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NEWS IN BRIEF

Rumaihi media personality of the year

DUBAI: Pan-Arab talks bringing together media bodies from across the region have named Kuwait's Dr Mohammad Al-Rumaihi as the personality of the year in recognition of his contributions in the field. Rumaihi, a professor of political sociology at Kuwait University, dedicated the achievement to his compatriots who have made notable contributions in the field of media and journalism, saying the accolade was a "tremendous honor". — KUNA



Dr Mohammad Al-Rumaihi

Kuwait stands with Bahrain

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly denounced the "heinous attack" on a Bahraini force garrisoning on the southern borders of Saudi Arabia which left two martyred and several injured. Kuwait stands in full solidarity with Bahrain in the aftermath of the despicable aggression by Houthis militants, the ministry said in a statement on Monday. — KUNA (See Page 2)

Kuwait, UK FMs discuss Iraqi ruling

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah held on Tuesday a phone conversation with UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, during which they discussed deep historical ties, as well as an Iraqi court ruling declaring the Khor Abdullah waterway agreement as unconstitutional. A ministry statement said the Iraqi decision was ahistorical and lacking context. The two officials also touched on Iraq's cancellation of the security swap protocol in Khor Abdullah, which was signed with Kuwait in 2008. — KUNA

Pan-GCC single visa mullied

ABU DHABI: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is considering a single visa system that will see its residents travel freely between member states, a UAE minister said. Bloomberg quoted Abdulla Bin Touq Al-Marri, UAE Minister of Economy, as saying the regime could be introduced "very soon".

Contaminated drug causes vision loss

LAHORE: Dozens of diabetes patients in Pakistan suffered vision loss after being given a contaminated drug, a provincial health official said Tuesday. Two men behind the supply of the drug, Avastin, have been arrested and 12 government inspectors suspended after an investigation found the medicine was packaged in an unhygienic environment. — AFP

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun on Monday submitted a draft law calling to stop the appointment of expats in government jobs unless there are no Kuwaitis to occupy the post. The draft law also stipulates that total salaries and remuneration for expats in public jobs should not exceed that of their Kuwaiti colleagues.

The bill calls for a total ban on the appointment of non-Kuwaiti employees through recruitment agencies. Under the draft law, a public job is defined as those in government ministries, bodies, departments and alike. Article 2 of the draft law states that "public jobs are restricted only to Kuwaiti nationals" unless

MoH employs AI for diagnosis, treatment

KUWAIT: The ministry of health has begun employing artificial intelligence techniques in various realms, namely for diagnosis and treatment, and has started training cadres on the emerging technology. The ministry is also using AI techniques at hospitals for various tasks including clinical care, research, production of medicines and overhauling administrative operations.

Saudi envoys meet Abbas as Zionist minister visits Riyadh

RAMALLAH: Saudi Arabia on Tuesday sent its first delegation in three decades to the occupied West Bank to reassure Palestinians that it will defend their cause even as it forges closer ties with the Zionist entity. In a sign of the thaw, Zionist Tourism Minister Haim Katz visited Riyadh on the same day, for the first such high-level public mission to the oil-rich kingdom. Washington has urged its Middle East allies — the Zionist entity and Saudi Arabia — to normalize diplomatic relations, following on from similar deals involving the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco. The Palestinians have labelled those United States-brokered agreements a betrayal of their plight and quest for statehood — but Nayef Al-Su-

dairi, who headed the Saudi delegation, sought to reassure them that Riyadh stands by their side.

"The Palestinian matter is a fundamental pillar," Sudairi, the new non-resident ambassador to the Palestinians, said after meeting top Palestinian diplomat Riyadh Al-Maliki in Ramallah for talks and to present his credentials. "And it's certain that the Arab initiative, which was presented by the kingdom in 2002, is a cornerstone of any upcoming deal."

The 2002 initiative proposed Arab relations with the Zionist entity in exchange for its withdrawal from the West Bank, east Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights, and a just resolution for the Palestinians. Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, 87, last week again stressed strong reservations to Arab countries building ties with the Zionist entity. "Those who think that peace can prevail in the Middle East without the Palestinian people enjoying their full, legitimate national rights would be mistaken," Abbas told the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

Jaber Hospital had witnessed a surgery with the Olympus device for the first time in the Gulf, Dr

newed for a similar period, but after again advertising the job. Expat employees should not be given any type of allowances throughout the contract period.

The draft law totally bans the appointment of expats in government jobs through recruitment agencies. The bill also stipulates that when it becomes a law, it will apply to existing expat employees when their contracts run out. In the explanatory note, Saadoun says that despite the submission of several draft laws by MPs calling to speed up the appointment of Kuwaitis in government jobs, the appointment of expats in public jobs and sometimes in sensitive jobs that control key issues at the cost of Kuwaitis puts national security at risk and increases the number of unemployed nationals.

Mazidi said, indicating that surgeons in these procedures are aided with 3D devices that screen patients' internal organs. Moreover, the hospital had also conducted the first endoscopic operation with AI technology for pinpointing tumors in the colon and the stomach — for the first time in Kuwait. He explained that the technology reveals tumors that cannot be detected with the naked eye.

Dr Mazidi announced that a division for training staff on AI at the hospital would be opened in October. The hospital, he added, already has a special ward called "the virtual division", where doctors are trained on state-of-the-art techniques. — KUNA



RAMALLAH: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas receives the credentials of Saudi Ambassador to Palestine Nayef bin Bandar Al-Sudairi on Sept 26, 2023. — AFP

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RNA recovered from extinct animal in first

STOCKHOLM: Scientists have for the first time recovered RNA from an extinct species, the Tasmanian tiger, raising hope for the resurrection of animals once thought lost forever. Stockholm University researchers told AFP. "RNA has never been extracted and sequenced from an extinct species before," said Love Dalen, a Stockholm University professor of evolutionary genomics who co-led the project. "The ability to recover RNA from extinct species constitutes a small step (toward) extinct species in the future," he said. Dalen and his team were able to sequence RNA molecules from a 130-year-old Tasmanian tiger speci-

men preserved at room temperature in Sweden's Museum of Natural History. With this they were able to reconstruct skin and skeletal muscle RNA. RNA is a molecule that is used to convey information from the genome to the rest of the cell about what it should do. "If you're going to resurrect an extinct animal, then you need to know where the genes are and what they do, and in what tissues they are regulated," Dalen said, explaining the need for knowledge about both DNA and RNA.

The last known living Tasmanian tiger or thylacine, a carnivorous marsupial, died in captivity in 1936 at the Beaumaris Zoo in Tasmania. After European colonization of Australia, the animal was declared a pest and in 1888 a bounty was offered for each full-grown animal killed. Scientists have focused their de-extinction efforts on the Tasmanian tiger as its natural habitat in Tasmania is largely preserved.

Daniela Kalthoff, in charge of the mammal collection at the Museum of



STOCKHOLM: Daniela Kalthoff, in charge of the mammal collection at the Museum of Natural History, examines a dry specimen of a Tasmanian tiger on Sept 26, 2023. — AFP

Natural History, said the idea of possibly resurrecting the Tasmanian tiger was an "exciting idea". "This is a fantastic animal and I would love to see it live again," she said, demonstrating the black-and-brown striped skin the researchers used in their study. Their findings also have implications for studying pandemic RNA viruses.

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Local

Kuwait to receive Eurofighter aircraft, part of bilateral deal

Italian ambassador inaugurates new visa office

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Italy to Kuwait Carlo Baldocci has announced that Kuwait is set to receive three to four Eurofighter aircrafts in the second half of October, part of a bilateral agreement between the two countries. Furthermore, it has been revealed that Maria Tripodi, Italian Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is planning a short visit to Kuwait in the coming week. During this visit, both nations aim to explore opportunities for collaboration across various fields. This visit underscores the commitment of Kuwait and Italy to strengthen their ties and cooperate on shared interests and partnerships.

Ambassador Baldocci made these statements during the inauguration of the new visa office at Oula Tower, which aims to streamline the visa application process for Kuwaiti nationals applying for Schengen visas. He expressed expectations that the number of visas issued would double this year following the implementation of the 'cascade' visa system. This led to the selection of a larger office space to accommodate the growing number of individuals interested in traveling to Italy.

The Italian ambassador noted that more than 80,000 Kuwaiti citizens have visited Italy since the beginning of the year, with 25,000 obtaining visas through the embassy's consular section, while the rest held prior visas. He highlighted Italy has issued over 25,000 visas in Kuwait, a notable increase compared to the 19,500 issued between 2021 and 2022. The processing time for Italian visas for Kuwaiti citizens does not exceed 48 hours.

During peak periods, the embassy's consular section issues approximately 300 visas daily. Baldocci advised prospective travelers to Italy to apply for their visas well in advance of their travel



KUWAIT: Ambassador of Italy to Kuwait Carlo Baldocci inaugurates new visa office at Oula Tower.

dates to avoid delays, especially if Italy is their primary destination or the location of their longest stay. Moreover, Baldocci mentioned a significant increase in the number of student visas granted to Kuwaiti students wishing to study in Italy, with more than 250 Kuwaiti students currently pursuing their education in Italy. He also highlighted the availability of four weekly direct flights to both

Rome and Milan and anticipated that this number would increase to daily direct flights by the summer of 2024.

The new visa office includes an exhibition area showcasing Italian culture, history, language and traditions, and its waiting rooms feature Italian designer furniture. This, coupled with the recent modification of the "cascade" visa mechanism for



Kuwait, will simplify the process for Kuwaiti citizens seeking long-term visas to Italy and Europe, provided that Italy is their primary destination for their initial journey. Italy is known for its warm hospitality, welcoming atmosphere, safety, diverse landscapes, millennia-old cities and unparalleled culinary tradition, making it a place where anyone can feel at home.

Congratulatory messages pour in



**Azerbaijan Ambassador
Emil Karimov**

I am pleased to extend my congratulations on the 62nd anniversary of the establishment of your esteemed newspaper. I gladly remember my visit to your paper on May 18th, 2023. I am confident that the cooperation between our embassy and your paper will continue on a wider scale in the future. On this auspicious occasion, I repeat my wishes for continued success. I take this opportunity to express to you and your family my best wishes for good health and success.

On the auspicious occasion of the 62nd anniversary of the Kuwait Times, I, and on behalf of all my colleagues in the embassy, wish to convey our heartfelt greetings and warm felicitations to all the distinguished team members of the Kuwait Times newspaper. Since its inception, Kuwait Times has regarded itself as a window into Kuwait and steadily strived to keep the world informed about the country. Fulfilling its mission to deliver accurate news to readers at home and abroad, Kuwait Times has established itself as one of the leading newspapers in Kuwait. For the past 62 years, Kuwait Times has been a beacon of truth, providing a reliable source of information that has shaped readers understanding of the world. Your dedication to the highest standards of journalism has earned you the trust and respect of countless readers. I wish the entire Kuwait Times team good health, wellbeing, continued progress, and prosperity.



**Major General MD Ashikuzzaman
Ambassador of Bangladesh**

ACA partners with Harvard University

KUWAIT: American Creativity Academy's (ACA) Professional Learning Hub in Kuwait has unveiled an exciting partnership with the prestigious Harvard Graduate School of Education in the United States, bringing Harvard's expertise to Kuwait's educational landscape. This partnership marks a significant milestone in ACA's mission toward educational excellence in Kuwait, by providing professional learning opportunities to ACA's staff and all educators around Kuwait.

"The collaboration with Harvard Graduate School of Education is a game-changer for education in Kuwait," said Sevag Kendirjian, the education director for SAMA Education, the holding company of American Creativity Academy Schools. When ACA Professional Learning Hub was founded in 2022, its vision was clear: to develop educators. "We understand the importance of investing in our educators, and recognize that this pursuit extends beyond our school," said Dr Claire Shea, the Head of School at ACA's Hawally Schools.

School Leaders in the Middle East can access a world-class leadership course right in their own backyard, delivered by Harvard's renowned faculty. The three-day leadership course offered by Harvard from 30 November to 2 December, is tailor-made for senior school



leadership roles in the Middle East: with cutting-edge strategies, innovative approaches, and leadership skills that will redefine the educational landscape in the region.

"We are looking forward to bringing our rich content and high-quality instruction to Kuwait this November," stated Shaylan Carrey, the associate director for the Middle East Learning Initiative from Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Millennials' spending habits on online games and the challenges

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Spending money on online games and participating in social media challenges has surged with the advent of technological advancements worldwide, especially in the realm of online gaming. Countries like Saudi Arabia invested over \$3 billion in this sector just last year. Concurrently, social media has capitalized on this global interest in gaming by incorporating live interactions between users and introducing tools that enable users to exchange gifts (money), resulting in a significant influx of funds.

While these developments have turned the industry into a multibillion-dollar behemoth, especially due to Generation Alpha (born after 2010), there remain some members of the millennial generation (born between 1981-1996) who are not entirely convinced about spending money on social media challenges and online games. Kuwait Times interviewed millennials to gauge their interest in these expenditures, with older respondents highlighting the challenges they face, given that they grew up during a time when video games were more affordable and prices were cheaper.

They also noted that their willingness to embrace this spending behavior often depended on the attitudes of the younger generation, particularly Generation Alpha and Generation Z (born between 1996 and 2010), which includes their children and siblings. The prevalence of spending habits among these younger generations has influenced their decision to adapt to the changing landscape.

Rawan Essa, 34, admitted that she had never considered spending money on online games, but several factors led her to reconsider, especially since she enjoys online games without being addicted to them. "I believe that online game creators have understood this issue and have worked on enhancing their techniques to tempt us (the older generation) into chang-



ing our minds, ultimately making us want to spend money," she said. "Once you start, you never stop, especially when most games offer items at affordable prices, often not exceeding KD 1 to 2, and sometimes even less. It becomes an unstoppable spending behavior," she added.

Omar Khaled, 37, initially resisted allowing his children to spend money on online games. However, he noticed that his kids felt left out among their peers, and the social aspect played a pivotal role in changing his perspective. "After a while, I tried playing online games myself, and over time, I found myself spending money on them. I also know people who engage in social media challenges, but their motive is to earn money. Nonetheless, I consider this an unethical way to make a living," he said.

Resistance to the Idea

On the other hand, the online gaming industry still faces challenges in gaining the approval and trust of millennials to adopt this new spend-

ing behavior, which could open up new revenue streams for them.

Ansam Ali, 34 years old, expressed her reluctance to engage in this spending behavior, as she believes that simply using online platforms for gaming already benefits these companies, not to mention the deluge of advertisements from major corporations that capitalize on users' interests. "It's another way for these companies to take advantage of people's hobbies, essentially a form of exploitation," she argued.

Hussain Abdullah, 29, echoed Ansam's sentiments, describing these companies as engaging in deceptive practices and viewing such expenditures as wasteful. Regarding social media challenges, he stressed that participation is a personal decision but noted that the younger generation is the most active on social media due to differing personal convictions. Additionally, he pointed out that participation depends on individuals' financial situations, geographical locations and their desire for quick profits, although he considers it an unethical means of earning money.

Kuwait stands with Bahrain, denounces Houthi attack

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly denounced the "heinous attack" on a Bahraini force garrisoning on the southern borders of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which left two martyrs and several injuries. Kuwait stands in full solidarity with the sisterly Kingdom of Bahrain in the aftermath of the despicable aggression by Houthi militants, the ministry said. The Ministry expressed sincere condolences for the leadership and people of Bahrain and the families of the two martyrs, praying for Allah the Almighty to lodge the martyrs in paradise and grant their families solace and the wounded a quick recovery.

GCC condoles Bahrain

Meanwhile, Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi of the Gulf Cooperation Council expressed sincere condolences for King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa and Bahrainis for the martyrdom of an army officer and a non-commissioned officer in an attack on the Saudi-led coalition forces. He prayed for Allah the Almighty to lodge the two martyrs in paradise and grant their families patience and solace, wishing the wounded a quick recovery. The Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen announced the martyrdom of two servicemen in a Houthi attack that injured a number of other servicemen in a border area between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Yemen on Monday morning.

Treachorous attack

Also, the Arab League condemned on Tuesday the treacherous acts of the Houthi militias in Yemen, saying that they threatened peace in the war-torn country and a ceasefire with the legitimate Yemeni government. A statement by Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit said that the Houthis were becoming more resistant to all notions of peace, choosing violence and destruction as a means to communicate. Abul-Gheit took the chance to express his condolences to the Bahraini servicemen who lost their lives during a Houthi attack south of Saudi Arabia, wishing for a speedy recovery for those wounded in the attack. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Group photo of organizers and sponsors. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

LEGO Shows returns to Kuwait, unleashing fun, entertainment

Special offers will be available for school trips, educational institutions

Al-Sayer: We are dedicated to keeping pace with the evolution of the entertainment sector in Kuwait.

Murad: We support and assist initiatives that provide an environment conducive to the future generations.

Majzoub: This year's festival is even more extensive with a greater number of activities.

Al-Dihani: We will provide specialized workshops using the educational spike prime kits.

KUWAIT: After much anticipation, the eagerly awaited "LEGO Shows" is making its return to Kuwait for the second time, following its initial appearance in 2019. This event promises to bring the unique world of LEGO adventures to the Kuwait International Fairground (Hall 8) from Oct 1 to 7, 2023, running from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm. LEGO Shows is the official LEGO event in the Middle East, and this marks the second time Kuwait has hosted this grand event, thanks to collaboration with Local Flavor and the support and sponsorship of several leading organizations, all under one roof.

Khaled Salah Al-Sayer, Managing Partner at Local Flavor, expressed the company's commitment to organizing such events. He noted that they are dedicated to keeping pace with the evolution of the entertainment sector in Kuwait, providing fun and thrilling experiences suitable for all tastes and age groups.

Ziad Majzoub, Vice President Sales and Marketing at Al-Rai Media Group, expressed his delight in sponsoring LEGO Shows in Kuwait as the exclusive media sponsor for the second consecutive time, following their sponsorship of the first event in 2019. He highlighted that this year's festival is even more extensive with a greater number of activities. He added that Al-Rai Media Group's sponsorship is driven by its commitment to participating in events that en-

gage various segments of Kuwaiti society, particularly children, to nurture their creative skills.

Bilal Murad, Executive Director of Marketing at M2R, said: "We are pleased to sponsor the LEGO Shows as part of our strategy to promote innovation. Through this sponsorship, we aim to contribute to the development of creative abilities among young age groups, especially children. We support and assist initiatives that provide an environment conducive to the future generations, adhering to the high-

Alnaqeeb: This event highlights the importance of engaging with children and providing everything that can enhance their abilities and skills.

est global standards, and offering assistance to any entity with creative ideas that serve the community."

Jana Khaldoun Alnaqeeb, Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility Manager at Kuwait News and Kuwait Times, emphasized that the interactive entertainment shows featured at LEGO Shows represent a significant added value for children and their families. She pointed out the participation of Kuwait Times and Kuwait News as media

sponsors is driven by their awareness of the importance of actively contributing to the development of children's skills, which significantly impacts their future success. Additionally, this event highlights the importance of engaging with children and providing everything that can enhance their abilities and skills.

Nada Abdullah Al-Dihani, Director General of Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity, one of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences centers, said: "We are delighted to

bringing back the LEGO Shows experience after a four-year hiatus due to the unexpected challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years. We aim to cater to LEGO enthusiasts in Kuwait with a larger space and more activities this year. The event promises to be a fun-filled experience for both children and families, all under one roof, thanks to the collaboration of several leading institutions that played a significant role in supporting this event. The sponsoring entities are expected to participate in an innovative LEGO-style manner."

The exhibition ticket grants access for one day per person and allows them to enjoy all the unique activities in the 26 designated areas throughout the day. Special offers will be available for school trips, educational institutions, and groups of 20 people or more. Regarding the live shows accompanying the events, three shows will run from Sunday to Saturday, and will include meetings and greetings with LEGO characters, in addition to exciting LEGO movies loved by all.

As for the live shows accompanying the events, which will be across 3 shows from Sunday to Saturday, as well as meet and greets with Lego characters, and in addition to the fun activities and Lego characters, the event will include the Lego movies known and loved by everyone.



The audience

Kuwait eyes renewable energy

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The delegation of the European Union to Kuwait hosted a high-level event on Tuesday titled "Supporting a Just Transition in Kuwait: Decent Jobs for a Sustainable Future". The event was organized in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD) and the International Labor Organization (ILO). Its primary focus was on highlighting the significance of a just transition in addressing the impacts of climate change in a manner that prioritizes human rights and social concerns. This event took place in anticipation of the 28th Climate Change Conference in the United Arab Emirates.

During his opening remarks, Secretary-General of SCPD Khaled Mahdi emphasized that the event aimed to discuss the importance of a just transition and its implications on the economy and society in light of climate change. He underscored the need to raise public awareness about these issues and reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to achieving a just transition that considers human rights, social protection and the future requirements of the labor market.

Mahdi also highlighted Kuwait's efforts to embrace renewable energy projects, including the development of environmental fuels, Al-Zour refinery, Al-Shagaya renewable energy complex, and other initiatives. Mahdi explained that Kuwait's strategies include diversifying energy

sources by adopting renewable energy solutions, transitioning from fossil fuels to liquefied gas, enhancing oil refineries to produce cleaner fuels and establishing a national carbon reduction strategy extending until 2050. He stressed that a just transition was a global approach to addressing climate change and emphasized Kuwait's commitment to mitigating the dangers of climate change through collaborative efforts.

Head of the European Union Delegation Anne Koistinen said the event not only highlighted the urgent need to address climate change challenges and secure a sustainable future for younger generations, but also emphasized the importance of cooperative efforts in achieving these goals. She stated that the European Union was ready to collaborate with Kuwait, ILO and like-minded partners in advancing a just transition. "Our collective efforts are a significant step towards creating a more sustainable future based on principles of human rights and dignity," she said.

Peter Rademaker, Deputy Regional Director and Director of the Decent Work Team at the ILO Regional Office for Arab States, emphasized the collaborative nature of the event and the joint commitment of all participating parties. He noted that achieving a just transition that creates decent job opportunities and leaves no one behind requires sound public policies, effective social dialogue among all affected groups and respect for fundamental labor principles and rights. Rademaker concluded by emphasizing the event's role in developing innovative ways to protect the environment, eradicate poverty and promote social justice, both regionally and globally, ahead of the next COP28 summit in the United Arab Emirates.

Groups address, tackle challenges facing Kuwait

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: The Festival of Civil and Student Forces Public Speaking addressed the pressing challenges facing Kuwait today, with the most significant concern being the deterioration of the education system. The event witnessed the active participation of various public benefit associations, including but not limited to the Cultural and Social Women's Association, Kuwaiti Socialists Association, Kuwaiti Graduates Association, Kuwaiti Association for Defending Public Funds, Kuwaiti Information Security Association, Kuwaiti Transparency Association, Kuwaiti Lawyers Association, Kuwaiti Economic Association, Sultan Educational Association, Kuwaiti Association for Education Quality, National Association for Child Protection, Kuwaiti Association for Learning Differences, Kuwaiti Association for Disability Issues, Kuwaiti Association for Supporting Inventors, Kuwaiti Blind Society, Hospital Child Care Association, Kuwaiti Writers' Association, National Association for Family Security (Rowasi), Kuwaiti Association for Media and Communication, Soroptimist International Kuwait for Community Development, Developmental Entrepreneurship Association and the Kuwaiti Association for Educational System Development.

Additionally, there were collaborative entities present at the event, including the Private Schools Union, Democratic Center List and Kuwaiti Democratic Youth Union. Their collective presence underscores the strength and awareness of civil society, individuals and students who share concerns about their future. Together, they have united to oppose

decisions driven by political motivations, emphasizing the crucial need to shield education from any form of political interference.

During the session, Abdullah Al-Radwan, President of the Kuwaiti Society Community Council, underscored the significance of education in Kuwait's history. He acknowledged that Kuwait's education system was once exemplary, benefiting from substantial funding that contributed to its excellence. However, he lamented that the introduction of extremist ideologies into education, along with changes in curricula and the recruitment of unqualified teachers, led to the decline of the education system.

He expressed his belief that recent decisions affecting education were inadequately studied and urged the values committee to pay attention to the declining educational standards, curriculum changes, the diminishing value of certificates and the preservation of national identity. Moreover, he questioned the timing of these decisions, which coincided with chaos in students' schedules and arrangements.

Radwan criticized gender segregation measures, highlighting the inconsistency in their application and the financial burden they impose on the state. He questioned the benefit of segregating genders in certain contexts while allowing interaction in others. Ghada Al-Khalaf, representing the Education Campaign, began by emphasizing that a nation's foundation lies in its people, starting with a robust education system and healthcare. Thus, education is deemed fundamental for national development and should remain free from unwarranted political or parliamentary interference.

Khalaf stressed the importance of preserving the quality and flexibility of education, emphasizing the need to combat partisanship and discrimination in educational policies. She aspired for the state to formulate clear and inclusive strategies for education that benefit all segments of society. To achieve this, she urged against political interventions in education and called for stability in educational policies.



KUWAIT: The Festival of Civil and Student Forces Public Speaking organized a program to address the pressing challenges facing Kuwait. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Red Crescent delivers generators to Ukraine



KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society delivers generators to the Ukrainian Red Cross to alleviate the energy crisis there. — KUNA photos

KHS to celebrate World Heart Day

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Coinciding with World Heart Day, Kuwait Heart Society (KHS) will celebrate this important event on Sept 29, extending the festivities for one week at Souq Al-Kuwait Market in collaboration with the Sabah Al-Ahmad Heart Center. The celebrations are scheduled to commence on Sept 28 and conclude on Oct 4.

Secretary-General of KHS Dr Rashid Al-Owayesh said during this period, the society will offer a range of medical tests, including assessments of blood glucose levels, cholesterol, blood pressure, weight and height to determine the body mass index. He emphasized that the activities are geared towards raising awareness about heart and blood vessel diseases, highlighting that prioritizing heart health enables individuals to mitigate numerous risks associated with heart-related conditions.

Dr Owayesh also underscored the significance of maintaining heart health, recommending regular physical activity, abstaining from smoking and adopting a healthy diet as essential steps in this regard. He further noted that this year's World Heart Day theme is "Use Heart, Know Heart", a choice made by the World Heart Federation.

Dr Owayesh expressed the society's pride in its social role in raising awareness about heart diseases and their associated dangers, emphasizing the importance of steering clear of these risks. He pointed out that over the past 40 years, the society has achieved significant milestones in spreading awareness of the risk factors contributing to heart diseases. Dr Owayesh concluded by affirming that the society carries out these initiatives as part of its social responsibility and encouraged both citizens and residents to take advantage of the services.

KUWAIT: The chairman of the board of directors of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer, announced on Monday the delivery of generators to the Ukrainian Red Cross to alleviate the energy crisis there. Dr. Al-Sayer said in a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the donation expresses the extent of solidarity of Kuwait's leadership, government, and people with people under difficult humanitarian conditions.

He added that this aid payment reflects the speed of Kuwait's response to the most urgent needs of Ukraine, pointing out that the associ-

ation had previously provided more than 5.33 tons of relief aid to help the refugees in Ukraine. The ambassador of Kuwait to Poland, Khalid Al-Fadhli, stressed the keenness of Kuwait to alleviate the suffering of the Ukrainians.

He stressed that Kuwaiti humanitarian aid stems from the high directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the political leadership. Ambassador Al-Fadhli pointed to the rapid response of various Kuwaiti institutions, praising the role of the Red Crescent Society in responding to Ukraine's requests.

In turn, the counselor at the embassy of Ukraine to Poland, Vitaly Pillay, in a similar statement to KUNA, praised the strength of bilateral relations between Kuwait and Ukraine, expressing his pride in what has been achieved in cooperation between the two countries in various fields. He expressed sincere gratitude to the leadership, government, and people of Kuwait for their supportive position toward the Ukrainians. The Kuwait Cabinet had earlier decided to provide humanitarian assistance worth two million US dollars to the refugees in Ukraine through the United Nations. — KUNA

Kuwait participates in Jordan's first Cyber Security Summit

AMMAN: The first cyber security summit held in Amman kicked off Monday with the participation of Kuwait to discuss a range of key global cyber security topics. Kuwait is represented by the Head of the National Cybersecurity Center, Major General Retired Engineer Mohammad Bouarki, Parliament MPs, and Members of the Arab Parliament Dr. Mohammad Al-Huwilah, Khaled Al-Mounes, and Hamdan Al-Azmi.

Speaking to KUNA, Bouarki said that cyber security is now a way of life and is a personal responsibility, especially since the danger of cyber security is now a reality that requires economic digital protection via establishing a secure environment in Kuwait enhanced by the experience of other countries. He stressed the importance of the center's participation in such events, which elevates its expertise by exchanging ideas and experiences with other countries in this field.

In his opening speech, Head of the Jordan National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), Bassam Maharmeh, said that the summit will discuss issues on cyber policies and strategies, cooperation mechanisms to confront international cyber risks and threats that countries and societies face, as well as learn about countries' related expertise and progress in achieving cybersecurity and digital safety.

On his part, Speaker of the Arab Parliament



Kuwaitis take part in Jordan's first Cyber Security Summit. — KUNA photos

Adel Al-Asoomi said that the Arab Parliament pays great interest in cyber security since it is attached to the digital economy and its vast spread globally, making it a governmental priority and an inevitable protection tool organized by new legislation and qualified entities to enhance the balance between protection of freedom and cyber attacks.

The summit, which is held under the patronage of Jordan Crown Prince Hussein, will focus on cloud security solutions, virus and malware protection, threat detection tools, security analytics, identity access management services, fraud prevention, and penetration testing. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Palestine, Egypt, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait are participating in the summit to discuss local and international legal issues on data protection and the significant impact of artificial intelligence on cybersecurity. — KUNA



Major General Retired Engineer Mohammad Bouarki

Charities launch campaign to pay students' fees

KUWAIT: The head of the Kuwaiti Charitable Societies Union, Dr. Nasser Al-Ajmi, announced Tuesday the launch of the national donation campaign to pay the fees of needy students inside Kuwait, to be held next Friday for five days. In a press conference, Al-Ajmi said that the campaign, which will be launched in cooperation with the Kuwaiti Federation of Private Schools, aims to collect donations for students who are unable to pay fees due to the limited financial situation of their families.

The initiative comes to strengthen partnership and social responsibility and achieve social solidarity between individuals, institutions, and needy families. He noted that the campaign aims to collect KD 750,000 (\$2.4 million) to pay school fees for 3,000 students at an amount of KD 250 for each student.

Among the sponsors were the Minister of Social

Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs, the Kuwait Banking Association, the General Secretariat of Endowments, and the Zakat House, in addition to 15 associations and other charitable bodies, noting that the campaign would be in several locations to collect donations: the Mubarakiya School, Al-Babtain Library, the National Library, and Bait Al-Othman.

Libya thankful

In another development, Libya's Health Ministry spokesperson, Muhyiddin Nweji, said on Monday that his government and people are very thankful for the aid presented by Kuwait in helping combat Hurricane Daniel's effects. The air bridge built by Kuwait has massively helped in alleviating the effects of the hurricane while also providing the basic needs for the affected areas, he added via a phone call to KUNA. "It's not strange that Kuwait regularly supports and aids countries and their people in disasters and crises," said Muhyiddin, who also serves on the Crisis Committee. The heavy floods hit the eastern region of Libya, causing a lot of damage, and the initiative taken by Kuwait has helped in dealing with the effects thanks to the implementation of its political leadership. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The Acting Director General of the Public Authority of Manpower, Marzouq Al-Otaibi, received the Deputy Regional Director for Arab States, Peter Rademaker and his accompanying delegation during his visit to Kuwait. — KUNA

Manpower discusses priorities with ILO

KUWAIT: The Acting Director General of the Public Authority of Manpower, Marzouq Al-Otaibi, received the Deputy Regional Director for Arab States, Peter Rademaker, and the Director of the Decent Work Team in the region at the Regional Office in Beirut and his accompanying delegation during his visit to Kuwait.

The visit aims to discuss topics of importance, namely the signing of the second decent work project, and to discuss ways of joint cooperation between the manpower and the International Labor Organization, to adopt agreed priorities for de-

cent work, namely improving the skills of women and migrant workers, improving the management of migrant workers, and promoting tripartite social dialogue, as well as cooperating in promoting and improving decent work in Kuwait.

The Deputy Director of the Regional Director for Arab States, Peter Rademaker, expressed his thanks and sincere gratitude for the measures taken by the Public Authority of Manpower. The meeting was attended by Marzouq Al-Otaibi, Acting Director General of the Public Authority of Manpower; Dr. Fahad Al-Madar, Acting Deputy Director General for Manpower Protection; Aseel Al-Mazyad, Director of Public Relations Department; and, from the ILO side, Jaber Al-Ali, ILO National Coordinator Kuwait Office; and Siham Nusseibeh, Technical Officer at the ILO National Office Kuwait Office.



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Greek flood victims race to rebuild

Macron bows to inevitable in Niger with worst Africa setback

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SEONGNAM: South Korean soldiers demonstrate their taekwondo skills during a ceremony to mark the 75th anniversary of Korea Armed Forces Day on Sept 26, 2023. — AFP

China, S Korea, Japan agree talks to push forward with cooperation

Summit first to be held since 2019 due to diplomatic tensions

BEIJING: China said on Tuesday it had agreed with Japan and South Korea to hold a summit between the three countries' leaders "as early as possible", after a rare meeting between senior diplomats in Seoul. The announcement comes as Seoul wraps up its first military parade in a decade showcasing its advanced arsenal in the face of plummeting ties with China's ally North Korea.

The three-way talks — attended by deputy and assistant ministers from the three countries — were seen as an attempt to ease Beijing's concerns over Washington's deepening security ties with Tokyo and Seoul. Beijing described them as an "in-depth discussion on promoting the stable restarting of cooperation". "It was agreed that carrying out cooperation between China, Japan and South Korea is in the common interests of the three parties," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said.

The three countries agreed to hold a meeting of their foreign ministers "in the next few months", Wang said, and to promote "the holding of a leaders' meeting as early as possible at a time convenient to all three countries." South Korea's foreign ministry also said the diplomats had "agreed to hold the trilateral summit meeting at the earliest time possible and host a trilateral ministerial meeting in preparation." The last such summit took place in 2019.

No other leaders' summit has since been held because of diplomatic and historical disputes between Seoul and Tokyo, in part linked to Japan's colonial rule over the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945. South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin stressed that cooperation among the three countries "plays a significant role not only in Northeast Asia but also in the peace, stability, and prosperity of the world", his ministry said in a statement before the meeting. Park further highlighted that together, the three nations "account for 20 percent of the world's population

and 25 percent of the global GDP", it added.

Around 4,000 troops marched through central Seoul on a rain-soaked Tuesday afternoon, cheered by umbrella-bearing crowds who waved South Korean flags. They were accompanied by 170 pieces of military equipment, including air and sea drones, tanks and missiles.

The number of troops and pieces of equipment taking part were revised down by officials from those originally planned. A flight display by South Korean warplanes, including US-made F-35 stealth fighters, was also cancelled because of the poor weather.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol watched the parade from a platform, applauding troops as they marched past. "To demonstrate the strong foundation" of Seoul's alliance with Washington, around 300 US military personnel also participated in the parade.

The parade in Seoul "is a not-so-subtle and visually provocative gesture on the part of the South Korean government of telling (North Korean leader) Kim Jong Un that Seoul will not be backing down or looking for ways to reconcile", LMI Consulting's Soo Kim, a former CIA analyst, told AFP.

As the threat from nuclear-armed North Korea grows, South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol has pulled Seoul closer to long-standing ally Washington. He has meanwhile sought to bury the hatchet with Japan, also a close US ally. In August they said a "new chapter" of close three-way security cooperation was beginning after a historic summit at Camp David in the United States. Beijing had lodged complaints over a statement released at the Camp David summit, in which the three allies criticized China's "aggressive behavior" in the South China Sea.

Beijing, Seoul's biggest trading partner, is also North Korea's most important ally and economic benefactor. While Tokyo, Seoul and Washington

have held joint military exercises against the growing North Korean threats, Beijing has recently sent senior officials to attend Pyongyang's military parades. China also claims self-ruled Taiwan as its territory, vowing to seize it one day, and officials in Washington — a key ally of Taipei, Seoul and Tokyo — have cited 2027

as a possible timeline for an invasion. In April, South Korea's Yoon said that tensions over Taiwan were due to "attempts to change the status quo by force". The comment resulted in a diplomatic tit-for-tat, with Beijing lodging a protest, which Seoul condemned as a "serious diplomatic discourtesy". — AFP

Big Tech rolls back misinformation curbs ahead of 2024 polls

WASHINGTON: As a global election season widely expected to be mired in misinformation and falsehoods fast approaches, the big US-based tech platforms are walking back policies meant to curb them, stoking alarm. Whether it is YouTube scrapping a key misinformation policy or Facebook altering fact checking controls, the social media giants are demonstrating a certain lassitude with being the sheriffs of the internet Wild West.

The changes have come in a climate of layoffs, cost-cutting measures and pressure from right-wing groups that accuse the likes of Facebook-parent Meta or YouTube owner Google of suppressing free speech. This has spurred tech companies to loosen content moderation policies, downsize trust and safety teams and, in the case of Elon Musk-owned X (formerly Twitter), restore accounts known for pushing bogus conspiracies.

Those moves, researchers say, have eroded their ability to tackle what is expected to be a deluge of misinformation during more than 50 major elections around the world next year, not only in the United States, but also in India, Africa and the European Union. "Social media companies aren't ready for the 2024 election tsunami," the watchdog Global Coalition for Tech Justice said in a report this month. "While they continue to count their profits, our democracies are left vulnerable to violent coup attempts, venomous hate speech, and election interference." In June, YouTube said it will stop removing content that falsely claims the 2020 US presidential election was plagued by "fraud, errors or glitches," a move sharply criticized by misinformation

researchers. YouTube justified its action, saying that removing this content could have the "unintended effect of curtailing political speech."

'Era of Recklessness'

Twitter, now known as X, said in November it would no longer enforce its COVID misinformation policy. Since billionaire Musk's turbulent acquisition of the platform last year, it has restored thousands of accounts that were once suspended for violations including spreading misinformation and introduced a paid verification system that researchers say has served to boost conspiracy theorists.

Last month, the platform said it would now allow paid political advertising from US candidates, reversing a previous ban and sparking concerns over misinformation and hate speech in next year's election. "Musk's control over Twitter has helped usher in a new era of recklessness by large tech platforms," Nora Benavidez, from the nonpartisan group Free Press, told AFP. "We're observing a significant rollback in concrete measures companies once had in place."

Platforms are also under pressure from conservative US advocates who accuse them of colluding with the government to censor or suppress right-leaning content under the guise of fact-checking. "These companies think that if they just keep appeasing Republicans, they'll just stop causing them problems when all they're doing is increasing their own vulnerability," said Berin Szoka, president of TechFreedom, a think tank.

For years, Facebook's algorithm automatically moved posts lower in the feed if they were flagged by one of the platform's third-party fact-checking partners, including AFP, reducing the visibility of false or misleading content. Facebook recently gave US users the controls, allowing them to move this content higher if they want, in a potentially significant move that the platform said will give users more power over its algorithm. — AFP

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	4.990		6.990
	4.190		2.430
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International

Macron bows to inevitable in Niger with worst Africa setback

‘France felt that it was losing its footing, but remained in denial and stunned’

PARIS: France is finally facing up to reality by withdrawing both its ambassador and military from Niger two months after a coup ousted the pro-Paris president, but the pullout marks the most severe setback yet for President Emmanuel Macron's Africa policy, observers say. Macron had staked France's strategy in the Sahel region of Africa on the political future of President Mohamed Bazoum, making the country a hub for its forces after successive coups in Mali and Burkina Faso forced the withdrawal of French troops. Paris long appeared reluctant to accept the ousting of Bazoum in a military coup on July 26. But while still insisting Bazoum remains the legitimate president, Macron announced in a TV interview Sunday that France's ambassador would soon leave, followed by all French troops by the end of the year.

France must now grapple with the logistical headache of pulling out 1,500 troops and hardware from a country ruled by military leaders it bitterly opposes, as well as urgent questions about the fate of its entire military deployment to fight jihadists in the region. “This third blow in less than two years against the presence of French military forces in Africa is the most serious setback for the head of state on the continent since his election in 2017,” said France's Le Monde daily. It said that in contrast to the pullouts from Mali and Burkina Faso, which in some quarters had been seen as an opportunity, the “forced withdrawal from Niger is a real blow for the entire military.”

Niger's coup leaders are also demanding a “negotiated framework” for France to withdraw its troops. The new military regime said in a statement read out on national TV late on Monday that the timeframe for the pullout “must be set out in a negotiated framework and by mutual agreement”. “Regarding the ambassador, we have no comment to make about the modalities of his return”, French foreign ministry spokeswoman Anne-Claire Legendre said Tuesday. “The release of President Bazoum is a priority,” she added.

‘Major trend’

Macron has repeatedly spoken of making a historic change to France's post-colonial imprint in

Africa, by abandoning any notion of the so-called strategy “Francafrique” where Paris sought to keep francophone Africa under its thumb. But analysts say Paris is losing influence in the face of a growing Chinese, Turkish and Russian presence, giving Macron's bold words about a new relationship with Africa little chance of taking flight.

For researcher Fahirman Rodrigue Kone, of the Institute of Security Studies (ISS), “France did not know how to withdraw at the right time and wanted to continue to play the leader in a context where the sociological environment has strongly changed.” A French diplomatic source, who asked not to be named, said Paris was reaping the consequences of a “hypermilitarization of our relationship with Africa” at a time when the most pressing crises on the continent were of security, poverty and environment. “Mali was a big hit, we knew that we were facing a major trend. We have seen this wave rising for years. France felt that it was losing its footing, but remained in denial and stunned,” the source told AFP.

The French deployment in the region goes back over a decade to 2013 when then president Francois Hollande sent troops into Mali to help fight a jihadist insurgency. The operation, which then morphed into the Sahel-wide Barkhane mission, saw successes notably in the killing of several key jihadist leaders and also in securing vast swathes of territory using tactics that impressed military analysts. Fifty-eight French troops lost their lives. But the military successes have contrasted with political failure, as democracy regressed rather than developed in a region also plagued by a flood of disinformation that Paris blames on Russia.

‘Worried about region’

“I am very worried about this region,” Macron said in the TV interview as he announced the pullout. “France, sometimes alone, has taken all its responsibilities and I am proud of our military. But we are not responsible for the political life of these countries and we draw all the consequences.”

France initially appeared dubious that the coup

Many do not say which side they are on, fearing repression. “Democracy is not that much practiced around here,” Thantaza Silolo, spokesperson for the largest opposition group, the Swaziland Liberation Movement (Swalimo), told AFP.

‘Terrorist’ party

Political parties have unclear status and cannot directly take part in the vote. They were effectively banned in 1973, but a new constitution in 2005 provided an opening allowing for freedom of association. Still, in practice there is no legal avenue for them to register, according to democracy watchdog Freedom House. Swalimo is incorporated as a non-profit.

The People's United Democratic Movement, one of the largest opposition movements, has been declared a “terrorist” organization and banned. Two opposition lawmakers elected in the last vote in 2018 are currently in jail. A third is in exile. Most opposition groupings have called for a boycott. Three have told voters to go to the polls.

Few political gatherings have taken place during a two-week campaigning period. Polls open at 7 am local time (5 am GMT) and close at 6 pm, according to the electoral commission, with results expected over the weekend.

Formerly known as Swaziland, the mountainous

On Tuesday, Katz reached Riyadh leading a delegation to attend a UN World Tourism Organization event, the minister's office said. “I will act to create cooperation to advance tourism and (the Zionist entity's) foreign relations,” Katz said in a statement. Next week, Zionist Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi is also due to visit Saudi Arabia, his office said.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the UN on Friday that he believes “we are at the cusp” of “a historic peace between (the Zionist entity) and Saudi Arabia”. Speaking Tuesday at a ceremony to mark the 1973 Arab-Zionist war, he said “many states in the Middle East want peace with (the Zionist entity)”. “Increasing the circle of peace is a historic opportunity and I'm committed to it.”

The 1993 Oslo Accords were meant to lead to an independent Palestinian state, but years of stalled negotiations and deadly violence have left any peaceful resolution a distant dream. Netanyahu's hard-right government has been expanding Zionist settlements in the West Bank which are deemed illegal under international law.

An escalation in violence has seen at least 242 Palestinians killed so far this year, according to official sources. The United States, which has brokered talks between the Zionist entity and the Palestinians in the past, has made no major push toward a two-state solution since a failed effort nearly a decade ago. The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since 1967 and later annexed east Jerusalem in a move not recognized internationally. It also maintains a land, sea and air blockade on the Palestinian coastal territory of Gaza, which is ruled by Hamas and where violence along the border fence has increased this month. — AFP

viruses in wild animal remains stored in dry museum collections. That might actually help us understand the nature of pandemics and where pandemics come from,” he said.

The study opens the door to using museum collections in this new way. “There are millions and millions of dried skins and dried tissue from insects, mammals and birds and so on in museum collections around the world, and one could actually now go and recover RNA from all these specimens,” Dalen said. — AFP



NIAMEY: A supporter of Niger's National Council of Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) holds a sign that reads, 'French army leave us, we don't want any more independence under high surveillance', as people protest outside the Niger and French airbase on Sept 16, 2023. — AFP

would succeed over time and also backed threats of regional bloc ECOWAS for military intervention — which never translated into action. French intransigence caused tensions even with allies, including the United States, which has 1,000 troops stationed in Niger and reportedly favored a more pragmatic approach.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin indicated Monday that Washington was not immediately planning to match the French move, saying it would “evaluate” its future steps. Uncomfortably for Macron, one of the last remaining allies of France is

country of 1.2 million people is landlocked between South Africa and Mozambique. About half the size of Belgium, it gained independence from Britain in 1968. Mswati, 55, ascended to the throne at the age of 18 and has ruled with an iron fist for 37 years. The king is constitutionally above the law. He appoints the prime minister and the cabinet, can dissolve both parliament and the government and commands police and the army.

Protests and killings

Shows of dissent are rare, but in 2021 the kingdom was shaken by pro-democracy protests. Dozens of people were killed as security forces violently quashed demonstrations calling for reforms. A curfew was imposed, demonstrations banned and internet access curbed. Protests have continued sporadically after the crackdown.

Earlier this year, human rights lawyer and government critic Thulani Maseko, was shot dead through the window of his home. Hours before his murder, the King had warned activists who defy him not to “shed tears” about “mercenaries killing them”. The United Nations has called for an independent investigation.

Known as Ngwenyama, “the lion” in SiSwati, the king has been widely criticized for his lavish lifestyle, while nearly 60 percent of the population live on less than \$1.90 a day. The plump monarch, who usually ap-

pears in public wearing traditional clothes, is known to love luxury cars and watches.

He spends millions of dollars a year on his 15 wives, some of whom he married when they were minors, and has at least 25 children. To mark the 50th anniversary of independence, in 2018 he changed the country's name to Eswatini — meaning land of the Swazis. Eswatini has one of the highest prevalence of HIV in the world with around 26 percent of adults aged 15 to 49 living with the AIDS-causing virus in 2022, according to UN figures. — AFP



LOBAMBA LOMDZALA: In this file photo, voters leave after casting their ballots during Eswatini parliamentary elections on Sept 21, 2018. — AFP

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Parliamentary vote set for Africa's last absolute monarchy

JOHANNESBURG: The last absolute monarchy in Africa, the Kingdom of Eswatini, holds parliamentary elections on Friday, with political parties banned from contesting. The constitution emphasizes “individual merit” as the basis for selecting lawmakers, who cannot be affiliated with any political group. Being in the good graces of King Mswati III, who wields absolute power, also carries much weight.

Democracy? ‘Not that much’

About 585,000 registered voters will be called to choose 59 members of the lower house of parliament, which plays only an advisory role to the monarch. Mswati, who can veto any legislation, directly appoints another 10 lawmakers.

With most candidates loyal to the king, the election is unlikely to change the political scenery. Only about a dozen of those nominated during primaries last month are known to have ties to the opposition.

Saudi envoys meet Abbas as Zionist...

Continued from Page 1

Sudairi's delegation, which crossed overland from Jordan, was the first from Saudi Arabia to visit the West Bank since the 1993 Oslo Accords, which had aimed to pave the way for an end to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. When asked whether there will be a Saudi embassy in Jerusalem, Sudairi recalled that there used to be one in the Jerusalem district of Sheikh Jarrah, and said that “hopefully there will be an embassy there” again. Palestinian official news agency Wafa reported that Abbas accepted Sudairi's credentials and said the envoy's visit will “strengthen the brotherly relations” between Riyadh and Palestinians.

Washington has been leading the talks between the Zionist entity and Saudi Arabia — the guardian of Islam's two holiest sites — on a potential normalization widely seen as a political game changer for the Middle East. The talks have covered security guarantees for Saudi Arabia and assistance with a civilian nuclear program, according to officials familiar with the negotiations who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman last week told US network Fox that the kingdom was getting “closer” to a deal with the Zionist entity but insisted that the Palestinian cause remains “very important” for Riyadh. In recent months the Zionist entity has already sent delegations to Saudi Arabia to participate in sports and other events, including a UNESCO meeting in early September.

RNA recovered from extinct...

Continued from Page 1

“Many of the pandemics that have happened in the past have been caused by RNA viruses, most recently the coronavirus but also ... the Spanish flu,” Dalen explained. “We could actually go and look for these

Earthworms contribute to 6.5% of world grain production: Study

PARIS: Most gardeners know that earthworms help keep soils healthy, now scientists have assessed just how important their underground activities are to global food production — and how to protect them. In research published Tuesday scientists found that earthworms may be to thank for more than six percent of global grain yields every year, because of their crucial role in soil ecosystems.

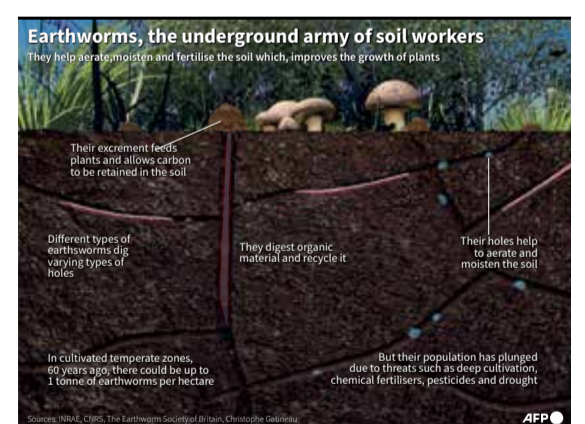
Worms help to decompose dead plant material, releasing nutrients plants need to grow, and their tunnelling helps plant root growth among other benefits. Evidence suggests they also help plants protect themselves against common soil pathogens by stimulating their defenses. But they are threatened by today's intensive and chemical-heavy agricultural techniques, scientists say.

Researchers writing in the journal Nature Communications analyzed maps of earthworm populations, soil properties, crop yields and previous studies of plant productivity to estimate the creature's impact on the global production of key crops. “Contribution” was defined as the percentage of the yield made possible thanks to earthworms.

They found earthworms may contribute to around 6.5 percent of the world's annual grain production, which includes dietary staples such as wheat, rice, maize and barley. “Their contribution may even be larger,” said Steven Fonte, an associate professor at Colorado State University in the United States who co-authored the study.

This is because earthworm populations “are likely underestimated in many places, especially in the tropics, due to a lack of research and funding in the global south”, he told AFP. Earthworms also contributed to 2.3 percent of global production of legumes, foods that include peas, lentils, chickpeas, soybeans and alfalfa. The annual total amounted to more than 140 million metric tons, the study estimated.

The authors said their findings represent one



of the first attempts to quantify the contribution of a beneficial soil organism to global agricultural production. They acknowledged a strong sampling bias when estimating earthworm populations because most of the data points were available in Europe and North America.

Even so, they found that earthworm contribution is especially high in the global south, contributing about 10 percent of total grain production in sub-Saharan Africa and roughly eight percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, the researchers found. They attributed this to soils there generally having higher acid and clay content and being less exposed to fertilizer, increasing the role earthworms play in plant growth.

In Europe and East/Southeast Asia, more than seven percent of grain production was attributed to their activity thanks to their higher population levels and soil acidity. Smaller earthworm populations, more widespread use of inorganic fertilizer and other soil properties were likely to have lessened their impact in other regions.

Agricultural and environment policies should support earthworm populations and soil biodiversity to help make the sector become more sustainable, the scientists suggested. Measures could include reducing tillage, cutting the use of toxic pesticides, and increasing the application of worm food sources like manure and compost, said Fonte. “Soils are estimated to contain approximately half of all biodiversity on the planet and are incredibly important for biodiversity conservation efforts,” he said. — AFP

International

Greek flood victims race to rebuild

Government response criticized as people brace for coming storm

VLOCHOS: When Storm Daniel this month dumped cataclysmic amounts of rain on his village in central Greece, Nikos Falangas barely had time to flee. Three weeks on, with the village of Vlochos still clogged with tons of mud, Falangas could only stare dumbstruck at what little remained of his family home.



This photograph taken on September 25, 2023 shows a family picture on the wall of a devastated house after the floodwater receded.

"All I could save was a family photograph and one of my child's toys. This is all that's left of the house where I was born and raised," he told AFP, fighting back tears. "Words cannot describe the tragedy we are going through," he said.

'Nothing can be done'

Eri, an Albanian laborer from a nearby village, was helping to salvage appliances from inside another house.

He noted that at the height of the flood, the water had reached the roofs of the traditional single-story houses. "That's four meters (13 feet) high," he said. "Nothing can be done here." Most of the villagers had left. The few dozen that remained were sheltering in the local church, which was built on a hill and therefore less at risk of flooding. The unprecedented storm left 17 dead and devastated the central region of Thessaly, the heart of Greece's agricultural production.

The flood drowned tens of thousands of farm animals whilst also sweeping through warehouses containing fertilizer, weedkillers, petrol and other chemicals, leaving behind a toxic floodwater mix. Piles of destroyed furniture, appliances and clothes were dumped outside each home as the stench of dead animals and tainted water filled the air. As the Vlochos villagers struggled to rebuild, dark clouds were gathering overhead. Lightning streaked through the sky and thick raindrops began to fall.

A new storm front dubbed Elias is expected to hit Greece from Tuesday, bringing heavy rain and sleet. Facing a barrage of criticism at a perceived failure in cooperation between the army and civil protection in the hours following the disaster, the government has pledged over two billion euros (\$2.1 billion) in reconstruction funds.

Dimitris Malai, a 27-year-old trainer, said he was determined to rebuild his life in the village. "This is where we grew up. We want to rebuild our village. But the authorities must do something for us, otherwise life cannot return here," he said. But some in Vlochos said the state was still conspicuously absent.



VLOCHOS: This photograph taken on Sept 25, 2023 shows the kitchen of a devastated house after the floodwater from Storm Daniel receded, in the village of Vlochos, central Greece. - AFP photos

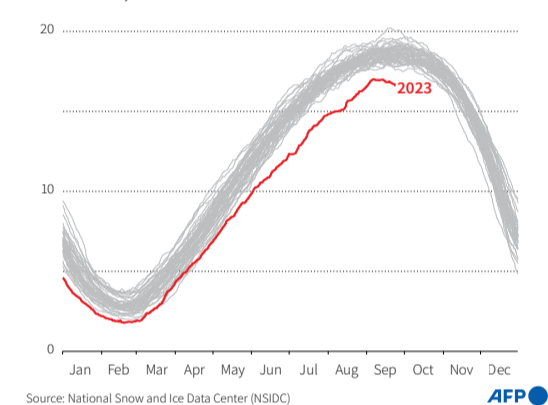
"No one came to see us, to help. Only some volunteer organizations supported us," said Apostolis Makris, a 62-year-old police officer.

"Sending us bottled water is not enough," fumed 68-year-old villager Dimitris Anastasiou. "We had everything and now we have nothing. They are crooks," he said of the government. His

wife Gogo, 65, broke down as they returned to their gutted home. "The memories of an entire life were lost, in addition to our property," she said. "All our family heirlooms, photographs and items of great sentimental value, were destroyed. It's as if a major part of my life was torn out," she said. "This is what hurts the most." — AFP

Antarctic sea ice: lowest winter maximum

Sea ice extent, in millions of km²



Source: National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC)

AFP

Antarctic ice hits winter record low

WASHINGTON: The sea ice around Antarctica likely had a record-low surface area when it was at its maximum size this winter, a preliminary US analysis of satellite data suggested Monday. As the southern hemisphere transitions into spring, the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) said in a statement that Antarctic sea ice had only reached a maximum size of 16.96 million square kilometers (6.55 million square miles) this year, on September 10. The ice pack typically reaches its largest size during the colder winter months, so the September 10 reading will likely remain this year's maximum. "This is the lowest sea ice maximum in the 1979-to-2023-sea-ice record by a wide margin," said the NSIDC, a government-supported program at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

At its high point this year, the sea ice was 1.03 million square kilometers smaller than the previous record, roughly the size of Texas and California combined. "It's a record-smashing sea ice low in the Antarctic," said NSIDC scientist Walt Meier. He added that the growth in sea ice appeared "low around nearly the whole continent as opposed to any one region."

Warming oceans

For several decades, the Antarctic sea ice pack had remained stable, even expanding slightly. But "since August 2016, the Antarctic sea ice extent trend took a sharp downturn across nearly all months" the NSIDC said. There is debate among scientists over the cause of the shift, with some reluctant to establish a formal link with global warming. Climate models have struggled in the past to predict changes in the Antarctic ice pack.

The downward trend is "now thought to be linked to warming in the uppermost ocean layer," the NSIDC said. "There is some concern that this may be the beginning of a long-term trend of decline for Antarctic sea ice, since oceans are warming globally." Melting pack ice has no immediate impact on sea levels, as it forms by freezing salt water already in the ocean. But the white ice reflects more of the Sun's rays than darker ocean water, so its loss accentuates global warming.

The loss of pack ice also exposes Antarctica's coastline to greater wave action, which could destabilize the freshwater ice cap and endanger coastal habitats. The melting land ice would cause a catastrophic rise in sea levels. — AFP

Scientists uncover a scaly surprise with new pangolin species

BANGKOK: The small, scaly, and highly endangered pangolin has been keeping a secret: it comprises not eight species but nine, with a new one discovered through analysis of confiscated scales. Scientists previously believed there were four Asian and four African varieties of the shy, nocturnal creature, which is often described as the world's most trafficked mammal.

However, even as the species was discovered, there are signs it may be disappearing, according to research published Tuesday in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Pangolin scales are coveted for use in traditional medicine, despite be-

Protestors demand Japan govt save thousands of trees

TOKYO: Campaigners filed a fresh petition with almost 225,000 signatures on Monday against plans to fell large numbers of trees and tear down a historic baseball stadium in a rare green area of central Tokyo. Lush with trees donated to honor Emperor Meiji a century ago, Meiji Jingu Gaien offers respite and shade — Japan saw its hottest recorded summer this year — in one of the world's biggest urban areas. The park area is also home to Jingu Stadium where US baseball star Babe Ruth wowed spectators in 1934 and where celebrated Japanese author Haruki Murakami says he was inspired to become a writer. Also on the site is a stadium dubbed the spiritual home of Japanese rugby.

But the redevelopment project, due to start this month, will see the sports facilities razed and rebuilt alongside several new high-rises to add to Tokyo's thicket of tall buildings. According to the petition submitted on Monday to the government, 1,000 trees will be cut down. The new baseball stadium will also endanger a boulevard of ginkgo trees, just six meters (20 feet) away, whose stunning autumn leaves attract huge crowds, campaigners say.

"These are all huge beautiful trees," said Rochelle Kopp, a management consultant who organized the petition — one of several — and who is also involved in a lawsuit against the project. "The online petition

numbers continue to grow because the more members of the public learn the details of the plan, the more people are unhappy about this plan to cram as many skyscrapers as possible into a small space and forever change a beloved landscape," Kopp told AFP.

'Heritage alert'

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) this month put the number of trees in danger at around 3,000 in a "heritage alert" issued by the advisory body to UNESCO. The redevelopment "will lead to the complete destruction of the urban forest that has been formed and nurtured over the past 100 years," ICOMOS said. "Urban parks are places for people's recreation and also contribute to maintaining rich biodiversity. They mitigate the heat island effect in cities and provide shelter in case of natural disasters such as major earthquakes," it said in a September 7 statement.

According to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's web page, the developers said in January last year they plan to cut down 892 trees. The number has since been reduced to 743 trees after further efforts to preserve trees, said a spokeswoman for Mitsui Fudosan, one of the major developers. "We continue studying how to preserve trees," she told AFP. The developers and the Tokyo government say that after work is complete, the number of trees and the amount of green space will in fact increase.

At just 7.4 percent as of 2015, Tokyo has one of the lowest percentages of public green spaces such as parks and gardens, according to data compiled by World Cities Culture Forum. This compares to New York's 27.0 percent in 2010, 27.9 percent in Seoul in 2019 and London's 33.0 percent in 2022. — AFP



TOKYO: People take part in a protest against the Tokyo metropolitan government's redevelopment project for the Meiji Jingu Gaien district in this file photo. - AFP

ing made of keratin, just like fingernails, and the diminutive creature is also hunted for its meat.

More than a million are believed to have been poached from the wild in the decade to 2014, according to conservationists, and all international trade has been banned since 2016. Despite its elusive nature, there have been suggestions before that the pangolin family might be bigger than believed.

Analysis of 27 scales confiscated in Hong Kong in 2012 and 2013 suggested a lineage unrelated to the eight known species. But only limited gene fragments were available, and no definitive conclusion could be reached. Picking up that trail, researchers analyzed scales from two confiscations in China's Yunnan province in 2015 and 2019 and compared them against whole genome data from all previously known species. They found a lineage "distinct from all eight currently known pangolin species", with signs it belonged to the Asian or "Manis" branch of the pangolin family.

They assigned the new species the tentative name "Manis mysteria" in a nod to its enigmatic nature and

found it likely diverged from the Philippine and Malayan pangolin species about five million years ago. The newly described animal's existence only came to light through samples seized from traffickers, and the research suggests the new species is already under pressure. Analysis "showed genomic signatures of a declining population, including the relatively low genetic diversity when compared to other pangolins ... (and) high levels of inbreeding and genetic load".

Just where *Manis mysteria* roams remains ... something of a mystery. Asian pangolins arriving in Hong Kong and Yunnan are believed to mostly originate in Southeast Asia. But because the new species does not look very different from its Asian cousins, it may well have been overlooked in the wild. It could also have escaped notice because it lives in an understudied region, or simply because pangolins tend to be hard to find. Regardless, the findings suggest the "urgent need" for more research, as well as "effective strategies for this mysterious species", the study said. — AFP

Young Nigerians amplify Africa's ignored stories

LAGOS: Nigeria, a nation of conflicts, corruption and poverty? That narrative is what a new breed of local media created by young Nigerians hopes to counter by getting away from the stereotypes they say are too often perpetuated by the foreign press. Over the last decade, several online publications such as *The Republic*, *Culture Custodian* and *Stears Business* have emerged in fields as varied as politics, culture, and economy providing more in-depth investigations. Their ambition: to offer more independent and innovative journalism closer to the interests of the youth than that offered by the traditional local press. "A new publication exploring and rewriting the Nigerian story," is how *The Republic* presents its mission since it was launched in 2018 by Wale Lawal, a 30-year-old author and entrepreneur.

Eager for news from his country while studying in England, Lawal became aware of the difficulty of accessing reliable, consistent and independent news sources. "Foreign press is more to serve foreign audiences who have their own interest ... local media was not just enough credible because of their links with politicians," he said. *The Republic* was launched to provide "serious journalism with an African worldview," he said. As social media expanded and demands for more democracy grew, a class of wealthier Nigerians emerged at the start of the 2000s, more demanding of their government and ready to pay for information. "Local media and traditional media has not met that demand. It's created this gap that new media founders realized that they can play a role here," Lawal said.

'African renaissance'

The flourishing of this new media, more widely seen in English-speaking countries, is touted by some as an "African renaissance." Many traditional newspapers were born at the end of colonial rule and the arrival of democracy but ensuing military rule and economic troubles weakened them. Lawal said politicians started controlling what was published by the media, "as they became one of the main financial contributors." The Western media thus became a primary source of reliable information about Africa but not without consequences.

"We are looking at a continent that for the most part of modern history has always had its stories being told by people who are not from the continent and that has its own implication about the perception of the continent." According to a study carried out by the non-profit organization *Africa No Filter*, a third of the articles dealing with Africa and published by local media come from foreign press services, primarily *Agence France-Presse (AFP)* and the *BBC*.

'Stereotypical narratives'

Despite progress, foreign press coverage "continues to contribute to the stereotypical narratives of a broken, dependent continent lacking in agency," said Moky Makura, executive director of *Africa No Filter*, which wants to change the discourse on Africa in the arts and media. "We are missing out on the stories of creativity, innovation and the opportunities that exist," she said. "Not only does the current framing inform how the world sees and treats us, it also affects how we as Africans see ourselves."

Makura said the constant negative narrative contributes to some of the economic migration from Africa. Critics say the foreign press reduces Nigeria to just a country battling the jihadist insurgency of *Boko Haram* for more than 14 years in the northeast. This imbalance eclipses, for example, the phenomenal global success of *Afrobeats*, a musical genre born in Nigeria's economic and cultural capital *Lagos*. "It's not about good and bad coverage, our life is just more complicated than what we might see in papers," Lawal said.

The *Republic* focuses instead, for example, on the future of basketball in Nigeria or the new foreign policy of the African giant. It publishes portraits, essays, reports and interviews that show the complexity of the country of 215 million inhabitants. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2023

Shutdown showdown threatens US govt pay and welfare checks

Moody's: A shutdown would put credit rating at risk

WASHINGTON: Millions of Americans braced Monday for pay and welfare checks to stop within days as Congress careened toward a damaging government shutdown, with Republican right-wingers blocking attempts to pass a budget. Four months after barely avoiding the more serious prospect of a credit default, the world's largest economy is once again on the verge of a convulsion, with the lights due to go out at the weekend.

Republicans leading the House of Representatives—hamstrung by hardline rebels demanding deep spending cuts—have been unable to pass the usual series of bills setting out departmental budgets for the next financial year, which begins on Sunday. The party's leadership does not even have the votes to advance a short-term funding bill at 2023 spending levels—known as a continuing resolution—to keep the government open past midnight on Saturday.

A shutdown would put at risk the finances of workers at national parks, museums and other sites operating on federal funding, but it could also carry significant political risk for President Joe Biden as he runs for re-election in 2024.

"Funding the government is one of the most basic, fundamental responsibilities of the Congress," the Democrat told reporters at the White House. "And if Republicans in the House don't start doing their job we should stop electing them."

The Biden administration also warned that seven million people who rely on the food aid program for women and children could also see their money stopped. The funding deadlock arose after House Republicans refused to support the government spending levels agreed between Biden and Speaker Kevin McCarthy, the top Republican in Congress that would keep government gears turning.

"UNLESS YOU GET EVERYTHING, SHUT IT DOWN!" former president Donald Trump demanded in a post on his Truth Social platform late Sunday as he led calls for the Republican hardliners to dig in.

Polarization

The budget vote in Congress regularly turns into a standoff, with one party using the prospect of a shutdown to seek concessions from the other, usually without success. Trump, who is also running for re-election, forced a 35-day shutdown over border controls in 2018 but ended up reopening the government after failing to secure a single concession from Democrats.

The impasse is invariably resolved before the standoffs become crises but this year the shutdown is exacerbated by new levels of polarization on Capitol Hill. In the Senate, debate is led by two political heavyweights, Democratic majority leader Chuck Schumer and Mitch McConnell, his Republican counterpart. Congress was out Monday but Schumer has been paving the way for a continuing resolution, including Ukraine aid, in talks with McConnell and the White House.

A measure that would keep the government open through early December has support on both sides of the Senate—but would likely not be ready for a vote before the shutdown and would not have the support of the Republican right.

Meanwhile, the Moody's ratings agency has warned that a US government shutdown this weekend, amid political deadlock in Congress, would have negative implications for the country's top tier credit rating. "A shutdown would be credit negative for the US sovereign," Moody's Investors Service wrote in a note to clients on Monday. The warning from Moody's—the only major agency to maintain its rating for US



WASHINGTON: Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack answers questions during the daily press briefing at the White House on Sept 25, 2023 in Washington, DC. — AFP

sovereign debt at its highest level—underscores the potential economic danger to the United States of failing to reach an agreement to keep the government funded before the end of the month. Fitch and S&P have both downgraded US debt in recent years, raising the risk associated with the debt—and the cost of government borrowing.

A shutdown "would underscore the weakness of US institutional and governance strength relative to other AAA-rated sovereigns," Moody's wrote. "Further, a prolonged shutdown would be disruptive to the US economy and financial markets, with potential negative ramifications for the sovereign's debt affordability," it added. — Agencies



CBK develops questionnaire for PMI

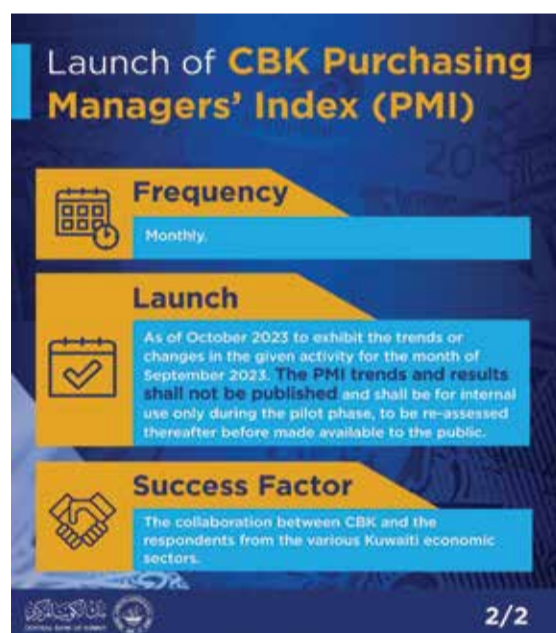
KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said that it had developed a questionnaire for the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI). The index enables prompt data collection, processing, and analysis to be produced in the form of timely and accurate periodic reports reflecting the real developments of economic activity in Kuwait. This came in a press statement by the Governor of the CBK, Basel A Al-Haroon, announcing that the success of this initiative will be the outcome of the collaboration between the CBK and the respondents from the various Kuwaiti economic sectors.

The prominence of the PMI resides in its ability to assess the progress of economic performance with precision due to its periodicity (on a monthly basis). PMI is usually issued before the release of official

EU tells Apple chief to 'open up' to rivals

BRUSSELS: The EU's digital chief Thierry Breton told Apple CEO Tim Cook on Tuesday that the iPhone maker must open up its products to competitors as part of Brussels' tough curbs on tech behemoths. Earlier this month, the European Union unveiled a list of the digital giants, including Apple, which will face new rules under the Digital Markets Act (DMA) on how they do business.

Other tech firms caught up included Facebook owner Meta and TikTok parent ByteDance. Apple has previously slammed the DMA, claiming it poses risks to users' privacy. Cook was in Brussels to meet



data on macroeconomic variables to help economists and stakeholders predict economic trends in Kuwait. In addition, PMI is considered one of the most significant economic data points in the global markets for better understanding of the different economies' and markets' trends.

Consequently, many central banks employ the index to make monetary policy decisions. The CBK PMI's results are drawn up in a questionnaire that includes nine index-related closed-ended questions, one closed-ended question on expectations of business prospects at the local and global levels, and four open-ended questions. All these questions are addressed to the purchasing managers of a different group of Kuwait-based companies engaged in production and service activities.

In addition, PMI, which is scheduled to open in October 2023, exhibits the trends or changes in the given activity in September 2023. The index's trends and results shall not be published and shall be for internal use only during the pilot phase (six months), to be re-assessed before being made available to the public. The pilot index will be applied to a small sample of carefully selected companies. — KUNA

with Breton and the acting competition commissioner, Didier Reynders.

"The next job for Apple and other big tech, under the DMA, is to open up its gates to competitors," Breton said, in a statement. "Be it the electronic wallet, browsers or app stores, consumers using an Apple iPhone should be able to benefit from competitive services by a range of providers," he added. Breton said the two men had a "constructive discussion on Apple's compliance plan" for the DMA.

Apple would not comment on Cook's visit. The EU however won a previous battle with Apple, forcing the company to unveil its new iPhone lineup with a universal charger on September 12. Brussels' rules insist all phones and other small devices must be compatible with the USB-C charging cables from the end of next year. Breton showed Cook his "museum" with several charging cables in a video shared on social media after hailing "cable clutter" as "a thing of the past" in his statement. — AFP

EU concerned by high disinfo rate on X platform

BRUSSELS: X, the online platform formerly known as Twitter, has the biggest proportion of disinformation of social networks scrutinized under a pilot analysis by the EU, a top official said Tuesday.

The analysis, carried out over three months in EU countries Spain, Poland and Slovakia, revealed that X was falling far short of an EU code of practice on anti-disinformation standards, European Commission Vice President Vera Jourova said. Twitter was one of dozens of companies running social media networks that signed up to the voluntary code of practice when it was launched in 2018.

But after being taken over by Elon Musk, who has rebranded it X, the company withdrew from the EU code. "X, formerly Twitter, who is not under the code anymore, is the platform with the largest ratio of mis- and dis-information posts," Jourova said.

She was speaking after the 44 companies still signed onto the code of practice—among them Facebook parent Meta, YouTube owner Google

and Chinese-owned TikTok—handed in their first full reports of code compliance. Though voluntary, aspects of the code underpin parts of new EU legislation known as the Digital Services Act, which entered force last month and which threatens massive fines of up to six percent of global turnover for companies found in breach. "Mr Musk knows that he is not off the hook by leaving the code of practice, because now we have the Digital Services Act fully enforced," Jourova said.

"My message for Twitter is: you have to comply with the hard (DSA) law. We'll be watching what you're doing," she said. The European Union's fight against disinformation has gained importance as awareness has grown of Russian attempts to sway European public opinion as it wages war in Ukraine.

Brussels is keen to have online platforms work hard to curtail misinformation and disinformation ahead of EU elections happening in June next year. The risk posed by Russia's online tactics "is particularly serious," the commission vice president said. "The Russian state has engaged in the war of ideas to pollute our information space." She said that, between January and April, Google terminated more than 400 YouTube channels involved in "influence operations" linked to the Russian state and removed ads from 300 sites tied to Russian propaganda agencies. — AFP

Rich nations must accelerate race to net zero: IEA

PARIS: Rich and developing nations alike must sharply improve their net-zero targets, the International Energy Agency said Tuesday, warning that a clean energy surge was the main reason the world's climate goals are still within reach.

Wealthy countries must now reach carbon neutrality in around 2045, five years early, and China should speed up by a decade to 2050 to keep to the Paris goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the IEA said. "The world has already delayed too long to avoid hard choices," the global energy watchdog said.

The report, which comes ahead of crunch UN climate talks, updates the IEA's landmark 2021 "Net Zero Roadmap", which said new fossil fuel development was incompatible with global decarbonization by mid-century and the 1.5C target. Two years later the IEA has seen progress in the form of record growth in solar power capacity and electric car sales.

These are in line with the IEA's pathway to net-zero emissions, as are the plans put in place by industry to roll out new manufacturing for them. The energy sector is "changing faster than many people think", the IEA said, adding that together these clean energy technologies are projected to deliver a third of the emissions reductions needed by 2030.

But it warned of the negative impact of increased fossil fuel investments and "stubbornly high emissions" during the same period, which saw a post-pandemic economic rebound and the energy crisis driven by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "The



PARIS: Rich and developing nations alike must sharply improve their net-zero targets, the International Energy Agency said Tuesday. — AFP

pathway to 1.5C has narrowed in the past two years, but clean energy technologies are keeping it open," said IEA chief Fatih Birol.

The IEA this month forecast that world demand for oil, gas and coal would peak this decade thanks to the "spectacular" growth of cleaner energy technologies and electric cars. But far from resting on that success, Birol said countries need to work together to substantially speed up climate action.

Even a small delay in ramping up emissions cuts beyond the current pledges "would cause global temperature to exceed 1.5C for almost 50 years", the report warned. It laid out a potential pathway for the energy sector—the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions—to achieve net-zero emissions and contribute towards curbing warming to 1.5C. The IEA said staying on track "means almost all countries must move forward their targeted net zero dates", with its pathway based on an "equitable" redistribution of targets, pulling forward China and richer countries to allow developing nations more breathing space to decarbonize after 2050. — AFP

Business

Sudan's crucial date industry struggles in war-hit economy

War destroys economic infrastructure, scares date buyers

KARIMA, Sudan: The lush palm groves of Karima are a long way from Sudan's battlefields, but the war's effects are all too present, leaving farmers struggling to find buyers for this year's harvest. Prices have collapsed in the vital date industry, the latest economic sector to become a casualty of war in the northeast African country.



Date bunches hang in a tree in the beginning of the harvest season in Barkal. - AFP photos

Every autumn, until this September, date farmers in northern Sudan pulled their harvests down from palm trees, securing a living for months to come. But five months into the war between Sudan's rival generals, the country's economic infrastructure has been destroyed and "buyers are scared", farmer Al-Fatih Al-Badawi, 54, told AFP.

Sudan is the world's seventh-largest producer of dates, growing more than 460,000 tons per year, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

How much of that figure will be available this year remains to be seen, but farmers in northern Su-

dan are lucky they could manage a harvest at all. In Karima — a town on the Nile River about 340 kilometers (210 miles) north of the capital Khartoum — the groves bustle with young men climbing date palms, dropping bunches of the brown fruit, beloved by Sudanese, onto white sheets below. Farmers who depend on the date industry face colossal challenges moving their products across the country, as do those in other agricultural sectors.

Along with insecurity, wartime fuel shortages have severely hindered the ability to transport goods.

Before the war, nearly all trade in highly centralized Sudan went through Khartoum. But constant air strikes, artillery blasts and street battles have left the capital largely off-limits to traders, who fear for their safety or are turned back by fighters at checkpoints. "Our main market was Khartoum", Badawi said. Without it, trade is at a standstill and the price for his crop is in freefall.

In Sudan, one of the world's most underdeveloped countries, dates and other agricultural products were a foundation of the pre-war economy. The agriculture sector employed more than 80 percent of the workforce and accounted for 35 to 40 percent of gross domestic product, according to the United Nations. But now, in much of the country including southeastern Gedaref state, known as Sudan's breadbasket, the land has been left fallow.

Processing factories have been razed or looted. Smallholder farmers have no access to financing, traders have no guarantees of viable markets and industry heavyweights have given up.

In May, Haggar Group — one of the agriculture sector's largest employers — suspended operations and laid off thousands of laborers. Even before the war began, one in three people were in need of humanitarian aid and the country's farmers — unable to meet domestic food security needs — struggled to break even. The date sector in Karima had been in urgent need of "guidance and agricultural policy", as well as resources to reduce high rates of waste, said

not only European companies but also Chinese companies," he said. "There may be unintended consequences." "It's positive that we held this engagement now from Chinese authorities," he added. China has recently implemented expansive new regulations covering cybersecurity, counter-espionage and data management, citing the need to shore up national security.

But the new regulations have worried some foreign firms, unsure of how their enforcement will affect their business operations in the world's second-largest economy.

The EU trade chief reiterated this week European concerns over the laws, stressing they are of "great concern to our business community". "Their ambiguity allows too much room for interpretation," he warned. Dombrovskis also said Tuesday that he had raised the issue of Europe's ballooning trade deficit with China, which he said had reached 400 billion euros (\$423 billion). "The dramatic increase of the trade deficit in recent years... has made headlines and has forced us to take a closer look," he said.

"We need more balance and reciprocity in our economic engagements." Economic relations be-



BARKAL, Sudan: People collect dates in the beginning of the harvest season in Barkal, in northern Sudan.

Al-Jarah Ahmed Ali, 45, another farmer.

Now the challenges have only worsened. Since April 15, fighting between army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and his former deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, has torn Sudan apart. Fighting has killed nearly 7,500 people, according to a conservative estimate from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. More than 4.2 million people — most of them from the Khartoum area — have been displaced within Sudan, and another 1.1 million have fled the country, according to the International Organization for Migration. Agricultural workers are

among those joining the exodus, and while they may find relative safety in northern Sudan, whether they can earn enough to survive in a collapsing date market is questionable. Among them is Hozaifa Youssef, a 26-year-old radiologist who left Khartoum to rejoin his family in Karima, where he is helping with the date harvest.

"I was going to India to get my master's degree," but that goal is now on hold, Youssef said.

The veteran farmer, Badawi, has not lost hope. "We're trying to find new markets, even though it's going to be more expensive. Hopefully, the price will adjust and it will all work out." — AFP

EU trade chief warns on China data laws

BEIJING: The EU trade commissioner warned Tuesday that Chinese regulations governing the transfer of data out of the country, including a revised anti-espionage law, could have "unintended consequences".

Speaking at the end of a four-day trip to China, Valdis Dombrovskis told a press conference that he had "positive" engagements with local counterparts. Asked by AFP if he had specifically discussed a recently revised law dramatically expanding China's definition of espionage, Dombrovskis said it had been raised in the context of discussions around "broader data transfers and data-related remarks".

"This may be an issue of systemic concern and it may affect all internationally active companies,

tween China and the EU were thrown into the spotlight this month after the bloc launched a probe into Chinese subsidies for its electric vehicle industry. Brussels maintains that Beijing's subsidies have led to unfair competition within the European market. And Dombrovskis told the Tuesday press conference that the EU investigation had come up in "pretty much all meetings" while in China, emphasizing that Europe needed to address "trade-distorting measures". Another top issue on the EU trade chief's agenda while in China was Russia's war in Ukraine, which Beijing has refused to condemn. "I have been very clear in all my engagements that responding to Russia's aggression against Ukraine is not just an EU priority, it's a decisive factor for virtually all priorities at the present time," said Dombrovskis. China has sought to position itself as a neutral party in the Ukraine conflict, while offering Moscow a vital diplomatic and financial lifeline as its international isolation deepens. "We are committed to supporting Ukraine to victory for as long as it takes," Dombrovskis said.

"It is in this context that it's difficult for us to understand China's stance." — AFP



Asian Games put China tech giants on podium

HANGZHOU, China: Alibaba was among the high-profile Chinese tech companies brought to heel by the ruling Communist Party, but the Asian Games in the firm's home city are proving to be a golden opportunity. Co-founded by Jack Ma in Hangzhou nearly 25 years ago, the Games would probably grind to a halt without Alibaba because it runs the multisport extravaganza's cloud computing system. It also owns the Slack-like Dingtalk platform that the army of Games staff uses and Alibaba-affiliated Alipay is the only Chinese digital wallet accepted across venues.

Underlining how Alibaba has appeared to have come in from the cold, at least for now, organizers are shutting journalists to the group's campus on day trips celebrating "a pioneer in China's Internet economy". Alibaba's partnership deals with the Games were signed before the official crackdown aimed at reining in China's burgeoning tech sector.

The Games are now a precious moment for Alibaba to burnish its image anew and for its representatives to hobnob with political, business and sports officials from across China, Asia and beyond.

In 2020 Alibaba became the country's first tech giant to bear the brunt of increased oversight. Chinese authorities called off what would have become one of the most valuable public listings in history — valued at \$34 billion — for its former subsidiary and Alipay owner Ant Group.

One month after officials hit the brakes on Ant's IPO, Alibaba was investigated for alleged anti-competitive practices, then issued a fine of \$2.8 billion. A series of moves against other tech firms in the following months slashed major industry players' market capitalizations by billions of dollars.

Authorities targeted companies with fines and rolled out rules for sectors ranging from music streaming apps to shopping and car-hailing, citing national security and anti-trust concerns. Tech bosses, notably the charismatic Ma, toned down their public behavior as Beijing grew concerned about their increasing power and audacity to step out of line.

Experts say that officials have subtly changed their tune in recent months and softened their grip as the Chinese economy grapples with flagging growth. Chinese premier Li Qiang in July called for government departments to "create a fair and competitive market environment... and improve transparent and predictable regulation to push for the healthy development of the industry", according to state-run CGTN.

Alibaba is not the only Chinese digital economy player getting its chance to shine at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, the unofficial home of the country's tech industry. Long-time rival Tencent is also seeing its moment of glory, with the new discipline of eSports — which has proved wildly popular with fans — dominated by Tencent-linked titles. The ascendance of eSports to a medal event at the Games comes after another lengthy official campaign, this one against video gaming, part of the larger tech crackdown. — AFP

Australian pilots call on Qantas chairman to resign

SYDNEY: Qantas pilots called Tuesday on the Australian carrier's chairman Richard Goyder to resign for presiding over "woeful decisions" that have battered morale and the airline's reputation.

The call comes after former chief executive Alan Joyce took early retirement on September 5 as Qantas battled criticism over high prices, mass ground staff layoffs and allegations it sold thousands of tickets for already-cancelled flights. "Richard Goyder has overseen one of the most damaging periods in Qantas history which has included the illegal sacking of 1,700 workers, allegations of illegally marketing cancelled flights, and a terribly managed return to operations after Covid-19," Australian and International Pilots Association president Captain Tony Lucas said in a statement. "The morale of Qantas pilots has never been lower. We have totally lost confidence in Goyder and his Board."

The association, which represents Qantas Group pilots, complained of a "series of woeful decisions", saying it was the first time in its 42-year history that it had called on a chairman of the airline to resign.

"Qantas desperately needs a culture reset but how can this happen with Richard Goyder as chairman?" Lucas said.

"Despite overseeing the destruction of the Qantas brand, Goyder last week accepted a near Aus\$100,000 (US\$64,000) pay rise - taking his pay to Aus\$750,000 - while staff are expected to accept a two-year wage freeze. This is a galling and tone-deaf decision."

The pilots' statement came a day after Qantas vowed to invest an extra Aus\$80 million in the next financial year to June 30, 2024 to soothe customer "pain points", including by increasing the number of seats redeemable by frequent flyer points and giving more generous support when "operational issues arise". Qantas warned at the same time that fuel prices had increased by about 30 percent since May 2023 and that it may have to "adjust its settings" to recover some of the extra cost if higher prices were sustained. — AFP



SHAKHTINSK, Kazakhstan: The logo of ArcelorMittal, a Western steel giant which entered the Kazakh market after the Soviet collapse, is seen on a mine building in the industrial town of Shakhtinsk on September 9, 2023. - AFP

Workers dying in ArcelorMittal's Kazakh mines

SHAKHTINSK, Kazakhstan: Standing in the vast windswept plains of the Kazakh steppe, miner Vladimir Khaniev stoically recalled the explosion that left him permanently disabled. "I heard a bang and the blast threw me off my feet and I lost consciousness," he told AFP. Over the past 15 years, more than 100 workers have lost their lives in mines in Kazakhstan owned by ArcelorMittal, a Western steel giant controlled by India's Mittal family.

Khaniev, who worked for 17 years at the company's Lenin mine in the town of Shakhtinsk, was left unconscious after an explosion tore through a shaft 800 meters (over 2,500 feet) underground last November, killing five of his colleagues. "On the surface, I look like a healthy guy," Khaniev said, "but my head hurts all the time. I'm short of breath. I'm always tired. I don't sleep much."

In mid-August, another five more people were killed at the mine, sparking a debate about the exploitation of workers in a country scarred by communism and authoritarian rule since the collapse of

Soviet Union. Khaniev now suffers from encephalopathy after inhaling methane gas released by the explosion. "In this company, we are treated like slaves, and this is the consequence: people are dying and will continue to die," said the 40-year-old, whose father and grandfather were miners.

Faced with the harrowing toll, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has threatened to ban ArcelorMittal from operating in Kazakhstan. But in a country teeming with natural resources and where the mining sector accounts for up to 17 percent of GDP, few expect that will happen.

"These fatal accidents are happening because of the greed of the company's managers," Khaniev said.

"There has been insufficient investment in new equipment and safety regulations, and there is a shortage of staff," ArcelorMittal Temirtau, the company's Kazakh subsidiary, declined an AFP request for an interview, while local officials refused to talk about the mines. Although an investigation established Khaniev's employer was "100 percent" at fault for the fatal accident, those responsible have still not been brought to justice. Among the five employees killed was Denis Inkin, an experienced driller. "My son was burnt alive. I never saw him again, he was buried in a closed coffin," his mother Galina Inkina told AFP. On her living room table stands a portrait of her son and a candle, which she lights every morning in his memory. — AFP

Business

NBK launches NBK Tech Academy

The first-of-its-kind in Kuwait to focus on digital technologies

KUWAIT: Demonstrating its unwavering commitment to investing in the human capital, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) greatly focuses on providing the Kuwaiti youth with the best-in-class and most advanced training programs as per the highest international standards. In this context, the bank has launched the first wave of its new NBK Tech Academy.

NBK Tech Academy is one of its kind. It is the first of its kind Academy, focusing on digital and data technologies. It is a professional training program to prepare and qualify young Kuwaiti talents to join the banking sector. NBK Academy was established in 2008, and after 28 successful waves and more than 190 active graduates, NBK Tech Academy was established due to the growing need for talents in the tech areas of the bank. The opening ceremony of the new trainees was attended by Isam Al-Sager, Vice-Chairman and Group CEO of National Bank of Kuwait, Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group CEO of NBK and Salah Al-Fulajji, CEO of NBK-Kuwait. The attendees also included Faisal A Al-Hamad, CEO - Global Wealth Management, Mohamed Al-Othman, CEO - Consumer and Digital Banking Group, Mohammad Al-Kharafi, COO - Head of Group Operations and Information Technology, and Emad Al-Abani, GM - Group Human Resources.

The program runs for six months until March 2024, with 10 participants receiving intensive training covering technical skills for advancing their careers including, but not limited to: FinTech, Data Analytics, Ethics in Technology, Cyber Security, Fundamentals of Digital Payments, Digital Innovation, Artificial Intelligence, Scripting and Programming, Fundamentals of Codifications, and Finance for Non Finance Professionals.

In addition to technical skills, the program also focuses on developing soft skills including, but not limited to: Teamwork and Team Building, Business



Najla Al-Sager: The Academy aims to nurture and develop the next generation of digital professionals

Gadeer Al-Kooheji: We seek to attract high-caliber talent and actively support NBK's accelerating digital transformation

Planning and Business Analysis, Writing Skills, Delivering Results, Meeting Customer Expectation and Customer Centricity, Presentation Skills, Productivity in the Workplace, Business Ethics, Principles and Values, Learning and Researching, Project and Change Management, and Customer Experience.

Talents are fresh Kuwaiti university graduates, with up to 4 years of experience, a high GPA, hold-

ing a degree in in MIS, Information Security, Data Science, Computer Science, and Engineering.

On this occasion, Najla Al-Sager, Head of Talent Management, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We are proud to launch NBK Tech Academy, which aligns with the growing demands for digital talents and skills. Through the Academy, we aim to qualify the next generation of

professionals to lead the technological advancement and innovation in NBK."

"The new NBK Tech Academy reflects NBK's vision to keep up with the growing needs and demands of the digital era, and its keen endeavors to nurture and develop highly-skilled talents in areas like MIS, Information Security, Data Science, and Computer Science," she noted. "NBK has unwavering dedication to driving innovation, which is reflected in launching this academy as a milestone on this way of nurturing Kuwaiti talent and preparing a new generation of digital professionals," she added.

On her part, Gadeer Al-Kooheji, Head of Talent Acquisition, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said: "Launching NBK Tech Academy for selected high-caliber young candidates in technical and digital fields aligns with the strategy of Group Human Resources' Talent Acquisition Department, which aims to attract top-notch talent to support the bank's accelerating digital growth."

"The Academy will provide fresh graduates as well as experienced candidates, in technical domains with high-level training and development opportunities, and actively contribute in shaping the future of banking and digital services, propelling Kuwait to new horizons in banking innovation," she mentioned. Delivering on its CSR commitments towards the youth, NBK provides young national talent from students and fresh graduates a variety of training programs to empower them with professional knowledge and expertise and practical training, in preparation to join the banking business.

NBK maintains its leadership in the private sector in terms of attracting, training, upskilling national talent and qualifying them to join the banking sector. The bank also stands out as the employer of choice for national professionals, with the highest Kuwaitization and employee retention ratios across the private sector.



A technician works on metal separators for recycling batteries and magnets at the research centre of the Atomic Energy and Alternative Energies Commission (CEA) in Marcoule, southern France. — AFP

Need for critical metals: Dilemmas for investors

PARIS: Soaring demand for the raw materials needed for the transition towards renewable energy is creating dilemmas for investors weighing the economic, environmental and human rights risks of such projects. With demand for fossil fuels expected to peak by the end of the decade, the focus is shifting towards lithium, cobalt, copper and other materials that are extracted from the earth through heavy labor and leave scars in the environment.

Demand for lithium—an essential component of car batteries—could increase ninefold between 2022 and 2050, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). Lithium demand has already tripled in the past five years. Lithium and other metals that the IEA calls "key to the clean energy transition" will be the topic of a summit hosted by the global energy watchdog in Paris on Thursday.

Demand for cobalt will have increased from 171,000 tons to 524,700 tons by 2050, according to the IEA, with nickel requirements set to soar 120 percent in the same timeframe. The IEA said in a July report that investment in the mining sector is still insufficient to meet demand, and also flagged concerns that a high concentration of new projects were clustered in a small number of countries. "This is a huge issue," said Jason Schenker, president of Prestige Economics. "We have massive shortfalls across commodities."

'A lot of money'

Swedish management company AuAg Funds has developed an investment portfolio dedicated to "essential metals", where the money placed in the fund is invested in shares of mining companies, smelting, refining and other parts of the supply chain. "We give exposure through equity to all metals: copper, silver, aluminium, lithium, uranium, cobalt," Christopher Svensson, founder and co-portfolio manager at AuAg Funds, told AFP. To comply with financial regulations, however, it is not possible for them to invest directly in a specific project, only in the companies. Schenker warns a lot of investment is needed in projects that will take a long time to deliver.

"The amount of additional mining, refining, smelting, and everything that's going to be needed to get us where we need to be in terms of supply is a number very difficult to come to, because every time you're opening a new mine, it involves a lot of money," he said. "These are large capital investments and they take many years to put in place before you really begin to see that return and the number of mines," added Schenker. Svensson said it needs "15-20 years to start a new mine". The mining sector also presents significant concerns around human rights and environmental pollution. Cases where the lives of mine workers are endangered, natural habitat is destroyed or local populations are negatively impacted regularly steal headlines. Others express concerns over carbon emissions from production and refining sites. — AFP

Air France-KLM to order 50 long-haul Airbus A350s

PARIS: Air France-KLM announced Monday that it was going to place a "major order" for 50 long-haul Airbus A350s, as part of its effort to introduce more fuel-efficient planes. The Dutch-French group said the planes, which represent an order of more than \$16 billion (15.1 billion euros) at the given listed price without counting any discounts applied, will be delivered between 2026 and 2030.

The order is also accompanied by acquisition rights for 40 additional aircraft. The statement said the order was "an evolutionary order, providing the group with flexibility to allocate aircraft within its portfolio of airlines, according to market dynamics and local regulatory conditions." Air France-KLM CEO Benjamin Smith said the order was "a major step in the renewal of the group's fleet".

He said the Airbus 350 "is a quieter, more fuel efficient and more cost-effective aircraft compared to previous generations" that would be "instrumental in helping the group reach our ambitious sustainability targets".

The order aims to replace 33 older generation Boeing 777-200s and A330s from the two airlines. The Airbus 350 is one of several more fuel efficient long-distance jets, along with other later generation planes including the Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

Air travel demand

Smith said that the group had set a target to reduce CO2 emissions per passenger kilometer by 30 percent by 2030. And the group said in Monday's statement that the Airbus A350 consumes 25 percent less fuel than the previous generation of aircraft of a

Huawei Watch GT 4 is now available for pre-order

KUWAIT: The Huawei Watch GT 4, the upcoming flagship smartwatch from Huawei, is now available for pre-order. This new watch adopts a fresh design on its exterior and introduces enhanced health and fitness features. It brings users holistic health management with more accurate heart rate monitoring and improved sleep tracking. The watch also debuts the Sleep Breathing Awareness feature and the innovative Stay Fit calorie management app. The Huawei Watch GT 4 is a fashion accessory that can complement any outfit and personality while also being a smart companion that helps you stay healthy and productive.

The Huawei Watch GT 4 is available for pre-order from today. Huawei has always woven innovative design into the DNA of its wearables. With the Watch GT 4, Huawei is blending haute couture-inspired aesthetic design and leading-edge wearable tech-

Alibaba plans to list logistics arm in Hong Kong IPO

BEIJING: Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba said Tuesday it intends to spin off its logistics arm Cainiao through an initial public offering in Hong Kong as the firm undergoes a massive restructuring. After years of turbulence in the Chinese tech sector, Alibaba announced in March it was dividing itself into six entities, with the goal of listing them separately, along with the replacement of CEO Daniel Zhang.



AMSTERDAM AIRPORT SCHIPHOL, Netherlands: An Air France plane is pictured on the tarmac of the Schiphol airport. Air France-KLM announced on September 25, 2023 that it was going to place a "major order" for 50 long-haul Airbus A350s. — AFP

similar size, largely due to the use of lighter materials. In July, Air France-KLM said it had doubled its net profit in the second quarter, benefiting from high demand in air travel despite rising inflation which has increased costs.

The group posted a net profit of 604 million euros (\$662 million) between January and June, and said sales rose by 13.7 percent compared with the same period in 2022. Ticket prices have soared since the pandemic, driven by rising fuel costs, increased demand and capacity constraints.

The group managed to turn a profit last year after having lost 11 billion euros during the pandemic, requiring the governments of France and

the Netherlands to intervene.

Air-France and KLM were also among 17 European airlines hit by a consumer complaint filed with the EU's executive arm earlier this year accusing the companies of greenwashing—the practice of making misleading climate-related claims. The European Consumer Organization, or BEUC, said in June that there should be a Europe-wide investigation and for airlines to "stop making claims that give consumers the impression that flying is sustainable".

Dutch environmental groups last year also threatened to take KLM to court over what they said were "misleading adverts" that promoted flying as sustainable. — AFP

nology. The watch comes in two sizes: 46mm and 41mm. The 46mm version features a unique octagon-shaped watch body, a tribute to the classic luxury watches but with a modern twist. The 41mm version boasts a pendant-like design that exudes grace and sophistication. The watch also offers a variety of colors and watchbands to choose from so that you can match your mood and outfit.

The Huawei Watch GT 4 has an exceptional battery life of up to 14 days on the 46mm and up to 7 days on the 41mm. This extended battery life ensures that you can always rely on your watch without frequent recharging. The Watch GT 4 brings a new era where fashion and personal health monitoring go hand in hand. Notably, it comes with an upgraded TruSeen 5.5+ heart rate monitoring technology, which brings a whole new level of precision and accuracy to heart rate and workout tracking.

What's more, the Watch GT 4 introduces the innovative Stay Fit app, which helps you control your calories and manage weight. It counts your calories, shows you how much you need to burn, and gives you weight control plans to achieve your health goals. The watch also supports over 100 sports modes and workout types, including Padel, a popular racket sport that combines elements of tennis



and squash. The watch also introduces the Sleep Breathing Awareness feature, which detects interruptions in your breathing while asleep and helps you improve your sleep quality.

With the Watch GT 4, you can make or receive calls, send or receive messages, check notifications, control music playback, and more. Plus, it is compatible with Android and iOS and works with them seamlessly. So, don't miss this opportunity to pre-order yours.

Zhang, who was initially supposed to take charge of the firm's new cloud computing branch in September after stepping down, left just as he was supposed to take up his new post. Alibaba said it intends to spin off Cainiao "by way of a separate listing of the Cainiao Shares", according to its filing with the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

It did not give a timetable for the move or how much it hoped to raise. According to Hong Kong daily The South China Morning Post, which is owned by Alibaba, Cainiao aims to raise at least \$1 billion on the stock market, which would make it the world's biggest IPO this year. In addition to e-commerce and logistics, Hangzhou-based Alibaba has business operations spanning cloud computing, media and entertainment, and artificial intelligence.

The changes come after years of turbulence for

China's tech firms, as authorities sought to rein in the powerful but poorly regulated sector. Alibaba was the first to fall foul of official scrutiny in 2020, with Beijing pulling the plug on a planned IPO by its affiliate Ant Group at the last minute in what should have been one of the largest listings in history at \$34 billion.

A record fine of \$2.75 billion was later imposed on the tech giant for alleged unfair business practices. Those measures marked the start of a tightening of regulation of the tech sector, which severely hit the profitability of the digital giants. After its heavy-handed approach, the Chinese government is now showing support for the digital economy, an important source of growth and potential jobs at a time when the economy is under pressure. But the sector has not yet regained its former dynamism. — AFP

THE 'TYRANNY OF THINNESS' STILL DOMINATES FASHION

Despite claims that the fashion industry is embracing curvier bodies, the data suggests it could be guilty of what one expert calls "fat-washing". While a handful of plus-size models such as Paloma Elsesser have grabbed media attention in recent years, the figures shows they remain a vanishingly small minority. Vogue Business looked at 9,137 outfits unveiled during 219 shows in New York, London, Milan and Paris last season and found that 0.6 percent were plus-size—defined as US size 14 or above, which is actually the average size for a woman in the United States—and only 3.8 percent were size 6-12.

This means 95.6 percent of outfits presented were in US size 0-4. Paolo Volonte, who teaches sociology of fashion in Milan, says brands use a few curvy models to deflect criticism. "It's 'fat-washing'," he told AFP, comparing it to criticisms of cynical "green-washing" by which the industry is accused of making empty climate pledges.

"They use curvy models in their shows to show inclusivity but in fact

this is to preserve and maintain a system based on the tyranny of the thin ideal," Volonte said. Ekaterina Ozhiganova, a 20-year-old model and law student, says luxury brands simply "refuse to represent normal people". Medium-sized women "are often told either to lose weight... or to push themselves up to XL," she told AFP. "Neither is healthy."

'Darling, that's the job'

Ozhiganova's advocacy group, Model Law, carried out a survey that found nine out of 10 models felt pressure to change their bodies, more than half on a regular basis. "It's very hard for them to talk about," she said. "If you complain, everyone will just say: 'Darling, that's the job.'" How it became "the job" is a question of history.

Volonte says the obsession with thinness dates back to the birth of industrial production techniques. Previously, designers made clothes specific to individuals. In the mass production era, they use small templates which they scale up for larger sizes.

This only works up to a certain size, however, after which fat and muscle can change the shape of bodies in more complex ways.

"It is much more expensive to produce and sell clothing on higher sizes and requires more expertise," said Volonte. At the same time, thinness became firmly associated with wealth—having the time and money to work on your body—an aspiration that has been deeply entrenched by advertising and the day-to-day practices of the fashion industry.

'A fantasy world'

There have been efforts to change things since the early 2000s when fears spread that size-zero models were encouraging anorexia in young people. Since 2017, France requires models to pass medical examinations, while the country's two biggest luxury conglomerates, LVMH and Kering, signed charters vowing to stop using size-zero models.

But with sizes varying from one brand to the next, this is hard to en-

force. Designers are as trapped in the status quo as everyone else. Elite couturier Mohammad Ashi says discrimination based on race and gender has been fairly well tackled in fashion, but shape is tricky. "We're not trying to avoid it, but from an industrial point of view, we can't produce a plus-size dress. We sell what we show and I know our clients personally. It's just business," he told AFP.

Couturier Julien Fournie has used pregnant models and his favorite model, Michaela Tomanova, has "six centimeters everywhere more than the others". But he says, "fashion remains fashion... It's a fantasy world and that will never change fundamentally."—AFP



File photo shows model Naomi Campbell walks the runway of the Dolce & Gabbana fashion show during the Milan Fashion Week Womenswear Spring/Summer 2024. — AFP



Model walk the runway of the Pierre Cardin show during the Paris Fashion Week Womenswear Spring/Summer 2024 in Paris.--AFP photos

PARIS FASHION WEEK

opens with drama and dashes of humor

Milan Fashion Week was not even over and the fashionistas were already back in Paris on Monday for another 100-plus shows in the hectic womenswear season. The spring-summer 2024 collections in the French capital run until October 3, with 107 brands presenting, of which 67 are giving runway shows. All eyes are on Balmain's show on Wednesday night after the dramatic theft of 50 of its outfits. Armed robbers seized the clothes on their way from Charles de Gaulle Airport to Balmain's Paris headquarters, leaving creative director Olivier Rousteing racing to pull together a replacement collection.



Paris is the last of the big four fashion weeks in the busy September calendar that sees back-to-back events in London, New York and Milan. The biggest story this season has been a new creative director at Gucci. The debut by Sabato de Sarno in Milan on Friday was a relatively low-key affair but gave a boost to the share price of French parent company Kering, which has been struggling lately to keep up with its major rival, LVMH.

The first day of Paris Fashion Week always focuses on emerging designers and there was excitement this year about avant-garde newcomer Marie Adam-Leenaardt from Belgium, who brought a dash of much-needed humor to the opening show. It opened with a chorus singing "Let's go to the beach!" only to follow it with a series of decidedly un-beachy grey, formal and structured outfits before introducing some more summery Barbie pink and sky-blue dresses.

"There's something very Belgian about it," the 27-year-old designer told AFP backstage. "It's important for me to play with the codes and have some paradoxes." Also showing on Monday was Victor Weinsanto, a former classical dancer who trained in fashion with Jean Paul Gaultier and loves to bring cabaret to the catwalk. There were doses of humor—opening with an extravagant wedding gown that he said was designed for "a woman who gets married entirely in Swarovski".

But he also showed a more serious side, with structured and chic pieces alongside more offbeat items like hooded suit jackets. Far from a newcomer, but long absent from the official line-up in Paris, is Pierre Cardin, which returned to the catwalk for the first time in 25 years last season and was back with a glamorous show on Monday night. The label's founder died in 2020 and his nephew Rodrigo Basilicati-Cardin is currently in charge but is embroiled in a bitter succession dispute with family members who have accused each other of fraud and other crimes.—AFP

This week also sees final shows for two big name designers. Gabriela Hearst is leaving Chloe after fewer than three years. Her sustainable focus was critically acclaimed but did not bring a major boost to sales. It will also be the last show for Sarah Burton, who took over at Alexander McQueen following the founder's suicide in 2010.



US fashion icon model Alva Chinn walks the runway of the Pierre Cardin show.





Dogs make a splash at UK coastal lido

Dozens of pooches on Sunday splashed around an outdoor swimming pool in southern England as part of the Saltdean Lido's "Dogtember" swim sessions for both dogs and their owners. The event, spanning four weekends in September, marks the end of the summer season at the Saltdean Lido, a 1930s Art Deco venue just outside the seaside town of Brighton. Dogs come to enjoy some aquatic fun such as fetching balls from the water or taking turns down a slide in a splash pool during what is said to be the biggest dog swim event in the UK.

"Dogtember is probably one of the most bonkers but most fun events that we operate at Saltdean Lido," said Deryck Chester, one of the directors of the

Saltdean Lido Community Interest Company, which currently holds the lease for the site. Around 8,000 dogs and people from all over the UK are expected to take part over the course of the month, Chester added. Dogs of all breeds are welcome but some events are also breed meet-ups such as the "Gold Rush" session for golden retrievers.

Kelly Wilkinson had come with her dog Ziggy, a cocker spaniel and springer spaniel mix, who she said is a "water doggy". "He loves swimming so we bring him here so he can live his best life," she told AFP. Jeff Stanbridge said his eight-month-old puppy Vinny was feeling a bit "overwhelmed" and staying out of the water for the moment. "But he loves running around with the other dogs and it's a great thing to do I think," he added.

'Dog heaven'

Another dog owner, Jenny Knight, said this is her third time coming to the event, which this year runs until October 1. "We try and come every year because it's fab, it's like dog heaven," Knight said. The event also helps raise funds for the restoration of the Saltdean Lido, which first opened to the public in 1938.

The venue was forced to close in 1940 with the start of World War II during which it was used as a water tank for the National Fire Service. After the war, the changing rooms inside the lido's main building—resembling the front of a cruise liner—were used for church services and a Sunday school. It reopened as a swimming pool only two decades later, in 1964, restored by



A dog swims during the 2023 Saltdean Lido Dog Swim event, in the coastal village of Saltdean, near Brighton, southern England.

the local council.

In 2010 a former leaseholder wanted to redevelop the site but it was saved by the efforts of the local community,

which led to the founding of the Saltdean Lido Community Interest Company. Dogtember is now in its sixth year and is on track to raise over £60,000 this season, according to Chester. "The income from the dog swims actually supports the human swims throughout the season" and contributes to the restoration of the building, Chester said.

He added that a lot of the people involved are volunteers, who "believe in the Saltdean Lido restoration project as well as being dog lovers". "It's a really community-inspired atmosphere here," he said. "I am not sure who enjoys it the most: the dogs, the swimmers, the volunteers, the humans. Everyone's smiling."—AFP



A dog shakes after exiting the water during the 2023 Saltdean Lido Dog Swim event.



A woman swim with her dogs during the 2023 Saltdean Lido Dog Swim event.



A dog retrieves a ball during the 2023 Saltdean Lido Dog Swim event.



Owners swim with their dogs during the 2023 Saltdean Lido Dog Swim event.



A dog jumps into the water. — AFP photos

Belgium students' love story with Taylor Swift

A hubbub grips the class in the Belgian city of Ghent as university students eagerly discuss whether US pop star Taylor Swift is a "literary genius". The question elicits passionate responses from students, and it's an exercise their professor hopes will enliven their engagement with more traditional figures of the English Literature canon.

The course is among a handful that have popped up at universities around the world as pop titan Swift has racked up hits and awards and as her Eras Tour is expected to set a record for the first billion-dollar tour. "To read her lyrics without the context of the song, it can feel like poetry," one student says, after the teacher opens the floor to discussion.



Taylor Swift

Another student pipes up to suggest it's too soon to say Swift, 33, has had the same cultural impact as William Shakespeare, known around the world for many centuries. While Shakespeare wrote at least 38 plays, Swift has recorded 10 albums. Some will wonder what Shakespeare and his peers share in common with today's biggest US singer-songwriter.

Well, they are all the subject of Elly McCausland's course called "Literature (Taylor's Version)" for Master's degree students at Ghent University, which will run until the end of the year. During the first class on Monday, assistant professor McCausland piqued the students' curiosity with controversial questions, including why certain authors and literature are considered timeless, while other books are not valued the same way.

McCausland's goal? To make literature more accessible. "I'd like to get people excited about literature, thinking about literature in a new way and realizing that actually even literature from centuries and centuries ago still has something to add to our conversations," she told AFP at the class.

'Swift is a real poet'

The 10-session course will use Swift's songs as references for themes and will focus on a series of historic texts including Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, lesser known than Jane Eyre. The

course has proved popular, with 61 students signed up, twice as many as usual. There are even students from other parts of Belgium. Zina Ringoot, 20, had learned just hours before that she could attend the course and made the 90-minute trip to Ghent from Antwerp in the northeast.

"I'm a huge Taylor Swift fan," said Ringoot, an English literature Master's student. "I'm hoping to write my thesis on Taylor Swift's album 'folklore' and how it connects to romanticism. So I thought I would get a lot out of this class." Not everyone in the class is a Swiftie, as her fans call themselves.

Joris Verschelde, 21, admitted he was "not that big of a fan" but wanted to "see the connection between the songs and what we already learned" in the older texts. Laughter often fills the windowless auditorium, despite the fact that serious themes are on the agenda, including feminism, sexism and misogyny.

When McCausland asks: "Who are the gatekeepers" of English literature, one student quips: "A bunch of old men!"

Even if critics reject comparisons with the canonical greats, Swift has fans even among Shakespeare experts including British academic Sir Jonathan Bate. After attending a concert during Swift's record-breaking Eras tour, Bate wrote in the Sunday Times in April: "I came away with confirmation of a thought I first had 15 years ago: this isn't just high-class showbiz, Taylor Swift is a real poet."

Beyond Belgium

University courses looking at Swift have been popping up around the world. New York University's Clive Davis Institute launched its first-ever course on Swift last year, and Queen Mary University of London offered a summer school this year looking at Swift through a literary lens. In Arizona, PhD student Alexandra Wormley is hosting a course on the social psychology of Swift at Arizona State University this autumn.

Critics online and even some media pundits have pondered just what it is about Swift that is so appealing. For Clio Doyle, an academic who hosted the summer course at Queen Mary, "Swift is a really fascinating songwriter".

The lecturer in early modern literature added that another reason she looked at Swift was because of her popularity and the discussions surrounding her work. "A course about Swift would be an opportunity for students both to deepen their readings of Swift's lyrics and to think about what it means to study something as literature," Doyle, who runs a similarly-themed podcast about Swift, told AFP.

The summer course will be offered again next year, and interest is not limited to the United States or Europe. The University of Melbourne will host a three-day "Swiftposium" looking at Swift's cultural, economic and global impact in February 2024, the same month her tour arrives in Australia.—AFP

'Dead Man Walking,' an emotional look at death row, opens Met Opera season

It's been three decades since Sister Helen Prejean entered the public eye for her memoir "Dead Man Walking," a recounting of her relationship with a death row inmate whose execution she witnessed. The 1993 best-selling memoir was made into an Oscar-winning film starring Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn, as well as an opera examining love, pain and redemption that after twenty-some years on the stage is core to the contemporary canon, and this Tuesday gets its Met debut in New York.

The operatic version of "Dead Man Walking" was composed by Jake Heggie, with Terrence McNally penning the libretto. This year's haunting Met production features mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato as Sister Helen. Bass-baritone Ryan McKinny plays the death-row inmate Joseph De Rocher, while soprano Latonia Moore takes on the role of Sister Rose, and mezzo-soprano Susan Graham—who sang Helen Prejean in 2000 when it premiered in San Francisco—plays De Rocher's mother.

The real Sister Helen is now 84 years old, and has spent the latter half of her life as a leading American advocate urging the abolition of capital punishment, which remains legal in many US states. After witnessing the death by electric chair of Elmo Patrick Sonnier—who the character of Joseph De Rocher is based on—she has accompanied a number of prisoners to their executions and hopes her book, the film and the opera can "wake people up" to her belief that the death penalty is morally wrong.

"I'm just so glad the story, and the reality is getting out to people," she told AFP backstage during an intermission of the final dress rehearsal prior to Tuesday's opening. Executions are "a secret ritual," she said, which few people bear witness to, recalling a Latin American expression she encountered while working in the region: "What the eye doesn't see



Opera singer Susan Graham (center) performs during the dress rehearsal of "Dead Man Walking".

the heart can't feel." "So we need art to pull back the curtain and bring people into the reality of it."

Forgiveness?

The Met's stark staging of "Dead Man Walking"—directed by Ivo van Hove—begins with a short film depicting the murder and rape for which De Rocher was convicted. In the next moment Sister Helen, who begins a correspondence with the convict as part of her Order's community outreach, is preparing to meet him at Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola.

Throughout the performance the two main characters are frequently on-stage together, without the partitions or shackles that typically characterize the production—letting the austere stage become an emotional prison of its own. "It's an opera about the death penalty, but in my mind it's really not—it's about, can you see the humanity in everyone? Particularly someone who's done terrible things?" McKinny, who plays De Rocher, told AFP.

"It's really about seeing everyone involved as human beings and asking, 'Is forgiveness possible?'" For Sister Helen, it's also about helping people to comprehend suffering—not only that carried

out by individuals, but the kind perpetuated by society. "There's the... thing of blaming individuals, we never look at the context of the culture in the society," she said, adding that beyond asking who did what, it's important to ask, "What did we do wrong?"

The Met's production of "Dead Man Walking" is part of the 143-year-old institution's shift towards more contemporary works, as it aims to diversify its audiences that traditionally skew elderly and white. In recent years the company has found success at the box office with operas by living composers, including "The Hours" and "Fire Shut Up In My Bones." Both are returning this season. The prestigious house will also stage "X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X" in November.

For Moore, the star American soprano who plays Sister Rose, the Met's move towards the contemporary is "necessary to show that we support American opera composers, and American artists here." "For years it's been such an international art form simply because opera is not really in the forefront of the arts here in America," she told AFP in her dressing room. But in recent years Moore said she's felt that change, giving her a sense of "American pride."—AFP

"Of course we want the classics, but if we don't do something to move forward, and we don't incorporate our own culture into this art form, then the art form will die in this country."

Moore added that it's also about broadening the appeal of opera to less-informed audiences. "For those people that think operas are for fuddy-duddies, and it's just the horns and 'Figaro, figaro,'" she said contemporary works like "Fire" or "Dead Man Walking" offer something "they can really touch and relate to." "It's tangible to them emotionally."—AFP



Opera singers Joyce DiDonato (right) and Ryan McKinny perform during the dress rehearsal of "Dead Man Walking" at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.—AFP photos



Sardines are grilled during the Saint Anthony celebration.



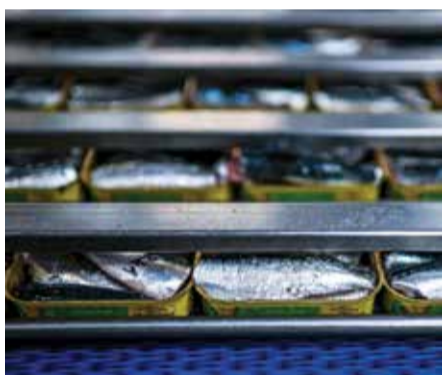
Women are pictured wearing a "sardine hat" during Lisbon's Saint Anthony celebration at Alfama neighborhood in Lisbon.



Employees of Thai Union, an international seafood and canned fish company, prepare canned sardines.



Sardines are pictured inside a bucket of water during the Lisbon's Saint Anthony celebration.



Canned sardines are pictured at Thai Union, an international seafood and canned fish company, at the company's canned fish factory in Peniche.

The humble sardine, a feature of the street parties that pop up across Portugal in summer, makes up two thirds of the country's fish catch and has spawned an important canning industry. "Where there are sardines, there are people, beer, friends and a sense of community. Sardines bring people together," 27-year-old Goncalo Ortega told AFP at a Sardine Festival street party in Lisbon this summer.

Nearly every town and village has its own summer festivities, with open-air dancing and, of course, the aroma of sardines grilling on an outdoor barbecue. "The sardine is the most abundant, most commonly found fish up and down the Portuguese coast. It's a really important part of people's diet, not just in fishing villages but also in major urban centers," explained Alvaro Garrido, an expert in the economic history of the fishing industry.

"In that sense, sardine fishing is of huge social importance, even more than Portugal's iconic salted cod," he said. The Portuguese eat more fish than any other nation in the 27-member European Union. Most of the fish is imported, notably the salted cod which features so prominently in the country's traditional cuisine but is actually fished in more northerly waters. "Portugal has a chronic trade deficit in fish products because of the salted cod imports.



That's balanced out somewhat by exports of tinned sardines," Garrido said. "Sardine fishing is special because it's a tradition. Everyone loves sardines, especially good quality ones," said Agonia Torrao, the captain of a fishing boat based in the port

of Peniche, in central Portugal. "You can find large numbers of sardines all along our coasts. That's why we fish for them," the 51-year-old told AFP. Despite its historic importance and the pride of place it holds in the Portuguese imagination, the fishing industry

is in decline. According to the office of national statistics, there were 14,000 fishermen in Portugal last year on 7,600 boats, around a third fewer than 20 years ago. — AFP



Fishermen fill up the fish tanks with sardines on board of "Deus Nao Falta" (God is not missing) fishing boat.



Employees of Thai Union, an international seafood and canned fish company, prepare canned sardines at the company's canned fish factory in Peniche.



A sardine is pictured in a box covered with ice at Peniche port.



Fishermen fill up the fish tanks with sardines on board of "Deus Nao Falta" (God is not missing) fishing boat in Peniche.

Stock photo giant Getty releases AI image generator

Photo agency Getty Images is launching an image generator powered by artificial intelligence and using its trove of stock photos, the company said Monday. With one of the world's most extensive photo archives, Getty is positioning itself as a competitor to the giants of generative AI, such as Dall-E creator OpenAI or Google, with its Imagen program, but also start-ups Midjourney or Stable Diffusion.

Midjourney became famous earlier this year as the software behind the

widely shared image of Pope Francis wearing a white puffer jacket, as well as another showing a fake arrest of former US president Donald Trump. Getty said its new product, titled Generative AI by Getty Images, was being made in partnership with AI chip giant Nvidia and that it would only be accessible to clients, not the general public. The service will be subscription-based, with rates based on the number of queries submitted by the customer, a spokesperson told AFP on Monday.

Getty Images, which has a distribution partnership with AFP, said it depended solely on its own stock photo library to build the AI. The company said it plans to remunerate photographers whose images were used to develop the software, who will receive a share of the revenues generated by the new tool.

Getty and Nvidia "want to develop these tools in a responsible way that returns benefits to creators and

doesn't pass risks on to customers, and this collaboration is testament to the fact that's possible," said Grant Farhall, Getty chief product officer. Many of the companies involved in generative AI creation are being sued by artists, coders and writers for having used their works to create the generative technology, without permission or remuneration. — AFP



Sports

'Killer Miller' holds record he would prefer not to have

Renowned for hitting big sixes and has cleared all grandstands

JOHANNESBURG: David Miller holds an international cricket record he would prefer not to have. No one has played more international cricket without playing in a Test match than Miller. The hard-hitting left-hander has played in 274 white-ball internationals. The nearest contender for the non-Test record is retired West Indian Keiron Pollard on 224.

"I would have loved to play a Test, but it is what it is," says Miller, 34. "I've achieved quite a lot in my white-ball stuff and I'm grateful to have played so many games." Miller has built a solid first-class record, averaging 36.32 in 63 matches, with six centuries, which he backed up with electrifying fielding.

But it was a time of plenty in a South African Test batting line-up which included Jacques Kallis, Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers and Faf du Plessis, while white-ball cricket was becoming ever more prevalent—and lucrative.

In 2018, nearing his 30th birthday, he retired from first-class cricket. "I wasn't being picked, even for the South Africa A side. There were guys ahead of me so I decided to concentrate on the white-ball stuff."

He is in demand from franchises around the world—playing for 22 different representative teams—and a crowd favourite in South Africa where supporters wave banners proclaiming 'Killer Miller' and 'It's Miller Time'. He is one of only four players who has scored more than 3,000 runs in one-day internationals with an average above 40 and a strike rate above 100. The others are De Villiers and England's Jos Buttler and Jonny Bairstow.

Big sixes

He is renowned for hitting big sixes and has cleared all three grandstands on different sides of

his home ground at Kingsmead in Durban. Recently he hit a ball out of the ground against Australia at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg.

An off-the-cuff comment he made after an Indian Premier League game is quoted regularly: "If it's in the arc it's out (of) the park, if it's in the vee it's in the tree." "That came from my dad," he says.

Andrew Miller was a good club cricketer who played for Natal Country Districts. It's not all big hitting, though. Batting at number six in a side without established all-rounders, Miller will likely be in situations at the World Cup where he will have to take responsibility for rebuilding an innings.

"It's about summing up the situation. Sometimes you are batting with the lower order and you have to decide with your partner at the time how you are going to go about it. "It's like a chess game at times. You are thinking about moves and what's important and what's not. It's about making clear decisions. It helps your execution when you are fully committed."

Both sides of Miller were on display when South Africa had to win the last three matches of a recent home series against Australia after losing the first two. In the fourth match he thrashed an unbeaten 82 off 45 balls as he and an inspired Heinrich Klaasen added a scarcely believable 222 off 94 balls for the fifth wicket.

In the deciding match, in trickier conditions, he made a more measured 63 off 65 balls to enable South Africa to get to a defendable total after a difficult start. "The World Cup is very open," he says. "We're a pretty experienced team. We're capable of doing it, so it's a matter of getting the basics right for longer periods of time." — AFP



JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's David Miller watches the ball after playing a shot during the fifth one-day international (ODI) cricket match between South Africa and Australia at Wanderers stadium in Johannesburg. — AFP

'Death of democracy' overshadowed cricket at 2003 World Cup

PARIS: Henry Olonga, by his own admission, was never the greatest cricketer to play the game but the Zimbabwean fast bowler left an indelible mark on the Cricket World Cup of 2003. That was the year that he and teammate Andy Flower hit the front pages with their simple "Death of Democracy" protest against the authoritarian government of Robert Mugabe, spelling the end of both of their international playing careers. At the previous edition in 1999, Olonga wrote himself a different chapter on the field when he took three Indian wickets in one over to secure a wholly unexpected three-run win in Leicester. The protest, however, was a different fox altogether.

"I had nothing to gain," Olonga told AFP in a Zoom interview from his home in Adelaide. "I had a decent lifestyle, I was paid well, I had some money stashed away, I had bought a house in Zimbabwe, a plot of land, I had a fiancée. Life was good. "But I felt a deep urge to do what we did because I believed in the cause. I still do."

On the morning of Zimbabwe's opening match against Namibia, February 10, 2003, at the Harare Sports Club, Olonga and his white teammate Flower released a statement to the press saying they would be wearing a black armband for the duration of the World Cup. "In doing so, we are mourning the death of democracy in our beloved Zimbabwe," it read. "We are making a silent plea to those responsible to stop the abuse of human rights in Zimbabwe. We pray our small action may help to restore sanity and dignity to our nation." It was an immensely brave thing to do in a country that was ruled by the iron fist of Mugabe who had been in power since 1980 and would retain it until he was removed and replaced by Emmerson Mnangagwa.

As the soldiers took up post around the boundary with their AK47s, the foreign press lapped it up with many proclaiming Flower and Olonga as heroes. Locally, however, it was met with mixed reactions, especially by other black Zimbabweans, something that still rankles with Olonga.

"There's a sense of disappointment that our mes-

sage wasn't really something that was possibly attainable," says Olonga. "We didn't change anything. We didn't transform the nation into this democratic fair country that we envisaged."

"I look back on the black armband and the very people that we were trying to help, the subjugated, oppressed and downtrodden, these were the very people who turned against me. I felt vilified by my own people. "There's much talk of Stockholm syndrome, loving the abuser. That has made no sense to me." Partly because of England's refusal to play in Harare, Zimbabwe qualified for the Super 8 part of the 2003 World Cup. Olonga's final act on an international cricket field was having Kennedy Otieno leg before as Kenya romped to a seven-wicket win in Bloemfontein.



Henry Olonga

'Dignity'

By then, Olonga was effectively on the run. His fiancée called it off and Olonga was charged with treason. He and Flower both left for England.

Unlike Flower, who played for Essex before going on to coach England to Ashes success in Australia, it was the end of Olonga's cricket career, aged 27.

He had taken 68 wickets in 30 Tests at an average of just under 40 and played 50 one-day internationals. "I was quite a mediocre player but I was amazing on a couple of occasions," he says remembering that spell against India in 1999.

"And I was injury-prone so I had maybe three or four years left, no more. "So I don't feel there was

diversity, with the power to reallocate matches from venues if there is evidence of non-compliance."

However, the ECB did not agree to all of the report's recommendations, including on equal pay for male and female players. The ICEC report called for overall equal average pay at international level by 2030 and equal average pay and prize money in domestic cricket by 2029.

Match fees paid to England's women for international matches are already equal to those paid to England's men. "The ICEC report was a massive moment for the sport and a responsibility we take extremely seriously, to bring about the changes we all want to see," said ECB chief executive Richard Gould.

"We think we are on a journey to try to change history in terms of what cricket looks like and will look like." ECB chairman Richard Thompson repeated the organisation's previous apology, adding: "I reaffirm our absolute commitment that cricket will strive to become the most inclusive sport in England and Wales."

But Rafiq said the ECB response was inadequate. "I expected the three-month response to be detailed, clear with strong commitments and unfortunately from what I've read it falls incredibly short and it's flimsy at best," he told Sky Sports. "How independent is the new regulator? We don't have any detail about it. "There are a couple of positives with commitments around women's cricket and match-fee equalisation, that should be the bare minimum. "These commitments are important, but is it going to solve the other issues that led us here in the first place? I don't think it will." — AFP

a tremendous loss in leaving the game. I don't look back with any form of regret on leaving when I did. "At least I left the game with a bit of dignity."

Olonga struggled in England, not able to get a professional contract and bouncing bits of commentary, but he met physical education teacher Tara Read. They married, had children and then moved to Australia. In the 20 years since the armband protest Olonga has yet to return to Zimbabwe where the sport has often struggled. Zimbabwe failed to qualify for the 2023 World Cup which gets underway in India next week. "The simple answer is I haven't felt safe," he says when asked why. "Twenty years on I don't know if safety is a concern. It may not be. Many people have returned, Andy Flower has returned... It hasn't appealed to me." Olonga is now a proud Aus-



Andy Flower

tralian citizen, to the point where he supported them during the recent Ashes series against England, and works as a singer - he appeared on the local version of 'The Voice' - and public speaker.

The 2003 protest is largely forgotten now by a world that has other, more pressing issues against which to rail. For Olonga, though, no matter how distant, that chapter will always be there. "It's something I can't get away from. I don't try to get away from it," he says ruefully. "But when I first started public speaking I'd spend about 20 minutes on it, now I just hint at it. "For me it's been in the blink of an eye but it's a long time ago. Two decades. Life moves on, the sport has moved on." —AFP

Pakistan's Azam expects support from Indian fans in WCup

LAHORE: Skipper Babar Azam said Tuesday he still expects huge support for the team at the World Cup in India, despite Pakistani fans being barred from traveling to the 50-over tournament. Indian ministries have yet to approve visas for spectators hoping to attend the seven week mega-event starting October 5, according to Pakistan media reports.

"Unfortunately, we will be missing our fans," Azam told reporters in a pre-departure press conference in the eastern city of Lahore. "However, as far as I know, all our games are all sold out and we will be playing in jam-packed stadiums so there will be support for us."

The Pakistan squad will depart early Wednesday and is slated to play two warm-up matches—against New Zealand on September 29 and Australia on October 3 -- both in Hyderabad. They open their World Cup campaign against the Netherlands, before facing arch-rivals India in the over 130,000-seat Ahmedabad Stadium on October 14.

"Everyone who travelled to India before told me that they got huge love in India, so we expect the same," he said. "I don't think our fans will sit silent, they will back us from the social media and other platforms and pray for our win." India's interior ministry did not respond to a request for comment on visa arrangements for Pakistan fans. —AFP

Kiwi veteran Boulton looking for 'one more run' at WCup

WELLINGTON: After 12 months out of one-day international cricket, New Zealand seamer Trent Boulton is relishing a third crack at the 50-overs World Cup after bitter defeats in the last two finals. The 34-year-old is one of the world's best ODI bowlers, but spent the last year sidelined from the Black Caps after turning down a New Zealand Cricket contract to play for lucrative Twenty20 teams in Australia, the United States and India.

Putting his international career on hold to spend more time with his young family was a risk, but Boulton is back in the frame for October's ODI World Cup after signing a casual-playing agreement with New Zealand cricket chiefs.

"I fully appreciated the fact that in giving my contract back, you open the door for other players," he said. "The decision was solely made around just being away from home a lot. "Selection for the World Cup was never guaranteed. I had to work for it, so I am very happy to be here."

New Zealand are bidding to reach a third straight final, and Boulton hopes the Black Caps can go far in India, "like we have in the last couple of attempts". He has been on fire since his return to international cricket in early September, taking eight wickets in two ODI defeats to England.

"It was a good feeling chucking back on the black ODI kit," he said. "I can't wait for more." Boulton was a key part of New Zealand's run to the last two finals when they lost to Australia in 2015 at Melbourne, then England four years later at Lords.

Finals heart-break

"I've been very fortunate to play in a couple of World Cup finals and been on the wrong side of all of them," he said with a wry smile. "It's a cliché, but you learn more when you fail than when you succeed. I feel like I'm a better cricketer for that experience."

His 22 wickets at the 2015 tournament was the joint highest alongside Australian speedster Mitchell Starc. They lost by seven wickets to hosts Australia in the final. New Zealand cricket fans need no reminding of the 2019 final defeat to England, who they meet in their first game of this year's tournament.

With England struggling to make the final few runs, Boulton accidentally trod on the boundary rope attempting to catch Ben Stokes, who went on to steer the hosts to victory in a dramatic Super Over. "I didn't know where the boundary was, and that was a crucial mistake," Boulton said of the blunder.

"It was a crazy game to be a part of," Boulton added. "I try not to look back on it." But he got a stark reminder when replays were screened in Southampton on Boulton's first game back for the Black Caps earlier this month in the opening ODI against England.

"It's still a hard one to let go. What was probably a little bit harder was when I come back after a year to play for New Zealand and it's a rain delay and the only game playing on the screen at the ground (was the 2019 final), so that probably pushed me a little bit," he admitted.

There is no changing past finals, of course, so Boulton has his eyes fixed on the future in the hope it will be third time lucky. "I'm looking forward to hopefully get one more run and lifting the trophy in a couple of weeks time," he said. "That's the big focus for a lot of us." —AFP

ECB to 'change' cricket after equality report

LONDON: English cricket chiefs have vowed to "change" the game after a damning report revealed racism, sexism, classism and elitism in the sport. The Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) published its report in June revealing "widespread" discrimination in the game. The commission, set up by the England and Wales Cricket Board, made 44 recommendations, including a call for an "unqualified public apology" from the board for its failings, which the ECB made immediately.

The ICEC was established in 2021 following a racism scandal centred around the treatment of Pakistan-born bowler Azeem Rafiq at Yorkshire. The ECB published its response to the ICEC report on Monday, saying it would be "taking forward most of the ICEC's recommendations".

It said it would set up a new cricket regulator, independent of the governing ECB, responsible for enforcement of regulations and carrying out investigations. The ECB also said it would invest a minimum of £25 million (\$30 million) a year above forecasted women's revenues to grow women's and girls' cricket at all levels.

It also plans to enhance equality, diversity and inclusion standards for county teams. That would include more ambitious targets for gender and ethnic

Sports

Eagles sink Buccaneers to stay unbeaten, Bengals claw Rams

Eagles are now only one of three teams in the league with 3-0 record

MIAMI: The Philadelphia Eagles maintained their unbeaten start to the NFL season with a comprehensive 25-11 victory on the road over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Monday. Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts rushed for one touchdown and threw for another as last season's Super Bowl runners-up improved to 3-0 — the franchise's best start to a season since the 1992-1993 campaign.

Hurts finished with 277 passing yards from 23-of-37 attempts while rushing 28 yards from 10 carries, including one of the Eagles' trademark "tush-push" close-range touchdowns. Philadelphia running back D'Andre Swift had 130 yards from 16 carries while wide receiver A.J. Brown caught the eye with 131 yards from nine receptions.

The Eagles are now only one of three teams in the league with a 3-0 record, joining the San Francisco 49ers and Miami Dolphins. Hurts warned after the game that the Eagles still had plenty of room for improvement as they target a swift return to the Super Bowl this season.

"We found a way to win, and we found a way to execute," Hurts said. "I think we're a work in progress. We're playing really good team football, and we're still growing. That's the beautiful thing about it." A cagey opening period saw defenses on top, with the Eagles having to settle for a 36-yard Jake Elliott field goal for their only scoring drive of the first quarter. Tampa Bay, who were also unbeaten before Monday, squared the game at 3-3 after a

Chase McLaughlin field goal in the second quarter before the Eagles took over.

Hurts threaded a superb 34-yard pass to Olamide Zaccheaus for the game's opening touchdown before Elliott booted another field goal to put Philadelphia 13-3 up at half-time. The Eagles turned the screw with the opening drive of the third quarter, Hurts marching his team 75 yards up field with a 13-play masterpiece that culminated with the quarterback being shoved over from one yard out to make it 20-3.

Tampa Bay were given a glimmer of hope soon afterwards when Dee Delaney produced a stunning interception to deny Philadelphia another touchdown. But the Eagles hit back as Tampa Bay tried to rush out of the end zone, with Rachaad White stopped in his tracks to concede a safety that put Philadelphia 22-3 ahead. Elliott added another field goal to stretch the Eagles lead to 25-3.

The Bucs did finally breach the Eagles defense on their next possession, with quarterback Baker Mayfield finding Mike Evans for a close-range score and then making the two-point conversion.

But it was too little too late as Philadelphia ran down the clock in the fourth quarter to close out victory. In Monday's other game, a ferocious defensive display set up the Cincinnati Bengals' first win of the season with a 19-16 defeat of the Los Angeles Rams.

A rampant Bengals defense sacked Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford six times while restricting the visitors to 292 offensive yards. — AFP



NEWARK: File photo shows Sean Couturier #14 of Philadelphia Flyers skates against the New Jersey Devils at a preseason game at the Prudential Center in Newark. — AFP

Mum or dad for tee? India's Ashok has parental choice

NEW DELHI: India medal hope Aditi Ashok has a tough choice to make before teeing up in a star-studded women's golf field at the Asian Games in Hangzhou on Thursday—will it be mum or dad on her bag? The 25-year-old finished agonisingly out of the medals in fourth at the Tokyo Olympics with effervescent mother Maheshwari, known to everyone as "Mash", as caddie.

"Tokyo 2020 was a great experience and having my mum caddie for me was a fun experience," Ashok told AFP before leaving for China. Mash and dad Gudlamani have taken turns as bag-carrier since the golfer was seven and were there in 2016 when, as a teenager, she first grabbed headlines by winning the Women's Indian Open.

At 16 she was the youngest player at the Rio Olympics the same year, with her dad doing the caddie duties. Her Tokyo exploits, where she was in silver-medal position for the first three rounds before being edged off the podium by former world number one Lydia Ko, put women's golf firmly on India's sporting map. But level-headed Ashok, who plays on the US LPGA and Ladies European Tours, did not dwell on her Tokyo disappointment. "My mindset has always been to focus on the process more than the outcome," she said. "I always give my best and move on to the next event. And I keep doing the same week after week."

Top sports court to hear Russian skater Valieva's doping case

LAUSANNE: The doping case of Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva whose positive test ignited a scandal at the 2022 Winter Olympics will be heard behind closed doors on Tuesday by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

In Beijing in February 2022, Valieva, then 15, became the first female skater to land a quadruple jump in Olympic competition, helping Russia secure gold in the team event. The next day, she was told she had tested positive before the Games for trimetazidine, a drug used to treat angina but which is banned for athletes.

Tuesday's hearing follows the exoneration of the teenager by Russia's anti-doping agency (RUSADA) which ruled that Valieva bore "no fault or negligence" for the positive test. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the International Skating Union (ISU) appealed RUSADA's ruling and are demanding up to

Ashok has gone on to crack the world's top 50 for the first time this year after earning a fourth European Tour win in Kenya in February. "This season so far has been the high point," Ashok said. "Not because of any one week in particular, but mainly because of the way I've played on both the tours and managed my game as well as breaking into the top 50." Mum and dad have different styles on the course, Ashok said.

"My dad and I tend to have more discussions about (how to play) a shot as he knows my game well enough to help," Ashok said. "My mum doesn't help as much with the decision-making (on the course) but I feel that helps too as I am more decisive and calmer while playing with her on my bag."

Grabbing attention

Ashok first picked up a club aged five in Bengaluru, the southern Indian tech hub where she grew up, and began learning to play at the same time as her parents. Golf has been a defining aspect of the family's relationship but she says she has had to work to "keep things separate" off the course.

She was tight-lipped as to who would get the bag-carrying honour when Ashok leads a three-member women's golf team at the West Lake International Golf Course in Hangzhou this week. "I'm excited to play the Asian Games in China and going about my practice and preparation to do my best," she said.

"I don't want to go with any expectations because it doesn't usually help." Women's golf was virtually unknown in India before Ashok's Olympic achievements, which all began when the then-teenager was in eighth place after two rounds at the 2016 Rio Games before fading to finish 41st.

"I'm happy that golf gets the attention it needs

four years' suspension and the cancellation of all her results since the end of 2021.

"WADA has taken this appeal to CAS in the interests of fairness for athletes and clean sport," a spokesman for the agency said in a statement to AFP, adding that RUSADA's decision was "wrong under the terms of the World Anti-Doping Code".

The three CAS judges will meet in Lausanne, while the young skater - now 17 - and some of the experts and witnesses will be heard by videoconference. More than a year and a half after the Olympics, the podium in the team event is still up for grabs - much to the dismay of the Americans, Japanese and Canadians, who finished behind the Russian gold medalists. US figure skater Vincent Zhou accused the global anti-doping system of "failing athletes". "As my team's empty medal boxes show, the global anti-doping system is failing athletes," Zhou, 22, said in a statement on Monday.

'Anti-Russian narrative'

While the case was the latest in a string of doping scandals involving Russian Olympic athletes, it also raised questions about how the 15-year-old athlete was treated, the way the test was conducted and the value of the drug involved for enhancing



KAWAGOE: In this file photo India's Aditi Ashok (R) and caddie, her mother Maheshwari known to everyone as "Mash", walk to the 18th hole in round one of the women's golf individual stroke play during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Kasumigaseki Country Club in Kawagoe. — AFP

performance. From the start, the case has presented a dilemma. Valieva's age, 15 at the time, should have guaranteed her confidentiality, under WADA rules for "protected persons" younger than 16. But Valieva's display in the team event in the Olympic arena had already drawn worldwide attention.

"Confidentiality is a good thing, but becomes a bit of a puppet when you're dealing with high-level athletes," David Pavot, director of the anti-doping research chair at the Canadian University of Sherbrooke, told AFP.

The Valieva affair, he added, has "brought to light wider ethical questions about a minimum age for participation in the Games". Under the pressure of suspicion and attention, Valieva cracked in the individual event in Beijing, stumbling four times in the long programme and finishing in tears as she tumbled from first to fourth.

The skating federation is raising the lower age limit for its senior category from 15 to 17 from 2024, citing the "physical, mental and emotional health" of competitors. Pavot added that Valieva has been caught "in a spiral bigger than herself, with an anti-Russian narrative where everything is mixed up", due to the systematic cheating revealed in 2015 that discredited both Russian sport and RUSADA. — AFP

Algeria withdraws from race to host 2025, 2027 Cup of Nations

ALGIERS: Algeria has pulled out of the running to stage the Africa Cup of Nations in either 2025 or 2027, the Algerian Football Federation (FAF) said on Tuesday, a day before the announcement of the host nation for each of the two tournaments.

The FAF said in a statement that it had "sent a letter to the Confederation of African Football (CAF) informing it of its decision to withdraw its bids to host the Africa Cup of Nations" in 2025 and 2027. Algeria was due to come up against its North African neighbour Morocco as well as Zambia and a joint Nigeria-Benin bid for the hosting of the 2025 tournament.

It had also entered the 2027 contest, up against Botswana, Egypt, Senegal and a combined Kenya-Tanzania-Uganda challenge. "This withdrawal can be explained by a new approach from the FAF related to its strategy for developing football in Algeria," the federation added.

The announcement came on the same day as a new president, Walid Sadi, took over the running of the FAF. It was understood that Algeria, like its political rival Morocco, would have preferred to host the 2025 AFCON. Earlier this year, leading Moroccan and CAF official Fouzi Lekjaa caused a stir when he told local politicians that the kingdom would be chosen for 2025.

Algeria had successfully staged the African Nations Championship, for which only domestically-based players are eligible, at the beginning of this year. CAF's executive committee will meet in Cairo on Wednesday when it will announce the hosts of the two editions of the Cup of Nations in question.

The next AFCON will be held in the Ivory Coast in January and February 2024, after it was postponed from June and July this year in order to avoid the West African rainy season.

Earlier, CAF president and South African billionaire Patrice Motsepe was acutely aware of the political rivalry between the neighbours. "We must not get involved in what is happening between Algeria and Morocco. CAF should never intervene in politics," he said during the CHAN tournament.

Motsepe has hailed the organisational abilities of both countries, who have each staged the Cup of Nations once with Morocco doing so in 1988 and Algeria two years later. "Morocco has often flawlessly hosted major competitions while the CHAN in Algeria this year was the best ever," he said.

During the CHAN, Motsepe said he wanted each region to host the Cup of Nations: "We cannot assign the organisation of the CAN successively to the same region." However, several months later, CAF secretary general Veron Mosengo-Omba said regional rotation may not always be possible. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

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

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

Change of Name

I, **Abubakar** Mohammed Yusuf, holder of passport No. L8617774, do hereby change my name to Abubakar Mohd Yusuf (as given name), Ansari (surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Abubakar Mohd Yusuf Ansari and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#4235) 25/9/2023

I, **Habibullah** Khader Abdul Khader (old name), residing at, 1188/A, Laxman Tirtha road, Honavar, Uttara Kannada, Karnataka, Pin: 581334 India (address) have changed my name as Habibulla Abdul Khader Sahed (new name) for all purposes, vide affidavit dated: 01-07-2023 before notary S.G. Hegde. (#4234) 25/9/2023

I, **Manukumar** Sinh holder of Indian passport No. V7432529 having permanent address Ghurapali, Banpura, Saran, Bihar 841212 resident in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will read as Manu Kumar Singh. (#4233) 25/9/2023

China win historic eSports gold

Haughey issues another warning for next year's Paris Olympics



HANGZHOU: China's gold medallists, Japan's silver medallists and Hong Kong's bronze medallists pose for a picture during the medal ceremony for their women's Rugby Seven during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou. — AFP photos

HANGZHOU: Hosts China won the first eSports gold medal in the 72-year history of the Asian Games on Tuesday as Hong Kong swimmer Siobhan Haughey issued another warning for next year's Paris Olympics. Gaming is making its debut as a medal event in Hangzhou in what is seen as a major step towards Olympic status one day.

Audiences of overwhelmingly young spectators have packed out the 4,500-capacity Hangzhou Esports Center in the hope of catching one of their heroes, especially South Korea's Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok. He will lead the Koreans in League of Legends — and controversially earn an exemption from military service if they win gold.

Medals are up for grabs in seven gaming titles, with China grabbing the first gold when they defeated Malaysia in the final of smartphone game Arena of Valor. Malaysia take home silver and Thailand bronze. "The audience who loves eSports and the veterans in the eSports industry have been looking forward to this for a long time," China's captain Luo Siyuan said after his team's historic victory.

"I believe that eSports will develop more and more in the future." Underlining just how popular eSports is at the Games, it is the only competition in Hangzhou where tickets were allocated through an initial online lottery.

China's place in the Games record books helped the home nation increase their overall tally of golds to 53 at the end of three days of action. They are way ahead of South Korea (14 golds), Japan (eight) and Uzbekistan and Hong Kong (both five).

With the 2024 Paris Olympics just 10 months away, Haughey won her second gold of the Games in another impressive performance in the pool which will make her rivals sit up and take notice. She shattered her own Asian record to add the Games 100m free-



HANGZHOU: Malaysia's coach Low Jia Cheng (L) prepares with his team members before the "Arena of Valor" Asian Games version final match against China during the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou. — AFP

style title to her Olympic and world silver medals. The 25-year-old produced an exceptional swim on Monday to crush the pack by nearly two seconds and take out the 200m crown, smashing an Asian Games record that had stood since 2010. She was fired up again over the shorter distance in blasting a 52.17sec to send a warning to Australian freestylers Mollie O'Callaghan and Emma McKeon.

"I haven't swum a best time since Tokyo (Olympics in 2021), but I knew I had the ability of going faster," said Haughey. "I'm really glad that I could do it here at the Asian Games and break the Asian record. It just proves that I'm not at my peak yet and hopefully I can keep going and keep swimming faster.

"Me and my coach, we're really prepared for Paris, and if I just keep doing what I'm doing right now, I'll be ready," she added. Haughey previously set an Asian record of 52.27 when she came second to McKeon at the Tokyo Olympics. Only world champion O'Callaghan has gone faster in 2023. China again bossed the Hangzhou pool, taking four of the six golds on the night. The other went to Tomoru Honda, who stunned exhausted Japanese team-mate Daiya Seto in the 400m medley.

On another day of dominance, China's all-powerful table tennis squad swept past rivals Japan 3-0 in the women's team final. They also claimed men's team gold over South Korea by the same scoreline. In artis-

tic gymnastics, Zhang Boheng won gold in the men's all-around final. But China were dethroned by Japan in the men's team sprint at the Chun'an Jieshou Sports Centre Velodrome on the first day of action on the cycling track. Japanese rider Yoshitaku Nagasako said his team thrived on the partisan crowd.

"When I heard 'China' I just thought 'Japan'. So the crowd was amazing," he said. "I'm really proud to win this one." China's women made no mistake in their team sprint final, beating South Korea to the title.

In other action, Hong Kong retained their men's rugby sevens title when they beat South Korea 14-7 in the final, as hosts China won the women's gold. — AFP



Siobhan Haughey

'Kick up backside' helps HK to Asian Games rugby gold

HANGZHOU: Liam Doherty made a try and scored the winner in a man-of-the-match performance as Hong Kong retained their Asian Games men's rugby sevens title on Tuesday. They beat South Korea 14-7 in the final in Hangzhou, as hosts China won women's gold for a second time.

Hong Kong head coach Jevon Groves said afterwards that he had to give Doherty a "kick up the backside" a couple of weeks ago. It clearly paid off as the winger-turned-forward took the final by the scruff of the neck either side of half-time.

After an attritional first period, Doherty broke the deadlock when he rampaged away from the attacking 10-metre line, broke two tackles and put scrum-half Cado Lee in under the posts. Russell Webb converted.

Just 48 seconds after the restart Doherty was released into space by Max Denmark's quick pass and ran in unopposed with Webb again potting the extras. "It's absolutely unbelievable," said Doherty. "We just made history for Hong Kong to win back-to-back Asian Games."

Groves singled out Doherty for praise. "He's usually a winger and he's moved into the forwards and learned that role really well," Groves said. "He's got pace and a bit of physicality so I'm really pleased for him because, probably two weeks ago, I gave him a bit of a kick up the backside and it's worked."

South Korea got a consolation try through Kim Eui-tae but Hong Kong were always in control. "Unbelievable," said Webb, whose unerring boot and cool head directing operations from fly-half was a feature of Hong Kong's march to the title.

It was Webb's first gold, having been forced to miss Jakarta five years ago through injury. "We had a game



HANGZHOU: Hong Kong's Liam Thomas Herbert (C) fights for the ball with Japan's Kippe Ishida (L) and Junya Matsumoto (C-L) in their men's Rugby Sevens match during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou. — AFP

plan, all thanks to the coaches, and the lads executed and it's awesome," he told AFP. "It's bigger than just winning this for us. It's winning it for our programme, the guys back home, for Hong Kong." Japan, beaten 12-7 by Hong Kong in a semi-final sudden-death extra-time thriller, came from behind to prevent China winning a shock bronze.

Nail-biting finishes

Japan, beaten 12-7 by Hong Kong in a semi-final sudden-death extra-time thriller, came from behind to

prevent China winning a shock bronze. China took a 19-14 lead at the end of the second half to a huge roar from a packed home crowd at the Hangzhou Normal University Athletics Field. As China kicked off, the siren sounded for full-time, giving Japan one last play.

They made it count with Kippe Taninaka touching down to tie the scores and Yoshihiro Noguchi converting to silence the fans. But the crowd were cheering again a few minutes later as China held on to pip Japan 22-21 in the women's final, which turned into another nail-biter. — AFP



HANGZHOU: Qatar's Belal Abunabot smacks the ball as Raimi Wadidie (13) looks on at the volleyball bronze medal match between Japan and Qatar during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou.



HANGZHOU: Spectators watch South Korea's Jonghoon Lim and China's Chuqin Wang play the men's team final table tennis match. — AFP photos