

Polestar2

Why wait to go electric

\$10,000 trade-in support



3

Amir, Crown Prince hail Kuwaiti women's rights, contributions



8

GCC economic growth expected to slow to 2.5%, Kuwait to 1.3%



11

Egypt artisans carve a path to world luxury markets



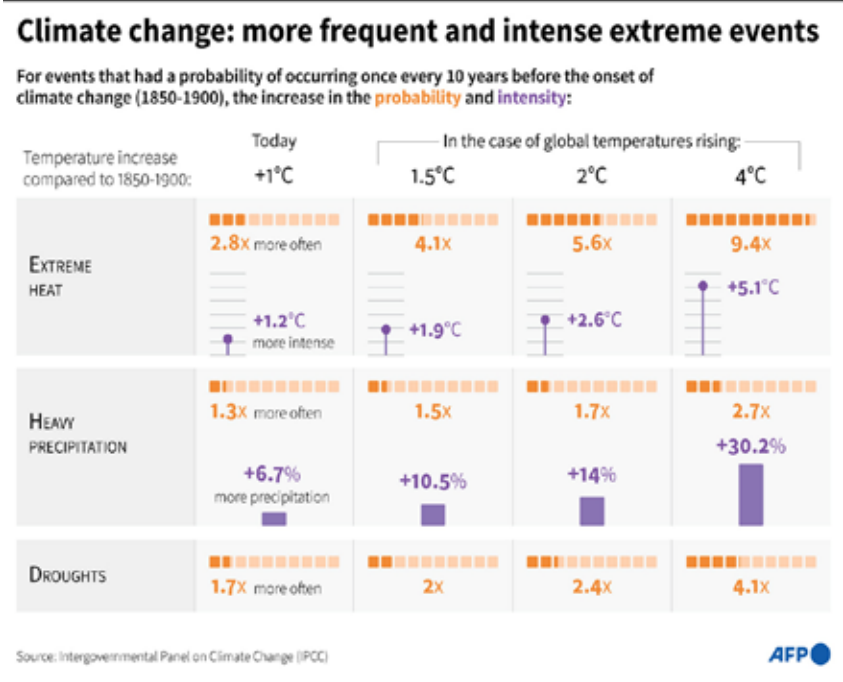
16

Moroccan nomads keep alive ancient sport of sand hockey



Next 5 years to be hottest ever

Asia heatwaves made 30 times more likely by climate change



GENEVA/NEW DELHI: It is near-certain that 2023-2027 will be the warmest five-year period ever recorded, the United Nations warned Wednesday as greenhouse gases and El Nino combine to send temperatures soaring. There is a two-thirds chance that at least one of the next five years will see global temperatures exceed the more ambitious target set out in the Paris accords on limiting climate change, the UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said.

The hottest eight years ever recorded were all between 2015 and 2022, with 2016 the warmest — but temperatures are forecast to increase further as climate change accelerates. "There is a 98-percent likelihood that at least one of the next five years, and the five-year period as a whole, will be the warmest on record," the WMO said.

The 2015 Paris Agreement saw countries agree to cap global warming at "well below" two degrees Celsius above average levels measured between 1850 and 1900 — and 1.5C if possible. The global mean tem-

perature in 2022 was 1.15C above the 1850-1900 average. The WMO said there was a 66 percent chance that annual global surface temperatures will exceed 1.5C above pre-industrial levels for at least one of the years 2023-2027, with a range of 1.1C to 1.8C forecasted for each of those five years.

"WMO is sounding the alarm that we will breach the 1.5C level on a temporary basis with increasing frequency", said the agency's chief Petteri Taalas. "A warming El Nino is expected to develop in the coming months and this will combine with human-induced climate change to push global temperatures into uncharted territory. "This will have far-reaching repercussions for health, food security, water management and the environment. We need to be prepared."

El Nino is the large-scale warming of surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean. The weather phenomenon normally occurs every two to seven years. Typically, El Nino increases global temperatures in the year after it develops — which in this cycle

would be 2024. Wednesday's predictions show "we haven't been able to limit the warming so far and we are still moving in the wrong direction", Taalas told a press conference. He said it could take until the 2060s to phase out the negative trend and stop things getting worse.

Heat gets trapped in the atmosphere by so-called greenhouse gases, which are at a record high. The major greenhouses gases are carbon dioxide, plus methane and nitrous oxide. "The return to normal level might take even thousands of years because we already have such a high concentration of carbon dioxide, and we have lost the melting of glaciers and sea level game," said Taalas. "There's no return to the climate which persisted during the last century. That's a fact."

Mean global land and sea near-surface temperatures have increased since the 1960s. The chances of temperatures temporarily exceeding 1.5C above the 1850-1990 average have risen steadily

Continued on Page 6

NEWS IN BRIEF

Rulings on election petitions due

KUWAIT: The court of first instance on Wednesday said it will rule on Thursday on a petition demanding to halt the June 6 snap polls until the constitutional court has issued its ruling on another petition demanding the reversal of a March 19 ruling that annulled the Sept 2022 election. Meanwhile, the constitutional court on Wednesday said it will rule on the petition on May 24.

Dubai driving license in 2 hours

DUBAI: Dubai is introducing a new service allowing people to get their driving license or vehicle registration cards delivered within two hours. The new service comes only two weeks after Dubai's Road and Transport Authority introduced a 'golden chance' scheme to allow more expats to swap licenses obtained from their home countries with UAE ones without taking driving lessons.

10m 'Zelda' copies sold in 3 days

PARIS: Japanese video game firm Nintendo said on Wednesday it had sold more than 10 million copies in three days of its latest release, "Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom". The company wrote on Twitter that the figures made it "the fastest-selling game in the history of The Legend of Zelda series", a franchise that dates back to 1986. — AFP

Universe's biggest stars detected

PARIS: The James Webb Space Telescope has helped astronomers detect the first chemical signs of supermassive stars, "celestial monsters" blazing with the brightness of millions of Suns in the early universe. So far, the largest stars observed anywhere have a mass of around 300 times that of our Sun. But the supermassive star described in a new study has an estimated mass of 5,000 to 10,000 Suns. — AFP

Assad to emerge from the cold at Arab summit

RIYADH: Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad will attend this week his first Arab League summit in 13 years, his foreign minister confirmed Wednesday, signaling regional reintegration after more than a decade of war. The host of Friday's summit, Saudi Arabia, has championed Assad's return to the pan-Arab body and invited the Syrian leader over the objection of other regional leaders. The Syrian government had been isolated in the region for years since its brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests in 2011 triggered a war that has killed more than 500,000 people.

Iran, Russia ink transport deal

TEHRAN: Iran and Russia agreed Wednesday to collaborate on the construction of the final part of a commercial transport network linking Russia to the Gulf and India avoiding Western sea lanes. Iranian Transport Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash, who signed the agreement with his Russian counterpart in Tehran, said the 164-km railway in Iran's north would be completed within three years.

Nepali mountaineer climbs Everest for record 27th time

KATHMANDU: Nepali climber Kami Rita Sherpa reached the top of Mount Everest for the 27th time on Wednesday, reclaiming the record for the most summits of the world's highest mountain. "He successfully reached the summit this morning guiding a Vietnamese climber," Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks, his expedition organizer, told AFP. Nepal is home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks, including the 8,849-m Everest, and welcomes hundreds of adventurers each spring, when temperatures are warm and winds are typically calm. Earlier Wednesday, British guide Kenton Cool reached the world's highest point for the 17th time, extending his own record for the most summits by a non-Nepali. Meanwhile, a 46-year-old Moldovan climber died on the mountain the same day — the fifth fatality of the season. Authorities have issued 478 Everest permits to foreign climbers this year, the \$11,000

Analysts say Assad's invitation also shows the clout of Saudi Arabia, which is casting itself as a peacemaker and asserting itself in multiple crises across the Middle East. Following a preparatory meeting on Wednesday, Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad told reporters Assad would attend Friday's event in Jeddah in person.

Beyond rekindling ties with the Assad government, the summit is expected to devote energy to two conflicts: The month-old showdown between two generals in Sudan and the eight-year-old civil war in Yemen. It is taking place in the same city where representatives of the two Sudanese camps have been locked in negotiations for a week and a half brokered by Saudi and US officials. In Yemen, meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is pushing for a peace deal with Iran-backed Houthi rebels after eight years at the helm of a military coalition that failed to defeat them on the battlefield.

Continued on Page 6

It is the only missing link in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) from northeast Russia via Azerbaijan to Iran's southern coastline and on to India by sea. Russia and Iran are both under international sanctions that restrict trade. The freight network of ship, rail and road routes, which covers some 7,200 km, avoids the Suez Canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea which would otherwise transport some Russian seaborne cargo.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who attended the signing ceremony, and Russia's Vladimir Putin, who spoke there via videoconference, both hailed the economic opportunities the agreement presents. — AFP (See Page 8)

fee part of total costs for a summit ranging from \$45,000 to \$200,000. Since most will need a guide, more than 900 people — a record — will try to summit this season, which runs until early June.

The 53-year-old Kami Rita Sherpa had held the overall title since 2018, when he ascended Everest for the 22nd time, passing the previous mark he shared with two other Sherpa climbers, both of whom have since retired. But on Sunday another climber, Pasang Dawa Sherpa, 46, tied the record by reaching the top for the 26th time.

A guide for more than two decades, Kami Rita Sherpa first summited in 1994 when working for a commercial expedition. Since then, he has climbed Everest almost every year, several times leading the first rope-fixing team to open the route to the top. "These records were made not with an intention to make them but during my work as a guide," Sherpa told AFP last month as he headed to base camp.

Dubbed "the Everest man", Sherpa was born in 1970 in Thame, a village in the Himalayas renowned as a breeding ground for successful mountaineers. Growing up, Sherpa watched his father and then his brother don climbing gear to join expeditions as mountain guides, and was soon following in their footsteps. In 2019, he reached the summit twice in



JEDDAH: Syria's Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad attends the Arab Foreign Ministers Preparatory Meeting ahead of the 32nd Arab League Summit on May 17, 2023. — AFP



TEHRAN: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Russian President Vladimir Putin attend via video conference the signing of an agreement to construct the final part of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) on May 17, 2023. — AFP



Kami Rita Sherpa

the span of six days. Sherpa's client Wednesday was reportedly Chinh Chu, a Vietnamese billionaire who made his fortune in finance, while Cool guided Richard Walker, executive chairman of British supermarket chain Iceland Foods, to the top. Nepali guides, usually ethnic Sherpas from the valleys around Everest, are considered the backbone of the climbing industry and bear huge risks to carry equipment and food, fix ropes and repair ladders.

Continued on Page 6



Local

Cyclists urge bike lanes for safety on Kuwait's streets

Kuwait's roads remain largely unfriendly, unsafe for cyclists

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: Over the last few years, usage of bicycles in Kuwait has significantly increased. Despite this increasing popularity, Kuwait's roads remain largely unfriendly to cyclists. This lack of infrastructure for bicycles creates a dangerous environment for cyclists, where they have to compete with motor vehicles for space on the road. Therefore, creating bike lanes in Kuwait is necessary to provide a safe and convenient mode of transportation for cyclists.

It will not only reduce the risks faced by cyclists, but will also contribute towards reducing traffic congestion and pollution and promoting healthier lifestyles amongst people. Thus, the government needs to prioritize the creation of bike lanes and encourage people to make use of this ecofriendly mode of transportation. This will be an investment in the future wellbeing of Kuwait's people and the environment.

Batoul Al-Abdullah, a cyclist who is a member of bike mate team, told Kuwait Times: "Lack of bicycle lanes in Kuwait poses a big challenge for us as cyclists, besides the lack of people's awareness about cyclists' safety and security. This puts us at high risk of accidents and danger."

The primary reason for creating bike lanes in Kuwait's streets is to ensure the safety of cyclists. Cyclists are ex-

posed to significant risks when sharing the road with motor vehicles because drivers may not always be aware of the presence of a cyclist or may not respect the distance that should be maintained between their vehicle and the bike. The creation of dedicated bike lanes will prevent cyclists from being hit by or involved in accidents with motor vehicles, making their cycling experience safer.

In this regard, Fahad Al-Abduljader, member of the Municipal Council, said that it is worth noting that the Kuwaiti traffic law has focused on addressing some problems related to bicycle lanes. For example, article 148 of ministerial decision no. 81 of 1976 regarding the executive regulations of traffic law no. 67 of 1976 states: "The cyclist must keep to the right side of the road and is prohibited from riding on the pavement. When a dedicated path is available, they must use it and cannot leave it."

"However, some still see an unjustified obstruction by cars, and a lack of concern from drivers for these cyclists, who have been repeatedly involved in accidents, some resulting in fatalities. As a result, many cycling enthusiasts have resorted to cycling on Sheikh Jaber Causeway at dawn to avoid accidents and over fears of drivers not paying attention to them," he said.

Moreover, Abduljader said avoiding bicycle acci-



Batoul Al-Abdullah



Fahad Al-Abduljader



Batoul Al-Abdullah cycling on the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway.

dents requires a comprehensive project that is not limited to dedicated paths. "If bike lanes are established without taking other steps, we will limit cycling to short lanes that do not serve the purpose. This will also prevent national and professional teams from practicing this activity on the roads, especially as they need long and open paths.

Although bike lanes are suitable for amateurs, an increase in cyclists will transfer collisions from the streets to the lanes, and from cyclists and cars to cyclists themselves,

which is no less dangerous than other accidents. Therefore, it is necessary to follow pioneering experiences in the region to achieve happiness, entertainment, physical and mental health for citizens and residents, and to encourage sports and entertainment activities while providing the highest level of guarantees for road safety," he added.



NBK sponsors 100/100 Arabic posters exhibition

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) provides its support to Contemporary Art Platform (CAP)'s "100/100 Best Hundred Arabic Posters Exhibition" for the first time in Kuwait, as part of the bank's continuous efforts to stand by the social and cultural institutions in Kuwait. This sponsorship comes in partnership with Sharaf Studio. The exhibition creates a platform connecting artists and scholars worldwide. NBK's support to this exhibition is a recognition of the important and pivotal role that culture plays in promoting our culture and shedding light on the Arab's rich heritage.

"NBK's CSR strategy focuses on supporting cultural activities that aims at building bridges between generations", said Farah Bastaki, NBK Digital Communications Manager. "NBK is keen that cultural and historical related events do attract a large segment of the society and it is our duty as a leading institution to be part in spreading cultural activities and help society to be engaged more and continuing to enhance Kuwait and Arab's history and tradition for years to come", she noted.

It's worth mentioning that a design workshop took place in line with this exhibition to bring together artists to reimagine the NBK Moneybox in designs inspired by the Kuwait Postage Stamps. The designs that were the outcome of this workshop were then showcased in the exhibition. Real NBK advertisements from the 1960s and 1970s that feature Arabic typography were displayed in this exhibition.

This exhibition in CAP Kuwait is an exclusive chance to witness exceptional winning selections from over 2500 submissions. It honors the best posters from the Arabic region that captured the contemporary visual culture of the Arab world. It is held every two years and with each new edition creating an archive of Arabic graphic design.

Over the past six and a half decades, NBK has committed itself to supporting social and cultural activities in Kuwait as part of its social responsibility. As a leading and prestigious institution, NBK has a track record of serving and supporting the Kuwaiti society. Its contribution to Al-Shaheed Park supports promoting and highlighting the richness of history and civilization.



Arab FMs prepare for 32nd Summit

JEDDAH: The Arab Foreign Ministers on Wednesday began their preparatory meeting ahead of Friday's 32nd Arab Summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah heads the Kuwaiti delegation to the ministerial meeting. President of the 31st Arab Summit and Foreign Minister of Algeria Ahmad Atef delivered a speech to the meeting, which stressed the importance of banding together to face regional and international challenges.

The official welcomed the return of Syria to its seat at the Arab League, saying that it would hopefully become a prelude to end the conflict in the fellow Arab country. He also commended the strong coordination between Arab countries, Turkey and Iran on the issue of Syria. On his part, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan delivered a speech after receiving the Presidency of the 32nd Arab Summit, hoping that the meeting, which includes the participation of Syria, would lead to further inter-Arab cooperation.

The Saudi Minister affirmed that the Arab re-

gion was filled with human and natural resources that would enable countries to play a more crucial role in the international arena, expressing the same time, Saudi Arabia's keenness on bolstering security and development in the region via the upcoming Arab summit. On his part, Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit welcomed in his speech Syrian Foreign Minister Dr Faisal Al-Mekdad, expressing hopes that the re-inclusion of the Syrian seat in the Arab League would lead to resolving the Syrian crisis.

Since the last Arab Summit in Algeria back in November, the Arab region had been in some serious alarming development, which led to the holding of two Arab summits within less than a year. Abul-Gheit touched on the developments in Syria, Yemen, and Libya in addition to the positive relations between Arab countries and nearby countries, noting that the negative impacts of external interferences required from the Arab world a strong unified stance.

On the situation in Palestine, the Arab League Chief affirmed that the situation was near full explosion, blaming the Israeli occupying forces for escalating the situation the Middle East region. The agenda of the Arab Foreign Ministers meeting would discuss the agenda of the upcoming summit within various domains including politics, economy, and others.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah held talks on Wednesday with his Omani counterpart Sayyid Bader Al-Busaidi.



JEDDAH: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah on Wednesday received his Bahraini counterpart Dr Abdullah Al-Zayani on the sidelines of the preparatory ministerial meeting of the 32nd Arab Summit. — KUNA photos

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs met with Jordan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Safadi on Wednesday, on the sidelines of Foreign Ministers' preparatory meeting for the 32nd Arab League summit. The two sides discussed bilateral ties and topics on the meeting's agenda. —KUNA



KUWAIT: (From left) Art Supervisors Ali Al-Qallaf, Mohammad Sarkhouh, Ali Al-Awad and Bader Nazar are seen at the art exhibition.



A mural showing traditional weddings in Kuwait.

No effort spared in keeping election transparent: Judge

KUWAIT: Acting President of the Supreme Judicial Council, Adel Bouresli, praised on Wednesday the ability of members of the judiciary in managing the electoral process with the highest levels of professionalism and competence. The remarks come after some MPs have previously stated that polling turnout results outnumber actual existing votes, and that they have suspicions about the election's results, notable by many MPs filing for grievances.

"Judges spare no effort to ensure that the electoral process takes place in an atmosphere of transparency and fairness, as was the case in previous elections," he said.

Also Wednesday, the committee entrusted in striking out the names of parliamentary candidates who are not eligible to run for the 2023 parliamentary elections completed its reviews and handed its report to Deputy Premier, Interior Minister, Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Wednesday.

An official source said the names will be announced on Thursday. A number of candidates, sources said, were checked for having a criminal record and files at the Psychological Medicine Hospital. —Agencies

Art exhibition showcases Kuwait's history

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Under the supervision of a number of art school supervisors at the Hawally governorate educational department at the ministry of education, an art exhibition was launched on Tuesday at The Avenues mall, showcasing exceptional artworks of 20 elementary school students from various of public schools in Hawally governorate.

The art exhibition is titled "At the Yaal", where "yaal" means the area between the coast and sea. It includes a number of sketches by elementary school students, in addition to a main painting that merged many drawings and drew the attention of all visitors. The four main supervisors who worked on this beautiful art exhibition are art mentor Mohammad Sarkhouh, teachers and art supervisors Ali Al-Qallaf and Bader Nazar and senior art supervisor at Hawally governorate Ali Al-Awad.

Sarkhouh told Kuwait Times this exhibition aims to educate the new generation about the history of their country, and how people used to live



Participant Ruqaya Al-Ateya is seen at the art exhibition.



Participant Fatima Bader Nazar poses for a photo in front of one of the paintings.

their daily life in the past, as students expressed what they learned through their paintings. He added that the exhibition will continue until Thursday, and is open to all visitors to come and encourage their children to learn and relive the history of their country. Sarkhouh said the drawings express the daily life of Kuwaitis back in the day, describing traditional weddings, family meals after morning prayers and pearling, in addition to details of daily social activities.

Meanwhile, the paintings include popular fish

that were and are still popular among Kuwaitis, making sure to teach children about the original Kuwaiti names of these fish. Sarkhouh said the art department of Hawally governorate is highly interested in developing students' artistic interests, and was amazed by the number of talented students in schools, which was clear by the large number of beautiful and talented artworks submitted by them, which forced the department to increase the number of the participants from 16 to 20 students from both boys and girls elementary schools.

Local

Amir, Crown Prince laud outstanding achievements of Kuwaiti women

Kuwait's history testament to women's dedication

KUWAIT: Marking Kuwaiti Women's Day, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed his pride and admiration to the outstanding contributions and achievements of Kuwaiti women and how they thrive to prosper the dear homeland. His Highness the Amir underlined the vital role that Kuwaiti women play in various fields and their answer to many of the required stages of development and renaissance that we all seek.

His Highness the Amir remembered the honorable national stances of Kuwaiti women in various events in Kuwaiti his-

tory and their fulfillment of their duties without hesitation or tirelessness, in a way that was the subject of appreciation and admiration. His Highness the Amir praised the many gains achieved by Kuwaiti women, especially in the recognition of their full political rights, of which they have always proven that they are worthy. His Highness the Amir expressed his congratulations to all his sisters and daughters, the honorable women of Kuwait, on this anniversary, wishing them all success in serving their country.

Also, His Highness the Crown Prince

Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed his admiration of the outstanding role of the Kuwaiti women in the construction of the dear homeland. Marking Kuwait's Women Day, His Highness the Crown Prince stressed the importance of women's role in enhancing the development of Kuwait's society, referring to gains made by Kuwait's women on all local and international levels. In addition, His Highness the Crown Prince voiced sincere congratulations to all women in Kuwait on this anniversary, wishing them success in serving the dear homeland. —KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



First female minister in Kuwait Dr Massouma Al-Mubarak



Kuwait Economic Society celebrates women achievements

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Kuwait Economic Society celebrated Kuwaiti Women Day on Tuesday to mark May 16, 2005, the day Kuwaiti women were granted their political rights to vote and to run in elections. The society celebrated by holding a seminar that included a number of high-profile women activists, personalities and senior leaders. The seminar discussed the challenges Kuwaiti women faced in getting their rights, and how they managed to overcome them, in addition to reviewing the history of Kuwaiti women's struggles.

Kuwait's first female minister Dr. Maasouma Al-Mubarak said Kuwaiti women have always struggled to obtain their rights, even after they succeeded in getting their political rights, which were implemented six years after amending the first article of the election law. Mubarak stressed that despite the struggle, women are still working on many laws until today that need to be amended or implemented.

Regarding Kuwaiti women's achievements, the former minister pointed out women still haven't got enough chances, pointing out that over 18 years, only 14 women succeeded in entering the National Assembly and only 27 women were appointed as ministers. She concluded by saying that Kuwaiti women need to be supported by laws, spreading more awareness about their rights and the importance of their voice in developing the country.

Founder and Head of the Women's Studies and Research Center at the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University Dr. Lubna Al-Qadhi said women must be optimistic and aware that choosing the right candidate in elections must be by her free choice, and to correctly evaluate the candidate, whether male or female, through their actual achievements. "Doubting

the role of women doesn't benefit anyone, and it affects the quality of women's rights. Women achieved a lot during the previous years, but they need the support of all society members, including the new generations," she said.

Former member of the Municipal Council and Vice President of the Business and Professional Women Network Maha Al-Baghli said Kuwaiti Women Day is one of the most important days due to the great achievements that have been achieved. She said people have started to forget this date, and everyone who supports women's rights must revive this memory.

Baghli said despite the successes, society still supports men more. She pointed out that when she was a member at the Municipality, she was struggling to prove herself as a woman, and was surprised that women in her workplace weren't treated equally with men in the matter of basic rights, such as the VIP passport that used to be for men only in her position.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Women's Cultural and Social Society Lulwa Al-Mulla spoke about the pioneering role played by the society in obtaining women's electoral rights, stressing the importance of the civil society in supporting women to reach high positions. She also reviewed the history of the female university students in Kuwait during the eighties, and how they succeeded to turn to another level of socialization in political life despite the rejection they faced at that time.

Member of the Economic Development Committee of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Engineer Sara Akbar spoke about how it is important to women in all positions to fight for their rights to choose the jobs they want to be specialized in. She recalled her journey in joining Kuwait Petroleum Company and working in oilfields while these positions were only for men, saying she had the support of her male manager. "It always needs the courage of a man to take the decision and open a door for a woman," she said.

General Manager of the Human Resources Department at Gulf Bank Salma Al-Hajjaj said empowering women and enhancing their leadership role requires more flexibility in dealing with them and taking into



KUWAIT: (From Left) Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Aliya Mawani, Salma Al-Hajjaj, Sara Akbar and Maha Al-Baghli are pictured during the event. Kuwait Economic Society celebrated Kuwaiti Women Day on Tuesday to mark May 16, 2005 - the day Kuwaiti women were granted their political rights to vote and to run in elections. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

account their social and family conditions by policy makers in various institutions. She said that women themselves must be ambitious, persistent and confident in their leadership and abilities to reach their career development goals.

She indicated that institutions in the private sector are keen to provide equal employment opportunities for both sexes, so that 50 percent are women and 50 percent are men. "However, after a while and as a result of social conditions, we find the balance has tilted in favor of men, and the ratio became 90 percent men and 10 percent women," she said.

Hajjaj noted the establishment of a work environment based on equality in which women are supported and empowered will achieve more innovation and success, and make the work culture healthier, which helps the progress of society and reflects positively on the labor market and the future. She said supporting and empowering women is a long-term commitment at Gulf Bank, stressing the importance of working to promote gender equality and empowering women to add to their full potential, which contributes to supporting the economic development of society.



KUWAIT: Canadian Ambassador Aliya Mawani (center) addresses the media. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

example in Syria and Sudan. They talked about regional dynamics with Iran and the main concerns for Kuwait and others in the region," she added. On the military level, Mawani said: "Canada's main military base of the region is here in Kuwait. This base will be staying and have a strong presence in the future. Kuwait has been an excellent host, and the level of collaboration we have is very good. We brought almost 4,000 Afghans and Canadians through Kuwait. We got very good cooperation from the government of Kuwait."

The ambassador revealed Canadian soldiers in the Kuwaiti base are also participating in the activities with the NATO Office, noting that the General who is in charge of the military base used to be a Commander with NATO, and he is experienced in leading a mission with soldiers from all different countries.

Mawani praised the role of Kuwaiti women. "We are seeing a lot of Kuwaiti women in healthcare, leadership positions, private sector, academia and the government. Kuwaiti women are very capable, smart and talented, and it would be very positive to benefit from their skills and perspectives. Having more voices and diverse experiences is positive and makes us stronger," she said.

"We understand from a lot of people that many

Awareness can increase cancer recovery rate



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Spreading cancer awareness can help reduce fatalities and increase the recovery rate to up to 95 percent, a local organization said during a workshop organized at Sabah Hospital recently. Cancer is a chronic disease that requires constant campaigns to raise awareness on the benefits of early diagnosis and treatment, said Dr. Khaled Al-Saleh, Chairman of the Board of the Cancer Aware Nation (CAN) Campaign.

He was speaking during the workshop titled 'cancer awareness, its means and best treatment methods'. "Raising awareness leads to rescuing many people, reducing the rate of cancer cases and cutting down the cost of cancer treatment," he said. "Treatment currently costs the government KD 50,000 per patient, whereas raising awareness costs only KD 5,000."

Saleh explained the importance of training volunteers on providing easy explanations to the public on the risk factors and main causes of cancer, including smoking which is the primary cause of 13 types of cancer, junk food, some viruses, particularly those sexually transmitted, as well as environmental pollutants. Furthermore, Saleh highlighted the importance of early diagnosis and breast self-exam, noting that women should consult with doctors in case they suspect the development of a breast tumor, while men should consult with doctors if they experience difficulty while urinating because this could be a symptom of prostate cancer.

Meanwhile, CAN Board Member Dr. Hussa Al-Shaheen said that similar campaigns carried out by the organization between 2010 and 2019 helped train around 127,000 high school students in carrying out breast self-exam. "The workshop is part of campaigns organized throughout the year to spread cancer awareness," she said, noting that participating doctors have multiple specialties which increases the scope of the subjects discussed.

Dr. Shaheen added that early detection of breast cancer achieves around 90 to 95 percent recovery rate. She said participants in the campaign decided to start training for dentists and nurses at primary care centers on recognizing most tumors causing gum and mouth cancer. Head of the Radiology Department at Adan Hospital Dr. Latifa Al-Kandari spoke about the relationship between x-rays and early detection of breast cancer as she focused on the causes of this type of cancer, available medications and preventive methods. She said women above 40 years of age should visit the mammogram testing centers.

Abdullah Al-Salem University gets 3 new colleges

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Public Universities Council agreed to establish three new colleges at the Abdullah Al-Salem University offering bachelor's degrees, the council's secretary general Dr. Hamad Al-Adwani announced on Wednesday.

The new colleges are the Engineering and Energy College, Computing and Systems College and Business Management and Entrepreneurship College. The Engineering and Energy College will include the following majors: biomedical instrumentation engineering, power systems engineering, robotics engineering and mechatronics.

The Computing and Systems College will include the following majors: Computer systems engineering, software engineering, cybersecurity engineering, data science and artificial intelligence.

The Business Management and Entrepreneurship College includes business administration, marketing, supply chain management, and logistics operations.

The council has also approved the enrollment of 600 students to Kuwait's newest public university, Adwani added. The students will undergo admission tests in English and mathematics. The university calendar for the fall, spring and summer semesters of the 2023-2024 academic year has also been prepared. —KUNA

Kuwait second largest trading partner of Canada in the Gulf

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Aliya Mawani revealed that Kuwait is the second largest trading partner of Canada in the Gulf. She said Canada has been working with Kuwait in the health and oil and gas sectors, in addition to the agrifood sector to get more Canadian quality products to the country. Mawani discussed during a media lunch her participation in the fifth meeting of the Political Advisory Group of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), which brings together Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in a regional partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

"We talked about how we can cooperate with NATO and ICI. We got a lot of positive messages about the NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait. They appreciated the training and the programming and want more continuous training," she said, adding the countries also discussed how to increase political dialogue during the meeting in Bahrain and how ICI countries can support Ukraine against Russia.

Regarding the visit of Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Canada, Mawani said the visit was successful, as it was his first official visit to her country, adding that Sheikh Salem toured the Canadian parliament and signed a memorandum of understanding to have a strategic dialogue on the establishment of a bilateral political consultation mechanism, which will help the two countries develop and consolidate bilateral relations in all fields and at various levels.

"There were very good discussions about sharing priorities and what is happening in the region, for

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Housing welfare to speed up work on women projects

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare is working on finding housing alternatives for citizens who have already put forward applications for housing, said Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Mutlaq Al-Otaibi. Otaibi said it was also important to speed up the work on housing projects designated for Kuwaiti women who are divorced or widowed and suggest other projects to address their needs. Otaibi commended the work that the Municipal Council has undertaken in cooperation with the authority to rush the delivery of government-owned lands, which have been previously given up by various government entities to the authority. —KUNA



Cooperative sector to fight inflation, attract Kuwaitis

KUWAIT: Head of the Consumer Cooperative Societies Union Abdelwahab Al-Fares said work will continue in order to improve the services presented to citizens and supply goods for suitable prices.

Fares said that he is keen on the implementation of a development plan for the cooperative sector that agrees with the vision of HH the Amir to achieve food security and comes in line with the policies of the Council of Ministers, adding that: "we will work on developing work at the union and cooperate with coops boards of directors to provide the best goods in their supermarkets." He said that despite the rise of inflation rates and the world economic crises, the union will continue fighting high prices and unify them.

He also touched on implementing an automated system in all coops. There will be effective plans, he said, for modernizing the cooperatives' system especially in the field of technology and attracting Kuwaitis to work in the sector.

Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Manpower Marzouq Al-Otaibi had signed this week a joint memorandum of understanding between the Public Authority for Manpower and the Ministry of Social Affairs aimed at Kuwaitizing supervisory and leadership positions in cooperative societies. Kuwaitization of the rest of the jobs in the departments of cooperative societies will be implemented in the future. The deal is one of many steps being taken to address the imbalance in the country's demographic structure. —Agencies

Kuwait democracy sets pioneering model: Academics

Freedom, transparency ensure the success of the country's electoral process

KUWAIT: Kuwait's democracy is considered to be an advanced, pioneering and developed example in the entire Arab region, and provides inspiration for promoting political involvement between the ruler and the ruled, academics and activists opined. Democracy in Kuwait is the culmination of genuine competitive elections that grant the National Assembly actual power in spite of some obstacles and challenges, they said in separate remarks to KUNA.

Kuwait's democratic experiment has been different from other democracies since it was created in the Gulf country, given that deep-rooted democracy in the society has reflected on the behavior that controls the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, said Dr Ahmad Al-Shareef, a professor of media and public relations at Kuwait University. Since the people of Kuwait pledged allegiance to Al-Sabah Family in 1972, a political system has been based on the shura (consultation) principle and democratization, he added.

The State of Kuwait saw its maiden electoral experiment in 1930 through its municipal council, when people began to lay the foundations of societal development, the professor pointed out. Formed in 1962, the Constituent Assembly was actually the milestone in the country's democratization, having been mainly tasked with the formulation of the constitution and principal laws, he said, adding that the first vote was held in November 1963.

Echoing Shareef's views, Dr Ibrahim Al-Humoud, a professor of general law at Kuwait University, said Kuwait's pioneering accomplishments in democratization and all-out development have earned it a distinguished status and effective presence in Arab,



Hussein Abdulrahman



Ayed Al-Manaa



Ahmad Al-Shareef



Ibrahim Al-Humoud

regional and international arenas. The Kuwaiti political system has been wielding plenty of resilience and competence to absorb political differences since the country was created, based on discussions, settlement or judiciary, he said.

Kuwaiti people began to be familiar with democracy at diwanis (gatherings) where the ruler and the ruled used to come together to look into political and societal affairs, the Kuwaiti professor added.

Dr Ayed Al-Manaa, a professor of political science and a scholar, said that Kuwait's democratic experiment dates back to 1921 when the country's first legislature was established following the approval of the late ruler Sheikh Ahmad bin Jaber Al-Sabah.

Democratic systems differ from one country to another, depending on several factors that are mainly connected with a society's culture and political,

economic and security circumstances, he believed. Kuwait, for instance, has a unique political model centered on relative political participation and the National Assembly is the country's legislative authority, Manaa pointed out. Kuwait's democratic situation and people's desire to maintain parliamentary life are two vital factors that have stood the most difficult internal and external circumstances, according to the political scholar.

Hussein Abdulrahman, a journalist and political activist, said the State of Kuwait has its unique political experiment involving the freedom of opinion and expression, and political participation. People's participation in the election of parliamentarians in full freedom, transparency, fairness and professionalism has unquestionably ensured the success of the country's electoral process, he added. —KUNA



Diplomatic Women's Group marks Kuwaiti Women's Day

KUWAIT: The Diplomatic Women's Group (DWC) of Kuwait culminated its 2022-2023 cultural and social activity season with an event commemorating Kuwaiti Women's Day, which falls on the 16th of May every year.

Narjes Al-Shatti, advisor to the DWC board of directors, as well as the event's coordinator Fawziya Baset, both commented on this occasion explaining the background of Kuwaiti Women's Day and DWC's choice to celebrate it. They explained that Kuwaiti Women's Day was declared by the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on May 16, 2005 to coincide with the parliament's decision at the time, to extend long-awaited political rights to Kuwait's women. The date was chosen in recognition of the decades-long hard work, activism and advocacy by generations of Kuwaiti women seeking equal footing under the constitution, with their fellow male citizens.

The Amiri decree for this day also recognized Kuwaiti women's valuable contributions in various fields domestically, in the Gulf and Arab regions, as well as on the global scene. The decree also paid homage to the exceptional role women played in resisting the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 including the women martyrs who sacrificed their lives for Kuwait's liberty.

Since Kuwaiti Women's Day was declared, the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah continued to emphasize its celebration throughout his reign in recognition of Kuwaiti women's continued and tireless contributions towards Kuwait's development and its future. In that spirit, it was only fitting that DWC chose the heritage site that is the Asharqiyyah School for Girls as its venue to celebrate Kuwaiti Women's Day this year.

The school is a historic symbol of Kuwaiti women's empowerment as it was the first modern girls' school in the country. As it opened its doors in 1940 it also opened the door for generations of Kuwaiti women to go on to achieve great pursuits culturally and professionally, thereby taking women's contributions to Kuwaiti society to a new high. DWC's celebration featured women entrepreneurs residing in Kuwait and representing various international communities including: Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mali, North Korea, Mongolia, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Pakistan and Lesotho.

The celebration also featured a presentation by Amal



Al-Faris showcasing the work of aspiring Kuwaiti fashion designers. The audience also enjoyed a presentation by Kuwaiti fashion designer Tasneem Al-Wuggayan, recreating the traditional Kuwaiti wedding rituals. Finally, Sheikhha Hala Bader Muhammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, DWC's honorary

president, saluted and thanked everyone who participated in making this event a success. The event was emceed by media personality Abdulaziz Darweesh who was exceptionally engaging and charming with the audience throughout the evening.



China asks embassies to remove political signs: Sources

French court upholds Sarkozy’s jail term in wiretap graft case

Page 6

Page 7

Europe, G7 sign war register for Ukraine

Ukrainian PM hails register milestone on the road to justice, reparations



REYKJAVIK: Participants attend the closing session on the second day of the 4th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, at the Harpa concert hall in Reykjavik, Iceland, on May 17, 2023. — AFP

REYKJAVIK: Europe and the United States on Wednesday hailed a newly created “register of damage” for Ukraine as a first step to making Russia pay for its war. The instrument, created by the 46-nation Council of Europe, records claims of damage or loss, paving the way to a future mechanism to compensate victims of the conflict. The register is a “first, necessary, urgent step” ensuring “justice that is centred on the victims” of the war, said council head Marija Pejcinovic Buric on the second day of the summit in Iceland.

She said that, by early Wednesday, 40 countries had signed onto the register, including the United States, Japan and all other G7 nations. Another three countries were finalizing internal procedures to do so. She and other leaders emphasized that countries outside the Council of Europe – a pan-continental rights body separate from the European Union but incorporating all 27 EU member states – could back the initiative. The register, established initially for three years, will be lodged in The Hague with a satellite office in Ukraine.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, at the summit, hailed the register as “an important milestone on the road to justice and reparations for

Ukraine and the Ukrainians who have suffered so much from this war. “The hard work begins now – we need to ensure that the register becomes operational soon, so that victims of Russian aggression could submit their claims.”

Wide support

US ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield, at the summit in an observer capacity, told Icelandic media that America was “proud” to join it and was working to drum up funds to contribute to it.

Russia was kicked out of the council last year after invading Ukraine. Several EU countries back Ukraine’s call for a special court to be set up to try Russia’s leadership for war crimes. The Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC) in March issued an arrest warrant for Putin, accusing him of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz voiced support for the register, which he signed on to, but pointed out that “it doesn’t settle the issue of payment for the damages” to Ukraine.

He said Europe could use money raised from frozen Russian funds to help pay for Ukraine’s postwar reconstruction. The move by the wider European community highlighted Russia’s isolation on the

continent. The summit “shows clearly that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin has failed,” Scholz said.

Ukraine presses for jets

“This meeting and this declaration is important to show the strength of our unity, the strength of our commitment” to Ukraine, the head of the EU’s European Council, Charles Michel, said.

The summit was held just after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky wrapped up a whirlwind tour of major European capitals that saw Germany, France and Britain all vow to step up arms deliveries to Ukraine. Ukraine is believed to be preparing an offensive on Russian positions in the east of its territory to be launched within weeks.

Zelensky is intent on boosting air defences as Russia deploys missiles and drones to inflict long-range damage. He is pressing Western allies to provide advanced fighter jets but they are wary, fearing it could escalate the war. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte agreed on the first day of the summit that they would build an “international coalition to provide Ukraine with combat air capabilities, supporting with everything from training to procuring F-16 jets”. — AFP

39 missing after Chinese ship capsizes in Indian Ocean

BEIJING: A crew of 39 Chinese, Indonesian and Filipino sailors were missing at sea Wednesday after a fishing vessel capsized in the Indian Ocean, officials said. Multinational search efforts were underway after Chinese vessel Lu Peng Yuan Yu 028 overturned in the early hours of Tuesday with 17 Chinese, 17 Indonesians and five Filipinos on board.

“Chinese and foreign ships have arrived in the area where the incident occurred and the search and rescue work is ongoing,” Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a press briefing Wednesday. “More rescue personnel are rushing to the scene,” he added. “We will continue to take all necessary measures with all parties to search for and rescue the missing persons.”

Beijing has deployed two commercial vessels to the area – the Lu Peng Yuan Yu 018 and Yuan Fu Hai – to help with the operation, state broadcaster CCTV reported. Philippine foreign ministry spokeswoman Teresita Daza said Manila was “aware and is closely monitoring the situation”.

Indonesia’s foreign ministry also confirmed the incident and said Beijing was coordinating the rescue efforts. The capsized vessel is owned by Penglai Jinglu Fishery Company, one of China’s major state-run fishing firms.

It was authorized to fish for neon flying squid and Pacific saury, according to the North Pacific Fisheries Commission. It left Cape Town in South Africa on May 5 for Busan in South Korea, according to the MarineTraffic tracking website, which last located the vessel on May 10 southeast of Reunion, a tiny French island in the Indian Ocean.

Penglai Jinglu Fishery also runs squid and tuna fishing operations in international waters, including the Indian Ocean and seas surrounding Latin America. The company declined to answer AFP questions about the incident.

Overfishing

Chinese Premier Li Qiang called on authorities to bolster safety procedures and oversight of fishing operations. “It is necessary to further strengthen the safety management of fishing vessels at sea and implement preventive measures to ensure the safety of maritime transportation,” he said.

China has the world’s largest distant-water fishing fleet, though estimates of its size vary widely. In 2017, Beijing pledged the fleet would be capped at 3,000 vessels, but a 2020 report by Britain-based think tank the Overseas Development Institute placed its size at just under 17,000.

The promise to cap the number followed an international backlash against overfishing by Chinese vessels. Chinese fishermen have increasingly sailed further afield as fish stocks at home deplete, becoming entangled in a growing number of maritime disputes and accidents.

In 2019, Manila accused a Chinese vessel of ramming a Philippine boat in the disputed South China Sea, causing it to sink and putting the lives of nearly a dozen crew members at risk. — AFP

Truss urges UK to get tough with China on Taiwan

TAIPEI: Britain’s former prime minister Liz Truss on Wednesday urged her successor Rishi Sunak to get tough with China on Taiwan, describing the democratic island as “an enduring rebuke to totalitarianism”. China considers self-ruled Taiwan to be its territory, to be taken one day by force if necessary, and strongly opposes any formal engagement with the island, including by high-profile foreign political figures.

Truss, who is on a five-day visit to Taiwan, accused Sunak and other Western governments of “trying to cling on to the idea that we can cooperate with China on issues like climate change, as if there is nothing wrong”. “But without freedom and democracy, there is nothing else. We know what happens to the environment or world health under totalitarian regimes that don’t tell the truth,” she said.

“You can’t believe a word they (China) say,” Truss

also called on Sunak to make good on his pledge during the Conservative leadership campaign last year to designate China a strategic “threat”, and went on to say the West could not avoid another “Cold War” with Beijing. It is “absolutely clear” that Chinese President Xi Jinping “has ambitions to take Taiwan”, she added at a press conference later. “We don’t know exactly when that could take place and we don’t know how... All we can do is make sure Taiwan is as protected as possible.”

Sunak has pushed back on the tough rhetoric against China that Truss deployed before and during her 49-day tenure at 10 Downing Street last year. She was ousted after her radical economic policies crashed financial markets. Since then, Truss — who is still a sitting MP — has been trying to rebuild her profile with a series of speeches overseas, including in Tokyo, Washington and Copenhagen.

The Chinese government slammed Truss as a “persistently irresponsible MP... causing her country another type of harm”. “A has-been UK politician is using the Taiwan issue in an attempt to seek publicity, which is done for their own political self-interest,” Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said during a Wednesday press briefing.



TAIPEI: Britain’s former prime minister Liz Truss delivers a speech as part of her five-day visit to Taiwan, in Taipei on May 17, 2023. — AFP

The former leader has also faced accusations back home that she is indulging in irresponsible sabre-rattling in a bid to maintain her political relevance. “The (Taiwan) trip is performative, not substantive,” House of Commons foreign relations committee chair Alicia Kearns told The Guardian newspaper last week. — AFP

Early blood test may unravel secrets of pregnancy loss

HVIDOVRE, Denmark: A blood test taken after a miscarriage suffered as early as week five of pregnancy can help explain why it occurred and in some cases lead to preventative treatments, Danish researchers say. One in 10 women experience pregnancy loss, with the number even higher in countries where pregnancies increasingly occur later in a woman’s childbearing years.

Danish gynecologist Henriette Svarre Nielsen and her team of researchers recently published a study in the British journal The Lancet showing that a blood sample taken from the mother soon after a miscarriage as early as the fifth week of pregnancy can determine whether the fetus had a chromosome anomaly. In Denmark, such tests are usually only offered after a woman has suffered three miscarriages, and

only if they occurred after the tenth pregnancy week. “This is 2023. We are way beyond just counting as the criteria” to investigate why somebody may be prone to pregnancy loss, Svarre Nielsen of Hvidovre hospital near Copenhagen told AFP. Now, as part of an ongoing study, all women who have suffered a miscarriage and visited the Hvidovre hospital emergency room are offered the blood test. More than 75 percent of them have accepted so far.

“For me it was obvious I would do it. It helps you understand,” said one woman who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity, since she hasn’t revealed her pregnancy loss to all of her family and friends. The blood test is immediately sent to the hospital lab. The fetus’ DNA is then isolated, sequenced and analyzed to see if it carries a chromosome anomaly, which is the case in about 50 to 60 percent of miscarriages.

Doctors can then determine whether some of the anomalies are more serious than others. “They would also be able to predict the risk” of future miscarriages, lab technician Lene Werge explained, demonstrating a DNA sample with extra copies of chromosome 21, which is linked to Down Syndrome. If no anomalies are found, doctors then launch a meticulous search for

answers. “We can start to ask the question, ‘Is it this? Is it this? Is it this?’,” Svarre Nielsen said.

Pregnancy loss can be the result of a hormonal imbalance, endocrinal illnesses, coagulation problems or lifestyle issues. If an explanation is found, doctors can determine the risks and devise a treatment plan. Launched in 2020, the project — dubbed COPL for Copenhagen Pregnancy Loss — is still underway and is expected to yield a unique database on a wide range of illnesses thanks to the large cohort, numbering 1,700 women so far. “We will have good data background to actually answer questions properly about pregnancy loss, reproduction, but also women’s health in general,” Svarre Nielsen said.

A doctor with more than 20 years’ experience, Svarre Nielsen specialized early on in reproductive health and is keen to develop treatments. “Pregnancy loss is something that’s very common. 25 percent of all pregnancies end in a pregnancy loss,” she said. “And even though it’s been so common for many, many years, the only focus has been on emptying the uterus after the loss.” She lamented that more effort had not been made to find explanations or support the mental health of couples after a miscarriage. — AFP

International

French court upholds Sarkozy's jail term in wiretap graft case

Sarkozy is innocent... We will not give up this fight: Lawyer

PARIS: A French appeals court on Wednesday upheld a prison sentence of three years, including two suspended, against former president Nicolas Sarkozy for corruption and influence peddling. The court ruled he should serve a one-year detention sentence at home with an electronic bracelet and banned him from public office for three years over his attempts to secure favours from a judge in a case uncovered by wiretapping.

Sarkozy is France's first postwar president to have been sentenced to jail. The 68-year-old left the courtroom without making any comment, but his lawyer said they would appeal before the Court of Cassation, France's highest appeals court. "Sarkozy is innocent... We will not give up this fight," said lawyer Jacqueline Laffont.

Sarkozy, who served one term from 2007 to 2012, has been embroiled in legal troubles ever since leaving office. In March 2021, a court found he and his former lawyer, Thierry Herzog, had formed a "corruption pact" with judge Gilbert Azibert to obtain and share information about a legal investigation. The trial came after investigators wiretapped Sarkozy's two official phone lines, and discovered that he also had a third unofficial one taken out in 2014 under the name "Paul Bismuth", through which he communicated with Herzog. The contents of these phone calls led to the 2021 corruption verdict.

The former leader contested the accusations and immediately appealed. On the first day of the appeals hearing in December last year, Sarkozy said he had "never corrupted anybody". His conversations with Herzog were played in court and expected to take a central role in determining Wednesday's ruling. The ap-

peals court also upheld the same sentences for Herzog and former judge Azibert, and banned Sarkozy's lawyer from practising for three years.

The so-called Bismuth case is just one of several dogging the man dubbed the "hyper-president" while in office. Sarkozy will be retried on appeal from November 2023 in the so-called Bygmalion case, which saw him sentenced to one year in prison in a lower court.

The prosecution accused Sarkozy's team of spending nearly double the legal limit on his lavish 2012 re-election campaign, using false billing from a public relations firm called Bygmalion. He has denied any wrongdoing.

And French prosecutors on Thursday demanded he face a new trial over alleged Libyan financing of his 2007 election campaign. Financial crimes prosecutors said Sarkozy and 12 others should face trial over allegations they sought millions of euros in financing from the regime of then Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi for the ultimately victorious campaign. Sarkozy is accused of corruption, illegal campaign financing and concealing the embezzlement of public funds but rejects all the charges. Investigating magistrates are to have the last word on whether or not that trial goes ahead. Despite his legal problems, Sarkozy still enjoys considerable influence and popularity on the right of French politics and has the ear of incumbent President Emmanuel Macron.

Before Sarkozy, the only French leader to be convicted in a criminal trial was his predecessor Jacques Chirac, who received a two-year suspended sentence in 2011 for corruption over a fake jobs scandal relating to his time as Paris mayor. — AFP



PARIS: Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy (C) arrives at the courthouse with his lawyer Jacqueline Laffont for the appeal hearing of a corruption trial at Paris courthouse on May 17, 2023. — AFP

Main parties struggle to excite first time Greek voters

ATHENS: They are Greece's first-time voters, some as young as 16-years-old, who came of age during national bankruptcy, the COVID pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Now they have a chance to decide the country's future when Greece goes to the polls on Sunday, three months after the nation's worst rail tragedy, in which 30 of the 57 people killed were under 30 years old.

The disaster prompted tens of thousands of people to take to the streets to vent fury with the government, which for the last eight years has been led by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis or his main rival, Alexis Tsipras. Conservative Mitsotakis, 55, leftist Tsipras, 48, and Socialist ex-MEP Nikos Androulakis, 44, are dominating the polls and high-school student Nefeli Zouganeli, 16, is eager to have her voice heard. "I recently learnt that I have the right to vote, and I am enthusiastic about it," she told AFP at her home in the northern Athens suburb of Anixi.

Greece is one of only three EU countries that

allow teenagers under 18 to vote. In Sunday's election, that means anyone born in 2006 or earlier. This time, nearly 440,000 young Greeks are eligible to cast their vote for the first time, representing around eight percent of the electorate.

Despite politicians' repeated calls and social media stunts, however, young voters are not expected to turn out massively on Sunday. Only one in four people aged 17-24 voted in the last election in 2019, notes Maria Karaklioumi, a political analyst for polling company RASS.

Zouganeli expects most of her classmates—fed up with the main parties—to either skip the vote or pick one of dozens of small parties with little hope of making it to parliament. "I think we must all go to vote. Abstention is not a solution," says the teen with dyed, cyan-coloured hair.

The February 28 train disaster, on the country's main train line from Athens to the second city Thessaloniki, may help tip the election. At the height of protests in March, tens of thousands of people demonstrated across the country.

Kostis Smanis, a 25-year-old electronics engineering graduate looking for work, says he was "sickened" by the government blaming the duty stationmaster and ducking responsibility for years of mismanagement and under investment. "I did not like how they tried to cover it up," he says. — AFP

dogan and Kilicdaroglu—but also suggested he may not support either candidate.

'Principles of Atatürk'

Ogan embodies the "Kemalist" principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a revered military commander who forged a secular Turkey out of the Ottoman Empire's ashes after World War I. In that sense, he is different from Erdogan and his Islamic-rooted party, although both are right-wing.

This "commitment to the foundational principles of Atatürk created an appeal for those who have been opposing Erdogan yet are not satisfied with Kilicdaroglu", Kursad Ertugrul, a professor at Ankara's Middle East Technical University, told AFP.

Ogan described his supporters as "Turkish nationalists, Kemalists, young people, the masses who find us modern". These represent "the masses... who see us as more intellectual, the masses who are fed up with the old faces", he said, depicting his ideology as an enlightened brand of nationalism.

His pledge to expel 3.7 million Syrian refugees living



ATHENS: Employees prepare ballots to be distributed to municipalities in Attica region and consequently to polling stations at a warehouse of Athens prefecture on May 17, 2023. — AFP

in Turkey back to their war-torn country appeals to anti-Erdogan nationalist voters. He also stresses security and fighting "terrorists", a term used by Turkish politicians to designate pro-Kurdish groups accused of ties with an insurgency that has taken on the state since the 1980s.

"Structures that do not distance themselves from terrorist organisations should not be included in the government," Ogan told AFP. He was referring to the main pro-Kurdish HDP party, which backed Kilicdaroglu's opposition alliance, and a far-right Kurdish group allied with Erdogan.

Seeking concessions?

Ogan could theoretically prevent Erdogan from extending his two-decade rule to 2028 if all of his supporters back Kilicdaroglu. "The winning equation will not be a simple sum of Erdogan's votes plus those won by Ogan, since many Ogan voters are also calling for change," Jay Truesdale of the risk advisory firm Veracity Worldwide told AFP.

But Ogan's "anti-Kurdish nationalism... makes it very difficult for Kilicdaroglu to strike a deal", predicted

Turkish politics expert Ertugrul. And since Erdogan almost won outright in the first round, he may not need Ogan's backing at all.

"Erdogan... doesn't need to make huge concessions to Ogan," said Berk Esen, a political science professor at Istanbul's Sabanci University, pointing to the president's parliamentary majority in alliance with another far-right party.

A polyglot ultra-nationalist from a minority group, the paradoxical Ogan was born in 1967, the youngest child of a rural and ethnically Azerbaijani family. He grew up in the eastern city of Igdir, near the borders with Armenia and Iran, and once worked as a shepherd. He received a doctorate in international relations and political science from the prestigious Moscow State University, is fluent in Russian and English and spent several years working in academia and think tanks.

Entering parliament in 2011 as an MP for the far-right MHP, Ogan is no stranger to speaking his mind or standing his ground, once getting involved in a violent scuffle with Erdogan's AKP party lawmakers in parliament. — AFP

Turkey's outsider basks in run-off fame

ISTANBUL: An also-ran who helped push Turkey to its first run-off election on May 28 is using his newfound fame to make ultra-nationalism mainstream and tease over a second-round endorsement. A dissident expelled from a far-right group, Sinan Ogan had spent most of his career on the periphery of Turkish politics before his unexpected score in Sunday's presidential ballot thrust him into the limelight.

Ogan, 55, picked up five percent of the vote, denying conservative President Recep Tayyip Erdogan a first-round victory against secular challenger Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who took 44.9 percent. Ogan is believed to have sucked votes away from Erdogan, who fell less than one percentage point short of an outright win. In an interview with AFP, Ogan said he would decide on his endorsement after talks with Er-

Next 5 years to be hottest ever...

Continued from Page 1

since 2015, a year in which they were considered close to zero. "It will be sad the day we pass 1.5 degrees but it's not a reason to give up," said Leon Hermanson of Britain's Met Office national weather service, the WMO's lead center on yearly to 10-yearly climate predictions.

"We need to emit as few as possible of the greenhouse gases and any emissions that we manage to cut will reduce the warming and this will reduce the big extreme impacts. "Nobody is going to be untouched by these changes and it's leading already to floods across the world, droughts and big movements of people," Taalas added that while predictions for climate averages are fairly strong, climate extremes predictions are "still a bit unknown, and the biggest impacts of climate change are felt through these extremes".

Meanwhile, climate change made record-breaking deadly heatwaves in Bangladesh, India, Laos and Thailand last month at least 30 times more likely, according to a study published Wednesday. Parts of India saw temperatures above 44 degrees Celsius in mid-April, with at least 11 deaths near Mumbai attributed to heat stroke on a single day. In Bangladesh, Dhaka suffered its hottest day in almost 60 years.

The city of Tak in Thailand saw its highest-ever temperature of 45.4 Celsius, while Sainyabuli province in Laos hit 42.9 Celsius, an all-time national temperature record, the study by the World Weather Attribution group said. Two deaths were reported in Thailand, but the real toll was likely higher as the extreme heat caused widespread hospitalizations, with the poor and vulnerable the worst affected.

The new study by international climate scientists looked at the average maximum temperature and the maximum heat index, which includes humidity. "In both regions, the researchers found that climate change made the humid heatwave at least 30 times more likely, with temperatures at least 2 degrees Celsius hotter than they would have been without climate change," WWA said in a statement.

"Until overall greenhouse gas emissions are halted, global temperatures will continue to increase and events like this will become more frequent and severe," it added. The analysis also found that such events in India and Bangladesh, previously once-a-century, can now be expected around once every five years because of human-caused climate change.

For Laos and Thailand, if global temperatures rise by two degrees Celsius — as will happen within around 30 years if emissions are not cut rapidly — such extreme events could happen every 20 years, compared to every two centuries now, the study said.

"We see again and again that climate change dramatically increases the frequency and intensity of heatwaves, one of the deadliest weather events there are," said Friederike Otto of the Grantham Institute for Climate Change and the Environment, who was involved in the study. "Still, heat action plans are only being introduced very slowly across the globe. They need to be an absolute priority adaptation action everywhere, but in particular in places where high humidity enhances the impacts of heatwaves," she added.

Scientists were previously reluctant to directly link a particular event to climate change, but in recent years a new field of "attribution science", like that done by the WWA, has emerged. Some weather events have a more complicated relationship to global warming than others, with the relationship to heatwaves and increased rainfall relatively easy to study. Other phenomena such as droughts, snowstorms, tropical storms and wildfires are more complicated however, according to the WWA. — AFP

Assad to emerge from the cold at...

Continued from Page 1

Neither initiative has yielded a major breakthrough so far, but Saudi op-ed writers and analysts are bullish. "The Jeddah summit is one of the most important summits for a long time because it will rebuild the Arab region in a way that relies on shared interests and turns challenges into opportunities," said Saudi political commentator Suleiman Al-Aqili. "If the summit is able to reintegrate Syria into the Arab system and take a strong position on the conflict in Sudan and Yemen, it will be successful."

Recent diplomatic shifts were accelerated by a surprise Chinese-brokered normalization deal with Iran announced on March 10. Less than two weeks later, Saudi Arabia announced it had begun talks on resuming consular services with Iran ally Syria, the first public step in a rapprochement that has since seen the countries' foreign ministers exchange visits. Yet Assad's presence in Jeddah on Friday does not

Nepali mountaineer climbs Everest for...

Continued from Page 1

Cool, 49, first climbed Everest in 2004, and his 16th ascent last year gave him the sole record for the most summits by a non-Nepali climber, but he told AFP then that he was "surprised" by the attention. "In reality, it's not that amazing," he said, pointing out that many Sherpa guides had stood on the peak more often than him. "People go 'it's a world record',

guarantee progress on resolving Syria's brutal war. In areas of northwestern Syria that remain under rebel control, there have been repeated mass protests against Assad's return to the Arab fold. Nor is it clear that the pan-Arab body can extract concessions on issues like the fate of Syrian refugees or the surging Captagon trade. "It's important to remember that Assad's return to the Arab League is a symbolic measure to begin the process of ending his regional isolation," said Anna Jacobs, senior Gulf analyst with the International Crisis Group. "In many ways it is the start of political normalization, but it will be even more important to watch if economic normalization comes with it, especially from Gulf Arab states."

Assad's stay in Jeddah will be followed across the region, perhaps nowhere more closely than in Damascus. "This is the first time in many years that my family and I have been interested in political news because we had lost hope," said Haidar Hamdan, a 44-year-old geography teacher in the Syrian capital. His country's reintegration into the Arab League represents a "return to the world order", he said, adding that he expected shuttered embassies and companies to reopen and "movement and life (to) return to the country". — AFP

it's not a world record," he said. "It's just that I happen to hold the non-Sherpa record, for whatever that is worth, which in my mind, (is) not very much."

The Moldovan climber died at Camp 4, said Expedition Himalaya, which arranged his permit. "He felt unwell at South Col and despite many attempts to provide him aid he passed away," the company said. Three Nepali climbers died on the mountain last month when a block of glacial ice fell and swept them into a deep crevasse as they were crossing the treacherous Khumbu icefall as part of a supply mission. The season's toll rose to four when a 69-year-old US mountaineer died this month during his acclimatization rotation at around 6,400 m. — AFP

International

Sudan war lays bare ‘fault lines’ between capital and periphery

Daglo has become a feared opponent, commanding the heavily armed RSF

CAIRO: Sudan's brutal war has pitted the traditional urban elite that has long monopolized wealth and power in the capital Khartoum against forces from the marginalized rural periphery, analysts say. For the past month, two rival generals have fought for control of the northeast African country in a war that has spread chaos, claimed at least 1,000 lives and displaced nearly a million people.

One of them is army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, a lackluster career soldier, born north of Khartoum, who toppled the veteran Islamist autocrat Omar al-Bashir after mass protests and then assumed full powers in a 2021 coup.

The other is his former deputy, Mohamed Hammad Daglo, a one-time camel herder from the remote western Darfur region bordering Chad, who now commands the feared paramilitary Rapid Response Forces, or RSF. Also known as “Hemeti” or “little Mohamed”, Daglo got his start in the notorious Janjaweed militia that Bashir unleashed in the early 2000s to brutally quash a rebellion by ethnic minority groups in Darfur.

In the years since, Daglo has maneuvered his way into the top echelons of power in the capital of five million people, even as he has been mocked among its elite for his provincial accent and lack of formal education. The Khartoum-centred old guard “view Hemeti as an illiterate upstart thug whom they first armed to do their dirty work” in Darfur, said Alan Boswell of think tank the International Crisis Group.

However, since then, Daglo has become a feared opponent, commanding the heavily armed RSF which is battle-hardened by service in Yemen and Libya and financed with profits from gold mines he controls.

‘New phase of struggle’

Sudan, a vast country of 45 million people, has a long history of inequality and strife involving ethnic minority groups in remote regions. Since its days un-

der British rule, “Sudanese political society has been centralized in the Nile Valley,” said Marc Lavergne, a specialist on the Horn of Africa and the Middle East.

Even after independence in 1956, “there has been this dichotomy between the Nile Valley, Khartoum, the parts that the British could make use of,” and the rest of the country, he told AFP. The more remote areas experienced decades of struggle “that no Khartoum government cared to address”, said Lavergne of France’s University of Tours who has worked for UN and non-government missions in Sudan.

“But today these peripheral regions hold the richest potential,” he said, referring particularly to large gold deposits in Darfur and elsewhere, from which Daglo has built a military and economic empire. A Rift Valley Institute report judged that, as a result, “the RSF is no longer a rag-tag militia but rather a well-trained and effective fighting force that can rival” the Sudanese Armed Forces.

“The current conflict represents a battle between the established military-political elite from the centre and an emerging militarized elite from Darfur to control the state, and is a new phase in the struggle between centre and periphery.”

Intruder from Darfur

Daglo has been depicted by his rivals as “an intruder from Darfur in more cosmopolitan Khartoum”, said Kholood Khair, founder of the think tank Confluence Advisory. “Before the war, the RSF were getting some traction in trying to create a narrative that they were fighting for democracy, and that they were doing so on behalf of all the marginalized people of Sudan,” she told AFP.

As he built his force, Daglo became “one of the best employers in the country”, recruiting fighters from areas “that had historically been marginalized by Khartoum,” according to Khair. But she added that, “once the war broke out, that narrative became more difficult to keep up” as “his troops are far less

tence carried out today at Changi Prison Complex,” a spokesman for the city-state’s prison service told AFP. Singapore’s Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) said in a separate statement that it would not release the name of the man to respect his family’s wish for privacy. “The person was accorded full due process under the law, and had access to legal counsel throughout the process,” CNB added.

A last-ditch appeal to review the case and stay his execution was dismissed on Tuesday, Annamalai said. Despite growing international calls to abolish the death penalty, Singapore insists that it is an effective deterrent against trafficking.

The Wednesday execution was the second in Singapore this year after Tangaraju Suppiah, 46, was hanged on April 26 for conspiracy to smuggle a kilo of cannabis. Thirteen death row inmates have been hanged since Singapore resumed executions in



BEIJING: A Ukrainian flag is seen on a wall in the embassy of Germany, in Beijing on May 17, 2023. Authorities in China's capital have asked several embassies to remove political signs from their outer walls, multiple diplomatic sources told AFP. — AFP

China asks embassies to remove political signs: Sources

BEIJING: Authorities in China’s capital asked several Western embassies this week to remove political signs from their outer walls, diplomatic sources in Beijing told AFP. Several Western embassies across Beijing display Ukrainian flags in solidarity with the country’s fight against Russia’s invasion, some accompanied by messages of support in English and Chinese.

However, sources in several European missions told AFP they had received a notice from Chinese authorities this week asking them to take down such political signage. All said they would refuse the request and that they would not change their policies.

One official from a European embassy confirmed the request, saying it was almost certainly related to several missions’ prominent display of a Ukrainian flag. However, an official from another European embassy said it was unclear whether the request was linked to Ukraine or the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia.



KHARTOUM: Smoke billows over residential buildings in Khartoum as deadly clashes between rival generals’ forces have entered their third week. Heavy fighting again rocked Sudan’s capital as tens of thousands have fled the bloody turmoil and a former prime minister warned of the “nightmare” risk of a descent into full-scale civil war. — AFP

disciplined” than those of the regular army. “They do not always follow orders and have been creating a lot of havoc for the people of Khartoum,” she said, as reports of assaults against civilians, looting and home invasions have risen sharply. The threat of deepening ethnic strife looms over Sudan, a diverse country at the intersection of historical migration and trade routes with a history of slavery.

Its rulers have historically exploited economic inequalities to divide and conquer, between the core and the periphery, between north and south, and based on skin color. “To this day, Sudanese have a lexicon of skin color” that discriminates

March 2022 after a hiatus of more than two years.

Tangaraju Suppiah’s execution sparked an international outcry, with rights groups pointing to “many flaws” in the case, but the Singapore government said his guilt was proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Activists said they will continue to push for Singapore to abolish capital punishment as it has no proven deterrent effect on crime. “The call to the Singapore government (to scrap the death penalty) has been loud and clear globally, and we will repeat the call: Singapore has to halt the executions,” Amnesty International’s executive director for Malaysia Katrina Jorene Maliamauv told reporters in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday. “They have to commute all existing death sentences.” Among those hanged last year was Nagaenthran K. Dharmalingam, whose execution sparked international condemnation because he was deemed to have a mental disability. — AFP

against those with darker pigmentation, Sudan specialist Alex de Waal wrote recently in the London Review of Books.

“The darkest people of the south (are) still routinely called abid, meaning ‘slaves’.” Skin color may not be a defining factor in the current war. But experts warn that a prolonged conflict will deepen fissures along the kinship lines and tribal affiliations on which Sudan’s many existing militias were formed.

“Both sides will, as they lose troops, need to recruit more,” said Khair. “And the easiest way to do that in Sudan has historically been through ethnic allegiances.” — AFP

Singapore executes second prisoner in three weeks

SINGAPORE: Singapore on Wednesday hanged a man for trafficking drugs, authorities said, in the city-state’s second execution in three weeks. The man was convicted in 2019 of trafficking around 1.5 kilos (3.3 pounds) of cannabis, Kokila Annamalai of local rights group Transformative Justice Collective told AFP. Singapore has some of the world’s toughest anti-narcotics laws: trafficking more than 500 grams of cannabis can result in the death penalty. “A 36-year-old Singaporean man had his capital sen-

Taiwan opposition picks mayor as prez candidate

TAIPEI: Taiwan’s Beijing-friendly opposition Kuomintang party on Wednesday nominated Hou Yu-ih, a popular mayor, as its candidate for the island’s presidential election next year. The poll in January is widely being viewed as a referendum on President Tsai Ing-wen’s handling of self-ruled Taiwan’s relations with China, which have soured during her tenure. Tsai does not accept China’s claim that Taiwan is its territory, and during her two terms Beijing has ramped up military and diplomatic pressure on the island.

In contrast, the Kuomintang (KMT) traditionally favors warmer ties with China. Hou said during a KMT party meeting on Wednesday that “safeguarding” Taiwan and bringing prosperity would be his main aims if elected. “At the moment, our country faces the risk of war under the international circumstances. Domestically, we are fighting against each other while our young people can’t see a future,” the 65-year-old said.

“We need radical change. We need a change of government... Taiwan is our home. Everyone should stand united,” he added. A former police chief, Hou entered politics in 2010 when he was appointed by then New Taipei City mayor and current KMT chairman Eric Chu as his deputy, a position he held for eight years. He became mayor of New Taipei City — Taiwan’s biggest constituency with around four million residents — in 2018 local elections, and was re-elected last year. During a recent city council session, when asked to clarify his position on China, Hou said he opposed Taiwan independence as well as the “one country, two systems” arrangement under which Hong Kong is governed as part of China.

Beijing has proposed the arrangement for Taiwan but a majority of Taiwanese people have rejected the model, especially after China crushed political freedoms in Hong Kong despite promising a degree of autonomy to the city.

The KMT chose Hou over tech Foxconn’s billionaire founder Terry Gou, who congratulated the New Taipei City mayor on his nomination Wednesday. Hou will face off against Taiwan’s Vice President William Lai, 63, who has been more outspoken about independence than Tsai. In January Lai said he considers Taiwan to already be a “sovereign country”, adding that there is “no need to declare independence again”. Beijing has said any move by Taiwan towards a formal declaration would prompt a military response. — AFP

N Zealand police say arson suspected in hostel fire

WELLINGTON: An arsonist may have ignited the hostel blaze that killed at least six people in New Zealand’s capital, police said on Wednesday, as they opened a homicide investigation.

Smoke and flames engulfed the 92-room, four-storey Loafers Lodge in Wellington in the early hours of Tuesday, sending residents fleeing for their lives. Some survivors crawled through smoke to safety, while others were rescued from the rooftop by firefighters using ladder trucks.

Those who died still lie in the charred building. “I can confirm that we are treating the fire as arson,” police inspector and acting district commander Dion Bennett told reporters, declining to give the full reasons. “It is being treated as a homicide investigation.” Police have a list of people they want to speak to, he added, but no one has been arrested so far. Firefighters found six bodies inside the hostel, but said they were unable to search everywhere because the roof had partially collapsed on the top floor.

Police have said the death toll may rise. Two hours before the blaze broke out, a couch had caught fire inside the building without being reported to emergency services, police said earlier. Investigators were looking into possible links between the two incidents, they said.

A police reconnaissance team entered the building on Wednesday for the first time since it was declared safe, to look for evidence and locate the dead. “The scene examination will be extensive and methodical and we expect it to take some time, likely several days given the large size of the building,” Bennett said.

‘This one’s real’

Fire damage inside the building was “extensive”, Bennett said, with burnt debris reaching as high as one metre (three feet). One of the survivors, Simon Hanify, said he heard a smoke alarm at the time of the couch fire but ignored it because it often went off without reason. When the alarm rang again two hours later, however, he left the burning building. “I wasn’t even going to leave my room. But I felt like a cigarette. I thought I’d go outside because I usually share them with other people,” Hanify told AFP. “There was smoke coming down the stairwell on the ceiling and our hallway,” he added. “I’ve been through fire before so I did a quick lap of our floor, knocking on doors, saying ‘this one’s real, evacuate.’” — AFP



WELLINGTON: Fire service members prepare an access for the police to the Loafers Lodge hostel where a fire broke out a day earlier in the suburb of Newtown in Wellington on May 17, 2023. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, MAY 18, 2023

GCC economic growth expected to slow to 2.5% in 2023: World Bank

Kuwait's growth seen slowing to 1.3% over cautious OPEC+ approach

KUWAIT: The economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are projected to grow at a slower pace in 2023 compared to the previous year, in the face of lower oil and gas earnings and a global economic slowdown, according to the new World Bank Gulf Economic Update (GEU). The GCC is expected to grow by 2.5 percent in 2023 and 3.2 percent in 2024. This compares to the region's remarkable GDP growth of 7.3 percent in 2022, which was fueled by a strong increase in oil production for most of that year.

Economic growth in Kuwait is expected to slow to 1.3 percent in 2023 in response to a more cautious OPEC+ production approach and sluggish global economic activity. Kuwait's non-oil sectors are anticipated to grow by 4.4 percent in 2023 driven primarily by private consumption.

The weaker performance in the GCC is driven primarily by lower hydrocarbon GDP, which is expected to contract by 1.3 percent in 2023 after the OPEC+ April 2023 production cut announcement and the global economic slowdown.

However, robust growth in the non-oil sectors, which is anticipated to reach 4.6 percent in 2023, will dampen the shortfall in hydrocarbon activities, driven primarily by private consumption, fixed investments, and looser fiscal policy in response to 2023's relatively high oil revenues.

The latest issue of the World Bank's GEU states that this year's more modest growth is nonetheless buoyed by the structural reforms undertaken in the past few years. Improvement to the business climate and competitiveness, and the overall improvements in female labor force participation in the GCC countries, especially in Saudi Arabia, have all paid off, though further diversification efforts are still needed and is underway, the report said.

This issue of the GEU, titled "The Health and Economic Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases in the GCC" focuses on how non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have become the leading cause of mortality and morbidity, accounting for close to 75 percent of all deaths and disability in the region. Of these deaths and disability, more than 80 percent are attributed to just four main NCD categories: cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, and respiratory diseases.

The report also highlights the substantial cost of NCDs to the economies of the GCC countries. A recent study published in the Journal of Medical Economics, a collaborative effort between experts at the World Bank and key stakeholders from across the GCC, estimated the direct medical costs of seven major NCDs to be around \$16.7 billion in 2019 alone. The same study found that NCDs also impose substantial indirect costs to their economies, through the adverse impact on human capital. The losses to workforce productivity alone cost the GCC economies more than \$80 billion in 2019. With an aging population, and with it the prevalence of NCDs, these costs are only expected to grow in the future.

"Many of the GCC countries have already taken impressive steps to address such risk factors, including taxing tobacco products and sugary drinks, restricting or banning the advertisement, promotion or sponsorship of tobacco, and reducing the amount of salt through reformulation. Several GCC countries have also set themselves important environmental targets. There is an opportunity to do much more to minimize NCDs and their costs in the future," said Issam Abousleiman, World Bank Regional Director for the GCC.

The report emphasizes that to effectively address the health and economic burden of NCDs requires a whole of

government approach, a strategic focus on prevention, the targeting of the young and adolescents, and the development and implementation of evidence informed and contextually relevant multi sectoral interventions. Government agencies need to work together now to minimize the future threat of NCDs.

GCC country outlooks

Bahrain: Bahrain's economic outlook hangs on oil market prospects and the results of the accelerated implementation of its structural reforms' agenda under the revised Fiscal Balance Program. Growth is projected to moderate to 2.7 percent in 2023 before averaging 3.2 percent during 2024-25 as fiscal adjustments continue. Growth in the hydrocarbon sector is expected to contract by 0.5 percent in 2023 while the non-hydrocarbon sectors will continue expanding by 3.5 percent supported by the recovery in the tourism and service sectors and the continuation of infrastructure projects.

Kuwait: Economic growth is expected to slow to 1.3 percent in 2023 in response to a more cautious OPEC+ production approach and sluggish global economic activity. The Oil sector is anticipated to contract by 2.2 percent in 2023 despite the newly established Al-Zour refinery. Kuwait's non-oil sectors are anticipated to grow by 4.4 percent in 2023 driven primarily by private consumption. Policy uncertainty caused by political deadlock is expected to undermine the implementation of new infrastructure projects.

Oman: Oman's economy is forecast to continue to grow, but at a slower pace, driven primarily by accelerated implementation of structural reforms under Vision 2040. Overall growth is projected to moderate to 1.5 percent in 2023 reflecting softening global demand. Accordingly, the hydrocarbon sector is anticipated to



contract by 3.3 percent reflecting OPEC+ recent production cuts while the non-oil economy is projected to continue its recovery trajectory by growing 3.1 percent in 2023 supported by frontloading of infrastructure projects, increased industrial capacity from renewable energy, and the tourism sector.

Qatar: Real GDP is estimated to slow down to 3.3 percent in 2023 after the strong performance registered in 2022, with the hydrocarbon sector expanding by 0.8 percent. The North Field expansion project is expected to boost the hydrocarbon sector in the medium term once the field enters commercial operation. Meanwhile, robust growth is anticipated during this year in the non-hydrocarbon sectors, reaching 4.3 percent, driven by private and public consumption.

Saudi Arabia: Following a stellar GDP expansion of 8.7 percent in 2022, economic growth is projected to decelerate

to 2.2 percent in 2023. A fall in oil production – as Saudi Arabia abides by OPEC+ agreed production cuts – will contract oil sector GDP by 2 percent. However, with oil prices remaining at relatively high levels, loose fiscal policy and robust private credit growth are expected to cushion the contraction in the oil sector. As a result, non-oil sectors are anticipated to grow by 4.7 percent in 2023.

United Arab Emirates: Economic growth in 2023 is expected to slow compared to 2022 due to a decline in global economic activity, contraction in oil production, and tightening financial conditions. Accordingly, real GDP is projected to grow by 2.8 percent in 2023 to reflect a decline in oil activity growth of 2.5 percent while a strong non-oil sector growth of 4.8 percent will soften the contraction in oil activities, driven by robust domestic demand, particularly in the tourism, real estate, construction, transportation, and manufacturing sectors.

Iran, Russia ink deal on huge transport network

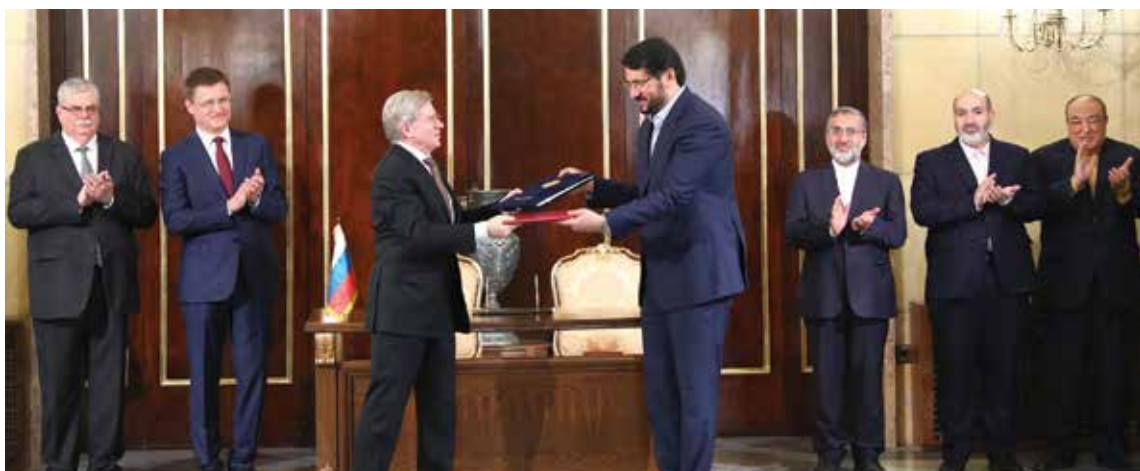
TEHRAN: Iran and Russia agreed Wednesday to collaborate on the construction of the final part of a commercial transport network linking to the Gulf and India while avoiding Western sea lanes. Iranian Transport Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash, who signed the agreement with his Russian counterpart in Tehran, said the 164-kilometre (102-mile) railway in Iran's north would be completed within three years.

It is the only missing link in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) from northeast Russia via Azerbaijan to Iran's southern coastline and on to India by sea.

Russia and Iran are both under international sanctions that restrict trade. The freight network of ship, rail and road routes, which covers some 7,200 kilometers, avoids the Suez Canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea which would otherwise transport some Russian seaborne cargo.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who attended the signing ceremony, and Russia's Vladimir Putin, who spoke there via videoconference, both hailed the economic opportunities the agreement presents.

The planned railroad would connect Rasht, a city in northern Iran, and the Astara crossing on the border with Azerbaijan. Bazrpash said the "process of construction" of the Rasht-Astara railway "has started and we will finalize it within the next three years".



TEHRAN: Iranian Road Maintenance & Transportation Organization Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash (right) and his Russian counterpart Vitaly Savelyev exchanging documents after signing an agreement to construct the final part in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) in Tehran on May 17, 2023. — AFP

Raisi said that, once completed, the INSTC will boost regional trade and noted the "great potential" in ties with Russia. The latest agreement is "an important strategic step on the path of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation", he said.

Putin praised the "obvious economic benefits" for both Moscow and Tehran in the form of new jobs and investments. "This unique north-south transport artery, of which the Rasht-Astara railway will be a part, will help significantly diversify international transport flows," Putin said.

"The transportation of goods through the new corridor will have a significant competitive advantage," he argued.

"The delivery of goods from Saint Petersburg (in Russia) to Mumbai (in India) will take about 10 days, compared to the journey through traditional trade routes that takes 30 to 45 days."

Putin said Russia and Iran "attach paramount importance to strengthening their economic and trade ties" as well as their bilateral relations in general. Moscow has come under punishing Western sanctions since its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Tehran, already facing sanctions over its nuclear activity and human rights issues, has been targeted with fresh Western restrictions over claims it was supplying Russia with attack drones to be used in the war, which Tehran denies. — AFP

UBS foresees \$35bn gain from Credit Suisse acquisition

GENEVA: Switzerland's biggest bank, UBS, expects to get a nearly \$35 billion boost from its acquisition of fallen rival Credit Suisse, according to a regulatory filing with US authorities. Under pressure from Swiss authorities concerned about the possible collapse of Credit Suisse, UBS agreed to buy the troubled lender for \$3.25 billion in the hastily-arranged deal in March.

UBS said in documents filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission that the purchase will result in "negative goodwill" — a term meaning that the price paid to buy a company is significantly lower than its fair market value, producing a gain for the buyer. "Due to the circumstances of the trans-

action, the purchase price will be lower than the net assets recognized, resulting in negative goodwill that is recorded in the income statement at the completion date," according to the papers filed late Monday. UBS put the figure at \$34.8 billion, a gain that will be noted in the second-quarter books of the mega-bank that will emerge once the deal is completed.

The banking giant noted that the figures could still change. UBS also estimates that legal liabilities may cost as much as \$4 billion, according to Bloomberg news agency. The boss of Swiss bank UBS promised a "360 degree investigation" into its stricken domestic rival Credit Suisse, ahead of the two merging into a new megabank.

The Swiss government strongarmed UBS into buying its rival for \$3.25 billion after the collapse of three US lenders in March raised concerns about Credit Suisse's own financial health, following a series of scandals in recent years. UBS CEO Sergio Ermotti, who returned to Switzerland's biggest bank last month to handle the merger, said it was "crystal clear, the situation hasn't developed in the last six weeks,



A logo of Swiss bank UBS is seen in Zurich, Switzerland March 29, 2023.

but in the last six or seven years". "This comprehensive, 360-degree investigation must go back a long way," Ermotti told the Swiss Media Forum in Lucerne, reported the Swiss news agency ATS. — AFP

Lebanon's tanking economy increasingly cash-based: WB

BEIRUT: The World Bank has warned that nearly half of crisis-hit Lebanon's economy is now cash-based as trust in banks has plummeted, heightening money laundering risks and slashing hopes for recovery.

Lebanon has been mired since 2019 in an economic crisis that the World Bank has dubbed one of the worst in modern history, as the currency's market value has fallen by at least 98 per cent against the dollar. As a result, the cash economy has nearly doubled in size from 26.2 per cent of gross domestic product in 2021 to nearly half of GDP last year, the Washington-based body said in a report Tuesday.

"A pervasive and growing dollarized cash economy is a major impediment to Lebanon's economic recovery," the report warned. The trend has adverse implications on "fiscal and monetary policy, significantly heightens the risks of money laundering, increases informality and facilitates tax evasion", it added. The World Bank estimated Lebanon's cash economy to be at around \$9.9 billion, or 45.7 percent of GDP in 2022. "Cash economies make it easier to conceal the source of funds for illicit and illegal activities," it added.

Lebanon's currency plunge has driven price hikes including on fuel, food and other basic goods, with supermarkets pricing items in dollars and many private employers paying salaries in cash. Banks have imposed draconian withdrawal restrictions, essentially locking depositors out of their life savings and prompting them to back away from a collapsing banking sector. "A cash economy has come to gradually replace the banking sector," the report said, adding that "the root cause of a pervasive cash economy is the loss of confidence in the insolvent banking sector".

"An increasing reliance on cash transactions threatens to completely reverse the progress that Lebanon made towards enhancing its financial integrity... before the current crisis," the report said.

Despite the gravity of the crisis, Lebanon's political elite, which has been widely blamed for the financial collapse, has failed to take action. Since last year, Lebanon has had no president and only a caretaker government, amid persistent deadlock between rival factions. A French judge probing central bank chief Riad Salameh's wealth in Europe on Tuesday issued an international arrest warrant for him, a source close to the case had said. — AFP

Business

US debt row overshadows Biden's truncated Asia trip

Concerns grow US debt ceiling row could tear up global economy

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden's departure Wednesday to the G7 in Japan was meant to launch a geostrategic masterclass on rallying the world's democracies against China. Instead, he will limp into an abruptly truncated journey facing concerns that the US debt ceiling row is about to tear up the global economy. Biden arrives on Thursday in Hiroshima, one of the two cities hit by US atomic bombs in 1945 -- a closing chapter to World War II and the start of an era of US leadership across the Pacific that Beijing now seeks to supplant.

He will meet leaders from the rest of the G7 club—Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan—that has been so crucial in the US-led drive to enforce unprecedented economic sanctions on China-ally Russia for invading Ukraine. However, visits next week to Papua New Guinea and to a Sydney summit of the Quad, comprising Australia, India, Japan and the United States, were canceled so that Biden can rush back Sunday and negotiate with Republican opponents on the debt ceiling.

For a president who often warns that democracies are in an existential fight to prove their viability against the world's autocracies, it's a sobering moment. "It's extraordinarily hard... to go to the G7 and talk about economic unity against Russia, economic unity against China, when the dysfunction is coming from inside the house," Josh Lipsky, at the Atlantic Council, said. Biden downplayed the reshuffling of his schedule, saying, "the nature of the presidency is addressing many critical matters all at once."

But Evan Feigenbaum, a former US diplomat with the Carnegie Endowment, was brutal. "It's tough to 'compete with China' in the Pacific when you're busy sinking your own boat," he tweeted. "How do we think we look to the rest of the world?"

Candidate Biden enters furnace

For Biden, 80, the trip and the debt ceiling mess

come at a crucial time. He has just launched his re-election campaign and Americans wary about his age are watching how he copes in the furnace of the presidency at home and abroad. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Biden can multi-task. "He can travel overseas, and manage our foreign policy and our defense policy and look after our national security commitments in an important region like the Indo-Pacific, and also work with congressional leaders to do the right thing—raise the debt ceiling, avoid default so that the United States credibility here at home and overseas is preserved," Kirby said.

The risks over the debt ceiling, however, are so huge—global market panic would be just the beginning of the fallout from a default—that Biden may spend much of his time trying to reassure fellow world leaders on the state of the US economy, rather than planning how to manage China.

Biden doesn't know whether the increasingly hard-right Republican party will allow an increase to the debt in time to prevent default. And he also doesn't know whether the left of his own Democratic party will forgive him for the compromises he may have to make to save the situation.

Quad consolation prize

Canceling the Papua New Guinea and Australia stops will have been a bitter pill for a president who has reinvigorated US diplomacy after the isolationist Trump years. The Quad, an informal grouping of large democracies interested in restraining aggressive Chinese economic and military expansion across the Pacific, is one of Biden's priorities. The White House was quick to point out that Biden will already be meeting in Japan on the sidelines of the G7 with his other Quad counterparts.

And a consolation prize for Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was extended in the form of

Altman has since become the global face of AI as he both pushes out his company's technology, including to Microsoft and scores of other companies, and warns that the work could have nefarious effects on society. "OpenAI was founded on the belief that artificial intelligence has the potential to improve nearly every aspect of our lives, but also that it creates serious risks," Altman told the hearing.

He insisted that in time, generative AI developed by OpenAI will "address some of humanity's biggest challenges, like climate change and curing cancer."

However, given concerns about disinformation, job security and other hazards, "we think that regulatory intervention by governments will be critical to mitigate the risks of increasingly powerful models," he said.

Go 'global'

Altman suggested the US government might consider a combination of licensing and testing requirements before the release of powerful AI models, with a power to revoke permits if rules were broken. He also recommended labeling and increased global coordination in setting up rules over the technology as well as the creation of a dedicated US agency to handle artificial intelligence.

"I think the US should lead here and do things first, but to be effective we do need something global," he added. Blumenthal underlined that Europe had already advanced considerably with its AI Act that is set to go to a vote next month at the European Parliament.

A sprawling legislative text, the EU measure could see bans on biometric surveillance, emotion recognition and certain policing AI systems. Crucially for OpenAI, US lawmakers underlined that it also seeks to put generative AI systems such as ChatGPT and DALL-E in a category requiring special transparency measures, such as notifications to users that the

The president of NamX played a key role in creating the world's first car with a patented removable hydrogen tank system. Additionally, the renowned Italian coachbuilder, Pininfarina, provided assistance in designing the hydrogen prototype.

Nassim Belkhayat, the CEO of Neo Motors, and Faouzi Annajah, the president of NamX, presented the project aiming to enhance Morocco's automotive production competitiveness. Morocco is currently the largest car manufacturer in Africa, and in September of the previous year, the government made a commitment to double its electric car production capacity within a two-year timeframe.

Scheduled for release in 2025, the HUV addresses the increasing worldwide demand for eco-friendly automobiles. Unlike electric vehicles that require hours to charge, hydrogen vehicles can be refueled within

the old policy aimed to "please investors, to the detriment of the Brazilian people."

Investors in Petrobras had resisted changes to the policy, which helped Brazil's biggest company deliver record profits of \$36 billion last year thanks to the global surge in fuel prices. Petrobras followed up the policy change by announcing hefty price cuts almost immediately: 12.6 percent for gasoline, 12.7 percent for diesel and 21.4 percent for cooking gas.

"I am particularly happy, and I think the people will be too," Lula said in a video posted to his social media channels after the decision. "More than a campaign commitment, it is a victory of the people... And it is only the beginning. We are going to invest in industry and the generation of jobs," the president added. Petrobras chief executive Jean Paul Prates, a former senator named to the post by Lula in January, said the decision will make the company "more efficient and competitive." "We will continue to be the market reference, without abdicating the (company's) competitive advantages," added Prates, a former senator named to the post by Lula in January. —AFP



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden (center) speaks during a meeting on the debt limit with (left to right) US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, US Vice President Kamala Harris, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, on May 16, 2023. — AFP

an invitation to a state visit at the White House. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is already booked in for a state visit this June.

But Washington is likely to rue the missed opportunity in Papua New Guinea, where Biden would

have been the first serving US president to visit. The symbolism, at a time when remote Pacific island territories and countries have become chess pieces in the geostrategic contest with China, would have been powerful. — AFP

ChatGPT's Altman pleads US Senate for AI rules

WASHINGTON: Sam Altman, the chief executive of ChatGPT's OpenAI, told US lawmakers on Tuesday that regulating artificial intelligence was essential, after his poem-writing chatbot stunned the world. The lawmakers stressed their deepest fears of AI's developments, with a leading senator opening the hearing on Capitol Hill with a computer-generated voice—which sounded remarkably similar to his own—reading a text written by the bot.

"If you were listening from home, you might have thought that voice was mine and the words from me, but in fact, that voice was not mine," said Senator Richard Blumenthal. Artificial intelligence technologies "are more than just research experiments. They are no longer fantasies of science fiction, they are real and present," said Blumenthal, a Democrat. The latest figure to erupt from Silicon Valley, Altman's testimony in front of a US Senate judiciary subcommittee was far from the testy grilling given to the bosses of Facebook or TikTok when they visited Washington.

"If this technology goes wrong, it can go quite wrong," Altman said. Tipped as an opportunity to educate lawmakers, Altman used the session to urge Congress to impose new rules on big tech, despite deep political divisions that for years have blocked legislation aimed at regulating the internet.

But governments worldwide are under pressure to move quickly after the release of ChatGPT, a bot that can churn out human-like content in an instant, went viral and both wowed and spooked users.

Morocco unveils its first hydrogen powered vehicle

RABAT: King Mohammed VI of Morocco unveiled the nation's first car brand along with a prototype of a hydrogen-powered vehicle. During a ceremony at the Royal Palace in Rabat on Monday, According to Morocco's MAP news agency, the recently unveiled car, known as the Hydrogen Utility Vehicle (HUV), was developed by Neo Motors, the first Moroccan-owned car company, and NamX, an automobile company based in Turin.

Petrobras scraps international price peg policy

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazilian state-run oil company Petrobras said Tuesday it has ended its policy of pegging fuel prices to the international market, an overhaul promised by President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva that had initially caused investor jitters. Petrobras, whose prices essentially determine how much Brazilians pay at the pump, said it would still set them using "market references."

But it said in a statement that the announcement "puts an end to the mandatory subordination (of prices) to the import parity price" in US dollars. Veteran leftist Lula, who took office for a third term in January, had vowed during his election campaign to "Brazilianize" the company's pricing policy, saying



WASHINGTON: Samuel Altman, CEO of OpenAI, testifies during a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law oversight hearing to examine artificial intelligence, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on May 16, 2023. — AFP

output was made by a machine. OpenAI's DALL-E last year sparked an online rush to create lookalike Van Goghs and has made it possible to generate illustrations and graphics with a simple request.

Lawmakers also heard warnings that the technology was still in its early stages. "There are more genies yet to come for more bottles," said New York University professor emeritus Gary Marcus, another panelist. "We don't have machines that can really... improve themselves. We don't have machines that have self-awareness, and we might not ever want to go there," he said.

Christina Montgomery, chief privacy and trust officer at IBM, urged lawmakers against being too broad stroked in setting up rules on AI. "A chatbot that can share restaurant recommendations or draft an email has different impacts on society than a system that supports decisions on credit, housing, or employment," she said. — AFP



minutes. In addition to providing longer driving ranges compared to electric cars, hydrogen vehicles also tend to be more environmentally friendly. —Agencies

Vietnam pledges no new coal plants after 2030

HANOI: Vietnam will not develop new coal power plants after 2030, according to a long-delayed national power plan published Tuesday, although the blueprint drew criticism that the transition to renewables is too slow. The Southeast Asian country committed to reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 at the COP26 climate summit in 2021.

The \$135-billion plan for its energy policy until 2030, mapping how it will reach those targets, was delayed for more than two years, with more than one earlier draft pointing to renewed investment in coal. According to the new plan, known as Power Development Plan 8, "by 2030, only coal power projects that have already been approved and those under

construction can proceed". Coal will represent 20 percent of Vietnam's energy mix by the end of the decade, down from 50 percent currently, the plan says.

Researcher Andri Prasetyo of Trend Asia said the decision to move forward with coal power projects until 2030 would "significantly increase the country's coal power capacity, hindering the development of renewable energy sources". He said the prioritizing of gas as an intermediate step towards renewables was "disappointing". Domestic gas will account for 9.9 percent of the country's energy by 2030.

The power development plan, approved by Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh on Monday, pledges that coal will no longer be used for electricity production by 2050. There will be a "shift to zero-emission fuels such as biomass, or ammonia", it says. However, Prasetyo said this switch would require substantial funds for repurposing existing fossil fuel power generation and warned that ammonia was "not a realistic and viable alternative". Vietnam has the world's third-largest pipeline of new coal power projects after India and China. — AFP

Business

Brazil 'finfluencers' bring finance to the favelas

Social networks help boost financial education among masses

SAO PAULO: With his tattooed arms, drop-fade haircut and baby-face looks, Murilo Duarte doesn't look like a typical financial adviser as he dishes out investment tips on social media from the Sao Paulo favela where he grew up. Duarte, 28, who has more than a million followers on social media, is one of the "finfluencers" — financial influencers — who have gone viral in Brazil, bringing financial education to the masses in a country known for its gaping inequalities.

"You don't have to have a lot of money to be an investor, but you have to get your accounts organized first," says one video by Duarte, better known as "Favelado Investidor," or Investor from the Favelas.

"The idea is to democratize access to financial education and the world of investing, especially for the lower classes forgotten by society," Duarte told AFP. Smart and charismatic, Duarte grew up in Jardim Joao XXIII, a poor neighborhood on the west side of Sao Paulo, Brazil's economic capital.

He put himself through accounting school working as an intern at a notary public's office, then co-founded a financial education company in 2019. By 2021, he had made his first million reais (around \$185,000). He now lives in an upscale neighborhood, employs 12 people at his company and is one of the most prominent voices promoting financial literacy in Latin America's biggest economy.

"No matter where you're from, you can get wherever you want if you work hard," he tells followers on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok.

But he cautions against get-rich-quick schemes. Getting on solid financial footing "is step-by-step," he says. "I started to see real results in my personal finances after eight, nine, 10 years. I'm clear about that: I'm not selling a dream that's going to happen overnight. It's a process."

Real-world economics

Including financial analysts, traders and less traditional profiles like Duarte's, there are more than 1,250 "finfluencer" profiles in Brazil, one of the world's biggest social media-using countries, according to a recent report by financial industry group ANBIMA. They have more than 165 million followers in all. "There's been a huge increase in Brazilians' interest in economic information," said Amanda Brum, ANBIMA's executive manager for communications and marketing.

"Social networks allow (specialists) to build a direct connection with users, which helps their followers trust and identify with them." The on-line gurus' tips are not all about multiplying income. Many give advice on day-to-day issues, such as dealing with fast-rising prices, in a country where the annual inflation rate hit more than 12 percent last year, before falling back to 4.18 percent currently.

Clayton Silva, who follows Duarte and also comes from a favela, says he was "drowning in debt and spiraling food prices" — common problems for working-class families in Brazil. But "his advice changed the way I manage my money: I don't borrow anymore, and I'm building up an emergency fund" for rainy days, said the 28-year-old driver and father of two. Next step, he says: invest in the Sao Paulo stock exchange. The number of individual investors in Latin America's biggest stock market grew 19 percent last year, to five million, notably driven by young investors, says Felipe Pava of B3, the company that manages the exchange.

From Instagram to Brasilia

Financial education exploded on social media during COVID-19 stay-at-home measures in Brazil, when the economy imploded and many



SAO PAULO: Influencer Murilo Duarte streams a live video at the Jardim Joao XXIII slum in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on April 19, 2023. — AFP

people were left looking for new income. Fueling the trend, "the interest rate hit a historic low of two percent, motivating investors to diversify" in search of higher returns, said Marilia Fontes, a founding partner of investment firm Nord Research and a top financial influencer herself. Some "finfluencers" have gotten so big their influence now reaches far beyond social media.

Nathalia Rodrigues, a 24-year-old business ad-

ministration specialist, grew up in a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. Now known as "Nath Finance," she went viral using a four-year-old cell phone to give free financial advice to other Brazilians like herself on YouTube. Last month, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva named her to his Sustainable Economic Development Council, a civil society panel to help the government develop public policy. — AFP

News in Brief

Siemens raises 2023 outlook

FRANKFURT: German industrial conglomerate Siemens raised its outlook for 2023 on Wednesday after second-quarter profits nearly tripled on higher orders. Between January and March, the group booked a net profit of 3.5 billion euros (\$3.8 billion), up from 1.2 billion euros year-on-year. Siemens said the boost came from the partial reversal of an impairment charge linked to its stake in Siemens Energy, as well as a 15-percent jump in new orders. Group revenues also climbed by 15 percent to hit 19.4 billion euros. Demand was especially strong at the group's smart infrastructure and mobility units, helped by easing global supply chain bottlenecks. — AFP

Commerzbank profits soar

FRANKFURT: Germany's second-biggest lender Commerzbank on Wednesday said net profit almost doubled in the first quarter, thanks to "a tailwind" from higher interest rates. The group said it made a bottom-line profit of 580 million euros (\$630 million), compared with 298 million euros over the same period a year earlier. "We had a very good start to 2023," CEO Manfred Knof said in a statement. "The interest rate development continues to give us a tailwind, and the fee business has delivered a good result," he said. Like other lenders in Europe, Commerzbank has benefited from a higher interest rate environment as the European Central Bank has raised borrowing costs at an unprecedented rate in recent months to combat inflation. — AFP

Ubisoft reports loss in 2022-23

PARIS: Ubisoft said Tuesday it plunged into a net loss in the 2022-2023 fiscal year as a number of highly anticipated video game titles were delayed. But the French firm said it expected to turn its net loss of 494 million euros (\$537 million) into an operating profit on the order of 400 million euros in the current financial year, which ends next March. The loss was due in large part to delays in the release of titles like Mirage, the latest in the blockbuster Assassin's Creed franchise, as well as Avatar: Frontiers of Pandora. The company confirmed the cost-cutting plan it announced in January, which consists of reducing staff levels and shedding some assets. But the firm said it plans to boost staff working on key franchise, Assassin's Creed, which will see several titles released in the coming years. — AFP

Canada inflation rises to 4.4%

OTTAWA: Canada's inflation rate rose slightly to 4.4 percent in April in an unexpected reversal of a downward trend over the previous 10 months, the national statistical agency said Tuesday. The Consumer Price Index was up 0.1 percentage points from the previous month's rate, after having posted a steady decline since a June 2022 peak of 8.1 percent. "The slow down in Canadian inflation is looking like it might have been a false dawn," Desjardins analyst Royce Mendes said in a research note, adding that the April figure "was well above consensus expectations." Canadians should expect the central bank as a result to "remain hawkish and focused on bringing inflation to heel, leaving the door open to further rate increases," he said. — AFP

Japan economic growth beats expectations

TOKYO: Japan's economy grew faster than expected in the first quarter, official data showed Wednesday, helped by a recovery in inbound tourism after pandemic border restrictions were lifted. The 0.4 percent rise in gross domestic product beat market expectations of 0.2 percent, after hopes of a rebound fell flat in the final quarter of last year.

Spending by visitors to Japan "rapidly recovered" in the three months to March, Ryutaro Kono, chief economist at BNP Paribas, said ahead of the GDP data release. "Domestic household spending also appears to have recovered at an accelerated pace," he added. The world's third-largest economy fully reopened its borders to foreign tourists in October following two-and-a-half years of COVID restrictions that pummeled the economy. Japan welcomed nearly five million visitors in the first quarter of 2023 — still significantly fewer than eight million in the same period of 2019, a record-breaking year for inbound tourism to the country.

Private consumption was up 0.6 percent. Economists said the rise, centered around the service sector including restaurants and hotels, helped offset a negative impact from external trade.

Exports of goods and services shrank 4.2 percent, against the backdrop of a slowing global economy and as the yen recovered from the lows registered last year. A boost from the hospitality industry helped Japan's economy "secure positive growth, even if just barely", said Taro Saito of NLI Research Institute.

Wednesday's figure was stronger than the 0.0 percent seen in the last quarter of 2022, which had previously been revised down from a preliminary estimate of 0.2 percent growth. Looking ahead to the next three months, "dwindling exports are forecast to persist due to the slowdown of overseas economies, particularly in Europe and the United States," Saito said.

However, this gloomy outlook is partly counterbalanced by brisk private consumption as economic activity normalizes, he added. UBS economist Masamichi Adachi also painted a sanguine picture.

Despite "headwinds from a slower global economy", the "high potential" of inbound tourism from China and expected rises in wages suggest growth will be "sustained", Adachi wrote.

Inflation in Japan has slowed from four-de-



TOKYO: A woman walks past an electronic quotation board displaying the 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average (top) on a street in Tokyo on May 17, 2023. — AFP

cade highs, with consumer prices excluding volatile fresh food rising 3.1 percent in March. Last month, the Bank of Japan lowered its growth forecast for the 2023-24 financial year to 1.4 percent compared with 1.7 percent previously. The bank's governors cited "extremely high uncertainties for Japan's economy, including developments in overseas economic activity and prices, as well as developments in the situation surrounding Ukraine and in commodity prices". — AFP

EU, India vow to boost trade ties despite tiff

BRUSSELS: The EU and India vowed on Tuesday to boost trade ties and tackle thorny issues through dialogue, after they risked overshadowing a significant meeting between the two sides in Brussels.

The European Union held its first-ever trade and technology council with Indian foreign, trade and communications ministers as they seek to bolster ties. The EU is India's third-largest trading partner with trade in goods worth around \$95 billion, and last year the two sides restarted talks for a free trade agreement. But hours before the high-level meeting, the Financial Times published comments by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell urging the bloc to crack down on India reselling Russian oil as refined fuels including diesel into Europe.

"If diesel or gasoline is entering Europe?... coming from India and being produced with Russian oil, that is certainly a circumvention of sanctions and member states have to take measures," he said ahead of a meeting with the Indian foreign minister.

After Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met Borrell in Brussels, he dismissed the issue during a press conference when asked about the comments. "I really don't see the basis for your question. Because my understanding of the council regulations is that if Russian crude is substantially transformed in a third country, then it's not treated as Russian anymore," Jaishankar said later on Tuesday. There were also reports on Tuesday that India planned to challenge the EU's "carbon border tax" at the World Trade Organization.

The tax imposes environmental standards on imports into the bloc based on the carbon emissions linked to their production.

Indian Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said India was discussing the issue with EU officials. "I'm sure that the intention is not to create a barrier to trade," he said. "We have a long time ahead of us in which we will be working together to find the right solutions to this." The EU's trade commissioner, Valdis Dombrovskis, echoed the commitment to dialogue but said the EU was "very careful to ensure WTO compatibility" and would apply the same price of carbon to imported goods as on domestic producers. — AFP



Al-Muzaini Exchange opens its 128th and 129th branch in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The number one money exchange company in Kuwait, Al-Muzaini Exchange Company recently opened its 129th branch in Al-Khairan Mall on Thursday, May 11, 2023 and opened its 128th branch in Al-Khaima Mall, Jahra on Tuesday, May 9, 2023. This rapid expansion reflects the company's endeavor to always be near its customers and its commitment to providing the highest quality of financial services such as money transfers, foreign currency exchange and bill payments with ease, comfort and safety and at the best prices, seven days a week.

Al-Muzaini Exchange Company General Manager Hugh Fernandes and the company's department managers, along with a number of the company's valued customers inaugurated the new branch in Al-Khairan Mall, Khairan. Fernandes stated: "We place immense focus on strengthening our leading position in the local market and to ensure that we

provide the best financial services experience to our customers and meet all their money transfer needs. It is an incredible achievement for Al-Muzaini to have launched two new branches in Jahra and Khairan within a week and emphasizes our efforts to stay true to our mission: to always be near to our customers and to add to their convenience."

The company always strives to make its financial services accessible to all. In addition to its strong network of branches, Al-Muzaini application provides safe and simplified financial solutions with many features such as: Availability in all digital platforms, new customer registration, the ability to add a new beneficiary and benefits from the Western Union service and Visa Direct services with simple steps to assist you with your transfers anywhere, anytime.

Al-Muzaini is also conducting its mega promotion campaign 2023. Transfer money through Al-Muzaini for a chance to win a BMW X3 2023 and incredible prizes worth over \$130,000. Send money through Al-Muzaini's branches, self-service kiosks, online or the mobile app and use any of their services for a chance to win every day. Transferring through the app multiplies your chances of winning. The campaign will begin from March 23 till June 11. Al-Muzaini, always near you!

Lifestyle



In this picture dyed threads are hung out to dry at the Kahhal looms hand-made rugs workshop in the Basatin district of Cairo. — AFP photos



A smith uses a loupe magnifier to inspect a jewellery piece at the Azza Fahmy workshop.



Bags are fabricated from cloths at the Malaika Linens factory.

Egyptian artisans carve a path to world luxury markets

Egyptian luxury brands are harnessing traditional craftsmanship from jewellery design to carpet weaving to bring the country's ancient cultural riches to the world. Experts in the sector say the global appeal of Arab and Islamic designs from other countries shows Egypt could do more to promote its rich, millennia-old artistic heritage.

One pioneer has been master jeweller Azza Fahmy, whose signature Islamic art-inspired pieces have graced the world's rich and famous including US pop star Rihanna and Jordan's Queen Rania. Fahmy, who started off in an Old Cairo workshop about 50 years ago, said her focus has been designs that "resonate with Egyptian identity".

Artists and artisans in Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, draw from a history that spans ancient Pharaonic times, the Mamluk, Ottoman and modern eras. "We are lucky to be able to draw on 6,000 years of history," said textile designer Goya Gallagher, founder of Cairo-based Malaika Linens, which makes high-end household pieces.

"The main challenge is making sure our pieces are timeless, that they're very well made and always hand-made," she said at the company workshop on the western outskirts of Cairo.

Myriad challenges

But while Egypt boasts some business success stories, many more luxu-



Sheets are fabricated at the Malaika Linens factory.

ry goods makers say they labor against myriad odds to eke out a market both locally and internationally.

In the era of global mass production, Egypt's once expansive pool of skilled artisans has shrunk, with many young people turning their backs on family skills passed down through the ages.

As businesses struggle to fill the talent gap, they also face the headwinds of a painful economic crisis that has tanked the local currency and restricted raw material imports. The state's efforts to support the handicrafts sector, meanwhile, have been "limited and sporadic", says the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

Culture consultant Dina Hafez agreed that Egypt offers little in the way of formalized arts and crafts training. "The training of artisans is still essentially

based on informal education and networks of apprenticeship," said Hafez of Blue Beyond Consulting.

"The sector lacks any structure. We need a real ecosystem. But for the moment, it's all based on personal initiatives." She said Egypt could learn from Turkey and Morocco, "where the opportunities and obstacles look a lot like Egypt", but which had managed to launch "their designs onto the international scene".

'Soft power'

Still, change is afoot.

Fahmy, the jewellery designer, said there is always space in the market for works made by skilled artisans and "good designers with creative minds and quality education". Many designers hope to benefit from government initiatives to

draw in investment and tourism revenue from its ancient wonders. At the Grand Egyptian Museum at the foot of the Giza pyramids, Egyptian luxury stores enjoy pride of place.

Although its official opening has been long delayed, the museum offers limited tours and events, and the shops already "showcase the best of Egyptian crafts", said the owner of one, Mohamed al-Kahhal. In Cairo's historic centre, linen company Malaika trains women from marginalized backgrounds in embroidery and sells the wares to its customers and to other fashion and textile brands. Carpet maker Hend al-Kahhal works in the same spirit, of bringing Egyptian identity to global frontiers.

Standing on the factory roof, where wool and silk creations hung out to dry, Kahhal said the family business works with designers "to give a contemporary touch to Pharaonic and Mamluk motifs".

The Egyptian Handicrafts Export Council, under the trade and industry ministry, has long been working to showcase such Egyptian creations internationally. But Hafez, the culture consultant, said she hopes for more progress in future, as often "budget constraints, red tape and customs regulations don't exactly make things easier". The question, she said, is whether Egyptian "authorities are really aware of the soft power these creators can have". — AFP



A worker paints a stenciled cloth at the Malaika Linens factory.



Threads are dyed at the Kahhal looms hand-made rugs workshop in the Basatin district of Cairo.



A worker sews a pattern of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs on a cloth at the Malaika Linens factory.



A rug is back burned with a flame at the Kahhal looms hand-made rugs workshop in the Basatin district of Cairo.



A smith fabricates jewellery at the Azza Fahmy workshop.



A collection of jewellery fabricated at the Azza Fahmy workshop.



A worker operates a loom while fabricating a rug at the Kahhal looms hand-made rugs workshop in the Basatin district of Cairo.

Elvis Presley's widow settles over late daughter's will

Elvis Presley's widow Priscilla Presley has reached a settlement over their late daughter's fortune, she said Tuesday, following a dispute over an amendment removing her from the will. Lisa Marie Presley died suddenly in Los Angeles in January from cardiac arrest at the age of 54. Lisa Marie had initially named her mother Priscilla as a co-trustee of her estate, but an amendment in 2016 would have instead made her eldest daughter Riley Keough the beneficiary of her estate.

Priscilla Presley filed a petition in January arguing the amendment was invalid because she was only presented with it after her daughter died, and it contained several technical errors, including lack of notarization.



(From left) Harper Vivienne Ann Lockwood, Lisa Marie Presley, Priscilla Presley, Riley Keough, and Finley Aaron Love Lockwood attend the Handprint Ceremony honoring Priscilla Presley, Lisa Marie Presley And Riley Keough at TCL Chinese Theatre. — AFP

"My family has resolved all confusion as it relates to our plea to the court and request for document interpretation after my daughter Lisa Marie's untimely passing," she said in a statement e-mailed to AFP. Earlier Tuesday, her lawyer Ronson Shamoun told a Los Angeles judge that the settlement had been reached. No details were disclosed, and the settlement is expected to remain sealed.

Keough's lawyer Justin Gold said his client was also happy with the resolution. Priscilla Presley, now 77, divorced Elvis in 1973 after six years of marriage.

Lisa Marie was the only child of the rock and roll icon, and retained control of her father's Graceland estate until her death. Riley Keough, 33, is an actor who has appeared in "Mad Max: Fury Road."

Lisa Marie was also survived by teenage twin daughters Harper and Finley.

Disputing media reports that she had sued "my beloved granddaughter," Priscilla Presley said: "As a family, we are pleased that we resolved this together... the Presley family is stronger than ever." — AFP

Coronation tiara crowns Geneva jewels auction

Adazzling tiara worn at two British coronations and the Star of Egypt diamond purportedly once belonging to King Farouk are among the historic jewellery items being auctioned Wednesday by Christie's in Geneva. The glittering pieces are going under the hammer in the auction house's Magnificent Jewels sale in the Swiss city. The sale also features the largest private collection of JAR jewellery ever to come to auction, spanning 40 years of the work of Paris-based creator Joel Arthur Rosenthal.

Less than a fortnight after the coronation of Britain's King Charles III comes the sale of the Bessborough Diamond Tiara, which was worn at the coronations of his grandfather King George VI in 1937 and mother Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Vere Ponsonby, the ninth earl of Bessborough, commissioned the Parisian jeweller Chaumet to craft a tiara for his wife to mark his appointment as Canada's governor-general in 1931.

The Art Deco tiara, made with platinum and weighing 136.5 grams, has an intricate floral design. "This is as iconic as it gets in terms of the style. The workmanship is unbelievable," said Max Fawcett, head of the jewellery department at Christie's in Geneva.

"This is quite crown-like, which is fitting for this year as it has been through two coronations," he told AFP.

"It's a piece of art and a piece of history." It is expected to fetch between



This photograph shows an employee of Christie's auction house holding the Bessborough Diamond Tiara. — AFP

800,000 and 1.5 million Swiss francs (\$890,000-\$1.67 million).

Star of Egypt

The Star of Egypt is a spectacular unmounted 105.52-carat diamond. Its origins are shrouded in mystery and it was reportedly bought in 1850 by the viceroy of Egypt, who sold it in 1880.

It first appeared on the London market in 1939. It was seemingly later bought by King Farouk, who ruled Egypt from 1936 to 1952. His impressive jewellery collection vanished when he fled into exile, and only reappeared several years later. The Star of Egypt was bought alongside jewels known to be in his possession.

It has been in the same family since the 1970s and has never been auctioned before. It is estimated at two to three million Swiss francs. "The shape

of it is incredible, the square emerald cut. It's an absolutely gorgeous stone," said Fawcett.

JARs on the shelf

The 28 lots by Joel Arthur Rosenthal (JAR) were amassed by a single collector over 15 years. Rosenthal, who was born in New York but moved to Paris, produces up to 70 meticulously-crafted pieces a year.

These are mostly pre-assigned to his existing collectors and friends, "so as a new collector it's difficult to get in there", Rahul Kadakia, Christie's international head of jewellery, told AFP.

"What's nice is that there are lots priced from 3,000 to 400,000 (Swiss francs), so there's a jewel or object for every level of collector." The most eye-catching is the 2011 sapphire, spinel and diamond 'eye' bangle, estimated at 150,000-200,000 Swiss francs. Its blue iris and black pupil is set on a golden expandable bracelet. "JAR is super-creative and inventive in the way he uses gemstones and fuses colors together," said Kadakia.

"It's so realistic. Even when you look in profile it shows you the curve of the eyeball." The priciest of the 102 lots is a Cartier Belle Epoque natural pearl and diamond devant-de-corsage formerly owned by Australian opera singer Nellie Melba. It was made in around 1902 and is estimated to be worth 2.5 to 3.5 million Swiss francs. — AFP



US actor Johnny Depp arrives for the opening ceremony and the screening of the film "Jeanne du Barry" during the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP photos

Johnny Depp receives warm welcome as comeback film opens Cannes

Johnny Depp was feted by fans on Tuesday as he arrived on the red carpet for the screening of his comeback movie at the opening of the Cannes Film Festival, which has sparked anger over the choice to celebrate the divisive megastar. Depp, 59, sporting a ponytail and shades, spent several minutes schmoozing with screaming fans, posing for selfies and signing autographs, before the screening of French period drama "Jeanne du Barry", in which he plays King Louis XV.

He joined stars such as Uma Thurman, Helen Mirren - her hair a witchy stack of blue and velvet - and Elle Fanning, for the first night of the industry shindig on the French Riviera.

Michael Douglas also received an honorary Palme d'Or, with the 78-year-old joking about the fact he is two years older than the festival. "This means so much to me because there are hundreds of festivals around the world but there's only one Cannes," he said. While 21 films from around the globe are competing for the Palme d'Or - the festival's top prize - there have repeated questions over its choice of opening film.

'Violence in creative circles'

Although his new film is playing out of competition, the jury for the Palme d'Or was asked about Depp's presence. Jury member Brie Larson, star of "Captain



US actor Johnny Depp (right) arrives with French actress and director for the opening ceremony and the screening of the film "Jeanne du Barry".

Marvel" and an outspoken MeToo supporter, looked flustered.

"You are asking me that? I don't understand... Why me specifically?" she said. "I don't know how I feel about it," she added, curtly. But there was plenty of anger online, with a friend of Heard, journalist Eve Barlow, starting a new hashtag - #CannesYouNot - criticizing the decision to invite Depp.

"Cannes seem proud of their history supporting rapists and abusers," Barlow wrote on Instagram, with pictures of Depp alongside past Cannes regulars such as Harvey Weinstein, Roman Polanski and Gerard Depardieu - all of whom have faced sexual assault allegations. On Monday, festival director Thierry Fremaux said he was not interested in

Depp's legal woes, saying: "I am interested in Depp the actor."

A group of 123 French film industry workers also denounced the festival for "rolling out the red carpet to men and women who commit assaults."

'Greatest film prize'

Jury chief Ruben Ostlund, who won the top prize last year, described the Palme as "the greatest film prize in the world. If I can choose between an Oscar and a Palme, it is an easy choice."

Of the films in the running for the award, a record seven have been directed by women. Several Palme laureates are back in competition, including Britain's two-time winner Ken Loach, Japan's Hirokazu Kore-eda and Germany's Wim Wenders. The festival, which runs until May 27, includes a slew of hot-ticket premieres, including "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny", the fifth and final outing for Harrison Ford as the whip-cracking archaeologist, and Martin Scorsese's new epic, "Killers of the Flower Moon", starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert De Niro.

Around a thousand police and security guards are in place for the festival, amid fears of protests linked to President Emmanuel Macron's unpopular pension reforms, with the CGT union even threatening to cut power. — AFP



Chinese actress Gong Li



Chinese actress Fan Bingbing



British actress Helen Mirren



US actress Elle Fanning



(From left) US actor Paul Dano, French actor Denis Menochet, US actress Brie Larson, Swedish film director and President of the Jury of the 76th Cannes Film Festival Ruben Ostlund, Argentinian film director Damian Szifron, French film director Julia Ducournau, French-Afghan writer and film director Atiq Rahimi, Moroccan film director Maryam Touzani and Zambian film director Rungano Nyoni pose as they arrive for the opening ceremony and the screening of the film "Jeanne du Barry" during the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes.



US actor Michael Douglas holds up the Honorary Palme d'Or of the 76th Cannes Film Festival he received during the opening ceremony in Cannes. — AFP photos

Michael Douglas in five films

Michael Douglas received an honorary Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival on Tuesday. Douglas described it as "an incredible honor", adding: "This means so much to me because there are hundreds of festivals around the world but there's only one Cannes."

The 78-year-old has delivered many beloved films, from thrillers such as "Basic Instinct", "The Game" and "Falling Down" to dramas such as "Wonder Boys" and superhero spectacles like "Ant-Man". Here are five key films that defined his varied and era-defining Hollywood career.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Before he became a star in front of the camera, Douglas won an Oscar as producer of this 1975 classic about a rebellious man in a psychiatric ward. Awkwardly, he had to reject his own father, film legend Kirk Douglas, who had won accolades for the stage version, and instead opted for Jack Nicholson in the lead role. It is one of very few movies to win all five



British actress Catherine Zeta-Jones (right) and her daughter Carys kiss US actor and Honorary Palme d'Or of the 76th Festival de Cannes Michael Douglas.

top Oscars -- best picture, director, screenplay, actor and actress.

Wall Street

Douglas became a household name with 1984's action comedy "Romancing the Stone", but he helped define an era with this 1987 film from director Oliver Stone about an unscrupulous corporate banker, winning the best actor Oscar in the process. Amid the go-go capitalism of 1980s New York, the character of Gordon Gekko and his infamous quote that "greed... is good" was supposed to be an attack on bankers, but instead became their slogan.

Fatal Attraction

It was a huge year for Douglas in 1987, which also saw the release of this box office smash, a psychological thriller about a woman (played by Glenn Close) who refuses to accept the end of a brief affair with a married man. It has since been criticized for perpetuating the concept of a deranged female, famously putting the term "bunny boiler" into the English language.

Basic Instinct

Douglas built a reputation for erotic thrillers in the 1980s and 1990s - and none had a steamier image than this thriller by director Paul Verhoeven, in which he played a detective falling for Sharon Stone. "At the time, I wanted to do something hardcore. It was the start of the 1990s, Americans were extremely conservative - it was a form of provocation," he told France's Liberation newspaper on Tuesday.

Behind the Candelabra

Douglas has remained in demand in recent years, starring in Marvel's "Ant-Man" films and scoring a Netflix hit with comedy series "The Kominsky Method". But he gave one of his greatest-ever turns as pianist Liberace in this 2013 film, shortly after recovering from cancer, winning him an Emmy and Golden Globe. Somehow delivering the character's flamboyance in a subtle and tender way, many saw it as the crowning achievement of a storied career. — AFP

Lifestyle



Jayaram with KEA office-bearers.

Blending genres: KEA presents riveting musical ensemble

By Sajeev K Peter

Gopi Sundar Live Ensemble, hosted by the Keralite Engineers Association, Kuwait, was a memorable evening for music enthusiasts in Kuwait, as the band deftly blended genres in a riveting musical show. Delivering a handful of soulful melodies and all-time favorite musical numbers with the accompaniment of an electrifying orchestra, the band enthralled the audience with its compelling stage presence and pulsating beats.



Preety Bhalla performs.

The event titled 'Rajatotsav', staged at the packed auditorium of the American International School in Hawally on the occasion of KEA's 25th anniversary celebration, was led by South Indian music composer and singer Gopi Sundar and consisted of talented singers from the South Indian music industry — Amrita Suresh, Jasim Jamal and Keerthana, in addition to Indian pop sensation Preety Bhalla.

An evening of stunning virtuosity and genre-defying music, the ensemble opened with Gopi Sundar's signature numbers. As the most commanding singer of the band, Amritha presented some of her best songs in her soft and graceful voice. The ensemble showcased a diverse range of musical numbers comprising of romantic melodies, folk songs and pop rap.

The presence of renowned South Indian film actor Jayaram as the event's guest of honor was an added attraction of the evening, as the national award-winning actor took the audience on an exciting musical journey through his 35-year-long acting career. Evoking nostalgia, the singers rendered songs from Jayaram's iconic films, composed by legendary South Indian music composers of yesteryear.

In the second segment, famous Indian singer Preety Bhalla took the crowd by storm with a rare blend of Punjabi, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic and Malayalam songs. Approaching the stage from the back of the auditorium as the spotlight fell on her silhouetted figure in brown-grey attire, Preety kicked off a high-voltage musical performance. Unleashing her voice with thrilling power, the Bollywood pop star delivered a one-of-a-kind experience for everyone, from families and kids to diehard rock music enthusiasts.

In her rich, distinctive and husky voice, Preety performed non-stop for nearly an hour, taking the audience along with her on an exhilarating musical journey. She hardly took a breather between songs and sang hit numbers of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Ilaiyaraaja,



Padmashri Jayaram with Gopi Sundar, Amritha, Jasim Jamal and Keerthana.

RD Burman and Laxmikant Pyarelal, among others. Singing in an impressive array of languages, she rocked as the audience joined her on stage to dance to her tune.

Popular songs like 'Bella Ciao' from Money Heist, Mohammed Rafi hits like 'Ghulabi Aanken' and the popular Arabic song 'Habeebi' were well-received by the audience. For Malayali music lovers, she rendered 'Appangalembadam' from Ustad Hotel and 'Meharuba', a song composed by Gopi Sundar for Joshiy's film Lailaa O' Lailaa. No sooner the curtain came down on 'Rajatotsav', the audience erupted in cheers. The event will be remembered as a

unique cultural show for its aesthetic appeal, live performances and effective use of technology.

Earlier, KEA President Zakaria Jacob, in his opening remarks, gave an overview of the association and its 25 years of service. Vice President Suresh C Pillai, General Secretary Jessy Zakaria and Treasurer Biji Paul were among the office-bearers who attended the inaugural ceremony. A host of guests, a diverse group of people from the engineering community in Kuwait, were also in attendance.

Martha Stewart, 81, is oldest Sports Illustrated swimsuit cover model

American lifestyle guru Martha Stewart has become the oldest cover model for Sports Illustrated's annual swimsuit edition, at the age of 81. The businesswoman, TV personality and celebrity chef was photographed in 10 different swimsuits in the Dominican Republic in January, in a shoot that is commanding attention on social media. A post Monday on her Instagram feed—which shows Stewart on the magazine's cover wearing a white swimsuit with a plunging neckline—said she had been approached by the publication last November.



File photo shows Martha Stewart attending the reopening of NYC Flagship store, The Landmark in New York City. —AFP

"Usually I'm motivated by pay but this time I was motivated by showing people that a woman my age can still look good, feel good, be good," Stewart said in a video on Sports Illustrated's swimsuit edition website. "I don't think about age very much, but I thought that this is kind of historic and that I better look really good," she added.

On Instagram she wrote to her followers about how "changing, evolving, and being fearless" are key life goals. "I hope this cover inspires you to challenge yourself to try new things, no matter what stage of life you are in," she said. Stewart shot to stardom in the 1980s, publishing a number of bestselling cookbooks after enjoying success as a chef. She launched Martha Stewart Living magazine in 1990, following it up with a weekly television program that focused on cooking, entertaining and decorating. Stewart later became America's first self-made female billionaire. But in 2004, her career and reputation came crashing down when she was sentenced to five months in prison on charges related to insider trading. She has been rebuilding her brand since then and earlier this year appeared in a Super Bowl ad with rapper Snoop Dogg, a longtime friend. —AFP

Possible antidote discovered for deadliest mushroom

Researchers said on Tuesday that an already widely used medical dye reduces the poisonous effects of death cap mushrooms in mice, raising hopes of the first targeted antidote for the world's deadliest mushroom. The China-led team said the dye, which has yet to be tested as an antidote on humans but has already been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) for other uses, has the potential to "save many lives".



Amanita phalloides, commonly known as death caps, are estimated to cause more than 90 percent of all deaths from mushroom poisoning worldwide. They often resemble other species of mushrooms that people like to pick in the wild—but eating just half of one can cause deadly failure of the liver or kidneys. While originally native to Europe, death caps have spread across the world,

causing more than 38,000 illnesses and nearly 800 deaths in China alone between 2010 and 2020.

For a new study published in the journal Nature Communications, the researchers sought to target alpha-amanitin, the main toxin produced by the mushrooms. They used genome-wide CRISPR screening, a relatively new technique that has helped researchers understand the role specific genes play in infections and poisonings.

The team had previously used the technology to find a potential antidote for the box jellyfish, one of the world's most venomous animals. The CRISPR screening identified that the protein STT3B was a key culprit in the toxic effects of death cap poisoning. The team searched through a database of drugs already approved by the US FDA and found one that could potentially block the protein.

'Unexpected connection'

It is a fluorescent dye called indocyanine green, which is administered intravenously. It has been widely used for decades in the US, Europe and elsewhere for diagnostic imaging, allowing doctors to measure liver and heart function. Qiaoping Wang, a researcher at China's Sun Yat-sen University and senior author of the study, told AFP that "upon discovering this unexpected connection, the research team was understandably taken aback".

The team tested the antidote first on liver cells in a petri dish, then on mice. In both cases, it "demonstrated significant potential in mitigating the toxic impact" of mushroom poisoning, Wang said. "This molecule holds immense potential for treating cases of human mushroom poisoning and could mark the first-ever specific antidote with a targeted protein," he said.

"It could save many lives if it is as effective in humans as in mice." The team now intends to conduct trials on humans using the dye as a death cap antidote. An extract from milk thistle seeds called silybinin has previously been used to treat death cap poisoning, but exactly how it works has remained unclear. —AFP

Flamingos and 'fascism': Tunisia's shadow cartoonist Z

Tunisia's top cartoonist doesn't hesitate to compare President Kais Saied with Hitler. It's a sign of the country's current political climate, but such vehemence is nothing new for the artist who has regularly savaged Tunisian leaders. He goes by the pseudonym Z and hides his face when posing for photos. For years, Z sharply satirized Tunisia's former autocrat Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and those who followed. Now, he is one of the most ferocious critics of Saied, who assumed wide-ranging powers in 2021 and rules by decree.

The tensions since have fuelled Z's art with "more adrenaline than the decade following the revolution" of 2011, when Tunisia became the birthplace of the Arab Spring protests, he said. In Z's drawings, Saied is depicted in Hitler-like poses with an overturned suction cup on his head to symbolize his "bouts of madness as he seeks to purify Tunisia", said the artist, a professional architect who divides his time between Tunisia and France. Under Tunisia's new "dictatorship", anonymity is prudent, he said in an interview with AFP.

Following Saied's sweeping power grab, "anonymity became vital because some people are being arrested just for expressing their opinion on Facebook", said Z. "You can imagine then what it is like for a cartoonist who criticizes the president day and night." And yet, he said, he enjoys the thrill of publishing his subversive artwork: "The adrenaline of fear reminds me of the Ben Ali era when we played with fire."

Circumventing censorship

Z's initial focus, back in 2007, was environmental protection, when state-backed development projects under Ben Ali threatened a seasonal flamingo habitat. Still a student, he raised awareness about the dangers facing the Lake Tunis lagoon on his website Debatunisie, com where the pink bird became his logo alongside critical articles. Z said he

became a cartoonist "by chance" when one of his blogs was censored. "I found that I could circumvent censorship by expressing myself through cartoons and reach a wider audience who was not interested in politics."

Under Ben Ali, who was ousted in the 2011 popular uprising, "being anonymous was necessary", said Z. "After the revolution I could have made myself known to the public, but there was a rise of Islamic activity threatening anyone who was against God. "And, truth be told, for a cartoonist religion is a formidable" source of inspiration, he added.

toonist said he does not claim to be changing mindsets through his drawings, but welcomes the reactions they trigger, even the insults and threats. His more recent cartoons carry Arabic-language captions, instead of French, to reach a wider audience including young people, he said.

"When the news is racing like at the moment, sometimes I wake up at night with an idea that I absolutely have to get out," he said. Today, Z believes Tunisia "is a dictatorship veering into fascism" where "hatred and discrimination" are omnipresent. People "can be attacked on the streets ... just for



In this image Tunisian architect turned cartoonist known only by the initial 'Z' to protect his anonymity, is pictured in his office in Tunis. — AFP

Saied won a 2019 election but then assumed wide-reaching powers in July 2021 and last year rammed through a constitution that gave his office sweeping powers and neutered parliament. Since February, authorities have arrested more than 20 of his political opponents and personalities, including former ministers and businessmen.

'Veering into fascism'

Although Z's cartoons are rarely published in print in Tunisia, they have a large following on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. The car-

expressing an opinion" and Saied supporters "can quickly brand you as an Islamist or a traitor", Z said.

But none of the leaders of modern Tunisia escapes Z's wrath—not even Habib Bourguiba, the country's independence hero and first president. "Everything began (with Bourguiba), the nepotism and the arrogance of the political class", he said. "It is as if a ghost lives in the basement of the presidential palace... and makes all those who enter it lose their mind." —AFP

Sports

Evenepoel's Giro team shredded by new positive COVID-19 cases

Withdrawals leave just 3 members of the team in the race

PARIS: The Giro d'Italia lost six more cyclists, four of them from former race leader Remco Evenepoel's team, on Wednesday owing to positive COVID tests taking the total of withdrawals due to the virus to 15 since the race began on May 6. Race favorite Evenepoel had withdrawn late on Sunday due to a positive test and despite the race organizers implementing stricter rules on Monday COVID continues to affect the peloton.

"Soudal Quick-Step is disappointed to announce that four more riders from its Giro d'Italia squad have tested positive for COVID-19 and will leave the race," read a team statement. "Following the positive test of Remco Evenepoel on Sunday, a further round of tests were made on the riders and staff that remained in Italy, with Jan Hirt, Josef Cerny, Louis Vervaeke and Matteo Cattaneo unfortunately unable to continue."

Their withdrawals leave just three members of the team in the race - Belgian rider Ilan Van Wilder is the best-placed, 19th some 12 minutes and 7 seconds adrift of the overall leader Geraint Thomas, winner of the 2018 Tour de France. "We will continue to monitor and implement our testing protocol on the three riders and staff that remain at the race," said team doctor Toon Cruyt in the team statement. The two other cases were both Italian riders, Andrea Vendrame and Stefano Gandin.

Evenepoel and the others were not obliged to withdraw due to a positive test - it is at the team's

discretion whether a rider carries on or not as the COVID health protocol has been dropped. Evenepoel's withdrawal had sparked the race organizers to take extra measures. "In the light of the latest developments concerning positive test results on some riders, the organizers of the Giro d'Italia informs that wearing a facemask will be compulsory in all areas of contact with the riders," said a race statement.

The statement said those areas include team buses and those parts of the start and finish zones of each stage that it supervises. With Evenepoel's hopes of adding the Giro title to the Vuelta he won last year having been dashed, there was speculation that the 23-year-old might try to gain consolation in competing at the Tour de France. His Soudal-Quick Step team boss Patrick Lefevere, however, was quick to dismiss the rumors. "No, he will not be there at the Tour de France," Lefevere told RTBF.

"We are not going to change his program, it would not be very smart of us. He is a young married man who has seen his wife for only 10 days this season. The best thing for him is to recuperate and to relax. We will then conduct some health examinations post-COVID and adapt his race program after that." Lefevere said Evenepoel would definitely defend his world road race title in Glasgow at the beginning of August but it "was too early" to talk of bidding for a second successive Vuelta crown which gets underway later that month. — AFP



Belgian rider Remco Evenepoel

Jokic dominates as Nuggets hold off Lakers in opener

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic produced a dominant display as the Denver Nuggets held off a late Los Angeles Lakers fightback to win their NBA Western Conference finals opener 132-126 on Tuesday. Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic finished with 34 points, 21 rebounds and 14 assists to give top-seeded Denver a 1-0 lead in the best-of-seven series. Jokic received offensive support from Jamal Murray, who finished with 31 points, while four other Denver players posted double-digit points tallies. The Lakers were led by Anthony Davis, who scored 40 points with 10 rebounds. LeBron James added 26 points while Austin Reaves added 23 points.

Denver led by 21 points in the third quarter but saw their lead whittled away to just three as the Lakers swept back into contention with a gutsy fourth-quarter fightback that ultimately fell just short. "In the first half we were really good — controlled the game, controlled everything, controlled the pace, controlled the defense and then second half we lost it," Jokic told ESPN. "But whether you win by one point or win by 20 at this time of year, it doesn't matter — a win is a win."

Denver coach Michael Malone saluted his team's composure in closing out victory. "A lot of our guys are battle-tested, we've been in a ton of close games," Malone said. "I didn't think there was any panic — there was poise. Our guys looked at one another and realized what we had to do to close this game out." James bemoaned the Lakers' slow start. "It took us a half to get into the game and that was pretty much the ballgame right there," James said. "We have to understand that we have to start from the tip-off — and they punched us in the mouth to start."

'Desperation'

With a raucous Ball Arena home crowd roaring them on, the Nuggets took early control, surging into



DENVER: Anthony Davis #3 of the Los Angeles Lakers attempts a shot between Christian Braun #0 and Nikola Jokic #15 of the Denver Nuggets during the first quarter in game one of the Western Conference Finals on May 16, 2023. — AFP

a 20-9 lead midway through the first quarter with a flurry of scoring that threatened to overwhelm the visitors. Jokic was at the heart of the opening onslaught, imposing himself with eight points, 12 rebounds and five assists in the first quarter alone to help the Nuggets take a 37-25 lead heading into the second quarter.

Denver continued to score freely through the second quarter to take a commanding 72-54 half-time lead against a Lakers defense regarded as one of the best in the league. Although Los Angeles managed to get their offense moving in the third quarter, outscoring Denver 38-34, the Nuggets continued to test the Lakers' defense. Jokic completed his sixth triple-double of the playoffs midway through the third quarter and then electrified the home crowd with a 31-foot three-pointer on the buzzer to put the Nuggets ahead 106-92 heading into the final quarter.

The Lakers came surging back in the fourth quar-

ter when a Reaves three-pointer trimmed the Denver lead to eight points with just over 10 minutes remaining. The Nuggets responded with four unanswered points from Murray to help Denver take a 14-point lead with just over seven minutes left on the clock. But again the Lakers responded and two quick threes from Reaves helped the visitors make it a three-point game after a 9-0 run.

The Nuggets held on however and a late Jokic free throw sealed the win. James took scant consolation from the Lakers' fourth-quarter fightback. "In postseason it doesn't matter if you cut it to one or you're down 20, if you lose, you lose," James said. "They are 1-0 and we have to come back with desperation going into game two. We have to play better, we have to rebound better ... We need to be better in all facets of the game." Game two in the series takes place in Denver on Thursday. The winner of the series will face either Boston or Miami in the NBA finals next month. — AFP

IPL giants Mumbai on shaky ground in play-off race

NEW DELHI: The IPL is hotting up with seven teams still in the hunt for play-off spots after five-time champions Mumbai Indians suffered a shock loss to Lucknow. Defending champions Gujarat Titans are the only franchise to have booked one of the four play-off places, with the Delhi Capitals and Sunrisers Hyderabad now out of contention.

Mumbai's five-run loss on Tuesday at the hands of Marcus Stoinis and Mohsin Khan left them needing to win their remaining group fixture against Hyderabad, and they still need other results to go their way. "We didn't play well enough to win. There were moments we didn't win. Unfortunate but we need to keep our heads high," Mumbai captain Rohit Sharma said after the defeat. Rohit, who led Mumbai to titles in 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020, said: "We have to come out and win that game (against Hyderabad on Sunday)."

The top two teams will play the first qualifier, with the winner heading straight to the final in Ahmedabad on May 28 and the loser playing the winner of the "eliminator" between teams three and four in the second qualifier. Lucknow, who made their IPL debut alongside Hardik Pandya's Gujarat last year, have had a hot-and-cold season but a better run rate than Mumbai has kept them in contention for the top four even if they lose their final group game.

Four-time winners Chennai Super Kings, led by MS Dhoni - who is believed to be playing his final season - looked like sailing into the next round but a shock defeat to Kolkata Knight Riders kept them waiting. They need to win their final match against the Delhi Capitals on Saturday to make the play-offs and possibly seal a top-two finish, but a loss will leave them at the mercy of other results. Other teams in contention include Royal Challengers Bangalore, led by Faf du Plessis, as well as the Rajasthan Royals, the Punjab Kings and Kolkata. — AFP

Close on 70 Kenyan athletes - mainly distance runners - have been banned in the last five years for drugs offences in a crisis that has tarnished the East African track and field powerhouse. In March, AIU head Brett Clothier warned during a visit to Kenya that the international anti-doping body was stepping up its investigations and testing in the country. The AIU also said in April Kenyan athletes were being assisted in covering up doping offences by a "medically-savvy operation".

Its claims followed an investigation into falsified medical documents from marathon runner Betty Wilson Lempus and 800m specialist Eglay Nalanyanya. Lempus was given a five-year doping ban in January while Nalanyanya was suspended this month for eight years for using a prohibited substance. Kenya reacted by promising on April 20 it would more than triple annual drug testing of athletes. Sports Minister Ababu Namwamba said Kenya was targeting 3,445 tests a year - compared to the current 1,000 - for its 37,900 athletes and support personnel. — AFP

Kipruto adds to Kenya athletics doping woes

PARIS: Kenya's 10 kilometers road race world record holder Rhonex Kipruto became the latest Kenyan athlete to be suspended for a doping offence on Wednesday by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU). The AIU said the 23-year-old - who won 10,000 metres bronze in the 2019 world championships - had been "provisionally suspended" for the "use of a Prohibited Substance/Method (ABP)". The ABP (Athlete Biological Passport) can show discrepancies that can reveal the effects of doping. Kipruto set the 10km record of 26 minutes 24 seconds in Valencia in 2020 - he finished a disappointing ninth in the 10,000m at the Olympics in 2021.



Benson Kipruto of Kenya

Floods force cancellation of Emilia Romagna F1 GP

PARIS: The Emilia Romagna Formula One Grand Prix due to be held at Imola this weekend has been called off as it is "not possible to safely hold the event" due to heavy flooding in the region, organizers said on Wednesday. Five people have died after heavy rains caused flooding across Italy's northern Emilia Romagna region. At Imola, the Santerno river which borders the track was flooded and race organizers had asked journalists and team staff not to go to the circuit on Wednesday.

Formula One said in a statement that following high level discussions "the decision has been taken not to proceed with the Grand Prix weekend at Imola". "The decision has been taken because it is not possible to safely hold the event for our fans, the teams and our personnel and it is the right and responsible thing to do given the situation faced by the towns and cities in the region," it added.

"It would not be right to put further pressure on the local authorities and emergency services at this difficult time." The civil protection agency said 14 rivers had broken their banks across the region between Tuesday and Wednesday, and 23 towns were flooded. It urged "maximum caution", as mayors warned people to stay on high ground. "About 5,000 people have been evacuated, but that number might rise," Civil Protection Minister Nello Musumeci told Radio 24.

'They are heroes'

In Forli, an AFP photographer saw people in a state of shock late Tuesday, fleeing through floodwaters in the dark in their bare feet. Images showed streets transformed into rivers, and firemen moving people to safety in rubber dinghies. Elsewhere, muddy waters rushed at great speed under the arches of the covered walkways in Bologna, while locals in



CESENA: Flooded bungalows are pictured in Cesena on May 17, 2023 after heavy rains caused major floodings in central Italy. — AFP

Cesena swam down a road to rescue a three-year-old child. "We absolutely must not lower our guard," Cesena mayor Enzo Lattuca said on Facebook.

Residents "must not under any account go into basements or cellars", and should "stay out of ground floors if possible", he said. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on Tuesday tweeted her support for those affected and said the government was "ready to intervene with the necessary aid". Some areas saw almost 300 millimeters of rain in just a few hours, Repubblica daily said. Much of northern Italy suffered a drought last winter, on top of a record lack of rain last summer that ruined harvests.

However, spring has been wetter and colder than normal across the country. For Formula One President and CEO Stefano Domenicali, the floods affected him personally. "It is such a tragedy to see what has happened to Imola and Emilia-Romagna, the town and region that I grew up in, and my thoughts and prayers are with the victims of the flooding and the families and communities affected," he said in a statement. "I want to express my gratitude and admiration for the incredible emergency services who are working tirelessly to help those who need help and alleviate the situation. They are heroes and the whole of Italy is proud of them." — AFP

Sports

Inter Milan reach Champions League final, first in 13 years

Inter beat Milan by 3-0 aggregate

MILAN: Inter Milan reached their first Champions League final for 13 years as Lautaro Martinez's sole goal of the match gave them a 3-0 aggregate win against AC Milan on Tuesday. Inter will undoubtedly be the underdogs against either Real Madrid or Manchester City in Istanbul on June 10, but the way they managed both legs of this all-Milan tie suggests they will be hard to beat.

The key moment of the night at the San Siro came when Argentinean Martinez exchanged passes with substitute Romelu Lukaku and drilled a shot from inside the penalty area that Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan allowed in at his near post. Martinez, Inter's captain, hailed the cohesion of his team over the two matches against their city rivals. "What counts is the squad. I experienced it at the World Cup (with Argentina)," he said.

"It makes it easy if you have a united squad with everyone pulling in the same direction. It means you get to play these very important matches in the best possible way." He added: "After winning the World Cup and experiencing what is the pinnacle for a player I knew we could reach this final, and we did it." His goal effectively killed off the tie. Trailing 2-0 from the first leg, Milan had pushed hard in the first half, spearheaded by Rafael Leao who shot across the goal and past the post with one of his side's best chances.

Lukaku spark

Maignan then superbly dropped to his knees to collect Edin Dzeko's glancing header from Hakan Calhanoglu's pacy free-kick. Lukaku's introduction

in the second half proved the spark that Inter needed to extend their lead. Absent for much of the season with injuries and with a damaged reputation following a disastrous World Cup with Belgium, Lukaku has slowly worked his way back to his best.

The forward on loan from Chelsea immediately caused problems in the Milan defence and created Martinez's goal to guarantee their place in their first Champions League final since the last time they won European club football's biggest prize under Jose Mourinho in 2010. "Tutti a Istanbul", the joyous Inter fans sang with the Nerazzurri now one game away from a fourth Champions League title.

Inter coach Simone Inzaghi said: "It's a dream come true. We always believed we could do it, we have had an extraordinary journey (to the final). "What pleased me? Everything. The running, the determination, the concentration... they were very good." Facing Inzaghi's men will be either Manchester City or record 14-time winners Real Madrid, with that semi-final finely poised at 1-1 ahead of Wednesday's decider at City's Etihad Stadium. "We're going to have to give it our all," Martinez said.

Milan's coach Stefano Pioli was left to contemplate a harsh ending to "a terrific" run to the last four. "It's normal to be disappointed after losing in the semi-final, especially in a derby. "The players gave their all in both legs but Inter deserved it. They played better than us, winning both matches. "Given our journey and what we've done over the past three years it would have been fabulous to get to the final. But we didn't make it, that's a massive disappointment." — AFP



MILAN: AC Milan's French defender Theo Hernandez (center) fouls Inter Milan's Italian midfielder Nicolò Barella during the UEFA Champions League semi-final second leg football match between Inter Milan and AC Milan on May 16, 2023. — AFP

Kane has a 'long career' ahead of him at Spurs

BANGKOK: Tottenham are confident Harry Kane will see out his career at the club, former captain Gary Mabbutt said Wednesday, despite persistent rumors of a big-money move for the England skipper. Club ambassador Mabbutt said Spurs would do everything they could to hold on to their record goalscorer, whose contract has just over a year to run.

"We will do everything we possibly can that Harry will remain a Tottenham player for the rest of his career," Mabbutt told reporters in Bangkok. "So that's what we're hoping for. That's what we believe is going to happen." The 29-year-old has bagged 27 goals this season, second only to Manchester City's Erling Haaland.

But with Tottenham sixth in the Premier League and out of the hunt for Champions League places, Kane has been linked with a summer move to Manchester United or Paris Saint-Germain. Tottenham are on their third manager of the season—interim boss Ryan Mason—and Kane has publicly criticised the club's culture since the sacking of Mauricio Pochettino, who led them to the 2019 Champions League final.

But Mabbutt, who lifted the FA Cup as Spurs skipper in 1991, insisted the turmoil would not put big-name coaches off taking the job. "All the big names want the job," he told AFP. "To be manager of Tottenham Hotspur football club is a massive role for any manager." Spurs take on Leicester City in the



Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane

Thai capital in July as part of a tour of Australia and Asia that also sees them play West Ham and former coach Jose Mourinho's Roma. — AFP

Newcastle don't feel 'hunted', says Howe

LONDON: Newcastle boss Eddie Howe says he does not feel as if his team are being "hunted" as he seeks to fend off charging Liverpool and finish in the Premier League's top four. The Magpies, seeking to qualify for the Champions League for the first time in two decades, host high-flying Brighton at St James' Park on Thursday. Roberto De Zerbi's side, fresh from a 3-0 win at Arsenal, are chasing European football for the first time in their history. Newcastle are currently third in the table—behind Manchester City and Arsenal—level on points with Manchester United. Both Newcastle and United have three games remaining.

Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool are just one point behind, having played a game more, after their seventh straight league win at Leicester on Monday. Howe said Newcastle still had matters in their own hands and insisted he was not focusing on red-hot Liverpool. "I don't feel like we're being hunted," he said at his pre-match press conference on Wednesday. "I don't feel that emotion. It's us against ourselves, really. That's how I see it. It's us trying to be the best we can be.

"I've not focused on any other team all season. In my experience, I knew Liverpool were never far away because they are a top team and they are capable of going on runs of wins. "They are very similar to Manchester City where they can win a group of games without blinking. They have got that experience." Victory in Newcastle's last two

owner Andrew Vassiliadis in a statement. "Landon Donovan, the entire San Diego Loyal team and I are dedicated to this mission, and we will continue to work tirelessly to achieve it. Our passion for soccer and for our community will never falter," he added.

MLS Commissioner Don Garber, who said in March he was "bullish" on San Diego's chances of becoming the 30th team has indicated the league could be looking for two more markets in the coming years. Las Vegas, Sacramento, Detroit, Phoenix and Tampa have all been mentioned as possible future locations for MLS clubs. While 32 teams is much bigger than most first division leagues around the world, MLS, with teams from the United States and Canada, operates with an Eastern and Western Conference.

The NFL and NHL both have 32 teams while the NBA and Major League Baseball both have 30 teams each. Mansour's ownership group also in-

cludes the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, a federally recognised Native-American tribe located in the San Diego area. The 75-year-old Egyptian born Mansour is a British citizen and lives in London. He is chairman of his family's Mansour Group which is involved in the automotive industry, financial services and real estate. Mansour also serves the senior treasurer of Britain's Conservative Party.

Howe also said he hoped the security breach that left him in danger at Elland Road could help prevent a future "tragedy" on a football pitch. The 45-year-old was confronted in his technical area by an angry spectator during Saturday's 2-2 Premier League draw at Leeds, and a man has since been banned from the stadium for life and charged with assault. "I just hope that that incident itself can then help the authorities and whoever is concerned with the security and safety of the players and staff," he said. He added: "I'd hate to see a tragedy on a football pitch that could have been avoided." — AFP

Today's Matches

UEFA Europa League		
Sevilla v Juventus	22:00	
beIN Sports 1 HD Premium		
Bayer 04 Leverkusen v Roma	22:00	
beIN Sports 2 HD Premium		
Basel v Fiorentina	22:00	
beIN Sports HD Xtra 2		
Alkmaar v West Ham United	22:00	
beIN Sports HD Xtra 1		

MLS unveil a new team in San Diego after record fee

MIAMI: Major League Soccer will announce a new team in San Diego on Thursday after British-Egyptian billionaire Mohamed Mansour paid a record expansion fee of around \$500 million, a person with knowledge of the plans has told AFP. The 30th club in MLS will play at the recently built 35,000 capacity Snapdragon Stadium, home to the San Diego Aztecs college football team and the San Diego Wave, the National Womens Soccer League franchise.

The previous record fee paid for entering MLS was the \$325 million committed by Charlotte FC in

2019. The original entry fee to MLS, for its first season in 1996, was \$5 million. The value of MLS teams has increased significantly in recent years. When Orlando City joined the league in 2015 their owners paid \$70 million while Los Angeles FC's owners forked out \$110 million five years ago.

The new San Diego team, whose name has yet to be revealed, is earmarked to start play in the league 2025 and will be the fourth MLS team in California along with the San Jose Earthquakes, Los Angeles Galaxy and Los Angeles Football Club. The source said the new club will not have any link to the current San Diego Loyal who play in the second tier USL Championship.

The Loyal, who count former MLS and United States national team star Landon Donovan, among their ownership group, have said they will continue despite the impending new arrival. "Our plan is simple. We aren't going anywhere," said chairman and

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

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

Change of Name

I, VIMAL NANDAKUMAR, holder of Indian Passport No: N2475690 having permanent address 204, Pushptara Apartment, Rajan Nagar, Abrama, Valsad-396001, Gujarat, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: **Given name: Vimal Nandakumar and surname: Pillai. (#3533) 18/5/2023.**

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Chaos brings curtain down on drama-filled SEA Games

Asian football probes ‘acts of violence’ after red cards



PHNOM PENH: Players and officials react as a fight breaks out on the sidelines of the men's football final match between Thailand and Indonesia during the 32nd Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) on May 16, 2023. — AFP

PHNOM PENH: The Asian Football Confederation said on Wednesday that it was investigating “acts of violence” after two mass brawls and four red cards marred the men’s final of the Southeast Asian Games. Indonesia defeated Thailand 5-2 in extra time on Tuesday in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh in a match that saw clashes between players and coaches of both sides. Thailand, who have since apologized and launched their own investigation, ended the bad-tempered final with eight players on the field.

One of those sent off was goalkeeper Soponvit Rakyard after he ran half the length of the pitch to deliver a diving punch to an Indonesian opponent. “The AFC is disappointed with the disorderly incidents at the SEA Games football final,” a spokesperson for the governing body for football in Asia said. “The AFC underlines the importance of fair play, mutual respect and

sportsmanship, and takes a zero tolerance approach towards all such acts of violence, which threaten the physical integrity of players and officials.”

Men’s football at the biennial SEA Games is played between under-23 sides. The final had been billed as a chance for Indonesia to restore some pride to its football following a deadly stadium disaster and the loss of hosting the Under-20 World Cup. But the game will be remembered for the scenes that began in the 97th minute when Thailand — who had been 2-0 down — scored to make it 2-2 and force extra time. Thai officials celebrated their late leveler by running over to the Indonesia bench, prompting the first melee.

When Indonesia took the lead back early in extra time, their officials returned the favor, with even more incendiary results. Sumardji, a member of the

team staff who like many Indonesians goes by one name, told TVOne that their players “returned the provocation and I chased them and shouted ‘Don’t!’” “But suddenly I got hit here (his mouth) and I fell down.” Kicks were landed as well as punches. Both teams had a player sent off, and members of their coaching staff were also dismissed.

As the Thai team’s discipline crumbled, another two of their players were sent off during extra time for second yellow cards. The Thai football association said it would punish anyone found to have been in the wrong. “The FA of Thailand must apologize for the clash on the touchline,” it said in a statement, adding it would “set up a committee to investigate those involved as soon as possible and will take decisive measures”. The chairman of the Indonesian FA pointed the finger at Thailand. “Sometimes we got provoked

and then we fell into it,” Erick Thohir told Metro TV. “I warned earlier that this is a provocation, they wanted us to lose. We were beaten, trampled on and cheated.”

Indonesian pride

The chaos and their role in it overshadowed the achievements of Indonesia’s young team, and what it means to football in the country. In October, a stadium disaster killed more than 130 people in East Java. And in May FIFA relocated the Under-20 World Cup from Indonesia to Argentina because of opposition in the Muslim-majority nation to the Zionist entity’s participation. President Joko Widodo said he was “very happy” that his country won gold. “This is something we had been waiting for 32 years, to be the champion in Southeast Asia,” Widodo told reporters, according to a statement by the presidential

Moroccan nomads keep ancient sport of sand hockey alive

M’HAMID EL GHIZLANE: In a Moroccan oasis town on the edge of the Sahara, nomads in turbans and tunics are thwacking a camel-wool ball across the desert in a traditional pastime: sand hockey. Similar in many ways to field and ice hockey, but played barefoot and with palm wood sticks, the ancient game is called “mokhacha” in the local Hassani Arabic dialect.

“We play mokhacha in our spare time,” said one participant, Hamadi Boudani, at the recent International Nomads Festival in the southern town of M’hamid El Ghizlane. “Our ancestors were nomads and as soon as they pitched their camp somewhere they would first rest and then, to pass the time, they would start a game,” he said. “This game is part of Saharan tradition.” The players were cheered on by enthusiastic fans as they churned up the sand in what was once a stop on the storied caravan route to Timbuktu.

They were wearing the daraa, an ample tunic favored by nomadic tribes, and the cheche cloth turban to cover their heads and faces from the desert sun. The two teams, one in white the other in blue, had a go at it on May 1, during the annual Nomads Festival which also celebrates song and dance and other desert traditions. Each team is made up of at least seven players, the outline of the pitch is crudely traced by hand in the sand, and the referee is simply known as the sheikh.

Sand hockey “is part of our ancestral heritage”, said Rachid Laghouanm who heads an association that promotes traditional sports and games in M’hamid El Ghizlane. “It was handed down from father to son, and it is vital that it does not disappear,” he said. But like other popular or traditional games and sports, “nomad hockey”



M’HAMID EL RHOZLANE: Locals play hockey during the 15th International Nomad Festival in M’hamid El-Ghizlane in Morocco’s southern Sahara desert. — AFP

as it is often called, is fading into oblivion. “We are trying to create awareness about the game” by organizing competitions and encouraging players to join them, said Laghouanem. According to the UK-based Hockey Museum, which says it is “the first and only museum of hockey in the world”, sand hockey has been around as long as any form of hockey “has been in existence”.

Forms of sand hockey are also enjoyed in Ethiopia, where it is called Genna, and in Tunisia under the name of Oggraf, the museum says on its website. These and the Moroccan version, it says, “date back over hundreds of years and a number of these games are still thriving, almost unchanged, to this day”. Other experts believe that hockey’s precursor was a stick-and-ball game with origins as far back as ancient Greece and Egypt. Boudani says he does not know which came first, sand, field or ice hockey. But what is clear to him is that “the nomads had no means of knowing that Westerners had a similar game”. — AFP

Qatar’s Sheikh makes improved bid for Man Utd

MANCHESTER: Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani has made an improved bid to secure Manchester United from the Glazer family, a source close to the bid told AFP on Tuesday. Sheikh Jassim is in a bidding war with British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe after the pair emerged as the main contenders to buy the Premier League giants.

Ratcliffe appeared to be the front runner when a third round of bidding closed last month. INEOS chemical company founder Ratcliffe, a boyhood United fan, had reportedly placed a higher valuation on the club as he seeks a majority stake. However, his bid could allow for executive co-chairmen Avram and Joel Glazer to remain invested in the Red Devils - a move that would be deeply unpopular with supporters.

By contrast, Sheikh Jassim’s bid is for 100 percent control of the club and promises to wipe United’s £970 million (\$1.2 billion) debt. The Glazers, who have failed to win over the fans since they saddled the club with debt in a £790 million leveraged takeover in 2005, appeared ready to cash out at an enormous profit when they first invited external investment in November. However, they are reportedly holding out for a world record £6 billion fee for a football club before they agree to sell.

The Manchester United Supporters’ Trust (MUST) has called for a swift conclusion to the process to allow new owners to be in place for the summer transfer window. United’s fortunes on the field



MANCHESTER: Old Trafford stadium, home ground of Manchester United football team, is pictured in Manchester, northern England. — AFP

have slumped during the Glazers’ reign in charge. They have not won a Premier League title since former manager Alex Ferguson retired a decade ago. But United did end a six-year trophy drought earlier this season when they lifted the League Cup in Erik ten Hag’s first year as manager. — AFP