

4 New 'zombie' drug has youth in its grip



5 Trump, in friendly US south, calls indictment 'ridiculous'



8 Argentina uses \$775m Qatar loan to repay IMF



16 Clinical Japan, slick Spain surge into quarterfinals



Kuwait rejects Lebanon minister's 'stroke of a pen' funding comment

Kuwait urges citizens in Lebanon to keep low profile amid 'disturbances'



BEIRUT: Protesters brandish flags and placards depicting the victims of the 2020 Beirut port blast during a march near the capital's harbor on Aug 4, 2023, marking the third anniversary of the deadly explosion. — AFP

KUWAIT: Kuwait strongly condemns recent statements by Lebanon's Minister of Economy and Trade Amin Salam regarding its foreign aid policy. Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said in a statement on Saturday. Salam had made an appeal to Kuwait on the anniversary of the Beirut blast on Aug 3 to fund the rebuilding of the wheat silos that were destroyed by the explosion.

The silos located in Beirut Port were built in the late 1960s with help from Kuwait through a loan from the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. In his statement on Thursday, Salam was quoted as saying that a decision to release funds from KFAED to rebuild the silos can be taken at Kuwait's foreign ministry "with a stroke of a pen".

"Such statements go against basic political norms and reflect insufficient understanding of the nature of decision making in the state of Kuwait," Sheikh Salem said. "Decision making is based on constitutional and institutional bases, including decisions related to humanitarian grants and loans that Kuwait gives to other countries."

While Kuwait takes pride in its historical record of foreign aid, it categorically rejects any intervention in its internal affairs and decisions, the foreign minister added, urging the Lebanese minister to retract his statement "out of keenness to preserve the

strong relations between the two countries".

On Saturday, Salam said that the term "with a stroke of a pen" is used colloquially in Lebanon to indicate that something can be done quickly and easily. "I did not mean any offense or violations of the constitutional and legal norms and mechanisms in Kuwait and Lebanon," Salam said, hoping that Kuwait accepts his clarification. "The phrases were not intended to offend institutional work, but it may happen sometimes that words are used in a colloquial dialect. This is what happened, the intention was to indicate acceleration and not anything else," he added.

Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati reiterated the strong relations between his country and Kuwait, "which cannot be tainted". Commenting on the controversy following Salam's statements, Mikati said that Lebanon respects "the principle of no interference in the internal affairs of other countries, including Kuwait, where decisions are subject to constitutional controls". Mikati further reiterated that Kuwait "never hesitates to support their brothers in Lebanon".

Also, the Kuwaiti Embassy in Lebanon on Saturday urged Kuwaiti citizens in Lebanon to steer clear of "areas of disturbance", calling on them to keep a low profile. The embassy, in a press release, advised Kuwaitis to stay away from "sites of security

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NEWS IN BRIEF

New visit visa conditions

KUWAIT: Official sources revealed that the interior ministry will issue new conditions regarding visit visas by December to reevaluate the mechanisms for their issuance and applying new mechanisms that prevent visitors from overstaying their permit. Sources said the health insurance fee could reach up to KD 500 and the visit period cannot exceed one month. "Fees for issuing a visit visa could also increase by 100 percent," the sources added. (See Page 4)

Saudi in Ukraine peace push

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia hosted talks on the Ukraine war Saturday in the latest flexing of its diplomatic muscle, a session that Kyiv acknowledged would "not be easy" given the wide range of countries represented. The meeting, which Ukrainian organizers said would include representatives from nearly 40 countries but not Russia, began on Saturday afternoon in the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah, participants said. The session was expected to feature three hours of statements from various delegations before a two-hour closed discussion and dinner. — AFP

US approves pill for PPD

WASHINGTON: The US Food and Drug Administration on Friday approved for the first time a pill to treat postpartum depression, a condition believed to affect around half a million women in the country every year. The antidepressant drug, called zuranolone, is "the first oral medication indicated to treat postpartum depression (PPD) in adults," the FDA said in a statement. — AFP (See Page 6)

Zionists kill 2 Palestinian teenagers

BURQA: Mourners on Saturday attended the funeral of a Palestinian killed by Zionist settlers in the occupied West Bank, after the UN warned of a dramatic spike in such cases. The Palestinian health ministry in a statement late Friday announced the death of Qusai Jamal Maatan, 19, saying he was "shot dead by settlers in the village of Burqa", east of Ramallah.

At the funeral procession, Maatan was wrapped in a black and white keffiyeh head covering and Palestinian flag. Mourners carried his body through the

village streets before his burial, said an AFP journalist at the scene.

Earlier on Friday, soldiers had shot dead another young Palestinian. In a statement, the Palestinian health ministry said 18-year-old Mahmoud Abu Saan was "killed this morning by live bullets from the occupation in Tulkarm". The official Palestinian news agency, Wafa, reported that Abu Saan was "shot in the head by the occupation soldiers at zero distance". At Abu Saan's funeral later Friday, his head was shrouded in the Palestinian flag as his body was paraded through the town's streets ahead of the burial, an AFP photographer said.

Since early last year, the West Bank has seen violence by Zionist settlers against Palestinian communities and

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BURQA: Mourners carry the body of 19-year-old Palestinian Qusai Jamal Maatan during his funeral in this village in the occupied West Bank on Aug 5, 2023. — AFP

Khan jailed after graft conviction

ISLAMABAD: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan was sent to jail for three years Saturday after a court in the capital found him guilty of graft, a move likely to bar him from standing in elections due later this year. Some small, scattered protests by his supporters broke out across the country after police arrested the former international cricket star at his home in the eastern city of Lahore.

Anyone convicted of a criminal offence is disqualified from contesting elections in Pakistan, and parliament is likely to be dissolved in the next two weeks before it completes its term, with a national vote to be held by mid-November or earlier. "His dishonesty has been established beyond doubt," judge Humayun Dilawar wrote in a ruling seen by AFP for a case centered on gifts he received and did not properly declare while he was premier. "He has been found guilty of corrupt practices by hiding the benefits he accrued from national exchequer willfully and intentionally."

In May, Khan was arrested and briefly detained in Islamabad for the same case, sparking

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Imran Khan

Top court suspends Gandhi's conviction

NEW DELHI: India's top court on Friday suspended the defamation conviction of Rahul Gandhi, a decision that could pave the way for the senior opposition politician to return to parliament after his disqualification. Gandhi, 53, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in March in a case that critics have said showed threats to the rule of law in the world's largest democracy.

He was turfed out of the legislature as a result but has stayed out of jail while appealing the case up to

the Supreme Court in New Delhi. A justice there said that the initial trial judge had failed to justify imposing the maximum sentence on Gandhi for his comments, made during a campaign rally four years ago. "The order of conviction needs to be stayed pending final adjudication," Justice B R Gavai said in his ruling.

News of the decision was greeted with jubilation at the headquarters of Gandhi's opposition Congress par-



Rahul Gandhi

ty, where supporters handed out sweets and cheered his triumphant arrival. "I would like to thank the people who helped us and the people who loved and supported us," he told reporters. Gandhi is the scion of India's premier political dynasty and the son, grandson and great-grandson of former prime ministers, beginning with independence leader Jawaharlal Nehru.

His Congress was once the dominant force of Indian politics but has withered in the face of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its nationalist appeals to India's Hindu majority. Gandhi himself has lost two elections to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has cast his chief opponent as a princeling out of touch with the concerns of ordinary Indians. — AFP



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Local

Arabs continue pushing for Middle East free of nuclear weapons: Kuwaiti official

World in 'dire need' for maintaining effectiveness of NPT treaty

VIENNA: The State of Kuwait has affirmed that the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) constitutes a "corner stone" of the world security and disarmament as well as nonproliferation of mass destructions arms.

The renewed declaration was made by Ambassador Talal Al-Fassam, the head of the State of Kuwait delegation participating in the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), scheduled from July 31 to Aug 11, 2023, at the Vienna International Centre in the Austrian capital.

An ideal avenue to rid humanity of nuclear arms' scourge is through ensuring their non-proliferation and total disposal as soon as possible, in line with the sixth term of the treaty, Ambassador Al-Fassam said in his address to the session. Fassam said the State of Kuwait dedicates utter concern for all issues related to disarmament, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and ensuring peaceful usage of nuclear energy -- these issues constitute the three fundamentals of the NPT.

He renewed Kuwait's principled and unwavering stand towards these subjects, its absolute adherence to the relevant international treaties and conventions as well as its advocacy of the necessity to boost and maintain these accords. The State of Kuwait, he continued, has affirmed necessity of attaining the global status of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), facilitating its implementation as soon as possible and that is through its endorsement by the states that have not done so particularly those that possess nuclear arms.

The State of Kuwait, through his statement, affirmed its adherence to the establishment of a Middle East free of nuclear arms and weapons of mass destruction, in line with of Resolution of 1995 convention for revising the NPT and outcomes of the identical conferences held in 2000 and 2010. The 1995 resolutions, upon which the treaty has been indefinitely extended, has to remain effective until attaining its objectives, Ambassador Al-Fassam said, adding responsibility of executing the resolutions hinges on all states parties of the NPT

particularly those that has nuclear arsenals. Also in this respect, he affirmed necessity that the Zionist entity join the NPT and subject all its nuclear installations to the IAEA examination.

Ambassador Al-Fassam expressed regret that the latest two conferences for reviewing the treaty lacked consensus on the final outcome, re-affirming that Arab States continued to push for clearing the Middle East of the nuclear arms and the weapons of mass destruction according to the UN General Assembly Resolution 73/546. The State of Kuwait has applauded the holding of the first session of the conference for establishment of the nuclear-free region in November 2019 under Jordan's chairmanship, the second and third sessions in 2021 and 2022. Fassam affirmed states' right to use nuclear power for peaceful purposes. He also emphasized: "we are in dire need for affirming credibility of the treaty and maintaining its effectiveness," hoping that the sessions would be capped with consensus and resolutions affirming the non-proliferation option for sake of the globe's peace. — KUNA



VIENNA: Ambassador Talal Al-Fassam is seen on screen as he speaks at the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). — KUNA



GENEVA: Kuwaiti Quranic reciter Mishary Al-Afasy is seen outside a United Nations building. — KUNA

Afasy awarded UN ECOSOC membership

GENEVA: Kuwaiti Quranic reciter Mishary Al-Afasy on Thursday joined the Creators Union of Arab (CUA), thus obtaining the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) membership. Afasy, who is the Imam of Kuwait's Grand Mosque, was honored, in recognition of his pioneering path globally as one of the most outstanding dignitaries. Under this membership, the holders can enter the UN HQ, attend meetings, and submit opinions and recommendations in line with specific measures and standards. Speaking to KUNA over the phone, Afasy

expressed his pleasure and pride for being selected to work, as a Kuwaiti person who loves humanitarian action, with the UN non-government organizations and voluntary agencies.

Afasy, who got the union's medal, said this honoring shows his commitment to serving his country and the whole world to achieve required sustainable development, and enhance society's efforts and skills that are in harmony with Kuwait's policy based on supporting peace and positive change. Head of the CUA and Arab media union Ahmed Nour said in a press statement that this honoring is a message of inspiration for future generations that encourages them to achieve achievements and excellence in their fields. He explained that Afasy's contributions have positively affected the lives of millions across the world through his Quran recitation, television and radio programs, chants, activities and charitable tours. — KUNA

Manpower to find solutions for nursing license delays

KUWAIT: The Union of Private Medical Professionals, headed by Dr Essam Al-Saleh, met with Acting Director of the Public Authority of Manpower, Marzouq Al-Otaibi, and the Deputy Director of the Planning and Administrative Development Sector Rabab Al-Osaimi, in the presence of Dr Hisham Yousef Abu Al-Jubain, Secretary General of the Union, Alaa Al-Meshari, member of the Board of Directors, to discuss the most important obstacles and challenges facing the private medical sector.

The President of the Union of Private Medical Professionals, Dr Essam Al-Saleh said: "We dis-

cussed issuing licenses for nurses and laboratory technicians in the private medical sector, which faces obstacles in some governorates as a result of manpower authority policies, especially Hawally Governorate.

"Otaibi promised to find solutions as soon as possible and circulate the decision to equalize job titles recognized by the Ministry of Health to those used in the Public Authority of Manpower," he added.

Dr Al-Saleh pointed out that the meeting also discussed the issue of opening the door for employment of doctors from the Arab Republic of Egypt and other countries whose nationals are currently not allowed to work in the country. The union discussed the issue due to the current need for these doctors in the medical sector.

Director Al-Otaibi said that the issue of contracting with doctors from the State of Egypt is not related to the authority. It is a decision issued by the Council of Ministers and is currently under study.

Pan-Arab talks held to revive Lebanon's banks

BEIRUT: Lebanon is able to have "robust" economic growth if it adopts drastic financial and economic reforms, Kuwait's top banker said last week. To regain investors' confidence and draw upon its unutilized potential, Lebanon needs to adopt a multifaceted approach involving political stability, structural reforms, effective economic policies and institutional governance principles, said Secretary-General of Kuwait Banking Association Hamad Al-Hasawi in his participation in an Arab forum held in Beirut.

The first Arab forum for banks and businessmen in Beirut discussed on Thursday ways to support financing policies and enhance cooperation between banks and businessmen as two main pillars in achieving Arab Economic Development.

This was stated in speeches delivered during the opening of the forum organized by the Union of Arab banks in cooperation with the International Federation of Arab bankers.

The Kuwaiti banker listed Lebanon's requirements as carrying out drastic financial and economic reforms in the banking system, ensuring transparency and economic institutional governance, promoting rule of law, protecting investors' rights, and improving infrastructure and public services.

"If Lebanon strictly puts economic reforms in place, then its economy will be able to achieve robust economic growth, create new jobs and improve the Lebanese people's standards of living in a sustainable way," Hasawi added.

The remarks came before the political spat that ensued after Lebanon's Minister of Economy and

Trade Amin Salam was quoted saying that a decision to release funds from the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development to rebuild the wheat silos destroyed by the 2020 Beirut blast can be taken at Kuwait's foreign ministry "with a stroke of a pen".

The gathering in which Hassawi was participating brought together businessmen and bank officials from across the wider Arab region, allowing the two sectors a viable opportunity to explore greater cooperation. The First Arab Forum for Banks and Businessmen, a collaborative endeavor between the Union of Arab Banks (UAB) and the World Union of Arab Bankers, sheds light on the need for better "investment performance," Salam had told the gathering last week. More cooperation between the public and private sectors has now become "crucial" in providing a business environment that is more conducive to lure greater foreign investments, in addition to bolstering the national economy, he underlined. Financial Resources Committee Chief Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah said the body serves as a "bridge" that links the business and banking sectors together, while also contributing towards funding development projects.

He added that Arab banks play an "important and vital" role in financing the business sectors by seeking to provide financing and services for small, medium and large enterprises.

He went on to highlight the talks as an "important chance" for Lebanon to restore "stability and balance" to its banking sector at a time where Beirut is grappling with economic turmoil, he said.

He said that Lebanon has an important opportunity to rebalance its banking sector, especially that some Arab banks have shown "interest in acquiring small banks that do not suffer from major financial problems", which benefits the Lebanese banking sector by injecting new capital that restores confidence in its reputation both in the Arab world and internationally. — Agencies



CAIRO: Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt Ghanim Al-Ghanim is honored during a visit to the delegation of Kuwait's Scout Association. — KUNA

Chalet, bus fires extinguished over weekend

KUWAIT: Fire crews put out a fire that broke out in a chalet under construction in the Khairan area as well as a bus fire in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh over the weekend, the Kuwait Fire Force announced.

The central operations, on Saturday afternoon, received a report of the chalet fire. "We directed fire brigades from the stations of Khairan and Al-Zour to the site of the communication. Upon the arrival of the teams, they found that the fire started on the second floor in wooden planks and spread to a small part of another inhabited chalet," the KFF explained.

Fire brigades evacuated the chalet and controlled the fire without causing any significant injuries, they said. Fire trucks rushed to put out the flames of a fire that broke out in several buses parked in a parking lot in the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh area. Witnesses said that the fire first broke out in one of the buses before quickly spreading to the rest.



KUWAIT: A chalet under construction is seen in flames after it caught fire on Saturday.

Ambassador lauds Kuwait scouts for pioneering role

CAIRO: Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt and its permanent representative at the Arab League Ghanim Al-Ghanim affirmed Thursday the key role of the Kuwaiti scout movement, which is considered "pioneering in the Arab world."

Ghanim made the statement to KUNA during a visit to the delegation of Kuwait's Scout Association (KSA) partaking in the session of voluntary action development for distinguished leaders that kicked off Wednesday and will run until Monday.

Ghanim lauded the KSA's role in terms of training courses provided to young men and women, and its permanent participation in all Arab and international activities, expressing delight at his presence with a group of scout leaders. On Egyptian-Kuwaiti ties, Ambassador Al-Ghanim affirmed that the relations between the two countries are "fraternal, deep-rooted and distinguished" at the leadership and popular

levels." Egypt's role throughout history is unforgettable," he said, stressing that Egypt has been standing beside Kuwait before and after independence, wishing Egyptians every progress and prosperity.

Chairman of the Arab scout committee and head of KSA Dr Abdullah Al-Tarjii said Ghanim's visit to the Kuwaiti scout delegation shows the government's interest in its children in all activities held outside the country. He added an agreement of cooperation was signed between the KSA and the Arab Scout Organization under the auspices of Ambassador Ghanim that aims to share experience and coordinate to establish events, forums and training workshops for Kuwaiti scouts.

At the end of the visit, Ghanim was awarded the neckerchief by the Secretary General of the Arab Scout Organization and the regional director Amr Hamdi. Ghanim was also given the shield of the Kuwaiti Scout Association. The course for distinguished leaders in the KSA, which is organized by the Arab Scout Movement founded in 1954, includes 10 sessions on many topics related to voluntary work. Of the topics being covered are international scouting policy for adults, standards for its national application and sustainable development goals. — KUNA

Local

Examining Threads: From ascent to decline

Data suggests users not impressed with new platform: Kuwaiti consultant

By Ghadeer Ghloom



Ahmad Ndoom

KUWAIT: We recently witnessed the release of a new app by Meta called Threads. Threads initially experienced unexpected success, with more than 100 million signups. However, we now notice a significant decline in users of the application, which raises questions about the reason for this decline after such a remarkable start. Management Consultant and Trainer Ahmad Ndoom shared his perspective with Kuwait Times to examine and understand the reasons behind Thread's decline.

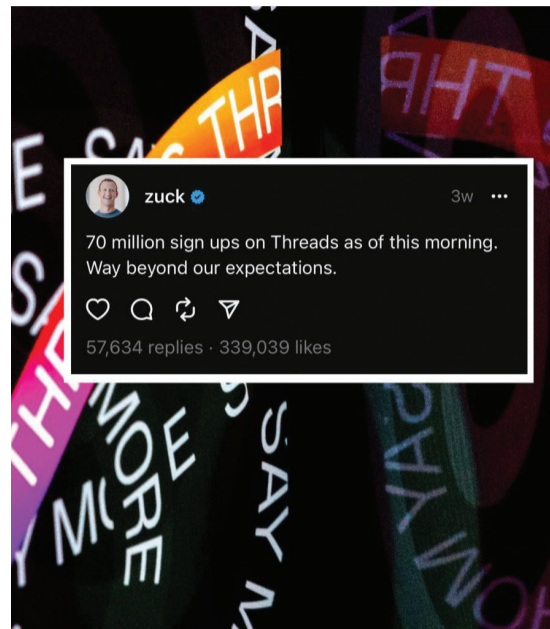
Ndoom started by raising the question: "How come these platforms offer their services for free? The platforms are giving us so much content for free — what do they get from us in return?" He then gives the answer, saying: "It seems like that the biggest battle in today's market is obtaining the customer's attention, and the heroes in these battles are social media platforms. They have our attention for several hours every day, and we cannot seem to get enough of them. Threads is trying to win our attention and pull us away from its direct competitor — Twitter, or X." Ndoom takes the matter a bit further, asking: "Will Threads succeed?"

"It seems that the future does not hold good news for Threads. Meta succeeded in taking active users from its other platform — Instagram — and con-

vincing them to take a look at Threads. However, they did not succeed in providing an answer to 'why?' They did not have enough reasons for the platform to exist. Each platform needs to have an edge; needs to provide a reason why you use it. The 'why' needs to be a special feature, and it seems like Threads still does not have this. Unless Meta comes up with a new feature that is not available on any other platform, it will remain a tough challenge to keep people excited about it," Ndoom said.

Ndoom supported his hypothesis by explaining through evidence and data. He began by highlighting the importance of attracting attention, which is the key for any platform's success, as mentioned earlier. "In terms of attention, there are two numbers that are important. First, the number of daily active users, and second is how much time an average user spends on the platform. Acquiring the first million users is the hardest, because these platforms have a snowball pattern of growth. For new platforms, it is necessary to provide a new feature that allows users to communicate and share content in a way that is not available on other platforms," he pointed out.

Moreover, Ndoom distinguishes between two types of social media users — Curious users and real users. "In the user acquisition battle, Threads seemed to win, and win big. In less than a week, Threads acquired more than 100 million users, even though it did not offer any new features. Yet, the reason for its success was not organic, and by organic, I mean it did not succeed because it offered something new. It succeeded because of the fame of its sister companies (Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp)," he said. "Meta was very smart, making it extremely easy



for Instagram users to create an account on Threads. However, the amount of time a user spends on Thread went down from 23 minutes to 6 minutes, and the number of daily active users also went down from 49 million to 23.6 million, according to Similarweb, a traffic analysis firm. This is a bad indication, and shows that users are not necessarily impressed with this new platform. There was an interest in it because people were curious. But after using it for a couple of days, people stopped using it and went back to the platforms they were on before," Ndoom noted.

Boarding schools: An option to make students stand out

By Zaid Aboobacker

KUWAIT: Many students think about moving abroad for university, but very few are aware of the options for spending their senior years of high school abroad. High school students are venturing abroad to study in different countries. This journey allows them to break away from familiar surroundings and explore diverse cultures, academic environments and new opportunities. From traditional boarding schools to unconventional learning programs and student exchange initiatives, high school students have various opportunities to immerse themselves in global education.

Moving to a different country and studying in a boarding school during your high school years will definitely make you stand out in your university applications later. You can find various possibilities to study abroad in your final years of high school by conducting a quick Google search. Most of these schools offer boarding facilities and even financial support, if needed!

Many high schools offering boarding facilities adhere to the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP) curriculum. With a reputation for promoting intercultural understanding, the IBDP curriculum prepares students to be global-

49 people arrested on multiple charges in 2 days: MoI

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior has announced multiple arrests over the weekend on multiple charges, including violating public morals, reckless driving, and forging documents. The total amount of people arrested were 49.

Two people of Asian nationality were caught forging official documents, the interior ministry said. The arrest came as part of the Ministry of Interior's efforts to arrest violators and outlaws, the Criminal Security Sector, represented by the General Directorate of Criminal Investigation - Department of Combating Counterfeiting and Forgery Crimes. The suspects were found to be forging documents, including entry visas, driving licenses, academic certificates, and seals. Officers also arrested three people who violated the Residence and Labor Law.

Inciting immorality

In a separate incident, 10 people were arrested on charges of acts contrary to public morals, or prostitution, in exchange for sums of money. The ministry said the arrests were carried out by the General Department of Criminal Investigation, represented by the Mubarak Al-Kabeer and Hawally teams. The suspects are of different nationalities. This comes in the same week that ministry officers caught 19 people of different nationalities on the similar charges on Thursday. Three people who incited immorality and debauchery on a social networking site were also arrested the same day and referred to the competent authorities for further legal action.

Driving on sidewalk

The interior ministry has also announced that it was taking legal action against the driver of a vehicle who appeared in a video clip circulated on social media. In the video, the driver seemed to have deliberately climbed over the sidewalk

by competent and open-minded individuals. Most residential schools offer the IBDP program, which is a two-year final year program for high school students, offered for mostly 15- to 17-year-olds, after which the student can apply for university. The IBDP is one of the best high school diplomas for university applications, particularly US universities including the Ivy League.

Some schools like UWC Adriatic and UWC Mostar have an open campus, which means facilities such as the dorms, labs and classes are spread across town, which enables students to integrate with the local community in Italy and Bosnia faster. Many of these schools often offer unique education systems like TGS (Think Global School), which makes students travel to four different countries and live with the local community for projects and studies based on their subjects of choice.

Student exchange programs are another way of experiencing life abroad, though this mostly lasts a year and you have to return and complete the rest of your high school years before going to college. It is best for young students to start building their profile/application early. A student's profile will be heavily influenced by your grades, extracurricular activities, internships, starting initiatives and volunteer work. Some schools, like UWC and TGS, focus more on character than grades, but they do take grades into account — just not as seriously as you might expect.

Also, do make sure that the school you join has a recognized diploma, so you do not have any trouble going to your desired university.



in violation of traffic laws and collided with another vehicle. A case was registered regarding the incident and several citations were issued against him. The vehicle was seized and held in the traffic booking garage.

The ministry has also nabbed a fresh batch of subsidized diesel thieves after raids carried out by Jahra and Ahmadi investigation teams.

The ministry said 28 people of Asian nationalities have been brought to justice. The raids as part of continuous efforts of the criminal security sector represented by the General Directorate of Criminal Investigation for Governorates Affairs. The suspects were caught selling state-subsidized diesel at a price lower than that at gas stations. The arrests were made in the Mina Abdullah areas of Ahmadi Governorate and Saad Al-Abdullah area of Jahra Governorate.

Drugs, alcohol

Finally, the ministry announced that six people were arrested in the areas of Subahiya, Salmiya and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh with a large amount of heroin and shabu and 100 bottles of homemade alcohol.

Four of the suspects are of Asian nationality, while two are Arabs, said the ministry. The suspects were caught selling and distributing narcotic and intoxicating substances in the areas of Sabahiya, Salmiya and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. Suspects in all cases are being referred to the competent authorities and for further legal action.

In my view

End of my wonderful journey as an intern at Kuwait Times

By Munirah Al-Fayez

My journey with Kuwait Times started when I applied online and received a phone call from a girl named Ghadeer telling me to come to Kuwait Times for an interview, which made me feel very excited. On the day of the interview, I was a little nervous, but I would say that I was calm overall. After a short drive, I arrived and was led up to the interview room. I must admit that the first thing I thought when I entered the room was "wow, this place is very well decorated!"

To be honest, I started forgetting about my nerves as I looked at the decor and the little knickknacks. Ghadeer was also very nice and her smile lit up the room. She asked me some questions, gave me some information and answered my questions. After that, she gave me a tour around the building. I have to say that other companies feel dull, but Kuwait Times felt like home, and it was due to everything from the furniture and interior design to the people working there. I was set to start in the following week.

I tried to prepare at home before my first day by doing research on what a journalist does and how does a journalist write. I tried to brainstorm some topic ideas, which is something that Ghadeer recommended. I went on my first day with a specific topic in mind and interviewed some people I know to see what their opinions and experiences were.

Editors and journalists at Kuwait Times were very helpful and extremely respectful of me and my abilities, which was very comforting for me as an intern on her first day. This made me feel less scared of the workplace and the work environment in the future. The first article I wrote was about things to do in the summer in Kuwait, and so far, the article has been read almost 2,500 times, which is something I am immensely proud of.

Even as the weeks went by, the employees were still very accommodating and enthusiastic to help. I was surprised with the amount of trust they had in me and the result of that was I started trusting myself and believing in myself and my abilities. This made me realize how much the work environment in a company can affect an employee or even an intern. Overall, I would say that my experience was positive from the day of the interview all the way up to now, as I am in my last few days here at Kuwait Times.

I have learned about things that I would like to change in myself, but there is not anything that I wished was different at Kuwait Times. There is a lot that I learned from my experience at Kuwait Times, but there are two main things I learned which are more obvious than the rest.

Firstly, I had the opportunity to discover what my passions are. Since I was given the space and freedom to write about whatever interests me, I am no longer someone who does not know what they are interested in. This is because I noticed that as the weeks went by, I kept writing about art, business and media. This was very cathartic, since I am the kind of person who has done every test on the Internet that "reveals" to you what your true passions are or what the "perfect" job for you is.

Therefore, interning at Kuwait Times was truly a perfect solution, because I was given the time and space to get to know myself and what I am interested in through the topics I chose to write about and through interviewing people who are experts in these fields.

The second thing I learned about myself through my experience interning at Kuwait Times is how to have balance. Knowing how to balance between the number of articles I publish and the quality of articles I publish taught me balance in other areas of my life. Through this experience, I also learned how to have a work/life balance. Knowing how to have balance in general is not easy and is something I have struggled with. Sometimes, as humans, we tend to be perfectionists or maybe find it difficult to accept that we have made a mistake or that we need some time to rest.

However, I have tried my best to remind myself in the past two months that it is OK if I needed some time off or a break from writing, and I believe that I was successful at listening to my own voice and knowing when to slow down.

I would recommend anyone who would like to have some work experience to search for the opportunity that they know is suitable for them. If you do not know what is suitable for you or what you are interested in, I would recommend you intern at Kuwait Times, because you will be given the space and time to write about almost anything.

It is usually the case that when a person is given the space and freedom to write without being told what to write about and without worrying about any kind of success, they usually write about what they are interested in deep down, even if it does not happen in the first few weeks. Here is to a more fulfilling and balanced life — thank you Kuwait Times!

How scorching heat affects your body

In my view



By Abdellatif Sharaa

Hot weather is good because you get more sunlight. When your body is exposed to more sunlight, it produces more vitamin D. Higher vitamin D levels directly correlate to a lower risk of cancer, higher energy levels, stronger bones and many more tangible benefits for your body". This was a statement on a website, but I could not find out who wrote it. It drew my attention to something I was not thinking about, because when the weather is hot, we naturally resort to whatever cools us and stay away from sunlight almost all day long.

Of course, we must be very careful in extreme heat to avoid sunstroke, burns, etc, but we still need some sunlight for a healthy life. Among the things you will gain from spending time in the sun is that you will be in a better mood. "Sunlight signals the body to produce more of the hormone serotonin. Serotonin is not only important for regulating body temperature, sleep and appetite, but also your mood," the statement said.

Talking about "good mood" may be in a reasonable moderate weather, not in temperatures of over 55 degrees Celsius! It said that you are probably more active when your mood is good. Maybe in theory, because I see some people barely moving and in some cases dragging themselves because of the heat. A great benefit of hot weather is that "you become more alert and it improves your memory". Is this not what we all want?

Melatonin is the body's sleep hormone, and with little sunlight, your body produces more melatonin, which makes you feel tired. However, when the sun rises, your melatonin levels decrease, making you feel energetic and alert. Warm weather also lowers your blood pressure. Is this not what we need? I need it for sure!

Cold weather constricts the blood vessels and makes it harder for your heart to pump blood. Warm weather does the opposite. It opens blood vessels and thus reduces the strain on the heart. Yes, let us benefit from sunlight and avoid getting burned by taking precautions to keep the harmful part of it away. I am sure many are aware of things to do in extremely hot conditions, and this is just a reminder — keep enough water close to you and drink plenty to help your body maintain homeostasis. It is advised to avoid being under the sun from around 10 am to 3 pm to avoid burns.

By the way, I saw another statement that said spicy foods actually help you cool down. "Spicy food increases your blood circulation, which in turn gets you sweaty. And as we know, sweating cools you down when the sweat cools down." Weird but true.

So, my dear friends, take heart: all is good, and no matter how scorching the heat is, the cup is always 2/3 full! May Allah bless you all!

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Visit visas could return under new conditions

KUWAIT: Official sources revealed that the Ministry of Interior will issue new conditions regarding family visit visas at the end of this year. Family visas have been suspended for over a year, in implementation of ministerial directives to re-evaluate the mechanisms for their issuance and applying new mechanisms that prevent visitors overstaying their permit. Sources told Kuwait Times they expect the new conditions to be publicized in December.

"The new mechanism is almost ready and will be submitted to the Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah in the coming period," sources said. "It will include granting a special card to the visitor and mandating the visitor gets health insurance, whether they are a son, daughter, or parent of a child older than 16 years old or a parent and their child." Visas won't be issued for a resident's brother or sister, sources said. They added that the health insurance fee could reach up to KD 500 and the visit period can't exceed one month. "Fees for issuing a visit visa could increase by 100 percent from what was applied in the past," sources added.

The new conditions include that the applicant promises that a visitor leaves the country immediately after the end of the visit period. If they do not leave, the resident who applied for their visa will be legally accountable and subjected to financial and administrative punishment, including permanently banning them from applying for a visit visa, sources said.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Civil Service Commission reaffirmed commitment to the policy of replacing foreign employees with Kuwaiti nationals (the Kuwaitization drive) at all government bodies pursuant to resolution 11 (2017) of the civil service council. The speculations circulated on social media networks regarding return to recruitment of non-Kuwaitis at some government bodies are inaccurate, the CSC said in a tweet on Thursday. Since the beginning of the replacement drive, the CSC has pursued the recruitment of nationals at all government bodies as per the set percentages for each career and through registration at the central employment plan, it added.

New 'zombie' drug has got youth in its grip

Drug causes hallucinations, paranoia: Recovered addict

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Recently, a new so-called "zombie" drug is spreading among the youth. The drug, also known as flakka, is a synthetic stimulant drug that belongs to the cathinone class. Kuwait Times spoke with a 27-year-old recovered addict to learn more. "Zombie is considered a cheaper alternative to shabu or heroin. It also has a stronger effect compared to chemical drugs, and it's now widespread not only in Kuwait, but in other Arab countries too," he said.

Regarding its effects, he said flakka gives a sense of excessive euphoria, which makes the user get rid of their fears, anxiety and depression in a short trip. But the problem is that the user under its influence sometimes sees things that do not exist, resulting in false

feelings and hallucinations that people are watching them, which gives a sense of paranoia. It works primarily by affecting certain neurotransmitters in the brain, which leads to having intense feelings.

The recovered addict noted the drug is made in China and is considered a synthetic drug and not a natural one. It then spread from India to the US. "Currently, the drug is one of the reasons for having many young addicts in the US, as a chemical drug may cost \$40, zombie is sold for \$5," he said. He pointed out the zombie drug is chemically related to other substances like bath salts and is designed to mimic the effects of illegal drugs like cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA, which gained notoriety in the early 2010s for their potent and dangerous effects.

The drug can be found in the form of white or pink crystals, resembling small gravel or chunks, and it is typically ingested by snorting, smoking or injecting. However, the drug has been associated with numerous cases of extreme behavior, leading to violent outbursts and self-destructive actions.

In Kuwait, statistics reveal the number of perpetrators of felony offenses related to drugs reached 2,349 males (1,409 Kuwaitis) and 97 females (69 Kuwaitis), while drug abusers among juveniles reached 200 teenagers from 2016 to 2020. Many studies have found drug dealers lure the newer generation and make them fall into the trap of abuse. In Kuwait, 650 people died of drug overdoses in a span of nine years (2012-2020), 400 of which are Kuwaiti citizens.



Visitors read books at the center's library.



The Gulf Arab States Educational Research Center. — KUNA photos

Gulf research center examines green schools, privatization models

KUWAIT: Director of the Gulf Arab States Educational Research Center Dr Mohammad Al-Sharikah said it was "important" to expand the center's activities to allow more room for Gulf specialists and researchers to benefit from the center and its services in a way that enriches the educational research movement regionally.

The statement came during an interview the center's director had with KUNA. He said the center, which is located in Kuwait, aims to contribute to the development of the education movement in its member countries on a scientific basis to ensure it's adequate and turn it into an effective force in the development of human capital and the social and economic development of the region and the Arab world.

Al-Sharikah said the center relies on a scientific approach to evaluate the reality of education systems in member states and find solutions according

to the latest global educational trends. The center also contributes to the formulation of educational policies by providing information based on research. It also conducts studies on educational variables pertaining to its member states.



Dr Mohammad Al-Sharikah

Green schools

Regarding the latest activities and achievements, Al-Sharikah explained: "Work is currently underway at the center to complete a number of important programs and studies, including a program related to green schools to enhance the role of educational systems in confronting climate change and enable them to play a pivotal role in raising awareness of environmental issues among young people."

He pointed out that the center is also working on a study on models of privatization of education, which aims to study the reality of education privatization in the Gulf countries and compare it with successful international models and then produce a guiding model based on a number of good policies and practices.

He explained that these policies will enhance the role of the private sector in the development of education and enable government institutions to govern the allocation of education in a way that ensures the integrity of procedures and processes in order to reach the goals of raising performance and improving the quality of education and its services provided.

Al-Sharikah added that the center is also currently working on developing strategies for teaching and learning English at the primary level, which will enhance the capabilities of teachers and students to acquire it as a second language and achieve the goal of active and enhanced learning in our classrooms.

Al-Sharikah praised the "prominent role played by the center in coordinating the efforts of member states in the field of promoting education, unifying its

goals, developing its curricula, providing the necessary support to them, and seeking to modernize their educational systems in order to achieve the aspirations of their peoples for progress and prosperity."

International conference

The center also monitors educational research worldwide. The center's library includes many books and studies of interest to the educational field, as well as a theater and specialized training halls to help workers in the educational field of different specialties to advance scientifically and culturally.

The center will hold its fourth international conference next year in the presence of a number of international experts and wide Gulf participation, at a time when it is currently developing its partnerships with global, regional and local research bodies to achieve the goal of keeping pace and maximizing the impact of the center's programs and projects at the international, regional and local levels, he added.

It is noteworthy that the Arab States Educational Research Center for the Gulf States is a specialized body in the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States and is based in the State of Kuwait and was established based on a decision issued by the Second General Conference of Ministers of Education in the Gulf States held in Riyadh in 1977. — KUNA



The center's theater.



Men walk into the center and adjacent library.



Stacks of the center's publications are seen in this photo.



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Lost in Tunisia-Libya desert: One migrant's story

Death toll rises to 30 in northern China floods

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MONTGOMERY, US: Former US President and 2024 hopeful Donald Trump arrives to address the Alabama Republican Party in Montgomery, Alabama, on August 4, 2023. — AFP

Trump calls indictment 'ridiculous'

Citing threatening post by ex-president, prosecutors seek protective order

WASHINGTON: Former president Donald Trump appeared before ardent supporters in the deeply conservative southern state of Alabama on Friday, dismissing the latest federal indictment against him a day earlier as an "illegal and unconstitutional travesty."

Trump, who is facing sweeping conspiracy charges over his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, called the indictment "ridiculous." "It's an act of desperation by a failed disgraced crooked Joe Biden and his radical left thugs to preserve their grip on power," Trump told the crowd.

A day after his visit to largely hostile Washington, Trump received a warm reception at the Republican summer dinner in Montgomery, Alabama's state capital. The 77-year-old billionaire won Alabama by landslides in 2016 and 2020, and all six Republicans

the state sends to the House of Representatives in Washington endorsed his re-election bid ahead of the evening engagement.

He is also backed by Alabama's senior senator, lieutenant governor and agriculture commissioner, although the junior senator and the governor have yet to endorse any candidate in the Republican primary. Trump was 39 points ahead of his closest rival, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, in FiveThirtyEight's national polling average on Friday — the kind of lead that has never been surmounted in modern primary contests.

Prosecutors meanwhile have asked a US judge to limit information Donald Trump can publicly discuss regarding the latest indictments against him, citing a threatening post by the ex-president which his campaign defended Saturday as "political speech."

Jack Smith, the special counsel overseeing the charges against Trump for seeking to overturn the 2020 election, filed a motion Friday evening urging a federal judge to impose a protective order regarding discovery evidence to prevent the former president from revealing details about the case. The new development came just hours after Trump defied a judge who had warned him not to discuss the case with any potential witnesses and posted what is being seen as a bald threat on his social media platform.

The former reality TV kingpin and property mogul, estimated by Forbes to be worth \$2.5 billion, has won the backing of more than 80 members of Alabama's House and Senate, dwarfing the roster of five lawmakers backing DeSantis.

"DeSantis is a nice guy, but Donald has been

there," Robert Nail, a resident of the state's largest county, Baldwin, told local news portal AL.com.

"He knows what to do and will hit the ground running. This nonsense with indictments is just background noise." But Trump makes his bid for a historic return to the White House charged with 78 felonies in three separate criminal probes.

He is due to go on trial in New York in March next year over allegations that he misrepresented "hush money" payments to a porn star, and is scheduled to be tried in May over his handling of national security secrets. He was in court on Thursday for a preliminary hearing over his alleged election interference and is expected to soon be charged by state prosecutors over similar allegations in a separate case focused on the southern state of Georgia. — AFP

Ukraine drone attack damages Russian tanker

KYIV, Ukraine: Ukraine carried out a drone strike overnight on a Russian tanker in the Kerch Strait, a day after one of Moscow's ships was hit in the Black Sea, a Ukrainian security source told AFP on Saturday. It was the latest attack around the Black Sea since Moscow exited a deal last month that had protected Ukrainian grain exports despite the conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

"Overnight the (Ukrainian Security Service) SBU blew up the 'SIG', a large oil tanker belonging to the Russian Federation that was transporting fuel for Russian troops," the Ukrainian source said.

The tanker SIG was hit at around 11.20 pm (2020 GMT) on Friday south of the Kerch Strait, Russia's Federal Agency for Sea and Inland Water Transport said. The ship suffered a hole at the waterline in the area of the engine room but is afloat, the agency said. In a video obtained by AFP purporting to show the attack, a vessel is seen approaching a large ship before the connection cuts off.

The Ukrainian source said the "successful special operation", which involved a naval drone and explosives, was carried out jointly with the navy in Ukrainian territorial waters.

The ship was "well-loaded with fuel, so the 'fireworks' could be seen from afar", it added. The oil and chemical tanker is under US sanctions for supplying jet fuel to Russian forces in Syria who are supporting President Bashar Al-Assad.

The Russian foreign ministry condemned the attack on a "civilian vessel, which not only threatened to kill its crew but also posed the risk of a large-scale environmental disaster". The ministry said the crew was not injured and repair works are underway. Traffic on a key bridge across the Kerch Strait linking the Moscow-annexed Crimea peninsula to Russia's mainland resumed early on Saturday after a three-hour halt, according to the Russian highways information centre's Telegram channel.

Crimea has been disrupted by several strikes throughout the war but it has seen more frequent attacks in recent weeks. Russian forces on Saturday downed a drone over the sea near Sevastopol, city governor Mikhail Razvozhayev said. Ukrainian drone strikes on Crimea in July blew up an ammunition depot and damaged the strategic bridge across the Kerch Strait. Tensions have risen on the Black Sea overall since Russia pulled out of an agreement protecting exports via the shipping hub during the conflict. — AFP

Pressure mounts on Niger coup leaders as deadline nears

NIAMEY, Niger: Pressure mounted on Saturday on the leaders of a coup in Niger on the eve of a deadline set by West African regional bloc ECOWAS for the military to relinquish control or face possible armed intervention. Former colonial power France, with which the junta broke military ties shortly after taking power on July 26, said it would "firmly" back whatever course of action the ECOWAS bloc took after the Sunday deadline expired. "The future of Niger and the stability of the entire region are at stake," the office of French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said, after she met Niger's prime minister, Ouhoumoudou Mahamadou, in Paris.

ECOWAS military chiefs of staff have agreed a plan for a possible intervention to respond to the crisis, the latest of several coups to hit Africa's Sahel region since 2020. "All the elements that will go into any eventual intervention have been worked out," ECOWAS commissioner Abdel-Fatau Musah said on

Friday. These included "the resources needed, and including the how and when we are going to deploy the force", he added.

"We want diplomacy to work, and we want this message clearly transmitted to them [the junta] that we are giving them every opportunity to reverse what they have done," Musah said.

Niger has played a key part in Western strategies to combat jihadist insurgencies that have plagued the Sahel since 2012, with France and the United States stationing around 1,500 and 1,000 troops in the country, respectively. Yet anti-French sentiment in the region is on the rise, while Russian activity, often through the Wagner mercenary group, has grown. Russia has warned against armed intervention from outside Niger.

The coup "is an error of judgment that goes totally against the interests of the country", French Armed Forces Minister Sebastien Lecornu told AFP in an interview on Saturday. He noted that Niger, one of the poorest countries in the world, relied heavily on foreign aid that risked being pulled if President Mohamed Bazoum is not reinstated as chief of state.

The junta has warned it will meet force with force. Mali and Burkina Faso, where military juntas have taken power since 2020, have also warned that any regional intervention would be tantamount to a



PARIS: Niger Prime Minister Ouhoumoudou Mahamadou speaks with the press outside the Niger Embassy, in Paris on August 5, 2023, days after coup plotters ousted Niger's President, holding him with his family in his official Niamey residence since July 26. — AFP

"declaration of war" against them. Bazoum, 63, has been held by the coup plotters with his family in his official Niamey residence since July 26.

In a column in The Washington Post on Thursday — his first lengthy statement since his detention — Bazoum said a successful putsch would "have devastating consequences for our country, our region and the entire world". — AFP

India's space mission enters Moon's orbit

NEW DELHI: India's latest space mission entered the Moon's orbit on Saturday ahead of the country's second attempted lunar landing, as its cut-price space program seeks to reach new heights.

The world's most populous nation has a comparatively low-budget aerospace program that is rapidly closing in on the milestones set by global space powers. Only Russia, the United States and China have previously achieved a controlled landing on the lunar surface.

The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) confirmed that Chandrayaan-3, which means "Mooncraft" in Sanskrit, had been "successfully inserted into the lunar orbit", more than three weeks after its launch. If the rest of the current mission goes to plan, the mission will safely touch down near the Moon's little-explored south pole between August 23 and 24.

India's last attempt to do so ended in failure four years ago, when ground control lost contact moments before landing. Developed by ISRO, Chandrayaan-3 includes a lander module named Vikram, which means "valour" in Sanskrit, and a rover named Pragyan, the Sanskrit word for wisdom.

The mission comes with a price tag of \$74.6 million — far smaller than those of other countries, and

a testament to India's frugal space engineering. Experts say India can keep costs low by copying and adapting existing space technology, and thanks to an abundance of highly skilled engineers who earn a fraction of their foreign counterparts' wages.

'A moment of glory'

The Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft has taken much longer to reach the Moon than the manned Apollo missions of the 1960s and 1970s, which arrived in a matter of days. The Indian rocket used is much less powerful than the United States' Saturn V and instead the probe orbited the earth five or six times elliptically to gain speed, before being sent on a month-long lunar trajectory.

If the landing is successful the rover will roll off Vikram and explore the nearby lunar area, gathering images to be sent back to Earth for analysis. The rover has a mission life of one lunar day or 14 Earth days. ISRO chief S. Somanath has said his engineers carefully studied data from the last failed mission and tried their best to fix the glitches.

India's space program has grown considerably in size and momentum since it first sent a probe to orbit the Moon in 2008. In 2014, it became the first Asian nation to put a satellite into orbit around Mars, and three years later, the ISRO launched 104 satellites in a single mission.

The ISRO's Gaganyaan ("Skycraft") program is slated to launch a three-day manned mission into Earth's orbit by next year. India is also working to boost its two percent share of the global commercial space market by sending private payloads into orbit for a fraction of the cost of competitors. — AFP

Dubai hit by heavy rain, dust storms

DUBAI: Dubai was hit by heavy rain, thunder and dust storms on Saturday afternoon with the wet weather set to continue until next week. Residents reported hearing cracks of thunder while dust blanketed parts of the emirate as wind speeds picked up, according to reports. The National Center of Meteorology recorded heavy rainfall across Dubai, including in Al-Barsha, Al-Barari, Emirates Road and Al-Qudra Road. The NCM issued a weather alert for parts of Dubai and Al-Ain, calling on the public that "hazardous weather events are expected".

Further rainfall and high winds were reported in Sharjah later on Saturday afternoon. The glass window of one shop in Sharjah was shattered by the powerful wind, leaving glass strewn on the floor. The powerful gusts caused damage to a number of other properties in the emirate. The unsettled conditions came after Al-Ain was lashed by heavy rain on Friday. Video released by the NCM showed motorists navigating downpours in the UAE's Garden City.

Abu Dhabi Police temporarily lowered the speed limit on the Dubai to Al-Ain Road from 140kph to 120kph and urged motorists to "exercise caution due to the rainy weather".

The NCM, in its latest five-day bulletin, forecast rainfall on Saturday afternoon, Sunday and Monday in eastern parts of the Emirates. The country has experienced unsettled weather in recent days, with high temperatures and humidity coupled with spells of fog and rain. Despite the wet weather, Al-Ain recorded the highest temperature in the country on Friday, reaching 49°C. Temperatures are expected to hover around the mid-40°C in Abu Dhabi over the next five days, but will be slightly lower in Dubai. — AFP

International

Lost in the Tunisia-Libya desert: One migrant's harrowing story

Scores died after Tunisia 'expelled migrants' to its borders

ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TRIPOLI, Libya: Pato looks at the picture on his phone. It shows him with his wife and daughter, all carefree smiles. "That's the last time we were happy," he says, completely traumatized. A few months after the photograph was taken, his life was shattered. A friend showed Pato, a migrant from Cameroon, a picture from the internet of two bodies huddled together on the desert sand.

It was of Pato's wife, 30-year-old Fati Dosso, and their six-year-old daughter Marie.T. The three had become separated on a trek through the desert between Tunisia and Libya on a day in mid-July that changed Pato's life forever.

His real name is Mbengue Nyimbilo Crepin, but his nickname is Pato. After working for seven years at various jobs in Zuwara some 120 kilometers (75 miles) west of Tripoli, Pato, 30, decided to go to Tunisia with his Ivorian wife and child. But unlike the thousands of sub-Saharan migrants who enter Tunisia planning to cross the Mediterranean for a better life in Europe, Pato and Fati just wanted to find a school for Marie.

'They abandoned us'

They were obsessed with giving her a French-language education because "since she was born, she has never been to school", Pato told AFP from an undisclosed location near Tripoli. Other Africans had told him this would be possible in Tunisia, he said. The first time they were intercepted was on July 13, in the Tunisian coastal town of Ben Guerdane. They were sent back into the searing heat of the Libyan desert and later re-entered Tunisia by night without even realizing they had done so.

Pato, Fati and Marie hadn't had water for 24 hours when they came across a woman and asked for some.

She directed them to a mosque, and after just five minutes the Tunisian police arrived. They took them to a police station where "there were a dozen or so other sub-Saharans who'd been picked up", Pato said. "They beat us and searched us, then left us sitting on the sand in the sun" before taking them to another police post "where they hit us and said they'd send us back to Libya". Another group of around 30 sub-Saharans was there too. "They took away our phones and smashed them in front of us, and took our IDs," Pato said. He and his small family were driven in a truck with other Africans back to the border.

"They abandoned us there beside a trench, telling us to cross it and go straight ahead into Libya," he said. "They threatened us with guns."

The weight of grief

In the desert, Pato found he had reached his limit. "I was completely exhausted. We'd been walking for four days with no food or water. I collapsed, and we were all crying."

"My wife asked me to try and get up, to keep going," Pato managed to convince Fati herself to continue, to "try to save the child at least". He stayed behind. "In my head, I was sure I was dead." Two weeks later, the weight of his grief is unbearable.

The picture of the two bodies in the desert has been seen worldwide at a time when human rights groups and the United Nations have denounced Tunisia for "expelling migrants" to its borders, despite its strenuous denials. Media organizations including AFP have also gathered many testimonies on the Libyan side. Pato and family were not among the hundreds of sub-Saharan migrants driven out of the port of Sfax, a main point of departure for illegal migration to Europe.



AL-ASSAH, Libya: Libyan border guard provide water to migrants of African origin who reportedly have been abandoned by Tunisian authorities, following their arrival in an uninhabited area near Al-Assah on the Libya-Tunisia border. - AFP

Those people were hounded out of the city after a Tunisian was stabbed to death in a July 3 altercation with migrants. Pato, his wife and their little girl were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

He only survived after two Sudanese gave him some water. Fati and Marie died of thirst in the vast expanse of desert. They were among 24 bodies humanitarian sources say have been found in the Libyan desert since the beginning of July. Their "image haunts my soul", Pato told AFP. "Every time

I wake I look round to see if they are there. "I've thought several times about killing myself," he said, staring straight ahead. "I regret not being able to get up and keep on going with them. I'd have preferred they found three bodies in the desert."

Pato no longer has family in Cameroon, where he comes from a conflict-ridden area in the south. He has been in touch with HRW and Doctors Without Borders to obtain asylum seeker status, and also for psychological support. — AFP

Pope draws 200,000 to Portugal's shrine

FATIMA, Portugal: Around 200,000 pilgrims flooded the shrine of Fatima in Portugal on Saturday to attend a service held by Pope Francis at one of Catholicism's most revered sites devoted to the Virgin Mary. Worshipers waved and called out "Vival!" as the 86-year-old pontiff, wearing a white cassock, slowly drove past on his popemobile.

He paused several times to have babies brought to him and kissed them on the head. The pope then recited the rosary with 112 sick youths, people with disabilities and prisoners at the chapel built on the spot where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to three shepherd children in 1917, and delivered a speech. In an address to the crowd estimated by local authorities at around 200,000 people, he reinforced calls made many times during his trip to Portugal for an inclusive Church.

"This little chapel where we find ourselves, is like a beautiful image of the Church, welcoming, without doors," he said in improvised remarks. "The Church does not have doors, so that everyone can enter," he added to applause from the crowd. It is the second day in a row that the pope, who is in increasingly fragile health and now uses a wheelchair or walking stick to get around, has not followed his prepared remarks. A Vatican spokesman told AFP that the pope had improv-



FATIMA, Portugal: Pope Francis greets sick young people during the Holy Rosary prayer at the Chapel of Apparitions in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima, in Fatima, on August 5, 2023. — AFP

vised one of his speeches on Friday due to "discomfort of vision", but that in Fatima it had been "a choice".

Francis arrived in Portugal on Wednesday for World Youth Day, a six-day international Catholic jamboree. After the service in Fatima, about 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of Lisbon, he returned by helicopter to the capital, where on Saturday evening he will lead a vigil at the waterfront Parque Tejo.

Church organizers expect one million faithful will attend the vigil at the park that has been built for the occasion on a former landfill site. Fatima draws millions of pilgrims from around the globe. Many pilgrims walk to the town and some complete the final stretch on their knees to demonstrate their devotion. — AFP

US approves pill for postpartum depression

WASHINGTON: The US Food and Drug Administration on Friday approved for the first time a pill to treat postpartum depression, a condition believed to affect around half a million women in the country every year. The antidepressant drug, called zuranolone, is "the first oral medication indicated to treat postpartum depression (PPD) in adults," the FDA said in a statement.

"Until now, treatment for PPD was only available as an IV injection given by a health care provider in certain health care facilities," it added. Dr Asima Ahmad, the chief medical officer at Carrot Fertility, a healthcare company in Menlo Park, California, said that "about one in eight women experience PPD symptoms after a recent live birth, and among those reporting symptoms, 75 percent go untreated."

"These numbers are elevated for minority populations: 81 percent of Black women and 76 percent of Hispanic women said they would have liked to learn more about postpartum mental health before having children, compared to 70 percent of women overall," she said.

"In a time when we are seeing rising maternal mortality rates, and significant racial disparities in maternal outcomes, we need to focus on solutions,

and that includes addressing postpartum depression." The pill, specifically designed for postpartum depression, has been shown to work faster than other antidepressants and is designed to be taken only over a short two-week period.

"Trials of the pill showed its side effects were less severe than other antidepressants currently in use, which can lead to sudden loss of consciousness, weight gain or sexual dysfunction, Ahmad said.

"Both the lower incidence of side effects and the short-term regimen, which could help some feel less stigma around having to use an antidepressant, could potentially improve compliance," she said.

Tiffany Farchione, head of psychiatry in the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, said postpartum depression is "a serious and potentially life-threatening condition in which women experience sadness, guilt, worthlessness — even, in severe cases, thoughts of harming themselves or their child." "Having access to an oral medication will be a beneficial option for many of these women coping with extreme, and sometimes life-threatening, feelings," she said.

The pill will be marketed under the brand name Zurzuvae, and was developed by Massachusetts-based Sage Therapeutics. According to the New York Times, the only other drug approved for postpartum depression is brexanolone, which was approved by the FDA in 2019 but requires a 60-hour intravenous infusion in a hospital, and costs \$34,000. No price has yet been announced for the new oral pill. — AFP

Kuwait rejects Lebanon...

Continued from Page 1

disturbances" in some areas in Lebanon and follow relevant guidelines issued by concerned local authorities. It further asked them not to hesitate to call it in case of emergency.

Mikati commissioned Saturday Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Bou Habib to communicate with Arab brothers to reassure them about the safety of their nationals in Lebanon. In a statement issued by Mikati's media office, the premier followed up with Bou Habib and Minister of Interior Bassam Mawlawi on the developments related to the "warning statements" issued by the embassies of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Germany for their nationals in Lebanon.

It added that available information reached after discussing with the military and security leaders revealed that the "overall security situation in general does not call for concern or panic". It noted that the political and security contacts on addressing the events in Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp have made progress.

Lebanon marked three years since one of history's biggest non-nuclear explosions rocked Beirut with hundreds of protesters marching alongside victims' families Friday to demand long-awaited justice. Nobody has been held to account for the tragedy as political and legal pressures impede the investigation. On Aug 4, 2020, the massive blast at Beirut port destroyed swathes of the Lebanese capital, killing more than 220 people and injuring at least 6,500.

Authorities said the disaster was triggered by a fire in a warehouse where a vast stockpile of ammonium nitrate fertilizer had been haphazardly stored for years. Three years on, the probe is virtually at a standstill, leaving survivors still yearning for answers. Protesters, many of them wearing black and carrying photographs of the victims, marched towards the port shouting slogans including: "We will not forget".

Some protesters waved a Lebanese flag covered in blood-like red paint while others carried an enormous flag covered in a written pledge to keep fighting for justice. The blast struck amid an economic collapse which the World Bank has dubbed one of the worst in recent history and which is widely blamed

on a governing elite accused of corruption and mismanagement. Since its early days, the probe into the explosion has faced a slew of political and legal challenges. In Dec 2020, lead investigator Fadi Sawan charged former prime minister Hassan Diab and three ex-ministers with negligence.

But as political pressure mounted, Sawan was removed from the case. His successor, Tarek Bitar, unsuccessfully asked lawmakers to lift parliamentary immunity for MPs who were formerly cabinet ministers. The powerful Iran-backed Hezbollah group has launched a campaign against Bitar, accusing him of bias and demanding his dismissal. The interior ministry has refused to execute arrest warrants which the lead investigator has issued.

In Dec 2021, Bitar suspended his probe after a barrage of lawsuits, mainly from politicians he had summoned on charges of negligence. But in a surprise move this January, Bitar resumed investigations after a 13-month hiatus, charging eight new suspects including high-level security officials and Lebanon's top prosecutor, Ghassan Oueidat.

Oueidat then charged Bitar with insubordination and "usurping power", and ordered the release of all those detained over the blast. Bitar has refused to step aside, but has not set foot inside Beirut's justice palace for months. "Work (on the investigation) is ongoing," said a legal expert with knowledge of the case, requesting anonymity due to its sensitivity. Bitar is determined to keep his promise to deliver justice for victims' families, the expert added.

French President Emmanuel Macron, told Lebanese: "I am thinking of you." "Lebanon was not alone then, and it isn't alone now. You can count on France," he posted. Washington condemned the long delay in holding those responsible to account. "The lack of progress towards accountability is unacceptable and underscores the need for judicial reform and greater respect for the rule of law in Lebanon," said State Department spokesman Matthew Miller.

On Thursday, 300 individuals and organizations, including Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International, renewed a call for the United Nations to establish a fact-finding mission — a demand Lebanese officials have repeatedly rejected. "If those responsible are not held accountable, it will put the country on a trajectory that allows this kind of crime to be repeated," HRW's Lama Fakih told AFP. — Agencies

Zionists kill 2 Palestinian...

Continued from Page 1

regular raids by Zionist forces. The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War. Excluding annexed east Jerusalem, the territory is home to nearly three million Palestinians and

Khan jailed after graft conviction...

Continued from Page 1

deadly unrest during which supporters of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party poured onto the streets and clashed with police. In the aftermath of his release following three days in custody, PTI has been targeted by a crackdown with thousands of arrests, reports of intimidation and muzzling of the press.

Images of Khan — or even mention of him by name — are prohibited from being broadcast on TV channels, but he remains wildly popular and last month a debut video to his personal TikTok account racked up more than 135 million views and 4.5 million likes within 36 hours. After he was taken away by police Saturday, a video statement Khan made before his arrest was posted to his X account with him calling for his supporters to protest.

"My fellow Pakistanis, they will have arrested me and I'll be in jail by the time this message reaches you. I have just one request and appeal, that you are not to sit silently at home," he said. "This is a war for justice, for your rights, for your freedom... chains don't just fall off, they have to be broken. You must continue peaceful protest until you get your rights."

Khan, 70, has faced a slew of court cases on charges he says are politically motivated since being ousted in a vote of no confidence last year, and was not present when he was sentenced Saturday. The judge also fined him 100,000 rupees (around \$350). Soon after the ruling, police entered his home in Lahore and took him away. "A thief has been arrested today," government spokeswoman Marriyum

around 490,000 Zionists who live in settlements considered illegal under international law.

The UN humanitarian agency OCHA on Friday said it had recorded 591 settler-related "incidents" in the West Bank in the first six months of 2023 resulting in Palestinian casualties, property damage, or both. "That's an average of 99 incidents every month, and a 39-percent-increase compared with the monthly average of the whole of 2022, which is 71," spokesman Jens Laerke told reporters in Geneva. — AFP

Aurangzeb told reporters. "Any negotiations with the thief will be difficult now because he will be in jail."

State TV said Khan had been taken to jail in Attock, a historical fort city around 60 km west of Islamabad. PTI lawyers said they were filing multiple appeals to try and overturn Khan's conviction and secure his release. "This is a very regrettable decision that was made in haste. Justice was not provided to us and the right of defense was not given," said Gohar Khan, a member of his legal team.

Khan's jailing will do little to calm the economic and political unrest that has roiled the nation for the past 18 months. Parliament is likely to be dissolved in the next two weeks before it completes its term, with national elections to be held by mid-November or earlier. "Everyone will ask questions about the credibility of elections in the absence of PTI and Imran Khan and questions will be raised about the credibility of elections in the outside world as well," political analyst Hasan Askari told AFP.

Khan rose to power in 2018 on a wave of popular support, an anti-corruption manifesto, and the backing of the powerful military establishment. When he was ousted in April last year, analysts said it was because he lost the backing of the top generals. In multiple speeches and interviews Khan has highlighted the power the top brass wield behind the scenes — a subject historically considered a red line in Pakistan. The case that has led to his arrest centers on gifts Khan and his wife received while in office. Pakistan newspapers have for months carried lurid stories alleging Khan and his wife received lavish presents worth millions during trips abroad — including luxury watches, jewelry, designer handbags and perfumes. Government officials must declare all gifts, but are allowed to keep those below a certain value or buy them at an officially agreed price. — AFP

International

Death toll rises to 30 in northern China floods

More than 600,000 residents evacuated from Baoding

BEIJING: At least 10 people were killed in floods in a city near Beijing, officials said Saturday, bringing the death toll from recent torrential rains in northern China to at least 30. Officials reported the deaths in Baoding, about 150 kilometers (90 miles) from Beijing, adding that 18 people were missing. Storm Doksuri, a former super typhoon that hit mainland China last Friday, has brought the most severe rains to the region since records began 140 years ago.

By noon Saturday (0400 GMT), more than 600,000 of Baoding's 11.5 million residents had been evacuated from areas deemed to be at risk, officials said. The torrential rain that hit northeast China on Saturday battered the provinces bordering Russia and North Korea. A red alert remains in force in Beijing due to "geological risks" such as landslides linked to the bad weather.

Clean-up operations are ongoing after the overwhelming rainfall, which destroyed infrastructure and flooded entire districts. China has been hit hard by extreme weather in recent months, from record-breaking heatwaves to deadly flooding.

Natural disasters caused 147 deaths or disappearances last month, China said Friday, after the heaviest rains since records began hit the country's capital.

China's Ministry of Emergency Management said 142 of the deaths or disappearances recorded in July were caused by flooding or geological disasters.

Streets became rivers

Dramatic aerial photographs taken by AFP of Zhuozhou on Wednesday showed shopping streets turned into rivers of brown water, while others showed farmland in the surrounding areas completely submerged and floodwater stretching for miles. AFP saw rescuers using boats to ferry instant noodles, bread and drinking water to residents who could not or did not want to leave properties engulfed by water. Millions of people have been hit by extreme weather events and prolonged heatwaves around the globe in recent weeks, events that scientists say are being exacerbated by climate change. Ma Jun, director of the Beijing-based NGO the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, said that while the typhoon had brought the rain, rising ocean temperatures due to climate change were also causing the extreme weather. "China has suffered unprecedented extreme heatwaves since last year... This year, there are record-breaking high temperatures in Northern China," Ma told AFP this week. —AFP



BEIJING: A local resident walks on a broken wall in the aftermath of the flooding at a village following heavy rains in Beijing on August 3, 2023. - AFP

Hun Sen marks birthday with poll victory confirmation

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia's outgoing leader Hun Sen marked his 71st birthday Saturday with official confirmation of his ruling party's landslide win in recent one-sided polls, paving the way for a smooth transfer of power to his eldest son.

Last month's election was widely decried as a sham after the opposition Candlelight Party — the top challenger to the ruling party — was barred from the contest over a technicality.

Hun Sen — who has ruled for nearly four decades — announced days after the polls that he was stepping down as prime minister and passing the baton to Hun Manet. His ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won 120 seats in the 125-member lower house, the National Election Committee said as it released the official results Saturday. Immediately after the announcement, the CPP issued a statement saying it accepted the results, which they said proved Cambodians "support Hun Manet as the successor".

The royalist FUNCINPEC party took the remaining five seats. The election committee also confirmed that four-star general Hun Manet, 45, was elected as an MP, a requirement for him to

become prime minister. The United States, United Nations and the European Union have condemned the election as neither free nor fair.

The official results allow Hun Sen to proceed with his plan to ask the king to appoint Hun Manet as prime minister on Monday so he can form a new government for a parliamentary confidence vote on August 22. The incoming government will usher in a new crop of young ministers — with some taking posts vacated by their fathers.

On Thursday, Hun Sen rejected international criticism of the elections and defended his decision to hand power to his son. He said his handover to Hun Manet — a dynastic succession compared by some critics to North Korea — was being done to maintain peace and avoid "bloodshed" should he die in office. Hun Manet on Saturday posted a picture on social media of his young son handing his father a bouquet of blue and yellow flowers with the message: "Happy birthday to respected and beloved father". The former Khmer Rouge cadre has run Cambodia since 1985, and has effectively eliminated all opposition to his power, with rival parties banned, challengers forced to flee and freedom of expression stifled. He helped modernize a country ravaged by decades of civil war and genocide with roads, mega-malls and substantial Chinese investment.

After stepping down as prime minister, Hun Sen will become president of the Senate early next year and will be acting head of state when the king is overseas. — AFP



NEW DELHI: Street dogs take a nap in front of commuters waiting for their bus at a bus stop in New Delhi on August 4, 2023. — AFP

New Delhi to hide street dogs ahead of G20 summit

NEW DELHI: India's capital will catch, sterilize and hide thousands of stray dogs roaming its streets as part of a campaign to clean up the megacity before it hosts next month's G20 summit. New Delhi's municipal government plans to use nets to trap the canines from dozens of locations including around boutique hotels and some of the city's most impressive monuments and tourist hotspots, such as the 17th century Red Fort.

On Thursday authorities directed city employees to begin rounding up dogs for transport to local animal sterilization centers "due to the G20 summit".

"All stray dogs picked up from these locations shall be kept... for their further care and feeding till the program is over," the order said. The Delhi metropolitan area, home to around 30 million people, has been on an intense beautification drive since India assumed the G20 presidency last year.

Authorities have cleared illegal slums near summit venues and revamped major arterial routes on the city's gridlocked roads ahead of September's summit, which will host leaders of the world's top economies. More than 60,000 stray dogs live on Delhi's streets according to India's Livestock Census of 2012, the most recent available government figures. Sterilization campaigns have been regularly employed by local authorities to keep the canine population in check, though dog packs remain present in parks and residential neighborhoods around the city. "These government people take them away to do sterilization then bring them back again," Mohammad Irfan, a shopkeeper based near the city's Jama Masjid mosque, told AFP.

"They don't have a permanent solution."

Beloved strays

Many of Delhi's strays are beloved by their adopted neighborhoods despite lacking formal owners, with some dogs clothed in special canine jackets to keep warm during the city's harsh winters. But they are also a hazard to humans, with local media regularly reporting on the mauling of young children by aggressive dog packs across the country. In 2018, angry villagers killed 13 stray dogs in Uttar Pradesh state after three children under the age of 12 were mauled to death on the same day.

Roughly 17 million dog bites are reported across India each year and the World Health Organization says that nearly 20,000 people nationwide die of rabies annually. Delhi's relocation plan risked dangerously agitating the dogs, Meet Ashar of the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) told AFP. "They are not used to being handled and picked up with nets and being transported," he said. "The next time they are approached by a human being, perhaps they could react in a defensive manner out of fear." — AFP

Ex-PM Thaksin delays return to Thailand

BANGKOK: Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra said Saturday he had delayed his return to the kingdom next week, as he awaits a breakthrough in a post-election gridlock that could see his family's party lead a coalition government.

The 74-year-old billionaire, who won two elections but was ousted in a 2006 military coup, has been in self-exile for 15 years and long said he wished to return home — despite facing criminal

charges that he says are politically motivated. On Saturday, Thaksin said that he had delayed his return due to a medical appointment. "I would like to postpone my return date to Thailand for not more than two weeks," he said on Twitter, recently rebranded X. His daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who was a prime-minister candidate for the Pheu Thai party that came second in the election, announced last month that her father was due to arrive on August 10.

A bogeyman for Thailand's pro-military and royalist establishment, Thaksin's return has the potential to inflame an already tense political landscape. The kingdom is in political deadlock after the military-dominated Senate blocked the leader of the Move Forward Party (MFP) from becoming prime minister after it won the most parliamentary seats in the May election. — AFP



GURUGRAM, India: Policemen are seen stationed outside a mosque closed for Friday prayer in Gurugram, Haryana State, on August 4, 2023, following sectarian riots. — AFP

Mosques shut after religious riots near Delhi

NEW DELHI: Most mosques were shut for Friday prayers in an important business hub on the outskirts of India's capital after six people were killed in sectarian riots. Police were deployed in large numbers outside several mosques in Gurugram, a satellite city of New Delhi and a key business centre where Nokia, Samsung and other multinationals have their Indian headquarters.

Tensions have been high in the area since Monday when mobs hurled stones at a Hindu religious procession and set cars alight in the predominantly Muslim district of Nuh nearby. An armed mob then attacked a mosque in Gurugram early Tuesday, killing a cleric in apparent retaliation, while several shops and small restaurants were vandalized or torched by mobs chanting Hindu religious slogans.

No major instances of violence have been reported since Tuesday night. Some mosques in Gurugram did allow small groups to assemble for Friday afternoon prayers — the most important of the week for Muslims. But five of the city's main Muslim houses of worship visited by AFP were

shut, with their entries heavily barricaded by police. Officers said there was no order from authorities to shut mosques and that local Muslim leaders had appealed to worshippers to pray at home in view of the tensions. "Police are just ensuring that the security arrangements are proper," senior police officer Varun Kumar Dahiya told reporters.

Around 500,000 Muslims live in Gurugram, which has also been the site of a long-running dispute over access to worship. Municipal authorities have blocked the construction of new mosques after protests by local residents. Muslims have responded by holding prayer services in open areas, which have also been picketed by Hindu hardline groups.

Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014, India has seen numerous outbreaks of violence between majority Hindus and its 200-million-strong Muslim minority. Critics accuse the ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party of marginalizing the Muslim community since coming to power. Religious riots in New Delhi left 53 people dead in 2020.

And at least 1,000 were killed in 2002 during violence in Gujarat, where Modi was serving as chief minister at the time. Most of the victims were Muslims. Tax officials raided the BBC's India office in February after the British broadcaster aired a documentary on Modi's actions during the riots. A probe appointed by India's top court said in 2012 it did not find any evidence of wrongdoing by Modi. — AFP



HONG KONG: This picture taken on March 25, 2019, shows exiled former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra being interviewed by AFP. - AFP

News in Brief

One dead in Polish mine accident

WARSAW: One person died and five were hurt Saturday in a mining accident in the southern Polish town of Ruda Slaska, mining company PGG said. "Following a tremor at a depth of around one kilometer at 6.13 am (0413 GMT) one person died and five others were injured. Their lives are not in danger," said PGG spokesman Tomasz Glogowski. "The deceased victim is a man of 39," he added. Glogowski said a rescue operation ended at 10 am. Seven people have died so far this year in Polish mining accidents, according to the National Office for Mines (WUG). There were 30 fatalities last year in the sector which maintains a key role in Polish energy production. — AFP

Mozambique sets date for October

MAOUTO: Mozambique will hold nationwide elections in October next year, the government of the gas-rich southern African country that has been fighting a prolonged Islamist insurgency has said. Mozambicans will vote for the president, legislature and provincial authorities on October 9, 2024, the presidency said in a statement on Friday evening, adding the decision was taken during a State Council meeting chaired by President Filipe Nyusi. The constitution prevents Nyusi, 64, from seeking a third term but his ruling Frelimo party, which has been in power since independence from Portugal in 1975, is yet to pick a successor. — AFP

Colombian leader's son paroled

BOGOTA: The son of Colombian President Gustavo Petro was paroled on Friday, after he was arrested on money laundering and illicit enrichment charges in a scandal linked to his father's election campaign. Nicolas Petro, the eldest of the leftist president's children, was arrested last week, initially denying the charges but later agreeing to collaborate with authorities. Judge Omar Beltran ordered the release of Petro, 37, but said he would not be allowed to leave the northern city of Barranquilla where he lives and banned him from contacting those involved in the investigation. — AFP

Mexico prosecutor arrested

MEXICO CITY: A senior Mexican public prosecutor accused of trying to cover up the murder of a young woman was arrested Friday on suspicion of obstruction of justice, authorities said. Uriel Carmona, attorney general in the central state of Morelos, was detained in connection with the death of 27-year-old Ariadna Lopez, whose body was found in October. She had gone missing the night before after leaving a restaurant in the capital. Carmona said afterward that the young woman had died of severe alcohol intoxication, denying there had been foul play after a first autopsy. — AFP

Cyberattack on US hospital group

LOS ANGELES: A cyberattack on a US hospital group has forced the closure of urgent care and other critical health services at its facilities across at least four states, officials said Friday. Prospect Medical Holdings, which operates 16 hospitals across California, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, suffered a "data security incident," a spokeswoman said in a statement to AFP. "Upon learning of this, we took our systems offline to protect them and launched an investigation with the help of third-party cybersecurity specialists," she said. — AFP

Brazil row over switch to e-books

SAO PAULO: The Sao Paulo state government decided this week to largely replace textbooks with e-books in high schools, sparking a row in Brazil, where education experts and publishers warned the move could have negative consequences. Starting next year, students aged 14 and over at 5,300 schools across Brazil's most populous state will study on digital media, except for literature classes, state education officials said. The move is part of education reforms by the administration of Governor Tarcisio de Freitas, a leading presidential contender and ally of far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022). — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, AUGUST 6, 2023

OPEC+ committee recommends to keep output policy unchanged

Saudi, Russia extend cuts despite recovering oil prices

VIENNA: A committee of major oil producers recommended Friday to keep the cartel's current output strategy unchanged after heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Russia extended their cuts despite recovering prices.

Oil prices have picked up in recent months due to high demand coupled with tighter supply, sending the price for Brent crude up to \$85 a barrel—its highest level in over three months. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, oil peaked at more than \$130 dollars per barrel.

In a virtual meeting on Friday, the group's Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) "reaffirmed the commitment of its member countries" to the production reduction strategy "which extends to the end of 2024", a press release said. The JMMC also expressed its "appreciation for the kingdom (of Saudi Arabia)'s additional voluntary cut of one million barrels per day (bpd)", which the country had extended until September on Thursday in an effort to prop up prices.

In addition to Riyadh's cut that took effect in July, a further cut of 300,000 bpd for September was announced by Russian deputy prime minister Alexander Novak. For the month of August, Moscow had pledged to cut production by 500,000 bpd. In June, the 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) headed by Riyadh and their 10 allies led by Moscow agreed to reduce output in 2024.

Recently, signs have emerged that supply cuts are starting to have the desired effect despite concerns about the health of the global economy. However, Saudi Arabia is expected to "gradually withdraw the voluntary cut over the coming months" and return to the agreed production level of ten million bpd to avoid "considerable revenue shortfalls... and dampening economic growth," said



The logo of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is seen at its headquarters in Vienna on June 3, 2023. —AFP

Commerzbank analyst Carsten Fritsch.

The next JMMC meeting is set for October 4, according to a statement from the group. The group's next ministerial meeting is scheduled for November

26. The JMMC has no decision-making power but discusses market conditions and makes recommendations, which are then formally discussed and decided at the organization's ministerial meetings. — AFP

US hiring cooler than expected

WASHINGTON: Job growth in the United States was lower than anticipated in July, according to government data released Friday, hovering at the slowest pace since late 2020 in encouraging news for policymakers. The figures suggest that the labor market in the world's biggest economy is cooling although wage gains remain strong, adding to signs that officials can lower inflation without triggering a major recession.

Analysts have been warning of a downturn as the central bank lifted interest rates rapidly to ease demand and rein in cost-of-living pressures, recently bringing rates to the highest level since 2001.

But hiring stayed solid as the United States added 187,000 jobs last month, slightly above the 185,000 figure in June which was revised downward, said the Department of Labor on Friday.

The jobless rate came in at 3.5 percent, a touch below June's 3.6 percent figure as well and remaining at a historically low level. President Joe Biden touted Friday's data as the result of an economic agenda he dubs "Bidenomics." "This follows recent news that our economy continues to grow, while inflation has fallen by nearly two thirds and is at its lowest level in more than two years," Biden said. He added that the administration is lowering costs for families.

Overall, "job gains occurred in health care, social



LOS ANGELES: A "We Are Hiring" sign is posted in front of a restaurant in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

assistance, financial activities, and wholesale trade," said the Labor Department. The labor force participation rate held steady as well.

'Buoyant' wage growth

But average hourly earnings rose 0.4 percent in July, the same pace as the month before, according to Friday's report. Compared with a year ago, earnings were 4.4 percent up, a level that some analysts believe could still be too elevated for the Federal Reserve.

"Wages did not ease as expected, which will be disappointing to policymakers," said Rubeeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics. Despite higher interest rates, consumer

spending has remained resilient, in part supported by salary gains. There have also been concerns that growing wages could feed into inflation. "Reflecting the tightness of the labor market, average hourly earnings continue to rise a buoyant rate," said Nationwide chief economist Kathy Bostjancic.

This is well above the pre-Covid pace of growth between 3.0 percent and 3.5 percent and "not consistent" with the two percent inflation rate sought by Fed policymakers, she added. But EY-Parthenon senior economist Lydia Boussour expects wage growth to eventually fall as hiring eases.

'Gently cooling'

For now, the latest numbers could lift hopes that the Fed soon ends its cycle of rate increases. "The July jobs report painted the picture of a labor market that is gently cooling to a slower and more sustainable pace," said Boussour. She added that downward revisions to prior employment gains and a shorter workweek "point to softer labor market momentum."

The Fed is likely to leave policy unchanged at their next meeting, she said, although the central bank could leave the door open to one additional rate hike before year-end—should the data justify it.

Officials are expected to assess the labor report for August, along with upcoming inflation readings, before making their next rate decision in late September. Farooqi said: "Fed officials will want to see further evidence of easing, in job growth, wages and inflation, to more sustainable levels." — AFP

Amazon, Apple beat earnings forecasts as they polish AI skills

SAN FRANCISCO: Amazon and Apple on Thursday reported earnings that topped market expectations, aiming for even better days ahead with the help of artificial intelligence (AI). "Inside Amazon, every one of our teams is working on building generative AI applications that reinvent and enhance their customers' experience," chief executive Andy Jassy said during an earnings call.

Apple views AI and machine learning as "core fundamental technologies that are integral to virtually every product that we build," company boss Tim Cook told analysts while discussing the iPhone maker's quarterly earnings.

"It's absolutely critical to us," Cook said of AI.

He cited crash detection and other iPhone features as technologies that "wouldn't be possible without AI and machine learning." Crash detection presents a user with a prompt for an emergency call if a handset senses a collision. "We've been doing research across a wide range of AI technologies, including generative AI for years," Cook said.

"We're going to continue investing and innovating and responsibly advancing our products with these technologies," Apple reported modestly higher profits in the recently ended quarter despite another dip in revenues, as a record performance

in services offset lower iPhone sales. Executives spotlighted increased sales in China and several key emerging markets that helped to compensate for declines in the United States where the iPhone sales have ebbed in a saturated smartphone environment. Profits for Apple's third fiscal quarter were \$19.9 billion, up 2.3 percent from the year-ago period. Revenues again declined, this time by 1.4 percent to \$81.8 billion, the third straight quarter with a year-over-year decline.

Bright spots for the tech giant included an "all-time high" in services revenue, comprised of the App store, Apple pay and Apple TV and other subscription services.

AI for all?

Amazon reported a quarterly profit that trounced market expectations, driven by strong sales helped by its annual Prime discount event. The e-commerce giant said it made a profit of \$6.7 billion in the recently ended quarter, eclipsing earnings forecasts. "It was another strong quarter of progress for Amazon," the company's chief executive Andy Jassy said in an earnings release.

The e-commerce colossus boasted of having its "biggest Prime Day event ever" in July, with subscribers to the Amazon service worldwide ordering more than 375 million items. Order delivery speeds in the US were the fastest ever, with Amazon continuing to work on optimizing efficiency and lowering costs at fulfillment centers, according to the company.

Jassy in March laid out a plan to cut 9,000 more jobs from the online retail giant's workforce, follow-



PALMDALE, US: Freight semi trailers are docked at the Amazon warehouse in Palmdale, California, on July 25, 2023. —AFP

ing the 18,000 that were axed in January. Jassy told his workers at the time that the extra layoffs were necessary as the company seeks a way to downsize after years of sustained hiring by the Seattle-based company. "The upturn in Amazon's commerce business is an encouraging sign for the back half of the year," said Insider Intelligence principal analyst Andrew Lipsman.

Revenue taken in by the Amazon Web Services

Argentina to use \$775m Qatar loan to repay IMF

BUENOS AIRES: The Argentine government said Friday it will use a loan from Qatar amounting to \$775 million to make a payment to the International Monetary Fund as it awaits approval of a disbursement from the IMF for \$7.5 billion. The credit operation would allow Qatar to lend Argentina Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), or money that countries reserve in the IMF for the equivalent of \$775 million, said a source at the economy ministry.

"It is the first time in history that Qatar has carried out a credit operation with Argentina," said the source, on condition of anonymity, adding that this will allow the South American country to pay the maturity "without using reserves." The credit was negotiated by Argentine Economy Minister Sergio Massa with the Qatari economic team "in absolute secrecy."

Argentina is seeking to avoid a new drain of dollars from its depressed international reserves. The Qatari loan will be applied Friday to the payment to the IMF on interest that is due. It will then be paid with the disbursement that Argentina expects to receive from the multilateral organization once its executive board ratifies, in mid-August, the approval of the fifth and sixth revisions of the agreement with the country. The loan with the IMF was taken by Argentina under the government of Mauricio Macri as an agreement for \$57 billion. After taking office at the end of 2019, President Alberto Fernandez renounced the pending disbursement tranches and renegotiated it in 2021 as an agreement for \$44 billion. Last Monday, Argentina paid the IMF a maturity of \$2.7 billion with yuan from a currency swap with China and a bridge loan of \$1 billion from the Andean Development Corporation (CAF). Argentina's international reserves include, in addition to dollars, a portion in gold and also other instruments such as the yuan from the swap with China. — AFP



BUENOS AIRES: This handout picture released by the Argentine Ministry of Economy shows Economy Minister and pre-presidential candidate Sergio Massa speaking during a press conference on how Argentina faces the payments to the IMF in Buenos Aires. — AFP

(AWS) cloud computing unit increased to \$22 billion in a year-over-year comparison, but costs climbed as well, resulting in a lower operating income than in the same period in 2022.

"Our AWS growth stabilized as customers started shifting from cost optimization to new workload deployment," Jassy said. "AWS has continued to add to its meaningful leadership position in the cloud with a slew of generative AI releases." —AFP

Business

Drought-hit Panama Canal must 'adapt or die' as water levels drop

A biting drought has seen traffic and income dry up

PANAMA CITY: The Panama Canal, an engineering wonder allowing ships to travel between two oceans, is seeking to adapt to climate change after a biting drought has seen traffic and income dry up.

The canal relies on rainwater to move ships through a series of locks that function like water elevators, raising the vessels up and over the continent between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. However, a water shortage due to low rainfall has forced operators to restrict the number of vessels passing through, which is likely to result in a \$200 million drop in earnings in 2024 compared to this year, canal administrator Ricaurte Vasquez said Thursday. The Pacific warming phenomenon known as El Nino, which can cause drought in some nations and flooding in others, is making the situation worse, meteorologists say. "The big disadvantage that the Panama Canal has as a maritime route, is that we operate with freshwater, while others use seawater," said Vasquez during a presentation to the media.

"We have to find other solutions to remain a relevant route for international trade. If we don't adapt, we are going to die." The 50-mile (80-kilometer) byway moves some six percent of all global maritime commerce, and 2023 revenue is forecast at \$4.9 billion, said Vasquez.

The canal opened in 1914 after a monumental construction project through dense jungles and mountains, with workers suffering tropical diseases, intense heat and rain. Since then, more than a million vessels have transited through the canal, saving them a lengthy journey around the tip of South America.

'Unusually severe' crisis

Meteorologist Alcely Lau told AFP that the country has "observed considerable deficits" in rainfall this year, boosted by El Nino. The drought has forced canal administrators to restrict the waterway to ships with a draft of 13.11 meters (43 feet) - which refers to how deep they sit in the water.

In 2022, an average of 40 ships crossed through the canal a day, a number which has now dropped to 32 to save water. For each ship, 200 million liters of freshwater is used to move it through the locks before being dumped into the sea. "This crisis is unusually severe," said Vasquez, adding that the "significant restrictions" would be in place until September next year.

Due to the draft restrictions, some merchant ships are forced to unload their containers and send the lighter vessel through the canal, while the goods traverse Panama by rail before being reloaded for shipping. If the drought and resulting restrictions continue, Vasquez fears shipping companies will "opt for other routes." This includes the Strait of Magellan - a natural passage at the tip of South America between the mainland and the Tierra del Fuego archipelago. "We think that if we find a solution relatively soon, not necessarily an immediate solution but one customers know is on the way, it should alleviate long-term concern," said Vasquez.

Saltier water going to cities

The lack of rain has also increased the salinity of the lakes and rivers that make up the canal's water-

tions in the morning until shortly before 7 pm (1700 GMT). Airport operator ADP estimated 10,000 passengers on 40 flights were affected. According to Marc Rochet, head of the French Bee and Air Caraïbes airlines using the affected terminal, flights took off with delays between one and three hours - and without luggage that had been checked in. "We didn't have another option, otherwise the whole system would be blocked," he told AFP.

The luggage in the terminal will be transferred to a secure hangar and then put on following flights.

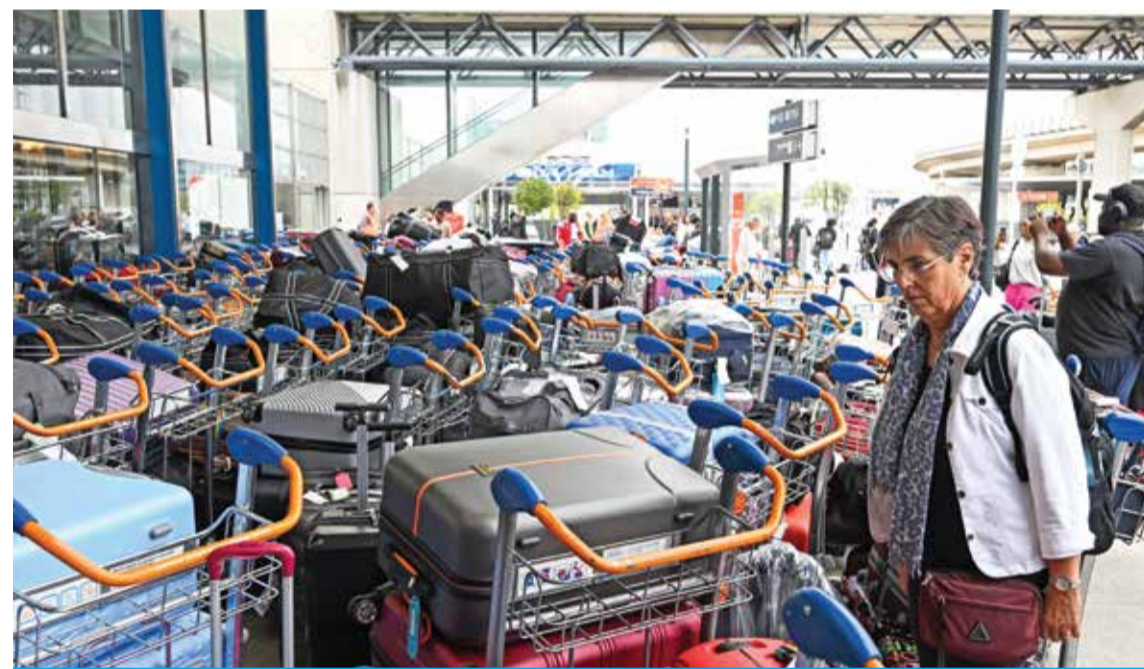
ADP tried to minimize the disruption by having planes use other terminals at Orly or use Paris Charles de Gaulle airport. Junior transport minister Clement Beaune called the situation "unacceptable", coming just weeks after the government made a series of proposals to improve the quality of service ahead of the Olympic Games next year. "This is exactly the type of concrete things that we need to watch," said Beaune. "When one link of the chain breaks you have a really big problem." - AFP

Pandemonium in Paris airport as bag handler breaks

PARIS: With just one year to go before Paris hosts the Olympic Games, one of the city's airports suffered an unprecedented breakdown on Thursday that led to a mountain of luggage piling up and delayed flights. A breakdown in the luggage-sorting equipment at terminal four of Orly airport meant that baggage had to be handled by hand.

That resulted in many flights leaving late and without the luggage of their passengers on board, according to airport operator ADP and airlines. Luggage clogged the entrance of the terminal as travelers were told to leave their tagged bags behind.

The breakdown lasted from the start of opera-



PARIS: A passenger looks on next to baggage carts stacked with luggage outside the entrance of the Orly 4 terminal, after a technical incident at the Paris-Orly Airport, in Orly, south of Paris. — AFP

Egypt ups overnight interest rates by 100 basis points

CAIRO: Egypt's central bank raised overnight interest rates by 100 base points in a bid by the cash-strapped country to cool down surging inflation. In a statement issued late Thursday night, the central bank said the overnight lending rate was raised to 20.25 per cent and the overnight deposit rate increased to 19.75 per cent. The central bank's Monetary Policy Committee's decision to raise interest rates came as a surprise following analysts' estimates predicting no change in rates.

Thursday's night's statement said that the increase was implemented to "contain the inflationary pressures and anchor inflation expectations". Over the

past year, Egypt's central bank has sought to offset rising inflation by raising its main interest rates. The last increase was in March, following one in December. "The MPC judges that inflation rates are likely to peak in the second half of 2023 before beginning a disinflation path towards the CBE's preannounced targets afterwards, supported by the cumulative monetary policy tightening to date," the statement said.

The Arab world's most populous nation witnessed its annual urban inflation rate rise to a record 35.8 per cent in June, continuing an upward trend that started in March of last year on the back of the economic repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war which caused an exodus of foreign currency from the nation's coffers. In order to qualify for funding from the IMF, Egypt has devalued its currency three consecutive times since March 2022 with another devaluation expected to take place before the end of the year. The central bank has been targeting inflation between 5 per cent to 9 per cent by the final quarter of 2023 and 3 per cent to 7 per cent by the end of 2026. - Agencies

a spokeswoman for the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service told AFP on Friday.

The samples tested excluded polar regions. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which uses a different database, has also recorded a similar trend in recent months.

It said the average sea surface temperature record was reached on April 4 this year at 21.06C, overtaking the previous high of 21.01C in March 2016. On August 1, average temperatures were at 21.03C, it said. Oceans have absorbed 90 percent of the excess heat produced by human activity since the dawn of the industrial age, according to scientists. This excess heat continues to accumulate as greenhouse gases - mainly from burning oil, gas and coal - build up in the Earth's atmosphere. Globally, the average ocean temperature

World's oceans set new surface temperature record

PARIS: The world's oceans set a new temperature record this week, raising concerns about knock-on effects on the planet's climate, marine life and coastal communities. The temperature of the oceans' surface rose to 20.96 degrees Celsius (69.7 degrees Fahrenheit) on July 30, according to European Union climate observatory data.

The previous record was 20.95C in March 2016,



PANAMA CITY: Panama's Canal Administrator Ricaurte Vasquez speaks during a press conference at the headquarters of the administration of the Panama Canal in Panama City. — AFP

shed - which also provides water to three cities, including the capital Panama City. "Every time we open the gate that leads to the sea, seawater is mixed with fresh water," said Vasquez.

"We have to keep that level of salt water within a certain range, because the water treatment plants do not have desalination capacity," he added. The

dwindling freshwater cannot be replaced with sea water - as used by the Suez Canal which connects the Mediterranean with the Red Sea - as this would require massive excavations. "Suez was much flatter and it was sand. In our case it is rock and there is a mountain range which is not very high, but it is there and it is a challenge," said Vasquez. - AFP

ADNOC Gas H1 profit declines

ABU DHABI: ADNOC Gas expects robust long-term structured demand growth for natural gas, despite the current lower price environment dragging its first-half profit down. The company, the integrated gas processing unit of ADNOC, reported an annual 12 per cent drop in net profit for the six months to the end of June to \$2.25 billion, it said in a filing to the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange, where its shares are traded. First-half revenue fell to \$10.62 billion from \$13.28 billion a year earlier.

The company said it maintained stable margins in a lower price environment and it is on track to meet its 2023 guidance. The January-June period earnings reflect the "resilience and robustness" of the company's business in the lower price environment compared to the higher prices witnessed in the same period last year, said Ahmed Al-Ebri, chief executive of ADNOC Gas.

"This performance demonstrates the strength of our business, which was also supported by selling more high-margin export liquids - a strategy that has proven effective," he said.

ADNOC Gas said it maintained high reliability with a 98.9 per cent average across its facilities in the first half of the year, contributing to a 15 per cent quarterly increase in production volumes in the last quarter. Competition for liquefied natural gas has increased since Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, with Europe importing record volumes of the super-cooled fuel to replace Moscow's gas supplies.

Global LNG trade hit a high of \$450 billion in 2022 amid a surge in European demand, according to the International Energy Agency. To adapt to lower liquefied petroleum gas and Brent crude oil prices in the first half of the year, ADNOC Gas said it shifted towards higher-margin export liquids and focused on increased efficiency.

These measures enabled the company to maintain a flat earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization of \$1.8 billion and net income of \$1 billion in the April-June period. "We continue to witness long-term structural demand growth for natural gas as a critical fuel for the responsible global energy transition," Al-Ebri said.

"Our recent signing of significant long-term LNG agreements and our domestic investments demonstrate that we remain ideally positioned to meet both local and international demand, while further decarbonizing our operations in line with the UAE's Net-Zero 2050 ambition." Net income in the second quarter of the year fell 29 per cent on an annual basis to \$1 billion, while revenue dropped to \$5.4 billion, from \$7.1 billion in the same period last year. ADNOC Gas maintained its dividend target of \$1.62 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023 and a further \$1.62 billion dividend in the second quarter of 2024. The company expects to grow the annual target dividend amount by 5 per cent per annum on a per-share basis over the 2024-2027 period, it said. As part of its strategic growth plans and entry into the international gas market, ADNOC Gas on Friday said it would acquire a 30 per cent equity stake in Azerbaijan's Absheron gas and condensate field in the Caspian Sea. - Agencies

has been topping seasonal heat records on a regular basis since April.

'Immediate threat'

"The ocean heatwave is an immediate threat to some marine life," said Piers Forster of the International Centre for Climate at Britain's University of Leeds. "We are already seeing coral bleaching in Florida as a direct result and I expect more impacts will surface." The overheating of the oceans is predicted to have other effects on marine plant and animal life too, including on the migration of certain species and the spread of invasive species. This could threaten fish stocks and thus undermine food security in certain parts of the globe. Warmer oceans are also less capable of absorbing carbon dioxide (CO2), reinforcing the vicious cycle of global warming. - AFP



In total, 243,277 new cars were registered in Germany last month.

German car market extends rebound in July

FRANKFURT: The German car market extended its rebound in July, official data showed Friday, driven by booming electric vehicle sales as supply chain woes continue to ease. In total, 243,277 new cars were registered in Europe's biggest economy last month, an 18.1-percent increase from a year earlier, according to the KBA federal transport authority.

Car sales have been rebounding since the start of the year, although they still remain substantially below the level recorded in 2019 before the coronavirus pandemic. Manufacturers in Germany, home to industry titans like Volkswagen and BMW, produced 300,300 vehicles in July, 20 percent more than in the same period last year, according to the VDA industry association. The sector is gradually recovering from supply chain issues - notably when it comes to semiconductors - that had slowed deliveries to customers. In particular, the market was boosted by registrations of electric vehicles, which rose almost 70 percent in July year on year, making up 20 percent of all registrations.

But analysts warn that the end of electric car subsidies for company fleets from September will have a dampening effect. "The current boom in new electric registrations is likely due in large part to the fact that commercial owners... still want to benefit from the government subsidy," said EY analyst Jan Miller. It is "likely to run out of steam very soon," the analyst added. Observers have also warned that the weakening economy in Germany, where growth is stagnating amid high inflation and rising interest rates, will weigh on the market.

Meanwhile, German industrial orders jumped in June for the second month in a row on the back of major contracts despite the downturn dragging on Europe's top economy, official data released Friday showed. New orders, closely watched as a predictor of future industrial activity, rose by 7.0 percent month-on-month after 6.2 percent in May, federal statistics agency Destatis said.

The indicator again surpassed its level before March, when it fell by 10.9 percent, the biggest monthly drop since April 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic throttled the economy. The rebound was a rare ray of light for Germany, which slipped into recession around the start of the year due to surging energy prices, inflation and interest rate hikes that have knocked demand.

"Another big surprise, this time on the upside," said LBBW analyst Jens-Oliver Niklasch. "Was the recession in the end only a bad dream? At least the collapse in March is over. We could look to the second half more at ease if the early indicators weren't so weak." June's rise was driven by "several big orders", without which the indicator would have fallen by 2.6 percent, the economy ministry said. - AFP

Business

China to lift tariffs on Australian barley

Latest thawing of ties between Beijing and Canberra

BEIJING, China: China said Friday it will remove extra tariffs on Australian barley, in the latest thawing of ties between the two after years of tensions.

Beijing imposed hefty levies on key Australian exports such as barley, beef and wine in 2020, leveraging its economic muscle at the height of a bitter dispute with the then-conservative government. It also stopped imports of some of Australia's most significant commodities, including coal, which curbed billions of dollars in trade. But on Friday, China's commerce ministry said it was "no longer necessary to continue to impose anti-dumping duties and countervailing duties on imports of barley originating in Australia in view of changes in the Chinese barley market". In turn, Australia said it would drop a retaliatory case against the world's second-biggest economy at the World Trade Organization, which was paused earlier this year as the countries' trade ministers stepped up negotiations.

"We welcome this outcome, which paves the way for our barley exporters to re-enter the Chinese market — benefiting Australian producers and Chinese consumers," Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in a statement. China had been angered by Canberra's legislation against overseas influence operations, its barring Huawei from 5G contracts and its call for an independent investigation into the

origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But their icy relations appear to have thawed since Australia's centre-left government adopted a less confrontational approach to China following its election a year ago. Recent economic data released by Beijing suggests the country's post-COVID recovery is running out of steam and growth is slowing, and calls for government support measures are ramping up. The softening of tensions with Canberra comes as Chinese President Xi Jinping has taken a more pragmatic approach to relations with its international partners, including a pick-up in talks with the United States.

Xi had called for relations with Australia to "improve" in a November 2022 meeting with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. It was the first formal summit between the two countries in more than five years. Australia has this year resumed exports of coal and timber, which were among a slew of commodities hit by Chinese import bans and restrictions as diplomatic relations soured in recent years. And trade minister Don Farrell told reporters in June that barley was "the next cab off the rank" following a "good meeting" with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Wentao, in Detroit. Barley exports to China were worth about Aus\$916 million (US\$600 million) in the 2018-19 season.



INVERLEIGH, Australia: A photo taken on December 14, 2020 shows a paddock of barley being harvested on a farm near Inverleigh, some 100kms west of Melbourne. — AFP

Farrell said he is also keen to get quality Australian wine back into China by removing anti-dumping measures imposed since November 2020, add-

ing that he had seen growers "leaving grapes to wilt on the vine rather than suffer the uncertainty of the global market". — AFP

Canada jobless rate ticks up to 5.5% in July

OTTAWA: Canada shed 6,000 jobs in July, pushing up the unemployment rate 0.1 percentage points to 5.5 percent — marking a third consecutive monthly increase, the government statistical agency said Friday.

Analysts were expecting a modest increase in new jobs following average monthly gains of 22,000 since the start of the year. "This was the first time the unemployment rate had increased for three consecutive months since the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic," Statistics Canada said in a statement. According to the agency, there were fewer people employed in construction (-45,000), public administration (-17,000), information, culture and recreation (-16,000) as well as in transportation and warehousing (-14,000).

Employment rose in health care and social assistance (+25,000), educational services (+19,000), finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing (+15,000) and agriculture (+12,000). Economists noted that demand for work was outpacing job creation amid soaring immigration that helped push Canada's population to 40 million in June.

"Job growth was flat, but controlling for a boost to the Canadian population, labor markets softened more significantly under the surface," RBC Economics analyst Carrie Freestone pointed out. Desjardins analyst Royce Mendes said in a research note, "It's clear that underlying momentum in the economy is slowing" and that "the Bank of Canada's efforts to rebalance the labor market are working."

"As a result, today's data reinforce our view that the central bank is done raising rates for this cycle," he said. The central bank last raised its key interest rate by 25 basis points to five percent in July. — AFP

Lula to host summit on the Amazon

BELEM, Brazil: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will host a regional summit next week with planetary stakes, as leaders of the countries that share the Amazon seek a roadmap to save the world's biggest rainforest.

The meeting of the eight-nation Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization on Tuesday and Wednesday in Belem, capital of the Amazon state of Para, will serve as something of a dress rehearsal for the COP30 UN climate talks, which the city will also host in 2025. It is the 28-year-old organization's first summit since 2009, as Lula seeks to deliver on his pledge that "Brazil is back" in the fight against climate change after a period of surging destruction in the Amazon under his far-right predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro.

With its hundreds of billions of carbon-absorbing trees, the Amazon is a key buffer against global warming. But scientists warn deforestation is pushing it dangerously close to a "tipping point," beyond which trees would die off and release their carbon stores back into the atmosphere, with catastrophic consequences for the climate.

Already, carbon emissions from the Amazon increased by 117 percent in 2020 compared to the annual average for 2010 to 2018, according to the latest figures from researchers at Brazil's national space agency, INPE. Veteran leftist Lula, who returned to office in January, said he planned to work together with the group's other members — Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela — to develop the Amazon basin "without destroying" it. Leaders are due to discuss strategies to fight deforestation and organized crime, and seek sustainable development for the region, home to 50 million people — including hundreds of Indigenous groups seen as crucial to protecting the forest.

The summit will conclude with a joint declaration, expected to be "ambitious" and set out "an agenda



BRASÍLIA: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (centre right) next to his wife Janja da Silva (right), shakes hands with the new Minister of the Supreme Federal Court (STF), Cristiano Zanin, accompanied by his wife Valeska Martins (left), during the inauguration ceremony in Brasilia, on August 3, 2023. — AFP

to guide countries in the coming years," said Brazilian foreign ministry official Gisela Padovan.

Crime in the jungle

Brazil, which holds around 60 percent of the Amazon, has pledged to eradicate illegal deforestation by 2030, and is pushing other countries to follow suit. Deforestation is driven mainly by cattle ranching, though it is fueled by a murky mix of corruption, land-grabbing and organized crime whose tentacles extend to the illegal traffic in drugs, arms, timber and gold. In Brazil, the world's top exporter of beef and soy, the destruction has already wiped out around one-fifth of the rainforest.

But after a 75-percent jump in average annual deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon under Bolsonaro (2019-2022) versus the previous decade, there are signs of progress. From January to July, deforestation fell by 42.5 percent from the same period last year.

Ahead of the summit, more than 50 environmental groups called on the region's governments to adopt a plan "to stop the Amazon from reaching a point of no return." The petition, published by the Climate Observatory, calls on countries to join Brazil's pledge for zero illegal deforestation by 2030, strengthen Indigenous rights and adopt "effective measures to fight environmental crimes." Lula said Thursday he was confident that "for the first time, jointly and cohesively," the region would "accept its responsibility" to fight rampant crime in the rainforest.

Lula insists responsibility for saving the Amazon extends worldwide. "The world needs to help us preserve and develop the Amazon," he said Wednesday. "Investing is cheap if it's a matter of saving the rainforest." Paola Arias, a climate scientist at the University of Antioquia in Colombia, underlined that the cattle and crops produced in the Amazon are often exported abroad. — AFP

Canada port workers accept deal ending shipping chaos

OTTAWA: Workers at Canada's busiest port in Vancouver and at harbors up and down the Pacific Coast have approved a tentative labor deal, their union announced late Friday.

After months of failed talks, more than 7,000 terminal cargo loaders and other employees in 30 ports had gone on strike last month and then staged another walkout days later. The labor unrest paralyzed industries across Canada, disrupting an estimated Can\$10 billion (US\$7.5 billion) in trade.

In a statement, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union of Canada (ILWU) said 75 percent of its members voted to ratify the agreement "after five weeks of labour instability at British Columbia's ports." No details on the terms have been released. But the union said it includes increases in wages, benefits and training, as well as provisions providing "certainty and stability" for workers.

Port automation, the rising cost of living and outsourcing had been the key issues behind the collective action led by the ILWU. Labor Minister Seamus O'Regan and Transport Minister Pablo Rodriguez in a joint statement called the ratification vote "good news for the employer, the union, and the many workers and businesses across Canada that rely on our BC ports."

They noted the "serious disruption to supply chains" caused by the port shutdowns, and said they've ordered a review of the labor dispute in order to provide trade and supply chain stability in the future.

The past month saw the union's bargaining team approve a tentative pact to end the strike only to see it rejected by union leaders, briefly sending workers back to the picket line. When the agreement was finally put to members at the end of July, they rejected it. That led the government to order the industrial relations board to help the two sides reach a deal. The west coast ports combined handled 16 percent of Canada's total traded goods in 2020, according to the British Columbia Maritime Employers Association. — AFP

TikTok unveils changes to meet tough new EU rules

BRUSSELS: Video-sharing platform TikTok announced Friday changes to meet strict EU rules including allowing European users to turn off the addictive feature that shows content based on their interests.

Under the new rules, Internet giants will be forced to take stronger action on data privacy, child protection, disinformation and hate speech. The web's 19 biggest players including TikTok as well as Amazon, Apple, Google, Meta and Microsoft, have until August 28 to comply, otherwise they face hefty fines. The European commissioner overseeing the digital market, Thierry Breton, warned TikTok last month to accelerate its adoption of the new standards.

Heading that warning, TikTok said it would allow users in Europe "to turn off personalization", referring to the "For You" feed that keeps people watching videos with recommended content based on their personal interests. European users can instead get popular videos from the places where they live and around the world, TikTok said in a statement.

Thanks to its editing features and an AI-powered algorithm, TikTok is popular, especially with young-



er audiences, and has over a billion users. It has, however, come under fierce Western scrutiny over its ties to China. Its owner, ByteDance, is Chinese, but the company denies it is under Beijing's tutelage.

TikTok said other measures to ensure compliance with the EU's Digital Services Act include making it easier for European users to report illegal content and banning targeted advertising for users in Europe aged 13 to 17. It added it would also be more transparent about its content moderation decisions, giving users more information about why a video has been taken down.

"We will continue to not only meet our regulatory obligations, but also strive to set new standards through innovative solutions," TikTok said. — AFP

US services sector growth retreats slightly in July

WASHINGTON: US services sector activity expanded at a slower clip in July with growth in new orders and employment decreasing, survey data showed Thursday, adding to signs the economy is cooling. While the rate-sensitive manufacturing sector has slumped since the US central bank rapidly lifted interest rates over the past year to tackle stubborn inflation, the services sector has shown resilience.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) services index ticked down to 52.7 percent in July, weakening from June but still comfortably above the 50-point mark indicating growth in the key sector.

"This is due mostly to the decrease in the rate of

growth for business activity, new orders and employment, as well as ongoing faster delivery times," said ISM survey chair Anthony Nieves.

The business activity index edged down 2.1 percentage points to 57.1 percent, while the new orders index dipped 0.5-point to 55 percent. "We are maintaining a cautious approach, although inflation seems to be easing," said a survey respondent.

"The overall business environment has stabilized, but tight labor markets are creating ongoing issues," the respondent added. On Thursday, a separate report showed that jobless claims continued to trend lower over a four-week average, with businesses reluctant to cut their workforce after difficulties of hiring and retaining staff during the pandemic.

For now, lower inflation figures could be a sign that the US economy can achieve a "soft landing" where price increases come under control without a massive recession, said Thomas Barkin, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, in a speech on Thursday. — AFP

Global equities mixed following US jobs report

NEW YORK: US stocks ended lower on Friday as traders digested a mixed employment report, while bourses in Europe and Asia advanced.

The United States added 187,000 jobs last month, below the 200,000 expected by analysts but roughly steady with revised June figures. The data added to encouraging signs that the Federal Reserve's aggressive interest rate hikes to ease demand may bring down inflation without triggering a major recession — and that it may decide to hold rates steady at the next policy meeting in September.

"A mixed US jobs report appears to have stabilized sentiment," said CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson while European and Asian markets logged gains. Friday's downward revisions to job gains in May and June "spoke to the idea that central bank rate hikes have done their job, and that no more are coming," Hewson added. But robust wage growth supported the argument that the Fed could hold rates higher for longer.

The US unemployment rate came in at 3.5 percent, below June's 3.6 percent figure and at a historically low level. And average hourly earnings rose 0.4 percent in July, the same pace as the month before but above expectations. "The key takeaway from the report is that labor supply continues to be tight, which could make it difficult to achieve a more Fed-pleasing moderation in wage growth," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare. "That might not translate into another increase in the target range for the fed funds rate, but it does fit the notion that the Fed will be inclined to keep the policy rate higher for longer," he added. Wall Street's main indices slumped to end the day, with the Dow losing 0.4 percent and the broader S&P 500 sliding 0.5 percent. The tech-heavy Nasdaq dipped 0.4 percent.

Europe's main equity markets ended the day higher. Meanwhile the dollar fell against its major rivals after the US jobs numbers were announced. Equities had slid midweek after Fitch stripped the United States of its top credit rating, seeing investors switch to haven assets such as the dollar, yen and government bonds. Positive earnings also helped to offset debt concerns in the world's biggest economy. "(Stock) markets have started to stabilize after a chaotic week led by the US debt downgrade and further interest rate hikes in the UK," noted Dan Coatsworth, analyst at AJ Bell. "Amazon's better-than-expected second quarter results have put investors in a better mood," he added. — AFP



Armenia resort struggles to heal 'scars' after Azerbaijan attack



Tourists visit a waterfall in the Armenian mountain spa resort town of Jermuk, known for its hot springs and mineral water. - AFP photos



Tourists visit a waterfall in the Armenian mountain spa resort town of Jermuk.



Tourists rest on benches in the Armenian mountain spa resort town of Jermuk.



Tourists are seen in the Armenian mountain spa resort town of Jermuk, known for its hot springs and mineral water.



A view of a guest house destroyed in artillery fire from Azerbaijan in the town of Jermuk on September 15, 2022.

Jermuk was Armenia's busiest spa resort before arch foe Azerbaijan attacked nearly a year ago. Now only the croaking of frogs and the occasional cry of a solitary swan fill the silence in the small town's deserted park. The mountain spa town dotted with hot springs came under artillery fire from Azerbaijan in September 2022. While authorities insist Jermuk is ready to host tourists again, locals say the wounds are still raw and the tourism industry has been struggling to recover in the aftermath of the assault.

"You can't see the scars of the war in the streets of Jermuk any more. They are on people's souls," said restaurant owner Ovsanna Stepanyan. She said that the number of tourists visiting Jermuk — which gave its name to Armenia's most famous mineral water brand — had plummeted after the Azerbaijani attack. "Hotels and restaurants are nearly empty, we are operating at a loss," the 42-year-old told AFP.

Stepanyan's eatery was once so busy people had to book a table days in advance. Now she receives just several customers each day and has been forced to lay off half of her staff. Tour guide Vazgen Galstyan, 33, said hotels, cafes, schools, and kindergartens were open but stressed that the emotional trauma inflicted by the conflict had not healed. "Many people here are still suffering from psychological trauma," he said. "We know that the risk of a new war persists."

'Terrible night'
Stepanyan said she had been struggling to forget last year's attack. She hid with her toddler son and mother in a basement when Azerbaijani forces shelled the town, an experience similar to that of many residents. "Those hours were full of fear, like in a horror movie," she said. "Then women and children fled Jermuk for Yerevan in trucks." "The road was full of cars with fleeing people, forests and fields on the outskirts of Jermuk were ablaze. I am still trembling

when I remember that terrible night." Locked in a decades-long dispute over Azerbaijan's Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh, Yerevan and Baku have fought two wars for control of the mountainous enclave, in the 1990s and 2020. Despite a Moscow-brokered ceasefire that ended the latest conflict, there have been near-daily border clashes between the Caucasus neighbors.



A view of the Armenian mountain spa resort town of Jermuk, known for its hot springs and mineral water.

In the worst fighting since the end of the war, Azerbaijan captured a pocket of land inside Armenia last year in fierce clashes between the neighbors that claimed the lives of 210 people. Both sides have accused each other of provoking the hostilities, which erupted on September 13, 2022, and ended with international mediation the next day. Yerevan said at the time that Azerbaijan attacked the towns of Jermuk, Sotk, and Verin Shorza — located near the two countries' border — using artillery, mortars, and large-calibre firearms.

'Huge tourism potential'
"The shelling of Jermuk began at midnight," said the town's vice-may-

or, Vardan Sargsyan. "Azerbaijanis were targeting roads and forests; they damaged residential buildings, vital infrastructure, the cemetery." But he insisted that "the consequences of the attack were eliminated, and damaged infrastructure was rebuilt."

"Jermuk is ready to host tourists again," added the vice-mayor. Tigran Sargsyan, 20, returned to Jermuk four months ago after completing his military



A view of the Armenian mountain spa resort town of Jermuk, known for its hot springs and mineral water.

service and is now running a shooting gallery in an amusement park. Targets feature Azerbaijani flags and portraits of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev.

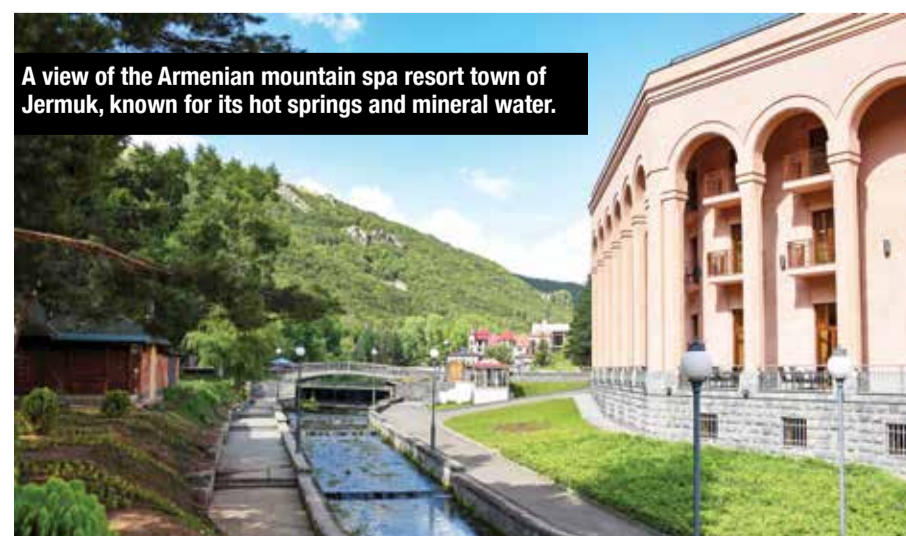
"The enemy is too close," he said, referring to Azerbaijani troops stationed about four kilometers from Jermuk. "If the situation does not change, there will be a fresh conflict and I'll have to go to war." A Russian tourist strolling nearby sounded a more optimistic note. "I know what happened in Jermuk last year, but I am not scared," said Yuliya Shtykova, a 51-year-old Muscovite. "Jermuk is a miracle, it has huge tourism potential." — AFP



A girl drinks water in the Armenian mountain spa resort town of Jermuk.



A street vendor sells toys and plastic water glasses in the town of Jermuk.



A view of the Armenian mountain spa resort town of Jermuk, known for its hot springs and mineral water.



Guides stand by their cars as they offer tours in the Armenian mountain spa resort town of Jermuk.

Belgium canal city of Bruges hits 'red line' with tourist crowds

Inhabitants of Belgium's cobblestone-and-canal city of Bruges are clear: summertime tourism has hit capacity. "It's really reached a red line now," says one, 55-year-old architect Arnout Goegebuer, as he sits inside a cafe, peering out a window across a packed outside terrace. "We don't need more tourists anymore, it's enough — maybe a little bit less" is needed, he says.

It's a sentiment reiterated by other residents of the western city, population 119,000, which each year hosts eight million visitors — most of them concentrated in the summer months, and most of them on day trips. Residents are not against tourism, which brings money and prestige and provides jobs. But they say it needs to be balanced, to stop the city turning into a Disneyfied open-air museum.

With Bruges crowds back to pre-COVID levels, including from cruise ships docking in nearby Zeebrugge port and disgorging passengers who spend just a few hours, "there's a lot of trouble" for locals, says Kurt Van Der Pieter, a 62-year-old retiree who lived his whole life in the city.

"People of Bruges say it's too much, it's too much — very too much some days," he says. The situation is not unique to Bruges. Europe's other top historical canal cities of Venice and Amsterdam have both taken steps to bar cruise ships calling.

Venice received a wake-up call in July when UNESCO recommended the city be put on its endangered list because of over-tourism and other problems. An August 2022 ranking published by an Airbnb competitor called Holidu put Venice, Bruges and the Greek island of Rhodes in equal second place in its list of the most overcrowded European destinations based on the number of tourists versus inhabitants.

The Croatian walled city of Dubrovnik — famed as the backdrop for much of The Game of Thrones fantasy TV series — came first on the list. Bruges's tourist authority, Visit Bruges, disputes Holidu's ranking and says its own figures, based on usage of mobile devices while in Bruges, show that daily there are 131 visitors per 100 inhabitants. "Bruges is often referred to as a mass tourism destination, but it isn't," a spokeswoman, Ann Plovie, tells AFP.

Tourism strategy

"This is like a bit (of a) misconception that the city is overcrowded. Indeed, I can't deny that there are many tourists, but you should come on different periods and then you would see also the difference," adds another spokeswoman, Anne De Meerleer. In 2019, Bruges implemented a five-year strategy to boost overnight stays, spread the tourist numbers around geographically and over each year, and to lure visitors more interested in cultural and gastronomic deep-dives than selfies and waffles.

"Our aim is to get not more visitors, not the volume is important, but the kind of visitors we get," De Meerleer says as she guides a visitor to stunning spots that are almost empty and are just a couple of streets from the main market square. The results of the strategy are unclear, torpedoed by the 2020-2021 collapse in tourism caused by Covid travel restrictions around the world.

Bruges' city centre also faces tensions over accommodation options for overnight stays, with a halt to buildings being converted to hotels to ensure locals aren't squeezed out. Unlike cities like Milan, Bruges has not banned private vehicles from its historic district, though the railway station is a short walk away. Car registration plates come from all over Europe. The Belgian city is already at work on its next five-year strategy, this one with an emphasis on sustainability.

Visitors' views mixed

The mix of tourists walking around in Bruges is even broader, as is their verdict as to whether they found the place overcrowded or not. "I didn't think there would be this much people," says Lee Hotae, a South Korean tourist admiring the city architecture in a guided group visit. "It's not that busy actually. It's like going to somewhere that's as nice as Amsterdam or Florence or Venice, but not as overrun," says a Scottish tourist, Ross Henderson, 43.

A 59-year-old French tourist, Ariele Delattre, who had made the short trip to Bruges from her hometown of Lille, near the Belgian border, says a canal boat ride revealed the tourist diversity. The boat's driver "asked what nationalities were present on the boat, and it's true that we had Asians, Germans, Britons, French, Indians — people from everywhere," she says. — AFP

Lifestyle



Canadian actor William Shatner talks to AI, in Van Nuys, California. - AFP photos



Canadian actor William Shatner speaks to fans in Australia using Hologram technology, in Van Nuys, California.



David Nussbaum, Founder and CEO of Porto Hologram, demonstrates how the hologram technology works, in Van Nuys, California.

CAPTAIN KIRK TO THE HOLODECK: Shatner beams in to remote meeting

More than half a century after he materialized on far-flung planets as Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise, William Shatner has beamed into a distant land in a demonstration of hologram technology. The "Star Trek" actor was a guest speaker at an advertising conference in Sydney, Australia, where his lifelike image appeared in a box like a giant action figure — despite his being in a studio in California. "You're 7,000 miles away and I'm here in Los Angeles," he told the audience. "And you can hear every word I'm saying. It's like I'm there; I'm in the phone booth."

The tech, produced by Los Angeles-based Proto, displays a high definition 2D image that uses shadows to create a volumetric illusion of three dimensions. Coupled with the human-sized display — the screen takes up the bulk of a 2.2-meter (8-foot) device — the result is pretty realistic.

But it is not without problems — the demonstration that AFP watched Tuesday initially faltered, with the audience left staring at a blank screen while Shatner hammed his way through a "Star Trek"-style materialization. "There's always jeopardy



Canadian actor William Shatner speaks to fans in Australia using Hologram technology, in Van Nuys, California.

when there's new technology," the 92-year-old shrugged when his image appeared inside the device in Sydney moments later. David Nussbaum, chief executive of Proto Inc. said the veteran performer was a natural choice to showcase the tech.

"William Shatner stamped the idea of holoportation on our imaginations with his performances on 'Star Trek' and now he can beam anywhere on Earth, in real life," he said. Canadian Shatner became a cult star in the

wake of the 1960s sci-fi adventure "Star Trek," which follows the crew of a spaceship as spreads liberal humanitarian ideals through the galaxy on a mission "to boldly go where no man has gone before." As well as numerous big screen follow-ups as the lantern-jawed Captain Kirk, Shatner also played the titular character in cop show "TJ Hooker," and won both a Golden Globe and a Primetime Emmy for his role on "Boston Legal." In 2021, he became the oldest person ever to



Canadian actor William Shatner answers questions from AFP bureau chief Huw Griffith, after talking to fans in Australia using Hologram technology, in Van Nuys, California.

go to space when he traveled aboard a Blue Origin craft. Shatner told AFP he was a fan of new technology, but pointed to the actors' and writers' strike playing out in Hollywood as a good example of how industries have to adapt to it. "We can't do what we did last year, six months ago," he said. "Artificial Intelligence, 3D, streaming, are all new ideas. So new protocol needs to take place. It's as simple as that. Everybody recognizes it."

Studios, whose production has

been shut down for weeks by the strike, are resisting demands to limit the use of AI in filmmaking and scriptwriting, in a dispute that is costing the entertainment industry million of dollars a day. The studios are "fighting it because they don't want to pay," said Shatner. "And what will make them pay the money? Hopefully not too much blood from the actors and the writers." — AFP

US police drop Cardi B mic throw probe

Cardi B will not face criminal charges over an incident in which she threw her microphone at a member of her audience, police in Las Vegas said Thursday. Detectives launched a battery probe into the "WAP" star's actions after she retaliated when a concert-goer chucked a liquid at her. Footage posted on social media shows the "Money" singer recoiling after someone close to the stage splashed the contents of a cup in her direction. In the clips, Cardi B can be seen pausing briefly, before flinging the microphone back in the same direction.

However, some videos online appear to show the mic making contact with a different member of the audience. Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department said Monday that a woman had contacted them to report a battery, and that they had begun an investiga-

tion. But on Thursday, they confirmed that the probe had been dropped. "After a thorough review of this case and with the consultation from the Clark County District Attorney's Office, this case has been closed as having insufficient evidence," a statement said.

"No charges will be filed in relation to this case." Meanwhile, a listing on bidding site eBay for a microphone purported to be at the center of the drama had reached \$99,900 by Thursday afternoon. TMZ reported the seller, Scott Fisher, works for a company that provides audio kit for Las Vegas clubs.

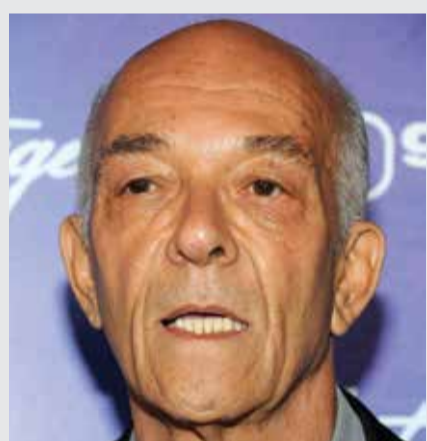
The entertainment outlet reported Fisher as saying the proceeds from the sale, which ends Tuesday, would be split between two charities — the Wounded Warrior Project and Friendship Circle Las Vegas, which helps teens and

young adults with special needs. The mic-hurl episode was the latest involving performers being the target of objects from the audience.

In June a man threw a phone at Bebe Rexha during a concert in New York, landing the singer in hospital. The same month an audience member threw a bag purportedly containing the ashes of their mother at the stage while singer Pink was performing in London. And last year Harry Styles good-naturedly paused a New York concert after someone threw a chicken nugget in his direction. In December, Guns N' Roses frontman Axl Rose pledged to stop throwing his microphone into the audience at the end of a show after a fan was reportedly hurt in Australia. — AFP



US rapper Cardi B arrives for the 2023 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. - AFP



US actor Mark Margolis arrives at the Variety and Women In Film Pre-Emmy Event on September 21, 2012 in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP

'Breaking Bad' actor Mark Margolis dies at 83

Mark Margolis, who played the sinister, wheelchair-bound cartel don Hector Salamanca in acclaimed TV shows "Breaking Bad" and "Better Call Saul," has died aged 83, his family said Friday. Margolis died Thursday at a New York hospital following a short illness, with his wife and son at his bedside, according to a statement. "Breaking Bad" star Bryan Cranston led the tributes, writing on Instagram: "I am very saddened today to learn of a friend's passing. Mark Margolis was a really good actor and a lovely human being. Fun and engaging off the set, and (in the case of 'Breaking Bad' and 'Your Honor') intimidating and frightening on set."

Bob Odenkirk, the star of spin-off series "Better Call Saul," called Margolis a "powerful screen presence." An official "Breaking Bad" social media account praised "the immensely talented Mark Margolis, who — with his eyes, a bell, and very few words — turned Hector Salamanca into one of the most unforgettable characters in the history of television."

In the show, Margolis's character — the patriarch of the drug-smuggling Salamanca family, who suffers a stroke after being poisoned by a rival — is only able to communicate by tapping a bell with his finger. Born in Philadelphia in 1939, Margolis moved to New York to pursue acting. He forged a successful career as a character actor, with supporting roles in films such as "Scarface," "Ace Ventura: Pet Detective" and "Black Swan," as well as HBO series "Oz." In 2012, he was nominated for an Emmy for "Breaking Bad." He is survived by Jacqueline, his wife of 61 years, as well as their only child Morgan and their three grandsons. — AFP



Taylor Swift adds Canada tour dates after Trudeau plea

US superstar Taylor Swift announced Thursday several Toronto dates for her much-hyped world tour after a plea from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau not to skip Canada. Concert sponsor Rogers Communications said in a statement that Swift will perform six shows as part of her "Eras Tour" in Canada's largest city, and that tickets would soon go on sale for the November 2024 dates. Swift herself also posted on Instagram: "Turns out it's NOT the end of an era."

"Miami, New Orleans, Indy and Toronto: The Eras Tour is coming to you in 2024," she said, with a photo listing the Canada stops as November 14-16 and 21-23. US singer Gracie Abrams, the daughter of film director J.J. Abrams, will also be performing, Swift added. Swift's initial snub of Canada when the tour schedule was first an-

nounced had greatly disappointed her Canadians fans, and Trudeau apparently could not shake it off.

In a tweet referencing the lyrics of Swift's songs, Trudeau last month urged her to fill the blank space and perform in America's neighbor to the north. "It's me, hi. I know places in Canada would love to have you," Trudeau said in a message on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, that quickly went viral. "So, don't make it another cruel summer. We hope to see you soon."

The artist had just announced the addition of new dates through 2024 to her consistently sold-out tour, which began in March in Arizona. She'd planned more than 100 concerts in the United States, Mexico, Europe, Asia and Australia, but not Canada. The bad blood risked turning Swift into something of an anti-hero in famously nice Canada. In June, a conservative lawmaker also lamented what he called the singer's lack of respect for the country and similarly implored her to save some dates for Canada. Swift's turnaround was the top story in most Canadian media on Thursday. She last came to Canada in 2018. — AFP

Lizzo denies harassment allegations including weight-shaming

Lizzo on Thursday hit back at allegations she weight-shamed her staff, calling the accusations in a lawsuit leveled by former dancers "as unbelievable as they sound." Three of the pop star's former dancers filed the suit in Los Angeles, with accusations of labor law violations including descriptions of what their lawyers deem shaming and sexual harassment. One of the allegations centers around an Amsterdam red-light district sex show which the dancers say they felt pressured to attend. At the show Lizzo pressured her dancers to interact with the nude performers, the suit alleges.

It also alleges that Lizzo's dance leader, Shirlene Quigley, frequently made sexual comments and proselytized her Christian beliefs, especially against pre-marital sex, "regardless of protestations." "Usually I choose not to respond to false allegations but these are as unbelievable as they sound and too outrageous to not be addressed," Lizzo posted Thursday on social media.

"These sensationalized stories are coming from former employees who have already publicly admitted that they were told their behavior on tour was inappropriate and unprofessional." The lawsuit alleges that white managers from Lizzo's production company, Big Grrrl Big Touring, Inc. (BGBT), which was also named in the complaint, "often accused the Black members of the dance team of being lazy, unprofessional, and having bad attitudes."

"Not only do these words ring familiar as tropes used to disparage and discourage Black women from advocating for themselves, but the same accusations were not levied against dancers who are

not Black," according to the complaint cited in the statement. "Only the dance cast — comprised of full-figured women of color — were ever spoken to in this manner, giving Plaintiffs the impression that these comments were charged with racial and fat-phobic animus," it added.

The accusations were particularly surprising given Lizzo's oft-repeated messages of self-love and body positivity. She did not directly address the accusations made against Quigley. Lizzo did explicitly deny the weight-shaming allegations. "There is nothing I take more seriously than the respect we deserve as women in the world. I know what it feels like to be body shamed on a daily basis and would absolutely never criticize or terminate an employee because of their weight," Lizzo said. — AFP



US singer Lizzo performs during the 2023 Governors Ball Music Festival at Flushing Meadows Corona Park, New York City. — AFP

Lifestyle



Rock salt left for wild animals is seen on a tree stump in a forest in the Tarhaus Valley, near the Ghimes-Faget village in the central Transylvania region of Romania.

The fight to save 'sacred' Carpathian forests from loggers



Flowering plants are pictured in the Tarhaus Valley, near the village of Ghimes-Faget in the central Transylvania region of Romania.

Vast gaps in the forest canopy are visible from above Romania's Carpathian mountains, while stumps studding the ground are reminders of the trees chopped into logs and piled beside dirt roads. Forest engineer Gabriel Oltean has fought against this intense, often illegal logging with cameras that broadcast live on YouTube the incessant passage of woodcutters' trucks. He said he caused "a psychological shock" among locals at the gates of the legendary Transylvania region, which led to investigations and wood confiscations — though no criminal convictions yet.

People like him are fighting for forests blanketing the 1,500-kilometre (900-mile) mountain range that spans eight nations and sits in a region that is supposed to be among the best preserved in the EU. But

The old-growth forests of the mountain range are also important for mitigating climate change. Worldwide, forests absorb a net amount of 7.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide, or 1.5 times what the United States emits, according to a study published in 2021 in the journal *Nature Climate Change*. But "on average a forest area of more than five football pitches is lost to wood extraction every single hour" in the Carpathians, Greenpeace said in a report last November.



Greenpeace spokesman Marek Jozefiak speaks during an AFP interview near Zatzarnica, southeastern Poland.

Lucrative business
More than half of the area of the Carpathians is in Romania, with the range also running through Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine and to a lesser extent Hungary, Serbia, the Czech Republic as well as Austria. On paper it's one of the most preserved regions in the EU, but only

activists have dismissed as failing to compensate for the ecological damage.

Instead, environmentalists would like to see more forests declared national parks for better protection. Greenpeace is calling on the European Union to develop and fund an action plan to safeguard the mountain range.

"We want to brand the Carpathians, just like the Alps... The Carpathians should be famous too," Jozefiak said. Poland has not created a single new national park in over two decades because of legislation according local authorities a veto.

Even in those that exist, exploitation is not prohibited. In Stuposiany, a state forest division in the Carpathians that is curiously wedged into a national park, officials say protection is already high on the agenda. "The timber harvesting process does not have a negative impact on the forest ecosystem," chief forester Ewa Tkacz told AFP, adding that "nature is very dear to us".

'Don't realise what we are losing'

Still, concern for the mountains has spawned protests, including logging blockades organized by a citizens' initiative. Andrzej Zbrozek, a biology teacher who lives deep in the woods, said the Carpathians "are becoming a farmland of sorts, subordinated to timber harvesting".

"It's hard for me to accept that the forests I've been wandering through my whole life are becoming much less valuable, thinned out," the 53-year-old told AFP against a backdrop of bird-song. Zbrozek — soft-spoken, with animated eyes, his long-hair tied back in a ponytail — said he struggles to instill concern for the Carpathians in his students, who include the children of foresters, hunters and farmers. "They're used to it. They don't see it, they aren't able to appreciate" the nature surrounding them, he said.

"We don't realize what we're losing," he added as he blamed logging for also worsening the effects of any floods. Slovakia's share of the Carpathians — second in size to Romania's — has also come in for environmental concern.

Geographer Mikulas Huba said that while on paper forest cover exceeds 40 percent of Slovak territory, "these are no longer real forests" but often logging sites or bushes.

Surveillance cameras, tracking app

In eastern Romania, deep in the Carpathians in Ghimes-Faget commune, the forest engineer Oltean searched in vain for trees that he marked two years ago. But the method — still used to track illegal logging — is not efficient with some markings simply fading over time or becoming covered by resin.

"If I couldn't find them (the marked trees), what can you expect of a forest guard inspector who is teleported here from another place to find problems and possible illegalities?" the 32-year-old asked. While the forests were largely preserved under the regime of communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who used them as hunting ground, the authorities have long struggled to stop the rampant illegal logging that took hold after his death in 1989.

when they reach the warehouses.

But criminal groups still often manage to circumvent these checks by organizing several transports with a single authorization notice. Only a small part is confiscated: Last year, nearly 90,000 cubic meters of wood were seized, according to the environment ministry. So the government decided to go further. In June, parliament passed a law to make cameras compulsory on forest roads. In 2024, the first 350 will be deployed.

Corruption

To be able to intercept suspects, software capable of alerting in real time would be needed, said Romania WWF expert Radu Melu. "Otherwise the trucks pass by the video camera, the image is recorded and archived, but then deleted after a certain amount of time without anything happening," he said. The gov-



Logged trees are pictured in a forest in the Bieszczady Mountains that are part of the Outer Eastern Carpathians, Ustrzyki Górne, southeastern Poland.



Logged wood is seen on a road at the Tarhaus Valley, near the Ghimes-Faget village in the central Transylvania region of Romania.



Logged trees are pictured in a forest in the Bieszczady Mountains that are part of the Outer Eastern Carpathians, Ustrzyki Górne, southeastern Poland.



A bear den is seen in a forest in the Bieszczady Mountains that are part of the Outer Eastern Carpathians, Ustrzyki Górne, southeastern Poland.

in reality a lack of enforcement and vast profits for the taking mean the forests' destruction, which is leading to pressure in Romania, is still largely greeted with indifference in Poland.

"This forest should be sacred. We should be protecting such places," Greenpeace Poland spokesman Marek Jozefiak said in the village of Zatzarnica in the country's southeast. "You see that hill? They've already logged it. Like 50 metres (160 feet) from a bear den," said Jozefiak, noting only some 150 brown bears are left in Poland. One of Europe's "last remaining biodiversity havens", the forests covering the Carpathians house bison, lynx, wolves and wildcats, along with scores of bird species like the three-toed woodpecker or the Ural owl.

one to three percent of the forest is strictly protected in Poland, according to the Greenpeace report.

The state forestry agency, responsible for both protecting the forests and cutting the wood, owns the majority of forests. Its revenue increased by 50 percent in 2022 year-on-year to 15.2 billion zlotys (3.4 billion euros), 90 percent of which comes from the sale of wood.

The agency is "trying to dig as much money as they can out of it", Jozefiak said. In 2018, Europe's top court ruled that Poland's government broke the law by logging in Bialowieza, a UNESCO world heritage site that is Europe's largest surviving primeval forest. Authorities have responded to accusations of illegal logging by planting new trees — which



Spruce trees are pictured in the Tarhaus Valley, near the Ghimes-Faget village in the central Transylvania region of Romania.

Some 80 million cubic meters of timber were cut illegally between 1990 and 2011, according to an estimate by the Romanian Court of Auditors dating from 2013. Currently, forests cover 6.6 million hectares, or a third of the country, while the timber industry is estimated to be worth nearly 10 billion euros, or 4.5 percent of the country's GDP, according to accounting giant PwC.

The cut wood is used as firewood, especially in rural areas, or exported for the international furniture and DIY markets. While it is difficult to have exact figures, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) estimates on the basis of spot checks that a third of the convoys carrying wood are illegal. Alerted by activist groups, the European Commission launched an infringement procedure in early 2020, which could see Romania face financial sanctions.

To better track looters, a digital tool, called Sumal, was implemented in 2014 and has since been upgraded — with former environment minister Barna Tanczos hailing it as "the most sophisticated system in Europe". Carriers must upload photos showing the amount of timber leaving the forest into an app so that it can be checked with their loads

ernment plans to implement a sophisticated surveillance system with satellite images, drones and planes flying over the areas — an investment of 46 million euros financed by European funds.

For Oltean, too, only technology will make it possible to fight against logging. Criminal groups often benefit from complicity within a corrupt forestry administration, as several resounding scandals have shown in recent years. "It is clear to me that human involvement must be reduced," he said. "No matter how good a friend you are with the policeman that caught you, if your speed is recorded on radar, there's nothing you can do about it."

In his area of Ghimes, ranger Petre Oltean — who is not related to Gabriel Oltean — sees the fight against logging is gaining pace thanks to the mobilization of "competent people" and the arrival of rangers who are "younger, with a different mentality". But those who fight sometimes do so at the risk of their lives. Attacks on activists and forest agents have been recorded, two of whom were killed in 2019. — AFP



Fires and spruces are pictured in the Tarhaus Valley, near the Ghimes-Faget village in the central Transylvania region of Romania.



Sports

Fritz downs Murray on way to Washington semifinals

Evans topples second-seeded hometown hero Tiafoe

WASHINGTON: Top-seeded Taylor Fritz battled past three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray 6-7 (2/7), 6-3, 6-4 then returned to breeze past Jordan Thompson and reach the semifinals of the rain-hit Washington Open on Friday. Fritz was not the only player pulling double duty at the combined ATP and WTA hardcourt tennis tournament, after rain brought play to a premature end on Thursday.

Britain's Daniel Evans defeated Alexander Shevchenko 6-4, 6-3 then came back to upset second-seeded hometown hero Frances Tiafoe 6-4, 7-5. Tiafoe had made short work of his third-round opponent, dispatching Chinese teenager Shang Juncheng 6-2, 6-3. But ninth-seeded Evans gained an early break in each set and turned back the American's bid to rally in the second, breaking Tiafoe for a 6-5 lead and saving a break point as he served out the match in the next game.

Evans next faces Bulgarian fifth-seed Grigor Dimitrov, who got some unexpected rest when France's Ugo Humbert withdrew from their quarterfinal with a leg injury. Fritz next faces Tallon Griekspoor, who finished off a rain-disrupted three-set victory over France's Gael Monfils before beating American JJ. Wolf 7-5, 6-4 in the quarterfinals. Fritz, ranked ninth in the world, looked anything but fatigued as he raced past Thompson 6-3, 6-3 in one hour and 17 minutes.

Thompson had earlier beaten Wimbledon quarter-finalist Christopher Eubanks 6-2, 6-2, while Fritz had needed three hours to subdue the 44th-ranked Murray. Murray, showing his formidable range of skills at age 36, won his first break chance of the

match with a forehand cross-court drop volley winner on the line, breaking Fritz and pulling level at 5-5 on the way to a first set tie-break.

Murray smashed a forehand winner for a 3-1 lead, took a quick break to replace a shattered shoe, then took two points off Fritz's serve as he pocketed the set. Fritz battled back to take the second and they fought to 4-4 in the third before Murray swatted a backhand wide to surrender a break. Down 0-40 in the 10th game, Fritz saved three break points. Murray denied him on two match points before Fritz blasted a forehand winner on his third chance.

'Insanely high level'

"I think that the match with Andy earlier was insanely high level," Fritz said. "I thought he played really well. I thought he served really well. It was a war," he added. "With how these balls are, they're so slow, dead, it's really tough to finish points. You're going to inevitably have these really long, physical rallies. I did a great job to win that. And then I did a really good job to come back and play how I played in that last match. I feel like my body probably couldn't have handled another battle like I had with Andy," Fritz added.

In women's action, top seed Jessica Pegula rallied past Wimbledon semifinalist Elina Svitolina 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 to book a semifinal showdown with Greek fourth seed Maria Sakkari. Sakkari had to win twice on Friday, beating Canadian Leylah Fernandez 7-5, 6-2 before dispatching seventh-seeded American Madison Keys 6-3, 6-3 in the quarterfinals.



WASHINGTON: Andy Murray of Great Britain shakes hands with Taylor Fritz of the United States after losing in three sets during Day 7 of the Mubadala Citi DC Open at Rock Creek Tennis Center on Aug 4, 2023. — AFP

Third-seeded American Coco Gauff cruised past sixth-seeded Swiss Belinda Bencic 6-1, 6-2 to line up a semifinal against defending champion Liudmila Samsonova, a 6-4, 6-2 winner over Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk. Gauff, in contrast, was never troubled by reigning Olympic champion Bencic, converting six of her nine break

chances. "I put a lot of hours in after Wimbledon and I was eager to bounce back," said Gauff, who crashed out in the first round at the All England Club. "The serve has improved, the return has improved and I think I'm dictating a lot of points, which against Belinda is not an easy thing to do." — AFP

'No hesitation' as Biles prepares for return

CHICAGO: Four-time Olympic gold medal gymnast Simone Biles geared up for her highly anticipated return to competition with an impressive practice session ahead of Saturday's US Classic — her first event since the Tokyo Olympics. The 26-year-old superstar, a 19-time world champion, has not taken part in elite competition since her drama-filled campaign at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games two years ago.

After struggling in the early rounds of the team competition at those Games, she withdrew and then pulled out of the all-around competition as well as the vault, uneven bars and floor disciplines. On Friday, she spent time on the four apparatuses with familiar routines and finished on the vault where she performed the highly challenging Yurchenko double pike.

She did not speak to reporters after the session, but Biles' coach, Cecile Landi, said there had been no late doubts from Biles about getting back into action. "We wouldn't be here if we had seen any hesitation," Landi said. "It's her will to be here, we support it, we see it, so as long as she tells us she is good to go, we're going to continue."

This weekend's event in Chicago will also mark a return to competition for reigning Olympic all-around champion Sunisa Lee, who has battled a kidney-related health issue this year. Lee said she was hugely impressed with how Biles performed in training. "I was watching her and she looks amazing, she does not even look like she took like a year off, any time off," she said. "But again, she's Simone, she's just amazing, it's really cool to be competing alongside her and just to have her there if I needed to talk or anything," she said.

Biles had first mentioned she wanted to return during a dinner at a Mexican restaurant in March, Landi said, and then ramped up her efforts after her wedding in May. "I would say it's after her wedding once everything was over, that we saw a shift in her training and commitment to being back," she said. Once back to work, Landi said she realized that Biles' skill-set remained solid despite the time away from the sport. "She could do everything that she could do before," Landi said. "I think we just used the routines... to make it as mentally and physically comfortable as she could handle."

Biles has said that in Tokyo she felt as if she had the "weight of the world on my shoulders". She said her issues had been due to an attack of what gymnasts call the "twisties" — where athletes become disoriented

and lose their sense of where they are in the air at a given moment, leaving them at risk of injury when they land. She eventually returned for the balance beam final, opting for a less ambitious routine than usual that earned a bronze medal.

'For herself'

Her Tokyo experience opened up a wide-ranging debate about mental health in sport and the pressures of high expectations on elite athletes. Biles, among dozens of top gymnasts who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of jailed US team doctor Larry Nassar, continues to use a therapist to help her with the mental side of the sport. She has yet to decide if her comeback will lead her to next year's Olympics in Paris but a successful performance this weekend will surely lead to increased hopes of a third Olympics appearance.



CHICAGO: USA's Simone Biles warms up while training for the 39th edition of the US Classic gymnastics competition at Now Arena in the Hoffman Estates suburb on Aug 4, 2023. — AFP

Biles also used the US Classic as her comeback meet in 2018 after taking a lengthy break following her gold-medal campaign at the Rio Olympics. But Landi said there's a different feel to Biles' approach this time. "She really wants it for herself," Landi said. "She is a married woman, she has matured, she knows what she wants and we are just around her to support her."

Lee said of her own form, that she felt she was reaching new levels before her health problems but was confident of re-capturing her best. "I was coming with new combinations, new skills, it would have been really cool but I already know that I can do it," she said. "So if I just get myself back to that pace, I'll be right on for the Olympics hopefully." — AFP

Eagles player acquitted of rape, kidnapping

LOS ANGELES: Philadelphia Eagles offensive lineman Josh Sills was acquitted on Friday of raping and kidnapping a woman in his Ohio hometown, charges that stemmed from a Dec 2019 incident. Sills, 25, had been indicted by a Guernsey County, Ohio, court grand jury in February on the charges, both felonies. The jury deliberated for about three hours on Friday after hearing four days of testimony.

They found Sills not guilty of forcibly restraining the woman in his pick-up truck and forcing her to engage in sexual activity. Sills looked on impassively as the jury foreperson read out the verdicts in court. But after Judge Daniel G Padden gave jurors their final instructions he offered Sills a chance to address them. "I'd like to say thank you for everything that you've done, for paying attention, doing your due diligence in listening to the testimony," Sills said. "I have done nothing wrong, and I am glad that was proven today." Sills' lawyer, Michael Connick, said the acquittal "ends a nearly four-year nightmare for the Sills family, and particularly Josh". Like Sills, the woman who accused him was 21 at the time of the incident, after which she immediately filed a police report. — AFP

NFL rusher Kamara, defender Lammons handed 3-game bans

NEW YORK: New Orleans Saints rusher Alvin Kamara and Indianapolis Colts cornerback Chris Lammons were issued three-game suspensions Friday by the NFL for their roles in a 2022 Las Vegas nightclub fight. The bans for personal conduct policy violations will keep each player out for his team's first three games of the upcoming regular season. Lammons and Kamara are eligible for all pre-season games and workouts.

Kamara will miss Saints games against Tennessee, Carolina and Green Bay before being allowed back on September 25 ahead of a home game against Tampa Bay. Lammons will miss Colts games against Jacksonville, Houston and Baltimore before returning on Sept 25 ahead of a home game against the Los Angeles Rams. Kamara pleaded innocent in March to charges of misdemeanor conspiracy to commit battery and felony battery resulting in substantial bodily harm.

He and three others, including Lammons, faced charges for allegedly punching and kicking victim Darrell Greene outside a Las Vegas nightclub during the weekend of the 2022 NFL Pro Bowl game, in which Kamara played. Police said a video supported Greene's claims that he was punched by Lammons and kicked by multiple people, resulting in a broken right orbital bone. Greene filed a civil lawsuit that was settled out of court.

Kamara pleaded no contest last month to a misdemeanor charge of breach of peace and was ordered to serve 30 hours of community service and pay Greene \$105,000 for medical expenses as well as a \$500 fine. The plea enabled Kamara, 27, to escape a possible felony battery charge that could have sent him behind bars for five years.

Kamara met with NFL commissioner Roger Goodell on Thursday in New York to discuss the incident and made an apology Friday in his first public comments about the incident. "Poor judgement on my end," Kamara said. "Definitely a bad decision. I was completely wrong. I embarrassed the Saints, I embarrassed my family and my mother. I embarrassed myself, embarrassed the city, and the shield, obviously, embarrassed the NFL."

Kamara, entering his seventh NFL campaign, has 5,135 rushing yards, 8,888 total yards from scrimmage and 72 touchdowns in his career. The Saints are 3-7 in games without Kamara since he debuted. He will miss at least one contest for a sixth consecutive season. "I'd be lying if I said it wasn't tough. I've lost a lot throughout this ordeal," Kamara said. "Definitely not looking for any pity, not looking for somebody to give me a pat on the back and say it's OK. I know what I did, I know what I was involved in and I definitely take responsibility. That's part of being a man and growing. From here, I've just got to make the right decisions and make the right choices." — AFP



Alvin Kamara



Anthony Davis

Lakers agree to terms with Davis on 3-year \$186m deal

LOS ANGELES: NBA All-Star forward Anthony Davis has agreed to terms on a three-year maximum contract extension worth \$186 million, a deal with the NBA's richest-ever annual extension at \$62 million, ESPN reported Friday. When completed, the agreement would link Davis to the Lakers through 2028 at a cost of \$270 million, according to the agent for Davis, Rich Paul.

Davis, who helped the Lakers win the 2020 NBA crown alongside four-time NBA Most Valuable Player LeBron James, was a key factor in the Lakers' run to last season's Western Conference finals, where they were swept by eventual champion Denver. The 30-year-old American averaged 25.9 points, a career-high 12.5 rebounds, 2.6 assists, 2.0 blocked shots and 1.1 steals a game last season while shooting a career-best 56 percent from the floor in his fourth campaign since being obtained in a deal with the New Orleans Pelicans.

Davis became eligible for the maximum extension on Friday and Lakers general manager Rob Pelinka wasted no time in securing the 6-foot-10 star for the club for another five seasons. It gives him the chance to unite with 38-year-old playmaker James and a strong supporting cast to bring another crown to the Lakers, who share the all-time NBA record with Boston of 17 titles. — AFP

Evenepoel aims to back rivals into corner in title bid

GLASGOW: Remco Evenepoel will defend his men's cycling world road race title in Scotland on Sunday on a course that culminates on the streets of Glasgow and which should suit the Belgian showman. An A-list of contenders includes fellow Belgian Wout van Aert, his great Dutch rival Mathieu van der Poel and two-time Tour de France winner Tadej Pogacar of Slovenia. The course is epic not only in its sheer length at 271km, but also because there are 480 corners in the final part of the race, which suits Evenepoel's strengths.

Urban courses tend to favor smaller men who can better negotiate high-speed cornering, gaining up to one second advantage per corner. "The guy who designed the course must have been at the pub, with all those turns it'll be quite a show," said Evenepoel who also holds the Vuelta a Espana title. Belgium has two other potential winners in van Aert, considered the most powerful all-round rider, and sprinter Jasper Philipsen, winner of four stages at the Tour de France. He could be a likely winner if the race ends with a bunch sprint. "It's like a junior race, except it's 271km long," van Aert said of

'Race of death'

However, Sunday's road race is the major attraction for most fans. The 200 riders embark from Edinburgh along a largely flat course which culminates with 10 laps of Glasgow city center, at 14.3km per lap. Rain is forecast the whole day which will add another element of drama. "If it rains this will be a race of death," predicted Florian Senechal. "I'll make a nice show but who wants a broken collarbone." Two-time world champion Julian Alaphilippe is a dark horse. His coach Tommy Voeckler described the course as peculiar because of the winding inner-city loop. "There are 48 corners per lap, so almost 500 in total in the second part of the race," he said, understanding that cornering will in fact be the cornerstone of any win.

The distance may also suit Dutch powerhouse van der Poel, who won two of the ultra-long Monument races this year, the Milan-San Remo at 299km and Paris-Roubaix at 253km. "You can attack on this course anywhere and lose the peloton in 20 seconds, we don't have earphones at the worlds. This may suit me," van der Poel said. He had been favorite at the 2022 worlds in Australia but ended up under arrest and in a police cell after a hotel confrontation with two teenage girls who he claimed had repeatedly knocked on his hotel door and ran away. — AFP

Sports

Man City brace for Arsenal assault in Community Shield

Annual curtain-raiser serves as perfect appetizer for Premier League

LONDON: Mikel Arteta has challenged big-spending Arsenal to deliver a statement of intent ahead of the Premier League season when they face treble winners Manchester City in the Community Shield on Sunday. Arteta's side have their sights set on dethroning City as they look to avenge last season's painful collapse in the title race. Fueled by a spending spree of more than £200 million (\$254 million) on England midfielder Declan Rice, Germany forward Kai Havertz and Dutch defender Jurrien Timber, Arsenal have an early opportunity to show they are equipped to end City's three-year reign as champions.

Arsenal finished five points behind Pep Guardiola's men despite holding an eight-point lead in April and Gunners boss Arteta knows this weekend's glamour friendly at Wembley offers an opportunity to lay down a marker. "For sure. After what we did last year, a lot of people are going to talk about what is next," Arteta said. "In the end, it will be about playing better and earning the right to win every match. We made some important signings, like other teams are doing, but when you are Arsenal, you have to handle that."

The annual curtain-raiser to the English top-flight campaign does not always prove an accurate barometer for what is to come but it does serve as the perfect appetizer for the Premier League, which kicks off with City's trip to Burnley on Aug 11. Arsenal's

opener comes against Nottingham Forest the following day in a rematch with the team who ended their title bid with a 1-0 win at the City Ground in May.

While Arsenal have a burning desire to get their hands on the Premier League trophy for the first time since 2004, Guardiola's side must prove they remain hungry for silverware. Cementing their status as one of English football's all-time great teams, City last season became only the second English club to win the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup in a single campaign, matching Manchester United's achievement in 1998/99.

'Still here to win'

Two months after Rodri's goal sealed City's long-awaited first Champions League crown against Inter Milan, Guardiola's men are back in action as they attempt to produce an encore to their golden year. City's dynastic status ensures they are favorites to become the first English side to win the top-flight title four years in a row. But there is one legitimate question hovering over the champions as they set off on their quest for a sixth title in seven seasons.

Can Guardiola refocus a squad potentially sated by so much success and possibly unsettled by close-season transfer movement? City captain Ilkay Gundogan, a key member of Guardiola's leadership group, has left for Barcelona and Algeria winger Riyad Mahrez has moved to Saudi club



Mikel Arteta



Pep Guardiola

Al-Ahli. Kyle Walker, Bernardo Silva and Aymeric Laporte have also been linked with moves away from the Etihad Stadium.

Croatia midfielder Mateo Kovacic has arrived from Chelsea to replace Gundogan and Joao Cancelo is back following a surprise loan move to Bayern Munich last season reportedly sparked by a row with Guardiola. The club are understood to have agreed a fee with RB Leipzig for highly rated Croatia international defender Josko Gvardiol.

As well as handling the transfer merry-go-round, the obsessive Guardiola surely spent his summer holidays fretting over City's ability to avoid a treble

hangover. Jack Grealish's wild celebrations revealed the sense of fulfilment and relief felt by Guardiola's players at the climax of an incredible season. But if there is concern about City's ability to stay hungry, Guardiola must have been relieved to hear Ruben Dias' recent rallying cry.

"Even though this team has won a lot in the past few seasons, we are still hungry and we are still here to win again and again," defender Dias said. "Actions speak louder than words. We can say what we want but all that matters is what we do when the games start. The mentality is there with everyone who belongs to the club." — AFP

Man Utd sign striker Hojlund from Atalanta

LONDON: Manchester United sealed their swoop for Denmark striker Rasmus Hojlund from Atalanta for a reported fee of £64 million (\$82 million) on Saturday. Hojlund agreed a five-year contract with the option of a further season as United manager Erik ten Hag finally got his wish to bring in a striker ahead of the new Premier League campaign. The 20-year-old could cost United a further £8 million if add-on clauses in his contract are met.

"It is no secret that I have been a fan of this great club since I was a small boy and I dreamed of walking out at Old Trafford as a Manchester United player," Hojlund said. "I am incredibly excited by this opportunity to turn that dream into a reality and I am determined to repay the faith that the club has shown in me. It is still early in my career, but I know that I am ready to make this step up and play with this group of world-class players."

Ten Hag made Hojlund his top target after United

reportedly refused to pay Tottenham's asking price for England striker Harry Kane, who appears bound for German champions Bayern Munich. French champions Paris Saint Germain were said to be in the hunt for Hojlund's signature before United won the race. Ten Hag was keen to boost his striking options after a season in which his side often lacked a cutting edge.

United finished third in the Premier League but scored just 58 goals — 36 fewer than champions Manchester City. Although Hojlund has a low profile compared to many of his new team-mates, Ten Hag is confident he can thrive under the Old Trafford spotlight. United football director John Murtough said: "Rasmus is a truly exceptional talent. He possesses technical and physical attributes which rank him amongst the best players in the world for his age group. "Working under Erik and his coaches will provide Rasmus with the perfect development platform."

Hojlund has enjoyed a sudden rise since starting his career in relative obscurity with Danish club FC Copenhagen in 2020. He moved on to Austrian side Sturm Graz, where his 12 goals in 21 games convinced Atalanta to sign him in Aug 2022. He scored 10 goals in 34 appearances in all competitions for the Italian team last season, catching Ten Hag's eye in the process.

Standing 6ft 2ins tall, Hojlund, who has scored six times in his six games for Denmark, should have the



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Danish forward Rasmus Hojlund reacts as he is introduced prior to the preseason friendly football match between Manchester United and Lens at Old Trafford stadium on Aug 5, 2023. — AFP

physical presence to cope with the aggressive approach of Premier League defenders. As well as his imposing physique, he is also blessed with blistering pace and predatory instincts in the penalty area. Hojlund's Atalanta boss Gian Piero Gasperini likened him to Manchester City's record-breaking striker Erling Haaland, whose goals helped United's rivals win the treble last term. — AFP

Defender Gvardiol signs five-year Man City deal

LONDON: Premier League and European champions Manchester City on Saturday completed the signing of Croatia center-back Josko Gvardiol on a five-year deal from RB Leipzig. No financial details were revealed but Pep Guardiola's side are understood to have agreed a fee of €90 million (\$99 million) for the Croatia international. Gvardiol, 21, has impressed in his two seasons at Leipzig which he joined from Dynamo Zagreb in July 2021.

"I have always dreamed of one day playing in

England and to be doing so now with Manchester City — after the season they have just had — is a real honor for me," said Gvardiol of joining a team which won the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League last year. "Anyone who saw Manchester City play last season knows they are the best team in the world. To win the Treble says everything you need to know about the quality this team has."

Gvardiol becomes Man City's second signing ahead of the 2023/24 campaign, following fellow Croatian international Mateo Kovacic. "To be joining City is something very special for me and my family," continued Gvardiol. "To have the chance to work with Pep Guardiola, too, will be amazing for me. I know I am not yet the finished article and I am sure my game will progress under the best coach in football. To be linking up with Mateo Kovacic will also be special. He's a top footballer and I hope we can

both help City achieve another successful season in 2023/24 and then beyond."

Capped 21 times for Croatia, Gvardiol made 87 appearances across two seasons for Leipzig winning back-to-back German Cups. He won two league titles with Zagreb before moving to the Bundesliga. City will now have six senior central defenders, but Guardiola has insisted that was not a problem given the gruelling nature of the season.

"The season is so long, there is many, many games. It is absolutely not too many," Guardiola told journalists ahead of Sunday's Community Shield against Arsenal at Wembley. "We are very happy to bring Josko to Manchester City," said City director of football Txiki Begiristain. "He is a player we have watched closely, and we feel he has a superb set of attributes. Top clubs all over Europe have been monitoring him, so to bring him here is great news for us." — AFP

Chelsea sign goalkeeper Sanchez on seven-year deal

LONDON: Chelsea on Saturday completed the signing of Spanish goalkeeper Robert Sanchez from Premier League rivals Brighton on a seven-year deal. Sanchez, who lost his place to Jason Steele during the second half of last season, will

offer competition for Kepa Arrizabalaga following the departure of Edouard Mendy to Saudi Arabian club Al-Ahli. "We're very pleased to welcome Robert to Chelsea and he adds further quality to our goalkeeping unit," Chelsea sporting directors Paul Winstanley and Laurence Stewart said.

"Robert has repeatedly proved himself in the Premier League and been capped by his country. We are excited to watch him work with Mauricio (Pochettino) and his coaching team during the season ahead." Sanchez becomes Chelsea's sixth summer signing as they prepare for Pochettino's first season in charge. The deal is reported to be

worth £25 million (\$32 million) with an additional sell-on clause included.

Spain international Sanchez, 25, worked with Chelsea goalkeeping coach Ben Roberts when he was at Brighton. Roberts left for Stamford Bridge in Sept 2022. New Blues manager Pochettino is overhauling his squad following the club's worst Premier League season in almost 30 years. Chelsea have also been linked with a move for Seagulls midfielder Moises Caicedo, with Brighton said to be looking for a £100 million fee. They open their new Premier League campaign at home to Liverpool on Aug 13. — AFP

Southampton strike late to launch bid for Premier League return

LONDON: Southampton kicked off their bid for an immediate return to the Premier League with a 2-1 win at Sheffield Wednesday in the opening game of the "toughest ever" Championship season on Friday. Nathan Tella's curler was turned in by Adam Armstrong to put Southampton ahead in the eighth minute at Hillsborough. Lee Gregory equalized with a close-range volley in the 54th minute.

But Che Adams' clinical finish from six yards in the 87th minute won it for Southampton at the start of their first season outside the Premier League since 2012. After last season's bottom of the table finish, former Swansea boss Russell Martin has been hired to stabilize a club that used three managers in their failed attempt to avoid relegation.

The gritty victory over promoted Wednesday underlined how tough it will be to escape a division packed with clubs ready to push themselves to the financial brink in their desperation to hit the Premier League jackpot. The average annual spending by Championship clubs is £32 million, with nearly two thirds of clubs paying more on wages than they generate in revenue.

Reading and Wigan were relegated last season after incurring penalties for financial issues, but spending has intensified after a summer of overseas investment in Championship teams. Influenced by Wrexham's rise to global prominence during their promotion to League Two last season under the ownerships of Hollywood actors Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney, US-based celebrities have rushed to buy into English clubs.

NFL icon Tom Brady, recently retired after his glittering career as a quarterback for the New England Patriots and Tampa Bay Buccaneers, has taken a minority ownership stake in Birmingham City. Optimism is high at relegated Leeds after their takeover by 49ers Enterprises — the investment arm of NFL franchise San Francisco 49ers. Top golfers Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas, alongside NBA star Russell Westbrook, added further glamour to the Leeds promotion push after the trio bought shares in the club.

Armed with substantial "parachute payments" from the Premier League after their relegation, Southampton, Leeds and Leicester undoubtedly have the financial muscle to barge their way back into the big time. But, inspired by tiny Luton's surprise promotion last season, virtually all of the Championship's 24 clubs can dream of going up.

The battle to snare one of three places in the top-flight will be harder than ever according to Huddersfield manager Neil Warnock, a 74-year-old veteran of four promotions from the second tier. "The toughest Championship ever. The six teams who have come into our league are all improved on the six who departed, so it will be twice as difficult," Warnock said. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
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Change of Name

I, **MOHAMMED ALIYAR UNNEEN** holder of Passport No. L3462449 do hereby change my name to **MUHAMMADALI** (as given name) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name **MUHAMMADALI** and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **6/8/2023**

Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh State, India — Pin code 518004, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (Given name) **Ahmed** and (Surname) **Abdul Salam Khan**. **(C 232) 3/8/2023**

my name will be read as: **Burhanuddin** (Given Name) and **Ghadyali** (Surname) **(C 3841) 3/8/2023**

I, **Ahmed Khan**, holder of Indian Passport No. V9396678, having permanent address H.No 43/70 N R Peta,

I, **Burhanuddin**, holder of Indian Passport No. L5940788 having permanent address, Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh, India - 457001, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth

I, **Asgar Ali**, holder of Indian Passport No. L5936609 having permanent address, Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh, India - 457001, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: **Asgar Ali** (Given Name) and **Presswala** (Surname) **(C 3839) 3/8/2023**

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Japan, Spain surge into quarters

Red-hot Miyazawa becomes top scorer • Brilliant Bonmati emerges as leader



WELLINGTON: Norway's midfielder Vilde Boe Risa and Japan's midfielder Hinata Miyazawa fight for the ball at Wellington Regional Stadium on Aug 5, 2023. — AFP

WELLINGTON, New Zealand: Japan's surprise title charge at the Women's World Cup gathered pace with a clinical 3-1 win over Norway to reach the last eight while Spain thrashed Switzerland 5-1 on Saturday. The 2011 champions Japan will face either holders the United States or Sweden in the quarter-finals and on this evidence they will take some stopping. They have won all four games in Australia and New Zealand — including a 4-0 thumping of Spain — scoring 14 times and conceding only once.

Hinata Miyazawa is also quickly becoming one of the breakout stars of a World Cup which has been full of shocks. The 23-year-old got the third nine minutes from time to seal Norway's fate in front of 33,000 in Wellington. She is now the tournament's top scorer. The teams went to the break level at 1-1, but Japan turned the screw on Norway in the second period through goals by Risa Shimizu and Miyazawa.

Norway threw everything at Japan late on but goalkeeper Ayaka Yamashita stood firm and in injury time pulled off a breathtaking save from a close-range header, somehow clawing the ball back off the line. Ominously for the rest of

teams, coach Futoshi Ikeda said Japan are becoming harder to beat as the tournament progresses. "The team is very positive, kept up the pace and I think we have become tougher than before," he added.

Brilliant Bonmati

Spain crushed Switzerland to reach the quarterfinals for the first time in their history and will face the Netherlands or South Africa next. Aitana Bonmati played a starring role with a brace and two assists in front of 43,217 fans at Eden Park in Auckland, a record crowd for a football match in New Zealand. Coach Jorge Vil- da, who made five changes to his starting line-up including dropping reigning Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas, said he had "the 23 best players in the world".

"Aitana played very well today, she scored goals and was player of the match, but the rest of the team played very well too. We have 23 Ballons d'Or," he said. Barcelona's Bonmati said the humbling by Japan in the group stage had been on their minds. "When you lose like we did the other day it is a really big blow but to win 5-1 in a World Cup knockout tie, be through to the quarterfinals and make history, that shows we are a team," said

the midfielder.

"It was not easy after the other day but today we saw the character of the players and I hope we have a lot of days left here." Spain were simply a class above a Swiss side who had reached the last 16 without conceding a goal but whose exit means they have still never won a major tournament knockout game.

'Lucky United States'

The United States, who have underwhelmed so far in their pursuit of an unprecedented third World Cup crown in a row, play Sweden on Sunday in Melbourne. It pits the two top-ranked sides left in the tournament after world number two Germany's shock early exit. The top-ranked US won their last World Cup encounter 2-0 in 2019 on their way to the title, but world number three Sweden were 3-0 winners when they last met at the Tokyo Olympics.

United States coach Vlatko Andonovski admitted the under-fire title-holders were lucky to still be in the tournament after some insipid displays. They stumbled out of their group in second place with one win — against Vietnam — and nervy draws with the Nether-



AUCKLAND: Spain's midfielder Aitana Bonmati scores her team's third goal against Switzerland at Eden Park on Aug 5, 2023. — AFP

lands and Portugal. "The fact we are in, we are lucky, but we are moving on," said Andonovski.

In Sunday's other last-16 encounter, the 2019 runners-up the Netherlands must avoid becoming the latest top team to go out at the hands of a lower-ranked opponent. South Africa, 54th in the world, beat Italy 3-2 to grab a place in

the knockouts and defeating the Dutch would be another major upset. "Look, we've been underestimated so many times before," South Africa's coach Desiree Ellis said on the eve of the game. "I think this group has shown that nothing can stand in their way. This group has shown that when the chips are down, they can stand up." — AFP

Germany questions footballing future after shock exit

BERLIN: As the dust settled on Germany's shock group stage exit from the Women's World Cup, officials and media sweated over the problems ingrained in the country's once proud football set-up. Germany, ranked second in the world and one of the favorites for the tournament, drew 1-1 with South Korea on Thursday. With four points after one win, one draw and a loss, the side finished third and were sent home before the knockouts for the first time.

Speaking on Friday, the German FA's sporting director for the women's game, Joti Chatzalexioiu said the organization had "no clear answers" for the early exit, but suggested past successes may have led to complacency. "Due to our success in the female division, we may have rested on our laurels once or twice." Only the USA have more than Germany's two World Cups, while the eight European Championship titles are four times that of Norway, the only other multiple winners.

The dramatic fall has been mirrored by the German men, who have now been eliminated at the group stage in the past two World Cups after having made it past that stage every time dating back to the 1930s. The sudden fall — Germany remains the only nation to have won World Cups in both men's and women's football — has some questioning the nation's sporting foundations.

Despite making it to the Euro 2022 final and losing in extra time to England, Chatzalexioiu admitted the German FA had recognized a number of issues in need of repair. "It's not like we haven't been trying to address things," the 47-year-old said, explaining the



BRISBANE: Germany's defender Marina Hegering reacts after a draw against South Korea at Brisbane Stadium on Aug 3, 2023. — AFP

German FA had "consciously developed a project for the future of male and female football" over the past five years.

The sporting director pointed out that South Korea bettered the Germans in one-on-one situations, implicitly questioning the players' skills and desire to fight. "When I see the one-on-one stats, then we didn't show enough in the tournament to be successful." German men's coach Hansi Flick has previously criticized the country's youth academy set-up for lagging behind other European nations, pointing out that star youngster Jamal Musiala "has been trained in England, not in Germany". "We really have to focus on the training," Flick said in December after his side were eliminated in Qatar.

Speaking with German tabloid Bild on Friday outside the team's Brisbane hotel, captain Alexandra Popp said she still did not have any answers after a sleepless night. The 32-year-old veteran would not be drawn on her future and batted away questions about the quality of coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg's tactics, instead saying the players needed to "take a look at ourselves first". — AFP

All Blacks in fightback win over Wallabies

DUNEDIN, New Zealand: The All Blacks surged back from a 14-point deficit to beat Australia 23-20 in Dunedin on Saturday and maintain their winning form ahead of the Rugby World Cup. Trailing 17-3 at halftime, New Zealand responded with two unanswered tries in the second half and a 79th minute penalty to Richie Mo'unga to run down opponents they'd beaten 38-7 in Melbourne last week.

Both All Blacks tries went to debutants, winger Shaun Stevenson and flanker Samipeni Finau, as they put an error-prone first half behind them and sealed victory when flyhalf Mo'unga landed his angled penalty shot from 35m out. It was a heartbreaking result but an encouraging performance from the Wallabies, who remain winless under Eddie Jones since he returned this year for his second stint in charge.

A vastly inexperienced side, led by new captain Tate McDermott, crossed for two tries in the first seven minutes and threatened to produce a first win over the All Blacks on New Zealand soil since 2001. But an All Blacks side featuring 12 starting chances held their nerve to make it four wins from four this year and extend their unbeaten streak to 11 Tests. It was their patchiest performance of the year, with greater cohesion achieved in the second half when experienced halves Mo'unga and Aaron Smith were introduced off the bench.

Captain Sam Cane conceded the All Blacks had been pushed to the limit. "That was a proper Test match, they were firing all the shots in the first half, to be fair, we were just hanging in there. They took it to us in a big way," he said. "I'm really proud of the composure and



DUNEDIN: Australia's Rob Leota takes in the lineout ball during the Rugby Championship & Bledisloe Cup Test match between Australia and New Zealand at Forsyth Barr Stadium on Aug 5, 2023. — AFP

the way we fought our way back. "We showed composure and the ability to grind our way back into the game when we were under a fair bit of pressure."

Flyhalf Damian McKenzie was guilty of wayward kicking and replaced early in the second half after being outplayed by inexperienced opposite Carter Gordon. Gordon's retention was staunchly defended by Jones in the leadup following a mixed performance in Melbourne, when New Zealand comfortably retained the Bledisloe Cup.

McDermott said defeat was difficult to take. "That first half showed what type of team we can be, but we have to play more than 40 minutes," he said. "We're gutted, but this gives us confidence that we are heading in the right direction. Credit to the All Blacks, the way they came out in the second half. It was a tough one. I'm really proud of that effort."

The visitors snatched early command and silenced a crowd of 28,265 with near-identical tries in the left corner, both converted by Gordon. The first went to winger Marika Koroiibete, before flanker Tom Hooper barreled over minutes later following a break from fullback Andrew Kellaway. — AFP