

**2** New Kuwait ambassador to US presents credentials



**6** India, Pak siblings reunite 75 years after Partition



**8** Drought tightens grip on Morocco



**16** Surprise date change as World Cup 100-day countdown begins



# 394 arrested in Mahboula, Jleeb amid MoI crackdown

## Ministry vows to arrest residency violators, wanted people, lawbreakers



KUWAIT: Police arrest alleged residency law violators and lawbreakers during a raid.

**KUWAIT:** The interior ministry announced relevant security sectors carried out a wide-scale crackdown in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula, arresting 394 residency law violators as well as wanted people - 66 in Jleeb and 328 in Mahboula. The ministry said in a statement to the General Department of Security Relations and Media on Saturday that the crackdown comes under instructions of Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Acting Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and follow-up by Undersecretary Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas, in order to confront outlaws, impose security control and maintain safety in these areas.

On Friday, the ministry launched a crackdown in Mahboula, led by Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled and several specialized security leaders. Crackdowns are continuing in various parts of the country, especially in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula, on a daily basis, in order to apprehend violators, wanted people and anyone who carries out acts in violation of the law, the interior ministry confirmed. The ministry urged all citizens and residents to cooperate with security forces and not cover up any violation of the

residency law, as it is a crime punishable by law. The ministry also underlined the need for sponsors to abide by the residence law.

Last week, informed sources revealed the interior ministry will provide a new site to accommodate those detained at the deportation prison in preparation for their deportation from the country. "The ministry of interior will continue its strict policy of not tolerating residency violators, and there will be no grace periods in which violators are allowed to leave with impunity, after giving many amnesties that gave permission to violators to leave, but they did not obey the instructions, which caused the number of violators to double instead of decreasing. Moreover, in the recent period, scores of foreigners entered Kuwait on visit visas, which expired, but they did not leave," the sources said.

The sources pointed out the ministry expects to arrest hundreds of thousands of violators, which will force it to provide places of detention for these people, especially since the deportation prison will not be enough if the plan to arrest violators goes as planned.

Continued on Page 6

### News in brief

#### All visa holders can do umrah

**RIYADH:** The Saudi hajj and umrah ministry announced Friday that all visitors to the kingdom who have entry visas of any kind like tourism or family visit can visit the holy sites in Makkah and Madinah and perform umrah. The ministry added that those who have entry visas for the US, UK and Schengen countries, provided the visa has been used at least once and has the stamp of the issuing country, can get a Saudi entry visa upon arrival to the kingdom and can also perform umrah. — KUNA

#### Polio found in NYC wastewater

**NEW YORK:** Polio has been detected in New York City's sewage, suggesting the virus that causes the disease is likely circulating there, health authorities said Friday, calling on residents of the Big Apple to make sure they are vaccinated. State health commissioner Mary Bassett called the finding "alarming, but not surprising". Last month, a polio case was reported in Rockland County, about 50 km northwest of Manhattan - the first one in the US in nearly a decade. — AFP

#### Major Egypt cabinet reshuffle

**CAIRO:** An emergency session of parliament on Saturday approved several cabinet changes in Egypt's first major reshuffle since 2019, with 13 ministers moved. The reshuffle appoints new ministers of health, tourism and antiquities, commerce and industry, irrigation, civil aviation, immigration, education, higher education, military production, manpower, public business sector, culture and local development. — AFP

#### Bank robber foiled by collapse

**ROME:** An Italian man had to be rescued after becoming trapped in a collapsed tunnel near the Vatican, suspected of being part of a gang burrowing its way to a nearby bank. Firefighters spent eight hours digging him out from under a road in the west of Rome, before he was finally freed and taken to hospital. — AFP

## Kuwait backs Saudi security efforts after fugitive blows self up

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait absolutely stands by Saudi Arabia and supports all measures it may take to safeguard its security and the safety of its people, the Kuwaiti foreign ministry said on Saturday. In a press statement, the ministry lauded the efforts of Saudi security agencies to resolutely prevent any bid to undermine the kingdom's security and stability, including the arrest of a wanted man in Jeddah, who blew himself up, injuring three security men and a resident. The ministry prayed for the speedy recovery for those injured in the incident.

Saudi officials said on Friday a suspect in a deadly 2015 Islamic State group attack on a Saudi mosque blew himself up while being arrested by

security forces in Jeddah. The four were wounded when Saudi national Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Bakri Al-Shehri set off the explosives belt, an official said. He was one of nine men wanted for the blast that killed 15 people - mostly police - near the Yemen border.

"When the procedures for his arrest were initiated, he blew himself up with an explosive belt, which resulted in his death and the injury of a resident and three security men," said a Presidency of State Security statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency. Al-Shehri, 39, was number four on a list of nine suspects in the 2015 blast, one of Saudi Arabia's deadliest attacks in years. Number five was arrested in May 2016.

The targeted mosque was frequented by members of a police special weapons and tactics unit in the southern city of Abha. The attack, claimed by the Islamic State group, followed the launch of a Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen in 2015 after Iran-backed Houthi rebels seized the capital Sanaa. — Agencies

## 'Top secret' docs seized in raid on Trump home

**WASHINGTON:** FBI agents seized records marked "top secret" during their search of former president Donald Trump's Florida estate, according to documents made public Friday in a probe that includes

possible violations of the US Espionage Act. The search warrant and related materials, unsealed by a Florida judge, showed agents carted away a significant number of items from the raid, which ignited a political firestorm in an already bitterly divided country.

The warrant, which was personally approved by Attorney General Merrick Garland, authorized the FBI to search the "45 office" - a reference to the 45th US president's private office at his Mar-a-Lago residence - and storage rooms. It directed them to seize documents and records "illegally possessed" in viola-

## Rushdie on ventilator, may lose an eye

**NEW YORK:** Salman Rushdie, who spent years in hiding after an Iranian fatwa ordered his killing, was on a ventilator and could lose an eye following a stabbing attack at a literary event in New York state Friday. The British author of "The Satanic Verses", which sparked fury among some Muslims who believed it was blasphemous, had to be airlifted to hospital for emergency surgery following the attack. His agent said in a statement obtained by The New York Times that "the news is not good". "Salman will likely lose one eye; the nerves in his

arm were severed; and his liver was stabbed and damaged," said agent Andrew Wylie, who added that Rushdie could not speak. Carl LeVan, an American University politics professor attending the literary event, told AFP that the assailant had rushed onto the stage where Rushdie was seated and "stabbed him repeatedly and viciously".

Several people ran to the stage and took the suspect to the ground before a trooper present at the event arrested him. A doctor in the audience administered medical care until emergency first responders arrived. New York state police identified the suspected attacker as Hadi Matar, a 24-year-old from Fairfield, New Jersey, adding that he stabbed Rushdie in the neck as well as the abdomen. The motive for the stabbing remains unclear.

An interviewer on-stage, 73-year-old Ralph Henry Reese, suffered a facial injury but has been released from hospital, police said. The attack took place at the Chautauqua Institution, which hosts



RIYADH: A handout image released in 2016 shows a list of wanted men including Saudi national Abdullah Zayed Al-Bakri Al-Shehri (second row, right), who blew himself up in Jeddah. — AFP

tion of three criminal statutes, including one falling under the Espionage Act, which makes it a crime to illegally obtain or retain national security information.

Trump, who is weighing another White House run in 2024, vehemently denounced the FBI raid on his Florida home and claimed that all of the material confiscated during the search had been previously "declassified". "They didn't need to 'seize' anything," he said in a statement on his Truth Social platform. "They could have had it anytime they wanted without playing politics and breaking into Mar-a-Lago."

Continued on Page 6

arts programs in a tranquil lakeside community 110 km south of Buffalo city. "What many of us witnessed today was a violent expression of hate that shook us to our core," the Chautauqua Institution said in a statement.

LeVan, a Chautauqua regular, said the suspect "was trying to stab him as many times as possible before he was subdued", adding that he believed the man "was trying to kill" Rushdie. "There were gasps of horror and panic from the crowd," the professor said. Rushdie, 75, was propelled into the spotlight with his second



Salman Rushdie

Continued on Page 6

Local

# Kuwait's New Ambassador to US presents credentials

## Budaiwi reiterates Kuwait's pride in strategic relations with US

WASHINGTON: The new Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US Jassem Al-Budaiwi has submitted his credentials to Chief of Protocol of the US State Department Rufus Gifford. During a reception held at the department, in presence of Assistant State Secretary



WASHINGTON: (From left) The new Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US Jassem Al-Budaiwi, the US Assistant State Secretary for Near East Affairs Barbara Leaf and Chief of Protocol of the US State Department Rufus Gifford. — KUNA photos



The new Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US Jassem Al-Budaiwi presents his credentials to Chief of Protocol of the US State Department Rufus Gifford.



### PM receives call from US National Security Advisor

for Near East Affairs Barbara Leaf, Budaiwi reiterated that the Kuwaiti political leadership is proud of strategic historical relations with the US. He also conveyed the greetings of Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, reaffirming mutual willingness to promote bilateral cooperation in all fields, mainly through strategic dialogue.

Speaking to KUNA, the ambassador spoke highly of the elevated level of deep-rooted relations between both friendly countries and peoples, which

have been furthered to cover significant strategic cooperation, based on continued fruitful efforts by both countries to ensure international security and stability. He added that the US is a major destination for Kuwaiti students, patients and tourists, stressing the economic significance of the US to the State of Kuwait as the former hosts the lion's

share of the Kuwaiti sovereign wealth fund's investments.

The ambassador pointed out close military and security coordination and cooperation between both countries, reflecting US commitment to ensuring Kuwait's security and stability. He boasted that Kuwait has great diplomatic and institutional representation in the US,

including the embassy in Washington, permanent mission to the UN in New York, two general consulates in Los Angeles and New York, 11 military technical offices, in addition to branches of banks and investment companies.

In other news, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received a phone call from US

National Security Advisor Jack Sullivan. During the phone call, Sullivan conveyed to His Highness Sheikh Ahmad greetings on forming the new cabinet. His Highness Sheikh Ahmad expressed thanks and appreciation for the kind words and sentiments, which reflected on the strategic relations between the two countries. — KUNA

## Foreign Minister honors Kuwait's new CRPD member

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received chairwoman of Tomooh Sports Club, National Director of Kuwait Special Olympics Rihab Buresli on the occasion of her winning membership of the UN

committee on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD). He conveyed congratulations of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for her unprecedented achievement.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad expressed confidence in Buresli's ability in reflecting Kuwait's expertise in caring for the disabled at the international committee, and contribute through the committee to promoting the rights of the disabled, and implement Kuwait's ambitious vision in caring for the disabled based on law 8/2010, that was presented as an International model through Kuwait's candidacy.

Buresli thanked HH the Amir and HH the Crown Prince, and said she will do her best to fulfill the confidence of the international community, which reflects Kuwait's leading role in the humanitarian action. She also appreciated the support of foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nasser and the efforts of Kuwait's Mission at the United Nations.

Kuwait's candidate Rihab Buresli took second place in the committee's elections as she received 150 votes out of the possible 182, one vote behind the first place winner. CRPD has 18 independent experts from around the world, and cares for the implementation of the disabled persons rights' treaty, by countries who ratified the treaty.



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets chairwoman of Tomooh Sports Club Rihab Buresli.

## Kuwaiti students graduate from Polish Naval Academy



KUWAIT: The Polish Naval Academy celebrated the graduation of 17 Kuwaiti students who are part of naval batch 47 of the Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy scholarship program. Kuwait's Ambassador to Poland Khaled Al-Fadhli attended the graduation ceremony. — Defense Ministry photos

On the occasion of the



Subscribe or renew your subscription  
KD 20 instead of KD 30 for 1 year

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext: 353-355-356



kuwaittimes.com

Local

# Kuwait's prolonged divorce cases turn women into easy victims

## Divorce rates higher among well educated people in Kuwait

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Several women have complained about the long process of divorce in Kuwait. Divorce cases have risen in recent years, according to the Central Statistical Bureau. It revealed the period from 2017 to 2021 witnessed the highest increase, with 8,041 cases only in the last year. Lawyer Ahmed Al-Turki said the numbers remain variable and some cases take more than a year, explaining the woman is the only victim in such cases, and she bears great responsibility in many cases for her

Psychologist Hind Al-Amiri told Kuwait Times the more educated the person is, the more they are demanding of their rights. "Many divorce cases are due to cheating, social media platforms and soap operas that often encourage it," she said.

"There is a lot of violence inside homes. Many women and children are abused in Kuwait and eventually the wife will ask for divorce to get rid of the husband," Amiri pointed out, stressing that the woman remains the person who loses the most in such cases. Even society blames her, which puts her under great pressure, as she is forced to endure circumstances beyond her capacity.



ics, forming a committee to look into the personal status law and organizing sexual education.

Central Statistical Bureau statistics showed the crude divorce rate was 8.9 percent, while the general divorce rate was 13.7 percent for Kuwaiti men in 2021. The crude divorce rate was 1.0 percent and general divorce rate was 1.1 percent for non-Kuwaiti men in 2021. The year 2020 is considered the lowest in the number of divorce cases during the period of 2017-2021, with 4,661 cases for Kuwaiti men and 4,294 for Kuwaiti women.

August 2021 was the month with the most divorce cases, with 623 cases for Kuwaiti men and

184 cases for non-Kuwaiti men. According to the age groups of Kuwaiti men, the highest number of divorce cases was recorded in the age group of 45+, reaching 1,528 cases, and the lowest was in the age group of 15-19 with 6 cases in 2021.

According to the age groups of Kuwaiti women, the highest number of divorce cases was recorded in the age group of 25-29, reaching 1,409 cases, and the lowest was in the age group of 15-19 with 76 cases in 2021. According to educational levels, the highest number of divorce cases was at the university level for both Kuwaiti men (1,834 cases) and Kuwaiti women (2,354 cases) in 2021.



### Divorce cases on the rise

marriage without her rights being guaranteed.

"Even her rights as a citizen are not allowed to her compared to what is allowed to male citizens. There are some divorced women who think that if her name is on the housing application or she has custody of the children, she will be the owner of the house in the future, but this is false information. She only has the right to housing because she has the custody of the kids. If the custody period ends, she is not entitled to live in or own the house," he told Kuwait Times.

Statistics show the highest rate of divorce is among educated people who have a university degree, where cases reached more than 1,834.

### Social media's effect

Last June, the Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies in cooperation with Kuwait University conducted a field study to survey the opinion of Kuwaiti citizens on the phenomenon of divorce. The study showed that 15 percent of the sample believe social media is the leading cause for divorce. The study showed social media is first in the causes for divorce, followed by weakness of faith, parental interference, lack of responsibility, financial problems, cheating and lack of trust between spouses, uncomfortable residence, beatings and violence, personal status law and sexual problems.

The study, conducted by Professor of Political Science Dr Faisal Boulaib, included 887 male and female citizens. It recommended treatment for social media addiction for spouses, strengthening their faith in religion, not allowing anyone to interfere in their married life, mandatory training programs to prepare each of them for marital life, raising responsible children, providing adequate housing for citizens in the shortest possible period, increasing government support, providing family counseling clin-

## Govt open to women quotas in Assembly polls

**KUWAIT:** A proposal made earlier by the Speaker of the dissolved National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem to amend the electoral law to set a quota for women in each constituency in parliamentary elections is very close to government approval after it was studied by the Cabinet's legal committee, which approved

it and placed it on the government's agenda. Sources said the proposal calls to allocate one or two seats to women in each electoral district, so the new Assembly will have 10 or at least five female members.

The sources said the proposal will be on the agenda of the new government to be formed following the National Assembly elections, expected to be held in late September. They said the current government will not consider the proposal because it is only temporary and will resign as soon as the election results are announced.

The sources said the proposal is null and void as it was submitted in a dissolved

parliament and will not be on the agenda of the concerned committee in the new parliament, but the plan is for the government to present it as a proposed law to be discussed first in the legislative committee, followed by the interior and defense committee, then go through due process.

The sources said the government wants the proposal to confirm the status of women in the society and have women in parliament, especially since elections have not brought women except on rare occasions. This does not meet the ambitions of and is not commensurate with the situation of Kuwaiti women, who have held senior positions, including as ministers.



KUWAIT: The National Assembly building in Kuwait City.

## Workshop discusses Arab environmental awareness efforts

**KUWAIT:** Sabah Al-Ahmad Environmental Training Center of the Kuwait Society for Environment Protection organized the sixth experts' workshop this year themed "Reality of awareness and environmental media in the Arab world" to discuss the concepts and activities of environmental awareness in the Arab region and the most important challenges and means of facing international environmental issues. Dr Mohammad Mahmoud from the Arab

Network for Environment and Development, Dr Ibrahim Audah from the Wild Life Society in Palestine and Chairwoman of Kuwait Society for Environmental Protection Dr Wijdan Al-Uqab, along with around 75 experts from 12 Arab countries, participated. The workshop discussed several issues including Kuwait Society for Environment Protection's experience in environmental awareness and media through a presentation of media develop-



ment followed by the society in an approach that directly contributes to the development of audiovisual environmental media. The Palestinian society dis-

cussed its vision of environmental media and popular awareness through popular campaigns it carried out and its experience through social media.

## Kuwaiti official underscores youths' social development role

**CAIRO:** The Head of the Women's Institute for Development and Peace in Kuwait Kawther Al-Jouan underlined on Saturday the importance of the role of conscious youths in promoting the culture of society and developing real awareness to avoid the false awareness broadcasted by social networking sites. This was mentioned in the first forum on 'Arab youth talk to build awareness' under the slogan, "Generations that support the nation's

issues," organized by the Arab Youth Council for Integrated Development in line with the Egyptian Ministry of Youth and Sports. The youth are targeted by social crises attempting to distort their values by spreading concepts that reject morals, putting it in formal frameworks trying to be implemented by countries and regard it as a personal freedom for the individual, while promoting it among the youth by printing its slogans on sports clothes and others, she stressed. She urged to focus on developing youth through advancing the culture of society, paying attention to young people, cultural diversity, and developing true awareness among young people to avoid the false awareness broadcasted by social networking sites. She underscored the need to raise knowledge for young people, pay attention to the health of the youth, as well as provide them with the opportunity to engage in



CAIRO: The Head of the Women's Institute for Development and Peace in Kuwait Kawther Al-Jouan speaks during the forum. — KUNA

beneficial activities for society, such as volunteering and keeping pace with the movement of society. She also drew attention to how vital the youth are as an economic force with their smart minds and awareness. — KUNA

## Coastguard foils 'suspected drugs' smuggling attempt

**KUWAIT:** The coastguard foiled an attempt to smuggle suspected illicit material near Um Al-Maradem island. A boat was spotted entering Kuwait's territorial waters near the island, so a coastguard patrol was dispatched to the area, which found three persons onboard with four jerrycans with



74 pieces of suspected drugs. One of the suspects led authorities to the person supposed to receive the drugs, who was arrested in Nuwaiseeb near Aquamarine Resort. The suspects and the contraband were sent to concerned authorities.



## Preparations complete for Kuwait's first satellite launch



**KUWAIT:** Team members of the National Project for the First Kuwaiti Satellite completed the final tests to prepare Kuwait's first satellite 'Kuwait Sat - 1' for launch in November. The team includes Dr Ahmad Taleb Al-Kandari, Anfal Al-Linqawi, Bodour Al-Sabti, Ghaith Al-Ghaith, Aseel Mubarak and Ali Mirza.

## Local

**Kuwait Times**  
Established 1961  
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher  
**YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN**

Editor-in-Chief  
**ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN**

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353/3561  
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618  
P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

## News in brief

## Kuwait condemns terrorist attack in Burkina Faso

**KUWAIT:** The State of Kuwait condemned and denounced on Friday the terror attack, which occurred in Yatenga province, northern Burkina Faso, leading to several casualties, said a Foreign Ministry statement on Friday. The statement reiterated Kuwait's unwavering position against violence and terrorism, renewing calls to bolster international efforts to rid the world and humanity of this belligerent threat. The statement reflected the State of Kuwait's sincere condolences to the families of the victims and also wishes of swift recovery for those wounded in the attack.



## Kuwait crude oil up \$2.07 to \$105.83 pb: KPC

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti crude oil price rose by \$2.07 during Friday's trading sessions to hit \$105.83 per barrel (pb), compared with \$103.76 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Saturday. Brent futures also fell by \$1.45 to \$98.15 pb and West Texas Intermediate dropped by \$2.25 to \$92.09 pb.



## Kuwait's Abdullah Al-Shemmari honored for youth excellence

**CAIRO:** The Arab League hosted a celebration to honor the winners of the Arab youth excellence awards 2022, including Abdullah Al-Shemmari of Kuwait, who won the third award for voluntary action. The awards are offered by the Council of Arab Ministers of Youth and Sports, whose executive council is currently chaired by Egypt. The celebration, co-organized by the League and the Egyptian Ministry of Youth and Sports recently on the eve of the International Youth Day, gathered a number of ambassadors and representatives of UN agencies based in Cairo. Speaking to KUNA on the fringes of the event, Shemmari thanked Kuwait's Public Youth Authority for nominating him for the award for his Alamal Voluntary Electronic Newspaper. The newspaper specializes in the affairs of persons with disability in the State of Kuwait and other countries in the region, and offers useful information to those persons and their families via Alamal portal, he said. "The idea of the project first sprang to my mind in 2008 when I heard about His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Award: its disability category inspired me to make life easier for those people," Shemmari noted. He dedicated the award to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for their constant support to Kuwaiti youth. During the celebration, the Arab League's Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs Haifa Abu-Ghazaleh and Egypt's Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports Abdullah Al-Batesh handed the awards to Al-Shemmari and the other winners. — KUNA

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** The Sturgeon Moon, the last supermoon of 2022, rises above Kuwait City on August 11, 2022. — KUNA photo

## Commerce minister bans cash payments at domestic help offices

**KUWAIT:** Commerce and Industry Minister Fahad Al-Shuraian issued two decisions banning cash payments at domestic help offices and exhibitions held in Kuwait, regardless whether the exhibitors are from Kuwait or abroad. The first decision commits companies and domestic help offices licensed by the Public Authority of Manpower and the commerce ministry to not deal in cash when processing any contract or transaction.

Payment should be debited from the customer's account through non-cash means as permitted by the central bank. Any establishment that violates this rule will be closed down and investigations will ensue. The second decision commits companies that are under the commerce ministry's supervision and participating in all types of exhibitions in Kuwait, regardless whether the exhibitors are from Kuwait or abroad, not to receive cash payments for any deal.

Meanwhile, Commerce Ministry inspectors closed a car rental office in Salmiya for breaking the law. The office workers reportedly forced clients to rent vehicles for a specific number of days, among other violations they have committed, the ministry said in a statement. Legal action has been taken against the office, it added.



**KUWAIT:** A commerce ministry inspector closes a car rental office in Salmiya.



**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced that the relevant security sectors carried out a wide-scale crackdown in the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula areas, arresting 394 violators of the residency law as well as wanted people, 66 of whom were in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and 328 in Mahboula. — Interior Ministry photos

## Store closed for selling counterfeit goods

**KUWAIT:** Ministry of Commerce and Industry inspectors closed a Salmiya store for selling counterfeit products. The inspectors confiscated a large number of purses, shoes and accessories bearing logos of famous brands, the ministry said in a statement, noting that legal action has been taken.





Indian, Pakistani siblings reunite 75 years after Partition

## Taleban violently disperse rare women's protest in Kabul



BAGHDAD, Iraq: Supporters of Iraq's pro-Iran Coordination Framework gather near tents set up on a bridge leading to the capital Baghdad's Green Zone, on August 13, 2022, a day after they launched their own sit-in and nearly two weeks after supporters of Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr stormed parliament and began an open-ended protest. —AFP

# Rival sit-ins deepen Iraq deadlock

## Sadr opponents launch their own Baghdad sit-in as standoff escalates

**BAGHDAD:** Opponents of populist Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr launched their own Baghdad sit-in Friday, nearly two weeks after Sadr supporters stormed parliament and began an open-ended protest first inside, then outside the legislature. The opposing encampments are the latest turn in a standoff between Iraq's rival Shiite blocs which has so far remained peaceful in the war-scarred country.

The pro-Iran Coordination Framework said it would hold an "indefinite sit-in" to press for a new government to be formed quickly to end months of deadlock. The announcement came in a statement read out to thousands of the bloc's supporters who had gathered on an access road to the capital's Green Zone, home to government and diplomatic buildings, as well as parliament.

"We don't know how long we're going to stay," said Abu Jabal, a 32-year-old day laborer. "Five months, 10 months, we don't know. Everything is ready, there will be food." An AFP correspondent saw protesters assembling large tents in readiness to camp out. Loyalists of Sadr, a revered Shiite cleric who once led a militia against US and Iraqi government forces, have been demanding fresh elections after the Coordination Framework named a candidate for the premiership.

The Coordination Framework—an alliance that brings together the party of ex-prime minister Nuri Al-Maliki, a longtime Sadr foe, and the Hashed Al-Shaabi, a pro-Iran former paramilitary network now integrated into the security forces—wants a new government as quickly as possible.

### 'New faces'

A statement from the alliance demanded the "formation of a new government" that would provide pub-

lic services and solutions to power outages and water shortages. Maliki said in a statement that Friday's mobilization showed "no party can take hold of the street at the expense of another."

"We're here to protect the state and the constitution," said Abu Mehdi, a protest organizer from the city of Hilla, south of the capital. "Give the Coordination Framework the chance to form a government."

Earlier in the day, thousands of Sadr supporters gathered



'Both camps are part of a corrupt system'

near parliament for the Muslim weekly prayers. A week earlier, Sadr had called out tens of thousands of his followers for prayers in the area.

For nearly two weeks, his supporters have held daily sit-ins, first inside the legislature and later on its grounds. Their protest reflects months of failed negotiations by Iraq's political forces to form a new government after inconclusive October elections. Outside parliament Umm Hussein, a Sadr supporter

in her 50s, said she was there to protest "the regime that for 20 years has done nothing for the people, except plunder and steal public money".

"Ninety percent of the population live in poverty, in sickness, in hunger," she complained, demanding "new faces" at the helm who would "serve the people".

### 'Lengthy struggle'

Sadr's supporters also rallied Friday in the southern cities of Amarah, Kut and Nasiriyah. Their rivals demonstrated in the main northern city of Mosul, AFP correspondents reported.

On Wednesday, Sadr demanded that the judiciary dissolve parliament by the end of next week, as part of his call for new elections. To further his campaign, Sadr called on his supporters to petition the courts en masse. Stewards handed out printed forms outside parliament on Friday, to which demonstrators only had to add their names and signatures.

The Framework had initially said they were conditionally open to new elections. Asked what he would do if the courts rejected the petitions, 32-year-old engineer Ahmed Al-Ibrahimi said: "Revolution is a lengthy struggle. Beating the retreat is not in our vocabulary. We will keep up our sit-in and we will maintain our demand for the overthrow of this corrupt political junta."

Also on the street Friday were dozens of supporters of an anti-government protest movement that erupted in late 2019. "Both camps are part of a corrupt system that steers the country," said Ali Jaber, a 50-year-old communist activist, alluding to the rival Shiite blocs. "Getting rid of them is the first step to fulfil the dreams of the Iraqi people," he said from a Baghdad square. —AFP

## Russia, US in talks over 'Merchant of Death' for Griner

**MOSCOW:** The US and Russia are discussing a prisoner exchange that would involve trading a notorious Russian arms trafficker for an American basketball star, a Russian diplomat said on Saturday. It marked the first time that Russia said that the talks concerned exchanging Viktor Bout, known as the "Merchant of Death," for two-time Olympian Brittney Griner.

"The discussions on the very sensitive topic of an exchange are proceeding via the channels chosen by our presidents," Alexander Datchiev, the head of the North America department at the Russian foreign ministry, was quoted as saying by the state news agency TASS. "Silent diplomacy continues and should bear fruit if Washington, of course, is careful not to fall into propaganda," he said. Griner was arrested at a Moscow airport in February for possessing vape cartridges with a small amount of cannabis oil.

The 31-year-old, who was in Russia to play for the professional Yekaterinburg team during her off-season from the Phoenix Mercury, was charged with smuggling narcotics and was sentenced to nine years in a penal colony in early August. Bout was arrested in Thailand in 2008 and then extradited to the US, where in 2012 he was sentenced to 25 years in prison on charges of arming rebels in some of the world's bloodiest conflicts.

He inspired the 2005 arms smuggling movie "Lord of War" starring Nicolas Cage and was dubbed the "Merchant of Death" by former British minister Peter Hain for supplying weapons to war-torn Angola and Liberia. Russia has long sought his release. Last weekend Bill Richardson, a former US ambassador to the UN who has negotiated the release of several Americans held in other countries, said he was "optimistic" about efforts to negotiate a "two for two" prisoner swap with Russia.

"I think she's going to be freed, I think she has the right strategy of contrition, there's going to be a prisoner swap — though I think it will be two for two, involving Paul Whelan," he told ABC's "This Week," insisting that he was only a "catalyst" in any negotiations. Whelan is a former US Marine who was convicted of espionage in June 2020 and sentenced to 16 years in prison. He has insisted on his innocence. —AFP

## US lawmakers pass landmark climate, tax plan

**WASHINGTON:** US lawmakers on Friday adopted President Joe Biden's sprawling climate, tax and health-care plan—a major win for the veteran Democrat that includes the biggest ever American investment in the battle against global warming.

Passage in the House of Representatives along strict party lines came after approval of the bill in the Senate by a razor-thin margin, with Vice President Kamala Harris casting the tie-breaking vote.

Biden quickly hailed the adoption of his plan, which includes a \$370 billion investment aimed at bringing about a 40 percent drop in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. "Today, the American people won. Special interests lost," the president tweeted in the minutes after the vote.

"With the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act in the House, families will see lower prescription drug prices, lower health care costs, and lower energy costs. I look forward to signing it into law next week."

The vote is a clear victory for Biden on one of his top policy priorities less than three months before November's crucial midterm elections, with his Democratic Party's control of Congress in the balance.

It also should help restore a semblance of US leadership in the fight to cut carbon emissions.

In her final comments before the vote, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called the legislation "a robust cost-cutting package that meets the moment, ensuring that our families thrive and that our planet survives." The package includes the largest ever commitment to fighting climate change by

the world's biggest economy, which is also one of the planet's worst polluters.

Climate activists rejoiced after the 220-207 vote, which earned the support of all Democrats, even progressives who had lamented that it did not go far enough.

The president of the Union of Concerned Scientists, Johanna Chao Kreilick, called the legislation "a game changer and reason for hope." The so-called "Inflation Reduction Act" also would provide \$64 billion for health care initiatives and ensure lower costs for some drugs, which can be 10 times more expensive in the United States than in some other rich nations.

Conservative lawmakers have criticized the bill as wasteful spending, and no Republican lawmakers supported it. "Democrats are jamming through Congress a bill spending hundreds of billions of dollars our country doesn't have, on far-left policies our country cannot afford," Republican lawmaker Lee Zeldin tweeted.

### Tax credits for clean energy

Rather than attempting to punish the biggest polluters in corporate America, the bill instead proposes a series of financial incentives aimed at steering the country away from fossil fuels. It would provide Americans with a tax credit of up to \$7,500 when purchasing an electric car, plus a 30 percent discount when they install solar panels on their roofs. The legislation would also provide millions to help protect and conserve forests, which have been ravaged in recent years by wildfires during record heat waves that scientists say are linked to global warming. Billions of dollars in tax credits would also go to some of the country's worst-polluting industries to help their transition to greener methods—a measure bitterly opposed by progressive Democrats who have, however, accepted this as the best option after months of inaction and frustration.

But they long ago had to give up their ambitions for free preschool and community colleges and expanded health care for the elderly.

At 34, Watkins has many years ahead of her at the US space agency NASA, and could very well be one of the first women to step foot on the Moon in the coming years, as a member of the Artemis team preparing for upcoming lunar missions. Missions to Mars are off in the future, but given that astronauts often work into their 50s, Watkins could conceivably have a shot. Either way is just fine, she says. "I certainly would be just absolutely thrilled to be able to be a part of the effort to go to another planetary surface, whether it be the Moon or Mars."

In the meantime, Watkins' first space flight was a history maker: she became the first Black woman to undertake a long-term stay on the ISS, where she



WASHINGTON: US House Democrats pose for photos after Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi signed the Inflation Reduction Act during a bill enrollment ceremony after the House passed the legislation at the US Capitol August 12, 2022 in Washington, DC. —AFP

### Corporate tax

Biden came to office with promises of sweeping reforms, but has repeatedly seen his hopes dashed, revived and dashed again. The 50-50 split in the Senate, with Harris as the tie-breaker, has effectively given a veto to moderates such as Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who used that power to block Biden's much more expansive Build Back Better plan. But in late July, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer managed to engineer a compromise with Manchin, whose state's economy depends heavily on coal mining. To help offset the plan's massive spending, it would reduce the US deficit through a new 15 percent minimum tax on companies with profits of \$1 billion or more—a move targeting some that now pay far less. That measure could generate more than \$258 billion in tax receipts for the government over the next 10 years, by some estimates. —AFP

has already spent three months as a mission specialist, with three months to go. The Apollo missions that sent humans to the Moon were solely staffed by white men, and NASA has sought over the years to widen its recruitment to a more diverse group of candidates.

The agency now wants to put both women and people of color on the Moon. "I think it is an important milestone for the agency and the country, and the world as well," Watkins says. "Representation is important. It is true that it is difficult to be what you can't see." The Maryland native added that she was "grateful for all of those who have come before me... the women and Black astronauts who have paved the way to enable me to be here today." —AFP

## US astronaut Jessica Watkins sets sights on the Moon, Mars

**NEW YORK:** If you had the choice, would you rather go to the Moon or Mars? The question is utterly theoretical for most of us, but for US astronaut Jessica Watkins, it hits a bit differently. "Whichever comes first!" Watkins says with a laugh, in a lengthy interview with AFP from her post on the International Space Station (ISS).



In this screengrab provided by AFPTV on August 9, 2022, US astronaut Jessica Watkins speaks during an interview from the Columbus module of the International Space Station. —AFP

## International

# Wind, thunderstorms expected around contained French wildfire

## French firefighters keeping a wary eye on the huge blaze

**HOSTENS, France:** French firefighters were keeping a wary eye on a huge blaze that appeared to be contained in the country's southwest, with thunderstorms and strong wind gusts expected in the area overnight. The 40-kilometre (25-mile) fire front in the Gironde and Landes departments around Bordeaux "did not significantly progress overnight. Firefighters are working on its periphery," police said in a statement.

But officials said it was premature to say that the blaze—which has already reignited once—was under control. "We remain vigilant" because "while we can't see huge flames, the fire continues to consume vegetation and soil," Arnaud Mendousse, lieutenant colonel of Gironde fire and rescue, told AFP.

Weather forecasters are expecting thunderstorms with wind gusts of up to 60 kilometers an hour in the region in the evening. The wind "could reignite the fire" that "is in a state of pause," Menousse warned. Authorities on Saturday reopened a highway linking Bordeaux and Spain after closing a 20-kilometre stretch on Wednesday.

Traditional firework displays for the Catholic Feast of the Assumption on Monday, when Mary is believed to have entered heaven, have been banned in

several areas.

Corsica was lashed by winds traveling at 95 kilometers (almost 60 miles) an hour overnight and hit by hail, Meteo-France said. Forecaster Claire Chanal said the storms expected this weekend could lead to flooding and hail. EU members including Germany, Poland, Austria and Romania have pledged reinforcements totaling 361 firefighters to join the roughly 1,100 French ones on the ground, along with several water-bombing planes from the European Union



**Fire continues to consume vegetation, soil**

fleet.

Most of the reinforcements had arrived on the ground, with the last 146 firefighters from Poland expected later on Saturday. "Here we are all volunteers. We're trained, we want to help," said Tone Neuhaffel, a German firefighter aged 36. France has been buffeted this summer by a historic drought that has forced water use restrictions nationwide, as well as a series of heatwaves that experts say are being driven by climate change.

### Forests off limits

In eastern France, police said on Saturday they were banning entry to most forests in the Bas-Rhin region near the German border. Cars, bicyclists, hik-



**SAINT-MAGNE, France:** A firefighting aircraft sprays fire retardant over trees during a wildfire near Saint-Magne, southwestern France. — AFP

kers, hunters and fishermen are prohibited from entry until Tuesday, police said in a statement. Only residents will be able to access the area.

"It's an extreme step in the face of an exceptional situation," said Pierre Grandadam, president of a group that includes the Alsace forested communities. "It's very difficult to enforce the closing of a forest, we can only do this as a last resort, but at the moment, everything is dry, the slightest gesture

can lead to a conflagration. I've never seen anything like it," said the 74-year-old. "We're praying for rain."

The blaze near Bordeaux erupted in July—the driest month seen in France since 1961—destroying 14,000 hectares and forcing thousands of people to evacuate before it was contained.

But it continued to smolder in the tinder-dry pine forests and peat-rich soil. Officials suspect arson may have played a role in the latest flare-up, which

has burned 7,400 hectares since Tuesday. Fires in France in 2022 have ravaged an area three times the annual average over the past 10 years, with blazes also active in the Alpine Jura, Isere and Ardeche regions this week.

European Copernicus satellite data showed more carbon dioxide greenhouse gas-over one million tons—had been released from 2022's forest fires in France than in any summer since records began in 2003. — AFP

## Indian, Pakistani siblings reunite 75 years after Partition

**BHATINDA, India:** Tears of joy rolled down his wizened cheeks when Indian Sika Khan met his Pakistani brother for the first time since being separated by Partition in 1947. Sikh laborer Sika was just six months old when he and his elder brother Sadiq Khan were torn apart as Britain split the subcontinent at the end of colonial rule.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of Partition, during which sectarian bloodshed killed possibly more than one million people, families like Sika's were cleaved apart and two independent nations—Pakistan and India—were created. Sika's

father and sister were killed in communal massacres, but Sadiq, just 10 years old, managed to flee to Pakistan.

"My mother could not bear the trauma and jumped into the river and killed herself," Sika said at his simple brick house in Bhatinda, a district in the western Indian state of Punjab, which bore the brunt of Partition violence. "I was left at the mercy of villagers and some relatives who brought me up."

Ever since he was a child, Sika yearned to find out about his brother, the only surviving member of his family. But he failed to make headway until a doctor in the neighborhood offered to help three years ago. After numerous phone calls and the assistance of Pakistani YouTuber Nasir Dhillon, Sika was able to be reunited with Sadiq. The brothers finally met in January at Kartarpur corridor, a rare, visa-free crossing that allows Indian Sikh pilgrims to visit a temple in Pakistan. The corridor,

which opened in 2019, has become a symbol of unity and reconciliation for separated families, despite the lingering hostilities between the two nations. "I am from India and he is from Pakistan, but we have so much love for each other," said Sika, clutching a faded and framed family photograph.

"We hugged and cried so much when we met for the first time. The countries can keep on fighting. We don't care about India-Pakistan politics."

Pakistani farmer and real estate agent Dhillon, 38, a Muslim, says he has helped reunite about 300 families through his YouTube channel together with his friend Bhupinder Singh, a Pakistani Sikh. "This is not my source of income. It's my inner affection and passion," Dhillon told AFP. "I feel like these stories are my own stories or stories of my grandparents, so helping these elders I feel like I am fulfilling the wishes of my own grandparents." — AFP



**PATIALA, India:** This handout picture taken on May 18, 2022 and received as a courtesy of Mumtaz Bibi's family shows Pakistani woman Mumtaz Bibi (center, bottom) sitting with her Indian brothers Baldev Singh (left) and Gurmukh Singh (right) at the Kartarpur corridor near the India-Pakistan border. — AFP

## 394 arrested in Mahboula...

Continued from Page 1

The sources stressed the deportation procedures will not be lengthy, and the ministry of interior will work in cooperation with concerned authorities to deport violators within three days of their arrest, except for those who have cases that require them to be detained to complete their trials.

## 'Top secret' docs seized in raid on...

Continued from Page 1

Legal experts cautioned that while the warrant cites the Espionage Act, any potential charges remain unclear and Trump is not necessarily suspected of espionage. "The Espionage Act encompasses a ton of crimes that have nothing to do with 'spying,'" Bradley Moss, a national security lawyer, said on Twitter. "It's about unlawful storing of information relating to the national defense."

Orin Kerr, a law professor at the University of California, Berkeley, agreed, saying the "Espionage Act is a pretty broad law about mishandling classified documents, not just espionage". Among the records seized during the raid were documents marked "Top Secret", "Secret" and "Confidential". Some of the papers were marked "SCI" - sensitive compartmented information - meaning they were meant to be viewed only in secure government facilities.

FBI agents also seized binders of photos, a handwritten note, information about the "President of France", and the grant of clemency made by Trump to Roger Stone, an ally of the former president, according to the list. The Justice Department had asked a federal judge to unseal the search war-

The sources pointed out that instructions have been issued to the ministry of interior leadership to continue to pursue residency violators and increase inspection campaigns, and not be affected by the preparations for the National Assembly elections, which also requires security teams of military personnel in large numbers to provide security. The sources pointed out the instructions issued also include punishing the sponsors of those who are arrested and preventing them from sponsoring foreigners for a period of not less than two years, as well as bearing the cost of deporting the expatriate. The deported foreigners will face a permanent ban on entering Kuwait in the future, they added.

rant on Friday barring objections from Trump.

The 76-year-old Trump did not block the release, but complained that he was the victim of "unprecedented political weaponization of law enforcement" by "radical left Democrats". Leading Republicans have rallied around Trump and some members of his party have accused the Justice Department and FBI of partisanship in targeting the ex-president. In an attack that appeared to be a direct response to the FBI search of Mar-a-Lago, an armed man tried to storm an FBI office in Cincinnati, Ohio on Thursday.

The assailant, who was shot dead by police after an hours-long standoff, reportedly posted on Truth Social that he hoped his actions would serve as a "call to arms". Garland on Thursday criticized what he called "unfounded attacks" on the FBI and the Justice Department while FBI Director Christopher Wray, a Trump appointee, denounced "violence and threats against law enforcement".

The Justice Department typically does not confirm or deny whether it is investigating someone, and Garland took pains to emphasize that the law was being applied fairly to Trump. In addition to investigations into his business practices, Trump faces legal scrutiny for his efforts to overturn the results of the November 2020 election, and for the Jan 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol by his supporters. Trump was impeached for a historic second time by the House after the Capitol riot - he was charged with inciting an insurrection - but was acquitted by the Senate. — AFP

## Rushdie on ventilator, may...

Continued from Page 1

novel "Midnight's Children" in 1981, which won international praise and Britain's prestigious Booker Prize for its portrayal of post-independence India.

But his 1988 book "The Satanic Verses" transformed his life when Iran's first supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a fatwa, or religious decree, ordering his killing. ovel was considered by some Muslims as disrespectful of Islam and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Conservative media in Iran hailed Friday's attack on Rushdie, with one state-owned paper saying the "neck of the devil" had been "cut by a razor".

Ultra-conservative newspaper Kayhan, whose chief is appointed by current supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, wrote: "Bravo to this courageous and duty-conscious man who attacked the apostate and depraved Salman Rushdie in New York." Rushdie, who was born in India to non-practicing Muslims and identifies as an atheist, was forced to go underground as a bounty was put on his head.

He was granted police protection by the government in Britain, where he was at school and where he made his home, following the murder or attempted murder of his translators and publishers. He spent

nearly a decade in hiding, moving houses repeatedly and being unable to tell even his children where he lived. Rushdie only began to emerge from his life on the run in the late 1990s after Iran in 1998 said it would not support his assassination.

Now living in New York, he is an advocate of freedom of speech, notably launching a strong defense of French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo after its staff were gunned down by Islamists in Paris in 2015. The magazine had published drawings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that drew furious reactions from Muslims worldwide. Charlie Hebdo said nothing justified the stabbing of Rushdie.

Global leaders voiced anger over the attack, with French President Emmanuel Macron saying the author "embodied freedom" and that "his battle is ours, a universal one". British leader Boris Johnson said he was "appalled," sending thoughts to Rushdie's loved ones and praising the author for "exercising a right we should never cease to defend". US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan called it a "reprehensible attack", adding that "all of us in the Biden-Harris Administration are praying for his speedy recovery".

Threats and boycotts continue against literary events that Rushdie attends, and his knighthood by Queen Elizabeth II in 2007 sparked protests in Iran and Pakistan, where a government minister said the honor justified suicide bombings. The fatwa and other threats failed to stifle Rushdie's writing and inspired his memoir "Joseph Anton", named after his alias while in hiding and written in the third person. — AFP



**CHAUTAUQUA, New York:** In this frame grab from video, Salman Rushdie is loaded onto a medical evacuation helicopter. — AFP

## International

# Taleban fighters violently disperse rare women's protest in Kabul

## Women march in front of ministry for 'bread, work and freedom'

**KABUL:** Taleban fighters beat women protesters and fired into the air on Saturday as they violently dispersed a rare rally in the Afghan capital, days ahead of the first anniversary of the hardline Islamists' return to power. Since seizing control on August 15 last year, the Taleban have rolled back the marginal gains made by women during two decades of US intervention in Afghanistan.

About 40 women-chanting "bread, work and freedom"-marched in front of the education ministry building in Kabul, before the fighters dispersed them by firing their guns into the air, an AFP correspondent reported.



**KABUL, Afghanistan:** Taleban fighters walk as they fire in air to disperse Afghan women protesters in Kabul on August 13, 2022. —AFP

### Protest ahead of Taleban rule anniversary

Some women protesters who took refuge in nearby shops were chased and beaten by Taleban fighters with their rifle butts. The demonstrators carried a banner which read "August 15 is a black day" as they demanded rights to work and political participation. "Justice, justice. We're fed up with ignorance," they chanted, many not wearing face veils.

"Unfortunately, the Taleban from the intelligence service came and fired in the air," said Zholia Parsi, one

of the organizers of the march. "They dispersed the girls, tore our banners and confiscated the mobile phones of many girls." But protester Munisa Mubariz vowed to continue fighting for women's rights.

"If the Taleban want to silence this voice, it's not possible. We will protest from our homes," she said.

Some journalists covering the demonstration—the first women's rally in months—were also beaten by the Taleban fighters, an AFP correspondent saw.

### 'Making women invisible'

While the Taleban authorities have allowed and even promoted some rallies against the United States, they have declined permission for any women's rally since they returned to power. After seizing control last year, the Taleban promised a softer version of the harsh Islamist rule that characterized their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001. But many restrictions have already been imposed,

especially on women, to comply with the movement's austere vision of Islam.

Tens of thousands of girls have been shut out of secondary schools, while women have been barred from returning to many government jobs. Women have also been banned from travelling alone on long trips and can only visit public gardens and parks in the capital on days separate from men.

In May, the country's supreme leader and chief of the Taleban, Hibatullah Akhundzada, ordered women to fully cover themselves in public, including their faces—ideally with an all-encompassing burqa. Since the secondary school ban was announced in March, many secret schools for these girls have sprung up across several provinces.

The United Nations and rights groups have repeatedly slammed the Taleban government for imposing the restrictions on women. These policies show a "pattern of absolute gender segregation and are aimed at making women invisible in the society", Richard Bennett, UN special rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, told reporters in Kabul during a visit in May.

Human Rights Watch on Thursday called on the Taleban to "reverse their horrifying and misogynistic" decision to bar women from education. "This would send a message that the Taleban are willing to reconsider their most egregious actions," Fereshta Abbasi, Afghanistan researcher at the rights group, said in a statement. Some Afghan women initially pushed back against the curbs, holding small protests.

But the Taleban soon rounded up the ringleaders, holding them incommunicado while denying they had been detained. —AFP

## Kenya's 'mama mboga' pinning hopes on future president

**ELDORET, Kenya:** Behind her makeshift stall in the Kenyan town of Eldoret, just a blue plastic sheet on the ground strewn with bunches of spinach and kale leaves, Agneta Muhonja Ambane's face is etched with fatigue. The 68-year-old grandmother did not go home last night, fearing she would run into her landlord demanding rent that she can no longer afford to pay.

She says she preferred to spend the night out in the cold in a corner of the market in the Rift Valley town. Ambane is a "mama mboga" ("mama vegetable" in Swahili), a term used for the women vendors found everywhere in markets or on roadsides across Kenya.

They sell small quantities of fruit, vegetables, beans or fried fish to eke out a living for their families. Ambane has been selling vegetables since she was just eight years old. "Now, life is hard, the cost of living is too high," she sighs. Its economy already hammered by the COVID pandemic, Kenya now is suffering from skyrocketing prices for essential goods caused by the fallout from war in Ukraine. Inflation hit 8.3 percent in July, the highest in five years, and the struggle of ordinary Kenyans to make ends meet was a hot-button issue in Tuesday's election.

### 'It's not possible'

After casting their ballots, Eldoret's "mama mboga" now hope Kenya's new leader—whichever it may be—will stick to the bold promises made on the hustings. Deputy President William Ruto, who was born in a village not far from Eldoret and is one of the two presidential frontrunners, has styled himself as the champion of "hustlers" struggling to make ends meet.

His rival Raila Odinga, the veteran opposition leader now backed by his longtime foe, the outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta, has also pledged to improve the lot of the ordinary Kenyan.

For the "mama mboga" of Eldoret, the situation is desperate, their customers now increasingly scarce. Ambane, who has 27 grandchildren, says her already meager income is dwindling further.

"Sometimes, you make a profit of only 100 shillings (about 84 cents) in a day, what are you going to buy with 100 shillings?" she says, her arms crossed over her orange-checkered apron.

"Do you think it's possible to support my whole family with these vegetables? It's not possible." She breaks off as a customer asks for the price of spinach. A few words are exchanged and the woman leaves without buying. "I told her 20 shillings (17 cents). She asked for 10, but I bought it for 15!" Ambane protests. "When we get sick, we can't afford to go to hospital. You either prioritise having food in your stomach or go to hospital." At the end of a nearby street, Julia Chepchirchir says she has no choice but to sell her goods at a loss. "Since COVID came, our business went down. We hope that after the elections everything will be good," says the 40-year-old single mother, her hair wrapped up in a pink scarf. —AFP



**NAIROBI, Kenya:** Martha Karua (center), running mate of the Azimio la Umoja political coalition presidential flag bearer, Raila Odinga, dances with some of the elected, allied women candidates. —AFP

## Defense minister enters Indonesia presidential race

**JAKARTA:** Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto has declared his entry into the country's presidential race in 2024, his third bid for the top job in one of the world's largest democracies.

The powerful minister is a controversial figure at home and internationally, having been accused of human rights abuses including involvement in the kidnapping and disappearance of pro-democracy activists in 1998. Speaking late Friday in front of thousands of members of the Great Indonesia Movement Party, or Gerindra, the former special forces commander accepted its nomination and said he was ready for the presidential bid.

"I am ready to keep fighting for the nation and the people, all my life and soul will be dedicated to our motherland," Prabowo told the party meeting on the outskirts of the capital Jakarta.



**SCHWEDT, Germany:** Michael Tautenhahn, deputy leader of the Untersee national park, takes pictures of dead fish on the banks of the river Oder in Schwedt, eastern Germany, on August 12, 2022. —AFP

## Fish die on Oder river after feared chemical dump

**SCHWEDT, Germany:** Thousands of fish have washed up dead on the Oder river running through Germany and Poland, sparking warnings of an environmental disaster as residents are urged to stay away from the water. The fish floating by the German banks near the eastern town of Schwedt are believed to have washed upstream from Poland where first reports of mass fish deaths were made by locals and anglers as early as on July 28. German officials accused Polish authorities of failing to inform them about the deaths, and were taken by surprise when the wave of lifeless fish came floating into view.

In Poland, the government has also come under heavy criticism for failing to take swift action.

Almost two weeks after the first dead fish appeared floating by Polish villages, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said on Friday that "everyone had initially thought that it was a local problem."

But he admitted that the "scale of the disaster is very large, sufficiently large to say that the Oder will need years to recover its natural state." "Probably enormous quantities of chemical waste was dumped into the river in full knowledge of the risk and consequences," added the Polish leader, as German Environment Minister Steffi Lemke urged a comprehensive probe into what she called a brewing "environmental disaster".

Subianto has lost two previous bids for the presidential office, having been defeated by incumbent president and his former bitter election rival Joko Widodo in 2014 and 2019. After his second defeat, Subianto and his team claimed the poll results were fraudulent, triggering protests in the capital that turned violent, with multiple deaths.

Widodo, who is constitutionally barred from seeking a third term, approved of Prabowo's candidacy.

"That's how democracy works. If a minister comes to me and tells me (he is running) there's no way I'd say no, I can't do that," Widodo told journalists late Friday. "If that's translated as me giving a blessing, be my guest."

Subianto, a former son-in-law of Indonesia's late dictator Suharto, has denied all allegations of his role in human rights abuses in Jakarta, restive province Papua and breakaway nation East Timor, and he has never been charged. Amnesty International Indonesia called the 70-year-old's appointment as defense minister in 2019 "a dark day for human rights". It also condemned the administration of then US president Donald Trump for granting Subianto a visa for a 2020 visit, after Washington had previously blocked his entry over the allegations. —AFP

### 'Atypical'

Standing by the riverbank, Michael Tautenhahn, deputy chief of Germany's Lower Oder Valley National Park, looked in dismay at the river on the German-Polish border. "We are standing on the German side—we have dead fish everywhere," he told AFP. "I am deeply shocked... I have the feeling that I'm seeing decades of work lying in ruins here. I see our livelihood, the water—that's our life," he said, noting that it's not just fish that have died, but also mussels and likely countless other water creatures.

"It's just the tip of the iceberg."  
The Oder has over the last years been known as a relatively clean river, and 40 domestic species of fish make their home in the waterway. But now, lifeless fish—some as small as a few centimetres, others reaching 30-40 cm—can be seen across the river. Occasionally, those still struggling to pull through can be seen flipping up in the water, seemingly gasping for air. Officials believe that the fish are likely to have been poisoned.

"This fish death is atypical," said Axel Vogel, environment minister for Brandenburg state, estimating that "undoubtedly tons" of fish have died. Fish death is often caused by the distortion of oxygen levels when water levels are too low, he explained.

"But we have completely different test results, namely that we have had increased oxygen level in the river for several days, and that indicates that a foreign substance has been introduced that has led to this," he said. Tests are ongoing in Germany to establish the substance that may have led to the deaths. Early reports had suggested indications of extremely high levels of mercury. But another batch of preliminary results released on Friday evening showed unusually high levels of salt. —AFP

### News in brief

#### North Korea lifts mask mandate

**SEOUL:** North Korea has lifted a mask mandate and eased other virus restrictions, state media said Saturday, days after leader Kim Jong Un declared "victory" over COVID-19. The announcement comes after Pyongyang earlier this week blamed Seoul for causing the COVID-19 outbreak in the North and threatened to "wipe out" the South Korean authorities, if necessary. Virus restrictions were eased as "the public health crisis created in the country was completely defused and its whole territory was turned into a clean one free from the malignant virus in the shortest period," Pyongyang's official Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) reported. —AFP

#### Cuba puts out huge fuel plant fire

**HAVANA:** Cuba's government declared the "elimination" on Friday of a fire at a major fuel storage plant that left two firefighters dead and 14 people missing. The presidency said on Twitter that "at 7:00 am (1100 GMT) the elimination of the fire was declared." After the fire was extinguished, 60 experts entered the disaster zone to recover the remains of those still missing. "Forensic Medicine teams have been working since early in the morning to search for the remains of the missing persons," the president's office said. —AFP

#### Colombia to restart talks with ELN

**HAVANA:** Colombia's government gave the green light on Friday to resume peace talks with the country's largest remaining rebel force, a key electoral promise that brought leftist President Gustavo Petro to power earlier this week. Colombian government officials on Friday met with members of the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Havana, where they have been based since 2018, with Bogota saying it officially recognizes the "legitimacy of dialogue... in the search for peace." "Both parties agree on the need to restart a dialogue process with facts that show Colombian society and the world that this will be real," High Commissioner for Peace Danilo Rueda said. —AFP

#### US Justice probes Baptist sex abuse

**WASHINGTON:** The Southern Baptist Convention, America's largest Protestant denomination, said Friday that it is being investigated by the US Justice Department following a scandal over its handling of sexual abuse. The church said several of its entities are being investigated and promised to "fully and completely" cooperate with the probe. "While we continue to grieve and lament past mistakes related to sexual abuse, current leaders across the SBC have demonstrated a firm conviction to address those issues of the past and are implementing measures to ensure they are never repeated in the future," the church said in a statement. —AFP

#### S Leone president blames oppn

**FREETOWN, Sierra Leone:** The president of Sierra Leone blamed deadly protests this week on opposition parties, claiming Friday night that his political rivals had attempted to overthrow his government in a "premeditated" insurrection. On Wednesday, a demonstration organized by women to draw attention to inflation and the rising cost of living descended into clashes between security forces and young men demanding President Julius Maada Bio resign. Violence erupted in several parts of the country, with the authorities imposing an internet blackout in response. —AFP

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 2022

# Business

## Drought tightens its grip on Morocco

### Al-Massira water reservoir now reduced to a pond following successive droughts

**RABAT:** Mohamed gave up farming because of successive droughts that have hit his previously fertile but isolated village in Morocco and because he just couldn't bear it any longer.

"To see villagers rush to public fountains in the morning or to a neighbor to get water makes you want to cry," the man in his 60s said. "The water shortage is making us suffer," he told AFP in Ouled Essi Masseoud village, around 140 kilometers (87 miles) from the country's economic capital Casablanca. But it is not just his village that is suffering—all of the North African country has been hit.

No longer having access to potable running water, the villagers of Ouled Essi Masseoud rely solely on sporadic supplies in public fountains and from private wells. "The fountains work just one or two days a week, the wells are starting to dry up and the river next to it is drying up more and more," said Mohamed Sbai as he went to fetch water from neighbors.

The situation is critical, given the village's position in the agricultural province of Seltat, near the Oum Errabia River and the Al-Massira Dam, Morocco's second largest. Its reservoir supplies drinking water to several cities, including the three million people who live in Casablanca. But latest official figures show it is now filling at a rate of just five percent. Al-Massira reservoir has been reduced to little more than a pond bordered by kilometers of cracked earth. Nationally, dams are filling at a rate of only 27 percent, precipitated by the country's worst drought in at least four decades.

#### Water rationing

At 600 cubic meters (21,000 cubic feet) of water annually per capita, Morocco is already well below the water scarcity threshold of 1,700 cubic meters per capita per year, according to the World Health Organization. In the 1960s, water availability was four times higher—at 2,600 cubic meters.

A July World Bank report on the Moroccan economy said the decrease in the availability of renewable water resources put the country in a situation of "structural water stress".

The authorities have now introduced water rationing. The interior ministry ordered local author-



**OULED ESSI MASSEOUD, Morocco:** A herd of sheep walk over cracked earth at Al-Massira dam in Ouled Essi Masseoud village, some 140 kilometers (85 miles) south from Morocco's economic capital Casablanca amidst the country's worst drought in at least four decades. — AFP

ities to restrict supplies when necessary, and prohibits using drinking water to irrigate green spaces and golf courses. Illegal withdrawals from wells, springs or waterways have also been prohibited.

In the longer term, the government plans to build 20 seawater desalination plants by 2030, which should cover a large part of the country's needs. "We are in crisis management rather than in anticipated risk management," water resources expert Mohamed Jalil told AFP. He added that it was "difficult to monitor effectively the measures taken by the authorities". Agronomist Mohamed Srairi said Morocco's Achilles' heel was its agricultural policy "which favors water-consuming fruit trees and industrial agriculture".

#### Key sector

He said such agriculture relies on drip irrigation which, although it can save water, paradoxically results in increased consumption as previously arid

areas become cultivable. The World Bank report noted that cultivated areas under drip irrigation in Morocco have more than tripled.

It said that "modern irrigation technologies may have altered cropping decisions in ways that increased rather than decreased the total quantity of water consumed by the agricultural sector".

More than 80 percent of Morocco's water supply is allocated to agriculture, a key economic sector that accounts for 14 percent of gross domestic product. Mohamed, in his nineties, stood on an area of parched earth not far from the Al-Massira Dam.

"We don't plough the land anymore because there is no water," he said, but added that he had to "accept adversity anyway because we have no choice". Younger generations in the village appear more gloomy. Soufiane, a 14-year-old shepherd boy, told AFP: "We are living in a precarious state with this drought. I think it will get even worse in the future." —AFP

## UK economy closes in on recession

**LONDON:** Britain's economy shrank in the second quarter, official data showed Friday, as the country heads towards recession under a new prime minister. UK gross domestic product dropped 0.1 percent in the April-June period after a rise of 0.8 percent in the first quarter, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. The Bank of England (BoE) expects the economy to enter a year-long recession by the end 2022 as Britons endure a cost-of-living crisis with inflation at its highest level in decades.

"With May's growth revised down a little and June showing a notable fall, overall the economy shrank slightly in the second quarter," said ONS director of economic statistics Darren Morgan. "Health was the biggest reason the economy contracted as both the (COVID) test and trace and vaccine programs were wound down, while many retailers also had a tough quarter."

Morgan said this was "partially offset by growth in hotels, bars, hairdressers and outdoor events across the quarter, partly as a result of people celebrating the Platinum Jubilee" that marked Queen Elizabeth II's 70 years on the throne. The ONS added that the UK economy slumped 0.6 percent in June.

#### New PM

Following Friday's data, Finance Minister Nadhim Zahawi said he was "determined to work with the Bank of England to get inflation under control and grow the economy". But Prime Minister Boris Johnson will not make "major fiscal interventions" before leaving office next month, his spokesman said on Monday amid calls for immediate government action to tackle Britain's cost-of-living crisis. Johnson, back at his desk after a five-day belated honeymoon with wife Carrie in Slovenia last week, has been criticized for being absent as the BoE last week warned of recession.

His trip coincided with Zahawi also being away on holiday, as the central bank hiked interest rates by the biggest margin in nearly three decades in a bid to stem surging inflation. Johnson, who last month announced he would step down on September 6 following a slew of scandals, is set to hand power to either Liz Truss or Rishi Sunak after a summer-long Conservative leadership battle. Foreign Secretary Truss and Sunak-Zahawi's predecessor as chancellor of the exchequer have clashed over how to address the crisis. —AFP



**LONDON:** In this file photo taken on May 12, 2022 a customer pays for his fruit and vegetables with a ten pound sterling note, at a trader's market stall in London. — AFP

## US to boost Taiwan trade, conduct air, sea transits

**WASHINGTON:** The United States will boost trade with Taiwan in response to China's "provocative" behavior, the White House said Friday, as it insisted on the right of air and sea passage through the tense strait. A new trade plan will be unveiled within days, while US forces will transit the Taiwan Strait in the next few weeks, said Kurt Campbell, White House coordinator for Asia-Pacific issues and an adviser to President Joe Biden.

The statement came after Beijing raged at last week's trip by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, launching its largest-ever military drills around the self-ruled island. Taiwan has accused China of using the visit by Pelosi, the highest-ranking elected American official to visit in decades, as an excuse to kickstart drills that Taipei called a rehearsal for invasion. China views Taiwan as its own territory to be seized one day, by force if necessary.

Campbell said Pelosi's visit was "consistent" with Washington's existing policy and that China had "overreacted." Beijing used the pretext to "launch an intensified pressure campaign against Taiwan to try to change the status quo, jeopardizing peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and in the broader region," he said.

"China has overreacted and its actions continue to be provocative, destabilizing and unprecedented." In response to China's drills, the United States is reasserting its involvement in the area, while reiterating its policy of "strategic ambiguity"—diplomatically recognizing China while simultaneously supporting Taiwan's self-rule.

#### 'Ambitious roadmap'

Campbell said the administration would continue to "deepen our ties with Taiwan, including through continuing to advance our economic and trade relationship."

"For example, we're developing an ambitious



**WASHINGTON:** The United States will boost trade with Taiwan in response to China's "provocative" behavior, the White House said Friday.

roadmap for trade negotiations which we intend to announce in the coming days," he said. Campbell said that the United States would also reassert its right to use international air and sea space between Taiwan and China.

US forces "will continue to fly, sail and operate where international law allows, consistent with our long-standing commitment to freedom of navigation." "That includes conducting standard air and maritime transits through the Taiwan Strait in the next few weeks," he told reporters.

Campbell did not confirm what kind of deployment would be made to support the maneuvers, saying he had no "comments about either the nature of our crossings or the timings across the Taiwan Strait."

payments by 24 months.

"Given the announced terms and conditions of the restructuring, and in line with our criteria, we view the transaction as distressed and tantamount to default," S&P said. Fitch, for its part, downgraded Ukraine's long-term debt from "C" to "RD," for restricted default.

The move came a day after Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said most lenders had consented to a pause for the payment of its \$20 billion (19.4 billion euro) debt until 2024.

Holders of about 75 percent of Ukraine's debt agreed to the pause, the finance ministry said in a press release. A country is considered in default when it is unable to honor financial commitments to

its creditors, which may be governments, international organizations like the International Monetary Fund, or private bond holders.

The "selective default" categorization is assigned when S&P "believes that the obligor has selectively defaulted on a specific issue or class of obligations but it will continue to meet its payment obligations on other issues... in a timely manner."

A group of Western countries—including Britain, France, Germany, Japan and the United States—had already agreed on allowing Ukraine to postpone interest payments on its debt last month, and had called on other countries to join the effort. The \$20 billion debt freeze is a new step in the effort to financially support Ukraine during the war. —AFP

## S&P and Fitch cut Ukraine's credit rating

**WASHINGTON:** Rating agencies S&P and Fitch again lowered Ukraine's credit rating Friday, deeming that the war-torn country's debt restructuring agreement placed it one notch from default. S&P cut Ukraine's rating to "SD" for selective default from "CC/C," noting that a majority of Eurobond holders agreed to defer debt service



## Business

# 150,000 Bangladeshi tea workers strike against dollar-a-day wages

## Unions demand 150% rise in pay amid rising inflation, plunging currency

**DHAKA:** Nearly 150,000 workers at more than 200 Bangladeshi tea plantations went on strike Saturday to demand a 150 percent rise to their dollar-a-day wages, which researchers say are among the lowest in the world. Most tea workers in the overwhelmingly Muslim country are low-caste Hindus, the descendants of laborers brought to the plantations by colonial-era British planters.

The minimum wage for a tea plantation worker in the country is 120 taka a day—about \$1.25 at official rates, but only just over a dollar on the free market. One worker said that was barely enough to buy food, let alone other necessities. “Nowadays we can’t even afford coarse rice for our family with this amount,” said Anjana Bhuyian, 50.

“A wage of one day can’t buy a liter of edible oil. How can we then even think about our nutrition, medication, or children’s education?” she told AFP. Unions are demanding an increase to 300 taka a day, with inflation rising and the currency depreciating, and said that workers in the country’s 232 tea gardens began a full-scale strike on Saturday, after four days of two-hour stoppages.

“Nearly 150,000 tea workers have joined the strike today,” said Sitaram Bin, a committee member of the Bangladesh Tea Workers’ Union. “No tea worker will pluck tea leaves or work in the leaf processing plants as long as the authority doesn’t pay heed to our demands,” he told AFP.

Plantation owners have offered an increase of 14 taka a day, after an 18-taka rise last year and M. Shah Alom, chairman of the Bangladesh Tea Association, said operators were “going through difficult times with profit declining in recent times”.

“The cost of production is increasing. Our expenses have increased as the price of gas, fertilizer and diesel have gone up,” he told AFP. Researchers say tea workers—who live in some of the country’s most remote areas—have been systematically exploited by the industry for decades. “Tea workers are like modern-day slaves,” said Philip Gain, director of the Society for Environment and Human Development, a research group, who has written books on tea workers.

“The plantation owners have hijacked the minimum wage authorities and kept the wages some of the lowest in the world.” —AFP



SRIMANGAL, Bangladesh: Bangladesh's tea garden workers protest in Srimangal on August 13, 2022. —AFP

## Fertilizer crunch: Albanian farmer feeds coffee to fields

**MAMURRAS, Albania:** With the pandemic and the Ukraine conflict sending fertilizer prices through the roof, Albanian farmer Alban Cakalli has turned to coffee, one of the Balkan country’s great loves, to nourish his fields. The 38-year-old farmer owns only half a hectare in the town of Mamurras in northwestern Albania, but even still is unable to afford the chemical-based fertilizers imported from abroad.

As in other parts of the world, Albania’s agricultural sector has been battered by rising costs, with fuel and fertilizer prices soaring after Russia, a major producer of both commodities, invaded Ukraine.

To curb expenditures, Cakalli has turned to coffee grounds, a natural fertiliser with readily available stocks in Albania, where drinking the caffeinated beverage remains a national pastime and cafes dot nearly every corner. On an average day, Cakalli says he is able to collect up to 40 kilograms of coffee grounds.

“The Albanians are passionate about coffee,” he tells AFP from his farm. The process is time-consuming, requiring him to first collect the used beans before mixing the grounds with herbs and later composting the concoction for three months.

But the final product is “rich in nitrogen, magnesium and potassium and is a good substitute for chemical

fertilizers” and “repels insects,” says Cakalli. Many of Albanian’s 280,000 small time farmers have returned to similar traditional methods to enrich their soil rather than pay higher prices for imported fertilizers.

### Quality counts

According to experts, fertilizers and fuels account for more than 45 percent of the costs in agricultural production in the country. For decades, Albania has relied on imports for fertilizer after its factories were largely abandoned and slid into disrepair following the fall of its communist government in the early 1990s. Russia was the top exporter of fertilizer to Albania last year, worth a total of \$11 million, according to the UN’s trade database.

By switching to coffee grounds, Cakalli says he saves between 1,500 and 2,000 euros (\$1,550 and \$2,070) per year. As COVID disrupted global trade, he has also diversified his operations in the field.

He now focuses on growing exotic crops—including passion fruit and goji berries—after the import of the fruits from South America were stopped during the pandemic just as demand began to rise.

“These fruits were in high demand because they are known to help boost the immune system and for their antioxidant properties,” says his wife Juli, a 34-year-old nurse. This year alone, Cakalli has harvested a half ton of passion fruit that sells for around 15 euros a kilo—which is no small sum in Albania where the average salary is 460 euros. “People like them a lot, their smell is fantastic and even better than those of the countries of origin because everything is fresh here,” says Cakalli.



MAMURRAS, Albania: Alban Cakalli fertilizes passion fruits plants in his farm in Mamurras. —AFP

Alban Zusi, an entrepreneur who has been producing organic fertilizer from animal waste in northern Albania’s Lezha, said the rise in prices has also come with “a silver lining” and allowed farmers to return to their roots. Others in the industry tend to agree. “Despite the difficulties, there is no shortage of opportunities,” says Fatmir Ndoji, the head chef of a well-known farm-to-table restaurant in the region. “To create pleasure for the palate, what counts is quality.” —AFP

## Rhine drops below crucial level, hits river transport

**FRANKFURT:** The Rhine river in Germany on Friday fell below a key waterline level used as a reference for judging its accessibility for shipping. The water dropped below the 40-centimetre (15.7-inch) reference level in Kaub, a noted bottleneck for shipping where the Rhine runs narrow and shallow.

That level is considered necessary for much of the transport along the river.

But it fell to 38 cm in the early evening in Kaub, about 30 kilometers (18 miles) south of Koblenz, and was expected to fall further by Monday, according to data and forecasts by the federal waterways authority. Transport company Contargo warned its barges would “not be able to sail without danger”.

“For reasons of safety, we shall have to largely discontinue our navigation on the Upper and Middle Rhine”, it said on its website, noting that “no significant rainfall is expected in the coming days”.

About four percent of freight is transported by sea in Germany, including on the Rhine, which originates in Switzerland and runs through several countries including France and Germany before flowing into the sea in the Netherlands. The Rhine has become more important in recent months because, to reduce its dependence on Russian gas in particular,



DUISBURG: A partially loaded inland vessel with containers moves along the Rhine river at low water level in Duisburg, western Germany. —AFP

Germany is looking to coal.

But the large power plants are mainly located around the Rhine, a key river for their supply.

Germany’s biggest companies have already warned that major disruptions to river traffic could deal another

blow to an economy already beset by logistical difficulties. The 2018 drought, which saw the benchmark depth of the Rhine in Kaub drop to 25 centimeters in October, shrank German GDP by 0.2 percent that year, according to Deutsche Bank Research. —AFP

## Five Chinese firms to delist from NYSE

**NEW YORK:** Five major Chinese companies including two of the country’s largest oil producers will delist from the New York Stock Exchange, the firms said in filings on Friday. Sinopec and PetroChina—two of the world’s biggest energy firms—will apply for “voluntary delisting” of their American depository shares, the companies said in separate statements.

The Aluminum Corporation of China, also known as Chalco, as well as China Life Insurance and a Shanghai-based Sinopec subsidiary, announced similar moves. The delisting plans come as tensions between Beijing and Washington climb over US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit last week to Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory.

Beijing has raged against the visit, staging

unprecedented military drills around the self-ruled island and suspending cooperation with the United States on issues ranging from climate change to fighting drug smugglers. The five companies are on a list of firms published by the US Securities and Exchange Commission that faced delisting from Wall Street if they did not comply with new audit requirements.

All five companies said in separate statements that they expected to stop trading on the NYSE by early September. The new requirements came into effect late last year, at a time when Chinese authorities were expressing reservations about China-based companies listing in the United States.

The five companies on Friday all pointed to the costs of maintaining the US listings as well as the burden of complying with reporting obligations as factors behind the decision.

China’s securities regulator on Friday said the moves were made by the companies “out of their own business considerations”. The delistings “will not affect the companies’ continued use of domestic and foreign capital markets for financing and development”, the regulator said in a statement. —AFP

## Clothing labels soon become mandatory in France

**PARIS:** France could soon pass a decree requiring every item of clothing sold in the country to carry a label detailing its exact impact on the climate. The European Union is considering a similar rule for the rest of its members.

A multitude of factors determine a piece of clothing’s sustainability credentials, from where and how its raw materials were grown, to what dyes were used in the coloring process and how far it travelled before arriving in store. The French Agency for Ecological Transition is currently testing 11 proposals for how to collect and compare this data. It is using 500 items of clothing to determine what the new labeling system might eventually look like.

“The message of the law is clear - it will become obligatory, so brands need to prepare, to make their

## Russia economy shrinks 4% as sanctions bite

**MOSCOW:** Russia’s economy contracted by four percent year-on-year in the second quarter, the national statistics agency said Friday, as Western sanctions take their toll in the wake of Moscow’s military offensive in Ukraine. In the period from April to June, gross domestic product “amounted to 96 percent of the level attained in the same period of 2021, preliminary estimates show”, Rosstat said in a statement.

It was the first full quarterly growth data to be published since Moscow sent troops into its pro-Western neighbor in late February and Western countries slapped stinging economic sanctions on Russia in response. After Russian GDP expanded by 3.5 percent year-on-year in the first three months of 2022, the country is now facing a long period of recession.

The Russian central bank said Friday that it is projecting economic contraction of between four and six percent for the whole of 2022 and then a further contraction of between one and four percent for 2023, before growth picks up again in 2024. “The decline in GDP will bottom out in the first six months of 2023,” said the deputy head of the Bank of Russia, Alexei Zabolotkin.

“The economy is moving towards a new long-term equilibrium... With the transformation of the economy, growth will resume,” he said. Western sanctions have targeted Russia’s energy and banking sectors in particular. Inflation in the country soared to a two-decade high in April, but has since slowed somewhat, but remains high, standing at 15.1 percent in July.

Meanwhile, aluminum producer Rusal reported a drop in half-year net profit on Friday as Western sanctions over the Ukraine conflict and weak domestic demand took a toll. Rusal said in a statement that “growing geopolitical tensions” and volatility on the markets “negatively affected the activities of Russian enterprises in various sectors of the economy, which led to a decrease in aluminum demand in Russia.”

Rusal’s net profit fell 16.7 percent to \$1.68 billion in the six months to June 30. Rusal also said it had been negatively affected by Australia’s ban on alumina exports to Russia as well as the suspension of production at Mykolaiv alumina refinery in Ukraine. Aluminum production costs in the first half of the year went up by 33.2 percent to \$2,028 per ton, up from \$1,523 per ton in the first half of 2021, the company said. —AFP

products traceable, to organize the automatic collection of data,” says Erwan Autret, one of the coordinators at the French agency. “Some say the models are too simple, some say they’re too complicated, but it’s a sign of the maturity of the debate that no one questions the need for these calculations anymore.”

The agency is expected to collate the results of its testing in the coming months, before handing the results to lawmakers. According to the United Nations, the fashion industry contributes between 2 and 4 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions due to its expansive supply chains and energy intensive production processes. “The fashion industry produces about 20 per cent of global wastewater, while 85 per cent of textiles end up in landfills or are incinerated when most of these materials could be reused,” the organization says.

“Overall, the industry consumes more energy than the aviation and shipping industry combined, which highlights the importance of emissions reductions across the sector.” In response, the UN set up the Fashion Charter in 2018 “to provide a clear pathway for the fashion industry to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050”. —AFP

## Business

# The women desperate to work in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan

## Deepening economic crisis has shattered incomes of households

HERAT: Since their takeover a year ago, the Taliban have squeezed Afghan women out of public life, imposing suffocating restrictions on where they can work, how they can travel, and what they can wear. There is hardly a woman in the country who has not lost a male relative in successive wars, while many of their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers have also lost their jobs or seen their income shattered as a result of a deepening economic crisis.

AFP took a series of portraits of women in major cities — Kabul, Herat and Kandahar — who are trying to keep households together by whatever means they can. "During these hard times, it is my job that has made me happy," 40-year-old baker Shapari told AFP.

"My husband is jobless, and staying at home. I am able to find food for my children."

Women have been barred from most government employment — or had their salaries slashed and told to stay at home. They are often also first to be sacked from struggling private businesses — particularly those unable to segregate the workplace in line with Taliban rules. Some jobs remain open, though women face far

steeper obstacles than male colleagues.

### 'Queen of the honey bees'

Tahmina Usmani, 23, is one of a few women journalists who have been able to continue working in the sector. In order to circumvent a Taliban order to cover their faces while on the air, she and others at Afghanistan's news broadcaster TOLONews wear a COVID face mask. "I was able to join TOLONews and be the voice for women in Afghanistan, which makes me feel great," she said.

Ghuncha Gul Karimi, another woman photographed by AFP, grew her beekeeping business to produce honey for sale after her husband left the country. "I've taken up two extra jobs and bought a motorcycle to drive myself from the honey farm and back," she said.

"I am determined to become the queen of honey bees." Even before the Taliban's return to power, Afghanistan was a deeply conservative, patriarchal country with progress in women's rights limited largely to major cities.

Women generally cover their hair with scarves, while the burqa — mandatory for all women



KABUL: This combination of photos shows women posing for portraits in different cities in Afghanistan. —AFP

under the Taliban's first regime, from 1996 to 2001 — continued to be widely worn, particularly outside the capital Kabul. Earlier this year, the

religious police ordered women to cover themselves completely in public, preferably including their faces. —AFP

## Myanmar junta curbs political parties meeting foreigners

BANGKOK: Myanmar's ruling junta has moved to restrict political parties from meeting foreigners or international organizations ahead of an election expected next year. The Southeast Asian nation has been plunged into turmoil and its economy is in tatters since a February 2021 coup which ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government. The military alleged widespread voter fraud during November 2020 polls which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party won in a landslide, although international observers said the election was largely free and fair.

The junta-stacked Union Election Commission said Friday that the country's 92 registered political parties would have to ask for permission if they wished to meet foreign organizations or individuals.

"Political parties need to respect the law. If they fail to do so their party's registration will be dissolved," the commission said in a statement. The body also accused foreign embassies and international non-governmental organizations of interfering in the 2020 polls resulting in fraud.

Political parties in Myanmar were scathing of the new edict.

Former NLD lawmaker Soe Thura Tun said it was undemocratic and did not respect the right to freedom of association. "It's not appropriate to restrict them (political parties)," he told AFP Saturday.

Ko Ko Gyi, chair of the People's Party, said the announcement was unprecedented and did not bode well for the prospects of Myanmar's next election being a genuine exercise in democracy.

"We believe that their action will cause major damage to the Myanmar people and international community's trust in the upcoming election and democratic system," he told AFP on Saturday.

Last week, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged the international community to reject the junta's "sham elections" planned for next year. "They can be neither free nor fair under present conditions," he said at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers' meeting in Phnom Penh, from which the junta's top diplomat was excluded over its failure to negotiate with its opponents. Earlier this month, the junta extended a state of emergency by six months saying elections could only take place when the conflict-racked country was "stable and peaceful". —AFP

## UK hit by latest rail strikes amid soaring inflation

LONDON: Football fans and holidaymakers faced travel woe Saturday as train drivers walked out across the UK, the latest in a series of industrial strikes amid spiraling inflation.

Members of the Aslef union at nine train companies are staging a 24-hour strike over pay and working conditions, bringing large parts of the network to a standstill, with no service in some areas of the country. "The companies have said that they cannot, or will not, give our members an increase," said Mick Whelan, Aslef's general secretary.

"They blame the government... while the government says it's down to the train operators. So we are caught in a Catch-22 situation where each side blames the other."

The train network has already been crippled by previous strikes, including a three-day walkout in June that was the country's biggest for 30 years. They, and other industries, are demanding higher pay to mitigate inflation that is forecast to hit 13 percent by the end of the year. —AFP

## Chinese homebuyers run out of patience with developers

BEIJING: Newly-married and with his first child on the way, auto worker Wang wanted to move into the apartment he bought in Wuhan three years ago but those hopes were dashed by China's ballooning property crisis. Saddled with \$300,000 in debt and with his unit nowhere near completion, the 34-year-old decided he had had enough and stopped making mortgage payments.

He is among numerous homebuyers across dozens of cities in China who have boycotted payments over fears that their properties will not be completed by cash-strapped, debt-laden developers.

"They said construction would resume soon," Wang told AFP, only giving his surname. "But no workers showed up." Beijing-based Wang was planning to start a family after purchasing the home.

"It wasn't easy for us to buy this home. It all came from my savings," said Wang. "Now there's no home, and we still owe two million yuan (\$300,000) in mortgage payments."

After years of explosive growth fuelled by easy access to loans, Chinese authorities launched a crackdown on excessive debt in 2020. That squeezed financing options for property sector giants such as Evergrande, as they struggled to make repayments and restructure mountains of debt.

Now they are facing mortgage boycotts and government pressure to deliver pre-sold homes.

In Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, buyers such as Wang said they received multiple postponement notices on their apartments from developer Myhome Real Estate, months past the promised delivery date in late 2021. The builder said in a notice this week that it had managed to release some frozen funds, adding that it expects to complete the Wuhan project in late 2022.

## S Korea pardons Samsung boss 'to help the economy'

SEOUL: The heir and de facto leader of the Samsung group received a presidential pardon Friday, continuing South Korea's long tradition of freeing business leaders convicted of corruption on economic grounds. Billionaire Lee Jae-yong, convicted of bribery and embezzlement in January last year, will be "reinstated" to give him a chance to "contribute to overcoming the economic crisis" of the country, justice minister Han Dong-hoon said.

Lee—who has a net worth of \$7.9 billion, according to Forbes—was released on parole in August 2021, after serving 18 months in jail, just over half of his original sentence. Friday's pardon will allow him to fully return to work by lifting a post-prison employment restriction that had been set for five years.

"Due to the global economic crisis, the dynamism and vitality of the national economy have deteriorated, and the economic slump is feared to be prolonged," the Justice Ministry said in a statement. The pardon was given so that Lee—as well as other high-level executives receiving pardons Friday—could "lead the country's continuous growth engine through active investment in technology and job creation", it added.

Three other high-profile businessmen were also pardoned, including Lotte Group chairman Shin Dong-bin, who was sentenced to a suspended two-and-a-half-year prison term in a bribery case in 2018.

A total of 1,693 people—including prisoners with terminal illnesses and those near the end of their terms—were on the pardon list, the ministry said, ahead of the annual Liberation Day anniversary Monday. The anniversary marks Japan's 1945 World War II surrender, which liberated

Wang said he stopped repayments this month, and that complaints to authorities in the city did not make a difference. "There's no hope in life, carrying on with payments like this."

### 'Our hearts are cold'

The "crisis of confidence" in China's housing market points to structural flaws, said Andrew Batson of Gavekal Dragonomics in a recent report. Because of their heavy reliance on selling apartments in advance, developers pursued business models that exposed buyers to the risk of not getting their homes, he added. As financially stressed firms halt construction on projects, "those risks have dramatically materialized". The crisis has left homebuyers in limbo. "I thought it would never happen," a Wuhan homebuyer surnamed Hu said of his unfinished home.

The 25-year-old said his family took out loans to help with the down payment for a three-room flat in 2018. At that time, Wuhan was encouraging college graduates such as Hu to get household registrations in the city, he said.

Known as "hukou", these all-important government registrations allow access to healthcare and schools. "Everyone was buying property back then... people were vying for it," he said.

Another young homebuyer Xue said almost all of his salary now goes to rent and mortgage payments. "I don't want to pay any more," the 24-year-old said. "Our hearts are cold." "It's not that we disregard the law or contracts, but this situation puts us under too much pressure."

Xue's family put down 800,000 yuan for the flat while he took on a 600,000 yuan loan that he has been repaying for two years. Buyers in Wuhan told AFP there have been protests over unfinished pre-sold homes in the city.

### Vicious cycle

Homebuyers in around 100 cities—involving more than 300 housing projects—have boycotted mortgage payments, according to a crowdsourced document named "WeNeedHome".

Many are in central Henan's provincial capital

Korea from decades of colonial rule and is typically celebrated each year with the pardon of hundreds of prisoners.

Lee, 54, issued a statement after the pardon was announced saying he aimed to "contribute to the economy through continuous investment and job creation for young people".

### Above the law?

Lee is the vice-chairman of Samsung Electronics, the world's biggest smartphone maker. The conglomerate's overall turnover is equivalent to about one-fifth of South Korea's gross domestic product. He was jailed for offences connected to a massive corruption scandal that brought down former president Park Geun-hye.

There is a long history of South Korean tycoons being charged with bribery, embezzlement, tax evasion or other offences. But many of those convicted have subsequently had their sentences cut or suspended on appeal, with some—including late Samsung chairman Lee Kun-hee, who was convicted twice—receiving presidential pardons in recognition of their "contribution to the national economy".

The giant Samsung group is by far the largest of the family-controlled empires known as chaebol that dominate business in South Korea. President Yoon Suk-yeol said Friday that the pardons were aimed at improving the lot of "ordinary people who have been affected by the prolonged Covid-19 pandemic".

But analysts said they simply allowed major businessmen to feel they were not "constrained by any legal norms", Vladimir Tikhonov, professor of Korean studies at the University of Oslo, told AFP.

Former conservative president Lee Myung-bak, who is currently serving a prison sentence over corruption and had initially been expected to benefit from the pardons, was not included on the list.

Justice minister Han said all politicians were excluded this time as the economy is the most "urgent and important" issue. Local reports have speculated that pardoning Lee Myung-bak



SHANGHAI, China: This file photo taken on July 27, 2022 shows removed company signage (top) in a view of the unoccupied Evergrande Centre building in Shanghai. —AFP

Zhengzhou, where authorities have set up a fund to help developers complete projects. Other affected cities include Chongqing and Changsha.

There have also been allegations of financial mismanagement, and some cities have called on banks to tighten their oversight of escrow accounts, according to local media reports.

Nomura analysts estimate that Chinese developers have only delivered around 60 percent of homes they pre-sold between 2013 and 2020. In those years, China's outstanding mortgage loans rose by 26.3 trillion yuan, Nomura added.

The property sector's woes were thrown into sharp relief last year when it emerged that Evergrande was having trouble repaying its creditors, sparking panic that the industry, which accounts for around a quarter of China's GDP, was on the brink of collapse. Homebuyers' ability to make mortgage payments is not the main issue, said Oxford Economics lead economist Tommy Wu in a report.

But a loss of confidence in developers will worsen the real estate downturn, he added.

"The chance of a vicious cycle—declining housing sales and prices, mounting developers' distress, and deteriorating local government finances—developing is concerning." —AFP



SEOUL: In this file photo taken on February 22, 2017 Lee Jae-Yong (center), vice chairman of Samsung Electronics, arrives for questioning at the office of a special prosecutor investigating a corruption scandal in Seoul. —AFP

would have been too risky for President Yoon, who is already struggling with record-low approval ratings.

### More legal woes

Lee Jae-yong still faces a separate trial over accusations of accounting fraud regarding a merger of two Samsung firms in 2015. In May, he was excused from a hearing in that trial to host US President Joe Biden when he kicked off a tour of South Korea by visiting Samsung's chip plant, alongside President Yoon. His pardon follows Samsung unveiling a massive 450 trillion won (\$346 billion) investment blueprint for the next five years, aimed at making it a leader in sectors from semiconductors to biologics and creating 80,000 new jobs.

But Lee's imprisonment has been no barrier to the firm's performance—it announced a surge of more than 70 percent in second-quarter profits in July last year, with a coronavirus-driven shift to remote work boosting demand for devices using its memory chips.

"Samsung operated perfectly well without any pardon," Tikhonov told AFP. "The pardon weakens rule of law, which potentially is, in fact, more detrimental than advantageous." —AFP



Thousands of postage stamps are exhibited.



A visitor takes pictures of postage stamps on display.

## POSTAGE STAMPS SHOW VITALITY FACING CHALLENGES OF TIMES

Since getting the first postage stamp in the world of Penny Black in 2002, Arianto Januar, living in Jakarta, feels that he is the happiest person. The black-white stamp with Queen Victoria's image issued by the British government in 1840 is the dream of every philatelist—a person who studies or collects stamps and related items—and it was being contested in an online auction in which Januar won it after raising the bid price many times. His savings for years had to be depleted for that small piece of paper, but Januar didn't mind.

"This is my passion. Not everyone can have a collection like mine," Januar, philatelist since the age of four and has a collection of millions of stamps, told Xinhua recently. Sometimes this member of the Indonesian Stamp Collector's Community has to fly to various countries, visit international exhibitions, or queue for hours, to get the new pieces he craves. Meanwhile, Resti Damayanti, a 15-year-old who missed the heyday of



Envelopes showing the travel route from East Asia to Indonesia in the early 20th century were exhibited at the Indonesia 2022 World Stamp Championship & Exhibition in JIEXPO of Jakarta on Aug. 6, 2022. — Xinhua photos

philately, said that at first, she wondered why people were willing to sacrifice everything to get a stamp, including her late father.

The confusion drove her to visit the Indonesia 2022 World Stamp Championship & Exhibition in Jakarta, which displayed thousands of stamps

belonging to hundreds of philatelists from 61 countries from Aug 2 to 9. She walked through booth after booth, observed the stamps displayed there, and then gained a lot of new insights. "We can gain new knowledge from a stamp, including the historical fact that in the past people had to travel by sea for six hours from Medan to Singapore. We need much less time by plane now," Damayanti said.

In the past, stamps were affixed to envelopes, postcards, or other postal items as proof of payment of shipping costs, but they are rarely used anymore since the digital era, although they are not completely lost, said the chairman of the Indonesian Philatelic Association, Fadli Zon. Philatelists around the world now still gather, discuss and hunt for stamps to enrich their collections, while many institutions still regularly publish their latest editions.

Zon, who has countless stamps in his private library in Jakarta, is still

waiting for his luck to get Surakarta military stamps, which were issued in only 40 pieces on an emergency basis during Indonesia's struggle to defend its independence in 1949, which are now worth billions of rupiah (more than 70,000 US dollars). Now stamps are markers of a nation's history and bridges of diplomacy between countries. "Stamps record the identity of a nation, can also be an object of investment, (and) the price reaches tens of billions of rupiah," Zon said.

Despite limiting the use of stamps, the digital era also makes it easier for philatelists to hunt and get new collections through online sales, Zon added. The survival power of stamps is also unlikely to be lost, as some countries have issued digital stamps—physical stamps with a digital touch such as barcode features—as well as crypto and non-fungible token stamps. — Xinhua

## Drought sows doubts over future of traditional English gardens

Guessing towards her thriving wildflower meadow and still-green tree cover in this otherwise parched corner of countryside in southeast England, Claire Price is adamant gardeners must adapt to the country's evolving climate. Price is the owner and self-described "custodian" of Reuthe's, a woodland oasis of evergreen trees and shrubs in Sevenoaks, Kent, which



Head Gardener of Reuthe's - the Lost Gardens of Sevenoaks, Melvyn Jones waters plants at Reuthe's - The Lost Gardens of Sevenoaks, near Seal, in Kent, southeast of London.

appears better placed than traditional English gardens of lawns and flower beds to withstand the increasingly arid conditions.

"We do not water any of the shrubs or the trees in the ground at all," Price told AFP proudly on Friday, just as a hosepipe ban came into force across the county of Kent and neighboring east

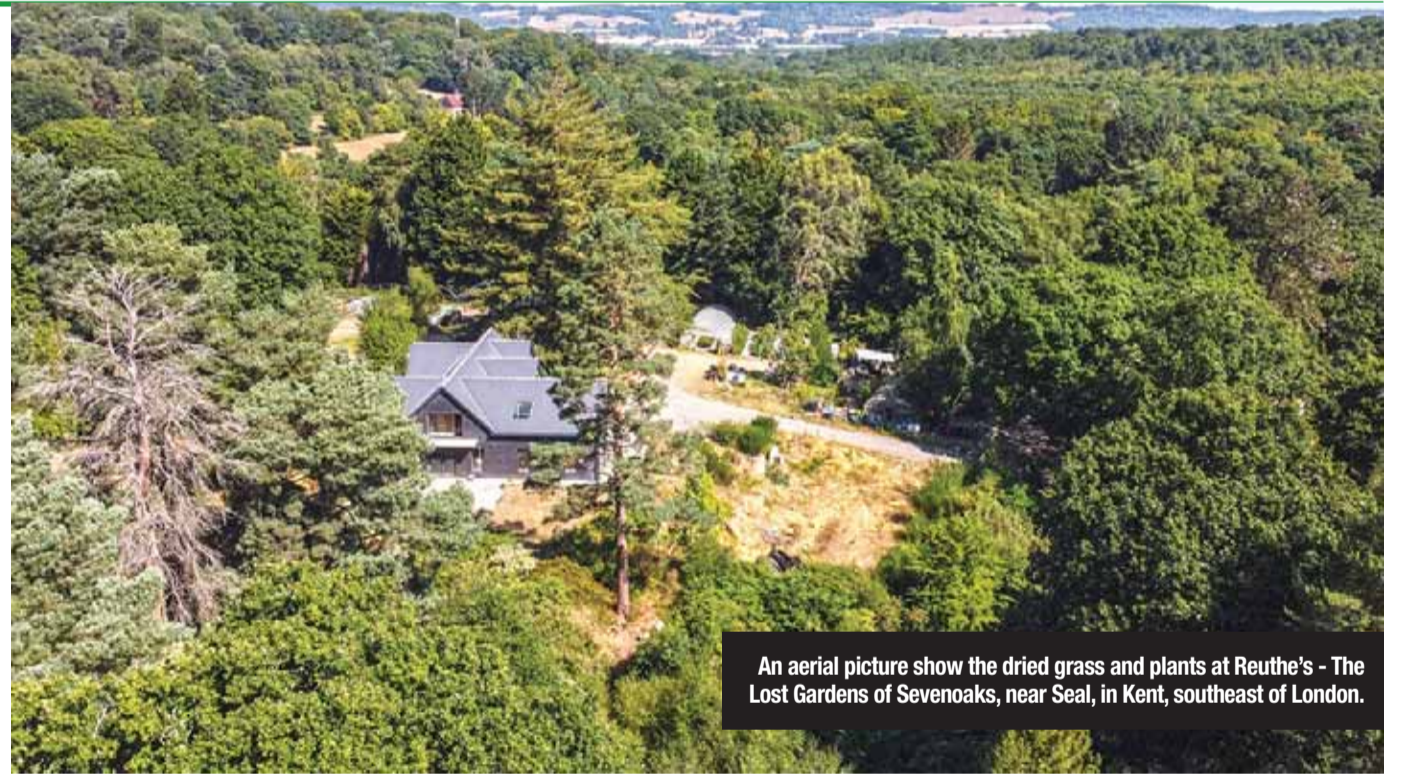
Sussex. "Our philosophy is if you treat the ground conditions correctly, so you dig in the right amount of... moisture and humus, then the plants will be able to cope with these extremes.

"That philosophy has shown to be for us the right solution... and, as our visitors walk around these amazing woodlands, they can see that everything is green and coping with the drought really well." With the drought officially declared Friday and water restrictions in place across swathes of England, horticulturists and others are urging a rethink of how the country's famously manicured gardens are designed and managed.

### 'Lawns need to go'

Price believes its gardeners need to "look forward" rather than back to the styles and preferences of previous generations—with the long-held national obsession with neat, lush lawns her top target. "I'm afraid their beautiful, manicured lawns need to go straight away," she said, arguing that their environmental benefits are not much better than those of artificial turf. "We need to be planting those lawns with wildflower meadows," she added.

We need to "start to work with nature, rather than seeing nature as something to be obliterated and dominated." Reuthe's, an 11-acre site sprawling over a hillside, is home to rare tree species, as well as one of Britain's biggest varieties of specialist rhododendrons, azal-



An aerial picture show the dried grass and plants at Reuthe's - The Lost Gardens of Sevenoaks, near Seal, in Kent, southeast of London.

eas, camellias and conifers.

Dubbed "the lost gardens of Sevenoaks", it was first established in 1902 but largely off-limits to the public and was just a plant nursery for decades. The entire site has only been fully accessible since 2018, when Price bought and began rehabilitating it.

Despite the ancient woodland's ability to withstand the current drought better than more ornamental gardens, like so much of the natural environment across drought-afflicted northwest Europe, it is feeling the effects of the record-breaking heat. The garden's bountiful rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias—which typically bloom in spring—are "quite durable" but going into survival mode and shedding leaves to retain moisture, Reuthe's head gardener Melvyn Jones explained. "This is unprecedented... we

do fully expect to perhaps lose a couple of our species," he added.

### 'Praying for rain'

Meanwhile, down in the nursery where visitors can buy plants and shrubs, frequent watering is required to keep them alive in the oppressive heat, with commercial sites omitted from the hosepipe ban. "It's that combination between being frugal with the water—not wasting it—and trying to get as much moisture down to the roots of the plants as we can," Jones said. Noting the region has had three consecutive summers of stifling heat and below average rain, he added that its shifting climate is taking a toll on the ecosystem and its stewards.

"As a horticulturist it is hard," said the 56-year-old, who admits to worrying

about the future. "I'm an old guy now (and) it does seem that the seasons aren't what they used to be, we don't seem to get the four seasons that we used to have. "As horticulturists, we need to look at future planning of... how we water and how we conserve water."

Experts overwhelmingly agree that human-caused greenhouse gas emissions are driving climate change, which makes extreme weather such as droughts more likely and severe. In the meantime, Jones—along with gardeners, farmers and many others across northwest Europe—is "praying for rain every day". "Fingers crossed we have two or three days of torrential downpours—that will help," he said. — AFP



Photo shows dried leaves on a plant at Reuthe's - The Lost Gardens of Sevenoaks, near Seal, in Kent, southeast of London. — AFP photos



The alpaca keeper Amy Tavare sprays some water on the alpaca Nuzzle (left) and Scratch (right) to refresh them at Reuthe's - The Lost Gardens of Sevenoaks, near Seal, in Kent, southeast of London.



Head Gardener of Reuthe's - the Lost Gardens of Sevenoaks, Melvyn Jones waters plants at Reuthe's - The Lost Gardens of Sevenoaks, near Seal, in Kent, southeast of London.



A photograph shows plants at Reuthe's - The Lost Gardens of Sevenoaks, near Seal, in Kent, southeast of London.



In this photograph Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldiers (in brown) and Pakistani Rangers take part in the Beating the Retreat ceremony at the India-Pakistan Wagah border post, about 35 km from Amritsar. — AFP photos

## High drama at the India-Pakistan border, every sundown

Every sunset on the India-Pakistan border, crowds go wild and soldiers goose-step in a chest-puffing theatrical ritual symbolising the countries' antipathy 75 years after independence, but the display ends with a brisk, brotherly handshake. Several hours before the ceremony, enthusiastic spectators begin trickling into sitting areas on either side of chunky iron gates separating the nuclear-armed Asian rivals at the Attari-Wagah frontier.

So close that they can see the faces of people on the other side, energetic masters of ceremony and ear-splitting nationalistic songs chivvy up the crowds as Indian and Pakistani flags sway atop immense poles. On the Indian side there is space for 25,000 spectators—more than on the other side—chanting “India Zindabad” (“long live India”) as a group of women perform with flags and dance wildly to the patriotic playlist.

Then the soldiers arrive, stomping up to the gate, kicking their legs up—the Indians in red-fanned hats and khaki uniforms, the Pakistanis in a dapper black. The climax is when the gates open. One tall Indian soldier twirls his moustache with menacing intent and flexes his biceps, with equally lofty Pakistani soldiers standing just a couple of feet away.

Then the ceremony, officially known as Beating Retreat, draws to a close with the lowering of the flags and a handshake. The flags are folded and the



Visitors and members of the Sanskar Pratishthan organization wave Indian flags during a ceremony to mark 'Raksha Bandhan' festival at the India-Pakistan Wagah Border Post.

massive iron gates clunk shut. “My blood is boiling. I also want to join the Indian army. Today's show has filled me with nationalism,” said Mangilal Vishnoi, 22, who travelled from Rajasthan to watch the ceremony with his friends.

### Bloody history

India and Pakistan, which celebrate 75 years of independence from Britain next week, share deep cultural and linguistic links but their history has been mired in violence and bloodshed. They

were partitioned in 1947 into predominantly Hindu India and Muslim-majority Pakistan against the backdrop of communal massacres and the movement of millions of people.

The countries have since fought three wars, two of them over the disputed region of Kashmir, as well as other military clashes. The latest conflict was in 2019 when India carried out air strikes inside Pakistan in retaliation for a suicide bombing in Kashmir that killed 40 paramilitaries.

Pakistan launched its own raid the next day and later shot down an Indian fighter jet and captured its pilot, taking the arch-rivals to the brink of war. The daily border ritual, which began in 1959, has largely endured, surviving innumerable diplomatic flare-ups and military skirmishes. It is supposed to be a symbol of cooperation but most of the spectators AFP spoke to said they felt a strong sense of rivalry.

“India and Pakistan can never be friends. Even if they extend an arm of

friendship, they will soon stab us behind the back,” said Harsh Sharma, 26, on the Indian side. “It was like watching an India-Pakistan cricket game. There was so much drama and action,” said housewife Nisha Soni, 25, who had Indian tricolor flags painted on her cheeks. “In the end I will say India won. We were louder and better in every way.”—AFP



Indian Border Security Force soldiers and Pakistani Rangers take part in the Beating the Retreat ceremony.



In this photograph an Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldier (right) and a Pakistani Ranger perform during the Beating the Retreat ceremony at the India-Pakistan Wagah border post.



School girls tie 'Rakhis' or sacred threads on the wrists of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel during a ceremony to mark Raksha Bandhan festival at the India-Pakistan Wagah Border Post.



Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldiers take part in the Beating the Retreat ceremony at the India-Pakistan Wagah border post.



## Indian lawyer wins 22-year legal battle over 25 cents

A lawyer who won a 22-year court battle for compensation from Indian Railways after being overcharged 20 rupees (\$0.25) said Friday that his quest for justice was worth the effort. Tungnath Chaturvedi bought two tickets from his hometown Mathura to Moradabad in 1999 and was charged 90 rupees instead of 70, the price of the fare. He was given a receipt, but officials at the state rail monopoly repeatedly refused him a refund.

The two cities are less than 300 kilo-

meters (185 miles) apart, but his journey to justice needed 120 hearings at the Mathura consumer court before five different judges over more than two decades before he was awarded compensation this month.

The case is a reflection of India's sluggish judicial system, where litigants are often frustrated by delays and cases can run for years, if not decades, in overburdened courts that have a backlog of around 50 million cases. The court awarded 66-year-old Chaturvedi a refund

of 20 rupees, plus interest at 12 percent a year, and compensation of 15,000 rupees.

But even as a lawyer representing himself, his victory cost him hundreds of hours of effort, plus 20,000 rupees in fees and other payments. Family and friends tried to convince him to give up the fight over a token sum, but he persisted.

“This wasn't about money but about my rights,” he insisted. “As a citizen, it's my right to question the arbitrary and corrupt practices of the state or its machin-

ery,” he told AFP. “Sometimes the court would adjourn because someone was sick or had to attend a condolence meet,” he said. At one point he cited a Supreme Court precedent when Indian Railways claimed the court did not have jurisdiction to hear the case. “At times, I used to get frustrated over the court delays, but being a lawyer, I was determined to fight the case till the end,” Chaturvedi said. “More importantly truth has to be told.”—AFP

Lifestyle | Features



A display of action figures at the Paramount+ 'Secret Headquarters' premiere at Signature Theater in New York City.



Actor Owen Wilson attends the Paramount+ 'Secret Headquarters' premiere at Signature Theater in New York City.



(From left) Kezii Curtis, Keith L Williams, Momona Tamada, Jesse Williams, Owen Wilson, Michael Pena, Ariel Schulman, Henry Joost, Abby James Witherspoon, Josh Koenigsberg and Jessie Mueller attend the Paramount+ 'Secret Headquarters' premiere at Signature Theater in New York City. — AFP photos

## New Owen Wilson superhero film bets on streaming power

Film "Secret Headquarters," out Friday, was originally slated for a theatrical release before creators opted to put it out exclusively on the streaming platform Paramount Plus instead. In the old days, the move akin to a straight-to-video release might seem like a slight-but the film's directors Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman say the release strategy appeals to kids, the movie's target audience.

"There was talk of the theatrical versus streaming and Henry and I were torn and then we sort of pitched it to the kids just to see how they felt because

their response is more important to us," Schulman told AFP, referring to the youthful cast. "We want them to have their big premiere... what do they want from it?" "They all sort of just shrugged and said 'streaming'-like of course," he continued. "Because we want to watch it right away, and as many times as possible."

The film-available on streaming in the United States as well as in Australia, Canada and Britain-sees Wilson play an absent father who turns out to be a superhero, with a lair of world-saving gadgets revealed underneath his bache-

lor pad. It's told primarily from the perspective of Wilson's character's son-a classic superhero flick set against the growing pains of puberty.

### Wes Anderson on Planet Marvel?

Wilson told AFP when he first received the script he read some of the scenes to his young sons, who got "caught up in the story." "That's kind of what appealed to me also, was the more sort of stuff of kind of first crush and that kind of awkwardness of, you know, being in middle school and trying to fit in and that stuff just kind of rang true to me," the

53-year-old said. Wilson said the film also brought on some awkward moments for him: a lefty, the actor was scripted as a right-handed superhero.

"I think that my throwing motion, if I get any flack about it, I want to get this story out there-I want to get ahead of it," the actor known for his roles in Wes Anderson's oeuvre said with a hint of a smirk. "It's hard to throw with your opposite hand." "And people say Owen Wilson doesn't push himself," director Schulman laughed. Wilson next is set to appear in the second season of Marvel's "Loki" on Disney+, in which he plays

Mobius M. Mobius, an agent focused on "time variant" criminals.

In 2021 the Dallas-born actor starred in Anderson's "The French Dispatch," continuing his long association with the filmmaker. Asked if there were any forthcoming Anderson projects in the works, Wilson paused before saying, "that would be nice too." "Could he join the MCU?" the actor then quipped, referring to the blockbuster franchise Marvel Cinematic Universe. "You never know." —AFP



Charred debris and caution tape are seen at the site where US actress Anne Heche crashed into a home in Mar Vista, California.

## Actor Anne Heche legally dead after crash

Hollywood actor Anne Heche has been declared legally dead, one week after she crashed her car into a Los Angeles building, a spokeswoman said Friday. Heche, 53, had been comatose in hospital with a severe brain injury since the fiery collision on August 5.



In this file photo taken on January 11, 2018 actress Anne Heche attends Variety's Presents: Salute To Service event in New York City.

Having lost all brain function, she is "legally dead according to California law," though her heart is still beating as her family keeps her body on life support while exploring organ donations, spokeswoman Holly Baird told AFP. "Today we lost a bright light, a kind and most joyful soul, a loving mother, and a loyal friend," the family said in a joint statement.

"Anne will be deeply missed but she lives on through her beautiful sons, her iconic body of work, and her passionate advocacy. "Her bravery for always standing in her truth, spreading her message of love and acceptance, will continue to have a lasting impact."

Heche, best known for 1990s movies "Donnie Brasco" and "Six Days, Seven Nights" as well as a high-profile relationship with talk show host Ellen DeGeneres, crashed her car into a two-story house in the Mar Vista neighborhood of Los Angeles. The violent collision resulted in "structural compromise and... heavy fire" at the scene, according to the Los Angeles Fire Department.

The ensuing blaze took 59 firefighters more than an hour to contain and fully extinguish, the department said. Local media reported Thursday that preliminary tests of Heche's blood had come back positive for narcotics, though more were needed to ensure the drugs had not been administered in the course of her treatment. Celebrity gossip outlet TMZ, citing unnamed police sources, said Heche had tested positive for cocaine and fentanyl, with the latter sometimes used for pain relief in clinical settings. Heche rose to fame with her role on the soap opera "Another World," for which she won a Daytime Emmy in 1991.

She was nominated for a Tony award for her appearance in "Twentieth Century" on Broadway in 2004. "My brother Atlas and I lost our Mom," Heche's son Homer Laffoon said in a separate statement. "Hopefully my mom is free from pain and beginning to explore what I like to imagine as her eternal freedom," he wrote. — AFP

## France plans fashion revolution with climate-impact labels

Is it better for the environment if you buy a brand-new cotton T-shirt or a recycled one? Well, it depends. Recycling has obvious benefits, but the process shortens cotton fibres and so usually has to be mixed with some oil-based material to keep it from falling apart. Such trade-offs make it tricky to figure out the real sustainability rating of clothes-but brands in Europe will soon have no choice.

Next year, France will pass a decree that will require every item of clothing sold in the country to carry a label detailing its precise climate impact. An exact timetable has yet to be finalized, but the labels are expected to quickly become mandatory, and the European Union is mulling a similar rule for the entire bloc.

For clothing firms, that means juggling many different and conflicting data points: Where and how were its raw materials grown? What was used to color it? How far did it travel? Was the factory powered with solar energy or coal?

The French Agency for Ecological Transition (Ademe) is currently testing 11 proposals for how to collect and compare data-and what the resulting label might look like to consumers-using 500 real-life items of clothing. "The message of the law is clear-it will become obligatory, so brands need to prepare, to make their



products traceable, to organize the automatic collection of data," Erwan Autret, one of the coordinators at Ademe, told AFP. "Some say the models are too simple, some say they're too complicated, but it's a sign of the maturity of the debate that no one questions the need for these calculations anymore."

### 'Transparent and informed'

The need for change in fashion is urgent. Statistics are notoriously hard to verify, but the UN says the industry is responsible for 10 percent of global carbon emissions, as well as a significant portion of water consumption and waste. Labels can be a key part of the solution, say campaigners. "It will force brands to be more transparent and informed... to collect data and create long-term relationships with their suppliers-all things they're not used to doing," said Victoire Satto, of The Good Goods, a media agency focused on sustainable fashion.

"Right now it seems infinitely complex," she added. "But we've seen it applied in

other industries such as medical supplies." Seeing how the winds are blowing, the textile industry has been racing to come up with technical solutions.

A recent presentation by Premiere Vision, a Paris-based textiles conference, highlighted many new processes including non-toxic leather tanning, dyes drawn from fruits and waste-and even biodegradable underwear that can be thrown on the compost. But the key to sustainability is using the right fabric for the right garment, said Ariane Bigot, Premiere Vision's deputy head of fashion.

That means synthetic and oil-based fabrics will still have a place, she said: "A strong synthetic with a very long lifespan might be right for some uses, such as an over-garment that needs little washing." Capturing all these trade-offs in one simple label on an item of clothing is therefore tricky. "It's very complicated," said Bigot. "But we need to get the machine started."

The French agency is due to collate the results of its testing phase by next spring before handing the results to lawmakers. While many welcome the labels, activists say this should only be part of a wider crackdown on the fashion industry.

"It's really good to put an emphasis on life-cycle analysis but we need to do something about it beyond just labels," said Valeria Botta, of the Environmental Coalition on Standards. "The focus should be on setting clear rules on product design to ban the worst products from the market, ban the destruction of returned and unsold goods, and set production limits," she told AFP. — AFP

## One dead, dozens hurt as gale hits Spain dance music festival

One person died and dozens more were injured early Saturday as powerful winds hit a music festival near the Spanish resort of Valencia, causing the stage to partially collapse, medics said. The incident occurred shortly after 4:00 am (0200 GMT) at the Medusa Circus of Madness dance music festival on Cullera beach, some 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of Valencia.

"At 4:18 am, part of the stage at Medusa Festival collapsed in Cullera due to a strong gust of wind," the 112 emergency services said on Twitter. "One person died and three were seriously hurt with multiple injuries," it said, indicating 14 others sustained light injuries. The health authorities later raised the toll to 40 injured.

Media reports said a young man in his early 20s died after being hit by parts of



the stage as it collapsed at the event which had been expected to draw some 320,000 festivalgoers. They also said some of the large structures making up the festival entrance also blew down.

Footage on social media showed powerful winds sweeping through the venue, trees and large structures bending dangerously, and debris flying everywhere as people fought to hold onto their tents and salvage their belongings. Spain's AEMET weather service said the Valencian coast had been hit overnight by various "warm downbursts", a weather event in which a powerful downward current of air hits land then spreads out in all directions.

"We are completely devastated and appalled by what happened last night," the

festival management said in a statement on social media, conveying condolences to the victims and their family and friends. It said an "unexpected and violent gale" had ravaged certain areas of the festival just after 4:00 am, forcing the management "to immediately evacuate the concert area to ensure the safety of the festival goers, staff and artists". Valencia's regional leader Ximo Puig wrote on Twitter it was "a terrible accident that has shocked us all", offering his "deepest condolences to the family and friends of the young man who died". — AFP

## Sports

# Qatar's ground control on red alert for World Cup disasters

## First World Cup in an Arab country

### News in brief

#### Player of the Year award

**PARIS:** Real Madrid pair Karim Benzema and Thibaut Courtois and Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne were on Friday shortlisted for the UEFA Men's Player of the Year award. The European body of European football said that a jury made up of journalists and representatives of clubs playing in European competitions voted for the trio from a list of 15. Polish striker Robert Lewandowski was fourth on the ballot and just missed out. The award will be presented on August 25 during the draw for the Champions League group stage. Real won the Spanish Liga and the Champions League. Benzema was named Champions League Player of the Season after scoring 15 goals in the competition, including three in Real's semi-final victory over Manchester City. When he scored Real's second goal against Frankfurt on Wednesday in the European Supercup, Benzema became the club's second-highest scorer in history with 324 goals, behind Cristiano Ronaldo. — AFP

#### Osasuna stun Sevilla 2-1

**MADRID:** Osasuna stunned Champions League qualifiers Sevilla 2-1 in the opening match of the new Liga season on Friday. Argentine striker Ezequiel 'Chimy' Avila gave Osasuna a ninth-minute lead. However, the advantage lasted just two minutes before Rafa Mir made the most of a fine pass from another Argentine, Papu Gomez to equalize. Sevilla finished last season in fourth spot in La Liga, 27 points ahead of Osasuna in 10th. But the underdogs were not overawed and grabbed a 74th-minute winner from the penalty spot courtesy of Aimar Oroz. Sevilla lost centre-backs Jules Kounde and Diego Carlos to Barcelona and Aston Villa respectively in the summer. On Friday, they were also without veteran striker Isco who arrived on a free transfer from Real Madrid but wasn't considered ready to make the match-day squad.

#### Barca register Lewandowski

**BARCELONA:** Barcelona managed to register new signings Robert Lewandowski, Franck Kessie, Andreas Christensen and Raphinha on Friday in time for their Liga opener against Rayo Vallecano on Saturday. However, French defender Jules Kounde remains unregistered with La Liga. Barcelona have spent 153 million euros on transfer fees alone to strengthen their squad, with Lewandowski the most notable new arrival from Bayern Munich. That deal came a year after Barca were forced to let Lionel Messi go to PSG as the Catalan giants labored under eye-watering reported debts of 1.35 billion euros (\$1.39 billion). Faced with severe limits on spending in order to comply with La Liga's financial controls, Barcelona needed to raise money quickly to be able to invest in signings and, crucially, to register new players. Earlier Friday, Barcelona sold another part of their media production unit "Barca Studios" for 100 million euros to Orpheus Media.

#### Serena to face Raducanu

**CINCINNATI:** Serena Williams will face a challenging first-round clash with reigning US Open champion Emma Raducanu when the US tennis great's farewell tour continues at Cincinnati next week. Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam champion, revealed this week that the "countdown has begun" to her retirement, with the 40-year-old expected to bid farewell after a final major campaign at the US Open starting later this month. Williams won her first singles match in more than a year when she defeated Spain's Nuria Parrizas Diaz in the first round at Toronto last week. That was before she revealed in an article in Vogue and on Instagram that she was "evolving away" from tennis. In her first match after the announcement, Williams fell in straight sets to Switzerland's Tokyo Olympic gold medalist Belinda Bencic in the second round. Williams faces another tough path in Cincinnati, where she is a two-time champion.

#### Spaun seizes Memphis lead

**WASHINGTON:** JJ Spaun sank two late clutch putts to fire a three-under par 67 and take a one-stroke lead after Friday's second round of the US PGA Tour's St. Jude Championship. The 31-year-old American sank a 13-foot birdie putt on his penultimate hole then closed with a seven-foot par putt to stand on 11-under 129 at TPC Southwind in Memphis, Tennessee. "I feel good. It's exciting," Spaun said. "Still a lot of golf left. Just going to try to keep doing what I've been doing the last two days and hopefully it will pay off." Austrian Sepp Straka, who missed six consecutive cuts entering the event, shared second on 130 with American Troy Merritt and American Denny McCarthy another stroke adrift. British Open champion Cameron Smith of Australia shared fifth on 132 with Americans Brian Harman, Ryan Palmer and Tony Finau. — AFP

**DOHA:** Facing a bank of screens that look like NASA mission command, technicians counting down to the World Cup in Qatar control the temperature, gates, 15,000 cameras and much more in the eight stadiums. The Aspire control and command centre will monitor all stadiums at once, as Qatar pulls out all the technical stops to keep an eye on the anticipated one million plus visitors from the moment they get off the plane to moment they leave.

Qatar has spent billions of dollars on building seven new stadiums and refurbishing an eighth for the first World Cup in an Arab country. It has seized on the uniquely short distance between them—barely 70 kilometers separate the two most distant venues—to set up the elaborate virtual network.

Organizers say the control centre, bristling with alarms and sensors, will set a benchmark for global sports events which must guard against terrorism, natural disasters and hooligans, as well as leaking water pipes. The numbers expected to be milling the streets worry the authorities. More than 3,000 Turkish police will reinforce local security forces, while small groups of police from each of the 32 competing nations will shadow their fans.

#### Cameras and drones

Supporters went through a first filtering when they applied for tickets. Names on a hooligan and fraud blacklist were barred. Fans will be followed on Doha streets by omnipresent CCTV cameras armed with facial recognition technology. Qatar University experts have developed drone surveillance systems that, they say, will give the most accurate estimates

## Qatar WCup 'will be most luxurious yet'

**DOHA:** A company that sells exclusive FIFA packages to the well-heeled is predicting record sales for the World Cup in Qatar, but its owner insists the tournament will be "good value" for all fans. Jaime Byrom, who has sold millions of hotel rooms over 10 World Cups, said wealthy supporters will be flocking to the tiny Gulf state from around the globe on private planes and yachts. Byrom's Match Hospitality has contracted 450,000 of the three million tickets for the tournament that starts November 20.

Packages range from \$700 for a top ticket with a slap-up meal, to bills of a million dollars-plus for big groups staying in top hotels and watching several matches. Byrom refused to give the highest prices for his Pearl Lounge at the Lusail Stadium, where the December 18 final will be held. At the lounge's 116 seats overlooking the halfway line, guests get special gifts, the food is prepared by Michelin-starred British chef Jason Atherton and the champagne flows.

The luxury at this year's World Cup "will exceed anything that we have delivered before", Byrom said. "There will be people who spare no expense to be here," he said. "They will bring their yachts they will fly their private aircraft, they will certainly make good use of their wealth. But that's only a minority of people." "There are just some people who are fortunate to have more money than others and they will have an experience that is beyond the reach of most of us and that is the way it is."



**DOHA:** People gather at the dome housing the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup countdown clock as it marks a hundred days, in the capital Doha on August 12, 2022. — AFP

## Arabs waiting impatiently for FIFA World Cup

**KUWAIT:** World football fans, particularly Arabs, are waiting impatiently for the 2022 FIFA World Cup to kick off in Qatar between 20 November and 18 December, hosting the best international teams on the planet. There are now just 100 days to go until Qatar hosts the FIFA World Cup for the first time in the Middle East and Arab world.

Actually, it is a race against time for Qatar to demonstrate its ability to organize an amazing festival, based on its great potential and experience in hosting Arab and world sports championships, with the 22nd edition of the event to deliver a legacy that sets the standard for future mega-event hosts. The club champions of Saudi Arabia and Egypt will inaugurate Qatar's 80,000-seat Lusail stadium to be used for the World Cup final on 9 September. The FIFA on Thursday moved the start of the upcoming World Cup in Qatar forward by one day



**DOHA:** Staff work at the Aspire security command centre for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, near Khalifa International stadium in Doha, where operation and security teams will be able to monitor all the stadiums during the World Cup. — AFP

of numbers on the streets.

In the Aspire centre, engineers will watch for air conditioning breakdowns and jams at the ticket gates. An interior ministry command centre that will monitor all streets, buses and metro trains. Police will move into the centre on match days and will play a key role when there are up to four games a day, with tens of tens of thousands of fans leaving one stadium and entering another.

"Basically we can open a door or all the doors in

a stadium right from here," said Niyas Abdulrahman, the organizers' chief technology officer, standing in front of the screens in the Khalifa Stadium compound. "Whatever happens, there is a response in place," said Hamad Al-Mohannadi, director of the command centre. "As long as there is no property damage and no one injured, we will just be watching," he added. "Anything related to property damage or someone being injured we will have to report it and deal with it." — AFP



**DOHA:** A picture shows a traditional Qatari sailing vessel known as dhow, with a banner affixed to a sail marking 100 days ahead of the football World Cup, with a view of the dome housing the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup countdown clock, in the capital Doha on August 12, 2022. — AFP

#### Moves like Jagger

Rolling Stones singer Mick Jagger, Chinese tycoon Jack Ma, royals and supermodels have been regulars at recent World Cups. And hospitality fees are a key earner for FIFA - \$184 million for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, according to the world body's accounts. Byrom told AFP that Match will beat the record revenues and 230,000 packages sold in Brazil.

Wealthy football fans—especially from Gulf nations—will be flocking to the first World Cup in an Arab nation. The company said that revenues are already 29 percent higher than they were 100 days

before the Brazil tournament started. "We are now dangerously close to surpassing the record that we set in Brazil and we know from past experience that the last three months are key to the success of the competition," said Byrom.

Match said Mexico, the United States, Britain and Argentina have bought the highest number of hospitality packages. But Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates were highest for revenues. India, Hong Kong, and Bangladesh—which like UAE do not have teams at the World Cup—were also in the top 10 buying nations, highlighting the spread of football's popularity. — AFP

## War minus shooting: Partition created fierce cricket rivalry

**KARACHI:** When India and Pakistan were forged out of violent partition 75 years ago, the split also created one of sport's greatest rivalries. Today, any cricket match between the two nations is one of the most watched events on the global sporting calendar - and victory used to promote their respective nationalism.

So strong is the rivalry between the countries that they can't even share the date of the partition which gave them independence, with Pakistan celebrating it on August 14 and India a day later. "India playing Pakistan involves the sentiments of millions," said Wasim Akram, one of cricket's all-time greats and now a commentator. "You become a hero if you perform well... you are portrayed as a villain if your team loses," said the former Pakistan skipper.

Matches ignite great fervor but they have also defused military tensions between the two nations, which have fought four wars since independence from Britain in 1947. During one period of sabre rattling in 1987, as troops massed along their frontier, Pakistan's military ruler General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq showed up unannounced in New Delhi - ostensibly to watch a match between the two. The move, as crafty as any a cricket captain could conjure up on the field, led to a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and tensions eased.

Still, the on-field rivalry has spilled off the cricket pitch for now. The neighbors have not played a Test since 2007, instead meeting only in the shorter versions of the game and at multi-team competitions on foreign soil, rather than head-to-head series at home. When they do play - as they will at the Asia Cup later this month in the United Arab Emirates - cricket fans around the world are glued to their TV screens, a multi-billion-dollar bonanza for broadcasters. — AFP

## Sports

# Seven-time winner Messi misses out on Ballon d'Or nomination

## French international striker Benzema - the overwhelming favorite

PARIS: Seven-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi paid a high price for an underwhelming first season with Paris Saint-Germain when he was left off the 30-strong list for this year's coveted football award. Lucy Bronze, who was runner-up in 2019, is one of three members of England's Euro-winning squad to be short-listed for the women's award. Messi, who won the title last year, had been an ever-present amongst the nominations since 2006 and a regular feature in the top three since 2007 with the exception of 2018. But Messi, 35, has missed out on the 2022 award following his switch from Barcelona to the French capital.

A change in the format has also worked against the Argentine superstar with the Ballon d'Or no longer acknowledging the best player over a calendar year. Instead, it is based on a season's record highlighting "the individual performances" and the "decisive and impressive character" of the nominees, according to the criteria. After leaving Barcelona in the summer of 2021, Messi was unable to stamp his genius on a PSG team desperate for a Champions League title.

The French champions suffered a last-16 exit at the hands of eventual winners Real Madrid. In total, Messi scored only 11 goals for PSG with his relatively indifferent club form failing to impress France Football magazine, the organizers of the Ballon d'Or which will be awarded in Paris on October 17. PSG teammate Neymar also misses out after a season where he scored 13 goals in 28 matches. The remainder of the list of nominees throws up few surprises.

French international striker Karim Benzema is the overwhelming favorite after being the architect of Real

Madrid's 14th Champions League title. He finished the European campaign with 15 goals. Benzema is likely to become the fifth French winner after Raymond Kopa (1958), Michel Platini (1983, 1984, 1985), Jean-Pierre Papin (1991) and Zinedine Zidane (1998). In the 2021/2022 season, Benzema scored 44 goals in 46 appearances for a Madrid side who also won the Liga title.

His goal in Wednesday's 2-0 victory over Eintracht Frankfurt in the European Super Cup took the 34-year-old to 324 goals for the Spanish giants. That edged him ahead of Raul in the club's all-time list with only Cristiano Ronaldo in front of him with 450. "He's in line for the Ballon d'Or. Is there any doubt? For me, no," said Real coach Carlo Ancelotti. Manchester United's Ronaldo, a five-time Ballon d'Or winner, is nominated again this year.

Benzema is joined on the 30-man list by teammates Thibaut Courtois, Casemiro, 2018 winner Luka Modric, Vinicius and former Chelsea player Antonio Rudiger. Beaten Champions League finalists Liverpool have seven players nominated, the most of any club. They are Trent Alexander-Arnold, Luis Diaz, Fabinho, Sadio Mane, since transferred to Bayern Munich, Darwin Nunez, Mohamed Salah and Virgil Van Dijk.

There is a 20-strong list for the women's Ballon d'Or including English stars Bronze, Millie Bright and Arsenal forward Beth Mead who won the Golden Boot at the women's Euro. France have four nominations - Selma Bacha, Kadidiatou Diani, Marie-Antoinette Katoto and Wendie Renard. Defending champion Alexia Putellas, who was ruled out of the Euros with a last minute injury, and Norwegian star Ada Hegerberg, the first winner of the prize in 2018, are also in the running. —AFP



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi reacts during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Real Madrid at the Parc des Princes stadium in this file photo. —AFP

## Tottenham's title credentials face Chelsea test

MANCHESTER: Tottenham lived up to pre-season hype they could challenge for the Premier League title by going top of the table on the opening weekend of the season, but face a truer test of their credentials away to Chelsea on Sunday. Antonio Conte has been heavily backed in his first full season as Spurs boss with the signings of Richarlison, Yves Bissouma, Ivan Perisic, Djed Spence, Clement Lenglet and Fraser Forster in the transfer window.

But none of the six new faces started in an impressive 4-1 win over Southampton to underline the strength in depth now on offer to Conte. Spurs, though, have only won once in the league at Stamford Bridge in 32 years and beating the Blues would send an early season statement of intent that they can bridge the gap to Manchester City and Liverpool.

Chelsea also got off to a winning start in less flamboyant fashion as they needed

a Jorginho penalty to see off Everton 1-0. Thomas Tuchel has demanded an improvement this weekend, but believes Chelsea will get better as the season goes on after a turbulent 2022 that saw the club suffer sanctions before Todd Boehly's consortium took control from Roman Abramovich.

The American has not held back in backing Tuchel with the signings of Raheem Sterling, Kalidou Koulibaly, Marc Cucurella and Carney Chukwuemeka. And Sterling believes Chelsea are also on the up as he outlined his reasoning for leaving Manchester City on Thursday. "You look at Chelsea in the last couple of years, it's four or five finals that they've been in," said the England international. "It's a team that shows that they are competing and they're only going to get better. So with the new ownership and the takeover it made a lot of sense."

**Pressure on Gerrard, Lampard**  
Former England teammates Steven Gerrard and Frank Lampard go head-to-head on the touchline for the first time on Saturday as Aston Villa host Everton with both seeking their first points of the season. Gerrard's decision to strip Tyrone Mings of the Villa captaincy and drop the England international for a des-



Tottenham Hotspur's Italian head coach Antonio Conte

perately disappointing 2-0 defeat to promoted Bournemouth on Saturday has upped the pressure on the former Liverpool captain.

Expectations were high for Villa in Gerrard's first full season after Diego Carlos and Boubacar Kamara turned their backs on Champions League football with Sevilla and Marseille respectively to sign over the summer. But

Gerrard's men have won just two of their last 12 Premier League games dating back to last season and those were against relegated Norwich and Burnley. Everton only narrowly avoided the drop last season and another difficult campaign lies ahead with Richarlison sold to Spurs and England striker Dominic Calvert-Lewin out injured for the first six weeks of the season. —AFP

## 'Game-changer' Bynoe-Gittens lifts Dortmund

BERLIN: Eighteen-year-old Englishman Jamie Bynoe-Gittens scored one and created another as Borussia Dortmund came back to defeat Freiburg 3-1 on Friday with all their goals coming in the last 13 minutes of the game. With the game drifting towards defeat, Dortmund were again able to rely on their young brigade, with Bynoe-Gittens and 17-year-old Youssoufa Moukoko scoring two quick goals to see the visitors pick up a valuable three points in their quest for a sixth Bundesliga title.

Dortmund manager Edin Terzic lauded his side's depth and praised "game-changer" Bynoe-Gittens. "With him, it's pretty simple - he's got the skills to decide games," said Terzic. "He's a game-changer and (I told him when he came on) I wanted to see that from him. "We fought back, scored three goals through three substitutes and showed how good the squad is."

The visitors dominated the early stages, with Anthony Modeste - playing in his first game for Dortmund just days after transferring from FC Cologne - striking up an immediate partnership with captain Marco Reus. Reus teed up Modeste to run into the left side of the penalty box in the 20th minute, forcing Freiburg keeper Mark Flekken into a save. Modeste also had a chance right in front in the 32nd minute after superb one touch football from Jude Bellingham and Raphael Guerreiro, but the Portuguese's cross was inches too high.



FREIBURG IM BREISGAU: Dortmund's English forward Jamie Bynoe-Gittens (left) and Dortmund's German forward Youssoufa Moukoko celebrate during the German first division Bundesliga football match between SC Freiburg and Borussia Dortmund on August 12, 2022. —AFP

As if stunned into action, Freiburg then flipped a switch, building pressure on a suddenly shaky Dortmund defense. Roland Sallai won a free kick on the edge of the box with 33 minutes played. Dead-ball specialist Vincenzo Grifo stepped up to force a fingertip save from Gregor Kobel in goal. Freiburg took the lead minutes later, when former Dortmund defender Matthias Ginter found Michael Gregoritsch who deftly drifted a header over Kobel and into the top right corner of the goal.

Terzic turned to youth halfway through the second

half, bringing on Bynoe-Gittens and Moukoko to introduce some potency to Dortmund's attack. Known more for his dribbling and assists, the Englishman equalized with a stunning strike from outside the box. While his shot was helped by a poor attempted save from Freiburg keeper Mark Flekken, the goal spurred Bynoe-Gittens and Dortmund into action. The former Manchester City academy player had a chance to put his side in front after 82 minutes, but was unable to control a sharp Marius Wolf pass with the goal begging. —AFP



NANTES: Lille's Brazilian defender Ismaily reacts after scoring his team's first goal during the French L1 football match between FC Nantes and LOSC Lille on August 12, 2022. —AFP

ahead of the long trip to Brittany. "He will be in the group. We will then see how to use him," said Tudor, adding that Sanchez was unlikely to start. —AFP

## Ismaily strikes late to rescue Ligue 1 draw for Lille

PARIS: Lille moved to the top of the fledgling Ligue 1 table after Ismaily's second half equalizer secured a draw from a tough contest at Nantes on Friday. Lille went into the game on the back of an impressive 4-1 win over Auxerre in last week's opening round but they were on the back foot when Moses Simon struck for the home side in the 27th minute, tucking in from close range. French Cup winner Nantes were held to an uninspiring goalless draw at Angers on the opening weekend but appeared to be closing in on a first win of the season as they held out against some sustained Lille attacks.

Fifteen minutes from time, however, the visitors, who finished a mediocre 10th last season, got their reward

## Hurkacz ends Kyrgios streak in Montreal

MONTREAL: Hubert Hurkacz overcame 53 winners from Nick Kyrgios to halt the Australian's nine-match win streak with a three-set quarter-final victory on Friday at the ATP Montreal Masters. The Polish eighth seed managed 43 winners of his own in a rapid-fire 7-6(7/4), 6-7(5/7), 6-1 triumph that put him into his fourth semi-final at the Masters level. Hurkacz will next face Norway's fourth-seeded Casper Ruud, who crushed home hope Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-1, 6-2, in 74 minutes.

Ruud will play his third Masters semi-final this season on Saturday, having defeated Hurkacz in their previous meeting in May at Roland Garros. At the bottom of the draw, Dan Evans completed a comeback to defeat American Tommy Paul 1-6, 6-3, 6-4, needing two match points to overcome Paul in two and a quarter hours.

But the chance of an all-British semi-final at this elite level fell away as Jack Draper lost 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 to Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta after saving a pair of match points. The 39th-ranked Evans, who managed only 15 winners, was decisively out-hit by Paul with 40. Not surprisingly he said reaching his second career semi-final in Masters tournament was a hard slog. "I had to try and hang in, get a few scraps off of him," he said. "If he made errors, take advantage, he was too good in the first set."

"You start to wonder if you can get into the match, so when I got the chance I took it to him. I was fired up - we had a good battle." For Hurkacz, it was a second win in as many matches against Kyrgios, the first played on grass in June at Halle, Germany. Kyrgios, known for quick play, had several service games go by in less than one minute, with the Wimbledon finalist barely pausing between the end of one point and the start of the next.

### Running on fumes

Wimbledon runner-up Kyrgios, who won his first title in three years last week in Washington, was bothered at times by his foot, lower back and hip as he lost momentum in the third set. "I was just running on fumes a bit towards the end," the 27-year-old Aussie said. "That's normal. "But I feel good, feel confident. I've got three or four days of rest until Cincinnati. I'm going to use that, really capitalize and just rest and recover." The pair combined for 39 aces, with Hurkacz striking 20 of them. "Over the last two months, Nick has been playing incredibly," Hurkacz said. "Today was a really tough match. Battling against him, it's very challenging, but it's also fun. "Nick is a super opponent. He can make every single shot. He doesn't really have that many weaknesses, if any. I was just trying to serve good and stay aggressive."

Hurkacz, a 2021 quarter-finalist in Canada, won his 31st match of the season. Ruud, who struck only nine unforced errors, was pleasantly surprised at his domination of Montreal's Auger-Aliassime. "It was one of those days where everything was in my favor," he said. "I had a troubling start when I was broken to zero. "But I turned it around. I made him play a lot of shots. Maybe playing at home was a factor for him. "I was lucky to be able to win and keep the crowd from not cheering too much." —AFP



**MANCHESTER:** Bournemouth's Irish goalkeeper Mark Travers (left) fights for the ball with Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Bournemouth on August 13, 2022. —AFP

## Man City, Arsenal maintain perfect Premier League start

### Aston Villa beat Everton; City crush Bournemouth 4-0

**MANCHESTER:** Manchester City stormed ominously to the top of the Premier League by cruising to a 4-0 win over Bournemouth, while Gabriel Jesus opened his Arsenal account in a 4-2 win over Leicester on Saturday. As soaring temperatures across England forced the need for water breaks at all this weekend's Premier League games, it was City who were on fire at the Etihad as promoted Bournemouth were blown away.

Erling Haaland failed to score on his home debut, but the Norwegian showed there is more to his game than goals as he used his strength before sliding in Ilkay Gundogan to open the scoring. Kevin De Bruyne then took centre stage with a scintillating finish with the outside of his right foot to find the far corner before the Belgian turned provider for Phil Foden to make it 3-0 before half-time. City eased off the gas after the break but added to their lead 11 minutes from time when Jefferson Lerma

turned Joao Cancelo's cross into his own net.

#### Jesus shines

Haaland's arrival at City was one of the factors behind Jesus' departure and the Brazilian is already looking like a bargain for the Gunners as he marked his home debut with two goals and two assists to maintain Arsenal's perfect start. Jesus was often deployed in wider areas in recent seasons by City boss Pep Guardiola, but was brought to Arsenal to be a number nine as he aims to secure a place at the World Cup later this year with regular games as a centre-forward. The 25-year-old showed his eye for goal with a sumptuous chip over Danny Ward to break Leicester's resistance and doubled his tally by heading home a corner at the back post.

William Saliba's own goal gave Leicester a foothold against the run of play. But the Foxes quickly threw that hope away when Ward dropped

a simple cross into the box and Jesus teed up Granit Xhaka to slot home. Another goalkeeping error at the other end gifted Leicester another goal as James Maddison's strike squirmed under Aaron Ramsdale. Arsenal, though, again responded instantly to avoid a nervy finale as Gabriel Martinelli fired into the far corner before Jesus hit the post with the chance to seal his hat-trick.

#### Gerrard beats Lampard

Steven Gerrard won the first managerial clash between him and former England teammate Frank Lampard as Aston Villa beat Everton 2-1 to get off the mark. Goals from Danny Ings and Emi Buendia eased the pressure on the former Liverpool captain after a run of two wins in their previous 12 games dating back to last season.

However, Villa had to survive a nervy finish as Lucas Digne's own goal gave Everton hope as Emi

Martinez twice denied Anthony Gordon. Leeds missed the chance to join City and Arsenal on six points after blowing a 2-0 lead at Southampton. Rodrigo's double put the visitors in command at St Mary's, but goals from Joe Aribo and Kyle Walker-Peters may have saved Ralph Hasenhuttl's job after reports this week suggested he could be the first Premier League sacking of the season.

Brighton and Newcastle failed to build on their impressive starts last weekend as both missed chances aplenty in a 0-0 draw at the Amex. It was also scoreless between Wolves and Fulham at Molineux after Aleksandar Mitrovic saw a late penalty saved by Jose Sa with the chance to win it for the visitors. Manchester United are aiming to kickstart Erik ten Hag's reign in charge later when the Red Devils travel to Brentford. Cristiano Ronaldo starts for United after being left on the bench for a 2-1 home defeat to Brighton last weekend. —AFP

## Countdown begins for World Cup

**DOHA:** FIFA and Qatar organizers on Friday counted the cost of bringing forward the start of the World Cup by a day as they launched the 100-day countdown to the event. Football's ruling body and the wealthy Gulf state both promised to help fans, sponsors and broadcasters hit by the change but did not give details. The organizing committee said "huge excitement" was building for the World Cup, which will now start on Nov 20, as people gathered at the main countdown clock on the Doha seafront to see the 100 days tick over.

The sudden move to bring forward Qatar's match against Ecuador - to make it the gala opening match - has added to Qatar's public relations battle. FIFA said its senior leaders had unanimously agreed that the Qatar-Ecuador game and the opening ceremony at the Al Bayt stadium should be a "standalone" event. The move maintained the tradition of featuring the host country or the reigning champions at the first match.

Qatar had been scheduled to play the official inauguration game on Nov 21, but the third match of the day behind Senegal-Netherlands and England against Iran. The Group A game between Senegal and the Netherlands has now been shifted from 1:00 pm (1000 GMT) on Nov 21 to 7:00pm. FIFA said tickets for the affected matches "will remain valid" and added that it would "seek to address any issues arising from this change in a case-by-case basis."

Qatari organizers, who have spent billions of dollars preparing for the event, welcomed FIFA's gesture for their "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to host the event. "The impact of this decision on fans was assessed by FIFA. We will work together to ensure a smooth tournament for the supporters affected by the change," organizers added in a



**DOHA:** This picture taken from the Gulf waters off Qatar's capital Doha shows a view of 974 Stadium, formerly known as Ras Abu Aboud, which will host matches of the FIFA football World Cup 2022. —AFP

statement, without giving details.

Some Ecuador fans may have to change flights to arrive in Qatar earlier. Paul Flores, a car company manager in Quito, said he would have to change flights and was doubtful he would get compensation. Flores, his wife and two children, had planned to go to the Formula One grand prix in Abu Dhabi on Nov 20 and then Ecuador's World Cup game the next day. He has tickets for five World Cup games in all.

Some companies linked to the first World Cup in an Arab country, expressed confidence, however, that any disruption would be overcome. "It is really not - compared to the other challenges that we could have faced or have faced in the past - a particularly large problem," said Jaime Byrom, chairman of Match Hospitality, which has a contract with FIFA to organize hospitality packages for World Cup matches and has locked in 450,000 tickets for the tournament. He said the priority would be to help Ecuadorian clients.

Official countdown clocks for the event were quickly changed and events for the last 100 days were moved from Saturday to Friday. Most events were low-key even though Hassan Al-Thawadi, secretary general of the Qatar organizing committee, said there was "huge excitement" building in the state of 2.8 million people. —AFP

## Werner scores on Bundesliga return

**BERLIN:** A goal from former Chelsea striker Timo Werner was not enough as Leipzig drew 2-2 at home with Cologne on Saturday. Leipzig played the majority of the game with 10 men, after Hungarian midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai received a straight red card for an elbow to the throat of Cologne's Florian Kainz just before half time. Werner put Leipzig 1-0 up in the 36th minute, when goalkeeper Marvin Schwabe let Werner's long-distance strike dip under his body and trickle across the line.

Cologne equalised just four minutes later however, when striker Florian Dietz dinked in from close range to chalk up his first ever Bundesliga goal. French forward Christopher Nkunku gave the home side the lead in the 56th minute, but Cologne were able to equalize with 20 minutes to go through a clumsy own goal from Leipzig's Josko Gvardiol. Augsburg won 2-1 away at Bayern Leverkusen thanks to a late goal from Andre Hahn in the 82nd minute.

Leverkusen, looking to rebound from a disappointing first round loss to Borussia Dortmund, went behind early when Augsburg midfielder Fredrik Jensen scored his side's first Bundesliga goal of the season. The home side hit back in the shadows of halftime, with Chilean midfielder Charles Aranguiz expertly threading a low strike past several defenders and into the bottom corner of the net. Hahn's 82nd-minute strike however saw Augsburg steal the lead and his side's first win of the year.

#### Burke scores for Bremen

Werder Bremen were able to snatch a late point at home against Stuttgart through a 95th minute goal from Scottish winger Oliver Burke. Bremen's 'Ugly Ducklings' Niclas Fuellkrug and Marvin Ducksch again combined to put the home side up early, with Fuellkrug getting on the board in the fourth minute. Stuttgart equalized in the 38th minute



Timo Werner

through Wataru Endo, before Sasa Kalajdzic slid a perfect pass into the path of Silas Katomba Mvumpa in the 77th minute to put his side 2-1 up. Burke's late goal saw newly-promoted Bremen claim valuable points in what is likely to be a difficult season.

In the German capital, under pressure Hertha Berlin roared out of the blocks at home against Eintracht Frankfurt, with Suat Serdar heading in a cross from Dodi Lukebakio. Frankfurt, who have opened up their season with heavy losses to Bayern Munich and against Real Madrid in the midweek Super Cup, hit back just after halftime when Daichi Kamada took advantage of a Hertha defensive mistake to bring the score to 1-1.

Frankfurt had a late penalty overturned on VAR and Hertha held on to pick up their first point of the season. In Sinsheim, Hoffenheim came from 2-0 down to win 3-2 against an impressive Bochum. The game started furiously, with Bochum's Simon Zoller scoring in the 10th and 13th minute, before Hoffenheim's Christoph Baumgartner got one back for the home side in the 14th minute. Former Liverpool defender Ozan Kabak equalised in the 23rd minute, looping a header into the top left corner of the net for his first Hoffenheim goal. —AFP