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\$10,000 trade-in support



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Court says 'not competent to rule on stopping polls'

Former MP denies being barred from elections

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Court of First Instance said on Thursday that it was not competent to rule on a motion demanding to halt the June 6 snap polls until the Constitutional Court rules on another petition demanding the reversal of a March 19 ruling that annulled the September 2022 election. The court said that halting the elections is a sovereign issue and the court has no

powers to rule on it, adding that the elections are set to go ahead until the Constitutional Court is scheduled to settle the destiny of the 2022 National Assembly.

The Constitutional Court on March 19 annulled the September 2022 elections and scrapped the 2022 Assembly. In addition, it reinstated the 2020 National Assembly which was dissolved by HH the Amir in August 2022. Illustrating its verdict, the court said that it found the Amiri decree that dissolved the

2020 Assembly had violated the constitution. As a result, it cancelled the entire election process held on September 29, 2022 and scrapped the National Assembly which was elected on that date.

It also revived the 2020 Assembly. But HH the Amir, on a recommendation by the government decided to dissolve the 2020 Assembly for the second time and called for the June 6 polls. However, six members of the scrapped 2022 Assembly later filed a petition demand-

ing that the Constitutional Court reverse its decision and re-install the 2022 Assembly. The Constitutional Court is scheduled to rule on the petition next Wednesday.

In the meantime, former MP Marzouk Al-Khalifa on Thursday denied that authorities barred him from running in the elections. Khalifa was released from jail on Monday after he was pardoned by HH the Amir from completing a two-year jail term for taking part in outlawed tribal primary elections.

Conflict zones missing out on climate funds

DUBAI: Conflict-plagued countries in the Middle East are among the most vulnerable to climate change but are almost entirely excluded from meaningful financing to mitigate its effects, aid groups warned Thursday. In a joint report focusing on Iraq, Syria and Yemen, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Norwegian Red Cross demanded greater assistance, saying the combined effects of climate change and armed conflict create an alarming cocktail of humanitarian woes.

The Climate Funds Update database, which collates information from 27 UN, World Bank and other multilateral funds, listed only 19 single-country projects in Iraq, Syria and Yemen that have been approved for funding as of January 2022, the report said. It noted the total amount disbursed to date is just \$20.6 million - less than 0.5 percent of the money spent on climate projects worldwide. "Current climate finance distributions almost entirely exclude the most fragile and unstable places," said the 56-page report. "It's clear from a humanitarian perspective that this must change," said Anne Bergh, secretary-general of the Norwegian Red Cross.

Grappling with an eight-year civil war, the University of Notre Dame's Global Adaptation Initiative ranks Yemen as one of the region's most climate-vulnerable countries, topped only by Sudan and Afghanistan. "In Yemen, it is not uncommon for people to flee their homes seeking safety from conflict only to then leave that new location because the land cannot be farmed" due to drought and water scarcity, the ICRC said in a statement.

The United Nations lists Iraq, still recovering from decades of conflict, as one of the five countries most impacted by some effects of climate change including drought. Syria is also at heightened risk following more than a decade of war that has battered the country's infrastructure. "Death, injury and destruction are the devastating and well-known effects of armed conflict," ICRC regional director Fabrizio Carboni said in a statement.

"Less well-known are the challenges residents must endure and overcome because of this terrible combination of conflict, climate change and environmental degradation." Climate finance is expected to be a key issue at

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Amir's Representative to partake in Arab Summit

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's Representative, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, accompanied by an official delegation, is scheduled to depart Kuwait on Friday (May 19) to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to head Kuwait's delegation at the 32nd Arab Summit in Jeddah.

The 32nd Arab Summit will kick off on Friday in Saudi Arabia's Jeddah city, amid delicate circum-

stances in which the Arab nation is trying to restore cohesion, reunion, and coordination. The League of Arab States is hoping for this session to be a fruitful summit that achieves its aspired goals. As for the Arab people, they look forward to this summit, especially with the return of Syria to the League of Arab States and after an official invitation for Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to attend the upcoming summit.

The Syrian participation decision in the Arab League meetings comes after an absence of 11 years, and the last Arab participation of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad was during the summit held in Sirt, Libya, in 2010. The Arab masses believe that this will

be the beginning of Arab reunification in line with the regional developments and international changes amid indications of reshaping the international order in general and the region in particular.

This hope stems from the speech of Arab League Secretary-General Ahmad Abul-Gheith, delivered on his behalf by the Assistant Secretary-General, Ambassador Hussam Zaki, during the preparatory meeting of the Economic and Social Council for the Arab Summit in Jeddah. During the meeting, he emphasized that the return of Syria to the Arab League and the positive atmosphere that the region is witnessing pushes to renew the determination to activate the principle of Arab solidarity. — KUNA (See Page 2)

Assad lands in Saudi for Arab Summit

JEDDAH: Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad arrived in Saudi Arabia Thursday, state media said, to join an Arab League summit for the first time in more than a decade of war. Assad "arrived at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah to participate in the Arab League summit" on Friday, Syrian state television reported. The

visit marks Assad's official return to the Arab fold after the body suspended Damascus in November 2011 over its bloody crackdown on protests, triggering a conflict that has killed more than 500,000 people and displaced millions.

Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries either severed or downgraded ties with Assad at the time - with Riyadh openly championing his ouster during the conflict. But earlier this month, the pan-Arab body welcomed Damascus back, with host Saudi Arabia inviting Assad to Friday's summit despite objections from other Arab countries.

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JEDDAH: This handout picture provided by the Saudi Press Agency SPA on May 18, 2023 shows Deputy Amir of Makkah Prince Badr Bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz (center) welcoming Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad (left) in Jeddah on the eve of the Arab League Summit. — AFP

GCC nations eye economic cooperation

JEDDAH: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) seeks to bolster economic and financial cooperation within the six-member bloc, its chief Jassem Al-Budaiwi said, citing an internal committee tasked with bringing such goals to fruition. Cooperation between GCC states has led to some notable "economic" achievements as of late, he said in a statement issued by the bloc after a meeting involving the aforementioned committee held in the Omani capital Muscat.

Trade within the Gulf Arab bloc skyrocketed to nearly \$105 billion in 2021, added the statement, while some 162,000 people own properties across

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JEDDAH: GCC economic and financial committee takes a group photo. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) seeks to bolster economic and financial cooperation within the six-member bloc. — KUNA

Prince Harry and Meghan in a 'near catastrophic' chase

LONDON: Competing claims surfaced Thursday over Prince Harry and his wife Meghan's purported involvement in a "near catastrophic car chase" with paparazzi in New York. A spokesperson for the couple drew global attention by announcing Wednesday that they had endured a "relentless" two-hour pursuit that resulted in "multiple near collisions involving other drivers".

The account of Tuesday's incident prompted comparisons to the circumstances around the Paris car crash in 1997 that killed Harry's mother, Princess Diana, which the prince blames on paparazzi pursuing her. However, New York police, the city's mayor and a taxi driver who briefly transported the couple have played down the danger and duration of the reported pursuit.

In an interview aired Thursday on Britain's ITV, one of the photographers involved in the drama alleged the couple's vehicle entourage were to blame for any danger. "It was very tense trying to keep up with the vehicles," said the photographer, who asked to remain anonymous. "They did a lot of blocking and there was a lot of different type of manoeuvres to stop what was happening."

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MANCHESTER: Britain's Meghan, Duchess of Sussex and Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, attend the annual One Young World Summit in this file photo. — AFP



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The 32nd Arab Summit: Common aspirations to face challenges

Arab world trying to restore cohesion, coordinate reunion



This file photo shows Arab leaders during the Arab Summit in Kuwait in 2009. — KUNA photos



This file photo shows Arab leaders during the Arab Summit in Saudi Arabia in 2018.

JEDDAH: The 32nd Arab Summit will kick off on Friday in Saudi Arabia's Jeddah city, amid delicate circumstances in which the Arab nation is trying to restore cohesion, reunion, and coordination. The League of Arab States is hoping for this session to be a fruitful summit that achieves its aspired goals. As for the Arab people, they look forward to this summit, especially with the return of Syria to the League of Arab States and after an official invitation for Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to attend the upcoming summit. The Syrian participation decision in the Arab League meetings comes after an absence of 11 years, and the last Arab participation of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad was during the summit

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During the meeting, he emphasized that the return of Syria to the Arab League and the positive atmosphere that the region is witnessing pushes to renew

the determination to activate the principle of Arab solidarity. The League of Arab States is considered the oldest international organization established after World War II and was formed on March 22, 1945. The headquarters of the League is located in Cairo, and it is an international regional organization based on cooperation among the member states.

This is confirmed by what has been stated in the preamble to its charter that the League was keen to support and consolidate Arab ties on the basis of respecting the independence and sovereignty of those countries. In its early years, the League of Arab States focused mainly on economic, cultural, and social programs. In 1959, it held the first Arab Petro-

leum Conference, and in 1964, the Arab Organization for Education, Culture, and Science was established, and in 1974, it recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of all Palestinians.

The Arab League supported Syria and Lebanon in their disputes with France and demanded the independence of Libya in 1945. It also supported Tunisia in its conflict with France in 1961. In the same year, it announced its opposition to the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine and demanded its independence. The Arab summits continued to be held normally and urgently, the last of which was held in Algeria last year, in addition to the economic summits. — KUNA



Jaber Armed Forces Hospital holds men's health symposium

KUWAIT: The Jaber Armed Forces Hospital organized the fourth Kuwait Men's Health Symposium and Workshop, with two specialists from Egypt and France in attendance.

Urology surgery and sterility consultant at the

hospital Dr Mohammad Al-Ghanim said that the workshop included lectures during which the latest developments in men's health were discussed, as far as ED (Erectile dysfunction) and Peyronie's disease were concerned.

ED can be due to advanced age, irregular sugar levels, hypertension, obesity, spine injuries, and patients who had prostatectomy due to cancer. Ghanim advised men to maintain an ideal weight, refrain from smoking, practice sports, eat healthy food, and visit the doctor when facing any problem.

Ghanim said the lectures were attended by doctors from the government and private sec-



tors as well as Kuwait board students. He said the latest surgeries and medications were discussed, and several surgeries were conducted during the workshop for patients with Peyronie's disease as well as patients who had problems with devices they had before.

The conferences and surgical workshops add to the doctors' experiences and polish their skills as they deal with world expertise. He appreciated the role of the hospital and Ministry of Defense in holding such conferences. Fourteen operations were conducted in three days, in addition to seven lectures.

Annual inflation rate rises by 3.69 percent

KUWAIT: Annual inflation in Kuwait has increased by 3.69 percent in April 2023 compared to the same month last year, numbers from the Central Statistical Bureau have shown.

The bureau uses the consumer index price (CIP) as a measure of inflation. The index, according to the document accompanying the data, is one of "the most important economic indicators to follow-up the business condition and the economic situation in Kuwait." It is also an essential element for following overall price movements in retail markets.

Monthly inflation rate has increased only by 0.16 percent in April 2023 compared to March 2023 as a result of the increase in prices of most goods, especially food stuff and education. The top three groups of goods which saw the highest increase were food and beverages, clothing and footwear and furnishing equipment and household maintenance items.

Prices of the food and beverage group increased by 0.35 percent because of an increase in prices of meat and poultry, fish and seafood, milk, cheese and eggs, oils and fats, fresh, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables, sugar and sugar products. Whereas the prices of other food items decreased. The prices of cereals and bread and beverages were stable.

Prices of clothing and footwear increased by 0.69 percent. Prices of the furnishing equipment and household maintenance group increased by 0.22 percent because of an increase in prices of furniture, upholstery, carpets, and home textiles.

CIP, according to the statistical bureau, is used as a measure of the changes in the purchasing power of the currency and to determine the interest rates and liquidity by the Central Bank of Kuwait. It also provides support to the adoption of appropriate economic decisions by the official bodies as well as for the preparation of national accounts at constant prices. —KUNA



LuLu Hypermarket holds Mango Mania promotion

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retail chain in the region, kicked-off its Mango Mania promotion, offering an enticing celebration of mangoes from May 17-23 at all its outlets in Kuwait.

The week-long festival of the 'king of fruits' promises an unforgettable experience for mango enthusiasts across the country. The LuLu Mango Mania was inaugurated at the LuLu Hypermarket's Quran outlet on May 17, by First Secretary, Political and Commerce, at the Indian Embassy, Smita Patil, in the presence of top management of LuLu Kuwait.

Held annually in the summer, the Mango Mania festival at LuLu Hypermarket is a much-awaited event among shoppers in Kuwait. With over 70 varieties of mangoes sourced from 10 different countries, including the classic Indian Alphonso, the Nam Dok Mai from Thailand and Philippines' own Manila mango or Carabao. The event is a veritable nirvana for mango lovers in Kuwait.

The event not only offers an extensive selection of fresh mangoes but also showcases the versatility of this tropical fruit through a wide range of mango-infused dishes, such as mango payasam, mango curries, mango cakes, pastries, mango halwa, and

much more. Spectacular displays of mangoes are a major highlight of the event, with LuLu Hypermarket transforming its outlets into a tropical paradise with captivating mango-themed creative displays and cutouts.

As part of the festivities, LuLu Hypermarket is offering amazing promotions and discounts on all varieties of mangoes. Shoppers can take advantage of special deals and offers, making it the perfect opportunity to stock up on their favorite mangoes and enjoy the sweet flavors of this beloved fruit.

One of the standout attractions of LuLu Mango

Mania is the creative cutouts of mango trees, adding a touch of whimsy and charm to the event. Visitors can capture memorable photos in front of these artistic installations, creating lasting memories of their Mango Mania experience.

LuLu Hypermarket invites all citizens and residents in Kuwait to join in the Mango Mania celebration and experience the joy of indulging in the king of fruits. Do not miss this exciting opportunity to explore the diverse world of mangoes and enjoy the delightful flavors and aromas that define this tropical treasure at very special prices.



Philippines will remain 'open to constructive dialogue with Kuwait'

KUWAIT/MANILA: The Philippine Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its thanks to the government of Kuwait for its hospitality to the Philippine delegation during its two-day visit to the country, stressing that the Philippines will remain open to constructive dialogue with Kuwait. The ministry said in a statement - emphasizing the friendly and historical relations between the Republic of the Philippines and the State of Kuwait. The two countries engaged in bilateral talks at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kuwait from May 16 to 17, 2023.

The Philippine delegation included some senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Migrant Workers, in addition to its attached agency, the Department of Foreign Workers Welfare. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Migrant Workers assured their nationals in Kuwait, as well as their families, of the government's full support and assistance.

During the official talks, the Philippine delegation expressed its full respect for Kuwaiti laws and deep appreciation for the hospitality of the government and people of Kuwait to more than 200,000 Filipino workers who consider Kuwait their second home. On matters related to the services provided to Filipino workers, the delegation said that "actions taken by the Philippine Embassy and the Philippine government are only to ensure the safety of our citizens," adding that "providing protection to citizens of any country abroad is a well-established duty of consular offices under international law and conventions."

Local

Ministry of Health inaugurates advanced diabetic foot center

Center uses pressurized oxygen to treat wounds



KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadi (center) poses for a photo with officials and staff in front of the Jaber Center for the Treatment of Diabetic Foot Thursday. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadi on Thursday inaugurated the Jaber Center for the Treatment of Diabetic Foot with Pressurized Oxygen at Jaber Hospital. The minister said the center is an important addition to specialized health services and is equipped with all the necessary devices to receive, diagnose, and treat diseases and wounds related to cases of diabetic foot. It will receive cases that can be treated using compressed oxygen devices.

Dr Al-Awadi said in a press statement, that the center falls within the framework of providing

high-quality health care to citizens. He explained that the center, which has an area of about 320 square meters, includes three compressed oxygen therapy devices, two single-digit devices, and a device that can accommodate six, in addition to providing all the necessary needs for the operations according to modern scientific foundations.

The head of Surgery Department at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital Dr Suleiman Al-Mazidi, said pressurized oxygen systems are used to treat many diseases, including diabetic injuries, damaged tissue, bone

infections, burns, skin restoration, air or gas embolism, anemia, blood poisoning and clogged arteries.

The center has many capabilities, as it has the Tcpo2 system to diagnose diabetic foot patients before rendering the required medical care using the pressurized oxygen systems. As the level of oxygen pressure is measured through the skin - determining the blood vessel damage percentage and evaluating wound healing in diabetic foot patients. The center can receive up to 24 patients per day for treatment with pressurized oxygen systems.



News in Brief

Co-ops to pay half their zakat to Kuwaiti debtors

KUWAIT: Cooperative societies will pay 50 per cent of their zakat to Kuwaiti debtors, Minister of Social Affairs and Women and Childhood Mai Al-Baghli announced in a ministerial decision on Thursday. The decision stipulates that 50 percent of the co-op's Zakat will be handed over to the debtors' committee formed by the Ministry of Social Affairs with the competent concerned authorities. The rest of the amount will be handed over to the Zakat House and may not be transferred to other entities or individuals. — KUNA

Seminar recommends network to protect human rights activists

KUWAIT: The participants of a regional consultation seminar on violence against women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa recommended launching a network to protect activists who defend basic human rights in accordance with the national and international references of each country. The recommendation came in a speech by Head of the Kuwaiti Union of Women's Associations (KUWA) Sheikha Fadia Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah at a press conference on Thursday following the end of the seminar. The seminar was held in cooperation with the Geneva Institute for Human Rights and the United Nations on violence against women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa. — KUNA

Interest-free installments for goods under KD 5,000

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Aiban issued a decision Thursday on regulations for installments of products and services. According to the decision, items valued at KD 5,000 or less must be sold in installments for the same price as the advertised cash price. Furthermore, the installments must be paid in equal monthly payments over a period not exceeding three years. Loaners must also register in the credit information network within six months of the issuance of the decision. The decision also stipulates that monthly installments for employees can't be set at more than 40 percent of their net monthly salary and at no more than 30 percent of the pension for retirees. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Officials and participants take a group photo at Kuwait National Museum during an event held on Thursday on the occasion of International Museum Day. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

NCCAL marks International Museum Day

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) held an event on Thursday, on the occasion of International Museum Day, with the participation of the Kuwait Heritage Society, the International Council of Museums in Kuwait (ICOM), the Museum of the National Bank of Kuwait, and the Quttainah Medical Museum at the Kuwait National Museum.

During her speech, Siham Al-Dawas Al-Azmi, Assistant Secretary-General for the Antiquities and Museums Sector at NCCAL, said, "Today's event was held because of its great importance to the culture of peoples and the protection of our heritage. The National Council, at the Department of Antiquities, aims to celebrate this day to enhance the spirit of awareness and culture and its role in developing society, preserving and disseminating heritage, and learning to use the latest means and technologies to preserve these documents so as not to lose them."

Sundus Al-Rashed, President of ICOM Kuwait, stated that ICOM celebrates International Museum Day, which is an international day held annually on May 18. It is coordinated by the International Council of Museums since 1977. "Each year, the International Museum Day has a specific theme; this



Folio of a Holy Quran written in neat Al-Nashk script dating back to 13 AD displayed at Kuwait National Museum.

year it will be about sustainability and wellbeing." "Here in Kuwait, we are focusing on the sustainability of heritage, so the exhibition displayed objects from the Islamic heritage, and we have a panel discussion about different subjects regarding sustainability and wellbeing and how these affect humans," she pointed out.

She affirmed that museums are shaping societies. They contribute to people's lives. The exhibition at the Kuwait National Museum will be open to the public until May 25th. Fahad Al-Abduljalil, president of the Kuwait Heritage Society, indicated that International Museum Day is celebrated for the second year in a row, adding, "Today's exhibition contains rare pieces. On this occasion, we aim to spread the museum's culture and encourage the participants to



A collection of daggers of different sizes with Islamic inscriptions on them, dating back to the Persian, Ghajar and Mughal eras displayed at Kuwait National Museum in Kuwait City on May 18, 2023.

take interest in the museum's sector."

"To get acquainted with the museum sector, which today has become a science itself, it needs to train Kuwaiti youth cadres to join this sector in terms of museum security systems, piece restoration, examination of artifacts, and the best way to display the pieces," he said. Abduljalil called on the private sector to establish more museums. "We are pleased that NBK has started in this regard by establishing a museum and activating the role of the private sector, which has a major role in the modern history of Kuwait. We are also pleased that the Quttainah Medical Center has its own museum, and this diversity in the participants indicates that there is an awareness of the establishment of museums," Abduljalil.

Azerbaijani envoy visits Kuwait Times, Kuwait News offices

KUWAIT: The Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Emil Karimov visited the Kuwait Times and Kuwait News offices on Thursday.

He met Public Relations and CSR Manager Jana Al-Naqeeb, Managing Editor Mustafa Qamhiya and Deputy Managing Editor Faten Omar.

During the meeting, Ambassador Karimov said that 22,000 Kuwaitis visited Azerbaijan last year, noting that there are direct flights between the two countries through Kuwait Airways, Jazeera Airways, and Azerbaijan Airlines.

The meeting tackled various topics of mutual interest to Azerbaijan and Kuwait, including economy, tourism, health, education and other issues.

Kuwait Times and Kuwait News staff took the ambassador on a tour of various departments at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, including the newsroom, printing press, studio and the artistic coworking space of the paper.



(From left) Faten Omar, Jana Al-Naqeeb, Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan Emil Karimov, Azerbaijani Consul Merdawood Sultanov and Mustafa Qamhiya. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



(From left) Azerbaijani Consul Merdawood Sultanov and Ambassador Emil Karimov.



(From left) Ambassador Emil Karimov, Consul Merdawood Sultanov and Jana Al-Naqeeb view Kuwait Times' archives.



Ambassador Emil Karimov (center) and Consul Merdawood Sultanov (center back) is accompanied by Kuwait Times and Kuwait News staff during a tour.



(From left) Jana Al-Naqeeb, Consul Merdawood Sultanov, Ambassador Emil Karimov, Mustafa Qamhiya and Faten Omar pose for a photo in front of the printing press.



Ambassador Emil Karimov.

News in Brief

5 UK universities
on MoE black list

KUWAIT: The Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education, Dr Hamad Al-Adwani, suspended the enrollment of Kuwaiti students in five British universities. The decision stipulated the suspension of the registration and enrollment of Kuwaiti students at all undergraduate and postgraduate levels, in all disciplines at the University of Salford, De Mont Fort University, and Brunel University London. The decision also stipulated the suspension of enrollment and registration of Kuwaiti students in a bachelor's degree in electronic engineering and electrical engineering at the University of Central Lancashire and a bachelor's degree in pharmacy at the University of Brighton. The decision does not apply to students who are actually enrolled and continuing to study, nor does it apply to those who received an approved acceptance from the Cultural Office before the decision was issued.

Campers ordered
away from Adira

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Army has renewed calls for campers, hunters and shepherds to stay away from the Al-Adira Range area in northwest Kuwait in order to ensure everyone's safety. Regular shootings with live ammunition are carried out at the aforementioned area throughout the year, the army said in a statement Thursday.

Fire breaks out
in school, mall

KUWAIT: A limited fire broke out in a school theater in the Jaber Al-Ali area on Thursday, the Public Relations and Media Department of the General Fire Force said in a statement. Firefighting teams were able to control the fire without any injuries. Also this week, fire crews controlled a fire that broke out in the basement of a shopping mall in Uqaila. There were no reported injuries.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: A rooftop excavator tears down a residential building. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait Post to deliver parcels to customers' door

Optional service costs 'symbolic' fee: Ministry of Communication

KUWAIT: People in Kuwait now have the option to receive their parcels from Kuwait Post at their doorstep. Official speaker for the Ministry of Communication, Dr Ahmed Al-Husseini, announced that the ministry has launched a service allowing customers to send and receive their postal shipments to and from their residence.

The announcement comes as Kuwait Post works towards updating its services, which has been reportedly in a state of paralysis for years. According to local media, parcels had piled up in previous years to the point where officials were asked to use their personal vehicles for delivery. In efforts to update its facilities, the Ministry of Transportation opened a new sorting center in Masayel area in 2021 meant to serve all areas across the country.

Customers can use the new delivery service for a

"symbolic" price, said Husseini. The price will be in addition to pre-clearance and customs fees, he said. Kuwait Post's website provides a calculator for anyone looking to get a quick shipping quote. Receiving and delivery charges, according to the website, will be free if the parcel is delayed for over four hours from the time of delivery promised by Kuwait Post.

How the new service will work

Customers will receive a text message from Kuwait Post alerting them of the arrival of their parcel. They can then go to the Kuwait Post website <https://kuwaitpost.moc.gov.kw> where they will be given the option to have the parcel delivered to their home for a fee or pick it up at the postal office. If the customer does not respond to the message within three working days, the parcel will be trans-

ferred to the appropriate postal center according to the customer's address.

The service will go live in the coming days after coordination with the Kuwait Customs, said Husseini. The ministry has also facilitated the payment process, which can be completed by logging onto the site and following the instructions to make a payment. Customers can also track their parcels through the website, or through text messages sent by Kuwait Post to customers. The messages inform customers of the status of the shipment and the procedures needed to clear customs and receive it.

Husseini urged customers to protect themselves from theft and data breach by verifying the source of the message. They can do so by logging in to the website (<https://kuwaitpost.moc.gov.kw>) before responding to the message or by calling 1880545.



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International Women's Group tours KOC exhibition

KUWAIT: A delegation from the International Women's Group (IWG), headed by Ghada Shawky, President of IWG and wife of the ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, paid a field visit to Ahmad Al-Jaber Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) Exhibition in Ahmadi on Sunday, May 14, 2023.

An organized tour was arranged where members were received by Rawan Al-Jaber and Ayah Dashti. Members were given an overview of the exhibition's history since its inception, named after HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah whose reign saw the birth of the oil industry.

While visiting the galleries, members enjoyed an overview that covered themes of oil geology, exploration, extraction and exportation, including Kuwaiti history and the devastating environmental consequences of burning oil wells during the invasion. A 15-minute 4D film, with pyrotechnics and surround sound was displayed for the guests, who were astounded by the enormous achievement of



extinguishing the fire of more than 700 oil wells in 1991, in merely 9 months.

At the end of the visit, Shawky presented an honorary shield on behalf of the group to express gratitude for the fruitful visit to the KOC Exhibition.





XIAN: Chinese President Xi Jinping arrives for the welcome ceremony for the China-Central Asia summit in Xian, Shaanxi province on May 18, 2023. — AFP

Xi hosts Central Asian leaders

Beijing pushes to fill vacuum left in former Soviet states by Russia's war in Ukraine

XIAN: Chinese President Xi Jinping will host a Central Asian summit on Thursday, seeking to build regional influence as G7 leaders hold a rival gathering in Japan. Held in the ancient Chinese city of Xi'an, the historic eastern end of the Silk Road that linked China to Europe through Central Asia, this week's summit is of "milestone significance", Beijing has said.

It is the first of its kind since the establishment of formal relations 31 years ago. It comes as Beijing pushes to fill the vacuum left in former Soviet states by Russia's war in Ukraine—and as Xi positions himself as a global statesman keen

to expand China's reach far beyond its borders.

"Xi will position himself as a leader that can promote global development and peace," Zhiqun Zhu, a Professor of International Relations and Political Science at Bucknell University, told AFP. The summit also takes place at the same time as a meeting of G7 in Hiroshima, which will likely focus on efforts to "push back China's growing influence around the world", Zhu said.

"The diplomatic and strategic significance cannot be underestimated," he said. Beijing says trade with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan reached \$70 billion in 2022

and expanded 22 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2023.

Central Asia has also become key to China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, a defining geopolitical project for President Xi Jinping. China, the world's second-largest energy consumer, has invested billions of dollars to tap natural gas reserves in Central Asia and rail links connecting China to Europe criss-cross the region.

And analysts told AFP this week's summit is likely to see efforts to push ahead with vast transport links and pipelines, including a long-stalled \$6 billion China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway and an expansion of the Central Asia-to-China gas pipeline.

Speaking in a Wednesday meeting with Xi, Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev hailed the "unique scope" of that project. And in Thursday talks, Xi told Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov that China was "willing to work with Kyrgyzstan to build a community of good neighborliness, friendship, shared prosperity, and a shared future".

He is set to meet with other regional leaders later, before a welcoming ceremony in the evening. A press event will then be held on Friday morning—expected to be attended by all six presidents—at which a joint statement is expected to be released. — AFP

Fresh rescue efforts as Italy counts cost of deadly floods

CESENA: Rescue workers searched Thursday for people still trapped by floodwaters in northeast Italy as more residents were evacuated after downpours which killed nine people and devastated homes and farms. Residents waded through dirty water or reclaimed what they could from sodden houses in towns across the wealthy Emilia Romagna region, famed for its historic cities and prized gastronomy.

As mammoth clean-up efforts got underway in some areas, authorities said electricity had been partly restored, but some 27,000 people were still in the dark. Nearly two dozen rivers and streams flooded across the southeast of the low-lying region following heavy rain earlier this week, submerging entire neighbourhoods and farmland, and damaging 400 roads.

Agricultural lobby Coldiretti said Thursday that more than 5,000 farms were under water, with drowned animals and tens of thousands of hectares of vineyards, fruit trees, vegetables and grain flooded.

As the water receded, residents were left cleaning homes and streets thick with mud and filled with debris. "I've lived here since 1979, I've seen floods go by, but I've never seen anything like that," Edoardo Amadori, a resident of the city of Cesena, told AFP on Wednesday.

Some of the over 10,000 people evacuated were being allowed to return home, though au-

thorities in Ravenna issued an immediate evacuation order early Thursday morning for three more villages threatened by floods.

Wall of water

The mayor of Ravenna, Michele De Pascale, announced that residents of about a half dozen towns could return, but warned them "to exercise the utmost caution". Cracks in river embankments still posed a risk to other areas, which were being closely monitored, he said.

The dead included a couple believed to have been hit by a wall of water as they went to check on their aromatic herb farm. The body of the woman, in her 60s, was pulled 20 kilometres (12.5 miles) by rushing waters to the beach in Cesenatico, according to SkyTG24.

There was little significant rainfall on Thursday and only light rain expected Friday, though authorities said the high level alert for rivers remained. Two people died in the same region earlier this month after two days of almost continuous rain.

"We had an estimated two billion (euros) of damages two weeks ago... the ground no longer absorbs anything," Stefano Bonaccini, president of the Emilia Romagna region, told La7 television channel late Wednesday.

"When we have six months of rain in 36 hours, falling where there had already been record rain two weeks ago, there is no territory that can hold out."

'Shocking disaster'

On Thursday Bonaccini compared the floods to the earthquake that hit the region on May 20, 2012, almost 11 years ago to the day. Fixing the damage would be "a gigantic undertaking",

Thailand," he said. While the coalition has a large enough majority to govern, to secure the PM's job it has to muster a majority across both houses—including the Senate, whose 250 members were handpicked by the last junta.

MFP's determination to amend Thailand's tough laws against insulting King Maha Vajiralongkorn has spooked the royalist-military conservative establishment. A number of senators have already said they will vote against Pita and on Wednesday a potential route around their opposition closed as the Bhumjaithai party said it would not support him. The coalition pact is 63 seats shy of the 376 votes it needs for a majority across both houses. But Pita played down the challenges.

"I'm not worried about setting up the government. I'm confident it will happen. I have a clear road map and objectives," he said. Pita said the eight coalition parties had committed to finding middle ground on the issue of lese-majeste reform—a significant development in itself, given that for many years even discussing the topic was off-limits.

Royal defamation convictions carry a jail term of up to 15 years. MFP says it wants to reduce this maximum and to restrict who can bring alle-



MASSA LOMBARDA: Residents sit in a dinghy during rescuing operations by firefighters in Massa Lombarda, a small village about 10 kilometers from Imola, after heavy rains have caused major floodings in central Italy. — AFP

he said, and the region launched a fundraising effort. Bonaccini said Ferrari, the luxury car-maker whose Maranello base is not far from the flooded areas, had pledged one million euros. The flooding caused the cancellation of Sunday's Formula One Emilia Romagna Grand Prix in Imola.

Italy's armed forces and the coastguard joined the rescue effort, deploying helicopters to lift desperate residents from their homes and inflatable boats to reach houses surrounded on all sides by water. Pope Francis offered his prayers for those affected and thanked everyone on the ground helping those hit by the "shocking disaster".

Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida said Wednesday that the government could not yet quantify the overall damage to the region while vast areas were still flooded. — AFP



BANGKOK: Move Forward Party leader and prime ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat (2L) gives a press conference with potential coalition partners in Bangkok on May 18, 2023, after his party secured the most seats in Thailand's general election. — AFP

gations—currently anyone can file a complaint to police. Sunday's election was the first since mass youth-led pro-democracy protests in Bangkok broke a long-held taboo by demanding curbs to the king's power and spending. — AFP

Death toll in Nigeria clashes rises to 85

JOS: The death toll rose to 85 from clashes between herders and farmers in central Nigeria that also displaced thousands of villagers, local officials said Thursday. The clashes broke out Monday in Plateau State that straddles the divide between Nigeria's mostly Muslim north and mainly Christian south, and which has struggled with ethnic and religious violence for years.

Thirty people were previously reported to have died. It was unclear what prompted the violence, but tit-for-tat killings between herders and farmers often spiral into village raids by heavily armed gangs.

"Eighty-five bodies (were) recovered," the chairman of the local government council Daput Minister Daniel told AFP in Mangu district. He said some people had been wounded, without giving a number, while "several houses have been destroyed and many people are now displaced."

Joseph Gwankat, a community leader from the local Mvaghavul Development Association, confirmed the toll of 85 to AFP. Gwankat said that 57 people were injured in the attacks and were being treated in hospital. There was no other confirmation of that figure.

The State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), which visited the area on Wednesday, said that "thousands of people" were displaced by the attacks. "We could see houses that were still burning," Juni Bala, director of search and rescue at SEMA, told AFP. "We couldn't go further because (the) youth were angry."

"The situation on the ground is very bad. Children and women by (the) thousands were moving on the road," he said. "They need shelter, food, beddings, non-food items."

Suspects arrested

Police said that five people had been arrested in connection with the violence. "Heavy security presence has been deployed," police spokesman Alfred Alabo said. "So far calm has been restored to the general area." The Nigerian branch of rights group Amnesty International condemned the violence. "These deplorable attacks took place at a time when the affected farming communities in Mangu were cultivating their farms and demonstrate complete disregard for human life," Amnesty Nigeria tweeted.

"The Nigerian authorities must do more to protect the people and bring the actual perpetrators of these attacks to justice." In April, nearly 50 people were killed when gunmen attacked a village in neighbouring Benue State, in violence local officials blamed on herdsmen. — AFP

Thai oppn leader confident of forming govt

BANGKOK: The head of Thailand's progressive Move Forward Party said Thursday he was confident of becoming prime minister despite junta-appointed senators saying they will block his appointment. MFP stunned observers by emerging as the largest party at Sunday's election, which saw a record turnout deliver a thumping defeat for army-linked parties who had run the kingdom for nearly a decade.

Two more small parties joined the new coalition formed by MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat, giving it 313 out of 500 seats in the lower house. "We have a lot of momentum, my coalition is taking shape," the Harvard-educated, 42-year-old Pita told reporters in Bangkok on Thursday.

"All parties support me, as the Move Forward Party leader, to become the 30th prime minister of

International

Jerusalem tensions run high ahead of far-right Zionist rally

Hamas condemns campaign of Zionist occupation against Palestinians

JERUSALEM: Jerusalem police and residents were bracing for extremist ministers and their supporters to rally on Thursday in an annual flag-waving march commemorating Zionist entity's capture of the Old City.

Palestinians in Jerusalem, who are forced to close their shops and are banned from the social hub of Damascus Gate to make way for the marchers, view the parade as a provocative move.

On the eve of the march, Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the "fateful day in 1967 when we liberated Jerusalem and reunited it."

Two of his extreme-right cabinet members, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, are expected to attend the rally. Following the 1967 Six-Day War, Zionist entity annexed east Jerusalem and its Old City in a move never recognized by the international community.

Netanyahu said "we are also doing this against all the threats around us," days into a ceasefire which ended deadly cross-border fighting with Islamic Jihad militants in Gaza. Thirty-three people including multiple civilians were killed in the blockaded Palestinian enclave and two in Zionist entity, a citizen and a Gazan laborer.

Militant group Hamas which rules the coastal territory said ahead of the march it "condemns the campaign of the Zionist occupation against our Palestinian people in occupied Jerusalem". Two years ago, after weeks of violence in Jerusalem in which scores of Palestinians were wounded, a war between Hamas and Zionist entity erupted during the march. Some 2,500 police officers are being drawn in to secure the march, which begins

in the western part of the city at 4:00 pm (1300 GMT). Last year, there were several isolated incidents of violence around the rally.

Clashes broke out between Zionist forces and Palestinians elsewhere in east Jerusalem, with the Palestinian Red Crescent saying 79 Palestinians were injured in and around the Old City. On Thursday morning, an AFP journalist saw tourist groups walking through the historic gateway, while Palestinians sold bread from a stall and opened their shops before the afternoon shutdown. Inside the Old City, Palestinian resident Abu al-Abed, 72, said he wanted "to go home". The marchers "are harmful, they're walking and start to hit the doors of the shops and the doors of our houses," he told AFP.

Transport Minister Miri Regev, from Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, was among Zionists waving flags at Damascus Gate hours before the official rally.

A spokesman for Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas warned Zionist entity "against insisting on organizing the provocative flag march". Pushing ahead with the parade "confirms the acquiescence of the Zionist government to Jewish extremists", spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said Wednesday. Since last year's rally, Zionist leadership has taken a marked shift to the far-right. Ben-Gvir, the country's national security minister who is expected to attend, was convicted in 2007 of supporting a terrorist group and inciting racism. Far-right ally Smotrich holds the finance portfolio along with some powers in the occupied West Bank, and also has a history of inflammatory remarks about Palestinians. — AFP



JERUSALEM: Zionist left wing and international activists block a road from the occupied West Bank to Jerusalem to prevent Zionist settlers from reaching an annual far-right march in Jerusalem, on May 18, 2023. — AFP

Erdogan's rival vows to send back migrants

ANKARA: Turkey's opposition leader vowed Thursday to send back millions of migrants in a strident message aimed at winning the backing of an ultra-nationalist who helped push last weekend's presidential vote to a runoff. Secular opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu delivered his first public address since a landmark election Sunday in which he came in almost five points behind President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Kilicdaroglu's performance was the opposition's best of the Turkish leader's two-decade rule. But it fell short of expectations set by pre-election polling and left the opposition visibly depressed. The 74-year-old has since revamped his campaign team and toughened his message to win over Turkey's right-wing voters in the May 28 runoff.

He also plans to meet Sinan Ogan — a far-right figure who picked up 5.2 percent of the vote and is still weighing his endorsement. Kilicdaroglu tried Thursday to toughen his message considerably from the more inclusive tone he set in the first stage of the campaign.

"Erdogan, you did not protect the borders and honor of the country," the former civil servant said. "You have deliberately brought more than

10 million refugees to this country... As soon as I come to power, I will send all the refugees home." Ogan has said he will only back a candidate who cracks down on migrants and fights "terrorism" — a code word in Turkey for Kurdish militants.

Erdogan and his Islamic-rooted party were lionized across swathes of the Muslim world for their more embracing stance towards those fleeing conflicts in countries such as Syria. Turkey's five-million-strong refugee and migrant population became the world's largest in the past decade.

A separate 2016 deal between Ankara and the European Union helped stem the continent's migrant crisis by allowing those trying to reach Western Europe to settle in Turkey. Turkey won billions of euros in funding from Brussels for the programme. But an economic crisis that gathered pace as the election neared sent anti-migrant sentiment soaring.

Erdogan's government has tried to find a middle ground. Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said on Thursday that Turkey had already sent more than half a million Syrians back. "We are not going to make Turkey into a refugee warehouse, and we have not done so to date. But the Syrians are our brothers," Soylu said.

"We cannot send them to their deaths. And we have not. Tayyip Erdogan doesn't want to be remembered as a leader who sent Syrians to their deaths." — AFP

Four kids found alive in Amazon after plane crash

BOGOTA: Four Indigenous children, including an 11-month-old baby, have been found alive in the dense Colombian Amazon after a plane crash more than two weeks ago, President Gustavo Petro said Wednesday, declaring "joy for the country."

Petro shared the news on Twitter, saying the children were discovered after "arduous search efforts" by the military. Authorities had deployed more than 100 soldiers with sniffer dogs to search for the minors who were traveling in an airplane that crashed on May 1, killing three adults.

Rescuers believe the children — who in addition to the 11-month-old included a 13, 9, and 4 year old — have been wandering through the jungle in the southern Caqueta department since the crash.

Earlier Wednesday, the armed forces said that search efforts intensified after rescuers came across a "shelter built in an improvised way with sticks and branches," leading them to believe there were survivors.

In photographs released by the armed forces, scissors and a hair tie could be seen among branches on the jungle floor.

Previously, a baby's drinking bottle and a half-eaten piece of fruit had been found. On Monday and Tuesday, soldiers found the bodies of the pilot and two adults who



SOLANO: A handout picture released by the Colombian army shows a soldier with a dog checking a pair of scissors found in the forest in a rural area of the municipality of Solano, department of Caqueta, Colombia. — AFP

had been flying from a jungle location to San Jose del Guaviare, one of the main cities in Colombia's Amazon rainforest.

One of the dead passengers, Ranoque Mucutuy, was the mother of the four children, who are from the Huitoto ethnicity.

Inaccessible region

Giant trees that can grow up to 40 meters tall, wild animals and heavy rainfall made the "Operation Hope" search difficult. Three helicopters have been used to help, one of which blasted out a recorded message from the children's grandmother

in the Huitoto language telling them to stop moving through the jungle. Authorities have not indicated what caused the plane crash. The pilot had reported problems with the engine just minutes before the airplane disappeared from radars, Colombia's disaster response body said.

It is a region with few roads that is also difficult to access by river, so airplane transport is common. The Huitoto, also spelled Witoto, are known for living in harmony with the remote jungle, and for their hunting, fishing and gathering skills which may have helped the children to survive. — AFP

Ukraine weathers 'unprecedented' Russian missiles

KYIV: Ukraine said Thursday it had downed nearly an entire barrage of Russian missiles overnight, the latest in an "unprecedented" wave of aerial attacks on the capital Kyiv. The defense ministry said Russian forces had launched 30 cruise missiles from land, sea and air, targeting several regions and killing one person in Odesa. The military said its air defense units had destroyed 29 of the cruise missiles and shot down four drones.

"A series of air attacks on Kyiv, unprecedented in their power, intensity and variety, is continuing," said Serhii Popko, head of Kyiv's civil and military admin-

istration. The attack follows other recent barrages in which Ukraine claimed to have downed several advanced Russian Kinzhal missiles. The United States also confirmed that one of its Patriot air defense systems supplied to Kyiv had been damaged, following claims by Russia its forces had fully destroyed one of the advanced systems.

In Ukraine's southern port city of Odesa, one person was killed and two were wounded after a missile hit industrial infrastructure, the military said. In Kyiv, officials reported explosions in the Desnyanskyi district and said a fire had broken out at a business in the Darnytskyi neighborhood as a result of falling debris. The military also reported "cruise missile" attacks in the central Vinnytsia region, while local media reported explosions in Khmelnytskyi, about 100 kilometers further west. G7 leaders meanwhile arrived in Hiroshima in Japan to weigh tighter sanctions on Russia, surrounded by reminders about the harrowing cost of war. — AFP

finance ahead of the event into regions affected by conflict.

COP28 offers an opportunity to talk to climate finance providers, including development banks such as the World Bank as well as humanitarian bodies, she said. "We do want to see a big step forward at COP28," potentially in the "form of a global pact that all these actors would sign up to", de Jong said. The proposed pact "would include at least a couple of solutions" such as streamlining applications and enabling more local projects rather than relying on government-driven schemes, she added. — AFP

that Al-Budaiwi affirmed the partnership's significance during a meeting with the US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Michael Alan Ratney at the secretariat's headquarters in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

Al-Budaiwi and Ratney discussed preparations for joint commissions' meetings, namely the joint task team, and regional issues of joint concern. The GCC chief congratulated Ratney on his recent appointment as Washington's ambassador in Riyadh. Al-Budaiwi heads the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council that comprises Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman. The GCC countries that joined hands to establish the regional bloc in early 80s of the past century in the shadow of a major war between Iran and Iraq are either close friends to the US or bonded with Washington with defense treaties. — KUNA

Prince Harry and Meghan in a 'near...'

Continued from Page 1

"Their driver was making it a catastrophic experience." He added: Harry and Meghan's driver "wanted to drive fast, cut through lanes and do this and do that, go the wrong way". The episode occurred after Harry, 38, and Meghan, 41, attended an awards ceremony in the US financial capital with Meghan's mother Doria Ragland. A New York police spokesperson said photographers made the group's transport "challenging", but there were "no reported collisions, summonses, injuries, or arrests".

Assad lands in Saudi for...

Continued from Page 1

Syrian pro-government newspaper al-Watan said Assad will likely meet "a number of leaders in bilateral meetings" Thursday evening and Friday morning. The last Arab League summit Assad attended was in 2010 in Libya.

Regional capitals had gradually been warming to Assad as he has held onto power and clawed back lost territory with crucial support from Iran and Russia. In 2018, the United Arab Emirates re-established ties with Syria and has been leading the charge to reintegrate Damascus into the Arab fold. Arab outreach to Assad picked up pace after a deadly earthquake struck Syria and Turkey on February 6. A decision in March by Saudi Arabia and Damascus backer Iran to resume ties has also shifted the Middle Eastern political landscape. Less than two weeks later, Saudi Arabia announced it had begun talks on resuming consular services with Iran ally Syria.

Officials at several recent meetings have said Arab leadership is needed to find a settlement to the conflict.

The fate of millions of Syrian refugees - many of them living in neighboring Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon - are among some states' main concerns. Several Arab countries are also seeking increased security cooperation with Syria, which critics say has turned

The New York Post quoted a source as saying that there were no emergency calls to police about the incident and that the purported chase "definitely wasn't two hours". But Chris Sanchez, a member of the couple's security team, told CNN that the pursuit was alarming and dangerous. "I have never seen, experienced anything like this," he said. "What we were dealing with was very chaotic."

The public were in jeopardy at several points. It could have been fatal." Harry, the younger son of King Charles III, has long had a difficult relationship with the media and in recent years has launched multiple ongoing lawsuits in Britain against outlets alleging privacy breaches. The couple relocated to North America after quitting royal duties in early 2020, in part citing press intrusion for the decision. — AFP



This handout picture provided by the Saudi Press Agency SPA on May 18, 2023 shows Deputy Amir of Makkah Prince Badr bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz (R) receiving Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad in Jeddah. — AFP

into a narco-state with a \$10 billion captagon industry, mostly trafficked to the Gulf.

Assad is hoping full normalization of ties with wealthy Gulf monarchies and other Arab states will help finance reconstruction. Following a preparatory meeting in Jeddah on Wednesday, Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad said "reconstruction will facilitate (refugee) returns, and we welcome any Arab role in this field." While Syria's front lines have mostly quietened, large parts of the north remain outside government control, and no political solution to the conflict is in sight. — AFP

Conflict zones missing out on...

Continued from Page 1

upcoming UN climate talks, which will be held in the United Arab Emirates' business hub of Dubai in November and December. Helena de Jong, a senior adviser with the UAE's COP28 team, said she was looking into ways to accelerate climate action and

GCC nations eye economic...

Continued from Page 1

the region, it showed. He went on to emphasize that GCC member states will collectively employ all tools at their disposal in a bid to propel economic cooperation to greater levels.

In another development, Al-Budaiwi on Thursday affirmed that the Gulf-US partnership is pivotal for serving mutual interests and beefing up regional security. The GCC Secretariat General said in a statement

International

New Zealand police charge man with arson over hostel fire

Fire damage inside was 'extensive' with burnt debris reaching as high as one metre

WELLINGTON: New Zealand police charged a man with arson Thursday over a hostel fire that killed at least six people in the country's capital. The man will face Wellington District Court on Friday, police said, adding that further "more serious charges" in relation to the deaths have not been ruled out. "The investigation is ongoing," they said.

Police said they were not seeking anyone else in relation to the blaze, which engulfed the four-storey, 92-room hostel in the early hours of Tuesday. Hours before announcing they had arrested and charged the man, police removed the first two bodies from the charred interior of the Loafers Lodge hostel.

As a white car drove the remains away from the building in central Wellington, emergency workers bowed their heads and a man and a woman chanted in a mark of respect. Firefighters said they had located six bodies within the hostel but a collapsed roof on the top floor made it impossible to search everywhere. Police say the toll may rise.

The scale of the fire shocked the country, with Prime Minister Chris Hipkins describing it at the time as an "absolute tragedy" while promising a thorough investigation. Some survivors crawled through smoke in the dark of night to escape the fire, while others were rescued from the rooftop by firefighters using ladder trucks. The remains of at least four of those killed still lie in the charred building.

'Felt like a cigarette'

A police reconnaissance team has been searching for evidence and trying to locate the dead since the building was declared safe for them to enter on Wednesday. Fire damage inside was "extensive", police said earlier, with burnt debris reaching as high as one metre (three feet). One of the survivors, Simon Hanify, told AFP he only escaped by chance. Smoke alarms in the building often went off without reason, he said.

"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 said on Wednesday. "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.'" The Loafers Lodge advertised itself as a "convenient and affordable" accommodation, with laundry, kitchen facilities and a lock on each floor.

It was used as a cheap home by a mix of long- and short-term residents, including some on lower incomes or those staying temporarily in New Zealand. Many were shift workers, making it difficult to be sure of everyone's whereabouts at the time of the blaze. — AFP



WELLINGTON: Firefighters inspect the Loafers Lodge hostel where a fire broke out a day earlier in the suburb of Newtown in Wellington. — AFP

Two climbers die on Everest, toll reaches seven

KATHMANDU: Two more climbers have died on Everest, expedition organisers said Thursday, bringing the number of deaths on the world's highest peak this spring climbing season to seven. The latest fatalities were a 58-year-old Indian woman who said before her expedition that she had a pacemaker, and a Nepali member of a team clearing trash from the mountain.

Suzanne Leopoldina Jesus died at a hospital in the Nepal town of Lukla after the Indian mountaineer was airlifted from base camp due to illness. "We brought the Indian climber to Lukla from the base camp in a helicopter on Wednesday as she was sick and could not climb," Da Dendi Sherpa, managing director at Glacier Himalaya Treks and Expedition, told AFP. Jesus had raised funds for her climb with the slogan, "Everest expedition and back on a pacemaker, at the age of 58". The primary school teacher aimed to be Asia's first person on a pacemaker and the oldest Indian to climb Everest, the Himalayan Times reported. "We tried to send her to Kathmandu. But due to the bad weather conditions, the helicopter could not fly to Kathmandu. She was admitted to a local hospital in Lukla where she died this morning," Sherpa said. In the other death, a Nepali trash collector died on Tuesday while descending. He was part of an annual mountain clean-up campaign by Nepal's army. "Work is underway to bring his body back," Pasang Sherpa from expedition company Peak Promotion told AFP.

Nepal has issued 478 permits for Everest to foreign climbers this season, which runs until early June. Since most will need a guide, more than 900 people in total will try to summit. On Wednesday, a Moldovan climber died at Camp Four en route to the top. — AFP



KATHMANDU: Medical staff shift injured Spanish mountaineer Carlos Soria to a hospital after being airlifted in Kathmandu on May 18, 2023, following a fall while ascending Dhaulagiri. — AFP

Iran warns Afghans in water dispute over river dam

TEHRAN: Iran demanded Thursday that Afghanistan respect its "water rights", charging that an upstream river dam there is restricting the flow into a lake that straddles their common border. Speaking on a visit to drought-parched southeastern Iran, President Ebrahim Raisi said: "I warn the rulers of Afghanistan to immediately give the people of Sistan-Baluchistan their water rights." The Helmand River flows from the mountains of the central Afghan province of the same name for more than 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) into Lake Hamoun, which straddles the Afghanistan-Iran border.

Raisi said Afghanistan should allow Iranian experts to visit and evaluate the water situation "straight away", adding that "the passage of time will not solve the issue". Afghanistan has blamed climatic factors for reduced river volumes. Raisi added that "if our experts confirm the lack of water, we have

Myanmar junta using imported arms to commit violations

UNITED NATIONS: Myanmar's military has imported \$1 billion in weapons since seizing power in a 2021 coup and used them "to commit atrocities," a United Nations expert said in a report released Wednesday. Fighting has ravaged Myanmar since the coup, including renewed clashes with ethnic rebel groups as well as the formation of dozens of "People's Defence Forces" now battling the junta.

In its crackdown against dissent, the "military has killed a minimum of 3,500 civilians" and the number of political prisoners has swelled to 20,000, said the report. It added that at least \$1 billion "worth of weapons, dual-use technology, and materials used to manufacture weapons" were brought in by the junta from the day of the coup on February 1, 2021, to December 2022, primarily from suppliers in Russia, China, Singapore, and India.

"These weapons, and the materials to manufacture more of them, have continued to flow uninterrupted to the Myanmar military despite overwhelming evidence of its responsibility for atrocity crimes," said Tom Andrews, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar. According to the report, the junta imported \$406 million in arms and equipment from Russia and \$267 million from China, including from state owned entities. Indian companies and state-owned entities accounted for \$51 million in goods.

Companies based in Singapore provided an additional \$254 million in supplies, while \$28 million in equipment came from entities based in Thailand. "Russia and China-based entities are critical to the Myanmar military for transfers of advanced weapon systems and their spare parts," Andrews wrote.

The imports have easily circumvented international sanctions prohibiting arms trade with Myanmar, according to Andrews. His report singled out an attack on an opposition-controlled village that killed around 170 people, including children, describing it as an example of a "probable" war crime.

Andrews wrote that a fighter jet dropped two bombs on Pazi Gyi village in central Sagaing region, targeting the opening ceremony of an office of the National Unity Government—a shadow administration dominated by lawmakers from ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party. Soon after, two attack helicopters arrived at the village and began firing on survivors and first responders, he added. "This brutal attack is also another example of how the Myanmar junta is using internationally supplied arms and associated materials to commit atrocities," the report said. Special rapporteurs are mandated by the UN Human Rights Council but are unpaid, independent experts who do not speak for the United Nations. — AFP



MADURAI: File photo taken on January 17, 2023, a participant (L) tries to control a bull during an annual bull-taming festival 'Jallikattu' in Palamedu village on the outskirts of Madurai. — AFP

India's top court upholds bull taming festival

NEW DELHI: India's Supreme Court upheld on Thursday a state government's decision to lift the ban on a popular bull-taming festival long blighted by allegations of animal cruelty. Animal rights groups had petitioned the court after the southern state of Tamil Nadu amended a law in 2017 to allow the traditional Jallikattu festival.

"The Tamil Nadu law is a valid piece of legislation and there is no flaw in it," Justice Aniruddha Bose declared on behalf of a five-member bench. During Jallikattu, young men try to grab charging bulls by their sharpened horns or jump on their backs.

Unlike in traditional Spanish bullfighting, the animals are let loose into open fields where young men

compete to subdue them bare-handed. Critics say organisers lace the bulls' feed with liquor to make them less steady on their feet, and throw chilli powder in their faces to send them into a sudden frenzy as they are released from a holding pen. There have also been reports of bulls having their horns sharpened with broken glass, while the "taming" can lead to serious injury and painful death for the animals. Over the years, dozens of people have been killed and hundreds more wounded during the festival.

Organisers of the centuries-old event insist the animals suffer no harm, calling the event an established part of Tamil culture. Jallikattu is celebrated in January during the Tamil harvest festival, Pongal. In 2014, the Supreme Court banned the sport, saying it inflicted "extreme cruelty" on the animals.

The ban led to massive street protests and hundreds of people were detained by police for organising Jallikattu contests in defiance of the court order. In 2017, the Tamil Nadu government lifted the restriction, paving the way for Jallikattu to resume across the state. — AFP

efforts and liaising with Chinese authorities in the search for survivors. Aircraft, including an Australian military plane, were currently scouring a 12,000 square kilometre (4,600 square miles) area south of where the upturned hull had been discovered as part of the "multinational" effort, the spokesperson said.

Seven-metre waves

"A number of merchant ships and other vessels have been assisting with the search and will continue to do so today. AMSA would like to thank these vessels and their crews for their invaluable assistance," the spokesperson said. The fishing vessel's distress beacon was first detected as Cyclone Fabian drove waves as high as seven metres (23 feet) and winds as strong as 120 kilometres per hour (75 miles per hour) through the area. And rough weather conditions have continued to hamper rescue efforts, AMSA said.

The Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) in Canberra "remains hopeful for a successful outcome, however the time elapsed combined with the weather conditions experienced make survival more challenging," they added.

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. Footage aired by CCTV showed mariners on board the boats carrying out search-and-rescue operations. Two other foreign merchant ships and four fishing boats were also at the scene, CCTV said. Various Chinese government departments were working with their counterparts in Australia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives to send reinforcements to help with the rescue, CCTV reported.

China's transport ministry has also sent four tugboats to Colombo in Sri Lanka, the closest major port where rescue vessels will dock for supplies and refuelling, CCTV said. — AFP

Two bodies found in Chinese fishing vessel crew search

BEIJING: Two bodies were found Thursday in the search for 39 crew members missing after a Chinese fishing vessel capsized in the Indian Ocean, Beijing's state media reported. The ongoing search operation following the capsizing of the Lu Peng Yuan Yu 028 "found and salvaged the remains of two victims", Xinhua news agency reported.

The Chinese vessel overturned in the early hours of Tuesday, carrying 17 Chinese, 17 Indonesians and five Filipinos. No details were given on the nationalities of the two bodies found on Thursday. The boat capsized within Australia's vast search-and-rescue region, Beijing's ambassador to Canberra said Thursday, noting it was 5,000 kilometres (3,100 miles) to the west of Perth, the state capital of Western Australia.

Countries are responsible for ensuring search and rescue in determined areas of the world's oceans under an international maritime convention. Australia has sent three aeroplanes and four ships to help in the international search-and-rescue efforts, ambassador Xiao Qian said earlier, urging Canberra to send more aircraft, ships and personnel to find the vessel. He also requested that the Australian government coordinate with other nations closer to the capsized ship. China was now seeking further help in coordination with Australian defence officials, he said. "To this moment, no individual has been found alive," Xiao said.

An Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) spokesperson said Australia was organising rescue

nothing else to say, otherwise we will not allow the rights of our people to be violated". He cautioned that Afghan authorities should take his words "seriously and not complain later". Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who was also on a visit to the province, late Wednesday called on Afghan authorities to let the water flow from one of the major dams built on the river.

"Our clear request from the Afghan side is to open the gates of the Kajaki Dam before the time is lost," he said. He also made a similar call to his Afghan counterpart Amir Khan Muttaqi during a phone conversation.

"Releasing water from Afghanistan and supplying Iran's water rights in a practical way is a serious demand of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and this has an impact on relations between the two sides," he said.

Lake Hamoun used to be one of the world's largest wetlands, straddling 4,000 square kilometres (1,600 square miles) between Iran and Afghanistan, fed by the Helmand. But it has since dried up, a trend experts blame on drought and the impact of Afghan dams and water controls.

Iran's foreign ministry says the country's share was legally defined in a 1973 agreement between the two countries and demands that Afghanistan uphold the deal. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, MAY 19, 2023

CMA to unveil more products and services to lure investors: Melhem

Efforts to bolster transparency at the market to continue

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Capital Markets Authority (CMA) is working on measures within international standards to lure investors, said a senior official on Thursday. Efforts to bolster transparency in all sectors of the Kuwaiti market would continue to enable Boursa Kuwait to gain further international footing, Ahmad Al-Melhem, Chairman of CMA Board of Commissioners, Managing Director said in an interview with KUNA.

The CMA is working on introducing more products and financial services soon including a platform to list and trade in bonds and funds at the market. The introduction of such tools came in line with efforts to lure investors after launching the services for revenue-producing real estate funds, margin trading, and many more.

Al-Melhem affirmed that the CMA was keen on providing auditing and regulatory services for dealing with traded shares for individuals, in addition to providing legal services for trading. The CMA also

is eager to make sure that the legislative and operative environments for trading were up-to-date and ready for human cadres for use to provide the best of services to investors and encouraging individuals, institutions and other entities to invest. Al-Melhem revealed that the CMA had launched its 2023-24 and 2026-27 strategies to meet the demands of the upcoming period and boost the level of trading at Boursa Kuwait and the financial status of the State of Kuwait. The strategies would aim to increase awareness within the investment, legal, and information security sectors for all those involved in the market's activities.

He also noted that the CMA's plans were in line with Kuwait's 2035 vision and the authority's contributions to turning Kuwait into an international financial and business hub. Al-Melhem went on to say that the CMA was looking into measure to establish a national strategy for financial inclusion in cooperation with several state entities to provide affordable products and services for individuals and business-

es. He noted that the initial steps towards that goal was launched in March of this year. On the positive impact of upgrading Kuwait to the emerging market ranks, Al-Melhem affirmed that it encouraged foreign investors, major corporations, and foreign capitals to invest more in the Kuwaiti market with an estimated KD 1.6 billion (around \$5 billion) coming in during the upgrading period that occurred between 2018 and the end of 2020.

The upgrade also increased daily exchange at the market 2020 on a daily average of KD 62 million (an estimated \$187.8 million) when compared to KD 18 million (around \$54.5 million) in 2018, he pointed out. He revealed that the upgrade also allowed for introducing investment products at foreign markets based on Kuwaiti shares, which joined international indices. Kuwait was upgraded to the emerging market ranks at the (FTSE Russell) index in September 2017, the S&P Dow Jones Indices (S&P DJI) in December 2018, and the (MSCI) index in June 2019. — KUNA



Ahmad Al-Melhem speaks during an interview in this file photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat.

UK touts \$22bn in Japanese investment

TOKYO: Prime Minister Rishi Sunak Thursday announced Japanese investment of more than \$22 billion into the UK, but accepted carmakers' concern about Brexit trade rules as he confirmed talks with the European Union. Visiting Tokyo ahead of a G7 summit in Hiroshima, Sunak said the investment by Japanese companies of £17.7 billion (\$22.1 billion) was a "massive vote of confidence" in the UK economy.

It includes planned funding of about £10 billion for offshore wind and hydrogen energy projects from Japanese trading house Marubeni, Downing Street said. Sunak said the deals showed the fruits of post-Brexit Britain becoming the first non-regional economy to accede to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

But the UK's divorce from the EU remains a serious headache for companies. European carmaker Stellantis has warned it could close some UK factories should Sunak's government fail to tweak Brexit trade rules, to ease the supply of batteries for electric vehicles. Ford, Jaguar Land Rover and German car industry lobby group VDA have all reportedly joined in calls for tariff-free access to be maintained despite a looming deadline under



TOKYO: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (second right) and his wife Akshata Murty (second left) disembark their plane upon their arrival at the Tokyo Airport ahead of the G7 Leaders' Summit, on May 18, 2023. — AFP

the EU-UK Brexit deal.

"It's something that car manufacturers across Europe, not just in the UK, have raised as a concern," Sunak told British media in Japan. "And as

a result of that we are engaged in a dialogue with the EU about how we might address those concerns when it comes to auto manufacturing more generally," he said. — AFP

G7 to squeeze Russia, weigh risk of China's 'economic coercion'

HIROSHIMA: G7 leaders arrived in Hiroshima, Japan, on Thursday to weigh tighter sanctions on Russia and protections against China's "economic coercion", surrounded by reminders about the harrowing cost of war.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is hosting leaders from six other wealthy democracies in his hometown — a city synonymous with nuclear destruction and now peppered with peace monuments. Leaders including US President Joe Biden will try over three days to forge a united front on Russia and China, where the allies' interests do not always neatly align.

Biden's delicate diplomatic offensive in Asia hit a bump even before Air Force One left US soil: a domestic budget row forced him to cancel stops in Papua New Guinea and Australia. He arrived in Hiroshima Thursday, becoming just the second US president after Barack Obama to visit a city leveled by his country's "Little Boy" atomic bomb. Russia's 15-month-old invasion of Ukraine will top the agenda when the G7 summit gets underway Friday, after a new spate of aerial attacks on Kyiv and a long winter of grinding warfare in Bakhmut and other frontline towns.

"We stand up for the shared values including supporting the people of Ukraine as they defend their sovereign territory and holding Russia accountable for its brutal aggression," Biden said as he met Kishida Thursday. The United States and its allies have poured weaponry into Ukraine to stall the Russian advance, but a long-anticipated spring counteroffensive by Kyiv's forces has yet to materialize.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is expected to address the group by video link. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said leaders would discuss battlefield developments and tightening a sanctions regime that, according to official statistics, caused Russia's economy to contract a further 1.9 percent last quarter. G7 nations have already adopted sanctions on Russian banks and military firms, and placed price caps on Russian crude. Discussions are expected on tighter enforcement, and new measures on a range of goods, including Moscow's roughly \$5 billion annual trade in diamonds.



HIROSHIMA: US President Joe Biden and Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida attend a bilateral meeting in Hiroshima on May 18, 2023, ahead of the G7 Leaders' Summit. — AFP

Nuclear shadow

Putin's repeated threats to turn the Ukraine conflict nuclear have been roundly condemned by G7 leaders and dismissed by some commentators as little more than an attempt to shake European and American resolve. But a leaders' visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park on Friday is likely to pull those threats into sharper focus. The bombing on August 6, 1945, obliterated Hiroshima, claimed an estimated 140,000 lives and forever changed the world. Kishida wants to use the summit to press his guests — nuclear powers Britain, France and the United States — to commit to transparency on stockpiles and arsenal reductions. But expectations for a breakthrough are low.

Summit discussions on China are expected to focus on efforts to insulate G7 economies from potential economic blackmail, by diversifying supply chains and markets. In disputes with countries from Australia to Canada, President Xi Jinping's administration has shown a willingness to block, tax or hamper trade with little warning or explanation. Biden on Thursday called the leader of Papua New Guinea — who Beijing is trying to woo with financial incentives — from Air Force One to emphasize Washington's support for Pacific nations, a White House statement said, after he nixed a visit there next week.

White House official Sullivan said G7 leaders were expected to decry China's "economic coercion" and work to bridge transatlantic differences on how to engage with Beijing.

Washington has taken an aggressive approach, blocking China's access to the most advanced semiconductors and the equipment to make them, and has pressed Japan and the Netherlands to follow suit. But European policymakers — most notably those in Berlin and Paris — are keen to make sure that "de-risking" does not mean shattering ties with China, one of the world's largest markets.

"This G7 is not an anti-Chinese G7," an adviser to French President Emmanuel Macron told journalists before the summit.

"We have a positive message for China, which is that we are ready to cooperate on condition that we negotiate together," the adviser added. Host Japan is also keen to talk to developing nations that have been wooed by Chinese investment, with leaders from India, Brazil and Indonesia among those invited by Kishida to Hiroshima. Evidence of Beijing's growing economic and diplomatic clout was on display Thursday in the former imperial capital Xi'an.

There, Xi is hosting the leaders of five Central Asian countries that were once seen as firmly in Moscow's orbit but are increasingly drawn to Beijing. — AFP

UK airline easyJet cuts losses on strong demand

LONDON: British airline easyJet said Thursday it had slashed first-half net losses on strengthening demand from holidaymakers as the aviation sector recovers from COVID. The group faced a loss after taxation of £307 million (\$382 million) in the six months to the end of March, a results statement said.

That compared with a loss of £431 million in the same period a year earlier, when the sector was hobbled by staff shortages as demand rebounded after the lifting of COVID restrictions.

The carrier, which is based in Luton north of London, added that revenues soared 80 percent to £2.7 billion on higher ticket prices and increased capacity, and gave a bright summer outlook. Costs, however, leapt 52 percent to £3.1 billion on a "significantly" increased jet fuel bill and "industry-wide" inflationary pressures. "EasyJet's optimized network combined with the strong demand seen for flights and holidays, enhanced revenue capabilities and operational resilience, means we enter the summer with confidence," said chief executive Johan Lundgren.

"Recent research has shown that travel is the number one priority for household discretionary spend with customers safeguarding their holidays and increasingly opting for low-cost airlines and brands which provide great value." The results come after easyJet upgraded its annual profit forecast twice earlier this year, as holidaymakers shrug off Britain's cost-of-living crisis. — AFP

UK's richest family patriarch Srichand Hinduja dead at 87

LONDON: Srichand Hinduja, the tycoon who headed Britain's richest family, has died at the age of 87, a spokesman said. Hinduja had dementia and his plight had become the centre of a family feud that culminated in court proceedings about whether he should be taken into public care.

The eldest of four brothers behind the Hinduja Group conglomerate, he died on Wednesday, according to a family spokesman. He "passed away peacefully" and was "looked after" by relatives, the spokesman said, hailing him as a "visionary titan of industry and business".

The Hinduja topped the Sunday Times Rich List in 2022 with a fortune estimated at £28.4 billion (\$35.4 billion). But a London judge said that despite the vast means at their disposal, Hinduja's needs had become "marginalized" by the family dispute, according to court filings that emerged in November. The family said they had settled their differences. The conglomerate was founded by the brothers' father Parmanand Hinduja who traded in tea and dried fruit in Mumbai in 1919 before moving it to Iran.

The brothers took over in the 1960s and greatly expanded the business. The sprawling Hinduja Group — led by London-based Srichand and Gopichand — grew to span interests in power, oil and gas, banking, and healthcare. Srichand Hinduja was thrust into the UK media spotlight in the late 1990s amid accusations that a leading member of Tony Blair's government had improperly lobbied to gain him British citizenship. — AFP



Srichand Hinduja

Business

Micron reveals \$3.6bn Japan chip plan after PM meets execs

Kishida holds talks with world's biggest chipmakers

TOKYO: Micron said Thursday it will invest \$3.6 billion to produce next-generation semiconductors in Japan, after Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held talks with some of the world's biggest chipmakers.

Kishida is trying to boost the domestic chip industry, after the weaknesses in global semiconductor supply chains were exposed by developments including the pandemic and the ongoing US-China tussle over advanced tech. Attendees at the Kishida meeting on Thursday included senior executives from Taiwan's TSMC, South Korean giant Samsung, and US titans Intel, Micron and IBM.

"Micron expects to invest up to 500 billion yen (\$3.6 billion) in 1-gamma process technology over the next few years, with close support from the Japanese government," the firm said in a statement, referring to the production of advanced DRAM memory chips. The investment would "enable the next wave of end-to-end technology innovation such as rapidly emerging generative artificial intelligence (AI) applications".

Micron added that it would be the first firm to bring extreme ultraviolet (EUV) chip-making to Japan. It described the tech as the "most sophisticated semiconductor manufacturing process in the world".

Kishida told the executives that "the government will work towards further expansion of direct investment in Japan and support for the semiconductor industry", but there were no details on any financial support from Tokyo. Bloomberg News had

earlier reported that Kishida was set to hand Micron \$1.5 billion in incentives.

Japan has already agreed to pour half a billion dollars into a new project to develop and make next-gen chips domestically. That deal involves eight major companies, including Sony, SoftBank and Toyota, who are partnering in a new firm called Rapidus that hopes to begin mass production by 2027.

TSMC and Sony have also inked their own partnership for a \$7 billion plant in Japan. Last month, Europe too announced plans to ramp up local chip production, with the goal of doubling its current global market share to 20 percent by 2030.

'Economic coercion'

Chips are the lifeblood of the modern global economy, powering everything from cars to smartphones, and they are forecast to become a \$1 trillion industry globally by 2030. Much of the world's semiconductor manufacturing is based in Taiwan. Fears have grown about the impact of any Chinese military action to seize the self-ruled island, which it claims as its territory.

The chip industry moves by Japan and Europe come as the United States and China lock horns over access to advanced semiconductors. Washington has in recent years sought to prevent advanced US chip tech from being exported to China, citing national security concerns.



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (third right) exchanges opinions with executives of a major overseas semiconductor manufacturer at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo on May 18, 2023. — AFP

Japan and the Netherlands recently announced their own export restrictions on chip items, without naming China. Still, Beijing reacted angrily, and has called for a World Trade Organization review of the measures. Last month, Chinese authorities also announced an investigation into Micron, which they

said was intended to "safeguard national security". Kishida's meeting with chip firms came a day before he hosts G7 leaders for a summit in the city of Hiroshima. G7 leaders are expected to call for "de-risking" of crucial supply chains, and to warn of the risks of "economic coercion" by China. — AFP



UK telecoms firm BT to axe up to 55,000 jobs by 2030

LONDON: British telecoms group BT said Thursday it will axe up to 55,000 jobs by the end of the decade in the latest tech jobs cull in response to rampant inflation.

The layoffs, comprising 42 percent of BT's workforce, come two days after UK mobile phone giant Vodafone unveiled plans to cut 11,000 jobs or one tenth of staff over three years.

"Both have been struggling with the pressures of inflation, most notably from energy," said Victoria Scholar, an analyst at Interactive Investor. BT employs 130,000 staff, including contractors.

The group will lower this to between 75,000 and 90,000 people over the next five to seven years, it said in a results statement. The grim news follows the axing this year of tens of thousands of jobs across the global tech sector, including by Facebook parent Meta, as soaring inflation also saps the world economy.

BT is implementing further cutbacks, having already slashed costs under a plan launched three years ago. "By the end of the 2020s, BT Group will rely on a much smaller workforce and a significantly reduced cost base," said chief executive Philip Jansen.

The company was "navigating an extraordinary macro-economic backdrop", he added. The slimmed-down group "will be a leaner business with a brighter future" and will "digitize the way we work and simplify our structure". BT said that once its full fiber broadband and 5G network was rolled out, it would not need as many staff to build and maintain it.

The firm also revealed Thursday that net profit soared 50 percent to £1.9 billion (\$2.4 billion) in its fiscal year to March, but the performance was skewed by a one-off tax credit. Pre-tax profit sank 12 percent to £1.7 billion from a year earlier, while revenue dipped one percent to £20.7 billion.

Shares slump

Investors took flight following news of heavy cutbacks. BT's share price sank almost nine percent in early morning deals on the rising London stock market. It later stood at 138.95 pence, down 6.2 percent from Tuesday's close. "Headlines will no doubt focus on the job cuts," noted Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Matt Britzman. "It's drastic, but it's not overly surprising given the mounting costs and slim margins in the wider business." As part of an ongoing overhaul, the firm announced a tie-up last year for its pay-TV channel BT Sport.

BT and Warner Bros. Discovery agreed to combine televised sport offerings in UK and Ireland. The new joint venture, combining the assets of BT Sport and Eurosport UK, will launch later this year under the banner TNT Sports. The move will mark the end of the BT Sport brand, which was launched ten years ago and features costly coverage of England's Premier League football. "The consolidation has the potential to create synergies," noted Scholar. Britzman said BT may be looking to eventually cash out. "Likely the more important goal will be the slow disposal of the 50-percent stake BT holds in the joint venture; options are in place for Warner Bros to buy portions of BT's stake over the first four years," he said. —AFP

City of London Corp policy chief hails warming UK-EU ties

LONDON: The City of London Corporation welcomed the EU adopting Wednesday a delayed agreement with Britain to advance cooperation on financial services regulation, while urging deregulation to boost the global finance hub.

Chris Hayward, head of policy at the financial district's governing body, said warming relations with the European Union provided an "opportunity", as he highlighted the need for UK deregulation in areas like fintech. The UK and Brussels concluded a post-Brexit financial services agreement, known as a memorandum of understanding, in March 2021 but it was never signed as relations soured amid Northern Irish trade tensions.

However, after the two sides agreed an overhaul of their trading relationship in March—under the new "Windsor Framework"—other outstanding issues such as financial services regulation appear ripe for resolution. "We now have the opportunity to have conversations again with Europe," Hayward told AFP on the same day the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, adopted the draft memorandum of understanding.

"Obviously we need to see the detail... but of course it's good news," he added, noting that "what is important is to get the talking that leads to action".

Raw deal: English consumers stuck with sewage cleanup bill

LONDON: England's privatized water companies pledged Thursday to make massive investments to stop raw sewage being pumped into waterways as concerns mount about water quality and laxer environmental protections post-Brexit.

But campaigners expressed outrage that the billions of pounds promised to upgrade infrastructure would be passed on to consumers already struggling with higher bills for utilities. Water firms have been under fire for years over releasing untreated wastewater into rivers and seas, blighting fragile ecosystems and leading to illnesses in people and the closure of beaches.

The long-running scandal has endured despite many of England's nine water and sewerage companies paying out billions of pounds in shareholder dividends in recent years and rewarding executives with multi-million pound remuneration packages. Last year, three French Euro MIPs even asked the European Commission to try to stop the UK releasing raw sewage as it was polluting beaches, marine life and waters across the Channel and North Sea.

Royal Mail parent sinks into red on costly UK strikes

LONDON: International Distributions Services, parent of British postal group Royal Mail, said Thursday it had sunk into an annual loss following mass strike action at the former state monopoly. IDS reported a loss after tax of £873 million (\$1.1 billion) in the 12 months to the end of March against a net profit of £612 million in 2021/22.

Revenue dropped five percent to £12 billion. "Quality of service has been significantly affected by industrial action and high levels of absence," said Keith Williams, independent non-executive chair at IDS. "I am sorry that we have not delivered the high

standards of service our customers expect. Improving quality of service is our top priority," he added.

Shares in IDS traded down 0.7 percent in London midday deals.

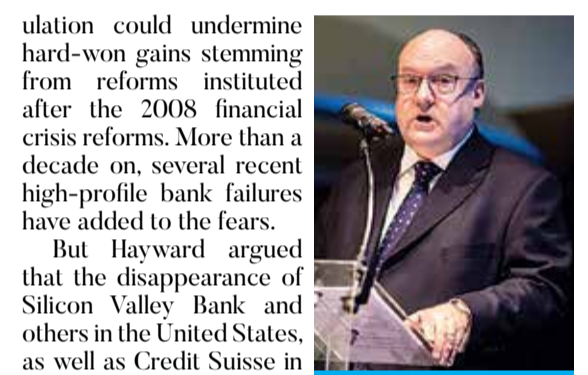
The results update comes after Royal Mail last week confirmed the upcoming departure of its chief executive. Simon Thompson will leave at the end of October, following criticism by UK lawmakers on the recent performance at Royal Mail.

The company had been blighted in its last financial year by industrial action, with thousands of workers protesting over wages failing to keep pace with soaring inflation. Thompson axed 10,000 Royal Mail jobs last year, or about seven percent of its workforce, blaming the move partly on the strikes. Royal Mail finally agreed a deal with union bosses in April, which includes a 10-percent pay rise for staff over three years. —AFP

Spain approves key housing law ahead of elections

MADRID: Spain's Senate gave final approval Wednesday to a bill aimed at capping soaring rents and addressing social housing shortages, giving a boost to the government before month-end local elections. The bill, which passed with 134 votes in favor to 117 against and one abstention, limits rent hikes, boosts protection for those facing eviction and sanctions landlords for leaving properties empty. It was passed by Spain's lower house of parliament, the Congress, last month.

Flagged by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez as the "first-ever housing law" since Spain's return to democracy in 1975, the bill is part of a reform



Chris Hayward

ulation could undermine hard-won gains stemming from reforms instituted after the 2008 financial crisis reforms. More than a decade on, several recent high-profile bank failures have added to the fears.

But Hayward argued that the disappearance of Silicon Valley Bank and others in the United States, as well as Credit Suisse in Europe, were not due to systemic factors.

"They were very different circumstances. You can never guarantee, even in a post-2008 environment, that you will never lose another bank," he said, adding he does not want the sector "overregulated".

Meanwhile, the City's policy head declined to join the mayor of London and others criticizing Brexit for costing the UK economy growth, jobs and opportunities. "I don't take the view that Brexit isn't working," he argued, despite even some proponents of Britain's EU departure now taking that stance.

Hayward noted that the financial services sector had lost about 7,000 jobs "as a result of Brexit", but that it has been matched by new jobs created, with European firms opening offices in London.

He also downplayed the significance of Amsterdam at times overtaking the British capital to become Europe's biggest hub in terms of equity trading volumes since Brexit. "I wouldn't read too much into one statistic... it's just one factor in a very complex financial sector ecosystem." —AFP



England's water companies have been criticized for allowing the discharge of raw sewage into waterways.

their greed." Greenpeace UK's policy director Doug Parr echoed the public fury around the issue.

"After years of relentlessly flooding our streams and beaches with raw sewage, an 'oops, sorry' from the water firms won't cut it," he said. "The promised £10 billion is a start but if it's all charged on peoples' bills whilst the shareholder dividends remain untouched, that would be a very strange way of being sorry." Last month the UK government announced its latest plan to better protect England's water supplies, promising more investment from water companies, alongside stronger regulation and tougher fines for polluters. —AFP

promised to Brussels in exchange for EU recovery funds.

"Housing ceases to be a luxury and becomes a right," the Socialist premier tweeted shortly after the Senate's vote, adding it was a "historic day". Spain's left-wing government wants to fast-track the bill into law before regional and local polls on May 28, regarded as a key indicator of who will win a year-end general election.

Under the proposal, rental rises will be decoupled from the consumer price index and permanently capped at three percent in 2024, with a new index due to be set by 2025.

It will allow regional authorities to designate as "stressed areas" neighborhoods where particularly high prices are driving out tenants and cap rental prices. The text also penalizes landlords for leaving homes empty if they own more than 10 properties—or five in stressed areas. —AFP

Lifestyle



In front of the NASA images projected on a screen, National Philharmonic Music Director and Conductor Piotr Gajewski rehearses "Cosmic Cycles, A Space Symphony" by composer Henry Dehlinger, at Capital One Hall in Arlington, Virginia. — AFP photos

US 'SPACE SYMPHONY' PUTS STUNNING NASA IMAGES TO MUSIC

It could be the ultimate blend of art and science—a new seven-suite "space symphony" inspired and illustrated by NASA's latest mind-boggling images. The world premiere outside Washington last week of "Cosmic Cycles" showcased vivid imagery compiled by the US space agency alongside the first-ever

experience that encapsulates both visuals and sound." A similar effort was undertaken over a century ago by English composer Gustav Holst—but when he wrote his famous ode to "The Planets," much in astronomy remained only theoretical. Since then, humans have walked on the Moon, sent ro-

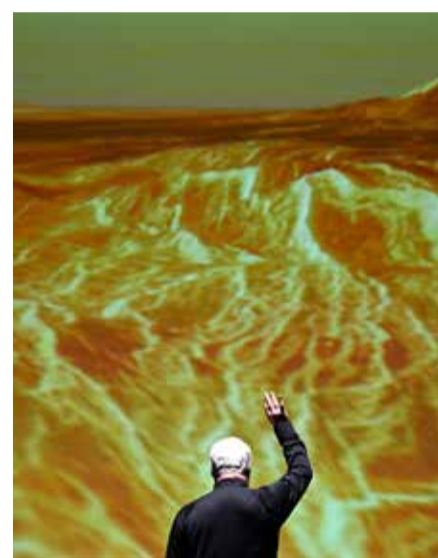
myself and remind myself that this isn't pretend—this is the real deal. Not science fiction, it's the actual science," he said. Piotr Gajewski, music director and conductor of the National Philharmonic, explained that the idea for the project came after previous work with NASA on visuals to go with a double-billing of Claude Debussy's "La Mer" ("The Sea") and Holst's "The Planets." For their next collaboration, 64-year-old Gajewski said he suggested to NASA "that we turn the tables on them."

"Rather than them getting a piece of music and putting pictures to it, that they start by putting short videos together... of their very, very best work." For Wade Sisler, executive producer at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, the challenge was worth the effort. "It's a journey unlike one that I have ever helped anyone take," Sisler, 64, told AFP.

'Like Van Gogh paintings'

The seven-part piece begins at the heart of our solar system—the Sun—with shots of its swirling and gurgling surface, and explosions of particles out to the planets. The next two movements focus on NASA studies of our home planet, from a global perspective and then through Earth photographs taken by astronauts in orbit. Apart from photos and videos, interspersed throughout the seven films are a "mesmerizing collection of data visualizations" created by NASA, Sisler explained.

Data on ocean currents, for example, "look like Van Gogh paintings when you put them in motion. The colors are



In front of an NASA image projected on a screen, National Philharmonic Music Director and Conductor Piotr Gajewski rehearses "Cosmic Cycles, A Space Symphony" by composer Henry Dehlinger, at Capital One Hall in Arlington, Virginia.

beautiful, you see patterns that you never realized before." A fourth segment on the Moon is followed by profiles of each planet—including a focus on images of the Martian surface taken by NASA rovers.

Jupiter, a "regal subject" according to Dehlinger, is introduced by roaring chimes and horns. The symphony also takes a detailed look at recent experiments on asteroids before a big finale of nebulae, black holes and other galactic phenomena. In addition to two

performances at venues outside Washington, NASA has released the videos to its YouTube page with a synthesized version of Dehlinger's soundtrack.

'A great mystery'

To hammer home the equal importance of the music and video, conductor Gajewski explained, they decided not to aim for exact synchronization, but to be more "fluid." That approach allows him "to find some moments that are different each time and each performance." "We really wanted people to be able to experience the music, the performers themselves, and also the science in a balanced portfolio," Sisler added.

Knowing the images and missions were real, Sisler said, elicits a stronger audience response in the digital age, when "you can conjure up anything through AI, conjure up anything in digital effects." "People are interested in real results. Like 'wow, we really went to that asteroid. Wow, we're really bringing it back here to Earth,'" he said, referring to the daring OSIRIS-REx sample retrieval mission. That awe-inspiring factor made the images perfect companions to orchestral pieces, Gajewski said.

"What is it that all of a sudden makes us emotionally weak when we hear one kind of music, or proud when we hear different kinds?" he asked. "It's all a great mystery, and of course space is the other great mystery, so they complement each other very well." —AFP



public performance of the music. Henry Dehlinger, the symphony's American composer, describes it as "almost like a total artwork."

"It's not just music, it's not just visuals—it's not a score for a film either," the 56-year-old told AFP before the concert. "It's more of an immersive

ing research labs to Mars and probed across the solar system with powerful telescopes allowing us to peer billions of light-years away.

The images from that research, compiled by NASA producers into seven short films, served as the inspiration for Dehlinger. "I had to almost pinch



In front of an NASA image projected on a screen, National Philharmonic Music Director and Conductor Piotr Gajewski rehearses "Cosmic Cycles, A Space Symphony" by composer Henry Dehlinger.



Composer Henry Dehlinger is seen during an interview with AFP after a rehearsal of his "Cosmic Cycles, A Space Symphony" at Capital One Hall in Arlington, Virginia.



Members of the National Philharmonic rehearse "Cosmic Cycles, A Space Symphony" by composer Henry Dehlinger, at Capital One Hall in Arlington, Virginia.



National Philharmonic Music Director and Conductor Piotr Gajewski rehearses "Cosmic Cycles, A Space Symphony" by composer Henry Dehlinger, at Capital One Hall in Arlington, Virginia.



In front of an NASA image projected on a screen, National Philharmonic Music Director and Conductor Piotr Gajewski rehearses "Cosmic Cycles, A Space Symphony" by composer Henry Dehlinger.

Thousands welcome Eurovision queen Loreen home to Sweden

Large crowds welcomed Eurovision Song Contest winner Loreen home to central Stockholm after she claimed the Scandinavian country's seventh title triumph at the weekend. Thousands of fans turned out in

the Kungsträdgården park in central Stockholm despite gloomy weather to watch the 39-year-old artist perform her winning song "Tattoo," a pop anthem about unconditional love. "I'm so grateful you sent me off to represent you, with everything my song stands for: compassion, hope, love and constructive solutions," she told the cheering crowd made up of young and old. "That's what we're all about."

"I think she's a really great artist," Viktor Rydefors, a 26-year-old student, told AFP. "It really is a performance, she totally captures the audience."

Andreas, a 40-year-old unemployed fan, called Loreen a "unique" performer. "If you're going to win Eurovision, you have to do it with a unique song, a unique artist, and a unique performance, and in that way she beats everything that's come before her."

Born in Sweden to parents of Moroccan Berber origin, Loreen—her real name Lorine Talhaoui—already won the contest in 2012. She is just the second artist to achieve a Eurovision double, 36 years after Johnny Logan for Ireland in the 1980s, and the first woman to do so.

Eurovision is hugely popular in Sweden and speculation is already rife about which city will host the show next year—exactly 50 years after ABBA's victory with its breakout hit Waterloo. "Perfect timing," the daily Dagens Nyheter said the day after Loreen's victory. —AFP



Eurovision Song Contest winner Swedish singer Loreen arrives at Arlanda Airport outside Stockholm, Sweden. — AFP

Lifestyle



This picture shows Damascena (Damask) rosebuds in the village of Qsarnaba.



A Lebanese villager harvests Damask roses at an agricultural field in the village of Ksarnaba, in the Bekaa valley. — AFP photos



A villager harvests Damascena (Damask) roses that are used for essential oils, sweets and cosmetics, in the village of Qsarnaba.



A woman serves a drink made of rose syrup at a house in Byblos.



Zahraa Sayed Ahmed produces rose water from Damascena (Damask) roses, at her house in the village of Qsarnaba.



Zahraa Sayed Ahmed produces a syrup from Damascena (Damask) roses, at her house in the village of Qsarnaba.



A worker pours syrup on a bun as she sells traditional dessert Kunafa, at a shop in Byblos.



Workers drop their bundles of Damascena (Damask) at a warehouse where they are paid based on their harvest, in the village of Qsarnaba.



Zahraa Sayed Ahmed carries Damascena (Damask) rosebuds to produce rose water, syrup, tea and jam, at her house in the village of Qsarnaba.

On a gentle slope looking out over Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, villagers work their way across pink-dotted terraces, gathering perfumed Damask roses that are used for essential oils, sweets and cosmetics. The rose harvest "gives you a bit of hope, it makes things beautiful, it calms you down—it gives you strength to carry on", said Leila al-Dirani, picking the flowers from her family's land in the village of Qsarnaba.

A soft bag tied around her waist and her hands scratched from the thorns, the 64-year-old plucks the small, pink buds from their bushes as their rich and heady scent wafts across the hill. The oil derived from the famed Damask rose — named after the ancient city of Damascus located just across the mountain range separating Lebanon and Syria—is a staple of perfumers.

Experts swear by the flower's therapeutic properties in fighting infection and as a relaxant, while rose water is used across the Middle East both as a refreshing drink, in sweets such as Turkish delight, to scent mosques and even to bestow luck at weddings. After a morning collecting roses, the workers in Qsarnaba drop their fragrant bundles at a warehouse in the village where they are paid based on their harvest.

At the facility carpeted with pink petals, Zahraa Sayed Ahmed—whose first name means "flower"—buys the raw materials to produce her rose water, syrup, tea and jam. Around four years ago, she set up a small workshop at her house, using a traditional metal still that "belonged to my grandfather", said Sayed Ahmed, 37.

'Roses help put food on the table'

With a kilogram (2.2 pounds) of rose petals, she said she can make up to half a litre of rose water. She then also bottles and labels her modest production by hand, putting it on limited sale locally. "The production of rose water is a part of our heritage," said Sayed Ahmed. "In every home in Qsarnaba there is a still, even if it's just a small one."

The rose season only lasts a few weeks, but it is a busy time for Qsarnaba's residents. "This year is the first year that we didn't bring workers to help us because the production is low



Scent of tradition lingers in Lebanon's 'village of roses'

and we couldn't afford it," said Hassan Al-Dirani, 25, who has been picking the flowers alongside his mother, Leila.

Since late 2019, Lebanon has been grappling with a devastating economic crisis that has seen the local currency collapse and pushed most of the population into poverty. "The rose harvest and all other harvests have lost about 80 percent of their value... because of the economic crisis," said local official Daher Al-Dirani, who hails from the extended family that is the biggest in Qsarnaba.

"But the roses help people put food on the table," he added. Exported from Syria to Europe for centuries since the time of the Crusades, the ancient Damask rose is also cultivated in countries including France, Morocco, Iran and Turkey. "Our village produces the most roses out of any village in Lebanon" and more than half of the country's rose water, Sayed Ahmed claimed proudly, as the captivating scent lingered in the air. "Qsarnaba is the village of roses." —AFP



Zahraa Sayed Ahmed produces jam from Damascena (Damask) roses, at her house in the village of Qsarnaba.



Zahraa Sayed Ahmed produces rose water from Damascena (Damask) roses, at her house in the village of Qsarnaba.



Dried Damascena (Damask) rosebuds are used to make herbal tea, at a house in Byblos.



A worker pours syrup on a tray of traditional dessert Kunafa, at a shop in Byblos.



This picture shows freshly picked Damascena (Damask) roses at a warehouse in the village of Qsarnaba.



Zahraa Sayed Ahmed produces rose water from Damascena (Damask) roses, at her house in the village of Qsarnaba.



A villager harvests Damascena (Damask) roses that are used for essential oils, sweets and cosmetics.

Lifestyle



Design Museum's Head of Curatorial Priya Khanchandani looks at some of the saris displayed at the Design Museum, in London. — AFP photos



Design Museum's Head of Curatorial Priya Khanchandani looks at some of the saris displayed at the Design Museum, in London, on May 17, 2023, during the press preview of the exhibition "The Offbeat Sari".



Design Museum's Head of Curatorial Priya Khanchandani looks at the sari by Sabyasachi saree with a bustier by Schiaparelli, worn by Indian businesswoman and socialite Natasha Poonawalla at the 2022 Met Gala, and displayed at the Design Museum, in London.

LONDON SHOW explores sari's 21st century reinvention

The sari is being reinvented for the modern age in an Indian "fashion revolution," with around 60 trailblazing examples due to go on display at a new exhibition in London. Over the past decade, according to curator Priya Khanchandani, the sari has seen the most rapid transformation in its 5,000-year history.

From sari styles worn by young women on their way to work in Delhi and Mumbai to the spectacular creation that was the first sari to grace New York's famous Met Gala, the London showcase spotlights the garment's 21st century revival. Khanchandani says she first became aware of a renaissance in 2015 when she met some of the designers in Delhi who were transforming the sari, traditionally a single long piece of unstitched fabric draped over the body.

"I saw the sari being revived as an everyday garment in a way that was

very fashionable. They were being worn by younger women than I knew before," she told AFP ahead of the show, The Offbeat Sari, which opens at the Design Museum on Friday. "They were often quite intellectual women, writers and artists... wearing them in ways that I didn't expect," she said.

Having previously viewed saris as a garment to be worn for special events or weddings, she suddenly noticed them being reinvented as everyday clothing, even teamed with T-shirts and sneakers. The birth of mass consumerism and social media in India combined with the growth of the country's urban middle class has accelerated the sari's revamp, Khanchandani said. "The influence of digital media which has a really significant reach in India, particularly among young people, allowed trends to spread and I think allowed the way that saris were being worn to become a grassroots movement," she added.

Pushing boundaries

Popular hashtags that have seen a vast array of images shared online include #sarilove, #sarifashion, #designsarees and #sareeindia. Despite the sari's long history, it was not until last year that a sari was seen at the celebrated annual Met Gala event in New York. Worn by Indian businesswoman and socialite Natasha Poonawalla, the showstopping ensemble featured a flowing gold sari by Sabyasachi with a gold Schiaparelli bustier. In addition to extravagant couture saris, designers in India have also pushed boundaries by experimenting in a range of ways. The Raj Kilt, by the Little Shilpa brand, is described as "half kilt, half sari" and reflects the cross-cultural experiences of Indian designer Shilpa Chavan who studied in Britain. Some of the most eye-catching and innovative exhibits include a sari adorned with sequins cut from old X-ray images from hospital waste and another

in distressed denim. But while the sari's potential for extravagance and creativity is on full display in the exhibition's selections, there are also examples of how it is being pressed into use to express ideas of identity and resistance. Hundreds of thousands of members of the so-called Gulabi Gang, a group set up to fight domestic violence, including sexual abuse and child marriage in rural India, have adopted bright pink saris along with bamboo sticks as the symbol of their movement. Also included in the show is a purple silk sari embroidered with sequins and crystals by the brand Papa Don't Preach.

After the label posted a photograph of the sari being worn by the author and comedian ALOK, who founded the #DeGenderFashion movement, it decided to remove the "womenswear" wording from their messaging. — AFP

Shetland knitters lament fading island tradition

Hazel Tindall sits in the armchair of her living room, her fingers moving with speed and precision as her knitting needles click together and the brightly-colored yarn in her lap takes shape. For Tindall, who first picked up her needles as a young child and is now 70, knitting was always a way to earn income on Shetland, off the far northeast coast of Scotland.

But with the discovery of oil off the remote islands in the North Sea in the 1970s, mechanization and cheap imports pushed many into more lucrative professions. Now Tindall and other locals fear the islands' once thriving hand-knitting tradition is facing extinction.

"I reckon in 10 years' time, you won't be able to come here and buy any hand-knitted stuff," she told AFP at her home north of the main Shetland town of Lerwick. "You might get machine-knit stuff, but hand-knits? No." Knitting is a time-consuming craft that requires planning and patience. Tindall once timed herself knitting a jumper and found it took about 90 hours, excluding the planning time. "People don't really realize how long it takes to knit something," she said. "Once you've been paid, it's barely over the minimum wage."

Cost

Knitting circles and groups have helped to preserve traditional patterns and techniques such as the complex "Fair Isle" pattern, named after one of the islands in the Shetland archipelago. But they have also become less popular over the years, as young people move on to more lucrative careers.

Tindall, who says there is no substitute for practice and watching others at work, says she regularly wears one jumper that is more than 40 years old. Knitting clothes — especially with soft, strong and lightweight Shetland wool — can reduce waste and protect the planet, she adds. "And if you're wearing wool, well, it's very environmentally friendly and it keeps reproducing. The sheep grow a fleece every year."

Juliet Bernard, who represents the UK Hand Knitting Association, agrees that the pay for hand-knitted items does not make it viable for most people. "I have turned down so many people who have requested me to hand-knit an item," she said. A hand-knitter would have to earn between £400 to £500 (\$505 to \$631) a week to make a living, she estimates.

Despite the decline in professional hand-knitting, there has been a surge of interest in the craft as buyers become more conscious of "slow fashion" and "ethical consumerism". The 2021 Craft Intelligence Report found that seven million people in the UK now enjoy knitting. About one million took up the craft since the start of the COVID pandemic. Bernard attributed much of that interest to British Olympic gold-medallist diver Tom Daley, who was spotted knitting and crocheting during the Games. He regularly shares his creations on Instagram.

Skills

Craft sales surged to over £3 billion in 2019, according to a report by the UK Craft Council in 2020. But the average price per object decreased from £157 in 2006 to £124 in 2020. Most crafters said they made less than £30,000 profit from sales in the last financial year. "More egalitarian market conditions and fewer barriers to entry for makers mean that whilst more people are now buying craft, they are buying craft at a lower value," the report says.

As a result, highly skilled crafters have to "differentiate their skill to justify their higher prices", it added. On Shetland, locals first started exchanging knitwear for supplies like flour and sugar with passing fishermen centuries ago. But in her armchair, needles aloft and scouring her book of patterns, Tindall says there is more to it than earning a living. "Knitting is everything to me — without it, well I don't know what I would have," she smiles, and the sound of clicking needles fills the air. — AFP

Burberry profits rise, China reopening boosts sales

British luxury fashion house Burberry on Thursday announced a jump in annual profits, with revenue boosted towards the end of its financial year thanks to China's reopening from pandemic lockdowns. Net profit grew almost a quarter to £490 million (\$609 million) in the 12 months to the end of March, Burberry said in a statement.

Revenue climbed 10 percent to £3.1 billion, compared with 2021/22. "We have delivered a strong financial performance, supported by good progress in our core leather goods and outerwear categories, with revenue accelerating in the fourth quarter as growth rebounded in mainland China," Burberry chief executive Jonathan Akeroyd said in the statement.



Despite the jump in profits, shares in Burberry tumbled nearly seven percent in London trading as investors banked strong recent gains. "By way of context, this follows a share price hike of 59 percent over the last year, as compared to a gain of 3.8 percent for the wider FTSE 100" index in London, noted Richard Hunter, head of markets at Interactive Investor. Last year also saw British national Daniel Lee replace Italian designer Riccardo Tisci as the group's creative director. — AFP



Sotheby's auctioneer Benjamin Doller (center right) takes bids during the Codex Sassoon sale at Sotheby's in New York City.

World's oldest near-complete Hebrew Bible sells for \$38 million

A Hebrew Bible more than 1,000 years old sold for \$38.1 million in New York on Wednesday, setting a record for the most valuable manuscript ever sold at auction. The Codex Sassoon — which dates to the late ninth to early 10th century — is the earliest near-complete Hebrew Bible known to still exist. It was sold by Sotheby's following a four-minute bidding battle between two bidders, the auction house said in a statement.

The Bible was bought by former US diplomat Alfred Moses on behalf of an American nonprofit that will gift it to the ANU Museum, Sotheby's said. "The Hebrew Bible is the most influential book in history and constitutes the bedrock of Western civilization. I rejoice in knowing that it belongs to the Jewish People," said Moses, an ambassador under president Bill Clinton.

The sale surpassed the \$30.8 million that Microsoft founder Bill Gates paid for Leonardo da Vinci's Codex Leicester manuscript in 1994 as the most expensive handwritten document ever sold at auction. The most expensive historical document remains one

of the first prints of the US Constitution, which Sotheby's sold for \$43 million in November 2021.

The Codex Sassoon is one of only two codices, or manuscripts, containing all 24 books of the Hebrew Bible to have survived into the modern era. It is substantially more complete than the Aleppo Codex and older than the Leningrad Codex, two other famous early Hebrew Bibles, Sotheby's said. The manuscript bridges the Dead Sea Scrolls — which date back as early as

the third century BC — and today's modern form of the Hebrew Bible. It is named for previous owner David Solomon Sassoon (1880-1942) who assembled the most significant private collection of ancient Jewish texts in the world. The manuscript was auctioned for the first time in more than 30 years and had a pre-sale estimate of between \$30 million and \$50 million.

The Codex Sassoon, which has moved about throughout its history, has only been presented once in the past to the public, in 1982, at the British Library in London, said Orit Shaham-Gover, chief curator of the Museum of the Jewish People. According to carbon-14 dating, the Codex Sassoon is older and more complete than the Aleppo, written in Galilee in the 10th century and brought to the Zionist entity in the 1950s after being found in that Syrian city. The manuscript is also considered to predate the Leningrad Codex, the oldest surviving copy of the Hebrew Bible text in its entirety, and dated to the early eleventh century. — AFP



The Codex Sassoon is auctioned at Sotheby's in New York City. - AFP photos

Sports

Top seeds Djokovic, Swiatek fall in Italian Open quarters

Seventh-ranked Rune beat frustrated Djokovic

ROME: Seventh-ranked Holger Rune beat a frustrated Novak Djokovic 6-2, 4-6, 6-2 in a rain-interrupted quarter-final at the Italian Open, where women's top seed Iga Swiatek retired injured on Wednesday. Serbian star Djokovic, who will drop to second in the world on Monday behind Carlos Alcaraz, admitted that he was outplayed in heavy, wet conditions after a week of rain in normally sunny Rome. "This is probably the coldest, wettest tournament I've ever played here in Rome," the 22-time Grand Slam winner said. "I don't recall so many days in a row (of) raining. In these conditions, it's very difficult to get the ball past him. He's a very talented, dynamic player - he was too good for me for most of the match," Djokovic added of Rune.

With her French Open title defense looming this month, Swiatek retired in the third set of her quarter-final against Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina. Poland's Swiatek had roared through the first set but after receiving treatment she called a halt with a right leg injury to hand Wimbledon champion Rybakina a 2-6, 7-6 (7/3), 2-2 win and a semi-final spot. Victory in drizzle and evening chill came in just under two and a half hours as Swiatek's 14-match Rome win streak was ended. Rybakina ended with 32 winners and 26 unforced errors, in a match Swiatek led by a set and 4-2.

"It's never good to win like this," Rybakina said. "I hope it's nothing serious for Iga. I'm glad to win, every match I play on clay gives me more confidence," she added. "I didn't start well but in the second set I found my rhythm." Rybakina will now take on former Roland Garros champion Jelena Ostapenko, who defeated Spain's Paula Badosa 6-2, 4-6, 6-3. Denmark's Rune will line up against Casper Ruud in the semi-finals after the Norwegian fourth seed defeat-

ed Francisco Cerundolo 7-6 (7/5), 6-4. Argentina's Cerundolo committed nearly 50 unforced errors and could not prevent 2022 Roland Garros finalist Ruud from reaching a third consecutive Rome semi.

"I'm back in Rome and feeling great," Ruud said. "I've had success in Italy. Maybe it's something in the food, there are a lot of reasons to be motivated here. It's great to be back in the semi-finals, I hope it will be a fun one." Six-time champion Djokovic was carrying an unspecified injury into the match as he lost for a second time to the rising 20-year-old Dane, who bested him to win the Masters 1000 at Paris Bercy last November. The latest contest between the pair was marred by spats with the chair umpire by both players—Djokovic on a time warning and Rune over a second-set line call.

Play was halted for just over an hour by rain. Shortly after the match began, Djokovic requested extra towels to pad his lower back on the bench during most changeovers. He has also suffered with a right elbow problem in recent weeks which caused him to miss the Madrid event and put his pre-Roland Garros preparation behind schedule. He was treated by the trainer and tournament doctor after the third game of the second set and given a painkiller before playing on. The exit of Djokovic—combined with that of Alcaraz this week - left the men's field wide open at the Foro Italico.

Really big win

Between them, Djokovic and Rafael Nadal have won 16 of the last 18 editions here; the last time one of the pair did not figure in a Rome final was 2004. Rune is only the sixth player to defeat Djokovic in Rome. "This is really a big win for me," Rune said. "Every match against Novak is a huge challenge.



ROME: Denmark's Holger Rune returns to Serbia's Novak Djokovic during their quarterfinals match of the Men's ATP Rome Open tennis tournament on May 17, 2023. — AFP

He's one of the greatest to ever play the game. "I was proud of myself and enjoyed every minute out there."

"I have to stay humble, I still have a lot to achieve. I'm a huge fighter on court, I leave everything out there. I had to fight hard and play my best tennis," he added. "I'm a big fan of Novak; he's a huge inspiration. He puts huge pressure on you—I had to stay

brave." Djokovic was playing his 17th consecutive Rome quarter-final, falling to 13-4. Tomas Berdych was the last player to beat him in the last eight in Rome back in 2013. His Rome record dropped to 67-11 as his bid for a seventh title ended after two hours, 18 minutes with 35 unforced errors in only his fourth loss of the season. — AFP

South and North Korea to clash on road to Olympics

KUALA LUMPUR: South Korea and North Korea's women's football teams were drawn in the same group on Thursday in Asian qualifying for the 2024 Paris Olympics. The neighbors and rivals will clash on October 29 in China. South Korea will be at the World Cup in July-August in Australia and New Zealand, but they have never reached the Olympics in women's football.

North Korea are traditionally stronger than the South in women's football but the reclusive country has largely retreated from international sport since

the pandemic. Also in Asian qualifying Group B are Thailand and current Asian champions China, who will host all the games in the group. Groups A and C, also with four teams in each, will be staged in Australia and Uzbekistan respectively in the second round of qualifying. The three group winners plus the best-ranked runner-up will progress to the final qualifying round. Two spots from Asia are up for grabs at next year's Olympics.

S Korea beat Japan

In another development, World number two An Se-young emphatically beat Japan's top-ranked Akane Yamaguchi to help send South Korea into the next round of the Sudirman Cup as group winners on Wednesday. Four-time champions South Korea will be joined in the knockout stage by previous runners-up Japan, despite the Koreans winning the tie overall. Following Korean victories in mixed doubles

and men's singles, the decisive blow came when An defeated Yamaguchi 21-11, 21-15 in a battle between the two best women's players on the planet. This year's edition of the biennial Sudirman Cup, hosted in the eastern Chinese city of Suzhou, has an extra edge because results count towards qualification for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Also into the quarter-finals in the mixed-team competition are holders China. The hosts are clear favorites to retain the trophy, which they have won a record 12 times. The formidable Chinese will take on Denmark - the only other undefeated team in that group - on Thursday in a final group-stage match-up before both countries proceed to the knockouts. Earlier Wednesday, Malaysia beat Taiwan 4-1. Both teams also advance to the quarter-finals. The Sudirman Cup is the first international sporting event in China since the country ditched its tough zero-COVID policies late last year. — AFP



ROCHESTER: Jordan Spieth of the United States looks on during a practice round prior to the 2023 PGA Championship at Oak Hill Country Club on May 17, 2023. — AFP

Spieth chasing career Slam at Championship

ROCHESTER: Jordan Spieth, chasing a career Grand Slam, confirmed Wednesday that he will play in the PGA Championship after two days of practice at Oak Hill testing his injured left wrist. The three-time major winner smashed tee shots, short irons and wedges from the thick rough and played nine-hole rounds with defending champion Justin Thomas on Wednesday.

Spieth skipped last week's PGA Tour event in his hometown of Dallas due to "severe pain" in his wrist but pronounced himself ready for the challenge of a major showdown. "I wouldn't play if I didn't think I was in good enough shape to play," Spieth told The Golf Channel. "I just don't have the reps I'd like to have going into a major but I'm happy to be able to play because I certainly didn't think so a week ago." Spieth will start at 8:22 a.m. off the 10th tee on Thursday alongside Norway's Viktor Hovland and Irishman Shane Lowry.

He will make a seventh attempt to join the players who have won every major at least once, a list that includes Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Gene Sarazen and Ben Hogan. Spieth's best result in the event was a runner-up finish in 2015 and his best showing with the career Slam at stake was a share of third in 2019. Cold conditions and possible frost are in Thursday's forecast with rain predicted to arrive Friday night with showers through the weekend.

World number one Jon Rahm, who won last month's Masters, tries for his second consecutive major victory when he tees off alongside reigning British Open champion Cameron Smith of Australia and 2022 US Open winner Matthew Fitzpatrick of England. Rahm, who has won four titles this year, would be halfway to a calendar year Grand Slam and leave himself only a British Open title shy of his own career Slam with a triumph at Oak Hill. "I'm confident. I feel good," Rahm said. "It has been an amazing year. I'm just hoping to keep adding more to it. It has been a lot of fun, and hopefully I can keep riding that wave."

Second-ranked Scottie Scheffler, last year's Masters champion and this year's Players Championship winner, would overtake Rahm for the rankings lead with a victory. Third-ranked Rory McIlroy, a four-time major winner from Northern Ireland, seeks his first major crown since 2014. He took a mental health break after missing the cut at the Masters and played only one tune-up event before the PGA Championship. "I needed it at the time," McIlroy said. "Whether it works this week or not remains to be seen." —AFP

Lyon set to miss out on Europe as new era begins

PARIS: As they head into a new era off the pitch, a disappointing season on it means Lyon, formerly French football's dominant force, are set to miss out on European qualification once again. With just three games of the Ligue 1 campaign remaining, including Friday's meeting with Monaco, Lyon are seventh, four points adrift of even a qualifying berth for next season's Europa Conference League.

A club who played in Europe in 23 consecutive seasons, culminating in their run to the Champions League semi-finals in 2020, are now set for a third campaign in four years without being involved in continental competition. A decline has set in on the banks of the Rhone at what was once France's model club, champions seven years running between 2002 and 2008. The appointment of Laurent Blanc as coach earlier this season, after a poor start, has not been enough to lift OL back to what they see as their rightful place after they came a disappointing eighth last year.

The return of local hero Alexandre Lacazette has been a success, with the striker netting 25 Ligue 1 goals since rejoining from Arsenal, and yet Lyon are simply not the force they once were. "Europe is bust," admitted France's 1998 World Cup winner Blanc after last week's 2-1 defeat at modest Clermont. "If the players don't agree with me, they will have to prove me wrong. And I will be very happy to be wrong," he told reporters on Wednesday.

In December, Lyon were taken over by American businessman John Textor and his company Eagle Football. Jean-Michel Aulas, the emblematic Lyon president who had been at the helm since 1987, initially stayed in his role but the man who built the modern club

Sydney strikes deal to host UFC events

SYDNEY: Sydney will host three Ultimate Fighting Championship events over the next four years in a major new deal, starting with UFC 293 in September. A venue is yet to be announced for the first show on September 10 and the headline act depends on the results



CLERMONT-FERRAND: Lyon's French forward Alexandre Lacazette (center) is tackled by Clermont-Ferrand's French defender Florent Ogier (right) during the French L1 football match between Clermont Foot 63 and Olympique Lyonnais (OL) at Stade Gabriel Montpied in Clermont-Ferrand. — AFP

departed earlier this month. Textor now has a clear path to shape the club in his own way, and he is expected to make sweeping changes to the scouting department, although Blanc looks set to stay as coach.

This week saw another major change, with the new owners agreeing to sell a controlling stake in Lyon's highly successful women's team—record eight-time Champions League winners—to US entrepreneur Michele Kang. It remains to be seen what the future holds for what was once a footballing force to be reckoned with in the European men's game. "This season is the end of an era, and another one begins in June," said Blanc. "We will need to go into it with ambition."

of upcoming fights. Sydney last hosted a UFC fight in 2017. "We just did a deal with the NSW government that will bring three pay-per-view events to Sydney over the next four years," UFC president Dana White said.

"The first will be happening on September 10 this year for UFC 293." Australia's top mixed martial arts fighter, featherweight king Alexander Volkanovski, will defend his belt at UFC 290 in July in Las Vegas against Mexico's Yair Rodriguez. A win could set up a re-match with Russian lightweight champion Islam Makhachev, who he

Player to watch

The Egyptian striker Mostafa Mohamed did not play for Nantes in their 0-0 draw at Toulouse last weekend in a protest against an anti-homophobia campaign across Ligue 1. "Given my roots, my culture, the importance of my convictions and beliefs, it was not possible for me to participate in this campaign," he wrote on Twitter after refusing to wear a jersey with the numbers in the colors of the rainbow. Mohamed was fined by his club, but is expected to be back in the team for Saturday's game against Montpellier. Nantes will need the on-loan Galatasaray player, who has scored 11 goals this season, as they look to climb out of the relegation zone. — AFP

lost to in February at UFC 284 in a sell-out Perth. "It would be incredible to fight in Sydney, obviously it's a quick turnaround but I've showed that I can be active, and I can definitely do it," Volkanovski told The Australian newspaper of potentially headlining the Sydney card. Fellow Australian and former middleweight champion Rob Whittaker is also at UFC 290, against South African Dricus du Plessis in a title eliminator. The winner would likely be pitted against Nigerian champion Israel Adesanya, also a potential main event for Sydney. —AFP

Sports

World Cup 2026 teams to be based in 'clusters': Infantino

FIFA rolls out 'green carpet' for celebrities, former players

LOS ANGELES: Teams at the expanded 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico will be based in regional clusters during the early rounds to ease travel, FIFA president Gianni Infantino said on Wednesday. Speaking in Los Angeles to unveil the official logo and branding for the tournament, Infantino said the move was prompted by the scale of the 2026 finals. For the first time the next World Cup will include 48 teams - up from 32 - and will be co-hosted by three countries, another first.

"The challenges will be the whole logistics around it," Infantino said. "It's a continent - three countries and not three small countries either - three big countries. The distances, the time zones, the climatic differences too - altitude in Mexico, sea level in other parts. So for us it's important to create the right environment for the teams and the fans to be put in the best possible conditions. Meaning not having to travel too much, especially at the beginning. So we will create some clusters where teams will be based depending on the draw and then they will play their games in that particular cluster."

Infantino said travel, and the move towards basing teams in regions, had been discussed at a meeting in Doha last week of the 32 coaches involved in last year's World Cup. "This was one of the advantages of

the World Cup in Qatar, where a player, one hour after the game, was in his bed," he said. "(In 2026) there will be some travel involved but we will coordinate that and make sure that it will be the best possible conditions for the teams."

Infantino meanwhile hopes the tournament can build on the success of the 1994 finals in the United States, which helped establish Major League Soccer in North America. Asked what he wanted the legacy of 2026 to be, Infantino told AFP: "That soccer will be the number one sport in North America." Infantino's remarks came as FIFA rolled out a "green carpet" for celebrities and former players at the Griffith Observatory overlooking Los Angeles.

The gala event was held to unveil the official branding for the 2026 tournament. Among the guests was former US international Alexi Lalas, one of the stars of 1994. Lalas backed Infantino's pledge to base teams in regions. "At the risk of 'grumpy old-man'ing it, it's not like these guys are sitting in the middle seat in economy on a budget airline or anything," Lalas told AFP. "They're on charter aircraft all over the place. But having said that, we're obviously talking about six-hour trips, time-zone changes. For a lot of players around the world that fundamentally changes the competition, so a regional type of situation makes sense." —AFP



LOS ANGELES: FIFA's President Gianni Infantino arrives for the official FIFA World Cup 2026 brand #WeAre26 campaign launch in Los Angeles, California on May 17, 2023. — AFP

Champions Cup final litmus test for Sexton deputy Byrne

PARIS: When Leinster play La Rochelle in the Champions Cup final in Dublin on Saturday, one man will be missing for the Irish side. Captain Johnny Sexton has been sidelined since leading Ireland to March's Six Nations Grand Slam and aged 37 the experienced playmaker is unlikely to feature again for the province. His next appearances will be in the green of his country, in the build-up to the Rugby World Cup, starting in September. After that competition he is expected to retire. In a glittering career, Sexton has won the Six Nations and the Champions Cup four times and in 2018 was named World Rugby player of the year.

"He's one of the most influential players ever in Irish rugby," former Ireland hooker Bernard Jackman told AFP on Monday. "Leinster will definitely miss

him. I know he was gutted when he got that injury because all season his goal was Grand Slam with Ireland, Champions Cup with Leinster, and a World Cup with Ireland," Jackman added. At Lansdowne Road this weekend, long-standing second-choice Ross Byrne is set to deputize for Sexton. The 28-year-old is just one of the pretenders to take over in the Test and provincial number 10 shirt in the long-term.

"I actually coached him at school," Jackman said of Byrne. "We had a good team at St Michael's, we struggled against a small school in the first round of the cup. And in the 14th minute of injury time he kicked a penalty from 40m to level the game. Then in the replay we won and we won the cup that year. He's always had, in Ireland we say, big balls, this mental strength where he enjoyed pressure," the former Leinster front-rower added.

'Fascinating'

Among those competing with Byrne for the Ireland outside-half position will be his younger brother and Leinster team-mate Harry and Munster's Joey Carbery and Jack Crowley. Crowley, 23, kicked a late drop goal last weekend as Munster stunned Leinster

to reach this month's United Rugby Championship. "He can play centre, he's a very good 10 and had his big moment on Saturday," Jackman said. "Andy Farrell really likes him. He's more of a running threat than Ross Byrne, younger, less experienced too, but the battle between Ross Byrne and Jack Crowley will be fascinating for Leinster and Munster and Ireland," Jackman added. Coaching La Rochelle this weekend will be former Ireland fly-half Ronan O'Gara, who Sexton took over from.

O'Gara played 130 Tests, winning a Six Nations Grand Slam and two Champions Cups for Munster. "I don't think the next 10 is going to be as dominant as Ronan O'Gara or Johnny Sexton were in terms of being number one for eight, nine years," Jackman said. "It's going to be really interesting," he added. During his absence over the recent weeks, Sexton has been seen in the stadium, watching games attentively. On Saturday he is unlikely to change the habit. "I think off the field this week he'll still have a big role," Jackman said. "He'll try and help Harry and Ross Byrne. He'll look at where Leinster will attack La Rochelle. Not having him on the field is a big boost for La Rochelle," he added. — AFP

Brentford's Toney vows to return after eight-month ban

LONDON: Brentford striker Ivan Toney promised to return to "playing the game I love" after being banned from all football-related activity for eight months over breaches of betting rules. Toney, charged by the Football Association in November with 262 alleged breaches over a four-year period, was suspended with "immediate effect" by the English governing body. The 27-year-old England international was also fined £50,000 (\$62,000). "Ivan Toney has been suspended from all football and football-related activity with immediate effect for eight months, which runs up to and including 16 January 2024, fined £50,000 and warned as to his future conduct for breaches of The FA's betting rules," an FA statement said on Wednesday. "The Brentford FC forward was charged with 262 breaches of FA Rule E8 in total between 25 February 2017 and 23 January 2021. The FA subsequently withdrew 30 of these breaches and he admitted to the remaining 232."

'Very difficult time'

Toney, responding in a Twitter post, said he was "naturally disappointed" at being hit with an eight-month ban as he thanked family, friends, Brentford and the club's fans "for their continued support, through what has been a very difficult time". He added: "I now focus on returning to play the game I love next season." An independent regulatory commission imposed the sanctions on Toney, who will not be allowed to train with his Brentford team-mates until September 17.

He will miss Premier League Brentford's last two fixtures this season, at Tottenham on Saturday and against Manchester City on the final day of the campaign. Toney, capped once by England, against Ukraine in March, has scored an impressive 21 goals in 35 appearances for west London side Brentford this season. Although he featured in an England squad before last year's World Cup, Toney was left out of Gareth Southgate's final selection for the tournament in Qatar.

His goals have played a key role in his team's rise to ninth in the Premier League heading into the last two games of the campaign. Toney said he would make no further comment until the written reasons for the commission's decision were published, echoing Brentford, who earlier on Wednesday explained they would wait until then before taking their "next steps". Speaking in December, following the announcement of the FA's charges, Brentford boss Thomas Frank said while the club had recruitment plans, they had "no specific one for potentially replacing Ivan".

Toney is not the first high-profile player to be banned for offences related to betting. England defender Kieran Trippier, now with Newcastle, was banned for 10 weeks and fined £70,000 by the FA in 2020 after giving out information for others to bet on his transfer from Tottenham to Atletico Madrid. In 2017, Joey Barton was banned for 18 months, reduced to 13 on appeal, while playing for Burnley after admitting placing 1,260 football-related bets over a 10-year period. —AFP

Challenge Cup history on the line, Glasgow face Toulon in final

PARIS: Glasgow Warriors meet Toulon in the Challenge Cup final on Friday with both outfits looking to add a fresh chapter for their storied clubs. The French side have yet to win the second-tier competition, despite reaching the decider four times and taking the Champions Cup on three straight occasions in the last decade. The Warriors, in their first continental final, they are eyeing both a first trophy since winning the Pro12 league in 2015 and Scotland's first European success. This season they have been revitalized under former South Africa fly-half Franco Smith and May 6's United Rugby Championship play-off loss to Munster was only their second defeat since November in any competition.

"We're sticking to what we do normally, but obviously there is that added wee bit of excitement going about," Glasgow lock Scott Cummings told reporters on Monday. "We've talked about the effort we've put in throughout the year and having something to show for that. Franco has always said 'You've not won anything yet'. We want to come home with a bit of silverware, that's the most important part," he added. Scotland's Cummings is set to come up against former Glasgow team-mate and fellow second-row Brian Alatau'uese. The 132kg Samoa forward spent two seasons at Scotstoun before heading to the Cote d'Azur in 2018. "Big Briz was really good quality here as well," Cummings said. "He had a couple of knee issues when he was here and that maybe meant he didn't get some of the game time he was hoping for, but he's a top-quality player. I haven't messaged him, but I'm sure I'll share a beer with him after the game," he added.

'Chock-a-block'

Toulon's most recent Challenge Cup heartache came last May, losing to fellow French side Lyon. "It's completely different. We're focused on this one, to win it," Toulon scrum-half Baptiste Serin told reporters on Monday. "If you look back to the past, it's not a good thing, it will make you frus-

Challenge Cup 2022-2023

President: Charles Shaw (SCO)
Coach: Franco Smith (RSA)

GLASGOW (SCO) FINAL TOULON (FRA)

Friday May 19 1900 GMT

Aviva Stadium DUBLIN Referee Wayne Barnes (ENG)

President: Bernard Lemaître (FRA)
Coach: Pierre Mignoni (FRA) Franck Azema (FRA)

Scrum-half Ali Price (Aged 30)

Winger Juita Wainiqolo (Aged 24)

Path to final

Scarlets (WAL) 1/2 Treviso (ITA)

Lions (RSA) 1/4 Lyon (FRA)

Dragons (WAL) Last 16 Cheetahs (RSA)

Challenge Cup 2022-2023

36	Tries	29
29	Conversions	17
2	Penalties	8
246	Points	209

Sources: EPC, clubs AFP

trated. We're focused on what we have to do in this final," he added. There will be tens of thousands fewer Toulon fans at Lansdowne Road compared to last season, when the game was played in Marseille, 65km up the Mediterranean coast from Stade Mayol. "The stadium was full for the last final

and we lost," Serin said. "It's not a way to guarantee victory having your own fans there. We would have preferred the stadium to be chock-a-block with Toulon fans but we're focused on the objective and not what surrounds the final," he added. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

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

Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name

I, Khan Nazia Nurulla, holder of Indian Passport No. T2418372 having permanent address H.No. 81/3, near Ameeniyah High School, Islampura, Baina Vasco-Da-Gama, South Goa, India- 403802. Residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Nazia Can. (#3534) 19/5/2023.

I, VIMAL NANDAKUMAR, holder of Indian Passport No: N2475690 having permanent address 204, Pushtara 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.

City thrash Spanish giants 4-0

Man City on brink of ending Champions League wait



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Swiss defender Manuel Akanji (center) heads past Real Madrid's Brazilian defender Eder Militao to score the team's third goal during the UEFA Champions League second leg semi-final football match between Manchester City and Real Madrid on May 17, 2023. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Manchester City's time to conquer Europe may have finally come after Real Madrid were slayed by the English champions on Wednesday to reach their second Champions League final. City thrashed the Spanish giants 4-0 at the Etihad for a 5-1 aggregate victory that exacted revenge for a dramatic semi-final exit to Madrid 12 months ago. Pep Guardiola's men are not just closing in on the trophy the club's owners have desired since an Abu-Dhabi backed takeover in 2008 began pouring billions of pounds of investment into the club.

Victory against Inter Milan in Istanbul next month could complete a treble of Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League, matching local rivals Manchester United's historic achievement in 1998/99. A fifth league title in six seasons appears a foregone conclusion with City needing a maximum of three points from their final three games. United will have their chance to protect their record as the only English club to do the treble in the first ever Manchester derby FA Cup final on June 3.

But City appear to have cleared the biggest hurdle standing between them and immortality by killing off the Champions

League monster that is Madrid. Carlo Ancelotti's men produced a series of thrilling escape acts to win the competition for the 14th time last season. This time City made sure to twist the knife when they had the defending champions on the floor. "It was so painful last season," added Guardiola. "We had what happened in our stomach for one year. I think today everything came out."

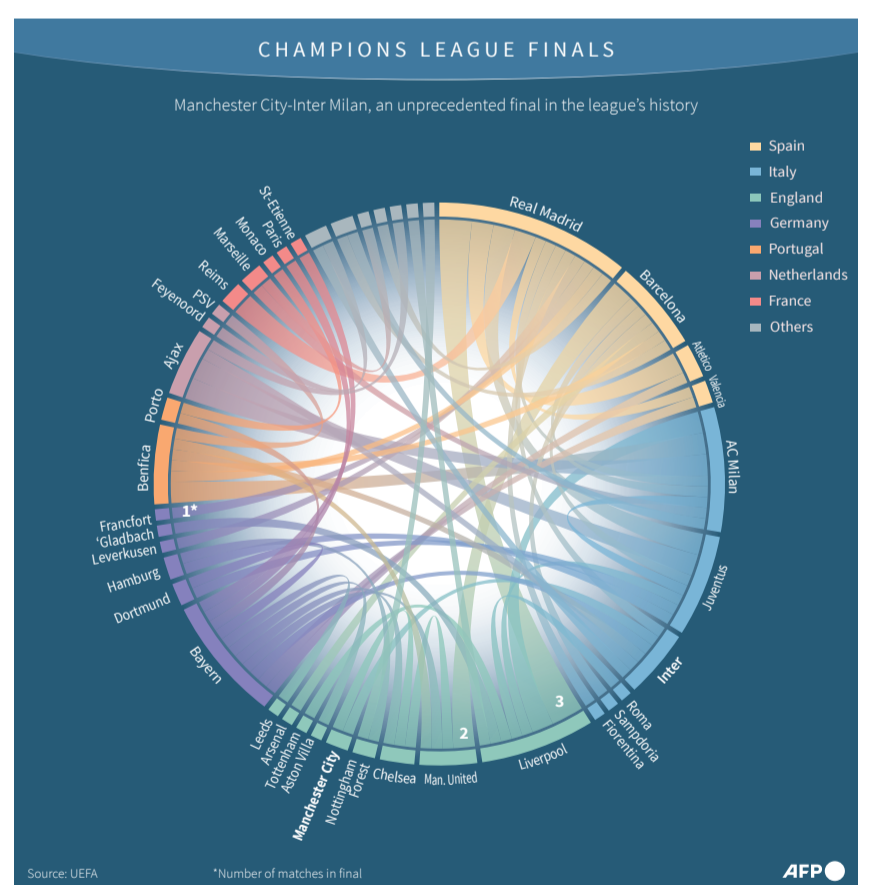
Courtois denies Haaland

The collective brilliance of Guardiola's side shone through on a night when stars Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne were kept scoreless. Only a hat-trick of stunning saves by Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois to deny Haaland his 53rd goal of the season saved the visitors from a historic humbling. Bernardo Silva's first-half double was the least City deserved from a near flawless first-half. Even when they took their foot off the gas after the break, Manuel Akanji's deflected goal and Julian Alvarez's cool finish in stoppage time gave the scoreline a fair reflection.

Guardiola said on the eve of the game that his legacy in Manchester was "already exceptional". But a failure to win the Champions League at City has always been a

stick to beat the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss. Guardiola's last lifted the European Cup 11 years ago, with a 3-1 win over Manchester United at Wembley the high point of his glorious four-year spell in charge of Barca. Seven years into his reign at the Etihad, City got their equivalent as the night of Madrid were made to look mediocre. "One of the highest," said Guardiola on where the performance ranked in his managerial career. The style, as much of as the success, of that Barcelona team was why City built an entire sporting structure to lure Guardiola to the Etihad.

His former colleagues at the Catalan giants Ferran Soriano and Txiki Begiristain were installed as the club's CEO and sporting director to entice Guardiola to England. The marriage of seemingly infinite resources from the Gulf and one of the greatest managers the game has ever seen is bearing fruit. "You cannot always win, but you can try," said Guardiola. "We have elevated this club to be there every year. This is what makes a big team, that come May or June you are always there fighting for titles." Already the dominant force in English football, City stand just one match away from finally scratching their Champions League itch. — AFP



Butler fuels Heat in game 1 victory

LOS ANGELES: Jimmy Butler's 35 points and a scorching third quarter propelled the eighth-seeded Miami Heat to a 123-116 victory over the Celtics on Wednesday in game one of the NBA Eastern Conference finals in Boston. The Heat erased a 13-point second-quarter deficit to snatch home court advantage from the Celtics, out-scoring Boston 46-25 in the third period to seize control. Jayson Tatum, the 51-point hero of Boston's game-seven victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Sunday, scored 30 points, but he coughed up two crucial turnovers in the final minutes as the Heat turned the defensive screws.

Butler added five rebounds, seven assists and six steals. Bam Adebayo scored 20 points with eight rebounds and five assists and Max Strus, Gabe Vincent, Caleb Martin and Kyle Lowry each scored 15 points for Miami. "Just shows the group of guys we have," Butler told broadcaster TNT of the strong, balanced effort. "So many different guys step up in so many different ways, night-in, night-out, we've been doing it all year."

Once again Butler got off to a hot start, his 12 first-quarter points marking his seventh game of these playoffs with a double-digit first period. But it was a back-and-forth battle,

neither team leading by more than four points in a first quarter that featured 13 lead changes and ended with the Celtics up 30-28. Tatum heated up in the second quarter as the Celtics pushed their lead to as many as 13 points before taking 66-57 lead into the break.

Boston out-scored Miami 40-16 in the paint in the first half, Marcus Smart keeping their aggressive offense clicking with 10 first-half assists — tying his career high for a half. Robert Williams was among four Celtics players to score in double figures before halftime and his four offensive rebounds helped account for the Boston's 11-2 advantage in second-chance points. The Heat responded with a vengeance in the third and led by 12 going into the final frame. Bedeviled by 11 first-half turnovers, the Heat had just one in the third period as they dominated every facet.

Boston opened the fourth on a 7-0 run and were just four back with 2:31 remaining. Martin drilled a corner three-pointer off a pass from Butler and after Tatum was whistled for traveling on back-to-back possessions Butler drained a three-point dagger that put Miami up by 10 with 1:03 to play. Miami made 16 of 31 three-point attempts while the Celtics made just 10 of their 29 from beyond the arc. Jaylen Brown, who scored 22 points for Boston, got a scare early in the fourth when a loose-ball scramble saw multiple players hit the court and he came up grimacing and holding his left forearm. The Celtics will try to level the best-of-seven series when they host game two on



BOSTON: Jimmy Butler #22 of the Miami Heat is defended by Jaylen Brown #7 of the Boston Celtics during the fourth quarter of game one of the Eastern Conference Finals at TD Garden on May 17, 2023. — AFP

Friday, but Butler said the Heat won't be content to leave Boston with a split of the first two games. "We did our job tonight," Butler said. "But we've got another one to get in two days."

It's the third time in four years that the Heat and Celtics are meeting in the conference finals. Last year Miami were the top seeds in the East while this year the Heat shook off an injury plagued regular season to come through the play-in and grab the eighth seed, knocking off the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks in the first round. The Celtics, who edged Miami 4-3 last year, are again seeded second as they try to get back to the NBA Finals after falling in the championship series last season to the Golden State Warriors. The series winner will face either the Denver Nuggets or Los Angeles Lakers for the title. — AFP

Nadal pulls out of French Open, set to end career

MANACOR: Rafael Nadal on Thursday withdrew from the French Open because his hip injury has not healed and said he expects 2024 to be his final year in professional tennis. "It's not a decision I'm taking, it's a decision my body is taking," said the 36-year-old Spanish player, who has played at the claycourt major every year since 2005 and won it 14 times. Nadal said he was taking a few months off, meaning he will also definitely miss Wimbledon and most likely the US Open, before starting to play again.

And he said next year would bring down the curtain on a career that has so far produced 22 Grand Slam singles titles. "It's probably going to be my last year on the professional tour, I can't say this 100 percent because you never know what's going to happen," he told a news conference. "The injury I suffered in Australia has not healed as we hoped." Roland Garros became impossible. I will not be there after many

years, with everything that (tournament) means to me."

Nadal said he will not set a date for his return, but said the Davis Cup in November could be a potential target. The former world number one has not played since the Australian Open in January where he picked up a hip injury in a shock second round loss to Mackenzie McDonald of the United States. He was expected to recover inside six weeks, comfortably in time for the claycourt season and to launch an assault on a record-extending 15th title at Roland Garros.

However, with his 37th birthday little over two weeks away and having skipped Masters events in Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo, Madrid and Rome, Nadal appears to be facing a final battle he cannot win. After a career plagued by knee, wrist and foot injuries in particular, the alarm bells have been ringing ever louder over the last year. — AFP