clinical performance with the ball and make it pretty comfortable," said Berrington. Plenty of UAE batters got in, including skipper Muhammad Waseem (36), but none were able to turn starts into big scores as wickets fell at regular intervals.

With two wins apiece, the West Indies and Zimbabwe meet in Harare on Saturday and are both well-placed to make the Super Sixes from Group A. The other match between the Netherlands and Nepal could end up being decisive in the race for third place. For Nepal, only a win will do but if they can get the better of the Dutch, they will be on the brink of qualifying. Netherlands will clinch



Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga

a top three spot in the group with a win, ahead of a final match against the West Indies. — AFP



First Kuwaiti in NCAA Division I

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti rising star Hashem Asad has committed to Georgetown University where he will suit up for the prestigious college's basketball team this fall. By joining the Hoyas, Asad will become the first Kuwaiti player to compete in the NCAA Division I, which gives players a great chance to join the NBA in the future. The 18-year-old most recently competed for Kuwait Club's U-19 basketball team. College basketball offers the highest level of competition for the sport in the United States behind the NBA only, and is considered the second best in terms of competition, followship and exposure.

Players competing in Division I, the highest ranking in NCAA tournaments, can declare for the NBA Draft after finishing their freshman year competing for their respective college's teams. The annual draft allows NBA teams to select top prospects from American universities or stand-out young players from around the world. Victor Wembanyama of France, considered one of the top prospects since LeBron James in 2003, was selected first overall by the San Antonio Spurs in the 2023 NBA Draft that took place this past Thursday.

Georgetown University's basketball program is considered one of the most prestigious in collegiate sports in the United States. Some of the best Georgetown alumni who played in the NBA include Patrick Ewing, Allen Iverson, Alonzo Mourning and Dikembe Mutombo. Asad hopes that playing for the Georgetown Hoyas would help him achieve his dream of becoming the first Kuwaiti to play in the NBA. — Agencies

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733

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

Change of Name

I, Husain, holder of Indian Passport No. P2217948, having permanent address MP, India - 452012, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name: **Hussain** and surname: **Dharwala.** (#3814) 23-06-2023

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

111048, 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 Mohammediya 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: **Shehbaz** and surname: **Azmin.** (#3811) 22-06-2023

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Kuwait hammer Pakistan 4-0

South Asian Football Federation Championship



NEW DELHI: Kuwait's Mubarak Al-Funaini (center) celebrates his goal during the Kuwait vs Pakistan match at the SAFF Championship on Saturday.

Kuwait's Al-Azmi wins silver medal

RABAT: Kuwaiti Athlete Abdulrahman Al-Azmi on Friday snatched the silver medal of the javelin throwing contest in the Arab Athletics Championship currently being held in the Moroccan city of Marrakesh. Al-Azmi made a new personal record after scoring 71.84 meters, giving Kuwait its second medal in the championship after a gold medal won on Wednesday by runner Yaqoub Al-Youha in the 110-meter hurdles competition. In a statement to KUNA, the Kuwaiti national team coach Hamo Al-Bukili lauded Al-Azmi's achievement, expressing hope the team would win more medals and titles in this championship. 16 Arab countries, including Kuwait, are participating in the Arab Championship which commenced in Marrakesh on Tuesday and concludes on Saturday.

Kuwaiti racer wins gold
Meanwhile, Kuwait's Yaqoub Al-Youha won on



Kuwaiti javelin thrower Al-Azmi wins silver medal in the Arab Athletics Championship. — KUNA photos

Wednesday the gold medal of the 110m hurdles race of the 23rd Arab Athletic Championship in Morocco. His achievement adds to the tally of the Kuwaiti mission one day after his compatriot Aisha Al-Khedr, a female sprinter, was able to break the national record with a 5.45m. long jump. The championship, being hosted by Marrakesh city from June 20-24, gathered athletes from 16 Arab countries. — KUNA



Yaqoub Al-Youha

NEW DELHI: Kuwait won against Pakistan 4-0 in the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship Group A match held in the Sree Kanteerava Stadium in the southern Indian city of Bangalore on Saturday. Kuwait's Hassan Hamdan netted the first goal in the tenth minute while Mubarak Al-Funaini scored the second and third goals in the 17th and 46th minutes. Eid Al Rasheidi netted the last goal in the 69th minute. The Kuwaiti team defeated Nepal 3-1 in the opening match of the Group A Wednesday, and India beat Pakistan 4-0.

Later yesterday, India's team took on Nepal. Kuwait will meet India while Pakistan will meet Nepal on Tuesday. In the Group B matches, Lebanon defeated Bangladesh 2-0, and Maldives overpowered Bhutan 2-0 in the Group B matches on Thursday. As part of the second round matches of the Group B, Bhutan team are scheduled to meet Lebanon, and Bangladesh will take on the Maldives on Sunday. On Wednesday, Lebanon will play against Maldives, and Bhutan will face Bangladesh. — KUNA



Kuwait's team participates in medical program

BERLIN: Kuwait Special Olympics participates in a medical sports program during the summer global games of the 16th edition of the Special Olympics World Games (Berlin 2023) held in the German capital. The medical examination program is one of the prime activities of the international event, with medical teams following up on health of athletes from 170 states, totaling 7,000. The medics measure blood pressure, examine physique of the athletes such as height and weight, in addition to ensuring they feed on healthy food and drink sufficient amounts of



Kuwait Olympics participates in medical program for athletes at Berlin 2023. — KUNA Photos

water during the various games. They also examine their psychological condition particularly in heated competitions. — KUNA



Medics measure blood pressure for participants in Berlin 2023.

Al-Anjeri discusses Kuwait's democracy on Good Morning Washington

Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri, Founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research, made an appearance on the popular morning show, Good Morning Washington, connected live from Kuwait, sharing insights about his recently released documentary film, "Is Kuwait in Danger?".

Al-Anjeri's documentary aims to raise awareness about the unique cultural, political and economic facets of Kuwait. The film draws attention to crucial issues, such as economic reform, political deadlock and media censorship. The thought-provoking title invites audiences to determine whether Kuwait is indeed in danger based on an array of individual perspectives and experiences presented candidly in the documentary.

During his appearance, Al-Anjeri noted his concern about a seeming lack of awareness among American politicians regarding Kuwait's position as a beacon of peaceful democracy in the Middle East. He highlighted Kuwait's unwavering adherence to UN resolutions and its role as a mediator for peace in a region often filled with conflict.

Al-Anjeri suggested that there are ample opportunities for Kuwait to fortify its ties with the United States. He pointed out the recent appoint-



ment of Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah as Kuwait's first female ambassador to the US, indicating a hopeful future for further collaboration. He also expressed optimism about the upcoming appointment of a US ambassador to Kuwait, emphasizing the potential for partnership with policy influencers, NGOs and free media.

He concluded his insightful interview by informing viewers that his new documentary, "Is Kuwait in Danger?", is now available for viewing on YouTube.



GOOD MORNING WASHINGTON
ABDULAZIZ AL-ANJERI
RECONNAISSANCE RESEARCH - FOUNDER & CEO