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## Rolling power cuts hit Kuwait

Over 40 areas affected as mercury soars to 52C • Ban on noontime motorbike deliveries

### Amir receives Crown Prince



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace on June 19, 2024. HH the Amir also received HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Massive power outages hit over 40 residential areas on Wednesday as temperatures soared to 52 degrees Celsius in most areas in the country, leading power consumption to rise close to the danger level and prompting authorities to resort to programmed cuts. The ministry of electricity and water and renewable energy said in a statement that the cuts were necessitated as power generation plants were unable to meet rising demand during peak hours, in addition to the rise in temperatures compared to the same period in previous years.

The ministry added that in order to protect the stability of the electricity network, it had resorted to "programmed cuts" for between one and two hours in various areas. The ministry urged consumers to rationalize power consumption during the peak hours from 11 am to 5 pm daily so that the ministry will not be compelled to resort to the same action again. The traffic department of the interior ministry also banned motorcycle delivery riders from the streets from 11 am to 4 pm from Sunday, June 23 until the end of August.

The areas affected by the blackouts were spread across the country and included parts of Kuwait City, disrupting major



KUWAIT: Policemen direct traffic at an intersection during a power outage on June 19, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

traffic lights and leaving many stuck in elevators. Police were dispatched to regulate traffic at several intersections around Kuwait, the interior ministry said, urging motorists to follow policemen's instructions.

The health ministry clarified in a statement that there were no power outages in

general hospitals, specialized centers or blood banks. Medical services in a limited number of primary care centers (clinics), which experienced temporary power outages, were not affected as backup generators were immediately deployed.

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#### NEWS IN BRIEF

##### Pollution kills 2,000 children daily

PARIS: Nearly 2,000 children die every day from health problems linked to air pollution, which is now the second biggest risk factor for early death worldwide, a report said Wednesday. Exposure to air pollution contributed to the deaths of 8.1 million people — around 12 percent of all fatalities — in 2021, according to the State of Global Air report from the US-based Health Effects Institute, including the deaths of more than 700,000 children under the age of five. More than 500,000 of those deaths were attributed to cooking indoors using dirty fuels such as coal, wood or dung, mostly in Africa and Asia. — AFP

##### Rise in diabetes among children

STOCKHOLM: Diabetes diagnoses among children under five have risen in recent years, a charity supporting diabetes research said Tuesday, adding that the COVID-19 pandemic could be an explanation. A new report by BarnDiabetesfonden (The Child Diabetes Fund) said that 460 children in Sweden were treated for type 1 diabetes in 2022, up from 283 in 2018, a 62 percent increase. The organization said studies had shown that young children who contracted COVID-19 were more likely to develop type 1 diabetes if the mother had never had COVID prior to the child's birth. — AFP

##### Ban on smartphones in schools

NICOSIA/LOS ANGELES: Cyprus is to ban mobile phone use in schools, the education minister said on Wednesday, saying they were too much of a distraction for students and led to anti-social behavior. Authorities plan to introduce the ban once it is discussed with parliament. Meanwhile, education bosses in Los Angeles voted Tuesday to work towards a complete ban on the use of smartphones in the city's schools. The Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education ordered staff to devise a plan to prohibit cell phones and social media throughout the school day. — Agencies

### 8 detained over Mangaf fire amid bldg inspections

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The public prosecution on Wednesday ordered the detention for two weeks of eight people, a Kuwaiti, four Egyptians and three Indians for two weeks in connection with the Mangaf fire that killed 49 people, mostly Indians. The prosecution has interrogated the eight men on charges of manslaughter, wrongful injury and negligence in the building fire that also injured at least 49 others, some of whom have already been discharged.

The fire, the worst building fire in Kuwait's history, shocked the society and authorities who immediately launched campaigns to eradicate all types of violations in housing units in the country to ensure the tragedy is not repeated. Bodies of the 45 Indian victims were repatriated to their homeland just before the Eid Al-Adha break.

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KOCHI, India: Relatives mourn around coffins containing the bodies of people who died in the Mangaf fire upon their arrival at Cochin International Airport on June 14, 2024. — AFP

### Putin and Kim sign mutual defense pact

SEOUL: Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a deal with North Korea's Kim Jong Un on Wednesday that included a mutual defense pledge, one of Russia's most significant moves in Asia for years that Kim said amounted to an "alliance". Putin's pledge overhauls Russia's entire post-Soviet policy on North Korea just as the United States and its Asian allies try to gauge how far Russia could deepen support for the only country to have tested a nuclear weapon this century.

On his first visit to Pyongyang since July 2000, Putin explicitly linked Russia's deepening of ties with North Korea to the West's growing support for Ukraine and said Moscow could develop military and technical cooperation with Pyongyang. After talks, they signed a "comprehensive strategic partnership" pact, which Putin said included a mutual defense clause in the case of aggression against either country. "The comprehensive partnership agreement signed today provides, among other things, for mutual assistance in the event of aggression against one



PYONGYANG: Russia's President Vladimir Putin shakes hands with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un at a signing ceremony following bilateral talks on June 19, 2024. — Reuters

of the parties to this agreement," Putin said. He said Western deliveries of advanced, long-range weaponry including F-16 fighters to Ukraine for strikes against Russia breached major agreements.

"In connection with this, Russia does not exclude for itself the development of military-technical cooperation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," Putin said.

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### Hezb chief warns Zionist entity, Cyprus over full-blown war

BEIRUT: Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah on Wednesday warned "no place" in the Zionist entity would be spared in case of full-blown war against the Lebanese group, and threatened Cyprus if it opened its airports to the Zionist entity. "The enemy knows well that we have prepared ourselves for the worst... and that no place... will be spared our rockets," Nasrallah said in a televised address. The Zionist entity must expect "us on land, by sea and by air", he said.

"The enemy really fears that the resistance will penetrate Galilee" in the the Zionist entity's north, he said, adding that this was possible "in the context of a war that could be imposed on Lebanon". The Zionist entity and Hezbollah, a powerful Lebanese movement allied with Hamas, have traded near-daily cross-border fire since the Palestinian group's Oct 7 attack on the Zionist entity.

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# Amir: Bush Foundation boosts noble, ideal values

## Sheikh Mishal praises American people's sacrifice, support during Iraqi aggression

WASHINGTON: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has affirmed the significant role played by George Bush H W Presidential Foundation for boosting noble values and expressed congratulations on the inauguration of the George Bush H W Presidential Library's new branch in Texas.

In a recorded statement during the library inauguration ceremony and the late US president's 100th birthday anniversary, His Highness the Amir addressed him and the present participants in the activity: "On behalf of myself and the State of Kuwait, Government, and people, we are pleased to offer good congratulations to the United States of America, its friendly people and the gracious Bush family on the annual

advent of the late president George Bush Senior's anniversary.

"We thank you for the invitation to partake in memorizing this anniversary while recalling with all pride the great alliance that had brought us together during the peak of the crisis that had been experienced by the State of Kuwait during the flagrant Iraqi aggression in 1990.

"Due to the sincere efforts that had been masterminded by President George Bush Senior, our partners under the leadership of the friendly United States expressed serious readiness to defend ideal values, justice and freedom, international laws, and Kuwait's legitimacy.

"We in the State of Kuwait deeply admire President George Bush (Senior), his sagacious

stands, sacrifices of the American soldiers, and the American people's support for our state; these are the most prominent chapters in the history of the distinguished and historic relations between the two friendly countries.

"Moreover, we express our deep appreciation of the George Bush Foundation for its continuous efforts for boosting the noble and ideal values and we offer heartfelt congratulations on the inauguration of the new branch of George Bush Library that constitutes a center for knowledge. In conclusion, we express our deep gratitude for the legacy of President George Bush and the friendly United States of America, appreciation of the spirit of solidarity, friendship, and our hopes for further progress and distinctiveness for everybody." — KUNA



WASHINGTON: His Highness the Amir speaks via a recorded statement during the inauguration of the new branch of George Bush Library. — KUNA

## Ambassador Al-Zain recalls late Bush Sr's role in freeing Kuwait

WASHINGTON: The Kuwait Ambassador to the US Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah has recalled the role of the late President George H W Bush in mobilizing an international coalition to liberate the State of Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion in 1990. Ambassador Al-Zain was speaking to KUNA during the inauguration of the Bush Library and Museum in Texas and on the occasion to commemorate President George H W Bush's 100th Birthday. Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah said the audience was honored to listen to a recorded speech broadcast by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during the ceremony.

On this occasion, she stressed the importance of the legacy left by the late President George H W Bush and his role within the framework of the leadership of the International Coalition to Liberate the State of Kuwait, emphasizing the special place that the late President enjoyed in the hearts of Kuwaitis. Sheikha Al-Zain also stressed the importance of remembering the role of leaders like the late President Bush, who take stances in making appropriate decisions to support the truth and promote international



TEXAS: Kuwait Ambassador to the US Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah is seen during the inauguration of the Bush Library and Museum in Texas. — KUNA

principles and laws.

The speech of His Highness the Amir received wide praise from the leaders of the Republican Party,

led by former President George W Bush, who lauded the distinguished and historical bilateral relations between the two friendly countries. — KUNA

## 4 initiatives Kuwait is working on to fix road conditions

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: Over the past few weeks, government bodies have been actively working to develop solutions to improve the condition of the country's pothole-ridden roads and curb the public's poor adherence to driving laws. Officials have announced new initiatives and provided updates on ongoing projects towards road repairs and stricter enforcement of the law. The announcements come in line with Kuwait Vision 2035, which includes expanding the roads by a third of its size, increasing it from around 6,000 km to over 9,000 km, and is expected to greatly improve Kuwait's status a financial and trade hub. Kuwait Times has rounded up a list of initiatives which are currently on the go.

### 18 tenders

On June 4, the Board of Directors of the Central Agency for Public Tenders was endorsed by the Cabinet to float 18 tenders submitted by the Ministry of Public Works for projects focusing on extensive maintenance of roads and highways in various parts nationwide.

This was announced in a statement by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Al-Maousherji after the Cabinet meeting held at Seif Palace, under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. "The move comes in implementation of the directives of His Highness the Prime Minister regarding the need to start maintaining the streets, immediately for the sake of motorists," Maousherji said.

### Rubber asphalt

Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research announced on May 28 that it has successfully implemented a project that contributes to the treatment and repair of roads using high-performance rubber asphalt technology. KISR said in a press release that the project, which it has been developing and testing over years in cooperation with the ministries of defense and public works, contractors and asphalt producers, "can be built upon and used to treat and repair roads in the country."

KISR stated that the project team supervised the

maintenance and re-paving of several roads within the institute's campus using this technology, applying modern theoretical and practical techniques. The institute added that the technology will be beneficial and is expected to work on roads across Kuwait.

### Cairo street project

On May 27, Public Works Minister Dr Noura Al-Mashaan announced that most restoration works of the 11-km-long Cairo Street, one of Kuwait's main roads, have been finalized and the remaining tasks are proceeding according to schedule. Cairo Street links several residential districts and regions starting from Shaheed Park and ending in Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center.

Speaking after she inspected the worksites, Dr Al-Mashaan said 92.2 percent of the project has been executed, affirming that the venture is in line with the state's approach to provide citizens with top-notch public services. "This is a bright stage in our efforts to attain the objective of providing an excellent infrastructure," said Mashaan, referring to the Cairo Street project that covers the construction of three tunnels and six causeways.

The project also includes building seven pedestrian bridges, water and rain networks, phone communications, lighting, traffic signs and urban greenery. Kuwait's domestic transport network already has seven ring roads, providing access to residential and industrial districts.

The ministry is also working on developing the Second and Third Ring Roads. Mashaan said that up to 97 percent of the renovation works have been accomplished in these locations, praising efforts exerted by the personnel of the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation.

### Crushing cars

High on the government's agenda is strict enforcing of traffic laws, Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef said last March. Bad roads and poor driving habits in Kuwait, have caused 296 deaths in 2023 and over 50,000 accidents have been recorded as well as 9 million traffic violations.

Violations included over four million speed tickets, over 850,000 redlight violations, 300,000 for not wearing a seatbelt, as well as over 185,000 for using mobile phones while driving, according to the interior ministry's traffic department.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef has directed to implement comprehensive traffic preparations with care and accuracy to preserve the safety of road users. Moreover,



KUWAIT: This photo shows a pothole in one of the many Kuwait's streets.

he ordered the dispatch of traffic patrols to all main and secondary roads to safeguard intersections, monitor any violations of traffic rules and laws, and to reduce traffic jams.

On May 30, the Ministry of Interior confirmed that there is no tolerance for reckless driving and endangering the lives of others and began confiscating the vehicles of those caught driving recklessly. In a statement, the ministry said the penalty is aimed at protecting road users from those who jeopardize the lives of people. "Law will be decisively applied to all violators", the ministry's department of security media and public relations added in a statement. It urged anyone who witnesses reckless driving to contact the emergency department at 112 or the WhatsApp of the General Directorate of Traffic at 99324092.



KUWAIT: Inspectors examine the counterfeit goods during the raid. — KUNA photos

## MOCI busts fake goods worth KD 10m in historic raid

KUWAIT: Ministry of Commerce and Industry inspectors busted a warehouse in Farwaniya containing more than 623,000 counterfeit goods — in what the ministry said was the largest raid in its history.

The items, imitations of famous international brands, were reportedly meant to be sold through social media auctions. Valued at KD 10 million, the items included a variety of goods such as accessories, bags, clothes and shoes.

The ministry said in a press release that the commercial control teams first became suspicious of the social media accounts selling these products online. Those accounts organized auctions or offered the products at prices significantly lower than the local branches of the international brands.

Upon detecting the suspicious activity, the teams monitored the accounts, ultimately identifying the source that was selling these counterfeit products to distributors in large quantities. The teams raided the warehouse after obtaining the relevant warrants.

Omar Al-Omar, the Minister of Commerce and Industry, praised the efforts of the inspection teams and their commitment to safeguarding Kuwaiti consumers against fraud. He emphasized the ministry's dedication to developing its inspection system to ensure market's stability and consumer protection. — KUNA

## CAN visits cancer patients during Eid, announces contest

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of Cancer Aware Nation Campaign (CAN) Dr Khalid Al-Saleh congratulated Kuwait's people, and cancer patients in particular, on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha and wished them a speedy recovery under the leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Head of Social Service at KCCC Huda Al-Shihab, who organized an Eid tour to visit patients during the holidays said visiting patients and comforting them increases the rate of acceptance of treatment which speeds up recovery. The tour is one of many that CAN has organized over the years, with the organization supporting cancer patients in hospitals or those on treatment. CAN has also organized initiatives such as sports

contests and field visits at KCCC and National Bank Children's Hospital.

Dr Al-Saleh said CAN is keen on implementing the recommendations of the Gulf Week's coordinating committee, which calls for increase of the rate of preventing cancers to 40 percent, and that is done through the implementation of programs for both healthy people and patients.

As breast cancer is the highest occurring among women in Kuwait, CAN sought through the (lose ... you win) contest to put women on a suitable diet program by contacting a nutritionist who will follow participants and give them nutrition advice to help them reduce their weights. The contest will also have a Haido sports team organizing sports activities from Sunday until Thursday each week during the contest which will be from September 16, 2024, until November 14, 2024. Dr Al-Saleh asked women to register for the free contest through the registration number 60961145.



Dr Khalid Al-Saleh



KUWAIT: CAN representatives are seen during their Eid visit to cancer patients.

## Local

# Kuwait marks 63rd Independence Day

## Kuwait remains on steady path of development, preventative diplomacy



KUWAIT: The late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem delivers Kuwait's independence speech in 1961 in this archival photo. — KUNA photos



Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem signs the declaration of independence with the British Government Chief Political Resident in the Arabian Gulf.

KUWAIT: June 19 of 1961 is a pivotal day in the history of Kuwait as it marks the end of the British protection treaty and the emergence of the modern state. On this day, Kuwait, a newly independent sovereign state, took its first steps in the journey of development. The late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem had signed the declaration of independence with the British Government Chief Political Resident in the Arabian Gulf Sir George Middleton. Three years after

the declaration, a decree was signed on May 18, 1964, merging the national day with the day in which Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem assumed office, making it February 25. Celebrations were held on that day as of 1965.

Since assuming office in 1950, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem took carefully measured steps paving the way for independence and achieving stability. The 15-year reign of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, who was dubbed, "father of indepen-

dence" and "father of constitution" was peppered with achievements. The State of Kuwait became member in the Arab League on July 20, 1961.

Sheikh Abdullah signed a decree on August 26, 1961, to hold elections of the Constituent Assembly, mandated with writing the constitution. The 183-article comprehensive constitution was completed in nine months, it laid the foundations for a sturdy democratic regime putting the Kuwaiti people on a path of

progress and prosperity. On September 7, 1961, an Amiri decree was signed specifying the shape and colors of the Kuwaiti flag, the very first flag to be flown following the independence. At that time, the State of Kuwait accomplished 43 laws and legislation, including the nationality law, monetary law, passports law and the organization of government departments.

New departments were established to cope with the development of the

nation, like public works, health, publication, knowledge, municipality, post and telephone, electricity and water, social affairs, awqaf, radio and television. Over the past 63 years, Kuwait had become reputable for its humanitarian contributions and its level-headed foreign policy. Kuwait remains on a steady path of preventative diplomacy, crises mediation and effort contributing to solving outstanding regional and international issues. — KUNA

## Al-Zour refinery in full swing at 615,000 bpd

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Al-Zour refinery stands as among the region's most impactful oil projects, besides being the cornerstone of state-run Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's (KPC) plans and strategies that aim to ratchet up oil refining capacity, the facility's fully operational output has reached 615,000 barrels per day (bpd). The refinery, some 90 kilometers south of Kuwait City, has long been one of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's core concerns, as evidenced by his attendance of a lavish ceremony last month to mark the facility's operation at full capacity.

Ranked seventh in the world's list of the biggest oil refineries based on daily capacity, a statistic that shows the sheer magnitude of the facility, Al-Zour looks poised to propel KPC to regional prominence given its contributions towards bringing the company's major goals to fruition, which subsequently triggers a positive ripple effect on the national economy.

The refinery churns out some 86,000 bpd of premium Naphtha, in addition to 99,000 bpd of jet fuel and 147,000 bpd of low-sulfur diesel, respectively, all the while keeping carbon emissions in check in line with Kuwait's commitment towards environmental sustainability goals. With its operation at full-fledged capacity, Al-Zour refinery will now be able to boost Kuwait's competitiveness in the global market though its production of oil-based products of



KUWAIT: Part of Kuwait's Al-Zour refinery is seen in this photo. — KUNA

sublime quality, with KPC chief executive Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah saying the nation will now "reap the benefits" of the facility, chief among them being a sharp rise in Kuwait's crude oil exports.

He went on to say that he was "proud" of the dedication and commitment of KPC's national workforce, saying their experiences in handling such a critical project would serve them well over the course of their professional careers, enabling them to better deal with future endeavors.

Echoing his sentiments, Wadhwa Al-Khatib, acting chief executive of KPC affiliate Kuwait Inte-

grated Petroleum Industries Company, said the opening of Al-Zour refinery would "usher in a new era" in Kuwait's oil industry, in addition to a "launchpad" for greater output capacity in line with environment safety standards. Some 30 countries from across the world have become the beneficiaries of the rise in Kuwaiti oil exports, with Al-Zour boosting total refining capacity from 800,000 bpd to 1.4 million bpd, the official underlined, giving due credit to the national workforce for coping with the arduous journey that culminated in the facility's full-fledged operations. — KUNA

## Kuwait reiterates calls to end Zionist war in Gaza

VIENNA: Kuwait on Wednesday urged the international community to step up efforts and put an end to what it called the "aggressive" war against the Gaza Strip, subsequently putting the Palestinians out of their misery. Vowing to keep aid to the Palestinians intact, Kuwait's permanent representative to the United Nations Nasser Al-Hayen told the UN Human Rights Council in its 56th session that the Zionist occupation forces continue to wage a "destructive" war against the Palestinians, lamenting the silence of the international community. He went on to say that the situation continues to exacerbate because of the impeded delivery of aid to the Palestinian enclave, calling for the immediate relief to be given to innocent civilians there.

Hayen on Tuesday told KUNA that the 56th session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) would investigate reports by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Secretary General. Regarding the human rights committee report on Palestine, Ambassador Al-Hayen indicated that some portions of the report were unbalanced in terms of equating the suffering of the Palestinian victims to their tormentors the Zionist occupiers.

The rest of the document dealt positively with Palestine and how to handle the situation, added the Kuwaiti diplomat; however, he also insisted that the report had focused on Hamas and the operation on October 7, 2023, equating that with the atrocities committed by the Zionist occupiers that killed around 38,000 individuals, which he considered as an act of genocide. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti pilgrims are greeted by their loved ones at Kuwait International Airport on Wednesday, June 19, 2024. — KUNA photos



## Kuwaiti pilgrims return home as hajj concludes

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Airport on Wednesday received Kuwaiti pilgrims after performing hajj. Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is working with full capacity to facilitate the return of the guests of Almighty Allah from the Holy Land of Makkah, through coordination with Kuwaiti hajj campaigns. The DGCA announced Tuesday that the total number of flights allocated for the return of pilgrims from Saudi Arabia will reach 38 flights, starting from the June 19th, and will continue for three days.

Muslim pilgrims wrapped up hajj in the deadly summer heat on Tuesday with the third day of the symbolic stoning of the devil, and the last circumambulation around the Kaaba, Islam's holiest site, in the city of Makkah. The three-day stoning ritual in Mina, a desert site outside Makkah, is among the final rites



of the pilgrimage and symbolizes the casting away of evil and sin. Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam. Its rituals largely commemorate the accounts of Prophet Ibrahim and his son Prophet Ismail, Ismail's mother Hajar and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), according to the Quran, Islam's holy book.

More than 1.83 million Muslims performed the hajj in 2024, including more than 1.6 million pilgrims from 22 countries, and around 222,000 Saudi citizens and residents, according to the Saudi Hajj authorities. — Agencies



## Local

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## In my view

## Harmonize penal codes for greater GCC cohesion

By Azzah Al-Ghamdi

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The establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) had lofty goals, the most important of which was to preserve the safety and security of its member countries from any dangers threatening the Arabian Peninsula. We, in the Arabian Gulf, share a common origin. Most of the citizens of the GCC countries descend from the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, whose ancestors did not leave this land despite the hardships they endured. They held on to their origins and their land until God bestowed wealth upon these generations, allowing us to enjoy the prosperity we have today.

However, today we need to adhere to the lofty goals for which the GCC was established. Similar to the European Union (EU), which was founded to protect member states from the dangers and wars that arose in Europe, the GCC was created to ensure the safety of its members. The EU pays considerable attention to its member states, and we in the Arabian Gulf must aim for more cohesion among the GCC countries than what we witness today. A step towards this cohesion could be the harmonization of laws.

Currently, each member state of the GCC has a different penal code, undermining the Arabian Peninsula's unity and convergence. Although geographically close, the member states are far apart in terms of legal similarities. To rely on a single security system for the GCC countries, we must also unify our legal systems. Discrepancies in the laws result in acts being criminalized in one country but permitted in another. Similarly, penalties for the same act can vary greatly between countries. This inconsistency leads some citizens to migrate between GCC countries to avoid stricter laws, which needs to be addressed.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's penal code may serve as a model for the GCC, as it guarantees freedoms without violating the principles of Islamic law. This has resulted in lower crime rates in Saudi Arabia due to its strict laws and punishments derived from Islamic law. Saudi Arabia is the only country that fully applies sharia punishments and has faced tremendous pressure without support from other member states to maintain the application of Islamic law for crimes that God Almighty has forbidden.

To bestow blessings upon all GCC countries, the commands of God Almighty must be implemented. It would be beneficial for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia not to be the only country applying God's law. A meeting between the ministries of justice of the GCC countries is needed to coordinate and implement a unified penal code across all member states.

We hope that this initiative will be led by the State of Kuwait, especially as Kuwait is in the process of amending its penal legislation to be applicable to all Muslims. Kuwait could take the initiative in convening a meeting of the council members to unify the penal code for greater cohesion among member states.

We aspire to be as cohesive as the member states of the European Union, which was established to protect European history and people with similar laws. The EU's decisions are binding on its member states, ensuring the future, comfort and security of European citizens. This unity was achieved after the Second World War, which caused immense loss of life in Europe. Similarly, unified laws in the GCC would enhance the security and cohesion of our member states.

## KFF responds to 68 water accidents over Eid holiday

KUWAIT: The Public Relations and Media Department at the Kuwait Fire Force said the fire and marine rescue departments responded to 68 reports related to marine accidents during the Eid Al-Adha holidays. No injuries were reported.

In a statement, the department urged seafarers to follow maritime safety guidelines, such as ensuring the readiness and maintenance of boats, wearing a life jacket and having a fire extinguisher on board. The department asked people to check the weather, refuel adequately, and pack enough food and water before going out to sea. Anyone in need of assistance can call the emergency phone number (112), the department said.

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Muslims in Kuwait celebrate Eid Al-Adha, which began on Sunday, June 16, 2024. (Top) People perform the morning Eid prayer to mark the beginning of Eid. (Bottom) Sheep are taken to the slaughterhouse on the first day of the Eid holiday to perform the ritual sacrifice. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Interior ministry committed to humanitarian treatment

Officials say workers, illegal residents held in centers must be provided with all means of comfort



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah is seen with officials during his inspection tour. — KUNA photos



Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is seen during a tour of police stations and the foreign workers shelter.

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah said Tuesday that officials continuously provide people held at the detention center for illegal residents with all means of comfort. The comments came as he paid an inspection tour to the residency law violators detention center on the third day of Eid. During the tour, the minister said in a news release that the ministry is working towards speeding up the deportation process of illegal expats.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef praised the efforts of other state bodies and their cooperation with the ministry on matters related to the center. The Interior

Ministry had announced last Thursday that it was extending the amnesty for expats in violation of residency laws until June 30, 2024.

The decision is based on instructions of Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, who gave orders to extend the deadline given the fact that many people were looking to avail the amnesty ahead of the Eid Al-Adha holiday.

The amnesty was originally set to expire on June 17. It allows expats in violation of the residency law to legalize their status in Kuwait or leave the country without paying fines or being blacklisted.

Expats who come forward to designated locations set up by the ministry and who wish to leave the country are held in the detention center until they are deported.

Over the Eid holiday, ministry officials have also visited Kuwait's Shelter Center for Foreign Workers as part of an inspection tour to multiple police stations. The ministry's undersecretary, Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, stressed the need to provide all means of comfort to those staying at the center. He ordered officers to remain committed to preserving the human rights of the workers during their stay. — KUNA

## NBK-sponsored Kuwait Dive Team lifts sunken boat

KUWAIT: Underscoring its constant dedication to supporting all initiatives that promote sustainability and environmental conservation, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues sponsoring Kuwait Dive Team (KDT) in its efforts to protect and rehabilitate the marine environment including islands and coral reefs, and removing harmful waste to preserve marine biodiversity.

In continuation of these efforts, KDT lifted a sunken boat in Fahaheel waters, as such boats endanger the marine ecosystem and organisms as they contain fuel and oils, in addition to obstructing maritime navigation. On this occasion, Talal Al-Turki, Executive Manager and head of Public Relations and Event Management at National Bank of Kuwait said: "We, at NBK, always seek to leverage our role as one of the leading corporations in social responsibility by introducing a variety of initiatives and programs across different fields, especially the environment."

"All awareness campaigns promoted on the social media pages of the bank and KDT aim to increase awareness of the importance of the environment and environmental preservation. Additionally, these campaigns highlight KDT's valuable contributions in the



Talal Al-Turki



protection and restoration of the marine ecosystem, as well as encourage volunteering in serving the marine environment by preparing national cadres specialized in marine operations and maintenance of mooring buoys around coral reefs," he mentioned.

"Our partnership with KDT aligns with our strategy to adopt environmental governance best practices, through a set of initiatives launched by the bank to promote sustainability, deepen environmental culture, and create awareness and interest in maintaining a clean, pollution-free environment," he emphasized.

Since the beginning of the year, Kuwait Dive Team lifted 56 tons of marine debris in 33 operations, with the participation of 800 volunteers. They also removed 28 tons of harmful waste in 18 operations on the coasts, ports and islands, in cooperation with gov-

ernment agencies, seven tons of abandoned fishing gear, and recovered three boats and a marine vessel of 21 tons. On the other hand, the team organized many awareness sessions and workshops with 300 participants to raise awareness on the importance of marine ecosystems and how to protect them.

It is worth mentioning that NBK regards environmental and climate issues as key priorities and therefore organizes awareness campaigns on its social media platforms to increase awareness on the importance of the environment and environmental conservation. Furthermore, the bank's sponsorship of Kuwait Dive Team has significantly contributed to protecting and restoring the marine ecosystem in Kuwait through many activities, including protecting coral reefs, cleaning beaches, establishing fish colonies, and lifting sunken ships and boats.



Chinese coast guard boarded Filipino naval vessels: Manila

## Ramaphosa sworn in for second full term as S Africa's president

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KHAN YUNIS: This picture taken from Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip shows smoke plumes billowing during ongoing battles in the Sultan neighborhood in the northwest of Rafah on June 18. — AFP

# Zionists' use of heavy bombs raises 'serious concerns': UN

## 'Details on six attacks are emblematic of a concerning pattern'

### Muslim voters in France fear far-right win



ROUFFACH, FRANCE: Workers prepare the mailing of official electoral content to citizens as part of the upcoming legislative elections, in Rouffach, eastern France, on June 19, 2024. — AFP

PARIS: Muslim voters are increasingly worried about the prospect of a far-right victory less than two weeks before France's snap parliamentary elections, fearing the possible restrictions that could follow. For Sarah, there's a "real risk" of seeing the National Rally (RN) win the ballot, called by President Emmanuel Macron after the far-right party trounced his centrists in early June's EU elections. The 23-year-old member of a Muslim women's collective told AFP that would give the party of Marine Le Pen free rein to pass laws restricting her freedoms in matters of dress and worship.

The RN has made no secret of its hostility to ritual slaughter, which would effectively ban halal and kosher meat. A bill it tabled in 2021 called for bans on "Islamist ideologies" and on the wearing of headscarves in all public places.

The current law prohibits the wearing of headscarves in public schools, and bans the wearing of full-face veils, such as the burqa, in public. The centrist government of Macron also banned the wearing in schools of the abaya gown worn by many Muslim women from this school year.

Appearing on French TV this week, RN party leader Jordan Bardella said it wanted to ban the wearing of the Muslim headscarf in public, describing the hijab "as a tool of discrimination between men and women and not desirable in our society." But he said even if the RN won the polls the measure would not come into force until after the next presidential elections in 2027.

Sarah—who like most people interviewed did not want to give her last name—was also concerned about the "legitimization" of hostility to Muslims. For her, if there is "an openly racist party in charge of the state, Islamophobic acts will multiply". With around six million people of Islamic faith or background, France is home to one of Europe's largest Muslim communities.

On Saturday evening, around 40 ultra-right-wing supporters marched through the streets of the southeastern city of Lyon, chanting "we are Nazis" and "get Islam out of Europe", according to videos on social media. The march was condemned by the rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris, Chems-eddine Hafiz, who called on the authorities to act in the face of "the liberation of extremist speech". — AFP

GENEVA: Zionist entity's repeated use of heavy bombs in the densely-populated Gaza Strip indicates repeated violations of the laws of war, the UN said Wednesday, highlighting six attacks that killed at least 218 people. In a fresh report, immediately slammed by Zionist entity as deeply biased, the United Nations rights office provided details on the six attacks, which it said were emblematic of a concerning pattern.

They involved the suspected use of up to 2,000-pound bombs on residential buildings, a school, refugee camps and a market. The rights office, known by the acronym OHCHR, said it had verified 218 deaths in those attacks, which were carried out in the early months of the war on Oct 7, but said it had information indicating the number of fatalities "could be much higher".

"The requirement to select means and methods of warfare that avoid or at the very least minimize to every extent civilian harm appears to have been consistently violated in Zionist entity's bombing campaign," UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement. The report concludes that the series of Zionist

entity strikes, exemplified by the six attacks carried out between Oct 9 and Dec 2, suggested that Zionist entity's military had "repeatedly violated fundamental principles of the laws of war", the statement said.

Among the attacks listed in Wednesday's report were the strikes on Ash Shujaiyeh neighborhood, in Gaza City on Dec 2 last year. It caused destruction across an approximate diagonal span of 130 meters (420 feet), destroying 15 buildings and damaging at least 14 others, it said. The extent of the damage and the craters visible and seen on satellite imagery indicated that around nine 2,000-pound GBU-31 bombs were used, it said, adding that it had received information that at least 60 people were killed.

GBU-31s, along with 1,000-pound GBU-32s and 250-pound GBU-39s "are mostly used to penetrate through several floors of concrete and can completely collapse tall structures," UN rights office spokesman Jeremy Laurence told reporters. "Given how densely populated the areas targeted were, the use of an explosive weapon with such wide area effects is highly likely to amount

to our prohibited indiscriminate attack."

Ajith Sunghay, head of OHCHR's office in the Palestinian territories, said that the report focused heavily on Zionist entity actions, since the weapons used by Zionist entity's military were far more destructive. The missiles fired by Hamas, while "absolutely unacceptable", he said, "have not caused significant killing during the war" by comparison. The incidents detailed in the report did not include a key and controversial blast early in the war on Gaza's Al-Ahli hospital compound, where Hamas initially talked about hundreds killed in what they said was a Zionist entity strike.

Asked why this incident did not figure on the list, Sunghay suggested the team had not had enough information to include it. The report highlighted that unlawful targeting was not only a violation of the laws of war.

When committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population, in line with an official state or organizational policy, it "may also implicate crimes against humanity", it said. — AFP

### US hurricane hotspots brace for busy year

RICHMOND, Virginia: His home wrecked by flooding, Texas resident Kevin McKinney had to borrow money from his wife's retirement fund to cover some of the cost of repairing damage wrought by the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey in 2017. "I had three feet (0.9 meters) of water in my home for eight days," McKinney told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, saying 500 fellow residents had "lost everything" due to flooding in the storm's wake.

Nearly seven years on, and with forecasters projecting an especially fierce hurricane season, McKinney fears another big storm could strike his neighborhood in the city of Richmond. Several deadly storms have already hit Texas this year. "You look at the projections this year ... (and) I think we're in pretty (big) trouble," McKinney said. "I hope not, but we all are on pins and needles."

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has forecast up to 25 named storms and an 85 percent chance of more hurricane activity than normal.

### Chad ammo depot blaze kills nine, wounds dozens

N'DJAMENA, Chad: A fire that tore through a huge military ammunition depot in Chad's capital N'Djamena killed at least nine people and wounded dozens more, officials said Wednesday, warning the toll could rise.

The blaze, which started late on Tuesday, sent powerful blasts into the night sky and the exploding ord-

"This year we're exceptionally concerned about the Texas coast, Florida Panhandle, South Florida, and the Carolinas," said Alex DaSilva, lead hurricane forecaster for the weather forecasting company AccuWeather.

At the same time, concern is growing that the federal government may already be running out of funds to respond to weather-related disasters that are becoming more frequent and destructive due to climate change. The latest projections by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) suggest its disaster relief fund - used to respond to major disasters - is forecast to run a deficit by September, as it had been on track to do last year.

"I hope last year was an anomaly, (but) the fact is we are trending towards ... more costly disasters, which is going to necessitate that fund being available and robust," said Chad Berginnis, executive director of the Association of State Floodplain Managers.

When the fund approached depletion last year, FEMA had to move to an "immediate needs" designation - essentially delaying non-emergency projects that could bolster preparation for disasters in the future - before Congress authorized additional money. "There are large and complex projects, and it can really throw those projects off when you have a delay in payment or reimbursement," said Berginnis, a former state hazard mitigation officer in Ohio.

"While the delay issue is problematic, we live right now in a time where the need for doing hazard mitigation or

nance shook buildings miles away. Chad's Health Minister Abdelmadjid Abderahim told journalists that the toll was in danger of rising as many of the 46 wounded were in an "extremely serious" condition.

A visit to the scene Wednesday revealed unexploded shells and other munitions scattered on the ground and the burnt-out wreckage of what looked like military vehicles.

Government spokesman Abderaman Koullallah said the cause was not "criminal" but an investigation was under way. According to initial indications, several people died in the ammunition storeroom, he said.

"There are fewer deaths and less damage than we foresaw. We were expecting dozens and dozens of



Two children play on Sandy Beach in Honolulu, Hawaii. — Reuters

resilience far exceeds the available resources, even at the federal level." A FEMA spokesperson said the agency continues to work with the Biden administration and Congress to ensure sufficient funding is available.

The agency in January announced a series of reforms, like streamlining applications for assistance, intended to get relief to disaster survivors more quickly. Immediate assistance post-disaster can be spotty, McKinney said he eventually got \$30,000 worth of help from FEMA after Harvey but added that there appeared to be no logic to how money was doled out in his area. — Reuters

deaths," Koullallah, who is also foreign minister, told AFP by telephone. "There aren't many civilians who lost their lives." The sky burst into flames above the Goudji area—where the army's largest depot of ammunition is located—for several hours before tapering off and finally ceasing after midnight.

The explosions shook buildings as far as seven kilometers (four miles) away and the flames were visible from far off. "The roof of our house was blown off by one of the explosions," said resident Kadidja Dakou, who lives in the Amsinene area near Goudji. The 36-year-old and her three children took refuge in the street alongside their neighbors, for fear their houses would collapse, she told AFP by phone. — AFP

## International

# Ramaphosa sworn in for second full term as S Africa's president

## ANC strikes a hard-won government coalition deal to remain in power

PRETORIA: South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa hailed "the beginning of a new era" on Wednesday as he was sworn in for a second full term as president after his weakened African National Congress (ANC) struck a hard-won government coalition deal to remain in power. Lawmakers voted overwhelmingly to re-elect the 71-year-old last week after a May 29 general election produced no outright winner for the first time in three decades. "The formation of a government of national unity is a moment of profound significance. It is the beginning of a new era," Ramaphosa said, after taking the oath of office during a ceremony at the Union Buildings, the seat of government, in Pretoria.

"The voters of South Africa did not give any single party the full mandate to govern our country alone," he added, speaking before lawmakers, foreign dignitaries, religious and traditional leaders and cheering supporters. "They have directed us to work together to address their plight and realize their aspirations." Ramaphosa is expected to announce his cabinet in the coming days, as talks with coalition members continue.

Numerous heads of state, including Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Angola's Joao Lourenco, Congo Brazzaville's Denis Sassou Nguesso and Eswatini's absolute leader King Mswati III attended the inauguration. Guests in suits, fancy dresses and coats to keep warm in the chilly winter weather started to arrive early in the morning amid a heavy police presence.

VIPs, some singing anti-apartheid struggle songs, were allowed into a small amphitheatre within the imposing, sandstone government building.

Other attendees, some holding South African flags,

sat on a lawn outside as dancers and musicians performed on a big stage. After Ramaphosa was sworn in, a band played the national anthem, followed by a 21-gun salute and a fly past by the air force.

It was the third time Ramaphosa has taken the oath. The former trade unionist turned millionaire businessman first came to power in 2018, after his predecessor and rival Jacob Zuma was forced out before the end of his term under the cloud of corruption allegations.

Ramaphosa was then re-appointed for a full five-year term in 2019. In South Africa, voters elect the parliament, which then votes for the president. Ramaphosa promised a new dawn for South Africa, launched an anti-graft drive and started to reform a collapsing energy system.

But under his watch, the economy languished, blighted by power cuts, crime remained rife and unemployment increased to 32.9 percent. In May, he led the ANC into yet another vote, but the historic party of the late Nelson Mandela came out bruised.

It won only 40 percent - down from 57.5 percent five years earlier. For the first time since the advent of democracy in 1994, it lost its absolute majority in parliament and was left scrambling to find coalition partners to remain in power. It has since agreed to form what it calls a national unity government with several other parties.

They include the centre-right Democratic Alliance (DA), the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party, the anti-immigration Patriotic Alliance and the small centre-left GOOD party. The deal allowed Ramaphosa to comfortably see off a last-minute challenge by firebrand leftist politician Julius Malema,



PRETORIA, South Africa: South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa (right) gestures as he takes the oath of office for his second term as South African President at the Union Buildings in Pretoria on June 19, 2024. — AFP

with 283 lawmakers in the 400-seat National Assembly voting to put him back in office.

But it has faced a vociferous opposition from the left, with Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters and former president Zuma's uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) refusing to take part and denouncing the inclusion of right-wing parties and the white-

led, free-market DA. MK came third in the election but has contested the results. Party spokesman Nhlamulo Ndlela said in a statement ahead of the ceremony that its lawmakers would snub the "far-cical inauguration of Cyril Ramaphosa as the puppet DA-sponsored President", also using a racial slur to describe the ANC leader. — AFP

## Italy coastguard recovers 6 bodies after shipwreck

ROME: Italy's coastguard said Wednesday it had recovered six bodies after a migrant boat sank this week off the southern coast with more than 60 people reported missing, including many children. Twelve people were rescued after the sailing boat sank around 120 nautical miles off the coast of Calabria overnight Sunday-Monday, although one of them died after disembarking. Italy's ANSA news agency reported that she was a 25-year-old woman of Iraqi origin.

The coastguard said Wednesday it continued to search the area around

the semi-submerged boat, which is still visible, on sea and in the air. "Following the searches carried out so far, six lifeless bodies have been recovered," it said. ANSA said they were four men and two women. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has been helping the survivors, who reported that 66 people had been missing after the shipwreck, "including at least 26 children, some of them a few months old".

Shakilla Mohammadi, cultural mediator for the medical charity, on Tuesday said those rescued were "traumatized, their pain tangible". "I talked to one young man who had lost his girlfriend," she said.

"Entire families from Afghanistan are believed to have died. They left Turkey eight days ago and had been taking on water for three or four days. They told us that they were travelling without life jackets and that some boats did not stop to help them."

Ten bodies were found in a separate shipwrecked migrant boat on Monday off the Italian island of Lampedusa, according to German aid group ResQship.

Some 3,155 migrants died or disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea last year, according to the UN's International Organization for Migration. More than 1,000 have died or are missing so far this year.

The Central Mediterranean - the area between the coast of North Africa and Italy and Malta - is the deadliest known migration route in the world, accounting for 80 percent of the deaths and disappearances in the Med. Many migrants set off from Tunisia or Libya by boat for Europe, with Italy often their first port of call. Arrivals have dropped considerably since the start of the year, with 24,100 people landing in Italy so far, compared to more than 57,500 in the same period in 2023, according to the interior ministry. — AFP



ARBIL, Iraq: A woman reacts as mourners gather for a memorial service for Iraqi Kurds who died at sea in a migrant boat off the southern coast of Italy, in Arbil, the capital of Iraq's northern autonomous Kurdish region, on June 19, 2024. — AFP

## Macron angers left, far right insists no NATO exit

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday faced accusations of transphobia after lashing out at the snap election manifesto of a new left-wing coalition, while the far-right party leader insisted he would not question France's international commitments including on NATO. With less than two weeks before the first round of polling in the snap elections

called by Macron in response to his party's defeat by the far right in European polls, the president is struggling to make up ground. His ruling alliance is forecast by opinion polls to come only third in the legislative elections on June 30 - followed by a second round on July 7 - behind the far-right National Rally (RN) and a new left-wing alliance.

This could put RN leader Jordan Bardella in a position to become prime minister in an awkward "cohabitation" with Macron, although the 28-year-old has insisted he will only accept this if his party and allies win an absolute majority of seats. Visiting a major defense show outside Paris, Bardella insisted that he "doesn't plan to question the commitments France has made on the international stage" on de-

fense if he takes power. "Our credibility towards our European partners and NATO allies is at stake," he said at the Eurosatory arms trade show outside Paris, moderating the far right's historic hostility to the Atlantic alliance.

The RN's three-time presidential candidate Marine Le Pen said in 2022 that if she were elected, France would quit NATO's integrated command in the name of "independence". A massive loan the RN received from a Russian bank in 2014, which it has since repaid, became a stick for its opponents to beat the RN with and point to the past warm relationship between Le Pen and the Kremlin.

The emergence of the New Popular Front, which groups left-wingers from Socialists to Communists,

has been an unwelcome development for Macron since he called the snap elections in the hope of rallying moderates across the spectrum. But Macron said Tuesday on a visit to western France that he had "confidence in the French" not to choose either extreme on the left and right. "They see well what is on offer. The RN and its allies offer things which may make people happy but in the end we are talking 100 billion (euros) a year," he said. "And on the other side, with the extreme left it's four times worse - there is no more secularism, they will go back on the immigration law and there are things that are completely farcical like changing your gender at the town hall," he added. The left-wing coalition's program includes a proposal allowing the change of civil status. — AFP

## Rolling power cuts hit Kuwait...

Continued from Page 1

The cuts came just a day after the ministry of electricity and water began receiving around 400 MW of power from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) power grid, out of the 500 MW purchased by Kuwait. Kuwait has been facing imminent power production shortages for the past several years as the construction of new power stations was not sufficient to meet fast-ris-

ing consumption. According to some unofficial studies, the ministry is facing a shortage of 1,331 MW this year, 1,440 MW next year and as high as 1,650 MW in 2026.

The ministry signed an agreement two weeks ago to import some 500 MW from the GCC power grid. But the sudden unexpected rise in temperatures sent consumption levels beyond the production capacity. The problem is expected to persist, at least in the coming four days, when maximum temperatures are forecast to remain above 50 degrees Celsius in most areas of Kuwait, including Kuwait City and Kuwait Airport. The Meteorological Department said the current heatwave was caused by an extremely hot spell resulting from the Indian monsoon.

lining the streets of Pyongyang along with children waving Russian flags and a military salute. Kim, 40, greeted Putin at the airport. After talks, Putin drove Kim around in a luxury Russian limousine. They then switched places and Kim drove Putin. Later, they watched a concert together. Putin accused the United States, South Korea and Japan of raising tensions on the Korean peninsula and said North Korea had a right to strengthen its own defenses.

Kim said the pact would expand cooperation in politics, economy and defense, calling it "strictly peace-loving and defensive" in nature. "Our two countries' relations have been elevated to the new higher level of an alliance," Kim said. At the start of their summit, Kim expressed "unconditional support" for "all of Russia's policies", including "a full support and firm alliance" for Putin's war with Ukraine.

Putin said Moscow was fighting the hegemonic, imperialist policy of the United States and its allies, Russian media reported. "We highly appreciate your consistent and unwavering support for Russian policy, including in the Ukrainian direction," Putin said. The West slapped on Russia what it cast as the toughest ever sanctions in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine began in 2014 after a pro-Russian president was toppled in Ukraine's Maidan Revolution and Russia annexed Crimea, with Russian-backed separatist forces fighting Ukraine's armed forces. North Korea "expresses full support and solidarity to the Russian government, army and people in carrying out a special military operation in Ukraine to protect sovereignty, security interests, as well as territorial integrity", Kim told Putin. — Reuters

## 8 detained over Mangaf fire amid...

Continued from Page 1

The Indian Embassy said the number of Indians being treated at hospitals has dropped to 25 from the initial 35.

About 176 of the 196 residents of the building were Indian nationals. There were also Filipinos, Thais, Pakistanis and Egyptians. Local media reported that HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has ordered a cash payment of \$15,000 to the relatives of each victim and that the funds will be delivered to the concerned embassy.

There has been no official confirmation of the payment, but Interior and Defense Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah had told reporters on Thursday that HH the Amir had ordered the cash payment without announcing the amount. In addition, victims are expected to receive compensation from the insurance company and their end-of-service compensation from their employers, a company offering security services to the local market.

Meanwhile, the interior ministry led inspection

teams into buildings in Hawally on Thursday as part of a campaign to ensure that all violations in apartment buildings are removed to ensure that similar fire tragedies are not repeated in the future. Sheikh Fahad said there will be no tolerance towards violating landlords who only care to increase their profits at the expense of the rights of workers. He affirmed that the law will be applied to all without exception.

The minister ordered that all violations should be removed and the situation of buildings being illegally utilized will be settled as soon as possible. Sheikh Fahad also paid a visit to a shelter for violating workers and ordered that the process of deportation should be speeded up.

Director of Kuwait Municipality Saud Al-Dabbous announced the municipality law will be amended to improve performance, adding that under current law, municipality teams are not allowed to enter buildings without the prior approval of the landlord or the public prosecution. He said that Minister of State for Municipality Affairs Noura Al-Mashaan has ordered the suspension of a number of municipal officials and ordered the formation of an independent investigation committee to investigate the officials about their responsibility towards the fire.

## Hezb chief warns Zionist entity...

Continued from Page 1

The exchanges between the foes, which last went to war in 2006, have escalated in recent weeks, and the Zionist military said Tuesday that "operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon were approved and validated". Earlier, Foreign Minister Israel Katz had warned of Hezbollah's destruction in a "total war".

Nasrallah said his Iran-backed group had been informed that the Zionist entity could use airports and bases in Cyprus if Hezbollah struck Zionist airports. Cyprus, a European Union member, has good relations with the Zionist entity and Lebanon, and lies close to the coast of both countries. "Opening Cypriot airports and bases to the (Zionist) enemy to target Lebanon would mean that the Cypriot government is part of the war, and the resistance will deal with it as part of the war," Nasrallah threatened.

Britain has also retained sovereign control over two base areas in its former colony Cyprus under the terms of the treaties that granted the island independence in 1960. Nasrallah's statements came a day after US envoy Amos Hochstein — who in 2022 brokered a maritime border deal between the Zionist entity and Lebanon — called for "urgent" de-escalation during a visit to Lebanon.

He also met with senior officials in the Zionist entity on his regional tour. "Everything the enemy says and that the mediators convey, including with threats of war on Lebanon... this doesn't scare us," Nasrallah said. On Tuesday, Hezbollah released a more than nine-minute video showing aerial footage purportedly taken by the movement over the Zionist entity, including what it said were sensitive military, defense and energy facilities and infrastructure in the city and port of Haifa.

Nasrallah said the footage was taken by a drone that "flew for long hours" over the Haifa port. He also warned that his group had only used "a part of" its weapons since October. "We have obtained new weapons," Nasrallah said, without elaborating. "We have developed some of our weapons... and we are keeping others for the days that will come," he said. — AFP

## Putin and Kim sign mutual defense...

Continued from Page 1

Kim praised Russia for making what he cast as an enormously significant strategic move to support North Korea, which was founded in 1948 with the Soviet Union's backing. Depending on the exact wording of the pact, which was not released, it could be a dramatic shift in the strategic balance in Northeast Asia by placing Russia's left behind North Korea - which faces South Korea, backed by the United States, across the heavily fortified demilitarized zone (DMZ).

While North Korea has a defense treaty with China, it does not have active military collaboration with Beijing like it has developed with Russia over the past year. North Korea also signed a 1961 treaty with the Soviet Union that included promises of mutual support in the event of an attack. China, the North's main political and economic benefactor, had no immediate response.

Putin's courting of Kim, which has included gifts of limousines and a tour of Russia's new space launch center, has alarmed the United States and its Asian allies. "Deepening cooperation between Russia and the DPRK is a trend that should be of great concern to anyone interested in maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, upholding the global non-proliferation regime, abiding by UN Security Council resolutions, and supporting the people of Ukraine," a spokesperson for the US State Department said. Putin was greeted by cheering crowds

## International

# Chinese coast guard boarded Filipino naval vessels: Manila

## Boarders were armed with swords, spears, and knives: Military chief

MANILA: The Philippine military said Wednesday the Chinese coast guard rammed and boarded Filipino navy boats in a violent confrontation in the South China Sea this week in which a Filipino sailor lost a thumb. Monday's incident was the latest in a series of escalating confrontations between Chinese and Philippine ships in recent months as Beijing steps up efforts to push its claims to the disputed area.

Filipino military chief General Romeo Brawner alleged the Chinese boarders were armed with swords, spears, and knives in the incident off Second Thomas Shoal. He denounced the Chinese action as "piracy" and demanded the return of seized weapons and other equipment, as well as reparations for damaged items.

China defended its actions, with its foreign ministry saying on Wednesday that "no direct measures" were taken against Filipino personnel. Images from China's Coast Guard shared by state media purported to show the confrontation on Monday, declaring: "The Chinese coast guard carried out boarding and inspection of a Philippine boat for the first time".

Photos showed two Chinese vessels approaching what it said was a smaller Philippine vessel from either side while another Chinese boat tailed closely behind. They showed Chinese coast guard officials then boarding the encircled vessel.

AFP was not able to independently verify the images. "Law enforcement measures taken by the China Coast Guard at the site were professional and restrained," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a regular news briefing in Beijing.

Second Thomas Shoal hosts a tiny Philippine garrison stationed on a deliberately beached old warship and has been the focus of a series of recent

confrontations. Beijing claims almost the entirety of the South China Sea, brushing aside competing claims from several Southeast Asian nations including the Philippines and an international ruling that its stance has no legal basis.

Second Thomas Shoal lies about 200 kilometers (120 miles) from the western Philippine island of Palawan and more than 1,000 kilometers from China's nearest major landmass, Hainan island.

Brawner described the incident after visiting the injured sailor in Palawan, saying Filipino personnel had "fought back with our bare hands" after Chinese coast guard personnel from eight vessels boarded their rigid-hulled inflatable boats. "They took guns and other equipment, destroyed our equipment on board including the motors. They punctured our rigid-hulled inflatable boats," he said.

"We are demanding that the Chinese return our rifles and our equipment and we are also demanding from them to pay for the damages that they have caused," Brawner said.

"For me this is piracy," Rear Admiral Alfonso Torres, commander for the Philippines' South China Sea forces, told reporters "seven firearms were looted and forcibly taken" by the Chinese coast guard.

He said communication and navigation equipment and an outboard motor were destroyed and the mobile phones of the Filipino crew were taken. Brawner said the Chinese coast guard carried "bolos" - a type of single-edged sword - as well as spears and knives. "Our troops had none of those," he said.

The Philippine military said the seized guns were intended for Filipino troops manning the BRP Sierra Madre warship on the shoal. The crew of the boarded boats were under orders not to



Philippine Coast Guard personnel prepare rubber fenders after Chinese Coast Guard vessels blocked their way to a resupply mission at the Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea, in this March 5, 2024 file photo. — Reuters

display their weapons, it said. China deploys coast guard and other boats to patrol the waters around Second Thomas Shoal and has turned several reefs into artificial militarized islands. It has stepped up moves against Philippine vessels in the area in recent months.

Torres said Monday's confrontation began when one of the Filipino boats was "illegally rammed" at "high speed" by a Chinese coast guard boat. The injured Filipino Naval Special Operations Group member lost a thumb when the Chinese vessel landed on top of the bow, Torres said. — AFP

## Philippine VP Duterte exits Marcos cabinet as alliance crumbles

MANILA: Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte resigned on Wednesday from the cabinet of President Ferdinand Marcos and another key post, in the latest sign that her alliance with Marcos Jr has crumbled. Marcos had accepted Duterte's resignation from the posts of education minister and vice chair of an anti-insurgency task force, Presidential Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil said in a statement, adding that the vice president did not provide a reason for the move.

Duterte, who will remain vice president, said in a press conference that her "resignation is not because of weakness but because of true concern for teachers and the youth." In the Philippines, where the president and vice president are elected separately, without a cabinet position, the vice president's powers are largely limited to ceremonial roles.

The Marcos and Duterte families joined forces in 2022 with Sara Duterte standing as Marcos' vice-presidential running mate, allowing him to tap the Duterte family's huge support base and seal a comeback for the disgraced Marcos dynasty. That alliance was always expected to collapse, but analysts were surprised by how soon the gloves came off after Marcos' predecessor, and Sara's father, Rodrigo Duterte, accused the president in January of using drugs.

Duterte's son, the mayor of Davao city, also called for Marcos' resignation at the time, and Sara did not object to the calls either. "It is the break we have all been waiting for," Jean Encinas-Franco, a political science professor at the University of the Philippines, said of the vice president's decision to step



QUEZON CITY, Philippines: Sara Duterte (center) is proclaimed winner of the vice presidential race by Senate President Vicente Sotto (left) and House Speaker Lord Allan Velasco at the House of Representatives in Quezon City, suburban Manila on May 25, 2022. — AFP

down from her cabinet post. Franco said Sara Duterte, who continues to enjoy high trust ratings based on independent opinion polls, would now have more leeway to criticize Marcos' policies.

Since coming to power in 2022, Marcos has reversed Rodrigo Duterte's pro-China stance and pivoted back to the United States, granting Washington greater access to Philippine bases amid China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and near Taiwan. He also brought to the fore a 2016 arbitral

secure a negotiated agreement on Tibet and spur China to tackle Tibetan aspirations on historical, cultural, religious and linguistic identity.

Among the delegation are the two authors of the act, titled 'Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act' or the Resolve Tibet Act, along with Nancy Pelosi, the former speaker of the US House of Representatives. The delegation also met officials of Tibet's government in exile, which functions from India.

### Who is the Dalai Lama?

Born in 1935 as Lhamo Thondup, the Dalai Lama was identified as the reincarnation of his predecessor at the age of two, and enthroned in 1940 as the 14th Dalai Lama in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital. Beijing invaded Tibet in 1950, and the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 after a failed uprising against its rule, since when he has lived in exile in the Himalayan town of Dharamsala.

He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

### Why is the visit controversial?

It has riled China at a time when Beijing and Washington are struggling to improve ties, and India's relations with China have also been strained since a military standoff on their

years as a student at Oxford University in the 1980s, he was invited to Balmoral Castle in Scotland for a few days.

"I have very fond memories of the Queen driving a car and inviting me to a barbecue... and Prince Philip showing me around by driving a carriage himself," he said. King Charles, then crown prince, also taught Naruhito fly fishing but "neither of us had success", he smiled. "I was welcomed with warmth as if I were their family member."

The imperial couple arrive in Britain on Saturday for private events ahead of the June 25-27 state visit, such as meeting Japanese people living there. The trip follows their first state visit last year to Indonesia. Naruhito and Masako also attended Queen Elizabeth II's funeral in 2022. — AFP

ruling, fortifying Manila's territorial claims in the South China Sea, which former president Rodrigo Duterte had largely set aside.

A major blow to the Marcos-Duterte relationship came late last year when Marcos said the government was considering rejoining the International Criminal Court, nearly five years after Rodrigo had withdrawn membership over objections to a bid by the court to investigate a bloody anti-narcotics campaign under him. — Reuters

Himalayan frontier killed 24 soldiers in 2020. US President Joe Biden is expected to sign the Resolve Tibet Act soon, in a bid to find a resolution for the dispute, although Washington considers the Tibetan Autonomous Region to be a part of China.

"This visit should highlight the bipartisan support in the US Congress for Tibet to have a say in their own future," the chief of the US delegation, and one author of the bill, Michael McCaul, said ahead of his departure from Washington on Friday.

### What are China's objections?

China accuses the Dalai Lama of being a "splitter" or a separatist, but he says he wants genuine autonomy for his remote Himalayan homeland. While Beijing has always objected to his meetings with foreign leaders, this has not prevented the Dalai Lama from meeting them, including US presidents, although Biden has not met him yet. However, the most contentious issue is the task of appointing his successor.

While Beijing has said it has the right to approve a successor, in a move set to strengthen its control over Tibet, the Dalai Lama says only the Tibetan people can make that call, and his successor could be found in India. — Reuters



TOKYO: Japan's Emperor Naruhito attends a press conference at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo on June 19, 2024 in advance of his visit to Great Britain. — AFP

## Why has a visit by US lawmakers to India upset China?

NEW DELHI: A delegation of US lawmakers met the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama on Wednesday in India's northern town of Dharamsala. The meeting annoyed Beijing, which urged the United States on Tuesday to "fully recognize the anti-China and separatist nature of the Dalai clique" and refrain from "any form of contact with it".

### Why is the delegation in India?

The bipartisan seven-member group of American lawmakers is visiting India to meet the Nobel peace laureate, the Dalai Lama. The United States has long supported the rights of the Tibetan people to practice their religion and culture, and has accused China of human rights violations in the remote Himalayan region that borders India. A bipartisan bill passed this month by the US House of Representatives aims seeks to push Beijing to hold talks with Tibetan leaders, stalled since 2010, to

## Japan emperor recalls time with UK royals

TOKYO: Japan's Emperor Naruhito said Britain's royals treated him "like family", as he recounted previous trips at a rare press conference on Wednesday ahead of a UK state visit. But the monarch, who will travel to Britain with Empress Masako, declined to comment when questioned on the thorny issue of male-only succession rules.

Naruhito recalled that during his two

### News in Brief

#### Nigeria cholera outbreak kills 30

LAGOS: Nigerian health officials are issuing warnings over a cholera outbreak that has killed at least 30 people, many of them in the commercial capital Lagos, since the start of the year. Cholera is an acute intestinal infection that spreads through contaminated food and water. It typically causes severe diarrhoea, vomiting and muscle cramps - and sometimes death. Lagos State health officials reported 15 deaths so far and 350 suspected cases, according to a statement on X, formerly Twitter this week. — AFP

#### Egypt 'deports Sudanese refugees'

CAIRO: Egypt has carried out mass arrests and unlawful deportations of thousands of refugees fleeing the war in Sudan, Amnesty International said in a report on Wednesday. The rights group said it had documented 12 incidents in which Egyptian authorities returned an estimated total of 800 Sudanese nationals between January and March this year without giving them the chance to claim asylum or challenge deportation decisions. It also said it had documented in detail the cases of 27 Sudanese refugees arrested between October 2023 and March 2024, 26 of whom were among those collectively expelled. — Reuters

#### Romania to buy S Korea's howitzers

SEOUL: Romania will buy \$920 million worth of South Korea's K-9 self-propelled howitzers, in its largest weapon acquisition in seven years, Seoul's defense ministry said on Wednesday. The deal was announced in a meeting between South Korean Defence Minister Shin Won-sik and his Romanian counterpart Angel Tilvar, during Shin's visit to the Eastern European country. Shin and Tilvar agreed that military cooperation between Russia and North Korea threatens the security of Europe and Asia, and close cooperation with the international community in responding to the matter was necessary. — AFP

#### Landslide kills 3 miners in Comoros

MORONI: A landslide has killed three children mining sand for the construction industry and injured two others on the island of Anjouan in the Comoros archipelago, a local official said on Wednesday. The landslide occurred on the outskirts of Mutsamudu, the capital of Anjouan, on Tuesday, said Mouhidine Saindou, deputy commander of the rescue services. Those killed were all under the age of 18, he said, without giving further details. — Reuters

#### Myanmar authorities arrest 22

YANGON: Myanmar authorities arrested 22 people for marking the birthday of imprisoned democracy figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi, local media reported on Wednesday. Police in Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city, arrested 22 people who had posted pictures of themselves wearing flowers in their hair - long a signature Suu Kyi look - Eleven Media reported, citing an anonymous official. Other local media said around a dozen had been arrested in the central Myanmar city for wearing flowers or praying with them in public. — AFP

THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 2024

# EU rebukes France for breaking budget rules

## Eurozone stocks plunge after bloc reprimands France

**BRUSSELS:** The EU on Wednesday reprimanded France for breaching the bloc's budget rules under President Emmanuel Macron, 10 days before snap elections marked by lavish spending promises. The news will be a blow to Macron as it is the first time France returns to the EU's public spending sin bin since he came to power in 2017. And it sets the stage for a potential clash between Paris and Brussels following elections on June 30 and July 7 - in which the far right and left, ahead in the polls, are pledging to spend billions more at a time when France will need to make cuts.

Alongside France, the European Commission said "the opening of a deficit-based excessive deficit procedure is warranted" for Belgium, Italy, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovakia.

The procedure kickstarts a process forcing a country to negotiate a plan with Brussels to get their debt or deficit levels back on track. The seven countries had deficits - the shortfall between government revenue and spending - above three percent of gross domestic product, in violation of the bloc's fiscal rules. The centrist Macron plunged France into political turmoil by calling the snap vote after his party's crushing defeat to the far right in EU elections earlier this month. Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire has warned that France could be thrown into a debt crisis if the spending programs of either the far right or a new left-wing alliance were adopted.

But senior EU officials refused to be publicly drawn on what the impact of France's vote could be on its fiscal discipline. A French finance ministry source said France's deficit would return from last year's 5.5 percent to below three percent by 2027 "provided a new government doesn't go in a different direction".

Brussels is reprimanding nations for the first time since the EU suspended the rules after the 2020 COVID pandemic and the energy crisis triggered by the Ukraine war, as states propped up businesses and households with public money. The EU spent two years during the suspension overhauling the budget rules to make them more workable and give greater leeway for investment in critical areas like defense. But two sacred goals remain: a state's debt must not go higher than 60 percent of national output, with a public deficit of no more than three percent. "Our economic and fiscal policies are now entering a new cycle," said the EU's economy commissioner, Paolo Gentiloni. "This does not mean 'back to normal', because we are not living in normal times; and definitely not 'back to austerity', because this would be a terrible mistake."

Countries failing to remedy the situation can in theory be hit with fines of 0.1 percent of gross do-



**BRUSSELS:** EU leaders and representatives talk ahead of an informal EU leaders summit to discuss electing the President of the European Council, nominating the President of the European Commission and appointing the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in Brussels, on June 17, 2024. — AFP

estic product (GDP) a year, until action is taken to address the violation.

In practice, though, the commission has never gone as far as levying fines - fearing it could trigger unintended political consequences and hurt a state's economy. EU officials have however stressed there would be stronger enforcement this time round. The commission said states must send their multi-annual spending plans by September 20 for scrutiny and it will then publish its recommendations in November.

Meanwhile, eurozone stock markets slid Wednesday after the European Commission reprimanded France for breaching the EU's budget rules, a further blow for the country in the midst of political tur-

moil ahead of surprise elections. London rose on a sharp slowdown in UK inflation, while telecoms giant Vodafone stock jumped two percent after the mobile phone giant offloaded most of its stake in Indian mobile tower operator Indus Towers for \$1.8 billion.

Paris led the fallers after the European Union's executive arm placed France back in the EU's public spending sin bin for the first time since President Emmanuel Macron rose to power in 2017. Investor sentiment has been rocked ever since Macron called a snap election last week in response to a far-right surge in EU elections. Macron's centrist bloc is currently trailing third in polls behind Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) party and a new left-

wing alliance New Popular Front.

Investors fear that French public finances could worsen significantly as a result of either tax-cutting policies by the far right - or the repeal of pension reforms by the left. "The French CAC once again finds itself at the bottom of the pile, with Goldman Sachs warning that a Le Pen victory would see the country's debt burden swell to the highest level since 1950," Scope Markets analyst Joshua Mahony in reference to Wednesday's performance.

Elsewhere, Asian stock markets finished mixed following yet another record showing in New York on Tuesday, which was fuelled by data that boosted US interest rate cut hopes. — AFP

## US deficit on track to soar 27% this year: Budget office

**WASHINGTON:** The US national deficit is on track to soar 27 percent higher this fiscal year than previously forecast, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said Tuesday. In updated forecasts, the CBO said it now expects the federal budget deficit to be \$1.9 trillion in the 2024 fiscal year, which rises to around \$2.0 trillion when accounting for a shift in the timing of certain payments.

This is around \$400 billion higher than its previous forecast in February, and would leave the deficit equal to 7.0 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), CBO director Phillip Swagel said in a statement. Much of this increase from the February forecast comes from a projected \$145 billion rise in projected outlays related to student loans. This follows revisions to the costs of subsidies issued by the Biden administration, along with a rule it has proposed to reduce the balance of student loans.

But the rise also includes a number of other factors, including an increase of around \$60 billion this fiscal year due to recently enacted legislation like the security aid package for Ukraine, the Zionist entity and countries in the Indo-Pacific region, Swagel said. According to the CBO forecasts, the net interest payments made on government debt is projected to rise to 3.1 percent this year, and 3.4 percent in 2025 - which would mark the highest interest cost in relation to GDP since records began in 1940.

Over the next decade, the US deficit is projected to total \$24 trillion, about 70 percent larger than the historical average over the past half-century, Swagel said. As a result, federal debt held by the public is expected to rise from 99 percent this fiscal year to 122 percent in 2034, according to the CBO.

The sharp rise in debt in both absolute terms and as a percentage of GDP has been tempered somewhat by an immigration increases in recent years. Net immigration between 2021 and 2026 is projected to be well above the historical average of around 200,000 people a year, which is expected to help temper the increase in debt, according to the CBO.

"The immigration surge is projected to increase the nation's nominal GDP by a total of \$8.9 trillion, or 2.4 percent, over the 2024-2034 period," Swagel said, adding that this would lower the deficit by a

## China eyes plan to connect Southeast Asian rail links

**KUALA LUMPUR:** China said it was willing to study a plan to connect Malaysia's \$10-billion East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) to other China-backed railway projects in Laos and Thailand, potentially expanding Beijing's Belt and Road initiative across Southeast Asia. Chinese Premier Li Qiang, who is on a three-day visit to Malaysia, said on Wednesday the proposal would make the central line of a proposed Pan-Asia Railway, running from Kunming in China to Singapore, a reality.

"This will better promote the construction of new international land and sea trade corridors, enhance regional connectivity, and deepen the building of the ASEAN community," Li said. Li is speaking during a ground-breaking ceremony at a construction site for the ECRL - a 665-km (413-mile) railway that will link peninsular Malaysia's east and west coasts by the end of 2026. Malaysia's government said in March it would consider extending the China-backed project to its border with Thailand. Li is on the third leg of a trip that has included New Zealand and Australia, as China looks to expand influence and investments in the Asia-Pacific region amid an ongoing rivalry with the United States.

He met Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in the administrative capital of Putrajaya, following his arrival in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday for a visit to mark 50 years of diplomatic ties between the two countries. After Wednesday's closed-door meeting, Li and Anwar witnessed the signing of more than a dozen pacts, including renewing a five-year program to collaborate in areas such as trade and investment, agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure and financial services, a statement after the meeting showed. The program, which will expire in 2028, was first introduced in 2013.

China also agreed to allow imports of fresh durian from Malaysia after it meets sanitary requirements, the statement added. Malaysia, one of the world's biggest producers of the spiky, smelly fruit, was previously allowed to ship only the whole frozen fruit and its products to China, with exports valued at 1.19 billion ringgit (\$253 million) in 2023.

The two countries also vowed to review visa-free travel arrangements set to expire in coming months.

China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner since 2009, and the foreign ministry said total trade was valued at \$98.9 billion in 2023. Anwar has pledged



**China's Premier Li Qiang walks with Malaysia Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim during their meeting in Putrajaya, Malaysia, June 19, 2024. — Reuters**

to remain neutral on China's geopolitical rivalry with the United States. Malaysia has announced large investments by companies from both countries this year, including from China's ByteDance and US tech giants Google and Microsoft.

Anwar has said Malaysia considered China an important trading ally and accused some Western powers of "China-phobia", amid ongoing clashes between neighboring the Philippines and China in the disputed South China Sea.

China claims almost the entire South

China Sea, including parts claimed by the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam. Anwar and Li on Wednesday agreed that China and relevant countries from the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) should independently handle the South China Sea issue, according to a report by Chinese news agency Xinhua.

The two leaders also pledged to work towards an early conclusion of a free trade agreement between China and ASEAN, Xinhua reported. — Reuters

## UK inflation drops to 2% target for first time since 2021

**LONDON:** British inflation returned to its 2 percent target for the first time in nearly three years in May, but strong underlying price pressures all but rule out a pre-election interest rate cut. While Prime Minister Rishi Sunak welcomed the fall in headline inflation in May, it has likely come too late to turn around his fortunes in British elections on July 4 or to prompt a Bank of England rate cut on Thursday.

Office for National Statistics data showed services price inflation, which the BoE thinks gives a better picture of medium-term inflation risks, was 5.7 percent. That was down from 5.9 percent in April, but higher than the 5.5

percent economists had forecast in a Reuters poll or the 5.3 percent predicted by the BoE last month. Sterling rose modestly against the dollar and the euro after the data, but British government bonds underperformed as investors bet the BoE would delay following the lead of the European Central Bank, which cut rates earlier this month.

"Services CPI continues to print to the upside (which) we think removes any lingering risk that the Monetary Policy Committee might announce a cut to Bank Rate tomorrow," said Cathal Kennedy, senior UK economist at RBC Capital Markets. The drop in annual consumer price inflation from April's 2.3 percent reading - in line with economists' expectations - took it to its lowest since July 2021 and marks a sharp decline from the 41-year high of 11.1 percent in October 2022.

The fall has been sharper than in the euro zone or the United States, where consumer price inflation in May was 2.6 percent and 3.3 percent respectively, belying concerns a year ago that British inflation was proving unusually sticky. Inflation first began to pick up in most Western



**LONDON:** Prices of food are displayed at the Borough Market as the UK inflation rates fall by less than expected in London, Britain May 22, 2024. — Reuters

economies in the second half of 2021 due to bottlenecks from the COVID-19 pandemic, then surged after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 caused natural gas prices to soar. — Reuters



## Business

# Gulf Bank reinforces commitment to Kuwait, regional capital markets

## Bank participates in Middle East Bonds, Loans & Sukuk Conference 2024

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance its role in developing the local capital market and maintain engagement with the business community in the region, Gulf Bank participated in the Middle East Bonds, Loans & Sukuk Conference 2024, held in Dubai earlier this month. The event attracted over 1,400 banking and investment executives from the region, featuring around 75 speakers and experts.

On this occasion, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Treasury, Lamia Karam, stated, "We are committed to participating annually in the Middle East Bonds, Loans & Sukuk Conference, as it is a prestigious event in the Middle East that brings together decision-makers in the banking and major investment sectors in the region."

She added, "Our goal in participating in the conference is to strengthen ties and relationships with major institutions in the Middle East, engage in strategic discussions about capital markets, and stay continuously updated on the latest trends and developments in this field, especially with the ongoing growth of bonds and Sukuk issuances in the region."

Karam emphasized that the conference provides an ideal platform for communication and the exchange of views between banks and investment companies, exploring potential cooperation and growth opportunities. Our annual participation highlights Gulf Bank's firm commitment to expanding its presence in the dynamic capital markets of the region and achieving its strategic goals.

Karam also mentioned that Gulf Bank is actively working to strengthen its pivotal role in revitalizing



Lamia Karam

the Kuwaiti capital market and providing exceptional investment opportunities for clients. Establishing its investment arm, "Invest GB," is a significant step in this direction, offering a comprehensive range of distinguished investment products and services.

She noted that Gulf Bank has successfully participated in managing bond issuances for several major banks and companies in Kuwait recently. She expressed her anticipation of managing more deals in the capital market in the upcoming period, thanks to the dedicated team at Gulf Bank, which spares no effort in achieving the best returns for all the bank's esteemed clients.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With



Gulf Bank's Executive Vice President - Customer Support Services - Sami Mahfouz poses with the bank team for a group photo at the Gulf Bank's pavilion.

its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments

in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

## Despite sanctions, Russia gets hands on Western goods

PARIS: A Kansas businessman shipped banned avionics equipment to Russia through Armenia, the UAE and other third countries. A French firm falsified documents to help unscrupulous European exporters circumvent sanctions. Despite more than two years of Western punitive measures, Russia is still getting its hands on prohibited goods, with the help of cunning businesses that go to great lengths to dodge the embargo. Last week, the United States unveiled fresh sanctions against 300 targets in and outside Russia.

"(These) actions strike at their remaining avenues for international materials and equipment, including their reliance on critical supplies from third countries," said Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. It may still not be enough. "Unfortunately, when people want to commit fraud, it might take some time but they succeed," Claire Lavarde, a lawyer at international law firm Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, told AFP.

Russia was hit with a first wave of sanctions following its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. The West tightened the screws after Moscow invaded its neighbor in February 2022. But Russia's economy has withstood the shock, growing 5.4 percent in the first quarter of this year as its trade relations with Asia and the Middle East soared. Some business leaders say they cannot always control where their products end up in the supply chain.

"We are not necessarily naive, but there is nothing we can do," said a senior executive at a European manufacturer of precision machinery who spoke on condition of anonymity. For legal protection, he said, "our lawyers advised us to have all our clients worldwide sign a document stating that they would not resell our products to Russia, Belarus and Iran."

Lavarde, whose firm helps banking, luxury and high-tech groups know who they can still work with, said: "One can imagine controlling the first re-export, but not the tenth." Despite export controls, Russia "continues to be able to import large amounts of goods needed for military production", according to a January report by the Kyiv School of Economics and the Yermak-McFaul International Working Group on Russian Sanctions.

Moscow's imports of "battlefield goods" and "critical components" took a hit in the aftermath of the invasion but they recovered in the second half of 2022 "as Russia was able to adapt supply chains", the report said.

Russian imports of battlefield goods reached \$932 million (\$68 million euros) between January and October 2023, only 10 percent lower than the pre-sanctions period. Data compiled by Eric Dor, director of economic studies at the France-based IESEG School of Management, showed that EU exports to Russia of 50 "high-priority items", such as semiconductors and integrated circuits, fell 95 percent between October 2022 and September 2023 compared to the same period in 2020-2021. Meanwhile, the study found that EU exports of such items to former Soviet republics, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates soared.

They more than tripled for Kazakhstan, quadrupled for Armenia and jumped almost 1,700 percent for Kyrgyzstan. "It's too systematic," Dor told AFP. These goods, he said, are "clearly" being re-exported to Russia. The Kansas businessman, Cyril Gregory Buyanovsky, 60, pleaded guilty in December for his role in a "long-running scheme to smuggle sophisticated US avionics equipment to Russia", Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen said at the time.

After Washington tightened sanctions in 2022, Buyanovsky and other conspirators shipped goods to Russia through intermediary companies in Armenia, Cyprus and the United Arab Emirates, US authorities said. They filed false export forms and used foreign bank accounts in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Cyprus and the UAE to funnel money from Russian customers to Buyanovsky's KanRus Trading Company.

In France, customs authorities raided an unidentified company in the Paris region in May that, according to the economy ministry, "specialized in the illegal export of goods to Russia". — AFP

## Power demand peaks in northern India heatwave

NEW DELHI: Searing heatwave temperatures in northern India pushed power demand to a record high, the government said Tuesday, with residents of the capital New Delhi also struggling with water shortages.

Much of northern India has been gripped by a brutal month-long heatwave, with temperatures regularly soaring above 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit). Northern India has "been experiencing high demand conditions due to a prevailing heat wave" since May 17, the ministry of power said in a statement, adding it had been forced to import 25-30 percent more power from neighboring regions.

"Despite these challenging conditions, the highest ever peak demand of 89 gigawatts in the northern region was successfully met" on Monday, it said. India is no stranger to scorching summer temperatures but years of scientific research have found climate change is causing heatwaves to become longer, more frequent and more intense.

India is the world's third-biggest emitter of greenhouse gases but has committed to achieve a net zero emissions economy by 2070 -- two decades after most of the industrialized West. For now, it is overwhelmingly reliant on coal for power generation. Authorities have avoided widespread blackouts but there have been multiple localized power outages when supply equipment faltered in the intense heat. The ministry said it ordered power companies to "maintain a high state of alert and

## Central China farmers face crop failures in 'withering' drought

HUDIAN, China: Farmer Bao Mingchen gestured to a dry pipe where water typically irrigates a patch of crops, the soil now cracked under a drought hitting China's vast agricultural hinterland. "Everything is dry," he said as he strode along the perimeter of a rice paddy near his home in Hudian, a humble township in the central Chinese province of Henan.

The rice plants still shine a radiant green but Bao, puffing on a cigarette, told AFP that the local farmers are beginning to worry about how much longer they can go without rain. Recent years have brought a long list of extreme weather events to China, including destructive floods and record-breaking heatwaves that experts say are made more frequent by global climate change.

Even as parts of central China were hit by drought, heavy rains and landslides across the south killed four people and left more than a dozen missing this week. The weeks-long dry spell striking central China has led many farmers to hold off on planting as agricultural authorities warn of damage to crops.

## China CB boss says no major stimulus to boost economy

SHANGHAI: The head of China's central bank said on Wednesday that the economy still faced many challenges, but warned authorities would not resort to huge stimulus measures and instead exercise moderation. The country's recovery from the impact of COVID has slowed in the months since it abruptly lifted tough restrictions in late 2022, with a property crisis and tepid consumer demand weighing on growth.



NEW DELHI: Residents fill their containers with water supplied by a municipal tanker in New Delhi on June 19, 2024 amid heatwave. — AFP

minimize forced outages of equipment".

People across Delhi, a sprawling megacity with an estimated population of more than 30 million residents, have been forced to rely on water tankers to meet demand. The authorities have reduced supply to cope with demand, expanding this week to the city's heart in New Delhi, the base of government offices and the homes of top political leaders.

Delhi relies almost entirely on water supplies from the neighboring agrarian states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. However, given the intense heat and the surge in demand in the respective states, city author-

A short drive down the road from Bao's home, 70-year-old reservoir manager Liu told AFP that the area hadn't seen any significant rain since April. "The drought conditions currently are very severe," said Liu, who gave only his surname, as he stood on the bank of the reservoir, the unusually low level of which was emphasized by a ring of stained concrete. Liu's reservoir serves as an important water source for the surrounding area, where farmers grow crops such as rice and corn. "If it doesn't rain there'll be a loss of the reservoir, and those farmers' rice paddy fields—they will have to be saved," he said.

"If it really doesn't rain, (the crops) will all die." Nearby, a 59-year-old woman farmer surnamed Wang arranged bushels of Chinese mugwort, a fragrant herb used in traditional medicine, along the side of the road. "Look at it, it's all withered," Wang said. "The bottom half is dead already. There are a few sprouts at the top but they're also about to dry up."

Across the road, Wang showed AFP a patch of crumbling dry soil where corn typically grows.

In a stroke of bitter irony, a sprinkling of measly raindrops fell for a couple of minutes, quickly evaporating on the scorching ground before the pale clouds dissipated beneath the blinding sun.

Wang said she hoped authorities could harness the power of technology to help local farmers through the drought. "With advanced technology and artificial rainfall, there'd be some hope for us,"

Leaders have unveiled a series of policies to boost infrastructure spending and spur consumption, but have stopped short of offering the big-spend "bazooka" called for by analysts, and which was introduced during the global financial crisis. Central bank chief Pan Gongsheng told a financial forum in Shanghai that the economy was struggling with "insufficient effective demand, insufficiently smooth domestic circulation, and a marked rise in the complexity, severity and uncertainty of the external environment".

But he said authorities would "avoid major easing or tightening", "Protecting price stability and promoting the moderate recovery of prices will be important considerations, while (we will) use interest rates, reserve requirement ratios and other

ities say they were not supplied enough.

Residents in Delhi also blame politicians for poor planning and under-investment in basic infrastructure. The India Meteorological Department, the national weather bureau, warned that "heatwave to severe heatwave conditions" are likely to continue until Thursday before gradually easing. It has repeatedly warned people of the "very high likelihood of developing heat illness and heat stroke in all ages", with "extreme care needed for vulnerable people". Temperatures are expected to fall as the annual monsoon rains move north this month. — AFP



XINYANG, China: A farmer sits on a dry rice field affected by drought at Hudianxiang village in Xinyang, in central China's Henan province on June 18, 2024. — AFP

she said. "But if there's really no rain, average folks like us will face total crop failure," she said. "That's just how it is." — AFP

policy tools flexibly," Pan said in a speech.

Beijing has set a target of around five percent growth this year, a figure seen as ambitious by many economists. China last year recorded one of its worst annual growth rates since 1990, though the first three months of 2024 outstripped expectations. And the International Monetary Fund recently upgraded its outlook for this year in light of the promise of more support measures.

A slew of measures introduced by the central government to boost the key property sector appeared to have had little effect. But state media reports last month that the central bank and financial regulators would cut minimum homebuyer rates could herald a larger stabilization plan, analysts said. — AFP

## Business

# More worries for China as sales at big e-commerce festival drop

## Consumer demand remains sluggish on worries over economy, jobs

SHANGHAI: Sales fell for the first time ever at China's blowout mid-year e-commerce sales festival as consumers remain cautious about spending as the economy sputters, according to third-party data estimates released on Wednesday. Combined gross merchandise volume (GMV), a widely used proxy for e-commerce sales, reached 742.8 billion yuan (\$102.36 billion) across China's major online platforms during the so-called "618" shopping event, 7 percent lower than the same period last year, digital retail data provider Syntun said.

Sales in 618 had grown even during the pandemic, according to Syntun, and peaked in 2023 at nearly 800 billion yuan. This year the shopping festival failed to stir up much excitement among shoppers, industry experts said, even as major platforms extended offers to a weeks-long period to woo consumers who have been tightening their belts amid a gloomy economic outlook.

The festival, named after the June 18 founding date of e-commerce provider JD.com but embraced by all platforms, is China's second-biggest annual sales event after Singles Day in November and is seen as a key test of household consumption. The world's second-biggest economy is being weighed down by a prolonged property crisis and high unemployment, weighing heavily on consumer confidence.

"With discounts available year-round, buzz around 618 has diminished," said Jacob Cooke, CEO of e-commerce consultancy WPIC Marketing + Technologies. JD.com said on Wednesday its turnover and order volumes reached a new high over the festival period, which ran from the end of May to June 18 this year. It did not elaborate on the exact growth rate of its orders or

sales during the festival, which was first launched in 2010 as just a one-day sale.

Major players such as JD.com and Alibaba's Tmall and Taobao platforms this year cancelled a traditional pre-sale period in which shoppers could place deposits on products and complete their purchases later. Instead, the sales period itself was extended. Sluggish demand also is pushing retailers to constantly focus on low prices and lower profit margins, analysts said, adding to disinflationary pressures.

An analysis by consultancy Re-Hub of luxury brands' discounting strategies during this year's 618 festival found nearly half of the brands they tracked either maintained or reduced their average discounts from the previous year, while 20 percent increased their average discounts.

Alibaba had previously flagged in a mid-618 season update that sectors such as home appliances were outperforming on its platforms, led by brands such as Haier and Xiaomi. The e-commerce giant said on Wednesday that sales of international brands including Nike, L'Oreal, Lancome and Adidas surpassed 1 billion yuan (\$137.82 million) on Tmall during the period.

Apple offered discounts of up to 2,300 yuan (\$318) on select iPhone models via its Tmall flagship store in a bid to keep pace with domestic competitor Huawei. Within the first hours of sales, Alibaba said Apple had sold more than 200 million yuan of merchandise.

Rival PDD Holdings' Pinduoduo, which does not traditionally disclose 618 sales data, did not respond immediately to a request for information. Given low prices are now such a common feature of China's consumer landscape, it is becoming more difficult for



SHANGHAI: This photo taken on June 6, 2024 shows people crossing a street at the Huangpu district in Shanghai. Sales fell for the first time ever at China's blowout mid-year e-commerce sales festival as consumers remain cautious about spending. — AFP

e-commerce platforms to keep customers engaged — even with traditionally successful sales festivals.

"I haven't been paying constant attention to 618, to be honest, because there are just so many (shopping festivals)," said Anita Meng, a university student

from Hangzhou. "Even if these festivals are still going strong, my wallet is already exhausted," she said, adding she only made one purchase this 618 — a gaming chair for her older brother that was reduced from more than 1,200 yuan to 1,000 yuan. — Reuters



NAIROBI: Protesters make signs with their arms in front of Kenya police officers during a demonstration against tax hikes as Members of the Parliament debate the Finance Bill 2024 in downtown Nairobi, on June 18. — AFP

## Kenya scraps most new tax hikes amid protest clashes

NAIROBI: Kenya's government on Tuesday scrapped plans to impose multiple tax hikes, the presidency said, amending a controversial bill that sparked protests where hundreds of demonstrators were arrested.

The East African economic powerhouse has struggled with a cost-of-living crisis, which critics warned would only worsen under the levies laid out in a bill due to be debated this week and passed before June 30. Hundreds of mostly young protesters assembled near parliament on Tuesday, with police firing tear gas, according to AFP journalists. The human rights commission KNHCR said 335 arrests were made.

Hours later, the presidency announced that it would scrap many of the bill's most contentious provisions, including taxes on bread purchases and car ownership. "The Finance Bill has been amended to remove the proposed 16 per cent VAT on bread, transportation of sugar, financial services, foreign exchange transactions as well as the 2.5 per cent Motor Vehicle Tax," the presidency said in a statement.

"Additionally, there will be no increase in mobile money transfer fees, and Excise Duty on vegetable oil has also been removed," it added. The cash-strapped government had earlier defended the hikes — which were projected to raise some 346.7 billion shillings (\$2.7 billion), equivalent to 1.9 percent of GDP — as a necessary measure to cut reliance on external borrowing.

Lawmakers were due to debate the bill on Tuesday afternoon but postponed the discussion to Wednesday, just before the presidency announced the changes following recommendations made by a parliamentary committee. "Because the people's representatives have listened to the people... they have adjusted the proposals," President William Ruto told lawmakers.

The bill sparked fury among many Kenyans, who staged protests on Tuesday dubbed "Occupy Parliament". Black-clad protesters were forced into a cat-and-mouse situation with police, with officers lobbing tear gas and — in one instance — chasing people into a church.

KNHCR said there were "arbitrary arrests" and an "unnecessary and disproportionate" use of force by security forces. A police report seen by AFP said one officer was seriously hurt when a tear gas grenade exploded in his hands.

"I am fighting for my future," one protester, 23-year-old Wangari, told AFP. "With such taxes, with such exploitation, I don't see how we can build a life," she said. "This is making it very hard for us, especially us, that are not a part of the one percent." Her thoughts were echoed by others like 29-year-old Rara Eisa who was protesting for the first time. "I am tired. The prices of everything have gone up, life is no longer affordable," she said, adding that the taxes "are not lenient in any way." — AFP

## Chinese automakers seek retaliatory tariffs on EU cars

SHANGHAI/BEIJING/BERLIN: Chinese automakers have urged Beijing to hike tariffs on imported European gasoline-powered cars in retaliation for Brussels' curbs on exports of Chinese-made EVs, the state-backed Global Times newspaper said on Wednesday. In a closed-door meeting on Tuesday also attended by European car companies, China's auto industry "called on the government to adopt firm countermeasures (and) suggested that positive consideration be given to raising the provisional tariff on gasoline cars with large-displacement engines," according to the report.

The meeting, organized by China's Ministry of Commerce, was held in Beijing and attended by SAIC, BYD, BMW, Volkswagen and its Porsche division, two people with direct knowledge of the matter said.

The main aim of the meeting was to put pressure on Europe and lobby against the tariffs Brussels announced last week to shield its car industry from Chinese competition, they added. The meeting was also attended by Mercedes-Benz, Stellantis and Renault, two separate sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.

The ministry did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment. The European carmakers either declined to comment or did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Industry insiders say both Europe and China have reasons for wanting to strike a deal in the months ahead to de-escalate tensions and avoid the addition of billions of dollars in new costs for Chinese EV makers, as the EU process allows for review.

The announcement to impose tariffs could trigger talks between Brussels and Beijing that are aimed at avoiding them, said Stefan Hartung, CEO of Bosch, the world's largest automotive supplier.

The European Commission said on Wednesday it was looking into the situation "with a view to discussing if a mutually agreeable solution can be found." EU trade policy is turning increasingly protective amid concerns that China's production-focused, debt-driven development model could see the 27-member bloc flooded with cheap goods, including electric vehicles, as Chinese firms look to boost sales overseas due to weak demand at home. The European Commission's June 12 announcement that it would impose anti-subsidy duties of up to 38.1

## Along Peru's mining corridor, Big Copper faces a snarl of trucks

LIMA: Surging copper prices this year have brought startling growth in the number of trucks carrying copper from illegal mines in Peru, jamming roads, causing accidents and creating hazardous conditions especially after dark along the Andean country's key "mining corridor" highway, industry sources told Reuters. With copper demand soaring as the world rapidly moves toward electric vehicles and clean energy, illegal mining has been booming. Trucks linked to artisan and illegal mining operations have been crowding vehicles from mines like Chinese-controlled MMG Ltd's Las Bambas, Hudbay's Constancia and Glencore's Antapaccay.

Mining sources told Reuters about alarming growth in delays and stoppages on the 482-kilometer highway, a partially paved road that is essential for trucks of copper concentrate getting to the coast.

"There are as many (trucks) or even more than ours," said a source close to Las Bambas in Peru's southern Apurimac region, the country's fifth largest copper producer last year. "It complicates life for all the mines using the corridor."



QINGZHOU, China: An employee works on a production line at a car wheel rim factory in Qingzhou, in eastern China's Shandong province on June 17, 2024. — AFP

percent on imported Chinese EVs from July followed a move by the United States to hike tariffs on Chinese cars in May, and opens a new front in the West's trade war with Beijing.

"Personally, I think it is unfair to start a tariff war solely on the basis of (China's) capacity utilization rate and insufficient demand for China's new energy vehicles," said Zhang Yansheng, chief research fellow, China Center for International Economic Exchanges. "We can see that China has adopted a package of policies to solve the 'overcapacity' problem, so this year, next year, and into the next four years, China's capacity utilization will continue to rise," he added.

The Global Times first reported late last month that a Chinese government-affiliated auto research centre was suggesting China raise its import tariffs on imported gasoline sedans and sport utility vehicles with engines larger than 2.5 liters to 25 percent, from the current rate of 15 percent.

Chinese authorities have previously hinted at possible retaliatory measures through state media commentaries and interviews with industry figures.

The same newspaper last month also hinted that Chinese companies planned to ask authorities to open an anti-dumping investigation into European pork products, which China's commerce ministry on

Monday announced it would undertake. It has also urged Beijing to look into EU dairy imports. Exports of passenger vehicles with engines bigger than 2.5 liters from Europe to China totalled 196,000 units in 2023, up 11 percent year-on-year, according to data from China Passenger Car Association. In the first four months of 2024, exports of such vehicles from Europe to China stood at 44,000 units, down 12 percent from the same period a year ago.

EU car exports to China were worth 19.4 billion euros (\$20.8 billion) in 2023, while the bloc bought 9.7 billion euros of electric vehicles from China, according to EU statistics agency figures. China accounts for about 30 percent of German carmakers' sales, and Germany is by far the largest exporter of vehicles with engines of 2.5 liters or above, having shipped \$1.2 billion worth to China since the beginning of this year, Chinese customs data shows. Mercedes-Benz's big-sized GLE Class SUV, S Class sedans and Porsche's Cayenne are the three most popular imported cars from Europe in China, the three of which accounted for more than one-fifth of the total 155,841 imported cars of European brands in the first five months, according to data tracked by China Merchants Bank International. — Reuters

Informal mining trucks were involved in at least 11 accidents in May along the highway, according to a document shared with Reuters by a source at Canada's Hudbay, which included images showing damage to the roadway.

Burgeoning stand-offs between big mines and artisan miners have complicated government efforts to spur investment and production to bolster the economy after Peru's long-held position as the No. 2 global copper producer was snatched away by rival Congo. Chile is No. 1, and Peru remains second for shipments.

The Hudbay source said there were around 120 trucks daily from artisan mining operations, some of which operate with permits and others illegally. The trucks were damaging the roadway, causing accidents and pollution. "While we've seen this problem for some years, the increase in truck numbers in 2024 is startling," the source added, saying the mine had formally sought government intervention to strengthen inspection and controls on the road.

Peru's Ministry of Energy and Mines and the regional Cusco government did not respond to requests for comment. A source close to Antapaccay said artisan and wildcat trucks often traveled at night to avoid detection.

Peru's government has tried to regulate artisan mining sector more by tightening up on permitting. Small-scale copper and gold miners have pushed



MADRE DE DIOS, Peru: Aerial picture of dredges at an illegal gold mining area in the Madre de Dios department, in Peru's southeastern Amazon region, on June 1, 2024. — AFP

back and protested, gumming up the government's plans to overhaul the sector. Local community groups told Reuters the recent boom meant more uncontrolled activity along the Andean region's roads.

"The flow is strong, sometimes too much. It's the same amount again as Las Bambas, an average of more than 100 trucks a day," Robertson Pacheco, leader of a local defense front in the Velille district of Cusco told Reuters by phone. "Informal miners have no control, there's no monitoring." — Reuters

THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 2024



US rapper, artist and fashion designer Pharrell Williams acknowledges the applause after presenting creations for the Louis Vuitton Men's Ready-to-Wear Spring/Summer 2025 collection as part of Paris Fashion Week in Paris on June 18, 2024. — AFP photos

## 'Dandy' Pharrell Williams kicks off Paris Fashion Week for Vuitton

Paris Fashion Week kicked off on Tuesday with hip-hop mogul Pharrell Williams playing on the language of one-world unity as he staged his latest branding event for Louis Vuitton at the UNESCO headquarters. The show celebrated "global dandies", with lots of diplomat-style double-breasted suits, pilot-inspired bombers and lots of takes on the label's iconic luggage for the ultra-rich leisure traveler.

The choice of models was color-coded to match skin tones with outfits – "a palette rendered in the nuances of skin tones of all the humans of the planet," as the show notes put it. There were silk-style pyjama suits and glittery new takes on the pixelated Damier check pattern that has been popular through Williams' tenure. He took over a year ago as creative director of the world's most profitable luxury label in a sign of the lucrative crossover between fashion, music and celebrity.

His lavish debut that year saw him take over Paris's historic Pont Neuf bridge, and his follow-up in January was an ode to Americana that looked like a carefully staged tie-in with superstar singer Beyoncé's new cowboy-themed album. For his latest, the "Happy" singer took over the home of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a symbol of international diplomacy in Paris.

Under the theme "The World is Yours", a teaser on Instagram featured children as diplomats being encouraged to work for a more unified world – with Vuitton-branded briefcases, naturally. The political message in this year's Olympic host city resonated on the front row at a time when the French far-right is surging in polls ahead of a snap election due in two weeks.

"We are living in a very tense period," said Djiby Kebe, of the Air Afrique art collective that made the short film. "France is opening up to the world like never before – with this show, with the Olympics – but we find ourselves with the possibility of a far-right government which terrifies us," he told AFP.

The label's parent company, LVMH, announced a strengthening of its partnership with UNESCO on environmental projects in April. That cannot come too soon for campaigners. Louis Vuitton, the world's most profitable fashion brand, scored just 29 out of 100 in the most recent Fashion Transparency Index by Fashion Revolution, which monitors areas such as environmental impact and labor rights.

### Burc Akyol

This week features the menswear shows, followed immediately by the haute couture shows until June 27. Earlier on Monday, popular newcomer Burc Akyol presented a mix of demure and racy outfits, which he said were born of his conflicted feelings over his recent civil partnership. "It's an explosion of someone who has so many things to say but only has five minutes," he said, after a show featuring his trademark high-slit skirts, tight wraps and lots of transparent tops.

"I'm still a very young brand and every day has its



Models present creations by Louis Vuitton.



own struggles. I go from cloud nine to minus one," said Akyol, who has been frank about the financial difficulties facing new labels. "The more we grow, the more we're meeting our market. It's very responsive but we have to stick to it," he told AFP.

The Games have brought fashion week forward from July, forcing some houses to abandon this season, includ-

ing Balmain, Valentino and Givenchy. A key highlight for fashionistas will be Vogue World, a mega-party organized by the magazine on Sunday, bringing together the doubly lucrative worlds of sports and luxury clothes. The industry is also preparing to say farewell to one of its most lauded designers, Belgium's Dries Van Noten, who is retiring after his show on Saturday. — AFP

## Celine Dion offers portrait of resilience in vulnerable docu

Celine Dion vowed Monday her "passion as a performer will never disappear," despite health struggles she says are still just a small part of her monumental story. "I'm not dead," the singer told AFP on the red carpet, ahead of the premiere of the both wrenching and joyful documentary "I Am: Celine Dion". The movie focuses on her soaring career and more recent challenges with a rare neurological disorder that has drastically hampered her ability to perform.

"When life imposes something on you, you have two options. You deal with it or you don't want to deal with it," Dion said. She called her decision to speak out about her condition in the documentary both "the greatest gift and the greatest responsibility," saying she hoped

it would inspire people with similar obstacles. At one point ahead of the premiere the Quebec-born star switched to her native French, telling journalists that "it's hard to be here. But at the same time, I'm so moved." "I feel that I still have a lot of support and a lot of love and I hope this documentary will help, because it helped me a lot," she said, detailing her gratitude to her family, her medical team and her fans. "Even if it's a forever fight, one day at a time."

The 56-year-old first disclosed in December 2022 that she had been diagnosed with Stiff Person Syndrome, a progressive autoimmune disorder with no cure. She was forced to cancel the remainder of her shows indefinitely. Treatment can help alleviate symptoms of the condition that can cause stiff muscles in the torso, arms and legs. Overstimulation can also trigger severe spasms, and can cause her voice to crack uncontrollably. "The show will still go on," she promised, but said it was important to be honest about the physical and emotional intensity of her condition.

Irene Taylor, the Academy Award-nominated director behind the film, told AFP that Dion's one ask was to be able to tell her own story, in her own words. "Would



Canadian singer Celine Dion attends the New York special screening of the documentary film "I Am: Celine Dion" at Alice Tully Hall in New York City on June 17, 2024. — AFP

that be possible? Instead of other people talking about me?" she recalled the superstar requesting. "That was like music to my ears as a storyteller," Taylor said. "She just opened up and was very authentic," the director continued. "In her joy, and also in her suffering." — AFP

## Anouk Aimee, 60s icon of French elegance, dies at 92

French star Anouk Aimee, who died on Tuesday aged 92, cast a spell over a generation of filmgoers with her doomed romance in Claude Lelouch's box-office smash "A Man and A Woman". Her role as a lovelorn widow in the 1966 film famous for its "chabadabada, chabadabada" theme tune won her an Oscar nomination, a Golden Globe for best actress and her entry into Hollywood.



Anouk Aimee

Aimee's elegant sophistication had already made her a star of such European masterpieces as Federico Fellini's "La Dolce Vita" (1960) and "8 1/2" (1963), and she was unforgettable as the ageing showgirl in Jacques Demy's heartbreaking musical "Lola" (1961). Fellini in particular revered her, saying her "face has the same intriguing sensuality as that of (Greta) Garbo, (Marlene) Dietrich or (Cindy) Crawford, these great mysterious queens, these priestesses of femininity."

"Anouk Aimee represents the kind of woman who worries you to death," he said. That combination of "melancholy and passion" marked much of her remarkable career, with the American director Robert Altman bringing her out of retirement to rekindle her old spark with Marcello Mastroianni in the acclaimed "Pret a Porter" in 1994.

### Fleeing Nazis

Born Francoise Dreyfus in Paris on April 27, 1932, Aimee was the scion of a theatrical family. Her life was turned upside down when German troops marched into the city when she was eight. Her father was Jewish, putting the family in mortal danger, even though she was raised a Catholic. "We moved all the time. We hid... But then the Germans turned up and took over the apartment downstairs," she recalled.

The family sent her to the countryside where they hoped she would be safer, changing her name so she would not have to wear a yellow star. Her lifelong love of animals was born from the comfort they gave her during her time in hiding, she later said. The war over, her career began at the age of 13 when she was picked from the street to play in a Marcel Carne film that was never finished for lack of money.

### The 'birth' of Anouk

She finally made her screen debut the following year and adopted her character's name, Anouk, as her own. It would become popular in France thanks to her. It was French poet and screenwriter Jacques Prevert who convinced her to also change her surname to Aimee, meaning "loved". Her career took off in 1949 with Andre Cayatte's "The Lovers of Verona". Her class and beauty brought her a string of roles including in "Montparnasse 19" by Jacques Becker before she began to work with Demy and Fellini.

The massive success of "A Man and a Woman" opened the door to Hollywood, where Aimee played opposite Omar Sharif in Sidney Lumet's "The Appointment" and George Cukor's "Justine" in 1969. But she stopped working for seven years after she married British actor Albert Finney – her fourth husband – in 1970. They divorced eight years later. "Cinema is like a meeting between lovers," Aimee told AFP. "I love that, it's like a gift and I adore the feeling of being loved." — AFP

## Justin Timberlake arrested, charged with drunk driving

Pop star Justin Timberlake was arrested on suspicion of driving while intoxicated in a chic town east of New York City, and spent the night in jail before being arraigned and released, local officials said Tuesday. The 43-year-old Timberlake, known for such hits as "SexyBack" and "Cry Me a River", was taken into custody in Sag Harbor, part of the affluent Hamptons community, in the early hours of Tuesday.



This handout image released on June 18, 2024 shows the booking photo of US singer-songwriter and actor Justin Timberlake. — AFP

"Justin Timberlake was arrested in Sag Harbor for driving while intoxicated," the prosecutor's office in Suffolk County said in a statement emailed to AFP. "He was arraigned in Sag Harbor Village Justice Court and released on his own recognizance," the statement said, adding that Timberlake's next court date would be a virtual appearance on July 26.

Sag Harbor police said in a statement that a police officer pulled Timberlake over shortly after midnight after seeing him driving his BMW through a stop sign and failing to stay on the right side of the road. "Upon investigation, it was determined that Mr Timberlake was operating his vehicle in an intoxicated condition," police said, confirming earlier media reports.

Timberlake's eyes were "bloodshot and glassy," and he "performed poorly on all standard field sobriety tests," CBS reported, citing court documents. The singer-actor, who is currently on tour in support of his latest album, reportedly told police he "had one martini" and was following his friends home, the network said. "Mr Timberlake was placed under arrest, processed, and held overnight for morning arraignment," police said. — AFP

# On thin ice: Greenland's last Inuit polar bear hunters



Inuit hunter Hjelmer Hammeken rides his dogsled on the soft sea ice as he looks for seals outside Ittoqqortoormiit. — AFP Photos



Peter Hammeken and his sons pose holding rifles in Ittoqqortoormiit near the frozen Scoresbysund Fjord on April 27, 2024.



Inuit hunter Hjelmer Hammeken, wearing a white camouflage suit, rinses a seal skin in a seal hole in the soft sea ice.



Hjelmer Hammeken and Martin Madsen eat the liver of a ring seal they just killed.

## 'Meaty rice'? South Korean prof aims to change global protein

In a small laboratory in Seoul, a team of South Korean scientists are injecting cultured beef cells into individual grains of rice, in a process they hope could revolutionize how the world eats. From helping prevent famines to feeding astronauts in space, team leader and professor Hong Jin-kee believes his new so-called "meaty rice" could become an eco-friendly, ethical way for people to get their protein.

No animals were harmed in the creation of the dish, which looks like a regular bowl of rice - albeit pink - but it gives off a faint buttery aroma, the result of being packed with beef muscle and fat cell culture. Using cultured meat, "we can obtain animal protein without the slaughter of livestock," Hong, of Seoul's Yonsei University, told AFP.

Companies worldwide have sought to commercialize meat alternatives, such as plant-based or



This picture taken on May 21, 2024 shows professor Hong Jin-kee posing with a bowl containing pink "meaty rice" at Yonsei University in Seoul. — AFP

cultured meat, due to ethical issues surrounding industrial livestock rearing, as well as environmental concerns linked to the greenhouse gas emissions from animal farming. Hong, who has a background in organoids and biomedical sciences, chose rice for his research as the grain was already the top source of protein for people in Asia.

His process can be currently time-consuming: A regular rice grain is coated with fish gelatin to help with adherence, then individually injected with beef cells before being cultured in a petri dish for up to 11 days. Rice possesses a "slightly porous structure," Hong said, and once the beef cells have been injected into the rice, the grain offers "an ideal structure for cells to grow uniformly from the inside out."

Hong's "meaty" rice contains eight percent more protein and seven percent more fat than regular rice. Hong and his team are still working on how to scale the process, he said, but he hopes to get his creation approved as a relief food for emergency situations in two African countries. "For those who are limited to... just one meal a day, a slight increase in (protein content), even by just a few percent, becomes incredibly important," he said. — AFP



Professional Inuit hunter Gaba Abelsen.

Inuit hunter Hjelmer Hammeken spotted a ringed seal near its breathing hole on the Greenland ice. In his white camouflage, he slowly crept towards it then lay down in the snow and waited. When the right moment came, Hammeken tapped his feet together. The seal lifted its head to look where the noise was coming from and the hunter fired.

He butchered the animal there and then, eating some of its liver while it was still warm, as his ancestors have done for centuries - the hunter's reward. Such scenes are common around the hugely isolated Inuit community of Ittoqqortoormiit, close to Scoresby Sound, the world's biggest fjord on the frozen east coast of Greenland.

All the men hunt in this colorful little settlement of 350 souls. While only the professionals track polar bears, everyone hunts seals, narwhals and Arctic musk ox. But for the last two decades climate change and hunting quotas have been threatening the livelihood on which Inuit families have long survived.

Hammeken is a legend in Greenland, its greatest polar bear hunter. AFP followed him and other professional Inuit hunters for several days during the hunting season. He killed seven this year to add to his tally of 319 over the last half century. When he arrives at the edge of the ice, where it meets the Arctic Ocean, he commands respect.

Hammeken made his reputation in the 1980s. He would go out alone for several weeks at a time, crossing the glaciers of the fjord with his dogs with little more than a tent to bring back up to three polar bears. It was the golden age for the hunters, when polar bear skins could be sold abroad. That ended in 2005 when quotas were put in place to slow the fall in polar bear numbers. This year's quota of 35 had been hit by the end of April, which was why Hammeken was hunting seals, on which there is no quota.

Climate change has turned the lives of the Inuit upside down since the beginning of the century - with the Arctic warming four times faster than the global average. "Before we could hunt all year," said Hammeken, 66. "In winter the ice was harder... and the fjord never melted."

But now the ice is retreating and the Sound is open and navigable between mid-July and mid-September. With the young hunter Martin Madsen at his side, Hammeken scanned the horizon. The wind had come up and the sea with it. It was time to go. The ice, which is thin at the edge of the sheet, had become unstable, and risked breaking up and taking him and his protege with it.

"In August, all the ice sheet will have melted. There will be just the sea, a rough sea," which will make hunting seals and narwhals - which are also subject to a quota - difficult, Hammeken said. With little ice on which to hunt seals, he wondered how the polar bears would survive. Stuck on



Professional Inuit hunter Hjelmer Hammeken.



Inuit professional bear hunter Martin Madsen shows the last polar bear he killed earlier in April before reaching the yearly quota.

land and starving now in the summers, they are coming closer and closer to the village looking for food.

### The young hunter

Back in Ittoqqortoormiit young Madsen looked out the window and checked the weather forecast on his smartphone. With bright sun and no fog, it was a perfect day for hunting. He got his guns and headed for the edge of the ice. The other hunters are already in position, scanning the wind-whipped water for signs of seals. Not that far away - within two kilometers or so - three polar bears are also out on the prowl for seals themselves.

To attract their prey, the Inuit scrape the ice with a long wooden stick called a "toog", which imitates the sound seals make when they poke through their breathing holes in the ice. When a hunter spots one, he shouts, "Aanavaa!" ("Look, a seal!") and whistles to attract its attention. If he misses his shot, the others are free to fire.

That day Madsen missed the seal he spotted. But the next day the 28-year-old killed a bearded seal with a single shot from more than 200 meters with his .222 rifle, rushing to drag it into his boat before it sank. "The dogs will have something to eat," he said proudly. Madsen is one of Ittoqqortoormiit's 10 professional hunters. Only those who live completely from the hunt are allowed to shoot polar bears.

"I have been hunting since I was a child. I grew up among hunters - my father, my grandfather" were also hunters, he told AFP. But since their time much has changed, most of all the diminishing chance of making a living from it despite being able to use snowmobiles and smart- and satellite phones on the ice. "Nowadays there is



Professional Inuit hunter Martin Madsen.

not much to hunt," said Madsen. "With the quotas and everything, it is not working anymore."

Polar bears can only be hunted by Inuits. Their skins go for up to €2,000 - but they can only be sold in Greenland after a European Union embargo in 2008. Seal skins, on the other hand, sell for €40 or less, half of what they were going for before they were hit with a similar embargo in 2009, which was later lifted for those shot by Inuits.

Back home, Madsen's partner Charlotte Pike prepared polar bear soup with tomatoes, carrots, onions and red curry. "Life is tough given how little we earn from hunting," said the 40-year-old who wants to put up tourists in their home as a way of helping make ends meet. "You hear everywhere now that we shouldn't eat meat and kill animals... but that is hard for us" in a place where nothing grows. Madsen never went to school, and he hopes his eight-year-old son Noah will not become a hunter like him.

### A boy's dream

Eleven-year-old Nukappiaaluk Hammeken, however, dreams of joining Ittoqqortoormiit's small elite of professional hunters, even if there is less and less at the top of the food chain to hunt. His father Peter, 38, runs a snack bar in this village at the end of the world, 800 kilometers from the next settlement in Greenland. Supplies come only twice a year by boat. During his grand-uncle Hjelmer's youth "almost every man in the village" was a full-time hunter, he said.

"What is going to happen in the next 50 years?" Peter Hammeken asked. "Hunting is fundamental for survival, we need it to feed ourselves and bring in money. It's important for the village and for our future." Nukappiaaluk will have to wait till his 12th birthday before he is allowed to go on his first hunt. To become a professional he will have to pass a long apprenticeship alongside the elders.

First of all he will have to be able to master a dog team, which is obligatory for professional hunting. Nukappiaaluk has already been making collars for his nine pups by hand. Over the next two months, Nukappiaaluk will start working his huskies. First he must learn to train them and so they can pull his sleigh to speeds of up to 30 kilometers per hour. Most of all, he must make sure they follow his verbal commands to the letter - the slightest error can be fatal in such a hostile environment.

And like countless generations of hunters before him, the shy boy will also have to learn to understand his prey, their behaviors and movement, and how that all changes with the seasons. Becoming a man and a hunter is inseparable for most Inuit. "If you do not know your ancestors, you do not know who you are," insisted his older brother Marti, 22. — AFP

Lifestyle

# Unveiling Tunis: Mural celebrates 'invisible' talents



Tunisian react as they attend the inauguration of '1001 Bricks Fresco', a participatory artwork by more than 500 inhabitants of Tunis led by Swiss artist Anne Francey, illustrating the diversity of the city, with the bas relief installed on the edge of the medina, the old town listed by UNESCO, in the capital's El-Hafsia district on June 7, 2024. — AFP photos

In the old medina of Tunis, a wall installation titled "1001 Bricks" showcases the talents of "invisible" creators, including art students, people with disabilities and school dropouts. Led by Swiss artist Anne Francey, the project took shape over a year through workshops that culminated in a large bas-relief made of carved and painted clay bricks, reimagining the cityscape.

The massive artwork now graces a square in the UNESCO-listed old town of the Tunisian capital. Its main creators are "the invisible, all these people who are on the margins of society, who have disabilities" and whom "we tend keep in the shadows and not really acknowledge," said Francey, 68. Despite challenges, the project engaged a wide spectrum of 550 participants including art professionals, students and members of AGIM, an association for people with motor disorders.

Mohamed Boullila, an AGIM trainer, said all those who contributed to the project left a personal touch. "We have the power to do things despite everything and show society that we shouldn't only be considered disabled," Boullila, who also lives with a disability, said during a workshop.

**'Metaphorical city'**

Samia Souid, 56, a longtime teacher at AGIM, said the project had a positive impact on youths. "Children who cannot speak expressed their feelings and their ideas" through the project, she said. Each group of creators "imagined a metaphorical city", with AGIM participants focusing on a city of challenges, producing sculptures



akin to contemporary art. Supported by a Swiss foundation, the project utilized clay bricks for their availability and wide use in Tunisian construction.

The initiative follows Francey's 2019 project "1001 Hands", inspired by the "One Thousand and One Nights" fairytale, emphasizing stories that intersect endlessly, she said. Francey noted the rarity and difficulty, on a global scale, of such a "participatory art project", since it challenges the tradition of top-down artworks. The installation helped blend the creations of "people of all social status", from architecture students to youths in reintegration – peo-

ple facing unemployment, substance abuse and other forms of social invisibility. It is "a way of coming together around a constructive project that makes us dream of a harmonious society despite the hardships the country is going through", she said.

**'Commitment'**

Beyond that, the mural is a statement on public space, as the square it occupies has endured years of neglect, serving as a garbage dump and parking lot until recent renovations. Raouf Haddad, a 42-year-old porter in the commercial neighborhood of Hafsia, said he checks in



Artistic bricks are displayed at the inauguration of the '1001 Bricks Fresco'.

on the artwork every day and helps whenever needed. "The entire medina should have initiatives like this," he said. "There are collapsing roofs and walls, alleys devoid of public lighting where people cannot pass."

He hopes the square will one day become like Batman Alley – a once-neglected passageway in Brazil's Sao Paulo which artists turned into a tourist attraction with a myriad of graffiti tags. For now, however, what matters most is that "1001 Bricks will lead to new projects" in a neigh-

borhood full of "abandoned and unexploited public spaces", said Firas Khelifi, a 28-year-old project manager working on children's awareness on global warming in the neighborhood.

The installation "will bring more animation because there are several festivals" in the medina each year likely to use the square for artistic performances and exhibitions, said Khelifi. "With families there and children playing, it will increase the community's commitment and belonging to the project." — AFP

# Iranians seek guidance from ancient poetry of Hafez

When Iranians worry about life's big questions, many seek answers in the works and wisdoms of Persia's most revered poet, Hafez – sometimes with the help of a parakeet. Retired housewife Mitra, 61, had questions about whether her son married the right woman, so she went to the tomb of Iran's beloved 14th-century bard in the southern city of Shiraz.

Seeking guidance, she visited a fortune-teller there, one of many who offer advice with the help of Hafez's collected works, a book of odes known as the Divan. After sharing her concern, Mitra watched anxiously as the fortune-teller thumbed through the thick tome, opened it on a random page and pointed his finger at one verse. He read it out and then explained its metaphors and mystical insights. Mitra's face lit up – the message was positive, and domestic harmony lay ahead.

"I finally did the consultation today for my son, because I had doubts on whether his marriage was a good decision," she said in the garden of the Hafez mausoleum. After the nod of approval for her daughter-in-law from within Iran's ancient lyrical treasure trove, she said: "I finally regained hope".

Some Iranian fortune-tellers, known as falgir, offer a special service to truly randomize the selection of the all-important Hafez verse. Chirpy parakeets known as "love birds" hop across stacks of colorful envelopes that contain his enigmatic poems and pick one out with their tiny beaks.

**Rich poetic tradition**

As Hafez devotees thronged into the mausoleum to pay their respects, another person seeking advice was Hamidah, a 44-year-old chemistry professor. "I always ask Hafez for help and consult

him," she said. "I can't explain this with the laws of physics, but it's a reality for me."

Poetry enjoys immense popularity in Iran, where timeless verses on love and spirituality can be found woven into carpets, engraved in jewelry and emblazoned on street billboards. The nation prides itself on its masters such as Rumi, Saadi, Khayyam and Ferdowsi, who wrote the epic Book of Kings, preserving Iran's pre-Islamic heritage through mythical tales and legends. "They are our national figures and the creators of our culture," said Farshad, a 41-year-old doctor.

Early 20th-century poetry gave voice to social protest and faced censorship under the former monarchy, including the works of dissident poets Ahmad Shamlou, Forough Farrokhzad and Simin Behbahani. But no Iranian poet has enjoyed enduring and universal adoration like Hafez, and a well-worn copy of his Divan compendium is found in most households. People from all walks of life regularly cite his lyrical wisdoms, mostly on the themes of love and wine and ironic takes on the hypocrisy of holy men.

His poetry is recited during Nowruz, the New Year, and other celebrations such as the winter solstice festival. "We start the year with the poems of Hafez," said Maryam Youssefi, a 46-year-old housewife, for advice on what "has in store for us". Fortune-tellers who interpret Hafez, can be found across Iran, but especially at his tomb, set amid rose gardens in Shiraz, 800 km south of Tehran. The tradition of Hafez bibliomancy – using his ancient wisdoms for divination and guidance – is known as Fal-e Hafez.

**'Ambiguous and multifaceted'**

Hafez lived during a turbulent era of Persia's history, and his contemplative verses often spoke of



Iranians visit the tomb of Persian mystic poet Hafez, in Shiraz, where he lived and died in the 14th century and composed his well known love poems or "ghazal", on May 12, 2024. — AFP photos

pain and human suffering as well as religious hypocrisy. His influences can be found far beyond Iran in the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among others.

Hafez has remained a venerated figure after the 1979 Islamic revolution, even if some senior clerics have voiced disapproval of the Fal-e Hafez tradition. In recent years, one criticized it as out of line with Islamic sharia law and urged people against "following Hafez's divinations".

Nonetheless, devotees keep flocking to Shiraz, and Hafez poetry reading sessions still draw large crowds, while the divination custom re-

mains alive and well. Many Iranians swear by it while others "practice the tradition without really believing in it," said Ahmad Akbarpour, a writer and poet from Shiraz.

Mostafa Eskandari, a 67-year-old fortune-teller, says he learned Hafez's poetry by heart and has been interpreting it for over 30 years. "Hafez's poems are ambiguous and multifaceted. They can be interpreted in different ways," he said. Yet the master of old speaks to everyone individually, said Eskandari. "If a thousand people each set an intention and open the book of odes together, each will receive a different response." — AFP



## Sports

# 11 swimmers in doping scandal named in China Olympic team

## Chinese swimmers tested positive for prescription heart drug trimetazidine (TMZ)

BEIJING: China will send 11 swimmers implicated in a major doping scandal to next month's Paris Olympics, after the country named its squad for the Games.

Twenty-three Chinese swimmers tested positive for the prescription heart drug trimetazidine (TMZ) - which can enhance performance - ahead of the pandemic-delayed 2021 Tokyo Games, it emerged in April.

They were not sanctioned after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) accepted the argument of Chinese authorities that the positive tests were caused by contaminated food. Several of the swimmers went on to win medals, including gold, in Tokyo months later.

China named its swimming squad for Paris on Tuesday. Among them were 11 of the 23 who were named in news reports in April that broke the story about the mass positive tests. The squad includes butterfly specialist Zhang Yufei, who won two golds in Japan, as well as another gold medalist in Wang Shun.

Breaststroke multiple world champion and 200m record-holder Qin Haiyang is another who was named in the reports and will go to Paris. In April, The New York Times and German broadcaster ARD reported that 23 Chinese swimmers tested positive for TMZ at a domestic

competition in late 2020 and early 2021.

It was determined by Chinese anti-doping authorities that they ingested the substance unwittingly from tainted food at their hotel and no action against them was warranted. WADA's decision not to punish the swimmers and allow them to carry on competing provoked intense criticism, particularly from the United States.

There was also anger at how the case emerged, via media reports rather than official channels. The head of the US national anti-doping agency Travis Tygart called it a "potential cover-up", an allegation WADA and China have strongly denied.

WADA has said it will send a compliance audit team to China to "assess the current state of the country's anti-doping programme", an investigation that China has said it will cooperate with. Asked Wednesday about when that compliance team might go to China, Beijing said only that it "consistently adhered to the firm stance of zero tolerance for doping".

China has "resolutely safeguarded the physical and mental health of athletes, safeguarded fair competition in sports competitions, and has made positive contributions to the unified global fight against doping", foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said.

### Scrutiny in Paris

This month The New York Times reported that Qin, Wang and another swimmer among the 23 had also tested positive for a different banned substance in separate cases years earlier. The Times said the three tested positive for clenbuterol in 2016 and 2017.

Chinese authorities argued they had ingested the substance inadvertently through contaminated meat and no disciplinary action was taken. WADA said the trio were found to have levels of clenbuterol which were between "six and 50 times lower" than the minimum reporting level currently used by the agency.

In a statement to AFP, China's anti-doping body hit back this week, calling the latest Times story a violation of "media ethics and morals". Along with powerhouses the United States and Australia, China will expect to be among the swimming medals when the Paris Olympics begin on July 26.

China's swimmers will however be under intense added scrutiny. Speaking on the eve of the US Olympic trials, which started Saturday, the 100m breaststroke world record-holder Lily King called the most recent revelations involving Chinese swimmers



HANGZHOU: (FILES) China's Zhang Yufei celebrates after winning the final of the women's 50m butterfly swimming event during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou. — AFP

"disappointing and frustrating". "You know, when we put everything on the line... everything that we do to compete with a level playing field, it's extremely frustrating to not have faith that others are doing the same thing," she said. Australia's head swimming

coach Rohan Taylor urged his team to focus on themselves.

"We have to trust that WADA and (governing body) World Aquatics are going to continue to investigate and that we are aligned with a clean sport," he said. — AFP



WASHINGTON: (FILES) US President Barack Obama presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom to baseball great Willie Mays at the White House in Washington, DC, on November 24, 2015. — AFP

## Baseball legend Willie Mays dies at 93: Family

SAN FRANCISCO: Baseball icon Willie Mays, one of the greatest players in the sport's history and beloved for his dazzling skill and athletic grace, died Tuesday aged 93, his family announced.

Mays' family confirmed the baseball icon's passing in a joint statement with his former team the San Francisco Giants. "My father has passed away peacefully and among loved ones," son Michael Mays said in the statement.

"I want to thank you all from the bottom of my broken heart for the unwavering love you have shown him over the years. You have been his life's blood," Giants chairman Greg Johnson said Mays, the first Black player to captain a Major League Baseball club, had left a mark which extended far beyond his sport.

"Today we have lost a true legend," Johnson said. "In the pantheon of baseball greats, Willie Mays' combination of tremendous talent, keen intellect, showmanship, and boundless joy set him apart. "He had a profound influence not only on the game of baseball, but on the fabric of America. He was an inspiration and a hero who will be forever remembered and deeply missed."

Major League Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred saluted center-fielder Mays as a star who inspired "generations of players and fans." "His incredible achievements and statistics do not begin to describe the awe that came with watching Willie Mays dominate the game in every way imaginable," Manfred said.

"On behalf of Major League Baseball, I extend my deepest condolences to Willie's family, his friends across our game, Giants fans everywhere, and his countless admirers across the world." Mays, affectionately known as the "Say Hey Kid", was born in Alabama in 1931, and first played baseball with the Birmingham Black Barons of the Negro American League in 1948.

He was subsequently signed by the Giants, then based in New York, in 1950, making his debut in the 1951 season where he dazzled with 20 home runs and won the Rookie of the Year award. Three years later he helped the Giants win the World Series, the franchise's last baseball title before they relocated to San Francisco.

It was during the 1954 World Series that Mays pulled off one of the most famous plays in baseball history, a jaw-dropping over-the-shoulder catch during a game one victory that came to be known simply as "The Catch."

That eighth inning showstopper against the Cleveland Indians kept the score knotted at 2-2 and the Giants would go on to win 5-2 in extra innings. Mays would later modestly play down his achievements, insisting he never kept an inventory of his many highlight reel-worthy catches and hits, preferring instead to concentrate on winning.

"I can't tell you about moments because I wasn't into that," he once told an interviewer. "I just played every day and enjoyed what I was doing. When I made a great catch it was just routine. I didn't worry about it. Winning was important. Winning." His philosophical approach to baseball was rooted in simplicity. — AFP

## 'Sacrifice, hard work' take Pooran past Gayle on T20 charts

GROS-ISLET: Nicholas Pooran on Tuesday insisted "sacrifice and hard work" have been key to him succeeding Chris Gayle as the West Indies leading T20 run-maker.

The 28-year-old Trinidadian passed the 2,000-run mark in the international game's shortest format when he clobbered Afghanistan for 98 in his team's 104-run victory in Monday's concluding group stage game of the World Cup.

For good measure, he also surpassed Gayle for most sixes by a West Indies batsman in T20 international cricket, taking his total to 128 to his former teammate's 124. "I'm just really happy that I can continue what he left. He obviously set the platform for us," said Pooran of Gayle.

"He's the definition of batting in T20 cricket. And I'm just really happy that I can continue to entertain people and take over where he has left." Until Monday, however, Pooran had struggled at this World Cup where pitches have tended to be slow and low.

In the first three group games, he made 17 against New Zealand, 22 in the clash with Uganda and 27 facing Papua New Guinea. The roller-coaster nature of his World Cup campaign has reflected large parts of his own career.

After playing at the 2014 Under-19 World Cup, a serious car accident sidelined him for a lengthy period. Pooran then featured in a head-spinning array of franchise events before he made his international mark at the 2019 50-over World Cup, hitting a majestic 118 in a win over Sri Lanka.

Later that year, he served a four-game ban for ball-tampering. In 2022, and with his rep-



GROS ISLET: West Indies' Nicholas Pooran plays a shot during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2024 group C cricket match between the West Indies and Afghanistan at Daren Sammy Cricket Ground in Gros Islet, St. Lucia. — AFP

utation restored, he was named captain of the T20 squad for the World Cup in Australia only to resign after the West Indies lost to Scotland and Ireland.

Two years on, Pooran will be crucial to the West Indies' hopes of a third T20 World Cup title as the 2024 edition enters the second round Super Eights stage. "It's a proud feeling. I've worked hard throughout my career," said Pooran.

"I've sacrificed a lot, so I want to be the best version of myself. What has happened now is only be-

cause of my hard work and belief in myself." He added: "I've worked extremely hard on my craft, batting on different positions and at the end of the day I'm a complete team guy. Whatever they require from me, I want to do it."

West Indies start their Super Eights campaign on Wednesday against defending champions England in Saint Lucia. They then tackle the United States in Barbados on Friday before facing South Africa in Antigua on Sunday. The final of the World Cup takes place at Barbados on June 29. — AFP

## Kuwait's Disabled Fencing team begin training in Cairo

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Disabled Fencing team arrived in Cairo, Egypt, to start a training camp that will continue until July 1, in preparation for the world fencing championship in Poland from July 2 until the 8th.

There will be 155 fencers from 45 countries competing in the foil, epee and sabre events, while Kuwait fencers will participate in the men and women's singles and men's doubles. Kuwait disabled team include Suleiman Al-Tamimi, Kholoud Al-Mutairi, Ayesha Al-Matar, Fahad Al-Bastaki, Fahad Al-Ansari and Salem Saleh.

Head of the delegation Saad Al-Ajmi said the Cairo camp will have intense training to be at their best adding "Kuwait team will present the best of levels in the world tournament which will see the best ranked world fencers, and hope the technical department led by coach Khalid Al-Sarraf will take the players to the top technical and physical readiness before the start of the tournament.

## New report warns of heat danger at Paris Olympics

PARIS: A new report backed by climate scientists and athletes warned Tuesday about the dangers posed by extreme high temperatures at this year's Paris Olympics. The "Rings of Fire" report - a collaboration between non-profit Climate Central, academics at Britain's University of Portsmouth and 11 Olympians - said conditions in Paris could be worse than the last Games in Tokyo in 2021.



Kuwait's Disabled Fencing team

It warned that "intense heat at the Paris Olympics in July-August 2024 could lead to competitors collapsing and in worst case scenarios dying during the Games." The study adds to a growing number of calls from sports people to adjust schedules and the timing of events to take into account the physical strain of competing in higher temperatures caused by global warming. "Rings of Fire" urges organizers of competitions typically held at the height of the northern hemisphere summer - such as the Olympics or the football World Cup - to re-think their scheduling. They should also provide improved rehydration and cooling plans for athletes and fans to avoid the risk of heat stroke, the study argued.

The Paris Olympics, which run from July 26-August 11, are set to take place in what are usually the warmest

months in the French capital which has been struck by a series of record heatwaves in recent years.

More than 5,000 people died in France as a result of searing summer heat last year when new local highs above 40 degrees Centigrade (104 Fahrenheit) were recorded around the country, according to public health data.

A study in the Lancet Planet Health journal last May found that Paris had the highest heat-related death rates of 854 European towns and cities, partly due to its lack of green space and dense population.

Rather than high temperatures, incessant rain is currently the bigger weather-related concern for Paris 2024 organizers, with regular downpours in May and June leading to unusually strong currents in the river Seine and poor water quality. — AFP

Sports

# Southgate faces Foden dilemma ahead of England's Euro clash with Danes

## Foden never looked comfortable with England's Three Lions on his chest

FRANKFURT: Gareth Southgate must solve his Phil Foden conundrum as the England playmaker struggles to reproduce his brilliant Manchester City form at international level. While England can book their place in the last 16 of Euro 2024 by beating Denmark in Frankfurt on Thursday, Foden's latest underwhelming display for his country has sparked a debate about Southgate's use of such a sublime talent.

Foden laboured to make any impact on England's nervy 1-0 win against Serbia in their Group C opener in Gelsenkirchen on Sunday. The 24-year-old was voted the Premier League's Player of the Year after playing a key role in City's fourth successive title triumph with 19 goals and eight assists.

Yet, in stark contrast to his excellence in a City shirt, Foden has never looked comfortable with England's Three Lions on his chest. He struggled during England's run to the Euro 2020 final, making subdued starts in the first two games and playing for only a further 25 minutes before missing the final defeat against Italy due to injury.

Following another inconsistent contribution at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, Foden has scored only once in his last 13 internationals. Southgate's decision to

play Jude Bellingham as England's number 10 and use Bukayo Saka on the right flank shunted Foden out to the left wing against Serbia.

Not for the first time, Foden seemed lost on that side of the three attacking midfield spots behind England striker Harry Kane. At City, Pep Guardiola is completely comfortable with using Foden as the number 10, while he also operates on the right wing at times.

Guardiola has allowed Foden to dictate the champions' tempo and he has thrived more than ever this season after taking on an influential role in the absence of the injured Kevin De Bruyne. But against Serbia there were few signs of the skill, deft passing and clinical finishing makes the 'Stockport Iniesta'—named after former Barcelona and Spain legend Andres Iniesta—such a favourite of City fans.

### 'Not his game'

Former Manchester City and England defender Micah Richards questioned whether Southgate is deploying Foden in the correct role. "When you have an extreme talent like Phil Foden, his best work has been in the middle of the pitch," Richards said.

"Sometimes when he is on the left-hand side, you put him in a position where

he needs to dribble past his opponent, that's not his game." One solution would be to switch Bellingham back into central midfield alongside Declan Rice in place of Trent Alexander-Arnold, whose move from right-back was hardly a resounding success in the Serbia game.

That would give Foden a chance to take centre stage as the number 10, with either Chelsea's Cole Palmer or Newcastle's Anthony Gordon featuring on the left. Rio Ferdinand, the ex-Manchester United and England centre-back, is concerned Bellingham—fresh from a superb first season with Real Madrid—might be demanding the ball too often, therefore diminishing Foden's chances of impacting the game.

"Jude Bellingham has come into this team and his body language has said to everyone 'give me the ball or I will go nuts'," Ferdinand told the BBC. "Phil Foden has seen that and his personality is not like that, and he is allowing someone else to come in and be the dominant figure in this team."

Foden has only four goals in 35 games for England and former Spain midfielder Cesc Fabregas urged him to take responsibility for his international malaise. "It's about if you want the ball enough to make the difference. Do you enjoy getting the



PARIS: (COMBO) This combination of pictures show Denmark's head coach Kasper Hjulmand (L) looking on ahead of the UEFA Euro 2024 Group C football match between Slovenia and Denmark, and England's head coach Gareth Southgate arriving for the UEFA Euro 2024 Group C football match between Serbia and England. — AFP

ball under pressure?" Fabregas said. "In the second half when they started to get pressed a little bit more, we started to see Foden hitting the ball 40 yards

without looking. You will never see Xavi or Andres Iniesta do that. "You need to take responsibility. I think players like Foden need to step up." — AFP



KSSC shooters Iman Al-Shamaa (left) and Abdullah Al-Rashidi

## Kuwait wins silver in ISSF Shooting World Cup, Italy

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club (KSSC) Duaj Al-Otaibi on Wednesday said Kuwaiti national team shooters, Abdullah Al-Rashidi and Iman Al-Shamaa won silver medals in International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) held in Italy.

Al-Otaibi added in a statement to Kuwait News

Agency (KUNA) the Kuwaiti shooters Al-Shamaa and Al-Rashidi won the silver medals, after they came in second place behind the United States team duo, Joel Smith and Vincent Hancock, who won gold and ahead of the Swedish team shooter. He praised Kuwaiti shooters Al-Shamaa and Al-Rashidi efforts in the tournament; in addition KSSC club is preparing the Kuwaiti shooters who will qualify for the next Olympic Games (Paris 2024). The continuation of Kuwaiti shooting victories is a result of the high patronage of the country's political leadership and the support of the General Sports Authority, pledging to intensify work to achieve more achievements for Kuwaiti sports in the upcoming sporting events. — KUNA

## Murray wins Queen's opener in 1,000th match of career

LONDON: Andy Murray started what is likely to be his Queen's farewell on Tuesday by beating Alexei Popyrin as defending champion Carlos Alcaraz made a winning return following his French Open triumph.

Murray, 37, a record five-time champion at the London grass-court tournament, outlasted the 48th-ranked Australian 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in the 1,000th Tour-level match of his career. The British former world number one dropped the second set and appeared to be struggling physically, grimacing after every serve.

But he hit back in the third, a vintage cross-court winner and fist pump lifting the vocal crowd as he brought up break point before dispatching it with a clinical backhand on his way to victory in one hour and 51 minutes.

Murray, set to retire either after Wimbledon or the Olympics, said: "I've not got too many wins this year, it's been a difficult season, and I did well to come through in the end. "Any win you can get is important, that's why we play. With Wimbledon a few weeks away I want to get some matches in my legs and some confidence. It's great to get another win here."

The three-time Grand Slam champion, who competes with a metal hip, has struggled with an ankle injury and a back issue this year. The Scot, who has plummeted to 129th in the rankings, said: "I've felt better, but it was enough today.

"My mum told me it was my 1,000th match and that's a lot of matches, a lot of wear and tear on the body and it's not easy, but I managed to push through it." Spain's Alcaraz, who lifted his third Grand Slam at



LONDON: Britain's Andy Murray returns against Australia's Alexei Popyrin during their men's singles round of 32 match at the Cinch ATP tennis Championships at Queen's Club in west London. — AFP

the French Open earlier this month, was not at his best but recovered from a mid-match dip to triumph.

The top seed committed just one unforced error in the first set to take a grip on the contest but his level dipped at the start of the second set and he trailed 2-5. From there he battled back impressively, saving three set points on serve at 4-5 before sealing victory to extend his winning streak on grass to 13 matches. The world number two, who followed up last year's victory at Queen's by winning his first Wimbledon, will next face Stuttgart champion Jack Draper, who was a comfortable 6-3, 6-2 winner against Argentine Mariano Navone in less than an hour.

"The first match in any tournament is never easy but even more difficult here on grass, starting the grass season," said Alcaraz, 21. He added: "It is good to have tough situations, having to deal with nerves." Earlier, Lorenzo Musetti upset Australian second seed Alex de Minaur 1-6, 6-4, 6-2. — AFP

## Messi takes center stage again for Copa America

ATLANTA: World champions Argentina get an expanded Copa America under way on Thursday with Lionel Messi looking to add a second continental title in what is almost certainly his final appearance in the tournament.

The 108-year-old competition is being held in the United States with the host nation among six teams from the CONCACAF region joining the 10 South American nations looking for a place in the July 14 final in Miami.

While FIFA will be looking closely at the organization of the event, two years out from the World Cup which will be co-hosted by the USA, Canada and Mexico, the tournament's rich history and prestige means it is much, much more than a 'trial event'.

Argentina have won the Copa 15 times but only once, in 2021, during the Messi era and coach Lionel Scaloni has stuck largely with his World Cup-winning squad, with veterans Angel Di Maria and Nicolas Otamendi likely taking their final bow in a major tournament.

Whether this is Messi's goodbye to elite international football remains to be seen—the eight-times Ballon d'Or winner, now playing in Major League Soccer with Inter Miami, will turn 37 four days after Thursday's opener in Atlanta against Canada and has yet to decide whether he will try to play in a record sixth World Cup.

"It's great to have records and continue to achieve things but I won't take part in a World Cup just to say I've done six," Messi told ESPN last week. "If I feel good and everything is in place for me to be there, fine, but I won't go just to go. It's very difficult to imagine what can happen because it's still two years away. I don't need to commit right now to whether or not I'll be there," he added.

What is certain is that Messi, who has managed his workload to try to be in peak condition for the tournament, would relish the chance to win a third straight major tournament with his country after so many years of frustration with his national team.

### Tough opposition

After facing Canada, Argentina take on Chile in New Jersey before finishing their group A action against Peru in Miami but they know that tough opposition awaits in the knock-out stage with rivals Brazil and Uruguay the



BUENOS AIRES: (FILES) Argentina's Lionel Messi (L) greets Uruguay's Luis Suarez before the start of the South American qualification football match for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, at the Monumental stadium in Buenos Aires. — AFP

two expected challengers for the title. Brazil have struggled in CONMEBOL qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup having won just two of their opening six games and they currently sit in sixth place in the standings having lost to Uruguay, Colombia and Argentina.

There are several familiar names missing from Dorival Junior's Brazil squad with Casemiro, Gabriel Jesus and Thiago Silva left out while Richarlison and Neymar are both missing due to injury. The pressure will be on the Real Madrid attacking pair of Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo to translate their club form into success for the Selecao while there is much excitement around the senior tournament debut of 17-year-old talent Endrick, who is set to join Real next month from Palmeiras.

Uruguay, also 15-times winners, have impressed under their 68-year-old Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa, who has brought his trademark high-energy style to the team and raised expectations with recent wins over Argentina and Brazil.

Liverpool forward Darwin Nunez will lead the line although Bielsa has the option of introducing veteran Luis Suarez from the bench. Colombia head into the tournament without a loss in over two years and with Liverpool's livewire winger Luis Diaz a constant threat and James Rodriguez enjoying a late career revival, Nestor Lorenzo's team can't be discounted.

The USA will hope that they can generate some sorely needed excitement after losing their way since a creditable run to the last-16 at the World Cup. Coach Gregg Berhalter is under some pressure to show he can get his team, which relies on the smart wing play of Christian Pulisic, to compete with teams from outside of CONCACAF. — AFP

## Ruiz ready to play starring role for Spain against Italy

GELSENKIRCHEN: Spain are hoping the "exceptional" Fabian Ruiz can again be the difference-maker when they look to build on an impressive win against Croatia in their second Euro 2024 outing against Italy on Thursday.

The meeting between the reigning European champions and the three-time winners of the competition in Gelsenkirchen is the standout tie of the opening round at the tournament. Top spot in Group B, and a theoretically easier last-16 draw, is at stake as the two sides aim to build on victories in their opening matches.

Italy came from behind to beat Albania, while Ruiz was outstanding as Spain thumped 2022 World Cup semi-finalists Croatia 3-0. Paris Saint-Germain playmaker Ruiz, 28, set up the opener for Alvaro Morata and scored himself with a classy finish as he outshone all those around him, including Croatia captain Luka Modric.

That game confirmed the importance to Luis de la Fuente's Spain team of a player who was not taken to the last World Cup by former coach Luis Enrique. "What can I tell you about Fabian Ruiz? He's an exceptional player, he's at the top level. If he wasn't called Fabian you would be talking a lot more about him," said De la Fuente.

"Based on what we've seen from him on a daily basis he's fantastic and has brilliant technique, we know what he brings to the team. "We should recognise the quality that he has. He has real imagination."

### Back in from the cold

De la Fuente's relationship with Ruiz goes back to when he was coach of Spain's Under-21 team—Ruiz was the star player when they won the Under-21 Euros in

2019. It was around that time that the former Betis man broke into the full Spain squad, and he featured in Luis Enrique's team at the last Euros, when they went out to Italy in the semi-finals.

Yet he was not a starter, and Luis Enrique did not pick him again, meaning he was out in the cold by the time the 2022 World Cup came around. But Spain's exit in the last 16 to Morocco led to Luis Enrique departing and De la Fuente taking over, and the new coach quickly recalled Ruiz.

"I've been with him since he was very young and his pathway at club and international level has been incredible," said De la Fuente. "He's the embodiment of the players that have been working hard in the shadows and maybe the media circus is not around him."

It is true that Rodri, widely considered as the world's best holding midfielder, gets more attention in the Spain team. But Ruiz is a supremely gifted player in his prime, and a key part of a side that is now more direct than under Luis Enrique, when their game was primarily centred on controlling possession.

Ironically Ruiz has flourished this season under Luis Enrique, now his coach at PSG. He joined PSG from Napoli in 2022 but has only really settled in France since his compatriot became coach last year. Ruiz ended the season at PSG by scoring the winner in the French Cup final against Lyon.

He was on target again in Spain's last pre-Euros friendly against Northern Ireland, before once more finding the net against Croatia. "It's important to start with a win in the tournament, especially against a strong Croatia team," Ruiz said after that game.

Next come Italy, as the nations meet at a fifth consecutive European Championship. Ruiz comes from the same tomato-producing town near Seville as 2010 World Cup-winner Jesus Navas and Barcelona starlet Gavi.

Having emerged at Betis, he moved to Italy with Napoli in 2018 and spent four seasons in Serie A. There he played under Carlo Ancelotti and Gennaro Gattuso as well as Luciano Spalletti, who will be on the Italy bench on Thursday. — AFP



LEIPZIG: Portugal's forward #07 Cristiano Ronaldo (R) crosses the ball during the UEFA Euro 2024 Group F football match between Portugal and the Czech Republic at the Leipzig Stadium in Leipzig. — AFP

## Ronaldo's Portugal scrape Euro 2024 opening win, Turkey beat Georgia

Pepe became the tournament's oldest ever player for the Selecao

LEIPZIG: Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal beat the Czech Republic 2-1 to claim a Euro 2024 debut victory on Tuesday but they needed to come from behind with a 92nd-minute winner from youngster Francisco Conceicao.

Earlier in the section's other clash, Turkey bested Georgia 3-1 in a pulsating match in Dortmund. Roberto Martinez's Portugal qualified at a canter with a 100 percent record, but only just scraped victory in Leipzig in their first match, under driving rain.

Ronaldo played at a record-extending sixth European Championship and 41-year-old defender Pepe became the tournament's oldest ever player for the Selecao. The Czechs went ahead against the run of play through Lukas Provd's fine strike from the edge of the box after the hour mark, but Robin Hranac's own goal soon pulled Portugal level before Conceicao's winner.

"We want to do more, but there was also a lot of emotion, a lot of desire and sometimes we failed to pull off the strategic plan," said Portugal midfielder Vitorinha, awarded player of the match. "We wanted to come out strong, show our strength and unfortunately we conceded the goal first, on the Czech Republic's first opportunity. "We showed all our coolness and resilience."

Portugal supporters chanted Ronaldo's name and imitated his "Suuuui" celebration shout as they marched to the game waving flags and in high spirits despite a brief but intense thunderstorm. Around 8,000

fans attended Portugal's open training session on Saturday, many of whom were just hoping for a glimpse of the 39-year-old former Real Madrid striker.

Thousands of fans sported replica Ronaldo shirts at the match but were unable to watch the all-time record Euros goalscorer find the net on a frustrating night against a solid Czech side. Ronaldo was thrice denied by goalkeeper Jindrich Stanek on a record Euros appearance and headed against the post, but was offside.

Diogo Jota put the rebound into the net but the goal was disallowed after VAR highlighted Al Nassr striker Ronaldo's infringement. It did not matter for Portugal in the end as 21-year-old Porto winger Conceicao, son of former Portugal international Sergio Conceicao, struck from close range.

"Francisco is the ultimate example of earning it, he deserves to be here and showed he is ready to help the group," Martinez told reporters. The former Wigan and Everton coach defended his team's performance.

"Today we won, because the group is united, it's a very resilient group, we became resilient over the past few days," he said. "After conceding it would have been very easy to blame each other but we didn't do that. We were a team." The Czechs were left agonising after battling so hard and almost claiming a point. "It hurts terribly when you work like this for 90 minutes, you give everything and you lose in the end," said Czech goal-

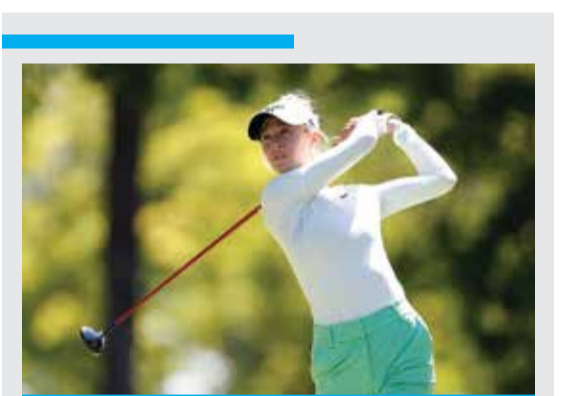
scorer Provd. "Our defenders played an incredible game. We just needed a bit more luck."

### Turkey turn-out

A well-supported Turkey started the Euros in entertaining fashion with an end-to-end win over debutants Georgia. Real Madrid playmaker Arda Guler scored a brilliant goal, along with strikes by Mert Muldur and Kerem Akturkoglu, to delight the masses of Turkish supporters.

Georgia were dangerous after Georges Mikautadze levelled Muldur's superbly hit opener, and struck the woodwork. Napoli star Khvicha Kvaratskhelia was below his best but despite defeat his team offered enough to give themselves hope for the matches ahead, against the Czech Republic and then Portugal.

"It was a match worthy of the Euros, we had great support even in difficult moments. This win is also for them and the party that they'll have," Turkey coach Vincenzo Montella told reporters. "It's my 50th birthday today so it was perfect day of sport and the victory was the best present that the boys could have given me." Hosts Germany are back in action on Wednesday as the second round of group matches commences, facing Hungary in Stuttgart. Scotland are chasing their first victory at a major tournament since 1996 as they take on Switzerland in the other Group A match, while in Group B Croatia play Albania. — AFP



GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN: Nelly Korda of the United States plays her shot from the sixth tee during the second round of the Meijer LPGA Classic for Simply Give at Blythefield Country Club. — AFP

## Korda unfazed by dip ahead of Women PGA Championship

LOS ANGELES: World number one Nelly Korda has shrugged off her recent dip in form as she chases the third major title of her career at this week's Women's PGA Championship in Washington state. Korda arrived in the Pacific Northwest after back-to-back missed cuts at the US Women's Open and last week's LPGA Meijer Classic, a sharp contrast to her blistering early season run of six tournament wins in seven starts.

But the 25-year-old is worlds away from hitting the panic button as she prepares to tackle the tight fairways of Sahalee Country Club in Sammamish, where accuracy is paramount.

Korda instead prefers to focus on the positive aspects of her recent struggles, maintaining that the occasional trough is inevitable.

"You can dwell on the negatives, but that will never lead you anywhere, so you try to look at the positives," Korda said. "That's golf. I'm going to go through these situations so many times where I feel like I'm playing really well, and I'll go through a little lull where golf is the hardest thing in my life right now. "I feel like that's what grows myself as a person and what makes me appreciate the sport so much and makes me appreciate the wins and the highs and good shots."

While accuracy off the tee at Sahalee is critical, Korda says she has no plans to rein in her signature, big-hitting style as she tackles the demanding 6,731-yard, par-72 layout. "Still going to be aggressive," she said. "There's a couple holes where I can't hit driver, but majority of the round I will be hitting driver just because you don't want a longer club into these greens."

"If you have the length you may as well—you have to hit it. This is the type of golf course where you just got to sack up and hit your driver."

Korda is also not prone to "analysis-paralysis" as she plots her way around this week's championship course. Instead she intends to play it as she sees it. "You can write as many things into your yardage book and you can pick a game plan that you want to execute, but typically it doesn't happen that way and you just got to adapt," she said. — AFP



Alex Qabazard with his team.



## BNK Motion's Qabazard shines in Aprilia RS660 championship

MISANO: Aprilia BNK Motion athlete Alex Qabazard recently participated in the RS660 Trofeo CIV Italian Championship Round 2 from June 14-16. Qabazard is the first Kuwaiti athlete to participate in the top-tier world tournament, in which Aprilia Kuwait is making its debut this year.

"This was a big round for me as it was the World Championship round at Misano Race circuit. With only 2 practice sessions and not knowing the track well I showed them I belong on the top as these riders. Previous championship riders know the tracks well. I got lap two times as high as 8th position even though I started p18 because of a red flag in qualifying as I didn't have time to set a good lap record."

"In the race I fought myself up to p12 lap 2, then went wide in lap 3 and lost positions to p16. I lost the front tire on last corner of 16th lap because the heat on the left side of my tire was dropping too much, which is quite normal in Mi-

sano as there is too many right turns so a lot of racers struggle with the left turns and I wasn't the only one who went out on turn 16 due to the tire temperature dropping on the left side of the tire. However, the team and riders of the championship was very impressed with my performance as it was my first time in Misano. They said I could easily fight for the top 3 with more time on this track as I had the pace with so little time as top 8. Every lap I went out I dropped tenths of seconds of my lap time as I got familiar with the track during the race weekend and short practice as we had," said Alex Qabazard.