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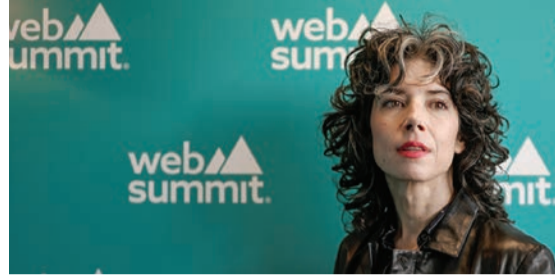
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Pope Francis holds open-air mass for 30,000 in Bahrain

World on 'precipice', pontiff says as he meets grand imam



(Left) Pope Francis arrives to celebrate mass at Bahrain National Stadium in Riffa near Manama on Nov 5, 2022. (Right) Pope Francis embraces the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb during their meeting at the papal residence near Sakhir Royal Palace in the eponymous Bahraini city on Nov 4, 2022. — AFP photos

MANAMA: About 30,000 flag-waving worshippers joined an open-air mass held by Pope Francis in mainly Muslim Bahrain on Saturday, the highlight of his outreach mission to the Gulf. Some of the congregation had tears in their eyes as they waited to see the 85-year-old at Bahrain National Stadium, the kingdom's biggest venue.

Francis, who uses a wheelchair and walking stick due to knee problems, smiled and waved to the crowds from an open-sided popemobile where he was seated, flanked by more than a dozen suited security guards and attendants. As a 100-strong, multinational choir sang in multiple languages, the Argentine stood to kiss children lifted up to greet him in the specially adapted vehicle, which drove slowly towards a white stage backdropped by a giant gold cross.

"This very land is a living image of coexistence in diversity and indeed an image of our world, increasingly marked by the constant migration of peoples and by a pluralism of ideas, customs and traditions," he said in an address.

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News in brief

Call to hike utility tariffs

KUWAIT: A technical government team recommended the Cabinet to increase electricity and water tariffs with the start of the new financial year in April next year. "Since expats are considered the largest consumers, being twice the population of Kuwaiti nationals, they should not pay 10 times less for utilities," sources told Kuwait Times. "The recommendation aims to increase tariffs by 50-100 percent, while prices for citizens will remain the same for their first residence," the sources said.

615,000 online purchases daily

KUWAIT: Official statistics of purchases by citizens and expats revealed around 615,000 online purchases are made daily in Kuwait, averaging to around KD 38.7 million. During the first nine months, online purchases amounted to about KD 10.56 billion, which equals to around 34 percent of total spending. Since the start of the year till September, a total of about 605 million purchases were made, 167.9 million of which were through websites or apps.

US grapples with three viruses

WASHINGTON: US hospitals are under pressure as cases of three respiratory viruses - the flu, COVID-19, and RSV - are rising at the same time, and earlier than usual, experts said Friday. Children are being hit hard by the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which causes the chest infection bronchiolitis in infants, and has spurred unusually high rates of hospitalizations in several countries around the world this season. — AFP (See Page 11)

Egypt cuts feed to 'mahraganat'

CAIRO: With its catchy beats and in-your-face lyrics, Egypt's hugely popular electro "mahraganat" music has found millions of fans in the conservative country - but now officials are pulling the plug. — AFP (See Page 12)

Egypt hosts 'watershed' climate meet

SHARM EL SHEIKH, Egypt: Leaders buffeted by the geopolitical crosswinds of war and economic turmoil meet in Egypt Monday at a climate summit tasked with taming the terrifying juggernaut of global warming. Expectations are running high in a world justifiably anxious about its climate-addled future as deadly floods, heat waves and storms across the planet track with worst-case climate scenarios.

The Nov 6-18 gathering of nearly 200 nations in Sharm el-Sheikh will be dominated by the growing need of virtually blameless poor nations for money to cope not just with future impacts, but those already claiming lives and devastating economies. Without a "historic pact" bridging the North-South divide, "we will be doomed, because we need to reduce emissions, both in the developed countries and emerging economies," UN chief Antonio Guterres said Thursday.

Last week the UN warned that "there is no credible pathway in place" for capping the rise in global temperatures under the Paris Agreement target of 1.5 degrees Celsius.

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SHARM EL SHEIKH: The main entrance of the Sharm El Sheikh International Convention Centre, where the COP27 climate summit will take place, is seen in this Red Sea resort city on Nov 5, 2022 — AFP

Twitter sacks half of staff as Musk launches overhaul

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter sacked half of its 7,500-strong staff on Friday as new owner Elon Musk launched his major overhaul of the troubled company just a week after his blockbuster takeover. An internal

document seen by AFP said "roughly 50 percent" of employees were impacted and would be denied access to company computers and email on an immediate basis. Workers around the world were shown the door and took to Twitter to vent their frustration or disbelief and say goodbye to one of Silicon Valley's most iconic companies.

"Woke up to the news that my time working at Twitter has come to an end. I am heartbroken. I am in denial," said Michele Austin, Twitter's director of public policy for the United States and Canada. "Regarding Twitter's reduction in force, unfortunately there is no

choice when the company is losing over \$4M/day," Musk tweeted Friday evening in his first comment on the subject, 24 hours after the company's initial email notifying employees of forthcoming layoffs.

Ahead of the layoffs, Twitter closed access to its offices worldwide, asking employees to stay at home to await news of their fate through an email. "It's a pretty inhumane way to treat people. It seems like a mercenary effort, they're trying to save money at all cost," said one dismissed employee who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

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'No choice' but cholera water in Lebanon

BEBNINE, Lebanon: Marwa Khaled's teenage son was hospitalized with cholera after drinking polluted water in Lebanon's impoverished north - yet she still buys the same contaminated water, the only kind she can afford. "People know (the water is contaminated), but they don't have any other choice," said 35-year-old Khaled, standing near her son, who is bedridden at a cholera field hospital. "Everyone will end up with

cholera."

Last month Lebanon recorded its first cholera case since 1993, in the nearby Syrian refugee camp of Rihaniye - weeks after an outbreak in Syria, which lies about 20 km away. Now the World Health Organization warns the waterborne disease is spreading "rapidly" as Lebanon struggles with crumbling infrastructure, poor sanitation and limited access to clean water following three years of economic meltdown.

Over a quarter of the country's more than 400 recorded cases are from Khaled's hometown of Bebnine, where people resort to unsafe water sources as the state fails to provide clean water.

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BEBNINE, Lebanon: In this photo taken on Oct 26, 2022, medics attend to a child at a ward in a mosque hall converted into a field hospital. — AFP

Dr Al-Awadhi: Kuwait is keen on offering comprehensive healthcare for children

Health Minister inaugurates Kuwait Pediatric Conference



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi checks out a medical equipment for children during the pediatric conference on Saturday. —KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi inaugurates the conference.



Conference head Dr Eman Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Kuwait is keen on boosting and protecting children's healthcare rights, as well as offering preventive, curative and rehabilitative care at the required quality under the umbrella of comprehensive healthcare. The Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi said on Saturday.

He added during the speech he gave during the opening ceremony of Kuwait Pediatric Conference earlier on Saturday, "Protecting the child's rights in healthcare is basic human right in various years of his age, according to the international charters and the United Nations (UN) agreements. This conference is a remarkable achievement in the road of children's healthcare, expressing his hope that the venue would come out with distinguished recommendations. He added that it would contribute in updating the children healthcare policies and protocols, and monitoring its application



KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi with participants.

through the appropriate scientific indices, he affirmed. The conference coincides with the international celebration of the World Children's Day, and the aspects of the conference are highly endorsed, he added.

Meanwhile, Head of conference Dr Eman Al-Enezi said that this event covers all the sections of children's pediatric specialties in Kuwaiti hospitals to offer the appropriate opportunity for all public and subsidiary specialties in the children medicine. The conference, in which 500 participants from Kuwait and the Gulf region nations are taking part

in, comes amid great challenges facing the health sector following the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, nevertheless the preparatory committees prepare a precise scientific program that comes upon the latest developments in the field. The conference is hosting a group of experienced international advisors and analysts to offer 65 lectures and 16 work papers, as well as five specialized workshops in the field, Dr Al-Enezi said. She expressed hope that this conference would play a key role in offering the best healthcare possible for children in our country. — KUNA

Kuwait crude oil up \$2.46 to \$96.27pb: KPC

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil price went up \$2.46 during Friday's trading session to reach \$96.27 per barrel compared with \$93.81 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Saturday. In global markets, benchmark Brent was also up \$3.99 to \$98.57pb and West Texas Intermediate up as well with \$2.96 to \$92.61 pb. OPEC basket price drops \$1.23 to settle at \$93.51 pb.

Meanwhile, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) said that its basket of crudes dropped by \$1.23 to settle at \$93.51 a barrel in trading, compared to \$94.74 last Wednesday, said the organization Friday. The overall annual average of the cartel was \$69.89 pb, the organization's bulletin said in its bulletin.

After its ministerial meeting on the fifth of last October, the OPEC Plus alliance decided to reduce oil production rates by two million barrels per day, starting from the beginning of this November, to support prices witnessed in the third quarter of the first quarterly loss in two years. In their final statement, the OPEC Plus ministers stressed the decision to reduce the uncertainty surrounding the prospects for the global economy and the oil market and the need to strengthen the long-term guidance of the oil market. —KUNA



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PAM issues citations to 127 workers

KUWAIT: As part of inspection campaigns by the Public Authority of Manpower, 127 workers were



issued citations in Salmi on Friday. The campaign was held in cooperation with the general security department at the interior ministry. The campaign saw citations issued to 93 workers on article 18 iqamas, 19 workers on article 20 iqamas and 15 other workers. Necessary legal procedures were taken against the violators.

Local

Zain to sponsor London Business School MENA Startup Competition

Company part of judging panel during event at Dubai IFC



The competition took place at the LBS Campus in the Dubai International Financial Center.



Haya Al-Mana on the judging panel

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its strategic sponsorship of the London Business School MENA Startup Competition, LBS's inaugural venture competition in the region. Many entrepreneurs and startup owners from across MENA took part in the startups pitching event held at the LBS Campus in the Dubai International Financial Center.

Zain's support to this unique competition - launched by one of the world's top academic business institutions - came in continuation of the company's efforts to enrich the regional tech startup ecosystem. Zain is committed to make an impactful contribution to support entrepreneurship and innovation, not only in Kuwait, but across the entire region.

As a strategic sponsor, Zain was part of the judging panel during the event held at the LBS Campus in the Dubai International Financial Center, represented by the company's Innovation and Entrepreneurship Expert Haya Al-Mana. Al-Mana joined in hearing and evaluating the 12 finalists' startup pitches. The first and second place winners were selected based on criteria set by London Business School.

The event featured 12 finalists with promising startups, spanning different industries like Fintech, AgriTech, e-Commerce, Healthtech, and other emerging sectors. The finalists represented nations from across MENA, including UAE, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. The 12 front-runners qualified from over 70 submissions and underwent rigorous one-on-one mentoring sessions and workshops facilitated by individual and institutional mentors.

The first LBS MENA Competition was supported by the Institute of Entrepreneurship and Private Capital (IEPC) and is considered one of the most-reputed startup competitions to connect aspiring entrepreneurs with VCs and investors in the MENA region. Zain has a long list of efforts and initiatives to support entrepreneurs and startup owners, most notably its Zain Great Idea tech startup accelerator program. The company recently launched ZGI's seventh season, aiming to entrepreneurs towards the best experiences that bring them sustainable growth and leverage on its partners ecosystem to connect them with venture capital firms and business partners to help them put a steady first step in the business world. Zain Great

Idea is one of the most successful projects under the company's Innovation and Entrepreneurship strategy. Investments in ZGI startups are well over KD 6 million (\$20 million) to this date. 30 percent of ZGI alumni now own thriving and active businesses to this day across local and regional markets, and 40 percent of these businesses have raised capital.

ZGI offers a refreshed opportunity for local talents and the region's entrepreneurial community. Throughout six successful editions, the program has empowered, trained, and invested in hundreds of creative and driven Kuwaiti and Arab youth, of which many now own thriving and active Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to this day in local and regional markets.

Zain is well aware of the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive impact through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most influential issues in the community, including the support of youth, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

In my view

Social impact of US taxation

By Atyab Al-Shatti

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The US taxation system is governed by the Federal Insurance Contribution Act, Federal Unemployment Tax Act and State Unemployment Tax Act that collectively form the structure of taxation that an American periodically pays to federal and state governments. The home pay entitlement of each individual forms a fair pay that the employee takes after deducting applicable taxes and leans on till the next paycheck.

It is known and understood that the home pay entitlement is subject to further taxations, whether federal, state, local or even by subscribing to a phone plan or insurance policy. Deduction through sales tax continues as the individuals seeks their basic living needs and is taxed again for groceries, clothes and other basic needs.

The taxation system appears equal for all Americans, as the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) imposes two taxes on employers, employees and self-employed workers - old-age, survivors, and disability insurance, which is commonly known as social security, and the other for hospital insurance, which is commonly known as Medicare. For 2022, the FICA tax rate for employers is 7.65 percent - 6.2 percent for social security and 1.45 percent for Medicare (the same as in 2021).

The equality in this economic political system fades away at the time of its application, due to the absence of serious government supervision over capitalism that financially exploits the citizen. There has been an increase in college payments for university and higher education, becoming a heavy financial burden due to the continuous rise in tuition fees and education expenses. A student has to apply for a loan in order to pay college fees, simply because of an absence of supervision, which allows owners of schools and colleges to raise prices without a limit or ceiling. The economic political structure therein suffers from a serious vacuum that makes it almost impossible for citizens to achieve the "American Dream".

Some people, due to their critical situation, are forced to cohabitate in order to avoid the high rates of taxations, where even marriage is socially exploited due to such difficult circumstances, while poverty for some becomes a shadow that can hardly be escaped from. Such abuse of economic freedom is also applied to other services and needs for Americans, for example buying a house or simply trying to survive.

It is also understood that some student workers who are enrolled at least half-time in a university and work part-time for the same university are exempt from FICA tax. But in order to be exempt from FICA payroll taxes, a student's work must be "incident to" the pursuit of a course of study, which is rarely the case with full-time employment. However full-time college students are never exempt from FICA taxes on work performed off-campus.

While the US lately became one of the leading countries in addressing human rights issues such as monitoring trafficking in persons worldwide, it is time for the country to look at its own citizens and help overcome the economic-political vacuum within the system.

High temperatures hit employees' productivity

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Summer in Kuwait passed with dust storms, humidity and very high temperatures caused by global climate change. These weather fluctuations were a challenge for employees to maintain their productivity levels. Kuwait Times spoke to human resource expert Aref Abdullah Al-Ajmi and discussed with him the effects of this issue locally.

"It has been noted that there has been changes in the performance of employees during the current summer period. High temperature is absolutely the main reason, which led to workers getting angry quickly and boredom at work, and their psychological state was poor," he said. Ajmi pointed out that as a result of weather fluctuations, there has been a negative effect on the workflow and level of productivity.

"Companies, especially in the private sector, requires a certain level of productivity, regardless of the circumstances, which puts pressure on the employees and unfortunately pushes them to a breaking point," he said. "Employee productivity in hot countries improves in the winter, while in cold countries, we see productivity improves in the summer due to the psychological factor that plays a



Aref Abdullah Al-Ajmi

very big role. Despite the presence of air conditioning in most workplaces and commercial complexes in Kuwait, the impact of high temperatures on employees is linked to another aspect, which is traffic jams. This consumes most of their energy and enthusiasm to work, especially in the summer, after staying under the sun for a long time and arriving to work

to get tasks done," Ajmi said.

Regarding suggestions that can contribute to improving the productivity of employees during the summer period, he said: "The problem of the private sector in Kuwait is that it is not governed by any government regulatory bodies represented by the Civil Service Commission, which no longer bears any responsibility towards the private sector, especially during the last three years. In terms of improving the work environment, for example, the official leave decisions issued by the bureau are specific to the government sector only without any interest in the private sector. So there must be a greater and effective role in following up with the private sector."

Ajmi said: "I agree with the idea that the private sector should have a free market that does not harm their interests, but what must be realized is that private sector companies in Kuwait operate in an exceptional environment with severe weather fluctua-



tions during the summer period and a significant rise in temperature, so there must be alternative solutions that increase work productivity and improve the work environment of employees, such as setting regulations for private sector companies that contribute to adapting to climate fluctuations, raising employee productivity and reducing traffic jams, as well as allowing employees to spend more time with their families."

Ajmi added: "It is also possible for many sectors to shift towards remote work, especially since during the pandemic some companies resorted to online work and it was a successful experience for them, in addition to organizing annual vacations for employees spread throughout the summer period, especially since it is during the summer that business movement will be slower. This will contribute to alleviating the impact of the severity of summer on them and reduce traffic congestions at the same time."

Rain prayers in mosques

KUWAIT: Mosques in Kuwait performed prayers for rain in accordance with the sunnah at 10:30 am on Saturday. The prayer is held whenever there is drought or lack of sufficient rainfall to meet human, animal and plant needs for water. — KUNA



TUNIS: Kuwait's Ambassador to Tunisia Mansur Khaled Al-Omar submits credentials to Tunisian President Kais Saied. — KUNA

Kuwait's envoy to Tunisia presents credentials

TUNIS: Kuwait's Ambassador to Tunisia Mansur Khaled Al-Omar submitted on Friday his credentials to Tunisian President Kais Saied. This came during a reception in which President Saied received Al-Omar's credentials as Kuwait's Ambassador to the country, in addition to five other ambassadors in Tunis, Tunisia's presidency said in a statement. — KUNA

CBK chief launches 'Kuwait Economic Student Award'

Awards promote scientific research in economic and banking fields

KUWAIT: The Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Institute of Banking Studies, Basel Ahmed Al-Haroun, announced the launch of the third round of the "Kuwaiti Economic Student Award," addressed to undergraduate and graduate students. The awards promote scientific research in the economic and banking fields through motivating and encouraging young national cadres to enhance their research competence according to high scientific standards in banking and finance fields.

The governor noted that this award, offered by the CBK and Kuwaiti banks as part of the "Kafa'a" initiative, and managed by the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS), is part of CBK's strategic pursuit to entrench scientific methodology for addressing banking and finance issues. Ultimately, this would cultivate specialized and highly qualified national cadres in all aspects of the Kuwaiti banking and financial sector.

Al-Haroun add that the success of the Kuwaiti Economic Student Award, in its first and second rounds, is a reflection of the importance of instilling a culture of scientific research among students and highlighting the distinguished among them and

motivating them to develop solutions to improve the status of the banking and financial work in Kuwait. The governor explained that a judges' panel comprising international experts will review and select the best research papers according to academic and scientific criteria, and for the first time the following prizes will be awarded to the research papers that win the first three places. The first prize winner of the Kuwaiti Economic Student Award will receive an award of KD 5,000, the second place winner will receive an award of KD 3,000, and the third place winner will receive an award of KD 2,000. In addition to an incentive award for outstanding research with an innovative topic, the winners will also be presented with certificates of merit and a commemorative gift, and the first-prize winning research paper and any research recommended by the committee would be printed, published and distributed to serve as a reference for those wishing to benefit from sound research. The KIBS will manage the award procedures, including receiving research papers, ensuring that they comply with criteria, appointing the judging panel, documenting the panel's decisions, and announcing the results. The governor concluded by noting that the



Basel Ahmed Al-Haroun

details of the awards, conditions for applying, means of submission of research work, and dates for receipt of applications are published on the website of the Kafa'a programs. Those wishing to apply, as well as others interested, may find the details regarding the 2022 awards and submit their applications forms starting from November 6, 2022 until February 23, 2023, through the website "kafaakw.org".

News in brief

Info ministry regulations

KUWAIT: Information Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi issued three ministerial decisions regarding organizing advertisements in print, television and radio. The first decision lowers the cost of ads in the interior ministry's print publications by 50 percent, and 25 percent in GCC productions. Governmental and public interest institutions will get a 50 percent discount on all ads. Ads with cultural, scientific or literary content will get a 50 percent discount, while Arab ads of the same type will get a 25 percent discount. The second and third decisions give a 50 percent discount on private ads of governmental, official or public institutions.



Cigarette cartons and 1,600 vape flavors

GCC national arrested

KUWAIT: Customs officers at Nuwaiseeb arrested a GCC national who arrived on Saturday with a firearm and bullets he had hidden in his car's interior decor. Officers also arrested a Kuwaiti on Saturday with an amount of Lyrica in his belongings while departing. Meanwhile, Nuwaiseeb border customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle out around 750 cigarette cartons and 1,600 vape flavors. The contraband was found hidden in a car that was impounded for further legal action.



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Sabah meets on Thursday the head of KFF Khaled Al-Mekrad and a number of KFF officials.



Kuwait Fire Force opens new center

KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Sabah met on Thursday the head of KFF Khaled Al-Mekrad and a number of KFF officials. The

occasion was the opening of the Arifjan center of KFF in Sabah Al-Ahmad City, which was built with the most advanced construction systems to cover the needs of firefighters. The center will cover all incidents in the area and will be able to support the rest of the southern area. The interior minister praised the role of KFF as the center is the second of its kind in the area, built to ensure security.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) said fire

squads have controlled a fire that erupted in an apartment in Hawally on Friday. "Central command sent fire squads from Hawally and Salmiya as well as the search and rescue department which found the fire erupted in an apartment on the fourth floor," the PR department at KFF announced. The teams evacuated residents of the building and the fire was extinguished successfully without any injuries.

Kuwait, Years From Now Student Art Competition 2022

10 October - 13 November 2022

We are excited to welcome each and every youngster to our Student Art Competition 2022. We hope everyone is ready to showcase and create beautiful artworks of Kuwait in the future. We're searching for great art - so get your paintbrushes, color pencils and markers ready. Let your talent flow and start painting. Good luck to our young artists!

- The competition is open to students aged 6-18 years under the categories of 6-8 years, 9-11 years, 12-14 years, 15-18 years and special abilities students.
- The competition is open to all schools in Kuwait (government and private).
- 5 winners from each category will receive valuable prizes.
- All participants will receive a certificate of appreciation.
- All schools and individuals interested in participating in this competition are welcome.
- You can use any drawing sheet, but of A3 size.
- All artworks must be hand drawn and not computer generated.
- All paintings should be submitted by email at art@kuwaittimes.com in PDF format only.
- Kuwait Times reserves the right to retain the drawings for future use.
- Participants should include on the bottom of the artworks the following: Name, age, email address, phone number and school in legible font.



KUWAIT: A cultural presentation from Indian state of Karnataka.

Indian Embassy holds Karnataka facilitation event

KUWAIT: Embassy of India, Kuwait, organized a state facilitation event for Karnataka on November 2. The event titled 'Karnataka Rajyotsava' highlighted tourism and investment potential of Karnataka state of India with a One District One Product exhibition of products from Karnataka, Hampi Festival, Cultural and performing arts and textiles and handicrafts of Karnataka.

In her inaugural remarks, Indian Embassy Charge d'Affaires Smita Patil underlined the economic, investment and tourism potential of Karnataka and urged Kuwaitis and friends of India in Kuwait to visit Karnataka. She stated that Karnataka is a modern industrial state, renowned for production of sandalwood, furniture, soap, oil, talcum powder and incense sticks, along with the Bangalore silk.

At the forefront of technological innovation, the state is known for its contribution of software and service exports, just as it is known to be the land of coffee in India. It is the fourth-largest manufacturer of automobiles in India, second-highest producer of special purpose and heavy electrical machinery, and among India's top states contributing to the electronic industry. The state also prides itself in being a key operational hub for 400 Fortune 500 companies and is India's largest software exporter. The region of Bangalore is one of the global hotspots of technological innovation and startups.

During the event, detailed virtual presentations were held by "Invest India", Karnataka Tourism Department and Tourism department of Hassan



KUWAIT: Indian Embassy Charge d'Affaires Smita Patil makes her inaugural address.

district in Karnataka. "Invest India" presentation focused on sectors like tourism and wellness, electronic system design and manufacturing, steel, textile and apparel, clean energy, and food processing, with a glimpse of India Investment Grid, an official opportunity discovery platform of Government of India.

The vast tourism potential of Karnataka was showcased with a focus on diverse destinations such as beaches, heritage monuments and adventure settings. Hampi, Halebidu, Bangalore, Shravanbelagola, Mysuru, Coorg and Mangalore are some of the prominent destinations of interest to visitors from Kuwait. Handloom saris from Karnataka such as Irkal, Udipi, Bangalore and Mysore silk saris were showcased. Vibrant cultural performances featured arts and culture from the state of Karnataka. The event witnessed enthusiastic response both physically and virtually from the business community in Kuwait along with community members from Karnataka.



Malaysia's Mahathir seeks re-election

Biden, Trump target pivotal battleground in countdown to midterms

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KOSTROMA, Russia: Handout picture shows police officers and investigators working at a cafe in Kostroma destroyed by a fire. — AFP

Huge Russia bar inferno kills 15

Bar had a collapsed roof and burnt-out walls, with near total destruction inside

MOSCOW: Russian police on Saturday detained a man suspected to have caused a huge fire overnight at a bar in the historic city of Kostroma that killed at least 15 people. Fire fighters fought through the early hours to extinguish the blaze at the popular Poligon bar in the city, which is around 300 kilometres (180 miles) northeast of Moscow.

Russian agencies reported that the fire could have started after a drunk man fired a "flare gun" on the dance floor. "Police officers identified and detained the suspect (behind) unlawful acts in an entertainment establishment in the city of Kostroma, which resulted in a fire and the death of people," Russian police said.

"He has now been handed over to investigative authorities," it added, without providing any further details. Russia's Investigative Committee opened a criminal case of "causing death by negligence". It published images from inside the burnt-out building, showing a barely recognisable bar with some

visible stickers of beer brands. The bar had a collapsed roof and burnt-out walls, with near total destruction inside.

State television aired night-time images of the bar-housed in a single-storey logistical centre engulfed in flames. Authorities said the fire started at around 2:00 am local time (2300 GMT Saturday) and was put out at around 7:30 am. Kostroma regional governor Sergei Sitnikov said 13 people were killed.

'Flare gun'

"Two more bodies were recovered. This means the number of victims is now 15," the TASS news agency later quoted law enforcement sources as saying. Around 250 people were evacuated from the building when it caught fire, authorities said earlier.

TASS, citing emergency service sources, said a drunk man with a "flare gun" was likely to have caused the fire. "He was spending time in the bar

with a woman, ordered her flowers, with a flare gun in his hands," the source told the agency.

"Then he went to the dance floor and fired it." Emergency services said the blaze engulfed more than 3,500 square meters (37,700 square feet). Some local media, quoting witnesses, said here was panic when the fire started as people rushed to an exit, causing a jam. One man forced a closed door open, possibly saving lives, according to reports.

The RIA Novosti news agency said the bar belonged to a local deputy of the ruling United Russia party, Ikhtiyar Mirzoyev. He told the agency that he would "give all the necessary help to the families and loved ones of the dead." On its website, Poligon says it acts as an evening and night-time "place for recreation and entertainment".

Lax safety

By day, it is a typical Russian "stolovaya"—a casual restaurant serving traditional food. It says

it is housed in a "distribution centre" and is popular with traffic police. State television showed images of dozens of emergency workers fighting the inferno.

The sign "Poligon" was visible amid the flames raging on its roof. One fire fighter told state television that it took 50 people to extinguish the blaze and that they had used 20 fire engines. He said the fire was especially difficult to put out because of a risk that the building might collapse.

Kostroma, a city on the Volga river of around 230,000 people, is one of Russia's oldest cities and famous for its medieval architecture and monasteries. Russia, which frequently has a lax approach to safety rules, has seen a number of deadly fires at entertainment venues in recent years. In 2018, a fire killed 60 people in a shopping mall in the Siberian city of Kemerovo. In 2009, another blaze at a nightclub in the Urals city of Perm killed 156 people. — AFP

Iranians stage new protest actions despite crackdown

PARIS: Iranian students protested and shopkeepers went on strike Saturday despite a widening crackdown, according to reports on social media, as demonstrations that flared over Mahsa Amini's death entered an eighth week.

The clerical state has been gripped by protests that erupted when Amini, 22, died in custody after her arrest for an alleged breach of Iran's strict dress code for women. As the working week got underway, security forces adopted new measures to halt protests at universities in the capital Tehran on Saturday, searching students and forcing them to remove facemasks, activists said.

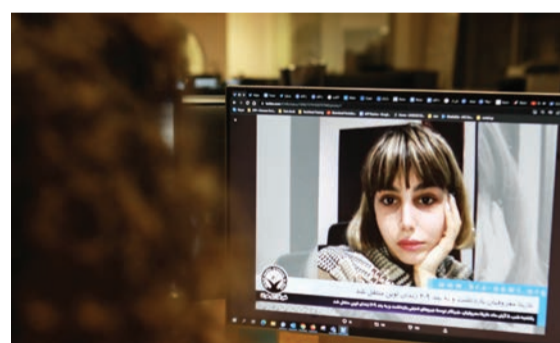
But students were seen demonstrating and chanting "I am a free woman, you are the pervert" at Islamic Azad University of Mashhad, in northeast Iran, in a video published by BBC Persian. "A student dies, but doesn't accept humiliation," sang students at Gilan University in the northern city of Rasht, in footage posted online by an activist. AFP was unable to immediately verify the videos.

In the northwestern city of Qazvin, dozens were heard chanting similar slogans at a mourning ceremony 40 days after the death of protester Javad Heydari. The Norway-based Hengaw rights group said people were observing a "widespread strike" in Amini's home town of Saqez, in Kurdistan province, where shops were shuttered.

"Our weapon is our unity, our weapon is our rage, our weapon is our resistance... You cannot stand against the will of people," tweeted Hassan Ronaghi, the brother of prominent rights campaigner Hossein.

Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights said Wednesday that at least 176 people have been killed by the security forces in the protest crackdown. It said another 101 people had lost their lives in separate protests since September 30 in Sistan-Baluchistan, a mainly Sunni Muslim province in the southeast of the country.

An official in Kerman province admitted the authorities were having trouble quelling the



NICOSIA, Cyprus: A woman in the Cypriot capital Nicosia, looks at a screen, displaying an undated video of Iranian journalist Nazila Maroufian, who according to a Norway-based human rights organisation, was arrested by the Iranian authorities on October 30, after she interviewed the father of Mahsa Amini. — AFP

protests that first broke out after Amini's death on September 16. "The restrictions on the internet, the arrest of the leaders of the riots and the presence of the state in the streets always eliminated sedition, but this type of sedition and its audience are different," Rahmani Jalali, political and security deputy for the province, was quoted as saying by ISNA news agency.

In a flare-up in Sistan-Baluchistan, up to 10 people, including children, were killed Friday by security forces in the city of Khash, Amnesty International said. Molavi Abdol Hamid, the cleric who leads Friday prayers in Sistan-Baluchistan's capital Zahedan, in a statement condemned the incident in Khash as a "massacre" that he said killed 16 people. A video verified by AFP shows youths running for cover and screaming as bursts of gunfire are heard on a road in Khash.

Ultra-conservative President Ebrahim Raisi on Friday dismissed a pledge by his US counterpart Joe Biden to "free Iran". Campaigning for mid-term elections, Biden had said: "Don't worry we're gonna free Iran. They're gonna free themselves pretty soon."

Raisi retorted that Iran had already been freed by the overthrow of the Western-backed shah in 1979. "Our young men and young women are determined and we will never allow you to carry out your satanic desires," he told a gathering commemorating the November 1979 seizure of the US embassy in Tehran by radical students. —AFP

French far right picks Bardella as Le Pen successor

PARIS: France's far-right National Rally on Saturday designated Jordan Bardella, its 27-year-old rising star, to succeed Marine Le Pen as party chief and pursue efforts to move the group toward the political mainstream.

Bardella, who was widely expected to win as Le Pen's protegee, won 85 percent of the votes from party members, beating Louis Aliot, mayor of the southern city of Perpignan, who garnered 15 percent. A beaming Le Pen announced the result during a meeting in Paris, and Bardella is expected to address the gathering later Saturday. His nomination comes after the party had its best-ever showing in parliamentary elections earlier this year, gaining 89 seats even after Le Pen failed to unseat Emmanuel Macron in her third run for the presidency.

"Over 40 years of struggle, the National Front succeeded in putting all the major issues facing our society at the heart of public debate," Le Pen said, referring to the party's former name. Bardella has embraced Le Pen's efforts to shed the virulent anti-Semitic and extremist views fomented by her father, party founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, who was excluded in 2015.

But the National Rally was rocked this week by the suspension of one of its parliamentarians, accused of making a racist outburst against a fellow lawmaker in parliament. Bardella has also faced the daunting task of getting the party on solid financial footing as it faces inquiries over alleged misuse of public funds by party members, including Le Pen.

Brought up in a gritty Paris suburb by his Italian-born mother, Bardella promotes a slick image, is rarely seen out of a suit, and has impressed both admirers and critics with sharp performances in election debates.

"One of the things I'm most proud of is helping a new generation of leaders and lawmakers to emerge... who resemble the people and convey its aspirations," Le Pen said. But there are questions over what value the RN presidency has for Bardella, given that Le Pen formally leads its cohort in parliament and is widely expected to again be its presi-



PARIS: Newly elected French far-right party Rassemblement National (RN)'s president Jordan Bardella, stands next to parliamentary group leader Marine Le Pen. —AFP

dential candidate in 2027.

But the party leadership can also be a stepping stone for when "MLP" finally bows out from the political scene, at a time when populist parties are gathering steam across much of Europe.

Both Bardella and Le Pen will nonetheless have their work cut out for them in convincing voters that the party is a respectable mainstream force, capable of uniting and governing the country. This week they had to defend a member of parliament, Gregoire de Fournas, who yelled "back to Africa!" to a black lawmaker who was challenging the government's response to migrants rescued at sea in the Mediterranean.

He later said he was referring to the boat, not his fellow lawmaker, but Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said Friday that Bardella had shown his complicity in "everyday racism". Bardella has also been criticised by Aliot, who as mayor of Perpignan is the only RN politician to run a city larger than 100,000 people.

He accused him of encouraging white supremacist groups, noting that Bardella has given credence to the so-called "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory of a surreptitious "Islamisation" of Europe orchestrated by its elites—something Le Pen has shied away from.

In an open letter last month, Aliot slammed "extremist nostalgia" and "the excesses of the National Front of a long-gone era". Bardella accused him of "bitterness and bad faith", insisting his goal is to win over more supporters from traditional parties on the right and left. — AFP

International

President Biden, Trump target pivotal battleground in countdown to midterms

Biden and Obama to appear in Philadelphia to woo voters

PHILADELPHIA, United States: They have been shadowboxing at separate campaign stops across the United States for weeks but the Democratic and Republican leaders find themselves on the same battlefield Saturday as they make closing pitches in Pennsylvania for next week's midterm election. President Joe Biden will rally alongside his old boss Barack Obama as the Democrats deploy their big guns to build the energy they hope will spread nationwide and reverse the late rightward-shift in polling.

And in a split-screen preview of a potential rematch of the 2020 presidential contest, the mid-western state is also playing host to Biden's predecessor and bitter political rival Donald Trump. Obama-still the party's most bankable star six years after leaving the White House—begins the day in Pittsburgh with Democratic candidate John Fetterman, who is in a dead heat against Republican TV medic Mehmet Oz in their crucial Senate race.

Biden and Obama then appear in Philadelphia, the historic cradle of US independence where the 44th and 46th presidents will woo voters from the suburbs that make for a crucial base of Democratic support.

The Keystone State backed Trump over Hillary Clinton for president in 2016 but preferred Biden to Trump in 2020. Strategists from both parties believe the side that wins the post vacated by retiring Republican Pat Toomey will hold the majority in the upper chamber of Congress next year.

Fetterman and Oz sparred for an hour in state

capital Harrisburg 10 days ago, with Fetterman still struggling with communication issues after a stroke in May upended his campaign.

'Chipping away'

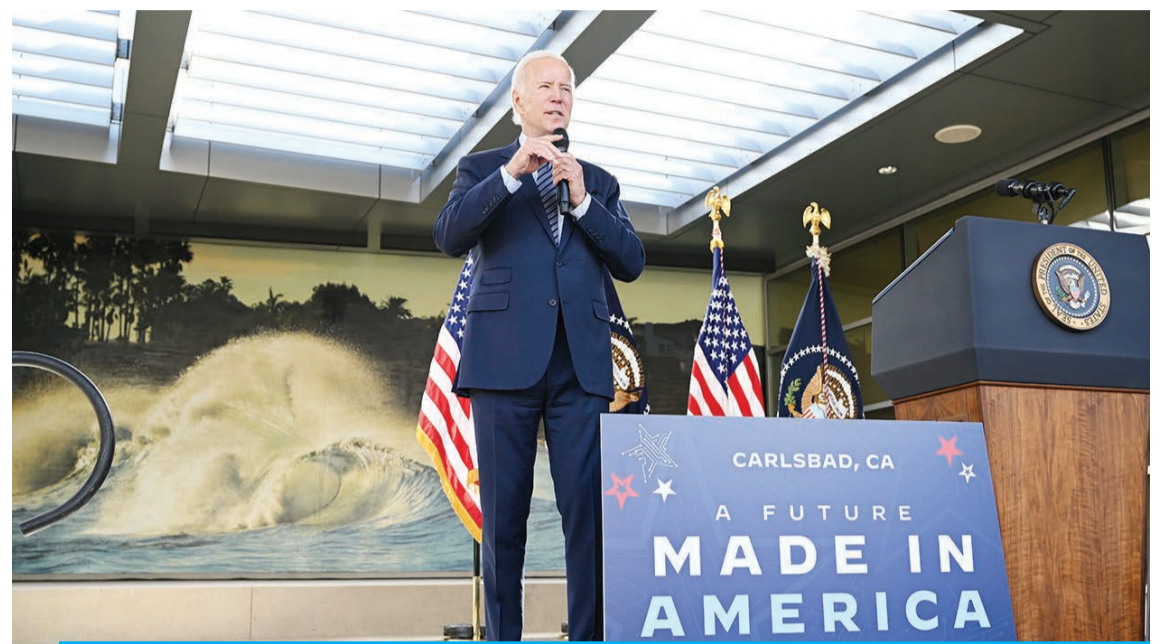
"The month-to-month shifts in support for Oz are not statistically significant," said Patrick Murray, director of the independent Monmouth University Polling Institute. "The overall trend suggests he has been chipping away with some voters who have not been completely comfortable with him, but that mainly happened prior to the debate."

Just a few miles east of Pittsburgh in Latrobe, Trump—the one-term 45th president with ambitions to return as the 47th—will seek to firm up support in a region that delivered him big margins in 2016 and 2020.

Pennsylvania is seen as a must-win not just for control of the Senate, but also for the balance of power among the country's 50 state governors, influential officials that weigh in on most aspects of voters' lives, from education and health care to voting rights.

Democratic gubernatorial nominee Josh Shapiro has been spotlighting the fringe views of state senator Doug Mastriano, his far-right opponent who was involved in Trump's attempts to overturn the 2020 election.

A victory for Trump-backed Mastriano would give the prominent election denier oversight of the state's voting system for the 2024 presidential race. Like Biden, Trump has visited Pennsylvania twice this year, rallying for Oz and Mastriano most



CARLSBAD, United States: US President Joe Biden speaks about the economy at ViaSat, an US technology company, in Carlsbad, California. — AFP

recently in Wilkes-Barre in early September.

The 76-year-old tycoon has already claimed baselessly that the state's elections have been "rigged," echoing his false claims that his own 2020 defeat was the result of widespread fraud.

"As Biden's approval rating plummets, Pennsylvania crime spikes, and Pennsylvanians

grapple with a 74 percent hike in heating oil, coupled with record inflation, just weeks away from winter," Trump's office said in a statement.

"The America First Movement offers the Keystone State an alternative vision for America: safe streets, cheap gas, low inflation, and a thriving American economy." — AFP

S Korea miners rescued after nine days

SEOUL, South Korea: Two South Korean miners who were trapped for more than nine days in a collapsed zinc mine have walked out alive, in a miraculous end to a difficult rescue operation. The two men were trapped in a vertical shaft about 190 metres (620 feet) underground after the mine collapsed on October 26 in Bonghwa, eastern South Korea.

Dramatic local TV footage showed them emerging from the mine on Friday, assisted by rescue workers. The survivors, aged 62 and 56, were in stable condition, authorities said. To keep warm, the miners are believed to have built a fire and a tent out of plastic inside a tunnel, they added.

The survivors "had instant coffee mix powder with them, and I was told they had that as a meal," said Lim Yoon-sook, a fire department officer. "I've been also told they endured by drinking any water that dropped inside the shaft."

Family members were overjoyed, saying they still cannot believe the good news. "I just yelled out: father!" a beaming Park Geun-hyeong, the son of one of the survivors, said of the moment they were reunited.

"I told him: You've become a famous figure now." A woman surnamed Lim, the niece of the other survivor, said her uncle at first kept asking who she



ANDONG, South Korea: A miner is carried into a hospital in Andong on November 5, 2022, after being rescued from a collapsed zinc mine in Bonghwa. — AFP

was—as he was wearing an eye patch after almost 10 days in the dark.

He laughed when he finally recognised her. "This still feels surreal," she added. The news came during a period of national mourning in South Korea, after more than 150 people were killed in a crowd crush in Seoul last week.

President Yoon Suk-yeol issued a Facebook message on Saturday, calling the men's return "truly miraculous." "Thank you and thank you again for coming back safely from the crossroads of life and death," he wrote, also thanking rescue workers. — AFP

Succession is taboo as Biya set for 40 years at helm

YAOUNDE: Cameroon's 89-year-old president, Paul Biya, on Sunday marks the 40th anniversary of his rise to power amid splashy ceremonies where the word on everyone's mind — succession — will almost certainly be absent.

The Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (RDPC), which Biya founded in 1985, says it will hold "a big party" up and down the country to mark the anniversary.

The festivities will celebrate "political stability and peace — the biggest successes of these last four decades in Cameroon," said Herve Emmanuel Nkom, a member of the party's central committee.

At the RDPC's headquarters in Messa district, a couple of dozen party members were busy selling caps, scarves, shirts and multi-coloured garments emblazoned with Biya's face.

"Lots of people come by and look — we get a lot of orders," said Sylvie Beyala, 42, a party member for 20 years, next to a photo of a beaming Biya and the slogan "Unity, Progress, Democracy."

The crowning event on Sunday will be a "regional mega-rally" in front of city hall in Yaounde, the capital, but no word has emerged as to whether Biya himself will attend.

The anniversary bash aims to divert attention away from "the crucial question," said Stephane

Akoa, a professor and researcher in political science.

"It's not whether Cameroon is doing well or could be doing better, but how the president is," he said. Biya rose to the top job on November 6 1982 after seven years as prime minister.

He is only the second president in Cameroon's history since the central African nation gained independence from France. He is also the continent's longest-serving leader after Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who seized power in 1979. Commentators ascribe Biya's extraordinary political longevity to a mixture of astuteness and ruthlessness — he has a constellation of loyalists in key positions and crushes or sidelines opponents and rivals.

But his public outings, except for a few choreographed TV appearances, have become rarer and rarer in recent years, stoking speculation about his health. Any official talk of succession is taboo, and none of the most visible figures around Biya has publicly uttered a word about entertaining any wish to succeed him. "Ministers have fallen into disgrace just for thinking about a theoretical departure of the president," said Aimee Raoul Sumo Tayo, a defence and security specialist on Cameroon.

"Mr Biya has put the saying 'divide and rule' into practice... forces which could have challenged him for power have been unable to get organised and, even less so, unify," said Akoa. Even so, conversations about a successor are rife. Those most commonly named are Biya's son, Franck Biya, and Finance Minister Louis-Paul Motaze. The younger Biya already has a discreet following among supporters called "Frankists." — AFP

Pope Francis holds open-air mass...

Continued from Page 1

The pope, who has made outreach to Islam a pillar of his papacy, is on his second visit to the resource-rich Gulf, the cradle of Islam. During his 2019 trip to the United Arab Emirates he led a mass for 170,000 people and signed a Christian-Muslim manifesto for peace.

He has spent much of his four-day Bahrain trip meeting top officials and religious figures, but for Catholics in the tiny island nation, including many migrant workers, Saturday's mass was the high point. "We've been here since one o'clock. We didn't sleep," said volunteer Philomina Abranches, 46, an Indian-born Bahrain resident. "We are so excited. We all call him 'Papa'. More than anything, he represents peace in the world. This is what we need now."

He also attended a service at Our Lady of Arabia Cathedral, the biggest in the Arabian Peninsula that

seats more than 2,000. Hundreds of migrant workers were among the congregation welcoming him. The Argentine decried the "opposing blocs" of East and West, a veiled reference to the standoff over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in a speech to religious leaders. "We continue to find ourselves on the brink of a delicate precipice and we do not want to fall," he told an audience including Bahrain's king and Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Cairo's prestigious Al-Azhar Mosque.

"A few potentates are caught up in a resolute struggle for partisan interests, reviving obsolete rhetoric, redesigning spheres of influence and opposing blocs," he added. "We appear to be witnessing a dramatic and childlike scenario: In the garden of humanity, instead of cultivating our surroundings, we are playing instead with fire, missiles and bombs."

Francis, who is on his second visit to the wealthy Gulf, later met privately with Tayeb, with whom he signed a Muslim-Christian manifesto for peace in the UAE in 2019. "This meeting has great symbolic importance, both locally and internationally, for promoting peace and peaceful co-existence between different religions and civilizations," said Hala Ramzi Fayed, a Christian and member of Bahrain's parliament. — AFP

leader Nancy Pelosi prompted Beijing to shut down bilateral climate channels. Sweeping restrictions imposed last month by the Biden administration on the sale of high-level chip technology to China deepened the rift. "We are at a watershed moment," said Li Shuo, a Beijing-based policy analyst with Greenpeace International. "If the politics are so bad that the world's two biggest emitters won't talk to each other, we're not going to get to 1.5C."

A bilateral meeting between US President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping during the G20 summit in Bali days before the talks in Egypt close, should it happen, could move the dial, Li observed. "That dynamic would play back to Sharm el-Sheikh." Biden will arrive in Egypt touting the landmark Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which earmarks nearly \$400 billion — and potentially twice that amount — to speed the greening of the US economy.

But legislative elections on Nov 8 could dampen US bragging rights if Republicans hostile to international climate action take either or both houses of Congress. A bright spot at COP27 will be the arrival of incoming Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who has vowed to aim for zero deforestation in the Amazon, reversing the extractive policies of Jair Bolsonaro, who will step down on Jan 1. — AFP

Twitter sacks half of staff as Musk...

Continued from Page 1

The cull is part of Musk's push to find ways to pay for the mammoth \$44 billion deal for which he took on billions of dollars in debt and sold \$15.5 billion worth of shares in Tesla, his electric car company.

Company sources said that Musk's teams were imposing a furious pace on the remaining employees, bringing in Tesla developers to oversee the work of "Tweeps," the inhouse name for Twitter workers. Musk, the Tesla and SpaceX chief, is said to owe \$1 billion in annual interest alone to pay for a deal he tried to wiggle out from almost as soon as he made it in April. Musk has been scrambling to find new ways for Twitter to make money after his mammoth buyout, including an

idea to charge users \$8 a month for verified accounts.

The moves would help overcome the potential loss of advertisers, Twitter's main source of revenue, with many of the world's top brands putting their ad buys on hold, spooked by Musk's well-known disdain for content controls. The mercurial tycoon on Friday complained on Twitter of a "massive drop in revenue" that he blamed on "activist groups" that were pressuring advertisers. "We did everything we could to appease the activists. Extremely messed up! They're trying to destroy free speech in America," he added.

This appeared to refer to Musk's recent meeting with civil rights groups in which he heard concerns that Twitter would open the floodgates to hate speech a week before midterm election in the United States. In an effort to soothe nerves, Musk had vowed that Twitter will not become a "free-for-all hellscape", but since taking over the company he also has shared a tweet relaying a conspiracy theory about an assault on the husband of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. — AFP

Egypt hosts 'watershed'...

Continued from Page 1

While worst-case projections are less dire than a decade ago, current policies would still see Earth's surface warm a catastrophic 2.8C, and no less than 2.4C even if countries meet all their carbon-cutting pledges under the Paris treaty.

"There have been fraught moments before," said E3G think tank senior analyst Alden Meyer, recalling other wars, the near collapse of the UN-led process in 2009, and Donald Trump yanking the United States out of the Paris Agreement in 2016. "But this is a perfect storm," dubbed by some a "polycrisis", said the 30-year veteran of the climate arena. Casting an even longer shadow on negotiations in Egypt than Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many experts say, is the further erosion of Sino-US relations, which in the past have anchored breakthroughs in climate diplomacy, including the Paris Agreement.

But a Taiwan visit in August by US congressional

'No choice' but cholera water...

Continued from Page 1

The actual number of cases could be much higher, with the health ministry recording more than 2,400 suspected and confirmed infections. The mother-of-six and her family drink contaminated water, trucked to their home from nearby wells and water sources, because they lack access to running water and cannot afford bottled water.

Like much of Lebanon's marginalized north, Bebnine suffers from dilapidated infrastructure and government neglect. A quarter of the town's residents are Syrian refugees living in squalid conditions. Only 500 of Bebnine's households are registered with the state water network, in an overcrowded town of 80,000 people, according to engineer Tareq Hammoud of the North Lebanon Water Establishment. But even these do not receive round-the-clock water supply.

A branch of the sewage-polluted Nahr al-Bared river flows through the town and has been contaminated with cholera, infecting nearby wells and water sources, field hospital director Nahed Saadeddine said. Around 450

patients attend the hospital for treatments every day, she said. The contaminated stream "provides water for all the crops in the area... There are wells, tanks, and springs pulling water from it, even water filtration sites," Saadeddine told AFP.

Cholera is generally contracted from contaminated food or water, and causes diarrhea and vomiting. It can also spread in residential areas lacking proper sewerage and drinking water systems. "The infrastructure must be changed, the wells and water sources improved" to eradicate the disease, Saadeddine said. "We want a long-term solution. Otherwise, we will see a lot more disasters."

The disease can kill within hours if left untreated, according to the WHO, but many of those infected will have no or mild symptoms. It can be easily treated with oral rehydration solution, but more severe cases may require intravenous fluids and antibiotics. Some patients at the hospital have contracted the disease more than once, among them Rana Ajaj's nine-year-old daughter.

"Five of us are sick at home. Even after the treatment, we will be sick again from drinking the same water," the 43-year-old said, passing a cup of water to her 17-year-old daughter who lay in bed, while her younger daughter sat close by. In the next bed, 10-year-old Malek Hamad was struggling to drink his medicine, exhausted from losing 15 kg after two weeks of illness. — AFP

International

Malaysia's nearly 100-year-old elder statesman Mahathir seeks re-election

Mahathir's party would not form any alliances with parties that are led by 'crooks or jailbirds'

LANGKAWI, Malaysia: Mahathir Mohamad, the nearly 100-year-old elder statesman of Malaysian politics, filed his candidacy Saturday in what is likely to be his final race, as campaigning for upcoming general elections began. Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob called for elections 10 months ahead of schedule, with the graft-tainted ruling party of jailed ex-leader Najib Razak seeking to cement its political comeback four years after it was dramatically voted out.



'I am optimistic we will win'

A Guinness World Record holder for being the "world's oldest current prime minister" when he became premier for a second time in 2018, the 97-year-old Mahathir will stand again to defend his parliamentary seat in the holiday island of Langkawi in the November 19 vote. Visibly slowed by age but still looking healthy, Mahathir was greeted by dozens of supporters waving flags of his Homeland Fighters' Party as he arrived at a local government office in Kuah, the island's main town, to register his candidacy.

Mahathir told reporters that he stood a "good chance" of winning and laughed off suggestions he

should retire. "I'm still standing around and talking to you, I think making reasonable answers," he said.

He added his party would not form any alliances with parties that are led by "crooks or jailbirds", an apparent reference to the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). Ismail, of the UMNO, and opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, of the Pakatan Harapan coalition, have also filed their candidacies elsewhere in the country.

Anwar urged voters to come out in big numbers, as fears circulated that torrential rain during the monsoon season could dampen turnout. "I am optimistic we will win," he told AFP from his constituency in the northern Perak state. Meanwhile, in Sabah, in Malaysia's part of Borneo Island, police fired tear gas to disperse scores of supporters of a minor opposition party who attempted to force their way into a nomination centre in the interior town of Tenom after their leader's candidacy was rejected.

Hazani Ghazali, the internal security police chief, was quoted by The Star news portal as saying that tear gas was fired to disperse the crowd, with no injuries reported. Serious violence is rare during general elections in Malaysia.

Corruption a key issue

Nonagenarian Mahathir, who once ruled the Southeast Asian nation with an iron fist from 1981 to 2003, came out of retirement to lead the opposition Pact of Hope alliance in the 2018 general elections.

The reformist alliance won a stunning victory over then-incumbent Najib, who was later convicted of corruption linked to the 1MDB state fund financial scandal



LANGKAWI, Malaysia: Malaysia's former Prime Minister and founder of "Gerakan Tanah Air" (Homeland Movement) Mahathir Mohamad (3R) raises his hands with others candidates outside the nomination centre in Langkawi Island. — AFP

and is now serving a 12-year jail sentence. Mahathir became premier again just two months shy of his 93rd birthday, but his government collapsed in less than two years due to infighting.

He has warned that Najib would be freed if the jailed politician's allies in UMNO win, signalling that corruption will be a key issue at the polls. He also offered to become prime minister a third time. "You should see the circumstances of my country ... so much of corruption and so many wrongdoings. It's time to fight, fight, fight!" said Hamidah Ayub, 66, a Mahathir supporter.

While Mahathir is expected to win easily in

Langkawi, aiming for the premiership a third time would be tough, an analyst said. At least four blocs including the one he leads are vying for a majority in the 222-seat lower house of Parliament, making it a tight contest.

The 21 million voters also include more than six million new registrants, many of them young, who came on board following electoral reforms. "Mahathir's time has passed," Bridget Welsh of the University of Nottingham Malaysia told AFP. "He was given a second chance and bungled it. His chances this time to run as prime minister are extremely slim." — AFP

N Korea launches ballistic missiles

SEOUL: North Korea fired four ballistic missiles on Saturday, the South Korean military said, the latest in Pyongyang's testing blitz this week as Washington and Seoul concluded their biggest-ever air force drills. The flurry of North Korean launches included an intercontinental ballistic missile and one that landed near the South's territorial waters. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol said it was "effectively a territorial invasion".

The launches came as hundreds of US and South Korean warplanes-including B-1B heavy bombers-participated in the Vigilant Storm exercise, which Pyongyang described as "aggressive and provocative". "The South Korean military detected four short-range ballistic missiles launched by North Korea from Tongrim, North Pyongan Province, to the West Sea at around 11:32 a.m. to 11:59 a.m. today," South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said in a statement on Saturday, using another name for the Yellow Sea.

Their "flight distance was detected at about 130 km (80 miles), an altitude of about 20 km, and a speed of about Mach 5", they added. Mach 5 is equivalent to five times the speed of sound. The United States and South Korea have warned that these launches could culminate in a nuclear test by North Korea, and extended their air force drills to Saturday in response.

Vigilant Storm was originally scheduled to run from Monday to Friday. Pyongyang ramped up missile launches in response to the drills. Such exercises have long provoked strong reactions from North Korea, which sees them as rehearsals for an invasion.

'Significant threat'

Vigilant Storm concluded on Saturday, with the US Air Force deploying two B-1B long-range heavy bombers on the final day in a ramped-up show of force. This was the first time B-1Bs have flown to the Korean peninsula since December 2017.

The South Korean JCS said it demonstrated the "capability and readiness to firmly respond to any provocations from North Korea". Pyongyang has especially condemned past deployments of US strategic weapons such as B-1Bs and aircraft carrier strike groups in times of high tension. While the supersonic B-1B "Lancer" aircraft no longer carries nuclear weapons, it is described by the US Air Force as "the backbone of America's long-range bomber force".

The USAF lists the Lancer's weapons payload as 34 tonnes (75,000 pounds), which can include cruise missiles and laser-guided bombs. The B-1B's range can be extended by in-air refuelling, giving it the ability to strike anywhere in the world. Ahn Chan-il, a North Korean studies scholar, told AFP that given the B-1B's status as a strategic US asset, its deployment will be seen as a "significant threat" by North Korea. The B-1B deployment came a day after South Korea scrambled fighter jets in response to what it said was the mobilisation of around 180 North Korean warplanes. —AFP

Imran Khan claims Pakistan PM had role in plot to kill him

WAZIRABAD, Pakistan: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan on Friday accused his successor of involvement in a plot to kill him as he recovered in hospital from gunshot wounds following an assassination attempt. Khan told reporters that Shehbaz Sharif, who replaced him as premier following a vote of no confidence in April, masterminded the attack along with Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah and a senior army commander.

"These three decided to kill me," Khan said in his first public appearance since Thursday's shooting, adding that two gunmen were involved. The government has denied any part, and blamed the assassination attempt on a lone assailant fueled by religious extremism. The military called his accusations "baseless and irresponsible".

The attack on Khan's convoy killed one man and



JEJU, South Korea: Mourners take part in a candlelight vigil to commemorate the 156 people killed in the October 29 Halloween crowd crush, on the resort island of Jeju on November 5, 2022. — AFP

Candlelight vigils mourn S Korea Halloween victims

SEOUL: Candlelight vigils and rallies were held in South Korea on Saturday to commemorate the 156 people killed in a Halloween crowd crush, with public anger growing over one of the country's deadliest disasters.

The victims, mostly young people, were among the estimated 100,000 that had flocked to the capital Seoul's popular Itaewon nightlife district to celebrate the first post-pandemic Halloween.

South Korean law enforcement officials have conceded that there was insufficient safety planning for a crowd that large, and opposition politicians have accused President Yoon Suk-yeol's government of not taking responsibility for the disaster.

Thousands gathered in central Seoul at a candlelight vigil organised by a civic group linked to South Korea's main opposition party, with many holding signs that said: "Step down, Yoon Suk-yeol." The group—which had also organised anti-government rallies prior to the disaster—said it was also holding similar vigils in other cities, including Busan, Gwangju and Jeju.

And in Itaewon, at a subway exit near the ally at the centre of the Halloween crush, there was a sea of white floral tributes and post-it notes. One said: "I will not let you go next time." Another read: "I will remember you forever." Mourners also left chocolates, beer, soju—a Korean alcoholic beverage—and strawberry milk.

'DEEPLY SADDENED AND SORRY'

Reflecting public anger over the tragedy, a woman identified by local media as the mother of one of the victims was seen ripping apart floral wreaths left by the president and Seoul's mayor at a memorial on Friday.

"What's the point of (these flowers) when they couldn't protect (our children)? Think about it," she was seen

wounded at least 10, significantly raising the stakes in a political crisis that has gripped the South Asian nation since Khan's ousting. The 70-year-old former international cricket star had been leading a campaign convoy of thousands since last week from Lahore to the capital Islamabad.

Sitting in a wheelchair—his right leg in a cast and left



LAHORE: Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan talk with media representatives at a hospital in Lahore, a day after an assassination attempt on him during his long march near Wazirabad. — AFP

saying in footage broadcast by local TV stations. "What's the point of standing next to these (wreaths) when you let our babies die?"

Uniformed police officers were then seen escorting the woman away from the memorial. President Yoon on Friday joined other top officials—including the national police chief and the interior minister—who had apologised over the disaster. "As a president who is responsible for the lives and safety of the people, I am deeply saddened and sorry," he said. "I know that our government and I... have a huge responsibility to ensure that such a tragedy never happens again."

Scrutiny of crowd management

Yoon—who is with the conservative People Power Party—has been battling record-low approval ratings since taking office in May, and his political opponents are now taking aim at his government over the Halloween crush. A group of young Koreans held a separate commemoration in central Seoul that organisers said was attended by 500 people. "I can't believe people of my age died just because they wanted to have some fun on Halloween," said Park Tae-hoon, 29, one of the organisers and a member of the progressive Jinbo political party.

He told AFP before the event that its purpose was to demand punishment for those responsible and measures to prevent a recurrence of the tragedy. South Korea is in a period of national mourning that ends Saturday, with flags flying at half-mast and entertainment events cancelled. Public scrutiny of how the Halloween crowd was managed is mounting, and a wide-ranging probe is underway to determine the exact cause of the crush. With no single organiser for the Halloween celebrations, the government did not require any of the bars, clubs and restaurants—some located on Itaewon's narrow alleys and side streets—to submit a safety management plan.

And even though police had estimated beforehand that a crowd of 100,000 would participate, they only deployed 137 officers—compared with the 6,500 sent to another part of Seoul that night for an anti-government protest a fraction of the size. — AFP

leg heavily bandaged—Khan spoke for over an hour, railing against the government and establishment he accuses of unseating him. He said his opponents wanted to accuse him of "desecrating religion, or desecrating the prophet" and would then blame a religious extremist for killing him.

Khan offered no evidence to support his claims. Sanaullah had earlier said the attack was "a very clear case of religious extremism". The suspect in police custody, named by Punjab government officials as Naveed Ahmad, said in a video leaked by police to the media that Khan was "misleading the public".

He added he was angry with Khan's noisy convoy for interrupting the call to prayer that summons Muslims to the mosque five times a day. Khan was looking out at the crowd when bullets were sprayed at his modified container truck as it slowly inched through a thick crowd in Wazirabad, around 170 kilometres (105 miles) east of Islamabad. "Bullets hit my leg, and when I was falling there was another burst," Khan told reporters. "There were two men. Had they synchronised well, I would have not survived. "One of them was caught and he is being touted as a religious fanatic. He was not a religious fanatic—there was an elaborate plan behind this." —AFP

News in brief

80 Rohingya detained

YANGON: More than 80 Rohingya people seeking to travel by boat to Malaysia have been detained in Myanmar's southeast after traffickers abandoned them, a security source told AFP on Saturday. Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar's western Rakhine state are widely regarded as illegal immigrants in the Buddhist-majority country and have long faced discrimination, been denied citizenship, health care and education. The group, which included women and children, had been detained by authorities on Friday near Thanbyuzayat town in Mon state, a security source who didn't want to be named told AFP. "They were hiding near rubber farms after the boats which they took from Rakhine state left them," the source said, adding that traffickers had promised to take them to Malaysia.

Italy to let rescue ship dock

ROME: Italy will allow an NGO ship carrying 179 migrants rescued in the Mediterranean to dock so medics can carry out health checks, the country's foreign minister said Friday. Antonio Tajani said that German NGO SOS Humanity's vessel Humanity 1 would head for Catania, Sicily, and "be able to stay in our territorial waters for the time necessary for us to examine all the emergencies on board". "We will accept all those people, for example because they are minors, or because, according to what we know from the media, they are pregnant women or with young children, or people with fever", he told a press conference in Rome. But he warned that "all those who do not meet these criteria will have to be removed from our territorial waters by the ship". More than 1,000 migrants are currently aboard rescue boats trying to reach Europe, and Italy has faced mounting pressure to let humanitarian ships dock.

Police seize Captagon pills

RABAT: Moroccan authorities Friday seized more than two million amphetamine-type Captagon pills, foiling an "international trafficking attempt" to West Africa, police said. The pills were found at the Tanger Med industrial port complex on the kingdom's northern coast, the DGSN security service said in a statement. The drugs were "concealed inside a goods container onboard a maritime transport ship" headed from Lebanon to West Africa, it added, without specifying which country. Searches "led to the discovery and seizure of psychotropic substances hidden inside barrels containing consumer products", according to the DGSN, which said authorities seized "2,018,500 Captagon tablets". An investigation has been launched in the coastal city of Tangier. Trade of the stimulant has skyrocketed in recent years, mostly originating in Lebanon and Syria, where a multi-billion-dollar industry has made the drug the war-torn country's largest export.

Landslides kill seven in Venezuela

PUERTO LA CRUZ, Venezuela: Landslides and floods caused by heavy rains have killed at least seven people in the coastal state of Anzoategui in eastern Venezuela, regional authorities announced on Friday. Six bodies were found in the city of Puerto La Cruz, and another, that of a child, in the nearby town of Guanta, said state governor Luis Marcano. "The whole hill fell down... We are all affected," said Richar Vardagreda, a resident of Puerto La Cruz. Nearly 80 people have died in Venezuela in recent weeks due to heavy rains, including 54 in a landslide that occurred on October 8 in Las Tejerlas, in the north-central state of Aragua, according to official reports. A thousand rescue workers, volunteers and security officials have been deployed in Anzoategui. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2022

German leader calls for equal trade ties in China summit

Scholz seeks to drum up greater economic cooperation with Beijing

BEIJING: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told Chinese leaders in Beijing on Friday that Berlin expected equal treatment on trade as he tried to drum up greater economic cooperation despite growing distrust of the Asian superpower in the West. Scholz is under pressure to push Beijing to get tough on Russia over the war in Ukraine, and he said Friday that Germany and China had agreed they both opposed any use of nuclear weapons in the conflict.

The German chancellor is the first G7 leader to visit China since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, which led the world's number two economy to close its borders and President Xi Jinping to largely eschew in-person diplomacy. But his trip has prompted criticism at home over Berlin's growing economic reliance on Beijing, and sparked controversy for coming so soon after Xi strengthened his hold on power in China just last month.

Tensions are also running high between the West and Beijing on issues ranging from Taiwan to alleged human rights abuses. Scholz held talks with human rights lawyers critical of the regime in Beijing ahead of the trip, a source in his entourage told AFP. Received by a smiling Xi at Beijing's Great Hall of the People shortly after arriving, Scholz said he hoped to "further develop" economic cooperation while alluding to areas of disagreement. "It is good that we are able to have an exchange here about all questions, including those questions where we have different perspectives—that's what an exchange is for," Scholz said.

"We also want to talk about how we can further develop our economic cooperation on other topics: climate change, food security, indebted countries." "Xi underscored the need for China and Germany,

two major countries with great influence, to work together in times of change and instability and contribute more to global peace and development," Beijing's Xinhua News Agency reported.

Scholz also spoke with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang at a meeting in which he called for fair trade between the two countries. At a press briefing during which Chinese officials said there was "not enough time" for questions, Scholz urged Beijing to do more to "use its influence" on its ally Russia, currently engaged in a months-long war in Ukraine.

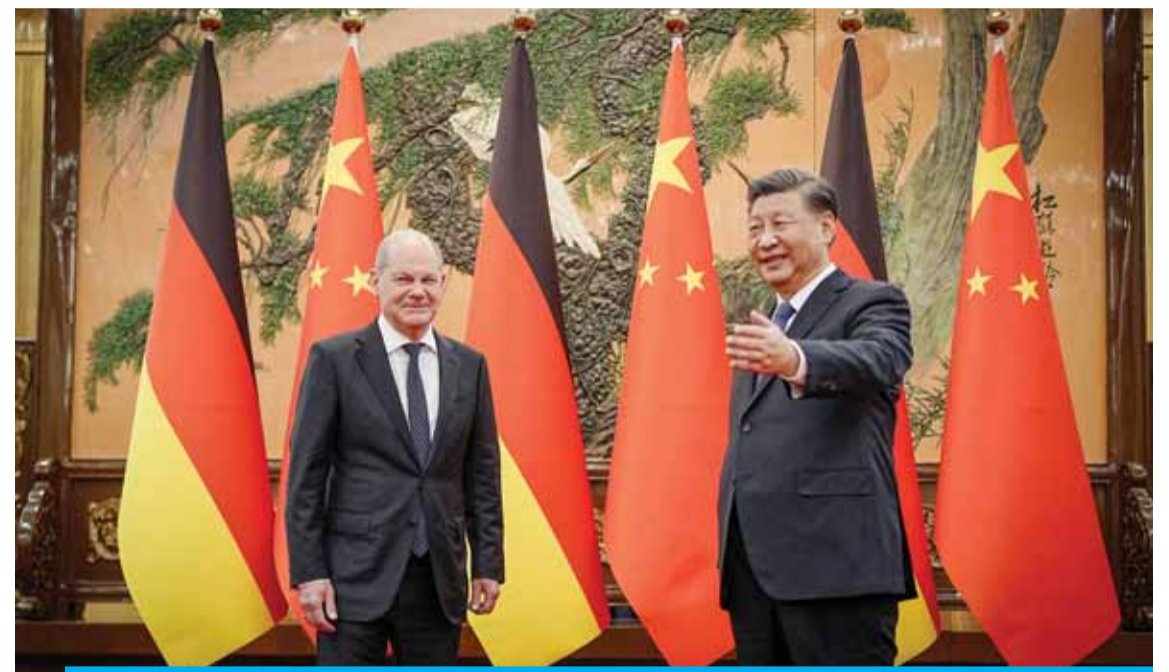
Both sides said they opposed the use of nuclear weapons in the conflict, with Scholz telling reporters: "Everyone says clearly that an escalation via the use of a tactical nuclear weapon is ruled out". China has steadfastly avoided criticizing Russia for invading Ukraine and instead blames the United States and NATO for the war.

'Keep doing business'

The German delegation of more than 60 people was met on the tarmac at Beijing airport by a military guard-as well as health workers in white hazmat suits who conducted mandatory PCR tests in buses converted into mobile laboratories. Scholz's PCR test was taken in his plane by a German doctor he brought with him and supervised by Chinese health officials, according to the German government.

China's economic importance is seen by some in Berlin as more crucial than ever, as Germany hurtles towards a recession battling an energy crisis triggered by the Ukraine war.

China is a major market for German goods, from machinery to cars. But German industry's heavy



BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) welcomes German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on November 4, 2022. —AFP

dependence on China is facing fresh scrutiny after the over-reliance on Russian energy imports left it exposed when Moscow turned off the taps. Scholz's approach is still underpinned by the idea that "we want to keep doing business with China, no matter what that means for the dependence of our economy,

and for our ability to act", opposition lawmaker Norbert Roettgen told the Rheinische Post newspaper. Concern about China has also come from within Germany's ruling coalition, with Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock saying past mistakes with Russia must not be repeated. —AFP

Escape from Foxconn: Workers recount chaos at iPhone factory

BEIJING: Zhang Yao recalls the moment he realised something had gone deeply wrong at the Chinese mega-factory where he and hundreds of thousands of other workers assembled iPhones and other high-end electronics. In early October, supervisors suddenly warned him that 3,000 colleagues had been taken into quarantine after someone tested positive for COVID-19 at the factory.

"They told us not to take our masks off," Zhang, speaking under a pseudonym for fear of retaliation, told AFP by telephone. What followed was a weeks-long ordeal including food shortages and the ever-present fear of infection, before he finally escaped on Tuesday.

Zhang's employer, Taiwanese tech giant Foxconn, has said it faces a "protracted battle" against infections and imposed a "closed loop" bubble around its sprawling campus in central China's Zhengzhou city. Local authorities locked down the area surrounding the major Apple supplier's factory on Wednesday, but not before reports emerged of employees fleeing on foot and a lack of adequate medical care at the plant.

China is the last major economy committed to a zero-COVID strategy, persisting with snap lockdowns, mass testing and lengthy quarantines in a bid to stamp out emerging outbreaks.

But new variants have tested officials' ability to snuff out flare-ups and dragged down economic activity with the threat of sudden disruptions.

Desperation

Multiple workers have recounted scenes of



SHENZHEN: This file photo taken on May 27, 2010 shows Chinese workers in the Foxconn factory in Shenzhen, in southern China's Guangdong province. —AFP

chaos and increasing disorganization at Foxconn's complex of workshops and dormitories, which form a city-within-a-city near Zhengzhou's airport. Zhang told AFP that "positive tests and double lines (on antigen tests) had become a common sight" in his workshop before he left. "Of course we were scared, it was so close to us." "People with fevers are not guaranteed to receive medicine," another Foxconn worker, a 30-year-old man who also asked to remain anonymous, told AFP.

"We are drowning," he said. Those who decided to stop working were not offered meals at their dormitories, Zhang said, adding that some were able to survive on personal stockpiles of instant noodles. Kai, a worker at in the complex who gave an inter-

view to state-owned Sanlian Lifeweek, told the magazine Foxconn's "closed loop" involved cordoning off paths between dormitory compounds and the factory, and complained he was left to his own devices after being thrown in quarantine.

TikTok videos geolocated by AFP showed mounds of uncollected rubbish outside buildings in late October, while employees in N95 masks squeezed onto packed shuttle buses taking them from dormitories to their work stations. A 27-year-old woman working at Foxconn, who asked not to be named, told AFP a roommate who tested positive for COVID was sent back to her dormitory on Thursday morning, crying, after she decided to hand in her notice while in quarantine. —AFP

who established the AI Now Institute at New York University in 2017 and has advised US government regulators, has emerged as a prominent critic of the business models built on extraction of personal data to use for targeted advertising.

'Punching above our weight'

She became president of Signal two months ago and is pushing hard for the app to become a genuine alternative to the likes of WhatsApp and Apple's iMessage. "We want to make sure that everyone in the world can pick up their device, quickly open Signal, use it to communicate with anyone else," she said. The odds are stacked against her firm-WhatsApp, she says, has around 1,000 engineers and many thousands of support staff, while her company has just 40 people in total.

The app is governed by a non-profit organization, the Signal Foundation, and is just beginning to ask users for small donations to keep it going. The company's David vs Goliath act was laid bare in January when co-founder Moxie Marlinspike left his post as CEO, detailing how hard it had been to keep the app going. "I was writing all the Android code, was writing all of the server code, was the only person on call for the service, was facilitating all product development, and was managing everyone," he wrote in a blog at the time.

Yet Signal has been downloaded more than 100 million times and, although Whittaker will not con-



LISBON: Signal messaging application President Meredith Whittaker poses for a photograph before an interview at the Europe's largest tech conference, the Web Summit, in Lisbon on November 4, 2022. —AFP

firm the figures, reports last year estimated it has 40 million regular users. And she is undaunted by the task, arguing that having talented staff helps close the gap with competitors. "We have a small team that are extremely competent and yet we're punching way above our weight," she said. Signal has increasing numbers of friends in the pro-privacy sector. Email services like Proton, search engine DuckDuckGo and countless data analytics firms all market themselves as privacy-focused apps. —AFP

US services growth slips to lowest level since 2020

WASHINGTON: The American services sector grew less than expected in October, at its weakest level since May 2020, as new orders eased and businesses struggled to replenish their stocks, an industry survey said. Growth in the key sector, which accounts for two-thirds of the world's largest economy, has held up since the height of the pandemic but analysts caution that high inflation and weaker demand could stall its momentum.

The Institute for Supply Management's services index dipped to 54.4 percent last month, down from September but still firmly above the 50-percent threshold indicating growth. "Supplier deliveries continued to slow, at a faster rate in October... growth rates and business levels have cooled," said ISM survey chair Anthony Nieves in a statement. The latest reading is the lowest since May 2020, when the figure stood at 45.2 percent, he added. This comes as the business activity index dropped 3.4 percentage points from September, while new orders moderated as well, the survey found.

Even though supply chains showed signs of improvement, respondents face challenges hiring qualified workers and some companies are holding off on filling open positions due to economic uncertainty, Nieves added. One respondent in the construction industry said customers are starting to delay projects or enter smaller-scale scopes of work, underscoring the jitters. —AFP

Layoffs hit Silicon Valley as Amazon freezes hiring

SAN FRANCISCO: Payments firm Stripe and rideshare company Lyft, two darlings of Silicon Valley, announced major layoffs Thursday as the economy continues to darken for Big Tech. The tough economic times are also hitting Amazon, which announced that it would freeze new corporate hires amid a highly uncertain economic environment. The bloodletting came as the tech world awaits major layoffs at Twitter after the takeover by Elon Musk for \$44 billion. Media reports said that Musk is preparing to eliminate thousands of jobs as early as Friday in an attempt to find ways to help pay for the massive buyout.

Stripe, a payments company based in San Francisco and Dublin, said it was going to slash 14 percent of its staff telling its employees it had "overhired for the world we're in." The company said this would return staff to the 7,000 people it had in February. "We are facing stubborn inflation, energy shocks, higher interest rates, reduced investment budgets and sparser startup funding," Stripe CEO Patrick Collison wrote in a note to staff. Ride-hailing app Lyft, a rival to Uber, said it was letting go 13 percent or 683 non-driver employees. It cited a likely US recession and the rise in insurance costs for drivers. —AFP

Surveillance 'existential' danger of tech: Signal boss

LISBON: The mysticism that has allowed tech firms to make billions of dollars from surveillance is finally clearing, the boss of encrypted messaging app Signal told AFP.

Meredith Whittaker, who spent years working for Google before helping to organize a staff walkout in 2018 over working conditions, said tech was "valorised" and "fetishised" when she first began in the industry in 2006. "The idea that technology represented the apex of innovation and progress was fairly pervasive in government circles and popular culture," she said in an interview on the sidelines of the Web Summit tech conference in Lisbon this week.

But legislators and users were now reckoning with the "well-documented harms of allowing a handful of large corporations have the power to surveil almost every aspect of human life". She said people were now seeking out apps like Signal because they appreciated the "real existential dangers of placing their most intimate thoughts, their locations, their friend networks in the hands of corporate and state surveillance actors". Whittaker,

Business

US job gains top expectations in October as wages move higher

Data underscore challenges in lowering rampant inflation

WASHINGTON: US job gains topped expectations in October, according to official data released Friday, as hiring remained resilient and wages moved ever higher, underscoring the challenges in lowering rampant inflation. The data comes days ahead of critical midterm elections, where decades-high inflation has propelled economic issues to the top of voters' minds and President Joe Biden faces a battle to avoid losing control of both chambers of Congress.

The figures will provide little comfort to the Federal Reserve, which has been battling to cool the economy, as policymakers fear high prices will become entrenched and rising pay will create an upward spiral-inflicting more harm on families and businesses. American employers added 261,000 workers last month, far more than economists had forecast, though the pace was lower than the 315,000 increase in September, which was revised much higher than originally reported by the Labor Department. The jobless rate rose two-tenths to 3.7 percent, according to the closely-watched US employment report. Biden cheered the data which showed 10 million jobs have been created since he took office in January 2020, but he recognized the hardship Americans face due to higher prices.

"Inflation is our top economic challenge... The global inflation that is raging in other countries is hitting us as well," Biden said in a statement on Friday. He said policymakers will "do what it takes to bring inflation down." Average hourly earnings for private sector workers jumped another 12 cents or 0.4 percent last month, to \$32.58, the report said.

Wages have increased 4.7 percent over the last 12 months as firms have had to compete to find and retain workers in the tight labor market. That pace is slightly slower than in September, which the Fed will welcome, but many employees are pushing for increases to avoid losing ground to elevated consumer costs. US markets rallied following the latest data, which raised hopes of a soft landing for the economy. Major indices closed higher on Friday, despite the Fed's pledge that interest rates will need to rise further to quell inflation.



NEW YORK: In this file photo taken on October 11, 2022, a worker polishes an item of jewelry at the workshop of Tiffany's jewelers in New York City. — AFP

'Softening'

"The bottom line here is that the labor market is softening, but has not yet reached the point where the data are screaming at the Fed to stop tightening," said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, in an analysis. But if employment trends continue, markets will start to push policymakers to "rethink the idea of continued hikes next year," he added.

The data showed notable job gains in health care, professional and technical services, and manufacturing. The Fed has raised borrowing rates six times this year to cool demand, but there have been few signs it is having an impact on consumer spending or inflation.

The central bank said this week that it would have to continue hiking rates, although that has raised the risk that the world's biggest economy will suffer a downturn.

But Susan Collins, president of the Boston Federal Reserve Bank said she sees a chance to accomplish the

task of reining in price increases without completely putting the brakes on growth. While inflation so far is only slowly drifting down, "I do not believe a significant slowdown is required to accomplish our goal," she said in a speech in Washington on Friday. But she stressed that the Fed must continue to act as "current levels of inflation are simply too high, and are taking a significant toll on households and firms."

While the policy tightening normally would be expected to lead to job losses, economists say employers are reluctant to shed workers that they struggled to find. "The data are still showing strong positive momentum in the labor market which is not yet showing much adjustment in response to a rapid tightening of monetary policy," said Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics.

"These data will keep the Fed on track to keep raising rates into restrictive territory," she said in an analysis. — AFP

Adidas eyes Puma boss to take over

BERLIN: German sportswear giant Adidas said Friday it was in talks with the chief of rival outfitter Puma to take the reins after the planned departure of its current CEO. Adidas was in discussions with the Puma boss Bjorn Gulden "as a potential successor" to current boss Kasper Rorsted, it said in a statement. Earlier in the day, Puma announced that Gulden would be stepping down at the end of the year, to be replaced by in-house hire Arne Freundt.

The switch of leadership at Adidas comes as the iconic kit-maker seeks to emerge from months of turbulence which have hit sales. Adidas lowered its outlook for 2022 in July due in part to continuing severe coronavirus restrictions in key market China and the expected hit to sales. The group also cut ties with



Kanye West at the end of October after a series of anti-Semitic tweets by the rapper caused outcry. Adidas ended production of the highly successful "Yeezy" line designed together with West. Both Adidas and Puma are based in the Bavarian town of Herzogenaurach, close to Nuremberg, in the south-eastern region of Bavaria. The twin companies were founded by two brothers. Adolf Dassler began Adidas before his brother, Rudolf, with whom he had a fierce rivalry, established Puma. — AFP

China says to stick to zero-COVID after reopening rumors

BEIJING: China said on Saturday that it would "unswervingly" stick to its zero-COVID policy, dampening the outlook for global markets following their recent surge on hopes that Beijing would cast aside some of its economically damaging virus curbs.

China is the last major economy wedded to a strategy of extinguishing outbreaks as they emerge, imposing snap lockdowns, mass testing and lengthy quarantines despite the widespread disruption to businesses and international supply chains. Stock markets climbed on Friday in part on unsubstantiated rumors that Beijing was poised to announce significant changes to the policy or even lay out a path towards a full reopening.

But authorities poured cold water on the speculation, with National Health Commission (NHC) spokesperson Mi Feng confirming on Saturday that Beijing would "stick unswervingly to... the overall policy of dynamic zero-COVID". "At present, China is still facing the dual threat of imported infections and the spread of domestic outbreaks", Mi said at a press briefing.

"The disease control situation is as grim and complex as ever," he said. "We must continue to put people and lives first." China recorded 3,659 new infections on Saturday, the majority of which were asymptomatic, according to the NHC.

The thousands of domestic cases logged in the past week represent a tiny fraction of the country's vast population, but have been enough for officials to take drastic action—sometimes with unpopular or tragic consequences. A lockdown of the world's biggest iPhone factory in the central city of Zhengzhou prompted large numbers of workers to flee on foot, alleging food shortages, inadequate medical care and poor treatment from their employer, Taiwanese tech giant Foxconn.

On Thursday, authorities in the northwestern city of Lanzhou made a rare apology after a three-year-old boy died of carbon monoxide poisoning following his denial of medical treatment during a weeks-long COVID lockdown. Officials on Saturday criticized the use of "excessively layered" and "one-size-fits-all" policies in some locales but insisted the overall zero-tolerance virus approach was "correct".

Reopening rumors

Chinese stocks jumped on Friday in part on rumors that China might loosen the policies, which include a ten-day quarantine for inbound travelers and a "circuit-breaker" on Covid-affected international passenger flights. The Hang Seng Index closed up more than 5 percent, while bourses in Shanghai and Shenzhen rose 2.4 percent and 3.2 percent respectively.

But a reopening still appears to be a long way off, with areas contributing over 10 percent of China's overall gross domestic product under some form of enhanced virus curbs as of Thursday, according to a calculation by Nomura. The Japanese bank also warned that the impact of any policy easing "would likely be very limited" and said it foresaw a "very small probability to materially ending (zero-COVID) before March 2023".

China's year-on-year economic growth rebounded to 3.9 percent in the third quarter of this year, but analysts still expect Beijing to miss its stated goal of around 5.5 percent annual GDP growth by a wide margin. President Xi Jinping, who has made fighting the pandemic a cornerstone of the ruling Communist Party's legitimacy, lauded zero-COVID's "significant positive results" at a congress last month as he sealed a precedent-busting third term in power. — AFP



BEIJING: German and Chinese flags hang from a road lamp in front of Tiananmen gate in Beijing on November 4, 2022 as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz arrives for a visit to China. — AFP

Germany wrestles with economic dependence on China

BERLIN: As Chancellor Olaf Scholz travels to Beijing, policymakers and businesses at home are grappling with an existential question: how can they reduce their reliance on China and can they survive without the world's second-largest economy?

Massive exposure

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the upheaval caused in Germany by breaking off economic ties with Moscow has cast a new light on Berlin's relationship with another autocratic regime. China, where German industrial groups turn a sizeable chunk of their profits, has been Berlin's biggest trading partner for the past six years, with goods worth 246 billion euros (\$243 billion) passing back and forth between the two countries last year. Around 104 billion euros of that growing business were accounted for by the auto, chemical and manufacturing sectors—the backbone of German industry.

In the first half of 2022, direct investments in China reached a record of approximately 10 billion euros, according to a study by the IW economic institute. More than 5,000 German businesses are active in China, including such heavyweights as Volkswagen and Siemens, as well as large number of smaller businesses in the "Mittelstand". Another major dependence is in the area of rare earth minerals, such as lithium, cobalt and magnesium, desperately needed in Europe for the production of key technologies like batteries.

Awakening

Any "naivety" in relations with China was "over", German Economy Minister Robert Habeck said in September. Even liberal Finance Minister Christian Lindner has called on businesses not to rely too much on China amid increased tensions with Beijing. Before heading to Beijing, Scholz sketched out the contours of his China strategy in a newspaper op-ed. Germany should "reduce one-sided dependencies" on China, while keeping a sense of "proportion and pragmatism", he said.

"There are a number of German businesses who see China above all as a competitor and not as a potential market," said Tim Ruehlig, a China expert at the German foreign policy institute DGAP. Since 2019, the BDI German industrial lobby defined China as a "systematic rival" and not just a partner, before the European Union moved to do the same.

The heavyweights of the German economy are the most reluctant to change their approach towards China. "Some big businesses are continuing to increase their presence considerably," said Juergen Matthes of the IW economic institute in Cologne. The three big auto manufacturers—Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes-Benz—as well as the chemical group BASF, together accounted for a third of all European investments in China between 2018 and 2021, according to a recent study by the Rhodium group. In 2021, 40 percent of Volkswagen's revenues came from China. At sportswear group Adidas, the figure was 21 percent, and for Siemens it was 13 percent.

"More dialogue" was needed with China, the former CEO of Volkswagen Herbert Diess said earlier this year, noting his concern at the lack being taken by the German government. — AFP

Kenya Airways flights disrupted due to pilot strike

NAIROBI: Kenya Airways flights were disrupted Saturday as a strike by its pilots demanding better working conditions grounded over a dozen planes, affecting thousands of passengers, the country's transport minister said. The airline, part owned by the government and Air France-KLM, is one of the biggest in Africa, connecting multiple countries to Europe and Asia, but it is facing turbulent times, including years of losses. The Kenya Airlines Pilots Association (KALPA) said that no Kenya Airways flight flown by its members had departed Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport starting from 6:00 am (0300 GMT) on Saturday.

"The strike is fully in force," KALPA union secretary general Murithi Nyagah said in a statement released on Saturday. The pilots announced the strike in defiance of a court order against the industrial action and have given no indication of how long it will last.

Kenya's newly appointed Transport Minister Kipchumba Murkomen told reporters at the airport on Saturday that the strike was unwarranted and "akin to economic sabotage".

He said around 10,000 passengers had been affected by the strike, which had led to the grounding of 15 planes. "I am not saying their concerns are not valid," he said, but added that their actions were drastic as he appealed to the "goodwill of the pilots to terminate the strike."

Frustrated passengers described huge queues at the airport, with many travelers only learning about their cancelled flights when they showed up to check in. "We have been told nothing," American tourist Jill Lee told AFP as she waited in line to figure out her next course of action after her flight to Dar es Salaam was cancelled at the last minute.

The 65-year-old had booked a safari in Tanzania but said she had no idea where she would spend the night after her connecting flight from Nairobi was cancelled. "Many people here have nowhere to go. It's pretty horrible."



NAIROBI: Kenya Airline Pilots Association (KALPA) secretary general Murithi Nyagah, speaks during a media brief amid strike by Kenya Airways pilots organized by KALPA, at their offices next to Jomo Kenyatta International airport in Nairobi on November 5, 2022. — AFP

'Soften its stance'

Kenya Airways on Saturday reported high call volumes at its service centre due to the "ongoing unlawful industrial action", urging customers to only contact the airline if they were travelling in the next 48 hours. The pilots, who have had a particularly fraught relationship with management, are pressing for the reinstatement of contributions to a provident fund.

They also want back payment of all salaries stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic. KALPA representatives said Friday that a series of meetings with airline management had failed to resolve grievances. "Kenya Airways management's actions have left us with no other option," Nyagah said, adding that a 14-day notice on the industrial action had ended without a solution.

"We had hoped that the management of the airline would soften its stance and engage in negotiation on the issues raised." On Monday, the airline won a court injunction stopping the strike, but an official at KALPA, which has 400 members, told AFP the pilots "were acting within the provisions of the law" and that they were yet to be served with a court order.

The carrier warned earlier this week that the strike would jeopardize its recovery, estimating losses at \$2.5 million per day if the pilots went ahead with their plans. The airline was founded in 1977 following the demise of East African Airways and flies more than four million passengers to 42 destinations annually. But its slogan "The Pride of Africa" rings hollow as it operates thanks to state bailouts following years of losses.

Like other carriers around the world, Kenya Airways saw its revenue nosedive after the pandemic grounded planes worldwide because of stringent travel restrictions, devastating the aerospace and tourism industries. — AFP

Business

At 'African COP', continent's climate needs may go unmet

Scientists and campaigners fear they will be sidelined again

PARIS: It is being billed as the "African COP" but scientists and campaigners on the continent least responsible for climate change fear the UN summit that begins on Sunday in Egypt will once again leave them sidelined. As the toll of climate-linked disasters mounts in debt-ridden countries across Africa, governments are demanding that rich polluters pay for the harm their emissions have already caused, known as "loss and damage".

"Historically, Africa is responsible for less than four percent of global emissions, but Africans are suffering some of the most brutal impacts of the climate crisis," said Ugandan campaigner Vanessa Nakate. "We need financial support to cope with the loss and the damage we're experiencing across the continent. We need polluters to compensate for the destruction they've caused."

Richer governments rejected a call for a financial mechanism to address losses and damage at last year's climate talks in Glasgow and instead negotiators agreed to start a "dialogue" on financial compensation. But as floods, heatwaves and droughts sweep across the planet, hitting the most vulnerable hardest, activists are hoping the issue will take centre stage at COP27 in Egypt.

'From words to deeds'

In an opinion piece in *The Guardian* on Friday, the leaders of France, the Netherlands and Senegal urged greater-and more concrete-support for Africa, especially for adaptation. "For Africa, climate change is an irreversible reality. It's too late to turn back the clock," wrote France's Emmanuel Macron, Mark Rutte of the Netherlands and Macky Sall, Senegal's leader and chair of the African Union.

"COP27 is a vital opportunity for the world to support Africa in facing the impact of climate change... the conference must generate a breakthrough on finance for climate adaptation and move from words to deeds." In Africa alone, extreme weather events have killed at least 4,000 people and displaced 19 million so far this year, a study by

the Carbon Brief news service said last week.

The ongoing drought in East Africa is impacting the livelihoods of more than nine million people, and 1.4 million people have been displaced in recent weeks in the worst floods on record in Nigeria.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in February warned that tens of millions of Africans face a future marked by drought, disease and displacement due to global heating. "Multiple African countries are projected to face compounding risks from: reduced food production across crops, livestock and fisheries; increasing heat-related mortality; heat-related loss of labour productivity; and flooding from sea level rise," scientists wrote in a dedicated chapter on the continent. Chukwumerije Okereke, a professor in environment and development at Britain's University of Reading, said that African nations would demand greater action from the polluting countries that are driving climate change.

"African countries believe they have been significantly shortchanged because they are the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change," he told AFP. "The best way to stave off a more devastating impact of climate change on the continent is through rapid decarbonization."

Countries agreed at last year's UN climate talks in Glasgow to raise the ambition of their emissions-cutting plans. However, the UN says those additional measures would result in a pollution cut of less than one percent by 2030. The Glasgow summit also produced a new strategy for financing the energy transition, with a group of rich nations committing to providing \$8.5 billion to coal-dependent South Africa over three to five years-in grants and loans-to help its climate plan and catalyze private investment. This week the World Bank said that South Africa, one of the world's largest greenhouse gas emitters, will require at least \$500 billion to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Susan Chomba, director of the African NGO Vital Landscapes, said governments should use



SHARM EL SHEIKH: Participants visit the Sharm El Sheikh International Convention Centre, ready for the COP27 climate summit, on Nov 5, 2022. — AFP

COP27 to push green development investment on the continent.

"We do need development for our people and we need to use the resources that are within our reach on the continent," she said. "The war in Ukraine has exposed the naked risk of overdependence on fossil fuels, even for the richest economies, but also the ripple effect that it is having on energy fertilizer and food prices on the continent."

'Fake promises'

Progress at recent COPs has been stymied by a failed promise by rich nations to provide at least \$100 billion annually to developing ones to help decarbonise while adapting to climate impacts.

"COP27 is going to be a COP where we're going to be able to build up trust," said Ineza Grace from the Loss and Damage Youth Coalition. "All of those fake promises have never been accomplished and we are the generation that is kind of living in the hotspot. But we are also a generation that does not want to sit down and just continue to be victims."

Okereke said to expect "constructive ambiguity" around loss and damage finance. "If they do set up such a facility then it might still be four or five years before the structure or the functionalities of such a facility is agreed," said Okereke. "So poor countries should be aware that while having a facility is a victory, it may not necessarily translate to more dollars coming to them." —AFP

S Africa to press rich nations for more money at COP27

CAPE TOWN: South Africa needs much more money to green its economy than what rich nations have promised so far, President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Friday, ahead of a key global climate summit. Ramaphosa is due to travel to Egypt in the coming days to attend the COP27 meeting, where funding for Africa's green transition is likely to be a flashpoint.

Last year, South Africa, the continent's most industrialized economy, secured \$8.5 billion in loans and grants from a group of rich countries. But Ramaphosa said the money was not enough, with a just transition investment plan released on Friday suggesting Pretoria will need about 1.5 trillion rand (\$83 billion) over the next five years. His comments come after the World Bank earlier this week said South Africa would need around \$500 billion by 2050 to achieve carbon neutrality.

"We need much greater funding than what has been put on the table," Ramaphosa told an online sitting of the Presidential Climate Commission. "And in going to COP27, that's precisely the message that we will be taking forward." Ramaphosa said South Africa was working with international partners to find additional funding, adding that some already said they are willing to make new proposals.

The president said he has stressed the need to



SHARM EL SHEIKH: This picture shows the interior of the Sharm El Sheikh International Convention Centre where the COP27 climate summit will take place —AFP

increase the share of grants to avoid adding to the country's already heavy debt burden in talks with other leaders. "The key challenge for South Africa and our sister countries on the continent is access to new, at scale and predictable funding that does not further exacerbate our debt crises," he said. Key areas in need of investment included the electricity and the green hydrogen sectors, as well as initiatives to ensure a just transition, Ramaphosa said.

'Hold developed economies accountable'

South Africa, one of the world's top 12 largest polluters, generates about 80 percent of its electricity through coal. The World Bank on Friday said

the country has been granted financing of \$497 million to decommission one of its largest coal-fired power plants and convert it to renewable energy.

Leaders of a divided world meet in the resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh this month tasked with taming the terrifying juggernaut of global warming as they face gale-force geopolitical crosswinds, including the war in Ukraine and economic turmoil. UN chief Antonio Guterres said Thursday it was time for a "historic pact" between developed and emerging countries, with richer nations providing financial and technical assistance to help poorer ones speed up their renewable energy transitions. — AFP



WASHINGTON: US Federal Reserve Bank Board Chairman Jerome Powell delivers opening remarks during a news conference following a meeting of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) at the bank headquarters in Washington, DC. —AFP

US trade deficit widens in Sept as imports rise

WASHINGTON: The US trade gap widened in September after five straight months of decline, government data showed Thursday, on cooling food and energy exports while imports of products like semiconductors and consumer goods picked up. Although companies had rushed to replenish depleted inventories to meet strong demand from consumers, analysts caution that domestic demand in the United States would weaken while a strong dollar and slowing global growth bog down exports.

In September, the overall trade deficit widened to \$73.3 billion, up from a revised \$65.7 billion figure in August, Commerce Department data showed. The expansion was more than analysts expected and came as exports dipped to \$258 billion on a drop in industrial supplies such as crude oil and food like soybeans. Imports rose to \$331.3 billion, helped by shipments of semiconductors and consumer goods including cell phones.

The imports rise in September was "likely a result of businesses pulling in holiday inventory in early to avoid supply disruptions," said Matthew Martin of Oxford Economics in a note.

But a "precipitous decline in ocean and air freight volumes, coupled with the recent slowdown in the trucking market, signal a clear slowing of domestic demand," he added. The US deficit with China decreased \$1.4 billion to \$32.1 billion in September, data showed. While there has been strong demand from US consumers, soaring inflation has raised concerns that shoppers will pull back, causing firms to become more cautious. The Federal Reserve has been raising interest rates aggressively to cool the economy and bring down surging prices, but stubbornly high costs has meant many families have to spend a greater share of their incomes on staple goods.

The central bank announced a fourth straight bumper rate hike on Wednesday, with Fed Chair Jerome Powell saying that it remains "premature" to think about pausing the increases.

Higher interest rates have also strengthened the US dollar, making American goods relatively more expensive, which could weigh on exports. "Looking ahead, trade flows are likely to weaken," said economist Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics in an analysis. — AFP



ROME: Italians will face a tough winter with rising interest rates, soaring inflation and higher energy prices.

Italy raises public deficit forecast for 2023

ROME: Italian far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on Friday raised next year's public deficit forecast in order to finance measures to help households and businesses confront soaring energy prices. Like other countries in Europe, Italians will face a tough winter with energy bills increasing alongside higher interest rates and inflation. Meloni, who came to power last month, pledged during the election campaign to control expenditure in a country long plagued by low growth and huge debt.

On Friday, after a cabinet meeting, the government agreed to increase the public deficit to 4.5 percent of GDP. It is above the 3.4 percent forecast by her predecessor Mario Draghi in September, but in line with what Italian media had reported she

would do. "This allows us to free up an additional 22 to 23 billion euros (\$22-23 billion) that we intend to devote to the fight against rising energy prices," Meloni told reporters late Friday. The deficit is forecast to fall to 3.7 percent in 2024 and three percent in 2025, according to an economics roadmap adopted by Rome.

Meloni's government also raised the forecast for economic growth this year to 3.7 percent, up from Draghi's prediction of 3.3 percent. It comes after Italy posted better-than-expected quarterly growth on Monday. "Thanks to a favorable third quarter", the government was able to free up "around 9.5 billion euros" that the government will allocate "from next week" towards measures to mitigate higher energy costs, Meloni said. Economy Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti, who served under Draghi as economic development minister, kept the previous premier's forecast of 0.6 percent growth in 2023.

"We are ready to confront the risks of recession that are mentioned more and more, at the global and European level, and which could also affect the Italian economy," Giorgetti said. —AFP

Canada sees lower deficit, possible 2023 recession

MONTREAL: Canada's government announced modest new spending in an updated fiscal plan Thursday, as windfall revenues allow it to slash its budget deficit ahead of a possible economic downturn. Under pressure to tighten the belt, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said spending measures, including eliminating interest on student loans and lowering credit card transaction fees for small businesses-amounting to about Can\$30 billion (\$22 billion) over six years-would not fuel inflation.

She also introduced investment tax credits for clean energy projects such as the production of hydrogen from renewable sources, and taxes on corporate share buy-backs. "Canada cannot avoid the global slowdown to come, any more than we could have prevented COVID from reaching our shores once it had begun to infect the world," Freeland said in a speech to parliament. "But we will be ready." The minister pointed to "targeted inflation relief" for those in need, adding that "we cannot support every single Canadian in the way we did with emergency measures at the height of the pandemic."

Continued robust economic stimulus spending, she explained, would run counter to the central bank's fight against surging consumer prices. Inflation soared to a June peak of 8.1 percent before falling bit by bit to 6.9 percent in September. The Bank of Canada responded with several outsized interest rate hikes, to 3.75 percent, and signaled more to come. — AFP

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In this handout photo provided by NASA, NASA's Space Launch System (SLS) rocket with the Orion spacecraft aboard is seen atop the mobile launcher in Cape Canaveral, Florida. — AFP photos



In this fish-eye view image released by NASA, the Artemis-1 rocket is rolled out from the Vehicle Assembly Building en route to Launch Pad 39B shortly after midnight at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

NASA ROLLS ROCKET OUT TO SPACE CENTER LAUNCH PAD

NASA rolled out its largest-ever rocket to a launch pad in Florida on Friday and will try again 10 days from now to blast off on a much-delayed uncrewed mission to the Moon. After two launch attempts were scrubbed this summer because of technical problems, the rocket returned to the Vehicle Assembly Building to protect it from Hurricane Ian.

The US space agency used the time to carry out minor repairs and to recharge the batteries that power systems on the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket. The SLS rocket's four-mile (six-kilometer) journey from the Vehicle Assembly Building to the Kennedy Space Center's Launch Pad 39B took nearly nine hours, NASA said. The 322-foot (98-meter) rocket was rolled out slowly on a giant platform known as the crawler-transporter designed to minimize vibrations.

The next launch attempt is scheduled for 12:07 am Eastern Time on November

14 with backup dates on November 16 at 1:04 am and November 19 at 1:45 am. "We're comfortable launching at night," NASA associate administrator Jim Free said at a briefing on Thursday. Free said radar and infrared camera imaging will provide the necessary data to track the rocket's performance. If the rocket blasts off on November 16, the mission would last a little more than 25 days with the crew capsule splashing down in the Pacific Ocean on December 9.

The highly anticipated uncrewed mission, dubbed Artemis 1, will bring the United States a step closer to returning astronauts to the Moon five decades after humans last walked on the lunar surface. The goal of Artemis 1, named after the twin sister of Apollo, is to test the SLS rocket and Orion crew capsule that sits on top. Mannequins equipped with sensors are standing in for astronauts on the mission and will record acceleration, vibration and radiation levels.

The Orion capsule is to orbit the Moon



In this image released by NASA, NASA's Space Launch System (SLS) rocket with the Orion spacecraft aboard is seen atop a mobile launcher at Launch Pad 39B, at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on November 4, 2022.

to see if the vessel is safe for people in the near future. At some point, Artemis aims to put a woman and a person of color on the Moon for the first time. And since humans have already visited the

Moon, Artemis has its sights set on another lofty goal: a crewed mission to Mars. During the trip, Orion will follow an elliptical course around the Moon, coming within 60 miles (100 kilometers) at its

closest approach and 40,000 miles at its farthest—the deepest into space ever by a craft designed to carry humans. — AFP

US grapples with spike in trio of respiratory viruses

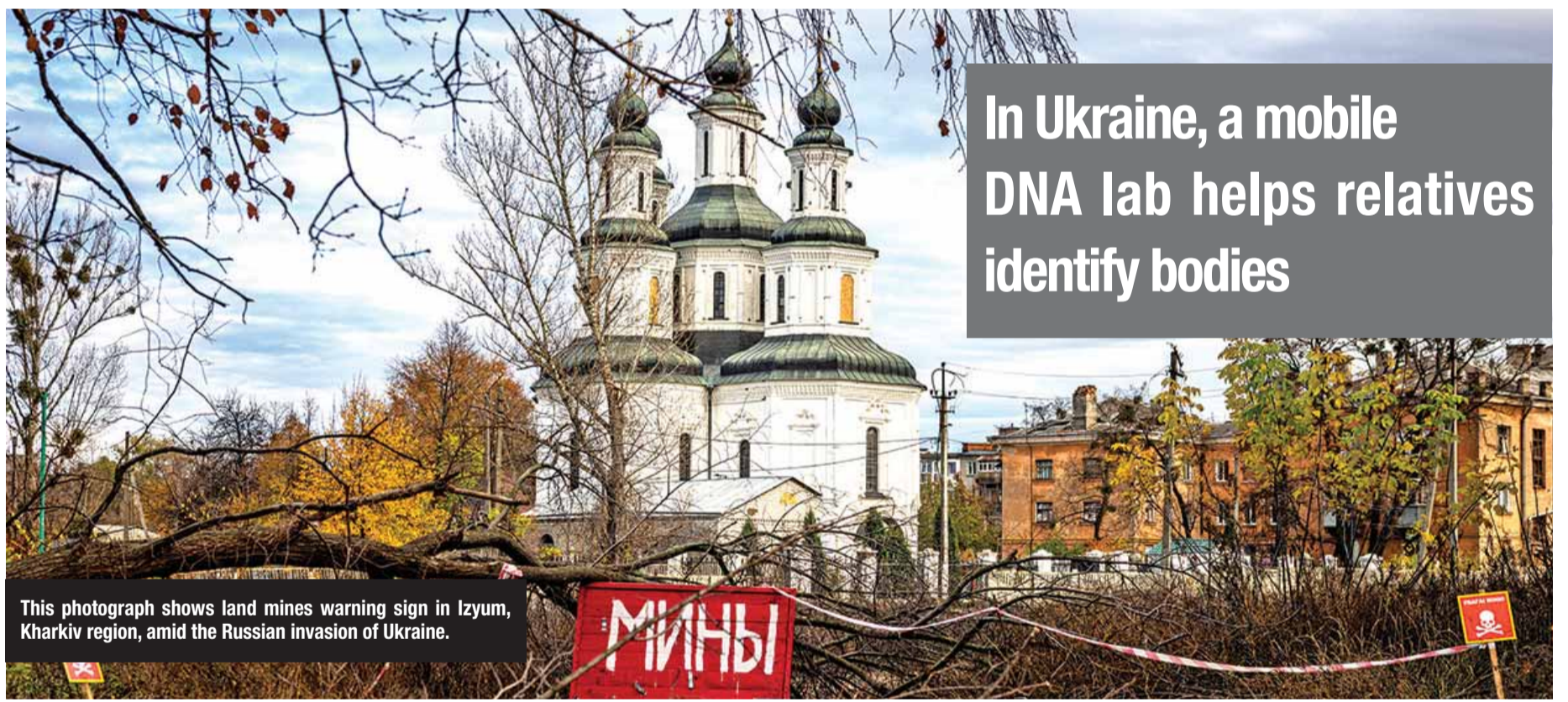
US hospitals are under pressure as cases of three respiratory viruses—the flu, COVID-19, and RSV—are rising at the same time, and earlier than usual, experts said Friday. Children are being hit hard by the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which causes the chest infection bronchiolitis in infants, and has spurred unusually high rates of hospitalizations in several countries around the world this season.

"We suspect that many children are being exposed to some respiratory viruses now for the first time having avoided these viruses during the height of the pandemic," said Jose Romero, director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, at a press conference.

All three of the circulating respiratory viruses have similar symptoms, and even if most patients recover in a week or two, the very young and elderly are at risk of developing severe illness. A surveillance system that tracks visits to outpatient medical providers and emergency departments for cold-like symptoms such as a fever or sore throat has shown "high" activity for this time of year, he said. "We're seeing the highest influenza hospitalization rates going back a decade."

He warned that if a child was struggling to breathe, had bluish lips, muscle pain and dehydration, it was crucial to take them to a doctor. Experts say it is still difficult to say whether this year's influenza virus was causing worse illness than usual, but it has started circulating particularly early. The United States is still recording more than 270,000 cases of COVID-19 per week.

Hospitals in the mid-Atlantic states, New England, and Washington state are "currently experiencing significant strain," said Dawn O'Connell, assistant secretary at the US Department of Health and Human Services. Vaccines are currently available for two of the circulating viruses, COVID-19 and the flu, however flu vaccination rates for children are below what they were prior to the pandemic. Pfizer announced this week that it had positive results in a clinical trial for an RSV vaccine. Scientists and researchers have failed to find a successful vaccine for the virus over the past half a century. — AFP



This photograph shows land mines warning sign in Izyum, Kharkiv region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In Ukraine, a mobile DNA lab helps relatives identify bodies

A mobile DNA laboratory was set up this week in Izyum, eastern Ukraine, to spare relatives of the war dead the pain of visually identifying bodies. Around 50 people came to take part Friday in the DNA sampling organized on a parking lot in Izyum, AFP journalists said. "I am searching for my father Anatoly Matyshko. His neighbors say he was killed on March 10 by shrapnel and buried in his garden," Inna Kupriyanova told AFP.

"He was unearthed and taken to the Kharkiv morgue, but another body was found in the same garden." "So I am coming to give my DNA, so that we can really identify my dad and give him a proper burial," the

46-year-old nurse explained. People genetically linked to a deceased or a missing person spent a few minutes providing saliva samples in a small white van. The others were instructed to bring a personal item—ideally, a toothbrush—belonging to the missing. The "LAB'ADN" is a mobile structure deployed by the forensics department of the French Gendarmerie Nationale (IRCGN). It is able to quickly carry out genetic analysis on a large quantity of biological samples.

Hard to recognize

France gifted Ukraine the first laboratory in July. Paris promised to send a second one to Ukraine by the end of the year,

France's ambassador to Ukraine Etienne de Poncins announced recently. Mid-September, authorities found hundreds of graves marked by wooden crosses and number plates in a forest near the eastern Ukrainian city of Izyum, which had been occupied by Russian troops for almost six months.

The 450 bodies that were exhumed were sent for identification in the Kharkiv morgue, the prosecutor's spokesperson told AFP on Friday. "We heard about this lab so we came here" said 57-year-old Lyuba Yaresheva, accompanied by her sister. They are hoping to retrieve the body of their nephew, who they fear is among those

buried in the forest.

Until the mobile lab was set up people had to go through the painful steps of going to the morgue to identify the corpses, as was the case in Bucha in April. DNA sampling "helps us to identify the exhumed corpses, because they were there for more than a day... the relatives are often not able to identify them," Viktoriya Bulavina, in charge of the mobile lab, told AFP. According to the regional prosecutor, 750 bodies have been exhumed from different burial sites since the area was liberated in September. — AFP



Photo shows empty graves after the exhumation of bodies in the mass graves dug during the Russian occupation in the town of Izyum, Kharkiv region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A DNA laboratory was deployed this week in the town of Izyum to help relatives of the 450 bodies found in mass burial sites to formally identify the remains of their loved ones without going through the grueling visual examination. — AFP photos



People wait outside a center to submit their DNA for the identification of their loved ones in the town of Izyum, Kharkiv region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Lifestyle | Features



US singer and songwriter Dolly Parton arrives for the 57th Academy of Country Music awards at the Allegiant stadium in Las Vegas, Nevada. Music's A-listers celebrated a new crop of legends entering the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame this weekend, among them country queen Dolly Parton and rap agitator Eminem. — AFP photos



Eminem performs onstage at the 2022 MTV VMAs at Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey.

Music world celebrates Dolly Parton, Eminem at Rock Hall of Fame

The music world gathered in Los Angeles to honor some of its finest acts on Saturday - inducting the latest class of luminaries including Dolly Parton and Eminem into the prestigious Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The country queen and rap agitator are joined by pop futurists Eurythmics, smooth rocker Lionel Richie, new wave Brits Duran Duran, confessional lyricist Carly Simon and enduring rock duo Pat Benatar and Neil Giraldo in entering the music pantheon. The Cleveland-based Hall of Fame which surveyed more than 1,000 musicians, historians and industry members to choose the entrants will honor the seven acts in a star-studded gala at Los Angeles's Microsoft Theater.

More supergroup concert than ceremony, the evening saw music legends honor their peers with performances of their time-tested hits-the lineup is usually kept under wraps until showtime. But Rock Hall Chairman John Sykes spilled some of the guest appearances in an interview this week with Forbes, telling the outlet that attendees will include Olivia Rodrigo and Alanis Morissette while Bruce Springsteen and Sheryl Crow are set to figure among those introducing the honorees.

'Sound of young America'

Sykes emphasized the institution's fluid definition of "rock" that is more about spirit than genre. Over the years a number of rappers, pop, R&B and country stars have been brought into the hall's fold. "Rock and roll, like music culture itself, never stays in one place. It's an ever-evolving sound to reflect culture," Sykes said.



Eminem and Snoop Dogg perform onstage at the 2022 MTV VMAs at Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey.

"So you look at these different artists that you're going to see inducted this year-they're different genders, they're different colors, they're different sounds but they have one thing in common, they created the sound of young America." This year's inclusion of Parton, 76, prompted a characteristically humble response from the beloved icon, who initially requested her name be taken out of the running, saying that she was far from a rock star.

But voting had already begun, and the organization explained to Parton, whose prolific body of work includes the classics "Jolene" and "I Will Always Love You," that her body of work was worthy. "When she understood what the true meaning of rock and roll is, then she embraced it and is going to not only attend the ceremony but she's making a rock and roll album

and is going to debut a song, specifically from that record, at the ceremony," Sykes revealed.

Eclectic group

The 2022 group of hall of famers is among the organization's most eclectic in years. Detroit rapper Eminem burst onto the world stage in the late 1990s with darkly comical hits off his major label debut "The Slim Shady LP" including "My Name Is." "The Marshall Mathers LP" cemented his superstar status, becoming one of the best-selling albums of all time and setting up the rapper as one of pop's master provocateurs with a blistering flow.

He joins fellow rappers including Jay-Z, Tupac Shakur, Ice Cube and Grandmaster Flash along with his loyal

producer and mentor Dr Dre in the hall.

Eminem gained the recognition in his first year of eligibility: acts can be inducted 25 years after their first commercial music release. Lionel Richie, the crooner behind enduring love songs "All Night Long" and "Hello," earned the distinction after already scoring the majority of music's top honors. The 73-year-old artist has been inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame as well as designated a Kennedy Center Honoree and a winner of the Gershwin Prize for Popular Song.

Eurythmics-the duo comprised of Annie Lennox and Dave Stewart-earlier this year also entered the Songwriters Hall of Fame. The synthpop innovators behind "Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)" will now take their place among rock's greatest. Duran Duran is set to reunite with their former guitarists Andy Taylor and Warren Cuccurullo. Simon, the singer-songwriter behind the 1970s classic "You're So Vain," will finally be inducted following almost two decades of eligibility.

And power couple Benatar and Giraldo, who dominated the 1980s with hits like "Hit Me With Your Best Shot," will also finally get rock hall recognition for their vast output. Judas Priest along with Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis will also receive awards for musical excellence, while Harry Belafonte and Elizabeth Cotten will be recognized for early influence prizes. The gala will begin at 7:00 pm (0200 GMT Sunday), and will be broadcast on November 19 on HBO. — AFP

Amazon founder, Jay-Z interested in NFL Commanders

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos is interested in purchasing the NFL's Washington Commanders and music industry icon Jay-Z might join him as an investor, according to multiple US media reports. The Washington Post and People magazine, each citing unnamed sources, said Bezos was considering a bid and Jay-Z, whose real name is Shawn Carter, might partner with him. Bezos owns the Washington Post and is executive chairman of Amazon, which is in the first season of a streaming deal for Thursday night NFL games worth a reported \$1 billion.

The reports come after Commanders owners Dan and Tanya Snyder said on Wednesday that they have retained a firm to "consider potential transactions" involving the club. Bezos was not known as a bidder for the most recently sold NFL team, the Denver Broncos, who were purchased from the trust of the late owner Pat Bowlen by a group led by Walmart heir Rob Walton for \$4.65 billion, a record purchase price for any North American sports franchise.

NFL owners ratified the sale in August, making Walton the NFL's richest owner, a mark Bezos would eclipse should he purchase the Commanders. Forbes magazine lists Walton's net worth at \$59.2 billion while Bezos ranks as the world's fourth-richest person at \$113.2 billion. In August, Forbes estimated the Commanders are worth \$5.6 billion. In September, Bezos attended the first NFL game in Amazon's new telecast deal at Kansas City.

Another person the Post reported is interested in the Commanders is Byron Allen, owner of Entertainment Studios, also known as Allen Media Group. Allen, a bidder for the Broncos, would be the first Black majority owner of an NFL team. Dan Snyder is under investigation by the House of Representatives oversight and reform committee, the NFL and attorney generals in Virginia and Washington DC regarding allegations of financial misdeeds. — AFP



Organist Dylan David Shaw plays the Midmer-Losh pipe organ 'Poseidon' - the world's-largest pipe organ at the Boardwalk Hall Auditorium in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The tune of Bach's famous toccata rises in a monumental, vibrant sound in every corner of the auditorium. In Atlantic City, on the east coast of the United States, "the world's largest organ" is coming back to life, thanks to the people behind the scenes. — AFP photos

Renaissance of world's largest pipe organ

You've never felt Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor quite like this: in Atlantic City, the largest organ in the world is coming back to life. The pipe organ in the New Jersey city's Boardwalk Hall was constructed in the 1920s, during the seaside resort area's golden age. But the instrument suffered the wrath of a hurricane in 1944, and wear and tear after years of quasi-abandonment for a while left it unusable. Now, through private donations and careful restoration, it is coming back to ear-pleasing functionality.

From near the stage the antique wooden cabinet looks tiny, but inside it includes a record seven keyboards and rows of keys and pedals that control the pipes, only two-thirds of which are currently in working order. "It's an experience that's hard to really describe," said Dylan David Shaw, a 23-year-old organist. "Every conceivable sound of the orchestra that you can think of is available at your fingertips: strings and woodwinds, orchestral trumpets, flutes," Shaw said. "Anything you can possibly think of: percussions, glockenspiel, even a full grand piano in one of the

side chambers."

He added: "It's a magical experience." The history of the instrument, which was constructed by the Midmer-Losh Organ Company, goes hand in hand with that of Boardwalk Hall itself. The imposing arena facing the ocean has been the site of Miss America competitions, the 1964 Democratic convention, and boxer Mike Tyson fights. The organ was built "to fill this enormous space with music," said organ curator Nathan Bryson, who called the "enormous instrument" the "precursor of surround sound."



Retired electrical engineer Dean Norbeck mends wires for the Midmer-Losh pipe organ 'Poseidon' - the world's-largest organ, at the Boardwalk Hall Auditorium restoration workshop in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

50 percent playable

The pipe organ has a stunning 33,112 pipes, the most in the world, in wooden rooms accessible by a narrow staircase and ladders. By comparison, the famous Grand Organ of Notre Dame in Paris has fewer than 8,000 pipes. When the organist plays "The Star-Spangled Banner," listeners feel almost as if their bodies are vibrating with the notes of the US national anthem. While Atlantic City holds the record for most pipes, just an hour's drive away in Philadelphia stands the "Wanamaker," the world's largest organ in working order that's inside a Macy's department store. Since 2004 a historic organ restoration committee entirely financed through donations has been working to return Atlantic City's organ to its full sonic power.

Behind the stage, Dean Norbeck, a retired electrical engineer, patiently mounts small magnets on a board, which conduct air in the pipes to produce sound. Some repairs are easy to identify, but "sometimes it can be tricky to figure out why the pipes are not playing," Bryson said, and "where the point of failure is along the way." For organist Shaw, the instrument is "over 50 percent playable." The total restoration will cost some \$16 million, Bryson said. So far \$5 million has been raised. — AFP

Egypt cuts the feed to popular 'mahraganat' electro music

With its catchy beats and in-your-face lyrics, Egypt's hugely popular electro "mahraganat" music has found millions of fans in the conservative country - but now officials are pulling the plug. "Never call it mahraganat again," came an edict from Egypt's musicians' union. "Anyone who writes the word mahraganat on his videos will have his name immediately crossed out," union head and former star crooner Mustafa Kamel said.

Relying heavily on computer-generated and synthesized beats, mahraganat - often known as "electro-shaabi" (popular electro) - is a far cry from the pop melodies that normally rule the radio waves across the Arab world. Its blunt lyrics tackle topics including love, power and money, booming across class barriers through nearly every speaker in the country, where more than half the population is under 25 years old.

With its roots in impoverished urban neighborhoods, the genre has often sparked the ire of critics as "low-brow", and social conservatives have long derided it as "uncouth". But its songs have often overtaken traditional media darlings on pop charts, skyrocketing artists from low-income areas to concert venues and luxurious wedding halls, with some playing to sold-out crowds across the Red Sea in Saudi Arabia.

'Preserve public taste'

As part of its latest campaign to "preserve public taste", the musicians' union is splitting singers from the abolished genre into two categories. Those whose voices are judged up to par will be labeled "popular singers", who must perform with a minimum of 12 syndicated musicians.

Rappers instead can perform with just six - "at least a pianist, a bassist, two guitarists, a drummer and a percussionist", Kamel told a press conference last week. The mahraganat singers who fail to impress will be called "vocal performers". They will have to renew their licence every three months, have the culture ministry's censor approve their lyrics, and take an oath not to "use any word or image that violates Egyptian morality", whether at home or abroad.

The syndicate will judge whether the performer has demonstrated "respect for the union, the nation, and the young people" looking up to them, Kamel said. Its war on mahraganat music is not new. In 2020, the union issued a ban on the performances that was unevenly enforced as artists continued to put out hits and sell out venues. When Kamel took over as union chief last month, some hoped the former star lyricist - who gained fame in the 1990s for his romance ballads - would go easier on the much-maligned genre.

'Professional jealousy'

In one online video viewed by tens of thousands of people, popular Egyptian rapper Moscow questioned the decisions. Are artists "really going to wait for someone to tell us how to talk about ourselves and our own lives?" he said. For singers and rappers whose genres were built by those excluded from conservatories and traditional music academies, the requirement to employ a full band of registered musicians was also seen as absurd. In working class neighborhoods in the 2000s, artists huddled in their rooms with barebones equipment and pirated software, later monetizing social media success after the country's 2011 uprising.

Egypt has long been a key hub of Arab music and a cultural powerhouse in the Arab world. Cultural critic Joseph Fahim praised mahraganat's "sense of abandon". The genre has showed a reality of Egyptian society that "neither the government nor the syndicate is willing to admit exists", he wrote online. The battle against the genre is "rooted in class, professional jealousy, and the regime's insatiable desire for controlling public taste and enforcing its bourgeois mores", Fahim said. — AFP

Sports

Forte upsets Cave Rock to win Breeders' Cup Juvenile

14-race event worth \$30 million

WASHINGTON: Forte outraced favored Cave Rock down the stretch for a 1 1/2-length upset victory Friday in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile to become the early 2023 Kentucky Derby favorite. Todd Pletcher-trained Forte charged late and Cave Rock, weakened by an early challenge from 30-1 longshot Hurricane J, won the 1 1/16th-mile race in 1:43.06. "The horse deserves the credit. He raced so good," jockey Irad Ortiz said after his 15th career Cup win. "When it was time to go, as soon as we hit the clear, I hit him once and he started going forward. I knew he was going to be tough to beat."

The \$2 million dirt showdown topped five opening races for two-year-olds in the two-day, 14-race event worth \$30 million at Keeneland in Lexington, Kentucky, as drama builds to Saturday's three-year-olds races, topped by the \$6 million, 1 1/4-mile Breeders' Cup Classic. Runner-up Cave Rock, an oddsmakers' darling at 2-5, and third-place National Treasure (8-1) were trained by Bob Baffert, who owns a record-tying five Juvenile wins. "He ran a gallant race. He got beat by a good horse," Baffert said of Cave Rock. "Forte ran a great race and came and got us."

Famed trainer Baffert returned to Kentucky for the first time since being banned by Churchill Downs in the wake of Medina Spirit's failed drugs test after the 2021 Kentucky Derby. Pletcher won his 13th Breeders Cup race and third in the Juvenile, but wasn't comfortable until 4-1 Forte charged past the Baffert entries in the

final strides. "You know when you get to Bob's horses they are going to find something else," Pletcher said. "I thought we had him but was most happy when he goes by." "Definitely paid off coming here."

Two wins for O'Brien

Irish trainer Aidan O'Brien won his first \$1 million Juvenile Fillies Turf after 14 prior failures, taking his 14th Breeders' Cup victory overall thanks to Irish horse Meditate with Ryan Moore aboard. "This filly, she done that very easy," Moore said. "Lot of talent. She hasn't ran a bad race all year." The 2-1 favorite, with Moore aboard his 10th Breeders' Cup winner, completed the mile in 1:35.38 to win by 2 1/2 lengths over Pleasant Passage with Cairo Consort third. "We wasn't sure about the mile but Ryan gave her a brilliant ride," O'Brien said. "Michael was very confident that this was the race for her. It's incredible, really. I'm so delighted for everyone."

For their second wins of the day, Moore and O'Brien collected their fifth career wins in the Juvenile Turf when Victoria Road captured the mile race by a nose for the Irish horse's fourth win in a row. Mischief Magic charged up the middle to win the 5 1/2-furlong Juvenile Turf Sprint in 1:02.41 to make British trainer Charlie Appleby the first to win four consecutive races. The Godolphin stable horse, which went off at 6-1 with jockey William Buick aboard, outraced runner-up Dramatized to win by a length with Private Creed third.



LEXINGTON: Irad Ortiz Jr. aboard Forte (far left #4) runs to victory in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile during the 2022 Breeders' Cup at Keeneland Race Course on November 04, 2022.— AFP

"Everything just came together for him," Buick said after his sixth Breeders' Cup win. Appleby, a seven-time winner in 12 Breeders' Cup starts, won last year's Turf, Mile and Juvenile Turf before making it four in a row. "Fantastic ride by William," Appleby said. "He got him

to the lead on the back turn there and made a lovely run up the inside." Wonder Wheel took a three-length victory in the \$2 million Juvenile Fillies, completing the 1 1/16-mile race in 1:44.90 ahead of Leave No Trace and Raging Sea.— AFP



PARIS: Spain's Carlos Alcaraz Garfia returns the ball during the men's singles quarter-final tennis match between Spain's Carlos Alcaraz Garfia and Denmark's Holger Rune on day 5 of the ATP World Tour Masters 1000 - Paris Masters (Paris Bercy) - indoor tennis tournament on November 4, 2022.— AFP

Alcaraz retires with injury as Djokovic races into semis

PARIS: World number one Carlos Alcaraz retired from his Paris Masters quarter-final against Holger Rune on Friday with an abdominal injury, while defending champion Novak Djokovic made quick work of Italy's Lorenzo Musetti. Alcaraz, the reigning US Open champion, lost the first set and was trailing 3-1 in a second set tie-break when he decided to stop, having received treatment to his left side at the previous changeover. "It's something wrong on the abdominal," said Alcaraz. "At the end of the set, it was wrong. It was getting wrong and I preferred to retire and take care about it."

The Spanish teenager had been attempting to win a third Masters title of the year after victories in Miami and Madrid. Alcaraz would have been confirmed as the year-end world number one before the ATP Finals in Turin later this month had he lifted the trophy this weekend in the French capital. Instead, his participation at the November 13-20 event is now in doubt. Alcaraz had arrived in Paris struggling with a knee injury, an issue he downplayed earlier in the week.

"Right now I have some test on how it's gonna be before Turin, but right now I'm focused to try to get better in the abdominal and trying to be at 100 per cent in Turin," said Alcaraz. "I cannot stretch. I couldn't serve well. I couldn't hit the forehand well. When I turn the body, I feel it. I feel the abdomen in so many movements." "It's in a zone that I have problems. I have problems before," he added. "Let's see if it's the same problem as I felt before or not."

Rune will face in-form Felix Auger-Aliassime for a

place in Sunday's final. The 19-year-old Dane lost to Auger-Aliassime in the final in Basel last weekend. In the last match of the evening, Stefanos Tsitsipas eliminated American Tommy Paul, the American who dumped Rafael Nadal out, 6-2, 6-4. "It was a very good match today, in terms of level and intensity, from start to finish," said the Greek world number five who will face titleholder Novak Djokovic in the semi-finals.

Tsitsipas dominated the first set. The second went with serve until 5-4 when the Greek, needing one game to take the match, broke to love. Djokovic charged into the last four with a 6-0, 6-3 demolition of the 20-year-old Musetti. Musetti, who lifted the trophy in Naples last month, won just eight points as Djokovic motored through the first set in 24 minutes.

The 21-time Grand Slam champion, gunning for a record-extending seventh Bercy title, dropped serve early in the second set but swiftly recovered with successive breaks. "The tactic was to be very aggressive, to deny him time," said Djokovic. "It worked well." Earlier, Auger-Aliassime continued his quest for a fourth title in as many weeks by beating Frances Tiafoe 6-1, 6-4 to stretch his winning run to 16 matches. The 22-year-old Canadian also won in Antwerp and Florence last month. No man has won four tournaments in four weeks since Ivan Lendl in 1981, on his way to winning five in a row.

Having raced through the opening set against the 21st-ranked Tiafoe, Auger-Aliassime needed six match points to finally see off the American and reach his second Masters semi-final. The eighth-seeded Auger-Aliassime has enjoyed a breakout season. His 56 wins are third most on the ATP Tour this year, while only Alcaraz has bettered his four singles titles. "I have felt great not only this week but in the last few weeks," said Auger-Aliassime. "Sixteen wins in a row is special. I have an opportunity to win again tomorrow. I'll try to seize it, but definitely it's been an amazing period."— AFP

Will Gordon, who matched the lowest round of his career with a 62 on Thursday for the 18-hole lead, shot 67 to share second with countryman Sam Ryder on 129, one stroke ahead of American Patton Kizzire with Swede David Lingmerth fifth on 131. World number 59 Henley won his first PGA title at the 2013 Sony Open in Hawaii, took the 2014 Honda Classic and captured the most recent of his three career tour crowns at the 2017 Houston Open.

In January, Henley challenged for another Hawaii victory but lost in a playoff to Japan's Hideki Matsuyama. Henley, who began on the back nine, ran off three birdies in a row starting at the 11th hole, added others at the 17th and third and then ran off three in a row again at the par-4 sixth, par-5 seventh and par-3 eighth holes. "Definitely things were going my way," Henley said. "A lot of my lag putts today and some of my chips weren't great, but I ended up making the putt and keeping the round going in a great direction."

Henley grabs PGA Mexico lead with back-to-back 63s

MEXICO CITY: Russell Henley, chasing his first PGA title since 2017, fired a second consecutive eight-under par 63 to seize a three-stroke lead after Friday's second round of the Mayakoba Championship. The 33-year-old American, who shared the lead for three rounds at last year's US Open before a Sunday collapse, stood on 16-under 126 after 36 holes at El Camaleon in Riviera Maya, Mexico. "I felt great the last two days," Henley said. "Mentally felt confident and believing in what I was doing. Hit a lot of fairways and had some nice par saves that kept my round going. Very happy with where I am."

Hashimoto dethrones Zhang to win world gymnastics title

LIVERPOOL: Japan's Daiki Hashimoto dethroned reigning champion Zhang Boheng to win the men's all-around final at the World Gymnastics Championships in Liverpool on Friday. Two-time Olympic gold medalist Hashimoto tallied 87.198 to reverse the result of last year's final in Kitakyushu and Wednesday's men's team final, when Zhang's China beat Japan to gold. It was the latest chapter in a developing rivalry between the two star gymnasts, who were separated by just 0.017 a year ago. Hashimoto is widely hailed as the successor to Japan great Kohei Uchimura, who won an unprecedented six successive all-around titles between 2009 and 2015.

The 21-year-old, who won the all-around title and the horizontal bar event at last year's Tokyo Olympics, hit the front on the second rotation after scoring 14.333 on the pommel, the best of the night on the apparatus. Zhang stayed on his coattails throughout but Hashimoto held firm and a 14.433 score on the high bar was enough to seal the crown. Hashimoto's compatriot Wataru Tanigawa won the battle for bronze, with America's Brody Malone fourth and British home favorite Jake Jarman fifth. Zhang, who scored 86.765, has been on a redemption mission since being overlooked for last year's Tokyo Olympics. The 22-year-old revealed he attempted a less complex routine due to ongoing physical issues.—AFP



LIVERPOOL: Japan's Daiki Hashimoto competes during the Horizontal Bars event of the Men's individual all-around final at the World Gymnastics Championships in Liverpool.— AFP

Henley said tee shots have been crucial to his success. "There are some intimidating tee shots for me and I just am trying to just commit to what I'm doing," Henley said. "Just being in a good head space for those tee shots is a good start." Two-time defending champion Viktor Hovland of Norway, ranked 11th, fired a 69 to share 14th on 134. Second-ranked Scottie Scheffler, the reigning Masters champion who could regain the world number one ranking from Rory McIlroy with a victory, shot 71 to share 29th on 136.

Gordon and Ryder each seek a first PGA triumph. Gordon birdied the second and fourth holes of both the front and back nines. Ryder made seven birdies on the front side, opened the back nine with a bogey and went birdie-bogey at 15 and 16. "I came out and just didn't really miss much on the front, was playing really solid," Ryder said. "Just got a little loose on the back... got a little out of sync there, but I managed it pretty well. I'm pretty happy with the way I got it around."— AFP



TEXAS: Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus celebrates after defeating Jessica Pegula of the United States in their Women's Singles Group Stage match during the 2022 WTA Finals, part of the Hologic WTA Tour on November 04, 2022.— AFP

Sabalenka books WTA Finals semis; Jabeur eliminated

FORT WORTH: Aryna Sabalenka beat Jessica Pegula 6-3, 7-5 on Friday and advanced to the semi-finals of the WTA Finals as second-ranked Tunisian Ons Jabeur was eliminated. Greece's Maria Sakkari, ranked fifth, beat Jabeur 6-2, 6-3 on Friday night to finish unbeaten in round-robin play. Her victory assured Sabalenka of second place in the Nancy Richey Group and a berth in the knockout stages. Seventh-ranked Sabalenka had done her part with the victory over third-ranked Pegula.

With so much on the line, Sabalenka was dialed in from the start. "I'm just happy that I was really focused from the beginning to the end and I was able to finish this match in two sets," she said. Sabalenka, who improved to 4-1 against Pegula, took charge early and took full advantage of four first-set double faults from Pegula. The second set was a more tightly contested affair, Pegula quickly erasing an early break as Sabalenka suddenly found herself struggling on serve.

Despite seven double faults in the second set, Sabalenka managed to keep it close and broke for a 5-3 lead to pile the pressure back on Pegula. Pegula, who secured her spot in the elite season-ending event with her triumph at Guadalajara in October, responded with a service break of her own and leveled the set at 5-5. Sabalenka digging deep to win the last two games and polish it off in two sets. "It's tough but that's tennis," Pegula said. "You have one good week, and then you're right back at it the next. There's a lot of really high highs and low lows."

"You end the year well and then I come here, lose all my matches," added Pegula, who noted the number of her defeats this week in Fort Worth was the same as she'd endured in "like three months." Jabeur, a finalist at Wimbledon and the US Open this year, could have still sneaked into the semis with a straight-sets win over Sakkari. But she didn't get a look in as a "fearless" Sakkari wrapped up a victory in just 69 minutes. As group winner, Sakkari guaranteed she won't have to take on number one ranked Iga Swiatek in the semi-finals.

Instead she'll face either Caroline Garcia or Daria Kasatkina, who clash on Saturday with second place in the Tracy Austin Group on the line. "I think I just have to keep doing what I've been doing," Sakkari said in an on-court interview. "I'm trusting myself. I'm just fearless on the court." Sabalenka will have the unenviable task of taking on Swiatek in the semi-finals. The Polish star, whose eight titles this year include the French Open and US Open, has reigned at number one for 30 weeks. Swiatek has won the last four of their five career meetings, including a US Open semi-final in September.— AFP

Sports

Crowds, color and COVID rules as Hong Kong Rugby Sevens returns

Teams converge for one of Asia's biggest sports events

HONG KONG: Fans of the Hong Kong Rugby Sevens shrugged off a three-year pandemic absence as the weekend sporting spectacle kicked off with drinking, fancy dress-and COVID rules. Teams from nations as far-flung as Samoa, Spain and South Africa converged for one of Asia's biggest sports events, which Hong Kong bigwigs hope can prove that normality is on the way for the city. Hong Kong has languished since early 2020 under onerous COVID curbs, some of which are still in place. Spectators have to wear masks and provide a negative COVID test to get in, with overseas visitors normally a large share of the crowd-mostly kept away by rules on new arrivals entering public venues in their first three days.

Fans out in force

But Hong Kong-based fans were out in force, many cradling large jugs of drinks, eventually filling about three-fifths of the stadium. Most were unmasked, despite the best efforts of security guards waving signs telling people to cover up. "There's a big crowd, good experience," said Talaiaisi Toma, a 32-year-old Samoan living in Hong Kong, wearing the colors of the Pacific nation. "I'm super excited to be here," said his friend Sone Loleni, who was draped in the national flag. "I watched on the TV. I wasn't expecting to (ever) be here in the park."

When their team took to the field, for a strong win over New Zealand, the pair whooped, hollered, and waved their flag as the larger Fijian contingent joined them. Among the spectators in fancy dress-a staple feature of the Sevens-were Mario & Luigi impersonators, a man in a red gorilla suit and two people in ketchup-bottle costumes. On the stadium's east stand, a group of South African women were dressed in green wigs and



HONG KONG: Jose Iruleguy of Uruguay (right) is tackled by Jefferson Lee Joseph of France on the second day of the Hong Kong Sevens rugby tournament on November 5, 2022. — AFP

tutus paired with rainbow leg warmers.

"To be honest I was going to boycott it, because of all the silly rules," said one of them, who gave only her first name, Nunki, and said her age was "28 forever". "But my daughter was so excited so I did this for her. Despite my misgivings, I've actually enjoyed it." Another

of the weekend, Salom Yiu and Seb Brien getting it over the line in a 36-14 defeat by New Zealand. Akula Rokolisoa supplied a try and two conversions for the Kiwis. Samoa made sure of top spot in the late match, with a 31-15 win over Hong Kong - Maliko getting four more tries - though the home side made them sweat for it, getting it back to 12-10 in the first half and keeping the tries coming in the second.

Australia beat New Zealand 24-17 in Saturday's final game, eliminating the Kiwis and keeping their own hopes for the cup alive. The action was backdropped by half-empty stands, as the city's strict pandemic rules continue to dampen enthusiasm from local and especially international fans. Spectators have to wear masks and provide a negative Covid test to get into the stadium, and overseas visitors cannot enter any public venues during their first three days in the city.

On the field, crowd favorites Fiji topped their group, dispatching Spain and the USA to ensure progress from Pool C, along with the Eagles, who will play France. In the earlier matches, Great Britain upset South Africa 12-10 in Pool B. South Africa later lost to France, 19-17, but remain in contention for the cup and face Fiji in the quarter-finals. Ireland topped Pool D, winning all of their games, sealed with a 21-17 win over Argentina. They face Australia in the quarter-finals.—AFP

Samoa top 'pool of death' at HK Rugby Sevens

HONG KONG: Samoa dominated the "pool of death" at the Hong Kong Rugby Sevens on Saturday, beating Australia and the hosts to barrel their way into the next round. The Pacific islanders saw off the reigning World Sevens Series champions in a 22-17 thriller, thanks in part to two tries from Vaa Apelu Maliko, a day after stunning New Zealand 24-0.

"That's what we were aiming for, to lead the group," said Samoa coach Brian Lima. "We're feeling good that we made it to the quarter-final." Lima's side will face Argentina in the next round on Sunday, a match that he flagged as a physical clash. "Argentina are always - always - a physical team," he added. "So it's a big game tomorrow, it's not that easy. It's all about the mental." Asked if his side, firmly established as one of the competition's in-form outfits, could win the tournament, he insisted they would take it "one game at a time".

Elsewhere in Pool A, Hong Kong got their first tries



AUCKLAND: New Zealand's Ruby Tui (right) takes a pass from New Zealand's Ayesha Leti-L'iga (center) despite France's Joanna Grisez (center - ground) during the New Zealand 2021 Women's Rugby World Cup semi-final match between New Zealand and France on November 5, 2022. — AFP

England, NZ set up Women's Rugby final showdown

AUCKLAND: England and New Zealand won gripping semi-finals in Auckland on Saturday to set up a women's Rugby World Cup decider between the two top-ranked teams. Top seeds England absorbed a fierce challenge from Canada to prevail 26-19 before the defending champion Black Ferns delighted their Eden Park home crowd with a 25-24 defeat of France. Both matches were decided in the dying moments, bringing to life a tournament that had largely been dominated by mismatches, including four lopsided quarter-finals last week.

New Zealand's win was the most pulsating, only sealed when French fly-half Caroline Drouin missed a relatively simple penalty shot at goal with 30 seconds left on the clock. It was heartbreak for the fourth-ranked French, who have lost all eight semi-finals they have reached. It hands the Black Ferns a chance to clinch a sixth title in the ninth edition of the tournament. They will, however, need to topple two-time champions England, who have become the world's leading team since adopting a professional women's structure in 2019.

The Red Roses are on a 30-match winning streak,

although that was severely challenged by the third-ranked Canucks, who threatened to pull off a major upset. Two tries to winger Abby Dow-including a length-of-the-field score-proved crucial for England, along with the boot of centre Emily Scarratt, who slotted three penalty goals in her 11-point haul. Otherwise, the tournament favorites were matched in all departments by Canada, who trailed 15-12 at halftime and were just four points behind when replacement forward Tyson Beukeboom crossed with 12 minutes remaining.

'Down to the wire'

England captain Sarah Hunter said her team showed character to repel another late Canada assault. "It went right down to the wire and I'm so proud of the way the team dug in at the end," Hunter said. "Canada were relentless, they came and they came and they came." "For the rugby fans out there, that was a great showcase of what the women's game is all about." England raced 12-0 clear when flanker Marlie Packer and Dow scored tries in the opening 15 minutes.

Canada levelled the scores when flanker Karen Paquin and centre Alysha Corrigan crossed, both set up by smart play from scrum-half Justine Pelletier. Scarratt landed penalties either side of the interval before the game's most decisive moment. A long spell of Canadian attack ended when the English claimed possession and swept 100 metres downfield from their own try-line, ending with Dow's second try.—AFP

in the group said she had kept her booze-filled plastic cup to her mouth all day, with eating and drinking being one of the only times masks are not strictly required. As she spoke, the Hong Kong team ambled along the pitch, headed for an extremely tough match-up with reigning series champions Australia.

Nets win without Irving; Bucks keep rolling

LOS ANGELES: The Brooklyn Nets shook off controversy and eased to a 128-86 NBA victory over the Washington Wizards on Friday in their first game since star guard Kyrie Irving was suspended. Kevin Durant came up just shy of a triple double, delivering 28 points, nine rebounds and 11 assists. Nic Claxton added 18 points for the Nets, who notched just their third victory of a young season that has already seen plenty of turmoil. The Nets sacked head coach Steve Nash on Tuesday, and suspended Irving for at least five games on Friday-a week after he sparked a firestorm with a social media post featuring a link to a film widely condemned as anti-Semitic.

Hours after the suspension was announced Irving did apologize via Instagram, but the fallout continued Friday as Nike suspended its relationship with him and cancelled the upcoming launch of his Kyrie 8 signature shoe. "Let's put the joy back in basketball," Nets owner Joe Tsai said in a tweet after the victory. Durant certainly did all he could in that direction, shining in his hometown of Washington where the margin of defeat was the largest at home in Wizards history.

Up by 12 at halftime, the Nets roared out of the gate in the third quarter and out-scored the Wizards 59-29 in the second half. "We just continued to move the basketball all night. Everybody touched it, everybody got to the paint and was able to generate some

Marinos grab J-League title

TOKYO: Australian manager Kevin Muscat said it felt "a little bit surreal" after leading Yokohama F Marinos to the J-League title in Japan on Saturday after a nervy end to the season. Marinos lifted the trophy after a 3-1 win away to Vissel Kobe on the final day, clinching the title two points ahead of defending champions Kawasaki Frontale, who beat FC Tokyo 3-2. Muscat follows in the footsteps of current Celtic manager and Australian compatriot Ange Postecoglou, who led Marinos to the title in 2019.

"At the moment it's just a little bit surreal," said former midfield hard-man Muscat, who joined Marinos in summer 2021 when Postecoglou left to take over at Celtic Park. "I'm just really proud. I think if there's an overriding emotion it's pride. Not just the result today but the way we played made me really proud." Marinos squandered several chances to wrap up the

The home crowd were in full voice to back the hosts as they went down 43-0, chanting "Hong Kong!" throughout the game, and booing every Aussie touch. "I'm very happy with the atmosphere," said Robbie McRobbie, chief executive of the Hong Kong Rugby Union (HKRU). "People seem to be enjoying themselves and having a good time. That's what we're all about. "We see ourselves as being one of the milestones on the path to normality. I've got confidence that we're heading in that direction."

Barred from entering

One visitor unimpressed by the pace of Hong Kong's reopening was South African tourist Renier du Plessis. Having arrived in the city a day earlier specifically for the tournament, and unaware of the Covid rules, he was barred from entering the stadium. "We didn't know you have to be here three days before you can enter any parks," said the 38-year-old businessman and Springboks fan, who last visited the tournament in 2019 and had already bought his tickets. "In South Africa we don't wear masks anymore. We don't even know how to do rapid tests. One of the local ladies showed us how to do it," he told reporters on the stadium concourse, before revealing that this was not his first rejection of the day.

"We were refused at Disney World this morning. It's disappointing, the fact that we cannot do anything," he said. "Where am I supposed to be for the next three days? You can only walk the shops for that long, it's going to get boring eventually." McRobbie said the HKRU was aware of nine such knockbacks for recent arrivals and would speak to the customers affected, but added that Hong Kong's COVID rules were "not a secret".—AFP

good offense," Durant said. "That's how we want to play moving forward," added Durant, whose highlights included a wicked crossover dribble that brought Wizards center Daniel Gaffort to the floor in the first quarter.

A change of look didn't change the fortunes of reigning NBA champions Golden State, who fell 114-105 to the Pelicans in New Orleans for a fifth straight defeat. Stephen Curry, Andrew Wiggins, Klay Thompson and Draymond Green all sat out as Warriors coach Steve Kerr made good on his assertion that he was "willing to play anybody" in a bid to turn things around. Youngsters Jonathan Kuminga, Moses Moody, Anthony Lamb and Ty Jerome kept it close, but couldn't get over the hump against a Pelicans team led by Brandon Ingram's 26 points.

The Los Angeles Lakers also lost again as Lauri Markkanen scored 27 points to lead the surprising Utah Jazz to a 130-116 victory. Jordan Clarkson added 20 points and Kelly Olynyk scored 18 for the Jazz, who improved to 7-3. Russell Westbrook had 28 points and six assists off the bench for Los Angeles, who fell to 2-6. LeBron James, who has been battling flu and a sore left foot, had 17 points and 11 rebounds.

Lakers coach Darvin Ham called the game a "huge step backward," pointing to lackluster defense that saw the Jazz score 75 points in the first half. Meanwhile, the Milwaukee Bucks kept rolling, beating the Minnesota Timberwolves 115-102 to improve to 8-0, the best start in franchise history. Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo had his 30th career triple double with 26 points, 14 rebounds and 11 assists and Jrue Holiday scored 29 points for the Bucks, the only unbeaten team remaining.—AFP

title over the final weeks of the season and saw their eight-point lead reduced to just two as Kawasaki kept up the pressure.

Marinos took the lead against Kobe through Elber but the home side, who started with former Barcelona legend Andres Iniesta on the bench, equalized in first-half injury time. Takuma Nishimura edged Marinos back in front in the 53rd minute before Teruhito Nakagawa added another for insurance 20 minutes later. Kawasaki took an early lead against Tokyo but then had goalkeeper Jung Sung-ryong sent off for a wild challenge in the 29th minute.

Kawasaki, who had won the title in four of the previous five seasons, went on to claim the win but it was not enough to catch Marinos. "There's emotion, of course, and that's why the game is so great," said Muscat, who managed Melbourne Victory to two A-League titles in his native Australia. "We've been focusing on creating moments, and today the moment we created also created history. These guys will go down in history as one group that won the trophy for Marinos."—AFP



KOBE: Players from Yokohama F Marinos celebrate after taking Japan's professional J-League football title following their 3-1 victory over Vissel Kobe to put them at the top of the standings on November 5, 2022. — AFP

Sports

Australia's Mabil completes journey from refugee camp to World Cup

Asian football boss urges support, not 'cynicism' for WCup

SYDNEY: Awer Mabil will complete a remarkable journey from a refugee camp to the planet's biggest sporting spectacle when he lines up for Australia at the World Cup, overcoming personal tragedy along the way. The winger's rise from humble beginnings is the stuff dreams are made of and the 27-year-old, who plays in La Liga for Cadiz, has never forgotten where he came from.

"Obviously it was the foundation for me. It gave me a lot of values that I still carry to this day," he told Australian broadcaster SBS of his early life. "One of the main things is humbleness-to always be humble-that's what I learned from being in that environment from that age." Mabil was born in a refugee camp in Kenya after his parents fled conflict in Sudan, surviving on one meal a day as a child and kicking around a ball-usually a sock filled with plastic bags-barefoot to pass the time. "I was born in a hut, a little hut. My hotel room is definitely bigger than the hut, the room we had as a family in that refugee camp," he said.

"For Australia to take us in and resettle us, it gave me and my siblings and my whole family a chance at life. That's what I mean by thanking Australia for that chance of life, that chance of opportunity they allowed my family." After being resettled in Australia in 2006, with the help of his uncle, he developed his football enough to join A-League club Adelaide United, becoming one of their youngest debutants at 17 years and 118 days. In 2015 he moved to Europe with Danish side Midtjylland, playing a part in their title-winning campaign in 2020 and fulfilling a lifelong dream to be in the UEFA Champions League.

Vision

After stints in Portugal and Turkey, Mabil secured a free transfer to Cadiz this year. If his club career has been a touch itinerant, he has been a regular for the Socceroos under coach Graham Arnold and played 29 times for Australia, scoring eight goals. He netted on his debut in 2018, a game remembered for Mabil and childhood friend Thomas Deng, both refugees from South Sudan, making their international debuts in the same match.

Unlike Mabil, injuries derailed defender Deng's Socceroos career, although he was recently called into the Australian camp for September friendlies against New Zealand. Mabil faced another huge challenge in 2019 when his teenage sister was killed in a car accident while he was in Abu Dhabi with the Socceroos at the Asian Cup, leaving him devastated. He was, though, a crucial cog in the Australian side that secured passage to Qatar and a fifth straight World Cup.

Mabil was the hero as he converted a sudden-death penalty against Peru in their inter-continental play-off in June. He called it a thank you to Australia for giving him a home. "He had a dream that one day... he would play at a World Cup and he would represent Australia," Mabil's uncle Peter Kuereng told reporters. "At the age of 11, that's when he had that vision. That dream is now achieved." Australia kick off their World Cup campaign against defending champions France in Group D on November 22 before facing Tunisia and then Denmark. They have only got through the group stage once, in 2006, when they made the last 16.

Boss urges support

Meanwhile, Asia's football chief called for support for the Qatar World Cup on Saturday despite the "deep undercurrents of cynicism" that have marked the build-up to the event. Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa praised Qatar's "extraordinary efforts" in hosting the tournament, and said a successful World Cup is "the need of the hour... in these challenging times". "There are deep undercurrents of cynicism due to a combination of factors," the Asian Football Confederation president said in a statement. "But no other sport has the unique power to bring us all together in a positive spirit of joy, excitement and optimism."

In the countdown to the first World Cup on Arab soil, Qatar has become increasingly frustrated at criticism. Officials point to wide-ranging labor reforms, including a minimum wage and virtual abolition of the exploitative "kafala" system. Last month, Qatar's emir said the country was facing an "unprecedented campaign" of criticism. Labor Minister Ali bin Samikh Al Marri told AFP that some of the Gulf state's critics had "racist motivations".

Sheikh Salman, a member of the royal family in Qatar's neighbor Bahrain, said the AFC "pledges its full support and unwavering commitment" to the host country, a member of the 47-member confederation. "Now more than ever, it is crucial for all of us to wholeheartedly complement their efforts by offering our full support to the tournament," he said. The World Cup, the first major global sporting event with fans since the pandemic, starts on November 20. — AFP



Australia's Awer Mabil

Tomoooh Sports Club delegation in Cairo

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Tomoooh Sports Club delegation left for Cairo, Egypt to participate in the Special Olympics National Games in the Athletics and Bocce events. There will also be a training camp. The delegation has 18 players - 8 in athletics, 7 in Bocce and 3 in Equestrian. Tomoooh chairwoman, National Kuwait Special Olympics director Rihab Buresli said this participation is on the agenda of events outside Kuwait to give "the players the opportunity to compete and gain experience while improving their abilities -all in preparation for the world games which will be held in Berlin next year". She said she has confidence in the Kuwait athletes with mental disabilities. Buresli said the Club provided players with all they need.



France meet familiar foes to start defense

PARIS: France are hoping to heed a warning from history as they kick off their defense of the World Cup trophy in a group which bears a remarkable resemblance to the section in which they started their road to glory four years ago in Russia. Like in 2018, Les Bleus begin their World Cup campaign against Australia and they will also take on Denmark in Group D.

The only difference in Qatar is that Tunisia complete the section instead of Peru, who lost an inter-continental qualifying play-off on penalties to the Socceroos. France come into this World Cup billed as one of the leading contenders to go all the way, but past experience should teach them to be wary. After all, no nation has successfully defended the trophy since Brazil in 1962, and the last time the French went to the tournament as defending champions, they swiftly returned home with their tails between their legs.

Having won the World Cup on home soil in 1998, four years later they went to South Korea as defending European champions and clear favorites to claim another title. Hampered by an injury to Zinedine Zidane, they were stunned by Senegal in their opening game and were eliminated in the group stage without even scoring a goal. A repeat of such a scenario seems improbable for the side coached by Didier Deschamps, who have an attack led by the brilliant Kylian Mbappe and Karim Benzema, the latter fresh



DOHA: People watch an air show at the Corniche in Doha on November 5, 2022, ahead of the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup football tournament. —AFP

from winning the Ballon d'Or.

Throw in Antoine Griezmann, Christopher Nkunku and Ousmane Dembele, and scoring goals should be no issue for Les Bleus, but they have problems elsewhere. Paul Pogba and N'Golo Kante, their first-choice midfielders in 2018, are out injured, and several others have been strug-

almost seems unreal," Andreas Kraul, a sports commentator for broadcaster DR, told AFP. "And from the minute he was back, he has made a difference," Kraul added. At press conferences, coach Kasper Hjulmand has praised Eriksen's contribution to the team. "The Danish national football team is better with than without Christian Eriksen, because his calmness is infectious, so the whole team is better able to make the right decisions," Hjulmand said recently.

'Symbol of hope and joy'

The small country of 5.9 million people has an intimate relationship with their team, but things have changed since Eriksen's collapse. "He's now also a symbol of hope and joy," one supporter, Kasper Thomsen, told AFP. Most agree that his new-found maturity has benefited the side, of which he is one of the veterans - along with captain Simon Kjaer and goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel.

"We see the signs of a relaxation and ease in Christian's game, which is fantastic," coach Hjulmand noted. "He's so composed and calm, and he plays a lot of deep balls left and right, he keeps the game

moving when he needs to, and it's a pleasure to see the way he settles in on the pitch," he added. However, the depth of talent in the rest of the squad also allows the player with 117 caps and 39 goals for Denmark to relax. — AFP



Danish midfielder Christian Eriksen

Addo-Carr scores 5; Australia cruise into League semis

HUDDERSFIELD: Star winger Josh Addo-Carr ran in five tries as reigning champions Australia dispatched Lebanon 48-4 on Friday to cruise into the semi-finals of the Rugby League World Cup. The Kangaroos dominated a Lebanon side featuring several Australian players of Lebanese heritage who ply their trade in the NRL.

Australia will next play the winners of Saturday's quarter-final between New Zealand and Fiji. That semi-final will take place on November 11 at Elland Road in Leeds, with the winners of England v Papua New Guinea taking on the victors of the clash between Tonga and Samoa at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium 24 hours later. "I'm grateful for the five tries. I'm grateful to be on the wing. All I've got to do is catch the ball and put it down," Addo-Carr told BBC.

"I love playing with these boys and this coaching staff. I think we've got something special, we've got a bond like no other and you can see on the field that we're having lots of fun. "I love having fun. I get to do what I love doing and that's playing football. Never in a million years did I think I'd be in the UK playing the sport I love. I don't want it to end." The loss meant that Michael Cheika no longer has to split his loyalties between coaching Lebanon and the Argentina rugby union team.

The Pumas kick off their Autumn Nations Series in a high-profile game against England at Twickenham on Sunday before taking on Wales and Scotland, at least, now, with Cheika's full attention. "Today we got blown away by higher quality at the ruck," said Cheika, who led the Australian rugby union side to the 2015 Rugby World Cup final. "They blew us apart at the ruck in the first half and after that they could do whatever they wanted.

"It was not the performance we wanted but at the same time we showed a lot of spirit and grit to stay in there and play a real physical contest right until the death. We exceeded expectations. "Coming into this game we got a little bit intimidated in the first half, but we got our wits in the second. But obviously Australia have a high amount of quality so I don't think anybody is surprised by the result" Addo-Carr notched up a quickfire hat-trick within 19 minutes in Huddersfield as Lebanon struggled to cope with the sheer early power of the Australians.

Powerful centre Latrell Mitchell then proved too much to handle as he barrelled his way over the line before Nathan Cleary unlocked the door for Cameron Murray to notch Australia's fifth and sixth tries in quick succession to leave it 30-0 at half-time. Addo-Carr nabbed his fourth five minutes into the second period before there was finally some sunshine for the Lebanese as a Mitchell Moses grubber through saw former Kangaroo Josh Mansour tap down after Cameron Munster failed to clear the ball.

The winger, incredibly overlooked for selection for New South Wales in the State of Origin series, touched down for his fifth on the hour mark. Munster cleverly kicking through with no defenders at home. Liam Martin bundled over for Australia's final try as the Kangaroos slightly misfired late on against a dominated Lebanese side in a mistake-ridden final quarter. "We let ourselves with ill-discipline," said Addo-Carr. "I think if we fix that, our best footy is ahead of us. We know we've got a hard game ahead of us next week. We're just loving every moment and this is special to be a part of." — AFP

Eriksen brings calm to Denmark squad after remarkable recovery

COPENHAGEN: Denmark's number 10, Christian Eriksen, will be a quiet but inspirational figure for his team during the World Cup, after his sudden cardiac arrest during a Euro 2020 game traumatized a nation. The Middelfart-born playmaker spent eight months out following his collapse on June 12, 2021. He returned in a Premier League game for Brentford on February 26 this year. A few weeks later, he was back playing for Denmark in a game against the Netherlands. Even though the Danish squad proved their worth without him, reaching the semi-finals of the Euro and easily qualifying for the World Cup, Eriksen's return was warmly welcomed.

"His return to the team less than one year after, it's a little cliché to say but it's a fairytale story which

Haaland late show sends Manchester City on top

Leeds win thriller against Bournemouth • Brighton rock Wolves



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland scores but following a VAR check was found to have been offside, and the goal disallowed, during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Fulham on November 5, 2022. — AFP

LONDON: Erling Haaland fired Manchester City to the top of the Premier League as the champions recovered from Joao Cancelo's dismissal to clinch a last-gasp 2-1 win against Fulham, while Leeds staged a stirring fightback to beat Bournemouth 4-3 on Saturday. Pep Guardiola's side led through Julian Alvarez's first half goal at the Etihad Stadium.

Fulham equalized before the interval when Andreas Pereira converted a penalty awarded for Cancelo's foul on Harry Wilson, with the City left-back sent off much to Guardiola's visible disgust. But Haaland was the hero yet again after missing City's last two matches due to illness and a foot problem.

On as a substitute, Haaland scored a stoppage-time penalty to notch his 23rd goal in 16 competitive City appearances since his close-season move from Borussia Dortmund. City's seventh successive home league win lifted them one point above previous leaders Arsenal, who can go back to the top of the table with a win at

London rivals Chelsea on Sunday.

Alvarez opened the scoring after 17 minutes, racing onto a fine through ball from Ilkay Gundogan and firing in a powerful shot off the underside of the crossbar. But 11 minutes later Cancelo barged Wilson off the ball as the Fulham winger broke through on goal. Darren England brandished a red card and Fulham midfielder Pereira, formerly of City's archrivals Manchester United, sent Ederson the wrong way with his spot-kick. However, Haaland came on with half an hour left and turned the tide in City's favor. Antonee Robinson's foul on Kevin De Bruyne in the 90th minute conceded a penalty that Norway striker Haaland fired past Bernd Leno.

Crysencio Summerville starred for Leeds as they came back from 3-1 down at Elland Road. Summerville was Leeds' match-winner in last week's shock victory at Liverpool and he followed it up with another crucial strike that clinched successive wins for Jesse Marsch's side. Bournemouth led 2-1 at the break after

James Tavernier and Philip Billing had cancelled out Rodrigo's early penalty. Dominic Solanke put the Cherries further ahead early in the second half. But Sam Greenwood curled home Leeds' second and Liam Cooper headed them level before Summerville slammed home the winner with six minutes remaining.

Brighton beat Wolves 3-2 at Molineux just hours after the struggling hosts appointed Julen Lopetegui as their new manager. Former Real Madrid boss Lopetegui, hired to replace the sacked Bruno Lage, will take charge on November 14, when the Premier League pauses for the World Cup. Interim boss Steve Davis remained in charge against the Seagulls and couldn't stop second bottom Wolves crashing to a fourth defeat in six games. Adam Lallana gave Brighton a 10th-minute lead when he curled in his first goal since March 2021. Goncalo Guedes levelled two minutes later from close-range and Ruben Neves put Wolves ahead with a 35th minute penalty after Lewis Dunk was ruled to have handled.

It was the first time Wolves had scored twice in a Premier League game this season. Japan winger Kaoru Mitoma equalized for Brighton when he nodded in Lallana's deep cross in the 44th minute. Wolves defender Nelson Semedo was sent off five minutes into first-half stoppage-time after hauling down Mitoma. And Mitoma set up Pascal Gross to blast into the roof of the net as Brighton stole the points in the 83rd minute. Bottom-of-the-table Nottingham Forest drew 2-2 with Brentford at the City Ground thanks to a stoppage-time own goal from Mathias Jorgensen.

Morgan Gibbs-White scored his first goal for Forest in the 20th minute, but Brentford equalized in first-half stoppage time after referee Andre Marriner awarded a penalty following a check on the pitch-side monitor. Marriner originally decided that Dean Henderson had not fouled Yoane Wissa but changed his mind and Bryan Mbeumo scored from the spot. Brentford took the lead with 16 minutes left but Gibbs-White's effort went in off Jorgensen in the final seconds. — AFP



MANCHESTER: Fulham's Brazilian striker Carlos Vinicius (L) and Manchester City's Spanish midfielder Rodri vie for the ball during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Fulham at the Etihad Stadium — AFP

Al-Failakawi wins gold medal

KUWAIT: Shooter Othman Al-Failakawi won the gold medal in the 25-meter rapid fire pistol contest during His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Shooting Championship. Al-Failakawi, who represents the Military Sports Union, managed to

win the gold after taking first place, ahead of the shooter Hassan Al-Failakawi of the National Guard, who won second place and the silver medal, and Abdullah Al-Mullah from the National Guard shooters, who came in third and obtained the bronze medal. — KUNA



Othman Al-Failakawi

England cruise into T20 WCup semis as Australia eliminated

SYDNEY: Ben Stokes hit a gutsy unbeaten 42 as England made the Twenty20 World Cup semi-finals on Saturday with a tense four wicket win over Sri Lanka, shattering the hopes of defending champions Australia whose title defense is now over. England needed to win to make the last four from Group 1 alongside already-qualified New Zealand, and they achieved the feat in a nail-biting finish with two balls to spare. If they had lost, Australia would have gone through.

Sri Lanka looked on track for a big total when they reached 80-2 after 10 overs, but the aggressive Pathum Nissanka was out for 67 and they crumbled to 141-8 with Mark Wood taking 3-26. England raced to 75 without loss in reply and looked on track for an easy win. But they collapsed to 111-5 under pressure from the Sri Lankan spin attack and it went to the wire. The victory was not enough to dethrone New Zealand at the top of the table with England settling for second. The fate of Group 1 will be determined on Sunday.

Sri Lanka's defeat ended Australia's stuttering tournament, with their title defence never recovering after losing heavily to New Zealand on the opening day then having to share the points with England due to rain. Sri Lanka, who have not beaten England in a T20 since 2014, won the toss and asked England to field, conscious that all five previous games at the ground during the World Cup had been won by the team batting first.

Nissanka pulled Stokes for an authoritative six off the second ball and two more sixes in the third over, off Wood, signaled their intent. But an aggressive 39-run opening stand came to an end when Kusal Mendis (18) attempted another boundary from Chris Woakes and Liam Livingstone held a catch near the ropes. Nissanka kept the runs flowing but his new partner Dhananjaya de Silva (9) slogged at a slower Sam Curran ball and was caught by Stokes in the deep. They reached 80-2 at the halfway point, but then Livingstone took a simple catch to remove Charith Asalanka (8).

Nissanka brought up his second 50 of the tournament and ninth overall then crunched Stokes for six to pass 1,000 T20 career runs. But tight bowling from spinner Adil Rashid slowed the run-rate and he eventually accounted for Nissanka, who heaved to substitute fielder Chris Jordan at long-on after a 45-ball knock. — AFP



SYDNEY: England's Ben Stokes hits a shot during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2022 cricket match between England and Sri Lanka. — AFP