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Thousands of US sailors, Marines reach Red Sea after Iran tensions

Deployment adds to growing US military buildup in tense Gulf waterways



This handout photo released on Aug 6, 2023 by the US Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (DVIDS) shows a US navy sailor from USS Bataan (LHD 5) monitoring as the amphibious assault ship transits the Suez Canal with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). — AFP

DUBAI: More than 3,000 United States military personnel have arrived in the Red Sea aboard two warships, part of a beefed up response from Washington after tanker seizures by Iran, the US Navy said Monday. The deployment adds to a growing US military buildup in tense Gulf waterways vital to the global oil trade and led Tehran on Monday to accuse the US of inflaming regional instability.

The US military says Iran has either seized or attempted to take control of nearly 20 internationally flagged ships in the region over the past two years. The US sailors and Marines entered the Red Sea on Sunday after transiting through the Suez Canal in a pre-announced deployment, the US Navy's Fifth Fleet said in a statement. They arrived on board the USS Bataan and USS Carter Hall warships, providing "greater flexibility and maritime capability" to the Fifth Fleet, the statement from the Bahrain-based command added.

The deployment adds to efforts "to deter destabilizing activity and de-escalate regional tensions caused by Iran's harassment and seizures of merchant vessels," Fifth Fleet spokesman Commander Tim Hawkins told AFP. USS Bataan is an amphibious assault ship which can carry fixed-wing and rotary aircraft as well as landing craft. The USS Carter Hall, a dock landing ship, transports Marines, their gear, and lands them ashore.

In a Monday press conference, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said US deployments are only serving Washington's interests. "The US government's military presence in the region has never created security. Their interests in this region have always compelled them to fuel instability and insecurity," he told reporters. "We are deeply convinced that the countries of the Persian Gulf are capable of ensuring their own security."

The latest deployment comes after Washington said its forces blocked two attempts by Iran to seize commercial tankers in international waters off Oman on July 5. The maritime services in Iran said one of the two tankers, the Bahamian-flagged Richmond Voyager, had collided with an Iranian vessel, seriously injuring five crew members, according to state news agency IRNA.

In April and early May, Iran seized two oil tankers within a week in regional waters. Those incidents came after the Zionist entity and the United States blamed Iran in November for what they said was a drone strike against a tanker operated by a Zionist-owned firm carrying gas oil off the coast of Oman. The US announced last month that it would deploy a destroyer, F-35 and F-16 warplanes, along with the Amphibious Readiness Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit, to the Middle East to deter Iran from seizing ships in the Gulf.

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MPs demand return to old energy prices, 20% hike in salaries

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Five MPs called on Monday for abolishing the increases made to electricity and fuel prices in 2016 so that electricity charges would return to just 2 fils per kilowatt. Charges of electricity were raised in 2016 from 2 fils a kilowatt to 50 fils per kilowatt, applying mostly to expatriates and Kuwaiti citizens in a few cases. The proposal also called for cancelling the increase in fuel prices introduced in 2016, so petrol prices would return to under 100 fils per liter.

Meanwhile, five other lawmakers called for setting the minimum wage for Kuwaiti employees once every three years, taking into account the inflation rate. The minimum wage must be raised by 20 percent every three years, according to the proposal. Pensioners will also get a 20 percent raise every three years. The proposal also applies to Kuwaitis employed in the private sector.

The two recent proposals come as part of a string of populist proposals by lawmakers who were elected to the National Assembly on June 6. On Sunday, MPs proposed raising salaries of Kuwaiti employees in the government and private sector, in addition to retired citizens, by as much as KD 400. Lawmakers also demanded that 20 percent of returns on Kuwait's foreign assets should be distributed annually to Kuwaitis above 21 years old. The cost of the proposed hikes will be several billion dinars every year.

Also, MP Saud Al-Asfour, head of the disabled affairs committee, said on Monday the committee amended the law on people with disabilities to include Kuwaiti women who take care of their non-Kuwaiti children, non-Kuwaiti husbands and any non-Kuwaiti relative.

Kuwait bans horror film

KUWAIT: Kuwait has banned a horror film featuring a transgender actor, authorities told AFP on Monday, despite the movie screening in other parts of the conservative Gulf region. The film titled "Talk to Me", which is currently in theatres in the United Arab Emirates and

Saudi Arabia, features transgender Australian actor Zoe Terakes but no explicit LGBTQ references in any of its scenes.

Kuwaiti authorities have "banned the screening of the Australian film, Talk to Me" which was scheduled for release last week, Hisham Alghanim, vice chairman of the Kuwait National Cinema Company, told AFP. The reasons for the ban "are unknown until now", he said. Kuwait's information ministry was not immediately available for comment.

Gulf Arab states, including Kuwait, the UAE and Saudi Arabia — all of which outlaw homosexuality — routinely censor films that contain LGBTQ references. Most recently, they banned the latest Spider-Man animation in June, reportedly over a scene that includes a transgender pride flag. Terakes on Sunday criticized the move to ban the film in Kuwait, describing it as "dehumanizing".

"Our film doesn't have queer

themes," Terakes said in a statement posted on social media. "I am a trans actor who happened to get the role. I'm not a theme. I'm a person," added Terakes, who identifies as non-binary and previously appeared in the acclaimed TV series Nine Perfect Strangers. "Kuwait has banned this film due to my identity alone," Terakes said, adding that the move "is targeted and dehumanizing and means to harm us". — AFP

US lab repeats nuke fusion feat with higher yield

WASHINGTON: US scientists responsible for a historic nuclear fusion breakthrough say they have repeated the feat — this time achieving a greater yield of energy. The Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory stunned the world in December when it announced it had carried out an experimental nuclear reaction that put out more energy than was put into it, a holy grail of science in the quest for unlimited, clean power to end the era of fossil fuels.

"We can confirm the experiment produced a

higher yield than the December 2022 experiment," public information officer Paul Rhien said Monday in an emailed statement, without disclosing specific figures. He added the California lab planned to report the results at upcoming scientific conferences and in peer-reviewed publications. The new development was first reported by the Financial Times.

Nuclear fusion has been touted by its supporters as a clean, abundant and safe source of energy that could eventually allow humanity to break its dependence on coal, crude oil, natural gas and other hydrocarbons driving a global climate crisis. However, there is still a long way to go before fusion is viable on an industrial scale, providing power to homes and businesses.

Nuclear power plants around the world currently use fission — the splitting of a heavy atom's nucleus — to produce energy.

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WASHINGTON: This picture provided by the National Ignition Facility at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory on Aug 7, 2023 shows a preamplifier module increasing laser energy as it travels to the target chamber. — AFP

Gandhi restored to parliament

NEW DELHI: India's main opposition leader Rahul Gandhi was restored to parliament on Monday after the Supreme Court last week suspended his defamation conviction over comments criticizing Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Gandhi is the scion of India's premier political dynasty and his reinstatement was welcomed by other members of his Congress party, which was once a dominant force but has lost the past two elections to Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Gandhi's disqualification "has ceased to operate subject to further judicial pronouncements", Utpal Kumar Singh, secretary-general of the lower parliament house, said in a statement. The 53-year-old Gandhi was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in March in a case that critics flagged as an effort to stifle political opposition in the world's largest democracy.

The conviction stemmed from a remark made during the 2019 election campaign when Gandhi had asked why "all thieves have Modi as (their) common surname". His comments were portrayed as a slur against the prime minister and all those with the

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NEW DELHI: India's Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi arrives at the parliament on Aug 7, 2023. — AFP



Local

Ever-evolving healthcare sector focusing on social welfare, comprehensive services

Health Ministry using current digital technologies to proliferate its services

In my view

Backwardness equation



Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh

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Results reached by the publication follow-up committee of the supreme council for culture in Egypt said more than a decade ago, the Arab world was at the tail end of the "reading" nations list, because the average reading rate is no more than a quarter page per individual per year, while the United States was on top. According to a study by the books and publications committee, the Arab world publishes 1,650 books annually, while the United States alone publishes 85,000 books yearly.

The study of the committee agreed with similar results reached by UNESCO in 2014, which showed the share of every one million Arabs is no more than 30 books, compared to 854 books per million Europeans. The reading rate of an Arab individual is a quarter page per year compared to the reading rate of an American individual, which is up to 11 books annually.

This information and others is known to us for many decades, and discussed by thousands of educated Arabs since the start of the last century, until it became among the information that is memorized by the Arab citizen of all cultural standards and used for self-ridicule and going deeper in masochism.

Reading is love and training, and those who were not trained to read at a young age are rarely successful in training themselves at an older age. Reading is a skill children gain to benefit from once they become adults. Arab children were suffering from a high rate of illiteracy 60 years ago, as well as difficulty in accessing books. Despite this, the reading percentage among them was much higher than that among children today amid falling illiteracy, particularly in the Arab Gulf countries, and ease of accessing books.

Educated Arabs were not successful over 100 years in convincing decision makers to adopt a plan to encourage reading among Arab children. They did not succeed for a simple reason, which is the existence of a large gap between decision makers and the educated, to a point where a saying became famous among our decision makers about the educated, which is: "Consult them and do otherwise".

Free reading classes stopped in 90 percent of schools, and 95 percent of libraries are neglected in Arab schools, while the situation in foreign schools is much worse, as they encourage reading in foreign languages and Western culture. They teach our children another culture, only to find the Arab child when grown up is living among us, but he is a foreign body, and may attack Islamic culture as the case is today. With this they spread the disease of alienation among us, which is the most dangerous disease that can affect nations.

Our grandchildren are living in a difficult environment today, as we were not only satisfied with not encouraging our children to read in their language and love our culture; rather we encourage them to disable the thinking and intelligence centers in them by encouraging them, with ignorance in many cases, to sit in front of social media and network programs for many hours, and this is the great calamity.

A scientific study by Michigan State University that included 1,300 children to gauge scientific gain and its relation to sitting in front of the TV, researchers found and warned of the statistical relationship between the number of hours watching TV by children and reduced scientific gain and acquiring harmful social behaviors. The study showed that early childhood is an important period for the growth of the brain and forming of behaviors in children, so it must be utilized ideally.

Americans are still complaining because their children are sitting for two hours daily in front of the TV, and they present studies to not exceed this period and encourage its reduction. But in our case, a field study by social counselor Taher Al-Nujaidi at the GCC level showed 90 percent of our children aged 3 to 7 sit in front of social media and games for around 5 to 6 hours a day. What does this mean? It simply means the spread of backwardness among our next generations, as the backwardness equation is a lack of reading plus sitting for hours in front of screens small and large, which equals to a coming generation that is more backward and more dependent on others with inability to keep Allah's bounties to us.

Studies are published, columns are written and screaming mouths warn, while decision makers are not moving. All development efforts are without value if we do not confront the backwardness equation, but who can convince decision makers? A question that has been waiting a long time for an answer.



New Al-Jahra Hospital



Modern technology in Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital



Robotic surgery team in Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital



Surgeries room in Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital

KUWAIT: The healthcare sector in Kuwait has always focused on providing proper and updated treatments to members of society through comprehensive services, which were founded prior to the country's independence and it continued in the modern era with ever evolving plans to boost services in all medical fields.

The government of Kuwait had allocated a considerable amount of the state's budget to the Ministry of Health to help bolster health services in the country in accordance with international standards and medical practices. The main plan of the ministry is to train and develop the skills of national health service cadres and staff to further build and solidify the foundation of this vital sector.

In regards to the history of Kuwait's health service, the first health clinic in the country was founded in 1904, while the inaugural hospital in Kuwait was opened in 1912. As Kuwait continued to take significant strides in all sectors, healthcare became more developed through by bringing competent medical experts from far and wide.

Kuwait made sure that its health



Sharq Al-Ahmadi Health Clinic inauguration

strategy was in line with international practices namely of the World Health Organization (WHO) with the Gulf country pushing for hosting regional centers of the renowned organization and other entities in the country. Kuwait also made sure to implement policies touted by WHO when came to combating the spread of disease, promoting healthy lifestyles, and following proper procedures when it

came to providing adequate health services and medicine.

While the infrastructure of health clinics, hospitals, and specialized centers continues to be developed and upgraded, the Healthy Ministry had made it its mission to use current digital technologies to proliferate its services via using applications to reach wider tech-savvy audiences and clients. In line with the digiti-

zation of services, the "Q8Seha" application, launched by the Ministry in 2021, came as a step to elevate healthcare services in Kuwait.

In other achievements, the Health Ministry achieved 80 percent of its 2013-launched national survey to detect and prevent diseases causing loss of hearing and ear infections. Genetic ailments and their treatments were also on the radar of the Health Ministry, which founded an advanced laboratory for genetic assessment at the Kuwait Medical Genetic Center (KMGC). In another important step, an Amiri decree was signed to establish the Dhaman Health Assurance Hospitals, a public and private sector venture at a capital of KD 230 million (around \$16.97 million).

Around 24 percent of the Dhaman company's shares are owned by the state, the private sector has around 26 percent, and 50 percent is given to Kuwaiti citizens. While Kuwait continues to implement its plans for overall development, the future for the healthcare sectors seems to be on the upbeat as the public and private sectors, exemplified in the Dhaman venture, aim to become the top medical provider in the Middle East region. — KUNA



Late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah inaugurates Amiri Hospital.



Amiri Hospital during its inauguration.

Thoracic Diseases Hospital performs rare operations

KUWAIT: The Thoracic Diseases Hospital of the Ministry of Health announced on Monday that it conducted rare operations. The hospital carried out a procedure of two aortic valve replacements by catheter using the latest type of valves (EVO-LUT FX). Kuwait is the first country to use this technology in the Middle East after the United States of America. The head of the Department of Adult Cardiology at the hospital, Dr Abdullah Al-Enazi, said in a press statement on Monday that this achievement complements the hospital's efforts to upgrade and take advantage of international and modern technologies.

Al-Enazi pointed out that the two operations

were performed on two patients by the valve team at the hospital under the supervision of Dr Khaled Al-Marri and were crowned with success. He added that the two patients were suffering from severe valve tightness. This necessitated a replacement operation for this valve, indicating that the modern valve is characterized by ease and accuracy in installation, which results in reducing complications for patients and using less dye.

He pointed out that the modern valve reduces the time of the operation and facilitates the operation of cardiovascular catheterization if the patient needs it in the future, noting the interest of the Ministry of Health in providing the latest international technology and modern techniques to provide the best medical services to patients inside the country. The aortic valve is one of the four valves that regulate blood flow through the heart, and restoration and replacement are two surgical procedures to treat a damaged or injured aortic valve. — KUNA



Dr Khaled Al-Marri and Dr Abdullah Al-Enazi.

Local

Rise in diabetes cases linked to poor lifestyle and dietary habits

Kuwait ranked second in the prevalence of diabetes

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: According to a recent study by Wisevoter for 2023, diabetes has spread in Kuwait at a rate of 24.9 percent, which specialists attribute to the poor lifestyle and dietary habits of people. The International Diabetes Federation ranks Kuwait second in the world in the prevalence of diabetes after Pakistan. One of the main causes of diabetes is obesity, which has a prevalence rate of about 37.9 percent in Kuwait.

Dasman Diabetes Institute explained on its website that in type 2 diabetes, there are two major things that go wrong, either with the pancreas, which may stop working properly, or insulin resistance develops and stop doing its job in lowering blood sugar. Therefore, dietary management of type 2 diabetes should improve the func-

tion of the pancreas and also reduce insulin resistance.

According to experts, there are many ways to help improve insulin resistance like weight loss and healthy fats. Studies show conclusively that replacing foods high in saturated fat with unsaturated fats (especially polyunsaturated fat) can improve insulin resistance. In addition, having more fibrous foods like wholegrain, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and pulses can help improve insulin resistance - even if you do not lose weight.

In a recent study, 86 percent of people who lost 10-15 kg were able to have a functional pancreas and stop diabetes medications. It is worth noting that some people - despite losing 15 kg - are unable to achieve normal pancreatic function. People diagnosed with type 2 diabetes re-

cently (within 6 years) are more likely to achieve remission of their type 2 diabetes via losing a lot of weight.

Experts revealed that low carbohydrate diets can help, which eliminate added sugars and starchy foods, while adding more protein can help the pancreas produce more insulin. Intermittent fasting, which is a way of eating at certain times, has also helped people limit the amount they are eating and may also have other benefits.

People with diabetes must also engage more in regular exercise as advised by their healthcare provider. Exercise can help improve insulin sensitivity and control blood sugar levels. Also, high-stress levels can impact blood sugar control. Incorporate stress-relief techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, yoga or hobbies you enjoy.



Abdulrasoul Salman discussing artwork during the exhibition.



Artwork showcasing the Iraqi invasion. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Iraqi Invasion art work



Abdulrasoul Salman (left) chats with Salem Al-Rasheedi

Government to fix Jleeb issues

KUWAIT: The Council of Ministers issued a decision instructing the Minister of Municipality, in coordination with the concerned authorities, to address the current situation in the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh area. In its decision, the Cabinet indicated that the government's keenness to develop radical solutions that would contribute to addressing the existing situation in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

In its meeting held on July 31, 2023, the Cabinet listened to an explanation by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior on the situation in the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh area in terms of urbanization, planning, security, and residential, which was exploited for uses other than what was intended, as well as the need to find radical solutions to contribute to addressing these conditions in the region.

The Cabinet decided to assign the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and the Minister of State for Communications Affairs, in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and the Public Authority of Manpower, in addition to the bodies it deems appropriate, to review all decisions issued by the Council of Ministers and the Municipal Council, including studies and initiatives to address the current situation in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, as well as to provide the Council of Ministers with the outcome of the matter within a month from its date.

Audit Bureau deals with 1,128 topics worth KD 1.7 billion

KUWAIT: The Audit Bureau announced on Monday that it dealt with 1,128 issues by expressing an opinion on them from April 1 and July 31 worth KD 1.7 billion (\$5.5 billion). "About 84 percent of the total number of topics issued during this period were presented by ministries and government departments worth KD 1.6 billion (\$5.2 billion)," said Ali Al-Kandari, an auditor at the department of control of social and health affairs.



Ali Al-Kandari

"Ten percent of the topics presented were from entities with attached budgets worth KD 43 million (\$139.8 million), while six percent of them were for entities with independent budgets worth KD 55 million (\$178.8 million)," he said. He indicated the bureau issued its opinions ranging from approval, conditional approval or renewal of approval for 586 topics worth KD 848 million (\$2.7 billion).

"The bureau issued its opinion not to approve 32 topics worth KD 47 million (\$152.8 million) during the abovementioned period and found 13 topics in violation of the provisions of articles 13 and 14 of the law establishing the Audit Bureau worth KD 4 million (\$13 million)," Kandari added. He pointed out that the bureau returned 418 topics worth KD 628 million (\$2.04 billion) for not providing the bureau with documents for the topics presented and related data and clarifications. — KUNA

Arts exhibition commemorates Iraqi invasion

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Kuwait Arts Association held an exhibition on Sunday to display Kuwaiti artists' paintings that recall the Iraqi invasion on Kuwait in 1990 to keep this memory alive among Kuwaitis of younger generations. President of Kuwait Arts Association Abdulrasoul Salman expressed his gratitude to Kuwait Times for its continuous support of Kuwait Arts Association since its establishment. He also thanked the artists who participated in this exhibition for their diverse artistic styles, as well as the minister of social affairs.

Salman then told Kuwait Times that on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the establishment of Kuwait Arts Association, it is celebrating by showcasing local, Arab and international artistic and visual projects and contributions. The latest exhibition, titled "The Saddamist Invasion of Kuwait", features work by artists who are members of the association, presenting around 48 artworks that depict the period of the invasion and the destruction that occurred during these eight months, as well as artworks that portray the liberation of Kuwait.

The aim of this exhibition is to commemorate the past that people have not forgotten, with its destruction, martyrs and resistance. Iman Al-Enezi, Manager of the Civil Associations Department, said: "Today we take part in the opening of the fine arts exhibition that reflects the period of the invasion. As the management of public benefit associations, we are proud of such exhibitions that

commemorate the past, which Kuwaitis must be knowledgeable and aware of."

Salem Al-Rasheedi, Assistant Undersecretary of the Social Development Sector at the Ministry of Social Affairs, told Kuwait Times: "We have been invited today by the Kuwait Arts Association to remember the ordeal that Kuwait faced during the invasion in 1990 and the strong stance of Kuwaitis through this exhibition. We can see that this crisis has become the reason for national unity between the people and the ruler, as well as among the people themselves."



Iman Al-Enezi

'Day of Steadfastness' documents heroic role of National Guard men

KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of the National Guard, Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, received the Undersecretary of the National Guard, Lieutenant General Engineer Hashem Al-Rifai and Director of the Moral Guidance Directorate, Brigadier General Dr Jadaan Jadaan. He presented the team who are working on the film and book called "Day of Steadfastness", which document the heroic role of the National Guard men in confronting the brutal invasion forces.

The Deputy appreciated the efforts of those in charge of producing the documentary film and the special edition, praising the high level of organization. He also recalled the martyrs of the National Guard who gave their lives in order to defend the dear homeland, praying to Allah Almighty to bless them with His mercy and forgiveness, and to perpetuate the blessings of security and safety in Kuwait under the wise leadership of HH the Amir, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and HH the Crown Prince.



News in Brief

Liquor factory busted,
Asian suspect nabbed

KUWAIT: Hawally security officials arrested a delivery man for being in possession of alcoholic drinks. The Asian suspect (nicknamed Chivazo) was found in possession of a large quantity of imported and local alcoholic drinks. He was arrested in Salmiya. Detectives at Al-Nuqra police station received information about an Indian expatriate who was selling liquor in the area. Detectives raided the site and arrested him. During interrogation, he confessed that he manufactures local liquor at home.

Defense ministry and
KISR sign agreement

KUWAIT: Military Facilities' Engineering Sector of the Ministry of Defense on Monday signed a cooperation agreement with Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) in technical, scientific and innovation fields. A ministry statement said the agreement aims at advancing work through mutual technical expertise pertaining to road examinations. The accord underscores the Ministry's commitment to KISR as a "strategic partner" in this specialized domain and beyond. The signing ceremony was attended by Ministry acting undersecretary Sheikha Dr Shamayel Ahmad Al-Sabah, and KISR acting director general Dr Manea Al-Sedairawi. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: People take shelter from the sun under a traffic light in Kuwait City, amidst a heatwave. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Expat students dissatisfied with private school system

'Schools admitting more students than their capacity'

By Zaid Aboobacker

KUWAIT: In the pursuit of preparing future generations, the school system is experiencing a wave of discontent. From rigid and color-specific dress codes to lack of opportunities, expatriate students are displeased with their schools. Students also do not see teachers as mentors who can guide them. They cannot be blamed for this mindset alone, as many teachers in Kuwait join as part-timers in schools with little to no experience in the field of teaching.

Since these teachers ask for very little salaries, schools are more than happy to recruit them after seeing a bachelor's degree. Good teachers do exist, but they are few in number, according to students. One of the reasons good teachers aren't arriving in Kuwait might be because of visa issues, which have a negative impact on teachers' mental health because

they are unable to bring their families to the country where they live.

Schools are admitting more students than their capacity, which increases the student-to-teacher ratio in classes, consequently reducing the quality of education. Many teachers provide extra tuitions in their homes for an extra source of income. This might lead to teachers teaching less in school and focusing more on their tuitions. "You can buy books and uniforms from school, but education itself is acquired elsewhere," said Ali, a former student who studied in Kuwait for the past 12 years.

Michael, an 11-year-old sixth grade student, told Kuwait Times he was forced to buy very specific type of shoes. He also complained the school splits textbooks into a number of very short volumes and also updates the textbooks every year so students cannot borrow textbooks from their seniors and are forced to buy them from the school.

A lack of internships and opportunities for expatriate students also makes them mostly dependent on their grades for their university applications, while field trips and outdoor activities have reduced over the years. Fatima, a four-year-old kindergarten student, said she and her classmates have only one physical education class per week. This means that they only get access to playgrounds once every week.

Rayhaan, a student from the same school, said seniors face congestion during sports periods, as too many students are on the playing field, because the school schedules all classes of his grade into the



same 45-minute session. When schools take students to amusement parks for annual field trips, students also experience overcrowding there due to multiple classes and schools present in the same place at the same time. Omar, a student from one of these schools, said the essence of the trip, which is to enjoy the rides and hang out with friends, is ruined due to the large crowds present there.

A number of private schools in the UAE have already introduced the use of laptops and tablets in classrooms, but private schools in Kuwait are lagging behind in this regard. Schools have exerted efforts to increase the quality of education by creating new infrastructure and regulations, but students are unimpressed and view such moves as only to make more profits. The students are given no reason to believe otherwise.



Promoting business ties, Malawi's envoy visits Lulu

KUWAIT: In a significant move to strengthen bilateral trade and economic ties between Malawi and Kuwait, Younos Abdul Karim, the esteemed Ambassador of Malawi to Kuwait, paid a momentous visit to the regional office of Lulu Hypermarket in Farwaniya, Kuwait. During the visit on August 7, 2023, Ambassador Younos Abdul Karim held a productive meeting with Mohmed Haris, the Director of Lulu Hypermarket Kuwait, and other prominent members of the top management team.

The visit marked a pivotal milestone in exploring various business possibilities, particularly focusing on the import of Malawi's high-quality products into the Kuwaiti market. Both sides expressed their eagerness to forge a long-lasting partnership that will not only boost trade relations but also foster cultural exchange between the two nations. Ambassador Younos Abdul Karim commended Lulu Hypermarket's reputable presence in Kuwait and its pivotal role in the retail sector. He conveyed his appreciation for Lulu Hypermarket's commitment to offering a diverse range of quality products to Kuwaiti consumers and tourists alike.

During the meeting, Mohmed Haris, extended a warm welcome to Ambassador Younos Abdul Karim and his delegation. He expressed keen interest in exploring the untapped potential of Malawi's unique and rich offer-



ings, he acknowledged that Kuwaiti consumers have a growing demand for distinctive products from across the globe and expressed Lulu Hypermarket's commitment to providing an avenue for Malawian products to reach Kuwaiti consumers.

Both parties discussed various strategies to facilitate the smooth importation of Malawian products into Kuwait, overcoming any potential hurdles and ensuring compliance with regulations. Additionally, they explored possibilities for joint marketing initiatives to raise awareness of Malawi's products and culture within Kuwait. In his remarks, the Ambassador expressed his optimism and confidence in the prospects of this partnership. He highlighted that the collaboration between Malawi and Lulu Hypermarket Kuwait would not only enhance economic prospects but also create meaningful connections between the peoples of both nations.



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Philippines summons China envoy over water cannoning of boats

Jailed former Pakistan PM 'in good spirits'

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LAMPEDUSA, Italy: Rescuers helping migrants to board a rescue boat during operations that took place south of Lampedusa, rescuing 57 migrants and also recovering the lifeless bodies of a woman and a minor on board. -- AFP



16 dead in shipwrecks off Tunisia

Stranded migrants saved, but dozens missing off Italy in rough seas

TUNIS: Sixteen migrants have died in shipwrecks off the coasts of Tunisia and Western Sahara, officials said Monday, as North Africa faces a spike in Europe-bound sea crossings.

Much of the North African coast has become a major gateway for irregular migrants and asylum seekers primarily from other parts of the continent, attempting perilous voyages in often rickety boats in the hopes of a better life. At least 11 migrants died in a shipwreck off the coast of Tunisia's second city of Sfax, said local court spokesman Faouzi Masmoudi, revising an earlier toll of four fatalities.

Another 44 are missing while two others were rescued from the boat that had 57 people on board, all of them from sub-Saharan African countries, Masmoudi added. Survivors of the sinking, near Tunisia's Kerkennah Islands in the Mediterranean Sea, said the makeshift boat had departed over the weekend from a beach north of the coastal city of Sfax. Masmoudi told AFP coastguard units were searching for more survivors.

The distance between Sfax and Italy's Lampedusa island is only about 130 kilometers (80 miles). Authorities in Morocco meanwhile said the bodies of five migrants, all from Senegal, had been recovered while 189 had been rescued after their boat capsized off Western Sahara. The five bodies as well as 11 migrants in "critical condition" were transferred to a hospital in Dakhla, the disputed Western Sahara's second city on the Atlantic coast, a military source told Rabat's state-owned MAP news agency.

According to the source, the boat had embarked from "a country located south of the kingdom" and was headed towards Spain's Canary Islands before being discovered off the coast of Guerguarg, just north of Mauritania. It was in a "difficult situation", the source added. The migrants who were rescued, including at least one woman, were taken to Dakhla on Sunday and handed over to Moroccan authorities, according to the source.

At least 30 migrants are missing following two shipwrecks off the Italian island of Lampedusa, ac-

ording to survivor testimony, as rescuers on the rocks winched to safety 34 others stranded on the rocks by rough seas. Around 28 people were reported lost at sea by survivors on one boat, while three were reported missing from the second, after both went down in stormy weather on Saturday, said the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Both were rickety iron boats believed to have set off from Sfax in Tunisia on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Italy's coastguard said it had saved 57 survivors from the two shipwrecks, and recovered the body of a woman and a child. It released dramatic footage Sunday of the rescues, in which people could be seen carried high on the crests of vast waves, while a coastguard vessel soared and plunged nearby. While some people tried to climb onto the vessel as it rocked, others, wearing black rubber rings, clung desperately to one another in a human chain.

The Central Mediterranean migrant crossing route from North Africa to Europe is the world's deadliest. Over 1,800 people have died attempting it so far this

year, Di Giacomo said—almost 900 more than last year. "The truth is that figure is likely to be much higher. Lots of bodies are being found at sea, suggesting there are many shipwrecks we never hear about," he said. According to Tunisia's interior ministry, 901 bodies had been recovered this year by July 20 following maritime accidents in the Mediterranean, while 34,290 migrants had been rescued or intercepted.

Most of them came from sub-Saharan African countries, it said. Nearly 90,000 migrants have arrived in Italy this year, according to UN refugee agency, with most of them having embarked from Tunisia or neighboring Libya. Crossing attempts multiplied in March and April following an incendiary speech by President Kais Saied who had alleged that "hordes" of sub-Saharan migrants were causing crime and posing a demographic threat to the mainly Arab country.

Xenophobic attacks targeting black African migrants and students have increased across the country since Saied's February remarks, and many migrants have lost jobs and housing.—AFP

Britain begins housing migrants on docked barge

PORTLAND, UK: Britain on Monday began housing migrants on board a barge docked off the southwest English coast, in its latest controversial immigration policy that has drawn heavy criticism from locals and rights campaigners. The "Bibby Stockholm", which has been moored for weeks in Portland on the Dorset coastline, accepted the first of up to 500 young, male inhabitants due to stay there, after a series of delays.

The decision to dock the vessel in Portland, a small island with a population of about 13,600 people, has prompted a backlash from some locals, including its Conservative MP, who argue the area is ill-suited to the task. Rights advocates have also hit out at the policy, saying the barge is unfit for the purpose, with protesters from either side showing up at the waterfront site in recent weeks. Steve Valdez-Symonds of Amnesty International UK branded the barge "a shameful way to house people who've fled terror, conflict and persecution". It was previously used by Germany and the Netherlands to house homeless people and asylum-seekers,

but opponents in Britain have noted it was previously described as an "oppressive environment". A number of migrants did not board the barge after legal moves.

"None of the asylum-seekers we are supporting have gone to the Bibby Stockholm today," said Steve Smith, chief executive of refugee charity Care4Calais, adding that they had suffered torture, modern slavery and had traumatic experiences at sea. "To house any human being in a 'quasi floating prison' like the Bibby Stockholm is inhumane. To try and do so with this group of people is unbelievably cruel," he said. The firefighters' union last week called for an urgent meeting with the interior ministry over safety concerns raised, but officials have said it passed all necessary checks. The UK government, which is trying to lower the costs of housing asylum claimants following a surge in cross-Channel arrivals aboard small boats in recent years, has insisted the barge provides suitable accommodation. Britain's asylum system backlog had ballooned to more than 130,000 by the end of March. The bill to house those applicants and other migrant arrivals has spiralled to more than £6 million a day, according to officials, as they resort to using hotels and other temporary accommodation. "The government thinks it is right to find alternatives that are cheaper and more cost effective," Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesman told reporters Monday. "We think this is one alternative."—AFP

Coup sanctions plunge Niamey into the dark

NIAMEY, Niger: The long-suffering people of Niger's capital, Niamey, are used to intermittent power cuts. But since the coup d'etat one week ago, interminable blackouts have tested their patience to the limit. Faced with hours of enforced downtime every day, the poorer districts of the capital erupt into cheers of relief when lights, fridges and tools finally hum back into life. In the Dan Zama area, the electric sewing machines in Issa Adamou's workshop are silent. Their owner idly swats at mosquitoes with a fan while he settles in for the long wait.

A group of young people while away the time at a "fada" ("club") down the street, sipping tea in the half-dark, while a chorus of frogs serenades them from the gloom of a nearby pond. After the military took power on July 26, Niger's neighbors not only slapped financial sanctions on the coup leaders, they stopped transmitting electricity to the poverty-stricken Sahel country.

Given that 70 percent of Niger's power comes across the border from Nigeria, that has been a major blow. Not that the Nigerian network was reliable. Blackouts there had a knock-on effect on Niger, one of the poorest countries in the world.

But now the state power company Nigelec has only its meager domestic generation plants to rely on and their output is far from sufficient to supply the capital and its two million inhabitants. Fada owner Kadi Moukaila is not impressed. "Customers complain because they can't get chilled drinks here anymore," she grumbles. Elhadj Tidjani, a 70-year-old resident of Gawaye, on the other bank of the Niger river from Dan Zama, is also fuming. "You can't hear the call to prayer from the loudspeaker at the mosque because of these damned power cuts," he complains.

The daily blackout is heralded, in the wealthier parts of the city, by the roar of an army of generators firing up shops, service stations, chemists and plush villas. In districts like Dan Zama and neighboring Lazaret, street vendors gather around solar-powered streetlamps when darkness falls, or tout their wares under the light of Chinese-made torches which are becoming costlier by the day.

Aziz Hama, one of the tea-sipping coterie in the



NIAMEY, Niger: Diesel jerrycans are brought to a generator in Niamey on August 7, 2023. Nigeria announced on August 2, 2023 that it was cutting off electricity supplies to its neighbor, in line with the sanctions decided by Niger's West African neighbors. — AFP

fada, thinks Niger will carry on coping as usual. "We're used to blackouts. We can hold out for ages. Nigeria will have to find another way if it wants to put pressure on our country," he says. Mohamed, a barber from Dan Zama, also tries to remain sanguine.

"Sourou, sourou ('Be patient')," he tells the restless gaggle of children waiting for him to shave their heads. He has invested in rechargeable solar-powered shavers so he can carry on working regardless but business is much slower. And, a mechanic by trade, he worries how long Niger can hold on. "For the moment the power cuts last about four to five hours. We can cope with that. 'But what if one of the (Nigerelec) turbines goes?'" he says.

"These cuts come at a bad time. Prices are going through the roof because of the attacks," says Moukaila, referring to the jihadist insurgencies plaguing sections of the Sahel belt spanning Africa from west to east. "They're making it hard to source supplies." Moussa Abba, who owns a chemist in Niamey, is not taking any chances. "We bought a new generator as backup. These aren't ordinary power cuts," he explains. Halidou Jika, who sells frozen foods, says he now only keeps the minimal amount of stock "so I don't have to throw loads away" if the cold chain breaks. Niger has played a key part in Western strategies to combat the jihadist attacks that have undermined the Sahel since 2012, with France and the United States stationing troops there. But hostility to France is growing in former West African colonies such as Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, while Russian influence, often via the Wagner mercenary group, is on the rise.—AFP



PORTLAND, UK: A picture shows an aerial view of The Bibby Stockholm accommodation barge (left) moored to the quayside at Portland Port in Portland, on the south-west coast of England on August 7, 2023. — AFP

W African bloc to meet after Niger defies ultimatum

NIAMEY, Niger: West African leaders will hold a summit on the crisis in Niger this week after the country's military rulers defied an ultimatum to restore the elected government or face possible military intervention. In its first official reaction since Niger ignored the deadline of midnight (2300 GMT) on Sunday to rein-

state democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum, the ECOWAS regional bloc said it would meet in the Nigerian capital Abuja on Thursday. "The ECOWAS leaders will be considering and discussing the political situation and recent developments in Niger during the summit," the 15-nation bloc said on Monday.

ECOWAS had issued its ultimatum at a previous summit in Abuja on July 30, warning it did not rule out the "use of force" in Niger. No foreign troops were visible on the streets of Niger's capital, Niamey, after the deadline came and went on Sunday.

A source close to ECOWAS said an immediate military intervention to restore Bazoum was not being envisaged at this stage. Neighboring Mali neverthe-

less said it and Burkina Faso—which have both been suspended from ECOWAS over their own military coups—were sending a joint official delegation to Niamey to show "solidarity (with) the people of Niger".

They have said military intervention would be tantamount to a declaration of war. Niger's military leaders have closed the nation's airspace and on Monday its skies were clear of traffic, according to the flight tracking website Flightradar24. Italy urged ECOWAS to extend the deadline and seek a diplomatic solution, with a similar call from Germany.

"A solution must be found. It's not set that there is no way other than war," Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told La Stampa newspaper. Algeria,

which shares a long land border with Niger, has also cautioned against a military solution, which President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said would be "a direct threat" to his North African country. Senators in regional heavyweights Nigeria urged everyone to focus on the "political and diplomatic option". Just before the ultimatum expired on Sunday, Niger's military rulers closed the Sahel country's airspace and warned any attempt to enter it would meet with an "energetic and immediate response". They said there had been a "pre-deployment in preparation for intervention" made by two Central African countries, without naming them, and warned: "Any state involved will be considered co-belligerent."—AFP

International

Jailed former Pakistan PM 'in good spirits' despite tough conditions

Detained in 'C-class cell,' Khan sleeping on a mattress on the floor

ISLAMABAD: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan was in good spirits despite tough conditions in jail, his spokesman said Monday, following a graft conviction that has ruled him out of contesting elections due later this year.

The former international cricket star was arrested Saturday and whisked to prison after being found guilty in one of the more than 200 cases he has faced since being booted from office by a vote of no confidence in April 2022. There were small, scattered protests — including outside Lahore High Court, where a few dozen people gathered — but Khan's street power has drastically diminished since authorities cracked down three months ago and rounded up thousands of his supporters.

A lawyer met Khan on Monday at a century-old jail on the outskirts of historical Attock city, around 60 kilometers (40 miles) west of the capital, to obtain power of attorney so his team could press ahead with a series of legal challenges.

"He is being held in deplorable conditions not fit for any human, but he is in good spirits," Khan's spokesman Raouf Hasan told AFP. "He said to 'tell the people that I will not compromise on my principles.'" The 70-year-old is being held in a so-called "C-class cell", sleeping on a mattress on the floor and with only enough room for a prayer mat. There is little access to daylight, and a fan but no air conditioner in the summer heat, Hasan said. Lawyers were able to gain power

of attorney from Khan, allowing them to file a bail application on his behalf and also appeal for him to be moved into an "A-class cell". "We're hopeful that we will be able to secure bail and the decision will be suspended and the disqualification revoked," said Hasan.

Question mark over elections

At a court hearing that Khan did not attend on Saturday, a judge found him guilty of failing to properly declare gifts he received while in office and sentenced him to three years in jail. The sentence disqualifies Khan from taking part in elections, although many politicians — including current Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his brother, former premier Nawaz Sharif — have recovered from convictions or had them overturned to make a comeback. Parliament is due to be dissolved on Wednesday, days ahead of the end of its natural term, giving the interim government 90 days to hold an election.

But there is already speculation the vote could be delayed following the release at the weekend of the country's latest census data. Law minister Azam Nazeer Tarar told a local TV channel that constituencies would have to be redrawn according to the new census, warning there could be a delay to polls of up to two-and-a-half months.

Khan's arrest and detention for three days in connection with the same case in May sparked deadly violence, with his supporters taking to the streets in



LAHORE: Lawyers in support of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan, denounce his arrest during a protest outside the High court in Lahore on August 7, 2023. — AFP

the tens of thousands and clashing with police. It also prompted the crackdown that saw almost all of his top leadership arrested or forced into hiding, leaving the party scrambling to set up a replacement decision-making body. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party won a by-election over the week-

end, and in a second vote came behind an independent candidate, with both polls held in his stronghold of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

"His being in prison is not going to dent his popularity," Hasan said. "He is the leader of the people and there is every reason for the establishment to sit down

and talk to him." In the eastern city of Lahore, where Khan was arrested Saturday, a few dozen lawyers and PTI supporters gathered outside the High Court to protest against his conviction. "God willing, we lawyers will continue to stand firm against this illegal and unlawful ruling like a solid wall," said Irfan Faiz. — AFP

UN: Three-quarters of children in S Asia face extreme heat

NEW DELHI: Three-quarters of children in South Asia are already facing dangerously high temperatures, the highest level worldwide, as the impact of climate change grows, the United Nations warned Monday.

About 460 million children are exposed to extreme heat in South Asia, or 76 percent of children, compared to a third of children globally, the United Nations children's agency said.

"With the world at global boiling, the data clearly show that the lives and well-being of millions of children across South Asia are increasingly threatened by heat waves and high temperatures," said Sanjay Wijesekera, UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia. The UN warns children in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Pakistan are at "extremely high risk" of the impacts of climate change, defining extreme high temperatures as 83 or more days in a year over 35 degree Celsius (95 degree Fahrenheit).

Children cannot adapt as quickly to temperature changes, and are not able to remove excess heat from their bodies. "Young children simply cannot handle the heat," added Wijesekera. "Unless we act now, these children will continue to bear the brunt of more frequent and more severe heatwaves in the coming years." — AFP

Iran building collapse death toll rises to 5

TEHRAN: Five people including two policemen were killed and at least 11 others injured during the collapse of several buildings in Iran's capital, local media reported on Monday. The policemen were securing the planned demolition on Sunday of "unauthorized buildings" in Tehran's southwest, ISNA news agency said. Another news agency, Tasnim, said two of the officers were killed.

The overall "toll from the collapse" has reached five, spokesman for Tehran's fire department, Jalal Maleki, told Fars news agency. According to ISNA, authorities had begun the demolition of one building when five others collapsed. Rescue operations were underway to find others who may be trapped under the rubble, ISNA and Tasnim reported.

Photographs from the scene issued by Tasnim showed rescuers and heavy equipment working below a pile of debris and twisted metal several meters (yards) high, with other unfinished and partially damaged buildings around them. ISNA quoted a police statement saying the buildings which collapsed did not comply "with construction safety measures".

A Tehran city official said on Saturday that au-



TEHRAN: Rescue personnel gather at the site of a collapsed building in Tehran on August 6, 2023. — AFP

thorities had demolished more than 46,000 unauthorized buildings over the past two years, according to Hamshahri newspaper.

In May 2022, a building collapse in Iran's southwest killed 43 people, in one the country's deadli-

est such incidents. The collapse of the 10-storey Metropolis building, which had been under construction in the city of Abadan in Khuzestan province, sparked protests across the country decrying corruption and incompetent authorities. — AFP

Thousands of US sailors, Marines...

Continued from Page 1

Last week, a US official told AFP that Washington is also preparing to put Marines and Navy personnel aboard commercial tankers transiting the Gulf as an added layer of defense. Washington's stepped-up military response comes at a time of deepening engagement between the region and

China, which brokered a shock detente between Gulf rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran in March.

Tehran's relations with other Arab Gulf states are also growing. The president of the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait's foreign minister were both offered invitations to visit the Islamic Republic last week. "Security will remain a friction point in US-Gulf relations even if the threat posed by Iranian attacks against shipping eases in the short term," said Torbjorn Solthvedt of the risk intelligence firm Verisk Maplecroft. "The perception that the US isn't doing enough to deter Iranian attacks against international shipping will persist," he told AFP. "The need for a new approach is evident." — AFP

extreme temperatures inside specialized devices.

Like fission, fusion is carbon-free during operation, and has additional critical advantages: it poses no risk of nuclear disaster and produces much less radioactive waste. During December's experiment, the lab used 192 ultra-powerful lasers to deliver 2.05 megajoules of energy to a tiny capsule smaller than a pea containing isotopes of hydrogen. It produced 3.15 megajoules of fusion energy output. While the result was a net energy gain, 300 megajoules of energy was needed from the electrical grid to power the lasers. — AFP

gathered outside Congress headquarters in New Delhi, shouting slogans backing Gandhi and thumping drums.

Gandhi returned to the lower house Monday afternoon as a lawmaker from the southern state of Kerala, but didn't immediately issue a public comment. India's top court suspended Gandhi's defamation conviction on Friday and said the initial trial had failed to justify imposing the maximum sentence for his campaign rally comments four years ago. "The order of conviction needs to be stayed pending final adjudication," Justice B R Gavai said in his ruling.

Gandhi is the son, grandson and great-grandson of former prime ministers, beginning with independence leader Jawaharlal Nehru. Congress was once the dominant force of Indian politics, but Gandhi has lost two elections to Modi and his Hindu nationalist BJP after being cast as a princeling out of touch with the concerns of ordinary Indians.

The weakened Congress has tried to stitch together a grand coalition with disparate regional opposition parties in the run-up to the 2024 national elections, in which Modi hopes to win a third successive term in office. They hope to beat the BJP by challenging what they say is its centralized and nationalistic appeal to voters. — AFP

Zionist strikes kill 6 in Syria

BEIRUT: Four Syrian soldiers and two Iran-backed fighters were killed Monday in pre-dawn Zionist strikes near Damascus, a war monitor said, in the latest deadly Zionist air raid to hit war-torn Syria's capital. The air strikes targeted Syrian regime forces, and military positions and weapons depots used by armed groups supported by Tehran, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

During more than a decade of war in Syria, neighboring Zionist entity has launched hundreds of air strikes on its territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Hezbollah fighters as well as Syrian army positions. Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Observatory, told AFP that "four Syrian soldiers including one officer, as well as two Iran-backed fighters were killed in air strikes on Tehran-supported groups' positions and warehouses for ammunition and weapons."

Two regime forces and five foreign fighters were wounded in the strikes, he added, saying four of them were in critical condition. The Zionist strikes hit areas near Damascus International Airport, Dimas Airport and Kisweh, all close to the capital, destroying weapons and ammunition depots belonging to Iran-backed groups, said the Britain-based monitor which relies on a wide network inside Syria.

Earlier Monday, state media said four Syrian soldiers were killed and four others wounded in the strikes, citing a military source. "At 2:20 am (2320 GMT Sunday), the (Zionist) enemy carried out an air attack from the direction of the occupied Syrian Golan, targeting areas in the vicinity of Damascus," official news agency SANA reported.

The raid killed "four soldiers and wounded four others", it said, reporting unspecified material damage and adding that Syrian air defenses intercepted some Zionist missiles. An AFP correspondent in the capital reported hearing the sound of explosions. The Zionist entity rarely comments on strikes it carries out on Syria, but it has repeatedly said it would not allow its arch-foe Iran, which supports the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, to expand its footprint there.

With Iranian as well as Syrian support, Assad's government has clawed back much of the territory it had lost to rebels early in the conflict which broke out in 2011 and has pulled in foreign powers and global

jihadists. Asked about Monday's strikes, a Zionist army spokesperson told AFP in a statement: "We do not comment on reports in the foreign media."

On July 19, Zionist air strikes near Damascus killed three pro-government fighters and wounded four others, the Syrian Observatory said at the time. SANA had reported two soldiers were wounded in those strikes. It quoted a military source as saying the bombing targeted "certain positions in the vicinity of Damascus". Syria's foreign ministry had condemned that attack "in the strongest terms".

In a statement carried by SANA, it called on the United Nations and the Security Council to "take immediate action" to oblige the Zionist entity "to desist from these criminal policies". Early last month, state media said the Zionist entity had carried out air strikes near the government-held city of Homs. The Zionist army later said it struck an anti-aircraft battery after rocket fire.

On June 14, the Zionist entity carried out air strikes near Damascus wounding a soldier, according to SANA. Those strikes came after others which in late May hit the Damascus region, with the Observatory reporting five wounded in attacks on air defense sites that host fighters from Lebanon's powerful pro-Iranian movement Hezbollah. Previous Zionist strikes have put both Damascus and Aleppo airports out of service. And in late March and early April, the Zionist stepped up its strikes on Syria with four raids on government-held areas in less than a week, targeting positions of Syrian government forces and pro-Iran groups.

On Saturday, at least three civilians from the same family were killed when Russian warplanes struck the outskirts of the northwest Syrian city of Idlib, the Observatory said. Russia has over the years repeatedly struck Syria's last main opposition bastion, but attacks killing civilians had been limited this year until an uptick in violence in late June.

"Russian air strikes this morning" to the west of the city left "three dead from the same family... and six people wounded", the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said, adding rescue teams were still at work removing rubble. Four strikes hit the area where rebel bases are also present, added the Observatory.

Since 2020, a ceasefire deal brokered by Damascus ally Moscow and rebel-backer Ankara has largely held in Syria's northwest, despite periodic clashes. However, in an uptick in violence, Russian air strikes killed at least 13 people in Idlib province on June 25, in what the Observatory said at the time was the deadliest such attack on the country this year. — AFP

US lab repeats nuke fusion feat...

Continued from Page 1

Fusion on the other hand combines two light hydrogen atoms to form one heavier helium atom, releasing a large amount of energy in the process. That is what occurs inside stars, including our Sun. On Earth, fusion reactions can be provoked by heating hydrogen to ex-

Gandhi restored to parliament...

Continued from Page 1

same surname, which is associated with the lower rungs of India's caste hierarchy.

Anyone sentenced to a custodial term of two years or more is ineligible to sit in India's parliament, and Gandhi was expelled as a result, though he stayed out of jail while appealing to the Supreme Court. Congress head Mallikarjun Kharge said the reinstatement was "a welcome step", and called on the government to concentrate on "governance rather than denigrating democracy by targeting opposition leaders".

Fellow Congress party MP Shashi Tharoor also welcomed Gandhi's return "with enormous relief". "He can now resume his duties in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) to serve the people of India and his constituents... A victory of justice and for our democracy," he said. Many Congress leaders posted videos and messages hailing Monday's order, and Kharge offered sweets to opposition leaders. Dancing supporters waving flags

International

Philippines summons China envoy over water cannoning of boats

West says Beijing's actions threaten regional peace, stability

MANILA: Manila summoned Beijing's envoy on Monday after the China Coast Guard blocked and water cannoned Philippine vessels in the disputed South China Sea, President Ferdinand Marcos said. The incident happened Saturday as the Philippine Coast Guard escorted charter boats carrying food, water, fuel and other supplies to Filipino military personnel stationed at Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands. Beijing claims almost all of the South China Sea, through which trillions of dollars in trade passes annually, and has ignored a 2016 international court ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

The Philippine military and coast guard have accused the China Coast Guard of breaking international law by blocking and firing water cannon at the resupply mission, preventing one of the charter boats from reaching the shoal. Another charter boat successfully unloaded its cargo.

"Our Secretary of Foreign Affairs summoned Ambassador Huang (Xilian) today and gave him a note verbally including pictures, video about what happened, and we are awaiting their reply," Marcos told reporters. "The position of China, of course, is they say 'this is ours so we are defending it', and we, for our part, are saying 'no, we own it so we are defending it'. So that becomes a grey area that we are discussing."

China maintained over the weekend that it had taken "necessary controls" against Philippine boats that "illegally" entered its waters. The US State Department on Sunday condemned the Chinese actions, saying they directly threatened regional peace and stability. Britain, Australia, Canada and the European Union also criticized Beijing's conduct. Second Thomas Shoal is about 200 kilometers (124 miles) from the Philippine island of Palawan, and more than 1,000 kilometers from China's nearest major land-

mass, Hainan island. China's coast guard and navy vessels routinely block or shadow Philippine ships patrolling the contested waters, Manila says.

The Philippines has issued more than 400 diplomatic protests to Beijing since 2020 over its "illegal activities" in the South China Sea, the foreign ministry said. China appeared to be "trying to gauge our commitment to supply our troops" at the shoal. National Security Council spokesman Jonathan Malaya told reporters on Monday. "For the record, we will never abandon Ayungin Shoal," Malaya added, using the Philippine name for Second Thomas Shoal, located in the Spratly Islands.

'David and Goliath'

Malaya said Saturday's "David and Goliath" incident showed the Chinese had established what appeared to be a "blockade" of the shoal. "There were only two (Philippine) coast guard vessels and two Philippine supply boats against six large Chinese coast guard vessels and two Chinese militia vessels, and more People's Liberation Army naval vessels at near proximity to the area," he said.

Malaya said he believed it was the largest Chinese presence at the shoal "in recent memory". At one point, a China Coast Guard vessel came "within 20 yards (18 meters)" of a Philippine coast guard boat, which he said could have resulted in a collision.

The National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea, which includes representatives of various government agencies, condemned the Chinese actions "in the strongest terms". "As a low tide elevation, Ayungin shoal can neither be the subject of a sovereignty claim nor is it capable of appropriation under international law," the task force said in a statement. Second Thomas Shoal was part of the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, and the resupply and up-



AT SEA, Undefined: This file photo taken on April 23, 2023 shows Philippine coast guard vessel BRP Malapascua (left) patrolling near the grounded navy ship BRP Sierra Madre where Philippine marines are stationed at Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. — AFP

keep of the BRP Sierra Madre were "legitimate Philippine government activities", it added.

The Philippine military deliberately grounded the Sierra Madre on Second Thomas Shoal in the late 1990s, and keeps up a tiny garrison there to maintain a presence in the hotly contested waters.

In a statement on Monday, the Chinese coast guard urged Manila to "tow away" the ship and "restore the reef to its original state". Manila and

Beijing have a long history of maritime disputes over the South China Sea, but former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte was seen as cozying up to China in the hope of attracting investment. Since succeeding him, however, Marcos has insisted he will not let China trample on his country's maritime rights, seeking to strengthen defense ties with former colonial ruler and longtime ally the United States. — AFP

Cambodian king appoints Hun Sen's son as new PM

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia's king appointed Hun Sen's son the country's new leader Monday, beginning a handover of power that ends nearly four decades of rule, but the outgoing premier promised this was "not the end" of his political career.

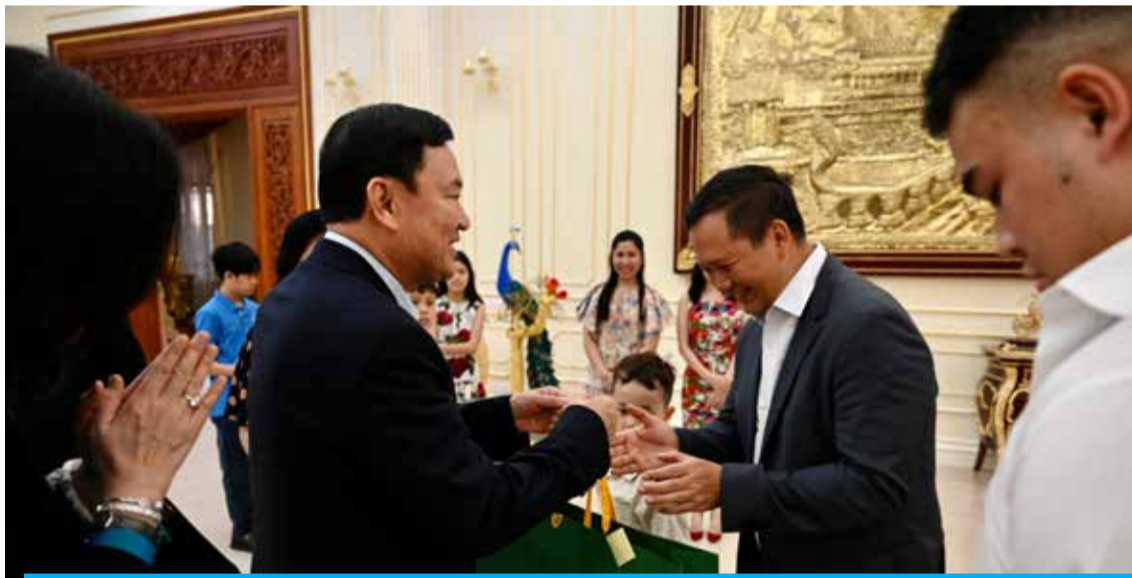
King Norodom Sihamoni issued a royal decree appointing Hun Manet as prime minister, after Hun Sen had announced last month that he was stepping down and handing power to his eldest son. Hun Sen—one of the world's longest-serving leaders—made the announcement days after a landslide victory in July polls that were widely decried as a sham, after main challenger the Candlelight Party was barred from participating. To officially assume the post, 45-year-old Hun Manet and his cabinet must win an August 22 vote in parliament, where his father's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has all but five of 125 seats in the lower house.

Hun Sen has for years pursued a ruthless campaign against any opposition, banning parties and forcing adversaries to flee abroad. While insisting he would not interfere with his son's rule, Hun Sen promised on Monday he would continue to play a prominent political role.

"It is not the end yet," he said, adding he would continue serving in other positions until at least 2033.

After stepping down, Hun Sen has said he will become president of the Senate early next year, making him acting head of state when the king is overseas.

In a letter to the king, Hun Manet thanked him for "the great chance to serve the nation", pledging to maintain peace, push for development and improve the standard of living in the country. Longtime opposition politician Sam Rainsy, self-exiled in France, said any hopes for more freedom under Hun Manet or that he might distance the country from major benefactor



PHNOM PENH, Cambodia: This photo taken on August 5, 2023 shows Thailand's former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra (second left) offering gift to General Hun Manet (second right) during Hun Sen's birthday in Phnom Penh. — AFP

China were misguided. "I think this is pure illusion," he told AFP ahead of the appointment. "You can change leaders many times but nothing will change because the system remains the same."

Untried, untested

The incoming government will usher in a crop of young ministers, with some taking posts vacated by their fathers. Despite being groomed for years, Hun Manet remains untested in the political arena and relatively unknown beyond it, according to Sebastian Strangio, author of "Hun Sen's Cambodia". "It is very hard to determine any distinctive national vision," he said.

Hun Manet was educated in England and the United States, but there are few signs he would bring his country closer to Western powers. "I have not seen any evidence that Manet has either the ability or the

desire to push Cambodia in the direction of significant reform," Strangio said.

He said Hun Manet's decisions would be "dictated by" the country's rigid political system, requiring him to maintain the loyalty of the political establishment, business elite and security forces. Hun Manet is a member of the ruling party's powerful permanent committee, and has been the Royal Cambodian Army's commander since 2018.

He has previously met world leaders, including China's President Xi Jinping, Cambodia's main ally. Emeritus Professor Carl Thayer, at Australia's University of New South Wales, told AFP Cambodia would likely remain close to Beijing. "Hun Manet will have little choice but to accept the hand that is dealt him, that is, dependency on China to keep the CPP in power," he said. — AFP

Investigators scour wreckage after

Pakistan train crash

NAWABSHAH, Pakistan: Investigators scoured the wreckage on Monday of a weekend train derailment that killed at least 34 people, the latest deadly crash to hit Pakistan's antiquated railway network.

More than 1,000 passengers were aboard the Hazara Express when it came off the tracks in a flat, rural part of Sindh province near Nawabshah, around 250 kilometers (160 miles) by rail from the southern port city of Karachi. It was winding its way north on a 33-hour journey to Havelian in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province when disaster struck near Sarhari around lunchtime.

"I was sitting in my shop... Suddenly, there was a huge bang," said Azmat Ali, 25, who has a store near the crash site. "We immediately thought an accident had

taken place. We started running and when we arrived... we pulled out bodies and injured people from the wreckage."

Muhammad Afzal Kolachi, a spokesman for Pakistan Railways, told AFP Monday the death toll had risen to 34. Hospitals in the area declared an emergency as they struggled to deal with dozens of passengers brought in with severe injuries.

Local residents, some who waded through waist-deep water in a canal that runs alongside the railway track to reach the crash site, were praised for their heroic response. "Despite Sarhari being a backward area, the locals swiftly arrived at the scene to provide assistance," said 28-year-old rescuer Zulfiqar Ali. "Whoever heard the news—even women and children—came here. I saw myself local farmers reached the spot to take part in rescue efforts."

Crashes and derailments occur frequently on Pakistan's antiquated railway system, which has nearly 7,500 kilometers (4,600 miles) of track and carries more than 80 million passengers a year. The network, once the pride of



NAWABSHAH, Pakistan: Railway workers repair a damaged track, a day after the derailment of a passenger train in Nawabshah on August 7, 2023. — AFP

British rule during the colonial era, still has tracks, junctions and bridges dating back more than 150 years, although modernization is underway as part of the massive China-Pakistan Economic

Corridor. It is still a favored means of transport for poor people, especially those who migrate to the mega-city of Karachi for work and then return to their rural homes to visit family. — AFP

Thai pollrunners-up agree coalition with govt-aligned party

BANGKOK: Thailand's election runners-up announced a fresh coalition with a government-aligned party on Monday as lawmakers attempt to overcome resistance from military and pro-royalist senators to break a political deadlock.

The kingdom has been unable to form a government

after the reformist Move Forward Party (MFP) fell short of a majority, despite winning the most seats in May's polls, and was later excluded from a progressive coalition.

The party's closest rival, Pheu Thai, announced the new partnership on Monday along with another party, Bhumjaithai, bringing together a total of 212 seats in the country's parliament.

A previous eight-party coalition headed by MFP failed to get leader Pita Limjaroenrat elected PM after he was blocked by junta-appointed senators opposed to his pledge to reform Thailand's tough royal defamations laws. Pheu Thai announced last week the progressive party had been excluded from the coalition, saying support for Pita's bid had stumbled over MFP's insistence on lese-majeste reform.

Among the parties opposed to MFP's inclusion were Bhumjaithai—a member of the army-backed coalition government elected in controversial 2019 polls.

Following talks Pheu Thai leader Chonlanan Srikaew announced Monday that a coalition agreement between his party and Bhumjaithai had been reached. "We would like to thank Bhumjaithai for accepting the invitation so that we can step over this political deadlock," he told a press conference.

Chonlanan added that Pheu Thai and Bhumjaithai would seek support from other parties in forming a government. Bhumjaithai leader Anutin Charnvirakul said his party had accepted on three conditions, which included dropping the lese-majeste amendment and the continued exclusion of MFP from the group. — AFP

Iran's FM in first Japan visit since 2019

TOKYO: Iran's foreign minister visited Japan on Monday for the first time since 2019, in a rare trip to a G7 member country by the Islamic republic's top diplomat. The purpose of the visit by Hossein Amir-Abdollahian to the current chair of the G7 was not announced, but reports said Japan would press Iran to stop supplying Russia with arms.

Kyiv's military said last month it had destroyed dozens of Iran-built attack drones targeted at Ukraine's Odesa region. Amir-Abdollahian met Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, with both hailing the opportunity to have face-to-face talks in Tokyo.

"I am grateful for having this opportunity of exchange of opinions" over bilateral, regional and international issues, the Iranian diplomat said. Ahead of the meeting, Amir-Abdollahian told reporters in Tokyo "we don't pick a side in any war", denying Iran had provided Russia with arms. Jiji Press reported. He added that Iran "has never provided drones to any country for use in Ukraine", according to the report.

Amir-Abdollahian will also make a courtesy visit to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, private broadcaster TBS reported. TBS, citing unnamed government sources, said Japan would raise the issue of arms exports to Russia. The Japanese foreign ministry said in a statement that Hayashi had "requested Iran to take constructive measures, repeating Japan's position on Russia's invasion into Ukraine".

Nuclear concerns

Japan and Iran have traditionally kept friendly ties despite key Tokyo ally Washington's tense relations with Tehran. Iran used to be a major oil exporter to resource-poor Japan, but volumes have dropped sharply in recent years due to US economic sanctions on the Middle Eastern country.

Amir-Abdollahian's visit to Japan is the first by a top Iranian diplomat since December 2019, and the first under President Ebrahim Raisi. However, Hayashi and Amir-Abdollahian have held telephone talks in the past, most recently in April this year.

During the April talks, Hayashi expressed Japan's support for the 2015 nuclear accord between Iran and six major powers, and urged Tehran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog. The 2015 accord—to which Russia and China were also parties—was aimed at scaling down Iran's nuclear activities in order to allay fears it was developing atomic weapons.

But the United States pulled out of the deal under former president Donald Trump and efforts to revive it under President Joe Biden have faltered, while Tehran has expanded its nuclear work. — AFP



TOKYO: Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (left) meets with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at Kishida's official residence in Tokyo on August 7, 2023. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2023

Saudi Aramco Q2 profits drop 38% on lower prices

CEO: Profit reflects our resilience to adapt through market cycles

RIYADH: Oil firm Saudi Aramco on Monday announced profits of \$30.08 billion for the second quarter, a sharp fall from the same period last year when prices surged after Russia invaded Ukraine. The 38-percent year-on-year decline "mainly reflected the impact of lower crude oil prices and weakening refining and chemicals margins", the largely state-owned company said in a statement published on the Saudi stock exchange. The decline followed a drop of 19.25 percent in first-quarter net profit. Aramco's CEO Amin Nasser said in a separate statement that "our strong results reflect our resilience and ability to adapt through market cycles." The firm's "mid to long-term view remains unchanged", he added. "With a recovery anticipated in the broader global economy, along with increased activity in the aviation sector, ongoing investments in energy projects will be necessary to safeguard energy security."

Production from the world's biggest crude exporter was down after Riyadh in April announced cuts of 500,000 barrels per day, part of a coordinated move with other oil powers to slash supply by more than one million bpd in a bid to prop up prices. In June, the Saudi energy ministry announced a further voluntary cut of one million bpd which took effect in July and has been extended through September. The kingdom's daily production is now approximately nine million bpd, far below its reported daily capacity of 12 million bpd. Aramco is the main source of revenue for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's sweeping economic and social reform program known as Vision 2030, which aims to shift the economy away from fossil fuels. Analysts say the kingdom needs oil to be priced at around \$80 per barrel to balance its budget.

Prices are now above that threshold, a sign that the recent supply cuts are starting to have the desired effect. The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate crude for September delivery traded Monday at \$82.54 and European benchmark Brent crude futures were just below \$86. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, oil peaked at more than \$130 dollars per barrel.

'Phenomenal figures'

The cuts "show the lengths to which the kingdom will go to defend oil prices, as a slumping market



for its lifeblood commodity is damaging to its ambitious economic diversification efforts," said Herman Wang, associate director for oil news at S&P Global Commodity Insights. Aramco is undertaking investments to ramp up national production capacity to 13 million bpd by 2027.

"It's an expensive proposition for Aramco to hold production capacity offline in the name of OPEC+ cuts, but the hope is that the sacrifice being made now will pay off in the end with higher prices," Wang said, referring to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, headed by Riyadh and their

10 allies led by Moscow. Aramco reported record profits totaling \$161.1 billion last year, allowing the kingdom to notch up its first annual budget surplus in nearly a decade.

Yet those "were phenomenal figures driven by a very particular set of geopolitical factors and Saudi Arabia's leadership can't have been predicating Vision 2030 spending on such results", said Jamie Ingram, senior editor at the Middle East Economic Survey. "Higher revenues would of course be favored by officials, but Saudi Arabia still has very low debt levels and strong reserves that it can tap into," Ingram added. Nasser

told reporters on Monday that global demand was "expected to grow by about 2.4 million barrels (per day) in the third quarter 2023 compared to the same period last year", an increase mainly led by China where demand has been "stronger than expected".

Saudi Arabia owns 90 percent of Aramco's shares. Aramco's base dividend for the second quarter will be \$19.5 billion, the same as for the first quarter, the firm said. It will also distribute a new performance-linked dividend of \$9.9 billion in the third quarter, and expects to make similar dividend payments over the next six quarters, it said. — AFP

Musk: Cage fight with Zuckerberg will stream on X

WASHINGTON: Elon Musk said Sunday that a "cage match" he and Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg have seemingly agreed to as a fund-raiser will be carried live on X, formerly known as Twitter, which he owns. "Zuck v Musk fight will be live-streamed on X," Musk posted. "All proceeds will go to charity for veterans." Zuckerberg soon hit back on Threads, the new app he launched last month in a direct challenge to what was then still called Twitter, saying he was ready.

"Shouldn't we use a more reliable platform that can actually raise money for charity?" he added, in a dig at the wave of problems faced by Musk's platform since he took over last year. The two billionaire entrepreneurs, who in the past have occasionally jostled from



This combination of file photographs shows Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg. — AFP

afar, became direct competitors after Zuckerberg's Meta launched its Twitter-like Threads platform in early July, quickly drawing 120 million users, according to Quiver Quantitative.

Musk then posted on X, "I'm up for a cage match if he is lol," referring to a form of Mixed Martial Arts in which rival fighters employ a variety of techniques—

like wrestling or Brazilian jiu-jitsu—while limited by few rules. Zuckerberg, a martial arts enthusiast who has taken part in jiu-jitsu competitions, responded to Musk's initial, seemingly humorous, challenge by replying on Instagram "Send me location."

The exchange sparked a torrent of reactions on social media, as well as prompting a lively round of betting on the potential winner.

The 39-year-old Zuckerberg, with his fighting experience, emerged as the clear favorite despite the decided size advantage of Musk, who is 52. No date has been set for the fight, which—if it does happen—is expected to take place in Las Vegas. The two tech giants have clashed over the years on issues ranging from politics to artificial intelligence.

But the arrival of Threads heightened the pressure on the already troubled Twitter, which Musk rebranded to X last month. Musk bought that social network for \$44 billion before announcing massive layoffs and opening the platform up to conspiracy-minded posters, leading several advertisers to turn elsewhere. — AFP



Spiro scooters and motorcycles have batteries that can be removed quickly and has developed a network of stations where low batteries can be exchanged for fully-charged ones.

African electric motorcycle startup Spiro to expand

PARIS: African startup Spiro said Friday it will expand its leasing of electric scooters and motorcycles to Kenya and Uganda after having received new financing. Already present in Benin, Togo and Rwanda with 10,000 vehicles, the loan of \$63 million will allow it to expand and put another 15,700 of the battery-powered vehicles on the road.

Spiro's scooters and motorcycles have batteries that can be removed quickly and has developed a network of stations where low batteries can be exchanged for fully-charged ones.

Having obtained a first tranche of financing of \$60 million, on Friday Spiro signed a \$63 million loan with French bank Societe Generale. "In Africa there is a big tradition of moto-taxis. It is these drivers who are our core clientele, said Spiro's chief executive Jules Samain.

Spiro offers leasing plans and a subscription for battery swapping. At five dollars per day, "choosing electric is very profitable for our clients," said Samain. "They don't suffer price rises on petroleum products, they don't have to do the same maintenance as on a gasoline motorcycle and they have a more solid vehicle," he added.

The scooter and motorcycle have a range of between 75 and 90 kilometers, and the batteries can also be charged at home by clients. Spiro is controlled by the Emirati fund ATIF founded by Gagan Gupta, a developer of industrial sites in Africa.

Spiro intends to develop manufacturing facilities in each African country it operates. Its first assembly plant should open next year in Benin. One of its rivals, Roam, opened Africa's first electric motorcycle factory in Kenya. — AFP

Taiwan chip giant TSMC to approve German plant

FRANKFURT: Taiwanese semiconductor giant TSMC is poised to approve construction of a plant in Germany, with Berlin to provide five billion euros (\$5.5 billion) in subsidies for the project, a report said Monday.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) controls more than half of the world's output of microchips, powering everything from coffee machines and smartphones to cars and missiles. But it has been facing pressure from Western powers to build more production sites, known as foundries, overseas as tensions surge between China and Taiwan, a self-ruled democracy that Beijing claims as its territory.

On Tuesday, TSMC's board of directors is likely to back building the factory in Dresden, in the eastern state of Saxony, which would be its first in Europe, German financial daily Handelsblatt reported, citing government sources. The government will provide the huge subsidy from a special fund earmarked for boosting semiconductor production and climate protection measures, it said.

The factory will be run in collaboration with Bosch, Infineon and NXP, and will primarily produce chips for the auto industry, the report said. Germany's economy ministry and TSMC did not respond to requests for comment from AFP. The company operates the world's largest silicon wafer factories, and already has plants

in Taiwan, China and Japan. A planned Arizona plant—one of the largest foreign investments in the United States—is currently delayed until 2025 due to a shortage of skilled workers.

The TSMC factory will be the latest semiconductor project to be unveiled in Germany recently, part of a broader European drive to boost semiconductor manufacturing. But the German chip drive faces numerous challenges, ranging from high energy prices

following Russia's invasion of Ukraine to shortages of skilled workers. In June, Berlin and Intel signed a deal for the US chip behemoth to build manufacturing sites in the eastern city of Magdeburg after months of tense negotiations.

But the huge level of state support—Berlin is providing 9.9 billion euros for the 33-billion-euro project—has proved controversial, with some questioning whether the investment is worth it. — AFP



Business



HILLA, Iraq: A man stands next to his fishing boat, abandoned on the banks of a branch of the Euphrates River in the town of Al-Hamza near the city of Hilla on July 6, 2023.



HILLA, Iraq: A man jumps onto his fishing boat, moored on the banks of a branch of the Euphrates River in the town of Al-Hamza near the city of Hilla on July 6, 2023. -- AFP photos

Water-stressed Iraq dries up fish farms

Officials see the need for trade-offs to meet demands

AL-BU MUSTAFA, Iraq: Iraqi villager Omar Ziad gazes at the cracked and barren earth where his fish farm once stood, lost to water conservation efforts during a devastating four-year drought. As the alarming water crisis blamed mostly on climate change drags on, officials see the need for trade-offs in an effort to meet the country's demands.

Drastic government measures have restricted water use for some purposes, including crop irrigation, and authorities have cracked down on illegal practices they long ignored. Since late May, unauthorized fish farms like Ziad's have become a target. "I've worked in this industry since 2003," the 33-year-old said at his village of Al-Bu Mustafa in Iraq's central Babylon province.

He had watched helplessly as officials from the water resources ministry sealed his family's seven fish ponds. Surrounded by fields and majestic palm trees, this was where Ziad, his father and seven brothers would rear carp, which Iraqis use to make their beloved grilled fish dish known as masguf.

At full capacity, the farm held about 50,000 fish

and earned the family the equivalent of \$1,300-2,600 a month, far more than many in the country.

"We would share the revenues", said Ziad, who also works as a teacher. He added that they sold their fish "cheaply", but since all but five of the village's 80 fish ponds shut down, the price of carp has almost doubled, now selling at more than 8,000 dinars (around \$6) per kilogram, he said.

"Strategic reserves"

From a bird's-eye view, the backfilled dry patches of land that replaced the ponds are marked out by unpaved roads. The monotony of the barren landscape is occasionally interrupted by ponds that still hold water. These were spared because their owners had the necessary permits, according to Ziad.

Water supply in Iraq, which the United Nations ranks as one of the five countries most impacted by some effects of climate change, is in a dire state. Declining rain over the past four years coupled with rising temperatures has brought water levels in the Tigris and

Euphrates rivers to staggering lows, for which Baghdad also accuses upstream dams built by neighboring Turkey and Iran.

"The strategic water reserves in Iraq are at their lowest point" in nearly a century, said Khaled Shamal, spokesman for the water resources ministry. Some of Iraq's 43 million inhabitants share the blame, he told AFP, due to water-intensive "irrigation practices".

Shamal justified the crackdown on unauthorized fish farms by saying the ponds "increase the water surface susceptible to evaporation", provoke seepage into the soil, and contribute to "environmental pollution". About half of Iraq's estimated 5,000 "unlicensed" fish farms have been closed, Shamal said, pointing out that authorities still allow mobile fish tanks which are submerged in rivers.

Plunging output

Ayad Al-Talibi, president of the Iraqi association of fish farmers, said he accepted the shutting of unauthorized ponds but questioned whether the water that

has been saved was "properly used". Before the May crackdown, Iraq produced nearly one million tons of fish per year, but Talibi told public broadcaster Al-Ikhabariya that output has now plunged to 190,000 tons. According to him, the sector employs two million Iraqis. "All of these families will migrate to the cities" which might struggle to accommodate them, he predicted.

The water crisis has also affected river fishing. In Iraq's far south, high salinity has harmed fishing in the Shatt al-Arab waterway, where the Tigris and Euphrates converge before spilling into the Gulf.

As the flow of fresh water from the north decreases every year, the riverbed gradually fills with salt water. Sailing the waters of Shatt al-Arab, fisherman Khdeir Aboud, 71, casts his net but expects no major catch. Fresh water would once carry "all types of fish" but "with the salt water, there's nothing left", said the white-bearded man. The meager pay he now makes "can't support a household", he lamented. "Most fishermen have quit the trade for odd jobs. There are only a few old people left." -- AFP

Stocks waver on uncertain rate outlook

LONDON: Concerns about the potential for further interest rate hikes weighed on stock markets Monday even as data pointed to weakening economies in the US and Europe, though Wall Street managed to recover some of last week's heavy losses.

Investors were spooked Friday by US jobs data that showed slower hiring but further wage increases—underscoring persistent inflation pressures. Wall Street stocks rose early Monday after a gloomy end to the week on a mixed employment report, as traders geared up for closely watched inflation data.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average advanced 0.8 percent to 35,331.36, while the broad-based S&P 500 climbed 0.6 percent to 4,504.30. The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index also rose, by 0.3 percent to 13,955.78. The movements came as the US economy added fewer jobs than expected in July, according to last Friday's official employment data.

This lifts "an already high bar for the Federal Reserve to raise lending rates when it issues its next policy decision" on September 20, said analyst Joseph Manimbo of Convera.

While some Fed officials such as governor Michelle Bowman have said they expect additional interest rate increases will be needed to lower inflation to the central bank's two percent target, she and other policymakers have maintained their decision will remain data dependent. New York Fed president John Williams, meanwhile, said in an interview with The New York Times that the Fed could bring rates down next year. "It should probably come as little surprise at this juncture to hear some competing views out of the Fed," said Patrick O'Hare of Briefing.com. "Nonetheless, the market is anxious to hear the Fed publicly coalesce around the idea that it is done, and that has yet to happen," he added in a note.

A key data point that will factor into the Fed's decision is the consumer inflation report due Thursday morning. Analysts expect a moderate annual rate of 3.3 percent—rising slightly from June's figure.—AFP



NEW DELHI: A laborer works at a construction site of a shop in New Delhi on August 7, 2023. -- AFP

Indian economy growing at 6.7% rate: S&P Global

MUMBAI: The Indian economy is expected to grow at an average rate of 6.7 percent between fiscal year 2023-24 to fiscal year 2030-2031, said S&P Global giving a decade-ahead forecast for Asia's second-largest economy. India's gross domestic product (GDP) is likely to rise to \$6.7 trillion to FY31 from \$3.4 trillion in FY23, said S&P Global in its August volume report titled "Look Forward, India Moment".

S&P Global said that India's short-term economic growth will be driven by a 678.6 million strong labour force, though getting more women to enter the workforce will be pivotal for future growth, as only 22 percent women participated in the workforce as of 2022. India has an immense opportunity to increase its share of global manufacturing exports, in line with the government's aim to raise manufacturing to 25 percent of GDP by 2025 from the current levels of 17.7 percent.

Already the third largest consumer of energy globally, India's per capita energy consumption remains just one tenth that of the United States, according to the report. S&P Global Commodity Insights expects

the country's total energy demand to double by 2050. India's efforts to meet its growing energy needs while lowering emissions will be closely watched as a model for other emerging economies.

"India and the rest of the world are joined at the hip in the journey to reach net-zero emissions... Developing countries will be watching closely as India continues its growth trajectory while trying to reduce the carbon intensity of its economy and ultimately bend its total GHG emissions curve," said Atul Arya, chief energy strategist, S&P Global Commodity Insights.

Meanwhile, the report added that mobility in India, despite having massive potential, will be challenged by infrastructural hurdles, especially in the cities. "Urban centers are India's growth engines. However, due to the massive influx of cars in cities, hyper-local commuting challenges like congestion and pollution are detrimental to the India growth story," the report said.

"This will make personal mobility far more important than individual car ownership, spurring demand for public transport and new and innovative shared mobility solutions," it added. When the members of the monetary policy committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will begin its huddle on August 8 to decide on India's monetary policy for the coming months, they will have to consider two crucial factors: the recent significant increase in prices of vegetables, cereals, and pulses in the country and the US Federal Reserve's decision to resume raising interest rates after a pause.—AFP



TOKYO: A man walks in front of an electronic board showing a share price of the Tokyo Stock Exchange along a street in Tokyo. -- AFP

Brazil's indigenous population grows to nearly 1.7m

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's count of its Indigenous population rose by 89 percent from 2010 to 2022, to nearly 1.7 million people, though the rapid growth was attributed partly to new methodology, according to census results released Monday.

Under the new count, Indigenous people make up 0.83 percent of the South American country's total population of 203 million, up from 0.47 percent at the previous census, said the national statistics institute, IBGE. However, IBGE noted "lim-

its" in comparing the 2010 and 2022 Indigenous figures, because it had sent census-takers to more Indigenous reservations and used a new methodology, asking people in all native communities if they self-identified as Indigenous.

Brazil's overall population grew by 6.5 percent from 2010 to 2022, to 203.1 million. The country's more than 700 Indigenous reservations are home to 689,000 people, IBGE said. The largest, the Yanomami reservation in the Amazon rainforest, has 27,000 inhabitants. The figures come as a divisive debate rages in Brazil over Indigenous lands.

The Supreme Court is currently hearing a so-called "trial of the century" over whether new Indigenous reservations can be created on land where native communities were not present in 1988, when Brazil's current constitution was ratified. The lower house of Congress passed a bill

Paris: Tough Airbnb rules 'working' as violations fall

PARIS: The city of Paris said on Monday that its tough restrictions on the online accommodation service Airbnb were working, pointing to fewer violations of the code this year in the French capital but stiffer fines. Airbnb use has grown dramatically in recent years across the world, with the service allowing users to find accommodation in a private home rather than a hotel.

But criticism has also increased alongside its growth, with entire buildings used for Airbnb short term renting in some towns and cities, changing the character of areas, forcing locals out and closing schools. In Paris, only main residences can be freely rented as furnished tourist accommodation, provided that they are declared to the town hall and within a limit of 120 days per year. The rules are even tougher if the property is a second home.

Paris, which hosts the summer Olympics next year when accommodation is expected to be at a premium, in 2021 won approval from France's Court of Cassation for its restrictions, with the instance ruling they were in line with EU law.

Since then, it has raked in 6.5 million euros in fines issued by the courts. But this amount is falling as infractions dwindle, standing at 535,000 euros over the first seven months of 2023, for 65 cases judged, compared with 3.5 million in 2021 and 2.5 million in 2022, when a total of 370 cases had been processed. "The regulatory arsenal" of the city "is working, there are fewer infringements", the city hall said in a statement, adding that the high figures of litigation in 2021 and 2022 were due to cases being suspended pending a ruling from the EU. At the same time, the average size of fines has risen: whereas it was 15,000 euros in 2022 at first instance (22,000 on appeal), it now stands at 20,000 euros (31,000 on appeal) this year.

"The courts are more severe," said Ian Brossat, the deputy mayor in charge of housing, adding "judges now assume that those who cheat do so knowingly". A "multi-rental" owner from the 16th district of Paris even received the maximum fine of 50,000 euros, an unprecedented sanction, added Brossat, who represents France's Communist Party.—AFP

in May to codify that restriction. But activists say that violates Indigenous people's rights, given that many were forced from their ancestral lands, including under the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who took office this year, began creating new Indigenous reservations in April, after a hiatus under his far-right predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro.

Bolsonaro, an agribusiness ally who pushed to open protected Indigenous lands to mining and industry, argued that Brazil's Indigenous reservations—covering 11.6 percent of the national territory—amount to "too much land for too few Indians." Scientists, however, say that ensuring native people's land rights is one of the best ways to stop the destruction of the Amazon and other forests, key resources against climate change.—AFP

Relief and despair: Repeal of logging ban divides Kenya

Country's forests are once again open for business

MOLO, Kenya: It was the news Kenya's timber industry had waited over five years to hear: a ban on logging was over, and the country's forests were once again open for business. But conservationists were dismayed at the announcement in July by President William Ruto, who had cast himself as a champion of the environment, and made planting 15 billion trees a centerpiece of his climate change agenda.

The government defended lifting the ban, insisting that only mature trees in state-run plantations would be felled, and that Kenya's most biodiverse and carbon-rich wild forests would remain untouched.

The explanation did little to quash charges of hypocrisy, with Ruto just weeks away from hosting an international climate conference in Nairobi. "Kenya has been a clear leader here, investing in clean green growth and raising forest cover. Now the country is busy clearing its forests while at the same time hosting climate change negotiations," said opposition leader Raila Odinga.

'Ruto to the rescue'

Ruto, who was deputy president when the ban was introduced in 2018, said it was "foolishness" to let trees rot while businesses were importing timber. The temptation to assist a sector that employs 50,000 people directly — and 300,000 indirectly — would have been strong at a time when anti-government demonstrators are protesting rising prices.

In Molo, a highland town northwest of Nairobi, sawmill owner Bernard Gitau said Ruto had "come to the rescue" after he was forced to lay off workers and curb output because of the ban.

His factory is still only half operational, with machinery lying idle and coated in sawdust. But a skeleton crew of 50 has been sanding doors and planing lumber as he waits for business to rebound.

"Some of them came and were praying outside my gate there, saying we thank God now that this

sawmill has come back to life," said Gitau, who is also chairman of the Timber Manufacturers Association of Kenya, an industry group. "The economy of this town is going to improve."

The ban was introduced at a time when Kenya's forests were being cleared at a rate of 5,000 hectares a year, depleting water supply in the drought-prone country, and contributing to global warming.

Forests have slowly started recovering since the ban took effect but, without it in place, questions are being asked about how Ruto can more than double the nation's tree cover by 2032 as he's promised.

"This time you're talking about planting, tomorrow you're talking about cutting. It does not add up," said Godfrey Kamau, chair of the Thogoto Forest Family, a conservation group protecting 53 hectares of native forest outside Nairobi. Environmentalists won a reprieve on August 1, when a court temporarily barred the government from issuing logging licenses until a legal challenge is fully heard.

'Rampant corruption'

The move has also revived scrutiny of the Kenya Forest Service (KFS), the state agency tasked with policing the scheme and allocating logging permits. KFS said the process would be transparent, and replanting carried out in cleared areas. But critics say the KFS has not undertaken adequate reforms since being accused of "rampant corruption" as well as the "wanton destruction" and "plunder and pillaging" of forests by a government taskforce in 2018. Sawmill owner Gitau said concerns over native forests being logged were misplaced. The timber industry was only interested in the fast-growing trees introduced during British colonial rule like pine and eucalyptus, he said, not indigenous species found in protected forests.

"We know the law," he said. "It is prohibited." But in the nearby Mau Forest, a vast mountain ecosystem and crucial water source, Environment Minister



MOLO, Kenya: Workers at a block-sawing factory prepare lumber from tree trunks at a sawmill in Molo constituency, Nakuru county on July 11, 2023. — AFP

Soipan Tuva said trees were being illegally cleared just days after the ban was lifted. She ordered additional KFS rangers to Mau and other threatened hotspots as part of a "ruthless" campaign to stamp out illegal logging. "People who imagine that our forests are available for encroachment should forget it," she said. The mixed messages from the government undermine community efforts to discourage logging, said Kamau, whose organization works with locals to protect Thogoto Forest.

"The president stood and said that logging has been allowed... The common wananchi (people) will decide now it's time to start cutting a tree," he told AFP in Thogoto, which is hemmed in by hundreds of acres of plantation forest. He lamented the focus on replanting and extracting timber rather than indigenous trees that attract wildlife, store carbon and support nature for generations to come. "It feels like you have been doing zero work at the end of a day." — AFP

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 160 million for three months with a rate of return at 4.375 percent.

French billionaire Drahi feels 'betrayed' as graft claims swirl

PARIS: With corruption claims threatening to engulf his global business empire, French-Zionist billionaire Patrick Drahi said Monday that he felt "betrayed and deceived" by a small group of his colleagues.

Swiss-based Drahi, whose Altice group of businesses spans telecoms and media in Europe, the Zionist entity and North America, is trying to ease investor concerns weeks after one of his top lieutenants, Armando Pereira, was detained in Portugal. The authorities there have accused Portuguese billionaire Pereira of 11 offences of corruption and money laundering, with a central allegation that he set up a network of bogus suppliers to embezzle money through Altice's procurement system.

Pereira, who has no formal post but is widely seen as Drahi's right-hand man, denies the claims.

But the scandal has spread from Portugal to other parts of Drahi's empire, with executives in the United States and France being dismissed, suspended or stepping back. "If these allegations are true, I feel betrayed and deceived by a small group of individuals, including one of our oldest colleagues," Drahi told investors and analysts during a widely anticipated conference call on Monday.

He said the claims had come as a "shock and a huge disappointment". But he insisted that the amounts involved were relatively small, and that the firm was cooperating with law enforcement and had halted trading with any of the companies under investigation in Portugal.

'Very unpleasant'

Drahi, who generally keeps a low profile and rarely talks to investors, has amassed a fortune estimated at more than \$10 billion, making him France's 13th richest man, according to French magazine Challenges. He pieced together a network of companies through leveraged acquisitions and is now a major player in telecoms in France, the Zionist entity, Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal and Switzerland.

Drahi, who also owns broadband firm Altice USA and part of Britain's BT, is known as an art lover and bought Sotheby's auction house in 2019. But his investment spree was made possible in large part by borrowing, resulting in a debt pile worth around \$60 billion.

With interest rates rising and the corruption scandal making headlines, Drahi chose to make a rare appearance on calls with investors and analysts on Monday and Tuesday. "It is very unpleasant to see the word 'corruption' next to the name of our group," he said, adding that his company should be regarded as "a victim". — AFP

New York drives towards first US congestion charge

NEW YORK: New York wants to introduce car-loving America's first congestion charge, but the move faces fierce opposition — including from the city's famous yellow taxis. The plan, similar to pricing long in place in London and Singapore, aims to improve air quality in the Big Apple by easing Manhattan's traffic-choked streets.

It also seeks to raise much-needed revenue to upgrade a creaking subway system that is used by around four million New Yorkers every day.

The scheme, slated to start next year, is being challenged in court, highlighting the difficulty of levying drivers in a country where car is king. Officials insist the toll will help the environment by reducing pollution, and make the city that never sleeps more efficient by speeding up travel times.

"Congestion pricing is a generational opportunity," said John McCarthy, a spokesman for New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). The plan would charge drivers for venturing below 60th Street in Manhattan, an area that encompasses the business districts of Midtown and Wall Street.

The MTA has not yet set rates, but is considering charging \$23 during rush hour and \$17 for off-peak times. Taxi driver Wein Chin worries that the charge, which cab-

bies would pass on to customers, will mean fewer fares.

He earns around \$300 to \$400 a week and is already struggling to pay off a \$170,000 loan he owes for his taxi permit. "I don't know that I could survive, paying the mortgage, supporting a family," the 55-year-old, who moved to the United States from Myanmar in 1987, told AFP.

The New York Taxi Workers Alliance, a union representing 21,000 cabbies, estimates the levy could see drivers lose \$8,000 a year in income.

Members have taken to the streets in recent weeks to demand they be exempted from the toll. The union's president, Bhairavi Desai, said the charge could sound the death knell for some drivers already hammered in recent years by a surge of Uber drivers and the pandemic. "There are only so many ashes that the phoenix can rise out of," she told AFP.

Carbon emissions

Officials have proposed discounts to appease low-income New Yorkers. Some 700,000 vehicles enter the proposed pricing area every day, with cars traveling just seven miles per hour on average due to gridlock, officials say. The scheme aims to lessen traffic by ten percent daily, thereby reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

Indonesia economy grows faster than expected in Q2

JAKARTA: Indonesia's economic growth accelerated faster than expected in the second quarter of the year, official data showed Monday, the strongest rate in three quarters despite lagging exports. Southeast Asia's largest economy grew 5.17 percent on-year between April and June, according to Statistics Indonesia, beating analysts' expectations.

The continued growth was driven by household spending, foreign and domestic investment and increased government spending, Statistics Indonesia official Edy Mahmud told reporters.

"During the second quarter of 2023, Indonesia's economic performance was supported by the increase of people's mobility and religious holidays that drive up people's consumption and production activities," Mahmud said. He emphasized the resilience of Indonesia's economy emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic despite exports contracting for the first time since the last quarter of 2020, owing in part to declining palm oil prices. Exports fell 2.75 percent compared to the same quarter last year, figures showed. Indonesia posted growth last year of 5.3 percent — the highest for nine years — on the back of soaring export prices and the lifting travel restrictions.

Jakarta is targeting the same figure again this year. But analysts expect a slowdown in the coming



NEW YORK: Traffic makes its way past Radio City along a cross-street in Manhattan, New York city on September 22, 2022. New York wants to introduce car-loving America's first congestion charge, but the move faces fierce opposition - including from the city's famous yellow taxis. — AFP

Officials cite studies showing that central London saw a 20 percent fall in CO2 emissions after it introduced its charge in 2003. "We know vehicle pollution is a major contributor to the climate crisis that harms both our planet and our health," said Tim Donaghy of Greenpeace. "Shifting away from cars and towards more public transit is a step in the right direction, and can create healthier more people-centric cities." New York's plan has been years in the making. Michael Bloomberg proposed a toll in 2007 when he was mayor, but it wasn't until 2019 that lawmakers finally reached agreement. The federal government then greenlit the proposal in June this year, with local officials pledging to introduce the charge in spring 2024.

Neighboring New Jersey responded by suing the government, claiming the scheme would place an unfair financial burden on those who have to drive to Manhattan for work.

The state also objects to its residents having to pay for the upgrade of New York's underground train network. The MTA estimates that the pricing will generate \$1 billion annually for subway improvements.

New York Governor Kathy Hochul has vowed that New Jersey's suit will not stop congestion pricing from going ahead. "It's a win, win, win for transit, traffic and the environment," Danny Pearlstein, a spokesman for public transit advocacy group the Riders Alliance told AFP. — AFP



JAKARTA: Indonesia's economic growth accelerated faster than expected in the second quarter of the year.

months as record global commodity prices stoked by the Ukraine war start to ease.

"Lower commodity prices and weaker global demand weighed heavily on exports last quarter," said Gareth Leather, senior Asia economist at Capital Economics. "Our forecast that global growth will

struggle and that commodity prices will remain subdued suggests that exports will stay weak."

Leather predicted Indonesia's quarterly growth would fall to around 4.5 percent in the coming months while official figures indicate it will remain at around five percent. — AFP

Lifestyle

Mystery in Dubai as mega-wheel stops turning

Two years ago, Dubai's skyscraper-studded skyline welcomed a Ferris wheel touted as the world's largest, but it mysteriously stopped turning just months after opening. The much-touted Ain Dubai (Dubai Eye) was designed as a tourist-luring landmark in the United Arab Emirates' glam-hub, which is home to the world's tallest building. But now it stands idle for undisclosed reasons, its extravagant light fixtures the only parts seemingly still working. "Ain Dubai remains closed until further notice," says an official website for the attraction.

"We continue to rigorously work on completing the enhancement works that have been taking place over the past months." The wheel was supposed to close for just a month but its reopening has since been postponed indefinitely.

Those behind the project inaugurated in 2021 have failed to reply to enquiries. At restaurants, shops and cafes built around the attraction, employees remain skeptical that the structure, which took around six years to build, will ever turn again. "Last year they promised us that in winter it will be open, even now, they are saying that in (the coming) winter it will be open

again," said one employee at a nearby shop. "But we're not sure... it will," said the man who asked to remain anonymous due to fear of reprisal.

'Too slow'

The Dubai Eye, built by a consortium of international companies, is located in Bluewaters—a man-made island designed as a retail, residential and entertainment hub. For more than a year, the main entrance to the attraction has remained closed and ticket booths abandoned. Only a slow trickle of tourists visit the site, snapping pictures of LED lights mounted on its exterior. "I asked a security guard here about it and he told me that it doesn't work," said Marwan Mohammad, an Egyptian tourist.

"I asked him for the reason but he did not give me an answer," said the 33-year-old business consultant. In a city filled with record-breaking landmarks, the Dubai Eye stands at a height of 250 meters (825 feet), each of its legs the length of 15 London buses, according to Dubai's tourism department.

Nearly twice as tall as the London Eye, it is the largest of its kind in the world. Its 48 passenger cabins, all of



This picture shows a view of the Ain Dubai (Dubai Eye) observation wheel in Dubai.--AFP

them air-conditioned, can carry around 1,750 passengers on a single ride. Ticket prices range between 100 dirhams (about \$27) and 4,700 dirhams (about \$1,280), with luxury passes and private cabins on offer. "The view was very beautiful from above," said Mohammad who experienced the 38-min-

ute ride before it closed, adding however, that it moved "too slowly".

'Heavier than island'

With no official explanation, rumors are rife on the Ferris wheel's apparent technical issues, especially among employees at Bluewaters. They all spoke

on condition of anonymity, fearing repercussions from authorities or their employers.

"This is a man-made island. I heard that (the wheel) is heavier than the island itself, that's why it is very dangerous," said a waiter at a nearby restaurant, adding that it had been noisy during its few months of operation. "Now... it's only for show, just for the lighting and that's it". The giant wheel, made of more steel than the Eiffel Tower, features prominently on the list of Dubai's top tourist attractions.

They include the Dubai Frame monument and Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building. Patrick Clawson, research director at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said official silence on the Ferris wheel suggested a complicated problem. UAE authorities are generally "quick to provide information if they" have a solution, he said. But with the Dubai Eye, "whatever the problem, the authorities are not confident they have a solution," he said.—AFP



After Spanish ban, dwarf bullfighters take show to France

A Spanish troupe of dwarf bullfighters have taken their act to France after their home country banned such shows on the grounds that they encouraged mockery of disabled people. Thursday night's show by the troupe, called "Diversiones en el Ruedo" ("Bullfighting Fun") in the 650-seat arena at Thethieu, a village of 850 people close to the Spanish border, was sold out. Unlike regular bullfights, the performance did not result in injuries or death for the participating animals. Instead, the performers presented sketches and skits in various costumes, and sometimes involving small cows, sparking laughs and applause.

Spain's parliament banned such shows as of April on the grounds that dwarfs dressing up as bullfighters, or as firefighters, for the amusement of the crowd were being "used to provoke mockery, ridicule and derision". Spain based its ruling on European Union directives concerning discrimination against disabled people. But the performers themselves dismissed the reasoning. "It's a comical show, there's no blood and no killing, just parody," said Daniel Calderon, leader of the 11-person troupe.



Members of the "toreros comicos" of the "Diversiones en el ruedo" Spanish troupe perform during the Thethieu festival in Thethieu, southwestern France.

He said dwarfism had been used "as a pretext by people who just don't like bullfighting" to justify the Spanish ban. Another member of the cast known as the "comical bullfighters", 31-year-old Paul Munoz wearing a sequined costume, called Spain's stance "unfair", saying the performers themselves had

never been consulted on the ban. "We love what we do, it's our job," he said.

Mika Romero, the troupe's French representative, added: "The real discrimination is to deprive them of their livelihood." But Violette Viannay, president of the "French Little People's Association" said such shows were "counter-productive" in the struggle for better integration of people with dwarfism into the rest of society. "It's not just a question of size," she said. "Dwarfism is a condition created by rare illnesses," she said.

The French government minister in charge of disability, Fadila Khattabi, told AFP that it was "problematic to consider dwarfism as a source of entertainment". Discrimination of dwarfs was "centuries old" and had to end, she said. "We must, together and urgently, change this kind of representation," she said. The minister said she preferred instead to focus on what she called the "superb performance" by French athletes at the World Dwarf Games in Germany, the largest international sporting event for athletes with dwarfism which ends on Saturday.—AFP



Members of the "toreros comicos" of the "Diversiones en el ruedo" Spanish troupe perform during the Thethieu festival in Thethieu, southwestern France.



Members of the "toreros comicos" of the "Diversiones en el ruedo" Spanish troupe greet the audience at the end of their show during the Thethieu festival in Thethieu, southwestern France.--AFP photos

Lifestyle



This photo shows members of the winning team posing with a silk banner and their prize of roasted meat after the final in the grassroots basketball competition CunBA in Taipan village, Taijiang county, in southwestern China's Guizhou province.--AFP photos



This photo shows a general view of spectators watching the grassroots basketball competition CunBA in Taipan village, Taijiang county, in southwestern China's Guizhou province.



China's village basketball league a slam dunk

Thousands of raucous Chinese basketball fans pack tightly into a floodlit stadium filled with swirling fog, eager to spur on the teams battling in the tournament final. It's almost midnight in Taipan—a remote village in southwest Guizhou province—but the championship game is only just getting under way after a weekend of action. Clanging pots and pans punctuate the hum of the crowd in the steep main stands, while millions of online viewers and social media users hold their breath as the jump ball is tossed.

This is China's village basketball, a grassroots phenomenon that has spi-

meaning village in Chinese—are all amateurs, and the prizes are simple platters of roast meat. But it's the pure electricity of the games that keeps fans and players hooked. "As soon as I arrived in Taipan village, the first thing I sensed was a feeling of enthusiasm and excitement," Xia Wenxian told AFP. Xia, 30, has come as part of a team proudly representing his home village of Gaoding, tucked away in the rugged hills of Guizhou over 100 kilometers away. "Our CunBA has the same competitive sporting spirit as the CBA and NBA," Xia said, as he prepared for his team's crucial semifinal match later that evening.

CunBA on Chinese social media and glowing praise by official press have brought throngs of visitors this summer. In Taipan's main thoroughfare on the afternoon before the final, locals in traditional Miao clothing lay out fruit and other items for sale as a police helicopter makes noisy circles above and eager spectators arrive from far and wide.

Organizers say the densely packed village stadium holds over 20,000 fans—more than 16 times Taipan's population of 1,200. China's official news agency Xinhua said that collective online viewership of CunBA competitions has topped 100 million. The rise of village basketball has provided a golden opportunity for businesses and politicians to capitalize on the public adoration.

A brochure handed out in Taipan by the local county's culture and tourism bureau expounds upon the CunBA's recent success, calling it "a window to observe Chinese-style modernization", a slogan often employed by China's ruling communist party. In between the sometimes rain-soaked contests, there are impassioned musical performances featuring dancers from minority groups wearing brightly colored clothing, projecting a rosy image of ethnic harmony and respect for local customs.

Chinese state-backed media has also jumped in, with the Global Times saying the CunBA is "aimed not only at enriching the leisure activities of rural residents but also at promoting rural revitalization and the construction of a strong agricultural nation". During halftime at one game, fans waved dozens of huge Chinese flags while performers in costumes resembling the military uniforms worn by the People's Liberation Army in the 1940s marched across the court.

Crimson banners adorn the village's buildings, with one reading "rural sports, letting the light of the countryside illuminate the future". "CunBA, unite and work hard, advance forward bravely!" reads another. Above the court, a sign reads: "All ethnic groups enjoy sporting events

together, carrying forward Chinese spirit, gathering Chinese power."

Booming business

As the CunBA grows in popularity, so too does its profitability. In late July, NBA star Jimmy Butler paid a visit to Taipan village, where he was greeted by thousands of adoring fans and players with whom he dribbled and made practice shots on the court. Butler, who earlier this year led his Miami Heat to an appearance at the NBA Finals, is an official marketing partner of leading Chinese sportswear brand Li-Ning. One week after the NBA star left, Taipan village was still buzzing with excitement.

Li Wending, 44, brought his two



This photo shows a player losing his balance during a game in the grassroots basketball competition CunBA in Taipan village, Taijiang county, in southwestern China's Guizhou province.

raled in recent years from a humble local tradition into a viral hit and staple of Beijing's propaganda machine. Basketball is hugely popular in the country, but widespread corruption and recent investigations into match-fixing within the CBA, China's top domestic league, have discouraged many fans and diverted their attention elsewhere.

Athletes in the "CunBA"—with "cun"

Local custom gone viral

The tradition of holding annual basketball competitions goes back decades in Taipan, a village in minority-dominated Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, but only in the past few years has the concept caught on beyond the local area. It's an unlikely site for a national tourist attraction, but the roaring success of the



This photo shows players competing during an invitational game of the grassroots basketball competition CunBA in Taipan village, Taijiang county, in southwestern China's Guizhou province.



This photo shows performers in Miao ethnic minority costume performing during the grassroots basketball competition CunBA in Taipan village, Taijiang county, in southwestern China's Guizhou province.

Sublime! 'Barbie' tops \$1bn globally in first for solo woman director

Hollywood's pink wave has yet to crest as Warner Bros' "Barbie" dominated for a third straight weekend in North American theaters, pushing the film's global haul past \$1 billion in a first for a solo woman director, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday. The Greta Gerwig-directed blockbuster has tapped into a cultural zeitgeist: not only did it make history by hitting the billion-dollar box office milestone, it also did so faster than any film—including those directed by men—in Warner Bros.' 100-year history, executives there said.

The film, which earlier scored the biggest opening weekend of the year, "has captured the imagination of moviegoers around the world and the results are incredibly impressive," analyst Paul Dergarabedian of Comscore said. Starring Margot Robbie as iconic doll Barbie and Ryan Gosling as boyfriend Ken, the movie earned a projected \$53 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period, for a domestic total of \$459 million and a whopping \$1.03 billion worldwide.

Co-written by Gerwig and her partner Noah Baumbach, it follows Barbie as she contends with her woman-led, pink-plastered fantasy land becoming infected with real world problems, in a comic self-aware commentary on the dolls' decades-old cultural significance. A supporting cast including Will Ferrell, Kate McKinnon and America Ferrera add even more star power to the film, while its soundtrack includes new songs by chart toppers Dua Lipa, Lizzo and Nicki Minaj—as well as a surprise hit in "I'm Just Ken," the power ballad sung in the film by Gosling.

"Barbie" is only the sixth film to surpass \$1 billion at the box-office since the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Variety. Falling to third place was Universal's "Oppenheimer," the dark historical drama whose opening the same week as "Barbie" sparked the massive "Barbenheimer" social media trend.

'Oppenheimer' becomes top-grossing WWII film

It was bumped by Warner Bros. newcomer "Meg 2: The Trench," an action sequel in which Jason Statham tries to survive attacks by gargantuan prehistoric sharks. "Meg 2" pulled in \$30 million for the weekend, while Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer" earned \$28.7 million to push its global total to \$552 million. That total made the story about the creation of the atomic bomb the all-time top grossing World War II film, ahead of Nolan's own "Dunkirk" (\$527 million) and Steven Spielberg's "Saving Private Ryan" (\$482 million), not adjusted for inflation, according to Hollywood Reporter.

Fourth place for the weekend went to "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem," the latest in the franchise about a team of reptilian heroes in a half shell. The Paramount animated comedy, featuring the voices of Jackie Chan and Post Malone, brought in \$28 million. Disney release "Haunted Mansion" slid two spots to fifth, with the lavishly produced kid-centric film—starring LaKeith Stanfield, Tiffany Haddish and Owen Wilson—earning \$8.9 million.

Holding its own in sixth was the independent "Sound of Freedom," from Santa Fe Films and Angel Studios, at \$7 million. The low-budget action thriller has sparked controversy, with critics saying its story about child sex trafficking plays into Qanon conspiracy theories. All in all, it was an exceptional weekend for Hollywood, with the top four films all raking in \$28 million or more—though whether the industry can sustain that momentum in the face of a historic writers' and actors' strike remains to be seen.

Not only did the top films come close to doubling the total from the same weekend last year, they surpassed the corresponding pre-pandemic weekend in 2019, analysts said. As Ken might have said—in a line reportedly ad-libbed by Gosling in "Barbie"—the weekend was "Sublime!"

Rounding out the top 10 were: "Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part 1" (\$6.4 million) "Talk to Me" (\$6.2 million) "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny" (\$1.5 million) "Elemental" (\$1.2 million)—AFP



Al-Omari Grand Mosque in downtown Beirut an icon depicting city's history



A painting showing a Beirut notable who renovated the mosque in the 1077 hijri year.



A stone engraving dating back to Ottoman rule decorates a wall of the mosque.

Al-Omari Grand Mosque stands out in the middle of downtown Beirut as a landmark depicting parts of the city history way back to the Islamic conquest during era of the Caliph Omar bin Al-Khattab. Suhail Mneimneh, head of the Beirut Heritage Society, said in an interview with KUNA that the mosque had been built upon rubble of a Roman military compound. The Crusaders, during their presence in the Levant in 1110 had transformed the mosque into a church until the Islamic ruler Salah Eddine Al-Ayyoubi restored its original features as a mosque. The interior is marked with engravings and ancient stones reflecting its historic value.

Al-Omari Grand Mosque, during

the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war and the battles that had raged in downtown Beirut, was badly damaged, along with many other buildings and properties in the region. However after the civil war, a Kuwaiti woman good doer, Suad Mohammed Al-Humaidhi, gave donations for renovating the mosque. Nowadays, the three-storey mosque can accommodate some 3,000 worshippers. It was reopened after the face-lifting, thanks to the Kuwaiti's donations on June 4, 2004, in a broad ceremony attended by Al-Humaidhi, the former Lebanese mufti and the late prime minister Rafic Al-Hariri. —KUNA



Al-Omari mosque's interior, with the pulpit, the mihrab and engraved ceiling.



Gate of the mosque.



The mihrab engraved with the ten men promised by the Prophet (PBUH) to be in paradise.

ROYAL COLLECTIONS MUSEUM: Beautiful journey in Spain's history



The museums' entrance.

The Royal Collections Museum is the most important cultural project in Spain, as it is a beautiful journey in Spain's history. The idea was put forward in 1935, but began its constructions in 2006, and inaugurated by the Spanish King Felipe VI on last July, 25. The Museum located in the Spanish capital Madrid, with area of more than 40,000 square meters over six floors. It has more than 650 pieces collected by Spanish kings over the past five centuries, some of which hold the names of artists such as Velazquez, Francisco Goya, El Greco and Jean Lorenzo Bernini. —KUNA



One of the museum's unique collections.



One of the historical wagons in the museum. — KUNA



One of the museum's halls.



Historical musical instruments.

Sports

'Deep concerns' as Pakistan clears cricket team for World Cup in India

Pakistan, India due to clash in a high-voltage game

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's government on Sunday said the country's cricket team will be allowed to play in the World Cup in neighboring India later this year, but expressed "deep concerns" over security. "Pakistan has deep concerns about the security of its cricket team. We are conveying these concerns to the International Cricket Council and the Indian authorities," the foreign ministry said in a statement. "We expect that the full safety and security of the Pakistan Cricket Team will be ensured during its visit to India." Pakistan and India

are due to clash in a high-voltage game in Ahmedabad on October 15, the home city of India's prime minister Narendra Modi.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had earlier stated reservations over playing in the 130,000 capacity Ahmedabad stadium and in front of a potentially hostile crowd. The PCB had even threatened to boycott the World Cup after India refused to send its team across the border to feature in the forthcoming Asia Cup. After India's refusal, the August 30-September 17 Asia

Cup was rescheduled on a hybrid model with only four matches in Pakistan and the remaining nine in Sri Lanka.

Pakistan criticized India's hard-core stance on stalling cricket ties over the 2008 militant attacks on Mumbai. The two countries have not met in a bilateral series since 2012 and only play in multinational events, the last in the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia in October 2022. "Pakistan's decision shows its constructive and responsible approach vis-a-vis India's intransigent attitude, as the latter had refused to send its team

to Pakistan for the Asia Cup," added the statement.

The World Cup runs from October 5 to November 19 in India. "Pakistan has consistently maintained that sports should not be mixed with politics," added the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement. "It has, therefore, decided to send its cricket team to India to participate in the Cricket World Cup 2023." It added: "Pakistan believes that the state of bilateral relations with India should not stand in the way of fulfilling its international sports-related obligations." - AFP

Britain's Evans and US teen Gauff win Washington titles

WASHINGTON: US teen star Coco Gauff and Britain's Dan Evans captured titles with straight-set triumphs on Sunday at the ATP and WTA Washington Open. World number seven Gauff won her fourth career WTA title by defeating Greece's ninth-ranked Maria Sakkari 6-2, 6-3 while 30th-ranked Evans dispatched 37th-ranked Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor 7-5, 6-3 at the hardcourt event, a US Open tuneup.

Gauff, at 19 the youngest Washington WTA finalist, added to a trophy haul that also included 2019 at Linz, 2021 in Parma and this past January at Auckland. The success came after a first-round exit at Wimbledon last month. "It was really tough a couple weeks ago," Gauff said. "We were all feeling it and I'm glad that I was able to bounce back."



WASHINGTON: Daniel Evans of Great Britain (left) and Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands pose with their trophies after Evans won the men's singles final on Day 9 of the Mubadala Citi DC Open on August 06, 2023. — AFP

Gauff, last year's French Open runner-up, had lost four of five prior matches against Sakkari, who fell to 1-7 in WTA finals with her sixth consecutive loss in a tour championship match. "It's pretty disappointing, but a month ago we didn't think I'd be here," Sakkari said. Evans, a 33-year-old Englishman whose only prior ATP title came in a 2021 outdoor Melbourne event, became the first British champion in Washington since Tim Henman in 2003. Evans, with only eight tour-level wins this year entering the week, will advance to a new career high of 21st in the world after arriving in the US capital on a seven-match tour-level losing streak.

"I couldn't have really thought about this at the start of the week. Amazing week," Evans said. "It means the world to me. It genuinely does." Griekspoor was denied his third career title after crowns at Pune in January and 's-Hertogenbosch in June. "First time in DC, making finals, not too bad I guess," Griekspoor said. Griekspoor, 27, saved a set point in the 10th game with an ace wide but Evans broke him in the 12th game to take the first set when the Dutchman netted a backhand after 53 minutes.

Evans had 14 winners to only three unforced errors in the opening set. The second set was halted at 2-2 by lightning and resumed after a delay of about two hours and 20 minutes. Evans broke at love for a 5-3 lead, a backhand winner and backhand lob winner setting up a break the Dutchman surrendered on a double fault. The Englishman saved four break points in a tense ninth game and after nearly 10 minutes blasted a service winner on his first championship point to take the title after one hour and 41 minutes.

Gauff, who didn't drop a set all week, won the first in 42 minutes but Sakkari broke her to begin the second. They traded service breaks in the fourth and fifth games but Sakkari double faulted away another break to lift Gauff level at 3-3. Gauff held, broke in the eighth game when Sakkari swatted a forehand beyond the baseline, and held again to complete the victory after 84 minutes on a backhand winner. Sakkari, 28, won her only prior WTA title at the 2019 Morocco Open. - AFP

Glover wins PGA Wyndham title

MIAMI: Lucas Glover clinched his fifth career PGA Tour title with a final round of two-under par 68 on Sunday to capture the season-closing Wyndham Championship. The 43-year-old American won by two strokes over Russell Henley and South Korean An Byeong-hun at Greensboro, North Carolina, in the final event before the PGA playoffs. The 2009 US Open champion took his first tournament since the John Deere Classic two years ago to ensure his place in the FedEx Cup playoffs, catapulted from 112th to 49th in the season points standings.

Glover has battled with the "yips" frequently through the past decade but said he had found the consistency he needs to win. "It starts and ends there with me and you know it has been a long road, 10 years of fighting something and to find something that completely changed the momentum and everything was obviously a blessing," he said. The top 70 players in the standings advance to the playoffs and that prospect added some extra spice to the final round at Sedgefield Country Club. Two-time major winner Justin Thomas and Australian Adam Scott, the 2013 Masters champion, both missed out on playoff spots by a single stroke.

The FedEx Cup playoffs begin with the St Jude Championship in Memphis, Tennessee next week before moving on to the BMW Championship in Illinois and conclude in three weeks at the Tour Championship in Atlanta. Glover began his round with a bogey on the par-4 first hole but birdies on the fourth, eighth and 11th put him back in contention. The final groups were forced to wait more than two hours due



GREENSBORO: Lucas Glover of the United States speaks to the fan after winning the Wyndham Championship at Sedgefield Country Club on August 06, 2023. - AFP

to a storm delay before coming back onto the course. Glover kept his cool to finish with pars on each of his remaining four holes while Henley concluded with three straight bogeys.

Henley had no doubt that the delay had impacted his game. "I just never got comfortable, felt a little jittery out there, just never got into a good sync with my swing, felt kind of rushed from the top of my swing, just didn't do a good job of handling the restart," he said. Thomas finished one place outside the playoff spots in 71st but came agonizingly close to making it on the final hole. His chip for birdie from well off the green came out off the flagpole, causing Thomas to collapse on his back in frustration. "I did

my part. I played the best I could and I fought as hard as I could and shot the lowest I possibly could," he said.

Scott had never missed out on the playoffs before and gave his all to keep that streak going with his 63 on Sunday. "I think I'm actually getting to the point where I've got to put that stuff aside and not play to keep a streak of playing playoffs going but play to win stuff, not just be there to make the numbers up," said the Australian after his round but before his fate was known. "If it does end, I think it's a good thing. I think it gives me a good chance to have a look at what I need to do differently to be more competitive in whatever competition I'm playing in." - AFP

DeChambeau's rare 58 delivers LIV Golf Greenbrier win

WASHINGTON: Bryson DeChambeau, the 2020 US Open champion, fired a rare 58 in the final round to win the LIV Golf Greenbrier title on Sunday. The 29-year-old American had 13 birdies against a lone bogey to shoot 12-under and finish on 23-under 187 for the 54-hole event at the resort in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. That was enough for a six-stroke victory over Chile's Mito Pereira, who fired a closing 63.

"It's beyond words," DeChambeau said. "I've been working so hard for a long time and I knew something special was going to come at some point. I just didn't know when." DeChambeau called it "probably the greatest moment in my golfing career." "I had something special going today and I just felt super comfortable over tee shots," he said. "I just kind of felt everything clicking. Missed it in the right places when I needed to and putted beautifully."

DeChambeau's score at the Old White course on the upstart Saudi-backed circuit matched the lowest round in US PGA Tour history, the 12-under 58 fired by American Jim Furyk in 2016 at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut. "Being a part of the same agency, as well, is kind of fun," DeChambeau said of the elite-level 58 club. The Old White hosted a PGA event from 2010 to 2019 and Australian Stuart Appleby fired a 59 in the final round of the inaugural tournament to win the title. DeChambeau birdied 22 of his last 34 holes on The Old White for his first victory since the 2021 PGA Arnold Palmer Invitational at Bay Hill.

"Just having my place in history here is something I'll cherish for the rest of my life," DeChambeau said after his course-record effort. It also was DeCham-

beau's first win since his father, Jon DeChambeau, died last November at age 63 after years of battling kidney disease. "He was with me out there all day today, no doubt," DeChambeau said. "It has been a really difficult couple of years but doing it this way and finishing out with a 58... it's just amazing what I was able to do. I'm super excited."

Ryder Cup? 'Awesome'

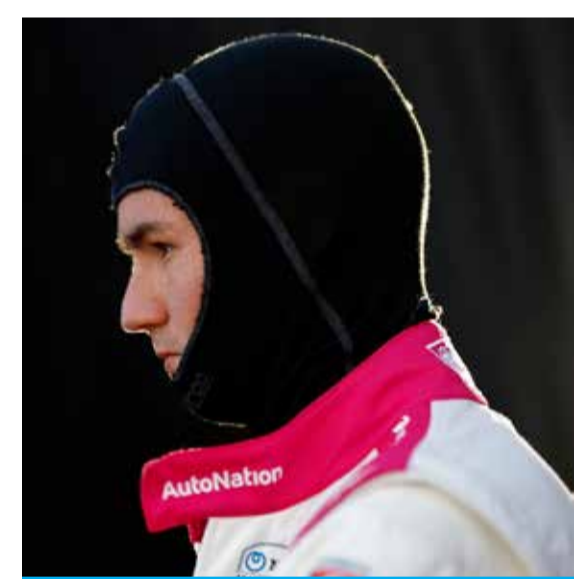
Asked if the 58 might bring a call from US Ryder Cup captain Zach Johnson to play next month against Europe in Italy, DeChambeau was matter of fact about the prospect. "If I do get a call that would be awesome," he said. "If not, I'll be rooting them on over in Rome." Other 58s worldwide include those fired by Japan's Ryo Ishikawa in 2010 and South Korea's Kim Seong-hyeon in 2021 on the Japan Tour, American Jason Bohm in 2001 on the Canadian Tour, Germany's Stephan Jaeger in 2016 on the developmental Korn Ferry Tour and Spain's Alejandro del Rey in 2021 on the Challenge Tour.

DeChambeau opened with back-to-back birdies, reeled off four in a row starting at the fourth hole, took his lone bogey at the par-3 eighth but followed with back-to-back birdies at nine and 10. He said he pondered a 54 after six birdies in the first seven holes but "I threw that to the wayside, like just get under 60 first."

He birdied the par-5 12th then closed with consecutive birdies at the par-3 15th, par-4 16th and par-5 17th, knocking in a six-foot putt, and the par-3 18th, where he sank a 40-foot putt from over a ridge in rainy conditions for 58, then jumped for joy and pumped his right fist in celebration. "I pretty much felt like I blacked out after I made that putt," said DeChambeau. DeChambeau opened Friday with a 68 and matched the prior all-time low round in LIV's two-season history with a 61 on Saturday to pull within a stroke of 36-hole US co-leaders Matthew Wolff and David Puig. In the team competition, Pereira's Torque finished on 49-under to defeat DeChambeau's Crushers by three strokes. - AFP



WEST VIRGINIA: Bryson DeChambeau of the United States celebrates his record 58 to win the LIV Golf Invitational - Greenbrier at The Old White Course on August 06, 2023. - AFP



Kyle Kirkwood

US racer Kirkwood captures IndyCar Music City title

WASHINGTON: American Kyle Kirkwood held off New Zealand's Scott McLaughlin after a restart with four laps remaining on Sunday to win the IndyCar Music City Grand Prix for his second career title. Kirkwood sped away at the late restart and kept the Kiwi at bay for the victory after 80 laps on an 11-turn, 2.1-mile temporary street course in Nashville, Tennessee.

"He was so fast at the end," Kirkwood said. "We were good on the initial lap but right there at the end they were so fast and they ran me down in that last lap." Pole-sitter McLaughlin settled for the runner-up spot for the second year in a row. "I gave it my all, tried my hardest," McLaughlin said. "Bummed we didn't get the win but we weren't best on the day."

IndyCar season points leader Alex Palou of Spain was third ahead of his nearest points rivals, American Josef Newgarden in fourth and New Zealand's Scott Dixon in fifth. Kirkwood, who started eighth, took his only other win in two IndyCar seasons in April at Long Beach. "It's super cool," the 24-year-old Floridian said. Palou, the 2021 season champion, stretched an already-commanding 80-point lead with four races remaining this season, the next on Saturday at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course. "It was a tough race but we made it work and we're on the podium," Palou said. "We need to get that championship so we'll keep pushing."

McLaughlin jumped to the lead and stayed there until pitting on lap 25 and several drivers exchanged the top spot until Kirkwood took over and kept it into the final restart after a four-car crash. Kirkwood surged ahead of McLaughlin on the restart and kept his advantage all the way to the end. Dixon, last year's Nashville champion, made his 318th consecutive IndyCar start, matching the all-time record streak owned by Brazil's Tony Kanaan. Next year's Nashville race will be moved to September, where it will serve as the 2024 season finale, and have a revamped downtown layout. - AFP

Sports

France's clash is special moment for Morocco's World Cup coach

'I know France team perfectly, which is an advantage'

ADELAIDE: Morocco's presence in the last 16 of the Women's World Cup is a dream come true for the tournament debutants, and a clash with a much-fancied France side makes Tuesday's game a particularly special occasion for their coach. Reynald Pedros, 51, is a former France international midfielder who played alongside Zinedine Zidane in the team that reached the semi-finals at Euro 96.

In recent years he has made a name as a coach in the women's game, spending two seasons in charge of Lyon, the club that has dominated in France and Europe over the last decade. He won back-to-back UEFA Champions League titles in charge of Lyon, with a side containing the likes of Wendie Renard, Eugenie Le Sommer, Selma Bacha and Amel Majri - who will all feature for France in Adelaide on Tuesday.

"I know this France team perfectly, which is an advantage," Pedros said after Morocco pulled off one of the great major tournament shocks to qualify from their group at the expense of former champions Germany. "They are a very

strong team with experienced, top-level players." Six members of the France squad in Australia played under Pedros at Lyon, with captain Renard, Le Sommer, Bacha and Majri joined by goalkeeper Pauline Peyraud-Magnin and midfielder Kenza Dali. "It's going to be a bit of a reunion, so it will be a special moment," said Le Sommer, the 34-year-old striker who is France's all-time top scorer.

"Football is surprising. If you had said to me when he left Lyon that we would meet again in the last 16 of the World Cup, especially with him in charge of Morocco, I would not have believed it. "He knows the France team inside out, with the players he coached at Lyon and those he came up against." Pedros also won consecutive French domestic crowns and a French Cup when in charge of Lyon. Le Sommer added: "He did great things with us, winning titles. It was by no means insignificant."

'Winning mentality'

Pedros, who won a French title as a player with Nantes in 1995 and helped

them reach the Champions League semi-finals the following year, began working with the Moroccan football federation in late 2020. He has helped oversee the development of women's football in the country and took the team to the final of the Africa Cup of Nations on home soil last year, via which they qualified for the World Cup. "He has brought great experience, stability and a winning mentality," Nassim El Kerf, a journalist with the Moroccan news website Le Desk, told AFP. "He has been a key figure in the development strategy for women's football in Morocco and has made himself popular thanks to his results."

Victories against South Korea and Colombia, after a 6-0 hammering by Germany in their opening game, have seen Morocco make history at the tournament - no Arab team had won a Women's World Cup match before. But beating France - whose own coach Herve Renard spent three years in charge of the Moroccan men's team between 2016 and 2019 - would be a remarkable achievement for the side ranked 72nd in the world. "We



Morocco's coach Reynald Pedros

are going to try and cause them a few problems," Pedros said. "It has been an incredible World Cup, full of surprises.

That is the magic of sport at the highest level. You never know what is going to happen." — AFP

Trump slams 'woke' US women's team after WCup exit

WASHINGTON: Former US president Donald Trump took a swipe at his own country's women's soccer team on Sunday evening after they crashed out of the World Cup on penalties to Sweden, declaring that "woke equals failure." Despite sealing American glory at the previous two World Cups, the team have become a lightning rod for anger from the US political right, in part because of their advocacy for social justice. Many conservatives were particularly chagrined by players taking the knee during the national anthem, in protest at the country's record on racial equality.

Their co-captain, Megan Rapinoe, was given the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Trump's successor, Joe Biden. She was among the players who missed penalties during Sunday's shoot-out, as the Stars and Stripes made their earliest ever exit from a Women's World Cup, after a 0-0 draw in Melbourne. Trump, who is running for a White House return in the 2024 election, wrote on his own TruthSocial website that the loss was "fully emblematic of what is happening to the our once great Nation under Crooked Joe Biden."

"Many of our players were openly hostile to America - No other country behaved in such a manner, or even close. Woke equals failure," he wrote. "Nice shot Megan," he added, in a jibe at Rapinoe, the former Ballon d'Or and World Cup Golden Boot winner. The 38-year-old, a central part of the USA sides that won the 2015 and 2019 World Cups as well as Olympic gold in 2012, is at the tournament for the fourth and final time before retiring.

Jamaica team vow to deliver knockout punch to Colombia

MELBOURNE: Jamaica coach Lorne Donaldson likened their Women's World Cup last-16 clash against Colombia in Melbourne on Tuesday to a boxing bout and pledged to be the ones delivering the knockout punch. Both sides are gunning to make the last eight for the first time with a clash against either European champions England or another tournament surprise-package, Nigeria, at stake.

"They're all big games, this is just a different round, so the approach, we are not going to change much," said Donaldson, whose side have yet to concede a goal, holding powerhouses France and Brazil. "We are going to come up and give it a good shot. Someone will be knocked out, like a boxing match, someone will go down. We're going to be the one standing when the game is over."

While the 51st-ranked Reggae Girlz have yet to concede, they have only scored once - against Panama through Paris Saint-Germain's Allyson Swaby. Donaldson admitted that must change. "The lack of goals coming in, I don't think it's a major concern to us," he said. "We have played some good teams



MELBOURNE: USA's forward #15 Megan Rapinoe (left) and USA's midfielder #22 Kristie Mewis react at the end of the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup round of 16 football match between Sweden and USA. — AFP

She was a key voice in the team's battle with the US federation for equal pay and conditions and remains an unflinching advocate on racial equality, as well as issues affecting women and the LGBTQ community. For so long the face of women's soccer at home and abroad, she was close to tears in her post-match interview after the 5-4 penalty loss. "I mean, this is like a sick joke," she said. "For me personally, this is dark comedy. I missed a penalty."

Trump, the frontrunner for the Republican nomi-

here, France and Brazil, two of the top teams in the world and we were actually supposed to be losing by six or seven, according to the critics.

"To get through the (group) round you just need to do what you have to do. But obviously now we need to score goals to win this game or we are knocked out." An impressive Colombia, ranked 26, are banking on two teenage stars to help steer them into the last eight. Real Madrid striker Linda Caicedo has already announced herself to the world with goals in wins against South Korea and Germany during the group phase. She is set to be joined by fellow 18-year-old Ana Maria Guzman in her tournament debut with attacking defender Manuela Vanegas suspended after two yellow cards.

Extra special

Coach Nelson Abadia has mentored both Caicedo and Guzman since they were 12 years old and has full faith they will rise to the occasion. "I have 23 players and they are all very talented," said Abadia, who is renowned for sticking with the same starting team where possible. "I'm fully confident in Ana, she is very capable." Guzman played at last year's under-17 World Cup in India where they lost 1-0 to Spain in the final, and said she was ready to step up. "I will play any position, left or right and enjoy every second," said the Deportivo Pereira player, sitting next to her coach. "It's a great opportunity. The coach has been a key person in my life, he has

nation in the 2024 presidential election, faces a series of legal challenges ahead of the national polls, including over allegations he tried to subvert the results of the last election. President Biden's wife, First Lady Jill Biden, offered the team more consolation than Trump did. "Today, you inspired us with your grit and determination. We are proud of you," she tweeted. "Always remember that you encourage women and girls everywhere to show up and fight for their dreams." — AFP



MELBOURNE: Jamaica's coach Lorne Donaldson talks to player Jody Brown during a training session in Melbourne on August 7, 2023. — AFP

always supported me and I want to give my best. "To be playing with Linda is extra special. Yes, we are the youngest, but we will break our backs for this shirt," she added. Guzman is expected to be the only change to the team that lost 1-0 to Morocco in their last group game. Abadia said he was wary of a Jamaican side who have defended consistently well at the World Cup. "We know what Jamaica offer, they are a very solid team in defense," he said. "We must pay attention to the counter-attack as well, because they are very strong in that area too." — AFP

Sundowns win, Chiefs held, Pirates sunk as S Africa season starts

JOHANNESBURG: The 'big three' South African clubs had mixed results as the league season began this weekend with title-holders Mamelodi Sundowns winning, Kaizer Chiefs drawing and Orlando Pirates losing. Sundowns, seeking to win the Premiership a seventh straight time, triumphed 2-1 at Sekhukhune United in a match where both sides had a player sent off. Chiefs, hoping to end an eight-season trophy drought, fielded several new signings but failed to impress in a 0-0 stalemate at home to perennial strugglers Chippa United.

Pirates, who also invested heavily in new players and are the pundits' favorites to pose the strongest challenge to Sundowns, fell 1-0 away to Stellenbosch. Namibian Peter Shalulile, joint winner of the Premiership Golden Boot last season with 12 goals, and new signing Lucas Ribeiro from Brazil scored for former African champions Sundowns. Soon after Shalulile converted an early penalty, Sekhukhune were reduced to 10 men when Vusumuzi Mncube was red carded for a studs-up tackle.

A tap-in by Ribeiro, who joined from Belgian outfit SK Beveren, doubled the lead in the second half before Jamie Webber netted direct from a free-kick to create a tense finish. When Sundowns' Rivaldo Coetzee retaliated after being fouled, he was dismissed five minutes from time. "Considerable work went into strengthening the squad during the close season and we saw the benefits tonight," said Sundowns coach Rulani Mokwena.

One of Sundowns' biggest challenges this season is likely to be fixture congestion. Apart from 30 Premiership matches, they will compete in two domestic knockout competitions. The Pretoria outfit will also be involved in the inaugural African Football League—launched as the CAF Africa Super League—and the CAF Champions League. Venezuelan Edson Castillo was among Chiefs' newcomers as controversial new coach Molefi Ntseki made his Premiership debut.

Ntseki, sacked as South Africa coach after failing to qualify for the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations, has said that criticism of his appointment stems from him not being a "celebrity". Backed by a 35,000 crowd, Chiefs rarely troubled Chippa, an eastern Cape club best known for narrow escapes from relegation and firing an average of four coaches each season. Pirates dominated possession in the Cape winelands town of Stellenbosch only to be sunk by an Antonio van Wyk goal just before half-time. — 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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
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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

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. (C 3842) 6/8/2023

England survive Nigeria scare

Australia surge into World Cup quarters



BRISBANE: England's forward #11 Lauren Hemp (right) competes for the ball during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup round of 16 football match between England and Nigeria at Brisbane Stadium on August 7, 2023. — AFP

BRISBANE: England survived the sending-off of Lauren James to scrape past Nigeria in a penalty shoot-out on Monday and were joined in the Women's World Cup quarter-finals by co-hosts Australia. European champions England will play either Colombia or Jamaica in the last eight on Saturday, but they got there the hard way. Chloe Kelly scored the winning penalty in Brisbane as England beat Nigeria 4-2 in the shoot-out after a tense last-16 tie finished 0-0 at the end of extra time.

England had a major scare before a crowd of 49,461, having come through the whole of extra time a player short following the 87th-minute sending-off of James for a stamp on Nigeria's Michelle Alozie. Coach Sarina Wiegman, who welcomed key midfielder Keira Walsh back into her side after injury, called it "a very, very hard game". "How we did that and how the team just kept going, I'm so proud of them," said Wiegman, whose side are regarded as favorites to take the crown from beaten holders the United States.

Georgia Stanway put the first penalty of the shoot-out wide for England, but Desire Oparanozie and Alozie followed suit, both missing the target with Nigeria's first two attempts. Beth England, Rachel Daly and Alex Greenwood all scored for England before Kelly converted the decisive kick. "It's amazing, anything that's thrown at us we show what we're capable of," said the Manchester City forward Kelly, who scored the winning goal in last year's European Championship final. "We've been practicing (penalties) a lot and it's working."

The defeat was cruel on Nigeria, the world's 40th-ranked team, who followed up their impressive performances in the group stage by pushing England all the way. Their England-born defender Ashleigh Plumptre crashed a shot off the woodwork in the first half and Uchenna Kanu also hit the frame of the goal. However, this was the third game out of four at this World Cup in which Nigeria failed to score.

"We had every opportunity to get the result and

unfortunately we didn't get it done," said their American coach, Randy Waldrum. "I think we could have (won it in 90 minutes). We had the best chances, we hit the crossbar twice in regulation play. We were a bit unlucky not to get something out of it." But credit to England, they are a great side." England will discover the identity of their quarter-final opponents on Tuesday when Colombia face surprise-package Jamaica in Melbourne.

Kerr makes comeback

Australia are also into the last eight as Sam Kerr came off the bench in a 2-0 win over Denmark in front of nearly 76,000 fans in Sydney. They will play France or Morocco on Saturday in Brisbane after making fairly light work of a toothless Denmark. To cap a good night's work for the Matildas, talismanic striker and captain Kerr came on with 10 minutes left to huge cheers for her first action of the tournament after a calf injury.

The dangerous Caitlin Foord ran Denmark ragged throughout and scored a fine first after being set up by the impressive Mary Fowler on 29 minutes. Hayley Raso grabbed a second to make the game safe 2-0 minutes from time. The Chelsea predator Kerr, who was supposed to have been the face of the World Cup before injury struck on the eve of the tournament, said it was "a big relief to be back". "I feel good. I think I was a bit rusty, but, no, I feel great. I'll sleep better tonight than I have for the last three weeks."

The home side are thriving on growing excitement at what they can achieve at this World Cup, where the demise of the United States has opened the door for a new champion. "I think we're embracing it, I think the girls are loving it," Kerr said of the expectation. "The Australian public has been amazing. We've felt the love, just walking down the street it's been a real buzz." Sweden will face Japan in the quarter-finals on Friday, with the Netherlands taking on Spain the same day. — AFP

Magical Messi lifts Inter Miami

FRISCO: Lionel Messi scored twice, including a brilliant late equalizer, as Inter Miami advanced past FC Dallas to the quarter-finals of the Leagues Cup on penalties after an enthralling 4-4 draw. A trademark curling free-kick in the 85th minute, Messi's seventh goal in four games for Miami, took the game to a shoot-out after the Argentine's side had trailed 4-2 with 10 minutes to go.

Dallas exposed Miami's defensive weaknesses, in Messi's first game away from home, and kept Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets relatively quiet for long stretches but the World Cup winner still made the difference. "It's obvious that for him a free-kick around that area is like a penalty kick for another player," said Dallas's Spanish coach Nico Estvez of Messi's superb strike. Dallas began brightly before Messi put Miami ahead in the sixth minute with a precise side-foot finish from a pull-back from Jordi Alba, the former Barcelona full-back who was making his first start for the club.



TEXAS: Lionel Messi #10 of Inter Miami CF makes his penalty kick attempt during the Leagues Cup 2023 Round of 16 match between Inter Miami CF and FC Dallas on August 06, 2023. — AFP

It was initially ruled out for offside but the decision was reversed after the referee, on review, ruled that Miami forward Josef Martinez had not blocked the view of the goalkeeper. Dallas drew level in the 37th minute through Argentine Facundo Quignonez, who swung home a cross from overlapping full-back Marco Farfan. They went ahead on the stroke of half-time through Bernard Kamungo, who rounded Miami keeper Drake Callender. Another Argentine, Alan Velasco, made it 3-1 in the 63rd minute with a free-kick from the left which flew untouched into the far corner.

Teenage substitute Benjamin Cremaschi took only a minute to reduce the deficit but an own goal from Robert Taylor restored the two-goal cushion for Dallas at 4-2. Messi then chipped a free-kick into the box and Farfan, unchallenged, inexplicably headed into his own goal to keep Miami alive. Five minutes from the end Messi strode up and slotted home a free-kick from 20 yards to take it to penalties. — AFP

Arsenal lift Community Shield, end City's streak

LONDON: Arsenal lifted the Community Shield to end Manchester City's silverware streak with a 4-1 penalty shoot-out victory after a 1-1 draw against the treble winners on Sunday. Mikel Arteta's side forced the shoot-out thanks to Leandro Trossard's heavily deflected equalizer 11 minutes into stoppage time after Cole Palmer's superb curler put City ahead late in the second half at Wembley.

Kevin De Bruyne hit the bar with City's first spot-kick and Rodri's effort was saved by Aaron Ramsdale before Fabio Vieira converted the decisive kick in the annual curtain-raiser to the Premier League season. Arsenal's celebrations were far more frenzied than would normally be seen in what in the glamour friendly, but their jubilation underlined the months of anguish endured since they blew a golden opportunity to win their first title since 2004. "It feels great. It doesn't get much better than winning a trophy at Wembley against the best team in the world," Arteta said. "We are here to win trophies for this club. Seeing so many happy and proud people is great." City boss Pep Guardiola added: "We are disappointed. We would love to win today. Manchester City is a good team but sometimes you lose. In the end we could not do it, their penalty takers were better than us."

City made history by becoming only the second English club to lift the Premier



LONDON: Arsenal's Norwegian midfielder Martin Odegaard holds up the trophy as Arsenal players celebrate winning the English FA Community Shield football match between Arsenal and Manchester City at Wembley Stadium August 6, 2023. — AFP

League, Champions League and FA Cup in a single season last term. Their fifth Premier League title in six seasons came at Arsenal's expense as the Gunners wasted the eight-point lead they held at the start of April to finish five points behind the champions. Showcasing £160 million worth of new signings in Declan Rice, Kai Havertz and Jurrien Timber, it was clear Arsenal had a point to prove to City as they snapped into tackles with the kind of urgency that usually accompanies a title decider.

While Arteta and his players cavorted around the pitch and soaked up the raucous celebrations from their fans, they might wish to note that the Community Shield winners have gone on to secure the Premier League title just once since

2011. Arsenal led the table for 248 days last season and still fell short, prompting Arteta to admit they will need an "unheard of" points total to stop the champions, who are aiming for an unprecedented fourth successive title.

Arteta will have been encouraged by a composed display from England midfielder Rice following his £105 million move from West Ham. Timber, another new recruit, was also solid at left-back but Havertz was typically profligate as he wasted Arsenal's two best chances to take the lead. Havertz will be expected to lead the Arsenal attack while Gabriel Jesus recovers from knee surgery and this was hardly the ideal introduction to his new club for the inconsistent German. — AFP