

# The Egyptian Gazette

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## Positive forecast for growth of national economy

Gazette staff

**MINISTER** of Finance Mohamed Maet described yesterday as 'positive' a recent decision by international credit rating agency, Moody's, to keep Egypt's credit rating as is, despite the complex external shocks facing the global economy and emerging countries.

The decision, the minister said, reassures continued confidence by international institutions in the resilience and solidity of the Egyptian economy.

"This comes in the light of the economic and financial policies and reforms implemented during the past years," Minister Maet said.

He pointed out that Moody's report and evaluation include a commendation of the effectiveness of the policies implemented and the measures taken by the Egyptian government.

The report and the evaluation, the minister added, also commended the ability of the government to deal with crises in general, and the current crisis, in particular, in an effective manner.

Moody's kept Egypt's credit rating at B2.

It said its decision in this regard boiled down to the proven track record



Minister of Finance, Mohamed Maet

of the effectiveness of the policies implemented by the government.

Moody's also said that it would closely follow up economic conditions in Egypt in the coming months to take a decision regarding the sovereign assessment of the Arab country, with the possibility of adjusting the future outlook of the Egyptian economy to a 'stable' one with a positive improvement in economic and financial conditions in Egypt.

Minister Maet cited this as a goal the Egyptian government is working to achieve in the coming period.

He said three major international credit rating agencies had fixed Egypt's credit rating in April and May.

This, he said, came less than a month after a severe and extremely difficult global crisis that cast a shadow on all countries.

He said these decisions confirm large-

ly and impartially the strength and solidity of the Egyptian economy.

"This comes in the light of continued improvements in most economic and financial indicators," the minister of finance said.

He revealed that the national economy grew by 7.8% between July 2021 and March 2022.

He expected the growth rate to reach 6.2% during the entire 2021/2022 fiscal year.

He said the unemployment rate dropped to 7.2% in March this year, the lowest in many years.

"The state budget will also keep achieving a strong and large primary surplus that is expected to be in the range of 1.2%," Minister Maet said.

He added that the budget deficit for the current fiscal year has already decreased to about 6.2%.

"This reflects continued improvements in the indicators of public finance and the budget, despite all the external challenges and shocks that the Egyptian economy has been exposed to," the minister said.

He said the government hopes to attract \$10 billion in foreign direct investments annually during the next four years.



## Gold eases locally despite global gains

Ahmed Kamel

**DESPITE** its global gains, gold stabilised on the local market yesterday. The precious metal's prices have been unchanged since Monday, according to market data.

The price of 21k gold stood at LE1,105 (around \$59.7) per gram. The prices of 24k and 18k gold firmed at LE1,190 LE930 per gram, respectively, according to market data.

The price of 24k gold has declined by around LE120 over the past 10 days, according to market data.

Globally, gold prices firmed around \$1,854.05 per ounce yesterday. Earlier this month, prices of the precious metal shot up on the local market in the wake of the bullion's gains worldwide.

The household sector considers gold as a haven from inflationary pressures, stoking demand for bullion at times of economic turmoil. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has triggered a supply crisis worldwide, unleashing waves of price hikes since February.

There are high seasons for gold in Egypt, where demand usually picks up. These high seasons include the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, *Eid al-Fitr* (the feast that marks the end of Ramadan), *Eid al-Adha*, Mother's Day (marked on March 21), New Year and Coptic Christmas (marked on January 7).

The bullion may gain more ground if a wave of slump hits the global economy as it is deemed to be a traditional store of wealth. Fed policy is expected to be the decisive factor going forward.

The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) is scheduled to meet on June 13-14. The FOMC might raise rates five times this year as the US economy expands, strengthening the greenback and boosting equities worldwide.

The FOMC will meet four more times this year in July, September, November and December.

The Committee raised rates by 0.5 per cent in early May. Fed Chair Jerome Powell has said that the benchmark interest rate would be lifted further this year, citing spiraling inflation.

Global gold demand (excluding OTC) increased by 34 per cent, year-on-year, to 1,234 tons in the first quarter (Q1), data from the World Gold Council (WGC) showed.

Central banks added 84 tons to global official gold reserves in 2022 Q1, according to WGC data. Egypt was the biggest buyer in Q1, reporting a 44 ton (+54 per cent) increase in its gold reserves in February, according to WGC data.

"We see a continuation of net central banks' buying in 2022, albeit at a lower level than in 2021," a WGC report said in April.

The universal advice for investors is to diversify their portfolios. Real estate, bank certificates of deposit (CDs) and gold remain the safest investment channels for individuals to combat the depreciation value of money.

The country's two state-owned lenders National Bank of Egypt and Banque Misr issued CDs in the Egyptian pound at 18 per cent in March.

## Global equity funds see first inflows in 7 weeks

**NEW YORK** (News Wires) – Global equity funds saw money inflows in the week to May 25 as some investors took heart from a rebound in markets this week, after sharp declines in stock markets in the previous seven weeks.

According to Refinitiv Lipper, investors bought a net \$6.16 billion worth of global equity funds, marking their first weekly net buying since April 6.

The MSCI all country world index has gained over 3% this week, after slumping about 12.7% in the last seven weeks on worries that aggressive rate increases to tame inflation could send the global economy into a tailspin.

The big inflows into global equity funds were also due to the creation of new shares in the equity exchange-traded funds (ETF), Jefferies said in a note.

The data showed equity ETFs saw inflows worth \$15.76 billion in the week, the highest in nine weeks.

## Egyptian delegation visits DRC

Gazette staff

**A** MINISTRY of Irrigation delegation visited the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) yesterday to explore means of transferring Egyptian expertise in integrated water-management and the application of modern irrigation systems with Congolese officials.

The visit of the delegation came within the framework of directives by Minister Mohamed Abdel Aati for maintaining co-operation with the DRC in the fields of irrigation and water resources, the Ministry of Irrigation said in a statement yesterday.

It referred to a protocol for technical co-operation in water resources that was signed by both Egypt and the DRC for five years as of this year.

The protocol, the ministry said, was signed under the umbrella of the Integrated Water Resources Management project.

It noted that the project includes multiple development activities by the two states.

"The project will be implemented



MEMBERS of the Egyptian delegation with a Congolese official during their visit to Kinshasa yesterday.

through an Egyptian grant that will seek to maximise the use of water resources and build and develop technical cadres to manage these resources," the ministry said.

It added that yesterday's visit by the Ministry of Irrigation delegation aimed at giving the go-ahead signal for implementing the first phase of one component of the co-operation protocol, namely of the exchange of expertise.

The ministry noted that Egypt imple-

mented several development projects in the DRC, within the framework of the aforementioned co-operation protocol.

These projects, it said, included the construction of a centre for the forecast of rain and climate change in Congolese capital Kinshasa.

"The projects also included the establishment of a multi-purpose hydroelectric power station and the drilling of 12 underground wells that are powered by solar energy.

## Textile Council holds 1st meeting after reformulation

Gazette staff

**MINISTER** of Trade and Industry Nevine Gamea headed yesterday the first meeting of the Textile Industries Council after its reformulation.

The meeting reviewed plans for the development of the cotton farming system and upgrading the spinning, weaving and ready-made garments industry.

Minister Gamea highlighted the presence of strong interest on the part of Egypt's political leadership and the government in upgrading the spinning, weaving and ready-made garments industry to meet the needs of the local market and raise exports to foreign markets.

"We will be taking advantage of the

great agricultural and industrial components of the national economy in this regard," Minister Gamea said.

She added that in doing this, Egypt would capitalise on the good reputation and distinguished position of its cotton in all global markets.

Minister Gamea noted that the new council contains representatives of all the parties involved in and concerned with the development of the spinning, weaving and ready-made garments industry in Egypt.

The council, she said, aims to develop a comprehensive vision for the advancement of this vital sector.

She pointed out that Egypt works to expand all stages of production, from the cultivation of Egyptian cotton to the making of the final products.

## Rouble extends losses after rates slashed

**LONDON** (News Wires) – The Russian rouble extended its losses yesterday after plunging the previous session as the central bank slashed interest rates, signalling more cuts to come, and the prospect of easing capital controls and a possible sovereign default hammered the currency.

The rouble slumped around 10% to the dollar and euro on Thursday as the central bank cut its key rate to 11%, the third 300-basis-point cut in a row, as inflation slows from more than 20-year highs.

The rouble was 2.1% weaker against the dollar at 66.63, a more than two-week low. On Wednesday, the rouble had hit its strongest level since February 2018 of 55.80 against the greenback.

Versus the euro, the rouble lost 4.4% to trade at 70.99, tumbling further away from the seven-year high of 57.10 hit on Wednesday.

Propped up by capital controls, the



**A FILE** photo of Russian rouble banknotes of various denominations on a table in Warsaw, Poland.

rouble had artificially risen to become the world's best-performing currency so far this year. New gas payment terms requiring conversion of foreign cur-

cy into roubles and a fall in imports have also helped.

But it has now lost the support of the month-end tax period that usually sees

export-focused companies convert foreign currency into roubles to pay local liabilities.

Economy Minister Maxim Reshetnikov on Thursday said the currency's strength, which has raised concerns about the negative impact on Russia's budget revenue from exports, was making Russian goods uncompetitive abroad.

He expects the mandatory proportion of foreign currency revenue that exporters must convert into roubles to be cut further from 50%.

Market eyes are focused on Russia's National Settlement Depository (NSD), which has promised to make interest payments yesterday worth \$71.25 million and 26.5 million euros (\$28.5 million) on two Eurobonds.

That is in spite of Washington deciding against extending a key licence that had allowed Moscow to keep paying bondholders despite the sanctions imposed over its actions in Ukraine.

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# Makram: President pays great attention to backing national industry

Gazette staff

**MINISTER** of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs Nabila Makram asserted that President Abdel Fattah El Sisi is paying great attention to supporting and strengthening national industry, depending more on local products and enhancing self-reliance.

The State is further backing the private sector to play its role in developing the economy in the coming period, Makram told the official Middle East News Agency (MENA) yesterday in remarks on the occasion of "Egypt Can With Industry" conference, set to take place on Tuesday and Wednesday.

She said that this edition will convene at a very important timing amid global economic changes.

She underscored the necessity of searching for alternative solutions and backing the State's strategy for strengthening and deepening the national in-



dustry, in addition to transferring IT and working with foreign companies that have business in Egypt in different fields in order to reduce imports.

Makram said the political leadership is always keen on offering opportuni-

ties for several global companies to invest in Egypt, which, she added is mainly contributing to providing more job opportunities and luring further investments to the Egyptian market.

Highlighting the recent legisla-

tive and economic reforms in Egypt, Makram stressed the need to capitalise on the national industrial investment roadmap.

Makram said the government is supporting the national industry through offering a package of incentives to foster the various manufacturing sectors and expand the industrial base as well as adopting initiatives for backing local products and stimulating exports.

All such initiatives contribute to increasing sales of Egyptian products and growth rates of various industrial activities, according to her.

Industry is capable of leading progress in several national economic and strategic fields; particularly that Egypt has great potentials and many elements of success including skilful workers, plenty of raw materials, in addition to a good infrastructure that is getting stronger by development projects launched by President Sisi in the past few years.



**MINISTER** of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities Assem el-Gazzar (R) during his meeting yesterday with Omani Ambassador in Cairo Abdullah bin Nasser Al-Rahbi.

## Cairo, Muscat eye more closer co-operation

**MINISTER** of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities Assem el-Gazzar met yesterday with Omani Ambassador in Cairo Abdullah bin Nasser Al-Rahbi, and undersecretary of Oman's Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning Hamad bin Ali Al-Nazwani.

During the meeting, Minister Gazzar expounded Egypt's urban development experiment under the guidance of President Abdel Fattah El Sisi.

Egypt has witnessed unprecedented urban development activities in various fields, as part of the country's national strategic plan for urban development "Egypt 2052".

The plan aims at increasing Egypt's inhabited lands to 14-7 per cent to support economic and social development and to cater to the needs of a growing population, el-Gazzar said.

For his side, Al-Rahbi praised Egypt's ambitious urban development plan, saying that Egyptians now, like their ancestors of pyramid builders, are rushing to build the new Egypt.

Al-Nazwani also hailed the national development projects, especially those concerning the development of the unsafe slums and the construction of social housing projects.

## 'We Are All One' initiative extended to Eid el-Adha

**THE** Interior Ministry announced yesterday that it would extend the 22nd phase of 'Kolena Wahed' (We are All One) initiative till Eid el-Adha.

The initiative aims to provide several food commodities to citizens with high quality and low prices.

Goods are available at the initiative's outlets nationwide with a discount ranging between 25 per cent to 60 per cent.

As per directives from President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, the Ministry of Interior launched the initiative on June 30, 2018, in collaboration with major retail chains across the country.

The initiative's main purpose is to control price hikes, end monopoly and regulate local markets so as to mitigate burdens in favour of citizens.

## Gov't working with OECD to upgrade environmental sector

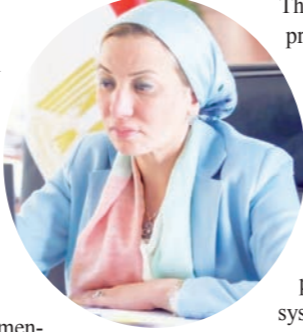
Gazette staff

**MINISTER** of Environment Yasmine Fouad held a virtual meeting yesterday with Acting Environment Director of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Alain de Serres.

During the meeting, Minister Fouad discussed mechanisms of boosting bilateral co-operation in the field of the Environmental Impact Assessment Review (EIA Review).

The minister stressed the importance of environmental reviews in setting clear goals and helping to adjust the course to achieve the best results.

She also reviewed some of the features of Egypt's green transformation, starting with working to change the language of dialogue on the environment and climate in the last five years, to turn it from combating sources of pollution and reducing pollution rates, to work on creating links between the environment and the economy, in line with President Abdel Fattah El Sisi's directives that led to a structural reform of the environment sector.



The minister further underlined efforts to involve the private sector in the environmental work as one of the mechanisms to build a supportive climate in the field of waste management.

She cited the issuance of the first Waste Management Law in Egypt, saying the law is based on the principle of the "circular economy".

It is a framework of three principles, driven by design: eliminate waste and pollution, keep products and materials in use and regenerate natural systems.

She also shed light on the launch of the National Climate Change Strategy 2050 (NCCS 2050), which is an integrated strategy that targets achieving sustainable economic development and decreasing harmful emissions.

At the end of the meeting, they agreed on continuing discussions on the best forms of co-operation, particularly in light of Egypt's preparations for hosting the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP27) to the UNFCCC, to be held in Sharm el-Sheikh this November.

## Egypt, Equatorial Guinea keen to boost tourism, trade ties

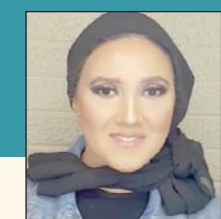
**PRIME** Minister of Equatorial Guinea Francisco Pascual Obama Asue asserted his government's keenness on benefiting from the Egyptian experiment in light of the distinguished political ties between the two countries.

This came during his meeting yesterday with Egypt's Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea Haddad Abdel Tawab el-Gohary, in presence of the Secretary General of the Guinean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Foreign Ministry said on its Facebook Page yesterday.

The Guinean prime minister lauded

progress made so far in co-operation between Egypt and Equatorial Guinea, citing the scholarships and training courses provided by the Egyptian Agency of Partnership for Development (EAPD) to trainees from Equatorial Guinea in various fields.

He said his country is looking forward to enhancing co-operation with Egypt in the agricultural and tourism domains in the coming period, inviting Egyptian companies to organise trade fairs in Equatorial Guinea to promote various Egyptian products there.



Meet An Entrepreneur  
**Nayrouz Talaat**

## From corporate life to handicrafts and exports

*When Mona Sayed found that working in finance and accounting in multinational companies was not what she wanted, she started her own company in 2016 to preserve heritage crafts all over Egypt. Sayed has much to say about the business concept of 'Trade fair' and the challenges that came with it.*

Our value proposition is that we work with craftsmen all the time for the sake of sustainability. We help them sell their products and to develop them to cope with current demand. Our main revenue is from sales, which we plan to increase through competitive pricing.

**EG:** Why did you start?  
What's the passion that drives you?

**Mona Sayed:** I was unhappy working in multinational companies and starting a heritage crafts company has been one of my life goals. So I thought putting my experience to work to achieve something that creates an impact on craftsmen and preserves our heritage.

**EG:** What's your background?

**MS:** Business administration from Helwan University. I majored in foreign trade.

**EG:** What are the issues that you are solving and what's your value proposition?

**MS:** When I started doing my market research, I found that craftspeople were totally lacking in the basics of how to sell their products. Many of them were marginalised as most of the heritage crafts are in governorates, not in the capital.

Through launching my company, we apply 'trade fair' which means we enable craftspeople to make a decent living while protecting them from unscrupulous middlemen who can buy their handmade products at insultingly low prices.



**MONA** Sayed (L) posing for a photo with a craftswoman in Sinai.

**EG:** Tell us more about the process, users and business model.

**MS:** We find craftspeople ourselves and compile a database. Our business model entails revenue to cover overheads and invest profits in the development and training.

**EG:** What are your achievements and future plans?

**MS:** We have worked with 2,000 marginalised producers, of whom 90 per cent are women, in 14 governorates. We also helped craftspeople export their products.

**EG:** What are your main challenges?

**MS:** During my journey in my startup, in fact, we are still facing challenges as social enterprise. We need more reforms in our banking system to incentive companies and ease the means of having funding.

**EG:** Do you think the Egyptian entrepreneurship system supporting you?

**MS:** There is support from individuals working in the same area. We also collaborate with other partners that help us develop our venture.

## Demonstrative Explanation of the Ministerial Decree No. 2020/463 Aiming to Boost the Efficiency of Industrial Motors

Egypt gives significant attention to energy and enhancement of energy efficiency to increase the economic activities' profitability and safeguard the environment, in line with the national plan aiming at reduction of greenhouse gas emissions as well as supporting economic growth and national industry. Egypt has recently developed a comprehensive plan to enhance the resource's efficiency and mitigate greenhouse gases' emissions. Among the actions undertaken, was when the Ministry of Trade and Industry issued the Ministerial Decree 2020 / 463 for enhancement of electric motors efficiency in industrial operations.

Accordingly, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), in cooperation with the Industrial Modernization Center (IMC) and with funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), have implemented the project entitled: "The Egyptian Program for Promoting Industrial Motor Efficiency", which strengthens the relevant decrees issued by the Ministry of Trade and Industry to support the Egyptian policies for reducing greenhouse gases' emissions resulting from industrial processes, since electric motor systems account for %70 of the industrial electricity consumption worldwide and enhancing their efficiency would save nearly %4 of the electricity consumption in Egypt.

The Ministerial Decree 2020 / 463 includes two parts, the first part tackles "name plate" labelling for all AC motors in Egypt showing the degree of energy efficiency as per the energy efficiency classification (IE Code) and in relevance to the declared tables in the Egyptian standards. The decree applies to single-phase and three-phase AC motors with a capacity of 0.12 kW - 1000 kW and with the characteristics specified in the decree, given that the decree would apply to motors with the mentioned specifications within a maximum period of 6 months starting the issuance date of the ministerial decree. This would ensure that the end-user is aware of the motor's efficiency and selects the most appropriate motor to achieve the optimal savings in the end-user's facility.

The second part of the decree tackles applying the "Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS)", which would prevent entry of low-efficiency motors (less than IE3 efficiency) into the Egyptian market. The decree applies to three-phase squirrel-cage induction

motors, with a capacity of 0.75 kW - 375 kW, and should be applied to motors with the mentioned specifications within a maximum period of 18 months starting the issuance date of the ministerial decree.

The ministerial decree enclosing these two segments, applies its provisions on motors with voltage (50 V - 1000 V) and frequency (60/50 Hz), single-speed motors, with number of poles (8 - 6 - 4 - 2) and duty cycle (S1), and direct on-line operated motors which are not connected to the equipment or machinery. Apart from that, motors are not subject to the provisions of this decree.

Hence, the ministerial decree compels the producers and importers of electric motors to conform to the Egyptian standards equivalent to that of the international standards for electric motors energy levels, as well as facilitating the import and manufacturing of motors based on the energy efficiency to eventually develop specific mechanisms to validate their efficiency levels in accordance with the Egyptian standards or the equivalent accredited certificate emphasizing conformity with the energy efficiency level.

The "Egyptian Program for Promoting Industrial Motor Efficiency" seeks to create a legal and regulatory environment that encourages the use of energy efficient motors. The "Egyptian Program for Promoting Industrial Motor Efficiency" is also working on providing recommendations to the Ministry of Trade and Industry to support policies and work to implement relevant ministerial decrees through workshops and round table discussions, and seminars with all partners, agencies, and stakeholders, benefiting from international experiences and analyzing the market situation to overcome the potential challenges of implementing the decree and support the spread of highly efficient motors in the Egyptian market.

Since the "Egyptian Program for Promoting Industrial Motor Efficiency's" inception and over the past period, the project held a number of meetings and seminars in the context of supporting and promoting the ministerial decree and oriented relative manufacturers and importers with the content of the decree to facilitate its implementation and achieve the desired goals.



The Egyptian Gazette

Saturday, May 28, 2022

## Substantial progress on Libya

**G**OOD news from Cairo to the Libyan people: Egypt has made much progress in encouraging Libyan delegates to meet in our capital and reach a consensus on the constitution and electoral law. Regional and international powers concerned with the Libyan question sighed with relief as Libyans will go to the ballot to vote for the successor of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, who was killed in 2011.

Members of the Joint Committee, who represent the High Council of State (HCS) and the House of Representatives (HoR) have agreed on 140 articles of the draft constitution. In its closing statement, the joint committee's members disclosed that a task force would be established to prepare a compromise formula on the articles agreed upon to refer them to the HoR and HCS for consideration.

"The agreed-upon articles concern Chapters I to IV, while 'very few' articles were shifted to the next round of talks for further review and amendment and would be discussed with the remaining articles considering the draft constitution as one indivisible unit," the Joint Committee said in its statement.

Also, Parliament Speaker Aqila Saleh and the HCS chief Khaled Al-Mashri will organise general elections within 12 months.

Libyan-Libyan consultations on the draft constitution opened in Cairo on May 15, under the auspices of UN Special Adviser on Libya Stephanie Williams.

Williams is in a race against time to achieve a breakthrough in the Libyan file, with increasing international pressure to name a new envoy to head the UN mission in Libya. Williams had previously acknowledged the pervasive "spirit of cooperation and positivity" as the Libyans explored a constitutional roadmap.

Since the Libyan crisis broke and ignited a civil war a decade ago, Egypt has maintained that Libyans, saved from foreign intervention, can successfully bear the responsibility of restoring stability and security to their country. It is foreign intervention in the form of foreign troops and mercenaries deployed on their territories, which has impeded the Libyan people's efforts to put out the flames of civil war and start anew—stronger and more optimistic about their future.



The Africa We Want

Abdelmonem Fawzi

**W**E may never be able to build a prosperous economy in our continent, simply because we only work to support the economies of outsiders.

The problem is that every value we have on our land is made to be taken away for free.

To address this challenge, delegates from across Africa participated recently in a three-day Expert Group meeting on financing Africa's recovery, which took place in Dakar, Senegal.

During the meeting, Stephen Karingi, director of the Regional Integration and Trade Division at the UN Economic Commission for Africa, described regional integration as a 'key' to transforming Africa's fragmented economies.

African countries, he added, should therefore harness opportunities embedded in integration initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to foster post-Covid-19 economic recovery and transformation.

"Although commendable progress has been made in advancing integration agendas, challenges remained," Karingi said.

"On trade integration, progress has been made in boosting intra-African trade like the adoption of industrialization policies and strategies," he added.

However, he noted that Africa continues to trade more with the outside world than with itself.

Karingi said macroeconomic integration and convergence were essential to accelerating intra-regional trade. Five regional economic communities,

Karingi said, namely COMESA, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, and SADC, have primary macroeconomic convergence criteria already.

Africa's integration and socioeconomic development, he added, is impeded by huge infrastructure gaps.

"Production integration on the continent remains uneven and weak," Karingi said.

Meanwhile, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the ECA, Vera Songwe, said Africa had a unique opportunity to do things differently.

She urged the delegates participating in the meeting to share their experiences and ideas to "break the cycle of solely donor contributed aid" in Africa.

Songwe added that Africa's growth must be 'great', 'sustainable' and 'inclusive', because growth linked intrinsically to commodity prices "cannot be the norm in the future".

"As we look at the gains we have made in the last decade and the gains that have been taken away by the Ukraine crisis, we can rethink what kind of growth Africa can have," she said.

"We must do this as a continent, not as individual countries," she added.

A delegate from Tanzania wanted the final recommendations of the conference to include a call for member states to unpick any issues standing in the way of a fully operational African free trade agreement.

A completed AfCFTA, he said, would boost trade and investments among member states and help member countries to easily recover from the economic contraction caused by Covid-19. ECA's Deputy Executive Secretary,

Hanan Morsy, presenting stark data on where the twin crises of the pandemic and Ukraine have brought Africa.

She said some people do not know the length or the breadth of the crisis.

Morsy noted that Africa needed things to get better, and make sure that it does not get worse.

The ECA Conference of Ministers (CoM2022) provided an opportunity to thrash out the details on how this could be achieved.

A delegate from Namibia asked questions about why African states are still competing with each other when they are expected to integrate since the launch of AfCFTA.

Karingi said the integration process was being hindered by difficulties in infrastructure, financing and policy issues like the rules of origin that are a challenge for a common open market.

"The solutions Africa comes up with should outlive the current shocks the continent goes through," Karingi said. "Dialogue within countries should be encouraged."

He added that concerted efforts were required from all the regional economic communities, key partners and stakeholders to tackle integration challenges.

African countries, Karingi said, should implement the AfCFTA to strengthen the resilience of African countries to withstand future economic shocks and maintain sustainable growth in the post-Covid-19 era.

The good news is that the ECA would continue to support member states.

It will also continue to support the RECs, the AUC and the AfCFTA secretariat in implementing the agreement

and and provide technical support to them.

Director of the Sub-Regional Office for East Africa, Mama Keita, presented a report on behalf of the Intergovernmental Committees of Senior Officials and Experts, which govern the work of the five sub-regional offices for southern Africa (SRO-SA).

Keita said the offices were able to offer technical assistance, advisory services, training and analytical tools to governments and RECs on the AfCFTA which is a cross-regional priority.

In a related development, Director of the African Institute for Development and Economic Planning (IDEP), Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, noted that efforts for implementing priorities, such as the AfCFTA would need to be sustained with the support of the human and institutional capacities in member states.

She added that to build national capacities, the ECA instituted the Young Economists Network (ECA-YEN) which will provide the necessary capacities to support countries in macroeconomic modeling and the launch of research programmes in them.

Currently, ECA-YEN brings together nearly 1,000 young economists and 88 universities in 21 countries, who are all working to bridge the gap between academia and decision-making in member states.

Representatives of member states acknowledged and commended the support of the SROs and IDEP.

They reiterated their commitment to working with ECA on regional and national priorities.

# Economy may soon reveal who's been swimming naked

From Harrop

**W**ARREN Buffett famously said, "Only when the tide goes out do you discover who's been swimming naked." What the Oracle of Omaha meant was that when markets are booming, people who take unwise risks can still do OK. When conditions go south, those who invested or borrowed recklessly often find themselves exposed to financial trouble.

There remains a belief that controlled spending and borrowing reflect well on one's character. But very often what comes off as a lack of prudence is really a lack of sophistication. Much of the public has difficulty assessing risk. That goes double during flush times, when financial companies lure the unsuspecting into their net with offers of "easy money" for which they charge high interest. Low-income people are especially vulnerable.

The targeted audience often doesn't read the fine print. Nor does it consider the likelihood that interest rates or the price of gas will eventually rise.

Despite expected Federal Reserve interest rate hikes, household debt in the US – which covers borrowing at all income levels – is nearing a record \$16 trillion. Those who use credit card debt to make ends meet or to keep up appearances are about to see most of their interest rates rise. When the economy seemed indestructible and interest rates were low, they figured, what the heck, we need a new kitchen.



Change should be expected. Thus, there should have been little surprise that as interest rates headed upward, the share of subprime credit cards and personal loans that are at least 60 days late in payment would rise. March was the eighth month in a row in which such delinquencies topped the month before.

Subprime loans are designed for people with less-than-great credit scores, many of whom also have low incomes. Lenders demand higher interest in return for taking on the above-average risk that these bor-

rowers won't be able to keep up with payments.

Nowadays, even careful investors who had built up their savings when stock prices kept rising may have erred on the side of optimism. Some had allocated their entire portfolios – at least in their head – to early retirement or down payments on a swank house. Their financial advisers now talk about panicky calls as the Dow swoons, as it's done a lot lately. (Buffett advises investors who freak out during down markets to just stop looking

at their portfolios.)

But some problems aren't as bad as they seem. First off, the recent jump in defaults comes on top of the totally unexpected low number of delinquencies during the pandemic. Lenders expected a massive wave of defaults.

What happened? Stimulus checks helped many who were living on the edge to keep up payments or pay loans off. Meanwhile, the pandemic shutdowns saved them money for gas or meals out. At the same time, lenders expecting the worst had tightened standards, which ruled out some with iffy credit histories.

As Yogi Berra said, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future."

There remains good news in robust employment and growing wages. Lenders may ease standards at such times, figuring the borrowers can always get a second or third job. To the surprise of many, inflation has not slowed down consumer spending, the pillar of the American economy. The chief beneficiaries last month were restaurants, bars and car dealers.

Buffett also said: It is wise for investors to be "fearful when others are greedy and greedy when others are fearful."

Tides go out but also come back. Savers who kept their clothes on, even when lower interest rates tried to seduce them into heavy borrowing, may be best positioned to get back into the swim.

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# The next crisis to hit markets may be liquidity

Jared Dillian

**L**IQUIDITY is the lifeblood of the capital markets. It is the ease at which an asset can be turned into cash without disrupting the price of that asset. This was never really a concern in the US, whose markets are prized for being the deepest, most liquid in the world. It's one reason why the dollar is the world's dominant reserve currency. But liquidity has been slowly draining from various markets to the point where the Federal Reserve this month warned that it threatens financial stability. Investors who ignore this warning do so at their own peril.

Liquidity can be measured various ways. In the stock market, these include average daily volume, top of book size (how many shares or contracts are on the bid and offer) or market depth, which is the total number of shares or contracts below the bid and above the

offer. There are many reasons for why liquidity has declined, starting with regulations in the stock market that have reduced incentives to display orders, meaning the willingness of market makers to post bids and offers on the screen.

More recently, the decline in liquidity can be tied to the Fed's plan to tighten monetary policy by raising interest rates and shrinking its almost \$9 trillion balance sheet. Don't forget, the Fed had been pumping \$120 billion per month directly into the financial system since the early days of the pandemic by purchasing bonds in the open market. Now, that money will be coming out.

This has contributed to higher levels of volatility, which has an inverse relationship to liquidity. And in the futures markets, margin requirements can also impact liquidity. As they increase, it reduces the number of contracts an investor can trade without posting additional margin.

As Bloomberg News's Cameron Crise pointed out last week, stock market liquidity is the worst ever outside the financial crisis and early Covid.

The market for US Treasury securities, called the most important in the world, is also seeing a reduction in liquidity. So much so that it is not unusual to see rapid and wide swings in yields for no apparent reasons. The Fed said in its report that "liquidity metrics, such as market depth, suggest a notable deterioration in Treasury market liquidity."

"Tick" size also contributes to liquidity shortfalls. A tick is the smallest increment that stocks, futures, or bonds can trade. One tick in the stock market is one penny. Also, if the spread between the bid and offer is too small, that also reduces incentives to display liquidity, or post bids and offers. I have been a proponent of rolling back decimalisation in the stock market and going back

to fractions, which would increase incentives for market makers to post bids and offers. Years ago, the Securities and Exchange Commission conducted a study with small cap stocks to determine the effects on liquidity of varying tick sizes.

Although the results were inconclusive, the agency should have included large, liquid stocks to get an informative outcome.

Most outside observers look at bid-offer spreads linearly, thinking that the wider they are, the more costly to investors. Yes, they may hurt the individual who buys 100 shares of General Electric Co. in his or her E-Trade account, but individuals are also investors in mutual funds and such, which transact in very large size and would benefit from the additional liquidity created by larger tick increments.



Bloomberg LIQUIDITY is drying up in the financial markets.



# Salah eyes Champions League revenge

**LONDON** (News Wires) – We have a score to settle," Mohamed Salah posted on social media moments after Real Madrid set up a re-match with Liverpool in Saturday's UEFA Champions League final.

Salah's first appearance in European club football's show-piece game came to an agonisingly premature end in Kyiv four years ago.

The Egypt forward made a tearful first-half exit after suffering a shoulder injury in a challenge with Real defender Sergio Ramos, who was accused of cynically slamming his opponent into the turf.

Madrid went on to win 3-1 and Salah has never been able to shake the bitter memories of that night.

"That was the worst moment in my career," the 29-year-old said at Liverpool's pre-match media. "I was really, really down in that time."

"I was like: 'We cannot lose this way.' I never felt that feeling before in football, especially the first Champions League (final) for all of us."

Salah made amends 12 months later, scoring a penalty as Liverpool beat Tottenham to be crowned European champions for the sixth time.

But even though Ramos has since moved on to Paris Saint-Germain, Salah would dearly love to make Real pay when they meet again at the Stade de France this weekend.

"I think it is revenge time," Salah said according to Reuters as he picked up his award as the Football Writers' Association player of the year earlier this month.

While Salah has retaliation on his mind, he travels to Paris

besieged by concerns over his form, his fitness and even his long-term future at Liverpool.

His 23rd goal of the Premier League season against Wolves on Sunday meant he finished as the joint top-scorer in the competition alongside Tottenham's Son Heung-min.

It is the third time he has topped the charts and season by also finishing as the top provider of assists.

Yet the stunning early-season form that writers' honour him in recent months secured Salah the Premier League title race on Sunday as Liverpool narrowly lost out to Manchester City in his past 17 games for club and country.

That run includes a defeat on penalties against teammate Sadio Mane's Senegal in a World Cup play-off, a repeat of the result in the final of the Africa Cup of Nations earlier this year.

The demands of an exhausting season are beginning to show even before the final in Paris, for a player who is rarely injured.

Salah was forced off early in Liverpool's FA Cup final victory over Chelsea and did not start either of their final two league games to ensure he was fit to face Madrid.

The caution shown by Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp, whose side were chasing an unprecedented quadruple until they were pipped to the league title by City, is understandable.

In five seasons since returning to England Salah has scored 156 goals, playing a huge role in Liverpool's first Premier League title

for 30 years in 2020, as well as their runs to three Champions League finals.

One persistent cloud on the horizon is that his contract expires at the end of next season and negotiations have dragged on, with reports that he wants to be the Premier League's highest-paid player.

Salah confirmed this week that he would at least see out the final year of his deal, but refused to commit his longer-term future to the Reds.

Despite his history with Madrid, Real could now prove the most likely destination should he choose to leave Anfield.

Los Blancos are in need of a superstar signing to soften the blow of being turned down by Kylian Mbappe, who has decided to remain at PSG.

Liverpool boast impressive attacking riches but a fit and firing Salah would be a huge weapon against Carlo Ancelotti's Real – and the player himself has clearly not lost confidence.

"If you compare me with any player in my position, not only in my team but in the world, you will find that I am the best," he told BeIn Sports.

Former Liverpool star Steve McManaman said that his old club deserves to be hailed as English football's greatest ever team if they beat Real Madrid in the Champions League final tonight.

Having already won the FA Cup and League Cup, Klopp's side face Spanish champions Real in Paris with a treble in their sights.



Mohamed Salah



Aryna Sabalenka

## Tsitsipas, Sabalenka advance at French Open

**PARIS** (News Wires) – Stefanos Tsitsipas was again made to work hard for victory, the Greek fourth seed overcoming Czech qualifier Zdenek Kolar 6-3 7-6(8) 6-7(3) 7-6(7) in a marathon match to move into the French Open third round.

Aryna Sabalenka needed just 62 minutes to beat Madison Brengle 6-1, 6-3 and advance to the third round at Roland Garros for the third straight year.

Two days after the 23-year-old Tsitsipas came from two sets down to beat Italian Lorenzo Musetti at the clay-court Grand Slam, there was another nail-biter for the 2021 finalist.

The match appeared headed for a deciding set when Tsitsipas found himself down four set points in the tie-breaker but the Greek found a way to save them all before converting his second match point after four hours and six minutes.

Tsitsipas slammed his racket down in frustration after forcing an error from Kolar as the crowd erupted in appreciation.

"He drove me crazy. It was really frustrating," Tsitsipas said in his on-court interview.

## Canada stuns Sweden in world hockey

**TAMPERE**, Finland (News Wires) – Drake Batherson scored on a power play 43 seconds into overtime to give Canada a 4-3 comeback victory over Sweden in the world hockey quarter-finals.

In the semi-finals today, defending champion Canada will face the Czech Republic, and the United States will play Finland. The Czech Republic beat Germany 4-1, the United States topped Switzerland 3-0, and Finland beat Slovakia 4-2.

Canada overcame a 3-0 deficit in the third period. Ryan Graves scored 1:21 into the period and Pierre-Luc Dubois and Matt Barzal connected

30 seconds apart late in regulation.

After William Nylander was called for tripping 25 seconds into overtime, Batherson fired a sharp-angle shot behind goalie Linus Ullmark from the bottom of the faceoff circle.

"Obviously, being down 3-0 going into the third period was not what we planned, but we were able to get that goal early in the third," Batherson said according to AP.

"I was frustrated that I took a penalty, and to be honest I thought we were going to have a hard time coming back, but we never gave up."

Nylander, Carl Klingberg and Max Friberg scored for Sweden.



JOHN Hayden of the United States, left, is challenged by Switzerland's Dean Kukan during the World Hockey Championship quarter-final match.



**SOUTH** Korea's Son Heung-min (C) fighting for the ball with Iran's Shojae Khalilzadeh and Ali Gholi Zadeh (L) in a qualifying match for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar earlier this year.

## Canada cancels June 5 exhibition against Iran

**TORONTO** (News Wires) – Canada Soccer has cancelled a friendly between the men's national team and Iran next month, the national governing body said, following widespread opposition to the fixture.

No reason was given for the cancellation of the game that was set to be played on June 5 in Vancouver and would have marked the first for Canada on home soil since March when they qualified for the Nov. 21-Dec. 18 World Cup in Qatar.

The game had drawn plenty of opposition from politicians and the families of the Canadians who died aboard a Ukrainian passenger plane that was shot

down near Tehran in January, 2020 by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had also said he felt it was "a bad idea" to invite the Iran team to Canada.

"Over the past week, the untenable geopolitical situation of hosting Iran became significantly divisive, and in response, the match was cancelled," Canada Soccer said in a statement according to Reuters.

"While we considered the external factors in selecting the optimal opponent in our original decision-making process, we will strive to do better moving forward."

# Al-Ahly's road to the CAF Champions League final

**EGYPTIAN** giants Al-Ahly will chase down a record breaking third successive CAF Champions League title as they must do so at the home of Moroccan rivals Wydad Casablanca on Monday.

Al-Ahly has reached a fifth CAF Champions League final in six years. They have already faced major foes Mamelodi Sundowns and Raja Casablanca on their path to the decider, and Coach Pitso Mosimane has a long and storied history with Wydad, who will have home ground advantage at the Stade Mohammed V.

Mosimane is seeking an unprecedented third victory in a row as coach – and fourth title overall – but there must have been times this season where deep down he wondered if his side could be champions.

There have been some scares, particularly in the pool stages, but the quality and mental fortitude of Mosimane and his players has shone through.

Their campaign began back in October where they faced Niger outfit Union Sportive de la Gendarmerie Nationale (USGN) in the second round, having been handed a bye through the first stage.

It was never expected to be a challenge, but after they only managed a 1-1 away draw in Niamey, there were a few flutters.

But the team responded in emphatic style

in the return leg as they claimed a crushing 6-1 victory, which remains the biggest win in the competition this season along with Wydad's 6-1 success at Ghanaian side Hearts of Oak at the same stage.

Mohamed Magdy scored a brace after Mohamed Sherif had opened the scoring, the first of his six goals this campaign that leaves him second on the top scorers' list, one behind Brazilian Tiago Azulao from Angolan side Petro Atletico.

That result booked a place in the group stage for Mosimane's men, which they started with an underwhelming 0-0 draw against Sudanese side Al-Hilal in Omdurman, supersport reported.

Ahly had actually skipped the first round of pool matches due to their commitments in the FIFA Club World Cup, so this was in fact in the second round of fixtures.

It got worse for them next as they lost 1-0 at home to Mosimane's former side Sundowns to take a single point from their first two matches. Thapelo Morena got the historic goal for The Brazilians as they claimed a first ever win in Egypt.

Ahly then played their catch-up fixtured from the first round of games, another nervy 3-2 home win over Sudanese side Al-Merreikh.

The victory was only secured thanks to an

own goal from the visitors' Mustafa Karshoum in the final 15 minutes after Al-Merreikh had battled back from 2-0 down to draw level.

Ahly then travelled to South Africa, where they have never won, and came unstuck again as Sundowns won 1-0 at home to do the 'Double' on their rivals. Peter Shalulile got the all-important goal.

It was clear at that stage that Sundowns would win the group, but Ahly still had plenty of work to do to finish in second and qualify for the quarterfinals.

Percy Tau scored early to help them to a 3-1 victory at Al-Merreikh that boosted their chances significantly, but they still had to avoid defeat at home to al Hilal to advance.

It was not the most assured performances, but a goal from Hussein El-Shahat with 16 minutes remaining secured the win.

Mosimane has always said that the group stages are the entrée and the knockout rounds the main course, and some teams can peak too early.

His side faced a tough battle against Raja in the Last 8, but this is where they shine, able to eke out results when it matters.

They claimed a 2-1 home success in the first leg and then came back from a goal down to equalise in the return in a 1-1 draw. But for Mohamed Abdelmonem's strike they would have exited on the away goals rule.

They faced surprise semi-finalists Entente Sportive Setifienne in the next stage, the Algerians having ousted more fancied Esperance in the last round.

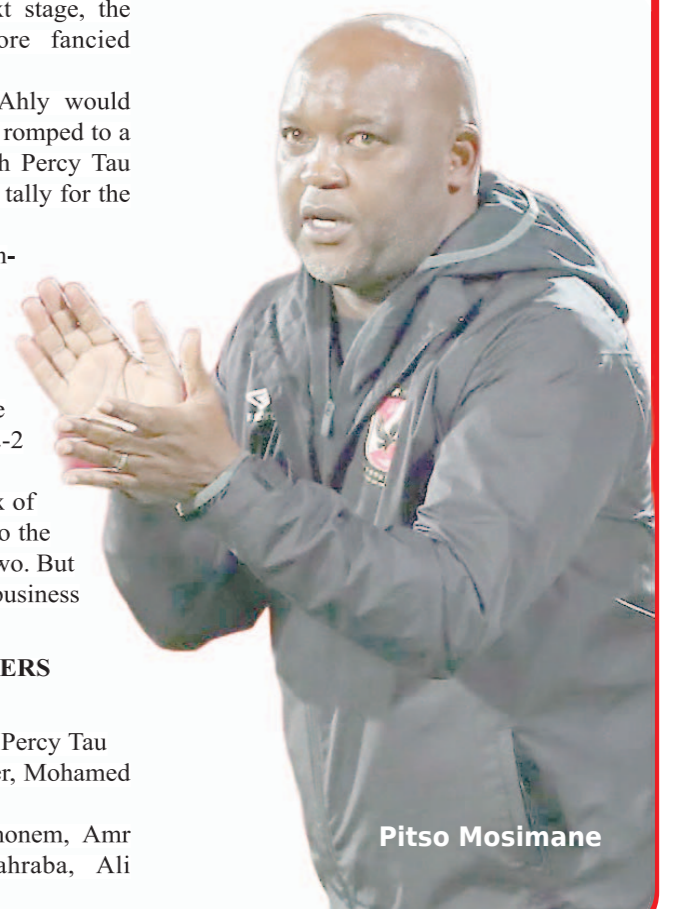
But there was no way Al-Ahly would spurn this opportunity and they romped to a 4-0 first leg win in Cairo, with Percy Tau grabbing a brace as he took his tally for the campaign to three.

It made the second-leg essentially a dead rubber, especially when Ahmed Abdel Kader scored early on to lead Setif needing six goals, but Mosimane's men needed a late goal from Sherif to scramble a 2-2 draw.

It means Al-Ahly has won six of their 12 matches on their way to the final, drawing four and losing two. But they will argue they did the business when it mattered most.

### AL-AHLY GOALSCORERS

- 6 goals – Mohamed Sherif
- 3 goals – Hussein El-Shahat, Percy Tau
- 2 goals – Ahmed Abdel Kader, Mohamed Magdy
- 1 goal – Mohamed Abdelmonem, Amr El-Solia, Hamdy Fathy, Kahraba, Ali Maaloul, Taher Mohamed.



Pitso Mosimane



# Ukraine tells West: Stop playing with Russia, end war

KYIV (News Wires) – President Volodymyr Zelensky urged the West to stop playing around with Russia and impose tougher sanctions on it to end its "senseless war" in Ukraine, adding that his country would remain independent, the only question was at what price.

Zelensky's criticism of the West has mounted in recent days as the European Union moves slowly towards a possible Russian oil embargo and as thousands of Russian troops try to encircle the two eastern cities of Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk.

Three months into its military operation in Ukraine, Russia has abandoned its assault on the capital Kyiv and is trying to consolidate control of the industrial eastern Donbas region, where it has backed a separatist revolt since 2014.

Western military analysts see the battle for Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk as a possible turning point in the war after a shift in momentum towards Russia following the surrender of Ukraine's garrison in Mariupol last week, according to Reuters.

"Ukraine will always be an independent state and it won't be broken. The only question is what price our people will have to pay for their freedom, and what price Russia will pay for this senseless war against us," Zelensky said in a late-night address on Thursday.

"The catastrophic unfolding events could be still stopped if the world treated the situation in Ukraine as if it were facing the

same situation, if the powers that be did not play around with Russia but really pressed to end the war."

Zelensky complained about disagreements within the EU on more sanctions against Russia and asked why some countries were being allowed to block the plan.

The EU is discussing a sixth round of punitive measures, including an embargo on Russian oil imports. It requires unanimity but Hungary opposes the idea on the grounds that its economy would suffer too much.

Hungary needs 3-1/2 to 4 years to shift away from Russian crude and make huge investments to adjust its economy and until there is a deal on all issues, it cannot back the EU's proposed oil embargo, a top Hungarian aide said.

Zelensky said Russia was getting one billion euros a day from the 27-nation bloc for energy supplies.

"How many more weeks will the European Union try to agree on a sixth package?" he asked.

"Pressure on Russia is literally a matter of saving lives. Every day of procrastination, weakness, various disputes or proposals to 'pacify' the aggressor at the expense of the victim merely means more Ukrainians being killed."

Zelensky's comments mark the second day in a row that he has sharpened his criticism of the world's approach to the war.

Russia's separatist proxies in eastern



TANKS of pro-Russian troops in the Luhansk Region, Ukraine.

Ukraine claimed full control of the important battlefield town of Lyman yesterday, and Ukraine appeared to concede it, as Moscow pressed its biggest advance for weeks.

Lyman, site of a key railway hub, has been a major frontline as Russian forces press down from the north, one of three directions from which they have been at-

tacking Ukraine's industrial Donbas region. The pro-Russian Donetsk People's Republic separatists said they were now in full control of it.

## G7 reaches agreements on phasing out coal

BERLIN (News Wires) – The Group of Seven countries has reached concrete agreements on phasing out coal power generation and expanding renewable energy production, German Environment Minister Steffi Lemke was quoted by German media *RTL/ntv* as saying yesterday.

The pledge would mark the first commitment from the G7 to quit coal-fuelled power – use of which needs to decrease if the world is to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, according to Reuters.

"There are very concrete declarations and agreements for the expansion of renewable energies, but also for example for phasing out coal," Lemke said.

The final communique of the three-day G7 meeting in Berlin this week would also include a strong emphasis on protecting biodiversity and fighting plastic pollution, she said.

Lemke was speaking as Germany hosted G7 energy, climate and environment ministers for talks held against a backdrop of spiralling energy costs and fuel supply worries sparked by the war in Ukraine.

The conflict has triggered a scramble among some countries to buy more non-Russian fossil fuels and burn coal to cut their reliance on Russian supplies, raising fears that the crisis could undermine efforts to fight climate change.

Germany has said finding alternative fossil fuels would not come at the expense of environmental goals.

## William holds future of monarchy in his hands

LONDON (News Wires) – While nearly all attention will be focused next week on Queen Elizabeth as she celebrates her 70th anniversary on the throne this year, for those with eyes on the future of the British monarchy, attention is switching to her grandson Prince William.

With the health of the popular 96-year-old queen an increasing source of concern, forcing her to pull out of public engagements, her Platinum Jubilee will mark not just a time to reflect on her past, but to look ahead.

Most polls show a majority of the British public support the monarchy, and, while his 73-year-old father commands less popularity, William – the second in line to the throne – and his wife Kate are the most liked royals after the queen.

But, surveys also suggest those aged under 50 are far more ambivalent about the institution.

"The future does rest on Prince William," Matthew Dennison, a biographer of the queen, said. "And we all know that public opinion can be unkind."

"William is the key person because William is going to be king one day," said Charles Rae, a former royal correspondent at the Sun newspaper. "He's the last of the Mohicans, basically. I think an awful lot rests on William's shoulders for the future of the monarchy."



## Disbelief over N. Korea's tiny Covid death rate

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) – According to North Korea, its fight against Covid-19 has been impressive: About 3.3 million people have been reported sick with fevers, but only 69 have died.

If all are coronavirus cases, that's a fatality rate of 0.002 per cent, something no other country, including the world's richest, has achieved against a disease that has killed more than 6 million people.

The North's claims, however, are being met with widespread doubt about two weeks after it acknowledged its first domestic Covid-19 outbreak, AP reported. Experts say the North should have suffered far greater deaths than reported because there are very

few vaccines, a sizable number of undernourished people and a lack of critical care facilities and test kits to detect virus cases in large numbers.

North Korea's secretiveness makes it unlikely outsiders can confirm the true scale of the outbreak. Some observers say North Korea is underreporting fatalities to protect leader Kim Jong Un at all costs. There's also a possibility it might have exaggerated the outbreak in a bid to bolster control of its 26 million people.

"Scientifically, their figures can't be accepted," said Lee Yo Han, a professor at Ajou University Graduate School of Public Health in South Korea, adding that the pub-

lic data "were likely all controlled (by the authorities) and embedded with their political intentions."

The most likely course is that North Korea soon proclaims victory over Covid-19, maybe during a June political meeting, with all credit given to Kim's leadership. The 38-year-old ruler is desperate, observers say, to win bigger public support as he deals with severe economic difficulties caused by border shutdowns, UN sanctions and his own mismanagement.

"Diverse public complaints have accumulated, so it's time to (strengthen) internal control," said Choi Kang, president of Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

## Iran summons Swiss envoy over US seizure of Iranian oil

TEHRAN (News Wires) – Iran yesterday summoned the envoy of Switzerland, which represents US interests in Tehran, to protest against the US seizure of Iranian oil from a Russian-operated ship near Greece, the foreign ministry said in a statement quoted by Iranian media.

The ministry called for the immediate release of the ship and its cargo, the IRNA state news agency quoted it as saying.

The United States on Wednesday imposed sanctions on what it described as a Russian-backed oil smuggling and money laundering network for Iran's Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force.

A spokesperson for the US Department of Justice declined to comment on the oil seizure.

"The Islamic Republic expressed its deep concern over the US government's continued violation of international laws and international maritime conventions," IRNA and other media quoted the foreign ministry as saying.

A source at Greece's shipping ministry told Reuters on Thursday that the US Department of Justice had "informed Greece that the cargo on the vessel is Iranian oil."

It was unclear whether the cargo was impounded because it was Iranian oil or due to the sanctions on the tanker over its Russian links. Iran and Russia face separate US sanctions.

Three sources familiar with the matter told Reuters on Thursday that the US plans to send the cargo to the United States aboard another vessel.

## UN: 72,000 displaced in east DR Congo clashes

GENEVA (News Wires) – Recent clashes between the military and M23 rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo have displaced 72,000 people, the United Nations said yesterday, warning that fleeing people faced "constant violence" and the looting of their homes.

In a statement, the UNHCR refugee agency said 72,000 people had fled their homes in the Rutshuru and Nyiragongo territories of North Kivu province since May 19.

"At least 170,000 civilians have been displaced, often repeatedly since an escalation of fighting in eastern DRC from November 2021," the statement added.

Separately, the Norwegian Refugee

Council (NRC) and International Rescue Committee (IRC) said yesterday that around 37,000 people had fled Rutshuru and Nyiragongo since May 22, AFP reported.

Clashes between the army and M23, a primarily Congolese Tutsi group, have spread close to the provincial capital Goma since erupting late last week.

M23 briefly seized the city in late 2012 before the army quelled the rebellion the following year.

But the militia resumed fighting this year, accusing the Congolese government of failing to respect a 2009 agreement under which its fighters were to be incorporated into the army.

## Travellers to face sticker shock this summer

DALLAS (News Wires) – Airlines and tourist destinations are expecting monster crowds this summer as travel restrictions ease and pandemic fatigue overcomes lingering fear of contracting Covid-19 during travel.

Many forecasters believe the number of travellers will match or even exceed levels in the good-old, pre-pandemic days. However, airlines have thousands fewer employees than they did in 2019, and that has at times contributed to widespread flight cancellations.

People who are only now booking travel for the summer are experiencing sticker shock, according to AP.

Domestic airline fares for summer are averaging more than \$400 a round trip, 24 per cent higher than this time in 2019, before the pandemic, and a whopping 45 per cent higher than a year ago, according to travel-data firm Hopper.

"The time to have gotten cheap summer flights was probably three or four months ago," says Scott Keyes, who runs the Scott's Cheap Flights site.

Internationally, fares are also up from 2019, but only 10 per cent. Prices to Europe are about 5 per cent cheaper than before the pandemic — \$868 for the average round trip, according to Hopper. Keyes said Europe is the best travel bargain out there.

Steve Nelson of Mansfield, Texas, was standing in

line this week at a security checkpoint in Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, ready to board a flight to Nice, France, with plans to attend a Formula One race in Monaco.

"I decided it's time to work on my bucket list," Nelson said. "I hadn't even considered Monaco until this year."

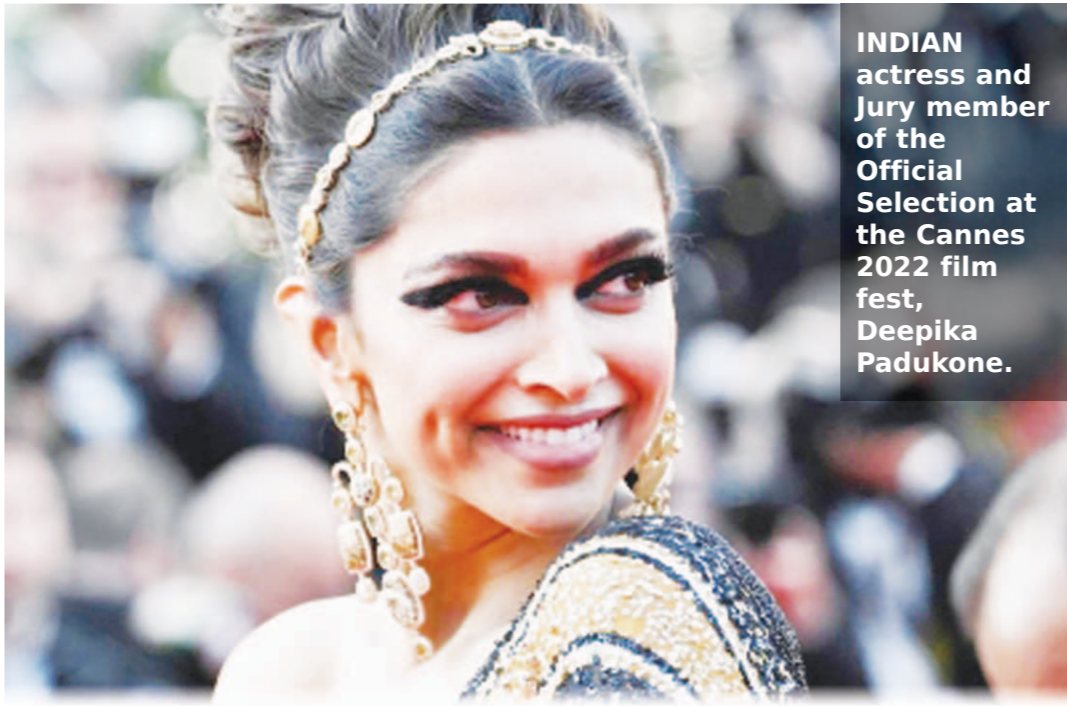
Although many countries have eased rules for travel, there are still restrictions in place that add to the hassle factor. Notably, the United States still requires a negative Covid-19 test within a day of flying to the country.

"We only realised that a couple days before coming here. We kind of panicked to find a place to get tested," said Jonny Dawe, a software engineer from Bath, England, who was in Dallas for a conference — his first major trip since the pandemic started. "You have to check all the testing requirements for the countries you are visiting, and you have to worry about contracting the virus."

Online spending on US flights eased in April after a torrid March, but it's still up 23% from spring 2019 mostly because of higher prices, according to Adobe Analytics.

Airlines blame the steeper fares on jet fuel roughly doubling in price over 2019. It's more than that, however. The number of flights has not returned to pre-pandemic levels even though demand for travel is surging.





INDIAN actress and Jury member of the Official Selection at the Cannes 2022 film fest, Deepika Padukone.

## Indian film industry seeks new horizons in Cannes

CANNES (France), (News Wires) – India's film industry, the world's most prolific, is taking centre stage at the Cannes Film Festival, but insiders say it's a challenge to please global audiences without losing its massive fanbase at home.

India is the festival's first-ever guest of honour this year in its "Marche du Film" where global companies come together to buy and sell film rights and hash out production deals.

A high-profile Indian delegation, including a government minister, has been given privileged access to global distributors and screened many work-in-progress movies in search of financing.

"We feel that Indian cinema may be at a turning point, that there's been a renewal of Indian cinema," Jerome Paillard, the Marche du Film's executive director, told AFP.

Global distributors took a major interest in India a decade or more ago with global hits like Hindi-language film *The Lunchbox* (2013).

"And then nothing much happened", he said. "But now there are several films in the making that we find interesting. Maybe there's a new impetus."

The Indian film industry produces up to 2,000 movies per year, more than any other country.

The country's 1.4 billion inhabitants, growing middle class, huge theatre network, and sizeable global diaspora give the sector a fanbase that is the envy of the world.

It has also made inroads beyond its native speakers — in places like China, Egypt and Nigeria.

But catering to Indian tastes can often stand in the way of going further, said Pranad Kapadia, the director of Moviegoers Entertainment, a UK-based distribution firm specialising in Indian cinema.

"We're very self-contained," he told AFP at the Cannes festival.

"Obviously a film-maker wants to make content that resonates with every audience. But in an effort to target a non-core audience, you may alienate your core audience."

Indie film-makers in India — with a taste for the more high-brow fare that might interest the global festival circuit — often struggle to get financing from major producers or the government, said Paillard.

This was not always the case. In the 1950s and 1960s, a generation of Indian directors moved away from traditional musicals and were supported by the government.

## Stars, royalty watch ABBA's return in digital stage show

LONDON (AP) – "ABBA Voyage" is certainly a trip.

Four decades after the Swedish pop supergroup last performed live, audiences can once again see ABBA onstage in an innovative digital concert where past and future collide.

The show opened to the public in London yesterday, the day after a red-carpet premiere attended by superfans, celebrities and Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia. The guests of honour were

pop royalty — the four members of ABBA, appearing in public together for the first time in years.

They were in the audience, though. Onstage at the specially built 3,000-seat ABBA Arena next to east London's Olympic Park were a 10-piece live backing band and a digital ABBA, created using motion capture and other technology by Industrial Light and Magic, the special effects firm founded by "Star Wars" director George Lucas.

The voices and movements are the real Agnetha Faltskog, Björn Ulvaeus, Benny Andersson and Anni-Frid Lyngstad — choreographed by Britain's Wayne McGregor — but the performers onstage are digital avatars, inevitably dubbed "ABBA-tars." In unsettlingly realistic detail, they depicted the band members as they looked in their 1970s heyday — beards on the men, flowing locks on the women, velour pantsuits all around.



Members of South Korean K-Pop group BTS.

## K-pop sensation BTS to launch new show on Apple Music

LOS ANGELES (News Wires) – BTS will reveal their gradual journey to becoming K-pop superstars through a new Apple Music weekly limited series.

The streaming service announced Thursday that BTS will launch their new show "BTS Radio: Past & Present" on Apple Music 1. The three-episode limited series will air weekly, leading up to the release of the band's new album "Proof," which arrives on June 10.

The inaugural episode will air May 28 at 6 am PDT.

The Grammy Award-nominated band will take listeners on their quest to stardom while sharing stories and songs that helped shaped them. The group is known for hit songs such as "Dynamite" and "Butter."

"We wanted to use this radio show to celebrate nine years of BTS with you guys and with our ARMY all over the world," said RM of the seven-member boy band — which also includes J-Hope, Suga, Jungkook, V, Jin and Jimin.

"Every episode is dedicated to you," RM continues. "And we wanted to share the BTS songs that help tell our story."

In the first episode, BTS explains the beginning of the group with songs that inspired their sound and style. The second episode — which airs June 3 — has the band pick some of the BTS ARMY's favourite songs.

BTS shows how the group ultimately achieved fame as global music sensations in the final episode on June 10.

## Barcelona recruits sheep, goats to fight wildfires

BARCELONA (News Wires) – It's a rustic scene — sheep and goats graze placidly while a shepherd keeps watch. But this is Barcelona's biggest public park, not the countryside.

Since April, Barcelona city hall has employed 290 sheep and goats to munch undergrowth at the Collserola National Park on the outskirts of Spain's second-largest city.

The aim of the pilot scheme is to reduce the risk of wildfires by clearing vegetation in an environmentally friendly way. It also helps educate the Mediterranean port city's 1.6 million residents about the countryside.

"The biggest challenge is re-educating people about rural life," said Daniel Sanchez, one of the shepherds, as he took the animals out to graze.

The 36-year-old moved to Barcelona from Sant Llorenç Savall, a town some 50 kilometres further inland, to look after the herd. He sleeps in a shed in the park near the sheep and goats.

The 8,200-hectare (20,262-acre) park is 22 times bigger than New York's Central Park and eight times larger than the Bois de Boulogne in Paris.

Its viewing points offer sweeping vistas of Barcelona, and hiking trails make it popular with joggers, cyclists and people out for a walk.



SHEEP and goats graze at the natural park of Collserola, near Barcelona.

"Every year it catches fire," said Sergi Dominguez, a 52-year-old maintenance worker who was in the park walking his dog.

The sheep and goats "eat the scrub and that is the best thing that can happen", added Dominguez, pointing to the dry vegetation. He said he hoped the flock would return next year.

The project ends in June. If it is deemed a success, the authorities may expand it to other green areas.

Ferran Paune, the biologist and livestock farming expert in charge of the project, said the area posed a "very high risk of wildfires".

"We are in a Mediterranean zone. On top of that, it's overcrowded, with many urban areas and people living in woodland," he added.

"This natural park could burn completely in just eight hours, which could cause a very serious problem — people needing to be evacuated or being injured." The goats and sheep appear to have adapted "perfectly" to the urban park, Paune said.

But Sanchez, who gave up a career as a lighting technician a decade ago to become a shepherd, said he was "getting tired" of the city noise and the night-time light pollution.

## Students turning to TikTok to help them study

NEW YORK (News Wires) – Forget dance challenges, TikTok is now becoming an educational platform... or almost. On the social network, many users are now tuning in to livestream sessions specifically aimed at helping them study — a trend that is gaining momentum as exam season approaches.

What if social networks could help students get better grades? Accounts encouraging users to revise are proliferating on TikTok thanks to the "Study with me" trend. As such, many creators now film themselves live, in the midst of their study sessions, either writing in their notebooks or typing on their computer keyboards. And while some creators feature in front of the camera, others prefer more anonymity, showing only their hands. Between the noises of the keyboard or the pen on paper — or the silence or birdsong of the surroundings — these videos, which are almost like ASMR

videos, have found their audience on the social network. One popular account, @oamht, shares various such study videos with over 172,800 followers: "Why is this so relaxing?", commented a user called Sophie. "Whenever I see her, it makes me want to be that responsible and smart," added Nicole, another follower.

To date, the hashtag #studystream totals 288.6 million views on TikTok while #studywithme counts 3.5 billion views. Other keywords, such as #studytyme or #studymotivation — also widely used on the social network — have 570.9 million and 462.8 million views, respectively. A trend that was already all the rage on YouTube in 2019.

In addition to posting videos on their TikTok accounts, content creators regularly hold live study sessions. The idea is that followers tune into the live event so that they won't be tempted to reach for their smartphone instead of

focusing on getting the work done. A challenge that is far from easy. If the idea is commendable, some users aren't always all that serious about revision, preferring to chat with followers via the live chat function, while others ask questions on the study topics.

The account @studying.with.a.view offers live revision sessions with a breathtaking view of the Swiss city of St. Gallen to its 100,000 followers. Some may doubt its authenticity. However, one user commented: "The background is real, I joined the live and saw the clouds, smoke, cars and even people moving!" The creator posts the same short text announcing the study times of the day: "Stop scrolling. This is your sign to study, so let's study together, next to my beautiful view of St. Gallen, Switzerland. 9am-10am & 11am-12am CET — 50 minutes of studying — 10 minutes' break," the creator announced, among other things, on her latest video.

